

# renaissance

RTOERO Magazine

Spring 2021



## brave new world

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20 tech trends for 2021

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Cybersecurity 101

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7 free fitness apps



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PHOTO, 10'000 HOURS

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# keep in touch!

The RTOERO online community is fun, active and engaged. Connect with our growing group for updates on news and events near you, exclusive contests, retirement tips and more.

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 [RTOERO](https://www.youtube.com/RTOERO)

## renaissance

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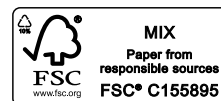
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We asked James Franklin McDonald, Patricia Ogura and Allan Britnell to tell us about the one piece of technology they can't live without.



**JAMES FRANKLIN MCDONALD**

“My computer is my best buddy. At the crack of dawn, it is ready to do my bidding. Unanswered email messages, unfinished articles and pending letters to the editor await my attention. Google searches sometimes require consideration. My calico cat, Dallas, lying close by, often assists me by tiptoeing over the keys. My computer is a technological marvel.”

—*District 22 Etobicoke and York*



**PATRICIA OGURA**

“I must separate surviving from living where tech is concerned. My mobile is ‘essential’ because I can’t pay rent without it. The tech I never *want* to live without is pretty traditional: the radio. Intimate, stimulating, resourceful, relevant in any mood and like the best of friends, it’s warm and reliable.”



**ALLAN BRITNELL**

“I could not live without my MacBook laptop. It’s not only the main tool I use for doing my job but also a communications device (email, text and FaceTime), an entertainment centre, the repository for our family photos and so much more.”

# Reader letters

We wowed you with our winter issue!

**It was indeed a pleasure to read through the winter 2021 issue of *Renaissance*,** as it is with every issue. Your amazing layout and choice of content certainly make for an enjoyable and informative read, from cover to cover. The arrival of *Renaissance* always calls for an extra coffee (if it's morning), an extra glass of wine (if it's afternoon) and a few hours to sit, relax and soak in all the interesting articles and fabulous photos. The variety of topics gives me a chance to smile, dream, envy, become informed, empathize and read about the experiences of friends and colleagues.

—Larry Holseth (District 39 Peel)

**I received my winter 2021 issue of *Renaissance* today.**

Wow — you did such an amazing job in the format, layout and overall quality of the magazine. You presented my piece so beautifully. Great job, and thanks for this opportunity.

—Morris Tait (District 30 Northumberland)

**A huge WOW to those responsible for the upgrade of the design of *Renaissance* magazine!** I love the fresh use of colour, great titles and layouts, and super photography. Just fanning the pages, I think I will be reading many or most of the features. Well done.

—Ron Brownsberger (District 34 York Region)

**Congratulations on a very interesting magazine!**

I've had a stroke and thoroughly appreciated the article by Jo-Anne Willment, who has shown a lot of courage. I'm pleased she received encouragement to carry on. She is young enough to have a successful life and overcome many problems from the stroke. I like her attitude and perseverance.

—Eleanor Mackenzie (District 50 Atlantic)

**Thank you for your help with my article,** "Experience of a lifetime," in the winter 2021 issue of *Renaissance*. It was accompanied by such an effective layout. With teachers now receiving their issues, I am overwhelmed by the reconnections that have happened, including an RTOERO member in Kenora and a superintendent from East York who spotted my name and got in touch.

—Lester C. Fretz (District 14 Niagara)

**I'm sending my thanks to you and your team for a great winter 2021 issue of *Renaissance*.**

As a senior, the exercises will be a great help, especially when combined with some of the superfoods that were highlighted. Great job.

—Paul LeBlanc (District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand)

**Your new look blew me away.** The magazine is so beautiful! And it's easy to read, with very inviting content about *real* people. I picked it up to glance through and ended up reading it all the way through. Way to go!

—Jim McDonald (District 22 Etobicoke and York)

**I've been enjoying "Spotlight on" at the end of each issue of *Renaissance*.**

I did look far and wide through my last few copies to find out how I might participate in a future article but could not find the information I was seeking. Where exactly do you ask your question for the next issue(s)?

—John Borovilos (District 16 City of Toronto)

**From the editors:** We're delighted you enjoy "Spotlight on"! We ask the question on our Facebook page ([facebook.com/rto.ero](https://facebook.com/rto.ero)), but not on a specific date. Join our Facebook community and watch for the "Spotlight on" question and join in lots of other lively conversations.

**As we go to press,** the pandemic is still impacting day-to-day life in many ways. As you know, we plan and produce *Renaissance* months before it lands in your mailbox or inbox, so some stories and images might not align with current COVID-19 best practices or restrictions (our travel feature, for example). If we still can't travel this spring, consider our spa story your getaway until we can.

Stay safe,  
Stefanie Martin  
Editor-in-Chief

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

We welcome your feedback, so please send your letters to [renaissance@rtoero.ca](mailto:renaissance@rtoero.ca). Letters may be edited for length and clarity at the discretion of the editor.



## Exclusively for RTOERO members



**As a benefit of RTOERO membership,** you receive a paid print or digital subscription to our award-winning *Renaissance* magazine. Each quarterly issue brings you the information you want to live a healthy, active life in retirement.

\$5 from your annual membership dues is allocated to your one-year paid subscription to *Renaissance* magazine and is non-refundable.

## Do you know someone retiring from the education sector?

RTOERO now offers free virtual Retirement Planning Workshops for anyone in the education community!

### They'll learn more about:

Planning for their financial future

—  
Their pension

—  
Health benefit needs in retirement

—  
RTOERO benefit plans

—  
Retirement insights from peers

For a full schedule of upcoming webinars and to register, visit [rtoero.ca/events/retirement-planning-workshops](https://rtoero.ca/events/retirement-planning-workshops).



# Living digital

High-tech,  
high-touch  
connections

by **Rich Prophet**,  
RTOERO Chair



## Digital technology is ubiquitous in everyday life.

Contrary to ageist stereotypes, older adults tend to be active technology users.

In RTOERO's membership surveys, you have told us how you use technology:

- 99 per cent of members have computer and internet access
- 72 per cent use YouTube to search for information
- 53 per cent use Facebook to keep in touch with family, friends and other RTOERO members

Knowing that so many of you are keen on technology, RTOERO uses digital communication methods to connect with members in a variety of ways:

- In 2020, RTOERO sent 5 million email messages to members
- We reach more than 2.5 million people a year on Facebook, and more than 100,000 engage with us through comments, likes and shares
- During the pandemic, we set up a Zoom account for each RTOERO district to help keep members connected

Sadly, technology can also have a downside. Cyberattacks, hacks and scams are a growing problem — and seniors are often the target. We will continue to share information with you about how to protect yourself online.

For most of us, however, the benefits of technology outweigh the problems. We go to online sources, such as the McMaster Optimal Aging Portal, for important health-and-wellness information, and use our devices to keep in touch with family and friends.

Of course, low-tech, high-touch communication is also important. From our readership study, we know that more than 80 per cent of members highly enjoy receiving and reading *Renaissance* in print. Many members also choose to receive paper copies of their district newsletter. But each year, more members opt for *e-Renaissance* and emailed newsletters.

At RTOERO, we will continue to look for high-tech and high-touch ways to stay connected with you. 🌸

Please keep in touch,  
Rich

# Diversity, equity and inclusion

Embracing  
priority  
principles

by **Jim Grieve**,  
RTOERO CEO



## ***"The secret of change is to focus all your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new." –Dan Millman***

The past year has demonstrated that we are not waiting for the new reality — we are already in it.

We understand our fragility within a global pandemic.

Our confidence in the political world has been shaken to the core.

The need to learn about and embrace diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is not an option but an urgent imperative.

In the decades since I started working in education, I have been on a journey of learning about DEI. Every day, I'm confronted with, and grateful for, new insights. The staff of RTOERO and I are taking DEI courses, and we focus on DEI concepts in every monthly staff meeting.

## **We're changing. We're learning.**

RTOERO is working to create "a safe space for open and ever-changing perspectives, where a wide range of visible and invisible human qualities are acknowledged, respected and given an opportunity to thrive." I've borrowed this quote from the Regional Diversity Roundtable, a DEI non-profit organization with which we collaborate.

Among our collective commitments, our *Strategic Plan 2025* states that staff and volunteers will actively seek opportunities to learn and grow in our understanding of DEI. We have made this resolution to ensure:

- A diversity of perspectives and voices are heard
- All members and stakeholders feel a sense of belonging, respect and safety within RTOERO
- Our grants and scholarship programs are accessible to a range of individuals and communities
- The development of a healthy and engaged membership

To realize this collective commitment in 2021, we will be offering a series of webinars and other learning opportunities, including a DEI self-evaluation tool that RTOERO staff and members can use to assess their personal learning.

Regardless of our roles, what unites us has always been our belief in securing a more inclusive future for one another and our communities. 🌸

Let's continue "building the new" together,  
Jim

# Our classified section has moved online!

Visit [rtoero.ca/classified](https://rtoero.ca/classified)  
for the latest updates and to  
share posts online for free:

- reunions
- classifieds
- jobs
- volunteering
- travel
- rentals





# The comfort of stone

Changing lives and  
changing landscapes

by **Marie Pottle** (District 7 Windsor-Essex),  
writing as **Marie Groundwater**



## Introduction

My birth above the bakeshop on Albert St. in Kirkwall, Orkney; my early years among my father's family there after the war; our time in Aberdeen and Edinburgh; and holidays to the Western Highlands, where my mother's people lived — all this was known to me as a child growing up in southwestern Ontario. However, it was not until some years after the death of my father that, as an adult, I first returned to Scotland with my mother. We crossed from the mainland to the Orkneys by air.

Several years later, I took my own daughter "home" to the Highlands and islands of my birth, this time crossing by sea ferry. The reality of seeing the people and places I had always heard about in the talk around our kitchen table was life changing. The impact of the beautiful and historic Orkneys, particularly, has informed the poetry that begins this book.

As immigrants, our family arrived in Canada in early April, but my father could not begin teaching in Chatham, Ont., where he had secured a position, until September. He had exhausted most of the funds from the sale of our house in Edinburgh to pay the cost of ocean passage for himself, my mother, my younger sister and me — as well as for his widowed sister and her son, who was disabled, who now lived with us.

A cottage without any plumbing near Peterborough, Ont., at Bridgenorth by Lake Chemong, was our very rustic beginning in the "new world." Here, our father travelled the winding roads of the Haliburton Highlands late into the summer nights, delivering ice cream to small stores.

In Chatham, my mother gave birth to my brother and another sister. We were now a family of eight, and teachers' salaries were extremely low at that time. The last meagre cheque came at the end of June; the next, not until the very end of September. To make ends meet, my father laboured in the

sweltering cornfields. When that was still not enough, my mother and aunt went to work at night, peeling tomatoes in the canning factories. My mother, always strong and resourceful, but a little prideful too, warned us not to tell anyone — after all, our father was a "professional" man.

Windsor, Ont., offered a little more money for teachers and, more importantly, a university. This welcoming city of the "Christmas Tree Man," a poem in *The Comfort of Stone*, was to be our final destination. As an immigrant family, we had moved from one rented place to another, and (counting the two I attended in Scotland) I had changed schools nine times by my 16th birthday. While living in our last family home in Windsor, I met and married my husband, who also came to Canada at age seven — but from England. It took my Scottish parents a little time to forgive me for marrying an Englishman, but we were indeed well-matched: we both felt unsettled anywhere. We are now in our 12th home, having lived in the city, the country and along the shore of Lake Erie.

