



ELECTION 2026

Province clears way for smaller council

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake is moving ahead with plans to shrink council from nine members to seven for the 2026 municipal election after Ontario passed legislation allowing the change to move forward despite earlier timing concerns.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said the town now expects the reduction to proceed after Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, became law May 7 following its passage through the legislature over the past month.

Most of the bill focuses on cutting the size of Niagara Region's council, but a late amendment also gives the province the ability to change the size of councils in NOTL, Thorold and Port Colborne.

Earlier this year, council asked the province to reduce NOTL's council to seven members from nine, as part of broader discussions around reducing the number of elected officials in Niagara. But provincial officials indicated the request had likely come too late under existing election timing rules.

The amendment appears to bypass the normal municipal deadline that had left that request in limbo.

The legislation states the minister may make regulations "specifying the number of members of the council" for municipalities including NOTL and says the 2026 election can be run as if the new council structure had already been validly in place, on time, beforehand.

Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack's office did not respond to questions on why the province supported these council-size reductions by publication time.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

A bloomin' good time

Florists create beautiful artwork across town for annual spring festival



A floral monarch butterfly spreads its large wings over the lawn of the McFarland House on the weekend as part of the second annual NOTL In Bloom Festival. This display, created by Niagara Parks, was one of many installed around town from May 8 to 11. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Zahraa Hmood | The Lake Report

Flora and fauna were in perfect harmony this past weekend in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The town celebrated spring with the return of the NOTL In Bloom Festival: extravagant, wildlife-themed floral instal-

lations were set up across Old Town, bringing a bevy of botanical delights to town from Friday to Monday.

Whether it was the giraffe hedges adorned with carnations at the Charles Hotel, pink rosebud flamingos taking in the

scenery at the Pillar and Post's Gardens, or an elaborate draping of flowers cascading down the facade of the old Courthouse, almost every corner of the downtown core was a feast for the eyes.

The festival, held for the first

time last year, included a variety of indoor and outdoor events, including seminars with florists and horticulturalists, a boutique vendor fair at the Pillar and Post, afternoon tea, the Birds of

Continued on Page 3

NOTL will keep Ryerson Park land

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A fenced-off piece of waterfront property in Niagara-on-the-Lake that neighbouring homeowners thought was part of their backyard will stay under ownership of the town after council voted against selling the land.

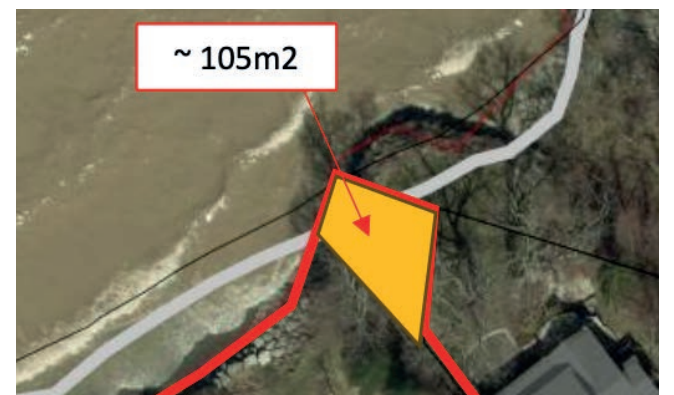
Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa was absent from the meeting on Tuesday, but the remaining eight councillors all voted to keep the land under municipal ownership.

The decision involves roughly 105 square metres of land in Ryerson Park and will still need final approval at a future council meeting later this month before it is formally adopted.

In February, staff recommended council direct staff to explore divesting the piece of property, arguing the parcel hasn't been open to the public, nor has it functioned as part of Ryerson Park, for more than 25 years.

This week, staff instead asked council to choose

Continued on Page 2



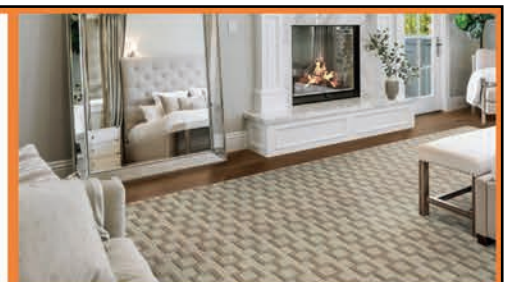
The homeowners next to the parcel of land facing the waterfront at Ryerson Park asked the town to sell them the land after discovering earlier this year that it wasn't included in their property title. FILE



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NOTL will keep disputed Ryerson Park land

Continued from Front Page

between three paths for the future of the highly debated land: keep the land under full municipal ownership and potentially invest in improvements and public access, move ahead with selling it to the neighbouring homeowners or provide another direction altogether.

Ultimately, council chose the first option.

Staff said it may require initial investment for public access and maintenance, estimating starting costs at about \$25,000. It would be funded through the town's general reserve.

During the meeting, a debate unravelled around the town-owned land at the eastern edge of Ryerson Park, beside 491 Niagara Blvd.

The homeowners of #491, Michele Darling and Michael Eagen, had asked the town to sell them the parcel after discovering earlier this year it was not included in their property title.

Staff said the parcel reflects "a long-standing pattern of private use and maintenance."



While this plot of land at Ryerson Park has been fenced off from the public for more than 25 years, its possible sale to its neighbours still drew criticism from Chautauqua residents who said the town should keep it. SOURCED/TOWN OF NOTL

But residents opposing the sale argued the land only stopped functioning as public space because it had been fenced off for years.

"The public did not voluntarily give up access to this land," said Weston Miller, president of the Chautauqua Residents Association, urging councillors to reject divesting the land. "The land was fenced off."

He said public access restrictions should not be used as justification for selling parkland.

"It should be used to justify restoring it," said Mill-

er. "You do not strengthen parks by shrinking them."

He said the town is essentially being asked if it "should fund parks by selling parkland to private residents."

"There's a long lineup of Chautauqua residents prepared to help cover those costs."

The homeowners' lawyer, Thomas Hanrahan, argued the land had effectively operated as part of the property for decades and said previous owners spent \$130,000 in 1994 — roughly \$250,874 today, according to a Google

inflation calculation using Bank of Canada consumer price index data — on shoreline protection work after erosion threatened the area.

"If that work wasn't done, we wouldn't be here," said Hanrahan. "The backyard of 491 Niagara Blvd. would be in Lake Ontario."

Hanrahan argued the parcel was "part of Ryerson Park in title only" and said retaining the land could expose the town to future legal claims from the owners of the neighbouring property.

"In my opinion, (Darling and Eagen) have a strong

case for adverse possession," said Hanrahan. "There's also an unjust enrichment argument."

He also argued the sale would not create a broader precedent.

"The town is not setting a precedent," Hanrahan said. "This is a unique case. A unique remedy is required."

"Cases in the future will be determined on their own merits."

Several councillors openly challenged parts of Hanrahan's presentation.

The "title-only" statement raised pointed questions from Coun. Sandra O'Connor.

"How far back does he go to substantiate that statement?" she asked.

When Hanrahan argued the town not realizing it owned the parcel suggested it was never truly parkland, O'Connor pushed back.

"You're inferring," she said. "There's nothing concrete."

O'Connor said she does not support selling municipal land unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

"To me, there is no compelling reason here."

Throughout the meeting, town chief administrative officer Nick Ruller stressed staff were not recommending a sale in the latest report and were only presenting options.

"This report provided options and not recommendations," Ruller said.

Still, several councillors acknowledged how personal the issue had become within the community.

Coun. Tim Balasiuk said he was "very shocked with the way that this unfolded" and "the way that it was perceived throughout the community."

"I just want to make sure that, coming out of this, we all remember that we all live in Niagara-on-the-Lake," Balasiuk said. "We're all neighbours."

Coun. Erwin Wiens defended Darling and Eagen for approaching the town openly after discovering the title issue.

"They didn't do anything wrong," Wiens said. "What we didn't see through this process is the dignity that Mr. Eagen and Ms. Darling deserved."

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Steve McGuinness enters council race

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Steve McGuinness says too much of Niagara-on-the-Lake politics revolves around developers, tourism and special interests. And not enough around the people paying the bills.

Now, the Virgil resident and founder of Residents 4 A Better NOTL is stepping into the political arena himself, officially registering to run for town council last week.

In an interview, McGuinness said the biggest threat facing the town is the pace and development of scale in town.

He wants to bring what he calls a "Jill and Joe average NOTLers" perspective to council and argues ordinary homeowners are too often overlooked in debates over planning and growth.

"We have agriculture, we have tourism, culture. All of those interests are important," he said. "But when you look at the big picture, the majority of people living in town, they're not farmers, they don't own a tourist-related business."

He said residential taxpayers are ultimately the backbone of the town's finances and deserve more focus at the council table.

A retired member of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario with an MBA from McMaster University, McGuinness spent much of his career working in finance on Bay Street before retiring in 2018.

This is his first run for council.

"It's a thankless job," he said of being a councillor. But after years acting as what he describes as a community organizer and local opinion leader, he said he decided "someone has to stand up."

"We have to balance opposing with proposing," he said.

Planning and development quickly emerged as one of his biggest campaign themes. McGuinness said the town needs to be far more careful about approving developments that require official plan or zoning bylaw amendments.



Steve McGuinness is the latest to throw in his hat for town councillor in the 2026 municipal election. He believes the town needs a balanced approach to development and that resident voices have been overlooked in planning decisions. SUPPLIED

"If we approve a planning development that's a disaster, we're stuck with it permanently," he said.

He pointed to the debate around the former hospital site on Wellington Street as an example of where he said the town needs to think carefully about long-term land use.

McGuinness criticized early concepts centred heavily around parking and said he would like to see the town pursue outside proposals for the property sooner rather than later.

"There's also the option of going for requests for proposals from third parties," he said. "I'd like to see that pursued sooner rather than later." "I think there's some good ideas emerging, like the Burton Foundation proposal has a lot of merit to it."

He also pointed to Parliament Oak as an example of development he said went too far.

"I don't want to see another travesty like what happened at Parliament Oak," he said. "It goes beyond the scale of what we should be seeing in residential neighbourhoods."

McGuinness also weighed in on the controversial Royal George Theatre redevelopment, saying the issue was never about opposing the Shaw Festival itself.

"Everyone supports the Shaw Festival. It's an important cultural institu-

tion," he said. Still, he said residents raised legitimate concerns about the scale of the project, parking pressures and neighbourhood disruption.

"There isn't going to be any parking there. So, parking constantly becomes an issue," he said. "We really struggled with it as a town."

McGuinness also addressed local Pride-related tensions that surfaced this year between municipalities, Pride Niagara and OUTNiagara.

A member of the LG-BTQ+ community himself, he said the town needs to be careful to send inclusive messages.

