

## Clayfield Hyatt hotel planned for the Village

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A new hotel located at 111 Garrison Village Dr. will be part of the Hyatt Hotel family's line of boutique hotels.

Set to open in spring 2026, the Clayfield will feature 60 rooms and 42 vacation rental apartments in the buildings behind the hotel, said Adam Hawley, vice president of Traditional Neighbourhood Developments.

"We're very excited to be partnering with Hyatt and for all the benefits and expertise that they bring," he told The Lake Report, which learned of the Hyatt-Village partnership — previously kept tight-lipped —

after receiving an email tip from a resident.

This group of hotels, called the Unbound Collection, features a handful of "very unique boutique



Continued on Page 2 Construction is ongoing in the Village. FILE



## Year in Review: Development pressures remain NOTL's biggest issue

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

Growing pains dominated the news in Niagara-on-the-Lake throughout 2024. Again.

From longstanding disputes over plans for the iconic Rand Estate, to lowrise condominium projects, a hotel on the beloved old Parliament Oak school property, mammoth highrises in Glendale and much more, development proposals were the number one issue facing the town in 2024.

And as the new year begins, there is no easing of growth pressures on the horizon.

For that reason, we consider community change and development as the biggest issue facing NOTL now and in the future.

In contrast, many NOTLers have made it clear they don't want rampant development to alter the community they call home. Council — and the province's notori-

Continued on Page 3

# Top NOTL newsmakers

People who helped shape the conversation in 2024



Clockwise from top left: The late Peter Earle, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, fired librarian Cathy Simpson and suspended NOTL Catholic school board trustee Natalia Benoit were some of the top newsmakers of 2024.

Kevin MacLean | The Lake Report

When it comes to generating headlines, Niagara-on-the-Lake is far from the sleepy, retirement community many view it as.

NOTL produces a huge amount of news, week in and

week out — and we have chosen to highlight some of the top stories and newsmakers of 2024.

Here are just a few of the major newsmakers of the past year.

In any small Canadian town, the elected councillors and may-

or tend to be among the biggest newsmakers in any given year.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is no different and we don't just have a mayor, we have a lord mayor.

And love him — or not — as the leader of town council, Lord

Mayor **Gary Zalepa** stands out as one of the top newsmakers of 2024 in NOTL.

His influence and oversight of council and how it deals with is-

Continued on Page 4



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# Boutique hotel slated to open in 2026

*Continued from Front Page*

hotels around the world that are part of the Hyatt family,” Hawley said.

The hotel will not be owned by Hyatt but instead will function as a franchise.

“We are the owners and developers of it — it’s not going to be owned by Hyatt or anybody else,” Hawley said.

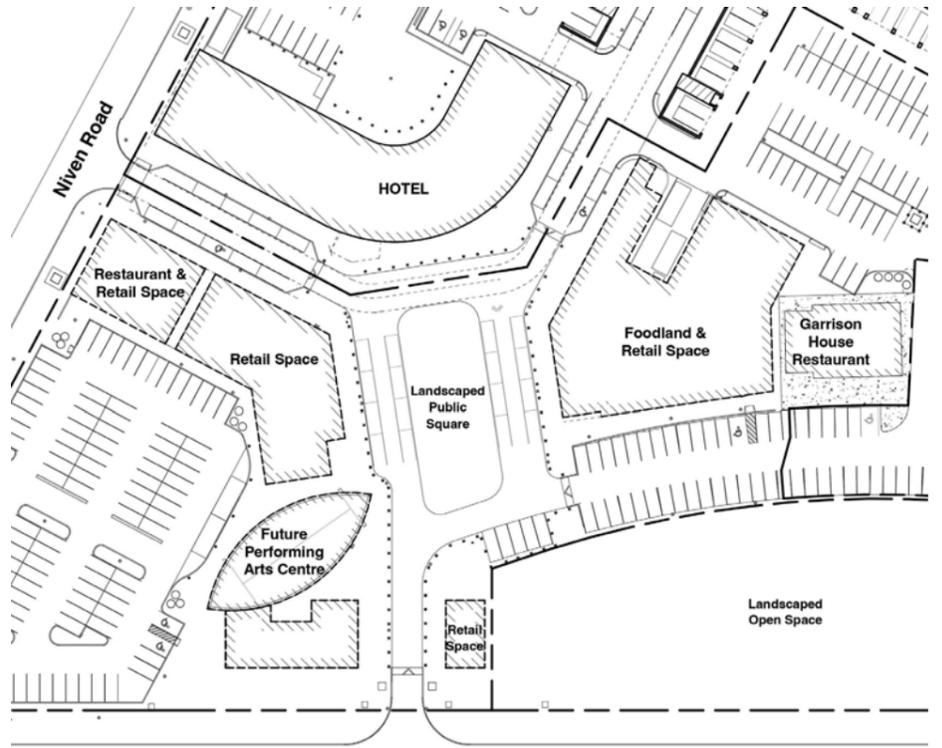
All 102 rooms at the Clayfield will be booked through the hotel, he said. The 42 vacation apartments will be larger than the hotel rooms and feature a kitchenette.

The hotel’s unique name was chosen to reflect its place in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

“The name Clayfield was inspired by the rich soils that are so integral to the town’s proud agricultural heritage and the culture of creativity that is evident throughout life in Niagara,” Hawley said in an email.

The hotel, which will also feature a restaurant, will sit beside the up-and-coming Foodland grocery store at the Village Centre, next to the Garrison House.

Set to open late next year,



A site plan for the Village shows plans for a hotel, grocery store and arts centre. The hotel will be called the Clayfield and is in Hyatt’s line of boutique hotels. SUPPLIED

the Foodland store is currently under construction at the site.

Site plans for the grocery store and the hotel, which include up to 60 rooms and several small vacation apartments, were approved in September 2022, with

documents from the town of NOTL showing a total of 16 buildings of various sizes, a central plaza and parking for 388 cars.

The hotel itself was initially proposed at a public meeting back in 2018.

The hotel lands had been

zoned for commercial development since the Village subdivision was approved more than 25 years ago.

Hawley said more information on the hotel’s development is to be released gradually.

[juliasacco@niagaranow.com](mailto:juliasacco@niagaranow.com)

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## Floods, speeds cams and reductions

Continued from Front Page

### YEAR IN REVIEW

ous Ontario Land Tribunal — made headlines over the past 12 months as they approved several housing projects that neighbours and community groups found objectionable

NOTL's leaders — and the decisions they made — were closely scrutinized (and often criticized) by a very involved and engaged electorate.

This is not a new debate in town. It's flourished here for decades. But with loud public protests, numerous anti-development screeds on social media and many more development decisions facing councillors in the second half their four-year term, vigorous debates will continue in 2025.

Those debates and decisions will determine what NOTL will look like in the decades to come.

We anticipate that many people will not like the result.

Meanwhile, let's take a look through the pages of The Lake Report in 2024 and how we got to this point.

#### JANUARY

**Jan. 4 edition:** Town council emerges from a closed-door meeting in mid-December to outline its plans to allow developer Solmar to build a new entrance to its **Rand Estate development** — via the Upper Canada Heritage Trail. It's a controversial and short-lived proposition that meets huge public opposition and is rescinded on Jan. 12

After nearly three decades in business, **Customs House Cigars** closes its doors and owner Ian Wilson retires.

The annual **Tractor Parade**, the COVID-era brainchild of Dorothy Soo-Wiens and her husband Erwin, rakes in more than \$100,000 in donations for cancer research.

**Jan. 11:** In Niagara Region, **amalgamation** is not the answer to the area's political concerns, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says.

Niagara Region's **speed camera** near Crossroads Public School in Virgill is now operational — and speeders will soon start receiving tickets in the mail.

Garrison House chef David Watt teams up with colleagues to produce "**Feast of Friends**," a new cookbook featuring 30 recipes from 30 chefs who have had an influence on Watt.



Top: Residents of Chautauqua, after three years of lobbying, succeed in having the speed limit on the narrow streets lowered to 30 km/h. Bottom: A speed camera on Niagara Stone Road in front of Crossroads Public School causes mixed reactions from drivers, many of whom call it a cash grab. It results in lots of tickets for speeders.

The **NOTL Museum** has wayyy more artifacts than it has space. The latest in a series of stories looks at the museum's expansion needs and \$10-million fundraising plans.

**Jan. 18:** After three years of concerted lobbying by residents, council votes to reduce the speed limit to 30 km/h on the narrow streets and lane-ways of NOTL's **Chautauqua neighbourhood**.

The **polar vortex** — remember that? — sweeps in and sends Niagara temperatures plunging.

And icewine growers who were anxiously awaiting the chance to harvest the year's grapes are able to chill out and bring in the crop.

**Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa**, who lives not far from the Rand Estate, again declared a conflict of interest during debate on giving Solmar access via the heritage trail. He says he was following legal advice.

