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

George back on stage | Page 3

Vol. 8, Issue 46 Canada's most-awarded community newspaper November 20, 2025

THE WILD WEST OF WINE

Ferox given estate winery status, with limitations

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A contentious year for Ferox by Fabian Reis's zoning application reached a decisive point Tuesday night: the winery has received estate winery status from council.

But there are strict limits on how it can run.

Niagara-on-the-Lake council approved a revised zoning bylaw for the winery at 1829 Concession 4 Rd., allowing it to operate as an estate winery while capping occupancy, restricting hospitality uses and requiring most of the property to remain in vineyard production.

Owners Fabian and Stephanie Reis also own the former Harvest Barn property, nearby at 1822 Niagara Stone Rd. The new bylaw ties the properties to-

Continued on Page 2

Helping those who help

NOTL fire department prioritizes first responders' mental health after trauma



A few of the many volunteers and staff who make up Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire & Emergency Services team, who serve the community 24 hours a day, seven days a week. From left, firefighters Lorenzo Mazzuca, Darren Trostenko, Lyle Renaud, Alistair Harlond, Brenda Lowes, Armand Istanboulian, Kevin McClelland, Jay Plato, Zach Dingman and Todd Polly at the Glendale station. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Zahraa Hmood | The Lake Report

Every job comes with an industry that operates in its own little world — its own history, codes of conduct, language and experiences that are distinctive to the profession.

For Kelli Nicholson, whether you're a police officer, a firefight-

er or a paramedic, being the first on the scene of an emergency forges realities that only other first responders know well.

Some niche experiences are benign, like being able to speak with ease in 10-codes and the phonetic alphabet, or having a unique sense of humour.

However, some incidents are far more difficult, whether it's a fatal car crash, a senior having a medical emergency, a house fire in your community or trauma involving a child.

That reality hit home this summer.

Niagara-on-the-Lake fire-

fighters were among the first on the scene in the early hours of Monday, July 21, when three young people driving on Queenston Road died after their vehicle struck a tree and burst into flames.

Continued on Page 4

Proposed NOTL tax hike rises to 2.19 per cent after budget changes

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's council made a few changes to the draft of its annual budget for next year, which

have brought the potential property tax for 2026 up to 2.19 per cent, compared to the proposed 1.81 per cent from two weeks ago.

At an assessed value of \$546,000 per household, this represents a bump in

the annual property tax of \$33.60, versus the old draft, which would've seen NOTL residents pay \$27.87 more next year.

Council had the opportunity on Monday in a special council meeting

to propose amendments to the town's newly announced budget, part of the new process under the province's "strong mayor powers" legislation.

Councillors presented eight possible changes,

two of which passed. Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa now has until Nov. 25 to veto them.

The first change, proposed by Coun. Gary Burroughs, called for hiring a certified engineer as the development engineer, replacing

the originally planned engineering technologist.

Burroughs argued that having an engineer would be an asset to multiple prongs of the municipality's

Continued on Page 5

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Royal George rebuild back on stage

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A week made all the difference.

Niagara-on-the-Lake council voted Tuesday night to undo last week's decision to delay the Royal George Theatre rebuild, voting 6-3 to approve its official plan and zoning bylaw amendments and directing staff to come up with new planning paperwork ahead of the next council meeting.

This will allow the multi-million-dollar rebuild of the 110-year-old theatre on Queen Street to move forward.

The move comes one week after the town's Nov. 11 decision to hold off on approving and have staff investigate concerns about the theatre's size, height, parking and accessibility.

"It was a roller coaster, but we're very happy with the ultimate result," said Shaw Festival executive director Tim Jennings, speaking to The Lake Report after the meeting.

In council's Nov. 11 decision during the committee of the whole meeting, it directed staff to look into several parts of the Royal George Theatre's rebuild.

One instruction asked staff to see whether the new Royal George could be designed with a maximum floor area of 35,000 square feet — 3,000 less than the Shaw's planned 38,000-square-foot design, spread out over three floors.

These 38,000 square feet represent the size of the building above-ground, while there would be an additional 15,500 square feet below ground, for a theatre that's 53,500 square feet large in total.

Following that, in a Nov. 17 submission to the town ahead of its Nov. 18 council meeting, the Shaw warned it could abandon the rebuild — or sell the Queen Street-Victoria Street property — if council did not approve the required planning amendments.

The letter said further delays would add more than \$200,000 per month in escalation, contract and financing costs and could prevent the new theatre from opening in fall 2028, "costing main street merchants and hoteliers millions in lost revenues."

Any reduction below the current 38,000-square-foot design would trigger a full redesign that the Shaw cannot fund after spend-



The Shaw Festival's proposed Royal George design. The project has been given the green light by council to move to next stages. UNITY DESIGN STUDIO

ing more than \$4 million on engineering and earlier revisions, the letter said.

"We are a charity. We do not have the capacity to fund a redesign of this project," it said.

Initially, council voted to keep its Nov. 11 direction in place, until Coun. Tim Balasiuk proposed to reopen the file after a 10-minute break — a reconsideration motion that two-thirds of council supported.

"The reason why I brought this back up is because I just feel like this needs more dialogue," Balasiuk said in the meeting.

Although council had heard back from the Shaw about what it was prepared to offer, he said he felt staff still needed clearer direction to confirm those commitments and to determine whether the festival was willing to address the rest of council's requests "at all whatsoever."

The reconsideration allowed councillors to undo last week's instructions and replace them with a new set of directions for staff: update the zoning bylaw to include five accessible parking spaces, accept cash-in-lieu for one required parking space, work with the Shaw Festival on a public-washroom agreement and sort out remaining details, such as landscaping, outlined in the festival's Nov. 16 letter.

These new directions do not include the previous direction about possibly reducing the size of the new theatre.

Council approved the amended motion with those

new directions. Couns. Maria Mavridis, Andrew Niven and Sandra O'Connor opposed both reopening the file and the final decision.

"I still have concerns over mass and scale, so I cannot vote in favour of it until it is addressed," said O'Connor at the meeting.

She said the building would be too imposing on Queen Street and is uncertain about how the municipal heritage committee's comments on the project would be handled at the site plan stage.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa told The Lake Report that he is pleased with council's decision.

He called the Royal George rebuild a major project for the community and the result of "months and months of work and many dollars spent" on policy, heritage and planning requirements.

"I appreciate council doing that," Zalepa said. "They put a significant amount of work into doing their homework, asking questions, reviewing all those reports — which, you know, are hundreds and hundreds of pages."

He said recommendations are never final until council votes and that last week's committee feedback "led to some changes, which I think are better for the overall project."

"Now, the next step is we do have to approve the final bylaws, which would implement the official plan amendment and the zoning bylaw amendments," Zalepa added.

Coun. Gary Burroughs, who voted in favour of approving the rebuild, told The Lake Report he was frustrated with and confused by how council handled the process, especially the procedural limitations on debate and the way motions unfolded during the meeting.

"I know the rules say that you can speak once, but the fact that we couldn't (speak more) on such a controversial issue was upsetting to me, because I had a lot to say," said Burroughs. "I was assuming there would be another motion that would put it in a better light."

"After the break, that's what Tim Balasiuk and I came up with, which is fine," he added. "But again, talking about process — it should never have gone there."

In an emailed statement on Nov. 19, Jennings said the Shaw is "happy to see council's decision to let us move ahead and respect the town's commitment to a thorough process regarding the future of our Royal George Theatre project."

He said the Shaw looks forward to "working with town staff on the next steps" and is "excited to move forward with our plans to build a new Royal George (that) our community, staff and audiences will be proud of for generations to come."

The rebuild of the Royal George Theatre, which is closing its doors at the end of the year, is expected to cost \$75-85 million.

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Culture changing to **talk more** about mental health

Continued from Front Page

All three young men, two of them Brock University students, were pronounced dead at the scene. They all died inside the flaming vehicle, burned beyond recognition.

Having an organized debriefing afterward was invaluable, Fire Chief Jay Plato says. It hasn't always been that way, however.

Many first responders know exactly "what it's like to sit with a dead body, or what it's like to have a really traumatic experience and not be able to talk to your spouse about it," Nicholson says.

As a constable with Niagara Regional Police for 10 years, she went through it firsthand.

"I didn't go home and tell my parents about the horrible things that I had seen."

