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CHERRY RED

Annual St. Mark's festival draws crowds to celebrate harvest time



Adelaide Cameron, 7, beats the heat with a cold drink while sporting a pair of colourful butterfly wings at the St. Mark's Cherry Festival. Visitors of all ages flocked to the annual event to enjoy sweet treats and the lively atmosphere. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Maddy Gordon | The Lake Report

The sweetness of summer continues in Niagara-on-the-Lake, as tender fruit harvest and celebration began the first weekend of July with St. Mark's annual Cherry Festival.

Hundreds lined up outside St. Mark's Anglican Church

on Saturday morning to get their hands on one of 700 highly coveted homemade cherry pies, as well as quarts of fresh cherries grown in town.

The festival has supported the church — and fed both locals and tourists cherry treats — for over 35

years, and this summer was no different.

Church volunteers were hard at work running the festival, whether by selling the desserts, sorting silent auction items or running the shopping tables and book sales on the property.

Preparations began in

January with the baking of hundreds of pies, which are sold frozen the day of the festival.

“It takes a good six months of all these amazing volunteers that are just dedicating so much time to this impor-

Continued on Page 5

New Rand Estate hotel plan criticized by town planners

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's municipal and heritage planners rejected Benny Marotta's previous development plans for the historic Rand Estate, and once again, they're not

enamored with his latest proposal.

The town published a review on Friday of the heritage impact assessment submitted as part of a plan to build a luxury hotel on the estate in Old

Continued on Page 2



Town planners have recommended against approving developer Benny Marotta's newly revised plan for the Rand Estate. FILE



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Planners say Rand hotel would **adversely impact** heritage property

Continued from Front Page

Town, which is almost 100 years old.

The municipal heritage committee approved the review during its meeting Wednesday evening, which will be incorporated into a future staff report on the project.

The developers behind this project want to construct a five-storey Ritz-Carlton hotel on the site with 111 rooms, surface and underground parking and five residential buildings with up to 270 units, along with other features.

This comes after the Town of NOTL rejected subdivision plans for the estate, put forth by the same developers in 2023 — a decision the Ontario Land Tribunal upheld in 2024, finding that the project wasn't "good planning in the public interest."

Regarding this latest project, town staff say it would have "significant adverse impacts" on the historical aspects of the Rand Estate, as well as the estate's overall cultural heritage landscape.

The heritage impact as-



The five-storey Ritz-Carlton hotel that developers want to build on the Rand Estate would be larger than the other structures on the site today. Town staff say the developers need to defend the hotel's planned intensity. SOURCED

sessment the developers submitted doesn't "sufficiently demonstrate" that what they want to do is "the least intrusive development approach" or that they've thoroughly considered all the "heritage-first design alternatives" possible, the review states.

Among the negative impacts to the site's heritage, staff draw attention to the proposed hotel's size: it will be larger than the estate's existing structures. Staff say the developers need to

further justify the hotel's planned height, footprint and overall scale.

They mention the developers would be cutting down 215 of the estate's 694 mature trees — making way for new buildings, residential areas and access to the underground parking and residential areas — as well as landforms, vegetation, garden areas and other parts of the Dunington-Grubb landscape.

"Mature trees constitute an important aspect of the

Rand Estate and their association with the site," the review states. Removing those trees will impact the estate's landscape, a part of its history.

Developers may potentially remove the carriage house on 200 John St. E. to build access to the residential area and outdoor pool and spa. Staff note in the review there's missing information about what will be done with it, as well as the Victorian wooden gazebo on 176 John St. E.

The developers will need to present a conservation plan that demonstrate how they'll preserve the integrity of the cultural heritage landscape throughout all phases of the development and present alternative development approaches, staff write.

They also want to see an evaluation of the "combined effects" of the proposed development, a strategy to address the restoration of the Dunington-Grubb landscape and more assessment

of plans to remove, relocate and alter parts of the estate like the carriage house, tea house, Victorian wooden gazebo and more.

The review was submitted by Sumra Zia, interim senior heritage planner, and Taya Devlin, manager of planning, building and development services.

During the heritage committee's Wednesday meeting, David Snelgrove said he's "distressed" that the developers, from his perspective, have chosen to take their preferred development for the estate and "pluck it down on the site."

Blake Lyon, chief executive officer for Solmar and Two Sisters Resorts, told the committee he takes issue with that characterization of their process and that the developers worked diligently on these new plans.

"We invite your comments and we'll continue to refine this," he said. "This is meant to be a world destination to bring the history that you're all working hard to protect and to demonstrate to these new visitors coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake."

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These stories are part of an ongoing series examining what some describe as Niagara-on-the-Lake's "Wild West" winery sector — allegations that some wineries are ignoring zoning bylaws and event restrictions, operating with little apparent consequence, and raising questions about whether the town is adequately enforcing its own rules. The series also looks at the larger issue facing NOTL: whether the solution is to modernize the rules to better reflect the realities of the industry, or to crack down on those failing to follow the rules already in place.

Konzelmann must pay neighbour \$41K in legal costs over events

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A court fight over prohibited outdoor events at a Niagara-on-the-Lake winery has produced legal bills on both sides, with the winery ordered to pay its neighbouring farmer a little over \$41,000 and the farmer agreeing to pay the municipality \$20,000.

The June 26 costs decision follows a judge's finding that the court action from the farmer's company, Brox Company Ltd., was necessary to stop the winery, Konzelmann Estate Winery, from using its land in ways that violated the town's zoning bylaw and site plan agreement.

Brox president Ed Werner said the costs show the dispute created an unnecessary burden for residents, farmers and taxpayers.

Superior Court Justice A.J. Ohler said Brox's application was important — it involved the use of a neighbouring property in a way that affected Brox's farming activities and didn't align with what was allowed by the town's zoning bylaw and approved site plan agreement.

"The application was clearly necessary to stop Konzelmann's use of its lands in a manner inconsistent with the town's bylaw and site plan agreement," Ohler wrote.

Brox had sought \$43,071.15 in costs from



A legal fight over outdoor events at Konzelmann Estate Winery has left the Lakeshore Road winery owing Brox Company Limited \$41,683.62, after a judge found Brox had to go to court to stop land uses not allowed under town rules. FILE

Konzelmann Vineyards Inc.

The estate winery argued no costs should be awarded or, alternatively, that Brox's request was excessive. It pointed to an offer from last September to settle that included consent to the orders Brox sought and \$10,000 in costs.

Ohler said the amount was reasonable given the issues involved, the need for expert evidence and how far the case had progressed before Konzelmann agreed to the court orders Brox was seeking.

"While Konzelmann submits that the costs are excessive, it has not provided a bill of costs for consideration," Ohler wrote.

The final amount came to \$41,683.62, which needs to be paid within 60 days.

The case stems from Brox's application over the winery's outdoor events in 2024 and 2025.

Earlier this year, the court ruled Konzelmann's outdoor events were contrary to the permitted uses under the town's zoning bylaw and inconsistent with its approved site plan agreement.

The court issued permanent injunctions barring Konzelmann from any future use not permitted under its zoning, site plan agreement or any licence issued by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, conditions to which the winery agreed.

Council approved a zoning amendment in April and the winery is now working through final site plan approval.

Brox's application also sought to compel the town to enforce its bylaws against Konzelmann, but that part of the case was dismissed.

A May 6 court memo says Brox and the town reached an agreement on costs payable to the town. Under that agreement, Brox agreed to pay the town \$20,000, including tax and disbursements, within 30 days.

In a statement to The Lake Report, Werner said the town's failure to enforce its bylaws created unnecessary costs.

"The failure of the town to enforce its own laws has resulted in an unnecessary burden on all parties and the taxpayers of the town," Werner said.

Werner said residents and farmers seeking justice should not rely on the current council's enforcement

process and may need to go directly to court against an offending party.

Konzelmann's vice president, Claudia Konzelmann, said the winery respects the court's decision and is focused on moving forward.

"As we complete the remaining approvals, our focus remains on working collaboratively with the town and complying with all applicable municipal requirements," Claudia said in an email.

"We remain committed to being a responsible neighbour."

Claudia described the "area in question" as a "small, grassed section of our property overlooking Lake Ontario," with no permanent structures, buildings, electrical services or event infrastructure.

"It is simply an outdoor ceremony location," she said. "We believe it has minimal impact on the surrounding area."

The town said it respects the court's decision and does not intend to comment on the costs awarded.

"The town is committed to a fair, consistent and balanced approach to bylaw enforcement across the community," said town spokesperson Marah Minor.

"The town continually reviews its processes and practices to ensure they remain effective, transparent and responsive to the needs of the community," she said.

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Former NOTL admin Marnie Cluckie joins Halifax

Staff
The Lake Report

She was known for almost three years at the top administrator for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Now, she's readying to take on another top administrative role — this time, out east in Halifax.

Marnie Cluckie, who served as chief administrative officer for NOTL from December 2020 to January 2024, is set to become the Halifax Regional Municipality's chief administrative officer starting Sept. 23.

Following her departure from NOTL, Cluckie became city manager for the

City of Hamilton, her hometown, a role she'll continue to serve until she moves on to her new job.

"This is a vibrant municipality with real momentum and an exciting future. I look forward to working with regional council, municipal employees, community partners and residents

to listen, learn and support the work underway," she said in a media release.

After a year-and-a-half-long search for a replacement, Cluckie's role in NOTL was taken over by current CAO Nick Ruller a year ago in July (Bruce Zvaniga served as interim chief administrative officer during the search).

