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November 16, 2023

Slow rollout of room tax cash jeopardizes festivals: Chamber

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Fat stacks of room tax cash collected from the patrons of Niagara-on-the-Lake's hotels will continue

to gather interest in the town's coffers for a bit longer at least.

That was the decision of council after almost three hours of discussion at town hall Tuesday morning, much of which was closed

to the public.

Minerva Ward, chief executive of Tourism NOTL, came to council seeking a \$226,000 loan to support the operations of her organization, which markets the town's festivals

to visitors.

"We're basically asking to borrow against what is owed to us," Ward said in a phone call after the meeting.

According to Ward, the \$226,000 would be half of

the \$452,000 in room tax revenue collected in 2022.

Hotel stays are now subject to a 2 per cent room tax, but the levy is scheduled to rise to 3 per cent in January and be extended to bed and

breakfasts and cottage rentals.

As the town's destination marketing organization, under provincial law, Tourism NOTL is entitled

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Dylan and Maya lead annual Candlelight Stroll Dec. 1

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Youth is at the forefront for this year's Candlelight Stroll.

Twelve-year-old Maya Webster and 13-year-old Dylan Dietsch will each be in carriages to lead the popular annual winter stroll, organized by the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce.

As usual, thousands are expected to pack the streets of Old Town for the stroll on Dec. 1.

"We are thrilled that our community can keep the tradition of their beloved Candlelight Stroll this year," said chamber president Minerva Ward.

As part of that tradition, the chamber board has selected Dylan and Maya from a list of nominees to receive funds raised by the Candlelight Stroll.

Dylan, a student at Cross-

Continued on Page 24

A day of remembrance in NOTL



Huge crowds gathered to watch the Remembrance Day ceremony in Old Town this year. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Julia Sacco | The Lake Report

They came to remember on Saturday — hundreds of people, young, old, veterans and those compelled to pay their respects for sacrifices made so many decades ago.

It was one of the largest crowds in recent memory.

In Old Town, for Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, the day was especially poignant.

His son Nathan, 23, a sub-lieutenant with the Royal Canadian

Navy and stationed in Esquimalt, B.C., figured in his father's speech to the crowd, along with several other NOTL natives serving in the military.

Having a son in the military has "changed the perspective on

Remembrance Day so much for our family," Zalepa said later.

"It makes it really raw and much more apparent."

In Queenston, site of the town's

Continued on Page 15

State of the Shaw: Audience slow to return to pre-COVID levels

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

Tim Jennings remains an optimist.

It's a must when you're overseeing operations of the Shaw Festival, a major re-

gional economic driver and the country's second-largest live theatre operation.

There is no room for pessimism when playbills are planned a year or more in advance, you're at the mercy of the whims of patrons and

often buffeted by the winds of economic uncertainty.

Not to mention a pandemic that almost no one saw coming.

In the wake of the COVID years, theatre attendance across Canada remains

diminished, with many houses half-full (or less) some nights.

Overall, the Shaw's attendance remains about 20 to 25 per cent below 2019 levels, Jennings said.

It was not unexpected, but

the Shaw's executive director and CEO says Niagara-on-the-Lake's landmark operation has weathered the storms better than many of its contemporaries.



Tim Jennings.

Continued on Page 4

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John Peller's retirement plan signals **big change** for Niagara winemaker



John Peller plans to step down as president and CEO of Andrew Peller Ltd. within the next year. FILE

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

John Peller is stepping down from the family business.

Peller quietly uncorked his plan to retire as president and chief executive officer of Andrew Peller Ltd. in a Nov. 9 news release outlining the vintner's quarterly earnings.

The company operates a number of wineries in Niagara, including Peller Estates, Trius and Wayne Gretzky Estates in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Peller also operates NOTL's Riverbend Inn as well as Thirty

Bench Wine Makers in Lincoln.

"I am committed to providing leadership and support, together with the other members of the board and the Peller family, as we enter the next chapter of (Andrew Peller Ltd.'s) evolution," John Peller said in announcing his retirement.

The Peller board is already engaged in the process to find the company's next president and CEO.

The board said it wants to find "a CEO who will respect the company's "core values and will continue the rich traditions that have been ingrained in the com-

pany due to the contributions, efforts and commitment of the Peller family."

In addition to Peller announcing his intention to retire, independent board members Perry Miele, Shauneen Bruder, François Vimard and David Mongeau stepped down effective immediately, "to support a proactive refreshment of the board."

Replacements are expected to be appointed within the next few weeks, the company said.

John is the third generation of Pellers to run the business, which also includes wineries in the Okanagan Valley in British

Columbia.

In addition, the company produces and number of wine-based liqueurs, craft ciders and craft spirits, and owns 101 retail shops operating under the Wine Shop, Wine Country Vintners and Wine Country Merchants brands.

As for company financials, Peller's sales were up marginally in the first six months of 2023 (ending Sept. 30) at \$200.7 million versus \$199.5 million over the same period in 2022.

Sales rose during the pandemic but have since dropped back to more traditional levels, the company noted.

Tech expert thinks he can get town's parking back **between the lines**

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A Niagara-on-the-Lake entrepreneur thinks he has the solution to the town's parking problems.

And as the town will soon be collecting bids from the business sector for a project to overhaul the town's parking services, it comes at an opportune time.

Grant Furlane, chief executive of LocoMobi, a tech company that works with towns to resolve municipal parking and transit issues, plans to throw his name in the hat once NOTL starts accepting proposals.

"You can't not notice the parking problem," said Furlane, who moved to NOTL for his retirement a year ago.

One of the issues is that many of the town's parking meters do not accept credit cards, but it's hardly the only issue.

The town allows drivers to use Honk Mobile to pay for parking in Old Town, but wifi is not freely available there – and not every person parking in Old Town has the cellular data to download the app.

Some retail workers have told The Lake Report they are frequently asked to break large bills for change because the town's meters



Grant Furlane imagines a world without parking metres, and thinks he can help make it happen. EVAN LOREE

don't accept bills, despite charging \$5.25 per hour.

"It (NOTL) doesn't have a parking problem, it has an infrastructure problem," Furlane said.

And while the town's population is small at only about 19,000 people, "It's a busy place in the summer and it should be treated as a major city problem," he said.

Furlane said the town has a lot of traffic and congestion as a result of infrastructure issues.

In fact, traffic was one of the reasons he decided to move to St. Davids and not Old Town, he told The Lake Report.

But he thinks automation can be a big part of the solution.

Rather than continuing to invest in parking meters, Furlane suggests the town could set up cameras with licence plate recognition at its parking lots.

Cameras track the coming

and going of drivers and can be used to automatically bill them, he said.

And the same technology can be used to issue tickets to drivers who violate parking bylaws.

What people don't seem to realize, Furlane said, is that the parking machines they invest in today might be gone five years from now.

In fact, he thinks the future will be meter-less.

Furlane said the town is "in trouble" if it only wants to replace its machines.

The town needs to think bigger about its traffic, network and ticketing problems, he said.

Furlane doesn't know when the town will be seeking pitches to fix its parking problems, but said, "We will be one of the core companies probably bidding, whatever they do."

Parking "should not be out on its own" but integrated with the town's transpor-

tation plans, he said, and staff across departments need to discuss plans.

Another issue impacting the town's parking services is its mobile network.

"You don't have a strong network here. Your closest tower might be in St. Catharines," he said.

Finding a signal can be even more difficult near the Canada-U.S. border, Furlane added.

"If I'm downtown and I want to use a mobile app, sometimes because I'm near the border, I pick up a different network."

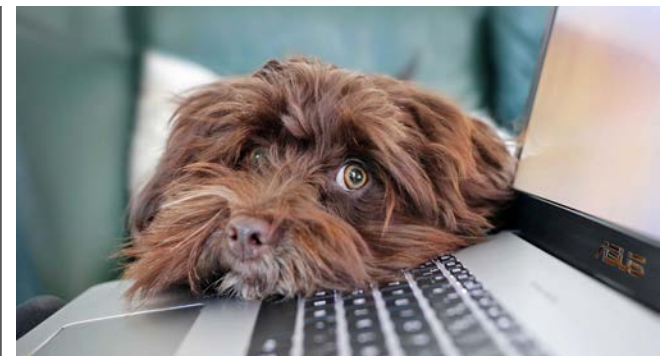
That makes it even more difficult for drivers to download Honk Mobile to park.

Furlane speculated that the town was not having a big conversation on how to resolve the network issues, even though it would make it easier for people to download Honk Mobile while searching for parking.

When he pitches the town on the parking solutions he offers through LocoMobi, he's said he will "tell them what they need," not what they want.

It's the same strategy he used when he secured the city of Kitchener as a client, he said.

And if he can't get the ear of the town, he said he and his company might go directly to council with his ideas.



The Town of NOTL has entered into a partnership with DocuPet to offer residents the opportunity to purchase dog licences online. PIXABAY

NOTL dog owners can now **license** Fido online

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

A new partnership between the town and an online pet licensing platform means making your furry friend legal has become easier for residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The town has enlisted DocuPet to handle the issuing of dog licences via notl.docupet.com.

When a pet is registered on the platform, a new licence is issued and mailed to the owner. For an additional cost, residents can browse hundreds of tag styles online or design their own tags.

CAO Marnie Cluckie called the initiative "a fantastic modernization effort that offers a simplified online experience to dog owners."

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, meanwhile, said the service "will be extremely valu-

able to pet owners and a necessity for animal safety within the community."

Licences issued through DocPet include the HomeSafe lost pet service, an identification and reunification program that links a unique code on each tag issued to an online profile of the pet.

HomeSafe is a key to keeping dogs from winding up in shelters, said DocuPet CEO Grant Goodwin.

"Running an effective pet identification program is incredibly important for the welfare of pets in the community," he said.

Pet licensing is mandatory for dogs in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Under the old system, all licences expired on Dec. 31 regardless the date of issue.

Under the new partnership, licences will expire 365 days from the date of issue.



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Tourism agency seeks temporary loan to cover \$226K in promotional costs

Continued from Front Page

to half the revenue from the room tax each year.

Despite this, council declined Ward's request after some councillors raised concerns about financial transparency and the security of the town's tax revenue.

Ward said she was "terribly disappointed" by the decision.

"It would be unreasonable for a municipality to give money out without having an agreement for financial accountability in there," said Coun. Sandra O'Connor, who chaired the meeting.

Coun. Maria Mavridis said she could back the loan, but only if it was funded out of the town's parking reserve.

Town treasurer Kyle Freeborn said the town's parking reserve was legally and financially the most secure revenue source from which to draw the loan.

While the town was advocating for a financially secure deal, Ward said if anyone needed security it was Tourism NOTL, which still had not received any money from the room tax.

Ward first brought up her concerns about the delayed rollout of the room tax funds at a budget meeting Nov. 7.

"We are incurring significant debt in delivering this marketing without (municipal accommodation tax) funds," she said at the time. "We've reached a point where we can no longer do marketing," she added.

In an email, she said "critical initiatives like the Icewine Festival are in jeopardy" because of the delayed funding.

The town is working with Tourism NOTL on a transfer agreement that will set the terms for how the room tax is remitted.

Town chief administrator Marnie Cluckie said the transfer agreement would protect both parties from financial vulnerability.

Ward said that document



Minerva Ward, president of NOTL's Chamber of Commerce, wants a temporary loan from the town to help cover tourism promotion costs it has incurred. EVAN LOREE

should ideally have been signed shortly after council passed the room tax bylaw in 2022.

"I don't think there's any blame. I think it's just noteworthy that agreements just do take time," Cluckie said at the meeting Tuesday.

Ward said the town was shifting the blame for the delayed rollout.

