

# *women* leading WELLAND



MADE IN WELLAND | 2025 EDITION

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

04

Welland Facts  
& Figures

---

06

Women  
Entrepreneurs

---

10

Women in the  
Trades

---

14

Welland's Corporate  
Leadership Team

---

16

Welland Celebrities

---

18

Women in Logistics

---

20

Community Leaders

---

22

Women in Healthcare

---

24

Women in Sports

---

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# elcome



For more than 15 years, *Made in Welland* magazine has told the story of a city on the rise, highlighting growth, innovation, and the strong sense of community that defines Welland. This year, we take a powerful step forward by focusing on the women whose leadership, dedication, and vision are shaping our city's future.

In these pages you'll meet women who lead in many ways – coaching athletes, restoring health, running businesses, repairing railways, navigating waterways, managing teams, and creating experiences that bring people together. Their stories span sectors like sport, healthcare, skilled trades, tourism, hospitality, and industry. Their contributions are meaningful. Their impact is undeniable.

Why does this matter? Because when we amplify the voices and accomplishments of women, we expand the definition of leadership and inspire those who are still finding their way. We

show what's possible for every young girl looking ahead, every professional seeking a path, and every person to be inspired.

As the women of Welland's Corporate Leadership Team, we are proud to be part of a city that values leadership in all its forms and encourages growth. We hope this edition informs and ignites conversation and appreciation for the people who help make Welland thrive.

Those featured in this magazine are builders, leaders, and community shapers. We can't wait for you to turn the page and meet them all.

*Stephanie Nagel, Lina DeChellis, Jessica Ruddell, and Tara Stephens*

*On behalf of the City of Welland's Corporate Leadership Team*

# Welland

Where quality of life *meets* low cost of living



**400**  
acres of  
parkland



**15**  
parks + 3  
parkettes



**24KM**  
of trails



**112**  
restaurants



**27**  
schools

20 elementary  
7 secondary

(Public, Catholic & French  
schools for both levels)



**14**  
new doctors in  
the last 2 years



**19**  
golf courses  
within 30km  
of city centre



**5<sup>TH</sup>**  
safest metro  
area in Canada  
(Violent Crime Severity Index)



**Welland**

**\$530,600**



**Niagara Region**

**\$613,400**



**Toronto Area**

**\$995,100**

**Welland home prices are**

**13.5%**  
lower than  
Niagara



**46.7%**  
lower than  
Toronto

Sources: Canadian Real Estate Association, Niagara Association of Realtors  
June 2025

**EXPECTED  
20-YEAR GROWTH**  
(2021-2041)



**population**

**55,750 to 103,000**



**housing units**

**+22,420**



**commercial growth**

**+4.8 million sq. ft.**

# Open for business

With a strong commitment to fostering economic growth, and efficient approval processes, Welland is ready to meet the needs of growing industries. It's a city that offers a dynamic lifestyle, affordable living, and endless opportunities for business success.

## Holiday Inn Express

- 51,700 sq. ft. hotel
- 4.5 month turnaround

## Canadian Tire

- 120,000 sq. ft. expansion
- 15 week turnaround

## 150 Downs Drive

- 36,000 sq. ft. multi-unit industrial
- 3 month turnaround

## Innio

- 500,000 sq. ft. manufacturing facility
- 8 week turnaround

## Linamar

- 280,000 sq. ft. manufacturing facility
- 4 week turnaround (conditional permit)

## Upper Canada Railway Service

- 20,000 sq. ft. manufacturing facility
- 2 month turnaround

## Fonthill Lumber

- 96,000 sq. ft. manufacturing and warehouse facility
- 2.5 month turnaround (sawmill/woodworking plant)

## An Educated & Skilled Workforce

Welland has a well-educated, skilled, and diverse workforce. Keeping with the theme in this issue of *Made in Welland*, we've broken down some demographic and labour statistics by gender. Women in Welland are highly educated, with the majority holding postsecondary credentials and outperforming men in university and college attainment. These trends signal strong potential for women's continued leadership in the local economy and workforce.

A sizable gender gap still exists, however, in construction, manufacturing, and apprenticeship. This is a long-standing, but slowly improving disparity. It reinforces, however, the achievements of many of the exceptional women featured in this issue.

## Select Educational Attainment and Workforce Statistics

	Statistical Area	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
<b>Postsecondary</b> (certificate, diploma, or degree)	Welland	53.2%	<b>63.1%</b>	58.3%
<b>College</b> (certificate or diploma)	Welland	27.2%	<b>36.8%</b>	32.2%
<b>University</b> (Bachelor's degree or higher)	Welland	13.6%	<b>20.6%</b>	17.2%
<b>Apprenticeship</b>	Welland	<b>10.9%</b>	4.1%	7.4%
<b>Labour Force</b> (construction or manufacturing)	Niagara	<b>27.3%</b>	6.5%	17.2%
<b>Unemployment Rate</b> (June 2025)	Niagara	7.1%	<b>5.3%</b>	6.4%

Sources: Statistics Canada 2021 Census.  
Workforce Collective: Niagara Labour Market Insights.



# Savvy Sisters

put Welland B&B on the map.

*5.7 million TikTok views drive international news coverage for entrepreneurial dynamic duo*

Three years ago, sisters Kristen and Kathryn Groom took a leap of faith in themselves and each other. They purchased a heritage home with the vision of running a charming bed-and-breakfast near the banks of the Welland Canal Recreational Waterway.

Not the typical career path for a millennial corporate HR director (Kristen) or a Gen-Z masters student studying national security and public safety (Kathryn).

