Residents with COVID in Pleasant Manor, Upper Canada Lodge

Penny Coles
The Local

All three long-term care homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake had residents with COVID-19 leading up to Christmas.

Niagara Long Term Care's outbreak began Dec. 12 and included more than 30 people, but no longer has cases of COVID-19 in the facility, and instead is dealing with an outbreak of other respiratory illnesses.

Radiant Care Pleasant Manor's COVID outbreak began Dec. 22, with two residents having recovered and four still-active cases as of Tuesday.

Tim Siemens, CEO for the Virgil long-term care facility, told The Local symptoms of residents who have tested positive have been mild, and fortunately no one had to be hospitalized.

"Thanks to Niagara Public Health for providing great guidance in the protocols we followed during the outbreak," he said in an email.

Dining room services have been suspended during the outbreak, with residents eating meals in their rooms. Essential caregivers were and continue to be allowed in, although general visitations have been suspended.

Despite the outbreak, "our residents had a great Christmas," said Siemens. "We are very grateful for the support extended to our home by our local community. Our residents and tenants were blessed with a Christmas Tractor Processional (thanks Erwin and Dorothy Soo-Wiens and all participants), and our long-term care residents were each blessed on Christmas Day with individual Christmas stockings lovingly provided by Joan King and the volunteers who filled them." Henriette Koning, director of seniors services for Upper Canada Lodge, told The Local Tuesday there are currently 22 residents at the Wellington Street regional long-term care facility who have tested positive for COVID-19.

"Each impacted resident is presenting with mild symptoms and no one has required a transfer to hospital," said Koning. "Staff at the home have implemented all the necessary infection prevention and control measures, including PPE use, frequent hand hygiene, testing and decreasing the number of visitors. To ensure consistent implementation of infection prevention and control measures, the home has enhanced staffing throughout the outbreak." Koning said that despite the outbreak and the holiday storms in Niagara, "the residents at Upper Canada Lodge were able to enjoy their Christmas, particularly the generously donated Christmas stockings that were delivered to all the residents in the home."

Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Niagara Region's chief medical officer of health, confirmed Tuesday that outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes have increased to 19, up from residents in 15 homes with COVID a week ago.

There are six additional homes with outbreaks of other viruses, including RSV and influenza. However, we have seen an increase in COVID-19 in senior care homes. We're over 260 members right now," said Howse. "We're pretty much the only branch in our zone that has had an increase in membership even through the COVID restric-
tions. We're quite proud of that. We've over 260 members now.

Mike Balsom
The Local

The Royal Canadian Legion Branch 124 in Niagara-on-the-Lake welcomed 12 new members at its first New Year's Levee since 2020 this week.

In front of a crowd that approached 50 on New Year's Day, Branch president Al Howse led the new members through the organization's oath, as they declared their loyalty to their sovereign and country with family members and friends bearing witness.

Having not been able to gather safely during the pandemic, the event was a chance to hold the ceremony for all members who joined the local branch over the past three years. As Howse explained, at least 36 new recruits were invited to take their oaths but two-thirds of them were unable to attend Sunday.

"There were some members who left and rejoined, so we didn't include those members in the invitations," said Howse. "We're pretty much the only branch in our zone that has had an increase in membership even through the COVID restric-
tions. We're quite proud of that. We've over 260 members right now." Howse explained the three levels of membership at the Legion. Ordinary members are those who have served in the military and young adults with special needs! Donations can be made online at: redroofretreat.com/giftsfromtheheart or by calling our offices at 289-868-9800

Charitable Registration #887592285RR0001

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The Niagara-on-the-Lake

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Charitable Registration #887592285RR0001
Pharmacists now have ability to write prescriptions

13 common conditions

Penny Coles
The Local

January 4, 2023

It may take a few weeks to iron out potential glitches, but Sean Simpson of Simpson’s Pharmacy is thrilled to be able to offer a service he and other Ontario pharmacists have been proposing to the province for years. Pharmacists now have the power to prescribe treatments for 13 common conditions, at no cost to the patient — all they need is their health card.

Simpson says pharmacists have become accustomed to giving immunizations, and have been able to prescribe Padviod for COVID-19, so this isn’t a stretch. Expanding their services “is something we began preparing for a long time ago, and it’s something that’s been proven pharmacists are capable of.”

It’s a move that has been anticipated for some time, and yet it came suddenly — the details of the program weren’t announced until a few weeks ago, says Simpson, including the fact that it will be fully funded by the province.

The major issue for pharmacists will be handling the documentation necessary for funding, he adds. Three of the five pharmacists at Simpsons have had that training and the other two will soon. “That’s the biggest source of preparation, that we get the documentation right.”

The process of assessing patients and prescribing medication might take some time to figure out without having any idea of the workload, he says, but he anticipates it will need to be by appointment. “As much as we would like to see people able to show up for assessment, that might be the exception rather than the norm, and appointments might be necessary.”

Assessing certain conditions and prescribing medication “takes the ability to treat people to our fullest scope,” he says, and is similar to what they have already been doing — it’s not unusual for people to go to their pharmacist for advice on treating an ailment.

“We’ve tested and assessed these types of conditions, and while we might want to treat them with prescriptions, we’ve had to default to over-the-counter solutions,” he says. If a prescriptive medication was preferred, a doctor’s appointment would be necessary.

It will be an adjustment to workflow for the pharmacists, says Simpson. And although there are consultation rooms in the pharmacy, they can also do consultations by phone or video.

When customers come in looking for an assessment and prescription, names and details will be taken. “If we can’t handle the assessment on the spot, we’ll get back to them. We hope people can be patient with it.”