St. Davids residents remain deeply concerned about plans for the **Tawny Ridge development**, despite some revisions.

They worry about sewage capacity and flooding after rainstorms.

**Jan. 25:** NOTL Catholic school trustee **Natalia Benoit** is suspended for five months for violating the board's code of conduct by comparing the Pride flag to the Nazi flag.

Nearly 600 residents responded to questions about their **future housing needs** and now independent researchers Steve Ferley and Michael Ennamorato and a team from Niagara College are analyzing the data to determine what the town's seniors say is most important to them.

Council rejects the recommendations of its own planning staff and refuses to approve an unpopular **King Street condo** project proposed by Bice Builders.

Thanks to a \$15-million donation, Niagara Health renames the St. Catharines hospital the **Marotta Family Hospital**.

#### FEBRUARY

**Feb. 1:** The annual **icewine festival** suitably begins with frigid, sub-zero temperatures but experiences

heavy rains during a soggy second week of festivities.

And that excessive rain leads to **flooding all over town** as the uncharacteristic precipitation fills ditches, vineyards and parks.

The bad news continues for suspended NOTL Catholic school trustee **Natalia Benoit** as a financial audit shows she did not properly report her 2022 election expenditures.

Thorold native **Max Murphy** is hired as the new pro at the NOTL Golf Club. By late summer, though, he leaves the club and no replacement is announced.

**Feb. 8:** As he languishes in a Chinese jail, pro-democracy activist **Jimmy Lai**, owner of Vintage Hotels in NOTL, is nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The community rallies to help **Crossroads Public School** principal Kate Fish and her family after a pre-Christmas fire destroys their Niagara Falls home.

The town approves a **\$10.2-million capital budget** for 2024. Two major projects include reconstruction of Concession 6, between Warner and York roads, and a watermain replacement on Hunter Road.

Exclusive drone photos give readers a birds-eye view of the construction of a **massive stone breakwall** to protect the Lake Ontario shoreline from erosion. It's the latest step in a multi-million dollar Parks Canada project.

**Feb. 15:** Town councillors admit they **messed up** and inadvertently voted to reject a project that had already been approved. They reversed course and the result is the entire Tawny Ridge development — which St. Davids residents campaigned vehemently against — now has the green light.

The **Lake Report** is again honoured by the Ontario Community Newspapers Association, nominated for 27 awards, the most of any publication in the province. Again.

With a major **solar eclipse** happening in April, the town is preparing for the possible influx of a large number of visitors.

The **NOTL Local**, once a locally owned and operated entity, now controlled by online publisher Village Media Inc., announces plans to end its print publication on Feb. 28. Its demise follows the suspension of Metroland's Niagara This Week print edition a few



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# Lord mayor, librarian, boxer among **top newsmakers** of 2024

*Continued from Front Page*

sues appears to have led to a more hands-on, professional and practical approach to issues.

Many might argue this has amounted to a more pro-development approach.

Former chief librarian **Cathy Simpson** was also a top newsmaker.

Her career as CEO of the NOTL Public Library abruptly ended last spring after she wrote an opinion piece for The Lake Report headlined, "Censorship and what we are allowed to read."

After a complaint from letter writer Matthew French, the library board demanded Simpson formally renounce the piece, which ironically was published during Freedom to Read Week.

She refused and was fired, sparking much debate about the role of libraries and the concept of library neutrality.

**Peter Earle's** story is both sad and uplifting. The longtime NOTL store owner told The Lake Report about how his battle with ALS had led him to decide to end his life on his own terms.



St. Davids boxer Mackenzie Wright, left, and Ottawa 67's Kaleb Dietsch are two of NOTL's sports newsmakers.



In an emotional and frank story published on May 1, he spoke about choosing to have a medically assisted death on June 4.

NOTL Catholic school trustee **Natalia Benoit** became a major newsmaker, for all the wrong reasons.

The unrepentant Benoit was suspended for five months last January for violating the board's code of conduct by comparing the Pride flag to the Nazi flag.

As well, a financial audit showed she did not properly report her 2022 election expenditures.

As COVID wreaked havoc on society, NOTL's **Dorothy Soo-Wiens** came up with a novel idea in 2021: an annual pre-Christmas Tractor Parade to celebrate the farming community.

It's a natural fit for NOTL and almost makes us wonder why no one ever thought of it before.

The concept caught on and has grown in size and popularity in the years since. It's just one example of the tireless community work that Soo-Wiens is well-known for.

After vandals twice tar-

geted her Pride flags, Virgil's **Sheri Durksen** fought back against intolerance and spoke out. She would not be deterred and instead doubled down by putting up even more Pride flags.

Red Roof Retreat's **Steffanie Bjorgan** was honoured by the Governor General as she received the Meritorious Service Award.

## SPORTS

Whether it's pickleball, tennis, hockey, lacrosse, golf, soccer or water sports, NOTL remains a big sports town.

This summer two local lacrosse teams, the **U9**

and **U13 Niagara Thunderhawks**, showed the power of never giving up.

They battled back from deficits to capture their zone championships in an action-packed tourney played at home in Virgil.

Two young NOTL golfers (and St. Davids Public School classmates), **Kaige Zhu**, 11, and **Eli Perng**, 12, finished first and second in the Notah Begay Junior Canadian Golf Championships in Quebec.

Then at the U.S. final in Louisiana in November, Zhu, who is also a talented tennis player, ties

for ninth. Perng is also a gifted hockey player and continues to pursue his sporting passions.

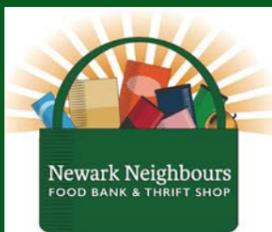
**Kennedy Bartel** and rowing partner **Isabella Issig** won gold in the pairs under-17 2,000-metre race at the prestigious Royal Canadian Henley Regatta.

St. Davids amateur boxer **Mackenzie Wright** travelled the world representing Canada in her bid to earn a trip to the 2024 Paris Olympics. She fell just short of that goal but did herself and the country proud with her gutsy performances.

The **NOTL Wolves U18 rep hockey team** beat the Fort Erie Meteors and qualified for the provincial championship tournament in Kingston.

The team, coached by **Devon Neudorf**, had a stellar season and wrapped it up with a 1-2 record in the round-robin in Kingston.

NOTL minor hockey grad **Kaleb Dietsch** overcame surgery for a shoulder injury and became a regular on the blue line of the Ottawa 67's of the Ontario Hockey League.



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# An eclipse and celebrating women

Continued from Page 3

months earlier.

**Feb. 22:** NOTL chief librarian **Cathy Simpson** writes an opinion piece for The Lake Report headlined, “Censorship and what we are allowed to read.” The resulting controversy ends her career.

Council reverses town staff decisions preventing two residents from **cutting down trees** on their properties, taking issue with the town’s approach to tree preservation.

**Foot patrols** bring a “nostalgic aspect” back to policing in NOTL as constables Nicolas Hawrylyshyn and Michael Malachowsky walk the beat in downtown NOTL every week.

Minimal snowfall and balmy winter temperatures are indicators of major **climate change** — and it could mean big problems for NOTL in the future, columnist Kyra Simone warns.

With the departure of chief administrator **Marnie Cluckie**, the town forms a committee to find a permanent replacement for her. Almost a year later, no one has been hired.

**Feb. 29:** A letter from reader Matthew French calls out **chief librarian** Cathy Simpson’s opinion piece for promoting “right-wing talking points.”

**Laurie Harley**, one of the founders and leaders of NOTL’s innovative Ambassadors program, is named the town’s Citizen of the Year.

**Ontario Grape Growers** chief executive Debbie Zimmerman and famed NOTL vintner Donald Ziraldo say the country needs a national version of the Vintners Quality Alliance of Ontario — dedicated to the promotion of wines from every appellation in Canada.

After a sometimes heated debate, council says it won’t allow any more **Queen Street patios**. For now.

## MARCH

**March 7:** As the controversy over chief librarian Cathy Simpson quietly brews behind closed doors, The Lake Report publishes its second annual salute to **International Women’s Day** with a special sec-



The Lake Report celebrates NOTL women with a special edition chock full of stories about some of the movers and shakers in our town. For a second year in a row, a massive group of women gathers for a photo. Left: All the hype for the total solar eclipse gets eclipsed by clouds that cause poor visibility of the astral event.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

tion containing stories and photos.

In the not-too-distant future, with up to 20,000 people ultimately calling the Glendale community home, many of them living in **highrise towers** beside the QEW, those people could control NOTL’s destiny, columnist Brian Marshall warns.

The snowbells are in bloom, tulips are nudging through soil and after a wacky winter weather-wise, **record-setting temperatures** across Ontario prompts golfers to hit the links in droves. In early March. The Queenston and St. Davids golf courses are packed.