The problem was, when she started as a police officer in 2009, there wasn't a lot of education, or "buy-in," on how to actually deal with these traumatic incidents on a personal level, she says.

"The culture still predominantly — and, really, social norms — told first responders that you are weak if you have emotions."

In 2014, Nicholson went back to school to complete a master's in social work at the University of Windsor. Today, while she's in a different line of work, she's still confronting this reality among emergency responders — and is working hard to change that culture.

She's a clinical therapist and founder of Lifeline for the Frontline, a counselling service based in St. Catharines for first responders in the Niagara area — including, for the past year, the volunteer firefighters who serve Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire and Emergency Services.

Not acknowledging one's feelings after a traumatic event can have consequences, she says.

If someone is experiencing post-traumatic stress and it's not dealt with, after a month, they can be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, she notes.

For first responders, who are vicariously experiencing other people's tragedies and "often in the line of fire," trauma is a hazard of the work they engage in, she says.

And that trauma can be very real.

Nicholson notes studies have shown 49 per cent of paramedics and 48 per cent



Top: NOTL's firefighters can be called on to respond to harrowing situations, with no warning. Bottom left: Kelli Nicholson, a clinical therapist who works with first responders, says part of her work is teaching people to recognize the emotions they're feeling in times of stress. Bottom right: NOTL Fire Chief Jay Plato encourages his team to talk about what they went through after a critical incident, rather than bottling up their feelings. FILE/SUPPLIED/DAVE VAN DE LAAR

of 911 operators report experiencing a mental health problem such as PTSD, depression or anxiety.

As well, 34 per cent of firefighters report significant mental health challenges, while police and first responders experience significantly higher rates of PTSD, depression and anxiety than civilians.

In a 2025 report on PTSD's impact on Canada's workforce, the federal government says first responders and other public safety personnel are at an increased risk for PTSD and other mental health conditions because of "repeated (and often routine) exposure to dangerous or life-threatening events."

Nicholson notes this all can have a ripple effect, coming up in a person's interactions with their colleagues, friends and family. "It infiltrates into all the parts of your life."

Her work now is part of an effort by NOTL's fire department to help its crews cope with the toll that their work can inflict.

"The entire profession and the entire concept is to show up when someone is typically in their worst moments," says Plato.

Last year, NOTL Fire received and responded to 761 calls for service, including 59 fires, 135 medical calls and 126 auto collisions. That's an average of almost one serious situation every day.

“It's nice to hear you're not alone.”

JAY PLATO
NOTL FIRE CHIEF

By its nature, the profession has highs and lows — when responders are able to help the people they encounter, it's a good feeling, Plato says.

"On the flipside, there are times when you aren't able to assist. That weighs heavily on the mind afterwards."

Based on Plato's eight years of experience with the fire department and conversations with volunteers who have been in the job for longer, talking about mental health was not commonplace even a few years ago.

"It clearly wasn't something that was talked about in any field. It wasn't as prevalent," he says. "Across the board, we've really stepped up."

Today, things are different.

The mental and emotional impacts of the work first responders do daily are very front-of-mind for him, Plato says.

It's a unique situation for NOTL's fire crews, he adds, because they're not full-time firefighters. They all have lives or jobs outside of their role as volunteers.

Full-timers, at the end of the day, have the option of taking time off to recuperate after a call.

While volunteers have some support from the department, Plato says, "they still have a daytime job. They still have something they need to go to that day. They still have their family at home that they left."

So, the department decided to bring on someone who could help create a formal wellness program that allows volunteers to be taken care of — and to take care of themselves.

Enter, Nicholson.

She says Lifeline for the Frontline's work is structured with five pillars: education, building resilience, critical incident response, follow-up and ongoing wellness.

As part of her col-

laboration with NOTL Fire, she's led workshops for volunteers, including new recruits, to educate them on emotions and self-awareness.

She says it's important for people to recognize that having emotions is a normal part of daily life — understanding this allows people to feel less weak.

"I say to my clients all the time, 'You have emotions throughout every single part of the day,' " she says.

"It's only when those emotions get really, really big that we're like, 'Oh, I'm having a big feeling right now.' "

For first responders, that's why tools like critical incident debriefs among team members after a potentially traumatic event are important.

"It allows people to return back to what happened and revisit that and allow them to be more self-aware about what emotions are coming up for them."

After the horrific crash on Queenston Road this summer, NOTL firefighters arrived at the scene about 3 a.m., Plato says, and were on hand for an hour.

That night, at the District 5 Fire Station in Glendale,

those who responded to the crash gathered to talk about what they'd just gone through, along with some other volunteers who were there for the department's training night.

Plato says he reached out to Nicholson to have a representative from Lifeline for the Frontline to lead the debrief.

Since Nicholson was away at the time, Daultan Leveille, a registered therapist and firefighter from St. Catharines, responded. Plato said the conversation was led by its participants, with Leveille guiding people to share how they're feeling along the way.

During that debrief, Plato says he focused on telling the volunteers that their emotions were valid and that they shouldn't be ashamed of what they were feeling in the moment.

Plato compared the process to therapy and said it was a place where bonds were built between everyone in the room.

"Leaving there, everybody felt good about the fact that we were just able to talk about it and that we were able to come together as a group and ensure everybody was feeling OK."

Such sessions are helpful, he says — it means a lot to hear someone say exactly what you are thinking and feeling in the moment.

"It's nice to hear you're not alone."

Since Plato started with the department in 2017, he says there's been an uptick in discussions around mental health.

"It continues to become more prevalent."

Part of that changing culture may come from the next generation of volunteer firefighters.

Many of the fire department's new recruits are in their 20s and with that comes a greater familiarity with talking about mental health, compared to decades prior, when mental health simply wasn't discussed, he says.

"They're more open to the idea of talking about it."

Regardless of the difficulties that come with opening up, Plato says he tries to reassure the people he works with that what they encounter in their work isn't something they need to brush off — because it's not what people see in their everyday lives.

"So talk about it, if you need to. It's OK to talk about it."

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Free Old Town parking returns in December

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The annual tradition of free parking in downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake will return this December.

To make the holiday season lighter for residents and visitors stopping in the heritage district in Old Town, the town is waiving the need to pay for parking starting Dec. 1.

NOTL council voted in favour of the measure during its committee of the whole meeting last Tuesday, in response to a letter from Kathy Weiss, president of

the NOTL Chamber of Commerce.

"Offering free parking not only demonstrates goodwill during the holiday season, but also encourages residents and visitors to explore downtown, shop locally, and enjoy the exceptional dining experiences while celebrating the winter festivities," she wrote.

The vote passed unanimously. Council held no further discussion on the item.

The town has provided free December parking for several years.

daniel@niagaranow.com



Parking in Old Town will once again be free during the month of December.

Town commits to hiring staff engineer

Continued from Front Page

daily affairs.

"There are so many departments that would benefit from an engineer's thought process," he said.

This change adds \$64,000 to the operations budget, bumping up the property tax by 0.36 per cent from 1.81.

The engineer would serve in the planning, public works and infrastructure departments. While Coun. Erwin Wiens did not oppose the idea, he emphasized that the town would still need to seek outside expert guidance on planning, public works and infrastructure matters.

"I don't want to set our residents up with the expectation that the expertise will all be in-house," said Wiens.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita expressed support for the amendment, especially if it meant having two engineers — one in the planning department and another as director of public works.

Chief administrative officer Nick Ruller described such speculation as "pre-mature," but Cheropita's support grew after he spoke.

"I'm even more supportive now that we would have an engineer on the planning staff," she said.

Burroughs estimated the cost of the amendment at \$64,000, or 0.36 percent of the budget.

The second amend-



There were two amendments to the town's 2026 budget.

ment, proposed by Coun. Adriana Vizzari, sought to extend the 15 per cent discount currently offered to residents with three or more children for swim lessons to include the swim team, recreation programs and camps.

This change adds \$3,000 to the budget, bumping up property taxes by 0.02 per cent from 1.81.

Vizzari supported extending the discount to non-residents as well, explaining that non-residents could only access the discount after spots were filled by residents.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor supported the discount for residents but expressed hesitation about extending it to non-residents.

"I would support the discount for residents, but I'm not comfortable extending it to non-residents," said O'Connor.

Parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte clarified that residents have a five-day window to register for programs before non-residents can sign up.

Wiens, however, saw the

proposal as beneficial, even if it meant non-residents might receive a discount.

"I don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water," he said.

