Residents battle removal of eight mature trees

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

More than 700 people who signed a petition that began circulating less than two weeks ago have called for the town to stop a developer from cutting down eight mature trees in the Old Town. The trees are on a lot at 474 Simcoe St., the site of a proposal to build two new homes on the property. In early November, a public meeting was held to hear questions and concerns about site owner David Funk's request for a zoning bylaw amendment that would allow the homes to be constructed.

About 10 people came forward opposing the project, with the focus of their comments on preserving the trees that are planned to be removed. At Tuesday night’s committee-of-the-whole planning meeting, the zoning bylaw amendment was approved by council – but with an amendment directing the committee of adjustment, who will evaluate the next steps of a consent application for the property and severance, to consider preservation of all trees the developer says could be destroyed.

Stuart McCormack, who created the petition that started circulating on Dec. 30, delivered a presentation at the November meeting, as well as at Tuesday’s committee-of-the-whole meeting. He cites the town’s Official Plan, which says existing trees “must not be unnecessarily removed and wherever possible should be preserved and protected,” also noting that taking down the trees would go against provincial and regional policies related to climate change.

According to an arborist’s report included in the November committee-of-the-whole meeting, one of the eight trees is more than 100 years old. “Any replanted trees will not replace the existing healthy ones in our lifetime,” said McCormack at the earlier meeting that there are three in the front yard that are a priority to be uprooted.

They need to be taken down in order to build drives and to allow services to be installed. Given their size, “it would be very difficult to keep the three in the front,” he said.

Continued on page 3

COVID-19 spikes in long-term care

Penny Coles
The Local

There has been a spike in COVID-19 cases in Niagara long-term care and retirement homes in recent weeks, but that is not unexpected at this time of year. Over the holidays, explains Dr. Azim Kasmani, Niagara’s medical officer of health, as visits by family members increase, so do respiratory illness outbreaks.

On Monday, the Niagara Region website was reporting 16 outbreaks of respiratory illnesses, including 10 related to COVID, four influenza A and some with causes unknown.

“We often see a rise in influenza, COVID-19 and other respiratory disease at this time of year,” says Kasmani. “People want to be with their loved ones over the holiday, and this gives viruses a chance to spread. This tends to happen in the community as well.”

There are many factors that impact the spread and severity of these illnesses, such as built-up immunity from infections and vaccinations, he says. Wastewater data, which has been used by public health experts to track and monitor COVID as the number of tests administered and reported dropped, hasn’t been updated recently to quantify the numbers in the community.

“When testing availability changed, reporting changed as well. Not everyone who gets COVID gets tested. The vast majority of the cases reported come from long-term care homes, hospitals or emergency rooms. Most people are using rapid tests, and when testing availability changed, reporting changed as well.”

Continued on page 9

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According to an arborist’s report included in the November committee-of-the-whole meeting, one of the eight trees is more than 100 years old. “Any replanted trees will not replace the existing healthy ones in our lifetime,” said McCormack in November, reiterating his position when before councillors and staff this week.

The trees in jeopardy are six silver maples, an English walnut, and a honey locust. Fielding questions at that meeting from Councillor Gary Burroughs about whether the trees have to come down, William Heikoop, a planner speaking on behalf of the property owner, said at the earlier meeting that there are three in the front yard that are a priority to be uprooted.

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Continued on page 3
Dr. Peter Simon, a Chautauqua resident, has been named to the Order of Ontario. (Supplied)

Mike Balsam
The Local

As he retires from his role as president and CEO of the Toronto-based Royal Conservatory of Music at the end of August 2024, Dr. Peter Simon may not have much time to prominently display in his office the official Order of Ontario insignia badge he will soon receive from the Honourable Edith Dumont, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and Chancellor of the Order of Ontario.

A Niagara-on-the-Lake resident, Simon is one of 25 new Ontarians named to the province’s highest honour on January 2.

“I am deeply honoured to be acknowledged for the work I’ve done over 33 years,” he says. “It’s very special, and I am very grateful. I happen to know several of the people on the list, too. These are all people of great achievement, and they are very good people who care about their community. I am happy to be included among them.”

For Simon, a highly educated and accomplished pianist himself, his career with the Conservatory has been all about using the arts to further the social development of all people in Canada and beyond.

“I believe that music is the most important means that we have to develop both individual and societal selves,” Simon tells The Local. “There are immense benefits that studying music brings to young people. It opens their minds and their hearts to creativity and self-expression. It develops discipline and makes them problem-solvers. It allows one to enter the sublime realm of imagination.”

With retirement looming, Simon has had much time to reflect on his more than three decades leading RCM through an extended period of rapid growth and expansion. During his tenure, RCM launched its Learning Through Music initiative that sought to teach at the arts at the centre of public education. Since its inception in 1994, more than 300,000 students in over 300 schools and communities have benefited from the program.

Three years later, Simon launched the Glenn Gould School, now one of the most outstanding performance training institutions in the world for exceptionally gifted musicians, most of whom receive a full-tuition scholarship. Each year the school offers as many as 150 master classes with some of the world’s greatest performers and conductors, including Sir András Schiff, Riccardo Muti and Zubin Mehta. As well, Gould School faculty have included the likes of Paul Kantor, Andrew McCandless, Andres Diaz and the late Leon Fleisher.

“He was in my view the greatest living musician in the world,” Simon says of Fleisher, under whom he studied at the University of Michigan in the 1980s. “I later persuaded him to teach at the Glenn Gould School so that our students would have access to the ‘greatest mind in music of our time.’”

In 2013, Simon led the restructuring of the Royal Conservatory’s young artist programs, renamed The Phil and Eli Taylor Performance Academy for Young Artists, that provides mentorship and training for 90 highly gifted young musicians between the ages of eight and 18 each year.

He oversaw the fundraising for the 2009 opening of the new TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning and Koerner Hall, as well as a new Performing Arts Division at The Royal Conservatory which presents and oversees more than 300 concerts and events each year.

And the past 10 years have seen the launch of RCM’s Early Childhood Music Education programs, a new teacher certification program, a digital learning division and an expansion south of the border, where RCM’s structured curriculum and assessment model has been adopted by more than 100 schools, 6,000 independent teachers and approximately 10,000 students.

Simon never set out to become an arts administrator. Music, though, has always meant everything to him, going back as far as when he took his Grade 2 exam through the Royal Conservatory at the age of eight.

He studied at the Conservatory as a student of Boris Berlin, whom he considers an agent of change in his life, his first major influence before meeting Fleisher.

“He allowed me to achieve my potential,” Simon says. “He gave me the confidence to move forward.”

With the goal of becoming a concert pianist, Simon went on to study music at New York’s Juilliard School and in London with Louis Kentner. He received a Doctor of Musical Arts Degree from the University of Michigan while studying under Fleisher, then divided his time between performing, teaching at the University of Western Ontario and overseeing the artistic direction of Pre-view Concerts in Toronto.

His move into arts administration began in 1986, when Simon returned to The Royal Conservatory as its director of academic studies. In 1989 he moved on to the Manhattan School of Music in New York City, where he became president. Three years later Simon was back at RCM to take the helm of the newly independent Canadian institution.

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I really felt that the nation needed the conservatory,” he recalls, “because it really is the foundational base of music education across Canada. Hund- Redddress dozens of schools each year through our learning system. It connects communities in every corner of the nation. There’s really no other institution like this in any other country.”

With Simon’s retirement nearing, he and his wife, Can- dadian pianist Dianne Werner, moved to the Chautauqua area in 2021 with their German Shepherd/Rottweiler-mix rescue dog named Scoo.

“We love Niagara-on-the- Lake,” Simon says. “We think it’s a fantastic community, and we’re very grateful to be here. And our dog and her husband and their two kids (Peter and Maggie) were already here.”

Simon and Werner are en- joying the quieter life in NOTL, though they still maintain an apartment in Toronto close to the Conservatory, which he says “was back at RCM to take the helm of the newly independent Canadian institution.”

Dr. Peter Simon, a Chautauqua resident, has been named to the Order of Ontario. (Supplied)
Developer wants trees removed for driveways, servicing

Continued from page 1

said Heikoop, from Upper Canada Consultants.

The removal of the mature trees, which provide shade along Simcoe Street, is also a concern for Coun. Wendy Cheropita.

“Those are pretty significant, and I find a little troubling,” she said.

After Burroughs raised questions Tuesday about the town’s next steps and the committee of adjustment’s role in a decision, clerk Grant Bivol drafted an amendment for council, which Burroughs did not support — he wasn’t satisfied with the wording — that the committee of adjustment consider protecting the trees, but not that councillors direct the trees to be protected.

The motion was moved by Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, who said the report mentions the trees in question on several occasions.