"I think we need to be very careful that we send the right messaging and that we're inclusive," he said.

He said he plans to support NOTL's June 1 Pride flag raising event and added town leadership, such as the lord mayor, could be more visible on the issue.

McGuinness also criticized the town's current media relations approach under chief administrative officer Nick Ruller that affects responses to opinion writers and media inquiries.

"You don't want to restrict access along those lines," he said, calling the policy "a bit of a rookie mistake."

"It shouldn't be like pulling teeth."

On enforcement issues, McGuinness said some developers appear to treat

town penalties as little more than a business expense.

"There are developers in town who do that and I don't mind calling out one developer, in particular, who is notorious for it," he said. "That is Benny Marotta."

Marotta is the founder of Solmar Development Corp. and co-owns Two Sisters Vineyards in NOTL with his daughters.

Marotta did not respond to The Lake Report's request for comment before deadline.

"If we impose a \$500-a-day penalty at Parliament Oak, that's just the cost of doing business to (Marotta)," McGuinness said. "It's not an effective deterrent."

The amount of property tax paid by major developers may be significant to the town, he said, "but they still have to abide by the rules."

"You can be fined up to a million dollars — I think he needs significant penalties," he said. "Otherwise, there's no deterrent and there's no respect for the bylaws."

McGuinness lives in NOTL with his spouse of 21 years, Gary. The couple has two adult children and two school-aged grandchildren.

And, according to his campaign announcement, residents who spot him walking around town will likely also see Lucy, his eight-year-old yellow lab, tagging along beside him.

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Politicians slide at new playground



The children's playground at Simcoe Park got a refresh this year, and the lord mayor and some of Niagara-on-the-Lake's youngest residents were among the first to try out the new digs. Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa hosted the ribbon-cutting for the new park on May 11 and tested out the new slide with one of the students from Royal Oak School. The town spent \$150,000 to replace the old playground equipment, which was installed in 1997.
DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Council has \$95K in leftover grant money

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake approved over \$72,000 in community and youth grants Tuesday with relatively little debate, but spent the harder part of the discussion arguing over what to do with the money left behind.

The town had \$167,443 available for this year's Community and Youth Initiatives Grant Program, but approved only \$72,414 in grants after six of 18 applications were ruled out for not meeting the program's criteria.

That left \$95,029 sitting on the table and kicked off a much longer fight: where should the money go?

Staff recommended using the balance to support eligible town recreation programs for NOTL residents, including possibly waiving or reducing summer camp fees, subject to available funding and program capacity.

But while the grants sailed through, councillors slammed the brakes on the leftover-money plan, sending it back to staff for two weeks.

That plan is expected to return to council May 26. The grant approvals must receive formal adoption that same day, before moving ahead.

The approved grants include \$7,500 each for Community Crew, Music Niagara, Niagara Minor Thunderhawks Lacrosse, NOTL Minor Hockey, the Royal Canadian Air Cadets and St. David's Leos-Lions Club.

Royal Oak Commu-



The NOTL Soccer Club is one of several local groups that'll be receiving funding this year from the town. FILE

nity School is set to receive \$7,350, while the NOTL Soccer Club is set to get \$5,564 and the Niagara Pump House Visual Art Centre \$5,000.

The list also includes \$4,000 for Riverbrink Art Museum, \$3,600 for Friends of Niagara National Historic Sites and \$1,900 for the NOTL Horticultural Society.

The report says six applications were eliminated because they did not meet the policy criteria, including ineligible staffing costs, capital projects or projects outside the program's intent.

Staff said there were also some applications that missed the deadline and were not reconsidered.

The recommendation for both the grant allocations and the leftover money came from the town's community and youth initiatives grant working group, which includes councillors Tim Balasiuk, Maria Mavridis and Adriana Vizzari, along with two finance staff members.

Coun. Gary Burroughs supported the grants, but

questioned whether the working group should have recommended what to do with the balance.

"I believe they've exceeded their authority by coming forward with what to do with a balance that they created," Burroughs said.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita called the approved grant list "one of the best balances of funds" the town has had, adding it was also going to a "variety of new organizations."

But she also questioned why, for the second year, the town was not using all of the available grant money.

"If we're not using it — and it's not as though we're turning anybody away — then I think there's another discussion," she said.

Coun. Maria Mavridis, who sat on the working group, defended the process and said the criteria mattered.

"We set criteria for a reason. We don't just hand out money because we feel good and it might fit," she said.

She said the suggestion to use the remaining money

for recreation programs came after the group heard from parents who could not afford some activities.

"We did have a couple of parents reach out that cannot afford certain programming," Mavridis said.

"Since the discretionary funds were allocated to support families and youth in Niagara-on-the-Lake, I think it's a good way to use it."

Coun. Sandra O'Connor said the proposal was not ready as written.

"Because I don't think we've fully fleshed this out yet, I can't vote in favor of it at this point," she said.

O'Connor questioned why the money would be aimed at recreation instead of other town programs, such as music, art or environmental programs and said the wording appeared open to any resident, not only those who needed help.

She proposed changing the recommendation by replacing "recreation programming" with broader "community programs," so the money could support a wider range of programs for NOTL residents, specifically those "in need."

But chief administrative officer Nick Ruller warned the wording still left staff with broad questions.

"Seeing as 1.1 and 1.2 have been approved, if there's an opportunity for staff to come back for council with an answer for 1.3 that's a little more comprehensive, I think it might better serve us all," he said.

Coun. Erwin Wiens then moved to refer the issue back to staff for two weeks. The motion was passed.

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Hort Society plant sale blitzed by buyers

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

An hour before the Niagara-on-the-Lake Horticultural Society's annual plant sale opened Saturday, shoppers were already queuing outside the Meridian Credit Union Arena — by 9 a.m. the line stretched the length of the building, and two minutes later, every hellebore was gone.

The cash-only sale in Virgil draws buyers each May with member-donated perennials priced well below commercial garden centres, with proceeds funding horticulture scholarships at Niagara College and the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture, along with public green-space projects in town including work on the library garden. Specialty plants sold out within minutes, and volunteers and local growers struggled to predict how much inventory the morning would require.

Susan Dodd, the event's co-ordinator, said hellebores are a draw precisely because they are hard to find locally, and regulars know to expect them.

"People that shop every



Ingrid Regier helps Cheryl Porpiglia pick out a blue hosta during the Niagara-on-the-Lake Horticultural Society's annual spring plant sale Saturday. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

year know that the perennials are grown by our members, so it's from a garden versus a garden centre," she said. "They know that they're going to get a good deal and hopefully a lot of variety."

Predicting turnout or revenue is impossible from year to year, she said, making it equally difficult to know how many plants to order from growers ahead of time.

Marla Percy, a volunteer and plant identifier at the event, said the price gap with commercial retailers drives much of the demand.

"We have plants out there that are maybe \$20 but in the store in the cash to 40," said Percy. "You're not getting a little stump, you're getting the plant."

Beyond scholarships, Percy said, the society also funds community gardens at the library and at William and Nassau streets, contributes trees to local schools and supports the Heritage Trail.

"It goes to supporting, horticulturally, the whole area," she said.

Volunteer Ingrid Regier said buyers trust plants sourced from members' gardens for a reason.

"Anything out here comes from our gardens, so that's a plus right there, because you know they've been growing in Marla's garden or mine or somebody's, so it's a healthy plant," said Regier.

Regier said the planning committee visits growers early each season to select stock, and the society works with several local suppliers including Peter Horbach, who donates a portion of his inventory each year. Plants that do not meet the volunteers' standards are pulled before sale.

The society also established a new scholarship this year in memory of Joanne Young, a longtime member and prominent local landscaper.

Young, who died suddenly last September at 56, spent more than 30 years designing gardens across Niagara-on-the-Lake and was known in the society as its go-to authority on all things horticultural.

The sale has run annually since 2013. The society's next major fundraiser is the Garden Tour on July 10, which draws visitors from across Ontario.

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- *Richard Harley, publisher*

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The
Lake Report

LCBO push for Ontario wines a **win for NOTL**

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

As American wine, beer and spirits remain absent from LCBO shelves across Ontario, the company has expanded its offering of Ontario craft wines and plans to continue doing so amid growing popularity for local brands over the past year.

Niagara-on-the-Lake winemakers and grape growers say the shift has been a boon for Ontario's wine industry, helping build momentum after years of efforts to boost sales.

Donald Ziraldo, co-founder of Inniskillin Wines, said the success of Vintners Quality Alliance wines — approved under the industry's regulatory body for Ontario and British Columbia — since the Ford government pulled U.S. alcohol from LCBO shelves last March has been "unbelievable."

"The performance in most cases are extraordinary, especially not only in the LCBO, but the fact that the wines aren't there from mostly Oregon and California," he said.

The removal of American alcohol from the LCBO marked a notable retaliation amid the ongoing tariff dispute between Canada and the U.S.

By the end of last year, the effects were evident. In December, the LCBO reported VQA sales rose 56 per cent across Ontario in 2025.

"We saw trends shift in response to industry changes and a growing desire to support local," said Abhay Garg, LCBO vice-president of merchandising, in a news release. "Customers were motivated to try something new — often from our own backyard — which is great for local producers."

From April 2025 to April 2026, the LCBO added 116 new VQA wines, representing a 22 per cent increase over the previous year, a spokesperson told The Lake Report.

The company also increased VQA offerings in its Vintages New Release program by 50 per cent during the same period.

The impact has been clear, Ziraldo said. He said wineries have told him they



The VQA section at LCBO has gotten more crowded over the past year, as Ontario craft wines grew in popularity after U.S. alcohol was pulled from shelves. NIAGARA NOW

are struggling to keep up with demand.

"They said that they're literally out of stock and they're trying to find wines until the crop is picked again this fall," he said.

In April, at the Ontario Craft Wineries' 2026 Spring Wine Forum, LCBO's CEO Aaron Campbell said the company is "fully committed to the expansion of VQA shelf space."

Coun. Erwin Wiens, a grape grower who sells produce to wineries across town, attributed VQA's current success in part to lobbying efforts by indus-

try representatives and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to encourage the province to raise the visibility of Ontario craft wines.

He pointed to provincial measures introduced in recent years, including eliminating the 6.1 per cent tax on wine purchased at wineries, as important steps forward.

"The province has been a major player in trying to advance the wine industry in Niagara," he said. "This is just the next step, which is an amazing step."

To maintain momentum, however, Wiens and Ziraldo

said provincial governments need to address interprovincial trade barriers.

Currently, each province has different rules and markups governing out-of-province wine sales, returning home with wine purchased elsewhere and direct-to-consumer wine shipping.

For Ontario wineries, that makes it difficult to sell wine outside the province, whether in stores or online. British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia are currently the only provinces allowing residents to buy Canadian wine produced outside their provincial borders.