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Toronto-Niagara hovercraft could get terminal permit by year's end

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The long-promised 30-minute hovercraft ride between Niagara and Toronto has a new checkpoint: authorization to build a terminal by the end of this year.

Hoverlink president Erika Potrz told The Lake Report that final permitting for the company's 18-acre South Shore waterfront terminal on Lake Ontario is expected to be completed in late 2026. The company still hopes to launch the service in 2028.

The terminal is part of Hoverlink's proposed high-speed passenger service across Lake Ontario, which would connect Toronto to Port Weller in St. Catharines, and back, in about 30 minutes.

The service would not launch from Niagara-on-the-Lake, but could eventually give Niagara travelers another way to reach the Greater Toronto Area without using the Queen Elizabeth Way.

The proposed service

would use two large hovercraft, each with room for 180 passengers but no vehicles.

The hovercraft are designed to operate year-round, including in a wide range of weather and ice conditions. The service would run 18 hours a day, with up to 48 crossings daily.

The company estimates the service could remove up to 8,000 vehicles a day from the QEW.

Hoverlink has not released final ticket prices. Company materials say fares are expected to be comparable to existing public transit options, which it lists at about \$42 round trip by bus and train.

"We expect that the pricing will be comparable to existing transit options between Niagara and Toronto," Potrz said.

She said regular meetings are continuing with the Toronto Port Authority and the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation as the project moves toward construction and operations.

A City of Toronto staff report from March says



Hoverlink's proposed hovercraft service would carry passengers across Lake Ontario between Toronto and Port Weller in St. Catharines in about 30 minutes. FILE

Hoverlink proposes to begin service in early 2028 at the earliest.

The company has not yet developed a formal public engagement plan, but the Toronto report says Hoverlink will begin public engagement activities in 2027.

Potrz said tariffs created "significant challenges" for

vessel manufacturing and procurement, forcing the company to rethink how the hovercraft would be built.

Founder and CEO Chris Morgan led work to establish a Canadian-based supply chain with Canadian vessel manufacturers and domestic suppliers, she said.

"This process required considerable time, coordi-

nation and approvals, but has positioned the project with a stronger and more resilient Canadian supply chain," Potrz said.

She said Hoverlink secured its Toronto docking location last May through what she called "a landmark operating agreement" with the Toronto Port Authority.

Because the proposed

Toronto terminal is on Toronto Port Authority lands, Toronto staff say the city does not have its own approval or regulatory process for that site.

City staff are still reviewing technical information related to the proposal and expect to report back in the second quarter of 2027. The report says that review "may result in future discussions with Hoverlink to resolve outstanding matters."

Asked how much has been spent on the project so far, whether a yearly breakdown is available and what milestones have been reached with that investment, Potrz did not provide a dollar figure or annual breakdown.

She said the project is privately funded and has advanced without direct government financial support.

"Despite this, the company has secured critical waterfront infrastructure, long-term operating agreements, regulatory approvals, strategic partnerships and a viable path to commercialization," she said.

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Cherry pie was the treat of the day for sisters Isabel Hainer, 9, and Eloise Hainer, 6, as they enjoyed dessert during the annual St. Mark's Cherry Festival on Saturday. The annual festival is renowned for its homemade pies. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Cherry pies **sell out again** in no time

Continued from Front Page

tant activity," said Jo-Anne Hill, festival chair. "It's our one fundraiser for the year."

This year's festival, like festivals past, started at 9 a.m., though the line-up for pies began much earlier. Typically, fresh-baked pies sell out faster than frozen ones, but it's not unusual to sell all 700 pies before the festival comes to a close, Hill noted.

"We had 175 people waiting as of 7:30 a.m.," she said. "They waited in the rain patiently, and they were wonderful, just wonderful."

Sue and Cerry VanZandt stumbled upon the festival in an effort to explore Niagara-on-the-Lake while visiting from Alberta, and said they were happily surprised.

"We knew that this was a beautiful area, and we came into town and there was the cherry festival. It was a no-brainer — we were coming down here," Cerry said.

"I was really hoping



From left, Gary Memzel, Donna Fleece, Barbara Maisonneuve, and Michelle Scott hold up the official "Pies Sold Out" sign at the St. Mark's Cherry Festival. The festival quickly sold out all 700 of its famous cherry pies, with people once again lining up down the road before the gates opened. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

there'd be ice cream, so I was very happy," Sue added, pointing to a slice of cherry pie served with vanilla ice cream, a popular treat for a hot festival day.

For some families, the St. Mark's Cherry Festival is an annual summer must-do.

"We come out every year, we go to the Strawberry Festival, the Peach Festival, the Cherry Festival," Toron-

to resident Stephanie Bonic said. She and her five-year-old son, Teddy, visit family in NOTL to attend the fruit-themed festivals.

Teddy tried a cherry and Coke float drink and was happy to report "it had ice cream in it."

The treats are one part of the festival, the other being the silent auction and shopping tables. Attendees

browsed items such as jewelry, books, CDs and home decor.

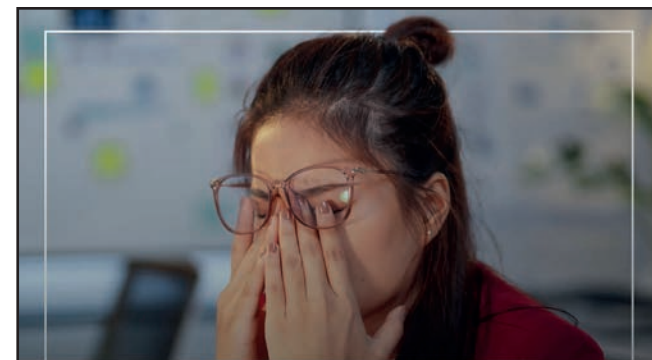
"I'm very touched by the atmosphere and the people that attend," Hill said. She is leading the festival for the first time this year and says the church community was a great support in the process.

"I can get emotional talking about it," she said. "I am just so touched and impressed and proud of how everybody dedicates so much time."

All funds made by the festival go toward maintaining the over-200-year-old church and its community.

"It's one of the oldest still operating Anglican churches in Canada," Hill said. The book sale was moved inside the church this year, giving visitors a chance to peek inside the historic building.

"(The festival) is so important for us and for us to be part of the community," she said. "It's really, very heartwarming."



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Firefighters gift **new mower** to Red Roof

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

The St. Davids Firefighters Association bought Red Roof Retreat a \$9,000 riding mower Thursday, covering an equipment cost the charity says it cannot spare from its \$4.3-million building project.

Association members presented the zero-turn machine July 2 at Red Roof's 11-acre property on Concession 6 Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The mower is the largest piece of more than \$18,000 the St. Davids Firefighters are donating this year.

Red Roof, which provides respite and recreation programs for about 200 families of children and young adults with special needs, is directing nearly all of its money into a new 5,700-square-foot respite house currently under construction on the property.

The charity's old mower demanded constant repairs and had become unreliable, said founder Steffanie Bjorgan. Replacing it was an



Red Roof Retreat's new \$9,000 zero-turn mower will cut the grass on its 11-acre property. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

expense Red Roof could not take on itself right now.

"We saved ourselves a whole bunch of cash at a time where most of our cash is getting into the house," she said.

The machine will cut walking paths and play areas around the property, which also contains a hobby farm and four horses. Regular cutting keeps ticks back from the children who use them, and an 11-acre site cannot be maintained by push mower, said Bjorgan. The St. Davids firefighters

raised the money through its monthly breakfasts at the St. Davids fire hall, which run nine months of the year, and its annual turkey raffle. J & S Performance, a Niagara-on-the-Lake business, cut the group a deal on the mower to make the purchase possible.

Bjorgan said she will retire the old machine without regret.

"It's one mower that blows the grass out front and directly into my face. So I won't miss that mower," she said.

The firefighters chose Red Roof and the other recipi-

ents by a vote at one of their meetings, said Steve Roy, president of the association.

"Each member put forth a prospective donor and then after that we just voted on it," said Roy.

The St. Davids firefighters gave mainly to minor sports in past years. This year the list grew to include Birchway Niagara, Gillian's Place, Niagara Palliative Care and other local causes, said Rob MacLeod, secretary-treasurer of the association.

The mower arrives during the largest expansion in Red Roof's 26-year history. The charity is replacing its 1,100-square-foot bungalow with a two-storey building that will raise its capacity by more than 50 per cent.

The campaign passed \$4 million in April, leaving about \$300,000 to go. The exterior of the new house is largely complete and crews are working on the interior.

Red Roof aims to open the building later this year, if fundraising holds its pace.

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Video series features history through cemeteries

Staff
The Lake Report

As Canadians embrace staycations this summer, a new video series is inviting residents and visitors to explore Niagara's history through some of the region's most significant cemeteries and monuments.

"Tales from Cemetery Trails," produced by Guaranteed Funeral Deposits, highlights the lives, legacies and final resting places of influential Canadians, including Laura Secord and Sir Isaac Brock.

Filmed at historic locations such as Drummond Hill Cemetery and Brock's Monument, the series explores how burial grounds and memorials preserve the stories of those who helped shape Canada.

The launch comes as the federal government's Canada Strong Pass is expected to encourage more Canadians to visit historic destinations and attractions this summer.

One episode follows



Caroline McCormick, the great-great-great granddaughter of Laura Secord, speaks about the Drummond Hill cemetery in Niagara Falls, where Secord rests today.