“I’m very comfortable with that going forward,” said Zalepa.

Planning director Kirsten McCauley said the decision before committee of the whole Tuesday night was related to the zoning bylaw amendment, and that the consent application process is when more direction can be given to the developer.

“That would be the vehicle to impose those conditions,” she said.

The staff report on last night’s planning agenda says there is a total of 11 trees that could be removed out of 21 on the property. Eight were identified for removal to accommodate the new homes, and three were slated to be taken down due to their poor health, says the report.

The three mature trees along the front of the property contribute to the streetscape of Mary and Simcoe Streets, but the report says some tree removal along this section may be needed for servicing and driveways.

However, efforts “should be made in aligning driveways and servicing to retain as many mature trees as possible,” says the staff report.

The applicant has said additional trees will be planted on the property to compensate for the removed trees, reads the report.

“The town staff remain of the opinion that an effort should be made to preserve as many mature trees as possible, particularly those fronting the lot and any boundary trees shared between the subject lands and the nearby property at 464-Simcoe St.”

Town staff had recommended the property owner’s zoning bylaw amendment be approved.

Dock area resident Ron Simkus is also a critic of the proposal to remove eight decades-old trees from the property, and reached out through his list of about 100 residents who receive his weekly email blasts, usually about water levels, to make people aware of the request to remove them.

Old Town is a heritage district that combines the legacy of distinctive old trees, reads the report. “There is a good reason for millions of tourists coming to NOTL each year, because this little town provides comfort, and sometimes envy, to our visitors,” he said.

Heikoop says there is a place, within reach of the GTA, that symbolizes what everyone wished their community could actually strive to be.

“It’s not uncommon for new developments to involve lands being subdivided, which results in a need for multiple driveways, he added.

“The loser in every one of these proposals are the trees, particularly the large old ones that take up too much space, restrain construction access and block the way for multiple driveways,” Heikoop warned.

“You should be concerned about water levels, to make people aware of the request to remove them,” he said.

The three mature trees on the Simcoe Street lot proposed for development. Residents were hoping the town would not allow the trees to be cut down.
Town has three top positions to fill in coming months

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Niagara-on-the-Lake’s new interim chief administrative officer says he looks forward to working with a small team at town hall — one that is currently operating without two recently-departed senior staffers.

Bruce Zvaniga was appointed by council late last year to take a role with another municipality — city manager in Hamilton.

He is technically employed with the town until Jan. 14 but is using two weeks of vacation before that date, explained town spokesperson Marah Minor.

Senior heritage planner Denise Horne and director of operations Rome D’Angelo have also both decided recently to part ways with the town.

Zvaniga started his role on Jan. 1 and told The Local that the town is equipped to serve residents with the group it has in place, and that he looks forward to both vacant positions being filled soon.

“Although the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has a lean staff force, it has good bench strength,” he said in a statement to The Local, adding that the current team will manage the town’s day-to-day operations despite the two short-term vacancies.

Several other projects in- volving heritage staff are ongo- ing, including reviewing her- itage aspects of development applications and working with the Municipal Heritage Com- mittee and D’Angelo’s last day with the local government was Jan. 5.

His role is being taken tempo- rarily by Darren MacKenzie, the town’s current manager of public works serving as acting director of operations.

“The recruitment process for the director of operations position will begin shortly, said Minor.

“Both positions are of great importance to the Niagara-on-the-Lake community,” said Zvaniga, referring to the role left by Horne and D’Angelo.

Finding a new director of operations will be a “rigorous” process to have the right candi- date to fill this significant role, added Zvaniga.

“We are seeking an individ- ual who has the expertise and experience required to contin- ue the progress made by Mr. D’Angelo and who will contin- ue to work with the great team in operations to provide service to the community,” he said.

“I look forward to working closely with staff to ensure we choose the right fit for Niagara-on-the-Lake,” he added.

A town news release said Zvaniga has 40 years of expe-rience leading municipal gov-ernment services and critical infrastructure projects for vari-ous municipalities.

His executive leadership “spans multiple municipalities,” where he has overseen trans- formative projects such as the consolidated Niagara Transit Commission, South Niagara Falls Wastewater Systems, Hu- rontario Light Rail Transit, Bur- lington’s Prosperity Corridor and Toronto’s Waterfront Revi- talization, said the news release.

Zvaniga is a licensed pro- fessional engineer and has held significant roles in transporta- tion organizations, including serving as the vice-chair of Intelligent Transportation Sys- tems Canada.

It is estimated it will take several months to find a per- manent CAO, the only staff role municipal councils are critical for hiring and firing.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa told The Local when the in- terim position was filled that Zvaniga would not be seeking the permanent CAO position.

‘Evening with captain’ fundraiser for summer students

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

An inaugural event about the War of 1812 and its naval history will also help local stu- dents make sure their ship is sailing in the right direction as they look for employment during the summer months.

On Jan. 20, Friends of Fort George will host an inaugural fundraiser to raise money to fill and potentially increase the number of youth summer staff positions at Fort George, one of Niagara’s best-known sites tied to the War of 1812.

The Naval Dinner will fea- ture Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa as the evening’s “captain,” lead- ing a program that will centre on the off-land action that took place on Lake Ontario and Lake Erie.

Parks Canada will be bring- ing artifacts and sharing infor- mation about the activity that took place on Niagara waters.

Some of these exhibits have not been out in the public before,” said Zalepa, noting his office is delighted to be involved with the event as an effort to raise money for local student employment positions, which could lead to enter- nancy and Toronto’s Waterfront Reviva- lization, said the news release.

Making a donation to the event means you will have the oppor- tunity to view exhibits that could lead to exten- sional for about 20 years

While Zalepa is also an avid sailor in his free time, he’s also interested in the naval history of Niagara, he said, adding that Lords of the Lake, authored by Robert Malcolmson, is possi- bly the most informative read available about how the war was fought on Lake Ontario.

“It’s a pretty unknown feed- er of action,” he said, noting that everybody “always seems to focus on the ground campa- gns of 1812” when discuss- ing the war.

Zalepa has sailed recre-ationally for about 20 years and his family is involved with Niagara-on-the-Lake Sailing Club, an organization that also pays great attention to sup- porting youth.

The work by Friends of Fort George to help young people get involved with Parks Cana- da is “vital for setting up and creating future leaders,” he said.

Friends of Fort George exec- utive director Amanda Gam- ble said the fundraiser, new this year, will hopefully provide for additional youth staffing in the summer, returning to pre- COVID-19 numbers of about 15 to 20 students per summer, as opposed to the less than a dozen put to work the last two summers.

The student hired will work at Fort George as well as Brock’s Monument.

“This will be helpful for that — getting back to those pre- pandemic numbers,” she said.

Summer 2024 will also see a return of a full schedule of re-enactments, which has been shortened since the 2020 sea- son.

“This is the first year we’ve been able to drive back into those events,” said Gamble.

Tickets to the naval din- ner are $160 and will include a charitable receipt for the dona- tion portion of the ticket. Tick- ets must be reserved in advance as space is limited. For more in- formation, contact the Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621 or email admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca.

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Members of the public were able to board and tour a tall ship that docked at Navy Hall in 2012.
ENTERTAINMENT SPOTLIGHT: FIRSTONTARIO PAC

Just like pianos, we all exist with our own unique elements of disharmony.

written by Mitchell Cuningham
Director of Lessons in Temperament • Artistic Director, Outside the March

Developing and continuing to revisit Lessons in Temperament with James Smith over the past seven years has been one of the great privileges of my creative life. To me, the show has always served as a testament to how little is required for a theatrical exchange to take place between a storyteller and their audience.

When we originally premiered at the SummerWorks Festival back in 2016, we played exclusively in people’s houses and apartments; ten evenings, ten living rooms, home to ten out-of-tune pianos. Each night, James would approach the instrument and begin to play a Beethoven sonata—which wouldn’t sound very good. The piano clearly needed some love and care. Then he would remove his tools from his kit, and methodically begin to bring the instrument into tune – while teaching those gathered – both about the art of piano-tuning, but also about his family’s extensive journey with neurodiversity.

Over the course of ninety minutes, James gives voice to a subject that is often left unspoken - telling the story of four brothers living with obsessive-compulsive disorder, autism, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Through the power of his storytelling, James is able to conjure true transformation - underscored by him finally once again playing that same Beethoven sonata, this time now on an instrument now perfectly in balance.

Since that initial, award-winning run, we’ve worked to share James’ family anywhere there was a piano in need of tuning, and an audience we could congregate around it - venues as unexpected as a Loblaws in midtown Toronto, as prominent as the Stratford Festival and National Arts Centre, and as far-flung as Calgary’s High Performance Rodeo, and a month-long run off-Broadway at the Signature Theater. A few years back, we also adapted this piece into a feature film – now available to watch on TVO, and stream through iTunes. In every instance, the core elements are the same - the basic building blocks of theatricality as far as I’m concerned – someone with a personal story to tell, and a unique way of sharing it that only they could harness.

