

NOTL man **loses bid** to quash Marotta defamation suit

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

A judge has refused to throw out a defamation suit filed by developer Benny Marotta against a Niagara-on-the-Lake senior who

made critical comments on social media about the prominent builder.

In a ruling last Thursday, Justice Edward Morgan of the Ontario Superior Court in Toronto dismissed an application by Stewart

Hall, who had argued his comments on the NOTL 4U Facebook group should be considered protected speech under Ontario's anti-SLAPP legislation.

SLAPP laws, or "strategic litigation against public

participation," are intended to prevent powerful people or organizations from using the courts to silence public criticism.

The case stems from a June 2024 post in the NOTL 4U group, where Hall

accused Marotta and his companies of engaging in corrupt business practices, offering bribes to politicians and employing aggressive tactics against opponents.

Hall's post followed a controversial 5-4 town

council vote that approved Marotta's proposal to build a hotel on the former Parliament Oak school site, which he purchased in 2022.

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Election 2025

Kaiser and Baldinelli run head-to-head in federal election for **third time**

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

All four major parties in Niagara-on-the-Lake's riding have announced their candidates for the snap federal election on April 28.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the New Democrats have selected Shannon Mitchell as their candidate for the Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake riding.

Lifelong Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Andrea Kaiser is the face of the Liberal Party for the riding, facing off against incumbent Conservative Tony Baldinelli.

This year, NOTL's election riding excludes Fort Erie, a municipality that was included in past elections.

The riding now includes Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake, reflected in its name.

Kaiser has run as the Liberal candidate for NOTL's riding twice before, once in 2019 and again in 2021.

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THE WILD WEST OF WINE

Bylaw bypass: Does zoning matter?

How a farm winery isn't following the rules, bylaw enforcement is practically non-existent and competitors are getting frustrated

This is the first in a series of stories about NOTL's "Wild West" of wineries, examining zoning bylaws, restrictions, how some wineries are ignoring those bylaws and restrictions and operating as they please, and how the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake doesn't appear to be enforcing its own bylaws. And we look at whether the solution is to change the rules to ease restrictions or crack down on those who aren't following the existing rules.

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake has a wine problem.

Well, a winery problem. And it centres around the rules for how wineries are allowed to operate.

Under the town's bylaws, there are two distinctions for wineries: Smaller-scale operations are classified as farm wineries, while larger facilities are zoned as estate wineries.



Ferox by Fabian Reis winery has caused a stir in the wine industry. It appears to be operating outside town laws, bringing NOTL's winery zoning requirements and enforcement practices into question. PAIGE SEBURN

With those distinctions come sets of rules for what's allowed — and, importantly, differences in the ways the two operations are taxed.

Farm wineries, which pay only agricultural taxes besides the commercial taxes paid on their maximum 18.5-square-metre re-

tail space, face many restrictions. They cannot host events, can't operate commercial kitchens or serve food of any kind, and are not allowed to have hospitality rooms or dining areas or patios.

Essentially, unless farm wineries have a site-specific permission granted by the town, they

can only produce and sell wine. They can operate a small retail space, where wine tasting is allowed, but can't sell anything besides wine produced on the property, from the grapes it grows on site.

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Bikes for Farmworkers is in **dire need** of donations

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Time to dust off those bicycles sitting in your garage and give them a new life.

Bikes For Farmworkers is

running out of bikes — fast. With fewer than 60 left, it urgently needs adult bike donations to help migrant farmworkers get around Niagara-on-the-Lake this spring and summer.

"Generally, at this time

of the year, we would have at least 150 bikes all ready and refurbished to go out for sales," said Dave Cox, volunteer with the program.

"This is the worst it's been, and I've been here since 2019."

Bikes For Farmworkers is a volunteer-driven outreach organization through Gateway Community Church, selling reconditioned bikes to seasonal farmworkers annually since its inception in 2017.

The program's supply has been dwindling.

In 2022, the program had 420 bikes, but by 2023, that number dropped to just 368. Last year, only 150 bikes



Volunteer Dave Cox with one of the few bikes left.

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Town should discuss seniors housing: Burroughs

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

After a fully booked presentation held Monday night on the state of housing for seniors in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Coun. Gary Burroughs says the next step for the senior housing options group is to connect with council and get the ball rolling on offering the town's aging population more places to live.

"They've done their part, it's really up to us," Burroughs said in an interview. During Monday night's Learn & Live presentation on senior housing, Cindy Grant spoke to a full crowd of around 70 residents on the ongoing housing discussions and the latest findings of its survey.

Late last year, Grant hosted a series of sessions to discuss the group's housing options survey conducted earlier in the year and take in more NOTLer feedback.

By 2031, the age group of 65 to 74 will increase by 13.5 per cent in all five villages of NOTL and by 2041 the age group of 75 and over will be increased by 73 per cent.



The majority of NOTL seniors are aware they need to make a housing change soon, says Cindy Grant.

"This town is getting old," Grant said during her presentation.

The survey found the majority of NOTL residents are living in single-family homes, with 55 per cent of respondents answering that they are currently considering changes but have no plans in place.

"Overwhelmingly, people know they need to do something," Grant said.

Key factors for seniors considering a change were easy access to health care, a range of services and amenities, staying in the community and maintaining social relationships.

Grant noted next steps include meeting with experts and developers to see what options are moving forward.

"We have met with a few

developers and of course the first question is 'Where is the land?'" Grant said.

In order to meet needs, some of these residences may not be in Old Town, Grant said.

"God ain't making more land in Old Town," she said.

She noted that if residences are to be built in Glendale or other villages, the town must ensure that public transportation improves.

Following the data presentation, which included a number of options ranging from resources for aging in place to full-blown new developments for retirees, Grant took time for suggestions from the audience.

Ingrid Regier, a resident at Radiant Care Pleasant Manor, voiced concerns over one of Grant's options that included working with developers to build new accommodations.

"Developers are there to make money," Regier told The Lake Report in an aside.

"Did anybody ever mention affordability or housing?" Regier asked Grant.

One of her biggest concerns was surrounding

parking availability at these potential new developments.

Regier described the chaos caused by the lack of parking at Pleasant Manor, specifically when a resident died and a celebration of life was held on the property.

"There was no parking."

Grant said the group is many steps away from a discussion about parking.

"I know we're many steps away but until we be proactive about it, we're cooked," Regier said.

"There's lots to worry about," Burroughs said. "I don't know what the solutions are."

He noted the several properties outlined during the presentation as potential locations for senior housing, including the old hospital and the old Laura Secord Public School in Queenston.

Burroughs said both sites have potential.

"There has to be, first of all, involvement from the town," he said.

Burroughs was the only councillor to attend the presentation Monday night, noting that Coun. Sandra O'Connor could not make it.

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Town to save \$539K with vehicle lease program

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Town council has voted in favour of leasing Niagara-on-the-Lake's light-duty vehicles through Enterprise's corporate fleet management program, a decision expected to save the town an estimated \$539,043 over the next 10 years.

In the recommendation to council, staff said the agreement, receiving seven votes in favour and one against at a March 25 council meeting, will make the town's reserve of fleet vehicles more sustainable.

The town's fleet currently includes 48 vehicles, 37 of which are light or medium-duty, such as vans and trucks. Many of these vehicles are aging due to a two-year pause in replacements caused by a delay for a fleet review and funding issues, the recommendation said.

Under the new plan, vehicles will be replaced more frequently, every 48 months, rather than the current practice of keeping them for up to 10 years.



Town treasurer Kyle Freeborn said the vehicle lease program is "the most fiscally responsible" decision for the town, during a March 25 council meeting. JULIA SACCO

The aim is to maximize the fleet's value and reduce fuel and maintenance costs associated with older vehicles by \$32,000 annually.

By outsourcing fleet management, the town will also eliminate the need for a dedicated fleet coordinator, saving an additional \$132,000 each year.

The town plans to re-purpose funds from other infrastructure or capital projects to cover the lease program's costs for the first two years.

In 2026, staff estimate the budget will require \$170,000 — \$100,000 for heavy-duty vehicle replacements and \$70,000 for future lease payments, which will increase by \$10,000

annually until 2035.

Without this investment, the town may be forced to reduce the fleet and cut services, said the recommendation from staff.

Darren MacKenzie, the town's manager of public works, said the program will allow town mechanics to focus on heavy-duty and specialized equipment, where the majority of their time is already spent, while Enterprise handles light-duty vehicles.

Kyle Freeborn, the town's treasurer and director of corporate services, called it "the most fiscally responsible choice at this time."

However, Coun. Sandra O'Connor opposed the move and suggested a defer-

ral, which was defeated. She's concerned about risk management and argues the timing isn't right in light of tariffs.

"I'd love to reconsider it in the future once we have more stability in our tariff situation, but not now," she said.

O'Connor added, while Enterprise has Canadian branches, it is American-owned, which contrasts with previous town discussions about supporting Canadian-made products.

MacKenzie clarified Enterprise Fleet Management Canada Inc. is a Canadian corporation, which pays taxes in Canada.

But O'Connor wanted to know about profits, which she said go to the U.S.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa clarified that, like any corporation, shareholders of a company receive a dividend on their shares.

Which means Enterprise Holdings, the U.S.-based company, would generate revenue from its operations in Canada through Enterprise Fleet Management Canada Inc.

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Fort Erie no longer part of NOTL's federal riding

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

The April 28 federal election will see the votes split up differently among the municipalities that make up the eastern end of the Niagara Peninsula.

Niagara-on-the-Lake's riding will no longer include Fort Erie and will

be comprised of just NOTL and Niagara Falls. It also has a new name, reflecting that change: Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake.

This all comes after the abolition of the Niagara Centre riding, which has been replaced by a new riding called Niagara South. It will include Fort Erie and most of the old Niagara

Centre riding. Voters in Welland, Thorold and Port Colborne also will cast their ballots in Niagara South.

Because of this change, the parts of St. Catharines that used to be part of the Niagara Centre riding now belong to the Niagara West and St. Catharines ridings.

The new voting map was

created by the independent electoral boundaries commission as part of a major redistribution of ridings in 2023.

In the last federal election, on Sept. 20, 2021, Fort Erie had a population of 32,901, according to StatsCan, while NOTL's population was 19,088 and Niagara Falls' was 94,415.

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Kaiser and Baldinelli will face off in federal election

Continued from Front Page

Conservative Baldinelli has won the last two federal elections for Niagara Falls.

In 2021, Baldinelli won with 37.9 per cent of votes compared to Kaiser's 33.5 per cent.

Kaiser currently holds the position of regional councillor, winning the election in 2022 with 44 per cent of votes.

She is well known in NOTL for involvement in the wine community as the daughter of Inniskillin co-founder Karl Kaiser and proprietor of her own brand, Drea's Wine Co.

In the past, Kaiser has been chair of Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake and retail manager at Reif Estate Winery.



