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Integrity commissioner says **mayor in conflict** on Rand Estate

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa should not have taken part in a discussion about the future of the Rand Estate two months

ago, according to the town's integrity commissioner.

But while town protocol requires sustained complaints to be reported to council, the commissioner says this complaint was not sustained, so the finding will not go before council.

The finding stems from a July 8 complaint by resident Kathryn Podrebarac over Zalepa's participation in discussion of Rand Estate development plans during the June 2 committee of the whole planning meeting.

"I filed this complaint

only after the lord mayor declined my written request that he declare a conflict and step aside," Podrebarac told The Lake Report.

Jeffrey Abrams and Janice Atwood-Petkovski of Principles Integrity, the town's integrity commissioner,

found Zalepa should have declared a pecuniary interest because of his proximity to the development.

Zalepa's property is about 65 metres from the boundary of the lands covered by the application — within the 120-metre

area used to notify nearby property owners, which the commissioners said created a presumption of pecuniary interest.

They nevertheless concluded in their Aug. 10

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Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa.

Zalepa seeking **region chair** job

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

For the first time in two decades, Gary Zalepa's name won't be on the ballot for this fall's municipal election, but his career in local politics could be far from over.

Niagara-on-the-Lake's incumbent lord mayor has thrown his hat in the ring for the job of chair of Niagara Region.

Immediately after the Oct. 26 municipal election, Premier Doug Ford's government plans to appoint the heads of eight regions across southern Ontario.

It is the biggest change to the regional government model since Premier Bill Davis introduced the concept in the 1970s.

Besides Niagara, the province also plans to appoint new chairs for four-year terms in Durham, Halton,

Continued on Page 3

A new space to create

Public gets first look inside Shaw's newly built Artists' Village



Melissa Novacosky, associate executive director of the Shaw Festival, speaks to the press during the grand opening of the Shaw's Artists' Village, explaining how the company's four former costume locations have been consolidated into a single facility. She holds up costume patterns and fabric samples as part of the media tour ahead of the ribbon-cutting. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Andrew Hawlitzky | The Lake Report

The Shaw Festival is celebrating the opening of a 42,000-square-foot campus in Niagara-on-the-Lake that will house dozens of actors and other performers who put on the theatre company's productions, as well as anchor a variety of education programs.

The Artists' Village was the site of an opening reception and ribbon-cutting on Friday, attended by the Shaw's top executives, as well as local, regional and provincial leaders.

The facility was built at the site of the former Upper Canada Lodge long-term care home on

Wellington Street. The residences opened in February and have been nearly full since April.

Currently, the Shaw Festival rents apartments across NOTL to house its seasonal company, keeping about 100 artist beds in town at a subsidy of roughly \$800,000 a year against market value, said

Tim Jennings, the Shaw's executive director.

The village's 26 furnished apartments, which hold up to 31 artists, will replace a share of those rentals.

"The Shaw Artists' Village is a

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Mayor cannot vote on Rand Estate plan

Continued from Front Page

disposition that his participation was an “error in judgment made in good faith” and closed the file.

If the applications return to council or committee, they said Zalepa should declare a conflict and recuse himself.

Zalepa said he co-operated fully with the investigation and sought professional advice, stressing the commissioner considered his participation a good-faith error.

“While others may continue to debate the disposition or advance their own interpretations of the applicable rules and legislation, I do not intend to litigate those issues through the media or social media,” Zalepa said in an emailed statement.

“I remain committed to transparency, accountability and adherence to the guidance provided by the appropriate authorities.”

The Lake Report asked Zalepa about previous conflict declarations and whether he will recuse himself from future Rand Estate matters. He declined



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa takes part in a Rand discussions June 2, despite having previously declared a conflict based on legal advice. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

to answer, referring to his statement.

Podrebarac provided The Lake Report with her correspondence with the commissioners, including their Aug. 10 disposition and Aug. 18 response.

The commissioner defended the decision not to send the finding to council, saying town rules must be read alongside laws and other rules governing the commissioner’s work.

The town’s complaint protocol says if a complaint is sustained in whole or in part, the commissioner “shall” report the findings to council.

Abrams said that rule does not apply because the complaint was not sustained.

He told The Lake Report Wednesday that Zalepa’s participation was a good-faith error, an exception under the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act.

That meant no report to council was required or in the public interest, he said.

The protocol says the commissioner can recommend no penalty when a contravention resulted from a good-faith error. Podrebarac argues that is what should have happened.

“He was entitled to recommend to council what should happen, a penalty, or none. He wasn’t entitled to make that decision himself and close the file,” she said.

“That decision belongs to council, and council never got the chance to make it.”

Abrams said that provision applies only after the commissioner decides to send a report to council. Here, the commissioners determined the complaint was not sustained, so no report was required.

“It is not a case of ‘disregarding’ provisions,” Abrams said. “It is a question of providing reasonable interpretation to the policy.”

He said commissioners

sometimes must reconcile conflicting rules using the law, town policies, best practices and case facts.

Abrams said Principles Integrity did that here to serve the public interest and avoid the “politicization” of whether a breach serious enough to warrant a report occurred.

Concerns about how the commissioners handled the case should be taken to the Ontario Ombudsman rather than council, Abrams said.

“I happened to have the knowledge and background to follow what went wrong here. Most residents wouldn’t, and shouldn’t have to,” she said.

“When an integrity commissioner makes a finding like this, it’s supposed to go to council so council can deal with it. If that doesn’t happen, and a resident isn’t able to catch it, the finding just disappears, as if it was never made.”

The town did not answer The Lake Report’s questions about complaints concerning Zalepa’s participation in Rand Estate matters, referring them to the integrity commissioner.

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Chair role would be full-time for Zalepa

Continued from Front Page

Muskoka, Peel, Waterloo, York and Simcoe County.

The move eliminates Niagara's 19 elected regional councillors and gives the appointed head of council "strong chair" powers as part of the Tories' strategy to streamline government operations.

"I have applied for the regional chair position," Zalepa told The Lake Report on Wednesday from Ottawa where he was attending the Association of Municipalities of Ontario annual conference.

Zalepa's interest in the regional job has been somewhat of an open secret over the past month or two and some political sources across Niagara consider him a frontrunner for the job.

His experience as a member of regional council and his skills as a policy-focused leader are seen as major assets by insiders.

Still, he faces some competition for the post.

Sources say that outgoing St. Catharines regional Coun. Peter Secord and retiring Welland mayor Frank Campion also are interested in the job.

"The application process was very detailed," Zalepa said.

"I was provided an interview that was, in my opinion, very comprehensive."

In an interview while driving home from Ottawa, he said that when the job posting was circulated in June he had already been considering applying for it.

"I thought, 'Well, I'm going to put my name in as an applicant, just so I can consider (the post) if it became an option,' " he added.

It's a big job — and he already has a big job working full-time in the real estate



Inside sources tell The Lake Report that Gary Zalepa is one of the frontrunners for Niagara Region chair. FILE

sector as senior vice-president of network development for Vancouver-based Century 21 Canada.

If he is the one chosen head the region, he said he will have to step away from the Century 21 job, possibly taking a leave or maybe even retiring.

"I haven't made a final decision on that," he said.

"I want to be respectful of the fact that I have a great private sector employer who is really good to me and who I have a lot of respect for," so he'll deal with that if and when the time comes.

Because of the confidential nature of the proceedings, led by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, political sources refused to reveal much information about the applicants or the process for choosing the successful candidates.

The so-called "strong chair" powers bestowed by the province under the Better Regional Governance Act, which was passed in May, have been decried as "undemocratic" and unnecessary by many critics. But the province kept them intact.

They mirror the "strong mayor" powers previously enacted by the Ford govern-

ment and will mean the chair can propose budgets, veto bylaws that conflict with provincial priorities, direct staff, plus hire or fire key senior bureaucrats.

According to Niagara Region, the appointed chair also could propose bylaws that advance provincial priorities and only need support of one-third of regional council to approve them.

With the elimination of Niagara's 19 elected regional representatives, when council gathers for its first meeting in November, it will be comprised solely of the area's 12 mayors and the chair.

The province has not yet confirmed whether it will allocate council weighted voting based on population.

That might mean the Big Three cities — Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Welland — could effectively control the outcome of council votes and thus limit the power of the region's small municipalities, including NOTL.

