



Royal Canadian  
Legion hosts  
levee, welcomes  
new members  
**page 16**



Honorary cannoneer Tony Chisholm (in grey), assisted by Parks Canada's Dan Laroche, Thomas Forsyth and Peter Mitchel, lights the cannon for a ceremonial firing across the Niagara River from the grounds of Navy Hall. It's a time-honoured tradition of the annual New Year's Levee. (Penny Coles)

# Navy Hall Levee returns following COVID absence

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

The traditional New Year's Day levee at Navy Hall was back after a three-year absence Monday, with friends and neighbours greeting each other, Friends of Fort George offering a warm welcome in the historic setting with flames blazing in the fireplace, refreshments served and the much-loved cannon-firing to end the celebration.

The event, hosted by Parks Canada's Scott Finlay, included greetings from Friends president Tony Chisholm, Lt. Col. Bernard Nehring, Dr. Richard Merritt, Rick Meloen, Lord Mayor Gary

Zalepa, MPP Wayne Gates and MP Tony Baldinelli, well as toasts to King George III, after whom the fort is named, and King Charles, along with the singing of God Save the King.

It fulfilled the intention of a levee: a Canadian tradition for military and political leaders to ring in the new year with members of the public, and toasts to the king and Canadian armed forces past and present.

Navy Hall wasn't as crowded as in previous years, and the speeches were kept short, but appreciation for the event, presented by Parks Canada and the Friends of

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# NOTL's wartime houses created a community

**Mike Balsom**  
The Local

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 ex-

pectation of living up to their agreement."

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

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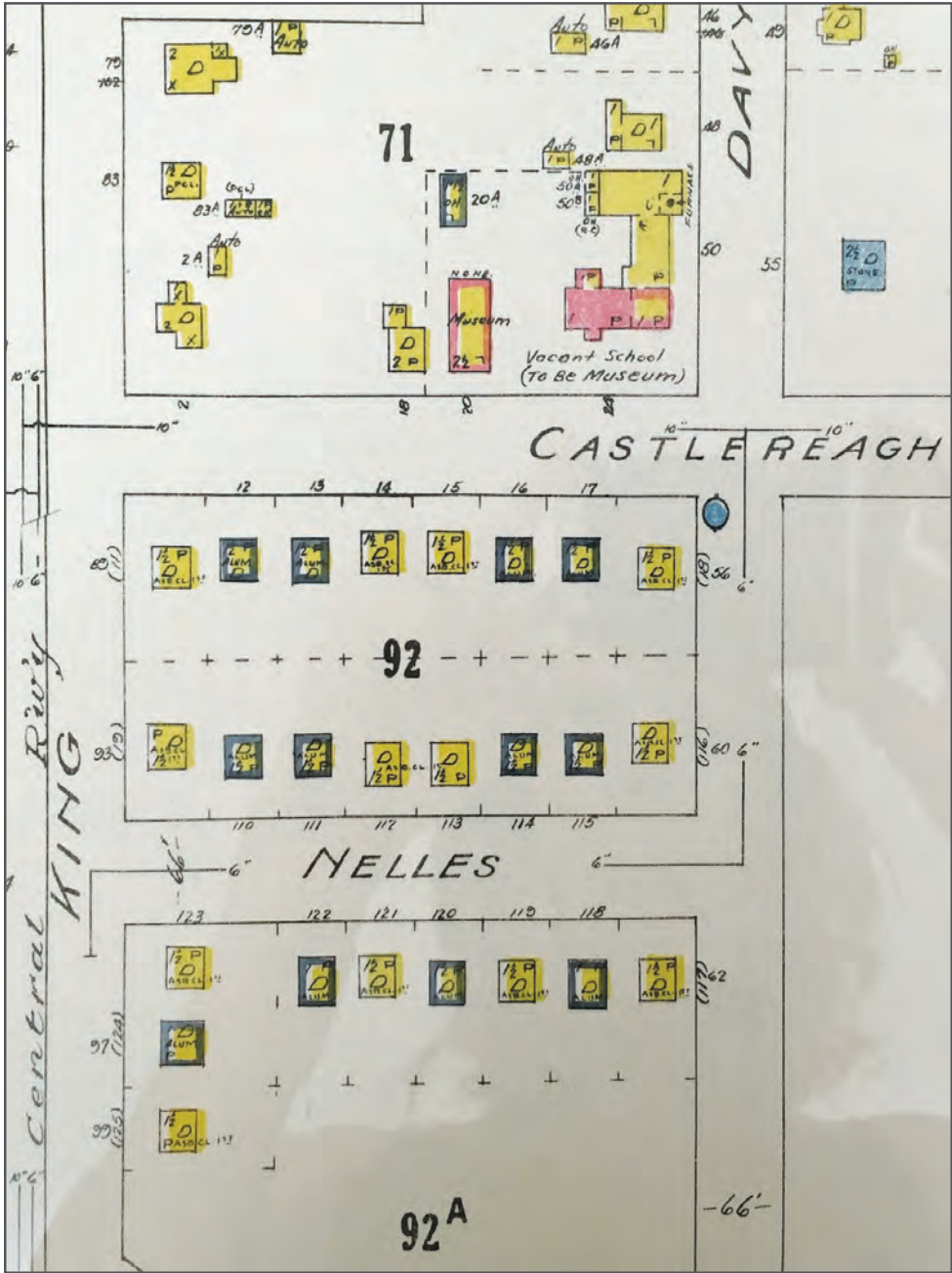


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# Community became ‘one big collective family’



A map of the Victory Estate homes on Nelles and Castlereagh Streets, as plotted by NOTL Museum volunteer researcher David Hemmings.

