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*Restoring small-town
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Front page photo: Jeff Duc has been named the latest grape king and will represent the industry at events for the next year. ~ Luke Edwards photo



Outgoing grape king Erwin Wiens passes the chains onto Jeff Duc, the newly installed grape king for 2024/2025. ~ Luke Edwards photo

A Duc ascends the throne: New grape king announced

By Luke Edwards

Unlike his opa, the new king hasn't exactly been crowned. And that's quite alright for Jeff Duc.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake grape grower was named 2024 Grape King and installed as the 67th person to have the title at a special event held last month following the Grape Growers of Ontario celebrity luncheon.

Duc, a third-generation farmer, received his jacket and grape king chains from outgoing king Erwin Wiens. A little over a half century ago his opa, Jack Forrer, was grape king. Back in those times there was a full robe and crown the king wore during their installation. Duc admitted he was happy that tradition was a thing of the past.

"No, this is perfect. This is good enough for me," he said with a laugh.

But Duc said he won't be taking the role lightly, understanding the importance the grape king role has in advocating for the industry, and setting it up for future growers.

"I just want to be a good representative and champion of our industry, and hopefully build an industry for the next generation. That's what these grape kings have done for us, so hopefully we can continue growing the industry," he said.

Today, Duc runs the family farm with his dad Ray. Together they manage 250 acres of mixed grapes, supplying Arterra Wines. The farm also produced other tender fruits in the early days, but the family switched exclusively to grapes when the canning facility in town closed up.

Each year the grape king acts as the face and voice of the industry, including taking part in the invitational grape stomp at the Grape and Wine Festival.



A group shot of many of the grape kings in attendance during last month's event welcoming Jeff Duc to the exclusive group. ~ Luke Edwards photo

Duc thanked his family and friends, as well as all the industry people who have supported him.

And while the industry faces some challenges, Duc remains optimistic.

"There's going to be a lot of sales opportunities and hopefully we can capitalize with them," he said, referring to some of the alcohol modernization changes.

Additionally, he said the 2024 harvest is looking great. Niagara's weather in the early months of the spring and summer were uncertain, but clear skies and warm weather in September set things up well.

"Look for 2024 wines, because they're going to be spectacular," he said.

Outgoing grape king Erwin Wiens called the last year among the best of his life. And like Duc, he acknowledged some of the headwinds the industry faces, but said it's incumbent upon them to keep pushing.

"Adversity is what makes us Canadians and what makes us farmers," he said. "The industry will always be in turmoil."

However, much like how the growers and grape kings who came before Wiens and Duc helped build a strong industry for the future, today's growers must build it even more for the next generation.

"It has to be better than we found it," he said.



New greenhouse will make Niagara College ‘a leader’ in applied research

HESIC team hopeful to begin project intake in early 2025

By Luke Edwards

Excitement is building for researchers and staff at the Horticultural and Environmental Sciences Innovation Centre at Niagara College, as they near completion of a new purpose-built research greenhouse.

While the centre’s associate director Kimberley Cathline said she’s proud of the work the team has done in recent years, working in a small part of the college’s academic greenhouse limits what they can offer to partners and the industry.

“It’s not really set up to do research projects,” she said during a tour of the construction site for the new five-bay research greenhouse that will include two lab spaces, a meeting room, a vertical grow room, and cold storage area.

Even with construction ongoing this fall, it’s evident how much the new greenhouse will change things. Passing the academic greenhouse on the way to the site, Cathline points to two colleagues

working away on a project. They’re limited for what data they can collect since conditions are restricted to whatever the academic students require. The new facility will allow them to set everything from temperature and humidity, to carbon dioxide and spectrum-adjusted lighting.

Once complete, the new greenhouse won’t just give them the ability to set conditions however they like, they’ll be able to do it five times over.

“We want to be able to address as many research needs as possible,” Cathline said.

One of the five bays will be devoted to cannabis production to support the college’s existing cannabis program. Cathline expects them to begin intake for other projects in early 2025, but added there’s already interest from industry partners.

“A lot of people are interested in working with us,” she said.

In addition to the five greenhouse bays, the new facility also has a vertical grow room that mimics the indoor growing conditions of real life operations. With growth opportunity and excitement in this form of production, Cathline said



Kimberley Cathline, associate director of the Horticultural and Environmental Sciences Innovation Centre at Niagara College, said her team is excited to finally be nearing completion of a new research greenhouse. ~ Luke Edwards photos

the college can do its part to develop the sector.

Next to the indoor grow room are two labs, where staff will be able to take measurements and conduct tests.

“Not having our own lab limits the amount of information we can give back to our partners,” she said.

Other opportunities that will become possible with the new facility include testing with benchtop systems, nutrient film techniques, and highwire setups.

Once complete, visitors will come in through an entryway that will offer a small glimpse into the controlled environments. However, entry into the research areas will

include hygiene and biosecurity systems will be in place to ensure the areas are fully controlled.

Overall, Cathline said the new greenhouse will provide a boost to the horticultural industry.

“I think this will position us as a leader in applied horticultural research in Canada,” she said.

HESIC’s focus is on applied research, projects that have a real world impact on businesses. At the same time, it also provides students a chance to go beyond the classroom. HESIC hires college students to be a part of the team. It gives them a chance to see what it’s like when they’re working for more than just a grade.

Continued to page A5 →



Five bays in the greenhouse will allow staff to control conditions such as temperature and humidity to get the best research data possible.

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→ **Continued from page A4**

“They (HESIC partners) are making business decisions based on the information we provide,” Cathline said, adding many companies want to conduct research or do trials but, lack either the space, scientific expertise, or both, to do it.

Oftentimes the partners they work with have limited or no knowledge about horticulture. For instance, HESIC worked with EcoWool to test if unusable sheep wool could be an alternative to peat moss. Peat moss is considered non-renewable, so finding a re-

placement in a product that would otherwise be a waste would be a win-win.

The entire facility clocks in at 1,258 square metres (13,540 square feet), with each greenhouse bay 128 square metres (1,378 square feet).

Funding for the project has come from several sources, including: the Greenhouse Technology Network through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Niagara Region, Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the Ontario Research Fund (ORF), as well as Niagara College itself. 🌱



Drone shots of construction at the new research greenhouse on Niagara College's Daniel J. Patterson campus in Niagara-on-the-Lake. ~ Niagara College photos



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Innovation could give greenhouse cucumber growers a hand up

Robotic harvesting tool uses touch to cut costs

By Luke Edwards

To demonstrate how his team overcame a significant hurdle in their quest to develop viable robotic cucumber harvesting technology, Brian Lynch looked down and put his hand in his pocket.

Despite not being able to see clearly what was in his pocket, his fingers could quickly identify his car keys, some loose change, and whatever else he happened to be carrying around with him that day.

The new tools Vineland Research and Innovation Centre will be showing off to those in the industry in October is based on that very simple premise: Sight gets you close, touch gets you precise.

“To build something that’s going to go exactly to that precise spot based on data from cameras is really challenging,” Lynch, director of horticultural technology services at VRIC said.

Back in 2018 Lynch and his team at VRIC began searching for robotic harvesting solutions for greenhouse cucumber growers. Whatever they came up with had

to be fast and accurate enough to make it worthwhile, but also at a price that meant a reasonable return on investment.

And that’s where the challenge came in. The latest cameras can do amazing work. Laser systems can also return wonderful data. However, they either cost too much, take too long, or both.

“From the very beginning the strategy in how we solved the problem was driven by constraints on the cost,” Lynch said. The goal, after all, is to produce something that growers will be able to buy.

So instead of focusing all of its attention on the “vision” of the robot, Lynch’s team opted to use the cameras to get them close, and then develop a new tool to finish the job.

“It feels its way to the stem, so that means we don’t have to know where the stem is, we just have to know where the cucumber is. And that’s a lot easier of a problem to solve,” he said.