Liberal Andrea Kaiser and Conservative Tony Baldinelli.



Born and raised in Niagara Falls, Tony Baldinelli began his career in politics in 1988, working as legislative assistant to MP Rob Nicholson.

Baldinelli has worked as a public relations, public affairs and community relations specialist with Hill and Knowlton Strategies in Toronto before returning to Niagara Falls, where he held the title of senior manager of communications and

stakeholder relations for the Niagara Parks Commission.

In October 2019, Baldinelli was elected as Member of Parliament for Niagara Falls and has held the position since.

Green Party member Karen Fraser, a resident of Niagara Falls, will run for Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake.

A member of the party since 2005, Fraser has run in a number of elections in the past, including for a

spot as regional councillor in 2022.

New Democrat Mitchell currently holds a position as board trustee for the District School Board of Niagara.

Owen Riel, president of the Niagara Falls Federal NDP Riding Association, said information on Mitchell will be available on the party website in the coming days.

The April 28 election comes shortly after the snap provincial election on Feb. 27.

In a statement outside Rideau Hall on March 23, Prime Minister Mark Carney said the election was called in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's "unjustified trade actions and his threats to our sovereignty."

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Social media ‘not a defamation-free zone,’ says judge

Continued from Front Page

Morgan determined Hall’s statements went beyond fair comment and could reasonably be seen as defamatory. The decision means Marotta’s suit against Hall can continue.

In his decision, he described the post as “intemperate” and an “ad hominem attack” that implied widespread bribery and corruption without any factual basis.

Hall told The Lake Report he plans to appeal Morgan’s ruling.

“It was shocking and disappointing to receive the judge’s decision on my motion to dismiss the \$2 million libel suit brought against me by Solmar and Benny Marotta,” he said in a statement.

“I feel that it was unfair and unreasonable based on the evidence presented to court.”

Hall said he removed the post a week after it was published.

“I am not editorializing when I say that the tone and content of the message is, by any measure, intemperate. The fact that it prompted a lawsuit is perhaps the least surprising thing about it.”

JUSTICE EDWARD MORGAN
ONTARIO SUPERIOR COURT

“To be sued for a Facebook post that commented on an issue of public interest, was up for seven days, was seen by a limited number of people and removed at the request of Solmar’s lawyer is disturbing,” he said.

“I view this as an attempt by a large corporation and wealthy individual to silence an ordinary citizen commenting on an issue of public importance.”

In a statement supplied via his lawyer, Marotta said he was “very pleased with the judge’s decision and in particular his findings and look forward to total vindication at trial.”

“I am hopeful that all development applications in the town can be dealt with on merit without council



Prominent developer Benny Marotta, right, is suing NOTL resident Stewart Hall for defamation for a Facebook post Hall made, which accused him of widespread corruption and bribery. Hall’s anti-SLAPP motion was dismissed.

and staff being subjected to false, accusatory and inflammatory influences, and as always I look forward to working with our community.”

The Facebook post and its consequences

Hall’s post specifically questioned whether councillors who voted in favour of Marotta’s hotel project had received undisclosed gifts or payments.

He encouraged readers to search online for past legal disputes involving Marotta’s company, Solmar, and accused the developer of bullying political opponents through lawsuits.

Marotta’s lawyers argued the statements were not only false but damaging to their client’s reputation and business interests.

They pointed to investigations by police and the town’s integrity commissioner, both of which found no wrongdoing related to a \$10,000 cash envelope Marotta handed to Coun. Gary Burroughs in March 2023. Burroughs returned the envelope and no charges were laid.

Hall admitted in court in February that he was aware no legal action resulted from the incident, but he continued to suggest corruption in his Facebook post.

Judge’s analysis: Fair comment or defamation?

To succeed in an anti-SLAPP motion, a defendant must demonstrate their speech was a matter of public interest and had substantial merit, the judge noted. The court must also weigh the harm caused by the speech against the public interest in allowing it.

Morgan found that while

development projects and municipal decisions are matters of public interest, Hall’s statements crossed the line into defamation.

He noted the Facebook group had 3,100 members, including town councillors, and that Hall’s words could have serious repercussions for both Marotta and local officials.

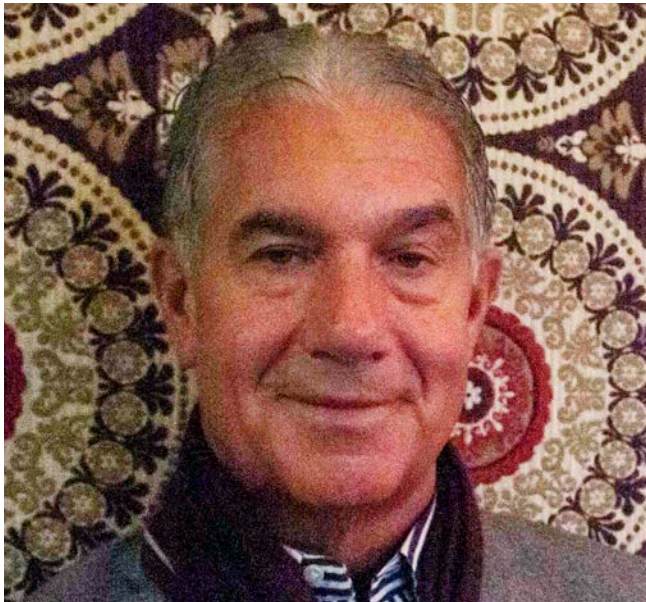
“The thrust of the post is that the plaintiff and his companies have a longstanding practice of bribing public officials and of suing all who oppose him,” Morgan wrote.

“I am very pleased with the Judge’s decision and in particular his findings and look forward to total vindication at trial. I am hopeful that all development applications in the town can be dealt with on merit without council and staff being subjected to false, accusatory and inflammatory influences.”

BENNY MAROTTA

“The two posts also convey that those public officials who support the plaintiff’s real estate projects ... have either been intimidated or received bribes and are equally corrupt.”

Morgan said the message “is designed to do more than to galvanize opposition to the Parliament Oak development project; it is designed to disqualify any and all development by



(Marotta).”

Hall’s claim that he was merely posing questions or encouraging research was dismissed by the judge, who noted that rhetorical questions such as “How many received cash or gifts in kind from Marotta that were not reported?” were clearly intended as accusations.

“The statement is a sardonic way of suggesting that of course there were other cash gifts,” Morgan wrote. “For the defendant to say that he was just raising questions is, frankly, to understate the intelligence of the reader.”

Morgan also noted that Hall had not actually read the articles he referenced in his post and conceded under cross-examination that he did not believe some of his own allegations were true.

“I make no comment on the content of this Facebook post — i.e. whether it contains truth, whether it is ‘just desserts’ for the plaintiff, whether it is an effective form of community advocacy, etc. But I am not editorializing when I say that the tone and content of the message is, by any measure, intemperate. The fact that it prompted a lawsuit is perhaps the least surprising thing about it,” Morgan wrote.

Public interest vs. harm

In weighing the potential harm of the lawsuit against the importance of public debate, Morgan determined that Hall’s accusations carried serious consequences for Marotta’s business and reputation.

He noted the developer’s projects, including the Parliament Oak hotel, require ongoing municipal approvals and that public perception could impact future votes.

“Being known as a corrupt developer whose supporters take bribes is bound to be a type of harm that will cause serious detriment to the plaintiff and his business,” Morgan wrote.

He continued that “NOTL is a town of 19,000 residents, and in the small-town environment described by the (Hall) one can reasonably assume that a significant percentage of the community will have seen or been referred to (Hall’s) post.”

While acknowledging the importance of public discussion on local development, Morgan ruled that Hall’s approach — levelling serious, unsubstantiated accusations — did not contribute meaningfully to the debate.

“There is, of course, legitimate public interest in expression that addresses real estate development and local development applications,” Morgan wrote.

“I view this as an attempt by a large corporation and wealthy individual to silence an ordinary citizen commenting on an issue of public importance.”

STEWART HALL

“But that interest does not weigh heavily on the ledger where the expression, as here, takes the form of serious, unsubstantiated accusations against a developer and city councillors rather than an actual critique of a development policy or plan.”

Morgan also rejected arguments that Facebook

should be considered a more lenient platform for public discourse, writing that “social media is not a defamation-free zone.”

He acknowledged Marotta’s lawyers conceded that he “is or has been engaged in some personal litigation against the mayor of Caledon, as prominently mentioned in the (Hall’s) original post,” but since that legal action is unrelated to any development proposal in Caledon or elsewhere, “(Hall’s) reference to it in the context of his Facebook message about development approvals is thus an entirely gratuitous reference injected as an element of character assassination rather than as a bona fide argument about (Marotta’s) real estate developments.”

“The message is designed to do more than to galvanize opposition to the Parliament Oak development project; it is designed to disqualify any and all development by (Marotta). Not only does it call (Marotta) a criminal operator, but it ‘casts aspersions,’ as (Hall) has conceded, on any officials who might agree with him.”

Hall argued that his statements were merely questions, however Morgan found that “the impugned Facebook posts were designed to lower the Plaintiff’s reputation in the eyes of the reasonable reader, and they are bound to do so ... The message cannot be rationally understood in any other way.”

Morgan said the comments are more than questions, but “piercing barbs, whose form is a question but whose meaning is an accusation.”

He decided Hall has no valid anti-SLAPP defence to the defamation claim and dismissed the motion.

Next steps in the case

With Hall’s anti-SLAPP motion dismissed, the defamation lawsuit can proceed, barring a settlement. If found liable, Hall could face financial damages for harming Marotta’s reputation.

Marotta has filed a submission for the legal costs pertaining to the anti-SLAPP motion. Marotta’s lawyer, William McDowell, a partner at Lenczner Slaght, would not comment on the costs being sought as it is still before the judge.

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Bikes for Farmworkers seeks donations

Continued from Front Page

were repaired.
This year, it started with just 80 bikes — and has already sold 24.
Former NOTL fire chief Ken Eden, who co-ordinates the group, says these bikes are a key part of migrant workers' daily lives and are the only form of personal transportation they have.

"The farmer takes them (the farmworkers) in for groceries and banking, etc., once a week, but other than that, if they want to go anywhere for any reason, visit, shop," Eden said.

And while migrant workers generally don't use bikes on farms, those working in greenhouses sometimes do. "They have huge greenhouses. So they'll actually ride them around between the greenhouses and within the greenhouses," Cox said, adding that this shows just how essential these bikes are.

"It's their primary mode of transportation — they really don't have any other options, they don't have vehicles," he said. "It's part of their living."

Bikes For Farmworkers spend at least \$20, often more, refurbishing each bike. The money raised from bike sales, which are \$25 each to keep them affordable, goes into buying parts like tubes, cables and



Dave Cox repairs one of the few bikes the organization has to help migrant farmworkers travel around Niagara-on-the-Lake this spring and summer. PAIGE SEBURN

tires — which can be up to \$30 for one.

