

# MERRITTON MATTERS

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## Merritton Matters

Merritton Matters is available free of charge at many of the businesses in our community and delivered to thousands of homes in the area through The St. Catharines Standard. We also offer the option of mailing individual copies to your home address. If you would like to receive a mailed copy of each newsletter, please call Sheila at 905-227-8988.

**CHECK OUT THE MERRITTON MATTERS WEBSITE AT [WWW.MERRITTONMATTERS.CA](http://WWW.MERRITTONMATTERS.CA)**

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



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or by mail to 3 Capri Circle, St. Catharines L2T 3X4.

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Editor's Note: In the last issue, we said goodbye to Gary Peschell who was never afraid to offer his opinion on any topic with a keen interest in politics, history and heritage conservation. Readers of that article let us know that we should have added that he was a prolific letter writer. 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.

*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 "grandeur" 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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We are pleased to welcome **HEATHER WEARING** (formerly from Tangles) as an addition to our team.

Heather would like to take this opportunity to welcome her clients and any newcomers to join her at her new location. We look forward to welcoming you.

# MERRITTON BILL WILEY FUNDRAISING TRIVIA NIGHT

Thanks to those of you who joined us for a trivia night at the Merritton Community Centre on September 27<sup>th</sup>. Watching people act out the words of a song such as Ashanti's 'Where I Stand' could have been worth the price of admission! The proceeds of approximately \$1000 will be directed to dedicating a memorial parkette in honour of Bill Wiley. Bill, who passed away in 2011, spoke passionately about preserving the wonderful history of Merritton and was a great source of information about this community so the trivia night was a perfect fit. He was a city councillor for Merritton, a former Merritton High principal, a deputy mayor, a member of Lions Club for 28 years and also a member of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 138, Merritton.

We believe it is time that we recognized Bill's contributions to our community and hope to have another Trivia Night fundraiser. More details will be forthcoming.



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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS 2014

On Monday, December 1, 2014, at the Canadian Legion Polish Veterans Branch, the new mayor of the City of St. Catharines presented his inaugural address. The global shift in the economy away from large-scale manufacturing has deeply hurt this region and is very evident in the vacant industrial properties in the area. But Walter Sendzik also reminded us that the city has advantages that we don't seem to be capitalizing on such as:

- being centrally located along one of the largest economic corridors in North America with a transportation hub that links two countries by road, rail and water;
- having Brock University and Niagara College that have both invested in research-based learning that will create the next generation of business concepts and ideas;
- a new state of the art hospital, a soon-to-be open Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine & Performing Arts School in downtown St. Catharines; and the Meridian Centre.

These assets may contribute to us becoming a leading city again if we can capitalize on them. Council needs to harness the power of business to fully realize our potential and provide areas of focus. The people of Merritton have our own specific concerns with the need to expedite the redevelopment of the old hospital site by creating jobs, new living and employment spaces and breathing new life into the Queenston Street neighbourhood.

The entire text of the Mayor's address is available at <https://www.stcatharines.ca/en/governin/resources/Mayor-Sendzik-Inaugural-Address-2014.pdf>.

## 2014 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Congratulations to Jennie Stevens and David Haywood on their successful bid to represent Merritton ward. Jennie was an existing Merritton councillor and David replaced Jeff Burch who was unsuccessful in his bid for mayor. The two elected councillors began their term of office on Monday, Dec. 1. The other ward candidates were Geoffrey Black, Brandon Currie, Marta Liddiard and Lesley Seaborne. Congratulations also to the elected DSBN trustees who represent the entire school board area and Pat Vernal who will represent the Niagara Catholic District School Board for Merritton Ward 1 and Thorold.

The total ballots cast was 4399. As of October 27<sup>th</sup> 2014, there were 15,279 eligible electors in Merritton Ward which indicated a 28.79% turnout. Worth noting as well was the substantial number (1768) of under voted ballots where people voted for less than the maximum choices. Each ward ballot had 4 contests: mayor; ward councillor; regional councillor and school board and if a voter did not choose the appropriate amount in each contest, the entire ballot was counted as an under vote. The most frequented polling station was the Merritton Community Centre with 1431 votes cast, followed by Jeanne Sauvé French Immersion School (1044), Burleigh Hill Public School (939 votes) and St. Barnabas Church (454).