**March 14:** After weeks of deliberation and debate, council cuts a **proposed tax hike** of 9.88 per cent to 6.75 per cent.

While charitable donations pushed revenue to a record \$36.7 million, the **Shaw Festival** continues to suffer from a COVID hangover and loses \$5.7 million in 2023.

St. Davids boxer **Mackenzie Wright** falls a single point short in her latest attempt to qualify for the

2024 Paris Olympic Games. The bout in Italy means she’ll have one more chance to qualify for the Games, via a tournament in the Philippines in May.

An army of volunteers helps make sure the NOTL Hockey Association’s annual **March Break Classic** tourney is a resounding success for participants and fans. And the hometown U9 Wolves local league team performs well and wins silver after a loss to a powerhouse team from Sault Ste. Marie.

**March 21:** After being suspended by the library board on March 8, chief librarian **Cathy Simpson is fired** over the content of an opinion piece published in The Lake Report. The Feb. 22 opinion piece, “Censorship and what we are allowed to read,” focused on Freedom to Read Week, but drew strong criticism from a few in the community over its promotion of some of the principles espoused by the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism.

With Niagara Region’s new **speed camera** operating outside Crossroads Public School, we asked readers

if they’ve received any speeding tickets. Dozens of readers respond and they are none too happy about the expensive surprises that have arrived by mail.

A **160-home development** in Virgil will mean the loss of about 800 trees — and area residents are upset at the prospect.

**March 28:** The long wait for a **walk-in clinic** for patients in NOTL who don’t have a family doctor is almost over. The Niagara North Family Health Team says a new nurse practitioner will start seeing patients in April.

The Lake Report is flooded with letters and residents are speaking out, unhappy that the **NOTL Public Library board** fired chief librarian Cathy Simpson over an opinion column censorship.

NOTL’s **Kaleb Dietsch** is making an impression with the Ottawa 67’s of the OHL and now he’s been called up to big club to practice and work out daily. The move pays off as in the 2024-25 season, Dietsch has been a full-time regular on the

Continued on Page 6

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# Spring brings Virgil Stampede and development proposals

Continued from Page 5

Ottawa blueline.

## APRIL

**April 4:** The average NOTL home price has topped \$1 million, according to the Niagara Association of Realtors.

Hundreds of kids storm the fields near the NOTL Community Centre for the annual **Bunny Trail** and egg hunt.

The town will receive about \$3.5 million from the sale of the **Niagara Regional Broadband Network** to a subsidiary of Cogeco Communications. NOTL, through Energy Services Niagara, held a minority stake — 25 per cent — in the internet, telephone and TV provider since it was formed in 2004 to fill the region's need for broadband services.

NOTL plans ahead for the April 8 **solar eclipse**, as fans warily watch weather forecasts, which are not positive.

**April 11:** The eclipse was eclipsed by the weather. It got dark for a few minutes in the middle of the day and the streetlights turned on briefly, but cloudy skies ruined the much-anticipated total solar eclipse that thousands of people hoped for.

The planned twinning of the **Garden City Skyway** takes a big step forward as the province opens bids for the project.

The long-awaited Ontario Land Tribunal hearing into the development proposed for the **Rand Estate** begins.

Oops. After Chatauqua residents lobbied for three years to lower area speed limits, the town installed new 30 km/h signs. However, several were put up on the **wrong streets**. The town corrected the problem after The Lake Report asked about it.

**April 18:** After two years as CEO of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake, **Minerva Ward** abruptly leaves her post. No explanation is offered and board chair Andrew Niven takes over the helm until an interim CEO can be hired.

**Stone fruit farmers** in NOTL are warily watching the weather forecasts as low overnight temperatures threaten the early spring blossoms.

The **Rand Estate** has important cultural heritage attributes, but just what the attributes are is a subject of debate, a former senior NOTL town planner tells the Ontario Land Tribunal. One of the bones of



Controversial developments are discussed, including the Parliament Oak hotel (left) and White Oaks highrise expansion.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

contention, Leah Wallace says, is how much of the old Dunington-Grubb landscape design remains on the property.

**April 25:** Thanks to a \$1-million donation from the Goettler Family Foundation, the Niagara Foundation has obtained full ownership of the **Wilderness property** on King Street in NOTL. The Wilderness, “as it has been known for more than 100 years,” is about five acres and “has significant historic, cultural, environmental and botanical importance within the Niagara region,” the foundation says.

Residents objecting to the firing of chief librarian **Cathy Simpson** obtain more than 600 signatures on a petition calling for the library “to follow its own policies for protecting library neutrality and viewpoint diversity.”

NOTL marathoner **Margot Devlin** conquered the London Marathon for the fifth time. Registered in the age 65 to 69 category, she bettered her time from last year's rain-soaked race by more than 22 minutes, with a time of 6:45.14. Next up is her 11th New York City Marathon in November.

## MAY

**May 2:** Well-known NOTL retailer **Peter Earle** is preparing to close up shop — and end his life. After years of struggling with ALS, has decided he will have a medically assisted death on June 4 and in an interview he talks about his decision.

The Ontario Land Tribunal has approved a **controversial condo** planned at the end of King Street. The 17-unit, three-storey project originally proposed by Josh Bice of Butler's Garden Development Inc., has been greenlit after the owner appealed the project for a non-decision by council in

late October 2023.

Plans for a cross-lake **hovercraft service** from Niagara are still afloat, promoter Chris Morgan of NOTL says. He promises more details soon, but months later we're still waiting on a firm date for launch.

**May 9:** **Angry residents** stormed out of a planning meeting after being told they could not speak during the public delegations portion. Following three public presentations, residents chimed in from the back of the room asking when they would have the chance to speak.

**NOTL councillors** have been among the lowest paid in Niagara Region, with an annual salary of \$16,208. Coun. Wendy Cheropita convinced her colleagues to boost their pay to \$20,000, which will cost the town about \$30,000 a year.

It's time to take stalk — it's **asparagus season** and NOTL's Thwaites Farms is ready for lovers of the delicious green stalks

The NOTL branch of the Royal Canadian Legion is planning ceremonies to mark the 80th anniversary of **D-Day on June 6**.

Members of a community group that want the town's integrity commissioner to investigate the firing of **NOTL's chief librarian** are refused permission to speak to council. A town official tells them the subject doesn't meet the rules and policies for public delegations.

**May 16:** The **Virgil Stampede** is back for another year, culminating with Monday's Victoria Day fireworks show.

Some residents say amendments planned for a **condo development** near Line 1 Road go too far. The developer wants to redesignate the land as medium-density residential instead of low-density residential to

build 50 townhouses.

If you're one of many visitors flocking from near and far to see what Niagara-on-the-Lake's all about, the friendly folks patrolling Queen Street in their blue vests are here to help. The **NOTL Ambassadors** program has returned for another season.

**May 23:** While Saturday's crowds at the **Virgil Stampede** were smaller than expected, over the weekend and holiday Monday the venue was packed and attendance records might have been broken, organizers said.

An Ontario Land Tribunal hearing on developer Solmar's plans for the **Rand Estate** goes on hiatus until late summer, as issues of road access, landscape features and sewage capacity are debated.

After the town refuses to have its **integrity commissioner** investigate the firing of chief librarian Cathy Simpson, a group of residents says they will seek their own integrity investigation.

“The Doc,” as he was known to many, **Dr. Ranjit Ahluwalia**, a family physician and fixture in NOTL for a half-century, dies at age 95.

**May 30:** Councillors pass a controversial bylaw to make way for the creation of developer **Rainer Hummel's** proposed 81-room hotel at 228 Queen St. in Old Town.

Lifelong NOTL resident **Dave Van de Laar**, The Lake Report's talented news photographer, is named Photographer of the Year by the Ontario Community Newspapers Association. In all, the newspaper and its niagaranow.com website earn 27 awards in the association's annual competition.

**Queenston** attracts a larger number of vehicles, cyclists and hikers with its

scenic routes and attractions — and the village's residents association wants the town to lower speed limits in the community, citing safety concerns.

The U13 **Niagara Thunderhawks** are crowned champions at the annual Mike Jones Memorial Lacrosse Tournament in Virgil after a 7-3 come-from-behind win over the Pelham Raiders.

## JUNE

**June 6:** New **crosswalk lights** on Niagara Stone Road near the NOTL Community Centre and library are a hazard because many drivers don't see them and are not stopping for pedestrians, some residents say. Aquatic sports run in the family for NOTL sisters **Peyton and Georgia Leigh**, who are making a splash on the national swim scene. Just 16 and 13 respectively, they're setting records and have their eyes set on representing Canada internationally.

A single-vehicle crash that took the life of another person on a notorious section of **Lakeshore Road** sparks a flurry of mixed emotions from local residents who can agree on at least one thing: the stretch of road is a killer. Despite opposition from many residents, The Lake Report calls on the region to remove a tree along the stretch of road that has claimed several lives.

