



Residents **reject** new Rand road proposal

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Tensions flared at a Niagara-on-the-Lake council planning committee meeting Tuesday, as residents expressed frustration over a proposed private road through the Rand Estate.

Council chambers were packed, reflecting high public interest in the controversial development. Fifty-seven people also attended an open house on the same issue last week. At both meetings, nearly all attendees opposed the proposal.

The rezoning application, submitted by Solmar Development Corp., would change the land use at 200 John St. from agricultural

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Overpopulation creates **congestion**

Parking mayhem outside St. Davids school an accident waiting to happen, says parent



Drone footage shows congestion outside St. Davids Public School, where parents say overcrowding has led to cars parking on sidewalks. SUPPLIED

Paige Seburn | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

Overcrowding at St. Davids Public School has prompted renewed calls for safety improvements, but the District School Board of Niagara says it won't provide answers or possible solutions until trustees receive a report this fall.

In an Aug. 8 letter to the school board, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Regional Police, parent Melanie Marull urged immediate action to stop cars from driving and parking on sidewalks outside the school.

She called it a "long-standing

and dangerous issue" that puts children at risk.

"Sidewalks are intended to be safe spaces for children and pedestrians, particularly around an elementary school," Marull said.

"The continued presence of vehicles on these walkways is not

only illegal, it is a threat to life."

Marull said growing vehicle and student traffic is increasing "well beyond the site's capacity," adding that congestion and improper flow are

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Mayor, experts and residents condemn Second Sons 'hate rally'

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A white nationalist rally by about 50 members of the extremist group Second Sons at Brock's Monu-

ment in Queenston Heights Park over the Labour Day weekend has drawn strong condemnation from Niagara-on-the-Lake officials and experts.

The group gathered at the historic site on Aug.

31, posting photos and videos of masked members carrying flags and wearing shirts reading "All Thy Sons." A video shared Sept. 6 shows members standing at the base of the monument, which is operated by

Niagara Parks.

Second Sons, founded in 2024 by Jeremy MacKenzie — the creator of Diagon, which the RCMP has described as a "militia-like extremist organization" — describes itself online as a

"Canadian men's nationalist club."

Its website says, "Our birthright has been stolen from us as we are being pushed out of society, academics and the workforce and replaced by foreigners

without any connection or roots to the Canadian people."

Mayor Zalepa condemns rally
Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa

Continued on Page 3



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Racist group targets **poorly educated** and **'economically insecure'** white men

Continued from Front Page

addressed the incident at Tuesday's committee of the whole meeting, calling the rally unacceptable. "On behalf of myself, my fellow council members and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, I want to make it clear that this group's message is not supported or condoned, and this type of hate has no place in our town," Zalepa said. "The town does not tolerate any form of racism, hate, or discrimination."

Zalepa said neither Niagara Parks nor the Niagara Parks Police were notified about the gathering and no complaints were received at the time. Niagara Parks Police were informed afterward and followed up.

"I have full confidence in our local police and public safety authorities," he said. "To our residents, especially those who may feel targeted or hurt by this demonstration, know that you are respected and fundamental to the fabric of our community. This recent rally does not reflect our ethics or the inclusive, welcoming environment we are committed to fostering."

Experts warn of growing far-right activity

Saleh Waziruddin, executive director of the Niagara Region Anti-Racism Association, called the rally a serious escalation in extremist



Members of an extremist group gathered without permits at Queenston Heights during the weekend. SOURCED

activity locally. "This is a new level of activity that we've seen from the white supremacists in Niagara," he said.

Pascal Lupien, a political science professor at Brock University who studies far-right movements, said Second Sons is part of a broader trend of groups known as "active clubs."

"I'm certainly aware that this is part of a trend of what are sometimes called 'active clubs,'" Lupien said. "The march in Niagara-on-the-Lake is not an isolated incident, it's part of a trend."

Lupien said such groups often target economically insecure young men,

engaging them in fitness and social activities while promoting far-right ideology.

"Many of these groups certainly have a goal that goes beyond athletics," he said. "Some of them are fairly blunt in terms of their message. They see something like a race war coming and they are basically recruiting and training young white men to be prepared for this race war that they imagine is coming."

He added that fighting these movements is challenging because of Charter protections around free speech.

"Trying to go at them too hard can sometimes have

the opposite effect," Lupien said. "The best approach ... is education. ... Generally, these groups get the strongest support from people who haven't had the chance to educate themselves."

Waziruddin said he hopes police enforce existing hate crime laws and called for stronger measures to hold extremist groups accountable.

"We need to use the hate crimes laws we have and also expand them," he said. "So that people who are spreading hate and intimidation can be held accountable."

A growing local concern The rally came just weeks after local resident Matthew French discovered fliers near the Niagara-on-the-Lake post office from another far-right organization, the Dominion Society.

"These groups have become more sophisticated in their marketing and camouflage," French said. "The casual observer would likely think this is a poster for a local historical society."

Zalepa said council and staff remain committed to "safety, fairness and respect for all residents," adding that the town is focused on ensuring Niagara-on-the-Lake continues to reflect "a resilient, vibrant and welcoming community that residents expect and deserve."

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Human skull found near lake sparks **homicide probe**

Staff
The Lake Report

A human skull discovered near Read Road and the shore of Lake Ontario late last month has led to a homicide investigation, Niagara Regional Police confirmed Tuesday.

Detectives say the victim is a Black man, believed to be between 18 and 22 years old, standing between 5-foot-10 and

6-foot-3 with a muscular build. Efforts to confirm his identity are ongoing.

Police believe the man's death occurred sometime between late 2021 and spring 2025. Investigators say the case is "particularly complex" due to the condition of the remains, which were recovered in stages. A skull was located on Aug. 31, and on Sept. 3, additional skeletal remains were recovered from the

same area.

Forensic examinations and post-mortem testing are underway with the Ontario Forensic Pathology Service. Investigators say the description of the victim does not match any known missing persons cases within the Niagara region.

The Niagara Regional Police homicide unit is leading the investigation with assistance from the

Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains Co-ordinator. The area where the remains were found remains under police guard while searches continue.

Police are urging anyone with information to call 905-688-4111, option 3, extension 1009417. Anonymous tips can be submitted through Crime Stoppers of Niagara at 1-800-222-8477 or online.



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Residents say **no means no** for Rand access

Continued from Front Page

to low-density residential to allow construction of a private road, with an emergency access point at 588 Charlotte St.

Council did not make any decisions at Tuesday's meeting but instead heard input from town staff and residents. A date for a vote on the re-zoning has not yet been set.

Many residents criticized the application, questioning why it was back before council after being rejected multiple times.

"The application is an abuse of process," said lawyer Kathryn Podrebarac.

Solmar's latest application marks its third attempt in three years to build a private road through the Rand Estate.

In 2023, the town's former heritage planner, Denise Horne, wrote a report rejecting much of what Solmar proposed in a similar project.

A 2024 appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal also failed. The tribunal rejected the proposal on five grounds: damage to mature trees, road safety concerns, harm to cultural heritage,



NOTL residents who attended Tuesday's meeting were overwhelmingly opposed to a request for access to the Rand Estate.

harm to wildlife and negative impacts on an endangered bat habitat.

In April 2025, the tribunal dismissed another version of the proposal.

At Tuesday's meeting, Solmar's planner, Paul Lowes of SGL Planning, said the tribunal's decision "creates some concern and some ambiguity," and part of the process was ensuring everyone understands what the ruling means.

But some residents saw the new application as an attempt to bypass previous rulings.

"So why are we here tonight?" asked local resident Judy McLeod. "So that you can agree with Mr. Marotta (Solmar CEO) that no doesn't really mean no?"

So far, revisions to the proposal have mainly focused on road safety. Solmar has also suggested changes to the emergency access point on Charlotte Street, which critics say is too narrow for emergency vehicles.

Lyle Hall, speaking as a private citizen and not in his role as chair of the Niagara Foundation, said the proposal addresses road safety while ignoring other significant concerns, including future development on the new road.

"Solmar didn't include a heritage impact assessment in their application," said Hall. "The application says nothing at all about heritage ... they want you to bite on just the street without telling you what the street is for."

The Rand Estate, located in Old Town, is a designated heritage area dating back to 1910. Opponents fear the development could damage historic structures on the site.

While Solmar has stated it intends to develop the area following a successful rezoning, no detailed plans have been submitted to the town.

"We don't have any plans

about future developments on the property at this point," said town senior planner Aimee Alderman.

Residents also criticized the absence of Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens, and Coun. Maria Mavridis during all or part of the Rand Estate discussion.

Mavridis told The Lake Report that Wiens was feeling unwell, prompting Zalepa to leave the chamber to assist him. Mavridis said she also stepped out to check on Wiens.

Zalepa later told The Lake Report he had declared a conflict of interest based on advice from the town's integrity commissioner regarding the Rand Estate file. He said he did so based on the proximity of his address to the Rand Estate area.

Zalepa said he is awaiting further guidance on whether he should continue to participate in the process.

"Once I review the input from the integrity commissioner, I will decide upon whether I participate in the decision process going forward or declare any conflicts," he said.

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Paws on the trail



Owners and their dogs walked in the Commons on Sunday as part of the Paws on the Trail fundraiser to help raise money for the continued expansion and restoration of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Town to spend \$290K on playground upgrades

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is set to spend about \$300,000 replacing children’s playgrounds at Memorial Park and Simcoe Park, with work starting later this year.

The \$140,000 Memorial Park project is funded through the capital levy, while \$150,000 for Simcoe Park comes from the parkland dedication reserve, said Kevin Turcotte, NOTL’s parks and recreation manager.

Residents voted online to help shape the new playgrounds. The town expects to select the top-voted designs by mid-September.

If weather allows, the Simcoe Park playground will be installed before year-end, while Memorial Park’s equipment will be replaced in spring 2026. Ribbon-cuttings are



Memorial Park, located on King Street in Old Town Niagara-on-the-Lake, is set to receive a new \$140,000 playground, scheduled to be installed in spring 2026. PAIGE SEBURN

planned for summer 2026 following safety inspections.

“The two designs for each park have already been vetted to ensure they are within budget, accessible and consider maintenance requirements,” said Turcotte, adding they “were based on typical playground designs.”

Key goals in the design process were: placing the equipment within its existing space, getting the most value out of the budget and playground features, building with high-quality materials, using wood fibre mulch for surfacing, keeping mats underneath swings to prevent scattering mulch and meeting accessibility

standards set by the Canadian Standards Association.

The September vote was the first opportunity for residents to weigh in on the designs. “This has been the town’s practice in previous years regarding playground replacement or new playground installations,” said Turcotte.

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Brock’s Monument closing for \$1.1M restoration



Brock’s Monument is getting a \$1.1 million makeover and is expected to be closed until spring 2026. GAIL KENDALL

Staff
The Lake Report

Access to Brock’s Monument will be closed starting this month for major masonry repairs, backed by a \$1.1-million federal investment. Work is expected to continue until spring 2026.

St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle announced Monday that Parks Canada will restore the 56-metre monument’s deteriorating mortar joints to stabilize the

172-year-old structure. An assessment flagged the need for repairs to protect the historic landmark.

Parks Canada said the work is critical for public safety and long-term preservation of the monument, which has stood at Queenston Heights since 1853 to commemorate Sir Isaac Brock and the 1812 battle fought there. The project will also improve the visitor experience and support local tourism.

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Committee recommends demolition of homes on Royal George site

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The sun is setting on the Royal George Theatre. The Niagara-on-the-Lake municipal heritage committee has approved the demolition of two heritage buildings at 178–188 Victoria St., despite some hesitation about the impact on the historical character of the neighbourhood.

The buildings, owned by the Shaw Festival and currently used as administrative offices, sit next to the existing Royal George Theatre. If approved by council, the land would be incorporated into the new theatre site.