In the end, we must return to the beginning. I read somewhere that people who come from islands can never truly be at home anywhere else. We lost our wonderful father, and the music of his piano that had always filled our life, when he was only 52 years old. With some of his last breaths, as if to someone far away, he said, "Put the flags up on the Kirkwall pier." Like the ships of wartime Orkney, he was coming home to safe harbour.

*The Comfort of Stone* is the poetry of changing lives and landscapes, of family and memory. It is poetry that remembers the music.

If you are interested in learning more about my book, want to "talk poetry" or would like to renew our acquaintance from years past, you can connect with me on Facebook or by email at [mariegroundwater@gmail.com](mailto:mariegroundwater@gmail.com). 📧

**This excerpt is the introduction to my full-length poetry manuscript, *The Comfort of Stone*, which is slated to be published in autumn 2021. There are several strong themes linking each unit; one focuses on the impact of immigration and the dimensions of time that it creates.**

One of the poems, "To New Beginnings in Canada," closes with these lines:

*In those days, emigration  
was a kind of death.  
Our loss keened loudly  
from the Western Highlands  
to the Orkney Islands in the North Sea  
by those who loved us.*

*One Grannie crying on a station platform,  
holding us tightly in her arms —  
"I'll never see ma wee bairns again..."*

*She didn't.*

# Advocacy in action

Working for a more  
equitable world

by **Patricia Ogura**

**Older adults are the fastest-growing age group in Canada.** Together with our members and partners, RTOERO advocates for critical public policy improvements that will address the urgent needs of Canadians aged 65 and older and create a more secure and compassionate future for everyone.

RTOERO focuses on three key issues: creating a national seniors' strategy, advocating for geriatric health care and promoting environmental stewardship. Our Vibrant Voices program works with government and industry to address these areas. And you can add your voice to help us keep the momentum going: Encourage immediate and extended family, friends and neighbours to join in. If you don't speak, how can you be heard?

## Seniors' strategy

Current mental and physical health-care infrastructure and frameworks for ensuring seniors' financial security are not adequate; they need re-imagining and rebuilding from scratch. "We should be very concerned that the system is broken," says Margaret Gillis, president of the International Longevity Centre Canada. "We are not able to accommodate needs now, or needs that are going to happen in the future as we age. We need to fix the entire system. It's economically sound to do so."

RTOERO is advocating for:

- income security
- universal public pharmacare
- eliminating social isolation barriers
- creating supports for people who want to age at home

## Geriatric health care

By 2024, Canadians aged 65 and older will account for 20 per cent of the population, and Canada's health-care system won't be able to meet the demand without significant changes. "COVID-19 has shown us the cost of not investing... nothing and no one in health care should be marginalized," says Dr. Paula Rochon, vice-president of research at Women's College Hospital and the RTOERO Chair in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Toronto. "We need to focus on every aspect and work together for solutions. No stopgap measures."

RTOERO is advocating for:

- geriatric training to ensure we have enough geriatricians and health-care professionals trained to work with older adults
- healthy aging initiatives, including promoting active lifestyles, social inclusion, mental health supports, age-friendly communities and strategies for coping with change
- more long-term care facilities

- resources for recognizing and preventing elder abuse, and helping abuse victims

## Environmental stewardship

All efforts — personal, community or legislative — that respect the environment make a difference. "The environment can't be...an afterthought. With no habitable earth, what other issue could possibly matter? Everything else is secondary," says Kelly Bannister, an ethnobiologist and biocultural ethicist, and co-director of the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance in the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria.

Neil Ever Osborne, a conservation photographer and the climate change and sustainability editor at the Weather Network, suggests you start with an individual or family plan. Join or organize community or office efforts. Educate and be educated. "Science is making a major comeback," says Osborne. "Science warns us of what is ahead."

RTOERO is advocating for:

- a ban on single-use plastics
- common recycling standards
- eco-friendly transportation
- initiatives that safeguard our water supply and drinking water quality

Whatever your age, your voice has power. Use it to encourage others to protect two extraordinary Canadian treasures: its older population and its magnificent natural resources. "You have to get involved to have any influence," says Kathy Wachs, a community activist in Chemainus, B.C., who mobilizes community participation for environmental projects.

To learn more about these key issues and RTOERO's advocacy in action, visit [rtoero.ca/vibrant-voices](https://rtoero.ca/vibrant-voices). You will also find advice on how you can talk and act — as a voter and as a consumer — to build a better, more equitable world for everyone. 🌱



Creating a  
national seniors'  
strategy



Advocating  
for geriatric  
health care



Promoting  
environmental  
stewardship

# Giving today and tomorrow

Three powerful ways to support your favourite charity

by **Alison LaMantia**



**Planned giving, monthly giving and tribute donations** are significant ways you can contribute to your favourite charitable organization and support its financial stability.

## Planned giving

Planned giving — also called legacy giving — leaves a gift in the future, most often through your will, and is generally much more than you could afford to donate while you're living. Your legacy gift can be cash, of course, but it can also come in the form of stocks or funds transferred to the charity's portfolio. It can also be done any time before your death to create a living legacy. Planned

giving can have tax benefits too, so you'll want to talk to your family, your lawyer and your financial planner to maximize the impact.

"Your heirs won't be shortchanged when you leave a legacy gift to charity," explains Lesley-Anne Scorgie, founder of MeVest and money columnist for *Renaissance*. "Your estate will receive a tax receipt for the amount of your gift, which reduces the amount of tax owing on your estate. In other words, taxes that would have otherwise been paid can go to help the community, and, because of Canada's tax regulations, charitable gifts may result in tax savings on the estate."

Building awareness around planned giving is a new focus for the RTOERO Foundation, and is the result of members asking how to make this kind of gift.

"It's really the donor's story," says Tammy Gonsalves, manager of philanthropy at the RTOERO Foundation. "It's their way of saying, 'I trust the work you do. I also believe in a better future for all of us as we age, and I'm going to make sure that happens whether I'm here or not.'"

For the foundation, planned giving can make a major difference. "It helps build the sustainability of the foundation, potentially for decades to come," explains Gonsalves.



# legacy giving

## the next chapter in your story

You live life with purpose. You are proactive about your health. You care about the future of the RTOERO Foundation and its mission to enhance the lives of older adults in Canada.

A legacy gift – a planned bequest specified in your will – is one of the most significant and lasting contributions you can make for future generations. It is a statement of your generosity and a powerful continuation of the values you practise today.

Are you ready to start creating your lasting legacy with the RTOERO Foundation?

**Contact your lawyer or financial planner to determine what kind of planned gift is best for you, your family and your estate.**

### Monthly giving

The name says it all; this is simply a scheduled monthly donation. This reliable form of revenue can reduce administrative and fundraising costs for a charity, which helps your donation go further. Setting up a monthly gift helps you strategically align your philanthropy efforts to causes that matter to you.

Monthly giving made up 11 per cent of the RTOERO Foundation's annual revenue from individuals in 2019.

### Tribute donation

A tribute, or memorial, donation is a gift made in honour of someone. You might contribute to a hospital foundation in the name of a loved one who received life-saving treatment. Or you might make a donation to celebrate a birth or wedding, or to honour a life.

District 17 Simcoe County is one of several RTOERO districts that makes tribute donations to the RTOERO Foundation in memory of members who have died, in cases where their families haven't asked for memorial contributions to another specific charity.

"Our executive members believe that the foundation's efforts best match the goals of the RTOERO organization; namely, to help improve the lives of members and seniors," says Paul Healy, president of District 17 Simcoe County. "We appreciate the support the foundation continues to provide to other organizations to enhance research in the field of geriatrics and to make a difference in the lives of all seniors."

In 2019, RTOERO districts donated \$10,875 to the foundation through tribute gifts.

To discuss planned giving to the RTOERO Foundation, call Mike Prentice, executive director, at 416-962-9463 ext. 285. To set up a monthly or tribute gift, call Deanna Byrtus, manager of donor relations, at 416-962-9463 ext. 271. ☎



**RTOERO** Foundation  
Fondation

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Toronto, ON M5R 2S7



# 8 key trends in digital health care

Transforming the future of health and wellness

by **Pauline Anderson**

**Elon Musk of Tesla is developing an implantable brain-machine interface (BMI) that** stimulates neurons and promises to revolutionize the treatment of a broad range of neurological conditions. While a computer hooked up to your brain to treat your Parkinson's disease is likely a long way off, Musk's initiative illustrates the progress being made in the field of digital health technology.

We talked to Dr. Darren Larsen, chief medical officer for OntarioMD, a subsidiary of the Ontario Medical Association, which advises physicians on digital health tools. Here's a short overview of the trends he's seeing in the field.

## **Virtual health care**

The onset of the COVID-19 crisis caused a swift and seismic shift from in-office to virtual health care — delivered via phone,

email or video conferencing. Research indicates that only about seven per cent of primary care doctors regularly used the virtual approach before the pandemic, but within a month and a half of the outbreak, 91 per cent had switched over. "This is the most dramatic shift in health care I've seen in my career," says Larsen.

Patients, he adds, are keen on the shift — partly because it saves them precious time — but surveys show most want to



keep seeing a doctor in-office, at least for the first visit. There are still procedures, such as pap smears and heart tests, that can only be done hands-on, and Larsen predicts there will be a balancing of in-person and virtual care over time.

### On-demand health care

Digital technology is allowing today's busy and increasingly mobile patients to access health care at their own convenience. After all, most Canadians now own a smartphone and have access to the internet; that's where they're researching medical facilities and booking doctor appointments. And they go to their appointments armed with health data they've collected on their devices, such as electrocardiographs (ECGs), says Larsen. (More on those below.)

While he "love[s] data-driven conversations with patients," Larsen says the sheer volume of information patients gather does cause unnecessary worry. "They come with a raft of data to show how sick they are, when you know that all they've given you just shows they're quite normal."

### Wearable devices

Small devices implanted under the skin that continuously monitor blood sugar levels have been a godsend for people with diabetes. "We're getting very precise with real-time blood sugar trends and that's awesome; it allows me to accurately change a patient's insulin levels," says Larsen.

Elsewhere, people are sporting exercise trackers, such as Fitbits; sweat sensors; nutrition indicators; and oxygen monitors. While many wearable devices aren't sensitive enough to make a huge contribution to the general illness conversation, there are some exceptions, Larsen believes. One he singles out is the Apple Watch, which has an ECG monitor that can alert you when you're in atrial fibrillation.

Then there's the device worn like a collar that measures oxygen level, heart rate and

respiratory rate, and even tracks snoring, he says. Larsen notes that applications on these devices are getting smarter, making the technology more useful. "They're starting to do a lot of actual curation and better interpretations," he says.

### Electronic health records

These have been around for years, but today there's an increasing level of connectivity that allows health experts to easily access patients' lab tests, imaging reports, drug information and immunization records. Experts are using increasingly sophisticated technology to keep electronic health records accurate and free from data breaches.

While connected systems are currently limited to hospital settings, and primary care records mostly stand alone on private servers, the next big frontier, according to Larsen, is getting primary care data into those larger health databases.

### Artificial intelligence (AI)

AI uses sophisticated computer-based pattern recognition to identify abnormalities physicians might miss. For example, it's being put to work picking up potentially cancerous growths on scans, determining overall cardiovascular risk through data analysis and perfecting medical imaging. "You see predictions that computers will replace radiologists for the bulk of X-ray reading within the next 10 years, and the same for CT [computerized tomography] scans," Larsen observes.

