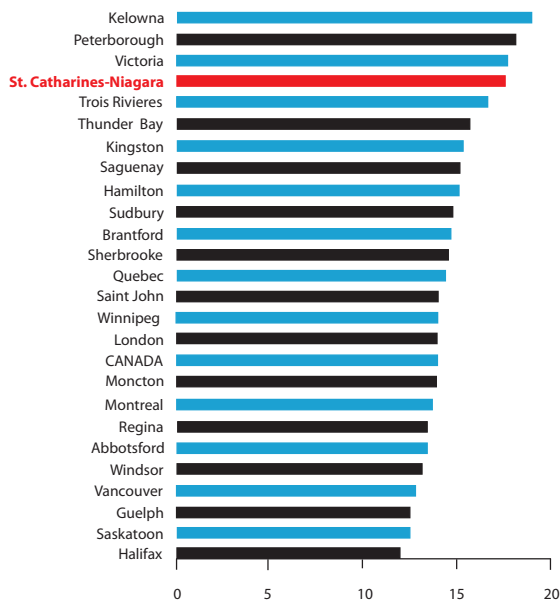


# Seniors in Niagara: Creating Age-Friendly Communities

## CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREAS % of 65+ population

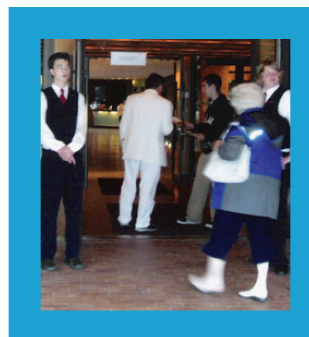


demographics-  
who are we?

**Brock**

Canada is full of aging baby boomers as North America's largest generation progresses through life's stages in a world with increasing life expectancies. We aging boomers will have a strong impact on the economic, social, and health care systems as well as the physical space that we occupy. And we will affect Niagara more than other areas because the Niagara census metropolitan area has the fourth largest percentage of seniors in the country.<sup>1</sup>

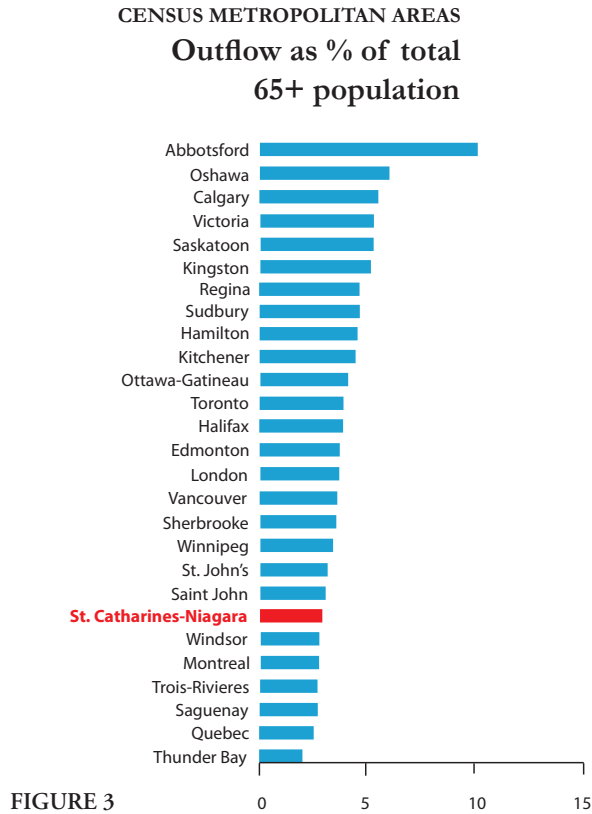
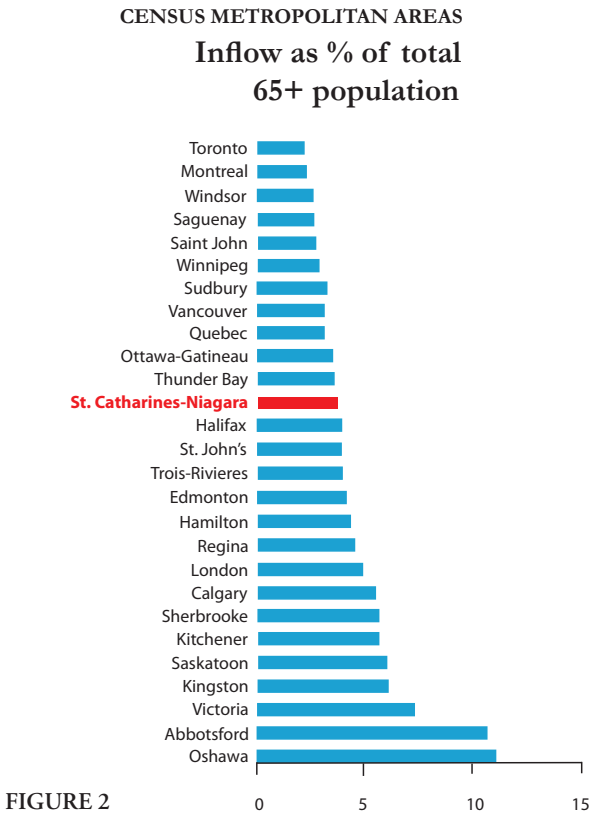
At this point, most boomers are still young enough that we are healthy and active and living full lives in the community. We look a lot like other age groups in that we range from the highly affluent to the less well-off living on fixed incomes with most of us in the middle class. We are better educated and better off financially than previous generations, and we expect to live longer. We are aging, however, and our lifestyle and our needs within the community will change as we age.<sup>2</sup>