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 grandfather was 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 town lifeguard known simply as Vi, bought the home from Violet’s mother, Ivy Taylor, the original owner.

Mills’ grandfather Jack first came to NOTL when he was stationed at Camp Niagara. He died in 1948 of tuberculosis, and as a veteran’s widow, Ivy was eligible to apply under the Veterans’ Land Act.

“It had three bedrooms, two upstairs and one downstairs,” Mills says. “One bathroom, no shower. We had six kids in there, including two foster kids, and four of those kids were girls.”

Mills claims he was often still in bed when the first warning bell to start the school day at Parliament Oak went off, but he had enough time upon hearing it to get to class before the second bell. He goes on to list the names of his neighbours and estimates that at one time there were as many as 60 kids running around between the two streets.

“We were like one big collective family,” he remembers. “We had the only gas stove on the street at one time. Whenever the power went out everyone came over with their kettles to get them boiled. We shared eggs, milk, sugar, you name it.”

Until Vi died in 2020 the family still gathered frequently at the small home, which served as the base camp for events such as the Christmas Parade.

“Not having the house for the parade the last couple of years was really sad,” Mills admits. “My wife Cathy and I considered buying the house after Mom died, but we didn’t.”

Moe Bjorgan’s father, Ken, had left St. Catharines to fight overseas. He applied to the program when he returned from the war and he and his wife Flora became the first owners at 24 Castlereagh.

“It was a ridiculous price,” says Bjorgan of that house. “I think it was \$5,400, and the interest rate was great and guaranteed for life. All the men on both streets were veterans, and they often got together, and so did the kids. And most of the families were pretty big, with six or seven kids.”

“We’d be playing ball hockey on the street, or

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# Could a similar program solve housing crisis?

Continued from page 2

British bulldog or kick the can,” he adds, laughing, “and we’d 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 Cas-

tlereagh; 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 Sentineal of Sentineal 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.



Flora Bjorgan with her daughter Glenda, outside their Victory Estate home. (Supplied)



14 Castlereagh, where Vi and Doug Mills raised six kids. (Supplied)



A young Rick Mills on the veranda at 14 Castlereagh Street, circa 1967. (Supplied)



NOTL Museum curator Sarah Kaufman stands outside of the house her grandparents once owned, now designated as 308 King St. (Mike Balsom)



Victory Estate houses today, in a view down Castlereagh Street. (Mike Balsom)



# 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.



Film director Michael Pohorly returns to his roots in the wine industry. (Supplied)

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 *The Grey* and *The Incredible Hulk*, TV series

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.

"I wanted the brand to

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Option 3: Respondents without the internet, please call  
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# Council meetings moving back to evenings

**Kris Dube**  
The Local  
Local Journalism  
Initiative Reporter

When council meetings resume this year, they will be conducted in the evening, as a result of a recent decision by councillors.

In November, council deferred approving its meeting schedule for 2024 until staff provided an analysis of public participation, online and in-person at town hall, as well as statistics for attendance at council and committee-of-the-whole meetings.

Council received that information at its last meeting of 2023, and voted to revert to tradition — holding meetings in

the evening, beginning at 6 p.m.

In 2023, a decision of this new council meant most meetings were held Tuesday mornings and could stretch on for hours. But councillors agreed last month that the bulk of business being done before noon interferes with their own day jobs.

Coun. Maria Mavridis said she's glad they took the trial run in 2023, but with "closed session after closed session," and Mavridis sitting on six committees, it's more convenient for her to attend council and committee meetings starting at 6 p.m.

"It was great in theory, but now looking at it, it does prevent us from doing our daytime jobs," she said.

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 2024 later in the day.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita moved that council choose the option to return to nighttime meetings, which was not recommended 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 hall don't get paid for overtime.

They mostly work "extra for free" during evening meetings,

said chief administrative officer Marnie Cluckie, adding this happens after staffers quickly use up their lieu time.

In staff's analysis of statistics, recorded and live views of meetings was "down significantly" in 2023, said Cluckie.

"It's hard to know definitively why," she said, noting that numbers were possibly up in 2021 due to the pandemic. She also said viewership was likely more in 2022 due to it being an election year.

"It is pertinent to note that from 2021 until April 2022, all meetings were virtual-only due to the pandemic; this would have invariably increased the livestream viewership numbers. It is to be expected that the 2022 municipal election would also

have had an upward effect on viewership numbers," reads the staff report.

Attendance at council and committee of the whole for daytime meetings, held from May to November 2023, stood at 93.5 per cent, based on the members present at roll call.

Attendance at evening meetings, held from December 2022 to April 2023, was 95.5 per cent.