### JEFF BURCH

Thanks to our former city councillor Jeff Burch for his commitment

to the people of Merritton and the city of St. Catharines. He was first elected in 2006 and completed his second term of office in November 2014. Jeff was a strong advocate for improvement in the city and in his ward of Merritton and his support of the arts, culture and heritage was well recognized during his eight years on city council.

### LOOKING BACK AT THE 2010 ELECTION - WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

In the 2010 municipal election issue of Merritton Matters, we mused about whether or not any action would happen on several important issues. Here's the checklist we presented then. See for yourself whether this list has been accomplished to your satisfaction. If not, let your ward councillors and the new mayor know what should now be at the top of their to-do list.

- greening of Hartzel Road
- bike lane on Hartzel Road
- reconfiguration of lanes on Hartzel Road
- encouragement of new businesses
- promotion of existing businesses
- establishment of a Business Improvement Area
- rejuvenation of Queenston Street
- help for Queenston Street businesses after the hospital leaves
- cleanup and promotion of Centennial Park
- further development of Mountain Locks

We also wanted those elected to support and take an active role in our existing community groups such as the Merritton Community Group, Lions, Lioness, Legion, and the MAA.

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## GRAND OPENING OF UNITY IN THE COMMUNITY

Westview Centre4Women held a Grand Opening on Thursday, Sept. 18 in the old hospital parking lot on Queenston St. with special guest Bones the Ice Dog and a fire truck display. Guests at the opening heard all about the new program in place at the weekly drop-in centre, located at 124 Queenston Street, where women of all walks of life are welcomed with a safe and dignified environment.

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# Merritton's Historic Fire Truck

Readers have asked about Merritton's Fire Truck, which used to be a regular in the Labour Day Parade so we contacted Al Lobsinger and Tom Richardson. Here's what we found out:

You could say that Al Lobsinger is the guardian of the Merritton fire truck. Once owned by the Merritton fire department, it was sold on amalgamation with the city and pressed into service elsewhere. While new and on duty for Merritton, it survived a fire in 1929 when it fell through to the basement of the firehall. The service sent it back to the manufacturer and had it rebuilt while their other vehicle had to be scrapped. Eventually Al, who had lived on Walnut Street, just down from the station, purchased it and gave it the work that it required.

The truck was purchased from Al and donated to the city after a fundraiser organized by Tom Richardson, another guardian of the spirit of the engine, and heavily supported by the Volunteer Merritton Fire Department members. Parked at the old Merritton Fire Hall, it only emerged when Al or one other driver was available to drive it because, as Al says, "If you broke it, how could you find the parts to fix it?" Al is careful to say that the truck wasn't restored, something that would prohibit children from exploring it and require much more careful scrutiny when out in the public.

The last time Al drove it was approximately six years ago in the Merritton parade. But he still makes sure that it is cared for. When the truck was stored in the building by the high-level bridge where the firefighters train, he kept after the city until it was towed to the Lake Street yard. Then in October he again persuaded the city to have it moved to the Geneva Street fire station where the staff have been shining and polishing it in their spare time. The story of the fire truck even includes some drama that occurred during the reign of Mark Melenbacher when the late fire chief wanted to affix a 'for sale' sign on it. Al quickly came to the rescue, making sure that Mark was informed about the whole story and basically telling him that selling wasn't an option. Mark, once he knew the story, agreed and the new fire chief, Dave Wood, also sees the value of the truck.

Wouldn't it be great if the truck was stored at the Merritt Street fire hall? It doesn't look like it will happen though. When the city decided to incorporate their command center into the build, the plan for storage area disappeared.



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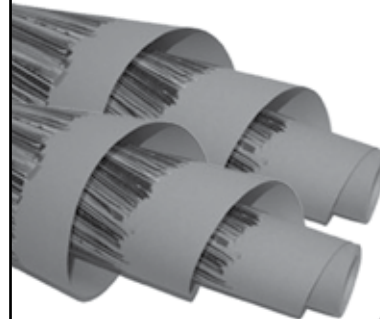


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# Living in Niagara Report

The Living in Niagara Report is intended to be a measure of quality of life in Niagara, across various sectors and provides interesting reading. While not specific to Merritton, the final report weaves together people from diverse areas of expertise who have suggested action steps for future community planning in the Niagara Region. The report was done by Niagara Connects staff and volunteers, and supported by a team of Brock researchers. The 2014 report follows previous reports in 2011 and 2008.

