

# The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



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Fire Chief Nick Ruller is happy to see Jazmin safe at the top of the embankment, as is her owner, Jinous Joyce. (Joe Pillitteri)

## Dog rescue a calm, coordinated success

Penny Coles  
The Local

A Read Road family now has their beloved pet home safely, thanks to a well-coordinated rescue by the Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire Department, and its Virgil station volunteers.

When the call came in Sunday afternoon, says Fire Chief Nick Ruller, it was for emergency assistance. What unfolded after they met the family, who had tried to rescue their pet before calling for help, was not something firefighters have directly trained for, but have had lots of “parallels” to what has transpired during other rescues they’ve been involved in.

The golden doodle, Jazmin, was trapped in a crevice formed by shoreline erosion, says Ruller. The crevice was very narrow, only about 10 inches wide at the top, down a steep embankment near the lake, and Jazmin was lodged eight to 10 feet down inside the

crevice. Her family had tried to rescue her with a pole and a loop that they were able to attach to her collar, but she was too tightly jammed in the narrow confines of the small space to pull to freedom.

Ruller says when they first arrived, with a pumper, a heavy rescue truck with specialized rescue equipment, and a pickup truck that allows access to remote locations, he used satellite imagery on their mobile data terminal to look for better access routes, and found a farm road with access from Firelane 15.

The best option seemed to be to remove the lake-side of the crevice, says Ruller.

Neighbour Joe Pillitteri arrived on his gator, after hearing the sirens on Lakeshore Road and following the trucks to the lake.

Pillitteri says his first thought when he heard fire trucks heading toward his

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## Vaccinations should roll out in Niagara this week

### Some will be delivered by Public Health to long-term care homes

Penny Coles  
The Local

Dr. Mustafa Hirji isn’t “super-thilled” with the amount of Pfizer vaccine coming to Niagara this week, but he is very excited that the group suffering the most amount of deaths, the very vulnerable residents of long-term care and assisted liv-

ing homes, will be getting it in the coming days.

The province won’t allow the acting medical officer of health to release numbers of the vaccines being shipped, and although the “amount is not terrific, it’s something we can work with.”

Niagara Health received its vaccines at its St. Catharines

Hospital site Tuesday to begin administering shots Wednesday, also handing off vaccine vials to Public Health, to be transported to long-term care homes and high-risk retirement homes. Public Health nurses will be providing support for staff as they vaccinate their residents, following a protocol carried out every year for

seasonal influenza, says Hirji, “building off something we know works.”

It means getting the vaccine quickly to a group of people who are dying from COVID-19, he adds, in order to prevent more tragedies.

“Throughout this pandemic, residents of long-term care homes and retirement homes have suffered the brunt of this pandemic,” says Hirji.

Almost 80 per cent of those who’ve died in Niagara —150 people in our community, as of

Monday — have been among these residents; 72 of them have died in the last three weeks alone.

Once residents and their care providers are immunized, he said, lives will be saved.

The challenge of using the Pfizer vaccine outside of the hospital setting is the need to keep it frozen and stable, but kept in a fridge once it’s thawed it’s stable for about five days but you really can’t move it far from that fridge. At room temperature it’s good for about four to five hours and then it’s spoiled,

so keep it in the fridge, and then take it out just before you’re ready to use it,” he says.

There is a prioritization of long-term care homes, looking at their history of outbreaks how difficult to manage they’ve been, and looking at the set up of homes in terms of how difficult it is to manage outbreaks.

He expects to have residents of all 34 long-term care homes vaccinated in about three weeks, he says.

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# Fire department benefits from community, council support

Continued from page 1

property was that they were coming for him.

"I'd been out clearing some brush, and decided to burn it," he says. "I had used some cereal boxes to start the fire, and when I heard the sirens, I quickly googled and discovered there is a burn ban in effect."

The ban is to cut down on travel to help keep residents and emergency service personnel safe during COVID, he says.

"It would have been so embarrassing if they'd shown up here. I know half these people."

When he got to the lake, he watched in awe the precision of the movements of the rescue team, as their plan was developed and put in motion.

They took their pickup truck closest to the site, loaded with equipment that included the jaws of life, a roof ladder and airbags. They used Pillitteri's gator to anchor the ropes and tie off the roof ladder, nervous they might swing around and scare Jazmin.

Ruller says he appointed a chief rescue sector officer, whose job it was to make a plan, develop it and communicate it to the firefighters, and an incident safety officer "to look at the bigger picture, to make sure an officer didn't put themselves in a dangerous position." The safety officer was watching the stability of the ground, and the proximity of firefighters to the edge, he says.

As the plan was put into motion, Pillitteri watched firefighters "digging really gently from the bottom, to try to break things up, break the crevice open and free the dog. They were working almost two hours on it, and it was intense. They all did an outstanding job."

Fire Chief Nick Ruller took charge from the top, at a vantage point where he could see everyone, and calmly but sternly shouted down instructions. "It was really impressive

to watch the approach they all took to solving the problem," says Pillitteri.

"When Nick called to them to stop, they all immediately stopped, and waited while the situation was reassessed."

Pillitteri says Ruller repeatedly called to the firefighters that safety was tantamount to the rescue, "and everyone just worked at it in a really coordinated way, in a calm, safe, methodical and easy fashion to do what they needed to do, and to make sure nobody was going to get hurt while they were doing it."

Ruller says "it was critical that we were using measured risk, and constantly reviewing our rescue plan. My focus from up top was to ensure coordination between upper and lower activities, as they were occurring simultaneously."

It was "pretty methodical, and well-coordinated, and that limits the risk," he says.

Pillitteri says once he felt assured the firefighters were going to be able to save the Jazmin, he decided to document what he was seeing, taking both videos and photos. "It's really impressive, the complete calm and coordinated effort that they all gave."

As a business owner, Pillitteri says, "I'm hyper aware of good culture, and watching them I saw a real sense of camaraderie and positive culture. That comes from good leadership, and good teamwork."

One of Ruller's jobs, as commander overseeing the overall operation, included keeping tabs on the elapsed time of the incident. "The reality is with an incident like this it's very hard to gauge the time."

During a structure fire, as an example, he says, the dispatch centre provides them with a time notification every 10 minutes, "because when you're involved in a rapidly evolving situation, it's hard to manage your time unless you have that clear notification."

At one point, firefighter Jason Disher drove Pillitteri back to his shop to pick up a few extra shovels. The rescue team had enough personnel, but as they were working under the threat of the end approaching darkness, they felt they might need to move quicker, says Ruller, and extra equipment would help.

In their favour, he says, the bank was walkable, they had the jaws of life, the roof ladder to help pry the soil away, "and a lot of manual labour."

The airbags, which are intended to help raise a car during a motor vehicle collision and can withstand great weights, were used to protect Jazmin.

