

MERRITTON MATTERS

SUMMER 2014 • Volume 10, Issue 2 • www.merrittonmatters.ca



Photo by Susan Fluellon

Vacant St. Catharines General Hospital - See Article on Page 21



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

We are proud to present you with a special section on Merritton Votes! Be sure to check out candidates' responses to our questions.

OTHER ARTICLES:

- James Gander's Store Then and Now
- Trivia Night – September 27th
- Westminster Church History
- Merritton Grenadiers
- Goodbye to Lioness Club
- Donald Thomas – Mission Accomplished

Merritton Matters

Merritton Matters is available at many of our community's businesses and delivered to thousands of homes in the area through The St. Catharines Standard. If you would like to arrange delivery by mail, please call Sheila at 905-227-8988.

CHECK OUT THE MERRITTON MATTERS WEBSITE AT WWW.MERRITTONMATTERS.CA

MERRITTON COMMUNITY GROUP IS A PROUD PARTNER OF THE MERRITTON LIONS CLUB



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Send articles or ideas for future articles to the editor at MerrittonMatters@hotmail.com or by mail to 3 Capri Circle, St. Catharines L2T 3X4.

Shuffle Board Anyone?



By Penny Coles

The Merritton Community Centre has four beautiful shuffle board courts, regulation size, that have not been used for years. If anyone is interested in starting or joining a shuffle board league, daytime or weekday evenings, call the centre at 905-682-0098 and leave a message. If there is enough interest, community centre board members will help organize the league and be on hand to help out. How about a seniors' group? Shuffle board is a game that will help keep you active and provide a social setting.

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James Gander's Store Then and Now

Do you ever drive down Merritt Street and try to picture how it would have looked 100 years ago? Well, here's a rare opportunity to help us understand that the bones of the community still underlie our current structures. The first photo shows the James Gander General Store around 1891. The same location is shown in the second photo in more recent times.

James Gander purchased this location on Merritt Street from Hugh Sulkey and then opened his general store. Successive generations of the Gander family took turns at running the James Gander General store and some of them are pictured in the photo above. From left to right you can see James Gander, Hubert (Bert) Gander, Adelaide Gander, Sarah (Gander), and Annie Gander.

James operated the store until his death in 1920 and then his son Bert took over until his death in 1926. Daughter Sarah (Sadie) and her husband Fred Kerr took the location over, briefly, until moving to Townline Rd and opening their own store. The store on Merritt St. then became Hardy's Hardware.

Born in Carmarthen, Wales in 1849, James Rupert Gander moved to Canada in 1857 when his father, a career British soldier, was transferred.

James later moved to Merritton in 1865 and married Adalaide Parnall in 1871. He worked for William Parnall who owned another grocery store in Merritton. Adalaide died in 1877 and James later married Anne Robinson and had three children with her. James spent his career in the grocery business, while also serving as Town Treasurer for 15 years, as well as being heavily involved with St James Anglican Church. He was the first member of the Merritton public library board. James Gander is one of the two names on the stone above the main entrance to the old Merritton Town Hall. Buried in Victoria Lawn Cemetery, his memorial stone can be plainly seen by driving west on Queenston St, just past Emmett Rd, on the south side of the street. An obituary noted that, "In the death of the late James Gander, Merritton has lost one of its most highly respected citizens, he being an honest and upright merchant since his boyhood days and his death will be felt keenly by the many warm friends which he made in his place of business as well as the many with whom he transacted business in the responsible offices which he filled in the interests of the town of Merritton."



'Merritton Bill Wiley' Fundraising Trivia Night

Please join us for a trivia night at the Merritton Community Centre on Saturday, September 27th with the proceeds directed to a memorial project to honour Bill Wiley that has yet to be finalized. Tickets are available at a cost of \$15 for this event which will start at 7:00 p.m. We encourage you to get your team together and join us! **Tickets are available for purchase at: Merritton Community Pharmacy 491 Merritt St, Fresh Eats & Treats 431 Welland Avenue, Niagara Mini Dental Implant Centre 185 Merritt St, or phone 905-227-8988 (Sheila or Tony).**

Bill, who passed away on July 3, 2011 at the age of 76, was passionate about everything but particularly about Merritton. He was a city councillor for Merritton, a former Merritton High principal, a member of Lions Club for 28 years and also a member of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 138, Merritton. When he contributed to the 'Welcome to the Merritton' sign, he insisted that his name be displayed as 'Merritton Bill Wiley'. We believe it is time that we recognized Bill's contributions to our community.



Bill and Dunc Schooley Pool

Bill Wiley was instrumental in helping to achieve the re-naming of the Merritton Pool in 2003. In December 2002, Bill and Ted Collins, representing the Merritton Lions Club, went to the St. Catharines Heritage Committee and received support in re-naming Merritton Pool after long time Lions Club member and Merritton resident Mr. Duncan "Dunc" Schooley who had provided many years of community service including serving as pool committee chairman at the original pool. Then Councillor Jamie Almas was successful in his motion

at a city council meeting in 2003 to have 'all of the citizens of St. Catharines join in recognition and heart-filled thanks to Duncan M. Schooley for his tireless and selfless efforts to make the former Town of Merritton and its successor, the City of St. Catharines, a truly great place to live and raise a family'. City council at the time extended their appreciation to Bill Wiley and the Lion's Club of Merritton for bringing this matter to the attention of City Council.