One interesting section provides data on various employment sectors in the Niagara Region and the report deems this to be an area of concern that needs attention throughout the region. Conversations with people of Merritton, along with a drive through our ward, would likely provide much the same opinion. The Goods Producing Section of the Niagara economy (i.e., agriculture, construction, and manufacturing) is much smaller overall than the Services Producing Section which includes jobs in areas such as trades, health care, accommodation and food services.

Manufacturing is shown as 11.7% of Niagara's employment and many in our community will remember when this number was much higher and when jobs in manufacturing provided a steady income for families.

A summary of the report can be found at [http://www.livinginniarareport.com/wp-content/uploads/Living\\_In\\_Niagara\\_2014\\_summary\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.livinginniarareport.com/wp-content/uploads/Living_In_Niagara_2014_summary_booklet.pdf).

Niagara Connects Council is a group of community volunteers dedicated to leading a culture of evidence-informed planning in Niagara. Niagara Connects hosts the Niagara Knowledge Exchange where people can exchange news and ideas on Niagara-focused community action as well as planning, innovation and learning. Their calendar lists several opportunities for the exchange of information through seminars and webinars. Go to [www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com](http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com) to find out more.

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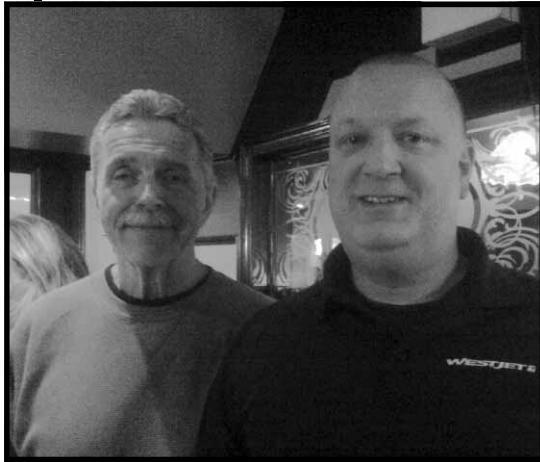




## YOUTH DARTS

The fine people who run Merritton's Youth Dart League are serious about teaching the sport of darts as well as the value of community service. Debbie Burch and Bruce Davey are among the well-qualified instructors who instill a love of the game in young competitors aged 7 to 17. No experience is necessary to join this league to learn a sport that also has benefits in the development of math and coordination skills. Players compete locally and several players have gone on to compete provincially and nationally. Practices are held at the Royal

Canadian Legion, Branch 138. All youths are welcome to come out and play at a cost of \$2 for nonmembers of the league. Demonstrating their good citizenship, the current members of the group held a successful fundraiser and donated the proceeds to Community Care. For more information on the Merritton Youth Dart League call Debbie or Bruce at 905-227-3308 or email [dnbdarts@yahoo.ca](mailto:dnbdarts@yahoo.ca).



## MHS Student/Staff Annual Christmas Gathering

Many Tigers were at the Griffon Pub at 165 Hartzel Road (formerly "Players") on Dec. 19 to mark the 2014 gathering. It was one of the best turnouts in years, and great to see so many familiar faces. Some notable absences were Bruce Hemphil (in B.C.), Bryce Dekker (under the weather), and Wayne Brown (??). Please continue to "pass the word" about this annual event as it's the only way to get an even better turn out next year. In case you are reluctant

to come for fear of not knowing anyone, the answer is simply contact one or more of your "buds" to tell them you're going and ask that they come out too. Finally, why not put yourself on the mailing list by sending an email to Bruce at [bhemphil@cogeco.ca](mailto:bhemphil@cogeco.ca) or [stucolt@cogeco.ca](mailto:stucolt@cogeco.ca).



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# CHARITY ABOUNDS

## YES, WE'RE STILL TALKING ABOUT THE ROLLER RINK

In a previous issue, we had asked if anyone remembered the two roller rinks that were in Merritton. Many readers could recall the roller skating rink that was located where Food Basics is now. But the other rink remained a mystery until Mike Johnson contacted us with the following information. Mike wrote, "Regarding the Roller Rink, I was at North Ward School on Smythe Street in the early 50's. We could get to the rink by walking east, then across the bark pile to the back tracks, over the trestle and then to Hartzell Road to the Roller Rink. It was between the Grantham Packers Abattoir and Aiken & McLachlin Construction Company, on the west side of Hartzel, about where Timmy's is now."