In her assessment of the situation, Coun. Wendy Cheropita said Tourism NOTL worked proactively after the room tax was passed and drafted a transfer agreement for the town to review because the town didn't take the first step.

"I'm in no way pointing fingers at our staff. They're busy, they have a lot on the go. Whatever the delays were, it didn't happen," Cheropita added.

Though funding for the marketing organization has been at a standstill, it has continued to promote the town and its seasonal festivals to would-be visitors.

"We've operated in good faith, never expecting these delays of a year and a half," Ward told The Lake

Report.

Meanwhile, the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, of which Tourism NOTL is a subsidiary, has been shouldering expenses the tourism marketing partner could have been paying for with revenue from the room tax.

The chamber is on the hook for almost \$217,000 in fees associated with the marketing group for 2023 alone, Ward said.

And the chamber has near \$162,000 on the line from 2022 as well, she said.

"This is not just about organizational strain," Ward said in an email.

"The tourism industry has suffered enough and the town's delay is now contributing to the problem, not the solution."

The whole debacle came up when, at a town budget meeting, Coun. Gary Burroughs said he was "frustrated" council was being asked for money to support the tourism industry but was "not talking about the funding source."

He said funding for Ward's organizations, the chamber and Tourism NOTL, ought to come from

the room tax.

The decision to refuse the loan was defeated in a 3-3 split vote, with Cheropita, Burroughs and Tim Balasiuk in favour of it.

Mavridis, O'Connor and Adriana Vizzari all voted against. Coun. Nick Ruller was not at the meeting.

Coun. Erwin Wiens and Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa attended the meeting but missed the vote, citing other meetings that they had to attend.

However, during discussions, Wiens said he could not support "lending money out without agreements."

Because he missed the vote, Zalepa said he wanted to review the meeting before commenting on how he would have voted.

However, he said he would have preferred to followed the process and have both parties negotiate a transfer agreement, rather than trying to "work it out in a public meeting."

"I just think that's an unproductive way to do business," he said.

There is "no question" that the transfer agreement should be completed first, he added.

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Shaw audiences are **slow** to return to pre-COVID levels

Continued from Front Page

“Lots of my colleagues are only back to 50 per cent or 60 per cent of their 2019 numbers,” he said.

There’s an ebb and flow to nightly attendance.

Overall, the festival budgets for an average two-thirds house attendance, he said. Some nights, that means only 40 per cent of seats are sold.

Sunday nights and Tuesday-Wednesday are often leaner, while Thursday through Saturday continue to power the Shaw.

COVID is a watershed point and many businesses, the Shaw included, now talk about the pre- and post-pandemic eras. The fact Jennings et al. had wisely purchased pandemic insurance for the festival helped a lot, but that was then.

Like many businesses, the Shaw is still trying to claw its way back to the better times of the pre-COVID years.

In the theatre sector, “there are always these down periods where you’re dealing with significant challenges,” Jennings said in an interview.

And if you don’t plan programs and adopt an optimistic viewpoint that things will change, “then I think you kind of spiral into a defeatist space where it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

On the other hand, he believes, “When you’re optimistic and push for success, you mostly achieve it.”

That requires more than just wishful thinking, though, and it doesn’t mean everything you do every year is going to be a winner – or that it all is going to turn out the way it was envisioned.

“But sometimes you might not realize how much you succeeded until you’re looking at it in the rear-view mirror a couple of years later,” he said.

Historically, about one-third of all Shaw patrons come from the United States. So far, American visitors are only back to about 85 per cent of pre-COVID levels, but they’re not staying in town as long, Jennings said.

In the past, U.S. guests



Above: Sanjay Talwar as Ebenezer Scrooge in “A Christmas Carol,” on now at Shaw Festival. Below: Executive director Tim Jennings. DAVID COOPER

would stay five nights and buy 10 tickets or more, on average. Now, they’re more likely to buy eight to 10, he said.

Almost all of Canada’s live theatre companies are charities or non-profit organizations, working on incredibly slim one to two per cent margins, he noted.

“When the Festival Theatre ‘does really, really well, we do really, really well. It can overtake any problem on any of the other stages. The reverse is not true.’”

TIM JENNINGS
CEO, SHAW FESTIVAL

Just as the rest of us have seen how the costs of our everyday staples have jumped markedly in the past few years, so have the prices of goods the Shaw relied on.

The increments have been “massive,” Jennings said.

“Everything has been affected, from lumber, steel for our sets, to materials for our costumes, which have gone up enormously. Labour costs, too.”

“Seeing 30 per cent in-

creases in cost is not something that you can then immediately turn around and charge your audience 30 per cent more. We’re charities. We’re here to try to give back to everybody.”

The theatre company has been “very careful” about raising rates coming out of the pandemic “because we know that if people don’t come it affects every business around us,” Jennings said.

An estimated \$7 to \$9 is spent in the region for every dollar dropped at the Shaw, he added.

Last year was a bit of a break-even year for the company and, thanks to an accumulated surplus, the festival made some capital improvements. But, he cautioned, “Things are very carefully managed.”

Planning live theatre productions requires a lot of faith, smarts and no small measure of luck. With such risky business comes rewards.

“We create 100 per cent new product every year. We are always working on the edge of margins that put as much work into the space as possible with as little return as we can get away with,” Jennings said.

He calls it constructive positive risk. “But, you know, sometimes that doesn’t work out and that’s OK.”



In those years, investments are made because they serve other “goods.”

He sees planning the Shaw’s shows akin to managing a stock portfolio. “Some of the shows are going to do great. Some of them aren’t.”

“And hopefully the ones that do great are the ones that are our big drivers. But they aren’t every year.”

When the 856-seat Festival Theatre “does really, really well, we do really, really well. It can overtake any problem on any of the other stages. The reverse is not true.”

“If all the small theatres do really, really well and the Festival Theatre does poorly, it’s a rough year and it doesn’t matter if (the small ones) sell out every show.”

With all its theatres and stages full, the Shaw can theoretically bring in a maximum of about 3,000 people a day, less than half what the country’s only larger space, the Stratford Festival, can handle.

“The point of a charity is to deliver its program and to put good back in the world primarily” and, in the Shaw’s case, to serve some

basic human needs through art, Jennings said.

He believes it is incumbent on the festival to provide as many shows as possible, because, using the analogy of a food bank, “you don’t want there to be a whole bunch of surplus money sitting in there at the end of the year when you could have fed more people.”

“Well, we’re effectively feeding them differently. And so we want to make sure that we’ve spent every cent we can but still run a viable business.”

Looking ahead, in response to a survey of patrons, the Shaw is moving toward earlier start times for shows.

Jennings noted this year’s Christmas shows – “Brigadoon” and “A Christmas Carol” – have 1 and 7 p.m. starts.

Tickets for next season’s blockbuster, “My Fair Lady,” are already on sale and show times are mainly 2 and 8 p.m. but Jennings said that could change in 2025.

The festival is “leaning towards” experimenting with earlier starts for that season.

And he’s optimistic theatre-goers will continue to return and help erase the memories of the COVID era.

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NOTL illustrator releases first children's book – with familiar title character

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report

Darren Cranford has illustrated dozens of books for other authors but, until now, he has never written one of his own.

At the end of October, however, he celebrated his literary debut with his first-ever children's book, "Nottle's First Day of School," of which he is both the author and illustrator.

Cranford, who also works as an animator and is the co-owner of Keyframe Digital Productions and Krow VFX, said this story idea was "brewing in my head" for five years.

"I thought, 'You know what, I can do this,'" he told The Lake Report. He spent the last three years putting it all together.

"Nottle's First Day of School" focuses on the message of "it's what's inside that counts," telling the story of a lunchbag who doesn't look like much from



Darren Cranford plans to continue writing after the publication of his first book "Nottle's First Day of School." SUPPLIED

the outside but has much to offer.

"The book is about a little paper bag and he goes to a new school, he meets up with the other lunchboxes who are all beautiful commercial lunchboxes and he's just a little bag," Cranford said.

The book features a spe-

cial title character named after the town's popular acronym, NOTL.

"It's a little homage to my hometown of NOTL and I put a little twist on it with the spelling N-O-T-T-L-E," he said.

Cranford has worked as an illustrator for other children's books and has

animated hundreds of hours of content in his work as an animation director, being nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for directing in animation.

For his debut children's book, he gave each of the lunchbox characters personalities to explore in further books and projects.

"I've already been talking with a producer who saw the book and is thinking of making it into an animation project," he said, "which is great, because my company can now animate it as well."

To celebrate the launch of "Nottle's First Day of School," Cranford is doing a book signing in Niagara Falls on Friday and one at a later date in Toronto.

"Hopefully I'll be doing one at my kid's school here at Crossroads, though I haven't confirmed that yet," he said.

Cranford's first book is available for purchase online on Amazon.

Town's fire alarm safety program proving popular

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A new fire prevention program being offered by Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire & Emergency Services has already drawn interest from the community, the administrator of the department's risk reduction program says.

Administrator Dylan Skubel said the department had 19 people sign up since the program started on Nov. 1.

"We've been talking to these people and they are definitely appreciative of the program," he said. "They have lots of questions."

As a part of what is called the Alarm Assistance Program, adults over the age of 65 can now register with the department for the free service.

It will allow them and anyone with a disability or limited mobility to have fire officials visit their home to ensure smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are correctly installed and func-



Dylan Skubel, left, fire inspector and risk reduction program administrator for NOTL Fire & Emergency Services, and fire prevention officer Karley McKeigan. RICHARD HUTTON

tioning as required.

The purpose of the program is simple, said Karley McKeigan, a fire prevention officer with the department.

"Essentially it is designed for people to reach out and ask for assistance for fire prevention in their homes," she said.

The program is part of a provincewide strategy, she said – demonstrated most recently via the Saved by the Beep smoke alarm test day last month – to raise awareness of the importance of having the devices in working order.

"This is Niagara-on-the-Lake's way of getting in on that," she said.

By law, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors must be installed on each floor of a home and outside of each bedroom.

Additionally, batteries should be replaced annually, including back-up batteries for hardwired devices.

Residents who register for the program will receive an annual phone call about any help needed to test, check or replace smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms or batteries.

Participants can opt out or request no further follow-up at any point.

"The well-being of our residents is a top priority and initiatives like these demonstrate our commitment to public safety," said Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa.

"I know that this program will be well-received and appreciated by our community members."

In addition to performing tests on the devices, firefighters also will confirm alarms are installed in the right spot, conduct a battery check and replace them as necessary.

Alarms will also be installed, relocated or replaced as necessary and residents will also be provided with fire safety information.

Residents aged 65 and over and anyone with a disability or limited mobility wishing to enrol in the program should call 905-468-3266, email firedepartment@notl.com, or fill out the online form at notl.com.

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Survey launched to determine NOTL seniors' housing needs

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

A comprehensive survey of Niagara-on-the-Lake residents has launched this week to try to determine what people's housing needs and desires are as they age.

The detailed online survey is a key research tool that an ad hoc committee of concerned residents hopes will outline people's future needs.

The committee, headed by Cindy Grant, wants to understand the evolving requirements of seniors and what they need to maintain their quality of life as they get older.

"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," Grant said when the project was first announced.

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

But first the research has to determine what those



Michael Ennamorato is one of the researchers conducting the survey into NOTL seniors' housing needs. KEVIN MACLEAN

needs are – if any.

Two prominent Canadian research professionals who live in town, Steve Ferley and Michael Ennamorato,

were recruited to design the survey and ensure the poll can independently collect information on NOTL's senior housing needs.

No personal identifying details will be collected and all responses will be anonymous.

As well, the group has partnered with the Niagara College School of Business, Prof. Nick Farnell and a team of graduate students in the business analytics program to collect and analyze the results, in conjunction with Ferley and Ennamorato.

