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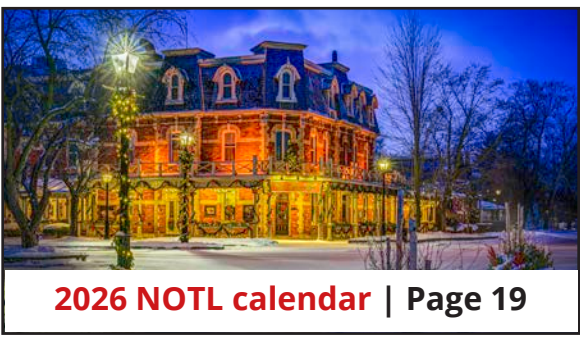
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Hyper-local news for Niagara-on-the-Lake



Town waives \$7.5M in parking fees for Shaw

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake gave the Shaw Festival an early Christmas present this year, to the tune of \$7.5 million.

After uncertainty stalled the project, the Royal George Theatre rebuild is back on track, with council approving planning bylaws Tuesday night to move things forward.

That included no requirement for on-site parking, even though, at today's rate, the 104 previously waived spaces would top \$7.5 million

The Shaw will pay a cash-in-lieu fee for the single new space created by the rebuild, instead.

A formal notice of decision issued Wednesday says the official plan and zoning changes can be appealed to the Ontario Land Tribunal until Dec. 16

The vote finalizes last week's reversal, when

Continued on Page 3

Model citizen has new mini

Royal George replicas made to honour the soon-to-be-demolished theatre



Leslie Mann created three mini Royal George Theatre architectural models to honour the architecture of the building. DAN SMEENK

Daniel Smeenck | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

Model maker Leslie Mann couldn't have timed his latest project better.

Mann's three architectural models of the front façade of the Royal George Theatre, which he built almost a year ago, have

been getting some attention this fall in Niagara-on-the-Lake, with the theatre's closure at the end of this year.

With the Royal George potentially on its way to demolition early next year, these

models may soon serve as lasting reminders of the 110-year-old building's first life.

"I'm hoping that now with the whole situation with the building coming down, there should be some patrons or townspeople

who are fond of the building," he said. "Maybe they would like a replica they can put on the coffee table or up on the wall to remind them of it."

Continued on Page 6

Region cuts nearly \$1M in development charges for Parliament Oak hotel

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

Two Sisters Resort Corp. won't be paying a nearly \$1 million regional development fee for its Parliament Oak hotel underground

garage; however, it's unclear how or if the region will make up the money.

After an extensive debate among Niagara Region councillors on Thursday night, Nov. 20, council voted 14-11 to go ahead

with waiving the fee.

The decision stipulates that the cost will not come from the regional taxpayer, impacting the property tax levy; however, at this time, regional staff say they don't know where exactly

the money for that fee will come from.

That fee would've seen the developer, Two Sisters Resort Corp., pay \$904,819 to Niagara Region — a development charge for the second level of an under-

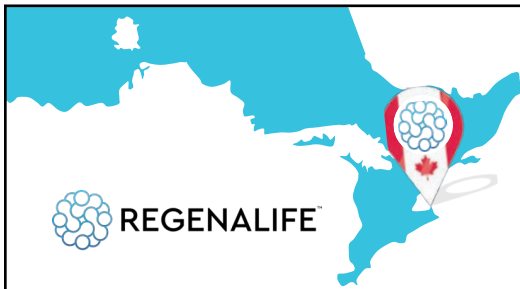
ground parking garage for what's expected to be a luxury hotel at 325 King St. in Old Town.

The Town of NOTL asked the developer to add this second level of underground parking, where originally

there was going to be above-ground parking.

The developer's lawyer, Tom Richardson of Sullivan Mahoney LLP, told regional council this was changed

Continued on Page 4



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Mayor wants **patios to remain** in town

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

After having to withdraw a notice of motion from last week's council meeting on the state of temporary patios in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says he hopes council can still find a path forward on the broader issue of patios in town.

A notice of motion was part of the Nov. 18 council agenda, requested by Zalepa, looking at two options for how the town should move forward with the patios set up in the town after council cancelled the temporary patio program this year.

That program's end will see the removal of all temporary patios, many of which have been open since the COVID-19 pandemic, by the end of the year.

Zalepa told The Lake Report ahead of Tuesday's council meeting that he would withdraw his notice of motion on temporary patios after staff, who consulted legal, advised it is out of order under the town's procedural bylaw.

"The temporary patio policy has now twice been considered by council, and therefore, it does not qualify as an item to be brought back to the agenda period," he said.



Some businesses that set up temporary patios on parking spaces in Old Town are now looking to make their patios permanent by paying for the spots. FILE

Zalepa said patios on Queen Street are "well-liked, obviously. There's no doubt about that." But he added he is "very concerned" and said the town needs a way to address the issues raised in the community around design, cost and the use of public land.

"That's what I'm trying to do," he said.

Council had previously begun researching what a permanent patio program could look like — however, according to Zalepa's notice of motion, council halted that work before the results of that research could be presented to the community.

The notice of motion notes that, on Sept. 23, council approved a request from the Irish Harp Pub that would allow it to keep its temporary patio through a cash-in-lieu payment system for each of the three parking spots it would take up for its outdoor patio (as

well as three extra spots it wanted for a short-term rental business being run on the property).

In that approval, it also told staff to review the cash-in-lieu of parking policy for public and private lands and provide an updated policy and process for consideration.

However, the notice of motion states that "businesses currently operating temporary patios are not clear on next steps."

Therefore, the notice of motion Zalepa put forward would've seen council choose from two different actions for next steps, which would've seen patio operators either remove or not remove the patios by the end of this year.

He said staff reviewed the rules and advised that the notice of motion could not proceed.

"Staff — very good in their work — they did

research, they obviously consulted legal," he said. "They came back with the advice that the notice of motion, basically, is out of order."

"It's disappointing, but that's the rules, and we're here to follow the rules."

The first option involved the town working with patio operators who wish to use public lands for their patios after the town finishes its Old Town parking study, to allow them to pay to use the land. This option would've seen operators take down their patios by the end of the year.

The second option, however, would've seen the town "immediately work with those patio operators" and "enter into agreements ... to compensate the town for lost parking revenues," with the end result being that operators wouldn't remove their patios by the end of the year.

Zalepa said he hopes the issue can be revisited in some fashion.

"I'm hoping at some point, in the near future, council can get to a point where it considers the concerns of the community (and) it gets to a better place where we can find a go-forward, you know, for patios on Queen Street," he said.

"Obviously, that has to be outside of the temporary policy."

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

Town waives **\$7.5M** in parking for Royal George

Continued from Front Page

council backed away from delaying the Shaw's multi-million-dollar project over concerns about size, height, parking and accessibility and directed town staff to return with the paperwork needed to move it forward at the soonest possible meeting.

A special council meeting was held where staff brought that paperwork forward. It was approved after a procedural challenge, parking-related questions and clarification on how long council may review the site plan, which remains under review.

Staff earlier calculated that the four parcels that form the Royal George site would require 104 parking spaces for the existing buildings — a requirement previously waived. The new theatre increases that total to 105.

Tuesday's decision waived that last required space,

leaving Shaw to pay cash-in-lieu for one, with 104 still not collected at this stage. The town's 2025 cash-in-lieu of parking indexing report values a parking space at \$72,664.

Coun. Andrew Niven asked why the bylaw shows the parking requirement reduced to zero.

Kirsten McCauley, the town's director of community and development services, said the requirement appears as zero because council directed staff to accept cash in lieu for the one remaining parking space.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor requested to amend the agenda and asked council "to allow me to put on the floor a motion about the site plan for the Royal George, so that councillors can be given an opportunity for input to staff before staff approves the site plan."

McCauley said the site plan is already posted online and on Friday,

councillors were emailed links to site plan information, landscape drawings, elevations and supporting studies: "I had suggested that any council members could reach out and view any of (those) materials or meet with staff to discuss it further."

"That is available to the public, too, if anybody wanted to come out to town hall to view those documents," she added.

"We do have the site plan application and agreement webpage active now on the site plan webpage," McCauley said, adding that councillors can contact staff at any time for help reviewing or navigating the material online.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa ruled O'Connor's motion out of order, a view the town clerk agreed with and meeting chair Coun. Erwin Wiens ultimately upheld.

By press time, the town had not responded to questions seeking to confirm

when the final site plan agreement is expected. The town's website states it's "under review."

O'Connor asked, "How long do we have, as councillors, to provide the feedback to the director before (the site plan) goes forward?"