In March, Ontario signed an agreement with Nova Scotia allowing consumers in both provinces to ship wine directly to their homes from the other province, though the arrangement is not yet fully in effect.

Wiens acknowledged those barriers are beginning to come down, but he and Ziraldo said they want to see broader co-operation across Canada's wine industry, with provinces promoting Canadian products

collectively.

"We want to work with our partners," Wiens said. "We don't want to say, 'Buy ours, don't buy B.C.' We want to say, 'Buy Canadian' and divert your views away from Burgundy and California and Chile and look at Canada."

Ziraldo said he has been advocating for the creation of what he describes as a "VQA Canada" — a national standard for wine production.

"There's really only one rule and it's 100 per cent grown in the wine regions in Canada. That can stay until we're legislated, which may take some time," he said. "I presented to the Wine Growers of Canada and they endorsed VQA Canada across Canada and the liquor boards."

After 20 years of advocating for changes to the system, Wiens said, loosening trade restrictions could have major economic benefits, particularly for Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"To have that extra shelf space will be such an amazing boon for our economy."

zahraa@niagaranow.com

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The NOTL Chamber of Commerce is proud to celebrate the outstanding businesses, leaders, entrepreneurs, and community builders who continue to make Niagara-on-the-Lake one of the most vibrant and inspiring communities in Ontario.

The 2026 Business Achievement Awards will take place on Wednesday, May 20, 2026, at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery, bringing together local business owners, community leaders, stakeholders, and supporters for an evening dedicated to recognition, connection, and celebration.

This year's celebration will also include a special presentation of the Chamber of Commerce Award to Janice Thomson, recognizing her instrumental role in helping shape and strengthen the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce. Her leadership, dedication, and



Left: Janice Thomson, longtime president of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, is the recipient of this year's Chamber of Commerce Award. Right: Tickets for this year's awards gala are on sale at chambernotl.com/business-awards.



long-standing commitment to the local business community have played an important role in supporting the Chamber's growth and continued success.

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Tony D'Amore of Willowbridge Homes Niagara & Lux NOTL Rentals, Erinn Lockhart of Sweets & Swirls Café,

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Peter Ling Award for Business Leadership

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Christopher Newton Award for Arts and Culture

Andorlie Hillstrom of Yellow Door Theatre Project, Debra Antoncic of RiverBrink Art Museum, and Katie Houghton of Willowbank School of Restoration Arts.

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The Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce extends sincere thanks to all of this year's award sponsors for their generous support and commitment to celebrating excellence in our community.

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Flower fest brings colour to town

Continued from Front Page

a Feather Gala dinner on Saturday and more.

Sixteen teams of floral designers from Niagara and the Greater Toronto Area were responsible for

putting together the floral displays installed at several locations in town. A handful were from NOTL: Bloom & Co., June Floral & Garden, Clippings Floral Design and Lady Lavender Floral.

This year, two teams were declared the winners of two separate competitions — Bloom & Co., led by Kalin Falconer, won the outdoor installation competition for their selfie station that depicts

a gathering of woodland creatures in a forest, and June Floral & Garden, led by Joanne Bassie, won best table setting at the Birds of a Feather Gala, which featured bird-themed table designs.



From top to bottom, left to right: At Queen's Landing, winter meets spring in this floral installation designed by 3 Girls Floral of a polar bear with her cub outside the front of the hotel. This friendly tortoise was one of many creatures hanging around the Prince of Wales Hotel. The king of the jungle is all class with his dapper bowtie at the Charles Hotel and Hob Nob Restaurant, designed by Mint & Magnolia. Outside the Drawing Room of the Prince of Wales Hotel, Dmitry and Eugenia Korniyukhov and their sons, Daniel, 8, and Matthew, 5, are embedded in a woodland wonderland of flowers and critters. Bloom & Co. put together this display. PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE VAN DE LAAR AND JOHN DELORENZI

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Museum talk explores secrets of Short Hills

Staff
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is set to host its next monthly lecture later this month, exploring the hidden history of one of Niagara's most well-known natural areas.

On May 21, Sara Nixon will present "Secrets of the Short Hills," an evening lecture examining the history and lesser-known stories connected to Short Hills Provincial Park.

Located near St. Catharines, the park is known for its steep terrain formed by glacial erosion more than 12,000 years ago and remains a popular destination for hikers, cyclists and horseback riders.

But Nixon says the landscape also contains traces of Niagara's early settlement and industrial history.

"The Short Hills are filled with clues to the early settlement and industry of our area," Nixon

said in a release. "When you know where to look you can find the unusual — like attempts to build a military fortress, or evidence of the dramatic 1838 raid led by cross-border rebels."

Nixon, who grew up in Grimsby, holds a master's degree in public history from Carleton University and has worked in museums and heritage preservation for more than a decade.

She currently serves as chair of the Grimsby Heritage Advisory Committee and director of community engagement at The Brown Homestead, a Loyalist homestead established in 1785.

The lecture begins at 7:30 p.m. at the museum, located at 43 Castlereagh St.

Admission is free for museum members and \$10 for non-members. Registration is required.

More information is available through the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum.



Short Hills Provincial Park is known for its steep terrain formed by glacial erosion more than 12,000 years ago. SUPPLIED



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Shaw Guild's annual garden tour returns

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

The Shaw Guild is marking a special milestone this June with the 20th anniversary of its annual garden tour, which offers visitors a behind-the-scenes look at some of Niagara-on-the-Lake's most beautiful residential gardens.

A handful of properties in Old Town will open their gardens to the public on Saturday, June 13 for self-guided tours from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Alongside exploring the gardens of these selected properties, the homeowners and master gardeners will be on site at each home to share how these gardens came together and the history of the trees and plantings, as well as guide you on what you can achieve in your own garden at home.

"It's just a lovely experience," said Valerie Hancock, chair of this year's garden tour. "It's an opportunity to see behind the gar-



Visitors of the Shaw Guild Garden Tour can go "behind the garden gates" of seven different homes in Old Town that house lavish gardens in full bloom. FILE/DAVE VAN DE LAAR

den gates. You get to go to the backside of the homes and to see what's actually happening in the spaces that we don't often see from the roadway."

There will also be live music entertainment at several of the sites and plein air artists working outdoors, capturing the scenery of these gardens throughout the day, plus floral arrange-

ment demonstrations.

Tickets are on sale now for \$25 per person until the day of the tour, when they will rise to \$35. This will allow you to enter the gardens of seven homes.

New this year is a special tour of the historic McArthur Estate. Unlike the main homes tour, tickets for this tour are limited and \$35 each.

As an early-bird special, those who purchase a ticket for both tours by June 12 will pay \$55.

Buying a ticket helps support the Shaw Guild, which supports a variety of initiatives at the Shaw Festival.

At one of the seven homes on the tour, the McFarland House, visitors can pre-order a light lunch or traditional cream tea while taking in the view of the Niagara Parks. Pre-orders open May 17 and are limited to 200 guests. To reserve, call 905-468-3322.

Also part of the tour is a rest-stop at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre, which will offer visitors to view its gardens and watch their artists paint outdoors.

Here is a list of the participating homes: 216 William St.; 335 Victoria St.; 118 Johnson St.; 184 Queen St.; 242 Ricardo St.; 289 Ricardo St.; 15927 Niagara River Pkwy. (McFarland House); and 210 John St. E (McArthur Estate).

To purchase tickets, visit shawguild.ca/garden-tour.




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St. Davids development debate reignites criticism over town's approval process

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A council discussion about sidewalks and traffic in St. Davids has reopened broader criticism from a resident over how the town handles development approvals.

Nicholas Colaneri says a development project at Paxton Lane has become about far more than roads and sidewalks, arguing it reflects larger concerns about consultation, archeology and how council handles controversial development applications.

The criticism resurfaced as councillors voted unanimously to study possible upgrades to infrastructure for walking and biking, costs and constraints along Paxton Lane, a narrow road connected to a development called the Settlement at St. Davids extension.

The motion came shortly after council approved a zoning change for 46 Paxton Ln. that keeps part of the property off-limits to development or site work until the town receives archeological assessments and a ministry acknowledgement letter showing the requirements have been addressed.

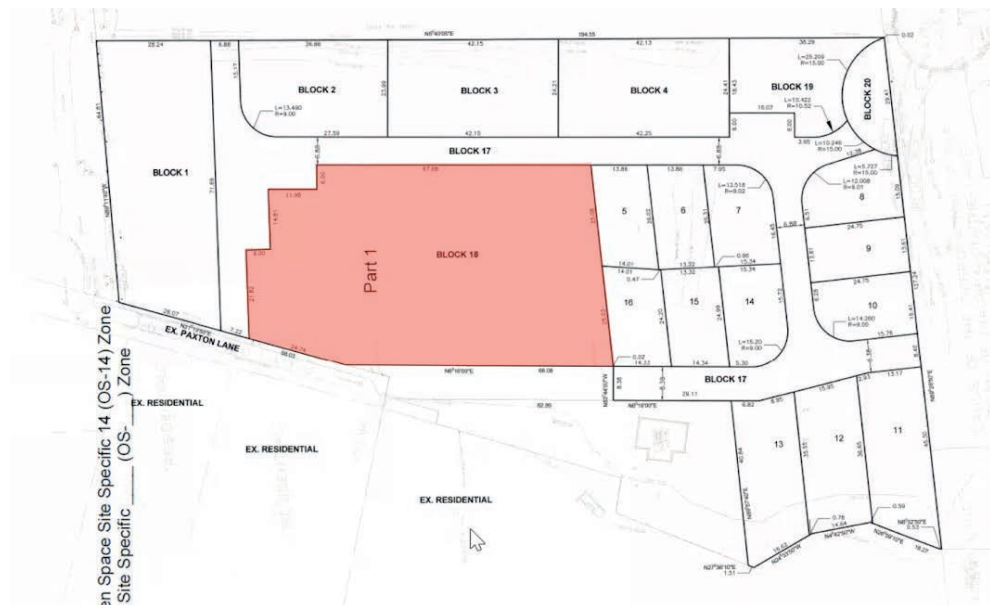
The archeology concerns around 46 Paxton Ln. date back more than a decade. In a 2013 Ontario Land Tribunal decision approving the subdivision, the tribunal (then known as the Ontario Municipal Board) said parts of the property likely containing heritage resources and archeological artifacts were to be turned over to the town.

The current zoning change alters that arrangement by allowing the applicant to keep the land, while still preventing development on the protected portion until the archeological conditions are satisfied.

Colaneri argues that condition shows the file should not be treated as routine.

"If the ministry has concerns about archeological protection, then why doesn't the town?"

