

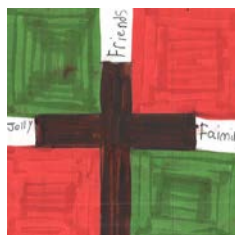
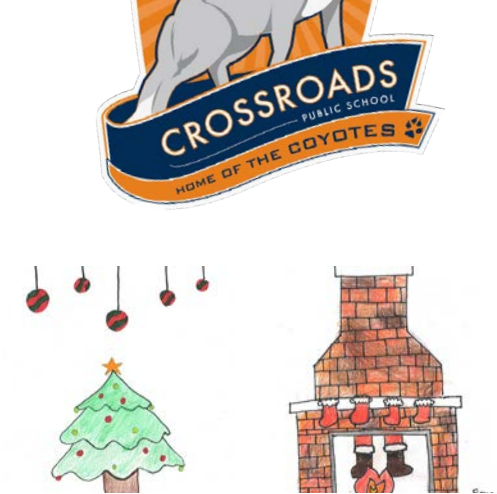




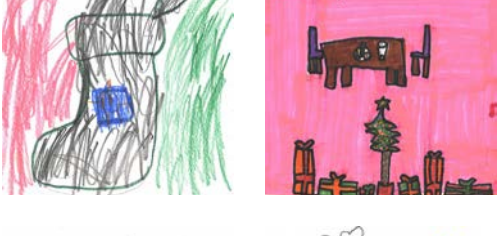
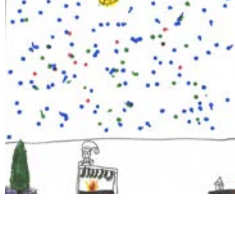
# The Lake Report



# The Lake Report



# The Lake Report





## Lake Report takes a break

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

It's the time of year again when most of us get to take a little break for the holiday to spend time with family and friends.

And as usual, The Lake Report will be taking a short break, too.

This issue is the final edition of 2024. The paper will return on Jan. 9 with the first issue of 2025.

The Lake Report would like to thank all of our readers and advertisers who supported us this year.

Every ad, large or small, helps us keep printing news that matters to residents of our town and connects residents to the dozens of Niagara-on-the-Lake businesses that are the lifeblood of our community.

Every letter or story tip sent to us helps shows just how important it is to have an independent, locally owned newspaper serving NOTL.

We hope that our coverage of news, arts, sports and feature stories about your neighbours and important NOTL issues has helped keep you connected with the community this year.

During the holidays our coverage will be limited, but please see our website niagaranow.com for breaking news stories and occasional coverage until we return full force in January.

Happy holidays!

# Santa rolls into town

## Massive crowds gather for annual Christmas Parade



Five-year-old Rowan watches the floats go by during the annual Christmas Parade on Saturday. Crowds lined the streets of Old Town to get a glimpse of this year's parade, and of course, Santa himself. **Find more parade photos on Page 5.** DAVE VAN DE LAAR

# Grape growers hope to curb the flow of foreign juice into Canada

Richard Wright  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A 7,000-tonne surplus of grapes in Ontario following the fall harvest has growers here calling on the government to do something about domestic wine content regulations.

"It is almost criminal in our minds that these grapes are being dropped on the

ground, not purchased, and imports still find their way into our marketplace," said Debbie Zimmerman, executive director of the Grape Growers of Ontario.

A total of 71,000 tonnes of grapes were produced by growers in the province in 2024.

Of that, only 64,000 were purchased, said Zimmerman.

The culprit: Finished

bulk wine, also known as juice, from foreign jurisdictions such as Australia, Chile and Argentina.

These products can be purchased on the open market at lower prices and blended with the domestic juice.

Ontario legislation requires that only 25 per cent of a bottle's content be from this province — from places such as

Niagara, Prince Edward County and Pelee Island — for it to still be branded as a domestic wine.


Zimmerman said her organization is actively lobbying government to change the rules.

"We're working with the government of Ontario and we are speaking to them about ... content," she said.

*Continued on Page 3*



This mockup VQA Canada chart shows how a far-reaching national standard could look for our country. SOURCED




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# New regional budget means higher property taxes for NOTL

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

With the approval of Niagara's regional budget, residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake can expect higher taxes.

In a news release, the region outlined a levy increase of \$46 million, equalling an estimated 9.6 per cent in the levy.

"For the average home in the Niagara region this would equate to an approximate \$191 increase on the regional portion of the property tax bill," the release said.

Regional coun. Andrea Kaiser said NOTLers can expect an even bigger increase.

Kaiser used the example of policing cost per household to illustrate how much more NOTLers can expect to pay.

Most cities in the region have policing costs ranging between \$300 to \$400 per household, Kaiser said.

"Based on assessment, Niagara-on-the-Lake is at \$786," she said.

Kaiser was satisfied with allocations outlined in the



With a levy increase of \$46 million, NOTLers can expect to pay more on the regional portion of their property tax bill.

capital budget, including several infrastructure investments.

But Kaiser was not in support of the operating budget, she said.

"It's due to expenses that I deem to be ones that we should be examining to reduce the levy for residents of all of the region," Kaiser told The Lake Report.

There is very little wiggle room for what councillors can do to reduce the budget, but one thing that can be

done is reducing discretionary spending, she said.

Incentive grants were included in the budget and are not on par with the regional growth Niagara is experiencing, Kaiser said.

"We had a study done that shows these grants are not doing the work they are supposed to do," she said.

The taxpayer can look at an increase of around two per cent per household.

"Some councillors are ignoring the math."

If councillors were to get rid of tax incentive grants right now, residents would have a two per cent tax reduction, she said.

"It's pretty substantial," Kaiser said.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa was in agreement with Kaiser, he said in an interview.

"Coun. Kaiser and I have taken some exception with some of the grants that do not align with councils strategic priorities, that would be housing and affordability," Zalepa said.

"I would have liked to see those discontinued even with a phase out period, but council didn't choose that," he said.

Kaiser has a motion prepared for the NOTL council meeting scheduled for Jan. 28, 2023.

"(The motion) will hopefully address the same kind of scale that's going to be (used) in Niagara-on-the-Lake for the general levy as well," she said.

Coun. Gary Burroughs has several concerns surrounding the budget, including impact on the taxpayer and what this budget could mean for NOTL council.

"My concern is the

amount is less than staff are recommending for local council," Burroughs said in an interview.

Burroughs said he hopes Kaiser and Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa being on regional council will help NOTL.

"Regional budgets are passed down to local municipalities by assessment and because we're the third highest after St. Catharines and Niagara Falls, any increase will impact our local taxpayer," he said.

There is a lack of representation on regional council that impacts NOTL, Burroughs said.

"The need for a family and housing budget, we don't benefit from that, there's no projects in Niagara-on-the-Lake. And police, our share of the police budget was higher than our total local budget," he said.

The Glendale project is going to increase NOTL's share of the regional budget, too, Burroughs said.

"(It is) going to make our residents pay more of that high regional budget. Every time it increases you can bet, coming down the road

as Glendale takes place, we are going to pay more and more," he said.

Burroughs said a focus on infrastructure will not do NOTL much good either.

The capital budget boasts \$100 million for infrastructure upgrades to support major industrial investments.

"They're not doing an awful lot in Niagara-on-the-Lake," he said.

"They're not taking into account what residents want."

Zalepa said the capital budgets funding to infrastructure will help with a number of smaller projects in NOTL.

"It's actually quite extensive, mostly it's around roads, bridge repairs, culverts," he said.

He added that the regional budget addresses a lot of services that residents may not be familiar with but are important nonetheless.

"We're looking at housing, dealing with homelessness and pressures around affordability, there's a lot of regional effort at work there and not everybody always sees that but they are important to society," he said.

[juliasacco@niagaranow.com](mailto:juliasacco@niagaranow.com)

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# Council roundup: Next meeting is Jan. 28

Richard Wright  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

NOTL town council held its final regular meeting of 2024 on Dec. 10 and discussed spending guidelines for town departments as the municipality has yet to finalize next year's budget and a new fee for special event permit fees.

Here's a brief summary of the final meeting:

### Budget motion

In lieu of approving a final municipal budget for 2025, council approved the ability for all town departments to take on costs of up to 35 per cent of last year's expenditure budgets to continue funding essential services — as the town works to put together a final budget it can approve in the new year.

In September, council approved a timeline for working on the 2025 capital and operating budgets, aiming to finalize them on Dec. 10.

Budget meetings commenced Nov. 20 with the following meetings scheduled on Nov. 28 and Dec. 5. The final meeting was deferred into January by a staff request.

Without a final decision on complete operating costs and will continue early in the new year.

This leaves the total operating budget planned for next year, as well as how much the property tax levy will increase for NOTL residents, undecided.

On Nov. 20, the budget committee was looking at a proposed operating budget of around \$18.4 million and a 14.4 per cent property tax increase.

Coun. Erwin Wiens questioned whether or not this situation would affect town staff's ability to secure the best price for road construction and asphalt resurfacing needs.

"Are we able to get in on those (tenders) or does this not apply to that?" he questioned, noting that tendering in January usually results in the best price.

"The cost will go up considerably if we don't do it early," he warned.

Council directed staff to investigate and report back.

### Glendale area development charges

Council directed staff to prepare a 2025 background study to consider an area-specific development charge in Glendale to address anticipated costs related to the area's growth.

These include stormwater, wastewater and infrastructure costs. This

is in addition to a proposed regular development charge study set for 2025.

"With growth (in Glendale) we're going to need more community services and ways to fund these community services," Coun. Sandra O'Connor said.

During last week's committee of the whole meeting, councillors delayed approval of the Glendale secondary plan until January.

### Special event permit fee is coming

As of Jan. 1, a \$100 fee will be attached to the special event permit application process.

The item was brought forward by Coun. Maria Mavridis, who stated her research — as well as information gathered by town staff — shows other municipalities in Niagara as well as those as far off as Barrie charge between \$200 and \$500 for such permits. "We are in budget mode and I was looking at ways to create revenue streams that other municipalities use that we don't have," she said.

Mavridis added that \$100 is a cost she is happy with now but is also willing to discuss an increase down the road.

"Some others have said it should be higher," she said.

"I am open to that. I just want to ensure that we are

covering the staff time that is put into the work being done."