Wiens deemed the question out of order, but McCauley said staff would "be happy to arrange a meeting to review the information with her as soon as possible."

O'Connor also flagged a discrepancy between staff numbers in two reports — one listing 88 people, another 200 — but McCauley said the 88 figure came from the applicant's presentation, while "the 200 includes performers as well as staff of the theatre."

"However, staff can follow up," McCauley added.

The bylaws passed, with only O'Connor, Niven and Coun. Maria Mavridis voting against them.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com



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Abomination? Or just **plain fun?**



Despite the usual grumbling from some of NOTL's perpetually displeased crusts, visitors Lynn Halliday, left, and Susan Halliday of Oakville happily pose with the Angel Inn's giant Abominable Snowman — injecting a much-needed shot of Christmas spirit into our tired old pretentious town.

DAVE VAN DE LAAR

\$900K may ultimately come from taxes

Continued from Front Page

after “considerable objection” from the project’s neighbours.

With this change, the lot coverage of the hotel will be 25 per cent, and there will be more landscaping surrounding the hotel above ground.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, who sits on regional council, voted in favour of waiving the fee along with 13 other regional councillors. NOTL Coun. Andrea Kaiser was not present at the Nov. 20 meeting: her email said she was away on vacation until Nov. 24.

Zalepa told The Lake Report that this development should be encouraged to have underground parking and make better use of its space for landscaping.

“It shows that the proponent — the owner of the property — was willing to make the further investment to get this right for the community and that’s going to go a long way,” he said.

In July, NOTL council agreed to support the developer’s bid to reduce their development charges for the hotel’s second level of underground parking by writing a letter to the region.

Under Ontario’s Development Charges Act, the region is required to collect development charges from developers. If unpaid by the developer, they will be added to the levy.

When asked directly by Welland Coun. Leanna Villella if the cost for this development charge is going to be passed onto the taxpayers of the Niagara region, the region’s chief administrative officer Ron Tripp said, “As this point, I don’t know.”

“We’re in the process of seeking legal advice,” he said. “There potentially are



The development charge fee would’ve seen Two Sisters Resort pay \$904,819 for the second level of its hotel’s underground parking garage. SOURCED

options. Maybe or maybe not desirable options, but that’s why I can’t give a definitive answer at this point in time.”

This move by regional council comes from the region’s corporate services committee, which voted on Nov. 5 to recommend that this one-time exemption from the development charge for underground parking be approved and not be charged against the levy.

Some councillors during the Nov. 20 meeting shared their concerns that, regardless of what the committee’s recommendation states, the source of that funding is still unknown — and could come from the wallets of residential taxpayers.

“If you can’t give a definitive answer, I don’t think any of us can give a definitive answer at this point,” Villella told Tripp. The councillor ultimately voted against waiving the fee.

When asked where the money will come from if not the general levy, Zalepa said that regional council “made really clear” it doesn’t want this development charge to be funded from the levy and that “this is something that needs to be revisited in the development charge bylaw.”

Also during the meeting, regional councillors discussed at length Niagara’s development charges bylaw.

The region’s rules differ from the Town of NOTL

when it comes to development charges for underground parking: where underground parking is exempt from the town’s development charges, it’s not exempt from the region’s charges.

Some councillors who supported waiving the fee pointed to this charge in the region’s bylaw as a mistake and shared overarching concerns about the bylaw.

“I think the way we do development charges is wrong,” said Port Colborne Coun. Bill Steele. “Quite frankly, it’s a crapshoot.”

Zalepa told The Lake Report he’d be in favour of that development charge being removed.

“It doesn’t make sense to tax something that we actually want. We’d be better to tax the above-grade parking because we’d actually prefer people to put the parking underground.”

Niagara Falls Mayor Jim Diodati pointed out that the Parliament Oak project achieves the region’s goal of adding more green space to the area by moving its parking underground.

“For the obvious reasons, we want to encourage underground parking, not discourage it,” he said.

However, a few councillors who voted against waiving the fee shared that they believe the developer was, in fact, aware of the development charge beforehand.

“We’re sitting here and somehow the thought of development charges slipped through the minds of all of those people. We have a seasoned developer, mayors and we have a lawyer who understands this,” said St. Catharines Coun. Haley Bateman. “I’m not buying it.”

Zalepa, who asked questions of the regional chair about the process the developer underwent when submitting their plans to the Town of NOTL, said he believes the discrepancy arose from the change in the project from the original application.

“I can surmise that’s where the gap was: the additional parking was never part of the original application.”

He told The Lake Report that he’s not going to speculate on whether or not the developer knew about the change and its impacts.

“At the end of the day, they’re looking for relief for a project that has significant community benefit.”

Richardson said the developer was looking at \$5.3 million in regional development charges, including the underground parking lot fee. With this fee waived, it will still need to pay more than \$4 million to Niagara Region for this development.

— With files from Daniel Smeenck.
zahraa@niagaranow.com



No groundwater plan yet for Parliament Oak

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A Niagara-on-the-Lake resident says the former Parliament Oak school redevelopment could worsen flooding along the nearby One Mile Creek if groundwater from the site isn't properly managed during construction.

The Town of NOTL says no water can be pumped or drained from the property at 325 King St. until the developer files a detailed groundwater management plan.

The province says it has not received any registration for groundwater-taking at the site, which would be required if more than 50,000 litres a day are pumped during construction.

The developer has not yet confirmed how much water it expects to pump or whether it will exceed that limit.

The plan must show where the water will go — either into the storm or sanitary sewer systems, with proper testing and approvals — and how it will be tested, treated and monitored before any release.

Until then, "they are not permitted to discharge water off-site," the town's public works and infrastructure services department said.

The only work currently allowed on the site is shoring and caisson installation, "which are required to stabilize the site and prevent safety issues."

The property will be the future site of a Two Sisters Resorts hotel, from development company Solmar Development Corp.

Ron Simkus, a director with the NOTL Residents Association, said he's concerned that work below the water table could alter groundwater flow feeding One Mile Creek and worsen flooding if not carefully controlled.

Simkus said the ministry told him the developer has two options — either pump water into the (sanitary) sewer with Niagara Region's approval or release it into the storm sewer up to the legal limits.

Spokesperson Lindsay Davidson, for Ontario's



Machines continue to dig deeper at Parliament Oak, despite there being no plan for groundwater. FILE

Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, told The Lake Report the ministry has not received "a water-taking Environmental Activity and Sector Registry (EASR) registration under the company name Solmar Properties or for the site located at 325 King St., Niagara-on-the-Lake."

Any plan above 50,000 litres a day must be formally registered, the ministry said, and include a report from a qualified professional explaining how much water is being taken, how clean it is and how it will be released.

Any release into the storm or sanitary sewer would also need to follow municipal or regional bylaw rules.

Simkus said he observed what appeared to be water being pumped toward a storm sewer on Nov. 4. He said a ministry compliance officer later told him no hose or pump was visible when inspected and site personnel denied any discharge.

The ministry confirmed an environmental compliance officer visited the site on Nov. 5, where it said "no off-site discharge or indication of environmental impacts were observed."

One question the ministry did not answer was whether it has any information on whether the developer expects to go over the 50,000-litres-per-day threshold — or whether that information would only be disclosed at the time of registration.

The Lake Report also asked the developer whether any water has been discharged from the site and whether future pumping

is expected to go over the 50,000-litres-per-day limit that would trigger provincial registration rules. The company did not respond by press time.

Concerns about how the redevelopment could affect flooding along the creek are not new.

Engineering studies used to support a zoning change for the property drew scrutiny from residents last year, including Simkus, who argued that the development sits in a sensitive watershed and that even temporary dewatering could change flow paths or increase discharge downstream.

A Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority stewardship guide notes that about 93 per cent of the land in the creek's watershed is privately owned, meaning protection of its water and habitat quality depends heavily on landowners working with governments and agencies.

In an email, it said the property at 325 King St. lies outside its regulated limit and it "does not have a streamflow gauge" on the creek.

As such, activities at the site "do not require permission" from the conservation authority, which "defers to the municipality regarding any proposals or applications for this property."

Town staff said it ensures the developer's compliance through regular site visits and can issue fines if limits are exceeded. But the creek is not a municipal drain under Ontario's Drainage Act.

Property owners are responsible for maintaining the sections that run through their land, excluding culverts at road crossings.

The town said several culverts crossing the creek have been replaced over the years and are functioning as intended, with another set for 2026 at Regent Street. Replacing culverts helps reduce localized flooding.

