



Whiz kid wins science fair | Page 7



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SUGAR RUSH!

Kids scramble to get share of 8,000 chocolate eggs at annual Kinsmen hunt



Levi Rumsey, age 2, gathers chocolate eggs during the Kinsmen Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, a cool spring day that drew more than 500 children to the field for the annual community tradition. **Read all about the celebration on Page 9.** DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Province plans to cut Niagara region council down to just **elected mayors**

Paige Seburn
The Lake Report

BACK TO NINE:
Province rejects town's plan to eliminate two council positions. **Page 3**

Niagara-on-the-Lake council says it has dodged forced amalgamation — but the fight over regional governance isn't over yet.

Now, Ontario's proposed Better Regional Governance Act could cut down the town's representation at the Niagara Region council table to one person from two.

The legislation would reduce Niagara regional council from 32 members — currently made up of one regional chair, 12 elected mayors from Niagara's mu-

nicipalities and 19 elected representatives — to 13, consisting of the region's 12 mayors and a regional chair.

It would also expand the chair's powers and introduce a yet-to-be-defined weighted voting system among the municipalities.

The province has not publicly set a timeline for when the legislation could pass, but if approved, the changes would apply beginning with the 2026–30 council term.

For NOTL, that would mean losing its regional councillor seat, currently held by Coun. Andrea Kaiser, leaving only the lord mayor at the regional table.

"One of 12 is better than two out of 31," said Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, who backed the proposal in an April 2 news release alongside six other Niagara mayors.

Continued on Page 2



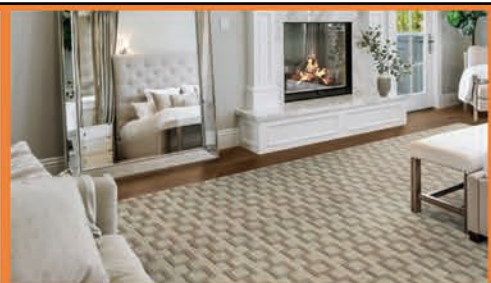
Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser's position won't exist if the province's plan to cut Niagara council down to just 12 elected officials comes to fruition. FILE



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Province hopes to slash Niagara council to 13 members

Continued from Front Page

“We wrote to Premier Ford in February because we believed Niagara needed reform,” Zalepa said in the release. “Today’s announcement reflects that direction, and we welcome it.”

Kaiser said she would likely have run again and supported some form of reform, but the province’s move has cut short a planned public consultation process.

“We were planning, as a regional council, to do a public process,” she said. “That’s obviously been curtailed.”

She said she does not believe the changes are in the best interest of NOTL residents.

“I was surprised to read that the chair will be getting strong powers,” said Kaiser, noting the position remains appointed, not elected.

“A person being appointed — and not elected by the public — having strong powers is concerning to me,” she said.

“Previously, in my mind, it was a very figurehead position that the chair was.”

Kaiser said her concerns



Doug Ford has announced a plan to cut down Niagara regional council to 13 members, with an appointed chair and the area’s 12 mayors and a weighted voting system. FILE

extend beyond the chair’s powers to the proposed use of weighted voting, which could shift influence toward larger municipalities.

“We’ve already been struggling to have our voice heard over the years at the region,” she said.

With fewer members on regional council, she also said “it will be a really big struggle for the Niagara-on-the-Lake (lord) mayor” and smaller communities like NOTL to “find consensus on certain things.”

“With more people at the table, you can kind of find

common thinking,” she added.

Coun. Gary Burroughs, who served as the region’s chair from 2010 to 2014, said the proposed changes could leave the town’s priorities unsupported.

“We have heritage — which we like to focus on — and that’s not true in any of the other municipalities,” he said, noting NOTL is “the only one with a large piece of Greenbelt that needs to be protected.”

“But that won’t be supported anymore,” said Burroughs.

He also raised concerns about how the announcement of Niagara mayors supporting the proposal was handled.

“In our case, (councillors) were never informed that the town had supported the change in regional structure,” he said, arguing council should be kept aware of decisions and news releases affecting the town in advance.

Zalepa dismissed those concerns.

He said the work behind the April 2 release was done through a council-approved

group established to review governance reform. The group consists of Couns. Tim Balasiuk, Sandra O’Connor, Wendy Cheropita and Erwin Wiens.

“I don’t believe councillor Burroughs volunteered for that,” he said.

But Zalepa said for now, there are “really no changes.”

“I think sometimes we read things and maybe we don’t understand them quite — so we react quicker,” he said, noting the current regional government remains in place.

“We have a functional regional council that’s the same constitution that was elected four years ago,” said Zalepa.

“We have a mandate to consider reviewing services.”

He also pointed to what he described as the broader outcome — that earlier concerns about forced amalgamation have been avoided.

Former regional chair Bob Gale’s began a short-lived push for amalgamation in February, which met a wall of opposition from NOTL’s council and regional council. He back-tracked on that push, putting forth the idea

of reducing regional council and introducing weighted voting in early March.

“We’ve managed to stave off forced amalgamation,” Zalepa said, adding that while the premier “made it very clear that he was interested in doing more,” the province ultimately chose to focus on regional governance and work with local mayors and municipalities.

“And I think we’ve successfully shown that we can do that,” he said.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said he is approaching the proposal with an open mind, pointing to the province’s focus on efficiency.

“We’re looking for efficiencies and savings — and that’s the goal,” he said.

Regional councillors in Niagara are paid about \$45,309 annually, but the province has not outlined specific figures of cost savings resulting from the removal of 19 seats.

Wiens said the town will need to ensure its voice remains strong under any new structure.

“We have to make sure that continues. No question.”

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Peter Canaria of Toronto works his smelt net at the mouth of the Niagara River on a cold spring night. Despite the steady effort, the fish weren't cooperating, leaving him with more time to watch the sunset than fill his bucket DAVE VAN DE LAAR

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Province declines NOTL seat-cut proposal, council split on whether move was 'premature'

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's push to cut two council seats ahead of the 2026 election has been rejected by the province, leaving councillors divided over whether the move was rushed or needed.

That proposal would have reduced council to seven members, including the lord mayor, from nine — but the town received a response from the minister of municipal affairs and housing last week confirming the change would not move forward. There are no plans to pursue further reforms before the next election.

Coun. Gary Burroughs said the move came too soon.

"To me, I think it was premature by this council and several others," he said, arguing the town should have waited for direction from the province before acting.

The town's amalgamation working group proposed the idea, which was later summarized in a report presented to council March 24, when council voted to ask the minister to consider the change.

The town submitted its plan to cut council to Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack. In response, the minister called Coun. Erwin Wiens and explained that



The province has declined NOTL's idea to reduce its own number of councillors from eight to six. Coun. Adriana Vizzari says a reduced council means reduced representation for NOTL's unique communities. FILE

the province will not be moving forward with the proposal.

"The province chose not to reduce council," said Wiens, the councillor who brought forward the motion.

However, Wiens said the province "noted that they saw leadership from Niagara-on-the-Lake."

"That helped them in their decision not to amalgamate moving forward," he said. "We needed to be ahead of the game."

Wiens said council's goal was — and is — to "stave off amalgamation and remain autonomous," noting the threat of amalgamation

is still in front of the town, but "not imminently."

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said acting early was necessary.

"It's the municipality being proactive," Zalepa said.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita concurred, calling it a good move for several reasons.

"If it helps to maintain our community in its entirety," she said.

Cheropita said the town has also been exploring what else can be done to find savings and "hopefully not have to be part of the amalgamation process."

Other councillors said representation is too high of a concern.

"Fewer representatives will dilute the voices of Niagara-on-the-Lake's distinct villages and limit residents' access to local decision-makers," said Coun. Adriana Vizzari.

Vizzari and Burroughs said residents must have a voice and a council downsize could weaken that and the diverse perspectives needed for effective governance.

"I care deeply about this," Vizzari said.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor said the town's intention was "to address the premier's concerns" since it does not want to be amalgamated.

She said the move would've only brought minimal financial savings anyway — with council-

lors earning about \$20,000 a year — and left residents with fewer representatives to contact.

"That is a problem, but you have to weigh the potential for full amalgamation against that," she said.

Coun. Andrew Niven said he saw both benefits and drawbacks to the decision.

"We need to be careful with a one-size-fits-all approach," he said.

"If this change helps strengthen our governance model and potentially avoid changes like amalgamation, then I see it as a positive step forward."

"But that being said, I don't believe the reduction will result in dramatic cost savings and do have some concerns about the potential loss of representation," said Niven.

Coun. Maria Mavridis said any change would still require a bylaw, adherence to the Municipal Act and provincial approval before taking effect.

Now, Coun. Tim Balasiuk said the issue comes down to balance.

"A smaller council can improve efficiency and decision making, but it must not come at the expense of strong representation for our residents," he said.

"It is essential that every voice in Niagara-on-the-Lake continues to be heard and reflected at the council table."

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Niagara-on-the-Lake residents hope for better cell service, but they also hope the Niagara Parks Commission and Shared Tower Inc. can find spots for the towers that don't interfere with scenic public parks and trails, noting people come here to "get away" from those sorts of views. Right now the towers are proposed along the Niagara Parkway trail. FILE

Residents **back better cell service**, but don't want towers in scenic public parks

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

No one in the room argued against better cell service.

But as plans for three new towers along the Niagara River Parkway were laid out, residents repeatedly returned to one question: why are they proposed on parkland?