In all the places we’ve played, both the live show and the film, one thing has remained constant. Almost without fail, at least one audience member after the show will come up to James and open up to him about their own personal journey with mental health - theirs or someone’s close to them. Often these sharings come along with the phrase: I’ve never told anyone this before.

Two things I didn’t know about pianos before working on Lessons in Temperament.
1) A piano goes out of tune whether or not anyone plays it.
2) It is impossible to perfectly tune a piano – instead, the task is to make sure each part of the instrument is proportionately out-of-tune, so that things sound in balance. Just like pianos, we all exist with our own unique elements of disharmony. I hope that you’ll be able to come and join James around the piano. And stick around afterwards, to be a part of the beautiful discord.

Get tickets at firstontariopac.ca or call the box office at 905-888-0722.

Lessons in Temperament is the story of four neurodiverse brothers, told through a theatrical escape into the art and science of piano tuning. The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre presents this award-winning production on THURS 1 FEB.

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upcoming shows

- 20 JAN BEYOND THE IMITATION GAME: The story of the Enigma machine
- 1 FEB LESSONS IN TEMPERAMENT: A memoir of minds gone out of tune
- 2 FEB CIRCA HUMANS 2.0: Boundary-pushing circus
- 14 FEB KANDACE SPRING: A Valentine’s evening of jazz
- 29 FEB CHORI! CHORI! CHORI! Monomo Ako: ‘The Epic ABBA Singalong
- 6 MAR CHEERISH THE LADIES: Grammy-nominated Celtic Supergroup
- 20 MAR THE PEKING ACROBATS: Redefining Chinese acrobatics
- 10 APR BELA FLECK & ABIGAIL WASHBURN: King & Queen of the banjo

FirstOntario
PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE
DOWNTOWN ST. CATHARINES
nottlocal.com
There are several important issues facing Niagara-on-the-Lake and residents of the area. One is the almost crusade-like effort to save eight mature trees on a lot proposed for development of two houses. It’s not just about those eight on Simcoe Street; however, it’s about a town’s commitment to preserve trees, except when they are on property to be developed. It seems residents who want to install a pool or have a little more shade in their backyards have to jump through hoops to remove a tree, often being refused a permit — that is, after all, the intent of a tree bylaw — but it’s for driveways and new houses, it seems the trees are too often doomed to destruction.

Also in the public eye these days is the town’s “resolution,” offered in an unusual manner after a closed session, to offer a developer access to his proposed subdivision across a portion of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail, which continues to be restored with public donations, for the benefit of bicyclists, dog owners and anybody who enjoys a nice, safe walk away from traffic.

The developer has drawn strong opposition, understandably, and because the discussion was held behind closed doors, and is likely related to a legal issue, we aren’t privy to the reasons anyone on council could possibly have thought this was a good idea. If there is any bright side to this suggestion it is that it will have to be heard in the court of public opinion, and it is likely it will not with no doubt where the public stands — if it even gets that far. There is no word from the developer at this point about whether he is interested in pursuing that avenue of access.

COVID-19 and long-term care in Niagara

COVID-19 vaccines in earlier waves of the pandemic, and getting shot in the ground for our new South Niagara hospital last summer. But this news highlights the need to remain vigilant in pro-"}

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**COVID-19 and long-term care in Niagara**

MPP Wayne Gates Niagara Falls Riding

Like many members of our community, I was disturbed to see a recent alarming rise in COVID-19 and respiratory virus outbreaks in long-term care homes across Niagara and the province.

We’ve lost 260 residents over the last four months — and then an additional 250 confirmed outbreaks and nearly 16,000 COVID-19 cases.

We also know that from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic until April of 2022, we lost more than 4,300 long-term care residents and 13 staff members to COVID-19.

I want to be clear — these residents are our mothers, our fathers, our grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, neighbours. They are people who have worked their entire lives to make this province a better place for everyone. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, and a basic standard of care in their golden years.

Our number one priority must be improving quality of care for patients in long-term care, home care, and retirement homes. As your Member of Provincial Parliament, and the Official Opposition Critic for Long-term Care, Home Care, and Retirement Homes, this is an issue I am working on daily.

**Seniors in our community**

It is also particularly concerning for our community here in Niagara-on-the-Lake. We know that over 12.2 per cent of our town’s population is 65 years of age or older, and that the town has struggled to access front-line healthcare services in recent years.

We have been proud to work together to bring concerns around healthcare and long-term care for the community. This includes working together with the Lord Mayor and town council to get a nurse practitioner back in the town, advocating for Niagara to receive an additional medical specialist.

COVID-19 vaccines in earlier waves of the pandemic, and getting shot in the ground for our new South Niagara hospital last summer. But this news highlights the need to remain vigilant in protecting seniors and long-term care residents. And it comes on the heels of a damning report released by the Ontario Ombudsmen in September of last year.

**Ombudsmen report**

The Ombudsmen called for significant changes to Ontario’s long-term care system after he found that there were no inspections of long-term care homes in the first wave of COVID-19 in 2020 for seven weeks. The Ombudsmen also found what was called a “complete system breakdown,” where inspections had to be halted because there was no planning from the Ministry to inspecting seniors on the job.

The report included tragic stories, including of family members who contacted the Minister several times in the initial wave of the pandemic about concerns at the long-term care homes where their parents or relatives lived. Some of these individuals did not hear back from the ministry until several months later, after their loved ones had passed away.

Unfortunately, the provincial government has not treated the long-term care file with the seriousness it deserves. There has been a five different Long-term Care Ministers in just over four years.

**Accountability**

The provincial government has refused to hold the bad actors in long-term care accountable. This means that there are no sanctions on long-term care homes liable for any potential for resident choking. More often than not, residents are left in soiled diapers and sleeping on bare mattresses, and an incident of resident choking. More than 70 residents died in the early part of the pandemic, including some of dehydration.

The provincial government has also passed legislation, Bill 161, that makes it much harder for families to hold long-term care homes liable for any potential harm to residents.

Finally, the provincial government simply refuses to address the staffing crisis in healthcare and long-term care. They have no central plan to address staffing and continue to fight nurses in court over their unconstitutional wage-suppression law, Bill 124.

We have offered solutions to the provincial government, to help retain staff and hold long-term care homes accountable.

**Legislation**

We were proud to introduce a Bill alongside my colleagues at Queen’s Park last year that would treat healthcare workers, including PSWs, with respect and dignity, and address the gap in care our system is currently facing.

The provincial government has vowed to expand nursing ratios for long-term care homes in Ontario, which would bring thousands of workers back into the profession, which in turn will enhance quality of care for residents.

We have also worked on legislation that would ensure quality of care for long-term care homes by including the use of private nursing agencies.

We know that agency nurses are being paid more than double what full-time, permanent nurses earn for their work, contributing to the staffing crisis and leading to worse quality of care for residents.

We have also worked to urge the provincial government to stop issuing more licences for profit-long-term care owners who have track records of the survey could help that cause.

Finally, I am asking all residents and community members to do their part: please, if you have not already done so, get your flu shot and COVID-19 booster and help to ease the strain on our healthcare system.

Working together, we must treat all healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses and PSWs with respect, hold the bad actors in long-term care accountable, make sure inspectors have the tools they need to do their job, and get every single resident a standard of four hours of care a day.

Our seniors deserve nothing less.
I am writing to express my concern about council’s decision on Dec. 15, 2023 to allow an easement over the Upper Canada Heritage Trail to facilitate access to the proposed subdivision on the Rand Estate.

The developer’s current proposal does not contemplate an easement, nor was the possibility of an easement raised by council, staff or the multitude of experts offering their considered opinions during the public session.

It is with dismay that we read about the impending closure of Upper Canada Lodge and the relocation of the remaining residents to Fort Erie.

The demographics of Niagara-on-the-Lake make it obvious that this is a town that is in decay, which was clearly made by another non-resident expert who based their findings on the age of the plumbing rather than those who are, in this town, simply aging!

There is nothing fundamental wrong with the structure or the concept of separate wings with a central dining room and courtyard area where people engage with others.

The location is perfect, close to town and on the commons. All Upper Canada Lodge needs is some TLC. The Upper Canada Heritage Trail is a mistake.

It is deeply concerning to me that behind closed doors our elected officials would allow access to a subdivision development close to public spaces. This portion of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail, recently improved in the vicinity of the East and West Line section with funding support from private donors, stands at risk of being compromised by increased traffic and construction. This decision might also discourage future potential donations for such initiatives.