The most-viewed meeting of 2021 was on Oct. 25 when 292 people tuned in to watch, among other issues, a discussion about outdoor skating rinks on town property, and an extension to the Anderson Lane fire station.

On April 25, 2022, 286 sets of eyes watched that evening's

council meeting — either live or recorded — as the most viewed meeting of that year. The town discussed and approved a coyote management plan that night, and resident Scott Robinson spoke to councillors about remedying the housing affordability crisis in town. Also Clare Cameron, on council during its last term and the deputy lord mayor, said she would not be running in the election that year.

In 2023, the July 25 meeting drew the most viewership for the year, drawing just 83 people who heard the approval of the strategic plan, with its goals and priorities to shape the future of NOTL, and the need for more town-organized programs and activities for families and youth.

# Operations director leaving NOTL for Hamilton

**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 retirement — this time, heading back to Hamilton, where he worked in operations for much of his 30 years in municipal leadership.

"I see it as a great chance to get back to my home town with my track record in operations, and add value to the Police Services Board," where he will once again be working 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 I'm going back to my wheelhouse." And he can do that without the daily commute 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 Hamilton, 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 organizations."

Although he can be credited 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.

It is based on what he calls "emotional intelligence," which he describes as understanding what staff need, emotionally as well as prac-

tically, and giving them the necessary resources to do their jobs correctly.

"Emotional intelligence allows you to empathize, to understand the relationships of others, and to really develop a solid relationship with staff. My real work is to support my staff."

The most important part of communication is listening, he adds, and listening not only shows a level of respect for others, it helps produce great work from staff.

His experience of working in NOTL was with people who have a strong sense of community, pride in their town, and work together "in a respectful way."

From his perspective, to maintain that environment, "listening and providing feedback is critical."

As he leaves NOTL, he knows he has made progress in the Dock Area, but also acknowledges there is more work to be done, including the addition of a pumping station that will eliminate the need for portable pumps to prevent flooding.

He has overseen a \$6.5 million grant application that if successful, will fund the project — the town is still

waiting for a response. "It's work that needs to be done," he says. "It's just a matter of funding."

He has also recommended a berm to prevent water from the marina from crossing Melville Street to River Beach Drive and Ricardo Streets.

Ron Simkus, Dock Area resident who worked extensively with Cluckie and D'Angelo on Dock Area improvements, 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'Angelo on his new job, he said, "with sadness in my heart," and spoke highly of the operations director, his skills, competency and his "ability to speak to the public, and also deal with conflict resolution, 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 need programming for families at the community centre, and we've done that, with pro-

grams that will keep kids active in a fun and safe environment."

He also mentions a pickleball program for youth, and says enrollment for all the family and youth programs so far "has been excellent. It's great to see the number of people engaged in those programs."

If approved by council and included in the 2024 budget, there is also a plan for a mobile unit that moves

from park to park, community to community, as part of a summer recreational program, he notes, increasing the use of public parks.

Also at top of mind, and something he hopes will occur in the future, is a focus on a functional parking study, with a "holistic review," and critical, he adds, is an urban and rural road safety audit.

There are foundations in place for these future initiatives, he says, that can be

handled collaboratively.

Leaving behind the community of people he has come to know "will be bittersweet. It will be sad to leave. I'm all about people and relationships, and working in this small community, driving to work every day on concessions that go through beautiful vineyards — I'll miss that. It's a great town, and I'll be back to visit for sure. I will always remember NOTL and all it has to offer."



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Rome D'Angelo is hitting the road back to Hamilton. (Supplied)



# EDITORIAL

## News we can expect to hear in 2024

January 2022 the headlines were about community outbreaks of COVID, which were putting those in long-term care at risk.

January 2023 the headlines were also about the rise in COVID cases in long-term care.

On Dec. 29, 2023, the region was reporting 536 active cases in Niagara — those that are reported, with the actual number expected to be higher — and 10 outbreaks

in hospitals or long-term care residences.

In January 2023, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, then acting medical officer of health for the region — he has since moved on — was calling on the province to strike up a commission to study what we had learned from the pandemic, what was done right, what could have been done better, and what could be done to prevent it from happening again — a commission similar to what occurred after

SARS, only this time possibly recommendations would actually be carried out, as they weren't then. Nothing like that has occurred, and our lives have thankfully pretty much returned to normal. COVID clinics have closed, and the remaining signs are the masks still worn in hospitals, long-term care, and by some individuals who make that choice. Businesses, while not totally recovered, are rebounding.

Other headlines from 2023

we can expect to reappear in 2024: developments, which include proposed hotels, apartments and subdivisions, and neighbours' concerns and opposition. Most from last year remain unsettled; we will still be writing about them, and there are sure to be some in the works we don't yet know about.

The municipal accommodation tax was and continues to be under the microscope. The future of the former hospital building is still undecided,

but hopefully we will see some movement on that front. Upper Canada Lodge was making headlines as far back as 2020 and every year since, and will continue until we actually see it close, likely this year, which is unfortunate but also inevitable.

Last year's budget was not completed until April, and was approved with an increase not considered sustainable — let's hope it doesn't drag on that long this year, but it certainly wasn't completed before the end of

2023, as initially planned.

