

The Lake Report

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Hyper-local news for Niagara-on-the-Lake



Boxer wins sixth gold | Page 13

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NOTL man, 36, charged with sex assault of minor

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Police believe there may be additional victims as the investigation into a Niagara-on-the-Lake man accused of sexual offences involving a minor continues.

Thomas Theal, 36, faces 10 criminal charges, including sexual assault and sexual interference with a person under 16, following an investigation by Niagara Regional Police.

Theal was remanded into custody Saturday, Nov. 21, and remained in custody following a court appearance Monday, according to court documents and information provided to The Lake Report by the St. Catharines courthouse.

His next appearance is scheduled for Friday, Nov. 27, at 10:45 a.m.

Police were called Nov. 19 to investigate a reported assault involving a teenage girl from St. Catharines, who said she had been assaulted by an adult man she met approximately one month earlier.

Detectives with the Niagara Regional Police child abuse unit took over the investigation

Continued on Page 4

Time to get to work

NOTL's new council sworn in at inaugural meeting Tuesday night



Lord Mayor Vaughn Goettler addresses a packed room at Niagara College after NOTL's new seven-member council was sworn in Tuesday. He pledged to hold the line on taxes, pause new development until infrastructure can support it. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's smaller, seven-member council was sworn in Tuesday at Niagara College, where Lord Mayor Vaughn Goettler renewed his promises to hold the line on taxes and pause new development until infrastructure can support it.

For new and returning councillors, the weeks since the election have meant a return to the classroom, with training in everything from municipal finance to how to run a council meeting.

"The talking is finished now and the action has to start," Goettler told The Lake Report after the ceremony.

Goettler reaffirmed his campaign promises to donate his annual salary to local charities, work full-time as lord mayor and refrain from using his strong mayor powers.

"Anything that's in motion, I have to be very careful how I deal with it, so I don't create lawsuits," he said of development applications already underway.

Continued on Page 3



It was a full house for the inaugural meeting of NOTL's new council. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



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Province has not requested federal flood relief for Niagara

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report



Floodwater swamps the basement of Madis Tambre's Niagara-on-the-Lake home on Aug. 2. Nearly four months later, he was still going next door to his mother's house for water. Other residents experienced similar damage. SUPPLIED

Canada's federal department in charge of emergency management confirmed Thursday that the Ontario government hasn't asked Ottawa for disaster funding following Niagara's summer flooding.

The response follows The Lake Report's article published Wednesday that raised unanswered questions about provincial and federal disaster assistance for Niagara-on-the-Lake residents.

"Ontario has not requested federal assistance under the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements for this flooding," said Public Safety Canada, the federal department, in an email.

The federal program helps provinces and territories cover the costs of responding to and recovering from "large-scale disasters caused by natural hazards," the department said. The program gives the funding to the provinces, which then provides it to those impacted by a natural disaster.

Public Safety Canada said that before submitting a claim for federal disaster assistance, provinces must assess disaster-related losses and recovery costs to determine whether they meet the financial threshold for federal assistance.

Under the program's guidelines, provinces generally have six months from the end of a disaster to request funding, although exceptions can be granted — the two major floods that took place in Niagara-on-the-Lake were on July 28 and Aug. 2.

The confirmation follows comments from St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle on Nov. 13, when he told The Lake Report that Ontario must request federal disaster funding before Ottawa can provide it.

The Ontario government can utilize its own disaster assistance programs without federal approval.

None of the flood victims interviewed by The Lake Report for its Nov. 18 story reported receiving provincial relief. It remains unclear whether Ontario intends to request federal assistance or whether Niagara's disaster recovery costs meet the federal program's funding requirements.

Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates said Tuesday he did not know whether the province had made that request. On Friday, he told The Lake Report that the provincial government should "aggressively pursue" every source of funding it can, including from the feds.

"If the province believes we don't qualify, the families and farmers impacted deserve to know why," he said.

He said it's important to emphasize that the province has its own disaster assistance programs and that it doesn't need the federal government's permission to help affected families.

As for farmers, he noted that Agriculture Minister Sam Oosterhoff told him some of the damage to grape growers' vineyards may not be clear until spring.

"I understand that, but that shouldn't prevent the province from determining whether Niagara qualifies for other available disaster assistance," he said.

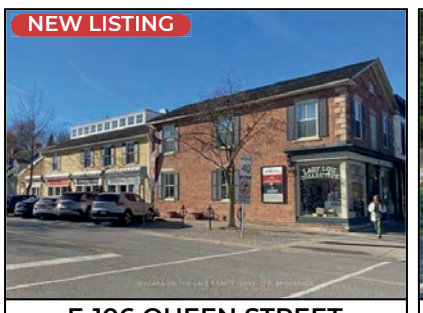
Follow-up questions were also sent to Oosterhoff., who did not respond by publication time.

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NOTL's new council was sworn in on Tuesday night at Niagara College, before adjourning the meeting for a celebration at the school's Benchmark Restaurant, where guests enjoyed performances by Yellow Door Theatre Project and some tasty culinary creations from the school's chefs in training. PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Staff looking at overlapping priorities to help shape a new strategic plan: Ruller

Continued from Front Page

"But anything that's coming up, until we can make sure we've got infrastructure out in place, we're going to say, 'Just hold on.'"

In his inaugural address, Goettler said he has been working with town staff to find savings and new revenue to hold down taxes. He also reiterated his promise to give residents a year of free access to the town's recreational facilities.

Since taking office, Goettler has met with other Niagara mayors and regional officials. He plans to meet with representatives of the seaway, airport and hydro authorities.

Asked about working with Premier Doug Ford amid uncertainty over amalgamation, Goettler said he saw no reason they couldn't work together.

"I don't know the premier. I've never met him, but I don't know why when I meet him that we can't work together," he said.

Gary Burroughs, who was formally appointed deputy lord mayor Tuesday, said council will use electronic voting so councillors won't see how their colleagues voted before casting their own votes.

"It's going to be great and we've already been practicing with it," he said.

Burroughs said he has filled in for Goettler five times since the new term began. Representing the town at events and speaking with residents, he said, is "the part of the job I love."

"Everybody has worked to get elected as individuals. We were all in competition," he said. "Now we need to form as a team."

Burroughs said he wants councillors to spend the next month or two learning to work together, even when they disagree.

Chief administrative officer Nick Ruller said staff have been looking for overlap in council members' campaign priorities to help develop a new strategic plan.

"It does sound like there's a lot of shared priorities amongst them, so I think they've got a good starting point," he told The Lake Report.

Ruller hopes work on the plan will begin in the new year, giving staff direction early in the four-year term. He has also been briefing Goettler on regional governance, including efforts by local municipalities to protect the interests of smaller, rural communities.

Councillors have been learning how the town manages its finances, how municipal planning works, what laws govern their work and how to use the software for council meetings. Ruller said they've trained in smaller groups to avoid a quorum and ensure no council business is conducted.

Tuesday's ceremony at the college's Daniel J. Patterson campus opened with a procession by the Fort George Fife and Drum Corps. Juliet Dunn sang O Canada and Corry Carter of Six Nations of the Grand River gave a traditional Indigenous welcome.

Goettler, Burroughs and councillors Tim Balasiuk, Steve McGuinness, Weston Miller, Andrew Niven and Sandra O'Connor made their declarations of office before Goettler received the chain of office.

Goettler, Miller and McGuinness are new to council. Burroughs, Balasiuk, Niven and O'Connor served in the previous term.

Former lord mayors Gary Zalepa and Betty Disero and former councillor Wendy Cheropita attended. Council members took turns introducing and thanking their families.

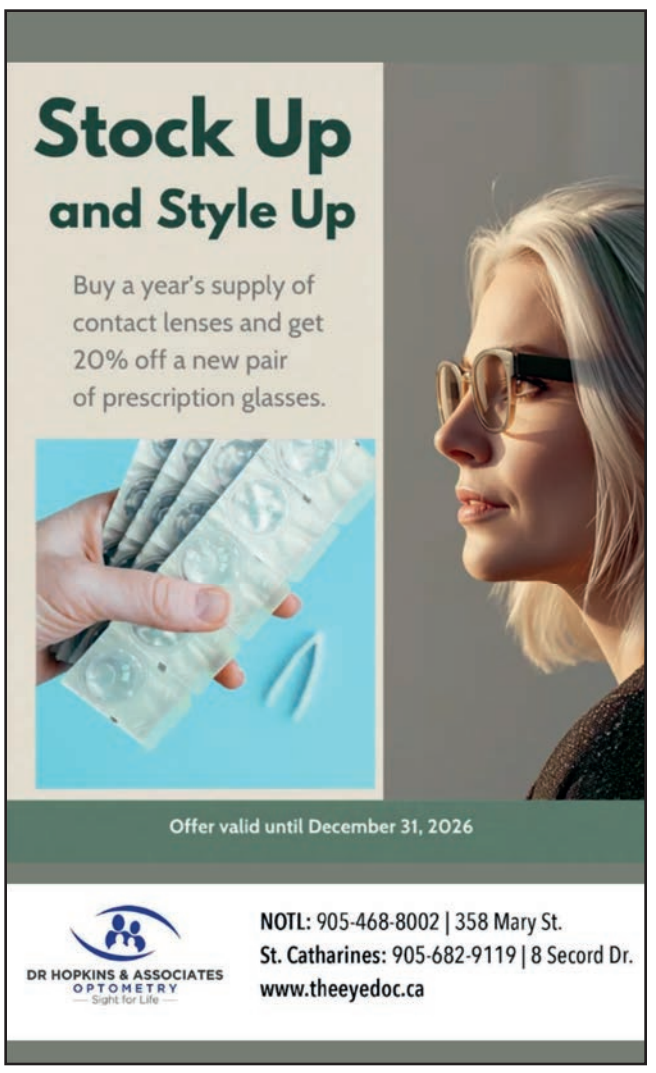
Goettler called the group his "dream council" and "the perfect mix of new blood and demonstrated experience." He encouraged residents to share ideas, raise concerns and speak up when they think council is getting something wrong.

"And tell us if we're getting it right — that doesn't hurt either," he said with a laugh.

"I want this to be a term in which we bring people together rather than drive them apart," Goettler said. "Today we have an opportunity to set a different tone."

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Thomas Theal, 36, faces 10 different charges including sexual assault of a person under 16. FILE

Man accused in sexual assault of minor remanded into custody

Continued from Front Page

and learned the girl had allegedly been sexually assaulted repeatedly over the course of that month. Theal was arrested the following evening, Nov. 20.

Theal is charged with sexual assault, sexual interference with a person under 16, invitation to sexual touching, exposing sexual organs to a person under 16 for a sexual purpose and distributing an intimate image without consent.

He also faces charges of printing, publishing or possessing for the purpose of publishing child sexual abuse and exploitation material, possession of child sexual abuse and exploitation material, assault, assault involving choking and assault with a weapon.

The allegations have not been proven in court.

Police said detectives believe there may be other victims and are encouraging anyone who may have been affected, or who has information about the investigation, to come forward.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the police's child abuse unit at 905-688-4111, option 3, extension 1009783.

Anonymous tips can also be provided through the NRPS tip line at 289-248-1058.

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Tanya Rice, founder of Community Initiative for Animal Rescue, lost her husband and biggest supporter, Peter Rice, suddenly on Nov. 19. She is dedicating her weekend animal rescue fundraiser to his memory. FILE

Animal fundraiser to honour late Peter Rice

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report

The Community Initiative for Animal Rescue will honour one of its biggest supporters, Peter Rice, at its annual Christmas fundraiser in Niagara-on-the-Lake this weekend.

Rice died suddenly Nov. 19. His wife, Tanya Rice, who founded the group, said the fundraiser will go ahead in his memory.

"Peter was my biggest cheerleader in fundraising for animal rescue," she said in an email.

"Our families and members know that's exactly what Peter would want. Please join us in Peter's memory and make it the best fundraiser of 2026."

The sale runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 28, and Sunday, Nov. 29, at 456 Line 2 Rd., behind Crossroads Public School. Holiday planters, baked goods and bracelets will be for sale, with proceeds supporting animal rescue in Niagara.

Raffle tickets are three for $5 for a Christmas basket valued at $300 and donated by Kent Heritage Farms. The winning ticket will be drawn at 3 p.m. Sunday.

In lieu of flowers, Tanya Rice asked people to consider attending the fundraiser and supporting the cause. She thanked her family and fellow volunteers for helping put on the sale.