Currently, there is no fee attached to such applications.

The \$100 fee will remain in effect until a comprehensive review of the special events program is complete in the third fiscal quarter (July to August) of 2025.

Wiens, who, as an organizer of last week's tractor parade in Virgil, needed a permit from the region, said he found its process of charging varying rates for private events versus charitable events a good way to go.

He offered that as a suggestion for the upcoming review.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita also agreed with the fee and asked for a comprehensive review of the time and effort town staff take to complete the process to determine the best rate.

She added that the \$100 might be a good place to start but wanted to know more.

"I would like to understand, when we see that report, what is involved. It is an onerous process ... and if it can be streamlined at all, that would be great too."

The next council meeting is scheduled for Jan. 28 at 6 p.m.

# Growers want producers to use more domestic grapes

Continued from Front Page

"Right now, it allows the blenders to put 25 per cent in the bottle, right?"

"We're saying that's not good enough."

She believes proof that this needs to be changed not only comes from the surplus in 2024, but also that since it became legal in Ontario earlier this year for private retail outlets to sell alcohol, nothing has changed in the minds of wine producers.

"We're looking over our shoulder, saying, 'We're in a greenbelt. We have 8,500 new points of access in this province, yet we still can't sell our domestic products to our domestic buyers.'"

"Like, what is wrong here?" she said.

Zimmerman said there should be co-operation on the part of buyers to give growers some certainty for the future, unlike what was experienced this year.

"A number of growers had their contracts cut in June and by the time you get to June you spent a lot

of money on pruning, tying and then they got told they didn't need their grapes and then they're saying, 'What the heck? I'm here at the end of June, I don't have a buyer, so now where do I go?'"

That precarity has given growers a lot of anxiety, she added.

"Right now, growers are very uncertain about what it's going to look like in 2025."

### VQA Canada standard

In the face of Ontario wines using foreign juice, a VQA standard is something that does exist in Canada.

VQA Ontario and B.C. are legal designations that let consumers know what they are buying has been produced solely using Canadian grapes.

There is now a conversation happening to revisit the idea of a VQA Canada designation, which would help growers in Ontario, B.C. and other provinces such as Quebec and Nova Scotia.

On Dec. 12, Senator Robert Black stood before the

country's upper house and outlined the need for wine and grapes to move freely across Canada.

This is currently hindered by interprovincial trade barriers.

Zimmerman is encouraged by these efforts to create a legal system where Canadian growers can collaborate with each other to help keep shelves full of domestic brands and to mandate a Canada-only VQA stamp of approval.

"We are working very closely, though, with all of our partners across the country," she said.

"This is something we need for the future, that VQA Canada structure."

Donald Ziraldo — co-founder of Inniskillin Winery and founding chairman of the VQA brand — wrote Black's question to the Senate.

He has also been a longtime advocate of establishing a national VQA standard.

In order to do that, however, wine and grapes from individual provinces

must be able to reach other jurisdictions.

In June, Ziraldo, and a delegation of wine industry members along with Niagara Centre MPP Vance Badawey, met with federal agriculture minister Lawrence MacAulay in Ottawa to urge the feds to hear his arguments.

At the same time, Ziraldo approached Vancouver Centre MP Joyce Murray to table a motion in the House of Commons.

That didn't happen due to conflicting priorities for the House, said Ziraldo.

However, he still came away from his efforts over the last year feeling positive.

"I appreciate the fact that senator Black put it forward to the government/Senate, and I'm now happy that we can move forward hopefully with the province's co-operation," said Ziraldo.

By addressing the Senate with his question, Ziraldo feels Black has officially put the matter on public record and will hopefully begin a dialogue.



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# Stockings for Seniors returns for fourth year

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Christmas is coming for 145 residents at Pleasant Manor and Niagara Long Term Care retirement homes.

For the fourth year in a row, Joan King asked Niagara-on-the-Lake residents to put together stockings for seniors in town to brighten their holiday season.

Started during the COVID-19 lockdowns, King has donated stockings with essential items and a few holiday treats to seniors in care homes who may be spending the Christmas season alone.

More than 100 people from the community reached out and donated a stocking this year, King told The Lake Report.

“I’ve got quite a group. Sometimes they will come with two or three or five (stockings) and some of them are just huge, filled to the brim,” she said.

King said NOTLers are moved by the feeling of loneliness some of the residents experience.

“It’s so heartwarming to



Joan King collects the last incoming stockings at the community centre on Monday, with stockings going out for delivery shortly after. JULIA SACCO

see what people in the community do,” she said.

And the happiness it brings residents makes it all worth it.

Along with the care homes in NOTL, King is bringing stockings to individuals who use meals on wheels this year.

“They deliver to about 150 different people and I asked them to specify the people that would be all alone, that will not have visits from family, so we narrowed that down to about 30 (people),” King said.

“It must be an awful feeling, so it’s just a little surprise, a fun thing that they can open up and get some joy,” she said.

Some stockings have activity books, colouring books, markers, stuffy toys and more.

“People think of everything, it’s a nice variety,” King said.

Along with the stockings, residents will receive handmade cards made by NOTLer Amika Verwegen and her four children.

“The cards are so cute

and they have little riddles in them. The cards are a tradition that they do as a family,” King said.

Several other donations were made from organizations in NOTL, including 67 stockings from Crossroads Public School kindergarten students and 35 more from the St. Davids Lions Club.

Volunteers from NOTL Palliative Care knit little hearts for each resident and the town of NOTL donated some of their annual holiday cards for each stocking as well.

Hearts were knitted by Marilyn Bartlett, Dena Broeders, Louanne Rudisuela, Jean Stoddart and Lorraine Horton.

On Monday, NEOB Lavender donated several soaps and sprays for the seniors, too.

Stockings were gathering at the community centre between 10 a.m. and noon on Monday and delivered shortly afterward.

Martin Mazza, owner of Italian Pizza & Subs will play Santa on Christmas Day, handing out stockings at Pleasant Manor, King said.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com

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# Christmas Parade rolls through



Above: Members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 124 in Niagara-on-the-Lake showcased the popular fish fry for the parade, with a fish in a fryer basket. The fish fry is closed for the holidays and returns Jan. 9. Bottom, clockwise from top left: There was no shortage of Grinches in this year's parade. The Burlington Teen Tour band plays some festive tunes for the crowds. Santa Claus and his reindeer led the final float in the parade. Students and staff from Crossroads Public School wave and give holiday greetings as they march down Queen Street. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



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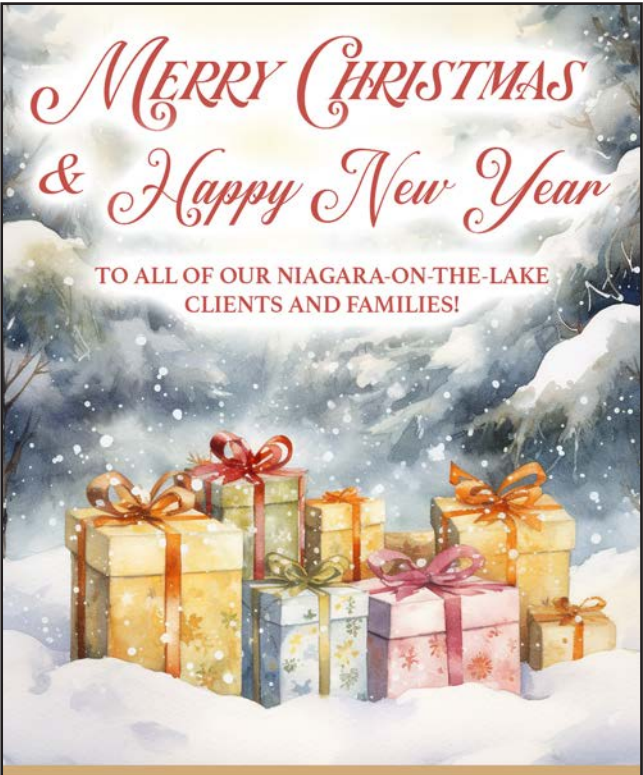
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# Christmas book sends positive message

Staff  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake serial entrepreneur Al Huberts doesn't just make board games and design fashion. He's also an author — and this year, he's hoping he has the "perfect" Christmas gift with his new book.

He's all geared up to release his children's book, "River's Perfect Christmas" for the world to read.

The story is about a six-year-old boy named River who overhears his neighbour tell his mother that there will be no presents for her children on Christmas day due to the difficulties of the past year.

River then takes it upon himself to ensure that his neighbours have a memorable Christmas.

Huberts says the 32-page book presents a "positive message for children and adults alike and does so using thoughtful rhyming prose supported by beautifully crafted illustrations."



Author Al Huberts, right, and illustrator Becca Marshall say their book "River's Perfect Christmas" gives all ages a lesson on how to be kind and caring. SUPPLIED

The illustrations are by Becca Marshall, a school teacher and working artist who Huberts met through his neighbour.

Regular readers of The Lake Report might remember a story about the book, which was supposed to launch in 2024. It was delayed and will now launch in the new year via a Kickstart campaign — something Huberts is fond of and

is also doing with his board game Build-iT Step by Step.

To help ensure a successful Kickstarter campaign, Huberts will first launch campaign to garner supporters contact information.

Supporters that register their contact information will be the first notified of the Kickstarter launch date and in doing so will receive their copies of the book well in advance of the general public.

The first 2,000 supporters will receive a copy of the book signed by Huberts and Marshall.

The pre-launch is open for registration now and will run until Jan. 30, followed by the Kickstarter campaign.

More information, including a video about the book and how to register for the campaigns, can be found at [rule1concepts.com](http://rule1concepts.com).

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# \$12,300 raised for Kazemi family

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Asadullah Kazemi was elated when the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce presented him and his family with a cheque of more than \$12,300 of funds raised from this year's Candlelight Stroll.

"I really don't know how to thank you all. It is an immense joy to be able to pay off my debts," Kazemi said after the presentation.

Kazemi, his wife Mahdia entered Canada in February of last year after a journey from Afghanistan in which they accrued a debt of \$15,000 US dollars. At the time, Mahdia was pregnant with their first child.

Their two children, now one-year-old Ali and three-month-old Zahra, were present for the presentation.

