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Hyper-local news for Niagara-on-the-Lake



A Christmas miracle? | Page 11

Vol. 8, Issue 49

Canada's most-awarded community newspaper

December 11, 2025

Residents want to see **community use** for old hospital

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A new report prepared for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake shows that its residents favour uses that serve the community — and reject commercial ones — for the former hospital site at 176 Wellington St.

From July to November, the town heard from more than 800 people through an online survey, a workshop, community boards, a community walk, three public information sessions, a meeting with Royal Oak Community School and engagement with Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River.

On Tuesday, council accepted a report presented by project lead Denise Horne of NPG Planning Solutions Inc. that pulls together those results. Staff plan to return in January with redevelopment options.

People most often sup-

Continued on Page 2

House tour aims to raise \$200K

Annual Rotary fundraiser opens NOTL homes for people to visit



A Victorian candlelight Christmas at the MacArthur Estate on Sunday after the Holiday House Tour included a serious charcuterie spread. The annual event raises money for charities and this year raised \$200K which will go back into the community. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Andrew Hawlitzky | The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Rotary Holiday House Tour brought thousands of ticket holders into seven decorated homes while raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for charities at its 26th annual weekend event.

On Dec. 5 and 6, new and old houses opened across town, plus ticketed evening events at the MacArthur Estate, with organizers aiming to reach \$200,000 for local community projects, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum

expansion, youth programs and international aid.

The Holiday House Tour has raised more than \$1.5 million since it began, including \$260,000 in ticket sales last year, with \$230,000 going directly to

charity. Committee members estimate that about 3,500 general tour tickets were sold this year.

"This will be our best year; it's also about 90 percent of the

Continued on Page 6

NOTL teens run away with all-American titles at U.S. race

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

They trained, they ran, they conquered.

Two Niagara-on-the-Lake teens helped lead their track club to a first-place finish at

the prestigious U.S. cross-country running national championships last Saturday.

As well, Ben Bayne and Luke Simpson, both 13, captured individual all-American honours with their stellar race performances.

The pair were among more than 250 runners who competed in the 13-14 age group's four-kilometre run at the Amateur Athletic Union's Cross-country Nationals in Knoxville, Tenn. Battling muddy conditions

on the race course, Bayne, a student at Crossroads Public School, led all his teammates and finished third overall, in a time of 13:44.3. He was just 16 seconds behind the overall winner, a 14-year-old from Texas.

Simpson, who attends St. Michael Catholic School, was 13th in a time of 14:07.3.

However, among the 13-year-old runners, Bayne was second and Simpson was eighth.

Those results earned the two NOTL boys all-American honours, a prized recognition bestowed upon the top eight finishers in each age group, coach Steve

Continued on Page 18



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Residents reject commercial use for hospital

Continued from Front Page

ported housing for an aging population, medical services, educational uses, parking, parks and open space and community facilities, while retail and restaurants ranked lowest. The report says the site's size could accommodate a mix of compatible uses.

But no matter what, anything built must fit the neighbourhood, respect the area's historic character and not add to parking or traffic issues, residents say.

The report says the site is one of the town's few large parcels of land in Old Town designated for open space and community facilities and zoned institutional, and should not be redesignated to residential until other community use options are explored.

When council accepted the report, it also endorsed consultants' advice to keep that status in place while community uses are evaluated.

Four recommendations were given to the town: set a planning timeline, look at which uses are feasible, identify possible community



Project lead Denise Horne of NPG Planning Solutions Inc. outlines residents' call for seniors' housing and other community uses — and their firm opposition to commercial development — at the former hospital. PAIGE SEBURN

partners and follow guiding principles to help council make decisions.

At the meeting, Coun. Wendy Cheropita said paying off the remaining debt on the property, finding a parking solution and protecting Royal Oak Community School should all be considered.

She also emphasized architectural compatibility and maintaining green space, saying any future plan "doesn't have to be one

thing" and could combine multiple ideas.

Coun. Maria Mavridis questioned how many Royal Oak students walk to school — details staff said it would bring back as part of the January options.

Wiens, meanwhile, pressed staff on whether it was prepared to bring redevelopment options forward next month — a timeline staff said it could meet.

The online survey showed the most support for seniors'

housing, although housing also drew significant opposition. Almost 80 per cent of the respondents were over 54 years old and most live in Old Town, with a majority saying new uses should primarily benefit permanent residents rather than tourists.

At a workshop, participants called the site a gateway and said new uses must fit the area and not worsen parking and a neighbourhood walk highlighted the importance of the streetscape, trees and open lawn areas.

At the public sessions, people noted the limited number of schools in town and showed little interest in private development, restaurants, community hubs, a library and commercial uses.

The report said Royal Oak Community School confirmed the site supports its needs and "provides a unique environment in which students can benefit from the many assets in Old Town." Indigenous communities also asked to stay involved, especially around archeological matters.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

Niagara on-the-Lake 50 YEARS



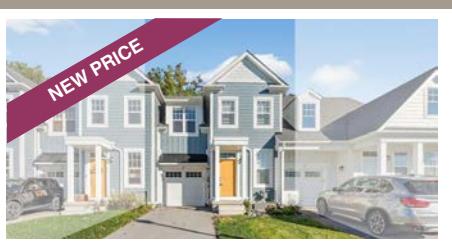
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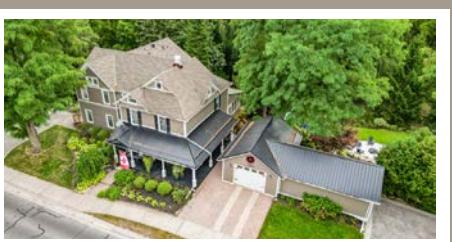
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Irish Harp decision delayed as town wonders what to do about patios

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

As Niagara-on-the-Lake ends the temporary patio program it introduced five years ago to help restaurants during the pandemic, it's now uncertain what will happen with one Old Town business's bid to keep its patio for good.

On Tuesday, council voted to defer a decision on whether to allow the Irish Harp on King Street to make its temporary patio permanent.

The delay gives the town time to review staff's recommendation to refuse the pub's offer to pay about \$436,000 in cash-in-lieu to take over six parking spaces for its patio and short-term rental units.

Couns. Wendy Cheropita and Andrew Niven said they want staff to examine an option that would grant the Irish Harp three parking spaces for its patio, but not the three tied to its rental units.

"I was grateful that they were looking back into it and that council was asking the town to look into a way that we could find a viable solution," said Irish Harp owner Jovie Joki.

Niven asked for the matter to return at the planning committee of the whole meeting on Feb. 7 in the new year. Joki said it will come back for discussion that day.

Staff recommended rejecting the cash-in-lieu proposal due to Old Town's already limited parking and "outstanding concerns" for the safety of the residents.

Staff warned that if the spaces were removed, delivery trucks would need to park elsewhere, potentially affecting road safety.

The Irish Harp was previously permitted to extend its front patio over parking



Irish Harp owner Jovie Joki says she wanted the town's temporary patio program to keep going until it found a solution. PAIGE SEBURN

spaces in 2009.

The temporary patio program ends Dec. 31, which will mean all businesses operating a temporary patio, many of which are concentrated in NOTL's downtown core, will need to take down their patios.

Town communications co-ordinator Marah Minor said so far, only the Irish Harp and one other Old Town business have applied to make their patios permanent.

The owners of the Olde Angel Inn and neighbouring properties are seeking approval to make the inn's patio and two existing cottage rentals permanent.

Their application, presented at a public meeting last Tuesday, covers three buildings at 224 and 226 Regent St. and 42 Market St., and would retain the two parking spaces associated with the rentals.

"This is simply to permit what's already existing," said Lichheng Lim, a senior planner with NPG Planning Solutions representing applicant Keith Turner, during a November open house.

Turner told The Lake Report the zoning change is a "natural" step.

"The patio area currently being used for the Angel Inn is zoned commercial and a patio is an allowable use," he said in

an email. "Our customers have enjoyed it for the last four years. We are not looking to increase capacity, so increase(ing) parking shouldn't be an issue.

"We're looking forward to welcoming customers back to the patio next season."

Not everyone in Old Town agrees.

Gina Angelakopoulos, who owns the Epicurean restaurant on Queen Street with her husband, John, spoke against the Irish Harp and Olde Angel's plans council meetings on Dec. 2 and Dec. 9.

The Epicurean operates a patio on its property.

"Staff have been clear and consistent in identifying that this request represents a significant loss of required parking and the surrounding area cannot absorb the impacts," she said Tuesday.

In an interview last week, Gina said she is glad to see the temporary program ending and opposes making any patios permanent. She and John cited heritage concerns — John said it would "change the look of the town" — as well as safety issues such as exceeding capacity limits.

They also view the situation as an issue of fairness.

"We followed the rules," John said. "Those people, they break the rules. That's the difference."

Previously, the town began studying what a permanent patio program might look like. However, on Feb. 25, council voted to end the temporary patio program at the end of this year and halt work on a permanent patio program.

The motion to end the patio program directed staff to report back on budget, timing and boundaries for a Queen Street master secondary plan, which would consider the future of patios in the heritage district.

Kim and Scott Gauld,

owners of Sunset Grill, installed their patio in 2020 under the temporary program. They support making patios like those at the Olde Angel Inn and the Irish Harp permanent, but are frustrated by how the town is ending the program.

"My biggest disappointment is the process that led to the program's conclusion," said Kim Gauld.

She noted during the Feb. 25 meeting, staff shared a report that addressed issues with the existing program — including options for annual fees, design guidelines and steps toward a permanent approach.

Instead, she said, the town hit pause on this work.

"This feels like a decision made without proper consideration of the very solutions staff had prepared," said Gauld.

How, or whether, patios might be incorporated in the future remains unresolved.

Joki said she wishes the town had not run out the clock on the temporary patio program.

"I wish it would have continued until they found a better option."

Short-term options were discussed at last week's committee of the whole meeting, with Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa asking if a stopgap should be considered until the Queen Street secondary plan is done. Work on that plan may start next spring.

Cheropita argued that the patios are popular and should continue. Niven agreed but said the program needs "enhancements."

Coun. Sandra O'Connor said she does not support extending the program before the Queen Street plan is finished. Coun. Gary Burroughs agreed. Coun. Maria Mavridis said patios are not the highest priority with one year left in council's term.

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Human remains identified as Toronto man

Staff
The Lake Report

Police have confirmed the identity of the human remains found on the shores of Lake Ontario in Niagara-on-the-Lake in August as a man from Toronto who has been missing since 2022.

Homicide detectives with Niagara Regional Police aren't releasing the identity of the victim, at the request

of his family, but say he is a 24-year-old male from Toronto who was reported missing and last seen in May 2022.

This case remains an active investigation by detectives with Niagara police's homicide unit, in collaboration with the Toronto Police Service.

Police are asking anyone with information to contact them at 905-688-4111,

dial option 3, extension 1009417.

Members of the community who wish to provide information anonymously can contact Crime Stoppers of Niagara online or by calling 1-800-222-8477.