They are about two feet by two feet, and just an inch thick, and when placed above the dog, protected her from soil falling on her. She was in obvious distress, and they didn't want to contribute to her anxiety.

When he announced they were 90 minutes into the incident, he said, he made it clear "we need to be sure that this is our plan for continuing. If not, we need to look at alternatives, because we only have about 60 minutes of daylight left and that's going to change our entire operation." At that point they evaluated and decided they were confident of their rescue plan being effective, he says, "and it wasn't more than 10 minutes after that discussion occurred that we successfully removed the dog."

Pillitteri was at the top, waiting for Jazmin, along with her family.

It was "really emotional" when they carried her up the bank, and it was obvious she was going to be okay, he says. "She was really happy with Brad Disher carrying her up the hill, a little spooked obviously, but you could tell she was okay, and happy to see her owners. They were overjoyed to see their puppy."

Ruller says the department had put in a call to the humane

society once they knew what they were dealing with, in case there were any health issues, and they were also waiting. But once it was safe to say Jazmin was fine, humane society staff drove the golden doodle and her relieved family home. On Monday, her family reported to the many following the story on social media that she was fine.

Ruller says he sent an email to the Virgil firefighters Sunday night. Their professionalism was not lost "on myself or the deputy chiefs" during the rescue, he says.

"Sometimes, we push hard, and it can be very demanding. The reality is this week we had several incidents where our firefighters' performance was stellar, the direct result of the work they put in well before the incident occurs. You don't rise to an occasion. Essentially you perform at the level of training the preparation put in prior to an incident. I'm a firm believer in the value of that training preparing you for the incident."

It was an intense week for firefighters as they entered 2021, adds Ruller, which started with a call to attend an incident on the Niagara River Parkway on Line 3, and was reported as a fatal shooting by a Niagara Regional Police officer, now under investigation with the provincial Special Investigations Unit.

On Friday, firefighters were called out to an early morning fire in the Old Town. Three stations responded to the Windsor Circle home, which had started as a vehicle fire and spread to the house, and to one other of the four-unit row housing, successfully protecting the other two.

Ruller says his goal is always to be "over-prepared and underwhelmed" at an incident, by insuring we have well-trained firefighters."

It's also important that the leadership of the department advocates on their behalf to council ensuring council is equipping them "in a manner that is going to allow them to effectively do their job. We have a phenomenal combination of



Firefighter Jason Disher (left) helps Brad Disher carry Jazmin up the embankment. (NOTL Fire Department photo)



Fire Chief Nick Ruller coordinates the rescue from the top of the embankment, where he can see the entire operation, including the crevice where Jazmin was lodged. (Joe Pillitteri)

those things right now. We have incredible support from council, and senior management providing support from the town."

The level of leadership is incredibly committed, as are firefighters.

"It really is a community effort, including the business owners who allow firefighters to leave their place of employment, the residents who yield to green lights so firefighters get to the incident in a timely manner, and the firefighters willing to commit that time and take time away from their careers and their families, and put that effort into it. It really is about community service at all levels."

Ruller, whose voice softens

when he speaks of Sunday's success, admits to having a soft spot for dogs and their families.

"I'm a dog owner and a dog lover. We have an English bull dog at home, and the dog owners were there, with their kids. It's always tough to see that. You can empathize with their feelings. You want to do the best you can for them."

Understanding their concern, he was glad to see Jazmin had no obvious injuries.

Pillitteri says he and his family have two small dogs they walk along the top of the embankment regularly, and Sunday was a good lesson. "This settled the argument about whether they should always be on leashes or not."

## Weston Miller has joined our team!

We would like to welcome Weston Miller to Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty, Brokerage. Born and raised in the heart of Old Town Niagara-on-the-Lake, Weston has the knowledge, experience, and passion to help curate your dream Niagara-on-the-Lake lifestyle. Educated at Trinity College in the University of Toronto, Weston spent four years immersed in the hustle and excitement of living in Downtown Toronto. However, one of the most important lessons he learned while living in Toronto was just how desirable of a home Niagara-on-the-Lake truly is. Weston has the knowledge and skill not only to help you find your dream house, but also to help introduce you to your dream Niagara-on-the-Lake lifestyle. From wine clubs to social clubs, Weston can connect you to the very best that our beautiful town has to offer.



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# CAO gives COVID update at Monday's meeting

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

At Monday's planning meeting, town CAO Marnie Cluckie spoke of the vaccine roll-out, and the welcome reduction in the number of people travelling from outside the area.

Although Premier Doug Ford's announcement of increased measures was expected Tuesday, she said, "we don't know what that looks like," and

promised the town would pass on the information as soon as it becomes available.

The plan for the vaccine roll-out, which should get underway in Niagara this week, is determined by the province, she explained.

The Niagara Health system takes over from there, and Public Health has been asked to play an enhanced role with distribution of the vaccine to long-term care and retirement

homes.

Town staff and members of the emergency control group have offered their services to work with the region in identifying potential locations that could be available for mass immunization, she said.

The town has had to start laying off contract staff, Cluckie said, although "we've been working hard to keep people working," deploying staff where necessary.

"We've told our people to work from home as much as possible, except for those in essential services who have to come into the office, up until Aug. 31," to reduce chances of contact and passing on the infection.

The good news, Cluckie said, is that the town is clearing snow from the path at the Virgil Sports Park, and from the trail in Sparky's Park, behind the St. Davids Fire Hall on Warner Road, so people can get out, walk and get some exercise.

Although the Bell Media campaign indicates fewer visitors are coming to town from outside the area since the shutdown, a portable washroom has been placed outside Hendriks valu-mart to discourage visitors from asking to use local business facilities.

Shutting down public washrooms last spring caused a huge dilemma for visitors who continued to travel to NOTL, but had nowhere to go when they got here. Their choices were unhealthy and disturbing to many residents.

"While we are not encouraging tourists to come in, and in fact they should not be, we know that is happening," said Cluckie, and the town is taking a proactive measure, and trying not to repeat the situation that occurred with the first shutdown.

The town is responsible for cleaning them regularly, she says.

The Bell Media campaign

showed between Dec. 22 and the Dec. 26 shutdown, 60 per cent of those entering NOTL were from the region, 19 per cent from the GTA, 12 per cent were NOTL residents, and eight per cent were from Hamilton.

For the period after the shutdown the numbers changed to 49 per cent from the region, 26 per cent from the GTA, 14 per cent from NOTL and again eight per cent from Hamilton.

When asked about recent fines as a result of COVID regulation infractions, Cluckie explained that six of seven recent tickets issued were to

visitors staying in a short-term rental. Although the reservation had been made before the lockdown, their arrival in town was after it went into effect, and the six people ticketed were all from different households.

She said the town is seeing an uptick in the number of complaints it receives, "not necessarily valid complaints, but we're experiencing a number of opportunities to educate the public."