Merritton Grenadiers

Labour Day in our community is synonymous with parades and it seems a fitting time to remember the Merritton Grenadiers, a great trumpet band sponsored by the Town of Merritton, the Lions Club, the Merritton Fire Department and the Legion. Formed in July 1952, with the motto "Ab Populo" (for the people), they were the first senior band to take part in drill contests, changing their routines to form a new show each time. In 1953 the Grenadiers represented Canada at the Lions International Convention in Chicago and in 1954 at the convention in New York City wearing uniforms designed by Hugh McKean, the band director.



Picture from Waterloo Public Library - Photographs of Merritton marching band parading north on King Street near Dupont Street during Waterloo Band Festival parade.



John Cassidy provided the following memory from the days of the band.

In the mid-50's Merritton had quite a good trumpet band called the Merritton Grenadiers. (Today it would be called a drum and bugle corps.) The Toronto Argonaut Football club decided to run its half-time show as a series of band competitions. We entered along with several others and at each game a different band would perform.

Well, the Musicians Union was not impressed and we were all "Black Balled" for a year. That meant that whenever we wanted to appear anywhere in Ontario we had to receive permission from the union executive. As Labour Day approached, we asked to be allowed to appear in the Merritton Parade (our own home town) and we were refused.

In those days the Labour Day Parade would begin at the top of the hill about where Lorenzi's restaurant was located. Our Bandmaster Hugh McKean took our band to the top of the hill and we formed up one block ahead of the rest of the parade. When it was about to begin, the Merritton Grenadiers started out and led the parade down through the town. Most people would have never suspected what happened, but we felt we were in our rightful place.

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'LAUGHING LIONS' MERRITTON AFTER- SCHOOL PROGRAM

Since 2012, the Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre has been providing after school programming for children age 7 to 12 at the Merritton Arena on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:15 to 5:45 pm. In partnership with the Merritton Lions, this program also benefits from the Niagara Prosperity Initiative. They will start up again on Tuesday, September 9th and are currently accepting new children into the program as well as seeking community volunteers. Community service hours for high school students are available. If you would like to learn more about the program, please call them at 905-685-6589 Ext. 243 or email youth@folk-arts.ca. Look for the Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre at the Labour Day Parade!!

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Here's the Latest on Several Previous Stories in MM

PINEHURST UPDATE

Anyone looking for a large building situated on a huge parcel of land? Great memories come free of charge! Pinehurst is now in receivership and the old Merritton High School building is for sale with real estate agent David Cooperman.

The ad mentions that the building is subject to an easement. The building is listed as approximately 89000 sq ft on 3 levels on a site that is 5.1 acres. The zoning is for community institutional I2.

CITY ZONE MAP OF PINEHURST AND SURROUNDING AREA



MAPLE CREST UPDATE

We have received several requests from people who are eager to rename the land where the Maple Crest Elementary School stood in honour of Mike Collins. The late Bill Wiley was an advocate of naming the Merritton Bridge after Mike. Unfortunately park naming is more difficult as the name has to be approved by city council.

IT'S BEEN 15 YEARS
Merritton High School's closing happened in 1999.

BOWLING ALLEY UPDATE

Penny Coles wrote about the bowling alley located in the Merritton Community Centre which has been there for decades. We actually had another bowling alley in our community located at the Pen Centre. (The Pen is in the Merritton ward but is considered by the owners to be a regional mall.) Harry Gretzsinger opened the restaurant at the Pen Bowl in 1959 and the snack bar continued until the bowling alley closed years later. Who can forget having fries and gravy after a game of bowling? Harry later sold that restaurant to become the owner of the Centennial Restaurant, located across from the Bank of Nova Scotia on Merritt Street from 1967-1977. (Piries Appliances annexed it later.)

ROLLER SKATING TRIVIA

In the last issue we asked if anyone had any stories to share about the roller-skating facility on Hartzel Road. It was located in the vicinity of the current library, CCAC and Food Basics store. Unfortunately, we didn't receive much information. The one we were referring to was called Wheelies although someone thought that we actually had two roller skating arenas in our past. **Last call – any memories to share about our roller skating past???**



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Goodbye Lioness

In the last issue of Merritton Matters, we featured a history of the organization written by George Hostick and Kathy Rutherford with congratulations on their 65th anniversary.

The Merritton Lioness has now wound down their chapter, marking this with a last social in June. Dedicated to the end, they achieved their final fundraising goal of the purchase of a guide dog, the culmination of a five year commitment. The Lions International organization stopped recognizing Lioness groups several years ago which led to a gradual phasing out as more female members join the co-ed Lions clubs around the world.



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- Born and raised in St. Catharines
- Lives in downtown area with his wife and their 2 children
- Son of prominent union rep for CAW Local 199

EXPERIENCE

- Responsible for overseeing government agency to ensure taxpayer's money spent properly
- Along with local mayors, led the development of St. Catharines/Thorold Prosperity Council
- Worked closely with City Council and developed a document instrumental in the city's job creation program

COMMUNITY

- Active in Hospice Niagara, Hotel Dieu Rehabilitation Centre
- Co-chaired Pathstone Children's Mental Health fundraising campaign to assist children and families in Niagara
- Active at St. Catharines Museum, Niagara College and other community and charitable groups



WALTER
Sendzik
FOR MAYOR

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MERRITTON OR LIBERTY BAKERY

Does anyone remember the bakery at the rear of Frank Pett's or Petti's confectionary store across from the Lybster Mill which now houses Johnny Rocco's restaurant among other enterprises? Mario Lorito's father operated the bakery along with two partners, one of whom was Filomeno Ricciuto. Mario's family lived next door to Makin's grocery store on Merritt Street. He would appreciate any information available or any suggestions on other sources or archives that may be searched.