A closed loop system finds the cucumber, working its way from the bottom of the vegetable to the top. Once the hand has detected it has reached the top, a cutting de-



Vineland Research and Innovation Centre is working to develop robotic cucumber harvesting technology. In the photo is Brian Lynch, director of horticultural technology solutions. ~ Luke Edwards photo

vice snips the stem and the hand places the freshly cut cucumber in a bin.

“We’ve got to make sure the technology we’re using relies on simple components,” Lynch said.

Other camera-focused systems carry plenty of risk, he added. Leaves can get in the way, or worse yet, the device can get mistaken between the stem and the main vine. Lynch said he’s heard stories of harvesting devices that killed plants after cutting what it thought was a stem.

The system produced by VRIC has no risk of that, he said.

Additionally, Lynch said it’s far easier for camera systems to identify the cucumber rather than differentiate between leaves, stems and vines. Ultimately, Lynch said his job is to innovate products that are a benefit to the industry, grow-

ers, and in the end, consumers. With labour, and especially skilled labour, an ongoing challenge for growers, this technology could be a solution.

The goal now is to find some partners to get a product ready for commercialization. The focus for Lynch was developing the specific harvesting tool. Existing chassis technology could be adapted or otherwise used to round out a complete product.

In October, staff will be welcoming industry members to the VRIC campus for demonstrations of the technology. It’s happening at the same time as the Canadian Greenhouse Convention, which takes place in Niagara on Oct. 9 and 10. Industry members interested in registering can visit here: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9w3fwu>.

Predicting when a product might actually be available is always a challenge, but Lynch is hopeful it could happen in a couple years. One thing he’s realized during this work is that the adoption of robotic technology is something of a two-way road. As much as his team and others like him are trying to create tools that work in current greenhouse settings, future greenhouse and greenhouse vegetables can be considered with robots in mind. That means facilities that are built with robotic needs in mind. It also means changing caretaking techniques to have plants that work better with robots or even developing new varieties that remove plant characteristics that stump robot devices. 🌱



This is what a finished product could look like when VRIC finds the appropriate partners to build out its robotic cucumber harvesting device. ~ VRIC photo

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Latest intake for Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative funds more than 100 projects

Applications for next stream open Oct. 15

By Niagara Farms Staff

The provincial and federal governments will help fund dozens of research projects through the latest round of the Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative.

In a press release sent out in September, the provincial government said more than 100 research and innovation projects and activities received funding in the most recent intake. That includes 67 applied research and pilot and demonstration projects, as well as 10 commercialization projects. More than 30 businesses also received specialized expert mentoring through the Grow Ontario Accelerator Hub.

Locally, groups such as the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Brock University's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute, and the Ontario Grape and Wine Research group received money.

"This additional intake will support innovation and research across a wide range of diverse commodity groups across Niagara and the province," said Sam Oosterhoff, MPP for Niagara West.

"Adapting new technologies on farms and at food processing sites is key to the success of our local agri-food sector."

Applications for new rounds of funding open up in October. The Bio-enterprise Canada Corporation will open up its next commercialization stream intake on Oct. 2, while its Grow Ontario Accelerator Hub is open on a continuous basis until all spots are filled.

Meanwhile, the funding streams for the Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative will open for applications next month as well. The applied, pilot and demonstration, as well as the knowledge translation and transfer streams will open on Oct. 15.

"Our farmers and food processors must continue to innovate to compete. Our investment in the Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative will supercharge their innovation efforts," said Rob Flack, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

The two levels of government are investing an additional \$3.5 million in the initiative, which is part of the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year, \$3.5-billion investment by provincial, federal and territorial governments.

More information on the Agri-Food Research Initiative can be found at ontario.ca/page/ontario-agri-food-research-initiative, and more information on the accelerator hub can be found at bioenterprise.ca.

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🍃 AT THE MARKET 🍃

There's always room for dessert at the Baking Room

Fonthill home baker's known for her scones, but also loves making breads, cookies and more

By Luke Edwards

What started as a creative outlet during COVID-19 lockdowns has become a home business for a Fonthill woman.

Braiden Preece began baking back in 2020 when the pandemic was keeping people at home. She'd had no real formal training, but did have a mom who baked cookies and a grandma who was a good overall baker.

"It runs in the family," Preece said.

Baking gave her something to do in 2020 beyond her studies.

"I started (baking) in 2020 during the pandemic, I was looking for a creative outlet...I was finishing my master's and I just kind of fell in love with baking," she said.

Soon she was selling to friends and family members. In time she would expand to markets.

Preece can now be found at various markets across the region, including farmers' markets like Grimsby, and vendor market events held throughout Niagara.

She also does catering and special events.

"Scones are my biggest seller, for sure, that's probably what most people would know me for," she said.

However, Preece also loves baking breads and pizza doughs. Visitors to her booth can also expect to find cookies, cookie bars, pretzels and more.

She said she loves going to markets. Not only does it provide a space for a home business like the Baking Room, but her fellow vendors and the customers are always friendly. In Grimsby



Braiden Preece began baking during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020. She now runs a home business and can be found at markets and events throughout Niagara. ~ Luke Edwards photo

her stall has been next to Simon Pellegrino and his Simon Says ice cream business, giving the two a chance to become friends.

And it's seemingly impossible to walk around a market in a bad mood.

"People that come to markets are always in such good moods and always happy to support local businesses," she said.

The Baking Room is on social media, @thebakingroom_homebakery on Facebook and Instagram. Preece can also be contacted through email, thebakingroombakery@gmail.com or at 289-241-8574. 🍃

To nominate a local vender for our monthly "AT THE MARKET" feature, contact Luke Edwards at luke@granthaven.com

Autumn, the time to stock up

By Michelle Seaborn

Another month ends, a new season begins. For many of our local farmers' markets, their season will end sometime in October. The Grimsby market will finish on Oct. 10, just before Thanksgiving.

This is truly a season to give thanks. Many farms faced challenges this year, whether by the cool, wet spring, the frost that destroyed tender blossoms, or the drawn-out warmth of late summer which saw many crops ripen up to two weeks earlier than expected. Yet we are thankful, knowing that next year we get to try all over again.

This is the time of year to get out to markets and stock up. Baked goods, breads, ready-made meals all store well and now is the time to check for a bit of extra freezer space.

Many of the products now available will keep if stored correctly. Your crucifers such as cauliflower, broccoli, brussels sprouts all keep well and can be frozen for later use. Apples and pears stored in a cool place in cardboard can last well into the new year. Many vendors will still have an abundance of other fruit varieties as well.

Carrots, onions, potatoes, and cabbage will last well and maintain their flavour for several months. Gourds, pumpkins, and many varieties of squash have now made an appearance,

great for soups and hardy meals on cooler days. There is still a wide variety of tender vegetables still available including green onions, lettuce, field tomatoes and cucumbers.

Take time to visit a local farmers' market, stock up on all Niagara has to offer, and enjoy for months to come. Check with your favourite vendors, many will have 'farm gate' sales available right at their farm making it easy to pick up your favorites even when the markets close. Enjoy a day at a farmers' market, you will be glad you did! 🍃

Michelle Seaborn is the Grimsby Farmers' Market manager



Estate Greens starting small, in more ways than one

Company aiming to provide home indoor growing solutions

By Luke Edwards

Several years ago, Clifford Buckingham ran into a conundrum. He was a home gardener whose contract work as an ultrasonic inspector for nuclear reactors took him away for large chunks of time.

"I was growing plants at the time and when you leave plants for a certain length of time, they die," he said matter-of-factly.

He may now spend the bulk of his time at home, but more recently Buckingham had another life moment that will interrupt his availability: the birth of a child.

However this time, he's much more prepared to keep his plants growing while he may otherwise be distracted with the important job of being a dad.