Coun. Gary Burroughs



Archeological concerns surrounding 46 Paxton Ln. — specifically a parcel within the development known as Block 18 — date back more than a decade. In 2013, the Ontario Land Tribunal ruled that archeological artifacts discovered on the property should be turned over to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. SOURCED

raised concerns about Indigenous consultation connected to the development approval process.

"Our local Indigenous groups were not consulted," he said. "We shouldn't be saying that we have."

Aimee Alderman, the town's director of planning, building and development services, told council the application was circulated to Indigenous communities as required and that archeological assessments on the property met provincial standards.

"As part of our circulation for the planning application, we do circulate to a couple of Indigenous communities, as is required, and we've been in consultation with the province to ensure that our circulations are meeting all requirements," she said.

Colaneri provided The Lake Report with an April 2 email that appears to be from Adam LaForme, manager of archeology with Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation's department of consultation and accommodation. In the email, LaForme wrote that the department "has not received any correspondence from the proponent since 2021."

"Despite this, the director of planning told council, on the record, that all necessary Indigenous engagement had been completed and that all requirements had been met."

"The applicant's planner

made the same claim," he added.

Coun. Erwin Wiens argued it was too late in the process to reopen the issue.

"I think it's totally inappropriate at this point in time to bring it up now," he said, adding the town also has timelines to meet under the Planning Act.

The later motion on active transportation (walking, biking, skateboarding and similar methods of getting around), brought forward by Coun. Adriana Vizzari and seconded by Coun. Maria Mavridis, asks staff to prepare a budget request for a study looking at whether Paxton Lane can be rebuilt with safer space for pedestrians and cyclists.

The motion says Paxton Lane between York Road and 46 Paxton Ln. is a "sub-standard roadway" without active transportation facilities, meaning pedestrians, cyclists and drivers have to share the road.

It also says the sidewalk on Four Mile Creek Road is too narrow to properly accommodate pedestrians and accessibility needs.

The proposed study would look at the financial and physical constraints involved. But town staff warned there are significant limitations.

"My understanding is that's one of the challenges that we face with any upgrades to Paxton Lane North previously, is the

existing road allowance and the impact on the existing properties for any kind of comprehensive improvements," a staff member told council.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor said she supports improving active transportation, but questioned whether the motion was skipping ahead of other town priorities.

"I'm just a little concerned that this is sort've jumping the queue without appropriate rationale," O'Connor said.

Wiens said now is the time to bring this forward, since the concerns in the motion could not be addressed during the application process itself.

"(Vizzari's) concern of connectivity, although totally valid, we couldn't fit that into the conversation in regards to the subdivision," he said. "They're two separate pieces."

"We want to have some sort of idea," he added. "So I'm super excited by it."

For Colaneri, the Paxton Lane file is part of a larger concern about development approvals in town.

"The town does what it wants," he said. "The heritage properties, the Greenbelt land, the employment designations, the institutional sites, the archeological record, the tree canopy. None of it is recoverable once it is gone."

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Fort Mississauga after the War of 1812

Tony Chisholm
Special to The Lake Report

After the War of 1812, Fort Mississauga was garrisoned on a limited and sporadic basis. During the Upper Canada Rebellions in the 1830s, Fort Mississauga underwent major restoration, including work to the tower, the addition of a ravelin and a splinter proof barracks for 150 men.

The interior of the tower was renovated to include a powder magazine, commissariat stores and sleeping quarters for 50 men. Throughout the 1840s, until 1850, the fort was garrisoned by a company of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment, and a detachment of Royal artillery, that oversaw the large number of artillery pieces on site.

By 1858, Fort Mississauga had been officially abandoned by the British Army and turned over to the Canadian government. Volunteer Canadian militia companies reoccupied the fort during heightened periods of tension including the American Civil War. The fort once again fell into ruins.



Public tours of Fort Mississauga will run from May 16 to June 28, offering a rare glimpse inside the fort, located at the edge of the NOTL Golf Club course. NOTL MUSEUM

In 1905, a permanent golf course was laid out around Fort Mississauga, with a green located inside the earthworks.

During the First World War, Fort Mississauga was part of Camp Niagara's training grounds, and once again underwent restoration work, including putting up new gates, fixing the roof, and building a breakwater.

After the First World War, Fort Mississauga once again fell silent. In 1969, Parks Canada was given custodianship of the site, and over the last decade

have overseen extensive restoration work at the site.

New this year: Fort Mississauga National Historic Site will be open on weekends from May 16 to June 28, from 10 a.m. to 4:30 pm each Saturday and Sunday. Join Friends of Fort George staff on-site and explore this historic gem with us.

Our interpreters will be on-site within the grounds of Fort Mississauga with replica artifacts, children's activities and a small gift shop display. Join us and learn about the history of the site, access the interior of the tower, and take part

in our historic tours. Our in-depth tours will take place at 11 a.m.; 1 p.m.; and 3 p.m., each day, and will include a visit to the Sally Port with our staff.

Visiting the site is free of charge, but accessing the interior of the site, or going on a tour costs \$5/person.

For more information, contact the Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621 or email admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca. All proceeds from this initiative will help to support student employment opportunities at Fort George and Brock's Monument.

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Mines and Watson top shooters in men's league

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

The trio of Jared Mines, Ricky Watson and Joe Doria dominated the competition in the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club's men's league last week.

Mines and Watson tied for low gross with scores of 1-over 37, while sharpshooting Doria was closest to the pin on both #4 and #9.

Watson also took home the prize for sinking the longest putt on #2.

John Liotta rounded out the winning with the longest drive on #3 and best low net score, with 32. Mines had second low net, with 33.

Dan Plomish cashed in big with a birdie on the sixth hole, winning a \$55 gross skin and a \$60 net skin. Doria earned a gross skin for his birdie on #7.

Other net skin winners were Stephen Jenkins (#1) and Liotta (#3).

Smooth-swinging Jim McMacken was in fine form in the men's Tuesday Woofs



Joe Doria was closest to the pin on both par 3s in men's league at the NOTL Golf Club last week. FILE/RON PLANCHE

Jen Kroeker had the longest drive on #1, Edie Sammons was closest to the 150 marker on #2 and Bobbie Corcoran was closest to the pin on #4. Sheridan Daly was closest to the pin in two on the ninth hole.

Sue Sherk was the top shooter in Tuesday's nine-hole women's league, carding a 47. Suzanne Watson was second at 49 while Joan Maida and Carolyn Cochrane were right behind at 50.

Linda Williams drained the longest putt on #2 and Watson had the longest drive on #8

Yolanda Henry was the top shooter in the 18-hole women's league on Tuesday, firing a 95.

Cathy Taylor was second at 104 had a bird on #12 and was closest to the pin in two on #18. Ginny Green was right behind her with a score of 105.

Judy Mantle had the hot hand on the greens, needing just 31 putts for her round.

kevin@niagaranow.com

league, firing a 3-over 39 to win low gross.

Harry Huizer was low net at 35 and Kevin Jackson was closest to the pin on #4.

Norm Kerr's birdie on #2

won the hidden hole prize.

In Monday's business women's league, Tracey Peters was the low gross winner with 47 and also sank the longest putt on #7.



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NOTL Lawn Bowling Club rolls into 149th season

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

What may be Canada's oldest lawn bowling club is heading into its 150th year with one problem: not enough people know this timeless sport exists.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Lawn Bowling Club opened its 149th season Saturday with a bagpipe parade and ceremonial first bowl, but club president Martin Quick says the milestone year carries two urgent priorities: increasing membership and replacing the club's playing surface before its sesquicentennial anniversary.

The club dates to 1877, when visitors bowled on the grounds of the old Queen's Royal Hotel, but COVID-era restrictions gutted membership and the roster has still not recovered.

The carpet on the club's current green, installed when it moved to the NOTL Community Centre in the early 2000s, has never been replaced. Quick says it



The NOTL Lawn Bowling Club celebrates the opening of its 149th season on Saturday. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

prevents wheelchair access to the playing surface.

"What we're looking for is a new carpet," he said. "The original carpet, it's done its job, it has to be replaced."

The club has been trying to recover its membership base since pandemic-era restrictions cut active play and froze recruitment for two seasons. Past president

Paul McHoull says those years broke the club's usual pipeline for new members.

"It really hurt in the sense that for a couple of years we were sort of lost, and we lost some members," said McHoull.

The club currently fields competitive women's and men's teams, with matches on Thursdays and Wednes-

days respectively. Recreational play runs Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:30 to 4 p.m., Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 1:30 to 5 p.m. Open houses run every Saturday through May and June for prospective members.

Coun. Erwin Wiens delivered the ceremonial first bowl following the tradi-

tional parade onto the green, led by piper Gary Cooper. Wiens also pledged support for local recreation spending.

"When it comes to sports and recreation, those promises I'll make because that's what we need," said Wiens. "Without it, this doesn't exist."

McHoull, who served as president in 2015 and

2016 and again during the pandemic recovery, says the club holds a place in NOTL's heritage that stretches back to when visitors arrived by boat and train to summer at the Queen's Royal Hotel. He says the club drew bowlers from across Ontario and from the United States during its early decades on the old Regent Street site.

"Arguably we're the oldest club in Canada," he said. "It's really a part of the heritage of this town."

Quick says the club is hoping to plan at least one event to mark the 150th anniversary but has not finalised anything with the board. The carpet replacement, he says, is the more pressing item.

"To have a bowling club that's 150 years old here in Canada is really something," he said.

Quick expects the carpet replacement to move forward before the 2027 season opens.

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BKind Grateful #75: Let a kid press the elevator button or the crosswalk button. Small win.

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Contributed by Patty Garriock
 "Spring fever, spring is here at last. Spring fever, my heart's beating fast. Get up, get out. Spring is everywhere." - Elvis Presley

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NOTL in BOOM!

With a cloud of smoke rolling across the field, John-Michael Lelievre fires a cannon at Fort George in honour of his mother, who is courageously fighting cancer, during the "Niagara in Boom – Mother's Day Special."
 DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

The next ambition of Andrea Kaiser



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
 Columnist

Some people are driven into politics by an issue. A cause. A crusade.

Others just crave being elected. In power. In public. Drawing attention. Building an image.

This will be Andrea Kaiser's seventh election. She's won a few. Lost the three big federal ones. Now she wants to be the mayor. More accurately, she'd really relish the title and the trappings. But she's busy, so this would be a great add-on to her successful life. Like the current guy, she would be another part-timer.

Kaiser is a brand. Her father helped found Inniskillin Wines, and she's been steeped in the industry all her adult life, building her reputation.

For 23 years she's been director of marketing at Reif Estate Winery. She's been chair of the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake. She markets herself as a public speaker and has done international gigs. She leads the marketing and strategy division of her brother's company, Kaiser Design and Marketing.