While the committee’s decision is not final—council must still vote on the matter—it marks a key step in the Shaw Festival’s plan to replace the 110-year-old theatre.

“We’re making due progress,” said Tim Jennings,



The municipal heritage committee has recommended two heritage homes on Victoria street be demolished to make way for the Shaw’s new theatre. DANIEL SMEENK

executive director of the Shaw Festival.

Jennings told The Lake Report the Shaw will begin tendering demolition contracts for the Victoria Street buildings “immediately.” Once demolition is approved, he said, the process could begin within about two weeks.

It remains unclear which council meeting will vote on the demolition. Jennings said it could happen in early October, but no date has been confirmed. Coun. Gary Burroughs, a member of the heritage committee, also said he was unsure.

Jennings told the commit-

tee the goal is to demolish the Victoria Street buildings by late October and to take down the entire Royal George Theatre by late January.

The committee recommended demolition on the condition that a site plan agreement and a conservation and commemoration plan are completed. The Shaw submitted its site plan for the theatre in late August.

Every committee member except Coun. Tim Balasiuk voted in favour of the recommendation. Balasiuk said he feared the decision could set a precedent and harm

the Queen-Picton heritage district, where the buildings are located.

“These are heritage homes we’re looking at demolishing,” he said. “Don’t make this commonplace.”

Michael McClelland, senior architect with ERA Architects, presented the Shaw’s application on behalf of the town. He acknowledged the demolition’s potential impact.

“This is a difficult decision,” he said. “We want to mitigate the loss of two buildings.”

Kasper Koblauch, an urban planner with ERA, said that despite the risk to the district’s heritage character, there was a “viable path to continue.”

Jennings echoed that to The Lake Report, saying demolition was a “reasonable choice” given the scope of the project.

The buildings are considered to have “contextual” heritage value, meaning they reflect the area’s character but are not designated

heritage structures themselves.

Burroughs supported the recommendation but raised concerns about delays in new construction.

“When an application is made, when will a new structure go up?” he asked, adding he didn’t want to see an empty lot for two-and-a-half years.

Jennings said construction will begin immediately after demolition, so the space should not sit vacant for long. He previously said the new theatre is expected to be completed by summer 2028.

“It’s up there with hospitals in terms of complexity,” he said.

Other concerns included landscaping along Victoria Street. Committee member John Morley criticized the proposed tree size, calling the planned 45-millimetre caliper “laughable” and suggesting trees should be at least 120 millimetres in diameter.

The committee also

discussed fencing during demolition and the design of open windows on the proposed ghost façade—a feature allowing people to see into some rooms from the street.

Committee member David Snelgrove criticized the lower-level windows, calling them an “attractive nuisance” that could pose a safety risk to children.

“I feel very strongly that these openings should not be openings,” he said. “They should be glazed.”

In response, Jennings told The Lake Report, “there’s a lot more conversation that has to get realized” before commenting further on that design detail.

The Shaw Festival has been working to redevelop the Royal George Theatre throughout the summer. The building, which has been owned and operated by the Shaw since 1980, is being replaced due to issues including flooding and foundational instability.

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‘Penners’ marks 75 years of customer service

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

It’s been 75 years since the doors of a Niagara-on-the-Lake institution first opened.

Penner Home Hardware, or “Penners” as most locals know it, celebrated its 75th anniversary on Friday with a community barbecue for customers, staff and family. Under a white canopy, employees served hot dogs, hamburgers and vanilla cake to guests.

Marcia Penner, who runs the business with her husband Kevin, said being in the same town and the same location for three-quarters of a century makes the milestone especially meaningful.

“We love our community,” she said.

The store began in 1950 as an independent hardware business founded by Peter Penner. It joined the Home Hardware chain in 1964 — a move Kevin and Marcia call a “great partnership.”

Peter’s son Harry took over the business in 1982 at age 40, and Kevin was



Kevin and Marcia Penner are recognized by Ken Cressman, right, Home Hardware’s territory manager in Hamilton and Niagara, for 75 years in business. DANIEL SMEENK

handed the reigns in 2008. Peter died when Kevin was “very young,” he said, but both Harry and Kevin were on hand for Friday’s celebration.

Now 83, Harry has worked at the store his entire adult life. He started full time at age 16, deciding school wasn’t for him — and, after that, he barely missed a day of work.

He said the family has run the business “pretty much the same way” through the generations.

Harry enjoys the business side, especially negotiating with suppliers, but said success ultimately comes down to treating people fairly.

“When you’re buying, don’t nickel and dime the people that you’re buying from,” he said.

He’s passed those values on to Kevin.

“He knows he’s got to negotiate, he knows he’s got to watch prices,” Harry said.

Harry also emphasized the importance of having goals.

“I wanted to have the biggest lumber yard in the Niagara Peninsula,” he said. “That’s what I’ve worked towards. Whether I’ve got that, I don’t really know. But I think that became a drive to keep going.”

Kevin and Marcia said the store’s longevity also comes down to company culture, with customer service and community involvement at its core.

“Customer service is number one,” Marcia said.

That philosophy extends to the staff as well. Store manager Lawrence McLean, who has been with Penner Home Hardware for four years, helped cook and serve cake during the event.

“It’s a non-corporate vibe,” he said. “But we do things very well. The customer service is incredible here and the staff are amazing.”

“(Marcia and Kevin) treat people the way people should be treated.”

Marcia said their children Kelsey and Kyle are next in line to take the business over, marking four generations of local family ownership.

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SORE rezoning bid for Rand Estate deemed incomplete, heads to tribunal

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Save Our Rand Estate has filed its own rezoning application for the historic Rand Estate at 144–176 John St. East — but the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake doesn’t want to handle it.

Town staff ruled the application incomplete because it lacked the signature of the property owner: Solmar 2 Niagara Inc. and Two Sisters Resorts, companies controlled by developer Benny Marotta.

SORE plans to bring the motion forward to the Ontario Land Tribunal instead, which will hear the case on Sept. 26.

If SORE manages to rezone the property, it could mean down-zoning or restricting what Marotta’s companies could do with it. **SORE filed the application to fix a bylaw error**

Lyle Hall, chair of the Niagara Foundation and a SORE member, said the purpose of the rezoning is to correct what the group views as a “clear error” in the previously approved Romance Inn proposal for the site in 2011.

He said council’s intent then was to cap the hotel

at three storeys, but the bylaw allows up to 57 feet — roughly five storeys. A later application from Marotta sought to increase that height further, to the equivalent of seven storeys.

“All SORE is seeking is to rectify the bylaw so it conforms with Council’s intent in 2011,” said Hall in an email, adding the group sees it as doing the town’s “work” at no cost to it.

“Our fight is with Benny Marotta, not the town,” he added. “The town does not need to participate or spend any money. SORE is happy to take on the burden of having this bylaw corrected.”

Hall also pushed back on online commentary that SORE is “appealing” the town’s decision at the tribunal.

“SORE has not appealed anything to the OLT yet, contrary to what’s being suggested on social media,” he said.

“SORE can file a ZBA, anybody can. This may be a surprise to some but it’s the law. We all live here. It’s our community. We’re trying to help an overwhelmed town. We’re hopeful that the town’s solicitor will clear this up for council so that we can move forward on

this without imposing any financial or other burden on the town.”

Staff, not council, makes the call

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said the choice to deem the application incomplete was a staff matter — one he fully backed.

“That decision rests with staff,” he said. “I was very comfortable with it and I appreciated the advice that we received.”

Coun. Maria Mavridis agreed with Zalepa: “Only complete applications come before council,” she said.

Applicants must tick a set of required boxes when filing an application, she said — one of them being the property owner’s signature.

“There was no signature, so it wasn’t a complete application,” she said. “I’ve got to support staff.”

“They’re the professionals. They’re the ones that know the provincial policies,” she said, adding that no SORE application is publicly accessible because it wasn’t deemed complete.

Mavridis said most developers go through a pre-consultation before filing an application, meeting with staff and councillors to review studies and costs — something she said could

have changed how things went, “had they come and spoken to us.”

Zalepa said the fact that a rezoning application was submitted is disappointing, but clarified it will not affect council’s other dealings with Solmar — those are a separate matter, he said.

The town sought advice internally from its legal counsel — who seeks outside advice on flash matters — before staff deemed the application incomplete, he added.

“Unusual” move by SORE leaves town baffled

Both Zalepa and Mavridis said they were caught off-guard that SORE attempted to file a rezoning without the owner’s authorization.

“I’ve never seen it, ever before,” said Zalepa.

“I just find it strange. If you owned a property, would you be happy that somebody is filing an application to rezone your property?” he said. “It’s unusual.”

Mavridis echoed that view: “I was surprised,” she said.

“Anybody can apply to rezone anybody’s property?”

She said she didn’t know such a move was even permitted and had never heard



The Rand Estate on John Street. FILE/PAIGE SEBURN

of it happening “ever in the history of Niagara on the Lake.”

“Everyone has the right to put in an application,” she said, while also pointing out “there’s been a lot of staff time and council time” used during this process.

Zalepa questioned SORE’s standing.

“I don’t know who SORE is as an entity — I don’t have their corporate documents. I don’t know who their directors are,” he said. “Before I do business with anybody, I want to know who they are.”

Town sounds alarm on taxpayers toll

Repeated development-related cases can take a toll on a municipality, Zalepa said. “There’ll be some greater costs that we’ll have to bear.”

“Anytime there’s a matter for the Ontario Land Tribunal, there’s an additional cost to the community and the taxpayer,” he added.

Mavridis said the town has already spent around \$6 million on legal fees “fighting developments” since

2018 — about \$3 million of it tied to Rand Estate disputes.

“At some point the bleeding has to stop,” she said.

Zalepa says town will defend itself Sept. 26, “as it should”

At the hearing later this month, SORE will argue the town was wrong to dismiss its application as incomplete, while Zalepa expects NOTL to stand firm.

“The town will defend its decision, as it should,” he said.

Mavridis said SORE going to the tribunal “came all of a sudden.”

“We’re learning a lot as we go,” she said. “I don’t think that SORE would take it to the (tribunal) if they didn’t have reason to.”

Solmar, Solmar’s lawyers Sara J. Premi and Mark Flowers, SORE’s lawyer Sonia Patel, and the town’s communications co-ordinator — asked for more concrete details about the application — did not respond to The Lake Report’s questions by press time.

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The Lake Report

Winery group partners with museum to celebrate NOTL history

Staff
The Lake Report

A new partnership between the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum will blend the region's wine culture with its rich history while raising funds to support both heritage and community initiatives.

Through a newly signed memorandum of understanding, a portion of proceeds from the Wineries' popular Winemakers' Tasting Pass will be donated to the museum. Passholders will also receive free admission to the museum starting immediately.

Each year, the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake donate half of all Winemakers' Tasting Pass proceeds to local organizations. Beginning this year, 25 per cent will go to the museum and 25 per cent to the Farmworkers Hub, which supports seasonal agricultural workers in Niagara.

"As wineries, we are deeply rooted in this community, and our story is inseparable from the history of Niagara-on-the-Lake itself," said Alison Zalepa, board chair for Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake. "Partnering with the museum allows us to celebrate that shared legacy while ensuring future generations can experience both our wines and our heritage."

Sarah Kaufman, the museum's CEO and curator, said the partnership provides vital support while creating new opportunities for visitors.

"We are grateful for the support of the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake and thrilled to welcome Winemakers' Tasting Pass holders into the museum," she said. "This partnership helps us preserve and share Niagara-on-the-Lake's unique history, while also connecting visitors to the vibrant wine culture that is such a vital part of our community today."

The Winemakers' Tasting Pass offers guests a glass of wine at 23 participating wineries, each showcasing premium Niagara vintages. With the added museum access, visitors can also explore local history through exhibits and artifacts that highlight the town's heritage.

