

# 2021



 **GNCC**  
GREATER NIAGARA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# ANNUAL REPORT

# WHY THE GNCC?

Too often, businesses and entrepreneurs feel isolated and struggle to achieve their personal and business goals. We are here to help make your business better by providing you with networking, savings, marketing opportunities and a large audience to make it easy for you to power your business growth.

The GNCC is the voice of business. We impact public policy at all levels of government so that you can succeed and prosper in local and global economies. We are also members of the Ontario and Canadian Chambers of Commerce, which makes our voice even stronger. Our councils represent specific demographics and guide our programming to ensure Niagara achieves its economic and social best.

# ACCREDITATION



Excellence is Accreditation. It is the formal acknowledgement that the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce has been successfully evaluated against rigorous national standards of policy, service, and performance by the Chamber Accreditation Council of Canada (CACC).

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# VISION

Niagara to be at our economic and social best

# MISSION

With broad engagement, we advance the interests of our membership through advocacy and services, building prosperity for the people of Niagara

# VALUES



Forward-thinking



Non-partisan and principled



Inclusive, collaborative and respectful



Accountable and responsible



# CHAIR'S MESSAGE

COLLEEN FLEMING

"We cannot do it without you," said CEO Mishka Balsom five years ago at our Annual General Meeting. That message, shared when I first joined the GNCC Board, was very apropos for a Chamber, and it couldn't ring more true as we move into 2022 and reflect on 2021.

The pandemic restrictions are easing as I craft this message, but we are now entering a sixth wave of COVID-19. I believe our community is prepared, with 91% of eligible citizens having received at least one dose of a COVID vaccine, and we have demonstrated our willingness to work together to fight the pandemic. As a community, we mourn those lost to COVID-19. We have also witnessed a great deal of economic and emotional pain during this historical disruption of everyday life. Even as Niagara recovers and adapts, we are witnessing a growing humanitarian crisis in Europe. Again, the Niagara community is stepping up to support those in need; we are a caring and resilient community.

The GNCC could not have faced the challenge of 2021 without our members and sponsors. It was imperative to our successful advocacy that we had your voice informing our work. In response to the rapidly changing environment, the staff published the Daily Update. This publication became a 'must read' in Niagara, and our members told us they read it daily and trusted they were informed. GNCC advocated at the municipal, provincial and federal levels to influence COVID policy and gain financial support for our community. GNCC also made the time to advocate for long-term Niagara initiatives, such as an integrated transit system. Members realize the economic and social value of transit and appreciated Niagara collaborating on this issue.

GNCC could not have made it through 2021 without a dedicated and talented staff team, led by CEO Mishka Balsom. The workload was heavy and the stress high, but under Mishka's leadership we retained our staff and they delivered. I only have time to highlight a fraction of their contributions. The distribution of rapid tests in collaboration with Great Wolf Lodge was beyond

our normal Chamber mandate, but the staff embraced the work. The demand outpaced supply, so GNCC advocated that Niagara get its fair share. Another highlight was the staff's rapid adaptation to the virtual world. Our members participated in virtual events such as the Niagara Economic Summit, Women in Business Awards, and our Espresso Live Webinars.

And we could not have made it through 2021 without our highly dedicated board of directors. Although they were facing challenges in their work environment, they took the time to actively engage in the GNCC Board and committee meetings to serve the Niagara community. Their knowledge of the market and deep skills in their respective sectors infused the work of staff for optimal results.

As I finish my three years as board chair, I am optimistic about Niagara's future. We have learnt that we can build a healthy and prosperous Niagara if we work together.

Thank you. We certainly could not do it without you.



# CEO'S UPDATE

**MISHKA BALSOM**

Although the challenges of the pandemic shaped our lives throughout 2021, both professionally and personally, it also gave us further purpose to keep our vision at the forefront of all of our activities: Niagara at its economic and social best, even during very challenging times.

