



What to know about Chautauqua speed changes | Page 10

Catholic trustee **suspended** for Nazi and Pride flag comparison

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake Catholic school board trustee Natalia Benoit violated the board's code

of conduct by comparing the Pride flag to the Nazi flag, an independent investigation has concluded.

On Tuesday, her board colleagues voted to suspend her for five months.

Benoit is barred from attending Niagara Catholic District School Board meetings and from taking part in board-related activities until June 30.

The decision was released in a statement

announcing the findings of – and subsequent board vote – on a report prepared for trustees by independent investigators Parker Sim LLP.

The investigation into Benoit's conduct came after

a complaint was filed last June by Welland-Pelham trustee Paul Turner, citing Benoit's actions outside a May 23 board meeting.

In announcing the



Natalia Benoit.

Continued on Page 10

Snow kidding: Cool contest conjures up nicknames for town plows

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Sled Zeppelin's coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake and they're bringing Scoop Dogg and Ctrl Salt Delete with them.

Well, sort of.

While they may sound like the names of the hottest – or is that coolest? – acts topping the Icelandic pop charts, they represent something a little closer to home.

They're some of the names designed to add a dash of personality to Niagara-on-the-Lake's fleet of six street and two side-walk plows.

And they are the result of a month-long contest for residents, who were encouraged to come up with names for the town's snow-clearing equipment.

Catch My Drift? Yep, that's another one.

While an online search shows most of NOTL's winning names have ap-

Continued on Page 2

Good time for **icewine**



Chamber president Minerva Ward said snowy conditions on Saturday added something to the Icewine Festival's wintry feel. JULIA SACCO

Julia Sacco | The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's icewine festival village was kicked off with weather fit for an icy weekend of wine tasting.

Saturday and Sunday marked the first weekend of Queen

Street's Icewine Village, featuring icewine tastings, talks, cocktail recipes and live music.

The temperature on Saturday, at a low of -12 C, didn't scare crowds away — in fact, many people said they were happy to

see some snow on the ground.

Nicole Scheid moved to New Zealand 18 years ago and tries to make it back to Canada during the holiday season. This year was her first time visiting NOTL's Icewine Festival.

"I wanted to come into town and grab some photos of the snow for my friends because snow is a novelty," she joked.

Scheid left for New Zealand

Continued on Page 5

Researchers analyzing nearly **600 responses** to senior housing survey

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

And now the analysis begins.

Fieldwork for the survey of Niagara-on-the-Lake seniors' future housing

options closed Sunday and all told nearly 600 people answered the online poll.

"We're happy to report that the final sample is extremely robust, with 587 NOTLers aged 55 or over completing the question-

naire," said Steve Ferley, one of the researchers with the project.

"That number is considerably higher than the original survey target," he noted.

When the survey launched

late in the fall, Ferley and fellow research professional Michael Ennamorato said they hoped at least 400 seniors would provide information about their housing needs as they age.

The survey organizers

expect data analysis to show the relative importance of various factors in NOTL seniors' housing needs – both in the next few years and over the longer term.

"We want to thank the 587 NOTLers who took the time

and effort to fill out the online questionnaire," said Ferley.

"Your input will help enormously to provide objective guidance in this important area."

Continued on Page 11



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Tender fruit growers keep an eye on weather amid winter chill

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

It's a little too early for tender fruit growers to be pressing the panic button about quantity – and quality – of the 2024 crop, a Niagara-on-the-Lake farmer says.

“We haven't had any super hot days,” said Phil Tregunno of Tregunno Farms. “Everything appears to be dormant still.”

Tregunno is also chair of the Ontario Tender Fruit Growers.

According to the Weather Network, the average temperature across southern Ontario in December was 3 C. It was the first time since 2015 that the average temperature was that high.

The ideal time for tender fruit trees to bud is in early May, Tregunno said.

“If we get a cold spell and then it warms up again ... you never know. It's Canada,” Tregunno said. “There was another El Nino (year) where it got warm in late January, but that was a long time ago.”

Nelson Thwaites, farm manager at Thwaites Farms, agrees with Tregunno.

“There are no issues,” he said.

However, he cautioned that because temperatures now are dropping, there are concerns that if the mercury plunges too low, crop size could take a hit.

“If temperatures drop below (-20 C), you get buds freezing on the trees,” he said. “That could reduce



Nelson Thwaites, farm manager at Thwaites Farms, said warmer-than-normal temperatures in December won't affect the 2024 tender fruit crop. RICHARD HUTTON

this year's crop.”

Peach and nectarine trees are most vulnerable to the extreme cold, “more than apple or pear trees,” he added.

While the weather throughout December was warmer than average, colder temperatures hit the region over this past week or so.

Environment and Climate Change Canada is forecasting a return to more seasonal below-freezing temperatures.

Thwaites said that fluctuation is reasonable.

“The swing was not cold enough to cause any damage, yet,” he said.

Sarah Marshall, manager for the Ontario Tender Fruit Growers, also thinks it's still early to be worried.

And while the tempera-

tures were mild throughout December, it's not without precedent.

“Last December (2022) wasn't really that cold. It was 15 C last Dec. 30,” she said. “People tend to forget.”

The fruit growers monitor “chilling hours,” the amount of time where temperatures hover just above freezing (between 2 C and 7 C) and trigger dormancy.

“We do the same thing with heat units (in the spring) to see when we get to a certain point,” Marshall said. “When will the first bloom be? The first harvest?”

Tregunno, meanwhile, said early blooms, while not necessarily desirable, are also not unheard of.

“It could have been in 2012 when one of these things led to an early bloom

on April 10 or something like that. Ideally, we like it to be in the first week of May” or thereabouts.

Thwaites, however, said growers will be monitoring temperatures on an ongoing basis

The tender fruit industry is a multi-million dollar business in the province, with Niagara growers representing a substantial portion of that.

While figures for 2023 are not yet available, in 2022, 25.2 million tons of fruit (peaches, pears, plums, prunes and nectarines) were sold, up eight per cent over 2021 (23.6 tons).

The value of the 2022 crop was \$72.7 million, up 18 per cent from 2021 (\$61.7 million).

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Town has fun with renaming snow plows

Continued from Front Page

peared in other snow-plow nicknaming contests around North America, all the monickers are pretty chill.

“Residents' participation in naming our fleet is a testament to the strong sense of community we have here in Niagara-on-the-Lake,” said interim chief administrator Bruce Zvaniga, adding that the contest also

served as a way for residents to learn about services the town provides.

“We hope these fun names will encourage residents to get familiar with our snow and sidewalk plow procedures,” he said.

Other winning names included Buzz Ice-Clear, Skip the Ditches, Darth Blader and his frozen force-wielding nemesis, Snow-be-gone Kenobi.

“I am thrilled to see the engagement by our community during this contest,” said Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa. “The new names reflect our residents' enthusiasm, and we are proud to showcase them on our plows.”

In a statement announcing the winners, the town said the names will be added to the plows soon.

The eight winning

names for the town fleet, in no particular order: Sled Zeppelin, Buzz Ice-Clear, Ctrl Salt Delete, Skip the Ditches, Catch my Drift, Darth Blader, Snow-be-gone Kenobi and Scoop Dogg.

The town plans to organize a photo featuring the winners, council members, staff and the newly christened plows, spokesperson Marah Minor said.

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Staff supports King Street condo

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The town planning department says yes, residents say no.

Niagara-on-the-Lake town staff are recommending a three-storey, 17 unit condominium be built on vacant land on a cul-de-sac at the end of King Street.

Though staff recommendations are, like the rest of the project application, subject to an impending Ontario Land Tribunal hearing, council decided to hold a public meeting on the recommendations on Wednesday evening.

The project has ruffled more than a few feathers since it was first announced in July 2023.

At every stage of public debate, residents have objected to the bulk, height, location and infrastructure impact of the proposed project.

Owner and developer Josh Bice has appealed the project to the land tribunal and councillors and staff have stated publicly they were waiting on Bice's resubmission when he appealed.

Staff have since said they received his resubmission after being notified of the appeal.

Sketches appended to the report show the reoriented building backs onto agricultural land to its west and faces residential properties to its east.

The new design now includes 24 parking spaces, up from 18, the report said.

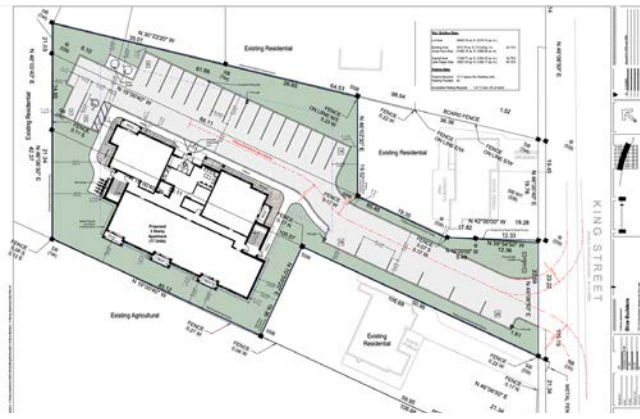
The revision would require exemption from additional requirements in the official plan.

With the new design rotating the building to face inward, the entrance will no longer comply with the official plan which mandates main entrances face the street, the staff report said.

Resident Andre Mecs said the new amendments should be discussed in a public meeting.

"The Planning Act requires at least one public meeting prior to any amendment to the official plan or zoning bylaw," the town's official plan says.

The updated proposal also



A new sketch of the proposed building shows the entrance will face into the side yard and the building will back onto agricultural lands to the west. SOURCED

asks for exemption from planning requirements that restrict the construction of medium-density buildings on local streets like King.

"Does development follow the law or does the law follow development?" said Mecs.

The resident, who lives across from the vacant lot, said developers don't have a right to a bylaw amendment and must provide good justification for getting one.

For example, Mecs said Bice has not explain why he shouldn't include a children's play area in the project.

"The applicant does not feel that an equipped children's play area is needed based on proximity of the lands to nearby parks," the staff report said.

Mecs said a feeling is not a reason to exclude a requirement in the official plan.

Heading into Wednesday night's meeting, Mecs said he would be arguing the town is not justified in granting the amendments sought by Bice.

"I don't see how they could settle (at the tribunal)," he said.

He argued the additional requests from Bice in the application resubmission still need to go through a public process.

"If there are significant changes to the application that differ greatly from what was previously presented to the public, an additional Public Meeting will be required," Director of planning Kirsten McCauley said in an email.

However, McCauley also said applicants can request exemptions from the planning legislation at the resubmission stage without

subjecting them to public meetings.

The difference is one of scale, and McCauley said staff has to assess the need for additional meetings on a "case-by-case basis."

She said the intention of the new amendments requested in Bice's resubmission are captured in the original draft.

The official plan recommends that medium-density projects not direct traffic to local streets.

Other design changes identified in the staff report include the position of the parking and the rear yard set back.

The staff report said the project is consistent with the town, region and province's planning policies.

In papers shared with The Lake Report ahead of the meeting, resident Patrick Gedge said the intent of the staff report appears to be to "keep the developer whole."

The resident presentation package said the revised submission asks the town for permission to break even more of the official plan's rules.

