

# The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL

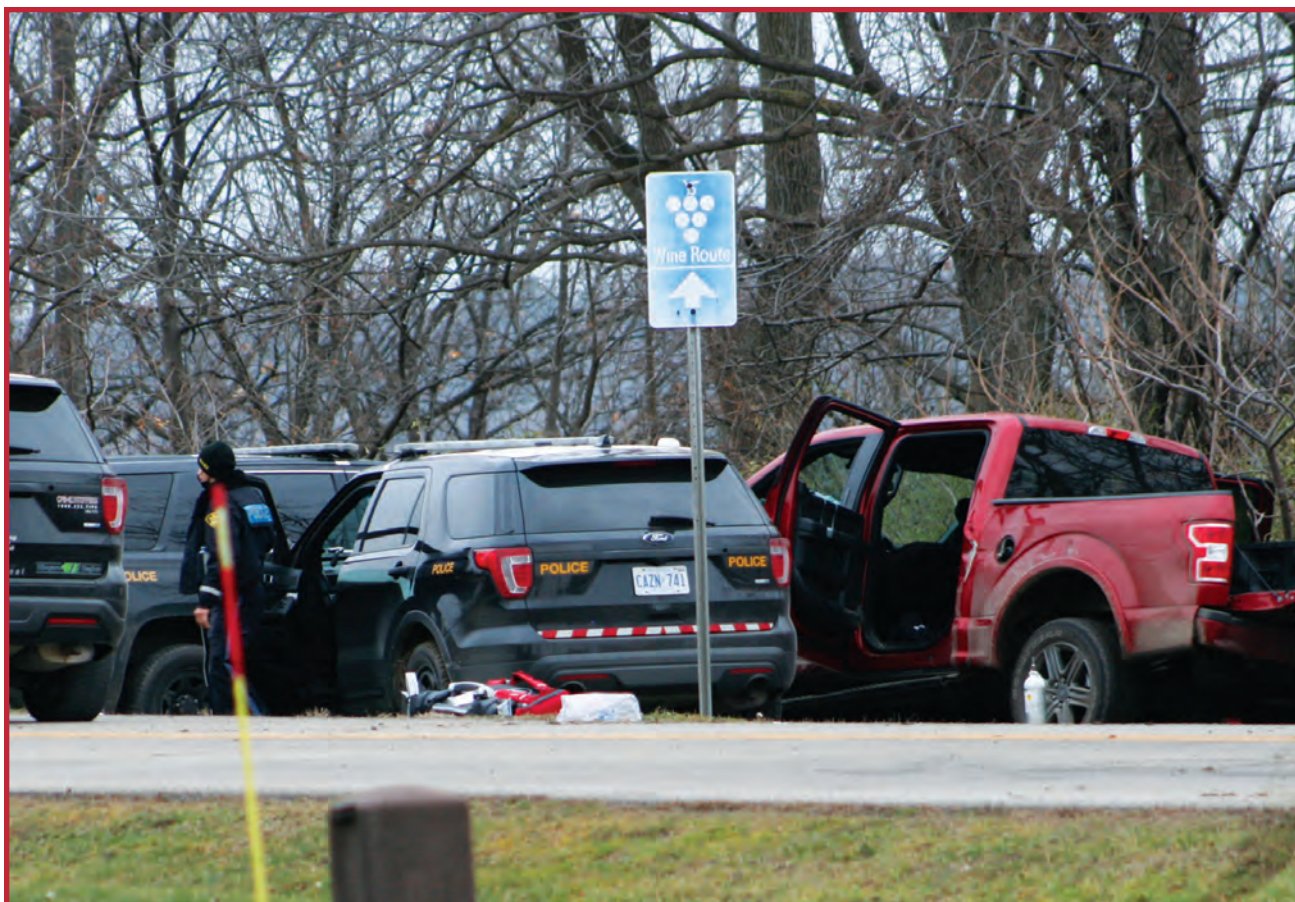


Lack of  
Public Health  
involvement  
with vaccine  
campaign  
'frustrating'

page 2

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notllocal.com JANUARY 7, 2021 Volume 3 · Issue 1



## Man dead following police shooting

A man is dead after being shot by police Tuesday afternoon. Police had been called to a Niagara Falls location after receiving a report of a suspected impaired driver. About an hour later he was located in the area of Line 3 and the Niagara River Parkway. "There was in interaction with an adult male and he was subsequently shot by police," the police report says. He was transported to the hospital with life-threatening injuries, where he was pronounced dead. The SIU is now investigating. Roads in the area were closed, and neighbours were told to stay in their homes for several hours. Anyone who may have witnessed this or has information is asked to contact either the SIU at 1-800-787-8529 or the NRP at (905) 688-4111 ext. 1009134. The SIU investigates reports involving police where there has been death or serious injury. (Mike Balsom)

## Retired firefighter looks back on 38 years as a volunteer

Penny Coles  
The Local

After 38 years as a volunteer with the Queenston fire department, Ken Hernder has several memorable calls he's answered, many of them having nothing to do with fighting a fire.

At 65, his mandatory retirement date was Dec. 31, so he begins the new year without worrying about responding to his pager.

His wife Cindy Young Hernder has compiled a list of some of his calls, thinking many Niagara-on-the-Lake residents would be very surprised at what is expected of a volunteer firefighter.

Some of that has changed over the years, as some situations, such as water and gorge rescues, which are now assigned to specialized, professional teams.

Although he has answered those calls in past years, he believes it's for the best that firefighters who have more training in those areas have taken over.

He remembers one rescue of fishermen on the Upper Niagara

River, who had fallen overboard.

The Queenston Fire Department at that time had a 12-foot aluminum boat and a nine-horsepower motor, he says.

"I was just a young guy, watching from shore. The boat got out to them. The fishermen were wearing lifejackets, and were trying to get into the boat, almost tipping it in the process. The firefighters threw them a rope and towed them back to shore. After that they said they'd never take that boat out again. We'd never do another water rescue if we didn't get a bigger boat, and that never happened."

These days, the U.S. Coast Guard and Homeland Security can get to an incident on the river the fastest, and they respond to most rescue calls. St. Catharines has a water rescue team as well, he says. "We leave the water rescues to those who have the time to train for them."

Another memory, the most traumatic of his career, and certainly the most tragic, was the

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## First COVID outbreak in NOTL long-term care

Penny Coles  
The Local

The message from the acting medical officer of health for Niagara hasn't changed: "Don't follow the example of some of the politicians in the news of late. Do what we did back in the spring, stay home, and minimize contact with other people."

That's the first line of defence in protecting those in our long-term care homes from COVID-19, says Dr. Mustafa Hirji, where new out-

breaks continue, including for the first time since the start of the pandemic, in a Niagara-on-the-Lake facility.

If we don't give COVID the opportunity to spread to others, says Hirji, "hopefully that will bring the numbers down, we can recalibrate, and we'll have the vaccine soon so we can at least protect the most vulnerable in our community."

The most vulnerable includes residents and staff in the Niagara Long Term Care Residence on Wellington Street

in NOTL, formerly a Chartwell home. An outbreak was declared there on Saturday, although "fortunately not affecting a large number of people," says Hirji.

"We were declared in an outbreak by Public Health on Saturday, Jan. 2, when we received a positive staff case through our weekly surveillance testing," says Chris Poos, executive director of the facility. "Since then, we have received two resident-positive cases, and one additional staff member. Both staff

members are asymptomatic and self-isolating at home."

Staff remain vigilant in all infection prevention and control measures, "including twice-daily screening of residents and staff for any signs of the COVID-19 virus, and regular testing," says Poos.

"Residents are isolated to their rooms, receiving in-room meal service, and are being cared for by staff on contact droplet precautions. Staff are wearing full personal protective equipment at all times, which is

well stocked in the home," Poos continues.

"We are in daily contact with Public Health to assist us in managing the outbreak, and hope for the good news to come soon that the Pfizer-BioNTech and/or Moderna vaccines become available to all residents and staff in the Niagara area."

When the number of COVID cases increase in the community, visitors and staff have a greater risk of introducing the infection to long-term care homes, hospitals and retire-

ment homes, Hirji says.

"As the number of cases increases, we see that to be the case in long-term care."