There was some discussion throughout 2023 about amalgamation — expect much more on that front, likely before the month is over. It might be the big story of the year, or if the province listens to what municipalities have to say, it could turn out to be nothing.

Here's hoping for good news to share, and wishing you all a happy 2024.

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

## 2024: A New Year Brings New Hope

**Tony Baldinelli**  
MP, 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 habits 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 squeezed Canadians who have a mortgage or borrow money.

As a result, Canadians are cutting back their spending. Consequently, Canadians are travelling less, shopping less, and giving less to charities, just at a time when charitable help and donations are most needed.

In November, Feed 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 11,000 people, a total of one in every eight residents in the city. That represents a staggering 71 per cent increase

from 2022.

Also in November, the federal government released its Fall Economic Statement. It contained — brace for it — \$20 billion in new inflationary spending, which will keep inflation and interest rates higher than many Canadians can afford. Just when Canadians needed relief, this reckless government went ahead and poured more fuel onto the flames of inflation.

Despite all this new spending, I was very disappointed that it somehow failed to include any information or reference about extending the Wine Sector Support Program, which is very important for many wine producers and grape growers in Niagara-on-the-Lake and across the country.

Unfortunately, 2023 also saw the escalation of the housing crisis.

Since this Liberal government took office in 2015, rent and housing costs have doubled, and tent cities are springing up in almost every major city. Mortgage payments are also 150

per cent higher, and Canadians fortunate to own a home will have to renew their mortgages at today's rates, which will be an increase between two to six per cent or higher. These interest rates risk a mortgage meltdown on the \$900 billion of mortgages that will renew over the next three years.

And these are just costs related to inflation and interest rates. That's not even including all the new and higher Liberal taxes that Trudeau's government has planned to implement next year and in the years ahead.

Next spring, the alcohol escalator tax is set to increase by 4.7 per cent. The NDP-Liberal government is also forging ahead on the reckless Digital Services Tax, which puts Canada at risk of U.S. retaliation. Then, there is the flawed Underused Housing Tax to consider, without even mentioning Trudeau's biggest tax of them all — the carbon tax — which he plans to quadruple in the coming years.

None of these NDP-Liberal policies bring down prices on



Tony Baldinelli

goods or services, nor do they 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.

As a result, Canadian families are poorer and they are forced to cut back, seniors watch helplessly as their life-long and hard-earned savings dwindle away, and the dreams of our children and future generations are crushed as opportunities to own a home are dashed.

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 worth the cost. 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.



### View from the couch

**Donald Combe**  
Special to The Local

Trevor Noah: *Where Was I* (Netflix, 2023) is about a South African comedian, writer, producer, political commentator and actor who delivers a list of

the five things white people love most: museums, swimming, being flabbergasted and being white — you will have to view it to see the fifth. Though projecting "niceness," he is both an accurate critic of society and highly engaging.

Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to go to movies. Until he resumes going to theatres, he has graciously agreed to share his opinions, through "short and sweet" exclusives, of online series and movies for The Local.

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### Where's Ben?

Eden student Ben Foster continues to discover new locations in NOTL, wondering how familiar others may be with them. If you know where this photo was taken, email penny@notllocal.com.

Last week, Doug Hernder was the first to tell us Ben was at the new gateway wall, on Queen Street at Mississagua Street.



## COMMENT

*Local* LETTERS Thanks to those for work completed in 2023

Well, 2023 has come and gone. I hope it was a good year for everyone.

I am writing today to thank those who played a very large role in some of the work completed in town this year, the floral and lighting enhancements to the Glendale bridge and

roundabout, the new look of the Virgil commercial centre, the new Heritage District entrance, the pride crosswalk and the new crosswalk at the community centre, to name a few.

A big thank you goes to the former council members Clare Cameron (also deputy

lord mayor), Allan Bisback, Norm Arsenaault, John Wiens, Erwin Wiens, Gary Burroughs, Stuart MacCormack, Sandra O'Connor (who replaced him) and Wendy Cheropita for their collective leadership.

Thank you for your time and in-depth discussion, spend-

ing hours in the planning and the financial processes during some very difficult times.

Thank you to residents Margaret Louter, Richard Wall, Justin Williams and architect Gordon Stafford, Gerry Kowalchuk (for his time and generosity), the town's Inclusivity

Committee, the St. Andrews/Aberdeen residents who all worked with council providing support and expertise on these projects.

Ongoing gratitude goes to town staff. Marnie and Rome, you will be missed.

Thank you to the current

council for allowing this work to be completed. I wish them much success in 2024.

So . . . Happy New Year everyone. All my best wishes and I hope 2024 will be another great year!

**Betty Disero**  
NOTL

*Local* LETTERS 'Twas just days before Christmas in NOTL

'Twas ten days before Christmas when in the Virgil Government House,

Council met in secret, quiet as a sneaky little mouse.

While good town residents celebrated the festive season,

And the tourists licked and littered with neither rhyme nor

reason,

The elves of council held a "special meeting" to cook up a scheme,

Which alas, had a woefully familiar theme.

The Garys, Erwin, Wendy, Maria and all the rest were there,

Cozy, clubby, hidden in their chambers lair.

And of course, the public was excluded so no one could listen or judge what was fair!

Its Christmas the town councilors all said so what do we need?