He's not sure when the bakery was formed but suspects it may have been between the years 1937 and 1945. It may have been called Liberty Bakery.

One of the delivery drivers was Mr.

Livio Colavecchia who lived in Merritton. Mario's phone # is 905 934-5553.

Remember Them

By Karen Tiffney

Editor's Note: We are very fortunate to receive a new poem that Karen has written especially for Merritton to mark Remembrance Day. Her son Joshua will have been in the military for six years in September. Josh was busy in the spring, training in Wainwright, Alberta which was a sorrowful and difficult time for the soldiers when Lt.-Col. Dan Bobbitt was killed when the light armoured vehicle that he was traveling in, rolled over. Four other soldiers were also injured in the accident. Thankfully, Josh returned to base in Petawawa safely at the beginning of the summer season and even had an opportunity to enjoy some summer leave time at home in Merritton with his family and friends.



Members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 138, Decoration Ceremony at the Merritton Cenotaph, 1949.

REMEMBER THEM

Whether they were soldiers from years gone by or soldiers who serve today,
We will remember them as we join together and pray.

Veterans now feeble and old,

Reminisce and remember their younger days when they were ever so bold.

We wear a poppy...standing straight and tall...our hearts filled with pride,

Showing respect for those who have served...praying for those who continue to fight for our freedom today...and remembering those who now in Heaven abide.

They stand for unselfishness...we remember and are so grateful for all that you gave,

They gave unselfishly...we see the markers placed upon their graves.

They stand for freedom...we remember as we go about our day
able to live a life free from suffering and pain,

The blood on their hands...we will never see the stain.

They stand for heroism...we remember that they were someone's

father...mother...son...daughter...sister...brother...they are heroes indeed,

Always willing to put their lives on the line whenever their country had a need.

They stand for strength...courage...integrity...we remember all their own personal traits,

Traits which ultimately determined their own fate.

At the 11th hour...of the 11th day...of the 11th month...we remember all that they stood for...

but most of all, we remember their courage and sacrifice,

We remember those who paid the ultimate price.

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Goodbye Chief Mehlenbacher



In previous editions of Merritton Matters, we've brought you details about our new fire hall, Fire Station #4 on Merritt Street, which also houses the City's data and communication centre. At the grand opening ceremony last November, Chief Mark Mehlenbacher was on hand along with Mayor Brian McMullan and MPP Jim Bradley to welcome the visitors touring the modern facility. Mehlenbacher

was praised for his advocacy of the new station with its modern dispatch centre, technology training space and his emphasis on increased emergency preparedness. Chief Mehlenbacher died July 18th at age 55.

It's an exciting time for our city.

We need experienced leadership to ensure we complete our civic projects and restore prosperity to our entire city.

SAY hello! TO THE NEW ST. CATHARINES



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Linda, Jackson and Jeff Burch



Merritton is a great example of smart renewal.

As a City Councillor for Merritton Ward, Jeff Burch provided leadership in the revitalization of that community. This experience will be essential for completion of downtown projects and restoring Port Dalhousie.

Merritton Votes!

The municipal election will happen on Monday, Oct. 27, 2014 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. The official results will be declared on Oct. 28 and the newly elected will begin their term of office on Monday, Dec. 1. Information about advance polls will be posted on the City's election website at: www.stcatharines.ca.

Make sure you check the voters' list to ensure your name is correct. The voters' list will be available for viewing at the Office of the City Clerk, 2nd floor, City Hall, and at all branches of the St. Catharines Public Library. Our local library branch is at 149 Hartzel Road. When you arrive at the voting place, you must show identification to prove that you are the person whose name appears on the voters' list. The identification must show your name and address. Photo identification is not required.

You must vote in the ward where you reside. If you also are the owner or tenant of a property in another ward, you are not permitted to vote in that ward instead. If you are a non-resident elector, and you are the owner or tenant of properties in more than one ward in the municipality where you do not reside, you must choose which ward you wish to vote in.



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*Katrina & Daniel
Haine*



WHAT CHOICES DO YOU HAVE?

SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEES

Check the city's website for the most current list of candidates in this category. There are four different possibilities that voters may choose depending on your eligibility.

English-language Public District School Board - four (4) to be elected at large. This is your default choice unless you are qualified to vote for a separate or French board.

English-language Catholic District School Board - one (1) to be elected from Ward 1 (Merritton Ward) to be combined with the City of Thorold. You must be a Roman Catholic, and you must be a separate school board supporter or the spouse of a separate school board supporter. If your spouse is a Roman Catholic and you are not, you are not eligible.

French-language Public School Board - one (1) to be elected at large. You must be a French-language rights holder, and you must be a supporter (or the spouse of a supporter) of the French-language public school board.