**June 13:** Councillors reach a stalemate regarding **White Oaks Resort and Spa's** proposal to increase building heights in Glendale for a major new residential development. Both White Oaks' request for four new towers and a proposal from one councillor to reduce the buildings' heights were rejected at the committee of the whole planning meeting.

Despite pleas from residents opposed to it, NOTL's

planning committee approves Two Sister Resorts Corp.'s controversial plan to build a 129-room hotel on the site of the old **Parliament Oak school**. The project will include a restaurant and patio, spa and personal services, banquet/conference facilities and retail stores. Full council approval is still needed, however.

“**My Fair Lady**” makes a triumphant return to the Shaw Festival stage, earning kudos from theatregoers and a stellar four-star review from The Lake Report's critic, Penny-Lynn Cookson.

**June 20:** Emotions are mixed as the notorious **Lakeshore Road tree** at the site of two deadly car crashes is taken down. A tree removal service cut down the mature maple on the stretch of road across from the Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery.

Where does the NOTL housing market go from here? Longtime journalist, commentator and former federal cabinet minister **Garth Turner** joins The Lake Report as a columnist.

**Bikes for Farmworkers** needs more bikes! With a big increase in bike sales over this time last year, and a steady stream of needy customers still coming through the doors weekly, the volunteer agency needs more two-wheelers.

Ken Schander, Laurie Harley and Rose Campbell are all honoured with the prestigious **Paul Harris Award** by the Rotary Club of NOTL.

**June 27:** A formal 5-4 vote approves plans for the 129-room **Parliament Oak hotel** on King Street. And as summer unfolds, the venerable old school will be knocked down to make way for developer Benny Marotta's latest project.

An **informal online poll** conducted by The Lake Report finds the approval ratings for the mayor and many councillors is less than 20 per cent.

Chief librarian **Cathy Simpson** will not be returning to the NOTL Public Library, but some residents say their battle for library neutrality — the right of patrons to access books that express multiple, even offensive viewpoints — is far from over.

As always, NOTL's unofficial kickoff to summer, the annual **Strawberry Festival**, is huge and tasty hit.

**NEXT WEEK:** Part two of the Year in Review, from July through December.

# 15-year-old charged in string of break-ins

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A 15-year-old boy from St. Catharines has been charged with several counts of mischief in connection with a string of car break-ins that took place in Niagara-on-the-Lake over the holidays.

Fifteen total incidents of vehicle break-ins were reported in NOTL between Dec. 21 and 31, Niagara Regional Police said in a statement.

Police later confirmed the suspect had already been arrested for failing to comply with his release order and had been in custody since Dec. 31.

The youth was originally arrested on Dec. 6 and held for a bail hearing. On Dec. 7, he was released from custody with conditions. Const. Phil Gavin told The Lake Report.

“Those charges included theft of a motor vehicle (two counts), possession

of property obtained by crime, dangerous operation of motor vehicle, flight from police and mischief,” Gavin said in an email.

Then, on Jan. 2, the suspect was hit with additional charges: 25 counts of mischief under \$5,000, two counts of using an unauthorized credit card, possession of a stolen vehicle and failure to comply with his release order.

As of Tuesday morning, he remained in custody.

He was charged with incidents in Old Town, Chautauqua, Niagara on the Green and Niagara Stone Road near Creek Road, Gavin said.

The investigation remains ongoing with initial damage estimates at more than \$40,000, police said.

John Fuller’s car was one of a reported 12 broken into in the early hours of New Year’s Day, around 3 a.m.

The window of his car, parked outside his home

on Dorchester Street, was smashed in, but nothing was stolen.

“Apparently his bail lapsed, so the cop said he was just acting out between the hours of midnight and 3,” Fuller told The Lake Report.

“He just smashed things and didn’t really care about money,” he said.

The person who broke Fuller’s window drove around in a stolen black Ford F150, but Fuller says there are other instances of robberies and break-ins in NOTL being done by another group.

Home security videos posted by victims to the Facebook group NOTL 4 All show multiple people breaking into or damaging cars in several neighbourhoods.

The investigation remains open and ongoing to identify any additional suspects, Gavin said.

Any members of the public who have photos or videos with more than

one suspect and want to pass these images and recordings along to the investigating detectives can call 905-688-4111, option 3, extension 1007518, he said.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said the best thing NOTLers can do for the time being is be vigilant with their private property.

The town is working closely with police to ensure information is shared with the public appropriately, Zalepa said.

Gavin said, alongside the officers who regularly patrol NOTL in their vehicles, there are now detectives and members of the street crime unit working in town, plus two additional officers from Niagara Regional Police’s youth engagement and community outreach team.

Anyone with information can contact Crime Stoppers of Niagara online or by calling 1-800-222-8477.

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## Lord mayor to host series of **open houses**

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

In the interest of getting more face-to-face time with the people who populate the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa is set to host a series of public meetings across the municipality this winter.

Starting Thursday, Zalepa will be hosting open houses in each of NOTL's five villages.

The "village visits" will feature a brief presentation

from the municipality and time for residents to connect with council members and town staff.

"These village visits are an important part of how we can stay connected as a community," Zalepa said in a media release.

The open houses are scheduled in St. Davids on Jan. 9, Glendale on Jan. 16, Virgil on Feb. 3, Old Town on Feb. 18 and Queenston on Feb. 20. Each will take place from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

The visits will provide a forum for residents to

discuss key town initiatives, Zalepa said.

Zalepa told The Lake Report the town has been wanting to host these village visits since the beginning of last year to give residents a better opportunity to share input and ask questions.

"Especially things that council has on the plate for this year such as the official plan, hospital renewal and heritage expansions plans."

Zalepa said much of the information residents wish to see about these municipal endeavours is available on

the town's website, [notl.com](http://notl.com), but meeting in-person offers a place to have an informed conversation.

"Face-to-face is so much better than anything else. I find some things could be interpreted online in a way that is not as effective, so this is a good way to do that," he said.

For more information, including the venues for these meetings, visit [notl.com/recreation-community/community-news/news-release-lord-mayor-zalepa-hosts-village-visits](http://notl.com/recreation-community/community-news/news-release-lord-mayor-zalepa-hosts-village-visits).

## **Icewine Village** returns to NOTL this month

Staff  
The Lake Report

If you're looking to inject a little sweetness into the bitter winter cold of January, the upcoming icewine village might be the place for you.

Niagara-on-the-Lake's annual Icewine Festival will return for its 30th year, transforming Queen Street into a winter wonderland on Jan. 18 and 19 and then again on Jan. 25 and 26.

During a presentation to council in December, festival committee member Dorian Anderson said the 2025 festival aims to bring in 10,000 visitors to NOTL — 4,000 more than last year.

The cozy winter village will feature the usual wine and food vendors, coupled with bonfires and enclosed snow globes available for warming up.

Entrance into the icewine village is free, so guests can try some of Niagara's world-

renowned icewine — made from frozen grapes harvested annually from NOTL's many wineries during January — paired with signature dishes, warm up by fire pits and watch live ice carvings without purchasing a ticket.

For a more elevated experience, VIP passes are available online at the Icewine Festival website, along with VIP snow globe rentals.

The VIP experience includes access to the exclusive lodge, seating in a

snow globe, complimentary snacks and a premium icewine and cheese tasting.

The festival itself will feature 37 wineries from across the region, with opportunities to sample icewines from them all, whether it be at the icewine village, through the discovery pass or the Cool As Ice Gala on Saturday, Jan. 18 at the Niagara Parks Power Station.

For a detailed schedule, visit [niagarawinefestival.com/icewine-series-events](http://niagarawinefestival.com/icewine-series-events).

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Ontario 

# Willow Cakes & Pastries to **close storefront**

Increasing costs push bakery to switch to online business model

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Those looking for their last chance to grab their favourite treats from Willow Cakes & Pastries will want to mark Jan. 26 on their calendars.

After more than 20 years in business on Mary Street, co-owner Catherine O'Donnell announced the closure of the Niagara-on-the-Lake staple's in-person bakery on social media last week.

"Between the escalating cost of rent and the rising prices of high-quality ingredients, it has become more difficult to sustain our operations in the way we've always envisioned," O'Donnell said in the statement.

Son and co-owner Sean O'Donnell said the issue of achieving a work-life balance was another major deciding factor in closing the storefront.



Willow Cakes & Pastries is closing its storefront and moving online due to rising costs.

"It's time to enjoy the success that she's already had and relish in the fact that she did what she always wanted to do and became a staple of the town while doing it," he told The Lake Report.

The closure of the Mary Street storefront, however, doesn't mark the end of tasty baked goods from the O'Donnells.

With last week's announcement came the introduction of Simply Shortbread, an online mail-order business and its sister business, the Willow, dedicated to cakes and custom orders, just without an in-person bakery.

The company plans to stay connected with NOTL, hosting pop-up events and bringing treats to customers in new and unique ways, O'Donnell said in the statement.