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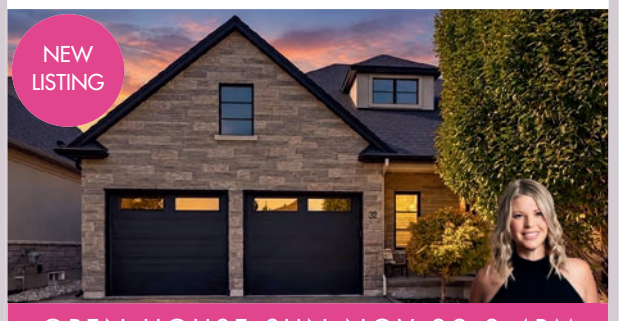


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Goettler says region chair told him amalgamation is 'not on the table'

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report



Lord Mayor Vaughn Goettler says region chair Frank Campion told him an amalgamation of Niagara cities isn't in the cards right now. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Niagara-on-the-Lake Lord Mayor Vaughn Goettler says Niagara regional chair Frank Campion told him amalgamation is not on the table, easing his concerns about the town's future as an independent municipality.

Goettler, who previously described amalgamation as a "clear and ever-present danger," said he raised the issue with Campion on Monday.

"He said to me, 'It's not on the table,'" Goettler told The Lake Report following his inauguration Tuesday night.

In an email to The Lake Report, Andrew Korchok, chief of staff in the regional chair's office, said Campion would not comment on his conversation with Goettler at this time.

Korchok said Campion will address governance during Niagara regional council's inaugural meeting Thursday evening.

The Ontario government announced Campion's appointment Nov. 10. The former Welland mayor took over as regional chair Nov. 15.

He previously supported reducing Niagara's 12 municipalities to four cities before changing his position earlier this year in favour of retaining all 12 municipalities with fewer elected officials.

Goettler said people questioned how he would work with Campion given the regional chair's previous support for amalgamation, but he wanted to speak with him directly before drawing conclusions.

"We've had good discussions already about that," Goettler said.

Asked how he would make sure he isn't Niagara-on-the-Lake's last lord mayor, Goettler said his conversation with Campion changed his answer.

"I would have answered the question differently before my meeting with Mr. Campion yesterday," he said. "I would have said that I was going to do everything I could to fight against amalgamation."

"If that's off the table, then I think we can kind of settle down and deal with business — and not worry about whether you're going to be the last mayor," he said.

Goettler said he would fight any renewed push for amalgamation.

"I'm still going to make sure it doesn't creep back into our vocabulary," he said.

"I think I will have an opportunity to run a second term, a third term, or whatever."

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NOTL in the clouds

From John DeLorenzi's drone, the fog rolling in from Lake Ontario looks like a wave about to break over Fort Niagara and swallow Niagara-on-the-Lake. Across the mouth of the Niagara River, the fort is still visible at the edge of the fog bank. On the Canadian side, the white steeple of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church catches the last of the sun, standing out against the copper and gold of Old Town's trees as wisps of fog drift between the houses below. The photo was taken just before sunset on Saturday, Nov. 21. JOHN DELORENZI

OPEN HOUSE

Thursday December 3,2026

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Session 2 – Starting at 3pm approx
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OPEN HOUSE

Niagara on-the-Lake HYDRO



Aspen Air Charters' Piper Navajo sits on the tarmac at Niagara District Airport. After travellers asked for more options, the carrier added Tuesday and Thursday flights on its 11-minute route to Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport. SUPPLIED

Aspen Air fields over 1,000 inquiries about NOTL-Toronto flight service

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

This time of the year is typically a little quieter for air travel. In the interim period between summer vacations and the winter holiday rush, the skies are less busy over southern Ontario.

For Aspen Air Charters, however, this November its staff have been a lot busier than they expected.

Since launching scheduled passenger flights between Niagara-on-the-Lake and downtown Toronto, the chartered flight company says it's gotten more than 1,000 inquiries from those interested in taking to the skies with Aspen Air.

The flights, going between Niagara District Airport and Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, last 11 minutes, allowing travellers to bypass taking the highway or the train into the city.

Josh Hooper, who co-founded the company with Bruce Haskins, says those inquiries are made up of people requesting one of seven seats on its two daily round-trip flights and people who've asked questions on social media.

"We've received an enormous amount of interest in such a short period of time," he said, adding that it was "pleasantly surprising."

Dan Pilon, CEO of Niagara District Airport, was not as surprised, given that from 2017 to 2022, a similar service, run by FlyGTA, began in Niagara-on-the-Lake that took people on short-haul flights to Toronto.

It ended after inactivity following the pandemic, rising fuel costs and a shortage of pilots.

"We were and we had still been receiving phone calls on a weekly basis ever since then," he said. "So, not surprised to see that there's a demand for the service that exists."

That demand led him and Haskins to accelerate plans they had to add more flights to its weekly schedule — instead of flying between the NOTL airport and the Billy Bishop airport three times a week, there will be flights all five weekdays.

Rather than adding those extra two days in the spring, as originally planned, they decided on Nov. 16 to add them right away.

This is based on the feedback the company heard from prospective customers, Hooper said, who saw the available flights on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and were asking where the flights on Tuesdays and Thursdays were.

"People were like, 'I love that the service is there, but I have a meeting on Tuesday. And so, I'm not going to use it.' That's the type of person we're trying to attract," he said. "Somebody that has the dinner in Toronto for the night and wants to take the a.m. flight the next day back."

As of last Thursday, none of the flights that have flown since the launch were fully booked (one flight was a seat short of being filled). Besides the lack of Tuesdays and Thursdays, Hooper said this is likely because people are still learning about the service, while some are booking available flights in the distant future.

Booking is open for all of next year, and some customers have been booking flights up into April.

"Because we're doing two flights daily between Niagara and Toronto, it's not going to fill every single flight, even if we have 1,000 inquiries," he said.

Part of the reason Aspen Air was going to wait until the spring to introduce more flight days was because of the time of year it launched this new service.

"November's traditionally very slow in the airline world, same with February. They're just not super busy," Hooper said.

The company's also developing an online booking system travellers can use to book their seat themselves online — because this is its first time offering scheduled passenger flights, travellers have to request a seat and wait for a company employee to contact them and arrange travel details and payment over the phone.

With the new software, travellers will be able to purchase a ticket online as they would with any other airline. Hooper said Aspen Air's hoping to have the booking portal up and running sometime between mid-December and mid-January.

Reflecting on the long-term plan for the company, keeping in mind any potential disruptions (such as what happened at the start of the decade with the pandemic), Hooper said the business has a diverse service model that, he hopes, will keep the revenue coming in if flights are grounded.

Alongside the scheduled flight service, the company is still providing chartered flights — a service Hooper said thrived during the pandemic when compared to commercial air travel — and also provides aircraft maintenance services.

"Our long-term goal is to service the entire Windsor to Quebec City corridor," he said. "That's a long road and it's not something that's going to happen tomorrow."

Putting aside unexpected circumstances, Aspen Air will be watching to see if business will boom as the word spreads in the coming weeks and months, especially starting this spring, when tourism season rolls back around.

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‘Little Women’ live reading embraces Christmas spirit

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report



Tara Rosling directs a holiday reading of Little Women Dec. 19 and 20 at Yellow Door, with proceeds supporting Newark Neighbours and Community Care. FILE

While perhaps not considered a Christmas tale in the traditional sense, for Tara Rosling, the story of “Little Women” embodies much of the spirit of the holiday.

“It has so much of what I think many of us of an older generation would really love Christmas to be about,” she said. “Celebrating together, being generous with one another and supporting one another.”

Rosling directs a live reading of Lauren Gunderson’s adaptation of “Little Women” at the Yellow Door Theatre studio, 504 Line 2 Rd. in Virgil. Performances are at 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 19 and 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 20.

The production will feature young actors portraying the March sisters and Laurie, along with a special role for a young narrator who will also represent Beth’s hands on the piano.

Ticket proceeds will benefit Newark Neighbours and Community Care, continuing Rosling’s annual holiday charitable efforts.

Rosling usually hosts an annual reading of “The Mistletoe Bride,” but felt it was time for a new idea.

“It does echo, thematically, what’s going on in our time,” she said.

The production also gives young cast members an opportunity to work with professional actors Katie Bain and Kristopher Bowman in a professional setting, Rosling said.

“We feel very lucky to have them on board.”

Guests can arrive early for a pre-show crafting activity and enjoy holiday treats throughout the event.

Tickets cost $20 and are available online at zeffy.com/en-CA/ticketing/little-women-a-theatrical-reading.

Guests are asked to bring a non-perishable food item for the food bank collection.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com

McFarland House decks halls with art-inspired decorations

Staff
The Lake Report



A traditional Victorian-style table setting for a holiday meal at McFarland House. SUPPLIED

The Garden Club of Niagara is marking its 30th anniversary by turning the rooms of McFarland House into Christmas displays inspired by painters from Emily Carr to Vincent van Gogh.

The decorated house is a stop on the Rotary Holiday House Tour on Friday, Dec. 4 and Saturday, Dec. 5. Visitors can also tour the house separately during Niagara Parks’ Heritage Christmas event on Sunday, Dec. 6.

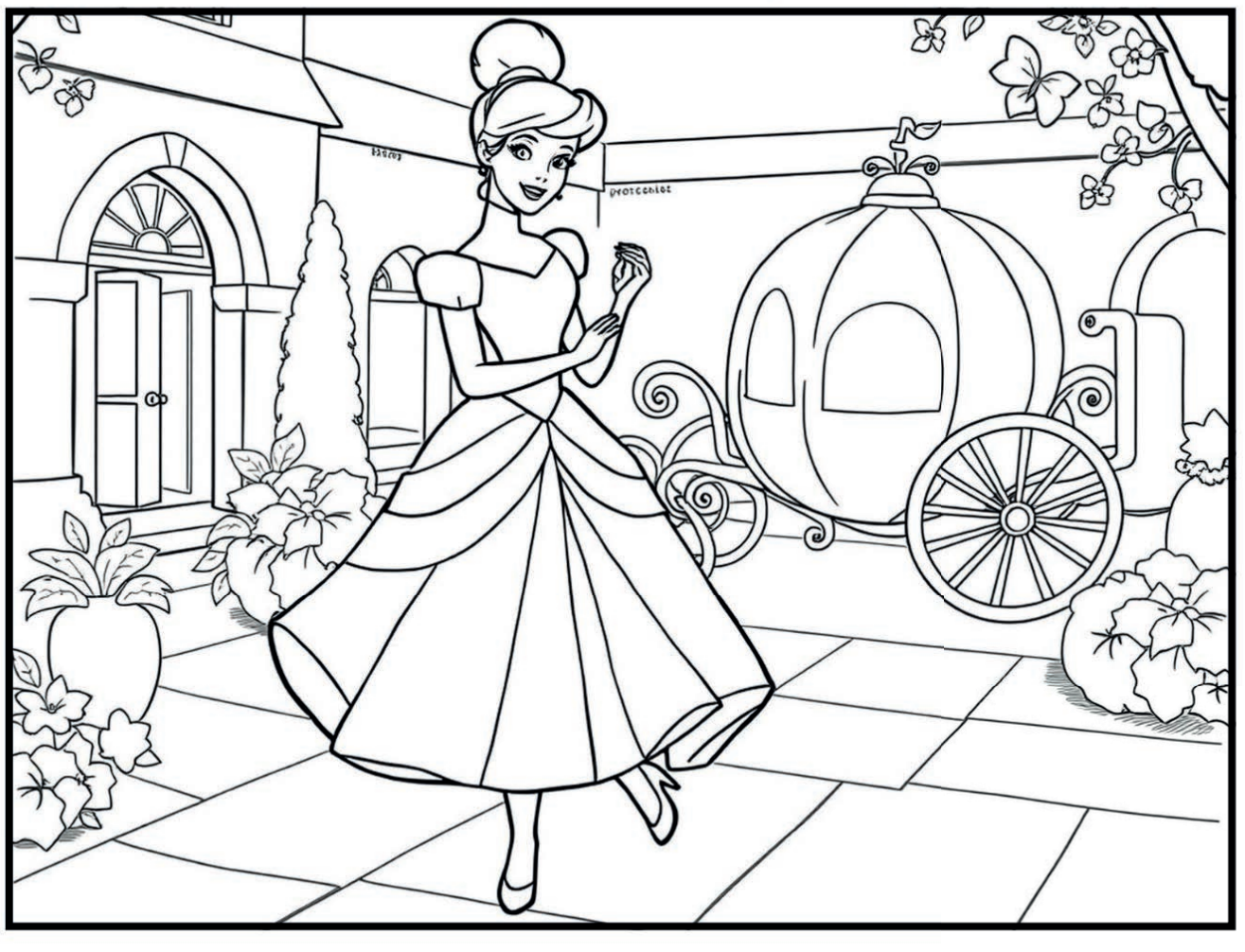
Ten design teams are decorating seven rooms, the staircase and landings, the conservatory and the exterior. The club is calling the display A Festive Celebration of Art Through the Ages. Tom Thomson and Lawren Harris are among the other artists whose work inspired the designs, which use white pine, western red cedar and other natural materials.