About one-third of the new cases in the last week are in the climbing number of outbreaks in 15 long-term care facilities, with hospitals and retirement homes bringing the total number up to 23 facilities as of Tuesday fighting the coronavirus. The Greater Niagara General site of Niagara Health has an

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# Public Health not consulted about vaccine distribution

**Penny Coles**  
**The Local**

The vaccine should be coming to Niagara soon, but Dr. Mustafa Hirji, the region's acting medical officer of health, is frustrated with the lack of information he's received regarding its arrival.

"I don't have any kind of dates or timeline for vaccines," he says, "but I'm hopeful it won't be too long." It's now being distributed to many parts of the Greater Toronto Area and into Hamilton, "and hopefully it will be coming here next."

In terms of how the vaccine will be rolled out across

the region, Hirji had little information earlier this week.

"We know the Pfizer vaccine will go to hospital sites, and the expectation is it will go to one of the Niagara Health sites. Niagara Health bought additional freezers last month, and has the capacity to store very large amounts of the Pfizer vaccine, should large amounts start to come here at any point."

He's not expecting those large amounts any time soon.

"I'm pretty realistic around the fact that the vaccines have just been approved. It's been less than a

month, and there hasn't been a lot of time to manufacture the vaccine. The entire world is trying to get a hold of it, so I expect there will not be a lot of it coming."

As distribution of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine began in Ontario, it was delivered to a number of hospitals in the GTA, where it could be kept at the extreme cold temperature required. Vaccinations of health care workers were occurring on-site. The Moderna vaccine doesn't require the same storage temperatures, and when it arrives, is expected to be administered first to residents of long-term care.

"We haven't heard much about the plans around the Moderna vaccine, but hopefully there will be an announcement of that coming soon," says Hirji.

The region has "sample plans" for distribution, and has had since the start of the pandemic, knowing a vaccine would come eventually, he says.

The plan includes getting the vaccine first to long-term care residents and staff.

But even more frustrating than the scarcity of information about a timeline for Hirji is the lack of involvement in discussions about the vaccine roll-out between

the provincial task group and regional Public Health, with no idea if those discussions will occur.

"There is no way to know at this point if Public Health

will have a role in the vaccine campaign," says Hirji.

"The Province has its task group in charge of

**Continued on page 5**

## Risk to long-term care begins with community cases

**Continued from page 1**

outbreak involving the entire facility, declared Dec. 10, and the St. Catharines General Site has been dealing with an outbreak in one unit since Dec. 31.

"The current situation with rising numbers (in the community) isn't good," Hirji says.

We have to wait another week, maybe two or three to see the impact of the lockdown that began Boxing Day, he says, but Hirji is also concerned about new cases as a result of Christmas gatherings.

He says we can definitely expect "a bit of a short-term worsening before we see things get better."

In Niagara, Hirji says, "we're fortunate that right now, although our hospital numbers are higher, we're not in a critical situation where we can't provide hospital care to the people who need it."

The limiting factor to hospital care, he says, is now on the staffing side. "I think we are still constrained, but we're managing. As far as I know everyone is getting the care they need."

Staffing issues are also stressing long-term care homes, he says. "In an outbreak, the need for staff increases, to continue care and do all the extra infection and prevention control measures to control the outbreak. But what actually happens is maybe staff members are out sick, or have been in high-risk contact with people who are sick, and are not able to work, and need to be isolated. Long-term care homes really struggle with having the staff to provide the care that's needed,

and it becomes harder to control the outbreak. When they don't have the staff to control the outbreak, it spreads and makes the problem more difficult. It becomes a vicious cycle, with staff exhausted, and long-term care homes struggling with that issue."

In the early stages of the pandemic, it quickly became obvious that having staff move from one long-term care home to another, which was standard practice, was causing virus spread. There was a stop put to that, but now, with staff shortages, "in some cases, it does happen," says Hirji.

Facilities need to reach out to agencies for temporary staffing, and those people might be moving from one home to another, providing critical staffing.

That also applies to health-care workers who provide specialized services, including primary physicians, who go into multiple long-term care homes, he adds.

"Our first line of defence in keeping outbreaks out of the homes, is to reduce the number of cases in the community. That's the first thing that needs to happen. All of us need to do the hard work of the shutdown, do what we're supposed to do, and stop interaction between people. That's what we have to do to protect long-term care homes," says Hirji.

Additional staffing would be helpful, "but I don't hold out a lot of hope for that." The shortage extends across the province, and staff available to work in long-term care homes "are all tapped out," he says.


"Getting the vaccine to Niagara in the next few weeks, for staff, visitors and residents of long-term care homes, will also prevent outbreaks and will be a great game-changer."

Causes of new cases are similar to recent weeks. In addition to the long-term care homes, there has been a lot of spread within households, a few more cases of family gatherings in the lead-up to Christmas, and some cases within workplaces, says Hirji.

In NOTL, the cases this Tuesday were up to 110, with 26 new cases in two weeks. The outbreak in Niagara Long Term Care declared Saturday "is part of the story," he says.

In the last two weeks, there have been several cases in NOTL households, family gatherings and meeting with friends.

Also, there are a few cases in NOTL linked to work or visits outside the community, he says.




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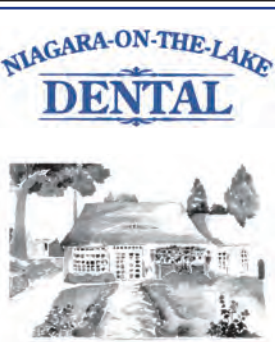
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# Fiery van crash one of most difficult calls

Continued from page 1

2004 fiery church van crash into the barriers in front of the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge toll booth. Three people, including the driver and two passengers, were killed.

The carnage, says Hernder, was the worst he has ever seen.

The van was carrying members of a Bronx church group home, after they had attended a conference in Toronto.

"That's one that stays in your mind," he says.

There is not much to be done about memories like that, Hernder says, but he believes he's fortunate in the way he deals with some of the more horrific incidents he's encountered on the job, although the department offers help to all firefighters now.

"I seem to be able to find a spot in my head and keep them inside," he says.

"It also helps to recap what happened when you're back at the hall, maybe have a beer. And then you put it behind you."

Niagara-on-the-Lake, with its volunteer department is "one little town like every little town in Ontario. We do what we can to help the citizens in our

community."

From the most gruesome situation he's encountered, Hernder switches to something less serious, and slightly humorous.

He recalls being called to a fire at Private Eyes, and when firefighters entered, the place was thick with black smoke. When they traced the cause of the smoke, it was a "golden horseshoe" that turned out to be a plastic toilet seat on a wall that someone had set on fire.

As they walked through the main room of the lounge, women continued performing, and men continued watching, not seemingly bothered by the heavy smoke or the men in their gear with their heavy equipment. "It was like they thought it was all part of the act."

One of the hardest parts of the job has been the many motor vehicle collisions firefighters are called to, never knowing what they will find when they get there.

In a small community, it may be a family member, a friend, or a relative of a friend.

Hernder says he's seen firefighters face all those situations. "It's part of the job," he says. "Your initial reaction is to take care of what's happening, then

you realize, "it is who I thought it was. Not only do you have a victim right in front of you, but it's someone you know." Having that happen even once in a career as a firefighter "would be too many times," he says.

On his list of calls he mentions the hazardous material spills they've cleaned up, bomb threats, an incident with a truck carrying nuclear detonators which closed the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge, a plane crash, and several Bruce Trail and Niagara Gorge rescues.

As Hernder faces a new year with his pager silent, he says he won't mind not being woken up at 3 a.m. Cindy tells him she

won't know what to do with him on Monday nights, when he's usually at the station for training sessions. She has always supported him, and although he's been called away from many family occasions, he knows she's proud of his role as a firefighter.

"The fire department is in a good position, with new recruits coming up. If someone's thinking of joining, don't be afraid. When things go back to normal, walk up to a fire hall on a Monday night and open the door," he says. "People will talk to you and tell you what it's like. It's a great way to give back to your community."

Hernder says retiring is bittersweet. "I have 38 years of

knowledge and training, but others have to move up the ladder. I've had a good run and some fun times. It's time for others to take over."

The association at the hall is strong, he says, and he looks forward to post-COVID, when social gatherings and fundraisers are permitted.

His concern is that community events will change as well, if the Queenston firehall is closed. He also worries for the safety of villagers and those living nearby.

The station was built in 1947 because there were too many local tragedies that occurred due to the slow response time of firefighters coming from further

away, he says.

