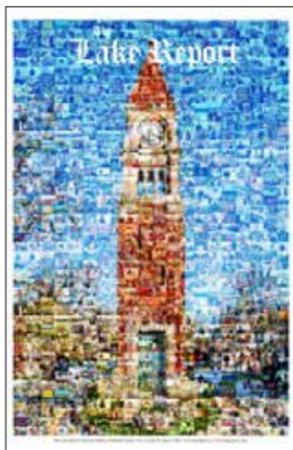




YEAR IN REVIEW: 2021



July 1 and June 3, 2021 front pages.

## A Year of Living Anxiously

By Kevin MacLean

Life in 2021 began in the midst of a growing COVID-19 pandemic, with no end in sight.

And it ended in much the same way, with the highly transmissible Omicron variant wreaking havoc worldwide and here at home. It really was a year full of anxiety.

Once again, our front-line workers in hospitals and clinics, pharmacies and medical centres, all our emergency services, grocery stores, essential retailers and service providers, plus hundreds of volunteers in Niagara-on-the-Lake made the difference. And they are continuing to do so.

While the pandemic was the biggest news of 2021, we also enjoyed periods of normalcy as life returned to what it once was. Here are some of the news highlights of the past year:

### JANUARY

**Jan. 7 edition:** Five NOTL doctors and the entire Niagara North Family Health Team announce they are planning to move to The Village plaza to a yet-to-be-constructed building behind the CIBC. The move was to happen by January 2022, but construction is still underway.

Police shot and killed a man in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Jan. 5 after a chase that started in Niagara Falls. The shooting occurred on the Niagara Parkway near Inniskillin Wines after police chased a red pickup truck at high speed from near Lundy's Lane all the way to NOTL.

After months of dodging COVID-19, two of Niagara-on-the-Lake's long-term care homes are now in the midst of outbreaks and the province is facing a major lockdown.

NOTL made its way to centre stage for CBC's

national New Year's Eve broadcast. The show was hosted by Canadian comedy icon Rick Mercer and Wayne Gretzky Estates.

**Jan. 14:** A resident of the Niagara Long Term Care Residence dies after contracting COVID-19 and cases in NOTL surged to their highest level since the pandemic began, quadrupling in the past week.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro's former vice-president of operations is charged with fraud after more than \$425,000 was stolen from the utility. Kazi Marouf, 67, repays all the money and will later plead guilty but will not serve any jail time.

The much-anticipated COVID-19 vaccine is slowly being rolled out in Niagara, but pharmacist Sean Simpson urges the federal and provincial governments in

Continued on Page 2

## Last dinner before lockdown



Around Niagara-on-the-Lake Tuesday, at places like the Sandtrap Pub and Silks restaurant, crowds of people were out to get their last taste of indoor dining for at least three weeks. At the Sandtrap, the restaurant was just under capacity for dinner. See Page 11 for a story about an impromptu concert at Spirit in Niagara distillery. RICHARD HARLEY

## NOTL long-term care outbreak grows to 28 cases

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

An outbreak of COVID-19 at Niagara Long Term Care in Niagara-on-the-Lake has grown to 28 cases, with 14 residents and 14 staff members testing positive for the virus as of Wednesday.

Most of the cases have been mild, with people

experiencing few or no symptoms, said Chris Poos, executive director of Niagara LTC. One earlier staff case has been resolved, he said.

As the Omicron variant swept the country, the initial outbreak at the Wellington Street home was declared on Dec. 27. All residents and staff were

tested for the virus after one resident and two staff members tested positive. Poos said no residents or staff have been hospitalized due to the outbreak and noted he thinks the vaccine is proving effective.

The home is holding a booster clinic Friday for residents who still need an extra shot.

We definitely feel that the vaccine is playing a big role in keeping symptoms mild, and in some cases positive staff and residents remain asymptomatic," Poos said. "Rapid testing is also a great defence, as it is catching cases prior to entering the home."

Continued on Page 10

## DR. BROWN

### Why isolation in nursing homes is a bad idea, despite Omicron

Dr. William Brown  
Special to The Lake Report

The scene was surreal on Dec. 30: just a few blocks from the Niagara Long-Term Care Residence where my wife resides, streets and stores were crowded with shoppers inside and outside lined up, most with masks on, some with noses poking out and packed together, eager for last buys.

The story that day was very different where, minutes before, I visited



Dr. William Brown

my wife in the Wellington Street care home where she and other residents were isolated in their rooms, apparently in response to the discovery that one resident

and a staff member had tested positive for COVID-19.

Isolation or not, other residents aimlessly paced the corridors and still others sat in common rooms vacantly staring or dozing with no one paying much attention to them.

What was going on?

Last year at this time, our streets were even busier during the holiday season days before an earlier variant, Alpha (U.K.) struck, decimating long-term care facilities in early January

2021.

Despite strict public health measures, including isolating residents in their rooms, many developed COVID, some became clinically symptomatic, and several died. Luckily, one wing of the Niagara LTC facility was apparently spared.

Unfortunately, vaccines, which might have prevented the tragedies, were still not available for several weeks, by which time the local

Continued on Page 18

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## YEAR IN REVIEW: 2021

Continued from Front Page

getting front-line health workers and vulnerable seniors jabbed.

Mild, rainy weather means the icewine harvest will be late and the smallest ever, growers say.

**Jan. 21:** NOTL long-term care home deaths due to COVID rise to five as positive cases surge. A large outbreak at Niagara Long Term Care grows to 90 active cases, including 68 residents and 22 staff.

Meanwhile, Canadian snowbirds wanting to escape to the southern United States have been flocking to NOTL's airport to hop on a helicopter for a quick flight to Buffalo – then hopping in their car and heading to warmer climates. The \$1,200 flights for up to three people includes cross-border transportation of your vehicle.

Upper Canada Lodge resident Maria Dos Santos is the first long-term care resident in town to receive a COVID vaccine, administered by Dr. Tim Bastedo.

The annual Icwine Festival is cancelled, another victim of COVID.

**Jan. 28:** The Gaio family wins big on TV's 'Family Feud Canada' as NOTLers eagerly watch and cheer on the hometown gang.

Cases of COVID-19 in NOTL long-term care homes have slowly started to fall, but facilities continue to take all precautions. One resident of Radiant Care Pleasant Manor in Virgil dies from the virus. NOTL has 94 active cases.

Good news: While taxes are rising about 2 per cent, the Town of NOTL expects to see a small operating surplus thanks to a "no frills" budget.

Is pet grooming an essential service in the midst of the pandemic? Groomers say yes, the town says no, but groomers are allowed to operate in some municipalities. Controversy dogs the industry.

### FEBRUARY

**Feb. 4:** Amid the pandemic, with revenue from items like parking fees declining the town needs to find a way to find new sources of revenue, says budget chief Coun. Allan Bisback. And a municipal accommodation tax (a levy on hotel rooms and rentals) is one pos-



Jan. 28 front page.

sibility. Almost a year later, heated debate on that idea continues.

With businesses facing tough times due to the pandemic, some retailers see a silver lining – the U.S. border is closed and more Canadians are making NOTL a destination.

After 11 deaths in one NOTL care home and a spike in COVID cases across town in January, pandemic statistics show area long-term care homes might have turned the corner. Niagara Long Term Care on Wellington Street has only six active cases now, down from 70 a week earlier.

**Feb. 11:** A massive fire at a storage property on Townline Road causes an estimated \$2.5 million in damage to several businesses. High-end boats and vehicles were among the items destroyed. GoFundMe campaigns are launched to help the businesses recover.

NOTL elementary school students returned to the classroom this week and schools are taking extra precautions to prevent potential spread of COVID.

Niagara should stay in lockdown a bit longer and not rush to reopen, says the region's acting chief medical officer of health, Dr. Mustafa Hirji. A provincial stay-at-home order remains in effect and regions with fewer COVID cases will open up soon.

Vaccines have helped NOTL's long-term care homes see a sharp decline in new COVID-19 cases after month-long outbreaks led to 14 COVID-related deaths, Hirji says.

**Feb. 18:** NOTL first major snowfall of the season turns the town into a winter wonderland and brings out neighbours and Good

Samaritans to help clean up after the deluge.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero says people need to "remain vigilant" after the provincial stay-at-home order is lifted and Niagara Region moves into grey-lockdown pandemic status.

As many businesses finally reopen, operators say the lockdown was tough and many worry whether stores, restaurants and services will recover.

In the wake of the major blaze on Townline Road, business owners and people who had goods stored on the site reflect on their losses and how they'll move forward.

**Feb. 25:** More than 15 NOTL volunteers are given special honours from the province of Ontario for their work in the community, receiving the Ontario Volunteer Service Awards during a virtual ceremony.

With the much-anticipated COVID vaccine rollout coming soon, Niagara Region's public health department wants to use the NOTL Community Centre to dispense the jabs, Lord Mayor Betty Disero says.

After 53 days in outbreak status and two resident deaths, Virgil's Pleasant Manor is now free of COVID-19 cases, Radiant Care CEO Tim Siemens says.

Citing restrictive measures on the rehearsal and performance of brass and wind instruments, and on singing, the Shaw Festival cancels its major 2021 production of "Gypsy: A Musical Fable" and delays it till 2023.

### MARCH

**March 4:** Dangerous COVID-19 variants are making their way to Niagara and public health officials are investigating at least 40 cases.

After weeks of lockdown and no visiting, families of some NOTL nursing home residents have at least been able to make "window visits." Children and grandchildren can only see their relatives through room windows, but it's a welcome change for everyone.

Andrew Peller Limited buys the neighbouring Riverbend Inn operation in NOTL, purchasing the historic 17-

Continued on Page 5

# SIU clears police officer in fatal Niagara-on-the-Lake shooting

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

A Niagara police officer feared for his life and was justified in fatally shooting a man who led four police forces on a five-hour pursuit, the province's Special Investigations Unit says.

Martyn Gordyn, 27, was shot by police after the stolen pickup truck he was driving was run off the road on the Niagara Parkway in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Jan. 5, 2021.

A Niagara Regional Police officer fired the fatal shot after Gordyn rifled through a duffle bag and appeared to be reaching for a gun, the SIU said in a report issued on Dec. 21.

The object turned out to be a butane torch, shaped like a garden hose nozzle, and used to vaporize and inhale methamphetamine. Several butane torches were found inside the truck afterward, the SIU said.

Known as "the subject officer" for the SIU's investigation, the regional officer fired two shots from close range and the first one, aimed at Gordyn's right shoulder, missed him.

The officer believed Gordyn "was reaching for a gun when he initially discharged his firearm, and that (he) had retrieved a gun and was about to shoot at the time of the second shot," SIU director Joseph Martino concluded.

That shot was aimed at the back of the driver's seat.

Although it turned out "there was no gun in the pickup truck and (Gordyn) did not have a gun at his disposal during the shooting, I am not persuaded that (the officer's) mistakes were unreasonable in the circumstances," Martino said.

He said he was satisfied the officer "discharged his weapon in the reasonable belief that it was necessary to do so to protect himself from death."

A detailed report by Martino offers a minute-by-minute description of the day's events, beginning with a police officer spotting the stolen red Ford F-150 crew cab pickup in a Tim



The shattered driver's side window of the stolen truck Martin Gordyn was driving. SIU PHOTO

Hortons drive-through in Hamilton at about 9 a.m.

The vehicle fled but police did not pursue it and notified Niagara police and the OPP.

Over the next several hours, Gordyn, with Lindsey Archer, 29, in the passenger seat, were spotted in Fenwick, Dunnville and eventually on Lundy's Lane in Niagara Falls at about 1:30 p.m.

From there, the truck was pursued by various police departments, including the OPP and Niagara Parks Police. At 2:11 p.m. at York Road and the Parkway, regional police used a spike belt to try to disable the pickup.

"The pickup truck's front passenger tire was damaged by the spike belt and, in time, would completely come off the rim, but (Gordyn) continued to drive" toward Niagara-on-the-Lake at about 60 km/h, the SIU said.

About five minutes later, regional and parks police tried unsuccessfully to box in the truck and the OPP deployed another spike belt as well.

As OPP and regional officers drove eastward along Line 3 Road near Inniskillin Wines, with the subject officer in the lead, he was able to broadside the slow-moving pickup. With help from other officers' vehicles, Gordyn was finally boxed in and forced into the ditch at 2:21 p.m.

Police yelled at Gordyn to put his hands up, but he ignored them and kept gunning the engine, trying to escape.

Two officers then shot pepper spray into the crew cab through an open driver's side rear window.

It bothered Gordyn but he didn't surrender.

The subject officer told the SIU, Gordyn "reached with his right arm towards the floor of the backseats and started to rifle through a duffle bag."

The officer, who was standing by the open driver side rear window with his gun drawn and pointed at Gordyn, "told him to stop reaching into the bag. Concerned that (Gordyn) was retrieving a gun, the officer took aim at his exposed right shoulder and shot once," the SIU said. The shot missed.

As Gordyn continued to reach into the rear compartment and came up with his right hand with what the officer feared was a gun, he fired a second round. "This one was aimed at the back of the driver's seat."

It was 2:22 p.m. Paramedics cared for Gordyn but he died of his wounds. His passenger, Archer, was eventually sentenced to 12 months probation.

In concluding that the police shooting was justified, Martino noted, "By the time his truck was effectively immobilized by the side of the road, (Gordyn) had led police officers from four police services on an hours-long rampage through the streets of several jurisdictions."

He endangered the lives of innocent people as he "ran stop signs and red lights, grossly exceeded the speed limit, travelled in oncoming lanes of traffic and struck objects along his path. No reasonable person would have been in any doubt of (Gordyn's) dogged determination to escape police apprehension at any cost."



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## GROWING PAINS: PART 4

# Owner-occupied rentals cited as one solution

*This is the fourth in a series of in-depth stories about how tourism is changing worldwide and how some destinations are dealing with concerns about overtourism, unprecedented growth in short-term rentals, skyrocketing housing prices and, ultimately, how these factors can affect communities.*

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The transfer of long-term housing stock to the short-term rental market is exacerbating housing crises all over the world but can be addressed by municipalities focusing on primary residence rentals, such as bed and breakfasts, a housing advocate says.

Fairbnb spokesperson Thorben Wieditz says focusing on primary residence home-sharing would prevent the growth of so-called “ghost hotels” and ensure communities do not get hollowed out by a shift away from long-term housing.

Wieditz said Fairbnb Co-op, a workers’ co-operative alternative to Airbnb, supports a permit system where the applicant has to prove the home they want to rent is their primary residence.