Thanks to the Merritton Lions Club for sponsoring the BBQ after the 2014 Kidney Walk on September 13<sup>th</sup> at Welland Canal Lock 3. A salute is also given to Tim Hortons for their sponsorship before the walk.



Several Merrittonians took part in the ALS Challenge and got doused by water buckets this fall. Brent Pfab was challenged by the Head Master at Ridley then suffered the consequences before challenging others.

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# Football School Prepares to Say Goodbye to the Community



Walk by the old Merritton High School, still labeled with signs that say Pinehurst, 'For Sale' signs now with the word 'SOLD' slapped over them, and you probably find yourself oblivious to the activity that has been happening within the walls of the seemingly-vacant building. Take a closer look and there's a crest on the front doors that reads Canada Prep Academy. The word 'Football' was dropped from the name but is a clue as to the unique nature of this under-the-radar but growing private school.

Canada Prep Academy is the only high school in Canada that plays a full American football schedule. The school has a mission of helping high school football players to achieve their individual goals and to reach their academic and athletic potentials. The setting is deliberately modelled after an American college prep school where the young people attending have the lifestyle of a student-athlete, preparing to get into university and, more importantly, being able to balance sports and academics. Walk through the halls and you'll see rooms for weights, training and film study as well as classrooms. Forty students from all over Canada (and a few from England) attend and stay in the dorms, eat in the cafeteria and train indoors and out. They travel to play against U.S. high schools and hope to catch the eye of scouts.

Canada Prep has five qualified teachers on staff and their principal

is Patrick Fife, a graduate of Thorold Secondary School and Brock University. The head football coach, Geoff McArthur, was an All-American wide receiver for University of California - Berkeley. He goes the extra mile for students, preparing video highlights of each one, all of whom are hoping to get college scholarships either to American or Canadian universities.

The school and its players are gaining more attention and were featured in *The Globe and Mail* in October. One student, Neville Gallimore, recently became the only Canadian ever invited to participate in the US Army All-American Bowl in San Antonio, Texas. Five students out of 40 have scholarship offers to NCAA universities, an accomplishment that is significant for a Canadian program, and certainly one founded only two years ago.

The program originally rented space from Pinehurst School, which purchased the Merritton building back in 2001, and was in need of tenants due to low enrolment. When Pinehurst closed abruptly in November 2013, Canada Prep remained in the building, expanding into Pinehurst's former classrooms and dorm rooms.

Now that the Pinehurst building has been sold, the school will be relocating to a new facility elsewhere in the Niagara Region. Merritton may not have been the permanent home of this history-making school, but it will always be where the school got its start. As much as Merritton has left a mark on Canada Prep, Canada Prep's students have also had a positive impact on the Merritton community. They hung out at the Dairy Queen, got their hair cuts at Mr. Coppola's, and ate breakfast at Lester D's. They felt at home in the three storey brick building nestled between the baseball diamond and the railroad tracks.

From Merritton High to Pinehurst, the building mostly constructed in 1934 has certainly had a rich history. As time marches on, those two years when it was occupied by a bunch of high school football players will become another chapter in the continuing legacy of Merritton.

## CHARITABLE CINDYS

A few years ago Merritton Matters featured the dedication of Cindy Crosbie and Cindy Van Vlack who collect donations for Community Care at Christmas time. What started as a tree decorating party in 1994 for 60 people evolved quickly into guests bringing unwrapped toys for those less fortunate. It became something more than simply camaraderie at holiday time to truly help those in need. The party has now grown to around 250 guests who continue to bring unwrapped gifts and non-perishable food items.

When they first started this charitable event, both Cindys lived in Merritton, and Cindy Crosbie taught at Merritton High. Now Crosbie teaches at Laura Secord Secondary School and they have moved to Thorold. Twenty years later the celebration held on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014 was the

final annual event hosted by Cindy and Cindy. But the tradition won't end here. Now Adam Bosak and his wife Jaime, who both grew up in Merritton, will become the new hosts of the event along with their two sons Oliver and Carter – something that has been in the planning for three years. They hope to continue what the Cindys have done over the last 20 years and help it grow in the future. Adam and Jaime's commitment to carrying on the good work that makes a difference to the community is to be commended. By continuing this event, they will be putting resources directly into the hands of people engaged in the important work of Community Care.