Secord's famous 32-kilometre journey during the War of 1812, when she warned British forces of an impending American attack. The video traces her legacy before ending at her grave in Drummond Hill Cemetery.

The cemetery also contains the Soldiers Monument, which commemorates British soldiers killed during the Battle of Lundy's Lane, one of the war's bloodiest battles.

"Historic cemeteries and

monuments are more than places of remembrance. They are places where Canadians can connect with their history and better understand the people whose actions helped shape the country we know today," Guaranteed Funeral Deposits' chief executive officer Heather Kiteley said in a news release.

The Laura Secord episode was produced with assistance from Friends of Laura Secord, a NOTL-based

volunteer organization dedicated to preserving her legacy.

"Laura Secord's story is deeply rooted in Niagara's history and in Canada's identity," said Caroline McCormick, Secord's great-great-great-granddaughter.

"Her actions during the War of 1812 made a significant contribution to Canadian history, and her legacy continues as a metaphor for courage, determination and fortitude today."

Mark Richardson said visiting historic cemeteries is a reminder that history is personal.

"Standing in Drummond Hill Cemetery, you quickly realize that these were real people who made difficult choices and whose actions helped define the country we know today," Richardson said.

"Tales from Cemetery Trails" can be viewed on Guaranteed Funeral Deposits' YouTube channel, which currently features episodes on Laura Secord and Sir Isaac Brock.

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Senior of the Year says **housing** remains a pressing need

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

As Niagara-on-the-Lake's newly recognized 2026 Senior of the Year, Cindy Grant is being honoured for years of volunteer service. The issue now commanding much of her attention is the shortage of housing options for older residents who don't want to give up living in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Grant, who received the town honour in June, has spent the past two years leading the Niagara-on-the-Lake Senior Housing Advisory Committee.

Since its creation, she said, the group has secured support from town council and staff and identified two potential sites for an independent living facility, while continuing to press governments, developers and property owners to help bring a project to fruition.

"There's no other alternatives in town for senior independent living," she said.

The committee was formed to raise awareness of the lack of housing options for seniors who no longer want to remain in

single-family homes but are not ready for, or do not need, long-term care.

Grant said the group has met with town officials, other levels of government, developers and property owners. While there has not yet been what she called an "explicit achievement" in the form of construction, she believes the committee has made progress by putting the issue firmly on the public agenda.

In March last year, the group presented the results of a survey it conducted on senior housing options in NOTL. The survey found the majority of NOTL residents are living in single-family homes, with 55 per cent of respondents answering that they are currently considering changes but have no plans in place.

"We just need to get some forward motion happening on them. But at least the issue is on the table," she said. "We have full support of town council and town staff. It's just a matter of putting all of the various bits and pieces together to make something happen."

The two potential sites identified for future devel-

opment are the former hospital property on Wellington Street and land at Veterans Memorial Park beside the Royal Canadian Legion branch on King Street.

Grant said many older residents she speaks to on a regular basis feel fortunate to be able to live in Niagara-on-the-Lake — they're frustrated, however, by the lack of housing choices that would allow them to stay in the community as their needs change.

"It's a function of land availability," she said. "It's a function of the most appropriate piece of land and the most appropriate location with the right developer that is able to building something on that property."

Some residents have already left Niagara-on-the-Lake to find independent living accommodations elsewhere, while others are choosing to remain in their homes while waiting for local options to become available.

"They will take advantage of something when and if it happens. But for now, they're very happy to live in this town, to continue to live in this town."

Grant was named the town's 2026 Senior of the Year through a provincial program administered by the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, which allows each Ontario municipality to recognize one resident over 65 for contributions to community life.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa presented her with the award during the town's annual Strawberry Social on June 24.

"I'm very honoured to be recognized," said Grant. "It certainly wasn't anything that I was expecting ... I was very, very surprised, but pleased."

Grant moved to NOTL in 2009 and has volunteered extensively in the community. She spent nearly a decade managing Newark Neighbours, the town's food bank, and became president of the Rotary Club of NOTL last July. She will remain co-president until next April.

"I've really enjoyed every minute of it," she said of volunteering. "It's important to me to be able to give back to my community at this point in my life."

zahraa@niagaranow.com



Cindy Grant, named Senior of the Year by the town, leads a committee that's been advocating for the construction of an independent living facility for members of NOTL's aging population. Among lots of other roles. SUPPLIED

26

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Nature's Heartbeat thumps at Pumphouse

Maddy Gordon
The Lake Report

Artist Lynda Flanagan opened her solo exhibit at the Pumphouse with a guiding statement: “We coexist with nature.”

Her latest collection of paintings, titled “Nature’s Heartbeat,” invites viewers to consider not only the co-existence of humans and the natural world, but also what binds them to each other.

The pieces in the collection are inspired by various locations in Northern Ontario and Flanagan’s love of the great outdoors.

“It’s ingrained in me. The wind in my face, the air, the sound of the waves. It just never leaves you,” she said.

The paintings do not depict individual places, but rather amalgamations of various landmarks. Flanagan and her family search for these elements in a small metal boat, stopping to take pictures for inspiration.

“I’ll get off on little islands and explore ... then I use my imagination to create a landscape,” she said. “You’re going to find a rock from the French River, Georgian Bay and Lake Hu-



Artist Lynda Flanagan’s “Nature’s Heartbeat” exhibit is on at the Pumphouse until July 26. MADDY GORDON

ron all put into one painting, because I name them for feelings. I don’t name them for places.”

As guests explore the exhibit, they might notice unusual colours used to depict nature — these are intentional details meant to evoke emotion, Flanagan explained.

“Somebody was like, ‘Why do you use purple

trees?’ Well, I didn’t run out of green. It was because I think people are resilient and they need to stand up for who they are,” she said, describing how different coloured trees symbolize the reliance between humans and nature.

As an artist, Flanagan says her goal is to make people feel emotions through nature to emphasize interconnectedness. She recalls an encounter with a woman at a market that solidified the importance of that connection.

“She kept coming back to my tent to look at one particular painting. I said, ‘What is it that you’re feeling?’ ... She said, ‘That’s where my father went camping,’” Flanagan said. “It’s storytelling, it’s that connection.”

Art, as a bridge between humans and nature, is central to the artist’s beliefs and passion for painting.

“I think wind, air, water, land (and) rocks all have to be aligned. They all have to be in balance with us ... we rely on each other for growth,” she said. “If we keep cutting down our trees and we keep digging up our

farmland, that’s not sustainability.”

The ability to resonate with Flanagan’s work was one reason why she was chosen as a solo exhibitor, Rima Boles, Pumphouse director, said.

“There’s something beautiful about her landscapes that people can connect to,” Boles said. “She uses reference photos, so they’re all places I think people (are reminded of) going up to a cottage or somewhere in Ontario.”

“It reminds them of different memories,” she added.

The Pumphouse will be home to the Nature’s Heartbeat exhibit until July 26, though Flanagan’s work resides in multiple galleries across the province.

“I really feel we need to be more aware of how interconnected we are before we destroy something that we don’t know we’re destroying, even down to the medicines that we find from certain herbs and certain parts of nature,” Flanagan said.

“We could unknowingly destroy what could ultimately save us.”

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Creatives sell works at **Artistry by the Lake**

Maddy Gordon
The Lake Report

Over 80 Niagara-based artists brought their craftsmanship to Queen's Royal Park for the Artistry by the Lake market last weekend.

With a view of Lake Ontario and the sound of waves rolling in, vendors showcased their products and met with fellow creatives.

"I meet a lot of people, and the vendors. We all swap out, so if they have to go buy food, I'll work their booth," said artist Cheryl Rodo. "It's a good community."

The artist uses old guitars to make customizable works inspired by music artists.

Rodo said craft shows are "mostly for referrals," as travellers passing through a market are unlikely to add a guitar to their luggage spontaneously.

"A lot of people see my artwork and they're in a band, and they'll say, 'Can you customize my band on it?'" she said. "People can



Vendor items included custom guitars. MADDY GORDON

see what I can do, and then I get commissions after the fact."

Fred Minor, a wood artisan, is another artist trying to get eyes on his work. He says he is still testing the waters of craft shows.

"It's still new to me, but so far I've had an excellent response from this," Minor said, motioning to his work. He uses scrap pieces of wood and thrift shop glasses to create flower vases.

"I never know what I'm going to build until I actually pick up a piece of glass and a piece of wood," he said. "I had my own shop, I did large stores, offices, kitchens, bathrooms. I loved it but I shut that down ... now I want to go more into

the creative end of it."

The individual design of each item — and knowing no one else can replicate it — is what makes Minor feel most proud of his work, he said.

The excitement of having unique, handmade products is as exciting for some shoppers as it is for him.

"It's nice to have a keepsake that has a story with it that you know someone made with their hands," Daniel Sullivan said. Sullivan and his mother, Maria, are visiting NOTL from Austin, Texas, and say Artistry by the Lake's creative atmosphere reminds them of the artistic environment in Austin. "It helps the community

more when you purchase something for a local artist versus a big conglomerate," Maria said.

The event includes a variety of art styles, such as paintings, print drawings, jewelry and wooden pieces. For Karolon Johnson, art in all its forms is worth celebrating. Her daughter, father, sister and sister-in-law are artists, adding a personal motivation to support local creatives.