"Now here we are years later, thinking about closing or amalgamating it. I just hope history doesn't repeat itself."

He understands the stations are old and run down, he adds, "but you don't need a Taj Mahal to park fire trucks in."

Firefighters from all five stations work as a team, and that won't change if two stations are amalgamated, which might make sense economically, he says, "but the station in Queenston is more than a station. It's where the community comes together for all kinds of events. Taking away the station will take a little bit of heart out of the village."



Ken Hernder dealt with a lot more than fires in almost four decades on the job as a volunteer firefighter, as do all volunteers serving the community. (Crispin Bottomley)

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# Save money on electricity while you can

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro customers are now paying a lower, off-peak electricity rate of 8.5 cents per kilowatt hour, whether they are currently time-of-use or tiered customers.

The lower rate went into effect Jan. 1 and lasts for 28 days.

The decrease in rates was intended as assistance to those in Ontario staying home during the COVID-19 shutdown, says NOTL Hydro president Tim Curtis.

That reduction will be reflected in the February hydro

bill, he says. After Jan. 28, customers will go back to their time-of-use or tiered rate.

The 8.5 cents/kWh hour is equal to the off-peak rate for time-of-use customers, as set by the Ontario Energy Board.

The tiered rates in December were set at 12.6 and 14.6 cents/kWh.

The new rates for Jan. 29 to May 1 are after the government decided to bear the excess costs of the Green Energy Act. "The rates are lower," explains Curtis, "but the rebate is also lower, so the net result will be minimal."

For larger businesses that did not previously get the rebate, and are not being given

a lower rate, the effect will be a significant reduction in cost, says Curtis. That's a move he praises. NOTL Hydro has been calling for many years to remove these costs from all electricity ratepayers and to treat all business customers as fairly as residential customers, he says.

On May 1, the tiered and time-of-use rates are meant to be reset. "Anybody who made a decision with regards to getting the tiered or time-of-use rates should re-evaluate at that time," says Curtis.

"Given recent history, it would not surprise me if we have other changes between now and May 1, 2021, but

I have no more knowledge than your readers as to this."

The Ontario plan to reduce costs to the consumer does not decrease the cost of producing electricity in Ontario. It simply transfers the cost from ratepayers to taxpayers, says Curtis.

"The cost of producing the electricity has not gone away. Any time the prices are lower than the cost is a subsidy, and that is borne by the taxpayer."

However, he adds, there is a benefit of lowering electricity rates in a time like this. "Most everyone has to pay for electricity, either directly or as part of their rent. They also have to pay it every

month. Reducing the cost of electricity is an effective way of getting money in the hands of most Ontarians quickly,

by reducing their current costs. Proportionally, it also provides a bigger benefit to those less well off."



Tim Curtis, president of NOTL Hydro (Photo supplied)

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# Bail revoked, Jimmy Lai's back in prison

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

A grueling year for Jimmy Lai has not ended well for him.

The owner of Apple Daily, a media outlet openly critical of the Chinese Communist Party, is back in jail, his bail from a December arrest revoked Dec. 31.

The media tycoon, with close family and business ties to Niagara-on-the-Lake, was out on bail earlier this year, and arrested again on Aug. 10, taken from his home in Hong Kong. Granted bail from that arrest, he remained free until Dec. 2, when he was arrested again. Although allowed bail on Dec. 23, he was ordered back to prison on Dec. 31, after the government's appeal to his release.

An Associated Press account of his return to prison said it was argued that the judge's decision to grant bail could have been erroneous, and therefore invalid.

Hong Kong judiciary had said he was granted bail because there was no flight risk, and that Lai was willing to have his movements monitored.

A pro-democracy activist who has taken to the streets in protest, Lai's most

recent charges have been for allegedly violating the lease terms for office space for the Next Digital, the media company he founded, and under the new national security law, of suspicion of colluding with foreign forces and endangering national security.

Associated Press reports his bail conditions included surrendering his travel documents and a ban on meeting with foreign officials, publishing articles on any media, posting on social media and giving interviews.

Lai had recently resigned as chairman and executive director of Next Digital, which runs his Apple Daily newspaper, "to spend more time dealing with these personal affairs," the Associated Press reports.

Lai is the owner of Vintage Hotels, which includes the Pillar and Post, the first hotel to be taken over and managed for a time by his twin sister, Si Wai Lai, a Niagara-on-the-Lake resident. Vintage Hotels also includes the Prince of Wales, Queen's Landing, and other properties in NOTL and Ontario.

Si Wai now runs the Oban Inn, also owned by her brother.

Lai has been known

to have visited Niagara-on-the-Lake with his family often, and has been described by his NOTL family as a kind man, a calm person, and passionate about his beliefs.

About his most recent arrest, his niece Erica Lepp says, "we're of course praying for my uncle every day."

Lai was chosen one of Time Magazine's top 100 influential people in 2015.

In December 2020, Lai was given a Freedom of Press Award by Reporters Without Borders for his role in founding Apple Daily.



Jimmy Lai walks through the streets of Hong Kong in the rain during a protest in 2019. (Screenshot)

## Province 'reinventing the wheel'

Continued from page 2

vaccinations, and doesn't have anybody with a public health background on it." He doesn't know if Niagara Region Public Health will be given any responsibility for administering doses locally. "We just need to be given the vaccine so we can start to use our plan."

Niagara Health has put together a committee, has started planning for the Pfizer vaccine, and has involved Public Health in those discussions, he says.

He sees the lack of involvement with Public Health departments across the province as one reason the distribution and administration of the vaccine are lagging far behind what was expected.

"There has been a lot of talk about how slow rolling out the vaccines has been in the parts of the province that do have it. They're trying to run a vaccination program, and not using the existing infrastructure we have for a vaccine, which is of course through Public Health. That

is really frustrating."

The areas of the province that have the vaccine "could be getting it out much more quickly, getting it to long-term care homes where people are sadly dying, and it's all slowed down because the Province, instead of using existing infrastructures channels, has decided to reinvent the wheel and do something completely different.

That's where I feel the frustration. It doesn't make sense why the Province hasn't even spoken to us."

The Province "really hasn't engaged with Public Health at all through this pandemic, going back to mid-January when we were first learning about it and wanted to know how to detect it in Niagara. Hospitals were initially to report COVID cases to the Province, "rather than giving the role to us so we could see if it was in hospitals or the communities. Eventually we started doing that. But at many different stages, they haven't involved us as much as I think they could have."

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# EDITORIAL

## We're almost there, but we need to pull together

We may be entering the toughest months of this pandemic. The news is not good, with numbers rising in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in the region and across the province.

And depending on how many people didn't stay home and do what they were supposed to do over the holidays — in addition to the politician we know broke the rules — we might be in for a bumpy ride before we start to see that downward slope we're waiting for, possibly even until the arrival of the vaccines in Niagara, which could take awhile.

Thanks to all of you who did make sacrifices over the holidays. It wasn't easy, and there may have been a few tears in some households, but we're already almost two weeks into this lockdown, and we'll get through it, hopefully with good news at the end.

The really heart-breaking news is that COVID is now in one of our local long-term care homes, and is also increasing in facilities across the region. All health care providers,

and all staff at these places have already been through so much. They know what they have to do, and we can be sure they're doing their best. But they're overworked, exhausted, burned out, and must feel the weight of the world on their shoulders. At work, they're rushed off their feet keeping their patients and residents as safe as possible, and then they go home to their family, also concerned about keeping them healthy.

If we want to make their job easier, and prevent more deaths of vulnerable seniors in their care, we have to do our part. It may be hard for some to make the connection between staying home with only those in your household, and saving the life of someone you don't know who is in long-term care, but we're assured that connection is the contributing factor between the increase in cases. If we don't contain the spread within our community, we put others at greater risk, and that's on us.

We tend to think about the elderly as the vulnera-

ble in our society, and this disease is certainly toughest on them. However, the vulnerable sector includes people of all ages. We need to remember there are special needs children, people fighting cancer, people with all kinds of issues, including mental health problems. There are many reasons why people are vulnerable, and need our protection.

It may be tough, we may be tired of following rules, but it's not for much longer, and maybe this time we break the back of this disease for good.