While a consultation for an over-the-counter solution would take two to three minutes, prescribing consultations might take 10 to 20 minutes or longer, he says.

“There will be a learning curve, more from the administration side than anything.”

But despite there being details that need to be worked out, Simpson says, “this is awesome. It will fill in some of the gaps, particularly in Niagara on-the-Lake. We’re really excited to be able to offer this service, and do what we’ve been trained to do. It will be beneficial to many. We’re eager to get going, work out the kinks and see where it goes.”

Giving pharmacists the ability to prescribe for some common problems “is a great way to increase capacity in the health care system,” Simpson says, adding it should be especially helpful in NOTL, where walk-in and urgent care clinics are not readily available.

Residents rostered with the Niagara North Family Health Team have good access to doctors when needed, he explains, but many are not, “so for them there is a lack of resources to access. This will provide a good alternative for them, and for tourists who present with one of the conditions pharmacists can handle.”

Pharmacists will be able to offer prescriptions for:

• hay fever
• sinus problems
• pink eye
• dermatitis
• menstrual cramps
• acid reflux
• hemorrhoids
• cold sores
• tick bites
• sprains and strains
• urinary tract infections.

‘Typical pattern’ of spread

Hirji reminded the public to make sure they are up to date with COVID and flu vaccinations, including booster doses for ages 12 and up, and a bivalent booster for those aged five to 11, six months after their second dose.

Children aged six months and younger are recommended to get an initial two doses of COVID-19 vaccine, and everyone six months of age and older should get the influenza vaccine, he said. He also recommended wearing a mask indoors and in crowds outdoors, staying home when sick, and “using freely available rapid tests to confirm we are free of infection before we leave isolation.”

Governments also have a responsibility, he added, by having promotion, incentives or policies that increase vaccination and masking.

In addition, government should invest in improving HVAC systems so indoor air is disinfected, making everyone safer, and address inequities in society, ensuring everyone has access to paid sick days “so that no one has to choose between making their ends meet and going to work when they might infect others.”
or worked as police officers or firefighters. Affiliate membership can be attained if a family member is an ordinary member. And affiliate membership applies to anyone with no link to military, police or firefighting occupations.

Two couples were taking the oath together Sunday. William and Sheryl Christiansen and Mike and Anne Morgan were looking forward to the social aspect of being members.

Jim Willett is a new affiliate member whose grandfather and uncle both fought in the Second World War. They were both members at Branch 124 in the 1950s.

“My uncle had a regimental band over there,” said Jim. “He played trombone, he was the band leader. He had the band at Queenston Heights for years after, Fred Willett and his concert band!”

For Willett, joining the Legion is a way of following a family tradition.

“And my friend is a member here as well,” he added. “I’ve been here a few times. I’ve played in their golf tournament. I grew up in Niagara Falls but every summer I stayed in Niagara-on-the-Lake with my aunt and uncle until I was about 15. It was like a hometown for me.”

Andre Boland’s father was a retired police officer. He’s a relative newcomer to NOTL and joined the Legion just before COVID hit.

“I was introduced to the Legion by some friends and neighbours in St. Davids,” Boland told The Local. “I thought joining would be a good opportunity to become involved more on a volunteer basis, and to learn a little more about people who gave their lives for this country.”

Paul Dolby also joined before the pandemic. His father was a Branch 124 member and he recalled visiting the King Street hall with him as a child.

“I’ve been helping out with the fish and chips and the barbecues,” Dolby said of his involvement so far. “A lot of the members here are people I went to school with at both Parliament Oak and Niagara District, too.”

Howse pointed out that a lot of the branch’s members are, like Dolby, multi-generational, but generally there is a good mix of those with others who have no ties to previous members.

“We look for our members to come to meetings and put their own two cents in,” Howse said of membership expectations. “We look for volunteers for things like the poppy campaign, events such as Canada Day, our ham and turkey rolls, and of course our fish fry. Our membership really helps with that, and the fish fry is what really keeps us afloat here.”

Howse explained how the Legion gives back to the community, citing a recent fish fry that raised funds to support the Canada-Ukraine Foundation. He also mentioned plans to finally install an elevator at the branch. The fundraising drive for that project will be a major focus over the next few months.

Following the swearing in, each new member was presented with their Legion badge. Then at mid-afternoon, everybody gathered together for the traditional levee ceremony.

That included the playing and singing of God Save the King and O Canada, as well as speeches by MP Tony Baldinelli, MPP Wayne Gates and Loré Mayor Gary Zalepa. Then glasses were raised to toast King Charles, the country of Canada, fallen comrades and visiting friends, before belting out a couple of verses of Auld Lang Syne.

Cadet bottle drive Saturday

Penny Coles
The Local

The 809 Newark Air Cadets will hold their annual January bottle drive Saturday again at three locations: The St. Davids Lions Club on York Road, the Royal Canadian Legion Hall on King Street, and Cornerstone Community Church on Niagara Stone Road.

They promise a “drive up and we will remove bottles from your trunk” service from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at all locations. All refundable liquor, wine, and beer bottles, as well as beer cans, will be accepted.

Cory Abt, chair of the 809 Squadron and father of a cadet, says the drive will go to cadet programs, but will also fulfill a wish for funds to build two flight simulators.

Rent is also high at the Croatian National Centre location on Line 3 — most cadet squadrons are able to make their home base in a school or armoury, which is much cheaper, he says.