It's not the last we've heard from the two Cindys, as they won't totally be giving up their charitable work. They hope to have an event in July to support the Niagara Children's Centre along with the Community Care food bank.



## CHECK THESE OUT

- There will be a Merritton Reunion Sock Hop on September 5, 2015 from 2 - 7 p.m. at the Merritton Legion, 2 Chestnut Street, St. Catharines. Check out their Facebook page.
- You might be missing! Sleuths on the Merritton Memories Facebook page have been looking for people with whom they have lost contact over the years.
- If you are interested in a 'I love Merritton Hoodie', call Pat McCabe at 905-684-2590.

## LIONS CLUB OF MERRITTON ELIMINATION DRAW WINNERS DEC. 5, 2014

1st	Anita Harding	\$100
50th	Norm Dent	\$25
100th	Dan Haine	\$25
150th	Riley Morra and Gillian	\$25
200th	David Mackie	\$25
250th	Mike Rombough	\$25
300th	Kevin Mlot	\$25
350th	Doris Weir	\$25
400th	Ken & Sandy Harder	\$25
450th	Rick Lick	\$25
500th	Amber Bell	\$25
550th	Al & Leah Crosbie	\$25
600th	Bob Makins	\$25
650th	W. Tucker	\$25
700th	Dan Haine	\$25
750th	Lorraine Clark	\$25
800th	Adam Vanderwielen	\$25
850th	Jason Disher	\$25
900th	Makenna Schroeder	\$25
950th	Ev Davidson	\$25
1000th	Kelly Hogan	\$25
1050th	Bradley Winslade	\$25
1100th	Bradley Favero	\$25
1150th	Doris Fraser	\$25
1200th	Tony Morra	\$25
1250th	Carl Cardas	\$25
1300th	Joanne Pymont	\$25
1350th	Wayne Miller	\$25
1400th	B Ruch	\$25
1450th	Sean Ip	\$25
1500th	Heather Clunis	\$25
1550th	Steven Kraus	\$25
1596th	Sue Duemo	\$25
1597th	Rick Green	\$25
1598th	Rob Hill	\$100
1599th	Peter Michaud	\$200
1600th	Mike Bell	\$2,500

## GREEN THUMBS

On Wednesday, October 1, Trillium award winners were announced for St. Catharines. This is the 30<sup>th</sup> year that the city has sponsored the program to applaud neighbourhood civic pride. Homes in the Merritton area were recognized for their efforts and talents as well as their contributions to making our ward a greener and more aesthetically pleasing place. Entries were judged based on colour, garden maintenance, use of plant and landscape material, as well as how properties fit in with the existing landscapes.