They christened the Tudor Revival-style house the Rose Manor — a nod to the

Rose family who built the home back in 1906, as well as to Welland's claim to fame as the Rose City. With no previous hospitality experience, the duo enlisted family and friends to help renovate, furnish, and transform the home into a quaint and inviting B&B that today boasts a Tripadvisor rating any hotelier would die for — 4.9 stars.

When the savvy sister entrepreneurs took to TikTok to showcase their journey and drive business, they became a viral sensation. Many of the comments likened their story to that of the Gilmore Girls

TV series that ran from 2000 to 2007. The international press absolutely ate the narrative up, with the Groom sisters earning featured stories on CNN Travel, People.com, the Daily Mail, and more.

Welland's location affords Rose Manor guests easy access to all the popular tourist destinations that its numerous B&B counterparts in Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake have to offer. It's an ideal home base for many sports tourists too, visiting Welland for dragon boat races or rowing regattas held on the Recreational Waterway, or leisure cyclists taking

advantage of some of the best trails in Niagara. It's also a great photogenic venue for micro-weddings and bridal shower receptions.

In addition to the traditional warmth and hospitality of a B&B stay, guests can relish the thoughtful extra touches the Rose Manor has to offer. The sisters recruited a local facialist to operate a spa in one of the rooms. The front yard has a great view of the Merritt Park Amphitheatre,

where you can take in a concert on the canal on select Friday evenings during the summer.

And finally, there's great company to be had — and not just with the welcoming hosts. Supposedly, the Rose Manor is home to a friendly (and at times quirky) ghost who goes by the name Birdie. Now there's a great premise for a Gilmore Girls sequel!



*The Rose Manor then and now. Photo credits: Welland Museum, Jodie Schaefer*

## Q&A with K&K

**Q:** Kristen, what's it like working for yourself after working in the HR world for more than 10 years?

**A:** I love working for myself but to be honest, it was nerve wracking to finally take the leap. We opened our B&B over three years ago but I only left my corporate HR Director role last year. It was challenging to juggle

both full-time work and getting the B&B off the ground but during that time, I really reflected on what I wanted my career and life to look like. I never want to look back and think 'what if' so it made sense to try it. Owning our own business has given me a sense of peace and drive I didn't know I needed. I am grateful for the experience my corporate life gave me but I am extremely happy with my decision to bet on myself!

**Q:** Kathryn, you were 24 when you went all-in with the Rose Manor. What advice do you have for other entrepreneurial-minded young people seeking to become their own boss?

**A:** I wasn't always sure what I wanted to do for a career. My educational background could have taken me in a completely different route but I always knew I wanted to be my own boss. As much as I loved my education and am happy I completed it, I'm much happier running a bed-and-breakfast as opposed to the realm that path would have taken me. I think both Kristen and I would encourage any young person to go with their gut and not be afraid to pivot if a different career path excites them. Taking a risk can be scary but starting this business has been the best decision I have ever made for myself.

AS FEATURED ON







# Meet Niagara's modern- day railway pioneer

*Harlee Barfknecht-Zuber breaks stereotypes and blazes a trail out of iron and oak*

For Niagara industry, one of the region's great advantages is its comprehensive transportation infrastructure. Highways connected to three major cross-border bridges come to mind immediately, as does the Welland Canal, a key segment within the St. Lawrence Seaway system.

Less obvious, but just as important, is Niagara's robust rail network. CN and CP both operate main and branch line track, and shortline operators such as Gio Rail service many industrial rail users in Welland and neighbouring communities.

Behind the scenes, track needs to be regularly inspected, maintained, re-built, and sometimes even built from scratch. It's a niche business, and one of the few players in Niagara is a relatively new and up-and-coming company — Iron and Oak Railroad Services. What makes Iron and Oak particularly unique is its co-founder: a young, entrepreneurial woman.

Harlee Barfknecht-Zuber grew up in Hamilton, studied Business Advertising at Mohawk College, and then worked in the restaurant business for 10 years after



graduating. Then in 2019, she embarked on a radically new career path in industrial sales, first in metals, then in the railway business.

A man's world perhaps? Not for Barfknecht-Zuber. "Covid was my great equalizer," she explains. "I used the time working from home to build my own client list and did lots of cold calling. By the time we moved back into our offices full time, I was able to secure site visits and start learning on job sites."

After changing employers in 2022, and being disillusioned by the lack of hands-on responsibilities, she ventured out on her own, launching Iron and Oak along with a colleague, Nigel Murdza, a 20-year track construction and maintenance veteran.

Today, the company boasts a team with more than 75 years of shared track experience, along with hi-rail trucks, and specialized machinery and equipment to complete any job. In addition to servicing shortlines and rail-equipped industries, Iron and Oak gets a lot of work from the Thorold Multimodal Hub (see page 18), a sprawling industrial complex linking road, rail, and the Welland Canal.

Although the business is based in Thorold at the Multimodal Hub, Barfknecht-Zuber calls Welland home. "It's affordable, close to major highways, and is surrounded by

# "Representation matters, because if you can *see* her, you can *be* her."

farmland where I wanted to eventually end up," she says. "I absolutely adore living in Welland."

As a woman entrepreneur in a male-dominated industry, Barfknecht-Zuber is honest about the challenges (it can be "isolating"), but adamant about the eventual rewards. "I know there are days when you will be the only girl at a site walk, or the only girl at a board meeting, but I promise it is a more shared experience than you think," she advises.

"In this day and age when DEI is being attacked it is more important than ever to show up. Representation matters because

if you can see her, you can be her, and I want to be an example to other young girls finding their own ambitions."