One of the six proposed changes that didn't go through was O'Connor's idea to raise the parking rate for all paid parking areas in the town by 25 cents, which would've raised \$152,000 in revenue, with no direct impact on the tax levy.

"This is a nominal increase," said O'Connor.

Right now, the town is charging \$5.25 an hour to park on Queen Street and \$5 elsewhere in NOTL.

Wiens supported the idea, saying that compared to parking rates in bigger cities, NOTL's rates don't attract many complaints. "I don't see people being upset saying, 'I've had to spend an extra 75 cents to park on Queen Street for three hours.'"

The town is waiting on a parking study, which will not be ready until late 2026. Because of this, Coun. Andrew Niven said he would

prefer to wait until the study is completed before the parking rate is hiked.

Other proposed amendments included reducing a grant to Niagara College, funding navigational signs for visitors, implementing vehicle-usage monitoring programs, installing floating docks at River Beach and using municipal accommodation tax funds for signs in NOTL's parks.

The total cost of the docks project and the parks signage would have been \$235,000, with \$69,000 coming from municipal accommodation tax funding. The reduction of the grant to Niagara College would have gone from \$30,000 to \$20,000.

The cost of the navigational signs is unknown. The cost of vehicle-usage monitoring technology would have been reported as part of the 2027 budget.

Under the strong-mayor powers, the mayor tables the budget, and council has 30 days to propose amendments. Council can overturn a veto with a two-thirds majority. The lord mayor was given eight days to veto the amendments made to this budget.

The town has set a Dec. 3 deadline to finalize the budget. If no amendments had been made, the budget would have passed without changes.

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Chautauqua urges town to protect trees

Dan Smeenck
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

In an effort to preserve the Chautauqua neighbourhood as it is for generations to come, dozens of its residents guided two Niagara-on-the-Lake planning members on a tour through the community last Monday, highlighting the parts they value and what they believe is at risk.

Senior planners Fiona Main, a key architect of the town’s new official plan, and Taya Devlin, toured the area as residents outlined concerns that Chautauqua’s distinct character is not being protected.

The area is known for its cottage-style homes, abundant park space, shade and strong sense of community. Much of the discussion during the tour was around the style and size of the homes and protecting the area’s trees.

Weston Miller, president of the Chautauqua Residents Association, said the tour followed conversations during the official plan open house in October. Following



Chautauqua residents look to show town planners the parts of their neighbourhood they cherish. DAN SMEENCK

it, residents still had many questions.

“I thought the best approach was to have a meeting,” he said. “And I thought the very best approach was to have that meeting in Chautauqua.”

Residents Margret Walker and Mary Kilmer joined the tour to help show the town what they consider precious about the historic area, while raising specific concerns.

Kilmer said her issues were about “new home builds” and “preserving the tree canopy.”

“I have seen a lot of changes,” Walker said.

“Some have been nice, but the destruction of the tree canopy has been really hurtful.”

Walker and others noted that newer homes with basements — uncommon historically in the neighbourhood — make it harder for oak trees to get the conditions they need, causing them to die.

“We have lost a lot of our beautiful canopy,” she said. “It takes a long time to get that canopy back (once the trees die).”

The town has faced criticism from Chautauqua residents over changes in the draft 2025 official plan.

Language from the 2019 plan that committed to creating a secondary plan for Chautauqua was removed, prompting concerns. Instead, the new plan states it will consider a secondary plan among other planning options for Chautauqua.

The residents association argues a secondary plan is essential to protect the neighbourhood, a distinctive hub-and-spoke community with roots in the 19th-century Chautauqua adult education movement.

Miller said the meeting went well and that Main and Devlin were “quite receptive” to residents’ concerns.

When approached with questions from The Lake Report during the tour, Main said to instead contact the town’s communications team. It did not respond to questions before the print deadline.

Kirsten McCauley, director of community and development services, was expected to join the tour but did not attend. She is leaving Niagara-on-the-Lake for a position in Grimsby.

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Penny-Lynn Cookson
Special to The Lake Report

If we believe that theatre must be a living, evolving thing, then take comfort, this chestnut is burning brightly over the yule log fire. Sparks fly the instant the Shaw Orchestra strikes into “I’m dreaming of a White Christmas” and rapidly segues from pop to jazz to swing. We’re enveloped in a nostalgic flame of time and place. It’s the Second World War, Christmas Eve, 1944 and battle-weary American soldiers on the front are longing to be home with their loved ones.

Capt. Bob Wallace (Jeff Irving) and Pte. Phil Davis (Kevin McLachlan) lead a buoyant “Happy Holidays.” It fades to “White Christmas,” the most requested song on American Armed Forces Radio. Released in 1942, it remains the most popular Christmas song of all time. Ten years later, in 1954, the now-famous Wallace and Davis appear on the Ed Sullivan Show. For those of us once glued to the telly Sunday nights, we are reminded of simpler corporate sponsorships as two leggy models giggle and wiggle across the stage as Oxydol boxes. As a family variety show, Sullivan’s soft spot was more Topo Gigio, the Italian mouse puppet, than Elvis’ hip gyrations. Davis and Wallace’s upcoming gig in Florida is sidetracked by an army pal’s request that they catch the act of his singing sisters, Betty and Judy Haynes. Once Phil lays eyes on Judy (a sizzling Mary Antonini), the train tickets to Florida are replaced by tickets to Pinetree, Vt., where the sisters are



The cast of Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas” performing “Let Yourself Go” at the Shaw Festival. This production features “spectacular” dancing with “terrific choreography” designed by Allison Plamondon, writes Penny-Lynn Cookson. MICHAEL COOPER

booked for Christmas at the Columbia Inn. A smitten Phil hopes Bob will be enamoured by and marry Betty (Camille Eanga-Selenge). This does not look promising. The train ride to Vermont has the ensemble crammed into one car, fully anticipating and enthusiastically singing “Snow” as they head north to ski, skate and holiday. On learning there is no snow but a December heat wave in Vermont, one couple decamps for Saskatchewan.

The show will go on despite cancellations at the near-bankrupt Inn owned by Gen. Tom Waverly, Davis and Wallace’s former Army commander. As Waverly, David Keeley deftly balances tough and tender. His “concierge,” bookkeeper and nosey switchboard operator, Martha Watson (Jenni Burke), is his sassy foil who holds her own. Vivienne Atwood as Susan, the general’s visiting California granddaughter, exhibits a confidence and métier beyond her years.

Jason Cadieux captures the taciturn individualism of the Vermont handyman, saying little but “Ah, yup” and then charming us with a little breakout tap dance. Why is this production so satisfying? Irving Berlin’s songs are pure genius. The orchestra sweeps and swirls us along. We unabashedly sing on request. Imaginative lighting and sets shift swiftly. The dancing is spectacular with terrific choreography designed by Allison Plamondon. The 1950s costumes of Judith Bowden are fast changing and wonderfully colour coordinated with her set designs. “Blue Skies” features Jeff Irving and the ensemble costumed in blue suits and hats dancing beneath and between clouds. Kevin McLachlan and Mary Antonini radiate chemistry together and with the Ensemble passionately tap dance over the giant keyboard of “I Love a Piano.” Jeff Irving as the cool, contained Bob transitions into meltdown, and so do we, as he succumbs to his feelings for Betty singing “How Deep Is the Ocean.”

More emotion was required of Camille Eanga-Selenge’s Betty. Her withheld response to Bob and her big solo in the Regency Room were empty of torch believability. “White Christmas” is a thin plot on stage and screen, carrying big music and production values. The play is up against the memorable 1954 film cast of Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney, Danny Kaye and Vera-Ellen, directed by the brilliant Michael Curtiz of “Casablanca” and “Mildred Pierce.” Nonetheless, this production, directed by the experienced Kate Hennig, succeeds because it convincingly reminds us, in these troubled times, that love, friendship, respect, compassion, community and generosity of spirit and giving are what matter. And yes, it does snow and it is no longer asbestos flakes. And yes, we do receive a lot of love to keep us warm. Penny-Lynn Cookson is an arts and culture historian, writer and lecturer living in Niagara-on-the-Lake.



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NOTL hires interim municipal director

Staff
The Lake Report

With the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's current director of community and development services set to depart from her job in one week, the town is bringing in a temporary replacement as it looks to fill her spot.

John Hendricks will serve as the interim director of planning, building and development services, starting Wednesday, Nov. 19.