Before the stroll, \$5,000 of debt was remaining and the family was still in need of funding to acclimate to



The Kazemis are immensely grateful for the funds raised through this year's Candlelight Stroll, which will go toward paying travel debts incurred while fleeing Afghanistan, as well as helping them acclimate to living in Niagara-on-the-Lake. JULIA SACCO

their new lives in Niagara. Beatrice Campbell, stage manager at the Shaw Festival and a friend of the Kazemi family was at the cheque presentation and shared in the family's gratitude. After two years, the Kazemis are still awaiting

permanent resident status, Campbell told The Lake Report. "Our despair is increasing day by day," Kazemi said in a written statement. Donations from the community mean a lot to the family during a difficult time.

"I can't tell you what this will mean. It's an incredible gift," Campbell said. Kathy Weiss, the chamber's interim director, said she was honoured to hand the Kazemi family the cheque. "It confirms the spirit and generosity of Canada," she said.

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This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style.  
Category: A PLACE IN HISTORY

The last major conflict of the War of 1812, the battle of this city took place in January 1815, after the war had ended.

Last issue:

Category: SCOTLAND

Clue: A celebration of Scottish sport and culture, the annual these "Games" include caber tossing.

Answer: What are the Highland Games?

Answered first by: Sue Rautenberg

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Lynda Collet, Bob Wheatley, Jane Morris, Claudia Grimwood, Jeff Lake, Kathy Humphries, Katie Reimer, Jim Dandy, Sheila Meloche, Margie Enns, Patricia Kierans, Tuija Johansson, Daniel Smith, Marla Percy, Wade Durling, Esther VanGorder

Email answers to [editor@niagaranow.com](mailto: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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# Christmas Tractor Parade a huge hit

Richard Wright  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Bigger, better and good for the whole community. That's the reception to last Thursday's fourth annual Tractor Parade in Niagara-on-the-Lake, which filled the streets of Virgil with rumbling machinery, bright lights, festive music and Christmas cheer.

"It went perfect," said Coun. Erwin Wiens, who founded the event on a humble scale in 2021 with his wife, Dorothy Soo-Wiens. "The two major things the town gave us was more space at the arena (to stage the tractors), which was helpful, and closing the roads made a huge difference," he added.

The parade was first presented during the COVID-19 pandemic, rolling by Radiant Care Pleasant Manor in Virgil to provide elderly and shut-in NOT-Lers with a Christmas exhibition.

That edition attracted 19 tractors, mostly of the smaller variety, decked out in Christmas lights and decor.



Decorated tractors take a cruise through Virgil last Thursday. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

The next year, it grew to 65 units and the route moved beyond the general area of the seniors' home.

This year, 78 units from small tractors to huge harvesters and semi trucks joined the promenade and meandered through an even larger portion of the community.

As they made their way through the streets of Virgil, many gathered on the sidewalks to watch the illuminated vehicles make their procession around the village.

"It's a spectacle," said Wiens. "It's amazing." "Everybody seems to

want to always do a little bit better and do more and I'm always so impressed."

### Parade sideshow for a good cause

That extra mile extended to the home of Virgil's Megan Dyck where 32 of the tractors rerouted their paths to swing by the 15-year-old's home.

Dyck was born with a rare genetic condition known as trisomy 8 and was diagnosed earlier this year with clear cell carcinoma.

Knowing this year will likely be her last Christmas, the family had been putting out calls within the community to help her make it a

little more enjoyable. On Nov. 27, employees of a local equipment rental company showed up at her home on Homestead Drive and draped the property with Christmas lights and displays.

Later the same night, the Wiens dressed up one of their tractors to pass by the house and give her a taste of what the community was expecting at the actual parade.

"And so then what we decided to do yesterday (Dec. 12) was ask if anybody wanted to go and we actually had to cap it at 32." [wright@niagaranow.com](mailto:wright@niagaranow.com)





## Home for the Holidays

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# Flowers for seniors brings holiday cheer

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Members of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Horticultural Society combined their love of plants with some philanthropic spirit to spread holiday cheer to seniors in town.

Ingrid Regier, Kim Mustill and Alice Rance met at June Floral & Garden last Thursday morning to load up 145 poinsettias for Niagara Long Term Care and Radiant Care Pleasant Manor retirement homes.

While putting the boxes of flowers and cards together, Regier remarked how happy the residents looked when they saw her coming down the hall with the poinsettias.

“We think it’s lovely that we can give people in homes who can’t get out a bit of cheer,” Rance told The Lake Report.

Rance and Mustill dropped their load of flowers off at Niagara Long Term Care and Regier went to Pleasant Manor.

“We’re from the (horticultural society) so we love plants. This is our way of sharing what we love with



Alice Rance and Ingrid Regier added holiday cards to each poinsettia. JULIA SACCO

people who can’t get out and experience Mother Nature,” Mustill said.

Rance added that poinsettias last for a long time, so residents will be able to have a pop of colour in their rooms for the holiday season.

The NOTL Horticultural Society does another flower drop-off for seniors during the springtime when flowers begin blooming.

The NOTL Horticultural Society is always happy to take in new members who are interested in helping out with community events like these — and you don’t have to be a gardening expert, Mustill said.

“I’m what I would now consider a light green thumb,” she said.

Mustill said spending time in the community with other gardeners is a great way to learn.

[juliasacco@niagaranow.com](mailto:juliasacco@niagaranow.com)




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\*\* Source: Google Trends and Google Reviews    \*Source: RE/MAX LLC rankings for Large Team Residential, 2023.    \*\*Source: REDATUM Agents by units – listing and selling combined performance in TRREB Jan 1 - June 30, 2024. RE/MAX Escarpment Golf Realty Inc., Brokerage. Independently owned and operated.





NOTICE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION, OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING

- What:** Notice of **Complete Application, Open House** and **Public Meeting** for a **Zoning By-law Amendment** (under Section 34 of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended).
- When:** **Open House: Tuesday, January 7, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.**  
**Public Meeting: Tuesday, January 14, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.**
- Where:** Open House: Electronically via the directions below.  
Public Meeting: In-person at Town Hall, Council Chambers, 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, or electronically via the directions below.
- Regarding:** File No. ZBA-16-2024 – 1829 Concession 4 Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake

What is this?

An application has been received for a Zoning By-law Amendment on the subject lands (see location map). The Application requests to rezone the subject lands from “Rural (A) Zone” to “Rural (A) Site-Specific” to permit the conversion of the existing Farm Winery to an Estate Winery with secondary uses for retail space, hospitality areas and commercial cooking equipment.

Dialogue is encouraged:

You are invited to attend the Open House and Public Meeting to gather information and provide input regarding this matter.

**Town Hall is open for the public to attend Committee of the Whole and Council Meetings, including Public Meetings, in-person. Alternatively, the public will continue to have the option to register in advance to participate electronically.**

**The Open House will continue to be held electronically at this time.**

If you wish to participate electronically at the Open House or Public Meeting, you must register in advance with the Town Staff noted below. You will receive an email on the date of the meeting with instructions to connect to the Open House and/or Public Meeting on your computer, tablet or telephone.

- **Open House** – Victoria Nikoltcheva ([victoria.nikoltcheva@notl.com](mailto:victoria.nikoltcheva@notl.com) or 905-468-6451) (register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Tuesday, January 7, 2025)
- **Public Meeting** – Clerks Department ([clerks@notl.com](mailto:clerks@notl.com) or 905-468-3266) (register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Monday, January 13, 2025)

If you wish to attend the Public Meeting in-person, registration with the Clerk is appreciated.

If you wish to view the Open House and/or Public Meeting for information purposes, registration is not required.

The meetings will be recorded and available for viewing after the meetings on the Town’s website at <https://www.notl.com/council-government/mayor-council/meetings-agendas-minutes>

**Please Note:** Written comments on the application are encouraged and must be submitted to the Town Clerk, at 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0 or via email at [clerks@notl.com](mailto:clerks@notl.com) referencing the above file number. Unless indicated otherwise, all submissions, including personal information, will become part of the public record.

For more information:

A copy of the application and supporting documents for the proposal may be obtained on the Town’s website at <https://www.notl.com/business-development/public-planning-notices>, or at the Community and Development Services Department within Town Hall.

Please contact Victoria Nikoltcheva, Senior Planner, at 905-468-6451 or via email at [victoria.nikoltcheva@notl.com](mailto:victoria.nikoltcheva@notl.com) if additional information is required.

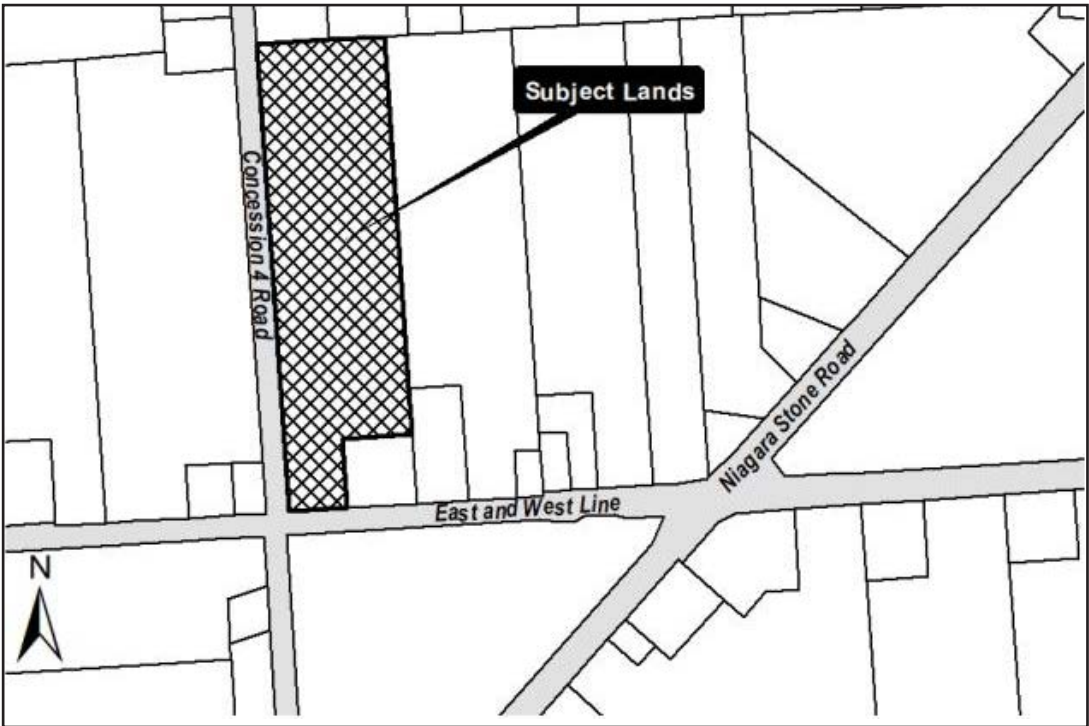
If you wish to be notified of the future decision with respect to the application, you must submit a written request to the Town Clerk including your name and the address to which such notice should be sent.