Last Wednesday, staff with the Niagara Parks Commission and Shared Tower Inc. presented ideas for three new telecommunications towers in Niagara-on-the-Lake to a crowd of about two dozen people at a public open house at Queenston Chapel.

The plan includes 35-metre monopoles at the McFarland North parking lot near the Niagara River Parkway and East-West Line intersection and at Brown's Point.

There's also plans for a 30-metre tower at Queenston Heights Park — as part of a broader effort to fix coverage gaps along a 56-kilometre stretch of Niagara Parks land.

Shared Tower Inc. would install and own the infrastructure and Niagara Parks would develop, manage and maintain policies around design and standards, aiming to make it less intrusive.

Cell towers carry wireless signals that let phones, emergency services and other systems communicate.

The new ones are meant to fill known dead zones along the Niagara River Parkway where cellular service is unreliable or drops altogether, particularly between existing towers that are several kilometres apart.

The deadline for public feedback was April 6. If approved, the towers could be in place by 2027.

Installation will 'fundamentally change' the area: NOTLer

Zierler says existing telecommunications infrastructure is not enough.

"Two towers are currently being overloaded," she said.

The need for improved coverage was echoed by resident Mario D'Uva.

"Seven months of the year, we essentially don't have a signal. Especially on busy weekends," D'Uva said. "I did submit an email talking to that point."

But while few questioned the need, many like Don Dinnin questioned where the towers are being placed — and whether alternatives were seriously considered.

"I'm sure farmers would love the income," he said.

"I don't really want to hear from Shared Tower — I would like to hear from the commission, as to how they came about deciding only to look at parkland."

Project representatives said multiple locations were reviewed following a thorough engineering study of the entire 56-kilometre corridor and towers are going on "pre-disturbed land" to avoid disturbing natural areas.

They said that while they could consider adjustments to placement, options are limited by factors such as archeological requirements, pipeline easements and how signals travel between towers across the area.

Dinnin acknowledged that a few years invested is significant, but he said it's minor compared to the decades the tower would stand and how it will "fundamentally change the nature" of the sites.

"People come here to get away from this," said Dinnin.

Brown's Point parking lot a concern

One of those potential changes has nearby resident Ryan Tregunno worried about how the towers could affect the heavily used Brown's Point parking lot.

"As a neighbor across the road, I can expect that all those cars will be parked in the head of my driveway, because it happens now — and you have parking," he said.

"Now, you're taking a quarter of the parking."

Commission chief operating officer Marcelo Grusso said staff reviewed alternative locations, including the maintenance yard, but it did not work due to connectivity requirements between infrastructure.

"I agree that this was the most challenging site," said Grusso of the Brown's Point location.

He told Tregunno it was good he brought up something the commission had not heard before: a concern about the parking area.

"We weren't as concerned about losing those spots, at that time, when we were looking at this."

"But we're willing to look at making a move that makes sense within the range that it will still work," Grusso said, reminding residents to submit their concerns.

"We're just saying this was the site that would allow us to fix the problem," he added.

Company consulting three major carriers, withholds names

Resident Joe Dias questioned whether the plan would hold up long-term.

"Are we going to be looking at another tower in two more years?" he asked.

Further towers are not expected, Grusso said,

since "these are the number of towers we ended up with that would correct all gaps from Fort Erie to Niagara-on-the-Lake."

Dias also questioned how the project could evolve over time — if additional equipment is added to towers, would residents be consulted again?

Representatives said the consultation applies to the tower itself and that equipment added later does not go through public consultation and is instead regulated federally. So the current consultation process is the main opportunity for public input, unless the project must restart.

"The tower has to be built by the three-year anniversary," said Zierler. "Can't just start construction then, it has to be built."

"If that lapses, then the public consultation would be restarted," she said.

Questions during the meeting also focused on process, including whether the town had been involved.

Zierler said the municipality was given materials and invited to comment as part of the process, but emphasized that telecommunications towers are federally regulated and do not fall under municipal or provincial planning rules.

She said Shared Tower is working with "all three" major carriers, but said she could not share names of "due to confidentiality."

The commission's chief executive officer David Adames thanked residents for coming out and said while it's encouraging there is agreement on the need to solve connectivity issues, concerns about aesthetics and location remain central.

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Photo courtesy of the NOTL Museum.

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Among the winners of the NOTL Minor Hockey Association's annual awards were Craig Slack (volunteer of the year), Nathan Reid (player dedication award), Thomas Munera (Virgil Business Association scholarship), Nathan Muir (goalie award) and Rich Andres (coach of the year). As well, Corson Dick received the Jamie Froese Memorial Award. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Hockey players and volunteers honoured

Staff The Lake Report

With another successful season in the books, the NOTL Minor Hockey Association honoured some of its coaches, players and volunteers last week.

The organization's annual Memorial Awards were handed out in a ceremony at Centennial Arena in Virgil and followed by a dinner banquet.

Craig Slack, who helps coach multiple teams, was presented with the Volunteer

of the Year Award by association president Pete Flynn.

The Kocsis/Glauser Memorial Award for coach of the year went to U15 rep team coach Rich Andres, whose team made it all the way to the provincial semifinals.

Nathan Muir received the

Mike Moore Goalie Award and Nathan Reid was honoured with the Joel Murray Player Dedication Award.

Corson Dick earned the Jamie Froese Memorial Award while Thomas Munera took home the Virgil Business Association Scholarship Award.

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Virgil student wins big at Niagara science fair for **microplastics research**

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

They might be tiny, but their negative effects on the environment are anything but.

Microplastics have become a hot topic in the realm of ecology and health, with more studies published every year detailing the prevalence of the synthetic solid particles in our food, water and air.

For Sophie Clattenburg, a Grade 8 student from Virgil with a passion for chemistry, it's a topic of great interest to her.

"It's so invisible to you, you don't realize what problems they're causing, despite their small size. They're ubiquitous," she said.

"People are just learning about them now, but before it wasn't very known."

She put her passion into a project on the topic — and won big.

Clattenburg won Best in Fair at the Niagara Regional Science and Engineering Fair, held last week, for her research project on natural alternatives to the chemicals used to remove microplastics from the drinking water in the Niagara region.

In her project, she covers how the Niagara Region uses aluminum sulfate, a synthetic coagulant, to



Sophie Clattenburg won Best in Fair at the Niagara Regional Science and Engineering Fair, held last week, for her research project on natural alternatives to the chemicals used to remove microplastics from the drinking water in the Niagara region. SUPPLIED

remove microplastics when treating drinking water.

The problem, she said, is that synthetic coagulants can generate non-degradable sludge, which can contain toxic chemicals, requiring cleanup.

Instead, she said, there is growing research showing that natural materials, called bio-coagulants, can be used to remove microplastics from the water.

The project involved extensive research into the topic, including conversations with a representative from the Niagara Region's drinking water treatment team, and work in a laboratory.

In the lab, she created her own microplastics using microspheres made of polyethylene terephthalate and polystyrene. She "weathered" the micro-

plastics through grinding, oxidation, abrasion and UV exposure.

Then, she tested the removal of these microplastics from water using three types of bio-coagulants: chlorella vulgaris (a micro algae), ulva lactuca (a macro algae) and psyllium (a soluble fiber supplement).

"It was really eye-opening," she said of the process. "I thought it was amazing to be able to work in a lab and it made me feel like a real scientist."

Clattenburg wrote up the findings of her research and lab work and presented it at the science fair on April 1 in St. Catharines. She received extensive feedback from the judges of the competition, who called the project's topic "cutting-edge."

As for what's next for the 13-year-old, she's heading to the Canada-Wide Science Fair in Edmonton in late May. She'll be presenting the same project there.

"I'm really passionate about the topic of microplastics, so I'd definitely like to keep researching that," she said of her future. "The more I keep learning about science, the more passionate I'll get, and I'll see where that takes me."

zahraa@niagaranow.com

The beauty of Italy, on display at **new art gallery**

Staff
The Lake Report

If you've never had the opportunity to explore the expansive vineyards of Tuscany, take in the idyllic landscape of Sicily or relax on the shimmering coast of Puglia, this new art exhibition in the heart of Old Town will show you all these views and more.

"From Italy With Love" celebrated its opening at Il Gelato di Carlotta's gallery space on Saturday. The collection showcases the creations of artists who took part in artist and instructor Sandra Iafrate's painting workshops throughout Italy.

The exhibition, running



The "From Italy With Love" art exhibit is running until June 30 at Il Gelato di Carlotta on Queen Street. SUPPLIED

from now until June 30, is described as "an invitation to experience the colour, warmth and romance of Italy," by Iafrate in a media release.

The local artist travels

to the country every year to teach immersive painting workshops. Her workshop participants paint on location in regions such as Sicily, Umbria, Tuscany and Puglia.

The exhibition includes a variety of media, including oil, acrylic and mixed-media painting, showcasing a range of styles and artistic voices from representational to abstract work.

"Painting on location and immersing ourselves in daily life in Italy creates a deeply inspiring experience, and this show celebrates that shared artistic exploration," said Iafrate.

Alongside the main exhibition, select overflow works will also be presented at Gate

Street Studio, Iafrate's NOTL studio and creative space.

Il Gelato di Carlotta is located at 59 Queen St.



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Golden egg found **in record time** after years of searching

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Anessa Raso had 500 reasons to get up early Saturday morning — a decision that ended up paying off.

She woke up at 3 a.m. to get ready to search for realtor Stefan Regier's golden egg — which he hides every year in April at a park around town.