we are long term residents

As FIGURE 2 indicates, Niagara is not currently a strong magnet for seniors moving from other areas although we probably could be if we chose to emphasize certain characteristics of our area. We are currently drawing seniors from smaller rural areas and nearby areas in Ontario—particularly Toronto.<sup>3</sup>

As FIGURE 3 indicates, most seniors in Niagara are long term residents who are aging in place. Niagara has more than its share of seniors because residents seem to enjoy the lifestyle here and are content to stay even when they retire. It is this stay at home idea that drives our large population of seniors more than a large influx from outside.<sup>4</sup>



## we contribute to our communities



We are at a stage in our lives where we want to give back to our communities and we have the time and resources to do that. Almost 70% of us provide assistance in the form of time and money, to spouses, children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbours.<sup>5</sup>

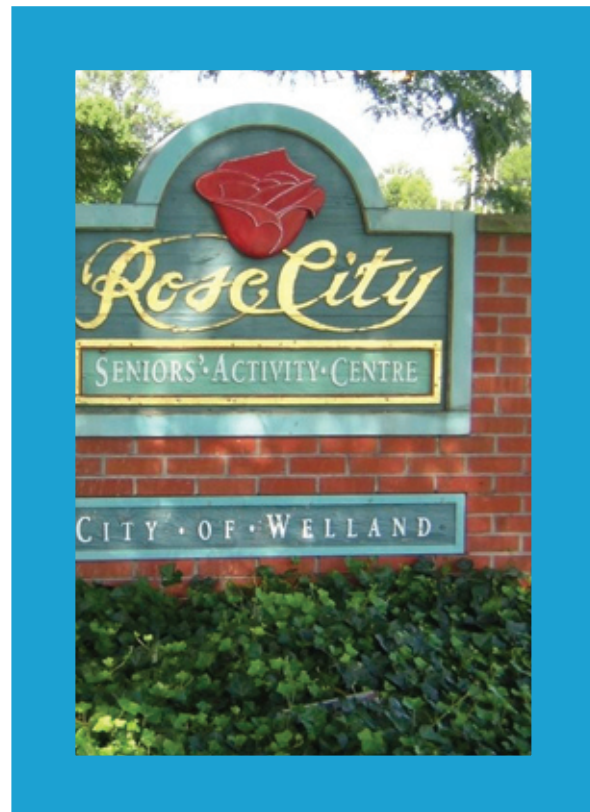
We donate approximately 20% of our after-tax income to charities as compared to 7% donated by younger people.<sup>6</sup> We also bequeath gifts to charities. For example, the Shaw Festival recently received a \$2.5 million bequest from a long time patron.

