



DID YOU GET AN MPAC ASSESSMENT NOTICE?



Over 713,000 property assessment notices were mailed out by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) at the end of 2023.

Before the pandemic, properties were reassessed – and new notices were sent – every four years. But that was halted in 2020, when Ontario froze assessments at 2016 property values. An amendment to the Assessment Act in August 2023 extended the use of 2016 property values through the end of 2024.

The notices that were sent last month are the result of a change to the property. According to an MPAC news release, 49.35 percent of those changes were an update to the ownership of a property, whether through a sale, a change of the owner’s name or their citizenship, or some other similar factor. Another 27 percent reflect an update to the assessed value of the property, typically as a result of renovations, the addition of new buildings, or a change in classification.

Other reasons for a notice could include the creation of a new property, such as through a severance or consolidation (11.6 percent); or an update to mailing address, lot dimensions, legal descriptions, property locations, school support, occupancy, or taxable tenants.

“Ontario is constantly growing, and our property landscape changes each year. For example, on average, 10 percent of the province’s homes sell each year,” Nicole McNeill, President & Chief Administrative Officer, said in a media release. “At MPAC, our team of property market experts work continuously to maintain Ontario’s property database through the updating of records and the timely assessment of new construction, additions, and renovations. These Property Assessment Notices reflect changes to properties and property ownership that were made in 2023.”

Next year, assessments will once again begin to reflect current market value of properties. Those values are used to determine what percentage of the municipal and school tax bill we each pay.

For additional information or to find out what to do if you disagree with an assessment, visit <https://mpac.ca/>

Chris Occhiuzzi

In this Issue...

President’s Message.....	2	MLA Food Drive	6
Navigating The Frozen Beauty	3	New Members	7
2023 Photo Contest Winners	4,5	Local’s Corner.....	8



President's MESSAGE



During my winter Zoom calls with MLA members living year-round in Muskoka, I often marvel at the glorious views out the windows behind them, with sparkling snow on the trees and glittering ice on the lake. If this is your daily view, I hope you are loving it .. and sending photos to your Muskoka neighbours who aren't there!

The fall and early winter was an active, productive time for the MLA. As a result of your membership and support, we had a strong and credible voice in our advocacy work, bolstered by experts we retained, and continued our programs benefiting the Muskoka community.

The decisions being made by municipal councils across Muskoka – especially those prioritizing the environment and fiscal responsibility -- reinforce the importance of the MLA's involvement in the 2022 municipal elections, identifying candidates aligned with our members and encouraging voter turnout.

A prime example was the decision made by Township of Muskoka Lakes Council in January NOT to delegate planning decision authority to staff, but to retain authority in Council. Mayor Peter Kelley explained: "I have a very difficult time upping the delegation of authority on any of these planning matters – particularly ones that affect the waterfront, that impact the environment or the character of TML. That was a big factor in why I ran for this office. .. As leaders, it's ultimately our responsibility to take responsibility for these decisions." The MLA advocated strongly for this result, since we support planning decisions being made by elected officials with opportunities for public input.

Another example was the adoption by Township of Muskoka Lakes Council of a new Official Plan (OP) with strong environmental protections that discourage condominium ownership of resorts, and push new aggregate operations back more than 2 km from shorelines. We worked alongside smaller lake associations to help persuade District Council -- the final approval authority -- to uphold the OP, including the aggregate policies that will be so important for water quality.

In December, the MLA hosted a virtual open house where Mitch Goldhar and his team at Penguin Group of Companies presented their plans for the Cleveland's House lands and answered questions. Working with Friends of Muskoka since 2017, MLA volunteers helped pause the approved development of 4,000 units and significantly reduce what can be built. Mr. Goldhar's open and candid approach -- including the creation of a dedicated email address for further questions: info@clevelandshouse.com -- is widely appreciated.

The MLA's advocacy work representing our members' interests also extends to the Province. With other organizations across Ontario, we are working to persuade the Province to allow municipalities to regulate large boat wakes, which are irreparably eroding shorelines, loon nests and other wildlife habitat. We also helped persuade the Province to regulate 'floating accommodations' that are anchoring and being occupied as seasonal cottages, without being subject to municipal bylaws on noise, garbage or other concerns.

The Town of Bracebridge is now reviewing its Official Plan for the next 20 years. The MLA is participating in the creation of this new OP and advocating for strong policies to help protect the environment and shorelines.

The MLA's volunteers and wonderful office staff organized our annual fall food drive and delivered generous contributions to the Salvation Army.

It's membership renewal time, and you should have received your renewal packages explaining how to renew: either manually or through our new auto-renewal program. If not, please email our office at info@mla.on.ca or call (705)765-5723 and we'd be happy to help you.