Passes are available through the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake website.



A portion of proceeds from the Winemakers' Tasting Pass will support the NOTL Museum and the Farmworker's Hub.

Queenston Heritage Day returns with family-friendly activities

Staff
The Lake Report

Queenston Heritage Day returns Saturday, Sept. 13, with a full day of free, family-friendly events celebrating the village's history and community spirit.

Hosted by the Queenston Residents' Association and the Queenston Volunteer Firefighters' Association, the festival runs from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Queenston Firehall, 5 Dumfries St., and throughout the village.

The day kicks off with a pancake breakfast at the firehall from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., followed by a heritage passport activity and guided walking tours from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Visitors can explore local history through interactive experiences at the MacKenzie Printery, cultural performances at the firehall and craft activities presented by the RiverBrink Art Museum.



Willowbank is one of the places that will be open to explore during Heritage Day in Queenston. FILE

Live music by "Old School Rewind" will run from 1 to 3 p.m., alongside carnival games, a photo booth and a raffle to raise funds for upgrades to the village park playground. Lunch from the barbecue will be available at the firehall starting at noon, and snacks and sweets will be served in the afternoon.

Organizers encourage visitors to bring lawn chairs, comfortable shoes and a sense of community spirit. Most activities will be outdoors on level ground, and accessibility accommodations can be arranged in advance.

Admission is free, but tickets are recommended and can be reserved online through the Queenston Residents' Association.

Laura Secord's 250th birthday to be celebrated with cake

Staff
The Lake Report

Residents and visitors will gather in Queenston this weekend to mark the 250th birthday of Canadian heroine Laura Secord, whose famous trek during the War of 1812 helped change the course of the country's history.

The celebration takes place Saturday, Sept. 13, at the Laura Secord Homestead, where events will run as part of "Queenston Heritage Day" from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission to the historic site will be free.

Secord is remembered for her extraordinary 30-kilometre walk through enemy lines in June 1813, when she overheard American officers planning a surprise attack. She warned British forces of the impending assault, and, with the help of Indigenous allies, they defeated the Americans at the Battle of Beaver Dams.



Niagara College's School of Culinary Arts will provide the birthday cake for Laura Secord on Saturday. SOURCED

"Laura Secord's story is not just a tale from the past," said organizers from the Friends of Laura Secord. "It reminds us of the strength, resilience and determination of ordinary Canadians in extraordinary times."

The festivities will include a birthday cake prepared by chefs from the Niagara College School of Culinary Arts, to be served at 1:30 p.m. at the homestead, located at 29 Queenston St.

Throughout the day, visitors can explore the homestead, take part in interactive activities and enjoy heritage-themed programming across the village.

Town seeks resident input on asset management

Staff
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is asking residents to help shape priorities for its Asset Management Plan, which will guide decisions on maintaining and investing in critical infrastructure

such as roads, water systems, parks and recreation facilities.

The plan, prepared with consultant PSD Citywide Inc., will guide decisions on maintaining and investing in municipal assets, including roads, water and wastewater systems, parks and recreation facilities.

It aims to balance costs, service levels and long-term needs.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said feedback will help council make more informed decisions about where to invest. Chief administrative officer Nick

Ruller added that input from residents will help identify which services are most valued and where funding should be focused.

The survey is open until Sept. 26 and can be completed at jointheconversationnotl.org/asset-management-plan.



Have your say on town assets until Sept. 26.



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NOTL's population rise key factor in parks and rec plan

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Book clubs, community gardening and letter writing are just some of the activities Niagara-on-the-Lake's parks and recreation department is thinking of adding to its itinerary over the next 10 years — and it wants these activities to attract NOTLers ages eight to 80.

The town's first-ever parks and recreation master plan is looking at how to create and build services that'll meet the wants and needs of the town's growing population, including activities that both young people and seniors can enjoy together.

Town staff is hosting the second round of public engagement for its master plan, with a draft version of the plan now available online for anyone to view.

The draft has updates to policies that guide the town's parks and recreational facilities, and a plan for those parks and facilities for the next decade.

The process of creating this plan started in 2018, said parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte. Last July, the town held its first round of public engagement.

The current draft plan, 185 pages, covers accessibility, comfort, maintenance, equipment replacement, health and safety and implementation strategies with



George Schachtschneider loves to play tennis at Veterans Memorial Park. He even comes on rainy days to help maintain the court. The town's parks and recreation master plan draft came out on Wednesday. DAN SMEENK

more than 100 recommendations, Turcotte said.

This latest plan includes specific goals for improving and maintaining the parks and recreation facilities and ideas for new programs.

Danielle Lenarcic Biss is an associate and planner from Thinc Design, a landscape architecture, planning and urban design firm, which led the development of the draft.

Biss said one priority in the plan is something called "intergenerational programming": activities that bring people from different age groups together to take part in one thing.

She said this focus was shaped by NOTL's aging

demographic and projections for the town's population change — by 2038, Niagara-on-the-Lake is expected to be home to around 25,670 people.

"This brings a lot more families," she said. "In some cases, it's changes and in some cases, it's anticipating and looking ahead to what's needed."

The plan mentions that St. Davids and Glendale residents stressed the need for better recreational infrastructure "to keep pace with rapid population growth," including basketball courts, soccer fields, year-round indoor space and more shade structures and larger trees outdoors.

As for the intergenerational programs, the plan mentions research that indicates young people gain more self-esteem, do better in school and gain social skills from participating in these programs, while seniors see better health and self-esteem, less social isolation and greater satisfaction with life.

Some of the potential activities in the draft include community gardening, nature walks, book clubs, trivia and Bingo events, pen pal and letter-writing programs, and more.

Biss said the plan also looks at combining parks and recreation with economic development and

having more local public art displays.

A public meeting was held last Tuesday at the Meridian Credit Union Arena, where residents could view a physical copy of the draft.

Marah Minor, communications co-ordinator for the town, said the town's top priority with this plan is "listening to the community to understand its needs and then making informed decisions on how to allocate resources and implement them effectively."

The Lake Report spoke with residents near Veterans Memorial Park, which features soccer fields, a swimming pool, and the home of the NOTL Tennis Club.

Most residents shared positive feedback about the work done by the parks and recreation department.

"I think they do a good job," said Les McFarlane.

Others offered suggestions for improvement.

"Just make it more open for people to be able to come out," said Julie Corrick.

"Especially for elderly people because they're not fit enough, or not in the best enough shape for people to do sports."

Corrick also suggested extending the bus service for seniors to improve park access, including offering free transit for older residents.

Biss said community interest in outdoor amenities has grown since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the municipalities she has worked with, she said NOTL stands out for the level of engagement.

"Town staff have been extremely engaged, residents have been so passionate," she said. "This is a community that clearly cares deeply."

Residents can view the draft plan online at jointheconversationnotl.org/parks-and-recreation-master-plan until Sept. 15. Feedback will be accepted through the site until that date.

A revised draft is expected to go to council this fall.

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Konzelmann Estate Winery faces public backlash over wedding proposal

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Konzelmann Estate Winery faced further criticism from residents on Tuesday as its proposal to create a wedding ceremony space went before council. Concerns were raised about noise, traffic and pesticide exposure.

The winery, located at 1096 Lakeshore Rd., is seeking to rezone a portion of its northeast property to allow quiet wedding ceremonies for between 50 and 200 guests.

John Federici, a town planner who presented the application, said the rezoning would not involve any new construction.

"The applicant is not proposing to construct any permanent structures," he said.

Zamima Khan, a planner at Quartek representing the

winery, said Konzelmann plans to host 25 to 30 events each summer in the rezoned area.

Council received the information but did not vote on the proposal.

Neighbour Ed Werner, who sued the winery and the town last year over alleged bylaw violations, spoke against the plan. He said he has been dealing with issues involving the winery since the 1980s and claimed it has a history of disregarding rules.

"This move would legalize their illegal activities," Werner said, warning it would create "endless conflict" with neighbours and set a troubling precedent.

"Everyone will want 30 events," he said, noting that similar issues are emerging in agricultural neighbourhoods across the area.

Werner's lawyer, Tom Richardson, also addressed council, alleging the prop-



Ed Werner, a neighbour of Konzelmann Estate Winery who sued the town and the winery last year, voices his opposition to their proposal for a wedding ceremony area during a council meeting on Tuesday. DANIEL SMEENK

erty has "been used illegally since 1992."

Donald Cole, a doctor and emeritus professor at the University of Toronto, raised concerns about po-

tential health risks from pesticides in the surrounding vineyards. He warned of pesticide drift that could affect guests attending events.

"There's multiple considerations regarding potential guest exposure," said Cole.

Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens pushed back on that concern.

"Is there any evidence they (farmers) are not following the rules?" he asked. "This is hypothetical."

Neighbour Daniel Curry said it was "premature" to consider a zoning change.

In an email to The Lake Report, Claudia Konzelmann, vice-president of Konzelmann Estate Winery, responded to concerns about crowd size, stating the 200-person figure would only apply if people were "right beside each other."

"Our plan has always been to comfortably fit guests in the space," she said. "Ensuring room to move freely and maintain a welcoming environment."

She also criticized the use of photos during the presentation.

"Many, if not all, of the photos shown to illustrate crowd capacity were outdated, some dating back 10 to 15 years. In fact, one clearly displayed signage from 2015," she wrote. "These images do not represent our current or proposed operations."

Konzelmann addressed noise concerns as well, describing planned music as "light instrumental background music" and comparing the sound level to "that of a household air conditioner."

Federici noted the nearest residential home is 180 metres from the proposed event area, with another dwelling 70 metres away.

Coun. Andrew Niven declared a conflict of interest at the start of the meeting, noting he is the director of marketing and hospitality at Konzelmann Estate Winery.

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Moonlight Picnic rocks Pumphouse

Guests at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre's Moonlight Picnic on Sept. 5 enjoyed a Gatsby-themed evening along the Niagara River, featuring live music by the Niagara Rhythm Section, a silent auction and pre-purchased wine, beer and cider. The fundraiser ran from 6 to 10 p.m. and invited groups of up to six to bring their own picnics and table décor, with prizes for the most creative displays. Tickets were \$210 per table or \$40 for individual mixed seating, with proceeds supporting programs that make art accessible to the community. MEGAN VANDERLEE PHOTOS

NASA to NOTL: Scientist leaves U.S. amid Trump politics

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

After more than seven years searching for life beyond Earth at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md., Danielle Simkus has returned to Niagara-on-the-Lake — a move she says was driven by politics, deep funding cuts and growing uncertainty under Donald Trump's presidency.

Simkus, 36, left NASA on July 15 after what she calls a "grim" shift under Trump's administration, which saw diversity programs dismantled, budgets slashed and researchers fearing for their future.

"Leaving NASA in July was such a huge relief, but it was really sad," she said in an interview with The Lake Report. "I never really pictured leaving NASA."

A Canadian citizen, Simkus moved to Washington, D.C., in 2018 on a green card and spent seven and a half years at NASA, first as a postdoctoral researcher and later as a research scientist in the Astrobiology Analytical Lab. As a Cana-



Danielle Simkus with her husband, Noah Hahn, and daughter, Phoebe, along the Niagara River in Niagara-on-the-Lake. After more than seven years at NASA, Simkus returned home with her family, saying U.S. politics under Donald Trump cut her career short. PAIGE SEBURN

dian, she was a contractor working at NASA rather than directly for the agency.

"It was early in my schooling that I decided that I really wanted to work at NASA and specifically in this lab," she said. "Working at NASA was my dream job."

But she said things began to unravel after Trump's re-election in the fall of 2024.

"Things really started to go south," she said. "In January, I was just like, 'I'm only going to look for this type of role in Canada.' My husband and I just decided we didn't want to be down there anymore."