For the past few years Buckingham has been developing and improving hydroponic and indoor vertical farming systems. Those systems, and the expertise he has gained since he got into indoor growing in 2019, are now being offered to the public through his new company Estate Greens.

"I just had so much fun, I built this system and thought hey, let's get this system out to the people," he said.

Capitalizing on technology already developed, as well as a few ideas from his own experiences, Buckingham's aim is to introduce indoor growing to as many people as possible.

"I work on pairing those companies together and building a system that is affordable, small, usable and easy to clean," he said.

With questions of food security and food sovereignty increasingly on the minds of citizens, Buckingham said indoor and vertical

growing are ways to ensure we have quality and healthy food into the future.

"There was a time where everyone had a garden, and now, that's not as common," he said. However, with more people rediscovering their green thumb, indoor farming could be an additional option.

"I really want to help people who are trying to get into that space to be able to grow it year round," he said.

Getting to this point was quite the journey for Buckingham. He worked on a farm near his hometown of Bradford in his youth, where he said he learned a lot. However, he'd later go out east to study marine biology and policing. Eventually he got a job as an inspector for nuclear plants, after going back to school once again.

When he got serious about indoor growing Buckingham initially thought he'd go big with a large operation in Welland. He soon learned that wasn't the right approach, and switched gears.

"The answer is bringing the solution to the consumer and letting them decide how to use it," he said.

With the help of Estate Greens, home growers can choose what works best for them. Buckingham said getting into indoor growing can be as affordable as \$50 or upwards of \$3,000 for a more advanced system.

"It's totally dependent on what you want you're trying to grow, how you're trying to grow and what your expected output is," he said.

Buckingham sells his indoor grown microgreens to a small clientele of friends and family members. The systems he's developed allows for trays and trays of microgreens - the operator of one of his racking systems could expect about 36 pounds of pea shoots a week - as



Clifford Buckingham started a new company with the aim of advancing indoor growing, vertical farming, and microgreens. ~ Luke Edwards photos

well as a smaller, half-rack system that allows for microgreens on the bottom half and traditional fruit and vegetable plants above.

He said he's also happy to include as much or as little automation as possible. For some, the thought of indoor growing is a hobby they do for their mental health. They don't require automatic watering systems.

Yet, for those in a rush who simply want homegrown veggies, automation might make more sense.

"We're trying to find that balance of affordability and usability so that people will actually continue to use these products...and it's not just a fad," he said.

Cleaning the system takes up the most time, and even that would be no more than an hour a week. With automated systems the rest is just regular checks to make sure everything is working, and then harvesting the crops.

"Our goal is to pair energy efficient technologies as well as easy-to-use technologies," he said.

Education remains a huge focus, as well, since people still aren't entirely sure about microgreens, indoor growing and soilless techniques. Buckingham said he and his team want to help inform, "from being a consultant to just a friend."

Fortunately, in some cases, saving costs and improving quality are one and the same. As an example, Buckingham said microgreens taste better when they're kept in darkness for a week or so and only given light for a day or two before harvesting. That light kicks in the processes which create chlorophyll. Microgreens only need a short blast of light to get them to peak look and taste, Buckingham said.

He's been fortunate to receive support from outside organizations and experts, as well as from his own internal team, which includes Preston Sibley and Michelle Brisebois.

For more information on the business, visit estategreens.ca.



Buckingham has experimented with various aspects of indoor growing, from automated watering systems to which colour of lights he uses. ~ Estate Greens photos



Growing systems developed by Estate Greens can produce a large amount of microgreens in a relatively small space.



Buckingham said he's been grateful for the support he's received, including the work of staff members Preston Sibley and Michelle Brisebois.

Fall fair season comes to Niagara



By Luke Edwards

As sure as it's the time when the leaves turn colours, September also marks a busy time of year in the fair calendar.

Several communities held their fall fairs last month, including West Niagara, Wainfleet, Binbrook and Caledonia. The fairs featured animal shows, 4-H achievement days, home goods and vegetable exhibits, food, rides and music.

Much of the attention will now turn to the upcoming Royal Agricultural Winter Fair next month. It runs from Nov. 1 to 10 at Exhibition Place in Toronto.

This year's theme is "A century of champions." For more information visit royalfair.org.



Amanda Lindsay-Peaire milks one of her goats at the West Niagara Fair.



Dogs of all breeds wowed spectators with their shows of agility and acrobatics. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Ribbons were up for grabs for those who grew, baked and made showstopping foods, crafts and produce.



Zoey Harrow, 3, got up close and personal with a chick as her family visited the West Niagara Fair from Waterdown.



This alpaca was a little curious to meet a visitor to the West Niagara Fair.



A 4-H member adjusts her animal during the dairy show.

**West
Niagara
Fair**



4-H members are put through the paces during the dairy show.



John Delaney and Wendy Donaldson came down from Welland to visit the Wainfleet Fall Fair. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Michelin and Paul Lemay check out the giant pumpkins at the Wainfleet fair.



The Haanemaayers, Joel, Nathaniel, and Kyle, have some balloon creations made for them at the Wainfleet fair.



Landon Costiff, from Port Colborne, greets one of the cattle on display at the Wainfleet fair.



Jillian Huibers found a new way to get around, pending parental approval.

Wainfleet Fair



The Niagara Antique Power Association was offering up their own rides to kids at the Wainfleet Fall Fair.



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Marshville Heritage Festival



Old wisdom abounds at Marshville Heritage Festival

Annual event celebrates life as it once was

By Luke Edwards

Riley Gagnier provided a little evidence that Sean Wright's dad was onto something.

Shortly after the Fenwick girl made a rope with the help of Jerod Dahlgren and the antique ropemaking system he was overseeing, Wright shared a piece of wisdom his dad Doug always said.

"The best ropes are made by people under 12 or over 80," Sean said.

How exactly his father came to that understanding has been lost to time, but one thing that hasn't been lost is the knowledge of hand ropemaking. That's because Sean has continued on, running the ropemaking booth that Doug started way back in the early days of the festival.

"He was a big believer in the Marshville Heritage Festival," Sean said.

For young and old alike, the ropemaking booth mixed science with magic. There's an explanation of how it all works and where the strength of the rope comes from. But for anyone watching the device in action, Sean said there's also a tinge of magical curiosity as they watch the strands weave together.

The festival once again took place over the Labour Day weekend, welcoming crowds in from far and wide to see first hand what life was like in Wainfleet a couple hundred years ago. Volunteers could be found dressed in period costumes as they exhibited all the areas of pioneer life, from the aforementioned ropemaking, to blacksmithing, cooking and more.

Organizers are now looking forward to the annual Christmas festival at the village. For more details follow the Marshville Heritage Festival's social media accounts or visit marshvilleheritagesociety.org.



New to Marshville this year was an antique buggy display and sale in the arena. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Visitors check out an old steam Sawyer Massey tractor.



Riley Gagnier learns first hand how ropes were made in the old days. She was visiting the Marshville Heritage Festival from Fenwick with her Gigi and Papa.

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Doppelganger performs during the Marshville Heritage Festival. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Lynn Gibson (left) and Gwendolyn Goodfellow were in period costume and making up a batch of pear jam.



Dan Rykse stands in front of a Marshville sign he carved.



Volunteers like Leslie Curry helped with demonstrations of all the old tools and devices at Marshville.

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Haldimand farmers learn about the benefits and opportunities of drainage

By Luke Edwards

If done right, even Haldimand's heavy clay isn't enough to make tile drainage a non-starter.

That was one of the messages that farmers received recently when the Haldimand Soil and Crop Improvement Association held its end-of-summer meeting. Taking place at Aaron McQueen's Fisherville farm, the day was devoted to drainage.

"It's such a big issue for Haldimand growers," said Kim Glenney, secretary of the association. Layers of soil in Haldimand can contain as much as 60 per cent clay, leading many local farmers to assume tile drainage would be largely a waste of money.

