



A rendering of the new Royal George Theatre front.

2025 IN REVIEW:

Politics and growth dominate, but plenty to celebrate, too

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

In the second half of 2025, development pressures, the Royal George Theatre redevelopment and the Parliament Oak hotel project dominated the headlines in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

But there also was plenty to celebrate, thanks to the annual peach and cherry festivals, garden and house tours, the Terry Fox Run, the library's 225th birthday, plus the Christmas Parade and the annual Tractor Parade to close out the year

Continued on Page 6

# Wine leader honoured

Niagara-on-the-Lake visionary Don Triggs receives Order of Canada



Donald Triggs will be officially appointed officer of the Order of Canada at a ceremony in Ottawa on March 19. He is known for his visionary leadership in Canada's wine industry and his philanthropy in support of education and the arts. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Tim Taylor | The Lake Report

When Don Triggs talks about his life and career, his memories are peppered with references to his youth spent in a small Manitoba prairie town. He credits his family and early experiences for his love of the land, his commitment to agriculture, even his business acumen and negotiating skills.

On March 19, Donald Triggs, 82, will be appointed an officer of the Order of Canada in an Ottawa ceremony, one of 80 recipients in 2026.

In making the appointment, the governing body cited, in part, "(his) visionary leadership reshaped Canada's wine industry ... Beyond business, he is a committed philanthropist who supports education and the arts with passion and purpose."

And it all began in the hamlet of Traherne, Man., population

Continued on Page 12

## Community Heroes: People who make NOTL a better place

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

When something special needs to be done in Niagara-on-the-Lake, there's no shortage of groups and organizations ready to step

up and make a difference in the community.

Well-established groups like the town's service clubs and associations — Kinsmen, Lions, Newcomers, Rotary, Virgil Business Association and others

— continue to do great things, raising astounding amounts of money thanks to the efforts of numerous volunteers.

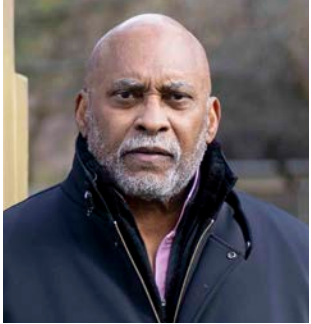
We salute them and all their efforts. This year, The Lake Report has chosen

to single out some of the individuals who have made it their "job" to selflessly give back to the community. We're focusing on just a few of the many deserving individuals.

Through contributions

small and large, these Community Heroes are just some of the many people who make NOTL a better place. They don't seek recognition, but we'd like to highlight

Continued on Page 9



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# Insurance challenges take centre stage in designation debate

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

In a town known for its history, it is not surprising that some residents want their homes designated as heritage properties, to commemorate their significance and protect them for future generations.

That desire led to shock for a handful of Old Town homeowners after they learned the insurance costs tied to designation could be a major problem.

Two of those owners, Barbara Worthy and Jim Reynolds, went before Niagara-on-the-Lake town council in the fall to share that insurance companies would not give them adequate coverage if their properties received heritage designation.

The issue was at the centre of a report that came before the municipal heritage committee at its first meeting of the year on Jan. 14.

The big takeaway in the report is that heritage designation itself does not affect insurance coverage; however, factors related to



Owners of heritage homes say they're facing issues with insurance — a deterrent to heritage protection.

it, including the building being built before 1940, could impact whether a property gets coverage.

The town quoted the following statement from the Ontario government in its report to the municipal heritage committee: "Insurance premiums should not go up because of a heritage designation. Some companies do not insure buildings over a certain age, but designation itself does not place additional requirements on the insurer and should not affect premiums."

The town said it will continue to consult with residents and the Insurance Bureau of Canada to make sure concerns are assuaged.

So, what is behind the

issue? Industry experts say several factors, namely high reconstruction costs, make insurance coverage more difficult and expensive for people in places like Old Town.

"A heritage home's replacement cost (what it would cost to rebuild) includes repairs that may involve specialty contractors and building materials," said Brett Weltman, manager of media relations with the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

“All of this, and several other factors, are factored into the price for insurance for a heritage home. With heritage homes, it is the age of the building, electric, plumbing (and the list goes

on) that is of interest to insurers; not whether or not it has a heritage designation.”

Weltman also pointed to an Insurance Bureau of Canada pamphlet that lists other factors affecting heritage properties, including longer bureaucratic timelines, more specialized professional assessments, stricter bylaws — such as requirements to rebuild on the original site — and longer claims settlement periods.

The Lake Report contacted 12 Canadian insurance companies to discuss their practices regarding heritage properties. None agreed to an interview, though some cited a lack of expertise as a reason why they did not want to do one.

"I consulted with our home insurance team and they do not feel we have the level of specialization and client base in heritage designated properties that is needed for this conversation," said Keren Adderley, senior communications consultant at Co-operators Insurance.

Anas Abdullah, an assistant professor in actuarial science at Brock University

who previously worked in the insurance industry, echoes that “exceptionally high reconstruction costs” and “specialized materials” play into the high premiums on heritage homes.

Abdullah also said that some heritage homeowners are sometimes told to go to specialized places, based on experiences he had when he was in the industry.

"For those heritage homes, some of the insurers ... are told they can only obtain coverage through some specialized prestige or high-net-worth insurance," he said. "It's a much higher premium."

None of this is helped by the fact that an additional factor plays a major role in Niagara-on-the-Lake in rising insurance rates, he said: flood risk.

He called flooding the “elephant in the room” when assessing insurance risk, particularly for homes near the shoreline, where many heritage properties are located.

“You combine this concentration of flood exposure with this exceptionally high reconstruction costs ... then obviously the final total

increases dramatically," Abdullah said.

When it comes to heritage homes and general insurance costs, outside of environmental risks, Weltman encouraged owners of heritage homes to shop around for coverage.

“While we can’t speak to this particular municipality’s designation of heritage properties and/or any additional bylaw requirements and restrictions,” he said, “we encourage homeowners to obtain a copy of any applicable heritage bylaws and work with their insurance representative to understand their potential insurance implications.”

All three Delater Street homeowners declined to speak on the record to The Lake Report, though Reynolds provided an update about the status of his premium in November.

"My replacement value and premium jumped at the mention of designation. It has since come back down but not to where we were before this all started," he said.

"I will be interested to see what the town discovers as they study this issue."

***daniel@niagaranow.com***

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## Rebuilding Brock

The scene at Brock's Monument looks a little different this winter. The 166-year-old war monument is undergoing its first major restoration since 2009, repointing mortar, replacing stone and installing new roofing. Restoration efforts will cost \$1.1 million, funded by the feds. Parks Canada hasn't provided an updated timeline on when it will be completed. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

## High-profile holiday break-ins among 36 cases reported last year in NOTL

Dan Smeenck  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Two high-profile break-and-enters in Niagara-on-the-Lake during the holiday season have brought crime into the spotlight for the sleepy rural town — two cases among the 36 of which Niagara Regional Police say the town was a victim last year.

Of these 36 cases reported to Niagara police, six of them have seen charges laid, while 13 remain under investigation and 17 were closed due to a lack of sufficient evidence.

While the two holiday incidents may have some NOTLers wondering if they may be next on the list of targets, Niagara police is urging the public to remain calm.

The two notable cases involve a break-in from November, in which an unidentified suspect on an all-terrain vehicle broke into a Niagara College facility on Concession 5 and stole wine, and the break-in of a home on Wall and Four Mile Creek roads on Dec. 19, in which the suspect allegedly sexually assaulted a 15-year-old girl.

"Obviously, I think it's sad and disturbing," said Holmes Hooke, a resident living in Chautauqua who noted car break-ins in his neighbourhood as well as a relative lack of police presence in the town.



There were 36 break-ins in NOTL in 2025, according to police. Residents are urged to lock vehicles. DAN SMEENCK

"People are concerned. They're locking their doors at night more and during the day too."

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa issued a statement following the December incident, which he called "deeply troubling."

"Safety, in our homes, on our streets and in our community, is a shared priority," he said.

That case led to the arrest of a suspect four days later, 33-year-old Nicholas Morinello of Niagara Falls, who was charged with breaking and entering and sexual assault.

An official with the Ontario Court of Justice in St. Catharines told The Lake Report that Morinello was granted bail and is due in court next on Jan. 26.

Niagara Regional Police say 36 break and enters were reported in NOTL in 2025, compared to 23 in 2024 and 35 in 2023. They said three of the 2025 incidents occurred at 176 Wellington St.

Royal Oak School principal Julia Murray, whose

school is at that address, said she knew of two there were two incidents of windows broken in downstairs, an unoccupied part of the school's building, one in the fall and one in December. There were no incidents at the school itself, she said.

She declined to comment on break-and-enters in NOTL as a whole.

Niagara police spokesperson Const. Richard Hingley said people typically do report break-and-enters to police, making the figures a reliable reflection of incidents in the community.

Police recorded nine break-and-enters in November, the highest monthly total of the year. No other month exceeded four cases.

Of the 36 cases in 2025, police laid charges in six. Thirteen remain under investigation, while 17 were closed due to insufficient evidence. Police did not release information on the total value of stolen property.

Some residents say the incidents have prompted them to take additional precautions.

"With a young son," said Tania Ganassini, "my husband and I have been looking into hardening the home, which was something I wasn't familiar with until this happened actually."

She said the family plans to increase exterior lighting and add more locks.

Others point to broader factors. Paul McManis said the rising cost of living and inequality may be contributing to the problem, causing more crime.

"Things are getting so expensive," he said. "The divide is getting larger and larger."

Hingley said police have not identified any specific area of town being targeted and stressed there is no reason for alarm.

"Residents should not live in fear," he said. "Probably the best investment a homeowner can make is in good quality video to assist with identification of individuals."

Hingley said police use a range of investigative tools in break-and-enter cases, including canvassing, video review and fingerprint and DNA collection.

Some residents who spoke with The Lake Report said despite these high-profile cases, they still feel safe in their communities.

"I haven't experienced it. I don't know anyone who has," said Judy McLeod. "It still feels like a pretty safe place to me."

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# ‘We see it as an incubator’: Foundation with NOTL roots eyes **community-first future** for former hospital

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Jim Burton says the former hospital at on Wellington Street was built by the community, for the community — and he wants it to remain a place for the people of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

He’s chair of the James A. Burton & Family Foundation, which is proposing to turn the 2.32-acre site at 176 Wellington St. into a hub for the arts, culture and education, among other uses.

Right now, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake owns the site, which currently houses Royal Oak Community School, a Niagara Regional EMS station and other leased uses, though council has yet to approve a long-term plan for its future, after the hospital shut down almost a decade ago.

Alongside making it a campus for the arts, culture and education, the foundation is proposing that it would have studio, exhibition and performance space for local cultural groups, space for Royal Oak, a planned preschool, Indigenous-led education, expanded parking and other community uses.

The foundation says it is strongly encouraged by the town-commissioned public consultation carried out by NPG Planning Inc., which presented findings to council in December.

That consultation found most of its participants want to see the building and site serve the public in some way, rather than be used for commercial development.

Neither Burton nor the foundation has commercial interests in the site, he said — Burton added that he himself is NOTL resident.

“I’m interested as a resident and committing to help grow this community that I consider to be my home,” he said.

Foundation materials say the project would be funded through a long-term lease, using donations, government grants and on-site



Jim Burton, chair of the James A. Burton & Family Foundation, says the former hospital site should serve the people of NOTL. PAIGE SEBURN

revenue from tenants and parking.

It does not seek to own the property and would operate the site through a not-for-profit board under whatever ownership or lease structure the town ultimately chooses.

The foundation says it plans to submit a proposal if and when the town moves forward with a request for proposals for the old hospital.

**Site should continue serving the public: Burton**

Residents have been consistent, said Burton, about what they want to see happen at the former hospital.

“It’s a very rare public asset of our town and the community has been very clear,” he said. “Keep it public, community-serving and heritage-respectful — and let’s move forward through a fair, competitive process.”

He said the foundation respects that process and “will be ready with a serious proposal when the town issues its (request for proposals).”

Burton has seven children and 16 grandchildren and said, as a resident, he could imagine bringing them to the site during visits to

see performances, learn about local history and take part in community activity beyond Fort George or downtown.

**“It’s a very rare public asset of our town and the community has been very clear ... Keep it public, community-serving and heritage-respectful.”**

JIM BURTON  
CHAIR  
JAMES A. BURTON  
& FAMILY FOUNDATION

“I see having a tremendous use for this,” he said.

The foundation’s approach to transforming the site would continue to be shaped by resident feedback, he said: “We’ve been doing that for three years and we will continue to do that.”

That includes addressing practical issues such as parking, he said.

The foundation is in discussions with Parks Canada about increasing parking capacity near the site.

“That’s in a working process, but it’s certainly on our agenda,” he said.

**A shared space for culture, learning and daily use**

Burton said the proposed site would be a shared, flexible hub “where we can celebrate and showcase our heritage, our history and our culture,” with spaces such as classrooms and gyms serving different groups at different times.

The “gathering place” could offer studio, exhibition and performance space for local organizations such as Yellow Door Theatre, Bravo Niagara and Music Niagara, “to allow them to continue to be more actively involved and visible in our community,” he said.

The foundation lists other potential collaborators including Royal Oak, the Niagara Academy for Indigenous Relations, the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, the Shaw Festival, Parks Canada, the NOTL Museum, environmental, community and tourism groups, local wineries and culinary professionals.

“We’ve had significant relationships with a number of these organizations for a number of years as

a major donor for them,” Burton said.

“They’re very excited about this project,” he added.

**‘We see it as an incubator’**

Burton said the site is intended both for daily use by residents and for visitors, especially those arriving at the edge of Old Town through nearby Parks Canada parking.

“There’s a lot of people streaming into town,” he said.

Residents frequently raise the need for more accessible seniors’ housing, Burton said, but added that seniors’ groups themselves have pointed to other sites.