A human skull was discovered near Read Road and the shores of Lake Ontario on Aug. 31, prompting an investigation by police, who ruled the cause of death to

be a homicide. Additional skeletal remains were recovered from the same area on Sept. 3.

Police believe the man's death occurred sometime between late 2021 and spring 2025. Investigators at the time the remains were discovered said the case is "particularly complex" due to the condition of the remains, which were recovered in stages.



The Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake sincerely thanks everyone who made the 26th Annual Holiday House Tour a success – the McArthur Family & Team, our sponsors, homeowners, decorators, volunteers, performers, community partners, & attendees! We couldn't do it without you. **♥ Thank you! ♥**

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A Christmas present for Big Brothers Big Sisters

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara received a donation of \$10,000 last week thanks to the NOTL Chamber of Commerce's group insurance plan. This Christmas season, insurance broker Jim Garrett is encouraging other NOTL organizations to step up and help Big Brothers Big Sisters and the children it supports. The Chamber's not-for-profit plan lets member businesses purchase affordable extended health and dental benefits that would otherwise only be available to larger companies. Garrett Insurance kicked in \$5,000 and the Johnston Group in Winnipeg, which oversees the Chamber plan, matched it. On hand for the cheque presentation were Bryan Rose, executive director of the Niagara Community Foundation, Erin Graybiel, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters, Jeremy Garrett, president of the Garrett Group, and Jim Garrett. SUPPLIED

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Biinaagami map teaches Royal Oak students

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Royal Oak School principal Julia Murray is delighted to finally use Canadian Geographic's Biinaagami giant floor map after waiting for "many years."

The 11-by-eight-metre map lets students take off their shoes and walk across a large-scale depiction of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

Biinaagami means "clean water" in Anishinaabe, Murray said. The name reflects the effort by Canadian Geographic and the school to draw attention to environmental issues in the region while grounding that work in Indigenous perspectives.

"This felt like a really good fit for our school," Murray said. "Because of course, we are on the land of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples and the lake is a stone's throw away."



The Biinaagami map offers a detailed overview of the Great Lakes' watershed — a way to engage its viewers with themes of environmental stewardship. DAN SMEENK

"How we keep biinaagami, or clean water, is deeply important to our way of life, to animals' way of life, to Indigenous people's way of life, and that we each have the ability to have an impact in creating a better system and environment around us."

Teacher Melissa Smith brought grades 6 to 8 students to the map recently. They learned about the importance of the Great Lakes

and the role water plays in sustaining life on Earth.

Students also personalized the lesson by placing small cones on five of their favourite places around the lakes. Many chose spots in and around Niagara-on-the-Lake, while others pointed out Philadelphia on the map or mentioned visits to areas near Lake Superior.

Austin Puffer, a Grade 8 student, said he saw a

similar map before near Lake Superior. He called Tuesday's lesson "fun" and was particularly excited that "we got to see big lakes."

The map includes radio-wave symbols at 10 locations, where students can tap their phones to access virtual-reality videos. One shows beluga whales where the St. Lawrence River meets the Atlantic Ocean, highlighting their declining numbers.

Smith said the walkable, physical tour of local freshwater systems helps make those lessons memorable.

"This kind of resource would benefit every single kid," she said. "Because I think there's no way five years down the road these guys are asked 'Oh, did you study the Great Lakes?' and they would be like 'No, I don't remember.'"

Royal Oak School had the map for two and a half weeks total.

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Cash-in-lieu parking fee rising to \$75,716

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The fee that Niagara-on-the-Lake property owners pay when they can't meet required parking rules on their land is going up next year.

Council has set the 2026 cash-in-lieu of parking rate at \$75,716 per space, a 4.2 per cent increase tied to national construction cost trends.

The new rate takes effect Jan. 1, the day the fee is

updated annually under the town's bylaw.

Cash-in-lieu is used when a property owner is required to provide a certain number of parking spaces under zoning rules but can't. Instead of supplying the spaces, the owner can ask council for permission to pay the fee, which the town places in a reserve for future parking projects.

A typical example of this could be a restaurant wanting to add more indoor seating, or a hotel looking to build a few additional guest

rooms. Both uses trigger higher parking requirements under the zoning bylaw.

If the property can't physically fit the extra parking spaces on-site, the owner can apply to pay the cash-in-lieu fee instead.

A more unique case is the Irish Harp Pub on King Street's current application to the town.

The pub has three parking spaces behind the building, but that area has functioned as a temporary patio since 2020, when the town created a COVID-19 patio

program allowing restaurants to use space normally reserved for parking.

With the temporary program ending in December, the owner wants to keep the patio permanently, removing those required spaces and creating a need for three more under the town's parking rules.

To address that, the owner has applied to pay cash-in-lieu for six spaces. Council has referred the matter to February for further consideration.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

Town helps businesses after recycling change

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake will provide short-term relief for businesses affected by the region's move to privatize non-residential recycling collection.

On Tuesday, council voted to offer twice-weekly cardboard collection until Dec. 31, 2026, for 67 businesses in Old Town's downtown designated business area.

The province has shifted recycling collection to producers rather than municipalities.

Producers chose not to collect residential and non-residential recycling on the same vehicles, leaving Niagara Region responsible

for handling non-residential recycling. The region determined that continuing to collect it would be prohibitively expensive.

As a result, the privatization of non-residential recycling begins in Niagara Region on Jan. 1. Residential recycling remains unchanged.

Town treasurer Kyle Freeborn told council there are 463 non-residential properties in NOTL, with Old Town experiencing the most "concentrated" impact of the switch in recycling collection.

A staff report estimates the program will cost just over \$63,000, funded through the municipal accommodation tax. Staff will return early next year with

options for what to do after next December.

Councillors broadly supported the temporary measure. Coun. Gary Burroughs said he is concerned about the long-term consequences of shifting recycling responsibility to producers.

"The province has rushed into this," he said. "There's all sorts of problems. People are going to say 'Why recycle? Just throw it out.'"

Coun. Erwin Wiens questioned why the town was stepping in for Old Town's tourist area but not for farmers in rural parts of NOTL.

"Those packing houses are putting out way more than what Queen Street is doing," he said.

Wiens and Coun. Wendy Cheropita also raised

concerns about the ongoing "downloading" of responsibilities from higher levels of government to municipalities, a trend Wiens said has persisted the last 30 years.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, who also sits on regional council, said Cheropita was "off base" in her comments about downloading. Freeborn responded by explaining how the new collection system works while noting the shift toward privatization.

Wiens stressed the temporary nature of the town's plan, which is funded through accommodation tax revenue.

"It's applicable in this situation, but it's not a solution," he said.

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Rotary House Tour aims for \$200K

Continued from Front Page

fundraising that we get during the year," said Jamie Knight, past president of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Rotary Club.

Earlier this fall, the Rotary Club presented a \$100,000 cheque to the NOTL Museum's \$10-million expansion campaign, of which most proceeds came from the holiday tour and a third fundraising day at the MacArthur Estate.

Committee chair Carol Lipsett said planning stretches across most of the year, with a core group of about 20 Rotarians and roughly 300 community volunteers staffing the homes. Each site needs six to eight people at a time to move visitors through from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. over the two days.

"We like to have houses with character. The visitors really like to see a combination, so we have both new and old," said Lipsett.

She said emails begin arriving in January from people asking for next year's dates so they can book accommodation, with many tourists coming both from out of town, the U.S. and some travelling from Europe.

"I have had people come in and say they brought their children, and now they are bringing their grandchildren," said Lipsett.

One of Lipsett's recommended stops this year was the Music House on Gate Street, an 1823 building that once served as the original Methodist meeting house, and at one point a butcher shop.

Inside, visitors were treated to homeowner and musician Eric Harry performing on grand piano, harpsichord, vintage glass harmonica and a 1615 viola da gamba.

"It has been so much fun. People love the music room and hearing the instruments. They have really been enjoying the experience," said Laura Harry, homeowner.

Harry said she and her husband are new to Niagara-on-the-Lake and saw the tour as a direct way to contribute to the town.

On Brock Street, visitors

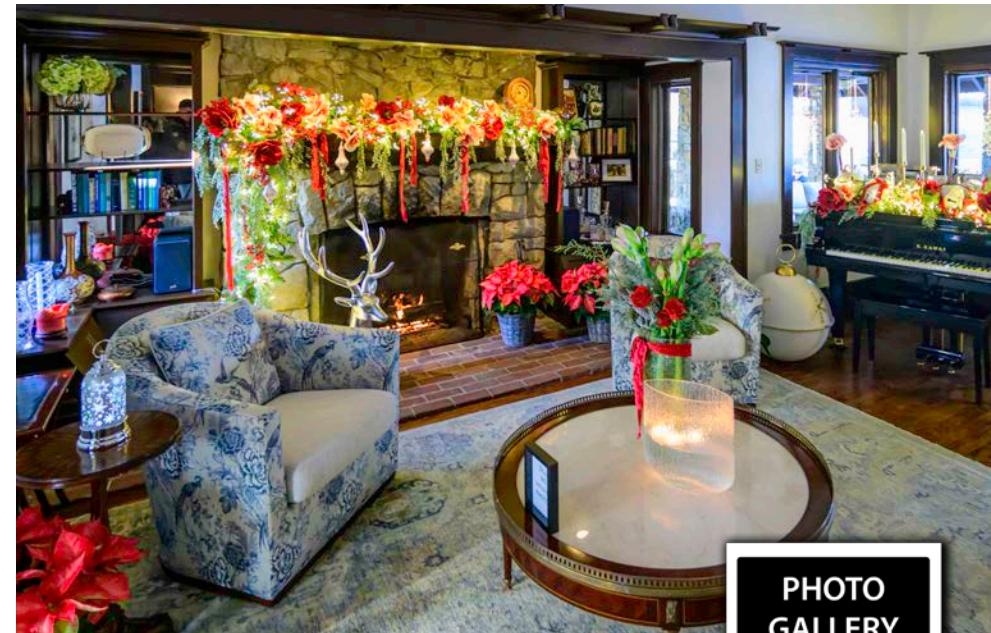


PHOTO GALLERY

See more pictures at niagaranow.com



Top: Inside King's Landing on Ricardo Street, a 1908 home built by John J. Wright. The room was decorated by Regal Florist & Garden Centre. Bottom: A highlight of the holiday season for many in Niagara-on-the-Lake is the Rotary Club's tour of the MacArthur Estate, lavishly decorated by a close-knit team that includes the MacArthurs. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

stepped into The Cottage, a contemporary home with hickory floors, an oak staircase and views of a treed back garden.

"My wife came to me and said, Do you know what I have done? She volunteered last year and decided to send in the application. We have had a lot of fun doing it," said homeowner Mark Brown.

Inside the "BC room," guests viewed a working grandfather clock from 1870, along with a painting of Rose Cottage in Oakville that inspired the home's exterior.

Although not part of the daytime ticket this year, the MacArthur Estate remains central to Rotary's holiday fundraising through separate Merry & Bright and Victorian Candlelight tours.

