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Stroll and parades | Pages 6-8

Vol. 8, Issue 48

Canada's most-awarded community newspaper

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2026
budget
approved
with 2.19%
tax hike

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's budget has been set for the next year, with a property tax hike of 2.19 per cent and plans to spend \$44.2 million on operations and \$8.3 million on capital projects.

According to the town, the planned tax bump adds about \$33.55 more to the bill for a home assessed at a value of \$536,000.

The final capital budget excludes water and wastewater. The water and wastewater budget will be released in early 2026. The stormwater levy remains unchanged.

Major capital projects include road work on Line 3 and water main replacement on Line 7.

The town's largest expenses in the operating budget fall under "municipal purposes," a category whose largest subset is contracted services. The town will

Continued on Page 3

Private recycling is 'poor policy'

Sudden change in services will cost businesses more, say managers and owners



Erin Vanbussel, general manager at the Silversmith Brewing Company, says changes to the system of collecting recyclables will cost her company about \$175 a month. "We do use our recycle bins. We put them out weekly. And it is going to hurt us in the long run," she said. DAN SMEENK

Daniel Smeenk | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

Jan. 1 will bring a major change for Niagara-on-the-Lake businesses, especially those with large amounts of cardboard, plastics and other recyclables.

In late November, Niagara Region announced it will stop

collecting non-residential recycling because of a new provincial rule putting the responsibility for residential recycling in the hands of producers — companies that supply packaging and paper products.

"As part of their transition planning, producers have determined that non-residential recyclables cannot be collected together with residential recyclables under the new producer-run system," said Dave Yousif, acting

director of waste management services for Niagara Region.

Because non-residential recycling is not included in this program, which means the recy-

Continued on Page 2

Moving of soil from Parliament Oak was done without a permit

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is saying that the work that happened to move soil from the construction

site of the future Parliament Oak hotel to the site where Glencairn Hall used to stand took place without the required permission.

Early last month, trucks full of dirt from the grounds of 325 King St. could be

seen driving down to 14795 Niagara River Pkwy., where the historic Glencairn Hall stood before it burned down in April.

Crews began work at 325 King St. in preparation to build what's set to

be a luxury hotel where the former Parliament Oak Public School stood. This work includes removing soil from the ground and other construction-related activities.

The Town of NOTL says

it did not approve the dumping of soil at the Glencairn Hall site. However, the town did not say by press time whether it issued any punishment for this breach.

"To remove or deposit fill, you need approval through

a building permit, site plan agreement or site alteration permit," said Marah Minor, the town's communications co-ordinator.

"A site alteration permit

Continued on Page 4



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Public recycling too pricey, says region

Continued from Front Page

cling can't go into the same vehicles, Niagara Region would have to have its own service for this.

Having a service just to collect non-residential recycling would be prohibitively expensive, said Niagara Region.

"The total estimated cost of delivering this stand-alone service would be up to \$3.5 million per year, a level that is not financially reasonable or sustainable under the region's current budget," the region said in a press release.

Private companies will now handle the service. Niagara Region released a list of eight private companies available to businesses, including Miller Waste Systems, which has a branch on Townline Road in NOTL.

The region said 4,735 non-residential properties currently receive recycling service across Niagara. The Lake Report heard from four NOTL organizations affected by the change.

While some expect a greater impact than others, all expressed frustration with the decision.



The province's change to the recycling program will not affect residential buildings. FILE

Erin Vanbussel, general manager of Silversmith Brewing Company in Virgil, said the change will cost her business \$175 a month.

The brewery generates significant recycling; she has a cardboard bin that "could fit a human being inside." The business already uses a third-party garbage and cardboard recycling service that comes biweekly for larger items, but she said the new rules will increase their burden.

"I will say this was a shock when I received the notice in the mail last

week," she said. "We do use our recycle bins; we put them out weekly. And it is going to hurt us in the long run."

Vanbussel called it an "added cost" on top of taxes and said it could lead to more garbage as people throw out items that should be recycled.

Alyssa Griese, an employee at Just Christmas in Old Town, manages much of her workplace's recycling. She said the place she works will struggle to adapt.

"We're now trying to figure out what to do because we don't have the space to put a bin to store our recycling," she said.

Griese also said she thought the change was very "overnight."

For not-for-profits and religious groups, the costs may be especially difficult.

Cindy Grant, director of Newark Neighbours, said she understands the policy stems from the province and gives the region some grace, but she still believes it is poor policy.

"I understand the requirement for changing the policy at the region and that the burden of recycling is

now passed onto the providers," she said. "It does put an additional burden on businesses and especially not-for-profits. It has come as a surprise to many businesses with little communication from the region."

Don Dineley, a member of the property committee at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, also said the news came as a shock.

"I certainly didn't know anything about it," he said. "It's not a very good thing for churches, small churches."

He added that some organizations appear to be treated differently, saying it was not fair for the Shaw Festival to receive a break while small businesses must pay for recycling themselves.

Les Fincham, also a member of the property committee, said they talked about the issue on Tuesday night and said the issue wouldn't have too large an impact on them except when it comes to major events. They are still trying to decide what to do.

Residential recycling will continue as normal.

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CORRECTION:

A story in last week's paper used the term "waived" in describing the Royal George Theatre's parking requirements, which could be interpreted as the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake choosing not to charge for general parking. In fact, the theatre's zero-parking condition is legally grandfathered under the Ontario Planning Act and is not a council decision. The wording has been updated for clarity. Although the theatre's general on-site parking requirement remains zero, the zoning rules for the rebuild require adding one new parking space on paper, triggering a \$72,664 cash-in-lieu fee since no physical space will be built. Shaw will also provide five new accessible parking spaces on-site.

No general parking needed for Royal George

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Shaw Festival didn't get a multimillion-dollar parking break for the Royal George Theatre rebuild.

A correction published this week clarifies that the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake did not "waive" parking requirements for the project.

The theatre was built long before modern municipal parking rules existed and was never required to provide general parking.

As long as it remains a theatre, that zero-parking requirement is legally grandfathered under the Ontario Planning Act. Shaw will still add five accessible parking spaces on-site.

Provincial law protects uses that were legally established before newer rules came into force, so the town can't apply modern parking requirements as long as the property continues to operate as a theatre. In planning language, "use" refers to the activity occurring on the land — in this case, a theatre.

Current NOTL parking rules say a theatre the



The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake says the Royal George's non-conforming use applies to the rebuild, as well as expanded properties, so no general parking is needed.

size of the original Royal George would require 104 parking spaces, and the rebuilt design would require 105.

Shaw owes a single \$72,664 cash-in-lieu fee for that one additional space. This will come alongside the rebuild's site plan agreement. The town's website

says the site plan is under review.

The extra space isn't grandfathered because only the theatre's original zero-parking requirement is protected, not the new number created by the rebuilt design.

If a theatre had no grandfathered protection and

had to meet today's parking rules, more than 100 required spaces would cost over \$7 million at current cash-in-lieu rates.

But the Royal George isn't subject to those rules — its parking requirement remains legally grandfathered at zero.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

Town plans to spend \$611K more on roads

Continued from Front Page

spend \$1.2 million more on municipal purposes in next year's budget.

Salaries are expected to rise by more than \$1.1 million next year in the operating budget.

Percentage-wise, the biggest increase in spending will be for work on the municipality's roads, at an extra \$611,655 for 2026, or 57 per cent more from this year.

Originally, the draft budget projected a 1.81 per cent tax increase. Two amendments affecting tax rates were later approved: one expanding recreation program discounts for families with three or more children, and another funding a new engineer position in the planning department.

Council unanimously approved the budget. Coun.



The town's capital budget for next year is \$8.3 million, which will include spending \$611,655 more in 2026 on road work, compared to 2025. FILE/DAN SMEENK

Sandra O'Connor supported the document but raised concerns.

"I want to reiterate that I still think that the two tourist-related projects should be partly funded from the municipal accommodation tax," she said. "And the planning fees should be close to full cost recovery, not subsi-

dized by the taxpayer."

"But overall, I am supportive of this budget."

The two tourist projects she referred to are a contribution to a portion of parks signage and floating docks.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said ignoring the study that guided recent development fee changes, presented to council in October, would

have created "compliance issues."

"We certainly want to make sure that development pays for development," he said. "But at the same time, it has to be measured and responsible and legal."

He said he wanted residents to know it wasn't as if "developers weren't paying."

Council approved the budget at a special meeting on Dec. 2, ahead of its planning committee meeting and one day before its self-imposed Dec. 3 deadline.

This is the first year the town's budget was drafted under strong-mayor powers, which allow the mayor to table the budget and council to propose amendments. In previous years, it was council that introduced the budget.

— With files from Paige Seburn.