With your continuing support, the board, office staff and hundreds of volunteers are eager to carry on the MLA's work to preserve and enhance Muskoka for all generations to value and enjoy, throughout 2024.

I wish you and your families a safe and enjoyable winter!

Susan Eplett



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NAVIGATING THE FROZEN BEAUTY

In winter, Muskoka's breathtaking landscapes and pristine lakes are transformed into expansive sheets of ice, providing a perfect platform for winter sports and recreation, and roads to remote cottages and worksites. But that flat, inviting surface can also conceal danger, and every winter brings a litany of drowning deaths and close calls by skaters, ice fishermen, snowmobile and ATV riders, and truckers out on the ice.

And even though the hazards of working or playing on ice aren't new, we need to refresh our awareness, because climate change is eroding the safety of Muskoka's ice: With milder winters, ice is forming later and going out sooner. Some observers have suggested that, at present rates, ice fishing and winter snowmobiling on Muskoka's lakes will disappear within 10 years.

So, to make the most of the opportunities our frozen lakes and rivers provide, it's vital to do so safely. Here are some basics.

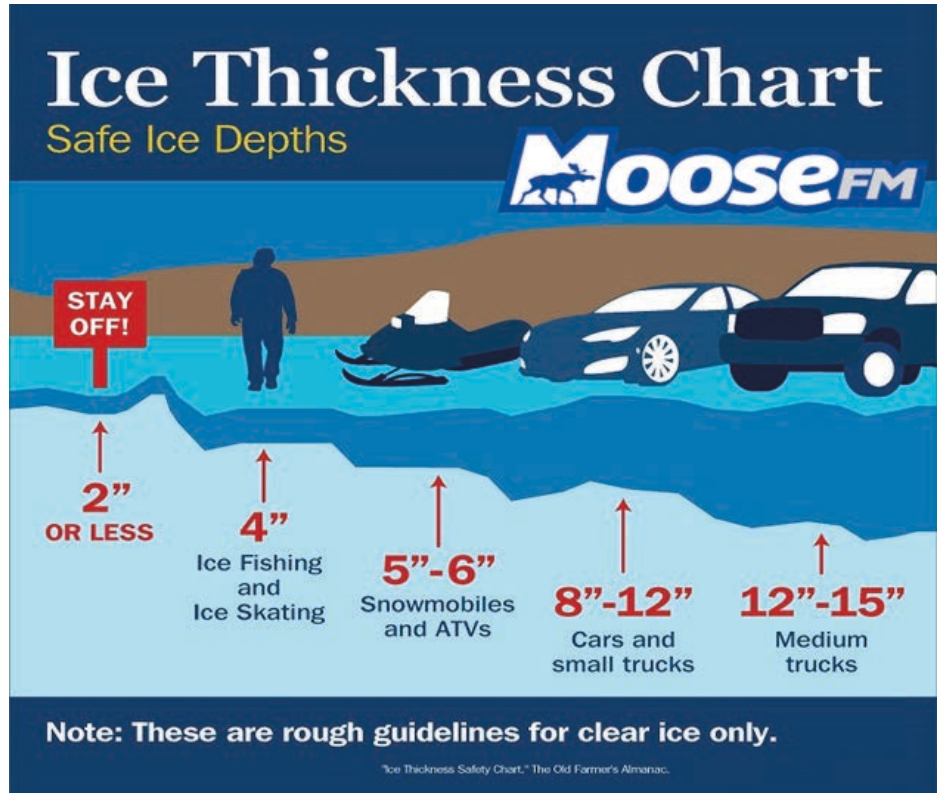
Understanding Ice Conditions

The first thing to recognize is that ice in Muskoka's lakes isn't uniform. Temperature, snow cover, currents, water depth and prevailing winds can all affect ice thickness, quality and stability. Before heading out, check with local authorities, such as Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for information on current ice conditions.

Ice Thickness

Determining whether it's safe to walk, skate, fish, or drive on a frozen lake depends, first, on ice thickness and quality. The following are general guidelines:

- **2 inches (5 cm) or less:** Stay off the ice
- **4 inches (10 cm):** Suitable for walking, skating and ice fishing
- **5 inches (12 cm):** Suitable for ATVs and snowmobiles



- **8-12 inches (20-30 cm):** Suitable for a small vehicle.
- **12 inches (30 cm) or more:** Suitable for a larger vehicle or a group of people.

