



GONE TO THE DOGS

A collection of pups playing in the snow by photographer Dave Van de Laar



Through the years, award-winning Lake Report photographer Dave Van de Laar has captured some incredible images of dogs playing in the snow, like this one here of a dog, all dressed up for the cold, running like it's a beautiful summer day without a care in the world. **Find a small collection of some of the best photos on Page 12.**

Town sues quarry company for \$1.2 million over drain cleanup

Richard Wright
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is suing a local quarry company for costs related to the cleanup of the Cole Drain in 2022 following an environmental spill in NOTL's farmlands that summer.

In a statement of claim filed with the Ontario Superior Court on Aug. 14, the

town argues that Arriscraft Canada Inc., which operates the quarry located between Concession 5 and 6, is responsible for the formation of a sludge-like and putrid material in the drain, which it rushed to clean up, costing about \$1.2 million.

Arriscraft denies allegations that it was responsible for the substance, which, after the town had already cleaned it up, was determined to be sulphate reduc-

ing bacteria.

The incident has resulted in a "he said, she said" scenario with the town and Arriscraft pointing fingers at the other for the liability.

The town says Arriscraft was, ultimately, responsible for the bacteria formation as a result of releasing water with a high concentration of sulphate into the drain. It says the company should reimburse the municipality for the bill.

Arriscraft claims it did not do anything that violates the standards of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. It argues no environmental damage was done, that it did nothing to contribute to the incident and that the town "grossly" overspent on the cleanup.

Further complicating the issue is an agreement of

Continued on Page 3



The municipality removed 1.8 million litres of sulphur reducing bacteria that spilled from Cole Drain. FILE



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NOTL closer to updated official plan

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake town council is one step closer to implementing a new official plan, set to be in place next October.

During Tuesday’s committee of the whole planning meeting, councillors voted to receive an update on the official plan, including a proposed work plan to guide the process for revisions and approval.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor suggested an amendment to include input from each of the town’s advisory committees on their respective sections of the official plan, which was added.

The town’s planning director, Kirsten McCauley, was pleased with the suggestion.

“It’s going to be part of an overall engagement strategy that will be further detailed in a future report that we’re proposing,” she said.

Coun. Gary Burroughs asked if the update could be completed before the fourth quarter.

“I know we’ve hired staff to deal specifically with the



Planning director Kirsten McCauley says October is the “realistic” goal for the new official plan. JULIA SACCO

official plan,” he said.

McCauley said there has been discussion about the timeline and staff will continue to bring the plan forward as soon as possible, but the October deadline is “realistic.”

“In order to do all of the engagement that we’re hoping to do with the advisory committee, stakeholders, public engagement in general, we’ve identified that as a timeline,” she said.

Burroughs followed up

and asked if staff intend to bring back contextual zoning with the new plan, as was had before 2015.

Zoning will be discussed in depth during a zoning by-law review and that would be the appropriate time to discuss it, McCauley said.

The two zoning bylaws will be reviewed and consolidated into a single, comprehensive zoning bylaw that is updated in conformity with the official plan, she said.

“We will look at all of the options, including contextual zoning,” McCauley said.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita questioned McCauley on whether or not town staff is prepared for March 31, when the region no longer has responsibility for regional planning.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa clarified that there is still planning application work that has to be done around infrastructure that the region will be involved with.

“We are prepared and ready for that shift to take place,” McCauley said.

The shift will not affect the Planning Act in terms of planning approvals for different or consultation requirements, she said.

Coun. Andrew Niven asked if the new plan will be more flexible in terms of accommodating changes.

“We will work toward that as we go through the process,” McCauley said, citing a number of provincial changes since 2019.

Council will discuss the official plan again in February during a workshop on the engagement strategy and detailed work plan.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com

MPP Wayne Gates to be nominated as NDP candidate

Staff
The Lake Report

MPP Wayne Gates will be officially nominated as the Ontario NDP candidate for the Niagara Falls riding, which includes NOTL, for the upcoming 2025 election.

The nomination will take place Thursday, Dec. 5 at 6 p.m. at the Stamford Centre

Volunteer Firemen’s Association Hall.

Burt Sisler, a 109-year-old resident of Fort Erie and veteran of the Second World War, is nominating Gates.

Heather Kelley, a Fort Erie health care activist and Owen Bjorgan, an environmental activist from NOTL, will also be speaking in support of the nomination.

Candlelight Stroll returns this Friday

Staff
The Lake Report

NOTL’s annual Candlelight Stroll will hit the streets on Friday at 6:30 p.m. in front of the Court House on Queen Street.

The year candles will be sold in support of the Kazemi family, who recently moved to town from Afghanistan, fleeing the

Taliban and embarking on a harrowing 47-day journey to Canada.

The came to Niagara-on-the-Lake seeking safety and a better future, said a spokesperson for the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, which hosts the annual event.

Candles are \$5 each and can be purchased at the stroll during the event.

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Quarry company argues it wasn't at fault and that cleanup was 'grossly excessive'

Continued from Front Page

liability between the town and a previous owner of the quarry dating back to 1980.

The town claims the subsequent companies operating on the property are bound to the same agreement. Arriscraft argues the agreement was not transferable and that the town ultimately undertook a cleanup that was not necessary. It also argues that even if the agreement was in place, the town didn't honour its side of it.

In a statement of claim, filed with the Ontario Superior Court on May 29, the town says water from a settling pond at the quarry, owned solely at the time by Meridian Brick Canada, Ltd., was the source of the contaminant.

Arriscraft and Meridian merged in 2023.

The cleanup

Shortly after a discharge from the settling pond on approximately Aug. 16, 2022, the town received complaints about the appearance and odour coming from the Cole Drain north of the discharge point from the quarry.

"These complaints were inspected by town staff who confirmed the odour and observed a petroleum-like sheen and black sludge," states the claim.

Believing that an upstream spill had occurred, the town contacted the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, which sent out an officer to inspect.

The officer inspected the area and orally directed the town to clean up the material, which was then followed by a written directive from the same officer to confirm the verbal direction.

An official order to clean the site never came from the ministry itself, however.

The town then contracted GHD Limited as its environmental consultant and Accuworx Inc. to clean up the material.

Instructions from GHD called for the installation of soil berms in the drain to prevent waters from impacting Four Mile Creek, the Virgil reservoirs and Lake Ontario — water that provides a source of potable water and fish habitats.

Accuworx then "removed impacted waters from various sections of the Cole Drain into portable tanks," said the town's statement.



A truck removes water from the Cole Drain in August of 2022. The cleanup cost the town \$1.2 million. FILE

The removal of water from the drain was done on a 24/7 basis between Aug. 18 and 21.

An estimated 1.8 million litres of affected water were removed, of which approximately 1.1 million litres were shipped to a treatment facility called Moores refining.

"If the (Town of NOTL) had waited for test results, it would have realized that the water in the Cole Drain, even if odorous, was not hazardous."

ARRISCRAFT
STATEMENT OF DEFENCE

After learning the bacteria was not hazardous, the town had the remaining water shipped to the Niagara-on-the-Lake and Port Weller sewage treatment plants.

The expense associated with this work of approximately \$1.2 million.

Tests proved substance was not harmful

After testing, the town's consultant concluded the cause of the smell and sludge-like appearance of the water in the drain was sulphate reducing bacteria — micro-organisms that use sulfur for their metabolic processes.

"We use oxygen to breathe, but the sulfur-reducing bacteria can actually use elemental sulfur and convert it to hydrogen sulphide as part of the respiration and overall growth," Vaughn Mangal, assistant professor in the chemistry department at Brock University, told The Lake Report in October 2022. Hydrogen sulphide is

known for smelling like rotten eggs.

Mangal added there is no explicit health problem that could come from sulfur reducing bacteria.

Still, the town wants compensation for the money it spent to clean it up.

'Sulphate-laden water'

The town argues water samples collected by its consultant revealed a high amount of sulphate in the surface water where the quarry drains into the watershed.

"The sample from the quarry discharge water from the quarry pond was higher than any sulphate concentration detected downstream and were significantly higher than would be expected in rainwater," the town's claim states.

"The town pleads that but for the discharge of the sulphate-laden water from the quarry, the environmental incident would not have occurred."

The town believes that the defendant is in breach of various laws including causing damage to the Cole Drain contrary to the Drainage Act and endangering or killing fish habitats under the Fisheries Act.

Arriscraft responds

The law firm Goodmans LLP filed a statement of defence on Aug. 14 claiming its client was not responsible for the presence of the bacteria.

"Arriscraft operated its quarry in compliance with its environmental permits and all environmental laws, including the chemical limits applicable to the discharge of quarry water," it said.

The statement added that an annual third-party review from an environmental advisory company called WSP Canada Inc. gave the company a passing grade in 2023.

That report "concluded that water discharged from the quarry in 2023 did not exceed any limits prescribed by the Environmental Compliance Approval."

The company suggests chemicals from local farming and a lack of maintenance to the ditch could have easily caused the high concentration of the bacteria.

"Had the tall grass been cut and the previous grass cuttings been removed from the ditch then water would have flowed freely through the Cole Drain and the stagnant conditions needed for the development of the (sulphate reducing bacteria) growth would not have existed."

The company states that it should not be held responsible for any reason and is seeking legal costs on a full indemnity basis.

Liability clause

The 1980 liability clause between the town and then-quarry owner Burnstein Brick Limited stated that if any erosion, silting, toxic or chemical damage to the drains and watercourse was caused by the company, it would then be responsible for associated repair costs.

In its defence, Arriscraft argues the clause is not applicable to them because the company, and any of its affiliates, are not a corporate successor to Burnstein Brick. It also argues that even if the company was "somehow" still beholden to the clause, that the town didn't act in accordance with the agreement.

The company claims that, per the agreement, in such an incident where a potential environmental contaminant gets into a watershed, the town must give the company 30 days to respond.

It says it was never given a chance to do its own investigation before the town began cleaning the spill.

The company also argues the town's cleanup was a "grossly excessive" kneejerk reaction that could have been done at a much lower cost — and that the town should not have begun cleaning it until the substance was identified.

"There was simply no reason to send the water, at a significantly increased cost, to an industrial treatment facility."

"If the plaintiff had waited for test results, it would have realized that the water in the Cole Drain, even if odorous, was not hazardous."

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Tree bylaw ruffles leaves at council

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Presentations on tree removal permits during Tuesday night’s council meeting led to a lengthy discussion on the role of councillors in presiding over — and allowing exceptions for — municipal bylaws.

Six delegations requesting tree removal permits stirred up conflict during the council meeting on Nov. 26.

When discussing whether or not to grant each individual permit, Coun. Sandra O’Connor said making exceptions goes against the tree bylaw in place.

The private tree protection bylaw states that property owners must apply for a tree removal permit before removing any tree that has a trunk measuring 12.5 cm or larger in diameter and they may not destroy or injure any regulated tree.

The full bylaw, Bylaw No. 5139-19, can be found online on the town’s website, notl.com

“To ad hoc change a bylaw that we already have on the books is not the way



Coun. Maria Mavridis commented on how it is unfair that residents do not have to apply for permits when planting trees, only when taking them down. JULIA SACCO

to proceed,” O’Connor said when discussing the first tree.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said that situations like these are why appeals exist.

“It comes down to what’s fair,” he said.

Coun. Maria Mavridis said aspects of the current tree bylaw can be unfair for certain individuals.

“They didn’t need a permit to plant their trees and now they’re being told they need a permit to take it down,” she said.

O’Connor once again emphasized that, from her perspective, allowing trees to be taken down on a case-by-case basis is incorrect.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa

appreciated her comment, but acknowledged that the tree bylaw “obviously needs to be changed.”

Wiens said that a part of democracy is allowing people with special circumstances to speak on their reasoning for requests.

“We’re still a small town,” he said.

“It’s not for us to sit there and be onerous. We’re supposed to have feelings. We’re supposed to look at these things individually and see if there’s some sort of compromise we can come to,” Wiens said.