"We've noticed there's a large demand for our products still so, without having a storefront and doing it café style, we're figuring the logistics out," Sean O'Donnell said in an interview.

The social media announcement was met with more than 100 comments from NOTLers expressing how much they will miss the iconic bakery café.

"We are still looking to

service the general public, just on a placed order sort of basis," Sean O'Donnell said.

One idea O'Donnell mentioned was a "sour-dough Saturday" pop-up where people can stop by to pick up bread they have ordered.

The unit leased for Sister Shortbread is "just down the street" from Willow Cakes & Pastries, he added, noting that Willow headquarters won't be leaving NOTL any time soon.

And NOTLers can still look forward to enjoying a slice of Willow cake at the annual Canada Day celebration this summer.

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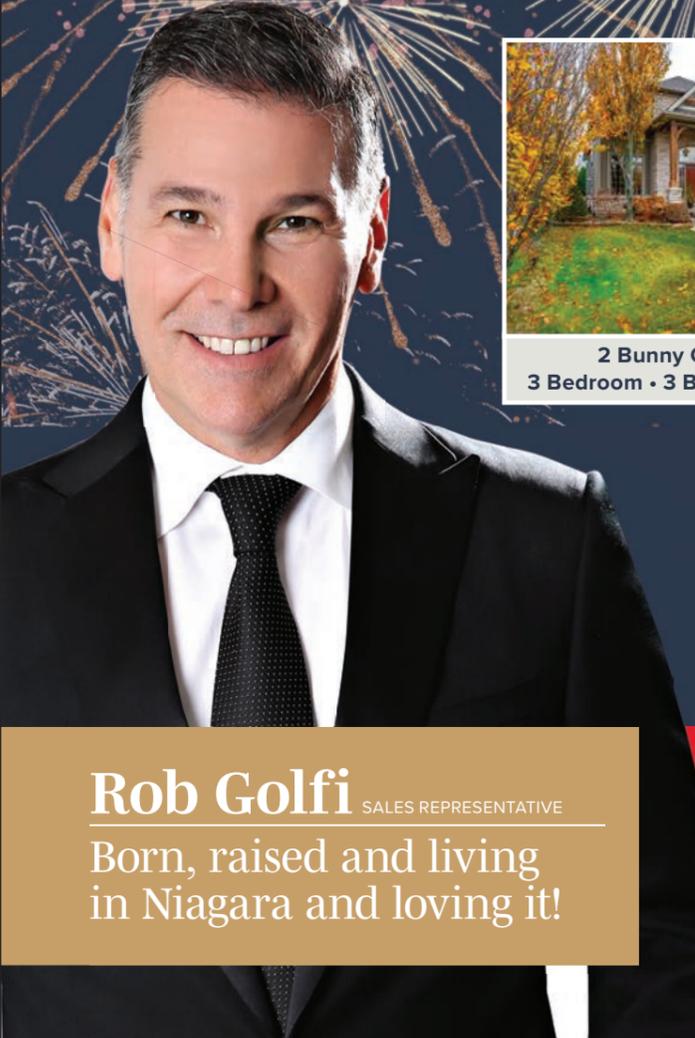
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From left, figure skaters Ophelia Xie, Samantha Frydryk, Coco Allinotte, Carlee Bering, Jamie Doucet, Kayla Thwaites, Liza Butko and Teresa Huang participated in the Provincial Series #2 Keswick competition in November 2024, taking home a bunch of accolades. SUPPLIED

## NOTL figure skaters celebrate **competition wins**

Darlene Dortono  
Special to The Lake Report

The NOTL Skating Club skaters are back at competing for the season. There have been two competitions so far.

At the end of the year, seven skaters attended the Provincial Series #6

Stratford December Classic from Dec. 12 to 15.

Liza Butko placed first, winning her Star 5 event, while Samantha Frydryk placed second in her Star 8 event and third in the Star 7 event. In the Star 5 event, Kayla Thwaites came in fourth.

Teresa Huang came in

fourth (Star 5 U10), Coco Allinotte sixth and Jamie Doucet 14th. Ophelia Xie placed sixth in Star 7 and 12th in Star 8.

Before that, eight skaters attended the Provincial Series #2 Keswick competition from Nov. 22 to 24 last year.

Liza Butko placed first winning her Star 5 event.

Samantha Frydryk placed second in her Star 8 event and fifth in the Star 7 event.

Ophelia Xie placed third in the Star 7 event and sixth in Star 8. In the Star 5 event, Carlee Bering placed fourth, Teresa Huang fifth, Jamie Doucet sixth, Kayla Thwaites seventh and Coco Allinotte 10th.



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-  **Monday, February 3**  
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Contributed by Patty Garriock

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## Santa's gone, but winter has just begun

Photographer Dave Van de Laar captured this shot of the statue of George Bernard Shaw which stands outside the Shaw Cafe on Queen Street. While the holiday season is over, we can continue to expect cold weather for the next few months.



## What I learned about winning and losing



**THE TURNER REPORT**

Garth Turner  
 Columnist

It was a tough election. The incumbent was entrenched, well-funded, known. But I'd spent almost a year knocking on doors. Wore out a perfectly good set of cowboy boots doing it. And the polls were at my back.

E-night came. I'd rented a hall. Hired a cheap rock band. Bought the booze. And then the place was swamped. Campaign workers, supporters and a boatload of people I'd never met showed up, along with the local and city media. Backslapping was everywhere. The sound of 'Attaboy!' filled the room. Me, hero. Elected. Goin' to the House.

Four years later, another night, another vote.

I lost. Same guy, but different context. This time I was the Man, not the face of change and optimism. Everything that had gone wrong in the past few years was on me, and others in



Garth Turner was elected to the House of Commons twice. He lost twice. Let's lighten up on those who serve, he says.

office. My opponents seized all chances to hang blame and guilt. The constituency work, the public meetings, problem-solving and the policy push in Ottawa just didn't matter. I realized my naivete. Canadians don't vote for. They vote against.

This time the hall was almost empty. People don't show up to celebrate defeats, or express support. The media guys came, however. This was news. And my parents. He had Alzheimer's then. Confused. A reporter got past me and asked, 'How do you feel about your son losing?' He began to cry. A TV cameraman rushed in to catch the moment. I hit him.

This is the glamour of public life.

An hour after being elected you have currency and purpose. From there until the moment of defeat, it is steadily spent. Lost. We have made citizens who enter politics into punching bags. They're not regular people trying to make a difference, helping the common good anymore. Over time they become the enemy, responsible for every failure, annoyance and hardship their constituents endure.

These men and women don't turn callous and uncaring. We just expect them to be omnipotent. Make the economy better. Make life easier and richer. Make prices fall and wages rise. Make benefits greater and taxes lower. Make us safe,

satisfied and prosperous, whatever the world is doing. Makes homes affordable. Make crime go away.

Or else. You're out.

There are 338 elected MPs in this country of 40 million citizens. So, 99.2 per cent of us never contest a nomination, fight an election or win. Those who do win face years of travel, family disruption, disjointed living in two cities and sustained criticism leading, on average, to defeat within eight years. And still, passionate people fight for the right to sit in one of those green chairs and strive to make Canada better.

The rest of us rip them apart in anonymous social media comments.

Maybe more folks should take a few minutes to reflect on why they would not – and do not – seek the job. We should perhaps be relieved there are citizens among us who step up, knowing the risks. Even thankful.

At the end of the day, the hall will always be empty. The applause gone and the haters near. Meanwhile the shiny new candidate is ascending.

Thank you for your service, Prime Minister.

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

garth@garth.ca

**Correction:** Our Dec. 19 editorial, "Yes, we can help fix the housing crisis," referred to Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa as a realtor in error. In fact, since 2016 he has been employed by Century21 Canada LLP, which is not licensed as a real estate brokerage but rather the master franchisor of the global Century21 brand in Canada. His role is senior vice president of network development. His team seeks to grow the franchise through adding new brokerages via startups, conversions and acquisitions.



### Air Cadets BOTTLE DROP-OFF returns January 11

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## LETTER OF THE WEEK

### Many thanks to our generous community

Dear editor:  
The magic of the Christmas season brought together our community to brighten up Christmas for the residents at Pleasant Manor and Niagara Long Term Care. Traditions continued as Amika Verwegen and her children, Nova, Fern, Yuna and Kazuhiro, created 145 Christmas cards with creative designs and riddles to please the residents.