Before heading out onto the ice you should perform a careful visual inspection. If you see any of the following, don't go:

- Cracks, breaks or holes in the ice
- Water on top of the ice or water flowing onto the ice
- Ice that appears soft or mushy
- Flowing springs in spring-fed ponds and lakes
- Ice that appears to have thawed and refrozen
- Snow on the ice; snow can warm up and weaken the ice because it acts as an insulator

Ice Colour Matters too

According to Destinations Ontario, ice colour is a reliable indicator of ice safety:

Blue ice is clear and strong: Ice colour deepens with increasing thickness. Blue ice forms when the temperature drops below minus 8 degrees Celsius.

White opaque ice or snow ice is only half as strong as blue ice: This is formed by wet snow freezing on the top of established ice, and can be very dangerous if it has formed on top of ice that is not fully frozen. Lower-level ice can take even longer to solidify, obscuring danger.

Dull grey ice is unsafe; Water is present and this ice will not support much weight. Grey ice is common in the spring and on faster moving water all winter.

Additional Ice Safety Precautions

- I. **Stay informed:** Check local ice conditions and weather forecasts before heading out.

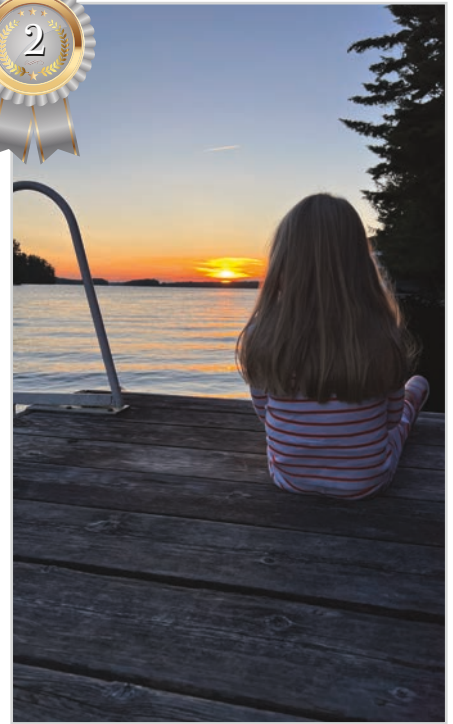


Congratulations to this year's Photo Contest Winners! We received over 100 entries and were impressed by the quality of the submissions. The selection wasn't easy, but a panel of judges agreed that the following pictures best reflected their respective categories. The first-place winners of each category will receive an 18"x24" plaque mounted print of their photo courtesy of Aben Graphics, which will be available for pickup at the MLA Office this summer. For those who didn't win first place, look for your photos in our publications!

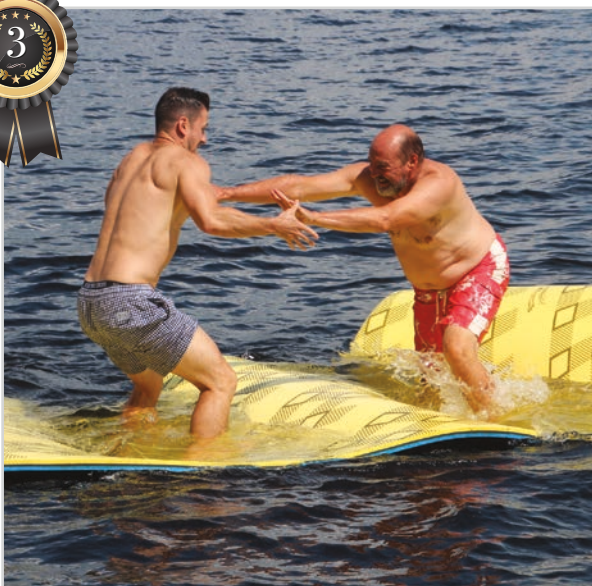
FAMILY & FRIENDS



Susan Babcock



Nicole Lemelin

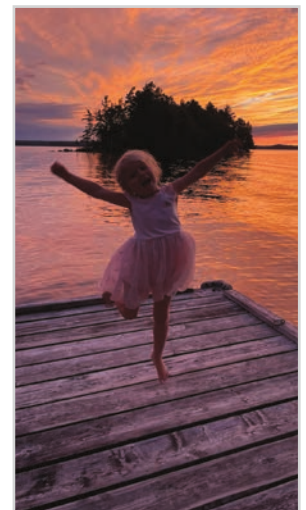


Susan Babcock

HONOURABLE MENTION



Christina Sarrancini



George Boddington



MUSKOKA LIFE



Mandie Charlton



David Croft

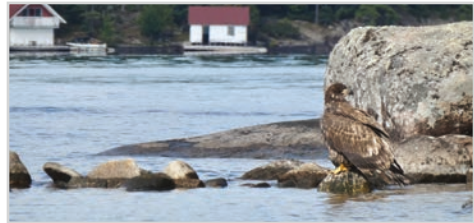


Lenore Inniss

HONOURABLE MENTION



Mandie Charlton



Dana Dyment

2024 Entries may be submitted by MLA members and their families in the categories of:

FAMILY & FRIENDS

Quiet times on the dock, boisterous play, cruising the lakes... show us how you and the people you love use the cottage.