Owner Brenda MacArthur said decorating the estate

starts on Oct. 31 and involves a close-knit team that returns each year to dress the house and grounds for three nights of evening tours.

"We all know that's the date that we're ready to get everything down from the barn, and the girls work with me. We have fun doing it, lots of laughs, lots of wine," said MacArthur.

The Friends of Fort George also participated in the MacArthur house tour. Leading the front of the tour, teaching guests about the long history of the building and its owners, extending over two centuries.

Local filmmaker Christine Dore-Scaini is following the work behind the tour with a small documentary project focused on the MacArthur Estate and the broader tour.

She and her husband, director Stefan Scaini,

moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake from Mississauga and began filming last year.

"We discovered the event last year, and Brenda (MacArthur) said we needed a behind-the-scenes documentary because it is so much fun. That is how it all started," said Dore-Scaini.

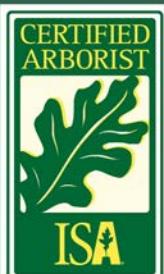
Scaini has directed films for Hallmark movies, and Dore-Scaini is hopeful the success of the behind-the-scenes project may raise interest for a larger documentary project next year.

Rotary volunteers will now tally final numbers before taking the rest of December off. In January, the committee plans to review what worked, confirm next year's list of homes, and, if all goes well, watch Dore-Scaini's finished film as they begin planning the 2026 tour.

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NOTL group steps up after fire kills 31 cats at Fort Erie sanctuary

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A Niagara-on-the-Lake animal rescue fundraising group is stepping up this weekend to help Happy Days Animal Sanctuary in Fort Erie pick up the pieces after a devastating fire killed 31 cats and destroyed the main building.

On Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Community Initiative for Animal Rescue, founded by NOTL volunteer Tanya Rice, will hold a Christmas bake sale at the Husky station at 615 York Rd.

It will include a craft table, baked goods, homemade chocolates and jams, and "We Love Pets" bracelets by Coconut Quartz.

All proceeds will go to Happy Days, which said in a post to its Facebook that its team is "devastated" and fo-



Coconut Quartz's "We Love Pets" bracelets will be sold at the fundraiser to support Happy Days Sanctuary as it recovers from the fire that killed 31 cats on Dec. 7.

cused on the surviving cats still in emergency care.

"Every life here matters," the post said. "Losing any of our animals is unimaginable."

The Dec. 7 fire not only

killed more than 30 cats but also destroyed the founder's home and the space where many rescues lived.

"The founders, Ann Swinson, her two sons Shane and Ryan, and the entire team at

Happy Days are heartbroken," said the sanctuary's official GoFundMe.

The only building left standing was already at capacity and now has to carry the full weight of the sanctuary's work.

Rice said the fundraising group wanted to respond quickly and raise as much as it could to help the sanctuary as it starts to put itself back together.

A surprise visitor is expected around 10:30 a.m. on Saturday: the community Grinch, stopping by to lift spirits amid a difficult week.

Happy Days Sanctuary is also accepting direct donations through its Canada-Helps page, which can be found by searching "Happy Days Sanctuary," as well as through its GoFundMe, searchable under the same name on the GoFundMe website.

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Three-storey apartment for Virgil approved despite concerns

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

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

Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors cleared the way for the planned building at 1839 Four Mile Creek Rd. in Virgil to move forward, endorsing the project on Dec. 2 and passing the official plan and zoning amendments on Tuesday night.

Town staff said the application, by developer Harvest Heights, has gone through three rounds of revisions in response to public, staff and council feedback.

The apartment plans include 29 units — because of the property's size, that works out to a density of about 95 units per hectare.

"The request is for an increase," said town planner Aimee Alderman of the density, which, for a medium-density residential development, would be a maximum of 30 units per hectare.



An early rendering of the three-storey, 29-unit apartment planned for 1839 Four Mile Creek Rd. — a project some say is pushing NOTL's density limits. SOURCED

Max Fedchyshak, senior planner with NPG Planning Solutions, said consultants reviewed the staff report and agreed with its recommendation to approve the zoning and official plan amendments.

Debate over the project unfolded at the Dec. 2 committee of the whole planning meeting.

Fedchyshak highlighted changes made since engagements with the public and the town, including increasing the front-yard setback

and reducing the height from 11.28 to 11 metres.

Patrick Walsh, who lives at 1831 Four Mile Creek Rd., submitted a response to the town about the plans in which he wrote that the application is "not in a state to proceed."

In addressing councilors on Tuesday night, he said staff's latest report indicates "a pattern of very site-specific adjustments" that show "the degree of customizations" requested for the project.

"We just wanted to point out that while things are still evolving, I think there's still some questions that we're concerned about and that we can try and find some answers for."

As a neighbour to the project, he expressed concerns about the apartment's impacts on neighbourhood privacy and said updated drawings "help illustrate the effect of the reduced setbacks," making for less privacy, he said.

"We definitely see more

projection into the setbacks," he said, from the seven-foot balconies, which use transparent guards.

Coun. Gary Burroughs asked whether revisions made to the apartment plans addressed the privacy concerns Walsh raised.

Fedchyshak said the building was shifted slightly north, creating more space along the south property line and that a 1.8-metre fence is proposed, which could be increased to two metres under the town's bylaw at the site plan stage.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor, who voted against the report, pressed staff on the proposed density, saying it is "about three times our normal medium-density criteria."

She also raised concerns about the project's stormwater management, noting the development would require capacity beyond the normal limit and would rely on the town's safety buffer to meet its needs, which "leaves the town without the safety buffer."

For Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, voting in favour was a no-brainer given how often he said he hears resi-

dents say they are looking for places to "age in place."

"There's lots of planning expertise and advice in here," Zalepa said.

He said he was pleased with how staff worked with the applicant to make changes to what he called an example of a complex and difficult application.

"There's anxiety around a change in neighbourhoods, but this is a really good change — and it's needed for many reasons," Zalepa said. "I'm ready to support this one."

Coun. Erwin Wiens also backed the proposal: "If not here, where?"

He argues that the town needs more places where young people can afford to live and where older residents can move to and, like Zalepa said, age in place.

"There's 100 reasons to support it and a couple reasons not to," added Wiens.

With the amendments now adopted, the developer must secure a site plan agreement before construction can begin. Once submitted, the town will post the site plan online that residents can review.

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Paxton Lane rezoning sparks concern over shift from tribunal-approved plan

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A rezoning proposal at Paxton Lane in St. Davids is drawing pushback from a local resident who says it conflicts with what the Ontario Land Tribunal intended when it approved subdivision plans for the area in 2013.

The warning came last Tuesday at a public meeting for the application on block 18 — a one-acre parcel of land at 46 Paxton Ln., next to the site of the David Secord House.

In 2013, the Ontario Land Tribunal, then known as the Ontario Municipal Board, approved subdivision plans for St. Davids from developer 2248877 Ontario Limited, but flagged this parcel of land for its archeological potential.

The tribunal required it to be transferred to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake once that archeological work was complete.

The applicant wants to keep this block of land private and add a holding symbol, which would stop any work from happening until the province signs off on the archeology.

Under this new setup, the land would no longer have to be turned over to the town — the developer would keep it after it's cleared, no longer guaran-



This lot, block 18, is a leftover piece of land inside the St. Davids subdivision that was slated to be conveyed to the town after required archeological work. SUPPLIED

teeing that the land ends up with the town.

Nicholas Colaneri says that's "a fundamental change from what the tribunal approved."

"My comments focus strictly on the planning and technical issues that directly affect the subdivision's long-term structure and the town's ability to make a defensible decision," he told councillors.

Colaneri said he isn't trying to stop development, but believes council is being asked to approve a zoning change (adding the holding symbol) that "represents a shift from permanent public conservation to temporary private control."

He said he wants the decision to be "transparent, coordinated and consistent" with town policies and the logic of the approval given in 2013.

"Proceeding with new zoning, while archeological work remains unfinished, is objectively premature,"

Colaneri said, noting that heritage and archeological work is "usually handled before new permissions or zoning changes occur."

He urged council not to approve the zoning until archeology is done and all the changes can be reviewed together, arguing that completing that work first is essential for council to "understand the full picture."

Approving it now, he said, could make the decision harder to defend if challenged.

"This is a planning reality," said Colaneri. "Decisions must remain aligned with the original intent of an approval authority to remain secure and defensible."

He also pointed to a revised servicing plan that proposes "a different routing and a different set of dependencies" than what the tribunal approved and said those changes affect how the subdivision fits together and how the surrounding land functions.

"Servicing is not a cosmetic detail."

"For these reasons," he said, "I respectfully ask that you refuse or defer any decision on the zoning for block 18," until the town completes a coordinated review, confirms what will happen with blocks 18 and 19, evaluates the revised servicing plan and receives updated comments from outside agencies.

Block 19 is not part of the rezoning request before the town, but the 2013 approval identified it as a conservation block as well.

Coun. Adriana Vizzari questioned whether updated traffic expectations in the area should factor into this application.

Especially considering that a decade ago, the region added road improvements to handle increased volumes, she said.

"Ten years ago, there wasn't a roundabout going in at the corner because of the increased traffic," she said.

Jennifer Vida, the planning consultant representing the applicant, said the approval has been kept active through time extensions and each extension was reviewed by agencies, with no traffic concerns raised.

She added that the current application has "not received any comments from the town's traffic department or the region."

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Bank of Montreal gives NOTL Museum \$100K

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

As the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum's lead curator prepares to depart from her role and head off to a new position in Port Colborne, the museum is sharing that it's received another \$100,000 from the Bank of Montreal to fund its expansion plans.

BMO is giving the museum \$100,000 over two years to support its \$10-million renovation and expansion project. Kaufman said the grant will go toward the project in general, though the bank expressed interest in the museum's Indigenous section.

The museum is able to get financial support by applying for bank grants, such as this one, and another it received in



Augusto Grebim, a personal banker at the NOTL BMO branch in Old Town. The bank has a drawing of the NOTL Museum it framed on the wall. DAN SMEENK

October from the Royal Bank of Canada, \$150,000 to build an elevator on the property.

Kaufman said BMO's decision to support the museum "definitely shows that there's confidence in this project."

The museum began working last year with Helen Seibel, BMO's head of employee and community giving, and submitted a proposal after determining the museum aligned with

the bank's focus on heritage and community.

"It was a perfect fit for them," Kaufman said.

"We've known about their support for quite some time, so we're excited to finally get it out."

Kaufman added that "one or two" more announcements may come either in the new year or before she steps down on Dec. 31, a move announced last week. She will take on the position of curator at the Port

Colborne Historical and Marine Museum in the new year.

She said fundraising will remain steady after her departure because it has always been a "collaborative project." She hopes to volunteer her time to continue supporting the effort.

This community focus is especially important to her, she said.

"It's most important that the community supports the project," Kaufman said. "It's their museum."

The federal government awarded the museum \$2 million in November to support its expansion, and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is contributing \$500,000 over five years.

Kaufman joined the NOTL Museum on contract in 2009 and has served as lead curator since 2010.