The town says it started the recruitment process to fill McCauley's role permanently and that in the meantime, Hendricks will provide "leadership and expert support" to town staff and ensure ongoing development projects continue.

Hendricks served in McCauley's role for the Town of NOTL from 2012 to 2016. In that role, he oversaw planning, building and bylaw enforcement functions and provided planning advice to council.



John Hendricks is the town's interim planning director.

"We are pleased to have (Hendricks) return to the town in the interim, bringing extensive experience and a strong understanding of our community to support staff and maintain momentum during this period of transition," said Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa in a Nov. 18 media release.

Hendricks has 44 years of experience as a registered

professional planner. He was the previous owner and president of NPG Planning Solutions Inc., where he "diverse planning assignments involving infill, brown-field, greenfield, rural, and tourism-related projects," the release stated.

"He also provided expert testimony on land-use and urban design matters, reinforcing the extent of his expertise."

He holds a bachelor of environmental studies from the University of Waterloo and is a member of the Canadian Institute of Planners.

Throughout his career, he has served on numerous planning-related committees and contributed to a wide range of municipal and private-sector initiatives.

"It is a special honour to serve the community in this way," said Hendricks in the media release. "While I was enjoying my recent retirement, I look forward to supporting the town during this transition period and working alongside the talented staff in the planning and building department."

"Niagara-on-the-Lake is a highly engaged community, and I am committed to helping ensure the team continues to be supported as we navigate this important work together."

McCauley's last day on the job will be Wednesday, Nov. 26.

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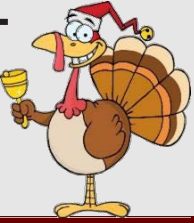
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Bottle drive sends Wolves to Kinsmen Cup

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

A bottle and can drive in Virgil is helping the NOTL Wolves U13 team cover the cost of its only tournament this season and giving families a simple way to support young players.

The team hopes to raise \$1,500 to get to the Kinsmen Cup in Dresden, Ont. from Jan. 30 to Feb. 1, a trip that includes paying for registration fees, travel and basic team expenses.

Saturday's drive was the first of two planned efforts, with another set for Jan. 3 at the same location.

Parents and players set up in the Virgil Meridian Credit Union Arena parking lot last Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., where a steady line of cars unloaded cans and bottles in the first hour.

Hockey mom and organizer Jackie Miller said the group wanted a fundraiser that would be easy for residents to contribute to, especially since Niagara-on-



Kids from the NOTL Wolves U13 team climb a snowbank during Saturday's bottle drive. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

the-Lake has no beer store where people can return empties.

"We are not asking anybody for money. This helps keep things out of the recycling, and it helps locals so they do not have to go out of town," she said.

Miller said the team collected an early estimate of about \$400 in bottles and cans within two hours of the first drive. Local businesses have also offered to donate their empties,

including the Sandtrap Pub & Grill.

The Wolves are a U13 local league team and this is their only tournament of the season. Coach Brandon Berry said the trip offers a rare chance for players to spend several days together, something that can create memorable moments both on and off the ice.

"They usually bond when they are all together in the hotel. It is really good for the kids," he said.

The tournament's registration cost sits in the range of \$1,075 to \$1,375, depending on division, and the team hopes to cover as much as possible so no player faces extra fees.

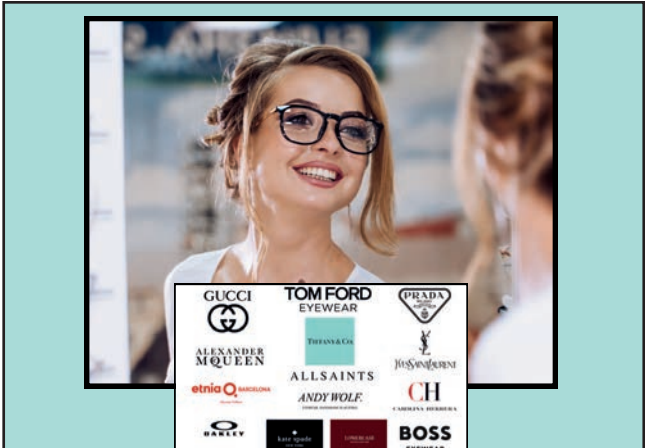
While the bottle drive helps pay for the trip, Berry said it also gives the kids a role in earning their place at the tournament. Several players spent the morning running to cars, sorting piles and stacking bags under tents set up to keep the rain off.

Miller has run similar events in past seasons and said they work because residents understand exactly where their contribution goes.

"We appreciate their support in helping us get to the tournament without any extra costs," said Miller.

The team will return to the same spot on Jan. 3 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Drivers can pull into the lot and volunteers will unload everything.

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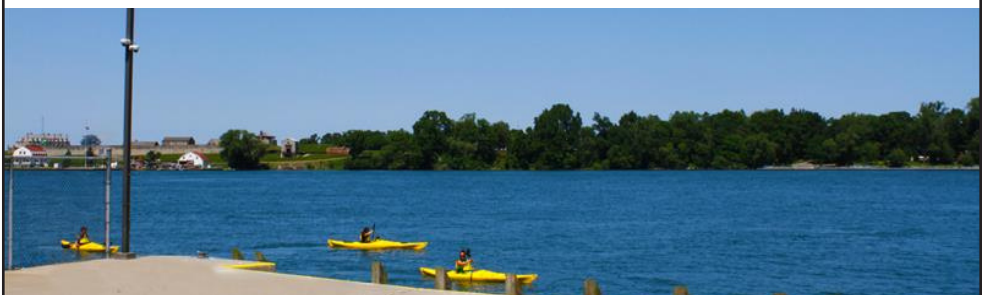


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Provide Feedback on the Dock Area Masterplan



The Town is updating its Dock Area Masterplan, led by an external consultant, MHBC Planning Urban Design & Landscape Architecture. The updated Plan will guide future improvements and identify opportunities to enhance the Dock Area and its surrounding spaces.

Engage With Us:

- ✓ Attend a drop-in Public Information Centre (PIC) on November 26, from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at the NOTL Community Centre Simpson Room (14 Anderson lane)
- ✓ The PIC will offer the public an opportunity to review the previous Plan and provide feedback on what should be updated in the new version.

SCAN ME





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BKind Grateful
With Bradley Hamilton

#53: Hosting a holiday party? Rather than asking guests to please bring nothing, help your local food bank instead and ask them to bring a non-perishable food item.

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



Contributed by Patty Garriock
“It is not what you look at what matters, it’s what you see.” - Henry David Thoreau

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NOTL sign gets attention

Tourism NOTL put up a lit sign last Thursday at the entrance of Simcoe Park. The sign, which is only up for the holiday season, was meant to resemble those which have become landmarks in cities like Toronto and Ottawa, said Tourism NOTL’s CEO Kathy Weiss. She hopes it will provide a good opportunity for tourists to take selfies and have something memorable from their time in the town. Three of NOTL’s fall visitors, Wayne and Anne Spencer of Australia, visiting with their son, Peter Spencer, of Toronto, pose with the sign. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

First NOTL. Then the Dominion



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist

It started with the posters. Old Town sprouted pictures of Canadian soldiers in WW1. The old flag. “Our people, our homeland” insignias. Poles around the Legion were especially targeted.

Then, more brazen, they showed up on Remembrance Day. A woman outstretched her arms to hold the Canadian Red Ensign. Beside her stood young men with signs. “Honour our fallen. Defend Canada’s future.” And this: “Remember their sacrifice. Preserve our nation.”

Behind them was that wall of hand-sewn poppies cascading down the front of the town’s most iconic stone building. Before them the cenotaph tower. Around them hundreds of the respectful, and the curious.

These are the warriors. The nationalists. They’re here to take the Dominion of Canada back.

NOTL resident Ken Jones is one of the three people now leading the Dominion Society, an overtly anti-immigration, white segregationist and patriotic group that claims a growing national following and a

local swell of support. Their presence here joins the Second Sons, an alt-right, male-only, martial arts, anti-foreigner bunch that held its national convention in Niagara and made headlines with military-grade manoeuvres around Brock’s Monument.

“There’s a huge appetite that has been fermenting for the past five years, getting increasingly radicalized by mass migration,” David Tyrie told me. “Canada really is a country with an identity crisis and we’re providing an answer in a way that resonates and in line with an accurate reading of Canadian historical identity.”