Of the six trees requesting removal, four were granted removal permits with specific conditions pertain-

ing to their circumstances, many of which included planting some trees in place of the one being removed.

Two trees were not granted removal permits, including an oak tree in Chautauqua.

O’Connor referenced the Chautauqua community tree plan, emphasizing the importance of oak trees in the area.

“If you agree to taking down this tree, every oak tree in Chautauqua will be in jeopardy and it could change the character of the whole neighbourhood,” she said.

The tree bylaw was originally driven by residents of Chautauqua, Wiens noted.

“This is the first time with the tree bylaw where a condition has come up and I’ve thought, this is exactly why this tree bylaw began, because of the community of Chautauqua,” he said.

Zalepa agreed, saying that other work could be done by the applicant before chopping down the tree, which had been dropping acorns.

Council voted unanimously to keep the tree where it is.

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Town changes gears on Virgil development

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

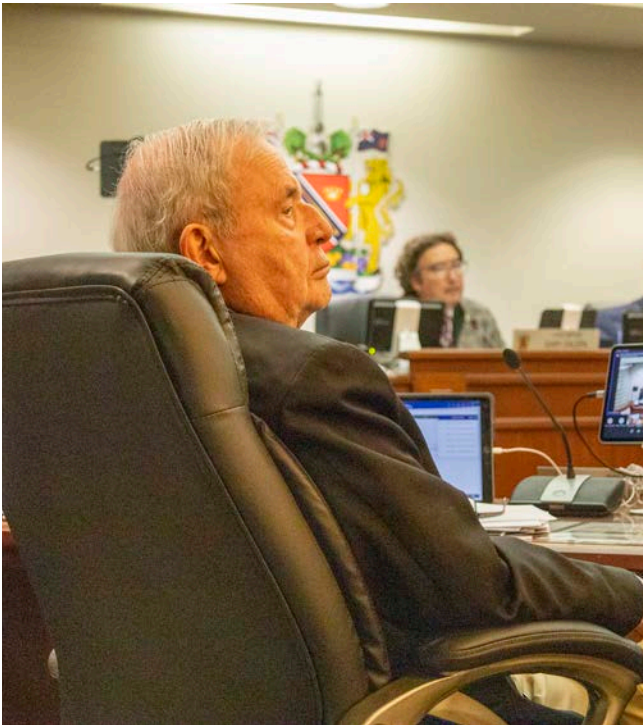
Councillors changed their final decision on the rezoning of land that will allow for the construction of a 41-unit townhouse development in the Virgil area.

During last Tuesday's council meeting, a former decision to deny the rezoning and official plan amendment was reversed — the development was given the green light to continue.

Councillors revisited a discussion from a committee of the whole planning meeting in November, in which they were against rezoning lands east and south of 419 Line 1 Rd. — they intended to finalize their vote during the Nov. 26 meeting.

Jesse Auspitz, principal planner at NPG Planning Solutions, and lawyer Tom Richardson, from Sullivan Mahoney, presented to council voicing their support for a rezoning.

Since the original decision to deny the rezoning on Nov. 12, Coun. Wendy Cheropita said she learned several new things about the



Coun. Gary Burroughs remained firmly against the rezoning at last week's council meeting. JULIA SACCO

development leading her to change her mind.

"I learned that they are three-bedroom, two-storey homes that are going to be designed for families and I learned that the price position is going to be under \$1 million, which in Niagara-on-the-Lake is under the mid-range," she said.

The development is very acceptable and would encourage more families to move to the area, Cheropita said.

Couns. Sandra O'Connor and Gary Burroughs remained firmly against the rezoning, being the only two who voted against it on Tuesday.

The density of the development will make for a nearly 50 per cent net increase of what the zoning

is in the neighbourhood, O'Connor said.

"That's not just a little bit higher as stated by the planner — that's a lot higher," she said.

Kirsten McCauley, the town's planning director, confirmed that the development is "a bit higher" than what is permitted in the town's official plan.

"However, I do think that we've done a detailed analysis to determine that it is still considered a compatible zoning," she said.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said it is important to get this development moving forward for the sake of housing diversity in NOTL.

"We have a crisis at our hands," he said.

"That's what we want, is young people. We want a high school, we want a medical centre. If we want all of these things, jobs ... and public transit, this is what we need."

Wiens also cited the Pleasant Manor addition that is being built, which will bring 250 new jobs to NOTL, which will mean more housing needed to accommodate new employees.

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A small chapel with big Christmas cheer

Paige Seburn
The Lake Report

The sounds of the season echoed along the Niagara River on Saturday afternoon, Nov. 30, as carolers raised their voices in song at the Living Water Wayside Chapel.

They were leading the third annual Caroling Sing-A-Long, a free outdoor event hosted by the Niagara Falls Faith Fellowship Church.

It took place at Niagara-on-the-Lake's renowned small chapel on Line 1 Road, nestled along the Niagara River Parkway.

Dianne Ticknor, performing artist and Niagara-on-the-Lake resident, led the vocals. She said she appreciates how carolling brings everyone together.

"It's the people. They're all excited to be here. They all relate to each other. They're all singing the same music," said Ticknor. "I love that."



Carolers gather together at Living Water Wayside Chapel to bring holiday cheer to Niagara-on-the-Lake with some Christmas classics. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Rick Meloen, a member of the fellowship church, says it was fellow church member Albrecht Seeger who proposed the idea of expanding the church's long-running Easter sunrise services to add a Christmas event later in the year.

Throughout the afternoon, the carolers performed from a songbook of 26 holiday classics.

Tom Pekar, a town crier and professionally trained Santa Claus, also joined the festivities.

"As the town crier, my job is to spread cheer throughout the year and welcome people," he said.

The best part of his job, he added, is highlighting those in the community who go unnoticed — like volunteers.

"I get to be the one to brag on them," said Pekar.

You can catch Pekar as Santa at the much-anticipated Candlelight Stroll coming up on Dec. 6 at the historic Court House.



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Crafting connections at the Legion

Paige Seburn
The Lake Report

At the Royal Canadian Legion 124's annual Christmas craft sale on Saturday, Krista Barlow's booth was filled with her handmade wirework jewelry, each piece crafted and polished by hand.

Representing her business, Grand Gem Jewellery and Rock Shop, the sale provided Barlow an opportunity to showcase her work and connect with the community.

"I love doing this," she said, noting how some customers came specifically to see her after hearing she would be at the sale.

"Some customers that I've had before, who knew I would be here, came to see me."

While the turnout may not have been as large as Barlow had hoped, she said it was rewarding nonetheless, engaging with customers about their



Krista Barlow sells a variety of jewelry. PAIGE SEBURN

interests and offering them more unique options.

"It's a win-win, no matter how you look at it," said Barlow.

The craft sale, held on Nov. 30 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., gave residents the chance to start their holiday shopping while supporting the Legion.

The sale featured a variety of handmade items, from jewelry to home decor, with all proceeds from

the space rental supporting the Legion.

According to Al Howse, president of Branch 124, the craft sale has been a staple of the Legion for over five years, usually raising more than \$1,000 annually.

In addition to the craft booths, attendees had the opportunity to participate in a penny raffle, where they could purchase \$5 tickets for a chance to win handmade items donated by the vendors.

Karen Jones, a member of the Legion's executive committee, said the raffle is a fun way for locals to support the Legion while also enjoying the chance to win one-of-a-kind items.

"Our penny sale is really cool, because each crafter donates one of what they make," she said.

While Jones believes the sale serves as a valuable opportunity for the community to unite in support of both the crafters and the Legion, she also expressed a desire for even greater participation in the future.

"I'd like more of the community to come together with us," she said.

With Fish Fry Thursdays, live music on Fridays from 6 to 9 p.m., and a rotating \$12 supper every Friday night, there's always something to look forward to at the Legion, said Jones.

Last Friday's special was chili — next week's might become the new crowd favourite.



Martin Sheppard Fraser LLP



ERICA A. BLYTHE
(VAN DE LAAR)
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Send a letter to editor@niagaranow.com

YOKA

POP-UP SALE
Friday Dec. 6

3 - 9 pm

NOTL Community Centre Yoga Studio

Young girls enter the world of science at Niagara College’s STEM workshop

Richard Wright
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

How many of us know the pH value of a glass of apple juice?

Eleven-year-old Ayla Jack knows the answers.

“Four and under is supposed to be good but zero isn’t good,” she said.

“I got about a two or a three so I think I’m doing good,” she added, referring to a litmus strip she dabbed with drops from a concoction she made from a fruit, juice, honey and pop mixture.

The St. Catharines youngster can credit her new wisdom to the “Women in STEM: Sip, Savour and Science Food Lab” experiential learning workshop held at Niagara College’s NOTL campus on Nov. 28.

Jack, like the other dozen or so kids taking part in the event, was there with her mother.

Across the hall, another workshop for women was being held and was also well-attended.



Chloe LeBlanc, left, and Ayla Jack learn the science behind a glass of juice at the STEM workshop. RICHARD WRIGHT

While the modern movement to increase the presence of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics began in the 1970s, many say female representation in STEM has been underreported throughout history.

Millions of people can tell you who Apple Inc. founder Steve Jobs was, but care to take a guess who Ada Lovelace was?

Lovelace was into computers and technology, too — over 200 years before Jobs and Apple.

Her analytical engine — a general-purpose computing machine that paved the way for modern computer

programming — is something Jobs could not have succeeded in his world without, many in the field of computer sciences say today.

Jack hopes to be one of those pioneering women one day.

While she hadn’t given much thought before about pursuing a career as a cook, or other areas of the food sciences, it is in her head now.

“It is an option,” she said.

For mom Lianne, the workshop was something she wanted for both herself and her daughter.

“I wanted her to learn about STEM and I am unsure myself,” she said. “It

is not too often you think of food as a science.”

“It helps them realize there is other stuff they can go into that is still STEM and it is so fun,” she added.

The evening was hosted by Niagara College’s Food and Beverage Innovation Centre but presented by Stephanie Thompson.


Thompson, an engineer at the St. Catharines General Motors plant, is the CEO and founder of STEM by STEPH, a Niagara-based social enterprise that connects women to STEM experiences and career paths.

“There are not a lot of women in STEM,” she said. “It is a pipeline that we need to keep feeding.”

“We are doing a great job in engaging young kids, and we have to make sure that there is support for them as they enter fields, as they enter academia.”


Proceeds from ticket sales from the event are being donated to YWCA Niagara to help support women in the community.

wright@niagaranow.com



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Notice of Completion

Municipal Class Environmental Assessment

Biosolids Management Master Plan Update

Niagara Region has completed a Biosolids Management Master Plan Update which reviewed the existing biosolids management strategies and treatment needs to the year 2051, in a manner that was transparent, sustainable, reliable, environmentally friendly, cost effective and flexible.

The Biosolids Management Master Plan Update was developed to:

- Meet the unique needs of Niagara Region and its customers, including treatment requirements, land uses and users, and environmental features
- Meet future needs associated with population growth, new regulations, climate resiliency, and energy efficiency
- Provide greater flexibility and reliability for biosolids management, both in the short term (i.e., 5 years) and long term (to the year 2051)
- Improve biosolids marketability
- Address community expectations regarding level of service, odour, air/noise, water quality, protection of the environment and aesthetics

Through this study, alternative strategies for managing biosolids were developed and evaluated, considering environmental and socio-cultural impacts, along with technical feasibility and cost. Overall, the study recommends increasing diversification of how biosolids are managed in the Region. This includes continuing land application

of liquid biosolids on agricultural lands and advanced stabilization of biosolids at the Walker Environmental Facility to produce a fertilizer product. The study also recommends increasing dewatering of biosolids to reduce the volume of biosolids to be hauled. The Garner Road Biosolids Facility will continue to serve as a centralized facility for dewatering in the Region with proposed upgrades to meet increasing demands over time. The Master Plan also recommends reviewing the feasibility of a centralized anaerobic digester facility at the Garner Road site to increase the opportunity for the Region to produce and utilize renewable energy in line with the Region's Corporate Climate Action Plan.