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Ravine Vineyard expands offerings with new bakery café

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery has expanded its culinary operations with a new bakery and café on its St. Davids property, offering fresh pastries, bread and a morning coffee program for visitors and locals.

The bakery operates five days a week, from Thursday to Monday, with all items made fresh daily.

Core offerings include butter croissants, pain au chocolat, Boston creams and a jelly-filled Berliner made with Ravine's own strawberry, lavender and rhubarb preserves. The preserves are bottled and sold under the winery's Lowrey Bros. brand.

A hybrid New York-Montreal style bagel has quickly become one of its most popular items.

"We make it in house with an everything kind of crumb on it," says executive chef John Vetere. The jalapeno and cream cheese savoury danish has also proven popular since it launched.

On Sundays, the café shifts into morning brunch service beginning at 11 a.m.



Left: Ravine's head baker Dre is the wizard behind the winery and restaurant's new cafe. Top right: A pain au chocolate. Bottom right: A bagel and lox sandwich. RICHARD HARLEY



It's like, I think there's a lot of people that just don't know that we're doing this," Vetere said.

The bakery is led by long-time baker, Dre, known as "Dr. Dre" who has spent 15 years developing Ravine's sourdough and bread program. Dre worked as a chef for 20 years before transitioning into baking.

"In 1989 I started as a dishwasher. In 2011 I was a chef at Riverbend," Dre said. He later joined Ravine when the winery needed a dedicated baker.

Dre inherited Ravine's sourdough starter from previous bakers, with a lineage that spans decades. "I inherited her sourdough, which she inherited from her previous baker. When I got it, it was 50 years old," Dre said. "So it's 65 then."

Sourdough remains central to Dre's craft. In fact, he says included in his "death bed dinner" would be simply a poached egg on plain sourdough.

"I just love the feel of sourdough, and it's only got three ingredients, and that's what makes it so special."

Dre embraces the nickname "Breadhead," a term

used for bakers passionate about dough.

"That's what they call guys like us," he said.

Ravine's café also showcases a range of croissants, fresh loafs, danishes and sweet pastries alongside the bread program.

"We have croissant, just basic croissant. And from that we make pain au chocolat, plain danishes," Dre said.

Dre bakes all the bread for the restaurant and events, too.

"All of our buns — like our burgers and everything that hits the table — is all made in-house," he said.

The expanded café brings that work out of the basement and into public view.

"It's just kind of bringing things out of the basement and putting it more upfront," Dre said.

The bakery now offers self-checkout options after 11 a.m. so guests can purchase leftovers without waiting for service.

The winery expects the bakery to grow its weekend offerings, brunch menu and pastry rotation as more locals discover it.

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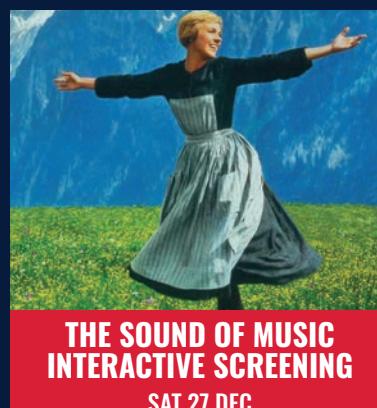
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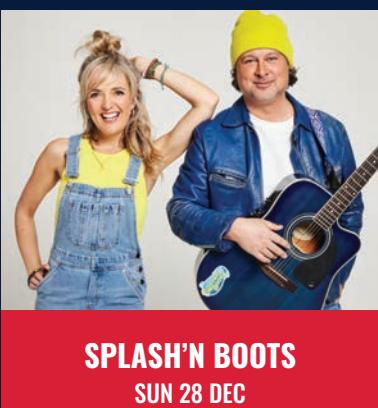
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Lost artwork finds its way home – with a little help from friends

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A month before Christmas, a lost painting at Toronto Pearson Airport set off an unexpected chain of events involving technology, a well-known artist and a link to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

That link was Filomena Pisano, who runs Camelot Studio in Virgil and has lived in the town since 2018. What followed, she said, was a moment that highlighted the better side of humanity.

"For me, it was really about 'Wow. What are the chances of this happening?'" said Pisano.

The story began years earlier with a major setback.

Pisano had always been creative. Before opening her art studio, she worked as an aesthetician and loved photography. As a child, she joked, she would spill her mom's espresso on paper and try to draw.

Ten years ago, everything changed.

"I got hit in the head with a kayak," she said.

She had been on a beach



Filomena Pisano with the original Frida painting in her studio in Virgil. One of the 50 limited edition copies of Frida got lost in Toronto Pearson Airport and was found the same day she posted on Facebook for help on finding it back. DAN SMEENK

in the Collingwood area when a storm blew through and a kayak went "air-borne," striking her in the head.

She suffered a concussion and recovered at her sister's home in Vaughan, where renovations left her without TV or Wi-Fi.

"I said to my mom, 'You know what? I'm going to go to Michaels and I'm going to get a pencil and I'm going to get some paper and

I'm going to sketch. I have to do something."

She later took classes and has now run her studio for five years.

While she was in hospital, two figures kept appearing in her dreams: Mary Magdalene and Frida Kahlo, the early 20th-century Mexican artist who turned to painting after a devastating bus accident — a biographical echo that stuck with Pisano.

She has long admired

Kahlo's work, admitting with a laugh that she is "a little obsessed."

"I think I'm at painting number 19 of her," she said.

"Spiritually, (I'm) very connected to her. And I can't even give you a substantial reason why."

One of those Kahlo portraits became the centre of the airport drama.

This summer, Pisano met her friend Ada Espinoza-Varas in person for the first

time after connecting on Facebook during COVID-19.

Espinoza-Varas, who lives in Brampton and had previously bought Pisano's original paintings, received a gift: one of 50 limited-edition prints of a Kahlo portrait, which were made in May after the original painting by Pisano was made in April.

In November, Espinoza-Varas passed the print to her longtime friend Clarise Morris of Burnaby, B.C., who was visiting.

On Nov. 25, after news broke that an original painting by Kahlo, *El sueño (La cama)*, sold for \$54.7 million at an auction, Pisano posted a photo of one of her own Kahlo works on Facebook. Espinoza-Varas replied to say the gifted print had gone missing at Pearson Airport as Morris travelled home the week before.

Everyone was "dis- traught," said Pisano. Still, she stayed hopeful.

"I just have a feeling it's going to come back," she told Espinoza-Varas.

She updated her Facebook post, asking anyone who might find the print to

return it.

While attending a play that day, she checked her phone at intermission. A message awaited her from Mara Busca, a Facebook friend who had seen the post. Busca told her she had asked a colleague at the airport, Orion Sulo, to look for the missing artwork.

He found it.

Morris later told Pisano she believed she had left the print in a Pearson washroom. Pisano doesn't know who turned it in to the lost and found, but is grateful.

"I was shocked that somebody didn't say, 'I found this, I'm going to keep it,'" she said.

Sulo placed the painting in his locker, and Espinoza-Varas and Busca — who had never met — picked it up. Espinoza-Varas then sent it back to Morris, who filmed its arrival at her front door. Morris now plans to frame it.

Pisano said the speed of the recovery and the way people mobilized showed a positive side of both social media and human nature.

"It kind of restored my faith in humanity."

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Bidding adieu to the Royal George with 'A Christmas Carol'

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

(out of five)

Royal George Theatre, 1 hour, 40 minutes, one intermission. Ends Dec. 21. By Charles Dickens. Adapted for the stage and directed by Tim Carroll.

Penny-Lynn Cookson
Special to The Lake Report

Oscar Wilde once said, "In life, there are two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants. The other is getting it."

This gives one pause for thought. Some will mourn the final performances of "A Christmas Carol" at the Royal George for the foreseeable future. Others will mourn the passing of the theatre itself, given its pending destruction and debated reconstruction. Both are stories of the past, present and future.

"A Christmas Carol" has within it experiences of Charles Dickens' own life (1812-1870). He was that lonely boy, forced out of school and home at 12, to work in a boot blacking factory due to his father's incarceration in a debtors' prison.

Despite a lack of a formal

education, Dickens edited a weekly journal for 20 years, wrote 15 novels, five novellas, including "A Christmas Carol," and hundreds of short stories and articles.

Passionate about the theatre, he loved mimicry and performing his characters on tour in Britain and America. Dickens was a major influencer of the mid-Victorian times, a dynamic intellectual, a prolific force in literature, journalism, theatre, performance art and social activism. No Scrooge, he was a generous man.

His two favourite books were the "Arabian Nights" and "Robinson Crusoe," which influenced "A Christmas Carol." The fantasy tales, narrated by Sheherazade, were stories within stories told over many nights. This framing device was used by Dickens for the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Future.

And in the descriptive character of the loner Ebenezer Scrooge lies the influence of the hardened Robinson Crusoe, a shipwreck survivor alone on a remote tropical island set in the era of imperialist expansion for trade and profit. Ideas transferred to the cold ruthlessness of business in

London.

In contrast to the warm anticipation of Christmas Eve, those within the office of Scrooge and Marley remain chilled to the bone. Scrooge denies extra coal to his shivering employee Bob Cratchit (Travis Seeto).

Nephew Fred (Jay Turvey) arrives to extend a cheerful Merry Christmas to Scrooge. He is dismissed with "Bah! Humbug." Two gentlemen canvassing for donations for the poor are briskly rebuffed.

Scrooge (Sanjay Tanwar) resents giving Christmas Day off with pay to the long-suffering Cratchit, who, with a family of a wife and six children, is terrified of losing his job and his small income. Scrooge's only concern is how many gold coins are nestled in his money box.

Home alone, Scrooge is spooked by the ghost of his former partner, Jacob Marley, who, condemned to wander the afterlife in iron chains, has come to warn Scrooge of his bleak fate if he doesn't change his ways. Scrooge's one chance to escape a bitter destiny is to agree to the visits of three spirits: Christmas Past, Present and Future. He agrees.



Sanjay Talwar as Ebenezer Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol," the last show at the Royal George. DAVID COOPER

Christmas Past uses clever Victorian black silhouettes to reveal Scrooge's lonely boyhood. He witnesses his fiancée, Belle, leave when she recognizes money means more to Scrooge than love.

Scrooge sees his beloved sister, Fan, die in childbirth. The infant, his nephew Fred, survives (Dickens lost his own beloved sister Fanny).

Christmas Present (Christopher Bowman) is a jolly giant of plenty, clothed in a green robe and scabbard festooned with fruit, fish, fowl and drink. Together, they observe the Cratchit family, which includes the crippled Tiny Tim, shar-

ing a modest Christmas dinner.

Christmas Future swoops in as a large white shroud, a phantom of what is to come. Scrooge is shocked to hear his business acquaintances express "a very cheap funeral" and that they might attend if lunch is provided.

At a resale shop in the grimy back alleys of East London, Mrs. Dilber (Patty Jamieson), Scrooge's former charwoman, flogs his linens and bed curtains, rings and all. Once Scrooge sees his name on a tombstone, he understands the error of his ways and becomes a changed man.