Like something out of Willy Wonka, whoever finds the golden egg receives a \$500 cash prize.

Raso, who is turning 20, has searched for the elusive egg since she was a young teenager and estimates she has taken part for about six or seven years.

"I did it with my cousins, and then I've done it by myself," she said. "Mostly just so I can get the prize myself."

She didn't waste much time Saturday morning, leaving her house at 4 a.m. and heading out with only her phone flashlight to guide her through the dark.



Anessa Raso was the lucky winner of realtor Stefan Regier's annual golden egg hunt. She found the egg at William Nassau Park, breaking a record for earliest find. RICHARD HARLEY

She said she even tried tracking Regier early on, spotting what she believed was his car heading toward the waterfront.

"I was trying my best to, but I couldn't find him," she said.

She checked about six

parks before arriving at the small parkette at the corner of William and Nassau streets just before 6 a.m.

"I was like, 'Should I check this park? Does it really count?'" she said. "And then something told me to come out and look. And I did."

She ended up finding the egg at about 6 a.m. — a record time, according to Regier.

At first, she wasn't convinced it was real.

"I honestly didn't think it was real at first," she said.

"And then I looked at the

note and I checked the number ... and then it was just like a huge sigh of relief."

Despite the excitement, Raso didn't immediately call Regier. Instead, she took a moment to herself.

"I was watching the sunrise because I just wanted to take a moment and just chill," she said.

She called him later that morning, around 7:45 a.m.

But there was something different this year that may have worked to her advantage.

Regier, known for his "money for nothing and tricks for free" approach to the egg hunt, had released a list of parks where the egg might be on his Facebook and Instagram.

The egg, however, wasn't at any of those parks. Regier had planned to later reveal a clue suggesting "something is missing," prompting searchers to look elsewhere.

Raso said she never saw the post.

"I don't see that stuff," she said.

Over the years, she's developed a strategy of her own: reviewing Regier's past posts on Facebook to see which parks he's already used, making a list, and prioritizing parks that haven't been used in a while, since he she thinks he doesn't often repeat locations.

"I made a list and checked the ones that he hasn't done first," she said.

Her persistence finally paid off.

"I've been looking for so long," she said. "I was so happy. I had a big smile on my face the whole time."

The win marks the first time she has ever found the golden egg.

As for what she plans to do with the \$500, she is still deciding.

"I have no clue," she said. "I was going to save it for a car ... I've been wanting a Jeep. Or maybe a trip in the summer with my friends."

Either way, after years of searching, the early mornings have finally paid off.

editor@niagaranow.com



StopGap Ramps Available for Eligible Businesses

The Town is once again accepting applications for its StopGap Ramp Program to help improve storefront accessibility and reduce single-step barriers.



Eligible businesses are invited to apply by April 30, 2026. A limited number of lightweight, portable ramps are available free of charge to businesses on a first-come, first-served basis.

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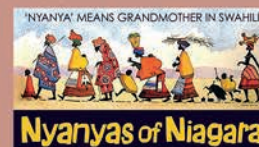
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Kinsmen celebrate egg-cellent turnout at annual Easter hunt

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

It took just minutes for 8,000 chocolate eggs to vanish — scooped up by a sea of excited children who fanned out across the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre in a spring tradition nearly 50 years in the making.

The NOTL Kinsmen Club's annual Easter egg hunt drew hundreds of participants for its free outdoor egg hunt.

Inside, the Niagara Nursery School ran its Bunny Trail fundraiser for a local daycare with 300 children currently on its wait list and needing the community's support now more than ever.

Ken Slingerland, director of the NOTL Kinsmen Club and a past president, described the egg hunt as the club's flagship event for the last 49 years. He said attendance surpassed the typical 500-person mark by a wide margin.



Kids ages four to six burst forward at the starting call, racing across the field to scoop up chocolate eggs during the annual NOTL Kinsmen Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday. Many buckets were full by the end of it. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Eliza McAllister, a Niagara-on-the-Lake parent who attended this year with her son, five-year-old Liam, noticed the same.

"It feels bigger this year," she said. "Even with the cold, everyone stayed. I think that says a lot about how important it is to people."

Inside, the Bunny Trail fundraiser ran from 9 to

11:30 a.m., with admission at \$5 per child.

Laura Townsend, president of the nursery school board, oversaw a bake sale organized by parent volunteers, colouring stations hosted by the Fine Estates Team, hot chocolate from the recently opened Foodland, and a touch-a-truck area featuring fire services, Niagara Regional Police,

paramedic units, tractors and a Performance Mercedes display. Performances from the NOTL Ukesters and a mahic show rounded out the morning.

The school serves more than 75 families yet has over 300 children on its wait list, a number that points to a childcare gap the fundraiser attempts to close.

"We now have third-gen-

eration families, with children and even grandchildren coming through the nursery school," Townsend said.

The Bunny Trail's \$15,000 goal was to help fund basic necessities for the nursery to continue serving the community for the foreseeable future.

"All of the proceeds raised today go towards

equipment for our classrooms, technology that teachers need," said Townsend.

Last year, funds covered new laptops for staff. This year, organizers are working toward a new colour printer and walkie-talkies for classroom communication. Durable outdoor play equipment, built to withstand both winter cold and summer heat, is a longer-term priority.

The Kinsmen direct any donations they collect at the event toward cystic fibrosis research, their national charitable cause. The hunt began in Simcoe Park nearly five decades ago and has been held at the community centre for roughly 15 years.

"It's just nice to have something that feels like the whole town is here together," said McAllister.

The Kinsmen Club's next major event is its annual car show, scheduled for Aug. 9 at the Kinsmen Scout Hall.

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Veteran documentarian turns to memoir after decades behind the camera

Tim Taylor
The Lake Report

Shelley Saywell has a 48-hour rule.

Like most of us with busy minds, she needs a way to be confident that the ideas she pursues seriously are worthy of her undivided attention.

Saywell, 70, moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake during the pandemic, in part, to take care of her aging parents. She is considered one of Canada's foremost documentary filmmakers and author of a recently published bestselling memoir.

"I have something called the 48-hour rule," says Saywell. "I get a million ideas in 24 hours, and I think they are all genius. By 48 hours, I've discarded 99.9 per cent of them."

"For me, it's a semi-joke — but not entirely. If

something makes me mad enough for long enough, I think, I've got to make that film, as long as its more than 48 hours."

Her 48-hour rule has propelled her 30-plus-year career.

She has recently donated her film legacy to the University of Toronto's media commons archives, for use by students in all faculties.

"I wanted the work to reach any student who might be doing their thesis on conflict resolution or violence against women, whatever."

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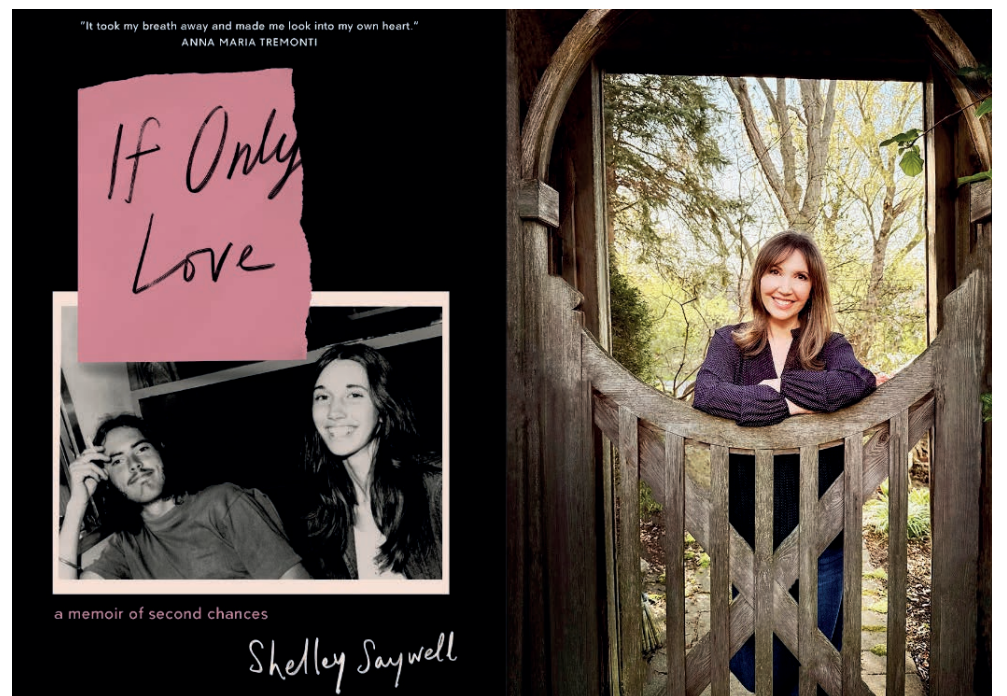
Her body of work encompasses some 20 documentaries on social justice and conflict. Her films have been shown in more

than 30 countries and collected numerous nominations and awards including Canadian Screen Awards, Hot Docs' Best Canadian Feature Documentary, an Emmy, Geminis and Genies. Her last film was released in 2016.

Saywell attributes her social consciousness to her formative years in her family home, largely in Toronto, with school-age stints in Hong Kong and Japan.

"I was raised in an open-minded encouraging atmosphere", says Saywell. "My parents fostered debate at the kitchen table. Every night, we were encouraged to have an opinion and then we were challenged on that opinion."