The Process

The Study followed the master planning process as established by the Municipal Engineer's Association Class Environmental Assessment process for Master Plans, which is an approved Ontario Environmental Assessment process. The Biosolids Management Master Plan Update is required to satisfy Phases 1 and 2 of the Class Environmental Assessment process. The Biosolids Management Master Plan Update followed Approach #1 of the master planning process which involved preparing a Master Plan Report at the conclusion of Phase 2 of the Class EA process. Additional investigations will be carried out at a later date and published to meet Schedule B or C project Class EA requirements or approvals through the Planning Act as described in the report.



Stay Informed

Feedback was received and reviewed during the master plan public review process. The final report has now been completed and has been made available to the public on the project website.

You can access the project website using the link below or by scanning the QR code



niagararegion.ca/projects/biosolids-master-plan

If you have questions or comments please contact the Region's Project Manager:

Jason Oatley
Manager, Quality and Compliance (Wastewater)
Niagara Region
3501 Schmon Pkwy., PO Box 1042
Thorold, ON L2V 4T7
905-980-6000 ext. 3758
Toll-free: 1-800-263-7215
Fax: 905-685-5205
niagarabiosolidsm@niagararegion.ca

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This notice was first issued on Nov. 3, 2024

Shaw's 'A Christmas Carol' remains fun time for all

"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"
★★★★
(out of five)

Royal George Theatre, 90 minutes, one intermission. Ends Dec. 22. By Charles Dickens. Directed by Ryan G. Hinds Adapted and originally directed by Tim Carroll.

Penny-Lynn Cookson
Special to The Lake Report

What is not to love about this "A Christmas Carol"? The house curtain presents a familiar scene: A snowy Queen Street in Niagara-on-the-Lake with its cenotaph, pharmacy and Court House.

Suddenly, there is violin and accordion music from the side aisles. Fake snowballs are being lobbed into the audience and thrown back to the actors.

Next, we are in a 'Jingle Bells' sing-along. The audience engaged and won, we are entertained.

And so began the Charles Dickens story of Ebenezer Scrooge, "a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint ... secretive, self-contained and solitary as an oyster."

Countless versions and adaptations have continued to appear from silent films to talkies, to cartoons, musi-



The cast of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," which runs at Shaw until Dec. 22. KATIE GALVIN

cals, plays and readings. Scrooge has been a coveted role most famously and well played on film by Alastair Sim. Other actors have included Basil Rathbone, Ralph Richardson, Derek Jacobi, Albert Finney, Christopher Plummer, Jim Carrey, George C. Scott, Patrick Stewart and Walter Matthau.

Even Michael Caine had a go in "The Muppet Christmas Carol" gamely co-starring with Kermit the Frog as Bob Cratchit and Miss Piggy as Mrs. Cratchit.

We kept watching with "Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol," the Flintstones, the Smurfs, and Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck in "Bah, Humduck!"

According to two Muppets in the 1992 film, "This is scary stuff. Should we be worried about the kids in the audience?"

"Ah, that's all right. This is culture."

The kids in the Shaw audience were rapt.

Sanjay Talwar as Scrooge is less ferocious and terrified than some, but he is effectively grumpy and greedy, talking to himself, poking his head out of the bed curtains with "Bah, Humbug" before falling asleep repeating "money, money, money."

Jay Turvey is solid as Scrooge's downtrodden clerk, Bob Cratchit, as is Jenny L. Wright as Scrooge's long-suffering

servant, Mrs. Dilber. A cheery Marla McLean sparkles as Mrs. Cratchit.

The sounds of clanking and wailing introduce the headless ghost of Scrooge's former business partner, Jacob Marley, who frightens the bejabbers out of Scrooge.

Marley is condemned to roam the world unfulfilled as his rapacious spirit never left the office. He comes to warn Scrooge to change his self-serving ways before it is too late and that he will be visited by three haunting spirits representing past, present and future.

As the spirit of Christmas Past, Tara Rosling is the gentle young Scrooge holding holly, playing ball

and flying freely through the air on a swing. Scrooge suffers the pang of boyhood remembrance.

Shawn Wright as Christmas Present is a big, bold festive spirit who shows the disdainful Scrooge how the families known to him unite to celebrate Christmas with warmth and love. He also exposes to Scrooge the impoverished horror lived by the children of ignorance and need.

A giant white ghost appears as the spirit of Christmas Future. He leads a trembling Scrooge to see what lies in store for him. He is mocked, unmissed and unmourned by all and shocked to see his headstone in a neglected gravesite.

Scrooge is transformed, becoming a model of sensitivity, kindness and generosity welcomed by family, friends and community.

The delight of this production owes much to its buoyant, genuine performances, fine direction, imaginative minimalist staging, creepy sounds and lively puppets — except for a limp Tiny Tim best represented by his crutch.

"A Christmas Carol" continues to enchant audiences. Its success was instantaneous. Written in six weeks by an anxious, cash-strapped Dickens, it was published Dec. 19, 1843, and sold out by Dec. 24.

Thirteen editions were

printed the following year. Dickens subsequently enjoyed giving public readings as he toured Britain and North America bringing him further acclaim and financial security.

Dickens was a Cockney visionary in a London built on power and money, trade and commerce. His strong London sensibility of time and place enabled him to harness and express the energy and theatrical variety of pantomime, magical fantasy, tragedy and comedy.

Christmas pantomime was an art form in Victorian England. It contributed to the Christmas we celebrate with carols, cards and the Christmas tree, the Tannenbaum, from the German Yule, brought to Windsor Castle by Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband.

Dickens was obsessed with time and punctuality, a central fact of London's social and economic life. The Christmas spirits each arrive at precisely 1 a.m. as Scrooge checks his clock.

Dickens said of himself that he was only interested in tomorrow, never today. Yet, we can't understand the present without the past and as both are present in the future, may we continue to enjoy "A Christmas Carol" well into the years to come.

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

Yellow Door Theatre's 'Into the Woods Jr.' is on Dec. 4 to 7

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Yellow Door Theatre Project's second show of the season will take guests on an enchanting tour into the heart of a classic musical — with a twist.

Performances of "Into the Woods Jr." start on Wednesday, Dec. 4, running every day until Saturday evening, Dec. 7, at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines.

Directed by Andorlie Hillstrom and led by a

talented cast of young Niagara performers, this rendition of Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's 1986 fairytale musical will feature everyone's favourite characters, but Yellow Door will be telling its story

In this rendition, Yellow Door has added its own spin to the story — the setting in an attic space where the cast members meet every week to play Dungeons and Dragons.

Yellow Door founder Andorlie Hillstrom connected with designer Corwin Ferguson, who not only agreed to a unique set design but

took things further by suggesting the Dungeons and Dragons concept.

This unique take on the musical, featuring a stripped-down set design, allows for even more emphasis on the storytelling aspect, Hillstrom said.

All members of the creative team and ensemble needed to be actively involved in decisions regarding costuming, set design and props.

"For example, D&D playing dice make great 'beans,' an old picture frame and some glitter elastic can become a 'harp'

and a fabulous piece of cloth could represent a 'beanstalk,'" Hillstrom said in a message to The Lake Report.

This ensemble cast features the senior performance company cast with Niagara youths aged 14 to 17 who are part of the NOTL-based theatre project.

Tickets are now available at the performing arts centre's box office: Visit firstontariopac.ca or yellowdoortheatre.com for more information, or call the box office at 905-688-0722.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com



Hannah Evans, who plays the dungeon master/narrator, and ensemble members rehearse a scene from the Yellow Door Theatre production of "Into the Woods Jr." SUPPLIED



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SNOW PROBLEM, DAWG!

A photo essay by award-winning Lake Report photographer Dave Van de Laar



Everest (Burnese mountain dog).



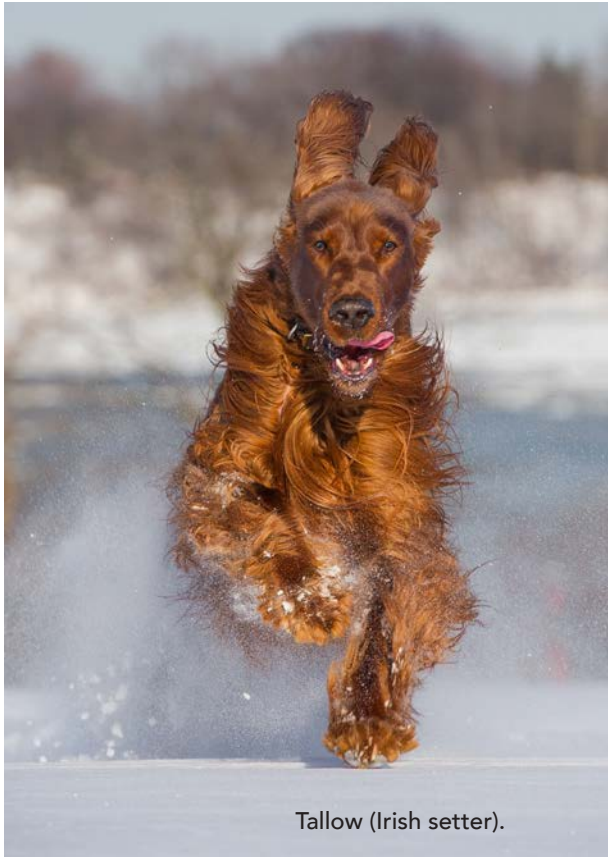
Teddy (golden doodle).



Teddi (shih tzu).



Darby (Irish setter).



Tallow (Irish setter).



Samson (part cane corso).



Max (golden retriever).

Winter is closing in. With the first official day of winter on the Dec. 21, and some snow already falling, we wanted to look back at some of photographer Dave Van de Laar's top shots of top dogs playing in the snow. Rest assured, all the dogs here are good boys and girls. If you're out and about this year with your dog and see Dave shooting, invite him over for a photo of your pet. If there's enough interest, we'll put together another snow dog gallery at the end of the winter season.



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Creativity at Christmas wreath workshop

Paige Seburn
The Lake Report

For Vanessa Larochelle and Jennifer Mills, Sunday’s Christmas wreath workshop at Queenston Library was a chance to tap into their creative sides.

“It’s a little out of my comfort zone, but I think it’s being taught well,” said Larochelle. “I’m not really crafty, so being able to do this is a little bit different for me and it’s nice.”

Both were excited to craft personalized holiday wreaths, guided by florist Shannon Troupe.

Mills shared similar enthusiasm as Larochelle.

“Shannon is doing a great job, she’s a great teacher. I’m having a great time,” she said.

Led by Troupe, owner of Lady Lavender Florals, the workshop allowed participants to create wreaths with materials like pine cones, dried fruits, ribbons and more.



Participants at the Queenston Library workshop use their imagination to make their wreaths a one-of-a-kind decoration for the holiday season. PAIGE SEBURN

Troupe provided initial guidance before encouraging attendees to personalize their wreaths at the “wreath bar,” where they could choose from a variety of decorative items.

The experience also offered a festive spread, including a hot chocolate bar, savoury charcuterie cups and non-alcoholic sangria.

Troupe, who has been a florist for five years and running the wreath workshop for two, was happy to see the positive community response, with 25 of the 35 tickets sold at \$80 each.

“Everyone seems to love it,” she said. “No matter what, everything looks great — no matter if you feel like you’re not doing it right. Everyone’s looks so

different, but so great at the same time.”

“Everyone is enjoying themselves — that’s the best part.”

As for what’s next, Troupe said Lady Lavender Florals’ future workshops, including a Mother’s Day edition, will continue to offer creative opportunities for the community to celebrate the seasons.



