

Homegrown *Niagara*

ARTS & CULTURE MAGAZINE

Volume 6 Issue 1

Summer of 2025

FREE!

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We're Back! www.homegrownniagaramagazine.com

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St. Catharines author publishes first novel, hard at work on second

Lori Littleton was born to write -- for newspapers, journals, and magazines, all around southern Ontario, Canada. And she's a heck of an editor and speech writer, too. But now, the active mom can add book author to her long list of accomplishments. The St. Catharines resident and former politician, including a successful stint as deputy mayor of St. Catharines, recently released her first book, *In Repair*, and she's working on her second.

Born in London, Ont., she spends her time with family, exercising, reading writing and travelling when's she's not performing her duties as a financial planner.



Lori Littleton of St. Catharines

Lori's first novel's protagonist lives in Niagara and a number of familiar communities are the backdrop.

"To me, it just felt right to have my

characters living in the same area as I do," she says. "I feel this region has so much to offer in terms of inspiration, but also its day-to-day life."

Lori says a draft of her new novel is imminent and she's even "percolating" a third in her mind. She's hoping to find an agent to guide her efforts. She'll always be proud of the hard work and excitement involved in publishing her first novel.

"Deciding to publish *In Repair* was one of the best decisions of my life, despite it being a scary, nerve-racking and stressful journey. People in St. Catharines have been incredibly supportive of my work, and I've been so grateful." www.lorilittleton.com

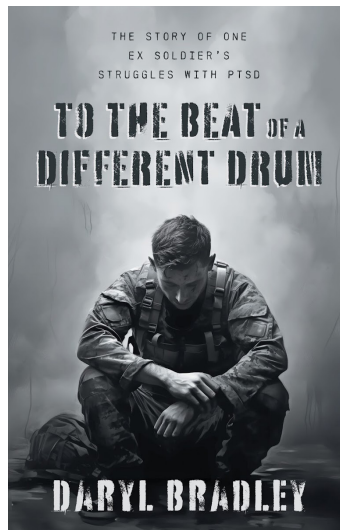
Thorold peacekeeping vet pens opus on struggle with PTSD

As part of a UN peacekeeping mission in Africa in 1994, Canadian soldier Daryl Bradley discovered first-hand the horrors of the infamous 100-day genocide in Rwanda, Africa -- and the inevitable struggle with PTSD he and many of his colleagues experienced upon their return home.

This book, his first, recounts his struggle to maintain personal relationships through a dark depression crushing his every waking moment only to worsen at night with constant nightmares, hallucinations and insomnia.

It was the help of two friends, he writes, and his own survival mode, that grants Daryl the strength to overcome the ghosts that haunt him.

The highly personal and candid 168-page memoir confirms the importance of adequate support systems for



veterans and the negative effects of PTSD.

Now living with his two adult children in Thorold, Ont., he keeps busy writing poetry, riding his

motorcycle, painting and playing guitar. *To The Beat of a Different Drum: The Story of One Ex Soldier's Struggles with PTSD* can be purchased through FriesenPress. www.friesenpress.com



Daryl Bradley of Thorold

PRETTY

Pretty like the moon,
Pretty like the air,
Pretty like the stars, and pretty
everywhere.
Pretty like the sun,
Pretty like the sea,
Pretty like lace, as pretty as can be.
Her skin glistens in the daylight,
She's so pretty, pretty like the night.
Her eyes sparkle staring into dawn,
She's so pretty she knows the way,
Like when lights are on.
She dances in the rain, not a care in the
world.
Until she's cold and wet, her hair in
loose curls.
She dreams and wonders but soon
she'll be told
"Act like a lady, well shape you like a
mold"
She's thin as air, but soon she drops
dead,
Knowing she lived in despair, with the
afterlife ahead.
-- ©2025 Avery Nault, St. Catharines,
Ont.

O SACRED WOOS NOW

WOUNDED (Tune Hymn 119, O
Sacred Head Now Wounded)

Verse One

O Sacred Woods, now wounded
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
By cuts and wounds all round
How does that green languish, which
was bright as morn
Yet though despised and gory
I joy to call thee mine.

Verse Two

What thou deer woods have suffered,
was all for sinners' gain,
On us was the transgression, but thine
the deadly pain,
How lost our precious savior, so
damaged is the place,
Where once did Cuckoos gather,
And Thrashers flew and raced.