The three kindergarten classes at Crossroads Public School continued to share in the spirit of giving when 67 Christmas stockings were prepared. The children are taught the importance of giving back to our community and bringing a little joy to the seniors in long-term care. The Niagara Lions under the direction of Dorothy Soo-Wiens had a

special afternoon filling 35 stockings. Palliative Care ladies find it in their hearts to knit 145 hearts. Thank you Marilyn Bartlett, Lorraine Horton, Louanne Rudisuela, Dena Broeders and Jean Stoddart. Melissa Achal, founder of NEOB Lavendar generously donated products that Niagara Long Term Care will use as a part of their Montessori kits. Also, many

shampoo bars and hand soaps will be enjoyed by many residents. Most importantly, YOU the community for finding such passion and generosity in making this initiative one of love and pure joy! To each and every one of you, enjoy the spirit of the Christmas season and all the best in 2025!  
*Joan King  
NOTL*

### Turner column on Airbnb numbers was incorrect

Dear editor:  
Columnist Garth Turner's belief and statement in his Dec. 19 opinion piece "The town that wants to be a motel," that "Airbnb shows more than 1,000 short-term rental listings in Niagara-on-the-Lake" clearly demonstrates that the columnist needs to do some further research to understand how the platform works. When one chooses dates for a location, many of the surrounding areas end up being included in the search result. This is true when one uses the platform to travel anywhere. Mr. Turner, before creat-

ing panic and perpetuating disinformation about the number of short-term rental properties (legal and illegal), please do another search and see where all of the 1,000 properties are actually located. You will see that a huge number are in Niagara Falls, Thorold, St. Catharines, Lincoln ... the list goes on and on. Once you have really done the proper research (which isn't just inputting dates and a location, but rather going through one property at a time to determine its actual location), please share the number of properties that are located solely in Niag-

ara-on-the-Lake with your readers and compare that to the number of licensed properties with the town. One can only hope that the staff analysis knows how to do the proper research. Once that is shared, I would suggest you consider rewriting your column with the actual facts. While I live in Toronto, I am the owner of a licenced short-term rental in NOTL. My biggest concern about Mr. Turner's article is that it creates unnecessary panic through the spreading of misinformation. I want to be clear that the

reason I knew immediately that Mr. Turner either does not know how such platforms work or possibly that he just wanted to have a big number to "make his case," is not because I am a host myself, but rather because of my prior travels. When I have looked on such platforms in anticipation of a potential trip, the options that come up are often quite far from the location I input. One has to sift through the information and carefully look at actual locations as part of the process.  
*Tara Abrams  
Toronto*



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style.  
Category: SO THAT'S WHAT THOSE LYRICS SAY!

"Got a long list of ex-lovers, they'll tell you I'm insane" is in "Blank Space" but her mom heard it as "got a lot of Starbucks lovers."

Last issue:  
Category: A PLACE IN HISTORY  
Clue: The last major conflict of the War of 1812, the battle of this city took place in January 1815, after the war had ended.

Answer: What is New Orleans?  
Answered first by: Margie Enns  
Also answered correctly (in order) by: Bob Wheatley, Sylvia Wiens, Howard Jones  
\*\*\* Many of you said "What is the Battle of New Orleans?" While that's the battle being referenced, the question is phrased so that the answer is simply "What is New Orleans?" If Alex Trebek wouldn't have accepted it, we can't either! Sorry!

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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# The green road forward for everyone



Brian Marshall  
Columnist

Sometimes it happens in person and other times by phone or email, but every week I hear from a variety of folks who wish to address something covered in this column.

So, I'd like to begin 2025, by extending my heartfelt gratitude to those who have taken the time out of their busy days to engage with this writer.

The information, opinions and observations provided by you not only convey valuable insights that otherwise may have been overlooked, but also have guided the content — and often the quality — of the column while ensuring the column continues speaking to the issues and concerns of NOTL citizens.

Thank you.  
The final Arch-i-text column of 2024 (“All about green infrastructure,” Dec. 19) was no exception and I received a number of communiques — a few of which I'd like to expand upon this week.

One reader pointed out to me that a document entitled “Climate Change Adaptation Plan” had been authored and published by the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake during the tenure of the previous council in March 2022.

The result of a collaboration between the town's environmental advisory committee, Brock University, municipal staff and various community stakeholders, this 48-page document (which can be found at NOTL.com) is a solid piece of work providing background, rationale and broad objectives for developing actual action and management plans.

These plans would trans-

late the six goals of the Climate Change Adaption Plan - Integrate Climate Change into Plans, Policies, By-Laws and Standards; Urban Forest Resiliency; Reduce Flooding Risks; Incorporate Climate Change in Design and Construction; Minimize Health and Safety Risks to Community Members; and, Support Public Awareness and Education — into real and concrete processes and policies for town staff to follow and enforce.

Interestingly, many of the identified objectives for action/management plans call for the broad institution of green infrastructure elements.

“Appendix E – Implementation Schedule,” beginning on page 36 of the published plan, details 19 action items related to the development of those “real and concrete processes” with associated timelines commencing in 2022 and, for many, completion before 2024.

To my knowledge, none of these action items have been completed and few, if any, have even been commenced.

Indeed, the reader who bought this document forward indicated she was “unaware of any action that has taken place on the plan during the past two years.”

It appears, based on the absence of any evidence of work on these action items, this is another “inconvenient truth” the lord mayor and certain members of the current council have shelved to languish in the dark as incompatible with their “development of GTA” suburbia agenda.

Moving on, another reader observed: “The Miyawaki mini forest sounds fascinating. Can you elaborate on what it is?”

Developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki about 40 years ago, the basic concept involves utilizing native species in dense plantings which results in high levels of competition forcing growth upwards rather than outwards.

A Miyawaki mini forest is ideal for defined and/or space-constrained areas and has proven to be successful in footprints as small as three metres by three metres



## Niagara-on-the-Lake Climate Change Adaptation Plan

Since the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake published its Climate Change Adaptation Plan more than two years ago, Brian Marshall says none of these action items have been completed and few have been commenced. TOWN OF NOTL PHOTO

(roughly 10 feet by 10 feet) and, importantly, can achieve mature heights with fully realized ecosystems in about 20 years.

It is comprised of four distinct (but inter-related in the functioning ecosystem) parts: The canopy trees such as oak, tulip, hickory, white pine; sub-canopy trees like black cherry and yellow birch; understory trees like dogwood and redbud; and shrub/ground covers which might include maple leaved viburnum.

Net-net, a fast-growing native ecosystem that rapidly augments the tree canopy while delivering a multitude of ecological benefits that can be planted in urban backyards, municipal parks and many other locations.

And the really cool practical thing?

After the first three or four years, it is virtual maintenance-free. Something which is a boon to private property owners but, on a municipal level, could have a really significant impact vis-à-vis reducing operating costs for the parks department.

There are many articles

and studies available online: Google “Miyawaki forest.”

Another reader, and regular communicant, suggested that green infrastructure would “require considerable extra planning in the town,” felt that “green infrastructure adjacent to orchards and vineyards is not a good thing” and went on to observe that, in his opinion, the town has not been adequately maintaining the drainage ditch infrastructure to properly manage stormwater runoff.

Now, those folks who are urban dwellers may not be aware that NOTL has an extensive network of open ditches designed to manage both surface and subsurface runoff of stormwater deposited during weather events. This is a crucial component of the town's flood mitigation strategy.

According to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, “Under the Drainage Act, municipalities have a statutory obligation to repair and maintain municipal drains, in accordance with their original design specifications. These design specifications are found in the

engineer's report, which was adopted by municipal bylaw, giving the drain its legal status.”

Further, this repair and maintenance must be performed in accordance with published “Standard Compliance Requirements.”

From a technical paper published by Fisheries and Oceans Canada entitled “Ontario Municipal Drain Maintenance and Repair,” we understand that, “Drains require maintenance and repair to ensure adequate movement of water.”

And the most common associated activities “involve bank repair or stabilization, brushing of vegetation on top of banks and along bank slopes, and removal of accumulated sediment and vegetation in a drain.”

In other words, because these drainage ditches have been traditionally designed to accept uncontrolled stormwater runoff, it is necessary to remove vegetation that would inhibit water flow.

Unfortunately, uncontrolled water runoff also carries with it soil particles that result in the sedimenta-

tion of the ditches and can (and does) result in bank erosion.

Further, this nutrient-rich (phosphorus and nitrogen) sedimentation from agricultural fields in the open ditches encourages the growth of vegetation — particularly of invasive plant species — in the bottom of these ditches that impede water flow.

In an effort to combat these issues, many jurisdictions around the world are recommending or requiring the establishment of properly designed riparian buffer zones — either wooded or grass or a combination of both — to reduce sedimentation and control erosion while filtering out phosphorus and nitrogen (amongst other contaminants).

A publication from North Carolina State University, published in 2023 and authored by Deanna L. Osmond, cites studies that “measured 80 to 95 per cent nitrate removed from the groundwater” and has been observed to occur “within the first 15 feet of the forested riparian buffer.”

The author also illustrated studies that found a 14-foot riparian buffer reduced sedimentation by 70 per cent, while a wide 91-foot grass/forest riparian buffer reduced sedimentation by 97.4 per cent, nitrogen by 80.1 per cent and phosphorus by 77.2 per cent.