The Dominion Society, now with 1,700 members, is Tyrie’s baby. After being booted out of the People’s Party of Canada by leader Max Bernier (he was national director), Tyrie says the rise of Donald Trump and growing nationalist movements in Europe brought him to a moment of action.

As he wrote on the group’s site: “In contemporary Canada, every foreign ethnic group has politically organized advocacy groups ensuring their interests are represented while Heritage Canadians remain atomized. This makes us easy to run over and ignore. It is time to get organized and make our voices heard.”

Heritage Canadians means white people. Tyrie, Jones and their supporters want immigration stopped. All of it. And then they



Posters appeared around town last week seeking supporters for a pro-white, anti-immigrant nationalist group that also targeted NOTL’s Remembrance Day.

want remigration.

“Mass immigration is the most destructive policy ever imposed on the Canadian people. It has eroded our sovereignty, diluted our culture and crippled our sense of identity & community as a nation,” the group’s manifesto reads. “It’s devastated our education and health care systems, depressed wages in the workforce and made housing completely unaffordable, especially for young Canadians.”

Tyrie believes a replacement theory’s being enacted as policy by the federal government. Instead of finding ways to boost our declining birth rate, “they have decided to replace us with foreigners.”

“Remigration is the return of foreigners to their respective homelands. It involves robust public policy tools that will create the legal, economic and cultural conditions to reverse the

tide of mass immigration and demographic change in Canada. This is the only way to preserve our nation.”

This, they say, is “sensible nationalism.” It’s an effort to save NOTL and other places from what Brampton has become. “Brampton is unrecognizable,” says the society. “It looks more like an Indian city than a Canadian one.”

Well, are these guys racists? Born of the white supremacy, neo-Nazi movement now gaining traction in the U.S.?

“I don’t consider myself a white supremacist. I consider myself a Canadian nationalist,” Tyrie says. “It’s not about racial superiority or that Canadians should enslave lower-value people. I’m saying Canada is the homeland of the Canadian people and should be preserved as such.”

The message, which he says is finding traction, is simple. The real Canada is gone. Our identity erased and history buried, as “our people” are replaced. The battle cry: “We will reclaim our homeland.”

I just read this piece to Dorothy. “Aren’t you worried,” she asked, “that you’re giving these wackos more oxygen?”

Yup, I do. But they’re here. They invaded November 11th. They stood among us. Being a tolerant, inclusive people, we let them. It’s what makes us Canadian.

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

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Jimmy Lai is a hero of democracy

Dear editor:
As President John F. Kennedy said in his “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech at the Berlin Wall in 1963, “Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in.”
Mr. Lai’s incarceration, for standing against tyranny and speaking in defence of freedom, is not just cruel and inhumane, but an affront to humanity (The Lake Report, Nov. 13, “Free Jimmy Lai now”).
Mr. Lai would not have

been faulted for living a quiet life, enjoying the fruits of his hard work and incredible success.
Instead, he placed himself in the face of a massive storm in defence of liberty and freedom of thought and speech.
I believe that he did this not because he didn’t foresee what would happen, but rather precisely because he did foresee the possible consequences.
He is not just a hero of democracy, but a giant of a man.
Ralph Nero
Old Town



People rally for the release of political prisoner Jimmy Lai, who has been imprisoned in Hong Kong since 2020. FILE

Roadside memorial repeatedly vandalized

Dear editor:
First allow me to thank our friends, family and the ever-so-kind people who live my town and Matthew Wilson’s town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for their compassion. You are our hope heroes.
On Oct. 25 my husband John Franz and I visited the memorial for my son Matthew Wilson on Lakeshore Road.
We had painstakingly and lovingly decorated it for Halloween and that day we discovered someone had stolen the two orange smiley face metal pumpkins that once belonged to Matthew.
What kind of person steals from a monument, a tribute to honour a son, a brother, an uncle?
I’m not just angry, I’m hurt, my heart shattered into a million pieces again.
It’s hard enough to grieve Matthew’s death every minute of every day and now we know a thief without a conscience or a heart has desecrated this hallowed ground.
The memorial is at the spot where Matt took his last breath on Earth in 2021 after he was struck by a pickup truck driven by Robert Enns. Matt was not walking on the road, as confirmed by a witness to detectives.
Yes, it’s only two metal pumpkins, but this has triggered my relentless grief and broke my heart again because they didn’t care



The Halloween-themed memorial for Matthew Wilson on Lakeshore Road near Stewart Road is shown before it was vandalized. SUPPLIED

they were stealing something precious to me, to Matt and his family.
My husband John (Matt’s stepdad) says because we can no longer tell Matt how much we love him this memorial is the best way to show we care, like a beacon of love shining up to Matthew in heaven.
We place some of Matt’s favourite things at this site. To celebrate Matt’s life, we make certain the decorations reflect happiness and joy, not sadness.
This is sacred ground.
To whoever stole the pumpkins, I pray your conscience will guide you to replace them alongside Matt’s cross.
Unfortunately, again on Nov. 2 when John and

I returned to remove the Halloween decorations we noticed one solar light top missing and one “Boo” sign also gone. That evening we replaced the stolen solar light top.
Then on Nov. 5 John noticed both solar lights and a solar flood light missing plus a couple of fall leaf bushes. It was the third time this memorial was vandalized.
Once again I am gutted with grief, anger, shock.
We decided to report this desecration to the police.
We were advised that police stations in other cities and towns including Niagara, Ancaster, Hamilton are having the same issues, as it seems stealing from memorials and gravesites has be-

come a trendy recreational activity for some people.
On Nov. 4, a 37-year-old, of no fixed address, someone known to police, who has a history of similar cemetery-theft offences in Niagara, Ancaster, Hamilton and other areas, was arrested in Niagara Falls.
Police in Hamilton checked to see if any of Matt’s items were found with this thief but at that time, they did not find any, but promised to keep me advised as they investigate further.
The kindness and caring given to us from others really helps John and I cope. We thank you for your loving support.
Colleen Franz
Virgil



This week’s riddle is “Jeopardy!” style.
Category: ROAD TRIP

Visiting Germany? Remember, there actually are speed limits on about 30 per cent of this road network.

Last issue category: **VEHICLES**
Clue: This Tesla load-hauling vehicle has invited DeLorean comparisons with its angular, stainless steel body.
Answer: What is a Cybertruck?
Answered first by: Margie Enns

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Sue Rautenberg, Susan Hamilton, Lynda Collet, Claudia Grimwood, Jane Morris, Esther VanGorder, Becky Creager, Alison Parsons, Bob Wheatley, Wade Durling, Kimberly Amaral, Jim Dandy, Katie Reimer, Jim Panetta, Julia Chishow, Tuija Johansson, Marla Percy

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Perspective: How big the new Royal George would be



Brian Marshall
Columnist

During the Nov. 11 council meeting, the councillors and lord mayor heard three delegations from town residents voicing opposition to the Shaw's proposed redevelopment plan for the Royal George Theatre.

Two of the residents raised some very legitimate and well-researched points, including, but not limited to, a total of more than 40 contraventions of policy (provincial planning statement, regional and town official plans), provincial legislation (Planning Act), local Niagara-on-the-Lake bylaws, et al.

And, that the town's urban design consultation with the region — because, of course, this council deep-sixed our local urban design committee and has failed

to replace it — noted that the proposed design was not in keeping with “best practices,” together with other infrastructure-related issues.

Most pithy, and reflected in the overall context of the delegations, was the statement made by the third resident: “It’s too big. All negative heritage, infrastructure, environmental, planning and precedent concerns stem from this single fact.”

While I do not agree completely with this statement — since I consider the proposed design to be inferior as a result of the absence of any reasonable contextual architectural considerations which would lend it a “place identity” within the heritage district — in the main, the delegate is correct.

In past columns, I have described the proposed building as a “behemoth” and a “leviathan.”

Now, most folks lack experience in translating a drawing into understanding what the completed building will look like in context. And, I’d opine that, in the Shaw’s fluid and continually shifting proposal, this challenge has been leveraged with artistic perspectives that carefully fail to show



A rendering shows the scale of the Royal George rebuild.

this mammoth within the surrounding setting.

So, let’s consider ... how “big” is big?

Well, in simple terms, at roughly 56 feet by 108 feet, the old Courthouse can be suggested to total approximately 18,000 square feet. The current Shaw proposal, according to Mr. Tim Jennings, during this same council meeting, is proposed to be around 53,000 square feet. Or, more than three times the size of the old Courthouse.