Verse Three

O may it last forever, and no more
cutting be
Woods never, never, never,

Be sacrificed for greed.
What language shall I borrow,
To thank thee dearest friend
For thy deep cooling power,
Which shades us without end.

Verse Four

O woods be ever near us, when heat is
at our door,
Then let thy presence cheer me, forsake
me nevermore,
When soul and body languish, o leave
me not alone,
Take away our pain and anguish,
By thy graceful boughs.
-- ©2025 Dr. John Bacher, St.
Catharines, Ont.

LINKED TO HIM

His hot skin, makes me melt from only
one touch.
He speaks with pride, sharper than
bristles on a brush.
He's tall and slim, like Slender Man he
has pale white skin.
He communicates through song, and I
through poetry
But wait too long, and I'd wind up
crying under a tree.
"And I don't care if you're with
somebody else" music to my ears,
Please I beg let this be true, don't make
me waste my tears.
So you know these words help express
my emotions,
And like all jobs you work it perfectly,
so take this promotion.
You're polite like "please and thank
you", mock me all you want, it only
makes me think of you.
I write too many love poems, but I can't
help it,
When I talk you catch my words when
I throw them.
-- ©2025 Avery Nault, St. Catharines,
Ont.

THEY SAY AND NEVER DO

They vape then complain they're
struggling to breathe.
They drink all night then complain their
head is pounding.
They do the deed before marriage, then
say they didn't know it was a sin.
They cuss all the time and get called

out, then they say it wasn't me.
They say God's name in vain, then say
"oh my God it's not a big deal".
They say they're Christian, then say
they don't pray every day.
They take part in sinful activities, then
say I'll just pray for forgiveness.
They never ended up praying.
-- ©2025 Avery Nault, St. Catharines,
Ont.

**REMINISCING UNDER A MAGIC
MOON**

In the darkness of night under a magic
moon
I remember your essence our favorite
tune
Lost in your eyes fading into your soul
Hearts beat in unison together we're
whole
I love you deeply my darling forever
more
I carry you always into my very core
I miss You so much and I always will
Rest easy my love I'm in love with you
still
Many years have come and gone
You're a lifetime away
The memories live on in my heart night
and day
The moon holds its secrets and
whispers to me
Keep believing in magic and one day
you will see
The one you hold dear and close to
your heart
Has not really gone you're not really
apart
True love never fades or can ever be
gone
It lives on in your heart from dusk to
dawn
Your beautiful smile your tender touch
Haunts me day and night I love you so
much
Under the magical moon and the spell
it casts
True love is forever and forever it lasts
-- Darlene DeNapoli, Niagara Falls,
Ont.



We're back after a nearly 30-year detour

IT'S BACK!

Homegrown Niagara Arts and Culture Magazine took a detour – for nearly 30 years – but it's back on track. And stronger than ever and with a webpage to boot!

Popular throughout Niagara in the mid- to late 1990s, Homegrown Niagara, always more of a hobby than business for me, slowly got edged out in favour of long hours at work and raising children. Five issues featuring local artists, musicians and writers were produced between 1994 and 1997.

(You can check them out on our website, www.homegrownniagamagazine.ca.)

But its apparent demise bothered me, for years and then decades.

You know that feeling of unfinished business? It haunted me.

Even though I'm currently busy with too many things to list, I've made a solid commitment to keep this full-colour magazine going – in print and digitally – for many years to come. And I've brought my son Patrick into the project to help, learn and ensure longevity.

Homegrown Niagara is a niche publication dedicated to highlighting the arts and culture of the unique community of Niagara on both sides of the border. We want submissions and story ideas from Grimsby to Niagara Falls, Smithville to Fort Erie, Buffalo to Youngstown. And all points in between.

We want to feature art, photography, poems, short stories, cartoons, recipes and songs of everyday people living amongst us. We want to shine a bright light on all the amazing talent surrounding us.

This is a magazine, By the People, For the People. (To borrow a famous phrase from south of the border.)

And it's also going to shine a light

on the arts and culture of the South Shore of Nova Scotia, because that's where the concept of an arts and culture magazine called Homegrown was born. In my 20s, I published South Shore Homegrown, a tabloid highlighting the arts and culture of that most beautiful of regions including such quaint, beautiful towns as Chester, Mahone Bay, Lunenburg, Bridgewater and Liverpool.