### RESIDENTIAL GARDEN AWARDS

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*Horticultural Society*

3rd place 9 Hessford Rd., Miller residence

### CIVIC BEAUTIFICATION AWARDS

*Sponsored By: The City of St. Catharines*

7 Perth St., Begolo residence

27 Oxford St., Keast residence

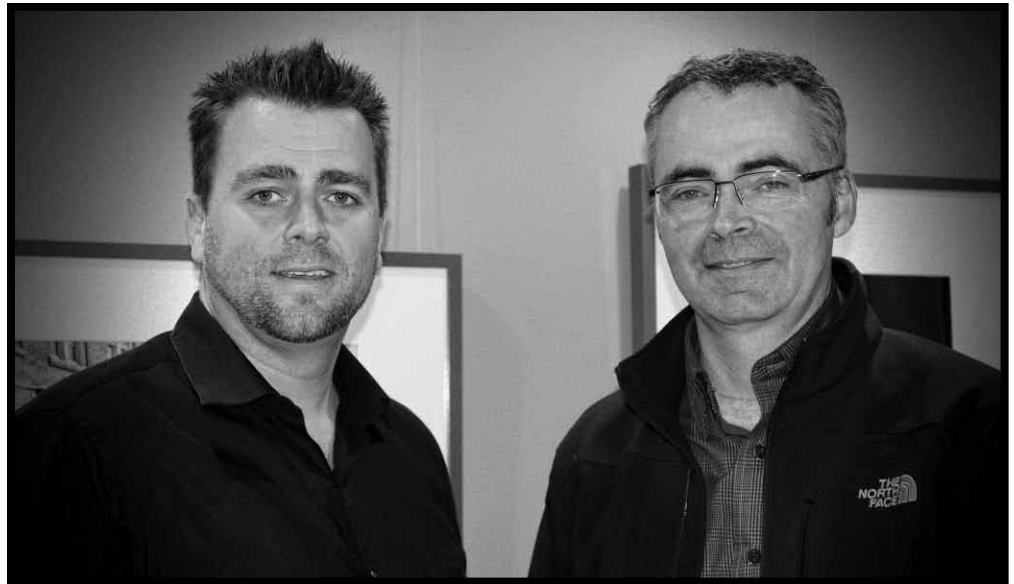
13 Southgate Cir., Di Paola residence



# Wise Guys Make Commitment to Merritton Children



The McNaughton family honour the late Jack McNaughton at the Lions Turkey Raffle each year. Jack's son Barry is shown here wearing a Winnipeg Jets hockey jersey with Porcupines and the number 433 on the back. Jack was in Squadron 433, Pride of the Porcupines in World War II.



The front cover of this Merritton Matters issue depicts the tentative design of a proposed new park, sponsored by the Wise Guys Charity, to be built in Merritton. An information meeting was held at the St. Catharines Museum in November to answer questions about the proposal.

## Here's what you need to know about the park:

**WHERE?** It will be located on the corner of Wilfred Laurier and Welland Canal Pkwy.

**WHEN?** The tentative timeline is to have clearing for the wooded area done by this spring and then work on the park throughout 2015. This, of course, is all subject to approval at city council.

**WHAT?** No name has been decided on for the park yet.

**WHO?** The Wise Guys have earmarked a \$25,000 donation to the park with the rest of the money to come from city funding already raised and some community fundraising.

Brandon Currie (shown above with Stuart Green) is the Chair of the Wise Guys Charity Fund Merritton Park Project. Brandon and his wife live in Merritton and he was instrumental in arranging the public meeting to provide feedback about how the park should be built. He is committed to helping ensure that the one-acre park is built in a timely manner and private funds are raised for the majority of the project.

The Wise Guys charity is a completely volunteer-run organization, co-founded by Charles (Chuck) Smith and his son Doug, dedicated to supporting worthy local projects throughout Niagara. The group began by raising money for the Walker Family YMCA in the late 1980s. At that time, they were known as the 'Y's Guys'. Their effort was very successful, bringing in more than \$100,000 to help build the facility. The charity is much larger than the Smith family now, with dozens of volunteers and corporate sponsors dedicated to supporting primarily children's causes throughout the Niagara Region.

This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wise Guys. To date, these volunteers have funded over \$2,000,000 in local projects, through charities such as: Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre; Family and Children Services; St. Catharines General Hospital; Heart and Stroke Foundation; Community Care; Infinity Play Place; Alzheimer Society; and Wellspring Niagara. The 25th annual Wise Guys Week is July 12 – 18, 2015 and there are several events planned. Check out [www.wiseguyscharity.com](http://www.wiseguyscharity.com) for more information on fundraising events and how you and your company or group can participate.

If you are specifically interested in helping bring this new park to life, please contact Brandon Currie at [info@brandoncurrie.ca](mailto:info@brandoncurrie.ca).

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# The Semi-Weekly Post

Anyone remember the Semi-Weekly Post newspaper that was published long ago in Thorold? Apparently Merritton news was important enough to be covered by this paper. M. I. Crandall submitted a copy of an issue dated December 19, 1922 to Newspaper Abstracts, which is where we picked it up. Here is the news that was making headlines back then.

- Miss Norma Gillis of Oak Street is confined to her room as she is suffering from rheumatism.
- C.R. Griffin of Bridgeville Ont. spent the weekend the guest of his son, Dr. C. Griffin, at the Merritt Inn.
- John R. Hilton, who boards on Maple St., met with a painful accident while engaged in his duties Friday night at the Kinleith paper mill. He was removing some shafting and a heavy piece fell from a shelf, striking him in the back of the head, inflicting a cut which necessitated four stitches. He will remain at Merritton for a few days until he is well enough to make the trip home to Belleville.
- Rev. A.J. Lousley of Brandon Manitoba is spending a few days in town where he was called by the serious illness of his father, Caleb Lousley, Canal Street.

Remember the articles on Merritton's Donald Thomas, the only RCAF crewmember to survive a crash over Berlin on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1943 who was being sought by people in Australia?

