



NEWS RELEASE

Step Inside History: Niagara-on-the-Lake Court House Opens for the Summer

For Immediate Release

May 9, 2025

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is proud to invite residents and visitors to step inside the iconic Niagara District Court House for a unique and engaging experience that brings local history to life.

Beginning Friday, May 9, and continuing to Monday, October 13, the Court House will open its doors every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 12:00 to 4:00 p.m. The public and media personnel are invited to attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday, May 16, at 11:30 a.m. in front of the Court House to celebrate this special occasion. The ceremony will feature guest speakers and self-guided tours of the building. Additionally, a new NOTL Ambassadors seasonal kiosk will be unveiled, built by Niagara College School of Trades with input from the Municipal Heritage Committee Members.

This initiative demonstrates the Town's continued commitment to Council's Strategic Plan Pillar, "Vibrant & Complete Community," with a focus on enhancing and strengthening community partnerships. The success of this initiative is made possible through the dedicated collaboration of our valued partners, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake, the NOTL Ambassadors, and the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre, whose contributions have been instrumental in expanding public access to the Court House and enriching the visitor experience.

Visitor Experience

During open hours, guests will be welcomed by a NOTL Ambassador and invited to step inside the historic Court House to enjoy a self-guided experience.

Visitors can:

- Explore the preserved interior spaces, with access permitted within designated areas;
- Discover the building's fascinating past through engaging historical displays and printed materials;



- Access additional information via QR codes linking to multilingual digital web content.

This initiative offers a meaningful opportunity for the public to engage with one of Niagara-on-the-Lake's most recognizable heritage landmarks. Mark your calendars and get ready to experience the Court House!

For more information, visit <https://www.notl.com/courthouse>

About the Court House:

Standing proudly in the heart of downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Court House is a cherished historic landmark with a dynamic past. Constructed between 1846 and 1848 in the Neoclassical Revival style by architect William Thomas, it served as the Niagara District's County Seat until 1862. After the court's relocation to St. Catharines, a major economic loss for the Town, the building adapted to numerous civic and cultural roles, including Town Hall, post office, fire hall, bank, factory, and theatre. Notable features include two grand courtrooms, a Speaker's Balcony overlooking Queen Street, and a still-functional bell tower. Stone-carved faces on the façade add a whimsical touch, their identities a mystery. The building became the birthplace of the Shaw Festival in 1962 and continues to host performances and events. Declared a National Historic Site in 1980, the Court House's exterior and parts of its interior are protected by an Ontario Heritage Trust Easement. A time capsule, sealed in 1981, awaits discovery in 2081, holding untold stories of this remarkable building's legacy.

Quotes:

"Since becoming Lord Mayor, I have been passionate about opening this historic building to the public. This space has witnessed centuries of stories, and on behalf of Town Council, we're thrilled to share them with the community and visitors alike. Thank you to our partners, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, Tourism NOTL, NOTL Ambassadors, the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre and Niagara College, for their collaboration in opening the Court House for the season." – **Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa**

"Opening the doors of the Court House is more than just a visitor experience; it's an invitation to walk through the chapters of the town's shared history. The Court House has long stood as a symbol of our cultural and architectural legacy, and Staff are proud to make it more accessible and bring people closer to the heritage that defines the community." – **CAO Bruce Zvaniga**

"We are delighted to welcome guests into the Court House, and encourage all visitors to stop by the Tourism NOTL office before departing to discover everything our town has



to offer. On behalf of Tourism NOTL, I wish to recognize our NOTL Ambassadors, whose dedication and service as volunteers play a vital role in creating a warm and informed experience for our guests.” **Director of Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake Kathy Weiss**

“The new NOTL Ambassadors seasonal kiosk will act as a focus point to welcome visitors and to help them discover more of Niagara-on-the-Lake. It has been a true community project with input from the Municipal Heritage Committee Members and built by the Niagara College School of Trades.” - **NOTL Ambassadors**

“We are proud to be a part of the reopening of the historic Court House in Niagara-on-the-Lake, an enduring symbol of justice, community, and heritage. This building has been the seat of justice, local government, and business. It also witnessed the development of the two beloved cultural assets, the Shaw Festival and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum. It's reopening marks a renewed commitment to preserving our past while engaging with the future.” - **Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum CEO/Curator Sarah Kaufman**

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