I thought up the whole concept while mowing a family friend's lawn on a breezy Nova Scotia evening.

While this print issue is being distributed only in Niagara Canada and USA, the next one will also be distributed in Nova Scotia, of course depending on advertising and patron support.

I've invested personal funds to get this print issue up and running but future ones will depend solely on the support of advertisers and patrons. Local advertisers were a hard nut to crack this time around – I knocked on a lot of doors! -- but I'm confident they'll eventually jump on board. Thanks to those who did, though!

Our commitment is to announce the production of future print issues when advertising and patron revenue hit that magical peak called break even. Any extra revenue will be re-invested in the form of increased page count and distribution.

The magazine will always be FREE to pick up in selected retail locations, art galleries and museums.

Print matters! There's nothing quite like holding what you're reading.

We hope you enjoy this relaunch of Homegrown Niagara.

Believe me: it's been a long time coming.

But worth the wait!



Issue from 1995

Homegrown
Niagara
MAGAZINE.COM

HOME GROWN Niagara Arts and Culture Magazine is published by Blair and Patrick Burgess of St. Catharines, Ont. and distributed free throughout Niagara Canada and USA.

Viewpoints expressed in the publication are not necessarily those of the publishers.

Homegrown Niagara encourages submissions of letters, poetry, short stories, ghost stories, songs, recipes, photography, art, cartoons, opinion pieces and articles.

Short stories should be no longer than 1,000 words.

All submissions should be sent to budgeburgess@cogeco.ca.

Although the magazine is FREE, voluntary payment may be e-transferred to budgeburgess2013@gmail.com.

Homegrown Niagara is independently owned and operated and produced in St. Catharines, Ont. It is printed in Brantford, Ont., because Niagara does not have any web offset presses left, which are needed to print this size magazine at a competitive rate.

Publishers: Blair Burgess, Patrick Burgess.

Editor: Blair Burgess

Design & Layout: Blair Burgess

Advertising: Blair Burgess; Patrick Burgess

Advertising rates:

Full page:	\$700
Half page:	\$400
Quarter page:	\$250
1/6 page:	\$135
1/12 page:	\$75
Patron:	\$15-\$25

Approximate circulation of the print issue is 10,000.

Webpage viewership is increasing daily.

Drowned American War of 1812 sailors need a Port public memorial

As developers mess around with the character of Lake Ontario's historic Port Dalhousie, two War of 1812 schooners lay forgotten 90 meters underwater 10 or so kilometres off shore.

And no one seems to care – at least locally.

American war ships the *Hamilton* and the *Scourge* went down off Port Dalhousie in a vicious squall after midnight on August 8, 1813. More than 50 souls were lost. Thankfully, nearby vessels managed to save 16.

To the best of my knowledge, there's no advertised public memorial to the disaster in Port Dalhousie, the nearest habitation to the maritime disaster. You actually have to travel up the QEW to Stoney Creek to experience a lakeside memorial to the brave American souls who went down in those two converted merchant schooners.

Back in the spring of 1990, I was lucky enough to be invited to powerboat out to a barge hovering over the site, exploring the armed wrecks with high-tech submersibles. The underwater survey of the *Hamilton* and *Scourge* was supervised by none other than Dr. Robert Ballard, the man who discovered the *Titanic* and *Bismarck* wrecks. Also in attendance was Dr. Margaret Rule, a famous British marine archeologist who died only last year.

Along with other members of the media, including my



Figurehead of USS *Hamilton*

former journalism intern and current Facebook friend #TonyPost, we got access to the control room where images of the wrecks were being beamed to TV screens from the submersible JASON.

It was surreal seeing the underwater graves of the wooden ships, complete with the image of a beautiful female figurehead on one of the bows. Since then, zebra mussels have attached themselves in the thousands.

At one point, remote control of JASON was handed over to school children watching from Sarasota, Florida. It was incredible to hear their excited voices over the loudspeakers.

Initially discovered in 1973, the wrecks are the best-preserved examples of their kind, according to Parks Canada underwater archeologists.

Currently, there's an intense focus on Port Dalhousie as officials from all levels of government quickly scrambled to fix a condemned pavilion in Lakeside Park (of Rush fame) and unsafe concrete piers stretching into the lake.