However, as they say, a picture is worth a thousand words.

In the 3D rendering shown above (produced by the Shaw’s architectural firm and included in their Aug. 8 streetscape study), this issue becomes readily evident.

The proposed size, massing and form of the building, considered within

the context of the surrounding buildings, completely dwarfs everything else in the heritage district.

And, for visual purposes, compare the proposed redeveloped theatre to the old Courthouse in the rendering, the latter shown on the right side of the image, three building blocks shy of King Street.

It is vastly larger.

Now, consider the adverse impact that the huge, imposing and dominating presence of this proposed behemoth will have on virtually every other building (and property owners) within Queen-Picton.

Quite simply, it will forever alter the bucolic heritage canvas of Old Town that draws so many people.

ERA Architects, the experts employed as heritage planners for the Shaw’s application, stated

unequivocally that the proposed redevelopment would have “negative impacts” on the Queen-Picton heritage district — a statement the individuals and councillors supporting this application have chosen to ignore.

And, for those who are committed to the tourism dollars, if you don’t think it is possible to kill the goose that laid the golden egg, think again ... We can become just one more unnotable backwater town with little to recommend it.

Just take a drive through the towns and villages of the Catskill Mountains’ “Borscht Belt” in New York — replete with bankrupt hotels, shuttered businesses and closed tourist attractions — to witness the results of going down the wrong road.

There are so many creative architectural design solutions that could result in a win-win proposition for the Shaw and the heritage district — if only the Shaw would choose to explore them rather than simply “tweaking” the fundamentally flawed proposed colossus currently on the table.

Finally, speaking to Shaw’s latest threat to scuttle the Royal George project if they are not given carte blanche, and much as I support an overture to redevelop the theatre, should it be a choice between their current proposal and the integral survival of the heritage district, I vote for the latter.

On another note, a disturbing foreshadowing of the trend towards converting our historic district into a Clifton Hill knock-off has physically manifested at the corner of Queen and King streets.

A sign, 15 feet long by seven feet tall, made of metal and plastic — designed to be internally lit for that neon effect — will now allow tourists to take a selfie in front of NOTL.

This tacky sucker flies completely in the face of the district guidelines and was never brought before the municipal heritage committee for review.

It may or may not be temporary — quite frankly, I don’t care.

When a business can’t get a sandwich board under the guidelines, what the hell was the town thinking?

Take it down, now.

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



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ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

At this time of year, many people seem to be working extra hard to present smiley faces and positive attitudes. The days are shorter, darkness comes earlier, and the temperatures are slowly sliding down, down, down. The beautiful and effulgent autumn maple leaves are mostly off the trees, bagged and ready to be collected by big trucks for the annual, very organized disposal. So here we are, then. From Niagara-on-the-Lake to Hong Kong and eventually to Toronto, the word “love” has suddenly been added to our vocabulary. And it happened so naturally, so quietly. Not scripted and rolled out by communications professionals. Real people sharing how love makes such a difference in their lives.

Please bear with me as I ramble in several directions, including the demonstration in front of the Queen’s Landing Hotel the day after Remembrance Day. Many of us were wearing “Free Jimmy Lai now” buttons. Amnesty International had hastily put together a totally grassroots event here in NOTL to coincide with the meeting of G7 foreign ministers. Those of us at the rally hoped our message would somehow find its way to the world leaders who were in our town. Their whereabouts was the best-kept secret in town, but hopefully our humble efforts were effective and will make a difference. I was shocked and, quite honestly, proud to see so many people who wanted to send a message of love to Jimmy Lai.

An extraordinary number of people, from an amazing cross-section of our Niagara population, had made the big effort to participate. At the urging of the Amnesty International organizer, we “marched” from the corner of King and Queen through Simcoe Park to the Queen’s Royal Hotel. It was easy to tell it was the first time chanting a message for many of us. We stood a bit self-



Ross Robinson felt the love for Jimmy Lai during a recent rally for his release. Lai, a NOTL hotelier and democracy advocate, has been jailed for his beliefs since 2020. FILE

consciously in front of the hotel, hoping against hope that our message would get to the political leaders and journalists inside. Jimmy Lai’s niece, local resident Erica Lepp, made a short speech and said, “My uncle loves this town — and today we can really feel the love.” He founded Apple Daily, a Hong Kong newspaper that espouses democracy and everyone’s right to freedom of speech.

The Lai family owns many things, including Vintage Hotels here in NOTL, and Erica mentioned that his driving principle, both personally and professionally, revolves around love. He has been in solitary confinement for over five years, and somehow still makes a global statement. Niece Erica believes NOTL’s message of love will get to her uncle, and was so grateful for the

overwhelming support. “The turnout has blown my mind.” For what it’s worth, my small-town mind was also blown away. If many people each do a little, great accomplishments are possible. Now, ramble with me to a much lighter level of love. What an unexpected treat to have been a tangential part of the Toronto Blue Jays run to the World Series. And to hear so many grown-up and mostly overpaid men talking about how the players on this team really and truly loved one another. The most super superstars and the players at the end of the roster, they all “loved coming to the ballpark every day.” The Blue Jays bandwagon got wonderfully crowded awfully fast once they made the postseason. Their determined bi-coastal run in the city and then Seattle before confronting the favoured Los Angeles Dodgers was joyful. We never stopped believing and loving. Unabashedly, these hardened professional baseball players hugged each other and repeated the word love. Personally, with the recent emphasis on professional sports gambling, I have

lost most of my enthusiasm for the top levels of many sports. But “Attaboys” to the Blue Jays. Despite their weird and rather unlikeable owner, Edward Rogers, this was a team to love. Undeniable attitude, and such talent. So many different players making big plays in different ways. And whether it was a fringe role player or a superstar making too many millions of dollars, it was obvious everyone loved being part of this team. Ultimately, our Toronto Blue Jays came second. Yes, Canada’s team didn’t win. Typically, we Canadians from coast to coast were so classy in defeat. All of us on the baseball bandwagon had loved the ride. Despite the current geopolitical issues between America and Canada, we all loved watching the World Series. A few days after Game 7, the National Post ran a three-page feature article headlined “Whoa Canada.” It said, “On the surface, our national anthem is a simple song to perform, but get ‘O Canada’ wrong, or alter its lyrics, and controversy is sure to follow.” Three full pages about ‘O Canada.’ What a country to live in. I love being a Canadian. rossrocket9@gmail.com

What it takes to put together your last will and testament



BOTTOM LINE

Steve McGuinness
Columnist

In my leisure time, I enjoy reading. Thriller fiction is my favourite genre. I’m currently reading John Grisham’s “The Widow.” Without spoiling too much of the plot, I can say the action revolves around a struggling small-town Main Street lawyer, retained to prepare a new will for a wealthy elderly client named Eleanor. Eleanor had a will, but do you? It’s shocking how many Canadians have not prepared a will or

completed any basic end-of-life planning. No matter your age or wealth level, this is imprudent and irresponsible. It can impose an unfair burden on your family to resolve your personal affairs without the benefit of your direction. Aside from a last will or testament, it is also advisable to prepare a power of attorney for personal care and a power of attorney for property. These documents (sometimes called a “living will”) appoint other trusted individuals to make decisions when you are still alive but have diminished ability to make key decisions yourself. This may be because you are medically incapacitated, either physically or mentally. You can also give instructions to your power of attorney for personal care on the level of medical intervention you prefer to save or sustain your life when you become



seriously ill. Do you need to hire a lawyer to prepare a valid will or living will? The simple answer is “no.” It is possible to prepare and execute valid documents yourself. This may not be advisable if you have significant value invested in property to pass on to your estate, but it may be sufficient otherwise. There are some excellent

interactive online software applications available now that can guide you through the process. What happens if you die without valid documents or survive but are unable to make medical and property decisions for yourself? In those cases, the government has set out standard order of priority rules that apply to appoint next of kin and distribute your property among them. The problem is that these rules may not align with your unexpressed preferences. Among other factors you are ignoring at your own peril when you fail to do basic planning are the implications on final taxes payable and on estate administration fees. In certain situations, certain property, including that held in tax-deferred plans, like registered retirement savings plans, can pass to your legal spouse without any income

tax becoming due on a final return. In other cases, the tax act requires capital gains tax to be paid. The gain is the difference between the market value of the property at death less the purchase price. In Ontario, estate administration taxes (sometimes called probate fees) vary based on the value of property in your estate. You do not need to pay estate administration tax if the value of the estate is \$50,000 or less. For estates valued over \$50,000, the estate administration tax will be calculated as \$15 for every \$1,000 (or part thereof) of the value of the estate. Certain property is excluded from this calculation, which includes death benefits paid on life insurance policies. This is because the owner designates the beneficiary of a life insurance policy in the policy itself and the insurer

pays those proceeds out tax-free, entirely separate from your instructions in a will. Some of you may consider yourself too young to start this planning now. But while the young perish of natural causes at rates lower than their elders, accidental death is always a possibility, at any age. Also, anyone may be genetically predisposed to certain critical diseases, like cancer, depending on exposure to certain environmental factors. Don’t delay. If you have not done so already, set aside the discomfort leading you to procrastinate and proceed full speed ahead with end-of-life planning today. Steve McGuinness was a senior adviser to major financial institutions during his Bay Street career and is now retired in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Send your personal finance questions to him at smcgfinplan@gmail.com.