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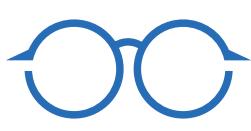


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Hot dogs take cool photos



Nancy Bailey and Sassy, the Portuguese water dog, were among many who got their photos taken with Old Saint Nick himself at the St. Davids Veterinary Clinic on Saturday, Nov. 29. Julia Michitsch and Kate Birmingham tried to get the preoccupied Sassy's attention while Alyssa Witteven snapped the shot. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Pattern of unpermitted work continues at Parliament Oak

Continued from Front Page

is required to remove or deposit fill on a property. The property owner would need to authorize this activity in order to apply for the permit."

A permit allowing site for site alterations at 14795 Niagara River Pkwy. "has not been issued," said Minor.

Gary Wheeler, communications co-ordinator for the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, said the ministry has "not been contacted about this specific situation" but that "staff are following up to obtain information from the owners of both sites to determine if action is required."

Wheeler said soil dumps are allowed if they meet certain standards.

"Excess soil may be deposited at a reuse site provided it is for a beneficial reuse, the quality of the soil meets the excess soil standards for the reuse site and it is deposited in accordance with the soil rules," he said.

When the ministry becomes aware of a complaint related to what it calls "excess soil management," it gathers information about what's going on, works with municipalities and follows the ministry's compliance policy "to determine what action is required to protect the environment and comply with the legislation," he said.

The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority said the Parliament Oak site is outside its jurisdiction, while part of the Glencairn Hall property lies within it. However, the type of activity involved in this



Trucks dump soil from Parliament Oak at the former Glencairn Hall property without a permit. The property is the subject of an arson investigation after a historic home was destroyed by a fire in April. FILE/DAN SMEENK

case would not fall under its authority.

"In this particular instance, this type of fill removal and transfer to another site is the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks and Town of NOTL," said Jennifer McQuillan, communications and marketing specialist for the authority.

"It is our understanding

that town staff are aware of

the activity."

Niagara Regional Police, in response to The Lake Report's inquiry, said the incident falls outside its responsibilities.

Two Sisters Resort Corp., owned by developer Benny Marotta, is behind the development of this new hotel.

The project has been the subject of two stop-work orders this year, one on Sept. 23 for doing excavation work and removing soil without a permit and another, on Oct. 3, for violating a site alteration

permit that was issued on Sept. 26 to allow the developer to conduct work within a permitted area of the site only.

The town, through Canada's Administrative

Monetary Penalty System, fined the developer \$500 a day for each day the illegal work took place.

The Glencairn Hall property is owned by Scott Corbett, who entered into an agreement in August with Marotta to merge a portion of Glencairn Hall's lands with a plot of land next door, owned by Marotta.

Minor said recovery efforts for heritage items were completed before the building's demolition, also in August.

Glencairn Hall, a 19th-century heritage property, was destroyed in a fire in April that police are investigating as criminal arson.

Wheeler said concerns about excess soil deposits can be reported to the ministry's Niagara District Office at 905-704-3900 during business hours, or to the Spills Action Centre at 1-866-663-8477 after hours, on weekends and holidays.

The Lake Report contacted Tom Richardson, a lawyer from Sullivan Mahoney LLP, representing Two Sisters on this project, but did not receive a response before press time.

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NEWS



Barbara Worthy is grateful to the Mennonite community for taking part in the history project. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

Documentary shares Mennonite stories

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

Stories of war, migration and peach orchards took centre stage as the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum launched its Mennonites of Niagara oral history project Saturday, tying decades of Virgil history to its planned \$10 million expansion.

On Nov. 29, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Mennonite families from Niagara-on-the-Lake gathered in Memorial Hall to watch new short documentaries, share family memories and hear how their interviews will inform new exhibits.

Funded through Library and Archives Canada's documentary heritage communities program, the project will anchor a permanent Mennonite display in the expanded museum and a digital archive of more than 100 oral histories.

Community engagement co-ordinator Barbara Worthy welcomed guests into a hall trimmed for Christmas, thanking families who had invited her and videographer Joe Lapinski into their kitchens and living rooms over the past year.

The gathering included relatives of six families featured in the films, many with roots in Virgil's fruit farms and small businesses.

"I can't tell you how grateful I am that you allowed me to come and

interview you," said Worthy. "You allowed me into your homes, and the stories you shared were so personal. I am privileged to have learned them."

The documentaries trace journeys from war-ravaged Ukraine, Poland and Germany, after the Second World War, to new lives on Four Mile Creek Road, Niven Road, Lakeshore Road and East-West Line.

Speakers recalled buying 10 and 12-acre parcels near Virgil over 70 years ago, digging basements by hand and planting peaches, tomatoes, strawberries, onions and cherries on land promoted as tender fruit country.

Family members also spoke about life after arrival in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Some remembered being called "DP kids" at school (short for displaced persons) and facing slurs over their German accents. Others said earlier pre-war Mennonite arrivals sometimes looked down on post-war Mennonite immigrants.

"When you look at history, the most important part to most people is the stories they can tell," said Stuart Hall, museum board member. "The most compelling stories are the cultural ones of communities."

"To be able to preserve the Mennonite history here is amazing because the culture is so rich and such an

important part of the story of this town."

The project builds on earlier interviews recorded by local historian Randy Klaassen and on material collected over 12 years. Along with diaries, maps, photographs, music and family memorabilia, the new recordings are freely available on the museum's YouTube channel.

These stories will be key for the museum as it goes toward its expansion, which will include expanding its exhibitions, said Amy Klassen, the museum's director of finance and marketing.

"We want to include these stories and your stories on the history of Mennonite life in the community, because it has left such a profound impact on our agriculture, our economy and our culture," she said.

The museum's expansion will add new program and exhibition rooms and artifact storage behind Memorial Hall, along with an elevator to improve accessibility.

A second enclosed link will join Memorial Hall to the house next door, once the home of Niagara Historical Society founder Janet Carnochan, which will become a research centre with archives, offices and space for volunteers.

"With the federal grant that was announced recently, the \$2 million from the government pushed us

quite a leap forward," said Klassen. "We are hoping that in 2026 we will be able to break ground if everything falls in line."

The museum's campaign aims to raise \$10 million and is now about 60 per cent complete, Klassen said.

This fall's federal funding and private donations have moved the project past the halfway mark, while a sold-out Dec. 7 fundraiser at the MacArthur Estate and ongoing events such as the annual garden party will support both the expansion and day-to-day operations.

Throughout the afternoon, Worthy and curator Shauna Jones urged families to consider donating photos, quilts, recipes and farm tools, noting the museum cannot accept especially large items — like tractors — but can care for smaller items that help tell the story of Virgil's farmers.

"You might think something is of no consequence, but it could be incredibly important as we build a permanent Mennonite exhibit in the expanded museum," said Worthy.

The oral histories will be added to the museum's online archive and to its future permanent galleries. Residents who want to share material or support the expansion can contact the museum for details on how to take part.

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Virgil Tractor Parade returns on Dec. 11

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

What started in the era of the pandemic as a way to bring some holiday cheer to the people of Virgil has become an annual tradition about to celebrate its fifth birthday.

The Virgil Christmas tractor parade is back in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Thursday, Dec. 11 and will see a procession of illuminated and decorated tractors, trucks and other farm vehicles make their way through the village in a festive celebration of the holidays.

For Dorothy Soo-Wiens, it doesn't matter how old you are — whether you're eight or 80, the parade is a festive event everyone can enjoy.

And, for her, it inspires the kind of excitement that makes her feel young again.

"It's like you're like a kid, all starry-eyed," she said. "For me, it's all about just being a child again and all those feelings of going to something that just brings you joy."

Soo-Wiens has co-run the parade for five years now, alongside her husband,



Coun. Erwin Wiens. They have help from the Niagara Lions Club, of which they're both members.

In its first year, 2020, 19 tractors were part of the parade, which was put together as a Christmas celebration in the absence of NOTL's annual Santa Claus parade, due to COVID-19.

Since then, things have grown exponentially — last year, 74 vehicles were part of the procession.

"We're thinking we'll have as many as that," Soo-Wiens said of this year's parade. "Every year, you want to have a little bit more."

Right now, dozens in Niagara's agricultural community are readying for the parade, stringing up

and attaching lights to their vehicles that are going to take part.

It's not just the farming community in Niagara-on-the-Lake, says Soo-Wiens: people from Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Vineland and Jordan also take part in the festivities.

Wiens, whose farm has five vehicles participating, said aside from the parade itself, everyone enjoys the preparation leading up to the parade of decorating their tractors and trucks.

"When they're putting those units together, the excitement behind it and going to Canadian Tire and buying all the lights and all the decorations, it is so much fun," he said. "Everybody's getting a kick out of it."

Unfortunately for the couple, during the event itself, they're busy at the arena, marshalling the vehicles out of the parking lot and into the streets.

"We can watch them all coming back, which is nice," Soo-Wiens said.