If a person or public body would otherwise have an ability to appeal the decision of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Ontario Land Tribunal but the person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body is not entitled to appeal the decision.

If a person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting, or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body may not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the opinion of the Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

Please note that third party appeals are restricted for this application as per Bill 185, Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024. *Planning Act* appeals may be filed by the applicant, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a “specified person” (as defined by the *Planning Act* 1(1)), and any “public body” (as defined by the *Planning Act* 1(1)).

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, December 18, 2024  
Grant Bivol, Town Clerk





# St. Mark's to host Christmas concert Dec. 22

Richard Wright  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Want to hear and sing along to some Christmas music? Look no further than St. Mark's Anglican Church this December.

The church is hosting a Christmas concert Dec. 22, called "A Christmas Homecoming: A Festive Celebration of Story and Song."

It will be just over an hour of songs and humorous spoken-word that aims to evoke an emotional connection between church and community, says the parish's music director Michael Bloss.

The goal is to invoke a feeling of being at home for the holidays.

"Because I think everybody has a warm spot, a warm story somewhere inside them from childhood or adolescence, or when they were away at university or whatever, which becomes a touchstone at this time of the year," said Bloss.

"What we're trying to do is provide some of those places in the music, in the carols and in some of the stories that we're reading, to



St. Mark's music director Michael Bloss will lead a Christmas concert at the church on Dec. 22 that aims to bring love and joy and a feeling of home. RICHARD WRIGHT

afford that kind of connection," he added.

Bloss will serve as conductor of the concert, standing before the St. Mark's Singers, their accompaniment which will be a trumpet, trombone and tuba quintet called Trilium Brass and around 180 attendees.

All attendees will be encouraged to sing along. "If they think they are

coming to sit and stare — no way," said Bloss.

"We are going to cover all of the favorite and tried and true carols."

Bloss hopes the concert provides everyone who attends with the joy and friendship that is the church's goal, but he also hopes it helps to serve as a launchpad for a wider musical foray.

"We've started a bit of a

choral program here at St. Mark's," he said, referring to the St. Mark's Singers.

"COVID decimated a lot of music programs in churches, and so we are in the process of trying to rebuild a foundation for that."

The singers — all-woman ensemble of two part soprano and two part alto — will be perform recognizable favourites and a few other tunes.

The final piece of the evening will come with the spoken word — stories delivered by rector Leighton Lee, who, according to Bloss, has a sharp sense of humour.

The stories that will be read will consist of things such as fictitious thank you letters for each of the 12 days of Christmas.

"So imagine somebody actually getting a partridge and then getting five gold rings and then getting, you know, 10 lords a-leaping," he mused.

The concert begins at 4:30 p.m. on Dec. 22 at St. Mark's.

Tickets are priced at \$25 with \$5 from each being donated to Newark Neighbours.

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**Contributed by Patty Garriock**  
“Nothing is a waste of time if you use the experience wisely.” - Auguste Rodin

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## Editorials

# That’s a wrap for 2024

Richard Harley  
Editor-in-Chief

Sometimes a small idea blossoms into something big and beautiful. Something it can have a ripple affect across the community.

A couple of weeks ago, while planning our annual holiday wrapping paper, we were hit with an idea: What if this year our paper was literally gift-wrapped with hand-drawn images from kids in the community?

What could be more meaningful than representations of what the holiday season means to the most precious in our town?

We reached out to principal Kate Fish at Crossroads Public School to see what we could do.

The idea was big: Let’s get every student in the school involved and have them draw what the holiday means to them. It could be anything. A Christmas tree,



a menorah, Diwali lights or a Santa hat. And we’d print every single one on our wrapping paper.

The response was an overwhelming yes from Crossroads and Fish jumped into action to help pull it all together.

This week you can see the results of that project — 294 images drawn by nearly every student in the school across all grades.

There are images of the Grinch, Frosty the Snowman, lots of mentions of the NOTL Wolves’ hockey teams, a family watching “Home Alone” by the fireplace, Christmas bulbs, Diwali lights and a menorah.

The diversity of submissions was astounding.

It’s such a wonderfully Canadian thing. Such a NOTL thing. Such a Crossroads thing.

Putting it all together took hours and hours of work. From the students who took the time to draw something special, to the teachers and Fish who printed, handed out and collected the images — and even scanned them all and sent them to us when we had a scanner malfunction.

Then there was the meticulous cropping work and placement on the page. That took about 12 hours alone.

Even further, the school printed off the images and

cut them out as decorations for this year’s float in the Christmas Parade. Such an amazing display of community spirit at Crossroads.

There was little time to pull it all together during a busy December, but together we managed it and we’re grateful to everyone involved.

We want to thank Fish for her enthusiasm bringing the idea to life. We can truly feel the spirit of the Coyotes with this wrap.

We invite you to please use this wrapping paper, and if you do, take a photo of it and send it our way to add to our collection. We’d like to see some of the creative uses NOTLers come up with.

Next year we’ll try to widen the scope to include even more schools if there is an interest. Because it might just be NOTL’s new holiday tradition.

[editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com)

# Let’s keep the conversation going

Richard Harley  
Editor-in-Chief

Last week’s editorial, “Stop trying to hide public information,” about public access to public documents got a conversation going.

We heard from many readers who congratulated us on the opinion piece, which — in response to a conversation at council — pointed out there is really no acceptable reason to make public documents difficult to access.

On the other hand, some weren’t happy that in making our argument, we took a critical stance on Coun. Erwin Wiens’ reasoning for voting against making public the site plans for the Parliament Oak development.

Essentially, we asked if he thinks the public is too daft to deserve access to those public documents.

Perhaps that was a bit harsher than needed.

To some, that’s what his language on council suggested when he argued that

site plans shouldn’t be given out freely because people could misinterpret them and spread misinformation.

We argued that isn’t a good enough reason to not give the public access to documents that, by all rights, belong in the public domain.

Wiens isn’t completely wrong — despite an overly simplistic implication that not everybody understands complex documents like site plans.

Of course, Wiens doesn’t think everybody is stupid. He knows everybody is not a planning expert and that few people who read site plans will fully understand them.

Just look at the Parliament Oak plan. It’s complex stuff.

But we feel the point may have been missed by some readers who took exception to the criticism and ignored our argument about the need for openness.

What the editorial really meant to convey — and, in fact, clearly stated — is that the fact most residents

are not planning experts is insufficient reason to shroud the documents in secrecy and not post them online for all to see.

As Wiens himself said, he agrees those documents should be public and has no issue with doing so as long as it’s not selective and it’s just policy that all documents get put online.

So, this week we’ll eat some humble pie for our condescending tone and embrace Wiens if he is to act on that and ask staff to make all site plans, etc. easily accessible online.

In a conversation with Wiens, he agreed that perhaps in 2024 the process of having to go to the town to view documents could be brought into this century.

He agreed, after hearing us out, that access from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays isn’t open access, and makes things especially difficult for people with accessibility needs. Or parents with small children, or people who work during those hours. The list goes on.

But that’s why conversation is so important. Conversations can make things happen.

And it’s worth nothing this paper has no beef with Wiens. While we often criticize ideas, philosophies and language used in public forums, these should not be seen as attacks on the person.

Wiens always takes a call, always is open to a conversation, and is open to hearing concepts he hasn’t considered.

He’s got plenty of ideas with which we agree strongly, such as not always chasing windmills on the public dime when there’s little hope for victory.

So, let’s keep the conversation going about getting better access to public documents. That’s what a good newspaper, and good editorial, is meant to do.

And that’s what a good council does for its residents, especially in a town where people are so engaged and care so much.

[editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com)



Pauline Reimer Gibson  
Audiologist

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

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## Editorial

# Yes, we can **help fix** the housing crisis

Richard Harley  
Editor-in-Chief

Ever heard something that just makes you scratch your head and go “What!?”

Last week in response to an excellent decision by town council to pause the approval of any more short-term rental licences in town, Coun. Tim Balasiuk declared essentially that because NOTL’s housing stock isn’t going to solve the housing crisis across the country, we should sit back and let these should-be-illegal, unsupervised mini-hotels invade our residentially zoned areas, where real people could be living and raising a family.

This attitude requires a strong response from our community.

It’s no different than saying: “Why bother recycling? My individual effort isn’t

going to solve the climate crisis and clean up our oceans.”

Every single home taken off the market for real people to live in contributes to the housing crisis here and across Canada.

Locally, it means about 10 per cent of our housing stock is being used for a purpose that by all rights should be flat out illegal if you consider the purposed of residential zoning.

Our town has a housing crisis and we’re letting it get worse by the day. See a letter this week from a concerned resident who also took issue with that statement. Or this week’s column by Garth Turner, who also calls out how dangerous it is to keep commercializing our homes.

It might be good for realtors and those rich enough to exploit a broken system.

But it isn’t good for average-income families hoping to raise children here. We need to fix that. And we need to do it now.

Don’t expect to find any help on this issue from our realtor mayor. That wouldn’t be good for his business.

But what we can hope is that councillors like Balasiuk take a step back, examine this issue objectively and re-evaluate their positions on the plague that is short-term rental culture.

Just look around the world at how many other cities are starting to wake up and realize these things are overall bad for business.

Let’s start to return our housing supply to what it is supposed to be — homes for people to live in.

More homes means more kids can sign up for Paddle Niagara and support Balasiuk’s business, too.