"It's just been a part of our family for a long time, starting with my husband's grandparents," she said. "Art is the sign of the spirit of a person. It's something that brings out something inside that other people may not see."

The annual show combines art with community, giving vendors a friendly setting to share their talent, Rodo said.

"When you love art, you do a lot of it, and you think 'I've got to start to market it.' This is a great venue to do it," she said.



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Golfers battle fog amid weird weather

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

Weird and wacky weather highlighted league play through much of Tuesday at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club.

Dense fog rolling in off Lake Ontario combined with brilliant sunshine provided a mix of conditions, from early morning through mid-afternoon.

Despite the morning fog, the 18-hole women's league held its annual Beat the Pro contest in which players dictated the club pro shop manager Darren Smith had to use to try to get closer to the pin on the 120-yard par-3 hole #4.

Whether he was forced to hit a sand wedge, driver, 5 iron or a 7, Smith proved tough to beat.

Only five players (Tracey Peters, Lisa Allen, May Chang, Martha Cruikshank and Sally Huck) managed the feat, the latter four only because the pro's shot went over the green and into a bush.



A mixture of bright sun and dense fog created odd playing conditions for the nine- and 18-hole women's leagues at the NOTL Golf Club on Tuesday. Here, Maria Townley, left, and her group putt out on the seventh hole. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

In the more serious competition, on the course, Diana Dimmer was top shooter with 91, followed by Cruikshank (92) and Yolanda Henry (98).

Marie Ellison and Dimmer were low net winners with 73, Cruikshank had 74, and May Chang and Judy Mantle were next with 75.

Mantle had the hot putter, needing just 29 putts over 18 holes. Ellison was second with 32 and Cruikshank was third with 34.

In Tuesday's nine-hole

women's league, Deborah Williams was first with 49, Cheryl Yamamoto and Carolyn Cochrane were second with 50, and Patty Garriock and Penny Green tied for third with 51.

Carole Matheson and Yamamoto had best low net with 34, followed by Cochrane (35) and Garriock, Williams and Ellen Smith all with 36.

Peggy Larder took the prize for closest to the flower on #2 and Sally Miller was closest to the in two on #9.

Miller also took low gross honours in the Monday business women's league, firing a nine-hole score of 44.

Other winners were Terry Huisman (longest drive on #1), Nancy Nichols (closest to the 150 marker on #2), Mary Beccario (closest to the pin on #4), Darlene Roos (sank the longest putt on #7) and Kirsten Murdoch (closest to the pin in two on #9).

The weather again wreaked havoc on the popular Thursday men's league as play was rained out for the third straight week. And the forecast for this week isn't looking good.

However, competitors in the Tuesday Woofs league were able to complete play, amid the fog and sunshine.

Jim Meszaros, who is always in contention, was top dog with a 3-over 39, while Paul Loucks took low net with 33.

Tony Sanfelice won the hidden hole prize with a birdie on #6 and Norm Kerr nailed his tee shot on #4 to win closest to the pin.

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Contributed by Patty Garriock

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Another tragedy on our roads



Kevin MacLean
 Editor Emeritus

Thankfully, Sínhue Garcia did not die alone — and we hope he did not in vain.

The migrant farmworker from Mexico was cycling with a friend on Concession 6 in rural NOTL late on the evening of June 26 when tragedy struck.

Garcia, 39, a married father of two, was hit by a vehicle, fatally injured and died at the edge of a vineyard. His friend was there to comfort him in his last moments.

We can only imagine the terror and pain that both men endured as Garcia's life ebbed away.

A worker at St. David's Hydroponics, he was yet another victim in a long series of tragic incidents over the years wherein farmworkers and others have been struck down in the prime of life.

And, as has happened several times, the driver who hit Garcia left the scene.

A 22-year-old Niagara-on-the-Lake man, Gavin Devries, faces serious criminal charges in connection with the crash.

To be clear, we are not judging the young man accused in this case. That is up to the courts as he is considered innocent until proven otherwise.

Little is known about what actually happened that night, but it will come out, in due course, before a judge. As it should.

What we are passing judgment on is how little regard some people seem to have for their fellow humans. We've seen too many hit-and-run crashes around NOTL. We've seen too many instances where, day or night, drivers in a rush, or without thought, push the limits, sometimes with life-

This poster, circulated by the Farmworker Hub in Virgil, reminds drivers to be aware and courteous when encountering cyclists on the roads around NOTL. We should all listen.

altering consequences.

In fact, barely 48 hours before this latest fatality, The Lake Report published a commentary, "Slow down, you're movin' too fast," on the sad state of driving.

Since that commentary, we have heard in person, via email and on social media from dozens of people who concur about the lack of care many drivers exhibit as they blow through stop signs, make unsafe lane changes or speed excessively along NOTL's thoroughfares.

We witnessed yet another foolish example one afternoon last week. We could only shake our head as a youthful dirt bike rider popped wheelies as he rolled through Virgil on Niagara Stone Road, roaring southward past Phil's Independent grocery store.

We've seen the same scenario several times over the past few summers on Queen Street, along Niagara Boulevard and on Mississa-

gua Street as well.

Often there are a couple of motorcycles but in each case the dirt bike appears to have no licence plate, let alone a responsible, mature operator.

Yes, kids will be kids, consequences be damned. And we realize by expounding on this subject we risk sounding like the curmudgeonly "Simpsons" character shouting at clouds. But enough already.

Concession 6, where Garcia died, is a popular high-speed option that locals love as an alternate route to Niagara Falls.

It's also only two lanes, with paved shoulders that are barely two feet wide. Certainly not room enough for cyclists to ride safely if drivers are not alert or courteous.

Ultimately, it's up to drivers to be aware, which is one reason, the wake of Garcia's death, we were happy to see a poster circulating thanks to the Farm-

worker Hub in Virgil.

As the hub's Britt Sliasis noted in a Facebook post, drivers need to give cyclists all the space they require. Not only is it a courtesy, it's the law in Ontario.

"Be kind. Be patient. Be aware," to help keep our roads safe for everyone, the poster says.

It also reminds us all that many people (including residents and tourists), but especially seasonal workers, rely on bicycles to get around town.

We know from experience that some drivers have little time or patience for cyclists, farm vehicles, slower drivers and the like when encountering them on the road.

How did we get to this point? We live in one of the most bucolic places on Earth. Embrace it.

We've said it before, but it bears repeating: Can't we all just relax a bit and enjoy life, while we can.

kevin@niagaranow.com

Correction: Last week's story about a vigil for Sínhue Garcia, a farmworker who was killed in a hit-and-run on Concession 6, misidentified Julia Buxton-Cox as a founder of Bikes for Farmworkers. In fact, she is the founder of the Farmworker Hub. Bikes For Farmworkers was founded by Mark Gaudet and Terry Weiner. The Lake Report regrets the error.



Law & order – and Erwin Wiens



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist

He's been a cop. A farmer. A local politician. Man of the people.

He's also been accused of conflict and favouritism. His first cousin is a developer living in the biggest house in town. He leans right. He's blunt. He was Grape King. Now he wants to be lord mayor.

Erwin Wiens seems like a complicated guy, with spreading influence. On the Niagara Parks Commission. The airport commission. The Lions Club. NOTL council. The irrigation group. Buds with Doug Ford. Ruler of 105 acres of grape vines. Lover of tractors, equipment and big trucks. Husband to Dorothy, famously Citizen of the Year, a quilter, volunteer and farm administrator.

"I really lucked out on that one," he says.

At the core, he seems less complex. Wiens is a process guy. Rules are in place for a reason, whether it's on the beat and among the cells as a police officer, or sitting in judgment of the next proposed hotel at town hall.

"I only ever wanted to do two things in life," he says. "I wanted to be a farmer and a policeman."

As a kid in a farming family, when it cost more



Erwin Wiens wanted to be a farmer or a police officer. He got both. Now he wants to be the leader of NOTL.

to grow a peach than it sold for, the path was clear. He joined Peel police, then the Hamilton force.

Wiens busted through doors on a police tactical unit and stood in protection of vulnerable people as social workers helped them through their haze. "You learn that people are essentially good. They mean well but are in different stages of their lives.

"So here we are in Niagara-on-the-Lake. We're blessed. We live better than most people and have an obligation to share that, because not everybody gets to live like we do. I've seen so many people in crisis, and everybody has some issue going on all the time. Life's not easy. Life's not fair."

Cops learn they have to dive into trouble looking for solutions but understand there may be none. In that case, you need those rules. Process. A guide to know what to do.

Wiens has brought those lessons forward. Not my job, he says, to judge if Benny Marotta should have another hotel or not. If he follows the procedures in place and does what the process asks him to do, then continue. It's not about growth or no growth. Instead, the rules.

He's been on council for eight years, two of them juggling police work and growing grapes. Those days are done. He's retired. He has a farm manager ("His name is Barak, so everybody calls him Obama. Great guy. Came as a temporary foreign worker from Jamaica").

He wants to be a full-time mayor — an upgrade from the part-timer who's been in place since 2022.

"I have the time now. But the job these days is about being available 24/7, isn't it? Dorothy and I both understand that if you're going to take this commitment on, then do it. People are count-

ing on you."

What of the allegations of conflict? Wiens sits on a committee overseeing irrigation, which his thirsty vines need. And his first cousin, Rainer Hummel, is a developer who not only requires town approvals but sued the municipality — and won a million bucks last year.

Wiens says he was cleared by the town's integrity commissioner, and so long as decisions are made "for the greater good, and not solely beneficial to me" there is no conflict.

