The federal government is expected to begin a consultation process this month to develop a catalogue of pre-approved home designs in an effort to accelerate the home-building process for developers.

When it was announced in early December, Housing Minister Sean Fraser likened the project to one from the post-Second World War era, when the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. (CMHC) developed simple blueprints to help speed up the construction of badly-needed homes for returning soldiers and their families.

That comparison brought to mind the continued existence of about 25 small homes on both sides of Nelles Street and the north side of Castlereagh Street, on the block where both intersect with King Street in Niagara-on-the-Lake. There were also a couple of such homes on Davy Street.

Back in 2019, NOTL Museum volunteer researcher David Hemmings looked into the history of what was referred to as Victory Estate. The story behind the homes, most built in the late 1940s, is a fascinating and oft-overlooked snapshot of the town in the latter half of the 20th century.

“In the early days they were effectively rented out for a period of time,” Hemmings told The Local about the homes that originally sold for about $6,000. “After five years it moved to a lease with an option to purchase. By 1950 or so, most began to buy their houses from the Central Mortgage, the company that built them.”

The details were all laid out in the Veterans’ Land Act, 1942, including generous financing arrangements.

According to an advertisement Hemmings shared that was published in the Globe and Mail at the time, “any ex-service man or woman with overseas service, or all who have served for 12 months in Canada, (were) eligible to make an application, providing they have been honourably discharged and have a reasonable expectation of living up to their agreements.”

Hemmings’ work discovered that most of this housing, built across Ontario, was prefabricated. Walls and roofs were built at a central factory then shipped to the final location for assembly. Once a street was constructed, it was neat, tidy and uniform.

The houses were generally one-and-a-half storey with
Community became ‘one big collective family’

Continued from page 1

A steep roof, shallow eaves and no dormers. That’s an apt description of the homes built in NOTL through the program. The last names of the original homeowners are like a Who’s Who of NOTL. If surnames such as Bjorgan, Clement, Cornfield, Garrett, Howse, Mills and Sartor ring a bell it’s perhaps because many became prominent local citizens, continuing their commitment to serving by contributing to the town where they settled. And the next generations of their families often followed suit.

Coincidentally, the late James and Nancy Clark, the first residents and owners of the home at 308 King Street at the corner of Castlereagh Street, were the grandparents of NOTL Museum’s managing director and curator Sarah Kaufman. “I don’t remember being in the house but my mother has many great memories of growing up there,” says Kaufman. “It was tiny, but my grandparents were a photographer and they had lived before in an apartment on Queen Street above his studio. When they moved there the house seemed huge to them.”

Kaufman’s mother, Sharon, shared memories of running around the Niagara Common with her four siblings and playing on the steps of the museum. She described an idyllic life-style, with their elementary school Parliament Oak right across King Street.

“My grandfather was a veteran from the military police,” Kaufman explains. “First he was photographing soldiers for identification, then he was one of the escorts going across the ocean with prisoners of war. And my grandmother was a war bride from Croydon. She became heavily involved with the (Royal Canadian) Legion.”

Kaufman laments that the post-war homes are not protected with a heritage designation. The unique layout of the houses and the odd yet uniform sizing of each property, she feels, make them worth preserving as a monument to a different time.

Rick Mills, a pastor at Life Abundant Niagara on Concession 7 Road, spent his childhood at 14 Castlereagh Street. His parents Doug and Violet, the long-time lifeguard known simply as Vi, bought the home from Violet’s mother, Ivy Taylor, the original owner.

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Could a similar program solve housing crisis?

British bulldog or kick the can, he adds, laughing, “and we see the Simpsons-Sears truck pull onto the street around Christmas time. We would have a huddle and speculate on what that kid might be getting for Christmas. We would take our dune buggies and mini-bikes out on the Common, as it was wide open at the time.’’

Following Ken Bjorgan’s death, Flora continued to live in the house until she moved into an assisted living facility just prior to the pandemic. There, she succumbed to COVID in June 2020 at 99 years old. Like Rick Mills, Bjorgan family members also considered buying the old family home. Instead they sold the house after Flora’s passing for $445,000.

“Now they sell for 100 times what they were bought for back then,” Hemmings marvels.

Despite that, Hemmings is of the opinion that if a government program could have done what it did at the prices they offered, there must be some way a similar program can do the same to solve the affordable housing crisis, in Niagara and across the country. Kaufman is sure most of the Victory homes facing the museum are currently being run as short-term rentals.

But the legacy lives on in her contributions to Niagara, as well as those of the Mills and Bjorgan families.

And of course you have to factor in the likes of Al Howse, the current president of the NOTL Legion Branch 124, appropriately named the Nelles Branch, who grew up at 28 Castlereagh, and Harold Clement, the original owner of 331 Davy Street, who served in local government from 1963 to 1997 as a municipal and a regional councillor. Clement also sat on the boards of the Niagara Parks Commission and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. And is there anyone who didn’t know Vi Mills’ sister, Jackie Sentinel of Sentinel Carriages?