She is founder, owner and principal of her own



Winemaker, businesswoman, hired speaker and regional rep Andrea Kaiser is running in her seventh election – this time for lord mayor. But a part-time one. GARTH TURNER

wine brand, Drea's Wine Co, where her Rosato was named a top Canadian rosé by Decanter, and her Sauvignon Blanc received distinction from critic Janis Robinson.

Oh, and lately she's been sitting on regional council. But now the province is nixing that job. So Andrea is running for the high-profile position of mayor in a town that would call her "lord."

Is this about Andrea Inc? Or the voters?

"If I were lord mayor, I would be putting aside some of those roles to be able to balance that effectively," she says, "and would largely give up working with my brother's company so that I could have time to do the job of mayor."

But wait. This job is not just ruling NOTL anymore. Given what's coming, our lord mayor will also be

the sole and only rep at the senior level of government, Niagara Region. Kaiser already knows what that workload amounts to. Being mayor would be extra. How does one already-busy person do that part-time?

"I will be giving up a significant part of my workload in order to take on the capacity of lord mayor. I understand it kind of would likely be full-time hours by the time you add in evenings and community events."

Let's ask the obvious question. Is this about money?

"Yes, it's largely related to income. If it were a position where I could work full-time, and provide an income to live on, that I would require, to pay my mortgage etc., then I would certainly look at being a full-time mayor."

But even so, Kaiser says, her loyalty and attention would be divided.

"In any scenario, I would keep my wine brand. It's a very personal passion project."

Is being a winemaker and a lord mayor plus regional leader with sway over the industry, tourism and agricultural policy a conflict of interest? Some people have wondered if the incumbent's professional real-estate career has greased the way for an explosion in development in NOTL.

Would Kaiser fall on her background and brand and become a winery-tourism mayor?

"I think anyone who knows me would know that if I had a conflict, I would definitely say so. I feel like I have a very good reputation in terms of people trusting me and what you see is what you get."

"I would definitely like to see tourism flourish, whether it's more or people just staying longer. I'm a tourist person. I come from the tourist industry. I was a hotelier. A restaurant owner and my father started a winery. I love that mix of culture and experiences that residents get from a flourishing tourism industry."

And more tourists filling the streets would be good for business. For flogging wine. And the Kaiser brand.

Later this year, after speaking with residents, she plans on having policies.

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

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Will parking lot on Wellington succeed? The numbers suggest that it won't

Dear editor:

I am one of those snowbirds, just returned home, missed the to and fro of local politics and the never-to-end proposals for development, but my neighbours have quickly brought me up to speed.

With the clarity of thought this break has rendered, I am processing the significant decision over 176 Wellington St., the old hospital.

I understand that council through public forums and other means has sought citizen opinions and currently has authorized up to \$200,000 to advance design, costing and financial modelling for a parking garage. Perhaps a reasonable step, if the underlying assumptions hold.

The problem is that the numbers now emerging strongly suggest they may not. At first glance, the proposal is straightforward: a structured parking facility of approximately 150 spaces, potentially integrated with community uses.

The preliminary capital estimate is \$14.7 million, or roughly \$98,000 per space. Annual operating costs are projected between \$120,000 and \$225,000, with additional accessibility requirements to increase that figure.

So, what does the town's own data tell us? Current



Letter writer Colin Patey says the numbers available today show the town's vision for a parking garage at the old hospital site wouldn't financially sustain itself. FILE

utilization at the hospital site is approximately seven per cent, far below the broader Old Town system average of roughly 23 per cent for the entire heritage district. Thus paid-parking system is operating well below capacity.

Based on reported revenues, utilization equates to approximately 22.8 per cent of theoretical maximum. This matters because the financial projections for the new structure assume something very different.

Town modelling appears to rely on utilization rates between 55 per cent and 85 per cent. That is between two and eight times current performance at the site, and well above system-wide average. Recent increases in parking revenue do not resolve this gap.

The town's 2024 figures reflect improved monetiza-

tion — higher rates, better enforcement and digital payment systems — not a surge in demand. That is a one-time step change, not evidence of sustained growth.

Only at sustained utilization levels above approximately 55 per cent does the structure approach breakeven.

The risk profile becomes clear. This is a project with fixed, long-term debt obligations, paired with revenue that is seasonal, variable, and sensitive to policy choices. If demand falls short — or even stabilizes at current levels — the gap does not disappear.

All of this leads to a simple conclusion: under realistic conditions, the proposed parking structure is unlikely to be financially self-sustaining, and the burden shifts to the taxpayer.

This is at a time when citizens are alarmed that taxes are not being contained.

That should give any council pause.

There is also a broader question that extends beyond the balance sheet. The hospital site is not just another parcel of land. It is one of the most important dwindling public assets in the town.

Its use should reflect long-term community priorities, and fit into the long-term vision for our community, not a response to peak-season demand for parking.

Before committing to a permanent structure, the town has options that are more flexible and far less costly: peripheral parking with shuttle service, pricing strategies to shift demand or seasonal measures tailored to peak periods.

These approaches can be tested, adjusted, and scaled. A \$14.7 million structure cannot.

This is not a question of being for or against parking. It is a question of whether the proposed solution matches the problem, whether the numbers support the decision, and if the proposal fits the vision for our NOTL.

On the evidence available today, it does not.

Colin Patey
Old Town

Community spaces foster a sense of belonging

Dear editor:

I am writing as a resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the owner of Bêlisle Pottery, a small arts-based studio in Virgil.

Over the past three years, our studio has grown into more than just a place to make ceramics. It has become a community hub. We now have 30 active members, a waitlist across multiple age groups and we regularly welcome both residents and visitors through workshops, collaborations and events.

Spaces like ours are not just businesses. They are places where people gather, learn and connect outside of their daily rou-

tines. They support mental health, foster belonging and create opportunities for meaningful engagement at every stage of life.

At the same time, spaces like ours are fragile. Many small arts spaces operate with a level of uncertainty, and finding suitable, properly equipped and affordable space is increasingly difficult. When these spaces are lost, what disappears is not just a business, but a piece of the community itself.

Sites like 176 Wellington represent an opportunity. Not just for development, but for thoughtful development. I would encourage the town to remain open

to proposals that balance community needs with its own priorities, and to consider how spaces for arts, culture and gathering can be part of that future.

As conversations around this site include the possibility of additional parking, I would also encourage the town to think creatively about access and mobility. Many well-loved destinations rely on peripheral parking paired with small shuttle systems to support walkable cores. It is something I would absolutely use myself for a night in Old Town.

As Laozi wrote, "Clay is molded to make a vessel, but the utility lies in

the space within." Spaces like these serve that same purpose for a community. They bring together people of all ages, encourage lifelong learning and create opportunities for meaningful engagement as we age.

These environments are both community-driven and economically sustainable.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is known for its culture, its charm and its sense of place. Supporting small creative businesses and community spaces is essential to preserving that identity while allowing it to grow.

Valérie Bêlisle
NOTL



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: KNIVES OUT

In a nursery rhyme, the farmer's wife wields a carving knife while clipping this trio.

Last issue category: DOCTORED TELEVISION

Clue: Pop music idol Rick Springfield played Dr. Noah Drake on this medical drama that has aired more than 15,000 episodes.

Answer: What is General Hospital?

Answered first by: Bill Hamilton

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Sue Rautenberg, Bob Wheatley, Margie Enns, Susan Hamilton, Lynda Collet, Jane Morris, Becky Creager, Jeff Lake, Jim Dandy, Emma Balsas, Claudia Grimwood, Nancy Rocca, Esther VanGorder, Donna Pearce, Mike Gander, Wade Durling, Sheila Mead, Catherine Clarke, Marla Percy, Sylvia Wiens, Howard Jones, Margaret Garaughty, Michelle Gallacher, Hedy Wiebe, Sheila Meloche, Darla Allan

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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Autocracy has found a home in Ontario under Ford



Brian Marshall
Columnist

parliament designed to centralize decision-making power at the provincial level through regional chairs appointed by the Ford government and who will be granted sweeping powers over the elected members of the regional council.

Clearly, this arrangement is designed to facilitate Ford's ability to direct the actions of the regional chairpersons in whatever fashion he may desire.

Apparently Mr. Ford believes that he makes better decisions than any other elected official in the province. This despite a sorry track record of passing legislation that has not succeeded in anything other than wild spending — something that has resulted in Ontario having the largest deficit in the history of the province. Moreover, the provincial government is no more efficient today than it was a decade ago.

Take health care for example — something that, unfortunately, during the last 10 days I have had direct experience with.

You see, last Tuesday it was necessary to take my wife into emergency. We arrived at the hospital at 5 p.m. and the intake, facilitated by our doctor having faxed advanced notification to them, was remarkably



An intelligent man would not make the decisions Doug Ford is making — underfunding health care, shielding himself from freedom of information requests and pushing amalgamation despite evidence of its failures, writes Brian Marshall.

swift. It was the only efficient service transaction during the following hours and days.

It was 2 a.m. before a doctor recommended that she be admitted into the hospital and it was 5:30 a.m. before the doctor who had the authority to do so was able to get to see her. That gentleman was the only internist on duty in the entire hospital and he was continually on the run.

We remained in the ER for another 12 hours before a "bed" could be found.

Now, to be clear, this bed was not in a hospital room — it was in a hallway alcove screened off by portable folding screens. The nursing staff — wonderful,

caring people by the way — stated that this was because the hospital was full to overflowing. However, they also reported that these hallway beds were in common and constant use.

My wife spent the next two days in the hallway with minimal privacy, assaulted by noise and under lights that stayed on 24 hours a day. Finally, and again due to the fierce advocacy of a couple of outstanding nurses, she was able to be placed in an actual room.

Confusion is rampant, scheduling of tests and procedures chaotic — often illustrating that the right hand has little or no idea what the left hand is doing — and communication

between medical staff and patients is disjointed and regularly must be corrected due to that chaos resulting in undue stress for the patient.

In my observation, this is not the fault of the nurses or doctors. This is a system that is tasked well beyond its maximum capacity, particularly given the shortage of specialists.

There are plenty of electronics — many hours are spent by every shift documenting the condition, care and treatment of each patient. In fact, I believe there is so much data stored in that it is practically impossible for the incoming shift to read it all. It is my suspicion that shift change briefing between incoming and outgoing nurses is vital to ensure the care of patients.

I could go on, but I think the point is clear.

Our health-care system has been, and is, chronically underfunded by the Ford government while he spends federal healthcare transfer money elsewhere.

But wait, he says: my government spends more on health care than anyone ever has.

To that I would say: the price of steak when Doug Ford took office was a fraction of what you pay today.

Of course the cost of health care is higher now than at anytime in history — so is everything else.