This may seem like a contradiction, but it isn't. We all have to eat, we need groceries and essential services, and need to support our restaurants and businesses every opportunity we get. The owners of our local businesses are also exhausted, and worried about whether they will survive another lockdown. They have worked so hard to keep their heads above water, finding ways to stay open on some level legally and safely, and it's not over yet for them. This month is just the beginning of a re-

newed struggle they hoped they had put behind them.

If there is anything you need, anything you can get close to home, feeling safe,

either with curbside pick-up, delivery, or cautious in-store shopping, please think local first.

We can see the finish

line, and if we work together, we'll reach it together.

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

## Gates pushes for long-term care reform



**Wayne Gates, MPP**  
**Niagara Falls riding**  
**Special to The Local**

Long-term care is a humanitarian crisis, in our community and in this country.

As awful as it is to read about the outbreaks, we cannot turn away from the facts: seniors are being forced to cry out and to beg for food and water, while they're left vulnerable to deadly infection. Loved ones are dying in long-term care — with more outbreaks than we saw even at the height of the first wave.

As with all governmental policy during COVID-19, I remain as open as possible to working with our Premier and providing a united front against this virus, but on the file of long-term care, Doug Ford has failed our province. Ford has had 10 months to prepare for a second wave of COVID-19, and yet our long-term care homes are even more at risk than during the first wave. Today there are more outbreaks in these homes than at any point during this public health crisis.

When we began to call on the minister of long-term care, Merrilee Fullerton, to provide immediate staffing supports to Oakwood Lodge in Niagara Falls, where more than 200 staff and patients were COVID-19 positive in the 153-person home, she waited more than a week before taking action. There were

promises of Red Cross intervention and supports that never came. COVID-19 waits for no one, and every day staff and resources weren't dispatched, lives were put at risk. Every day we wait for a vaccine plan that should have been rolled out months ago, lives are at risk. These are not faceless seniors, these are our parents and grandparents. They are the neighbours who built this community, and who deserve to live their twilight years in it.

Do you know what Doug Ford used the 10 months in between the COVID-19 waves to do? He focused on ramming through legislation which provided legal protection to private long-term care homes so families of the deceased and abused would find it almost impossible to hold them accountable in courts. Despite the bombshell Toronto Star report which showed more seniors died in these facilities than in public ones, and despite a rare leak from our Canadian military that blew the whistle on the abuses in these homes, Ford jumped to protect them legally. Who are they, you might ask? They're faces we're all too familiar with, such as former PC Premiers Mike Harris, Ernie Eves and Bill Davis who all sit on the boards of these long-term care homes. After Ford passed this disdainful legislation, he then moved to close our provincial parliament until February. This is why my NDP colleagues and I have requested that Parliament be immediately reconvened, so we can take emergency action on the COVID-19 humanitarian

crisis in long-term care.

The Ford government has taken steps to shut down the Province's long-term care commission, which was set to release a report in April on the state of these homes. When so many of us know a family member in our community who has lost a loved one in these private homes, it's hard not to feel anger when you see Ford's priorities. When so many of us read the Canadian military report that described the abusive conditions our seniors were living in, it's hard to understand why these private home operators are not being held accountable.

Since this crisis began, 2008 loved ones have died in long-term care. Our nation holds the unenviable record of the most COVID deaths in these institutions in the world. The for-profit providers who are responsible for this must be held to account, and where necessary brought to justice. The commission must be allowed to do its work even if it means revealing even more harrowing details about the state of Ontario's long-term care. It is time to put an end to covering for anyone who had a hand in this.

I am calling for the legislature to be immediately reconvened so we can disperse emergency aid to save seniors' lives, get staffing supports to long-term care, including from the military if necessary, put in place a plan to rid ourselves of this abusive system, and build a system that puts our loved ones' lives and well-being above profits.

This is a crisis, and it requires a crisis-like response. The dithering must stop.



## View from the couch

**Donald Combe**  
Special to The Local

I was serendipitously led to Bella Brown's fantasy world in the film *This Beautiful Fantastic* (Prime, 2016), but was soon mesmerized as she struggled

to create a garden to save her soul. Bella achieved the impossible. With the help of her fairy godfather, she created a garden and found a prince charming and they lived happily ever after. I firmly believe in fairy tales.

*Donald Combe is a re-*

*tired 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 Netflix series and movies for The Local.*



## Letters! We want letters!

If you have a letter to the editor you'd like to see published, please send it to [penny@notllocal.com](mailto:penny@notllocal.com). Please try to keep it to about 350 words. Sorry, but we won't publish anonymous letters. And please stick to the issue at hand, rather than attacking those involved. The deadline is Monday at noon.

## The Niagara-on-the-Lake

# LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community

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# COMMENT

## Online learning a challenge, but there are tips to make it easier



**Mike Balsom**  
Special to The Local

When I am asked about teaching remotely during a pandemic, my mind often drifts back to an old television commercial for the snack mix Bits & Bites. It featured a smooth-talking backyard neighbour, explaining how every time he reached into the bag to pull out a handful of goodies he'd end up with "whole new ballgame."

Since March, that is exactly what teachers and students have been facing at all levels of education, from primary grades all the way up to university and college. Remote learning is indeed a whole new way of doing things, to which many on both sides of the equation have had to adjust.

This is not to suggest that the rest of society has not faced similar difficulties. My heart goes out to those whose jobs and incomes have been interrupted by COVID-19, especially as we experience this second wave of the virus and another lockdown.

But education, for a number of reasons, seems to invoke opinions on both sides of the coin. On Monday, as students of the District School Board of Niagara and Niagara

District Catholic returned to fully online learning, a phone-in discussion on a local radio station revealed many parents upset with having their children stuck at home rather than back in class after the two-week break.

I don't think I am saying anything controversial by claiming that online learning is not for everyone. I can also claim the same about online teaching. As a high school teacher with the DSBN, I could have taken the plunge into becoming an online teacher years ago, but opted against that. I know that my strengths lie in connecting with students in the classroom, not over fibre optics.

As well, when September started, teachers across the province had to learn to adjust to the whole new ballgame of cohorts. At DSBN secondary schools, that means one class a day, first on a two-week rotation, then on a one-week rotation, with two separate groups in class on different days, while also having to manage and teach those students who opted not to physically return to the buildings for valid reasons. And of course, we all wear masks all day, which constantly slip down below our noses as we try to project our voices to the back of the room. Try figuring out whether or not a teenager is understanding your lesson when all you can see is their eyes.

My colleagues in the elementary grades face similar stresses, and many report feeling completely burned out this year like never before. Many secondary school teachers spend their evenings developing lessons they can deliver synchronously to students both in class and at home. And during my recent conversation with university professor Joseph Brown, he discussed the problems and challenges that he faces teaching online, from the lack of energy from the students to the inability to sufficiently implement interventions.

Not surprisingly, mental health has been a big focus during the pandemic as well. A recent article in the St. Catharines Standard focused on the DSBN's mental health team, and the efforts they have put forward to support students during this difficult time. The gist of things is that no one really knows what the long range effects of the pandemic will be on students once things are closer to normal.

Nevertheless, this is the situation in which we find ourselves. Believe it or not, there are ways to get the most out of it from a student's perspective. And parents of students of all ages can encourage their children to use some of these suggestions.

- Be sure your child is on a set schedule for remote learning.

Much of this will be decided by the teacher, but be sure to stick to a schedule.

- If possible, find a spot somewhere in the house that will be conducive to online learning, an area with few distractions. It's probably best that they are sitting at a table or desk to provide the same type of in-class experience they would likely have at school.
- Parents need to be present and involved in their child's learning as much as they

can. Ask questions at the end of the day and check on their mental health.

- When the learning sessions are over, try to encourage them to move, to have some kind of physical activity, to get outside and do something they enjoy doing. Encourage them to step away from the screens for any break time that is scheduled in the day.
- Reach out to your child's teacher if you are experiencing difficulties. Trust me,

the teachers want to hear from you.

As a father of a student who graduates from Laura Secord this June, and another who is studying remotely at Niagara College, I can relate to the difficulties many parents are facing to keep their children motivated and on track without attending school. My message to you all is hang in there, there's light on the horizon with the vaccine coming soon. We'll be back to the old ballgame one day before we even expect it.

## LETTERS

### We should be alarmed by changes to Conservation Authority legislation

Re: Changes to Conservation Authority legislation a concern, (NOTL Local, Dec. 31):

After reading this article, I am compelled to comment further.