Drainage day aimed to show that's not necessarily the case.

"It has specific management issues," said Jim Warren, from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agri-business.

The roughly 130 visitors were split into four groups, visiting four stations that showed how contractors install drainage systems, an overview of Haldimand's soil layers and what it means for drainage solutions, the benefits

of berms and diversion swales, and some of the legalities and processes for getting drainage projects approved.

"Drainage and erosion control is a passion of mine," said McQueen as he talked about a berm he installed on his farm, one of several throughout the property. In the event of a large rain event - which are becoming more frequent thanks in large part to climate change - the berm collects water that would otherwise run through his corn field and potentially cause damage to his crop and soil.

The excess water is then diverted safely away using a hickenbottom drain inlet.

"It's able to control the water," said OMAFA's Kevin McKague.

McKague pointed out that even a relatively small gully can cause extensive erosion, literally removing tons of topsoil a year.

"If you see stuff like that in your fields, you know it's worth trying to control," he said.

However, it was widely acknowledged that drainage solutions often require a huge investment. That's why the province has a licensing system with somewhere



Visitors watch a demonstration of how drainage systems get installed.
~ Luke Edwards photos

in the neighbourhood of 100 licensed contractors who undergo training and testing to ensure they know what they're doing, said Mel Luymes of the Land Improvement Contractors of Ontario. It's also why they're pushing for third party certification.

"It's too big of an investment to leave to the lowest bidder," she said.

New technologies are also being developed, such as control gates that increase or reduce the flow of drainage.

"So you can take advantage of every drop of rain," Luymes said. And as AI is further developed, systems that automatically make adjustments based on everything from the forecast to the crop to the time of year are on the horizon.

A combination of geology and earlier farming practices has left compaction layers that make drainage a challenge in Haldimand, Warren said. However, there are ways to overcome those challenges with well planned drainage systems, as well as other solutions like cover crops.

"It clearly can work if it's done correctly and done well," said Peter Johnson, a farmer and agronomist.

There are also legal and procedural matters to consider, said SmarAgri's Dan Breckon and consultant Sid Vander Veen. Depending on your property and adjacent natural watercourses, farmers may have a right to drain. Otherwise, it could require agreements with neighbours or a petition through the Drainage Act.

In the case of an agreement with a neighbour, Vander Veen recommended registering the contract on property title to ensure the agreement remains even after one of the parties sells their land.

Even with everything that farmers need to consider, Glenney said it's important to remember that Haldimand farmers do have options. Overall she said organizers were happy with the day and thrilled to have the support of LICO, local businesses, and the McQueen family. 🌱



Bruce Laidlaw explains some of the particulars of drainage systems to participants in the Haldimand drainage day.

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Visitors to the Haldimand drainage day event learned the particulars on how drainage systems can help, and how they get installed. ~ Luke Edwards photos



OMAF's Jim Warren explains the challenges and opportunities Haldimand farmers have, given their unique soil structure.



Aaron McQueen hosted the recent Haldimand drainage day. Drainage and erosion control are two passions of the Haldimand farmer.



Aaron McQueen is continuing work on his farm to install drainage systems and erosion control.

The problem with wild parsnip

By Alice Guthrie

Ontario has become the home of several invasive plant species. While most are threatening to local biodiversity, they are not directly harmful to humans. However there are some that can cause serious burns when touched, and everyone should be aware of these dangerous plants.

One of these is wild parsnip, a plant originally from Europe and Asia, where it was cultivated for its root. Very likely brought over for that purpose, the plant escaped from cultivated gardens and has spread widely across North America. It has been reported in all Canadian provinces and territories with the exception of Nunavut.

These plants- stem, leaves and flowers - produce sap that contains toxic compounds that can irritate human (or animal) skin, producing a burn like rash when exposed to sunlight. Mild cases are like a bad sunburn. In severe cases the skin goes red, develops large blisters and can feel like it is scalded. People or animals with white or light coloured skin or

coats are more seriously affected than those with darker colouring.

The plant produces dense stands which reduce biodiversity by outcompeting native plants. It is a problem agriculturally if it gets into forage crops, as chemical compounds can reduce weight gain or infertility and can even be toxic if eaten by livestock. This impacts the quality and salability of these crops. Their presence on the farm can also be a problem for workers or children playing in the fields.

Wild parsnip is considered a noxious weed in the Ontario Weed Control Act. These are defined as plants that can negatively impact livestock, crops or farm workers. Adam Biddle, the supervisor of forestry at Norfolk Council, admits that wild parsnip will likely never be fully controlled, but he says it is next on that county's 'hit list,' with mapping occurring to identify areas to target. He stated that it is, "Very difficult to provide adequate long term control," adding that it requires planning and long term commitment. Mostly the plant is being handled on a complaint



Wild parsnip is an invasive species in Ontario and can cause burns when touched. ~ Alice Guthrie photos

basis, with control targeted mainly where people are most likely to contact it.

Adam Chamberlin, project manager, forestry, Haldimand County, explained that the goal in Haldimand is to control the plant in areas where people are likely to encounter it. It is, "Impossible to eradicate ... like trying to eradicate dandelions," he stated. Haldimand

does mowing along county roads, but wild parsnip is a recurring problem, as seeds disperse and new plants come along. Large stands of this weed can be seen in several areas of Haldimand, particularly along the Grand River. It is very thick by the Highway 6 bypass along the bridge and in other areas along the river. 🌿

An empty mind and a full glass: Olympian Jon Montgomery shares stories of teamwork

Montgomery was celebrity speaker at GGO luncheon event

By Luke Edwards

With local grape growers in the midst of a mad dash to get their vines harvested, an Olympic gold medalist could relate.

Jon Montgomery, who famously won gold in the skeleton at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, recounted those moments leading up to and during his final run that vaulted him to the top of the podium at the games.

“My entire life was about to be compressed into 52 seconds,” he told the crowd at the Grape Growers of Ontario Celebrity Luncheon last month, recalling how despite the enormity of the situation, his years of training left his mind empty of stress and instead focused on the task at hand.

Much like how his lifetime of preparation and training all came down to a quick sprint to the finish line, those harvesting grapes have months and years of tending their vines and fretting about the weather condense down to a couple months of harvesting.



Olympian Jon Montgomery gave an entertaining presentation at the Grape Growers of Ontario celebrity luncheon, where he talked about how teamwork helped him achieve gold at the 2010 Winter Games. ~ Luke Edwards photos

But fortunately, Montgomery noted another similarity of what helped propel him to Olympic gold and what helps propel the Ontario grape and wine industry to global fame. And that’s even after the

host of the Amazing Race Canada grape stomped his way into a local rivalry he knew nothing about.

“As much as you are individual farmers and producers, there’s a network here,” he said. The 2010 Winter Olympics were a success for Canada, he said, because it was a truly Team Canada approach. Likewise, the success of Niagara’s grape growers is the result of a similar team mentality.

The call to work together came after Montgomery got a crash course in the wine appellations here in Niagara. Shortly after calling Niagara “one of Canada’s greatest growing areas,” he mentioned the Niagara Bench, leading to joking cheers from the Benchlands growers in the crowd and some light hearted jeers from the Niagara-on-the-Lake growers.

“I had no idea what I was wading into,” Montgomery said with a laugh.

Montgomery took the crowd through his journey to Olympic, and later, television stardom. Growing up in a small town in Manitoba, as the second smallest kid in his class, he didn’t realize what was possible until the young Montgomery met a similarly undersized hockey hero who’d just led the Calgary Flames to the Stanley Cup. Montgomery recalled meeting Theo Fleury, who shook his dad’s hand, and the young boy realizing Fleury was just like anyone else. It was just a matter of seizing on opportunities.