The post-war years were obviously a different time in NOTL’s history. But one has to hope that whatever comes of the federal government’s consultation process this month, some of these new by-design affordable housing units will end up in NOTL, and that they are effective in inspiring the same sense of community for the people who choose to live there as those who lived in the Victory Homes.

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Unscripted collaboration of film director, winemaker

Mike Balsom
The Local

The release of his own Unscripted line of wines is a dream come true for Niagara-on-the-Lake native Mike Pohorly.

Since graduating from Concordia University with a degree in communications and film, Pohorly has made a name for himself as a director and assistant director on countless television and movie sets, as well as in the advertising world.

At the same time he never lost sight of his formative years helping his parents Frank and Susan Pohorly work the NOTL vineyard they have run since the early 1970s.

Currently Pohorly lives on the west coast, where Vancouver continues to host a booming film industry. But he makes frequent trips back to Niagara, where he often connects with his friends who operate and work at various wineries.

Unscripted is a collaboration that came about through a connection with winemaker Marco Piccoli, whom Pohorly first met in 2004 when he filmed an icewine documentary called The Last Hand Harvest.

It was during brunch at Piccoli’s home a few years ago when Pohorly floated the idea of a collaboration to the winemaker who grew up in Northeastern Italy and studied winemaking at universities in Italy and Germany, as well as at Brock University’s Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI).

“He told me he had always had this passion for wines,” Piccoli says. “I was interested, because he’s very connected, very creative. He brings to the table such a strong marketing and creative background. We started working together on a vintage of Sauvignon Blanc two years ago. It all started over a casual glass of wine in my backyard.”

Pohorly, a graduate of Niagara District Secondary School, has approached his new venture the way he tackles his work on films such as DC: Legends of Tomorrow, Prison Break and Reacher, and his supervisory role in producing the in-game entertainment for the NHL’s Vancouver Canucks.

On a film set and in the arena, it’s important to have the right people in roles as scriptwriters, actors, production assistants, set designers and other positions, and to be able to work as a team. He took that team approach with Unscripted, as well.

“My partner Marco is such a talented and experienced winemaker who makes incredible wines. For the brand itself, it’s not unlike putting together a film,” Pohorly says. “There’s so much that goes into creating this venture in addition to making sure we have good wine. From finding the right bottle, selecting the label paper, creating the logo, developing the website, doing the accounting and administering the online sales it was a lot to take on while working full-time.”

He adds that a wine, just like a film or television series, has to have a good story.

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Coun. Nick Ruller also said it was “worth doing it,” referring to the experiment of moving to morning meetings in 2023 — but looks forward to sitting down in the council chamber in the morning in the day.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita moved that council choose the option to return to nighttime meetings, which was not recom-mended by staff.

“We should all be in the council chambers,” she said, referring to issues colleagues have with conflicting council and personal schedules.

Staff said daytime meetings offered an annual savings of over $10,000 — but added that senior administration at town didn’t get paid for overtime.

They mostly work “extra for free” during evening meetings, waiting for a response. “It’s work that needs to be done,” he says. “It’s just a matter of time.”

He has also recommend-ed a berm to prevent water from the marina from cross-ing Melville Street to River Beach Drive and Ricardo Streets.

Ron Simkus, Dock Area resident who worked exten-sively with Cluckie and D’Angelo on Dock Area im-provements, referred to their departure in one of his recent email blasts, and of the need to set the bar high for candidates to replace them.

He congratulated D’An- gelo on his new job, he said, “with sadness in my heart;” and spoke highly of the op-erations director, his skills, competency and his “ability to speak to the public, and also deal with conflict res-olution, balancing complex council politics and the core needs of the town.”

In addition to Dock Area advancements, D’Angelo says of his accomplishments in NOTL, “in 2023, we heard loud and clear from council and residents that we needed to keep programming for families at the community centre, and we’ve done that, with pro-

Penny Coles
The Local

Rome D’Angelo, the town’s director of operations for a little more than a year, says he is taking one more step in his career before re-tirement — this time, head- ing back to Hamilton, where he will work in operations for much of his 30 years in mu-nicipal leadership.

“I see it as a great chance to get back to my home town with my track record in op-erations, and add value to the Police Services Board,” where he will once again be work- ing in the area of fleet and facilities management, as he was for the City of Hamilton, he told The Local.

At the age of 60, he added, “this is the closing chapter in my career; it was just one of those situations where I had the opportunity to retire from the city of Hamilton, but I wasn’t ready to retire in my career. That’s why I came to Niagara-on-the-Lake. Now it’s time going back to my wheelhouse.” And he can do that without the daily com-mute to NOTL.

The fact that town CAO Marnie Cluckie announced her retirement just shortly before D’Angelo, and both are on their way to take on new opportunities in Hamil-ton, is not connected, he says.

“Looking at the timing, it seems like we were moving in parallel, but it was really just coincidence. We will be working for two separate or-ganizations.”