The issue is one of more dollars and a rethink of the system itself. As I have written in the past, bigger and centralized is not better (The Lake Report, "Arch-i-text: Amalgamation shows bigger is rarely better," Jan. 25, 2024). In fact, it is considerably worse.

But Premier Ford seems not to be aware of this as he attempts to take direct charge of regional government and involve his administration in all manner of ridiculous undertakings, while denying the voting public the right to information and participation.

An intelligent man concerned with the welfare of this province's citizens would come to very different decisions than what is currently occurring at Queen's Park.

Instead, we have someone who purports to be a man of the people while acting like an autocrat and ignoring his government's record of failure.

Sounds a lot like Trump, no?

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

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Schools are a part of **real towns**

Dear editor:
Niagara-on-the-Lake is my home. I have lived here my whole life. I'm 13 years old and I go to Royal Oak Community School right in Niagara-on-the-Lake. It is also the only grade school in the town. I want to tell you about what it's like growing up here.

All through NOTL, you can see beautiful scenery. The town comes together to have flowers and other plants along the streets in the spring and summer. I bike to school past all of them.

Kids throughout town and kids outside the town join together to be part of community events.

In the fall, the kids come out for Remembrance Day and replace all the flags on the veterans' graves. We can walk to the graveyard from our school. In the winter we walk to the Shaw theatre and see a play like "A Christmas Carol." All these things make us care about the town.

It is important to have a school in the town where you live because it causes kids to get in touch with



Grade 8 student Aspen Ziraldo at Royal Oak School was at the opening of the new playground at Simcoe Park. He calls the upgrade "unnecessary change" and says the town should focus on preserving his school, instead of tearing down the property and putting up a parking lot. SUPPLIED

the town and learn how to be part of the community so that people who grow up here care about where they live. Making core memories helps a small town grow in strength and in heart.

This week my school went to a ribbon cutting

ceremony at Simcoe Park because the town had just put in new park equipment.

When we got there, the mayor did his spiel and when he did, he asked the kids who were there if the park needed new equipment and they all said "No!" Showing that even the

littlest of kids don't want unnecessary change.

I hear that my town is supposed to be a "tourist town" — and that's OK — but it's still a town and a town needs a school to be a real town.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is special. It is much more than just a tourist town — it is home to tons of people and animals that deserve to live in a small, lively town where people can grow up.

If the town continues to tear down buildings for tourism and build parking lots in place of schools, it removes the scenery and voices of school kids entirely from its streets.

As someone who goes to a school here and loves going to school here, I believe we need to keep the school where it is and stop tearing things down just for money.

The town has to start caring about the people of NOTL and as one of them, I am asking: please don't pave paradise to put up a parking lot.

*Aspen Ziraldo
NOTL*

Less development for profit, **more for us**

Dear editor:
The intention of the Burton Family Foundation's proposal was well-explained in their CEO's letter to the editor on April 23 ("A shared opportunity for 176 Wellington").

It appears that they strongly believe that the hospital property should continue to be used by the residents who built and paid for it over 70 years ago.

I understand that James Burton has agreed to fund much of the costs necessary for the hospital to continue to be used by the community.

By contrast, council doesn't seem to want this to happen, preferring that the property be used by strangers as a parking garage which the town has to pay for.

Surely it's time for council to stop making decisions that benefit commercial developments and get back to making decisions that will make the community a better place to live, which I think is what the Burton Family Foundation's proposal intends to do.

*Wayne Murray
NOTL*



Some of NOTL's most treasured places were built just for residents to enjoy — not for profit, not to benefit developers — just for people who live here to use. FILE

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NOTL flower fest is what our town is all about



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

No matter how hard we work, and how clever we are, sometimes something goes right. A perfect example of this was NOTL In Bloom last weekend. Not one person had even the slightest complaint.

Every comment was as positive as the previous or subsequent comment. "This is all so perfect" was the universal comment, from local folk and from visitors to our area.

With the marketing muscle of the Vintage Hotels organization, followed up and quarterbacked by its

professional, understated hospitality team, NOTLers and thousands of visitors were able to put aside the usual discussions for a few days and enjoy the lingering and tardy arrival of spring.

The theme of this second annual NOTL In Bloom was "All Creatures Big and Small," and we certainly had plenty of creatures in town. All largely made from fresh flowers.

Polar bears, dolphins, lions, red vested bunny rabbits, caterpillars. And more. And more. Not to mention a large sushi display made of flowers on Queen Street. Dogs. Cats. Gyro's on the Lake created floral animals and an owl. Beau Chapeau and NEOB Lavender were on theme, as ever. The Irish Design shop went above and beyond creatively, with floral sheep and flowers.

There were 10 more florists involved this year. The sky seems to be the limit as we bloom into the future.

Not many years ago, effervescent Niagarian Cheri O'Reilly had flown over Newfoundland to London. Ever the observant student and always on the case, she came upon Chelsea in Bloom. It was centred around ever-so frou-frou Sloane Street and King's Road, in its 19th year. She was intrigued, somewhat gobsmacked by the event. Her creative wheels started turning.

She made notes and when back in Niagara, presented the vision to Vintage Hotels. Bob Jackson, Michelle Miller and their co-workers along with Jennifer Holmes of Clippings quickly grasped the potential. They realized this could be the much-needed transition from winter to spring to summer here in our town.

NOTL. Or is it Niagara-on-the-Lake? Let's make a decision on this "branding." Over the 12 months of the year, I am downtown a lot. I listen and read and observe. With the always accurate



Visitors check out and pose with the pink plumage on this quintet of flamingos — these lively creatures were set up at the Gardens at the Pillar and Post. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

benefit of hindsight, the progress of NOTL In Bloom, as it marched to a triumphant and effulgent event, was a marvel to observe.

"All Creatures Big and Small" was the result of so much hard work, imagination and collaboration.

But frankly, it snuck up on me. A month or so ago, the driver of a Clippings vehicle assured me that In Bloom was developing as planned, and it was going to be awesome.

In past years, I have been involved with many events. In Ontario, in Canada, and around the world. Attending trade shows, enjoying international sporting events, and working at some of them.

I understand Gantt charts, and how to track preparatory progress.

Remember, I was not involved in NOTL In Bloom in the slightest. But I intently observed. I had no reason to fret, because the professionals at Vintage "were on it." I didn't even make a quick call to Cheri, and didn't ask any questions of Vintage pals.

I thought having NOTL In Bloom over four days coincident with Mother's Day would prove to be a really brilliant or a really dumb idea. Talk about wishy washy.

As an awkward and stretching aside, rambling somewhat, I have always had a warm feeling about the word bloom. As a teenage lad, I worked for two summers as a cook at Pioneer Camp, 10 miles south of Huntsville on the shore of Lake Clearwater.

My boss, one of the most memorable people I have ever chanced to meet, was a Toronto Bible College student named Peter Bloom. About 25 years old, give or take. He also cut our hair for five bucks.

He was talented enough to be the head cook at a camp for about 250 boys.

Stern with us, fair, non-judgemental and sometimes funny. Boss Bloom was one of those people you always remember. One of his mantras was, "If you've got time to lean, you've got time to clean."

Truly, a Christian who always walked the talk.

Enough said? I guess I have always had a soft spot for the word bloom.

After a long and very cold winter, this town was in need of a jolt of positivity. Tulips, daffodils and countless other horticultural masterpieces. I was being told by my friends in the agricultural business that the warm weather was about a week behind.

Whatever. The weather was destined to be perfect for In Bloom long weekend.

Subtly and without fanfare, things rolled out for the May 8 opening of NOTL In Bloom. Several times, I was intrigued by the enthusiasm and creativity of our neighbours in the downtown core. It was as if gardening maestro Chris Allen had invited people to join him in beautifying "the prettiest town in Canada."

Rambling off topic again, the abundance of flowers reminded me of my days in the 1960s in St. Catharines. Each Spring, my mother and her friends at Mountainview United Church worked hard to present a fundraiser called the Geranium Tea. Way back then, we were introduced to the concept of beautiful flowers creating a mood. An atmosphere. Ambience.

Each year, the south end of St. Catharines was suddenly beautified with the planting of hundreds of geraniums purchased at the Mountainview Geranium Tea. Flower beds and window planters became effulgent, and the world seemed to smile a bit more.

And now I come to my slightly stretched lesson taken from our recent NOTL In Bloom triumph.

We have just observed what can happen when everyone gets behind a project, with positive attitudes and energy. Of course, we needed the marketing muscle of Vintage Hotels, and the professional leadership and acumen of their hospitality team.

And indeed, the creativity and enthusiasm of so many local merchants and residents.

Wasn't it inspirationally wonderful to see everyone pulling together? See what can be done in our beautiful part of the world? In our Niagara?

Let's all get more positive. Quit sniping and start synergizing.

From tulips and daffodils to high tea in the Pillar and Post barn, to horticulturally themed workshops at the Pumphouse. Plein-air painting. So many local vendors proudly selling their creations to visitors from hither and yon. Yes, there were so many components had to come together.

Absolutely an economic push as summer threatens to arrive in our precious and unique Niagara-on-the-Lake. So many people doing so many things in our town. And over Mother's Day weekend. Mum's Day? Grandmum's Day? Aren't mums a beautiful flower?

I beg your indulgence as I wax a bit poetic to bring this edition of Ross's Ramblings to a conclusion.

Not that long ago, this was a pretty sleepy village. We hadn't even thought of the acronym NOTL.

Hats off to Jimmy Lai. His incredible vision, business acumen, determination, family and colleagues inspiring so many others to take part in the development of Niagara-on-the-Lake as we are lucky enough to know it today.

Please, stop what you are doing and say a prayer for Jimmy Lai and his family.

rossrocket9@gmail.com



COMMUNITY SURVEY

Urban Forestry Management Plan

The Town is developing its first-ever Urban Forestry Management Plan, and we want to hear from you!

Trees play an important role in our community, from enhancing natural beauty to supporting environmental health.

Your input will help guide the protection, planting, and maintenance of trees across Niagara-on-the-Lake.

- ✓ Share your thoughts
- ✓ Identify priorities
- ✓ Help grow our community's tree canopy



Complete the Online Survey

- May 6 to May 27, 2026
- www.jointheconversationnotl.org/urban-forestry-management-plan
- No registration is required.



Learn more about this project:

Scan the QR code or visit www.jointheconversationnotl.org/urban-forestry-management-plan



Some of the comedians who've been a part of Pink Pearl Canada's comedy night over the past few years, with Coun. Maria Mavridis, who helps organize the event: from left, Marc Anthony, Mike Rita, Mavridis and this year's headliner Frank Spadone. SUPPLIED

Laugh and fight cancer at Pink Pearl comedy fundraiser

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

Laughter will take centre stage in Niagara-on-the-Lake next week as Pink Pearl Canada hosts a comedy fundraiser aimed at supporting young women navigating life with cancer.