But the creek remains part of the conservation authority's official floodplain mapping, informed by a 2005 watershed study that also recommended culvert upgrades and stormwater improvements along the creek, it said.

"To the town's knowledge, the (conservation authority) has not updated this mapping since the completion of the 2005 report, despite the town having undertaken several culvert replacements and drainage improvements since that time," said the town.

Simkus said that's the problem.

"The 2005 report recommended new mapping within the following 20 years to take in urban development and watercourse maintenance," he said. "It's 2025 today."

The town said it could not yet say whether groundwater pumping will continue after construction or how it could affect the creek, as the necessary information has not been submitted.

But, Simkus said, "the fact that the foundation of the lower parking garage is clearly identified as below the identified water table might give (it) a clue that pumping will be necessary."

He said the association is recommending several moves to mitigate the risk of One Mile Creek's flooding.

This includes a new study of the creek's water flow and flooding risks, requiring independent peer reviews of drainage reports before new developments are approved and clearly identifying and holding accountable the engineers responsible for stormwater designs.

It also includes prioritizing repairs to the St. Davids retention ponds as part of the town's asset management plan to improve system-wide flood resilience and considering a stormwater utility fee to help cover infrastructure costs.

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Royal George models honour architecture

Continued from Front Page

Mann has spent more than 40 years as an architectural model maker. He built models for clients in the Toronto condo market, with his first major client being the CN Tower. His wife, Kathy, also worked with him in the business.

Living in St. Davids for the past eight years, Mann has developed strong ties to NOTL — it was the members of the Niagara PumpHouse Arts Centre, where he volunteers, who suggested he create a 3D model of the Royal George.

The first model took 100 hours of work to build, from putting together detailed drawings of what it would look like to the finishing touches.

Fortunately for Mann, winding down from his career gave him time to complete the project, free from deadlines. The subsequent models took less time, 70 to 80 hours.

Each model of the Royal George Theatre costs \$950. “A lot of people don’t appreciate the time it takes to put it together,” Mann said. “So, they don’t value it in



Leslie Mann says he likely won’t be building models of the new Royal George theatre when it’s built. DAN SMEENK

the same way.”

While Mann is not a “big theatre-goer,” he has a deep appreciation for the Royal George as an architectural gem, much like other landmarks in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

He has also built models of Just Christmas, the year-round Christmas store on Queen Street, Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery

The new Royal George will have what’s called a “ghost façade” — the theatre will keep its current face on Queen Street while an entirely new building will be constructed behind it.

Mann said he’s unsure whether a ghost façade is the best option, but likes the idea of keeping the theatre’s front.

“If the new Royal George Theatre is built, I would probably not do a model of it,” Mann said. “I want to focus on buildings with heritage value.”

Mann’s models are valued by those who appreciate both art and architecture, he said. He believes the 3D models offer a unique way for people to experience structures in a way digital images cannot, including for projects that haven’t yet been built.

“Even though a lot of stuff is done digitally today, people don’t always believe what they see on a screen,” he said. “They know it can be manipulated. But when they see the model, they believe it’s an exact representation of what’s going to be built.”

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New NOTL butcher shop a long time coming for meat artisans

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The trajectory of Brandon Fiorino and Jon McDonald’s lives has taken an interesting path — from living as vegetarians to embracing meat later on, then entering the world of butchery.

Now, they’ve embarked on a new chapter in their journey as butchers, opening their first-ever shop in the village of St. Davids.

Theodore’s Artisan Butchers, located on York Road, opened its doors to the public on Oct. 29.

A visit to the shop reveals a straightforward layout: a menu behind the counter lists cuts from beef to sausage, and a fridge beside the register displays striploin, ribeye and other professionally prepared meats.

Behind that simplicity, they say, is years of skill and hard work, with a focus on quality and distinctive products.



Brandon Fiorino, left, and Jon McDonald opened Theodore’s Artisan Butchery in St. Davids at the end of October and aim to provide high-quality meat from small farms. DAN SMEENK

“We take pride in the fact that we dry age all of our steaks,” McDonald said. “It’s not every place that will do that for you.”

Their route to opening a Niagara-on-the-Lake butcher shop wasn’t typical.

McDonald grew up in a family of hunters and fishers but eventually chose vegetarianism over con-

cerns about large factory farms.

He later saw another option.

“I realized you can get from smaller farms that weren’t these huge factories,” he said. “That’s how I got into doing this.”

Both owners continue to buy from small local farms, including Fenwood Farm

in Ancaster for chicken and Beverly Creek in Millgrove.

Fiorino became a vegetarian in high school but shifted back to eating meat after moving to Toronto in “2011 or 2012.” He worked at a vegetarian restaurant at the time.

“I slowly just started to crave meat again,” he said. The pair began their

butchery careers in Toronto, often juggling other jobs while honing whole-animal butchery skills over the past seven years.

McDonald worked at a veterinary clinic and taught himself butchery through online videos to save money on meat. His girlfriend encouraged him to pursue it full-time.

Fiorino was working at N’Awlins, a New Orleans–style restaurant that closed during the pandemic. After it shut down, McDonald told him about an opening at a butcher shop.

Over time, they built enough confidence to venture out on their own.

“I think we came to a point in both of the places we were working that we have a lot of knowledge, a lot of skill, and we might as well do something for ourselves,” Fiorino said. “I think that’s what really was the driving factor to this.”

They chose NOTL because Fiorino’s parents live in Chautauqua and he

noticed the area lacked a butcher shop.

“It was convenient for both of us that we could open a place here,” McDonald said. “People here, it seems like, are very food-conscious and interested in their food and all that, too.”

Construction near York Road and Four Mile Creek has slowed business recently. McDonald said their first two weeks were busier than the past week, but he’s optimistic things will return to normal once the work wraps up on Nov. 28.

“It’s manageable,” he said. “People are pretty nice around here.”

Overall, they say business has gone well and the community has been welcoming.

“We’ve had lots of return customers,” McDonald said. “They do seem to see the difference in the higher quality product that we bring in compared to larger farms.”

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Postal worker supports kids' mental health

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Brenda Benoit Ferguson works at the Canada Post office in Virgil, where staff are adding a local fundraising effort to the corporation's charitable work through the Canada Post Community Foundation.

The foundation raises money each year for children's charities. This year, employees in Virgil set up a book sale to support Pathstone Mental Health in Niagara. It's their first book sale and their second year partnering with Pathstone. Last year, despite a Canada Post strike, they raised money by selling chocolate bars.

Funds raised in October and November go to Pathstone, while sales after that support the Community Foundation. Ferguson said the Virgil office has brought in about \$500 so far.

"I kind of thought it



Barbara Benoit Ferguson has raised about \$500 through her book sale at the Virgil office for Pathstone, a charity that helps children with their mental health. DAN SMEENK

would maybe be something we would only be able to do for a short time,” she said. “But the amount of books we’ve been donated is kind of amazing.”

Canada Post outlets across Niagara are holding their own fundraisers for Pathstone. One office is selling chili; another is selling plaid ribbons.

Pathstone's Project Plaid runs this Thursday and

Friday. Ferguson encourages people to wear plaid and donate. The fundraiser honours 18-year-old Amelia Durocher, who died by suicide. The initiative, inspired by Durocher's love of plaid, aims to raise \$100,000 for Pathstone Mental Health.

Ferguson said the effort goes beyond raising money.

"It is of course to raise money," she said. "But also to raise awareness and to start

conversations, to talk about the importance of our youth getting the help and you know, if our youth can get help now, imagine what they can be as they grow up.”

She noted that every \$50 raised covers mental health services for one child. Pathstone Mental Health supports children and youth experiencing mental health challenges.