Barfknecht-Zuber sits on the board of Women in Niagara (WIN), and is a member of the Association of Women in Metal (AWMI), where she shares her experiences and outlook with like-minded professionals and aspiring women business leaders.

"It's all about starting from the beginning and passing down knowledge. And that's truly the meaning of life if you ask me, sharing your experiences to help the person behind you — it's more rewarding than anything else."

## Niagara's Rail Infrastructure



Upgrading track at the Thorold Multimodal Hub

# Niagara College's dynamic duo

*Rebecca Nicholls and Julie Niemiec seek to bolster the involvement of women in the trades*

With more than 10,000 students enrolled in nearly 150 different programs, Niagara College is a trailblazer among Canada's postsecondary institutions. Closely tuned into the undercurrents guiding the labour market, Niagara College prides itself on preparing the next generation of workers for the positions that employers need to fill.

It's no surprise that the shortage of skilled trades is among today's most pressing challenges, a potential drag on sustained economic growth. Yet there is a largely untapped pool of workers — the 50 per cent of the labour market who are women.

At Niagara College, Rebecca Nicholls and Julie Niemiec are looking to change that. Recently appointed Associate Dean, Academics, Nicholls previously served at the associate dean level in Workforce Development and Community Partnerships where she bridged the ecosystem of employers, educators, and community organizations.







REBECCA NICHOLLS

As Manager of Apprenticeship, Niemiec is the driving force behind the college's initiatives involving trades training, overseeing innovative programming, employer partnerships, and community engagement.

Both are deeply committed to broadening the face of today's workforce in the trades, notably by strengthening the participation of women. Here's what they have to say about their challenges and achievements.

**Other than traditional stereotypes, what barriers do young women face when entering the trades?**

**JN:** Beyond stereotypes, young women often face a lack of visible role models in the trades, limited exposure to hands-on experiences in high school, and resistance when taking non-traditional paths. There can also be challenges related to workplace culture, access to female mentorship, and navigating environments that may not yet be fully inclusive.

**RN:** Many schools don't present trades as viable or appealing options for young

women, and guidance counselors may unintentionally steer them toward traditional female-dominated fields. Even when interest is high, young women often encounter male-dominated training environments and job sites that can feel unwelcoming. There are also financial barriers, like the high cost of tools and transportation, along with challenges such as lack of childcare or inadequate facilities. Perhaps most discouraging is the internal doubt many young women carry, fueled by a lack of visible role models and support systems.

**What initiatives have you been involved with to help overcome these barriers?**

**RN:** I've supported and amplified several initiatives at Niagara College, including NC Women in Trades, OPG Women in Trades, pre-apprenticeship programs, Skills Development Fund, and Trades Has No Gender. These are valuable opportunities to help young women discover, prepare for, and succeed in skilled trades. I'm proud to support Niagara College's efforts to actively increase the number of young women

entering trades through targeted outreach and support.

**JN:** We host these Women in Trades events twice a year, where high school-aged females are invited for a full day of hands-on career exploration. We also participate in Skills Ontario Young Women's Initiatives in collaboration with local school boards. And starting in fall 2025, we'll launch the Canerector Scholars Program, funded by a \$500,000 gift. It includes scholarships, mentorship, and leadership development, along with a Women in Trades & Technology group, a speaker series, and high school outreach.

**What's your message to employers struggling to find skilled workers?**

**RN:** I encourage employers to think beyond traditional recruitment strategies and tap into underrepresented talent — particularly women. Engage with Niagara College and our partners to help shape and attract the next generation of skilled workers. This isn't just about filling vacancies — it's about future-proofing the workforce through inclusive and strategic action.

**JN:** We see a lot of success stories that can offer a glimpse into the incredible potential we see every day at Niagara College.

One standout story is of a young woman who completed our Welder Apprenticeship program and is now working full-time in a fabrication shop in Niagara. She was the only woman in her cohort but quickly became a leader among her peers, earning the respect of her instructors and classmates. Today, she mentors other young women entering the trade and recently returned to the college as a guest speaker.

Another inspiring example comes from our Skills Development Fund Carpentry project, where a female participant launched her own renovation business shortly after completing the program. She was later hired by a major company to represent their brand in television and video commercials, an incredible testament to her talent and confidence.



# *Raising the roof:* Samanntha De Coteau

*Welland's  
“Roofer  
Girl”  
shatters  
stereotypes  
in the  
trades*



When Samanntha De Coteau first picked up a hammer, she didn't know it would lead to starting Canada's most visible all-female roofing crew — or that her journey would land her in Welland, Ontario.

Born in Whitefish Lake, Alberta, of Cree descent, De Coteau is a true roofing veteran. With 14 years in the trades and 12 years on the roof, she has not only built a business, but a sisterhood.

Her company, Summit Sisters, is more than just a catchy name — it's a movement. The idea was sparked when a woman in Belleville reached out to De Coteau asking specifically for an all-women roofing crew. The timing wasn't perfect: She and her husband had only just relocated to Welland, and were still finding their feet. But the request struck a chord — and lit a fire.

She began reaching out to every female





*The Summit Sisters: Women roofers from across Canada after one of their roofing "Smashes". Welland's Samanntha De Coteau (middle) founded the group.*

roofer she knew (mostly through online connections) and pulled together a team. What began as a single job quickly turned into something bigger. With support from Primeline Tools as a main sponsor, the project attracted media attention and even a documentary crew.

"With a little bit of elbow grease and a whole lot of faith," says De Coteau, the Summit Sisters were born. Today, they come together once or twice a year to tackle what they call "Summit Sister Smashes" — where the team installs a full roof, captures the experience, and shares it on social media to inspire other women in the trades.