Staff said the project will help the town meet the intensification targets set out in Niagara Region's official plan and will also more efficiently use the sewer, street and drinking water services that support the cul-de-sac.

Gedge's presentation said the official plan gives principles of compatibility priority over intensification targets.

The staff report concludes that the proposed residential structure is compatible with surrounding land uses.

It said the neighbourhood does not have any heritage value and is made up of new homes with a range of styles.

The report also said the building is compatible on the issue of "bulk mass and scale, though residents have vociferously argued it is too tall.

From ground to roofline, the structure is 10.2 metres. The rest of the almost two metres in height is used by "parapets" and store much of the building's mechanical equipment.

The extra height is not subject to the same height restrictions as the rest of the building, the report said.

"The surrounding properties to the north, east and southeast are permitted a maximum building height of 10.0 metres," the report said.

The report said the developer's request for 10.2 metres to the roofline and 11.8 to the parapets "represents a minor increase" over what's allowed in the area.

In his presentation, Gedge said only 30 per cent of the surrounding homes are two storeys and none of them have three.

Though medium density only permits 30 units per hectare, the 17 units proposed for this lot would ratchet the density up to the equivalent of 52.8 units per hectare.

Citing the official plan, the town report said there is an exception if the applicant can provide an analysis showing "minimal impact on surrounding neighbourhoods."

Aaron Butler, a planner retained by Bice, said in a report submitted with the application that the project would have minimal impact on the area because of it being set far back from the street and having ample landscaping for screening.

The staff report cites this in its conclusion that the proposed density fits the area.

Gedge's presentation says the developer's analysis is incomplete as Meritage Lane, north of the site, was not included in its research.

Bice did not respond to interview requests from The Lake Report and has not spoken publicly on the project since it was first unveiled.

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St. Catharines hospital to be renamed for Marotta family after \$15M donation

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara Health says a multi-million dollar donation from a Niagara-on-the-Lake family will go a long way toward transforming health care in Niagara.

Sisters Angela Marotta and Melissa Marotta-Paocelli made a \$15-million donation to the Niagara Health Foundation and to recognize the donation, Niagara Health announced it will be renaming its hospital in St. Catharines.

Since it opened in 2013, it has been known as the St. Catharines site of Niagara Health but it will now become the Marotta Family Hospital.

Niagara Health CEO Lynn Guerriero called the donation “transformational” for the health system.

“This donation will help us provide the best care possible to our patients, continue to attract and retain top talent and help make sure our staff, physicians and patients have access to



Melissa Marotta-Paocicelli, left, and Angela Marotta, with St. Catharines Mayor Mat Siscoe. Niagara Health announced the St. Catharines hospital will be renamed after the Marotta family. SUPPLIED

cutting-edge equipment,” she said.

The women are the “sisters” behind the Two Sisters Vineyards on John Street in NOTL as well as the new Stone Eagle Winery, under construction on Niagara Stone Road, near the Village plaza.

They are also the owners of the 11th Post on Queen Restaurant in Old Town. The women are the daughters of Benny Marotta, a developer and head of Solmar Development Corp.

In a statement announc-

ing the new name, Niagara Health said the two women decided to make the donation after touring the hospital.

It wasn’t the first time the family has made a contribution.

In April of last year, the family donated \$10 million toward the cost of the new south Niagara hospital, currently under construction on land at the corner of Montrose and Biggar roads in Niagara Falls.

The \$3.6-billion facility, which will replace Greater

Niagara General Hospital in Niagara Falls as well as the Douglas Memorial (Fort Erie) and Port Colborne General urgent care centres, is expected to be completed by the summer of 2028.

“Having such a close connection to the Niagara region, as a family, we know the positive impact this donation will have on the health and well-being of the community,” the sisters said in a joint statement.

“This beautiful hospital plays a crucial role in providing essential health care services and it is an honour for our family to be able to give back in this way as it represents what is most important to us – the health and well-being of family and the ones you care about.”

Andrea Scott, CEO of the Niagara Health Foundation, praised the family for its support.

“Their dedication serves as a beacon, illuminating a path toward a healthier and brighter future for our community,” she said.

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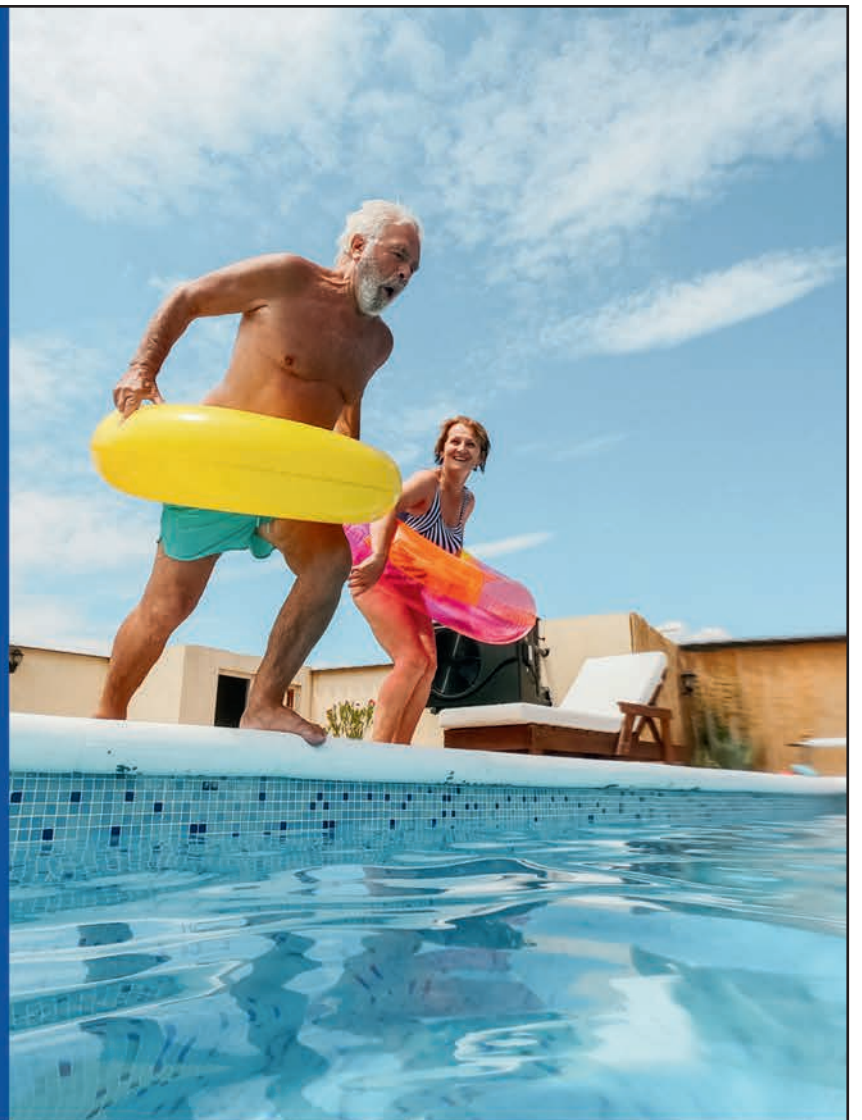
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Cold temps can't keep icewine fans away

Continued from Front Page

the next day and after a relatively snow-free trip, the downpour on Saturday was a pleasant surprise.

While it's summer in New Zealand, Scheid had been experiencing a "bit of a heatwave" before coming down to NOTL.

"I'm loving it knowing that I'm going back to the heat," she said.

NOTL Chamber of Commerce president Minerva Ward, who took the lead on the Icewine Festival, also shared her satisfaction with the wintry conditions.

"I think it's a very Canadian thing, so not many visitors mind being out in the cold," Ward told The Lake Report.

She added that many guests come from places as far as Ukraine and Thailand to get a taste of Canadian winter.

"The snow on the ground adds a special charm, so I'm actually happy that it's been snowy and cold rather than rainy and brown," she said.

For those at the festival who are used to the snow, the weekend was all about keeping warm.



Robert and Nicole Scheid were happy to see some snow after coming all the way from New Zealand to visit Niagara-on-the-Lake. See more photos at niagaranow.com. JULIA SACCO

Kathleen Meyer and Dhruv Sonkusale poured up icewine glasses for River-view Cellars throughout the festival weekend.

"We had double layers of socks, gloves, hand warmers and foot warmers," Sonkusale told The Lake Report.

He was looking for heated gloves before heading out on Sunday, but sadly no stores were carrying them, he said.

"So, we put warmers in the gloves," Meyer added.

Other tents didn't have to worry so much about the cold.

"This isn't our first time doing events like this, so we've brought with us a small propane gas heater," said Alan Dickson, owner of PigOut Catering.

"We also roasted an entire pig and that gives off a lot of heat," Dickson said.

Whether you were looking forward to snow or itching to warm up by the fireplaces along the village route, the first Icewine Village weekend did not disappoint.

The village will return next Saturday and Sunday. This year's festival admission is free and tastings are cashless following a pay-as-you-go method.

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 - Albert Einstein

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Smoke on the water



Photographer Dave Van de Laar captured the fog at the NOTL Sailing Club on Wednesday.

Editorial

Finding ways to address speed concerns

Kevin MacLean
 Managing Editor

It took three years of research, writing and lobbying – and a lot of patience – but the work of the Friends of Ryerson Park finally paid off.

And a majority of the town’s elected representatives finally saw the merit in giving the Friends (and the community) what they had been asking for:

Reduced speeds on the streets and avenues in the Chautauqua neighbourhood, where there are no sidewalks or wide road shoulders, and most of the streets are really just lane-ways – about 13 feet wide.

Many driveways are wider.

Despite all those idiosyncracies, drivers in the area often exceed the speed limit. It has been 50 km/h up till now – the same standard, default speed limit as everywhere else in town.

With the reduction to 30 km/h on almost all the streets in Chautauqua, we hope residents notice a change in drivers’ behaviour as they cruise the neighbourhood.



Ironically, perhaps, some (though not all) of the speed-limit offenders are actually residents of Chautauqua.

Many of the visitors we see cruising through the area are so busy sightseeing and eyeing unfamiliar territory, they’d be hard-pressed to exceed the limit.

But familiarity can breed complacency.

When you’re just trying to get home, or heading out to run an errand and you’re travelling a street you’ve driven a thousand times before, it is not difficult to step a bit too heavily on the gas pedal and find yourself motoring along at 60 km/h.

Doesn’t make it right or acceptable, but it happens.

Now, with a one-year pilot project planned and maximum speeds set at 30 km/h, drivers and the community will need to police themselves and rein in their enthusiasm behind the wheel.

(Interestingly, William Street, an overly wide main road into the neighbourhood, is exempt from the reduction. An arterial road in comparison to the lanes of Chautauqua, William Street can be something of a racetrack thanks to its width. But that road is perhaps an issue for another time.)

Chopping the area’s speed limit to 30 km/h is a major coup that would never have happened without the work of residents Brian Crow, Shaun Devlin and John Scott.

And while council’s endorsement of the change was not unanimous, rookie Coun. Nick Ruller, the town’s former fire chief, helped convince a majority of his colleagues that it was the right thing to do.

