



WAYNE THOMSON: *HELPING TO BUILD UP NIAGARA*

Wayne Thomson has been involved in local politics since he was 29 years old; he was the youngest councilman at the time, most of the others were in their 60s and 70s, and since that time, he's spent over three decades actively involved in local politics. He spent 14 years serving on city council and 17 years as mayor of Niagara Falls. He serves on numerous boards, two of which include Niagara Falls Tourism and the Human Resources Committee for the Region of Niagara.

During this time as mayor, Niagara Falls saw huge growth in many areas: the casino opened up in 1995, creating jobs for hundreds of people, the Scotiabank Convention Centre went from dream to reality, and the McBain Community Centre was built. Wayne Thomson is an individual who has had a major impact on the growth and prosperity of the City of Niagara Falls.

We recently caught up with Wayne to chat about the upcoming election, how Niagara Falls has changed, and of course, what lies ahead for the city.

TODAY MAGAZINE: WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE YOUR BIGGEST POLITICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS THUS FAR?

WAYNE THOMSON: "I had a dream, and the dream was to create year round permanent jobs in tourism in Niagara Falls, and it included a casino, a convention centre, a people mover...I personally worked the last 20 years on all of these issues. When the casino opened, the people who operated it at the time said it was without exception, the busiest casino in the world. Now we have two casinos, the WEGO system, the Scotiabank Convention Centre, which have all been a tremendous boost to the area."

TM: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHANGES YOU'VE SEEN IN NIAGARA FALLS?

WT: "Prior to 1995 when the casino opened, there were no high rise hotels, and within the last two decades, we have probably 30 high rise hotels, from 30 stories up to 59 stories, each one of them creating jobs. I think that was a wonderful period to be involved in local politics and personally, am extremely proud of the transition that took place."

TM: WHAT WILL YOUR PRIORITIES BE IF ELECTED FOR CITY COUNCIL THIS UPCOMING TERM?

WT: "I've always been one who has been extremely conscious of the financial situation, so that certainly will be a major priority, watching the budget. A lot of people don't realize that Niagara Falls is probably one of the most fortunate municipalities in Canada because as a result of the two casinos, we now get a percentage of revenue and last year, the City of Niagara Falls received 21 million dollars from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation. That is about one quarter of our total budget and gives us an opportunity to do things like fix the roads, upgrade our infrastructure, etc. I look forward to being involved in the next four years to take make sure that this community is a spectacular place to live because of that."

TM: WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE FUTURE OF TOURISM IN NIAGARA FALLS?

WT: "The tourism industry is the main thing I'm involved in right now, and the objective is to lengthen the stay by building on what we have. I think one of the things I am most excited about is the fact that the City of Niagara Falls, the Niagara Parks Commission and the private sector owners are now working extremely close together to market and to come up with new and unique ideas on how to attract people to the area. We have so many wonderful, exciting things here in the entire region."

TM: WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT BEING A CITY COUNCILOR?

WT: "After 35 years, I am running for city council again...I certainly enjoy my involvement and work at it every day. I get a tremendous amount of satisfaction and enjoyment out of it. It's not just the large projects like casinos and commercial developments that make the difference...from a personal point of view, I go into work and I hear from people who have a cracked sidewalk, or they didn't get their garbage picked up, or the snowplow didn't come by, all kinds of little things, but people call, and I have the wonderful opportunity to help them, and every day I drive home, I can feel good about the fact that very positive things happen on a daily basis."