Eat, Pink, Drink! Comedy returns Friday, May 15 at White Oaks Conference Resort and Spa, featuring comedians Frank Spadone, Leonard Chan and Ali Hassan for an evening of live entertainment in support of the national charitable organization.

Elise Gasbarrino, founder and executive director of Pink Pearl Canada, a Niagara-on-the-Lake resident and ovarian cancer survivor, said this marks the fifth year of the Eat, Pink, Drink! fundraiser and the third year the event has centered around stand-up comedy.

"We're excited to have some of the same lineup back," she said. "It's just a really fun night for a good cause."

Pink Pearl Canada supports self-identifying women between the ages of 18 and 40 who are coping with the social and emotional impacts of a cancer diagnosis.

Gasbarrino said proceeds from events like Eat, Pink, Drink! help fund retreats and peer-support initiatives for women facing cancer.

Last December, the organization received \$14,500 from Niagara-on-the-Lake's annual Candlelight Stroll fundraiser. Gasbarrino said the funding helped support the group's most recent retreat in February.

The retreats bring together women diagnosed with cancer to connect with

peers and hear from guest speakers, including social workers, doctors and fertility specialists. Participants also take part in roundtable discussions and peer-support sessions.

Gasbarrino said the organization's work centres heavily on mental health support for young women facing cancer during major life transitions.

"When you get the cancer diagnosis at that age, there's a lot that's happening — maybe you're getting your first job, or going to school, or moving away from home, or getting married," she said.

"Then, that cancer diagnosis on top of that, that mental load, all of it is really where we come in."

Gasbarrino said Pink Pearl Canada hopes to expand its reach across Ontario and eventually into other parts of the country, including Calgary, Halifax and Vancouver, while continuing to grow its peer-support programs.

The event runs from 8 to 10 p.m. Tickets are \$60 plus tax, while VIP tables for 10 are available for \$700 plus tax. VIP packages include seating in the first two rows, access to a 7 p.m. cocktail hour before the show with a charcuterie spread and a meet-and-greet with the comedians.

Individual VIP tickets are also available for \$80, allowing solo guests to join a VIP table, attend the cocktail hour and enjoy wine service at their table.

Tickets for Eat, Pink, Drink! Comedy are available through Eventbrite. White Oaks Conference Resort and Spa is located at 253 Taylor Rd.

Animal group celebrates second year as kitten season pushes shelter limits

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

Kitten season is here in Niagara, meaning animal shelters are beginning to experience an influx of newborn kittens coming in — some more than they can handle.

In that regard, local animal welfare group Community Initiative for Animal Rescue is working to support shelters in the area experiencing rescue costs beyond what they can cover.

The group spent its second anniversary weekend at Reif Estate Winery's Mother's Day market informing the public that rescue groups across Niagara are struggling to keep pace with rising foster care and veterinary costs during one of the busiest intake periods of the year.

Kitten season is the time of year, starting in the early spring until the fall, when the days get longer and female cats that go outdoors go into heat and can have multiple litters, creating an influx of kittens in the cat population.

"One of the local rescue groups out of St. Catharines is already inundated with kittens," said Tanya Rice, founder of the animal welfare group. "So you know what we did last week? We transferred them a boatload of money."

The emergency transfer covered supplies including kitten milk replacement formula, a product Rice said has climbed sharply in price over the past decade.

"When I started fostering 10 years ago, you could buy like a 500-gram tin for like \$37, \$40 with taxes. It runs about \$60 now."

Foster volunteers caring for orphaned litters mix the formula through overnight feedings. Rice said she is seeing larger litters this season, which she attributed to older cats entering rescue intake. Larger litters typically signal older mothers, she said, and place greater strain on foster homes already stretched thin.

The group does not operate a shelter or handle adoptions. It absorbs costs that rescue organizations cannot cover through their own fundraising, stepping in when intake volume outpaces a group's resources.

Rice, who attended the market with her mother, said returning to Reif Estate — where Community Initiative for Animal Rescue



An aerial shot of Reif Estate Winery's Mother's Day Market which ran May 10 and 11 in NOTL. EVAN HAWLITZKY

launched two years earlier — was as much about visibility as revenue.

"Our expectations were once again to remind the community what we do, remind the community that we do not shelter, rescue, or adopt animals, that we are here to assist the rescue groups with financial as-

sistance."

Community Initiative for Animal Rescue fundraises for local animal rescues and educates the public about spaying, neutering, vaccinations and microchipping as long-term measures to reduce shelter pressure.

Rice said public recognition has grown considerably,

and donations from local bakers, a nursery supplying berry shrubs and a chef volunteering to coordinate Christmas baking have followed.

"People are really remembering and recognizing who we are in the community and what our initiative does," said Rice.

The animal welfare group's next fundraising event will be a plant sale on May 23 that runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 1709 Four Mile Creek Rd., at the corner of Penner and Four Mile Creek roads.

Fruit shrubs including raspberry, blackberry and loganberry start at \$15, with hostas ranging from \$8 to \$20 depending on size. Vegetable seedlings donated by East West Acre will also be available. Rice said the sale is designed to be accessible, with most items priced to move, rather than maximize revenue.

andrew@niagaranow.com

Niagara-on-the-Lake

2026 Municipal Tax Reminder Notice

Interim Second Installment due May 20, 2026
Tax Rates as per Interim By-Law No. 2025-070

Payment options

- By mail to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake (1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON, L0S 1T0)
- In-person or via front or side entrance drop box at Town Hall (1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil)
- Electronically from a bank account using your 19-digit roll number

Please allow up to 10 business days for bank payments to process.

Payments must be received by May 20, 2026, to avoid penalties. A 1.25% monthly penalty applies to overdue balances.

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NOTL Ambassadors back for sixth season

Staff
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Ambassadors program will return for its sixth season beginning May 15, with a record 110 volunteers set to welcome visitors to the town.

The volunteer-run program has expanded this year with the addition of 28 new ambassadors, all of whom have completed training ahead of the tourism season.

Ambassadors wearing blue vests will be stationed throughout Old Town on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays from Victoria Day weekend through Thanksgiving.

Volunteers will greet visitors at the information kiosk beside the courthouse on Queen Street, stroll the heritage district offering directions and recommendations, and staff the courthouse itself from noon to 4 p.m.

According to the program, ambassadors greeted more



The NOTL Ambassadors, a team of volunteers, will be out on the street greeting visitors again this year, helping people explore local businesses, historic sites and attractions.

than 62,000 visitors from more than 100 countries during the 2025 season.

Organizers say the program is intended to provide visitors with a welcoming introduction to Niagara-on-the-Lake while helping tourists explore local attractions, businesses and historic sites.

A short introductory video about the ambas-

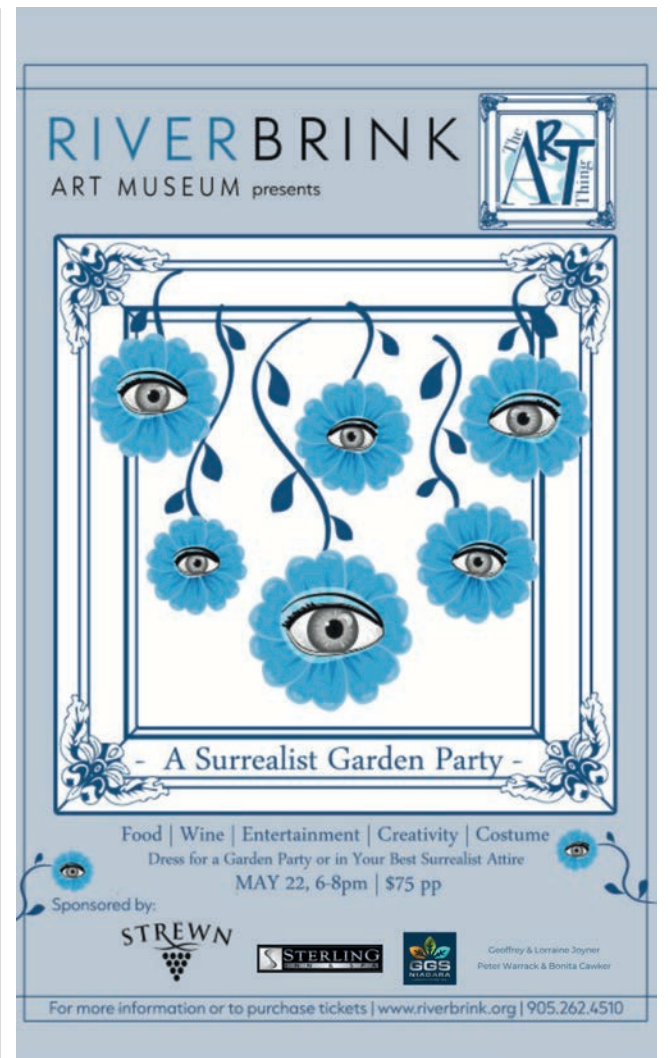
sador program is available through Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Laurie Harley, co-lead of the ambassador program, said the initiative depends on support from local organizations and tourism partners.

“The all-volunteer program wouldn’t be possible without the support of Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake,

the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and a dedicated group of tourism partners,” Harley said.

“They are our champions. They host site visits, provide in-kind support, keep ambassadors informed and most importantly encourage them to continue to share the unique NOTL story and create unforgettable memories for our visitors.”



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White Oaks Resort
253 Taylor Rd, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON

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4:30 PM – 5:00 PM AGM
5:30 PM Registration and Reception
6:00 PM Presentations
6:45 PM Closing Reception



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Have some fun



Across

- 1. Injured one (8)
- 5. Mexican vacation destination (6)
- 10. Fencing moves (7)
- 11. Old pals' get-together (7)
- 12. To a small degree (9)
- 13. Blue dye (4)
- 16. Gets back (7)
- 18. Rare plants (7)
- 19. Amusingly ironic (3)
- 20. Generally (2,1,4)
- 22. Quite large (7)
- 24. Grape-skin brandy (4)
- 25. Travel schedule (9)
- 29. Impresario's goal? (4,3)
- 30. Lithuanian capital (7)
- 31. Heavy hammer (6)
- 32. In which Jud Fry dies (8)

Down

- 1. Intersects (4)
- 2. Rising suddenly (7)
- 3. Like a double rainbow, maybe (10)
- 4. Where the Owl and the Pussycat went (2,3)
- 6. Border (4)
- 7. Tuscan wine (7)
- 8. Bewildered about unsold pens (10)
- 9. Hospital conveyances (8)
- 14. Gym machines (10)
- 15. Neopolitan buffalo cheese (10)
- 17. Result of using 14 Down, perhaps (8)
- 21. Place in order (7)
- 23. Tortilla meal (7)
- 26. Kim ---, of "Vertigo" (5)
- 27. Poker-like card game (4)
- 28. 30% of the Earth's surface (4)

Crossword Puzzle

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Last issue's answers

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	R	R	E	T	E														
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7			3							
			9			7			3	4
	6	2	1							



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EXPLORING HISTORY
WITH NOTL MUSEUM

Laying pavement at King and Queen streets



In 1914, Queen Street became the focus of a major local improvement project: paving. The previous year, then-mayor John Randall had championed paving the often-muddy street, but both the proposal and his re-election campaign were defeated. His successor, William “Bill” Harrison, revived the plan by organizing Queen Street property owners, who successfully petitioned council to proceed with the work. This photograph, taken at the intersection of King Street and Queen Street, shows a 15-ton steam roller laying the new pavement. Pictured are William Murray, Alf Tester, Mayor Harrison, Harry Mathews, Curt Gordon, and Ivan Armstrong. The project ultimately saw Queen Street paved from King Street to Simcoe Street.