Visitors on Friday and Saturday can buy scones, sticky toffee pudding, hot chocolate, mulled cider and tea. On Sunday, admission includes heritage crafts, and cookies and hot drinks will be sold in the conservatory.

McFarland House, at 15927 Niagara Pkwy., is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. all three days. Sunday admission is $8 for adults and $5 for children, and free for children two and under. For Sunday tickets, visit Niagara Parks. For the Friday and Saturday tour, visit the Rotary Holiday House Tour website.

SHAW FESTIVAL 26 X The Lake Report Colouring contest

Win tickets!



Enter the Shaw Festival and The Lake Report’s holiday colouring contest to win tickets to see *Cinderella*!

Contest open to students in grades 1 - 6.

Email your entries to megan@niagaranow.com by Tuesday, Dec. 1st.

Two winners will be selected to win a pair of tickets each. Winners will be notified by email on Dec. 2nd.

Let the holiday magic begin!

Name:_____ Grade:_____

Leap into the joyful, inspiring world of Shaw's 'A Year with Frog and Toad'

A YEAR WITH FROG and TOAD
★★★★★
(out of five)

Court House Theatre, 1 hour, 35 minutes. One intermission. Ends Dec. 23. Music by Robert Reale, book and lyrics by Willi Reale. Based on the books by Arnold Lobel. Directed by Jonathan Tan.

Penny-Lynn Cookson
Special to The Lake Report



Drew Plummer and Michael Therriault in Shaw Festival's "A Year with Frog and Toad," on until Dec. 23. DAHLIA KATZ

Confused by a year of weather? No snow? Winter? Here we've been basking like drowsy seals in the warmth of the sun, while international talks on climate change collapse and die. Feeling down and gloomy? Here's an antidote.

Fly, fly now, to the Shaw's enchanting "A Year with Frog and Toad." No need for self-help books, therapists, advice columnists, cannabis or booze. This is the feel-good production of the year, offering wisdom, love and guidance to the values of friendship, communication, generosity and overcoming adversity.

It is insightful, profoundly tender and raucously funny bringing thoughtfulness, self-recognition, laughter and joy to adults and children alike.

Sure, winter is for the birds. They may have flown south, timing it for the proper climate, but we're still here with Frog and Toad who are about to awaken from hibernation to welcome spring.

The kindly Frog encourages Toad to plant seeds for a garden, realistically advising that gardening can be a lot of hard work. The impatient Toad keeps asking when the plants will grow just like the kids always asking, "When will we get there?"

Frog quietly tells him that the plants won't grow if he shouts at them because they are afraid. Toad apologizes, "Sorry seeds," promising to keep them safe until they become flowers. He even entertains them with a dance and toot on a tuba.

Drew Plummer's mellow, smooth Bing Crosby voice and solid presence as Frog continues to reassure the impatient, anxiety-ridden Toad, a brilliant Michael Therriault. Frog worries that Toad is always depressed at 10 a.m. when the mail is delivered because he never receives any mail. Frog decides to send him a letter.

Jeigh Madjus as Snail with the mail continually brought laughs as he inched his way in and out of scenes giving new meaning to "at a snail's pace." Later, he comes out of his shell, no longer timid and ashamed, dancing to a burlesque strip tune, singing, "Holy cow, look at me now!"

Soon, it's summer and the squirrels, moles and birds, cheekily played by Kristi Frank, Jade Repeta and Matthew Joseph, have returned. Toad is extremely shy and self-conscious about being seen at the pool as he believes he looks funny in a bathing suit. He fears exposure and being mocked and humiliated by others singing "Getta Load of Toad." Many of us might recall a similar lack of self-confidence.

Then there are the times of misunderstanding even among the closest of friends. Frog goes off alone to an island to reflect on the things that make him happy. Toad believes that he must have done something dreadfully wrong that has made Frog unhappy. He prepares and takes a picnic to make amends.

The log he's paddling to the island overturns; the tea is lost. An endearing scene of respect and care follows as they munch soggy sandwiches.

Later, Toad makes cookies for the first time. They are so excellent, being crisp not brittle and soft in the middle, that they can't stop eating them. Crumbs are everywhere with no scolding to the joy of the children who whooped with laughter.

There must be an autumn "dark and stormy night" story. Frog recalls his terrifying experience as a shivering little frog left in the woods while his lost parents search for the path home. What if it is true that a large, terrible frog is lurking that eats little bunnies and enjoys small frogs for dessert? Kristi Frank, as the little frog, sings and manipulates a sweet, Kermit-like puppet most convincingly.

Winter comes with Frog lost then rescued and Toad nearly wiped-out careening down a hill on a runaway sled. Soon, it is the time of "Merry Almost Christmas" and a "Merry Almost New Year" with presents and a cozy tea before the decorated tree.

Were these stories that happened to Frog and Toad dreams, or realities? Maybe yes. Maybe no.

One thing that will never change is that Frog and Toad will always be best friends because they know what to say to brighten each other's day. And, thanks to Arnold Lobel (born 1933, died 1987) who, inspired by his own experiences, wrote and illustrated the 'Frog and Toad' series (published 1970 to 1977), we now have adult stories, disguised as children's stories, that suspend disbelief and imagine correctly what children would want to read.

As an exploration of his own daydreams and feelings, Lobel believed that the adventurous Frog and bumbling, worrywart Toad were "really two aspects of myself" and that adult and children's emotions were more similar than different.

Lobel said, "I cannot think of any work that could be more agreeable and fun than making books for children." Others agreed, as Frog and Toad books won Caldecott Honor and Newbery Honor awards, which are the highest awards for children's literature.

Lobel's daughter, Adrianne Lobel, commissioned a musical based on the four Frog and Toad books adapted to a theatrical script. It premiered in 2002 at the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis and Off-Broadway at the New Victory Theater for kids and families.

In 2003, it opened at the Cort Theatre on Broadway and was nominated for three Tony Awards: Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical by Willi Reale and Best Original Score with music by Robert Reale and lyrics by Willi Reale.

I cannot think of a more agreeable holiday experience than bringing this year to an almost close with Frog and Toad, well-directed by Jonathan Tan, set and costumes designed by Judith Bowden, choreography by Kerry Gage and terrific music by Ryan deSouza at keyboard, bassist Ross MacIntyre, Andy Ballantyne on winds and Jon Catanus on drums.

Penny-Lynn Cookson is an arts and culture historian, writer and lecturer living in Niagara-on-the-Lake.









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Town defends cancelling three residents association bookings

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report



Residents attend a Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association candidate forum at Crossroads Public School during the municipal election campaign. FILE

Niagara-on-the-Lake cancelled three community centre bookings by the town's residents association during the 2026 municipal election campaign without reviewing each meeting's agenda.

The town's Use of Corporate Resources During an Election Campaign Policy bars municipal facilities from being used for election-related purposes.

While the town reviewed other bookings to determine whether they were election-related, it cancelled the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association's three bookings May 25 after the association registered as a third-party advertiser.

"Staff reviewed the organization's existing bookings through the lens of the election policy and determined that allowing continued use of town facilities could be inconsistent with the policy's objective of ensuring political neutrality and avoiding the use, or perceived use, of municipal resources by election participants," said town spokesperson Quinton Ascah.

"As a result, the decision was made to remove the bookings upon registration rather than undertake a meeting-by-meeting assessment of their individual agendas," he said.

No formal complaints prompted the decision, Ascah said, calling it an "administrative application of the policy's broader objectives." He said the town "acknowledges that reasonable interpretations of election-related policies can differ."

Association administrator Ron Simkus said the town misunderstood the purpose of its election activities.

"We were deemed to be campaigning, when indeed, we were saying we weren't campaigning for anybody, we were trying to organize public forums," he said.

"We were told that we were forbidden to use the facility for any activity related to the residents association," he said, calling the restriction "excessive" and noting it remained until the election ended.

Rather than challenge the decision, Simkus said the association chose other meeting spaces.

"We're not going to die on this hill," he recalled the association deciding.

Regular meetings moved to private homes and a barn at Kai Wiens Family Farm. The three candidate forums were held at Crossroads Public School.

The association says the District School Board of Niagara put its permit on hold after a complaint questioning its political neutrality.

"They wouldn't say who it was that said we were actually biased or representing endorsement of candidates," Simkus said.

The association later clarified that its permit had been placed "on hold," rather than suspended or cancelled.

"The permit was never suspended," said school board spokesperson Milica Petkovic. "It went through the same review process as all candidate-related permits."

The board did not confirm whether it received a complaint or temporarily put the permit on hold.

The three forums went ahead after the association provided information showing all candidates had been invited on equal terms. Simkus called the process "very bureaucratic."

He said the association also faced pressure to endorse a slate of candidates, but its board voted to remain neutral, reflecting differing political views among its roughly 550 members.

"We voted as a board to not do that," he said.

"You can't speak on our behalf universally," he said.

Two directors, Peter Neame and Steve Hardaker, stepped away from the board before the forums to campaign for candidates independently.

Some people complained the forum questions were too complicated, Simkus said. The association's governance committee developed them using priorities identified in a May residents' survey.

"Right up to the day of the forum, none of us on the board were aware of what the questions were," he said.

The questions were given to the forum chair and moderator the night before the event and were not shared with candidates beforehand, he said, rejecting rumours that preferred candidates received them early.

"Totally false," he said. "The candidates who didn't complain did their homework."

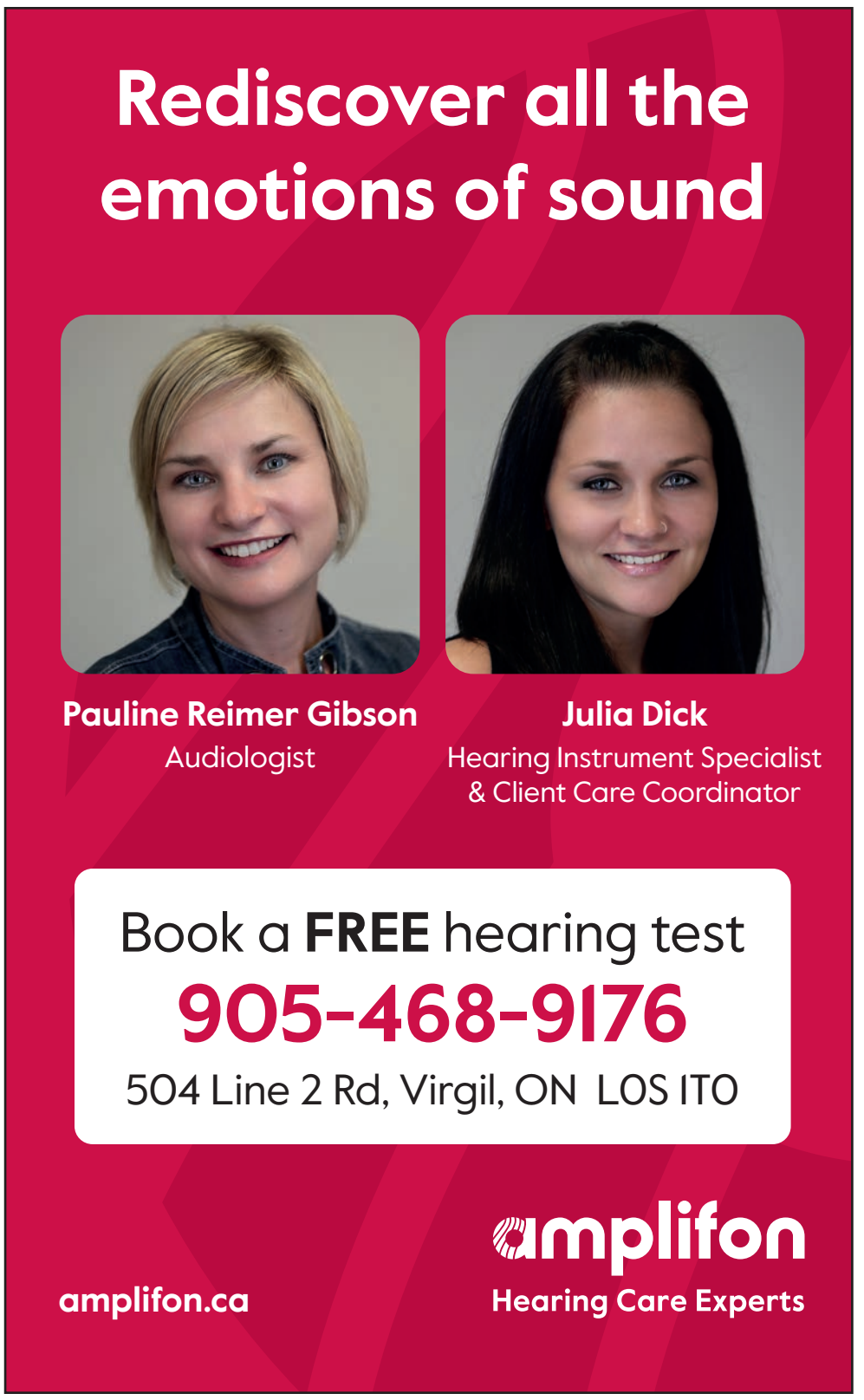
Simkus said he would not change the association's approach to future elections.