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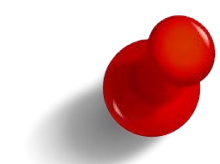
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COMMUNITY FAVOURITES: Legion Fish Fry Every Thursday 4 to 7 p.m. Duplicate Bridge at the Community Centre Tuesdays and Fridays at 1 p.m. Legion Progressive Euchre First and third Sunday of the month 2 to 5 p.m.			
<div>Community photo</div> <div></div> <div>Gavin James enjoys the Tea with Teddy sale at St. Anglican Church on Saturday. PAIGE SEBURN</div>			
8 Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre Reif's Holiday Market - 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Reif Estate Winery A Merry & Bright Christmas - 12:30 to 6:30 p.m. - McArthur Estate, 210 John St. East Seasons Chorale Christmas Concert - 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. - Bethany Mennonite Church Christmas Concert - 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. - St. Mark's Anglican Church Karaoke - 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. - Legion Branch 124	9 Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre	10 Music Trivia - 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. - The Irish Harp	Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre Holiday Wine Glass Workshop - 6 p.m. - Queenston Mile Winery Christmas Trivia - 8 p.m. - Exchange Brewery Beer And Books - 7 p.m. - The Old Winery
15 Breakfast With The Grinch - 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. - Hilton Garden Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre A Garrison Christmas - 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. - Fort George (Navy Hall) Meet & Greet with Santa and The Grinch! - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - Angel Inn Saint Nicholas Croatian Party - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. - Croatian National Centre 1416 Line 3 Rd. Silver Bells & Silver Screens - 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. - NOTL Public Library	16 O Hear the Angel Voices - 7p.m. to 8:45 p.m. - St. Mark's Anglican Church GLOW SERIES: A Musical Candlelight Experience - 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. - The Irish Harp Pub	17 The Great NOTLPL Bakeoff - 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. - NOTL Public Library	LET US KNOW OF YOUR UPCOMING EVENTS

Know of a local event? Tell us. Send us an email at editor@niagaranow.com

Report CALENDAR

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Warren

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Last issue:
Category: *WELCOME TO FANTASY ISLAND*
Clue: A tropical island seems nice for a new post-apocalyptic society, but I fear a few British boys won't see the end of this 1954 book.
Answer: What is Lord of the Flies?
Answered first by: Lynda Collet
Also answered correctly (in order) by: Bob Wheatley, Claudia Grimwood, Susan Hamilton, Jeff Lake, Catherine Clarke, Pamela and Will Wilson, Rob Hutchison, Jim Dandy, Marla Percy, Katie Reimer, Sue Rautenberg,
Email answers to editor@niagaranow.com, with your name, for a chance to win a \$25 Irish Harp Pub gift card every week. (Subject line: Riddle me this)
*REMEMBER TO PUT "WHAT IS" FOR JEOPARDY QUESTIONS!

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Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<div>Mark's</div>	<div>5</div> <div>LET US KNOW OF YOUR UPCOMING EVENTS</div>	<div>6</div> <div>Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Project Brew Summer Down Under - 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. - Niagara College NOTL Campus Fish Friday - 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. - St. Davids Lions Club Candlelight Stroll - 6 to 9 p.m. - Downtown NOTL Benjamin Hackett - 6 to 9 p.m. - Legion Branch 124 St. Davids Firefighters Association annual Turkey Roll - 7 to 9 p.m. Holiday House Tour Lunch - 11 to 2 p.m.- SVDP Parish Hall</div>	<div>7</div> <div>Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre Festive Fare - 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. - St. Andrews Church Holiday House Tour Lunch - 11 to 2 p.m.- SVDP Parish Hall Reif's Holiday Market - 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Reif Estate Winery A Merry & Bright Christmas - 12:30 to 6:30 p.m. - McArthur Estate, 210 John St.East The Great Taste of Canada Experience - 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. - Fort George (Navy Hall)</div>
<div>11</div> <div>0 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre s Painting - 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre 5:30 p.m. to ? - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre p.m. to 8 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre</div>	<div>12</div> <div>Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre Niagara on the Lake Christmas Tractor Parade - 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Coast to Coast: Canada's Survivalist Women - 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. - Laura Secord Homestead NOTL Community Palliative Care - Information Sessions - 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. - NOTL Public Library Cooking Class: Italian Feast - 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. - Inniskillin Wines</div>	<div>13</div> <div>Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre Jane Austen Tea Party! 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. - Fort George (Navy Hall) SOLD OUT Holiday pop up Market - 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. - Limited Distilling Beef on a Bun & Games - 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. - St. David's United Church Martin Murray - 6 to 9 - Legion Branch 124</div>	<div>14</div> <div>Holiday Market - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre NOTL Christmas Parade - 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Old Town A Garrison Christmas - 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. - Fort George (Navy Hall) Christmas open House - 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. - Joseph's Estate Winery Beaded Holiday Tree Workshop - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. - RiverBrink Art Museum Christmas Ham & Turkey Roll and Penny Raffle - 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. - Legion Branch 124</div>
<div>18</div> <div>OUR 5</div>	<div>19</div> <div>You and I Paint - 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. - Inniskillin Winery The Mistletoe Bride Live Reading - 7:30 pm to 9 p.m. - Silversmith Brewing Co.</div>	<div>20</div> <div>Fish Friday - 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. - St. Davids Lions Clubhouse John Claus - 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. - Legion Branch 124</div>	<div>21</div> <div>Holiday Wine Tasting & Paint Experience - 12 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. - Konzelmann Estate Winery</div>

m. Special thanks to Rob Harris at GoToNiagara.com for our list of events.




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



Your Lake Report is the proud winner of 112 national and provincial awards for journalism and advertising excellence.

#7: Start a gratitude journal. Reflect on the good things in your life each night and revisit it during challenging times.

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



Contributed by Patty Garriock
“This is what we are: a collection of stories that we share, in common. This is what we are to each other.” - Graham Joyce

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Parliament Oak is no more



Photographer Dave Van de Laar captured this last glimpse of Parliament Oak on Sunday, before the demolition of the building was completed. The school logos were still on the walls. Now the building is completely gone.

Editorial

Concealing documents is not openness

Richard Harley
Editor-in-Chief

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is once again twisting words around to make it seem like it is acting in the interest of the people, but in fact, is doing just the opposite.

In a town statement released Wednesday, the town seems to be doing its best to gaslight residents who are rightfully concerned about an ongoing push toward concealing information from the public.

This includes censoring voices of committee members and staff, locking documents away from the public under the guise of them being readily available to view at town hall, where town staff can make sure you don't write anything down, take photos or actually have any meaningful access to the document.

They can stand there and make you feel uncomfortable while they sip a coffee — and make sure you don't share it with anyone.

The statment says, “Once projects progress to the site plan approval stage, the Planning Act delegates this highly technical part of the process to authorized staff with input from various town departments, agencies and other professionals with technical expertise, and it does not require public input/engagement.”

They slide the most

important part of what they want to say in there so innocently, don't they?

Translation: We don't care about your opinion and aren't going to listen even if you offer it.

It continues: “While the documents from this stage are not posted online, they are readily available for review in person at town hall (1593 Four Mile Creek Rd., Virgil). Residents and stakeholders are welcome to schedule an appointment to review these documents, meet with staff and share any specific comments or concerns to be considered as part of the staff's review process.”

So, in other words, they're offering restricted access to a document that, by all rights, is public.

A freedom of information request would force the town's hand in releasing said document. Because it's public and withholding it simply isn't allowed.

So why go to the extreme effort of keeping it under lock and key instead of being open, transparent and releasing the documents to the public?

The statement comes on the heels of backroom discussions between staff and councillors to implement policies that prevent committee members from speaking with media without going through the town's communications department (a move that is not only against

our Charter rights, but is in such incredible bad taste it could literally only be done under this current council).

The town also wants to prevent committee members from writing letters to the editor of this paper — a suspicious action that doesn't exactly espouse trust. In fact, it does quite the opposite.

Here's a bit of inside baseball, but often the town won't even provide information to the media, tarnishing a relationship of information sharing that's happened in good faith for ages in cities and towns across the world.

It's nothing new. In fact, in 2021, the town sent a memo to all staff essentially threatening their employment if they speak to the media. Again, a direct violation of their Charter rights.

Knowing all that, the real kicker is the last line in the town statement, though: “Staff remain committed to ensuring openness and accountability in all aspects of our planning processes.”

Yeah, it's super clear that staff is all about transparency and openness (try saying that with a straight face).

It's a sad state of affairs when our town lets this kind of thing slide by — when only one or two politicians stand up against withholding information and fight for what's right.

Kudos to Coun. Andrew Niven, who addressed the elephant in the room at

council on Tuesday: If there is nothing to hide, why not share it with the public?

And he's exactly right. But unfortunately, the goal certainly is to limit public access or this kind of situation simply wouldn't occur.

Some of our councillors will likely tell you it's because it's what is allowed in the Planning Act.

That would be another attempt to mislead you. The truth is the town absolutely can share public documents. It just chooses not to.

When the public and the media have to continuously battle to receive public information, something is very wrong.

A freedom of information request should not be required to obtain a site plan.

It's a symptom of a disease within our governments and public offices.

It's something you should write to your councillors about.

It's something that prevents you, the voters and taxpayers, from having open access to important documents.

It's the town's way of keeping the people uninformed and the media quiet.

But, dear councillors and town staff members: This just ignites our fires. It is fodder for editorials such as this. And one day, it will lead to your replacement by a council that actually cares about the people it represents.

editor@niagaranow.com



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LETTER OF THE WEEK

Thanks for supporting animals in need

Dear editor:

Community Initiative for Animal Rescue and the fundraising committee would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the NOTL community, Niagara region and everyone who attended our fundraiser on Nov. 23 and 30 in support of our charitable partners.

A sincere thank you to our sponsors Coconut Quartz and Pet Valu Virgil for their continued support and generosity.

In addition, a much heartfelt thank you to all the amazing bakers, community volunteers and the following

businesses that added to the success of this event: Phil's Your Independent Grocer, Pet Valu Virgil, Hendriks Your Independent Grocer, Coconut Quartz and Husky House Restaurant.

We'd also like to thank all the NOTL homeowners who granted us permission to cut boughs and greens from your properties for the planters.

Your kindness added to the success of the fundraiser.

Merry Christmas to you and your families.

Carolyn Greenfield
Treasurer
CIFAR



NOTL homeowners let volunteers cut boughs and greens from their properties to create holiday planters for the fundraiser in support of animals in need. SUPPLIED

Roundabout is another bad traffic decision

Dear editor:

I cannot but help send in this letter, even as an outsider, from neighbouring St. Catharines.

I read Niagara Now/The Lake Report regularly. It is surely one of the best local media outlets going.

I love Brian Marshall's regular column on heritage-related themes. More so, as a senior and public historian myself, I look to all the articles on NOTL's beautiful historic town.

For over 50 years, we have driven visitors and guests from abroad to see NOTL, to go to the Shaw, whatever. We have also lived for over a decade in Britain and are



familiar with useful roundabouts.

I noted a recent letter to the editor of the St. Catharines Standard, noting the ever-ending fracas between townspeople and developers.

Many will agree, even those from outside NOTL, that the developers and council supporters of the

same have made a right mess of things. NOTL is a kind of star in Niagara for its Old Town, now under pressure from development.

This brings me to roundabouts and their usefulness. When done correctly, they do move traffic successfully.

I despair when I see the collision of voices regarding the St. Davids proposed roundabout as opposed to simple stop lights.

It appears that many private properties will lose some land with what the region has planned. Such a simple intersection, too.

We are so appalled already at the mess some engineers have made of the

Glendale-QEW intersection. What were they thinking?

It is so frightening to take guests to NOTL from St. Catharines that we will no longer take guests that way.

We will stay with the old way of going over the canal at Homer and Hwy 55 in the future. Or even, for us, a much longer route — the Lakeshore Rd route. Whatever it takes to avoid that convoluted roundabout at the Glendale-QEW.

It appears to have been created to please hotel owners and future development plans for the many condo towers planned at that site.