When bikes are too damaged to fix, the volunteers salvage usable parts and store them for repairs on other bikes, which keeps costs down and makes bikes affordable for migrant workers.

So, even if the bikes aren't winning any beauty contests, they are still incredibly useful — so bring them in anyway, says Cox.

Bikes are limited to one per year, per farmworker.

Dennis Blake, now in his third year of volunteering, said this helps ensure bikes are cared for, which in turn helps address the ongoing shortage by protecting the bikes the program has.

"If they lose the bike or it

gets stolen, well, they have to wait till the following year to buy another one," he said. "Usually, the farmer, wherever they're working, will let them store the bikes there."

Blake said the need for bikes is urgent as more migrants arrive.

To help, Bikes For Farmworkers is holding a bike drive on the next two Saturdays, March 29 and April 5.

The organization also offers year-round bike pickups from nearly anywhere nearby — just call 289-547-7442.

"We've been known to go to Port Colborne to get a couple of bikes," he said.

The bike drive will take place at the Old Virgil pub-

lic school at 1665 Four Mile Creek Rd. on March 29 and April 5, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Volunteers will be on-site to assist with donations, Blake said.

"Hopefully, we can get some donations from the community, so that we can start building up a supply of bikes throughout the summer, to make sure we get enough for the guys," said Cox.

The shop is open for bike sales on Sundays from 2 to 5 p.m., with drop-offs welcome during that time.

Repairs happen on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., when donations are also accepted. Starting in May, Thursday hours will extend to 7 p.m.

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Agri-businesses pessimistic about the future as U.S.-Canada trade war continues to ramp up

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

Businesses in the agriculture industry in Canada are facing mounting uncertainty as U.S.-Canada trade tensions and Chinese tariffs drive the sector's confidence to historic lows, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business reports.

The confidence small businesses have in Canadian agriculture took a nosedive in March, down to 21.3 index points, compared to 49.1 points in February.

This marks the lowest level ever recorded by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business — below the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2008 financial crisis lows.

Niagara-on-the-Lake's fruit growers, wineries and related suppliers are particularly vulnerable to rising U.S. tariffs and China's 100 per cent duties on canola oil,

peas and pork, the federation says.

"Chinese tariffs are coming at the worst possible time given the ongoing uncertainty in our trading relationship with the United States," said Simon Gaudreault, the federation's chief economist and vice-president of research.

The federation's bilingual policy analyst, Juliette Nicolaÿ, said growers nationwide are delaying investments and crop planning amid tariff uncertainty, and Niagara producers will have to navigate 'complicated' supply chain decisions.

"Some farmers have delayed expansion plans, such as increasing the wage of their employees, delayed plans of investments, so it's very worrisome," said Nicolaÿ.

The federation expects agri-businesses nationwide to raise prices by 3.7 per cent to offset losses, with



Farm workers prep for the season near the intersection of Lakeshore and Read roads.

grocery chains additionally raising prices for items at the cash register.

Niagara consumers could see higher grocery costs as local producers pass on expenses.

Chronic labour shortages and red tape compound challenges for NOTL farmers, Nicolaÿ said, stating that the federation calculates most farmers "spend 32 days just filling out red tape" paperwork, which could be used to focus on operations.

While 7 per cent of agri-businesses plan layoffs compared to 19 per cent across all sectors, less demand risks inventory not getting sold, she added.

Nicolaÿ also stressed indirect agricultural impacts on producers that don't trade with the U.S., such as Ontario's hog farmers, who may still struggle to feed their livestock because of impacts on corn farmers who are affected by U.S. tariffs.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business is urging policymakers to cut red tape and expand inter-provincial trade.

"Shopping local small businesses is really important because every dollar spent here keeps 66 cents in the community," said Nicolaÿ.

Ontario's small business optimism ranks lowest nationally at 23.4 index points. andrew@niagaranow.com



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Complaint-based enforcement ‘pits neighbours against neighbours’

Continued from Front Page

Estate wineries, which pay much higher commercial taxes because of their secondary uses, are permitted to hold events, have larger retail spaces, and offer hospitality rooms where wine and food can be served without the use of commercial cooking equipment.

Farm wineries must grow, crush, ferment and bottle all wine on-site. Estate wineries must also crush and ferment on-site, but can source grapes from anywhere in Ontario after first attempting to use fruit from NOTL and then the Niagara Region. Bottling must be possible to do on-site, but is not a legal requirement.

While these rules are clearly spelled out in by-laws, some wine producers don't seem to be following them, and the town's enforcement of those bylaws has been called into question by competing wineries.

The issue has raised a larger question of what is fair, how wineries that aren't following the law should be treated, and whether those laws need to be updated to reflect a changing wine industry.

Farm winery appears to be skirting the rules

Ferox by Fabian Reis, at 1829 Concession 4 Rd., is classified as a farm winery but appears to be operating as an estate winery.

The winery, owned by Fabian Reis and his wife Stephanie, serves food, operates a patio, hosts events and doesn't appear to be using 100 per cent of its own grapes in the production of its wine.

Reis' father, Bruno Reis, and his mother, Claudia Konzelmann, are both executives with NOTL wineries, at Reif Estate Winery and Konzelmann Estate Winery respectively.

His grandfather, the late Herbert Konzelmann, was a key figure in shaping and guiding the Niagara wine industry.

With both parents in key roles at estate wineries — subject to different regulations than farm wineries — Reis is no stranger to the industry's rules and distinctions.

It's unclear exactly how long Ferox has been operating as an estate winery, but Tripadvisor reviews from someone named Rose indicate it has had a patio since at least April 2023 and Ferox's Instagram shows it has been preparing food for retail sale to the public for immediate consumption

— defined by the town as a restaurant — since at least February 2022.

Reis has not responded in detail to several requests over the past month for comment nor to an extensive list of questions from The Lake Report to clarify Ferox's operations.

However, online images, customer reviews and the company's own OpenTable descriptions show Ferox offering a hospitality patio, restaurant-style meals and events. Meanwhile, under NOTL's rules, all it should be offering is — at most — wine tastings.

A question of fairness

Other winery operators, like Paul Harber, brand manager and proprietor of Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery, are asking why there are restrictions in place at all, if they aren't going to mean anything.

He says wineries that skirt the rules — and the town's lack of enforcement of its own bylaws — create an unfair playing field for wineries that are doing things by the book.

“Out of respect to the industries that we're in, or the community that we're operating in, we should follow the rules,” he said. “I'm not a fan of begging for forgiveness instead of asking for permission.”

He is wondering why the town is allowing wineries to operate illegally, why some operators aren't respecting the bylaws and what needs to be done to remedy the situation.

Harber doesn't want to see any winery shut down, but he wants a level playing field and questions why the bylaws, which were passed more than 30 years ago, are in place at all if they aren't obeyed and the town isn't actively enforcing them.

“Everybody should come through the front door on what they truly intend to do and want to be,” Harber said. “The town and the businesses should work together.”

“Not everybody will get what they want, but let's try to get everybody to at least get what they need,” he said.

Part of the problem is that the town only investigates a bylaw infraction if it receives a complaint. So far, there have been no complaints about Ferox.

And even if a complaint is filed, the town tries to “engage and educate” before it takes action, according to Kirsten McCauley, NOTL's director of community and development services.

McCauley said the town



Some of the questions that went unanswered

The Lake Report submitted the following questions to Fabian Reis. They have gone unanswered for over a month.

Has Ferox hosted tastings in separate spaces or events without proper permits? Reviews and social media posts describe tastings in indoor spaces not currently zoned for them.

For your extensive menu of more than 10 items, such as house cured salmon and cornish hen, do you use commercial cooking equipment?

On OpenTable, Ferox has a profile which identifies The Patio @ Ferox Winery as a farm-to-table outdoor pop-up restaurant. Is this accurate?

Where do you source your grapes? Your proposal said predominantly locally — what does that mean?

How do you respond to those who feel Ferox's approach to estate winery designation has been more about asking for forgiveness rather than asking for permission?

Is Ferox currently allowed to have a restaurant on site? Does it or has it at any time?

Has Ferox been operating under the conditions of a farm winery?

Has Ferox been operating under the conditions of an estate winery?

Is Ferox currently allowed to have a commercial kitchen on site? Does it or has it at any time?

“does not actively monitor postings on the Ferox Winery social media accounts or related messaging directed at the general public.”

If a complaint is filed and an issue is identified, the town notifies the owner and gives them a chance to address it or seek the necessary approvals.

Enforcement is only pursued if the town's efforts to educate the owner are unsuccessful.

Harber said that approach is unfair.

“If you're not doing anything until a complaint comes in, you're then kind of pitting neighbours against neighbours. That's not a good way to go about things. People shouldn't have to call each other out for being offside,” he said.

Given that no complaints have been received about Ferox, it has not been investigated by the town.

Wineries can apply for special event permits, but McCauley said Ferox has never applied for one, nor does the town have records of past hospitality events at Ferox.

Zoning request further complicates things

The matter got even more complicated when Ferox submitted an application for estate winery status on Nov. 19, 2024.

It's a layered situation involving two properties with combined acreage. One of the two properties owned by the winery — the site of the former Harvest Barn and briefly Alitura — already has estate winery status. However, the property where Ferox sits and operates does not.

During its presentation, the winery sought permission for its “future” hospitality room, kitchen and patio. The presentation also suggested the winery is us-



Top: A road sign advertises the winery's patio and food pairings, despite it not being legally zoned for such operations. PAIGE SEBURN
Bottom: Fabian Reis, owner of Ferox winery, in a Facebook photo. SOURCED

ing grapes sourced off-site.

Questions sent to Reis to clarify Ferox's operations also went unanswered, but it appears that Ferox is asking permission to do things it has already done.

While the requested zoning change is still being evaluated by the town, it raises ethical questions about granting permission to operators who might not be complying with town bylaws.

Currently, the size of the winery is the town's main focus. An estate winery must be at least 8.09 hectares and Ferox is only 4.27 hectares.

The only thing Reis would comment on is that he wants to transfer this existing estate licence to Ferox.

“It's all being dealt with by the planners,” he said.

But the bigger question seems to be whether the town should grant the estate status, given that the winery already appears to be operating as an estate winery without permission and without paying commercial taxes on its secondary uses like hosting events, serving food and operating a patio.

Harber says the whole situation raises further questions about what is fair. He wonders whether the town would grant estate sta-

tus to a winery that doesn't meet the requirements and has been ignoring the town's rules already.

A question of law

The situation also raises questions about whether the current zoning system is still relevant in 2025.

Town councillors had varying opinions on whether the zoning requirements need to be reviewed, as well as whether enforcement standards need to change.