Listing an entire home should be allowed but for no more than 90 days per year, which accounts for most weekends, Wieditz said in an interview.

In Toronto, where Fairbnb Co-op plans to launch next spring, since June 2018 short-term rentals have only been allowed in a primary residence, which cannot be entirely rented out for any more than 180 days per year.

Rental operators also must register with the city and collect a four per cent municipal accommodation tax.

This is essential because it ensures people do not sell their long-term residence to someone who is looking to run a commercial ghost hotel out of it, said Wieditz.

Nathan Rotman, a public policy representative for



Left: This bed and breakfast in NOTL is an owner-occupied short-term rental. EVAN SAUNDERS Right: Fairbnb spokesperson Thorben Wieditz SUPPLIED



Airbnb, said he disagrees with the claim that Airbnb and short-term rentals are eating up long-term housing stock.

He cited Toronto’s increasing housing costs as an example, saying after the city’s new regulations on short-term rentals came into effect housing prices didn’t go down.

“Rents are still going up,” Rotman said.

In his 2019 study “The Economic Costs and Benefits of Airbnb,” Economic Policy Institute director of research Josh Bivens cited the increase in housing prices and rent related to the proliferation of short-term rentals as about 0.4 per cent per 12 new Airbnb units in a census tract.

Wieditz argued that reducing the availability of permanent ghost hotels by implementing a primary residence requirement would benefit hotels, which pay commercial tax, operate according to zoning laws and have management staff who control guests.

Fairbnb charges a booking fee of 15 per cent. Of that amount, half will go to the co-op to help it grow and the other half will be put into the Kensington Market Community Land Trust. As the platform spreads to other cities,

Wieditz said Fairbnb will look to support local affordable housing programs.

The remaining 85 per cent of revenue is kept entirely by the property owner.

Wieditz stressed that Fairbnb is a co-operative, “meaning it is owned and operated by the people that participate in it.”

“It is designed to leave money in the community and that is the distinction compared to Silicon Valley-based platforms that operate around the world, extract money from a neighbourhood and then channel it, in Airbnb’s case, to some 40 subsidiaries to avoid all kinds of tax payments.”

By having community members dictate the platform, Wieditz hopes Fairbnb provides a supportive alternative to platforms like Airbnb.

In suggesting potential solutions for the short-term rental problem, Bivens echoes some of the same sentiments as Wieditz.

“The spread of Airbnb seems at its core to be a shift of potential housing supply from the long-term residential housing market to the market for short-term accommodations,” Bivens writes.

“The proper way to improve local zoning laws is not to simply let well-

funded corporations ignore the status quo and do what they want.”

Bivens argues municipalities need to hold true to their zoning laws, such as not allowing commercial businesses like unhosted short-term rentals on residentially zoned properties.

For planning lawyer Leo Longo of Aird & Berlis LLP in Toronto, the possible solutions should be tailored to the character of individual municipalities like Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Longo worked on the rules for short-term accommodations in Blue Mountain, where rentals in certain residentially zoned areas are a permitted use.

“Blue Mountain is a tourist attraction, so what they did is they recognized that providing a variety of accommodation alternatives to visitors is a good thing,” Longo, an expert in municipal law, said in an interview.

“It’s not that they were opposed to (short-term accommodations), they just wanted to make sure that they were in areas where the land use would not be incompatible with surrounding properties.”

Longo said he thinks that is the best way for municipalities to do it.

Oro-Medonte Mayor Har-

ry Hughes doesn’t agree.

Hughes said his staff looked at Blue Mountain specifically when drafting the township’s regulations on short-term accommodations last year.

“What we’ve seen in Blue Mountain is, that doesn’t work,” Hughes said regarding allowing unhosted rentals on limited residential properties.

Township staff found residents who happened to own property on residentially zoned land where short-term rentals were allowed were selling their properties to people who only wanted to operate them as a rental, the mayor said.

Oro-Medonte implemented a total ban on short-term accommodations on residentially zoned properties and Hughes stands by that decision.

Hosted rentals like bed and breakfasts still have to get a zoning change to operate. Old bed and breakfasts in Oro-Medonte will be grandfathered in since they precede the bylaw, Hughes said.

“Some people, and it will be forevermore, will try to utilize anything a township does to undermine council and staff,” Hughes said.

Representatives of the short-term rental businesses in Oro-Medonte are chal-

lenging the town’s decision at the Ontario Land Tribunal, but Hughes doesn’t see why unhosted short-term rentals would ever be declared as non-commercial operations.

“What people need to understand is it’s a long road and they need patience when you’re doing things that will not just be a temporary solution,” he said.

Overall, it seems that economists support Wieditz’s approach to short-term rentals, that is, enforcing an owner-occupancy mandate for rentals to get licensed in order to preserve long-term housing stock and promote community interests.

Municipalities “should seek to limit the reallocation of housing stock from the long-term rentals to short-term rentals without discouraging the use of home-sharing by owner-occupiers,” writes Kyle Barron, Davide Prosperio and Edward Kung in their 2017 study “The Effect of Home Sharing on Housing Prices and Rent: Evidence from Airbnb.”

“One regulatory approach could be to only levy occupancy tax on home sharers who rent the entire home for an extended period of time or to require proof of owner-occupancy.”



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# Expect accommodation tax to be approved soon: Mayor

## Launch date defeated in tie vote but proposal is not off the table yet, councillor says

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The municipal accommodation tax in Niagara-on-the-Lake might be on life support but it's not dead, Coun. Norm Arsenault says.

"It's never dead and I suspect that it may come back in the near future," Arsenault said in an interview Monday.

After the levy's June 2022 launch date was defeated on a 4-4 tie vote during a council meeting on Dec. 20, Arsenault and Lord Mayor Betty Disero said the tax will likely be voted on, and hopefully approved, later this month.

While voting on various aspects of the capital budget, council voted against starting the collection of the accommodation tax in June.

That leaves high and dry four key projects that were proposed to be funded with the revenue generated by the tax.

The projects without funding as of now are: installing flowers along Queen and Victoria Streets, the 13 for 13 Canada Summer Games Cultural Festival, new public washrooms on Queen Street and a donation to the NOTL Museum.

Arsenault voted in favour of collecting the tax, along with Lord Mayor Betty Disero and Couns. Sandra O'Connor and John Wiens.

Couns. Gary Burroughs, Erwin Wiens, Wendy Cheropita and Clare Cameron voted against it. Coun. Allan Bisback was not at the meeting.

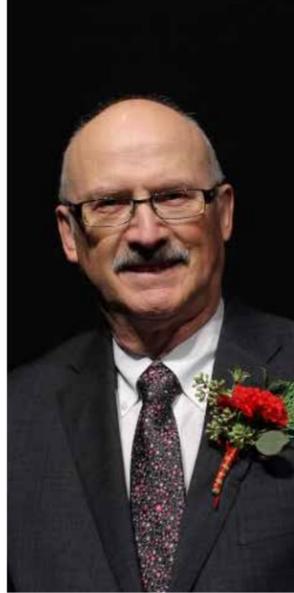
For Burroughs and Cameron, it was a matter of bad timing.

"Not right now, with everything that's happening to the hotels and the accommodation industry and our town (due to COVID-19)," Burroughs said in an interview on Monday.

Burroughs said he has lived in NOTL since the 1960s and has seen the town prosper and grow over the last six decades but he is worried the accommodation tax will hurt one of the town's key industries when



Lord Mayor Betty Disero, Couns. Erwin Wiens, Gary Burroughs and Norm Arsenault. SUPPLIED



it is already down.

"It's because of tourism that (NOTL has) been as successful as it is," he said. "To penalize, in any way, the hotel sector would be wrong at this time."

"The timing is just awful, doubly awful now that travel restrictions are once again being discussed," Cameron told council at the December meeting.

This week Premier Doug Ford announced a three-week lockdown for the province amid record-breaking COVID-19 case counts.

Town treasurer Kyle Freeborn told councillors he consulted with the Town of Huntsville, which has collected a four per cent accommodation tax on all short-term rental rooms in the town since 2019.

"Their revenues were around \$100,000 per month, even during COVID," Freeborn said.

Councillors were presented with three scenarios for implementing the tax in June, which accounted for varying levels of room capacity and prices.

Scenario two was what was voted on. It assumed a 60 per cent room capacity with an average room price of \$200. Based on this, the town estimated it would earn roughly \$309,000 over the course of seven months, or \$44,000 per month.

This was based on the town charging 1,347 rooms. The majority of rooms be-

ing charged are in hotels at 1,262. Country inns and villas account for the other 85.

As The Lake Report has previously reported, council's decision to charge the tax only on short-term rentals with five or more rooms significantly reduces the number of taxable rooms, entirely excluding bed and breakfasts and cottage rentals, which make up the majority of short-term rentals in town.

Eligible businesses will collect a two per cent accommodation tax on all room rentals with the town ramping the tax up to four per cent over the next few years.

Based on the numbers presented by Freeborn, post-pandemic, when room capacity is back to normal and the tax is at four per cent, NOTL could collect more than \$1 million in revenue per year from the tax.

Despite having traditionally been against the municipal accommodations tax in any form, Burroughs says those days might be behind him.

"I've learned a lot in the last three years and I think it probably is a useful tool," he said, acknowledging the tax as a valuable revenue source for the town.

But he has no plans to vote in favour of the tax until the pandemic is over.

Burroughs is also concerned about implementing the tax before the town finishes its tourism strategy.

During the Dec. 20 council meeting, chief administrator Marnie Cluckie told Burroughs a request for proposals for a consultant on the tourism strategy would be going out sometime in the first quarter of 2022.

Arsenault said having the tourism strategy in place would be helpful but the town can't let the dearth of a tourism strategy prevent it from moving forward with important projects.

"We're only asking about (charging) two per cent (for the accommodation tax) as a starting point and then (we could) go from there and develop a tourism strategy around that," Arsenault said.

"I don't have an issue with that. We just need to get the (accommodation tax) in place to get started. There's never a right time to impose something like that."

During the meeting, Coun. Erwin Wiens told fellow councillors he was uncomfortable with allocating the money generated from the tax before it had even been collected.

"Any money that comes from (the accommodation tax) should go into an account first and we should have it before we spend it," Wiens said.

"It's not prudent to do this because what happens if something like the pandemic continues? We commit funds we don't have and it's a mistake."

Noting that the tide was

turning against an approval of the tax, Disero stepped in to share her point of view.

"The one thing I want to say is 'shame,'" Disero said.

She said council had committed funds to various enterprises and that rejecting the accommodation tax as a source of revenue could mean the town has to raise taxes on NOTL residents in order to pay up.

"And maybe that's what you want but it's certainly not what I want," she said.

In an interview, Disero said there are three options for the town to pay for the projects the accommodation tax was supposed to fund.

"Either cut core services, which I'm not happy about doing, or raise taxes, which I'm not happy about doing," Disero said.

"The third option is to set a date to implement the accommodation tax, which I think will be the solution."

Regarding the Canada Summer Games 13 for 13 event, Disero said if the town couldn't find a way to fund it, council would have to ask the region for a way out, something she has no interest in doing.

Wiens said the town needs to reign in unnecessary spending on consultants and lawyers.

"You want to save money? Don't pay a consultant for a new firehall \$95,000," Wiens said.

"It just becomes frustrating for me. \$700,000 a year

on lawyer fees when our previous high is \$100,000. That's where the money comes from."

In relation to how the town could pay for the Summer Games event, Burroughs noted, "We've already committed to doing it so we'll have to find a way to do it. That's all we can do."

But Disero is confident the tax eventually will be put in place.

"I think that throughout the operating budget (discussions in January) we'll be able to sort out the question of implementation and format," she said.

One of the key reasons the vote on the tax failed to pass was the absence of Bisback, Arsenault said.

He said Bisback's absence had been planned for nearly six months, "which was unfortunate because this issue would not have happened," Arsenault said.

Bisback sits on the audit and finance committee and had approved the motion to start collecting the tax in June before it was brought before council.

Cheropita raised the concern that the town had not consulted enough with the hotel industry in NOTL since they are the businesses collecting the tax.

"Even just to say this is what our audit committee has discussed, this is where we are headed and you're going to be impacted by this," Cheropita said.

Arsenault said discussions on the tax have been ongoing for three years and there has been plenty of talk with industry stakeholders.

Disero said there was room for both approaches.

"What I'd like the staff to do is set up a criteria working with the industry on what the expenditures should be and then come back as soon as they can with what meets the criteria and what doesn't," she said.

If expenditures can't be decided upon, Disero said there is the option for the town to start collecting the tax and putting it into a reserve fund so spending on specific projects can be determined later.

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*Continued from Page 2*

acre vineyard property and 21-room hotel and restaurant for \$10 million.

With the pandemic, coyote sightings have become more commonplace, and a Niagara coyote hunter talks about how the service he provides is needed now as the animals encroach on urban areas.

**March 11:** Niagara-on-the-Lake learns it is receiving \$427,007 from the province to help cover COVID-related costs.

Town council is taking steps to prevent the destruction of healthy trees on municipal property. Before town trees can be removed to make way for housing construction, a thorough assessment will be necessary, councillors decided.

Councillors approved plans to consider ways to aid NOTL's ailing short-term rental industry – including a 30 per cent cut to annual licence fees – after a presentation by the president of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Bed & Breakfast Association.

With COVID variant cases rising across Niagara, public health is “in a race to get vaccines into arms,” chief medical officer Dr. Mustafa Hirji says.

**March 18:** NOTL schedules three vaccine clinics to get shots to the town's 1,300 residents over age 80. And the Niagara Regional Native Centre on Airport Road vaccinates about 500 people at its one-day clinic.

Long-term construction hoarding at two properties on Queen Street has become an ongoing source of consternation for NOTL councillors, who are considering creating a bylaw to limit how long hoarding can be used. The two separate projects are managed by Solmar Development Corp. and Niacon Ltd. Construction Company.

Developer Benny Marotta's company Solmar has dropped a controversial lawsuit challenging the town's historic designation of two properties that make up the Rand Estate, 177 and 244 John St. E.

A new NOTL bylaw will ban drinking and barbecuing in most municipal parks. The idea sparks some heated op-



March 11 front page.

position in the community.

**March 25:** Eager over-80 NOTLers flock to the community centre to get their first dose of the COVID vaccine. They say the whole process was seamless and well-organized.

Meanwhile, almost everyone 80-plus in Niagara has received at least one COVID shot or has an appointment for the vaccine, the region's public health agency says.

The Shaw Festival continues to kick the pandemic to the side, posting a \$185,000 surplus and defying the devastation many arts organizations are facing in the year-long global battle with COVID-19.