It's another reason why some see Zalepa as a sensible choice in helping prevent the Big Three from constantly tipping the scales in their favour and dominating votes.

Erwin Wiens, NOTL's deputy lord mayor, is one of three people running for the top job in town and he thinks Zalepa would be a good fit for regional chair.

"You need somebody who's policy driven and has an understanding of service boards," he said in an interview Wednesday.

Like Zalepa and some senior town staff, he was in Ottawa for the municipal conference.

"It's a policy job, not a political job and it would be hard to find somebody that knows more about policies than Gary. I wish him luck."

Zalepa has lived in Niagara all his life and grew up in NOTL.

The Zalepa family, including Gary Zalepa Sr., father of the current lord mayor, has been active in the Niagara real estate industry for many years.

He also has been active in NOTL politics for more than two decades and this will be the first time in 20 years that his name has not been on the municipal ballot.

Zalepa finished ninth in the 2006 election but was appointed to council in 2008 after the death of Coun. Bob Howard.

He was first elected as one of the town's eight local councillors in 2010, but finished 10th in the race in 2014.

He then won the regional council seat in 2018 and became lord mayor when he soundly defeated Betty Disero in 2022.

With Zalepa not seeking re-election, it means NOTL has not had a multi-term mayor since Gary Burroughs held down the job from 2000 to 2010.

Burroughs remains an incumbent councillor and is running for re-election.

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NOTL Museum lecture dives into polo

Staff
The Lake Report

For anyone curious about what goes on behind the speed and spectacle of polo, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is offering an inside look at the sport at its next lecture.

Stephen Littlechild, a Toronto Polo Club player, instructor, coach and umpire with more than two decades of experience, will speak about the history, strategy and horsemanship behind the game on Thursday, Aug. 20, at 7:30 p.m.

Littlechild's presentation will explore the sport's fast-paced action, including the role of thoroughbred horses known as polo ponies, as well as some of the terminology and techniques used by players, including mallets, bumps, hooks and chucks.

The lecture also will look at how polo is changing, including its worldwide reach, the growth of women's polo and the rising popularity of



Polo enthusiast and coach Stephen Littlechild will give a lecture on the game's past and future in Canada on Thursday at the NOTL Museum. SUPPLIED

youth polo. Littlechild will focus particularly on the sport in Canada.

A graduate of the United States Polo Association's

Certified Polo Instructor program, Littlechild is an interscholastic coach and active umpire. Through his Chukker Hill Polo School

in Richmond Hill, Ont., he works with beginner and intermediate players, teaching horsemanship, biomechanics and strategy.

He also will offer practical advice for people interested in taking up the sport during a question-and-answer session.

"Whether you're a long-time polo fan, an aspiring player or simply curious about the sport behind the speed and spectacle, this is your chance to get inside the game," Littlechild said.

The lecture comes ahead of Niagara Polo on Sept. 12, the museum's largest fundraiser. The annual event takes place on the historic Commons in NOTL, where polo has been played for more than a century.

Tickets for Niagara Polo are still available, with proceeds directed toward museum operations. Early-bird prices are in effect until Friday, Aug. 21.

The lecture takes place at the NOTL Museum, located at 43 Castlereagh St.



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Growers and government officials gather during a tour of Niagara-on-the-Lake farms hit by the recent flooding. Local farm groups laid out requests for crop insurance changes and other supports during the visit. SUPPLIED/ERWIN WIENS

NOTL crop growers await action after province tours flooded farms

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Almost 300 flood reports are now on the books in Niagara-on-the-Lake after this summer's two big rainstorms, but the full extent — and cost — of the damage is still being assessed.

On farms in town, the clock could run well into next year.

Provincial politicians have toured some of the town's hardest-hit farms and seen the damage firsthand: Fields flooded. Fruit trees toppled. Equipment ruined. And trees that spent days underwater, which may not survive to bear fruit another season.

Now, growers want to see what comes after the visit.

Trevor Jones, the minister of agriculture, food and agribusiness, visited Seaway Gardens and Huebel Estates last week, but left without making any specific promises to help.

Coun. Erwin Wiens, who joined Jones and Sam Oosterhoff, member of provincial parliament for Niagara West, on the tour, said the group visited those farms because of the extent of the damage there.

Wiens, who is also a farmer but attended in his role as deputy lord mayor, confirmed there were "no immediate commitments" from the province during the visit.

Representatives from Ontario Tender Fruit Growers, Grape Growers of Ontario and Flowers Canada Growers were also there to make the case for help.

Among them was Phil Tregunno, chair of Ontario Tender Fruit Growers, who said showing up is only the first step.

"Politicians are pretty quick to come down for the photo op, but when we actually ask them to change some of the things, like insurance and site specific, they're a little slow to move — if they move," he told The Lake Report.

The three organizations say farmers are dealing with disease pressure, lost plants and unharvested crops, with some longer-term impacts still unknown.

They are asking governments for help in several areas.

For one, they want crop insurance for damaged vines and trees adjusted to provide site-specific coverage and account for actions they'll need to take down the line, such as replanting vines and trees, as well as permission to use drones to spray fungicides in hard-to-access flooded areas.

Also, they're requesting flexibility on inspection deadlines for temporary foreign worker housing to give them time for repairs and clean-up, and for governments to use AgriRecovery, a disaster relief support system, to help farms rebuild and recover.

For Tregunno, changing crop insurance to help cover specific areas is the most immediate need.

He said a grower can suffer severe flooding at one orchard but receive little or no compensation since the insurance calculation considers trees across the farm's other properties.

"There's growers in the area that were underwater for several days, so those trees will likely die," he said. "But because they take the averages and your tree counts from other locations,

then there wouldn't be any compensation."

Tregunno said the three organizations made their requests clear during the provincial visit, including the push for site-specific insurance.

"They're well aware of our asks," he said.

But since the visit, Tregunno said, growers have heard nothing further from the province.

The Lake Report asked Jones whether the province would support the growers' requests, whether financial assistance is being considered and how much could be available.

In a statement, senior communications adviser Miriam Leardi said the government is working with the Town of NOTL and that affected farmers may be eligible for support through Business Risk Management programs.

She encouraged affected farmers to contact Agricorp at 1-888-247-1380 or at contact@agricorp.com for information about available programs.

Wiens said the town is now collecting information about the damage for the province as growers wait to learn what assistance may be available.

Although assistance remains uncertain, Wiens said the damage was difficult to miss.

"We saw farm equipment that had been underwater and ruined, greenhouse pots that had been washed away, grapevines and trees that had been underwater for a number of hours," Wiens said. "We also noticed the onset of rot mildew and other damage to produce that was beginning."

The agricultural dam-

age is part of a much wider flood recovery effort still unfolding across NOTL.

By Monday morning, the town had received 282 flood-related service requests. Staff are investigating concerns involving culverts, ditches, drainage systems, sewers and other infrastructure and mapping reported flooding across the town, according to an Aug. 17 statement.

Asked to estimate the financial losses for NOTL farmers, Tregunno said it is too early to put a dollar figure on them because the more enduring consequences are still unknown and losses vary considerably between farms.

"In a lot of cases, we're not going to see that damage till late fall or spring of next year," he said of trees that spent days underwater.

Tregunno said he believes the second storm, which took place Aug. 2, was the more destructive of the two because the ground was already saturated from the storm five days before on July 28.

"The second one was definitely the most destructive," he said.

After the first rainfall, Tregunno said he did not see trees falling or bending. After the second, peach trees carrying full crops toppled in the saturated ground.

Similarly, Wiens warned the consequences are not over.

"There was significant damage. There is concern for ongoing issues due to prolonged flooding," he said.

"That damage will become evident in the days and weeks ahead."

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Developer to dismantle and transfer historic schoolhouse

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

After concerns this spring that a 19th-century schoolhouse in Niagara-on-the-Lake was set to be lost to demolition, the future of this building now appears clearer.

The municipal heritage committee approved a new plan for the relocation of the schoolhouse, which sits on a plot of land along the Niagara River Parkway and was once connected to the now-de-stroyed Glencairn Hall.

To do so, however, the stone schoolhouse will need to be taken apart, reassembled and restored at its new spot — a plan the heritage committee signed off on during its latest meeting on Aug. 5.

This is to make way for a home the property owner wants to build on the land.

The relocation project will need council's approval before it goes forward.