For the many who do venture outside and line up and down the streets of central Virgil, they're treated to a spectacle — the drivers, in

return, are happy to have a captive audience, Wiens said.

"Every one of them say the same thing, that it's so exciting to see all the faces and everybody waving," he said.

"When we first started out with 19 people, there was apprehension, and now we have people wanting to get in because of how much fun they hear it is."

For those who want to see the parade, the route is as follows: the procession leaves from Centennial Arena at 6 p.m. sharp, heading onto Four Mile Creek Road, up to Pleasant Manor, then Eilden Street, Penner Street / Line 1 Road, Concession 4, Line 2 Road, then back to Four Mile Creek Road before returning to the arena.

"No matter how old you are, a child, an adult, midlife or senior, we just love parades, we love lights, we love things that celebrate Christmas," said Soo-Wiens.

Those interested in getting involved can contact the couple at erwinanddorothywiens@gmail.com.

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Candlelight Stroll lights up town Friday

Staff
The Lake Report

The giving season has returned to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The NOTL Chamber of Commerce is hosting the town's annual Candlelight Stroll this Friday, Dec. 5 from 6:30 to 9 p.m., with proceeds this year going to Pink Pearl Canada, an organization supporting young women who have been diagnosed with cancer.

The evening will begin at the old Courthouse with greetings from Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates and chamber and Tourism NOTL chief executive Kathy Weiss.

After the event's recipient is introduced, candles will be lit and participants invited to begin the stroll, led by horse-drawn carriages from Sentinel Carriages.

"The Candlelight Stroll is such a special moment for our community," Weiss said in a news release. "It's



Candles and choirs will brighten Old Town on Friday.

a night where neighbours, families, and visitors come together to share the simple joy of the season."

This year, after seeking suggestions from residents, the chamber's board chose Pink Pearl Canada as this year's charity. The organization supports and connects self-identifying young women across Canada who are facing the social and emotional challenges of a cancer diagnosis.

Candles will be available at stalls along Queen Street between King and Regent

streets, as well as at the Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake Visitor Centre and the Fort George Bus Lot Visitor Centre.

Volunteers — including students from Vineridge Academy, NOTL Ambassadors and community members — will help distribute them.

Candles are offered for a suggested \$5 donation, payable by cash on Queen Street or by debit and credit at the visitor centres.

A \$5 donation during the stroll also provides visi-

tors with a Ho Ho Passport, which offers discounts at participating businesses from Dec. 5 to 7. Rotary Holiday House Tour ticket holders can access the same offers by showing their ticket stubs.

Guests are encouraged to bring food donations for Newark Neighbours, which will have collection bins in front of the Courthouse. The organization provides Christmas hampers for more than 50 local families.

Parking will be available at Fort George, accessible from the Niagara Parkway at 51 Queens Parade. A free shuttle will run between Fort George and the Courthouse from 5 to 9:30 p.m. Candles will also be sold at Fort George for \$5.

Several choirs, bands and musical performers will volunteer their time along the stroll route.

Anyone wishing to make an anonymous donation may contact Weiss at kathy@niagaraonthelake.com.

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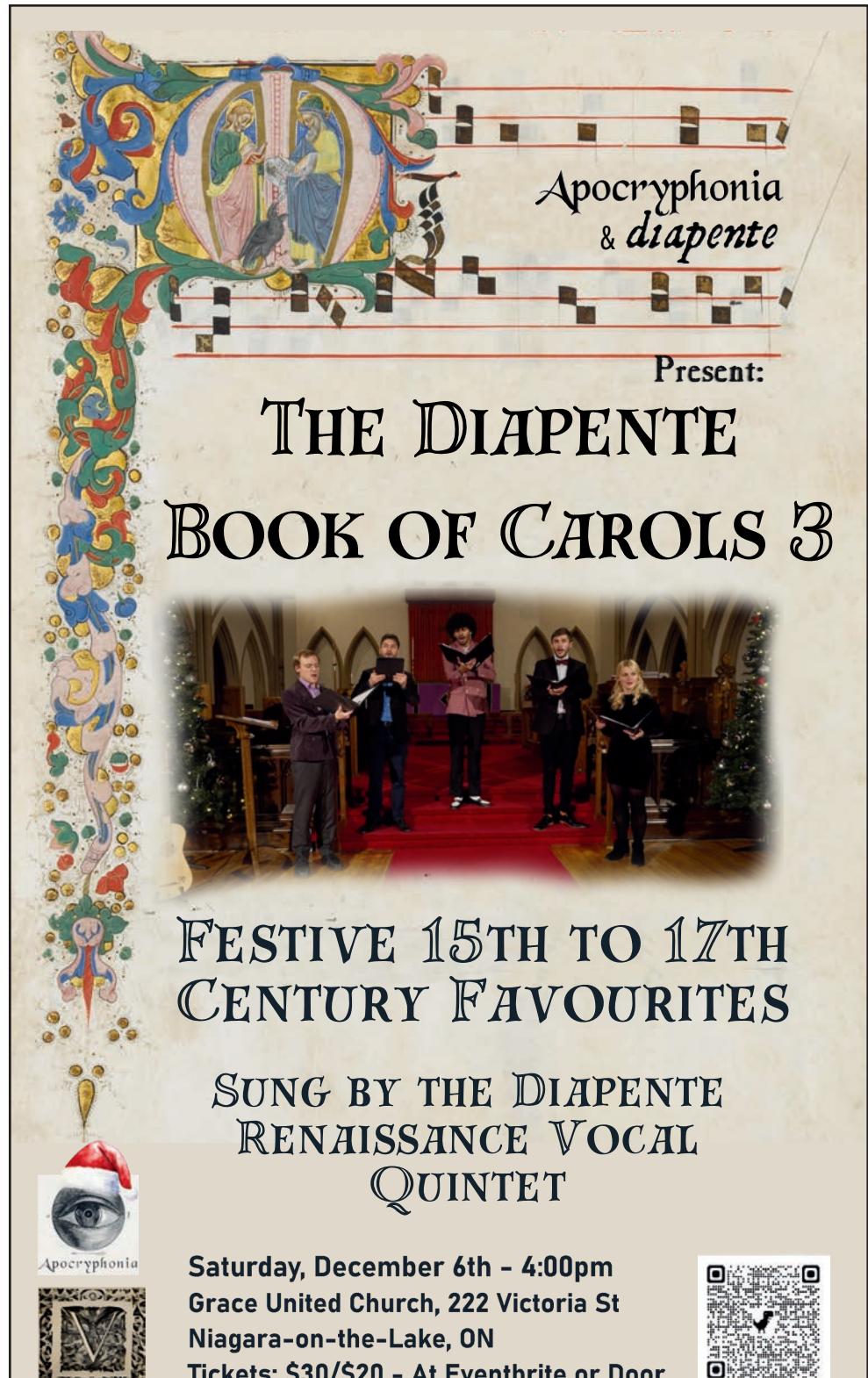
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Christmas Parade rolls out on Dec. 13

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Christmas Parade buttons are back in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The eight-member Christmas Parade committee is selling the buttons throughout town to help cover travel costs for marching bands coming into the parade. The pins have been available since late November.

John Strecker, head of the committee's fundraising group, stood with donations boxes selling the buttons with friends on Friday in front of the old Court House.

They also sold buttons Saturday in front of Penner's and the Independent Grocer on Queen Street and Monday at the tree lighting at the town hall in Virgil.

They will continue until parade day.

The committee produces about 2,200 buttons each year and tries to sell them all, Strecker said.

In past years, he said they have sold 2,000 buttons and raised more than \$6,000.



Christmas Parade fundraisers braved the cold to be outside selling buttons to help pay for the travel costs of marching bands. Front row, from left, Guy Hamilton, John Strecker and Mearl Obee. Behind from left, Gerry Brand and Robin Fraser. DAN SMEENK

Strecker has sold the buttons for 15 years, but said this will be the final year for him and his fundraising team.

"This will be our last year doing this as we are all getting older," he said. Coun. Tim Balasiuk is set to take over Stecker's role heading the selling of the buttons next year, he said.

Each button costs \$3. This year's design, created by the town's art department, features a snowman against a blue sky.

Strecker said the volunteer work has been a joyful part of the holiday season.

"It is ... probably one of the best small-town parades, and some would say one of

the best parades in Canada," he said.

The Christmas Parade starts at 11 a.m. on Dec. 13 at King and Centre Streets in Old Town and follows the town's traditional route down Castlereagh, Wellington, Byron/Prideaux, Simcoe and Queen streets.

daniel@niagaranow.com

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Left: During his time at Hotel Dieu Shaver, Robert regained not just his strength, but his spark. Middle: Robert and Sarah made Hotel Dieu Shaver Foundation's tree lighting event extra special this year by sharing their story and "flipping the switch" to illuminate the beautiful tree. Right: Thanks to the expert care received at Hotel Dieu Shaver, Sarah has been able to share more laughs and create more memories with her dad. SUPPLIED PHOTOS

A place of hope and healing: How Hotel Dieu Shaver helped a 96-year-old Niagara man reclaim his independence

SPONSORED The Lake Report

When 96-year-old Robert McPherson fell and broke his hip last summer, his daughter Sarah feared the worst. What followed was a challenging journey through acute care, setbacks and difficult conversations about long-term care — but also a journey that revealed the power of determination, compassionate caregiving and the transformative impact of rehabilitation.