French-language Catholic School Board - one (1) to be elected at large. You must be a Roman Catholic and a French-language rights holder, and you must be a supporter (or the spouse of a supporter) of the French separate school board. If your spouse is a Roman Catholic and you are not, you are not eligible.

REGIONAL COUNCILLORS

Six regional councillors will be chosen to represent the City of St. Catharines at large at the Regional Municipality of Niagara. Check the city's website for the most current list of candidates for these positions.

CITY COUNCILLORS

Voters in our community will pick two City Councillors to represent Merritton Ward. Check out the responses on the next page from these candidates.

MAYOR

One Mayor will be elected, at large within the city. Check out the responses on the next page from the candidates.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR OUR Q&A WITH THE CANDIDATES...



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UP CLOSE WITH THE CITY COUNCILLOR CANDIDATES

We asked each of the candidates for ward councillor to respond to a question in order to provide you with vital information about how they will impact on the people, businesses and community of Merritton if elected. The candidates contacted were those listed on the city's website as of the date of our submission to the publishers. (Please check the city's website for the most current list of candidates.)

Candidates were restricted to one paragraph in response to this question: What would you do to positively impact the people, businesses and community of Merritton over the next four years?

CURRIE, BRANDON

Email: info@brandoncurrie.ca

www.brandoncurrie.ca

Brandon's response: I would positively impact the community of Merritton over the next four years in all aspects through constant involvement and visibility in the community. Also having attainable objectives that can be successfully accomplished over the next four years that hold me accountable. By having clear concise goals and being visible in the community you are able to hear and see the issues that affect the community and have the ability to make changes not only on the council level but also through being involved.

LIDDIARD, MARTA

Email: marta4merritton@gmail.com

www.marta4merritton.com

No response received.

HAYWOOD, DAVID

Email: davehaywood@merritton.com

www.facebook.com/VOTEHaywood4Merritton

David's response: If elected, I plan on having a positive impact within our area by working towards four goals. First, I would continue my volunteer work with local community groups. To illustrate, as Co-Chair of the St. Catharines Green Committee (since 2011), I have worked with Greening Niagara at their Community Garden and Heritage Fruit Trail on Oakdale Avenue. Additionally, I have been an activate partner with the NPCA and their Canopy for Kids program – which has redesigned 9 local school yards - adding small urban forest while also educating children on the importance of the city's tree canopy. Merritton needs a councillor willing to sacrifice their time continuously – not only during election years. Second, I would continue the push for full-regional and GO transit within Niagara –making it easier for people to live within our city even if they do not work locally. Third, I would push to have city councillors be dual-city/regional councillors. Currently, both levels are not functioning cohesively and that is having a negative impact for businesses, residents, and our local economy. Lastly, and most importantly, I would analyse all city expenditures. With debts levels and debt ratings heading higher, any city councillor has no choice but to review expenses –the time is gone for mortgaging our children's futures.

SEABORNE, LESLEY

CELL: (905) 687-8200

www.lesleyseaborne.ca/

www.facebook.com/seaborne4citycouncil

Lesley's response: With the slogan, Vote LES for MORE!, I look forward to persuading fellow Merritton residents that, with my extensive community experience and legal background as a Law Clerk, I can bring a fresh approach and effect positive change at City Hall. I intend to fully utilize my research skills and resources to streamline City processes, reduce obstacles for business and represent the interests of community residents. I am proud of my track record for getting things done and I intend to continue to actively participate on City Boards and Committees to ensure the hard work of volunteers reach fruition and within a reasonable period of time. I am dedicated to helping people, businesses and our community and I intend to be a strong, effective and respected voice at City Council for the Merritton Ward and St. Catharines. I ask for your vote on October 27th, 2014 to help me accomplish this goal. Please follow my campaign on the web site referenced above where I elaborate on my Focus as a City Councillor and About Me. VOTE LES FOR MORE!

UP CLOSE WITH MAYORAL CANDIDATES

We asked each of the candidates for ward mayor to respond to a question in order to provide you with vital information about how they will impact on the people, businesses and community of Merritton if elected. The candidates contacted were those listed on the city's website as of the date of our submission to the publishers. (Please check the city's website for the most current list of candidates.)

Candidates were restricted to one paragraph for their response to this question: As a candidate for mayor, you must have a vision for our city. How would this vision positively impact the people, businesses and community of Merritton?

ARSENAULT, ADAM**CELL: (289) 723-6335****Email: arsenault4mayor@gmail.com****www.arsenault4mayor.ca**

Adam's response: Merritton is made up of young families who are looking for ways to stay in their own neighbourhood. I would propose a new splash pad and skateboard park in the Merritton/Secord Woods area. I would also propose that Centennial arena gets a major upgrade or a new area be built. I would also love to work with the Merritton community to create an event that will showcase their neighbourhood, restaurants etc in conjunction with the Merritton Labour Day celebrations which in itself needs more support from the city. We need to work with council in order to get new ideas passed, I cannot promise results but I can give you my word I will fight for a positive change in Merritton. If any candidate makes promises he is lying, the Mayor is just one vote of 13.

Merritton is a very unique area in St Catharines in that it has the potential to become a second business core for the city, and we need to offer assistance to small business owners whether it is via tax cuts or property variances. The time is now to put money into the Merritton area.