AI may also be useful in drug development, lowering medication error rates and identifying and addressing patterns of frequent use by patients in emergency departments. "I have about 10 years left in this career and I'm pretty sure AI will revolutionize what I do in medicine before I'm done; that's the pace of change," comments Larsen.

He's convinced that, before he retires, AI "will allow us to recommend

treatments with a degree of certainty that we're on the right path — right now, we're just using intuition." But Larsen cautions that "AI is only as good as the data you train it on, and you have to train it really well to make good predictions."

### Genetic-based treatments

Your genetic makeup is increasingly being used to determine optimal treatments tailored to you. Larsen participated in a study at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto, in which every patient who needed a psychoactive drug got a genetic test beforehand.

He says there were "profound success stories" — patients who had failed numerous therapies improved once a drug they could safely metabolize was identified using genetic information. "I would give it to them and, boom, they were all better in three months, and I think they would have died by suicide had I not found that drug," says Larsen.

### Virtual reality (VR)

This technology is being used to treat or help manage everything from autism and pain to post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. Larsen sees VR or its sister, augmented reality (AR), playing a role in helping seniors with cognitive difficulties better connect with their environment — perhaps using movement or music. "The biggest problem for people with dementia is that we kind of forget about them. We don't stimulate them anymore, which causes them to decline [further]," says Larsen. AR could also play an important role in training health experts to perform various medical procedures.

### Improved telemedicine

Doctors have been communicating remotely with rural patients for some time now, but it has become increasingly common, says Larsen. "It's available on every cellphone, every computer. I used to have to travel to a TV clinic in the hospital; now I can do it from my backyard on my iPhone." 📶



# 7 free fitness apps

It's time to get moving!

by **Ylva Van Buuren**

If you're looking for a gym-free way to get moving, fitness apps could become your ticket to working out. There are hundreds of apps available that cover a wide variety of exercise plans, support different fitness levels and build online communities. They're easy to download to your smartphone or tablet and, even better, many are free.

Health Canada recommends that adults of all ages get at least 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activity. They suggest sessions of 10 minutes or more at a time twice a week, and activities that work your major muscle groups.

As we get older, says Colin Milner, CEO and founder of the International Council on Active Aging, fitness is about finding activities that you enjoy doing and that support your physical condition and needs. That means fitness could be a guided aerobics class, yoga postures done in a chair or a rigorous walk in the woods — it's up to you.

Here are seven free get-fit apps we like, available for both Android and iOS platforms.

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults 65+, released by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) last fall, show what a healthy day should look like for everyone: move more every day, limit sedentary behaviours to eight hours or less, and aim for seven to eight hours of good-quality sleep.



- **ParticipACTION:** Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2021, ParticipACTION continues to draw on the latest science and original research to provide health and fitness information and workout routines for all ages and levels. Simply scroll through the app for motivating tips, articles and instructional fitness videos. Set personal goals on the app and track the time you spend exercising too.



- **FitOn:** While FitOn's claim to fame is that its workouts are created by celebrity trainers, the app includes a section of routines for seniors. Choose from cardio, high-intensity interval training (HIIT), strength, dance, yoga, Pilates and even barre (ballet) classes. Workouts vary in length and minimal equipment is required (you might need a chair for some). One nice feature of this app is that you can invite friends to the workout via video conferencing and get fit together.



- **Map My Walk:** This is a great option for people who love to walk. Rather than taking the same path every time, you can use the app to show you popular walking routes in your area and try them for a change of pace. Map My Walk also lets you track workouts and review distance, speed, duration, steps, calories burned and elevation.



- **Charity Miles:** Here's a way to work out and give back: With this app, every mile you walk, run, bike or even dance earns a donation (10 to 25 cents per mile) from a corporate sponsor for your chosen charity. More than 40 charitable organizations are listed, including the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Michael J. Fox Foundation and Habitat for Humanity. There are also opportunities to form teams and work out together.



- **Daily Yoga:** If your goal is to have an every-day routine of strength and mobility activities, this app will help. It provides different yoga classes in a weekly schedule and sends reminders. There are more than 100 yoga and meditation sessions for people of all skills levels to choose from. The Easy Yoga for Beginners program is a great place to start.



## is this fitness app for you?

This handy checklist will help you decide if your chosen program is right for you. The more you check off, the better the fit.

- This is activity/exercise I enjoy.
- The activity/exercise is functional and will help me do other things in my life.
- The program is easy to follow on a small screen, and cues are clear and well demonstrated.
- Exercise options are provided for different fitness levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced).
- The app lets me personalize information and keep track of my progress (which is great for motivation).



- **J&J Official 7 Minute Workout:** If you're a traditionalist (as in, you love regimented, gym-class-style exercise), this might be the workout for you. The quick, high-intensity workouts from Johnson & Johnson are effective and equipment-free. They include moves like jumping jacks, wall sits, pushups, crunches, step-ups, squats and planks, which you do for one minute each. With this app, it's best to start with the beginner programs and take breaks as necessary.



- **AllTrails:** Want to get out for a hike but not sure where to go? This app will show you nearby trails to hike, bike or run, and the search can be filtered by length, rating and difficulty level (and by dog- and kid-friendliness). Once you're on the trail, you can use the tracker feature to measure time and distance and see your progress along the route using your smartphone's GPS. 📶



# Food for thought

## We all know a healthy lifestyle

**that includes** building positive social networks, staying connected with family and friends, and being physically active and engaged is important as we age. Eating nutritious meals should also be right at the core of this way of living.

According to Carol Greenwood, senior scientist at Toronto's Baycrest Health Sciences and professor emeritus in the Department of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Toronto, research shows that exercise can slow down the aging process. It can also improve, stimulate and protect brain cells at the same time. Combine physical activity with a healthy diet and you have a blueprint for well-being. Greenwood also recommends reducing your intake of

red meat and packaged or processed foods, and instead leaning toward more plant-based meals.

Greenwood points out that antioxidants found in many foods help neurocommunication and encourage the survival of brain neurons. They also keep blood vessels healthy — and what's good for the cardiovascular system is good for the brain too.

While there is no single superfood that you should eat every day, there are many delicious ones chock full of components that help support brain health, memory function and learning. Many protect our brains though their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant actions. Here are four to add to your shopping list.

What we eat can have a big impact on our brain health

by **Fran Berkoff, registered dietitian**

**Fish:** Fatty fish — such as salmon, mackerel, herring, Arctic char, sardines and trout — contain omega-3 fatty acids, which reduce inflammation and can help boost brain health and slow down the loss of brain function typically associated with aging. Easy ways to meet the goal of three servings per week are baking or grilling a fillet of salmon or any favourite fish, making a sardine-and-onion sandwich (yummy, trust me) or including fish in a salad.

**Berries:** Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries and blackberries are bursting with antioxidants that not only protect brain cells by reducing inflammation but also help clear out some of the toxins that accumulate in the aging brain. This can help slow down cognitive decline and boost memory and learning. Another plus: Berries are low in calories and a good source of vitamins and minerals. Since it's not yet berry season, stock your freezer with bags of frozen berries (yes, they're as nutritious as fresh) to toss into smoothies, cereal, yogurt parfaits and salads. Or bake them into muffins, crisps or cobblers. Bonus: As you eat them, you can enjoy a taste of summer in mid-March!

**Cruciferous vegetables:** This family, which includes broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, brussels sprouts and bok choy, contains compounds that may reduce oxidative stress and lower the risk of neurodegenerative diseases. Cruciferous veggies are also high in vitamin K, which plays an important role in brain function and health. You can steam, roast or stir-fry them, add them to soups and stews, or serve them raw with dips and in salads.

**Nuts:** Adding a handful of nuts to your daily diet is another way to be good to your brain. There is no consensus on which nut is the healthiest, but walnuts, almonds and hazelnuts are well studied. Their antioxidants fend off cell-damaging free radicals and aid communication between brain cells. Enjoy them as snacks, or in granola, salads, stir-fries and desserts. 🌿



For more information on nutrition and brain health, go to [baycrest.org](http://baycrest.org) and search for the downloadable booklet The Brain Health Food Guide.



# 20 tech trends for 2021

Senior-targeted technologies, from smart beds to garden-weeding robots to health alerts from your watch

by **Martin Zibauer**

**You** know that sitcom stereotype: crusty senior, confused about how to use a computer, can't dial a cellphone and unwilling to embrace new technology, no matter how useful it is. Well, that is no longer true — it probably never was anyway — and now tech for seniors is so mainstream that it has its own buzzwords: *gerontechnology* if you're being formal or *silver tech* among friends.

In July 2020, Age-Well, a network of organizations working in gerontechnology, and Environics Research polled Canadian seniors to see how COVID-19 was changing their use of tech and online services. The results showed that, across the board, Canadians over 65 are using more technology. A lot more. Two-thirds own a smartphone (up from 58 per cent in 2019) and 83 per cent of them use it every day. Seniors report making more video calls, using social media more often (88 per cent access the internet daily) and consuming more entertainment via streaming services. And they're happy about it: 61 per cent feel technology has a positive impact on society.

Luckily, inventors and entrepreneurs are hard at work developing new technologies to satisfy the senior appetite for tech. Here are 20 — some available now, some coming soon — to watch out for.



1



It's no secret that temperature affects sleep, but Japanese research suggests this particularly applies to seniors, who sleep poorly when their beds are too warm. The Pod mattress from Eight Sleep circulates water through thin channels to adjust the surface temperature throughout the night, based on your preferences, sleep science and sensors monitoring your breathing patterns, heart rate and body temperature. Each side of the bed is independently controlled, so your partner will be as comfortable as you are (and less likely to steal the covers). At wake-up time, a built-in alarm vibrates at chest level and gently cools the bed. *From US\$2,545 (not yet available in Canada).* [eightsleep.com](https://eightsleep.com)

2



If you're not ready to get a smart mattress, try one of these sleep-inducing smartphone apps. The CBT-i Coach app, developed by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, teaches cognitive behavioural therapy techniques to quiet your mind before sleep. The Sleep Cycle app uses your phone's microphone and motion sensors to track and score your nightly sleep patterns, and its alarm wakes you gently when you're in the lightest part of the sleep cycle. The Calm app features celebrities, including Joanna Lumley and Matthew McConaughey, reading grown-up bedtime stories. Available for iOS and Android devices, CBT-i Coach is free, Sleep Cycle has a free tier and allows you to purchase add-ons in the app, and Calm has a free tier and various subscription levels.

3



Is the "check engine" light in your car on? Again? Fixd is a sensor that can help you decide whether to ignore the light; fix something simple, like a loose gas cap; or drive straight to your mechanic. The device plugs into your car's diagnostic port to identify why the light is on — and whether the problem is serious or not. Once you've dealt with the cause, Fixd will help you turn the light off. It also alerts you when a serious engine issue develops or the car needs scheduled maintenance. \$75.99. [fixd.com](https://fixd.com)



4

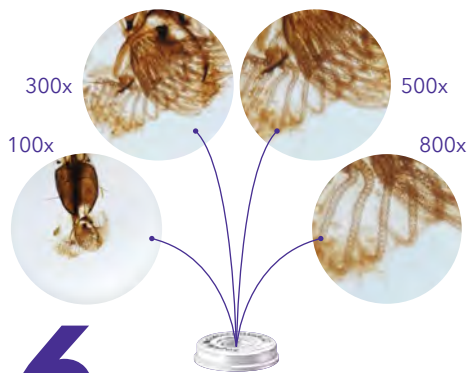
The Apple Watch is more than just a wearable smartphone. The device senses the acceleration pattern that indicates a hard fall and can call emergency services — unless you start moving again or respond to the alert. It's not perfect (high-impact exercise can trigger a false alert), but advocates think it's more likely to be worn than the unstylish fall-detection pendants that Age-Well's principal investigator, Alex Mihailidis, calls "stigmatizing" and likens to cowbells.