Saywell's father and mother were high-school sweethearts and teenage parents. Her father perse-



Canadian film maker and author Shelley Saywell's memoir "If Only Love, A memoir of Second Chances" is a story about love, personal grief and hope. SUPPLIED

vered achieving a degree in Chinese political history.

"My mother had a couple more babies and ended up becoming a social worker. They were very self-made."

At age 12, Saywell was enrolled in a British school in Hong Kong while her father completed a sabbatical year.

"I joined the debating society and already had, at that age, a social conscience. I knew in my heart that the Vietnam War was wrong. We were surrounded by people who impressed me or inspired me. Activists and journalists."

By the time she was back in Canada, Saywell was unsure of her future. With a bachelor of arts in hand, she enrolled in the York University Theatre School.

That didn't work. She realized that while her fellow students were absorbing their creative studies, she was in the cafeteria with a newspaper wanting to talk about "whatever the hell was going on in the world."

She asked herself: "How do I marry the part of me that loves the arts and the part of me that's always driven by the news?"

What did work was a conversation with a guidance counsellor at the University of Toronto.

"She was wonderful. She told me I should be a storyteller. And by the way, there's a bulletin board over there and there's a posting for a film company job."

She applied. "It was such luck andismet. What an opportunity. I never went back to school." Saywell describes her

career-long storytelling focus as social issues.

"Well, social issues slash justice. The films are primarily about the effects of conflict on women and children. I've also done two films on homelessness."

"And one on football, because everyone does one of those," she chuckles.

After a long pause to think about it, she admits the highlight of her career was probably Kim's Story.

"It was about the napalm girl, the famous, famous image of Kim Fook that appeared everywhere. It put me on the map. It sold everywhere. I loved Kim and I loved that film."

Saywell's recently published memoir is not her first foray into writing. But "If Only Love, A Memoir of Second Chances," is certainly the most personal.

It is a story about profound love, love resurrected and very personal grief. And hope.

"I was grieving for Daniel."

Daniel was Saywell's high school sweetheart, found again after 30 years distanced, and, after a complicated rediscovery, husband. Daniel died of cancer soon after they reunited.

"I was very lost. I stared at the wall for months. I was literally incapacitated. I had a hard time leaving my house," she says. "I wasn't planning to write a book. I just had to get through this time in my life."

Saywell saw an advertisement for a memoir-writing course at University of Toronto. The idea survived her 48-hour rule.

"I still wasn't yet think-

ing of writing a book, but it got me out of the house and into learning with 14 other would-be writers. It was my safe place."

Saywell describes the writing process as an escape from the present.

"I was writing about the past, I was happy and happiness is in short supply when you are grieving. I was in a place where Daniel was still alive."

In a few short weeks, "If Only Love" has become a national best-seller. It is published by Random House Canada.

Saywell says she has at least one more book in her.

"I feel like at this point in my life I've been given the gift of choice. And if I'm going to do something new, I'd like it to be without expectations."

"I think it will be a novel. I've got a couple of vague notions. Perhaps historic."

In the meantime, she cares for her ageing parents in old town.

She admits that finding Niagara-on-the-Lake was pure serendipity.

"It was COVID. A good friend who lives here, invited me down, into her bubble. We were out walking and saw a house for sale."

It passed the 48-hour rule.

"I absolutely love it here. I've been a city girl all my life. But I love going to the Legion for fish and chips. And driving along the Parkway," she says.

"There are so many interesting people here, creative people. In an environment where we can all hang out together. I wouldn't change it for the world."

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Contributed by Patty Garriock

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 - Dalai Lama

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Large crowd at tiny church

Nearly 50 people gathered for an Easter sunrise service at Wayside Chapel along the Niagara River Parkway. The outdoor service was organized by Reverend Tim Raakman and Rick Meloen, bringing the community together to celebrate Easter morning. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

How democracy slips away



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
 Columnist

All day. All night. A shipping-container-sized blue metal box throbs in the corner of the Parliament Oak hotel site. It hugs the back fence, a few metres from houses across the street.

"This is driving me crazy," says a neighbour (who asks to be anon). "I think these are pumps, draining that giant hole. But they never stop."

He even went and measured the sound, sending me the results. They looked brutal.

So why not complain to the town, I asked?

He shrugged. "Because they don't care."

Hmm. Wrong answer. But one I hear all the time. Like from the Old Town people who are still waiting for local politicians to release a report on where the Shaw dump trucks they'll have to live with for the next three years will go. Or the Virgil pickleball outcasts after officials closed the courts this year — without a word.

The point is that the most important, immediate, in-your-face, consequential and meaningful daily level of government is the one closest to you. The men and women with the power to destroy your property value, disrupt your business, impact your peace or just tick you off.

This brings us to the issue of governance. Lately everybody's had their knickers in a knot because the province wants fewer politicians so big decisions go faster. If it comes to pass, NOTL loses. In fact, our own wee council is helping ensure that's the case.

Here's the story.

The Doug Ford government wanted to swallow us into the region through amalgamation, and the premier's guy, chair Bob Gale, was supposed to do that. But he got called out as owning a book Adolf Hitler wrote and signed.

Auf Wiedersehen, Bob.

Now, says Queen's Park, the plan is to get rid of elected regional councillors (including ours) and have Niagara managed by local mayors plus a more powerful non-elected chair.

Mayors wouldn't be equal, however. Votes would be weighted. So, St. Catharines' guy would have eight more times influence than ours. The Falls mayor's vote would count for six of NOTL's.

And faced with this threat to democratic throttling, what did our council do?

It chose to gut itself. Become 25 per cent smaller. Dump two of the eight seats at the table — a move the province has since rejected.

Deputy lord mayor Erwin Wiens argued they had no choice.

"My end goal is to keep the town as its own municipality," he tells me. "We needed to show the premier that we were able to make hard decisions ... After careful consideration and dialogue, I put forward the motion to reduce the size of



NOTLers angry about development will soon matter less. The town's elected officials are being reduced and power shifted to an unelected regional boss. Our lord mayor says he supports it. FILE

council. I know that the motion helped Minister (Rob) Flack make his decision not to amalgamate the region at this time."

But there's tension here. Some folks don't understand how we keep democracy alive by making it harder for citizens to be heard or by giving "super" powers to an appointed regional czar with the ability to override bylaws, zoning or heritage restrictions.

Erasing our elected regional rep "does nothing to improve the operations of municipal government — it just reduces the access of our residents to our local government," veteran Coun. Gary Burroughs says.

Nor was the councillor-chopping about reducing overhead. "The cost savings is \$40,000, and with a multi-million dollar town budget, it makes no sense — it is strictly about access."

Burroughs sees more anti-democratic sentiment swirling, like with the town's recent gag order preventing officials from speaking with nasty opinion writers (gulp) and refusing to rent out the community centre for an all-

candidates meeting.

"Recently, we were told that the residents are very angry and we need to restrict too much access," he adds. "My question to staff at the time was ... why do you think the residents are angry? Maybe an answer to that question would go a long way to resolving our current state. Our residents are too intelligent and too caring to let our town be destroyed."

Meanwhile, Coun. Andrew Niven is also unconvinced we're on the right path.

"Niagara-on-the-Lake is unique, with over two million annual visitors, a strong agricultural economy, and a distinct heritage and tourism focus, amongst other strong drivers. Because of that, I believe we need to be cautious about applying a one-size-fits-all approach and ensure any changes reflect the specific needs of our community."

Well, here we are. Lord Mayor Zalepa formally endorsed the ill-fated move to chop council, dump our elected rep to the region, accept an unelected super-chair and submit to a voting scheme that would mute our voice. Your voice.

"This would start the demise of all small communities, especially ours," says Burroughs. "The only use for our town will be a tourist destination for the greater good? He never received approval from council for such an important issue. Maybe he doesn't need it anymore!"

This may not end well. Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister.

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NOTL in 'parking business' sad reflection of times

Dear editor:
Now don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you got 'til it's gone
They paved paradise and put up a parking lot

The lyrics of Joni Mitchell's iconic "Big Yellow Taxi" have been reverberating through my mind this week — not only because of the brilliant performance at the recent Juno Awards, but because of the unfortunate decision of our NOTL council to favour the construction of a parking lot at the iconic 176 Wellington St. site.



Indeed, the vision so thoughtfully researched and presented by the James A. Burton & Family Founda-

tion, offers a modern-day version of paradise for a small town that values community vitality, arts and culture, education, and young people. The proposed performance space, alone, offers a delightful vision for our community.

Set against that vision, the statement by one of our councillors, that "NOTL is ... a town in the parking business" is a sad reflection on our times. I have no doubt that our hard-working councillors are concerned about raising revenues. But really — a parking lot at a historic gateway site, where

caring and community have always been at the heart?

I urge our no-doubt well-meaning town council to take another look at the generous provisions of the Burton Foundation proposal, and put their collective energy behind a landmark idea that could be a source of pride for this community, for generations to come.

Why, we might even be able to persuade Joni Mitchell to attend the ribbon-cutting of NOTL's visionary new community-and-arts hub.

Robin Cardozo
NOTL

Why not let tourists use Fort George's parking lot?

Dear editor:
My head is spinning after attempting to follow the rapid gyrations, twists, turns, backflips and pirouettes on the suddenly urgent issue of tourist parking and amusement.