BURCH, JEFF**Email: burch4mayor@gmail.com****www.jeffburch.ca**

Jeff's response: It has been a great pleasure serving the citizens of Merritton for the past eight years. Working with my ward-mate Jennie Stevens and city council, we managed to revitalize our community in partnership with local developers, small businesses, community groups and citizens. We have drastically reduced graffiti, planted hundreds of trees, improved parks and trails, restored historic Merritton landmarks and created the conditions to allow new Merritton businesses to flourish and create jobs. We must continue the momentum we have created in Merritton and share this success with the rest of our city. I have a clear vision for the City of St. Catharines that revolves around 5 key priorities. (1) Bring jobs to St. Catharines; (2) Utilize tax dollars wisely; (3) Revitalize Port Dalhousie; (4) Complete our Downtown Projects; and (5) Help bring the GO Train to Niagara. You can learn more about my priorities for prosperity by visiting jeffburch.ca. As Mayor, I will never forget my roots as a Merritton ward councillor, but it's time for our community to lead the way. I know I can count on your support as we SAY HELLO TO THE NEW ST CATHARINES!

SECORD, PETER**Email: petesecord@petersecord2014.ca****www.petersecord2014.ca**

Peter's response: I believe that our community, including Merritton, needs to get back to basics and better represent taxpayers. That's why I am committed to freeze your city property taxes for 2 years. At the same time, I will work with the residents of Merritton and the rest of our community to review the entire city budget – line-by-line. Together, we will ensure that every tax dollar is bringing benefit to the taxpayer. Our community must get back to basics and find local solutions to create local jobs. We will use the knowledge and expertise from our local business community by establishing an Employment Council to direct City staff on how best to support our businesses. Likewise, we must get back to basics and commit to representing taxpayers in Merritton. I will work with your councillors to hold regular ward meetings in Merritton so we can hear your voice directly. City Hall will also introduce a fall budgetary update to the taxpayers to allow for further transparency. Together, with the help of the citizens of Merritton and my leadership, we can get back to basics in St. Catharines. Please go to www.petersecord2014.ca for more information.

SENDZIK, WALTER**Email: wsendzik1@gmail.com****www.votesendzik.ca**

Walter's response: One of my fondest childhood memories is spending many Labour Day weekends in Merritton with my dad, a longtime Local 199 member. I remember feeling the true solidarity and pride that people expressed in being a part of the Merritton community. I love Merritton's community pride, and I've seen it struggle from the closing of too many industries like Domtar, its high school and hospital. Merritton is the employment heartland of St. Catharines. With my real experience as a community builder and business owner, my vision is to rebuild the city's struggling economy. The redevelopment and prosperity of Merritton is a key part of that vision. Under my leadership, businesses will expand and new businesses will set up shop bringing more jobs to our community. Our young people will be able to find work in their hometown, keeping them closer to their families. Merritton's growth and redevelopment will bring new prosperity and more revenue needed to build a great city to live in and raise a family. My vision is simple hometown pride and prosperity, with new ideas and fresh thinking. A vote for Sendzik is a vote for the experienced leadership needed to build our great city. Share your Merritton pride by e-mailing at hello@votesendzik.ca.

STEVENS, MARK**Email: markstevensformayor@gmail.com****www.MarkStevens2014.com**

Mark's response: My vision for the city is one that would have a very positive effect on the city of St. Catharines but especially in Merritton. I believe we need to have a much stronger focus on the economy and the small businesses that make up all the great areas of St. Catharines. It's vital to streamline the process at City Hall so that existing businesses can continue to grow along with making it clear we will do everything possible to encourage new business to join our great city. Merritton's location within the city is prime for development with a great corridor like Hartzel Road to showcase one of the many growing parts of the ward. Merritton with all the amazing improvements around the old Domtar paper mill and the new development at the general hospital site will continue to show it's a great area to live, work and play. The residents, businesses and the community of Merritton will benefit from this strategy greatly due to the increase of people living and operating businesses in the ward. The history in Merritton along with a community that has given a relentless effort will ensure continuous growth and guarantees great things for the future of Merritton and the city of St. Catharines.



Bird's eye view looking north Merritton Canada Alliance Paper Mills in foreground.

Some Scattered Thoughts

By Phyllis Thomson

Merritton has always been unique. Fifty-plus years after our reluctant amalgamation with St. Catharines, ask any resident where they live and they will still answer "Merritton". And many years after the closing of our high school, who doesn't glance over at it as you pass by and remember all of the happy days spent there? We had the best of everything there – great teachers, terrific principals and, in my opinion, the best students!

In 1974, one of our esteemed citizens, the late Myles 'Pic' Leeson, said "it is remarkable that a municipality (Merritton) that no longer exists geographically should continue to identify itself". And today in 2014, it is no less remarkable.

One of the interesting things about our town is all of the little 'lanes' leading off of streets (i.e. Chestnut Lane, Walnut Lane, etc.) – how did they come about?

And did you ever notice the names of the streets? So many are named after trees or – heaven forbid – nuts! I wonder who named these streets? Who else had a beautiful swimming pool in their midst where our kids could swim safely all summer without paying a penny?

How many other small communities have their own parade that brings people from far and wide to participate or just to watch? And absolutely nobody but us had their own 'Davey Crockett', complete with coonskin cap and rifle.