Suddenly, free of gloom and full of the spirit of love

and giving, Scrooge vows to be a good uncle, a good boss, a good friend, and become "as good a man as the good old city knew..."

We wanted to feel that spirit of love, but the production seemed tired. It was the assured, solid performances of veterans Jay Turvey, Graeme Somerville and Patty Jamieson that carried the show.

Curious casting had Turvey as Scrooge's nephew Fred, appearing as old as Scrooge. Conceivable but questionable. Travis Seeto is too young, too fresh, to be the weary Bob Cratchit carrying the weight of his job and family with a dying child. Tiny Tim is an essential character and this rigid wooden puppet has never worked, nor do the other puppets.

For Scrooge, redemption has arrived. A changed and overjoyed Scrooge, back from the brink of tragedy, shares his wealth, embraces his family and will be a better person.

And so, in the spirit of the present and future joyous experiences, "A Merry Christmas, everybody..

Penny-Lynn Cookson is an arts and culture historian, writer and lecturer living in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

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NOTICE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION, OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING

What: Notice of **Complete Application, Open House and Public Meeting** for a **Zoning By-law Amendment** (under Section 34 of the *Planning Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended).

When: Open House: **Monday, December 22, 2025 at 5:00 p.m.**
Public Meeting: **Monday, January 13, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.**

Where: Open House: Electronically via the directions below
Public Meeting: In-person at the Town Hall, Council Chambers, 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, or electronically via the directions below

Regarding: File No. ZBA-26-2025 – 52 & 56 Shaw's Lane, Niagara-on-the-Lake

What is this?

An application has been received for a Zoning By-law Amendment on the subject lands (see location map).

The application is proposed to facilitate the development of three (3) on-street townhouse dwellings fronting Shaw's Lane.

The Zoning By-law Amendment proposes to rezone the Subject Lands from "Site-Specific Residential (R1-71) Zone" to a site-specific "Residential Multiple (RM1) Zone" to accommodate the proposed townhouse dwellings. Site-specific provisions are proposed for lot coverage, front yard, and rear yard setbacks.



Dialogue is encouraged:

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

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

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

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

- **Open House** – Connor MacIsaac (connor.macisaac@notl.com or 905-468-3266 ext. 313)
(register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Monday, December 22, 2025)
- **Public Meeting** – Clerks Department (clerks@notl.com or 905-468-3266)
(register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Monday, January 13, 2025)

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

If you wish to view the Open House and/or Public Meeting for information purposes, registration is not required. The meetings will be recorded and available for viewing after the meetings on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/council-government/mayor-council/meetings-agendas-minutes>.

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

For more information:

A copy of the application and supporting documents for the proposal may be obtained on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/business-development/public-planning-notices>, or at the Planning, Building and Development Services Department within Town Hall. Please contact Connor MacIsaac, Planner II, at 905-468-3266 ext. 313 or via email at connor.macisaac@notl.com if additional information is required.

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

If a person or public body does not share their views in writing to the Town Clerk or orally at a statutory Public Meeting before a decision is made, the person/public body:

- Is not entitled to appeal the decision of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Ontario Land Tribunal; and
- May not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the opinion of the Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

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

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, December 11, 2025

Grant Bivol, Town Clerk



Publisher: Richard Harley
Editor-In-Chief: Richard Harley
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#56: Be kind to yourself, too.
 Book off some time and enjoy something you have not done for a long time. Could be a walk in the park, massage, cooking class, lunch out, a yoga retreat, etc.

This tiny column gives tips to help promote kindness in our lives and spread joy and happiness.



Contributed by Patty Garriock

“Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love.”
 - Brene Brown

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Old Town lights up

The giving season is upon us. The Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce held its annual Candlelight Stroll on Friday, Dec. 5, filling the downtown core with flickering candlelight to raise money for charity. Here, a brass band provides some music for the festivities. This year's stroll raised \$14,500 for Pink Pearl Canada, an organization supporting young women with cancer. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

What turned NOTL real estate skunk



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
 Columnist

Renovated to flip, the house in Old Town has been officially listed for sale more than 200 days now.

Not so good, since the average DOM (days on market) for properties in Niagara-on-the-Lake is about 60. A price well north of three million doesn't help.

But wait. It's actually been available for almost 600 days. Two years — a fact hidden by the way local realtors dish out information to prospective buyers. There's even a warning on the official site of the Niagara Association of Realtors.

Don't trust our days-on-market stat, it cautions: "It does not include Cumulative Days on Market (CDOM), which account for prior listings of the same property that may have been cancelled, expired, or re-listed. As such, DOM may not represent the total time a property has been publicly available for sale."

Truth be told, properties in much of NOTL are having a hard time attracting offers, which may explain such hidden bits of data.

It's the same almost



This empty building lot in Old Town is currently for sale, listed at \$1.75 million. Inventory is piling up faster than prices are falling. GARTH TURNER

everywhere, but especially in a place like this where the average price of about \$1 million ranks us up there with godless Toronto and flaky Vancouver.

After all, we're not exactly diversified when it comes to jobs, or housing. Anything relatively "cheap" gets swallowed whole by our local cabal of short-term rental czars. That will not change until council does.

Now did you notice the interest rate news this week?

Right. There wasn't any. The Bank of Canada rate is stuck in the same spot (2.25 per cent) and economists forecast no change through all of 2026. In

fact, one bank (Scotiabank) says we should expect two rate increases to pop next summer and autumn — which would mean an end to current mortgage rates hovering around 4 per cent.

It's not the news realtors wanted to hear. Six months ago the buzz was that

the cost of money would cascade lower next year and we'd actually have a vibrant spring market — the first since 2023. But forget it.

Our central bankers worry Trump-tariff pricing could start pushing inflation aloft again next year. And while recent jobs numbers have been better, the GTA still has a 9 per cent unemployment rate.

If AI lives up to its billing, a lot more people might find themselves out of work because of large

language models, generative programs and robots that never take vacations, bathroom breaks or bitch about the boss.

Here's the paradox, though.

Real estate prices have come down. Mortgage rates fell meaningfully in 2025. It costs about 24 per cent less to finance a house than it did a year ago. Thirty-year mortgages have come back.

There is a ton of inventory to choose from. No

bidding wars now. No blind auctions. No multiple offers. Sure, overpriced homes will continue to sit, but there are lots of properties now priced at 2022 levels, getting no action. Sellers are anxious. Many are willing to deal.

This should be the stuff that a property market revival is made of.

But not so fast. We have a deficit in confidence.

The latest Leger poll shows 34 per cent of us think the economy is OK, while 59 per cent say it's poor.

Almost half believe things will get worse from here. That's despite recent rosy economic numbers (GDP) and employment stats, which surprised experts. In fact, the jobless rate nationally fell in a single month by an amount that has rarely been seen. Wages are rising 50 per cent faster than inflation, to boot.

So logic says people should buy. Emotion says whoa. And the property market goes skunk.

"For sellers, this is the time to price ahead of the market — not behind it," says head realtor wizard Lisa Taylor. "For buyers, this remains a window of opportunity where conditions are tilted in your favour."

In other words, why wait? You'll probably outlive Trump.

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

garth@garth.ca



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OPINION



Cottage rentals keep NOTL's economy going and its heritage buildings intact

Dear editor:

In his Oct. 30 column "The Turner Report: NOTL picks tourists over tenants," Garth Turner laments the lack of long-term rentals in Niagara-on-the-Lake and blames tourism. But his surprise is misplaced.

As a former minister of national revenue, he should have a good financial sense and understand the economics of owning a home and why long-term rentals are scarce — and why short-term rentals make sense in a town like ours.

Let's start with the math. The average home price in Niagara-on-the-Lake is about \$1.2 million. The mortgage payment alone would exceed \$4,000 per month, with another \$1,000 for property taxes and roughly \$300 for insurance. That's before considering maintenance, utilities, or a down payment easily exceeding \$200,000.

A landlord renting that same home for \$3,000 a month would lose money. And they must still account for vacancies, repairs, and the risks of Ontario's heavily one-sided Landlord and Tenant Act. The numbers simply don't work.

So when critics point to high rents and claim property owners are greedy, they overlook the real issue: it's expensive to own a home here.

Niagara-on-the-Lake has been a tourist destination



Jason Clements, a well-known short-term rental industry advocate and stakeholder, says short-term rentals are a good thing for NOTL's economy. FILE

for over a century — long before Airbnb. Its charm, wineries and heritage buildings draw visitors from around the world. And those visitors sustain our economy.

Even the wine industry, often seen as distinct from tourism, depends on it. Restaurants, shops and theatres thrive because of visitors. Without tourism, NOTL would not be the vibrant town we know today.

And let's address the "ghost rental" myth. Vacation rentals are occupied more often than many second homes. As resident Paul O'Connor told town council, his neighbour enjoys chatting with the guests next door — and noted that nearby houses

not used as rentals sit empty for 11 months of the year.

It's not short-term rentals that are sitting dark, but luxury homes owned by those who can afford to leave them vacant.

Cottage rentals aren't just good for tourism — they're also good for preservation.

Walk through Chautauqua and you'll see what happens when smaller homes are no longer viable as seasonal rentals: they're demolished and replaced with oversized new builds. Allowing short-term rentals keeps these older, character-filled homes alive and financially sustainable.

Anyone moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake should understand what kind of

community they're joining. Just as those who live in the rural areas accept the sounds of bird bangers during harvest season, residents in town should recognize that NOTL is — and always has been — a tourist community.

From the days of the Queen's Royal Hotel to today's theatre festivals and wine tours, tourism has been our lifeblood. Real estate prices here have always been higher than elsewhere in Niagara, long before Airbnb existed. And for more than a century, homeowners have been welcoming vacationers into town. That tradition isn't new — and it's not going away.

Short-term rentals are part of what keeps NOTL's economy healthy and its heritage intact. They offer families comfortable, affordable accommodations and encourage longer stays — all without the need for more large hotels.

The debate over short-term rentals has gone on for years, often fuelled by NIMBYism and misinformation. But it's time to recognize reality: Niagara-on-the-Lake is a world-class tourist town that thrives because people want to visit, stay, and fall in love with it — just as many of us did before deciding to make it home.

Jason Clements
NOTL

We can do better than the temporary patios

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

Dear lord mayor and councillors:

I know at a previous meeting the lord mayor was

intending to bring a motion concerning making the temporary patio program permanent and part and parcel of that withdrawn motion would have been to approve the consideration before you tonight, being the cash-in-lieu proposal by the Irish Harp.

I would like to strongly support the staff recommendation against approving this (and any other similar attempts) to extend the temporary patio program.

I, for one, look forward to Queen Street regaining her former regal beauty without the tawdry decks

projecting into the street, impeding vehicular and pedestrian traffic and the foraging skunks and rats digging through the crumbs dropped by patrons.

We can do better.
Bob Bader
NOTL

We welcome your letters

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



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This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style.
Category: ON THE ROPES

From 1900 to 1920 this contest using a rope was an event in the Olympics, with a British team taking the final gold.

Last issue category: THE MIDWEST

Clue: Part of Hitchcock's thriller "North by Northwest" was filmed at this iconic national memorial near Rapid City.