"The rules are clear. They've been investigated. People have the right to ask questions. That's my answer."

What about development? The mega-Royal George? Parliament Oak? Ritz-Carlton? Subdivisions in St. Davids? Condo towers in Glendale?

"We live in a constitutional monarchy, with rules and regulations. Do these things fit provincial policies? Do they fit the regional ones? The official plan? Zoning bylaws? Did the planning staff look at it? Can they defend it? If issues are contentious and people are upset, we need to change the policies.

"Let's address problems instead of complaining. Instead of throwing rocks, throw ideas. Start fixing things by adjusting and updating the policies. "It's not sexy."

Nope. Just basic police work.

Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister. garth@garth.ca

Too many candidates for change may hurt us all

Dear editor:

The Oct. 26 municipal election could decide whether Niagara-on-the-Lake stays the controversial course it has followed under the current council, or changes direction ... for which there appears to be a strong desire.

Erwin Wiens is running for lord mayor, likely meaning that Gary Zalepa will

not seek re-election. Mr. Wiens has served NOTL on council for years, for which we are all very appreciative.

At this point, our choices for lord mayor are Mr. Wiens, Vaughn Goettler and Andrea Kaiser. All are legitimate candidates with their own pros and cons. In my opinion, Mr. Wiens represents the status quo going forward while Mr. Goettler and Ms. Kaiser

represent change.

As someone looking for change, I'm concerned that without broad-based community discussion to coalesce the "change" vote behind one candidate, a split vote will enable the "status quo" to prevail.

Perhaps Mr. Goettler and Ms. Kaiser might decide between them that only one stay in the race

for lord mayor to face Mr. Wiens, and the other run for council. While that presents risk for both, likely no more than they face running against each other.

To reduce the chance of "status quo," there can only be one clear candidate for "change." Two is one too many.

*Jim Stirling
St. Davids*



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: WE ARE LITERARY FAMILY

George R.R. Martin wrote, one in this family "always pays his debts ... I think I will try and sleep. Wake me if we're about to die."

Last issue category: BUT FIRST, COFFEE

Clue: Kopi luwak is an expensive coffee from Indonesia that has passed through this cat-like animal.

Answer: What is a civet cat?

Answered first by: Howard Jones

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Bob Wheatley, Emma Balsas, Jane Morris, Jeff Lake, Margie Enns, Jim Dandy, Donna Pearce, Hedy Wiebe, Sheila Meloche, Nancy Rocca, Katie Reimer, Wade Durling, Claudia Grimwood, Randie Topps, Wade Durling, Susan Dewar, Jane Andersen, Sue Rautenberg, Lynda Collet

Email answers to editor@niagaranow.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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Let's put economic development back on the agenda for NOTL

Dear editor:

Part three of a long-view perspective, my series of letters, draws our attention to economic development.

There's only been a modicum of thinking about that since the Disero council — occasional mention of "strategic planning" amid preoccupations with tourism, hotels and housing development. Arguments for a more balanced strategy have occasionally been acknowledged, but mainly ignored.

The case for balance was simply put almost a decade ago. We had a medium-term tax problem — too many houses, not enough businesses to support a growing load.

The math was compelling as agricultural and not-for-profits, important as they are, pay less or no municipal tax. Compounding this was, and still is, the overshare we pay regionally for certain services, particularly policing.



The problem Niagara-on-the-Lake has, writes Terry Mactaggart, is too many houses and not enough businesses to support that growing load. The town needs to embrace 21st-century business ideas, he writes.

So, despite increased revenues from parking charges and the municipal accommodation tax, concerns continue to grow about the increasing burden on residents and the vulnerability of our town's reserves given growing demands for infrastructure.

Two of us were mandated to consider this dilemma and report back about what NOTL should be consider-

ing strategically to offset this trend.

That process took about a year and involved several meetings, over 50 business and community leaders as well as a look-about at certain other municipalities.

Our report "Strategic Direction: Ensuring Balance in a Thriving Community NOTL — Economic Development Strategy" was published

and presented to council in November 2019.

The report is extensive, yet hard to find on the net — I can provide a copy for anyone interested in its detail. It's still well worth a read.

Essentially, it underscored the need for developing a 21st-century economy keying off our cultural and agricultural strengths, but factoring in other assets, which were well-documented.

A planning clusters-innovation hubs approach was taken that embraced the entire community (each village including Glendale, the Highway 55 corridor, the airport, rural areas), acknowledging the requirement for new businesses and job creation that included a younger, creative generation, who would be instrumental in propelling our economy forward.

The role of local government would be facilitative, the drivers being clusters of

institutional and local leaders who had been identified and consulted about a way forward.

Looking back in an attempt to update and summarize, I still believe we need to balance our economic development as a four-part thrust:

Tourism is obvious but, as previously noted, requires moderation. Hopefully we will be adept enough to avoid a citizen backlash as has become commonplace elsewhere; History, culture and artistic endeavors are evolving, individually, and as a package. More collaboration is forthcoming utilizing the considerable resources at Niagara College and on the net — innovation for local trial as well export for institutions and audiences well beyond Niagara;

Agriculture is also paramount but needs to be leaning more towards 21st-century innovation.

Apart from viticulture and food, my impression is we are lagging others, including some close neighbours;


Stimulating a startup economy is also critical for fostering new businesses — outward looking, typically employing younger people. Incubation is commonplace elsewhere, effective and inexpensive to create. Tech, healthcare and education come to mind.

My sense remains that Niagara-on-the-Lake can be thought of and become more of a "creative common" (all four components above are or can be creative).

That's a brand that many would understand and rally to support. Mapping that out doesn't call for more consultants — we have plenty of underutilized talent at close reach.

A new council presents an opportunity.

Terry Mactaggart
NOTL


 **Thank You!**

On behalf of the Friends of Fort George, we would like to thank everyone that contributed to making Canada Day festivities in Niagara-on-the-Lake such a big success! In particular, we would like to thank

The Department of Canadian Heritage, The Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Tourism NOTL, Erwin Wiens Vineyards, Lions Club, Willow Cakes & Pastries, Parks Canada, NOTL Rotary Club, Phil's Independent Grocer, Hendrik's Independent Grocer, our Board of Directors, and countless volunteers that made the day possible.

All proceeds raised will help to support student employment opportunities at Brock's Monument and Fort George.



Criticize SORE, sure, but don't make up facts

Dear editor:

We, from Save Our Rand Estate, write to respond to Peter Rusin's letter in the July 2 edition ("Letter: Save Our Rand Estate stays silent on latest Ontario Land Tribunal ruling").

Mr. Rusin is correct about only one thing: that the tribunal recently ruled against us on a motion argued last September that we could proceed with an application to rectify the zoning bylaw on 144/176 John St.

The rest of his letter is full of falsehoods that we were sorely tempted to ignore. We have decided however, to reply.

First, in no way did the tribunal find that SORE's application was "improper, mischievous and troublesome" — an incorrect and false characterization by Mr. Rusin.

Quite the contrary, the tribunal acknowledged that SORE's application was solely to correct an alleged error in the zoning bylaw and made no finding on the merits of SORE's application.

The Ontario Land Tribunal simply found that municipalities were within their right to ask for an owner's signature on such applications, notwithstanding that both the Planning Act and several cases indicate clearly otherwise. This is why SORE is considering its review options for what we believe is an erroneous decision.



Hundreds of SORE members at a 2019 meeting about plans for the Rand Estate. Not what you'd call anonymous and lacking broad support, writes Judy McLeod. FILE

Second, Mr. Rusin is kidding himself if he believes SORE is an anonymous group, lacking broad-based community support and draining the town's tax revenue for legal expenses.

If he had attended the Jan. 18, 2018 meeting on Mr. Marotta's original hotel proposal, he would have seen 600 to 700 of us.

If he attended the special council meeting on April 23, 2023 to approve the Denise Horne report, he would have seen several hundred of us.

If he had attended any public meeting, tribunal or court hearing on the Rand Estate over the past last nine years, he would have seen us out in droves.

SORE has more than 600 households who have signed up to receive our emails. We are taxpayers and residents in Niagara-on-the-Lake and anything but anonymous.

Third, with respect to legal bills and SORE

"defaming the Marotta family," we urge Mr. Rusin to spend some time reading the SORE website, where he will discover the lengthy history of the Rand litigation — all of which has been initiated by the Marotta companies. Not by the Town of NOTL, nor by SORE.

Mr. Marotta has challenged every single decision of the elected council with respect to Rand going back to the Darte council decision to designate the Rand Estate under the Heritage Act in 2018. Every single decision. Both the town and SORE have been awarded significant costs by the courts as Mr. Marotta loses or abandons his court appeals.

If there's a concern about the amount of money the town has spent on Rand legal proceedings, Mr. Rusin should take it up with Mr. Marotta — an aggressive developer who has fought the town at

every turn for the last nine years when it didn't bend to his wishes.

The Marotta strategy has clearly been to try to bury the town in litigation. We applaud three successive councils in standing up to his bully tactics.

With respect to the recent Ontario Land Tribunal decision on our motion, as noted above, we question the outcome, given all the case law clearly stating that the landowner's signature is not required.

We have been considering our options on seeking a review of that decision. That process is ongoing and in the interim, our efforts have been focused entirely on the latest outrageous Marotta application for one of the largest Ritz-Carlton hotels in the world.