"I think we kind of set the bar," he said.

The association now plans to track candidates' campaign commitments — and whether the new council follows through.

"We're going to hold them to account," Simkus said.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com





Balasiuk takes on Santa parade buttons

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report



Coun. Tim Balasiuk sells $4 buttons to help fund Niagara-on-the-Lake's Dec. 12 Christmas parade. The buttons are available at several locations in town. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Coun. Tim Balasiuk has taken over Niagara-on-the-Lake's Christmas parade button fundraiser and is looking for volunteers to help sell the $4 buttons.

He was out selling buttons at locations around town on Thursday.

"I take the responsibility very seriously," Balasiuk said.

Standing outside Phil's Independent Grocer in Virgil, Balasiuk said he took on the role after longtime fundraising lead John Strecker stepped down.

Strecker wanted to take a break this Christmas and visit family overseas, Balasiuk said.

"Someone had to do it, so I said, 'I'm that guy,'" Balasiuk said.

Balasiuk helped choose the design for this year's parade buttons, which feature a vintage-style Santa Claus created with the help of artificial intelligence.

"I just went back to the old '80s sort of Santa Claus that I had always remembered when I was a kid from the parade," he said.

An image of the 1983 button design was uploaded to ChatGPT and of the four options it created, the parade committee selected the best one, Balasiuk said.

The buttons are available at Phil's Independent Grocer, The Stagecoach in Old Town, Balzac's, Avondale stores in St. Davids, Virgil and Old Town, and town hall.

All proceeds go toward the Christmas parade, which starts at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Dec. 12.

"The button fundraiser is actually pretty imperative to the operation of the parade," Balasiuk said.

As of Wednesday, $1,000 has been raised from button sales.

The parade will start at the intersection of King and Centre streets in Old Town and follow its traditional route along Castlereagh, Wellington, Byron/Prideaux, Simcoe and Queen streets.

Balasiuk said he is the only volunteer selling buttons before the parade. Anyone who wants to help can reach him at tim.balasiuk@notl.com.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com

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Golfing at the end of November?

Charlie Rate, second from left, celebrates like he's just won the U.S. Open as golfers savour a late-November gift — sunshine and temperatures near 19 C. Joining him for Sunday's round at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club are Sue Rate, left, Deborah Williams and Grant Williams. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



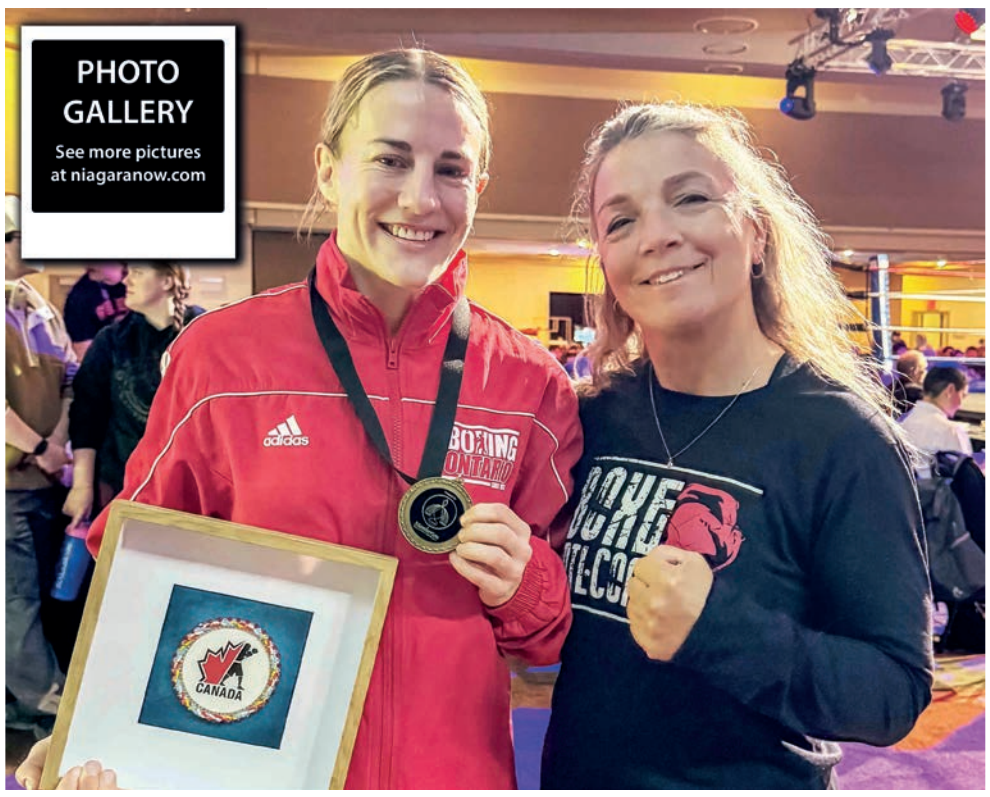


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Boxer's Olympic quest continues

After sixth national title, St. Davids fighter Mckenzie Wright takes aim at 2028 L.A. Games

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report



Six-time national champion boxer Mckenzie Wright is congratulated by her coach Danielle Bouchard after winning her latest title in Sydney, N.S. on Saturday. SUPPLIED

She just won her sixth Canadian amateur boxing championship title, but Mckenzie Wright says now the real work is about to start.

"I'm very hard on myself," the St. Davids pugilist said after returning home with her latest gold medal.

"When I was first starting, yes, this was a huge feat," said Wright, 36.

Being the Canadian champ is a big accomplishment. And doing it six times is a rarity.

"But at this point in my career, where everything's international and we're talking major games, we're talking about the Olympics, this is just an expectation for myself."

Her real goal is to qualify to represent Canada at the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. She narrowly missed out on fighting in the Paris Games in 2024, so her quest continues.

She earned her latest title in the 51-kilogram (112-pound) weight class on Saturday in Sydney, N.S., at the 2026 Elite Nationals tournament.

And she did it by defeating the same opponent she faced in the final a year ago, Amber-Jane Wall of St. Albert, Alta.

Last year, the pair fought on what was "my absolute worst day," Wright said. "A lot went wrong and I injured myself five days before that fight. I just got through it but it was a lot closer than it should have been."

This year's match-up was "a fun fight for me," she said.

The arena was packed with fans from the Nova Scotia community, scores of other fighters and a few celebrities, including three-time Olympian Mike Strange of Niagara Falls.

Anticipating a close fight, "everyone showed up, which made the atmosphere more exciting," Wright said.

She won the first round 3-2 on the five judges' scorecards and was ready for an aggressive onslaught by Wall in the second round.

Wright turned Wall's offensive into an opportunity to counter-attack and land some big punches. That strategy placed her first on all five judges' cards.

> "She is determined, gritty and an amazing athlete. Her continued presence at the top of Canadian Olympic boxing is a statement about her athleticism and an inspiration for athletes across our country."
>
> CHRISTOPHER LINDSAY
> BOXING CANADA
> EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"She came at me harder and then I really started landing clean, big shots on her, very big eye-catching shots" to seal the match.

She cruised through the third and final round, but Wall wasn't able to overtake Wright's hefty lead.

Christopher Lindsay, the executive director of Boxing Canada, was impressed with Wright's performance.

She "embodies every characteristic of a champion," he told The Lake Report.

"She is determined, gritty and an amazing athlete. Her continued presence at the top of Canadian Olympic boxing is a statement about her athleticism and an inspiration for athletes across our country."

At 36, Wright is the oldest fighter in her division, but that doesn't deter her. Women "ride the wave longer and we peak later. A lot of our team this year was over 30."

For the past few years, Wright has been a carded national team athlete, meaning she receives a bit of funding from the government to help defray training and other costs.

It also means she travels internationally to compete against the world's best. But despite the sometimes glamorous locales, the athletes are so focused on training and preparation, they seldom have time to enjoy the sights.

For decades, Canada has been criticized for underfunding even its most elite athletes which, in turn, can make succeeding on the international stage much more difficult.

Wright won't know till the new year if she will remain carded. But she's hopeful, despite having what she called "an off-year."

She fought in Brazil, Spain, the Netherlands and Mexico among other venues but didn't achieve the desired results.

That prompted a coaching change. She had spent nearly two years under the tutelage of Faisal Ahmadi of Niagara Falls, N.Y., and made great strides. But this year she felt her progress was stalling.

At Wright's level, success means at least making it to the medal round of competitions.

So earlier this year she asked Canadian women's boxing pioneer Danielle Bouchard to take her under her wing. Bouchard agreed and that relationship has been paying dividends since Wright began training with her in August.

Given the bond that often grows between coach and athlete, it can be difficult to switch mentors, but Bouchard "has been great. She's what I needed," Wright said.

Now, with six Canadian titles to her name, Wright is approaching hall of fame territory, but that's not on her radar. Getting back to work and fighting at the L.A. Games is.

On Sunday, she flew from Nova Scotia to Montreal, where the national team trains, and then drove eight hours home to St. Davids.

The next day she was on the job at the Niagara Falls clinic where she works as a registered nurse.

Such is the life of many elite Canadian athletes.

For now, she's taking two weeks off before resuming training.

"It's been very back-to-back since August," she said. "Now just my body needs to heal. My mind needs to heal."

Then the cycle will begin again, with the dreams of a trip to the Olympics hanging in the balance.







Holiday markets draw crowds to celebrate festive season

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report





Left: Shoppers browse knitwear, crafts and gifts at the second annual NOTL Christmas Market at the community centre on Sunday. Right: Two-year-old Austin Green and his mother, Erin Green, meet Santa at the Pillar and Post's Christmas Market in the Gardens on Saturday. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

The line for the Pillar and Post's holiday market stretched around the block Saturday and Sunday, while at Grace United Church, five volunteers turned a balcony full of donations into about 100 Christmas gift baskets.

Those were two of several holiday markets that drew shoppers across Niagara-on-the-Lake last weekend.

In the Pillar and Post's gardens, the free market ran Friday through Sunday with 23 local vendors. Cheri O'Reilly, events director at Vintage Hotels, estimated that 10,000 people came through the gates over the three days.

Gaylene Wakeman and Jessica Heath, both from St. Davids, came to hear carollers, shop and have coffee with Baileys.

"It's the first time they've ever had it here and it's a beautiful day," Wakeman said.

Katherine McMichael, owner of Lady Lou Collective, said the market brought shoppers to both her booth and her Queen Street store.

"It was a really good turnout, I think way better than anyone expected," she said. "It was nice so many people came to visit our town."

Big Brothers Big Sisters offered free carriage rides to people waiting in line and encouraged donations. Anna Vaccaro, the organization's volunteer enrolment co-ordinator, said many took her up on the offer.

At Grace United Church's Saturday market, the work began weeks before shoppers arrived. Church member Carol Gorman and four other volunteers sorted through donations, matching items such as mugs and wine glasses to make baskets for different occasions.