The vast majority of business owners are in full compliance of regulations, she said, although the town continues to deal with mask issues.

## Lags occurring in follow-up calls

Continued from page 1

Public Health nurse teams will be working seven days a week on the long-term care vaccination rollout, just as all Public Health staff are now.

Niagara Health is running the vaccination clinics at the hospital, he says, and prioritizing health care workers within the hospital staff. Those working on COVID wards, in emergency departments and intensive care units are likely going to be considered at a higher risk, he says.

After the first stage of health care workers, long-term care residents and Indigenous populations, he expects to see adults with chronic care issues, and essential workers next, with EMS staff "a bit earlier because of course they're just like other health care workers. They're probably going to end up being vaccinated relatively soon."

The number of people recorded as testing positive Monday was twice as high as any other day since the pandemic began, but at least 200 of the 471 cases were catch-ups that have been building up since the holiday, and became a back-log requiring some information checks. That process was automated over the weekend, and the backlog cleared up, Hirji says, but many of the rest of the more than 200 cases were people who met with family members, sometimes with everybody at one holiday gathering tested positive.

"It's definitely disappointing that health care workers that the public, along with high-profile people, didn't follow the rules, and have created this situation," he says, but "I'm hoping that everybody will take note of how high our cases are now, and will really pull together so we can start to get a better handle on COVID-19, get the numbers down and keep them down, at least long enough so we can roll out the vaccine and get everybody protected."

The shutdown now will help, and the province is announcing additional measures, although not a curfew, "to keep nudging people," which should help, says Hirji. "I think it's unfortunate it is taking a lockdown to do that, as opposed to what could have been voluntary actions. Hopefully with another chance to do this right,

we will do it better."

When the province announced the lockdown before Christmas, but said it wouldn't start until Boxing Day, Hirji believes they missed an opportunity.

"I think it would have made a difference" if the lockdown had begun Dec. 21, he says. Instead, the delay may have given people licence to rush out and use those days to finish shopping, and to get together on Christmas one last time before staying within their households, "and we're seeing the negative impact of the behaviour now. I really do think once that shutdown was announced, the clock should have started ticking at midnight that night."

The region is behind on following through with the cases because of the number of new ones, he says, but social gatherings are a big part of them, and many cases are in long-term care homes.

The region is prioritizing following up with long-term

care residents and staff, "because that's where we're seeing the most illnesses and death."

There were fewer cases of workplace transmissions, he says, but with people returning to work after the holiday, that could change.

When the numbers go up in the community, the risk is greater in long-term care, but also in other places, including essential workplaces, stores, and schools.

In addition to staying home to stop the opportunity for infection to spread, Hirji says his other message is to those who have been tested but haven't heard from the region. Be patient, sometimes it will be a couple of days before they hear from someone in Public Health, he says, "because our cases are so high."

And also to be patient while waiting for the vaccine, he says, by focusing on what we can do right now to stop the spread of infection, and once that vaccine is here, hopefully everybody will be very excited to get it."



Dr. Mustafa Hirji, acting chief medical officer of health. (Photo supplied)

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Marnie Cluckie, town CAO (Photos supplied)

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Completed applications may be submitted to the **Corporate Services Department, Municipal Offices, 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, PO Box 100, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0** or by email to [peter.todd@notl.com](mailto:peter.todd@notl.com)

Peter Todd, Town Clerk  
January 14, 2021



# Doctors should have new home this time next year

## Penny Coles

### The Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake doctors currently in offices in the former Old Town hospital building hope to have a new home by January, 2022.

The group has formalized an agreement with John and Adam Hawley of The Village to construct a medical centre behind the CIBC bank. A single-storey building will provide ground-level access to health care, in an accessible location in an established commercial area.

It will have offices for Dr. Iram Ahmed, Dr. Tim Bastedo, Dr. Karen Berti, Dr. Samreen Malik and Dr. Pratik Kalani.

The rest of the doctors in the Niagara North Family Health, currently in the Niagara Medical Clinic, will stay there, or find other locations, says Mary Keith, executive director of Niagara North Family Health Team.

Residents gathered in the community centre in 2016 heard a health care steering committee, formed in 2013, was looking at options for a health hub, with all doctors of the health team under one roof, and options for locations were investigated,



John and Adam Hawley are building a new medical centre behind the CIBC bank in The Village. (*Penny Coles*)

ending with the Crossroads proposal.

Keith said the delay of that development, with no idea when it would be resolved, left doctors “unable to commit” to that project.

The lack of other loca-

tions with sufficient parking for patients of all the doctors provided a stumbling block to having them all together under one roof, says Keith.

A proposal by Lloyd Redekopp to build a medical centre beside Crossroads

School that would accommodate all the doctors and health services has been stalled, waiting for a hearing before the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, still with no date yet to be heard.

## Efforts to find a home for

the medical group have been ongoing for more than seven years, says a release from the health team, beginning with news of the eventual closure of the NOTL Hospital.

The Village site will have sufficient parking for the pa-

tients of the Old Town doctors, but not for the entire Niagara-on-the-Lake health team.

“There are not a lot of

**Continued on page 5**

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# Doctors in Virgil clinic are staying where they are

Continued from page 4

spaces that would accommodate 11 physicians, the full team and adequate parking,” Keith says.

The design for the new building is not finished yet, she adds, and she’s not ruling out that there might be space for a specialist physician, but there won’t be room for all the family doctors.

In addition to the Old Town physicians, it will house nurse practitioners, a diabetes support team, registered dietitians, a mental

health team, chiroprody and foot care, nurse educators and occupational therapy. The building will also be home to family health team group programming, administration staff and the executive director of the team.

“The decision of the doctors to move from the old hospital to The Village is a welcomed step in creating stability for the doctors, Niagara North Family Health Team and the community,” says Lord Mayor Betty Disero about Wednesday’s announcement from the health team. “While the

proposed health hub will not house as many doctors as originally planned, the synergy will provide opportunities for services not currently provided.”

ic, and he’s heard nothing about when the appeal will be heard.

“I thought we would have this get through sooner. But because of COVID

There were originally two objections to his plan, one about storm water management that has been resolved. The remaining challenge comes from Anthony Annunziata, the owner of the Niagara Medical Clinic in Virgil, who had plans to expand the Niagara Stone Road and Line 2 building to accommodate all the doctors. He objected to the rezoning of Redekopp’s property from residential to commercial, necessary for the project to proceed.

Redekopp says he’s disappointed that this wasn’t dealt with “in a timely fashion.

I’m extremely disappointed in the LPAT process.”

He doesn’t know yet if Annunziata will remove his objection, but Redekopp says he plans to proceed with his project, although the design and size of the building may change.

“I still feel there’s a real need for a medical centre,” he says, possibly attracting specific medical services, such as a lab and X-ray department.

“The pandemic brought to light what health care in town should look like. I look forward to a resolution to this. I see no reason to stop right now.”