Answer: What is Mount Rushmore?

Answered first by: Kimberly Amaral

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Claudia Grimwood, Bob Wheatley, Lynda Collet, Sue Heinz, Jane Morris, Jeff Lake, Jim Dandy, Esther VanGorder, Nancy Rocca, Wade Durling, Howard Jones, Tuija Johnsson, Marla Percy, Katie Reimer, Bob Stevens, Margie Enns, Hedy Wiebe, Sheila Meloche

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

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‘If not here, then where?’ Not there



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

During the Dec. 2 committee of the whole planning meeting, council visited official plan and zoning amendments which would facilitate the construction of an apartment building at 1839 Four Mile Creek Rd.

Concerns were raised regarding this application. Regarding stormwater management, Coun. Sandra O’Connor pointed out that the application proposes to utilize the existing infrastructure’s 15 per cent safety buffer in order to manage their outflows.

Note that most of our existing infrastructure is sized to a five-year peak storm event — leaving them already undersized (including the current 15 per cent safety buffer) to manage a 100-year storm event; a phenomenon that, with climate change, seems to be occurring

ring almost annually.

It seems odd that there were no further comments or questions from the members of council regarding this issue; however, given this council’s record of supporting development proposals in the absence of robust professional engineering reports that encompass a complete analysis of impacts on existing storm/wastewater management infrastructure, this is, unfortunately, no surprise.

Ask the folks living in St. Davids who annually experience extensive flooding of their properties due to inadequate infrastructure and are watching the willy-nilly approval of new housing developments that will, almost certainly, add to their misery.

Or, speak to the third party engineering and groundwater management experts who have analyzed the sadly deficient engineering reports submitted to the town pursuant to the Parliament Oak hotel development.

Returning to this application, apparently most of our councillors have not travelled East & West Line between Concessions 4 and 6 during the heavy spring rains to witness the flooding of farmlands that already



A rendering of the three-storey proposal.

occurs — something this overture will likely exacerbate during peak storm events.

Moving on, O’Connor raised a question concerning the density of the proposed building.

In NOTL, we have only two density classifications: low density, at a maximum of 14 units per hectare and medium density, at a maximum of 30 units per hectare.

Historically, these parameters were established to ensure that any future developments would be minimally intrusive and compatible with established streetscapes.

But, on the 1839 Four Mile Creek Rd. property, the proponent has offered an application based on 95 units per hectare — more than three times NOTL’s maximum density.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita opined that this would be classified as high density, but Coun. Andrew Niven put the question of its classification to staff.

In a “shake your head”

moment, the town’s manager of development and planning, Aimee Alderman answered, “Our current official plan only has low-density residential or medium-density residential. We don’t have a high-density residential category. So, anything that is exceeding medium-density residential would still be considered within that (category), albeit with a different density.”

Across Ontario, anything above 60 units per hectare is honestly classified as high density. But, in NOTL, we disingenuously expand the medium-density category limit by 300 per cent to facilitate a development application.

Also raised by O’Connor was the absence of the regional urban design manager’s comments associated with the suitability of the proposed building in the context of the streetscape within the report/recommendation authored by town staff.

Mr. Khaldoon Ahmad wrote, “From an urban design perspective, the sup-

orting urban design brief and architectural design do not sufficiently lay out a compelling rationale for why a low-rise apartment block represents an optimal urban design solution for this site.”

He continued: “The proposal is not put in contrast with other forms such as detached houses on a common element driveway, townhouses and stacked towns. Without an urban design assessment and/or analysis of the proposed form in relation to surrounding buildings and other logical building options, the potential for establishing why this proposal represents good planning is not available.”

Further, he wrote: “The proposed development is in contrast to its surroundings in manifold ways. These should be addressed holistically with a sound architectural approach to justify the proposed zoning amendments. The proposed architectural approach — as a demonstration of an outcome of applying the proposed zoning — is more appropriate to an urban setting such as the core of Virgil or the Old Town.”

These comments largely echo my observations in the July 11 column (“Arch-

i-text: What makes these two development proposals different”).

In part, Mr. Ahmad’s statements also speak to the question raised by Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa — who declared himself strongly in favour of the application — and subsequently repeated by the deputy lord mayor, Coun. Erwin Wiens: “If not here, then where?”

May I respectfully suggest that answering this question lies completely within their mandate.

In fact, the basic precepts of good urban development planning place the onus on the local government to proactively identify low, medium and high-density locations, then apply the appropriate zoning and manage the build-out according to best practices (see: Niagara Region’s model urban design guidelines).

However, that would require taking responsibility for the solution and following best practices, rather than dancing to the tune of moneyed developers — a dance which, based on their voting record, this council is well versed in.

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



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Sharing an early winter day with NOTL's trees



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

So quiet on our streets. A really quiet Sunday morning downtown.

So few dog walkers out and about. With shorter days and longer nights, more darkness and, therefore, increased danger of having "the dreaded fall." Under the pretty white snow lurks ice — one simply cannot be too cautious.

Even Sweets & Swirls at our fabulous community centre was closed. No oatmeal cookie, or two, for me.

One comforting constant in our town is our abundance of trees. And

with some maple and oak species, lots of fallen leaves to rake.

It took two free walking tour guests from Lindsay, here on a two-day motorcoach trip with Cardinal Lakeshore Tours, to enjoy "White Christmas" at the Shaw, to point out our abundance of fallen leaves.

Except for them, the group members were living the good life at the Prince of Wales Hotel, taking advantage of the top-class service and shoulder-season group pricing.

Most of the group members were enjoying a "morning at leisure," but the energetic and observant Suzanne Barker and her daughter Mona Lisa were up and at 'em, hungry to learn about the rich history of our town.

We had walked from the historic Courthouse on Queen Street down Regent to Queen's Royal Park, discussing the burning of our town in 1813, and the Underground Railroad.

Admiring the peaceful



We get a lot of leaves in NOTL, eh? ROSS ROBINSON

neighbourhood and learning why Niagara-on-the-Lake was known as "America's attic" just after the Civil War.

Indeed, several Confederate army generals had come up here to dodge the danger of being convicted of treason. My goodness, even Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, was here for a while.

I should ramble back to our two energetic and inquisitive walkers from Lindsay.

They had no idea that Hollywood had filmed "Dead Zone" here in 1983, based on the Stephen King novel. The stars

were Martin Sheen and Christopher Walken, and our "historic" gazebo was left behind.

As locals, most of us tend to fall into the trap of taking our trees for granted. Not so for Suzanne and her horticultural and history-hungry daughter. By the way, they were the two most positive people I have met this year.

As we started to walk east down Ricardo Street from King Street, we were confronted by literally hundreds of brown yard waste bags.

In front of one house, count 'em, some 62 bags full of leaves. And several neighbouring houses also had impressive collections of bagged leaves ready for pick up by our efficient and confusing regional recycling squad.

My mind wandered, and the three of us had a rambling conversation, wondering what happened to all the leaves before raking and recycling became all the rage every autumn.

Yes, we talked about composting and the natural cycles of nature. But wouldn't forest floors have been totally overwhelmed, without human beings raking and raking and raking to keep the world neat and tidy?

Now I am going to really ramble. Please stay with me.

We have many unique and fascinating people living with us in our town. One of my favourite neighbours during my years living in Chautauqua was Holmes Hooke, who continues to make NOTL a very interesting place.

He and the Chautauqua Oaks team were well described in a recent issue of The Lake Report ("Letter: Chautauqua project preserves nature for the next generation," Nov. 27).

In a previous life, Holmes was a spoken word artist, touring the U.K., Canada and the U.S., performing at hundreds of festivals, theatres, clubs and schools.

A verse from "Plant a

Tree":

"Now you don't need a Ph.D
Or an online course in botany.

Just follow the simple recipe to plant a tree
And plant a tree
Plant a tree."

Let us remember the many benefits of trees. It is not my intent, and I do not have the knowledge, to ramble further about trees. Leave that to the experts.

We have heard a lot about this subject.

Please, slow down and admire our trees:

On our Commons, so many wonderful trees that were thoughtfully planted in straight lines.

The lines of maple trees on Oak Drive approaching the Circle/Amphitheatre. Way out on Airport Road near Niagara Stone Road and "the airport."

Every one of these now beautiful trees was planted by a visionary person at some point.

Think about it, and plant a tree. Or several trees.

rossrocket9@gmail.com

Our held-over then cancelled patio roller-coaster ride



THE FORUM

Steve McGuinness
Columnist

Group table reservations are in scarce supply this festive season. In warmer months, parties could spill outside onto patios to meet surges in table demands. This past summer, many busy roadside patios dotted Queen Street, some placed on municipally owned curbside parking stalls.

The use of old town roadway for patios dates back to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when distancing precautions closed indoor dining spaces. Offering the opportunity to dine al fresco threw a lifeline to small businesses confronting financial ruin, observing province-wide public health orders.

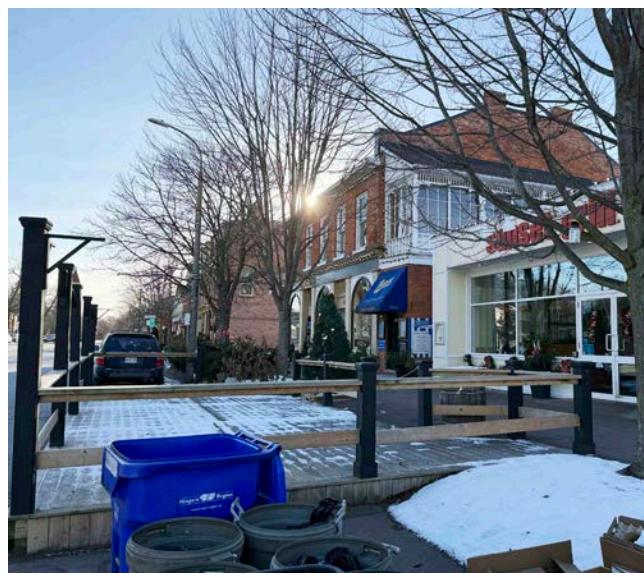
After infection levels fell, our town continued to extend the "temporary" patio permits. This year town

council finally decreed, effective Dec. 31, that all "temporary" restaurant patio permits will expire. Some owners have dismantled their patio structures already, although several remain defiantly in place.

There is no hope left for an 11th-hour patio reprieve, despite endless council debates. A recent chronology prepared by town staff shows no less than 20 discrete patio-related matters coming before council with related staff reports, between June 2020 and today.

Other Ontario municipalities have dealt with these patio transitioning issues with finality, devising methods for granting and renewing permits every season. Their patio operators follow rules regulating size and appearance, also ensuring that public safety and health objectives are met. The patios are especially popular among patrons with accessibility issues or canine companions.

Are there some unique challenges here in NOTL that other municipalities with permanent patio policies don't confront? Or, is our council less adept at balancing competing business, resident and tourist interests?



Temporary patio operators in Niagara-on-the-Lake, many concentrated in the downtown core, will have to dismantle their patios by Dec. 31. STEVE MCGUINNESS

The debate has turned nastier and more contentious here, with competing businesses angrily facing off.