“We think there is a need, but we don’t think this is the ideal site,” he said, adding the foundation has met with seniors and had “very productive conversations with them.”

The plans for a preschool in the proposal aim to address long waiting lists for early childhood care, he said.

The foundation also sees the site as a home for the Niagara Academy for Indigenous Relations’ work, an not-for-profit group with which the foundation has “a very committed relation-

ship,” he said.

“We see it as an incubator,” Burton said. “An incubator for really taking all these wonderful component parts that, we feel, create a community.”

**No formal name for foundation project, for now**

The foundation’s proposal has been shaped by years of engagement, including meetings with local groups and individuals, an independent Abacus Data survey the foundation commissioned and a review of NPG’s findings.

Burton said that “between the work that we’ve done — meeting with over 140 groups and individuals in town —” plus, its study and the NPG findings, “over 1,200 residents have responded to what they would like to see in this site.”

“(People) really want it, firstly, to be kept as a public community-serving capability,” he said.

The foundation is not attaching a formal name to the project at this stage, referring to it simply as 176 Wellington for now.

“We look forward to giving much more detail to the town as we respond to the request for proposals.”

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# Council green lights mix of parking and community space for old hospital

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake council is moving ahead with the recommended next steps for the former hospital on Wellington Street, but not without some debate over whether the town is moving either carefully or too slowly on deciding what to do with the old building.

A new town staff report on the property's future was presented to council Tuesday. It was approved, with Couns. Wendy Cheropita and Sandra O'Connor voting against it.

The report recommends the town, which owns the former hospital at 176 Wellington St., focus on a use for the site that serves the community, and do more work to better understand what kinds of community uses the property could realistically support.

It allocates up to \$12,000 for an external architectural consultant to prepare conceptual plans and recommends further analysis of the site before a request for proposals is issued, announcing and laying out the details of the former hospital's alteration for contractors.

The report does not propose any change to ownership. The town approved no final design, project or partner.

Chief administrative officer Nick Ruller stressed repeatedly that council was not being asked to approve a final concept or move ahead with a specific proposal.

"This information that we would gather would inform what we would put in the (request for proposals)," Ruller said, calling it a "starting point."

He said a past request for information on the hospital site was too broad in its scope, meaning the town couldn't move forward with concrete ideas for the project — the current report is meant to provide more clear direction upfront.

Before any decision is made on when to issue a request for proposals, staff



Niagara-on-the-Lake council voted to move ahead with further study of community-focused uses for the former hospital site at 176 Wellington St., as councillors debated how quickly the town should move toward outside proposals. PAIGE SEBURN

must provide the further information that, Ruller said, could be complete within four to six weeks, depending on consultant availability.

He said if staff are able to return to council by February and receive direction, the goal would be to draft a request for proposals and issue it several weeks later.

The decision exposed a split over how quickly councillors think the town should move toward outside proposals.

The debate followed a delegation earlier in the meeting from Jim Burton, chair of the James A. Burton & Family Foundation, who urged council to move faster and warned against delays that could push decisions on this project into the election cycle. Municipal elections are being held this year on Oct. 26.

The foundation has outlined its vision to turn the site into a hub for the arts, culture and education, and says it is prepared to respond to a request for proposals with a plan reflecting public feedback and the direction of the staff report.

"We appreciate the staff report was in line with what we had heard for the last three years," Burton told The Lake Report after the meeting.

At the meeting, Burton called on the town to return with a clear procurement approach and timeline, including a request for proposals, within 45 days.

"Let me start off by saying clearly, I am not a developer," he told councillors. "I have no commercial ties, directly or indirectly,

with 176 Wellington."

"Before you get back into another election cycle — which is going to take over everything that people think about — I would wish for you to be able to have a win."

He said the foundation's concern is that "the delay will not be helpful to the process," adding that the focus now should be on progress.

"We have solutions — as an example, even to parking. But we haven't shown you," Burton said.

Some councillors said that quick pace raised concerns.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa cautioned against rushing the process, saying council needs "to get the facts clear on the community benefit portion" before moving toward outside proposals.

"I think it shows that we're trying to be prudent with the leadership of this property," Zalepa added, "before we go to market on what could be some very exciting opportunities with third parties."

Coun. Maria Mavridis said she understands the push but is also not comfortable moving faster.

"I don't agree with the comment that it is a failure of leadership not to do so," she added.

Mavridis said council should stay the course and follow proper procurement rules on what she described as one of the biggest projects this council is dealing with.

Coun. Gary Burroughs supported the staff report but said the town should be careful not to repeat years of inaction tied to the site.

He asked whether a request for proposals could move forward more quickly "or in conjunction with some of the other studies" staff wish to complete.

Ruller responded that clearer guidance from council first would help avoid issuing an overly broad request for proposals.

Cheropita said she supports what she called an "excellent report," but worried the reference to a two-storey parking structure and early design work could limit ideas before the town hears from outside proponents.

She said the strongest concepts often come through their proposals.

Ruller said the two-storey reference was illustrative only and intended to help inform, not predetermine, a future request for proposals.

"Simply to highlight the fact that we're not looking to do a six-storey, you know, poured concrete (structure)," he said.

"Because as soon as someone hears parking garage, there are these negative connotations to it."

O'Connor questioned whether staff were shaping outcomes too tightly before hearing broader ideas through a request for proposals and said the report presented too few options for council to consider.

Ruller said the report reflects staff's interpretation of the public consultation carried out by NPG Planning Solutions Inc., and said if council has concerns about the range of options, the time to raise them is now.

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# Illegal winery operations, E. coli, Royal George rebuild, high policing costs

Continued from Front Page

Here is part 2 of our Year in Review:

JULY

**July 3:** Willow Cakes & Pastries has closed its regular retail operation, but it is still churning out delicious treats — and again this **Canada Day**, chef Catherine O'Donnell and her team produced the giant cake that attracts thousands to the July 1 parade through Old Town.

Beachgoers are still frolicking in the water at **Queen's Royal Beach** despite a warning from Niagara Region about dangerous levels of E. coli contamination, suggesting that the lone sign encouraging potential swimmers to search online to learn about water safety levels may not be enough. An investigation by The Lake Report using the region's data will show the beach was only declared safe for 10 of 31 days in steamy July.

Joyous NOTL's **Mariah Reese** and her family are declared "standout neighbours" after residents nominated them as part of the Town of NOTL's Good Neighbour Day promotion. Joyous NOTL, which has more than 2,000 members, aims to spread positivity and connection across the community.

**July 10:** The Shaw Festival's plans to rebuild the **Royal George Theatre** are met with moans and groans from an unusually packed council chamber. Attendance was so high for the town's planning committee meeting that an overflow room was required.

The future of **NOTL's former hospital** site is back on the table and the town is asking residents what should become of the old building. Online surveys and in-person comments will be used to determine what might happen on the site.

After the Virgil **speed camera** is chopped down for the fourth time this year, the region vows to use CCTV to monitor the camera — and maybe catch the culprit.

**July 17:** St. Davids boxer **Mckenzie Wright**, the reigning Canadian champion, narrowly missed qualifying for the 2024 Olympics, but she is not deterred. The 35-year-old has a new coach and is training hard to try to make her dream come true.

More than 900 people



PHOTO  
GALLERY  
See more pictures  
at niagaranow.com

Top: Things were more than peachy keen in August as thousands flocked to downtown Old Town and St. Vincent de Paul Parish for their annual peach festivals. DAVE VAN DE LAAR Bottom: NOTLer Jon Taylor, co-chair of construction manager Govan Brown, says when it comes to the rebuild of the Royal George, the company will do everything it can to minimize impact on residents and tourism. RICHARD HARLEY

join the **NOTL Horticultural Society** for its 30th annual garden tour. The organization also awards two horticultural scholarships, for Niagara Parks and Niagara College.

NOTL follows a by-law enforcement process of engage, educate, then enforce — but despite a formal complaint and a Lake Report investigation, **Ferox by Fabian Reis** winery remains in the education stage, working with the town as it plans to document any further rule violations. Ferox advertises food service and promotes events and patio service — all activities it is not allowed to offer.

Around 250 historical re-enactors pitched tents at **Fort George** to commemorate the 212th Battle of Fort George.

**July 24:** NOTL native **Richard Alan Moore**, 39, who killed an 84-year-old cyclist in a hit-and-run two years ago, is facing several serious new charges

after a boat collided with a swimmer in Muskoka on Saturday evening, leaving a 22-year-old man with life-threatening injuries. Moore faces several serious charges including impaired operation causing bodily harm.

After hearing from unhappy residents, Shaw Festival executive director **Tim Jennings** says the theatre company plans to revisit its plans for the rebuild of the Royal George Theatre.

Town council votes to support **Parliament Oak** developer Solmar's bid to have Niagara Region waive more than \$800,000 in development charges related to its underground parking garage. The town will send a letter to the region supporting the request.

**July 31:** NOTL resident **Jon Taylor**, co-chair of construction manager Govan Brown, says the company will do everything it can to minimize impact on residents and tourism, while striving to hire local

and create economic impact from the Royal George rebuild.

NOTL council approves the first draft of a **new official plan**, bringing the town closer to the final version it hopes to hand in to the province by November. It's now available for public review and feedback.

Two of the three young people killed in a fiery **single-vehicle crash** on Queenston Road last week are laid to rest after a funeral service in Niagara Falls. Their car left the road, hit a tree and burst into flames, trapping all three men inside.

NOTL golfer **Stephen Warboys**, 72, finishes tied for fourth in the 70 and over division of the Ontario Senior Men's Golf Championship. It was at Lora Bay Golf Club on the shores of Georgian Bay in Thornbury.

**AUGUST**  
**Aug. 7:** Farmers say they are proud of how they treat their workers — and frustrated by national

reports that they say don't reflect what's happening on **NOTL farms**. A cross-Canada survey released by the Migrant Rights Network details allegations of worker mistreatment.

The **Shaw's presentation** of "Gnit" earns a rare five out of five stars from The Lake Report's reviewer, Penny-Lynn Cookson, who says the entire cast shines.

Emotions bubble close to the surface for many who gather to celebrate **Inni-skillin's** 50th anniversary. There are lots of smiles and a few tears during the commemoration of the winery founded by Donald Ziraldo and Karl Kaiser in 1975.

**Aug. 14:** The Shaw tweaks its design for the rebuild of the **Royal George Theatre**, hoping the revisions will satisfy critics in the community.

After torrential spring rains created havoc at **TASC Tulip Pick Farm's** spring festival, town council rejects the company's request for a permit to hold a late-summer tulip fest.

The sweet aroma of **peaches** fills the air as the NOTL Chamber of Commerce and the St. Vincent de Paul Parish each hosted their annual celebrations of everything peachy.

There's joy and heart-break as the **NOTL Golf Club** crowns its club champions at its annual golf tournament. Overall, James Griganis-Meusel is men's open champ while Louise Robitaille earns the women's title.

**Aug. 21:** NOTL homeowners will pay more than **\$16 million for policing** in 2025, but that total could be a lot lower if regional council stops using home values to calculate how the service is funded, says Ken Gansel, the former chair of Niagara's police services board.

**Chautauqua residents** of all ages show their solidarity by turning out to protest the town refusing to designate their neighbourhood for a secondary plan under the new official plan.

After arson badly damaged **Glencairn Hall** in April, volunteers salvage what they can and then crews tear down what is left of the historic estate.

NOTL's old hospital site could become a **one-stop hub** for everything from condos and a pool to high-tech health services, says Dr. Nick Vaccaro, founder of RegenaLife, which wants to take over the town-

owned property.

**Aug. 28:** Despite rejections by the town and the Ontario Land Tribunal, developer **Benny Marotta** is trying again to obtain approval for a low-density residential development on the historic Rand Estate.

It's a sign that summer is winding down as the **NOTL Soccer Club's** wraps up the season with its annual year-end festival.

In an effort to reduce the number of crashes and fatalities, NOTL has cut **speed limits** on all rural roads to 70 km/h from 80 km/h.

**David Mines**, a long-time coach, manager and trainer in NOTL hockey and lacrosse in NOTL, and the late **Michael Kappel**, an international wrestler and rower, are inducted into the town's Sports Wall of Fame.

SEPTEMBER

**Sept. 4:** Growing peaches has been "challenging" for NOTL farmers this year as hot days and nights sped up ripening and could mean a smaller crop, says **Scott Epp** of Epp Family Fruit Farms. On the upside, peaches are sweeter than ever.

More than 50 people attend a virtual open house hosted by the town, where developer Solmar presented its latest attempt to rezone land near the historic **Rand Estate**. Most participants expressed strong disapproval of the project.

Niagara Region data analyzed by The Lake Report shows the water at the town's only monitored beach, near the gazebo at **Queen's Royal Park**, was unsafe for most of the summer. From the first day of summer on June 20 through Aug. 18, E. coli levels exceeded safe levels on 41 of 60 days.

St. Davids golfers **Kaige Zhu** and **Eli Perng**, both just 13, perform well at the Canadian under-15 championships in British Columbia. Zhu led after the first round but on day two fell back to finish fifth while Perng was 34th in the field of more than 50 young players.

**Sept. 11:** A **white nationalist rally** by about 50 members of the extremist group Second Sons at Brock's Monument over the Labour Day weekend draws strong condemnation from NOTL's mayor and many residents.

Overcrowding at **St. Davids Public School** renews calls for safety improve-

Continued on Page 7



# Anniversaries, museum expansion, school boundary changes

*Continued from Page 6*

ments, but the District School Board of Niagara says it won't provide answers or possible solutions until trustees receive a report later this fall.

**Brock's Monument** will be closed to the public until next spring to allow for more than \$1 million in repairs to the 172-year-old structure.

**Penner Home Hardware** marks its 75th anniversary with a community barbecue for customers, staff and family.

**Sept. 18:** The town settles a six-year legal battle with former resident **John Black**, who accused the municipality of abuse of process, bad faith and misuse of power involving his purchase and planned addition to his home at 27 Prideaux St.