In previous issues we followed the tale from the search to finding Donald's daughter-in-law to providing you with an excerpt from Donald's writings about his survival. Now, Mike Johnson, Merritton researcher extraordinaire, has found a St. Catharines Standard article that was published when Donald was released from the POW camp and forwarded it to Australia. Mike also let us know that Donald's mother was one of the Gillis family who owned a store on Oakdale Avenue. Many Merrittonians have fond memories of buying candy in tiny paper bags from Norma Gillis. One of the Gillis sisters worked as a librarian at the old Carnegie Building Library on Merritt Street.

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# MAA

The Merritton Athletic Association has had a busy winter with three A/E hockey teams, one Local League team and over 30 kids enrolled in hockey school! We are now preparing for summer sports, including soccer school and baseball. Please visit our website at [www.maasports.ca](http://www.maasports.ca) or our Facebook page for more information.



The Peeewe Merritton Bulldogs hosted the Howard Huskies from Maryland at the Meridian Centre on January 16, 2015.

## WERE YOU A MERRITTON KID?

Everyone is welcome to the Second Annual Merritton Kid Reunion which will be held on September 5, 2015 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Merritton Legion, 2 Chestnut St. East. The event will include a BBQ, raffles and more.

Donations to the raffle table are gratefully accepted. Please contact Bev at 905-937-4499 or Pat at 905-684-2590 for more information.

Don't forget to mark this date on your calendar!

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# Vera

By Tom Barwell

'Vera' is a World War II Lancaster Bomber based at the Canadian Warplane Heritage museum, one of 7377 built. Only 17 remain and only two are airworthy. She is one and the other is in Great Britain. Her name is "Thumper", and they were destined to meet in England and fly in formation over a two month time period performing at various air shows. The last time it was done was over fifty years ago.

Of the number of Lancs constructed, 430 were built at the "Avro" plant in Milton Ontario. In total approximately 3249 were lost during the war. They were the mainstay of the conflict that began in 1939. The Lancaster made its debut in 1942.

Looking at the plane you cannot help but think how brave the men must have been and the terror they must have felt when flying missions over Europe knowing that the odds of returning to base were very slim. They were pursued by night fighters, flack and searchlight beams that were almost impossible to escape once a plane was illuminated making them an easy target. Thirty non-aborted missions were required by each crew member to be considered a tour of duty. The longest mission ever recorded was an incredible 10 hours and 25 minutes.

Vera, rescued from a pylon in Goderich Ont., ended up in the museum and after 11 years was completely refurbished. It was done by a group of dedicated volunteers and no doubt was a labour of love. It was not an easy task. On August 5th, 2014 to the cheers of a large crowd, she rolled down the runway and with the signature roar of her 4 Merlin engines, began the long historic journey. Along the way she would make stops in Goose Bay Nfld, Keflavik Iceland and finally land in Coningsby England where the tour would begin. Upon landing she was greeted by a huge adoring crowd and the crew were treated like rock stars. It was rather an unsuspected greeting to be sure. The few remaining vets, who were crews on the bombers during the war were front and center, suddenly reliving their missions and many, no doubt, with tears in their eyes.

When the two Lancs flew over in formation it was an epic, awesome, eye popping event. They flew with modern and older

airplanes and for two months toured the country. The most amazing event sight could have been when the two planes were cruising with a "British Vulcan". This is a retired delta bomber jet of enormous size. It was an amazing contrast.

Wherever they flew, huge adoring, cheering crowds gathered. Upon returning to Hamilton on Sept 28th, another large crowd had formed, complete with a pipe band which seemed very appropriate. It was a very historical, successful journey, perhaps never again to be duplicated.

There is a solid Merritton connection to this amazing story. The chief pilot of the Canadian Warplane Museum is Leon Evans. Leon attended and graduated from the St. Catharines Collegiate in 1967 and was a member of the St Catharines Flying club. He was born to fly and flew Air Canada jets for 34 years, crossing the Atlantic an incredible 388 times.

During this period he learned to operate many types of airplanes and as a result became an instructor. After retiring he was offered the opportunity of flying the Lancaster, jumped at the chance and has been flying her ever since.

Leon is happily married to Mary Hannan who for many years lived with her family on Park Ave. She was a very pretty girl who babysat for neighbours in the area. She is now a pretty lady appropriately tagged as a "Lanc Lady" having travelled to England to take part in many of the festivities. She and Leon

now reside in nearby Fonthill.

