

Ridley College the No. 1 wonder; At 119 years, Ridley still has wow factor to be the top wonder of St. Catharines

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Nick Holmes loves nearly all the contenders.

Old Port Dalhousie, the Bruce Trail, Morningstar Mill, the Welland Canal - they're all fabulous, as far as he's concerned.

But when it came time to vote for the ultimate Wonder of St. Catharines, the Ridley College teacher didn't pull any punches.

He voted for his institution - and he convinced hundreds of others to do the same.

"This just wasn't a few kids voting over and over again on their laptops," said the history and geography teacher, after learning Ridley beat out 36 St. Catharines contenders for top billing in The Standard's Seven Wonders of Niagara contest.

"This was students and teachers and alumni and groundskeepers, everybody. Everyone is proud of their school."

The Standard, the Niagara Falls Review and the Welland Tribune kicked off the Seven Wonders of Niagara contest in

June, inspired in part by the CBC's Seven Wonders of Canada contest.

The Standard took nominations over the summer and voters weighed in on their favourite "Wonders" this month.

The nomination process yielded some quirky results, including St. Catharines' downtown core, the Pen Centre and Niagara-on-the-Lake's Canada Day Cake.

The winners might surprise you, too.

In St. Catharines, Ridley's 119-year-old private school ran away with the contest, earning 488 votes.

The next closest competitors were the Niagara Escarpment (159 votes), Lakeside Park Carousel (154 votes) and the Welland Canal (129 votes).

Holmes said the school's storied history, combined with its community activism, should make it a wonder in anyone's book.

"It may not be an architectural or engineering marvel, but it sure deserves to be up there with the best," he said.

Holmes added he told his Grade 9 and 10 students to vote - but also to explore the alternatives.

"It's a learning opportunity for them," he said, noting he takes students to many of the locations for history lessons.

"The (Port Dalhousie) beach, the locks, Morningstar Mill, these are all places we'll go."

Winning wonders in the surrounding area included:

Thorold: the Wonder award went to the restored Keefer

Mansion, which narrowly edged Holy Rosary Church and the twin flight locks.

Niagara-on-the-Lake: out of 22 suggestions, historic Fort George and the rushing Niagara River tied for top spot.

West Niagara: popular diner Butterball's Restaurant in Jordan was the clear winner, with the landmark "burned-out ship" in Jordan Harbour coming in a solid second.

For specific results, visit www.stcatharinesstandard.ca.

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