The 1830s-era stone schoolhouse, also known as the Larkin-Dimitrieff



The stone schoolhouse (and its chimney) on 14785 Niagara River Pkwy., built in the 1830s. FILE/DAN SMEENK

property, is located at 14785 Niagara River Pkwy. The schoolhouse will be moved from its current location at the back of the property to the front, closer to the Niagara River Parkway.

The property owner, prominent developer Benny Marotta, is looking to build a single-detached dwelling facing the Niagara River, says town heritage planner Sumra Zia, and the relocation of the schoolhouse will make way for said residence while making the schoolhouse more visible to passersby on the parkway.

The town approved the schoolhouse's relocation in 2022, with plans to move it in one piece to the west side of the property (it will be moved to the same spot).

Mark Schultz, a heritage consultant and structural engineer working with the property owner, told the heritage committee on Aug. 5 that the original plan was to pour a concrete beam with holes underneath the schoolhouse's walls and run steel through the beams, allowing them to lift the schoolhouse from the bottom and move it.

However, after inspecting the building, his team determined that they wouldn't be able to move it intact.

"Moving a stone building is fraught with danger. Any unreinforced masonry building, stone or brick," Schultz said. "The slightest mishap and you have a pile of not even Lego bricks, because they don't go back together that way."

Two aspects of the schoolhouse make it difficult to move with his planned method: the lack of consistent coursing in its masonry work and the building being deeper set in the ground than what they assumed.

"It became very prohibitive to try and move this in one piece," he said.

In April, Marotta got into hot water with the Town of NOTL after it discovered construction crews at the site were dismantling the schoolhouse without municipal approval.

At the time, the town noted that its building division saw the building being

deconstructed, defined as demolition under the Building Code Act.

It ordered the property owner to stop all work on the schoolhouse until proper approvals were obtained, also ordering him to make sure the building was secured.

Alluding to this incident, Schultz said there were "some misunderstandings," noting he was not involved with some of the decisions made then.

"There were some assumptions made about what could be done, how it could be moved forward. Dismantling, it was decided as a possibility," he said. "It was decided to move forward with that without final approval of everything."

The Town of NOTL reported in 2011 that the schoolhouse was likely built for the estate works of Glencairn Hall's original owner, entrepreneur John Hamilton. In staff's analysis of this latest proposal, it wrote that this move will change

the historical context of the schoolhouse.

However, it further noted the property has already been significantly altered through previous land severances, development surrounding the property and the loss of Glencairn Hall, which burned down in a fire in April 2025.

With Glencairn Hall and other structures once part of the estate's operations gone, the schoolhouse remains the last surviving feature of the Glencairn estate.

Therefore, staff wrote, the schoolhouse's long-term conservation and cultural heritage value will benefit from this plan to move and restore it.

Its approval of the schoolhouse's move comes with several conditions: among them, the property owner must submit a detailed restoration plan and install a commemorative plaque outlining the schoolhouse's history, recognizing its association with Glencairn.

zahraa@niagaranow.com

To Our Niagara-on-the-Lake Community

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Shaw’s newly built **Artists’ Village** opens doors to the public

Continued from Front Page

game-changer,” Jennings said at the ribbon-cutting event.

The five-building village took a year and a half of construction and forms the centrepiece of the festival’s ongoing \$150-million fundraising campaign, called All.Together.Now, which the federal government backed with a \$15-million matching grant in 2024.

Inside the Artists’ Village, the new Burton Centre for Lifelong Creativity gives the Shaw’s education and outreach programs a permanent home after years of competing for space at the Festival Theatre.

Jennings said the Shaw holds more than 5,300 of those events each year, reaching more than 120,000 people beyond its stages.

The centre features a dance lab with a sprung floor, sound-isolated practice rooms, a digital lab with a green screen for media and hybrid programs



Shaw Festival’s executives cut the ribbon to officially open the new Artists’ Village on Friday, Aug. 14. Pragna Desai, Tim Jennings and Jim Burton — the three with hands on the ceremonial scissors — mark the launch of the residential and creative hub, which will house performers and support education and outreach programs. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

and a flexible room called Village Hall for performances and lectures.

In September, the Shaw will launch a program for members of the aging population interested in dabbling in the performing arts, to be held at the Burton centre.

“It is our goal at the Shaw Festival that you don’t just come here to see a play

— you come here to play,” said Melissa Novecosky, associate executive director. “You come here to do an activity. You come here to try something, to get out of your comfort zone, to be with other people.”

The centre is named for Canadian entrepreneur Jim Burton, whose family foundation invested

\$5 million in the project. He describes the village as “bringing Shaw to the street” — carrying the skills of professional theatre to people who may never work in the arts.

Burton traces that conviction to his youth in Orillia, where a visiting musician inspired him to join an orchestra as a

trombonist and see a future beyond his hometown.

“Maybe it sets a spark that inspires them for the rest of their life,” he said of the students who will visit the campus.

Those students can stay overnight in the adjoining visitor residence, which offers simple two-bed rooms at about \$60 per bed per night for school and university groups taking part in Shaw programs.

Novecosky said the price could make multi-day trips realistic for university theatre programs squeezed by shrinking budgets for arts and humanities. Queen’s University has already scheduled to bring a two-week course to the campus.

The new wardrobe building unites almost 60 costume workers who produce close to 1,000 costumes annually for Shaw’s 12 to 14 productions. The department previously operated out of four locations.

“The most expensive thing here is labour,” said

associate head of wardrobe Janet Ellis, whose staff often lost parts of each day just tracking down basic supplies and “running up and down the stairs.”

The new facility puts the whole operation on one level, with room for seven cutting teams instead of five.

Artistic director Tim Carroll called theatre “the best thing in the world for the kind of crisis we face,” pointing to social isolation and hours lost to screens as the problems the village is built to counter.

Tim and Frances Price gave \$10 million to the campaign, among its largest private gifts.

“After decades of dreaming about it, drawing it, discussing it, fundraising for it, advocating for it, fighting for it and very frequently lying awake at night worrying about how we’re going to fund it,” Jennings said. “We at Shaw finally have achieved it.”

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Artists' Village's first residents talk life in new campus

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

Espoir Segbeaya sold her furniture in Montreal and moved everything she owns into a closet in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where the Shaw Festival now houses its actors in apartments it owns instead of ones it rents. Segbeaya and Dillan Chiblow live in the Artists' Village, the 42,000-square-foot campus the festival opened to the public on Friday, located inside the

former Upper Canada Lodge long-term care home. The Shaw pays roughly \$800,000 a year against market value to hold about 100 artist beds in rented apartments across town. The village's 26 units are meant to absorb part of that cost. Both actors moved in when the residences opened in February. The apartments have been nearly full since April. "I came here with everything I own from Montreal

because I'm not subletting," said Segbeaya. "It fits really well." Chiblow, who is Ojibwe and from Garden River First Nation near Sault Ste. Marie, made the same move for the season. The two are members of Shaw's Baillie cohort, four working actors who meet weekly with associate artistic director Kimberley Rampersad to take George Bernard Shaw's plays apart line by line while performing in the 2026 season.

Segbeaya said the rest of the company is too booked to do the same. "Not even the actors here, they're so busy that they don't get a chance to just go back to the text," she said. "And the way that they're doing it, it's really special." Chiblow said he knows of no other company that gives working actors that much study time. "I don't think it happens anywhere," he said. Shaw performers with 30 years of credits still book

time with the same coaches to keep difficult text under control. Both actors said watching that has taught them as much as the sessions with Rampersad. "It's also really admirable as an actor to watch established people also go to the coaches," said Chiblow. Segbeaya said no one at Shaw treats the work as finished. "Everyone's working hard all across the board," she said. "There is no, 'I'm good and I'm too good now.'"

Chiblow said residents working opposite schedules will often meet in the courtyard between the buildings. "When Espoir had her show premiere, we all had a bit of a BBQ out there and everyone came out," said Chiblow. He said the arrangement works because everyone in the building understands what the others are carrying. "It's going to be weird not to be here with this community."

andrew@niagaranow.com

Exploring the enchanting and diverse world of puppets

WALKING WITH GIANTS
★★★★
(out of five)

Artists' Village, a Shaw Festival presentation on puppets with Prof. Lawrence Switzky.