Although he can be cred-ited with several initiatives during his 14 months in NOTL, the approach he took with staff, an approach that has guided his whole career, he says, may have had the greatest influence.

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The Local

Rome D’Angelo is hitting the road back to Hamilton. (Supplied)
2024: A New Year Brings New Hope

Tony Baldinelli
MR Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and NOTL

2023 can best be described as a year in which Canadians and residents here in Niagara found themselves in a cost-of-living crisis. Unfortunately, much of it is a result of misguided and reckless policies implemented by a Liberal government, which is not concerned with our economic future, but rather its electoral survival.

Justin Trudeau’s government and its continued reckless spending have driven inflation rates higher than those experienced in the last 40 years, resulting in the Bank of Canada and banks having to hike interest rates, which have doubled, and housing costs have doubled, eroding the very revenue used to lower the costs of living.

Rather, they feed this government’s reckless spending habits, keep prices on goods and services high, and it pushes the costs of living even higher.

In November, Fed Ontario published a report that indicated 800,822 adults and children accessed a food bank in Ontario between April 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023, an increase of 38 per cent over last year and 60 per cent over pre-pandemic levels. Further, Ontario’s food banks were visited 5,888,685 times throughout the year, an increase of 36 per cent over last year and 101 per cent over pre-pandemic levels.

These concerning numbers are being experienced here in Niagara. According to a volunteer at Newark Neighbours, over 250 different people have been served this year, compared to about 110 people last year. Further, about 115 dinner hampers have been served to families for Christmas this year, compared with about 63 last year.

Meanwhile, Project SHARE in Niagara Falls saw a record-breaking increase in the need for their support this year, as they served more than 1,000 people, a total of one in every eight residents in the city. That represents a staggering 71 per cent increase from 2022.

In Niagara, November 2023 is expected to be a year in which Canadians and residents here in Niagara are realizing they are at risk.

Tony Baldinelli
MR Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and NOTL

On a larger scale, Canada loses its economic competitiveness, and this disadvantage hurts businesses and industries, which are needed to generate the very revenue used to support our public services and programs in the first place. If they close, or move out of the country, we are all worse off.

After eight years of this tired Liberal government, Canadians are realizing they are not the worth. We need the federal government to stop its reckless spending, get out of the way, reduce the tax burden it is placing on Canadians, and cut its red tape.

Under my Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, I vow to continue fighting for your interests in Ottawa, so we can all hope for a better tomorrow and a better year ahead than last year.

Thank you for putting your trust and confidence in me. It is an honour and a privilege to serve you.
Well, 2023 has come and gone. I hope it was a good year for everybody and that you were healthy.

I am writing today to thank those who played a very large role in some of the work completed in this year, both at the local and regional level.

I also wish to give my thanks to the former council members Clare Cameron (also deputy lord mayor), Allan Biuback, Norm Arsenault, John Wiens, and Ron Kruczenski. I want to thank the current council members Erwin Windy, Maryla, and the rest were there.

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rivers and Welland. These cities are currently in our Niagara Regional structure today. Because these cities have dra-


ting to the current structure

to write down the number of snow removal, street repair, fire services and recreation services. Expect just one seat for our 18,000

The same thing happened with areas they were merging with. The amalgamation of Torontonians who
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gnarion.ca/ government/budget-taxes/ prop-tax-calculator.aspx breakdown/ for a single calcula
tor on 2023 rates.

No great savings by combining municipalities

Savings is the Holy Grail of all amalgamations. But like the Holy Grail it is searched for but never found. Think about it. A snowplow driver goes out and plows the same distance in a given time frame. Under a city council the driver’s remains the same with perhaps some very small savings on ad

Planning functions can certain-

ly be cut but there is duplica-
tion at the Regional but there also will be significant costs in aligning all zoning and master plan bylaws into one. Expect many years before real dollars can be saved.

The Ottawa and Toronto amalgamations have showed increased costs in combining labour contracts because of the push to get to the “high water” level. In those cases all employ-

Planning standards to NOTL’s unique tour-

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A big thank you goes to

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tion at the Regional but there also will be significant costs in aligning all zoning and master plan bylaws into one. Expect many years before real dollars can be saved.

The Ottawa and Toronto amalgamations have showed increased costs in combining labour contracts because of the push to get to the “high water” level. In those cases all employ-

Planning standards to NOTL’s unique tour-

should NOTL get the lovely flowers maintained alongside streets like Queen when Welland has none? Will plan-
ing protections to save Old Town or Queenston or St. Da-

rivers and Welland. These cities are currently in our Niagara Regional structure today. Because these cities have dra-


ting to the current structure

to write down the number of snow removal, street repair, fire services and recreation services. Expect just one seat for our 18,000

The same thing happened with areas they were merging with. The amalgamation of Torontonians who
city councillors will see NOTL as


No great savings by combining municipalities

Savings is the Holy Grail of all amalgamations. But like the Holy Grail it is searched for but never found. Think about it. A snowplow driver goes out and plows the same distance in a given time frame. Under a city council the driver’s remains the same with perhaps some very small savings on ad

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ting to the current structure
Pohorly hoping to sell Unscripted to local restaurants

Continued from page 4

There he specializes in helping Pohorly and other ‘virtual’ small batch winemakers access professional wine-making facilities and also provides them retail exposure on site.