An electrical malfunction caused the massive February fire that did more than \$1 million in damage to businesses housed in three huge, repurposed former barns on Townline Road, the Ontario fire marshal says.

**APRIL**

**April 1:** Developer Hummel Properties Inc. is suing the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for damages over an interim control bylaw passed just days after council was sworn in on Dec. 3, 2018. The developer alleges an “insidious scheme” by the mayor and councillors.

Niagara's top doctor says COVID-19 worries could start to ease by mid-May, thanks to vaccinations.

The provincial vaccine booking system opened to people aged 70 to 74 caused a major frustration for some Niagara residents looking to grab their jab. Some had to travel to Hamilton to get their shot.

With cases of COVID-19 rising across the region and nicer weather around the corner, NOTL prepares to accommodate tourists

by posting safety signs, reopening public washrooms in Old Town and reinstating staff for public education and cleaning.

**April 8:** In the ongoing legal battle between Hummel Properties Ltd. and the Town of NOTL, the municipality says it acted legally when it implemented a bylaw to freeze all development in Old Town.

Simpson's Pharmacy in NOTL starts vaccinating some of the 4,000 people on its waiting list.

At the same time, NOTL is continuing to see thousands of visitors entering town on weekends, despite pleas from public health officials across Ontario for people to stay home and not travel out of their region.

The town hires a “fairness monitor” to oversee the potential sale of the former NOTL hospital site.

Wind and water have seriously damaged the stone breakwater “groynes” on NOTL's waterfront. The town is trying to figure out how to fix the \$300,000 project – and who is responsible.

**April 15:** When Premier Doug Ford announced a new shutdown two weeks ago, small businesses had to close their doors once again, leaving some owners frustrated as they scramble to adapt. Again. The back-and-forth lockdowns are painful, NOTL business operators say.

The town is handing out disposable masks to visitors and has assigned staff to town parks to help bylaw officers ensure people understand what's required.

As cases of COVID-19 continue to rise in Niagara and across the province, ICU and hospital admissions are passing totals from the peak of the second wave and far exceeding what they were during the first wave, says Niagara's chief medical officer.

After no one showed serious interest in buying the Rand Estate for \$19 million, developer Benny Marotta has taken the property off the market.

**April 22:** The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and council acted legally in instituting a 2018 development freeze and 2019 extension of the freeze, a Superior Court justice rules, rejecting

developer Rainer Hummel's lawsuit. In July, Hummel launches an appeal of the verdict.

People were swearing, yelling “and even spitting” at bylaw officers on the weekend as they tried to enforce COVID-19 safety regulations, chief administrator Marnie Cluckie tells councillors.

A town inclusivity committee online survey finds concerns about racism and lack of diversity. The poll only attracted 173 responses but noted instances of homophobia, NIMBYism and lack of female representation on town committees.

After deliberating the pros and cons of having enlarged patios pushing out onto Queen Street, town council extends the popular program until Jan. 1, 2022.

**April 29:** About 30 per cent of NOTL residents say they face hostility based on how long they have lived here, according to a survey conducted by the town's inclusivity and diversity committee.

Propane barbecues will be allowed in three of NOTL's parks after an outright ban of them sparked a community backlash – but some councillors feel that a prohibition on barbecues in any parks is exclusionary.

The town wants to hear from residents about the use of Ryerson Park, located along Niagara Boulevard in the Chautauqua neighbourhood, after complaints of overuse of the small park.

The town's irrigation system needs a major overhaul because it can't meet demand when farms need water the most, councillors are told.

**MAY**

**May 6:** Development firm Solmar (Niagara 2) Inc. wants to build 191 units on part of the Rand Estate property, comprising 125 single-family dwellings and 66 semi-detached homes. The plan immediately sparks opposition from residents who say it is not appropriate for the historic site.

Two NOTL pharmacies that had been busy inoculating patients against COVID-19 have been forced to stop. They have run out of vaccine and don't know

*Continued on Page 8*



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

## COVID Tracker

**NOTL active cases: 164**

**Region active cases: 4,627**

**Region deaths: 447**

**Region total cases: 24,586**

**Region resolved cases: 19,512**

*\*Jan. 5 data per Niagara Region Public Health.*

*Public health warns that "Due to the surge in COVID-19 cases, limited availability of testing, and changes to case and contact management practices, case counts shown below are an underestimate of the true number of individuals in Niagara with COVID-19. Data should be interpreted with caution."*



**Contributed by Patty Garriock**

"Happiness is an accident of nature, a beautiful and flawless aberration."

-Pat Conroy.

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## Editorial

# Another COVID lockdown

Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

Happy New Year – and welcome back to 2021. Or so it seems.

Twelve months ago at this time we were in the midst of a COVID tsunami. And we're right back there again.

We'll spare you the Groundhog Day analogies but last year many of us thought that with miraculous vaccinations on the horizon, maybe we were on the cusp of finally beating COVID.

It turned out that was not the case – but it hasn't been for lack of trying and lack of innovation.

Vaccines were developed in record time, businesses learned to quickly pivot and change in order to survive, and residents adapted to wearing masks and following the protocols designed to "bend the curve" and allow us eventually to return to some degree of normalcy.

Then came Omicron.

No one wants to be shut down for three weeks again, but here we are, trying not to outright defeat COVID this time but to reduce the number of hospitalizations and keep our health system from being overrun.

For many businesses like restaurants, gyms and hometown retailers, this is a worst-case scenario. We only hope that with the strong support of local residents they will all be able to weather this latest storm.

That's the bad news.

The good news is we have vaccines and boosters and rapid tests at our disposal. But our province has done a lousy job of late ensuring that those vaccines and tests make their way to those who need them most.

It's not too late to make it so, but Doug Ford and his team need to step up their game – and fast. Announcing blitzes, enlisting pharmacies to dispense shots

or the LCBO to distribute rapid test kits all sounds great, but not without the infrastructure to make it happen. Such words and promises need to be backed up by real action.

No one in Ontario – including us – really wanted a lockdown over Christmas, but way back in mid-December, the Ontario Science Table called for an immediate "circuit breaker" to avoid seeing 10,000 COVID cases through the holidays.

Ford chose to ignore that politically unpalatable scientific advice six months before an election – and sure enough, here we are facing thousands more COVID cases than we likely would have had he acted then.

And now, with testing limited, we really have no idea how many people are sick from the virus. None of this reflects well on the decision-making prowess of the "for the people" premier.

If there is a silver lining with Omicron (except if you turn out to be the one who is deathly afflicted by it), it is that while this variant is highly infectious, those afflicted by it generally have been experiencing much milder symptoms.

Especially, perhaps exclusively, if they have had two or more COVID vaccinations.

That is why it is so crucial that Ontario find a way to get more needles into arms now and for anyone who has not bothered to get vaccinated yet to read the proverbial writing on the wall.

To the vaccine-hesitant: The shot is safe, it's reliable and it will save lives. Maybe yours.

Barring a valid medical reason for not getting vaxxed, we really have to wonder: What will it take to get you to roll up your sleeve?

editor@niagaranow.com

# Town shouldn't get caught in developer's trap

Dear editor:

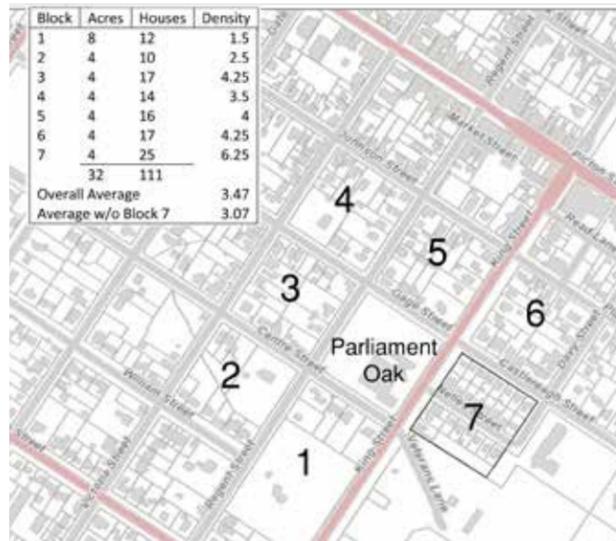
I applaud the newly formed committee addressing the proposed residential plan for the former Parliament Oak school site as featured on Page 1 of the Dec. 16 edition of The Lake Report. After reading the article I'd like to make two comments.

I want to challenge the statement that the density on the adjoining residential blocks is six houses per acre.

The seven blocks immediately surrounding the Parliament Oak school site contain 111 houses on 32 acres (six blocks are roughly four acres, one is more than eight acres) for a density of 3.47 houses per acre, as shown on the accompanying map.

On six of the seven blocks, densities range from 1.5 to 4.25 houses/acre. The seventh block – bounded by King, Castlereagh and Davy streets as well as Veterans Lane – contains 25 mostly wartime houses with a density of 6.25 houses/acre.

If the seventh block was



A Niagara Region map shows the density of the surrounding area. SUPPLIED

removed – these homes are a unique enclave but not representative of the spaciousness of Old Town – the overall average of the remaining six blocks is 3.07 houses/acre.

This analysis brings to light the absurdity of the developer's plan, which contains a density of 20 units/acre. More importantly, and this is my second point,

by proposing something so egregious, Liberty Sites has skillfully shifted the narrative to "how much is too much" versus why are we permitting institutional-zoned land to be converted to residential land in the first place.

Even the town's municipal heritage committee has fallen into the trap of giving the proposal credibility by

making suggestions on how to "tweak" the design.

If Niagara-on-the-Lake loses an entire block of institutionally zoned land for residential development, where will this institutional/open space/public land be replicated in the future?

The nearby Parks Canada lands, known as the Commons, is a welcome green space but it should not be looked upon as a replacement for municipal services.

Is council prepared to give up, forever, one of the only full blocks of institutional space in Old Town?

Liberty Sites was well aware of the zoning on this land when it purchased the property. The developer has moved the argument from one of land use to one of density.

Town staff and council should not get caught in this trap. Let Parliament Oak be the watershed moment where Niagara-on-the-Lake says "Enough!"

Lyle Hall  
NOTL

**HEY NOTL! WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR DINNER?**

← **Italian Pizza Pasta** or Spanish Tapas →

**NAPLES-ON-THE-LAKE OR CATALONIA-ON-THE-LAKE**



## No booster and a **shoddy reply** from civil service

Dear editor:

For someone like me, at age 80, the instructions were to wait six months after the second shot of COVID vaccine and then “get the booster.”

Dutifully, I waited six months but seeing the change in the news to get the booster earlier I tried, with no success.

The local pharmacy took my name and number but said only that “they would be in touch.” They have not been yet.

The Ontario vaccine portal offered a booster booking in March.

The reply from my inquiry in the portal was to “try the portal.”

My reply to that reply was as follows:



Many people are unable to book their booster shots and are frustrated with the online booking system. FILE

This is a shambles of a reply. Basically you are telling me to go to the sites I already went to, and which were not working, and you seem to think you have somehow “helped.”

This is a typical civil service “wash my hands”

of this with a “stock” reply. It’s totally useless, totally uncaring and, in fact, totally negligent.

As a senior at risk, I need to get the booster immediately because, despite restriction measures, I have to go out and about

to maintain myself and my house.

I have no choice but to make this exchange with the Ontario public service public in what is quite likely a vain attempt to arouse some shame in you people. In the past I have always felt the provincial civil service was better than the one in Ottawa, but you have just stood that notion on its head.

For shame.

There is no “service” in your reply, not the tiniest hint of caring at all.

Please give my regards to Premier Doug Ford, who, if he is heading a civil service comprised of people like you, is on his way out.

**Kaspar Pold**  
NOTL

## Why are there **delays** in getting a booster?

Dear editor:

Why is it that an adult cannot receive a booster shot in the Niagara region, unless they are lucky enough to book one with a local pharmacy?

After all the promotion done by all levels of

government and experts to “get a booster shot” as soon as possible, why is it that the Niagara public health department is slow to react by not providing adult clinics at arenas and community centres?

Last year’s slow start was due to a lack of vaccine. What’s the excuse this year?

Pharmacies are overwhelmed by the demand for booster shots and cannot keep up, their waiting

lists are several weeks long and yet we have been urged to get a booster as soon as possible.

I guess Niagara public health missed the memo.

**Joe Maio**  
St. Davids

## Bump out is a **necessary and effective** measure

Dear editor:

Ironically, Samuel Young’s letter published Dec. 9, (“Gateway bump out is going to cause accidents,”) illustrates why the three-way stop and bump out is necessary at the intersection of Queen and Mississauga streets.

In fact, it also demonstrates why more traffic-calming measures are needed. With three million visitors a year coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake it should be apparent that more needs to be done.

Niagara Falls on Portage Road between Mountain Road and St. Paul Avenue

is an excellent example of the effective long-term use of speed humps, bump outs, stop signs and lower speed limits as traffic-calming measures.

While highway safety engineers probably do straighten out dangerous curves, they likely do this on highways, not residential streets.

What Mr. Young, the driver of this “high-speed sports car” and many others need to recognize is that this is not a highway and driving on these streets in such a dangerous and unsafe

and inattentive manner does cause crashes.

It is the government’s responsibility to provide and maintain safe roads for the public to drive on. But more importantly, it is the driver’s responsibility to drive safely on these roads.

As a resident of Niagara Boulevard, I commend the mayor, the chief administrator and town councillors for having the courage to implement this intersection and I hope they see that more traffic-calming measures are still necessary.

It has had an immediate

and positive effect on lowering the volume of traffic on the Shakespeare/Niagara Boulevard corridor. I am in favour of the town keeping this as a permanent feature.

Mr. Young is such a keen observer of everything that ails this town. It’s a wonder he doesn’t run for municipal political office.

He is quick with criticism but short on solutions. If he has an “easy button” at home he should bring it to the council meetings. I’m sure it would be appreciated.

**Mike Grecco**  
NOTL

## No group is more **persecuted** than LGBTQ+

Dear editor:

From reading our community newspapers I see that there are issues over whether the rainbow colours should be painted on an Old Town street for a crosswalk to show solidar-

ity with our fellow LGBTQ citizens.

Frankly, I don’t understand why our LGBTQ neighbours should settle for the rainbow colours to be painted on asphalt for cars, horses and people to trample.

There exists no people more persecuted in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada, and the world than the LGBTQ.

The town has previously “set aside a significant site in the heart of the Old Town to understand,

celebrate and honour its Black history,” resulting in the Voices of Freedom memorial park.