Details of the survey are being published in The Lake Report and NOTL Local, posters will be put up around town and business cards promoting the research will be distributed to remind people to complete the survey.

Ennamorato emphasized that it is crucial to approach the research with no preconceived notions about what people want.

Everyone is different and even individuals in the same household might have differing opinions, he noted, adding that more than 10,000 people in NOTL are 55 or older.

"The whole point is trying to get an objective view of the landscape and from that, come to some conclusions"

from which some solutions might be derived, he said in an interview.

"But let's base it on an objective point of view."

It's entirely possible that people's concerns might not match the committee's or town leaders' or housing advocates' expectations. Up till now, the only available data has been purely anecdotal – comments and suppositions based on conversations or people's perceived needs.

It is hoped the survey is able to clarify things.

"For instance, what trade-offs are people willing to make? What's more important if I can't have everything?" Ennamorato said.

"What will I gravitate to? Will I stay in my community and accept a less-than-optimal housing option for myself?"

That might work for some. But others might expect "a complete turnkey operation, close to all amenities, close to the highway and access to anything they need," he said.

He hopes to obtain 400 or more responses for the survey, which takes about 15 minutes to complete.

"Once the survey is closed, we will work with Niagara College on applying standard research industry techniques to 'clean' the database with the objective of identifying inconsistencies, missing data and duplication and, where possible, using logic to take corrective action," Ennamorato said.

How the research will work:

- The survey will be available through The Lake Report and the NOTL Local using QR codes to connect to the online research.

- Provisions have been made for those without internet access to complete the survey at the NOTL library.

- The survey is available now through early January.

- No personally identifying information will be collected. All data will be anonymous, kept confidential and protected by industry-standard data protection and security mechanisms.

- Information will be reported in aggregate form only.

See a promotional ad for the survey this week on Page 16.



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Martin Mazza's restaurant, like many other businesses in Virgil, has continued to suffer with the ongoing construction on Niagara Stone Road. RICHARD HUTTON

Businesses 'frustrated' with pace of Virgil road reconstruction: Mazza

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Patience has worn thin for one business in Virgil that has spent months trying to stay afloat during the reconstruction of the village's main thoroughfare.

"This has been going on since March. You think they would have some better organization," said Martin Mazza, who owns Italian Pizza & Subs on Niagara Stone Road.

Businesses in the area have seen declines in sales during construction, he added, leaving them on edge.

"They are all frustrated," he said.

Likewise, Mellissa Hunter, manager of the Avondale convenience store in the Village Green Plaza, said business at the store had been adversely affected by the construction.

"We were down all summer," she said. "It's been kind of hard."

There were "a decent amount" of regulars still making their way to the store, but more casual customers were lost, she said.

"People were getting stuck in the traffic for 15 or 20 minutes," she said.

The work, which began in March and was supposed to have been completed by now, includes new storm sewers, a middle lane for left-turning vehicles from Four Mile Creek to Line 1 roads, plus new signals, sidewalks, crosswalks, overhead lighting and landscaping features.

Niagara Region is funding 80 per cent of the reconstruction's \$10-million cost while the town and Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro are chipping in the remainder.

Mike Wilson, the director of capital projects for

the region, said the project was "always targeted to be substantially complete" by the end of the fall and is on track to meet that goal.

"It's been moving along very well," he said.

By "substantially complete," Wilson said there may be small things that have to be completed in the spring.

Those leftover items would not impact traffic or businesses in the area, he said.

Things such as moving utility cables underground, plantings, asphalt and a parkette will be finished.

He emphasized that the project has entailed a lot of collaboration among the region, the town and utility companies.

"There are multiple stakeholders," he said. "This is the first time doing this kind of project."

Mazza, meanwhile, is relieved that paving is done, but added the project is by no means near completion, as concrete crosswalks were still being installed.

A traffic light at the entrance to the LCBO that was removed needs to be replaced, landscaping work still needs to be done.

The crosswalk issue is a concern for him.

"I found out the guys doing the work (Rankin Construction) advised the region against these stamped concrete crosswalks because they are slippery, especially when they get wet," Mazza said.

Wilson said Mazza is correct about the safety concern over the crosswalks – but measures had been taken to ensure they are safe once installed.

"This is the first time we have used stamped concrete rather than individual stones," he said. "Once they are complete, we're

going to come in and scour the surface."

Crosswalks on side streets connected to Niagara Stone Road were replaced first, "to try and keep the traffic following," Wilson said.

NOTL regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser said she appreciated that the ongoing work has been tough on businesses in the area.

"The end result is going to be so much better," she said. "It has been short-term pain for long-term gain. Hopefully in the long-term, the businesses will benefit."

While the project was approved prior to her being elected to regional council in 2022, she supported the improvements and said there was "a lot of community engagement" prior to the project going ahead.

"I believe at the time, there were discussions with the business owners," she said.

Mazza's restaurant has already had to battle through the COVID-19 pandemic and an industry-wide problem of attracting and retaining staff, he said.

Now, he said, he has had to navigate the road reconstruction and problems brought about by it.

Over the course of construction, power to his business has been cut off on several occasions, as have his gas and cable connections.

"I know there's gonna be hiccups. I know there's going to be issues," he said. "But, it just seemed like one hiccup after another."

Meanwhile, for her part, Hunter is feeling optimistic.

"It's getting a little bit better," she said of business at the store. "It's getting a little busier in the mornings. Things are starting to pick up now that (construction) is finishing up."

Events to fuel your holiday spirit in NOTL

From farm gear and Santa parades to stepping back in time, there are plenty of ways to get into the spirit of the holidays in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Here's how.

Friday, Dec. 1

Candlelight Stroll, 6:30-9:30 p.m.: A hugely popular event with proceeds going to charity. The annual walk, organized by the Chamber of Commerce, starts on Queen Street at the historic courthouse. Candles can be purchased for \$5 each and will be on sale onsite until 8 p.m. Prior to the stroll, there will be a number of warmup events, including performances by members of the Shaw Festival and the Niagara Star Singers from 2 to 5:30 p.m. Santa Claus will also be on hand.

Saturday, Dec. 2 and Sunday, Dec. 3

Rotary Holiday House Tour, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each day: Visit six uniquely decorated NOTL homes, plus cultural and historic sites. Tickets are \$45 and include a complimentary wine tasting. All proceeds to charities supported by the Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Saturday, Dec. 9

Christmas Parade, Saturday, 11 a.m.: Enjoy floats, marching bands and more. The parade will start at the intersection of King and Centre streets in Old Town and make its way down Castlereagh, Wellington, Byron/Prideaux and Simcoe streets before heading back to Queen.

Saturday, Dec. 9 and Sunday, Dec. 10

A Garrison Christmas at Fort George, noon to 4 p.m.: Visitors will experience Christmas traditions from the early 19th century as the fort will be done up for the holiday season with traditional decorations of garland and natural greenery. Hot beverages and treats will be available.

Thursday, Dec. 14

Third annual Christmas Tractor Parade, 6 p.m.: Fifty or more tractors decked out with an array of lights and other holiday decorations take to the streets of Virgil. The parade is also a fundraiser for Joe Pillitteri's Team Pillsy, which raises money for cancer research for the Terry Fox Foundation.

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Contributed by Patty Garriock
 "I dwell on possibilities."
 - Emily Dickinson

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Decorating the Court House



Photographer Dave Van de Laar was on scene when crews began decorating the old Court House on Queen Street for the holiday season. It requires a lift to get up to the high windows.

Editorial

NOTL seniors' future housing needs

Kevin MacLean
 Managing Editor

If you weren't born in Niagara-on-the-Lake, but now call it home, chances are you moved here because of the lifestyle, small-town community feel, fine weather, quaint village-like atmosphere, historic importance or any combination of similar reasons.

If you were born here, chances are you've seen myriad changes over the decades but despite it all, you love the place and maybe want to live out your days here.

No matter how you ended up in NOTL, we suspect it holds a special place in your heart.

As we all get a bit older and creakier, inevitably there will come a time when we might need to think about where and how we want to spend our future.

Well, there is no time like the present.

So, full marks to a group of volunteers from town who have taken it upon themselves to figuratively take the pulse of the community and try to



Scan this QR code with a smartphone and you can click through directly to the seniors housing survey.

determine what and how senior folks in NOTL might want to spend their later years.

This ad hoc committee 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.

We commend them for their energy and their foresight in trying to determine the future needs and desires of residents of our community.

Rather than relying on anecdotal evidence or making assumptions based on conversations or perceptions regarding what sort of seniors housing is needed in Niagara-on-the-

Lake, this group wants to have hard data and evidence.

To make that so, the group has engaged two prominent Canadian researchers, who happen to live in NOTL – Steve Ferley and Michael Ennamorato.

And together they are working with Niagara College's School of Business, Prof. Nick Farnell and graduate students in the business analytics program to collect and analyze the results of a comprehensive online survey.

This professional approach to investigating the community's needs should provide definitive insights into what NOTL seniors want.

The survey aims to gather information from residents 55-plus and once the data is collected and analyzed, this committee hopes to be able to move forward in a constructive way, with evidence-based knowledge of residents' desires.

We're not sure we've ever seen such a comprehensive, grassroots approach to such a communal undertaking.

No matter what the outcome – and until the survey is completed, no one really knows what housing options people want in NOTL as they age – we expect the process will be beyond reproach.

One key way we all can ensure that is to participate. Have everyone in your household 55 and up complete one of the online questionnaires over the coming weeks.

It is accessible via your smartphone by aiming its camera at a special QR code (a version of which appears on this page and in an advertisement elsewhere in the paper). As the ad outlines, if you don't have a smartphone or are not tech-savvy, there are alternative ways to fill out the survey.

The important thing is to let your voice be heard. Think about what your needs are now and over the next five to 10 years, and complete the survey. It is wholly anonymous and will be available until early January, so there is lots of time to ponder your options.

We encourage everyone to take 15 minutes and take part.

editor@niagaranow.com

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

Leaky sewers contaminating creeks **should concern us all**

Dear editor:

Your front-page, above-the-fold story in The Lake Report's Nov. 2 issue, "Leaky sewers contaminating NOTL creek with E. coli, town says," should give every resident in Niagara-on-the-Lake not only pause for thought but also

create a demand for immediate action.

The town has known since 2015 that one creek

running through town has "some of the brownest, foulest water in the (Niagara) region" and "the highest level of E. coli of any water system in the entire Niagara region," according to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

This is astonishing in a beautiful, historic, globally recognized town such as Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Are the memories of the

Walkerton water contamination so distant? People died in Walkerton.

An unconscionable number of First Nations reserves have been without clean drinking water for years and some for decades. And fresh clean water is becoming more and more scarce across the entire world.

Just two days after the publication of your article, the New York Times car-

ried a front-page story on the "tangle of rules" around groundwater across the U.S., which is also becoming more and more polluted and unregulated.

To think that every lovely forest creek running through NOTL backyards is contaminated with sewage cross-contaminating storm water is appalling and an unacceptable danger to human and animal health.

The cost to fix it is apparently in the "hundreds of thousands" of dollars.

And in the same issue, a debate about the cost of a traffic roundabout is ballparked at \$3.9 million, an underestimation by two to three times, according to a correspondent with knowledge of expropriations across the province.

Letter writer Peter Rusin ("With expropriations, roundabout could cost \$10

million or more," Nov. 2) estimates this roundabout will end up costing between \$10 million and \$12 million.

Water matters more than traffic or construction or ease of transportation. Clean water is survival.

In the words of oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle, "No blue, no green. No water, no life."

*Daphne Lavers
NOTL*

'It is pure magic:' Santa Claus flies again for palliative care

Tim Taylor
Special to The Lake Report

For more than a dozen years, blessed with a white beard and a robust torso, I have donned my red suit each December to wander Niagara, visiting homes and businesses — gatherings of all kinds — to kindle a little of the spirit of Christmas.