Ontarians have not seen this level of abuse of power since the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris cut provincial funding to Conservation Authorities by 70 per cent in the mid-90s, for downloading that funding responsibility to municipalities

without corresponding funding support.

With the passing of Bill 229, here is the issue: The Ford government buried these damaging changes to the Conservation Authorities Act within the omnibus provincial budget bill. It had nothing to do with the provincial budget and it absolved the government from first posting this on the Environmental Bill of Rights for commenting and input, which is required under provincial

legislation.

This is clearly an abuse of power based on political will rather than proven science, and from a local perspective, could lead to unwanted development in Niagara-on-the-Lake by way of Ministers Zoning Orders (MZOs).

We should all be alarmed at these abuses by this and the previous PC governments.

**Steve Hardaker**  
NOTL

### Shop local, not loco

During COVID times, we all had the opportunity of doing home improvements, whether it be plumbing, yard work etc. Those who are handy do it themselves. Those who are not call the experts.

My personal objective was simple: look for a local advertiser and choose and support local business. This I did!

All appeared fine but being under the COVID spell, I accepted a verbal quote for work to be

done in my home. I am penning this note to remind everyone to get a work contract in writing. I knew better than to accept a verbal agreement, but blindly relied and trusted my chosen local expert. In hindsight, a reputable company would have automatically issued a written agreement for both parties to be reviewed and signed. What was agreed upon verbally was never completed, and full payment was still expected.

What transpired due to not having a written contract led to a lien on my property and lawyer litigation.

Just a reminder to all of us that times are different today, and unfortunately not every business practises honesty and integrity. Save yourself a headache and get everything in writing!

Be smart and be safe.

**Raquel Bignucolo**  
St. Davids

### Why only one mailbox?

We've had the occasional problem with mailboxes. I mean, some yobos armed with a baseball bat and drunken loud intention, but why did you take our mailbox and only ours?

I don't know if I should be flattered or insulted. In either

case, I am inconvenienced. Would you like to return it? You might even put it back on its post.

Do young people make amends nowadays? I am assuming it was a young person. If an older person, then I guess

he/she has a problem and I should extend a little sympathy.

Anyway, whoever the person, or whatever the age, I would like it back . . . please!

**Cynthia Rand**  
1278 Line 2

### Ring in 2021



The Gretzky Estate Winery was this year's location chosen for CBC's New Year's Eve show, broadcast to millions of viewers across the country. The local portion of the event was recorded Dec. 29, 30 and 31, with the pre-recorded performers from all corners appearing on-camera for the show, hosted by comedian Rick Mercer.



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# Community mourns heritage preservationist Michael Howe

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Losing a well-fought battle with leukemia, long-time resident Michael Howe died peacefully at Hospice Niagara Tuesday, Dec. 29, at the age of 74.

In his final days in hospice care, from Christmas Eve on, says his wife Marsha, she was able to be with him around the clock.

Although the pandemic means she came home to an empty house she had shared with Michael for the last 20 years, with not even their son, Chris, able to travel from his Alberta home, Marsha says, “there is not a corner of the house, or in my being, that he’s not with me now.”

The couple met “on the streets of Niagara-on-the-Lake,” and became childhood sweethearts when she was 14 and Michael was 16.

When she says they met on the streets of town, she is referring to her childhood, and Michael’s, during a time when couples of the post-war era, raising kids during the 50s and 60s, met often for dinner and socializing, the kids playing outdoors.

Both Marsha, whose family in Niagara goes back generations, and Michael, whose parents Margherita and Norm moved here to raise their four children, were part of that group of kids.

They both went to Niag-

ara District Secondary School, and then away to university — Michael to Queen’s University, graduating in 1968 with a business degree and a Masters in business administration, Marsha to nursing school. They married in 1974.

He is known best in Niagara-on-the-Lake for his love of the community and its heritage, and was president of the Niagara Foundation. His father Norm was one of the founders, his mother Margherita a founding member of the NOTL Conservancy, so his dedication to heritage preservation came naturally, says Marsha. “They absolutely passed it on to Michael. He and Norm were close, really good with one another as father and son. I could see Norm passing that on to him.”

“Michael’s love of the community, and love of heritage, was bred in the bone,” agrees Niagara Foundation vice-president Brad Nixon.

“He had a natural, nuanced understanding of the community, and provided consummate leadership for the Niagara Foundation.”

His leadership was always provided in a quiet manner, “and often took care of details that might have otherwise been dropped,” such as keeping in touch with people.

Despite his busy schedule of travelling for work, “he was always able to pick up on foundation business and

move forward,” says Nixon.

He was thoughtful when weighing development proposals, would consider the consequences, and come up with an opinion which he would share, but never in an autocratic manner. “He was very much a consensual, collegial leader.”

In recent years, he was most concerned about the Wilderness, a King Street property with natural and built heritage the foundation is in the process of purchasing, changes on Queen Street, and extensive residential development he believed to be inconsistent with the style and heritage of the town, says Nixon, and had a very broad range of interests, consistent with the mandate of the foundation.

Michael, adds Nixon, was “observant, intelligent, and very witty. He sometimes didn’t suffer fools gladly. He was also compassionate, although that wasn’t something he wore on his sleeve.”

Nixon describes him as “socially progressive, in a quiet way.” Although the inner person was quiet, “he loved to party,” especially a local party with people from the community.

“There is no doubt his home was here. This is where his heart was,” says Nixon.

“We’re going to miss him. He was a good friend to all of us, and to the community.”

Michael’s career was spent with KPMG as a chartered accountant, and he



Michael and Marsha Howe visited an Owen Sound cottage in the fall, their last getaway together. (Photo supplied)

continued working until November, throughout his treatment. His expertise in risk management became known internationally, and he had travelled extensively, working most recently for KPMG in their offshore practice in Bermuda and the Cayman Islands, says Marsha.

He had retired at the age of 64, Marsha says, and worked for the Pan Am Games being held in Toronto in 2015, also in risk management, before agreeing to taking on more KPMG projects.

Marsha says they travelled together frequently, especially to Italy, where her sister lives.

It was there, in September, 2019, that she noticed Michael experiencing a shortness of breath during a hike in Capri, that was new for him.

“We’d been going there for eight or nine years, and this was different.”

Back at home in November, Michael underwent a vigorous medical investigation, and “there were all kinds of red flags,” she says, including low counts of red and white blood cells, and an absence of platelets, that meant he wasn’t getting enough oxygen.

He was diagnosed on Christmas Eve, 2019, with MDS, or Myelodysplastic syndrome, sometimes referred to as pre-leukemia.

After two months of chemotherapy at the Walker Cancer Centre, there was no improvement, says Marsha, and they were told Michael’s disease had progressed to leukemia, and would be very difficult to cure.

Marsha began driving him to the Juravinski Cancer Centre in Hamilton for treatment around the end of March, she says, just as COVID had shut everything down.

“I never even met his doctor,” she says. “I would drive him there for his appointment, and sit outside in the parking lot, in the extreme heat of the summer, while Michael went through all his treatments on his own.”

During that time, she says, “he was doing okay. We were walking, and he was a little slower than usual, but he looked okay. But he wasn’t getting a good remission.”

Marsha says the events of the last year brought them closer together than they had ever been. They had time to talk, “and we went through this together. Nobody else understood the disease. And Michael never stopped hoping for remission.”

His doctor suggested a new drug, and had enrolled him in a clinical trial at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto, but Michael became too ill, she says.

“He was so accepting of it. He did whatever he was

told, and just kept hoping for the best.”

They had a last getaway together after Thanksgiving, to a friend’s cottage in Owen Sound, but after that, he developed a fever, and was hospitalized.

“I can’t tell you the amount of chemicals and medication he received. It was absolutely overwhelming,” says Marsha.

She stayed with him, and as a registered nurse, became his primary caregiver throughout both his stay in the hospital and hospice, along with staff in full masks and gowns. She was the only visitor he had.

Being both a Leo and an A-type personality, Michael didn’t want company as he declined — he was a proud and private man, says Marsha.

One memory of her long-time companion makes her chuckle.

“He was always so nattily dressed. He’d come down the stairs ready to go out, and Margherita would say, ‘you look like you just stepped out of a bandbox,’ an old expression that means spotless and neatly pressed, which he was, she says. “That was something he enjoyed.”