An Apple Watch can also read the colour of your blood through the thin skin on your wrist to monitor your blood oxygen level. The reading isn't as accurate as the one you'd get from a dedicated pulse oximeter, which scans the colour through a fingernail, and it may be thrown off by darker skin and tattoos, but the Apple Watch scores well for sensing abnormal pulse patterns that can indicate atrial fibrillation (AFib). In a 2019 Stanford University study, Apple Watch alerts matched the accuracy of an electrocardiogram 84 per cent of the time. The study's senior author, Dr. Mintu Turakhia, says the watch's best use is to prompt people who don't know they have AFib to get it checked out. *Series 6 starts at \$529.* [apple.com/ca](https://apple.com/ca)

5

Do you ever wish a doctor, nurse or other health-care provider had experienced the situation you're facing? Embodied Labs is a training program for caregivers that uses virtual reality headsets to simulate the experience of macular degeneration, dementia or Parkinson's disease. A caregiver can also role-play to better understand the experience of LGBTQ seniors or seniors with terminal cancer in the health-care system. *Inquire for pricing.* [embodiedlabs.com](https://embodiedlabs.com)





# 6

OK, you don't really *need* to turn your phone's camera into a microscope, but examining fingerprints, human hair, plant parts and more up close is fascinating and fun. The iMicro Q2 is a fingertip-sized accessory lens that fits over any phone's camera lens, allowing you to view and photograph tiny objects at 800 times magnification and roughly 1 micron resolution. It offers optical performance comparable to that of a desktop microscope. \$39. [kickstarter.com](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1511111111/i-micro-q2) (search iMicro Q2)



# 7

The ElliQ robot uses artificial intelligence to keep seniors engaged. The tabletop robot, tested at Toronto's Baycrest Centre, learns your routines and adapts to your personality. It may, for example, suggest a walk when the weather's good or a TED Talk when it's raining. Unlike a passive voice assistant that only responds to questions and requests, ElliQ can deftly start a conversation. It wants to chat. US\$1,499. [elliq.com](https://www.elliq.com)

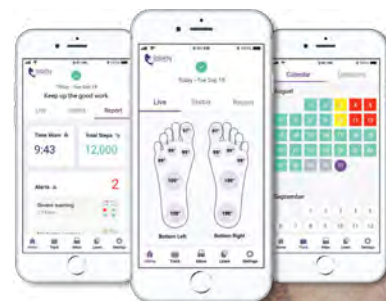
# 8

After a stroke or injury, the brain rebuilds connections more effectively when you perform a functional task with a meaningful goal, rather than just repeating an exercise. Neuro Rehab VR, employed in rehab clinics, uses a virtual reality headset to mimic real-life settings that make exercises feel more like something you want to do in your everyday schedule. For example, if you need to practise reaching and grasping movements, you might be given a shopping list in a virtual grocery store. The system also analyzes your movements, uses machine learning to customize the tasks to your rehab needs and provides detailed progress reports to health-care providers. *Inquire for pricing.* [neurorehabvr.com](https://www.neurorehabvr.com)



# 9

Siren Socks send temperature readings from six sensors to a smartphone app. For seniors with diabetes-related neuropathy, the socks can give early warning of a hot spot, which could develop into a dangerous foot ulcer. US\$21.95 per month (not yet available in Canada). [siren.care](https://www.siren.care)



# 10

For people with limited vision, the challenge of recognizing even familiar faces can be socially isolating. The OrCam MyEye is a finger-sized smart camera that slips over the arm of any pair of glasses. When the device recognizes a face, the wearer hears a message through earbuds identifying the person. The device can read written materials aloud and identify objects, including banknotes and packaged foods. \$5,800. [orcam.com](https://www.orcam.com)







# 11

Tired of weeding your vegetable garden? The solar-powered Tertill robot will patrol your plot, churning the soil surface or whirling its tiny string trimmer when it finds a plant shorter than an inch tall. When the Roomba-like device gently bumps into a tall plant (or a protective collar around vegetable seedlings), it turns away to weed somewhere else. To prep your garden the first time, you'll need to set boundaries — any garden fence will do — and remove tall weeds. Then, as soon as the sun recharges its batteries each morning, the Tertill starts wandering around, keeping your garden weed-free. *US\$349. [tertill.com](http://tertill.com)*



# 12

Patent applications suggest Samsung is developing a shirt that listens to breathing patterns for early signs of lung disease, including pneumonia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The company's HumanFit line has already launched clothing that uses your body movements to recharge your phone. [samsungfashion.com](http://samsungfashion.com)



# 13

Everyone is stressed out in airports, not least by the long, confusing walks and the time pressure to get to the boarding lounge. But if you're travelling through Tokyo's Haneda Airport, you can use a smartphone app to summon a self-driving chair that will take you to your gate or anywhere else in the airport. Whill Next chairs use map and sensor technology from self-driving cars to navigate without bumping into obstacles. They travel at a fast walking pace, and when a few are heading in the same direction, they sync themselves into a single-file wheelchair convoy. Closer to home, the chairs have been tested in Winnipeg International Airport. *Inquire for pricing. [whill.inc](http://whill.inc)*

# 14

The Livio Edge AI combines standard features of advanced hearing aids — ambient noise suppression and speech enhancement among them — with the artificial-intelligence services of a voice assistant. You can stream phone calls, music, a podcast or TV audio directly into the hearing aids, or use the voice assistant to answer a question or set a to-do reminder. The devices can translate speech, detect falls and track your social and physical activity as well. Bonus: The batteries are rechargeable. *Price varies. [starkeycanada.ca](http://starkeycanada.ca)*



# 15

Pandemic isolation has made all of us appreciate social interaction. Goodnightzoom.com connects seniors with kids (and parents) for story reading via video call. Seniors sign up with the service and, after an interview, can be paired with a family for storytime. Tell your own story or read a classic the service provides. You'll be giving busy parents a break and making a new connection. [goodnightzoom.com](http://goodnightzoom.com)



## 16

Your ear canal and the part just outside (the concha) are shaped like a bell. That bell adds distortion to some mid-range sounds, and distortion triggers our fight-or-flight response. That made sense when we were living in the wild (a twig snap could mean a predator), but now it means everyday sounds can create unnecessary stress. Soft silicone sleeves that fit like earbuds inside the concha slightly change the ear's acoustics to dampen sound distortion. The makers claim this reduces stress and improves your music-listening experience. Some wearers with tinnitus (though not all) report reduced symptoms — an unexpected effect that's still being investigated. *US\$36. [flareaudio.com](http://flareaudio.com)*

## 17

Slow coffee sippers, wake up! The Ember Mug<sup>2</sup> temperature-controlled smart mug uses an embedded heating element to keep your drink at the precise temperature you choose for up to 90 minutes, on one battery charge. The mug, which you control with a smartphone app, goes into sleep mode when it's empty and wakes up when you add liquid. *10-ounce mug, US\$99.95. [ember.com](http://ember.com)*



## 18

Pictionary Air updates the classic pen-and-paper game with an electronic wand. Use the wand to draw in the air, not on paper; your teammates see your sketch on a tablet or smartphone screen. There's extra challenge for the artist — you can't see your own work — as well as an opportunity to add charades-style theatrics to your clues. *\$24.99. [mattelgames.com](http://mattelgames.com)*



## 19

The fist-sized XB12 is a portable Bluetooth speaker from Sony with extra bass for richer sound and up to 16 hours of battery life on one charge. It's great for backyard barbecues or family picnics. *\$49.99. [sony.ca](http://sony.ca)*



## 20

Soundbars, those sleek horizontal speakers almost as wide as the TVs they're mounted above (or below), can greatly improve the sound quality of your Netflix nights without the high cost of a home theatre setup. Yamaha's YAS-209 has two surround-sound modes (great for blockbuster action) and a voice mode for dialogue-heavy scenes. Stream music from your phone and control the speaker with the built-in Alexa voice assistant. *\$600. [ca.yamaha.com](http://ca.yamaha.com)*



# cybersecu







# rity

# 101

Here's what you need to  
know to stay cyber-safe

by **Stuart Foxman**

# W

**e're spending more time  
online these days** — shopping,  
video calling friends and family,  
streaming movies or maybe

searching for the best-ever butter  
tart recipe. And then there are your  
computer-connected smart devices, like  
your TV, phone, watch, speakers, virtual  
assistant.... That's a bushelful of potential  
security concerns.

If only you had your personal cyber  
expert on call to answer your questions.  
You don't, so we asked one for you:  
Daniel Tobok, CEO of Cytelligence in  
Toronto. The internationally recognized  
cybersecurity and digital forensics  
expert talked to *Renaissance* about  
staying safe online.

PHOTO, 10'000 HOURS



## Who wants your information and why?

“Most people still think it’s some guy in a basement trying to break in,” says Tobok. “It’s [actually] all automated, with the power to do millions of computations per day.”

While there are some lone wolf cyber criminals, it’s usually organized groups that routinely try attacks. (This is separate from foreign countries that engage in cyber warfare, like Russia and China, for the purposes of espionage or stealing intellectual property.) Hackers look for personal information (your name, date of birth, address, phone number, social insurance number, health-card number, logins, etc.) and financial details (bank, credit card and payment information).

## What can they do with it?

### Cyber criminals can:

- Apply for loans or credit cards under your name, make purchases or create counterfeit cards
- Sell your information to entities on the dark web, or underground websites that are only accessible via specialized browsers – these entities will then try to spam or scam you, or engage in identity fraud
- Encrypt all your data and then demand a ransom to return it to you

## Think about how you safeguard what belongs to you

You may have the sturdiest locks, alarms for your car and home, and a safe for your jewelry. But you may not be protecting one of the most valuable things you own – your personal information.

Start with passwords. Are yours foolproof? It’s hard to create a highly-secure-yet-easy-to-remember password, so many people fall back on familiar terms, including family names, pet names, birthdays or anniversaries. That’s like hiding your spare house keys under the doormat: pretty obvious.

As Tobok points out, it doesn’t take bad actors much effort to get on your social media and discover the names of your kids, or find out that your cat is called Fluffy. And consider this: The United Kingdom’s National Cyber Security Centre analyzed passwords of accounts that were breached globally. Among the top 10 were *12345*, *123456*, *1234567*, *12345678* and *123456789* – you get the idea. Others on the list: *111111*, *password* and *abc123*.





“Weak passwords account for about 38 per cent of all attacks into private information,” says Tobok.

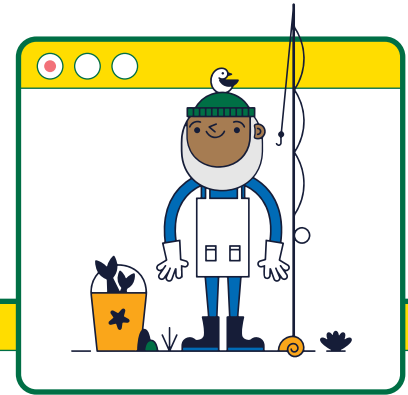
The solution is to use a combination of words. Or think of a phrase that means something to you (a song or movie title, for example) and use only the initials so the result isn’t a common word. Use upper- and lowercase letters, and add a numeral or symbol, like an exclamation point.