Coun. Andrew Niven, who is well-versed in the wine industry as director of marketing and hospitality at Konzelmann for 12 years, doesn't think the zoning laws are outdated.

He said many of the businesses not following the rules likely aren't aware of their violations. He sees the need for something like a “welcome package” to provide businesses with clearer guidance and expectations surrounding zoning requirements.

“There's a way to be more proactive to make (businesses) aware of such bylaws — then we may see more compliance,” he said.

This approach relies on businesses wanting to follow the rules, which Niven said he hopes is the case.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa does not see a need for updated bylaws and blamed previous councils for what he says is an outdated official plan. Council has prioritized getting that updated, he said.

“That process will include things that will feed into the bylaws and regulations around property use,” he said.

He encouraged businesses and residents to contribute their opinions.

“The official plan process is a perfect opportunity to give your input and your opinion,” he said. “Then we can review that and consider how we can make that process better for all businesses and residents.”

Coun. Erwin Wiens, who previously was a part-owner of the Harvest Barn property, agreed with Zalepa. He doesn't think the zoning system is broken and said his preference is to “bring people into compliance through good planning.”

“I think it works great the way we have it now. You know, there's always hiccups along the way, but the system really works well,” he said.

Zoning regulations were initially established at least 30 years ago to balance

Continued on Page 7

Councillors have mixed opinions on bylaw

Continued from Page 6

provincial regulations with municipal policies and were designed to protect farmland, he said.

"I'm very comfortable with how the town previously came to how we had those rules," he said.

The town's original restrictions on wineries date back 45 years, to 1980, but the main bylaws governing estate and farm wineries were passed in 1994, said the town's communications co-ordinator Marah Minor.

Wiens also values the complaint-based system of enforcement.

"Our goal is to get compliance, not convictions," he said. "But then, if we have to go to conviction, that is the system. And I'm a big fan of the system."

As far as enforcement goes, he doesn't want to see the town spend money to hire more bylaw officers, but said he is "always open to slight adjustments."

He clarified that when making a complaint, the burden of proof does not fall on the complainant. Bylaw staff conduct a full investigation, determining the best course of action. But he said thorough information in a complaint is always helpful.

Coun. Maria Mavridis had a slightly different take.

"There's a lot of bylaws that we're looking at to update, like even the noise bylaw, and all sorts of bylaws and policies," she said.

When it comes to enforcement, she said bylaw officers should conduct regular visits, similar to health and safety inspectors, to help en-

sure compliance and avoid confusion.

But finding the balance is tricky, she said, and she thinks an updated system could be necessary to enforce fines or issue compliance notices.

Mavridis, Niven, and Wiens agreed if a business realizes it isn't operating legally it should pause any illegal operations until it addresses the concerns, but Zalepa doesn't particularly think so. He says businesses should work with the town to bring their situation into compliance.

Harber, on the other hand, said Ravine has always obeyed the process and doesn't think it's fair that others aren't being held to the same standard.

For him and other operators, it's not just semantics.

There are tax implications and other concerns.

And it raises the question of whether a winery that's been following the rules has been systematically hurt by the town's lack of enforcement of its own bylaws.

If the illegal operators aren't incurring costs that a legal operator is, then Harber argues it creates an uneven playing field in which a good actor is essentially punished for following the rules.

On the other side of the coin, are farm wineries that obey the rules, and are making less profit because of it, also hurt by this? And who is at fault, the bad actors, or the town? Or both?

Time will tell if the town approves estate winery status for Ferox.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

Social media tells story of Ferox operations

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

With its current zoning, Ferox by Fabian Reis is not permitted to hold events, nor have a hospitality room or patio.

But a Google review from user Jamie O'Donnell four months ago describes "indoor tasting rooms on both ground and second floors."

Ferox's website states, "We strive to host a variety of events for all our guests at the winery. From live music to dinners to pick-up parties, there is always something happening at Ferox!"

It is one of many online posts about what Ferox has to offer at its site on Concession 4 Road.

Three years ago, a Jan. 28, 2022 Instagram post on Ferox's account promoted a gourmet, \$250 per person four-course meal for Valentine's Day in its "intimate barrel cellar."

This past Nov. 22, an Instagram post promoted a Dec. 1 event offering the public wine, food, music and vendors, which appeared to take place in the production barn.

An Aug. 6 Instagram mention also promoted a "Truffles x Ferox" event offering a four-course meal for 40 guests, which also appeared to take place in the production barn.

An event on the patio has been promoted, too. An Oct. 5, 2023 Instagram item advertised an Oct. 13, 2023 pet fundraiser on the



Ferox's Instagram doesn't shy away from promoting its events, which the winery is not permitted to host.

patio with a menu featuring lobster grilled cheese and Wagyu beef hot dogs.

That patio, which already exists, is part of Ferox's "planned" expansion, should it receive estate winery status.

Farm wineries typically aren't allowed patios either — amendments and agreements under the Ontario Planning Act are required — and if approved, a site plan control process must follow, said the town's communications co-ordinator Marah Minor.

Consulting firm NPG's planning report describes the "proposed" patio as an agriculture-related space for wine tastings with food pairings.

Minor said the patio would be located between the retail barn and the production building. However, online reviews and images show the patio already operating with seating that exceeds what's outlined in Ferox's application.

O'Donnell's review said: "Upstairs is a small balcony with a few seats looking over the vineyard. Small outdoor seating areas are at the front and side of the

OpenTable and lists more than 10 extensive menu items, such as house-cured salmon and Cornish hen.

However, under the town's bylaws, Ferox technically can't even offer customers something as small as a cheese board.

Meanwhile, that Aug. 6 post states "40 guests enjoyed a 4-course meal curated by @thepatio_ferox, spearheaded by Chef @adriano_cpz."

A Google review by user Rick M on Oct. 24 also mentioned more dishes, including squash gnocchi.

And a June 9, 2023 post had sausages and oysters prepared on a grill outdoors. Plus, the post for Dec. 1 said "chef @alexeats will be doing two scheduled food and wine pairings."

Ferox's website says its "food program" is temporarily offline but plans to reopen. Its OpenTable profile describes the restaurant as weather-dependent, though a March 3 Google review from Brenda Harwood mentioned "hors d'oeuvres."

Fabian Reis, who owns the winery with his wife Stephanie, has not responded to multiple requests for comment or The Lake Report's questions on Ferox's operations.

He only stated that: "We all know there's an existing estate licence already at Harvest Barn and all we're doing is — we want to transfer it to our location over at Ferox."

"So, that's all that can be said at this point."

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Firefighters **skate and educate** the public on fire prevention

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

Unless you know a firefighter in your life, it's not common to see them and get to talk to them on the job.

And, as Todd Foley, volunteer public educator with NOTL Fire & Emergency Services puts it, the times they do see them, when something bad is happening, doesn't give people an opportunity to talk with them properly.

"If people see us during emergencies, it's already a bad day," he said.

Foley, along with firefighters and volunteers from the local fire department, was at the Meridian Credit Union Arena on Saturday afternoon for a public skating event promoting fire safety and prevention.

"We'd rather meet them here, answer questions and prevent crises," he said.

The event is part of the fire department's efforts to reach out more to the community. Taking the lead from past public recommendations, it started a volunteer public education team last January.



Firefighters were at the Virgil arena on Saturday to raise awareness about fire prevention and safety. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

The "Skating with Firefighters" event was free to enter if skaters provided a short video of themselves testing their home smoke alarms. Otherwise, standard public skating fees applied.

Foley said he wants to normalize proactive safety concerns and ensure people feel comfortable with their firefighters.

"If people go home with one or two things they didn't know before, I'm happy," he said.

Fire prevention officer Dylan Skubel said its community outreach work is about strengthening the trust people have in them, while addressing ongoing issues preventing fire safety, such as not testing smoke alarms at home.

"Only working smoke alarms save lives," he said.

"Test your smoke alarms monthly and make sure that when the clocks change, you change your batteries — and all smoke alarms expire after 10 years, even if they're hard-wired."

Skubel said that the new

public education team's creation followed Fort Erie's success doing the same thing with its fire department. After some discussion, NOTL's fire department decided to try it themselves.

"We've had a lot of interest from groups in the community asking us to come out and set up and we just didn't have the staff of the time to get out there and do these events," he said.

"We were relying a lot on our firefighters."

Ten volunteers are currently on the public education team, planning a presentation at Crossroads Public School in May, as well as summer events and looking for more opportunities, like the skating event, to spread awareness.

"They've been set up the community centre a couple of times just talking to people with fire safety."

The firefighters' mascot, Sparky, joined Saturday's skate, and attendees received tote bags, safety pamphlets and firefighter merch from a table set up at the front of the arena.

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Experience a surreal world at the Pumphouse’s latest art exhibition

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre’s upcoming exhibition will allow Niagara-on-the-Lake residents to explore human and animal connections in fluid, dream-like compositions, states a media release from the centre.

“Paintings by Geoff Farnsworth” opens March 26 in the Joyner Gallery and will feature a blend of abstraction and figurative art.

An opening reception will be held on Sunday, April 6, from 2 to 4 p.m., where Farnsworth will discuss his creative process at 2:30 p.m.

Farnsworth, a St. Catharines-based artist who studied at the Art Students League in New York, has been influenced by past and present painters, abstract expressionism, film and music, according to the release.

His dynamic use of colour and form submerges viewers into a surreal world of reflection, it states.

“I want my environments



Geoff Farnsworth at work on one of his dynamic pieces. He will be available to discuss his creative process with NOTL residents at the opening reception of ‘Paintings by Geoff Farnsworth’ on April 6, 2025. SUPPLIED

to be dreamlike and open for exploration,” he states in the release. “I hope the feeling and inspiration from my paintings stay with viewers, encouraging them to see differently and create.”

Farnsworth, a St. Catharines-based artist, studied at the Art Students League in New York and was mentored by William Scharf, a protégé of Mark Rothko, the famed American painter and a key figure in abstract expressionism.

His influences include abstract expressionism, as well as past and present painters, film and music. His works have been showcased in major cities across North America, Europe and the Caribbean.

The exhibition runs through April 27. To see some of Farnsworth’s work, visit niagarapumphouse.ca/exhibitions/paintings-by-geoff-farnsworth-mar-26-2025

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Tourism master plan deferred

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors have deferred approval of the tourism strategy master plan until next month’s meeting on April 29.

Despite the deferral, Coun. Tim Balasiuk was appointed to the tourism board of directors during the meeting.

Consultant Robin Garrett presented during Tuesday night’s council meeting with concerns that amendments made to the plan fundamentally change the original strategy.

“We were actually quite elated with the final product,” Garrett said during her presentation.

“I’m asking council to approve the strategy as it was presented by the tourism strategy committee, or at least give us an opportunity to collaborate with you.”

A major concern of Garrett’s was the removal of the term “wine country” from the tourism vision statement.

