

# The Lake Report

Vol. 2, Issue 21

Niagara-on-the-Lake's first independent newspaper

May 30, 2019

## Lake level at record high



Rain is just one of the factors adding to the high water levels in Lake Ontario. BRITTANY CARTER

Brittany Carter  
The Lake Report

With Lake Ontario waters now at a record level, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is holding an emergency meeting Friday for residents worried about protecting their properties from flooding.

The meeting is at the community centre at 1:30 p.m. and will address people's concerns and provide more information about the

town's flood protection plan.

This week the water level in Lake Ontario passed the critical mark of 75.75 metres recorded in 2017 and water is expected to continue to rise throughout summer. By Tuesday afternoon, the level had reached 75.83 metres.

Notice of the meeting was provided to residents by town staff who went door to door in at-risk areas along the Lake Ontario and Niagara River shoreline.

Brett Ruck, manager of environmental services for the town, said he is putting extra measures in place to protect against potential flooding. The meeting will address what is already being done and what residents can do to protect themselves.

"We're going to talk about flood protection and what we're doing. We're going to talk a little bit about what people can do for themselves. And then I'm going

to explain to them, if we lose containment, this is what to expect," Ruck said in an interview.

While he said he can't predict if the sanitary sewer system will overflow, if that does happen, residents in the affected area will need to leave their homes.

"We won't have any ability to deal with the sewage at that time because the sewage system would be

*Continued on Page 2*

## Affordable development really 'affordable?'

"\$1,200 a month doesn't go deep enough to address the most at-need households."

JEFFREY SINCLAIR  
HOMELESSNESS ACTION  
PLAN ADVISER  
NIAGARA REGION



The only affordable housing building in NOTL is on Davy Street. It has a waitlist of 268 applicants. DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

Dariya Baiguzhiyeva  
The Lake Report

A NOTL developer's proposal to build two rental accommodation buildings in Virgil would not help the "most vulnerable" people who are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent and can't afford to move somewhere cheaper, says a Niagara housing advocate.

Jeffrey Sinclair, homelessness action plan adviser for the Region of Niagara, said rental units at \$1,200 a month would not be con-

sidered affordable for core housing needs or the "most vulnerable" households.

Statistics Canada says a household in core housing need is one whose dwelling is considered unsuitable, inadequate or unaffordable and whose income levels are such that they could not afford alternative suitable and adequate housing in their community.

NOTL developer Rainer Hummel, owner of Hummel Properties Inc., unveiled plans

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Sparks ride a carriage through Old Town. DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

## NOTL Sparks go for a ride

Dariya Baiguzhiyeva  
The Lake Report

Cinderella wasn't late to the ball on Monday night.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Sparks had their final party at Grace United Church on Monday and Sentineal Carriages, the company

providing horse-drawn tours in Old Town, offered a free ride for the NOTL Girl Guides.

About 15 to 20 girls, who split into two groups, took turns riding. Abby Moran and Sean Sentineal were driving

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## Thousand Words

Taking a first flight

By: Richard Harley, The Lake Report

Thousand Words is a photo series featuring images that The Lake Report finds to be particularly compelling — ones that tell a story words can't properly describe. Sometimes there may be several photos, other times there might only be one. A picture is worth a thousand words. See page 2.

*Exclusive to The Lake Report*

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# Meeting planned to discuss emergency tactics for record lake levels

*Continued from Front Page*

compromised. We're taking steps now to try to eliminate that if a little water gets in there. But if we lose full containment of the sanitary system there's no way for people to use water, flush it or anything else."

He said it's hard to predict how high the water will rise, but the town is preparing for 25 to 30 centimetres above 2017 levels. That would mean the water level could exceed 76 metres.

"If it goes beyond that I don't know how we're going to be able to control the river at that point," Ruck said.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero said Friday's meeting will

provide a forum to answer questions about the potential flooding and to relay the predictions about the water levels made by the International Joint Commission, a bi-national organization to resolve boundary water disputes between Canadian and U.S. governments.

"It depends on what the weather is doing, because it is the waves that are causing issues, in terms of flooding. We'll be talking about what those predictions are, we'll be talking about what we've been doing and what the priority locations are in terms of flooding prevention," Disero said in an interview.

She said high priority

locations near the sailing club are the area by Melville Street and the culvert near Delater Street. Crews were out on Tuesday placing sandbags and flood protection bladders, which are temporary barriers, in the area.

Sandbags will continue to be available for residents near the shoreline and pumps are in place.

Ruck said a 2019 action plan has been laid out and the town is on track to protect at-risk areas from flooding.

"The end of Nelson park, King's Point condominiums are going to need some sandbags. I know there's some residents over by the lighthouse that are going to need some sandbags, as

well," Ruck said.

The town had been working on protecting the shoreline from erosion, but the focus now has shifted to flood prevention. Ruck said the area has been secured for erosion until a permanent solution is complete.

"Erosion is in place, we're comfortable with that. There are a few things we still need to do, but they're minor," Ruck said.

Disero said the town is aware of people removing the small stones from the rock berm protecting the shoreline along River Beach Drive. She said police have been informed and cameras may be installed if there is time, but surveillance isn't the priority.



Town worker Blake Durocher places sand bags for flood protection along the shoreline on River Beach Drive. BRITTANY CARTER

"Right now, it's all about flood prevention. I don't want to waste time putting up cameras or putting up signs at this point. It's all about flood protection because waters continue to rise," Disero said.

"We're already above the 2017 levels, which caused havoc. So far, so good with what we've put in, but it's going to continue to rise beyond that, and we're going to make sure that we're protected."

# Chautauqua residents want Ryerson beach water tested

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Chautauqua residents want the beach water at Ryerson Park tested regularly by the Region of Niagara.

The beach at the west end of Niagara Boulevard attracts swimmers, kayakers and dog owners letting their pooches cool off most days each summer. In the wake of E. coli problems in other areas in town, some residents see water-quality testing as crucial.

At the annual meeting of the Chautauqua Residents Association on Monday, president John Gledie said the region has said testing is too expensive to do regularly, despite implementing testing for a short period in 2018.

The issue also sparked some discussion about the town's sewer problems and the potential of E. coli in the lake water. High fecal levels have been found in Two Mile Creek, which meets the lake not far from the Ryerson Park beach.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero — who made an appearance at the meeting to address



A dog swims back with a frisbee in its mouth at Ryerson Park beach in Chautauqua. RICHARD HARLEY

questions from residents of the neighbourhood — said she plans to bring a motion to town council to ask the region for proper monitoring of the beach.

Niagara-on-the-Lake regional councillor Gary Zalepa was also on hand and said he would find out how much it actually costs for a water-quality test.

Other issues discussed at the meeting included: a bush at the end of Shakespeare Avenue, which members said has been obstructing views of the lakeside for a decade; the potential of once again having access to an area of the old Mississauga beach shoreline that is currently not easily accessible to the public; tourist traffic on residential roads; an improperly placed turning sign; fig buttercups

consuming backyards; a growing concern with invading cormorants damaging natural habitats; and discussions about the neighbourhood tree plan.

The tree plan is progressing, with about 150 Chautauqua seedlings being nurtured at Niagara College, set to return to the neighbourhood in three to four years.

With regards to beach access, association members said they recall a legal agreement with the owner of the lakefront property on Shakespeare Avenue that would allow public access to the beach if the National Defence lands were opened to the public.

*Full disclosure: The author is a board member of the Chautauqua Residents' Association.*

# Thousand Words

A fledgling American robin pokes its head out of its nest. Soon the robin will leave the nest and take its first flight. For now, it waits for its parents to come feed it. Dad is never far off. **See page 7.** RICHARD HARLEY



# Cinderella carriage ride for NOTL Sparks

*Continued from Front Page*

the carriage drawn by a horse named Cinderella. When one group was on a ride, the rest of the Sparks played with soap bubbles and pinwheels outside the church.

"Most of (the girls) are from the area so they always see these horses, riding around. It gives them a really nice experience," said

Brenda Ferguson, a Brownie and Sparks leader.

"Sometimes when you're from somewhere that has stuff like that, you don't always get to experience that."

The ride was supposed to happen earlier this year but was delayed due to the weather, said Ferguson, adding she hopes to continue the partnership.

For the carriage compa-

ny, providing a free ride for the kids was a way to thank the local community.

"The community has always been so good to us that we take a lot of opportunities to give back to the community," Sentineal told The Lake Report. "We do a lot of free carriage rides in town, for things that are local in town, for really deserving causes."



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# Affordable housing project won't help 'vulnerable' tenants, advocates say

Continued from Front Page

at a town council meeting on May 13 to build two five- or six-storey buildings in Virgil.

Each building would have 40 units and 20 per cent of them – or 16 units out of 80 – would be considered affordable, said Hummel. Those 16 units would have an average rent of \$1,260 while the rental cost for the rest of the units would be about \$1,400.

The development's target group likely wouldn't be people in need of core housing, but rather those looking for a more affordable rental option in NOTL, said Sinclair. "\$1,200 a month doesn't go deep enough to address the most at-need households," he said.

The head of Niagara Regional Housing agreed the proposed new buildings would not help those who desperately have a core housing need.

"Two-thirds of the renters right now in Niagara-on-the-Lake are paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent and they're paying more than \$1,200 a month," said Donna Woiceshyn, CEO of Niagara Regional Housing.

"So for Niagara-on-the-Lake and for the prices of the rent that people are paying there, yes, it is affordable."

Woiceshyn also said renters in the Virgil project would not qualify for rent

aid from the region.

"We can't even touch those rents with subsidies because they're much higher than what we're allowed to pay in subsidies under our program," Woiceshyn said in a phone interview.

Under the regional agency's program, to be eligible for a subsidy, a one-bedroom unit in NOTL would have to cost no more than \$922 a month and two-bedroom units no more than \$1,052 a month.

Out of 16 acres of the property, Hummel said 3.5 acres would be for the rental buildings. Lord Mayor Betty Disero said she is interested in seeing what the developer plans to do with the remaining land, which is zoned as an enterprise area.