Coun. Erwin Wiens made the point that rural areas of town – where there have been fatal mishaps – should

not be ignored. And he’s right.

Council needs to find a way to address the concerns about speeding in rural zones – and not just throw up its collective hands and say, “We don’t have the resources.”

That’s easy and unfair. And, as Coun. Sandra O’Connor said, “We have to start doing something.”

The tougher decision is making it happen.

Chautauqua is not the only part of town where road safety is a concern, so we suggest councillors and town staff work together, devise a strategy (perhaps as part of the town’s transportation master plan, which is now being developed) and implement that strategy wherever in town is deemed appropriate.

That might mean a lower overall speed threshold across the board, or more traffic-calming measures, or permanent speed minders on some roads. We’ll leave it to the experts to figure out those finer details.

The only sure thing is that taking no action should not be an option.

editor@niagaranow.com

Correction: Our Jan. 11 story, “Fundraiser puts food on table of families of fallen farmworkers” included incorrect information about the death of Daniel Brown. A former NOTL seasonal worker, Brown died in his sleep at Van Berlo Farms in Simcoe, Ont., not in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in October last year.

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

Rand important but Parliament Oak is a **bigger concern**

Dear editor:

Is it any wonder that everybody in Niagara-on-the-Lake seems to be up in arms these days?

We've seen questionable recommendations by planning staff, a town council operating too much in hiding behind closed doors, the wide-ranging assault by developers seemingly wanting to turn our fair village into just another suburban subdivision – and all conducted under a code of silence.

I think it is time for us all to take a deep breath and begin honestly and openly communicating with one another.

The time for casting aspersions on our lord mayor and town council is past, just as the time for council to try running the town in secrecy and without

the support and input of a very talented, experienced citizenry is also past.

I applaud council for backtracking on its ill-advised offer to Solmar Development Corp. of the Charlotte Street/Upper Canada Heritage Trail access for Benny Marotta's proposed subdivision.

I am opposed to unreasonable development on the back of the Rand Estate and certainly opposed to allowing access over our publicly owned and publicly financed heritage trail.

However, I recognize the back of the Rand Estate will likely be developed and will cost us as taxpayers (and the community group SORE) substantial money to curtail the wild avarice of the developer and ensure appropriate development



A rendering of a proposed hotel for the former Parliament Oak school site. FILE

is approved by the Ontario Land Tribunal.

But I think our biggest concern at this time and with the same developer is his planned hotel for the old Parliament School site.

His plan for Randwood is certainly important in the context of protecting the last remaining property of

its type in Old Town and will certainly impact the beauty and historic nature of the town, albeit on the periphery of Old Town.

Mr. Marotta's plans for Parliament Oak, in the centre of town, will no doubt completely alter the ambience and character of the heritage district.

Picture a new, modern, four-storey hotel in the midst of a residential neighbourhood and across the road from the entrance into the Commons smack in the middle of Old Town.

I can only pray the community will come together like it has in opposing this developer's attack on Rand and our lord mayor and council will do whatever it takes to stymie this ill-advised plan.

We must pull together in the face of provincial legislation that hands too much power to the development industry.

Our council needs to instruct the planning department to withhold accepting any application as complete until it is verily complete with every "I" dotted and "t" crossed.

Once an application is complete the appropriate public meetings must be held immediately and feedback provided to the applicant with the clear message that if he or she doesn't respond within two weeks the application will be rejected out of hand.

It is time for our planning department and our council to step up to the plate and determine quickly whether an application is of benefit to the town or not – and accept quickly those that are and just as quickly deny those that are not.

You will be surprised how much support and good advice you will get from your engaged citizens by acting forthrightly and in the town's best interest.

Bob Bader
NOTL

King Street condo project's density is **unacceptable**

Dear editor:

I would first like to summarize the story line, so far, on the proposed King Street condo/apartment development and the town planning department's report recommending approval of the project.

Town staff and council appear to be bamboozled by the developers' end run appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Despite intense community opposition to the proposal, town staff essentially recommends we abandon the official plan and let developers do what they want in Old Town.

The key issue relates to the density (the size of the building) and setting a precedent that undercuts the official plan, which will assuredly result in an overbuilt Old Town.

The developer wants the



Writer Bill French says 52.8 units per hectare is an egregious proposal for a residential area. SOURCED

area reclassified from low density residential to medium density.

Beyond that, the proposal requests a density that exceeds the maximum medium density by 76 per cent. The proposal results in a density of 52.8 units per hectare vs a maximum medium density of 30 units.

However, compared to the property's current low density residential designation, the plans density of 52.8 units/per hectare is 277

per cent greater than the low density maximum of 14 units per hectare.

It is unacceptable to support a proposal that increases the lot's density 277 per cent from its current official plan designation and establishes a new precedent for future development.

This is massive overdevelopment and it is unnecessary to achieve our intensification targets.

Now, visualize for a moment the number of empty

and large lots that can be subdivided in Old Town.

The prospect of gross overdevelopment on those properties is shocking and will be to the detriment of our community and its residents forever.

The town's report goes on to say that "staff are of the opinion that the proposed density is appropriate."

They may think so, but the impacted community has been singular, loud and clear in their view that this development will adversely impact the quality of the neighbourhood.

There's a cute quote going around that it's like trying to fit a size 9 foot into a size 6 shoe.

I did the math, it's actually like trying to fit a size 22.5 foot into a size 6 shoe.

If approved, this will set a horrendous precedent,

effectively paving the way for developers to randomly over-build in many settings in Old Town.

The developers will render the official plan obsolete in the pursuit of maximizing their profits, at the expense of the town's residents.

The official plan was established to enable and direct development in our community. It is an agreement, a contract among the town staff, the councillors and the residents that defines the future of our community.

As co-authors and elected representatives of the community, councillors need to heed the will of the residents and honour that agreement.

This proposal must be stopped.

Bill French
NOTL



Rick Meloen.

Outpouring of support for heritage trail

Dear editor:

I was pleasantly surprised by the outpouring of support for the Upper Canada Heritage Trail these past few weeks.

Since 2017, the heritage trail committee, along with many volunteers, has spent a great deal of time and effort securing funding, organizing events, raising awareness of the trail and seeing the project come to fruition.

So the committee was appalled to find that the completed trail at Charlotte Street was in danger of being compromised.

Thank you to all who have contributed and supported the trail and who hopefully will continue to do so.

Construction on phase 2 has started, but there is still eight kilometres to go. Stay tuned for updates about the trail.

Rick Meloen
Chair
Heritage trail committee

Zalepa **didn't** declare Rand conflict during 2011 rezoning vote

Dear editor:

Despite Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa explaining why he has not participated in any discussions concerning development at Randwood, he has failed to convince me that his recusal is necessary, ("Zalepa following legal advice in declaring conflict on Rand," The Lake Report, Jan. 18).

Mr. Zalepa lives at the corner of Charlotte Street and the Promenade. None of

his property lines border the Rand Estate and the nearest section of the Randwood wall is about 200 feet away.

In 2011, when he was a town councillor, Mr. Zalepa lived in the same house on Charlotte.

Yet he voted that year when the official plan and zoning amendments to change Randwood from residential to commercial zoning came before the council without even a men-

tion of the fact that he lived nearby.

I would like to know why he felt he didn't have to declare a non-pecuniary recusal in 2011 but does so in 2024.

In 2011, Mr. Zalepa and other councillors met several times with residents of Christopher Street and Weatherstone Court who were decidedly against the zoning change.

Each time, he assured the

concerned residents that he would vote against the change.

However, at the meeting in December, he voted in favour of it along with councillors Collard, Dick and Flynn. Councillors Bau-Coote, Kaiser, King and Mazza opposed it.

With a 4-4 tie, Lord Mayor Dave Eke broke the tie by voting in favour (and notably failed to win in the next election).

Amalgamation shows bigger is rarely better



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

It often amazes me how, once a concept is adopted by the government, the actual success of the concept is rarely – if ever – quantitatively evaluated.

It seems to be an axiom amongst those involved in public service, whether elected or employed, that once a core premise in policy direction is established, it becomes sacrosanct and duly engraved in stone.

To illustrate this, let's explore a 20th-century concept that, by nearly every metric, is patently false but still a core premise in government.

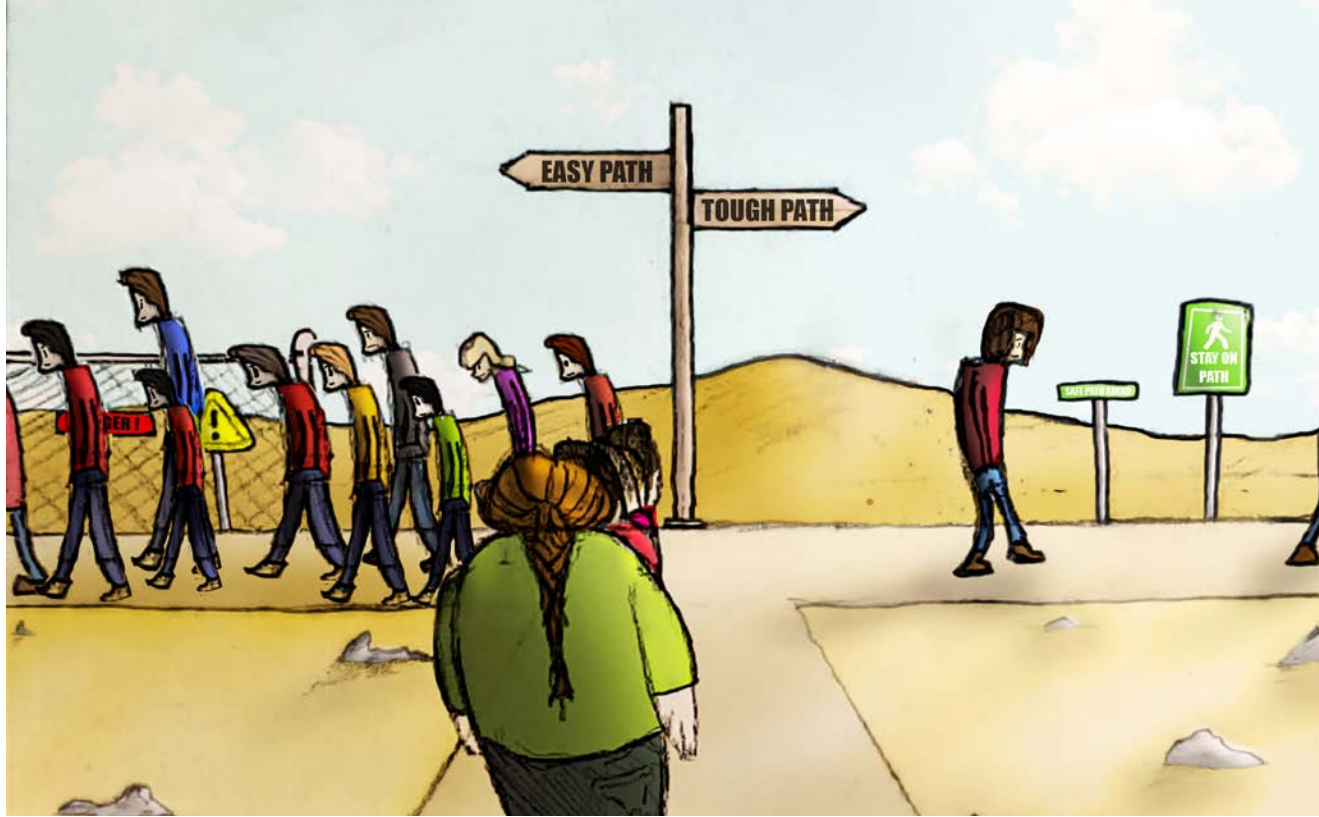
Loosely stated, this concept can be expressed as: "Bigger is better and can be achieved through centralization."