Bots — software applications that run automated tasks over and over — can try thousands of combinations per second, using every word in the dictionary and pretty much every name. And while you can’t make your code impossible to crack, you can make it harder. And that counts.

“Threat actors budget how much time they want to spend trying to hack; maybe 10 minutes per account,” says Tobok.

“Having symbols, numbers, capitals and all those variations makes it a lot more difficult for the system to read it. What makes something secure is how long it will take [to discover it].”

Trying to remember a whole lot of passwords is difficult to impossible, so many people use the same passwords (or a core one with minor variations) across multiple devices and accounts. Don’t. The problem is obvious: If a hacker gets your password and it’s your one and only, they have access to everything connected to you. That’s another reason not to employ the same passwords used by people close to you, such as a spouse or child.



## gone phishing

Cyber criminals like to keep you dangling with a strategy called phishing in order to get at your personal or financial information. Don’t bite on that hook. Here’s what you need to know about phishing and its variants.

- **Phishing** Any effort to steal your information by casting a wide net. Phishing messages can be emails, text messages, social media direct messages or phone calls. The messages seem above board, but the entities behind them aren’t.
- **Smishing** A phishing attempt through SMS (a.k.a. text message).
- **Spear phishing** Targeted phishing, in which the message looks like it is coming from a source you know. One common one: The sender asks you to do a favour and buy some gift cards for them.
- **Whaling** A phishing attempt against someone in a senior position, like a business executive or a government official.
- **Spoofing** Using a fake website to get you to reveal your personal information. It may look legit, but it’s bogus.

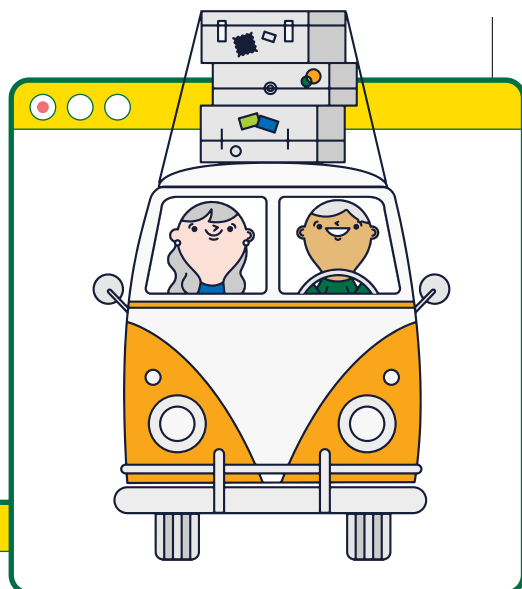
There’s no foolproof way to stop phishing attempts, which means you have to be extra-careful to avoid getting scammed. First, whenever you’re asked to provide your information, double-check if you have any suspicions. For instance, your financial institution would never ask you to share account details via an email. So if you get that kind of request, call your bank.

Next, don’t click on links or open attachments if you’re not confident of the sender. Take a close look at the name on an email or website. It can look right, but be a bit off: Maybe there’s a slight difference in the spelling, the URL or the address domain.

Last, don’t respond to threatening messages, such as those that claim to be from Canada Revenue Agency or another governmental organization, or to too-good-to-be-true offers, such as those promising you a free trip.

Phishing is getting more sophisticated, so you need to ramp up your radar too. When in doubt, delete.





## 7 ways to be cyber-safe on the road

When you travel, you take all sorts of precautions to protect your money and valuables. But what about protecting your information? The Government of Canada shares these tips to stay secure when you go on holiday.

- Before you leave, back up the files on the device(s) you're taking to the cloud or another device.
- Be wary when using public Wi-Fi at hotels, airports and coffee shops. These are highly insecure networks available to everyone. At the very least, avoid transmitting any information you wouldn't want intercepted or disclosed.
- Practise the same caution if using shared or public computers. They can have keyloggers, which are applications or devices that capture any information you enter.
- Be careful when allowing apps or users to access your devices via Bluetooth. As the government warns, "Some devices allow for automatic connection, meaning that other Bluetooth networks can connect to your device without authorization." You may want to disable your Bluetooth networking while you're away.
- Don't charge your phone on computers or devices connected to hotel docking stations, or on anything else that's outside your control.
- Have the software, hardware and storage media you need so you don't have to purchase it while away.
- Your device may have an option that will delete your data if a password is entered incorrectly a certain number of times. Consider enabling it – that way, if your device is misplaced or stolen, your losses may be limited.

For the complete list, go to [travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/cyber-safe](https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/cyber-safe).

## Keep track of what goes with what

So you've mixed it up with your passwords. That's great. Now, with all the ones you accumulate, how on earth will you remember them? One solution: a password manager. This virtual vault stores all your passwords and usernames; it might be part of your operating system or a downloaded app.

You can also store your passwords in the Notes app on your phone or, if you prefer a low-tech solution, on a piece of paper. "Paper is more secure than electronic," says Tobok. Just don't carry that piece of paper in your wallet. Tobok adds that you can also store that master list on your computer in a PDF, which is tough to decrypt.

"Paper is more secure than electronic."

## Go for extra layers of security

Protecting your passwords is a biggie, but it's not the only cyber consideration. Another security safeguard you can add is multifactor authentication. Think of it as an extra layer of security, like having to present two pieces of ID. It means you have to use more than one way to log in to or access something, such as your pass code and a fingerprint on your smartphone.

Tobok calls multifactor authentication a critical security step. Not using this safeguard increases your chances of a problem by about 90 per cent, he says. Any time you're presented with the choice of multifactor authentication on a site or device, take it.



## Beware of public Wi-Fi

Say you're running errands and realize that your Visa bill is due. You pop into the coffee shop on the corner, order a latte and use the café's public Wi-Fi to log on to your bank account, make some transfers and pay your balance. One less chore to do when you get home, right?

Bad idea, says Tobok. Don't use public Wi-Fi to do online banking or anything else confidential, because chances are that business offering you free Wi-Fi isn't using the strongest security measures.

If you want to save your data and use public Wi-Fi to stream sports or play a YouTube clip, go for it. But recognize that other things you do online can be easily compromised. Tobok adds that you might encounter nefarious Wi-Fi options that look legit but aren't — the name may be almost identical to a safe option and look official, but it's designed by fraudsters to swipe your information.

## Is antivirus software worth it?

You'd think antivirus software was a must, right? Well, yes and no, says Tobok. These tools are designed to scan for malware signatures and keep malicious software off your system, but many threat actors use non-signature viruses so they can slip through.

Tobok says popular antivirus software programs, such as Kaspersky and McAfee, do their jobs. And that can help when surfing fishy websites or clicking on pop-ups. But don't get a false sense of security. Antivirus software is better than nothing, but it won't protect you 100 per cent.

## Shush, not in front of Alexa

You're talking to a friend about a trip to Vancouver, or that 85-inch HDTV on your wish list. Then the next time you're online, you see an ad for a Vancouver hotel or a door-crasher special on that TV. Coincidence?

While algorithms can predict what we're interested in, Tobok says it's not nuts to assume that our smartphones are listening to us. Can someone eavesdrop on you through your iPhone? Should you turn your devices off when you're having sensitive face-to-face conversations? "I believe so," says Tobok.

Does the same advice go for tech like Amazon Alexa, Amazon Echo and Google Assistant? These tools respond to our requests and, through machine learning, start to understand our habits, says Tobok. Unlike a vacuum you turn on and off when the carpets need a cleaning, these devices are on 24-7. "Your privacy and preferences are exposed," he says.

You may think you have nothing to hide, but how would you feel if someone went through your trash and found receipts for medication you bought or a personal note you wrote? "If you think that's OK, then Alexa on," says Tobok. "But I think that's a little too close for comfort."

Still not convinced? Last year, *Forbes* reported that university researchers from Tokyo and Michigan discovered they could hack into virtual assistants by aiming a laser at them, even from long distances. The light essentially mimics a voice and makes the assistants carry out commands.

Here's the thing: The research was backed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the United States, better known as the Pentagon's research arm. So is Big Brother watching? Probably. Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean someone isn't out to get you. ☹

## getting rid of old tech

- Transfer files to your new computer or the cloud, or save them to an external storage device.
- Sign out of online accounts from the device you're discarding, and un-pair your computer from Bluetooth devices (such as your mouse, keyboard or monitor).
- Sending files to the digital trash bin isn't enough. Erase your hard drive and reset it to factory settings, which makes your data inaccessible.
- To make sure nobody can get at data on your memory card or SIM card, be thorough with your disposal. Shred, crush, mangle or otherwise destroy it.



# Sea-to-sea retreats

A sumptuous spa getaway may be just the ticket for a winter-weary soul

by **Doug Wallace**

**In True North style**, Canada's best spa sanctuaries take advantage of our rugged natural resources and stunning good

looks. From enchanting destination retreats to sublime city hideaways, proper pampering isn't too hard to find.

## COVID-19 reminder

As we go to press, we are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. If we still aren't able to travel, save these coast-to-coast spa retreats for when we can – any one of them will be a welcome getaway!



## Balnea Spa

Bromont-sur-le-lac, Que.

Set on a lake in the bucolic Eastern Townships, Quebec's biggest spa is a one-hour drive east of Montreal. The renowned thermal experience includes Finnish saunas, a thermal waterfall, seven hot tubs overlooking the lake and mountains, and a Turkish bath. Inventive treatments include the Omega-3 Scrub and the Integral Body and Hair Wrapsody.

**Top tip:** Try to work in one of the regularly scheduled nature runs; a yoga class; a Japanese *Shinrin Yoku*, or forest bathing, session; or a healthy meal at Restaurant Lumami. [balnea.ca](http://balnea.ca)



PHOTOS, COURTESY OF BALNEA SPA



## Ancient Cedars Spa at Wickaninnish Inn

Tofino, B.C.

One of the top spas in Canada is also its most westerly one, with views of the mighty Pacific. Six treatment rooms mirror the inn's cosy approach to wellness, offering massage, esthetics and yoga, plus a long list of facials. The temple-style Lomi Lomi Massage employs traditional relaxation rituals originated by Hawaiian healers to create wholeness in mind, body and spirit.

**Top tip:** Take time to commune with the natural coastline along Chesterman Beach. [wickinn.com](http://wickinn.com)



TOP PHOTO, JEREMY KORESKI, COURTESY OF ANCIENT CEDARS SPA AT WICKANINNISH INN.  
BOTTOM PHOTO, ANTHONY REDPATH, COURTESY OF ANCIENT CEDARS SPA AT WICKANINNISH INN

## not planning a getaway? welcome spring with a breath of fresh air for your home

**Sometimes even the best-loved homes need a refresh.** But lack of time and money can make redecorating a challenge – so we've picked five easy and affordable ways to spruce up your home with simple projects that will make a big difference. Even Johnson the Dog gets in on the act! Just remember: The experts at Johnson Insurance say some home projects can affect your insurance, so check before you start.

### Clear out your old stuff

The best first step is a good decluttering to make space for something new. Getting rid of faded and unloved items will boost your spirits and make you feel as if you're starting an exciting new chapter. Feel even better by donating items to a local charity. If you don't love it or use it, get rid of it!