So Montgomery began searching out those opportunities, eventually settling on skeleton as a way

→ **Continued on page A17**



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Following his presentation, Montgomery stuck around to let attendees meet him and pose for a picture with his gold medal.

→ Continued on page A16

to reach his Olympic dreams, much to the consternation of his mom.

As 2010 approached, the skeleton team was stuck in a classic old guard vs new guard situation, Montgomery said, with the old guard holding the lessons they learned themselves close to the vest.

"Our capacity to be a team was extremely limited," he said.

Fortunately, teamwork won out, and soon the skeleton racers were lifting each other up to new heights.

"We realized a massive rate of development," he said.

It all culminated with that fateful final run, that was capped off with Montgomery being handed a pitcher of beer, and taking a large celebratory gulp from it, as he walked through Whistler Village.

"I only wish it could have been a glass of Ontario VQA wine," GGO chair Matthias Oppenlaender joked as he introduced Montgomery.

That walk, along with his final run, was simply Montgomery living in the present, a state where his mind was clear. What does an Olympian think of when he's about to race for gold? For Montgomery, it was absolutely nothing.

Since those Olympics, Montgomery has become a TV star, hosting the Amazing Race Canada. That was another opportunity he could have shied away from. As an athlete, failure always came with a straightforward solution: get faster, stronger, better. Not succeeding in his audition was different.

"I didn't know how to take that rejection," he said.

But one thing he said he's learned is that the more challenges you attempt to tackle, the easier it gets.

Montgomery ended up becoming the host, which led him several years later to Niagara. The most recent season kicked off with a trip to Niagara, including a challenge that brought competitors into the vineyards and onto harvesting equipment.

It was his first time in Niagara, and he said it reinforced a belief he has in the country. Montgomery said the land is amazing, "but it's the people who get to call this place home who are the single greatest resource."

The GGO continued a tradition of donating to a local charity, choosing Pathstone Mental Health as this year's recipient of \$1,500. To up the donation, Montgomery auctioned off some personal items, including an Amazing Race Canada card that raised an extra \$2,600 from Joe Pillitteri. 🌱

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Some 'grape' opportunities exist beyond winemaking

Vineland Research and Innovation Centre's open house highlights work being done on table grapes

By Luke Edwards

It's hard to go too far in Niagara without seeing row after row of vines, but there may yet be a huge untapped opportunity for the region's grape growers.

Realizing that potential is going to take a mixture of research and innovation in the lab as well as a rethinking of how things are done out in the field. Fortunately, staff at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre are up to the challenge. Visitors to the annual What's Growing On Here open house last month learned about some of the work VRIC is doing on table grape development, along with an overview of its unique tree park.

One of the keys to building up a specific crop is getting a variety that works well in local conditions. VRIC and other research institutions are well known for work developing brand new varieties of tomato plants or peach trees.

However, that comes with a cost: Time.

"It could be 20 years or longer before you bring it to market," said Amy Bowen, director of consumer, sensory and market insights at VRIC.

So instead of reinventing the grape, the centre went searching elsewhere. The organization employs a scout whose job is to find innovations elsewhere in the world that may have an application here in Canada.

"We bring their genetics here and see how they perform," Bowen said.

That effort has seen some successes already. In fact, readers may have already snacked on a grape brought to Ontario with the help of VRIC. The Jupiter grape arrived in Ontario grocery stores a couple years ago, promising "fragrant aromas, sweet and crunchy taste, and vibrant deep blue colour," according to the Ontario Tender Fruit website.



Rob Flack, Ontario's minister of agriculture, food and agri-business, speaks at the What's Growing On open house last month hosted at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. ~ Luke Edwards photo

Visitors to the open house had the chance to try some Jupiter grapes, which seemed to receive a positive reaction, including a strong endorsement from one visitor in particular.

"It's just like eating candy," said Rob Flack, minister of agriculture, food and agri-business. Flack took part in the open house, and said VRIC and Niagara as a whole is an important part of Ontario's agriculture sector.

"It's a really special part of our province and country," he said.

Flack said VRIC is one of 14 such research stations in the province, and they all provide a valuable service to Ontario and to Ontario's ag sector.

Work at Vineland on table grapes isn't just restricted to varieties. Bowen said when they

embarked on the project their grower soon learned there's a difference between growing table grapes and grapes for wine. Table grapes require a different structure - called an open gable - to produce grapes that meet consumers' desires.

The open gable structure allows for better airflow and sunshine to produce grape clusters growers and consumers are looking for.

With the Jupiter grape already in the market, Bowen said they're hopeful to get some more varieties out into the public soon. Two other varieties - Magenta and Timson - were offered at the open house. They received some mixed reviews.

Staff at the centre are also using other tools to measure and evaluate grapes, including genetics.

"We can tell how the grape is going to taste before the vine even produces it," said Nicole De Long, director of business and client development.

Work on table grapes is meant to give growers the tools and information needed to grow the produce, and it's up to the industry to decide how it's adopted. However, Amanda Moen said there's a huge opportunity, considering only three per cent of table grapes eaten by Canadians are grown domestically.

"There's a huge opportunity for growth there," Moen, senior business advisor, commercialization and intellectual property, said.

Visitors to the open house also learned about the work being done at the centre's TreeCulture Research Park, a unique outdoor research lab that's a relatively new addition to the campus. Essentially, the park has what amounts to dozens of massive pots, one metre deep and 4.5 metres in length and width, buried into the ground, with sensors to measure things like moisture and acidity. The project currently underway in the research park is seeing how they can

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→ Continued on page A18

rejuvenate soil that's been disturbed during large development projects and testing how best to plant urban trees in that soil to ensure their success.

Rhoda deJonge explained how the big piles of dirt one might see driving past a development project is basically dead and unusable for growing.

"We're testing the best ways of bringing it back to life," the director of plant responses and the environment said. And it just so happened the campus has a major project, the Prudhomme's development, right next door, giving them ample and easy access to soil samples.

Fortunately, there are some ways that are proving successful, while also taking care of other issues. By mixing the dead soil with source separated organics - the stuff residents put in their green bins - as well as aged bark fines - waste produced in the lumber industry - that soil can once again become a viable home to an urban tree.

Vineland staff are testing various mixtures and how two tree species react to see what works best. They picked a Freeman maple, a hardy species often used in urban settings, along with a specific type of tulip tree, which are becoming popular but are more fragile than their maple cousins.

Through the Greening the Landscape consortium, which brings together organizations throughout the chain, from nurseries to municipalities, to share challenges and develop solutions for urban tree projects. Lessons learned through the consortium and from the research park will be shared far and wide to help ensure trees in towns and cities are given every opportunity to survive.



VRIC is testing various aspects of table grape growing, including using open gable structures instead of the more familiar structures found in vineyards for wine grapes. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Visitors to the What's Growing On open house got to taste some of the table grape varieties Vineland Research and Innovation Centre is testing for local production. One of them, Jupiter, can already be found in grocery stores and seemed to be a hit for those who tried it.

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Where are the robots? ROI and trust remain barriers

Researchers at Vineland can help integrate technology, writes Brian Lynch

By Brian Lynch, PhD, Vineland's Director of Horticultural Technology Solutions

We know growers face significant challenges with cost and availability of skilled labour.

We've seen amazing technological advancements in computer, vision, AI and robotics coupled with ever-increasing capabilities and continuously decreasing component costs. And the AgTech ecosystem is adding new members offering all kinds of new technologies at an impressive rate. But, what we don't yet see are robots everywhere on farms, in orchards and in greenhouses. Mechanization has established a secure position in agriculture and industrial-style automation has a good presence in the pre-planting and post-harvesting space.

So why don't we see more robots? There are technological challenges when it comes to replacing or augmenting human labour. And a few companies have

solutions that seem suitable for performing many tasks.

So, where are the robots? In 2023, Vineland interviewed 26 stakeholders in the horticultural automation industry to better understand their perspective on challenges and opportunities. And we learned that the two main reasons for growers not adopting automation are return on investment (ROI) and trust.