Corporations went down this conceptual road as well. However, over a period of time, a curious trend became evident in corporate books: it seemed that the more employees your company had, the less productive each employee was.

This observation was confirmed in studies conducted by analytics guru, Allan Engelhardt (Cybaea Limited) from which he concluded, "...when you triple the number of employees, you halve their productivity. Or: When you add 10 per cent employees, the productivity of each (employee) drops by 6.3 per cent."

Now, for a corporation willing to accept lower margins on higher volumes, this scenario still can yield growth in total profits. However, what happens in the public sector – where there are no "profit" benefits – when these same parameters are applied?

Consider Ontario's public health care sector which,



Columnist Brian Marshall says the easiest path might not always be the right direction. ALPEREN ALBAYRAK

in the last four decades or so, has undergone drastic restructuring.

In 1975, there was a network of small local hospitals across the province that handled the bulk of standard service provision. When a particular case, or cases, exceeded their capabilities, it was transferred to a larger facility with the equipment and specialists to be addressed.

Fast-forward to today and the vast majority of these local hospitals have been closed in favour of large complex health care centres that intake all persons requiring medical services.

If we posit a small, local hospital with a front-line health care employee complement of 200 people as representing a maximum employee productivity comparator and we apply Englehardt's productivity loss calculation to a hospital with a front-line employee population of 800, our per-employee productivity has dropped by 61 per cent.

In straightforward terms, for every 10 cases handled by a single front-line health care employee in that small local hospital, the big fancy complex health care centre can only handle 3.9 cases per single front-line employee.

And the maximum number of cases per em-

ployee only gets worse as the health care complex's total employee complement increases.

This loss of employee productivity is not due to lowered individual effort. On the contrary, each employee of a large organization may be working "harder" than their small organization counterpart.

Most experts who have studied the productivity question suggest the issue lies in communication. In brief, the more employees an organization has, the larger a cadre of middle management is required, in turn leading to a more complex reporting and administrative system.

This complexity not only increases the time spent by individual employees on non-service delivery tasks but also lengthens the decision-making timelines. Moreover, legacy systems that no longer serve any practical purpose are rarely, if ever, discontinued: non-productive "paperwork."

Is it any wonder that the quality of our health care system has significantly declined over the last four decades while the cost of the system has ballooned?

Bigger and centralized is certainly not better ... but it is more costly to the taxpayer.

Let's stay on this thread while turning our attention to another bigger and centralized is better overture once again being floated by the provincial government – amalgamation.

I seem to recall hearing the Ford government's rationale for considering amalgamation before: It was back in 1996 when then-premier Mike Harris announced that the amalgamation of the six lower-tier governments comprising Metropolitan Toronto would save up to \$645 million after amalgamation and \$300 million annually thereafter.

The consulting firm KPMG produced a report that estimated the cost of this amalgamation at no more than \$220 million.

So, how did that work out?

Well, the total cost of amalgamation was actually 20 per cent higher than estimated, landing at \$275 million. The predicted \$645 million disappeared like a puff of smoke, but they did manage to report an annual savings of \$135 million.

However, those "savings" (due principally to the elimination of elected officials) were almost immediately eaten up and surpassed by the expansion of the municipal staff and associated budgets necessary to navigate the much

more complex government organization required to service the new City of Toronto.

In reality, and where the rubber hits the road, the total operating cost budgets for 1997 (the last year before amalgamation) of Metropolitan Toronto totalled \$4.59 billion.

The following year (in constant 1997 dollars), that cost jumped by 18 per cent to \$5.6 billion and, by 2008 (again in constant 1997 dollars), the total had reached just shy of \$8.1 billion – roughly a 70 per cent increase.

This is no surprise to scholars who have studied "amalgamation" undertakings around the world. Quite simply, in the vast (nearly all) majority of cases examined in these studies, academics have found that amalgamation does not reduce costs – it increases them.

Even after Premier Doug Ford slashed the size of Toronto council, according to the city's published budget summary, the financial shortfall – read deficit – as of Dec. 31, 2023, is \$1.64 billion.

That money will need to come from taxpayer pockets (property tax increases, etc.) or add to federal/provincial deficit borrowing, increasing the generational

debt our government has bequeathed upon our children and grandchildren.

Even a very cursory consideration of the facts presented in this column leads one to ask the question: why would an elected politician, at any level of government, support embarking on a path that has no service delivery benefits while increasing costs exponentially?

Oddly, some of the politicians suggest that amalgamation will allow for a total overhaul of the administrative systems that expedite housing development approvals – get more homes built faster.

However, even if this overhaul were done (and done well), I'd suggest it would take more than a decade with a cost well into the billions of dollars – which doesn't really accomplish the stated objective regarding speeding development.

There are others who suggest that reducing the number of elected officials will not only save money but also speed decision-making.

Our lord mayor recently observed that the total salary of Niagara-on-the-Lake's town councillors is only \$182,000. It's my observation that council costs us less than one upper-middle-level bureaucrat.

Further, I've noticed no appreciable increase in the speed of decision-making since Ford reduced Toronto's council from 47 to 25 in 2018, but I have noted an increase in staff positions.

Bigger is not better ... it not only increases financial costs (tax burden) but also lowers individual productivity while reducing the representation of the taxpayers in the processes of governance.

There is a redolent smell of coffee in the room ... For goodness sake Ford, take a deep breath and wake up.

As was mentioned in last week's column, there is just a whole lot more work to do.

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



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Rand Estate a chance for Solmar to create something special

Dear editor:

In the opinion of many town residents, the Rand Estate in Niagara-on-the-Lake is unique.

It is seen as an iconic property and highly valued by those who consider it fortunate that it remains.

It is also seen by many as a property that contains features of heritage and historical importance and is an integral part of what makes NOTL a desirable destination for residents and others alike.

Randwood has been owned by a developer, Solmar, for several years.

In that time there has been a proposal to council for a hotel that has since been withdrawn due to opposition and a current proposal to council for a high-density residential development.

That proposal is now destined for a probable lengthy and expensive Ontario Land Tribunal hearing in March. These actions have resulted in a reduced level of trust



The Rand Estate and its historic front gardens as viewed from John Street. RYAN BOISVERT

and credibility in this developer by many.

Both proposals have been highly controversial and contested by the Town of NOTL and SORE (a citizens action group that is widely supported).

Among the concerns are

a lack of important technical information, zoning amendments to suit the developer, threats to heritage and historical assets and a disregard for the surrounding area.

Because of this, large amounts of money have

been spent on legal fees by both the town, SORE and Solmar.

In December, for reasons unknown, council offered the developer access to his property by allowing him a permanent crossing of the heritage trail. However, this

offer has since been withdrawn by council following a public outcry in response.

In my opinion, it is now well past the time that the developer should accept the inescapable fact and conclusion that his proposals in their present form

are clearly not wanted by NOTL residents or their representatives and do not respect the surrounding neighbourhood.

If he has any regard at all for the residents of NOTL, and in particular those nearby who would be most affected, he would be prepared to take a fresh look at his proposal.

At the risk of sounding and appearing naive, and without any legal considerations, this also could be seen as a great opportunity to develop a well-thought-out and outstanding proposal that is suitable and appropriate for this iconic property – one that the residents of NOTL can support and applaud and is at the same time a credit to Solmar and its damaged image.

This is, after all, a unique property with special restrictions and is not a normal or simple location for development.

Derek Collins
NOTL

Why does NOTL need a planning department?

The following letter was sent to members of town council and a copy submitted for publication.

I read with interest the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake staff report just released on the proposed 17-unit condo development on King Street.

While it was informative to understand what the planning department is thinking and recommending these days, I couldn't help but wonder why we need a planning department at all.

This report could have been just as easily written by the developer.

If the focus of our council is to save money, then why



Writer Judy McLeod wonders what the point of a planning department is if it is just going to side with developers every time, despite the town's official plan. FIREFLY

not start with eliminating most of the planning department.

A few administrators to simply rubber stamp applications with whatever a developer wants would suffice. And why have an official plan – if every amendment application is simply allowed?

While I appreciate the council making this report

public, it confirms my worst fears that the current administration and possibly some of our elected officials are simply here to facilitate the hollowing out of our official plan (and therefore our town and neighbourhoods) by using the provincial policy statements as the elephant in the room.

Judy McLeod
NOTL



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What you need to know about **speed reductions** in Chautauqua



Parents of children on Shakespeare Avenue were part of the vocal support for a speed reduction in the neighbourhood, which has no sidewalks. FILE

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Streets in the Chautauqua neighbourhood of Niagara-on-the-Lake are getting new, reduced speed limits as part of a year-long pilot project.

Here's how what you need to know.

The roads affected by the speed reduction include Addison Avenue, Circle Street, Dixie Avenue, Froebel Avenue, Luther Avenue, Niagara Boulevard from Palatine Place to Vincent Avenue, Oak Drive, Palatine Place from Circle

Street to the dead-end, Shakespeare Avenue, Vincent Avenue, Wesley Avenue, Wilberforce Avenue and Wyckliffe Avenue.

The speeds on these roads will be cut to 30 km/h from 50 km/h. William Street is excluded from the plan.

Town staff will be collecting traffic data, with speed minders placed throughout the neighbourhood, and the information will be compared to data from 2023.

"Staff will present their findings to council, who will then decide whether the speed reductions will be made permanent after

the conclusion of the one-year trial," said spokesperson Marah Minor.

She could not confirm when signs with the new speeds would be posted or how much it would cost.

She estimated staff would have the new signs priced by the end of January.

The decision was made at a council meeting Jan. 16 after a three-year lobbying campaign by residents argued there was a need for lower speed limits on the narrow streets of the lakeside neighbourhood.

There are no sidewalks or wide shoulders in the area, putting pedestrians, espe-

cially seniors and children, at risk, residents said.

Coun. Erwin Wiens raised concerns that investing resources to reduce speeds in Chautauqua would come at the cost of similar efforts needed in rural areas of Niagara-on-the-Lake, where there have been fatalities.

Minor said with limited resources, any such task could potentially reduce the amount of time town employees could dedicate to other projects.

"Staff remain committed to focusing on efforts that improve road safety," she said.

Benoit ousted for **Nazi flag** comparison

Continued from Front Page

sanctions against the NOTL trustee the board did not say what she had done to deserve the penalty.

That information will be available once the meeting minutes are posted online, a board spokesperson said.

However, in the livestream video of Tuesday's meeting board chair Danny Di Lorenzo reads from the report's conclusion, which said investigators found Benoit violated the code "when she compared the flying of the Pride flag to the flying of the Nazi flag after the board meeting on May 23, 2023."