The first shock came on inauguration day, when Simkus said diversity, equity and inclusion programs were "torn down."

"Any kind of mention of DEI — diversity, equity and inclusion — had to be removed," she said.

Weeks later, talk of 50 per cent funding cuts at Goddard further crushed morale.

"Everyone's either leaving or just completely unsure about whether they will have a job going forward," she said.

For Simkus, the combination of looming cuts and the erosion of diversity programs made one thing clear: the NASA she had dreamed of working for was changing — fast.

"It affects the way that people see NASA and it affects so many things in the way that research is conducted and how researchers are supported," she said.

Simkus said her own job wasn't immediately at risk but her lab group of 12 knew there would not be enough money to keep everyone employed.

"I don't think my job would have been guaranteed beyond maybe a few more months," she said. "Some of the senior people in my lab group stepped down — and that was a huge loss."

"All the early career people are just feeling very worried for their futures," she added.

She described an atmosphere of fear where researchers began removing diversity and inclusion language from their work pre-emptively, worried about potential consequences.

By February, the Trump administration's escalating tariff policies added tension. With steep levies imposed on Canadian imports, U.S. colleagues sometimes joked about Canada as "the 51st state."

"Month after month, it just became more and more clear that we needed to leave," Simkus said. "We just need to go back to Canada."

She and her husband also began thinking about their daughter's future.

"At that time, our daughter wasn't even a year old yet, but just thinking about her future — we were like, 'We really need to get her to Canada.'"

Despite the political climate, she said she loved her NASA colleagues and described the community

as "amazing," even if it was being tested.

"I would say it's always been a really inclusive environment," she said. "This is happening at such a high level."

Simkus also began questioning her own path, deciding she no longer wanted to work solely as a lab scientist.

"I was realizing that maybe I didn't want to be a lab scientist," she said. "I actually wanted to find a research support role."

Returning to Niagara-on-the-Lake was made easier by family ties. Her parents, Ron and Irene Simkus, have owned the family home for 15 years, which she calls her "home away from home."

"Having family here has made it very easy," she said. "It just feels a lot better being here."

Within weeks of moving, Simkus secured a job at Queen's University as a research projects advisor, helping faculty develop research proposals and secure funding.

"We'll be moving there in the next few weeks," she said. "Canada is the focus."

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NOTL Museum to explore the 'good, bad and ugly' of collecting

Staff
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum will take a critical look at the history of museum collecting practices during its upcoming lecture, "Museums: The Eras Tour," on Sept. 18 at 7:30 p.m.

The presentation, led by curatorial assistant Shawna Jarman, will examine how museums around the world built their collections over

the past century — and the ethical dilemmas many now face as a result.

"The acquisition of many of those artifacts came through colonial exploitation, theft, unethical trade and imperial ventures," Jarman said. "And while the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum's collection is not perfect, today, community museums like ours recognize that we are stewards of our collections. We still want to inspire wonder and

curiosity, but through the lens of respect and collaboration with the source communities we represent."

The lecture will trace the evolution of collecting, from the early "Cabinets of Curiosities" of the Renaissance — which mixed natural specimens, human-made artifacts and exotic items for the entertainment of elite audiences — to modern approaches that focus on reconciliation and

responsible stewardship.

Jarman hinted that a "somewhat controversial" artifact from the museum's own collection will be revealed during the talk, but offered no details, leaving history buffs to speculate.

Registration is required as space is limited. Admission is free for museum members and \$15 for non-members. More information and registration details are available at notlmuseum.ca/whats-on.



The NOTL Museum's assistant curator Shawna Butts in the vault of items — some which were obtained in more ethical ways than others through the years. SUPPLIED

NOTL author tells untold story of wine pioneer in new book

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

When Lake Report journalist Jill Troyer sat down with Paul-Andre Bosc in 2022 to learn more about Château des Charmes, then still a family-run winery, she quickly realized the story of his father, Paul Bosc Sr., was far too big for a newspaper article.

“There’s too much there,” she thought.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake writer has turned that into her first book, “The Winemaker’s Gamble,” launching Sept. 26 at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum as part of Ontario Culture Days.

“I literally think my jaw dropped,” Troyer said. “You can’t make this up. It’s such an amazing story.”

Published by Mosaic Press, the book tells the life of Bosc Sr., a fifth-generation French-Algerian wine-grower, who left Algeria during the war in 1962 and later carried out Ontario’s first commercial planting of vinifera grapes.

After arriving in Montreal with zero English, Bosc Sr. worked at the Société des



Author Jill Troyer works at her home desk in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where she wrote much of her debut book, “The Winemaker’s Gamble.” She said the view of the town’s streets outside her window set the perfect atmosphere. On her screen are details of her upcoming Sept. 26 launch event at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum. PAIGE SEBURN

alcools du Québec — the provincial liquor board, similar to the LCBO — before phoning Chateau-Gai in Niagara Falls to point out faults he had noticed in its wines.

The call led to a job offer. “There were a few steps along the way,” said Troyer, including time in Toronto to learn English before starting work at the plant in Niagara.

In 1978, he founded Château des Charmes and, around that time, planted vinifera grapes.

“Ontario wine had a terrible (wine) reputation,” she said, explaining that growers relied on Labrusca grapes, which survived the winters but produced poorer-quality wine compared to vinifera.

European varieties, such as Merlot, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc, were thought unlikely to survive the climate — but Bosc, trained in both viticulture and oenology, was convinced otherwise and planted 50 acres.

Many in the industry dismissed the move as unrealistic.

Yet, within roughly a decade, his vineyards were thriving — the wine industry had begun shifting toward vinifera.

Troyer is an award-winning journalist and carries more than 50 honours in broadcast and print.

She holds an advanced Wine and Spirit Education Trust Level 3 certification and writes regularly about Niagara’s wine industry for The Lake Report — where she encountered the story.

It was during that work that a conversation with Bosc Jr. led to months of interviews with him and his father, who died in December 2023 at age 88.

Troyer is grateful to have shown Bosc Sr. early chapters before he died.

“Because I really wanted it to be true to his voice and his spirit,” she said.

“I think his story was untold because he was not a boastful man, he was very quiet,” she added.

“He just went about his business.”

His wife, known as Madame, “was quite a

character herself,” Troyer said, known around town for teaching French in schools for decades.

“I think she taught everybody in the area,” she said.

She finished writing in 2024 and, after signing with a publisher that fall, spent the months leading up to March adding context and research before the book was complete.

It all came together during a difficult period for Troyer, who was diagnosed with cancer that same month while preparing the book for publication.

She underwent surgery in April and radiation treatment in August. “It’s been a lot,” said Troyer.

But the project also brought light back into a hard time.

“It definitely brought something positive and a focus that I had to get up and do in the morning,” she said.

She even remembers sending her publisher a manuscript file just hours after surgery. “It’s such a good story, and it’s also an important story,” Troyer said.

“To me, it’s a privilege to

be able to write it.” Troyer has lived in NOTL for about a decade — she’s proud to share such a locally rooted story with her community, she said.

The sale of the winery last year is just part of its ongoing story, she said — one she wrote about in the book.

Her launch event takes place Sept. 26 at the museum from 3 p.m. until 5, where the book will be available for purchase and signing.

It’s also available now, in a special early release from the publisher.

She is also scheduled to appear at the “Learn & Live” series at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library on Nov. 18 and beginning Nov. 20, readers can purchase copies from Amazon, Indigo and other retailers.

The book has also been recognized within the Canadian publishing industry, included in Quill & Quire’s list of ‘exciting’ fall releases, she said.

For Troyer, sharing Bosc Sr.’s untold story means ensuring NOTL remembers the gamble that built Ontario’s wine industry.

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‘Wait Until Dark’ at Shaw thrills in parts, falters in others

WAIT UNTIL DARK

(out of five)

Festival Theatre, 2 hours, 20 minutes, one intermission, ends Oct. 5. Written by Frederick Knott and adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher. Directed by Sanjay Talwar.

Penny-Lynn Cookson
Special to The Lake Report

This was one of those highly anticipated, “can’t wait to see” productions, guaranteed to put bottoms on seats. Melodramas and mysteries are always a big draw at the Shaw and the extra enticement here is the memory of the 1967 film “Wait Until Dark.” It starred Audrey Hepburn in a role for which she was nominated for an Academy Award. Sochi Fried is no slouch as Susan, the blind young woman having to bravely outfox three con men who believe there is a doll stuffed with heroin hidden somewhere in her Green-

wich Village basement apartment. In this adaptation by Jeffrey Hatcher, the time is changed from Frederick Knott’s play of the 1960s to 1944. The smooth and sympathetic Mike (Kristopher Bowman) arrives and easily convinces Susan that he is a former Marine buddy of her photographer husband, Sam. Sam (JJ Gerber) has been duped twice — once to carry the doll home, then called to a fake photography assignment in New Jersey to get him out of the apartment so it can be searched by the criminals. Mike’s partner, Carlino (Martin Happer), pretends to be a police sergeant, easily accessible due to a rigged telephone line. This is a reminder of Frederick Knott’s earlier, wildly successful Broadway play and subsequent film, “Dial M for Murder,” directed by Alfred Hitchcock. There will be mayhem and blood when the murderous mastermind Roat



Sochi Fried as Susan and Kristopher Bowman as Mike in the Shaw Festival production of “Wait Until Dark,” on until Oct. 5 at the Festival Theatre. PHOTO BY MICHAEL COOPER

(Bruce Horak) appears. Susan is his prey, trapped and having to rely on all her other senses — spatial, tactile, auditory — to survive. Her eyes will be those of

Gloria (Eponine Lee), the young girl upstairs, who can enlighten her by checking to see who is lurking outside as she opens and closes Susan’s window blinds.

There are illogical and implausible plot moments in the play that rankle. Lock the door. Send Gloria to the police station instead of meeting Sam at the bus

station. Don’t even think of lighting a match when gasoline has been doused about. On the plus side, the fight scene is excellent. Sochi Fried is terrific as Susan. Tension builds well and is much enhanced by the original music and sound designed by John Gzowski. On the con side, the lighting design of Louise Guinand can only be effective to a degree, given that we are distant from the stage, in the wide expanse of Festival Theatre. The fear and caged terror experienced by cinema audiences in small, dark movie houses can be achieved by extreme camera angles and closeups. This cannot be replicated in such a large space as the Festival Theatre. The intimacy of the Royal George Theatre would have been a better bet but financially not as winning. Penny-Lynn Cookson is an arts and culture historian, writer and lecturer living in Niagara-on-the-Lake.



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#44: When the fall comes, leaves are a big job. Rake up your neighbour's leaves especially if they are unable or are away.

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



Contributed by Patty Garriock
“A kindness is a fountain of gladness, making everything in its vicinity turn into smiles.”
- Washington Irving

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Stop and smell the gladiolus

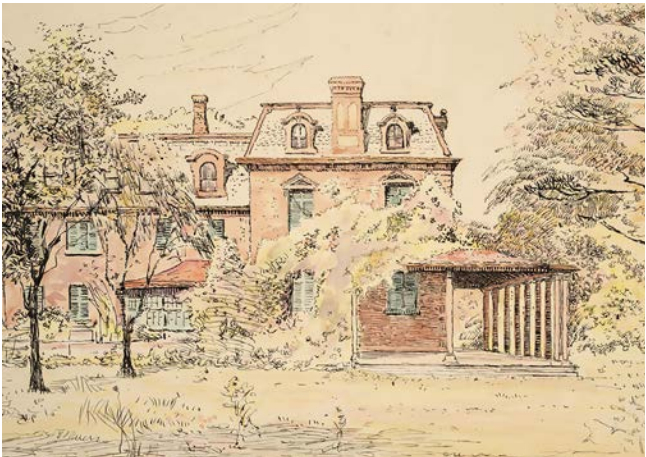
Sana Aldajani of Burlington shows her two-year-old son Talal the vibrant gladiolus blooms at Tasc Flower Farm on Sept. 3.
DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

The boy, the hole and the life below



THE TURNER REPORT
Garth Turner
Columnist



The mansion razed to build Parliament Oak school. Brick-lined tunnels below may still be there, but are destined to be a hotel parking garage. SOURCED

The dirt’s now being slung around in Benny’s big dig. That seven-metre-deep hole soon to open at the Parliament Oak site will eventually house the Porsches, Mercedes and Range Rovers of the tony new hotel’s patrons.