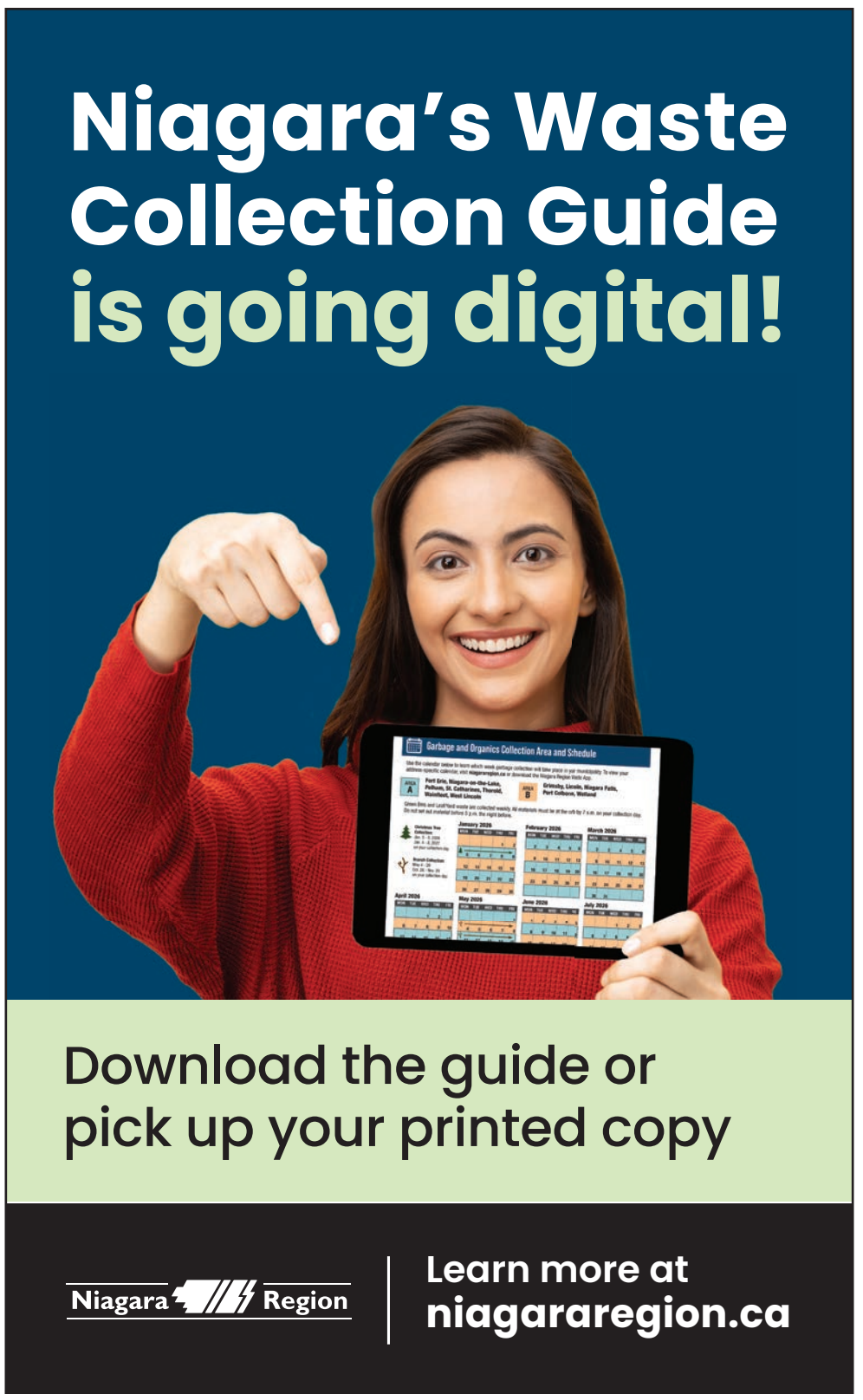
"A lot of people are downsizing, so they donate to us," said Gorman, who estimated the group put in more than 15 hours making the baskets.

Leslie Woodward, who led this year's market, said the baskets give shoppers something a little different to bring to a gathering. The church also sold homemade jams, tourtières, soups, baked goods and jewellery. Proceeds support church activities and community outreach, including the Candlelight Stroll.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre hosted the Grace Among the Vines Market on Saturday and the second annual Niagara-on-the-Lake Christmas Market on Sunday.

Queenston Pottery held its third annual Sip and Shop over the weekend, with live demonstrations Sunday. "We're just over the moon with how busy we've been," co-owner Lisa Dahl said.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com





Birchway Niagara expands abuse support for men

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Much of society's default idea of domestic abuse tends to be a situation where a man is the perpetrator and a woman is the victim. But new data from Statistics Canada is shedding light on how often men find themselves on the other side of this dynamic.

The latest numbers, released Nov. 18, indicate that over one-third of men in Canada (35 per cent) have reported experiencing at least one form of intimate partner violence since age 15, compared to around half of women (45 per cent).

Here in Niagara, that greater awareness has meant a change in how domestic abuse support programs are reaching out to potential victims at Birchway Niagara — the results, for its executive director, have been surprising.

Ten men have reached out for help since Birchway Niagara expanded its domestic abuse services to men in October. Nine have already been connected with support.



Birchway Niagara's new program offers free, confidential support to men affected by abuse. Nine of the first 10 men to reach out were connected with help. SUPPLIED

The organization's new, free and confidential program helps men who have experienced abuse and those who have engaged in abusive behaviour in relationships and want to change. Birchway says the service aims to fill a gap in support and prevention programs for men.

Support is offered virtually or at confidential locations across Niagara, including Niagara-on-the-Lake. The goal is to allow people to get support "in a way that feels comfortable to them," said Jennifer Gauthier, Birchway's executive director.

The response to the program has exceeded her expectations, she said.

"Given that we haven't done a lot of media around the launch, this is a larger response than anticipated, proving that there is a need for this in our community," she said.

Before its launch, Gauthier said, most available services came at a cost and were not specifically designed for men who've experienced domestic abuse, or want to stop participating in it.

Other options, such as the Partner Assault Response program, also exist, providing court-mandated support for people who have a criminal charge involving domestic violence.

But accessing help can come with another challenge: stigma.

Gauthier said men experiencing abuse may hesitate to come forward because they fear they won't be believed.

"Hopefully, as one of the main providers of domestic violence services in Niagara, we hope that we can build trust with all members of the community, including men," she said.

The program addresses mental, emotional, physical and financial abuse. It also supports men who experienced abuse as children and are seeking support.

Birchway first talks with each man to understand what help he needs and connects him with other services if needed. Men are then referred to Nova Phoenix Counselling Services for therapy, fully funded by Birchway.

Gauthier said the program is part of a broader shift for the organization, which changed its name from Women's Place of South Niagara in 2023 as part of an effort to expand its services to more people affected by abuse.

"Birchway is very committed to challenging gender-based stereotypes that impact the success of women, girls, men and boys in relationships," she said.

"I would encourage any man who has either experienced abuse or has used abuse in a relationship to reach out to our intake worker, to find out about our program and the supports that can be provided."

Those interested in accessing the free program can visit birchway.ca/get-help and select "Men's Support Services" to complete an intake form.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

Niagara on-the-Lake HYDRO

BOARD MEMBER UPDATE

Due to recent changes in legislation, Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro Inc. is seeking applications to fill vacancies for four (4) new members on its Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is responsible for providing overall direction in the management of the affairs of the company.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro Inc. is a trusted partner for our customers and continuously seeks to provide low cost energy delivery, high reliability and high power quality.

QUALIFICATIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES
Interested individuals should have sound business experience, analytical skills, be strategic thinking and understand organizational dynamics and effectiveness. Knowledge of the electricity sector, the regulatory process and previous experience on boards of corporations would be assets.

The Board of Directors meets most months for usually less than 2 hours. Meeting preparation and committee work or one-off assignments add to the expected commitment.

HOW TO APPLY
Interested individuals can send their resume and covering letter by December 18, 2026 to:

Attention: Board of Directors Application
Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro Inc.
P.O. Box 460 8 Henegan Road
Virgil, ON LOS 1T0

E-mail: director@notlhydro.com

We thank all applicants for their interest, however, only those chosen for an interview will be contacted.

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The Lake Report

OPINION

TLR

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BKind Grateful

#103: Offer to help someone practise a speech or presentation before the big day.

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

POSITIVE POWER +

Contributed by Patty Garriock

"Success means we go to sleep at night knowing that our talents and abilities were used in a way that served others."
- Marianne Williamson

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Have a lead on a story?

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Rotary gives $25K to museum



The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is making progress with its $2-million expansion plans this fall, pouring the concrete foundation for a new addition to its building and filling the large excavation behind Memorial Hall. As part of its support for the museum's efforts, the Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake presented the museum with a $25,000 cheque on Nov. 17, the second instalment of its $100,000 pledge toward the construction. "We are deeply grateful for their continued commitment to our community and to the preservation of our heritage," the museum said in its newsletter. SUPPLIED

The big plan for a 'click and lick' town



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist



Visitors clog Queen Street last Sunday afternoon. Now consultants are studying ways that will facilitate more tourists, not residents. GARTH TURNER

In the spirit of not being able to leave anything alone, NOTL is diddling with Queen Street.

Days ago, citizens were summoned to a meeting to view colourful boards and maps and write their detailed, in-depth thoughts on tiny Post-it notes. Pink, good. Yellow, bad.

It's the start of a process that will end up with an official plan for the main drag and the areas around it, which seem to be doing perfectly well on their own. (Except for the hulking Royal George complex and its disfiguring crane, of course.)

It took five minutes for the controversy to start.

"I'm concerned that a lot of people outside the heritage area will be influencing what happens in our neighbourhood that will impact our lifestyle," says Ellen Smith. "The full-time resident population in this great heritage area is disappearing and becoming very tourist-focused."

But, of course, this is all about making NOTL better for tourists. Just parse the town's stated goals for the entire process:

- Protect its heritage character
- Support a vibrant, year-round local economy
- Make it safer and easier to walk, bike and visit
- Guide growth that fits the area's character and scale
- Plan infrastructure that is ready for growth and climate change
- Create high-quality public spaces and streets for everyone

Heritage is good. That's why people come here from the wretched, teeming streets of Mississauga and Milton. But four of the five other objectives are, well, all about money. Two focus on the economy and visitors. Two are about growth. Nowhere does the word "resident" appear.

So this is a plan for more? More growth? More visitors? More infrastructure? Is that why the idea of kicking cars off the street is being considered, now that the sidewalks are stop-and-start (as they were last weekend)? How will the new guys on council handle this juggernaut, currently in the hands of pricey (out-of-town) consultants?

Let's slow down, says newbie councillor Weston Miller.

"Although Queen Street is a draw for visitors, it is also the main street for our residents," he says. "I'm a firm believer that people visit Niagara-on-the-Lake because we are the 'real deal': a genuine, charming historic town.

"Any decisions about Queen Street should reflect the needs of the people who live here, including the potential impact on Johnson and Prideaux if traffic patterns change. I don't believe that pedestrianizing Queen is necessarily the right solution for our residents."

Indeed. Worries that locals are voicing include turning the street into a pedestrian mall, so visitors can snorfle gelato and wander, distractedly, in safety. That would push hundreds of vehicles onto streets now lined with heritage homes — where actual people live.

Another is the suggestion a thoroughfare of mostly two-storey buildings could sprout additions, taking them to six levels. There's also talk of traffic lights at busy points, just to ensure we have all the rusticity of downtown Burlington.

"We are overrun with tourists," says Smith, an Old Town resident. "We are over advertising and attracting a crowd that has earned NOTL the label of the 'click and lick' town. I was mortified the first time I heard that. Photos and ice cream are the attraction. The increase in hotels in town and the mammoth Shaw building will change the ambiance."

So what is the point of this secondary official plan process? If it is not to serve the needs of residents (who are asked for input but not on the agenda), then clearly it's to set out a commercial agenda, map out expansion opportunities and ensure Marotta's new Parliament Oak and Rand Ritz hotels are fully booked.

Safety, growth, improvement. The economy. When you hear those words, prepare. The end is probably nigh.

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

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Jim Burton stands outside the former Niagara-on-the-Lake hospital at 176 Wellington St. His foundation wants to turn the building into a hub for arts, culture and education. David Israelson says that's the right fit for the site. FILE

New council can improve our town with cultural centre at 176 Wellington St.



David Israelson
Special to The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's new council can make a positive difference to this town by moving forward with the idea of turning the old hospital site at 176 Wellington St. into a cultural centre for NOTL residents.

That doesn't mean rubber-stamping the idea. We've had too much careless decision making under previous councils. We now need reasonable, objective thought from our new representatives.

Careful thought should tell our council members that supporting a cultural hub at the site is the right thing to do. If it's done right, 176 Wellington could honour our past while reflecting our future.

It could be an attractive, fresh, revitalized gathering place for us — the residents of all parts of Niagara-on-the-Lake. That would be consistent with the pledge of many of our new council members to put NOTL residents first.

There are still a lot of steps to get there. But opinion surveys done in the last year or so have already indicated what the public generally wants to happen.