Wines from Rennie Estate Winery, The Long Way Home and Stoney Ridge have all been produced at the facility by their own winemakers. Unscripted is the first one produced there by Piccoli himself.

“This venture is exactly what we want to showcase at Niagara Custom Crush,” says Piccoli. “Our facility doesn’t own the labels and it’s not the winery per se that produces the wines. Here, landowners and customers like Unscripted find a home to make their wines.”

Their first Unscripted product was a 2021 Sauvignon Blanc two years ago, produced using the facilities at Reif Estate Winery, a neighbour to his parents’ vineyards. Owner Klaus Reif was happy to help out both Pohorly and Piccoli. They shifted production of the Cabernet Merlot to Niagara Custom Crush after its grand opening.

Just a week before Christmas Piccoli brought their 2020 Cabernet Merlot to the bottling line at Vieni Estates Winery in Beamsville, where Vieni’s winemaker Mauro Salvador supervised the completion of about 140 cases.

The new red wine has a rich ruby colour. Piccoli says the Cab Merlot is fresh and young, and shows a lot of character.

“Flavour-wise it hints at strawberries and raspberries,” he adds. “Also dry fruits like plums, and ripe red apples. It’s very fragrant, the tannins are soft and velvety but intense, the mid-palate is also nice and strong, with a long aftertaste.”

Some of Pohorly’s friends from his Concor dia days, where he played university hockey for the Stingers, have reached out to him with feedback on the wines. All positive so far.

They likely acquired their bottles from the website, unscriptedwines.com, where both the white and red wines are currently available. It’s also available at Niagara Custom Crush’s retail store.

Though the production of both varieties was in a small-batch size, Pohorly is hoping to return to Niagara from his home base in Vancouver to start knocking on doors at local restaurants early in the new year. And the chance to visit Niagara more often, he says, is one of the happy by-products of the new business.

The frequent world traveller who spends much time in Indonesia, where he directed the drama Made in Bali, is considering starting a photo contest where a correct guess on the location could earn the winner a case of Unscripted wines.

Both Pohorly and Piccoli are looking forward to where this new venture will take them.

“We won’t cap the success of this,” Piccoli promises. “Who wants to do that? It’s just a matter of defining what success means to yourself or your brand. Then it’s just a matter of chasing it down.”

“We already have more Sauvignon Blanc, and more red coming, and we plan to do icewine as well,” adds Pohorly. “We’ve started very small, but for Marco and I, this is just the beginning.”
Queenston Firefighters give $500 to Youth Collective

Erinn Lockard and Sophie Cadeau of Sweets and Swirls Cafe joined Queenston Volunteer Firefighters Association’s Crispin Bottomley and Peter Cox recently as they presented a $500 cheque to support the Niagara-on-the-Lake Youth Collective. Lockard spent a lot of her childhood on the family farm in Queenston and remains closely connected to the village as a long time supporter of the Queenston Association’s Spaghetti Dinner events. The association offered Lockard a chance to give back by asking her to direct the donation to support a community cause of her choice. She chose NOTL Youth Collective. “I believe in the work being done at the NOTL Youth Collective. Supporting our youth and giving them a place to network and learn is so valuable,” says Lockard. The NOTL Youth Collective is coming up to its one year anniversary, and these funds will be used to support the popular culinary program, to continue to build youths’ knowledge and love of cooking, a core passion for Lockard. NOTL Youth Collective will resume programming in January. Follow them on Facebook at NOTLYouth.

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Local actor speaks of her role in *Son of a Critch*

Third season of series premieres next week

**Penny Coles**

The Local

Those who know actor Nora McLellan might have trouble picturing her as a mean, threatening nun whose main job as school principal is to terrify unruly students into submission with a stern look and a wooden ruler in hand.

But that’s not only the role she plays in a CBC television program, it’s a role she loves.

Best known in town for her years on stage at the Shaw Festival, the Niagara-on-the-Lake resident has a recurring role in the popular *Son of a Critch*, a CBC series going into its third season, which premieres Tuesday, Jan. 9.

Based on the award-winning, best-selling memoir from Mark Critch, host of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes, Son of a Critch* is described by CBC as “the hilarious and very real coming of age tale set in 1980s Newfoundland. It’s a heart-felt window into the life of a 14-year-old boy, much older than his years, who uses comedy and self-deprecating to win friends and find his place in the world.”

McLellan is enthusiastic about the show, the location — St. John’s, Nfld. — the cast and crew, and the fact that it offers her work she loves.