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NOTL's Jam Queen **cleans up** at Royal

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Farmer and accomplished jam maker Kim McQuhae of Niagara-on-the-Lake cleaned up again this year at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair's professional jams and jellies competition in Toronto.

She entered 23 jams in 14 categories, earning five first-place awards, five seconds, three thirds, four fourths and two fifths. She also received the Premier Exhibitor award and a spot in the Champions Showcase.

After the awards, McQuhae sold her jams at the fair — an experience she called particularly valuable and validating.

People come over when she begins selling her award-winning jams and say, "Oh, you're that girl," she said.

She earned \$640 in prize money, but said that's not why she enters the competition.

McQuhae first started making jam after buying Gryphon Ridge Highlands farm in 1997. The property had hundreds of fruit trees,



NOTL's Kim McQuhae shows off her winnings at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair earlier this month. The jam maker won five first place awards for her preserves. SUBMITTED

and plums were falling to the ground and attracting bees. A neighbour suggested she use the fallen fruit to make jam.

She was skeptical but tried it, and the idea solved her bee problem. That's when, she said, her neighbour "created a monster."

McQuhae entered the Royal for the first time in 2006, placing third that year. She earned her first championship the following year. In 2013, her chocolate raspberry jam won Judge's Choice and led to a "whole event" around it.

She now makes about 200 flavours. Standouts for her this year included lychee almond and spiced apple rhubarb; the lychee almond variety was featured on Breakfast Television.

When asked what makes a good jam, she said she often starts with a fruit like lychee and combines it with ingredients that help it set, such as sugar. Many of her jams use about four cups of fruit to five to seven cups of sugar.

"I usually have a formula in my head that usually works," she said.

She also specializes in low-sugar jams, using two cups of sugar instead of five or seven. Some of her jams contain no refined sugar — a category she also won awards in this year — and are made with maple syrup, honey or agave.

"There's a lot of people that may have diabetes who may be on low sugar diets and stuff," she said of the appeal of these jams.

The only downside, she added, is that opened jars must be kept in the fridge.

The Royal is McQuhae's main event each year.

When it's over, she said she can finally breathe a sigh of relief, and the winning jams often guide what she'll make for the spring farmers' market.

In summer, she begins preparing jams for the next fair. Experimentation keeps her motivated.

"I've always been very creative with different flavours," she said. "I don't like to be normal."

This year marked the 103rd edition of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, held Nov. 7 to 16.

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- Across**
- 1. Scent (5)
 - 4. Dutch canal city (9)
 - 10. Lively interest (10)
 - 11. Small margin (4)
 - 12. Serious warning (3,5)
 - 13. Animosity (6)
 - 14. Tropical fruit (10)
 - 16. Unspecified in number (4)
 - 18. Singles (4)
 - 20. Place to research (10)
 - 23. Throughout (6)
 - 25. E.g. Aldrin (8)
 - 26. Knave (4)
 - 27. Matrimonial lady-in-waiting (10)
 - 28. Gun dog (9)
 - 29. Customary (5)
- Down**
- 2. Weed (9)
 - 3. Lift up (7)
 - 5. Intended (5)
 - 6. Hardens metal (7)
 - 7. Christens again (7)
 - 8. Item with exchange value (5)
 - 9. Dozing (6)
 - 15. Tennis high ball (3)
 - 17. Salty cocktail (9)
 - 19. Slacker (7)
 - 20. Readable (7)
 - 21. Subscriber (6)
 - 22. Vacuum flask (7)
 - 24. Long-continued practice (5)
 - 25. Connected series of rooms (5)

Crossword Puzzle

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Last issue's answers

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EXPLORING HISTORY
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Niagara Camp farriers

During the First World War, horses were an important part of strategic warfare. Farriers, who had to be skilled in both blacksmithing as well as veterinary services, played an important role at the Niagara Camp training grounds. Their tasks included looking after the overall health of the horses, hoof trimming, shoe fitting, watering, as well as the logistics of transporting their furry friends to and from camp. It was their utmost responsibility to ensure the horses could serve effectively during training and later in the battles themselves. Each cavalry squadron had a farrier sergeant to oversee the well-being of their horses. Field officers in each regiment were required to know how to ride a horse, so anyone interested in the role was tested on occasion. Col. John R. Barber of the Lorne Scotts recalled that on a certain day, when the horses were finished training with their riders, they would then be used to test out new candidates. They would ride the horses at a walking pace through camp towards Fort George and then along the river to Paradise Grove (the forest at Queens Parade and John Street). Once they reached the forest, there was a bugle call that all the horses recognized as a direction to head to the stables for food. You can imagine the chaos that ensued. If the rider could stay on the whole way, then they passed the test. The purple poppy campaign started in Canada in the early 2000s as a way to honour the animals that also served during warfare. The NOTL Museum's poppy brigade has included the purple poppies in its project by creating special crocheted ones for the horse carriages and for poppy wreaths for the pet stores in town.



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From tennis to Parliament, why **age matters** more than we admit



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

One of the most memorable moments for me in the 2025 Wimbledon tennis tournament was the post-game interview with Novak Djokovic following his defeat by Jannik Sinner in straight sets, 6-3, 6-3 and 6-4.

Djokovic was obviously tired and upset that his dreams for another slam were quashed, especially one that would have tied him with his great rival, Roger Federer, for most victories at Wimbledon.

He is a determined, highly focused, disciplined, relentless and highly skilled player — his 24 grand-slam victories point to that.

But it was his comments about how aging was catching up to him, despite his relentless training schedule, that caught my interest.

He is now 38. His predecessors and chief rivals in earlier days were Nadal, who retired recently

at 38, and before him, Federer, who retired at 41.

In recent years, Djokovic has deliberately cut back on the number of scheduled tournaments he chose to enter to focus on “ones that count” to him such as the grand slams of the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon and U.S. Open as a way to reduce the risk of wear and tear injuries and the cumulative fatigue that comes with entering a fuller slate of tennis competitions.

Grand slam events on the male side can run to five sets and be taxing mentally and especially physically. Hence, committing to fewer tournaments makes sense to Djokovic as a way to peak at the right time to perform his best at Wimbledon, his favourite grand slam tournament.

Djokovic admitted that in the last two years, winning has become far more challenging for him despite carefully pruning his commitments and sticking to a rigorous training program.

Then the other day, I talked to my son, who, in his mid-50s, is very fit and had just returned from a several-day competitive bike race with some of his surgical buddies in Mexico.

One comment stood out, which was very similar to comments made by down-



Tennis player Novak Djokovic cut back on the number of tournaments he enters. WIKIMEDIA

hill skiers on the toughest runs in North America.

Both require rapid-fire decisions, which, especially on unfamiliar runs, were increasingly hard to make as they got older despite high levels of overall fitness for their age, competitiveness and determination.

To me, as a neurophysiologist, that translated as slower processing speeds in all the parts of the brain related to skiing and biking and has a parallel in Nobel Prize winners in the sciences.

These days, it's common for Nobel Prizes in the sciences to come two decades following the work that garnered the prize — which translates as winning prizes in their 60s and the original work which garnered the prize 20 years earlier in their 40s, and even earlier in

the case of theoretical physics, which requires a high degree of imagination and skill in mathematics.

The latter was certainly true in the Camelot period of quantum mechanics between 1900 and 1930, by which time the field had matured.