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NAVIGATING THE FROZEN BEAUTY *continued from page 3*

2. **Use safety gear:** Carry ice picks and wear a life jacket. These tools can be crucial when the ice breaks.

3. **Buddy system:** Never venture onto the ice alone. Always have a companion, and let a third party know your plans, including your expected route and return time. Being out on the ice at night significantly heightens the dangers and reduces safety margins, so

carefully consider the importance of your trip.

4. **Avoid high-risk areas:** Steer clear of areas with moving water, such as inlets, outlets, and areas with underwater currents. These areas are more likely to have thin ice.

5. **Listen to local authorities:** If signs or officials advise against venturing onto the ice, heed their

warnings. Safety should always be your top priority.

Muskoka's frozen lakes offer a winter wonderland for those seeking activity outdoors, but safety should be your priority. Plan carefully, remain aware of changing conditions and keep your ice travel options open. Nobody ever got hurt being ice safety smart.

MLA FOOD DRIVE HELPS THOSE IN NEED IN OUR COMMUNITY



The MLA's 2023 food drive was another success this year. Running August 27 through October 28, approximately 50 boxes of food were picked up by MLA volunteers and donated to the Salvation Army in Gravenhurst. Thanks to the people of the Muskoka communities of Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Bala, Port Carling, Port Sandfield, Minett, Rosseau, and MacTier for their generosity

and stepping up to help others in need. Further thanks go to the businesses that supported our efforts: Oliver's Coffee (Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Bala and Port Carling); Spirit Bay Harbour Marina; Beaumaris Yacht Club; Walker's Point Marina; Campbell's Point Marina; Mortimer's Marina; Glen Orchard General Store; and, SWS Boatworks (Lake Rosseau and Lake Muskoka). And of course, thanks to our MLA volunteers who did the heavy lifting — literally.

2023 drop off locations

BRACEBRIDGE: Oliver's Coffee, Spirit Bay Harbour Marina, Beaumaris Yacht Club, Agency Brokerage

GRAVENHURST/BALA: Oliver's Coffee, Walker's Point Marina, Campbell's Landing Marina, Oliver's Coffee - Bala

PORT CARLING: Mortimers Marina, Glen Orchard General Store, SWS Boatworks Marina, Oliver's Coffee, MLA Office

PORT SANDFIELD/MINETT/ROSSEAU Silver Stream Farms Store, Rosseau General Store, Minett Corner Store

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HELP US ACHIEVE OUR MEMBERSHIP GOAL! REFER A FRIEND AND BECOME AN MLA AMBASSADOR

Winter in Muskoka can be a magical time to escape the city and rediscover the beauty of a Muskoka winter. But it is also a time to reach out to friends and neighbours and help us bring new members to the MLA. Just one new member each from our existing membership will help us achieve our membership goal of doubling the membership. Just call the office with a name and contact info. We'll do the rest.



DETAILS, TOOLS & SIGN UP

Contact us at newmembers@mla.on.ca
or by phone 705.765.5723

New Members

Please welcome the following as new members of the MLA!
From September 16, 2023 to January 22, 2024

Laura PRATT
Michael WORB
Aleks PAUSAK

Jefferey BIRD
Laura REDDEN
Wesley HUNNISETT

Darcy BROWNE
Owen PHILLIPS
Lynn DECARO

Nancy GORDON
Erin O'BRIEN
Michelle VINCENT

Judy GAGE
Neil PACKHAM
Gale SPICER



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Local's Corner

Pie Pizza - Wood Fired Pizza Joint



Looking for a tasty lunch or dinner?

Look no further than Pie in Port Carling. The restaurant serves delicious wood-oven pizza as well as an assortment of appetizers, sandwiches, salads and pastas. There's a wide variety of pizza, not just the classics, but some unexpected topping combinations that are great.

There's an upstairs party room for gatherings and private events, and Pie is open year-round for both dine-in and take out. The wood oven adds an extra degree of coziness to winter nights.

We've had the opportunity to try Pie both ways — the sit-down experience is very pleasant, with great service, and the take-out option is just as good. Pie also sells hand-made pizzas for freezing so you can enjoy the experience at home. You'll find Pie in Port Carling (as well as Walkers Point Marina and Gordon Bay Marine) where it's open all week from 11:30 am to 9 pm.

114 Medora St., Port Carling (upstairs)
705-765-1518

Cathie Mostowyk



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