Penny-Lynn Cookson
Special to The Lake Report

We have been living and walking with giants for a very long time. In the context of puppets in our lifetimes, we can rattle off scores of Disney characters, radio and TV shows, films, Macy's Thanksgiving Day parades and theatre performances in one form or another all over the world. Think of Pinocchio, Charlie McCarthy, Howdy Doody, Lamb Chop, Kermit the Frog, Miss Piggy, other beloved Muppets of Jim Henson, Elmo, Big Bird and Yoda. Most recently, we have marveled at the spectacular stage productions of "War Horse" and "The Lion King." Our fascination probably began with fingers creating shadow images on cave walls lit by flickering oil lamps. The oldest puppet, dated circa 28,000 years ago, is a seven-inch carved ivory figure with tiny holes for moving the limbs found in Brno, Czech Republic. String-pulled figures from Egypt are more 4,000 years old. Ancient Greece and Rome had moveable toys and active rod puppets and string puppets.

Current technology is taking puppetry in astonishing new directions. Global travel is taking audiences to exotic locations with diverse puppet traditions long held sacred and maintained by generations of puppet masters and musicians. In "Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice," Penny Francis states, "Puppetry can be directly traced to the atavistic universal belief in the spirit life hidden within and embodied by natural phenomena things and materials. This belief forms the core of the animist religion and is intrinsic to the understanding of the puppet's origins." That spirit within took time to recognize when gazing at a high swath of white fabric at this summer's "Walking with Giants" event, part of the Shaw Festival's series of special presentations this season. Once the veteran actor and puppeteer, Graeme Somerville, stepped beneath the silk and began manipulating the rods, the terrifying, swooping, giant ghost of "A Christmas Carol" was effectively swirling before us. The five basic types of puppets are finger, hand, rod, marionette strings and shadow. Finger puppets are small, simple and great for small children. Hand puppets, such as Pulcinella or Punch and Judy, use the hand inside a glove or a sock. The popular Budaixi tradition of Taiwan has high-energy shows where intricate sack-shaped cos-



Michael Therriault as Scrooge with the ghost of Jacob Marley in "A Christmas Carol" (2017). DAVID COOPER

tumes allow for martial arts high kicks, while special effects create thunder and explosions. Rod puppets are controlled from below or side using wooden or wire sticks. The extraordinary Thang Long Water Puppet Theatre in Hanoi, Vietnam dates from 11th century villages of the Red River Delta of northern Vietnam when, after the rice harvest, fields were flooded to stage entertaining water shows. Today, eight puppeteers, standing in waist deep water behind a bamboo screen, manipulate fig wood rods to tell the ancient morality stories of rural village life. Puppets fish, chase ducks, observe royal processions and watch dragons fighting. Musicians play traditional instruments and singers shout words of warning or encouragement adding to the drama.

Marionettes are manipulated from above using strings or wires. The wood-carved Kathputli from Rajasthan, India may be richly dressed and painted but their travelling shows address social concerns of poverty and education. The Opera dei Pupi of Sicily preserves the oral tradition of romantic chivalrous tales of the Middle Ages with Christian and Saracen warrior puppets dressed in real armour. The flat leather shadow puppets of wayang kulit are an ancient form of storytelling that originated over a thousand years ago at the royal courts of Java and Bali and spread throughout Indonesia. The puppets move in front of a screen lit from behind where the dalang (master puppeteer) uses thin sticks attached to the puppets to manipulate the arms. The characters include the joker who can criticize delicate issues as well as the heroic characters from myths and Indian epics. The dalangs memorize a huge repertory of ancient narratives and poetic songs. One of the most influential traditions of puppetry today is the bunraku of Japan. Three black-clad puppeteers appear on stage with life-size puppets. They closely hold and maneuver the puppets by using their own hands and a puppet neck control bar. Prof. Lawrence Switzky, University of Toronto, mentioned these puppet traditions but focused more

on the expanding role and impact of puppetry in modern theatre and performance art. The Handspring Puppet Company of South Africa has been exploring the boundaries of puppetry and contemporary performance since 1981 in its collaborations with world-renowned companies in 30 countries and dealing with politically and socially sensitive themes. It also helps stage an annual outdoor puppet parade using giant and community-made puppets in Barrydale, South Africa. Handspring's founders, Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler, brought larger-than-life animal heroes to our world in the form of nine life-size horses for the renowned play "War Horse" in 2006. Great care was taken that the horse appear to be alive, that it breathed in and breathed out, thereby creating empathy with the audience. The horse was created to move, to be ridden and to be "a purveyor of life after death." In 1997, the acclaimed director and writer Julie Taymor brought to the stage her adaptation of the film "The Lion King." It was a huge risk. The audience knew the film. How could she create on stage things only possible on film? She had lived in Indonesia and Japan, been immersed in wayang kulit, bunraku and Akira Kurosawa films, studied mime and directed plays and films using puppets and masks, but how would she create a wildebeest stam-

pede? She did it by "breaking the wall," — staging a "double event" of the simultaneous animal heads on the actors, recognizable as human, carrying their masked animal selves racing down the theatre aisles. It was theatrical illusion. Film has to be believable. Theatre does not. It was thrilling. Disbelief was suspended. For Taymor, to tell a story well means finding and celebrating the common thread that we all share as human beings, of how we exist with nature and each other. It is not borrowing or appropriation of the stories or puppets of others. It is finding inspiration and sharing those techniques that belong to everybody, be they form or expression. The Bread and Puppet Theater in Glover, Vt. has the largest collection of big puppets and masks in the world. An old hay barn has been transformed into a museum for veteran papier-mâché puppets. The collection grows annually as it is built to the demands of human rights, poverty, warmongers and what to celebrate in this changing world. It is a theatre of all means of action not dialogue. As the traditional mantra of preservation doesn't apply here, one is advised to visit sooner rather than later. Open daily and fresh baked bread is available. Penny-Lynn Cookson is an arts and culture historian, writer and lecturer living in Niagara-on-the-Lake.



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Dark comedy comes to Jackson-Triggs

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

Eric Johnston never set out to become, as he describes it, “the poster boy” of men’s mental health in Canadian comedy. But with the debut of his “Run With the Bull” docuseries earlier this year, the comedian’s story and candour have become part of a growing conversation around addiction, trauma and self-care. Now, Johnston is taking the bull by the horns again with his “Son of a Bull” comedy tour, which stops in Niagara-on-the-Lake this Thursday, Aug. 20. Johnston will perform an hour-long set at the Jackson-Triggs Niagara Estate amphitheatre, blending nostalgia with gallows humour. “By the end of it, you’re going to learn everything you need to know about me,” he said. Johnston grew up in Hamilton with a professional wrestler for a father, Daniel



Eric Johnston.

“Bullwhip” Johnson, whose two-decade career included appearances with Lutte International, World Championship Wrestling and World Wrestling Entertainment. Johnston died of kidney failure at age 49, a week after Johnston turned 13, following a years-long battle with alcoholism. Johnston connects that loss with his own journey toward better physical and mental health, spurred by becoming a father and the challenges he and his

family faced trying to have children. While the subject matter is heavy, Johnston said his goal is to find humour in it. “I talk openly about the fact that my dad passed away, and I find a way to make it funny,” he said. “Taking these themes like death, alcoholism and infertility and flipping them on their head and presenting it in a way that, ‘It’s fine, it’s OK, I’m laughing — you guys laugh, too.’” Johnston said his performance style borrows from professional wrestling, shifting between quieter, intimate moments and explosive bursts of energy. The same material is explored in his “Run With the Bull” docuseries and 2024 book, including his childhood with parents who drank and the trauma of losing his father. Johnston said he never set out to use men’s mental health as a “hot-ticket item” to attract an audience. He simply wanted to

tell his story truthfully. “I had a father who was a superstar, my hero, who was on top of the world and just like this amazing character of a guy, amazing example of a man, of a tough guy,” he said. “And then his career ended and he drank himself to death.” When “Run With the Bull” premiered on Bell’s Fibe TV this spring, Johnston said people began telling him he had created a men’s mental health show. “One friend of mine just walked up to me and said, ‘You are going to help so many people,’” he said. “I went out and told the truth, and in that, the truth set me free to be the man I was supposed to be.” Doors open Thursday at 7 p.m. at the Jackson-Triggs amphitheatre, 2145 Niagara Stone Rd. The show starts at 8 p.m. with openers Jason Allen and Barry Vincent. Tickets are available at ericjohnstonwho.com/standup-comedy. zahraa@niagaranow.com



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There’s no better sound than children’s laughter

For families facing childhood illness, a moment of play can mean so much more than fun

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The Lake Report

When a child is facing a serious illness, family life can quickly become centred around hospital appointments, treatments and uncertainty. For their brothers and sisters, childhood can feel like it has been put on pause, too.