Disero expressed two concerns with Hummel's proposal, saying the developer asked for "quite a lot" from the town in the form of tax breaks and reduced development charges. Hummel wants the project to be exempt from property taxes in the first four years and be fully taxed by year 10. He also wants concessions on development charges, all municipal fees and park dedication fees.

"One is that he's asked for quite a bit of assistance," said Disero. "And second of all, they're employment lands. I'd like to see where we would replace those employment lands because employment lands in Niagara-on-the-Lake

are a very important issue as well," she said.

In an interview with The Lake Report on Tuesday, Hummel confirmed the rest of the land is zoned for business.

Employment lands are considered to be any properties designed for business or economic activities, such as manufacturing and warehousing, according to the Niagara Region website.

In 2016, the average total household income for 882 renter households in Niagara-on-the-Lake was \$85,367, according to the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis. The data, provided by the research organization, became available in April and was shared with planners from all 12 local area municipalities.

The Niagara Regional Housing has one affordable housing building in NOTL, on Davy Street. With 40 units, it is fully occupied. There are currently 268 applications on the waitlist and 33 of them are from Niagara-on-the-Lake residents.

Disero acknowledges NOTL's need for cheaper housing and said she would love to see more affordable housing for young families.

"If we're looking at areas where the land costs are slightly cheaper, that would probably be further out from settlement areas, like Glendale," she said.

"Do we look at the possibility of some additional density? Do we look at how we can assist with some development charges or taxes? But I don't want to do that if it's going to be a big burden on the rest of the taxpayers," Disero told The Lake Report. Hummel's company

received a number of emails and inquiries about the project, and the feedback has been mostly "positive," the developer said.

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has also followed up and Hummel is going to meet with the director of planning and the chief administrative officer Wednesday to discuss the project, he said.

Hummel said NOTL regional councillor Gary Zalepa and a senior manager for Niagara Region contacted him saying the region would support his project.

"But (the region) would let the town take a lead on the entire initiative," he said in a phone interview. The developer will also be meeting with the mayor and planning director for the Town of Pelham, where Hummel also wants to build some rental accommodation buildings.

If the NOTL project isn't approved, "we just sit for the time being," said Hummel, adding his company is also waiting for the province to table legislation which, if passed, would ease restrictions on development.

"We suspect that legislation would be favourable to allow infill development. And, if that is the case, then we would simply proceed with the development going forward on the entire site," said Hummel explaining he could start the development on 3.5 acres right away but wants to wait for the legislation to pass to be able to use the remaining 12.5 acres for business purposes.

"We would prefer to look at everything comprehensively or globally because you tend to do it in a much more sensible and proactive way versus just piecing it together," he said.



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# NOTL Chamber appoints new president

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce & Visitor and Convention Bureau has chosen its new president.

Eduardo Lafforgue is scheduled to begin his tenure on June 17, according to a chamber news release sent out Tuesday afternoon.

He succeeds longtime chamber CEO Janice Thomson, who left May 15 to become CEO of Niagara

Falls Tourism.

Lafforgue, a Canadian, moved to Europe in 2004 to be vice-president of acquisitions for Intrawest and went on to serve as associate director and managing partner of one of Europe's largest tourism and leisure business consulting companies, said the statement.

He has had responsibility for the direction of more than 80 strategic marketing and management tourism projects, including Libourne-Saint-Emilion (a wine-based

tourism development in France), Lefkadia Wine & Wellness Valley (Black Sea, Russia) and Barcelona's marketing plan.

"Eduardo will continue the successful implementation of the (chamber's) strategic plan to boost Niagara-on-the-Lake's brand equity as one of the country's unique tourism gems," said chamber chair Paul MacIntyre.

Lafforgue will be relocating to Niagara-on-the-Lake for the position. He is serving as CEO of Headwaters Tour-



Eduardo Lafforgue. SUPPLIED

ism, in Orangeville, Ont.

"I have a deep respect for businesses and the value creation that tourism businesses bring to stakeholders and am committed to sustainable, inclusive development practices and respect for the local community," Lafforgue said in the news release.



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# Editorial: The good – no bad, no ugly

Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

So often, the media are accused of focusing on the bad and ugly side of life. Unfortunately, bad things can be big news and it is part of the media's job to report on and shine a light on those facets of life.

But there also is plenty of good to acknowledge and we'd like to salute some of the great things we have reported on in our community just this week alone.

So ...

**Yea** To the town's work crews and the residents along the Lake Ontario and Niagara River shorelines who have been toiling to try to prevent flooding problems as waters rise to record levels.

**Yea** To Dan Patterson, the outgoing president of Niagara College, who announced this week that he is going to retire in 12 months, ending a remarkable 25-year tenure leading one of the most innovative and inventive community colleges in the country. The long list of "firsts" that Niagara College has accomplished under Patterson should make us all proud.

**Yea** The Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre and the women who founded this exceptional NOTL gem 25 years ago. It was wonderful to see the founders and the centre so publicly celebrated at Sunday's Iris Apfel-themed fashion show. Bravo!

**Yea** To the Thwaites family, one of Niagara's many hard-working farming clans. The story of their hugely successful fruit

and vegetable operation, carried on through multiple generations, is a testament to the family, its workers and the spirit of Niagara.

**Yea** To the organizers and participants in the migrant workers festival this past weekend. It is important to help and acknowledge the people who literally do the heavy lifting and hard work in the fields. They enable Niagara to retain its reputation as a leading agricultural community.

**Yea** To the Lord Mayor's youth advisory council, for its mental health and wellness conference specifically for Grade 8 students. With anxiety and mental health concerns common in today's young people, giving them some tools and information as they prepare for high school is an important step.

**Yea** To the NOTL Chamber of Commerce for so quickly finding a successor to departed president Janice Thomson. We look forward to what Eduardo Lafforgue will bring to the voice of business in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

**Yea** To Music Niagara as it prepares for its annual "Big Night" gala fundraiser on June 15. Wishing all the best on another great season to the staff and volunteers who make this festival such a success.

**Yea** To Sentineal Carriages for giving a group of young NOTL Sparks a memorable "Cinderella" moment as the Girl Guides rode through town Monday on one of Sentineal's horse-drawn carriages. A fun time and a priceless gesture.

*editor@niagaranow.com*



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A lovely tale of geese and nature

Dear editor:

I enjoyed Melanie Morris's column on the nesting Embden geese at the NOTL Sailing Club, "Sailing club's Embden geese and the circle of life," The Lake Report, May 30.

It illustrates another attraction Niagara-on-the-Lake offers to visitors besides heritage, theatre and viticulture: the easy access to a rich variety of wildlife.

That someone should take the trouble to observe in detail and speculate about the behaviour of a goose in contrast to the negativity expressed about the Canada and cackling geese is definitely a change for the better. Only last year, stories involving wildlife usually had tragic endings, like the shooting of the Embden geese on the Niagara River and the wild turkey on the Common.

Opportunities to observe wildlife can be a major attrac-

tion to tourists if properly promoted, something the Chamber of Commerce might keep in mind when hiring its new president.

That is why preserving the Lakeshore lands and retaining the aggregate ponds when the old waste water treatment plant is decommissioned must be given priority.

Of course, there are good environmental reasons for such conservation projects, too. But, even more important, recent research suggests that preserving our wild places where people may walk and relax and observe what's happening around them enhances both mental and physical health.

That is something everyone might take into consideration when so much wilderness and wetland are under threat.

*Ryder Payne*  
NOTL

### Bylaw protects trees, but town not enforcing rules

Dear editor:

Despite receiving at least three complaints from concerned residents, Niagara-on-the-Lake has not required the developer of a property at the corner of John and Victoria streets to comply with the town's tree bylaw.

Instead of forcing the developer to install a protective barrier around a municipal tree located on the property, as is required under NOTL's tree bylaw, it has done virtually nothing to stop the developer from parking heavy construction equipment on the root system of the tree, or from undertaking construction work in close proximity to the tree's root system.

The tree likely will suffer irreparable harm as a result, resulting in its eventual removal.

Two blocks away, yet another tree was cut down on King Street between Anne and John streets in the past week. When the Pillar and Post garden project began more than a year ago, NOTL turned a blind eye when the developer failed to comply with the town's tree bylaw of the day.

It did not require the developer to install a protective barrier around municipal trees, nor did it require the developer to remove a pile of heavy concrete waste that had been piled on the root system of

one of its trees.

The town only took action to ensure its trees were protected, several months later, after a local resident repeatedly expressed concern to a town councillor about the harm being done to the trees. However, the town did not require the pile of concrete to be removed. It sat on the root system of the affected tree for more than one year.

Virtually all of the remaining trees on the west side of King Street between Anne and John streets are now showing signs of distress. In addition, the developer has now allowed the inner protective barrier it placed around the trees to collapse, and is undertaking construction work in close proximity to their root systems.

It would not surprise me if all of them are eventually cut down, diminishing the town's tree canopy and making a mockery of the town's tree bylaw.

Bylaws, no matter how well-intentioned, are of no value if they are not consistently enforced. It is my hope that the town will enforce its tree bylaw in the future, and take strong action against anyone who chooses to ignore it.

*Terry Davis*  
NOTL

## The Lake Report

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Abi and Patrick Dowd walk Fort George on Saturday during the Artillery Day demonstrations. Story on Page 12. BRITTANY CARTER

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# Op-ed: A slice of life from a NOTL burial ground



Michael Rifkin and his daughter Elinor, 4, at Butler's Burial Ground. KEVIN MACLEAN

Michael Rifkin  
Special to The Lake Report

As a dad of three, I'm lucky to be able to raise my kids in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

In an old town with stories seemingly around every corner, any family walk can quickly turn into a history lesson or a chance to stretch the kids' imaginations.

Occasionally, though, the kids' growing minds bump against the tales and traditions I'm trying to help pass along. They see the historic surroundings differently and can even sometimes show me things that I might miss.

This happened in my family recently when I learned that we live within walking distance of a 200-year-old, allegedly haunted cemetery called Butler's Burial Ground. I'm not a strict believer in the paranormal, but it's a fun game to play along with and I thought of a ghost-hunting expedition.

