



2024



GNCC

GREATER NIAGARA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ANNUAL REPORT

WHY THE GNCC?

The Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce (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.

The GNCC is a non-profit, non-partisan, membership-driven organization comprised of 1,300 business enterprises, civic organizations, educational institutions and individuals. Through broad engagement, we advance the interests of our membership with advocacy and services, building prosperity for the people of Niagara.

We are a place of connection and belonging—a community that understands your goals and is here to help you reach them. Through meaningful networking, strategic marketing opportunities, and access to a broad and engaged audience, we make it easier for you to grow, thrive, and feel supported every step of the way.

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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PURPOSE

Champion the Niagara
business community



CHAIR'S MESSAGE

STEPHEN OTTEN

As Chair of the Board, it is my pleasure to present this report on the GNCC for 2024. The GNCC is here to advance the interests of our membership through advocacy and services, building prosperity for the people of Niagara. As the overarching corporate entity for the St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce, the GNCC is proud to reflect a deep and enduring commitment to the Niagara region. We are rooted in a legacy of leadership and advocacy—supporting businesses of every size and sector, from family-run storefronts to international investors.

By building on the strengths, expertise, and networks established throughout our history, we remain steadfast in our commitment to championing Niagara's business community.

Our goal is to foster a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable region. While we honour our rich history, we also embrace the opportunities of today and tomorrow to better serve our members and the broader Niagara region.

As Chair of the Board, I'm proud to share this reflection on a year that tested our resilience and showcased the strength of Niagara's business community. Despite the new challenges that 2024 faced us with, such as high interest rates, rising input costs, inflation, a tight labour market and weakened consumer confidence, our members have adapted, persevered, and continued to move forward.

And Niagara continues to grow. This year, we celebrated a major economic milestone: Asahi Kasei's announcement of a \$1.6 billion battery separator plant in Niagara—a project that will bring hundreds of jobs and position our region as a key player in the green economy. It's the most well-known example of new investment and growth in our region, but it is by no means alone.

Niagara's appeal continues to grow. In a time of global uncertainty, more consumers and tourists are choosing Canada—and choosing Niagara—for its stability, authenticity, and quality of life. This creates real opportunity for our local economy, especially in tourism, culture, and for small businesses.

While challenges remain, our community is ready. With innovation, collaboration, and a clear vision for the future, we're not just weathering change—we're leading through it.

Thank you for your continued trust, partnership, and belief in what we can build together.

Stephen Otten



VISION

A thriving, inclusive and sustainable Niagara.

MISSION

Through broad engagement, we advance the interests of our membership with advocacy and services, building prosperity for the people of Niagara.

GUIDING VALUES

GROWTH-ORIENTED

We are forward-thinking and focus on continuous improvement by leveraging past insights and current evidence, while ensuring diverse perspectives guide our progress.

NON-PARTISAN

We remain unbiased, focusing solely on the best interests of our diverse members and community.

COURAGEOUS

We embrace challenges and take bold actions to lead our community forward.

COLLABORATIVE

We foster opportunities for every business and individual to thrive and excel, using evidence to support our direction and intention.



CEO'S UPDATE

MISHKA BALSOM

Dear Members and Stakeholders,

2024 marked a year of momentum and renewal for the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce. With a firm eye on the future, we finalized a new three-year strategic plan, set to launch in January 2025. This plan establishes a focused direction for the GNCC, grounded in purpose and driven by outcomes that matter to our members and the broader Niagara community.

At its core is our purpose: to champion the Niagara business community. Our vision is a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable Niagara, and our mission is to advance our members' interests through broad engagement, strong advocacy, and high-quality services—building prosperity for the people of Niagara.

This direction has already guided our work in 2024. We celebrated record-breaking attendance at GNCC events, reflecting our members' growing desire to connect, collaborate, and build strong business relationships. These gatherings showcased our region's dynamic and engaged business landscape.

The GNCC delivered high-impact advocacy, ensuring Niagara's priorities were clearly communicated at all levels of government. From transportation and housing to cross-border trade and workforce development, we advanced issues vital to Niagara's long-term economic strength and sustainability.

Our member services also expanded in scope and impact. We enhanced access to business tools, launched targeted programs, and increased outreach to underrepresented groups. Special initiatives focused on key issues and opportunities deepened engagement with sectors and communities.

We are grateful to our Board of Directors for their leadership and strategic guidance. Their vision and governance are essential to steering the Chamber's work and strengthening its reach.