But will they need snorkels to get upstairs? Neighbours say there’s a mess of water down there. Some say a lot more lurks beneath what used to be a school.

Tom McMillan is one of them. He grew up across the street.

“I find it very troubling when I go by there now and see nothing but a field of dirt,” he says. He’s also thinking about what lies 10 feet under that dirt — history. “For sure they’re going to destroy it when they start digging.”

One day 60 years ago a hole opened up in the schoolyard. “It was maybe three foot square and being a kid, I stuck my head down in to see what was there,” he says.

“What I saw was a brick room, maybe 10 or 12-foot square. Then as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I could see two

arched doorways — one heading out towards King Street and the other off towards the school. There was maybe four feet of water filling this room and the two heavy arched wooden doors were off and floating in the water.”

Brick tunnels? Arched doors? Snaking off under the town?

“Shortly after, the hole was filled in and covered over, keeping kids in the schoolyard safe,” says Tom. “But why would there be two brick tunnels leading in different directions, so far underground?”

Who better to ask than Jim Smith, NOTL’s folk historian and author? (He knows everything.)

“What Tom says is true, but there’s more to the story,” Jim tells me.

“The man that filled in the hole was Noel Haines, a very good friend of mine. He told me he went into the hole, which was a brick-lined tunnel which I believe had an arched roof. He walked through the tunnel

from where it caved in, which is about the middle of the property, all the way to the corner of Regent Street and Gate Street and it kept going from there.”

“There used to be a mansion on the property which was taken down to build Parliament Oak School. I always wanted to go over the grounds with divining rods and see just where the tunnel is. I suppose I could find it at the corner of Regent and Gate. Divining rods work for me.”

Well, yes, a mansion there was.

My colleague Brian Marshall has written of the Regency-style home dating to 1846, acquired in 1865 by Josiah Plumb. That former Yankee became a federal MP, senator, then Parliament’s speaker in 1887.

Plumb expanded the mansion, added a third storey, multiple bedrooms, a billiard parlour and ballroom. His guests included Lord Dufferin, the Marquise of Lorne and his wife; the daughter of Queen Victoria;

Princess Louise, the Prince of Wales (King Edward VII) and the Duke of York, who would later take the crown as King George V.

Plumb died in 1888. The mansion changed hands. By the Depression of the 1930s, amid economic ruin, it was lost for unpaid taxes. The town took it. Council voted to gut it. The place sold for land value to the board of education in 1943. Soon the palace was trashed and a school built.

What of Josiah’s secret tunnels? Still there? Can we call in Jim and his rods?

When the idea surfaced for a big, honking hotel on the site, developer Benny Marotta presented council with a heritage impact assessment. It concluded that, nah, there’s nothing of value on that four-acre parcel. The politicians bought it.

“The property does not possess significant contextual value. The 1948 school structure, with its two bas-relief stone panels and modest details, possesses some design value, and the property possesses some historical value overall, however, the property is not considered a significant heritage resource,” it said.

And now, the dump trucks roll. The big dig deepens. Whatever is down there will no longer be.

But there’s one link to history. We’re still electing bozos.

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

garth@garth.ca



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Setting the record straight on planning

Dear editor:
Last week, Allan Bisback suggested in these pages that “virtually every proposal is approved without challenge” (Lack of scrutiny in planning department approvals, Sept. 4). That statement is not accurate and not evidenced.

In defence of many of our councillors and staff, I would like to take this opportunity to explain how the planning process actually works. As Mr. Bisback, a former councillor, will know, every development application begins with a pre-consultation meeting, followed by studies, qualified peer reviews and circulation of the application to multiple agencies for their comments and input. These include, but are not limited to, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Indigenous communities, the Region and the municipal heritage committee.

There is an open house, then a public meeting where residents can provide input — all before council even considers approval. In fact, no significant application is ever approved “as submitted.” Many are withdrawn, delayed or significantly altered along the way. Some applications also



Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens says town planning staff have to work within provincial framework and are doing so responsibly and in the interest of the town. DAN SMEENK

face Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) scrutiny. Under provincial law, council cannot reject an application that conforms to legislation and the town’s official plan without exposing taxpayers to costly and ultimately unsuccessful appeals. Our professional planning staff are legally bound to evaluate applications against the Planning Act, provincial planning statements and growth plans. These are not guidelines — they are enforceable requirements. Ignoring them would be unlawful.

The claim that approvals automatically favour developers also ignores reality. Numerous applications have been modified to protect heritage, reduce building scale or incorporate sustainability measures. These negotiated outcomes are a direct result of rigorous

staff and council review. Several heritage-related projects, for instance, proceeded only with extensive conditions of approval. That is not “rubber-stamping” — that is responsible planning.

Regarding transparency, Mr. Bisback raises the issue now, but where was that transparency when he was budget chair? Between 2018 and 2022, the town went to 11 Ontario Land Tribunal trials and lost them all. Millions of taxpayer dollars were spent, while only a small fraction was budgeted. The balance was quietly pulled from infrastructure — robbing residents of badly needed improvements to roads, sidewalks, culverts and drains. When put to the test at trial, our planning staff have been proven correct 100 per cent of the time.

Furthermore, legal counsel repeatedly warned

council that some cases were unwinnable. In one instance, the town could not find a single planner to support its position, yet Mr. Bisback pushed to continue, wasting money and misleading residents. That financial mismanagement left this council with an infrastructure deficit we are only now beginning to repair.

Some might ask: wasn’t I on that council too? Yes, and I repeatedly opposed those poor, politically motivated decisions. I was outvoted. My opposition is well documented.

It is one thing to call for accountability today. It is another to ignore one’s own record. As the saying goes: beware the naked man offering you his shirt.

Niagara-on-the-Lake residents deserve the truth. The most effective way to protect our community’s interests is exactly what is happening now: completing the official plan so that it conforms with necessary legislation, expanding the heritage district, applying the law consistently, requiring modifications where necessary and making decisions that can withstand external scrutiny. That is fair, transparent and lawful planning.

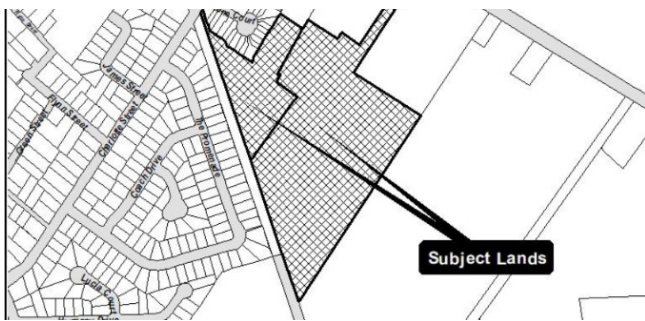
Erwin Wiens
Deputy lord mayor

Develop? Sure. But don’t impose on neighbours

The following letter was sent to the head of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake’s planning department, Aimee Alderman, ahead of the Sept. 2 open house on the official plan amendment for lands known as the Rand Estate. A copy was forwarded to The Lake Report for publication.

I do not wish to speak at the upcoming open house for the above-mentioned application, but I do wish to register my extreme annoyance at being forced to participate in another development application by Mr. Marotta that has been extensively and expensively reviewed by the Ontario Land Tribunal and found, by them, to be significantly problematic.

What particularly annoys me is the statement in



Letter writer John McCallum says developers should be able to build on their properties, but have no right to impose negative consequences on their neighbours.

the application that says, “Existing mature vegetation as well as heritage features designated under Part IV or Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act will need to be considered in the design and construction of both the primary access at 200 John St. E & emergency access 588 Charlotte St. at the time of a future zoning by-law amendment and heritage

permit.”

This is a patently ridiculous statement because everyone knows that if this application is approved road development will commence forthwith and matters such as vegetation (read, trees) and heritage features (read, wall and gates) will be dealt with as required (read, removed).

What is almost as an-

noying as the application itself is the fact that staff and council have even allowed this application to be registered at all. This application is absolutely identical regarding access as was rejected by the Ontario Land Tribunal.

While Mr. Marotta has every right to develop his property, what he does not have is the right to force the negative consequences of his development onto neighbouring properties and the town’s heritage trail.

If Mr. Marotta wants access to the subject lands, he can get it via his vinelands on East-West or via his vinelands on John Street. It is up to council and staff to communicate this fact to him in no uncertain terms.

John McCallum
NOTL

We welcome your letters

The Lake Report welcomes your letters to the editor. Please, write early and often. Letters ideally should be under 400 words long. Occasionally, longer letters may be published. All letters may be edited for conciseness, accuracy, libel and defamation. Please include your full name, street address and a daytime telephone number so that authorship can be authenticated. Only names and general addresses (eg. Virgil, St. Davids, NOTL) will be published. Send your letters to editor@niagaranow.com or drop them by our office at 496 Mississauga St., NOTL.

RIDDLE ME THIS

This week’s riddle is “Jeopardy!” style.
Category: BOOKS FOR KIDS

In a classic by Natalie Babbitt, this title family is “Everlasting.”

Last issue category: LET’S BOOZE IT UP
Clue: You’ll get a bit “fuzzy” if you have too many of this drink that combines peach schnapps and orange juice.
Answer: What is a fuzzy navel?
Answered first by: Terry Nord
Also answered correctly (in order) by: Sue Rautenberg, Gary Davis, Bob Wheatley, Stefanie Buikema, Jane Morris, Katie Reimer, Ardeth Staz, Jeff Lake, Edna Groff, David Spencer, Margaret Garaughty, Howard Jones, Bill VanGorder, Wade Durling, Lynda Collet, Nancy Rocca, Ella Andres, Esther VanGorder, Tuija Johansson, Margie Enns, Claudia Grimwood, Sylvia Wiens, Marla Percy, KC King
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The Shaw's Royal George 2.0 misses the mark



Brian Marshall
Columnist

On the evening of Sept. 3, I sat in the audience and observed the presentation made to the municipal heritage committee, which recommended voting in favour of advising council to move forward on the issuance of demolition permits allowing the Shaw to destroy two historic buildings in the Queen-Picton Heritage District.

Although this decision would, as the town's consultant from ERA Architects clearly pointed out, negatively impact the historic fabric of the district, it could be justified based on the Shaw's contribution to the town's arts and tourism sectors.

Further, it was suggested that consideration should be given to the Shaw's efforts, within its constraints, to ameliorate

the impact of this proposed new behemoth of a building on Niagara-on-the-Lake's gentle historic streetscapes.

But don't worry about that, they continued, because there is an expectation that a commemorative plan — replete with plaques, images and so forth — would be developed to ensure we'd all recall what had been lost and serve as permanent monuments where we can mourn the desecration of our heritage district.

It was at this juncture my mind harkened back to a scene from an old western movie in which a robber baron, gesturing to six men dead on the street, said, "They were in the way of progress, so I had them removed." Whereupon he pulled a handful of coins out of his pocket, dropped them on the ground and concluded, "That should pay for their burial and tombstones."

In a voice laden with irony, the sheriff replied, "It's mighty generous of you to pay for the markers that will remind their widows and children of what they had and what they've lost."