When not out on a "Smash", De Coteau and her husband operate Summit Sisters Roofing Inc. from their home base in Welland. She and her crew — six full-time roofers, plus her and her husband — take on work all over Niagara, and sometimes as far afield as Parry Sound or even back in Alberta. Their services range from repairs and re-roofing to new construction, with skills in everything from asphalt shingles to metal roofing and siding.

But while business is booming, finding skilled female roofers remains a serious challenge. "Finding good roofers is hard for every roofing company out there," De Coteau admits. "Finding female roofers is near impossible." That's why she's passionate about training new recruits right on the roof. "Roofing isn't for everyone," she says, and some new hires, male and female alike, quit by lunch. "You have to love hard work and have passion for it at the same time," she says. "I call it roof therapy."

De Coteau's journey highlights both the rewards and challenges of being a woman in the trades. One obstacle stands out: childcare. "When I lived in Alberta, it was easy to get my babies into daycare," she says. "Out here, there was a two-year wait list."

She believes the trades offer incredible opportunity — but women need to believe it too. "Growing up, I thought I was going to be a hairdresser. But life had different

plans. I joined the trades, and I was instantly hooked, I loved working with my hands and I loved the hard work."

Her advice to young women thinking about a career in construction is simple: "Just do it. You're not going to be fast, or a professional the first day. Be patient with yourself. You'll get there." And if she has anything to do with it, they won't have to get there alone.

"You have to love hard work and have passion for it at the same time."

# Leading with vision:

## Meet the women of Welland's Corporate Leadership Team

The City of Welland's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) is a group of senior leaders committed to delivering service excellence, fostering community well-being, and guiding the city toward a strong and sustainable future.

CLT members are department heads. But more than that, they are collaborators, innovators, and problem-solvers working across departments, turning strategy into action. Grounded in the City's values and united by a One Team, One Welland approach, they help move the organization forward with integrity, purpose, and accountability.

Welland can take pride in the fact that five of CLT's nine members are women. With portfolios spanning finance, infrastructure, community services,

economic development, and legislative services, these leaders shape policies and priorities that reflect the City's commitment to growth, inclusion, and long-term success.

This level of representation is meaningful. It reflects a culture where diverse perspectives are not only welcomed but recognized as essential to strong leadership. It also sets an inspiring example for the next generation of public service leaders.

Meet Lina DeChellis, Jessica Ruddell, Stephanie Nagel, and Tara Stephens. Together, in partnership with the full leadership team, they are helping build a Welland that's connected, future-ready, and positioned to thrive.



*Lina DeChellis*

**Director of Economic  
Development & Strategic  
Initiatives**

Lina DeChellis drives strategic initiatives and operations, contributing to the municipality's growth and success. She facilitates investment and development information and opportunities between City departments, the administrative team, and elected officials, cultivating positive business relationships.

### *Get to know* **LINA**

**Hometown:** Welland

**Years with the City:** 34

**Must-See or Experience  
Local Gem:**

The Recreational Canal and all it has to offer, especially the trail and Welland International Flatwater Centre.

**Favourite Welland Restaurant?**

There are too many to choose from and every eatery brings its own flavour and story to the city.

**Proudest Professional  
Accomplishment in Welland:**

Receiving the Women in Business – Excellence in Public Sector Award and continuing to lead our corporate Strategic Plan.





## Jessica Ruddell

### Director of Community Services

Jessica Ruddell has a strong foundation in community development, asset management, team building, and strategic planning. As the Director of Community Services, she oversees key operations in recreation, events, parks, and outdoor spaces. Jessica is a recognized leader in municipal government, driving strategic initiatives and consistently delivering results that contribute to the City's growth and success.

### Get to know JESSICA

**Hometown:** Niagara Falls

**Years with the City:** 1.5

**Must-See or Experience**

**Local Gem:**

Rec Rentals @ the Docks

**Favourite Welland Restaurant?**

Mr. Mikes

**Proudest Professional**

**Accomplishment in Welland:**

The opening of Memorial Park Pool. Although many of the approvals and contracts were in place prior to my arrival with the City, the way teams from across the organization came together to support construction, and opening for operations on time for summer 2024 was inspiring.



## Stephanie Nagel

### General Manager of Corporate and Enterprise Services/CFO

Stephanie Nagel is an accomplished financial management professional and experienced corporate leader. She drives strategic initiatives and oversees key operations as General Manager, Corporate and Enterprise Services/CFO. Stephanie has managed various areas including accounting, tax programs, water billing, insurance, financial systems, and municipal budgets.

### Get to know STEPHANIE

**Hometown:** Beamsville

**Years with the City:** 1.5

**Must-See or Experience**

**Local Gem:**

Welland Jackfish baseball games.

**Favourite Welland Restaurant?**

M.T. Bellies

**Proudest Professional**

**Accomplishment in Welland:**

Modernization of the City's Procurement Policy and practices, and how we're building strong teams and increasing collaboration both internally and externally.



## Tara Stephens

### Director of Legislative Services & City Clerk

Tara Stephens is a practiced and proficient leader in the legislative services sector. In her role as City Clerk, she oversees the City's key operations and drives strategic initiatives. With a strong foundation in council and legislative services, Tara plays a central and critical role in ensuring the corporation's operations are legislatively adhered to.

### Get to know TARA

**Hometown:** Dunnville

**Years with the City:** 18

**Must-See or Experience**

**Local Gem:**

Walking along the canal and watching boats move through the canal.