I figured my brave and playful and imaginative four-year-old daughter Elinor would be a good ghost-hunting partner and though the haunted history of Niagara-on-the-Lake is mostly news to her, she happily agreed.

On an appropriately grey, chilly afternoon, we set out to look for the spirits of Col. John Butler and company. As we walked, I tried to coax out of Elinor an

enthusiasm for the chance perhaps to see a ghost, something she'd only encountered in cartoon form.

After a single shudder and a short moan of worry, she settled into the reasonable but somewhat defiant position that although ghosts are scary, they don't actually exist. Her politely blunt rationality surprised me and made her seem like a three-foot-tall Carl Sagan. Not who I'd think to go ghost-hunting with.

We carried on anyway down the Butler Street path and arrived at the foot of a little hill, on top of which is the cemetery. The grass on the hill looked like it would be above ankle height and hadn't been cut yet this spring. Dandelions peeked up over the grass.

"Is this Butler's Bury-Go-Round?" Elinor asked, approaching the chain link fence that fronted the hill.

It didn't look like the historic cemetery I had been picturing, but the overgrowth seemed spooky enough for our purpose. We went through the opening in the fence, through the tall grass, up the hill.

The most obvious starting point was the two rows of grave markers. The original markers were so heavily aged that I couldn't read them any more than Elinor could. From a row of newer markers above them I read out the names of the

cemetery's inhabitants.

"Do you think any of these people are here with us?" I whispered, hoping to create a spooky vibe for us.

"No," Elinor said, again with chipper bluntness. "I don't see any ghosts."

I shrugged and we moved on to the mostly buried vault that holds the bones of Col. Butler and others. I told Elinor that there were several people buried there.

"Maybe," she said. "Or one really tall person." Not having seen inside the vault myself, I had to concede the possibility.

My game wasn't going how I'd hoped. I looked around. No ghosts. Just tall grass and dandelions.

Elinor crouched down. "Here's a dandelion shaped liked a star," she said.

I crouched next to her. She pointed to the dandelion and I agreed it was shaped like a star. It was the first thing we had agreed on since leaving the house.

"Is it time to go home?" she asked as we stood up. She'd been a good sport so far but the way she dragged her vowels told me she was getting tired and impatient. I'd been asking a lot of her in trying to get her to play along with a game involving characters and forces she hadn't heard of and didn't take for granted like I did.

I figured I should give up ghost-hunting and end our

visit on our note of agreement. I nodded and we started down the hill again.

Turning back for another look at the cemetery, for the first time I saw more than grass and dandelions and stone markers. I sensed vague ripples in the air at the top of the hill. A few out in the open, another one near the tree in the corner.

I began to tell Elinor, but she was already down the path and I turned away from the hill and followed her. As I walked quickly to catch up I noticed that my shoelaces had come undone. I called to Elinor to come back.


"Maybe Mary untied my shoes," I said as I retied my laces, referring to one of the names that had stood out to us.

"Yes, it was Mary," Elinor said, with the same cold factuality as before.

"But ghosts don't have hands," she continued, then tilted her head and tapped her chin with her index finger. "It must have been a skeleton. Or the head of a ghost with the body of a skeleton."


Again, I couldn't argue with her logic, but at least we were reaching something like an agreement and playing along. The trip suddenly seemed worthwhile.

"Maybe," I said as we walked. We discussed skeleton-ghosts while the ripples trailed in the air behind us.



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Niagara-on-the-Lake

# Mental health, screen time and vaping: Forum enlightens Grade 8 students

Dariya Baiguzhiyeva  
The Lake Report

As Grade 8 students get ready to transition into high school, keeping their academic and personal lives in balance may be hard. This is where a mental health and wellness conference came in handy.

Organized by Lord Mayor's youth advisory council, the second annual conference came back to NOTL Monday morning featuring four hands-on workshops and four speakers.

About 120 students from three local schools – Crossroads Public School, St. Davids Public School and St. Michael Catholic Elementary School – filled the auditorium of NOTL community centre.

Retired brain scientist and psychologist Ron Clavier, who now lives in NOTL, was the keynote speaker this year.

One of the topics Clavier talked about was screen time and how it can damage the brain. By debunking a popular myth that humans use only 10 per cent of their brains, Clavier emphasized the importance of early sleep and reducing time spent in front of computers or cellphones.

Another topic, which Clavier covered at the conference, touched upon anxiety. Clavier said "knowledge, confidence and certainty" are anxiety's enemies. "Never avoid anxiety.



About 120 students packed an auditorium at the NOTL community centre Monday morning. DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

Deal with it," he told the students. "Don't use drugs to escape anxiety. Protect yourself."

The Town, along with Clavier and The Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake, funded the conference by providing four school buses, said Victoria Steele, town's community engagement co-ordinator.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero addressed the students in the morning, highlighting the importance of broadening horizons as well as making connections and networks.

After Jaclyn Willms of Niagara Fit conducted a short warmup in the morning, students split into four groups attending four different workshops.

Melissa Dunlop from the Niagara North Family Health Team spoke about nutrition and the impor-

tance of keeping blood sugar levels stable. Using interactive activities, she talked how food choices can affect people's mood and vice versa.



Speaker Ron Clavier. DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

Daniella Lock, a health promoter with the Niagara Region, and Megan Ardiel, a public school nurse for the Niagara Region, talked about vaping and smoking. Smoking e-cigarettes is

heavily marketed to young people and once they get addicted to vaping, which contains e-juice made of nicotine, they become long-time customers, Ardiel told the students. The new addition to this year's conference was a workshop creating vision boards. For young people, it's easy to lose sight of what they want, said Karen Post of Red Roof Retreat. By creating a vision board – a collection of pictures or affirmations – students lay out a path of what they would like to do in the future and give their subconscious a direction where to go, said Post.

Isabelle Hendricks, a Grade 8 Crossroads student, said she found the conference to be helpful.

"It gives a new insight on how people relate to different things," she said adding her favourite session was making the vision board as it is "a creative way to show your inspirations."

Lisa Mayer, a Grade 8 teacher at St. Michael's Elementary School, said she liked the topic on vaping the most.

"I think the choices of the topics for this age group is phenomenal. I've been teaching in Grade 8 for 20 years so they're keeping up with the times and they're bringing it to their level, what's applicable for them," she told The Lake Report. "I think that's awesome."



Niagara College president Dan Patterson has announced he will retire in 2020. SUPPLIED PHOTO

## Patterson stepping down as Niagara College president

Dariya Baiguzhiyeva  
The Lake Report

Saying goodbye is hard, especially when you have served almost 25 years as Niagara College's president.

Dan Patterson, who announced his decision to the college staff and faculty on Tuesday, said he will not seek another term after his current one ends on June 30, 2020.

The decision wasn't easy to make, said Patterson, but he will be leaving the college knowing it's in a good financial situation. When he began his duties in 1995, there was a major cut to the college and the government at the time cancelled the Niagara-on-the-Lake campus.

"We were just devastated at the time because we had all these plans to build this campus, which now has a 38-acre vineyard," Patterson said in a phone interview.

"No other college or university has a 38-acre working vineyard, a two-acre hop yard, a greenhouse."

From "humble beginnings" fast-forward to 2019, Niagara College now boasts a lot of firsts: Canada's first commercial teaching winery, Canada's only brewmaster and brewery operations technician program, and the only full-time college program in photonics engineering technician and technology in the country. The college also offers Canada's only artisan distilling program and a new commercial cannabis production program.

If the 70-year-old Patterson had to describe his experience serving as a president, he would call it "exhilarating."

"It's been an honour, a privilege to be at the helm of an extraordinary college that's been very transforma-

tive and a leader in Canada," Patterson told The Lake Report.

During his presidency, enrolment has grown from 4,500 in 1995 to 13,000 in 2019, with students coming from more than 90 countries. Since 1995, the budget has also increased to \$210 million from \$58 million.

"I'm so proud of what I and my team have been able to accomplish and marvel at what we've accomplished," Patterson said.

Patterson, who lives in St. Catharines, said he looks forward to spending more time with his wife Sandra, but will continue to be involved in promoting post-secondary education.

Having received a number of community recognition awards, including the 2010 Niagara-on-the-Lake Citizen of the Year, Patterson's priority has always been students and linking them to "the world of work."

"The board of governors accepted Dan's announcement with deep appreciation for all that he has done, and great respect for his wish to move into a new phase of his life," said John Scott, chair of Niagara College board of directors.

"Dan's leadership has provided an exceptional era at Niagara College and we look forward to the opportunities to express our appreciation in celebration of his accomplishments over the coming year," Scott said in a statement.

The board of the governors will be announcing the details of the search process for the next president in the next coming weeks.

"When you're there for that long, 25 years ... I think, in many ways, it does mark the end of an era," said Patterson.

## Invasive gypsy moth spray program delayed

An aerial spray program combating gypsy moths and protecting tree canopy has been delayed. The first spray is now scheduled for May 30 to June 6. The second is planned for June 13 to June 20. The spray will be applied by a low-flying helicopter between 5 a.m. and 8 a.m. in the areas of Paradise Grove (on the corner of John Street and Niagara Parkway) and Upper Whirlpool Woods (a wooded area across from the Whirlpool Golf Course).

Gypsy moth caterpillars are an invasive species that defoliate and damage trees.

## TIDBITS

### Pumphouse celebrates 25 years

The Pumphouse's longest-running fundraising event brought fashion aficionados and vendors of handmade goods together for a luncheon and fashion show Sunday.

Celebrating 25 years, founding members of the Pumphouse took to the catwalk to close out the afternoon. The theme was inspired by fashion icon Iris Apfel.

"We were so pleased that our founding members joined the runway models demonstrating how timeless true beauty really is," said Rima Boles, director of the Pumphouse Art Centre



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## Thousand Words

Father robin calls to its youngster, encouraging it to take its first flight. The fledgling is now out of the nest and walking around in the branches of the pine tree. It flaps its wings and calls out to dad. **See page 12.** RICHARD HARLEY

## Garden of the Week contest in full bloom

Brittany Carter  
The Lake Report

The annual weekly contest for the most beautiful gardens in Niagara-on-the-Lake will be in full bloom on June 1.