We also appreciate the invaluable support of our advisory councils—NEXTNiagara, Women in Niagara (WIN), the Non-Profit Council, the Government Affairs Council, and the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Council—which shape and inform our work, ensuring the GNCC reflects the full spectrum of voices and priorities across our region.

As we prepare to launch our new strategic plan in 2025, we are committed to building on this foundation—growing in relevance, impact, and service. Together, we will shape a Niagara that is future-focused, collaborative, and resilient.

With sincere appreciation,

Mishka Balsom

LEADERSHIP & STAFF

DIRECTORS



Stephen Otten
Regional Vice
President, Business
Banking, Meridian
Credit Union
Chair



Noel Buckley
Niagara Falls
Convention Centre
Past Chair



Lisa Benger
MBA CHRL
Senior Vice President
Human Resources &
Health and Safety,
Walker Industries
Vice Chair



Rob DePetris
Tax Principal,
Wormald Masse
Keen Lopinski LLP
Honorary Treasurer



Dr. Marc Nantel
Vice-President -
Research & External
Relations,
Niagara College



Rick Nero
Partner, Baker Tilly
Niagara LLP



Kristen Nilsen
Academic Quality
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NEXTNiagara
Council Chair



Bruce Peever
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Canada Public Sector
Practice

STAFF



Mishka Balsom
CEO
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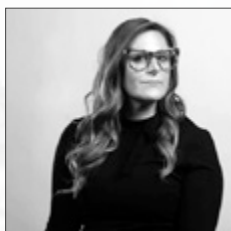
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Niagara Regional
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Honorary Solicitor



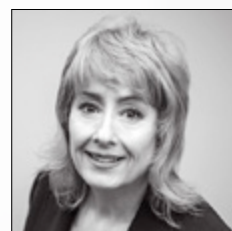
Janice Arnoldi
Social Media
Storyteller,
Strategist, Trainer
& Partner, Janice
& Robin Digital
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Todd Dougall
Owner, FreshCo



Jeremy Dunn
Commercial Vice
President, Hamilton
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Regional Marketing
Strategist,
Performance Auto
Group



Colleen A. Smith
CEO, FirstOntario
Performing Arts
Centre



Laura Tolhoek
Founder &
Principal Consultant,
EssentialHR



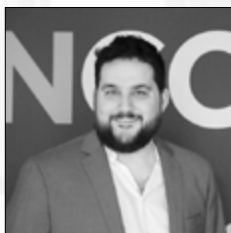
Taylor Wilson
Broker of Record,
Colliers International
Niagara Ltd.



Dr. Barry Wright
Dean, Goodman
School of Business,
Brock University



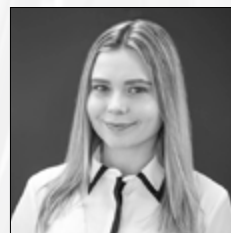
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BUSINESS COUNCILS & COMMITTEES

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

EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE

The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee works to foster a strong sense of belonging across the business community, ensuring that GNCC programs, events, and advocacy reflect the diverse voices, needs, and lived experiences of all stakeholders we serve.

Chair: Bruce Peever
Staff Liaison: Mishka Balsom, mishka@gncc.ca

WOMEN IN NIAGARA (WIN) COUNCIL



MISSION: To foster the growth and success of women in business in Niagara.

VISION: To empower women in Niagara to be at our economic and social best.

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

VALUES: Courageous, Collaborative, Respectful, Transparent, Inclusive

Chair: N'ora Kalb
Staff Liaison: Corrina Massicotte, corrina@gncc.ca

Social Media:  GNCC_WIN
 Women in Niagara
 WomenInNiagara
 womeninniagara

NEXTNIAGARA COUNCIL



MISSION: To Empower Young Professionals

VISION: To see Niagara grow as a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous community where the NEXT generation of leaders feel connected, represented, and engaged.

PURPOSE: To connect through networking opportunities, advocate for young professionals in the region, and engage in personal and professional development opportunities

VALUES: Inclusive, Equitable, Forward-Thinking, Committed

Chair: Kristen Nilsen

Staff Liaison: Corrina Massicotte, 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 sector. This will be accomplished by:

- Strengthening the capacity of the non-profit sector in Niagara
- Raising the profile and impact of the non-profit sector in Niagara
- Cultivating stronger partnerships between the non-profit sector and other GNCC members and the Niagara business community
- Informing and influencing GNCC policy relating to government directions that impact community well-being from both an economic and social perspective