“The pandemic brought to light what health care in town should look like.”

Lloyd Redekopp

Redekopp says LPAT has been slowed by the pandemic, that hasn’t happened,” he says.

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# EDITORIAL

## What can we do to make people listen?

Premier Doug Ford promised us early this week that Ontario was on its way to a scary place, and Tuesday, he followed through with his announcement on how to prevent getting there.

The modelling presented showed the current restrictions in place aren't working, and where we could be headed, which is indeed frightening. Ford said the province is in crisis, health care on the brink of collapse.

Worse-case scenario is 20,000 new cases a day by mid-February, with health care systems on the verge of being overwhelmed.

The aggressive variant could make it worse.

Ford has announced a second state of emergency, and a provincial stay-at-home order, which is new, and carries new restrictions. The stay-at-home order is effective Thursday at 12:01 a.m.

While it seems much like a curfew, it's not, Ford says. We won't have police pulling us over while we're driving home from work at night.

We will, however, face fines if we don't follow the rules.

People are required to stay home except for essential purposes, such as going out for groceries or medication, or to work. We're also allowed to access health care or go for a walk.

Outdoor gatherings will be

limited to five people. Masks are required indoors and recommended outdoors when you can't keep a two-metre distance.

Non-essential retail stores, including hardware stores, alcohol retailers, and those with curbside pickup or delivery, must close by 8 p.m. This doesn't apply to stores that sell food, pharmacies, gas stations, convenience stores or restaurants with takeout.

Students in Niagara will return to school, but not in some other hotspot regions such as Toronto.

The modelling shows restrictions put in place last month did not work. Also no surprise, a survey has shown

that 30 per cent of people in the province did not follow the December lockdown restrictions.

The majority did their part to limit the spread of COVID, but that wasn't enough to help the people who continued to get sick, or those who have died, the majority in long-term care homes. In the last two weeks, 198 long-term care residents, and two staff people, have died. Because one-third of Ontario residents couldn't stay at home.

The answer seems so simple. Stay home. We need the other 30 per cent to get on-board. Obey the rules and we'll be finished with them.

So much to look forward

to. Family to visit and hug. Parents knowing they can send their kids off to school safely. Better weather, restaurants and stores reopening, Shaw Festival plays to see, life getting back to normal.

For some, it means so much more. For those working to keep the rest of us safe, an end to the exhausting burn-out they must be experiencing. For others, the knowledge their business has survived, possibly. The ability to return to work, if their jobs still exist. Job security for the lucky ones, after a year without it.

There was some talk from the province that bylaw officers will be given more enforce-

ment powers.

We know they'll be needed, because some people are just not taking this seriously.

This is real. The horrible numbers we hear represent people, those with COVID and those dying. And those without COVID who are not getting the care they need because hospitals are overwhelmed and their care is delayed.

The vaccine has arrived in Niagara, ready to be administered Wednesday. But it is a long way from keeping us safe and letting us get back to living.

Stay home. Please.

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

## Two Mile Creek holds curiosities for locals to explore



Owen Bjorgan  
Special to The Local

Adjacent to the historic Butler's Burial ground, at the end of Butler Street itself, lies a local gem of a walking spot. With its paved trail and relatively new bridge connecting two Niagara-on-the-Lake suburbs through a forest, it's an amazing spot to get outside locally.

As you walk down below into the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority area, ahead of you lies Colonel John Butler's burial ground, a character steeped in NOTL's past. His profound influence in the late 1700s helped establish British presence in Niagara. His burial ground lies on the hillside of the very valley I'm about to explore.

Speaking of history, Two Mile Creek's floodplain paints an artistic picture of how the water has molded the earth since Butler's days, and the few thousand years before him.

Braided channels of the

creek's past lie empty, or simply swampy. Come spring, these arteries are filled with life again, as the majority of the conservation area sits on the floodplain.

These spillover spots create isolated vernal pools, which I was excited to stumble across. I don't think I've trekked through this end of the conservation area since I was 10! I wouldn't have fully appreciated the ecology of what I was seeing back then.

These pools, which are stagnant bodies of water, allow frogs, salamanders, and insects to breed without the presence of fish. Some of these depressions were an appreciable distance from the meandering creek, and they contained plant communities that are clearly adapted to becoming seasonally waterlogged. This also implies that the creek bed's pattern has been constantly changing over time.

Finding these spots for my first time has me intrigued to come back here in the spring, and see or hear what amphibians might breed in these pools. Amphibians are generally good indicators of environmental health, so we should be aware

of what's in our urban conservation areas.

That's more or less what this protected area truly is. Looking like a paintbrush of green moving from Niagara Stone Road towards Lakeshore Road, it is flanked by urban communities on both sides. The more recent developments on the north side of the area put a pinch on the open flow of this green space, ultimately creating a corridor for the creek, local hikers, and wildlife.

When you enter the forest, especially during this particular New Year, it becomes apparent that many of the trees are dead and down. Some have come to a resting point, but may have taken down several others with them like dominoes. Others hang on in the midst, like vertical daggers waiting for the next gust of wind to come. I found some branches stuck nearly a foot into the earth, implying they came hailing down with serious force in the wind storm from a couple months ago.

In a previous article for The Local, I made a case for our ash trees, the vast majority of which are standing as dead pillars, or have already fallen to the forest

floor. It was witnessed in this floodplain forest that the ash trees created highways for the animals to perch and eat on, as evidenced by the numerous types of scat and claw marks on the wood.

Two downy woodpeckers danced around in close proximity. They were all over the exposed wood and flaking bark, picking away at the dead pillars of ash. A bird of prey, too far away to tell the species, flies a couple laps above our heads before taking a rest on the top of a tall tree. All of these criss-crossing logs on the forest floor would surely be acceptable habitat for snakes, salamanders, and foxes.

At the uprooted base of a fallen ash tree, a small, mahogany-coloured bird flew up from underground and floated away to vanish. I've never seen a bird fly out of the ground like that in Niagara! I have some research to do.

Amidst all the broken trees, careful observation shows how you're standing in a flat valley of a winding creek. The ancient banks and berms on each side rise above the soggy lowlands and provide substrate for a myriad of pleasant tree surprises. The species found here generally don't tolerate the floodplain lifestyle, so what you see is a distinguished divide in the forest created by nature and time: the valley, and the hillside.

There is a small but excellent stand of black and pin cherries on a hillside in there. Some of the red oaks and nationally rare pin oaks on these little hillsides are about 200 years old. Twisted, ancient elms with yellowy bark droop over some bends in the creek, standing out like eyesores among the scores of grey ash. I was impressed by the pockets of tree biodiversity in here, but let's remember, they are just pockets.