Solmar has at least two other options through their own efforts to provide better parking for the Upper Canada Heritage Trail, which seems reasonable to ask that the responsibility and costs associated with construction traffic on their own land.

I am asking you, our elected officials to reconsider and reoffer the option of granting Solmar an easement via the existing trail.

Ricky’s Raps

It was over a year ago I posted 10 random thoughts on my social networking platforms, titling it, Ricky Rap. One off. Many commented and messaged to do more. A few suggested weekly. Gave it a try. Some Raps started becoming thematic. Worked hard not to opine or self promote — unless it worked. We like it. We laugh. We have fun. That’s the point.

Ricky’s Raps are 10 thoughts and offerings from Niagara’s own Rick Mills. Retired from more than 50 years of management within the steel industry, he continues pastoral ministry in the town he loves and on which he has published others on Facebook.

1. Little over a year ago I posted 10 random thoughts on my social networking platforms, titling it, Ricky Rap.
2. A one off.
3. Many commented and messaged to do more.
4. A few suggested weekly.
5. Gave it a try.
7. Worked hard not to opine or self promote — unless it worked. We like it. We laugh.
8. We have fun. That’s the point.
9. See ya next week.
Dr. Robin Williams
NOTL Library board member

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library board and staff are interested in exploring the special place books, reading, storytelling and libraries hold in the hearts of our community members. The power of the written and spoken word, the enchantment of libraries and childhood memories of time spent with books, creates a profound tapestry of emotions and experiences. This questionnaire prompts introspection and reflection, offering a unique lens through which to examine the bond between readers and their connection to books, storytelling and libraries.

Watch this space for interviews with an array of interesting community members.

I met with Niagara resident and former diplomat Margaret Huber to talk about her love of libraries and reading. Margaret and I sat in her very book-filled living room and she cited a quote from her favourite T-shirt: “If it’s books, it’s not hoarding.”

Margaret had returned to Niagara after an illustrious Canadian diplomatic career that spanned 40 years, taking her around the world. During many assignments, in Japan, the Philippines, European Union headquarters, Pakistan, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Italy, Jordan and Iraq, she served as ambassador in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, concluding with a three-year posting to Canada as chief of protocol for Canada. She loved her career and reflected on how lucky she had been to have represented Canada in many ways, but particularly in promoting education and cultural ties. She retired in 2013 but immediately undertook a 2014 fellowship with the Harvard Advanced Leadership Initiative, an innovative year-long program to tap the potential of leaders. This experience reinforced her love of lifelong learning, and she continues to maintain ties to this vibrant network.

Q: What was the first book you remember reading?
A: I have always been an omnivorous reader, but clearly remember one of my first books: the illustrated Raggedy Ann Stories. As former refugees from ethnic cleansing in Europe, parents greatly valued education and encouraged all six of us children to become readers. I have a poignant memory of the red-letter day at age five when my oldest brother George helped me obtain my first library card. It changed my life as I learned early on that books open windows to a wider world.

Q: What other books did you read?
A: Another older brother, John, and I were thrilled by the library’s Hardy Boys and Tom Swift adventure and science fiction series (I especially remember Tom Swift and His Flying Lab, a book filled with inspiring many young scientists or inventors). We read through the library’s entire youth sci-fi section and what an exciting day when we discovered an adult sci-fi section in the second floor of the library. It was as if we had discovered gold in the Klondike, we were so excited.

Q: What is your favourite book of all time?
A: There are so many favourites — but I think it would be The Tale of Genji, by Lady Murasaki Shikibu. In the early 10th century, she wrote a fictionalized account of life at the Japanese court. It is a bildungsroman (coming of age book) in that it follows a young man, Genji, from his youth through his adulthood. Full of adventures, and a fascinating read.

Q: Do you have a favourite genre?
A: Not really, as I said, my tastes are quite eclectic, but I do enjoy biographies. I am currently working through the Stephen Kotkin trilogy on Stalin, and eagerly await publication of the third volume. An American professor currently at Stanford, Stephen Kotkin has a profound knowledge of Russia’s history, of Stalin and of other authoritarian figures, still topical today.

Kotkin has twice been a guest speaker for the Canadian International Council, an organization with which I have maintained involvement.

Q: What happened with your reading in your busy adult life?
A: When I was bouncing around the world on my diplomatic duties, I used to stop at a favourite bookstore, Hatchards, whenever I was in London. This bookstore dates back to 1797 and is still located on Piccadilly Circus. Over the years, before long books online, Hatchards shipped boxes of books to me wherever I was in the world. Books provided inspiration, solace and company.

Q: What do you read, and where?
A: Although quite tied up with family, with a couple of boards and with mentorship roles, I enjoy reading in evenings when I have more time. Although perusing print books, I do use e-books and always have an audiobook in the car when driving distance.

Q: Can you talk a bit about philanthropy and libraries?
A: I am a strong supporter of libraries, particularly my first library, in Port Colborne, and currently am engaged in an initiative to expand youth learning support through a Port Colborne High School Century Scholarships and Awards program. However, I am in awe of others who have gone before in their recognition of the power of learning and libraries. My hometown benefited greatly from Port Colborne businesswoman Arabella Williams, who bequeathed her entire estate in 1950, including downtown properties which now houses the town library, Andrew Carnegie, an American philanthropist, seeded libraries across North America in the early 1900s — 125 in Canada, including five in Niagara (Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Thorold, Welland and Grimsby).

Q: Do you still get books from a library?
A: Despite having many books in my personal collection, I often go to the library, because I like being surprised. When wandering through the stacks, I am tempted to read things I wouldn’t normally order or pick out. I also benefit from word of mouth recommendations of friends, for books that I might not otherwise read. I also love exploring the archives in local libraries and most recently delved into the historical records related to Arabella Williams. Fascinating to read, source materials, media coverage and court documents of the day, trying to piece together her story and perspective — challenging as she left no diaries or personal papers.

Q: What do you think is the current role of libraries?
A: Libraries have re-invented themselves, and now are not just purveyors of books but are community hubs. They sponsor initiatives like evening with authors, Wine and Words or Beer and Books. I have appreciated even more libraries community services in helping elderly folks with technology, in Makery workshops or in Mons and Tots programs. And one thing that strikes me in particular these days is that the library is no longer a sacred silent space, but is filled with kids squealing, and day care workers wandering through. It is refreshing and shows that the library is meeting, creating and anticipating new needs. Those who would cut funding for libraries or even worse, tell libraries what they should be meeting, creating and-some threats to society, reprehensible dangers to democracy. Libraries enrich everyone’s lives — even if individuals themselves don’t use the libraries very much, and they don’t even have to go in now, they can access libraries electronically. We all benefit from living in a society that treasures what libraries have to offer — openings to new worlds.

Q: What is your favourite quote from a book?
A: Oh, that would be from Cicero: “If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.”

And on that note, I left Margaret with my arms full of borrowed books and plans from her orchard’s windfalls.
Dr. Azim Kasmani, Niagara’s medical officer of health, says COVID still needs to be taken seriously. While there are a number of people in critical care, as well as in intensive care units, and “some are unfortunately dying,” the numbers aren’t what they have been in previous years, he says. “However, there is certainly a significant amount of COVID-19 in the community, and we can all take steps to protect ourselves.”

In December, Niagara emergency departments were reported by public health as feeling the stress of an increase in respiratory illnesses in the region, resulting in more visits, more hospital admissions and longer wait times. While the number of patients seeking care was increasing, the severity of the illnesses Niagara Health was treating has been lower than in previous years, the report said.

Kasmani emphasizes the importance of being vaccinated, still the most effective tool we have to combat the disease, for those who haven’t had COVID or a vaccination in the last six months. With the vaccination, those who become ill will be less impacted by the disease.

Other recommendations also remain changed — in addition to being vaccinated, he stresses, wash your hands frequently, cover coughs or sneezes and stay at home when you’re sick. “And some may choose to wear a mask,” he adds.

Taking those steps “should help prevent illness across the community, and that protects the most vulnerable.” Although COVID has passed the pandemic stage, and may not be seen with the same urgency as it was in the past, what has changed comes from past infections and vaccinations. “The level of immunity affects the entire community.” However, Kasmani says, “we do still need to take it seriously.”

Introducing Sunday Brunch at NOTL!

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farm to table cuisine

3 course plated brunch
$65 per person
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Reserve your seat today!

Follow the QR code:
For many of us, fishing is a treasured pastime. But none of us wants to get caught in a “phishing” scam. That’s when cyber criminals send you a message, like an email, text message, or something on social media, pretending to be someone you know or someone in authority. They try to trick you into clicking on a link or downloading an attachment, which turns out to be malicious software – or “malware” – that can take control of your computer.