The squadron was hoping to have the flight simulators in place last spring, but is now aiming for February or March, says Abt, and the cadets are pretty excited to see them built. Once completed, he adds, they could be made available to the public.
Maxwell ‘gob-smacked’ with Order of Canada appointment

Former artistic director spent 14 years at Shaw Festival

Mike Balsom
The Local

When she moved on from her 14-year tenure as Shaw Festival’s artistic director in 2016, Jackie Maxwell had recently been appointed to the Order of Ontario. When she returns to Niagara-on-the-Lake to direct J.M. Synge’s ‘The Playboy of the Western World’ in May, she can add Order of Canada to her name.

Maxwell is one of 99 new appointees for the prestigious title for 2022, along with the likes of hockey legend Sydney Crosby, music producer Bob Ezrin and author and historian Ted Barris. The announcement was made Dec. 29 by Governor General Mary Simon.

“I was absolutely gob-smacked,” says the Belfast-born Maxwell on the phone from her Toronto home. “I found out just a few weeks before the announcement. It wasn’t something I had been expecting or thinking about. It came out of nowhere.”

Like a theatre-goer might while watching one of the many plays she has directed over the years, Maxwell says she went through a range of emotions.

“At first I was surprised,” she explains, “then I was very moved. And then I felt proud. It means a lot.”

“My dream was always to have a living playwright’s work was presented at the Shaw when the campaign to build the Donald and Elaine Triggs Production Centre was already underway. ‘The facility was originally slated to include three rehearsal-only spaces. It was Maxwell who suggested that the largest of the three would be ideal to host some of those off-the-beaten-path productions. ‘It’s a big memory, for me, the idea of creating that theatre,’ she says. ‘I thought we could develop a new kind of programming there, bring in more contemporary plays that theatre, “she says. “I keep in contact with students. I have great conversations with wonderful students. I see them later in different theatres. That whole generational contact is something I really love.’

She was supposed to helm ‘The Playboy of the Western World,’ a story set in a pub in her native Ireland, in 2020. In fact, she was two weeks into preparations for the production when COVID-19 shut down live performances.

So Maxwell was overjoyed when Carroll reached out to tell her it was time to get back at it. ‘I’ve always loved Synge,’ she says. ‘He did such a lot of research and developed a language that is really authentic. He so beautifully played with the language. It’s poetic, it’s funny, it’s dark. It’s really something to dive into. ‘It means a lot to me to get in there and do something in that space,” she adds about directing the play in the eponymous theatre.

And I’m looking forward to getting back to my walks in the common and visiting all the vegetable stands at the farmer’s market.”

Jackie Maxwell has been given one of the country’s top honours for her many contributions to Canadian theatre. (David Cooper, Shaw Festival)
Waterfront birding adventure with grandkids

David Gilchrist Special to The Local

With Christmas festivities complete and the grandchil-
dren off school for another two weeks, we thought about
what to do to help keep them occupied during that period.
We invited our two grandkids from Hamilton to come for a
sleepover, and they were joined the next morning by one of
their cousins from St. Davids. Considering the amount of
time they spend on their iPads these days, Grandma wanted to
ensure they had some time out-
doors for fresh air and exercise.
With this in mind, I offered to
take the kids birding along the
town waterfront.

This activity can be espe-
cially interesting during the
winter months. A number of
species of migratory waterfowl
make the mouth of the Niagara
River either their winter home
or a temporary stopping-off
spot before they head further
south. These winter visitors can
be seen offshore either singly,
in pairs, or rafting together in
larger groups. Prior to the big
storm last week, the numbers
had been quite low. The high
winds and colder temperatures
during that three-day storm
event, however, seemed to have
a significant effect. Thus, I was
quite pleased to see a number
of different species had finally
arrived and I had been able to
scope out where they might
be seen from various vantage
points along our Old Town
waterfront.

The day was sunny and a
considerably warmer, so it was
a good day to get the kids out
and about. We started at the
small park at the far end of the
golf course where the cairn
commemorates the Battle of
Fort George. Walking down
the path to the left, below the
row of benches, allowed us to
see our first series of diving
bufflehead ducks. These are a
smaller species and the white
and black markings of the male
are quite distinctive from a dis-
tance.

There were about a doz-
en, male and female, spread
out and taking turns to dive
for food. The binoculars we
brought helped the kids see
them from a distance.

Next, we decided to walk
down Delatre Street to the path
leading to Balls Beach. There,
we walked out on the rock
groyne, a breakwater built to
reduce erosion, and sat down
overlooking the water. The
kids noticed the water was very
brown, and I explained that it
was due to the high winds that
had stirred up Lake Erie during
the storm and that the stirred-
up water was now flowing
downriver to Lake Ontario.

As we sat, we noticed, far-
ther out in the river, a raft of
about two dozen long-tailed
ducks. This is one species that
overwinter each year. Their call
is quite distinctive and can of-
ten be heard in the night and
early morning. As we watched,
the entire group dove together.
I suggested that we time how
long they stay underwater and
it turned out to be just under a
minute — 52 to 53 seconds.

Lastly, we continued walk-
ing along Riverbeach Drive to
the dock beside the old Custom
Dock at the foot of Lockhart
Street. There, I was able to point
out a lone merganser heading
out further into the river. This
particular one seems to have
been in the area for quite some
time and will also, most likely,
overwinter here.

By that time, the grandchil-
dren were getting a bit tired
and hungry so we walked back
to the car left at Queen’s Royal
Park and headed home. A good
outing on a pleasant winter day.

Lachlan, Elise and Bella Gilchrist were able to see a lone merganser on the Niagara River. (Photos by David Gilchrist)
 Last year’s Local headlines in the first week of January included the news that community outlets were putting long-term care plans in place. Another headline based on information from the province and the region said COVID cases likely were higher than reported.

