

Celebrating Grand Valley's spirited past

Town remains 'delightfully small and quaint' while welcoming new growth

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When Jamie Stam and his wife decided it was time to move, they drew a circle around the Brampton area and realized it made just as much sense to commute from north to south as it did the other way around.

"We discovered a whole new world," Stam says of Grand Valley, a town of just under 3,000 people that's 15 minutes west of Orangeville and 35 minutes north of Brampton.

"It's delightfully small and quaint. The main street has been used in many movies and looks like something from another era. The river winds through the town in a serpentine-like way. I think the town resembles the early days of Stratford."

Stam and his wife purchased a 1920s, Mission-style home full of character. Though he was contemplating retirement, a vacant two-sto-

rey schoolhouse built in 1892 and his "fascination" with the cocktail culture that's sweeping the globe and urban centres like Toronto captured his imagination.

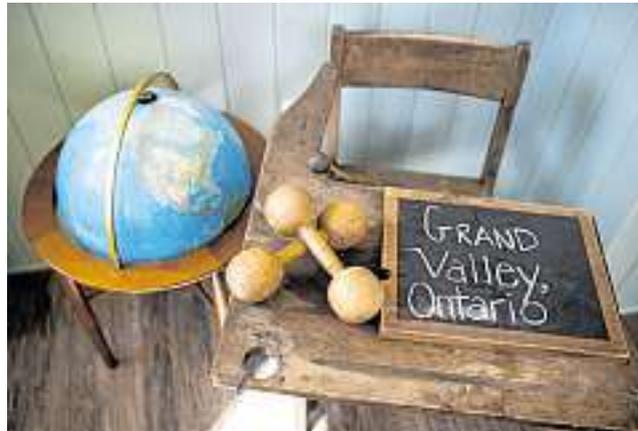
At the same time, changing laws meant it was possible to open the province's first combination cocktail bar and distillery that could become a destination for residents in nearby Caledon and Orangeville, as well as weekend drivers from the Greater Toronto Area.

"Just as they might go to a winery in Niagara, they now have options to discover what is becoming a 'bootlegger trail' with cideries, breweries and now distilleries coming into play up here," says Stam, who describes his job as 'chief executive bootlegger.'

With Grand Valley's storied history, it's an apt moniker. "This was the last place in all of Ontario to go dry before prohibition started in 1915," he says. "People came here for cocktails or beer."

Today, a growing number

coverstory



Grand Spirits Distillery, located in a circa 1892 schoolhouse, boasts the original massive chalkboard and is decorated with schoolhouse items.

of people are making their way to Grand Valley for a spirit of an entirely different variety: the one that comes with small-town living. Its current population of 2,950 is projected to reach 7,000 by 2031 under the provincial government's Places to Grow Act, Mayor Steve Solomon reports.

About 300 new homes have recently been occupied and about 600 more are on the horizon. Residents like Daniel Bonello, owner of the Brewed Awakenings by Daniel café, welcome newcomers. "I grew up in Grand Valley and always loved the small-town feel. It's a close-knit community," he says.

"With it being such a small town, we know most of the people here. With the new subdivisions, we're seeing new faces all the time. We're seeing young families and seniors and a lot of diversity, which is great for Grand Valley."

Agriculture forms the backbone of economic activity here, with almost 100 farms. In addition to affordability, there are lots of reasons why a young family or a couple wanting to downsize would want to move to Grand Valley. "It's not far from the GTA in terms of miles but when you're here, it feels miles away," Solomon says.

"You can easily get up in the morning and drive to Mississauga or Brampton for work but when you drive back this way, Grand Valley is the first place you hit that makes you feel like you're out of the GTA."

The folks who choose to call Grand Valley home appreciate a slower pace of life, says Solomon, pointing to fami-

lies signing their kids up for activities like softball, soccer and hockey and taking part in annual events like the Grand River Rodeo, Grand Valley John Deere Show, Grand Valley Fall Fair and Christmas in the Valley. "I hope the people moving here have the same experiences I had growing up here — carefree."



Folks who live in Grand Valley enjoy a slower pace of life.



Daniel Bonello, owner of the Brewed Awakenings by Daniel, grew up in Grand Valley and returned after studying culinary management at college.



Grand Valley is nicknamed 'Nature's Playground' — featured are a 3,500-acre lake and a biosphere with flora and fauna.



The Upper Grand Trailway offers scenic opportunities to experience the natural environment.



Visitors to Grand Valley now have options to discover what is becoming a bootlegger trail with cideries, breweries and distilleries coming into play.