Some edits also removed the theme of collaboration from the original strategy,



CAO Bruce Zvaniga says councillors can still make changes to the tourism masterplan. JULIA SACCO

Garrett said.

“The secret sauce to success is collaboration, alignment and coordination between stakeholders, between government, industry and residents,” she said.

Following around an hour of discussion between councillors, it was agreed to be revisited in a month.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita agreed that wine country should be included in the strategy.

“The strategy is suggesting to leverage the strength of wine country, and that’s generally what you want to do, is take your greatest strength and leverage it,” she said.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor said she would like to go back to what the original objective was when council requested the proposal.

“By focusing on the wine industry, I don’t think it addresses the other elements in here that we asked them to do,” she said.

Overall, O’Connor said the plan needs a bit more work.

“I think it’s very close. There’s a lot of really good things in here,” she said.

“But there’s a little more work that needs to be done.”

Chief administrator Bruce Zvaniga said the town can take comfort in the fact that the master plan is a policy document.

“Making amends to it is still something that council has the ability to do,” he said.

Coun. Erwin Wiens moved for a deferral on the decision until next month and motion was passed, with Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and Couns. Cheropita and Maria Mavridis voting against the deferral.

Following the vote, a ballot was held to select a member of council to sit on the tourism board of directors.

After two rounds of votes, Balasiuk was selected.

Cheropita and O’Connor also submitted their names for consideration.

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Rotary seeks homes for Holiday House Tour

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake residents still have the chance to see their home included along the 2025 Holiday House Tour route.

Returning for its 26th year on Dec. 5 and 6, the NOTL Rotary Club is looking for homes to include in the tour.

Chair of events Nancy Bailey told The Lake Report that historic homes are always enjoyed by guests on the tour.

“Niagara-on-the-Lake is known for our history and our beautiful homes so that’s the sort of criteria we try to fill,” Bailey said.

The tour is also interested in homes that may be built to look historic, as well as unique modern designs, she said.

“We just love to showcase homes and we’re proud to do that.”

Bailey noted the tour is the Rotary Club’s largest annual fundraiser.

The historic Brockamour Manor is one of the houses that have committed to being on the house tour this year. The Rotary club is looking for more homes to show off. SUPPLIED

Proceeds from the tour directly support international and NOTL charitable projects, including NOTL Palliative Care, the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre’s Healing Arts and C.A.R.E Program, the Friends of Fort George summer student program, the NOTL

Museum’s expansion program and more.

The Holiday House Tour donated around \$89,800 in local charitable donations and another \$78,100 internationally from the 2023 fiscal year, Bailey said.

“People are really making a difference when they do-

nate their homes and when they come visit on a holiday house tour,” she said.

To express interest in having your home included in the tour, reach out to Bailey at nancy.bailey@evrealstate.com or Kevin Stokes at kbstokes170264@gmail.com.

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NOTL's Kaleb Diestch is no treat for IceDogs

Eighteen-year-old Kaleb Diestch was mostly nervous leading up to playing with the Ottawa 67's against the Niagara IceDogs last Thursday.

"I definitely felt a little nervous in front of everyone, knowing that there's a bunch of people that I know and people who support me that are coming to watch me play," Diestch told The Lake Report.

Lucky for the Niagara-on-the-Lake-raised hockey player, the game ended with a win for Ottawa with a 2-1 final score.

Thursday marked the second time Diestch played in St. Catharines with the team this season, it being his home game for family and friends to come show support.

A large group of NOTLers, including his dad, Paul, bought out a section of the Meridian Centre Arena to cheer him on.

Diestch thanks all of his supporters for coming out to the game.

Looking ahead, Diestch has big goals.

"My goal is to get drafted to the NHL. The draft comes out soon and I'm just hoping to see my name come up," he said.

The races, the medals and the moment Carter Simpson won't forget

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Carter Simpson returned home to Niagara-on-the-Lake last week from the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Italy, sporting a pair of bronze medals in addition to a fourth-place finish in another race.

The 31-year-old alpine skier arrived in Turin on March 5 with Team Canada, where he was welcomed with cheers and excitement. The opening ceremony on March 8 left a lasting impression on his mother, AnnLiz Simpson.

"It was so beautiful," she said.

"They made it snow inside the arena," said her husband, Mike Sweeney.

Seeing Carter compete at such a high level was a proud moment for the family.

"There's really no words that can sum it up — seeing your kid compete at an international level," AnnLiz said.

Carter's two younger brothers, towering at 6'3" and 6'4", celebrated by lifting him up after his races.

When AnnLiz told Carter the news that he would be competing at the World Games in alpine skiing in Sestriere, he was jumping up and down and screaming out of excitement, she said.

Carter said finding out was extremely exciting



Carter Simpson proudly displays a Canadian flag signed by his Good Life spin class. The 31-year-old alpine skier earned two bronze medals in the Special Olympics. PAIGE SEBURN

and rewarding, as was the experience in Italy, where, alongside competing, he got to make some friends.

His favourite part of all was the excitement of racing down the slopes, said Carter.

After receiving his first medal, Carter ran over to his family and yelled, "I did it," after stepping off the podium, AnnLiz said.

"We were all emotional; everyone was crying," she said. "It really hit him there: 'Here I am competing on a world stage.'"

The slopes presented some challenging condi-

tions while there, though, with heavy snow and poor visibility, AnnLiz said.

On the final day of races, the intermediate slalom final was nearly canceled due to weather, which AnnLiz said would have been extremely disappointing.

But organizers decided on one run instead of the usual two, a decision that Carter handled with his usual calmness, she said.

"Was it scary?" asked AnnLiz.

"No," said Carter.

The community's support has been incredible, AnnLiz said.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said council invited Carter to the next Town meeting and he looks forward to presenting congratulations to him.

"We are very proud and extremely excited for him," he said.

Coun. Andrew Niven, director of marketing and hospitality at Konzelmann Estate Winery, said the winery plans to celebrate Carter with a community reception.

It will be a chance for people to congratulate Carter and for him to sign autographs. There's no

cost to attend and visitors can enjoy a small wine sample, said Niven. The celebration is April 10 from 4 to 7 p.m.

Carter's win was a proud moment for Canada, he said, especially since the country is more united than ever.

"It's an interesting time, when we're so proud of Canada," he said. "It just made the moment even more magical."

Carter's journey has inspired many, including Niven, who met him through Niagara-on-the-Lake Ambassadors' kick-off-to-the-season celebrations at Konzelmann.

"I'm blown away by it. But I feel he deserves it. He's worked very hard," she said about the town's support, adding that Carter's accomplishments were also acknowledged on the digital sign at the community center.

Carter has inspired himself, too.

He has been wearing his two bronze medals so proudly that AnnLiz thinks he has gone to sleep with them on.

"Because I could hear the clang," she said.

Carter, who moved to town with his family three years ago from Sault Ste. Marie, began skiing at age five, but the 2025 games marked his first international competition.

Previously, he competed in the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Calgary Games and two provincial games,

said AnnLiz.

Carter's spin class at Good Life Fitness has rallied behind him, with instructors using the mountain design on the wall to motivate athletes ever since he made Team Canada, AnnLiz said.

She said the instructors would say, "Carter, take us to the top of it! Who's gonna be first? Carter, who are you gonna beat?"

"They've been absolutely incredible," AnnLiz said.

Carter's hero, Canadian skier Jack Crawford, sent Carter a message before the race wishing he could be there to watch.

Carter, who wants to ski with him one day, has a connection through his younger brother Chandler, who has skied with Crawford on Team Ontario.

Support on social media also meant a lot and kept the crew motivated while in Italy, said AnnLiz.

As for Carter, no difficult conditions on the slopes can hold him back, as he's already focused on the 2029 World Games in Switzerland.

Next year, Carter will compete in a divisional competition, followed by Provincials in 2027. If he earns a spot on Team Canada, he will compete in Nationals in 2028 and, if successful, head to Switzerland in 2029 for Worlds, AnnLiz said. But he said he's confident.

"I'm good," said Carter. paigeseburn@niagaranow.com



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Contributed by Patty Garriock

“When I have nothing more to say,
I stop talking.”
- Martin Luther

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Fishing on the river



With the return of spring, fishers are out on the Niagara River looking for a catch. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

More mayhem as the sap flies in Virgil



THE TURNER REPORT
Garth Turner
Columnist

If a tree falls in Virgil, does it make a sound?
Apparently it’s thunderous.
“What was our council thinking?????” asks Nancy Nicols. “It was a premature decision to fell these beautiful and magnificent trees in this uncertain time. Please drive by again ... soon ... to see the devastation.”
To remind you: the issue is the chainsaw massacre of 700 pines in Virgil to make way for 152 as-yet unsold housing units because (as everyone says) we have a housing crisis and must build our buns off.
Everything’s approved these days. Tract houses. Honking big hotels in Old Town. Condos. Towers. Heritage house mutilations.
Meanwhile, the housing market’s gone icy. Sales are rare. Prices under pressure.
Now we have a federal election and untested PM. The orange guy across the river wants to tax and annex us. Layoffs have started.

People are uncertain, anxious and in no mood to spend seven figures on a new-build, even in bucolic NOTL.
By the way, Nancy loves trees. “My late husband and I built our home in 2010. We back onto hundreds of trees. We had one special blue spruce tree we called ‘Fat Albert.’ We adorned him with flood lights every Christmas, celebrating his beauty. Although Fat Albert still stands, we wonder for how much longer.”
But wait. There’s more to the story of arboreal mayhem, sap-spilling and slaughter.
Phooey, says Arthur Wosinski. “This was not a forest at any time, just an overgrown tree farm that was planted to harvest, but never was. Can we clear that up once and for all?”
“I happen to live in the development right next to it. We moved here 20 years ago when all around us was orchards and knew it would be developed at some point as it was within the Virgil urban boundary. Additionally, the ‘forest’ everyone is complaining about was obviously a Christmas tree farm when we first moved here and was just left to grow wild over the years.”
Well, she’s gone now. The pressure to build, build, build is not.
And that brings us to Stu’s Rangers. Or, as it’s formally



called, the NOTL Residents Association (NOTLRA). Inspired by former councillor Stuart McCormack, these folks are out to mobilize, politicize and give local politicians a few slaps on the noggin for the crazy stuff they do. Like murdering trees.
Membership has surged, I hear, and after a few organization gigs, the group is about to go big with an open house at the community centre on the night of Wednesday, May 14.
“We want people to know the purpose of a town-wide association is to be a way to build cross-community support for neighbourhood and town issues,” says Frances Stocker, “and to amplify

residents’ views through a combined, united voice. Also, such an association could provide a focus for encouraging residents to run for council.”
Well, the Rangers have now incorporated. They’ve got a Facebook group. A website is coming fast. And they have a way for new recruits to be in touch and sign up: notlra2025@gmail.com.
“We’re looking forward to building a strong, town-wide voice that will be heard loud and clear in decisions affecting our town,” says Stocker.
So the battle lines sharpen a little more. Wosinski (who’s also a realtor) says he does not yet have a handle on NOTLRA, but, “the NIMBY crowd has always been against all development.”
Odds are the Rangers will flourish in the months leading up to the next local election. McCormack has not ruled out the prospect of a reform “slate” being offered to voters at that time.
It seems to be a pivotal moment in this gelato-and-horses paradise, as local businesses harvest those \$1.40 American bucks and we hope Tariff Man has one too many cheese dogs.
Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister.
garth@garth.ca



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What's at stake in the coming federal election

Keith McNenly
Special to The Lake Report

Americans are beginning to experience the impacts of the extreme turn of direction being implemented by their new federal administration:

- America switching sides in Ukraine's heroic defence against Russian invaders
- The president's mob-like shakedown of Ukraine to acquire contracts for half a trillion dollars worth of its mineral assets in exchange for allowing its citizens to live another day
- Territorial aggressive threats against Greenland and Panama
- Coercive tariff wars first against Canada and Mexico, now extending to the rest of the world
- The constant insults to Canadians, threats to destroy our economy, seize our natural resources, and "annex" Canada as an American state

These previously unthinkable policy reversals, however, are just the tip of the iceberg.