Dr. Mustafa Hirji, our chief medical officer of health, predicted that first week of 2022 would see rising cases, and again made the same prediction this December. He hasn’t been wrong yet, and won’t be late in the year, with several reports indicating for the usual precautions so it isn’t any worse than expected.

Last year at this time, restaurants were closed to indoor din- ning and after the school holiday break classes resumed virtually. Fortunately there were a few fewer restrictions on the horizon we can see — just recommendations to make sure we have every vacci- nation possible, including a mask and wear masks when it makes sense to do so — indoors and out.

Mike Balsam Special to The Local

The spat of notable deaths the last few days of December made news, and as we take stock, on those who were lost in 2022. The year always brings a look back at the previous 12 months, remembering about some of the famous and infamous who enriched our lives for many years. These days it seems celebrity deaths have been happening more frequently.

Dec. 29 was a particularly tough day to take. It began with the news of the passing of Ian Tyson at 89 years old. Tyson was one of the most prolific and talented songwriters in Can- dian music, a mainstay of To- ronto’s early 1960s Yorkville folk scene with his then-wife, Sylvia.

His song Four Strong Winds, from Ian and Sylvia’s 1963 al- bum of the same name, topped the charts in Canada and was covered by the likes of Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, Waylon Jennings and Neil Young. The Canadian standard’s melody and lyrics about cold, lonely winds and flying snow impre- me, to be your voice in Ottawa.

The fall session of Parlia- ment dealt with many issues of importance to the people of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niaga- ra Falls and Fort Erie. As your federal representative, I worked hard to make demands for a fair use of the dysfunctional Ar- riveCAN app was ended. I have repeatedly pushed this issue with our Canadian caucus work to protect the interests of Canadians by ensuring that all Canadians are protected with the passage of my friend for Sarnia-Lambton, Marilyn Gladu’s private member’s bill C.228, The Pension Protection Act.

My Conservative col- leagues and I have worked hard to hold this government accountable for its out- of-control spending. We exposed the $54 million which was wasted to develop ArriveCAN, and our Anatola Genuer has identified at least $32 billion in COVID-inflicted overpayments and suspicious payments from the government in- cluding to deceased Canadi- ans. These wasteful spending errors are serious and require further investigation.

As identified by the Auditor General, the lack of controls in place by the Liberal gov- ernment has undoubtedly con- tributed to the cost-of-living crisis and fiscal mess that all taxpayers will be forced to pay for through higher taxes and higher inflation on everyday products, goods and services.

Looking ahead, a key priority will be to get the reckless spending by this Liberal government under control. Like an over-maneuvering ship today because of their reck- less and wasteful spending, Conservatives will continue to fight to make life more af- fordable by saying ‘no’ to the tripling of the carbon tax and the tax on food and home heating. It hurts those in a country such as Canada in which one in five Canadians are living in poverty and they could not afford the price of groceries. Or that 1.5 million Canadians needed to visit a food bank bar for food.

All this financial hardship is caused by the inflation crisis brought about by this govern- ment’s reckless and wasteful spending policies.

Again, thank you for the trust you have placed in me to be your representative in Ottawa. In 2023, I will continue to stand up for the interests of the people of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls and Fort Erie.
Thank you, thank you to our community: Maintenance workers who were the backbone of agriculture in our community. Those who owned farms, I knew very well. I served in the military, but I had grown up in Niagara-on-the-Lake. For my first five years of involvement, I was a sounding board for those who attended. In ways I could never have imagined in those early years, the lights of 2022 have grown exponentially in warmth and brightness. Ceto Reid, injured when he had been hit by a car while riding his bicycle in St. Catharines, had his way back home and had scheduled to go home to Jamaica the next day, would add his ‘amen’ to that. He remained in NOLT, unable to travel and receiving psychotherapy for a damaged hip, and will be here for about six more weeks at least. In the meantime, many volunteers are reaching out to help him. The beauty of thousands of flickering candles at the December 25th Candlelight Stroll, which raised money for Reid and for The Farmworker Hub, which helps local farmworkers with their needs, will continue to illuminate the path for us as a community.

The memories that stood out this year are those of candlelight — small, consistent flickers of light that continue to burn indefinitely, just enough to see ahead one step ahead at a time. One step at a time.

The message of the song Harvill’s cowworkers sang in his memory still strikes a chord in my heart as I play it at the close of the year.

‘You have led me through the fire
In the darkest night,
You have led me through the fire
You are close like no other
You are close like no other
I’ve known You as a Father
And I have lived in the goodness of God
And all my life You have been good
And all my life You have been good.
I will sing of the goodness of God’.

Harvill Maye in photos displayed at his memorial service, with a tray of strawberries he had just picked, and with his wife at home in Jamaica. (Photo by Jane Andres)
Sheila Hirsch-Kalm, best known locally for her gardening expertise and participation in many gardening initiatives in town, has died.

She passed away at home Dec. 18. Her funeral is being held Saturday, Jan. 7.

Her long-time friend Shirley Madsen, who held an interest in gardening, says she was in touch by text up to two days before Sheila died. Shirley was hoping to see her mother, but Sheila had said she wasn’t feeling up to company, and then her son Mark Hirsch, who was with her, responded, also saying she was not well enough for visitors.

Madsen says she received from Sheila on Dec. 10, and that she had been to the hospital in Niagara Falls to have a gash in her leg stitched. She was being accomplished. "She left because she felt regional accessibility commitments,” she adds.