Hundreds of participants kick off the annual **Terry Fox Run** in NOTL, by running, walking, biking and inline skating through hitting the streets of Old Town to support the fight against cancer.

Gardening expert **Joanne Young** dies suddenly on Sept. 11 at age 56. She was known and loved for her work with the NOTL Horticultural Society, her gardening seminars and her weekly columns in The Lake Report.

Queenston marks **Laura Secord's** 250th with speeches, a cake crafted by Niagara College and a pointed reminder that local history links to today's cross-border economy.

**Sept. 25:** On the heels of settling one lawsuit, the town agrees to pay developer Hummel Properties Inc. **\$1 million** over the town's misuse of an interim control bylaw in 2018 that targeted Hummel's project on Niagara Stone Road. The Ontario Court of Appeal in 2022 ruled the town's actions had been illegal.

The town issues a stop-work order and begins fining developer **Benny Marotta's** company \$500 a day for illegally doing excavation work and removing soil from the Parliament Oak hotel site because no permit has been issued.

The Lake Report wins another **13 national awards** for its quality journalism, commentary and advertising. In the Canadian Community News Media Awards, the newspaper and its website niagaranow.com received recognition in several categories.

Wi-Fi in the heritage district, **more public washrooms** and signs to help visitors navigate Old Town are just a few of the changes that could be coming to NOTL next year. Town staff presented the plans and more to council as part of a proposal to spend \$1.9 million in revenue from the municipal accommodation tax, a hotel levy charged to overnight visitors.

## OCTOBER

**Oct. 2:** After a five-year absence, the Niagara Regional Native Centre's **annual powwow** returns to the NOTL centre and attracts huge crowds.

Well, we won't have to worry any more about the Virgil speed camera being chopped down. Premier Doug Ford has moved to **outlaw speed cameras** across the province, a decision that will cost the NOTL an estimated \$100,000 in revenue that was to be used for traffic upgrades.

After ignoring a **stop-work order** from the Town of NOTL, developer Benny Marotta's company has received a permit to continue its excavation work at the future Parliament Oak hotel site.

**Pedal Pub** patrons across Ontario can now sip drinks while pedalling and partying. But not in NOTL. Town council votes to maintain its alcohol-free rules.

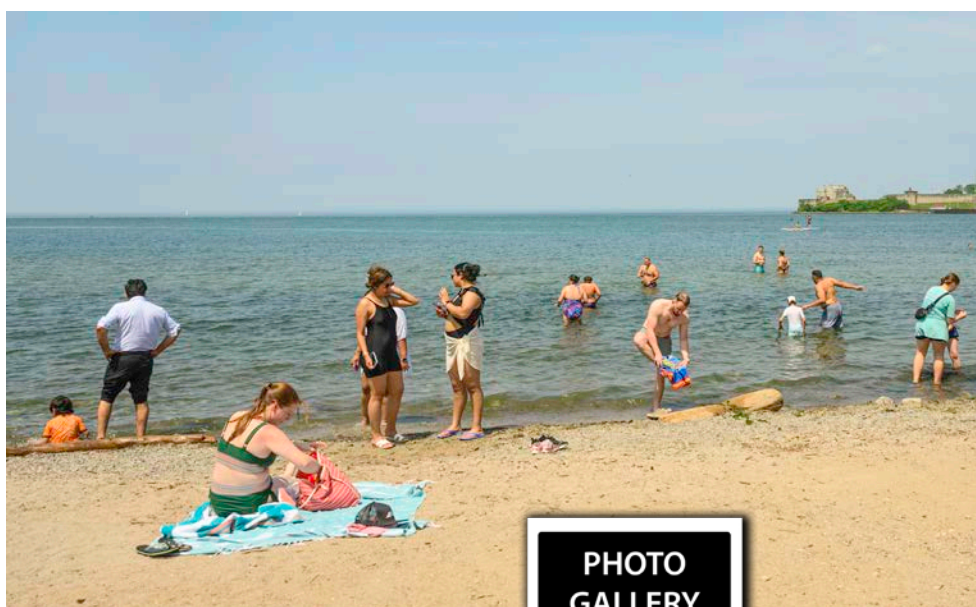
The **NOTL Golf Club**, the oldest in North America, celebrates its 150th birthday with a big party and players decked out in historic outfits.

**Oct. 9:** Four hundred years ago, a **towering oak tree** began life near what is now Lakeshore Road. The mammoth tree, on the Epp family farm, has earned provincial award recognizing its age and historical importance.

Council presses pause on **Ferox by Fabian Reis's** request to change its zoning from farm winery to estate winery. The Ferox property is about half the size of a typical estate winery but, in the past, has held events that are only permitted under the estate winery designation.

The **Garrison Village** farmers market will move to a much larger location next year, near the Clayfield Hotel now under construction on the property. The market will grow to about 40 vendors from the current 15, organizers say.

**Oct. 16:** The **Niagara Regional Native Centre's**



Top: An investigation by The Lake Report using the region's data showed that Queen's Royal Beach was only declared safe for swimming for 10 of 31 days in steamy July, due to E. coli contamination levels. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Bottom: As the Niagara District Airport celebrated its 96th birthday last year, it also announced big plans to accommodate more passengers and flights to and from further destinations as part of its \$195-million, 20-year master plan. PAIGE SEBURN

board of directors faces new allegations of intimidation, mistreatment and financial misconduct, as former staff and past leaders say programs have been disrupted, employees feel silenced and almost \$25,000 in payments were issued to board members this year. The allegations have not been proven and no board members will comment.

A summer survey and public input shows that NOTL residents want to see the former **town hospital** used for housing, planning consultants tell a public meeting at the NOTL Community Centre. Meanwhile, Lake Report contributor **David Israelson** argues the site should become a community cultural hub.

**Oct. 23:** The town's freeze on new **short-term rental** licences will remain in place until at least next year as council delays any further changes to its rental bylaw.

Cyclists and walkers participating in the annual

Hummel Family Healing Cycle Ride raise \$60,000 to keep **palliative care** services free for NOTL residents.

A special eight-page section of The Lake Report is published to celebrate the 225th anniversary of the establishment of the **NOTL Public Library**, which became Upper Canada's first circulating library.

A new group, formed by **Julia Buxton-Cox, Penny Milligan** and **Audrey Pellett**, brings women together to pool their donations and support local charities. The NOTL chapter of 100 Women Who Care collects \$100 donations from 100 women and gives \$10,000 or more to a single charity. Hospice Niagara is the first recipient — of \$15,100.

The **NOTL Museum** is getting a big boost to its facilities with the addition of an elevator, thanks to a \$150,000 donation from the Royal Bank of Canada Foundation.

**Oct. 30:** A bound-

**ary change** approved by Niagara school trustees that will shift about 125 St. Davids students to Crossroads Public School next year was rushed, poorly communicated and caught many families off-guard, parents say.

How about those Blue Jays?! As Toronto appears in the **World Series** for the first time in 32 years, NOTL residents pack pubs, hold viewing parties and a few lucky ones take in the first two games at what still is the SkyDome to some fans.

**Vandalism** at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Old Town has left the church community angry, confused and unsure what to do next. Church members say it is the second time since last month that a headstone was knocked over at the cemetery.

Thanks in large part to the work of dozens of volunteers, the **NOTL Wolves'** annual Harvest Classic Rep Tournament brings 40 teams to town from across

Ontario, making it one of the region's biggest youth hockey tournaments of the year.

## NOVEMBER

**Nov. 6:** Flights from NOTL to cities like Ottawa or Chicago could one day take off under a newly approved \$195-million, 20-year master plan to expand and modernize the **Niagara District Airport**, which is jointly owned by the municipalities of NOTL, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines. If funding and airline partnerships are finalized, the goal is to eventually have the airport available for regular commercial flights to major Canadian and U.S. cities.

After **Hurricane Melissa** tore through Jamaica, cutting off power and communication across the island, NOTL residents and provincial advocates moved quickly to help — collecting supplies, raising money and supporting farm workers desperate to reach loved ones back home.

The **Rotary Club** pledges \$100,000 to support the NOTL Museum's multi-million-dollar renovation and expansion project.

**Nov. 13:** A large group, including leaders from all three levels of government, gathers to protest the Chinese government's persecution of NOTL hotelier **Jimmy Lai**. The democracy advocate's niece, Erica Lepp, leads a march from Simcoe Park to Queen's Landing, one of Lai's hotels. Meanwhile, as **foreign ministers** from some of the world's leading democracies meet in town, local officials say it gives Canada an important chance to press for Lai's release.

**Richard Alan Moore**, who left the scene after his pickup fatally struck cyclist Nestor Chemerika, 84, is jailed for 11 months after pleading guilty. Meanwhile he awaits trial on serious charges after a swimmer was hit by a boat in Muskoka in July.

**Mayor Gary Zalepa** storms out of a council meeting after the town delays a decision on the Shaw's planned rebuild of the Royal George Theatre.

NOTL marks **Remembrance Day** with several ceremonies, including a large gathering at the Landscape of Nations Memorial in Queenston to honour Indigenous veterans.

**Nov. 20:** Council makes

*Continued on Page 8*



# Major developer ignores town rules, mayor still advocates for \$900K relief to bad actor

Continued from Page 7

a few additions to the **draft 2026 budget**, pushing the potential property tax hike to 2.19 per cent from the original proposal of 1.81 per cent. One of the changes is adding a certified engineer to town staff.

After a contentious year, **Ferox** by Fabian Reis's zoning application for estate winery status is approved — but with strict limits on occupancy and hospitality uses.

In an in-depth feature story, **NOTL fire** and emergency personnel speak about how crucial it is to talk about and process the emotions and trauma they encounter on the job. It's important not to bottle up feelings, fire chief Jay Plato says.

Farmer and accomplished jam maker **Kim McQuhae** cleans up again this year at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair's professional jams and jellies competition, winning a total of 20 awards.

**Nov. 27:** Niagara Region council decides Two Sisters Resort Corp. won't be paying a nearly \$1 million



A procession of 92 elaborately decorated trucks and tractors rolls through Virgil for the fifth annual Tractor Parade, a last-minute COVID event that's become a yearly Niagara-on-the-Lake celebration. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

regional **development fee** for its Parliament Oak hotel underground garage. However, it's unclear how or if the region will make up the money.

NOTL's long-awaited **official plan** is inching toward reality, as councillors lay out their final concerns before the document comes back for approval in February.

Retired engineer **Ron Simkus** says the hotel

development on the former Parliament Oak school site could worsen flooding along nearby One Mile Creek if groundwater from the property isn't properly managed during construction. The developer didn't respond to questions about water discharge plans for the project.

**DECEMBER**  
**Dec. 4:** A cynic might suggest that because it's a municipal election year,

there's no way the **2026 town budget** will have close to the nearly 8 per cent property tax hike inflicted 12 months ago. And they'd be right: council keeps the increase to 2.19 per cent.

Jan. 1 brings a major change to **blue box collection** for Ontario businesses, especially those with large amounts of cardboard, plastics and other recyclables. Private companies will now handle the service for non-residential recycling and that means extra costs for businesses small and large.

The Town of NOTL says the trucking of soil from the site of the future **Parliament Oak hotel** to the property where Glencairn Hall once stood was done without the required permits. The town doesn't say if the developer involved will face any consequences.

St. Davids boxer **Mckenzie Wright** takes another step on the long road to fighting for Canada at the 2028 Olympics, winning her fifth career national championship. That phenomenal feat puts her in a "rare position within the history

of Boxing Canada," says the head of the national boxing federation.

**Dec. 11:** NOTL's Rotary **Holiday House Tour** brings thousands of people out to visit seven specially decorated homes while raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for charities at the 26th annual affair.

NOTL runners **Ben Bayne** and **Luke Simpson**, both 13, finish among the top competitors at the Amateur Athletic Union's Cross-country Nationals in Knoxville, Tenn. Bayne is second and Simpson eighth among 13-year-olds in the four-kilometre race and the result earns the two Canucks all-American status. In addition, their team from the Thorold Elite Track & Field Club places first overall, well ahead of all their U.S. opponents.

Council approves a 29-unit, **three-storey apartment** proposed for Four Mile Creek Road, even though its density is triple what the town's planning rules normally allow.

Huge crowds fill downtown streets for the annual

**Candlelight Stroll**, raising \$14,500 for Pink Pearl Canada, an organization supporting young women with cancer.

**Dec. 18:** Radiant Care Pleasant Manor in Virgil opens its new long-term care home, a \$70.5-million redevelopment project adds 119 new beds to the facility. The three-storey building will have a total of 160 beds.

**Santa** comes to town for the annual Christmas Parade through Old Town and the fifth annual **Tractor Parade** lights up Virgil as 92 elaborately decorated trucks and tractors roll through the streets.

Premier Doug Ford unveils a new **Destination Niagara** tourism strategy that includes expansion of the Niagara District Airport.

Curator **Sarah Kaufman** departs the NOTL Museum to take on a similar job in Port Colborne, her hometown.

NOTL's Jewish community celebrates and reflects during **Hanukkah**, marking the start of the holiday with a ceremony in Simcoe Park beside a large lit menorah.

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# Sporting Heroes: NOTL athletes of all ages excel

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

Young, old and in every age group in between, Niagara-on-the-Lake boasts many athletes who have achieved remarkable things in sport.

Some of them have been immortalized on the Wall of Fame in the Virgil arena lobby — **David Mines** (hockey and lacrosse) and the late **Michael Kappel** (wrestler and rower) were added to that shrine this past year.

But many Sporting Heroes just quietly toil away at their chosen pastimes, happily training and performing, often excelling in their fields.

Looking back over the past year or so, there are numerous athletes whose accomplishments are worthy of note.

This week, we highlight a few of NOTL's many Sporting Heroes:

Skier **Carter Simpson**, 31, brought home two bronze medals and had one fourth-place finish in the 2025 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Italy.