Gail Benjafield
St. Catharines

How council can avoid the 14.4% tax hike

Dear editor:

How is it acceptable to propose a property tax increase over seven times the rate of inflation?

For many years I served on the executive leadership team of a large company with multiple divisions and thousands of employees.

Each year as part of the budget process we provided specific guidance to all divisions and departments, except for the salary budget, which could be increased in line with inflation everything else had to remain flat, which meant a zero budget increase.

Shortfalls were made up through innovation, enhancing organizational effectiveness, ongoing activity analysis to identify and remove activities that no longer added meaningful value, improving efficiency and eliminating layers of

management.

Improving the cost-effectiveness of an organization doesn't happen by accident, and never happens at all unless it becomes both a priority and a mandate.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita understands that this level of tax increase is far too high, and although she acknowledges it is not final, even as a starting point it should be considered unacceptable.

She rightly talks about maintaining services and improving infrastructure, but there isn't a single word about improving efficiencies or looking for ways to reduce administrative costs.

Kyle Freeborn, director of corporate services, does identify spending that could be cut to save money, but there is no mention of the need to improve the efficiency and cost effective-

ness of the town's operational structure and processes.

So what is the answer?

I'm not sure that council provided appropriate guidance before the budget process began. I don't think we would be looking at a 14.4 per cent increase had they done so.

However, it is not too late to put things right.

After multiple years of budget increases well in excess of the inflation rate, I would suggest it is reasonable for this year's budget increase to be held to two per cent.

In pursuance of this objective here are some suggestions to reduce costs: Hire a CAO with a proven track record in improving organizational effectiveness and reducing costs and a mandate to do so; stop bringing un-winnable appeals and legal actions sim-

ply as a matter of principle; eliminate all newly created and unfilled positions that are not absolutely essential to the town's operation;

examine all vacancies that arise to look at alternatives to filling them; review all layers of management with a view to flattening the structure; and develop a plan to find internal efficiencies and streamline town processes, perhaps utilizing Six Sigma process improvement methodologies, which have proven incredibly effective in both blue and white collar environments.

I know this will be difficult but the alternative is out-of-control budget increases for the foreseeable future, which is clearly unsustainable.

There is an urgent need for action now.

Jonathan Household
Old Town



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NOTL Community Centre Café

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Please give 10 minutes of your time.

Amnesty International local Group #137

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Good financial management needs transparency



Brian Marshall
Columnist

As was recently reported by Julia Sacco’s article in the Nov. 28 edition of The Lake Report (“Draft budget proposes 14.4 per cent tax hike”), the town’s finance staff in their draft budget has proposed a whopping great increase in our property taxes for 2025.

And, this increase follows on the two previous years’ increases — 8.9 per cent in 2023 and 6.75 per cent in 2024.

Simple math might suggest this totals 30.05 per cent tax increases over three years but, of course, annual percentage increases cannot be calculated quite so simply due to compounding.

Be that as it may, if we stick to simple math, that’s an average annual increase of slightly more than 10 per cent per year, while Canada’s annual inflation rate, according to statista.com, was 6.8 per cent in 2022, dropping to 3.8 per cent in 2023 and is currently projected to end the 2024 calendar year at 2.44 per cent.

Furthermore, this organization suggests an even lower rate of inflation (provided economic conditions remain stable, which is somewhat questionable given Mr. Trump’s re-election) for 2025.

So, in real terms, the town’s annual budgetary increases — and subsequent tax hikes — have far and away exceeded the rate of inflation.

But, the population of the town is growing say some, and that surely will result in higher costs of service.

Well, according to Statistics Canada, the town population in 2021 was 19,088 and, the latest data I could find (by worldpopulationreview.com) estimates the



town’s current population in 2024 at 20,102.

That’s a population increase of 388 additional residents per year which, expressed as a percentage equals 1.8 per cent in annual population growth from 2021 to 2024.

Somehow, I can’t see that relatively minuscule increase in town population having any notable impact on the town’s operating costs.

However, as the town’s director of corporate services, Kyle Freeborn, identified, salary increases and volunteer firefighter compensation are budgeted to increase by \$1.9 million.

Looking back, the salaries, wages and benefits line of the 2023 budget showed an increase of 8.6 per cent which would have included the 16 new staff positions approved for hiring during that year.

In the 2024 budget, this same line reflected an 8.2 per cent year-over-year increase and again should have encompassed seven more new staff positions.

Note: That is a total of 23 new staff positions over the two-year period (2023 and 2024) or an increase in town administration

employment of 16.8 per cent when, during the same period, the town population grew only 3.6 per cent.

Now, moving to the draft 2025 budget, a \$1.9 million bump to the salaries, wages and benefits line suggests a proposed increase of 13.6 per cent.

Say what?

Look, I know that insurers that provide employee benefit programs have ramped their rates — the Chartered Professional Accountants suggested a weighted average of seven per cent for 2024 in Canada — but benefits should comprise no more than 30 per cent of this budget line.

And, I’d argue that, properly negotiated, 25 per cent would be more appropriate.

Still, let’s err on the high side — while assuming that the 2024 budget number was not messed with by “discretionary” hires into new, unbudgeted staff positions:

In the 2024 budget, at 30 per cent, benefits would have equalled \$4,204,685. Then, applying the Chartered Professional Accountants’ seven per cent cost escalation, we arrive at an additional \$294,328 expense to this line.

That leaves us with a proposed increase associated with salaries and wages of \$1,605,672 or 11.5 per cent — again, assuming that finance staff has not incorporated more newly created staff jobs.

In an economic theatre wherein the prevailing inflation rate is 2.44 per cent, this seems exorbitant.

Moreover, I find it very interesting to observe that the town of Grimsby, with a population approximately 40 per cent larger (28,883 in 2021) than Niagara-on-the-Lake’s, had a similar number of employees, 150, and a 2024 budget reflecting \$30.6 million in gross operating expenditures — significantly less than NOTL’s \$48.5 million operating budget for the same year.

And, the 2024 budget for the town of Lincoln, which has a population of approximately 25,750, also reflected a notably lower number in gross operating expenditures.

While I realize that the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has some unique characteristics that may add to its expenditures in comparison to Grimsby and Lincoln, I am forced

to question whether those items justify the level of total expenditures reflected in the town budget.

Nor do I understand why NOTL requires a similar number of employees as a town that is more than 40 per cent larger.

It is little comfort to the Niagara-on-the-Lake taxpayer to know that our town — as/in 2023 — has the lowest property tax per \$100,000 of the assessed value of any municipality in the Niagara region when our property value assessments are markedly higher than those anywhere else in the region.

Bottom line, it’s the actual amount that comes out of the bank account to pay our property taxes every year that really matters.

And, for many retired folks on a fixed income, you can bet your last dollar that their income isn’t going to go up by 14.4 per cent.

This year, the Town of Lincoln won the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for its 2024 Budget from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada.

In response to receiving this award, Lincoln’s

mayor, Sandra Easton, stated, “This award underscores our unwavering dedication to transparency, fiscal responsibility and effective communication with our residents. We are committed to maintaining these high standards in our budget process to best serve our community.”

Greg Reimer, chair of Lincoln’s budget committee, noted, “This award highlights the town’s hard work and the collaborative effort behind creating a budget that not only addresses the immediate needs of our town but also ensures sustainable growth and development for the future.”

And, Lincoln’s director of finance/treasurer, Charlotte Tunikaitis, added, “Receiving the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from (the Government Finance Officers Association) is a testament to our commitment to excellence in financial management.”

“Our annual budget process is a vital part of our strategic planning, enabling us to address the needs of our community while fostering transparency and accountability.”


Given that Lincoln was presented this award after its budget had been assessed as best among 1,700 scrutinized municipal budgets, it seems that one of our neighbours here in the Niagara region appears to be a model of best practices.

Perhaps it would behoove the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to study and understand Lincoln’s methodology.

After all, isn’t employing “best practices” what every organization should strive to do?

While it wouldn’t make the pain of increased property taxes any less, a process dedicated to “transparency, fiscal responsibility and effective communication with our residents” would certainly go some distance to increasing the confidence of NOTL’s voters.


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



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When ‘affordable’ really means ‘worse’



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist

A new \$12 million listing. Multiple bids for a mouldy house. Record inventory. Slagging sales. Sellers who won't budge. Buyers who resist buying. All in all, it's been a weird year for NOTL real estate.

But now. Are we on the cusp of change?

Yeah, yeah, I know about Trump, tariffs and the big threat the Orange Guy poses to the Canadian economy, employment and our innate joie de vivre. But there are big housing developments politicians hope will stir your loins and make you write an offer.

Will they work? Should you (or your daughter) be

taking advantage of new rules that Chrystia Freeland, our non-financial finance minister, says will make home ownership “far more affordable”?

Let's review.

First, the price cap for insured houses is exploding higher, from a million to \$1.5 million. Buyers of properties (to that limit) will be able to secure mortgage insurance through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Yes, that costs money — normally added to the debt. And, yes, the banks will give a better rate to buyers with insurance — since they're the ones protected from losses (not the buyer). Mostly this is about a cheaper downpayment.

Currently to buy a place for, say \$1.4 million, takes a downpayment of 20 per cent — or, \$280,000. Ouch.

That's because there is no insurance and a buyer must prove they have the financial means to purchase and carry the place.

But under the new rules, coming into play Dec. 15, that house can be insured,



New federal mortgage rules coming into effect Dec. 15 will mean homes can be insured with less cash needed — however, columnist Garth Turner breaks down why the savings may not be that sweet. SUPPLIED

with less cash needed.

The requirement is five per cent of the first half-million and 10 per cent of the balance. In this example, that would total \$115,000 — a savings of \$165,000, or 59 per cent. Woo-hoo!

But wait. The house didn't

get cheaper. That \$165,000 is added to the mortgage debt, which is now \$1,285,000. To carry that at five per cent with a five-year term means monthly payments of \$7,540.

With the old, higher down, the monthly would

be \$6,570. Over five years, you pay \$58,200 more and at the end of the term, owe a remaining amount that is \$141,800 higher. Oops. That “savings” of \$165,000 just cost you \$200,000.

But wait. Freeland also says first-time buyers can get 30-year mortgages, up from 25. Won't that lower payments and make real estate great again?

Do the math.

Same house. Same price. Same lower downpayment. A mortgage amortized over 25 years (the current norm) costs \$6,570 a month. With the period changed to 30 years, that payment drops to \$6,064. It's a saving of \$506 a month — which sure looks appealing. Over 60 months, it equals a tad over \$30,000.

However, during those five years, the 30-year borrower pays \$4,300 more in interest and ends up owing an extra \$36,500. So, to save 30 grand, you must spend more than 40.

In short, the changes to increase affordability are costly, cash-flow punishing, increase indebtedness

and trick the financially illiterate (like the finance minister, apparently) into a false conclusion.

Further proof that the more diddling politicians do in the real estate market, the worse things get.

Oh, and there's one more change that's just been made. Existing homeowners with mortgages coming up for renewal won't have to pass a stress test proving they can handle a higher monthly payment.

This is a big deal since 70 per cent of all mortgages will be coming due by the end of 2026. A slew of them were taken back in the pandemic days when home loans were two per cent or even less.

These folks will be facing seriously fatter payments, but now won't have to prove their ability to pay. Why? So they need not sell a home they cannot actually afford.

The housing charade continues.

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

garth@garth.ca

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We need to **fix** the home care supply crisis



Wayne Gates
Special to The Lake Report

Recently, my office has been dealing with several serious issues regarding a shortage of medical home care supplies, affecting residents in Niagara and across the province of Ontario.

Just as recently as three or four months ago, things were running smoothly for home care patients, their families and caregivers, and the workers and companies who supply them with much-needed medical items.

However, in late September, the provincial government, under Doug Ford, launched new supply contracts for the delivery of medical items.

And the new system of supply contracts has had disastrous consequences for patients and their families.