ROI drives virtually all decision-making when it comes to technology adoption (with quality, convenience, environmental impact and other minor concerns sprinkled in). ROI is a balance between cost and performance - your technology needs to do the job well at a reasonable price.

We also hear that growers overwhelmingly see AgTech equipment as a capital expenditure. Ongoing monthly subscription payments are a hard sell (although not necessarily impossible). Technology has to be user-friendly, not subject to unending updates, as well as easily serviceable.

Trust is another major factor: trust that the technology does what it's supposed to, trust that



Robots and AI have jumped by leaps and bounds in many sectors, but there remains some hesitancy in some sections of the agricultural sector. ~ VRIC photo

it won't cause catastrophic harm to the crop, trust that it's not just another empty promise. Don't depend on a plethora of added-value features. Make your technology do one job really well and its ROI clearly defined accordingly. If it has added value then it should be exactly that, a bonus. Also, growers are pragmatic, they care about function and not form.

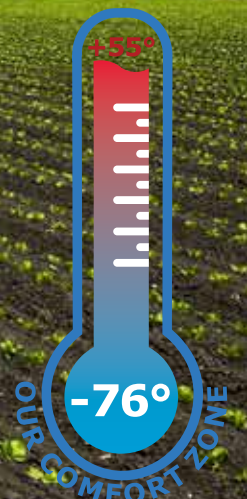
So where are the robots? Apart from some promising pilot projects, they're in the

same place they've been for quite a while: just around the corner. If you're developing new technology, then reach out to see how we can help boost your performance and validate your product. If you're a grower or distributor looking to filter out the noise, then reach out to see how we can help foster adoption to get the technology in your hands. Vineland is ready and able to help launch more technology into the market and ensure there's a solid impact for the industry. 🌱

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Winter squash a cozy companion for fall meals

Don't be fooled by its name, you don't have to wait until December to enjoy some locally grown winter squash.

Different varieties of the vegetable are now available, and with it, many different ways to enjoy it. Whether it's the classic butternut squash, acorn, or even spaghetti squash can be the star of a meal or a comforting side dish.

Here are a few ways to use up your winter squash, courtesy Foodland Ontario.



Spaghetti Squash with Kale and Sausage

Ingredients

- 1 Ontario Spaghetti Squash, (about 4 lb/2 kg), halved lengthwise and seeded
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) vegetable oil
- Salt and pepper
- 500 g Ontario Garlic Sausage, casings removed
- 2 large cloves Ontario Garlic, minced
- 1 Ontario Spanish Onion, chopped
- 8 cups (2 L) packed, torn Ontario Kale Leaves, coarse stems removed
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) sodium-reduced chicken broth
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) each shredded Ontario Cheddar Cheese, and panko
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) each bread-crumbs and fresh minced Ontario Parsley

Instructions

Place squash halves on parchment-lined rimmed baking sheet. Brush inside squash with half of the oil; season with salt and pepper. Place squash flesh side down. Roast in 375°F (190°C) oven until golden brown and tender, about 1 hour. Flip squash over and let cool.

Meanwhile, in Dutch oven, cook sausage over medium-high heat, breaking up with spoon until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer to bowl.

Reduce heat to medium. Add remaining oil, garlic, onion, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook until onion is softened and garlic is aromatic, about 3 minutes. Add kale, tossing to coat. Pour in broth; cover and cook

until kale is tender and broth has evaporated, about 5 minutes. Stir in sausage

Meanwhile, using fork, rake spaghetti-like strands from the squash, leaving the skin of the squash intact. Add squash strands to sausage mixture, stirring to combine. Divide mixture between squash halves.

In small bowl, combine cheese, panko and parsley. Sprinkle cheese mixture evenly over squash halves. Bake in 375°F (190°C) oven until golden brown, about 25 minutes.



Skillet Squash with Red Onion

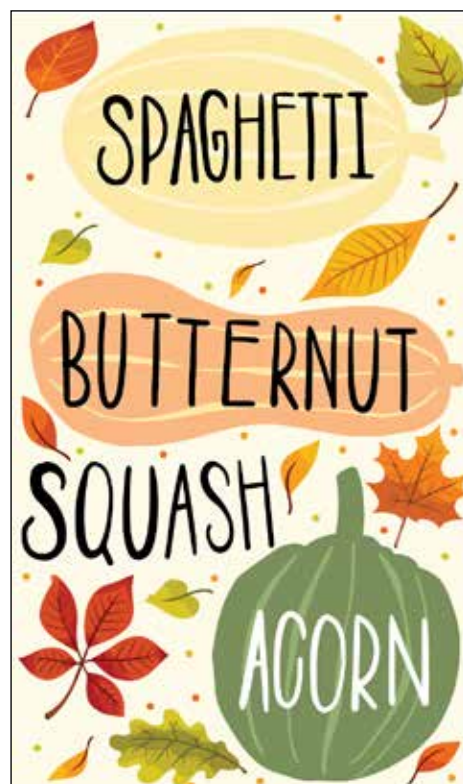
Ingredients

- 2 tbsp (25 mL) butter
- 1 small Ontario Red Onion, chopped
- 3 cups (750 mL) peeled, cubed Ontario Squash, such as Butternut
- 1 tsp (5 mL) granulated sugar
- Pinch each ground allspice, salt and pepper
- Fresh parsley leaves, torn

Instructions

In large nonstick skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add onion and cook until lightly softened, about 5 minutes. Add squash, cover and cook until squash is tender, about 20 minutes. Stir in sugar; season with allspice, salt and pepper to taste.

Just before serving, sprinkle with parsley.



Butternut Squash Lasagna

Ingredients

- 8 cups (2 L) 1/2-inch (1 cm) sliced, peeled Ontario Butternut Squash (about 1)
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) vegetable oil
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) ground nutmeg
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) butter
- 1 cup (250 mL) chopped Ontario Onion
- 3 cloves Ontario Garlic, chopped
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1-1/2 tsp (7 mL) salt
- 4-1/2 cups (1.125 L) Ontario Milk
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) chopped fresh Ontario Sage
- 1 cup (250 mL) grated Parmesan cheese
- 12 oven-ready lasagna noodles
- 2 cups (500 mL) shredded Ontario Mozzarella Cheese

Instructions

In large bowl, toss squash with oil and nutmeg. Place in single layer on large rimmed baking sheet. Bake in 400°F (200°C) oven for 30 minutes, or until tender. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F (180°C).

Meanwhile, in large saucepan, on medium heat melt butter. Add onion and garlic; cook for 3 minutes. Stir in flour and salt; cook for 1 minute. Gradually whisk in milk until smooth; add sage. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low and cook 5 minutes or until thickened, stirring frequently. Remove from heat and stir in Parmesan cheese.

In greased 13- x 9-inch (3 L) baking pan, place 3 noodles. Top with one-third of the squash. Spread one-third of the cream sauce over squash. Sprinkle one-third of the mozzarella cheese. Repeat layering twice.

Cover tightly with foil. Bake 30 minutes. Remove foil and bake for 25 to 30 minutes until top is golden and pasta is tender. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.



Squash Brownies with Chocolate Swirl Topping

Ingredients

Chocolate Swirl Topping:

- 4 oz (125 g) Ontario Cream Cheese, at room temperature
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) granulated sugar
- 1 Ontario Egg
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) vanilla
- 1 cup (250 mL) chocolate chips

Brownies:

- 1 cup (250 mL) mashed cooked Ontario Squash
- 1 cup (250 mL) packed brown sugar
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) each Ontario Buttermilk* and vegetable oil
- 2 Ontario Eggs, well beaten
- 1 tsp (5 mL) vanilla
- 1-1/4 cups (300 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp (5 mL) each baking powder and ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) each ground ginger and baking soda
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) each ground nutmeg and salt
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) toasted chopped nuts

Instructions

Chocolate Swirl Topping:

In small bowl, cream together cream cheese, sugar, egg and vanilla; stir in chocolate chips. Set aside.