Some say it is selfless. In truth, I can tell you it is the single most self-serving thing I do. Imagine the joy of having even one young person's eyes sparkle at the thought that I know his or her name and what they want for Christmas.

It is pure magic.

I just can't get enough of the sparkly eyes and the questions about Santa Claus and Rudolph and the sleigh and the cookies and the naughty and nice list, all spit out in one excited burst.

And, it is another great joy that all this supports the effort of our local palliative care service, bringing comfort and solace to individuals and families facing life changing medical circumstances.

Over the past decade, Santa's visits have raised some \$25,000 for the effort.

It all started in my late business career almost 20 years ago. Clad in a heavy, somewhat stale-smelling, Santa suit, rented from Malabar's Costumes in Toronto, I made the rounds of our company and department Christmas parties in

the bars and restaurants of the downtown core.

Each visit received a laugh, a drink and not much more. For a would-be Santa looking for the Christmas sparkle, it certainly fell short.

Fast forward to retirement. I knew I wanted to amp up the Santa effort, but wasn't quite sure how.

I knew where I wanted the donations to go. My mother had received a lot of palliative care support in her last days. My sister, Terry MacTaggart, was the director of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Palliative Care service.

The choice was straightforward.

My wife, Kathy (who refuses to become Mrs. Santa), gave me a Walmart Santa suit and I placed my first Book Santa ad in the newspaper.

The response was not overwhelming. Sure, there were excited kids at the fire station, a few appearances at real estate company Christmas parties and we raised a few donations. But I wanted more.

My first stop was Laurel's Sewing and Alterations in Chautauqua. Laurel Gordon has had a long and illustrious career making anyone wanting sewing skills very happy.

Even creating a personalized Santa suit didn't faze her. Gordon sent me to Google to look at thousands of Santa pictures to decide

what I wanted the suit to look like. Then, to Toronto to buy the fabric she needed.

A few short weeks later, I was walking with a new, energized Santa strut.

Each year in the middle of October, I contact the families and organizations who have used Santa's services in the past. Not surprisingly, some families age out of the Santa experience.

Other businesses change how they are mounting their Christmas parties. By early November, I've exhausted my existing clientele and moved on to new opportunities.

I now have a Santa business card. I have an ever-growing database. I occasionally advertise and post on Facebook. I even have my own email address: santaforpalliativecare@gmail.com.

Nowadays, Santa makes close to 30 visits each December. Usually brief and occasionally way too long. But not after Dec. 23.

After that, the children don't believe Santa isn't at the North Pole getting ready.

We drive a bright red station wagon. The kids understand that Santa couldn't arrive for his pre-Christmas visit by sleigh. Not possible. Both the sleigh and the reindeer are obviously getting ready for the big day.

My red station wagon becomes a temporary Summer sleigh and they



Tim Taylor says it's a great feeling to see excited children's faces when he dons a Santa suit and heads out to help raise money for charity. FILE/JULIA SACCO

completely get it.

I have learned to withstand the tugs at my beard from skeptical pre-teens. At most visits, Santa reads a shortened version of Clement Moore's 19th-century poem "The Night Before Christmas." The longer version makes the really young ones go a bit squirrely.

I wear a big skeleton key on a string around my neck. It's magic. With it, Santa is able to bring gifts to houses that don't have chimneys.

During COVID, with the help of Niagara College students, we developed an online visit process, straight

from the North Pole.

It wasn't quite the same, but still created some sparkle. It even allowed families separated by the pandemic, gathered by Zoom from all corners of the world, a very special moment with the guy in red.

I've arrived by fire engine. I've conducted the Niagara Symphony Orchestra. I've visited many of the regions assisted living and long-term care homes.

And I've rung the door bell of hundreds of homes with children's noses pressed to frosted windows.

But my greatest happi-

ness is the look on the faces of the true believers. It just doesn't get any better.

Each year, sometime between Christmas and New Years Day, we add up the cheques donated by Santa lovers from as far away as Grimsby and Fort Erie.

Bonnie Bagnolo, executive director of our local palliative care service, adds the online donations. And we marvel at just how generous people are.

Just after Christmas, I get most of my beard shorn, pausing for a few months until the spirit comes back.

It always does.



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Cora Long D.D.



The owners of the William Kirby House plan to designate it, to preserve it for future generations. BRIAN MARSHALL At right, the house circa 1895, when Kirby still lived in it. NOTL MUSEUM

Dispelling some **myths** about heritage designation



Brian Marshall
Columnist

I don't believe it is an overstatement to say that, for the first time in the history of Ontario, we have a government that is actively mounting an assault on provincial heritage.

Whether it be built heritage, cultural heritage or the protection of ecological features (very often a "character defining element" in a historical context), it appears there is little that Premier Doug Ford's government is not prepared to sacrifice on the altar of development.

In a few short years, this government has, through a series of provisions contained within various bills passed under the PCs' majority, systematically weakened the ability of municipal governments to protect the heritage and historic character of the landscapes within their boundaries.

And, where individual development applications may still have fallen within local control, this government has been shamelessly profligate in issuing minis-

terial zoning orders – dictatorial orders that bypass all existing legislation – to approve said applications.

Further, it has chiselled away at your rights as an individual property owner to designate.

However, despite the Ford government's heritage protection dismantling agenda to date, the primary power still rests in the hands and minds of individual property owners.

You can make a difference.

You, by choosing to designate your property, can directly contribute to the preservation of your community's unique character.

Now, before we turn to one couple who has stepped up to do just that, it may be beneficial to dispel a couple of misconceptions around heritage designation.

Foremost among these mistaken impressions is that your house must be "old" – that is simply not the case.

There are properties spotted across the province that, at the time they were designated, were less than 25 years from the build date: the Ron Thom-designed home at 4 Old George Place in Toronto and the Campbell Scott House at 89 Byron St. right here in NOTL being two quick examples.

In fact, of the nine designation criteria set out in Ontario Regulation 9/06 (a property must meet two of these criteria in order to receive designation), not a

single one speaks to the age of a building or property as being a critical or necessary component of Part 4 designation.

On the contrary, if each of the following three examples – drawn from that list of nine criteria – are carefully considered, a structure built last year may well qualify for designation:

"The property has design value or physical value because it is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method."

"The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit."

"The property has design value or physical value because it demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement."

Next on our list of misconceptions is the notion that heritage designation has an adverse effect on the resale value of a property in the event an owner wishes to sell it – a belief that is completely incorrect.

In March, McMaster University published a study entitled "Investigating the Impact of Heritage Property Designation on Real Estate Value."

This was the most comprehensive research ever conducted in Canada that considered this topic.

The study spanned from 1983 to 2019 (36 years) with a total sample size

of 178,035 sold resale properties, located in 10 municipalities serviced by Realtors Association of Hamilton-Burlington.

The conclusion reached by this study was "that heritage designations are positively associated with sale prices of residential properties."

In other words, the "sold" prices fetched by designated properties were consistently higher than those of comparable non-designated properties.

Bluntly, designation makes a property more valuable when sold on the open real estate market.

For those of us who follow such things, this conclusion came as no surprise – McMaster's findings were consistent with other studies conducted here in Canada, the United States and other international locales.

Incidentally, there is no fee associated with an application for heritage designation. The process is straightforward and not onerous in the least.

Should you happen to own a "historic" property, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum has a wealth of information related to town properties (and the past owners) that is easily accessible. Town planning staff are invariably helpful during the process.

Moreover, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has a grant program that helps owners to defray costs associated with the maintenance and upkeep of heritage designated properties.

So, a few weeks ago I had the opportunity to sit down with the lovely couple who own the William Kirby House on Front Street and chat about heritage designation.

Now, although their house happens to be "old" – built circa 1818 – and is representative of local early 19th-century housing design, perhaps its most significant attribute is not in the architecture but rather in its association with William Kirby.

For roughly six decades (1855 to 1906), this dwelling at 130 Front St. was the principal residence of William Kirby. He was owner and editor of the Niagara Mail during the mid-1800s and a published poet whose works were acknowledged by Tennyson.

Kirby authored a number of books, one of which was the first Canadian international "bestseller" entitled "The Golden Dog," a work of historical fiction set in Quebec City that was lauded by Queen Victoria herself.

His public service record included being the reeve of Niagara, a magistrate of Lincoln and was appointed collector of customs under the auspices of Sir John A. Macdonald's government.

Among his many other accomplishments, Kirby was a founding member of the Royal Society of Canada, a driving force in the formation of Canada's copyright laws and an outspoken 19th-century advocate of

Canadian nationalism. He believed that the future of Canada was as a bicultural, bilingual country.

In short, Kirby's many and varied undertakings had a profound influence on his community, the province, the emerging country of Canada and international interest in this new nation.

That said, this important local landmark had not been designated and, while I had absolutely no doubt that its current owners would be loving stewards during their tenancy, designation is about protecting cultural heritage assets and community character into the future. And, it carries benefits, only a few of which I've outlined in this column.

After careful consideration – which included reading the McMaster study – the owners of the Kirby house elected to move forward with its designation and the application was filed last week. It's a decision I applaud them for.

As a final note, it's my opinion that heritage designation is the single strongest method we have in Ford's Ontario to protect the character of our communities.

It's certainly not bullet-proof, but it is the best tool in our kit box.

Feel free to contact me if you'd like to explore heritage designation. I promise to assist where and as I can.

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



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NOTL Remembrance Day service was **disappointing**

Dear editor:

Remembrance Day services are a time of coming together, as a community, to reflect and remember the lives of the many thousands of young men and women who gave their lives in the ultimate sacrifice during war.

And today, more than ever, we need to remember and not repeat history.

Sadly, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Remembrance Day service in Old Town has really disappointed many of us, on many levels.

A large crowd turned out on Saturday, Nov. 11, to remember in solidarity and unity the lives lost and wars fought.

Coming together at such a time is important and necessary. It is a solemn and reverent time of reflection.

However, this was not the case here in town on Saturday.

For some unacceptable

reason, the microphone system was not working properly.

This being a time-sensitive event, the organizers had to begin the service in order to have the minute silence at 11 a.m. sharp.

Not only could we not hear what was said, or what names were read, two minutes' silence was not announced.

The service lacked any form of music. There were no bagpipes, no marching parade of military personnel, no children's choirs.

It really was a huge disappointment.

A complete stranger told me how disappointed she was with the whole service and said next year she will stay home and watch the service on TV from Ottawa.

Let's remember our veterans and let's do it with class.

Sheila Serio
NOTL



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa had to do most of his speech a capella when the sound system failed. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Remembrance Day sound system a let down, **again**

Dear editor:

I attended the Remembrance Day service Saturday in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Once again, I left feeling disappointed and frustrated that the ceremony, still, after many years, has not acquired a sound system that operates correctly.

Last year, I wrote to Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa expressing my disappointment that a decent sound system appeared unavailable on such an important day.

Mayor Zalepa's response was that it wasn't the town's

responsibility, but that it fell either to the Chamber of Commerce or the Legion to look after it.

No offer from him, to follow it up. However, I believe, it should be up to the town to ensure that NOTL can be proud and capable of honouring Remembrance Day appropriately.

We should be able to get our act together for the old soldiers and senior citizens and the attending public, who all deserve more.

Jean O'Malley
NOTL

More locations for **roundabouts**

Dera editor:

I understand those feisty folk in St. Davids have put together a petition about the roundabout that Niagara Region is going to build with the support of Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa.

I'm going to start a petition too, demanding roundabouts for King and Queen, King and Mary, and Mississauga and Mary in

Old Town as they are always backed up with traffic.

Then there's the dumb traffic light in Virgil at 55 and Four Mile Creek Road.