What to do if you fall victim to the attack
If you downloaded malware, step one is to disconnect from the network to try to prevent other devices from being infected. Next, you’ll need a malware removal tool or a computer technician to try and remove the malware.

Then, if you provided sensitive or financial information at some point, you’ll need to change your passwords on your most important accounts. Let your financial institutions know about malware on your systems, so they can monitor your accounts and prevent further damage.

How to prevent future attacks
If you’re not already doing it, you should regularly back up your files to an external storage device or in a cloud-based system so that you can return access and restore your systems after an attack.

You should also install anti-virus and anti-malware software on your computer. This will scan incoming messages for potential threats before they land in your inbox.

Only download files that you’ve confirmed came from a trusted source and avoid clicking on anything suspicious. Check the email address that the file came from – often the details don’t match who it’s supposed to be coming from.

Find more tips on how to protect yourself at getcybersafe.ca/ransomware.

Dealing with arthritis can make anything from enjoying a meal to tying your shoes more difficult. It’s something that more than 5.5 million people in Canada face every day.

Fortunately, there are many ways to help those of all ages living with arthritis. Here are a few ideas:

Take advantage of tools
Simple tools can make everyday tasks easy to master. Everyone’s level of ability is different, but people living with arthritis may consider using assistive devices to help with everyday activities.

Learn new techniques
Aside from tools and technology, there can be simple shifts to how something gets done that make it more possible. Based on your needs, a health professional can work with you to develop new ways to perform activities that are important to you.

Ask an expert
People living with arthritis want to be able to do the things they need or want to do with confidence. To help make that happen, work with an occupational therapist.

Known as OTs, occupational therapists are licensed health professionals who help people affected by injuries and various conditions. They are skilled in working with you to develop strategies and adaptations to perform everyday tasks and achieve your goals.

You can find an OT through the College of Occupational Therapists. The College protects you and your family by ensuring all licensed occupational therapists in Ontario are trained and qualified to offer safe, competent and ethical services. Find more information at coto.org.
A survey to quantify Niagara-on-the-Lake residents' needs for housing as they age is closing soon, but there is still time to have a say in its outcome. The comprehensive survey was designed by local research professionals, who, along with a group of community volunteers, think that NOTL seniors looking at appropriate options as they downsize may not find what they need in town, despite a desire to stay in their community. But the group decided they needed to quantify that issue, and have had a survey open to NOTL residents since November.

Steve Ferley and Michael Ennamorato, experts with extensive national senior management experience in building, maintaining and analyzing opinion surveys, volunteered their time and expertise to create a survey, and have partnered with Niagara College School of Business analytics program head Nick Farnell and his graduate students to help shape questions into an online tool.

Ennamorato says while they are satisfied with the number of surveys filled out to date, they want to be sure everyone in NOTL over the age of 55 has the opportunity to respond. In addition to providing valuable data, he says, completing the survey will help further the considerations and conversations of those in that age group. It's not only to their benefit, he explains, but it's valuable for the next generation, and for the town, to have a better understanding of how to keep seniors in their community.

Cindy Grant, chair of a town wellness committee last term of council, is one of the volunteers behind the survey. As that council wound down in 2022, she reported her findings that seniors ready to downsize were having to leave town to find the kind of housing they required. However, that report went no further, and last spring, she and a few others decided to take it upon themselves to gather hard data on what seniors are looking for.

The committee is now hoping for a “last push,” before the end date.

“We want to give everyone a chance to have their say on a very important subject,” says Ennamorato. “It would be a shame for anybody to lose their chance to be heard.”

The feedback the group has received from the community has been very positive, he added, and residents have seen the survey “as being relevant, and they are looking forward to hearing the results.” He notes not everyone likes talking about aging, but it’s something they need to think about, and we hope this is spurring on discussions about the type of housing that’s important to them. It’s not just as bad as doing taxes,” he says, “but it’s something you need to do. And some of the options you might choose may not be available if you wait too long. If you even get some preliminary planning done in your head, that’s a big step forward.”

The survey results can also be useful tools for town planning, and for developers.

“We’re on the cusp of a massive change when you look at the population of age groups,” he says. “I would think any information like this would be useful. If people say ‘I really want to stay here if I can, that’s an opportunity for local developers. The results should have some value to them.”

The survey will likely be spring before the survey results are ready to be made public, says Ennamorato, but they will “be a sense of what’s going on with the story before then.”

He and Ferley will continue to work with Niagara College, while students incorporate data with their programs, using the data in their work. They will do their own analysis on this in regards to understanding how survey results show what is happening with people. It will give them a good building block to learn from.

The next steps, says Ennamorato, will first be to look at the data and eliminate respondents who don’t qualify for the survey — those are pretty easy to identify — and once they know they have “clean data,” they will begin to look at it across different age groups, and determine if it’s consistent. If there are differences, he adds, they have to decide what to do about it — the answer could be nothing.

Then we start our analysis, creating tables across each question, and see what the story is, how much an issue this is, how it’s changing over time, and whether residents feel they have options available to them in NOTL, and the extent to which they want to stay here and what trade-offs they’d be willing to make. They will give us information as to what type of housing might be required.”

The group may make presentations to council and share their information with the region. The survey is available online and for those not qualify for the survey — those are pretty easy to identify — and once they know they have “clean data,” they will begin to look at it across different age groups, and determine if it’s consistent. If there are differences, he adds, they have to decide what to do about it — the answer could be nothing.

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The type of surveys is now available, asking Niagara-on-the-Lake residents about their housing needs as they age. The survey is available online and for those without a computer or internet access, it is completely anonymous and administered by Niagara College. Please make your views known.

**Where do you want to live?**

Tell us

A comprehensive survey is now available, asking Niagara-on-the-Lake residents about their housing needs as they age. The survey is available online and for those without a computer or internet access, it is completely anonymous and administered by Niagara College. Please make your views known.

**How to access the survey?**

**Option 1:** Scan the following QR code with your phone’s camera

https://forms.office.com/r/fqxerb7fJv

**Option 2:** Link to the survey with your phone's camera

https://forms.office.com/r/ftqxtt7k7v

**Option 3:** Respondents without the internet, please call 905-468-7498

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**Erica A. Blythe**

**(Van De Laar)**

**Martin Sheppard Fraser LLP**

**Erica A. Blythe (Van De Laar)**

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**Don’t miss opportunity to have your say**

Senior housing survey is about to wrap up

**Penny Coles**

**The Local**

A survey to quantify Niagara-on-the-Lake residents’ needs for housing as they age is closing soon, but there is still time to have a say in its outcome. The comprehensive survey was designed by local research professionals, who, along with a group of community volunteers, think that NOTL seniors looking at appropriate options as they downsize may not find what they need in town, despite a desire to stay in their community. But the group decided they needed to quantify that issue, and have had a survey open to NOTL residents since November.

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Origin of stone remains a mystery

Sharon Burns  
The Local

Local entrepreneur Peter Donato has a mystery he would like solved.

Donato, owner of Niagara Cycling Tours, was on a bike ride recently and saw an interesting square stone on a property under development on the river side of the Niagara River Parkway near Queenston.

“I saw this stone sort of by fluke, caught out of the corner of my eye,” said Donato. “It was one of the rare moments where I was just enjoying myself, minding my own business, and I just happened to be looking in this spot.”

Donato said that the stone would normally not be seen from the pathway in the spring, summer or fall, when foliage would have covered it. He happened upon it on a day when I brought a little ruler, it was gone unnoticed. “It’s an empty lot,” Donato said, adding there probably was never a home on this place, “The builder suggests that perhaps was never a home on this site. “The builder suggests that 25 years ago the lot was purchased and now, after all these years, the owner is going to build. That might explain why that stone has been there for a long time and explain why it’s sitting in leaves, but looks like it could be a granite of some kind.”

Peter Donato could see markings on the stone, but they are too faded to make out what they are. Perry Hartwick, chair of the Niagara Geopark, said it’s difficult to identify what kind of stone it is. “It’s hard to tell because it has moss on it, and it’s sitting in leaves, but looks like it could be a granite of some kind.”

Hartwick, working from photographs, noted that the stone “is made up of a coarser grain which doesn’t look like limestone. If that’s the case,” he said, “it didn’t come out of any quarries around here.”

Ordnance boundary stones were used to mark the boundary between town land and military reserves almost 200 years ago. To date, 19 of the 37 stones have been found. Rumble, board member of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, said the mystery stone is not an ordnance boundary stone. It doesn’t follow the pattern of the others, which are nine inches square, made of white limestone with a broad arrow marking it as British property. Nor does this stone have the initials B.O., which stands for Board of Ordnance, carved on it, or a number indicating which of the 37 stones it is.