We had our own Abbatoir too, and the fun of watching errant cattle who had somehow escaped from there, sashaying down Hartzel Road from time to time.

We had all the air pollution we needed and then some, from the old Alliance Paper Mill. Hard to believe that we got so used to it that we hardly noticed. And did you know that Merritton has the distinction of being the site of the first sulphite mill in North America?



For a small town, we had three great Doctors (Drs. Wilson, Fraser and Merritt) and you didn't even need an appointment to see them. How times have changed!

Will we ever forget our 'pride and joy', the old decrepit railway bridge that had to be crossed if we needed to get anywhere? It was an eyesore, but did we really care back then?

Not many other residential areas have an authentic old barn in their midst. Take a look behind #3 Cameron Rd. if you are travelling that way. It has been very well kept and, although I can't find much information on it, I know it dates back many, many years to the time when that area was all farm land.

There are so many things to remember and of which we can be proud. The late Robert Welch, a former Mayor of St. Catharines, said it best "Merritton community pride is a marvelous bond that unites people and instills a great feeling of belonging and togetherness".

With the passing of years, our children now must pay to swim in the pool that the Lions Club built for them many years ago. The old Abbatoir is long gone, as is the Paper Mill. And our old railway bridge is now a modern masterpiece. Our Labour Day Parade still marches on but sadly we no longer have our Davey Crockett. We do still have our past to remember and our future to look forward to and, come what may, Merritton will always remain 'unique'!



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Looking Back at the History of Westminster United Church

By Bruce Lilley

1876 John McCalla, a member of Knox Presbyterian Church, used \$1000 of his own money to erect a wooden building on Haynes Avenue on farmland donated by Mr. D.C. Haynes. Haynes Avenue Presbyterian was built on the west side of Haynes Ave. in the area of Seneca St. Although the population of St. Catharines at the time was only 11,000 people, it is a tribute to Mr. McCalla's faith in the future of this city and of the east end area that he built a church, confident that the years ahead would provide the people to occupy it and support it. The congregation numbered 29 at the start. This church served for 21 years and then, under the leadership of Rev. W.H. Geddes, another step forward was taken in the erection of a brick building on the corner of Queenston St. and Oakdale Avenue. The cornerstone was laid by Mrs. Mary McCalla on August 6, 1895 and here the congregation worshipped for 20 years.

1922 The name of the church was changed from Haynes Avenue to Westminster Presbyterian Church.

1925 The church became part of the United Church of Canada. The need for further expansion was apparent if the needs of the ever increasing congregation were to be met.

1927 Today our beautiful Westminster Church stands as a monument to the vision and foresight of Rev. Alfred A. Thomson, under whose direction this church was built and dedicated Oct. 27, 1927 at its current site. During the depression when the churches faced a time of anxiety and distress, Westminster was encouraged by the spirit of Christian fellowship and understanding revealed by the churches of Niagara Presbytery. With the perseverance of a committed and faithful congregation, this Church slowly moved forward.



1947 Rev. Elmer Ashley began his ministry in Westminster.

1951 The Church had a membership of approximately 750 with a Sunday school of more than 400, and many organizations which served the interests of a growing community.

1954 A sod turning ceremony was held for the construction of a large hall, a new kitchen and boiler room at a cost of \$84,450.00.

1955 The new and remodelled Church hall facilities were opened and dedicated.

1977 Rev. Gordon Geiger began his ministry at Westminster. The Manse was renovated and modernized. The Vestry was built.

1982 David Chotka was received as a candidate for the ministry.

1987 Rev. Norman Hair begins his ministry at Westminster. The Manse received a facelift and a new roof. A new heating system was installed in the church.

1995 Rev. Stephen Shantz begins his ministry in Westminster.

2000 Ground breaking ceremony was held September 27 for the installation of the Otis elevator.

2001 *125th Anniversary.* Dedication of the elevator on February 18 meant that Westminster became fully handicap accessible!

2004 Rev. Ron Pocklington begins his ministry in Westminster.

2005 Rev. Debbie Shanks begins her ministry in Westminster.

2012 Pastor Elliston Bridger begins his ministry in Westminster.

Westminster currently continues its outreach worldwide and in the local community. Locally they host the "Out of the Cold" program, the 33rd St. Catharines Scouts, and provide a safe place for social programs meetings.



Donald Thomas Search Update

In the last issue of Merritton Matters, we told you about Alan Price's search for Donald Thomas, a World War II survivor and Merrittonian. Donald was the sole survivor of a Lancaster Bomber secret operation in 1943 and then spent some time as a POW in the stalag made famous by the movie "The Great Escape". Families of the other men in the bomber who lost their lives were hoping for any information about Don, his life and his family.

We are so thrilled to let you know that descendants of Donald Thomas have been located. Debbie Tucker Thomas reached Alan Price, the man who started this search, through his email address listed in the last issue of Merritton. She has also been in touch with the family of Richard "Dick" Stuart, another crew member who died. Debbie is going to pass along the individual stories that Don had written about each of the crew members. Apparently Don's mother had written to each of the families of Don's crew and told them what she could about the night



they were shot down and passed on stories and information from Don's letters to them.

Debbie went down in the basement and dragged up an old wooden munitions box filled with Don's stories, notes, letters and pictures from the war and she's still going through it. His mother kept every newspaper article about him, every letter that he wrote, and the telegram that she received when he was shot down and missing.