And while we're at it, in Virgil let's make that one a double loop to speed traffic into town hall. Wouldn't want to slow down our lord mayor.

Bob Bader
NOTL

Roundabouts need **sufficient space** to be effective

Dear editor:

I just read two letters in your Nov. 9 edition regarding traffic circles for St. Davids, ("St. Davids needs a roundabout – at York and Concession 6" and "Hold a referendum on St. Davids roundabout plan.")

I also found that Alperen Albayrak's editorial cartoon on the subject hit upon the real problem with these traffic management devices. Too much management and too little space.

For the last 75 years, traffic conflicts at intersecting highways have

been handled by the construction of what are generally referred to as cloverleaves.

No 90-degree conflicts, no stop signs and no traffic lights solved things very well.

Their one drawback is that as time passed, traffic and municipalities both grew fairly rapidly and eventually, as shown in your cartoon, conflicts developed when a needed cloverleaf could not be constructed at the scale traffic engineering recommended due to conflicts

with built up areas at the same locations.

Some cloverleaves were modified to fit into the available space resulting in some T-intersections where on-ramps met the main roads and in sharper turns on the on-ramps.

This made them less effective, even when some of the additional expropriation costs were accepted.

The move to replace costly and underperforming cloverleaves resulted in the move to traffic circles and the newer double-diamond interchanges.

These, however, also only worked efficiently when they were constructed using the proper scale and area of land.

The traffic circles found throughout Niagara generally have been built using insufficient land area and too small a diameter of the main component.

It would be in everybody's long-term interest to build these junctions only if they can be constructed large enough to work properly and safely.

Jim Dandy
Niagara Falls

New Canadians can **'Leave your luggage at the door'**

Dear editor:

About 150 years ago, the Sioux Nation, led by Chief Sitting Bull, fled to Canada to avoid retribution by the United States' army after the battle of the Little Big Horn.

They were met not by an army, but by a single North-West Mounted Police officer, James Walsh, who stated they were welcome to stay, but they had to obey our laws – not use Canada

as a safe haven to conduct raids back into the United States.

That is one of many precedents in our history.

Canada has always been a safe haven for people seeking safety, freedom and opportunity.

Canada remains, to this day, a refuge from terror, wars and oppression.

Immigrants built our wonderful country, but I believe

there should be one simple rule for coming and staying in Canada: "Leave your luggage at the door."

We have all come to Canada for a clean, fresh start at life.

The turmoil and challenges of our old homes must be left there, as hard as that is.

Part of that fresh start in Canada is Canadians must not feel threatened here for terrible events occurring

elsewhere.

We, with all of our own challenges, must remain a beacon of safety and hope.

If one is so caught up in other conflicts, feel free to go there and work toward a solution, but no one in Canada should be threatened or attacked on our streets for what is happening elsewhere.

Thomas Caldwell
NOTL



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Not everyone attending fundraiser got to meet Princess Sophie

Dear editor:
Last week's edition of The Lake Report carried a story and photos of the gala fundraiser reception and banquet sat Queen's Landing for the Lincoln & Welland Regiment Foundation Senate, ("Princess Sophie tours Inniskillin, attends gala during visit to NOTL").



Princess Sophie and Ontario Lt.-Gov. Elizabeth Dowdeswell at the gala.
ALEX HEIDBUECHEL

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa noted that "everyone" was greeted by Princess Sophie, the Duchess of Edinburgh, who is the regiment's honorary colonel.

Not so.
I bought a ticket for \$275 and was excluded from the reception.

On complaining, the reply was that I was "misinformed" and only donors of more than \$1,000 were allowed to "meet and greet" the duchess or our lieutenant-governor. That happened at a special reception in another area of Queen's

Landing.
To add insult, they refunded my ticket, as a store might on complaint of purchase of a bad piece of meat.

I will continue to send my money in future as I support their recruiting and education work, but I will not be silenced.

Elizabeth Oliver-Malone
NOTL

Don't accept hotel proposals in residential areas

Dear editor:
The reason the town's planning committee meetings are so long is clearly that the applications are in contravention of the laws of the town.

They don't comply with either the bylaws or the official plan and the applications probably shouldn't have been accepted and certainly not given the credibility of having

public meetings to discuss them.

The residents rely on the town's bylaws and official plan when investing in their homes and they naturally don't want large commercial developments in residential areas.

As to the developers' threats to take the town's rejection of their proposals to the Ontario Land Tribunal, the province has

said that it wants more housing.

The Marotta and Hummel hotel proposals in Old Town could mean the removal of hundreds of housing units from the town.

At a time when the provincial government is asking for more housing, I can't imagine why the Ontario Land Tribunal would agree to having hundreds of potential housing units

removed and replaced by hotel rooms, especially when the land is in residential areas.

I strongly urge town staff and council to reject these commercial developments that are proposed for residential areas, knowing that they are not in the community's or the province's best interests.

Wayne Murray
NOTL

We have to think more about aging in place

Dear editor:
I was delighted to read a report in your paper describing a group investigating the need for seniors housing ("Group plans independent survey on NOTL housing needs," Nov. 2).

As the report states, this area has one of the highest percentages of retirees in the country. Despite this fact, we seem intent upon moving out of the area without any thought of the aging process.

My husband and I are among the retirees who came when we were a youthful 60.

Now in our mid-80s, we are still reasonably active and healthy, but maintaining our small home with a fairly big garden is becoming a less attractive chore.

We have decided to stay in our home, though and "age in place" for as long as possible, so I was hoping that this survey would also encompass thoughts

about people, without unlimited income, to achieve that aim even when life throws in a health problem.

However, if life forces an alternative living accommodation it would be a severe wrench to move out of the area.

With property values being what they are, I'm not sure I see an answer to that, but it is most encouraging to see that a group of responsible people are actually exploring possible

future solutions.

The current, dismaying growth of mammoth houses and luxury hotels unfortunately seems to be bringing more and more folks into the area who have no need to worry about taking care of these problems.

They already have other homes. Does this increase the disinterest in the proposed project?

Ann Handels
NOTL

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Laura Fakla and Marlene Bridgman agree it's important to "get your ducks in a row" before you die. EVAN LOREE

First ever 'death café' a chance to open up about end-of-life – over a cup of coffee

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

About 25 people came out to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre on Friday night to sip warm beverages and talk about death.

It was the NOTL Community Palliative Care's first-ever "death café," a casual get-together where people can share their thoughts about death in a supportive environment.

Death cafés have been popping up all over the world since 2010 after the concept was first developed by Jon Underwood, a funeral adviser in Britain.

Psychotherapist Geoff Straw, who helped lead the meet up, said death can be hard to talk about.

"Sometimes it's hard, because it's emotional, you know. It's hard for us, but it might be harder for a family member," said Straw, who works with both the dying and their families.

Many of the attendees said emotions can make it hard to have frank conversations about death.

Melissa Nixon, the palliative care group's volunteer co-ordinator, said she tried to talk to her partner about getting their affairs sorted before they die.



Armando Pena is humble enough to accept that he may need help from his family as he begins to age. EVAN LOREE

"He just said, 'No it's too soon,'" Nixon said. "He's not ready to talk about it yet. And some people, just, I don't think ever are."

Resident Marlene Bridgman said it's important to get wills and funeral arrangements settled so families aren't left fighting over estates.

She has seen too many families torn apart by the "almighty dollar" and did not want hers to be one of them, she said.

"It can be very complicated," said Ruth-Ann Nieu-

westeeg, a Niagara Falls city councillor and owner of Patterson Funeral Home.

Nieuwesteeg described one funeral she directed where the common-law spouse and parents of the deceased could not agree on how to handle the remains.

The spouse was able to prevent the parents from seeing the body before it was cremated, she said.

Bridgman said she has a cohabitation agreement with her live-in partner to help avoid situations such as the one Nieuwesteeg described.

"I don't want to end up having any kind of issues like this," she said.

Laura Fakla, who is single and without children, said she sometimes worries about who would take care of her if she ever got sick.

"That's the thing that plays in my mind," she said.

Fakla and a couple of her friends are talking about buying a home together to retire in so they don't have to rely on an old-age home, she said.

Open conversations with her family and friends helped to manage her fears, she said.

Ann Wilson was in her thirties when she lost her sister and that spurred her to try to make the most of her time on Earth.

"That was a bit of a wake-up call," Wilson said. "She said to me, 'I've lived a full life. It's just been shorter than most people.'"

Wilson recalls her sister was accepting of death, even though she had a two-year-old at home.

During a question-and-answer period, Bridgman described her perfect afterlife as one where you've made all your apologies.

"Hell would be to have regrets that you didn't say or do," she said. "You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough."



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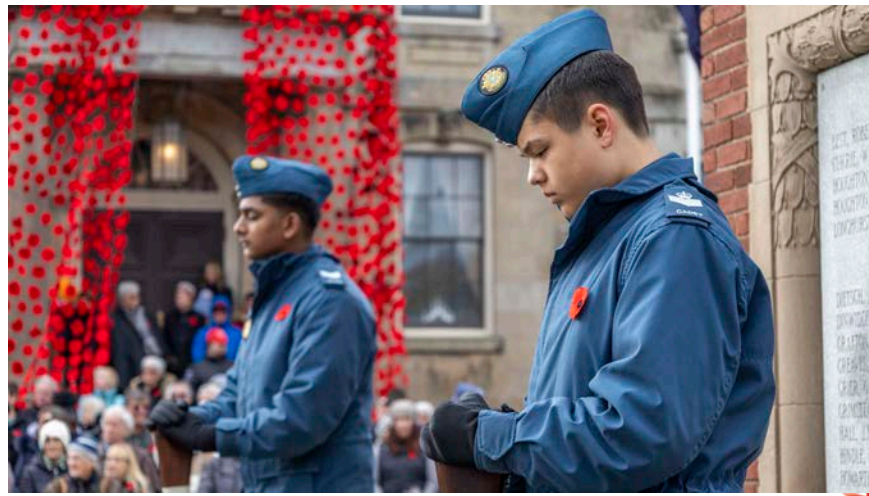
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 NEWS



Clockwise from top left: Legion Branch 124 president Al Howse. Sgt. Prestan Peters and Flight Sgt. Aiden Deane stood in respect of fallen troops during Saturday's Remembrance Service on Queen St. Firefighters, cadets and Mounties stand at attention during the ceremony in Old Town. Lt.-Col. Allan Magnacca lowering the Canadian flag. Jackie Dickieson holds the Legion flag. JULIA SACCO/DAVE VAN DE LAAR




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Clockwise from top left: Cadets stand on guard during the Remembrance Day ceremony in Queenston. Lee and Barbara Bentley attended the Queenston Remembrance Day service on Saturday. Flight Corp. Ethan Epp stood in reverence at the cenotaph during the morning service. People laid wreaths near the cenotaph in Old Town.
JULIA SACCO/
DAVE VAN DE LAAR



Large crowd turns out to pay their respects

Continued from Front Page

second service of the day, Barbara Bentley was there with her husband Lee in honour of her dad.

"My father is a 103-year-old veteran," Barbara Bentley told The Lake Report. "So it's very important to be here."

Harold Douglas Freeston joined the army in 1939 at age 19 and fought throughout the Second World War, Bentley said.

She believes her father is one of the last living veterans from that war. The centenarian now resides in an independent living home in B.C.

Bentley and her husband feel they need to come out on Nov. 11 and remember his service.

"Because he is so far away, and he has had some health issues over the last three months, there was no chance for him to have gone to the cenotaph," she said.

Growing up, speaking about what happened during the war was a taboo subject and only in the past 20 years has she learned about what her father went through.

"It was actually never spoken about in the home of any of the kids I knew. It was just too hard," she said.

"It's a whole different life. My dad lost two uncles in the First World War," Bentley said.