The first season of filming was in 2021, during the pandemic, when cast members stayed at the otherwise empty Delta Hotel in St. John’s, she says. For two summers, they would hang out together, going swimming or watching soccer — pandemic restrictions meant there wasn’t a lot else to do when not working. That has changed, but the cast and crew are still a tightly knit group.

McLellan also does some recording for the show in Toronto, and whether there or in Newfoundland, the people she works with are fabulous. We work hard, and when we hang out together we have a lot of fun. I’m never not having fun when working on it, she says.

McLellan agrees that for those who remember *The Wonder Years*, there is a similarity, especially with Critch as narrator, but, she emphasizes, the big difference is “this is a true story. It’s Mark’s life growing up in Newfoundland, as written in his memoir, and his talent as a comic is clearly evident.”

“While some of the story line may seem outlandish,” she adds, “most of it really happened.”

Much of the filming is done on a set designed to replicate the Critch family home, with Mark playing his father — even wearing his father’s jacket and carrying his father’s lunch box, says McLellan.

Young Benjamin Evan Ainsworth plays Mark, who in the beginning of season three is entering Grade 9, or what is considered junior high school in Newfoundland. He is still awkward, the ruler he uses is “pretty terrifying,” the ruler he uses is most of it really happened.

While never knowing what the future will bring, McLellan is hoping it includes another season of *Son of a Critch*, though a role for Sister Rose is not guaranteed.

In the meantime, “it’s wonderful to have the opportunity to do work I really enjoy; I still live here in town, and I love living here. I love the weather and I love the people.”

She encourages everyone to watch *Son of a Critch*, on CBC or CBC Gem, “a deeply funny show, a comedy that can really tug at our heartstrings. And I am constantly surprised by how much is packed into each episode of 22 minutes.”

**Actor Nora McLellan**

**Wishing you a safe, healthy, and prosperous new year!**

The Niagara-on-the-Lake

**2024**

**Happy New Year**
Levee: a perfect event for historic community

Fort George partnering as hosts, was evident. Parks Canada manager Dan Laroche spoke of his decades of work that began when he was hired for summers at Fort George, and of the partnership between the Friends of Fort George and the federal agency. It's a collaboration that works so well together, "it's hard to tell where the Friends end and Parks Canada begins. It's a partnership that is very important," he said, adding that he hopes 2024 will be the year that returns attendance at the Fort and all Friends' programs to pre-pandemic numbers. With many activities resuming, "it will be a power-packed 2024." MPP Wayne Gates, the last to speak, said it was "days like today" that make NOTL so unique and so special, and that "send a real message" to the people who live in the province and across the country of why it is so important to preserve NOTL and its history. On that note, the crowd headed outside for the traditional firing of the three-pound cannon across to the U.S. As was explained, seemingly in jest, it's in retaliation for cannon fire aimed at the British during the War of 1812, with the firing handed over to Chisholm, this year's honorary cannoneer, to successfully send the ceremonial cannon fire across the river.

MP Tony Baldinelli thanked Parks Canada and the Friends of Fort George for hosting the levee, toasted King Charles, and also all those who served in the past, serve in the present, and those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Three youngsters at the levee dressed for the occasion: Florenza Stackwood, Zach Hernandez and Jack Hill. (Photos by Penny Coles)

Tammy Zalepa and her son Nathan Zalepa chat with Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser.

The crowd gathers to listen to the speeches at Navy Hall, with a good turnout, although not as big as pre-pandemic years.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, with Parks Canada's Scott Finlay, host of the levee, and MPP Wayne Gates.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor accepts a glass of punch from Erika Alexander, who has been involved in the annual levee since its earliest years.
Local Staff

Although 2023 was welcomed, according to tradition, at Navy Hall after a three-year absence, 2023 began as a time of caution following the lifting of most pandemic restrictions, with all three long-term care homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake joining hospitals, long-term care and retirement homes across Niagara for a total of 19 outbreaks to start the year.

More bad news making headlines locally was the series of explosions one January morning in Port Weller's Sooty Products, and the huge fire that resulted, evacuating residents of nearby neighbours. One man, an employee who was at work at the complex that morning, died from the fire.

There was also good news to start the new year. Former Shaw artistic director Jackie Maxwell was "gob-smacked" by her Order of Canada appointment, although not a surprise to those who knew and admired her.

Also in January, after seven years of discussions and months of intensive planning, Caroline Polgrabi announced the Niagara-on-the-Lake Youth Collective was ready to launch its 2023 program.

Making headlines far from home were Russian attacks on Ukraine, and closer to home, the NOTL community was welcoming new arrivals from Ukraine who hoped for a brighter, safer future. Those who were arriving were not, according to the federal government, identified as refugees, nor were they considered permanent residents, although some were given a three-year work visa. They have settled in town and across the region, and have worked hard to become contributing members of the community.

In January Dr. Mustafa Hirji, then Niagara's acting chief medical officer of health, spoke to The Local about the handling of the pandemic, what lessons had been learned, what could have been handled better, and what should be done for the future. Having moved on from his position since, he was for those two and a half years of pandemic discussions often out of step with regional politicians and provincial decisions. He said he hoped there would be some kind of commission struck to look at our response and learn from it, and to be better prepared for the future. That hasn't happened, at least not yet.