## LETTER OF THE WEEK

# Housing crisis is **real** in NOTL

Dear editor:  
With some deliberate myopia, one town councillor says, “I just don’t think that short term rentals in NOTL are going to save the Canadian housing crisis.”  
Glad they’re thinking big,

but isn’t local government supposed to think locally?  
With several hundred houses in town currently reserved for temporary use, the very real local housing crisis could easily be reduced by simply shifting

those leases from nightly/weekly to annual/biannual ones.  
I hope that helps councilors see how that can be an option.  
**Lauren O’Malley**  
**NOTL**

# Community goodwill in NOTL helps my **journey to recovery**

Dear editor:  
I would like to share my story in hopes of celebrating this community’s goodwill.  
Over two years ago, I was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré shortly after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine.  
It has left me partially paralyzed and is expected to alter my life for a period of no more than three years, I can assure you that I am well on my way to recovery.

For this chapter, I am not living in my own loft at College and Bathurst but staying with my mum in NOTL, doing a lot of physiotherapy, rebuilding my confidence and paying it forward by volunteering with the local community with Newark Neighbours.  
Through some very intense workouts at the Brock Fully Inclusive Training Program with

Joel Neufville, I was able to lose the electric wheelchair.  
With the assistance of James Lavoie, national regional manager from the BTS Network, I was finally able to donate my wheelchair to For The Needy to The Greedy.  
Thank you NOTL, be very proud.  
**Steve Pitkanen**  
**NOTL**

# The town that **wants to be a motel**



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner  
Columnist

It’s probably the ugliest listing around. Basically, a garage glued to a box. On a narrow lot. No trees. But for \$1.6 million it could be your own NOTL income property.

Not far away, a modest two-storey brick building was listed on Queen. Just shy of \$3.5 million with a couple of small retail spaces below and two apartments above. Yup, short-term rentals (STRs). What’s interesting is the property tax bill: \$45,000.

Compare that with a three-storey heritage commercial building in Niagara Falls. More than 21,000 feet of leasable space. Solid lo-

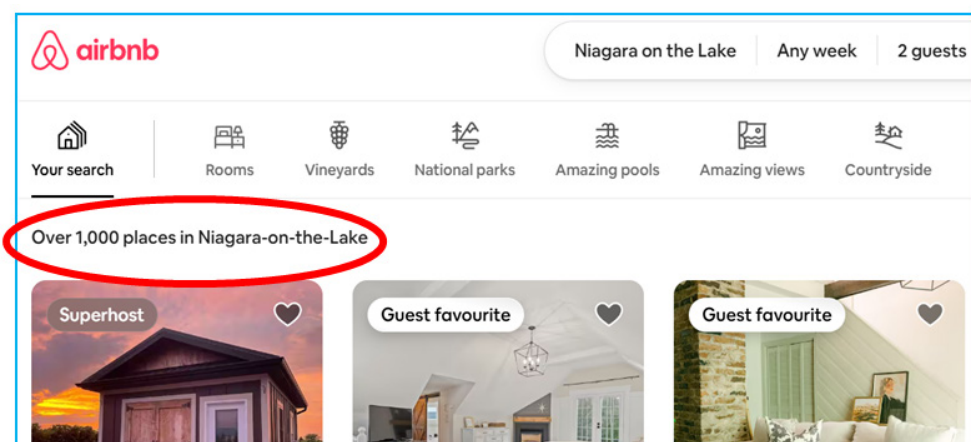
cation. Elevator. Nine commercial units. Leased. Nice ROI. Taxes? Just \$35,000.

Yes, we’re so special. Not always in a good way.

The financialization of NOTL real estate continues. And, sadly, the crew in charge of the place doesn’t seem to have a handle on it, even as they grow more aware we have a problem. Unlike most places, this paradise has blessed the conversion of houses into mini-hotels. If you want to buy the little bung next door and fill it with nice people from Baltimore and Pittsburgh, go ahead. No need to live there.

This has resulted in about 400 registered STRs. As Coun. Maria Mavridis says, that’s five per cent of NOTL’s housing stock.

But wait. As of this past weekend, there were 1,000 rentals listed for the town on Airbnb alone. Does this mean a whopping 10 per cent of residential real estate has actually been commercialized? No other place in Canada would come close to that. Are 600 rentals illegal? Are we fostering the same



Airbnb shows more than 1,000 short-term rental listings in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

vibrant community that lives in a Super8 or Holiday Inn Express?

Well, Mavridis is the sparkplug lately igniting potential change.

Council has decided not to accept any more applications for STRs until a staff analysis is ready. For some ungodly reason, that’ll take six more months. Then, maybe, a new bylaw. And, perchance, it will require rentals to be in primary residences where people actually, you know, dwell. (The new-application pause applies only to unhosted rental locations. Others can proliferate.)

Not everyone sees the issue with turning NOTL into a big motel.

Tim Balasiuk sits on council. “I don’t think (short-term rentals) in Niagara-on-the-Lake are going to save the Canadian housing crisis,” he says sarcastically. And it won’t. Maybe just here, however. When crap houses cost \$1.6 million and rentals with year-long leases are virtually non-existent, something’s not working.

As this pathetic column reported a month ago: “If you want to have a B&B, this town is your pal. Other places ban the

practice of renting out a room or a suite short-term unless you live in the place. Not here. We allow whole houses and cottages, villas and inns to thrive as tourist rentals.”

Do we need even more? A big honking hotel’s being built in the midst of the Old Town — where we already have the Prince of Wales, Q124, Shaw Club, Queen’s Landing, Harbour House, The Charles, Angel Inn, Best Western and more. Lots more.

Meanwhile on MLS there are only five local rentals listed. All houses, from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a month.

The number of for-lease apartments available: zero. But if you’d like to pay \$200 to \$1,500 per night, you have a thousand choices.

Yes, I know. A bunch of wealthy people here have bought up homes and financialized them. Why not? Good cash flow. A steady stream of clients. Easy online bookings. Just come up with a cute name. Include the word “historic.” Charge the tourists bigly and fly under the radar — both with the town (there’s an accommodation tax) plus, maybe, the CRA.

The clerks, gardeners, trades and baristas? Hey, we left you Welland..

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

**garth@garth.ca**  
**Editor’s note:** Last week’s “The Turner Report” column contained an error made in the editing process. While the columnist intended to mention the Ford Motor Company, it was changed to say Premier Doug Ford. The Lake Report regrets the error.



Gift certificates always make a great present!

# Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

From Paul, Matt and the Sandtrap Family.



# NOTL needs a plan for green infrastructure



Brian Marshall  
Columnist

Allow me to introduce a concept which is gaining a tremendous amount of traction amongst governments, urban designers, urban planners, environmental agencies and organizations around the world — that is, the replacement of significant portions of grey infrastructure with green infrastructure.

So, what are grey and green infrastructure?

Grey infrastructure refers to human-engineered infrastructure for water resources, such as water and wastewater treatment plants, pipelines, pumps and dams. In other words, all the engineered and installed components of a centralized mechanical approach to water management.

Green infrastructure conversely, is the “strategic use of networks of natural lands, working landscapes and other open spaces to conserve ecosystem values and functions and provide associated benefits to human populations,” (W. Allen, 2012), augmented by designed natural installations such as rain gardens or reed beds that treat wastewater.

The United States’ Environmental Protection Agency states that there are environmental, social and economic benefits that result from green infrastructure.

On the environmental front, these benefits include improving climate resiliency, increasing water quality, reducing localized flooding, reducing the demand on the potable water supply by capturing stormwater for reuse, improving air quality, reducing the heat island effect in urban settings and achieving the habitat connectivity required by many

natural species. Supported by multiple academic studies, the social benefits cited include improved health and well-being of human populations, an enhanced sense of community and an increase in public engagement leading to greater community cohesion.

From an economic perspective, green infrastructure decreases grey infrastructure investment and operating costs, has a salutary impact on neighbourhood property values, generates new, generally better paying “green” jobs for people with all levels of education and work experience and reduces the costs associated with flood damage.

Examples of green infrastructure projects proliferate around the world.

Consider the High Line in New York City, a 2.34-kilometre long biodiverse urban park supporting over 500 species that was built on an abandoned raised railroad thoroughfare in the heart of Manhattan.

In the City of Calgary, Alta., the constructed 385-acre Shepard Wetland functions as both a storm-water storage facility and a treatment wetland that naturally filters stormwater, improving its quality before it is discharged into the Bow River. Interestingly, its capacity is such that it can successfully manage a one-in-100-year flood.

Most notably, green infrastructure is actually cheaper to construct, maintain and operate than grey infrastructure.

In a presentation given to the American Public Works Association in October 2017, the authors of “Green vs. Grey Infrastructure Cost,” Rosa A. Fernández and Ryan Dupont, made the following statement regarding green infrastructure’s life cycle analysis cost:

“Green infrastructure is 24 per cent more cost effective than gray infrastructure over a 30-year period.”

Note that others have suggested life cycle savings in the 30 per cent range.

It is internationally recognized that cost effective green infrastructure not



While it looks unassuming now, Beamsville’s new Miyawaki Carolinian mini-forest in Val Fleming Park will mature in about 20 years and deliver a host of green infrastructure benefits to the environment and community. A smart investment, writes Brian Marshall.

only delivers defined benefits with urban and growth areas, but also underwrites, maintains, preserves and protects the biodiversity and ecosystem relationships in the natural heritage systems of the wider landscape.

The province defines a natural heritage system as “a system made up of natural heritage features and areas, and linkages intended to provide connectivity (at the regional or site level) and support natural processes which are necessary to maintain biological and geological diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species and ecosystems. These systems can include natural heritage features and areas, federal and provincial parks and conservation reserves, other natural heritage features, lands that have been restored or have the potential to be restored to a natural state, areas that support hydrologic functions, and working landscapes that enable ecological functions to continue.”

In short, watersheds and ravine systems, agricultural areas including farmland, interconnected water bodies such as lakes and significant land forms like the Niagara Escarpment.

Moreover, Chapter 3 of the Niagara Region’s official plan — “Sustainable Region” — states, “The establishment of these natural systems is required by Provincial policy. These systems have been integrated in this Plan and are known together as the Region’s natural environment system.”