Since moving back to Niagara-on-the-Lake, she and her husband always attend the smaller Queenston service because it is more intimate.

"It's actually very emotional with only a few people. It seems to be very personal," she said.

The day's ceremonies began at 10:45 a.m., when hundreds of NOTLers and visitors filled Queen Street surrounding the cenotaph. The Queenston ceremony followed at 1 p.m.

In Old Town, after the traditional two minutes of silence at 11 a.m. in front of the cenotaph, Zalepa addressed the crowd a capella, as the sound system for the ceremony wasn't working properly.

"The names listed on the cenotaph were our neighbours, friends, family and leaders," Zalepa said.

With time marching on, it can be easy to forget just how relevant Remembrance Day is, he added.

"Some of these connections with more current community members serving, that's where it can be hard," the mayor said, adding that some families with connections to recent conflicts have a hard time even making it out to the ceremonies.

In the crowd in front of the cenotaph were members of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire Department, the 809 Newark Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron, the Royal

Canadian Mounted Police and uniformed veterans and Legion members.

Several community members, families, businesses and organizations laid commemorative wreaths at both ceremonies.

Zalepa said he felt proud to read out the names of NOTL military personnel who are currently serving – his son included – and expressed a hope to draw more attention to the young people who join the forces.

He also singled out Sailor 3rd class Thomas Carbone, who recently returned from Operation

Reassurance in the Baltic, Cadet Dante Bell, and Sub-Lt. Luca Lavoie, who is based in Esquimalt.

"There are others and I'm going to commit to drawing attention to them over the next few years," he said.

"People told me they appreciated hearing the (NOTL) connection and they want to hear more."

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Last issue:
Category: THE GIFT OF THE GRAB
Clue: "Grab life by the horns" was its slogan back when it made the Ram.
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Wartime history comes ‘full circle’ for NOTL’s Gregg family

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A letter written more than 100 years ago has brought two families together once again.

Bill McKinley of Oakville was leafing through a folder full of documents and letters he had inherited.

At the same time, Steven Gregg of Niagara-on-the-Lake had become more curious about his family’s history after he attended a presentation at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum about the Ontario Farmerettes program during the Second World War.

His mother Dorothy had been a Farmerette and at the same time, she met his father, Stanley.

For McKinley, the papers in his possession at one time had belonged to his grandparents and among the documents was a letter written on YMCA Canada stationery from a soldier named Montague J. Gregg.



Bill McKinley, left, presented a letter written during the First World War by the grandfather of Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Steven Gregg. RICHARD HUTTON

It was written to the family of Cecil Dale, another member of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, which fought in the First World War.

“I got the folder and I opened it up. I saw this letter written, presumably to Cecil’s mother,” McKinley said.

“And all it said was, ‘Dear madam, thank you for the package. My mom lives

near your mom. I’ll have her give you a call.’ It was a nice letter.”

The letter was signed by Gregg and included the soldier’s regimental number. Cecil, meanwhile, had been killed in action while serving in France.

McKinley decided he wanted to find out more about the letter writer.

He searched for Montague J. Gregg on the Library and

Archives Canada website where he found the soldier’s attestation papers.

He conducted a further a search on Ancestry.com and then Googled Montague’s name “just to see what comes up.”

That’s where Steven Gregg came into the picture.

“(I found) the obituary for Steven’s father (Stanley),” McKinley said, adding he learned Steven lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake through a separate Google search.

At the same time, McKinley came across the story in The Lake Report about the Farmerettes event presented by author Bonnie Sitter. Gregg was quoted in the story.

“The whole thing took less time than it is to tell you this,” McKinley said.

Emails were exchanged between the two men and Sitter, who had co-authored a book on the Farmerettes program that was initiated during the Second World War by the Ontario Farm Service Force.

The program encouraged girls ages 16 to 18 to work in the fields during the summer while many of the men went off to fight in the war.

One of the stories detailed in Sitter’s presentation was that of the budding romance between Steven’s parents. Seeing that story convinced McKinley that he had found a descendant of Montague Gregg.

The two men met this past Saturday – Remembrance Day – to exchange the letter at the museum.

“This whole thing has really come full circle just by happenstance, really,” Gregg said. “The great efforts of Bill to connect us and have the wherewithal to think that we would want to enjoy seeing this little bit of history.”

His grandfather, Gregg said, talked very little about his experiences during the war.

“I think that’s typical of a lot of wartime families, actually,” Gregg said. “We

really knew nothing. To hear or to see that he was writing back to a grieving mother in Toronto was pretty amazing.”

When the war was over, Montague returned to his home in Toronto, Gregg said.

Then Monty got married, “had five sons, including my father (who died in 2019), and two daughters as well, all in Toronto.”

Gregg said the letter will be preserved by his family.

“I think certainly I would love to frame it, probably with the wartime medal of my grandfather’s.”

He is thankful for McKinley’s curiosity and the fact that he took the time to reach out.

“Bill’s efforts have been great, but none of this would have happened if (museum community engagement coordinator Barbara Worthy) didn’t sponsor talks like this (on the Farmerettes),” Gregg said.

“It’s made all this searchable.”



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NOTLers bring home more **Royal Winter Fair** honours

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report

2023 marks another successful year for Niagara-on-the-Lake's "Jam Queen" Kim McQuhae.

After yet another jam and jellies competition was judged at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair this past weekend in Toronto, McQuhae came home with an armload of awards.

McQuhae entered a number of her jams and jellies across the 14 separate categories and took home three first-place wins, one second and two third-place wins.

The winning entries that clinched a first-place win were McQuhae's maple cinnamon blueberry apple jam, her mango blood orange marmalade and her hibiscus flower jelly.

In second place was her strawberry jam and third, her raspberry lemon jam and blueberry sauvignon blanc jelly.

The hibiscus flower jelly was a new addition for this year's competition, McQuhae said.

"I was sort of fascinated, because earlier in the year



"Jam Queen" Kim McQuhae took home another armload of awards from the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. JULIA SACCO

the Food Network said something about being the new flavour trend of the year," she said.

First, she made a tea out of the flower, she said, which she then be made into a jelly.

"It came up with such a beautiful colour," she said. "It's a little floral, a little sweet and a little tart at the same time."

She prefers changing

up her flavours before the competition each year and the NOTL Farmers Market makes a great testing ground, McQuhae added.

"I like to experiment, I get bored really quickly doing the same thing," she said. "I'm at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Farmers Market and so sometimes that's my testing ground."

Some of the jams that didn't place as highly are

still beloved by her NOTL customers and herself, she added, so they will still be offered during the market's season and for sale at her farm for anyone who wants to stop by.

"(The) jalapeño apple jam is one of my best sellers at the market and that placed really poorly at the Royal. You just never know," she said.

She also entered an

elderberry jelly into the competition this year, which came in fifth: "For years I've had people asking me for elderberry ... people at the market really love it," she said.

McQuhae gave a shout-out to Walker's Country Market, which entered the fair for the second time.

"This year they had quite a few entries which is nice to see. It's good to have

some competition," she said.

Speaking of NOTL competition, this year marked Toad Hall owner Andy Parks' first-ever entry into the fair.

"I've always liked the Royal Winter Fair but I never thought I'd be able to participate in any way," Parks told The Lake Report.

He explained that after moving into his property, he noticed a unique black raspberry growing and decided to make a jam out of it.

"It was something that just came out of being here," he said. "The berries were there and I had an older friend tell me about them and what they were and I've been picking them ever since."

After getting a great response from friends and family, Parks entered his seedless black raspberry jam under the amateur raspberry jam category and took home first prize.

The jam isn't for commercial sale, however, so Parks urges those wanting to try to come out to the St. Nicholas Day Craft Sale on Dec. 2 and 3 at Toad Hall where it will be available for purchase.

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More **volunteers** needed for annual Holiday House Tour

Katie Aeby
Special to The Lake Report

Ninety-two-year-old Diane Armstrong has many happy memories of her life in Niagara-on-the-Lake, but one in particular stands out.

Every year she and her friend Miriam Nixon would be among the first to volunteer for the Rotary Club's annual Holiday House Tour and they couldn't wait for the weekend to arrive.

"The houses were always so beautiful. It was such fun to see them from the inside and the owners were so appreciative of everything we did," she says.

"What I particularly loved was meeting the people who came back year after year to enjoy this wonderful event. It really set the tone for the entire Christmas season."

"I miss doing that," she finished a little wistfully.

Once again, NOTL Rotary is working hard to ensure that this is the most successful Holiday House Tour ever, and once again the organiz-



Volunteer Karen Hatch during a previous Holiday House Tour. SUPPLIED

ers are counting on volunteers like Armstrong to help make that happen.

Almost all the tours are already sold out, but Rotary still needs more volunteers to help out.

As well, several entertainers have already jumped on board: Juliet Dunn and her pianist Doug Mundy will be entertaining guests at the Gate Street Studio; Brock University's Avanti Cham-

ber Singers will be performing at the front of McArthur Estate, and the Bethany Bell Choir at the rear.

Inside, the ever-popular Eddie Pizzo will be tickling the keyboards with holiday tunes: new recruits to the event, the Soenen Sisters Trio with harp, flute and cello will be performing in front of the fireplace, and guitarist Will Wilson will be undercover near wine stations outside.

In keeping with the evening event's Victorian theme, the NOTL Museum is lending authentic Victorian costumes to some of the volunteers, and once again The Friends of Fort George, dressed in full period uniform, will be conducting guided tours around the McArthur Estate Gardens.

Most important though, will be the dozens of residents who volunteer for the role Armstrong loved so much — helping guide guests through the houses that have been chosen for this year's tour and acting

as the eyes and ears of the homeowners.

Spots are filling up quickly but there is still an urgent need for more volunteers.

Shifts are only four hours long, with breaks and refreshments available during that time. And, in addition to making new friends and being part of something important, volunteers will each be given a free pass to the day tour, which can be used any time during the two-day event.

All proceeds will be distributed to local and international Rotary projects around the world.

Recipients here include organizations such as Red Roof Retreat, NOTL Palliative Care, Yellow Door Theatre Project, school lunch programs in St. Catharines and many more.

Internationally, Rotary Clubs everywhere have been part of the organization's long-running End Polio project, which has helped wipe out the disease almost everywhere in the world.

Your volunteer assistance will also help fund disaster relief in Ukraine, water projects in Kenya and dozens of other causes that are saving lives around the globe.

If you would like to be part of this special event, grab a friend and go directly to the tour website at holidayhousetournotl.ca.

Scroll down to the Volunteer section, then click the sign-up link, which takes you to a page with available time slots.

You can choose to volunteer at any house where there are still vacancies and any time slots that are still open on Friday, Dec. 1 and Saturday, Dec. 2 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. or 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.

If you have any problems, email Rotaryhht@gmail.com for help.

It takes a village like ours to make an event like this successful, and once again this year the Rotary Club needs your help to make that happen.