Also early last year, the group hoping to create a community hub at the former hospital building met with MPP Wayne Gates and NDP leader Marin Stiles to talk about their goal. Gates has continued to advocate for the hub.

The Niagara Falls MPP has also been pushing for a nurse practitioner in NOTL, which was promised by the current minister of health, but the funding so far has not been made available.

Last spring the Farmworker Hub at Cornerstone Community Church expanded, offering a place for men and women working on local farms to hang out and have some social time together, while still offering the same services of food and clothing with support from the church.

It has continued to grow in importance for the community of farmworkers, and late in the year was taken over to be operated by Cornerstone.

Last year, plans for the Ne-Gro Rural Ground were often in the news, but by March paths of those working together had begun to diverge. James Russell, who had brought ground-penetrating radar and the need to restore the cemetery to the attention of the town, set off in one direction and George Webber and a fundraising committee struck by the town in another. Russell has moved on, while Webber and the committee try to raise funds to finance future steps of restoration.

A much-discussed rainbow crosswalk was painted across Anderson Lane with little fanfare, just in time to celebrate Pride Day on June 1, but it was immediately vandalized, again and yet again, including on the morning of the day chosen for its ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Residents planned a rally in support of the crosswalk, which saw a huge turnout, and there have been no signs of vandalism since.

In September came the news of Hamas attacks on Israel, with the conflict continuing into the new year. A call by one local woman for the Jewish community to come together was realized before the end of the year, with plans for the continuation of such meetings locally.

As part of Remembrance Day services, the fundraiser to support restoration of the clock-tower cenotaph was proclaimed a success, reaching its goal with donations for the immediate work that needs to be done and also to help fund future maintenance. Watch for the work to begin in 2024.

Also in November Ward Simpson was celebrated by the Niagara Foundation, whose members named him the 2023 Living Landmark on NOTL. New Y ear's Eve with the traditional gathering of residents and guests at Christmas with toys and incomes that can't keep up.

In town, jaws at its most magical over the holidays, celebrations included the tradition- al Christmas Parade, Candlelight Stroll and Rotary Holiday House Tour, along with the third annual Tractor Parade, which raised $100,000 for the Terry Fox Foundation, and the third annual Santa Run, a successful fundraiser for the NOTL Youth Collective.

The year wrapped up on New Year's Eve with the traditional gathering of residents welcoming in 2024 at the Clock Tower.
The Chloe Cooley commemorative stamp was released for February’s Black History Month, recognizing her profound impact on the history of enslavement in Niagara and across the country. (File photo)

In April, MPP Wayne Gates, Royal Oak school head Julia Murray, NDP leader Marit Stiles, Robin Rodsec and Karyll Justo met at the former hospital building to discuss a community hub, an idea the town has discussed, but with no resolution. (File photo)

In November, Ward Simpson was honoured by the Niagara Foundation by being named a Living Landmark. His wife Oresta was at his side to celebrate. (File photo)

In December, we learned CAO Marnie Cluckie is leaving for a job with the City of Hamilton, and shortly after learned the town’s director of operations is leaving as well, for a job with the Hamilton Police Services Board. (File photo)

The much-discussed Pride Crosswalk was installed in May, just in time for Pride Day on June 1, but was vandalized several times. (File photo)

Revellers gathered on Queen Street by the cenotaph, to say goodbye to 2023 and welcome 2024. (Mike Balsom)

The year wrapped up with celebrations at the cenotaph. Pictured here are Chris Thomson, Karen Skeoch, Dan Skeoch, Brian Schmidt, Norma Price, Barb Schmidt and Jessica Thomson. (Supplied)

In May, Dock Area residents helped plant a rain garden to aid drainage and reduce flooding in their neighbourhood. A July photo demonstrates how well it works. (File photo)

In September, Erwin Wiens, already enjoying a year as deputy lord mayor, made a hole in one in the town’s annual golf tournament and in the same week was named Grape King. With him are his parents Johannes and Kiara, and his wife Dorothy Soo-Wiens. (File photo)
The players on the ice during the Niagara Predators games aren’t the only ones who are hoping their experience in the Greater Toronto area isn’t the only time they’ll be honing their skills with their sight on moving to the professional ranks. Whale, a third-year student in Niagara College’s Television and Film program, called the Predators games their first two seasons playing in Virgil. But a new opportunity with a Niagara Falls automotive dealership came up that made him unavailable to continue with the team. So Predators’ president Bob Turnbull reached out to the college’s program coordinator Bruce Gilbert, who recommended Whale for the job. “I jumped at the opportunity,” Whale tells The Local. “Rob invited me out to a pre-season practice and introduced me to the team. I had a chance to talk to him and the coaches and get comfortable with being around the players.”