Now fully restored, both projects have drawn even more visitors to the beautiful, historic port.

This would be a perfect time to launch a public fundraising drive to erect a memorial in Lakeside Park to the brave American sailors of the *Hamilton* and *Scourge* who sacrificed their lives 212 years ago on the perilous Great Lakes. -- 2025 Blair Burgess, St. Catharines, Ont.



Potholes Over Paintings

How Welland perfected the art of artwashing nothingness

Why Welland Simply Can't Have an Arts and Culture Scene

Ah, Welland. A city perfectly poised to not have an arts and culture scene. Some may dream of murals, galleries, and live performances breathing life into our streets, but let's not kid ourselves. Welland's socioeconomic environment is tailor-made for ensuring that creative ambitions remain comfortably buried beneath layers of pragmatism and neglect. Allow me to explain why.

Disposable Income? Try Disposable Hopes

In Welland, many residents are too busy deciding between paying the hydro bill or buying groceries to worry about supporting a poetry slam or attending a gallery opening. Disposable income is a mythical creature here, like a unicorn or a fully functioning downtown. Why spend money on tickets to a play when you can enjoy the free spectacle of pothole repair attempts on East Main Street?



© 2025 James Takeo



James Takeo of Welland

Arts Funding: The Great White Whale

Funding for the arts? Let's just say it's about as abundant as free parking downtown. Sure, there's money for consultants to draw up expensive plans for things we'll never do, but when it comes to supporting the local arts? Crickets. Don't worry though—artists are really good at working for “exposure.” That totally pays the rent.

Infrastructure: If You Build It... Oh

Wait, We Didn't Build It

What Welland lacks in theaters and galleries, it makes up for in...well, empty storefronts and a mall that's more of a social experiment than a retail hub. Without dedicated spaces for art and culture, we're left to improvise. Perhaps we could host an art exhibit in the Walmart parking lot or stage a play in the abandoned Zellers. It's all about thinking outside the box—or building, in this case.

Education: Because Who Needs It? Arts education?

Pfft. Who has time for that when we could be focusing on “practical” subjects that prepare students for the exciting local job market of minimum-wage positions? Let's face it: teaching kids to appreciate theater or painting isn't going to help them compete for a spot

at the Tim Hortons drive-thru.

Priorities: Potholes Over Paintings

Let's not forget that Welland has real problems. Housing shortages, infrastructure decay, and economic stagnation are the name of the game. Who cares about murals when there's a sinkhole to fix? Besides, nothing says “cultural renaissance” like a freshly paved road to nowhere.

Business Sponsorships: A Pie in the Sky

Local businesses could theoretically sponsor the arts, but why would they do that when they can invest in safer bets, like Christmas decorations or more flags? Besides, what's the ROI on sponsoring an art exhibit? Exposure? Please, leave that to the artists. Proximity to Cultural Giants

Why try to compete with places like St. Catharines or Niagara Falls, which already have thriving arts and culture scenes? Welland residents can always hop in their cars (if they're working) and head out of town for their cultural fix. Who needs local creativity when the big city is just a 20-minute drive away?

The Conclusion: Let's Embrace the Void!

Instead of lamenting our lack of an arts scene, let's lean into it. Welland doesn't need arts and culture when we have crumbling bridges, ill-timed construction, and a rich tradition of doing the absolute bare minimum to foster creativity. Who needs a thriving cultural ecosystem when we can keep relying on doing the same old thing, and hoping it'll be different?

So, let's raise a glass to Welland, a city where the arts come to dream...and stay asleep. Why change what's clearly working? -- *James Takeo, Welland, Ont.*

He's performed in 90 productions!

Theatre veteran committed to Garden City's Foster Festival

Theatre pro Jamie Williams remains a driving force behind the success of the Foster Festival, which showcases the heart and humour of renowned Canadian playwright Norman Foster right here in St. Catharines, Ont.

"I have had the great fortune, following the involvement of several previous projects at the Foster Festival, to have been brought onto their staff as artistic associate in December 2022," he says. "Along with co-producing all our events and productions, I am afforded the opportunity to also perform and direct."

The Foster Festival is currently in its 10th year.