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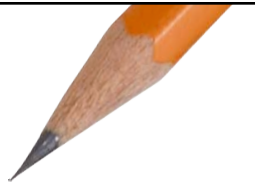
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Across

- 9. Al fresco (4-3)
- 10. Deadly intestinal ailment (7)
- 11. What Rapunzel grew (5)
- 12. Collection point for passage fees (9)
- 13. Retained (4)
- 14. It might be proscribed or prescribed (4)
- 15. Winger sliced bread (5)
- 19. Furrowed (6)
- 20. Face hardship bravely (4,2)
- 23. Despise (5)
- 24. Sullen (4)
- 25. Yield (4)
- 27. Community tunes and songs (4,5)
- 29. Rock bottom (5)
- 30. Entourage (7)
- 31. John ---, tempestuous court star (7)

Down

- 1. On one side of a notorious DM Z (5,5)
- 2. High level of excitement (5,5)
- 3. Your personal "equator"? (5)
- 4. Rhetorical skill (7)
- 5. Greenery? (7)
- 6. Out (9)
- 7. Turn down (4)
- 8. Unwise (4)
- 16. They can mix zombies (10)
- 17. Sources of Dabinetts, for example (5,5)
- 18. Gaiety (9)
- 21. Eventful trip (7)
- 22. Give in (7)
- 26. Lay to rest (5)
- 27. Grange (4)
- 28. Mandolin-like instrument (4)

Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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13			14		15	16	17
		18					
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Last issue's answers

1	T	O	A	M	A	N	5	C	O	D	E	W	O	R	D	
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				6		8	
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			4		6		



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Work on mRNA vaccines led to Nobel Prize in medicine



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

This year's Nobel Prize was awarded to Katalin (Kati) Karikó and Drew Weissman for their key role in the development of mRNA vaccines in the two decades leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Without that off-the-shelf work, mRNA vaccines would not have been available for the ensuing pandemic and many more millions would have died or developed persistent disabling post-infection symptoms – what's been called Long COVID. But first a little history about mRNA.

Single-stranded RNA probably appeared long before DNA in the evolutionary record because RNA offered a simpler, albeit more

error prone tool for coding generation to generation genetic information.

In that role, RNA remains the sole tool for coding information in viruses such as COVID.

For more complex life-forms such as most cells, RNA was usurped by DNA as the primary tool for coding genetic complex information in genes.

In cells, genes play many roles of which the manufacture of thousands of different proteins is among the most important because they provide the building blocks for the cell's internal skeleton, transport systems, communications systems, and several organelles in the cell.

The steps between DNA and proteins form the "central dogma" of molecular biology. In the first, called transcription, a single stranded copy of the sequence of bases in the gene is made, called messenger RNA or mRNA.

In the last step, the base sequence in the mRNA is read by the cell's ribosomes in the cytoplasm where the code is translated into a se-



ries of specific amino acids to create the precise protein specified by each gene.

It's more complicated than that but the essential point to grasp is the messenger-boy role played by mRNA in transcribing and translating specific genes into matching specific proteins.

That is the key to understanding the new science of employing mRNA to create tailor-made proteins including drugs for cancer and copies of the spike proteins of the COVID virus to provoke immune responses by the novel mRNA vaccines created and manufactured

by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

Fortunately, hurdles to mRNA technologies, which would have stymied the development of mRNA vaccines, were overcome by Weissman and Karikó in the two preceding decades.

They helped make mRNA safe and effective for billions of recipients during the pandemic and later.

Another key obstacle to overcome with mRNA vaccines was how to protect fragile RNA from enzymes that would normally destroy it soon after it was injected.

The solution was to clothe the mRNA in a lipid nanoshell to protect it from circulating enzymes in transit between the injection and insertion of the mRNA inside the host's cells.

Once inside, the mRNA co-opts the cell's protein machinery (ribosomes) to create the desired proteins. Mission accomplished: the mRNA is then destroyed by the cell's own enzymes, leaving nothing behind.

The latter is important because some anti-vaccine proponents continue to claim the mRNA (and DNA

in other vaccines) becomes incorporated within the host's genetic material. Not so.

The technology to create mRNA vaccines and protect them in nanoparticle-sized shells had been on the shelf of high-tech companies such as BioNTech and Moderna for several years where bio-engineered mRNA, for example, was explored as a possible tool for creating novel drugs to treat cancer.

When, for example, Pfizer-BioNTech learned about the pandemic in China in January 2020, it launched "Project Lightspeed" to harness mRNA technology to rapidly develop an effective vaccine and get it ready for phase one trials within six months.

In a similar fashion, Moderna, working with the U.S. National Institutes of Health, developed and manufactured a similar vaccine in the same timeframe using the science pioneered by Weissman's and Karikó's hard-won scientific advances of the previous two decades.

The whole program was an amazing success in

preventing symptomatic COVID disease in the pandemic.

Given the uniqueness and effectiveness of mRNA vaccines, and the potential of mRNA technologies to revolutionize drug development, it was no surprise when the Nobel committee awarded the 2023 Nobel Prize in medicine to Weissman and Karikó for their pioneering work.

For their efforts, in 2021 the two won the Lasker-DeBakey Clinical Medical Research Award, which often heralds a Nobel Prize in the future – as it did here.

The whole field of mRNA technologies pioneered by the duo's earlier studies has opened a new world for creating similar mRNA vaccines for influenza, tuberculosis, HIV, malaria and the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). It also opens new avenues for treating cancer and perhaps autoimmune diseases.

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



Future Polish premier visits Niagara Camp, 1917

Beginning in September 1917, camps were organized on the Niagara Commons to provide two months of training for Polish volunteers recruited in the United States. The objective was to prepare them for a Polish army, which was quietly being assembled in France to free Poland from foreign rule. In November 1917, there were over 4,000 volunteers in camp. The camps were multinational efforts. The French government paid volunteers five cents a day and promised an annual bonus of \$150. The American Red Cross and the YMCA provided recreation tents and the Buffalo Polish-American Citizens Organization helped clothe, feed and transport the men to Niagara. Canadian officers supervised the training and many town residents provided free accommodation during the winter of 1917. By the time the last camp closed in March 1919, more than 22,000 men had been trained and 21,000 of them had been sent to France to serve in the Polish Blue Army – so named because of their distinctive light-blue uniforms. In November 1917, the world-renowned pianist, Jan Paderewski, who later became the premier of free Poland, and his wife Helena visited Niagara Camp. He was a spokesperson for Polish nationalism and he is seen here inspecting the troops.

Old-time hockey and NOTL's wondrous musical moments



Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson
Columnist

Although I no longer watch hockey on the television, mainly because the players are too fast and too clever, the tragic news of a hockey player dying in England has been all over the news.

The images of Adam Johnson's jugular vein being severed by a razor-sharp skate blade were obviously horrific and graphic. I still have not been able to watch.

And this week, police in Britain arrested a man on suspicion of manslaughter in Johnson's death.

Hockey is a weird game and was a big part of my early life. Goodness, one game in North Bay in 1967 saw me take a record 37 minutes in penalties, as an unremarkable defenceman.

The last two minutes were for "delaying the game," which I thought was an unnecessary and cheap put down by the referee. Funny and true, but a bit mean.

I once took four stitches on my right eyelid, before the advent of face visors and cages. Even way back then, it was a dangerous game.

A Leaf game last weekend saw "a good effort by the fourth line and a couple of fights." Don't forget, this is 2023.

My good friend, the late Ralph Mellanby, often opined that every hockey fight was an attempt to concuss. He always called a spade a spade, not a horticultural instrument.

The new general manager of the struggling Toronto Maple Leafs wants the team to play with more "snot." Back in my days up north, our coach asked us to play with "an edge" and "an attitude." Are we digressing linguistically as a society?

Since the death of Johnson, I have asked several of my former Wallbanger and Hot Tub and Motts Old Caesars teammates if they have started to wear neck protection. Even at the speed they now play, their



José Guerrero with 25 young Mexican musicians of the Silvestre Revueltas chamber orchestra at Grace United Church presented by Music Niagara. ROSS ROBINSON

hollow-ground skates are dangerous. Their responses have been predictable.

"When I have something around my neck, I can't see the puck as well, and it hurts my breathing."

"It makes my skates feel heavier and slows me down. And, they don't come in blue and white."

"It's itchy and the velcro is irritating. It gets lost in my smelly hockey bag."

"The neck guards aren't expensive and I have played for decades without getting my neck cut."

Yes, for sure, and my childhood idol Rocket

Richard played for many years without getting his Achilles tendon cut. When it happened, someone soon invented a velcro achilles tendon guard that was added to all Tackaberry skates within a month.

In the hockey-rich province of Quebec, neck guards have been mandatory for players of all ages for over a decade. And by the way, their major junior league mandates facial protection and doesn't allow fighting.

And in children's hockey they have been obligatory for years.

Again, I love hockey when

it is played properly. Just watch the World Juniors, or the Olympics, or Canadian and U.S. college hockey.

I have long wondered why hockey is the only sport that publishes a PIM or penalties in minutes statistic. Games played, goals, assists and PIM. Can you imagine basketball noting points, assists and fouls? Or football listing yards rushing, passing and penalties incurred?

But enough ruminating about hockey, Canada's winter national sport.

As I attempt to age gracefully and with curiosity, I have

been searching out musical options in our community.

Frankly, it can be exhausting and just last weekend I marvelled at the talents of an Adele tribute at NOTL's Old Court House.

The median age of the audience gobsnacked me. My attention to music was basically detoured after Petula Clark and Roberta Flack, so the musical talents of Adele opened up a whole new world for me.

The next day, Atis Bankas and Music Niagara presented the 25 young Mexicans from the Silvestre Revueltas Chamber Orchestra at St. Mark's Anglican Church and Grace United Church in our pretty town.

This was a perfect complement to Remembrance Day and we also were enlightened about the Last Post Fund, finally honouring the thousands of Indigenous Canadians who have given their lives for freedom.

Neighbours and friends, the good Lord makes many flavours of ice cream, and there are numerous entertainment and educational options for all of us. Please, please support the many artistic and cultural groups in Niagara-on-the-Lake.



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In partnership with The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, NOTL Minor Hockey Association, The Fine Estates Team & Revel Realty.

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WHERE: Meridian Credit Union Arena
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Donations can also be dropped off
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MAC INC.

Tractor Parade is on the grow

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

If all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, could the same be said for farmers?

Not if Dorothy Soo-Wiens has anything to do with it.

Soo-Wiens was watching the late night news when she saw a story about a tractor parade held in the small Haldimand County town of Selkirk.

She thought it was a great idea and spoke to her husband, farmer and Niagara-on-the-Lake councillor Erwin Wiens.

"It was 11:20 at night and I said to (Erwin), 'We should do something here,'" Soo-Wiens said.

That was 2021, when NOTL was just coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Things had begun to open up, but not in time for the town to host its annual Christmas parade.

"We started calling some friends," Soo-Wiens said. A parade of 19 tractors was put together on short notice, and thus, the town's Christmas Tractor Parade was born.

Since that first year, the parade has grown, and this holiday season, it will be back for its third promenade through the village of Virgil.

Participation doubled in 2022 to 39 tractors and for this year's event, there will be at least 50 taking part, Soo-Wiens said.

This year's parade will be held Thursday, Dec. 14 at 6 p.m., and Soo-Wiens said



This year's tractor parade has drawn 50 entries so far, says organizer Dorothy Soo-Wiens. FILE/DAVE VAN DE LAAR

there is still time for more tractor drivers to sign up.

"It would be great to see if we could get to 60," she said.

Starting and ending at the Centennial Arena in Virgil, a long line of bedazzled tractors will head west on Four Mile Creek Road before turning north on Pleasant Lane and then continue along Eden Street.

The parade will then head east on Penner Street/Line 1 Road before turning south on Concession 4. The parade will continue along Concession 4 until it reaches Line 2 Road. Heading south on Line 2, the parade will then turn westward at Four Mile Creek Road and return to the arena.

People love the parade, Soo-Wiens said.

"There's something about the farm vehicles and the lights that everyone loves," she said.

The only problem for Wiens is that she never gets to see the parade, as she and Erwin are busy

marshaling the participants back at the Virgil arena.

"I have never been able to go out and watch," she said.

She has been told by others that a lot of people turn out along the route and that the event is popular with residents at the Radiant Care Pleasant Manor long-term care home.

"Every balcony is full," Soo-Wiens said.

As the parade continues to expand in size and popularity, Soo-Wiens decided this year to add a fundraising component to the event.