Other studies have shown that as a balanced ecology is achieved in forested riparian buffers, there was a measurable decrease in agricultural “pests” — both insect and avian.

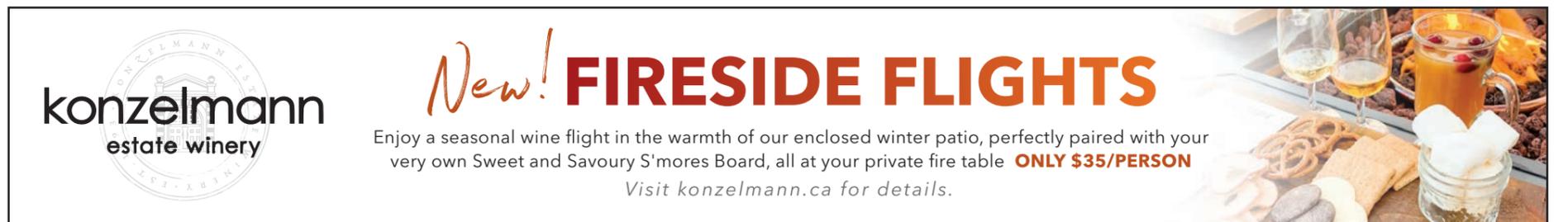
Perhaps Ontario should consider riparian buffers?

It seems to be the trend elsewhere in the world.

Hmmm ... I wonder how a Miyawaki forest would do as a riparian buffer.

And here's a fun fact: There are species of native dogwoods which are commonly used to stabilize stream banks and actually help control invasive species such as phragmites.

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



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# Finally, Donald Trump and I agree on something



## Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson  
Columnist

Yes, Donald Trump and I both want to get rid of the annually challenging concept of daylight savings time. If you'll pardon the pun, it's time.

Beyond that, at the risk of overreacting, "May the good lord be kind to us as the next few years transpire."

Donald Trump's first four years as leader of a very important nation, a nation that seriously affects our wee Canada, were a train wreck that ended very badly for untold millions of people. It seemed that a week didn't go by without another gong show dominating the news from his White House.

Please, don't remind me of Sean Spicer and Kellyanne Conway — slapstick, followed by fingernails on a grade school blackboard.

Many long public service careers ended in shambles

and his unnecessary public humiliations of both foes and friends were beyond belief.

It would serve no purpose for me, in our hyper-local journal The Lake Report, to call the president-elect Trump names.

Name-calling is sophomoric, so I won't call him a bully, a felon, a narcissist, a golf handicap sandbagger who regularly cheats on the links, a felon, a sexual predator, a "locker room talker," a fraud who shamelessly and regularly stiffes skilled tradesmen who have done their work as promised or a vain twit.

Calling him names would take me down to his level.

Years ago, I memorized a short poem that is timely: "Never fight with a pig. You can't win. You both get dirty. And the pig loves it."

Thanks to Herb Capozzi in Vancouver for these wise words. Advice to live by. But enough. President-elect Trump speaks highly of me, and he is not here in Niagara-on-the-Lake to present his side of the story. So let's be kind and fair and cut him some slack.

Still, I worry. He takes office on Jan. 20, a date he is calling "Liberation Day." This will be serious for our



Ross Robinson says Donald Trump is a serious threat to America and beyond. MIDJOURNEY

unguarded, but very much observed and monitored, border.

Too, he plans to demand ownership of the Panama Canal. He refers to a treaty negotiated in 1977 and ignores a very clever and appropriate palindrome.

Stop me, as I ramble on to terrain far outside of my expertise or knowledge.

We all know that if the head coach of a team gets

caught in a lie, or behaves really badly, he or she should resign. There is an old saying about a snake rotting from the head.

An honourable CEO steps down if caught in a serious lie, for the good of the entire company or organization.

I don't care how your net worth or portfolio will be affected by the Republican Party versus the Demo-

cratic Party. I lose sleep because I love America and Americans.

It pains me that so many of the citizens of this once-great country have put this man in charge.

This is serious.

Rambling back one hundred years now. It was 1925 when the very racist, supremacist and anti-Semitic Klu Klux Klan was working very hard to get established

in Niagara and other parts of Canada.

Saskatchewan was their most active territory, but Niagara was seeing lots of recruiting activity too. In London, and right here in Niagara.

Can't believe you didn't know anything about this dark chapter in our wonderful nation's history? Drop by our well-stocked local library and borrow Brian Martin's 2022 book, "From Underground Railroad to Rebel Refuge."

The well-respected author lives just over in London, and reading this book seems familiar, with street names like Mississauga Road, Gage, Front and Wellington.

Confederate leaders and their families lived happily here in NOTL, known then as America's Attic, while the danger of being convicted of treason cooled down.

This research reminds me that we have a shocking ability to forget what we don't want to remember and not to learn what we don't want to know.

The dark web and social media make our world an increasingly dangerous place. As citizens, we must be vigilant as we monitor our elected officials.

Enough said. May the good lord watch over us.

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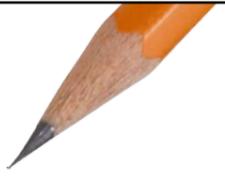
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# Have some fun



- Across**
- 2. Laboratory glassware (4,5)
  - 8. Entreaty (4)
  - 9. Mesopotamia was here (4)
  - 10. Middle East expert (7)
  - 11. Useful kind of truck (4-2)
  - 12. Employs (4)
  - 14. Bombs (4)
  - 15. American vulture (6)
  - 16. Thickly curled hairdo (4)
  - 18. More mature (5)
  - 21. Bring together (5)
  - 23. Have a taste (3,2)
  - 25. Egyptian water lily (5)
  - 28. Without purpose (4)
  - 29. Kitchen feature (6)
  - 31. Great Lake (4)
  - 32. "Shane" actor (4)
  - 35. Canter round a lure for bees (6)
  - 36. Sticks like glue (7)
  - 37. Sudden assault (4)
  - 38. Rhythmic swing (4)
  - 39. Gastric (9)
- Down**
- 1. Abnormally white (6)
  - 2. Discussed (6-2)
  - 3. "Walkin' back to Happiness" singer (7)
  - 4. How critical things may come (2,1,4)
  - 5. Conveyor (7)
  - 6. If it's in place it's in this (4)
  - 7. Charge per unit (4)
  - 13. Darted (7)
  - 15. Pivotal (7)
  - 17. Not easily hoodwinked (3)
  - 19. The fifth of twelve (3)
  - 20. Flightless bird (3)
  - 22. In poor health (3)
  - 24. Attendance check (4-4)
  - 25. Pitched abruptly (7)
  - 26. Proposition demonstrated by reasoning (7)
  - 27. Registers (5,2)
  - 30. Not quite (6)
  - 33. Small cells (4)
  - 34. Shocking art movement (4)

### Crossword Puzzle

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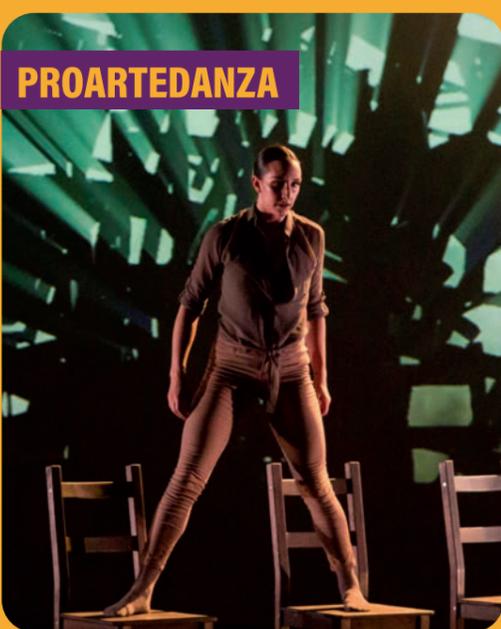
### Last issue's answers

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# EXPLORING HISTORY

WITH NOTL MUSEUM



## Mulholland's Store

This local department store was founded in 1867. Many locals would purchase their special gifts for loved ones at this shop every year. In 1906, they provided a Christmas "gift" to shoppers of a needle case. The small gift, with Queen Victoria brand sewing needles, also had promotional ads attached for dry goods, carpets, oil cloths, table linens and more. What a great marketing tactic for their audience. Every time something needed mending at home their advertisement would come out with the needles and provide another reminder of the store and its goods. The family-run business was such a success that they eventually opened another location in Virgil.

When the store closed down, possibly in the 1950s, Taylor's Ice Cream took over the space. Today, Dairy Queen operates in the building at 69 Queen St.