The administration is subverting American civic governance by installing unqualified department heads

to oppose and dismantle many of the institutions they are appointed to lead.

This novel approach mimics the playbook of corporate hostile takeovers in which the predator organization's goal is to destroy an asset-rich company and sell off its assets for profit.

The loss of the victim company in the marketplace, the fate of its employees, their pensions and their communities are not relevant factors.

The American press daily exposes new and inventive examples of the administration's weaponizing the law.

Competent career prosecutors are directed to use their positions in a subversive manner, forcing them either to perform illegal investigations and prosecutions or to resign.

Taxes levied on the middle class for services to citizens, social security for the elderly, healthcare and environmental protection are redistributed to the wealthy.

Most Americans don't support the loss of democracy nor the betrayal of allies, but the speed and scale of the corporate/mob-

styled dissolution of their institutions is beyond their imagining, and has many flummoxed.

Truth, reality and reason have been replaced by fear and fabrications. Republican supporters carefully curated fear and hatred of immigrants and LGBTQ people, and are pivoting now towards hatred of global trade, which is twisted as the world stealing from America.

The Constitution does not provide Americans succour from a legally elected but rogue president/king and powerful oligarch class.

Voters are being "sucker punched" after putting their trust in the Republican Party. The survival of American democracy is once again in the hands of "We the people."

Americans and Canadians have been friends for centuries. At a core level that has not yet changed, even though Canadians will continue to ramp up our boycott of everything American, to protect our economy and our country that generations of Canadians have fought and died for.

We are all victims of the same presidential mugging,

and are all suffering from his engineering of mistrust and division between us. We should not take the bait.

The president now pretends he wants Liberals to win, trying to influence Canadians to vote Conservative. He must think we are all stupid. No one is buying it.

As authoritarianism consolidates its hold in the U.S. and destabilizes global trade and military alliances, Canadians will now decide which federal party and leader is best suited to protect our own sovereign and economic interests.

A cool-headed, thoughtful team of professionals, focused on appropriate retaliatory tariffs, regional nation-building within Canada, and forging strategic alliances with other democracies, will best serve Canada.

It is in the hands of this generation of Canadians to use all the wisdom we can muster to mark our ballots with the singular purpose of keeping the true north strong and free.

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



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style.
Category: MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

A modification of a Portuguese guitar, it became popular in Hawaii in the late 19th century.

Last issue: BESTSELLING BOOKS
Clue: By Feb. 2024 this juvenile journal, the first of almost 20, had spent 778 weeks on the N.Y. Times children's series list.

Answer: What is Diary of a Wimpy Kid?
Answered first by: Sue Rautenberg
Also answered correctly (in order) by: Lynda Collet, Margie Enns, Mike Gander, Wade Durling, Jim Dandy, Rob Hutchison, Jeff Lake, Marla Percy, KC King, David Spencer

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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Restoration calculation: Why historical buildings are **worth saving**



Brian Marshall
Columnist

“Art Detectives” is a television series aired on TVO that is on my regular watch list. It centres around the ongoing search of Britain’s “Art UK” website — containing more than 500,000 works by more than 55,000 artists, which are held in the collections of more than 3,400 institutions — in an attempt to discover lost masterpieces.

Often, the artworks they target are found in poor condition and, based on the opinion of British art historian, Dr. Bendor Grosvenor, vis-à-vis a possible attribution to the artist, they undergo extensive restoration in the studio of Simon Gillespie.

It is a source of amazement to me how, under the expert hands of Gillespie, these sad and shabby, often damaged paintings are transformed to expose their original colours, figures, backgrounds and, often, glory.

I can only speculate about the number of man-hours devoted to each restoration and the cost associated with that investment.

After viewing a recent episode, a question occurred to me: What would happen if the preservation and restoration of art was treated in a similar fashion to how we, far too often in North America, approach similar considerations for architecture?

In the case of architecture, the decision of whether or not to restore and preserve an important building is often one purely measured in dollars (cost versus return) with little or no consideration for its less tangible — but nonetheless equally important — historical, cultural and societal contribution.

This thought process has driven the development of a concept advanced by some that it is acceptable to conserve important architecture as a “ruin.”

In other words, one can destroy a significant building provided a small part is preserved and a memorial plaque containing a description of the heritage, history and importance of the lost building is erected on site.

I would argue that this concept is fundamentally flawed.



Douglas Cardinal creates artistic masterpieces expressed in the medium of organic human-centric architecture.

A given piece of architecture, whether modest or grand, is a physical representation of the architect’s (or the property owner’s) creative expression, defined by its purpose, and set within — or sometimes in contrast with — the prevailing political, economic and cultural conditions of society.

No plaque or simple memorial can evoke the visual, emotive and tactile responses that are elicited by the whole expression, nor can a mere symbol connect us to the people who lived around and within its walls.

To answer my earlier question, let’s imagine that the cost versus return approach and the “ruin” concept are applied to the conservation of paintings.

You are visiting the Hermitage Museum in St.

Petersburg, Russia, and in one of the galleries, there is a frame that contains no art but highlights a section of plain wall surface measuring roughly 73 inches by 80 inches.

At eye level in this framed space, there is a small painting of a golden cupid and mounted beside it a bronze plaque which reads:

“Here once hung the jewel of our museum’s collection, ‘Danaë’ by the Dutch master Rembrandt Van Rijn, which he painted between 1636 and 1643. In 1985, a deranged individual scored it with a knife and splashed it with sulfuric acid. The damage was so extensive that it was deemed uneconomic to restore the painting, however, we did save and restore a portion of the painting — the cupid you can see hanging to

the right.”

Similarly, in our imagined progress, you might visit Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum, where another empty frame and “memorial” could be found — this one commemorating the 12-foot by 14.5-foot Rembrandt painting “The Night Watch,” completed in 1642.

In 1975, this masterpiece was attacked by a knife-wielding vandal who slashed the lower portion of the canvas multiple times, leaving over a dozen gashes through the painting.

Now, while the vandalism in these two illustrations did actually occur, both museums committed to restoration without considering the cost.

In the case of Danaë, it took Russia’s finest experts 12 years to complete the restoration, while the work on The Night Watch spanned four years.

In real terms, if a purely economic decision was the sole criterion in the restoration of artworks, there would be a lot of empty frames in collections around the world.

Consider the damages from the 2019 attack on Pablo Picasso’s painting “Bust of a Woman” with a restoration cost of \$460,000 — just one amongst many others.

We have visited the question of why many people

struggle with architecture being considered as fine art in past columns (e.g. “Arch-i-text: Can a building be a work of art? Yes, but many simply are not,” Jan. 5, 2023), so I will refrain from doing so again.

However, let me ask, how can it not be?

A painting is art that is lived with. Architecture is art that is lived in.

For those who argue that a painting is the work of one person and architecture is the work of many, well, not so much.

Most of the European masters had studios full of juniors who were trained to paint in the style of the master.

Indeed, when I knew Canadian artist William Kurelek in the early 1970s, he happily created in a studio organized along these lines.

The master created the concept and blocked out the piece. The juniors applied the paint with the occasional intervention by the master to “tweak” the work in progress towards fully realizing his artistic vision.

To me, that sounds pretty similar to creating architecture.

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



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I simply can't understand why we're so **keen on division**



Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson
Columnist

My weekly ramblings usually attempt to discuss a subject comprehensible to folks living here in the Niagara region. Quite often, I collect the facts and attempt to think a bit differently. A bit off centre, as it were.

Sometimes it's a stretch to develop a subject. This week, please bear with me because I have been shooting blanks. I am not stumbling around, but the world just seems so different to me.

The big news this week was the calling of a general

election, with Canadians across our land going to the polls on Monday, April 28 to elect our 45th parliament. The writs of election were issued on March 23 after Governor General Mary Simon accepted a request to dissolve Parliament from Prime Minister Mark Carney.

And that's about where my thoughts come off the rails. Normally, the most discussed Canadian issues would be fairly repetitive. Housing, healthcare, tax reforms, carbon tax, truth and reconciliation regarding our indigenous peoples, energy and pipelines.

Flipping through the TV channels for the last few days, I have been flooded with images of the President of the United States. It has been all consuming, inescapable, and that man is totally dominating our current Canadian election.

The central question being asked regarding our



Ross Robinson is tired of all the division because of U.S. president Donald Trump. He says Canadians should try to find ways to be kind to each other amid the tension.

federal election has been "Which Canadian political leader could best stand up to Donald Trump?"

This is where I find myself unable to relate. Let's get a grip. Even the great Gretzky has been pulled into the fray. Truly a great Canadian for so many years, such a leader, and so studiously and cleverly apolitical. Even though lately we may

think his choice of a certain friend is suspect.

Should so many Canadians have worked themselves into lathers regarding this unfortunate circumstance? Suggesting that a winery be renamed, writing graffiti on walls and defacing an iconic statue in Edmonton. Can we call a truce and come to our Canadian senses?

It is never my intention to

whine or focus on the negative aspects of issues. So, imagine my happiness when Katharine Ward discussed the most recent "separatism poll from Quebec" on Global News earlier today. I lived in "la Belle Province" for four years just after the Montreal Olympics in the 1970s. How I loved les Québécois, la ville de Montreal, and almost everything that

makes Quebec Quebec.

Never has Quebec support for separatism been lower.

Back in the day, I understood why they felt their culture, including the French language, was continually being threatened by the dominant English majority. They were sometimes paranoid in their attempts to protect French. Bill 101, bilingual store signs and other attempts to fight for bilingualism.