Coun. Maria Mavridis has emerged as a lightning rod for this fractiousness during her first term. She assumed her council role expecting to leverage her own practical business experience operating Corks Wine Bar on Queen. But a perceived conflict between her full-time role as a restaurateur and her part-time council role quickly surfaced.

Councillors must self-declare a conflict of interest when they have a "pecuni-

ary interest." Pecuniary implies having a personal financial stake. The onus is placed on individual councillors to declare such conflicts.

In case of ambiguity or uncertainty, the town's appointed integrity commissioner can conduct a review, initiated either by councillor referral or a resident complaint.

Corks Wine Bar has its own integrated patio space out front of its property. Its commercial tax assessment is based on the market value of the entire property, including that area.

The Sunset Grill, on the other hand, depended on curbside parking stalls for patio space. The town did not impose a seasonal square footage charge for that space's use to compensate for lost metered parking revenues.

Sunset's proprietors disagreed with the integrity commissioner's ruling that Coun. Mavridis was conflict-free, appealing to a tribunal. The town incurred legal fees in her defence.

Mavridis argued that Corks, as a wine bar, caters to customers later in the day than those served by a breakfast chain, avoiding direct competition. The appeal was eventually dropped.

Two other popular heritage area eateries are also seeking permanent solutions to expiring patio permits.

The Irish Harp Pub proposes to pay \$460,000 cash-in-lieu of parking to maintain its patio — a pricetag demonstrating how lucrative outdoor dining can be.

Meanwhile, the Olde Angel Inn is seeking a zoning change to make its 137-seat patio permanent, without adding or paying for parking.

A business owner opposed to the Angel proposal

ignited a fiery exchange at a Dec. 2 council chamber session.

Restaurateur Gina Angelakopoulos argued that granting the Angel request would sanction their prior non-compliance, thereby placing bylaw-abiding businesses, including her competing Epicurean restaurant, at a disadvantage.

In a very unusual procedural disruption, chair Tim Balasiuk allowed CAO Nick Ruller to fact-check her prepared remarks in real-time.

The only thing certain about this ongoing great town patio debacle is that it is not over.

The issue will undoubtedly resurface during the Queen Street heritage district secondary plan debate and the related parking study. Our next council may rise to the challenge and act more decisively then.

Prepare to fasten your patio table seatbelts when the wild ride resumes.

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

Canadians run away with national title at U.S. competition

Continued from Front Page

Fife told The Lake Report.

Bayne and Simpson train with Fife at the Thorold Elite Track & Field Club.

Their teammate Colby Craig, 14, of Niagara Falls was sixth in the race and also was named an all-American.

Together the Niagara team, which also included Evan Riou of Fort Erie, Max Woods and Max MacNeil of Niagara Falls, and Riley Isherwood and Ryder Savage of Thorold, finished well ahead of the other more than 50 track clubs that competed.

The Canadians earned a combined team score of 42 points to handily beat the Without Limits team from North Carolina (score of 95 for silver) and the Kern County Cross Country All-Stars from Bakersfield, Calif., (score of 151 for bronze).

Each team's score is determined by the placement of its top five finishers and the lowest score wins, like in golf.

"We won gold at the provincial level for this age group," Fife said.



From left, members of the Thorold Elite Track & Field Club who competed at the U.S. nationals in Tennessee: Riley Isherwood, Evan Riou, Ryder Savage, Luke Simpson, Ben Bayne, Colby Craig, Max Woods and Max MacNeil. The team finished first overall in the 13-14 age group and Simpson, Bayne and Craig were named all-Americans. SUPPLIED

"But in Canada there is no national championship for 13-year-olds and they aren't allowed to compete up in the higher category, so the AAU Nationals in the States is really the only option for them to compete at that

level," he said.

"Our team is a true representation of the region," he noted.

"I know our club says Thorold in the name but that's based on where we were founded and where we

are based at Canada Games Park, but we welcome athletes from all across Niagara."

Team members come from all over and "we have several other outstanding athletes from Niagara-on-

the-Lake," Fife added.

In November, runners from the Thorold club also competed in the All-Ontario Cross-country Championships in Whitby.

Bayne won bronze in the under-14 boys two-kilometre race, Woods was fourth and Simpson was right behind in fifth spot.

The NOTL boys' performances this year — including wins at their regional school finals — have made their families and coach proud.

But more than just the results, Simpson's dad Sean said, "I'm most impressed by their commitment and dedication to their training."

"They are both great kids who work extremely hard and help to push each other" to succeed.

Besides running, Bayne and Simpson play rep hockey — Bayne with the U14 Niagara Falls Canucks A team and Simpson on the AA St. Catharines Falcons.

Bayne started running about a year ago but "in the last six months he's had this rapid improvement and done very, very well," his dad Kevin said in an interview.

And after a week off he'll

be back training six days a week. It's a well-deserved rest after a strong performance to cap the cross-country season.

Bayne noted the Canadian families didn't know what to expect going into the U.S. nationals and "we were very surprised," pleasantly so, by the results because the Thorold team was up against some elite American clubs.

The individual and team performances were an "amazing" result, he said. And the fact some of the kids earned all-American status was a bit of icing on the cake.

"As Canadians, we got a bit of a chuckle out of that," he said.

He thinks a lot of Ben's inspiration comes from his two older brothers, who are both accomplished runners.

"He works really hard and he's really focused," Bayne said. And the result was, "in really tough conditions, he pulled off a phenomenal race."

Next he'll turn his focus to hockey and the indoor track season which begins in the new year.

Kevin@niagaranow.com

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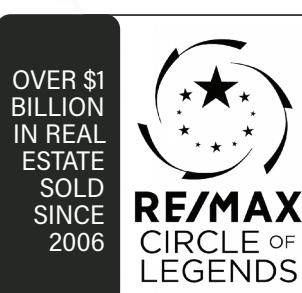


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Across

1. Egg-shaped (4)
4. Occurring after one's death (10)
9. Kind of engineer (10)
10. First son of Adam and Eve (4)
11. Six (4-5)

13. Also-ran (5)
16. Garment of ancient Rome (4)
17. Nobles (5)
21. Accustom (5)
22. Sailor (7)

23. Caterpillar (5)
24. Paces (5)
27. Harmonize (4)
30. Plot of ground (5)
33. Monarch (9)

35. Old Peruvian (4)
36. Immeasurably deep (10)
37. Overstate (10)
38. Indifferent (2-2)

Down

2. Small community (7)
3. Satan (7)
4. Portion of time (6)
5. Small bag (6)
6. Consecrated (4)

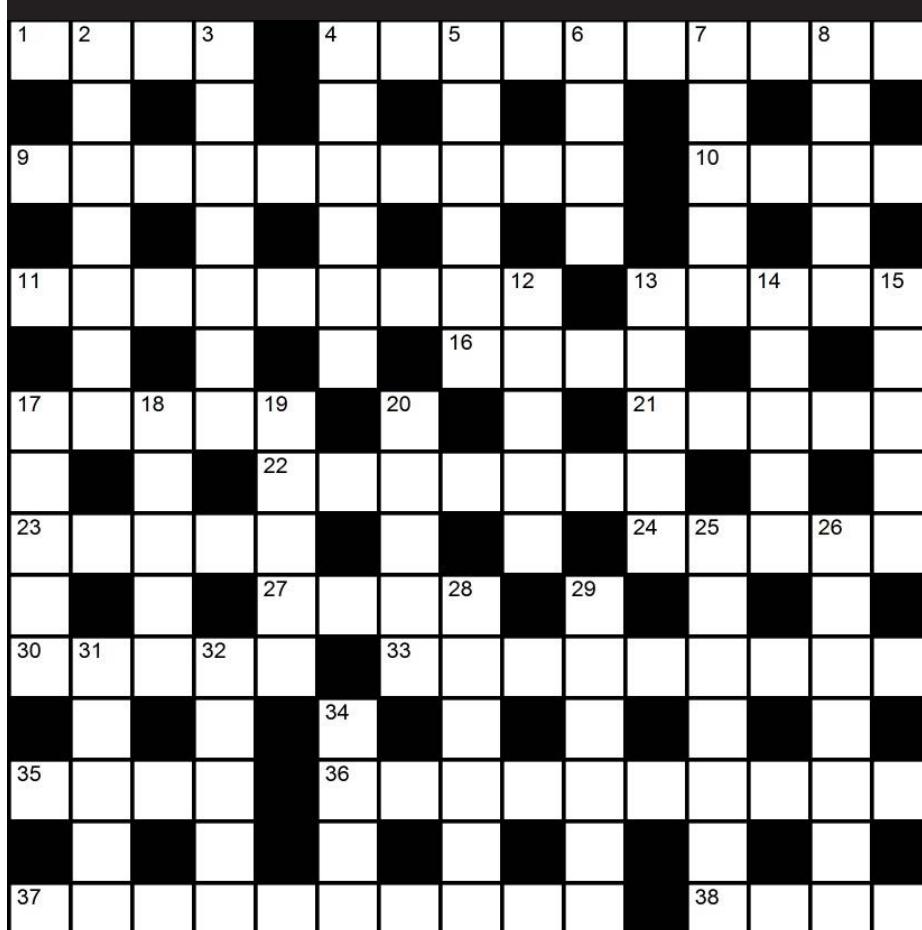
7. Former Portuguese territory in S China (5)
8. Join (5)
12. Name of a thing (5)
13. Dens (5)
14. Gravy (5)

15. Staggers (5)
17. Coral builder (5)
18. White heron (5)
19. Shatter (5)
20. Golf clubs (5)

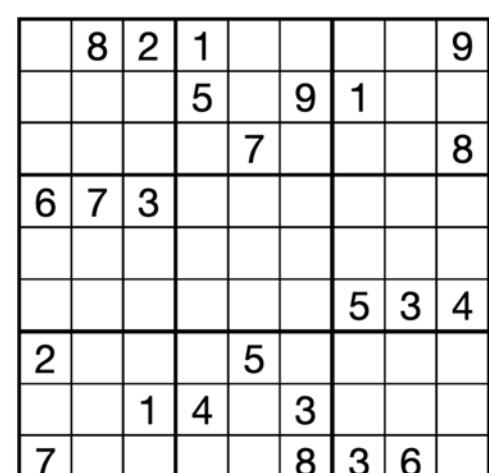
25. Lattice (7)
26. Winged horse (7)
28. Against (6)
29. Previously (6)
31. Addition (5)