In the past two years, we were called upon to support you in different ways than we had before, especially in providing information and tools that ensured your continuous resilience, strengthening your operations, and tapping into new resources. Here are a few such services that our members have come to value:

- We expanded our array of affinity partners to help you save money, including extended insurance benefit programs, affiliate discounts and savings.
- Our Daily Updates, an end-of-day brief read by over 3,600 people, providing timely and relevant information about government policies, business news, and resources to help you run your organization.
- Although we were prevented from meeting in-person, your wish to connect virtually to learn from experts, to be inspired by speakers, to celebrate business successes, was at a record high.
- We executed a number of special projects, most noteworthy the distribution of over 120,000 free Rapid Antigen Test Kits to almost a thousand small and medium-sized businesses, and the extensive Shop Local initiative branded #NiagaraMyWay, providing critical marketing opportunities to businesses to help stimulate our local economy across the region.
- We met with many provincial and federal politicians to discuss how their governments and parties could further Niagara businesses interests, among them Canadian Conservative leader Erin O'Toole, Ontario Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Vic Fedeli, Ontario Liberal leader Steven Del Duca, Ontario NDP & Official Opposition leader Andrea Horwath, and Ontario Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism, and Culture Industries Lisa MacLeod.
- And above all, the steadfast advocacy at all levels of government for services and policies that would not only get organizations through the pandemic, but also support their ongoing success. We have quite a few advocacy wins, but most important among them is the integrated regional public transit commitment.

Last year, after extensive consultation with our members, board, and alumni, community partners, colleagues and advisory councils, we developed our 2022-2024 strategic plan. Throughout the process, paramount to any decision was the commitment to build prosperity for the people of Niagara. Our three key strategies are as follows:

- In our commitment to continuously deliver value to you, we will provide the most relevant programs and services so that businesses can prosper and connect to/network with new customers and partners
- Strengthen existing policy development and advocacy by introducing new ways to increase impact and value for members and community
- Invest in staff and talent development to support capacity building while at the same time strengthen our brand through targeted stakeholder collaboration and partnerships.

Lastly, we were honoured to be bestowed, for a third time, with the Accreditation with Distinction from the Chamber Accreditation Council of Canada for our governance and policy work.

As always, it is an honour to be entrusted with the vision of our organization. And even more, it is a privilege to have earned your trust and support. Thank you to our members, partners, volunteers, board and colleagues for your collective commitment to the GNCC and Niagara. We are better for it.



# LEADERSHIP

## EXECUTIVE



**CHAIR**  
Colleen Fleming  
C. Fleming &  
Associates



**VICE CHAIR**  
Noel Buckley  
Niagara Falls  
Convention Centre



**HONORARY TREASURER**  
Rob DePetris  
Wormald Masse Keen  
Lopinski LLP



**HONORARY SOLICITOR**  
Harry Korosis  
Lancaster Chown &  
Welch LLP

## BOARD



**Janice Arnoldi**  
Janice & Robin  
Digital Communications



**Lisa Benger**  
Walker Industries



**Todd Dougall**  
FreshCo



**Mohamad El-Kayed**  
Business Development  
Bank of Canada



**Dr. Andrew Gaudes**  
Goodman School  
of Business,  
Brock University



**Scott Glover**  
Meridian Credit  
Union



**Kevin Hooiveld**  
Book Depot



**Ron Hurst**  
Nitec Energy  
Services



**Emily Kovacs**  
Niagara Folk  
Arts Multicultural  
Centre



**Clayton Letourneau**  
NEXTNiagara



**Roseanne Morissette**  
Performance Auto  
Group



**Dr. Marc Nantel**  
Niagara College



**Rick Nero**  
Baker Tilly Niagara  
LLP



**Taylor Wilson**  
Colliers  
International  
Niagara Ltd.



# STAFF



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# BUSINESS COUNCILS

The Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce, in an effort to continuously improve its effectiveness, has specialized councils. The overall goal is to stay leading-edge in membership services and policy-focused work.

We will harness the experience, credibility, as well as the intellectual and leadership capacities of our council members to mobilize community stakeholders to support businesses and Niagara's prosperity.

## WOMEN IN NIAGARA (WIN) COUNCIL



**Mission:** To foster the growth and success of women in business in Niagara

**Purpose:** To provide strategic and tactical direction to support the Council's mission and strategic priorities. Responsibilities include identifying issues relevant to women in Niagara and providing strategic guidance to address these challenges and opportunities.