Now, they have quickly realized that if they were to separate from Canada, they would be quickly chewed up by a unilingual, cold and dominating English majority in the United States.

So, I have rambled into unfamiliar territory and don't want to get pulled into the seeming vortex of political news totally dominated by the American political situation.

I really don't know where this is all going. Help me, please.

Degenerative disease in the spine: Part 1: **Lumbosacral spine**



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

Low back and often leg pain in humans are common much past 50 years of age. The origins of lower back and neck problems are probably rooted in the evolution of bipedalism several million years ago, with our ancient ancestors in Africa. Bipedalism conferred enormous advantages but came at some cost. How so?

Getting about on the hindlimbs freed the forelimbs for fashioning and using tools, signaling to others and wielding weapons.

The cost was that compared to four-legged animals, the adoption of an erect posture, greatly increased the curvature and pressures in the neck and lower spine and in fully bipedal species who lived long enough, led to age-related wear and tear changes in the vertebrae, intervertebral discs, posterior joints and related ligaments in both the neck and lower back.

This essay focuses on the lower back and next week's essay on the neck.

Much past 50 years of age, imaging studies in humans commonly reveal degenerative changes and compression of the vertebrae in the lumbosacral region, narrowed disc spaces between vertebrae, bulging discs and degenerative changes in posterior joints, which taken together can crowd the space through which the lower lumbar and upper sacral nerve roots must pass to reach the pelvis to form the lumbosacral plexus and the sciatic nerve (more on last in part three of this series).

Early on, those degenerative changes in the lumbosacral spine are usually asymptomatic but may become associated with chronic, often disabling pain in the lower back.

In some instances, the pain may be acute and severe in the lower back and one or both legs and accompanied by tingling and numbness in the legs.

Trying to sort out the precise cause of back and leg pain can be challenging, especially in later life, because the degenerative changes usually involve two or more levels in the lower back, such as L3-L4, and especially the L4-L5 and L5-S1 levels.

The diagnostic importance of the location of the



pain in the back and buttocks isn't nearly as helpful as the location of the pain and especially tingling and numbness in the leg(s) for sorting out the cause of the symptoms.

For example, symptomatic L5 root lesions characteristically produce pain in the lateral buttock and lateral calf, tingling and numbness in the top of the foot, especially the big toe and possibly, and may be associated with weakness in dorsiflexion and eversion of the foot.

On the other hand, lesions which involve the S1 root are usually associated with pain extending into posterior buttock and back of the calf, tingling and/or numbness in the lateral side of the foot and toes and possibly weakness of the posterior calf muscles as well as a reduced or absent tendon reflex at the ankle.

Sorting out and managing the cause of lower back

and leg pain is younger patients is usually easier because the symptoms, clinical findings and imaging studies usually agree and point unambiguously to a single level — the L4-L5 or L5-S1 level where a herniated or broken off piece of disc can usually be seen compressing the symptomatic root L5 or S1 root in a manner consistent with the clinical symptoms and findings.

Those are usually the easy cases to sort out.

The conundrum in later life is that degenerative changes in the lumbosacral spine often involve two or more levels in the lumbosacral spine.

In such cases, sorting out which clinical, radiological and electrodiagnostic features best explain the symptoms can be very challenging, even in the hands of experts, and the reason why surgery to relieve symptoms related

to degenerative disease so often fails to relieve symptoms — and may even compound them.

That's why specialty clinics that combine the expertise and perspectives of neurologists, neurosurgeons, orthopedic surgeons, rehabilitative medicine specialists, radiologists and physiotherapists are vital for assessing patients with low back and leg symptoms related to degenerative disease for coming up with plausible strategies for non-surgical and sometimes surgical treatment of patients with disabling back and leg pain.

Managing lower back and leg pain much past the age of 60 years of age can be tricky.

Figuring out what to do very much depends on the basics: Thorough histories and physical examinations, appropriate imaging studies read by experienced radiologists and overall assessments by surgical and medical specialists with lots of experience.

Together, they go a long way to providing the information patients need to understand what's going on in their back and the pros and cons of options for medical and surgical management needed to make the best decisions, especially in complicated cases.

Fortunately, in recent years, controlled studies

comparing non-surgical and surgical management have been carried out, which provide useful guidance when the team is trying to make the decision about management in consultation with the patient.

Those studies aren't perfect for the obvious reason that, unlike most drug trials, it's impossible to "blind" surgery and the placebo effect plays a part in colouring the results.

Even so, the discipline of rigorously assessing patients from the perspectives of different skill sets and perspectives helps patients reach better informed decisions in the imperfect world of managing chronic lower back pain.

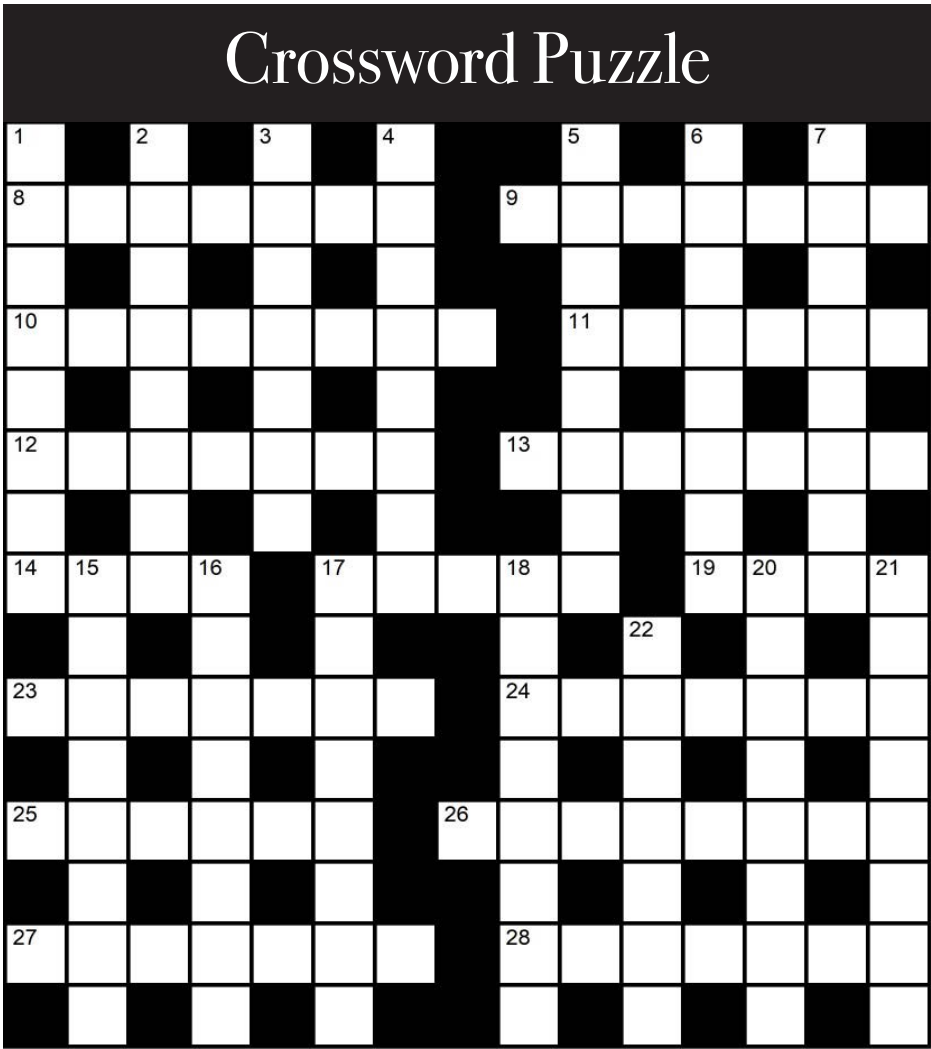
Readers might be interested to learn that one of the best papers on surgery versus conservative care was reported in the New England Journal of Medicine (one of the top five medical journals in the world) by a team from London Health Sciences Centre, in London, Ont., published 2020.

Look for programs on these issues on April 2 and 9 at 2 p.m. at the NOTL Public Library.

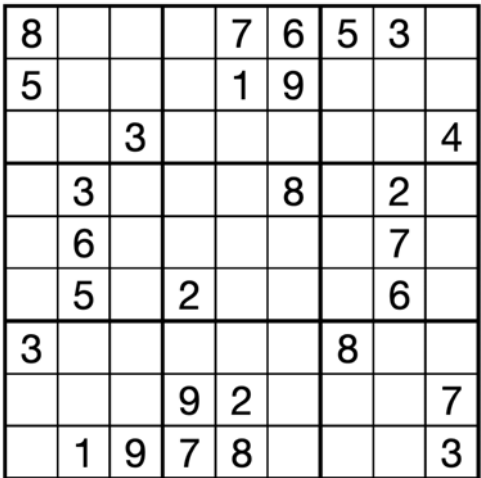
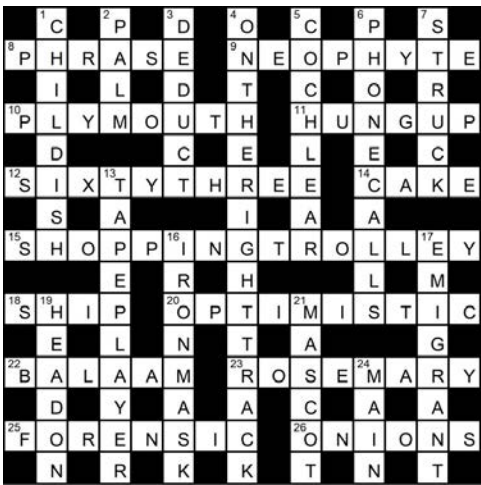
Dr. William Brown is a professor of neurology at McMaster University and co-founder of the InfoHealth series at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library.

Have some fun

- Across**
- 8. Track performer, perhaps (7)
 - 9. Spock-like (7)
 - 10. Squirmed (8)
 - 11. Power source (6)
 - 12. One responding to a stimulus (7)
 - 13. More often than not (7)
 - 14. Twitcher's cover (4)
 - 17. Split or indentation (5)
 - 19. Bridge section (4)
 - 23. Vets (7)
 - 24. Piccadilly hotel (3,4)
 - 25. Drawn to end the game (6)
 - 26. Spherical (8)
 - 27. Missing a piece (7)
 - 28. Passage (7)
- Down**
- 1. Large pig (8)
 - 2. Had Latin corrected in the Far East (8)
 - 3. Agree it got made over in Surrey (7)
 - 4. Recommendation (8)
 - 5. Duke whose family name is Seymour (8)
 - 6. Explanatory drawings (8)
 - 7. Flowering garden tree (8)
 - 15. Fomenting (8)
 - 16. In perpetuity (8)
 - 17. Ammunition case (8)
 - 18. Road accident statistic (8)
 - 20. Easy (8)
 - 21. Jesus's childhood home (8)
 - 22. Balkan native (7)



Last issue's answers



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

EXPLORING HISTORY WITH NOTL MUSEUM



‘Near, far, in our motor car’ at Queenston Heights c. 1908

This photograph, captured at Queenston Heights around 1908, looks like it inspired a scene in the 1968 movie “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.” In the background is a tiny sign that says, “Have your photo taken in motorcar.” But there are so many Edwardian-clothed children with wide-brimmed hats posing in front of it that we can barely see the phantasmagorical machine! It was around this time that the Niagara Parks Commission pushed tourists to visit Queenston Heights for the picturesque views rather than the site’s history. This “attraction” likely came about to encourage people to take home a souvenir as a reminder of their visit. This was just one of several private business ventures at the Heights at the turn of the 20th century. In fact, there were so many vendors operating stands that the Niagara Parks Commission decided to purchase the road leading up to it in order to have control over the number of souvenir stands.