And, in Chapter 5.2 — “Connected Region: Infrastructure” — speaks to green infrastructure “marching orders” in clauses 5.2.1.8 to 5.2.1.10 and specifically in 5.2.1.11 which reads:

“The region will promote the use of green infrastructure and low impact development by considering green infrastructure in public works projects and encouraging its use through review of development applications.”

Folks, this is not “merely tree-hugger” stuff ... it is the international, national, provincial and regional recognition that green infrastructure supporting natural heritage systems are intrinsic to ensuring a fiscally responsible address to ensuring our communities will prosper into the foreseeable future.

Drilling down on one specific objective in the re-

gion’s official plan, namely, 3.1.g, wherein it states: “Protect woodlands and their biodiversity, restore ecological functions, and enhance woodland cover through reforestation and restoration,” the Town of Lincoln has undertaken a brilliant address to this challenge.

In November of 2023, Lincoln’s council created a working group with a mandate to examine various municipal tree policies across the province, detail best practices and develop the framework for such a policy in Lincoln — a framework that would include community engagement and participation.

I was fortunate to be able to chat with a member of this working group, Liz Benneian, an environmental educator and advocate who has received numerous local, provincial and national awards for her work, who highlighted a few of the many accomplishments by this group.

Not only in one short year have they been able to provide town staff with all the necessary information and framework to allow Lincoln’s policy to be written, but they have also developed community tree “giveaways,” facilitated

the planting of 1,000 trees in the town, and their first Miyawaki mini-forest in a Beamsville park. Further, they anticipate the completion of a native species list — trees, understory plants and ground covers — by next month.

As Benneian observed, this record of success in such a short time was made possible because the project rested in the hands of a working group, operating outside of the political milieu, and was able to draw on the deep expertise of various town residents.

Would that more town councils utilize working groups to get the job done.

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is cited in the region’s Feb. 7, 2024 “Tree and Forest Canopy Project” report (<https://pub-niagararegion.escrimetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=35809>) — even when combining orchards and natural trees — as having the lowest level tree and forest canopy of the municipalities in the region at only 18 per cent.

This in the face of Environment Canada’s statement in their publication “How Much Habitat is Enough” (3rd Ed) that 30 per cent is the minimum forest cover threshold and still considered “high-risk,” 40 per cent cover is classified as “medium-risk,” and a 50 per cent canopy is suggested as “low-risk regarding the maintenance of a healthy environment.”

Meanwhile, our town seemingly ignores the imperative recognized by other jurisdictions (including our region) and continues to do business as used to be normal — evidenced by recently granting permission to a developer for the clear-cutting of several acres of mature trees in Virgil.

The protection and expansion of our natural heritage system supported by green infrastructure has become the proven order-of-the-day and necessary to our future.

Let’s get with the agenda, NOTL.

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



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Bryanna Gray and her children Mason and Ava rebuilt their lives with programs available through the Niagara Regional Native Centre. The centre is collecting donations online to support its community initiatives. SUPPLIED

# Native Centre holds winter giving campaign

Julia Sacco  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The Niagara Regional Native Centre is collecting donations for its first-ever winter giving campaign over the holidays. Named the Dęgyatahahk

Winter Campaign — which is a word meaning “you and I walk together” in Cayuga — the campaign is now accepting donations online. Funds raised will help advance the centre’s mission to foster, encourage and promote the cultural and social interests of Indigenous peoples.

With the launch of the campaign, the centre published Bryanna Gray’s story regarding her experience at Abbey House, the women’s transition centre led by the Niagara Regional Native Centre. “Through programs focusing on emotional health,

self-reflection, and positive family relationships, Bryanna gained the tools to rebuild her life and reconnect with her family,” the release said. For more information visit the Native Centre website, or donate at [canadahelps.org/en/dn/124305](https://canadahelps.org/en/dn/124305).



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### Wishing you peace and joy. Happy Holidays.

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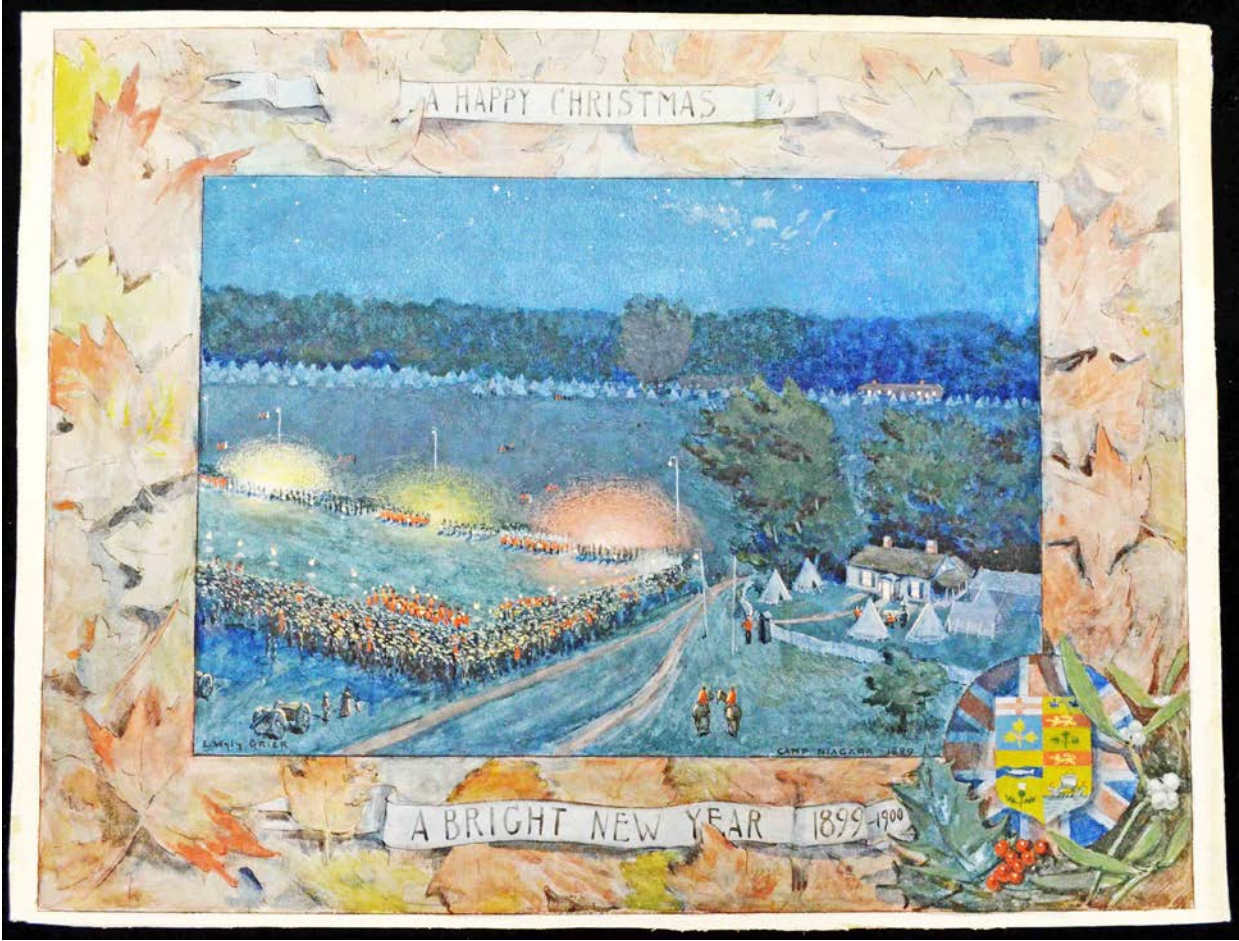
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## Christmas at Niagara Camp, 1899

Here is a watercolour depicting Camp Niagara in 1899 at Christmas time. This detailed work shows a celebration within the camp with bright lights and soldiers in formation. The painting was created by Sir Edmund Wyly Grier, signed in the lower left corner. Grier was a Canadian portrait painter who painted numerous portraits of political and corporate leaders and notable contemporaries. Merry Christmas from the NOTL Museum!







### Happy Holidays and Merry Christmas!

Have a safe holiday season!



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# Caring for your indoor plants this winter



**GROWING TOGETHER** 

Joanne Young  
Columnist

Now that we have tucked in our gardens for the winter and the first snowfall has arrived, it is time to turn our attention to our indoor plants.

First, I think it is important to note that the term “indoor” plant is a bit misleading. It suggests that certain plants want or prefer to grow inside our homes.

As a colleague of mine always says, “There is no such thing as an indoor plant.” All plants prefer to be growing in their natural habitats outdoors, wherever that may be.

Most of our indoor plants are from the tropics,

where they would be growing under tall palm trees with a misty rain shower on a regular basis. Our homes present a few challenges for them.

Here in Canada, our houses are very dry and warm in the winter. We also have much lower light conditions as we have more cloudy days and simply less intense sun.

If you had your plants outside for the summer months and have brought them back into house this fall, you will see those plants going through a bit of a struggle at this time.

Some leaves may be yellowing and falling off. Or, you may have brought in a pest or disease from the outdoors.

Even if your plants have been indoors all summer, they, too, will be having a resting time. Here are some tips to keep them healthy over winter.

With our sunlight levels being reduced at this time of year with the shorter days, it is beneficial to move the plants closer to a light source such as a window or patio door.



Joanne Young says indoor plants may not need to be watered frequently. Check the soil to gauge dryness.

If the plants were outside for the summer, they were accustomed to a much brighter light even if they were in a part shade location.

The lower light conditions mean that the plants are not growing as vigorously as they do during the summer months. The more growth a plant is putting, the more water it requires.

Therefore, they do not need to be watered as frequently. You should only water when the top inch of soil feels dry.

Instead of a regular schedule, it is better to check the soil itself to see if it is dry or use a moisture meter.

When the plants are not growing as quickly in winter, they do not require as much nutrients as they do at other times. So, cut back on the amount of food that you give them.

Keep plants away from cold drafts and registers or radiators. A cold draft from an exterior door can set back sensitive plants. Having plants too close

to air registers or radiators blowing out warm, dry air can also be stressful to the plant.

Don’t stress about leaves yellowing and dropping off. You will often see leaves turn yellow lower on a plant right before or as it is pushing out new leaves or producing new flower buds.

This takes a lot of extra energy to do so. The plant will then drop some of its oldest leaves so it will have the extra energy that it needs.