The Ritz-Carlton application clearly underlines the wisdom of clarifying the Rand Estate 144/176 John St. zoning bylaw, as Mr. Marotta now seeks approval for a hotel of some 85 feet high (including architectural features), which is almost three times what the 2011 council understood it was permitting in approving the Romance Inn.

Mr. Rusin should get his facts straight before penning his next letter to the editor. Everyone is entitled to an opinion, but not to a set of alternative facts.

Judy McLeod
SORE Association

Have an opinion you want heard? Email us.





Answers needed about old hospital future

Dear Editor:

In your June 25 issue, the observations and at least one, a few, several, or all questions from certain visitors to our treasured historic town of NOTL probably came to mind of many residents about the destiny

of the hospital site.

Hopefully there will some of these questions answered and acted upon, so that the plan benefits the taxpayers here, instead of just the tourists.

**Cecilia Bennett
NOTL**



Building 58 hotel rooms on Strewn Winery, including 42 rooms in a new, three-storey building, is not what Connie Tintinalli has in mind when she thinks of a "farm stay."

58-room 'farm stay'? Council must say no

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 lord mayor and members of council:

"The applications are proposed to facilitate the development of a hotel containing 58 guest rooms, and an event space within an existing wine production building, as secondary uses to the Strewn Estate Winery."

With all due respect, the proponent is euphemistically referring to this development as a "farm stay."

Sounds lovely. I imagine escaping the city to immerse myself in an agricultural environment in the countryside. Accommodations are an intimate, cozy cabin or cottage with a porch overlooking the vineyards or fields.

Enjoying fresh country air, trying to find a connection to the land and appreciate where our sustenance comes from.

Perhaps if I'm at a poultry farm, I would help gather eggs in the morning or milk the cows on a dairy farm or even better, on a flower farm, help to make bouquets.

Then at the end of the day, I imagine gathering around a harvest table

with the other dozen or so guests and sharing our experiences as we are enjoying some of the bounties of the farm.

It's hard to imagine that this would be part of the experience if you are staying at a hotel with 58 rooms and 114 other people gathering around the harvest table. How do they all interact with the land, the farm and the farmer?

This proposal is not bringing people to the farm — it is the city and development invading our precious countryside. Most of our orchards have become vineyards and now our vineyards may become hotels. Where does it all stop?

Commercial developments invading established residential areas in Old Town is bad enough, but even entertaining the idea of a hotel on agricultural land in the Greenbelt in a specialty crop area is blasphemy to nature and our environment.

This proposal is not for an agricultural "farm stay" experience — it is simply plunking a hotel in a vineyard to capitalize on weddings, conferences and other events.

Surely, this proposal must be met with a resounding "no."

**Connie Tintinalli
NOTL**

Questionable pardons erode the public's belief in justice — if there is any left at all



**Keith McNenly
Special to The Lake Report**

Keith McNenly
Special to The Lake
Report

The most dangerous power of the American presidency may not be the one Americans most fear.

When people think about unchecked presidential power, they usually think about military power: the nuclear codes, the commander in chief, the possibility of catastrophe at the push of a button.

But there is another presidential power, quieter and more respectable on paper, that in the wrong hands can do terrible damage to a constitutional republic: it is the pardon power.

If J. R. R. Tolkien had written "The Lord of the Rings" as a political parable for the 21st century, the "one ring to rule them all" might have been the presidential pardon: a lawful power that, when in the hands of the corrupt, can seduce a president into believing that ordinary rules don't apply to him, and subordinates into believing that loyalty will be rewarded with immunity.

Pardon abuse started on U.S. President Donald Trump's first day in office of his second term with sweeping clemency for those charged or convicted in connection with the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, an attempt to subvert the 2020

election he lost.

Since then, the controversial pardons have continued: last week, on the eve of the Fourth of July, he issued pardons to 11 people, including nine individuals who were convicted of violating a federal air pollution law, the Clean Air Act.

The Constitution gives the president broad authority to grant pardons for federal offences. Used properly, that power allows mercy where punishment has been excessive and correction where the justice system has erred.

But constitutional powers are only as safe as the character of the person entrusted with them.

For most of American history, presidents have exercised the pardon power with at least some sense of restraint. There has long been an understanding that clemency should not be used as a personal favour, a political reward or a shield for allies; however, in the hands of a self-serving president, the pardon ceases to be an instrument of mercy and becomes an instrument of retribution.

Once a president uses pardons to protect loyal associates or signal that certain people need not fear legal consequences, the rule of law weakens. The message is unmistakable: if you act in service to power, accountability may be optional. That is not mercy. It is privilege.

And that privilege is corrosive. It invites subordinates to take actions they might otherwise avoid. It undermines public confidence that justice is applied evenly. It creates the reality of a protected circle in which the law remains binding on ordinary citizens



In the wrong hands, presidential pardons are like the One Ring — dangerously powerful.

but negotiable for the well connected.

It frees family and allies to openly conduct obvious stock manipulation, be awarded non-competitive government contracts and receive foreign bribes, knowing those three magic words will absolve them in the final moments of the presidency: "I pardon you."

This is what makes the pardon power so dangerous. It requires no vote in Congress, no approval from the courts, and no meaningful institutional consent. It can be exercised instantly and finally.

That is why abuse of the pardon power is not just another political controversy. It is a constitutional danger. A republic cannot survive indefinitely as a president creates a class of untouchables around himself. Equal justice under law cannot coexist with a standing expectation that obedience to power will be repaid with legal absolution.

At a certain point, appeals to presidential restraint become beside the point. If a president has already shown a willingness to use constitutional power in bad faith, the answer cannot be to rest on hopes of sudden self-discipline.

What is needed then is oversight from Congress,

which has both the duty and the constitutional tools to respond when executive power is being used to subvert the rule of law rather than uphold it.

Some fear the possibility of a rogue or cornered president using military power to bring about devastation beyond their borders. But the pardon power, abused systematically, carries the risk of a different kind of ruin, aimed inward at the nation's own constitutional order. It can weaken law, destroy accountability, and make public corruption functionally untouchable.

That brings us back to Tolkien's central insight. The "one ring" does not simply grant power; it seduces the bearer already susceptible to corruption.

In the hands of someone bent on self-protection or vengeance, possession of that power does not produce restraint. It deepens the corruption and hastens the damage. That is why the answer now cannot be faith in the judgment of the holder.

It must be the intervention of the institutions designed to keep any one person from standing above the law.

The presidency was never meant to resemble a throne, and the pardon power was never meant to be a device by which one corrupt officeholder could marshal an army of corrupted subordinates. If Congress fails to act when that danger is plain, then the constitutional balance the founders designed is reduced to words on paper.

That is how a nation comes apart from within.

Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Keith McNenly was the chief administrator of the Town of Mono for 41 years.

An idea for vacation rental control: One per owner

Dear editor:

Niagara-on-the-Lake has always been a summer destination with Americans building large estates along the water. Chautauqua was founded as a cottage community.

In reference to Ken Moody's letter to the editor ("Hosted rentals don't 'hollow out' our town," June 25), he does not mention that subsequent to the meeting of the town with the Bed & Breakfast Association in 2008, vacation rentals were charged an additional fee, now for each bedroom, no

matter how small.

Eventually with the increases in fees, insurance, taxes and listing charges, it was decided that it wasn't really worth it anymore if you weren't in the "business" of vacation rentals. We were just trying to offset the costs of our vacation home.

Many people buy one property before they move and they want to use it some of the time. You don't really make any money unless you have multiple locations and this is perhaps what could be disallowed — multiple

locations by the same owner run solely to make a profit.

If vacation rentals were capped at one per owner and numbered companies not allowed, there would be a lot less vacation rentals. I think it's a matter of fairness. Business should not be able to profit from buying up residential real estate.

That in itself creates all the problems that Brian Marshall refers to in last week's column ("Architect: We don't need to axe rentals — just manage them"). It's not about "hollowing out" the community,

There are plenty of houses in NOTL that are empty all winter while the owners get out of the cold, and plenty of houses that are second homes.

After all, this is a summer destination, too, a tourist destination and a place where locals make a good living catering to tourists and taking care of properties.

We need to balance tourism with residents' needs and make the laws to do that fairly.

**Jackie Bonic
NOTL**

Preservation of Old Town's heritage on the chopping block



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

Yesterday evening, at the meeting of Niagara-on-the-Lake's municipal heritage committee, there were two significant overtures committee members were called to consider and vote upon.

One was a heritage impact assessment for the Rand Estate property based on the latest development proposal submitted by Solmar (Niagara 2) Inc. and the Two Sisters Resorts Corp. ("Arch-i-text: Batter up, NOTL, for another battle over the Rand Estate," May 20).

Following that was a heritage permit application by the Shaw Festival asking the committee to vote in favour, endorsing to council their current proposed design for the redeveloped Royal George Theatre.

However, the following analysis I wrote in advance

of yesterday's meeting, after thoroughly reviewing the impact assessment and application, the attachments, and resultant staff recommendations attached to the meeting agenda late last week. We will cover what transpired during the meeting at a later date.

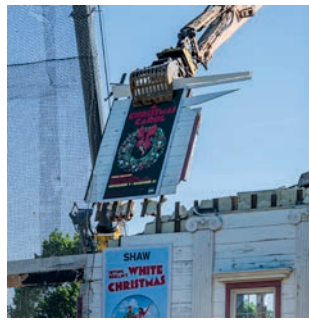
In my opinion, one staff report is a "win" for preservation of town heritage, while the other report supports a proposal that will result in a further and permanent loss of an iconic streetscape legacy.