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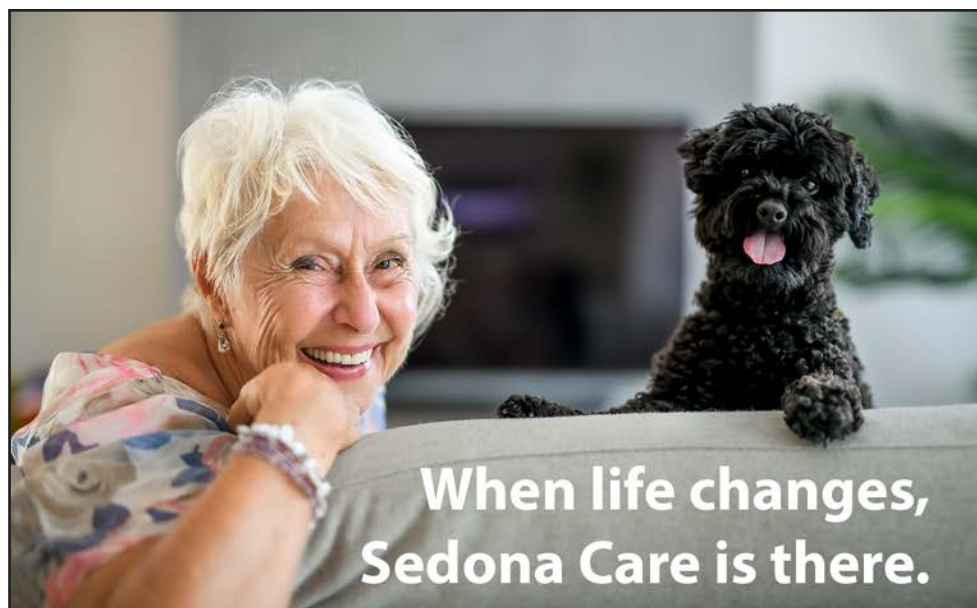


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Holiday market means Christmas time

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

The promise of handmade goods and baked treats brought shoppers through the doors of Grace United Church on Saturday morning as its annual holiday market returned to Victoria Street.

Many arrived looking for a small gift or a familiar seasonal flavour and found tables already thinning before mid-morning.

“I bought some shortbread cookies and a beautiful little gift basket with tea and hot chocolate,” said Marianne Johnston, visiting from Crystal Beach.

Marianne and her husband, Louis, were in town visiting family and decided to stop in after walking through the Old Town. Others at the sale said similar, noting the market has become a regular stop at this time of the year.

“When you start seeing markets like this, that’s how



Gift baskets line the tables as volunteers greet visitors at Grace United’s holiday market. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

you know Christmas is here,” said Johnston.

Grace United hosts its annual Christmas market to raise funds for building upkeep and other community programs. Held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., the sale features jams, preserves, baked goods, handmade items and a long table of gift baskets that volunteers start assembling in October.

Crowds tend to form

before the doors open and many items disappear quickly. By 9:30 a.m., volunteers were already restocking what they could and directing people to new tables.

Pauline Miller, chair of the church council, said this year’s turnout exceeded expectations.

“We are overwhelmed with how many people are already here and it’s not even 10 o’clock,” said Miller.

The church aims to raise between \$10,000 and \$12,000 from the market. The funds support heating, lights and repairs at the 202-year-old heritage building. Volunteers also see the event as a way to introduce newcomers to the congregation.

Miller attributed the strong morning turnout to the warmer weather, noting past markets often opened in snow or heavy wind, which limited foot traffic.

Volunteers spend weeks preparing, baking in stages

and jams are made throughout the year. Gift basket teams sort donated items, from mugs to decorations, into themed packages.

The results have built a reputation that keeps people returning.

“Reputation and the care in presentation,” said longtime volunteer Esther Giesbrecht when asked what brings people back every year. “That, and the short-breads are always a hit.”

One young volunteer from Grace United carried baked goods for a customer with limited mobility to her house up on Johnson Street, a simple gesture demonstrating how the church’s volunteers look out for their neighbours.

With the market finished, Grace United is preparing to serve as a lunch stop during the Rotary Holiday House Tour starting Dec. 5. The church will offer a simple meal to visitors before turning its attention to its Christmas Eve service.

andrew@niagaranow.com

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Have Your Say on Three Heritage Projects



The Town is inviting residents to help shape important heritage initiatives:

- The expansion and review of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District (HCD Study)
- The Heritage Tax Rebate Program, which offers incentives to preserve heritage properties
- The Cultural Assets Mapping project will initiate the Town’s Arts and Culture Master Plan by identifying local cultural resources.

Join us for a Public Information Centre (PIC)

- Thursday, December 4
- 5:00–7:00 p.m.
- Simpson Room, NOTL Community Centre, 14 Anderson Lane
- RSVP not required
- The PIC will feature a short presentation followed by interactive stations on each initiative.

Learn more about the Town’s heritage planning by scanning the QR code.





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#54: Write a nomination for someone special that has made an impact on you as well as the greater community/world. It's a good way to thank them.

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



Contributed by Patty Garriock
"Chance is always powerful.
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Hare Wine Co. donates cookie proceeds

John Hare of the Hare Wine Co. presents a \$5,000 donation to Amanda Ross of Gillian's Place, raised through the sale of Grandma Hare's Scottish shortbread cookies. Holding the sweet treats that made it possible, Hare noted the fundraiser brought in \$1,000 more than last year and expressed hope to reach \$6,000 in 2026. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

NOTL nears the tipping point



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist

Is it the giant chortling Bumble Yeti that looms over the Angel Inn? Or the tourist-sucking outsized lit NOTL sign in the park opposite the Prince of Wales?

When it comes to sketchy taste, it's hard to pick the winner. They both suck. But they also mesh with what our business and political elite seem to want for the place. If you build it, they will come, they say. At least until you stop giving them a reason.

People flock here (three million of them annually) because it's authentic. It's ancient. Historic. Quaint in a way Mississauga and Buffalo never will be. Not cute. Not fake.

The greatest attribute Niagara-on-the-Lake has is that archaic main street and the surrounding blocks of homes. They recall a time before AI, Trump, TikTok, sweatpants and that awful music Drake makes.

Old sells. It's why the town launched the heritage district conservation study and has a heritage tax rebate program, plus a watchdog heritage committee. As part of that study a freeze was

slapped on any development in the core for a year — and soon the public consultations will start.

But wait. It's too late. Council may think you're a criminal for trying to replace broken windows in a century home, but erecting a 50,000-square-foot, \$80-million industrial box with a six-storey tower on its butt end smack in the middle of the Queen Streetscape, causing at least three years of construction chaos and destroying a number of heritage buildings is, well, just peachy.

The Shaw's trophy temple was stalled by red tape for a few days. But after the lord mayor threw a hissy and stormed out of a meeting, with the festival threatening to abandon the project, his colleagues lined up.

When completed, the complex will tower over the main drag, dwarf neighbouring buildings, consume half a block, and turn a residential street into a commercial one.

As neighbour Maria Vaneva told our local leaders (in vain), "The approval process has not been adequately transparent for such a significant project in the heart of a national historic site and heritage district protected under the Ontario Heritage Act."

And she's right. Shaw boss Tim Jennings is bullying this giant mistake through the political process and, so far, he's winning.

"Further delays to this project will cost the Shaw



A giant Yeti outside the Angel. Is this what people flock to NOTL to see?

over \$200,000 per month in escalation, contract and financing costs, and more in lost revenues," he warned. "It will also mean that the Royal George will not be completed in time to open for the fall 2028 season, costing main street merchants and hoteliers millions in lost revenues."

But Queen, our gem, will be forever altered — by a massive building with a fake Disneyesque heritage façade. The street may never recover. The conservation freeze, the zoning restrictions, the height limits, the heritage preservation — poof. Meaningless. Bring in the excavator.

But wait again. The theatrical heritage marauders are not alone.

Days ago the town removed a hold on an estate property down the same street. Now developer Rainer Hummel is free to move ahead on an 81-unit hotel (yeah, another one) that will revamp an historic home, see a modern three-storey structure built for guests and come with a seriously-big underground parking garage.

Residents squawked loudly when the project was first proposed. It's also within the conservation zone. But, so what?

Meanwhile a few blocks away — also in the zone — workers grind away at the 219-room Parliament Oak hotel and conference centre. It's currently the Mother of All Holes as the two-level parkade is dug.

Of course, the complex is in a residential area, townsfolk objected loudly (there was even a protest) and the developer started work without permits. But, you, know, it's OK. Just pay your taxes and let us run the place...

By the way, politicians have just waived a nearly \$1 million fee the developer was supposed to pay with regard to his big dig. "It's a free gift," says Norm Arseneault, of the residents' association. "It's got to come from somewhere and taxpayers will pay the price."

No wonder Yeti's laughing.

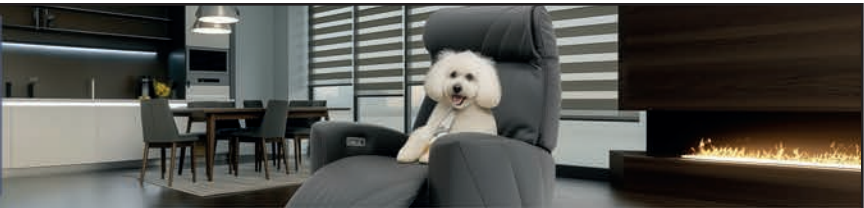
Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister.