**2021 Chair:** Julie Rorison, Mayor's Office, City of St. Catharines

**Staff Liaison:** Corrina Massicotte, [corrina@gncc.ca](mailto:corrina@gncc.ca)

**Social Media:**  @GNCC\_WIN

 Women in Niagara

 WomenInNiagara

 womeninniagara

## NEXJNIAGARA COUNCIL



VISION: Seeing Niagara grow as a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous community where the NEXT generation can create, connect, collaborate and call home.

MISSION: To represent and amplify the voice of the NEXT generation in Niagara by creating opportunities for community engagement and empowerment.

2021 Chair: Clayton Letourneau, Custom Sign Lab

Staff Liaison: Corrina Massicotte, [corrina@gncc.ca](mailto:corrina@gncc.ca)

Social Media:  @NEXTNiagara

 NEXTNiagara

 NEXTNiagara

 @NEXTNiagara

## NON-PROFIT NIAGARA COUNCIL



The mission of the Non-Profit Council is to be a champion for Niagara's non-profit and charity sector by raising awareness of their economic and social impact on our community, cultivating stronger partnerships between the non-profit and for-profit sectors, and advancing policies impacting community wellbeing.

2021 Co-Chairs: Lori Beech, Bethlehem Housing & Support Services and Adam Durrant, City of Hamilton

Staff Liaison: Hugo Chesshire, [hugo@gncc.ca](mailto:hugo@gncc.ca)

## GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COUNCIL



The Government Affairs Council supports the GNCC's mission of influencing government and public institutions on behalf of business by monitoring, anticipating, and advising on governmental and political matters at all levels wherever and whenever they affect Niagara business.

2021 Chair: Michael Ras, Counsel Public Affairs

Staff Liaison: Hugo Chesshire, [hugo@gncc.ca](mailto:hugo@gncc.ca)

Social Media:  @GNCCadvocacy

# ADVOCACY

## FEDERAL

### ACHIEVED DIRECTIVES:

Extended CEBA loan deadlines



Delayed CEWS/CERS tapering



Called for a border reopening plan with the Hamilton Chamber and Buffalo-Niagara Partnership, echoed shortly after by the Canadian Chamber



## PROVINCIAL

### ACHIEVED DIRECTIVES:

Called for the Government of Ontario to join the federal affordable childcare plan



Recommended that liquor delivery for restaurants and bars be made permanent



### NEARING COMPLETION:

In partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, advanced policy resolutions to address hospitality sector labour shortages, extending the CEWS for hard-hit sectors, incentivizing local tourism, and extending free rapid testing



Lobbied for reduced electricity rates and a cost-benefit economic analysis of time-of-use billing



## MUNICIPAL

### ACHIEVED DIRECTIVES:

Clarity and communication around local public health orders for business



Acted to preserve vital employment lands in Niagara from being converted to residential use



Advocated for regional transit amalgamation directly and through grassroots campaign



Lobbied for continuation of sidewalk patios for bars and restaurants



## FEDERAL

### ONGOING DIRECTIVES:

- Lobbied for increased housing start targets, financial incentives for people moving to low-cost-of-housing areas, multi-modal Seaway transport links and tourism promotion in the federal budget
- Fast-track immigration for skilled immigrants, especially to areas with significant job vacancy rates and slower-than-average population growth
- Recommended the deferral of the excise escalator tax
- Produced a federal election platform asking for more financial support to affected industries, modernizing the tax system, increasing the GST/HST threshold, offering a social safety net for entrepreneurs, investing in transport infrastructure, and more

## PROVINCIAL

### ONGOING DIRECTIVES:

- Third round of small business grant funding, transparency, and an appeals process
- Support for businesses required to enforce mask bylaws and check vaccine status via grassroots email campaign
- Clarity on reopening plans, trigger metrics, and other data and decisions
- Advocated for more incentives for developers to build affordable housing
- Produced an arts sector support whitepaper in conjunction with local sector leaders
- Lobbied the Ontario Chamber to join us in calling for applied research funding at Ontario colleges to match levels seen in Quebec
- Delivered the Ontario Economic Report locally
- Advocated for provincial funding for any employee paid sick day policy

# ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES AND LEADERS HOSTED



Canadian  
Conservative leader  
**ERIN O'TOOLE**

Ontario Minister of  
Economic Development,  
Job Creation and Trade  
**VIC FEDELI**



Ontario Liberal leader  
**STEVEN DEL DUCA**

Ontario NDP &  
Official Opposition  
leader  
**ANDREA HORWATH**



Ontario Minister of  
Heritage, Sport, Tourism,  
and Culture Industries  
**LISA MACLEOD**

# COVID-19 AND DIRECT SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

## RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING KIT PROGRAM



The GNCC launched its free rapid antigen testing kit program for businesses in May, 2021. This program is delivered in partnership with the COVID-19 Rapid Screening Initiative from the Ontario Chamber Network and with Great Wolf Lodge, our distribution partner.

Any business or non-profit with fewer than 150 employees can access the program and obtain free testing kits for their workforce.

The testing kits have helped identify many asymptomatic cases before they could cause workplace outbreaks.

**120,000+**

testing kits distributed throughout Niagara

**900+**

participating businesses and organizations

## DAILY COVID-19 / BUSINESS UPDATE



Through the Daily Updates, the GNCC delivers important business news in a timely manner.

We disseminate news and information we feel will be important to businesses, plus member updates, special offers, breaking news, and more.

**3,500**

unique subscribers and continues to grow

**247**

editions in 2021

**190,366**

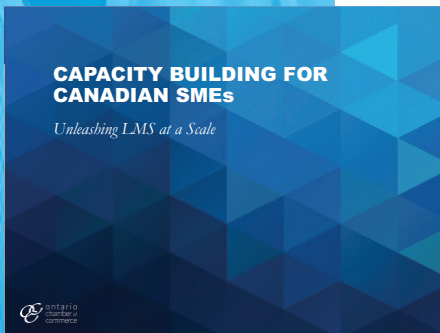
total opens

**23,622**

links clicked

# PROJECTS & INITIATIVES

## CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CANADIAN SMEs: Unleashing Learning Management Systems at Scale



In partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Magnet, and the Future Skills Centre we developed a Learning Management System (LMS) aimed at offering small to medium sized businesses (SME's) access to curated training content as well as a host of resources to support their recruitment and skill development needs.

## HACKATHON REPORT



The Hackathon Report lays out a path to Ontario's "she-covery" in Niagara by examining data on the gendered labour market impacts of the pandemic and offering policy solutions to confront both immediate and longer-term challenges. Throughout this, an intersectional lens is essential to ensure no women are left behind.

Read the full report at [gncc.ca/councils/women-in-niagara/the-hackathon/](https://gncc.ca/councils/women-in-niagara/the-hackathon/)



## STUDENT WORKPLACE PLACEMENT PROGRAM

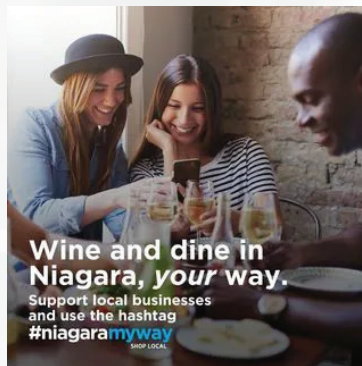


In Partnership with Magnet and the Talent Opportunity Program (TOP) to connect chamber members to the Magnet platform, a digital social enterprise at Ryerson University. Through Magnet, businesses can connect with new talent, access business growth opportunities and tools to navigate the impacts of a changing labour market and the COVID-19 pandemic.

## NIAGARA MY WAY

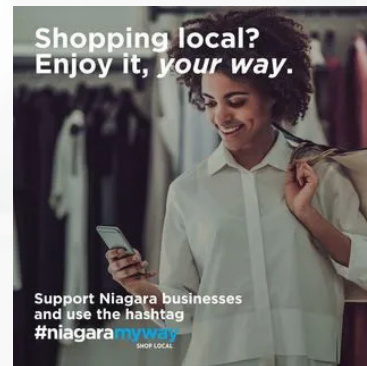


The Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce launched #NiagaraMyWay, a campaign designed to encourage people to shop locally to support local businesses of every sector – retail, seasonal, eateries, wineries – and more.