Brownies:

In large bowl, stir together squash, brown sugar, buttermilk, oil, eggs and vanilla. In small bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, cinnamon, ginger, baking soda, nutmeg and salt; stir into squash mixture until combined. Stir in nuts. Spread into greased 13- x 9- inch (3.5 L) pan.

Drop heaping tablespoons of chocolate swirl topping over batter. Swirl into batter with knife. Bake in 350°F (180°C) oven for 35 minutes or until tester comes out clean. Let pan cool on wire rack. When cool, cut into squares.

***Note:**

If buttermilk is unavailable, combine 1 tsp (5 mL) vinegar with milk and let sit 10 minutes. 🌿

Erland Lee Museum a celebration of women's rights

Family became a major dairy producer in Stoney Creek, helped create Women's Institute

By Luke Edwards

As a former colony of the British Empire, there are many traditions here in Canada whose roots are traced back to the other end of the Atlantic.

However, there's at least one tradition that has gone the other way, and every now and then Aubrey Whittaker surprises a Brit with that little piece of knowledge.

That's because - unlike what many in the United Kingdom believe - in fact, it was at a kitchen table in a farmhouse atop the escarpment in present day Stoney Creek that a couple prominent families hammered out the first constitution of what would become the Women's Institute.

"Most people think of it as a British organization," said Whittaker, the assistant curator of the Erland Lee Museum, which preserves the birthplace of the institute that was first created to share important knowledge to the area's rural women. That misconception is largely the result of its popularity in Britain, Whittaker said.

It was back in 1897 when Janet Lee and Christina Smith - along with their husbands, prominent businessmen Erland Lee and E.D. Smith - created the foundation for the organization that now spans the globe.

Education was something important to Janet, and something that would carry through the Lee family for generations. Before marrying Erland she was a teacher, and even following their marriage Erland encouraged his wife to continue teaching informally, a testament to the couple's progressive views for the time.



The table where Janet Lee, with the help of husband Erland, E.D. and Christina Smith, and Adelaide Hoodless, wrote the constitution for what would become the Women's Institute. ~ Luke Edwards photos

A member of the Farmer's Institute, Erland invited Adelaide Hoodless to speak at a meeting. Hoodless became an advocate for educating new mothers after she lost her own son to the "summer complaint," an illness that could have come from spoiled food, when he was only 14 months.

"It went to a very unreceptive male audience, but the women of the families who were invited absolutely loved to hear her speak," Whittaker said.

The Lees wanted to have Hoodless back to speak again, but the Farmer's Institute suggested it might only be appropriate to have her back for the next ladies night.

Instead, they took things a step further, organizing a separate night for Hoodless to speak.

"On Feb. 19, 1897 Erland and Janet got into their family sleigh in the middle of winter and hand

delivered 100 invitations to local women," Whittaker said.

A couple weeks later, they wrote the constitution for the Women's Institute.

While that's a significant enough moment in its own right, the Lee family's story is bigger.

Their ancestors include ties to the founding fathers of the United States, as well as one member who was kidnapped by pirates, and ended up in slavery when his parents refused to pay the ransom.

James Lee, who settled in the area not far from the museum, died when an ax his son John was swinging flew off the handle and hit James in the head. Another relation, Mary Osborn, is perhaps the first woman executed in Canada for murder, when she and her lover George Nemiers conspired, and eventually succeeded after a few botched attempts, to kill her husband Bartholomew.

Even the way the Lees acquired the land they'd later build the

farmhouse on is shrouded in a bit of mystery. Enoch Moore owned the land, lots 14 to 17, but went missing.

"He went down to New York to do some business, and he was never seen again," said Whittaker.

"They (the Lees) were technically squatting on this land for 40 years until 1848 when the Canadian government declared Enoch legally dead."

Eventually farming about 500 acres of land, the Lees became one of the most prominent farming families in the area. Milking their Jersey cattle, they would sell butter and cream, taking it down to the nearby train station to be shipped to stops along the Toronto, Hamilton, Buffalo line.

They also grew concord grapes. Erland was a life-long friend of E.D. Smith, and the two became business partners as Smith's jam empire grew.

→ **Continued on page A23**



The Lee family were prominent farmers in the Stoney Creek area.



A wooden jam spoon E.D. Smith used to taste his jam creations.

→ **Continued from page A22**

Today, the museum offers several nods to that farming history. A tour through the house uncovers old tools like a cherry pitter, grape skinner, Janet's horse riding gear, as well as dandelion colouring that was used to up the price they could charge for their cream. Sometimes the cream the cows produced would lose its colouring, which meant the farmers would get a lower price.

"People would add a little bit of dandelion colouring to make it look a little more yellowy," Whittaker said.

Outside the home in the nearby carriage house is the sleigh the Lees used to deliver those invitations in 1897, as well as some other antique farming tools and some tributes to the Women's Institute. For years it was a key organization that taught rural women important lessons on

food preparation, cleanliness and home sciences.

The institute would later take on an advocacy role, fighting for women's rights.

Today, branches exist across the globe.

In time the Lee family would move away from farming and ultimately sell the home after Frank Lee died in 1966. Whittaker said the family left a legacy of progressive thought, education, and women's rights.

The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario owns and maintains the Erland Lee Museum. It's open for tours on Fridays and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., as well as by appointment. The museum also hosts special events throughout the year. For more information visit erlandleemuseum.ca.

For more information on the women's institute, visit fwio.on.ca.



Though wine wasn't a big part of their operation - E.D. Smith's wife opposed drinking alcohol - the Erland Lee Museum does have some antique winemaking equipment. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Aubrey Whittaker is the assistant curator at the Erland Lee Museum in Stoney Creek.



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History made at 89th Prince of Wales Stakes

By Luke Edwards

The horse's moniker Vitality turned out to be an apt name, not just since it showed some pep to beat the field at the Prince of Wales Stakes, but also for the jolt of energy it gave to the first Indigenous trainer to ever have one of their horses win the historic race.

"I feel like I could pick you all up," a jubilant Harold Ladouceur told a crowd of reporters and track officials following the 89th running of the Prince of Wales Stakes.

Ladouceur, a member of the Moosomin and Kikino Metis settlements, is believed to be the first Indigenous trainer to win the second leg of the OLG Canadian Triple Crown.

"I'm so proud to be Indigenous. I'm just a kid from tiny little Lac la Biche, but I feel like I've joined a very elite group, and to do that as an Indigenous man, it feels amazing."

As he walked down to the oval following the win, Ladouceur pumped his fists in the air, embracing everyone he came across. Even following the initial excitement, the trainer could hardly keep his feet on the ground. At the same time, he offered his thanks and appreciation to everyone.

"I feel the love, thank you," he said.

Vitality was a bit of a surprise winner, with three other horses favoured to win. That included heavy favourite Midnight Mascot, which struggled early and couldn't make up enough ground on the far turn to be a contender. Pierre, another favourite, dropped back after a strong start.



Harold Ladouceur became the first Indigenous trainer to have one of their horses win the Prince of Wales Stakes. ~ Luke Edwards photo

Jockey Jose Campos said he knew Vitality was a nice horse to ride.

"So going in, I just listened to everything the trainer told me, and tried to keep that in mind," he said.

This year's Prince of Wales Stakes was the second largest in terms of wagering, falling just shy of last year's record setting performance. Still, wagering for the 11-race day topped \$3 million, with more than \$700,000 wagered on the Stakes race alone.

The three-year-old Vitality by Street Boss out of Belissimo was bred by Adena Springs

for owners Stronach Stables, and returned \$20.10 for the win.