Co-Chairs: Lori Beech and Adam Durrant

Staff Liaison: Hugo Chesshire, hugo@gncc.ca

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COUNCIL

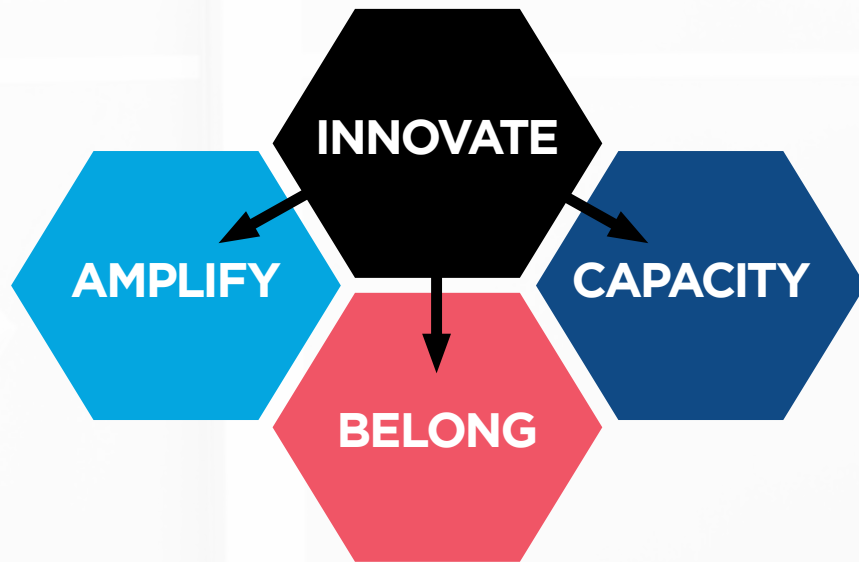


The Government Affairs Council supports the GNCC's mission of influencing government and public institutions on behalf of business by monitoring, anticipating, and advising on governmental and political matters at all levels wherever and whenever they affect Niagara business.

Chair: Damian Goulbourne

Staff Liaison: Hugo Chesshire, hugo@gncc.ca

STRATEGIC PILLARS: I-ABC



INNOVATE

Innovate with Purpose: Continuously innovate to meet the evolving needs of Niagara's business community. We will leverage technology, streamline our operations, and enhance our service offerings to ensure we provide the highest level of support. We aim to be a resource businesses rely on, offering unparalleled services and opportunities that drive prosperity and inclusivity across the region. We will also invest in the development of our internal team, providing them with the tools, training, and opportunities to innovate and contribute to our growth, fostering a culture where their creativity and expertise can flourish.

AMPLIFY

Amplify Voices: GNCC will continue to advocate fiercely for our members and partners, ensuring that their challenges are addressed, and their successes are celebrated. Through data-driven insights, GNCC will amplify the voices of all businesses across Niagara, using our trusted position to champion policy changes and create impact. In the face of rapid change, we will lead with courage—challenging the status quo, disrupting traditional ways when necessary, and finding innovative solutions that propel the region forward.

BELONG

Foster an environment of Belonging: We prioritize authentic and strategic connections among members, ensuring that every business has the opportunity to engage through a variety of platforms. We commit to making the Niagara business community a place where everyone can thrive. We will actively engage with and listen to equity-deserving groups, ensuring that our actions reflect the diverse voices of our region. By creating inclusive opportunities and promoting a sense of belonging, all businesses—as well as our internal team—feel valued, heard and supported.

CAPACITY

Build Capacity for the Future: GNCC will prioritize building the capacity of the organization, its team and members to better serve the Niagara business community. By embracing technology, data, and strategic resources, we will equip our staff and members with the tools, training and services they need to succeed. This includes modernizing member services, optimizing operational efficiency, and fostering innovation to meet the evolving needs of businesses across the region. Our goal is to ensure GNCC remains a resilient, resource-rich organization capable of thriving in an ever-changing environment.

“As a proud member of the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce, I can confidently say the value we receive is outstanding. The Daily Update email has become an essential part of my morning routine—it keeps me informed on everything from local business news to upcoming events and funding opportunities. It’s a quick, reliable way to stay connected with what’s happening in Niagara’s business community. The support, networking, and insight we get through our GNCC membership truly helps Specsavers stay engaged and ahead.”

— James Ranger, Specsavers

BUSINESS ADVOCACY

Executive Summary

In 2024, the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce led key advocacy initiatives across municipal, provincial, and federal levels, reinforcing its role as a champion for Niagara's business community. The GNCC advanced policy solutions that addressed infrastructure, housing, workforce development, trade, and cultural tourism. Through strategic partnerships, government engagement, and public policy submissions, the GNCC contributed to tangible progress on issues that shape Niagara's economic and social landscape.