It is also “in the wrong place,” said Rumble. “The stone Donato is curious about is roughly a foot and a half wide, but longer in length and all around not square, and possibly much larger in depth as it’s covered by dirt and I can’t tell what, if anything, it’s built on,” said Donato. It also appears to have a manufactured indent carved along one side. “It has very faint markings,” said Donato. “If you look carefully at some of the close-ups, when I brought a little ruler, it definitely looks like there were some markings but they’re heavily faded.”

Donato noticed a sign for the contractor on the property, reached out to the company and was given permission to approach the stone to take measurements and photographs. “It’s an empty lot,” Donato said, adding there probably was never a home on this site. “The builder suggests that 25 years ago the lot was purchased and now, after all these years, the owner is going to build. That might explain why that stone has been there for a long time and explain why it’s gone unnoticed.”

Donato hopes to find other stones like it. “Where there’s one, maybe there’s another one. Finding one more would really help.”

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Red Roof Retreat receives financial boost from Rotary

Sharon Burns
The Local

Recently the Niagara-on-the-Lake Rotary Club presented Red Roof Retreat executive director Steffanie Bjorgan with a cheque for $11,500. The donation was raised by the Rotary’s Icewine Cocktail Party held in September at the Hiscott House. "Red Roof Retreat is an organization that we’ve been supporting for many years at The Rotary Club," said Chris Hatch, chair of the community services committee at the Rotary Club. The event raised $23,000, surpassing their goal by $3,000. Funds were split between Red Roof, a local respite and activities-based organization for youth and adults with special needs, and international projects that the Rotary club regularly invests in.

"The international committee will decide how those monies get spent overseas," said Hatch. Icewine Cocktail Party co-chair Stewart Istvan noted that all food was donated by several local restaurants and live music was supplied by The Athertones for the second year in a row.

Bjorgan, who attended the event, said the donation will go into their “future expansion fund.”

Great way to start the new year

Sophie Szczesniak, Dr. Jessica Toth and Trevor Kwolek of Great North Physiotherapy in Virgil present a poppy donation of $2,250 to Royal Canadian Legion Branch 124 poppy chair Chris Toye and president Al Howse. It was great way to start off 2024, with positive vibes and financial support from the community, said Howse. (Supplied)

Sophie Szczesniak, Dr. Jessica Toth and Trevor Kwolek of Great North Physiotherapy in Virgil present a poppy donation of $2,250 to Royal Canadian Legion Branch 124 poppy chair Chris Toye and president Al Howse. It was great way to start off 2024, with positive vibes and financial support from the community, said Howse. (Supplied)

Ward Simpson, Christa Rawsthorne and Steffanie Bjorgan of Red Roof Retreat accept a cheque from Rotarian Stewart Istvan. (Melanie Purdy)
Arts Collective exhibition opens at Pumphouse

Local Staff

The Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre is starting the new year with a group exhibition featuring a diverse selection of artworks by professional artists from Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Running from Jan. 2 to March 24 in its Joyner Gallery, the NOTL Arts Collective Group Exhibition will showcase the exceptional creativity of its member artists, says a Pumphouse news release.

Expressing anticipation for the upcoming exhibition, Pumphouse art director Rima Boles emphasizes the significance of this annual event as it enters its third year. “This show has become a reflection of the vibrant artistic pulse thriving within Niagara-on-the-Lake. It not only highlights the growing recognition of visual arts in the community but also stands as a testament to the rich talents of the growing NOTL Arts Collective,” says Boles.

Participating in the exhibition for the first time is Julie Forrester Clark, who joined the collective last year. “I’m so happy and grateful to showcase my artwork alongside these very talented, high calibre artists in my town,” says Clark. “This exhibition highlights why NOTL should be considered a premier destination for visual arts in Ontario.”

At the same time as the collective exhibit, the Walker Room Gallery will display artworks by instructors offering classes and workshops at the Pumphouse. The Instructors Group Show presents diverse artistic styles and mediums, providing a glimpse into the breadth of creative talent and the art centre’s robust programme offerings, says the news release.

The opening reception on Sunday, Jan. 14, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., offers an opportunity for those who appreciate art to meet and engage with the exhibiting artists and view their works. Complimentary refreshments will be provided during the event, courtesy of Château des Charmes Winery.

All are invited to welcome the new year by celebrating the local arts community at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre. Further information regarding exhibitions can be found at the art centre’s website, niagarapumphouse.ca. For questions and pre-registration, contact Verne Chant at vernechant@outlook.com.
Fundraiser helps feed three farmworkers’ families

Thanks to local residents, the year ended with a glimpse of hope and comfort for three Jamaican families.

The goal of an online fundraiser held in December was to provide one month of groceries to three families whose lives were drastically impacted by the deaths of two fathers and a permanent injury to another while on the seasonal farm work program.

The families of 31-year-old Kemar Campbell and 34-year-old Daniel Brown, two coworkers who passed away in their sleep, are the first two fundraiser recipients. Kemar’s daughter celebrated her first birthday recently and was only four months old when her father left for the farm work program last spring. Daniel leaves behind two young daughters, a four-year-old and a baby daughter who was born a few weeks before he was to return home in September. Kemar and Daniel were coworkers on the same work crew and would often connect about the joys of fatherhood and the worries of family separation.

When KerriAnn, Kemar’s partner, answered her door and saw a stranger offering an envelope she had no idea it would be the first piece of good news since the loss of her partner eight months ago. A typical day for her involves getting her toddler up and ready for daycare at 5 a.m. before heading to work. When Kemar was alive she could budget properly and count on his support for necessities.

KerriAnn has received no support from the Jamaican or Canadian government agencies that administer the farm work program since his death in early May 2023. Kaniesha understands KerriAnn’s trials well. Grieving the loss of her husband Daniel while raising a toddler and a newborn without his emotional and financial support has often been overwhelming. When she received an unexpected phone call in December explaining the fundraiser it was a comfort to learn that people in our community cared.

The third fundraiser recipient was the family of Jeeel Stewart, who was permanently injured on the job at a local nursery in 2008. Suffering from severed tendons and nerves in his hand has prevented him from working for the past 15 years, resulting in the severe decline of his health. He has remained in hospital for the past three months, an incredibly hardship for his wife and children. The entire family has suffered since WSIB cut off compensation and therapy in 2010, ascertaining there was work he could do, even though the suggested jobs were in Canada.

The three families were very grateful to receive the money and expressed the thoughts summed up by KerriAnn: “I want to express my deepest gratitude for your generous monetary contribution during this difficult time of loss. Your support means a great deal to me and my family, and it provides a comforting reminder of the kindness that surrounds us. Thank you for your thoughtful gesture; it has truly touched our hearts.”

Seasonal farmworkers from Mexico and the Caribbean are our neighbors and friends. As a caring community, we cannot simply dispose of them. That care extends to families back in their home countries that are suffering as a result of their employment in Niagara. The plight of families whose breadwinners have suffered injury or death on local farms is inextricably linked to our own history.

Some names of the family members mentioned have been changed to respect their privacy.

The winner of the draw for donors who contributed $100 or more is Tracie Giesbrecht.
Jazz singer Juliet Dunn has a secret to share

Mike Balsom
The Local

Jazz singer and promoter Juliet Dunn has a secret, but she’s willing to share it with you.

The tireless co-creator and executive artistic producer of the TD Niagara Jazz Festival is organizing a series of Secret Salons that will give her a chance to get back behind the microphone a bit more regularly.

“I don’t usually sing during the festival,” she says. “Peter (her late husband Peter Shea) and I created the festival to promote other musicians. But I decided that it’s finally time for me to do my own thing outside of the festival in some more intimate settings.”

Her first series of three such events kicks off with her own Le Trio Parisien, led by Dunn in her French chanteuse persona, on Sunday, Jan. 28 in a venue yet to be announced.

“That’s the ‘secret’ part of this,” she laughs. “People do like pop-up things. I won’t announce where it is until two weeks before the event, which will give people enough time to plan for dinner and other things around the evening. I just thought it would be fun.”

The January gig will be followed by two more. On Feb. 18, Dunn will do a couple of songs with Wojtek Justyna and the PowerHouse TreeOh!, and on March 3 she will guest with multi-instrumentalist Bryan Covey.

Jazz Festival fans will recognize Justyna from his appearance at Simcoe Park last summer. The Polish-born resident of the Netherlands wowed the crowd with his virtuosic guitar playing during a set of jazz fusion numbers. Covey, who plays saxophone, clarinet, flute and other wind instruments, has performed on stage in Europe, North America and China, with notable performers such as Joan Rivers, Frankie Valli, Della Reese, and Mickey Rooney.