"It is as though she could not plant the containers to be placed around the garden. "I can sit in my chair, hose in one hand and a glass of wine in the other, and water them,” she told The Local last August, her arm sweeping across a stunning expanse of flowers in containers.

"If I can transition, I can teach other people to as well. I hope I can help others to keep going as long as I have.”

She suggested people who are caring for older family members might consider doing the same, to give them the opportunity to continue gardening.

"It is as though she could not keep moving, " she jokes. 'She was being accomplished. "She left because she felt regional accessibility commitments,” she adds.

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She suggested people who are caring for older family members might consider doing the same, to give them the opportunity to continue gardening.

"Days like that, when people came to see her and her garden, were her greatest happiness. "She didn’t like, and not only kept them in her mind and spoke it, knew she would love to see the garden culture of NOTL."

Madsen would also like to see Sheila’s gardens opened to members of the gardening organizations she helped in her gardens, in the hope that they would appreciate their beauty when they bloom. Sheila would love the idea of her plants in the gardens of people who shared her passion, "and it would be a way to keep Sheila’s memory alive in the community.”

Madsen was relieved to hear Sheila’s much-loved cat, OGG, will be cared for by a woman who knew Sheila and OGG well from time spent in her home. Sheila is survived by her sons Keith and his wife Dora and Mark and his wife Irene, along with her two grand-children, Joshua and Megan.

Friends and family will be received at Morse & Son Funeral Home, 5917 Main Street, Niagara Falls on Saturday Jan. 7, from 1 to 3 p.m. A funeral service to celebrate the life of Sheila will follow at 3 p.m.

In August, Sheila Hirsch-Kalm welcomed visitors on the NOTL Horticultural Society Garden Tour. She wanted to share the ease of transitioning to gardening in containers for those with mobility limitations (Penny Coles)

Shirley was hoping to see her mother, but Sheila had said she wasn’t feeling up to company, and then her son Mark Hirsch, who was with her, responded, also saying she was not well enough for visitors.

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"In the following days, Sheila’s texts indicated her leg was swollen, and she was in a lot of pain, but she was coming to help, and Madsen says she was under the impression Sheila had nurses and PSWs coming to the house.

On Dec. 18, Madsen received a call from Mark, saying Sheila had died that morning. Sheila passed away one day shy of her 87th birthday. In her obituary one of her grandchildren was quoted as saying "it is as though she could not bear even one birthday without her beloved husband, Michael.”

Sheila had lost her husband, partner, friend and “a good home for the unconventional” who she felt, "which she said was being accomplished. "She left because she felt regional accessibility commitments,” she adds.

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She suggested people who are caring for older family members might consider doing the same, to give them the opportunity to continue gardening.

"Days like that, when people came to see her and her garden, were her greatest happiness. "She didn’t like, and not only kept them in her mind and spoke it, knew she would love to see the garden culture of NOTL."

Madsen would also like to see Sheila’s gardens opened to members of the gardening organizations she helped in her gardens, in the hope that they would appreciate their beauty when they bloom. Sheila would love the idea of her plants in the gardens of people who shared her passion, "and it would be a way to keep Sheila’s memory alive in the community.”

Madsen was relieved to hear Sheila’s much-loved cat, OGG, will be cared for by a woman who knew Sheila and OGG well from time spent in her home. Sheila is survived by her sons Keith and his wife Dora and Mark and his wife Irene, along with her two grand-children, Joshua and Megan.

Friends and family will be received at Morse & Son Funeral Home, 5917 Main Street, Niagara Falls on Saturday Jan. 7, from 1 to 3 p.m. A funeral service to celebrate the life of Sheila will follow at 3 p.m.

In August, Sheila Hirsch-Kalm welcomed visitors on the NOTL Horticultural Society Garden Tour. She wanted to share the ease of transitioning to gardening in containers for those with mobility limitations (Penny Coles)
Skate fundraisers encouraged to support Alzheimer Society

For more than 10 years, Steve McNeil, an Etobicoke mail carrier, has been skating at rinks across Canada, including in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He is usually alone, often far from home, with exactly 19 hours and 26 minutes of skating stretching ahead of him — he does it to pay tribute to his mother, who was born in 1926.

He skates to raise funds in support of the Alzheimer Society. His mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in her early 60s, when her family noticed her confusion. She lived with it for more than two decades, much of that time with McNeil as her caregiver. His skates also honour all the caregivers who continue to care for loved ones with Alzheimer’s or dementia, he says.

Previously, McNeil has skated up to 10 fundraising events in a year, including in NOTL at Gretzky’s Estate Winery in December 2020 and February 2022. Typically, he steps on the ice at 12:01 a.m. and skates until 7:26 p.m., the first few hours in the dark, alone, often joined by others during the day.

In the early years, McNeil’s fundraising skates were mostly in Toronto, at Nathan Phillips Square, but he decided in 2018 to travel across Canada, skating in all the large cities. Then in 2020, his plan for an 11-city tour was cancelled due to COVID-19.

This year he will be doing just one skate on Jan. 14. In Kingston and is asking Canadians from coast to coast to join in and hold their own fundraising 1926 Skate Challenges on that day.

Neighbourhoods across Niagara are also encouraged to host their own 1926 skates to raise awareness and funds for the Niagara Alzheimer Society.

“Steve has skated in outdoor rinks across Canada in -34 C weather. I encourage everyone to show their support here in Niagara for those living with dementia on National Skate Day,” says Trena Kindt, CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region.

In 2020, McNeil, a recreational hockey referee, told The Local he feels blessed to be able to do something that comes so easily to him, and that can help raise money for something so important to him.