The report also concluded that Benoit "mischaracterized" what transpired at the meeting and "failed to acknowledge that the board's decision was consistent with its process as set out in the bylaw and imply that the board acted improperly in waiting to vote on the policy until June 2023."

As well, the investigation concluded that Benoit "supported the parents' comment that children should be removed from the Niagara Catholic District School Board and spoke publicly in a manner that could have been understood as speaking on behalf of the board."

In the past, Benoit has pushed for the board to



Natalia Benoit has been suspended until the end of June from her role as a NOTL Catholic school board trustee for comparing the Pride flag to the Nazi flag. SUPPLIED

reverse a policy allowing schools to fly the Pride flag during Pride Month.

At the May 23 meeting, she attempted to pass policy that would have prevented employees from advocating to students on "partisan, political or social policy matters." Had it been adopted, employees would have been barred from wearing or displaying symbols of an ideological nature, which would include the inclusivity flag.

Benoit also appeared in a now-deleted YouTube video after the meeting comparing the Pride flag to that of Nazi Germany.

Her justification for the

policy was that the role of educators was to teach kids how to think, not what to think.

Her formal motion made exemptions for advocacy of Catholicism.

"While I am sorry that we had to go through this process, I believe we made the correct decision," Di Lorenzo said in the board's statement.

"I am grateful for the thoughtful and compassionate comments made by the trustees during our deliberations."

Di Lorenzo, vice-chair Rhianon Burkholder (Thorold/Merritton) and trustees Larry Huibers (St. Catharines-Niagara-on-

the-Lake), Doug Joyner (West Niagara), Jim Marino (Niagara Falls) and Turner voted in support of the report about the complaint.

Joe Bruzzese (Niagara Falls) was the lone vote against the report but, in a separate vote, was in favour of the suspension.

Benoit will not receive correspondence from the board during her suspension but will continue to be paid under the terms of the Education Act. She has 14 days to appeal.

The decision was made via a recorded vote at a special meeting of the board.

Benoit has been on a leave from her role as trustee since September. She attended the meeting virtually but did not speak.

In its statement, the board said that the report will be made available when the approved minutes of the meeting are posted online.

The board's compliance audit committee will also meet at 10 a.m. on Jan. 31 to consider the audit reports of Benoit and trustee candidate Jolanta Pawlak's campaign expenditures.

That meeting will take place at the Catholic Education Centre at 427 Rice Rd., Welland. It will be open to the public and will be available via livestream.

- With files from
Evan Loree



The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum. FILE

Enjoy NOTL museum talks from the **comfort of home**

Staff
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is taking the chill out of the winter season with programs that can be enjoyed from the comfort of home.

The museum is offering weekly virtual lectures throughout the rest of January and all of February covering topics ranging from portraiture and selfie culture to a talk by journalist-turned-author Julian Sher.

The series kicked off Wednesday with "The Art of Portraiture, Our Best Face Forward," presented by Debra Antoncic, director and curator for RiverBrink Art Museum.

An art historian, Antoncic illustrated how the impulse to capture a likeness of an individual has a history dating back thousands of years. "Your portrait told the world all about you," said Antoncic. "It showed your status, wealth, personality, and a host of other details."

On Jan. 31, Sonia de Lazzar, an art history professor at Brock University, will look at the "selfie

obsession" in contemporary culture, and its connections with technology, psychology and society, from capturing our image on earth-orbiting spacewalks to the massive self-documentation on social media.

On Feb. 7, Sher, a journalist who worked for the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail, and was a senior producer for the CBC's The Fifth Estate, will discuss his new novel, "North Star."

It tells the story of the Canadians and a handful of Confederate agents who played a much darker role in supporting the enslaved South than history books note, and their participation in the formation of plots against former U.S. president Abraham Lincoln.

Additional lectures in the series include "Ordnance Boundary Stones: Updates and Restoration" (Feb. 14), "The Borderland: Black Agency and Resistance Between Two Nations" (Feb. 21) and "Historically Hysterical" (Feb. 28).

Registration is required. To register, visit notlmuseum.ca or call 905-468-3912.



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Findings **valuable** for NOTL, builders and beyond: Ferley

Continued from Front Page

Now, Niagara College Prof. Nick Farnell and his post-grad students will move into the data analysis stage together with Ennamorato and Ferley.

The first part of the analysis will be to get an in-depth understanding of how the sample breaks down according to the various NOTL communities, and how it's made up within other demographic elements such as age, gender and financial aspects, Ferley noted.

All those pieces of information will then be compared with secondary census data from Statistics Canada both across NOTL as a whole and within the individual NOTL communities, he said.

The initial stage of understanding the sample happens before delving into the survey data. Later data mining exercises will address questions such as: Do people want to stay in their current NOTL community?



Researcher Steve Ferley holds one of the business cards that were available around town to remind residents to complete the seniors housing survey. FILE/KEVIN MACLEAN

Are they OK with moving to a different community, so long as it's still in NOTL?

Or maybe they're looking at somewhere else entirely. What type of residence are they considering for the future?

Do Old Town residents'

plans and desires differ from people in other NOTL communities? Do downsizing patterns differ by community, age, gender or financial resources?

The questions are endless, Ferley said, "so the larger

the sample, the greater the opportunity for analyzing the diverse options that may emerge."

The college has access to a wealth of Statistics Canada data, including NOTL census information and

figures from other official studies. That can dovetail into the new survey data to yield as complete a picture as possible, Ferley said.

The survey originated from a committee of interested residents who recognized that quantified and objective data was required, he said.

"The findings will be valuable not only for NOTL specifically but also the broader Niagara region and elsewhere."

"Many companies in the seniors' housing field obviously do their own research. But the new survey may well give them fresh insights specific to NOTL. The information can help both their corporate operations and NOTL residents," Ferley added.

The committee that inspired the survey includes Robert Bader, Al Bisback, Fran Boot, Cindy Grant, Bill Halpenny, Sandra Hardy, Terry Mactaggart, Sandra O'Connor, Tom Smith, Tim Taylor and Peggy Walker.

The committee wants to understand the evolving requirements of seniors and what they need to maintain their quality of life as they get older, Grant said in November when the survey was launched.

"Niagara-on-the-Lake has one of the highest percentages of aging seniors in the country, many of whom wish to remain in our community, but the options are limited," she said.

Now that the data is about to be analyzed, Grant offered a "huge thanks" to all those who took the time to do the survey.

She hopes the information gleaned can help the town, builders, senior housing companies and others meet the needs of the community.

Once the results are known this spring, the details will be unveiled at a public forum, Grant said.

And then, "I think we'll need to have conversations with the town, with the housing folks at the region, with developers."

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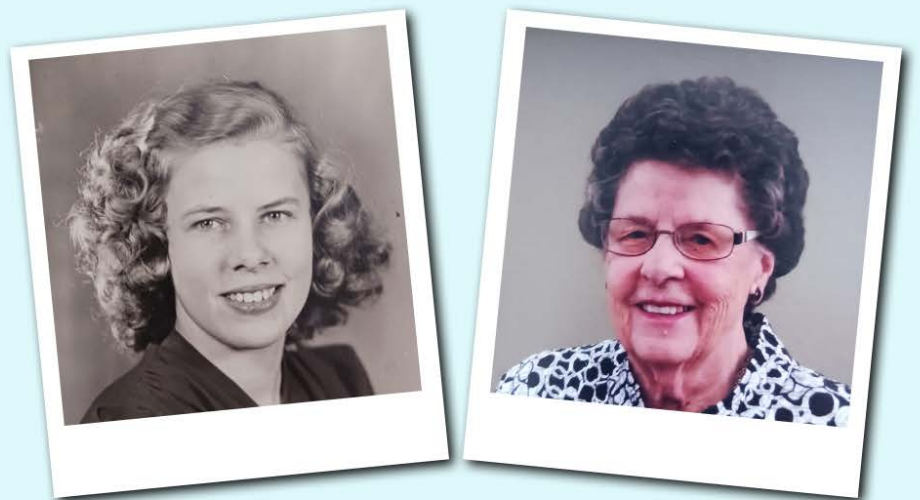
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Olde Angel Inn featured in CBC's new ghost hunting show

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report

Many residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake could likely recite a piece of history about the Olde Angel Inn — and some may even know that it's been the site of what some speculate is paranormal activity.

Whether it be through one of NOTL's many ghost tours or simply word-of-mouth, many have heard the tales of the inn's hauntings — but not many have been able to go behind the scenes and explore.

"Ghosting," a new show with Luke Hutchie and Matthew Finlan, premieres this Friday on CBC Gem and focuses on the two hosts exploring some of the most haunted spots in the country, including the Olde Angel Inn.

The unscripted comedy series follows Hutchie and Finlan through different locations in Canada along with several special guests as they decide whether or not the infamous spots are truly haunted.

"I actually lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake in Chautauqua Circle and I went to the Angel many times as a patron," said co-host Finlan.

Finlan, who recently acted alongside Finn Wolfhard and Billy Bryk in the slasher comedy "Hell of a Summer," said he had always



Matthew Finlan and Luke Hutchie are the hosts of "Ghosting," premiering Friday on CBC Gem. Throughout the series the two hosts will explore eight haunted locations across Ontario, including NOTL's Olde Angel Inn. SUPPLIED

been familiar with the spot but learned a lot more after deep-diving into its history for the show.

"We found out that it's Canada's oldest operational pub and one of the oldest — if not the oldest — coach houses in Canada," he said.

With Niagara-on-the-

Lake's notoriety as the most haunted town in the country, both Finlan and Hutchie said that when they were planning which spots to visit, "all directions kept pointing us back to the Olde Angel Inn."

"If you Google haunted places in Canada, (NOTL)

is always in the top five list," added Hutchie.

Like many Niagara residents, Hutchie, who grew up in Niagara Falls, spent a lot of time as a patron at the Angel.

"It was always that place that's just haunted," he said. Hutchie recalled sharing

tales of Capt. Colin Swayze, a British captain during the War of 1812, being passed around his friend group.

"It was definitely fun to go back and explore it," he added.

Along their travels, Hutchie and Finlan consulted with people in each

town to get extra input on the location's lore.

Diana Farr, one of the managers of the Angel, provided the ghost hunters with some important background information.

"We take you through the bar maiden, the American soldier who killed everybody and, of course, Capt. Colin Swayze," Hutchie explained.

The two hosts and their guest for the episode, Zoé De Grand Maison from "Riverdale," explored the main eating area, the lodging space upstairs and the cellar.

"We take you through the history of why the history of each room is important," said Finlan.

Finlan said that among all the spots visited during the making of the show, the Olde Angel Inn was the most frozen in time.

"That cellar, you can sort of feel how authentic it is," he said.

Other standout spots explored throughout the series include the Merrill House in Picton, the McDonald Log Cabin in Alliston and more. Each location is explored by the two hosts along with a celebrity special guest.