It is only when leaves at the tips of branches yellow that it is a concern.

When you think about how most of the plants we have indoors are from a tropical climate, it only stands to reason that they prefer to grow in an atmosphere with higher humidity levels.

Most houseplants grow best when humidity levels are between 40 to 50 per cent, but wintertime humidity levels are typically 20 30 per cent inside homes — sometimes as low as 10 per cent.

A simple way to ramp up the humidity around plants

is to cluster them together. Another easy method to increase humidity is to place plants on trays filled with pebbles and water.

The bottoms of the pots should be above the water level to avoid root rot. As the water evaporates, it creates a more humid microclimate for your houseplants.

Resist repotting plants in early winter. Plants take well to repotting when they are actively growing.

That’s why spring and summer are the best times to repot them. Repotting the plants when they are in a resting state can shock dormant indoor plants.

Wait to cut back leggy plants late winter or early spring. As the days are lengthening and the sunlight becomes stronger, your plants will begin to grow more.

The best time to prune back indoor plants is just before a growth spurt. This will help to increase the branching, creating a denser plant.

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



On behalf of the entire team at Blue Springs, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our amazing clients, vendors, and incredible staff for making this season such a success. We hope your holidays are filled with laughter, joy, and special moments with friends and family. Wishing you a happy and prosperous New Year, and we look forward to seeing you in 2025!



Sincerely,  
*The Blue Springs Team* 



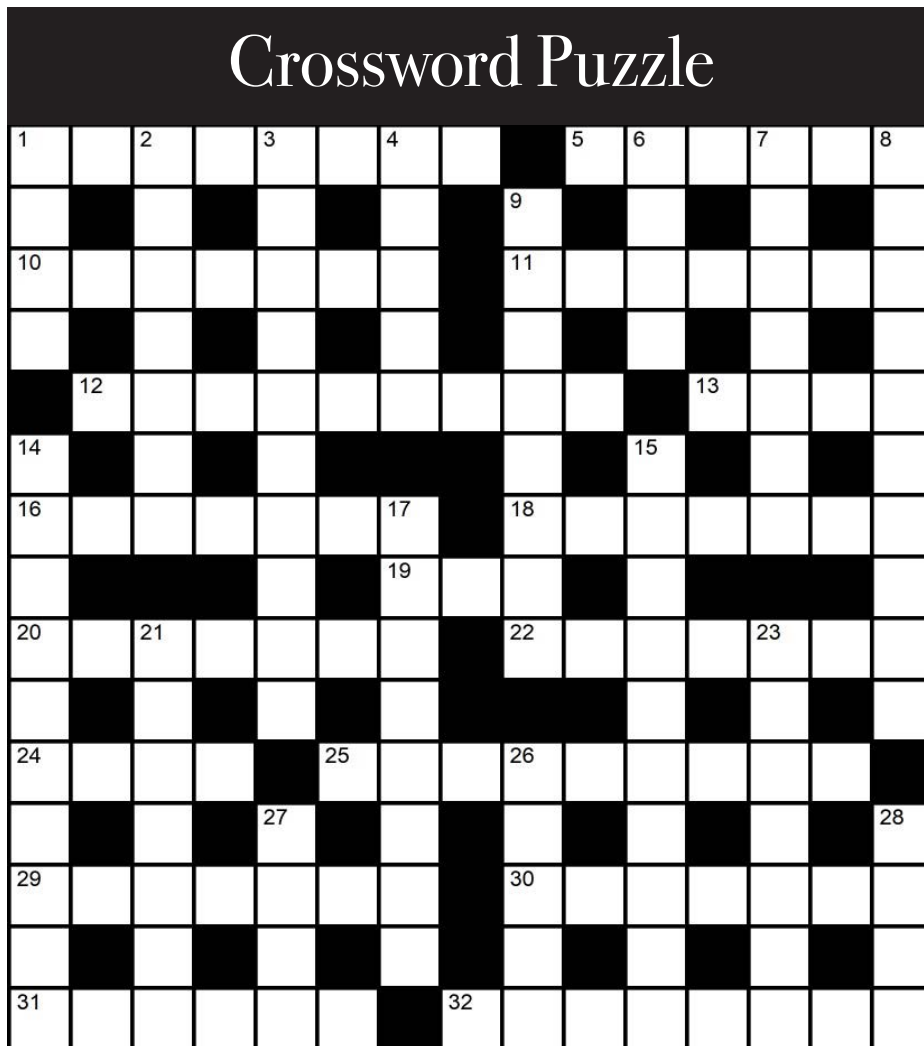


1. Injured one (8)
5. Mexican vacation destination (6)
10. Fencing moves (7)
11. Old pals' get-together (7)
12. To a small degree (9)
13. Blue dye (4)
16. Gets back (7)
18. Rare plants (7)
19. Amusingly ironic (3)
20. Generally (2,1,4)
22. Quite large (7)
24. Grape-skin brandy (4)
25. Travel schedule (9)
29. Impresario's goal? (4,3)
30. Lithuanian capital (7)
31. Heavy hammer (6)
32. In which Jud Fry dies (8)

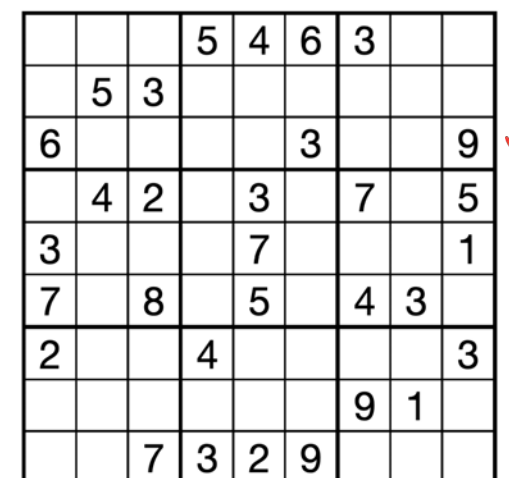
**Down**

1. Intersects (4)
2. Rising suddenly (7)
3. Like a double rainbow, maybe (10)
4. Where the Owl and the Pussycat went (2,3)
6. Border (4)
7. Tuscan wine (7)
8. Bewildered about unsold pens (10)
9. Hospital conveyances (8)
14. Gym machines (10)
15. Neopolitan buffalo cheese (10)
17. Result of using 14 Down, perhaps (8)
21. Place in order (7)
23. Tortilla meal (7)
26. Kim ---, of "Vertigo" (5)
27. Poker-like card game (4)
28. 30% of the Earth's surface (4)

# Crossword Puzzle



## Last issue's answers



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# One last kick at the 2024 cat, to improve our lives



## Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson  
Columnist

Toddlers in toques and grandparents with mobility devices often progress at about the same speed along the sidewalks downtown. Is there anything cuter than wee ones in warm and colourful toques? And anything better defining the word "loving" than grandparents enjoying a pre-Christmas day out, perhaps shopping for a last minute gift or two?

Time now for a sincere, loving, huggy rambling from our wonderful downtown NOTL Queen Street. I have said it before and still say it often: We are so fortunate to live here. It's not perfect, but it's darn good.

Let's create a "cell free phone zone" downtown.

Let's pass a local bylaw to make Queen Street, perhaps between Simcoe Street and King Street,

totally cellphone free.

Especially during the past two years, I have seen so much downtown. Almost all good. Too bad so many visitors don't maximize the enjoyment of their hours with us. This morning on the front step of the Court House, with nothing to do for awhile, I roughly calculated the percentage of passersby who are staring intently at the screens of their hand held devices. Almost 50 per cent! My friends, I'm not kiddin' ya. Almost half.

Never one to love and respect the status quo, which by definition changes all the time, allow me to offer a few suggestions to our town councillors. A trifle tongue-in-cheek, but also a trifle seriously. For the betterment of mankind. Our French Canadian friends have a wonderful expression which translates to "The more things change, the more things stay the same, eh?"

Is there a more beautiful retail walk in Canada than our old town Queen Street? Walk past the historically photogenic Prince of Wales, Hatley's, Fritters on the Lake, Bella Grace, Gyros on the Lake, Beau Chapeau, the award winning NEOB Lavender Shop, Cool As A Moose,



Ross Robinson says people should put down their phones and stop and smell the roses when exploring NOTL.

then the Sunset Grill and on down the street. All the way to Hendrik's Independent for great foodstuffs and a great team.

If your eyes are glued to a screen, you miss the charm, as well as the lovely Christmas trees and festive seasonal decorations.

Do we need a bylaw? If nothing else, parking rev-

enues lost due to unwieldy and challenging and time wasting parking metres will be replaced by tickets given out by our determined and efficient bylaw enforcement officers.

While we are fine tuning our sad parking enforcement situation, let's outfit the enforcers in bright Angie Strauss-like cloth-

ing. Instead of the current militaristic dark blue and black uniforms. Such an easy way to enhance the visitor experience — and proven to work in Bermuda and Hawaii.

While I am rambling from downtown, please join me feeling sorry for the lonely, ignored Bell pay phone attached to the west side of the liquor store. To be repetitive, how quickly things change.

Now, a rambling leap to the purest of Christmas traditions. Local yokel, engaging historical raconteur and tireless and enthusiastic and effective volunteer Rick Meloen has done it again. Back on Nov. 30, he gathered the sometimes faithful out at the wee Wayside Chapel near Walker's Family Market for the annual au naturel Christmas carol sing. The best song book, a great sound system and the joyful, enthusiastic and talented Diane Ticknor leading the singing.

Coach Meloen had more coloured Christmas light bulbs around his neck than adorn the seasonal tree at the cenotaph. The lights accent his dashing black top hat.

For me, this unique and low-key event is always the true kick off to the Christmas season. Even more of

a kick off than the start of the Grey Cup football game. To facilitate our planning for 2025, the Faith Fellowship Christian Reformed Church has wisely "frozen the date."

Each year from now on, the carol sing will be at 3 p.m. on the last Saturday of November.

Mark it down in your daily planners now, in ink. Saturday, Nov. 29, 2025, 3 p.m. At the Wayside Chapel. Overdress appropriately to suit the weather. And be in good voice.

Rambling to a close for the year 2024, "Don't come to me with problems. Come to me with solutions and suggestions."