Born in Peterborough, Ont., Jamie has been heavily involved in the theatre scene for decades, performing in 90 productions nationwide on such prestigious stages as the Stratford Festival, the National Arts Centre, Canadian Stage and the Citadel. He recently appeared in *The View from Here*, which he also wrote, alongside his wife Melanie Janzen at Theatre Orangeville and the Port Stanley Festival Theatre.

He's penned other comedies for several Canadian playhouses and was shortlisted for the Playwright's Guild Comedy Award in 2020.

Jamie says it was Niagara's geography and great outdoor venues that helped the Foster Festival survive the recent pandemic "when we were jumping into and out of lockdowns."

He explained the troupe performed on golf courses throughout Niagara in front of audiences socially distancing on golf carts. They also had a sold-out run in a historic barn at Niagara Peninsula Conservation Area's Ball's Falls park in Lincoln.

With the pandemic behind us, the

Foster Festival continues to offer plays in outdoor settings throughout the region.

St. Catharines resident Jamie plans to use his experience and skills to help the Foster Festival grow, through writing, producing and performing in uniquely Canadian plays and adaptations.

He's also a mentor of new talent.

"I think it's important as a practitioner of the arts, but even more as a citizen, to remember that art is a service integral to the mental and social well-being of any vibrant and vital community," he says.

The Foster Festival's Web page is: www.fosterfestival.com.



Jamie & his wife Melanie

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Michigan's Canadian Debt

by Tony Aspler

Michigan owes the birth of its wine industry to two enterprising citizens from Windsor and Walkerville, Ont.

One was an entrepreneurial Italian immigrant named Mariano Meconi; the other a wealthy Canadian landowner, Major Maurice R. Twomey, who trained sharpshooters for His Majesty's Royal Army in Windsor in 1915.

At the age of 13, Mariano Meconi immigrated from Faleria, Lazio, to Windsor with his two brothers. After school he worked at the Studebaker plant before saving enough to follow his chosen vocation, winemaking. He opened Border City Wine Cellars in Windsor at the height of Prohibition in 1921. He was 26 years old.

At that time Detroit had an estimated 25,000 blind pigs and speakeasies, all thirsty for his and Major Twomey's Windsor Wine Company's labrusca wines. The cases were illegally shipped across the river at night in boats with collapsible motors that could easily be hidden.

A Michigan Grape & Wine Industry Council report in 2008-2009 states: "In the late 1920s, it was believed that Meconi was either a partner of, or collected money for, Joseph Kennedy in the sale of whiskey in the Detroit/Windsor and the Port Huron/Sarnia areas under the name of Essex Import and Export Company." Major Twomey's operation specialized in sparkling wines whose contraband bubbly bottles proudly bore Piper-Heidsieck labels, making them doubly felonious.

Michigan was the first state of the union to ratify the 21st Amendment that would repeal Prohibition in 1933.

Within a year after repeal, both Meconi and Twomey transferred their operations across the river to Detroit. And in 1936 Meconi moved the family

business to its present location in Paw Paw, "in order to be closer to the acclaimed Lake Michigan Shore grape-growing region."

He renamed it, The Italian Wine Company.

But anti-Fascist sentiment during the Second World War prompted another name change to St. Julian Winery - in memory of the patron saint of the village where he was born.

But ever ecumenical, Mariano Meconi added to his portfolio a product called 'Sholom Michigan Kosher Sweet Concord Wine' which is still sold today and whose label sports a Star of David.

St. Julian is the oldest winery in Michigan producing a large range of grape wines, fruit wines, brandy, Michigan Brut 'Champagne' and an Icewine.

Fast forward to 2015. Currently there are 15,000 acres of vineyards in Michigan making it the fourth largest grape-growing state after California, Washington and Oregon; although most of this acreage is planted to the native North American labrusca varieties, Concord (red) and Niagara (white) which is mainly processed for grape juice. Today 117 Michigan wineries produce more than 1.4 million gallons of wine.

About 17 per cent of vineyard surface is devoted to vinifera varieties - producing the style of wines that wine lovers want to drink - such as Riesling, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Syrah.

Most of Michigan's quality wine grapes grow within 40 kilometers of Lake Michigan. Here, the 'lake effect' (similar to that in Ontario's Niagara, Lake Erie North Shore and Prince Edward County regions) protects the vines from winter snows, delays bud

break in spring which helps to avoid frost damage, and extends the growing season by up to four weeks.