Taking this trek in the winter months was both safe and rewarding. Safe from what, in the middle of an urban landscape? Considering the death of



Poison ivy clusters and dead ash trees dominate the floodplain, but Two Mile Creek has other secrets to be discovered. (Owen Bjorgan)

the ash tree canopy, much of the floodplain area is infested with poison ivy, thriving in the newfound sunlight. That is not an exaggeration of the word, as some old tree stumps were my height, but you couldn't tell it was a stump due to the thousands of wiry poison ivy vines which have enveloped it. It looked like black spaghetti. With the knowledge that some people can still contract poison ivy by touching its vine in the winter, I tried my best to steer clear, as I know I'm one of them.

I was enthused to see the clarity of the water in spots as I got closer to the edge. Although water clarity isn't an immediate indicator of quality, it is certainly an important variable for stream health. The many logs which have fallen into Two Mile Creek have created an assortment of desirable fish habitats. The relatively wooded hills in the conservation area filter the water running into it. At this point in the creek's stage, we're getting very close to Lake Ontario, where the mouth of the creek empties out by the old firing range.

It's at this exact point of entry where multiple fish species make their way upstream from Lake Ontario to spawn come spring. It's not unusual to see large rainbow trout and sucker

fish fighting the logjams and headstrong current down here.

I noted the fallen trees which have created ripple and pool effects in the creek. The woody debris can get stuck in the creek and alter the velocity and direction of the flow of the water. Sometimes, a deeper, cleaner pool ends up carving itself out behind a log, where the fish can conserve their energy, or perhaps choose to lay their eggs.

The fish habitat was evident, but as with amphibians, I would like to get back into the scrub come spring, and see which species are making use of this important fish habitat.

As four deer took silent but magnificent flight through the forest before me, I truly felt the constriction of their habitat, and the importance of this habitat corridor. Looking left and right, I could see the fringe of urban worlds. I realized the valley is wide, and narrow enough at once. In the winter air, you can see out either side of the protected area. Come summer, you would feel closed in among green foliage without a sense of depth in the forest.

The deer probably recognize this as one and the same. Maybe you'll be fortunate enough to see deer, woodpeckers, and birds of prey on your walk down here, too.

### The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community

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## LETTERS

### COVID teaches adapting to change

Of course there is lots to be positive about regarding 2020, but because there was so much unfamiliarity, fear, and ambiguity, we may be tending to focus on that. Many people are saying, "Thank goodness 2020 is behind us", but I am sure we all can draw some good from this past year, (hindsight is 2020).

Several years ago when I was a young parent, I remember being challenged into responding to the age-old question, "What is the most important thing we can teach our children?" Hmmm, well, how to love, be patient,

find courage or self-esteem, consideration of others, on and on, so many things. Then someone suggested, "we need to teach our children how to adapt to change." Ahh, yes, of course. In times of uncertainty (which there will always be), they/we must learn to adapt, to land on our feet, to think fast, re-adjust and carry on. I always remembered these words, "learn to adapt to change." Never did I have the opportunity presented to me so clearly, as this past year when I acted as office manager at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre in NOTL.

With the introduction of COVID-19 in our lives, there was no choice but to think on your feet, adapt, shift, change, pull a 180, change again, all the time moving forward providing opportunities, programs, and services to our local Art Community, and never knowing where it would all end.

I hope my children have learned this valued life-lesson along their way. I hope we have all learned it, if not before 2020, then certainly now, as we move into 2021.

**Gail Kerr**  
Resident of NOTL

## LETTERS

### Love your neighbour

Love your neighbour. There has been much made recently of the photos showing refrigerated trucks and containers ready for the overflow when hospital morgues are full. It seems people are surprised that morgues fill up. This is nothing new. I recall one particularly memorable night shift, early in my nursing career, when the job fell to me to take a recently deceased person to the hospital morgue. This was a small rural hospital, with cooler space for approximately six. I happened to be bringing person number eight. Working inside the cooler, I arranged the tables so they'd all fit, Tetris-style. It was cold, unsettling work, but each of those eight people deserved to be treated with dignity. I managed to get everyone arranged safely and continued my shift.

However, what is very new, is that we now have refrigerated containers waiting, anticipating, knowing there's going to be a run on morgue space. Because, you see, people still are dying from things apart from COVID-19: cancers, accidents and other life-ending non-COVID things continue. Morgues are still being

used. As unsettling as it was for me to spend time inside the morgue cooler so many years ago, the sight of the waiting cooler units and now field hospitals, shakes me to my core. I'm shaken because I know that behind each of those people who will ultimately reside inside the field hospital and, unfortunately, the refrigerated container, are scores of health care providers, environmental cleaners, diagnostic technicians, admitting staff (and many, many more) who are working until they have no more to give. They're working with inadequate PPEs, without eating or using the washroom, with painful, abraded faces from tight-fitting masks and shields; literally doing their very best to care for people, obscenely under-equipped and under-sung. They're working in a war zone that from the outside, looks surreally normal. These warriors are wearing armour unfit for the fight they're in. They're giving of themselves, and they're falling. We are failing them. (The system isn't helping either, but that discussion's for another day.)

The sight of field hospitals and waiting refrigerated containers should shake us,

should galvanize us into action. The war has spilled out from hospital corridors into plain view and cannot be negated or shrugged off as "not concerning." And yes, I do personally know people who have been sick with the virus. Very sick.

For those without extenuating circumstances, wearing a mask isn't hard. It doesn't muzzle, infringe on one's ability to speak, work, think, or participate in life. It's a symbol of loving your neighbour. One cannot spout love for humanity and refuse to wear a mask citing rights infringements. It is blatantly hypocritical. The vaccine won't invade and alter DNA, won't do any of the things professional fearmongers are reporting. Thanks to vaccines, the list of diseases Canadians aren't dying from any more is as long as my arm.

Let's support our health care warriors and each other by doing what we can to reduce the virus transmission. Together we can work to ensure those field hospitals and cooler trucks remain as unused as possible. Loving our neighbours has never been easier.

**Audrey Wall**

### Speak up about long-term care

The neglect, underfunding and overcrowding of Ontario's long-term-care facilities under the watch of numerous governments over many decades has

been tragic. The situation has only worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic. Send a letter to your MPP and MP urging action now

at [https://www.thestar.com/long-term-care/ltc-crisis.html?sp\\_ref=691714340.392.213671.e0.2](https://www.thestar.com/long-term-care/ltc-crisis.html?sp_ref=691714340.392.213671.e0.2)

**Robert Bader**



### View from the couch

**Donald Combe**  
Special to The Local

*Pieces of a Woman* (Netflix, 2020), is a powerful saga of a woman who gives birth to a "blue baby." The child would probably have lived if the birth had

occurred in a hospital; however, the mother-to-be had chosen to give birth at home with the assistance of a midwife. Lots of recrimination, guilt and suffering, but a strong and correct ending.