Robert's experience mirrors what many Ni-

agara families face: an aging loved one navigating complex health needs and a caregiver fighting to protect their dignity and well-being.

After an unexpected second fracture during recovery, Robert's mobility was drastically limited. Each hospital stay weighed heavily on Sarah, who visited at least twice a day to keep him grounded and comforted. Even as long-term care brochures were handed to her, she held firmly to the belief that her dad still had the strength and spirit to regain independence.

"Deep down, I knew he had more life to live," Sarah said.

Everything shifted on Sept. 4, 2024, when Robert was referred to Hotel Dieu Shaver (HDS) Health and Rehabilitation Centre.

From the moment they arrived, Sarah sensed a different approach. Although Robert remained non-weight-bearing, the rehabilitation team focused on possibility rather than limitation. On day one, they introduced gentle physiotherapy and safe, bed-based cardio exercises.

"They saw beyond his age and limitations," Sarah recalled. "They treated him as a whole person — a father, a storyteller, a man full of spirit."

Small gestures made a meaningful impact. When Robert grew anxious one evening, Sarah mentioned his love of classical music. By morning, a radio was filling his room with calming notes that brought him comfort.

Those moments, Sarah says, are what define the hospital: "It's a place where dignity, comfort and hope

are woven into the care."

Over three months, Robert worked tirelessly to rebuild strength, confidence and independence. By the time he returned home, he could use both a wheelchair and walker and transfer on his own.

For Sarah, the experience underscored the essential — and often unseen — role of caregivers. Throughout her dad's recovery, she was his advocate and constant support. At HDS, she found a team who supported not only her dad, but her as well.

"They guided me as a

caregiver," she said. "For the first time in months, I could take a breath."

Today, Sarah and her dad can enjoy more laughs, Sunday drives and simple moments together. As Christmas approaches, she is most grateful for the gift of more time.

Hotel Dieu Shaver, Niagara's only rehabilitation hospital, relies on community support to ensure patients like Robert receive exceptional care.

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I'm delighted to share some exciting news — my long-time colleague and friend, Heather Haynes, Realtor with Engel & Völkers, and I have officially joined forces in a new professional partnership. Our story began in the early 1990s at Toronto's iconic Sutton Place Hotel, where Heather and I worked together as Sales Managers. What started as a strong business relationship quickly grew into a genuine friendship built on shared values: exceptional client care, attention to detail, and a commitment to creating meaningful experiences for the people we serve. It's no surprise that we both gravitated toward the real estate industry, where these qualities are truly valued. With 15 years of real estate experience, including operating my own brokerage, and Heather's 5 1/2 years of dedicated industry work backed by over 35 years in sales, we bring complementary strengths and a unified vision to every client interaction. We believe one simple truth: It's not what we say about our service that matters most — it's what our clients say about their experience. Together, we are excited to focus our efforts in the Niagara Region, offering a dynamic, collaborative, and client-centered approach to buying and selling real estate. If you're considering a move — or would simply like to meet our team — we'd love to connect over a coffee and get to know you.

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#55: Buy Girl Scout cookies and consider giving a couple of extra boxes to someone who loves them.

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



Contributed by Patty Garriock

“Life is beautiful in its simplicity.”

- Thomas Mathiessen

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Deck the town hall

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake welcomed the community for a tree lighting Monday night, offering hot chocolate and sweet treats to celebrate the holiday season.

DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

The town of tough guys



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist

“Use or lose it,” he said. A few days prior to giving that advice, the ortho surgeon at Sunnybrook had used 16 screws and three metal plates to bolt my leg back together. Now he was telling me to keep moving or risk facing more future hardware from Home Depot.

That was 10 years ago. So, I walk. And walk and walk. A lot.

But this post isn’t about my bionic limb. Just where it took me the other day, walking down an Old Town street, where I was assaulted.

No sidewalks, so I trudged along the road’s edge, passing a parked vehicle. It started to move forward, into my side. I thumped with my gloved hand to alert the driver, expecting him to stop and wave me on.

He stopped alright. Then a guy about my age exploded from the driver’s door, cussing me out for hitting his truck.

“I saw you,” he yelled. He pushed me back. Then he punched me in the chest. I stumbled back, grabbed my phone, snapped a picture



Who would have imagined that walking around NOTL could end with being assaulted verbally and physically?

and got the hell out of there.

know him.”

He drove behind me closely as I walked away, horn blaring.

When they questioned him that night he lied to the cops, of course. “Says he never touched you,” the constable reported, “and felt threatened you’d enter his vehicle.”

I think the officer was a tad amused at the thought of two old guys in conflict. I decided to let it drop, after learning more. He was a neighbour.

Who was it?

Rambo whacked me in front of his own home. He’s a long-time NOTL resident. A business operator, I discovered. In fact, he owns a bevy of properties nearby, including short-term vacation rentals.

I showed my combat picture to a few people that I see routinely. “Oh yeah,” they said immediately. “We

But wait. The weirdness continued.

This time, days later, it was Queen Street at the grocery store entrance. Another driver sliced into a parking spot, inches away from me as I went to cross the street. I gave him The Look. And that was all it took.

“So, you’re a tough guy?” he said, whiskers from my nose after jumping out of the car. He was huge.

“What’d I do,” I asked?

“You looked at me,” he said. “You’re lucky my wife’s in the car or you’d be in trouble.”

It was like a failed movie script. I chuckled. Big mistake. “So take a swing at me, tough guy,” he said. “And see what happens.”

“Sorry, no,” I muttered. “That’s not what civilized people do.”

“Are you calling me uncivilized?” He got closer.

Louder.

Time to de-escalate. I took off my toque, introduced myself by name and said I’d never look at him again. He went quiet. Stepped back. Then shook my hand. And we broke off.

Walking away I wondered if it was my throbbing alpha-male animalistic vibes that had caused these scenes. But, nah, I’m harmless. It’s deeper.

People respond with anger, aggression and the need to lash out when they’re insecure and under threat. Not by an old dude with a dodgy leg, but by circumstances. Finances. The economy. Chicken in the store at \$21 that used to be \$14. Mortgage renewals at double the rate. Layoffs thanks to tariffs. Houses nobody can afford. Adult kids who can’t leave home. Spouses who expect more. It’s almost always about money.

Shopkeepers on the street say they’re hopeful for good Christmas sales, but worry. Anxiety and uncertainty pervade. Real estate has ground to a halt.

So many folks are expecting a recession that they may just cause one. And lately, as reported here, we’ve seen the immigrant-haters come to town and flourish, because you always need someone else to blame.

Even a guy walking by. But be careful. He might write about it.

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

garth@garth.ca



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THE FORUM

Steve McGuinness
Columnist

William Shatner, in his title sequence voiceover at the start of Star Trek solemnly professes that space is "the final frontier." Much closer to home, within Niagara-on-the-Lake, parking spaces are the way we profiteer.

The world's first parking meter was invented by two Oklahoma State University professors in 1935 for placement on an Oklahoma City street. The charge was a nickel per hour. By the end of the next decade, 140,000 meters had been deployed, proliferating across municipalities far and wide.

It was inevitable that our town would eventually latch onto this 90-year-old money-making technology.

Although December is their month off (as a seasonal goodwill gift to motorists), these machines work hard the rest of the year, generating significant revenues at curbside spots in the heritage district and surrounding municipal lots.

The town's 2024 financial statements attribute \$19.9 million of revenues to user fees and charges.

That is higher than the \$18.3 million generated by property taxes paid by property owners. In fact, user fees and charges funded 43.5 per cent of the \$45.6 million in municipal expenses.

The town maintains a lengthy listing of all town



A customer purchases a parking ticket in the summer.

user fees and charges. But parking revenues make up the most significant bulk by dollar volume. Inflation has lifted the original Oklahoma nickel per hour price significantly. In 2025, NOTL's old town meters charged over \$5 hourly.

By town staff's estimate, the additional revenue generated by a budget proposal to raise the hourly parking toll by 25 cents was \$152,000. Inexplicably, that 2026 budget amendment failed to pass.

But by using that estimate and presuming a \$5.50 per hour average rate, the calculated revenues for our meter squadron are \$3.3 million dollars annualized.

Additionally, we earn ancillary revenues from time violation parking tags and illegally parked vehicle fines, plus proceeds from permit sales for bus parking and resident passes.