**358,000**

people reached via social media



**2,615,000**

impressions generated

# SIGNATURE EVENTS

## STATE OF THE CITY ST. CATHARINES



The Mayor of St. Catharines Walter Sendzik shared his plans for the future of St. Catharines and its role in the Niagara Region with the business community.

## STATE OF THE REGION



Regional Chair Jim Bradley delivered a keynote address to the Niagara business community which was followed by an expert panel discussion on the issues Niagara faced in 2020 and opportunities in 2021.

## NIAGARA BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



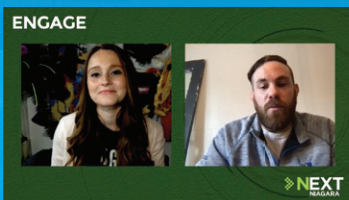
Over 35 finalists were recognized at the 17th Annual Niagara Business Achievement Awards. The Bestowed Award Recipients were businesses that have used creative and original approaches within their organization to improve planning, response and recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 and/or significant contributions to the community to aid in our recovery. They are: Community Leadership Award: Niagara Industrial Association; Entrepreneur of the Year: Geoff Dillon, Dillon's Distillery; Innovative Leader Award, Dr. Yousef Haj-Ahmad, Norgen Biotek.

## WOMEN IN BUSINESS AWARDS



The Women in Niagara Council (WIN), held the annual Women in Business Awards (WIBA) to honour the outstanding achievements of Niagara's leaders in business and non-profits. Over 40 finalists were recognized at the 20th annual event. General Motors' Carolyne Watts was presented with a lifetime achievement award in recognition of her trailblazing career in automotive manufacturing and her support of women in STEM careers.

## ENGAGE: A YOUNG PROFESSIONAL'S CONFERENCE



The NEXTNiagara Council launched an annual conference. ENGAGE was created as a day for young professionals across all industries and sectors to learn, connect, and grow with like-minded individuals across Niagara and beyond. The council worked to provide engaging sessions and conversations about personal, professional, and community growth.

## NIAGARA ECONOMIC SUMMIT



Niagara's ninth annual economic summit, which was hosted by the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce on the morning of November 2nd, once again gathered great minds from across the country in search of solutions for Niagara and ways to grow economically and socially. The keynote address from BDC's chief economist Pierre Cleroux outlined the economic situation for Niagara and how it compared to the country, followed by expert panels.