*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.*

## NEED HELP? MAKE THE CALL

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**905-351-1616**

**KIDS HELP PHONE**  
Service for youth  
**416-586-5437**  
**1-800-668-6868**  
(Crisis Line)  
kidshelpphone.ca

**ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**  
Meetings every Wednesday evening 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
St. Mark's Parish Hall  
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or find a meeting  
**905-682-2140**

**ASSAULTED WOMEN'S HELPLINE**  
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**1-866-863-0511**  
(Toll Free)

**CRIME STOPPERS**  
**1-800-222-8477 (TIPS)**  
niagaratips.com  
Text 274637 (CRIMES), keyword: Niagara, then your tip



### 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.



## NOTL LOCAL Front and Editorial Banner Bookings

### DON'T MISS OUT!

Contact us today. There are just a few dates left for these premium positions for 2021!

NOTL businesses: Call Karen at 905.641.5335 or email [karen@notllocal.com](mailto:karen@notllocal.com)

Businesses outside NOTL: Call Julia at 905.934.1040 or email [julia@notllocal.com](mailto:julia@notllocal.com)





PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice of Study Commencement

Municipal Class Environmental Assessment  
York Road and Four Mile Creek Road Intersection  
Improvements, St. Davids, Ontario

The intersection of Regional Road 81 (York Road) and Regional Road 100 (Four Mile Creek Road) is located in the heart of the community of St. Davids in the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The intersection is currently controlled by an all-way stop, and during peak periods motorists experience high delays. The skewed angle of the intersection also creates safety issues.

The Regional Municipality of Niagara is undertaking a Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) to address and improve conditions for all modes of transportation. This study will evaluate the need for additional transportation capacity, improve street lighting and illumination, enhance transit and active transportation through improved sidewalk connections and better pedestrian and cyclist facilities, conform to a complete streets approach, and strengthen the area’s relationship with its past.

Consultation with the public, Indigenous Nations, regulatory agencies and stakeholders is a key element of the Class EA process. Advanced notification of the PIC will be advertised on the Region website and in the local newspaper, in addition to being sent by mail to those on the study mailing list. To provide comments, receive additional information, or be added to the study mailing list, please visit [niagararegion.ca/projects/regional-road-100](https://niagararegion.ca/projects/regional-road-100)

Niagara Region recognizes that this project is being carried out during uncertain times with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic. Niagara Region will take all necessary steps to ensure maintaining the health and safety of the public. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of the project team members identified below:

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Personal information collected or submitted in writing at public meetings will be collected, used and disclosed by members of Regional Council and Regional staff in accordance with the **Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA)**. The written submissions including names, contact information and reports of the public meeting will be made available. Questions should be referred to the Privacy Office at 905-980-6000, ext. 3779 or [FOI@niagararegion.ca](mailto:FOI@niagararegion.ca).

If you require any accommodations for a disability in order to attend and participate in meetings or events, please let us know in advance so that arrangements can be made in a timely manner. Please contact the Accessibility Advisory Coordinator at 905-980-6000 ext. 3252 or [accessibility@niagararegion.ca](mailto:accessibility@niagararegion.ca).

Notice First Issued: Jan. 14, 2021

Shaw proceeding  
with plans for season  
to begin in May

Penny Coles  
The Local

Tim Jennings is desperate to see the Shaw Festival return to what it was intended to do.

The season won’t be following many of its past traditions, but he is planning for a season to occur, unlike last year, when play openings were postponed several times due to the pandemic, and eventually cancelled as time ran out.

This season is expected to see seven plays that were intended to be part of the 2020 season, with previews beginning in May, and openings in June, about a month later than most years.

Jennings, Shaw CEO, says plans are being made based on 30 per cent capacity, which is what is anticipated by May, but as he was all through last season, he’ll be ready to pivot “up or down” if needed.

It might have to be 25 per cent, it could be 100 per cent, “what’s important is to be open,” he says.

“It’s important from our point of view to be the anchor we are for the Niagara Region, in terms of economic impact. As an employer, we want to make sure our folks have jobs, and as a charity we want to return good to the world. But the importance of all of this, I truly believe, is that theatre serves a bunch of basic human needs we are simply not meeting at the moment, and we need to. That’s why this is charity, and why we’re trying desperately to get back up and running, because the sooner we start meeting those needs again, the better off we’ll all be.”

The mental health issues people are having from isolation, from not gathering, from a lack of empathy and human contact, says Jennings, “we’re seeing everywhere. The advantages we’re getting from the arts, and performing arts especially, are big. That’s why I’ve dedicated my career to this. We’re desperate to get back in some small way, just like we did with the concerts all fall. They had a real impact on people who needed that, needed that kind of gathering, and we’re finding there is a way to open safely.”

He is counting on seeing things open up quickly once the vaccine starts to be distributed, once flu season ends, and when the situation improves during the summer, as it did last year.

He’s also basing his optimism on what he’s seeing in most public health models, and the government’s plan for the wage subsidy going on only until June, at least at this



Tim Jennings, CEO of the Shaw Festival (Photo supplied)

time — and hoping those factors are correct.

With the growing number of COVID cases in Niagara now, it may be hard to look ahead to that time “from this moment, because we’re in the middle of this, but I think once we turn that corner it will get better very quickly.”

Long-term, 30 per cent capacity is not a financially viable model, he says, “but we have to invest in our community, and our people. My board has been 100 percent behind us. So if 2021 ends up being a year that we don’t make as much money as we spend, that’s one of the reasons why we’re a charity, and not a for-profit organization, to know that happens sometimes. But we’re hopeful we will be able to break even at least, while continuing to provide a good economic impact for the community, which is our first priority.”

A lot of the sets, props and costumes for this season’s performances were in progress last year, and Jennings says those who make them will continue to finish what was started, moving forward carefully.

“Shops are working differently than they normally would be, with protocols, including distances and masks, in place, that allow them to continue their work.”

Most meetings with staff, at this stage, he says, “are around how to make sure everything’s done safely.”

Rehearsals are planned to start in March, but “almost all of the shows were rehearsed for weeks and weeks last year,” he says.

What needs to occur is for the acting ensemble to be in good shape physically and ready to go, especially for those dancing in *Gypsy*, this year’s Festival Theatre musical, but he is sure they will be fit in

time for rehearsals to begin.

“Some cast members’ life choices and circumstances have changed since last year, and we have a few people who are not able to join us in 2021, but the vast majority are going to be back,” says Jennings.

“On the craft side, some have decided to retire, and on the arts side, some have gone back to school for a master’s degree, some decided to stay closer to home, have gone back into film, and a couple of young ladies are having babies, all choices they’re letting us know about. We’re not worrying about finding options. We can move others over from the cancelled plays, but the vast majority of the ensemble will look very much like it was intended to last year.”