Carter Simpson proudly holds a Canadian flag signed by his GoodLife Fitness spin class. PAIGE SEBURN

NOTL native **Kaleb Dietsch**, a stalwart on defence for the Ottawa 67's of the OHL, celebrated suiting up for his 100th game with the club. A graduate of the NOTL minor hockey system and the Southern Tier Admirals AAA program, he

is in his third season with the 67's after being drafted in 2023.

In minor hockey, last year the **U18 NOTL Wolves** rep team put together a dream season, skating to a 40-2-6 record, winning the Niagara District title and two tour-

naments along the way. The Wolves also qualified for the Ontario Minor Hockey Association championships for the second straight year. They fell short in the championships thanks to some bad bounces but still had what coach Adam Whyte recognized as "an amazing season."

Boxer **Mckenzie Wright** is one tough customer. At age 35, the St. Davids athlete won her fifth career national championship this fall, as she navigates the long road to the 2028 Summer Olympics.

Winning five national titles is a "rare" feat in Canadian boxing history, noted Boxing Canada executive director Christopher Lindsay.

"Her athleticism and skill continue to set her at the top of our women's 51-kilogram weight class and among the top of our national team pool of athletes."

Canadian cross-country runners **Ben Bayne** and **Luke Simpson** travelled to Tennessee in December with teammates from the Thorold Elite Track & Field Club and returned home as "all-Americans."

The 13-year-olds finished in the top eight in their age class (Bayne was second and Simpson eighth), which qualified them for the special designation. And their performances helped the Thorold team dominate the meet and win the overall gold.

Senior runners **Margot Devlin** and **John Bobrel** just keep going and going.

Devlin completed three marathons this year — in Paris, London and New York — meaning she has now finished an enviable more than 20 marathons.

And Bobrel earned the Six Star medal, a rare award recognizing runners who compete in the world's original six major marathons: Boston, London, Berlin, Chicago, New York and Tokyo.

The retired head electrician at the Shaw Festival, ran the Tokyo race last March and then set his sights on the Sydney race Down Under in 2026.

The husband-and-wife duo of **Stephen Warboys** and **Louise Robitaille** continued to make their mark on North America's oldest golf course — the 150-year-old NOTL club.

Warboys, a retired tennis club pro, is one of the most consistent players at the NOTL club and last year won the club's senior men's title.

He also finished fourth in the 70 and over division of the prestigious Ontario Senior Men's Golf Championship.

Robitaille, meanwhile, was crowned the women's Open champion at the NOTL club for the fifth time since 2018.

St. Davids Public School classmates **Kaige Zhu** and **Eli Perng**, both just 13, competed in the Canadian under-15 championships in British Columbia.

Zhu led all competitors after the first round but fell back on the final day to end up fifth while Perng was 34th in the field of more than 50 players.

Perng also won junior titles at Eagle Valley and Cherry Hill, and over the Christmas holidays was victorious in a junior tourney in Florida.

**Do you know of someone who deserves to be recognized as a Sporting Hero? Let us know: editor@niagaranow.com.**

# Community Heroes: People who make NOTL a better place

Continued from Front Page

and acknowledge them. Five years ago, **Dorothy Soo-Wiens** and her husband Erwin brought NOTL the idea of a holding a Tractor Parade to celebrate the agricultural community.

Like several other small towns, NOTL farmers could decorate their equipment and show it off to the community a week or so before Christmas.

Well, the agricultural folks embraced the idea and five years later the Tractor Parade has grown into a must-see event as it rolls through Virgil.

It's just one of the many community efforts that Soo-Wiens is involved in year in and year out.

We're not sure where **Cindy Grant** finds the time or the energy.

Whether it's her involvement with Newark Neighbours and the NOTL food bank, being president of the Rotary Club and the horticultural society, or advocating for seniors issues and affordable housing, Grant works tirelessly to make a difference.

**Mariah Reese** and her



Besides the Tractor Parade and other activities, Dorothy Soo-Wiens helped organize a Paws for Heroes fundraiser, to help provide service dogs for veterans and first responders living with PTSD. PAIGE SEBURN

family were selected by the Town of NOTL as "stand-out neighbours" as part of the town's Good Neighbour Day promotion.

Reese started a local Facebook group called Joyous NOTL, where positivity reigns and good things about NOTL are celebrated. It has since branched out to include occasional social events.

The professional arts thrive in NOTL but a decade ago **Andorlie Hillstrom** saw the need for a community-based arts

group and with that the Yellow Door Theatre Project was born. It's now a major force for developing young artistic talents at home in NOTL.

**George Webber** started Friends of the Forgotten, an organization that deserves to grow and ensure that the past is never forgotten.

His hard work and energy were the driving force behind attempts to restore the historic Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground, once known as the Negro Burial Ground.

While the group fell short of its fundraising goals, we hope Webber, the town and others will continue to make sure we honour this important link to our past.

**Vaughn and Lauren Goettler**, through their family's Goettler Foundation, have donated millions to community projects large and small.

From helping preserve the Wilderness property on King Street to supporting the Yellow Door Theatre Project, NOTL Museum, Red Roof Retreat and the heritage trail, the Goettlers are committed to sharing their wealth to make our community a better place.

**Steffanie Bjorgan** is another tireless worker, who has helped lead Red Roof Retreat as it has grown and prospered over the past 25 years. And now the respite care and support organization for children with special needs is in the midst of a major expansion.

**Barbara Ahluwalia** is an ageless wonder. Now in her 90s, for decades she was involved in numerous community ventures, but in recent years was a key figure in bringing the

Voices of Freedom Park to life.

And when it was clear that development of the Parliament Oak school was inevitable, she lobbied to preserve a monument on the site that commemorated families who helped slaves escaping the Deep South via the Underground Railroad.

The Chautauqua Residents Association is small, but mighty, punching well above its weight class. Under its current president, **Weston Miller**, as well as previous leaders, this group works to ensure the unique enclave that comprises the Chautauqua neighbourhood is preserved and respected.

The association also tries to foster community spirit by hosting events and gatherings throughout the year.

Summertime visitors to NOTL often rave about the floral beauty they encounter in Old Town. Much of that is a credit to **town workers** and the likes of **Chris Allen**, who lovingly tend to the gardens and hanging baskets that add so much to the town's ambience.

**Brittney Kranz**, lead coordinator of the Farmworker Hub in Virgil, helped rally

NOTLers to support workers after Hurricane Melissa slammed into Jamaica in October. Migrant workers are essential in NOTL's agricultural industry and when they are living here for up to 10 months of the year, the Farmworker Hub is an essential connection to the products and services they need.

Last, but far from least, we want to salute **Julia Buxton-Cox**, **Penny Milligan** and **Audrey Pellett**, the trio behind the launch this past year of NOTL's chapter of 100 Women Who Care.

They brought this amazingly simple charitable organization to town and it quickly took off, attracting way more than the requisite 100 women members. The group meets four times a year and each time, each member contributes \$100.

That creates a pool of more than \$10,000 that is then donated to a single charity. As the organization says, it's "simple, efficient and powerful."

**Do you know of someone who deserves to be recognized as a Community Hero? Let us know: editor@niagaranow.com.**



# Embrace the winter chill: Icewine Village returns this week

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Winter may mark the start of a season of shoveling driveways and trekking through snow-covered streets for many, but for wine lovers in Niagara, including Niagara-on-the-Lake, the time is now for icewine season.

The Niagara Grape and Wine Festival aims to celebrate that tradition in a social, fun way with its annual NOTL Icewine Festival, celebrating its 31st season this year.

Niagara Grape and Wine Festival executive director Dorian Anderson and event and winery relations manager Matt Finn are excited that Queen Street was half-closed as of 8 a.m. on Tuesday. The street will be half-closed until 6 p.m. on Jan. 27.

“We want it to be lively,” said Anderson. “One of the things that’s very important is that we keep the beauty of NOTL. So, the theme around the decor is a ski-lodge, kind of, environment. There’s looking to be lots of wooden harvest tables, lots of trees and greenery, we’ve got beautiful geodomes.”

The festival, which calls



Matt Finn, left, and Dorian Anderson are organizing this year’s NOTL Icewine Festival. Queen Street was partially closed Tuesday to prepare for the event and will remain closed until Jan. 27. DAN SMEENK

itself Canada’s largest wine festival, begins Jan. 16 and features three events: the Icewine Discovery Pass, the NOTL Icewine Village and the Cool as Ice Gala.

The Icewine Discovery Pass is valid Jan. 16 to 18, Jan. 23 to 25 and Jan. 30 to Feb. 1. It is available in three options.

The full pass allows access to six wineries of the holder’s choosing on any day the discovery pass is active. A mini pass provides access to three wineries, while a Friday pass allows access to six wineries on Fridays only.

All passes include food and wine pairings.

Participating wineries include the NOTL wineries Jackson-Triggs, Konzelmann, Inniskillin, Bella Terra, Château des Charmes, De Simone, Lailey, Lakeview Wine Co., Marynissen, Niagara College Teaching Winery, Peller, Pillitteri, Queenston Mile Vineyard, Reif, Riverview Cellars, Shiny Apple Cider, Trius and Wayne Gretzky Estates. Many are located in NOTL.

Finn said purchasers of the discovery pass can start to choose their wineries on Friday. He said the wineries

love collaborating with the festival.

“January is usually a very quiet month on the hospitality side of things,” he said. “But knowing that you have three weekends of programming when you’re going to see, you know, maybe 1,000 people maybe 2,000 people coming through your door who ordinarily wouldn’t visit at that time of year, is a big draw for them.”

The NOTL Icewine Village runs Jan. 17 to 18 and Jan. 24 to 25 on Queen Street. Admission is free, with opportunities to taste wine and enjoy culinary pairings with a variety of icewines. They will run 12 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The village also offers a VIP experience, which includes three hours or a full day in a heated snow globe structure, access to a private bar, a premium tasting of three icewines and a cheese platter.

A cocktail competition will take place during the village, with free admission to watch. Cocktails will be available for purchase “a la carte,” while VIP ticket holders can access three cocktails for \$25.

Anderson also talked about a new exhibit called the Icewine Imaginarium.

She called it “sensory experiences for the four main flavour nodes of ice wine.” It comes with information cards about different flavours of ice wines, and it was an “edutainment” experience.

On Jan. 24, the village will also feature the Icewine Cocktail Competition. The competition also features winter go-go dancers as a DJ, Nicholas Picholas from Kiss 98.5 in Buffalo.

The Cool as Ice Gala takes place Jan. 31 at the Niagara Parks Power Station. Guests can dress up, dance and enjoy icewine, wines and mocktails. There are 20 wineries participating.

Anderson called a “great grand finale” to the festival.

Finn said they’ve planning since the event since the fall. This includes get vendors, which include the 24 member club of Wineries of NOTL. They will be pouring two wines: an icewine or late-season wine and a “secondary wine of their choosing.” There are also six culinary partners.

Anderson said they are expecting around 20,000 people to the NOTL for the month of January.

Anderson said that since COVID, it has become 30 per cent more expensive to

put the event on, which has meant that event planners have had to watch what they spend. They believe the event nevertheless will be a success this year and will keep a lot of people happy.

“We want to celebrate being Canadian and enjoying the outdoor period,” said Anderson.

Tickets are available at [niagarawinefestival.com](http://niagarawinefestival.com).

There will also be other icewine events happening at the same time. Joseph’s Estate Wines Inc. will be hosting its annual Winter Sparkle Icewine Soiree on Jan. 24 and 25 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tickets for \$30 include both days.

On the top of Joseph’s Estate Wines icewine, Maria Grace Paola is the event planner at the winery and she said there would be soups, cheese, crepes, a chocolate fountain and desserts. There will also be a free draw and live entertainment.

This is the first time they’ve hosted the event and Paola is excited.

“I just want them to enjoy, have fun, meet other people, learn about ice wine,” she said.

Peller Estates Winery will be hosting a celebration of icewine dinner on Jan. 24.

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# Comedy festival is back in NOTL Jan. 29

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A bevy of giggles, goofs and good times will be had by comedy fans at the end of this month, when the 12th annual Icebreakers Comedy Festival returns to Niagara-on-the-Lake from Jan. 29 to 31.

The festival will present four shows: “An Evening with Steve Patterson” at Oast House Brewers on Jan. 29; “Corks Comedy Hour” at Corks Wine Bar and Eatery on Jan. 30; “The Meltdown” at Corks Wine Bar and Eatery on Jan. 30; and “The CBC Laugh Out Loud Gala” at the Royal Cambridge on Jan. 31.

Executive producer and comedian Jeff Paul, a NOTL native, said he expects almost 500 people to attend this year. The festival began as entertainment tied to the town’s ice wine celebrations and now become “its own thing.”

Paul will host “The Meltdown,” which he described as one of the festival’s dirtier shows. All performances are 18-plus, with 19-plus required for alcohol service.

“We’re gearing towards a sell out,” he said.



NOTL native Jeff Paul is the executive producer and a headlining comic at the Icebreakers Comedy Festival, which runs from Jan. 29 to 31. SUBMITTED

Each show features comedians with national profiles. Steve Patterson, host of CBC’s “The Debaters,” headlines the Jan. 29 show.

This marks Patterson’s first appearance at Icebreakers. He said he was eager to visit NOTL, a town where “The Debaters” has never taped.

“This is me testing the grounds, I guess,” he said.

Longtime comedian Elvira Kurt will open for Patterson. He praised her ability to read a room and set the tone.

“The CBC Laugh Out Loud Gala” will be hosted

by Ali Hassan, who also hosts CBC’s Laugh Out Loud podcast, which highlights comedians from across the country.

NOTL has become a regular stop for the gala, Hassan said.

“This is one of the few cities where we’ve just gone back every year,” he said. “They’re just so great to work with ... the audiences in NOTL are just very special.”

The gala lineup includes Martha Chaves, who will close the show. Chaves is originally from Nicaragua and went to Montreal as a

young woman. Her family in Guatemala.