A gift they all cried; a gift

shall be decreed!

But to whom, for what, doesn't there need to be a reason?

Why not to a developer more than one declared fore it tis the season!

But what more, they all asked can we give to owner of

most of the Towne?

Why not public land said all? Public land he can pave over to feather his crown!

But the town has owned the Heritage Trail for 50 years someone should have noted.

And a dedicated group is determined to fix it, use it, en-

sure it is promoted.

Who cares about the voters, the taxpayers, the residents, the heritage devoted?

For the developers always prevail with this council since the public last voted!

**R.A. Monette**  
NOTL

*Local* VOICES: Be afraid . . . be very afraid

**Paul Macdonell**  
NOTL

Like a reoccurring fungal infection, the concept of an amalgamated Niagara City is once again being floated by Queen's Park.

Past amalgamations such as Toronto and Ottawa have shown that smaller municipalities (with smaller voter bases) ultimately have little attention paid to their concerns even though they are the ones that universally suffer the most from this "bigger is better" fallacy.

So be prepared for the following:

**Much higher taxation**

Taxation is based on property values so in any amalgamation some communities end up paying significantly higher taxes. Proposed municipalities for us to "join" include Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Welland. These cities are currently in our Niagara Regional structure today. Because these cities have drastically lower property values than Niagara-on-the-Lake the merging of tax bases (with any or all of the four) will result in a small reduction for those cities but much greater taxes for Niagara-on-the-Lake.

A good example is Fort Erie, where the 2016 median residential valuation was \$191,500.

Compare that to house costs anywhere in NOTL, even back in 2016. (Note that all property assessments in Ontario are based on 2016 values.)

In any amalgamation NOTL's much higher house price evaluations will distort what is supposed to be a "fair payer" system.

In 2023 a home in NOTL with an assessment of \$800,000 (remember these are based on 2016 valuations) paid a total tax bill of \$8,696. That same priced home in Fort Erie paid \$12,950.00, in Niagara Falls \$12,040 and in St. Catharines

\$13,109.

If NOTL, with a relatively small population, were to merge with these four (much larger) groups we should expect a municipal tax increase of approximately 46 per cent.

Go to [niagararegion.ca/government/budget-taxes/prop-tax-calculator.aspx-#breakdown](http://niagararegion.ca/government/budget-taxes/prop-tax-calculator.aspx-#breakdown) for a simple calculator 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 mega city the driver's work remains the same with perhaps some very small savings on administration. A mega city will still have the same recreational facilities, parks and roads to maintain as today.

Remember that sewage/water, policing and garbage collection are currently all under the Region control so no savings can be had with these.

Planning functions can certainly be cut as there is duplication at the Region 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 shaved.

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 employees wanted (and got) was the highest hourly rates in the amalgamated area for that position.

If a junior planner was receiving \$50K in a small municipality he/she (rightfully so) expected to be paid the \$65K that a junior planner received in the other areas they were merging with. The same thing happened with employee benefits.

The expansion of services will also affect any claimed sav-

ings. Municipalities have differing levels of snow removal, street repair, fire services and recreation services. Expect the "high water" level to be the norm as no politician is going to cut services to existing residents nor be foolish enough to think differing levels of services can be established within the mega city.

**Services you don't want**

NOTL is different from other municipalities in the Niagara region. It is uncomfortable for us to state this but we are wealthier. Yes there is poverty in NOTL but not near the levels seen in the other proposed merger cities. So resident demand for certain social issues like public housing, health care outreach, homeless support and subsidized recreational facilities are all examples of services we need little of but still will be provided. It is not that we should not be providing such in a new super city but we should recognize that some of these (new to us) services will be of little value.

Expect a full-time fire department. This of course will be a great debate whether it is a benefit or not. A 24-hour, fully-manned service will certainly be welcomed but many will see the volunteer service as wholly adequate, meeting our needs with a dedicated group of residents. And will we keep all our fire stations? Probably only one. And remember this increased standard will also add costs to the mega city.

**Services you want but may not get**

Should NOTL get the lovely flowers maintained along streets like Queen when Welland has none? Will planning protections to save Old Town or Queenston or St. Davids really matter to a councillor from the St. Catharines area? Will the new mega city recognize our high percentage of seniors and allocate additional recreational and social

services to this area?

NOTL has unique tourist and historic preservation needs. We need constant municipal support for our wineries, our historic sites and tourist designations. If those areas of economic drivers decline because of lack of resources or neglect, the entire economic base of NOTL will be endangered. Can some mega city councillor from Fort Erie understand this, or even care? More than likely he/she will believe what is good for Fort Erie should be good for NOTL.