With only 10 people now allowed at a funeral service, Marsha says the family is instead hoping to have a larger, outdoor gathering this summer.

## Town offers help with long-term care outbreak

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Lord Mayor Betty Disero says she was saddened to hear about an outbreak at Niagara Long Term Care Residence on Wellington Street in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

“They have been so successful keeping the virus out for almost a year,” she says.

“Now, with all the variants showing up, it’s making the disease even more contagious.”

As the numbers of COVID cases increase in long-term care facilities, she says, “it seems like they’re trying to bail water out of

a boat that’s sinking. They can’t keep up with it.”

On Tuesday, the 124-bed residence was reporting two staff members and two residents infected. The staff members were asymptomatic, and self-isolating at home.

“My heart breaks for them. They’ve worked so hard, and just as we start to see a vaccine in sight, they get their first outbreak. It’s just awful. They were so close to being infection-free.”

All three NOTL long-term care homes have managed to keep COVID at bay, with this the first in town to have an outbreak.

The Town’s Emergency

Control Group has been in touch with Public Health, and has offered to be available to help out in any way they can, says Disero.

“It must be so difficult for them,” says Disero. “I’m sure they are taking every precaution to prevent infection from spreading, and keep their residents and staff safe. We’ll do anything we can to help.”

With the numbers going up in the community and across the region, she says, to keep people safe in long-term care, the rest of us have to be vigilant. “Wear a mask, keep a distance, wash your hands, and stay within your own households.”



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# High school student looks at education changes

**Janvi Ganatra**  
Grade 12, A.N. Myer  
Secondary School

I have always looked forward to my senior year of high school as a significant milestone in my life. Although the pandemic has drastically changed what this year looks like, I started Grade 12 with a mix of concern, excitement and an optimistic mindset.

Deciding to enter a hybrid learning model in September meant attending in-person classes two to three days a week with proper sanitizing, social distancing and a mask. The rest of the days were virtual learning from home. The most recent province-wide lockdown has changed this learning model to completely virtual, until Jan. 25.

As much as I have enjoyed the extra hours of sleep and freedom in my schedule, virtual learning is just not the same, and

can feel endless. Missing are the structure and learning environment of a classroom, the presence of a teacher and peers, getting to see friends every day, and even the buzzing hallways and loud cafeteria at lunch.

We all understand that COVID-19 is a serious health concern. With the necessary restrictions, schools and teachers are trying their best to adapt. And I am hopeful that in this new year, we will eventually reach a new normal.

For high school seniors, this year also includes finalizing post-secondary plans, applying to schools and scholarships while maintaining good academic standing and making the most of the final year in high school. Navigating all of this is stressful in itself, not to mention the added stress of transitioning into a new learning model, isolation, dealing with day-to-day changes and the uncer-

tainty associated with a pandemic. Amidst all of this, it is essential to prioritize mental health, realizing that this year many things are out of our control, and the best thing to do is make the most of the situation at hand.

I am thrilled to continue with my school's Arts Council and NOTL's Lord Mayor's Youth Advisory Council through Zoom and Google Hangouts.

Transitioning to tutoring math online through Microsoft Teams has been a whole new experience, and joining new extracurriculars in virtual formats, such as the Junior Achievement Company Program, are a fun way to stay connected, and explore doing things while gaining valuable experiences.

Every high school student's experience in learning during this pandemic has been different. Here are the thoughts and opinions of some friends in Grades 9 and 10, who

graciously agreed to share their experience.

"I think that schools are doing their best to keep us safe and allow us to con-

tinue learning, but I will be glad when it is safe to have regular school again," says Kaitlyn Lambert, a Grade 10 Student at Eden High

School. "Students need to know how to follow safety protocols. For example,

**Continued on page 10**



Janvi Ganatra is a Grade 12 student at A.N. Myer Secondary School. (Photo supplied)



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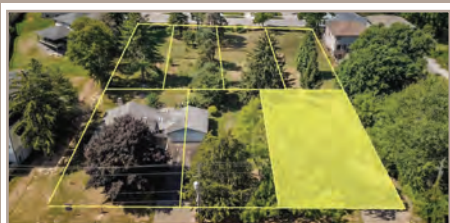
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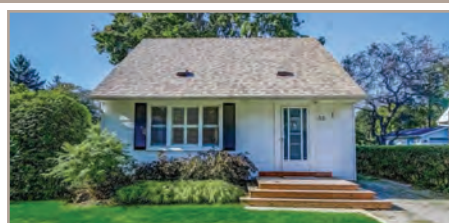
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# Students have ‘altered high school experience’

Continued from page 9

there have only been two cases (of COVID) in the entire school so far, and there has been no evidence indicating that there is a contraction of the virus from other people in the school.”

However, says Lambert, “with the amount of learning that is being done at home, it is harder to contact teachers for support, though they usually respond quickly.” Although there is online homework help, “we all miss that personal connection for better learning.”

Another challenge, says Lambert, “is that teachers are only getting a fraction of the time they usually have to teach us, so the courses and material are very sped up, meaning that certain things that would usually be taught are skipped to make time

for other lessons.”

It’s hard to catch up on missed work, she says, because of this speed and large volume of homework and assignments. “Though things are not ideal, by adhering to safety guidelines and such we can keep safe, get schools and other places functioning normally again, and we’ll at least reach the ‘new normal.’”

Maisie Harrison, a Grade 9 Student at A.N. Myer Secondary School, says, “this school year isn’t just about adapting to mask-wearing and regularly washing my hands, but finding my way around a new school.”

The teachers at Myer have been accommodating to every student’s needs in class, and online as well, she says.

“Despite a global pandemic, I have also been able to make new friends, and have an altered ver-

sion of a proper high school experience. I am still involved in clubs, like Myer’s Art Council. Even

though we are not meeting in person, we all still have so much fun making plans for future events. I know

that my Grade 10 year, no matter what restrictions Niagara is under, will be great. I have faith that my school will have the necessary support for me to succeed in my courses and enjoy my time at Myer.”



Kaitlyn Lambert is a Grade 10 Student at Eden High School. (Photos submitted)



Maisie Harrison is a Grade 9 Student at A.N. Myer Secondary School.



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Fish, our famous crispy fries and coleslaw!

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Include your Logo! Prices starting at \$20.  
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Call Karen 905-641-5335  
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Across:

1 Opposite of neither  
5 Protect  
10 “Four and twenty blackbirds baked in ---”  
14 On the ocean  
15 Publish  
16 Route  
17 Via  
18 Serviced  
20 Cotton Club setting  
22 Jamboree  
23 Up  
25 Intelligence agency  
26 Not traded on a stock exchange  
28 Top guns  
30 Ethnic  
35 In favor  
36 Adeptness  
38 State animal of Maine  
39 The Sultan of Swat  
41 Talent seeker  
43 Shuttle operator  
44 Behaved  
46 Wished  
48 Beat  
49 Accidental dive  
51 Feeble  
52 Some foreign Government heads  
53 Except  
55 Comic --- Martin  
57 Light metal  
62 Knuckleheads  
65 Suspension  
67 Duration  
68 First to die in the Bible  
69 Untrue  
70 Egyptian dancing girl  
71 Dabbling duck  
72 Absquatulates  
73 Drip slowly

Down:

1 Tub  
2 Workplace regulation agency  
3 Unglazed brownish-red earthenware  
4 Pulls  
5 Ingenious sales devices  
6 World’s largest economy  
7 Expression of incredulity  
8 Scrap  
9 Despise  
10 Parched  
11 Small lake  
12 U N nuclear watchdog  
13 Swirl  
19 Warning signal  
21 Touchdown forecasts  
24 German state  
26 O founder  
27 Temporary peace  
29 Single-masted sailboat  
31 Electrically charged particle  
32 Maritime refugees  
33 Tea-growing Indian state  
34 Inclines  
37 Southern hemisphere constellation  
40 “He’d make a lovely corpse”  
(Dickens: “Martin Chuzzlewit”)  
42 1,000%  
45 Kind of card  
47 Artificially-colored  
50 Went on the lam  
54 Like Mayberry  
56 Travel stamps  
57 “I --- my wit’s end”  
58 Projecting part of the brain  
59 Common fertilizer ingredient  
60 Shopping center  
61 Height of Denver  
63 Dull  
64 Sudden  
66 Employ

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
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68					69						70			
71					72						73			

LOCAL WORSHIP

CORNERSTONE  
COMMUNITY CHURCH

Sunday, January 10<sup>th</sup>

Online Only  
10 a.m. Worship

Speaker:  
Kevin Bayne

Message:  
A Gospel Identity

Please be advised that with the current state of COVID-19, your safety is of utmost importance to us. We will now be live streaming our service at 10:00 a.m. on Sundays.

www.ccchurch.ca

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Down:

1 Bath, 2 O S H A, 3 Terracotta, 4 Halls, 5 Glimicks, 6 U S A, 7 As if, 8 Run-in, 9 Detest, 10 Arid, 11 Pond, 12 I A E A, 13 Eddy, 19 Alarm, 21 E T A S, 24 Reich, 26 Oprah, 27 Truce, 29 Sloop, 31 Ion, 32 Boat people, 33 Assam, 34 Leans, 37 Lupus, 40 He'd, 42 Ten times, 45 Debt, 47 Rural off, 54 Rural, 56 Vises, 57 Am at, 58 Lobe, 59 Urea, 60 Mail, 61 Mile, 63 Tame, 64 Snap, 66 Use.