During the war, Don kept notes on the backs of cigarette packages and they're all neatly stacked together. Debbie and her daughter Emily have discussed going through everything and writing a book about his war experiences. He actually worked on writing a book for years but no one knows what happened to it.

Thanks to Debbie for providing us with this update. It's really amazing what all those men went through at such young ages!

Here's a brief excerpt of the story Don wrote. If this is an indicator, Debbie and Emily will have an intriguing book that we will definitely want to read.

TARGET BERLIN

By Donald Thomas, 1945

Last night, aircraft of Bomber Command carried out a large scale attack on the German Capital.....twenty of our aircraft failed to return. Ours was one of the twenty.

This is my story. It is not an unusual story. It has happened many times before, but to me it was a lifetime crammed into a few short weeks.

In the evening of December 29, 1943, we took off on our 23rd, and what was to prove our last flight – Target Berlin. I'll mention now that I was a mid-upper gunner on an R.A.F. Lancaster. Our crew had been given the dubious honour wind-finding. This consisted of flying five to ten minutes ahead of the main force; the navigator working out the wind direction and velocity; the W.O.P. transmitting them back to R.A.F. headquarters. From there it was sent back to the main force of bombers. I said 'dubious' honour above. We were ten minutes ahead and therefore out of protection of the stream. Add the fact that we had to break radio silence. Not so good. Jerry also had very efficient radar.

We found out how efficient a few minutes later. We were flying at 21,000 feet. The 10/10 (total covering) clouds below should keep down night-fighters and blanket searchlights. That left only flak or so I thought. This time it was to prove worse than it looked.

We were about an hour over Germany when it happened. We received a direct hit. The A/C was thrown a few hundred feet into the air. The skipper managed to keep control and we started down in a shallow dive. I don't know whether the engines cut out or not but everything was extremely quiet.



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Centennial Community Garden

We asked Jane Hanlon, Executive Director of GREENING NIAGARA (formerly Climate Action Niagara), to update us on the status of the gardens located on Oakdale Avenue near Centennial Park's entrance.

She let us know that the plots are fully leased again this year and they are now taking names for next year's waiting list. There is a very wide range of ages participating, from 19 to 91, with the seniors providing great guidance to the younger generations. Beans, garlic, chives, peppers and other veggies are now ripe and coming into season. There are 34 plots in the older section and 18 in the new section, totalling 52 plots. There are fruiting trees, berry bushes, and other perennial food crops. Next steps include defining the borders for attractiveness and rebuilding some of the older plots.

Don't forget that these plots are rented and tended by individuals so please do not harvest their dinners. To become involved in this or any of the other community gardens, please call the office at 289-434-0474. Happy gardening!



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The Highline

By Tom Barwell

At one time the Niagara area possessed one of the most extensive urban transportation systems in the province. It was called the NS&T. It went back as far as 1899 and covered an area that extended from Port Colborne to Port Dalhousie and many points in the surrounding area including Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls. Portions of it may still be seen throughout St. Catharines. For example, small gullies running through neighbourhoods, once were important rail routes. The ghost of a line running from Thorold to Port Colborne is now a walking trail.

The rail stock consisted of electric engines, passenger cars, streetcars and a host of maintenance vehicles necessary to run a major railway.

Merritton's contribution was part of the highline, a raised section of track. It ran from Glendale almost to Lincoln Avenue and was built entirely of stone and large rocks. It was closed because of a burnt bridge considered unsafe for passage. The last to use it was the Trillium Railway that is still active in the area. Much of it has been demolished to make way for development including a large concrete bridge that spanned Oakdale Avenue.

Looking west from the new bridge in Merritton you can still see the iron structure that crosses the main rail line. This is the second bridge and the foundations for the original still remain beside it. The present one is thought to be one purchased from the New York Central railroad.

The highline just didn't serve the railroad but played a large part in entertainment for the local kids. It was a great walkway to all parts of Merritton. On the west side was the old canal area. This was a great spot and served as an area for a launching pad of various missiles. Kites, BB guns, stones, catapults and large home-made cannons that could shoot a good sized ball bearing over half a mile. (Another Story). Trains did not travel at a great speed and were easy to avoid. It was a single track and quite narrow so care still had to be taken. The rail men would yell and scream at kids to get out of the way and in turn expletives might be echoed back. This did not happen very often as, realizing the danger, they would have moved into a safe area.

Sadly, as progress dictated, it has all but disappeared. And also, sadly, not a single piece of rail equipment was preserved. All engines, passenger cars and most rail lines are gone. Museums contain not a trace of this bygone era except for photos and some very well written books. Goodbye to a wonderful time period and hello to so-called progress.





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St. Catharines General Hospital Update

March 24, 2014, marked the first anniversary of the opening of the new St. Catharines site which is the replacement facility for the former St. Catharines General and Ontario Street sites.

In the spring of 2013, the Niagara Health System website promised that the 'residents and businesses in the Queenston area of St. Catharines can look forward to a new vibe in their neighbourhood'. A Niagara Falls developer Panoramic Properties Inc. -Butera Group had purchased the property with the purpose of changing it into residences.