The Burlington, Ont., native then enlisted fellow third-year student Andrea Pilon to take on the camera operator’s role. Whale had only done play-by-play once before, and that was for a soccer game. Immediately he found the pace of play a bit different for his Sept. 15 debut when the Predators hosted Trenton to open the Meridian Credit Union Arena. “The predators didn’t have their names on their jerseys yet,” recalls the 20-year-old. “It was nerve-wracking. I kept looking down at my team sheets, matching the name to the number, but as soon as I would look up again that player no longer had the puck. I sounded like I was one step behind.”

By the third game he was getting to know the players by their numbers and feeling more confident. It helped that he and Pilon were working from the crow’s nest above the scorer’s table at centre ice, in contrast to the press box located in the corner at the spectator level of the arena, from where Frena worked the previous two seasons. “We had a playoff game last year where we had to use the other rink,” Turnbull explains. “The only place you go was above the penalty box. Even with the old camera, the broadcast was a lot better. So I asked the town if they would be kind enough to move the ethernet (network) cable to the town’s nest for this year.”

The move has provided a better vantage point from which Whale and Pilon can more effectively follow the action. And they’re closer to the ice surface and not separated by glass, which brings ambient noise to the audio feed and an authentic-in-game feel to the broadcasts. “Also by the third game, Pilon was becoming frustrated with the consumer grade over-the-counter camcorder provided by the team. She reached out to Turnbull with her challenges and he was happy to acquire a broadcast-quality Sony camera for her to use.”

The camera and a clip-on lavaliere microphone are both connected to a laptop running OBS Studio, an open-source software program that allows them to stream live directly over the Predators’ YouTube channel. Through a connection with a friend who interred with the OHL’s Peterborough Petes, Whale was able to learn how to add a scoreboard graphic and live time clock to the screen as well. The result is a professional-looking and sounding broadcast that brings viewers into the action, delivering the excitement and tension of the game right onto viewers’ televisions or other devices. “It’s a chance to watch the players, to feel like play-by-play is you as the play-by-play announcer,” says Whale. “If I could do that as part of a TSN panel on the radio talking about sports.”

Whale, meanwhile, says she loves the challenge that the fast action on the ice brings to her camera work. She would love to eventual-fy a full-time job doing just that. She recently shot her last game for the Predators for a while, though. She’s off to Toronto to intern as a production assistant on Big Brother Canada for her final semester at the college. Turnbull is sorry to see her go, and holds the door open for her to come back any time. He’s also duly impressed that before she left, Pilon suggested a classmate who will be able to step into her spot beside Whale come January, when the second half of the season resumes.

The long-time hockey executive and coach is also duly impressed with the work that both Whale and Pilon have been doing with their broadcasts. “We’ve had a lot of feedback from the league and from parents of our players from other teams,” says Turnbull. “Our play-by-play is recognized as one of the tops in the league.”

Interesting newsgroupS

Mike Balsom
The Local

The Local

Happy new year.

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JONES, VERNON HAROLD – Passed peacefully at home with his family by his side on Saturday, December 30, 2023 just six weeks after celebrating his 100th birthday. Vernon has joined the love of his life, Thora, of 65 years. They raised five children together: Robert (Kathryn), Barbara (Norman), Thomas (Rhonda), Michael (Laura) and Sheryl (John). Proud Papa to 22 grandchildren, 26 great grandchildren, and 5 great-great grandchildren. Vernon will be remembered for his kindness, compassion and his example to his family and friends.

He was a constant example of unconditional love and service to those in need. He showed his love for his family endlessly and he loved everyone abundantly and without judgement or guile. He was a man of humility, meekness and the ultimate peacemaker. He looked for and found only the beautiful and the pure in each of us. As a family we will strive to honor his legacy by emulating his life. Vernon Jones lived a life of service, sacrifice and love. He was an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and will be remembered for his faithful service and commitment in various callings and positions as Bishop, Patriarch and temple worker with his loving wife beside him.

Vernon served as a commissioned officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II where he was given the nickname “Sweet Pea” from his flight crew. He was proud to earn his degree in Metallurgical Engineering from University of Toronto following the war. He worked for many years as the Chief Metallurgist at TRW Canada, before retiring at the age of 65. After retirement, he was committed to working at H&R Block, volunteering with the Heart and Stroke Foundation, as well as continuing his love for the game of golf.

Visitors will be received at BOCCHINFUSO FUNERAL HOME 2 Regent Street, Toronto following the war. He worked for many years as the Chief Metallurgist at TRW Canada, before retiring at the age of 65. After retirement, he was committed to working at H&R Block, volunteering with the Heart and Stroke Foundation, as well as continuing his love for the game of golf.

Vernon has joined the love of his life, Thora, of 65 years. His impactful posting was to Yugoslavia during Tito’s presidency, where as a junior officer he got his first indelible taste of the Cold War up close. Next came Moscow under Brezhnev, where he assigned with Pierre Trudeau to the 1971 visit and experienced the thrill of being embroiled in the 1972 Hockey Summit Series. A posting to Barbados followed and was an opportunity to explore the culture and geopolitics of a different part of the world.