Since I really want to conclude this column on a celebratory note, let's begin by considering the item connected to the new Royal George Theatre.

I am not going to reiterate all of the issues that this sadly flawed proposed design presents; those have been described in both past Arch-i-text columns and in many other articles by a variety of authors.

Rather, let's focus down on section 5.1 of the staff report — "staff analysis," wherein they describe the proposed building as: "a contemporary building that respects the established rhythm, scale and character of Queen Street without replicating historic architecture."

While suggesting that the



The new Royal George is expected by late 2028.

revisions to the original design (vis-à-vis "architectural composition, streetscape relationship, pedestrian scale, landscape treatment and transition to adjacent properties") are sufficient to "conserve the heritage character and heritage attributes of the Queen-Picton heritage conservation district."

Now, the common academic definition of an established streetscape rhythm can generally be stated as the result of existing buildings along a defined portion of a street which, together create a predictable, recurring pattern of physical elements that produce a sense of visual harmony, movement, and coherence.

Three primary principles in analyzing the rhythm of an existent streetscape look to the "solids" (wall surfaces) and "voids" (windows/

doors) of adjacent buildings, the spacing between the buildings and how they are positioned relative to the street and each other, the repetition of massing (building heights, rooflines, and widths), then the street-level features (such as trees, lights, benches, art or other pre-existing installations in the public space), which would include commemorative constructs standing off from the main facades of existing buildings.

I would suggest the proposed design fails to conform to these three core principles of rhythm.

First, the "solid" to "voids" ratio of the building is substantially higher than that of the existing Queen streetscape with glass (voids) distinctly dominant.

Second, applying the repetition of massing principle to the proposed design (relative to height, roofline and width), the proposed Royal George designs are a significant departure from the streetscape established by the existing buildings along Queen.

If built as currently proposed, by virtue of its scale and massing, the finished structure will not only become the dominant building within the Queen-Picton heritage conservation

district, but abruptly clash with and diminish the built-heritage assets — particularly those in the proximity of 83-85 Queen St.

Third, the so-called "ghost facade" — which is not physically a part of the proposed building's actual facade but rather a detached "floating" construct that will be perceived to be within the pedestrian zone — must be considered a "street-level feature."

Utterly unique, it will completely fracture the rhythmic contribution of other existing street-level features to the distinct detriment of the established streetscape.

This negative impact will be even more accentuated when directly approached from either north or south by pedestrians on the easterly sidewalk who will see what may be described as a very narrow, featureless column of limestone thrusting vertically skyward within the perceived walkway.

May I suggest that, in no fashion, does the proposed design respect the established rhythm, scale and character of Queen Street. Further, there are equally egregious issues on Victoria.

Bluntly, the revisions made to the original design by the proponents are com-

pletely inadequate vis-à-vis the conservation of the heritage character and attributes of Queen-Picton heritage conservation district.

If permitted to proceed in its current form, the new Royal George Theatre will permanently and unrecoverably damage the heritage district — a fact that both council and committee members would bear the responsibility for allowing.

But let's move on to the other item: the review of Rand Estate heritage impact assessment. In this case, the staff recommendation is the antithesis of that prepared for the Royal George application.

It is a masterful piece of work that draws directly on the conclusions of multiple heritage reports prepared on this property and the 2024 findings/decision of the Ontario Land Tribunal to send the proponents back to the drawing board regarding the future development of this historic heritage asset.

Let's give credit where credit is due — congratulations to the heritage staff for a fine piece of work on this application.

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

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ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

As I ramble about a perfect day of local tourism, please attempt to have an open mind about Niagara Falls. Niagara-on-the-Lakers have such an opportunity right on our doorstep, but only a surprisingly small percentage of us have experienced the Maid of the Mist.

The Eiffel Tower, the Hofbrauhaus, the Sydney Opera House and Bondi Beach — all must-sees around the world. Nearby Niagara Falls is as famous as any of them.

Last Sunday, my well-travelled daughter and I took an international visitor friend on one of the most famous boat rides in the world. Our six-hour outing had been organized perfectly, including the warm weather.

Here's how we accomplished a quickie Niagara Falls visit on an early summer day. It could have been a traffic gridlock nightmare, but she had it all figured out.

We left Old Town just before 9 a.m. and meandered south along "one of the prettiest drives in the world" — or at least, that's how the lower Niagara Parkway has been described for decades.

As we got nearer to the Whirlpool Bridge, the traffic got heavier. "Don't worry about it, Dad, I've got this," said my daughter.

She deftly and legally parked in front of the Niagara Parks Police building facing the American Falls, and we walked about 30 minutes north to the top of the incline railroad.

It took us down into the 170-foot-deep gorge and to the world-famous boat ride. Carrie had purchased our boat ride tickets online earlier that morning. Of course.

Talk about the efficient movement of tourists. It seemed effortless, and before long, we were wearing our very stylish blue wet weather ponchos, and standing along the lower rail of the boat.

Tourists from around the



It may not be the Maid of the Mist in name anymore, but the boat tour on the Canadian side of the Falls continues to dazzle people from around the world. WIKIMEDIA

world, literally, all wide-eyed and anxious to see the mighty Falls up close and personal.

Captain Bill Bert's announcements were clear and understandable, providing enough information to make this the boat ride of a lifetime. They had obviously spent enough on sound.

After about 15 minutes, we were in the swirling mist. Those of us who chose to stay outside suddenly experienced the full force of nature. Water, water everywhere.

They tell us some 600,000 gallons of water go over the three falls per second. That

sounds like a lot to me, but this might be a case of "a lie told often enough becomes the truth." Just trust them, and don't be cynical.

The excitement, speechlessness and enthusiasm of everyone on the boat. And so unfiltered. We stayed outside in the misty elements, and laughed as the drenching continued. Again, proof that laughter has no foreign accent. And no profanity.

After about an hour, our indescribable experience in the Niagara gorge was over. We had been completely immersed in world-famous Niagara Falls. The Horseshoe, Bridal Veil and American

Falls exceeded everyone's expectations (but that 600,000 number still sounds like an exaggeration).

A ride back up to Queen Victoria Park, and then a short walk back to our car parked in front of the Niagara Parks Police building. Talk about walking with a view. We had paid for two hours, and didn't have a ticket. A happy day.

By about 1 p.m., we were at Walker's Country Market on the Parkway, enjoying generously portioned fresh sandwiches and iced tea as a picnic lunch. Egg salad, turkey breast, pastrami on rye. Absolutely fresh corn on the cob (or is it cob on the corn?).

The freshest of fresh Kawartha Dairy ice cream, sitting on a bench gazing at the deceptively amazing Niagara River. So many flavours, but I always lick the butterscotch ripple. Merci to Josh and his enthusiastic fellow scoopers.

We take this river for granted, as it continuously drains four of the Great Lakes. And it's all fresh water.

So many people in the world need more drinking

water, and water for irrigation. Canada, our home and native land, is so blessed with natural resources including what seems to be unlimited fresh water. We have hundreds of thousands of lakes in Canada — purportedly.

So, what was so confusing up in Niagara Falls? I know a wee bit about trade names and intellectual property, but what the heck happened to the Maid of the Mist? An old, very old brand name.

All the visitors, from Canada or abroad, think they are on the Maid of the Mist. But on the Canadian side of the river, the signs don't say this — they say Hornblower, Voyage to the Falls, Niagara City Cruise.

It shouldn't confuse me, or cause me to worry, but what the heck happened to the feel-good moniker Maid of the Mist?

This has been a bit of a pushy Ramblings, but I do hope many of you will break routine and enjoy the Maid of the Mist (or whatever it is called).

Take a few hours. Be curious. A tourist in your own backyards.

rossrocket9@gmail.com

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Have some fun



Across

- 1. It preceded the C I S (1,1,1,1)
- 3. Comes before a sentence (10)
- 10. In a higher bracket (9)
- 11. School tool (5)
- 12. Taggers' normal medium (5-5)
- 13. Ore vein (4)
- 15. Mission Impossible's --- Hunt (5)
- 16. Those who change to suit the circumstances (8)
- 20. Eternity is about the whole (8)
- 23. South American ruminant (5)
- 25. One of five on D-Day (4)
- 27. Two-sided (10)
- 29. This Tom had a cabin (5)
- 30. Knock hen out for 25% (3-6)
- 31. Silver lining (6,4)
- 32. Reply request (1,1,1,1)

Down

- 1. Not cleaned (8)
- 2. Spiky customer on the seabed (3,6)
- 4. Site of major WW2 battle in the Pacific (7)
- 5. Roofed open gallery attached to a house (7)
- 6. Known in Eire as "the rebel city" (4)
- 7. Icehouse? (5)
- 8. Turbulent Severn causes anxiety (6)
- 9. Avoiding the outdoors (7,2)
- 14. Small daggers (9)
- 17. Foundation of pointillism (3)
- 18. Comforts (9)
- 19. Operated by 29 Across, perhaps (8)
- 21. Paper cutters, maybe (7)
- 22. Important period for accountants (4-3)
- 24. City satellite (6)
- 26. Plain code for computers (1,1,1,1,1)
- 28. Common term for computer and web programs (4)

Crossword Puzzle

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Last issue's answers

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1		7											3
4			6					9					



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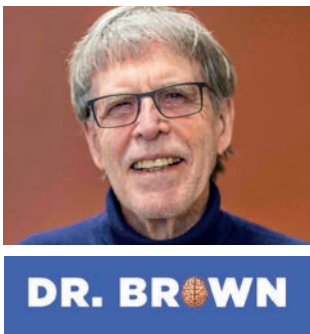
EXPLORING HISTORY WITH NOTL MUSEUM



Basket factory workers, c. 1930

It's that time of year when empty baskets begin making their way to Niagara-on-the-Lake's orchards, returning filled with the season's tender fruit. While today's harvest still relies on baskets, few people realize they were once made right here in town. With the large quantity of fruit grown locally, basket making was an important industry, providing farmers with the containers needed to harvest and transport their crops. Niagara-on-the-Lake was once home to a basket factory in the dock area near the slip, alongside dozens of others throughout the Niagara region. The building was destroyed by fire in the 1960s.