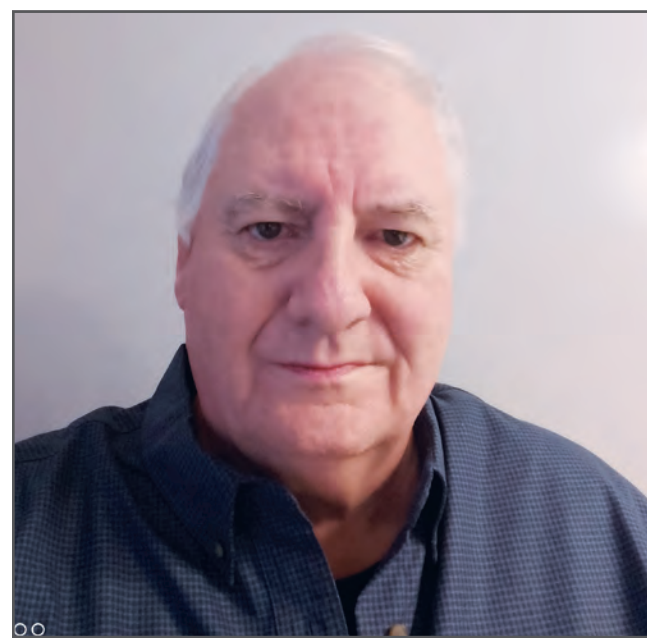
When you become the small fish in the big pond expect to eat the same as everyone else.

**Little representation**

Expect only one councillor for the entire NOTL area under any mega city format. The Ford government has shown no tolerance for large municipal councils, as Toronto's revamp has shown. If the total mega city population is 350,000 expect just one seat for our 18,000 residents based on a maximum 20-member council. In a 10-member council, which is just as possible, we will amount to half a councillor.

Some residents will say they have never had reason to deal with politicians so what does representation matter, but that does not mean it is not extremely important to be represented fairly.

Take for example certain Old Town rezonings. In an amalgamated city one lone council member would be standing up for what really mattered to desires of NOTL residents while 19 others would perhaps be looking at it from a tax base benefit. That same lone councillor might not be heard when talking about a separate traffic study for Old Town or a special sewer bylaw rate for St. Davids. The vast majority of council may say "follow the guidelines" of the mega city as a whole.



Paul Macdonell

Again this is uncomfortable but expect that some mega city councillors will see NOTL as a spoiled group of wealthy displaced Torontonians who should just adopt the same municipal service levels as St. Catharines and Welland. Don't expect any desire to raise municipal standards to NOTL's range but a great willingness to have NOTL conform to the larger group.

Currently there are many councillors that we can approach about a municipal problem. You may get ignored by one councillor, but if a problem is real, someone on our council will react. Now imagine if there is only one person that you can contact and that person doesn't like you, or agree with you, or perhaps just doesn't understand what you are trying to say?

Yes, we have only one representative for provincial and federal matters but municipal issues are different. They are always personal, always local and generally always immediate, when you need someone to listen quickly. That includes things such as snow removal, noise complaints, pot holes, bylaw enforcement and parking issues. It is important to have

good, approachable local politicians.

**What to do**

Contact our lord mayor and council and let them know you are not supporting amalgamation: [gary.zalepa@notl.com](mailto:gary.zalepa@notl.com).

Contact the Honorable Paul Calandra, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs. Paul. Calandra@pc.ola.org.

Let him know you are happy with the current structure and why.

Contact the Premier of Ontario, correspondence.premier.gov.on.ca/EN/feedback/default.aspx. Let him know your feelings.

Contact Wayne Gates your local MPP, at [wgates.fe-co@ndp.on.ca](mailto:wgates.fe-co@ndp.on.ca). Yes he is in opposition but he can certainly be heard and the more that contact him, the greater his voice will be.

*Paul Macdonell is a resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake. He was elected to four terms to Cumberland municipal council before it was amalgamated into the City of Ottawa. He is a graduate of the municipal affairs program at the University of Western Ontario and retired as a federal mediator resolving disputes with some of Canada's largest private employers and their unions.*



# Pohorly hoping to sell Unscripted to local restaurants

Continued from page 4

reflect what it feels like to connect with people on a spontaneous level,” the nephew of the late Niagara wine pioneer Joseph Pohorly says. “Kind of like leaning into your curiosity, going into uncharted territory, embracing an evening’s unplanned, or unscripted moments.”

The brand name, of course, links to Pohorly’s career as a director. And the label, with the word ‘Unscripted’ scrawled artfully from edge to edge in Pohorly’s own handwriting, captures that feeling.

“At first, it wasn’t supposed to be on the label,” Pohorly explains, “but it works to give the vibe that the more we’re ourselves, the more we’re open and vulnerable. When we’re not perfect, that’s when we enjoy ourselves. Having good wine is a conduit toward getting over our own insecurities, our need for perfection.”

As Pohorly was working on the business and marketing end of things, Piccoli was applying his vast experience and knowledge as a winemaker toward coming up with the most important part of the venture, the wine itself.

“He makes really good wine,” Pohorly says of his partner, who was winemaker at Jackson-Triggs for nearly two decades. “I’ve known him for about 20 years. My family has always sold their grapes to Jackson-Triggs and Inniskillin. There’s no one else I would have rather worked with.”

Piccoli, who interned at Inniskillin Winery after attending Brock, is now the chief operating officer and founder of Niagara Custom Crush Studios, run out of the site of the old Stoney Ridge Estate Winery on King Street in Vineland.



Mauro Salvador inspects the labelling process. (Mike Balsom)



Winemaker Marco Piccoli tests wine still in barrels. (Supplied)

gnon 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 after-taste.”

Some of Pohorly’s friends from his Concordia 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](http://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 the 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.”