“The question he’s asked most often when he comes off the ice after his marathon skate is “how do you feel?” he says. “The answer is, ‘I feel great!’ If I could raise more money, I’d go back out and do it again, even though the weather is extreme, and sometimes I’ve been skating in a blizzard at -40 degrees.”

McNeil is hoping his 1926 Skate Challenges will take place in communities on Jan. 14 across the country, and can happen anywhere: in a backyard rink, community rink or even at a local hockey game or team practice. Skaters can donate $19.26 to the Alzheimer Society — money raised from skates that occur in the Niagara Region will go to the Niagara branch.

Participants are encouraged to post pictures of their skating parties to social media using the hashtag #1926Challenge.

There are 11,099 people living with dementia in Niagara. The Alzheimer Society’s mission is to advocate for and with people with dementia and their care partners, and provide access to a diverse range of appropriate resources and supports. By providing education, personalized in-home support services and wellness programs, families can better understand dementia, navigate the healthcare system and access the resources they need, when they need them, says McNeil’s news release encouraging community members to get involved.

Steve McNeil skated with Bones, the Ice Dogs mascot, at The Gretzky Estate Winery in 2022 to raise money for the Niagara Region Alzheimer’s Society. (Mike Balsom)
The buzz on pollinators: Keystones create biodiversity

Sandra Ozkur
Special to The Local

We know the importance of native plants to the survival of our native pollinators, but within the native plant category there are superior species called keystone plants that are the best for supporting native pollinators through their entire life cycle.

Simply put, pollinators facilitate the transference of pollen from the male part of the flower to the female part, which fertilizes the plant so it will produce fruit, seeds and young plants. This transfer of pollen can happen by the wind, or on the fur of an animal, but the most effective pollination is done by insects. When an insect visits a flower in search of nectar, the pollen sticks to the hairs on its body as it moves from flower to flower, causing pollination.

Native bees, bumblebees and honeybees are the best pollinators. Their buzzing and shaking the pollen loose and the hairs on its body as it feeds the plant so it will produce fruit, seeds and young plants. This transfer of pollen can happen by the wind, or on the fur of an animal, but the most effective pollination is done by insects. When an insect visits a flower in search of nectar, the pollen sticks to the hairs on its body as it moves from flower to flower, causing pollination.

Native bees, bumblebees and honeybees are the best pollinators. Their buzzing and shaking the pollen loose and sticks to their hair. Butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, flies and bats are less effective because they have smoother bodies. Nearly one-third of human food production and 75 per cent of flowering plants require insect pollination. It is critical that we provide proper habitat for these creatures to thrive.

According to the National Wildlife Federation, native plants have tight relationships with all wildlife. This symbiotic relationship has formed over many thousands of years, providing natural sources of food, and protection to raise their young. Approximately 95 per cent of our terrestrial birds rely on the insects supported by these plants, so without healthy native plant habitat, birds and wildlife cannot survive.

The federation divides North America into ecological regions. Every ecoregion hosts unique native plant communities. Southern Ontario is located in the Eastern Temperate Forests zone.

Niagara’s location is even more unique because it is also part of the Carolinian zone, which makes Niagara one of the most biodiverse areas in Canada. Biodiversity means that we have a greater variety of flora and fauna than most other regions. Unfortunately, southern Ontario has high human population competing for land in this small area. We as landowners must share the land in a responsible way.

Professor Doug Talamy, an American entomologist, ecologist and conservationist, stresses the importance of including keystone plants in your pollinator garden. Keystone plants are critical to the food web because they provide all the necessary components for each stage of the pollinator’s life cycle. There are a handful of native keystone plant varieties that are superior performers when it comes to the volume of beneficial insects they can support.

Biodiversity is very important, and choosing keystone, shrubs and flowers is an easy way to provide habitat for numerous species of pollinators. One of the best keystone plants is the oak tree, which is indigenous to Ontario and thrives in Niagara. Native oak trees support more than 430 caterpillar species. Other top performers are the sugar maple, eastern cottonwood and hickory.

Prior to colonization, there were abundant forests of white oak, sugar maple, pine, ash, hickory and walnut trees throughout Niagara. Fine examples of these century trees can still be seen in the oak grove next to the commons and throughout the Chautauqua neighbourhood in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Even if you don’t have space to plant a keystone tree, there may be one already growing nearby that you can nurture. In NOTL, a group called ‘My Chautauqua’ has put an enormous effort into counting, mapping and preserving the oak and other keystone trees in their historic neighbourhood. There is an ongoing effort to protect the old growth while continuing to replant new young progeny from the acorns that have been sprouted and reared by Niagara College’s School of Horticulture.

Just like a keystone, holds an arch together, these trees and shrubs have the main components that hold the whole ecosystem together. For

Continued on page 11
Think of your garden as a complete community

example, the oak tree provides branches and leaves and pollen for insects and birds plus acorns that feed deer, squirrels, jays, mice, badgers, wild turkeys and mice, which in turn feed hawks, owls, foxes and coyotes. Oak acorns are considered a foundation in their food chain.

Insect larvae is the main source of food for baby birds that cannot eat seeds. According to a study from the University of Delaware, a nest of chickadees can require up to 9,000 caterpillars to raise a single clutch. A Lepidoptera (butterfly or moth) lifecycle begins as it lays thousands of eggs on the leaves of the host plant. When the caterpillars hatch, they eat the leaves of the host plant and grow fat, and at this stage they become prime food for birds. Many caterpillars still survive, and form a pupa or chrysalis that they attach to the underside of a branch or amongst the fallen leaves to overwinter. In the spring they emerge as adult butterflies or moths to start the cycle again. Certain species such as monarch and spicebush swallowtail butterflies can only feed upon specific plants, so be sure to include the right plants if you want to attract them.