My father-in-law and the loneliness that comes with aging



Dr. William Brown
Columnist

In the popular jargon of the day, my father-in-law was a good guy. Bob was good natured, welcoming, fair and gifted with humour and generosity.

Like some, he was a bit of a worrier about his health and subscribed to the Harvard Health Letter of the day — one issue of which stood out. In it, one expert claimed that when you retired at 65 years, you could probably count on good health for 10 to 15 years.

And so it was with Bob. His wife, Eve, inherited a small fortune, and they used it to good effect by happily travelling to spots all over the world and sometimes invited us along — good for us and them.

Following the Newsletter's script, in his mid-to-late 70s, Bob developed a

series of medical problems. Angina was followed by transient ischemic attacks and a stroke, which I've written about before because his case was written up for a medical journal complete (with an MRI scan of his thalamic stroke).

Following this, oddly enough, his hypochondriasis was gone, just in time for the bowel cancer which, a few years later, killed him.

His history was common enough: good health for 10 to 15 years following retirement followed by one health care problem after another in his late 70s, followed in his case by death at 78.

When I was a medical student in the 1960s, most people didn't make it past their early 70s because of cancer and cardiovascular disease for both of which there were no good fixes in those days.

There were exceptions of course — outriders who lived well into their late 90s, still mentally sharp but most experiencing increasing trouble getting about without assist devices.

There was nothing like the many game-changing interventions we now take for granted.

Joint replacement sur-



Once you get to a certain age, life becomes "the great winnowing," writes Dr. William Brown, whether it's from dementia, increasing physical fragility, or out-of-the-blue strokes, heart attacks or falls. UNSPLASH

gery, effective drugs for a growing list of autoimmune diseases and cancers (capable of turning what were miserable, even fatal diseases into manageable problems) and a growing array of interventionist tools, which cardiologists and cardiovascular surgeons deploy these days to fix problems in the heart and arteries. All transformed health care in the last several decades.

What we can't stop are what I see in long term care facilities— progressive degenerative diseases affecting the brain such as Lewy body dementia, frontotemporal degeneration, and

most common, Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, and other diseases such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as ALS.

What changes in our 80s through to the end of our lives are the compounding effects of multiple challenges such as impaired hearing, limited movement, pain in this or that joint or region, impaired balance, forgetfulness especially for names and appointments and items on to-do lists.

We're simply not as clever as we were in our middle years, much of which may go unnoticed or acknowledged especially when we're

surrounded by others of like age equally, if not more, challenged.

Which brings up a major problem highlighted several years ago by the U.S. Surgeon General: loneliness. It's not hard to see why.

If you've lost a partner, spouse or close friend and all the easy conversation and shared activities that implies, how do you fill the moments, days, months or years?

Sure, there are plenty of "things" and "events" to do, but they don't fill the void of those linchpin people in our lives as we age, especially in the later decades because others of similar age increasingly suffer from similar losses and constraints.

Late life is the great winnowing — the slow, painful loss of someone with dementia, increasing physical fragility or out of the blue, a major stroke, heart attack or a fall with significant complications may strike.

I'm struck by loneliness in the long-term care facilities where my wife Janet lived for over six years and even before that, for several years at home.

From my observations, residents with dementia rarely form meaningful

relationships with other residents, despite seeing and literally bumping into them daily, and sharing the same mealtime table for years.

The same residents rarely touch talk to, or even touch one another. Some staff are very helpful by talking to them or better holding them, but there's only so much you can do when facilities are understaffed — a universal problem these days in underfunded, understaffed nursing homes.

Residents in long-term-care facilities are among the loneliest in our society and with that loneliness and social isolation, comes a withering of social skills and speech.

Isolation and loneliness are true also in the wider society, especially for those in apartments with little sense of community, and much worse in the middle of busy cities such as St. Catharines, Hamilton and Toronto.

The Surgeon General was right about loneliness, even in the midst of busyness.

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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Obituary

Velma Lang



LANG, Velma Jeanne
May 3, 1946 – July 4, 2026

It is with great sadness, but with gratitude for a life well lived, that we announce the passing of Velma Jeanne Lang (née Vanderwater), who died peacefully at home surrounded by loving family and friends on July 4, 2026, at the age of 80.

Born in Leamington Spa, England, Velma began her life with a remarkable journey, crossing the Atlantic aboard the Queen Mary, arriving at Pier 21 in Halifax. She was raised in Wellington, Ontario, where she grew up among a close community that included several other war babies.

A lifelong learner, Velma earned her Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from the University of Toronto in 1968. She began her teaching career at Westlane High School in Niagara Falls, where she met the love of her life, William. They were married in 1970 and moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake, where they lovingly restored the historic Railroad School and made it their home.

After raising her family and continuing to follow her love of teaching, she returned to her studies, earning her Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language in 1992, followed by her Master of Education in 1998. Velma dedicated herself to helping newcomers to the Niagara region find their voice, confidence, and sense of belonging. Through her work in English language education, including with the YMCA of Niagara, she served as a LINC/ESL teacher, program coordinator, language assessor, and CLARS Coordinator. She also served as Affiliate representative and President of TESL Niagara.

In 2014, Velma was honoured by TESL Ontario with the Distinguished Contribution Award, recognizing her significant long-term achievements and contributions to English language educators, the ESL field, and the many newcomers whose lives were enriched by her work. Her love of teaching also took her

overseas, where she taught English in China and Thailand with Bill.

Above all, Velma's greatest joy was her family. She was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother, sister, sister-in-law, aunt, cousin, and friend. She will be deeply missed by her husband William, beloved children Jason, Cameron, and Jennifer, her daughter-in-law Elizabeth, and grandson Nathan. She is also lovingly remembered by her brothers Doug (Helen), Dave (Betty), Jon (Jackie), Peter (Cindy), and her sister Margaret (Tony) whom she was blessed to discover later in life. She is also survived by sister-in-law Donna Jean Janes, brother-in-law Wilson Lang (Claudia), and her many nieces and nephews.

Velma was predeceased by her parents Vernon and Joyce (Tudor) Vanderwater, whose courage and choices helped create the Canadian life and family she cherished, her parents-in-law Judge Harold and Marion Lang, sister-in-law Shirley Page (Doug), brother-in-law Ronald Lang (Birthe), brother-in-law Stephen Janes, and

nephew Richard Janes.

Velma lived with curiosity, compassion, and generosity. She found happiness in the pages of a good book and the countless close friendships formed through her book groups. She was an active member of Grace United Church, where she shared her time, service, and faith by teaching Sunday School, and supporting refugee families. She also gave back through her volunteer work with the Canadian Cancer Society and supported causes that reflected her desire to help others.

Velma will be remembered for her warmth, selflessness, and genuine interest in the lives of others. Whether welcoming people into her home or cottage, sharing stories over a cup of tea or glass of wine, discussing a favourite book, or spending time with family and friends, she had a gift for making people feel valued, supported, and heard. She loved learning, conversation, and connection, and carried with her a quiet determination to leave the world a better place.

A service celebrating Velma's life will be held on Saturday, July 11, 2026, 1 p.m. at Grace United Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake with a reception to follow. The church will welcome guests for visitation at noon. Cremation has taken place with interment in Wellington at a later date. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Velma's memory to CNIB Guide Dogs, The Seeing Eye, or organizations supporting education for women and girls in underprivileged countries. In honour of Velma's generous spirit, the family also encourages the gift of organ donation.

She leaves behind a legacy of kindness, learning, resilience, and love — one that will continue through the many lives she touched. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.



CELEBRATION OF LIFE



Peter (Pete) Bolduc

SUNDAY, JULY 12
2:00 - 4PM

Please join us on the patio to celebrate Pete's life, at Butler's Sports Bar (inside if rain).

284 Mary Street, NOTL

CELEBRATION OF LIFE



Maureen Pospiech

Please join us at Ravine Vineyard to celebrate Maureen's life on Tuesday, July 21st, 2026 from 2pm-5pm

Casual dress, best wishes only. Memorial donations may be made to Notl Lacrosse

Celebrating the life of Janet Brown



THE FAMILY OF JANET BROWN WELCOMES FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY TO ATTEND A CELEBRATION OF LIFE IN HER MEMORY ON THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2026 AT 11:00 AM AT ST MARK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ONTARIO.

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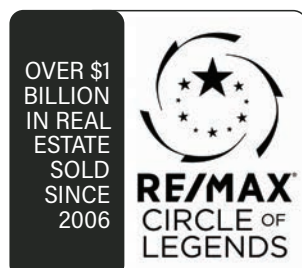
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