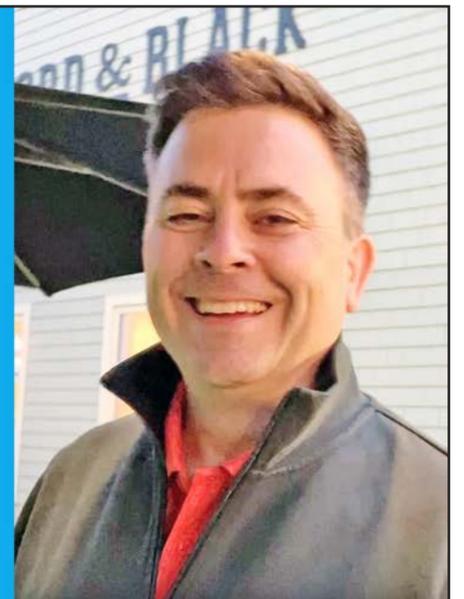
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### Grace United Church welcomes our new minister



On behalf of our entire congregation I would like to announce - and welcome - our new minister at Grace United Church, Rev. Daniel MacLean. He brings us the energy and experience of 20 years as an ordained minister.

Rev. MacLean is familiar with the Niagara Region, having recently spent some five years at a United Church appointment in the Hamilton area.

And our congregation members who have a link to the Maritimes will be pleased to learn that Rev. MacLean was born in P.E.I and grew up in the Maritimes as his father, also a minister, served at a succession of appointments in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Grace United members who are fans of Toronto Maple Leaf hockey and Toronto Blue Jays baseball will be thrilled to find that Rev. MacLean shares their enthusiasm. We also look forward to meeting Rev. MacLean's wife, Jacalyn, and their two Shetland Sheepdogs, Sonny and Tilly. It may take a little longer to meet their twin children, because Alex and Andrea are both studying at Queen's University.

A dynamic church like Grace United, in our exciting town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, deserves an equally dynamic minister, and we look forward to the coming years with his leadership.

**Pauline Miller**  
Chair of Council  
Grace United Church



# Mother Nature's clues for what's in store this winter



## GROWING TOGETHER

Joanne Young  
Columnist

I imagine that since the beginning of time, we have been trying to predict the weather, especially our winters.

Before computers and smartphones, people relied on the Farmer's Almanac to predict the weather in the coming seasons — and some still do.

For this coming winter, the Almanac is predicting the following forecast for Ontario:

“Temperate’ is on tap for most of the country this winter, but let it snow in Ontario! A winter of big freezes and heavy snowfall will be centred in Ontario and eastern Manitoba, while most of the rest of the country will get some relief

and reprieve from snow shovelling and super-cold temperatures.”

They predict that from mid to late January we will have very heavy snowfalls. How exciting (not!).

Even with the current technology we have to use, predicting the weather still seems like a bit of a gamble. But before this technology, what scientific methods would they have had to use?

Of course, predictions were made from observing nature. I must admit, as one who grew up on a farm, I love the many “observations” that have been passed down through the generations.

Most of them can be confirmed, scientifically speaking, but at first glance can seem questionable.

Here are a few ways in which you can predict the coming winter weather — for this winter or the next.

1. If the skins on onions and corn husks are thicker than normal, winter will be colder.

2. If two or more woodpeckers share a tree for storing food, it indicates a heavier snowfall this winter.

3. In the Niagara area, the snowy owls typically return in mid to late November. If



If the orange band on the woolly bear caterpillars is thicker than the black bands, there will be less snow and cold — or so the legends say ... Joanne Young says to keep shovels handy.

they arrive earlier than this, expect a colder winter with heavy snowfall.

4. The early migration of monarch butterflies indicates a cold winter ahead.

5. The thicker the hair grows on the nape of a cow's neck the colder the winter will be.

6. Frequent, heavy fog patches in August can be an indicator of a cold winter with lots of precipitation.

7. We can expect a bad winter when the raccoons have thicker tails with brighter coloured bands.

8. The early arrival of crickets indicates a tough winter ahead.

9. Spiders spinning webs larger than ever and a larger number of spiders in your home also indicate a snowy winter.

10. Pigs gathering sticks, leaves and other material to make a nest means more snow than usual.

11. Ants marching in a single line instead of fanning out more also indicates a bad winter ahead

12. Early seclusion of bees in the beehive

13. Muskrats burrowing holes higher on the river-bank means more snowfall than usual.

14. See how high a hornet nests ... will tell you how high the snow will rest.

15. Squirrels gathering more nuts earlier than usual means heavy snowfalls.

16. Frequent halos around the sun and moon are a sign of a bad winter.

17. If the orange band on the woolly bear caterpillars is thicker than the black bands, there will be less snow and cold.

18. I love this last one. If you pick a locally grown persimmons, the seed inside will be one of three shapes — a fork, a spoon or a knife. If it is a fork, the winter will be mild. If it is shaped like a spoon, the spoon resembles a shovel so there will be lots of snow to shovel. If it is shaped like a knife, it means that it will be biting, bitter cold that will cut like a knife.

According to a report based on persimmon seeds taken this past October, this winter will be a wet and stormy one. According to the persimmon theory, winter is bound to be a “mixed bag this year. We're looking at lots of rain, some ice and even some wet snow this year.”

They found equal parts spoons, knives and forks.

Even though I cannot prove every one of these predictors is true, I cannot disprove them yet at this point either. More research is needed.

All I can say is, keep your snow shovels handy this winter.

Joanne Young is a Niagara-on-the-Lake garden expert and coach. See her website at [joanneyoung.ca](http://joanneyoung.ca).

## Obituaries

### David Bennicke



**BENNICKE, David Kennedy**

Passed away peacefully and entered into the presence of the Lord on Sunday, Dec. 29, 2024, at the Greater Niagara General Hospital, at the age of 82.

Beloved husband of Shirley for 64 wonderful years. Loving father of Deborah Sherry Baldwin (Danny), David John Jr., Trevor Randall, and Craig Jeffrey. Cherished grandfather of Jerson and Matthew and great grandfather of Arien. Dear brother of Donnie (Judy), Dale (Monica), and the late Betty Stevens, and brother-in-law of Ted Stevens. Dave will also be fondly remembered by his extended family, including brothers-

and sisters-in-law, nieces, nephews, cousins, and countless friends.

Born on June 18, 1942, in Bible Hill, Nova Scotia, to Harold and Edna Bennicke, Dave grew up with a love for skating and played hockey passionately for the Bible Hill Dairymen, the Truro and District League. His career took him to Baie-Comeau, Quebec, where he worked for Cargill Grain Company Ltd. before moving on to Bunge of Canada, Quebec City, as superintendent retiring in 1995. He was a member of GEAPS (Grain Elevator and Processing Society). Later in life, he worked for Scotia Construction as supervisor in North Carolina.

Dave had a zest for life, with a particular love for classic convertible sports cars — he proudly owned a 1972 classic MG from England. A devout man of leaving behind a legacy of words for those who knew and loved him. He was Secretary-Treasurer of the First Gideon Chapter in Quebec City. Known for his strong will and methodical nature, Dave expressed his creativity through writing poetry and prose, leaving behind a legacy of words for those who knew and loved him.

The family received friends at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, on Thursday, Jan. 2 from 2-4 and 6-8 p.m. and on Friday from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. A service to celebrate the life of Dave, was held at the funeral home on Friday, Jan. 3, 2025 at 1 p.m. Burial to followed in Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com)



### Herman Neufeld



**Herman Wesley Neufeld**

May 16, 1944 - Dec. 31, 2024

Herman passed away peacefully on Dec. 31, 2024 from aspiration pneumonia. He also battled Dementia since 2019 and was residing at Radiant Care Pleasant Manor LTC since May 2024.

Herman was a wonderful son, brother, uncle, husband, father, and grandpa, and friend. Herman is survived by his supportive wife, Kathy of 58 years and his two sons, Ron (Kerri) and Brian. He was a loving grandfather to his 5 granddaughters, Chelsea

(Nick), Caitlyn (Thomas), Waverly, Sophia, and Abby. He is also survived by two sisters-in-law: Janet and Laura as well as numerous nieces and nephews.

He is predeceased by his parents Henry and Annie Neufeld as well as his nine siblings of whom he is the youngest: Nettie, Henry, John, Betty, Cornie, Annie, Gilbert, Lena, and Peter.

He had a love of sharing God's Word in his pastoral ministry, modeling the love of Jesus to everyone he met.

A special thanks to volunteer, Derek Lah and PSW, Yunay Garcia for their years of support within the home. The family would also like to thank the staff at Radiant Care Pleasant Manor for showering Herman with love and care over the last seven months.

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to Tallman Funeral Homes.

Visitation took place at Cornerstone Community Church (434 Hunter Road) on Monday, Jan. 6 from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., followed by a service at 11 a.m. and a gathering at Caroline Cellars. The funeral service was livestreamed via the Cornerstone Community Church YouTube channel.

In lieu of flowers, the family would appreciate donations to Radiant Care Pleasant Manor.

Online condolences at [www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca](http://www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca)



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# *New Year's Challenge*

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