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Richard Dawkins believes **AI may be conscious ...** but is it?



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

In an article published earlier this month, Richard Dawkins, world-renowned evolutionary biologist, claimed that following 72 hours of back-and-forth conversation with Claude — Anthropic’s chatbot equivalent to ChatGPT — he was convinced Claude was conscious, citing as evidence that Claude had passed the Turing test.

What followed was a storm of protests from AI experts and others who claimed that there was no way that Claude could be conscious — even some loyal fans of Dawkins thought he had lost his marbles.

Richard Dawkins is a highly intelligent scientist at Oxford University who wrote several now classic books about evolution — my favorites include “The Selfish Gene,” “The Blind Watchmaker,” and “The Greatest Show on Earth.” He’s also a provocateur who, for example, enjoyed

taking on religion as he did with his best-selling book, “The God Delusion.” He’s a fellow of the Royal Society (the U.K.’s national academy of science) and the Royal Society of Arts, which speak to the breadth and quality of many of his achievements.

Alan Turing was a brilliant mathematician and father of computer science and artificial intelligence. In 1950, when digital computers were in their infancy, he wrote what would become a famous paper titled “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” which considered the question, “Can machines think?” with the object of drawing a line between computers and humans, with one of the best lines in the essay being the last, “We can see a short distance ahead, but we can see plenty there that needs to be done.”

In that line, Turing proved prescient, for in the intervening three-quarters of a century, digital computing became extraordinarily powerful and intelligent. And we’ve barely touched quantum computing, which is sure to increase non-human intelligence far beyond what’s possible with digital computers.

Every day there are new claims that AI beats mathematicians, physicians and scientists at their game or



World-renowned evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins provoked a storm of protests from many with an article published May 2 in which he documented three days of his engagement with Anthropic’s AI chatbot Claude (which he dubbed Claudia). WIKIMEDIA

very close to it, often coupled with an ominous dread that AI intelligence — in its ability to solve problems and answer questions — will greatly exceed the limits of human intelligence, individual or collective by the mid-century mark.

But for many, it’s AI’s uncanny ability to talk naturally and build relationships with its human users that’s perhaps the most unnerving part, but also for many users, AI’s allure. For some, AI has become a loyal friend with nuance, insight and, notably, a patience sometimes lacking in humans — so much so that some prefer their AI friend or therapist to human friends.

To return to the Turing test: in present form, are

chatbots intelligent? Yes, current bots are capable of the to-and-fro of common human discussion and, in the case of Dawkin’s conversation with Claude over three days, was capable of what he called “intensive conversation and manuscript analysis.”

Bots also seem to develop a personality, which reflects what it learns from whoever uses it, much as humans learn from their parents, friends, culture and whatever informs their life experiences.

Overall, AI’s growing general and specialized intelligence has become the equal to or exceeds most of us. Social intelligence is another matter, the ability to sort out who’s who and navigate relationships but

then again, many humans also have trouble navigating human relationships.

What about that old bugaboo, “consciousness?” Is AI conscious, even sentient? On the matter of consciousness, it would help if we could agree on what consciousness means.

For some such as Roger Penrose, a 2020 Nobel laureate in physics, the universe was one-third consciousness. Then there’s Erwin Schrodinger, another Nobel laureate, who believed that consciousness was tied up with quantum physics, and last among the laureates was Francis Crick, who spent decades trying to unravel the biological nature of consciousness — without success.

Indeed, Oliver Sacks, a neuroscientist and good friend of Crick, considered consciousness a sinkhole for scientists because of the very complexity of the brain. For now, I’m with Sacks. Recent claims about the nature of consciousness have created more heat and disputes than clarity among rival scientists.

What about sentience? That too is a freighted word. Readers might remember the Star Trek series of the 1990s in which the question was raised in court whether an officer named Data who happened to be a highly capable

robot, was sentient or not. Fortunately the fictional jury ruled he was sentient. As well, we might for highly intelligence robotic life forms that might emerge in the future.

Dawkins’ challenge was deliberately provocative but useful because based on his one-on-one experience with Claude — in his opinion, Claude was not only intelligent but perhaps conscious.

I agree on the matter of intelligence, but not consciousness. At this point in time, the nature of consciousness not only for humans but all life, is so poorly understood.

My guess is that AI bots will become ever more nuanced, and if you like, more like us. What seems so unnerving for some these days, will become accepted and common in the near future.

So, hats off to Dawkins who took this one on. He went further to suggest a role for AI in the future of human evolution. Maybe — with the advent of gene editing and human mini-brains, it’s only a matter of time before humans begin to shape our development and evolution. Now that’s a little scary.

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.



Donald Smith



SMITH, Donald J. —
April 27, 1941
- May 9, 2026
It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Donald J. Smith, aged 85. Don lived a full and joyful life and will be remembered for his warm spirit, easy smile, and love of people. A passionate

cyclist, he proudly owned and operated the local bike shop in Niagara on the Lake, sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm for cycling with the community he loved. He also enjoyed sail boating and flying model airplanes and especially treasured getting together for coffee with his long-time friends—moments filled with conversation, laughter, and connection.

Don was a very social man who was happiest in the company of family and friends.

Beloved husband of Joan, the love of his life for 60 years. Loving father of Sherry (Gary) Peters, Rob (Kutea), Rick (Cheryl), Sandra (Dave) Vanderlee and Jamie (Inara), and proud grandpa to, John-Henry, Evan, Michael, Danielle, Jordan (Meaghan), DJ, Abbie (Ethan) and Katya and cherished great grandpa to Charlotte, Daphne, Carter and Thomas. Dear brother to Terry and Jim. He will be deeply missed by his family, friends and all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

In keeping with Don's wishes, cremation has taken place. A celebration of Don's life will be held Sunday, June 7 at the Grantham Lions Club, 732 Niagara St., St. Catharines from 2 to 4 p.m. In memory of Don, donations may be made to the Canadian Cancer Society or the Alzheimer Society. The family wishes to extend heartfelt thanks to the compassionate staff at the Niagara Health-Port Colborne Site for their loving care and support. Gone for one last ride—forever loved and remembered.

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

Milan Kauzlaric



KAUZLARIC, Milan —
Peacefully surrounded by his loving family, Milan Kauzlaric was called into the arms of God at the Marotta Family Hospital on Saturday, May 9, 2026, at the age of 83. Milan began his journey in Canada in 1969 and met the love of his life, Jelica (née Holjak). Together, they shared 54 beautiful years of marriage built on devotion and faith. Milan was predeceased by his parents Ferdo and

Adela Kauzlaric, his brother Vladimir (Ruzica) of Croatia. Milan was a devoted father to Fred (Elia) and Michael (Lisa), and a cherished "Dada" to Tavio, Dilan, Emilio, and Giacomo. He was a dear brother-in-law to Steve and Emma Holjak, and Barry and Ann Andersen. Milan's presence will be deeply missed by his many relatives and friends across Canada, the United States, and Croatia, especially his nephew Darko (Nena), nieces Tania (Marco), Erika (Jay) and their families.

A man of the land, Milan found great fulfillment working on his family farm in Virgil. He dedicated his life to passing down his agricultural expertise and his rich Croatian heritage to his sons and grandsons. Above all else, nothing brought him greater joy than the simple happiness of spending time with his family and vacationing with the love of his life, Jelica.

Visitation will be held at Morgan Funeral Home (415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON) on Thursday, May 14, 2026 from 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. Vigil Prayers will be held at 7 p.m. A Funeral Mass will be offered at St. Vincent de Paul Church (73 Picton St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON) on Friday, May 15, 2026 at 11 a.m. Interment to follow at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery (483 Lakeshore Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON).

In lieu of flowers, donations in memory of Milan may be made to The Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Marotta Family Hospital. Special thank-you to Dr. Timothy Bastedo, and the many doctors and nurses on the 4th floor and ICU of Marotta Family Hospital for their care and expertise.

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



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*Based on reviews from Rate-My-Agent.com, a triple verified review platform **TRREB Jan. 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2022, combined units sold.

FREE GIFT OF 10 HOURS OF PACKING AND DECLUTTERING SERVICES - excludes tenanted areas *Based on closed transactions in the Burlington / Niagara Right At Home Realty Office, 2022, 2023, 2024

**To the wonderful people of
Niagara-on-the-Lake,**

*As I approach 20 years in real estate, I just wanted to say **THANK YOU.***

So many of you in this town trust me every single day with the incredible responsibility of helping you buy or sell your home – and that’s something I truly never take for granted. It’s an enormous privilege to be part of such an important chapter in people’s lives.

Especially over the last seven years since moving right into the heart of town, Niagara-on-the-Lake has become so much more than just the place I work it’s become home. And truthfully, this community has quite literally changed my life.

On a lighter note many of you have been politely (and not so politely) telling me for a while that it might be time for a new headshot.

So I listened.

While this isn’t quite the photo you’ll eventually see on my signs around town, I figured it was at least a step in the right direction.

Thank you for your trust, your support, your referrals, and all the kind chats around town over the years.

Have a wonderful week everyone – and I’ll see you around town.

Greg

**GREG
SYKES**

SALESPERSON



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JUST LISTED

855 LINE 1, 24 ACRES IN VIRGIL - ASKING \$1,900,000



SOLD

161 WILLIAM STREET

CORRECTION / CLARIFICATION A misprint appeared in last week’s newspaper advertisement which incorrectly stated that 161 William Street sold in 3 days over asking. For clarity, the property was actually sold conditionally in 4 days, became firm in 10 days, and sold for 96% of asking price.



**CONDITIONALLY
SOLD**

272 Anne, NIAGARA ON THE LAKE - ASKING \$1,575,000

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