If we can't have a magnificently festive and effulgent Christmas tree on the wee island by the Cenotaph, let's place a dandy at the classy new town gateway at Mississauga and Queen streets. Or better still, as my wise and pot stirring son Scott suggested, how about a statement making, brightly decorated 20' balsam fir tree installed to mark the centre of the endlessly discussed, still controversial, future St. Davids roundabout?

Just a thought.  
Happy New Year. Merry Christmas. Love to all.



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# John Gardner



GARDNER, John Clifford- John Clifford Gardner, world traveler, adoring husband, caring father, and proud grandfather, passed away peacefully on Wednesday December 11, 2024 at the age of 91.

John was born in Watford, England on Feb. 28, 1933 to Clifford and Violet Gardner. In 1951, he enlisted in the Royal Air Force where he qualified as a pilot. John was immensely proud of his time in the service, always happy to regale an audience with stories from that time. He served until 1953 when he took a job in the tax office in Watford; it was here he met the love of his life, Joan Mary Seddon. They were married on July 16, 1960 and were married for 62 wonderful years. In 1962, John was recruited by the Bank of Nova Scotia to set up their Corporate Tax Department. It was then that John and Joan would move to Toronto, Canada where the couple welcomed their son Christopher in 1964 and daughter Karen in 1968. The family of four moved back to England in 1973 when John joined Citibank, settling in Gerrards Cross and allowing them to spend more time with their families. They would move again in 1976 to Old Greenwich, Connecticut, USA. While with Citibank, John was able to travel around the world as part of his job. John loved traveling for many reasons, but especially to meet and speak with new people of all cultures and walks of life. In 1988, John and his family moved back to England, settling this time in Bournemouth. John would retire in England in 1992, though he would continue working as a volunteer with several charity organizations. In 2007, John and Joan moved across the Atlantic once more, settling in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada. Here, John would do research for Niagara Historical Museum and Parks Canada, a testament to his unyielding love for history. This move also allowed them to spend more holidays with their grandchildren in New York. In 2022, just before Joan passed away, John and Joan moved into Chartwell Orchards Retirement Residences in Vineland, Ontario. It was here he enjoyed his remaining years, surrounded by loving and supportive friends comprised of staff and residents alike.

John is survived by his son, Christopher (Colleen) of Katonah, New York and daughter Karen of St. Catharines, Ontario, sister Glenda Taylor of Bournemouth, England and brother-in-law Geoff (Theresa) Seddon of Rayleigh, England. He is also survived by his grandchildren Catherine and Christopher Gardner, niece Lindsey Goacher, nephews Andrew Taylor and Trevor Seddon, grand-nephews Michael (Emily) Goacher and George Taylor, grand-niece Grace Taylor, and great-niece Isla Goacher. His family would like to extend special thanks to his “guardian angel” Tina Plourde who always helped take such wonderful care of John. With his insatiable curiosity and love of conversations with all people, John will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

Family will receive friends at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake on Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024 from 1 to 2 p.m. followed by a service at 2 p.m.

A private family interment will be held at Niagara Lake Shore Cemetery.

As an expression of sympathy, those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum (<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/10517>) or the Chartwell Foundation (<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/the-chartwell-foundationla-fondation-chartwell>).

Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com)



# Claudia Jantz



JANTZ, Claudia — After a courageous battle, Claudia passed away peacefully at Hospice Niagara with family at her side on December 15, 2024, at the age of 72. Claudia will be lovingly remembered by her children, Joshua Jantz (Gillian Buck), Jessica Jantz (Dan Baty), and Alexandra Dunham (Robert Peters).

She was the beloved spouse of Barry Snook for 18 wonderful years. Loving Gamma to her cherished grandchildren: Halen, Cassidy, Mieka, and Ryker. Claudia is also survived by her siblings, Cynthia (Steve), Colin (Cathy), and Craig (Dory), as well as many nieces and nephews. She will also be remembered by Herb Jantz and Brian Dunham.

A free spirit with an indomitable will, Claudia faced life’s challenges with remarkable perseverance and strength. Claudia had a creative spirit and a love for the outdoors. She spent countless hours crafting, painting, quilting, and nurturing her garden. She enjoyed peaceful drives, and found happiness spending time at the beach hunting for sea glass. Above all else, Claudia cherished her time with her grandchildren.

The family extends their heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Hospice Niagara for their compassionate care during Claudia’s final days.

In accordance with Claudia’s wishes, cremation has taken place. A celebration of her life will be held at a later date. If desired, memorial donations may be made to Hospice Niagara or your local Humane Society. Online condolences may be shared on Claudia’s tribute page at [EssentialsNiagara.com](http://EssentialsNiagara.com)



# John Fast



FAST, John – “My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

It is with very heavy hearts and profound sadness that we share the passing of our dear husband, father, Gramps and Bippy on Dec. 11, 2024 at the age of 83 at Radiant Care Pleasant Manor with family by his side as he entered eternal life.

His work here is done and he is dancing with the angels at the feet of God for eternity.

Devoted husband to Elizabeth (nee Weier) of 60 years; proud father of John Fast (Cathy Nevills); Dennis (and the late Susan) Fast; Lori (Jason) Peters and Mark (Amy) Fast. His joyous spirit is carried on by all his grandchildren who meant the world to him: Madison, Sheridan and Ethan Peters; Jackson, Mathis, Maelle and Magnus Fast.

Brother of Werner (and the late Marlene) Fast and Arnold (Elena) Fast of Germany; and fondly remembered by many in-laws, nieces, nephews, cousins, coworkers and friends. John was predeceased by his parents, Johan and Margaret Fast; beloved sister, Irene Epp; brothers, Victor and Edward Fast (Germany) and cherished granddaughter, Brooklyn Peters.

Although Parkinson’s Disease slowly infringed on his very active lifestyle and cognition; it was never able to diminish his cheerful personality, sense of humour and witty one-liners.

John worked hard throughout his life as an accountant and in passionate Christian service toward others through Bethany Mennonite Church, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Ten Thousand Villages. He was also committed to the community of Niagara serving on several boards, including Meridian Credit Union and the United Mennonite Home in Vineland.

We feel the loss of his physical presence so deeply, especially the strong bear hugs but find solace in feeling his spirit, remembering his laughter and echoing his many, many clever and humorous quips. His beautiful soul endures and he will live in our hearts forever.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated staff of Radiant Care Pleasant Manor who took such amazing and loving care of him. Their soothing compassion, respect and love comforted the family throughout John’s short (no pun intended) residence and after his passing. The chaplain, Mike Dyck, was a treasured source of support, strength and spiritual care for John and Liz throughout their journey. The family also deeply appreciates and values his sister-in-law, Marg Goerz, keeping him company and on his best behaviour in the home.

Visitation will take place at Bethany Mennonite Church located at 572 East and West Line in Niagara-on-the-Lake at 10 a.m. on Friday, Dec. 20, 2024 followed by a funeral service at 11 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, the family would appreciate donations to the Parkinson’s Foundation or Mennonite Economic Development Associates.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Online condolences at [www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca](http://www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca)



# Dean Steele



STEELE, Dean William — June 12, 1942 – Dec. 6, 2024

With broken hearts we announce the passing of Dean, our beloved husband, father, grandfather and brother.

He is survived by his daughters and sons-in-law: Tracey and John, Jodi and Ira, and Amanda and Joe. He leaves behind his wife of 26 years, Carol and his stepsons

and daughter-in-law: Garnet and Jen, and Myron. He was the adoring and adored Grandpa of Menno, Idyn, Nello, Dean, Landon, Mya, Max, Trent and Tess. He was elder sibling to his brothers David, Richard, Doug (late), and his dear sister Debbie.

Dean was a respected and renowned teacher and basketball coach at St. Davids and Parliament Oak elementary schools. He retired in 1997 following the heartbreaking early passing of his first wife, Patty.

He often spoke about how much he loved his childhood and teenaged years growing up in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He was an avid reader and enjoyed basketball, bird watching, cruises, camping or cottaging with the family, and coffee or cocktails with friends.

His grandchildren were the light of his life. He was so proud of them all. To him, the women in his life were (almost) always right and he would often say “Well, what do I know anyway.” But really, he knew more than most. He was certainly the best Jeopardy player and crossword in our family.

We love him more than we could possibly say, and there was no mistaking his love for us. He will be in our hearts forever.

- Tracey, Jodi, Amanda & Carol

You are welcome to join us on Saturday, Dec. 21 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Legion for an informal gathering and celebration of Dean’s life. Donations in honour of Dean can be made to Wellspring Niagara.



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Merry Christmas  
& Happy New Year!



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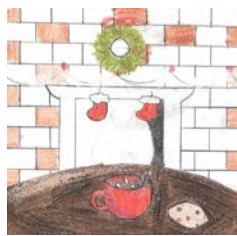
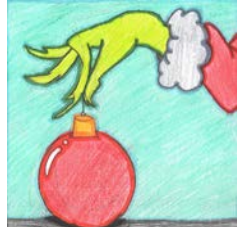
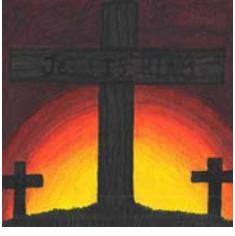
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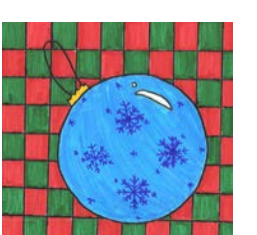




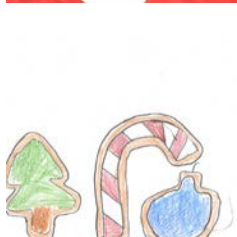
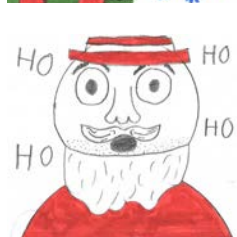
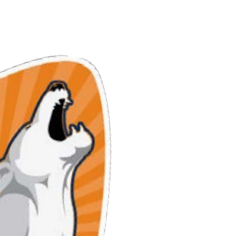
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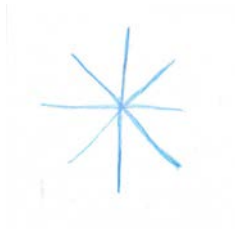
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