Joe Pilliteri, co-owner of Lakeview Vineyard Equipment, was approached about taking part in the parade and making it an opportunity through his Team Pillsy initiative to raise funds for cancer research.

Pilliteri was quick to jump on board alongside members of Team Pillsy, a group of volunteers which raises funds annually for the Terry Fox Foundation through participation in the town's annual Terry Fox

Run every September and through other events such as comedy night.

"I just think it's such a great idea," Pilliteri said.

On parade night, a group of Team Pillsy volunteers will take to the streets during the parade on ATVs to collect donations from spectators.

As of now, the team has raised upwards of \$125,000 for cancer research this year and with the parade and with events, including another comedy night Bella Terra Vineyards planned for before that calendar flips to 2024, Pilliteri is hopeful to add a significant amount to that total.

"We're hoping with these events we get to \$150,000," he said.

Meanwhile, anyone interested in taking part in the parade can contact Soo-Wiens by email at erwinanddorothywiens@gmail.com.

More information about the event can be found on the parade's Facebook page, NOTL Christmas Tractor Parade.



Top: From left, Matt Dietsch with son Colton, wife Kristen and his son Dylan, who is one of this year's beneficiaries of the Candlelight Stroll. SUPPLIED Bottom: Maya Webster needs donations for her fundraising team, Marchers for Maya, so she can help find the cure for diabetes. FILE

Two NOTL kids to lead the Candlelight Stroll

Continued from Front Page

roads Public School, lives with cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair.

"We were pretty humbled. It was a bit of a shock," said Matt Dietsch, Dylan's dad.

He said it would be a "tricky evening" for his son, who gets anxious in a big crowd.

Dietsch said he'd be introducing his son to the horses over the next couple weeks to help him overcome the anxiety.

Dylan and his family helped to raise \$40,000 for an inclusive playground at Crossroads in 2020.

Dietsch said he and his family would be using their share of the donations from the Candlelight Stroll to help pay for a lift to help Dylan get up and down the stairs.

Maya, who lives with juvenile diabetes, has been advocating for increased government funding for continuous blood glucose monitoring devices.

Her mom, Christi Webster, said Maya was "beside herself" with excitement when she learned she'd be helping lead the Candlelight Stroll.

And the excitement ramped up when she learned she could share her half of the proceeds with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, a research group working on a cure for the lifelong illness.

Webster said she shed a tear at the news.

"It made me feel very proud to be her mom," she added.

Jessica Taylor, the chamber's event manager, said each recipient would get half of whatever is raised from the candle sales at the stroll.

Candles will be sold for \$5 each from 2 to 8 p.m. on Dec. 1.

While Taylor could not recall how much the chamber raised last year, she said more than 3,000 were sold.

The stroll starts at 6:30 p.m. but the day includes several other events starting at the Niagara Pumphouse at 2 p.m.

There also are concerts by Shaw Festival performers, the Niagara Star Singers, Queenston Women's Chorus and Salvation Army Band.

The full schedule of events is on the chamber's website at niagaraonthelake.com/candlelightstroll2023.

NOTL getting ready to welcome Santa Claus

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

You better not pout – Santa Claus is coming to (Old) Town next month.

The jolly old elf will be the featured attraction as Niagara-on-the-Lake hosts its annual Christmas Parade on Saturday, Dec. 9 at 11 a.m.

"We've been around for over 50 years," said John Strecker, who chairs the parade's donation committee.

The parade made its return in 2022 after a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Strecker said turnout that year was smaller than in other years.

"I think there was still



Santa Claus will be back in town on Dec. 9 for NOTL's annual Christmas Parade. FILE

some hesitancy because of COVID," he said.

As is tradition, the parade will start at the intersection of King and Centre streets in Old Town and travel along Castlereagh, Wellington, Byron/Prideaux, Simcoe and Queen streets.

There is still time for individuals and groups to take

part in the parade. Entry forms are available at www.notl.com. Entry is free.

Residents are also being encouraged to purchase parade buttons – this year, they feature a design by artist Gail Kerr, a member of the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre.

Buttons are \$3 each and

are available for purchase at various locations throughout town and on the day of the parade.

"People always ask me where the money from the buttons goes," Strecker said. "We use it to pay for the marching bands (for travel expenses). This year we have five bands coming from all over Ontario."

The parade committee is also welcoming donations from businesses and individuals to help cover the cost of the event.

Anyone wishing to help can make a donation by mail to: Christmas Parade Committee, PO Box 100, Virgil, ON, L0S 1T0 or drop it off at the town's administrative offices at 1593 Four Mile Creek Rd. in Virgil.

NOTL's Devlin finishes her 11th New York Marathon

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

There's no stopping Niagara-on-the-Lake's marathon woman.

Margot Devlin just completed her 11th New York City Marathon on Nov. 5.

The NOTL senior, who is quick to advise that she's not fast, just slow and steady, will now start training for her next big race – her fifth London Marathon, in April 2024.

Finishing a road race that's 26.2 miles (42 kilometres) demands discipline and determination.

After all, it's roughly the distance from Old Town to Beamsville. No small feat, to be sure.

She has now completed 15 full marathons and more than a dozen half-marathons. And the 67-year-old has no plans to stop anytime soon.

As she mentioned last



Margot Devlin. SUPPLIED

year after running the New York race, her goal is to complete 15 (or more) Big Apple marathons.

"Because after you do 15, you get to wait for the start in a heated tent on Staten Island with all the elite runners and celebrities," she said.

Coaches seek answers as Predators lose again

Kevan Dowd
The Lake Report

Why score, if you can't win? That's the question the Jr. A Niagara Predators' players may need to start asking themselves.

Following their sixth straight loss Saturday, the Predators now sit in second-last place in the Greater Metro Hockey League's south division.

A 6-3 loss Friday to the North York Renegades in Virgil, followed by an 8-1 decision to them the next day on the road puts Niagara in the longest dry spell of its season.

Predators' head coach Kevin Taylor said staff are looking at game tapes for answers but he thinks some of the problem comes down to a persistent issue of players focusing more on stats than wins.

"There's a lot of individuals and they're more worried about points and what they're going to do next year. Unfortunately they're not looking at the bigger picture," said Taylor.



The Jr. A Predators are on a losing streak. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Friday started off well for the Predators, as they almost matched the Renegades shot for shot and had a 2-1 lead going into the second period thanks to markers by Luca Fernandez and Gehrig Lindberg.

Lindberg's second of the night briefly putting his team ahead by two goals 12 minutes into the second, but it didn't last.

The Renegades peppered the Niagara net with shots, scoring three in a span of 1:26 in the second period and five in total over the last half of the game.

Things didn't improve on the road Saturday, with Georgy Kholmovsky netting Niagara's only tally of the night in a lopsided 8-1 loss.

While Taylor and his coaching staff are left dumbfounded by a team that looks good in practice, he feels the only solution is to personally hold his players accountable for their actions, good and bad.

"I can't make any more excuses, ultimately this falls on me," he said.

"I have to get through to them and as a coach I'm struggling in that aspect just because we've gone through all the scenarios: are they not good hockey players, are they not smart hockey players, have they not been coached before?"

"We've sat down with the team and asked them these things and we're not getting the answers. And that's a

problem because we need to know, if I'm doing something wrong – and I said this in a meeting with them – then let me know."

But one of the biggest issues Taylor faces is teaching his players that while individual points are great, being on a winning team is just as important when being scouted by other teams.

"A lot of these teams would rather look for top 10 scoring on a first-place team, than the first-place scorer on a bottom team," he said.

But as usual, Taylor still tries to find positives, even in the face of a losing streak.

"It's nice to have this slump now because I truly believe where we are in the standings now is not a reflection on the team or the effort the guys have put in during practice. It's just not coming together in game time," he said.

The Predators return to Virgil's Meridian Credit Union Arena this Friday, Nov. 17 to take on the Tottenham Railers at 7:30 p.m.

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How to attract **birds** to your garden this winter



GROWING TOGETHER

Joanne Young
Columnist

Can you imagine what it must be like to be a bird braving a cold Canadian winter? It always amazes me how anything so small can survive such conditions.

I know that on those frigid January days, I don't want to spend any length of time outside, besides all day, every day.

Food can become scarce for birds during the winter months, so the food that you provide for them could be the difference between surviving and starvation.

What better way to provide food for the birds in the winter than to plant shrubs that will provide berries and/or seeds for them to

eat throughout the winter?

It's best to pick plants that are native to your region as these are the ones that birds will recognize as safe to eat.

These winter plants will not only be good food for your feathered friends, but will also add some colour and life to your garden throughout the winter months.

Here are a few must-have shrubs to add to your winter garden (all of which are native to this region, save for beautyberry):

Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)

Beautyberry (*Callicarpa bodonieri*)

Black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)

Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*)

Common hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*)

Crabapples (*Malus virginiana*)

Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus*)

Nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*)

Highbush cranberry viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*)

Depending on the weather and how hungry the birds are, the berries or seeds on the above-mentioned plants



Joanne Young says providing shrubs with berries is a great way to attract birds.

will persist on into January or February.

Some will even remain on the plants throughout the winter.

During periods of bad weather and towards the end of winter, other sources of food for the birds may become essential for their wellbeing.

By feeding birds in the winter, you are providing them with a constant supply of food so that they do not have to waste energy look-

ing for insects or searching for berries.

The best winter food for most birds are those items that are higher in calories and in fat. If only all our diets were that way, right?

Sources of higher fat content are nuts, lard, and suet. These sources of fat will provide additional energy for the birds.

One of the most popular seeds loved by cardinals, blue jays, nuthatches, finches and other songbirds

is the black sunflower seeds.

If you are using a mix of seeds, avoid using mixes that contain oats or milo. Fruit like apples and pears are also a desired treat.

Mealworms, cracked corn, millet and niger seeds are other favoured foods.

If using peanut butter, make sure that it is unsalted as salt can harm the birds.

Place bird feeders in areas where predators like cats and foxes can't hide.

Place the feeders 10 to 12

feet away from shrubs or brush piles.

The items that should never be used as bird feed are table scraps, rotten food, spoiled seed, meat, milk, salt or bread.

Like any other living thing, a clean source of water is also essential for a bird's life.

Offering a birdbath during the winter season helps wild birds easily find this valuable resource.

Of course, here, where temperatures go below freezing, you will have to consider a heated birdbath.

Offering a birdbath during the winter season helps wild birds easily find this valuable resource. This in turn helps them reserve energy for other activities such as keeping warm.

By providing some extra food for the birds this winter, you are not only helping them make it through the winter, but also providing yourself with hours of entertainment as you watch them play in the snow.

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

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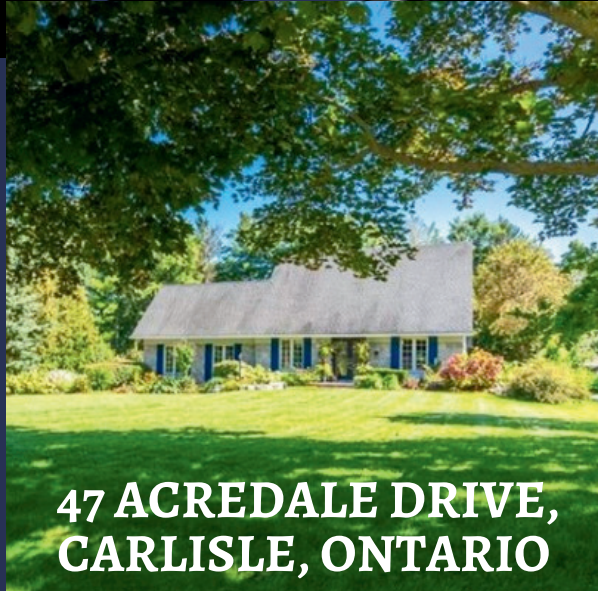
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