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A letter to Santa, the nicest Canadian

Keith McNenly
Special to The Lake Report

Dear Santa,
It's been more than 70 years since I wrote to you in the '50s.

I bet you're getting lots of letters from all over the world now that you have your own postal code, simply addressed: "Santa Claus, North Pole, Canada, H0H 0H0." Hope you are in talks with the posties union for special treatment for H0H 0H0 mail.

Everyone in the world knows Canadians are nice, and I think if there were a worldwide vote, you would certainly be picked as the nicest Canadian of all.

Don't let that go to your head, though: things are getting pretty nasty out there and relying on reputations of being nice doesn't get you very far nowadays.

The world has become a darker place, and it's going to be a tough Christmas for you, just like everyone else.

Not sure if it's been covered much in your local paper, "The Icecap Report," but the American president has declared economic war against Canadian imports, imposing tariffs on just about everything made in Canada.

Heck, he even wants you to become an American: yes, the North Pole is at risk. Probably should warn the elves.

Do the elves have a reindeer-powered squadron in NATO? Could save a few bucks and cancel the F-35



In his first letter to Santa Claus since he was a child, Keith McNenly updates Saint Nick on some of North America's political affairs, further south of the North Pole. FILE

orders with this unique Canadian technology. Anyway, I'm worried about your mission this coming Christmas Eve. All the bad stuff going on just seems to bode unwell for flying around hauling millions of presents.

Did you get pre-clearance from American customs? The president takes the supposed trade imbalance with Canada pretty badly, and I'm guessing that a hundred million presents being exported to the U.S., from Canada of all places, would pull his chain bigly.

As if getting around tariffs isn't a big enough worry for you to handle on top of the postal union strike, there's the accusation of supposed drug trafficking from Canada. Better be ready for a thorough search at the U.S. border. That

could take a very long time, especially for you and your flying sleigh with all those presents.

I hear that some American border agents can get pretty ornery with Canadians — "seeing red," so to speak, doesn't bode well, especially for you. Maybe wear plaid this year so you'll look like any other Canadian in a reindeer-powered sleigh lined up at the border.

Then there's ICE, not the kind you're used to at the North Pole, though — United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

You, of all people, can't afford to be held in detention at the border for hours on end on Christmas Eve, or dread the thought of being shackled and shipped off to a distant foreign prison camp somewhere.

I have a couple of suggestions for your 2025 Christmas Eve gift delivery.

It might be a good idea to cover up the Canadian flag on your sleigh when entering the U.S.; it could make you a target. Wearing the Canadian flag might still be a good idea when travelling in Europe, but it'd be pushing it entering the States right now.

The U.S. is shooting boats suspected of being drug runners out of the water in the Caribbean and Pacific. Can flying sleighs pulled by reindeer be next? Better to be safe than slurry.

Don't even consider entering the U.S. directly from Canada. Remember, we're also accused of being big-time drug runners, though I'm sure your very talented flight crew, Rudolph and his cronies, can dodge bombs bursting in the air, so I'm not too worried.

Millions of American kids might find it tough slogging this winter, with families having to pay excessive tariffs on imported toys, rising food costs, and laid-off parents. It all sure spoils the mood at the dinner table, so a generous Christmas visit from the nicest Canadian could make a happy difference.

On a final note, Canadian kids and parents can use an extra boost this year, too, for the same reasons.

Have a safe Christmas Eve flight, Santa.
Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Keith McNenly was the chief administrator of the Town of Mono for 41 years.



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style.
Category: MORE THAN ONE MEANING

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

Last issue category: ROAD TRIP

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

Answer: What is the Autobahn?

Answered first by: Terry Nord

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Susan Hamilton, Margie Enns, Sue Rautenberg, Jane Morris, Bill Hamilton, Bob Wheatley, Lynda Collet, Claudia Grimwood, Jeff Lake, Janice Taylor, Jane Andersen, Becky Creager, Nancy Rocca, Esther VanGorder, Sylvia Wiens, Jim Dandy, Kimberly Amaral, Katie Reimer, Catherine Clarke, Wade Durling, Howard Jones, Marla Percy, Tuija Johansson,

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Stop dumping your trash at McDonald's

Dear editor:
With regularity, as I enjoy an outside coffee at McDonald's at the corner of East-West Line, I observe non-customers dumping their household trash in the outside containers. These include Ontario, out-of-province and even out-of-country plated cars.

Motorists drive in and dump their trash, and if the containers are full, deposit them beside the container. Trash has included pieces of carpet and most recently

an empty, pint-sized paint can. The paint can raises an environmental issue.

Surely the owner of this McDonald's could review this past week's security camera records, identify the paint can bandit and turn the data over to the police for prosecution.

This practice, plus empty coffee cups, etc., deposited on shelves in grocery stores, speaks volumes about our society of today.

Samuel Young
NOTL



Letter writer Sam Young says people need to stop putting their household trash in the McDonald's garbages and learn to put it out on garbage day at their own homes.

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Sign of the times: Gifts, taxes and other things



Brian Marshall
Columnist

As many of you are likely aware, during last Thursday's regional council meeting, the majority of attending members (regional councillor Andrea Kaiser notable by her absence) voted in favour of giving Marotta's Two Sisters Resorts a gift in excess of \$900,000 by waiving the development fees on the second level of Parliament Oak's underground garage.

To roll the clock back, in July of this year, our local town council and lord mayor (with the exception of Couns. O'Conner and Niven, who voted against, and Coun. Burroughs, who abstained) voted to take the unprecedented step to petition the region to waive these fees.

Unprecedented, you ask? Well, based on my

research — and I am open to correction — this is the first time Niagara-on-the-Lake's council has ever formally requested that the region waive development charges to the benefit of a developer.

Yes, as Coun. Mavridis pointed out during the July meeting, the current council had previously asked the region to consider a "delay" on a project's development charges, but, there is a huge difference to waiving the same.

So, based on council's endorsement, the formal request was duly written and sent to the region.

As is normal practice, the region's staff received this request and fully considered it within the specific context and the general overarching financial and precedent-setting ramifications.

Based on their professional evaluation, regional staff recommended against waiving these fees.

Amongst other issues, they identified specific concerns associated with the establishment of a precedent outside the legislative framework, exposing the region and taxpayers to potential challenges from other developers, with the inevitable result of significantly reducing the revenue



Brian Marshall says the new NOTL sign at Simcoe Park is a tacky addition to the town's landscape. BRIAN MARSHALL

base that underwrites the region's requirement to provide infrastructure improvements.

Regional staff's recommendation posed some very real concerns.

Namely, if one gives away a million dollars here and there — because now developers across Niagara can cite this precedent for similar relief — where does the money come from to make up those losses in order to fulfil the region's legislated responsibilities?

Oddly, our lord mayor — known for bludgeoning NOTL town council to respect, accept and endorse the "professional expertise" of staff — actively worked to influence regional council members to ignore and

dismiss the recommendations of the "professionals."

Apparently, if a recommendation doesn't happen to fall within "build, baby, build" and "be damned the consequences" parameters, it is OK to disregard the professional acumen of the region's planning staff.

Moreover, Zalepa's arguments included the suggestion that recent changes in provincial legislation would allow the region to waive the charge without recouping the amount from taxpayers.

If the money doesn't come from the regional budget for Niagara ... well, it could, theoretically, be pushed upward into the provincial budget.

Although why the

province might assume the cost of a "gift" given by a regional council, together with assuming the liability for all such future "gifts" — and you can bet your life that this decision, "outside legislative framework," will be cited and serve as a precedent across the province — is highly questionable to say the least.

With the region currently bandying about a 10 per cent increase for the 2026 budget and our aging infrastructure slowly falling apart after years of accumulated neglect, surely the members of regional council cannot seriously believe that their direction to staff of finding a way to fund this and future "gifts" without dingging taxpayers is even remotely in the realm of reality.

But wait: perhaps Lord Mayor Zalepa and his like-minded cronies on regional council happen to know where the fabled money tree grows ... Since we are exploring fantasies, we might as well indulge ourselves for a moment in the phantasmagorical dimensions our elected officials apparently live in.

Fact ... there are only two choices: cut planned spending included in the budget (likely including once again

deferring expenditures on infrastructure maintenance/replacement) or raise taxes.

Even on the remote chance the province did agree to pick up the tab for municipal "gifts," the money to do so will come from you and me, folks, in the form of taxes to pay for our generational deficit financing.

Inevitably, each and every taxpayer in this province will underwrite this decision into the foreseeable future... All to provide a gift to a billionaire developer.