While we can’t be sure who the young girls are in this photo, their ages and the date of the image may suggest that it is a photo of some of the girls who went through the “Our Western Home” orphanage. This was a centre for British home children who underwent training to be servants or farm labourers. Looking at this image, you can almost imagine that, at any moment, this scene could take flight. Just like the famous flying car, Chitty. (Apologies in advance if the catchy song gets stuck in your head).

Springtime **care and dividing** of ornamental grasses



GROWING TOGETHER 

Joanne Young
Columnist

Ornamental grasses have a way of adding in a different element into the garden. Their soft, wispy textures can soften up the landscape and they add a sense of movement to the garden. There is nothing like the rustling of blades on a warm and sunny summer day. During the growing season, grasses are a very low-maintenance plant that requires little attention. In the spring, though, a little bit of effort is needed to keep your grasses healthy and thriving. If you like your garden looking tidy over winter, chances are you cut back your ornamental grasses in the fall. If you are like me, you like to leave any plants that

offer special winter interest, so I wait until spring to cut back the grasses. Either early spring or fall are acceptable times to be pruning back them back. All the new growth for this season comes from the ground itself, so it is best to remove all the previous season’s growth. If you have not yet cut them back, now is a great time to prune back the brown blades before the new growth begins to show at the base of the plant. The stalks of the grass can be so dense that it makes cutting them back a challenge, so using secateurs or electric (or battery) hedging shears works best. Cut back taller growing grasses, such as any varieties in the miscanthus and panicum family, to four to six inches from the ground. For shorter growing grasses such as blue fescue, hakonechloa grass, blood grass and dwarf fountain grasses, cut back to just two to three inches above the soil. Ornamental grasses, like many other perennials, will need to be divided about every three to five years. You will know that they need to be divided when the centre of the clump starts to die out and all



Joanne Young says ornamental grass should be divided when it begins to die in the centre.

the growth is on the outer edges of the clump. Before you start to divide the clump of grass, dig the entire clump out of the bed. If you try dividing by just pushing in the shovel into the clump while still in the ground, you cannot see how much root you are actually getting. You will find that you have a bit of a battle to do so, especially with the taller grasses. The root system is quite tough to get through. If you decide not to divide the clump when you see that the centre is dying out, the plant will continue to thin out and eventually die out completely. Once the clump is sitting out on top of the soil or on a tarp, it will be easier for you to see where to cut down through the roots. Cut apart the outer portions into as many pieces as desired and discard the center portion of the clump. The number of pieces will depend on the size of the clump. Before you plant back into the same hole or are



planning some of the new clumps into new areas, it is best to improve your soil. Be sure to mix in some composted manure or leaf or mushroom compost in with some of your existing soil. At the bottom of the hole, add in some bonemeal. Bonemeal is high in phosphorus (the middle number) and will aid with root growth. Set the newly divided plant into the hole, making sure that the top of the rootball will be at the same depth as it was before. Do not plant it deeper into the soil than before. Fill in the planting hole with your soil/compost mix and water around the base of the plant. Your grass is now set for another season. Joanne Young is a Niagara-on-the-Lake garden expert and coach. See her website at joanneyoung.ca. The Niagara-on-the-Lake Horticultural Society is pleased to be hosting a series of Saturday morning gardening classes, available to the public. They will be facilitated by Joanne Young and will run until May 31. For all the details and to pre-register for the classes, visit notlHORTSOCIETY.COM/classes.



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EVENT DETAILS

Niagara on the Lake Horticultural Society
hosts Gardening Classes Saturdays

March 1st to May 31st
10:am to 11:30am
Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre,
14 Anderson Lane, NOTL

ALL CLASS DETAILS AND BOOKING LINKS MAY BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE

notlhortsociety.com/classes

Obituaries

Robert Mackenzie



MACKENZIE, Robert — It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Dr. Robert Allen Arthur MacKenzie, who departed this life on March 25, 2025. Born in Kitchener, Ontario, on April 6, 1947, Rob was a man of integrity, and unwavering dedication to his profession, family, and community.

Rob pursued his studies in optometry with distinction, beginning at the College of Optometry in Toronto, where he was awarded a prestigious scholarship in his first year, before transferring to the University of Waterloo. He graduated in 1969, embarking upon a career defined by excellence and compassionate patient care. Establishing his practice in St. Catharines, he was later joined by Art Marchand in 1989. Together, they fostered a practice that welcomed numerous associates and built deep relationships with many long standing staff. Rob's commitment to his field was unparalleled; he devoted ongoing study, taking courses throughout his career, to ensuring his patients received the highest standard of vision care.

Beyond his professional achievements, Rob was a pillar of his community. His service extended across numerous organizations, reflecting his deep sense of civic duty. He was a Cub Scout leader, a junior baseball coach, and an ardent sportsman, excelling in golf, squash, and tennis. He was an enthusiastic member of the Jaycees in St. Catharines and a dedicated Rotarian in Niagara-on-the-Lake. His leadership extended to serving on the executive committee of the Ontario Association of Optometrists, and his faith guided his devoted service as a member and Elder of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Rob was a man of boundless curiosity, an irrepressible sense of humor, and unwavering loyalty to those he held dear. He possessed an insatiable thirst for knowledge, always asking questions, seeking new perspectives, and delighting in the unexpected. A steadfast friend, Rob was the kind of person who showed up, whether in times of joy or hardship, without hesitation or expectation. His adventurous spirit led him on many wonderful travels, from trekking through Europe in the 1960s - an experience which memorably required sleeping standing up or in overhead luggage compartments - to exploring culinary delights with his wife and riding roller coasters with his children. His presence was magnetic, his loyalty unshakable, and his absence will be felt profoundly by all who had the privilege of knowing him. A life so richly lived leaves an indelible legacy.

Rob leaves behind his beloved wife of 55 years, Mariette, whose steadfast partnership was the foundation of his life. He is mourned by his daughter, Rachelle; his son, Reagan; his daughter-in-law, Georgia; and his cherished granddaughter, Evie, who brought him immense joy. His memory will be forever honored by his brother, Brian, and his wife, Sheila; his nieces, Cheryl and Colleen; and his nephews, Iain and Michael.

Thank you to Dr. Durocher, Dr. Jayawardene, Rob's personal support worker Greg, and the many staff at The Royal Henley. In keeping with Rob's wishes, cremation has taken place and arrangements have been entrusted to Considerate Cremation.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donations to The Rossy Progressive Supranuclear Palsy Centre or the Niagara Dog Rescue.

A celebration of life will be held on Sunday, March 30 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Victoria and Albert Ballroom, Prince of Wales Hotel, 6 Picton St., Niagara-on-the-Lake. Tributes will begin at 2:30 p.m.

Antonio Palumbo



PALUMBO, Antonio, 1942-2025 — It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Antonio Palumbo. He passed away peacefully in his garden on Tuesday, March 18, 2025 at the age of 82.

Antonio was predeceased by his beloved parents Pasquale and Rosaria Palumbo. Forever loved and deeply missed by his caring wife of 50 years, Girolama Palumbo. Cherished father to Mario (Cindy) Palumbo & Rosie (Michael) Dzugan. Proud grandfather of Gabriele, Mateo, Angelina, Daniel, and Julia. Dear brother to late Maria, Francesco (Gaetana), Vito (Antoinette), Angelo (Pasqualina) late Filomena (Tomaso).

Antonio came to Canada by the grace and strength of God in 1967 with his masonry skills. He married Girolama Benevento in 1974 and settled on their farm in Niagara-On-The-Lake. He loved his wife, children and grandchildren very much. Antonio loved meeting and talking to people, was always very generous and willing to share a smile, a story, cheese, wine or espresso.

Antonio's memory was impeccable with time, dates, calculations and measurements. We will miss his great knowledge, advice, wisdom and life stories from Italy, Germany and Canada.

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted with Geroge Darte Funeral Home, 585 Carlton St., St. Catharines.

Visitation services were held Sunday March 23, 2025 2025 from 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. A funeral mass was held at, St. Vincent De Paul Church, 73 Picton St., Niagara-on-the-Lake on Monday, March 24, 2025 at 10 a.m.

Donations in Antonio Palumbo's memory can be made to Padre Pio and or St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Church.

Online guestbook: www.georgedartefuneralhome.com



Michael 'Mike' Roberts




ROBERTS, Michael W. "Mike" — It is with great sadness that we announce the sudden passing of Michael W. Roberts "Mike", on Thursday March 20, 2025, at the Niagara Falls Hospital, at the age of 76. Dear brother of Carol

Cosgrove, Jennifer Roberts (Nino Ferrantelli) and David Roberts. Fondly remembered by many nieces, nephews, friends and golf buddies from Sawmill Golf Course. Predeceased by his parents, William and Donna Roberts, brothers Robert and Leslie John and sister Sylvia. Mike will be remembered for his great sense of humour.

A celebration of Mike's life, will be held at the Royal Canadian Legion, Br. 124, 410 King St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON on Saturday April 26, 2025, from 2-5 p.m. As an expression of sympathy those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Heart & Stroke Foundation. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com



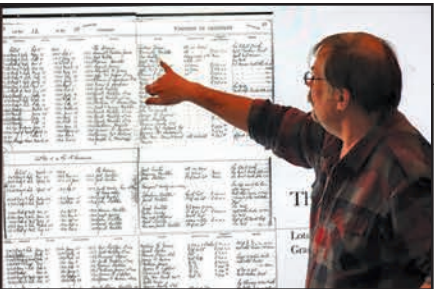


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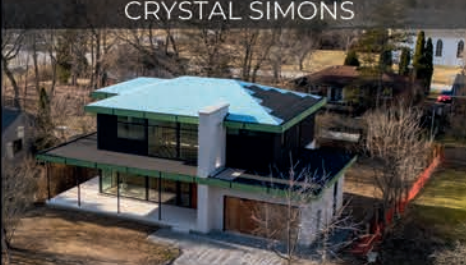
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