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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 Sauvi-



# 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.



Jayden and Caroline Polgrabia with Queenston firefighters Crispin Bottomley and Peter Cox, and Sophie Cadeau and Erinn Lockard of Swirls and Sweets, with a \$500 cheque for the NOTL Youth Collective. (Supplied)



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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-deprecation 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.



Nora McLellan as Sister Rose, wooden ruler in hand. (Photos supplied)

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, although coming into his own, as a late bloomer. "He's a 13-year-old boy going on 50," says McLellan, "and incredibly bizarre things keep happening to this kid."

Sister Rose, she explains, as a young woman, was in love with his grandfather, one of the main characters in the series. "It ended with her becoming a nun, and now they've reconnected, 50 years later."

The character she plays, McLellan adds, "is married to Jesus, but it's not a good marriage," a complexity that comes through in her handling of the students in her charge. And although that often means she can be "pretty terrifying," the ruler always in her hand, she never actually uses it.

Sister Rose "is a meaty role," and the only one not based on a real person, she

says — it's a composite of women who played a role in Mark's life growing up, and the love affair with a young Rose didn't really happen.

The kids in the show were 11 or 12 when the series started, and are now 13 or 14, and they too are fun to work with. "I just love them, and the crew too. It's really great to be amongst such a talented group of people."

However, she laughs, "I would love to be anywhere working."

A career built on acting, on stage, TV or in film, "is never secure. Whatever I'm doing at the time, I make the most of it. In this life you're always wondering what will be next, and I'm really happy to be anywhere. I'm not anywhere near ready for retirement."

"One minute you're waiting in the wings, the next minute you're wearing them," she laughs. "That's the goal I'm working on, because I love what I do."

Although she has man-

aged to combine some recent acting on stage while also filming *Son of a Critch* — there are occasions when the timing makes it possible to do both, such as a summer at the Blyth Festival, involving limousine runs to the airport to fly back to St. John's — there are not a lot of those opportunities, she says.

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

Local

The Trusted Voice of Our Community

2024

HAPPY new YEAR



# Levee: a perfect event for historic community

Continued from page 1

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 part-

nership 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.



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.



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.



# 2023: Good news at home, but touched by impact of war

## Local Staff

Although 2024 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 Ssonix 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 Polgrabia announced the Niagara-on-the-Lake Youth Collective was ready to launch its winter 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 February 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 Marit 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 Negro Burial 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. Russel 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.

Newark Neighbours settled in their new home on Niagara Stone Road, and with the extreme generosity of local individuals, organizations and businesses, helped more than

100 needy families and individuals at Christmas with toys and food. It was a significantly higher number than ever seen before in NOTL, reflecting a crisis across the country with rising costs for food, housing and other essentials, and incomes that can't keep up.

In town, always at its most magical over the holidays, celebrations included the traditional 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.



One of the first events of 2023 was the first disc golf tournament at the community centre, won by David Dankowski. (All file photos)



The NOTL Youth Collective, in the works for years, opened in January in the Virgil campus of Cornerstone Community Church.

thank you



Once again this year, words cannot fully express our deep gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the many donors and supporters that made our 2023 Newark Neighbours Holiday Food and Gift Program such a success.

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NOTL Minor Hockey League  
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.... and many, many generous individuals and families throughout our wonderful Niagara-on-the-Lake community. Thank you all!!



# 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW



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 Ridisec 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 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)*



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)*



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 Klara, and his wife Dorothy Soo-Wiens. *(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 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)*



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



# Preds broadcast team one of the best in the league

**Mike Balsom**  
The Local

The players on the ice during the Niagara Predators games aren't the only ones who are hoping their experience in the Greater

Metro Junior A Hockey League leads them to a future in the sport.

Across the entire league, announcers such as Nathan Whale, who does play-by-play for all Preds home games, are also hon-

ing their skills with their sights often set on moving to the professional ranks.

Whale, a third-year student in Niagara College's Broadcasting – Radio, Television and Film program, took over the role from Niagara-on-the-Lake native Michael Frena at the start of the 2023-2024 season.

Frena, a graduate of the same Niagara College 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 Robert 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 to 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 Tottenham at the Meridian Credit Union Arena to open their season.

"The Predators didn't have their names on their jerseys yet," recalls the 20-year-old. "It was nerve-racking. 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 to go was above the penalty box. Even with the old camera, the broadcast was way better. So I asked the town if they would be kind enough to move the ethernet (network) cable to the crow's nest for this year."



Andrea Pilon calibrates the camera before a recent Predators game. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Nathan Whale and Andrea Pilon set up the computer for their Predators broadcast.

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 lavalier 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 interned 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. The pair arrive over an hour before game time and their hard

work shows in the final product.

For Whale, the opportunity to work with the Predators is a dream come true. The Toronto Maple Leafs fan grew up loving both hockey and soccer, but it's those moments at home watching Hockey Night in Canada that got him hooked on a career in sports broadcasting.

"I miss Don Cherry. Intermissions just aren't as entertaining any more," says Whale. "I've always looked up to (TSN's) Bob McKenzie, but I am also a big fan of (late Buffalo Sabres play-by-play announcer) Rick Jeanneret. His 'May Day' call is my favourite call of all time."