On a closing note, down at the corner of Simcoe Park, a curious phenomenon can be observed.

Tourists glance at the giant tacky NOTL sign, shake their heads and take photos.

Not of the sign, not of themselves with the sign behind them, but of themselves facing the sign with the Prince of Wales as their backdrop.

Apparently, our visitors have more taste and discretion than those in town responsible for erecting this travesty.

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

This Sunday, the NOTL Legion on King Street will be alive with its annual Christmas Craft Show. Yes, this Sunday, the 30th. An extraordinary opportunity to find unique gifts and to feel really good about supporting talented and enthusiastic local crafters.

About 30 local resident crafters, and the main rule is that all items must be handcrafted by the vendors. No fair buying something from a big company and adding a retail markup. Handcrafted means handcrafted.

This show will be open between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. at our local Royal Canadian Legion branch. Branch 124, named in remembrance of

General Charles M. Nelles. He was the first president of our local Legion branch.

Right across King Street from the current big dig at Parliament Oak. Number 410, in between Genair and Veterans Memorial Park.

So here we are again, after a very active year filled with all sorts of Niagara area controversies. One of the most persistent discussion topics has been the potential traffic flow changes in St. Davids (note there is no apostrophe in the name of that town nestled in the shadow of the escarpment).

Another subject at the top of the list has been the change to the former Parliament Oak Public School site. Something big and substantial is definitely happening there. Lots and lots of trucks coming and going.

But let's all lighten up a bit and get jolly as the holly appears once again. Queen Street downtown, and indeed our four villages, are being transformed again, after the poppy project around Remembrance Day.

The Toronto newspapers have been running articles



The Legion's Christmas Craft Show returns Nov. 30, full of handmade items just in time for gift season. FILE

describing various Christmas markets within a reasonable drive of the big city. Who knew there were so many? From Elora to St. Jacobs to Stratford to Port Perry to Stouffville to Wellington across the lake in Prince Edward County.

And so, so many other potential day trips to towns in southern Ontario.

But this Sunday, right

here in our beloved NOTL, we will have the chance to be among Christmas Craft Show royalty. The story of our own Kim McQuhae was well told by my newsroom pal Dan Smeenk in last week's edition of The Lake Report (Nov. 20, "NOTL's Jam Queen cleans up at Royal").

Kim was recently named the premier exhibitor at this year's Royal Agricultural

Winter Fair over in the big smoke of Toronto.

Her products are amazing in their uniqueness, and Kim is one of a kind. Indefatigable, a risk-taker and photogenic.

She creates about 200 flavours of jams and jellies, from lychee almond to spiced apple rhubarb. And, she also makes low-sugar jams for those of us who have to be conscious of our sugar intake.

At the Royal this year, Kim entered 23 jams in 14 categories, winning an incredible five first-place ribbons, and a whole bunch of other prizes. Indeed, Kim was featured on Breakfast Television. They featured her lychee almond creation.

So, let's support the Christmas Craft Show at our local Legion. Organizer Karen Taylor-Jones and her helpers have assembled about 30 creative crafters who will display their wares.

Throw in a penny sale, some light lunch items, lots and lots of free parking, and what's not to love? And be advised: the term penny sale is outdated. This Sunday, I have been told we will get

20 tickets for five bucks.

Last year, I found several perfect gifts at the Christmas Craft Show at our local Legion. An appropriately bright red Christmas sweater and cozy woven hats and mittens.

How about the locally carved and painted wooden nutcrackers, ranging in size from six feet to six inches? Or the 16-year-old local girl who sold her homemade lip balms and lipsticks? OK, she comes from Niagara Falls, but we happily welcome her as a local.

This Ramblings has indeed rambled, but isn't that the nature of the beast?

There is just so much going on in our wee Niagara-on-the-Lake, especially at this time of the year. I almost forgot to mention the several jewelry makers who will be presenting their beautiful items this Sunday at the NOTL branch of the Royal Canadian Legion.

Wrapping up, may I respectfully suggest an early arrival. Some of the booths will be, wait for it, folks, jammed. Yes, ouch.

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rossrocket9@gmail.com

The Eagle has landed – and it rules the regional roost



THE FORUM

Steve McGuinness
Columnist

It has been a triumphant November for developer Benny Marotta and daughters.

Their new Stone Eagle Winery is now open. It launched following a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by town councillors and mayors from several Ontario municipalities. Soon after, it hosted a gala reception for delegates to the G7 foreign ministers' conference.

But not everyone in town is so enthused about the family's local development projects.

This bad blood began during the last town council term. A battle over a planned townhouse development at Randwood

Estates, proposed by Marotta's Solmar Development Corp, first got trapped in a development freeze. Then, it was stalled by an Ontario Land Tribunal ruling upholding the town's rejection of a rezoning application, on appeal.

Unchastened, a refreshed Randwood plan is now back in our planning department's workflow. This isn't the first time Solmar has aggressively asserted its private property rights in a fight against committed community interests. Retired Caledon mayor Marolyn Morrison has a decade-long litany of battle tales to recount. She thwarted an unwanted Solmar subdivision there beginning in 2004.

Meanwhile, excavation continues at the Marotta's Two Sisters Resort Corp. project at the former Parliament Oak school site. An underground parking garage will soon be poured. That project sparked neighbourhood anger after heavy equipment began removing soil before a town building permit was issued.

Recently, the development



charge that Niagara Region assesses on underground parking became another flashpoint of contention. A development charge raises revenues for municipalities, offsetting the costs of infrastructure to service new developments.

Most Niagara municipalities do not charge development charges on underground parking, but the region does.

NOTL town council passed a motion urging the region to issue a waiver, valued at \$904,819, on a portion of their development charge applicable on the Two Sisters Resorts' underground garage.

Niagara regional council is an unwieldy, bloated body. Mayors of all local councils sit on it, as well as other directly elected

representatives. Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and elected Coun. Andrea Kaiser represent NOTL.

Last Thursday, the NOTL Residents Association broadcast a red alert to members: the council debate on the Parliament Oak development charge motion would ensue later that day. An e-mail blitz urging its defeat began.

The arguments made at the debate were equal parts outlandish, misleading and inscrutable.

Our lord mayor claimed that the two-level parking plan was responsive to residents' preferences. That's revisionist. Neighbours actually eschewed any commercial development on what was once an institutional property.

Where once stood a school building surrounded by open playing fields, the new resort's landscaped areas may well remain gated to all except registered guests.

Underground parking also poses unique environmental risks because the building's footings extend well below the high water table at

a site close to One Mile Creek. Displaced water poses a flooding threat to surrounding homes. It may also de-water nearby tree roots, which certainly isn't environmentally green.

The adequacy of the engineering and peer review reports supporting the planning application also rests on unstable ground.

NOTL Residents Association volunteers, with extensive experience in geology and mining, delivered a scathing update at the organization's recent AGM. They maintain that the applicant's engineering report contains a disclaimer of liability for reliance placed on it by third parties.

Our head of planning leaves for Grimsby this week. These contentious matters remain behind for her interim replacement to manage.

Several councillors suggested the region was charging development charges on underground parking by oversight. Another suggested amending the bylaw instantly to correct "the mistake." The region's chief administrative officer

explained the impossibility of a quick fix, because a full-fledged review process would first be required.

Most importantly, the CAO could not provide assurances that offsetting the waived fee without imposing a higher tax levy, as required by the motion, was even practically achievable. He cautioned that legal advice was still being sought. His warnings fell largely on deaf ears.

When the vote was called, council passed it 14-11, with the mayors' block united in favour. Multi-millionaires received a 20 per cent off early Black Friday discount on the \$5 million total development charge.

Many town residents are now left less eager to try the Stone Eagle. This "victory" may not be one to toast. It leaves a bitter taste in many taxpayers' mouths.

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

What we found on a starry night in Queenston

Dear editor:

It was a wintry, starry night as we drove along the Niagara Parkway to look at the Christmas lights. The only sound we heard was from the car's engine. Inside, we were warm and toasty in our finest winter attire; after all, it was Christmas Eve.

We soon approached the village of Queenston, where we pulled off the parkway and slowly crept along the quiet, empty streets muffled by the snow.

Fairy lights danced on the branches of the evergreens, while others twinkled at us from the rooftops above. The warm glow from the windows looked so inviting.

"If we knocked on their door, would they invite us into their home?" I wondered.

The night was getting on, and our tired eyes were still glued to the window, searching for that special house that would make the drive worthwhile. And there it was.