# COMMUNICATIONS

## IMPRESSIONS — WHAT OUR VISITORS SEE

**483%**

increase in Facebook impressions

**676%**

increase in Instagram impressions

**6,704,895**

impressions across all channels

**234.8%**

increase across all channels

**97,119**

users visited our website

**225,698**

pages viewed on our website

## ENGAGEMENTS — WHAT OUR VISITORS DID

**46,918**

likes, comments and shares across social media platforms

**8,224**

links clicked from social media posts

**675,491**

views of video content across all platforms

**3,030%**

increase in video viewership

**128,338**

website sessions

**29,550**

website searches

## MEMBER EMAIL — WHAT OUR VISITORS READ

**47%**

of all readers are highly engaged and interact with our emails

**6,587**

subscribers across GNCC channels

**48.4%**

female subscribers

**30.3%**

aged 55-64

# LONGEST SERVING MEMBERS

## 10+ UNINTERRUPTED YEARS

13th Street Winery  
Advanced Office Solutions AOS  
All-Source Heat Treating Inc.  
Anfra-Tile & Stone  
Art's Tool Sales Ltd.  
b4 Networks  
Beatties  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of North & West Niagara  
Big Red Markets  
Boyce Dentistry Professional Corporation  
Boys & Girls Club of Niagara  
Brand Blvd. Inc.  
Brian's On Fourth Avenue  
Brock University – Goodman School of Business  
Business Builders Club of Niagara  
C.R. Smith Financial Services Inc.  
Canadian Tire Bank  
Carousel Players  
CEE Green  
Central Industrial Supply  
CIBC - Fairview Mall Banking Centre  
CIBC - Lake & Lakeshore Banking Centre  
CIBC - Niagara & Scott Banking Centre  
CIBC - Ridley Heights Banking Centre  
CIBC - The Pen Banking Centre  
CIBC Small Business  
Citrus Boutique Inc.  
The Club at White Oaks  
CMI Heavy Industries  
Cobblestone Gardens Retirement Residence  
Computan Ltd.  
Coppola's Ristorante & Banquet Facility LTD  
Credit Bureau Services Canada  
DDL & Co.  
Deloitte LLP  
Economic Development & Tourism Services (EDTS)  
Elio's Foot Comfort Care  
Employment Solutions  
Enns Cabinetry Inc.  
Fascination Dance Studio  
Frank Drasnin, CA  
Front Row Sports  
Gales Fuels  
Gowling WLG (Canada) LLP

Growth Associates  
H2Only Inc  
Heatherwood Retirement Residence  
Helen's Delicatessen  
Henley Honda  
Herb Lodde & Sons Roofing Ltd.  
Hernder Estate Wines  
Hotel Dieu Shaver Health & Rehabilitation Centre  
Ideal Plumbing & Heating  
Inniskillin Wines Inc.  
Innovate Niagara  
Jackson-Triggs, Niagara Estate  
Johnny Rag  
Jolanta Bula Legal Professional Corporation  
Ken's Salvage Co. Ltd.  
Kenneth McGowan Financial  
Knight Archives  
KPMG LLP  
Lakeshore Chiropractic Group  
Lancaster Chown & Welch LLP  
Larry's Rentall Inc.  
Linzel Distributing  
Lord Durham Rare Books  
Lost 'N' Found Yoga  
Mac Outpost  
Magiclean Services Inc.  
Markland Property Management Inc.  
McGowan Office Interiors  
Mentor Safety Consultants Inc.  
Mentor Safety Consultants Inc.  
Meridian Credit Union - Corporate Office - St. Catharines  
Merit Contractors Niagara  
Modern Landfill Inc. (Modern Corporation, Canada)  
Morison Insurance Brokers Inc.  
Mountainview Homes  
National Bank Financial Wealth Management  
Niagara Centre for Independent Living  
Niagara District Airport  
Niagara Falls Convention Centre  
Niagara Granite & Marble Ltd.  
Niagara IceDogs Hockey Club - OHL  
Niagara Regional Literacy Council  
Niagara Skilled Trades Academy  
Niagara Training & Employment Agency  
Nitec Energy Services Inc.

Ontario Chamber of Commerce  
Ontario Craft Wineries  
Ontario Power Generation (Niagara)  
Patrick's CO2  
Pen Storage  
PenFinancial Credit Union - Fourth Avenue Branch  
PenFinancial Credit Union - Dorchester Road Branch  
PigOut Roasters  
PlanET Biogas Solutions Inc.  
Professional Cleaning Specialists  
Pure Non-Scents  
R2 Gaming Inc.  
The RAFT - Resource Association For Teens  
Rankin Construction Inc.  
Rankin Construction Inc.  
RE/MAX Garden City Hendriks Team Realty  
Regional Doors & Hardware  
Reif Estate Winery  
Robertson Rentals  
Royal Niagara Golf Club  
Salon Alessandro  
St. Catharines Mazda  
St. John Ambulance  
The St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation  
Steadman Jewellers  
Stokes Seeds  
Systems Plus Inc.  
TAG Art Gallery  
Telecable.ca & Security  
Thorold Automotive Solutions  
Treadwell Farm to Table Cuisine  
Trilogen Technologies Inc.  
U-Cart Concrete  
Ukrainian Credit Union  
VandenDool Jewellers  
The Verge Insurance Group  
VinFirst Inc.  
Visiting Angels Inc.  
Walker Industries Holdings Limited  
Welland Avenue Car Wash Limited (WACW)  
Wellington Court  
The Wine and Beer Co.  
Yates Renovations Ltd.  
Young McNamara



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