Nominations are being accepted for the Garden of the Week contest, which will run until Aug. 31. It is put on by the NOTL Horticultural Society in co-operation with Communities in Bloom.

The nomination deadline for each week is Monday evening and all nominees



Garden of the Week nominations are now open. RICHARD HARLEY

will carry on to following weeks for consideration.

Residents can nominate as many gardens as they

like, as long as they meet the criteria.

The contest is open to all residents of NOTL with

front gardens visible from the road. Each garden will be judged on streetscape and curb appeal, personal expression and creativity, colour and texture, and maintenance and neatness.

Winners will be announced on the town's website and will receive a bottle of wine donated by Caroline Estate Winery and a gift certificate from Regal Florist and Garden Centre.

Submissions can be made through the town's Join The Conversation page or by email to [cib@notl.com](mailto:cib@notl.com).

## Museum to hold costuming course for seniors

Dariya Baiguzhiyeva  
The Lake Report

Niagara seniors looking for a little something different this June are in luck.

The Niagara Historical Society and Museum is planning a five-day "mini-course" for seniors, covering costuming and clothing through the ages — and into the future.

Each day will feature a short lecture and a workshop hosted by Pam Mundy, an award-winning costume designer and a longtime volunteer at the museum.

The program is made possible by a \$16,514 grant from the federal government's New Horizons for Seniors program.

The course is only open



A dress on display for Head to Toe exhibit at the Niagara Historical Society and Museum. BRITTANY CARTER

to people aged 60 and older, and the cost is \$2 per day to cover materials. Light snacks and drinks will also be available.

Sessions will take place at Navy Hall from June 10 to 14, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

### Course outline

**Day 1:** "An over-all look at clothing from the ancient Greeks to the modern day." Workshop: "What can you do with a straight piece of fabric?"

**Day 2:** "What goes Around Comes Around – A look at the cycle of changing clothing over the last 500 years." Workshop: "What will be worn in 2050?"

**Day 3:** "The Look of Work - Costume of modern everyday life. What is its purpose?" Workshop: "Creating a museum guide uniform."

**Day 4:** "Costuming a Character – Why and how actors in movies, theatre and television are 'costumed.'" Workshop: "Costuming a character."

**Day 5:** "Costume Close to Home – A look at how we costume real characters for the museum's Cemetery tours. What do we need to know?" Workshop: "Creating ideas for costuming the characters for this year's tour."

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Left: Gus Chambers, left, and an unknown associate in front of the Red & White grocery store. The store is now Nina Gelateria on Queen Street. SUPPLIED Right: From left, Michele Hendriks, Tony Hendriks, Don Chambers and Ruth de Laat, in the picnic section of the Valu-mart lot — representing decades of old-town grocery retailing. TIM TAYLOR

# Valu-mart: 70 years, three families and one grocery legacy

Tim Taylor  
The Lake Report

The tale of old town's Hendriks Valu-mart is a family story. Or really several family stories, rolled into one.

The first family of what is now Valu-mart was the Chambers. From the 1950s, Scottish-born Gus Chambers owned the Red & White, a full-service grocery store in part of what became Kennedy's Pharmacy, now Nina Gelateria, on Queen Street.

Chambers' young son, Don (he's now the Valu-mart butcher and has been for almost 40 years), was weaned on the shelves and in the storage rooms of that Red & White.

He worked after school and weekends, between Niagara District High School, summer softball games and fishing and swimming in the Niagara River at Gilligan's Marina.

Over the years, he did just about everything in the store. After graduation and a few tries at other endeavours, he returned to the family business and took up butchering.

In the early 1970s, Gus Chambers (and Loblaw, the building and brand

owner) built a new Red & White store, where Valu-mart is today. Don became the butcher.

"It was a bygone era," says Chambers, sitting in the low-ceilinged storage area, above the Valu-mart. He admits he's in his early 70s and despite his wife's urgings, has no immediate plans to retire.

"So much has changed over the years. In the old days, everyone would just shop in town. It was all families. The town was self-sufficient," he remembers.

"There were two or three hardware stores, four grocery stores, three gas stations and a movie theatre."

Another change, Chambers recalls, is how they received their meats. "I used to haul around 150-pound carcasses. Now it all comes in boxes. And no one had ever heard of veggie burgers."

By 1980, the Chambers family was ready to pass the grocery baton to Ruth and Adrian de Laat, and their young family. Very experienced in the grocery business around Ontario, the de Laat couple liked the look of Niagara-on-the-Lake and bought the business.

"It was a nice little community," says Ruth de Laat. (Adrian died 15 years ago).

"We moved here at a good time. The economy was strong. The town was growing but there was still a real sense of community."

It was during the 1980s that the Red & White became Valu-mart, part of a branding change by the parent company, Loblaw.

But even the rapidly changing demographic and local purchasing patterns didn't change the way the de Laat family did business.

The values of loyalty, community and family were still their touchstones.

"I remember we would get phone calls at home and someone was having a party and needed something after-hours. Adrian would go and open up to get it for them. And we delivered to seniors."

It wasn't just their own three school-aged children who worked at the store, helping the family and learning the business. "I think just about all the kids in town worked for us at one time or another.

She remembers the Dietsch boys: "All the Dietsch boys worked with us though high school and beyond. Now they own the Sandtrap Bar and Grill."

By 1990, the de Laats were looking for skilled manag-

ment to help run their burgeoning grocery business.

Once again, family became a determining factor.

Adrian's nephew, Tony Hendriks, proved to be just the right person. From the age of 14, Hendriks had been working in the grocery business in his hometown of Vineland. He started as stock boy, working part-time through high school and college.

At family parties, Hendriks recounts that he and his uncle would talk incessantly about the grocery business. It was almost as if Uncle Adrian was preparing the young Hendriks for his ultimate career.

By the time the de Laats needed a store manager, Tony, now in his mid-fifties, was ready for the job.

"Adrian was really my mentor," Hendriks says. "Everything I know about the grocery business, I learned from him."

By 1999, Hendriks had not only learned every aspect of the business, he and his wife Michele had purchased the franchise from his aunt and uncle.

"It is a neat family legacy that we have been successfully in the same place — the same business — for 40 years."

*"Our store is the meeting place. It is a place to catch up with each other. Our staff know so many customers by name — it is the essence of what we are."*

TONY HENDRIKS  
OWNER, HENDRIKS VALU-MART

Hendriks attributes his belief that employees are family, to the way his uncle related to the store team.

"I now hire more on attitude and outlook, than skill," says Hendriks. "I can teach people pretty much all they need to know. But I need to have a great attitude first."

Not surprisingly technology has dramatically changed the grocery business in the past three decades. Pricing, in-store promotion, signage and ordering are almost totally automatic.

"Sure, technology has changed a lot over the years. But not the need for good customer service. It really determines the relationship you have with your customers."

One of the challenges of a small store (Valu-mart's 6,000 square feet is small by any measure; the biggest Loblaw stores can be up to 100,000 square feet) is fighting for products that reflect the demographics of local customers and the produce available from the local agriculture sector.

"We have to push back for our customers," Hendriks says — defending his customers' needs is important to him. "Our customers' product choices are much different than the

average rural community."

On top of that, he says, customers tastes have also changed. "We've changed from a lot of package items to many gourmet items, organics, vegetarian products and so on. People are becoming more and more passionate about their food.

"We've also had to convince Loblaw to engage local food producers, so the system can allow us to buy local."

Hendriks believes too much technology can take the humanity out of the interaction with customers. "Our store is the meeting place. It is a place to catch up with each other. Our staff know so many customers by name — it is the essence of what we are.

"There are bigger stores now you can go to. Most of our customers come here because it's convenient and it's personal."

Hendriks says he wouldn't want to run a big store. "No way. It takes the personal touch away from running your business. I'd rather be in the store talking with our customers or unloading the trucks with our team, than sitting in an office."

It is almost as if Hendriks' staff and customers are part of his family, too.

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# Tennis takes off

Top: Stephanie Bonetta, Larry Platt and Shawna Macfarlane, tennis pro at the NOTL Tennis Club Spring Social Sunday. Bottom left: Brian Hogarth on the court for the Spring Social on Sunday. Bottom right: Myles Milligan practices tennis drills during the Spring Social at the NOTL Tennis Club on Sunday. BRITTANY CARTER

## On the tee: Doria wins low gross with score of 38

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

Top draft pick Joe Doria shot a 2-over 38 to win the low gross score in Men's Night competition at Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club on May 30.

Ted Wiens took the "A" flight with 22 points and Lou Puglisi topped the "B" flight with 21 points.

Nick Miller's net four points on the third hole won him a net skin worth \$354.

Gross skins (\$40 each) went to Ron Newman and Mike Eagen. The 50/50 draw earned Brodie Townley \$210.

Jeff Jacques had the longest drive on #3 and Steve Levy had the seniors long drive on #8. Closest to the pin winners were Ted Wiens (#1), Sean Simpson (#4) and Kevin MacLean (#9).

Nine hole Ladies: Chris Walker won both the low gross score, with a 48, and low net (35) on May 21.

Theresa Rothwell-Downs had the fewest putts 11, along with a chip in on #2. Linda Williams also chipped in on #2.

Men's Tuesday WOOFs league: Mike Eagen took low gross honours with a 40 and Gerry Sibbald was the net winner on May 21. Closest to the pin on #4 was Doug Garrett and Don Allen won the hidden hole prize.

Friday Couples: The team of Glen and Cathy Murray

and Martin and Margot Richardson were tops with a score of 35. Second were Mike and Yolanda Henry and Jim and Anne Sifton (also 35). Third place went to Paul and Ginny Green and David and Sue Gagne (37). Most honest were Ian Reece and Margot Hickson and Ross Smith and Bonnie Kinal. Closest to the pin on #4 were Dean McCann and Cathy Murray. Longest putts on #8 were sunk by Gerry Shelly and Marlene Sibbald.