At Ronald McDonald House South Central Ontario (RMH SCO), families call our House home while their child receives the medical care they need. While parents focus on treatment, we believe something important should remain: the chance for kids to laugh, play and simply be kids.

For five-year-old Seth Heikoop, play created a moment his family will never forget.

Seth is being treated for leukemia, and his family—including mom, dad, brother and sister—have stayed at RMH SCO 103 nights and counting. His dad describes Seth as a child who had become understandably serious during his treatment. “Seth was a pretty serious little boy, smiles were seldom and he didn’t laugh at all,” he shared.

Then, one day, Seth was playing with his siblings at RMH SCO.

“He gave an all-out laugh—balm to an aching parent’s heart.”

That is the power of play.

For a child facing illness, play can offer a moment of freedom from treatment. For a sibling, it can mean being a kid alongside their brother or sister. And for a parent, sometimes a child’s laughter is a reminder that underneath the worry, their child is still just a kid.

Today, there is something missing from our House: a dedicated out-

door playground.

Thanks to a transformational lead gift, RMH SCO has launched Lindsay’s Loves Playground, a new outdoor play space where children and families can step away from the hospital environment and into imagination, movement and joy.

Named in honour of Lindsay (Sgro) Bridge, the playground will be the first dedicated outdoor play space at RMH SCO—a lasting legacy designed to bring moments like Seth’s to hundreds of children and families each year.

The need is real — and it hits close to home. Roughly half of the families who stay at RMH SCO come from communities across Niagara. Every year, hundreds of children stay at the House, including both pediatric patients and their siblings.

A playground cannot change what brought a family to RMH SCO. But it can change what happens in between.

It can give siblings a place to play together. A child recovering from treatment a chance to feel the wind on their face. Parents a moment to watch their children laugh instead of worrying about what comes next.

This is more than a playground. It is part of making RMH SCO feel like home.

The lead gift has given this dream its foundation, but additional support is needed to complete the vision. Every gift matters. Whether it is \$25, \$100, \$1,000 or more, every contribution brings us closer to opening the gates.

Together, we can create a place where families can put illness aside—even for a little while.



The future home of Lindsay’s Loves Playground, a new outdoor play space where children and families can step away from the hospital environment for a moment of joy. SUPPLIED



Twins Spencer and Claire Rintjema playing together between appointments. The family has spent a total of 297 days at Ronald McDonald House. Additional support is still required to make the playground a reality. Every gift matters, whether it’s \$25, \$1,000 or more. Help Ronald McDonald House South Central Ontario bring a little more joy to kids staying in the hospital. SUPPLIED



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A little laughter can make all the difference

Help give children staying at Ronald McDonald House South Central Ontario a place to laugh, play and simply be kids. Lindsay’s Loves Playground will be RMH SCO’s first dedicated outdoor playground - a place where children facing serious illness and their siblings, including hundreds of children from communities across Niagara, can step away from the hospital and simply be kids - **and we need your help to make it happen.**



Donate today to help create more laughter, play and joy for families when they need it most.

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BKind Grateful #89: When someone is embarrassed by a small mistake, help normalize it and move the moment along.

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Contributed by Patty Garriock
“How beautiful the leaves grow old.
How full of light and color are their last days.”
- John Burroughs

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Foiled again!



Jay Buffington rides his wingfoil on Lake Ontario on Saturday, taking advantage of the rare wind conditions that allow him to foil in this spot.
DAVE VAN DE LAAR

NOTL’s choice, from blackjack to tarmac



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist

“We’re very, very, very worried about what’s happening,” he says. “The dots are starting to connect.”
Vaughn Goettler lets it spill out: “There’s more going on than we know. There’s a plan. Erwin is friends with Dougie. If he gets in, they’re going to put a casino or casinos into our backyard here, maybe even in one of the developments that’s under construction or proposed as we speak.”
So, yeah, the gloves just came off. Retired, wealthy, philanthropist, self-made man Goettler is taking direct aim at sitting deputy mayor, grape king and former career cop Erwin Wiens. Both want to be lord mayor. One is all brakes. One is all gas.
The election slugfest slipped into high gear late last week as the province (led by Doug “Dougie” Ford) announced “a major milestone” in its plan to double tourism in these parts. Simply put, this opens all of Niagara region to an historic expansion of casinos, gambling and related entertainment.
The company with a lock on casinos (now operating two in the Falls) has agreed to “allow additional casino operators to enter the gaming

market.” That market includes NOTL. And Goettler smells a blackjack rat.
“People have joked about a casino going into the Parliament Oak hotel,” he says. “But what if it’s not a joke? What if — nudge, nudge, wink, wink, behind the scenes, you know — Erwin has agreed? Maybe it’s already decided. Already done. We have no idea how many behind closed door agreements have been made.”
Poppcock, says Wiens: “I am unaware of any discussions of casinos taking place. For the record, I do not support casinos in Niagara-on-the-Lake. That is a hard ‘no’ for me.”
So, what do we know?
There is a ton of political capital being thrown at a dramatic expansion of the tourism business here. The province is spending more than \$1.5 billion to twin the QEW bridge over the canal. There is almost \$40 million in public money being scooped by the Shaw for its massive Royal George expansion.
And to help facilitate 25 million visitors a year, the cutesy little local airport is slated to become a regional hub. Passenger traffic could mushroom from about 8,000 now (mostly chartered heli riders) to 600,000, landing via jets on scheduled trips from Canadian and U.S. cities.
For his part, Wiens is fine with it.
“The airport’s master plan is a 20-year roadmap rather than a commitment that every recommendation will automatically be built,” he tells me. “Improvements such as termi-



Part of the provincial plan to double tourism is a big expansion of our wee airport. The plan is to eventually see 600,000 passengers a year as this becomes the air hub for Niagara Falls. SUPPLIED

nal and parking upgrades, and security and customs facilities will have direct benefits to the community.”
His main concern is the impact on agriculture. Otherwise, “I support responsible improvements to the Niagara District Airport because better air access can strengthen business connectivity, emergency services, local employment, tourism, community access and Niagara’s long-term economic resilience.”
Resilience or unshackled growth? Will Ontario’s thirst for GDP, its embrace of gamblers and the dreamy vision of Las Vegas North turn authentic little NOTL into a theme park?
Is Goettler’s paranoia that powerful forces have already approved too many new hotel rooms, surrendered too much local control and allowed developers to corrupt town hall, justified? Or does he spout election hyperbole meant to stir loins, flush cheeks and scare up votes?
But add it up: The airport.

The bridge. The bag money being thrown around. The unwarranted edifices like Parliament Oak or the Rand-Ritz Carlton. The gutting of our local council (we lose two seats and a regional rep). Even the St. Davids roundabout making trips to the casinos faster.
Goettler sees a plot. He also sees in the July 28 and Aug. 2 floods, justification for an immediate moratorium on all new development.
“We must do that, until we can figure out the infrastructure to support any more,” he says. “That’s really number one for the sake of all the residents.”
Wiens responds that his support for development, “is not a blank cheque.” Things like building out the airport, “must be supported by demonstrated demand, sound financial planning, appropriate environmental and agricultural studies, regulatory approvals, public consultation and a clear benefit to Niagara-on-the-Lake.”
Andrea Kaiser is also running to run the place. She tells me her position is that a process is required before, well, she has a position.
“I think the proposed airport expansion deserves a full and transparent public process before any position is taken. We need to understand the potential economic benefits, but also carefully consider the impacts on traffic, infrastructure, agriculture, residents, noise and tourism.”
Nominations close Friday.
Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister.
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Downsides of emergency declaration?

Dear editor:
After reading the article, “NOTL not in state of emergency after floods: CAO,” I went to the Town’s website to read the full statement from our chief administrative officer.

The resumé he summarizes makes clear that we have a highly experienced CAO, which is a significant asset in a small community. It is also evident from published reports and social media that town staff have been working extremely hard throughout the current flooding crisis, and they deserve our thanks.