To not do the same for my people is insulting.

**John Boydell**  
St. Davids

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## YEAR IN REVIEW: 2021

Continued from Page 5

when or if the provincial health ministry will replenish their supply.

A group of neighbours and vineyard owners is fighting a request from Queenston Mile Vineyards for a zoning change, accusing the winery of trying to covertly operate as an events space and saying it is not producing wine on the property.

NOTL will host tennis and sailing for 2022 Canada Summer Games. Tennis will be played at the Memorial Park courts and the NOTL Sailing Club will be hosting the sailing races.

**May 13:** COVID cases are trending downward, but the province's stay-at-home order should be extended until mid-June, Niagara's chief medical officer says.

Coun. Erwin Wiens and his wife Dorothy Soo-Wiens speak about their experiences with racist attitudes and defend Erwin's view that NOTL is "very wealthy, very privileged" and needs to do a better job at being inclusive.

A town survey about problems around Ryerson Park reveals residents are concerned chiefly with crowded on-street parking, increased traffic and fears about pedestrian safety.

Instead of doing a study, as recommended by town staff, Lord Mayor Betty Disero pushes through a motion to install a four-way stop sign at the intersection of Garrison Village Drive, Perez Road and Jordan Street, at the request of residents of the Village neighbourhood. If it turns out to not be needed, "then we remove it," the mayor said.

**May 20:** A fire believed to have spread from a neighbour's shed causes an estimated \$1.5 million damage to a home on Simcoe Street.

Niagara Shores Park, a natural gem on Lake Ontario with beautiful sunsets and stunning views of the Toronto skyline, could be fully reopened to the public as early as next summer, Parks Canada says.

Mobile phone data shows over 100,000 people entered NOTL the previous weekend as residents and visitors grow tired of indoor and outdoor restrictions. On the heels of the provincial



May 27 front page.

government extending the latest stay-at-home order to June 2, downtown NOTL was packed.

In response to complaints and concerns about congestion and crowding, town council orders parking restrictions and hikes fines near Ryerson Park. The plan works, as throughout the busy summer, problems are much reduced.

**May 27:** It's asparagus season in Niagara so we invited some of the area's top chefs to share their asparagus (recipe) tips. Delicious.

Vaccines are working and contributing to a sharp decline in COVID cases, says Niagara's top doctor.

With military-like precision, a team of doctors, nurses and staff from the Niagara North Family Health Team vaccinated about 150 people at a special one-day clinic at the old NOTL hospital.

Life is getting back to what used to be normal – golf courses are open, pickleball resumes and the Virgil splash pad and town parks offer some relief as people mark the May 24 long weekend.

### JUNE

**June 3:** The Lake Report celebrates the culmination of a 15-week "Pandemic Heroes" feature campaign with a celebration of YOU, our readers and residents, with a souvenir four-page wrap saluting the efforts of all those who made the essential sacrifices, to stay home, stay healthy and stay safe as much as possible.

The Niagara Regional Native Centre burns a sacred fire in memory of the 215 children whose remains were found buried near the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in B.C.

And a NOTL mother helps organize a memorial at St. Michael Catholic Elementary School, placing children's shoes near the front entrance in recognition of the 215 Indigenous children found buried near the Kamloops residential school.

The Shaw Festival joins an aggressive provincewide campaign asking the public to demand the reopening of live theatre in Ontario. The #FairnessForArtsON campaign urges people to send letters to the premier, government ministers, MPPs, municipal leaders and other representatives.

**June 10:** Incidents involving brazen coyotes have been occurring frequently in NOTL and this week a 14-year-old boy was attacked in Virgil. Billy Pillitteri-Smith suffered some scratches and a minor wound, requiring him to undergo a series of rabies shots.

The first NOTL fruit festival of the season, the Strawberry Festival put on by St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, has been cancelled again. Later, we'll learn that the Cherry Festival in July and Peach Festival in August also will not go ahead as planned.

Artist Filomena Pisano expresses frustration that an anti-masker fellow tenant in the old Virgil Public School hosted maskless indoor classes for children in March and violated pandemic protocols.

Now that the province has allowed patios to reopen on Friday, wineries are finally able to set up their outdoor tasting spaces, a welcome reprieve after a difficult year of restrictions and uncertainty.

**June 17:** NOTL resident Jordon Williams urges the town to install a rainbow crosswalk in Old Town to recognize the LGBTQ+ community and Indigenous and other marginalized groups. Six months later, council has approved the idea but some residents have been vocal about not spending public money on a crosswalk without consulting residents first.

The sounds of gunshots, barking dogs, and smoke and stun grenades disrupted a quiet St. Davids neighbourhood as police raided a

Continued on Page 10



Kevin Do waves his rainbow flag during the rainbow crosswalk painting at Niagara College in 2019. FILE/BRITTANY CARTER

## Residents split on idea of rainbow crosswalk, Lake Report survey finds

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake residents are narrowly in favour of a rainbow Pride crosswalk on Queen Street, a survey by The Lake Report has found.

As of Monday, 402 people had answered the brief online survey at [surveymonkey.com/r/notlcrosswalk](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/notlcrosswalk).

Of those respondents, 341 indicated they are residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

And of those who said they live in NOTL, 175 people (51.32 per cent) said they support a rainbow crosswalk, while 146 people (42.82 per cent) indicated they were opposed to the idea. Another 20 people (5.87 per cent) said they didn't care either way.

The survey asked respondents to leave a brief explanation of their reasons for or against the crosswalk. At its final meeting of 2021, town council approved its capital budget for the coming year, which includes \$15,000 for the crosswalk.

There were mixed results, with many of the supporters saying they think it's the right thing to do to show inclusion to the LGBTQ+ community

in NOTL, while others simply said they think it would look nice.

On the other hand, many opposed to the idea said they didn't think a rainbow crosswalk was a suitable aesthetic for NOTL's downtown historic area, that it was an unnecessary expense for the town and some found the whole idea "offensive."

Survey respondents who were in favour of the crosswalk offered comments such as:

"We are the friendliest town in Canada. This is about sending a message of love and acceptance."

"If this helps just one person feel safe and accepted, why not?"

"My question would be, why not? The rainbow is a symbol of inclusion. It sends a message of safety and respect — how can this be a bad thing? It tells people something about our town and what we value far which extends beyond only LGBTQ rights."

Those on the opposing side left comments such as:

"I believe that the best way for people to feel accepted is to stop trying so darn hard to make them feel special. As

a woman of colour, I want to walk down the street and be accepted like everyone else. Would I like to see a corner celebrating Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC)? Absolutely not!"

"It's not necessary. There has never been anything within the downtown character or atmosphere to suggest that it is unwelcoming to anyone. A brightly coloured crosswalk would be an unsightly addition and spoil the historical character of the town."

"God created humanity. He created marriage between a man and a women. Period."

The survey is still open for respondents. The poll will only accept one answer per IP address. Only answers from people who indicated they are residents of NOTL were considered in calculating the results.

Of those who indicated they did not live in NOTL, 43 (75.44 per cent) were supportive of the crosswalk, while 12 people (21.05 per cent) were not. Two people (3.51 per cent) said they didn't care either way.

See NiagaraNow.com for a larger selection of comments pro and con.

## Town approves \$15K for Pride crosswalk

Niagara-on-the-Lake council has set aside \$15,000 for the installation of a rainbow crosswalk.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero said council still needs to vote on where the crosswalk will be installed and did not specify a timeline for when it might come to fruition.

At its final meeting of 2021, NOTL council passed

the proposal, recommended by the town's diversity, equity and inclusivity committee.

The funding for the project was included as part of the 2022 capital budget.

The committee also recommended the town install rainbow benches throughout the community. While the benches are not included in the capital budget, "the plan

is to install them in all five villages," said communications co-ordinator Marah Minor.

The town is working with the committee to "allocate funding and determine the location."

Once funding and locations are determined the matter will go to council for final approval, she said.



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# Two notable NOTLers named to Order of Canada

Broadcaster Duff Roman and bank executive Harriet Stairs honoured for their contributions

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake residents David Mostaway (known to the world as broadcaster “Duff Roman”) and trailblazing bank executive Harriet Stairs have been named to the Order of Canada by the Governor General.

“First of all I was very surprised. Second of all, I feel very, very honoured,” Stairs said in an interview on Sunday.

Stairs is being recognized for “advancing women’s opportunities within the financial sector, and for creating equitable and inclusive policies within corporate and community-based initiatives,” according to a citation on the website of Governor General Mary Simon.

Stairs has been married for 21 years and has two children from a previous relationship. She and husband Edward Mooney split their time between their homes in NOTL and Toronto, though Stairs says she has spent more time in NOTL these past two years thanks to the pandemic and will eventually move here full-time.

She has been a professional and personal advocate for equitable corporate and social policies since she started working for the Bank of Montreal in 1967.

“I never thought that I would ever join a bank. I knew nothing about banking. Banking sounded so straight, so boring,” Stairs said with a laugh.

The Montreal native was hired as a hostess for Expo 67. “I wanted to be a part of that because it was happening in my hometown. Montreal was just bubbling with the first expo fair,” she said.

Stairs made an impression during her summer job with the bank and was rehired for a full-time position. By the late 1990s, she was executive vice-president of human resources and was having a positive and major effect on the corporate structure of the bank.

Stairs notes that when



Left: Harriet Stairs outside her home in NOTL. EVAN SAUNDERS Right: Duff Roman with his first Juno award. SUPPLIED



she began her career with the bank some 70 per cent of its staff were female, yet there were no women in the senior management ranks.

“When I started out there wasn’t even a woman in middle management,” she said.

“So every rung (that I climbed) up the corporate ladder was always greeted with, ‘Oh, you made it!’ Like something special had happened and I thought, ‘Hmm. I don’t think anything special has happened, I just got promoted.’”

Stairs said she worked with the bank to implement flexible benefits so women could get the same benefits as their male peers.

“It was the first flexible benefits in Canada,” she said.

She also worked to change the systemic succession planning which made it possible for women and men to be at the top of the corporation, she said.

In 1994, Stairs and the Bank of Montreal received the Catalyst Award, the first company outside of the United States to receive it and the first bank in North America. The award recognizes businesses that show initiative in promoting career and leadership

development for women.

Stairs is proud to think the changes she helped introduce at BMO had a ripple effect on other corporations.

“When we won these awards for things we did internally to change the culture, other banks thought they better smarten up or they might lose their good women and their good men because a good man also likes to work in a good culture,” she said.

“But it wasn’t only the bank. It had ramifications throughout Canada, which I think is an important thing.”

After taking early retirement from the bank, Stairs focused all her energies on non-profit volunteer work.

“I didn’t need any more corporate life. I really wanted to give back and start trying to help other entities,” she said.

Her extensive volunteer work since retirement is a whole other reason the 75-year-old is receiving the Order of Canada.

Stairs was on McGill University’s board of governors for 10 years and she sat on the boards of Ryerson University, the governing body for the community colleges of Ontario, and the Shaw Guild.

She has also been involved with Sheena’s Place, a non-profit that helps people with eating disorders, and was chair of the Psychology Foundation of Canada.

Stairs has also been involved with the Little Smile Theatre, which puts on performances in retirement homes, Strong Minds Strong Kids, Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts, and Portage, a program to help individuals suffering from addiction.

This staggering volunteer ethic begs one question: where does Stairs’ passion for positive change come from?

“From my parents, particularly my mother,” Stairs said.

“I have two sisters, and my mother always told us we were going to have to look after ourselves and be educated and work hard.”

Stairs said her mother was always involved in charitable work and her grandfather was mayor of Montreal.

“For our family, giving back was a way of life, so I just kind of picked it up.”

Stairs also credits her early education at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Montreal as teaching her

and other young women to be professional and community leaders.

While the professional world has become more welcoming of women and diversity in general, Stairs said she knows the fight is not over.

“There’s still so much to do. This is an endless work,” she said.

She feels giving time to volunteer organizations enriches the individual.

“That’s what people don’t understand. If you make the time you will get so much more out of it and you will learn so much,” she said.

Stairs said one of her best learning experiences was working with youth suffering from addiction through Portage.

“They’re fabulous young people. It’s just that they’ve got an addiction. We all have problems in life, you don’t write someone off because they have an addiction. You help them.”

**Broadcaster Duff Roman**

Duff Roman is being recognized for his “contributions to the Canadian music industry as a broadcaster and executive, and for his steadfast promotion of Canadian talent,” the official citation reads.

Roman is known for his

tenure with CHUM-FM as a broadcaster and has been an instrumental force in promoting Canadian artists throughout his long career in the music industry.

Canadian content rules require that about one-third of artists broadcast weekly on radio stations be Canadian.

And while this law has been beneficial for the promotion of Canadian talent, without proper funding there wasn’t really much “talent” to choose from, Roman said.

“There was some pretty weak stuff that was getting onto the air to reach that 30 per cent minimum,” the 83-year-old NOTL resident said in an interview Sunday.

Roman said a good friend told him and other broadcasters to quit whining and to get some money together to produce quality Canadian content.

And so Roman set about creating one of the most essential programs for Canadian artists the country has to offer.

The Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings, or FACTOR, is a private non-profit organization that financially aids Canadian musicians seeking to record, tour or promote their material.

Roman started FACTOR in 1982 with \$200,000 from CHUM-FM and Mofat Communications. Today, the program works in conjunction with the Canada Music Fund and doles out some \$23 million in grants to Canadian recording artists every year, he said.

Artists who have used FACTOR to aid in the expensive recording process include Bedouin Soundclash, Alexisonfire, The Trews, Sam Roberts, July Talk and many other notable Canadian musicians.

In his starry past, Roman also briefly had a record label called Roman Records where he recorded early demos by Levon and the Hawks, later to be known worldwide as The Band.

“I feel sometimes like Forrest Gump, sort of being everywhere,” Roman said with a laugh.

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## YEAR IN REVIEW: 2021

Continued from Page 8

home on Kenmir Avenue and arrested two people on drug trafficking and gun charges. Fentanyl and \$84,000 in cash were seized, police say.

A coyote expert tells The Lake Report culling is ineffective, but preventive measures – like sealing garbage cans – are essential to curb coyote aggression, something the Town of NOTL says it is already doing. A farm worker was bitten on a grape farm near Virgil, adding another violent example to the increasing incidents around town.

A 191-unit subdivision proposed by Solmar (Niagara 2) Inc. on the historic Rand Estate draws heated comments and pointed questions from residents during a virtual open house.

Queen Street was as busy as Queen's Royal Park on Saturday as visitors and locals thronged together to enjoy the first step of Ontario's reopening plan.