“He’s calling his show Lush Life — An Odyssey of Love,” says Dunn, who is clearly energized by the chance to get back in front of jazz fans. “I’m really enjoying the chance to learn some new tunes for this. I’ve had the chance to learn the song Lush Life, and an Elvis Costello tune called Baby Plays Around. And I’m doing some blues songs with Wojtek’s group.”

Dunn gives away that the January and March shows will definitely be in St. Catharines, and there is a high possibility that the PowerHouse show will be somewhere in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

“The venues can include private homes,” she explains, “especially when we do these in the summer months, in people’s backyards. Sometimes it might be a winery, or a brewery, or other traditional venues. We plan on doing four series of three events each, and we won’t repeat a venue within the series.”

She stresses that the Salon Series is not officially part of the TD Niagara Jazz Festival. That, by the way, is already in full swing for 2024, with four shows on its Twilight Jazz and Blues Series beginning Jan. 22 with Garnetta Cromwell and DaGroovemasters at The Hare Wine Co.

February will see that series continue with three shows celebrating Black history and culture to mark Black History Month. The Thompson Egbo-Ebgo Trio appears at The Hare on Monday, Feb. 5.

The venues can include private homes,” she explains, “especially when we do these in the summer months, in people’s backyards. Sometimes it might be a winery, or a brewery, or other traditional venues. We plan on doing four series of three events each, and we won’t repeat a venue within the series.”

Juno Award winner and speaker Carlos Morgan will open the show by sharing his in-depth knowledge on the history and contributions of some of the best Black artists and musicians in Canada.

Acclaimed Toronto composer and pianist Egbo-Ebgo, originally from Nigeria, will follow that talk with his jazz trio, featuring Randall Hall on bass and drummer Jeff Halischuk.

Morgan will return on Thursday, Feb. 15, this time as a singer at Table Rock Restaurant in Niagara Falls. The restaurant will be transformed into a grand jazz club, where Morgan will perform original songs and numbers by Prince, Luther Vandross, Stevie Wonder, Barbra Streisand, the Beatles, and James Ingram.

The Jazz and Blues Series concludes with another Juno Award winner, blues guitarist Harrison Kennedy, formerly of the band Chairmen of The Board, on Sunday, Feb. 25 at the Niagara Artists’ Centre in downtown St. Catharines.

Information on the a Twilight Blues and Jazz Series is on the Jazz Festival’s website at niagarajazzfestival.com.

But to be in on the secrets, Dunn invites you to contact her via email at julietdunn33@gmail.com or you can purchase tickets at buypressplaytickets.com/sf/jal-salonseries/.
The U18 Wolves turn focus on league title, OMHAs

Mike Balsom
The Local

His U18 Wolves rep team may have returned to Niagara-on-the-Lake from last weekend's International Silver Stick Tournament in Forest, Ontario, without any silver medals or a banner to hang in their home arena, but head coach Devon Neudorf knows they brought home something just as important.

"It was a great weekend overall," Neudorf said Monday. "Ultimately, it provided us with more confidence and understanding, and reinforced the fact that we are one of the best teams in the province. We can compete with any team that we meet on the ice. That's a great thing heading into the playoffs and hopefully the OMHAs (Ontario Minor Hockey Association Championships) in April!"

The Wolves qualified for last weekend's tournament by winning the Bob Merkley Memorial Regional Silver Stick Tournament in Midland back in November, emerging from that round undefeated.

They followed that this weekend by going 3-and-1 in pool play, finishing second in the U18B division out of six teams, and taking the Metcalf Castor River Canucks to triple overtime in the semi-final before losing that game 3-2. The Canucks went on to lose the championship game to the host Lambton Shores Predators 3-0.

The Wolves opened the tournament with a 5-4 come-from-behind victory over the Petrolia Oilers Friday morning.

"Petrolia was ranked the number one team in the province," Neudorf said. "We were down 3-2 after two periods. At intermission we told the guys to dig deep the last 15 minutes. Petrolia scored again a minute into the third, which was deflating. But we came back with three unanswered goals to win it."

Andrew Bain notched the winning goal for the Wolves in the final minute of the game. It was Bain's first goal and his first game in three months for NOTL, after nursing a broken collarbone during that time. Bain ended up scoring three goals over the weekend, tying with a couple of players from other teams for the most goals in the tournament.

The Wolves were back on the ice Friday evening for the tournament's feature game against the host team, with the local Legion Pipe Band bringing all the players into the Shores Recreation Centre Arena and NOTL captain Marco Grusoso taking the ceremonial opening faceoff.

"We came out a little flat in that game," said Neudorf of the Wolves 6-2 loss. "We weren't quite as disciplined as far as our forecheck and taking the stick defensively. Ultimately, we didn't quite have it."

After the disappointing loss, Neudorf reminded his team why they were at the tournament, and to keep their minds on the next day's games.

The talks worked, as the Wolves blanked the Canucks 1-0 in Saturday morning's game, then dominated the Mooretown Flags 6-0 later that afternoon. NOTL goalies Quinten Davis and Braden Sawyer each picked up shutouts in the wins.

"Calo Zambito scored on a shot from the point in the 1-0 win," Neudorf explained. "And in the game against Mooretown, the boys came out right from the puck drop ready to play. Dylan Price and Lucas Roberts Ramos both got shorthanded goals on the same penalty kill in the third period, too. It was a big win for us heading into Sunday!"

Though the Wolves, Predators and Canucks all had 3-and-1 records after the preliminary round, the Predators received a bye into the final game based on head-to-head scoring by period.

"If we had picked up one more point against Lambton Shores in the third period we would have had the bye to the final," Neudorf said. Instead, the Wolves were to have a rematch against Metcalf Castor River.

"We decided to start Quinten in net because he got the shutout against them Saturday morning," Neudorf explained. "He played well Sunday, too. We had two power play goals, from Logan Rossi and Ed Friessen, and we never had a lead in the game. We came back from 1-0 and 2-0 to tie it up both times."

Regulation time ended in a 2-2 tie. Overtime was a back-and-forth battle, with the referees going light on their whistles through all three extra frames. The Wolves hit the post three times and the crossbar once, but with 34 seconds remaining in the third overtime period the Canucks were able to push a rebound over the goal line to escape with the 3-2 win.

"It was heartbreaking, and devastating," Neudorf said. "But we didn't give up a powerplay goal through all five games. The boys played with discipline, they really were able to dig deep throughout the weekend. As we move towards the OMHAs, we can remind them how it felt to lose such a meaningful game in such a heartbreaking fashion."

The team was back on the ice Monday night to begin the push to the provincials, beating Thorold 3-0. NOTL is currently in first place in the Niagara District League with a record of 13-3-3, three points up on the Port Colborne Sailors.

The league playoffs start in early February, while the OMHAs are scheduled for April 5 through 7 in Kingston, Ontario.

"That's our focus now," Neudorf said. "The boys know what they have to do. In the playoffs, every game matters, every shift matters. You just have to do those extra little things. When you think you can't get a stick on something, you just do what you have to do to make it happen. It's about bringing that extra five or 10 per cent effort every time you step onto the ice."

Other Local Skaters are stars

Samantha Frydryk, Alexx Hill, Liza Bulko and Kayla Thwaites from the Niagara-on-the-Lake Skating Club competed at the Stratford December Classic competition recently. Thwaites earned gold assessment in the STAR 3 division, Bulko silver assessment in the same division. Frydryk came third in STAR 5, and Hill seventh in STAR 8 and 12th in STAR 9. (Supplied)
Preds hope for turnaround in weekend games

Mike Balsom
The Local

After being behind the bench for four games in four days with his Niagara Preda- tors, coach Kevin Taylor was to get little rest Tuesday. He and team president and owner Robert Turnbull had to make the trip to the Marleau and Jane Labbe Arena in Sturgeon Falls for the Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League’s annual All-Star Games.

After losing three of those four games, it was a welcome diversion, especially with Pred- ator’s players Logan Baille, Eric Clasen, Aidan Jenkins and Isaac Locker scheduled to take the ice, with Taylor himself se- lected to help guide the South Division U18 squad.

But it was clear the coach was itching to get some practice time to prep his team for this weekend’s home-and-home tilt against Northumberland.

It was a long weekend,” Taylor said during the nearly four-hour drive through Tues- day’s winter weather. “The guys were coming back after two weeks off, and what made it even tougher is we didn’t get any ice time because of the hol- idays. They worked hard, but the schedule did us in more quickly than you might expect.”

The weekend started out well enough, with a 5-4 home victory Friday over Totten- ham. Declan Fogarty opened the scoring for the Predators with a power play goal in the first, but Tottenhams’ Emile Martin re- plied three minutes later to tie it up near the end of the period.

The Railers went ahead 90 seconds into the second on the strength of a goal by Matthew Prock, but George Kholmovsky tied it up with about the same amount of time remaining in that frame.