The CAO’s statement appropriately emphasizes that declaring a state of



NOTL residents facing destroyed basements are left wondering why the Town of NOTL chose not to declare a state of emergency after two major floods. FILE

emergency does not automatically provide access to provincial or federal funding, and that some public statements have contained inaccuracies. Fair enough. However, I was disap-

pointed that the statement did not address the central question underlying this debate: What are the advantages and disadvantages of declaring a state of emergency

in NOTL under the current circumstances?

Clearly, some neighbouring municipalities considered this question and concluded that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. Presumably, our town’s leadership conducted a similar assessment and reached the opposite conclusion. That decision may well have been the right one for NOTL.

That said, shouldn’t residents, particularly those who have suffered flood damage, be told what those disadvantages are, and why they led to the NOTL official position on the subject?

Robin Cardozo
NOTL

Climate change needs to be on the election agenda

Dear editor:
To NOTL residents: This is a love letter — to you, to our idyllic town, to our remarkable planet, and to future generations.

This has been a summer to remember, but for alarming reasons — extreme heat, air quality alerts due to Ontario wildfires, and flash flooding.

This is perhaps an unprecedented summer — the summer we have all been directly impacted by climate change.

We can choose to forget — and go blindly forward. Only to be reminded next summer, and quite possibly, more extremely so.

Or, we can choose to take concrete and immediate action.

Human beings have the capacity to accomplish phenomenal things.

Look at what we did during the pandemic. There was an emergency, and we immediately addressed it. We looked it in the eye and took radical, concrete action because it was a life-and-death situation.

Well, the climate crisis is currently proving itself to also be a life-and-death situation.

There is an upcoming election in October. Just a few days ago, I looked at all the candidates’ platforms, and only two of them even mention the word “environmental.”

This strikes me as wildly out of touch and incredibly

inadequate in light of what we have just experienced as a community. Does this not strike you as woefully insufficient?

I believe that we, as a community, have a responsibility to demand more.

I propose that we ask all candidates to make climate action a real part of this election conversation. That they each conscientiously and courageously outline what they are prepared to do for our community in light of this rapidly accelerating issue.

When the candidates come knocking on your doors, ask them: What is your platform for climate resilience?

The town already has a

Climate Change Adaptation Plan. What will you do to ensure that its 27 actions are actually implemented?

What concrete action will you take during your term? How are you proposing to lead during this crisis?

We are navigating a summer that has given us a very real glimpse of what climate change means for our community.

Let’s meet this moment and ask our representatives to do the same. For ourselves. For our community. And for future generations. Please join me in asking all of our candidates to do more.

Tara Rosling
NOTL

Measure councillors’ success by their achieved goals

Dear editor:
Happy to learn that Councillor Mavridis is pleased with her performance (“Mavridis will seek re-election for 2026 term,” Aug. 6).

The assessment of one’s performance becomes

more credible when weighed by third party. To state the obvious.

In Business 101, an individual is asked to set precise, measurable goals with a definite time line for himself. The actual results can be measured

and the performance evaluated.

Why can’t our politicians do the same thing? This is not nuclear surgery.

Nice, clear, well-written article, by the way.

Philippe Borel
St. Davids



Maria Mavridis.

We welcome your letters

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



This week’s riddle is “Jeopardy!” style
Category: **THAT ADDS UP**

Jerome Horwitz, Moses Horwitz and Samuel Horwitz went by other names nyukking it up as members of this troupe.

Last issue category: **SIMPLE**

Clue: **Used in everything from daiquiris to gin fizzes, simple syrup is commonly made using equal parts water and this.**

Answer: **What is sugar**

Answered first by: **Sue Rautenberg**

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Bob Wheatley, Jane Morris, Hugh Lundy, Lynda Collet, Becky Creager, Donna Pearce, Nancy Rocca, Howard Jones, KC King, Claudia Grimwood, Wade Durling, Emma Balsas, Jeff Lake, Sylvia Wiens, Jim Dandy, Margie Enns, Esther VanGorder, Catherine Clarke, Marla Percy, Katie Reimer, Jane Andersen, Glenda Lightfoot, Tuija Johansson, Sheila Meloche

Email answers to editor@niagaranow.com, with your name, for a chance to win a \$25 Irish Harp Pub gift card every week. (Subject line: Riddle me this)

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A better world is possible when we embrace change



Brian Marshall
Columnist

My brilliant wife has a mantra that she used in her career as a very successful CEO and it goes:

“If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always gotten.”

Now, she applied that saying to problem-solving — envisioning new, better processes and outcomes for the business. Far too often, she believes, human beings become complacent and the security of repetition wins over the opportunity for improvement — even continuing to do things that are ineffective or simply do not work anymore.

So, as a collective, we fall into the rut of repeating the past simply because it is familiar and comfortable.

But, then there are those who step out and create new and wonderful alternatives.

Consider the advent of mass timber construction which began in Europe about 20 years ago using cross-laminated timber that had been developed in the 1990s.

For reference, cross-laminated timber is an engineered wood product made by using thin layers of hardened, kiln-dried lumber, which are arranged in a perpendicular pattern of alternating grain patterns then glued together under high pressure. Remarkably stable and extremely strong, cross-laminated timber is a viable alternative to steel and structural concrete.

Why is this important?

According to the United Nations Environment Programme’s report “Building Materials And The Climate: Constructing A New Future” published in September 2023, “The building and construction sector is by far the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, accounting for a staggering 37 per cent of global emissions.”

The concrete industry alone is responsible for approximately eight per cent of global carbon dioxide output. To put it in other terms, if this industry were a country, it would be classified as one of the top five worst contributors to pollution on the planet.



Limberlost Place in Toronto, George Brown College’s new campus. DOUBLESPEACE PHOTOGRAPHY

Despite this, it continues to be a dominant structural material for the construction of any large building simply because it is a familiar and traditional methodology.

Ontario provincial legislation allows for mass timber buildings up to 18 storeys, however if you are still shaking your head over the concept, allow me to provide a few quick examples.

Located in Milwaukee, Wis., the Ascent MKE building completed in 2022 is currently the world’s tallest mass timber at 25 storeys (284 feet). With the exception of the hybrid construction of the first six floors, the structure is completely comprised of mass timber elements made from sustainably sourced wood. Construction took 22

months — about 25 per cent faster than traditional construction — and was no more expensive to build than its concrete and steel equivalent.

Finished in 2014, the 160-metre-long Mistissini Bridge in northern Quebec spans the Upaachikus Pass. With the exception of the concrete piers that act as its foundation, mass timber replaced all of the traditional concrete and steel that would historically have been used.

In Toronto, located at 185 Queens Quay E., Limberlost Place is a 187,500-square-foot mass timber building that opened late last year to serve as George Brown College’s waterfront campus.

The PNE Amphitheatre in Vancouver was opened this

year just prior to the FIFA World Cup. At this point in time, its arched, 100-metre-long roof (capable of sheltering 10,000 people) resting on only three points is documented as the longest free-span mass timber roof in the world.

Moreover, mass timber elements are manufactured here in Canada and the warmth of the natural wood renders the mass timber buildings just plain beautiful.

Let’s turn a page and visit Prince Edward Island where an outfit named Aslan Renewables has introduced what the company’s founder and CEO refers to as “a hydro power plant with IKEA instructions.”

Essentially, this brainchild was birthed to take advantage of the approximately 64,000 small dam sites sprinkled across Canada and the company has developed a modular unit (think a 20-foot sea container) that holds up to 12 turbines capable of producing four megawatts of electricity which can be shipped to a site and activated within two days — no excavation, no concrete and zero environmental impact.

In addition, each unit is fully autonomous — constantly monitored/controlled

by an integrated AI component — and can be installed, actively feeding the grid for only about \$115,000. Furthermore, there is no need for any alterations to the existing electrical grid. It’s completely plug and play.

Will this technology replace the major electrical generation installations? Well, no.

However, consider the fact that the province of P.E.I. has 170 small dam sites. According to Murray, if each these sites were producing hydro-electric power, the output would be “upwards of 20,000 megawatt hours per year.”

That’s enough to power somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 homes in that province — simply by putting these old dams back into production.

And, if every old dam in Canada were similarly equipped, that 20,000 becomes somewhere north of 7.5 million megawatt hours per year. That’s power enough for roughly 650,000 to 700,000 homes.

Thank God for those who embrace innovation and change — a better future depends on them.