With this being a lighter year of productions, with five fewer than on last year’s playbill, “it makes a difference in how much space we need, and how fast we can get the other shows happening. It feels like it’s enough time right now, and if something happens between now and then that makes us reconsider, we’ll do that, and we’ll fix it. It’s how we’ve been existing for a year now, It’s what we all have to do to keep that optimism, to be ready to change again. Hopefully we won’t need to, and it all works out better than we think.”

At the end of the day, “it feels a little like our job is to keep people engaged with art, and use art as a way to make a better world. Right now it’s a very rough world, and we want to be there when we come out of it. It’s an important part of my job, to make sure we’re able to do whatever we can do, and obviously we have to do that safely,” says Jennings.

“That’s the gig right now, to figure out how to make art as best we can, and as safely as we can.”



# Local man publishes his first book

**Randy Klaassen  
Special to The Local**

“My children have often asked me to write about our family,” says a local man whose professional career spans four continents, Africa, Europe, Asia and North America.

Abdulahomed Kaderali took up the task of fulfilling his children’s request with *My journey, my story, my life*, a book, recently completed and published.

Abdul and his wife Lata moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake a number of years ago. To learn more about the NOTL community, Abdul joined the bridge club at the community centre, and during a game, he discussed with another member his interest in finding assistance to write about his life experiences.

This person happened to be a member of the NOTL Writer’s Circle, and she suggested he attend a gathering. “The Writer’s Circle was

a big help, not only with my memoir, but they have inspired me to write about other experiences as well,” said Abdul. “The group not only helped me with critiquing my writing, but also where to find help to get it published.”

Abdul’s story begins with his grandfather, who at the age of eight, sailed from India to East Africa in search of distant relatives. He settled in the City of Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika, where Abdul’s father, and later Abdul, was born. As a young man, Abdul studied architecture at Leicester School of Architecture, near London, where he obtained his professional distinction as a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

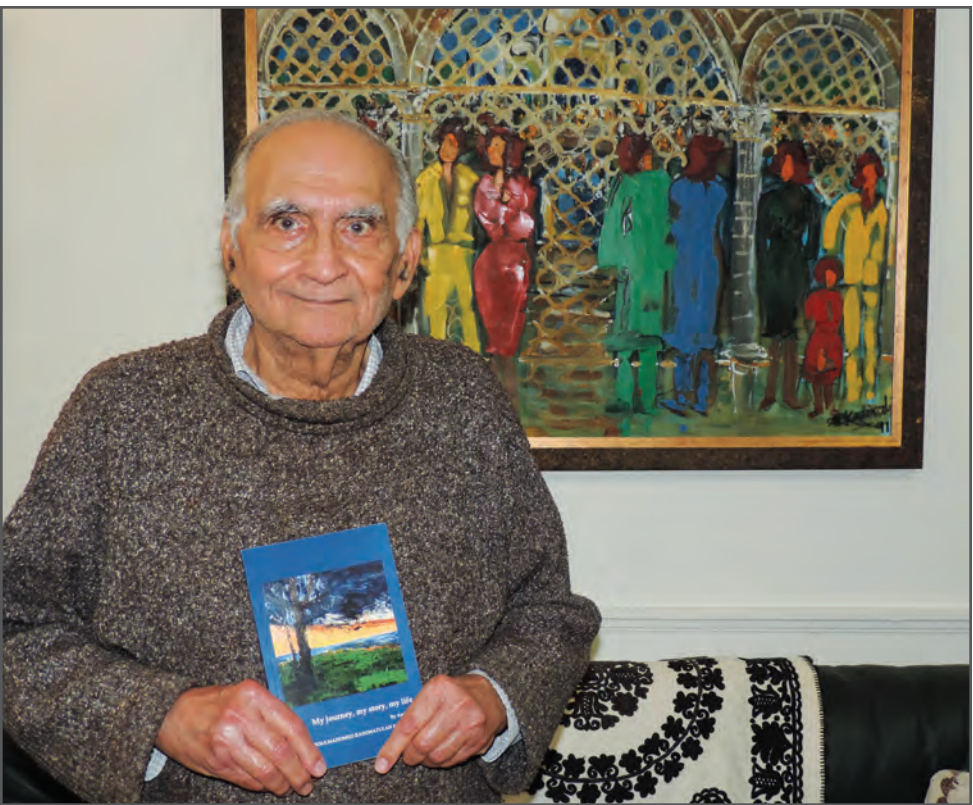
When Abdul returned to Dar es Salaam to begin his professional career, he was joined by Lata. She was from India, and the two met while studying in England.

In the early 1960s, Tan-

ganyika became the independent Tanzania, which created political and social upheaval. The turmoil resulted in the Kaderali family leaving the country, with Abdul and Lata relocating in Pakistan. The reprieve from political change of Tanzania only lasted a few short years in Pakistan, when conflict between India and Pakistan shut down major building projects. Eventually, Abdul was able to immigrate to Canada in the early 1970s.

While it was a challenge to re-establish his work as an architect in Toronto, it was not long until a number of major building projects involved his work. Libraries, theatres, schools and civic centres and more have all been part of Abdul’s passion for how we interact as communities.

Another passion of Abdul’s is painting. Their home is decorated with a number of his artworks. In spring of 2019, he shared them with a display at the



Abdul Kaderali holds his memoir, standing in front of his painting, *Visit to Taj*. In his book, the author thanks writer Randy Klaassen for advice and help with editing. (Randy Klaassen)

NOTL Library. The image selected for the cover of his book is a painting of Abdul’s, *Turmoil*. With it he envisioned a tree on their property, overlooking Lake Ontario, while expressing his feelings of dealing with the COVID pandemic. The light on the horizon reveals his hope and anticipation of working on further writing projects to share with family and friends.



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# Local man heads national food bank organization

**Mike Balsom  
Special to The Local**

Eradication of hunger across the country is the ultimate goal for Chris Hatch, CEO of Food Banks Canada.

And, since moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake with his wife Karen in November, he is working toward that goal from his home office on John Street.

Food Banks Canada is a national charitable organization that supports a network of 650 provincial associations, affiliate food banks, and food agencies all working at the community level to relieve hunger. Their work is focused on maximizing collective impact, strengthening local capacity, and reducing the overall need for food banks.

“We provide national leadership to relieve hunger today and prevent hunger tomorrow, working with a food bank network across Canada,” Hatch says of his organization’s mission statement. “Our mandate is both a short-term one, making sure people who are hungry today get the food they need. And on a more long-term basis, we work with the federal and provincial governments trying to enact social policy changes to alleviate hunger in the future.”

Hatch is clearly the right man for the job. He took the helm of the national organization in December, 2017, after nine years as executive director at the Mississauga Food Bank. While in that role, he was instrumental in developing a sophisticated inventory management system.

“It just dawned on me that we needed something better than pencil and paper,” Hatch explains. “So we put in a barcode-scanning inventory system just as sophisticated as you would find in grocery stores. It would predict shortages, help us find where things were, it automatically rotated the stock. We had scanning guns and were able to control inventory.”