**June 24:** Kids sports, including soccer and lacrosse, plus skateboards and splash pads are back and families are overjoyed to be back outside again.

A proposed housing development on the old Parliament Oak school property has some nearby residents angry and ready to fight back against the developer – and one elderly couple feeling they are being driven out of their ancestral home.

We bring you the story of the MacSween family, farmers famous for their roadside Quiet Acres fruit market – and a major tender fruit operation.

Happy NOTLers queue up to get their second COVID vaccination jab at a special clinic at the community centre.

After eight years with the Town of NOTL, municipal clerk Peter Todd is fired by new chief administrator Marnie Cluckie. The move was unannounced and no reason or details were given.

### JULY

**July 1:** The Lake Report marks Canada Day with a sombre front page dedicated to the Indigenous children lost to the country's residential school system. A flag at half-mast is depicted surrounded by 1,140 stars, representing children lost in



July 22 front page.

Kamloops, Cowessess and lesser known sites in Regina, Brandon and Lestock.

Hundreds of people gathered at Queenston Heights in NOTL for a maskless political rally for Maxime Bernier, leader of the People's Party of Canada. Attendees and speakers promote a variety of conspiracy theories and other fringe points of view.

It's time for a haircut. The province is entering Stage 2 of reopening, which means people can now gather in groups of 25 outdoors and groups of five indoors.

As NOTL grapples with Canada's scandal over the history of residential schools, the town's Ryerson Park may soon see its name changed, Lord Mayor Betty Disero says.

Niagara-on-the-Lake's tennis courts are getting a \$90,000 upgrade, just in time for the Canada Summer Games in 2022.

**July 8:** The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority will be taking down about 400 ash and Manitoba maple trees along Two Mile Creek near Butler's Burial Ground this month. The forest rejuvenation project will see about four hectares of trees removed and replaced with native tree species.

Opposition to the Parliament Oak development proposal heats up, with residents telling a virtual open house that the plan is "outrageous," inappropriate and ignores the character of NOTL's Old Town area.

A lawn sign that celebrates one couple's "traditional marriage" has drawn loud criticism from neighbours and NOTL residents for being a message of homophobia and intolerance.

Walkers in the month-long Niagara-on-the-Lake Step

Challenge smashed the original goal of 20 million steps and then easily exceeded the revised goal of 40 million. Final tally: 50,232,770 total steps logged.

**July 15:** Lukas Smith, a 41-year-old father of three, suffers fatal injuries when hit by a car on Irvine Road near Scott Street, not far from the home he built for his family. He was cycling with his son Riley, 13, when they stopped so Smith could fix his son's bike at the side of the road.

Officials from Provincial Animal Welfare Services seized more than 150 dogs from a rented home at 115 Delater St. A Lincoln County Humane Society spokesperson said she expected the dogs would eventually be adopted.

Ontario is about to enter Step 3 of its reopening plan, and retailers and restaurant operators are excited for the increased capacity, even without foreign tourism. The Canada-U.S. border remains closed.

Newark Neighbours food bank has a shiny new commercial fridge, thanks to a donation from the NOTL Legion Branch 124. Food bank co-ordinator Cindy Grant said the fridge means they can store fresh food and will help greatly with donations from the community garden.

**July 22:** The water at Queen's Royal Beach is significantly cleaner now than it was prior to 2017, water tests results show. The change is due in part to remedial actions taken by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and the Town of NOTL after a storm water drain allowed high levels of E. coli to reach the lake.

Council decides to give the public two more weeks to offer their comments on the proposed gateway at the intersection of Mississauga and Queen streets. The current design, featuring a 25-foot obelisk, has sparked some loud, negative feedback, prompting the extension.

NOTL's inaugural Farm Workers Hub attracts more than 100 migrant workers, who turned out to receive donations from community members across the municipality.

Continued on Page 12

## NOTL baby one of 11 born at Niagara Health on New Year's Day

Staff  
The Lake Report

Eleven families in Niagara have a new reason to celebrate New Year's Day.

Gabriella Barde was one of 11 babies born at Niagara Health on Jan. 1, 2022, making her grand debut at 7:14 a.m. She weighed in at six pounds, four ounces and 49 centimetres long.

She is the first child of proud parents Jenny Rose Barde and Michael Laurence Barde of Niagara-on-the-Lake, who moved to Canada from the Philippines in August 2021.

"Before I gave birth, I was really nervous to deliver the baby, but when I saw her, everything changed," said Jenny Rose. "It's worth the wait and the pain. It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be."



Michael Laurence Barde and Jenny Rose Barde with their newborn baby Gabriella Barde. NIAGARA HEALTH

Her water broke almost immediately after the clock struck midnight.

Due on Jan. 11, Gabriella surprised her parents early by giving her family two reasons to celebrate Jan. 1.

"We've been married for about three years and thought we couldn't have children," said Michael.

"Around the same time we were approved to move to Canada, we were surprised and so excited to find out that we were having a baby. I'm super happy. I was crying in the room too during the delivery. Honestly, we were quite surprised and didn't expect it to be on New Year's Day. It's a memorable day."

## Friday booster clinic scheduled for Niagara LTC residents

Continued from Front Page

He said all staff who have tested positive on a rapid test, may have had an exposure or who are symptomatic, are self-isolating at home awaiting PCR results or completing the 10-day isolation as directed by public health officials.

"We continue to follow all directions from public health and have all outbreak protocols in place. Our priority remains our residents, their families and our hard working staff."

Poos said families are receiving regular email updates and that the home has been holding virtual town halls with families of residents two to three times per week "to provide live updates and answer any questions they may have."

A year ago, in January 2021, a COVID outbreak at the facility led to 11 deaths and more than 120 infections.

As of Wednesday, regional data showed Niagara-on-the-Lake had 156 active cases, and the sixth-highest active case rate (86.9)



Niagara LTC executive director Chris Poos.

per 10,000 people in the Niagara region. The region reported 342 new COVID cases Wednesday and 4,627 total active cases.

However, during a news conference Monday, Niagara's chief medical officer of health Dr. Mustafa Hirji said with the provincial shift away from testing, the number of cases is likely far higher than is being reported.

He estimates the actual number of active cases could be anywhere from two to three or more times as high as official statistics show.

As the Niagara LTC outbreak began, Poos last week noted, "Out of

an abundance of caution we have implemented all outbreak precautions on the third floor and due to the high rate of community spread, we proactively placed the second floor on outbreak protocols."

General visitation is currently not permitted in the home. Fully vaccinated essential caregivers are allowed to visit but must pass active screening, receive a negative rapid test and wear full PPE, including a respirator mask.

All staff must also pass active screening and receive a negative rapid antigen test daily prior to entering the home and are cohorted to specific home areas for their shifts, Poos said.

"We are well-stocked with all PPE and staff are working hard to provide great care to our residents. My hope is that everyone follows the guidelines set out by public health and that more people in the community will get vaccinated, including receiving their boosters when appropriate."

  
Pauline Reimer Gibson is an Audiologist with over 20 years of experience who loves helping people of all ages in the community. Julia Dick is the Front Office Coordinator and a longtime resident of Virgil. Call Julia today to book a complimentary hearing test.

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# Swinging into lockdown with **impromptu** performance before restrictions hit

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

At least some people got to swing into the latest provincial lockdown with their toes tapping and a belly full of strong spirits.

An intimate crowd gathered at Spirit in Niagara on Tuesday night for an impromptu musical performance by Niagara jazz giants Peter Shea and Juliet Dunn, the night before Ontario's new restrictions came into effect.

"We will definitely miss bringing you live music over the next three weeks," the couple said in a last-minute message announcing the show.

Shea is a longtime drummer and piano player and Dunn has been singing for most of her life. The gig was extra sweet for Shea because he got to perform on his father's grand piano, Dunn said.

Shea's father, now in a retirement home, was a criminal lawyer and excellent piano player, Dunn said. And Spirit in Niagara on



Peter Shea and Juliet Dunn perform an impromptu set at Spirit in Niagara Tuesday night, the last before Ontario's three-week lockdown came into effect. EVAN SAUNDERS

Lakeshore Road has become the new home of the family grand.

"I asked the owner, Arnie (Lepp), if I could convince Peter's dad to have the piano live here. We would lock it up and just use it for events, if he would be OK with that," Dunn said in between songs at the venue.

"And he said, 'Absolutely.'"

Dunn says Spirit in Niagara is one of her new favourite spots in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"We used to do shows in our studio but our studio is tiny so we can't do them anymore because of COVID," she said.

"So, I played the opening here in October and as soon as I walked in I went, 'Oh, this would be a really great venue.'"

Dunn said the large main hall at Spirit of Niagara is great for allowing social distancing, remarking during her first song that it was nice to play in a space where she could take her

mask off while singing.

The acoustics were pretty nice too, as Shea played piano and Dunn sang jazz standards and popular songs. They also performed a duet.

While she understands the importance of the lockdown, Dunn said she is frustrated with not being able to perform live for people.

"We're going to do some live streaming but we are so sick of it. We've been doing it for two years – live streaming."



## NOTL rings in the new year **creatively**

Top: A small group of people also gathered at the clock tower cenotaph to ring in the new year at midnight. LINDA ANDERSON-KOZIK. COVID-19 restrictions forced the early closures of New Year's Eve parties all over Niagara-on-the-Lake this year, but some places managed to get creative. At Wayne Gretzky Estates, families skated on the outdoor rink and dined outside near heaters. RICHARD HARLEY

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### YEAR IN REVIEW: 2021

Continued from Page 10

With the Delta variant growing, flu season on the horizon and children under 12 not yet eligible for COVID vaccines, NOTL pharmacist Sean Simpson worries people who have hesitated about getting the shot could cause serious problems for themselves and those youngsters who are unvaccinated. He urges everyone to get the job.

**July 29:** With just over one-third of 12- to 17-year-olds fully vaccinated, Niagara Region public health is pushing hard for young people to get their shots before school resumes in September.

The NOTL Public Library is branching out and, together with the town's Communities in Bloom committee, has opened a market stand – inside the library. It's a new place for NOTLers to get fresh veggies – for free, or an optional donation.

The future is looking good for the Pedal Pub a year after town council tried to bar it from operating in NOTL. Council has asked town staff to work with the Pedal Pub and plan alternative routes so the popular ride does not roll down Queen Street and can continue operating.

Big changes are coming to how drivers get into and out of Old Town as the pivotal intersection of Queen Street and Mississagua streets will become a three-way stop. A traffic-calming "bump out" will also be included in the pilot project. Six months later, the bump out is still a target of opponents.

#### AUGUST

**Aug. 5:** NOTL's Elaine Tanner, a swimming star of the 1968 Summer Olympics, revels in the remarkable exploits of Canada's female swimmers at the Tokyo Games.

A St. Andrews Glen couple have been displaying and giving away anti-hate signs in their neighbourhood, saying there is never a wrong time to affirm that you stand against hateful ideologies.

Finally, more than 18 months after it last hit the stage, the Shaw Festival officially resumes indoor shows when "Sherlock Holmes and the Raven's

Curse" debuts at the Festival Theatre.

The Town of NOTL launches a short-term rental compliance program, offering 24/7 support for complaints against licensed rentals. The program, administered by Granicus, will also help the town crack down on unlicensed operators.

**Aug. 12:** The men served up some sizzle but the women supplied the drama during a humid, steamy championship weekend at the NOTL Golf Club. James Grigjanis-Meusel easily defended his men's open crown with a 16-shot win but the women's championship went to four extra holes before Yolanda Henry edges Louise Robitaille to win her second straight title.

And the NOTL Tennis Club's mixed doubles tournament was filled with close matches as the club hosted its first tourney since 2019.

Councillors express frustration with the increased pace of development in NOTL and the delayed approval of the town's official plan by the Region of Niagara.

**Aug. 19:** The governing Liberals pull the plug and launch the country on a federal election. All five main party candidates are ready to run in Niagara Falls riding, which includes NOTL and Fort Erie.

Fully vaccinated Americans have been allowed into Canada since Aug. 9 and area businesses are eager to welcome back our neighbours from south of the border and the money they bring. But business operators say they have seen few Americans so far.

Dogs will continue to be allowed to run free on part of the Commons in NOTL, but Parks Canada is restricting off-leash pets to the large field just north of John Street. New signs will be installed to make clear exactly where dogs can roam off-leash.

Delta variant cases are on the rise in Niagara but lockdowns can be avoided if enough people are vaccinated, says the region's chief medical officer.

**Aug. 26:** The Lake Report announces plans to host an in-person federal all-candidates meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 7, at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery in St. Davids.

The Balls Beach stone breakwater



March 25 front page.



Aug. 12 front page.

collapsed in March due to extreme weather caused by climate change and a design that wasn't prepared to deal with those problems, councillors are told.

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is inviting expressions of interest about how the old NOTL hospital site could be used and The Lake Report launches a new series inviting residents to have their say and offer their ideas for this iconic location.

For the first time in 15 years, the Shaw Guild Garden Tour is stepping away from its regular early summer date in June, to now take place in September.

NOTL councillors are fully vaccinated but there has been no decision yet



May 20 front page.



Sept. 9 front page.

if shots will be mandatory for all town employees, the mayor says.

#### SEPTEMBER

**Sept. 2:** NOTL council approves a municipal accommodation tax as part of its 2022 budget. It's not a new idea: councillors approved the same tax in January 2020 and then quickly reversed themselves amid opposition from the hospitality industry. The new plan will only apply to operations with five or more rooms, meaning the vast majority of short-term rentals will not collect it.

After a shortened season, the NOTL Soccer Club's 2021 finale is marked with a day of fun and games for the kids.

The annual Terry Fox Run is return-

ing to NOTL on Sept. 19 but again this year it will be a virtual affair due to COVID, says organizer Joan King.

NOTL's Niagara Motors GMC dealership celebrates its 75th anniversary in true car-lover fashion – with a show and a barbecue fundraiser at Red Roof Retreat.

**Sept. 9:** COVID-19 recovery, vaccine mandates and climate change are some of the big topics federal candidates discussed during a debate sponsored by The Lake Report at Ravine Estate Winery.

It's been 20 years since the 9/11 terror attacks changed life as we know it. We asked NOTL residents from across the region for their recollections of that time.

People really don't like the proposed new design for the entranceway to Old Town, especially the inclusion of a 10-foot tall obelisk, the imposing nature of a proposed wall and alterations to the intersection of Mississagua and Queen streets, a town survey finds.

Members of the Niagara North Family Health Team in Virgil will be relocating temporarily to the old hospital at the end of December as they await construction of the new Village Medical Centre near Shaw Street Drug Mart.