They want 176 Wellington to remain in public hands. They want whatever is built or restored there to respect Niagara-on-the-Lake's historical heritage (not another monster hotel) and they want it to be for residents, not another tourist attraction or a parking lot.

It's widely recognized around town that the most well-formed proposal for 176 Wellington to date is the cultural hub idea put forward by the not-for-profit James A. Burton Family Foundation.

The foundation, whose main benefactor lives here, has drawn support from Indigenous, music, tourism and youth theatre organizations as well as the Shaw Festival and Royal Oak Community School to turn the site into a cultural gathering place to serve residents.

It could include a small performance space that could be used for concerts and even a revival of the immensely popular Friday night and Saturday afternoon films that used to be screened at the Shaw Festival Theatre.

The Burton Foundation still has a lot of detail to fill in, but it is committed to contributing substantial funding to kickstart the project, and it has reached out to residents and groups all around NOTL to generate enthusiasm.

The new federal budget also promises $4 billion over several years to "expand the reach of Canadian culture [and] bring communities together." There must be room in that budget for us.

The previous council tried to engineer the debate over 176 into a crude choice between public use and a parking garage. They backtracked in the run-up to the Oct. 26 election, voting to issue a request for qualifications from those who have ideas and dreams for the site.

The request for qualifications is supposed to let officials evaluate the people or groups who have ideas for 176 Wellington. That left the town wiggle room to reject some ideas, then follow up with a request for proposals while pushing for parking.

Is this alphabet soup necessary? I don't think so.

Our new town council and lord mayor should realize that they are not bound by this two-step process. They can simply go straight to a call for proposals.

Moving forward with this would be good for Niagara-on-the-Lake, but it's still going to take a lot of work.

Town council could help by coming up with a clear, positive request for proposals. The Burton Foundation needs to present a clear idea of what it's proposing, and constantly communicate and listen to the public.

Making 176 Wellington come alive could be a legacy that our new council and lord mayor could point to with pride. It's a great idea if we get it right, and the time to do this is now.

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

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RIDDLE ME THIS

This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: BIRDS WITH JOBS

Before electronic gas detectors, coal miners took this songbird underground to warn them of carbon monoxide.

Last issue category: THAT'S GOTTA BE A MYTH

Clue: This shoe company named for a Greek goddess is valued at ... $100 billion? You have gotta be kidding!

Answer: What is Nike?

Answered first by: Jane Morris

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Susan Hamilton, Margie Enns, Bob Wheatley, Sue Rautenberg, Claudia Grimwood, Emma Balsas, Jeff Lake, James Wells, Lynda Collet, Jane Andersen, Hugh Lundy, Stuart McCulloch, Nancy Rocca, Gavan Wilson, Hedy Wiebe, Donna Pearce, Jim Dandy, Howard Jones, Wesley Mann, Tammy Florio, Katie Reimer, Gary Davis, Catherine Clarke, Tuija Johansson, Esther VanGorder, Sheila Meloche, Marla Percy, Ana-Marija Petrunic

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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OPINION

The provincial tool that could actually improve local planning



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

Off the top, to those loyal readers who have waded through my last three columns: while I did my best to boil down the architectural precepts into an embraceable framework, it still might have been heavy slogging. And I truly appreciate your investment to stick with me.

Last week's column left off by suggesting that overtures such as the Parliament Oak hotel and the Royal George redevelopment — both egregious examples of inappropriate design — might never have been approved under a properly written, provincially acceptable community planning permit system enacted in our municipal bylaws.

Yep, Ontario municipalities (and residents as represented by their elected councils) have a concrete and legal alternative to our current, sadly broken and very complicated planning process for new development applications.

Ontario introduced the development permit system in 2007. Changes under the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act led to the current community planning permit framework, which took effect in 2016. Its rules, though tweaked now and again, remain in place under Ontario's Planning Act.

In short, this system combines what would otherwise be handled by several separate approval processes into a single, integrated permit process within a geographically defined area.

Instead of an applicant navigating multiple separate applications and hearings for items like zoning, site plan control and minor variances to obtain the required approvals for a project, one permit application under the system shall encompass the combined requirements specified for that area.

Municipalities that adopt a community planning permit system need to pass a bylaw that clearly identifies the boundaries of the specific area to which it will apply.

Further, this bylaw will contain the standards and criteria that will govern permit decisions therein, with the result being actual scope



The Parliament Oak hotel site on King Street in October 2025. Construction is still ongoing. FILE

and rules that are entirely local, rather than following a single provincewide template.

Yes, you read that right — a largely local system that can be couched in all the things that really matter when contemplating development within a given neighbourhood or area.

But why would the Ford government — infamously renowned for underwriting centralized decision-making control at the provincial level and consistently eroding municipal authority — allow for this apparent outlier?

The answer is quite simple: if the municipality has not made a decision within 45 days of receiving the required information, materials and fee, the applicant may appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

So, should an application conform to the specifications defined in the community planning permit system bylaw, the time it takes to get shovels in the ground can be shortened by months (or even years) compared with the established application process — conforming to the "build homes faster" central pillar of Doug Ford's platform.

But let's drill down a little further on what might be included in a community planning permit system bylaw for a given area (settlement or rural) in NOTL.

Any bylaw must include the allowable and prohibited land use requirements. Further, development standards — such as minimum and maximum density, height provisions, setbacks, parking requirements, lot coverage and so on — are necessary inclusions.

That said, there is a wide variety of provisions that may be embedded in the bylaw.

Urban design requirements are one such option. They may include detailing exterior design elements in accordance with provisions in the official plan regarding the preservation of community character (e.g., scale, massing, appearance and design features).

Another might be required sustainability inclusions like permeable pavement, mini-forests, transportation facilities and green roofs, among others.

Co-ordination of the construction timeline with the completed provision of infrastructure service delivery (something which may include conditions relative to required infrastructure investments from the municipality and/or developer) can be incorporated.

Speaking of timelines, to limit land speculation (i.e., the acquisition of raw land, then obtaining development permits that significantly enhance the property value and subsequently selling the "improved" lands at a substantial profit) in favour of actual building starts, the bylaw can specify a defined period in which construction must commence on an approved application before the permit expires.

If the permit expires, the owner can no longer market the land with that approval in hand.

And this is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of identifying many other opportunities that might be embraced to define a truly resident-driven "local" planning platform, while framing a clear, simple and efficient process for both town staff and applicants to follow.

This shift from the prevalent broken planning system is neither cheap nor easy.

Despite the fact that there are several successful examples of community planning permit systems in Ontario municipalities that might be cribbed from, the shift will require a significant upfront investment to establish a workable — easily modifiable for our municipal complex of unique villages and rural environs — template for the municipality of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

However, sometimes one must simply bite the financial bullet when implementing a proven system that is likely to result in higher returns.

Of course, no matter how good a system might be, it is completely dependent on support by the executive (the council and lord mayor) to underwrite its success. And while I've been very favourably impressed with our new lord mayor during recent discussions, we shall have to wait and see if the newly elected executives live up to their promises.

For more insight into community planning permit systems, you can go to notlra.com/cpps or contact me at homeguide.ca@gmail.com.

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

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Instead of AI, why not showcase our own local talent on parade buttons?

Dear editor:

Niagara-on-the-Lake is a town rich in arts and culture. Our many events and festivals provide wonderful opportunities to showcase the talents and creativity of our vibrant community. The annual Santa Claus Parade is no exception, and it is an event I eagerly anticipate each year.

One of the traditions I particularly enjoy is seeing the fundraising buttons, featuring the work of local artists, and reading about the inspiration behind their designs in this very paper.

You can imagine my dismay and disappointment upon seeing this year's selection.

Why did the committee feel the need to jump on the AI bandwagon? We are fortunate to have so many talented artists in our community of all ages, including students in our local schools and participants in the many art programs offered throughout the town.

Surely, there was an opportunity to engage this talent rather than turning to artificial intelligence.



This year's Christmas parade button appears to be AI-generated, says Monique Portelli. She wonders why a local artist wouldn't be used instead, as was the case in years past.

My now-adult child fondly remembers taking classes at the Pumphouse, where students were encouraged to create advertisements and posters for the Santa Claus Parade and Candlelight Stroll. What a wonderful way to nurture creativity, encourage community involvement and give young artists a chance to contribute to the events that make our town special.

While I have purchased a fundraising button in support of the parade, I do hope the committee will reconsider its approach in the future. In a town that takes such pride in its arts and culture, I hope we can do better.

Let's celebrate the creativity and talent that already exist right here in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Monique Portelli
NOTL

Niagara-on-the-Lake needs its high school back

Dear editor:

As a lifetime resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake and a retired history teacher at Niagara District Secondary School, I believe I am uniquely qualified to make an observation about what makes a small community thrive.

While roads, parks and municipal services are important, no institution has historically done more to unite our town than its secondary school.

In small communities, a high school is far more than a place of learning. It is where generations of families meet, where lifelong friendships are formed, where young people develop their character and values and where a shared community identity is created.

The four teenage years spent in secondary school are among the most influential in shaping the adults our children become.

For more than six decades, Niagara District Secondary School served as the heart of Niagara-on-the-Lake. From the 1950s through 2010, the school brought together students, parents, alumni, service clubs, local businesses, community organizations and volunteers in support of the next generation.

Graduation ceremonies were particularly powerful examples of community spirit. Scholarships, awards and recognition from local organizations connected residents of all ages and backgrounds. The entire town came together to celebrate its young people and invest in their future.

That sense of connection is no longer what it once was. The closure of Niagara District Secondary School as an active secondary school removed one of the few institutions capable of bringing the entire community together around a common purpose. As a result, an important part of our civic identity has been weakened.

Today, the future of the school's property is once again under discussion. At the same time, the province is moving toward significant changes that could further reduce local influence over public education. These developments make the current moment especially important.

Our newly elected town council may have one final opportunity to preserve and restore a community asset that meant so much to generations of residents.

This should not be viewed simply as a real estate decision. It is a decision about the future character of Niagara-on-the-Lake and whether we value the institutions that bind us together.

I respectfully urge council to seize this opportunity. Niagara District Secondary School was more than a school. It was the heart and soul of our community. Once such institutions are lost, they are rarely recovered.

Let us not miss this last chance to protect an essential part of our identity.

Donald MacDougall
NOTL

Criticism of candidates who lost was tough but necessary

Dear editor:

The people spoke, and I fully support Samuel Young's recent letter to the editor ("Women who lost election weren't effective leaders," Nov. 19).

It is important to say what he said because it reflects what so many of us in this community believe.

It isn't easy to write a letter like that, and it is tough for the former councillors and their families and friends to hear it. However, public office comes with a responsibility to be held accountable for a four-year track record.

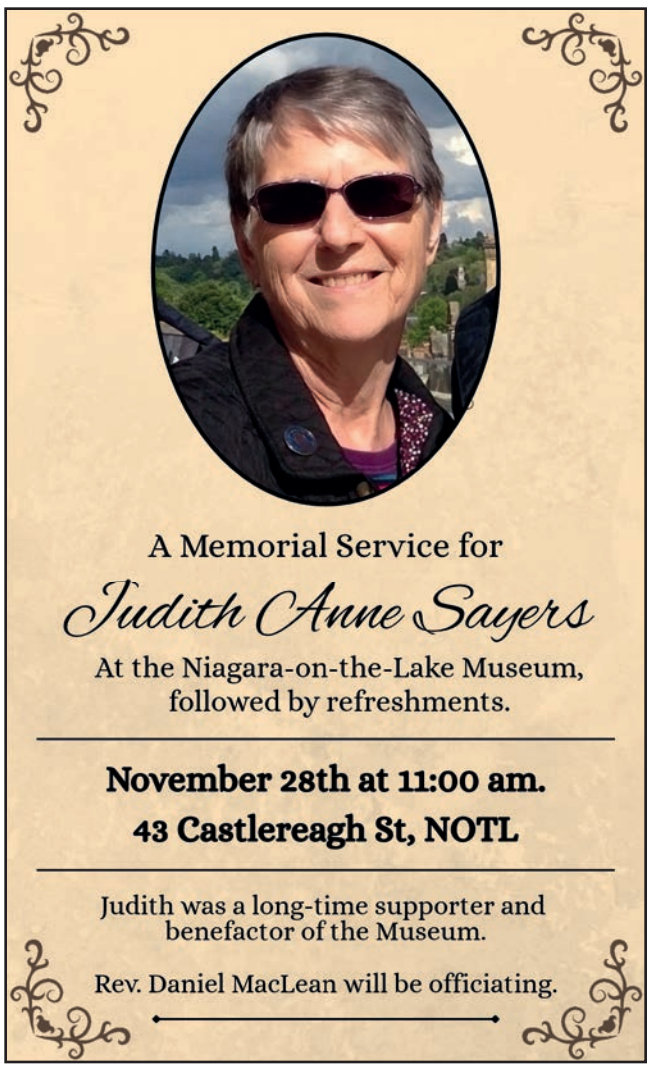
For the past term, many residents felt that our voices were ignored and that council was operating behind closed doors rather than listening to the community.