She began performing stand-up at 25 and now teaches comedy at Humber College. Her material often draws on everyday observations and her experiences as a naturalized Canadian.

“We call her the grand dame of Canadian comedy,” Hassan said.

Chaves returns to the festival for a second year. She said she enjoys performing in NOTL and plans to include Niagara Falls jokes, though she was unsure how specific her material would be to the town.

“I usually ... write about the town where I go,” she said.

The two comedians said politics will largely stay out of their acts.

“To talk about what’s going on in the news is an exercise in futility,” Chaves said, citing how quickly events change.

She added that she is concerned about the future of Canada and the world.

“I’m more worried about Canada at the moment, what’s going to happen to us,” she said.

Festival details and tickets are available at icebreaker-comedy.com.

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

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# Triggs says receiving Order is ‘highlight of life’

*Continued from Front Page*

less than 500 (now 1,770), 125 kilometres west south-west of Winnipeg.

“Let’s face it: receiving the Order of Canada is a highlight of my life,” says Triggs proudly. “It somehow says I made it.”

Triggs family emigrated from England in the late 19th century, homesteading land that would with cattle and mixed grains.

“I have pictures of my grandmother pitching sheaves into a threshing machine. We all worked hard.”

The seeds of Triggs’ future were sown, literally, in these Manitoba fields.

After school, Triggs and his twin brother, Ron, worked a lucrative trap line until darkness. Then, their farm chores completed, the two skinned and stretched the pelts, usually ermine, readying them for market.

Triggs laughs when he describes how his relationship with the Hudson Bay fur buyer honed his marketing and negotiating skills.

“He came to town once a month, advertising in the local paper. It was my first lesson in negotiation. A two-foot ermine pelt was generally worth three dollars. He’d offer \$2. I’d refuse and walk away. You learned. I’ve used that lesson ever since.”

Triggs was content with a career in farming.

“Farming is a good, good living. I really wanted to farm.”

But fate stood in his way. An uncle’s serious health issue meant only one of the two brothers could stay on the farm.

“My father took us aside and declared that one of us would have to leave the farm. We drew straws and I lost.”

Triggs used the savings from his half of the trapline earnings to enter the agricultural economics faculty at the University of Manitoba, graduating in 1966, the same year he married his wife of 60 years, Elaine, also a U of M honour student.

“The courses that interested me were macroeconomics, econometrics, statistics,” says Triggs. “I took all the options that led me towards business.”

When they graduated, the two moved to London, so he could pursue a masters of business administration at what is now the Ivey Business School.

“It was an eye-opener for me. We were forced to think



Donald and Elaine Triggs share a toast to his becoming an officer of the Order of Canada. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

like a CEO. It really lit a fire under me.”

It was during his time at Western University that Triggs was taken by the wine bug.

“Elaine and I were taken to dinner at a fancy place. We were poor students. We thought a bottle of Mateus and a pizza was special. Our host ordered a bottle of Chateaufort-du-Pape. He explained to us all the grape varieties in the wine, where they were grown, the soils they were on and how they contributed to the wine’s character.

“This was farming, but there was so much more to it than growing wheat or corn. I was hooked.”

After stints as an assistant product manager for Colgate Palmolive and another at a marketing services company, Triggs was headhunted to help run the Labatt’s foray into the Ontario wine industry.

Finally, he was back with his first love: agriculture.

He was a believer.

He envisioned, along with a few other Canadian new-wine pioneers, an industry making world-class wines that would compete in Europe and around the world.

“We knew that our vineyards were built for ease of production in labrusca grapes. They were not attuned to making quality

“We did a bunch of consumer research on how to position our new brand. We learned that there were warm fuzzies around brands that used the name of the president and even better if you had two real people in the name, partners working together ... So, our marketing director put all the partners’ names into a hat and drew two out: Jackson-Triggs. That simple.”

DONALD TRIGGS  
FOUNDER, JACKSON-TRIGGS

wines. We had to retrain ourselves — our grower communities. We had to redevelop our thinking.”

To put their money where their mouths were, the Triggs made a six-figure contribution to Brock University’s cold climate oenology and viticulture institute to enable the school to bring the best and brightest wine makers and technologists from around the world to speak to its budding wine-makers and grape growers.

Perhaps Triggs’ best-known business venture is the creation in 1993 of Jackson-Triggs, one of Canada’s foremost winery brands.

He has a funny story about how the would-be winery was named.

“There were five partners when we started Jackson-Triggs. We were going to

acquire the Labatt wine business. Basically, we all borrowed as much money as we could, put it into a kitty and then together we borrowed a whole lot more.”

“We did a bunch of consumer research on how to position our new brand. We learned that there were warm fuzzies around brands that used the name of the president and even better if you had two real people in the name, partners working together.”

“So, our marketing director put all the partners’ names into a hat and drew two out: Jackson-Triggs. That simple.”

JT, as it became known over the next decade, was the cornerstone of Vincor International, with wineries and partnerships all over the wine world. Triggs was the CEO and president.

In 2006, Vincor was sold to Constellation Brands, a leading international producer and marketer of a host of wine and alcohol brands. The Canadian operations of Constellation Brands were purchased in 2016 by Arterra Wines, wholly owned by the Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan.

Triggs moved on.

On a kind of swan song tour across Canada following the sale of Vincor, Triggs began dreaming again of going back to the land, of rekindling his inner farmer.

“I went across the country and said goodbye to everyone. I stumbled across an abandoned peach orchard that would make a wonderful vineyard.”

It got Triggs thinking.

“I talked to Elaine. We thought, well, maybe we should do this. We both love farming.”

In the end, that property didn’t work out. But it was a flame that just wouldn’t go out.

“I found another piece of property that was just gorgeous. Elaine looked at me and said: ‘Don, you buy that site. We’ll do the wine business. We’ll do the winery.’ So, we did it.”

The Triggs had help from their youngest daughter, Sarah, who joined the effort to create the Culmina Fam-

ily Estate Winery, in Oliver, B.C.

“Sarah jumped at the chance to be a part of the startup. She went off to Australia, did a master’s in wine making and business and then joined us. I was delighted. She was a big, big contributor.”

After 12 successful years, Culmina was sold to Arterra Wines.

The Triggs have two other children. Andrea, their eldest, is married and living in Australia. Melissa lives in Don Mills. They have a total of four grand-children.

In 2018, Triggs received an honorary doctor of laws from Western University.

In addition to spending time plotting how to see their children and grand-children, the Triggs are never far away from divining ways to support their favourite non-profit organizations. Both are members of the Shaw Festival board of governors.

Over the years, they have made significant financial contributions to a long list of recipients, including Western University, Brock University and the Shaw Festival.

“Our love of theatre began during our university years in Winnipeg. A major patron gave tickets to performances to members of the student council. I invited Elaine. It was mind-blowing. It just opened another door for me. It cemented in me the importance of giving back to the arts.”

The Triggs began coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake as young students, camping in an old army tent on the Commons and attending the fledgling Shaw theatre. Over the years, they have moved around a great deal but always returned to town. They currently live along Queen Street, overlooking the iconic fourth hole of the golf course.

“We’re delighted to be back. We love it here. Our neighbours, our theatre — the whole cultural scene. It’s a very special place.”

Triggs is a little anxious about his upcoming investiture ceremony.

“It’s so special. They sent me the little pin. Of course, I will wear it proudly, but I’m petrified of losing it.”

Triggs is close to finishing a book about his life experiences. “Not for publication, but for my great-grandchildren so they can know how it was.”

He may have trouble keeping publishers away. [timothyntaylor1949@gmail.com](mailto:timothyntaylor1949@gmail.com)



# NOTL Order of Canada recipient says authenticity brought success

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Mandy Rennehan is someone who values being true to herself: she says she's proud she never felt the need to compromise who she was to succeed in the world of business.

"I kind of go against the grain of corporate constipation," she says.

"A lot of these companies very much are like, 'We need Mandy in here (for speaking engagements) to get you guys to come out of your skin,' because I don't know any other way to be but authentic."

Rennehan has won many awards for her entrepreneurial success and outreach work — receiving the Order of Canada, however, feels different, she says.

When she got the phone call, the woman from the government told her that she smiled when her file crossed her desk and said: "This was award was initiated by



NOTL's Mandy Rennehan is one of two local Order of Canada recipients. She is being recognized for her entrepreneurship and efforts in advancing women in trades and LGBTQ+ rights. SUPPLIED

people like you."

The Niagara-on-the-Lake resident is one of two entrepreneurs in the town receiving the honour this winter. The other is winery operator Donald Lawrence Triggs.

Rennehan, nicknamed Bear, is the founder of Freshco, a full-service reconstruction and retail maintenance firm. There is

no relation to the grocery store chain, though she said the company sometimes receives angry emails about the price of bananas.

"We just learn to have fun with it rather than fight it," Rennehan said with a laugh.

Started 31 years ago, when she was 19, Freshco provides trades services rather than food. Rennehan said her love of the trades

came early.

"I didn't know why I loved construction, I just did," she says.

She says she has experience in a range of trades despite never attending college or becoming certified in any one area, something she believes helped her business.

Freshco operates as a one-call service for retail maintenance jobs such as plumbing issues, roof leaks, tripping hazards and overflowing toilets.

"I was probably the first in Canada to facilitate one phone call," she said, referring to consolidating multiple trades into a single service rather than having retailers call different companies for different jobs.

The company now employs dozens of tradespeople and works with Fortune 500 retailers in the United States, including Nike and Sephora.

"If they're a sexy retail client, they're basically our client," Rennehan says.

Despite Freshco's international reach, Rennehan has always called Canada home. Originally from Yarmouth, N.S., she says her life shows someone from a small community and a family with financial struggles can build a successful business.

She says her reputation as a "go-getter" spread in Atlantic Canada when she was 19 and 20. By age 30, she was a millionaire.

Rennehan has also focused on giving back. She says she has delivered "hundreds" of public speeches and works to encourage women to enter the trades, particularly given that women are underrepresented in the trades and that there's a shortage of skilled trades workers in Canada.

One advantage she said she had was her comfort navigating male-dominated environments.

"I grew up with three brothers ... everyone else seemed to be boys around me, so I certainly knew my guys," she says.

Alongside her public speaking engagements and mentorship work, Rennehan also hosts the show "Trading Up with Mandy Rennehan" on Netflix and Global TV. She is also the author of the book "The Blue Collar CEO."

She has also been outspoken in her advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community as a gay person herself. Freshco was recognized as the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce LGBT Business of the Year in 2017.

She previously lived in Toronto and Oakville before moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake five years ago. She says it had long been a place where she came to relax.

"When the pandemic hit, I looked at my partner and said, 'Why the hell are we here anymore?'" she says. "We just did it."

"NOTL is my home now." Rennehan said the Order of Canada ceremony will take place in the spring.

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**Contributed by Patty Garriock**

"Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, making mistakes and having fun." - Mary Lou Cook

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Spotlight on young talent

Ten-year-old actress and NOTLer Vivienne Atwood delighted audiences as Susan Waverly in the Shaw Festival's holiday production of Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" — she received recognition from the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake on Tuesday for delivering what they called an "exceptional performance."  
PAIGE SEBURN

Opinion

Worries build as Shaw clams up



**THE TURNER REPORT**  
Garth Turner  
Columnist



While the massive Shaw project will upend the downtown in unknown ways, at least these trees will be protected. Area businesses may not be so lucky. GARTH TURNER

Tom Simmonds tells me NOTL is full of snowflakes. The warm kind.  
"There's a lot of woke babies in this town who came from the big city thinking life was going to be all peace and quiet," he says. "The idiots who complain about farmers using bird bangers and windmills to protect their crops and having burn-offs ... It never stops."  
He wrote after last week's post about Old Town residents irked by a construction fence around several doomed buildings at the new Royal George complex site. Yes, a fence is needed to contain the coming mayhem. No, it doesn't need to be covered with promotion and branding for Shaw, its builder, architects and consultants. A mural of the iconic streetscape would have been sweet. Heritage photos. Even a pic of the new faux theatre façade.  
Woke babies abound elsewhere, adds Tom. Like those who live behind the new Terminal 4 Clayfield Hotel and its 42 vacation rentals, complaining about the urban wall they now face.  
"I too feel sorry for the people who live/bought on

Perez, but that's the chance you take when you buy across the street from an open lot. We back onto a vineyard/orchard but who's to say how long it'll stay that way. That's the chance we took and there's little one can do to prevent progress, if that's what you want to call it."  
Well, progress is about to hit Queen Street. And so far, we ain't ready for it.  
Kathy Weiss, CEO of both NOTL Tourism and the Chamber of Commerce, says so far local businesses have been left in the dark when it comes to the massive Shaw construction project about to begin. No project timetable. No traffic plan.  
"I think we should bring everybody together — all those affected businesses," she says, "to discuss these challenges and make sure there's the right people in the room who can provide answers and make an impact."  
The Shaw build is expected to take three years to erect a 55,000-square-foot

complex, three times the mass of the Court House down the street, with a length extending half a block along Victoria, and towering the equivalent of six stories about it. This is a huge undertaking. Thinking it can be done without shutting down roads and sidewalks or threatening the existence of some stores is naïve.  
And how will heavy construction be handled during the next three summers when Queen is shoulder-to-shoulder with tourists, cars are everywhere and festival season arrives? Is there a strategy?  
The business community has none. I asked the builder, Govan Brown. No reply. I asked the Shaw's czar, Tim Jennings. No answer. But what about the Town of NOTL? Surely our guys didn't greenlight a \$80 million monolith, the biggest erection in downtown NOTL history, without asking how it'll be done — did they?  
They did.  
I asked this:

"Could you please tell me if the Town has received a construction plan from the Shaw or Govan Brown stating the various stages of demolition and construction, the time allotted for each and the approximate dates each will be commenced?  
"Also, is there a traffic plan? What route will construction vehicles take to the site? Where will equipment be parked when not in use? Will Victoria Street be closed and, if so, for what duration? Alternatively, will there be a flag person on duty, especially during the summer and on weekends, if that street is to be restricted, or rendered one-way."  
"I have asked the same questions," Coun. Gary Burroughs tells me. "But I haven't heard back anything yet."  
Ditto his colleague Coun. Maria Mavridis. "As of today, I have not received any of the information above as a councillor."  
How about our lordly mayor? I asked him, too.  
Gary Zalepa said, "Many details will be included in the development agreement, conditional site plan and site plan agreement as they are finalized."  
Staffer Aimee Alderman has been tasked with digging up more details and getting them to us. Soon. Maybe. But the project moves forward.  
We're about to rip the downtown apart. Poor snowflakes.  
Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister.  
garth@garth.ca



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# The meaning of the engineer's iron ring

Dear editor:  
As the town welcomes Jordan Frost, its first professional engineer in more than a decade, residents may notice a small but distinctive symbol worn by many Canadian engineers: a plain metal ring on the little finger of the working hand.