### Try a fresh coat of paint

Painting is the easiest way to freshen things up, but you don't need to go all-out to make a splash. Don't paint all four walls – just paint one with a bold accent colour. Or paint a table or chairs. Get creative and take some chances; you can always repaint if you don't love the result.

### Cover up with fabrics

Decorative pillows, blankets, couch throws and small rugs can transform your home and make any room look fresh and new. Check thrift and vintage stores for unusual pieces, or search online for fashion-forward items.

### Go green with plants

Plants offer more than decorating oomph: They improve air quality, create a sense of well-being and can help reduce background noise. Choose plants that fit your environment and your life – some plants are well-suited to lower light if you don't have many windows, while others can be low maintenance in case you travel. Adding something green in a pot, whether it's hanging in a window or even inside a terrarium, freshens up a space beautifully – just make sure your plants are pet-safe if you have a kitty or a pup.

### Update kitchen or furniture hardware

Replacing the knobs or pulls on your kitchen cupboards (oversize pulls are still trending here, FYI), bedroom dresser, bathroom cabinet or TV console drawers is an easy and inexpensive makeover that packs a surprising decor punch. Swapping out hardware is simpler and way less expensive than replacing an entire set of cabinets or piece of furniture; add a new coat of paint and you'll feel like you're in a brand new room.



## Scandinave Spa Blue Mountain

Blue Mountains, Ont.

Get the blood going surrounded by views of the Niagara Escarpment at this 25-acre, award-winning and very busy spa just outside Collingwood. The serene scene is total hydrotherapy immersion through saunas and a steam bath, cold plunge pools and a waterfall, plus relaxing solariums and hammocks.

**Top tip:** Arrive early so you can wander the Forest Bathing Trail on foot or by bicycle before your spa experience.

[scandinave.com](http://scandinave.com)



## Grotto Spa at Tigh-Na-Mara Seaside Spa Resort

Parksville, B.C.

Stop in at Tigh-Na-Mara, just north of Nanaimo, and book into one of the romantic log cabins for a night or two. The gorgeous 20,000-square-foot spa champions total rejuvenation via treatments using natural West Coast ingredients. Infused with detoxifying minerals and trace elements, the Grotto Mineral Pool is a perfect presoak. With a two-storey waterfall and a cool-splash cascade, you'll feel as if you're swimming inside a movie set.

**Top tip:** Peg your visit to lunch. Everybody dines in their robes at Treetop Tapas & Grill, a foodie favourite.

[grottospa.com](http://grottospa.com)



## Northern Lights Resort & Spa

Whitehorse, Y.T.

Ringed by the McClintock Mountains, this family-run Yukon River Valley resort features seven alpine log chalets with all the comforts of home, just 20 minutes south of Whitehorse. Guests can head out each day on guided adventures or simply enjoy the Finnish or infrared saunas and a soothing massage. Packages can include return airfare from Vancouver to Whitehorse.

**Top tip:** Upgrade to one of the new glass chalets so you can drift off under the northern lights. [northernlightsyukon.com](http://northernlightsyukon.com)

TOP PHOTOS, COURTESY OF SCANDINAVE SPA BLUE MOUNTAIN. MIDDLE PHOTO, COURTESY OF GROTTTO SPA AT TIGH-NA-MARA SEASIDE SPA RESORT. BOTTOM PHOTO, COURTESY OF NORTHERN LIGHTS RESORT & SPA





## Thermëa by Nordik Spa-Nature

Winnipeg, M.B.

Find head-to-toe pampering with massages, body treatments and facials at Winnipeg's top spa. The three-step Nordic-style thermal experience involves heating up in two saunas and two aromatic steam baths, followed by a dip in a cold pool or an icy waterfall. Finish up with a rest in a heated hammock or around the fire. Bring your appetite — Restö serves a small but scrumptious menu. Try the Scandinavian-style open-faced sandwiches.

**Top tip:** With the Aufguss ritual, a towel-waving Sauna Meister directs hot, scented steam toward guests in the Finlandia sauna. [thermea.ca](http://thermea.ca)



## Dol-ás Spa at Fox Harb'r Resort

Fox Harbour, N.S.

Nova Scotia's top destination spa is just across the Northumberland Strait from Charlottetown. Secluded and sumptuous, the 85-room resort is attached to a championship golf course and offers loads of outdoor adventure, including kayaking, fishing and horseback riding. Ocean-inspired spa treatments include fun things like seaweed mud therapies, a number of facials and a full slate of esthetic services.

**Top tip:** Go big or go home with the 5½-hour Fox Harb'r Interlude package, which delivers a massage, facial, body treatment and mani-pedi. [foxharbr.com](http://foxharbr.com)





## Bota Bota spa-sur-l'eau

Montreal, Que.

The St. Lawrence River is home to this floating spa, steps away from Old Montreal. Popular but exceedingly quiet, the Nordic-style water circuit includes saunas with a view of the river, steam baths, a large outdoor whirlpool and a cold tub — try your best not to yell as you plunge in. Wind down with a quick rest in one of the hammocks before indulging in a massage from an efficient and practised team.

**Top tip:** Don't leave without strolling over a little bridge to the large pool back on land for a glass of bubbly or two.

[botabota.ca](http://botabota.ca)

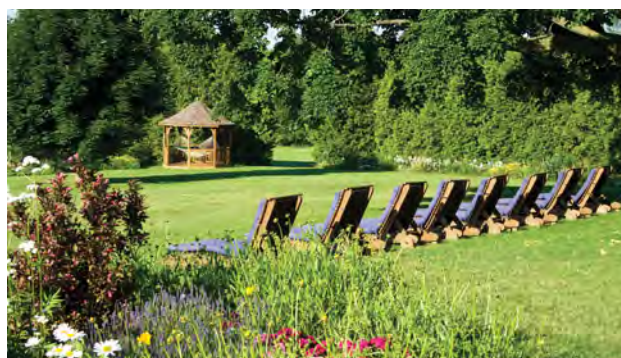


## Ste. Anne's Spa

Grafton, Ont.

The biggest destination spa in Canada is a 90-minute drive east of Toronto, set on more than 400 acres of farmland. It's actually a heritage fieldstone castle that dates to 1858. Visitors come for the facials, massages and body wraps, and the reiki and reflexology, and stay for the healthy dining and romantic stress relief.

**Top tip:** Book into one of the spa cottages, which are set off anywhere from 500 to 1,500 metres away from the main buildings. They are more spacious and more private, and some have outdoor hot tubs. [steannes.com](http://steannes.com)





# Is downsizing right for you?

Going smaller can help shore up your investment nest egg

by **Lesley-Anne Scorgie**

**Stats show that when people retire,** their spending only nudges down about 10 to 15 per cent relative to what it was during their working years. It's a myth that retirees spend considerably less money. *How* they spend it shifts, though, to travel, medical expenses, grandkids and the like.

Translation: If your total retirement income from your monthly pension, investments (such as a registered retirement income fund, or RRIF) and other sources of revenue (such as rental properties or side hustles) doesn't add up to 90 per cent of your pre-retirement total, you may be underprepared.

Take 10 deep breaths if this is you, because there's another option you can explore to shore up your retirement nest egg. Ready? If you are a homeowner with a low (or no) mortgage, you can downsize to unlock the equity in your primary residence.

First, get clear about your potential net payout. Start with an assessment of your property's value. This is best done through a real estate agent you trust, but you can also look at comparable listings on [realtor.ca](https://www.realtor.ca).

With the valuation in front of you, deduct any transaction fees (lawyers, taxes and real-estate commissions) as well as any lingering mortgage and home equity line of credit (HELOC) balances. If you owe money for consumer purchases, such as credit card balances or car loans, deduct those too. (Having consumer debt in retirement is not a good idea.) Your expected net payout is the number that's left over.

This is the amount of money you'll have to put toward a downsized home purchase and to beef up your retirement nest egg, which is the goal. If your net proceeds are large — maybe you've been living in a hot real estate market — downsizing is worth exploring.

If you pursue this option, my advice is to scale back your next home purchase in a meaningful way. Then you can put a good chunk of your equity to work —



hundreds of thousands of dollars of it, in fact. For context, every \$250,000 you add to your retirement nest egg and invest in a fixed-income-based portfolio that produces a 4.75 per cent annual rate of return gives you a monthly income stream just shy of \$1,000.

Here's how to calculate your potential investment income over time: Multiply the investment cost by the yield to get the amount of annual income. Continuing with the example above, if your incremental investment from downsizing is \$250,000 and yields 4.75 per cent annually, your investment income will amount to approximately \$11,875 per year. And you won't have to dip into the capital to get it; that's just the income.

If your monthly retirement income is at a less-secure level, you'll naturally want to bank more of that equity and put it toward building up your nest egg. It's important to consult your financial planner or investment adviser before downsizing, because the additional

investment from the net proceeds should be considered in the context of your total investment portfolio.

Once you choose this strategy, you'll want to research the prices and locations of downsized homes that interest you. Ask yourself: What's going to make me happy and serve my retirement needs?

The downsizing strategy has other benefits too. Having a smaller home means lower utility bills, fewer "things" to manage, easier maintenance and less stress. You will have to adjust to a new, smaller lifestyle, of course, but embracing this change could be great for you *and* your nest egg.

There are certainly other options that allow you to scoop equity from your primary residence and support your living costs in retirement, such as refinancing or securing a reverse mortgage or HELOC. But these solutions are forms of debt, which, in the vast majority of cases (though not all), you're better off getting rid of permanently. 🌸



# Smartphone savvy

How to choose the  
right model for you

by **Allan Britnell**

**Once upon a time**, mobile phones were just that: telephones you could take with you when you were on the go. Today's smartphones are hard-working multi-taskers that let you access email and the internet, send text messages,

take high-quality pictures and video, stream movies and your favourite TV shows, listen to music and more. It goes without saying that these quality features aren't free. So how do you sort out what you need in a smartphone?

We asked Ian Hardy, publisher of Canadian cellphone review website MobileSyrup ([mobilesyrup.com](http://mobilesyrup.com)) to highlight the key features worth considering if you're in the market for a new phone.



PHOTO, EGEGG



### iOS versus Android

There are two basic smartphone platforms: Apple's iOS system for iPhones or the Android system, which Samsung, Motorola, Google and others operate on. Techies like the greater variety of brands and amount of customization possible with Android phones; Apple fans like that user-friendly iPhones seamlessly sync with the programs on their other Mac devices, and that FaceTime video conferencing is built in.

In the end, either platform will offer everything you need. Unless you're up for learning a whole new set of functions, you're probably better off sticking to the platform you're already familiar with.

and manipulate one-handed. Larger screens (6 inches or more) make it easier to watch movies, if that's your thing, but some approach tablet dimensions and can be hard to hold in one hand. Regardless of screen size, your device will allow you to increase legibility by adjusting features such as font size and brightness.

All new phones are fairly durable. Look for an IP67 rating to confirm dust and water resistance. Some higher-end phones have shatterproof glass. The cheaper option is to buy a protective case, though these can make the device feel bulky.



### Power storage

Battery life is rated in milliamps per hour (mAh). A phone with 2,000 or more mAh should easily last a full day or more on one charge.



### Photo archives

A phone camera with 12-megapixel resolution will take images that rival those of any dedicated digital camera. Newer phones feature multiple lenses enabling enhanced zoom, or use features such as portrait mode, which focuses on the subject in the foreground while blurring the background.

Video is the biggest memory hog, so if you plan to download movies to your phone or store dozens of videos of the grandkids, look for a model with 64 gigabytes or more of memory.