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<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
<p><b>Walking Tours of Old Town - 11 a.m.</b> - Queen's Royal Park</p> <p><b>3rd Annual Lions Golf Tournament - 11 a.m.</b> - Eagle Valley Golf Course</p> <p><b>Teen Literary Alliance - 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.</b> - NOTL Public Library</p> <p><b>Ghost Tours of Fort George - 8:30 p.m.</b> - Fort George</p>	<p><b>Flag Raising for Niagara Pride Week - 9 a.m.</b> - Town Municipal Offices</p> <p><b>Fun Duplicate Bridge - 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.</b> - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p><b>Committee of the Whole - 6 p.m.</b> - Council Chambers</p> <p><b>Public Meeting: Residential Infill Policies - 6 p.m.</b> - Council Chambers</p> <p><b>Community Drumming Night - 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.</b> - Niagara Regional Native Centre</p>	<p><b>Janet Carnochan Day</b></p> <p><b>NOTL Rotary Club - Noon</b> - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p><b>Niagara Golden Age Club: Seniors Euchre - 1:30 p.m.</b> - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p><b>40 Creek Whiskey Pairing Night - 7 p.m.</b> - The Irish Harp Pub</p> <p><b>Movie: Mary Queen of Scots - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.</b> - NOTL Public Library</p>	<p><b>NOTL SupperMarket - 9 p.m.</b> - The Village</p> <p><b>NOTL Toastmasters - 9 p.m.</b> - Niagara College Campus</p>
<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	
<p><b>Walking Tours of Old Town - 11 a.m.</b> - Queen's Royal Park</p> <p><b>Polish Sunday in NOTL - Noon to 3:30 p.m.</b> - Byron, Wellington and Picton Street</p> <p><b>The Niagara Symphony presents: Face to Face and Fabulous with TORQ Percussion - 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.</b> - Trius Winery &amp; Restaurant</p>	<p><b>Fun Duplicate Bridge - 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.</b> - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p><b>Town Council Meeting - 6 p.m.</b> - Council Chambers</p> <p><b>Community Drumming Night - 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.</b> - Niagara Regional Native Centre</p> <p><b>Monday Night Teen Hang Out - 6 p.m. to 7:15 p.m.</b> - NOTL Public Library</p>	<p><b>NOTL Rotary Club - Noon</b> - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p><b>Niagara Golden Age Club: Seniors Euchre - 1:30 p.m.</b> - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p><b>Pizza Garden - 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.</b> - NOTL Public Library</p>	<p><b>InfoHealth: The Family Team - 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.</b> - Public Library</p> <p><b>NOTL SupperMarket - 9 p.m.</b> - The Village</p> <p><b>NOTL Toastmasters - 9 p.m.</b> - Niagara College Campus</p>

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	<b>30</b> <b>Minecraft Club</b> - 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. - NOTL Public Library <b>Tinker Thinker Thursdays</b> - 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. - NOTL Public Library <b>Seniors Fitness: Health Safe &amp; Strong</b> - 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. / 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. -	<b>31</b> <b>Duplicate Bridge</b> - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre <b>Mahjong Game: Drop in</b> - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre <b>Knit a Bit</b> - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Public Library	<b>1</b> <b>Mori Gardens Seminar Series: Winning Plant Combinations</b> - 10 a.m. - Mori Gardens <b>Walking Tours of Old Town</b> - 11 a.m. - Queen's Royal Park <b>Ragnar Niagara 2019: Running Event</b> - 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. - <b>Farmers' Market</b> - 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. - The Village
1 p.m.			
	<b>5</b> <b>Minecraft Club</b> - 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. - NOTL Public Library <b>Clare's Bike Night</b> - 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. - Clare's Harley-Davidson <b>Opening Reception: Founding Members' Art Exhibition</b> - 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre <b>Niagara Jazz Festival presents Live Learn Jazz: Women Of The Hour, Voices In The Vines</b> - 7 p.m. - Stratus Vineyards	<b>6</b> <b>Duplicate Bridge</b> - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre <b>Mahjong Game: Drop in</b> - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre <b>Neighbourhood Walks: Queen Street Estates</b> - 6 p.m. - Post Office, Queen Street <b>Interfaith Devotional Gathering</b> - 7 p.m. - 11 Harmony Drive, NOTL <b>Rosé Day Getaway</b> - 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. - Two Sisters Vineyards	<b>7</b> <b>Mori Gardens Seminar Series: Pruning Evergreens</b> - 10 a.m. - Mori Gardens <b>14th Annual Shaw Guild Garden Tour</b> - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. - Shaw Festival <b>Rest &amp; Refreshment Stop on Shaw Garden Tour</b> - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. - Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre <b>Grace United Church: June Jamboree</b> - 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Grace United Church <b>Walking Tours of Old Town</b> - 11 a.m. - Queen's Royal Park <b>Farmers' Market</b> - 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. - The Village
et - 4:30 p.m. to - 7 p.m. to ege, NOTL			
	<b>12</b> <b>Family Health</b> - NOTL et - 4:30 p.m. to - 7 p.m. to ege, NOTL	<b>13</b> <b>Seniors Fitness: Healthy Safe &amp; Strong</b> - 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. / 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre <b>Minecraft Club</b> - 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. - NOTL Public Library <b>The White Effect Dinner</b> - 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. - Queenston Heights	<b>14</b> <b>Duplicate Bridge</b> - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre <b>Neighbourhood Walks: Irish Town/Rye Park</b> - 6 p.m. - Rye Park <b>Annual Seafood Picnic</b> - 7 p.m. - Reif Estate Winery <b>Trius Red Presents Movie Night in the Vineyard: Mama Mia</b> - 8 p.m. - Trius Winery & Restaurant
	<b>15</b> <b>Homegrown Wine Festival</b> - Wineries of Niagara <b>Farmers' Market</b> - 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. - The Village <b>United Empire Loyalist Flag Raising</b> - 9 a.m. - Queen Street, Cenotaph <b>Niagara College: Bake with an Expert</b> - 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Canadian Food and Wine Institute at Niagara College		

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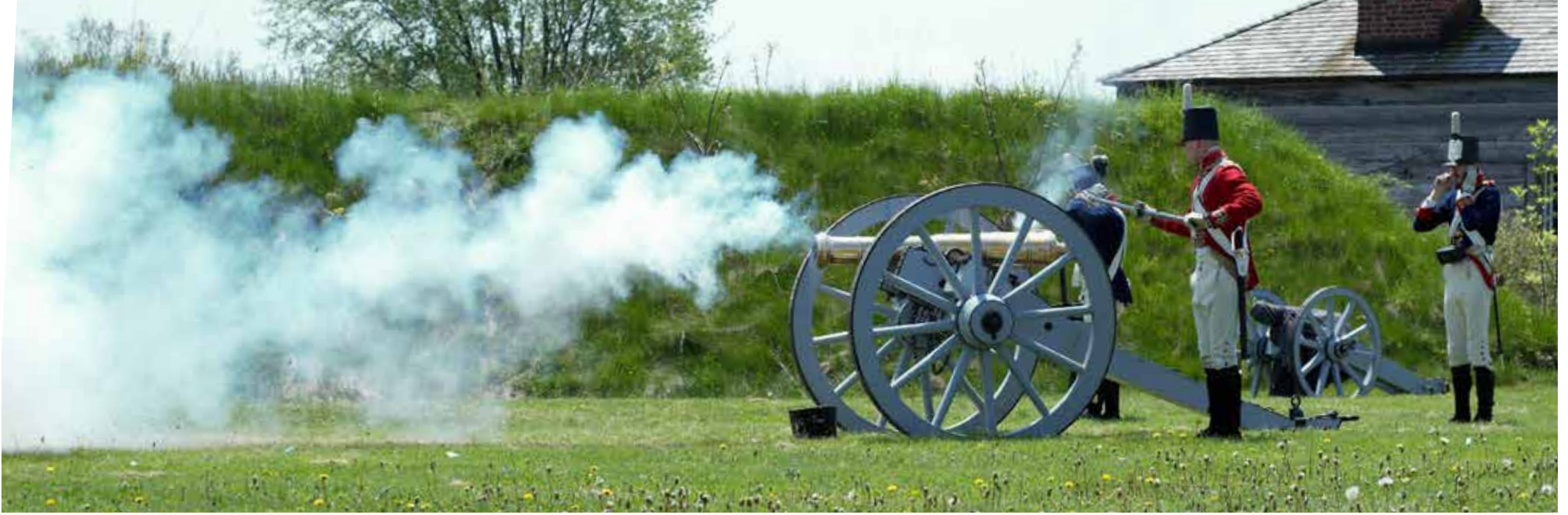
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Cannon fire at Fort George. BRITTANY CARTER

# Cannons fire at the fort

Brittany Carter  
The Lake Report

Cannons were ablaze on Saturday when Fort George celebrated the 303rd anniversary of the Canadian Royal Regiment of Artillery.

The weekend also marked the 206th anniversary of the bombardment of Fort George, which occurred on May 25, 1813.

Peter Martin, special events co-ordinator for Fort George, said the coinciding of the two important dates helped the historical site tell different stories about

Canada's artillery.

Artillery Day, which is recognized across Canada, fell on May 26, but Martin said the event was planned on Saturday to combine both events and to not step on the toes of Fort Erie, which he said would also likely have celebrations for the day.

Throughout the afternoon, the historical site conducted cannon demonstrations to showcase the heavy artillery used from past to present.

Martin said the cannon firings are always a big draw, which is part of what

made Saturday's event a success.

"People love cannons, but you have to be very careful because it's like a firework. It's beautiful and makes cool noises, but if you put your hand in front of a firework when it goes off, you're going to get hurt. This is the same."

Safety regulations are in place to allow the fort to fire the cannons regularly.

"The Historic Weapons Advisory Committee for Parks Canada, which is a national committee, deals with the safety and the operation. Safety is our

number one concern for the staff and the public," he said.

Educational talks on the British army and the different faces of artillery were open to all visitors of the fort during the event on Saturday. Children were encouraged to take advantage of the Kiddie Boom demonstrations in the afternoon, where they commanded the troops through a faux cannon firing.

While Artillery Day hasn't been an annual event at Fort George, Martin said he would like to bring it back in the future.



Soldiers walk Fort George during Artillery Day on Saturday. BRITTANY CARTER

# Migrant workers honoured at annual festival

Brittany Carter  
The Lake Report

Migrant workers were celebrated for their contribution to Niagara-on-the-Lake's agricultural success on Sunday.