This iron ring is neither decorative nor honorary, but carries a meaning unique to Canada.

The ring originates in the Ritual of the Calling of an Engineer, first held in 1925 following several tragic engineering failures, most notably the Quebec Bridge collapse,



which claimed 75 lives. The ceremony is administered by the Corporation of the Seven Wardens, an independent body separate from licensing authorities. Engineers receive the ring as a reminder that their professional decisions have real and sometimes ir-

reversible consequences for public safety.

The ring itself is deliberately modest — traditionally iron, now often stainless steel — and is worn so that it touches drawings, documents or keyboards as engineers work.

Its purpose is not to confer status, but to serve as a constant, physical reminder of ethical responsibility and humility.

Canada is unusual in maintaining such a tradition. In many countries, professional accountability is expressed almost entirely through licensure

and regulation.

Canada complements those systems with a personal, lifelong reminder that ethical judgment cannot be delegated.

My familiarity with this tradition is personal as well as civic. I have two brothers who are professional engineers, and over the years I have seen how seriously this quiet symbol is taken.

It reflects a distinctly Canadian understanding of professionalism: that public trust rests not only on rules, but on conscience.

**Stuart McCormack**  
**NOTL**

# Medical assistance in dying: The perfect prognosis?

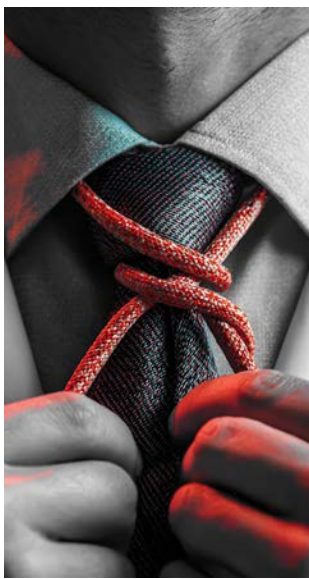
Dear editor:  
A close relative had developed a series of medical issues which did not readily fit into successful treatment patterns. When he checked in with his general practitioner some time ago, his GP suggested MAiD (medical assistance in dying) as the best prognosis.

More recently, he was taken to the Marotta Family Hospital, formerly the St. Catharines General Hospital, with some non-positive symptoms. The presiding physician also suggested MAiD as a final solution.

The good news is that if you are conscious and in your right mind, the staff probably won't put a pillow over your face while you are sleeping. The bad news is that if you are not conscious, or appear to be in a confused state of mind, the situation changes somewhat.

COVID was a wake-up call for politicians and administrators at all government levels that health costs could be substantially reduced by simply letting patients die. Budget cuts could largely go without comment in the midst of a pandemic.

The Ontario government passed a law specifically exempting long-term care homes, and related institutions, from liability for failing to provide adequate



treatment for the people in their care. Sections of nursing homes could be cordoned off, and patients simply left to die on their own recognizance. What a great idea.

Nowadays, politicians and administrators have their own various agenda, and providing public funds for chronic health care is certainly not among them. Premier Doug Ford began his regime (before COVID) by making massive cuts to public health services.

These, plus cuts to epidemic response programs by the federal government, ensured that COVID hit Canadians much harder than would otherwise have been the case. But here comes the bright side.

COVID prepared Canadi-

ans to accept a much higher level of death in public institutions than might have been the attitude formerly. The problem was that, after COVID had peaked, we were back in the valley of despond.

Without further large cuts to health care (a politically-risky proposition), politicians might be unable to transfer massive amounts of public funds to their own pet projects.

Enter the "death with dignity" proponents. Governments could channel "happy death" through the entire medical and social system, and take minimum responsibility for these programs.

The fact that these deaths were particularly happy for politicians, administrators and "death with dignity" enthusiasts was usually left out of the advertising prospectus.

It was truly remarkable how energetically physicians and medical personnel entered into the spirit of "happy death." They, too, could be happy that MAiD would conceivably slow down further cuts to health care, along with providing some residual powers to the medical profession itself.

The parameters set by old white males, such as Hippocrates, had long since been exploded by more progressive thinking. What

was formerly known as "the oath of Hypocrites" (in one comedian's parlance) is no longer a topic for discussion. Medicine has transitioned into a culling of the herd.

It is characteristic of Canada circa 2026 that no one is likely to advocate a "life with dignity" initiative. Apart from a lack of government interest in such dubious social proposals, this might well prove to be a white elephant, unlikely to take the popular fancy.

In the meanwhile, it is much better to focus on "business as usual."

As an afterthought, we may add that the immediate cause of our relative's visit to hospital turned out to be the side effects of a new drug that he had been recently injected with.

This drug stays in one's system for six months; so further negative effects of this drug are possible.

Meanwhile, hospital staff decided to administer a further injection which would counteract the first one, but were not very successful at it.

Apparently, only one practitioner in the hospital was very skilled at doing this particular injection. So, a bad arm was another side effect of our relative's visit to the hospital.

**Kevin McCabe**  
**St. Catharines**

Read more letters at [niagaranow.com](http://niagaranow.com)



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style  
Category: FICTIONAL FEMALES

**In a 1996 book her wedding gifts include a silver horse and three ancient dragon eggs.**

Last issue category:  
**MAKING SOME BONES ABOUT IT**

Clue: The masseter muscle closes the mouth by elevating this jawbone.

Answer: What is the mandible?

Answered first by: Bob Wheatley

Also answered correctly (in order) by:  
Claudia Grimwood, Jeff Lake, Sylvia Wiens, Jim Dandy, Esther VanGorder, Donna Pearce, Katie Reimer, Nancy Rocca, Lynda Collet, Laura Hollemans, Wade Durling, Sheila Meloche, Sue Rautenberg, Marla Percy, Catherine Clarke

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)

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# NOTL needs apartment buildings – but, the right ones



Brian Marshall  
Columnist

Realistically, this town needs more apartment buildings.

We require both affordable long-term rental accommodation and condominium units to satisfy the needs of the people who work in NOTL businesses plus first-time buyers and older folks who would like to age in place in our wee town.

Now, I am not talking about high-rise apartment towers such as what is proposed for Glendale’s White Oaks development — as I have written previously (“Arch-i-text: What’s wrong with this picture,” March 9, 2024) this type of building is inherently unsustainable, dehumanizing and, practically, never truly “affordable.”

No, what I am speaking to here is the need for low-rise (three or four storeys) buildings located on green-field (or carefully selected

brown-field) sites that the town’s planning department has pre-identified and correctly zoned for such development(s).

I realize this approach to planning — proactive versus reactive — is rare in this province; however, that is not to say it shouldn’t or couldn’t be done.

Simply, as long as planning remains in the reactive mode, the future of our urban landscapes (including heritage streetscapes), together with NOTL’s rural and natural spaces, remain largely subject to the demands of developers — demands driven by profit versus what is best for the community.

Let us postulate for a moment that proper proactive planning has been instituted and provisions have been made for low-rise apartment developments on lands within our urban boundaries that respect the existing settlements and streetscapes. Would there be any reason to oppose such development?

I can only think of one.

Frankly, the architecture of most apartment buildings is crude: a single block massing sometimes articulated by harsh straight lines to resemble a jumble of smaller blocks.

Exterior finishes are largely sterile — either



Simcoe Lofts illustrates how outstanding architectural design can create buildings that actually beautify urban streetscapes, says Brian Marshall. BOLDERA ARCHITECTS INC.

uniformly drab or a combination of white and black broken by the occasional application of manufactured wood grain material.

And, in those instances where colour is utilized, it is invariably applied in patterns that resemble the painting of a child in kindergarten.

This simplistic design approach to apartment buildings has dominated the sector for decades and has resulted in a quasi-institutionalized environment within the resultant neighbourhoods.

It really doesn’t have to be this way.

For contrast, let’s visit midtown Toronto to take a quick look at five iconic apartment buildings that reflect the times during which each was built.

First we’ll head to Avenue Road just south of St. Clair

where there are three buildings that were constructed during the late 1920’s and reflect the social exuberance of that time as expressed in the architecture.

At the corner of Avenue Road and Balmoral (#150) stands the Balmoral Apartments, a superb example of the period revival (Eclectics) style drawing heavily on Tudor revival.

Clad in brown brick, it is decorated with limestone appointments. The main entrance is within the recessed courtyard on the north elevation: a space accessed by passing under a monumental round-arched opening whose keystone is surmounted by a stepped gable with carved detailing and flanked by rounded buttresses with finials.

Clarendon Avenue is one

block south on Avenue Road and at #2 stands the Clarendon Apartments.

Much more modest than the Balmoral, it’s similarly anchored in the Tudor revival expression of the Eclectic styles. Its main field is brown and red brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern with extensive limestone appointments. Of particular note is the extensively carved cornice banding around the roof.

Finally, directly opposite on Clarendon, is the eye-popping Claridge Apartments.

Principally rooted in the Romanesque Revival style with a sprinkling of Moorish arches and classical detailing, its buff brick is also laid in a Flemish bond pattern with limestone, concrete and some marble appointments. The brick pattern decorations, standing proud of the main field are real show-stoppers.

And its lobby, with its art deco fixtures and ceiling mural painted by the Group of Seven artist, J.E.H. MacDonald, is perhaps the most beautiful in Toronto.

Next, we’ll head north to St. Clair and turn east. At 110 St. Clair West and at 64 St. Clair are the Parklane and Fleetwood apartments, respectively.

Built in the final years of the 1930s, these buildings are two outstanding examples of Toronto’s art deco architecture.

In my opinion, this architecture is just plain sexy. The curves accentuated by the horizontal brick bands create a nearly organic feel to the art deco architectural homage to streamlined modern design as expressed throughout all facets of society during this period.

Having visited the past, I wondered if there were any present-day Ontario architects producing more refined low-rise apartment designs which flew in the face of modern “factory” generated residential buildings.

In short order, I found the Simcoe Lofts.

Developed by the Toronto firm Boldera Architects for a site in Penetanguishene, Ont., the subtly curvaceous design recalls the art deco style. The building incorporates biophilic design principles, with every residential unit granted gardens, views of the lake, while daylight and natural ventilation floods the interior spaces.

Clearly, it can be done.

The question remains, “Why is this the exception rather than the rule?”

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



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# Future councils will inherit a colossal financial mess



## THE FORUM

Steve McGuinness  
Columnist

In a local radio interview last week, Coun. Maria Mavridis recapped the year 2025 by reciting a list of council accomplishments. Holding the 2026 tax hike to 2.19 per cent “to keep affordability front of mind” was one.

But the harsh reality is that our approved budget raises operating costs another 7 per cent this year, masked by raiding reserves from our accumulated surplus.

This week, a 2024 asset management plan report was tabled at town hall. It recommends raising our taxes 2.4 per cent each and every year for the next 20 years for capital investments required to close an infrastructure deficit.

This means that from 2027 to 2047, our town’s tax hikes need to exceed this year’s 2.19 per cent to fund capital improvements, even before considering operating costs.

Does anyone else feel hoodwinked in a municipal election year?

The town portion of our property tax bills have actually increased at an almost 30 per cent compound clip over this council’s term, with only around 16.4 per cent of that attributable to inflation. Even the resurgence in parking revenues since COVID could not offset this rapid and massive spending spree.

Our home values have dipped around 30 per cent over this same period, according to the Niagara Association of Realtors. So we’re now paying 30 per cent more on an asset worth 30 per cent less. This fiscal irresponsibility this term kneecaps our future councils, leaving them little manoeuvring room going forward.

I led a thorough analytical review of 2026 town budget for the NOTL Residents Association. It isolated 28



NOTL’s mayor has a history of ignoring professional advice from town residents. Why? Who knows. It seems he “trusts the experts” until they expose his ineptitude.

specific recommendations for improvement. I also provided councillors with an itemized list of annual savings adjustments totalling \$3.2 million.

In reply, the lord mayor, Gary Zalepa, dismissed my effort and attacked my professional competence. He wrote: “When you hide behind some claim of prior financial expertise and provide advice/suggestions that are not sound, that is unprofessional.”

Meanwhile, Coun. Mavridis was one of three coun-

cillors (along with Couns. Tim Balasiuk and Wendy Cheropita) who failed to propose even a single budget amendment at a Nov. 17 special council meeting.

There, council passed only three budget amendments totalling \$66,325 against our \$44-million budget. This pathetically futile effort fell well short of the required mark. They used a putty knife to remodel a budget requiring a sledgehammer.

Meanwhile, the regional portion of our tax bill will remain uncertain until Feb. 5. We are trending toward a 6.98 per cent increase.

At a Jan. 8 meeting, Zalepa raised a point of order challenging a motion to defer budget finalization — on the grounds it strayed off the published agenda. The meeting chair and clerk overruled his objection explaining committee agendas are always subject to amendment.

He ought to grasp that basic procedural rule by now given the “15 years of municipal council experience and four years as region budget chair” he cited in his aforementioned nastygram to me.