He's actually always seen himself in a role more like McKenzie's, as an analyst who sits on a panel with other hockey experts breaking down the minutiae of the game, rather than as an announcer calling the plays as they happen.

Last fall Whale had a chance, at the invitation of the friend who interned with the Petes, to do colour commentary for a pre-season OHL game. He could envision that role being a future career trajectory.

"But I've really grown to like play-by-play since starting with the Predators," says Whale. "If I could keep doing this in the future that would be great."

My ultimate goal would be to be part of a TSN panel of hockey analysts. But I'd be just as happy working on the radio talking about sports."

Pilon, meanwhile, says she loves the challenge that the fast action on the ice brings to her camera work. She would love to eventually find 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. He does an extraordinary job. We're very fortunate to have both of them."

## LocalHAPPENINGS

HAPPY new year

A message from NOTL Cats Rescue

We're grateful to our dedicated supporters, foster homes, and adopters of NOTL Cats Rescue. Thank you for ongoing support of the community.



8-month-old Miesha



8-month-old Paisley

notcats.weebly.com/

www.facebook.com/notcats/

www.petfinder.com/member/ca/on/niagara-on-the-lake/notl-cats-rescue-on581/

## LIVE MUSIC FRIDAYS

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**Legion 410 King St. NOTL**

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10:00 a.m.  
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Message: Kevin Bayne Elder Led Prayer

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OBITUARY



**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, Thorold on Wednesday, January 3, 2024 from 5:00 – 8:00 PM. A Funeral Service will be held at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 351 Glenridge Avenue, St. Catharines on Thursday, January 4, 2024 at 11:00 AM. There will be visitation one hour prior to the service at the church. Interment at Pleasantview Memorial Gardens will follow the service. If desired, donations to Heart and Stroke Foundation. On-line condolences and donations may be left at [www.bocchinfusofh.com](http://www.bocchinfusofh.com)

In Vern’s eyes, “Family First” and every day was a “Good Day”!

NOTICES

To place an Obituary or  
In Memoriam in our Classifieds,  
please contact Julia at:  
[julia@notllocal.com](mailto:julia@notllocal.com) or  
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Deadline is Tuesdays at 1 p.m.

SUDOKU ANSWER  
Sudoku solution from  
December 27, 2023

6	4	1	8	7	2	5	9	3
5	8	9	1	6	3	7	4	2
2	3	7	5	9	4	8	6	1
1	9	6	7	2	5	3	8	4
7	5	8	3	4	6	1	2	9
4	2	3	9	1	8	6	7	5
3	6	5	2	8	9	4	1	7
9	7	4	6	3	1	2	5	8
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The Niagara-on-the-Lake  
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OBITUARY



**PETER JULIAN ARTHUR HANCOCK**  
16/3/1938 - 18/12/2023

Peacefully on Monday, December 18th, 2023 at the Greater Niagara General Hospital. Peter arrived in Canada in 1940 at Pier 21 in Halifax, a two year-old war guest of the Dominion, evacuated from England along with his mother and sister. He left us in his eighty-sixth year with a distinguished record of serving the country that became his home. He found his métier in diplomacy and during his long career in Canada’s foreign service became one of its most skilled practitioners, with an

abiding commitment to advancing Canada’s interests on the world stage.

Welcomed by the generous Moyer family to the Niagara Peninsula, they lived during the war in Vineland Station, and later moved to St. Catharines. At Queen’s University he studied political science, wrote poetry, produced theatre, and met Eleanor Toren, whom he married in 1960. In postgraduate study of the history of ideas at Brandeis University under Herbert Marcuse, he had hoped to savour the great works, but found that academics spend more time reading one another. Disappointed, he left.

As a young man of letters gifted in languages, he joined the Department of External Affairs as part of the celebrated class of ‘63. His inaugural 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 assisted with Pierre Trudeau’s landmark 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 skilful 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 that year, 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 both Poland and East Germany, 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 upon retiring he would move back to his roots and establish a home in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

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 “congenial 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](http://www.morganfuneral.com)

*And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.*

— Tennyson



**MCNULTY, JOAN CHRISTINA (IRWIN)**—It is with great sadness that we announce the peaceful passing of Joan Christina McNulty on Saturday December 23, 2023, at the Greater Niagara General Hospital. Beloved wife of the late George McNulty (1977). Loving mother of Sean McNulty, Stephen Irwin, and Angie Irwin. Dear sister of Steven Irwin (Jennie). Adored great aunt of Janae, Parker, and Hunter. Predeceased by her brother Jay Irwin and great nephew Justin Irwin Brown. Fondly remembered by many friends. Joan worked in Dr. Rigg’s office in Niagara-on-the-Lake for over 30 years.

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](http://www.morganfuneral.com)





# Legion Levee welcomes new members, public

**Sharon Burns**  
**The Local**

The Royal Canadian Legion Branch 124 held its annual levee Monday, which included welcoming six new

members who declared their allegiance to the sovereign and loyalty to Canada.

MP Tony Baldinelli was one of the new members gathered for the Loyal Toast and branch president Al

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.



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. (Photos by Sharon Burns)



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.



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