Think of your garden as a community, with each member having a task to do. Keystone trees provide shade, leaves, food and nesting sites for birds and pollinators. Their roots protect soil from erosion, and the fallen leaves serve as a home to many insects and micro-organisms that break down the leaves into compost. Keystone shrubs provide protection from predators and the woody stems are used for bee and insect nests. Northern highbush blueberry and prairie willow support over 250 species of wildlife that feed upon their leaves, flower nectar, pollen, berries and seeds. Native sunflowers, milkweed, black-eyed Susan, green-headed coneflower and goldenrod are prolific pollen providers and support upward of 100 insect species and 50 varieties of bees. In comparison, imported flowers like daylilies and hostas support zero native pollinators. Use a variety of colourful keystone flowers to bring beauty to your garden and have something blooming throughout the entire growing season for a continuous nectar supply.

Start thinking of your garden as a complete eco-system where plants and wildlife are interdependent. Becoming a more conscious gardener will add to the biodiversity of this very special ecozone, and preserve its beauty for future generations.

To learn more about the efforts of Chautauqua tree preservation visit www.mychautauqua.ca. For more information about keystone plants by ecoregion visit www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/About Native-Plants/keystone-plants-by-ecoregion.
Mike Balsom
The Local

The morning rain and a temperature of 6.5 C at noon might not have been usual conditions for a round of golf on New Year’s Day, but no one was complaining at St. Davids Golf Club Sunday.

Owner Debbie Gor- ing told The Local that tee times were booked solid from 8:50 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. New Year’s Day.

Cheerful golfers were unloading their clubs and stretching their limbs to loosen up before teeing off for either nine or 18 holes. And when the sun peeked through the clouds at about 12:40 p.m., many were anticipating shedding layers once into their round.

Mike Choma is a member at St. Catharines and Queenston Golf Clubs. He usually plays Queenston on New Year’s Day, but the recent rain meant that conditions on St. Davids, protected a bit more by the escarpment, on St. Davids, were more favourable than his home course.

Brian Dimitroff of Niagara Falls had finished playing nine holes and was waiting to connect with Brian and Shirley Dimi- troff of Niagara Falls for his back nine.

Choma is a member at St. Davids and Queenston Golf Clubs. He usually plays Queenston on New Year’s Day, but the recent rain meant that conditions on St. Davids, protected a bit more by the escarpment, were more favourable than those at the sister course. “It’s not too bad out today,” Choma said, pointing to the club boots he was wearing to ensure his feet stayed dry. “I don’t wear my golf shoes when it’s like this. In the winter, you have to think a bit more about your game, choose different clubs than you would in the summer. And I use a different golf ball, too, one with a bit less compression.”

Choma went on to acknowledge that there would be less roll on his drives on this particular soggy Sunday, while often on New Year’s Day icy conditions might put a few extra yards onto his length from the tee boxes.

Parker Moran drove down from Stoney Creek to play St. Davids Sunday. Like Choma, the 26-year-old usually plays Queenston but chose St. Davids on Jan. 1 for the same reason. The HVAC technician’s winter rounds are not limited to New Year’s Day — the avid golfer tries to book a round at least once every month of the year at one of the two courses.

The group of Mark and Drew Timlock and Robbie Denham were putting out on the fourth green as Mo- ran followed his down-the middle tee shot. Denham missed his first putt by just a few millimetres.

For the second straight year, Bob Hewer of Thorold had arranged an informal tournament of sorts. The 20 or so in his group were all arriving between noon and 1 p.m.

“My friend Dave Bren- nan called me last year at the last minute and asked me if I wanted to golf,” explained Hewer. “It was a nice day (similar to Sunday, the temperature reached 5 C on Jan. 1, 2022), so I thought, why not. Then we started calling some others, and it just blossomed into four groups.”

It blossomed further for New Year’s Day 2023, with a fifth group added to the competition. Organizer Brian Dimitroff was all smiles as he and wife Shirley readied for their nine holes with Choma. When someone wished him a good round after his tee-off, he summed up the feeling of each and every one of the golfers present. “Even a bad round is a good round today.”

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

Thank you!!
Their 2021-2022 season was prolonged and carried into the extra period by taking a penalty of their own. The Ravens sealed the victory just moments after Niagara’s Riley Ellis skated to the penalty box.

Taylor acknowledged that the team is still working on improvements to both their power play and penalty kill unit. "The first half of the season was really getting the winning goal two minutes into the overtime period. Taylor said, "I don’t think we’ll be scoring a goal in the third period, but after having lost 9-0 in their previous match against the Renegades, the team is now focusing on putting more energy into the penalty kill." The team needs to make meaningful changes to the front lines to be able to shore up their special teams. A few games may not be as strong. The guys are looking forward to the second half. There’s a real buzz and we don’t want to disrupt that."

Looking at the first five games, Taylor said the biggest surprise player-wise has been the performance of 16-year-old forward Nolan Wyers, who has been named to the GMHL’s Under 18 All Star Game scheduled for Jan. 17 in Barrie, Ont. Wyers has amassed 16 goals and 10 assists in 24 games for the Predators.

"Our goalkeeping is another surprise," said Taylor. "I didn’t think we’d have the level of goalkeeping we have. And we picked up (Declan) Foga and (Cameron) Savice late in the season, and you can see they’re really buying into the whole thing. They’re willing to do what they have to do to make the whole team better.”

After hosting Barrie Friday, the Predators travel the next day to Tottenham to take on the fourth-place Thun. Those are two important games for the team to begin its climb up the Northern Division standings.