**Sept. 16:** With the federal election looming, the first day of advance polls at the Virgil arena and the Community Centre were chaotic and disorganized, resulting in long lines and some people leaving without casting a ballot, some residents say.

Only 12 of 255 licensed short-term rentals in Niagara-on-the-Lake have to collect the town's new accommodation tax, which targets properties with five or more rooms, researchers at The Lake Report discover.

NOTL first responders take part in a small but solemn ceremony to mark the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

A parking lot and road were built without permission on top of an environmental conservation area near the Holiday Inn on York Road, now the developer is looking for approval after the fact by having the area rezoned.

**Sept. 23:** Conservative incumbent Tony Baldinelli is again victorious, winning his federal seat by about 3,000 votes over his nearest rival, Liberal Andrea Kaiser.

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Report

In a two-hour weekend blitz, volunteers scoop up a dozen large bags of recycling and garbage along the Niagara Parkway as part of a World Cleanup Day event organized by the town's environmental advisory committee.

Darren Werner, 58, has been missing since Sept. 16 when police say he was last seen near Townline Road. Werner owns the property at 1238 Townline Rd. that was the site of a multi-million fire in February.

New vaccine rules make indoor dining feel safer, patrons say. Businesses so far say they are having no issues requesting proof of vaccination, but some fear pushback from customers.

**Sept. 30:** A former senior executive of NOTL Hydro, who stole more than \$425,000 from the utility and then repaid it all, will not spend any time in jail. Kazi Marouf, who was vice-president of operations, was given a conditional sentence of two years less a day when he appeared via Zoom in a St. Catharines courtroom.

A new gateway design chosen for the entranceway to Old Town does not feature a controversial obelisk and aims to be more reminiscent of Niagara-on-the-Lake's heritage buildings.

National Truth and Reconciliation Day should be focused on education about residential schools, says Shaw Festival actor Julie Lumsden, a Métis who hails from Manitoba. The day – Thursday, Sept. 30 – is reserved for remembering the victims of the residential school system in Canada.

Niagara's chief medical officer of health says people, including family members, who aren't vaccinated against COVID-19 shouldn't be invited to Thanksgiving gatherings this year, to help reduce the risk of spreading the potentially deadly virus.

**OCTOBER**

**Oct. 7:** Inside Crossroads Public School in Virgil, 6,509 orange hands adorn one prominent wall, each hand created by the students and staff to represent Indigenous children who died attending Canada's residential schools.

Two Sisters Resorts Corp. appeals an order by the Town of NOTL to carry out essential repair work on the Rand Estate.

The NOTL Museum is looking to expand and has asked the town for

\$700,000 over four years to help make its plans a reality.

Niagara-on-the-Lake got its first taste of junior hockey in about two years Friday night and the new team in town, the Niagara Predators, skated away with a 5-3 victory in their Greater Metro Jr. A Hockey League home opener in Virgil.

**Oct. 14:** Most of the town-ordered repairs to the historic Rand Estate have been deferred till spring, but developer Benny Marotta has been told to ensure the buildings are protected from trespassers by the original January deadline.

NOTL restaurants were practically running out of turkey by the time Monday rolled around on Thanksgiving weekend.

It is now against the law to park adjacent to or in a town park overnight in NOTL. Some councillors were concerned with RVs staying overnight near Simcoe Park.

**Oct. 21:** The NOTL Public Library launches a Planned Giving Program, encouraging people to remember the library when they are drawing up their wills and doing estate planning.

The site of the former American Hotel on NOTL's waterfront could become condominiums or a hotel, says its new owner. Niagara's Blythwood Homes purchased the 61 Melville St. property for \$1.9 million from the previous owner.

Save Our Rand Estate, the NOTL group that has been fighting to protect and preserve the historic Randwood Estate in Old Town, has won a heritage award from the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.

A man accused of manslaughter in the death of a fellow resident at a NOTL nursing home has died prior to his case being heard in court. Robert Barry Stroeh, 75, died Oct. 11 at the Niagara Long Term Care Residence on Wellington Street. He was charged after Verna Traina, 94, died in 2019.

**Oct. 28:** Councillors have overruled a decision by the town's licensing committee and imposed a year-long ban on three short-term rentals that were operating illegally. "People (need to) understand that if they break the law, there's a cost to that," said Coun. Norm Arseneault.

A 39-year-old NOTL man is free on bail and facing three child pornog-

raphy charges after an investigation by the Niagara police internet child exploitation unit. Weston Thomas Nesbitt was arrested Saturday and released Sunday on \$5,000 bail.

There were tears of joy and thanks Saturday as the expanded Niagara Nursery School officially opened and showed off its expanded new \$2 million facility.

**NOVEMBER**

**Nov. 4:** Thousands of knitted and crocheted poppies created by the NOTL Legion's "poppy brigade" adorn the exterior of the museum to mark Remembrance Day.

Development company Solmar has dropped its challenge to the town's plans to designate parts of the Rand Estate under the Ontario Heritage Act, telling the Conservation Review Board it will pursue "alternative remedies."

After a year-long pilot project, the NRT OnDemand transit service has been expanded to include all of NOTL. Now, by using a mobile app – or calling a dedicated number, 289-302-2172 – you can book a minivan to take you around town or to other parts of the Niagara region.

Remembrance Day ceremonies in NOTL will be slightly streamlined this year, but the public is encouraged to come out and pay their respects on Nov. 11. Masks are mandatory.

**Nov. 11:** To mark Remembrance Day, The Lake Report features stories on Victoria Cross recipient Maj. Benjamin Geary and on a ceremony at the Landscape of Nations memorial at Queenston Heights celebrating Indigenous soldiers who fought and died for Canada during the War of 1812, and who continue to do so today.

And Denise Ascenzo tells the story of her father-in-law, who fought for Italy, which supported Germany during the Second World War.

Despite some revisions to the plan, residents voiced concerns that the proposed apartment building at the old Parliament Oak school site is unacceptable in Old Town.

The massive Tweed Farms cannabis growing operation on Concession 5 has closed and 30 employees were permanently laid off. Tweed is owned by Canopy Growth, which has been cutting costs in response to dramatic

*Continued on Page 14*

# RIDDLE ME THIS

**David's parents have three sons:  
Snap, Crackle, and \_\_\_\_?**

**Last issue: What has roots as nobody sees,  
Is taller than trees, Up, up it goes, And yet  
never grows?**

**Answer: A mountain**

**Answered first by: Margie Enns**

**Also answered correctly (in order) by:  
Pam Dowling, Josh Langendoen, Doug Bruce,  
Sheila Meloche, Mary Drost**

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YEAR IN REVIEW: 2021

Continued from Page 13

and growing losses.  
**Nov. 18:** NOTL plays a big role in the "Little Canada" exhibit in Toronto. The founder of the miniature display fell in love NOTL, saying it reminds him of Europe.

Streetside patios across town will continue to be a staple through 2022 – and possibly forevermore. Council expanded its previous extension of the patios for another full year and will look at ideas to make them permanent.

There will be no conventional Christmas parade again this year but Santa will cruise through town as he did a year ago, visiting all NOTL communities.

The NOTL Chamber of Commerce, organizer of the Candlelight Stroll, has named Virgil teenager Devon Botbyl as this year's recipient of money raised from candle sales.

After 22 years as the town's animal control contractor, Ken Reid is unhappy with the way the municipality went about deciding to seek new bids on the service.

**Nov. 25:** After a hiatus due to COVID-19, the annual Lord



Nov. 18 front page.

Mayor's Volunteer Awards returned, honouring 11 of Niagara-on-the-Lake's many outstanding volunteers for their selfless charity and community work.

With the rollout of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for use in children age five to 11, Niagara's top doctor says public health clinics from now until Christmas will be exclu-

sively for that age group.  
An environmental assessment nears finalization and representatives from the Region of Niagara say a proposed roundabout on Four Mile Creek Road in St. Davids is past the time for public consultation. And it could be under construction by 2025, an official said.

The Lake Report launches a feature series about the sinking of the Foam, one of the worst tragedies in Lake Ontario maritime history. The 1874 incident is shrouded in mystery and many fundamental questions remain impossible to answer. The seven young men from Toronto who perished just off the shore of NOTL are all buried in St. Mark's cemetery.

DECEMBER

**Dec. 2:** In the first installment of an on-going in-depth series on short-term rentals, The Lake Report details how tourist areas across Canada and around the world are dealing with the phenomenon.

The idea of even considering implementing a living wage of \$18.90 for municipal employees proved divisive for NOTL councillors, though a plan to look into the pro-

posal narrowly passed.  
As kids line up to get the jab, pharmacist Sean Simpson notes children under 12 years old have no protection against COVID-19 so getting them vaccinated first will better protect the entire population.

Advocacy group SORE designs a new housing plan for the Rand Estate that includes 71 homes and preserves heritage features on the historic property.

**Dec. 9:** More than five years after NOTL's Ashley Simpson disappeared in British Columbia, her remains have been found and her boyfriend is facing a charge of second-degree murder.

The Town of NOTL's vaccination policy came into effect on Dec. 1 and three staff members are now on unpaid leave for failing to comply with the regulations.

With COVID-19 cases rising again and worries about new variants, the Niagara Regional Police Service is implementing a vaccination policy for members, as Jan. 4.

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas in downtown NOTL as storefronts are lit up and beautifully decorated for the festive season.

**Dec. 16:** Three people at Crossroads Public School and one at St. Davids Public School have been infected with COVID-19, forcing the closure of two classrooms at Crossroads and one at St. Davids.

A small group of NOTL residents is hoping to have a big impact in preserving the character of Old Town. Spurred on by the plan to develop the old Parliament Oak school site, they have formed Preserve Our Special Town (POST).

Council wants to reduce the speed limit on Concession 6 Road between York and Queenston roads to 60 km/h from 80 km/h following a string of scary collisions this year. And a roundabout or traffic signal could be in the intersection's future.

With a provincial election on the horizon, the three major political parties all have picked candidates for NOTL's riding. By law, Ontario's provincial vote must be held on or before June 2, 2022. In the running are incumbent Wayne Gates (NDP), Bob Gale (Progressive Conservatives) and Ashley Waters (Liberal).

# Town to spend \$60,000 on Rand Estate study

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report



This stone oven on the Rand Estate has been reclaimed by nature. EVAN SAUNDERS

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is planning to spend \$60,000 to \$70,000 on a character study of the Rand Estate, something advocates say should have been done years ago.

The plan to move forward with hiring a consultant passed in a 6-2 vote, with Couns. Erwin Wiens and Norm Arsenaault voting against it. Coun. Allan Bisback was absent.

Lawyer Kate Lyons spoke to council on Dec. 20 on behalf of Save Our Rand Estate (SORE) to encourage the adoption of a staff recommendation to do the character study.

In 2018, NOTL hired Bray Heritage to study all estate lots in the Old Town and Bray concluded that a character study of the Rand Estate and Brunswick Place (now known as the McArthur Estate at 210 John St. E.) should be done by the town, Lyons said.

“These two properties are some of the best examples of large lot developments that arose in Old Town in

the late 19th and early 20th century,” she read from the Bray report.

Having a full view of the Rand Estate’s character is only half the battle, Lyons said.

The other half is what does “compatible development” mean for adjacent lots.

Lyons also felt the character study would be a foundational part of studies the town plans to do in its yet-to-be-approved official plan.

The new official plan “actually calls for a special study, which would have a larger mandate than this character area study,” she said.

The study is intended to establish a framework for

planning development on the property and adjacent lands, according to a staff report on the matter.

The report can be found on the council agenda for Dec. 20, under CDS-21-029.

SORE laid out three objectives for the character study, which were endorsed by town staff in the report.

The first objective is to establish a planning framework that protects the character, heritage, agricultural and natural features of the area.

The second is to formulate land use and cultural heritage policies for potential development in the area.

The last is to recommend additional mechanisms to address the area’s character.

Wiens took issue with

the proposal as an example of council’s unnecessary spending on lawyers and consultants.

“I sarcastically said earlier today that we’re going to need to hire a consultant to manage all of our consultants, but there’s something to that,” Wiens told council.

He questioned whether any relevant or new information would be gained from spending up to \$70,000 on a character study for a property the town has been litigating and creating reports about for more than three years.

“What’s going to come out of (the study) that nobody knows about?” he asked.

“If by now our staff haven’t heard it then we should be firing every one of our planners because they’ve heard it and heard it for years.”

Wiens expressed disappointment that the money to pay for the consultant would be taken from the general levy.

“We all agree it needs to get developed. Let’s get our planners, who are capable of doing the job, to get on with the job,” he said.



## O’er the holidays

Over the holidays there were a few sights to behold in town, including a Santa 5K run, which saw people dressed as Santa run through town to raise money for charitable causes. DAVE VAN DE LAAR. Another NOTL sight to behold was the first tractor parade organized by Dorothy Soo-Wiens. Tractors clad in Christmas lights drove around Virgil, drawing plenty of families to take a peek. RICHARD HARLEY

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# COVID cases likely **vastly underestimated**: Hirji

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report



Dr. Mustafa Hirji.

Niagara's chief medical officer of health says the lack of testing for COVID-19 likely means the number of cases is vastly underestimated.

Dr. Mustafa Hirji told a news conference Monday that as cases continue to surge, the public health department is being stretched to the limit once again and the number of hospitalizations is on the rise.

"Most countries in the world are seeing a very sharp, pretty vertical increase in cases really driven by the Omicron variant," Hirji said, noting that in Ontario there's been an alarming spike in cases.

"When we take a look at here in Ontario, you can absolutely see what's been going on for the last few weeks, and just the scale of how high that has been," he

said, highlighting a graph that shows the steepest growth curve since the beginning of the pandemic.

"We're all aware, of course, there's lots of struggles to actually get testing right now. And the province is now limiting testing. So we aren't actually even seeing the full number of cases out there and probably the true number is actually much higher than this."

He said to get some sense of the numbers, testing has actually doubled, "and even though testing has doubled," cases are about 11 or 12 times higher than they were in November 2021.

"That shows just how much more infection is going around, I think in terms of how many more people are testing positive," he said.

The highly contagious Omicron variant has "completely overwhelmed" the previously leading Delta variant, he said.

"There's still a little bit going around, but it's really insignificant to what we're seeing with the Omicron variant now."

Niagara's trend is similar to the province, Hirji said, with a "very sharp upwards trend in cases."

He said while Niagara's cases aren't showing quite as big an increase, he suspects the data is also skewed by limited testing.