Metered parking is enforced for 3,340 hours a year, meaning the annual maximum revenue is \$18,370 per space at full utilization. Of course, actual occupancy rates fluctuate wildly based on seasonal visitor volumes.

How much are these parking stalls worth as an asset? The town will value them

at \$75,716, effective Jan. 1, 2026. This is the cash-in-lieu penalty amount charged to businesses unable to meet minimum parking requirements.

To realize a 10 per cent yield on this asset value, a parking stall needs to sustain a 40 per cent occupancy rate during the ten daylight operating hours. If occupancy drops to 20 per cent, then the return drops to 5 per cent — still a better rate than a bank guaranteed investment certificate pays.

Town staff are currently studying an offer by the Irish Harp pub to rededicate six required parking spots over to use as patio dining space, with three for short-term rental parking. That proposed deal is valued at over \$436,000.

It's an innovative option unavailable to most Queen Street restaurateurs, whose curb patios will be returning to our parking space inventory after the pandemic temporary permits program ends soon.

The Harp's six spot parking in lieu patio proposal is dwarfed by the requirement for the Royal George theatre's replacement complex, reduced from 105 spaces to one.

This carries forward a

credit of 104 spaces for the legal non-conforming use of the existing theatre, consolidated with two Victoria Street lots.

The town issued a statement, "Town corrects community misinformation regarding the Royal George Theatre," on Dec. 3, explaining this.

At a Dec. 2 committee of the whole planning meeting, Gina Angelopoulos, owner of the Epicurean restaurant, opposed the Olde Angel Inn's permanent outdoor patio proposal.

She specifically objected to the legal non-conforming parking exemption credit applying on a consolidated carry-forward basis there.

Meanwhile, Coun. Andrew Niven suggests expanding the old town metered parking zone to increase revenues.

Other influencers — including Frances Stocker, of Seniors for Climate in Niagara — propose keeping more vehicles further away from the core. Her ideas include creating a park-and-ride hub at a major entry point and embracing "hop on/hop off" shuttles.

Would daytrippers embrace this idea? Niagara Parks' WeGo service presents a successful nearby precedent to emulate.

Could it generate sufficient net operating profits to replace any foregone meter parking revenues?

If not, the town costs currently recovered from meter feeding motorists would shift onto local taxpayers. That would be unfortunate.

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

stevemcguinness94@gmail.com

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

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

Last issue category: MORE THAN ONE MEANING

Clue: A wading bird, or a machine with a hoisting arm at a construction site.

Answer: What is a crane?

Answered first by: Margie Enns

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Claudia Grimwood, Bob Wheatley, Lynda Collet, Sue Rautenberg, Brianne Rhi, Jeff Lake, Sue Gulley, Karen Williams, Nick D'Amore, Esther VanGorder, Kimberly Amaral, Jim Dandy, Sylvia Wiens, Nancy Rocca, Wade Durling, Kim Mueller, Katie Reimer, Bob Stevens, Brandy Delaney, Sheila Meloche, Hedy Wiebe, Tuija Johansson, Jane Andersen, Marla Percy, Catherine Clarke, Howard Jones, Wesley Mann, KC King

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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The battle of fact vs. fiction happening in our town



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

Back in the late 1960s, the phrase "Go, lemmings, go" was coined to reflect a new generation's belief that most people would unthinkingly accept the majority opinion and tailor their actions to conform accordingly — even when the inevitable result of doing so would lead to harm.

It implied that the need to belong was so pervasive, individuals would suspend their critical, analytical and even ethical judgment with respect to harmful group actions.

Hence the lemming reference — an animal that was then, and still is today, popularly believed to commit mass suicide during their migration by following the "herd" even as it runs off of cliffs.

What is truly ironic? While lemmings mass-

migrate, they don't commit mass suicide.

Fact: when Disney was filming "White Wilderness" in 1958, they believed some dramatic footage was in order for the lemming segment to be truly impactful.

So, a "mass suicide" was staged by the simple expedient of dumping out cages of lemmings over the edge of a cliff while employing strategic camera angles to capture this "unreasonable" suicidal behaviour.

Not only was lemming "mass suicide" a total fiction (documented in a 1983 CBC investigation), but all facts to the contrary were completely ignored.

Even more telling, over seven decades later, the vast majority of folks still believe that lemmings commit mass suicide.

It just goes to show how a really good fabrication, told by a very convincing narrator, supported by a clever (albeit misleading) presentation and underwritten by the power of a large organization, can convince many people that fiction is actually fact.

Here in Niagara-on-the-Lake, apparently aided and abetted by several of our elected "representatives," this narrative has been successfully played out again



NOTL councillors have drank the developers' Kool-Aid, writes Brian Marshall.

and again over the term of the current council.

To be clear, the "harm" pursuant to these overtures is directly and unequivocally linked to the existent infrastructure, historical matrix, the designated heritage district and the residential character/livability of Old Town.

Currently, there is a giant hole in the ground between Gage and Centre streets on King Street, awaiting the foundations for a new hotel. Beginning with the rezoning of the property in 2024, concession after concession has been made to allow the continuance of work on the development.

And, despite seriously

flawed engineering studies, notable, potentially disastrous infrastructure, storm and groundwater management concerns, significant over-reach on work being conducted without permits and the flouting of stop-work orders, amongst other issues, town council and staff continue to facilitate the project in the face of serious opposition by experts and the majority of Old Town residents.

Most recently, we witnessed our lord mayor actively — and successfully — lobbying members of the regional council to provide an unprecedented gift to the developer in excess of \$900,000 out of regional development charges.

All this predicated on the highly dubious claim that the finished hotel will eventually qualify as a five-star facility — something a couple of the supportive councillors suggested we "needed" to "help fill" one of the town's "economic gaps."

Well, it appears a few folks have drank the Kool-Aid.

With site plan approval currently pending staff approval and the power of the mayor's office behind it, it appears the proposed 19-metre-tall monster will

rise to completely alter the residential face of King Street and hollow out the shouldering neighbourhoods.

And, speaking of monsters that will detrimentally alter streetscapes (in this case, the heart of the heritage district) ... in a special meeting held on Nov. 18, town council voted 6-3 to approve the zoning bylaw amendment and official plan amendment required for the Shaw Festival to forward their proposed redevelopment of the Royal George.

This decision was a direct response to a letter penned by Mr. Tim Jennings and directed to the members of council.

In this letter, he suggests, the Shaw has invested "over \$4 million in design, assessments and engineering," of which "\$1.4 million of that has been spent since July in revisions to the building envelope and systems requested by the town, council, and its committees."

He continues that any further "material change" will necessitate a "full redesign," which he claims the Shaw cannot afford.

And finishes with a polite threat: "The most likely outcome of council rejecting the current proposal would be the abandonment of the

project by the Shaw and the likely sale of the conjoined property by the board."

What he fails to mention is that the \$1.4 million spent since July was invested in "tweaks" — none of which materially addressed or altered the primary issues with the original design.

Had this organization been truly open, consultative and responsive to the concerns of the town residents, that \$1.4 million would have been invested in a fundamentally altered exterior design — for example, presenting as a "village" (or cluster) of buildings with multiple roof surfaces and orientations contextually compatible in scale and form to merge with the shouldering/adjacent properties.

In short, respectful of the heritage district and the neighbours.

Instead, the Shaw's executive body made a decision to put lipstick on a pig — at a very sizable cost — apparently believing they could sell it.

And they did. Pour the council another round of Kool-Aid.

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

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How was I asleep on this great Canadian story?



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

Largely because of my commitment to Rambling once a week in The Lake Report, I try to keep up to date with the news of Niagara and beyond. But just last week, a national story jumped out at me that I had totally missed. It forced me to stop, reflect and perhaps even think a bit deeply.

Colleen Jones, a truly great Canadian, has passed away, after an incredible sports and broadcasting and personal life. Hers was a

joyful life, and she has left a legacy of kindness. Love, joy and kindness.

Reading about her life has really affected me. Especially since last week in our local weekly paper, there seemed to be a lot of angst, and indeed a shortage of civility and respect. We have no shortage of issues that will affect our futures, but may I humbly and respectfully request that we all take a few deep breaths?

The tipping point for me, just after I read about the untimely passing of Colleen Jones, was the picture of the trash dumpster behind our local McDonald's ("Stop dumping your trash at McDonald's," Nov. 27).

It was accompanied by a rather harsh letter to the editor ("A letter to Santa, the nicest Canadian," Nov. 27).

Since childhood, I have been interested in sports. Not just the major North American professional



Colleen Jones passed away at the age of 65 in Halifax after a lengthy fight with cancer. CURLING CANADA/ANDREW KLAVER

sports, but also minor sports played in many countries, by many athletic and talented sportsmen.

Let's agree that people who don't always strive to finish first in their chosen pursuit can be winners — if they try their best. As best I can recall, my parents never asked me how I finished. They always asked me how I tried.