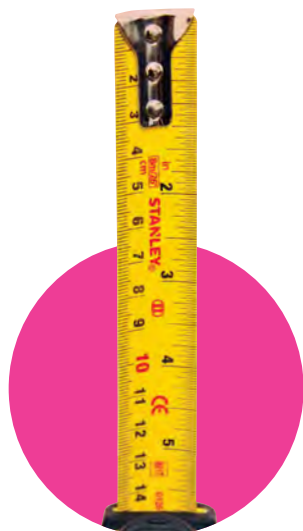
You can get away with less memory (and therefore a cheaper phone) if you regularly purge old images and video clips, or store everything in the cloud.



### Budget mindedness

With the wide array of manufacturers around these days, there are more lower-price options available among Android phones. That said, all the cellular network providers offer "free" phones if you lock into a two-year plan with the newest phones tied to the priciest plans. You can save money by pairing an older-model phone with a less-pricey monthly fee. When shopping around for a plan, be sure to ask about discounts for seniors and teachers.

An even cheaper alternative is to buy an older, refurbished model and sign up for pay-as-you-go service with only the features you need, such as "talk and text" plans that don't include cellular data. But, then, you're really opting for more of a phone-phone than a smartphone. ☞



### Size matters

Like TVs, phone screens are measured diagonally. Small phones (5 inches or less) are easier to fit into your pocket



# Livin' la vida low-tech

The value of turning off and tuning in

by **Alison LaMantia**

**"They say I'm old-fashioned, and live in the past, but sometimes I think progress progresses too fast!"**

That's a quote from Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, but it could just have easily been attributed to my husband's aunt Bess LaMantia. She refuses to give up her flip phone, and we tease her (lovingly) regularly.

"I just don't feel the need to be connected 24-7 to the world around me," she explained when I asked. "I do enjoy texting and keeping in touch, but that is all I need the phone for. I find it fascinating how, no matter where you go, heads are down and phones are on. It's hard to even say a polite 'hi' to people you pass by now."

While her fondness for her flip makes sharing photos of her grandnieces more challenging, she may be on to something.

This past year has forced many of us, myself included, to embrace technology more than we might have pre-pandemic. And while there are good reasons — for example, we feel safer attending virtual fitness classes — tech fatigue has set in for some of us.

Sure, technology offers lots of conveniences, like the ability to take a course online or to preheat the oven from a smartphone app. But what are we giving up in exchange?

Potentially a lot. Many popular technology platforms are designed to harvest our attention and data. If you're a smartphone user, you may have found yourself lost in an app, scrolling mindlessly or unable to stop playing a game.

But here's the catch: We might think we're consumers of these platforms, but we're often the product instead. That's because the tech companies sell our data to clients, or leverage it to generate mind-boggling ad revenue. In other words, we're the commodity.

That's not the only downside of high-tech living, either. Here are just some of the entries in the Ledger of Harms published online by the Center for Humane Technology. (You can find the full list and supporting data at [ledger.humanetech.com](http://ledger.humanetech.com).)

- **The spread of misinformation.**

Fake news spreads six times faster than true news.

- **Decreased memory and focus.**

We can focus for only 40 seconds on average while working on computers.

- **Stress, loneliness, feelings of addiction and other health impacts.**

One month away from Facebook resulted in improvements in emotional well-being.

- **Less empathy, more confusion and misinterpretation.**

Infants showed greater unhappiness and fewer positive emotions when their mothers looked at their devices for as little as two minutes.

- **Negative impacts on younger generations.**

These include developmental delays and increased suicide risk; social media use is linked with an increase in depressive symptoms in teenagers.

But you don't need to ditch social media, online classes or video chats with the grandkids to tap into the benefits of living low-tech. If you plan how you'll use technology and stay mindful of the traps designed to suck you in, you can enjoy the upsides of tech. Here are some tips.

- **Stop notifications.** These pop-ups are one way that technology platforms steal your attention. Turn off notifications in your smartphone's settings menu to stop the interruptions, and then check in with apps on your schedule.

- **Take tech breaks.** These can help you deepen connections with the people right in front of you. They can also help reduce stress, increase self-worth and improve sleep. Step away from your laptop, smartphone or tablet a couple of



PHOTOS, HALFPPOINT

**WANT TO  
LEARN MORE?**

For information about how the design of technology platforms can harm us, watch the film *The Social Dilemma* on Netflix or visit [humanetech.com](https://humanetech.com).



nights a week and lose yourself in a good book or work on a puzzle.

- **Set limits.** Look for a digital well-being function in your devices' settings and set time limits on app usage. Depending on the device, you may be able to see how long you've spent on different apps. You might be surprised!
- **Go exploring.** If you aren't in a hurry, switch off Google Maps and find a new route home. New research published last year in the journal *Nature Neuroscience* showed that people feel happier when they have more variety in their daily routines.
- **Talk instead of type.** Next time you want to reconnect with an old friend, opt for a phone call. According to research published in a fall 2020 issue of the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, voice chats create stronger social bonds without an increase in awkwardness.
- **Write a letter or keep a journal.** Hand-writing documents has many benefits, including improved mood and enhanced creativity. And let's face it: A letter that arrives in your mailbox is an old-fashioned treat that can make your day.
- **Pay attention to how you feel.** Social media has been shown to negatively impact feelings of self-worth. Unfollow accounts that make you feel bad about yourself, or delete the app. 📵

## we asked

### HOW DO YOU TURN OFF AND TUNE IN?

"I have gone back to good old-fashioned paper-and-pencil crosswords. I had forgotten how much I had enjoyed these years ago."

— Carol Chouinard (District 3 Algoma)

"I sprinkle in housework, gardening, watching my favourite British soap and TV series, reading, cooking and a daily COVID walk to lessen device overload. I call that living day by day."

— Mary G. Cecol (District 15 Halton)

"I go camping, canoeing and hiking; and spend time gardening, knitting, reading, doing yoga and cooking. I also enjoy spending time outdoors with my husband and my four dogs."

— Arlene Cole (District 28 Region of Durham)

"I eat dinner at the table, talk with family, listen to music, knit and crochet, paint and read a favourite series of books."

— Nancy Newman (District 34 York Region)

"I garden and build model steam engines to keep busy during the summer, and then model railroading takes over during the winter months."

— Dave Dykeman (District 41 Elgin)

"I crochet, bake bread, play the ukulele and hike the Bruce Trail."

— Charlotte Davey (District 17 Simcoe County)



# Love is in the air

We asked: What's your favourite romantic comedy?

## **Sleepless in Seattle**

**Plot:** After the death of his wife, Sam moves with his son, Jonah, to Seattle. Sam is lonely, so Jonah calls in to a talk radio program to find his dad a new wife. Not too happy about this, Sam nevertheless agrees to talk about his feelings. Reporter Annie is listening to the program and falls for Sam despite having never met him. Oh — and she is engaged. Regardless, Annie writes Sam a letter asking him to meet her at the Empire State Building on Valentine's Day.

—George Denny (District 18 Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes)

—Marilyn Mandziuk (District 16 City of Toronto)

## **When Harry Met Sally...**

**Plot:** Recent college graduates Harry and Sally share a car ride from Chicago to New York and argue long and hard about whether or not men and women can be strictly friends without sex becoming an issue. After 12 years of on-again, off-again friendship, Harry and Sally finally admit that men and women can be not only friends but also lovers and lifelong partners.

—Claudia Mang (District 22 Etobicoke and York)

## **Pretty Woman**

**Plot:** While on a business trip in Los Angeles, Edward, a ruthless mergers-and-acquisitions vulture, picks up Vivian, a prostitute, and asks her to stay with him for the weekend and pose as his girlfriend. Edward discovers that Vivian has a lot to teach him — and his life will never be the same.

—Suzanne Poudrette-Gagnon (District 45 EstariO)

## **The Holiday**

**Plot:** Iris, who lives in London, and Amanda, who lives in Los Angeles, are both plagued by rotten relationships and cheating boyfriends. They decide to swap houses for a much-needed holiday — and find true love into the bargain.

—Anne MacInnis (District 19 Hastings and Prince Edward)

—Lorraine Knowles (District 36 Peterborough)

## **The American President**

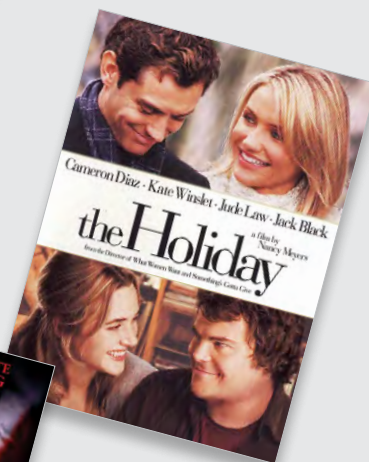
**Plot:** The widowed U.S. president is up for re-election and, thanks to overwhelming support, expects a sweeping victory. He meets an environmental lobbyist and falls in love — but his supporters aren't happy about the relationship, and his ratings plummet. He needs to choose: his political career or his chance at love again.

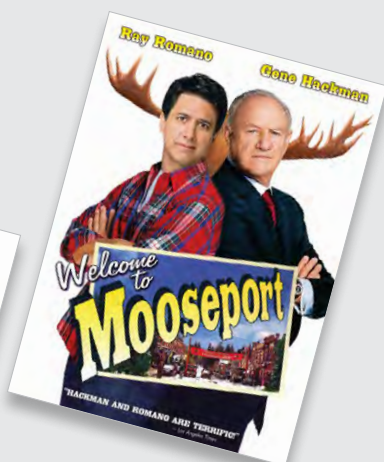
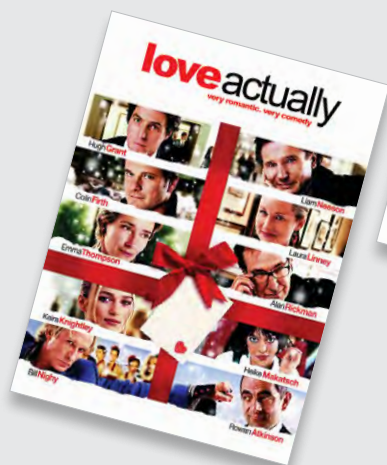
—Virginia Gregg (District 34 York Region)

## **Some Like It Hot**

**Plot:** Two musicians witness a mob murder and are forced to leave town. They disguise themselves as women and join an all-female jazz band on their way to Florida. Things heat up, and the mob closes in.

—Joan Trotman (District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand)





### Love Actually

**Plot:** In the month before Christmas in London, nine loosely connected stories explore the vagaries of love; among them, the newly elected prime minister falls for a junior staffer, a graphic designer is devoted to caring for her mentally challenged brother and a married man is tempted by his new executive assistant.

—Carole Costello (District 16 City of Toronto)

### Welcome to Mooseport

**Plot:** A former U.S. president, shell-shocked after a nasty divorce, retires to his bucolic holiday home in a sleepy Maine town and agrees to run for mayor. But this is not your usual political battle, and Handy Harrison, his rival for the town's top spot, is not your usual opponent.

—Elise Burns (District 15 Halton)

### Leap Year

**Plot:** Anna wants to get married, but her boyfriend is dragging his heels. She decides to take advantage of the Celtic tradition that allows a woman to pop the question on February 29 and follows her lover to Dublin. Fate in the form of Declan steps in — and Anna finds true love after all.