Still, cases are far higher than any previous wave, he said.

The other part of the story, he said, is hospitalizations are increasing.

He said the province

"tried optimistically a few weeks ago to put out a plan where they weren't going to worry so much about cases going up" and instead focus on hospitalizations.

That was clearly the wrong move, he said, despite vaccines proving effective at preventing hospitalizations.

"That was overly optimistic because if the vaccine is less effective (at preventing the spread) and more people becoming infected, this gap of people who are still going to be hospitalized despite the vaccine is going to be applied to a larger and larger number of people. And so those hospitalizations are going to start adding up."

He said that's exactly what we've seen as cases spike and he expects to see more over the next ...

**Read the full story online at [niagaranow.com/news.phtml/6816](http://niagaranow.com/news.phtml/6816).**



In December 2021, Tessa Elliott Israelson and Thomas Aiken were married at the Court House in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The bride is daughter of NOTL residents David Israelson and Susan Elliott. The groom, who hails from Brighton, England, is son of John and Fiona Aiken, who live in Sussex, England. The newlyweds live in Toronto; Tessa is a lawyer and Tom is senior manager with a digital marketing company. The families are overjoyed to celebrate their children's marriage, with special thanks for custom designed and installed chuppah (wedding canopy) by Nate Beattie, Cary Frank and Victor Tarnoy.

## SPONSORED STORY

# New ownership, same **quality service** at Virgil Animal Hospital

Brittany Carter  
The Lake Report

Veterinarian Derek Nichols is fulfilling a longtime dream of owning his own clinic and says he feels incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to do so in his Virgil community.

As of Jan. 1, Nichols officially took ownership of the Virgil Animal Hospital at 1630 Niagara Stone Rd.

"Being the owner and the primary vet, I'm going to be here all the time," he says, noting his full-time presence at the clinic is important to his clients.

"I think that's going to be a huge factor for people, knowing that the owner and the primary vet is going to be the one they're conversing with and talking to all the time."

Nichols says one of the most important things people want in a veterinarian is to be able to have that feeling of safety and trust.

"I aim to take a team-based approach with my clients, creating open lines

of communication, offering options and working with them to develop successful prevention and treatment plans," he says.

"I enjoy meeting new people, hearing their stories and contributing my part to the health and happiness of their pets, no matter how big or small."

The friendly and supportive staff at the clinic have helped make the transition smooth for Nichols, he says.

"It's very important to me to have a cohesive unit that are working towards the same goal of providing exceptional pet care."

Nichols recognizes the work previous owners Ron and June Mergl did to build the foundation for the clinic, which originally opened in November 2019, and says he is excited to be able to take over such a new space for his own practice.

Nichols, 38, is qualified and ready for this new chapter in his career. He has a four-year undergrad degree from the University of Guelph, graduating with



Derek Nichols assumed ownership of Virgil Animal Hospital on Jan. 1. BRITTANY CARTER

a bachelor of sciences in zoology in 2006.

He followed that with four years at the Ontario Vet-

erinary College in Guelph, where he graduated as a doctor of veterinary medicine in 2011. He has prac-

tised at Wilson's Animal Hospital in St. Catharines for the last 10 years.

"I enjoyed making connections with people and their pets and nurturing long-term relationships. I came to develop many close client/patient relationships throughout my years at Wilson's and hope to continue growing these here at Virgil," he says.

He moved to Virgil in August 2020 with his wife Stephanie and their three boys, Mason, Logan and Reece. Since their move, he says they already have immersed themselves in the community, especially through sports, and are eager to become a staple in the neighbourhood.

Nichols' boys are involved with soccer, baseball and hockey, and he is helping to coach all three of them in hockey this year.

"Virgil is an up-and-coming, tight-knit community. It has a small-town country feel with family-friendly neighbourhoods and family-owned small businesses.

This is what drew us to this town," he says.

He plans to provide the community with genuine, knowledgeable and personalized service.

"We've been welcomed into this town by so many people already and this is my chance to give back and do my part for this great community ... I'd like people to know that I'm very upfront, honest and genuine. The old adage is to treat people as you would want to be treated. I tell them straight up, 'If it were my dog or cat, this is what I would do.' And I think they appreciate that."

"This community is really growing and my hope is to be the main vet in Virgil that everybody's going to want to come to," he says.

The Virgil Animal Hospital will retain its name under Nichols' ownership and will be open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. Visit [virgilanimalhospital.com](http://virgilanimalhospital.com) or call 905-468-8585 for an appointment.



The Virgil Animal Hospital is under new ownership and will be open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Visit [virgilanimalhospital.com](http://virgilanimalhospital.com) or call 905-468-8585 for an appointment.



# Dr. Brown: Why isolation in nursing homes is a bad idea, despite Omicron

Continued from Front Page

surge was beginning to wind down. But there was another tragedy – the cost of isolating residents in their rooms.

Residents with cognitive and memory problems in care facilities became more confused when they were isolated in their rooms for several weeks for fear they might become infected or infect others.

The cognitive and social cost to the isolated residents was real and lasting – and, in retrospect, was probably not worth the cost of isolation, given that many developed COVID anyway.

Now, in the face of the exponentially spreading Omicron variant, the Ontario government, health minister and their advisers are skittish and worried that what happened to nursing homes last January might happen again: the Omicron variant might sweep through, threatening residents with illness or even death.

That was reason enough for homes to try to keep the virus out by testing staff and essential workers daily, and requiring both to wear



Cases of COVID-19 are on the rise, but with extremely contagious Omicron variant the solution isn't isolating seniors, says columnist Dr. William Brown. FILE PHOTO

properly fitting N95 masks coupled with plastic shields and gowns.

This time, however, there are three major differences. First Omicron is several times more catchable than the U.K. variant was and given the fact that early on one resident and staff member at Niagara LTC tested positive, the chance this variant would spread throughout the facility was high, no matter what protective measures were taken,

including isolation. (In fact, as of Tuesday, 14 residents and 14 staff were infected.)

Second, so far, Omicron appears to be significantly milder than were the Alpha and Delta variants, especially for the fully vaccinated

My understanding is that well over 90 per cent of current residents are fully vaccinated and most have received booster shots. If so, the evidence strongly suggests that a full course of vaccination, with the added

protection of a booster shot, should offer very good protection against clinically significant infections, even for the elderly.

The worst part of this story is that isolation of demented patients is never a good idea. Nearly a year ago when my wife was isolated for the first time, it was a very disorienting experience for her as she already was struggling to make sense of others and the space she lived in.

What happened to her happened to other residents in those several weeks of isolation.

Evidence from the earliest cases in late December to as recently as Jan. 3 at Niagara LTC suggests that cases among the mostly elderly residents have been doubling roughly every 24 to 48 hours, similar to rates reported elsewhere for Omicron without the strict control measures imposed here.

Late on Jan. 4, I learned that some residents and staff members who tested positive, developed minor symptoms and so far, hopefully nothing worse. If so, that would be consistent with early data elsewhere that the vaccinated have little to fear from this variant, even if they're frail and elderly.

However, the fact that this variant managed to slip through surveillance testing and obligatory wearing of N95 masks, plastic shields and clean gowns by staff is worrying for the future should a much tougher variant emerge.

I'm glad I can visit my wife, but my guess is the toll on what remains of her capacity to make sense of

her world might be made worse by unnecessarily isolating her and others in the same boat.

In my opinion, that's cruel now and was nearly a year ago. But at least last winter we were learning about what did and did not work and best care standards.

What wasn't learned last year, was the human cost to residents of isolation. That was and is a serious problem not addressed by most of the "experts" in this pandemic.

This time, there's little excuse for isolating residents in their rooms in the vain hope any long-term care facility can keep this virus out or spreading within wings. Isolating residents probably won't contain the virus and only make life more unbearable for residents and those who care about them.

The question this time around isn't simply about public health but humane care.

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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# Ross's Ramblings: Is NOTL in danger of becoming a **BANANA** republic?

Ross Robinson  
Special to The Lake Report

**BANANA:** Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything.

It seems that almost every week a new and clever acronym enters our local lexicon.

Decades ago, CAVE was first uttered locally by the late entrepreneur Kevan O'Connor, a great pal to so many. He was also a key supporter of Red Roof Retreat.

As a real estate developer, he was consistently held to account by a group of determined and well-intentioned residents who fought every one of his projects. He said they were "Citizens Against Virtually Everything."

The acronym NIMBY is well-known, often applied to those who say a project might be good, but Not In My Backyard. SNAFU is universal, from the military expression, Situation Normal All Fouled Up, approximately.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, we have SORE to describe the good folk working to ensure the Rand Estate will be a good example of



Parliament Oak. FILE

"the highest and best use of land." A neat acronym, although SORE makes me think of a sore throat or a Band-aid, a scab.

Somehow, the planning and development process usually works, and the Prince of Wales Hotel anchors downtown's historic main corner. Who would have thought an old brick cannery could become the classy and unique Pillar and Post?

Our wonderful public library, the community centre, the Robert Howse path from Old Town to Virgil have all been changes for the betterment of our lives. How did a cenotaph get located in the middle of our main street?

And now we are in the

midst of the process regarding the future use of the old Parliament Oak Public School property (with another virtual public meeting set for Jan. 10). Tempers are short and dramatic words such as audacious and explosive are now in our local version of Hansard.

Frankly, I admit to having no real understanding of zoning bylaws or official plans or secondary plans or heritage preservation areas. I leave that stuff to the professionals and developers. But, I watch and I read the local papers. And I wonder.

How did so much get done over the years? The large hotels, the King's Point condominiums (which king? where is the point?), the absolute gem set back from Paffard Street, that includes

16 condominiums, a four-storey building buffered by tasteful landscaping. Different NOTL residents have different housing wants and needs. Let's be more kind and respectful.

And now let's ramble back to the Parliament Oak project. It is interesting that some young local people in town, with a past connection to the site, agree something must be done.

Many of them hope to live here someday and seem to love the proposal by Liberty Sites (3) Ltd. Granted, it won't provide affordable housing, but it will expand the diversity of accommodation inventory.

It is my understanding that until this year, there has been no purpose-built rental accommodation constructed in NOTL for over 35 years.

The current proposal includes underground parking and preserves the historic facades on the King Street side of the building. Tasteful landscaping will soften the structures, and in a few years, people will do well to remember there was once a thriving elementary school and playground on the site.

My late sister was presi-

dent of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario for eight years and enjoyed several great triumphs as they protected heritage structures across the province. They suffered some heartbreaking losses, too, as wrecking balls destroyed built heritage.

As the 20th century drew to a close, she was asked about the desire by some folk to have the Peace Bridge between Fort Erie and Buffalo designated as a heritage structure. "To receive heritage status, a building must be more than just old. It must be significant. And by the way, the Peace Bridge is ugly."

In no way am I saying the former Parliament Oak building is ugly. But let's be objective and admit it is a mundane, tired, yellow brick building that has served its purpose. Thousands of students learned, played and grew up there, and the Christmas plays in the gymnasium were so special each December.

It's time to be visionary and fair-minded. Propose, discuss, modify, propose, discuss, modify, agree, then go for it and build. "Com-

mit. Then, figger it out."

Why did Parliament Oak close? That darned David Foot and his book "Boom, Bust & Echo" explained it. Demographics. Smaller families – and most young families couldn't afford to live in Old Town.

The long game here is to somehow create a path toward much more diverse housing in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Some people want single-family detached homes on a large or small lot. Others want semi-detached or townhomes. The three townhomes at the corner of Gate and Mississauga are so tasteful.

How unfortunate that hundreds, of hard-working people must commute 20 or 30 minutes, or more, to their jobs in Old Town.

So, let's support the good people of POST. They want to Preserve Our Special Town. Let's preserve what is good and change what needs changing.

Be respectful and kind, and work together with positive attitudes. Things aren't going to stay the same on that property. Don't get GOUT. Guide Our Unique Town.

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## 'Adoration of the Magi'

Penny-Lynn Cookson  
Special to The Lake Report

Jan. 6 is Epiphany on the Julian calendar, a Christian feast day celebrating the revelation of God incarnate in Jesus Christ.

It is also known as Three King's Day commemorating the westward journey of the three Magi carrying gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the scene of the nativity in Bethlehem, as written in the Gospel of Matthew.

We know it by singing the popular Christmas carol: "We Three Kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar, field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star."

And on Epiphany Eve, the Twelfth Night, we might think Shakespeare, or not, while eating Three King's Cake hoping to find the hidden bean and claim the gold paper crown to become king.

In 1423, renowned artist Gentile da Fabriano was commissioned by Palla Strozzi, a wealthy banker, to

create an altarpiece for his family chapel in the Basilica di Santa Trinita in Florence.

Florence was not ruled by kings but by an affluent class of merchants, bankers and guilds. Strozzi's keen patronage of the arts and his desire to exhibit his wealth and status led to da Fabriano's "Adoration of the Magi," considered the epitome of the International Gothic style of the late 14th to early 15th century.

In this uniquely constructed, detailed and radiant work, da Fabriano created a continuous narrative of the journey of the Magi and the birth of Christ, while using new techniques such as layering real gold leaf under layers of paint to create an added glow by candlelight and by his use of "pastiglia," building up areas with plaster and gesso to give a 3D illusion.

At the top of the gilded frame, three curlicue spires contain three tondos, God in the centre, the archangel Gabriel to the left unfurling



Gentile da Fabriano, "Adoration of the Magi," 1423, Tempera on panel, Uffizi Gallery, Florence. SUPPLIED

God's Annunciation scroll, and to the right the Virgin Mary accepting her fate.

The three background scenes tell the Magi's story from the sighting of the star, to riding in procession to Herod's Jerusalem and onward to enter the gate of Bethlehem. Details abound. A solitary traveller is robbed by thieves. A cheetah on the back of a horse is poised to leap to chase a deer.

The smaller scale of these images suggests distance and depth in contrast to

the surface handling of the foreground where the Magi have arrived at the scene of the nativity.

The entourage crowd presses forward to see, faces expressive, costumes resplendent, the foreshortened horses adorned in splendid gold tack turn in nervous agitation. These beautiful horses are a luxury, expensive to own and maintain and the exclusive privilege of kings and nobility.

The royal dog lies apprehensively under the

hooves. Exotic animals, kept as pets or gifts, are in the throng. Monkeys sit on a dromedary; a lioness eyes two birds. The patron, Palla Strozzi, holds his falcon (strozziere is Tuscan for falconer), while standing behind the elegant, red stockinged young Magus, Balthasar, who holds his gift of myrrh, a perfumed embalming oil, symbolic of death, while his gold spurs are being removed by his groom in preparation for kneeling.