There have been persistent service issues affecting the delivery of medical home care supplies.

Some of the key issues include an inconsistent and insufficient supply of products, which lead to patients being forced to buy supplies out-of-pocket, an erratic delivery schedule for supplies, poor packaging and labelling of supplies (which complicates the distribution of medical care to the correct patients), a reduced delivered volume (with often only five boxes delivered instead of the usual 20) and deliveries being sent to the wrong locations.

It's gotten so bad that some of my constituents — residents here in Niagara who depend on home care supplies to meet their medical needs — are having to order their supplies off of Amazon.

Some patients are now ending up at emergency rooms and urgent care centers because of a lack of medication for their illnesses or pain.

Some palliative care patients have gone 30 hours



without a pain pump. Some cancer patients have nearly run out of ostomy bags.

In my office in Niagara, I have a constituent, Diane, who relies on home care supplies daily.

At one point, Diane was down to less than one week of supplies — and she didn't know what she would do once she ran out.

It's outrageous that this has happened under the Ford government's watch.

The system was working perfectly fine until the Ford government switched suppliers, which raises serious ethical concerns, and has created a disaster for patients and pharmacies.

This is completely unacceptable to me.

It's bad enough the Ford

government has created uncertainty and anxiety for our home care patients, and unnecessarily increased the pressure on our emergency rooms — but forcing people already dealing with an out-of-control affordability crisis to pay out of pocket for needed medical supplies is outrageous.

I have written directly to the Minister of Health on this issue, and I have questioned the government in the provincial legislature directly on these concerns.

I will not rest until we have these concerns addressed and fixed for our residents.

And frankly, it's part of a pattern from the Ford government when it comes to our health care, long-term care and home care sector.

Recently, we learned that in our long-term care sector, the provincial government, under Doug Ford, failed to meet its own legislated targets for care for long-term care patients.

The government is claiming to work towards a standard of four hours of direct care per day per patient by

next March — but it failed to meet the target of three hours and 42 minutes by March 31 of this year.

According to a government report, we need 13,200 additional nurses and 37,700 additional personal support workers in Ontario.

In order for residents to get the care that they deserve, we must address the staffing crisis in our health care and long-term care system.

Nurses and personal support workers need full-time jobs, with strong wages, benefits and pensions.

And the Ford government's use of private staffing agencies, which charge our public care system hundreds of dollars per hour and worsen the staffing crisis, is exacerbating the problem.

Hospitals and long-term care homes spent nearly \$1 billion in 2022-23 on private agency staff.

What we must do is number one, fix the home care supply crisis and return the operation of supply delivery to the way it was before, prior to Premier Ford creat-

ing this chaos in the system.

We must ensure every patient who has paid out of pocket for supplies during this period is fully reimbursed.

Next, we must invest in our public health care and long-term care systems and ensure that workers in these systems are treated fairly and paid appropriately for the work they do.

We must severely limit the use of private agencies in our public system.

Then, I am calling on the government to pass my motion to create a caregiver support benefit, to make sure that those who are working to take care of their parents, family, or friends who receive home care do not face financial hardship for supporting their loved ones.

Investing in our caregivers and our home care system will reduce the pressure on our hospital system and ensure that everyone in our community can get the care they need and deserve.

Wayne Gates is the NDP member for the provincial riding of Niagara Falls.

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NOTICE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION, OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING

- What:** Notice of **Complete Application, Open House** and **Public Meeting** for a **Zoning By-law Amendment** (under Section 34 of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended).
- When:** Open House: **Thursday, December 12, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.**
Public Meeting: **Tuesday, January 14, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.**
- Where:** Open House: Electronically via the directions below
Public Meeting: In-person at the Town Hall, Council Chambers, 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, or electronically via the directions below
- Regarding:** File No. ZBA-15-2024 – 1594 Concession 6 Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake
- What is this:** An application has been received for a Zoning By-law Amendment on the subject lands (see location map). The application proposes to rezone the subject lands to expand the site-specific uses permitted through By-law No. 500JK-95 to add permission for a Respite Care Facility and Adult Day Program and seeks relief from the standard Rural (A) provisions for lot area, lot frontage and front yard setback, in addition to setting out site-specific parking requirements.

Dialogue is encouraged:

You are invited to attend the Open House and Public Meeting to gather information and provide input regarding this matter.

Town Hall is open for the public to attend Committee of the Whole and Council Meetings, including Public Meetings, in-person. Alternatively, the public will continue to have the option to register in advance to participate electronically.

The Open House will continue to be held electronically at this time.

If you wish to participate electronically at the Open House or Public Meeting, you must register in advance with Town Staff as noted below. You will receive an email on the date of the meeting with instructions to connect to the Open House and/or Public Meeting on your computer, tablet or telephone.

- **Open House** – John Federici (john.federici@notl.com or 905-468-6441) (register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Thursday, December 12, 2024)
- **Public Meeting** – Clerks Department (clerks@notl.com or 905-468-3266) (register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Monday, January 13, 2025)

If you wish to attend the Public Meeting in-person, registration with the Clerk is appreciated.

If you wish to view the Open House and/or Public Meeting for information purposes, registration is not required.

The meetings will be recorded and available for viewing after the meetings on the Town’s website at

<https://www.notl.com/council-government/mayor-council/meetings-agendas-minutes>

Please Note: Written comments on the application are encouraged and must be submitted to the Town Clerk, at 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0 or via email at clerks@notl.com referencing the above file number. Unless indicated otherwise, all submissions, including personal information, will become part of the public record.

For more information:

For more information:

A copy of the application and supporting documents for the proposal may be obtained on the Town’s website at <http://www.notl.com/business-development/public-planning-notices> or at the Community and Development Services Department within Town Hall.

Please contact John Federici, Senior Planner, at 905-468-6441 or via email at john.federici@notl.com if additional information is required.

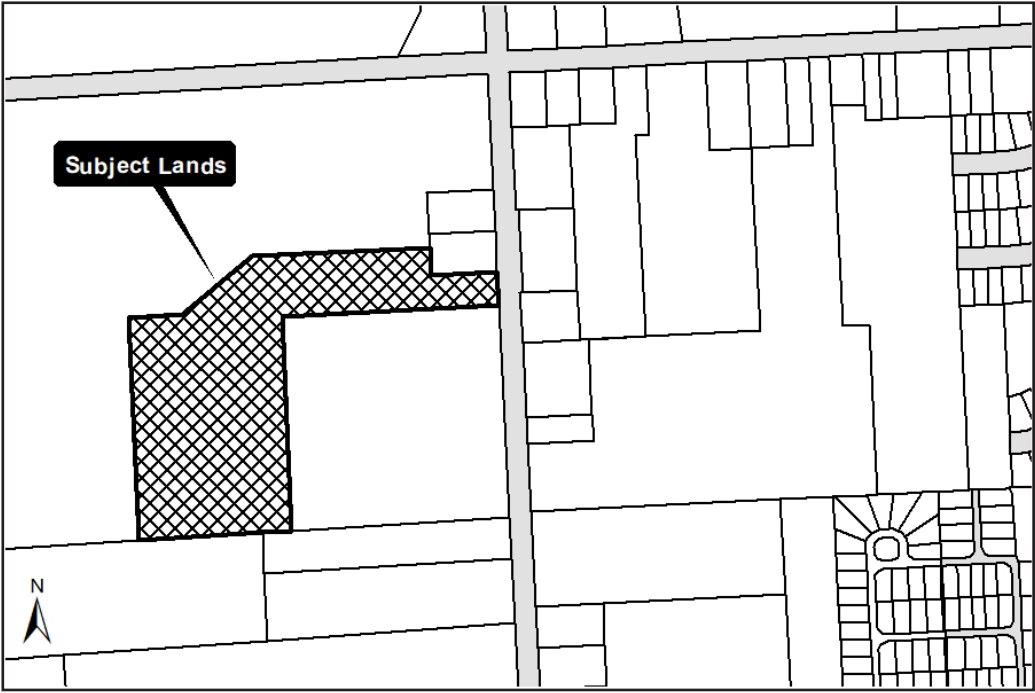
If you wish to be notified of the future decision with respect to the application, you must submit a written request to the Town Clerk including your name and the address to which such notice should be sent.

If a person or public body does not share their views in writing to the Town Clerk or orally at a statutory Public Meeting before a decision is made, the person/public body:

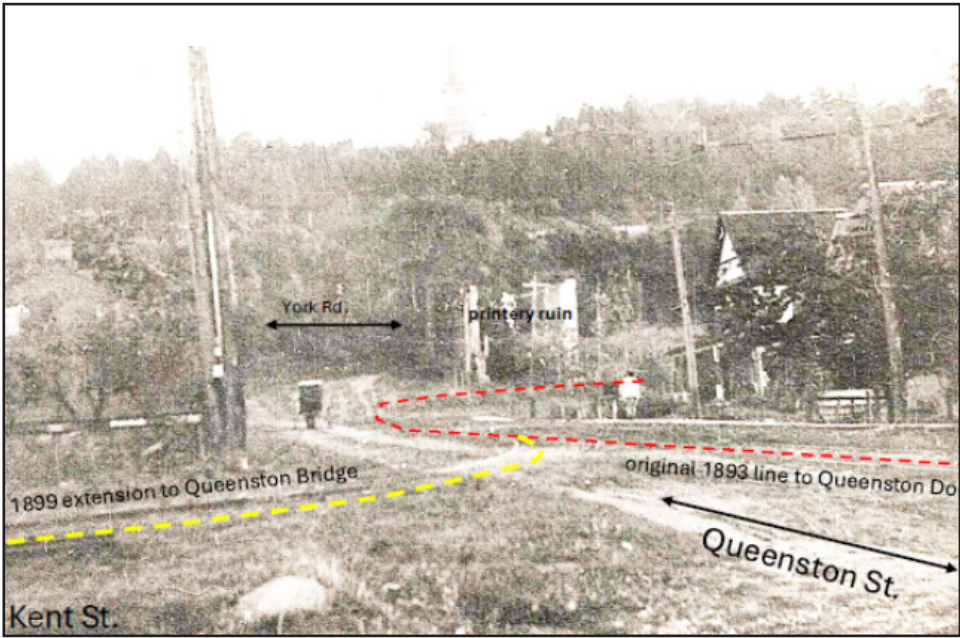
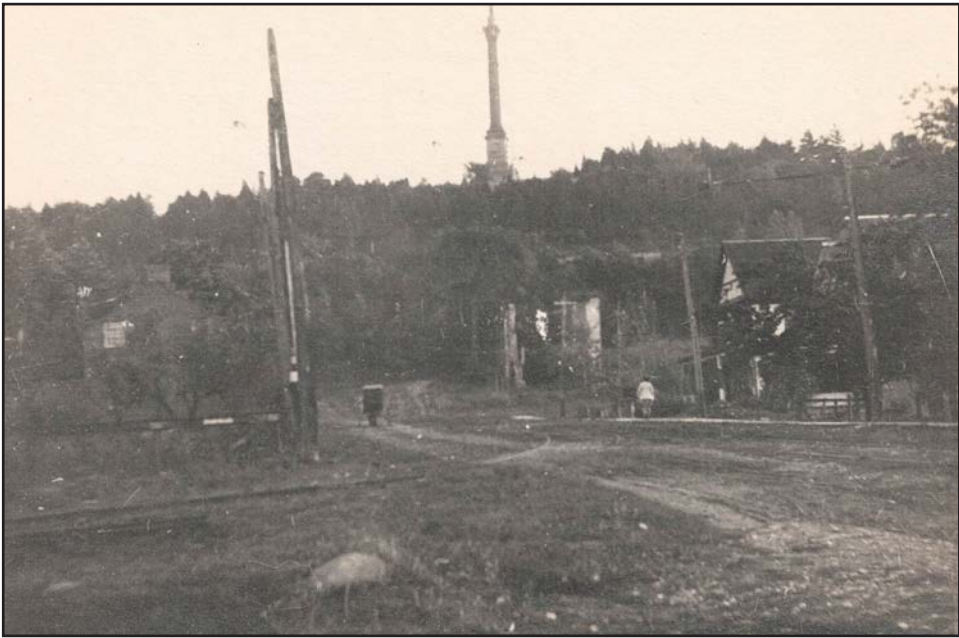
- a) Is not entitled to appeal the decision of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Ontario Land Tribunal; and
- b) May not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the opinion of the Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

Please note that third party appeals are restricted for this application as per Bill 185, Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024. *Planning Act* appeals may be filed by the applicant, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a “specified person” (as defined by the *Planning Act 1(1)*), and any “public body” (as defined by the *Planning Act 1(1)*).