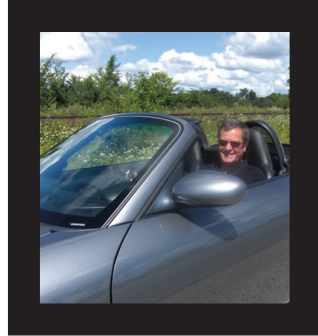


## we are volunteers

It is estimated that non-profit organizations in Niagara average 60 volunteers per agency and 470 hours a month; equal to 3.12 full time jobs or \$131,326 per agency. Almost 40% of us in Niagara who are over 65 years volunteer hundreds of thousands of hours each year.

Many of these hours are spent in Niagara's 32 long term care facilities. Eight of these homes are run by Regional Niagara where we raised \$306,215 in donations in 2007/08. We also contributed significantly to the estimated 89,000 hours of unpaid work in these regional institutions.<sup>7</sup> The Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) reports that aging Canadians "are the invisible backbone of the health and long term care system contributing over \$5 billion of unpaid care."<sup>8</sup>





### 11we are active in politics

We are politically involved. We vote at higher rates than other groups in the population and serve on local municipal councils and other civic bodies. We have formed community based groups that focus on our unique needs such as Active Living Niagara 50+. In addition, funding is being sought to develop an age-friendly city initiative in Welland as a pilot project.



### we drive research and innovation

We are consumers of services, especially those that assist us to look younger, stay healthy, and remain active. These desires are driving new industries and products in the health and pharmaceutical industry, such as nutritional supplements, cosmetics, new surgical techniques, and food and beverages that promote longevity and youthfulness.

We also have had an impact on the construction industry. We want to simplify



our lives and move into smaller homes but with the amenities we desire.

### we are rich and poor

Most rich Canadians are aged 45 to 64; three out of five individuals in the top 0.01% are in this age group. According to Statistics Canada, the net worth of people aged 55-64 in 2005 was \$407,417 and those aged 65+ was \$303,167 as compared to the median net worth of all Canadians of \$148,350.9 Although Niagara's average income is lower than in other parts of Canada, older adults are better off like those in the rest of the country.<sup>10</sup>

Our income drops dramatically in our eighties, however, so as we live longer we have fewer resources to rely on. It is also at this time that our health deteriorates and we may need to access services that are provided in homes for the aged that can be expensive. <sup>11</sup>



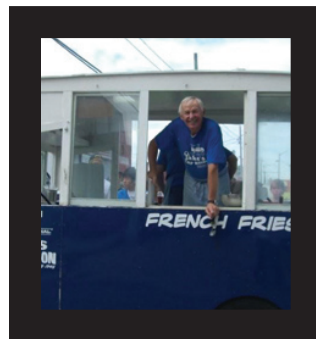
## we are transitioning to retirement

In the last ten years, Niagara's labour force has changed. There has been a dramatic increase in the participation and employment levels of individuals aged 55 years or older. Aging adults are transitioning and easing into retirement by remaining in the work force longer or on a part time basis. In Canada, in 2007, 8.9% of those over 65 years of age worked; up from 7.5% in 2003.<sup>12</sup>

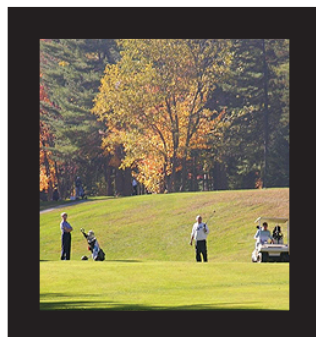


## we have encore careers

Entre-boomers or seniorpreneurs are redefining the age for entrepreneurs. The economic volatility and the tenuous nature of our investments are fuelling the development of new small businesses meeting the needs of our communities and aging population.<sup>13</sup> This sector of the economy has grown by 35% between the years 2001 and 2005 and there is no end in sight.



According to CARP, 53% of Canadians expect to work at least part time after retirement and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) says that we are willing to take substantial pay cuts, work flexible hours, and accept employment that is more personally fulfilling.



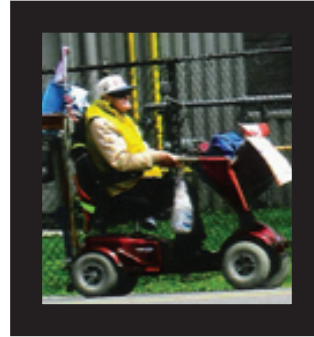
### what do seniors in Niagara want?