Back on Nov. 20, Zalepa also persuaded regional council to waive a more-than \$900,000 development charge on the Parliament Oak hotel’s second floor of its parking garage. This generosity set a fiscally destructive precedent.

When confronted with the chasm between that \$900,000 and the \$5,000 “slap-on-the-wrist” fines assessed for 10 days of violations at the hotel construction site, he questioned the linkage. So, he’s effectively sanctioning gifts to multimillionaire developers that ignore our rules with impunity.

He has also declined comment on an ombudsman complaint filed about that \$900,000 relief.

All regional councillors received the legal analysis underlying the NOTL Residents Association complaint. The lord mayor actually replied privately to NOTLRA founder Stuart McCormack about it, writing: “During your time as (an) elected council member, past examples of you providing legal opinion to NOTL council have been directly connected to

recent settlements, not in favour of the town.”

There is some comfort, but no joy, in another professional being targeted by an unnecessary Zalepa personal attack when volunteering advice.

The Niagara Police Services Board has also resisted a \$2.7 million cut from its \$236.9 million budget, insisting every cent of its 11.5 per cent hike is necessary to maintain effective policing. The concerns regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser raised about fairer police cost sharing remain unresolved.

So, we must now bear even more exorbitant policing costs as the lowest use consumers of policing.

As for its effectiveness, it has been nine months since the Glencairn fire without any arson investigation leads emerging.

*Steve McGuinness, CPA, is retired from a career in financial management on Bay Street. He holds degrees in political science and business administration. He offers reflections on public policy issues within our community.*

[stevemcguinness94@gmail.com](mailto:stevemcguinness94@gmail.com)



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# Some Winter Olympic levity to loosen up the world



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson  
Columnist

Two of my outstanding memories of the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary are Eddie the Eagle and the Jamaican bobsleigh team. What a glorious event for Canada.

And some 38 years later, our world could really benefit from a break.

Following world, national and local news now, it is tough to find anything that could be called funny. Throw in cold weather and long dark nights, and we fight through our annual winter season.

Upcoming, the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games will open on Feb. 6. There will be gold, silver and bronze medals awarded in many events, and likely our Canadian team members will bring home more than a fair share. Almost certainly a record haul.

But let's look into the situation for a moment. Are we getting better when compared to other nations? Perhaps, but there are so many more events now. Many more opportunities to grab a medal. Not just a few skiing and skating events for individuals and teams.

Admit it, some of the sports are a bit quirky. Who came up with the "synchro" concept?

Synchro, of course, is the short and slang form of synchronized. Let me take this Ramblings to a crazy level. Sometime in the future, will we be able to sit in front of a television



Ross Robinson looks forward to watching Olympic hockey, where fighting isn't a thing. He's fed up with how fist fights are still part of NHL games and culture. SOURCED

screen and watch highly trained women and men compete in synchronized biathlon?

Cross country ski until exhausted, stop, lie down, control your breathing, and then aim and pull the trigger of a high powered rifle. All the while, synchronizing movements with a partner?

This rambling mind boggles.

Skiing used to be

essentially alpine and nordic. Now, the variety of different disciplines gets confusing. And hats off to the athletes from the Scandinavian nations. Especially lightly populated Norway, that always seems to dominate the various cross country races.

They really do set the standards for quadricep development and aerobic capacity. VO2 max, wot?

With only a few million people.

Now let me ramble to "our sport." Yes, Canada's sport: hockey.

Ice hockey, as people in the antipodes call it, as opposed to field hockey. Or, as millions of people in India and many other countries call field hockey, hockey. I am not trying to confuse anyone, but let's think globally. And yes, it is confusing.

It's quite a stretch to call the recent ice hockey tournament the World Juniors. Painstakingly organized by the International Ice Hockey Federation, but so few countries involved. Hockey helmets off to Sweden for winning the gold medal by nipping the Czechia team in a fast and fabulous final game. So skilful, so rugged, and no fighting. Repeat, no fighting.

Our hard working young Canadian lads accepted bronze medals after defeating

Finland in the consolation final. Hurrah, I think.

But never fear, Tim Hortons is skating to the rescue. The company founded by the rugged defenceman from Cochrane has entered into a fairly complicated sponsorship deal. Something about 20 free Timbits if (make that when) Canada wins a gold medal in Milano Cortina.

But I get confused and disillusioned here. Apparently you have to be a member of their rewards loyalty program, and spend at least \$5 on other yummy treats. Why does there always have to be a catch?

Many Canadians will be watching the Olympic hockey. Both sexes. No fighting. That's right, fighting in hockey is mainly a Canadian thing.

Why do Canadians allow male hockey players to punch each other in the face, attempting to concuss?

Just asking.

rossrocket9@gmail.com



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# New public works director says **balance, communication** key

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

In his first weeks on the job, Niagara-on-the-Lake's new public works and infrastructure director says he's paying close attention to how his decisions will affect the people of this town.

"It's been good," said Jordan Frost, who started the role earlier this month. "Just on the second week here, learning a lot about how we do things internally. But it's pretty positive and pretty exciting as well."

Frost, who's still getting up to speed on ongoing issues in town, said his plan is to respond to concerns raised by residents, council and staff, while also reviewing existing studies, design work and technical expertise — both inside and outside NOTL — before making future recommendations.

"Every municipality is a little bit different from one another," he said. "So, trying to stay adaptive and responsive to changing needs, right?"

That approach also applies to some of the town's



Jordan Frost says learning the ins and outs of the town is a key focus in his first weeks as Niagara-on-the-Lake's director of public works and infrastructure. PAIGE SEBURN

most talked-about infrastructure issues, he said.

When asked about issues such as the Rand Estate proposals, the Parliament Oak development and drainage concerns, Frost said his decision-making looks beyond technical details alone, weighing social, financial and environmental factors.

"We want to work collaboratively with the

other departments and team members here at the town and the community."

The goal is to preserve natural heritage while maintaining existing infrastructure and avoid decisions in one department creating problems elsewhere, he said.

"I think it's about striking a balance and trying to get the right people at the table."

When it comes to development applications, Frost said public works and planning are working toward the same goal: serving residents.

"I like to think that we're not two different departments," he said. "We're all working for the one taxpayer, the one ratepayer."

Frost said balancing council priorities and

resident concerns starts with listening and clear communication.

"I think it's about creating this accountable and transparent process, where we bring things forward, we discuss, we provide a response, we actively listen," he said.

Much of the work done by public works staff, Frost said, goes unnoticed when systems are running properly — and becomes visible only when something goes wrong.

"You turn on your tap, you have safe drinking water — we take that for granted," he said. "There's a lot of work, pre and post, for the infrastructure to take shape and be completed."

He said part of the job is helping residents understand why infrastructure projects take time and why work isn't always visible.

"Trying to help kind of explain that in a way that isn't super technical to the public," he said. "It does take time, but it is a reasonable amount of time — and we're trying to do things the right way, not the quick way."

Living in NOTL means

Frost brings extra pride to the role, he said, though his approach would be the same anywhere.

"It just adds that, I guess, a little bit of extra sense of community pride — of helping directly where I live and play, right?"

In the short term, Frost said, his first 90 days will focus on learning what is and isn't working and improving communication.

"Before you can fix any problems or seize any opportunities, you truly have to understand how things are working," he said. "Because my perspective is one thing."

Longer term, he said the goal is to meet council's strategic priorities and bring forward technical documents that help guide long-term decisions, including water and wastewater master plans and the town's asset management plan, which was presented to council Jan. 13.

"It's about trying to set us up with some foundational guiding documentation that we can refer back to," he said. "And then start to build upon that."

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



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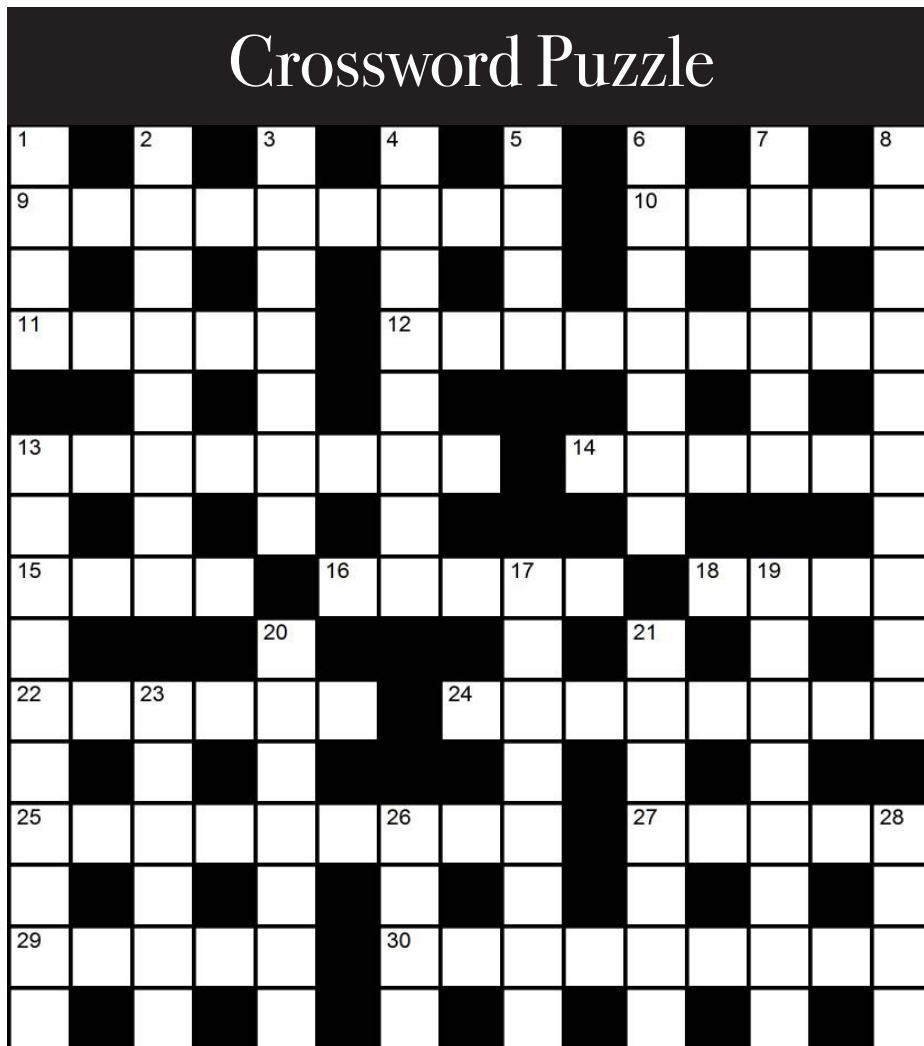


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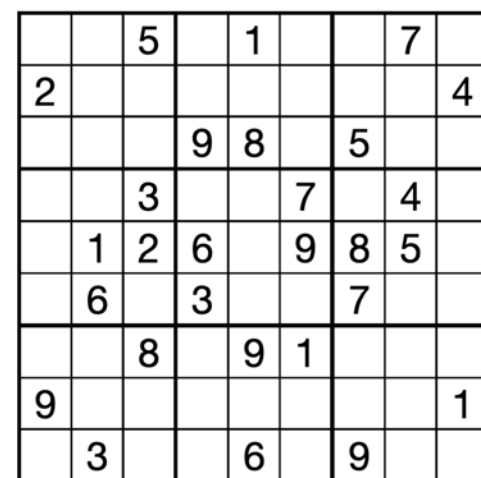
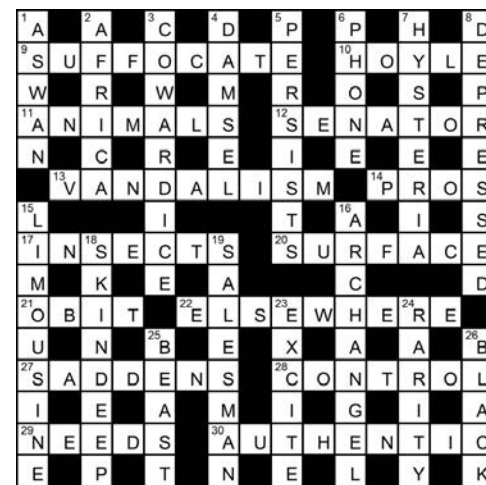
9. Deserted settlement (5,4)
10. Shout of greeting (5)
11. Artist's support (5)
12. Square one (9)
13. Helps drivers see (8)
14. Most secure (6)
15. Whirlpool (4)
16. More unfavourable (5)
18. Grant to the needy (4)
22. Arrest (6)
24. Railway track supports (8)
25. Long-armed anthropoid ape (5-4)
27. Anaesthetic (5)
29. Boat spines (5)
30. Flattery (5,4)

1. Look at amorously (7)
2. Ate (8)
3. Smart (7)
4. Broad-brimmed straw hat (8)
5. Obstacle (4)
6. Gossip (4-3)
7. Mountain plant (6)
8. Diva (10)
13. Rope-like hairstyle (10)
17. Prevented from speaking (8)
19. Get too hot (8)
20. Revulsion (7)
21. Arid areas (7)
23. Merchant (6)
26. Protruding tooth (4)
28. Garden tool (4)

# Crossword Puzzle



## Last issue's answers



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EXPLORING HISTORY  
WITH NOTL MUSEUM



# Hands up, Kaiser Bill!

Niagara-on-the-Lake’s winter sculpture tradition was first captured in image during the First World War, when Polish soldiers stationed at Niagara Camp crafted playful snow figures in Simcoe Park. One of their more famous pieces, shown in this photograph, showed a snow cannon aimed at Kaiser Bill, who has his hands raised in surrender. This weekend, this spirit of winter creativity returns. Ice sculptures will dot Queen Street for the Icewine Festival, celebrating both the town’s frosty past and its modern icewine tradition.