The white house, with candles burning in each of its windows, with a white picket fence decorated with long evergreen garlands and red bows. Christmas lights sparkled on the arbour gate, simply decorated with a matching evergreen wreath and a large red bow.

We stopped to admire the charming white house,

and I snapped a picture with my camera. I could imagine the family singing carols, or perhaps serving hot apple cider to their invited guests, or simply relaxing in front of the TV while watching "A Christmas Carol" with Alastair Sim.

Many years later, I came across the photo. I had to go back and see if the house was still there. I drove through the streets searching for it, and lo and behold, there it was. Nothing had changed.

It made me happy to see it again. It brought back the warm memories of that night, and I wondered why I had waited so long.



NOTL is the place to be to see fantastic Christmas lights, writes Lucy Kovaliv. FILE

If you haven't visited this beautiful part of Ontario, you won't be disappointed. I've driven the Niagara Parkway to Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake. Both are especially enchanting around Christmastime.

You will not be disappointed, and perhaps you will discover that particular charming house, like we did.

Lucy Kovaliv
Mississauga

Chautauqua project preserves nature for the next generation

Dear editor:

This fall, the Chautauqua Residents Association unveiled a sculpture in Chautauqua Park recognizing the Chautauqua Oaks Project's work in reforesting the neighbourhood's treasured, but dwindling, tree canopy (Oct. 24, "Honouring the oaks, and the hands that planted them, at Chautauqua Park," The Lake Report).

We are very thankful for the honour.

We are also deeply grateful for the awareness the sculpture will draw to the 500+ oak trees we planted, 165 of them in Chautauqua



The Chautauqua Oaks Project preserve the neighbourhood's tree canopy for years to come, write Leslie Frankish and Holmes Hooke. DAN SMEENK

— one for every existing magnificent heritage oak still standing.

As these new oaks will live for hundreds of years, this awareness will help maintain a stewardship state

of mind in the community for many, many decades to come.

The project's success was the result of many, many kind and caring volunteers. We would like to rec-

ognize some particularly generous individuals who contributed to the establishment of the project: JB Hopkins (tree expertise), Betty Desiro (town support), Ruth Denyer (major patronage), Shauna Dickson (website construction), Dan Patterson, Alan Unwin (Niagara College partnership) and especially Mary Jane Clark, who oversaw the growing of a future oak forest from our very own heritage acorns.

Once up and running, the project provided an outlet for members of the community keen to

help ensure there will be a magnificent, epic tree canopy for future generations.

We are thankful to the countless volunteers who pitched in with: acorn harvesting, seedling nurturing, sapling rescuing, tree planting, tree watering, inventory recording, neighbourhood canvassing, locates arranging, tree fund donating, support letter writing, as well as the 93 households that welcomed our trees into their gardens.

And of course, we are thankful for the existing heritage oaks of Chautauqua for providing us with such

joy ... and all the glorious acorns that allowed us to plant their next generation.

P.S. We would also like to commend the residents embarking on efforts to prevent unnecessary tree removal.

To anyone looking for a way to help preserve the distinct nature of the great Chautauqua tree canopy, please visit chautauquoaksproject.ca for the list of recommended trees to plant.

With gratitude:

Leslie Frankish
Holmes Hooke
Chautauqua Oaks Project
NOTL

O what a rent the envious Doug Ford made

Dear editor:

In the last several decades, there has been a worldwide trend for the rich and powerful to put systems in place that will make them more rich and more powerful.

All this re-engineering of governments and economies rests on the backs of ordinary citizens, and is a clear recipe for the impoverishment of the general populace.

In Ontario (and North America generally), the great imperative of government is to turn aspiring yes-men into millionaires, to turn millionaires into multi-millionaires, multi-millionaires into billionaires, and billionaires into multi-billionaires.

This is being done through legislation that consistently favours those already rich and powerful.

The flip side of the coin is that the professional classes are being turned into the ordinary middle class, the middle class is being turned into the precarious lower middle class, the lower middle class is being turned into the barely surviving class, and they are being fast-tracked into becoming the homeless or day-to-day subsistence class.

In late October, Premier Doug Ford tabled legislation which (in the small print) would put an end to any kind of rental security, including rent controls.

To put this in perspective, the average rental cost for a one-bedroom apartment in Toronto in 2023 was \$2,500. And 48 per cent of the population of Toronto is renters.

Under this legislation, all of these people could be looking at rent increases of 50 per cent overnight. The

smart money sees Ford's proposals as a trial balloon, which Ford is likely to reintroduce at an opportune time.

Even with the offending clause removed, Bill 60 is at least the third Ontario bill in the last 10 years to hand more power over to mega-landlords at the expense of tenants. One can understand that.

How can multi-billion dollar management corporations, land holding consortiums, and international housing speculators survive in a world dominated by tenants trying to exist on fixed incomes and poverty-line jobs?

Even under previous conditions, the process of squeezing all but the more wealthy tenants out of their current housing is well-advanced. For several years, Premier Ford's government

has been setting the annual rent control increases at 2.4 per cent, which is all but the highest possible increase.

At the same time, with full support from the Ford government, large landlords and property management corporations are pushing for annual above guideline rent increases of nearly 2.4 per cent.

The upshot of this is that people on fixed incomes, or earning not much above minimum wage jobs, are often facing something like a 4.8 per cent rent increase annually, even under rent controls.

This is clearly not sustainable, and, under the current conditions, most of these people will be pushed out of their current rental units over the next five to 10 years, supposing that this has not already happened.

Other techniques to evict tenants contrary to the law



Writer Kevin McCabe says Doug Ford's Bill 60 puts more power in the hands of landlords at the expense of tenants.

are well-established, as there are no limits on rental increases when there is a turnover of the apartment.

This makes it almost impossible for tenants who have been evicted unjustly to find another apartment which is comparable to their former one.

It is a harsh judgment on Ontario's citizens that people commonly get the government that they deserve. Ontarians can only excuse their own political ineptness on the grounds that the Ford government

uses both the funding from their millionaire/billionaire friends, as well as large amounts from the public purse, to provide their policies with daily positive advertising and promotion, as well as using regular attack ads directed against their opponents.

It remains possible that when more Ontarians find themselves out on the street, they may reconsider their votes in the past for Ford and his government.

Kevin McCabe
St. Catharines

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- Across**
- 1. Of the red planet (7)
 - 5. Family line (7)
 - 10. Sandbag (4)
 - 11. Hostile (10)
 - 12. Balladeer (8)
 - 13. Resembling a horse (6)
 - 15. Yuletide visitor (5,5)
 - 17. Talk irrationally (4)
 - 19. Agitate (4)
 - 21. Not doable (10)
 - 24. Entertains (6)
 - 27. Burn without flame (8)
 - 28. Narrow entrance (10)
 - 29. Encounter (4)
 - 30. "Stand by your Man" singer (7)
 - 31. Exact (7)
- Down**
- 2. Space traveller (9)
 - 3. This evening (7)
 - 4. Water-dwelling (7)
 - 6. Banish (5)
 - 7. Vanquish (7)
 - 8. Thermoplastic yarn (5)
 - 9. From a distance (4)
 - 14. Greek liqueur (4)
 - 16. Member (4)
 - 18. Worth nothing (9)
 - 20. Politician's badge (7)
 - 22. Sensational novel (7)
 - 23. Mohammedan (7)
 - 25. Temperamental (5)
 - 26. Slumbered (5)
 - 27. Storage shelter (4)

Crossword Puzzle

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Last issue's answers

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Niagara District Airport

Congratulations to the local airport on its master plan. It is exciting to think of the possibilities that having such an airport in town could bring. In their honour, we are sharing a photo of the first female manager of the Niagara District Airport: Blanche Quinn. In 1960, Blanche started working at the flight desk, though she knew very little about flying. But that didn't last long. Back then, there were no control towers or equipment. She had to learn to calculate the wind speed based on how straight the flag would fly. If she could see the crane over by the Port Weller Dry Docks, then she knew there were three miles of visibility, and that was good for biennial flight review flying. One of Blanche's career highlights was accomplishing a solo flight. She spent 28 years of her life working with the Niagara Airport Commission and in 1965/66, she became manager of the Flying Club and then worked full-time for the airport commission. She eventually became the first female manager. In 1988, she retired from the airport. We think she would be quite proud to see how far it has come today.

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How intelligent is artificial intelligence, and **is it conscious?**



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

My reference point for questions like this is the Star Trek series, "The Next Generation." One of the officers, suitably named Data, on the Starship Enterprise stands out.

He's cognitively very bright and has super-human strength, but struggles to understand the nuances of human feelings and emotions.