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, November 29, 2024
Grant Bivol, Town Clerk



EXPLORING HISTORY
WITH **NOTL MUSEUM**



Queenston, circa 1910

There is a wealth of knowledge in the community about our history and we enjoy tapping into local knowledge to figure out mysteries in our collection. This week's image of Queenston originally had very little information attached to it. At first glance, one might notice the Mackenzie Printery ruins and what looks to be a rail line running from centre off to the left. From our local sleuth, this photo was determined to be taken from the corner of Kent and Queenston streets, looking towards Queenston Heights. The rail line is the extension added in 1899 for the Queenston Bridge access for the Niagara Falls Park & River Railroad. Queenston Street also had the original 1893 line that headed to the Queenston docks. Note the buggy on Queenston Road which helps us determine that the picture must be circa 1910, before cars became more affordable. Thank you to Andy Panko for helping us clear up this mysterious photo.

CANDLELIGHT STROLL 2024

We're thrilled to have you join us for our beloved annual Candlelight Stroll this Friday, Dec. 6 at 6:30 p.m. in front of the Courthouse!

Candles will be sold in support of the Kazemi family: Asadullah, Mahdia, Ali (age 18 months) and Zahra (age 3 months). This NOTL family is from Afghanistan and recently fled the Taliban, embarking on a harrowing 47-day journey to Canada. Despite these challenges, they arrives in Niagara-on-the-Lake seeking safety and a better future.

Visit niagaraonthelake.com/candlelightstroll2024



Mac for Mc: Realtors' toy drive supports sick children

Paige Seburn
The Lake Report

Dressed in his signature red suit, Kris Kringle — this one known as the Santa Claus of Port Dalhousie — greeted families with a warm smile and hearty “ho, ho, ho” at MAC Inc.’s annual toy drive on Saturday.

Children lined up for free photos with Santa from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., as Kringle’s jolly spirit set the tone for a day of giving back.

Hosted at Revel Realty Inc. on Four Mile Creek Road, organizers Evan and Jessie MacDonald said they look forward to delivering the hundreds of toys they’ve collected to the Ronald McDonald House Hamilton and the McMaster Children’s Hospital in Hamilton, as well as food and clothes for Newark Neighbours in NOTL.

This charitable effort is led by husband-and-wife duo Jessie and Evan Mac-



A bunch of toys ready to bring smiles to children in need. PAIGE SEBURN

Donald, both head coaches at the agency — Jessie is also a broker and Evan is also a sales representative.

For the couple, this cause is personal.

Their twins were born prematurely and spent time in the McMaster Children’s Hospital.

“While we were there, we met a lot of people who had sick kids,” Evan MacDonald said.

“Over Christmas, they would stay at the Ronald McDonald House.”

They were deeply moved by the organization’s mission to bring normalcy to

families facing the stress of a child’s illness.

“At Ronald McDonald, they do an amazing job every year of trying to make a normal Christmas for kids that are sick,” MacDonald said.

The Ronald McDonald House provides families

with accommodations for \$11 per night, offering kitchens, living spaces, and game rooms to ease the challenges of caring for a hospitalized child.

It’s a critical support system, helping families stay together during incredibly difficult times, he said.

They emphasized how crucial it is for families with sick children to have access to gifts during the holiday season.

While parents are focused on their child’s health, they said the financial strain and emotional stress can make it hard to think about buying Christmas presents.

To support the Ronald McDonald House, Revel Realty hosts several fundraisers throughout the year, including a golf tournament and the annual Revel Ball.

This year, the real estate agency raised \$50,000 — the Ronald McDonald House costs about \$12,000 per year to operate each family room.

“The \$50,000 that we raised this year is basically four rooms covered for the year, which is pretty amazing,” MacDonald said.

Many assume the Ronald McDonald House is fully funded by McDonald’s, but in fact, MacDonald said, the company contributes 30 per cent of the funding, while the remaining 70 per cent is raised through donations and fundraising efforts.

Donations will be accepted until Dec. 6. To help ensure Old Saint Nick can deliver gifts in time for Christmas, those interested can consider bringing toys to Revel Realty Inc. to brighten the season for those in need.

Looking ahead, Revel Realty is also gearing up for the Tractor Parade on Dec. 12 at 6 p.m.

The team will host an open house during the parade, offering a cozy spot to watch the festivities, complete with cookies and hot cocoa for everyone.

Sandtrap Open raises \$18,350 for two charities



The Sandtrap Pub & Grill’s annual charity golf tournament raised a whopping \$18,350 for two charities, the Ronald McDonald House and Niagara Children’s Centre. The total was split between the two organizations, each receiving \$9,175. SUPPLIED



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The Lake Report



MW CELLARS

Have some fun

- Across**
- 9. Georgia's capital (7)
 - 10. An ancient one had a bird problem (7)
 - 11. Banish (5)
 - 12. Comparable (9)
 - 13. Road journey refreshment break (3,4)
 - 16. Wield (5)
 - 17. Fish eggs (3)
 - 18. Oddball (6)
 - 19. Entirely (6)
 - 22. Pre-DVD technology (1,1,1)
 - 24. Dorian Gray's vice (5)
 - 26. Door knockers (7)
 - 27. Seen behind the scenes (9)
 - 29. Believer in karma (5)
 - 31. Found between sea and shining sea (7)
 - 32. Make clear (7)
- Down**
- 1. Try (7)
 - 2. Bluff King Hal's regnal no. (4)
 - 3. First-class (4-4)
 - 4. View unfavourably (10)
 - 5. Youth charity (1,1,1,1)
 - 6. Monotonous routine (6)
 - 7. Next? (6,4)
 - 8. Adjusts beforehand (7)
 - 14. If it's too hot, get out of it (3,7)
 - 15. New actress about spreading the word (10)
 - 20. Last remaining chance of relief (4,4)
 - 21. Tofu base (7)
 - 23. Publishing (7)
 - 25. Home of the Prado (6)
 - 28. Oil-rich monarchy on the Arabian Peninsula (4)
 - 30. Old boatman (4)

Crossword Puzzle

1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8
9								10						
11						12								
13		14						15		16				
						17								
21						22							23	
24				25				26						
27						28				29		30		
31								32						

Last issue's answers

1	R	M	C	I	R	C	L	E	D	P							
8	W	H	O	O	P	I	U	A	R	O	A	D					
	Y	T	C				10	L	O	O	S	E	P				
11	U	L	T	I	M	A	T	E	S		12	W	H	A	M		
	N		V	D	S					15	L	I	A				
16	F	O	R	E	S	A	W		19	T	R	I	G	G	E	R	
	O	I						20	O	U	R	E	H	T			
21	L	U	C	I	F	E	R		23	U	R	U	G	U	A	Y	
	D	H	L	T	I	C						P	R				
25	I	N	T	O	U	C	H		26	E	N	C	A	S	E	D	
	N	E	E					29	A	E	C		O				
30	G	I	R	L	D			32	S	T	A	Y	C	A	L	M	
								36	G	O	M	A	G	H	R	E	E
37	N	O	N	O	T	E			38	E	D	D	I	E	S		
	R							39	T	R	A	I	N	E	D	E	S

						8		1
	9	8	6			3		
				5		2	9	
	6				5			
	3		8	2	1		5	
			9				8	
	5	4		6				
		6			3	4	2	
7	3							

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Biology, physics, artificial intelligence and **complexity**



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

This year's Nobel Prizes in physics and chemistry highlighted the growing importance of artificial intelligence in science and life in general.

AI may have begun with Alan Turing in the 1950s, but the field really took off with the creation of powerful computers, fast chips and machine language, the last of which endowed computers with the ability to find patterns in enormous data sets and even come up with tweaked or entirely novel algorithms to analyze data and solve questions humans struggle to solve.

That was the case with Demis Hassabis, John Jumper and Google's groundbreaking and highly successful program AlphaFold 2.

As the Nobel committee put it, they "cracked the code" for how linear strings of amino acids arranged themselves into three-dimensional shapes,

often bringing amino acids, otherwise distant from one another in the linear chain, much closer together to perform the functions the proteins evolved to accomplish.

AlphaFold 2 is iterative: The data is run through successive analyses, each successive version an improvement on the last.

The program drew on lessons learned from a database of over 200,000 proteins whose relationships between linear sequences of amino acids and their related three-dimensional shapes had been laboriously determined by other means such as X-ray crystallography and provided clues to nature's rules that govern the relationships between linear amino acid sequences and the 3D shapes of proteins.

Yet other lessons were garnered from evolutionarily related proteins and at the atomic level, how combinations of specific atoms influence the shapes of combinations of atoms to form molecules.

In short, Jumper's team learned from as many sources as possible to find with atomic-level precision in predicting how the order and selection of amino acids determines the 3D shape of complicated proteins.

AlphaFold 2 completely changed the landscape for



Life probably began 3.7 billion years ago with single strands of RNA capable of generating copies of itself. MIDJOURNEY

determining the shapes of proteins.

More important would be to learn how specific 3D shapes correlate with specific functions — answers that will revolutionize the design of vaccines and other pharmaceuticals.

It is a perfect example of how AI can solve formidable stumbling blocks in biology and science more broadly.

The team's success reminds us that coding lies at the heart of life itself. After all, where did the code for the sequence of amino acids come from in the first place?

From the order of the four bases in genes that read (transcribed) in the nucleus, creates single-stranded copies of the genes called messenger RNAs (mRNA).

The sequence of bases in the mRNA is then read (translated) in structures

called ribosomes in the cytoplasm as successive triplets of bases: Each triplet coding for a specific amino acid to be added to the growing chain of amino acids in the protein.

It could be argued that life is all about coding — DNA to mRNA and mRNA to protein.

With such simple coding systems at the root of life, where did all the complexity come from that differentiates humans from bacteria, tiny nematode worms and house flies, which employ the same atoms, molecules and coding systems?

For the nervous system at least, the answer lies in the far greater number of nerve cells and their connections in humans, which, like larger and faster computers, are capable of analyzing larger data sets and endow the brain with extraordinary

specializations of which speech is a prime example.

Regions of the neocortex analogous to human areas of the brain involved in speech exist in other primates but don't possess the requisite complexity and size (translated as computational power) to match human speech areas or areas of the brain involved in music, mathematics and all else that make humans unique among species.

But there's a longer story in play.

Life probably began more than 3.7 billion years ago with single strands of RNA capable of generating copies of itself, coding for amino acids and acting as enzymes to foster and direct chemical reactions.

Sometime in the next hundreds of millions of years simple cells probably emerged akin to bacteria and archaea.

But it took as much as two billion years for complex single cells to evolve and only in the last half billion years did multicellular, then complex multicellular organisms evolve including in the last 200,000 years modern humans.

Along the way, there were several major and many more minor extinctions, which killed off millions of species but also created conditions for some species

to take hold such as the earliest primates over 50,000 years ago.

The most important factors governing evolution were lots of time, chance and underlying biological coding and information systems.

Here we are, the cleverest species so far, but at the molecular level, not much different than countless other far simpler species over the last 3.7 billion years.

On the grand scale of the universe, increasing complexity was a feature of the evolution of the universe as a whole, the birth, life and death of stars, the creation of increasingly complex atoms and much else in the universe.