The Migrant Worker Bike Safety and Information Festival welcomed more than 300 workers to the Centennial Arena in Virgil with a free afternoon barbecue and entertainment.

This was the first year the Niagara Migrant Worker's Interest Group partnered with the NOTL Safety Committee to combine each organization's annual migrant worker events.

"We took the bike rodeo and we took the information fair and we combined the best elements of each

festival and put them into one," said Crystal Goicoechea, counselling support co-ordinator for Positive Living Niagara.

She said the safety committee focuses on bike safety while the interest group targets the social, health and informational aspect.

"The festival is something that we feel is very important to provide for the workers. They come here, they leave their families behind, and they work really, really hard to contribute to our community and to our economy."

Goicoechea said the festival is a way to thank the workers for their contribution and hard work. Also important is ensuring the workers are aware of and are receiving the services

they are entitled to, she said.

The Migrant Worker Interest Group has partnered with GateWay Community Church to hold a monthly information hub for the workers. The first one is June 9 from 4 to 7 p.m. and will serve as a pilot night, Goicoechea said.

"Recently partnered with GateWay, Pastor Michelle (Mercer) was really interested in assisting the migrant workers and was very generous in donating the space for the hub," she said.

GateWay Community Church is a familiar place for many workers as a bike repair shop is located there, she added.

During the festival on Sunday, Virgil's Bikes for Farmworkers raffled off 35 bikes for the workers.

# Thousand Words

Shortly after this photo was taken, fledgling robin took its first flight. The baby bird will not return to the same nest again. RICHARD HARLEY



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# Niagara Fit offers health for everyone

Brittany Carter  
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Niagara Fit offers a unique approach to personal training – the company takes fitness to the next level.

With an expansion of its facilities was finished a few weeks ago, personal training services at Niagara Fit have become more versatile.

Jaclyn Willms, owner of Niagara Fit, says the company added new equipment, allowing her to offer more functional and more sport-specific training. With more space, she says she's able to do more for clients.

Everyone who steps into Niagara Fit receives a specialized plan to help them achieve their own fitness goals, Willms says. Staff trainers then fine-tune programs to suit each individual.

"All the programs are

designed for each person. Our personal training is one-on-one, so everything that you do try, you are with someone the entire time," says Willms.

Five dedicated personal trainers on staff each specialize in different areas of rehabilitation and focused fitness methods. Between them they boast credentials ranging from Can Fit Pro CPT, Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology CPT, certification in active aging, children's fitness and precision nutrition, and a member of the Ontario College of Kinesiologists; Willms says there is a trainer for everyone.

She has been providing personal training services in Niagara-on-the-Lake for 11 years and Niagara Fit has been in operation at 358 Mary St. for the past four years.

She started training out of people's homes

and community locations before opening her own studio. Through the studio over the last few years, she says she's been able to really become part of the community. The expansion has helped her reach more people interested in taking their fitness to the next level, she says.

"There's a lot of different things that we can do now that we couldn't before. The energy is better, it's bigger but it still does have that intimate feel," Willms says.

It's important to Willms that Niagara Fit holds on to its reputation of individualized personal training.

In an effort to offer more options for her clients, she introduced a new group "bootcamp" program called Move360.

Move360 just launched and Willms says it has already been very well-received. The class

runs Monday to Friday at 6:30 p.m. Registration is required as there is limited room available.

"We want to make this a lifestyle, that's why each class isn't crazy intense. It's something that you're going to do long-term. Some of the exercises have rehab aspects to them," she says.

Willms understands that a lot of residents in NOTL are snowbirds. Keeping that in mind, she says her programs don't expire. The team at Niagara Fit works with each client to find a timetable that works for them.

With no membership fees, she says clients don't need to feel like they're stuck in their plans.

"We offer a unique approach that's different than you might typically know. No membership fees, it's all one-on-one so everything's designed to you," she says.



Jaclyn Willms, owner of Niagara Fit and personal trainer, assisting long-time client Mike Clarke. BRITTANY CARTER

Mike Clarke has been training with Willms for more than five years. He says the individual and personable experience from the team at Niagara Fit keeps him coming back.

"I find it very motivational. People are friendly. It's a sense of being in the community. I get something that I couldn't get with Goodlife Fitness or some of the bigger gyms,"

Clarke says. The team's focus on individuals' needs is the high point, he says. "Knowing that, as you get a little bit older, you're unique in terms of injuries and building a proper, balanced personal training regime."

Niagara Fit welcomes more clients. Call the studio at 289-257-8748 for a consultation.

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*Have some fun*

The Lake Report is looking for puzzle makers who would like to help develop this page. We are seeking both standard and cryptic crossword writers. editor@niagaranow.com

- Across**
- Single things (5)
  - Marine calamity (9)
  - Abominable snowman (4)
  - Teacher (10)
  - Form of bowling (6)
  - Termination of a pregnancy (8)
  - Stiffness in the joints (10)
  - Peruse (4)
  - Needless bustle (4)
  - Eye-glasses (10)
  - Statue support (8)
  - Like some mammoths (6)
  - From e.g. Portsmouth or Basingstoke (10)
  - Taverns (4)
  - Opponent (9)
  - Prolonged pain (5)
- Down**
- Cousin of your daughter (5)
  - Capital of Bhutan (7)
  - Minor Biblical prophet (5)
  - Execute (7)
  - Earthquake scale (7)
  - Dark brown (9)
  - Capital of Austria (6)
  - Home (9)
  - Ask for a loan (3)
  - Not sweet (3)
  - Wand showing sovereignty (7)
  - Lounges (7)
  - Frustrate (6)
  - Shutting (7)
  - Kind of month (5)
  - Fabric woven from flax yarns (5)

### Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8	
			9						
10			11						
12				13					
14	15			16	17		18		
19		20	21		22	23			
24				25	26			27	
28							29		
30							31		

Last issue's answers

1	O	2	O	3	A	4	M	5	B	6	S	7	S	8	B
9	U	P	P	E	R	C	A	S	E	10	M	O	T	T	O
11	S	T	C	R	A	A	R	O							
12	T	H	I	G	H	13	Y	A	R	D	S	T	I	C	K
							14	E	L		H	N	K		
15	A	B	N	O	R	M	A	L	16	B	U	N	G	L	E
17	C	Y	N												
18	C	O	S	Y	19	E	D	I	T	S	20	P	R	E	E
21	E	O													
22	S	U	M	M	O	N	23	A	R	M	24	C	H	A	I
25	S	E	L												
26	I	M	B	R	O	G	L	I	O	27	O	A	R	E	D
28	B	O	G	A	I	B	A	I							
29	L	A	D	E	N	30	M	E	S	M	E	R	I	S	M
31	E	Y	E												

### Sudoku

	1	5		7				
				9	1	5		
		2	4					8
		1		7	6			
3		8		4				7
	2	9			4			
8				2	9			
2	4		6					
		9		3	5			

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## Painting the lake

Richard Polinski paints a watercolour view of Ryerson Beach in Chautauqua. The New Jersey resident is originally from Tonawanda, N.Y., and came back to visit his mother. While visiting NOTL he was excited to head up to the Welland Canals and see a ship go through. After that, his wife allowed him a few hours of painting time while she rested in the car. The final painting depicts a sailboat. Though there wasn't a boat out that day, Polinski said he's seen them on the lake before and he's wanted to paint the scene since.

RICHARD HARLEY



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# Shaw Festival review: **The Horse and His Boy**

Mike Keenan  
Special to The Lake Report

Shaw Festival artistic director Tim Carroll writes, "Many of our plays are set in the past but we are also building the audience of the future." The program lists 6+ as the appropriate age for *The Horse and His Boy*, yet wee ones younger than six were seated in the Festival Theatre occupying booster seats.

Immediately, the Hermit narrator, Jenny L. Wright, casts them spellbound, introducing the story. Not a peep was heard, but there were laughs along the way and enthusiastic applause at the end. At two hours and an intermission, they demonstrate staying-power. And, as Narnian horses save and educate humans, the children readily buy into a respect for animals, important to C.S. Lewis.

It helps that the production is magical, thanks to the talented team of director Christine Brubaker, composer and sound designer Deanna Choi, projection designer Jennifer Goodman. The sets, props, sound and atmosphere are addictive.

As with last season's *The Magician's Nephew*, youngsters can attend pre-show workshops in which they

learn songs and responses that make viewing interactive. I enjoyed the finger snapping (reminding me of *West Side Story*) along with chants by the chorus "Snap, snap, follow the map" leading us to mythical locations, accompanied by projected maps. Whenever Jay Turvey cries "To Narnia," in response, the kids shout out, "and the North!"

In her director's notes, Brubaker says, "Our dramatic action follows two horses and their riders as they traverse miles and miles of forests, deserts, cities and mountains. And these horses are not just any old horses, they are Narnian; they speak and are as complex and nuanced as any of us."

Anna Chatterton in the playwright's note explains: "Both Lewis and I take turns in this play highlighting the ridiculous and the sublime, the light and the dark in the story. The cost of Aravis (Madelyn Kriese) having to leave her family in order to have the free life she longs for. The searing loneliness of Shasta (Matt Nethersole) feeling adrift in the world, having nowhere he can call home."

Four principal characters face adversity in Calormen in the south, struggling to be their own person; children readily buy into



Matt Nethersole as Shasta with the cast of *The Horse and His Boy*. SUPPLIED PHOTO/DAVID COOPER

that notion. Youthful Shasta escapes from slavery by teaming up with a talking horse, Bree (Jay Turvey), himself a captive. They escape to Bree's native Narnia, where the animals talk. Aravis declines a noble yet arranged marriage by her father and escapes on the back of Hwin (Kristi

Frank), also from Narnia.

Physical obstacles appear along the way including a ferocious lion, a case of mistaken identity and a war that is well-depicted through clever lighting techniques, ending in a happy Narnian denouement.

A sense of motion throughout is conveyed by

body language, the chorus, movable sets by Goodman and Turvey and Frank's realistic impersonations. Clever masks arc over their heads. They prance and snort, feet resembling hooves. Two other actors rear ends, each with a unique outlook.