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



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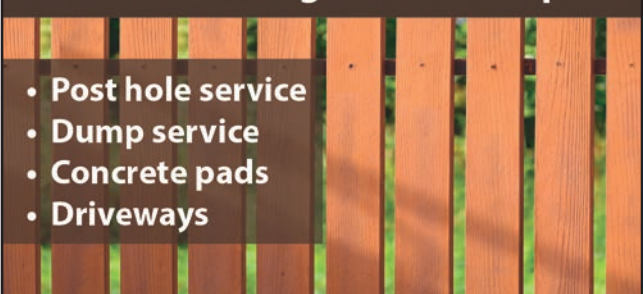
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Magic of Motown alive again at Music Niagara’s latest show



ROSS’S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

How did I not know Smokey Robinson had been a vice-president of Motown Records way back when? Not only do we share a surname, but I spent an afternoon at the Motown Museum in the Brewster-Douglass housing projects after running the Detroit Free Press Marathon many years ago.

Berry Gordy was the founder of the Motown Records and its subsidiaries, and is certainly a prime example of what one man can accomplish. The Brewster-Douglass projects was just one of the lower-income housing areas in Detroit, but it produced so many superstars: think of Diana Ross, Aretha Frank-

lin, the Commodores, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles — this barely starts the list.

I will ramble to the Ironwood Cider House on Lakeshore Road on Aug. 12 — just last week. Obviously, the Shaw Festival is the headliner here in our precious Niagara, but there are so many other diverse entertainment options available for us to enjoy.

Part of Music Niagara’s Pops Series, that evening the Undercovers featured the music of Kenny Rogers, Lionel Richie and Smokey Robinson.

How did Kenny Rogers elbow his way into this show? Beats me, but I have never really been a music guy. The closest I got to music was at Laura Secord Secondary School in St. Catharines, where both of my children were very involved in many of the wonderful programs headed up by David Sisler. Band, the musicals, choir, and more.

The Undercovers entertained us with their rich harmonies and signature style, but the value added was the education. So many



A 1970 television performance captures the polished sound and style of Motown’s golden era. Smokey Robinson’s music was among the classics celebrated by the Undercovers during Music Niagara’s Pops Series at Ironwood Cider House last week. SOURCED

facts provided in their soulful storytelling.

I thought I had been fairly aware of what was going on in the world of music, but now I know I knew next to nothing. Unlike my NOTL pal Ed Barisa, the enthusiastic vice-chair of Music Niagara.

He has shared with me that he had been a “roadie” for a couple of his teenage years in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, just south of Montreal. This gave him a lifelong love of the world of music.

This week’s Ramblings is definitely rambling, but I am going to continue with a Music Niagara theme. The Pops Series opened this year with Quartetto Gelato. Always unpredictable, and an evening of vibrant rhythms and a variety of musical surprises.

And let me repeat: the talent. I had no idea we had such a talented oboe player in our midst. Colin Maier is the production manager of Music Niagara, and “in his spare time,” incredibly talented on this double-

reed woodwind instrument. Yes, he plays the notes, but with such intensity and passion. And a sartorially creative raconteur to boot. When introducing Quartetto Gelato’s songs, he deftly slipped in so many interesting historical tidbits. Value added, which we appreciate.

And methinks we went an entire evening without a mention of Elvis, John Denver, Bing Crosby or Neil Diamond. I don’t really know what I am talking about, so I will ramble in another direction.

Music Niagara’s assistant production manager is Loris Isabettini, with so much to do during Music Niagara’s 2026 season. Some nineteen varied shows, and proving his talents, “you hardly know he is there.”

Imagine our surprise when Colin Maier invited him on stage to entertain us. Loris is larger than life, and this fall will be defending his PhD thesis at the University of Windsor. I think this means he will be adding to the world’s body of knowledge, and has been discovering new facts. In his case, his

subject is argumentative studies. Who knew?

What stage presence, and he enthralled us singing “In the Jailhouse Now” by the Soggy Bottom Boys. Of course. What a hidden talent, singing the words so naturally and with all the moves.

So this has been a wandering Ross’s Ramblings. I have tried to emphasize how much is going on culturally in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Get out and enjoy. Learn.

And, I get fatigued when government leaders tell us their party “is providing” this many millions of dollars for whatever project or initiative. It’s not their money. That money comes from the taxpayers. Are they attempting to deceive us?

Music Niagara receives some funding and grants from various government bodies. So, from taxpayers. Money well spent, with hard working, talented and passionate people.

You will meet vibrant Music Niagara volunteers like Judith Tsaros and Dianne Hall.

Resolve to get out more.

rossrocket9@gmail.com

MOVING ROADS FORWARD

Notice of Construction Niagara Stone Road (Regional Road 55) from Line 1 Road to East West Line Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Project Description

Niagara Region will be reconstructing Niagara Stone Road (Regional Road 55) from Line 1 Road to East West Line in the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The project includes full road reconstruction, widening the roadway to three lanes, construction of paved shoulders, installation of storm sewers and catch basins, and new traffic signals at East West Line to improve safety, drainage and traffic operations. Construction will be completed on behalf of Niagara Region by Walkers Construction Limited.

What to Expect

During construction, residents can expect periodic noise, dust and increased construction activity within the project limits. Every effort will be made to maintain access to homes and businesses, but temporary disruptions to driveway access and single lane closures will be required. Advance notice will be provided whenever possible.

- The key tasks to be completed are:
- Full reconstruction and widening of Niagara Stone Road (Regional Road 55) to three lanes
 - Installation of paved shoulders, storm sewers and catch basins
 - Construction of new traffic signals at East West Line
 - Placement of base asphalt in 2026, with the final surface asphalt to follow in spring 2027

When

Working hours will typically fall between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday to Friday. Construction is expected to begin in the coming weeks and the road reconstruction, including base asphalt, is anticipated to be completed by December 31, 2026, weather permitting. The final surface course of asphalt will be completed in spring 2027. We appreciate your cooperation and patience during this time.

Safety

This work involves heavy equipment, excavation and restricted work zones. Please obey all posted signage and barriers and keep a safe distance from the construction area.

For comments, questions or for more information, please contact the project team:

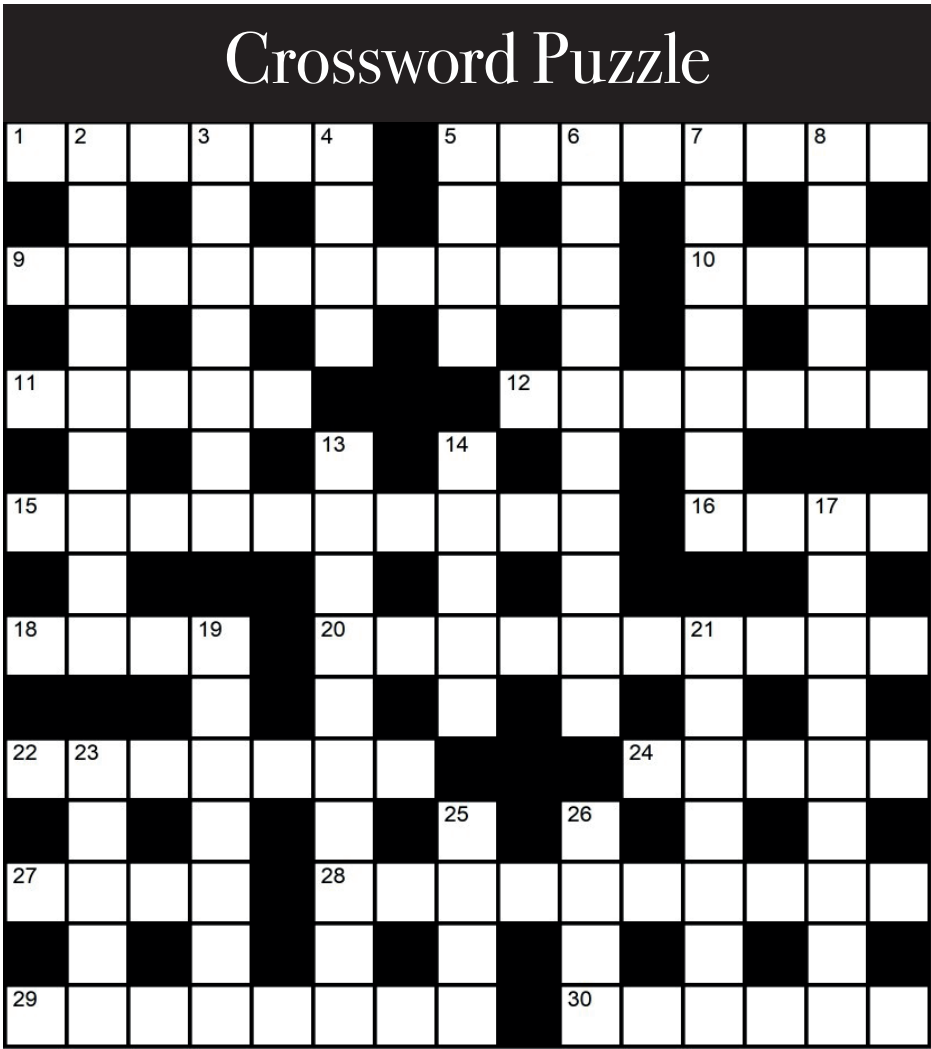
Robert Friscioni Contract Administrator robert.friscioni@chisholmfleming.com	Alex Vilella Project Manager, Niagara Region alex.vilella@niagararegion.com
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This notice was first issued on August 20, 2026.