In their two previous meetings, this season with the Bulls, the Predators came out on the short end of 8-1 and 6-1 decisions. "Friday will be tough, but we’re going to have a different lineup than we’ve had so far,” Taylor predicted. "It will be interesting to see how it goes. The second-half schedule doesn’t see us playing the top couple of teams as much as we did the first half, so I think we have a real chance to make it into third or fourth place.”

The following week will be a busy one, with a trip to Brantford on Jan. 11, a home game against Tottenham Jan. 13 and a Sunday road game against the eighth-place Stittsville Flyers. Game time Friday is 7:30 p.m.
LocalSPORTS

Memorial tournament a success with players and fans

Mike Balsom
The Local

Though he was never a hockey player, Niagara-on-the-Lake’s James Berg was a huge contributor to the town’s minor hockey organization. And exactly a year to the date of his sudden death on Dec. 23, 2021, a tournament in his name is helping out once again.

Organized by family members, the James Berg Memorial Hockey Tournament in Vigil raised $5,500 two days before Christmas for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves Minor Hockey Club. Despite the blowing snow and hazardous road conditions that day, eight teams squared off in the day-long tournament that also included a raffle, a barbecue and a great deal of surprisingly high-level action on the ice.

“The stands were packed,” Berg’s 21-year-old daughter Madison tells The Local. “The snow was crazy, but the whole community really came out. There were people all over the arena. It was so amazing to see how busy it was.”

The idea for the tournament originated in the mind of Madison’s cousin, Matt Friesen. “My uncle was a great guy,” Friesen says. “I’m really close with his kids, though I’m a bit older than all three of them. I wanted to do something to honour him on the anniversary, and a hockey tournament was the first thing that came to mind.”

Friesen told Madison and her brothers Mackenzie, 23 and Mitch, 18, about his idea last summer, and they quickly got to work putting things together. “Matt contacted the town to ask about ice time,” explains Madison, “and once we had a date we threw it out there on Facebook. We thought we might be able to get four teams to make a perfect little tournament, but the response was overwhelming. We ended up with 10 teams interested, but had to cut it back to eight due to the ice time.”

For the most part those teams were all assembled specifically for the tournament. Friends and relatives of the Berg children were on the ice as well as a number of former Wolves players from the decade-plus during which James was involved as a coach, trainer and member of the organization’s executive board.

Kyle Pauls organized the team that ended up winning the tournament, and he says he was surprised by the level of hockey that was being played that day. “I didn’t anticipate that much talent,” Pauls says. “It was a welcome surprise.”

His own team included former Quebec Major Junior Hockey League player Matt Thorpe of Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Charlie Izaguirre, who played four years of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III hockey at Lake Forest College in Illinois.

But according to multiple sources, all eight teams were similar in make-up. “One of the other refs on my team is we absolutely want this tournament to come back. It’s a great way to honour my uncle James. “Dad would have loved the tournament,” she says. “He would have been here, and he would have enjoyed the day so much. He would have been really happy.”

The family hasn’t yet decided if the James Berg Memorial Hockey Tournament will be an annual event, but they are getting pressure from many who were there that Friday. “I need to talk to Madi to see what she thinks,” Friesen says, “but I 100 per cent want to do it again. It’s a great way to honour my uncle James. I’d like to keep it going every year. I know the players want it to come back.”

Friesen also explained if it came back, “We realized the night shift the night before,” Pauls adds, “but there was no way I was going to miss the tournament, even with the weather. I made sure I got up early to get there and beat the storm. The consensus from every-one on my team is we absolutely want this tournament to come back next year.”

The Berg family, Mitch, Madison, Carolyn and Mackenzie at the James Berg Memorial Hockey Tournament.

Kyle Pauls’ winning team included Matt Thorpe of Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Charlie Izaguirre.

Henry Berg and Mackenzie Berg at the arena. (Photos supplied)
**OBITUARY**

EPP, IRENE—It is with immense sadness, but grateful hearts that we announce the passing of our beloved wife, mother and grandmother, Irene Louise Epp (nee Fast), on December 27, 2022, at the age of 84. Devoted wife of Henry W. Epp (63 years), loving mother of Gary (Cindy) Epp, Joanne (Michel) Gagne and Kathy Epp. Awesome grandmother of Alex, Nicholas, Forrest, Faith, Sandy and Amy. Sister of Werner (& the late Marlene) Fast, John (Liz) Fast, Arnold (Elena) Fast (Germany), sister-in-law of Abe Epp. She is predeceased by her mother Margaret Fast, father, Johann Fast, brothers Viktor and Edward Fast (Germany). Mom is also survived by many nieces, nephews and several cousins. Irene was a dedicated employee of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for many years, devoted member of the Niagara United Mennonite Church, White Oaks and Niagara-on-the-Lake Tennis Club.

Many thanks to the dedicated staff at Upper Canada Lodge where she spent her last year. Visitation will be Monday, Jan. 2, 2023 from 8:30-10:00 p.m. at the Niagara United Mennonite Church, 1775 Niagara Stone Rd, Niagara-on-the-Lake. In lieu of flowers, the family would appreciate donations to MCC Canada or Niagara United Mennonite Church.

**NOTICES**

To place an Obituary or In Memoriam in our Classifieds, please contact Julia at: julia@notllocal.com or 905.934.1040

Deadline is Tuesdays at 1 p.m.

**PUZZLE ANSWERS**

Sudoku solution from December 22, 2022

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NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

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May this year bring each of you happiness, good health, new adventures, and good fortune.

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