*The Horse and His*

*Boy* by C.S. Lewis, adapted by Anna Chatterton, directed by Christine Brubaker, until July 21 at the Shaw Festival Theatre, [Shawfest.com](http://Shawfest.com), 905-468-2172 and 1-800-511-7429.

If you go: *House Program* available at: [www.shawfest.com/playbill/the-horse-and-his-boy](http://www.shawfest.com/playbill/the-horse-and-his-boy).

## Say hello to the Shaw's new intern artistic director

Kimberley Rampersad  
Special to The Lake Report

One of the loveliest aspects of working at the Shaw Festival is becoming a part of the community.

I enjoy the elegant nod with residents walking their furry companions as I walk off my wheels of cheese down the beautiful streets. I cherish speaking with my neighbour Miss Lili as she tends to her beloved garden whenever she can, before I snatch a beautiful blossom to don in my hair a la Moya O'Connell on an opening night. I value singing in the pews at "my" church and



Shaw's intern artistic director Kimberley Rampersad. SUPPLIED PHOTO

not just for my supper on stage.

I get a kick out of hearing critiques, criticism and

compliments about what we are doing at the Shaw Festival, especially as I am purchasing more wheels of

cheese to motivate future walks and excursions to the gym. Truly.

At first I was surprised by the conversations. When people would approach me, I wasn't sure what gave me away as an ensemble member of the Shaw Festival.

Perhaps it was because back when I started four years ago I looked like a dancer, and therefore an actor. My second year? Likely because I was devouring scripts as I tried to stay erect on the elliptical.

Last year maybe it was because I had enough Shaw swag to outfit the entire company. This year, I hope

conversation continues to come my way, as I have a new position here as the intern artistic director.

I believe so many of you care about us and our activities because we are a part of your community and I know we wish to continue to be as valued to you as you are to us.

Theatre is a community-building exercise, but not by intent. The community part is a byproduct so to speak, one of many, just as theatre enriches education, stimulates creativity and awakens empathy.

These are blessed results, but not the reason we do it.

The reason to make theatre is to make excellent theatre. We are in pursuit of excellence and, with that pursuit, the most noble secondaries come to bear. Indeed, we like the secondary, as it can be measured and society is in the business of quantifying the goodness of anything in order to justify it, to fund it, to support it.

But it is the act of someone wanting to respond to the theatre we are making here at Shaw which is our reason for doing it.

And I am so glad to listen and speak about it with you. Please stop me and say hello.



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# Exploring Photos: with Jim Smith

Exclusive to The Lake Report



## The commissariat's office

Located on Veterans Lane in NOTL is a heritage building that once was the commissariat's office through two world wars. This photo is from 1946. From the 1940s into the 1960s, Teen Town was held here where we danced the night away to our favourite popular tunes. Boys Town, Girls Town and Brownies were also held here. The building had also been the Fort George Golf Club house at a time when the Common was a golf course.

SUPPLIED PHOTO/JIM SMITH

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## The simple design canvas

Brian Marshall  
Featured

A number of times in previous columns I have referred to the architectural style of a house, but this week I'd like to consider a more fundamental feature: the form or shape of a house.

Fact is, there are only a few basic forms, with comparatively minor modifications that are repeatedly used throughout the spectrum of architectural styles. In the vast majority of cases, this begins with a choice: rectangular or square.

So, picture a child's building blocks wherein the square blocks are of uniform height, depth and width while the rectangular



Many architectural styles start with the four-square form.  
BRIAN MARSHALL

lar blocks are consistent in height and depth but may vary in width.

For our purposes, each block will represent a room's dimensions. From these blocks we can construct simple plan forms by combining them into a single row (linear) or multiple rows (massed) with the resulting shape being a

three-dimensional square or rectangle.

Taking two or more simple plans and joining them at 90 degrees results in a compound plan (most frequently an L, T or U shape). So, to make the form of a typical simple plan Georgian, we could take six square blocks, assemble them in two

parallel rows to produce a rectangle, and then another six blocks for the second storey.

Alternatively, assembling four of these blocks would produce a square, add four more for a second storey and the building form is a "four-square" (two rooms deep by two rooms wide by two rooms tall).


The four-square form is seen very frequently around Niagara. It can be elegantly unadorned like the one in our photo, or dressed-up with the design elements of an architectural style. The most common styles which use the four-square form include later period Regency, Colonial Revival, Folk Victorian, Prairie, Craftsman and Edwardian.

If you are looking to find a four-square, ignore additions or minor wall projections. Focus on the main mass of the house. A square cube topped by a hipped or pyramid roof are the keys.

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# The churches of Virgil

Denise Ascenzo  
Exclusive/The Lake Report

As towns develop and grow in history, the need for places of worship inevitably become a priority. Virgil was no different.

The town never grew as substantially as Old Town or St. Davids, but the citizens were no less devoted to improving their community.

The first church services were often held in someone's home or barn until land and money were found to build a church.

The first recorded gathering of people was in the home of George Lawrence, who was a Methodist and one of the village founders.

Methodism arrived in the Niagara region in the late 1780s. A Loyalist from Carolina, Maj. George Neal, arrived in Upper Canada after the American Revolution and started holding "class meetings" in St. Davids and later in Virgil.

When Lawrence converted to Methodism, he became a class leader for the Virgil congregation. Two other prominent men in the community, Albert Andrews and Robert Warren, were strong supporters of the church, both serving in the Sunday school and as stewards. Warren was involved with the church for over 60 years.

A meeting house was built in 1840 and a graveyard was established on land donated by George Lawrence.

The meeting house, although simply designed, had many interesting features. Like St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Niagara, the interior of the church had a high pulpit and a gallery on three sides. To maintain the church and full-time minister the church raised funds through the rental of pews.

It was quite the system and one can clearly see that the more you were willing to pay, the better the position you had in the church. For \$8 a year you could rent one of the six pews on either side of the pulpit. For \$6 a year you could have one of



Silversmith Brewery is located in one of Virgil's old churches. BRITTANY CARTER

the first 16 pews in front of the pulpit. It seems the farther out of sight you got, the lower the fees were. It cost \$5 for the four pews on the right and left side, and under the gallery, \$4 for the six pews in the centre under the gallery – and all the rest were free.

The first Methodist chapel was torn down to make way for a new chapel that was built in 1904 near the Lawrenceville Restaurant. After the union of three churches, Presbyterian, Methodists and Congregationalists in 1925, the Methodist Church in Virgil was rebranded to Virgil United Church.

In 1965, the congregation of that church joined the congregation of Grace United Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The amalgamation included not just the people but also many artifacts from the Virgil church building. Two stain glass windows, some chairs and the pulpit were all installed in Grace United.

The church building in Virgil was eventually sold

and later demolished. The bricks from the building were used by the Pump-house in NOTL.

There is still a graveyard from the original Methodist meeting house. George Lawrence is buried there along with many other familiar names such as Anderson, Belvidere, Caughell, Haines and Stevens, to name a few.

A plaque was erected in the graveyard and it gives a brief history of the founding of the Methodist church. The cemetery is no longer in use and is maintained by the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Another church community also developed in the early days of Virgil. The Baptist community started in 1829 under the guidance of Rev. John Oakley. He was a storekeeper for the military from 1814, until he retired 10 years later to become a school teacher and preacher. Oakley first started a Sunday school in Virgil and by 1829 he had the money to build a small

church on the west side of town.

In 1841, under the leadership of Mr. Dorland (a retired school teacher), a larger Baptist church was built in Virgil on the west side of Four Mile Creek and in front of the Baptist cemetery. The first meeting in the new church was held on August 12, 1841. It is unfortunate that the early records for this congregation were lost.

As happens in many small villages, by 1937 the Baptist church community had dwindled and the church was closed. It was later used as a meeting house for the Mennonite Brethren for a brief period and then sold.

In 1991, the Baptist Church was lost in a very devious manner. The land and building were owned by Tom Quinn, owner of the Dew Drop Inn. Without a town permit, he had the church demolished over one weekend. The community was in an uproar, but nothing could be done to undo the damage. Quinn

was fined \$100 for his act of vandalism to a historic property.

Several more congregations started up in the community of Virgil, such as the Ukrainian and Russian Baptists who arrived in the area from the Canadian prairies in the 1930s, during what was called the Dust Bowl Disaster.

At first, this group worshipped with the Baptists in Virgil, however a splinter group broke away and started an Evangelical congregation. Their church is still standing on Niagara Stone Road and is now a private residence.

The Presbyterian Church made a brief appearance in Virgil. The church was on or near where the old Angelo's barbershop was. However, there was a great controversy over who actually owned the land. By the 1880s, the congregation disbanded with many families joining St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in NOTL.

St. John's Anglican

Church was established in 1896. The building was erected on land donated by Jacob Field and located on Niagara Stone Road. It is a simple rectangular brick building with a steep gabled roof. There are three arched windows at the front with one circular stained glass window above them. The front door is off to the side of the building. But like other small communities, the congregation dwindled and could no longer support the church building.

In 1996, the church building and land were sold to a commercial group and the building was used for many purposes, such as arts and crafts sales, and later an antique store.

Then, in 2012, the building was converted into Silversmith Brewery. A glass addition was added to the side where today one can see today the brewing process.

Chris Pontsioen and Matt Swan preserved much of the heritage of the building. In 2014, the Peter J. Stokes heritage commendation committee acknowledged their work, stating: "This is an excellent example of the adaptive reuse of a later 19th-century Gothic Revival church." Today you can still see the stained glass windows and the old wooden beams supporting the gabled roof.

By the 1930s, the Mennonites were arriving in Virgil. Their arrival made a great impact on the community. Houses, barns, businesses, schools and churches all were established. This was a huge, positive change for the town.

\* Many thanks to David Hemmings for his permission to tell stories from his book "The Cross Roads, Fortune Favours the Strong," available at the Niagara Historical Society and Museum..

**More Niagara's History Unveiled articles about the past of Niagara-on-the-Lake are available at: [www.niagaranow.com](http://www.niagaranow.com)**



# COMMUNITY



We invite you to submit photos and stories for consideration in this section. Send your submissions to [editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com) for a chance to be featured.