INFRASTRUCTURE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The GNCC advocated for enhanced **commerce-enabling infrastructure**, including the expansion of the Niagara District Airport and year-round GO train service to Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, and Grimsby. The Chamber also supported critical investment in the South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Through **cultural tourism advocacy**, including Niagara Week, the GNCC called for a live arts tax credit, arts apprenticeship programs, and capital funding for cultural institutions. These efforts emphasized the sector's economic impact and long-term potential.

A key win was the **adoption of the Municipal Growth Framework** by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. This policy calls for a more balanced fiscal relationship between municipalities and upper-tier governments, enabling sustainable investment in infrastructure and services.

LABOUR & TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The GNCC supported reforms to **Post-Graduate Work Permit (PGWP)** eligibility, particularly for Niagara's winemaking and ECE sectors, and advocated for more sustainable funding for post-secondary institutions. Recommendations aligned with the Blue Ribbon Panel's findings were submitted to the provincial government.

HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT

GNCC-led OCC policy resolutions called for increased **student and affordable housing**, lifting tuition freezes, and expanding institutional funding. Locally, the Chamber engaged with St. Catharines on housing grants and planning policies, advocating for a data-informed, flexible Community Improvement Plan.



Federal Minister of Housing,
Infrastructure and Communities
SEAN FRASER

GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the year, the GNCC met with key decision-makers to elevate regional priorities. Notable figures included Hon. Sean Fraser (Housing & Infrastructure), Hon. Stan Cho (Tourism & Culture), Hon. Nina Tangri (Small Business), and Bank of Canada Deputy Governor Rhys Mendes, among others.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The GNCC participated in community consultations in Thorold and Niagara Falls and relaunched the Non-Profit Council (NPC). Internally, the GNCC strengthened its advocacy framework and is preparing a publicly accessible platform to communicate policy positions more effectively.

CROSS BORDER AND TRADE RELATIONS

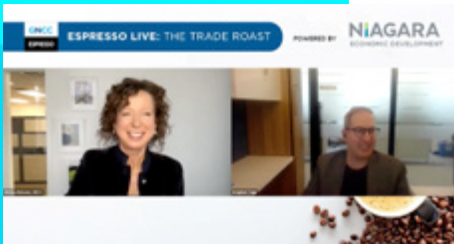
The GNCC helped establish a **binational chamber alliance** with partners in Windsor, Detroit, Hamilton, and Buffalo-Niagara. Priorities included border security, USMCA compliance, tariff reduction, and facilitating daily cross-border movement. Advocacy focus will evolve in 2025 in response to shifting U.S. leadership.

“We truly appreciate everything the Chamber does to support Destiny Copper and the Niagara business community.”

— Greg Hanna, Destiny Copper

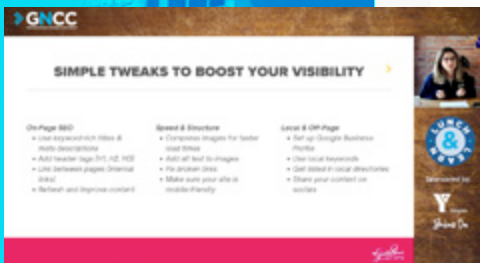
PROGRAMMING

GNCC ESPRESSO LIVE



Our routine webinars deliver timely and pertinent insights, featuring industry experts at the forefront of their fields.

LUNCH AND LEARN



Lunch and Learns are expert-led, bite-sized sessions designed to help businesses grow and thrive. Covering key topics from leadership to marketing, these events are open to all businesses—providing valuable learning opportunities, with free access for GNCC members.

MONTHLY CONNECTIONS



Monthly Business After Fives provide the business community with constant networking opportunities to stay connected, and Lunch & Learns provide a free opportunity to valuable education sessions.

TAILORED NETWORKING



GNCC members depend on our regular programming to foster connections and stay engaged. Year-round, we curate a diverse lineup of events including WINspirational Women, NEXTNiagara Socials, and the Niagara Business Leadership Series.

SIGNATURE EVENTS

STATE OF THE CITY ST. CATHARINES



Mayor Mat Siscoe delivered his second State of the City address as Mayor of St. Catharines to 360 attendees. The event featured a keynote followed by a fireside chat.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



The International Women's Day Celebration, hosted 475 attendees. The event panel featured Katharine Coons, Christine Burych, Brenda Heatley, Calissa Ngozi, and Iris Corrales focusing on mental health in the workplace.