Across:

1 Both, 5 Guard, 10 A pie, 14 Asea, 15 Issue, 16 Road, 17 Thru, 18 Maintained, 20 Harlem, 22 Field day, 23 Astir, 25 N S A, 26 O T C, 28 Aces, 30 Tribal, 35 Pro, 36 Skill, 38 Moose, 39 Ruth, 41 Scout, 43 N A S A, 44 Acted, 46 Hoped, 48 Tan, 49 Header, 51 Puny, 52 P Ms, 53 Bar, 55 Steve, 57 Aluminum, 62 Idiots, 65 Moratorium, 67 Span, 68 Abel, 69 False, 70 Alma, 71 Teal, 72 Flees, 73 Seep.



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OBITUARY



**KATHARINA (SCHMIDT) EWERT 1936-2020**—Katharina Ewert passed away to be with Jesus on December 30, 2020, in her 84th year. She is predeceased by her husband Cornelius Ewert (1925-1999) and her siblings Nick, Mary, Henry, Jake and Dave. Survived by Annie Ewert and John (Carol) Schmidt.

Katharina was born in Leamington, Ontario to Nikolai and Helena (Martens) Schmidt in 1936, persevering despite dire circumstances at birth. She was Tina to her family and Katy to her school mates.

Dearly loved mother of Ken (Rebecca) Ewert, Bob (Sylvia) Ewert, Judy (Wulf) Giesbrecht, Lynda (Ed) Giesbrecht and Susan Ewert (Steve Kelly). Grandmother and Oma to Rachael (Paul) Weber, Sarah (Miguel) Johnson, Kenny (Eden) Ewert, Julia (Jason) Doffin, Naomi (Andrew) Schricker, Becky (Atlee) Jones, Joshua (Becky) Giesbrecht, Katelyn Giesbrecht, Breanne (Niko) Schellenberg, Virginia Giesbrecht, Paige (Ali) Esfahani, Holly (Matt) Hanigan and Jada Ewert. Great-grandmother and Oma to Noah, Thomas, Isabella, Mikayla, Kenzie, Frankie, Louie, Liam, Zander, Jazlyn, Wrigley, Hailey, Paityn, Camden, Charlie, and Sylvie.

Katy with her family attended Dunnville Mennonite Church where her father was pastor, then Bethany United Mennonite Church in Virgil. She pioneered and volunteered at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Ten Thousand Villages Store from 1984-2010. Katy was the cornerstone to a large family and a pillar in her church and community. She was a farmer, factory worker, committee leader, volunteer, Sunday school teacher, prayer warrior, school bus driver, quilt maker, baseball cheerer and travel companion. She loved to read, play table games and visit. She sewed many quilts for her family, cooked wonderful meals and baked delicious desserts. She will forever be warmly remembered in our hearts.

Private family service to be held at Tallman Funeral Homes and Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers we ask for donations to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

**GREAVES, WILLIAM - AUGUST 19, 1945 - DECEMBER 29, 2020**—It is with a heavy heart that we share the news of Bill passing away peacefully in his sleep in Thunder Bay, Ontario where he was awaiting a return to Florida for the winter. Bill, once involved in the family jam business, followed his passion of racing horses for many years in Fort Erie. He retired in 2008 and enjoyed winters in Florida, fishing and his grandchildren.

Son of the late William Greaves and Lillian Maud Parker and predeceased by his sister MaryAnn Greaves, he leaves to mourn Judith (nee Grierson) his wife and best friend, as well as his sons Billy (Jessica) and Jason (Lynn). He was the proud grandfather of William and David, and Victoria and Eliza. He will be fondly remembered by cousins David, Robert, Helen, Fred, Marnie-Lynn, Nancy, Janie and Roy as well as many other friends and family. Cremation has taken place. An online service will be held Jan 23rd. Please contact a family member for more information.

In lieu of flowers, the family wishes donations to be made to the LongRun Thoroughbred Retirement Society or the St. Catharines Church of the Deaf, care of Calvary Church, 89 Scott St., St. Catharines, ON L2N 1G8.



**TOBE, STEPHEN**—It is with profound sadness that Stephen's family announces his passing. Stephen was born in NOTL 76 years ago to the late John and Rose Tobe. He is predeceased by siblings, Estelle and Allan. He is survived by his beloved wife of 51 years, Martha, sister Vicky Wright (Harvey) and numerous nieces and nephews. After Stephen graduated from McGill University with a PhD in Biology, he never looked back. A post doc fellowship at the University

of Sussex led to scientific discoveries and lifelong personal and professional collaboration. Stephen was a professor at the University of Toronto in insect physiology for 35 years. His lab's research on cockroach hormones made him a world renowned scientist. Stephen also dabbled in administration and was associate dean for 4 years. He mentored colleagues and students in Asia where crustaceans replaced insects as a research tool. His passion for scientific involvement in different arenas lasted for a lifetime. Stephen lived between Thailand and Niagara after retirement. Beach walks, fiery Thai food, travel and international friends made for rewarding winters in Ban Kwai. Ham radio, wine, produce growing and family were the cherished highlights in Niagara. Stephen lived a rich and varied life and was a citizen and explorer of the world. He will remain a force in many lives forever. A celebration of his life will be held post COVID. Thank you to the Niagara palliative group for Stephen's fine care and to Dr. O'Kane and team at PMH. Online condolences may be shared at <http://www.pjdartefh.ca>. Memoriam donations can be made to the University of Toronto Library Fund c/o [donations.management@utoronto.ca](mailto:donations.management@utoronto.ca) or 416-978-0811.



**HOWE, MICHAEL NORMAN**—Passed away peacefully at Hospice Niagara on Tuesday December 29, 2020 at the age of 74. Beloved husband of Marsha for 46 years. Loving father of Christopher Howe. Caring brother of Peter (Judy McLeod) Howe, Robin Howe and Louise (John Thompson) Howe. Fondly remembered by his nieces and nephew Rosalind, Joelle, Alexandra and Trevor. Predeceased by his parents Margherita and Norman Howe.

Michael was born in Toronto and raised in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He was educated at Queen's University graduating in 1968 with a Business degree and a Masters in Business Administration. He joined Peat Marwick in 1974 and remained with KPMG for his entire career as a Chartered Accountant. Michael was a consummate professional, passionate about his work which continued until November of this year. His career was marked by frequent and extensive international travel and over the years he visited nearly all of the world's major cities. He was highly respected internationally for his expertise in Risk Management. Most recently, he worked in the off-shore practice in Bermuda and The Cayman Islands. Through the years, he was a positive mentor for many of his colleagues. Michael cared deeply about his community and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and fought to preserve its heritage, mainly through the work of the Niagara Foundation of which he was president of their board for many years. He will be remembered for his wry sense of humour, scathing wit and gusto for life. He loved dogs. Duster, his Brittany, was his best buddy.

At home he enjoyed working in the garden and gave true meaning to the term "House Proud".

Above all, was the life Michael shared with Marsha. He genuinely lived his marriage vows, "till death do us part." He truly loved Marsha and he will be eternally missed.