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# Intelligence, whether human or AI, evolves the same way



**DR. BROWN**  
Dr. William Brown  
Columnist

In the Nov. 24, 2025 issue of the journal Nature, Blaise Agüera y Arcas, a leading figure at Google, wrote an essay about how we got to where we are with artificial intelligence and much more. He began with a proposition:

The emergence of what we might call intelligence in AI was not a single giant step but evolved, to borrow a phrase from biology, or, expressed another way more familiar to AI developers, as a result of computational scaling, beginning with simple models for predicting next words or parts of words coupled with increasingly sophisticated large language models and datasets.

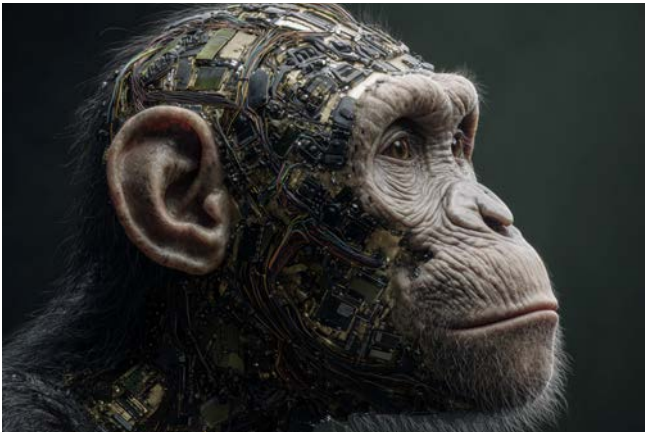
By 2025 this process led to versions of AI that are capable of human-like fluency and solving increasingly complex problems that humans find challenging, if not impossible to solve. So

much so, as Arcas writes that “we are running out of intelligence tests that humans can pass reliably, and AI models cannot.” That’s a lot of change for Google and the whole AI field in the last 15 years.

Not surprisingly, given the hype that surrounds AI, a recent article by David Adam in the journal Nature, in which scientists were asked to speculate about the future, suggests that by the mid-century mark or perhaps earlier, AI will reach a level of general intelligence equivalent to or exceeding that of humans, individually and perhaps even collectively.

Going forward, Adam suggests that future versions of AI might become capable of designing and carrying out scientific studies on their own, some of which could rewrite current flawed standard models of the universe and subatomic physics and might, as one physicist put it, even win Nobel Prizes in the process.

One stepping stone to which was AlphaFold2, a version of AI designed to figure out the three-dimensional shapes of proteins and thus how they might work. That effort won the Nobel Prize in chemistry or, rather, two humans did — Demis Hassabis and



Life and AI aren’t so different after all — both are based on computation and both will, in Blaise Agüera y Arcas’ opinion, co-evolve. MIDJOURNEY AI/RICHARD HARLEY

John Jumper, who were responsible for developing AlphaFold2 (among others at Google).

But it was AlphaFold2 that did the computational work. AlphaFold2 was like a loyal grad student who learned under the tutelage of humans at Google — not human of course, but a student nonetheless and perhaps deserving of a share in the prize.

Since then, AlphaFold has been adapted to solve other problems such as predicting weather with a high degree of precision. However, developing general intelligence equivalent to humans is a whole other challenge.

Human intelligence is very broad in scope. It involves social intelligence: figuring out who’s in who’s

several similar high-quality sources.

This makes AI invaluable as a source of information for health care professionals however experienced they might be.

One of the reasons AI is so beguiling is its uncanny ‘naturalness’ as I alluded to last week using the example of an AI therapist talking from a smart phone on the dashboard of a car, with its client, a human who was driving the car. It was the naturalness of the conversational to and fro which was so captivating for the human and frankly me, listening to the exchange. The power in that example came from the large language models which make conversation almost human in tone and composition.

But what is most intriguing to me is the suggestion by Blaise Agüera y Arcas that computation, which is so central to AI, might also have played a key role in evolution.

Arcas suggests, “If scaling up computation yields AI, could the kind of intelligence shown by living organisms, humans included, also be the result of computational scaling? If so, what drove that — and how did living organisms become computational in the first place?”

His answer is straightforward. How else could simple, then more complex, organic molecules have formed in the vicinity of deep sea vents other than in response to physical-chemical and quantum rules operating in the presence of hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, nitrogen ions and atoms to initially create bases, sugar and phosphate groups, then nucleotides and finally strands of RNA over time scales of hundreds of millions of years?

Similar computational rules would have governed the formation of other life molecules essential to the formation of the first simple cells, then complex single cells, followed by multicellular organisms and life as we witness it every day.

Each step in life’s growing complexity involved computation. That’s the message Google’s Blaise Agüera y Arcas makes in his essay and his final point.

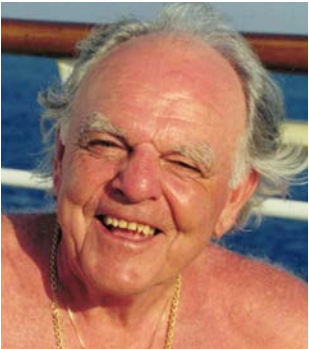
Life and AI aren’t so different after all — both are based on computation and both will, in his opinion, co-evolve.

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.



Obituaries

John ‘Jack’ Bell



BELL, John (Jack) Barry —  
March 26, 1931 – Jan. 6, 2026

Forgive me for leaving the party early. Jack peacefully, and graciously completed his life’s work on Jan. 6 after a brave journey with vascular dementia. It’s hard to believe that this wonderful, larger than life man is no longer with us, our hero. Jack always had a smile on his face, laughter in his heart, and hugs for those he loved. Jack’s ultimate love was for his wife, Teresa (Ogilvie) of 42 years, they were life partners and work partners. Whatever challenges came their way they faced them together. Perhaps their greatest strength was their shared sense of true love and partnership. Although their time together ended too soon, they shared more love than many experience in several lifetimes. Jack and Teresa travelled the world together, experiencing Africa, South Pacific, Europe, Asia, and many cruises. Together they built a beautiful home, filled with love and laughter. Always enjoying their serene backyard. When Jack wasn’t getting dirty from playing in the dirt at work, he was getting dirty working at home, updating the house with many projects, in the gardens, or knee deep in his fish pond. Jack had pride in any work he touched and he loved sharing it with his friends and family. Often hosting backyard barbecues filled with food from the vegetable garden, local wine, and memories to last a lifetime.

Jack was predeceased by his brothers Bill and Doug, his sister Sharon, and by his sons Scott, and Chris Ogilvie. Jack is survived by his loving wife Teresa, and his brother Donald, sister Sandra, his children Tracey and Brad(Anna), his grandchildren Cassidy-Lynn Ogilvie, Noah, Stanley, and Audrey, and numerous nieces and nephews, and great-nieces and great-nephews.

Jack had an incredible sense of humour lighting up whatever room he walked into and always had a great story to tell. He was a mentor and advisor. To many a natural leader, and a man who fully lived his values, principles, compassion, and appetite for life and adventure. Jack was a big presence in our lives and the life of his community. He had an active and long successful business career. Jack was a partner at ABC-Andres-Bell Construction in 1960 before forming Bell Contracting Equipment in 1986 and Bell Travel Group in 1984. Jack had a love for heavy equipment, and he was proud to have excavated for his community for so many years. Some of his favourite projects he was involved with were for the Welland Canal, Shaw Festival, Brock University, the Fallsview Casino, McMaster University, Jackson-Triggs Winery and the Niagara Falls History Museum.

His community involvement was lengthy. He found time to coach minor hockey in Virgil and was proud to be a referee in the American Hockey League for many years. He was a volunteer fireman in Virgil for over 20 years. He volunteered for the Canadian Cancer Society for five years. He was president of Niagara-on-the-Lake Minor Hockey Association from 1967 to 1969, a member of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Parks and Recreation Committee from 1970 to 1973. He was Master of the Masonic Lodge Niagara #2 in 1971, and a proud Brother for over 60 years. He represented Niagara-on-the-Lake as a school trustee with the Lincoln County Board of Education from 1974 to 1981, becoming chairman of the board in 1979. He was a member of the East Niagara Housing Authority from 1975 to 1981. He became Niagara-on-the-Lake Citizen of the Year in 1975. He was chairman of the Niagara Falls Downtown Board of Management in 1986. Jack received the Paul Harris award from Rotary International in 1999. He again became Niagara-on-the-Lake citizen of the year award in 2003 a group award for the major fundraising of the new Virgil Arena(Meridian Centre) in 2003. He also helped with fundraising for the new Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre. He was president of the Niagara Construction Association in 2003.

Jack filled his 95 years with fun, hard work, and adventures. As you can tell he was a friend to everybody, a true gentleman, and a loyal friend. Jack loved to laugh and could engage an audience with his numerous recitals. He was always eager to lend a hand and share a story or offer his opinion on politics often over a single malt scotch or two. Thank you to all who loved to befriend him, challenged him, supported him, advocated beside him, and made his life fulfilling and rewarding. Jack faced his illnesses with incredible strength, and continued until he no longer could. He was truly a brave champion; Jack chose to leave this world as he lived it with determination, strength, and on his own terms. We were lucky to share our incredible journey with him. We extend our gratitude to Dr. K. Bertie for her compassionate care who provided endless comfort, it will forever hold a special place within our hearts. Memorial tributes may be made directly to Niagara-on-the-Lake Palliative Care.

A private Masonic Ceremony and Burial will take place. A Celebration of Life will be taking place in the early summer in the Bell Garden for all to celebrate a remarkable man’s life and achievements.

Jack never liked to say goodbye, as goodbyes are final, he’d liked to say see you soon. So Jack, with that in mind, we will miss you, we will continue to love you, and we will see you soon.

Funeral arrangements with Haine Funeral Home & Chapel, 26 Ormond St. South, Thorold.

Michael Costa



COSTA, Michael, Vincent —

It is with great sadness that we announce the sudden passing of Michael on January 7, 2026, at his home at the age of 41. Loving father of Daniel and Ella and partner of Erin. Beloved son of Filomena and Joseph Costa. Adored brother of Daniella, Isabella and Megan. Dear grandson of Vincenzo and Sarafina Pisano, John and Noemia Costa. Loved nephew of John and Isabella Bisanti, Lui and Melissa Pisano, Johnvand Ana Costa, Robert and Cecilia Costa. Fondly remembered by many cousins and friends, Alexandra, Rebecca, Matthew Pisano and Matthew Costa. The family will receive friends at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, on Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m., and on Saturday, Jan. 17, 2026, between 10:30 and 12:30 p.m.

Following the visitation on Saturday, a funeral mass for Michael will be held at St. Vincent de Paul Church, 73 Picton St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, at 1 p.m. Cremation to follow. As an expression of sympathy, those who wish, in lieu of flowers may make a memorial donation to Pathstone Mental Health-Pathstone Foundation. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com).

Henry George Stewart



STEWART, Henry George  
Aug. 21, 1939 – Dec. 30, 2025

Henry George (Jim) Stewart of Virgil, Ontario, passed peacefully at St. Catharines Hospital on December 30, 2025, surrounded by his loving family. Born on Aug. 21, 1939, in Kinneff, Scotland, Henry was the son of George and Catherine Stewart. In 1957, at the age of 17, he immigrated to Canada with his family from Southampton, England, following his father who had secured employment in Edmonton, Alberta. In 1958, Henry met the love of his life, Leona Chichak. They were married on Sept. 12, 1959, and shared 66 years of marriage together. They raised three children together: Rodney, Heather and Michele.

Henry built a long and successful career in retail, beginning with the Bata Shoe Company and continuing for more than 30 years with Sears Canada. He retired in 1996 after nearly four decades of dedicated service.

A natural entertainer with a warm sense of humour, Henry enjoyed music, magic, and performing for family and friends. He was an avid sports fan, followed traffic and weather reports with keen interest, and loved watching classic war films and westerns. Henry was also an avid lawn bowler and a well-respected President of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Lawn Bowling Club for several years, a role he carried out with dedication and pride.

Henry will be deeply missed by his beloved wife, Leona; his children Rodney (Lisa), Heather Meyer (Brent), and Michele Johnson (Dan); his sister Joy Reeves (Oscar); his grandchildren Corey McCallum, Beth Stewart, Hayley Stewart, Amanda Bosnar, and Brad Johnson; and his great-grandchildren Harlow Bosnar and Oakes Bosnar.

He was predeceased by his parents George and Catherine; his brother Allen (Margaret); and his cherished dog, Maggie.

The family extends heartfelt thanks to Dr. Qawi and the caring staff at Pleasant Manor for their compassion and support.

A celebration of life will be held in honour of Henry Stewart on Jan. 31, from 1 to 4 p.m., in the Mori room at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre, 14 Anderson Ln., Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

Family and friends are invited to gather to share memories and celebrate a life well lived. Donations in his honour may be made to the Canadian Cancer Society.

Anne Tremain



TREMAIN, Anne (nee Severs) —

Anne Tremain, sculptor, artist, loving mother, grandmother, and longtime resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake, passed away peacefully aged 94, on Jan. 4, 2026. She is survived by her children Sally, Gillian, Mary and William, as well as grandchildren Sorcha, Celeste, Kiyoshi, Rowan, Nola, and her much loved older sister Jill and family. Her husband Ron passed away in 1998. The entire family and those who knew her, will remember her as an incredibly compassionate person, highly intelligent, filled with curiosity, and deeply artistic in every move she made through the world. Her dedication as a mother, doting grandmother, beloved spouse, caring sister and aunt, will forever be cherished. Anne was a gentle force, a true individual, and an articulate and wise spirit. She will be very greatly missed by her family and many friends. A celebration of Anne’s life will be held in the spring in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Information will be updated at <https://www.ccb scares.ca/st-catharines- obituaries>.

*For obituary and memorial inquiries,  
please contact [editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com).*



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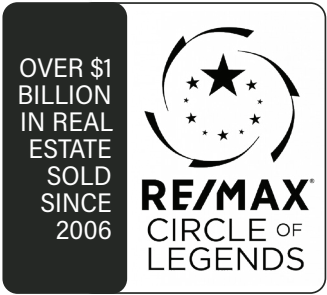
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