It seems as if in one or two meetings, our elected representatives along with the non-elected councillor have decreed we are suddenly in such an overwhelming parking pickle that the residents who wanted 176 Wellington preserved for community space — the same residents who pay their salaries — should be ignored, because the people who drop by to lick and litter need to park

more conveniently so they can get out of town more quickly after their ice cream and a search for a public washroom (or after creating one).

Yesterday, in order to calm myself, I walked around the Commons. When I emerged in the Fort George parking lot, there were four cars parked. I have never seen it full except for special events. The free community shuttle to the Courthouse was waiting. I noticed washrooms both at the fort and the shuttle stop.

Though I am not paid by the tax-payers to confront these urgent issues, I wondered if the Fort George parking lot could be better

utilized to deal with the twin big dilemmas of where tourists could park and pee.

I decided to help the decision makers by pacing the distance between the existing under-utilized parking lot and the proposed multi-million dollar parking garage — 200 steps. I will not submit my normal consultant's fee as it was a pro bono publico initiative.

After passing 176 Wellington — and wondering which developer it had been promised to — I continued along to Queen Street where I was struck by how lovely it is again now that those hideous outdoor patios have been removed. Our historic streetscape has

been restored. The gardens can flourish rather than be covered and trampled.

But wait, not so fast. Patios need to come back because "they're popular." They are so important that council will sacrifice parking spaces for them.

In view of this urgent parking dilemma, I find that a bit strange. And popular with whom? I've lived in the Old Town for 25 years and know no one who enjoys sitting curbside inhaling vehicle emissions in July.

But then, I am just a tax-paying resident, not someone paid to make these important decisions.

Rick Monette
NOTL

Misquotes and half-truths in Turner's take on Shaw

Dear editor:
So, Garth Turner has been wondering why the list of people actively avoiding him has been lengthening lately (The Lake Report, "The little troop that became Shaw Inc." March 26). Let us see if I can enlighten him.

To call the executive director of the Shaw Festival "the dude in charge" is extremely rude, and the fact that the editor or publisher allowed this to be printed says much about the paper itself.

The paper is, in my opinion, responsible for the very poor state of mental health of people living in town. Everyone is worried, but no

one seems to be listening to them — both town and council are reacting like rabbits in the headlights.

Turner's column is full of misquotes, half-truths and opinionated rubbish. At least, there are some like the Irish Design shop, right next door to Royal George, who seem to welcome what is going on.

I fully understand that the people living in close proximity to the Royal George, and Garth Turner is one of them, may be affected by the construction. But the Shaw Festival has done its best to mitigate the effects of what is clearly a long and lengthy construction.

There are many other construction projects currently proceeding that seem to have escaped Garth Turner's attention. Maybe this is because he is living too far away from them.

Now Turner wants to question the whole basis of the non-profit sector. He says "After all, were it not for government cheques and tax-deductible donations, the Shaw would have lost \$20 million dollars last year on its theatre operations."

What he may have meant to say is that the Shaw would have closed in the late '60s if it was not for government cheques and tax-deductible donations.

Do yourself a favour: if you do not understand the not-for-profit sector, then read Carolyn Bodnar-Evans' letter from April 2 ("Don't mischaracterize Shaw Festival"). It is spot on.

So, can I appeal to the list of people actively avoiding Garth Turner? Please talk to him soon and bring a smile to his face.

In the meantime, we can wait until late 2028 before a beautifully designed, state-of-the-art theatre opens on Queen Street. I hope the Irish Design shop will be justly rewarded for its patience and support.

Peter Barwell
NOTL



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: OUR GREEN PLANET

It's thought that this tree also called a maidenhair tree was first cultivated in China 1,000 years ago.

Last issue category: 7-LETTER WORDS

Clue: Named for its inventor, it's a brand of hot tub with underwater jets.

Answer: What is a jacuzzi?

Answered first by: Sue Rautenberg

Also answered correctly (in order) by:

Susan Hamilton, Emma Balsas, Becky Creager, Lynda Collet, Jane Andersen, Jeff Lake, Catherine Clarke, Claudia Grimwood, Jim Dandy, Martin Vagners, Nancy Rocca, Bob Wheatley, Susan Dewar, KC King, Marla Percy, Sylvia Wiens, Wade Durling, Sheila Meloche, Howard Jones, Donna Pearce, Margie Enns, Bob Stevens, Tuija Johansson, Becky Creager, Alicia Southall Margaret Garaughty

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

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

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Premier Ford's tidal wave of **unwise new legislation**



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

Not a day goes by in my world without someone raising the topic of Trump's ongoing chaos both on the international stage and within the country he claims to be leading into a bright new tomorrow.

Certainly anyone who has been forced to the gas pumps recently has felt the bite of his ill-advised strategy — and I use the word "strategy" very loosely — in launching the "war" on Iran.

Sadly, according to a CNN poll aired on April 6, more than 80 per cent of his MAGA base believe he has a considered plan for this overture.

One recalls the old saying, "There are none more blind than those who will not see" in this situation.

Closer to home, Doug Ford's government is taking a page out of Trump's play-

book to introduce equally ill-advised legislation with dire future impacts on provincial and local levels. They too are counting on your willful blindness.

Remember, this is the premier who, when questioned about his push for amalgamation despite multiple readily available studies that show it will result in higher costs and greater inefficiencies, stated that he had "never seen that."

Apparently, like Trump, the premier of Ontario simply believes what he wants to believe — facts be damned.

We have omnibus Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, undergoing second reading in the legislature; a bill the government claims will "reduce barriers to homebuilding and increase economic efficiency by creating a simplified and standardized format for official plans and clarifying and streamlining site plan rules."

Amongst other things, should this bill be passed into law, municipal official plans will no longer be required to address adaption strategies to climate change or mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.

It will repeal sections of the Municipal Act that



Doug Ford seems to be straying further and further from democracy. Would we sit by and accept it if the prime minister decided he will appoint all premiers?

provide for the use of green development standards, effectively gutting more than a decade of moving towards sustainability in new developments and will translate into higher energy consumption (and higher operating costs for property owners) over the lifespan of new houses.

In a LinkedIn commentary, Chris Ballard, who served as Ontario's Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister of Housing in the former Liberal government, states that Bill 98 "ignores the downstream costs taxpayers will bear in flood damage, heat emergencies, and aging infrastructure."

He observes that "this bill continues the govern-

ment's practice of shutting out public scrutiny and legal accountability."

Adding that, "bundling housing, transit, water, green building standards, and climate planning into a single omnibus bill prevents meaningful public debate on each issue. The government is using a housing headline to slip through environmental rollbacks that would never pass on their own merits."

But this certainly isn't the first time that the Ford government has masqueraded handouts to developers behind fanciful words and titles. Think of the More Homes Built Faster Act for example. Indeed, bills 109, 185, 3, 44 and 17 are all titled with promises to build

more homes faster.

And, while the development community enjoys the benefits, none of these pieces of legislation have translated into new housing starts.

Which brings us to Ford's penchant for secrecy and avoidance of accountability.

Hidden away in the 2026 budget, his government is proposing significant, retroactive changes to Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to exempt the premier, cabinet ministers, parliamentary assistants and their staff from public records disclosure.

In a March 13 statement on the proposed changes written by Patricia Kosseim, the information and privacy commissioner, we read, "This amendment is about hiding government-related business to evade public accountability."

She observes that, "If records about government business can be shielded from scrutiny simply because they sit in a minister's office, on a staffer's device, or within a political account, public accountability is eviscerated."

Warning the changes could result in citizens experiencing "excessive government intrusion into their private lives."

One has to wonder whether the ongoing investigation into the Greenbelt scandal and the current action to access Doug Ford's cellphone records by Global Media may not be two of the principal causes for this overture — particularly given the fact the changes will be retroactive.

Finally, it seems that Premier Ford has achieved amalgamation in all but name. Regional council will be reduced to the 12 mayors with a handpicked (by the premier) appointed chair with "strong 'mayor' powers."

By dint of weighted voting, effective control of council has devolved upon the three big-city mayors and control of the budget will sit directly with the new chair ... centralized control by Queen's Park.

Lower costs? Not on your life. Ford is running the biggest budget and largest debt in Ontario's history.

Just consider the cost of his office staff which has skyrocketed since he took office, with 50 people on the 2025 Sunshine List at a cost of \$8.1 million dollars.

But he'll be in charge.

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

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Royal Oak's success is all about **where it lives**

The following letter was sent to Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and members of town council. A copy was forwarded to *The Lake Report* for publication.

Dear councillors of Niagara-on-the-Lake:

I am writing as a teacher at Royal Oak Community School. While I am not a resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake, I am deeply invested in the wellbeing of the children and families who call this town home.

I respectfully ask that you remain open to allowing Royal Oak to continue operating at the 176 Wellington site, ideally as part of the Burton Foundation's proposed 176 Wellington project.

Royal Oak was established by local families in response to the closure of Parliament Oak in 2015, and it has since grown into an essential part of the community. It provides not only a local schooling option, but also a personalized approach to education



Krista Hill says the Town of NOTL should consider proposals that allow Royal Oak to continue operating.

that supports students with diverse learning needs.

More than that, it is a place where children feel safe, supported and inspired — a place where they discover who they are and what they are capable of.

The location at 176 Wellington is central to this experience. It allows students to engage directly with the rich history and culture of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Within walking distance of significant landmarks, natural spaces and cultural institutions, our students don't just learn about their community — they

experience it. Relocating the school would fundamentally limit these authentic, place-based learning opportunities.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is a growing and dynamic community, with more families choosing to call it home. Ensuring that children have access to meaningful, local education is vital to sustaining that growth.