Jockey Justin Stein also had a memorable day, winning back-to-back \$100,000 Ontario Sired Heritage Series Stake races, winning the Rondeau Bay Stakes atop Frac Amour, which was trained by Julie Mathes, and following that up with a win in the Lake Erie Stakes, atop Junior Hot Sho, trained by John Ross.

The Fort Erie racing season isn't quite over. Races continue on Mondays and Tuesday through Oct. 22. For more information, visit forterieracing.com. 🍀



The Fort Erie Race Track's signature event, the Prince of Wales Stakes, took place last month.

AgRobotics Demo Day gives look at future of farming

By Jeff Helsdon

The latest adaptations to help farmers were on display at the AgRobotics Demo Day at the Ontario Crops Research Station in Simcoe recently.

Kristin Obeid, group co-chair, said she was approached by Chatham-Kent farmer Chuck Baresich, saying he had two robots he wanted to experiment with.

"I jumped in with two feet since everybody should have a chance to participate," she said.

Baresich, who has since started Haggerty Robotics, pointed to the labour shortages in the agriculture sector and the growing number of herbicide-resistant weeds as problems facing the industry.

"I didn't want to wake up in 20 years and have a problem," he said.

Many of the robots are currently built in Europe and the United States, but Baresich questioned why they couldn't be built in Ontario.

"There are times it makes sense to take existing technologies and adapt them," he said. "There are also times we can take a brainchild from Ontario and make a new product."

After Baresich approached the ministry in 2021, the group was formed and began to look into the possibility of using robots and artificial intelligence (A.I.) to solve many problems growers are facing. At the end of the first year, the group was working with five different robots. That number has now grown to 20 different robot models working in the province, some on farms and others in research trials, with a goal of reaching 30 by the end of the year. The group's membership has expanded to over 180 people from all over the world.

The group now includes representation from: OMAFA, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, municipal governments, Haggerty AgRobotics, University of Guelph, McMaster University, University of Waterloo, Conestoga College, Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA), Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario (FVGO), Holland Marsh Growers Association (HMGA), Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers (OPVG), Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario (IFAO), Nortera, Korechi Innovations (Oshawa, Ontario), Nexus Robotics (Montreal Quebec), FarmDroid (Denmark), Naio Technologies (France) and Raven Industries (Canada and U.S) and many more.

The group's purpose is not to sell robots, but to provide input on how to improve the machines to



An AgXeed AgBot 2-055W3, one of the devices on display at the recent AgRobotics Demo Day. ~ Jeff Helsdon photos

work better in Ontario production systems. The group has been really successful at building cross functional teams and finding the right partners to solve important problems growers are facing.

The AgRobotics Demo Day attracted a lot of attention, with more than 170 people registered.

Here are the products displayed:

AgXeed AgBot 2-055W3

This Netherlands-built tractor is an autonomous Diesel that will spray, mow and flail. At the Simcoe day it was set up to work in an orchard, but has many other uses.

The Agbot will mow and spray at the same time. Not only will it spray, but it will spray intelligently. It can read chlorophyll levels to aid with spot spraying, judging where spray is needed and where it isn't.

"We are using this technology to be more efficient with our spraying," said Sean Bartlett of Provide Agro.

Intelligent spraying also comes into play with spraying apple trees. The ag bot can spray different volumes for individual trees, dependent on the development stage of the apples.

The tractor has a camera on it so the operator can remotely see what it is doing. For instance, if there was a bin left in the row, the operator could access the camera to see what stopped the machine. This works in conjunction with Lidar that will scan what's in front of the unit.

If there are problems, the company can access the unit over GPS for diagnostics.

A 100-horsepower tractor plus a sprayer unit is \$375,000. Bartlett

said the uses are much broader, and it can be used for many things a tractor can.

"The idea is to utilize it for as many things as you can for that payback," he said.

Crop Tracker App

This neat smart phone app will use Lidar on an Iphone Pro to measure apple size and count. It will give an average size and count per tree.

The app is free to members of the Ontario Apple Growers or Ontario Tender Fruit Association.

Launched in February by a Kingston company, the app is constantly being improved and is already on version 9.

Augean Robotics Burro

The Burro reflects well on its namesake, which was a pack

animal. This robot is basically a flat platform used for harvest assistance, with the addition it can mow. Security cameras can also be put on it and a bird banger added.

The Burro is available in three sizes, with the cost varying from \$21,000 for the smallest and \$33,000 for the largest.

The main function is fruit pickers can have the unit trail them as they harvest to hold the fruit. When the bins or baskets are full, the operator presses a button and the unit travels to the staging location for unloading.

This unit uses GPS for navigation and is battery powered. The battery life is eight to 10 hours, and the unit can be programmed to go to the charging unit at night.

VitiRover

→ Continued on page A26

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AgRobotics Demo Day gives look at future of farming

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The VitiRover is a robotic lawnmower that can cut 10 acres over a two-week period. It will recognize areas with longer grass that grows faster and will cut those areas more often.

This \$12,000 robot is solar powered. The battery lasts eight hours and then the unit returns to the docking station to charge.

Harvest Corp Technologies asparagus harvester

This unit, built in Tillsonburg, will harvest asparagus by height or girth. It uses cameras to judge the spears, making instant decisions if an individual spear will be harvested, cut and dropped if it's deformed or left to grow.

A powerful vision system and AI learning are at the centre of deciding what spears are cut. An oscillating cutter is used to cut, then a gripper puts the spears on a conveyor to a bin.

Company president Steve Spanjers estimated the robot to be 95 per cent accurate of what it picked and left. He suggested one person could go behind the machine to get what the machine missed.

Currently, the harvester is powered by a Yamaha generator. A battery and solar system are being examined for the future.

Cost is about \$400,000 for a four-row machine. It's estimated the payback on the machine will be 3.5 years based on a production cost of 26 cents per pound, and this



The Burro can help with harvest assistance. ~ Jeff Helsdon photos

may be able to be lowered through ACI grants.

Vivid Machines Vivid X Vision System

This is a crop load management system for thinning, farm management, and yield. The Vivid X Vision System mounts onto any farm equipment and provides real time data and predictions for every plant. It will improve orchard management

with up-to-date maps detailing precise tree counts, varieties, and rootstocks, while monitoring blossoms, fruit development, and yield at the block and section level.

Picketa System

This company's tissue sample analyzer takes a job that required mailing in samples and turns it into instant plant tissue data in the field. This information is vital in assessing

the plant health and if more nutrients are needed to be applied.

The analysis is performed using the LENS system and provides immediate results. The software will track the results and provide trends that can be assessed.

Naio Technologies Oz

Targeted at market gardeners, this French-made electric tractor is

→ Continued on page A27



Crowds watch as the VitiRover is demonstrated.

→ **Continued from page A26** versatile and can perform a variety of functions, including hoeing, weeding, seeding, spraying and transporting plants or end product for a base area. It costs \$60,000, and is completely automatic.

Korchi Innovations

This Ontario company is in the process of developing this tractor with the working group. Its stage of development is early enough that the company does not want photos released of it.

Working with the University of Guelph, it can identify weeds in the field. For example, if a grower identified a problem with lima beans that were contaminating a portion of the field, the tractor can identify the weed density with cameras and a decision can be made about how much herbicide is applied in different sections of the field. If the weed problem becomes too severe, a decision can be made to avoid harvesting an area with too much weed contamination.

Obeid explained where humans typically only scout 10 per cent of the acreage previously for weeds, this technology makes it possible to scout 100 per cent of the fields.

“That’s what this is about is doing the farming process better,” Haggerty said. 🌱



Harvest Corp Technologies asparagus harvester ~ Jeff Helsdon photos



Naio Technologies Oz, a French-made electric tractor.

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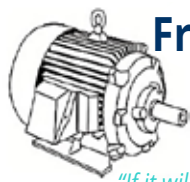
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