Dr. Tapo Chimbanga, Founder of Future Black Female, received the 2024 IWD Award.

STATE OF THE REGION



The State of the Region address with Chair Jim Bradley hosted 400 attendees with the Chair's keynote followed by a fireside chat interview. The event was put on in partnership with Grimsby, Lincoln, West Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake Chambers of Commerce and the Niagara Association of Realtors, the Niagara Industrial Association, the Niagara Home Builders Association and the Niagara Construction Association.

CHAMBER CONNECTS



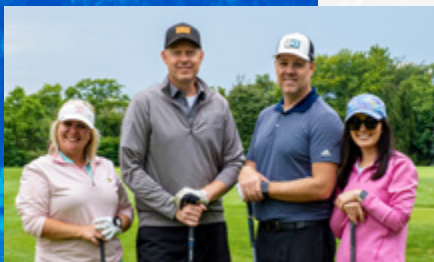
The 3rd annual Chamber Connects, hosted at Ridley College, is a celebratory event to show appreciation to members. Chamber Connects gave members a chance to showcase their products and services, network, feel appreciated, and just have a good time!

NIAGARA BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



54 finalists were nominated for the 20th annual Niagara Business Achievement Awards, with 320 in attendance. Bestowed Awards for people and businesses who have shown outstanding community leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurship, were presented to Gabriel DeSantis, Janice Thomson, Mark Sherk, and David Adames.

FALL CLASSIC GOLF TOURNAMENT



The 49th annual Fall Classic Golf Tournament, held at St. Catharines Golf & Country Club, consisted of an 18 hole full day of scramble golf, followed by a 19th hole reception, dinner and raffle draw. A day to give everyone a chance to network on the golf course was cut short for the first time ever, due to a tornado.

NEXTNIAGARA ENGAGE



The NEXTNiagara Council convened the 4th annual ENGAGE conference for young professionals hosted at Lookout Point Country Club. This year's conference was focused on affordable housing and also raised volunteer hours for non-profits.

SMALL BUSINESS MONTH



Small Business Month hosted at Club Italia featured insightful presentations on creating a better team, hiring tools, strategic marketing campaigns and business taxes. The full day symposium consisted of learning and constructive conversations geared to benefit small businesses in Niagara. The event was attended by 200 people.

NIAGARA ECONOMIC SUMMIT



The Niagara Economic Summit hosted at White Oaks Conference Resort & Spa featured a keynote from Prasad Puttagunta, Vice-President of Project Management with Asahi Kasei. The summit included panel discussions on global connectivity, innovation and sustainability, and the future of manufacturing.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS AWARDS



The Women in Niagara Council's 25th annual Women in Business Awards recognized 68 finalists, and bestowed the Ruth Unrau Legacy Achievement Award to Stephanie Thompson, with the Lifetime Achievement Award going to Michele O'Keefe.

COMMUNICATIONS

IMPRESSIONS — WHAT OUR VISITORS SEE

2.2M

Impressions across all social channels

72,000

Website visitors

2,360,000

Website impressions

ENGAGEMENTS — WHAT OUR VISITORS DID

1.4M

Likes, comments,
shares across all social
channels

24,758

Links clicked from
social media posts

26%

Engagement Rate

9,500

Website clicks

60%

Follower growth

MEMBER EMAIL — WHAT OUR VISITORS READ

2,800

GNCC Insider subscribers

4,000

Daily Update subscribers

“

I absolutely love the GNCC Daily Newsletter... You do a fantastic job—not just with the newsletter, but with all your events and initiatives. Thank you for your continued help and support to the Niagara Region!”

— John Lally, Lally Homes



“I’m thrilled with the digital marketing services from the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce, especially the e-blasts and Monthly Highlights. Their strategic insights helped us create ads that truly connected with our audience. We saw an incredible return—six times our investment. I highly recommend GNCC’s services to any Niagara business looking to grow their online presence. Thank you, GNCC, for your outstanding support and results-driven approach!”

— Tresa Pappachan, Adapt Immigration



“Working with the GNCC with the digital marketing services has been such a benefit to our organization. As a charity, it’s often difficult to find affordable and accessible marketing channels that feel authentic and in-line with our values and priorities. Partnering with the GNCC has checked all the boxes for us, allowing us to support a fellow not-for-profit, reach our target audience and build brand awareness across Niagara. The GNCC team is easy to work with, tailoring the campaign to meet our objectives and get the most out of our efforts. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with the GNCC and look forward to our ongoing partnership.”

— Suzanne Veenstra, Niagara Community Foundation

2024

YEAR IN PHOTOS





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