All went well until a Starfleet officer, keen to understand how Data worked with an eye to making copies of him, claims she had the right to take him apart to study him without his permission because he isn't a sentient being and thus not entitled to refuse.

The issue was solved by convening a court to explore whether Data was sentient and therefore entitled to refuse. After a long, gruelling touch-and-go trial, which explored all the issues and evidence, the

court ruled that Data was sentient and as entitled, as any human, to refuse.

That mythological trial in the 1990s raised questions that philosophers, neuroscientists, computer designers, AI companies, ethicists and religious experts have asked since the dawn of AI in the 1950s: is AI capable of intelligence akin to humans and at some stage, could AI be conscious?

I like the answer expressed by Barbara Montero recently in the New York Times, Nov. 8, about whether AI is intelligent, in the article "AI Is on Its Way to Something Even More Remarkable Than Intelligence."

She stated, "Today we have reached that point. AI is no less a form of intelligence than digital photography is a form of photography."

Referring to consciousness, Montero states, "And now AI is on its way to doing something even more remarkable, becoming conscious. As we interact with increasingly sophisticated AI, we will develop a better and more inclusive conception of consciousness." Makes sense to me.

AI is on a steep growth curve because of larger, better databases, improving algorithms, more powerful



In the TV show, "Star Trek: The Next Generation," Data the android is put on trial to argue whether or not he is a sentient being with rights or the property of Starfleet. Now, that conversation is starting to become a reality as artificial intelligence becomes smarter. So far, the answer is that AI is not sentient. But it won't be long. SOURCED

and faster computers, and learning from experience. That's eerily similar to how the human brain learn.

First, the basic layout of the nervous system and circuitry necessary for basic functions such as rolling over, sitting, standing and walking, coupled with more fulsome interactions with caregivers and the immediate environment, followed by rapid learning of suites of new skills and understandings and so on in a process which goes on for a lifetime but fastest in the early decades of life.

That's where nature and AI part company; AI continues to improve by leaps and bounds while the human capacity to learn begins to taper off in mid-life and faster in the later decades of life.

With the advent of practical quantum computers in the next few decades, the computational power of computers will be enormous and pose a threat to any jobs that are computationally and data-driven.

By that stage, the power of quantum computers will exceed the capabilities of

their human creators and not necessarily for the good, especially if the underlying intelligence becomes autonomous.

After all, when devices become so talented that few if any humans, even working in groups, can keep up, never mind lead, where does that leave most humans, except what some call joe jobs, which most humans have always wished technology would free them from?

Then there's the matter of hybrid AI-human systems. Already, several types of devices have been developed to restore speech to those who have lost it, or movement where there is paralysis.

What teams of scientists have been able to accomplish with relatively simple systems involving as few as 100 electrodes located in regions of the brain associated with speech to restore spoken and written speech is very impressive in the last five years.

Imagine the power similar hybrid systems may offer for restoring natural movement to those with movement disorders or paralysis within the coming decade. Hybrid systems like these are bright spots for AI.

But, to the question, is AI intelligent? Sure. It is, and becoming as intelligent or more than most humans.

Is AI sentient? Not yet, but on the way. And it won't be long.

Think back to what's happened over the last 125 years and project forward with an ever-quicken pace, to imagine how technology may impact our children and certainly grandchildren and beyond. The question is, where are the brakes if the pace becomes too fast, takes too many wrong turns, or begins to threaten how humans govern themselves?

Those are questions similar in urgency to that other looming threat, global climate change, both of which need prompt action.

However, progress on climate change is stumbling and on the technology front, there's been little proactive action to prevent some of the scariest impacts of increasingly powerful AI.

The trouble with both threats is that meaningful action requires worldwide consensus and action and for as long as modern humans have been around, consensus has never been one of our species' strong points.

Intelligent, yes; wise, no.
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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Obituary

Janet Elizabeth Brown



BROWN, Janet Elizabeth (nee Eaton) - passed away Saturday, November 22, 2025 at the age of 82. Janet leaves behind her husband Dr. William Brown, children Dr. Timothy Brown (Marianne), Dr. Martha Brown Truncale (Charles) and grandchildren William, Owen and Molly.

There is everything to celebrate in her life well lived. Janet was remarkable for her warmth, intelligence, and sunny disposition. Married for nearly 60 years, Janet and Bill were best friends. She described her married life as ‘never boring’ with career moves from Ontario to Oxford, Boston and finally Niagara on the Lake.

Family, friends, and coworkers knew well her radiant smile and social ease that welcomed conversation and genuine interest. She was a trustworthy and trusting colleague and friend. Her enduring networks, especially the nursing ‘girls’, are testament to a life of caring for others.

Janet held a master’s in nursing from UWO and lent her career skills to nursing education, the Women’s Christian Association of London, the Massachusetts Public Health Association and Hospitality Homes of Boston. Janet even organized a visit from the Queen Mother to celebrate the opening of Parkwood Hospital services for veterans.

Janet was the ‘best mom in the world’. She always had a smile and plenty of patience. Janet lost her own mother at age 5 and grew up moving throughout Ontario with her father’s career at CIBC. Her memorable childhood summers were passed at the cottage in Port Elgin with her aunt Betty and many cousins. Being a Mom was something Jan enjoyed and it showed. She was proud of Tim, an Otolaryngologist in Halifax and Martha, an Orthodontist in Alaska. Much family fun skiing near Georgian Bay, summers at the cottage in Haliburton and on trips abroad were all the result of her organization. Janet even embraced Bill’s love of flying, earning her pilot’s license to ensure that she could set the plane down safely.

The Anglican church community and her faith played a prominent role in her life. First at St John the Evangelist (London) and later Grace Episcopal (Newton, MA) and St Marks (NOTL), Janet filled roles from Warden to serving communion and organizing everything from teas to academic talks. Her love of weaving and amazing creativity produced liturgical hangings and vestments that will see many years of service.

The family wishes to thank the staff at Pleasant Manor for their unfailing care and kindness. For those who wish, memorial donations may be made to Radiant Care Pleasant Manor and St. Mark’s Anglican Church NOTL. An internment has taken place, and a spring memorial service will be announced at a later date. Arrangements entrusted to Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake. Memories, photos, and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.

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Artistic Director: Johann Vanlittersum



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Award-winning Lake Report photographer releases 2026 NOTL-themed calendar

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Dave van de Laar spends much of his time photographing nature and people around his home in Niagara-on-the-Lake, whether for The Lake Report or his own projects.

For the past couple of years, one of those projects has been putting together a calendar for the upcoming year, featuring a work of original photography for each month of the year.

Now, as the end of 2025 draws near, Van de Laar is rolling out his calendar for 2026, his third year releasing a calendar.

He said it's especially popular with former residents who want a reminder of home.

"A lot of people send it (the calendars) all over the world now," he said. "A lot of people, they send them to their relatives that used to live in NOTL like that live in Europe."

"I know one lady ... her husband is in an old folks'



This photo of a hummingbird is one of the NOTL photos in the 2026 calendar, now available. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

home. And what they do is every month they both open up the calendar to the next month. It's kind of a tradition; it's kind of neat."

Van de Laar took a photo to represent each month this year. January features "Heritage Beneath the Snow," which he calls "a quiet winter portrait of a red-brick house nestled among the evergreens."

The calendar includes similar descriptions throughout. April shows tulips in the foreground and a carriage horse passing by, accompanied by the line:

"As spring blossoms across Niagara-on-the-Lake, the clatter of hooves echoes in streets steeped in history."

The summer images — from June to August — include the Laura Secord House at mid-day, a hummingbird in mid-flight and a cannon at Fort George in mid-fire.

He said he first created a calendar after posting his photos on social media and seeing the strong response. He began photography 15 years ago, focusing at first on "art photography" before shifting to scenery, which

drew more interest. "I sort of stuck with that," he said.

His favourite NOTL locations range from the Prince of Wales Hotel to crab-apple trees to the gazebo. He tries to capture each spot in every season.

Working on the calendar, he said, keeps him sharp and encourages him to see his surroundings in new ways, offering something fresh for both himself and his audience.

"It keeps giving me inspiration to go out looking at different things," he said.

The 2026 calendars are available for \$20 at davehvandelaar.com, by emailing davehv@gmail.com, and at select local shops and wineries. Van de Laar says he hopes it'll make a good Christmas gift for your friends or loved ones.

Van de Laar is an award-winning local photographer and was named the Ontario Community Newspapers Association's 2024 Photographer of the Year. daniel@niagaranow.com



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