CBC's "Ghosting" with Hutchie and Finlan premieres Friday, Jan. 26 with all episodes available on the free CBC Gem streaming service.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com



Jill Brooke tested out some treats from the other bakers during last Monday's instalment of The Great NOTL Bake-Off at the public library. JULIA SACCO

Bakers show off their skills – at the library

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report

Whether you're a new home baker or the next Anna Olson, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library's monthly bake-offs are the place to be.

Led by community engagement co-ordinator Debbie Krause, each meeting has a prompt for people to base their recipes on — last Monday's was savoury treats.

"It's fun to have the challenge thrown out," Ruth Cook told The Lake Report.

"One month it was cookies, then it was tarts and this time it was savoury — just putting those challenges out makes it interesting," she added.

Some participants tried out entirely new recipes, while others stuck to what they knew.

Velma Burke brought out an old classic: "Very simple, bacon-wrapped water chestnuts," she said.

All it takes is soaking water chestnuts in soy sauce for a few hours, wrapping them in bacon and baking them in the oven.

"I've been making these

since the '70s," Burke said. "They were very popular."

Christiane Houle-Wurster, on the other hand, tried out a new recipe at the last minute — and it paid off. She followed a new recipe for cornbread muffins.

"It's a recipe from 'Once Upon a Chef,' so I took a chance," she said.

She added that she didn't have the time to make her original muffin recipe but they still came out with a great texture.

"The secret is always butter," she joked.

Besides testing and trying out new recipes to share

with each other, the bakers also enjoy chatting with each other among small bites during these meetings.

"Some people like to talk baking," said Robin Larocque.

She explained that when she starts talking about baking her family loses interest.

"It's nice to be able to talk about it here," Velma Burke added.

The next instalment of The Great NOTLPL Bake-Off is Monday, March 18 at 3 p.m. Those interested can register on the library website.

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\$9 million St. David's Cold Storage expansion result of steady demand

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

With an ever-growing client list, it's clear to St. David's Cold Storage president Alfred Dyck that the business has room to grow — including the size of its floorspace.

"Everyone's got to put something somewhere," Dyck said.

"(Customers) depend on us for the receiving of goods and we move the food out of here right into their production lines every day."

The company, which provides the cold storage of food for commercial clients across the Niagara region and Canada, is in the midst of a \$9-million expansion of its Four Mile Creek Road facility.

The first phase of what will be a 60,000 square-foot expansion is nearly complete with the second phase slated to begin in the spring.

When all is done, storage space will increase to 130,000 square feet, nearly double the current size of 70,000.

Last week, St. David's got a bit of help from the province in the form of a \$1.3-million interest-free loan that will help pay for the expansion.

"It's going to help us expand so that we don't have to say no to so many manufacturers that we do right now because we don't have the space to accommodate them," Dyck said.

The business has come a long way from its humble beginnings in the wake of the CanGro food canning



Increasing demand is behind the need to expand St. David's Cold Storage's Four Mile Creek facility, president Alfred Dyck says. RICHARD HUTTON

facility pulling up stakes and leaving town in 2008. The storage company took over CanGro's facility after that.

"We started here with a 30,000-square-foot cooler," Dyck said. "Paul Bosco (Sr.) from Chateau de Charmes was one of our first customers and started with products he didn't have room for."

From there, the search was on to find more clients.

"We just knocked on a few more doors and we installed freezers and so we went from just wines to fridges and freezers so we can accommodate all the different food sectors."

Since then, St. David's Cold Storage has gone from serving the wine industry to sectors across the food and beverage sector.

"It's probably 50/50," Dyck said. "It's still the

wine industry, the juice industry, food industry cherries, peaches."

Dyck expects growth to continue for the business, saying that as long as businesses are producing perishable goods, there will always be a need to find a place to store them while they await delivery to businesses, and eventually consumers.

"People that are manufacturing here have to drive to Toronto to store their goods," he said. "And that's why we're so successful, because there is no frozen storage in the Niagara region."

The loan is part of the \$140 million the province is investing in manufacturers across Ontario through the government's Regional Development Program. So far, \$140 million has been doled out to 100 separate projects.

Vic Fedeli, minister of economic development, called Niagara's manufacturing community "robust" as a result of businesses like St. David's Cold Storage choosing to invest in their growth. The province, he added, can help with those investments.

"We can be confident that our targeted approach to fostering stability and growth across our economy is working," Fedeli said.

Other Niagara businesses receiving loans in the latest round of funding included Stanpac, a manufacturer of dairy food and beverage packaging located in West Lincoln (\$3.3 million) and AMSI in Beamsville, which designs and constructs e-houses, a prefabricated building that houses electrical equipment for a wide range of industries (\$2.1 million).

hutton@niagaranow.com



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style.
Category: HONOUR

This biblical king judged a child should be split in two. He didn't go through with it, however.

Last issue:

Category: LOVE

Clue: It's a nicer way to refer to the excess fat on either side of the waist.

Answer: What is love handles?

Answered first by: Bill Hamilton

Also answered correctly (in order) by:

Bob Wheatley, Susan Hamilton, Margaret Garaughty, Howard Jones, Gordon Yanow, Lynda Collet, Jeff Lake, Becky Creager, Claudia Grimwood, Jim Dandy, Maria Janeiro, Susan Dewar, Sylvia Wiens, Wade Durling, Nancy Rocca, Pam Dowling, Marla Percy, Margie Enns, Christine Doiron, Violet Schnierle, Tammy Florio, Catherine Clarke, Elaine Landray, Richard Maxwell, Jane Morris, Edna Groff, Daniel Smith, Sheila Meloche

*REMEMBER TO PUT "WHAT IS" FOR JEOPARDY QUESTIONS!

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Patios renewed but with concerns for future

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake continues to support seasonal patios more than three years after they became a fixture in town, but one councillor thinks there's room for improvement.

"I don't want to do things piecemeal. I want to do it as a whole so we can look at all the things that are impacting our downtown," said Coun. Sandra O'Connor.

O'Connor suggested it was time to end the current seasonal patio licence program, which was introduced during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020 in response to provincial indoor gathering restrictions.

She would prefer to start fresh with a new approach.

She raised concerns about the seasonal patios' effects on the heritage of Old Town, loss of space for benches and trees, equal treatment of businesses competing for patio permits and financial losses for the town from patios built on municipal parking spaces.



Coun. Sandra O'Connor thinks it's time to end the town's temporary patio program. EVAN LOREE

Seasonal patios, which opened during the tourism season, helped dining establishments keep their doors open during the pandemic and the program has been renewed annually since 2020.

A staff report to council in November outlined the benefits of the new program.

It stated the new program would not need annual approval from council, would introduce application fees to cover administration costs and would charge parking rates to restaurants with patios occupying parking spots.

O'Connor was unable to convince her peers to cut the existing patio program, but they instructed staff to

keep working on a permanent program.

There are currently 37 restaurants in NOTL that could qualify for seasonal patio licences, said a staff report attached to the agenda.

Coun. Gary Burroughs wanted to see a cap on them, though staff suggested in its report that a limit could harm business owners.

Seasonal patios occupying parking spots raised financial concerns at a meeting in November.

A staff report answering those concerns said the town loses \$12,250 per parking stall, per season as a result of patios.

Coun. Nick Ruller was not hung up on the parking.

"The intent is to provide the parking to support the businesses in the area," he said.

If the town was attracting additional business with other enhancements, like patios, he said he'd continue to support them.

But O'Connor said the issue was about space, not spending.

"This is going to make our parking downtown worse," O'Connor said. "The situation is currently inadequate."

She also argued there was less need for patios now than when the program began.

Social distancing measures are gone and the tourism industry has "rebounded" since the lockdowns of COVID-19, she said.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita disagreed.

"Many of the businesses that have patios, their businesses are still not recovered since COVID," she said.

"And I think to take something like this away is simply saying 'I'm not gonna support the business community.'"

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St. Davids speed camera will be active in April

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Drivers travelling along York Road near St. Davids Public School may have noticed what appears to be one of Niagara Region's new speed cameras.

They would be right – sort of.

The region's associate director of transportation planning, Scott Fraser, says that as part of its automated speed enforcement programming, it is rotating the use of the four speed cameras through 13 community safety zones the region had at the time program was approved.

"The housing and the pole are mounted permanently and then as each camera rotates, it's inserted into that now pre-installed pole and housing," Fraser said.

A speed camera is now live on Niagara Stone Road, near Crossroads Public School, and will be active until the end of March before it is moved to the York Road location.

The camera will then undergo a short testing



A speed camera located on York Road near St. Davids Public School will go live on April 1. RICHARD HUTTON

period of less than a week, Fraser said.

"We have to reverify (that) the camera has been set up and installed properly," he said.

Signs notifying drivers of the speed camera's upcoming installation have been posted to warn drivers travelling in both directions along York Road in St. Davids.

There is a "moderate speed threshold," Fraser said, that is not set by the region but rather by the province. It is also something that will not be disclosed.

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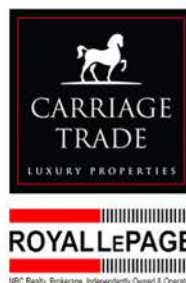
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THE LOVE REPORT

VOLUME 1 COMING SOON

The Lake Report is looking for a bit of romance this Valentine's Day.

We're asking NOTL residents to submit their most romantic photos, love stories and artwork to be published in our Feb. 15 issue.

Know a good love story? Want to surprise a friend or family member?

Send us your creative content by Feb. 8 to be considered. There is a limited amount of space available, so hurry to get your stories to us! Send them to editor@niagaranow.com

While this feature is themed to Valentine's Day, The Lake Report will be working on a monthly "good news" report to accompany our regular news content.

Likewise, send us all of your good news and we'll consider it for a future edition.

Much love,

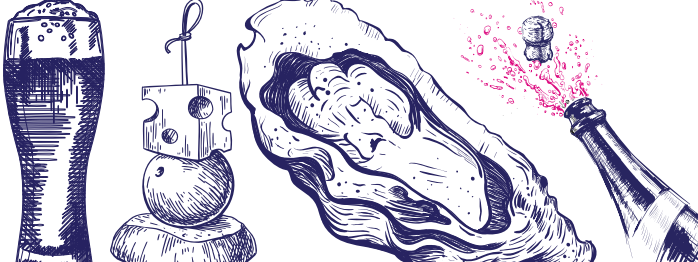
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TEAM OF THE WEEK



U9 Local League

The Lake Report's NOTL Minor Hockey Association Team of the Week for this week is the U9 Local League team. Front Row: Auston Cwiertniewski. Middle row: Aiden Popivanov, George Petrakis, Luke Boyack, Brock Friesen, Caden Hielema, Zach Neufeld, Cedrick Olsen, Johnny Rogers, Felix Bator and Graham Stax. Back row: Coaches Paul Staz, Gary Friesen and Mike Cwiertniewski.
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No margin for error for **inconsistent** Predators

Kevan Dowd
The Lake Report

It's do or die for the Jr. A Niagara Predators and they are clearly feeling the heat. Starting last weekend with a 3-1 loss to the Tottenham Railers, the Predators fought hard Sunday to beat the St. George Ravens 6-5 in a shootout.

Niagara sits in sixth place of eight in the Greater Metro Hockey League's south division with just six games left before the playoffs.