Michigan has four federally approved viticultural areas (AVAs). In the northwest part of the state, near Traverse City, lie the Leelanau Peninsula and the Old Mission Peninsula. Half of Michigan's wine grapes are grown here.

In the southwest part of the state lie the Lake Michigan Shore and Fennville appellations, where 45 per cent of Michigan's wine grapes are grown.

The newest AVA is at the top of the Leelanau Peninsula, which rejoices in the name of 'Top of the Mitt' because the area looks like a huge baseball glove.

For decades now the Michigan Grape & Wine Industry Council has held an annual competition for its local producers. I was invited to be one of the 25 judges. We were divided up into panels of four and we had to come to a consensus as to whether a wine we sampled blind was worthy of a gold, silver or bronze medal or no award. There were 372 entries all told, submitted by 47 wineries. If all four of us gave a wine gold medal then it automatically became a Double Gold award and would be tasted by the entire roster of judges later in the afternoon to determine 'Best of Show' trophies at what was termed the Sweepstakes Round.

I had not previously tasted many Michigan wines - we don't see them on liquor board shelves - and I was very impressed by the quality and style of the sparkling wines, the Rieslings and Cabernet Francs. A far cry from the kind of those high alcohol wines that were ferried across the Detroit River in the Roaring Twenties.

www.tonyaspler.com

On the social utility of a front-yard garden

Story & Photos by Patrick Burgess

One particularly hot day in August, a grizzly looking man with a cigarette dangling from his mouth was walking along the sidewalk beside our house. I was working away in the garden, and he stopped to talk with me. To my delight, he started sharing fond memories of fresh garden tomatoes and his favourite varieties.

He proceeded to ask about the details of my garden - a subject which I am always happy to entertain. Several other examples come to mind: children stopping their parents to admire the wildflower border, an elderly woman who shared the history of the maple tree behind our house, or the neighbours who nominated our garden for a Trillium Award. Had I instead been a posted guard of the all-American lawn, I likely would not have gotten more than a polite nod from these folks.

Our house is on a corner lot in a historically lower-middle income neighborhood. Since the backyard is

largely covered by concrete, I was forced into the front and side yards when I started my garden. Over the course of a few years, I chipped away until there was virtually no lawn left. Half of the former lawn is dedicated



to the local ecology. A prairie mix of native tall grasses, annuals, and perennials has been established here. This area also contains a large “bee hotel”, and various bird houses. The concentration of life here is staggering.

Throughout the season, the garden is alight with a dazzling variety of creatures. One may awaken to see a cottontail munching in a patch of clover, cats chasing after butterflies by the catnip, myriad bees, wasps, beetles, and flies buzzing about the flowers, or the tangle of a spider’s web catching the early morning light. Here, though on a tiny scale, nature puts on her most spectacular show.

The other half is dedicated to producing food and medicinal plants for our home. Here I grow

a collection of annual and perennial herbs, leafy greens, tomatoes, corn, beans, squash, you name it. There is also a fruit patch that bears raspberries, blackberries, currants, grapes, and pears. This small area provides us with surprising abundance: in keeping with the theme, we often have more than we need and can share excess with neighbors or the local food bank.

To many, one’s garden is a personal space. Gardens are cordoned off to the back of the property with a fence as tall as can be reasonably achieved. While there is certainly merit in this approach, I have become convinced that we are losing something valuable here. By facing outwards, our gardens can involve us with the fabric of the community in a dynamic

way. My hope is that more people will explore alternatives to their conventional lawns.

We are missing a golden opportunity to increase sustainable food production, bolster local ecology, improve neighborhood aesthetics, and strengthen relationships with our neighbours.



Patrick Burgess of St. Catharines





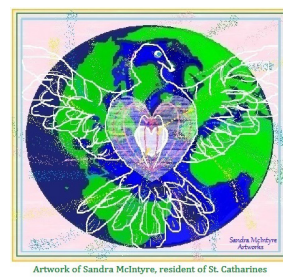
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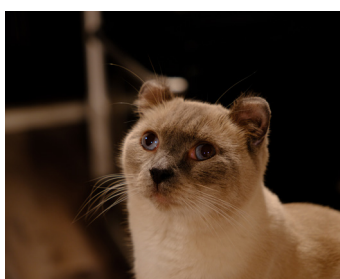
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Thank you!