32. Loud, resonant sound (5)
34. Showing unusual talent (4)

Crossword Puzzle



Last issue's answers



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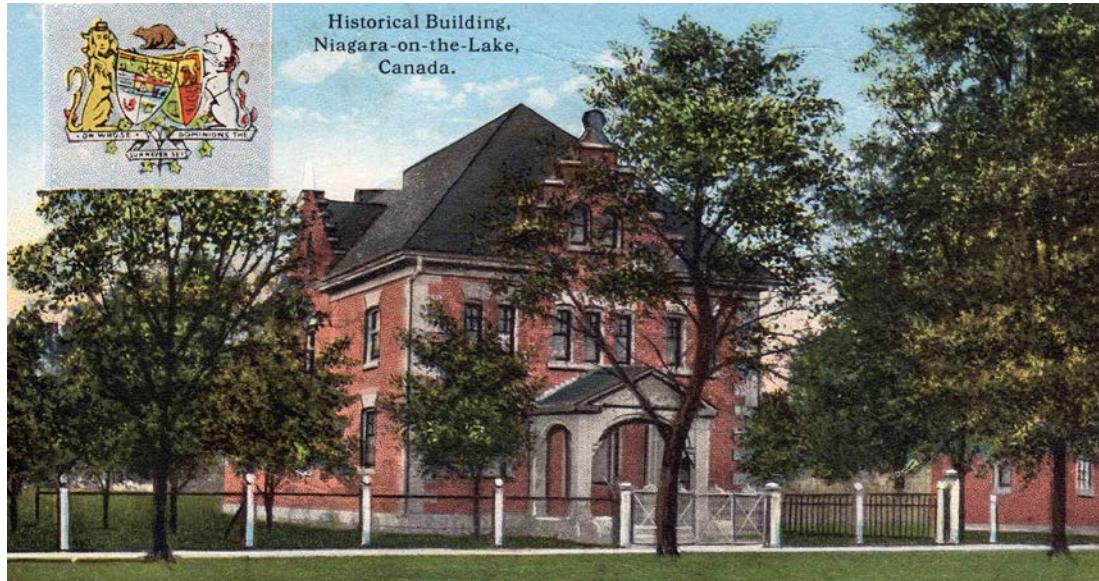
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EXPLORING HISTORY
WITH NOTL MUSEUM



130th anniversary of the museum

On a snowy Dec. 12, 1895, 15 local residents met at the Courthouse on Queen Street to form what would be called the Niagara Historical Society. This was a movement by local residents to make sure that our significant history wasn't forgotten. At the time, several people doubted their ability to collect artifacts of significant interest, believing that everything had been given away or destroyed, or that no one would donate anything for a museum. Fortunately, the newly formed society, under Janet Carnochan's leadership, ignored these sentiments. Janet was our first president and later, curator. She also became one of our first local historians who documented many of the stories we still refer to today. In 1907, they opened Memorial Hall (seen here), which is the first purpose-built museum in Ontario. Walking into the museum during Janet's tenure, you would have likely seen her covered in papers, books, and most certainly dust. Janet, with greying hair in a tight bun, would be hunched over her desk, deeply immersed in her research or writing. Upon noticing you there, Janet would have jumped in excitement at the opportunity to tour you around the museum. You would no doubt have felt amused, watching her eyes glow with the passion to immerse you in the stories of her favourite relics. From Janet's pioneering leadership to the innovative programming of today, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum continues to evolve while remaining true to its mission. This museum is, above all, the community's museum. What has kept the museum alive for more than a century is not simply the buildings or the collections — it's the spirit of the people. Generation after generation, investing in the museum and our heritage. Your museum has thrived thanks to the dedication of volunteers, members, staff, donors and its caring local residents. Thank you.



Have an opinion
you want heard?
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The long road travelled and ended – and a big thank you



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

My wife Janet, in the 59th year of our marriage, died in the evening of Nov. 22, 2025, unresponsive after many hours of effortful, tiring cyclic breathing — deep breaths punctuated by long pauses — before the final and last pause.

Then, Jan experienced what we in the family called "the slumps" when she might slump to one or the other side, unresponsive for a minute or so before recovering.

These events became more frequent and longer lasting, which, together with increasingly severe cognitive decline, were the chief reasons Janet was admitted to Niagara Long Term Care Residence in fall 2019, just before COVID-19 struck with a vengeance in early 2020.

In her last three years at Niagara Long Term Care, Jan's language skills withered and, like many residents, she eventually all



Janet "Jan" Brown died Nov. 22 after a battle with dementia. SUPPLIED

but lost her ability to speak more than a few words, although her understanding was better preserved.

Like many residents with dementia, she also lost her talent for making friends — in this case, with other residents, although throughout her long illness, Jan never lost her sunny disposition, innate cheeriness and sense of humour.

In 2022, Janet was transferred to Pleasant Manor and continued to slowly decline cognitively. In 2023, she developed episodes when she became unresponsive, only to come to several hours later.

Similar events occurred every few weeks with the same outcome. These events were probably epileptic in origin — an example of non-convulsive seizures, but the collective best decision was to forgo using epilepsy drugs because of their propensity to make patients drowsy.

In the final several months, swallowing and drinking became increasingly challenging and finally, impossible near the end, when Jan became increasingly drowsy and less responsive.

She had Alzheimer's disease, based on much of the history. But she also had cerebrovascular disease based on the MRI finding of several infarcts. Atypical too for Alzheimer's disease were the early "slumps" and the later, longer-lasting periods of unresponsiveness, which were probably epileptic in nature, but not a feature of Alzheimer's disease.

I mention this because assigning specific causes to some dementias is problematic in cases such as Jan, who had atypical features.

Would the new monoclo-

nal antibody drugs designed to clear beta amyloid from the brain have made a difference? On the evidence I've seen, no.

What I know is that when Jan had all her considerable senses about her, she would not have wanted to go through the last eight years, although throughout her care, especially at Pleasant Manor, my sense was that Jan wasn't unhappy with her lot — bored maybe, but not unhappy.

If Jan was unhappy, it was early on when she was frightened by the prospect of literally losing her mind. Through it all, Jan never lost her sense of humour, playfulness and endearing affection, which made her such a wonderful wife and partner to be with.

In that sense, "Jan" was never lost, including her most deeply embedded memories of her father — a warm, joyful man wired just like his daughter.

If Jan could speak, she would want me to thank everyone who helped her, and others on similar journeys. It's not easy for those who have dementia or their caregivers, whether they are

at home or in long-term care facilities.

Except for visitors and families, and long-term care workers, what goes on in long-term care facilities is out of sight and mind for most in the community.

Over the last six years, I've witnessed their hard work, dedication and faithfulness to care for their charges much as they would their own. That's been a privilege to witness first-hand, and never more so than in Jan's last few days.

For all the loving care everyone in long-term care shows for their charges, Jan and her family are very grateful and thank you. And remember, Jan and others you've cared for might just be watching and cheering you on.

Keep that thought in your hearts and minds as you go about your very impressive work of caring for those unable to care for themselves.

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.

FEATURED

97-year-old NOTLer brings knitted joy

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

One of the highlights of the Santa Claus Parade in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Dec. 13 will be the knitted items made by 97-year-old Dora Werenchuk.

Werenchuk has lived through more Christmases than most and hopes her creations help keep people warm — in both body and spirit.

She said she knits "mostly pullover and sweaters," her favourite items to make, but her collection also includes winter hats. She also dabbles in crocheting: one example, a white wool filet crochet depicting rural life, hangs between two rooms in her home.

"There's no second one in the world," said Werenchuk. "That's because I created it myself."

Her path to knitting began in a far more difficult place.

As a teenager in Austria in the early 1940s, she was



Dora Werenchuk with one of her knitted sweaters and beside her crocheted artwork. Werenchuk will be selling her items at the Santa Claus Parade on Dec. 13. DAN SMEENK

forced into the Hitler Youth after the Nazi occupation of the country. Her first experience knitting was making socks for soldiers on the European battlefields of the Second World War.

"Crazy he was," she said, of the leader of the Third Reich, recalling how things initially seemed good after the invasion, with improved social programs, but deteriorated once the war escalated.

Werenchuk moved to Canada in 1949. She first spent three years in Lethbridge, Alta., working in sugar beets before coming to the Niagara region in 1952.

After six months in St. Catharines, she settled in the Niagara-on-the-Lake home her husband built in 1953.

Throughout her life, she kept knitting and crocheting. She became especially

active after retirement and now sells her work outside her home.

Her friend Shirley DeBoer, who's supporting the project, said children's hats sell for \$5, adult hats for \$8 and sweaters for \$10 to \$15.

Werenchuk will be selling her items outside the Royal LePage office at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday during the parade.

daniel@niagaranow.com

Obituary

James Lundy



LUNDY, James – Passed away peacefully at St. Catharines General Hospital on Monday December 1, 2025 in his 39th year. Beloved son of Tony and the late Denise Lundy (2019). Caring brother of Mike (Jennifer) Lundy. Loving uncle of Rose. James will be sadly missed by his family and friends.

Cremation and a private family service has taken place. Arrangements entrusted to Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St. Niagara-on-the-Lake. In lieu of flowers, those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Humane Society of Greater Niagara. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com



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NOTL author searching for Ralph Lauren

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Rita Brown has made her mark in the fashion world many times over.

She spent 43 years at the Shaw Festival as a senior cutter and head of wardrobe. She toured internationally promoting Papiers à la Mode with collaborator Isabelle de Borchgrave, featuring paper dresses Brown designed and de Borchgrave painted. Her work has taken her from New York to St. Petersburg to London.

Brown, now living in Niagara-on-the-Lake's Old Town, is also preparing to release a book in early 2026 on the ladies' riding habit — women's equestrian sportswear — a project that took her 10 years to complete. The book is titled "The Lady's Riding Habit: The Evolution of Women's Equestrian Dress."

"There weren't that many books about it," she said. "And so, I really delved



Rita Brown toured globally for her paper dresses and has spent 10 years writing a book about women's athletic fashion. She hopes someone can put her in touch with Ralph Lauren for permission to republish photos. DAN SMEENK

heavily into it."

But one challenge remains: securing approval to reprint a photo of a notable Ralph Lauren women's sportswear piece.

Brown said photo permissions for the book cost about \$10,000 in total for roughly 150 images, a process that was usually

straightforward. She received permission for every photo within a year — except anything from Ralph Lauren.

The book is moving ahead without those images, but Brown said the omission matters because of Ralph Lauren's influence on the style she is documenting.

"There is no one who, sort of, what shall I say, parlayed his fashion business into a fashion empire by sort of using aspects of both American but I would argue mostly English aristocratic dress," she said. "And very much of it was parts of the riding habit."

She said she hoped to include a "lovely" photograph, but struggled to even reach the company, despite her decades in fashion.

"I tried to get in touch with Ralph Lauren over a period of two years," she said.

After receiving no response, she set the issue aside for a time, then asked her son to reach out to a

friend who she thought might have contacts at the company. That led nowhere, as did her efforts to contact the Ralph Lauren public relations department.

"Nothing seemed to work," said Brown.

That brings her back to NOTL.

Her friend Ruth Denyer wondered whether someone in town might have a connection to Ralph Lauren.

Denyer believes that in NOTL, "there's a way to connect to anyone if you know where to look," citing an example of a local connection that linked her to George Clooney.

Brown hopes someone in NOTL can help her reach the fashion house and secure permission for the image — a detail she says is significant for those who care about the history of women's sport.

"It was the first set of clothing especially made for a woman to participate in sport," she said.

daniel@niagaranow.com

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