It is a privilege to teach here, and to be part of a community that values connection, history, and opportunity. Losing Royal Oak from this location would be a significant loss — not

only for the school, but for the broader community it serves.

I recognize that council must weigh many competing priorities, and I respect the complexity of your role.

My request is not that decisions be made solely with Royal Oak in mind, but that all viable options for the 176 Wellington site be given fair and thorough consideration.

Issuing a request for proposal would allow for a full exploration of possibilities and ensure that decisions are made with a clear understanding of the potential community impact.

I strongly believe that council has a responsibility to consider proposals that preserve and support organizations like Royal Oak — organizations that contribute meaningfully to the social, educational, and cultural fabric of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Krista Hill
St. Catharines

Old hospital parking lot would be **empty** outside tourist season

Dear editor:

In *The Lake Report*, April 2, page 3 ("Hundreds attend community meeting on fate of old hospital, no council members show up") this does highlight our councillors' total lack of interest to seek an alternative to the construction of an above grade "parking facility."

Surely, anything that has the potential to increase the burden of more cars rolling through downtown will have a negative impact.

Why not construct a parking facility away from downtown ie. an on-grade car park with a similar number of paid parking spaces, supported by a shuttle bus every 15 minutes into town?

This could run April through end of October as that seems to be the crush

time.

To actually build a parking facility on the old hospital site, which would only be necessary for those time frames, is ridiculous, as it would sit practically empty for the remaining months.

I think it's time that city hall considers the residents who actually live here and pay taxes, to have something that would benefit them for a change.

Go back to the drawing board and give more recognition to what the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake deem as more appropriate.

A community hub, as noted by the J.A. Burton Family Foundation, is just the type of facility that this town needs.

Kenneth O'Malley
NOTL

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NOTL needs wide range of seniors housing options



Michael Ennamorato
Special to The Lake Report

Over the past two years, Niagara-on-the-Lake's seniors housing advisory committee has been raising the profile of seniors housing issues and establishing lines of communication among both public and private sector parties that can effect positive change.

This work has ranged from high-profile advocacy for seniors housing at the NOTL old hospital site, to low-key facilitation of potential partnerships for other opportunities.

The committee's seniors housing study has provided a sound foundation for these endeavours.

Executed to rigorous standards, it provides a sizeable database that can be relied upon to accurately represent the entire NOTL senior population's characteristics, attitudes, behav-

iors and needs regarding current and future housing.

As the housing topic gains prominence in public discourse, there is a natural tendency to begin treating the concept of "seniors housing" as a generic shorthand for a complex set of issues.

This tends to streamline thinking and can eventually lead to oversimplification of the challenges and a paring down of possible solutions through a "one size fits all" mentality. The erroneous notion that seniors constitute a single, largely homogeneous, group with one set of prevailing needs can become ingrained within such a mindset.

In light of this, it is useful to revisit the housing study's rich dataset to underscore two key themes: consensus among seniors on their core requirement and, the diversity of population sub-segments, attitudes, aspirations and needs uncovered among NOTL's senior residents that require multi-faceted and nuanced solutions.

Among areas of consensus, there are some important "universals" shared by virtually all NOTL seniors.

It is clear, for instance, that the large majority share a desire to age in their current community and, ideally, within their current neighbourhood.

Indeed, fully 48 per cent assign this objective a rating of 10/10 for importance. Yes, there are some seniors with much wider-ranging social networks who are not closely tied to NOTL, but these individuals represent a fairly small niche population.

It is also true that all seniors are on a journey characterized by changing needs and dependencies as they age. So, each individual's current needs may bear little relation to what could be required in the future. This reality alone calls for a fairly wide range of supports and housing options within NOTL to accommodate this inevitable progression, particularly since relatively few seniors have any desire to leave.

A third universal is tied to one's control of this progression. Without exception, NOTL seniors want to retain as much independence as possible as they age.

The vast majority currently live independently and this sense of independence drives their future needs and desires.

Though they recognize that additional supports and likely new housing arrangements will be required as they grow older, they want to be in command of the change process: adding only what is required as new needs arise while respecting the fundamental principle of maintaining personal independence.

While aging may be characterized by the gradual loss of physical and, sometimes, cognitive abilities, it would seem that one of the greatest sources of anxiety among the elderly is the possibility of losing control over one's life.

And, while this might be seen as a "universal," it adds complexity to meeting seniors housing needs because it suggests a requirement to offer nuanced "a la carte" solutions that can, to some degree, be customized as individual circumstances evolve.

When this sort of flexible customization is presented as a possibility, seniors give it an average rating

of 9/10 for importance in sustaining future quality of life.

The other universal theme tying all of this together is health care. The survey shows easy access to health care is both a critical priority and a source of concern.

Health care accessibility and the notion of independent living are closely linked in the minds of seniors and, together, form an integrated set of priority needs.

Without doubt, health care support increasingly permeates considerations of housing suitability and overall quality of life through the aging process.

It is no surprise, then, that 73 per cent of seniors assign the importance of "easy access to health care" a score of 10/10 and the majority (59 per cent) consider it to be their first or second most important factor when making housing decisions.

One might say the pillars of health care and community, coupled with the desire to retain independence as circumstances evolve, establish the basis for consensus among seniors

when considering their future housing needs.

The large majority want to continue residing in NOTL with access to a range of services that can be acquired as needed and while maximizing their sense of control and independence.

But they also believe the core health care supports and related housing options that can make such aspirations a reality are not yet fully available in NOTL. This creates a point of tension that begs for resolution.

Resolution, though, must take into account a wide range of personal circumstances that complicate the task. Next, we will explore this aspect of the challenge.

Michael Ennamorato is a social geographer, retired researcher and former president of TNS Canada. The NOTL seniors housing survey was designed and analyzed by Steven Ferley and Ennamorato, both NOTL residents with extensive research design and related executive consultancy experience. Fieldwork and data processing were conducted by Niagara College.



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Hospital gowns always make a **fashion statement**



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

Regarding the highly respected Canadian universal health care system, I have always been totally impressed by its efficiency, accessibility, and standards of care. This has included some six CAT scans, which provided diagnostic information to help determine what was going on within my person.

All the people working in the diagnostic imaging departments of the hospitals in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls were ultra competent, and seemed to

genuinely hope I would realize good outcomes.

Earlier this year, my medical journey took a big leap forward, as I was scheduled for an MRI. A quick bit of Google research told me magnetic resonance imaging is a non-invasive, radiation-free technique used to help diagnose brain, spine and joint injuries or other diseases. Obviously, the main responsibility of the patient is to lay very, very still for 30 or 40 minutes.

Six weeks before my scheduled MRI appointment, I received the standard letter which talked about total fasting for six hours on the big day, registration time and a request to leave all jewelry (one or two Ls?) and piercing stuff at home. I thought that registering one whole hour before the actual MRI time was a bit much, but as usual, the experts know best.

Which leads me in a very



Ross Robinson simply can't understand hospital gowns.

rambling fashion to what I consider to be the oddest, most ridiculous garment ever foisted upon mankind. Something that is the polar opposite of what is seen on the high fashion runways of Milan.

Whoever came up with the design for the hospital gown? Or did it evolve naturally over the years? Seriously, it must have been the brainchild of a highly unqualified committee. As Lee Iacocca once said, "To be truly effective, a

committee must consist of an odd number of members, (pause for a second or two), and three is too many."

Think of a few other unique and memorable outfits or uniforms. The King's Guard at Buckingham Palace are elite professional infantry soldiers from the Household Division, responsible for guarding the sovereign. Who can forget their red tunics and bearskin hats? If you haven't seen them live and in colour, they perform their ceremony at 11 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Schedule subject to change occasionally.

Okay, yes, time to ramble back to hospital gowns.

Let's return via a Club Med beach in Europe. A beach populated by middle aged or older men, pridefully wearing their always-too-small Speedo "swimming costumes."

And when flipping through the TV channels,

we have all seen very well fed Sumo wrestlers grunting and groaning as they try to throw their opponents to the mat. And if thrown to the mat, how do they manage to get up?

Indoor box lacrosse? Are there any rules limiting the amount of protective equipment the goaltenders can attach to their bodies? It is a miracle that the opposing players ever manage to score even one goal.

Oh yes, hospital gowns. As instructed, I arrived for my MRI last week seventy minutes before my actual appointment. An efficient registration, then easy to follow signage directed me to the diagnostic imaging waiting room. Five people in various levels of nervousness, some with caregivers, respectful of individual space. Everyone silent, not even any small talk.

Half an hour before my appointment, MRI

technologist Martin called my name. Perfect for his job, efficient, by-the-book and smiley. Even enthusiastic. Very much on point, as he provided a locker key and then handed me the hospital gown. No instructions or words of encouragement. Just the standard hospital gown.

I put all my clothes and personal belongings in the locker, and then tried to put on the flimsy hospital gown. I remembered it went on backwards. I tried this way, that way and several other ways.

Try as I might, I just could not get the darned bow tied behind my back. I never was any good getting kitchen aprons on without help.

As my MRI appointment time approached, Martin knocked on the door, came in, and quickly tied the bow of the hospital gown.

How was that for a weekly Ross's Ramblings? Somewhat bizarre?.

rossrocket9@gmail.com

ANNUAL VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Each year, CN is required to manage vegetation on its right-of-way. Managing this vegetation contributes to mitigating fire risks and enhances the efficiency of inspection of track infrastructure.