The journey is over and Vera is now once again home in her museum hanger. You might see her high overhead on a commemorative flight, particularly on Remembrance Day, saluting the veterans far below.

Some people say these heritage planes should never be flown for fear of damaging them or losing them forever. That would be akin to staring at a stuffed animal with a glassy eyed stare. Flying is a great way to spread heritage which Canadians sometimes seem to ignore.

It is not cheap to maintain this historic icon. The museum gets little money from the government. They rely mostly on tourism and public donations. The museum's a wonderful place to visit and there are many other exhibits besides the Lanc but Vera is for sure the focal point.



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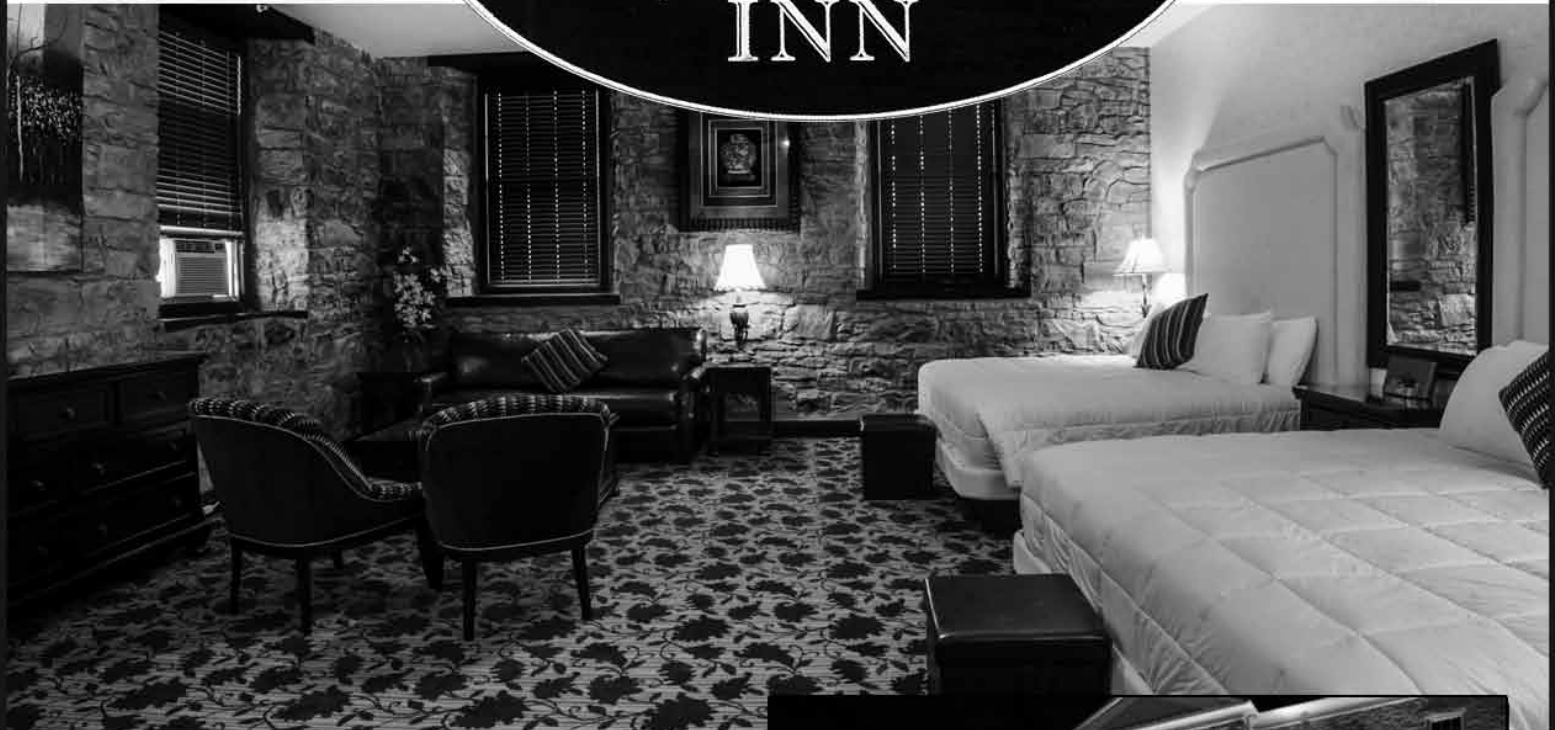



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