At the end of the day, the results speak for themselves. Voters didn't make their decisions based on gender — they voted based on performance, communication and results.

It is time for a fresh start with a council that prioritizes transparency and truly represents the people of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Judith Barnes
NOTL







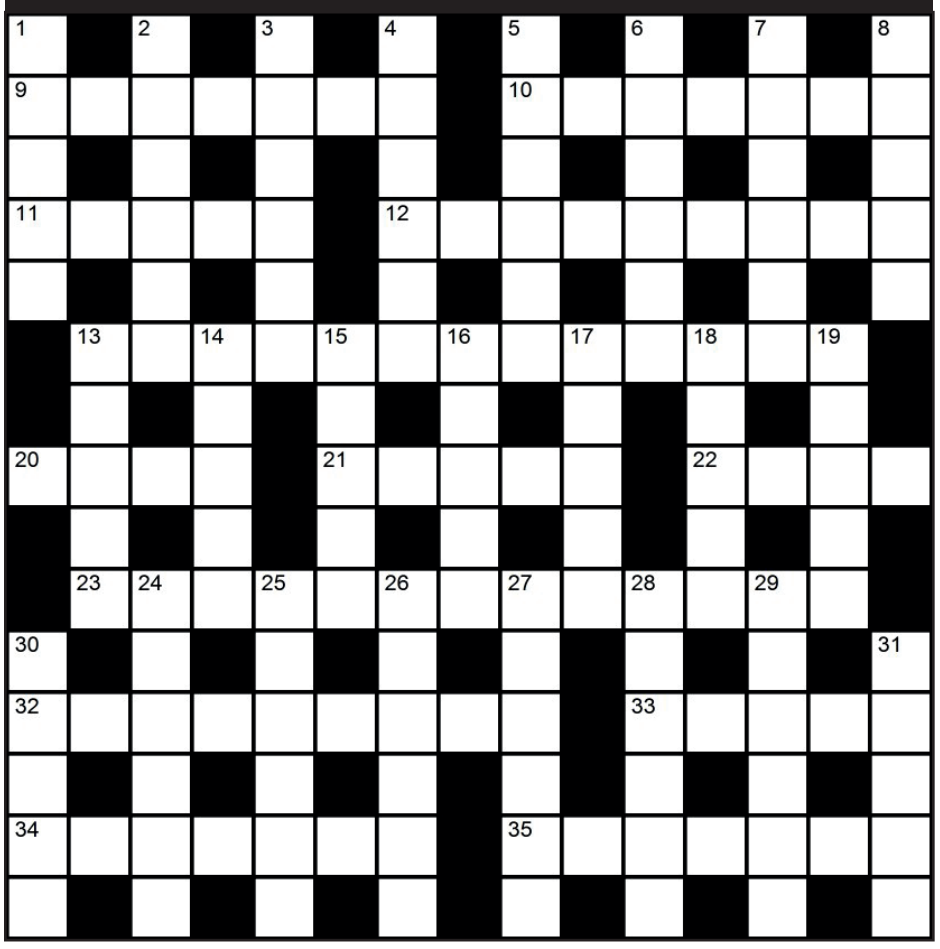
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GAMES

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Crossword Puzzle



Across
9. Photograph taken at very short range (5-2)
10. Kind of illusion (7)
11. Relating to sound reproduction (5)
12. Holy Communion (9)
13. Dog with wavy silky hair (6,7)
20. Leg joint (4)
21. Graded (5)
22. Wife of one's uncle (4)
23. Reflection (13)
32. Doctor (9)
33. Cost (5)
34. Typical (7)
35. Petite (3-4)

Down
1. Fragment (5)
2. Black magic (6)
3. Make over (6)
4. Become visible (6)
5. Steel boot reinforcement (6)
6. Filter (6)
7. Operational (6)
8. Vigorous attack (5)
13. Sarcastic doubter of sincerity and merit (5)
14. Unsoiled (5)
15. Strange and mysterious (5)
16. Organisation (3-2)
17. Per --- ad astra (R A F motto) (5)
18. Resident of e.g. Basra (5)
19. Russian revolutionary leader (5)
24. One-fifth of the atmosphere (6)
25. Ethnic (6)
26. Posted (6)
27. Yearner (6)
28. Warning (3-3)
29. Source (6)
30. Atomize (5)
31. Conical tent (5)

Last issue's answers

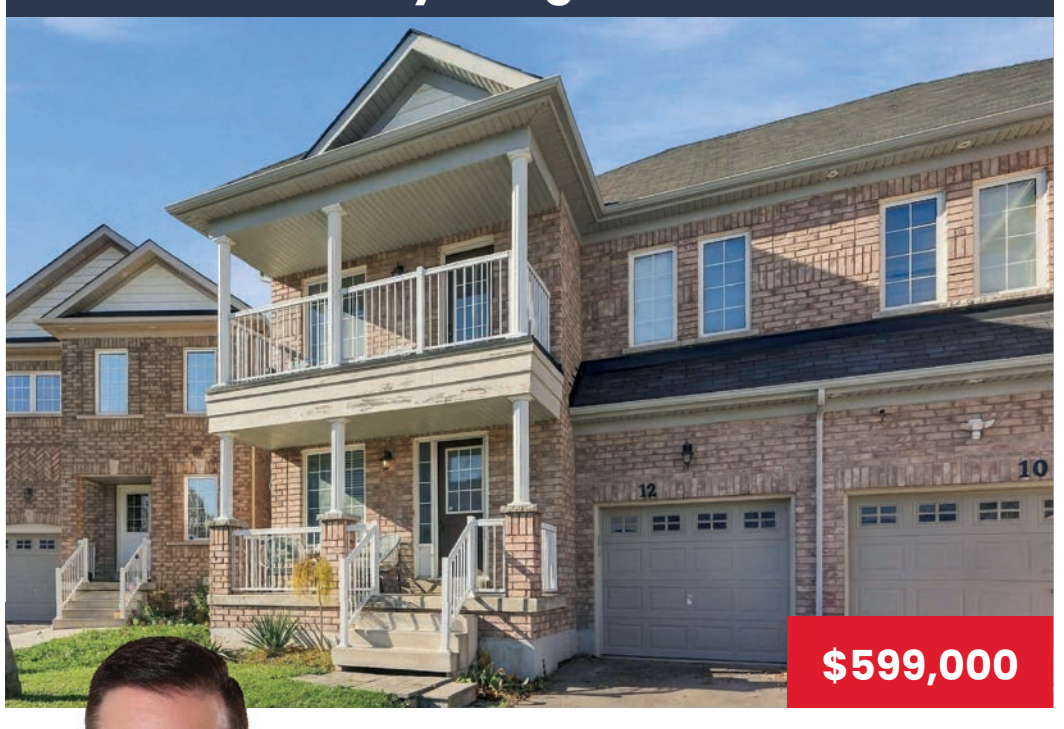
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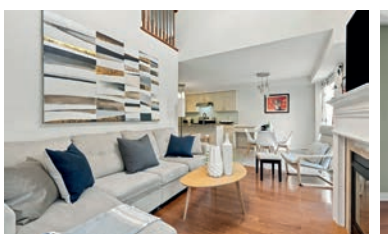
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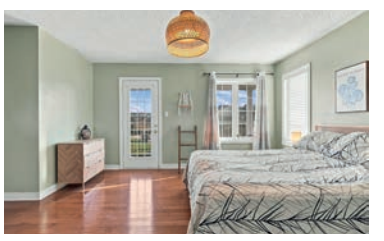
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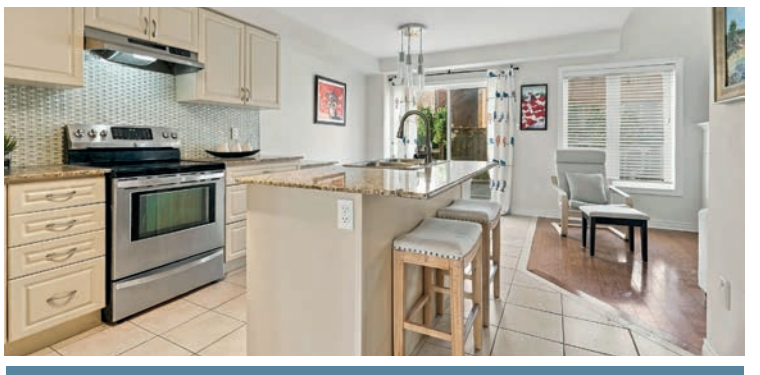
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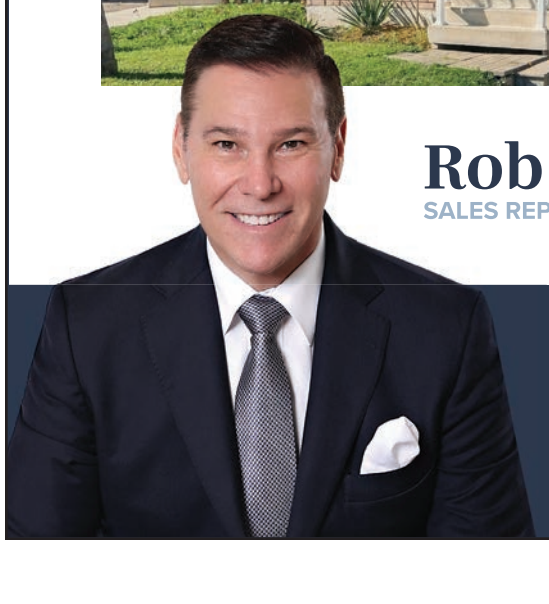






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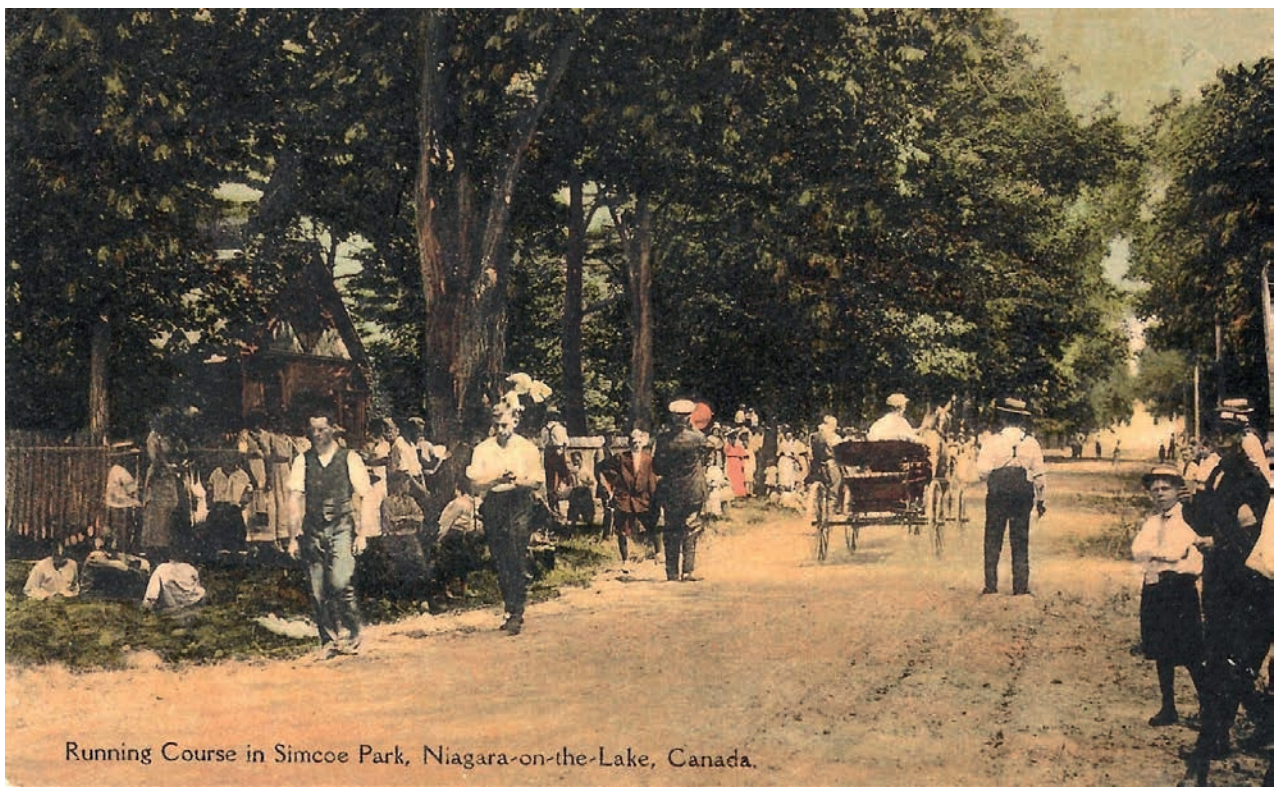
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NIAGARA ON THE LAKE MUSEUM



Running course in Simcoe Park, c. 1920

The land that makes up Simcoe Park was once part of the military reserve, a status it retained until the 1930s. But the community had already come to think of the park as "theirs" by the 1880s, when the Town of Niagara hired a caretaker to look after it. When the town later considered making improvements, residents were keen to protect the park's character. They wanted to make sure it would not become a beer garden or be used to pasture cows. Clearly, these were possibilities that people felt needed to be ruled out. By 1900, the park had a bandstand, pavilion, swings and pathways, although it's not clear from the surviving records whether all of these improvements were formally approved. And there was more happening in the park than leisurely strolls. This postcard shows a running race taking place in Simcoe Park. The sports bowl, which remains a familiar feature today, was dug in 1935. Over the years, Simcoe Park has continued to grow as a place for recreation and community life, and it remains an important public space today.