Cremation has taken place. A celebration of Michael's life will take place at a later date. Arrangements entrusted to MORGAN FUNERAL HOME,

415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake. In lieu of flowers, those who wish, may make donations to Hospice Niagara or Lincoln County Humane Society. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com)



NOTICES

To place an obituary in our Classifieds, please contact Julia at: [julia@notllocal.com](mailto:julia@notllocal.com) or 905.934.1040  
Deadline is Tuesdays at 10 a.m.

CARD OF THANKS

Thank you God, Holy Spirit and St. Jude for listening and answering my prayers.  
- NS

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from December 31, 2020

5	2	3	7	1	4	6	9	8
9	6	8	5	2	3	1	4	7
4	1	7	9	6	8	3	5	2
1	8	2	6	9	7	5	3	4
7	4	9	8	3	5	2	1	6
3	5	6	2	4	1	8	7	9
2	7	5	1	8	9	4	6	3
6	3	1	4	7	2	9	8	5
8	9	4	3	5	6	7	2	1

SUDOKU PUZZLE

6				7	2			
		9			3			
			5				6	
							8	
	5	8				1	2	
4		3	9					
	6			8				
		4			1	2	5	
				5		9	3	6



# NOTL native teaching information technology in Russia

Mike Balsom  
Special to The Local

Monday, Jan. 4 was an exciting and interesting evening for 35-year-old Joseph Brown. He and his wife Beth sat down at their temporary rental home in Niagara-on-the-Lake to watch Canada take on Russia in the World Junior Championship semi-finals.

Joe donned his Team Canada jersey for the game. But the computer science professor and his wife have been living just outside of Kazan, the capital city of the Russian republic of Tatarstan, since 2014, and the couple couldn't totally push aside their allegiance to that country's national junior squad.

While Brown was still attending Niagara District Secondary School (he graduated in 2003), his parents, Ruthann and Gary, sent him to a computer camp, where he learned to build websites. That piqued Brown's interest in programming. Until then, his love of the Hardy Boys novels had him setting his sights on a future involving forensics, specifically DNA analysis.

He enrolled at Brock University for an undergraduate degree in computer science, and subsequently earned his master's degree at the same institution. The University of Guelph was next, where he earned his PhD in the same discipline.

While waiting to defend his thesis there, he took a job at Polycon Industries, a Magna company in Guelph. He spent a year at Polycon as a manufacturing systems analyst, crunching numbers, collecting data and helping engineers troubleshoot to solve defect problems on the automotive bumper production line.

Once he had successfully defended his thesis, Brown decided that he preferred the world of academia to industry, and began shopping his curriculum vitae around to various institutions. Two

months into his search, he was contacted by Innopolis University in Russia. In consultation with Beth, who grew up with a bit of a nomadic lifestyle due to her father's work, he decided to accept the invitation to an interview via Skype.

Following two such interviews, Brown was invited to the university for a face-to-face meeting. "So I went over to Russia for a few days," he reminisces, "which was a huge process, as you have to get all the visas and that sort of stuff. I headed over, and when I got back, they offered me the job. We decided to take the offer."

Innopolis University is Russia's answer to Silicon Valley in California. "It's about a 45 minute drive away from Kazan," explains Brown. "It's on the top of a hill, just across the Volga River. They went in there and bulldozed a full forest. They are putting in a full city in that area."

While construction of the campus was still underway, his first year was spent working out of an office building in the larger city of Kazan. The university helped Brown and other international professors assimilate into that community, with some basic language instruction and help finding them living quarters. A year later he was on the campus and living in the brand new high-tech community, also called Innopolis.

All instruction on the campus is conducted in English. The students are a mix of Russian nationals and international students. "It's a private institution, with government support," Brown explains. "We only focus on the IT (Information Technology) aspect. The partner companies that are doing the funding, when a student is in here, they agree to also work a year in one of the partner companies."

Innopolis is tuition-free for students in exchange for that commitment to one of the more than 150 IT firms

involved, including Yandex, the largest technology company in the country — think of it as Russia's version of Google. A bachelor's degree is offered in informatics and computer science, while master's programs include AI (Artificial Intelligence) and robotics, software engineering, cybersecurity and data science. They can also move onto postgraduate studies in theoretical foundations of computer science.

As a professor at Innopolis, Brown splits his time almost evenly between teaching and research. An additional 20 per cent of his time is expected to be spent in service to the community, which could include public communication and administrative duties, among other tasks. With co-writer and fellow Innopolis professor Hamna Aslam, he recently published a textbook, *Affordance Theory in Game Design: A Guide Toward Understanding Players*, which he uses in one of the fourth-year computer science electives that he teaches.

COVID has forced most of his instruction online. Like Canada, Russia went into a lockdown last March. "They put us all on vacation," Brown says. "They told us to just stay in our homes and only come out for groceries to our nearest store. As a foreign national, I have a registration for where my home is, and I have to carry that. There's an equivalent for Russian citizens, an internal passport. During the pandemic they were stopping people, and you had to have that on you."

He and Beth arrived in Canada in mid-November and had to follow quarantine procedures for 14 days. Comparing the current lockdown that began on Boxing Day to what he experienced in Innopolis, Brown can't believe how lax the restrictions are here. When he returns to Russia next week, he will have



Joe and Beth Brown are in NOTL for the holidays, but Joe will head back soon to Innopolis University, Russia's answer to California's Silicon Valley. (Photos supplied)

to test for COVID, but he says there will be no forced quarantine period for him. The private medical insurance that is part of his employment with the university gives him a higher class of medical coverage, too.

When he does return, he will be doing so alone. As Beth does not have a work visa in the country, she spends much of her time supporting Brown's academic endeavours. The pair met at Brock and married in 2013. Brown describes his wife, who holds a degree in calculus, as his scientific equal. "She's my editor-in-chief, my proofreader," he says. "But because she doesn't have a work visa, they are not allowing her to return at the moment." Currently, they have no idea when she will be able to rejoin him in Innopolis.

Brown says he stays away from politics in Russia as much as he can. He feels safe in Innopolis and doesn't see a large military or police presence there or in the larger Kazan. "Like in Canada, people are separate from their government," he explains. "It wouldn't be accurate to say that a lot of the Russian people, especially the youth, are happy with what their government is doing. You have to live in the system, and kind of mind your tongue while you're there."

The Browns spend most of their time socializing with other members of the academic community. Joe's love of hockey, though, has resulted in the couple becoming huge fans of the Russian pro league, the KHL.

Specifically, they attend the games of the team based in Kazan, the Ak Bars. "They've been around since the Soviet league," says Brown. "They're really good. They won the championship, the Gagarin Cup, two years ago. We were there for the equivalent of the Stanley Cup finals. The ticket prices are so cheap, about 2000 rubles, about \$40 in Canadian funds, 6000 rubles for the Cup games."

Which leads back to this year's World Junior Championships. "We've been cheering for Russia, and for Canada," he admits. So when the two bitter enemies faced off in the semi-final game, he had to choose sides, and Canada won out. They won the game, as well, shutting out Russia 5-0, punching their ticket to

the gold medal contest and forcing his second favourite team to vie for the bronze against Finland Tuesday.

As of press time, those games hadn't yet been decided. But Joe was happy to not have to make the decision on which jersey to wear. He simply planned to switch between games.



Joe Brown enjoys watching great hockey in Kazan, where he teaches.

## Life in Kazan

**Kazan** - population 1.169 Million (2012 Census)

**Innopolis** - known as an urban settlement and satellite of Kazan, founded in December, 2012, designed to house a population of 155,000, about 42 km southwest of Kazan, 790 km east of Moscow

**Travelling from Toronto to Kazan** - via Turkish Airways, Toronto to Istanbul, Istanbul to Kazan

**Innopolis University** Student-Teacher ratio is 16.8:1; 23 per cent of its students are international, with currently under 700 full-time students enrolled

**KHL** is the Kontinental Hockey League

**Ak Bars Kazan** plays in the KHL's Kharlamov Division; their current captain is Canadian Justin Azevedo from West Lorne, Ont., a 2008 draft pick of the LA Kings; Patrice Cormier of New Brunswick, a 2008 draft pick of the New Jersey Devils, is also a member of the team; the team was originally called Mashstroy Kazan, then SC Uritskogo Kazan; notable NHL alumni include Vincent Levalier, Brad Richards, Alexi Kovalev and Pavel Datsyuk



Joe Brown teaches a class at a Russian university.