This sporting philosophy was drilled into me by my mom and dad, both fine athletes. From Saskatchewan and northern

Ontario, they were lifelong athletes and spectators. In Kirkland Lake, Winnipeg and wherever their lives took them, they were both skips at the local curling clubs. They won more games than they lost, and they enjoyed every one of those games.

They would have been huge fans of the late Colleen Jones. She was a two-time world champion and curled in the Tournament of Hearts 21 times. Then, nearly 40 years as a CBC host. A very personal life, and the obituary and comments about her from around Canada repeatedly mention certain wonderful words and character traits.

One of her co-workers during her long tenure at CBC described Jones as "always so damn fun. It was easy to forget she was famous because she was so down-to-earth. Always."

So now I will ramble back to really famous athletes.

Often, really rich athletes who decided to play the more popular sports here in North America. It would be silly, and a waste of time, to list their names. I will mention just a few: Gretzky, Messi, Mboko, Matthews, McDavid, Henderson, Bichette ...

OK, you catch my drift. They are so famous and make so much money.

Back now to Colleen Jones. Her childhood family environment in Nova Scotia, her natural talent, the coaching she received, her meticulous attention to detail, and her work ethic allowed her to achieve greatness in her chosen sport and career.

Don't get me wrong. I am not complaining that I know so little about Colleen Jones. Or that I missed taking joy from her careers and life. That's just the way life turned out.

Let me suggest we do two things. Firstly, let's expand

our horizons a bit. Or a lot.

And let's be more respectful and civil here in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Let's feel free to put our opinions and thoughts out there, verbally and in writing. Both formally and informally. I have been shocked by some of the things I have read and heard of late.

There are so many truly horrible things going on in our world. Let's do our things to make things better.

Colleen Jones, Order of Canada, was a great Canadian, and she has been well recognized.

She was a high achiever, kind, loving, an optimist, a loving person. So many more words could describe her.

Canada is a better country because of her.

My sincere condolences to her family and friends.

Love each other, and be respectful and kind.

rossrocket9@gmail.com

Want to know how ChatGPT works? Create a simpler model



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

Last fall was a big year for AI at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library, beginning with a several-week course on artificial intelligence, including exercises with ChatGPT in September, followed in October by reviews of the 2024 Nobel Prizes in physics and chemistry, both of which were closely tied to AI.

In the case of the physics prize, the two laureates played key roles in the early development of large language programs and for the chemistry prize, the three laureates focused on the development of software designed to decipher the 3D structure of proteins based on their amino acid sequences and developing entirely novel proteins.

But the Nobel committee's press release, short summary and extended scientific papers weren't all that helpful when it came to describing what AI was and explaining what jargon terms such as neural networks,

large language models and other technical terms actually mean in layman's terms, leaving me to wonder if the writers were as perplexed as the rest of us.

Then, I discovered a gem of an article written by Aatish Bhatia, which appeared in the New York Times on April 27, 2023, with the intriguing title: "Watch an AI Learn to Write by Reading Nothing but Jane Austen."

To keep matters as simple as possible, Bhatia chose a laptop computer loaded with a basic form of ChatGPT, called BabyGPT, which intentionally was not loaded with the usual reams of data but left blank except for core large language algorithms that mimic written language.

Sounds simple, but as Bhatia stated, "The inner workings of these algorithms are notoriously opaque," even if "the basic ideas behind them are surprisingly simple."

That's what I've always suspected, but it was comforting to realize I'm not the only dummy who struggles to understand what those algorithms are doing.

ChatGPT is usually trained by trolling through mountains of internet text and other sources and repeatedly guessing the next few letters and grading themselves against the real thing.



For the purposes of this illustrative study, the computer was loaded with core large language algorithms but no reams of data to train on.

Hence, starting out, BabyGPT had no idea what letters, never mind words or grammar, were. Rather, BabyGPT started from scratch with only algorithms designed to look for patterns in whatever characters were presented.

What was presented to BabyGPT for this illustrative experiment?

There were six options from which the operator could choose, all small, such as the complete works of Jane Austen or William Shakespeare, or other similar-sized databases — each with no more than a few megabytes, compared to the usual many terabytes of internet text.

For Jane Austen, the exercise began with a standard prompt: "You must decide for yourself," said Elizabeth.

Before training with the Jane Austen database, BabyGPT produced a gibberish of letters, punc-

tuation, capitalized or not letters, but no meaningful text.

After 250 rounds — about 30 seconds of processing time on a laptop — a few simple words emerged such as "the, us, all, he and be," but otherwise all gibberish, random punctuations and capitalizations.

After 500 rounds — about a minute of laptop processing — more complex words appeared, such as "she, refer, was, prove, and what," and some punctuation such as periods in their right place, sometimes.

After 5,000 rounds — about ten minutes of processing time — the program produced longer words, made fewer spelling mistakes and grammar improved, but sentences still made no sense.

Here, Bhatia pauses in his article to explain what BabyGPT is actually doing.

To quote, "BabyGPT is an extremely complicated mathematical function involving millions of numbers that converts a sequence of letters, in this case, into an output — predication of the next letter. And with every round of training the algorithm adjusts the numbers to improve its guesses — thus learning. What the algorithm generates is not letters but probabilities and why we get a different answer each time a response is generated."

After 30,000 rounds and one hour of training, full sentences finally emerge but still don't make sense and at this point, BabyGPT reached its best.

Further improvements would require expanding the database on which the computer algorithm trains.

That's why this simple model progressed so far and no further; it needed a far larger database from which to learn and improve.

Even so, as the author pointed out, "in just an hour of training on a laptop, a language model evolved from generating random characters to a crude approximation of language."

For comparison, babies take many months, even a few years, to learn a language.

Depending on the version, ChatGPT was trained on millions to trillions of times more data than was used in this simple model. That's where ChatGPT gets its information and power.

ChatGPT and similar devices also need very complex mathematical algorithms to analyze and make sense of the data. Sometimes programs can find and even develop novel algorithms on their own, which improve processing without human input.

That's amazing and reflected in the development sometimes of new abilities unanticipated by their

human creators and surely a sign of intelligence.

In the two years since Bhatia's article was published in the New York Times, the talents of AI have grown exponentially with traditional silicon chip computers.

Imagine the giant steps forward when quantum computing matures, which, theoretically, can handle far more and more complex data than silicon chips, which are close to reaching their limits.

Will AI exceed human intelligence? For many tasks, it already has and will soon possess intelligence exceeding human intelligence in all spheres because AI continues to improve at breakneck speed and human intelligence is stuck with a brain not noticeably improving.

That's the point Steven Weinberg, a Nobel-winning particle physicist, made a few years ago — humans may have reached the limit of individual and beyond which evolving computers will be necessary, as they already are in analyzing complex astronomical data gathered from the latest generation of telescopes.

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




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Boxer wins fifth national championship

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

St. Davids boxer McKenzie Wright took another step Saturday on the long road to fighting for Canada at the 2028 Olympics.

Wright showed her dominance in the ring again, winning her fifth career national championship, a phenomenal accomplishment says the head of Boxing Canada.

"McKenzie's performance was fantastic," executive director Christopher Lindsay told The Lake Report after the championship bout in Winnipeg.

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

"And her five-time national champion status brings her into a rare position within the history of Boxing Canada," Lindsay said.

But Wright says she still has unfinished business.

She narrowly missed the chance to fight in the 2024 Paris Olympics but has the Los Angeles Games in 2028 squarely in her sights.

And she's taking concrete steps to make that a reality.

She is now ranked 24th in the world in her weight class by World Boxing, one of only two North American fighters in the top 25.

Considering the fact that at 35 she is much older than a lot of the other top boxers, that ranking is a testament



Boxer McKenzie Wright.

to her talent and the grueling training that Wright puts herself through.

She's just 5 foot 4, tops out at about 112 pounds, but she sure can pack a punch.

The Elite National Championships last week in Winnipeg decided who would represent Team Canada for the coming year and with her win Wright will remain a member of the national squad.

"I was the number 1 seed, so received a bye straight through to the semifinals where I faced provincial champion Jade Delgado from Ottawa," Wright told The Lake Report.

That bout was "very one-sided" and put her through to the final on Saturday against Alberta champion Amber-Jane Wall.

The fight was "very competitive and close going into the third, but I dug deep and my experience showed. I found her timing, pushed the pace and found a home for my right hand and check hook. When the final bell went, we knew we had it."

This means she maintains

her position on the country's Elite A team for 2026.

"There will be a few international competitions next spring with the big focus being the Commonwealth Games in Scotland next summer," she said.

Team Canada doesn't get to send a full team to those Games. "Only three women will be chosen, so the tournaments leading up to the Games will be the deciding factor" in who attends.

Wright's success is all the more remarkable because, after first winning the national crown in 2010 and 2011, when she was barely out of her teens, she stepped away from the ring for five years.