In the third, NOTL native Josh Frena scored an exciting short-handed goal on a partial breakaway and Niagara’s top scorer Luca Fernandez put the team up 4-2 with just over 10 minutes to play. But the Preds left the door open for the Rail- ers, and Prock and Ezra Barer took advantage to tie it up four minutes later. Fernandez re- sponded not long after, potting his 20th of the season, and the Preds were able to hold on for the win.

As has been the case for much of the season, Niagara played well against first place North York. Saturday night for almost 30 minutes. But the Renegades exploded for four goals in the second period de- spite stellar play in goal from Predators netminder Zane Clausen. Defenderman Nick Savoiev’s power play goal mid- way through the third was all the Preds could muster in the 4-1 loss on the road, their sev- enth loss against North York.

“I thought we played a great first period against them,” Taylor said. “We didn’t come out as strongly in the second period, and we won the third period. They have a good team, the best team in our division, if not the league. We got to play them one more time this year.”

Following Friday’s script, the Predators took a 4-2 lead against the Flyers in Toronto Tuesday with goals from Rhys Jones, Isaac Locker and two from Declan Fogarty, all in the first period. But they allowed the Flyers to get back into the game with two goals to tie it in the second.

Kholmovsky scored ear- ly in the third, but the Flyers responded with three of their own to take a 7-5 lead. Fer- nandez added another for the Preds with 45 seconds remain- ing, but it was too little too late.

“We were up 4-2, but we got sloppy, sat back and didn’t stick with the game plan,” lamented Taylor. “We took way too many penalties, 49 minutes of them. It’s tough when you’re missing certain guys for a long period of time, with back-to-back-to- back penalties. It makes us put out guys for more shifts than they should be out there.”

The four-game-stretched Monday night in Oshawa, when the Preds lost a 6-2 decision to the Durham Roadrunners. Nolan Wyers and Kholmovsky picked up the goals for Niagara in a game where they were out- shot 50-33 and were trailing for almost 57 minutes.

The Preds now sit in sev- enth place in the eight-team South Division, a point behind the other teams. It’s my first All- Star game, too, and I’m happy to be out there to help coach.”

Taylor was also looking forward to Saturday’s Game time Friday night at the Meridian Credit Union Arena in Sturgeon Falls.

“It’ll be something differ- ent for the guys,” he said about the four Preds participating. “They’ll get to experience it, talk to some of the other play- ers, see what it’s like on some of the other teams. It’s my first All- Star Game, too, and I’m happy to be out there to help coach.”

Taylor also was looking forward to this Saturday: After hosting the Stars Friday night in Virgil, the players have invit- ed their dads to ride the team bus to Colborne, Ontario, for the team’s annual fathers trip.

Game time Friday night at the Meridian Credit Union Arena is 7:30 p.m.
IAN “SCOTTY” GILMOUR BREMNER MURRAY
MAY 30, 1932 – DECEMBER 3, 2023

With profound sadness, we announce Ian “Scotty” Murray passed away peacefully with family by his side in London, Ontario on Sunday, December 3, 2023 at the age of 91 years young.

Loving, loyal and proud father to daughters Colleen and Heather. Adored by his cherished grandsons Spencer Craddock, Devoted and caring husband to the late Emily Craddock. Predeceased by four brothers, one sister and parents. Brother-in-law and Uncle Ian to many relatives in Scotland and Ireland who remember his kindness and thoughtfulness. Scotty was missed by London friends and neighbours who fondly recall driveway chats and visits, as well as life time old town friends in Niagara-on-the-Lake who would meet to catch up at the local coffee shop. Our dad was born at Rosehall Cottage, in Drumoak, Scotland. He grew up in the seashide town of Buckie. He often spoke of his adolescent life experiences growing up during the war years and recounted listening to Churchill over the radio. At the age of fourteen, he began a six year apprenticeship building wooden fishing boats at Jones Shipyard in Inverness. His mother sent him to Canada when he was twenty years old with $54 in his pocket. He stayed with a brother in Toronto for three months. One weekend they drove to Niagara Falls to take in the attractions and returned home along the Niagara Parkway. By chance, they stopped in at Shepherd Boats and my dad got hired that very day in 1953 and began work the following week. One afternoon, while driving down the dock hill, he met our mother outside her nursing residence and they were married in 1961. In 1966, he erected a small garage at Gillingham Yacht Basin where he established Murray’s Boat Repair. Over the years, he moved to a larger shop at the marina, where he continued to work on wooden boats and became an expert craftsman in the repair, painting and maintenance of fibreglass boats. After running a successful company, where business was done by a handshake as a true gentleman, Scotty retired in 2009 at the age of 77.

During retirement, our dad enjoyed memorable family summer vacations to his hometown in Scotland. When relatives visited him in Niagara, he delighted in touring them around sharing the local sights. While in London, Grandpa Scotty could be found cheering for Spencer at whatever sport he was playing each season. We often went out for a coffee and a drive to the park to see the geese. He enjoyed feeding and watching wildlife in the backyard garden.

Dad had a strong will, determination and resilience. Anytime he was challenged he always rallied back. We used to joke that our dad was like a cat with 15 lives! He always had a smile on his face and a story to tell. Dad was a great teacher of life and a genuine friend. We miss him terribly but we carry loving memories that will remain forever in our hearts and minds. Thank you dad for those great teacher of life and a genuine friend. We miss him terribly but we carry loving memories that will remain forever in our hearts and minds. Thank you dad for those

Cheers to you, dear dad, for a life well lived. Till we meet again. Love always.

Memorial contributions to the Celebration of Life. A private family interment will take place at St. Mark’s Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake in the spring. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions to the Celebration of Life. A private family interment will take place at St. Mark’s Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake in the spring. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions to the Celebration of Life. A private family interment will take place at St. Mark’s Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake in the spring. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions to the Celebration of Life. A private family interment will take place at St. Mark’s Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake in the spring. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions to the Celebration of Life. A private family interment will take place at St. Mark’s Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake in the spring. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions to the Celebration of Life. 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Wayne Gretzky Estates Winery and Distillery is once again offering free skating on its outdoor rink in an initiative they call Community Skate Day. This past Monday was their first free skate of the season.

“This year’s been a bit of a struggle with the weather,” said Mark Vaiana, estate manager. “It’s the latest start we’ve had to a rink season just because of the warm weather. The rain was making things a little more difficult, but we’re finally rocking right now, so hopefully it stays that way.”

The rink has been a part of the winery since it opened in 2017. A refrigeration system under the rink allows it to stay frozen “up to about 5 degrees, but we’re finally rocking right now, so hopefully it stays that way,” explained Vaiana.

Estate mixologist Alex Archer was tending bar and handing out skates on Monday, and said he noticed an increase in skaters from previous outdoor days this season. It costs $10 per person to rent skates, and in the past, said Vaiana, “Gretzky’s donates proceeds from skate rentals to local charities, such as Neworks Neighbours, but has not yet generated enough for a donation this year.”

Skaters of all talents were on the ice on Monday afternoon. Some were bragging the side boards while others skated hand-in-hand or showed off their stopping skills. Friends Steve Paget from Niagara Falls, and Tacie Donais from Beamsville, usually skate for exercise at the Beamsville Community centre a couple of times a week, but heard about community skate days and chose to change things up by coming to Gretzky’s. “It’s just the vibe,” said Donais. “You can come here and you have the outdoor air and the ice rink, and just the whole hockey Gretzky legend and the history behind him.”

Nick Antonacci and Francesca Puccinelli, from Mississauga and Toronto “always stop at Wayne’s when we come into Niagara” and just happened to be in town on community skate day. Celebrating Francesca’s birthday, the pair planned to watch the NCAA football championship from Niagara.

“One day, I’ll probably move here,” said Puccinelli. “We’re engaged to be married and when the day comes to get married, I’ll probably be in Niagara, so we’ll be back.”

“I’m tired of the traffic and we kind of want that small town feel,” added Antonacci.

A group of 18 retired educators from Niagara Falls decided to make the community skate day one of their regular planned outings.

“We came because we heard there was a community skate day and all the people in our group are retired teachers from Saint Paul High School in Niagara Falls, and we have a habit of getting together,” laughed John Zeman who was proudly sporting a Buffalo Bills toque. It was their first time at the rink, but former vice-principal Tom Marshall vowed it wouldn’t be their last. “Life’s” he said. “Everybody’s friendly here and they make us feel very welcome.”

St. Catharines resident John Zeman and Tom Marshall enjoy Monday’s community skate day at Gretzky’s.

Mixologist Alex Archer noticed an increase in the number of skaters over earlier outdoor days. (Photos by Sharon Burns)