Big discoveries at the tiniest level of physics



DR. BROWN



The IceCube Neutrino Observatory, which allowed scientists to detect high-energy cosmic neutrinos from outside our solar system. This year's Nobel Prize winner in physics, Francis Halzen, made key contributions to the observatory. WIKIMEDIA

The Standard Model for the subatomic universe contains a thoroughly confusing number of, and names for, elementary particles and forces — so many that physicist Enrico Fermi (Nobel Prize winner, 1938) is said to have quipped in the 1950s, when there were far fewer known particles than now, that "Young man, if I could remember the names of these particles, I would have been a botanist."

If Fermi was frustrated, imagine the impact of the proliferating particles, forces and fields, which began in the late 1800s.

These days, the list is bewildering and often accompanied by strange names. At its simplest, it includes six quarks (up, down, charm, strange, top and bottom), which combine to form particles such as protons and neutrons; six leptons (the electron, muon and tau, plus their three corresponding neutrinos); force-carrying particles (photons for electromagnetism, W and Z bosons for the weak force and gluons for the strong force); and the Higgs boson.

If that isn't enough for readers, alternative counts put the number up to 61 and counting, if variations such as colour, charge, chirality and antimatter are included.

It was much simpler in 1900, the dawn of the Camelot years in physics.

In 1897, the electron was discovered by J.J. Thomson (Nobel Prize winner, 1906) and in the process proved that the atom was divisible. In 1911, Ernest Rutherford inferred the existence of the atomic nucleus from experiments in which Hans Geiger and Ernest Marsden fired alpha particles at thin metal foil, including gold.

The vast majority of alpha particles shot straight through the thin sheet of gold, suggesting there was a lot of empty space in the gold. Occasionally, however, particles were reflected back, suggesting they had hit something tiny but solid — what would come to be called the nucleus.

The experimental model strongly suggested that the nucleus of atoms was tiny and surrounded by vast empty space through which Rutherford imagined electrons orbited like tiny planets. Rutherford went on to discover the proton in 1917 and was followed later by James Chadwick, who discovered the neutron in the same laboratory in 1932 (Nobel Prize winner, 1935).

Electrons and what governed their orbits were the subject of intense study by a small group of physicists in Denmark, Germany and France, culminating in pivotal studies by Werner Heisenberg (Nobel Prize winner, 1932) and Erwin Schrödinger (Nobel Prize winner, 1933). Each developed a different mathematical model for describing the behaviour of electrons, and their equations, surprisingly, yielded identical, highly precise results.

Between those early days and the present, two major theories emerged in physics: relativity, in its special and general forms, sprang from Albert Einstein's fertile mind and describes the universe on the largest scale, while quantum physics describes it at the tiniest level.

The latter spawned the Standard Model to link all the particles, fields and forces related to atoms together.

However, despite being incredibly useful and precise as a tool, the Standard Model of particle physics does not incorporate gravity as described by general relativity and has the feel of being cobbled together, as indeed it was.

Along the way, new particles were postulated to fill gaps in the Standard Model, most of which have been confirmed to exist by experiment, such as the Higgs boson in 2012 using CERN's Large Hadron Collider.

This year's Nobel Prize in physics celebrates the continuing story of one of the universe's most abundant particles: the neutrino. C.P. Snow recounts the story of the neutrino's birth in his 1981 book, "The Physicists."

In 1930, physicist Wolfgang Pauli proposed that an extremely light, electrically neutral particle could carry away energy that seemed to be missing in beta decay. Fermi later built the particle, called the neutrino, into his theory of beta decay. In 1956, Frederick Reines (Nobel Prize winner, 1995) and Clyde Cowan detected the particle and sent Pauli a telegram announcing their result.

Neutrinos come in three flavours: electron, muon and tau. They can change flavour as they travel.

Some are produced in Earth's atmosphere, in nuclear reactors or in the sun. The IceCube observatory has detected high-energy neutrinos from beyond our solar system, including evidence of a source in an active galaxy powered by a supermassive black hole.

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.

OBITUARIES

Nadine Kettell-Osborn



Nadine Barrett Kettell-Osborn died peacefully on Nov. 15, 2026, at Hotel Dieu Shaver in St. Catharines, Ont., Canada. She was a loving wife and a devoted mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. A master baker and accomplished hostess, she embraced life with a passion for travel, an enthusiasm for the arts, and a strong commitment to charitable causes and environmental conservation. An admirer of fine living in all its forms, she was always eager to share the good things in life with others. For nearly 89 years she lived life to the fullest, yet her passing came far too soon for someone so active and vibrant, with many more adventures still planned.

Born on Dec. 28, 1937, in Baltimore, Md., Nadine was educated at St. Mary's Seminary Junior College and attended the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy. She spent 25 years at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, first as a researcher and later as a senior administrator.

Nadine was briefly married to Joseph Morton in 1958, and in 1959 she welcomed her son, Ralph Wallis Kettell II. With help from her parents, she devoted herself to raising Ralph while building a successful professional career. Ralph, who went on to become an accomplished electrical engineer and mining investor, predeceased her in January 2025.

In 1984, Nadine married Richard Warren Osborn and moved to Canada. She became an active and valued member of her community, first in the Greater Toronto Area and, since 1999, in Niagara-on-the-Lake. A dedicated supporter of the arts, she served as accommodation officer for Music Niagara, arranging housing for visiting musicians. Her love of theatre and music, together with her involvement in community causes, remained central to her life.

Nadine explored much of North America and travelled widely overseas. At 18 she toured Europe with her grandfather, and in later years she visited the Middle East and Asia. Her love of exploration took her snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef. Always drawn to ambitious, thoughtful undertakings, she visited all 13 official U.S. presidential libraries and museums, from New York to California, as well as all 50 U.S. state capitals. These journeys deepened her appreciation of American history and gave her a unique perspective on the nation's political heritage and the families who helped shape it.

Over the years, Nadine made her home in many places across the United States and Canada. Her residences and holiday homes included the Hockley Valley, Ont.; several locales in the Toronto area; Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.; Jamestown, Va.; New York City; West New York, N.J.; Las Vegas, Nev.; Sarasota, Fla.; Beaufort, S.C.; and Ocean View, Del.

Nadine is survived by her devoted and admiring husband, Richard Warren Osborn; her daughter-in-law, Laura Ollinger Kettell; her grandchildren, Ralph Wallis Kettell III (Emily), Collin Sloan Kettell (Susan), and Chloe Marguerite Kettell; and her two adored great-grandsons, George Washington Kettell and Dallas Stone Kettell. She is also survived by her stepchildren, James Osborn (Cindy), Blaire Lynn Birchard (Jeffery), Kymberlee Alice DiPeso (Joseph), and David Osborn, and her stepgrandchildren, Parker, Lynley, Joseph Jr., Daniel, Jenna, Grayson, and Amelia.

Among the ways Nadine expressed her love for family was her unwavering tradition of sending cards for birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, Valentine's Day and other special occasions. Often tucked inside was a small stack of U.S. two-dollar bills, part of her personal campaign to keep the denomination in circulation. It was a simple but enduring expression of the care and affection she held for those closest to her.

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

Judith Anne Sayers



Jan. 28, 1938 — Oct. 15, 2026

Spouse of John, mother of sons John (Dr. Eleanor Latta) of Toronto and Craig (Andrea) of Portland, Ore. Beloved by grandchildren Elizabeth and Richard of Toronto, and Gillian Lark of Portland, Ore. Daughter of the late Perezel Pearce and Helen Pearce (née Munro) of Toronto.

Judith was a founding and active member of the Kingsway Platform Tennis Club, where she competed successfully in many club and outside tournaments. She was also a tireless worker in the Ladies Guild at Royal St. George's College in Toronto.

After Judith and her husband, John, retired to Niagara-on-the-Lake, she was also an active member of Grace United Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, participating in and donating to many fundraising activities. While living in Toronto, her churches were Kingsway-Lambton, where she was married, and Humber Valley United Church.

In addition, she was a proud supporter, life member and significant benefactor to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, where she was a member for many years.

An avid collector, Judith's collections now reside with the Smithsonian Museum (Washington, D.C.), the Dundas County Historical Society and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum. She was a longtime member of the Toronto Postcard Club.

Judith and her husband moved to The Royal Henley Retirement Residence in St. Catharines in early 2024. The family would like to thank the nursing floor at Royal Henley, and in particular Dr. Jayawardene and nurses Jordin and Charity, for their care and support during Judith's final months.

A memorial service will be held in the hall at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, 43 Castlereagh St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 28, with refreshments to follow.

In lieu of flowers, please make memorial donations to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum or to Grace United Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake.



Rowena Wilson



It is with great sadness the Wilson family announces that Rowena passed away peacefully, surrounded by loved ones, on Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2026, at the age of 87. Rowena was born in Yarmouth, N.S. She spent many of her early years in Nova Scotia until the family settled in Saint John, N.B., where she later met her husband, Frank. Frank's career took their growing family to places like St. John's, N.L.; London, Ont.; Georgetown, Ont.; Raleigh, N.C.; and Tampa, Fla. Retirement brought Row and Frank back to Quispamsis, N.B., and then ultimately to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., in 2008. Along the way, Rowena and Frank had more than 60 years of fun and adventure, travelled extensively and built great relationships — many of which she still had as treasured friends today. Rowena's love and enjoyment of her family and friends was one of her greatest sources of joy. She appreciated having her "boys" all close to her in Niagara-on-the-Lake in recent years, but had always appreciated having them around her during her life (even back during their action-packed youth in Georgetown). She loved being able to spend time with her grandchildren, great-grandchild and "granddogs." She was also blessed to be able to still have such close relationships with her own sisters and Frank's family. She was always an active and busy person. She enjoyed travelling, shopping, baking, watching sports, playing cards, happy hour (HH), live music, all things Disney, going for walks and celebrating her favourite holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Rowena was a woman of faith and had a generous spirit throughout her life. She was always there to lend a hand and donate her time — even when the task was not glamorous. She spent a lifetime formally volunteering, but also always giving care and support to friends and acquaintances by making meals, writing a thoughtful card or just talking and listening.

Rowena was predeceased by her beloved husband Frank and brother Bob. She is survived by her sons Stephen (Jennifer), Craig (Katherine) and Paul (Kathryn); grandchildren Blake (Sarah) and Erica (Eric); great-granddaughter Sydney; sisters Diane (Bob) and Florene (Art). She will be missed by her various friend groups, especially the ladies from cards, mahjong, the Thrift Store and St. Vincent de Paul church. She will be missed by her entire extended family locally, in Eastern Canada and in the U.S. We take comfort in knowing she had a wonderful life, is with the Lord now and is enjoying HH again with her dear Frank. Cheers.

In keeping with her wishes, cremation has taken place. A celebration of life will be held in spring 2027, with details to be announced at a later date. Arrangements have been entrusted to Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake. In memory of Row, memorial contributions may be made to the charity of one's choice and would be appreciated.

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



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