Of course, in our case, the "memorials" around the misplaced, contextually inappropriate proposed leviathan will serve as a



A proposal for the new Royal George Theatre. FILE

poignant advertisement to visitors that the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake neither respects nor protects the history and character embodied in the built heritage of its streetscapes.

And it is that character which fuels the visitor (and resident) experience — something echoed by a recent visitor who was quoted in this newspaper saying, "I just really like the architecture, I think it's a very cohesive look altogether and it's giving a lot of small-town vibes."

Now, while the majority of my professional colleagues feel that the correct approach for the old Royal George would be to preserve it, structurally stabilize the building, then subject the interior to adaptive reuse, perhaps within

an expanded theatre, let's simply consider the proposed redevelopment design as currently presented by the Shaw.

Beginning with the "ghost facade" proposed for Queen Street.

There are many reasons why "ghost facades" have been subject to professional criticism over the recent decades. However, in the context of Royal George, I will just focus on two — these being the lack of authenticity and mediocre to terrible execution.

Speaking to the former, far too often a ghost facade prioritizes a superficial appearance over functional reality — something the authors of the Habitable City website refer to as "lifeless masks" that lack the substance and integrity of a

truly integrated building.

In the Shaw's proposal, this lack of integration and lifelessness is further accentuated by actually creating a physical separation between the "ghost facade" and the building itself, augmented by a disassociation between the architectural styling of the building's actual facade and the "ghost facade," rendering it well and truly a "tombstone."

In terms of execution, it may be beneficial to compare and contrast ERA Architects' work on the ghost facade incorporated in 132 Yonge St. — the historic Elgin Block portion of the Bay Adelaide Centre East Tower in Toronto — with the Shaw's proposed ghost facade.

Aside from the fact ERA's facade actually served the purpose of contributing to an intensification of heritage fabric on the immediate streetscape and was installed as an unbroken continuation of the historic facade, they actually disassembled a portion of the heritage facade into 34 pieces, made silicon moulds of them and subsequently cast accurate reproductions which were, in turn, utilized to create a "ghost" which actually recalled the historic architecture.

In doing so, ERA managed to execute an integrated and aesthetically pleasing ghost facade, as opposed to the stranded, characterless and sad concrete monolith proposed by the Shaw.

As a final note to this week's column, allow me to posit that the openings of a building — that is, the windows and doors — are some of the principal elements in establishing its stylistic character. Not only is the shape, size and treatment of the openings (and any decorative surrounds) key to this character, but they also serve to create a sympathetic relationship with the other buildings that comprise the streetscape.

Not even a passing nod to the streetscape has been made by the Shaw's architects in the choice of blatantly commercial treatments of the openings. In fact, it is almost as though they deliberately decided to divorce the building from its streetscape in order to draw attention to its non-conformity — a "hey, look at me" moment.

And we'll visit Victoria Street next week.

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



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ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

This Ross's Ramblings will be way out of my lane. I almost always try not to get "too deep" and I usually try to steer clear of potentially controversial topics around our town.

There are much wiser local people who are willing to do much more research in their areas of expertise and skilfully articulate their arguments.

But one almost guaranteed result of any big public project is a delayed and then late-finish date. Almost guaranteed.

Currently in Toronto, the long-overdue Eglinton Avenue rapid transit project has become almost cartoonish in its multi-year lateness.

With no finish date imminent, it has become

a joke, and even the head people at Metrolinx ceased blushing several years ago.

This government agency was set up in 2006 to better co-ordinate transportation projects that affect the people of Ontario. What happened, we may ask?

But it's not funny to local business people and residents. Their stores and streets have been closed for several more years than expected, and so many of them have had their lives upended.

Why? Because over the years, we have become conditioned to "grin and bear it" when it comes to scheduling and completing public sector projects.

How did the very large Great Wolf Lodge get planned, built and open so fast? How do the good folks at Disney World in Florida almost always meet their opening date promises? Not a year or a season, but an actual calendar date.

These incredibly successful companies are fair with contractors and builders. They agree to terms of reference and then agree to a reasonable date when they will be able to welcome paying customers.

They essentially say, "You



Ross Robinson says the Royal George builders should commit to being done on time, unlike many construction projects that run well past their deadline. FILE

have done this before, so no surprises, even strikes and extraordinary acts of nature. Plan contingencies, and tell us the date when you can finish the project."

The parties agree to penalty clauses, always punitive and expensive, and then the work begins.

Back about 2006 in Orlando, Universal had a big sign in front of a planned new attraction that read "Opening Spring 2007." Down the road, Disney had an even bigger sign that read "Opening May 17, 2007."

Guess what happened, and who was welcoming smiling and money-spending guests first? It was

almost magical, and it was an unbelievable amount of hard work.

Now let me deftly ramble back to Queen Street in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

I don't pretend to understand the many issues involved with the Royal George Theatre project. Many well-qualified and concerned people are on the case and there have already been many changes in direction and thought. The finish line is far in the distance.

But let me put in my informal two cents' worth.

This ambitious undertaking is brave and necessary. Something must

be done, and in the end, something will be done. During the process, when the time comes to firm up schedules, let us take a lesson from Disney and Jim Pattison, the owner of Great Wolf Lodge.

Agree to the details, work with well-experienced and honest people and get to work. Make the penalties for missing deadlines punitive. And stick to them.

Please don't say 2029 and then take a year or two or three longer. Or even longer. The pain to local businesses and residents will be unbearable. To everyone involved.

What do I know, but if

Disney and Great Wolf Lodge did it, so can we here in NOTL.

Way back in the 1970s, I worked in the food service areas of the Olympic Games in Munich and then four years later at the Montreal Olympic Games.

To say the least, they both had well-publicized opening dates. I watched it happen and was involved at a very low level.

Meeting those deadlines wasn't easy or pretty. Sometimes it got nasty, and many people worked around the clock to bring the projects home.

Big penalty clauses were in play, and the world was watching, waiting for the Games to open.

The pressure was on. During the last days, carpets arrived, paint was painted, and beds were made in the Olympic Villages. Food arrived for more than 50,000 meals each day.

It was amazing, and it is very possible here in NOTL with the Royal George project.

Think private sector and think punitive penalties for lateness.

Let's raise the curtain at the new Royal George Theatre in 2028.



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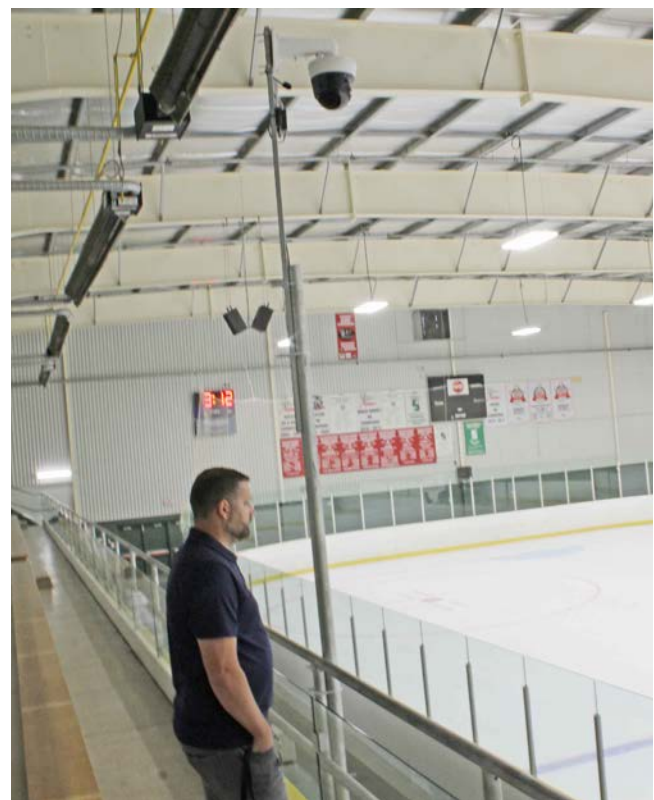
Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Parents who can't make it to the arena can now watch their children's hockey games from home, thanks to a new streaming service available in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

In late August, the town announced it has partnered with LiveBarn to install and operate cameras at Meridian Credit Union Arena and Centennial Arena. The cameras, which overlook the ice rinks, began recording on May 23.

LiveBarn offers a subscription service for \$27.95 per month for a basic package and \$37.95 for a premium package. Subscribers can use the promo code NOTL-LIVE to receive 10 per cent off.

"It's like Netflix," said Kevin Turcotte, the town's manager of parks and recreation. "You can watch your son or daughter play hockey. You can tune into one of our rinks when they're playing at a certain time and you can watch the camera follow the puck — they have puck-following technology."



Kevin Turcotte, here with the LiveBarn camera at the Meridian Credit Union Arena, said he believes LiveBarn will provide a valuable service for the town. DANIEL SMEENK

Turcotte said the service is also a valuable tool for coaches, who can use video footage for training purposes.

Although the system has been active since May, the town chose to announce the partnership at the start of hockey season.

"I think we wanted to have another boost for it," said Turcotte. "Just because we'd make more users than just for lacrosse (in the summer)."

He confirmed there was no cost to the municipality. LiveBarn provided and installed the equipment and

operates it independently, including handling the internet service.

"They only asked that you kind of promote the service within the municipality," Turcotte said. "But it's all LiveBarn's equipment. They do their own internet service."

The town has signed a contract with LiveBarn for four years, said town spokesperson to Marah Minor.

LiveBarn operates in more than 2,000 sports venues across 49 U.S. states and all 10 Canadian provinces. Turcotte said Niagara-on-the-Lake is following the lead of other municipalities in the region.

"The majority of rinks in the Niagara Region use LiveBarn," he said.

Turcotte called the project an exciting opportunity for the town.

"We were excited that there was no financial obligation for the town and [that it] provided an additional service to users on the facility."

You can learn more and subscribe to LiveBarn at livebarn.com

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NOTL boxer **Mckenzie Wright** loses tough bout at world championships

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

After a decisive win in her first bout at the World Boxing Championships in Liverpool, NOTL fighter Mckenzie Wright lost a unanimous decision Tuesday to a boxer from China in the round of 16.

Wright, fighting from the red corner, was behind from the start, losing each round 10-9 on all five judges' cards.

Her second-round opponent in the 51-kilogram class, Xinyu Qi, was relentless and managed to land several key punches in the three-round match.

Wright, 35, is the reigning Canadian champion in her weight class and has been training in hopes of qualifying to represent Canada in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

This was Wright's first time fighting at the world championships, which is just one of the steps along the road toward her Olympic goal.

Last Saturday, Wright made short work of Yara Alamri, of Saudi Arabia, winning a unanimous decision.

Wright has fought for Canada at numerous tournaments over the past three years.

A former kickboxer, the St. Davids resident returned to the ring in 2023 after



NOTL boxer Mckenzie Wright listens to her coaches in between rounds during her fight Tuesday at the world championships in Liverpool. WORLD BOXING PHOTO

a five-year break and has made her mark on the Canadian boxing scene, dominating her weight class.

She narrowly missed qualifying for the 2024 Paris Olympics and feels she has what it takes to represent her country in Los Angeles in 2028.

She won a bronze medal in June at the World Boxing Challenge in the Czech Republic and trains almost daily in her Olympic quest.

"With the way things ended last (Olympics) cycle, with it being that close so many times, I can't leave it like that. I have to right those wrongs," Wright told

The Lake Report prior to the world championships. "I think it would be unfair to myself to leave it like that."

She views her previous attempts to qualify for the Olympics as building years, allowing her to improve, get stronger and mature.

"The way I look at it, too, is OK, I'm older, but that means I have more experience. So, with the five-year break that was five years less damage to my body," Wright said.

"I always say, 'Yeah, I'm 35 but I'm only 30 in boxing years' " thanks to her years away from the sport.