The spray program is not being done for aesthetic reasons.

To ensure safe railway operations, CN will conduct its annual spray program on its rail lines in the province of Ontario. A certified professional (Davey Tree Expert Company of Canada, Ltd., 1-800-465-6367) will apply herbicides on and around the railway tracks (primarily along the 24-foot graveled area/ballast). Product requirements for setbacks in the vicinity of dwellings, aquatic environments and municipal water supplies will be met.

CN may use the following products:

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Detail	Saflufenacil	32773
Esplanade	Indaziflam	31333
Garlon RTU	Triclopyr	29334
Garlon XRT	Triclopyr	28945
Gateway (Adjuvant)	Paraffinic Oil	31470
Hasten (Adjuvant)	Methyl & ethyl oleate	31760
Milestone NXT	Aminopyralid	28517
Navius Flex	Aminocyclopyrachlor, Metsulfuron-Methyl	30922
Overdrive	Diffluenzopyr, Dicamba	30065
Telar XP	Chlorsulfuron	30036
Torpedo EZ	Flumioxazin, Pyroxasulfone	33872
Vision Max	Glyphosate	27736

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Visit www.cn.ca/vegetation for more information or to make an inquiry, contact the CN Public Inquiry Line at contact@cn.ca or 1-888-888-5909.

CN.CA



Public Information Centre Vineyard Creek Environmental Assessment

The Town has initiated a Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA) to address localized flooding concerns and improve the Vineyard Creek Stormwater Management (SWM) pond. Community members are invited to participate in a Public Information Centre (PIC) to provide input.

PIC Details

- April 16, 2026 | 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.
- Presentation starts at 5:30 p.m.
- NOTL Community Centre - Auditorium (14 Anderson Lane)
- No registration required

Attendees will have the opportunity to review the study, discuss potential solutions, and speak directly with Town Staff and its consultant, GEI Consultants Canada Ltd.

Learn More about this Project

- Visit jointheconversationnotl.org/stormwater-environmental-assessment-st-davids or
- Scan the QR code





We need a home for young voices at 176 Wellington St.

Andorlie Hillstrom
Special to The Lake Report

For years, I have watched children walk into our small space in Virgil, unsure of themselves. Some are quiet. Some are anxious. Some don't quite know where they fit.

And then something happens. They step into a role. They find their voice. They stand a little taller. They begin to see themselves differently.

This is the work of the Yellow Door Theatre Project.

Over the years, I have seen children who could barely speak above a whisper take the stage with confidence. I have seen friendships form across schools

and communities. I have seen young people discover a sense of belonging that stays with them long after the final curtain.

Some have gone on to perform professionally, including at the Shaw Festival. Many more carry these experiences into their lives in quieter but equally meaningful ways.

The children come from Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Virgil, St. Davids — from across the Niagara Peninsula. They come because they want to be part of something. They come because they are curious, or shy, or full of energy, or searching for confidence.

They come, and they grow.

What we have built is an incubator for young people. Not just for performance, but for confidence, creativity and self-expression.

We have done this with very little.

So, I often ask myself — what would be possible if we had a space that matched the potential of the children we serve? A space where we could welcome more participants. A space designed for rehearsal, learning, and performance. A space that signals to young people that what they are doing matters.

176 Wellington offers that possibility.

This beloved building gives us an opportunity to invest in the next generation — to create a place where

children from across this region can come together, learn, create, and grow.

The children are already here. The need is already here. The work is already happening.

What is missing is a permanent home.

As decisions are made about the future of 176 Wellington, I hope there is room to consider what it could mean for young people in this community to have a place that reflects their potential.

Because I see that potential every day. And it deserves a space to grow.

Andorlie Hillstrom is the artistic director of Yellow Door Theatre Project in Niagara-on-the-Lake.



Yellow Door Theatre Project founder Andorlie Hillstrom says the town should leap to accept a proposal for the old hospital that offers space for our children to flourish.

The question that was never asked of Shaw

Dear editor:

Niagara-on-the-Lake is one of the most historically significant communities in Canada. The first capital of Upper Canada. Its heritage is what makes this town worth living in, visiting and investing in.

Development and progress are possible here. The question has always been how to do so in a way that honours what makes this community irreplaceable.

When the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake approved the demolition of the Royal George Theatre, a 1915 historic site at the heart of our designated heritage conservation district, residents were told there was no other option.

The building was failing. Preservation was not viable. Demolition was the only path forward.

What that record shows is that the most fundamental question was never answered before a demolition permit was issued.

Could the Royal George have been preserved, mod-

ernized and expanded to meet every goal the Shaw Festival identified, within the rules that exist to protect our heritage district, at what cost?

Industry standard suggests the answer is yes.

The engineering evidence before staff and council was commissioned after the new design was already complete. A bit of a carriage before the horse. It found preservation impractical and cost-prohibitive.

No physical testing was performed. No engineering calculations were performed. A visual inspection on a single day. When truly dealing with a conservation-first analysis under the Ontario Heritage Act, you should be able to answer those questions before approval.

They never were.

What if someone told you the concerns of the existing building could be addressed for roughly \$2 to \$4 million, according to Ontario industry standard rates?

What if someone told you the full preservation, modernization and expansion for

accessibility, zero carbon, everything proposed, could be done for \$35 to \$55 million or at most the same \$90 million. Is the building worth preserving?

The question was never asked. Never proposed. The approval process never produced this analysis. Our community never had the opportunity to weigh what was possible against what was proposed.

Amendments are only supposed to be used when conforming is not possible. What if someone told you that conformity was possible? That the official plan didn't need to be amended? That the existing rules deliver a preserved or completely new development to conform with the rest of Queen Street and still fulfill every need?

A thorough, transparent process explains itself. Residents of a heritage community deserve nothing less.

This is what led my company to stand up for residents. The Divisional Court raised serious legal questions worth answering

before dismissing on standing. The town called that full vindication.

That is not what the decision says.

A full vindication wouldn't have serious legal questions worth answering. It wouldn't have seven grounds for appeal. It wouldn't have the Royal George still protected with an undertaking while the Court of Appeal decides. Is that full vindication?

The questions raised matter far beyond Niagara-on-the-Lake. Ontario has over 100 designated heritage conservation districts. This affects every heritage community in this province.

Development, growth and progress will always be part of this community's story. The question has always been whether we do it in a way that honours what makes Niagara-on-the-Lake worth protecting.

That question deserved a better answer than it received.

*Nicholas Colaneri
NOTL*

Let the old hospital maintain its purpose: Helping the sick

Dear editor,

It is quite obvious and logical that the old hospital should be used for medical purposes to benefit a local community. It was designed and built as a hospital.

Local residents have been cared for in the past: my mother-in-law who lived on Victoria, a friend who lived on Johnson. Treatments may have been limited, but the care was not.

At the last grab for a

commercial use, Margarita Howe and her group were very active and vocal in their efforts to "save our sick." Unfortunately, it was only partially successful.

The large modern hospital beds are blocked by elderly patients who have nowhere else to go.

Let's use the old hospital as a residence for the people who are unwanted in modern hospital care.

*Cynthia Rand
NOTL*

We welcome your letters

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

Burton Foundation's community vision for old hospital snubbed

Dear editor:

My husband and I are 12-year residents of Old Town, NOTL and we consider this our forever home.

With us settling here, we have been lucky enough for our adult children to follow us, our daughter in 2019 and now our son 2026.

We were made aware of the 176 Wellington project with our granddaughter's enrollment into the Royal Oak Community School, which now resides at that site.

Having spent some time around the site of the hospital, we have really noticed what a truly wonderful area it is, rich in history and attachment to NOTL.

The children are so enriched in the community with outdoor walks, lunch at local restaurants, fundraisers and really enjoying the area for all its spender.

Our daughter would love to consider relocating closer to the school, but is waiting for the outcome of the 176

Wellington site as many young families are.

The Burton Foundation is offering this city an incredible gift at no cost to the taxpayers and a sustainable long-term lease model supported by philanthropic investment and diversified revenue streams.

50,000 square feet of versatile space including Royal Oak, junior kindergarten to Grade 8, daycare, performance and rehearsal areas, exhibition spaces, various

arts, heritage and space for cultural groups.

They even have approx. 250 parking spots as part of a balanced approach to accommodate both resident and visitor.

On March 24, this incredible opportunity was snubbed and a new design from who, not sure, took the front stage in chambers.

\$200,000 will be spent to further refine this new design, which is primarily a parking garage two to three

storeys with 150 parking spots and 13,000 square feet of community space. The price tag for us taxpayers: up to \$19 million with a potential revenue stream of \$1.1 million per year.

Why would council put \$200,000 into this when the Burton Foundation has been knocking on the door, yelling from the rooftop for over four years just for the opportunity to participate in a request for proposal?

I'm worried the refinement of this design will make it impossible for the Burton Foundation to submit a request for proposal because the perimeters and direction will be so different.

This doesn't seem logical, so what information are we missing or not being told?

Thank you for your attention to this most important matter to NOTL.