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Niagara's culture of hockey thriving for adult players in GHL Niagara

Right behind lacrosse and other First Nations games, ice hockey is considered Canada's national sport – a big part of our culture. And it's that very hockey culture that Nick Vocal of Welland, Ont., is keeping alive in Niagara through the GHL adult hockey league, an organization he purchased 13 years ago after joining as a player three years earlier.

Established more than 20 years ago, the league is made up of adult players of all levels of hockey prowess, from beginner to highly skilled, separated into divisions best suited to their level of play. The league, which runs in winter and summer, plays out of arenas in Virgil and St. Catharines.

A software product manager and



GHL in action

devoted family man, Nick is known throughout the league as a friendly, fair-minded "commissioner" who wants adults to live out their hockey dreams in a safe, non-critical and supportive environment.

"In the years to come I'd like to expand our hockey base and continue to find new ways to engage in community supports," he says. "The GHL allows

adults who would not have been able to experience hockey the opportunity to play, which is very important to me, so I want to keep that alive."

Nick says the league, which draws players from all over the region and beyond, is committed to giving back to the community by supporting such entities as Community Care, Birchway Niagara, FACS and the Red Cross. "Mobilizing our members to give back brings me a lot of joy."

Nick says, although geographically large, Niagara's remains small enough to instill a strong sense of community in himself and others.

"I'm a firm believer that you get what you give."

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Niagara's world-famous Polka King still performing at 90

Niagara's own three-time Grammy winner, Walter Ostanek aka The Polka King, loves to hang out with the boys at a north end, St. Catharines, Ont., Tim Hortons, where many customers take time to chat with him while enjoying their coffee. Walter's looking great at the young age of 90, a milestone he reached in April.

Quebec-born Walter is still performing, mainly in Canada, but not recording anymore.

Walter and his bandmates in the Walter Ostanek Band perfected more than 100 polka albums and videos over his nearly 70-year career.

"To us, playing polkas is the greatest job in the world," Walter says. "You see, it's really gratifying to see people having a good time as they're listening or dancing to their favorite polka after a hard day at work.

"We've had the pleasure of recording since 1957. We've even been fortunate enough to be recognized three times by the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences with the highest honour in the music business, the Grammy Awards."

A resident of St. Catharines, Ont., since the mid 1970s, Walter hosted television and radio shows, appeared on big-time American talk shows, and performed with such musical



Walter Ostanek of St. Catharines

giants as the Oak Ridge Boys, Ronnie Milsap, Ray Price, George Jones, Slim Whitman, Lawrence Welk, Roy Clark and Tommy Hunter. And the list goes on.

Walter appeared everywhere you can think of, with long runs at Oktoberfest in Kitchener, Ont., and at Marineland in Niagara Falls, Ont., and on numerous

telethons and fundraisers. He expanded his popularity worldwide by appearing on cruise ships and touring Hawaii, Italy, Austria, Slovenia and Holland.

Walter says he loves living in Niagara, having performed throughout the region, especially at the start of his polka journey.

"It's home," he says, while packing his car for a trip south of the border.

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Cave Springs trail absolutely bewitching

Story & Photo by Blair Burgess

The last time I was at Cave Springs, tucked against the Niagara Escarpment between Beamsville and Vineland, Ont., I was there to interview the self-proclaimed witch of the place, for the local community newspaper.

Margaret Reed, her long grey hair gathered into a girly ponytail, claimed in her singsong English accent that she was 300 years old because she drank the magical water emanating from the property's namesake local spring.

That was more than 30 years ago.

Her red barn-like house, surrounded to the rooftop by thick Carolinian forest, smelled moist and musky inside, even though it was neat and orderly, like her.

Her eyes sparkling with delight, Margaret talked for an hour or so about how she loved the forest life and giving tours of the magnificent, enchanted property to local schoolchildren and random visitors.

Apparently, one day she had driven down the QEW from Toronto, in an open-top sports car, her long hair whipping in the wind, and ended up as lifelong caretaker of the property known for its spring water, ice cave, mysterious rock carvings, and historic Indigenous camp site.

In the low light, it was not long before I was convinced Margaret really was an ageless witch, but of the friendly

variety, like Glenda from the Wizard of Oz.