While they have a healthy enough lead on seventh, they trail the Railers and Ravens by four points.

On paper, it's hard to know what went wrong for the Predators Friday night.

Outshooting Tottenham 37-33 and playing a clean game penalty-wise, Niagara's only goal of the night came from Reese Bisci halfway through the first period.

But a tying goal late in the first, another in the second period and an empty-netter late in the third sealed the deal for a Tottenham victory.

"This is a game we should have walked away



The Predators chase a rebound as a shot floats over the head of Tottenham goaltender Nicolas Perreault, the game's first star. Niagara lost 3-1 in a game they expected to win. KEVAN DOWD

with," said Predators head coach Kevin Taylor. "We had everything going. I don't know what happened tonight, I think they just wanted it a little more."

Despite his team putting in a good effort, Taylor felt they just couldn't seem to catch a break.

"The puck also wasn't bouncing our way tonight. Maybe it just went in their favour because they out-

worked us, I don't know," he said.

"I really thought this was our game. I was more worried about Sunday's game."

Thankfully, the Predators got the bounces two days later with a road win against St. George in what Taylor described as a totally different game.

"I was really happy with some of the guys I'd been waiting for to step

up and play their game and they came out that night," he said.

"It was a nice, gritty win. We got our two points. We have another game coming this weekend (versus the last-place Toronto Flyers) that should be another two points, but we'll see what happens."

Cameron Savoie opened up scoring for the Predators early in Sunday's game but

two goals for St. George had them trailing until Declan Fogarty tied things up just before the end of the first period.

Another tally for Savoie plus one for his brother Nick put the Predators ahead by two after 40 minutes.

A power-play goal for St. George narrowed the gap but Nolan Wyers notched his team's fifth of the night

with nine minutes to go.

The Ravens fought back, netting two and forcing five minutes of three-on-three overtime, which still was not enough to end things.

Savoie would come through in the shootout, with a clutch, hat-trick goal for the win.

"They were pumped, everybody was happy, they were thrilled with what happened and so was I," said Taylor about the win.

"It was a little nerve-racking. But we grinded out a good two points."

Up next for the Predators are the Toronto Flyers this Saturday and while he thinks the Predators will perform well, Taylor does not want to be overconfident.

"We need two points more than anything right now," he said.

"Toronto is playing better. We just have to outwork them and I think that's what we're going to focus on this week at practice."

With just one game scheduled this week, the Predators won't be back on home ice until Sunday, Feb. 4 against the Flyers.

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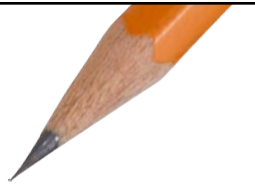


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Have some fun



Across

- 1. Analgesic (10)
- 7. The Orient (4)
- 9. Former German chancellor Willy --- (6)
- 10. Abstract soy spins out of control (8)
- 11. "Titanic" star (8)
- 12. Flower arrangement (6)
- 13. Itsy-bitsy bit (4)
- 15. Taxpayers' get-outs (10)
- 18. No matter what (2,3,5)
- 20. Charts (4)
- 22. Most humans (6)
- 24. To complete something, go this (5,3)
- 26. Fomenting (8)
- 27. Light snooze (6)
- 28. Otherwise (4)
- 29. Superfluity (10)

Down

- 2. Emergency supply flights (7)
- 3. Japanese assassin (5)
- 4. Mediate (9)
- 5. Long noosed rope used to catch animals (5)
- 6. Modernize (5)
- 7. Verbal softener (9)
- 8. Enamoured (7)
- 14. Very small painting (9)
- 16. Before, to Tennyson (3)
- 17. Automotive fuel reserve, perhaps (6,3)
- 19. Animal air intake (7)
- 21. Mundane (7)
- 23. One going downhill fast (5)
- 24. Conducted (5)
- 25. Beyond what is usual (5)

Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
9					10				
11						12			
13		14		15	16	17			
18	19							20	21
22			23	24			25		
26						27			
28				29					

Last issue's answers

1	E	D	W	A	R	D	5	C	H	E	E	7	S	E			
8	C	E	L	U	E	B	E	9	A								
10	H	A	C	K	S	11	S	E	A	T	B	E	L	T	S		
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Following in the **footsteps** of our ancestors



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

To claim that footprints are far more interesting than skulls might seem odd coming from a neurologist who spent a career dealing with diseases affecting the brain and nervous system, with little attention to feet.

The size and shape of the skull tell us much about the evolution of the brain, especially for those regions associated with speech and higher cognitive functions.

By dating what remains of the skull, sedimentary layers surrounding the skull, analysis of whatever other skeletal elements were found, and perhaps analysis of what DNA might be salvageable from within the bones of the inner ear, it's possible to draw a reasonable picture of where the

owner fits in the story of human origins.

Footprints make their producer's story personal. They speak to where the person was headed, at what speed, whether he or she was alone or in the company of others of their kind and whether they might have encountered other creatures along the way.

Perhaps the most famous footprints were left by an australopith, named Lucy by her discoverers, Donald Johanson, Maurice Taieb, and Yves Coppens. These footprints were dated to 3.2 million years ago.

Several years ago, fossilized footprints were found on a beach on the south coast of Spain dating back 110,000 years, consisting of 20 or so adults walking at a leisurely pace and several children whose footprints suggested they were playing with one another.

Given the date of the prints, they must have been neanderthals and in my imagination, the adults were talking to one another and the children were playing much as we might do in the same place today.



Perhaps the most compelling footprints to me were those of an adult human, probably carrying a child on one hip, found in New Mexico that date back 8,000 years.

The trail of prints suggests the child might have wiggled from time to time or her mother was tired, and the child was allowed to walk on his or her own for short stretches before being picked up and carried in the same fashion again and again.

Adding interest were intersecting prints: one set

was probably produced by a woolly mammoth and the other, at another point in the trail, by a giant sloth.

Who were the mother and child? Where were they headed? What became of them? Those are only three of the many questions those prints prompted in me.

Sometimes footprints speak to a larger story, such as those recently discovered in White Sands National Park in New Mexico, which date to 21,000 to 23,000 years ago using radiocarbon dating.

Precise dating is critical here because, until this recent finding, the evidence strongly suggested that migration to the Americas occurred much later - 16,000 to 14,000 years ago, long after the Last Glacial Maximum 20,000 years ago.

By that time, the climate was warmer and a land bridge of sorts would have made migration from Asia to Alaska less challenging than at the peak of this glacial period 20,000 years ago when so much water was tied up in thick ice and the mean sea level was 125 metres lower than today.

The original study was heavily criticized on technical grounds because of the possibility that the samples used to date the footprints using radiocarbon might have been contaminated by sediment and aquatic plants that were thousands of years older.

Hence the recent update study in which a host of precautions were taken to exclude contamination of new samples for radiocarbon dating and optically stimulated luminescence was used to independently date the footprints.

Using both methods, the dates were almost identical to those revealed in the first study.

The significance of this new finding is that modern humans left Asia for the Americas several thousand years earlier than was hitherto thought and smack dab at the peak time for the Last Glacial Maximum when thick ice covered much of Canada, the northern United States, northern Asia and what is now Alaska.

It's hard to imagine traveling under those conditions, whether across vast ice-

fields, sea or some combination of the two.

That some made it to become North America's earliest ancestors is a testament to their toughness and intelligence. Probably most travelled in small groups and their food would have come from the sea as it does today in Antarctica.

Even before the advent of modern humans, neanderthals and later versions of homo erectus covered vast continents, sometimes in appalling conditions, in a series of generational steps, and only the hardest and luckiest groups survived.

Perhaps you understand why I'm so interested in ancient footsteps. Each tells compelling stories, most of which we can only imagine.

And isn't imagination what makes life worthwhile, whether we're physicists, artists of all kinds, or just plain curious about the natural world and mind?

Dr. William Brown is a professor of neurology at McMaster University and co-founder of the InfoHealth series at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library.



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EXPLORING HISTORY WITH NOTL MUSEUM



The Whale Inn

The Whale Inn, shown in this 1960 photograph (before its restoration), was built in 1835 to cater to sailors and merchants arriving at the Melville Street harbour. The Whale Inn is also known as the Elliott House. Its first innkeeper, Walter Elliott, was succeeded by his son Thomas, a fisherman, whose wife and daughters ran a boarding house here post-1870. The Elliott House was noted for the excellence of its cooking. Visitors to the nearby Queen's Royal Hotel often ate there. Though the Whale Inn was supposedly a teetotal establishment, its house mincemeat was liberally laced with brandy and sherry. For many years, the house has been a private dwelling, but the taproom door at the left front is a reminder of its earlier function.

Our summer exhibition will feature significant heritage homes in NOTL. If there's one you would like to see featured, let us know at contact@nhsm.ca.

Travel in Mexico *without guacamole*



Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson
Columnist

Reflecting on my peripatetic life, I realize I have often studiously avoided the local foods that define an area.

Recently, this meant 19 days in Mexico without tasting, seeing, or even smelling guacamole. I flat-out don't like guacamole.

I returned in mid-January to Niagara-on-the-Lake during the annual and well-presented Icewine Festival.

The music was fun, the ice carvings fabulous, but I didn't sip any icewine. Why? Because I just don't enjoy it.

Over the years, the province of Quebec has been the scene of many great adventures for me and mes amis, but only once did I taste poutine. Cheese curds and my tastebuds don't jive.

The most meaningful trip of my life, vacation or business, was to Israel over the Christmas period in 2015.

So much to learn and so much to think about, including man's inhumanity to man and the Holocaust. A day at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum, changed my life.

I also got in a good amount of tourism while living in downtown Jerusalem, and even a one-day course in making hummus. But not even one morsel of hummus crossed my lips.

I organized a wee choir to sing "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem," on Christmas Eve, in Manger Square near the Church of the Nativity in the West Bank, at midnight.

This was followed by an appropriate champagne toast, which was watched over by stern-looking soldiers carrying rifles. Still, no hummus for me.

During the mid-1970s, I lived, played and sailed in New Zealand and Australia.

I drank so many varieties of their beers, but only had one slice of toast lightly spread with Vegemite or Marmite. Ycch.

I have had lots of fun with friends in Nashville, but could never sprinkle even their coolest hot sauce on my plateful of BBQ ribs and grits.

Bourbon whiskey is not smooth going down my throat, so I drink Bud tallboys when south of the



Ross Robinson says guaca-no-please to guacamole. FILE

Mason-Dixon line.

Getting back to Mexico, or "May-hee-coe," for a minute: on New Year's Eve on the Chapala Malecon boardwalk with the locals, someone broke out a bottle of tequila for celebratory shots.

They didn't force a shot on me, especially after I told them that shots sometimes make my trousers fall down. Corona and Modelo cervezas were just fine with me. Mexico without tequila?!

Speaking of beer, weren't we? Please, brewmeisters, don't mess with my beers.

Keep them simple: ales and lagers. Don't get cute by adding pumpkin, grapefruit or peach notes.

Back now to an eventful

and happy and more normal phase of my life, working in the Olympic Village in Munich in 1972.

Ah, the plates full of bratwurst and sauerkraut, with lots of spicy mustard, with beer drunk from large earthenware steins of strong Hofbrau and Löwenbräu.