**Favourite Welland Restaurant?**

Ye Old Squire, and Bridgewater Brewery

**Proudest Professional**

**Accomplishment in Welland:**

It's difficult to determine one accomplishment in my career. Welland is where I started my career, and the municipality has supported me through each step of my journey. Being awarded City Clerk for the municipality after many years of hard work, dedication, and experiences would have to be my proudest accomplishment to date.



# Anna Olson: Hometown Proud

*Canada's beloved baker shares how local markets, family roots, and small-town pride shaped her culinary journey.*

Anna Olson may be one of Canada's best-known culinary figures, but talk to her for a few minutes and it's clear her heart — and her kitchen — are firmly rooted in Welland.

Since moving to the city in 2001, the acclaimed pastry chef, cookbook author, and television host has found inspiration in everyday local moments. "Saturdays at the local farmers' market — where I'd stroll through the stalls, chatting with growers — instilled in me a profound appreciation for seasonal, locally sourced ingredients," Olson says.



Living in Welland has given Olson more than just fresh produce; it's provided the backdrop for her unique style of culinary storytelling. The Niagara region itself, she says, is rich with narratives. "Niagara is vibrant with history, annual harvests, and events that bring people together — they lend themselves beautifully to telling stories through food."

Olson believes food is about more than flavour. It's about forging connections. "Living amidst this vibrant place has taught me that storytelling in food — through images, ingredient origins, and authentic personal touches — is essential because it invites people into your kitchen and your life."



“Small communities often foster big opportunities when you bring passion, persistence, and pride in local tradition.”

That sense of invitation is something Olson learned early on, watching her grandmother prepare family dishes with love woven into every pastry. Her mother encouraged culinary experiments that sometimes ended in what Olson affectionately calls “gourmet goo,” but always sparked joy. Together, they gave her a love of baking and the confidence to try new things.

It's a spirit she hopes to see flourish in the next generation, especially among young women in smaller communities like Welland. Her advice? “Let your community be your classroom and your audience, and don't be afraid to ask for guidance or advice. Small communities often foster big opportunities when you

bring passion, persistence, and pride in local tradition.”

Olson's own path wasn't always so clear. In her mid-20's, after a tough day working in banking, she found herself baking banana muffins in the middle of the night — a moment she calls her “muffin epiphany.” It led her to culinary school and a whole new career. “Sometimes your greatest breakthroughs come in quiet, unexpected moments — and that pursuing your calling often begins with that one small, courageous decision.”

Today, Olson continues to champion Niagara's evolving food scene, from praising the young talent she's seen come out of Niagara College to celebrating

Always eager to give back to the community that is a source of pride and inspiration to her, Olson is the Honorary Chair for the fundraising committee for the Central Firehall revitalization project. A dedicated group of volunteers has been working for years to protect and restore the downtown Edwardian-style building, which opened in 1920. The fruits of these efforts were celebrated on June 5, 2025, with the grand opening of an impressive firefighting exhibit on the main floor.



the area's growing cultural diversity. She lights up talking about one of her favourite local spots — like grabbing a quick bite at Mexican Taco Zone.

Whether she's cooking for millions on screen or casually popping into Black Sheep Coffee for an afternoon pick-me-up, Anna Olson embodies the best of Welland: warm, welcoming, and deeply connected to the community that helped shape her into Canada's beloved baking ambassador.



Anna Olson is the author of ten best-selling and award-winning cookbooks. Her latest work, *Anna Cooks*, hits the bookshelves on September 30, 2025.

# Anchors away!

*Gina Delle Rose-Ash blazes the trail for career women in Great Lakes logistics*



As a high school student in Port Colborne, Gina Delle Rose-Ash vividly remembers the rumble of the ships from the nearby Welland Canal, how it would sometimes even shake Lakeshore High's portable classrooms.

She didn't know it at the time, but her professional journey would later take her deep into the heart of marine transportation. After nearly a decade with The St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation (SLSMC), she joined HOPA Ports in 2018, and was recently promoted to the role of manager of market development.

It's an exciting time at HOPA Ports (the abbreviated name for Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority), having recently launched a major presence in the Niagara region. Delle Rose-Ash has been proud to contribute to the Thorold Multimodal Hub, a 600+ acre industrial complex with direct access to marine, rail, and highway transportation.

The Hub has emerged as a thriving industrial ecosystem in its first two years of operation, having welcomed more than 30 tenants. Its location along the Welland Canal strengthens HOPA Ports' network and marine shipping infrastructure, enhanced by easy access to CN track through local shortline service by GIO Rail.

In 2023, HOPA Ports brought the strategic model to the Lake Erie entrance





HOPA is a key stakeholder in the Thorold Multimodal Hub, linking rail, road, and water.

of the Canal, opening the Port Colborne Multimodal Hub. It recently announced a major biofuel terminal project there, which promises to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 144,000 tonnes by 2030.

"Being part of an organization that's strategic, collaborative, and constantly pushing the envelope is incredibly fulfilling," says Delle Rose-Ash. "We're not just moving goods — we're building the future of Canadian trade."

Delle Rose-Ash's entry into the male-dominated world of marine logistics wasn't easy. In addition to curiosity, grit, and self-motivation — all gender-neutral prerequisites — there was a whole other layer involved for a female professional.

"It requires confidence, resilience, and a willingness to chart your own course," she advises. "Be visible, be bold, and be yourself. Authenticity is your greatest asset. Don't wait to be invited — show up and take your place."

For Delle Rose-Ash, networking is a secret to success. She serves as a board member with several industry

"Be visible, be bold,  
and be yourself.  
Authenticity is your  
greatest asset."

associations, notably The Marine Club organization, the McMaster Institute for Transportation & Logistics, and the Niagara Industrial Association.