Here too, in some form, that increasing complexity was based on coding, and information, which if you think about, is what AI is all about — coding and information.

We created AI and now AI helps us understand ourselves, our world and our universe.

That's why AI, biology and physics have so much in common.

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.

Swiftie Positivity unlike **grating negativity** here in NOTL



Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson
Columnist

Everyone's favourite songwriter and singer and influencer is wrapping up her positively successful Eras Tour in Vancouver. We have benefited from her sustained positive injection into our lives, which are generally dominated by negative thoughts, events and people.

I have become boringly fatigued by the thinking of so many people here in Niagara. So much of what we hear at the ValuMart (I know, I know, The Independent) and at Sweets 'n

Swirls at the Community Centre, has a negative vibe.

Letters to the Editor of The Lake Report are mostly written by complainers and know-it-alls. Many of these negative, self professed high brow whiners like to intellectualize, after they tell us how much knowledge they possess.

And how about the sad drone cheating scandal that resulted in our Canadian Women's Soccer team punished so severely at the recent Paris Olympic Games? Coaching careers ended, and many players' hearts broken after they got caught flying drones over the New Zealand team practice. Only 5 km. from a French national airport.

Not only were our soccer champions breaking federal laws, but they were stupid.

Last week, a national team player whined, "I just hope people don't think we were cheaters." Guess what. They were cheaters!

Rambling deftly back now



How the times change. A ticket to see the Beatles was just \$5.50 in 1965. Now Taylor Swift tickets are in the thousands.

to the attitude around Taylor Swift. I took the GO (yes, Government of Ontario) Bus from St. Catharines Fairview Mall to the Burlington Fairview GO station, and then the GO Train to Toronto's Union Station. Seamless connections, and the price is so right. Especially for Seniors.

A similar attitude, in most ways, to my annual Go Train experience in late July. My buddy Larry and I immerse ourselves into Caribana on the Toronto waterfront. Thousands of Canadians, all excited, all proud, all enthusiastic, polite and respectful. Almost all female, almost all black,

and all loving Canada's biggest Caribbean celebration. And the sexy ladies do their best to include two old white guys.

At the Loose Moose Bar on Front Street, founded in 1989, with NOTL connections, near the Rogers Centre, a single Mom who works in the Custodial D Department of Brock University, was quaffing a large and delicious mug of Oast House Barnraiser beer. Because she works at Brock, her son has had four years tuition covered, and he will get his Psychology degree next Spring. She has it figured out.

Her life is good, and she said, "I missed all the concerts when I was younger, because I couldn't afford the ten or twenty dollar tickets. I paid way too much for this Taylor ticket, but she has been a huge part of my life, and I wasn't going to miss her tonight."

Everyone was relaxed, gracious, polite, courteous

and more. Unlike some sporting events, and other big name concerts, there was no threatening bad behaviour, no over drinking, no drugs, and no gratuitous profanity.

Unlike the sea of crankiness that we seem to live in, Swifties have the best attitudes.

About five hundred of us, all ticketless, ticketless in Toronto, hoping against hope, outside Gate 3 of the Rogers Centre, ever positive in the chilly evening. Ten minutes before the eight o'clock start, we chanted "Open the door. Open the door." Loudly and good naturedly. The well trained and polite security guards didn't open the door. The Toronto Police mounted unit had wrapped very large Eras Tour friendship bracelets around the necks of their horses. Bewdy, eh?

And my daughter gave me a friendship bracelet. The beads read, "Enchanted."

Eunice Brzezicki



Eunice Grace Brzezicki (née Campbell), peacefully on St. Andrew’s Day, Nov. 30, 2024, in her 100th year. She outlived her first-born, Michael (d. 1953) and is survived by sons Colin (Diane) and Paul (Gayle), and grandchildren Catherine, Gordon, David, and Evan. Born in Pitlochry, Scotland, she married Stefan Brzezicki (deceased 1996) and emigrated with her family to Canada in 1950. She worked for Bell Telephone (later, Bell Canada) until retirement in 1989. She was a devoted mother and a loyal employee. Her sense of humour was akin to Yogi Berra’s in that it was often unintentional.

“I wish you would speak legibly.”

“There’s nothing wrong with my memory. I just can’t think of his name.”

“On the return flight I was talking with a woman called Emily, and we exchanged names.”

Mum enjoyed travel, mostly in the US and her beloved Scotland. At home she was a keen and tireless gardener. She loved reading, theatre, cinema and music ranging from opera to country. In lieu of flowers, you may make a donation to a charity of your choice. Online condolences may be shared on Eunice’s tribute page at Essential-sNiagara.com

May the wind always be at your back, the sun shine warmly upon your face, the rain fall softly on your fields, and your spirit rest eternally.



Joyce Connolly



Joyce Violet Connolly (Clement) — Dec. 6, 1931 - Nov. 23, 2024

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Joyce Connolly, a beloved wife and soul mate of the late Norm Connolly (1926-2011). Loving Mother to Sharon (Dave) and Gary (Leslie). Much loved Nan to Chris (Julia), Trevor (Cheryl), Kelly (Darren), Oliver (Erin), Lara (Geoff) and Great-Nan to Logan, Zach, Adelyn, Cam, Reagan, Amelia, Arthur and Claire. Special Aunt to Barb and lifelong friend of Jean Smith (deceased).

Joyce was born in Virgil Ontario and spent her early years on the ancestral farm along Four Mile Creek Road. In 1951 she married Norm Connolly and together raised a family in Niagara-on-the-Lake. In 1988 she and Norm moved to a home on Paudash Lake near Bancroft where they spent the next 23 very happy years. While at Paudash, Joyce renewed her love of painting and produced a significant number of folk-art pieces that now occupy space in the homes of family, friends and others. Joyce and Norm were active members of the local community around Bancroft making many new lifelong friends along the way.

Over the years, Joyce and Norm watched their family grow as grandchildren married and produced a new generation of great-grandchildren. Many happy times were spent at Paudash where family met to celebrate anniversaries, birthdays, holidays and weekends. Joyce and Norm loved it when the whole family was together. A few years after Norm’s passing in 2011, Joyce moved to Perth, Ontario and eventually to Almonte to be closer to her son Gary and his family.

We are deeply grateful to all the staff at Orchard View by the Mississippi where Joyce spent the past eight years. And, to the medical staff at the Almonte General Hospital who provided compassionate care for Joyce through her final days.

Joyce will be forever missed by three generations of family. Our world is a better place because of her.

Joyce is interred beside Norm in McGillivray Cemetery, Paudash, Ontario. Special thanks to Tim Baragar of Neuman Family Funeral Home who provided compassionate care to Norm in 2011 and Joyce in 2024.

If desired, donations may be made to The Almonte Hospital Foundation in the Town of Almonte Ontario.

Ted Van de Laar



VAN DE LAAR, Ted —

It is with great sadness that the family of Ted Van de Laar announces his peaceful passing on Monday, December 2, 2024, at Linhaven Long Term Care at the age of 90, with family by his side.

Ted was the beloved husband of the late Donna (December 8, 2009 -nee Hindle). A devoted and loving father, he will be deeply missed by his children: Katherine (Walter), Garry (Tracy), Kevin (Claudia), Colleen (Greg), and Amy (Sean). Ted was a cherished “Opa” to his grandchildren: Ryan (Sarah), Danielle (Matt), Hailey (Andrew), Emily, Matthew, Diego, Jesse, Lucas, Rhiannon, and Connor. He was also a proud “Great Opa” to Lucille and Adelaide.

Ted is fondly remembered by his sisters-in-law Mary, Willie, Mary, and Cathy, as well as by many nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends. He was predeceased by his brothers Frank, Harry, John, Bill and Peter, and his sister-in-law Margo.

Born in The Netherlands, Ted immigrated to Parry Sound, Ontario, as a young boy with his parents before settling in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He dedicated 42 years of his career to General Motors before enjoying a well-earned retirement. Ted loved spending time at his fruit farm and appreciating the simple joys of rural life alongside his pet dogs, cats and rabbits. He enjoyed long walks, scenic car rides, and lively coffee gatherings with friends. Above all, Ted treasured the time spent with his family. His kindness, warmth and love will live on in the hearts of all who knew him.

The family extends heartfelt gratitude to the nurses and staff at Linhaven for their compassionate care.

The family will receive friends at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON on Sunday, Dec. 8 from 2 to 4 and 6 to 8 p.m. Funeral mass will be celebrated at St. Vincent de Paul Church, 73 Picton St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, on Monday, Dec. 9, 2024, at 11 a.m. Rite of committal to follow in Niagara Lake-shore Cemetery. In memory of Ted, those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Alzheimer’s Society. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.



Keith Worrall



WORRALL- Donald “Keith”
March 14, 1941 – November 26, 2024

Donald “Keith” Worrall passed peacefully into heaven, surrounded by family, on November 26, 2024, forever reunited with his beloved wife, Marilyn, and his cherished daughter, Laura Campbell. The joyous reunion was undoubtedly celebrated together with a big piece of cake and a toast in honour of Laura’s heavenly 57th birthday on November 27, 2024.

Keith is survived by his devoted family: daughter Christine Goard (Jason), son Stephen Worrall (Baihua), and son-in-law Duncan Campbell (Laura). His resilience and strength will live on in his much-loved grandchildren: Jorden, Adam, Taylor, Emilie, and Ryan.

Keith was born to the late Thomas and Goldie Worrall and was raised on the family farm in Dunnville, Ontario, along with his brother Jim and sisters Donna (Hack) and Shirley (Odelli).

He spent his early years helping his family on the dairy farm, where his parents instilled the values of a disciplined and industrious work ethic – values he carried with him throughout his life.

Despite all his responsibilities, Keith found time to pursue his first passion: hockey.

He would often take the long walk, hockey bag over his shoulder, from the family farm to practices and games. If he was lucky enough, he would catch a lift from the local milkman on his way into town. His efforts paid off when he helped his team win the PeeWee Championship in the Minor Hockey League. He always felt proud that his parents could take a break from the farm to watch a game or two.

Keith later played Junior A for the St. Catharines Teepees and Senior A for the Galt Terriers and Guelph Regals into his mid- twenties. During this time, Keith attended the University of Guelph, where he earned his University Diploma from the Ontario Agricultural College on May 20, 1964.

After graduating, he took a summer job at Thompson Products, where he met his soon-to-be wife, Marilyn. He would often sneak away to visit Marilyn on his lunch hour and that’s where they quickly struck up an unbreakable bond. Keith and Marilyn dated for 2 years and married in 1966. Together, they started Parkway Farms and raised their three children in the community of Niagara-on-the-Lake, while Keith continued to work in sales at Robin Hood Feeds.

Later in life, Keith’s greatest passion was spending time with his extended family, especially his grandchildren, and when time allowed, he enjoyed travelling with Marilyn and family. He always looked forward to a round of golf with friends and family, his yearly fishing trips with the boys, and a game of cribbage around the kitchen table.

He will be remembered for his smile that would light up a room and his effervescent spirit that made everyone feel so special and full of joy. He had a welcoming wave and a hearty laugh; anyone was always welcome to join him for a lively conversation on his front porch.

The family would like to extend their deepest gratitude to his neighbours and loving friends who were always there to lend a helping hand. A special thank you to Dr. Salib and the caregivers who made his final days so comfortable: Dr. Manser, nurses Colleen O’Gorman and Helen Ferley, and his personal care workers, with special thanks to Suneela.

The family will receive friends at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, on Friday, Dec. 20, 2024, from 6 to 8 p.m. A service to celebrate the life of Keith will be held at St. Mark’s Anglican Church, 41 Byron St., Niagara-on-the-Lake on Saturday, Dec. 21, 2024, at 11 a.m. Burial to take place privately in the springtime in the church cemetery. In his memory, donations can be made to The Walker Family Cancer Centre, St. Catharines General Hospital, or a blood donation can be made to the Canadian Blood Services.

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



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