She came back in 2022 and has now been national champ again from 2023 through 2025.

So, while she is older than many opponents, as she likes to say, "Yeah, I'm 35 but I'm only 30 in boxing years" thanks to those years away from the sport.

Earlier this year she split with coach Jesse Sallows of City Boxing Club in Niagara Falls and has been under the tutelage of Faisal Ahmadi — "Coach Sal" — from Niagara Falls, N.Y. He was on hand for the Winnipeg tournament.

She also trains regularly in Montreal with the national team.

Wright still works part-time as a nurse at a cosmetic medical clinic in Niagara Falls.

And she will continue to

split her time between training with Ahmadi and traveling a couple of times a month to Montreal to work out under national team coaches Vincent Auclair and Samir El Mais at the Olympic Stadium.

"An important part of training in Montreal with the team is I have more sparring and training partners that are closer to my size and skill level," she said. That allows her to implement the strategies her coaches have her working on.

It's key for her to improve and develop.

Lindsay noted the 2026 season will be focused on building Wright's international experience and refining her style to best suit international judges.

"This deepening experience will mean several trips across the world with World Cups, Commonwealth Games and Continental Championships on the schedule," he said.

"This investment in exposure will give her confidence and an understanding of her direct opponents come the start of Olympic qualification in 2027."

As the head of Canadian amateur boxing, he had high praise for Wright.

"Boxing Canada is privileged to have such a strong athlete in our ranks and the national team benefits from McKenzie's leadership, hard work and unflinching desire to be a world-best, Olympic-style boxer."

The Lake Report

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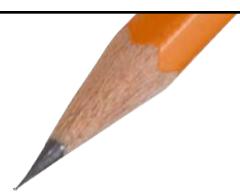
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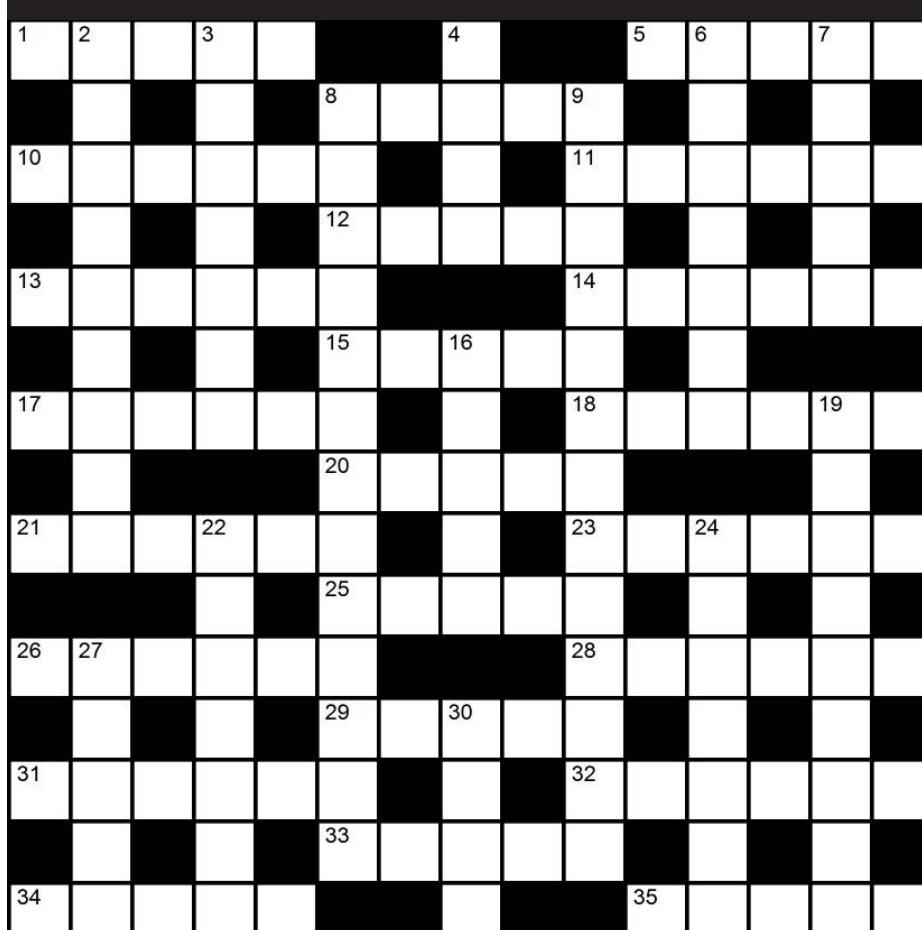
Across

1. Frequently (5)
5. Divest (5)
8. Sag (5)
10. Spanish fleet (6)
11. Israeli currency (6)
12. Bring together (5)
13. Dwelling (6)
14. Kine (Arch.) (6)
15. Moor (5)
17. Contaminate (6)
18. Resist (6)
20. Minor actor in crowd scenes (5)
21. Sliding compartment of furniture (6)
23. Capital of the Bahamas (6)
25. World's largest democracy (5)
26. Regular customer (6)
28. Departs (6)
29. Rotten (5)
31. Capital of the Philippines (6)
32. Scandinavian kingdom (6)
33. In what place (5)
34. Tale (5)
35. Small salamanders (5)

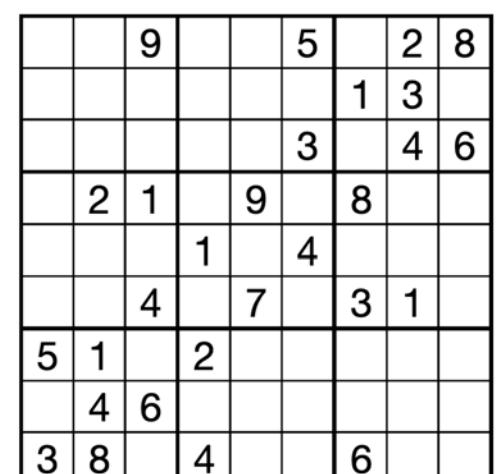
Down

2. Alien (9)
3. Scrutinise (7)
4. Central Chinese desert (4)
6. Crown (7)
7. Standard of perfection (5)
8. Wife of your son (8-2-3)
9. What shrinks do (13)
16. Behaved (5)
19. Declaration (9)
22. Soldier (7)
24. Type of twin (7)
27. Behind (5)
30. Junkie (4)

Crossword Puzzle



Last issue's answers



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Queenston's steamship days

Here we see one of the Canada Steamship Lines famous lake ships departing from Queenston dock, with Brock's Monument visible atop the heights to the left. At the height of its popularity, the Canada Steamship Lines fleet would transport up to 10,000 visitors from Toronto to Niagara and Queenston on a busy summer weekend. Toronto-based companies often held employee picnics at Queenston Heights Park, sending their entire staff aboard these excursion ships. Each of the four vessels in the fleet made two trips to Niagara daily in 1910. The last of the ships, the S.S. Cayuga, stopped in 1957.

For local residents, these ships were a cherished part of the summer rhythm. Many would stroll down to the dock each evening to watch the final boat come in. Former Queenston resident T.A. Clifford recalled a favourite end-of-season ritual: "On the last trip of the season, the captain, Jimmy, came down onto the dock to say goodbye to the dock staff and in particular, Walt Sheppard, the dock manager. They made a great to-do about how sad they were and when the boat pulled away from the dock, Walt got a towel soaked in water, rang his tears from it while the captain laughed and blew the whistle in long, loud blasts."

Last week's photo correction: Please note that last week's photo was mistakenly identified as Blanche Quinn. In an ironic twist, the person who provided that identification was actually Blanche Quinn herself. Her family has since confirmed that the woman in the photo is not her but her mother-in-law, Gertrude Louise (Allen) Quinn. Fortunately, her inspiring story at the airport is all true.



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Brett Sherlock on famous ladies (personal friends) and their collections – and Willowbank's strategic path forward

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The Lake Report

As Willowbank School of Restoration Arts approaches its 20th anniversary, under the renewed royal patronage of HM King Charles III, executive director Katie Houghton welcomed guests to the finale of the "Intersections in Heritage Conservation" lecture series on Saturday, Nov. 22. The lecture was led by the captivating Brett Sherlock. Before he spoke, Houghton briefed the packed Bright Parlour on Willowbank, highlighting the school's ongoing role as a leading global educational institution in heritage conservation.

Willowbank is developing a strategic philanthropic plan to support the creation of much-needed educational spaces, ensuring students can continue to learn and practise the full breadth of the school's curriculum. These spaces will enable hands-on training in trades, conservation and restora-

tion, allowing Willowbank to expand its programs, welcome more students and strengthen its role as a global leader in heritage education. The school looks forward to continued support from the Niagara community and beyond as it embarks on this next chapter. To learn more about these plans, contact Katie Houghton at katie.houghton@willowbank.ca.

