PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Professional Development and Wine Country



Mary Ellen Bench, IMLA President

Happy Canada Day to IMLA members on both sides of the border!

I have had a busy couple of months attending IMLA events including the mid-year, IMLA in Canada Day in Port Credit, and the amazing Top 50 in Philadelphia. I learned a lot and was happy to see so many engaged members at each of these events. We all have so many new issues to deal with and new challenges in managing law offices, that IMLA can help us build the networks we need to keep on top of it all.

Now that those events are behind me, I am doing what I consider to be my duty to host the upcoming IMLA Annual Conference in Niagara Falls and visiting some of the local establishments to be best able to make recommendations on places to go for lunch or dinner, or just a tour, when time allows. With so many apps that provide all manner of information about locations and rate restaurants, I may not need to do this, but one cannot be too careful!

Here's an insider's hint: When you see "VQA Ontario" on a bottle of wine, it tells you the wine is made from 100% Ontario-grown grapes. VQA stands for Vintners Quality Alliance, the body that sets the standards for wine making in the Province, and the Niagara region is one of three appellations that are within the Ontario VQA system. Ontario has a cool climate, excellent for growing grapes, and is well-known for its "coolest" wine, Icewine—which I may have mentioned previously. Icewine can be made from several varietals of grapes and by allowing them to freeze naturally on the vine, the flavours become more intense and so does the sugar. Please take an opportunity to try it when you are at the Niagara Conference.

I suggest that those who are interested in taking a few days to explore Ontario's wine country check out this website: www.winecountryontario.ca, and take turns being the designated driver so all can have a turn to enjoy! The site has a lot of information about the various vineyards, restaurants and accommodations in both Niagara-on-the-Lake and in nearby Twenty Valley and the Niagara Escarpment. It also has a great trip planner. If you are staying a few days and looking for a small but wonderful town to stay in, I can highly recommend Niagara-on-the-Lake. The town is old by North American standards, with buildings dating back to the War of 1812 era. I mention the War of 1812 because it appears to be an event in our shared history that we may have different views about, depending on which side of the border you grew up on. Niagara -on-the-Lake features many superlative places to stay that can be found under the banner of the Vintage hotels (www.vintage-hotels.com)--my personal favourite is the Prince of Wales.

Now for my research. If you head out towards Niagara-on-the-Lake (where our Executive Director Chuck Thompson says he experienced "the best meal ever," so ask him for specifics), you will find some extraordinary places to eat and drink. If you are looking for someplace casual and small, at the entry to the town there is Backhouse, with a seasonal menu, and the Garrison, with the best burgers in the area, made from brisket. The wineries have created fabulous restaurants as well, and I highly recommend a visit to neighbouring properties at Peller Estates and the Two Sisters. Wayne Gretzky just opened a new distillery as well, and for hockey fans, he and his dad have been known to frequent it. They have a great mixologist on staff at the bar so remember to ask Zac to make you something special. Many craft breweries are popping up as well that are worth a visit. Before you get all the way to the actual town of Niagara-on-the-Lake you will pass through an area still known as St. David's where Ravine Winery serves a very nice meal with their own wines to compliment.

If you head in the direction of the Niagara Escarpment, you can enjoy a wonderful meal with award- winning wines at the Coach House Café at Henry of Pelham (please note I have a conflict as my cousins own and operate this establishment). They are famous for their Baco Noir and Icewine, among others. And last week I discovered a winery called the Good Earth that was exceptional. It has an outdoor pizza oven as well as an interesting menu, and the best pink Pinot Grigio around. While out that way, please look up Upper Canada Cheese, which pairs well with any of the wines. All of these, and many more, can be found on the wine country website and built into a trip planner, so it couldn't be simpler. Best is to do a couple of days at each. If you sign up for the land use tour at the Conference you may even get to visit one of them on official business!

With the Conference now only months away, please check out the excellent program and register if you have not already done so. Our IMLA team has created some great events for you including an opening reception at Table Rock at the brink of Niagara Falls, a walk under the Falls, and a great movie ride for your enjoyment. I hope you also take a few minutes to check out our sponsors, as without their support and enthusiasm, it would be a very different event. Your Host Committee (Heather Salter (City Solicitor, St. Catharines), Ken Beaman (City Solicitor, Niagara Falls) and me, with help from Nicole Auty (City Solicitor, Hamilton) and Jennifer Feren (Niagara Region school board), look forward to greeting you! ML