Spicy chickens and potatoes, in never-ending quantities, served by pretty mädchens in their colourful dirndls.

Hot dogs at various baseball stadiums, overpriced beers and unsalted peanuts from the unique and colourful vendors. La Stade Olympique and Les Expos, could anything be more fun?

Now to the Canadian favourite, Tim Hortons.

Not to drop a name, but to drop a name, my mother is from Cochrane in northern Ontario and for a year, while in her twenties and a schoolteacher, moonlighted as the go-to babysitter for the great future NHL All-Star defenceman and Donut King.

Even with this close connection, I have never drunk a cup of Tim Hortons coffee. I have scarfed innumerable Dutchies and muffins and hundreds of Timbits, but never has a double-double passed my lips.

Millions and millions of people can't be wrong, but both coffee and tea have always seemed a bit weird to me.

And by the way, back in the day, Timbits were called doughnut holes and were just a clever way to use the dough left over after deep frying dozens and dozens of doughnuts.

To squeeze more dough out of the dough, as it were.

Just to prove I am not totally a food contrarian, my several trips to New Orleans, or "N'Awlins," have included many many beignets, those unhealthy but tasty, icing sugar-coated delights served at numerous outdoor cafes in and around the French Quarter.

Rice stir-fries at Chinese restaurants, and soy sauce flavouring with steamed rice

and pho soup at Vietnamese restaurants across Niagara: I love these tastes.

Fresh Beaujolais wines and Choucroute in Alsace Lorraine make for wonderful picnics along the Rhine River.

And I have devoured many steak and kidney pies and ploughman's lunches in the old country.

I will wrap up by explaining why I have never eaten one forkful of potato salad. What a Canadian picnic favourite, eh?

In 1964 I worked the summer as a cook at Pioneer Camp up near Huntsville.

On a hot August day, I helped to make potato salad for some 200 campers and staff members. Apparently, our refrigeration protocols were weak, with the mayonnaise in the recipe.

Over half the campers and staff spent the night going back and forth to the KYBO ("Keep Your Bowels Open") — that was the last time I was anywhere near potato salad.

On a much more positive ending note, let's enjoy some butter tarts from Niagara Home Bakery.

My mom made the best butter tarts, but our local bakery comes a close second.

Add a glass of cold white milk, and life doesn't get much better.

Here among the cats: NOTL group seeks to help feline friends

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Miesha and Phoenix were busy making themselves at home, looking out the window or simply checking out the surroundings, at their temporary home with NOTL Cats volunteer Tanya Rice.

Purrs and paws are a way of life at the Rice home, as it is for other volunteers fostering 20 cats and kittens currently being cared for by the group while they await their forever home.

"We need to draw some attention to adopt, don't shop," Rice said. "Adopt from your community cat rescue. This is what we're here for."

There is a steady flow of felines coming into the rescue, cats picked up as strays, others that have been abandoned and still more who have been surrendered to the group as the owner can no longer care for them.

NOTL Cats does its best to help them all, Rice said. "We have immediate shelter for cats that require medical attention, or if

they're recovering from veterinarian procedures such as spaying and neutering," she said. "But once they've recovered from that, then we need foster homes."

By adopting from a rescue, new pet owners can be assured they are adopting a healthy pet, added Erika Buchkowsky, another volunteer with NOTL Cats.

"It just makes sense to adopt from a rescue group rather than go on Kijiji," she said, adding that many have not been spayed or neutered.

"You don't know if their medical needs have been addressed," she said.

Oftentimes, cats come to the group needing medical attention

"They come in with infections – eye infections, respiratory infections," Rice said.

"They're injured. Some have had broken bones," Buchkowsky added.

All cats adopted from the group are checked by a veterinarian, spayed or neutered, microchipped, treated for fleas and parasites, litter trained and socialized. Adoption

fees vary depending on the animal.

But before all that, when a cat is brought to the rescue they are first checked to see if they have been microchipped. If they are found to have been chipped, every attempt is made to contact the owner and have the feline returned home.

"In some cases, the owner does not want to be found, which is unfortunate," Buchkowsky said.

Just in the past month, the group has taken in four abandoned kittens, Rice said. She expects that those numbers will increase with kitten season just around the corner.

"The cycle is going to begin in six to nine weeks, with more kittens," Rice said.

And with the expected increase in the number of felines needing help, NOTL Cats will be looking to the community for help, whether it be through a donation of supplies or funds to help with veterinary costs or by volunteering to become a foster for the group.

NOTL Cats relies on the

donations it receives from the community to go about its work and hosts fundraising events in the spring, summer and at Christmas. Additionally, donation boxes are located at businesses throughout the town.

The group is also thankful for businesses who support their work, including Hendricks Independent Grocer, SOKO Bakery Cafe, Sweets & Swirls Cafe at the NOTL Community Centre, Virgil Animal Hospital, Minor Brothers and the aforementioned Virgil Pet Valu.

Anyone wishing to help, can contact the group via its Facebook page or the NOTL Cats website. The group can also be reached via email at notlcatrescue@gmail.com. Cats up for adoption are listed, with photos on the website as well as on Petfinder.

Potential cat parents can also meet some of the group's charges via meet and greets once a month on Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Virgil Pet Valu, 1630 Niagara Stone Rd. Each meet and greet will feature two cats.

hutton@niagaranow.com



Erika Buchkowsky has some snuggle time with Phoenix, one of the cats who call the rescue home. RICHARD HUTTON



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Starting your **landscape** journey



GROWING TOGETHER 

Joanne Young
Columnist

Are you wanting to make some changes in your garden this year? Is there something that you have always dreamed of adding to your yard?

Winter is a great time to be planning what changes you would like to make this coming season.

So many times, we know that we want to make changes, but before you know it, another year has passed and the garden still looks the same.

This is because it can, sometimes, be overwhelming to know where to even start so we don't start at all.

Here are some key factors to think about when planning the yard of your dreams.

Use and purpose

When thinking about changing your garden or when starting a new project from scratch, the first thing to consider is how you want to use the space.

Decide what the desired purpose, or purposes, of your ideal yard are before making any other decisions.

An easy way to do this is to write down a list of everything that you would like your space to include. Even if some of the list seems unattainable right now, include them on the list anyway.

For example, you may want to have a hot tub one day down the road, but you know that it may take you a couple of years before you are ready for one. You



Columnist Joanne Young says it's a good idea to start planning your garden in the winter, giving thought to its purpose, climate and style. JOANNE YOUNG

should still plan for it now so that you can designate a spot for it.

I find that one of the biggest mistakes that people make when planning their landscape is that they do not plan for future wants.

This is usually followed by "I wish we would have thought of that before we had planted a tree there" or whatever the situation calls for.

Always consider the big picture first. You can then break it down into doable projects as time and budget allows.

Common uses for outdoor spaces include entertainment area, play area, cooking and dining, storage, relaxation area, gardens (ornamental and vegetable) and swimming pool.

People and pets

Next, you will need to think about who will be using the space.

Do you need to accommodate young children, or will it be primarily used by adults?

When you entertain, what

size of groups will you be having?

Do you have adequate spaces for dining and relaxing?

Don't forget to think about pets — animals often dictate landscaping decisions.

Environment and climate

Now it's time to take an inventory of your property.

One thing to take into account is the light conditions in the various areas of the garden. What areas receive sun all day and what areas are more shaded?

Knowing this can help you better plan where things should go.

You may want a sitting area in a shady spot, while your vegetable garden needs to be in full sun.

Another important consideration is the different views that you take in around the yard.

Are there views that you need to soften or block? Is there a view that you want to bring out in some way?

Take special note of any drainage issues that you have. Is there a place

where the rainwater seems to collect? Is there a way to take advantage of the water or is there a need for a drainage solution?

Before you implement any new hard surfaces (decks, patios, walkways), you need to observe the existing grades. You do not want to be creating any drainage issues.

Garden style

You will notice that I haven't even mentioned deciding on your garden style.

You probably already have an idea of what look you are after, but knowing all the above details first will help you make your final decisions that much easier.

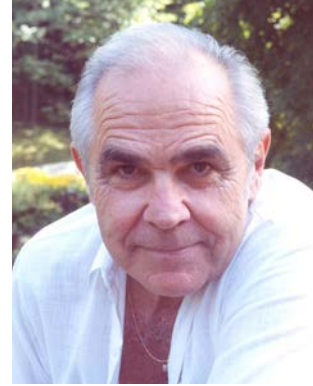
Consider the interior and exterior style of your home and try to create unity between these and your landscaping.

Strive to make your outdoor space one that reflects you and brings you joy.

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

Obituary

Michael Kucan



KUCAN, Michael (Jr.)
March 8, 1937 –
January 15, 2024

Our beloved Father and Grandfather passed away suddenly in his sleep, at home for which we are grateful in his 87th year, after a yearlong illness.

Jr. was predeceased by his adored wife, Donna Louise (April 1997). Was the dear father of Shelley

(Jim) Hernder, Michael Kucan and Tracey (Ray Hunter) Kucan. Dearest Papa to his grandchildren, Michael (Laura Augustin) Hernder, Brooke Hernder, Trevor Hernder, Devin Hunter and Chase Hunter. His grandpets will also miss their Papa and the treats. He also leaves his furbabies, Whiskey and Shadow without a warm lap to snuggle on. Dad was predeceased by his six siblings, all his best buddies, his dear cousin and good friends.

"That was the hardest thing about getting up there, the loss of most everyone," he said. Born in Thorold South, he moved to a farm, in Virgil with his family and lived the rest of his days in Niagara. Realizing the factory job he held after high school wasn't for him, Mike followed his older brothers into the trucking business and never looked back. Either working in the managerial and shipping side of the profession or on the open highways in his Mac or Kenworth, he spent over fifty years in the industry he loved. Working into his late 70s, he still drove transport trucks, delivering loads. "He backed up more miles than you drove forward," was a familiar line! He travelled afar, through business and pleasure. Loved Hawaii and the White Cliffs of Dover. Moved into and cared for a new home, attended Adanac Lodge #614 (He was Master in 1978) and went to his Shriner meetings.

Dad loved good food, a good book, good cars, the casino and animals, especially dogs and cats. Also, Country and Western music, wrestling, his Ukrainian heritage, proud that he spoke the language fluently, the Blue Jays in his later years and playing cards, mostly euchre. He had a gruff exterior but a heart of gold and was wise. We will miss you Dad and your 3X's a day phone calls, bursting through our doors for dinner, raiding our gardens and yelling our names. Your strength, positivity, generosity and ability to forgive was admirable. Dad, your work on earth is done! Mike's (Jr.'s) family would like to extend our gratitude to the Personal Support Workers who cared for our Father, at home. Thank you. Arrangements entrusted to Hulse & English Funeral Home & Chapel, 75 Church Street, St. Catharines (905-684-6346). Cremation to follow. No visitation. A celebration of Michael Kucan Jr.'s life to be held in the Spring, details announced at a later date with interment next to Mom at Lakeshore Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to any animal rescue group, in his name. Dad would have liked that. Psalm 23: Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me.

Online tributes may be made at hulseandenglish.com.

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