After initially training with coach Jesse Sal-lows of City Boxing Club in Niagara Falls, she is now under the tutelage of Faisal Ahmadi — "Coach Sal" — from Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Wright also travels to Montreal a couple of times each month to train under Canada's national team coaches.

Looking ahead, there's the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Scotland on the horizon and then Olympic qualification starts in 2027 with the Pan American Games in Peru.

kevin@niagaranow.com

Golfers celebrate some **great scores**

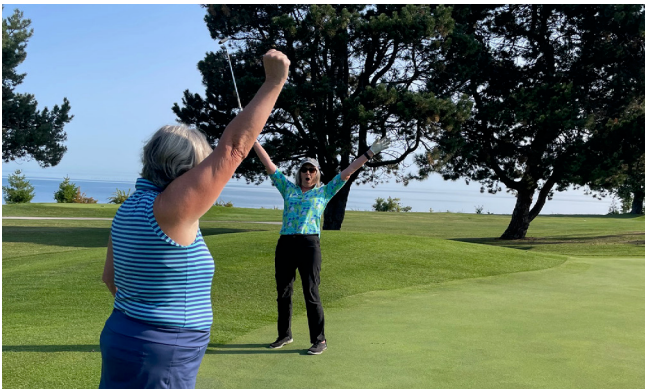
Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

After kicking things off with a cheerful social gathering filled with fresh fruit and sweet treats, members of the Niagara-on-the-Lake nine-hole women's league wrapped up trophy play in style Tuesday — with a lively round of Bingo, Bango, Bongo.

Susan Horne was the top shooter with a total score of 38, followed by Judy Cardiff with 36 and Bonnie Lamourie with 33.

But the big winner was Ellen Smith, who sunk a 20-foot putt for par on #3, en route to carding a 47, her best score ever on the course.

The 18-hole women's league also wrapped up its trophy competition Tuesday and Maria Townley scooped the Hunter Trophy by shooting her best round of the



Sally Miller, left, and Ellen Smith whoop it up after Smith sank a long putt for a par on the third hole Tuesday in the nine-hole women's league at the NOTL Golf Club. Smith had her best round ever at the club. DEBORAH WILLIAMS

season.

Her net score of 65 earned Townley the Hunter Trophy and she also had the best gross score with an 87.

Her round included a chip in for birdie on the tough par-5 fifth hole.

Other top shooters were: Carroll Baker (90), Lisa Allen and Yolanda Henry (91) and Susan Gagne (93).

Other low net scores

were: 69 — Cheryl Yamamoto and Gagne (69), Sharron Marlow (71) and Margot Richardson and May Chang (72).

Carolyn Porter was closest to the pin on #4 and sank her putt for a birdie. Other birdies on the day went to Henry (#5) and Baker (#7).

Next week is the league's the final scramble for points toward the Vera Derbyshire

Trophy, the award for golfer of the year.

Penny Green had the top gross score in the Monday business women's league, with 42.

Other winners: Theresa Dyck (longest drive on #1), Gagne (closest to the 150 on #2), Tonie Mori (closest to the pin on #4), Mary Beccario (for sinking the longest putt on #7) and Baker (closest to the pin in two on #9).

Rain forced cancellation of the Thursday men's league last week for the second week in a row, but the Tuesday Woofs league went off without a hitch.

Al Kavanagh's 1-over 37 was the best gross score while Randy Busbridge was low net winner with 31.

Dan Regan won the hidden hole with a birdie on #8 and Bill Daly was closest to the pin on #4 and finished it off with a birdie.

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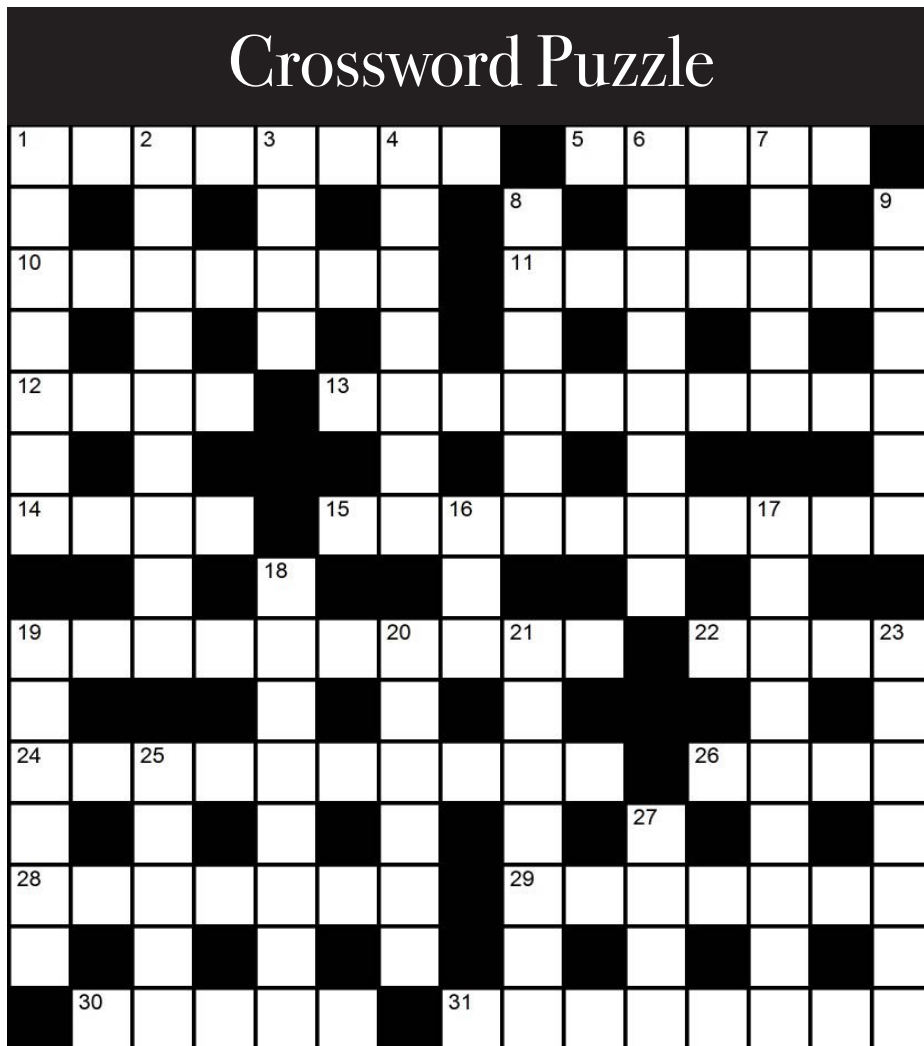


Have some fun

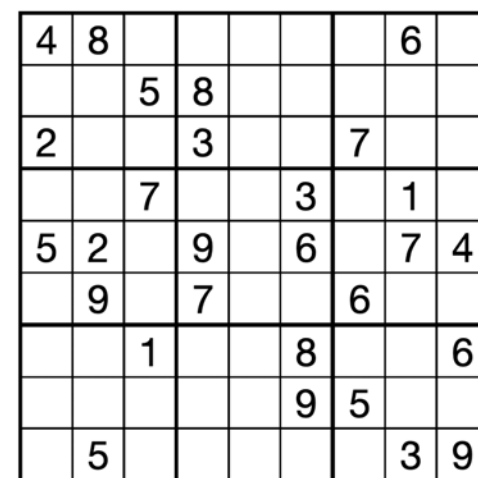
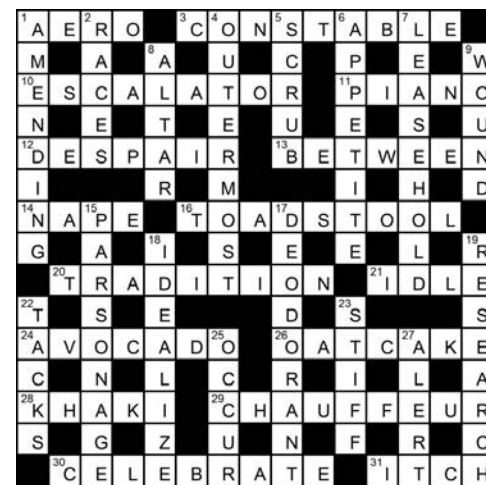
1. No-show (8)
5. Ring fighter (5)
10. Seed providing milk and meat (7)
11. Anthropoid (3-4)
12. Performs (4)
13. Limited (10)
14. Island in central Hawaii (4)
15. Area of South London (10)
19. Senior mail official (10)
22. Passport endorsement (4)
24. Large city (10)
26. Fruit aka the Chinese gooseberry (4)
28. Hearing distance (7)
29. Employ excessively (7)
30. Stench (5)
31. Signal to arise (8)

1. Praise vociferously (7)
2. Pruning shears (9)
3. Not one (4)
4. Radical (7)
6. Biddable (8)
7. Survive (5)
8. Chicken of very small size (6)
9. Lethal (6)
16. Furrow (3)
17. Religious (9)
18. Flatten out (8)
19. Treat with excessive indulgence (6)
20. Grunts (6)
21. Incident (7)
23. City in central Texas (7)
25. Fortune-telling cards (5)
27. Lake or pond (4)

Crossword Puzzle



Last issue's answers



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EXPLORING HISTORY WITH NOTL MUSEUM



Niagara Hospital opens in 1951

There's lots of discussion about the future of the hospital site on Wellington Street. This hospital originally opened on Sunday, May 6, 1951 and was built to replace the Niagara Cottage Hospital on Queen Street. A few reports in the museum's collection provide some interesting insights into the opening of this hospital. The total cost to build the Wellington Street hospital, including new equipment, was \$222,943.82. A majority of the revenue came from community donations, with the town, township, county, provincial and federal governments coming in to support as well. At the time, the annual health statistics included 401 admissions, 77 births, 13 deaths and 72 surgeries. In the first year, both hospitals were supporting the community until all services could be smoothly transitioned over. The first-year operating budget was a whopping \$42,828.77.



FALL GARDENING CLASSES STARTS SOON

Joanne Young - Niagara-on-the-Lake's Garden Coach is offering four classes on fall gardening ideas.

Classes will be held each Saturday morning September 6 to September 27 - 10am to 11:30am Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre, 14 Anderson Lane,

SEPTEMBER 6th - Fall and Winter Plant Show-offs
SEPTEMBER 13th - Starting From the Ground Up
SEPTEMBER 20th - The World of Bulbs
SEPTEMBER 27TH - Putting Your Garden to Bed

Topic and Ticket details are on our website notlhortsociety.com/classes

Advertising inquiries?
Email advertising@niagaranow.com

Theoretical physicists, surprises and **extinctions**



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

For 40-plus years, my career focused on clinical neurology and related aspects of neuroscience, both of which I enjoyed and enjoyed some success.

Then two books caught my attention: one by David Christian in 2011, "Maps of Time," which covered all of history from the Big Bang to the present, and Chris Stringer's 2012 book, "Lone Survivors," which covered the human origins story.

Both books expanded my interests and perspectives and led to several six-week series at the library and later were expanded to cover the annual Nobel Prizes and writing my 2016 book, "Perspectives."

But of all the interests triggered by Christian and Stringer's books and many other related books, as well as primary sources, it was physics which most caught my interest.

Why? Because physics covered everything from

the creation and evolution of the universe writ large, from the Big Bang to the present (and future), and the universe writ tiny, the sub-atomic universe of quantum mechanics.

The story of human evolution is important too because without modern humans, there would be no science and no one to understand what was happening in the universe — the universe would unfold without a witness.

More than any other field in science, physics is split between theoretical physicists and experimental physicists.

This was never more true than in the last century, especially in quantum physics where, except for bashing particles together from the early days of Rutherford to later times doing the same with far more expensive particle shooting galleries such as the massively large Hadron collider in Switzerland, much of the progress in physics came from the artful creation of mathematical models of atoms from the likes of Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrodinger, Born, Dirac, Feynman and Weinberg, to list the major players.