Some of the historic features of the old hospital were to be incorporated into the design. Then NHS Interim President and CEO Sue Matthews had said that, "The NHS made a pledge early on that we would not let the St. Catharines General or Ontario Street site go dark."

We asked Kevin Blozowski, Planner (Special Projects) from the City of St. Catharines to give us an update on the status of the vacant hospital site at 142 Queenston Street. A public information session meeting was held on May 27, 2014, hosted by the City of St. Catharines and the Butera Group to provide the Queenston Street community with plans for the former General Hospital site. Preliminary concept visuals were available for review and discussion and one has been included with this article.

The meeting at Connaught Public School was well attended with over 100 people. Residents and business owners in the vicinity were interested in the nature of the proposal which is to be residential apartments as well as an indoor recreational fitness facility. The agent for the owner indicated that they will make formal application for site plan approval from the City in the fall of this year. In the meantime they have indicated that they will undertake a number of studies, such as traffic, parking and servicing, to assess how the proposal will function on the site as well as be integrated within the community in a manner that improves the streetscape along Queenston Street.

At the May 27 meeting, City personnel advised attendees that, as the project moves forward and there is a story to tell, the community will be further informed. A reconstruction of Queenston Street is scheduled for 2015 and we will keep you updated about public open houses.



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Chris **Schatz**, Teacher, Ferndale School

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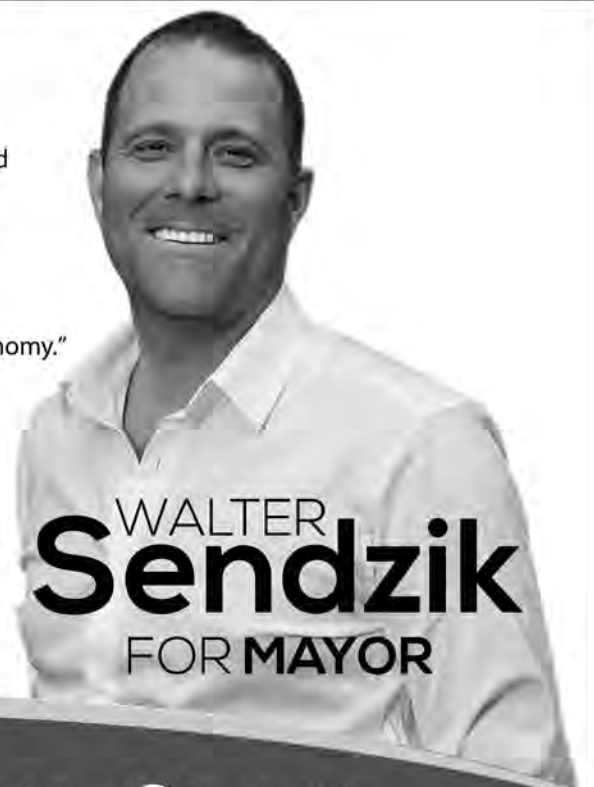
"Walter's work in the business community has **strengthened** Merritton and the local economy."

Doug **Little**, Owner, Keg Restaurant, St. Catharines

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"Walter's commitment to **service** and to his community is second to none."

Rob **Depetris**, Past Chair of the United Way



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GOODBYE GARY

By Wendy Haywood

On July 28th, Merritton lost a long-time resident, Mr. Gary Peschell, to a brief battle with cancer. For those who didn't know Gary, you may recall seeing a tall lanky man who wore glasses and his signature fishing hat or his long trench coat walking down Hartzel Road or anywhere in Merritton. You could always count on Gary saying 'good morning' as he strolled past you on his daily walks. He used to walk along the railroad tracks bringing home "interesting" plants. One year he filled his yard with ragweed much to the chagrin of neighbours.

Gary frequented the Merritton Public Library as he loved to read. During the summer months he kept cool at the swimming pool where he enjoyed conversing with the lifeguard about the latest news. He was a member of St. James Anglican Church and a regular at many of the local retailers along Hartzel Road.

Gary will be fondly remembered by the many people who knew him and by those who just recall seeing the tall lanky man wearing his fishing hat. Rest in peace Gary, you will be missed.

Editor's Note: Gary Peschell was never afraid to offer his opinion on any topic but he was particularly interested in politics, history and heritage conservation. His letters to the editor can be found in back copies of newspapers from around the province. Here's an excerpt from one he wrote to The St. Catharines Standard in 2009 about a roman classical concrete pillar top found in Centennial Park which originated either from the old Carnegie library or from the old Bank of Toronto building demolished in 1966 in downtown St. Catharines.

Dear Editor,

The pathetic remnants of the old Bank of Toronto building in Centennial Park should remind us of the devastation of St. Catharines' architectural heritage. Granted, most old buildings cannot be preserved. Indeed, most don't merit it (like the Ricci's Tavern in Merritton, from the 19th century but with zero "artistic" appeal). But some few should be.

And it's not even mainly about preserving our heritage. It's about the overall "attractiveness" of this city -- something real and tangible that makes it appealing to tourists and other visitors.

Take the old library: Its classical styling lent a "grandure" to the heart of the city that its destruction took away. And what a draw it would have been to film companies seeking locations! (Remember The Skulls showing the old Grantham Township offices and the Port Dalhousie lighthouse? And The Fraternity set at Ridley College?)

Just some thoughts for heritage conservation policy in future.
Gary Peschell

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