When he returned to Moscow in 1979 it was as deputy head of mission, an expert in East-West relations, and one of the most skillful interpreters of the Soviet Union — just in time for Canada’s boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics. As head of policy planning in Ottawa in the early 1980s, he led development and elaboration of foreign policy, and accompanied Gorbachev on his influential 1983 visit to Canada. Later he worked directly with PM Pierre Trudeau on his International “Peace Initiative”, helping to pen the seminal Guelph speech. A stint as deputy head of mission in West Germany from 1985-1989 was followed by the role of Ambassador to Poland and “Republika Srpska”, where he witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall. His final posting was Ambassador to Turkey from 1993-1996.

After retiring from public service he was appointed Head of Regional Office in Banja Luka for Republika Srpska, implementing the Dayton Peace Accords in Bosnia and Herzegovina (an American initiative under President Clinton). Upon his return to Canada, he taught for several years at the Munk School for Global Affairs & Public Policy, and at Trinity College, University of Toronto.

Despite living much of his life abroad, home for Peter was always the Niagara Peninsula. His knowledge of the region was encyclopaedic and up-to-date, from natural history, local politics, the best plays at Shaw this season, the best restaurants and wineries, its demographics and cultural enclaves, to, always, always, the history of the place. It was his terroir, and the pond hockey rinks of his youth, the music and pizza in Buffalo, and the multicultural community he grew up with in St. Catharines shaped his character in enduring ways. It was no surprise that Peter was a consummate story-teller, and a brilliant conversationalist when it pleased him.

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Peter was a consummate story-teller, and a brilliant conversationalist when it pleased him. He was possessed of a great roaring laugh and was a man of keen insight, rare wit and towering erudition. He was a constant and voracious reader. Peter will be sadly missed by his four children (Christopher (Pat), Max (Karen), Martha (Jeffrey), Claudia (David)) and six grand-children (Julia, Ben, Jasmine, Zoe, Aidan, Tara), and by friends and family at home and around the world.

The family thanks the many friends, neighbours and care staff who made his last years as comfortable as possible despite declining health, and allowed him to remain in his home where he was happiest.

As per his wishes, his ashes will be interred at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery, and a “congregial but not lugubrious” event will be held to mark his passing and celebrate his life at Morgan Funeral Home in Niagara-on-the-Lake in a few months. Please check the funeral service became one of its most skilled practitioners, with an

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MCNULTY, JOAN CHRISTINA (IRWIN)—It is with great sadness that we announce the peaceful passing of Joan Christina McNulty on Sunday December 23, 2023, at the Greater Niagara General Hospital. Beloved wife of the late George McNulty. (1977) and was a man of keen insight, rare wit and
towering erudition. He was a constant and voracious reader. Peter will be sadly missed by his four children (Christopher (Pat), Max (Karen), Martha (Jeffrey), Claudia (David)) and six grand-children (Julia, Ben, Jasmine, Zoe, Aidan, Tara), and by friends and family at home and around the world.

The family thanks the many friends, neighbours and care staff who made his last years as comfortable as possible despite declining health, and allowed him to remain in his home where he was happiest.

As per his wishes, his ashes will be interred at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery, and a “congregial but not lugubrious” event will be held to mark his passing and celebrate his life at Morgan Funeral Home in Niagara-on-the-Lake in a few months. Please check the funeral home website for service details.

Donations if desired may be made to Gillian’s Place in St. Catharines, or The Chautauqua Oaks Project ℅ the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Tree Fund. Condolences at www.morganfuneral.com

A private family service was at MORGAN FUNERAL HOME, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake on Wednesday December 27, 2023. A celebration of life for Joan McNulty, will be held at Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre – Mori Room on Saturday, January 20, 2024, from 1-4 p.m. Those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com
Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa told a story about his son, then eight, being asked by the Legion to read Flanders Fields, and how that was so significant to him, he is now serving in the Canadian Navy aboard the HCMS Winnipeg. Revs. Judy and Sheldon Kofsky, Legion members themselves, spoke of hope as they addressed the crowd.

President Al Howse, Lt. Col. Bernard Nehring and Jack Gemmell, Legion District Commander, all spoke to the gathering at the New Year’s Levee. Gemmell gave a heartfelt message in which he declared that no veteran should be without a home. Lt Col. Nehring gave one of many toasts, including to fallen comrades and to visiting friends. He also led the audience in Auld Lang Syne.

Howse’s explanation of some symbols of the legion, such as the Union flag, the poppy and the torch.

Howse said he was pleased to announce that the membership of the branch is growing, that Branch 124 raised more than $150,000 for the cenotaph project, and that this branch is financially comfortable. Priorities include repairs, improvements, and upgrades, including to the roof, he said.

Several dignitaries spoke, with the overwhelming theme one of hope for 2024.

Legion president Al Howse asks new members to pledge allegiance to the sovereign and to Canada.