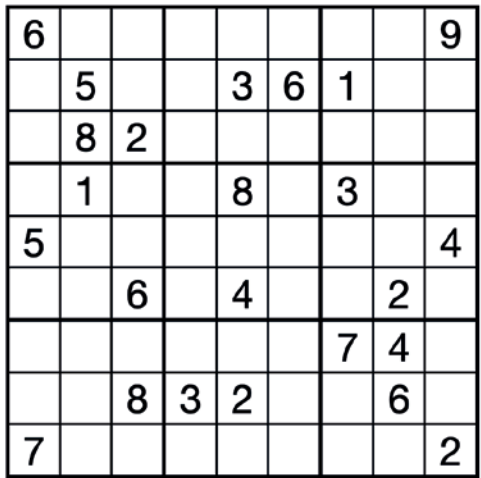
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- Across**
- 1. Without exception (2,1,3)
 - 5. Crossword with no clues (8)
 - 9. Good for you (10)
 - 10. Chancel wear (4)
 - 11. Geological faults (5)
 - 12. Impressive array (7)
 - 15. Vulnerable (3,2,1,4)
 - 16. Free from bias (4)
 - 18. Corporate big wheels (1,1,2)
 - 20. Stage illuminators (10)
 - 22. Country on Lake Tanganyika (7)
 - 24. Edge of a precipice (5)
 - 27. Angler's decoy (4)
 - 28. Firm which makes Up! (10)
 - 29. Arrogant, presumptuous people (8)
 - 30. Overnight flight (3-3)
- Down**
- 2. Hold on ... (3,6)
 - 3. Good conductor, perhaps (7)
 - 4. Diamond songwriter (4)
 - 5. Flake (4)
 - 6. Common currency in New York, for example (6,4)
 - 7. Disappear slowly (4,3)
 - 8. Insurgent (5)
 - 13. Disregarded for promotion (6,4)
 - 14. Largest of the Lesser Sunda Islands (5)
 - 17. With great concentration (9)
 - 19. Used TNT to blow up a scholar (7)
 - 21. Floral wreath (7)
 - 23. Wrongfully appropriate (5)
 - 25. Looked up to in Switzerland (4)
 - 26. Nicholas II was the last (4)



Last issue's answers



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Canadian Army Veterinary Corps, ca. 1918



The Canadian Army Veterinary Corps was part of military life at Niagara Camp during the First World War. Veterinarians and farriers, pictured here, cared for the horses used by the cavalry units training at the camp. Their patients, however, may not have always been horses. Military units often adopted mascots, including dogs, goats, and even bears. Yes, bears. But perhaps we shouldn't be too surprised by this. The Veterinary Corps has its own connection to one of the most famous bears in popular culture. In 1914, Lt. Harry Colebourn, a veterinarian with the Canadian Army Veterinary Corps, purchased a bear cub and named her Winnipeg, or "Winnie." She became the Veterinary Corps' mascot before eventually making her way to the London Zoo, where she inspired A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh. So, while Niagara Camp did not have Winnie, it did have a military bear of our own for a time. The bear was the mascot of the 76th Battalion.

SPONSORED

Community Palliative Care to host Hummel Family Healing Hike

SPONSORED
The Lake Report

Community Palliative Care & Wellness in Niagara-on-the-Lake is excited to announce this year's signature fundraising event, which will be changing things up a bit from previous years: The Hummel Family Healing Hike for Palliative Care.

Since 2021, the Hummel Family Healing Cycle Ride has brought riders together in support of the organization, with participants getting together in teams to cycle in Niagara-on-the-Lake and raise money for the palliative care organization.

Now, as the organization continues to evolve, it wanted this year's event to be even more inclusive and reflective of its companionship motto.

"We wanted to open the ride up to anyone and everyone," says executive director Bonnie Bagnulo. "It would give us an opportunity to be able to talk to everyone and walk alongside them."

A hike allows for meaningful conversations, welcomes people of all ages

and abilities and encourages families to participate together, she says.

The hike is set for Sunday, Sept. 6 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., starting at Veterans Memorial Park in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The goal for this year's hike is to raise \$25,000. Donations will be matched by the Hummel family, the official sponsors of the annual fundraising event since 2021.

Every registration and donation helps the organization support its neighbours by contributing to the costs of the following: comfort and mobility equipment for lending, transportation delivery costs for larger lending items, regular program fees, essential supportive teaching items, cognitive boxes and rental storage for large equipment.

After setting off from Veterans Memorial Park, the Hummel Family Healing Hike for Palliative Care will take place on Niagara-on-the-Lake's Heritage Trail.

Formerly known as the Upper Canada Heritage Trail, this scenic pathway follows the historic 19th-century Erie and Ontario

Railway corridor through Niagara-on-the-Lake—once considered the heart of Upper Canada. It preserves an important piece of the region's transportation history.

Much like this trail, Community Palliative Care & Wellness has a rich history of its own. Formerly known as the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Palliative Care Service, it has proudly served its community since 1986.

The organization is getting ready to celebrate its 40th Anniversary Ruby Milestone Celebration this fall — Bagnulo advises everyone to keep an eye out for more details about this celebration in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, on Sept. 6, participants in the Hummel Family Healing Hike for Palliative Care will have the opportunity to reconnect with past and present board members, visiting volunteers, ad hoc committee members, supports and friends who have all helped shape Community Palliative Care & Wellness' journey.

To register and donate, visit cpcw.ca.

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Obituary

Dr. James Brooks

BROOKS, Dr. James “Jim” Stewart —

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Dr. James “Jim” Brooks, who departed peacefully on August 16, 2026, at the age of 89. A dedicated family physician, gifted athlete, avid traveler, and unwavering champion for those in need, Jim leaves behind a legacy defined by compassion, integrity, and lifelong service to his community. Born on April 7, 1937, in Sudbury, Ontario, to the late Oscar and Hilda Brooks, Jim moved to Toronto at an early age. Growing up in York Township, Jim developed a lifelong passion for sports and athletics. A natural competitor with drive and discipline, he played youth baseball, enjoyed golf, and played hockey at an elite level, ultimately earning coveted spots playing for the Toronto Marlboros and the University of Toronto Varsity Blues. Beyond his athletic pursuits, Jim possessed a keen mind and a profound calling to help others. He earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine in 1964. This marked the beginning of an extraordinary medical career that spanned over 60 years. Jim practised as a devoted family physician across Toronto and the Niagara Region, continuing to see and care for patients until May 2026. Throughout his decades in practice, Dr. Brooks was revered by patients and peers alike. He consistently fought for the underdog and gave the highest level of care possible, regardless of circumstance or background. To Jim, medicine was never just a job, it was a sacred duty to ensure every individual was treated with dignity, respect, and deep human kindness. Above all his professional accomplishments, Jim’s proudest role was that of a loving family man. He is survived by his cherished daughter, Joya, and her husband, Jason, as well as his adored granddaughters, Clementine and Cleo, who brought endless joy and pride to his life. Jim will be deeply missed by his family, friends, and colleagues alike. His memory will live on in the countless lives he touched, healed, and advocated for throughout a lifetime of dedicated care. In accordance with his wishes, cremation has taken place and arrangements are entrusted to Essentials Cremation and Burial Services. Online condolences may be shared on Jim’s tribute page found at EssentialsNiagara.com

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