Eight years ago, she founded Women in Logistics, to connect women involved in Great Lakes marine transportation. The annual event began with 20 attendees and has grown considerably since then, to more than 130 in the recent iteration.

"For me, networking has opened doors, sparked collaborations, and helped me

grow both personally and professionally."

Her advice? "Get involved. Join boards, attend events, volunteer, ask questions."

Thinking back to when she first started her career, Delle Rose-Ash believes that there has been real progress for women in the industry. "I now see more women at industry events, sitting on panels, leading discussions, and occupying seats at the head table," she notes. "But there's still work to be done at the executive level."

## THOROLD MULTIMODAL HUB HIGHLIGHTS



600+  
ACRES



1 MILLION  
SQ. FT. WAREHOUSE  
& OUTDOOR STORAGE



Heavy  
Crane  
Availability



Liquid  
Bulk



Dry  
Bulk



On-Site  
Water  
Treatment



Class-A  
Power, 185MW  
Capacity

# One incredible journey

*Janet Madume's personal experience gives her unparalleled insight when it comes to helping newcomers settle in Niagara.*



The Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre (WHCMC) celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. The not-for-profit organization was initially established to help settle Vietnamese immigrants during that country's refugee crisis, then broadened its scope to welcome newcomers from around the globe.

The WHCMC was one of Janet Madume's first points of contact when she and her family first arrived in Canada at the Peace

Bridge in 2001. Staff helped her with emergency shelter, and with locating permanent accommodations. Today, Madume leads the organization that once helped her, serving as its Executive Director since 2016.

During her tenure, the WHCMC has evolved considerably, emerging as a comprehensive community hub that offers employment solutions in addition to its core settlement services, from offices in Welland and Niagara Falls.

Employment services are available to all, but the Heritage Council's roots helping immigrant populations give it unique insight into bridging the gap between available pools of workers and more than 200 employers across Niagara with hiring opportunities.

Two innovative initiatives stand out in this regard. The WHCMC supports Internationally Educated Professionals (IEP) programs designed to help highly skilled newcomers navigate domestic



accreditation pathways, including financing for supplementary training and exams.

It also delivers a unique training program to both immigrant workers and their employers, to promote cultural sensitivity and successful workplace integration.

By assisting with initial housing, language, community integration, and employment, the agency addresses the full cycle of challenges facing newcomer families.

Proof of its success is in the pudding: nearly three-quarters of the WHCMC's initial clients end up settling in the Niagara area.

But Madume isn't one to take all the credit. Instead, she praises the Welland community for its openness and its opportunities. "Welland isn't just where we landed," she says, referring to her own personal experience, "it's where we built our life. It's where our family found stability, a sense of belonging, and a purpose."



Janet Madume presents the International Woman of the Year Award to a recent recipient.

*"Welland has a big heart. And that's why it continues to call people in, just like it once called us."*

# The Role of Women in the Immigrant Journey

*Each year, the WHCMC honours one deserving woman as its International Woman of the Year. Janet Madume shares this powerful testimony of what this award means:*

"As a past recipient, I can speak firsthand to the deep significance of this recognition. It's not just about the individual — it's about what that woman represents: courage, perseverance, and quiet leadership in the face of enormous upheaval. For many women seeking asylum or resettling in Canada, the journey begins long before they set foot on Canadian soil.

They are often the emotional anchor of their families, tasked with holding everything together — managing fear, uncertainty, and trauma — while creating a sense of stability for their children and partners. In many cultures, women are regarded as the heart of the household, responsible not only for caregiving but also for upholding cultural values, language, and traditions.

When those women arrive here, that role expands. Suddenly, they're not only rebuilding a home — they're navigating a new education system, job market, and language, all while working to heal from what's been lost. Many of the women we support come with degrees, careers, and leadership experience from their home countries; however, these accomplishments often go unrecognized in their new context.

Still, they rise. They take language classes while working night shifts, access childminding services to pursue retraining, and find ways to balance their professional ambitions with cultural expectations and family responsibilities.

That's why this award matters so deeply. It sheds light on the invisible labour and strength that women often bring to the settlement journey. It honours not just achievement, but transformation — the ability to fall, rise again, and then lift others as they go.

These women are not only surviving; they are shaping the future of Welland and communities like it. They are entrepreneurs, advocates, caregivers, and changemakers. And as someone who has walked that path, I can tell you: this kind of recognition doesn't just validate the journey — it empowers the next step forward."

# Building a healthier Niagara

*Niagara's Jill Croteau leads a collaborative drive to attract more family physicians to the Niagara region*



There are many challenges when it comes to healthcare in Canada, but two chronic issues seem to dominate the headlines these days. Experts say that we can go a long way towards resolving the first, if we can make good headway with the second.

These issues? ER wait times and family doctor shortages. In Niagara, Jill Croteau is leading the charge when it comes to the latter.

As Physician Recruiter Program Manager for the Niagara Region's Economic Development team, Croteau is tasked with leading efforts to recruit and retain doctors to the area. It's a role she has thrived in since 2011, helping attract 24 new physicians to Niagara last year alone.

Croteau credits this success to a strong collaborative approach by local interest holders: municipalities, medical schools, healthcare leaders, and others. "I've

witnessed a remarkable shift in how Niagara approaches healthcare," she says. "We are working together in new and innovative ways."

The approach is certainly multifaceted. Financial incentives are part of the strategy, such as the \$100,000 the City of Welland offers physicians to defray the considerable cost of relocating and setting up a new practice here. Twelve new doctors have begun practicing in Welland since 2023.