Similarly, modelling the universe coupled with rigorous experimental observations brought enormous



A close-up of the superconducting magnets lining the LHC tunnel, hinting at the sheer engineering power and precision behind particle acceleration — the backbone of modern experimental physics. SOURCED

progress in understanding the origin and evolution of the universe.

But unlike chemistry and biology, theoretical physics fosters plenty of speculation, some so weird that it garners a lot of public attention for as long as the public attends to much in science.

For example, shortly after the Higgs particle was finally proven to exist, some physicists wondered what might happen if the Higgs particle, which is thought to confer mass on other particles, changed its mass and hence the mass of other particles.

They speculated that even though the likelihood of that happening was vanishingly tiny, on the time scale of the universe, it could happen — and if it did, the universe would vanish at light speed beginning where

the change in mass began in the universe.

Doom speculation also centres on matter and antimatter — particles of identical mass but opposite charge.

Both are thought to have been created within the tiniest fraction of the first second in the universe and would annihilate one another, leaving no matter in the universe and no possibility of any stars or life of any kind.

That is, unless matter particles slightly outnumbered antimatter particles, leaving surviving matter sufficient to produce all the matter with which we are aware.

And there is some evidence from collision experiments in which protons are fired at other protons that some antimatter can be produced — let's just hope they

don't create a chain reaction such as the speculative change in the mass of the Higgs particle.

Other speculations aren't so crazy. Again, given the time scale of the solar system and especially the sun and Earth, for sure, there will be future extinctions, even massive ones, which in the past came close to destroying most of life on land and in the seas.

How do we know this? Because massive volcanic eruptions are natural events that have happened several times in the past and on minor scales continue, as we well know, wherever the Earth's plates come together.

Similar reasoning suggests that a collision with a massive asteroid akin to that which struck the east coast of what is now Mexico will happen again — it's simply a matter of time.

And what about extinction of our own species? Extinction is in the cards here too, because every prehuman species has gone extinct before, hence Chris Stringer's 2012 book, "Lone Survivor."

Of course, we don't know precisely why we might go extinct at this time, but climate change would be a good candidate given that we are top predator and already we've done a good job of devastating ecosystems on which we so depend. We are like lemmings blindly running to a precipice few see or are willing to see.

The dilemma for humans is that even though we are highly intelligent as a species — evidence for which surrounds us in the many devices we play with and use — we are also incapable of getting along with one another, even in the short term. Humans are a quarrelsome, selfish, bullying and tribalistic species.

No need to go back to ancient times — look at the history of the 20th century and the first quarter of this century.

Countries spend billions and even trillions on arming themselves to the teeth and some aren't hesitant to use them.

Even if war hasn't broken out in the South China Sea yet or other seemingly quiet-for-the-moment areas of the globe, wars have a way of erupting — witness the simmering conflicts between Thailand and Cambodia these days.

We simply can't get along with one another — that's a fatal flaw for such a clever species.

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.

Add a water feature? **Yes**



Joanne Young
Columnist

Have you ever wondered if adding a water feature to your outdoor living space will increase your enjoyment of your garden?

The simple answer is yes. A water feature can add a lot of value, both aesthetic and functional, to a garden. Here's what it will contribute to your garden experience.

Aesthetic appeal

Every garden, whether front or back, whether big or small, needs to have visual focal points.

Focal points are necessary to draw your attention to a particular area of the garden. It might be a place where your eyes go while you inside doing dishes at a window.

A focal point may be placed close to a sitting area where you can appreciate the details up close. A pond, fountain or stream becomes a centrepiece, drawing the eye and adding interest.

Another aesthetic appeal of a water feature is its sheer natural beauty.

Reflective water surfaces, movement and the way light plays on water all enhance the overall atmosphere. There is always something special about sitting out in the garden in the evening, watching the glittering lights on the surface of the water.

Water features also pair well with surrounding plants, especially moisture-loving varieties like ferns, hostas, or Siberian irises.

Cascading or weeping plants are also great combinations with water features as they mimic the movement of the water.

Plants such as weeping Japanese maple, weeping white pine, weeping blue atlas cedar are all great companions to any water feature.

Sound and atmosphere
Trickling or bubbling water can mask unwanted noise (like traffic) and create a calm, meditative ambiance.



Reflective water surfaces, movement and the way light plays on water all enhance the overall atmosphere of a garden, says gardening expert Joanne Young.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Horticultural Society will host a series of public Saturday morning gardening classes with Young at the NOTL Community Centre from Sept. 6 to 27. All classes start at 10 a.m.
Sept. 13: Starting From the Ground Up
Sept. 20: The World of Bulbs
Sept. 27: Putting Your Garden to Bed
Pre-register at notlHORTSOCIETY.COM/classes.

The sound and sight of water can reduce stress levels and increase feelings of relaxation and well-being. This has become even more important in recent years with the busyness that surround us.

Wildlife attraction

Water features support biodiversity. Birds, frogs, insects, and even small mammals are drawn to water, especially if you use native plants or keep it chemical-free.

Water features are also very important when it comes to attracting pollinators, which has become a focus of gardening.

The presence of water can attract bees and butterflies and small birds if designed with shallow or still water access.

Microclimate and cooling

Moving water can help to regulate temperatures. Water can help cool the immediate area around it, which can be a relief in hot summers.

It will also boost humidity levels, which can benefit plants and people alike in drier climates.

Personal expression

Whether you have a formal fountain, a Zen-inspired pond or a rustic stream, a water feature expresses personal style and taste.

You can customize your water feature by going more modern, natural, minimalist or maximalist. There is always a feature to match any garden theme.

Here are some low-maintenance and eco-friendly water feature ideas for your garden, depending on the size, budget and style you're aiming for:

1. Mini solar fountain bowl (tabletop or ground-level)
Low-maintenance: just

keep it filled with water.
Eco-friendly: powered by a small solar panel.
Bonus: attracts birds and pollinators.

Ideal for: patios, balconies, or small gardens.

2. Wildlife pond (without a pump)

Low-maintenance: no filtration needed if you include native aquatic plants.

Eco-friendly: supports frogs, insects, birds; chemical-free.

Tips: use oxygenating plants (like hornwort), a sloping edge for animals to enter/exit, and avoid fish to keep it balanced.

3. Bubbling rock fountain

Low-maintenance: recirculating water system with a hidden reservoir.

Eco-friendly: closed-loop system uses minimal water and can be solar-powered.

Style: natural, blends into rock gardens or modern minimalist landscapes.

4. Rain chain into a gravel basin

Low-maintenance: no moving parts; just requires occasional debris clearing.

Eco-friendly: redirects rainwater from your roof into the garden.

Bonus: looks beautiful and makes a gentle water sound in the rain.

5. Birdbath with pollinator perch

Low-maintenance: clean and refill weekly.

Eco-friendly: simple water dish with stones for bees and butterflies to land on safely.

Pro tip: choose a shallow dish (two to three inches deep max.) or place some smooth beach stone in bottom of bowl.

Where can you place a water feature in your yard?

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

Obituaries

Frances Voogt



VOOGT, Frances (Beintema), 1942 - 2025 —
Frances passed away on Friday, Aug. 29, 2025 at Marotta Family Hospital in St. Catharines. She is now reunited with her "honey bunny" husband Peter and parents Andy (Anne) and Jean (Jantje) Beintema. Devoted mother of Julie Voogt and Lisa Kouretsos. Cherished grandmother of Nicole and Laura, and Bill, Tom and Jenna. Treasured Great Grandmother of Nathaniel, Naomi and Estrella. Frances loved her grandchildren and great grandchildren with all her heart. She was very proud of all their accomplishments. Her cuddles and giggles will forever hold a special place in each of their hearts. Dear sister of John (Alice) and Janet

Meloen (Rick). Frances was born Freekje Beintema on September 19, 1942 in the village of Blija, Friesland in the Netherlands. It has been told she was so small at birth that she could fit in a wooden shoe. The family with Frances and younger brother John immigrated to Canada in 1948. They settled in Ridgeway where she and John attended school. After high school Frances had a job in the local drug store and gift store where she likely got the bug to collect plates. Sister Janet came on the scene in 1954 much to the delight of Frances. The family were charter members of the Christian Reformed Church in Niagara Falls. This is where she met her future husband, Peter Voogt. They were married on August 31, 1963. They lived in Chippawa for a short time, then moved to Grimsby where Frances worked at Beamish Department Store. They soon moved to a farm in Winona and started a greenhouse operation. The family grew with the two daughters Julie and Lisa. Frances loved dressing her daughters in her handmade creations. The girls were always in proper attire, with good manners. Eventually the family came to Niagara-on-the-Lake to live on a fruit farm on Concession 4. This was their home for over 40 years. Frances helped on the farm and in the off season would find work in neighbouring greenhouses and family greenhouses. She had so much more than a green thumb, she loved flowers and was most happy surrounded by and caring for them. Near the end of their farming career, Frances and Peter enjoyed the Niagara Falls Farmer's Market with their vegetable stand, that she was most proud of. Frances was always busy, tending the gardens and her beloved hostas, cutting the grass, with a push mower or occupied with crafts. She liked to do various crafts, needlepoint, adult colouring and knitting. Her handwriting was impeccable, from personal letters and special occasion cards, regularly keeping in touch with family in Holland. Frances made friends easily with her sunny disposition and always seemed to have a positive attitude. Saturdays were her day to make the trip to Ramaker's Dutch Store and to Walmart or Micheal's for wool. Sundays were for church and she was a faithful member of Faith Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Niagara Falls. It was sad that her later years brought on the onset of Alzheimer's. Peter and the family tried their best to care for her and keep her at home, but it began to be overwhelming. Frances spent her last years at Westhill Care Center in St. Catharines. Frances knew she was a child of God and is now at peace with her Lord. Visitation took place at Hetherington & Deans Funeral Chapel, 5176 Victoria Ave., Niagara Falls on Sunday, Sept. 7, 2025 from 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. Graveside Interment was held at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Monday, Sept. 8, 2025 at 10 a.m. followed by a funeral service at 11 a.m. at Faith Fellowship Church, 4878 Jepson St., Niagara Falls. Donations will be thankfully received for the Alzheimer's Society of Canada. A sincere and heartfelt thank you to the exceptional staff at both Westhills Care Centre and Marotta Family Hospital for their many thoughtful expressions of kindness, reassurance and extraordinary care.

Fond memories, special photographs and messages of condolence may be shared online at www.hetheringtonanddeans.com.

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MEMORIAL

Julie Rollason



ROLLASON, Julie (nee Swingler)
Passed away peacefully, on Thursday, Aug. 28, 2025 at the Greater Niagara General Hospital in her 86th year. Predeceased by her husband Bryan Rollason (2021). Together with Bryan her soulmate, partner, husband once again. Dearly loved Mother to Mark Edward Rollason, Simon Llewellyn Rollason, Joanne Dena Newman, Katrina Inez Rollason. Daughter in law Sharon Rollason, Marnie Mackinnon. Grandmother to Bethany Newman, Gareth Rollason, Victoria Rollason, Owen Rollason.

A teacher for her entire life and known for founding multiple Montessori schools from Newmarket to Niagara-on-the-Lake. Teaching was her passion, her cornerstone, her happy place. Countless students that had been taught by Julie returned to connect with her later in life. A life well lived with many friends, travels and great culinary experiences. Julie will be deeply missed. Julie's family would like to thank the staff and doctors at Greater Niagara General Hospital for their kind and loving care.

In accordance with Julie's wishes cremation has taken place. Online condolences may be shared at wilsonbc.ca (Wilson Burial and Cremation, St. Catharines)
In memory of Julie plant a tree.
Teachers nurture saplings so that one day they can become mighty individuals.



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