#### ■ community engagement

Engaged seniors are healthier and more likely to take part in civic, social, and recreational activities. Our volunteer work provides the community with essential services while keeping us out of costly hospitals or long term care facilities. We like to be engaged in meaningful paid or volunteer work and life-long learning opportunities.<sup>14</sup> When we transition into retirement we are eager to share our knowledge with our younger colleagues, our communities, and each other. At the same time we want to learn new skills by tapping into resources such as those offered at Niagara College and Brock University.

#### ■ independence

We desire transportation services that allow us to move independently.<sup>15</sup> As we age we will need enhanced, affordable, and reliable transportation. For example, buses should be designed to allow people to embark and disembark with relative ease. Cost effective programs designed to assist seniors such as Seniors Helping Seniors, Niagara Region's Gatekeepers and other similar initiatives should receive sustained and adequate funding.



#### ■ sound economic, social & physical planning policy

We want to live in housing developments that are close to services we need for our recreational, health, and social activities. They should be affordable, accessible, and energy-efficient. We would like housing that allows us to transition as we age from full independence to supported living.<sup>16</sup>

#### ■ consumer-focused health care services

We have specific needs that frequently go unmet. For example, we suffer from depression that is often viewed as a normal part of aging and often goes undiagnosed.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the shortage of doctors trained in geriatrics makes it difficult for us to access proper preventive medical help so we “end up rushed by ambulance into overcrowded emergency departments when a health crisis hits”.<sup>18</sup>



## ■ recreation facilities

We want facilities that are near to where we live and that accommodate a variety of needs from the athletic younger senior to the elderly person who may be physically impaired.

## ■ libraries and other low cost services

We know that we remain happier and healthier when we are provided with community based services. Facilities such as libraries provide us with opportunities to interact with people. Low cost recreation activities and facilities are good for us. People of all ages, income levels, and physical abilities can take part. Young families who have children in strollers, who take part in family picnics, who ride their bicycles or run along nature trails, are able to access these facilities at a minimal cost. Libraries that are open regular hours,

housed in accessible buildings, and located near public transportation are excellent venues for programs focused not only on seniors, but for young children, students, and community groups.

## ■ open spaces and accessible buildings

We want open spaces and buildings that are designed for the visually, hearing, and physically impaired as well as for the able bodied. By using a variety of textures, colours, and sounds, areas can be created that are easy to navigate both inside and in areas such as parking lots, parks, and sidewalks.<sup>19</sup>

## ■ alternative methods of communication

We recognize that technology is being developed at an incredible rate and we want to be able to access this technology for our communication needs. New equipment should take into account our decreasing eyesight, range of motion, and our learning styles.<sup>20</sup>

## ■ safe communities

We want to be able to navigate our communities and live in our homes without being worried that our personal safety is at risk. We want well trained and equipped police services, interested and engaged neighbours who look after each other, and community policies and programs that are designed for our specific needs in mind.

## we can make Niagara accessible to all by considering the World Health Organization's age-friendly cities initiative

### outdoor spaces and

**buildings** that are clean, green, and equipped with public toilets, places to rest, and are safe for pedestrians and bicyclists.

**housing** that is affordable, near essential services, and includes a range of options and designs.<sup>21</sup>

### social inclusion and

**participation** that is respectful of aging adults, their place within the community and family, inclusive of age ranges, different cultures and genders.

### communication and

**information** services that are widespread, easy to use, and promote engagement with younger people.

### community social and

**health services** that are accessible, wide ranging, networked, offered at home, in the community, and in institutions, and that allow for more volunteers to fill gaps in health and social services.

**transportation** that is available, affordable, reliable, comfortable, has specialized services for older people and the disabled, courteous drivers and passengers, appropriate transportation stops and stations, safe driving conditions and adequate parking.

### civic participation and

**employment** that allows for a variety of paid and unpaid options, flexibility to accommodate older workers and volunteers, entrepreneurial opportunities, training, encouragement of civic participation, and valuing older people's contributions.

NOTE: *References are available electronically.*

*Please see [www.brocku.ca/nco/pb02](http://www.brocku.ca/nco/pb02)*





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