—Linda Skeries (District 17 Simcoe County)

### A Good Year

**Plot:** Max Skinner, a failed London banker, inherits his uncle's vineyard in Provence, where he had spent happy childhood holidays. When he arrives, he meets a woman from California who claims to be his long-lost cousin — and the real vineyard owner. Uh-oh.

—Jodi Kimm (District 22 Etobicoke and York)

### As Good as It Gets

**Plot:** Melvin Udall, a reclusive, obsessive-compulsive romance fiction writer with no social filters alienates everyone he comes into contact with, including his gay neighbour Simon. When Simon is assaulted, Melvin reluctantly takes charge of Simon's dog — and they bond. As he opens up, Melvin begins to conduct a relationship — sort of — with Carol, the lone server who will wait on him at the local diner, the only place Melvin will eat.

—Ewa Romanski, RTOERO chief financial officer

### Moonstruck

**Plot:** Italian-American widow Loretta reluctantly says yes to a marriage proposal from her stable but boring and mama-fearing boyfriend, Johnny. But when she meets Johnny's younger brother, Ronny, she knows she is falling in love, no matter how hard she tries to back away. Ronny won't take no for an answer, and while Johnny is away saying goodbye to his mama, who is ostensibly on her deathbed, Loretta relents and discovers she is not the only one in her family with a romantic secret.

—Diane Devey (District 24 Scarborough and East York)

### The Wedding Singer

**Plot:** Robbie, a wedding singer, is left at the altar and gives up all hope of finding true love. In fact, he decides to quit the wedding singer business — his heart just isn't in it — and reneges on his promise to sing at his new friend Julia's wedding. But it's too late — he has fallen in love with Julia and now has to win her before she says "I do."

—Kevin Power (District 38 Lambton)



# The golden age of teaching

During my career, education – and teaching – was transformed

by **James Franklin McDonald**,  
EdD (District 22 Etobicoke and York)



**I** **magine:** Just 19 years old, and soon to have a newly minted teaching certificate in my back pocket! It was the spring of 1955. My Ottawa Teachers' College year was coming to a close. I did not realize at the time that I was on the threshold of a 34-year career during one of the most exciting times in education. Without question, for a beginning teacher in Ontario in 1955, teaching was the opportunity of a lifetime. I had opted for a profession with endless possibilities and great potential, if I was willing to make the effort to succeed.

There were hundreds of ads for teaching positions, filling several pages of the major newspapers every single week, from every school board in Ontario. I had no idea where I wanted to teach, and so I was literally waiting for something to fall into my lap – and it did.

One memorable day, the college principal called me out of class with a surprise. Knowing that I had been a keen army cadet throughout high school, he suggested that I attend an interview with officials who were recruiting teachers for the Camp Petawawa army schools at that very moment in his office.

The details of the interview are now foggy, but I do remember one of the interviewers asking me what my hobbies were. Hobbies? I was a greenhorn kid from a dairy farm in eastern Ontario, where work was the only hobby I knew. I blurted out, "Hunting and fishing." He sarcastically remarked, "That should go over well in the classroom." After hearing his response, I felt my chances were pretty slim, but I got the job and would be teaching Grade 4.

I was thrilled to have my very first job, with its starting annual salary of \$2,400. Although it was slightly above the going rate of other school boards in the area, this pitiful stipend was equivalent to an unskilled labourer's wage.

But I was in on the ground floor of my career. It was a time of unprecedented expansion. During my first 15 years of teaching elementary school, enrolment in Ontario grew by almost 600,000 students before tapering off in the 1970s. Little one-room schools were closing, and thousands of new schools were being built. Teacher shortages became a serious problem, forcing school boards to compete aggressively to hire new staff.

The two schools in Camp Petawawa enjoyed an excellent reputation under the leadership of

Left: James and Catherine McDonald on their wedding day, 1957.

Right: The McDonalds with their four children, 1966.

a strong-willed, dynamic supervising principal. The schools were well-equipped and well-organized, with effective discipline standards. The children came from fairly advantaged homes, with stay-at-home mothers on hand when they went home at noon for their lunch break. They were a pleasure to teach. At that time, words such as *autistic*, *hyperactive* and *attention deficit disorder* were not part of our vocabulary when referring to students.

I taught Grade 4 for two years in the junior school; in my third year, I moved to Grade 6 in the senior school. In my second year, I met my future wife, Cathy, who was a new teacher on staff. We married in September 1957. After completing my very first university course by correspondence from McMaster University, I quickly decided that there had to be a better way to obtain a degree.

Queen's University appealed to me, as it was in familiar territory. In the spring of 1958, I saw an opportunity to move to Kingston, Ont., after spotting a teaching ad from Fort Henry Heights army schools, which were located nearby. I applied and landed a vice-principal position in its junior school.

At the time, school boards encouraged teachers to improve their academic qualifications and backed this up with financial incentives. They built salary increases into teacher contracts for every five university courses completed, and a hefty increase for completion of a BA degree. After some years, and much burning of the midnight oil, my initially pitiful salary started to resemble a living wage. By the end of my career, I was earning a very respectable income — 30 times higher than my starting salary.

The focus of my personal life changed dramatically after moving to Kingston. I was now a family man with a young daughter. We purchased a tiny house in a quiet suburb of the city, about 15 minutes from my work.

The Fort Henry school was another exceptionally rewarding work experience, with happy kids, supportive colleagues and a dedicated principal. During my time there, I taught grades 5 through 8. I finished my BA degree at Queen's through night school and summer school, and my bachelor of education at the University of Toronto after completing required assignments and one summer's attendance on campus.

It was not all smooth sailing. There were several lean years when money was very tight, making me wonder sometimes if I should have heeded a close friend's repeated advice to quit teaching for a better-paying job. He was a farm machinery salesman earning several times my meagre salary.

I am fond of telling a story about a conversation I had with Cathy in my fourth year of teaching, just after we had moved to Kingston. We had a young child and a bare-bones, recently purchased little house in the suburbs. However, we were really scraping bottom financially. It was near payday at the end of the month when she said, "We have nothing for dinner. I will have to make porridge." I became irate and said, "There is no way we are having porridge for dinner!" I scrambled around and found \$1 in change. I went to the grocery store and bought three pounds of hamburger for that little pile of change. Barbecued hamburger sounded like a much better dinner than porridge.

My family and I spent seven rewarding years in Kingston, where we enjoyed our lives and made close friends, many of whom were teaching colleagues. In 1965, much to our friends' dismay, we decided to move to Toronto so that I could obtain a master of education degree at the University of Toronto. They could not believe that we would leave our comfortable life and pull up stakes to move to a big city.

Jobs were plentiful. I obtained a teaching position with the Etobicoke Board of Education as vice-principal in a junior school. It was the right move, but with 75 elementary schools, it was a much bigger pond than the three-school Fort Henry board. I was going to have to prove myself, or gradually sink into obscurity among the hundreds of teachers employed by this board.

The gods were with me. I spent four years in two different schools as a teaching vice-principal and obtained my master of education degree plus an Ontario school inspector certificate. Then I was appointed principal of a small school in southern Etobicoke.

At last I had the opportunity to run my own show. After 14 years in the classroom, teaching every grade from 2 through 8, I felt that I was ready.

The principalship was the job that I loved best. I couldn't wait to get to work in the morning. Every day was different. Every day was challenging. Every day was exciting. With effective and positive support from board administrators, I was able to implement the board's policies and programs to enable its teachers to perform their jobs effectively. As principal I had one goal in mind: to strive for excellence.

Only two unfortunate provincewide fads stand out during my career. The open-plan school and the whole-language learn-to-read program were foisted on teachers by school boards throughout the



McDonald and family at his doctorate graduation, University of Toronto, 1985.



province. Swept along by their popularity and the Ministry of Education's avid recommendation that these were front-line progressive education initiatives, the Etobicoke board invested heavily in both. Uncharacteristically, Etobicoke did not do its homework. The first fad was short-lived, but the second was long-lasting and much more detrimental to students.

In spite of these missteps, a multitude of progressive initiatives were implemented during my time in education. School boards were flush with money. Teachers' salaries increased dramatically, beginning in about 1965, along with their rapidly improving qualifications. And school boards expected teachers to keep up with the latest developments in education research by upgrading their skills and knowledge.

Part-time university courses were easily accessible. Free, board-sponsored, in-service evening training sessions were held for teachers wanting to learn new skills in every subject area. The number of professional development days increased, allowing teachers to attend education seminars focused on new Ministry of Education initiatives and kids to enjoy some time off. Teachers had opportunities to attend out-of-town education conferences or apply for a sabbatical year to earn a postgraduate degree. An innovative four-over-five salary plan allowed teachers to take a 20 per cent reduction in salary for four years and then take a break and enjoy the fifth year off — with pay — to do whatever they wished.

School boards actively supported teachers. They chose highly effective classroom teachers for consultant positions geared specifically to assist fellow instructors who needed help. Large urban boards established their own curriculum departments staffed by consultants to develop in-house teaching guides.

The Ministry of Education conducted certificate programs for teachers who wished to obtain qualifications in specialized areas, such as special education, early childhood education, the use of audio-visual equipment in the classroom and English as a second language instruction. The opportunities for teachers to improve their expertise at little cost were endless, and these enhanced skills proved to be of enormous benefit to many children.

McDonald is ready to ride, 2020.



Far-sighted, innovative leadership at the ministry and school board levels led to new programs that were advantageous for young children. Senior kindergarten for five-year-olds, while not compulsory, gradually became commonplace throughout Ontario, followed later by junior kindergarten for four-year-olds. These highly popular programs added thousands of students and teachers to the system. Play-based learning helped give children from different backgrounds the foundational skills they needed for more formal learning in Grade 1.

Before the 1970s, many children with special needs were excluded from school or offered programs that were little more than child care. This changed with the introduction of smaller, special education classes for children with learning disabilities in the '70s. They were taught by highly skilled teachers with the help of teaching assistants who were trained to help students develop effective learning strategies.

In this era, English as a second language (ESL) classes and summer school programs were introduced to benefit new Canadian children who were flooding into Ontario. A French-immersion program also debuted on a limited basis to encourage bilingualism. It soon became very popular and expanded significantly.

Ontario's 1968 evaluation of the education system, known as the Hall-Dennis Report, changed the way students were treated within schools. Among its many recommendations, it advocated the introduction of special education classes. It soundly condemned the practice of failing students and corporal punishment. Strapping — the

controversial, barbaric practice of slapping children on the palms of their hands with a leather strap — had been an ingrained part of the system ever since Ontario's public education began, but the report recommended it be banned. The strap gradually fell into disuse in Ontario in the early 1970s but was not formally abolished in Canadian schools until the 1990s.

This same report recommended replacing student failures with "continuous learning," or, more simply stated, allowing children to progress at their own rate. This controversial idea gradually caught on, and outright failure became frowned upon in favour of children moving to the next level along with their own age group. It was a progressive move — educators knew well that requiring struggling students to repeat their year had little academic merit and very negative, emotional consequences for children.

When I started my first teaching job in 1955, I had no idea that I was on the precipice of so many exciting changes or personal opportunities. During my 34-year career, education was transformed, from banning the strap to replacing failure with continuous learning. Schools became more inclusive for all sorts of students, who were vastly more diverse than my cohort, which came from fairly advantaged homes with stay-at-home mothers.

My own program of continuous learning eventually resulted in my earning a doctorate, with a focus on how teachers allocate their time. And I had no inkling that my meagre starting salary would grow so much, or that teaching would prove to be so personally satisfying. ☺