Guests then turned their attention to Sherlock, who shared his journey with some of the world's most famous jewels and the women who shaped his understanding of their human stories: HRH Princess Margaret, Dame Elizabeth Taylor and HH Princess Salimah "Sally" Aga Khan, all personal friends.

The HRH Princess Margaret dazzled with her poise. Sherlock recalled: "It was always a big deal for a boy from Niagara-on-the-Lake to go up to the guard's gate and say, 'It is Mr. Sherlock for Her Royal Highness the Princess Margaret.'



Brett Sherlock speaks to a full room at Willowbank Saturday morning using a scene of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in "Cleopatra" to illustrate how the actress' jewelry revealed the private lives of the three women at the heart of his talk. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

And them reply, 'Yes, she is expecting you.'" Her tall Poltimore tiara travelled with him during landmark sales.

Elizabeth Taylor revealed the vulnerability behind glamour. "I took

the Peregrina pearl in my briefcase, strapped into the seat beside me, and drove it to the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) in Carlsbad California from her home in Bel-Air. I sat

with it until it was weighed and confirmed," Sherlock said. He laughed recalling the time when "the moment the missing pearl surfaced in her dog's mouth while in a hotel room in London."

"Sally" Aga Khan had a casual ease with major stones. At a predawn breakfast after Alana Weston's 21st birthday ball, Sherlock reached into his jacket to return a sapphire and diamond necklace Aga Khan had asked him to hide as she felt overdressed. Pulling out only half, he worried, "How am I going to pay for the other half?" — but HH laughed, as the missing piece was still safely in his pocket and could be easily repaired.

"The most important thing is relationships," Sherlock said. "Auctions depend less on glamour than on trust." Sherlock closed the morning by crediting his mother, who told him as he left for his first London internship: "Go off and do whatever you want, be whoever you want, Niagara-on-the-Lake will always be your home, nothing will change here, and you can always come home." As he obviously did, 22 years later, with husband James Booty.



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Obituary

Dr. Lawrence Costello



COSTELLO, Lawrence —

Dr. Lawrence "Larry" Costello, known to many as "Doc," passed away peacefully. Born to Air Commodore Martin Lawrence and Muriel Costello, Larry served with distinction in the Royal Canadian Regiment, including a meaningful deployment to Cyprus with Canada's Peacekeeping mission.

An adventurer at heart, he set Canadian parachuting records, later earned his pilot's licence at 61, and loved sailing in Halifax and Bedford. Larry was a compassionate and respected physician whose care touched many lives.

He is survived by his loving wife of over 50 years, Teresa Costello; his children Colin, Martin, Laura (Alfie) Alford, Jennifer, mother of Benjamin and Abigale, and Anne (Kevin) Butler, mother of Finley and Molly; his sister Edith Costello; and his niece and nephew, Piper and Paul Huggins. He was predeceased by his sister, Catherine Huggins.

He will be deeply missed and remembered with love.

Cremation has taken place, and the family will receive friends on Sunday, Dec. 14, 2025 from 2 to 6 p.m. at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake. Funeral Mass will be celebrated in St. Vincent de Paul Church, 73 Picton St., Niagara-on-the-Lake on Monday, Dec. 15, 2025, at 11 a.m. Inurnment to follow in the church cemetery. For those unable to attend the service, it will be live-streamed on the Morse & Son and Morgan Funeral Home Facebook page at facebook.com/morseandson on Monday, Dec. 15 commencing at 11 a.m.

For those who wish, memorial donations may be made to the Canadian Cancer Society or to Niagara Palliative Care.



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Rosling's 'Mistletoe Bride' back for 11th year

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Actor Tara Rosling's one-woman performance of "The Mistletoe Bride" is back in Niagara-on-the-Lake this holiday season at the Silversmith Brewing Co. on Dec. 14 at 6 p.m.

The story, originally written by English author Jeanette Winterson, is "a ghost story, a solstice story, a Christmas story (and) a rite of passage story," Rosling said.

The show has run every Christmas season since 2014, except in 2020 during the COVID-19 shutdown.

Proceeds from the show will go to Gillian's Place, a Niagara-based charity that supports and shelters women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Rosling said the choice of charity aligns with the story, which includes an incident of sexual assault that is "poetically described" and involves "a woman who



Tara Rosling is back again at the Silversmith Brewery Company on Dec. 14 to perform "the Mistletoe Bride," which she and director Peter Hinton have done since 2014. SUBMITTED

liberates herself from that scenario."

"There's an essence of Me Too in it," she said.

When she and Peter Hinton, the director who did the first show with Rosling, were looking for a charitable organization to donate the funds to, it seemed like "the perfect fit," she said.

Rosling first encountered

the story through Hinton and "loved" it. They began rehearsing and asked Silversmith to host the show.

Its first year drew "way more people than we expected," she said, prompting them to add a second performance that night.

What they thought would be a one-time event has become "tremendously

satisfying."

"I never anticipated it would become a local tradition," she said. "Silversmith beautifully supports the story."

Tickets are \$100, with \$80 going to Gillian's Place. The evening includes a three-course meal and a pint of beer.

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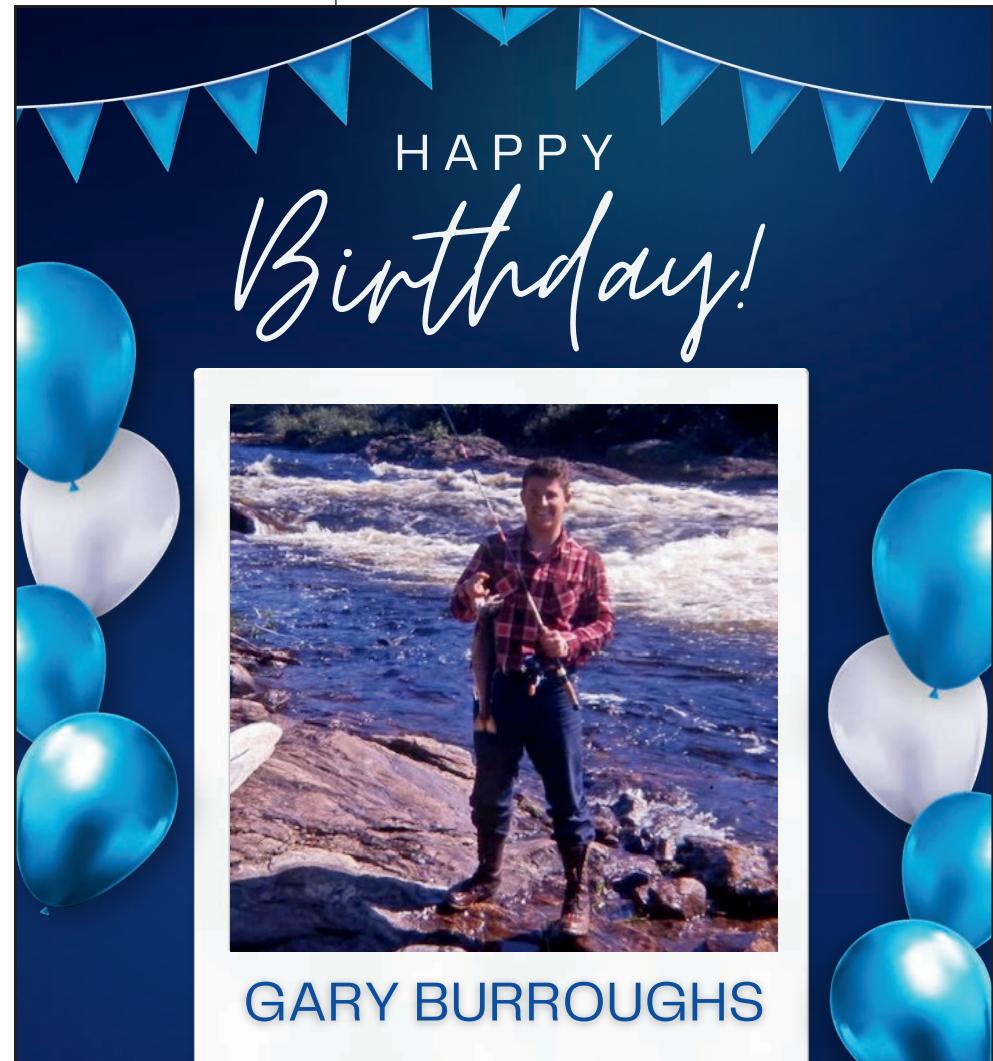


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GARY BURROUGHS

On December 8th, we celebrate a milestone for this remarkable man, whose wisdom, integrity, and kindness have made a real impact in our world. Dad, we are incredibly proud and grateful for all you have done and continue to do for our family and the community you love.
Happy 80th Birthday!

With love always, Alex and Josie

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*TRREB Jan. 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2022, combined units sold.

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