In her small, dimly lit kitchen in the middle of the woods, I believed we could have been conversing in any of the last three centuries. I felt an eerie bridge to the past. She smiled knowingly.

Margaret's been dead since 2005 – I have no idea if she was 90 or 330 when she passed-- but the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority has kept the legacy of her beloved Cave Springs alive by turning it into a passive conservation area.

Margaret's red house still stands, but it is boarded up. There are some nice trails to walk on at the base of the escarpment, near Margaret's old home, but the real fun is climbing up to the Bruce Trail above.

There are incredible vistas overlooking Lake Ontario atop the area's steep cliffs. If you do venture upward, keep small children within reach: there are no fences to prevent falls. It is a challenging hike full of rock, maple forest, wildflowers, alternating sun and shade, birds galore, and fresh wind of varying temperatures.

And if you hear a faint whisper in the wind, you will know it is the friendly witch watching over you and your loved ones.



Sales are brisk

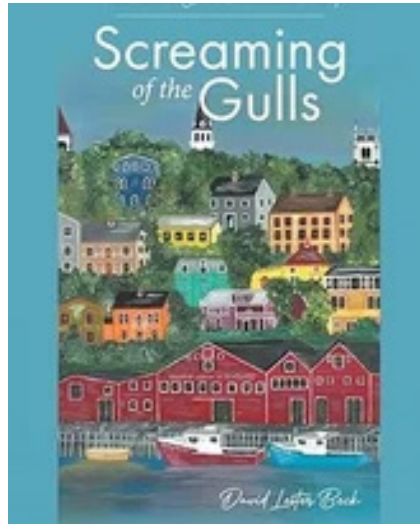
Homegrown Lunenburg pens personal memoir

Now a resident of Dartmouth, Lunenburg born and bred David Beck has authored a highly personal biography about growing up in the well-known seaside town while struggling through poverty, bullying, sexual abuse, addiction and learning challenges.

Screaming of the Gulls: A Lunenburg, Nova Scotia Story has been selling like hotcakes locally and on-line.

"*Screaming of the Gulls* is a book everyone should read, for the remarkable stories it tells and the joy and humour in the telling," says David. "This book was written in part to encourage anyone with a learning disability to persevere, and to show the deadly toll sexual abuse takes on children."

The book shares his many humorous childhood "adventures and misadventures" while growing up as an "outsider" in Nova Scotia's richest fishing



town.

"But it's also a story of resilience and redemption," says David, who's learned to read and write in his senior years.

Now in his '70s, David has not

slowed down one bit.

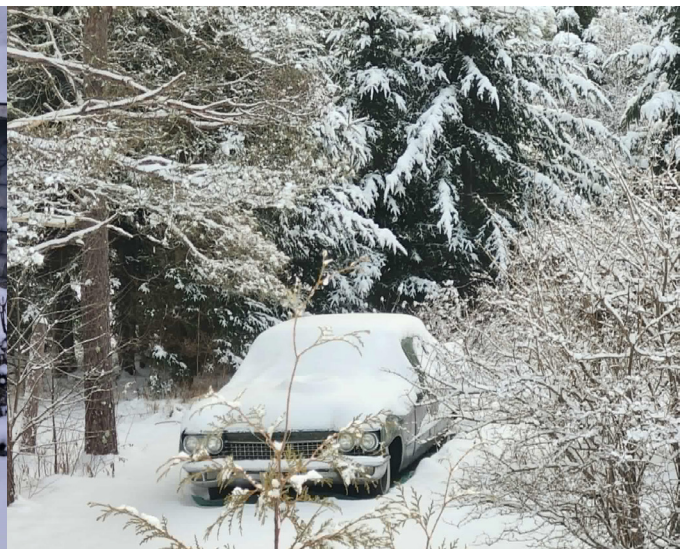
When not relaxing with his wife, he spends his time living life to its fullest by kite surfing, mountain biking, skiing, fixing up cars, taking nature photos and producing stunning works of folk art. www.amazon.ca



David Beck of Dartmouth, NS

Michael Nelson is known throughout the Maritimes for his love of vintage cars and photography

Photos © 2025 by Michael Nelson and Tina Durling, Barss Corner, Lunenburg Co.,NS



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