Another important piece of the puzzle is the support Croteau is able to draw upon when helping new doctors navigate the many hurdles involved when establishing a practice. That includes assistance with topics as diverse as immigration, networking with local health professionals, community integration, and advertising for new patients.

“The incentives help,” Croteau explains. “But it’s the people and partnerships that truly set this region apart. Every successful recruit reflects the efforts of so many partners. That collective spirit is what energizes me.”

The Region’s recruitment program also relies actively on recruitment initiatives outside the country — so as not to cannibalize from other Canadian communities. Last year, Croteau headed delegations to the U.K., Ireland, and the U.S., including events attended by Canadian medical students abroad interested in repatriating home.

Recent physician recruits are among Croteau’s strongest advocates. “They talk about how supported they felt from the beginning, not just by our recruitment team, but by their peers, communities, and local leaders,” she explains. “That peer insight is often the tipping point that turns interest into commitment.”

Last year, Niagara’s collaborative approach helped inspire the creation of the Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (OPRA). The not-for-profit organization unites local recruitment professionals from across the province, sharing best practices and advocating for primary care friendly health care policies. And the OPRA’s inaugural Chair? Niagara’s Jill Croteau.

“Every successful physician recruit reflects the efforts of so many partners.”

the **CHALLENGE**

Estimated doctor shortage in Niagara:

**106**

Practising physicians over 65:

**14%**

Niagara population growth (2020–2024):

**46,789**

Average practice size (number of patients):

**1,380**

the **PROGRESS**

Physicians accepting patients (June 2025):

**37**

New physicians in Niagara, 2024:

**24**

Top source of new physicians:

**U.K.  
62%**

Welland doctors accepting new patients (July 2025):

**13**



# There's no place like home

*Niagara College's athletics program thrives under world-class leadership*

"Growing up in Welland, I always imagined returning one day," says Michele O'Keefe. "There's something special about this city — the people, the sense of community, and the pride that comes with calling it home."

It was seven years ago that she fulfilled her prediction, stepping down from a very successful tenure at the helm of Canada Basketball, where she served as Executive Director, and then President and CEO.

Now as Sr. Director, Athletics & Student Engagement at Niagara College, O'Keefe shares her talents — nurtured at provincial, national, and international levels — to develop and strengthen the student experience through sports.

"Being able to give back locally — through sport, wellness, and community





initiatives — feels like the most important contribution of all,” she says.

O’Keefe’s leadership philosophy at Niagara College is to merge competitiveness, consistency, and excellence throughout all athletics programs. But not just on the field of play — also in the classroom. On the whole, “Knight” athletes consistently achieve more than 80 per cent averages despite their intense sports schedules.

“Michele’s unique ability to bring people together and drive collaboration in support of students is infectious,” says Sean Kennedy, president of Niagara College.

During the course of her career, the status of women in sports has been nothing short of transformational, and O’Keefe is very excited about the prospects. “For the first time, the business of women’s sports not only exists, but it’s thriving,” she says.

She points first to the Women’s National Basketball Association’s (WNBA) launch in 1997, and more recently to the Professional Women’s Hockey League (PWHL) and the Northern Super League, a new Canadian professional soccer league.

Moreover, O’Keefe notes from personal experience that professional challenges at the helm of Canada Basketball were rarely gender-based. That’s a testament to today’s acceptance of women in corridors of sports power.

But acceptance and overall gender equality are different issues. According to the Global Gender Gap Reports 2024, reaching full gender parity across the

world will still take another 134 years to achieve. Pointing to this disappointing disparity, O’Keefe sees women’s sports as more than just a game — they’re a “mirror for our values, and a critical opportunity to accelerate equity in both culture and commerce.”

“Now is the time to double down,” she says.

Although she has contributed significantly to driving progress throughout her career, one event that’s especially close to her heart is Welland Girls Sports Day, a joint initiative between Niagara College and the City of Welland to introduce girls between the ages of 6 to 12 to a wide range of sporting activities.

Grassroots opportunities like this, combined with a growing ecosystem of female sports stars and role models, are critical for long-term traction. “It’s about empowering the next generation of female athletes and showing them that they belong in sport,” she says.

Welland is well positioned in this regard, according to O’Keefe. “Welland was a fantastic place to grow up — filled with abundant recreational activities and sporting opportunities that shaped childhoods.”

“In 2025, that legacy is stronger than ever, fueled by substantial investment in public infrastructure and sport tourism,” she says, drawing attention to the Welland International Flatwater Centre, Empire Sportsplex, and Youngs Sportsplex.

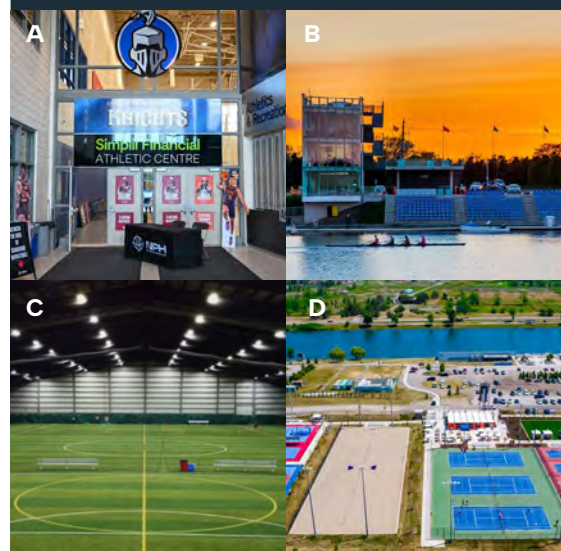
## Welland’s World-Class Community Sports

### Niagara College’s Simplii Financial Athletic Centre **A**

Home of the Niagara College Knights intercollegiate sport program, this facility includes a 15,825 sq. ft. gymnasium, a 3,612 sq. ft. fitness centre, a multi-purpose studio, a gravel walking track, an athletic therapy centre, and more.