*Love birds*



## Artifact of the Week: "Niagara-on-the-Lake" painting



**Answer:** This week's artifact is an oil on canvas watercolour by Jackson G. Smith, painted in 1949. The framed painting depicts the Lakeview House, also referred to as the Riverside Inn or Harbour Inn, built in 1860 by John Thornton. The Inn was built on the corner of Melville Street and River Beach Road for one of the owners of the railway car company. John Rousseau Senior bought the establishment in 1970. His son John Junior inherited the business in 1881 and leased it to a series of innkeepers. It was the only Inn in Niagara that remained open year-round in 1934. It burned in the late 1990s and is now the site of riverfront condominiums.

**The Artifact of the Week column is submitted by the Niagara Historical Society & Museum, exclusive to The Lake Report.**

**The museum is taking a short hiatus from Artifact of the Week, but it will return in a few weeks! Send your thoughts and ideas to The Lake Report by email at [editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com)**

## Local Snaps:

### Swingin' in the sun



Jaxon Becker swings while Colton (in the back) and Michael Becker are pushing him. EUNICE TANG

### Bulb sale helps trees



Lord Mayor Betty Disero held a bulb sale at 477 Butler St. on Thursday. The sale continues Thursday 5 to 7 p.m. and Friday 9 a.m. to noon. Flowers are \$3 a dozen. RICHARD HARLEY

## Ten Thousand Villages rug event an annual affair

Dariya Baiguzhiyeva  
The Lake Report

Growing up in Pakistan, Yousaf Chaman learned of how hand-knotted rugs are made.

"Rugs have a very emotional appeal. It's like a painting," he said. "Rugs are very much this personal connection with the art."

Chaman, who is the director of Bunyaad Rugs, a Pennsylvania-based fair trade company, brought over 100 hand-knotted rugs to Niagara-on-the-Lake last weekend. The fair trade rug event, featuring handmade rugs in different sizes and designs, will run until June 2 at Ten Thousand Villages on Queen Street.

Bunyaad creates rug-knotting jobs by working with over 850 families in about 125 villages across Paki-

stan. Artisans get paid before rugs leave Pakistan and, by knotting rugs, workers are guaranteed a long-term sustainable job. Plus, they are able to send their kids to school and can have good living conditions, said Chaman.

Depending on a type and size, one rug can have from 100 knots to 900 knots per square inch. Artisans are paid for every knot they tie, said Chaman, and the retail price for one rug can range from \$95 to \$10,000.

It can take a family up to two years to finish a single 9 by 12 foot rug, he added.

Inspired by the surrounding landscape and architecture, artisans are also encouraged to be creative and can choose the colour and designs according to their culture and their local environment. Rugs are durable and can be passed down to the future genera-



Yousaf Chaman brought back over 100 hand-knotted rugs. DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

tions, with some rugs lasting for over 100 years, said Chaman recalling how his family has a 150-year-old rug.

Customers are able to buy rugs at the store or online. They're also allowed to take a couple of rugs home to see how they might fit with the interior of their homes, said Teresa Friesen, store manager at Ten Thousand Villages.

"We're hoping to keep this going every year and build that relationship with our customers and the town. And know that every year this will

be a tradition and we'll bring these (rugs) in," said Friesen.

Eugene Ellman, a member of Fair Trade Canada's board of directors, was at the store last Friday to hear a presentation by Chaman on how rugs are made.

"It's very important that consumers understand when they're buying a carpet or a rug, there are differences in a market," Ellman told The Lake Report. "By being a discerning consumer, you can support producers in developing countries that are actually getting a fair price for their work."

## RIDDLE ME THIS:

**I welcome the day with a show of light, I stealthily came here in the night. I bathe the earthy stuff at dawn, But by the noon, alas! I'm gone. What am I?**

**Last Week's Riddle: Spelled forward I'm what you do everyday, spelled backward I'm something you hate. What am I?**

**Answer: Evil**

**Answered first by: Shelley Kobelsky**  
**Also answered correctly by: Lynda Collet, Jacob Willms, Cheryl House, Marian Konik**  
Email answers to [editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com) for a chance to win a prize.

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Featured local story

## Thwaites Farms: Asparagus



### CELEBRATING NIAGARA'S FIRST SPRING HARVEST

Tim Taylor  
The Lake Report

Ontarians love asparagus, the first local crop in the spring. We celebrate its arrival. We revel in its short season. And we mourn its passing.

Luckily, four generations of Thwaites – the fifth generation of eight grandchildren is coming along soon – make certain that people in Ontario and Quebec get their annual fill of the green spears.

Family patriarch Reginald Thwaites was a Barnardo Boy, arriving in Canada in 1909 as one of an estimated 100,000 destitute English orphans sent to start a new life. He bought his first 25-acre tender fruit farm in Jordan in 1925.

Reginald's grandson John and three of his four sons have since nurtured the family farm into almost 500 acres in Niagara-on-the-Lake and Norfolk County, on Lake Erie's north shore.

The focal point of their business is the storage and packaging operation (and now retail, for asparagus) on Firelane 11, just north of Lakeshore Road, west of Old Town.

By the turn of the millennium, Thwaites Farms had become a highly successful fruit farm, focusing on pears, nectarines, peaches, seedless grapes and wine grapes. It was not until 2013 that the opportunity to expand into asparagus surfaced.

Their middle son, Nelson, explains how it happened: Members of their seasonal crew of Jamaican workers, who worked on an asparagus farm in Norfolk County from May through June and then moved on to

Thwaites Farms for the Niagara fruit season, mentioned the asparagus farmer was thinking of retiring.

"I thought, 'I'll kick myself if I don't look into it,'" recalls Nelson. "It just all worked out really well."

Now during spring Nelson and his brothers Graham and Corbin share the day-to-day operations of the asparagus side of the business. Nelson also handles the marketing and sales.

John explains that the addition of asparagus lengthens their productive season by two months, helping them justify more and better equipment and making their key seasonal crew much more efficient.

"We're harvesting almost seven months of the year now," he says. "Starting in May with asparagus and through to grapes right into October."

"Asparagus is the only crop that we grow that we retail. When we are in peaches and pears, it is strictly a wholesale operation."

"Local consumers are asking for local product," he adds. "Sure, the big companies have their long-term contracts, but they are also out here looking for local products."

"Asparagus is the first local crop of the season, so everyone, including the large retailers, get very excited about that. They want to put their 'grown close to home' signs up."

The Thwaites' asparagus field operation employs about 50 workers on 180 acres every season, reaping some 10,000 cases, each filled with 28 pounds of spears. The mechanized sorting and packaging

operation in Niagara-on-the-Lake employs another 20-plus workers. A tractor-trailer travels between the field and the NOTL plant pretty much every day.

Nelson says asparagus is a fairly simple crop to grow. The plants mature from "crowns" (asparagus seedlings) that are grown locally in Norfolk County.

"Unlike peaches and grapes, there is no trellising, there's no pruning and there's very little spraying," Nelson says. "There's harvesting and that's all there is to it."

Father and son chuckle when asked how they get along in the family business — looking at each other to see who wants to answer first.

"When he listens to me, we get along fine," John jests.

"When he's on holidays, there's no problem," quips Nelson.

All teasing aside, having four decision-makers doesn't mean they are not agile in their business. It is clear they respect what each brings to the table.

"The four of us are different personalities, so we don't always agree all the time," says John. "But most of the time the different opinions help us analyze things better."

John notes the younger generation is much better at high-tech things, whether it is GPS on tractors or computers on packaging lines. For example, Nelson, being of the younger generation, hooked up a \$10,000 GPS unit that drives the planting tractor, with no need for a human to steer it.

"There has to be an operator on board, but only to monitor the machine. After



Above, from left, John Thwaites, Lebert Dawson and Nelson Thwaites are ready for customers. Asparagus is the only produce Thwaites Farms retails. All other produce from its 500 acres — peaches, pears, nectarines, eating grapes and wine grapes — are sold wholesale. Every season, Thwaites Farms produces 10,000 cases of asparagus. Each case weighs 28 pounds. The plant requires 20 employees to sort and pack the harvest.

TIM TAYLOR PHOTOS

a while, if he hasn't done anything, the unit stops until he pushes the 'operator alive' switch.

It's John, however, who gets a lot of the credit for the farm's timely decision to get into asparagus.

It was a swift move to replant 70 acres of canning peaches, they recall. In 2008, when it was announced Niagara's canning industry was closing, John moved "that day" to purchase as many seedlings as he could find, in order to move away from canning peaches and completely into all fresh market produce.

John Thwaites and his sons have used almost 90 years of family experience to drive their business into the forefront of Niagara farming.



### Crispy baked asparagus recipe

Enjoy asparagus coated in panko breadcrumbs and Parmesan cheese, and baked until golden brown and crispy.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed
- 1/2 cup flour
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 3/4 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions: Dredge the asparagus in the flour, dip in the egg and then into a mixture of the panko, Parmesan, salt and pepper.

Preheat oven to 425F. Place the asparagus in a single layer on a wire rack on a baking sheet. Bake until golden brown, about 7 to 13 minutes.

Yield: Two servings  
Prep time: 10 minutes  
Cooking time: 10 minutes

### Seasonal workers are key resource



Lebert Dawson looks after the little asparagus retail store that juts out into the parking lot from the main door of the Thwaites Farms plant in NOTL. In many ways, he also keeps watch over the fast-moving packing and storage operation. Dawson, from Saint Catherine parish in Jamaica, just outside Kingston, is the middle child of eight children. He first became a seasonal worker for

the Thwaites in 2009. He comes north in March and returns home at the end of October. "I miss my family," says Lebert. "But my wife and I are accustomed to this. We have a nice time when I go home."

"Lebert's an excellent worker," says Nelson Thwaites. "He has the right personality for retail."

"I think some people come here just to see Lebert," adds John Thwaites.

Asparagus should be available into late June, says John. Bundles sell for \$3.50 and \$2.50 each, depending on their grade. The main differences between Grades 1 and 2? The latter's spears might be a bit crooked.



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