Caspar, the middle-aged Magus with a reddish beard, reaches to remove his crown before bowing to the infant King of Kings to present his gift of frankincense, the symbol of deity. The elderly Melchior kneels, his crown on the ground, while the Christ child places his little hand on his bald head, an act of benediction as the Magus tenderly brings the child's foot to his lips.

Mary sits resplendent in a robe of costly lapis lazuli pigment. Her attendants examine Melchior's gift of gold, the symbol of kingship on earth. Golden halos, inscribed with possibly Mughal script, follow a sinuous line upward to the star above.

Three paintings in the

predella below represent Christ's early life and reveal da Fabriano experimenting with light and shadow. In the nativity, he captures the crescent moon and its dark side and the angel announcing the birth in a blaze of light to shepherds with their flocks.

The newborn infant radiates an aura of light in what may be the first night rendition of the nativity. The flight to Egypt takes place as the midday sun throws brilliant light and dark shadows on the hills. The final scene depicts the presentation of Jesus in the temple, his induction into Judaism 40 days after his birth.

The painting celebrates nature with flowers spilling out of the columns that bracket the images on either side. Pomegranate trees symbolize power, beauty and eternal life, and olive trees symbolize peace, wisdom, prosperity and success. Let us add joy and hope for the days ahead.

*Penny-Lynn Cookson is an art historian who formerly taught at the University of Toronto and was head of extension services at the Art Gallery of Ontario. See her upcoming series on "The Venetians" from River-Brink Art Museum, Feb. 17 to March 24 on Zoom.*



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# FEATURED



## A new face for King Street?

Brian Marshall  
Columnist

The streetscapes of a town are the images one conjures from our memory. They evolve over time as new buildings are constructed beside older structures, each a reflection of societal change.

The most memorable streetscapes are those in which each building respects all those that came before and while there may be stylistic differences in the architecture, there is an overall continuity or inherent rhythm, which our human senses find pleasing.

In the main, Niagara-on-the-Lake has been incredibly blessed in the evolution of its streetscapes. While not all of its buildings can be said to be exemplary (or even good) architecture, for over 200 years there has largely been a tradition of continuity within the existing streetscape. Call it being a good neighbour.

Until quite recently, there have been no “monster” homes built as in-fills. New builds have generally conformed to the rhythm of the street, not shading or overlooking their neighbours nor blocking existing sightlines.

And, in most cases, even when the architectural style of the new build was a clear departure from the neighbourhood, significant investment was made to integrate into the streetscape.

This appears no longer to be the case. Our town has become a target investment opportunity for developers whose rapacious desire for return on investment willy-nilly disregards 200 years of tradition.

So, stroll down King Street from Mary, focusing on the left side of the road.

On the corner we have Brockamour, an early two-storey 19th century build. Next comes “The Wilderness,” a heavily wooded lot anchored around what is perhaps the oldest surviving example of a bungalow in Canada. Following which we have the Lyons-Jones House, a two-storey circa 1835 Regency build.

Then, occupying a full block, is the mid-20th century Parliament Oak school. Crossing the road, on the corner of Gage and King, sits



West view of the proposed Parliament Oak building. SUPPLIED

a two-storey Gothic Revival home followed by two American foursquare homes. We can continue down King Street, but this sample illustrates the general rhythm of the streetscape which I suggest is representative of Regent, Centre and Gage.

Now we'll circle back on the Parliament Oak school itself. Constructed in four parts (1948, 1956, 1966 and 1976), the building is architecturally undistinguished, typical of institutional builds of the mid-20th century.

Clad in yellow brick produced in Wellington County and through southwestern Ontario (very popular in mid-20th century builds), it is somewhat incongruous with typical Niagara-on-the-Lake streetscapes, but that said, its one-and-a-half to two-storey height respects the rhythm of King Street and minimally impinges on the sightlines of neighbouring houses.

And, with all due respect to those who may have emotional attachment to the school, understanding the absolutely vital preservation of the worked limestone inserts, there is very little (in my opinion) of this building that deserves architectural preservation.

So, in short, while the existing Parliament Oak school may present an incongruous facade within normal NOTL parameters, it respects the King Street rhythm (and bows to the neighbouring properties on Gage, Centre and Regent) which allows for 360-degree streetscape integration.

Now, let's visit the latest Liberty Sites (3) Ltd. proposal for the redevelopment of this site.

This proposal is anchored on a +/- 70-unit apartment

(or condo) building fronting onto King Street. Admirably they have, in their secondary submission, worked to establish step downs to the heights of the existing shouldering properties on King Street in an attempt to maintain the rhythm of the streetscape.

But given the monumental footprint (one full block) and finished height (including mechanical penthouses) of this building, it would purport to be the “jewel” in the necklace of the King streetscape and one must ask if it is both worthy and contextually compatible with such a “pride-of-place.”

In order to better understand and appreciate the concerns voiced by neighbours and other NOTL citizens, we need to take a quick trip down to the Queen's Landing Hotel on Byron. Although the hotel's facade length is shorter than the proposed Liberty Sites build and its New Traditional NeoClassical styling is more contextually compatible with typical Niagara-on-the-Lake streetscapes, it can provide a rough touch-point relative to the size, height and sightline issues raised.

The latter two issues can best be illustrated by standing at Ricardo and Melville looking back toward the hotel, which, due to the slope, exposes four storeys that would be comparable to the west view of the proposed Parliament Oak building.

Now, imagine the front facade of the hotel as yellow and stone grey, strip off its NeoClassical portico, and place it on the Parliament Oak site; the sheer size of the proposed building (despite its multiple massings and stepped back third/fourth storeys) will completely dominate the streetscape and dwarf its neighbours.

To be clear, I am not criticizing the quality or composition of the Liberty Sites design. In fact, in absence of any contextual considerations, as an example of 21st-century multi-unit residential architecture, there are many things I admire in the design.

That said, as Arch-i-text readers will know, I believe the best architectural design (particularly infill) is integrative: one that is anchored in the topography of the land, contextually appropriate within existing streetscape(s), respects the visual line-of-sight/privacy of neighbouring properties and, among other considerations, adds to the established architectural integrity of a community.

Unfortunately, the Liberty Sites proposal fails this “acid” test (one I believe that is shared by the majority of NOTL residents) on several levels.

While I understand the developer's imperative to deliver the maximum return to investors, in my opinion the proposal, as currently presented, is seriously flawed relative to the site's location within the King Street streetscape.

There is certainly a valid argument to be made about the practicality and marketability of this type of building in Niagara-on-the-Lake, but none that can reasonably justify constructing it on the Parliament Oak site.

In light of the volume of variances to bylaws, zoning changes, etc. needed, allowing this development to move forward will require a significant political commitment to change the face of King Street.

And that is something I hope the champions of the town's new official plan will not do.

## Looking to the Stars



### Now's the time to understand what's really important

This week we see Venus conjunct the sun in Capricorn and Mercury turning retrograde.

**Thursday, Jan. 6:** Mercury in Capricorn connects with Neptune in Pisces, bringing good fortune and good news to many. It was Jan. 6, 1975, that we first saw “Wheel of Fortune” on TV. Today is also Epiphany, the day the Magi came and met the baby Jesus.

Friday, Jan. 7: A mix of stubborn and generous floats through the cosmos and makes for a mixed bag kind of day. Formula One racing star Lewis Hamilton celebrates birthday #37 today.

**Saturday, Jan 8:** Today, the sun is conjunct Venus in Capricorn. In the heart of the sun, Venus officially begins a new 18-month cycle. Sun conjunct Venus is a rebirth of the heart. Our heart chakra realigns with the solar plexus.

Our values realign with who we truly are. There are parts of ourselves that used to define us in the past – and some of these parts may no longer be relevant and may no longer serve our growth. But there is also a part of us that never changes. And we should not forget about it either, because that's our essence, who we truly are, behind layers and layers of conditioning. Beginnings of cycles are very powerful, so you really want to take your time to tap into this powerful renewal energy of the sun-Venus conjunction to get crystal clear about who you really are and what it is that you truly want. This is not necessarily a time to make bold movements, to make important decisions, since Venus is still retrograde.

This is, however, a time to understand what really matters, what's truly important. Happy

birthday to Elvis Presley and David Bowie, two great musical artists of our time.

**Sunday, Jan. 9:** Fiery generosity thanks to the moon in impulsive Aries in perfect harmony with Mars in fearless Sagittarius. This is a day to say thanks for the gifts. On Jan. 9, 1839, Louis Daguerre took the first photograph of a man having his shoes shined in Paris.

Monday, Jan. 10: As if Venus together with Jupiter weren't good news, couple that with a sun/Neptune connection a few hours later and you've got a day where dreams can come true. Make a list and dream with confidence. The biggest star in Hollywood, Toronto-born Mary Pickford, divorced Douglas Fairbanks Jr. after 15 years of marriage on Jan. 10, 1936.

**Tuesday, Jan 11:** Today's big astrological question: “Which is more powerful, Mars in Sagittarius or Neptune in Pisces.” Neptune should win but a trip across water to study ancient mysteries should make everybody happy. It was Jan. 11, 1922, that insulin was first used to treat 14-year-old Leonard Thompson of Toronto.

Wednesday, Jan. 12: The moon is in Taurus most of today. Late this evening she moves into Gemini. There's lots going on. Much of it is relaxed. Some of it is stubborn. Some say that Capricorn likes to own and run things. Jeff Bezos, Mr. Amazon, was born on Jan. 12, 1964, and he turns 58 today. What do you get for the man who has it all?

Next week we see Mercury turn retrograde.

**You can get your personal horoscope emailed to you at [www.lutts.ca](http://www.lutts.ca). Yearly forecasts now available.**

*Astrology is a form of entertainment, not a science.*



The Museum is temporarily closed, but visit [notlmuseum.ca](http://notlmuseum.ca) to explore our online resources, or to shop the gift store.



## EXPLORING PHOTOS WITH NOTL MUSEUM



### Polish Snow Cow

This photograph from the winter of 1919 shows William Donald Harrison and Allan Blake Harrison admiring the “snow cow” sculpture in Simcoe Park. This one and others in the park were created by the Polish soldiers for the enjoyment of the Niagara-on-the-Lake community. The Polish soldiers were training at Niagara Camp during the First World War and were later sent to Europe to help liberate the Polish territories that were occupied by the Central Powers (Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary) at the time. While enjoying the snow this winter, see if you can recreate the popular snow cow in your local park.

## Obituary & In memoriam

### Marlene Beatrice Christie



On Friday, December 31, 2021, Marlene Christie passed away after a long and full life. Marlene was the beloved wife of Bob Christie (2007) and loving mother of Rosemarie, Pat, Tom and Rob. She will always be remembered by her grandchildren Heidi, Genevieve, Gabrielle, Hayden and Liam. Marlene will be missed by her large extended family of brothers and sisters and their families. The girls’ weekends will not be the same without her. Marlene was a Registered Nurse; graduating from St. Mary’s in Kitchener (1958). During her many years at Hotel Dieu Hospital in St. Catharines, Marlene worked in obstetrics, surgical and emergency departments. Marlene also compassionately cared for many friends and family in times of sickness and crisis. She was an active volunteer at the Out of the Cold program and at Hospice Niagara.

Marlene had many creative talents and could turn her hand to almost anything -sewing, gardening and cooking as well as her more hidden talents of carpentry and electrical repair. Everything accomplished accompanied by a song. She loved to sing. An immense thank you to everyone at Upper Canada Lodge for all their love, care and compassionate support. In accordance with her wishes, cremation has taken place. A celebration of Marlene’s life will take place in Spring 2022. Arrangements will be announced on the GEORGE DARTE FUNERAL HOME website. Memorial donations may be made to the Canadian Cancer Society or to Wellspring Niagara.

Online Guest Book - [www.georgedartefuneralhome.com](http://www.georgedartefuneralhome.com)



### Stephen ‘Steve’ Kaple

A graveside service will be held at St. Vincent de Paul cemetery in Niagara-on-the-Lake, on Saturday, January 8th at 2pm. All friends and family welcome to attend.

# Let the new year begin with new **garden goals**



Joanne Young  
Garden Columnist



New garden. JOANNE YOUNG

With the new year comes an opportunity to set new goals for the year ahead. This includes setting new goals for your garden as well.

Even though I am sitting here looking out the window right now and can still see an uncharacteristically green lawn, winter is a great time to be planning changes that you would like to make

in your garden this next growing season.

Most people that I talk with are unhappy with the way their garden looks – or at least an area of their garden.

They find it hard, though, to put their finger on what it is that isn’t working. They just know that they would like to up their game to create the garden of their dreams.

I often hear people say, “I planted all of my favourite plants, but I am still not pleased with the results.”

A good garden is so much more than just a collection of plants. There are many factors to consider when designing a garden, such as:

Does your garden convey your desired style?

Are the lines of your garden pleasing to the eye?

Does your garden capture people’s attention as they enter it?

#### Step 1:

##### Develop A Critical Eye

Sometimes, when you have been looking at the same landscape for many years, it can be very difficult to imagine it any other way. You have been looking at the same overgrown spreading junipers for so long that they have just become part of view.

Whether you are renovating an old landscape or starting from scratch, you need to develop a critical eye; that is to try to look at what is there with new eyes.

Start to look closer at things. Are plants blocking the view to the front door? Have plants become so large that they are overwhelming the house? Is your concrete walkway all cracked and uneven? Are there any eyesores that need to be hidden?

One of the best ways to start seeing things differently is by taking photos of the area and then studying the pictures. By looking at a photo of your garden, you can be more removed and objective about what it is that you are seeing.

#### Step 2:

##### Analyze Your Site

The next step would be to analyze your site, which means taking inventory of what you have to work with. Are there any plants that you want to keep? Are there plants that need to be taken out?

Do walkways or patios need to be replaced? Are there any problem areas that need to be addressed (e.g. drainage, privacy issues, ugly views)? Does your present landscape meet your needs and wishes? Analyze the sun patterns in the yard. What areas get morning sun or afternoon sun?

#### Step 3:

##### Make A Wish List

The third step is to write down a list of everything that you would like to see incorporated in your garden – covered sitting area, water feature, attracting birds, vegetable garden, better curb appeal, etc.

Don’t be afraid to include items that seem unattainable, with proper planning those things may become possible. The only limitation is your imagination. Once you have analyzed your site and have your wish list in front of you, the planning can begin.

Over the next few weeks I will be writing about the Five Senses of Garden Design, looking at what you need to incorporate into your garden in order to make it the space that you desire.

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



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