*Heather Campagnola
NOTL*

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380 Nassau, Niagara on the Lake - Asking \$2,500,000



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Have some fun



Across

- 1. Farm honkers (5)
- 4. Declares formally (9)
- 10. High-pitched flute (4)
- 11. Happening together (10)
- 12. Safe stores (6)
- 13. Casual tops (1-6)
- 14. W W II turning point (1-3)
- 16. Lowest-value chessmen (5)
- 19. Deciduous timber trees (4)
- 20. Cloth colourist (4)
- 22. Portable music players (5)
- 24. Deep voice (4)
- 25. May contain peas or beans, for example (4,3)
- 26. Shows broadcast again (6)
- 29. Mental analysis (10)
- 30. Woodwind instrument (4)
- 31. Graceless (9)
- 32. Up (5)

Down

- 2. My Fair Lady --- Doolittle (5)
- 3. Author of "Ozymandias" (7)
- 5. Told (4)
- 6. Consecutive parts of a meal (7)
- 7. International carrier (7)
- 8. Frequently (4,5)
- 9. Misbehaves (4,2)
- 15. Rainless months (3,6)
- 17. Egyptian cobra (3)
- 18. Indicate agreement (3)
- 21. Profoundly different (7)
- 22. Household chore (7)
- 23. Wanders away (6)
- 24. Obtains temporarily (7)
- 27. Model --- Campbell (5)
- 28. Stupefy (4)

Crossword Puzzle

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Last issue's answers

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14	T	I	T		15	P	L	E	16	B	S	R	R						
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27	O	O		F	O	R	T	S	E	G	T								
28	M	E	R	C	I	A		T	U	R	K	I	S	H					
29	E	D		R	O	D	E	O		D	B	Y							
30	N	A	I	L	S		O		R	A	C	L	E	S					
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Fire was key to evolution – where did it come from?



DR. BROWN
Dr. William Brown
Columnist

blazing hearth under a rock shelter's over-hang; the band is swathed in furs inside the hide-tent pitched against the back wall. Children snuggle up against their parents. Outside the temperature is well below zero. Inside it's just above freezing, but smoke hovers near the smoke hole high overhead. Most of the small band are young, the older ones in their early 20s."

He continues: "One man stands out, his weathered face visible under his parka hood. He is older; one arm stiff from a hunting accident long ago and his expression conveys the wisdom of years. He is a storyteller, a mentor for the band. He tells of the ancient days when the world came into being, created by intelligent common place animals. In time, these animals fashioned not only rocks and valleys, rivers and forest, but also human beings, men and women. The elder speaks for hours, his voice rising and falling as he pauses for emphasis, gestures dramatically or describes the character of a human or an animal."

In those two paragraphs, Fagan, an experienced anthropologist, imagines what life might have been like for small bands of modern humans in the dead of winter. It was clearly very cold, but everyone was well-dressed, huddled together and mesmerized by a shaman holding forth with their



shared creation story. One thing made survival possible: fire.

This brings up the question of when and how humans and our ancestors created and controlled fire on demand.

There's no shortage of YouTube videos on how to survive in the outdoors in the winter, which involve creating shelters from whatever's nearby such as branches or whole trees and a fire to keep them warm, dry their clothes and cook their food.

But however tough it looks, most outdoors experts bring a saw, axe and large, well-honed knives with them, as well as matches or a lighter to start a fire.

A meticulous study from December last year of how neanderthals controlled fire as early as 400,000 years ago in east England was reported in Nature. What the investigators discovered was a site where fires had been created on demand by striking flint with pyrite (also called fool's gold) to

generate sparks and thus ignite wood.

This gave them mastery over fire and the means to stay warm and cook their food. The reason for choosing the site was a nearby watering hole that attracted game, a real plus and reason enough for neanderthals to occupy the site off and on over many generations.

The ability to create fire on demand was a huge evolutionary step, because cooking breaks down meat and other foodstuffs, making them easier to digest and extract more dietary benefits from their food.

Sitting around a fire is

also a social activity, not doubt prompting storytelling as Fagan imagined in his account. Fire is also a good way to keep predators at bay, a real plus with the likes of cave bears and lions around and even sharing the same cave.

If controlled fire was a huge plus for neanderthals 400,000 years ago, how far back does controlled fire go?

There's some evidence that homo erectus, a million years ago or more, used fire, but prompts the question: how?

Pyrite, though a common enough mineral worldwide, was not common at the site studied but was probably transported — perhaps traded from the nearest site 40 miles away.

One hypothesis suggests that early hominins such as erectus didn't create fire but took advantage of fires generated by lightning. That makes no sense to me.

Sure, it's possible that some early hominins took advantage of natural fires

to create their own and kept the latter going by adding flammable material, but lightning as a source of fire, any place I've been, is rare.

Hominins needed a way of generating fire on demand, if not by striking flint with pyrite as many aboriginal groups do, then by rubbing sticks together to create enough friction to trigger a fire. Even YouTube illustrates that method.

But nix to the idea of lightning as a source, although lightning is a common way of triggering forest fires under dry conditions.

On another note, Fagan's second paragraph describes what he sometimes witnessed in his travels through Africa: shamans enthral-ling audiences with creation stories.

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

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Obituaries

Martin Hefferon



HEFFERON, Martin —
November 9, 1947 – April 2, 2026

It is with profound sadness that the family of Martin (“Marty”) announces his peaceful passing on April 2nd, 2026, at St. Catharines Hospital, Ontario, Canada, aged 78.

Born in Dublin in 1947, Martin began his career as an accountant in Dublin and later in London, before he and his beloved wife Nessa (McGuire) emigrated to Toronto in 1976. There, he built a distinguished career spanning four decades in the commercial insurance industry, serving as President of Biggs, Evans, Phillips & Martin Insurance Brokers, and later acquiring North City Insurance, a brokerage he nurtured into a thriving

agency. His sharp business instincts, tireless work ethic, and steady confident energy earned him the deep respect of all who knew him, and he was a mentor to many.

Martin possessed a brilliant mind with remarkable breadth across business, history, geography, and politics, and his opinions were always well-informed and delivered with courtesy. He was the kind of man who gave you his time and genuinely wanted to know something about you – a reflection of his caring nature and the integrity he possessed.

A generous and altruistic man, Martin quietly helped many. From volunteering with disadvantaged youth in Dublin at seventeen, to supporting the blind, to helping newcomers to Canada, his generosity was never performed – it was simply who he was. For over 12 years he served as a board director and steadfast supporter of Developing Scholars, an English-language school for disadvantaged children in Guatemala, offering wise counsel and tangible support to its students.

Martin retained lifelong ties to Ireland, and his love of Irish music and song was well known to all who heard him sing. He had an insatiable passion for rugby, playing on the Senior Cup team at St. Mary’s College Rugby Club and winning the final in 1963. He also enjoyed golf, skiing with his family, and summers spent in Ireland, and cherished his annual gatherings with his five brothers across Europe. On retirement, he and Nessa made their home in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where he would never miss a sunset from the porch overlooking the lake.

Above all, Martin was a devoted and loving husband to Nessa for 51 years, and a loving father to Nischa, Conor, and Ciara.

He is sadly missed by his brothers Liam, Tom (Jean), Michael (Catherine), Colm (Maureen), and John (Maeve), and by his many beloved nieces and nephews in Ireland, Canada, and Australia.

Following cremation, Martin’s ashes will be returned to Dublin for a funeral service and interment in the McGuire family plot in Bunnadden, Co. Sligo. Funeral arrangements will be announced at a later date.

Donations in memory of Martin may be directed to The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation at <https://thepmcf.ca/ways-to-give/memory/>

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.

Elisabeth Redikop



REDIKOP, Elisabeth (Liz) —

It is with heavy hearts we share the passing of Elisabeth (Liz) Alida Redikop (nee Booi). She passed peacefully at Greater Niagara General Hospital, on Friday, April 3, 2026, at the age of 86. Born on May 19, 1939, in Dordrecht, Holland and journeyed to Canada with her family by boat, arriving on her 13th birthday in 1952. She met her one and only love Jacob (Jake) and they married

in 1959. Together they raised their three girls and settled in Queenston, Ontario and were married for 66 years. Loving mother of Deberah Ruddy (John Girvan), Nancy Jenkins (Tim) and Lisa Merlino (Rich). Cherished Nanny of Sara Ruddy (Joe Kenney), John Jenkins (Vanessa), Brian Jenkins, Thomas Jenkins, Tyler Merlino, Jesse Merlino, Stephanie Merlino (Chad Maurice), and Great Nanny of Jacob and Connor Jenkins. Dear sister of Arie Booi (Pearl), and Norman Booi (Christine), and sister-in-law of Barb Booi and Adolf Menge. She will be fondly remembered by many nieces, nephews, and friends. Predeceased by her grandson Shane Ruddy (2006), siblings; Joe Booi, Emma Walker (Eugene), Nick Booi, Alida Menge, Arina Howse (Ron), Dieny Kidd (Ken), Len Booi and Joanne Booi. Special thanks to Para-Med PSWs Summer, Carol, Anob, Kendra, Sue and Michelle for their kind and compassionate care. Thank you to the Doctors and staff at GNGH, special thanks to Shelby, Belinda, and Shawn. The family will receive friends at Patterson Funeral Home, 6062 Main St., Niagara Falls on Sunday, April 12, 2026, from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. Memorial service will take place in the chapel at 1 p.m., and for those that cannot attend in person, please join through livestream, either through the funeral home website or the direct link, <https://funeraweb.tv/en/diffusions/122518>

As expressions of sympathy, donations to Niagara-on-the-Lake Palliative Care and Wellness through their website www.notlpc.com or via e-transfer to notlpc@bellnet.ca, would be appreciated by the family.

Memories photos and condolences may be made at www.pattersonfuneralhome.com.

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