Most of those who made the most significant contributions were in their 20s and 30s with only the odd older ones, such as Max Born.

Paul Dirac, perhaps the cleverest of them all, was most productive in his twenties in a field like quantum mechanics, which at that time rewarded original thinking and high mathematical skills with less dependence on accumulating information over several decades, so characteristic of physician-scientists.

Albert Einstein, who Dirac considered the best of the lot because of his magisterial work of general relativity, was 36 at the time it was published and had been working on his theory for several years with some help from other mathematicians.

Thereafter, Einstein was no longer productive at the level he was between 1905 (age 26) and 1915 (age 36). Competitive, yes, original, yes, but not at the same level.

Max Born, who guided many of the young prodigies in quantum mechanics, was in his 40s at the time.

The point of this exercise is to illustrate that aging begins to take a toll on our physical and cognitive skills beginning as early as our late 20s and 30s.

Supportive though indirect evidence for which is MRI findings of neocortical thinning beginning in the late teens and early 20s, and matter changes beginning a decade later and all increasing much faster much past 60, which is precisely what I call the sweet spot for senior politicians — they still possess high enough but diminishing cognitive skills to manage their jobs effectively helped by several decades of accumulated experience.

My artist friends, writers, painters and musicians may have different takes, but the evidence is compelling enough to me to justify a broader look at aging, which, based on MRI studies, begins surprisingly early, even if performance declines aren't so obvious except when subjects are pressed to the limit as they are in highly demanding athletic events or managing complex organizations.

Diminishment, the loss of abilities which we take for granted, comes early to

athletes, as seems to be the case with Novak Djokovic and his generation, but comes to all of us in different ways and times.

It's how we manage that diminishment that counts.

As for Djokovic, I hope he returns next year for another crack at matching Federer's eight victories at Wimbledon, but given the trajectories of Sinner, Carlos Alcaraz and Djokovic, a Djokovic win at Wimbledon 2026 would be a miracle.

Going beyond athletics and science, it makes sense to me that there should be age limits beyond which people cannot serve as politicians — need I say more for the Senate and House of Representatives in the U.S. and equivalents in Canada and especially so for prime ministers, presidents and local politicians, too.

Too often politics locally, provincially and nationally become clubbish and a safe financial haven and source of influence, when what citizens need is accountability, vision, original thinking and enough energy to get things done.

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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November 20, 2025



FEATURED

Obituary

Blanche 'Babs' Matthews

MATTHEWS, Blanche Marie "Babs" 1929-2025 - passed away peacefully at the Greater Niagara General Hospital on November 5, 2025 at the age of 96. Beloved wife of the late Gordon Matthews (1996). Loving mother of Carolyn (the late John-2011) Van Helvert, William (Cathie), Douglas (Jane), Mark (Debra), James (Brenda), Craig, Christopher (Vanessa), and Barbara (Michael) D'Alessandro. She will be forever missed by her many grandchildren and great grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. Predeceased by her brother George Greves Jr. and grandson Jeffrey Vaughan. As a young girl growing up in Niagara-on-the-Lake mom enjoyed her sports. In her teen years she played first base for Shepherd Boat Works. Mom was also an accomplished swimmer and competitive badminton player. She carried this love of sports into her later years to become an avid fan of the Toronto Blue Jays and could always be found watching either tennis or golf on TV. Mom had a love for family. She was always surrounded by her many pictures and photo albums. Cremation has taken place. Friends and family are invited to Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St. Niagara-on-the-Lake on Sunday November 23, 2025 from 2 to 4 pm. A funeral mass will be celebrated at St. Vincent de Paul Church, 73 Picton St. Niagara-on-the-Lake on Monday November 24, 2025 at 11 am. Rite of committal will follow at St. Vincent de Paul Church Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, those who wish may make a memorial donation to Heart Niagara or Wellspring Niagara. Memories, photos, and condolences may be shared at www.morseandson.com



We welcome your letters

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

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TAKE NOTICE that the Council of the Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake intends to designate the property at **1791 CONCESSION 2 ROAD, THE HOUSE OF ELSIE (PART TWP LOT 24 RP 30R6765 PART 1)** as a property of cultural heritage value or interest under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter 0.18.

Description of Property

The subject property is located on 1791 Concession 2 Road. The subject land is located at the intersection of Concession 2 Road and East and West Line towards the east of Concession 2 Road. 1791 Concession 2 Road contains a residential structure, a shed and orchards towards the north of the subject property. The two-storey structure is located with a moderate setback from Concession 2 Road and a large setback from East and West Line. The access to the house is through a dirt and gravel driveway from Concession 2 Road.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest

The property known as the House of Elsie has cultural heritage value or interest for its design and physical values, its historical and associative values and its contextual values.

The residential structure on 1791 Concession 2 Road is a representative example of a Neo-Classical farmhouse. Constructed in circa 1819, the subject property is two storeys in height with a symmetrical three-bay façade. The main entryway is in the centre of the façade, with windows located at either side of the entryway. The exterior walls are clad in red brick, laid in a Flemish bond pattern on the façade and in a common bond pattern on the remainder. The roof is a high-pitched hipped roof, containing overhanging eaves with plain soffits, fascia, and frieze. Two of the original four red brick chimneys remain, one located towards the west of centre on the north elevation and the other located towards the east of centre on the south elevation. The subject property contains vertical rectangular window openings on the first and second storeys. The windows are a six-over six double hung configuration. The openings feature radiating flat arch brick voussoirs, as well as plain, flat wooden trim surrounds and sills. The central, prominent main entrance contains a semi elliptical arched opening with a wood framed fanlight transom and three-quarter sidelights with wooden panels towards the bottom. The doorway contains a plain entablature and fluted wooden pilasters. The entrance opening features radiating semi-elliptical arched voussoir brickwork. The foundation is constructed of rubble stone.

1791 Concession 2 Road has associative value with the Ball family, records regarding their family land, business, and politics show a deep contribution to the community of Niagara-on-the-Lake. It is believed to have been constructed circa 1819. Moreover, the subject property has associative value with the Cooper family, one of the pioneer peach growers in the area. The family acquired in 1910 and developed the land into a fruit farm. The Cooper family has contributed to the agricultural growth of the rural areas of Niagara-on-the-Lake through their farmsteads.

1791 Concession 2 Road has contextual value because it is important in maintaining the historic character of the area. Both the Concession 2 Road and East and West Line streetscapes majorly consist of farmsteads, orchards and residential properties that are one to two storeys high with a large to moderate setback from the road. Most of the buildings are recent built structures or have been modified. The residence stands near various other historic buildings listed on the Municipal Heritage Register. The historic Neo-Classical style structure reiterates the historic character of the area and connects the context to its historical agricultural roots.

1791 Concession 2 Road has contextual value because it is historically linked to its surroundings as being part of the Cooper family fruit farm. The house structure was once a part of a larger farmstead. The land has since been subdivided but the farms still exist towards the south and east of the subject property.

Description of Key Heritage Attributes

Key exterior attributes that embody the heritage value of the dwelling at 1791 Concession 2 Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake include its:

- Two storey Neo-Classical farmhouse
- Symmetrical three-bay façade
- Hipped roof with overhanging eaves
- Two red brick chimneys at either side of building
- Common bond red brick on the west, north, and east elevations
- Double hung six-over-six windows
- Plain, flat wooden trim surrounds and sills
- Wood framed fanlight transom and three-quarter sidelights
- Radiating semi-elliptical arched voussoir brickwork
- Location along Concession 2 Road
- Historical connection to farmstead
- Original box-like structure
- Centred prominent entryway
- Plain fascia, soffit, and frieze
- Flemish bond red brick on the façade
- Vertical rectangular window openings throughout
- Radiating flat arch brick voussoirs
- Semi-elliptical arched entryway opening
- Entablature and fluted wooden pilasters
- Rubble stone foundation
- Setback from the road

Objections

Any objection to this designation must be filed no later than 30 days after the date of publication of the Notice of Intent to Designate. Objections **should be directed to Grant Bivol, Town Clerk, 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake, L0S 1T0. The last date to file a notice of objection is December 19th 2025.**

Queries

Any further queries should be directed to Sumra Zia, Heritage Planner at (905) 468-3266 ext. 327 or through email at sumra.zia@notl.com.

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake this 20th day of November 2025 GRANT BIVOL, CLERK

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