### Welland International Flatwater Centre **B**

A facility of choice for elite championships, while also offering many recreational opportunities. Equipped with a state-of-the-art indoor training tank outfitted for rowing, canoe, kayak, and dragon boat training. The WIFC hosted the 2015 Pan-Am Games and more recently the 2024 Can American Club Crew Championship for dragon boat.



### Youngs Sportsplex **C**

With four tennis courts, an indoor FIFA regulation soccer field, and five outdoor fields, Youngs Sportsplex also offers an indoor golf driving range. The facility hosted several events during the 2022 Canada Summer Games. The Welland Ball Hockey Club is also right next door.

### Empire Sportsplex **D**

A multisport facility featuring courts for tennis, pickleball, basketball, and beach volleyball. The sportsplex opened in 2022 to rave community reviews, and it even won a provincial design award from Parks and Recreation Ontario.

“Giving back locally — through sport, wellness, and community initiatives — feels like the most important contribution of all.”



# Pioneer ON ICE

*Amanda Benoit-Wark nurtures the next generation of female hockey stars*

The first time the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) ever held a Women's World Championship tournament in back-to-back years, Welland's Amanda Benoit-Wark played in both — and won gold both times.

As a pioneer in elite women's hockey, she played with the likes of Hall of Famers Hailey Wickenheiser, Danielle Goyette, Caroline Oullette, Jayna Hefford, Kim St-Pierre, and Jennifer Botterill.

Today, hockey is still in her blood. She coaches the Prep Girls hockey team at Ridley College, a prestigious private school in nearby St. Catharines, where she also teaches physical education.

"Welland was always a place where I wanted to be, my family was all there, and the coaching opportunity just happened," she says. "I had a young son at the time and didn't know how I would manage but ended up being encouraged to apply by my husband and parents. And here we are today, 18 years later!"

In that time, female hockey has certainly changed. Unlike in the 1990s, the World

Championships is now a perennial event. At the last Winter Olympics in 2022, the Canada-U.S. women's hockey gold medal game averaged more viewers than any NHL contest that season.

The Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) is now in its sophomore season, after an incredible launch last year. University opportunities abound on both sides of the border, feeding the elite teams and giving young women the chance to continue with competitive hockey after aging out of minor hockey.

When she started playing hockey, Benoit-Wark could only play on boys teams, including the Welland Tigers. She only started playing with girls around age 14, but to find a team suited for her level, it meant later travelling to Toronto three to four times a week to play for the Toronto Aeros.

"It's so encouraging to see how far the sport has come," Benoit-Wark says, "how much growth there has been both on and off the ice, how many little girls are involved, and how the older generation of players are giving back."



# “It’s so encouraging to see how far the sport has come.”

Having been around hockey all her life, Benoit-Wark has achieved the pinnacle at all levels. Winning world championship gold was certainly a highlight. “There is nothing in the world like representing your country, and if you’re lucky, winning gold medals,” she says. “That sense of pride when you have an entire country behind you is incredible.”

But coaching a high school team to a championship engenders a different sense of pride. Her Ridley Tigers played in the Conference of Independent Schools Athletic Association (CISAA) finals five years in a row, winning gold twice (in 2019 and 2020).

“Putting together a group of student athletes and guiding them to be the best versions of themselves — while you ask

each of them push each other for the betterment of the entire group — is very fulfilling.”

When one of her players graduates with a hockey scholarship, Benoit-Wark is immensely proud for her. But hockey is a team game. That’s why Benoit-Wark makes sure to point out that the achievement is at heart a team effort. “Scholarships don’t happen unless you surround yourself with good people,” she explains. “From my staff to all the other players on the team, reaching that next level is not happening without the work of an entire group.”

That’s exactly how a little girl from Welland embarked on her own dream, one that took her to the biggest stage in hockey — and then back to a city and sport she loves.

## *Amanda* **BENOIT-WARK**

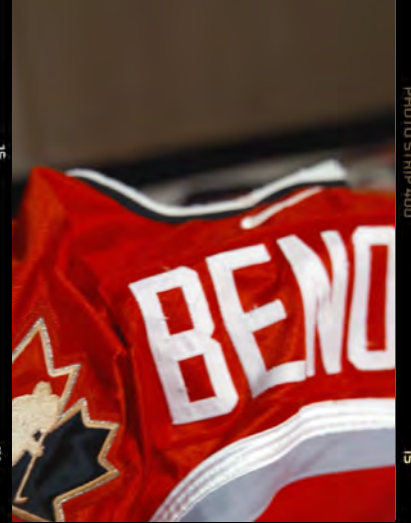
### PLAYER HIGHLIGHTS

1999 IIHF World Championship — Gold  
2000 IIHF World Championship — Gold  
2002 Olympic Gold (alternate player)  
Esso Women’s National Championships — 2 Gold, 3 Silver, 1 Bronze  
1997-98 — COWHL Most Valuable Player  
1998 Esso Tournament Best Forward  
1993 U18 National Championship Gold & Tournament MVP  
2004 FIRS Inline Hockey World Championships — Gold

### COACHING HIGHLIGHTS

2015 U22 National Women’s Development Team — Gold  
2017 U18 National Women’s Development Team — Bronze  
2008-Present — Head Coach, Ridley College

- 2019 — CISAA — Gold
- 2020 — CISAA — Gold



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