Another innovation he introduced was a state-of-the-art aquaponics farm, raising tilapia to assist in growing fresh vegetables. “I read about it (aquaponics) and thought we might be able to use it in the food bank,” he tells The Local. “I found an organization in Wisconsin that is an expert on aquaponics. I got a large grant to buy the equipment, install it and train people. We built a full-scale system and supplied 50 other food banks with bok choy and romaine lettuce year round. And we made an arrangement with a company that would fillet, clean and package the fish for us. We would flash-freeze them and ship them off to the food banks.”

This business-like focus on innovation and improvement in food bank systems might lead one to assume that Hatch has spent his working life in the non-profit sector. On the contrary, it is most likely his 25

years as a human resources consultant that has allowed him to see the changes that needed to be made.

A native of Boston, Hatch’s corporate career took him around the world, working for three large global multi-million dollar consulting firms, including Wyatt Worldwide and Mercer. In 1996, he came to Canada to run the national operation of one of those firms. The family (his first wife and their three boys and one girl), fell in love with the country immediately, and never left.

In 2005, Hatch stepped down from his fast-paced, high-pressure consulting career as his first wife was attending graduate school. He became what he calls a house dad, running the kids to school and events and doing all the household chores. It was during that time he decided to volunteer at the Mississauga Food Bank.

“When I walked in, I was shocked,” he remembers. “I had no idea how big it was. I thought it was going to be a little pantry with a couple of shelves of food.”

Soon, his business background led to an invitation to sit on its board of directors. When the executive director was terminated, he threw his name into the hat and after a long search process, was offered the job. He immediately brought his business focus to the organization.

“I feel very strongly that the charitable sector needs more people with a business background,” Hatch says. “We need to have IT, HR, finance, marketing, risk management. All the things that a company has needs to be in a charitable organization as well.”

He got to work reorganizing, rebranding and relaunching that food bank, and it grew dramatically. His success there was noticed by the national organization, which came calling three years ago. Upon being hired by Food Banks Canada, he was handed the strategic plan developed by the board and got to work beginning to execute it.

During the pandemic, Hatch and his staff of 35 employees have been instrumental in helping meet the increased demand for food bank services. “Demand has gone up dramatically across the country,” he says. “The good thing is we’ve had tremendous support from the federal government, the provincial government, and the corporate world.”

In March, when Premier Doug Ford announced an \$8 million grant to support food banks across the province, Hatch was involved in helping the provincial organization Feed Ontario source food and distribute hampers to all the food banks in Ontario. It was instrumental in alleviating difficulties posed by early supply chain issues.

Hatch and his staff have been responsible for sourcing and



Chris Hatch (Photo supplied)

moving 39.1 million pounds of food during the pandemic. They work mainly in food procurement and distribution, soliciting donations, distributing surplus food across the country and purchasing in bulk when funding is available. Logistics is a major focus, moving food by rail, ship, plane and truck, and even serving remote communities in areas such as Iqaluit. They have a network of large warehouses across the country, and also rely on food banks in larger cities to help distribute to those in smaller communities.

Food insecurity and hunger is a poverty issue, says Hatch, and Food Banks Canada advocates to solve that problem. “I have staff that work in Ottawa lobbying with the federal government and the provincial governments,” says Hatch. “We’re currently working with the federal government to try to get in a national, subsidized daycare system. We’re fighting for housing benefits, and minimum wage policies, too.”

The pandemic has resulted in the Food Bank Canada offices near the Pearson Airport being closed, so now is the perfect time for Chris and Karen to make the move to NOTL, where he can do most of his work from his home office.

“Karen has cousins who live down here, and we have been coming to visit them for years,” he explains. “We fell in love with Niagara-on-the-Lake and have always dreamt of living here. We came down this summer and fell in love with the house and decided to buy it.”

They love the walkability of the community, and Hatch says he can feel the stress of the big city already being lifted from his shoulders. “I know it’s off-season for tourism, but we love how quiet it is,” he enthuses. “We love the feeling of community. We’ve only been here two months and we’ve already connected with people from Rotary. We couldn’t be happier. We look forward to meeting people post-COVID.”

The former varsity rugby player at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, is full of energy and enthusiasm, and has brought those traits to his new community. He is eager to make connections within the town and to get involved. It surely won’t be long until that energy and enthusiasm have a direct impact on NOTL.



# Local asks for cannabis petition support

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Debbie France, a resident of Norfolk County, and Irene Murray, a Larkin Road resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake, have similar goals.

Ask either of them about the impact of cannabis growth and its impact on neighbouring residents, and they have so much research and years of investigation at their fingertips, they don't know where to start. And, they both laugh in separate phone conversations, they have trouble knowing when to stop. Their passion, and their fears for the future, direct their energies.

Murray recently asked Debbie France to share some of her information she regularly disseminates through media, and in speaking with Norfolk councillors and planning staff. Although directed to improving a serious situation in Norfolk, Murray fears it may be what we are looking at for the future of rural Niagara-on-the-Lake communities. It is likely already occurring, as she has heard anecdotally, says Murray, and there is no reason to think the situation won't worsen. She'd like the town to be prepared.

Neither are talking about commercial medicinal cannabis growth as regulated by Health Canada. Although such operations also can have a huge impact

on neighbourhoods, Health Canada is the regulator and needs to enforce the regulations it sets, says Murray, applauding the residents of St. Davids for taking on the issues with Tweed, and wishing them success.

Murray and France are concerned about designated growers who operate with licences to grow medicinal cannabis, in quantities that may be legal but end up being sold illegally.

Murray began her investigation into the legalities of growing when there was such an operation down the road from her a couple of years ago. It was shut down, but it wasn't the first in town and it's likely not to be the last, she says.

"The problem is people don't understand what is happening. They need to be educated about what to look for."

The petition will remain open until January 20, 2021. Those wishing to participate in the petition can visit <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-2920>, to add their name in support.

The petition says the existing regime governing the production of medical marijuana, particularly by designated growers, is rife with abuse as a result of loopholes in the current legislation that impede local officials' and law enforcement's investigations of growing operations that appear to be in violation



Designated medicinal cannabis operations can have a big impact on a municipality, with little way to control them. (Stock photo)

of the law.

It also references "a lack of oversight from Health Canada of growing facilities," and of individuals "obtaining extraordinarily large prescriptions" to be grown by designated growers, an excess of what a normal medical use prescription would be.

Many have reached the scale of commercial growers but are subject to the same controls, the petition says, and a growing number "are linked to organized crime and are supplying the contraband market."

Petitioners ask the Minister of Health to take immediate

action, eliminating existing loopholes and providing law enforcement with the tools they need to investigate and prosecute unlawful designated grow operations.

In addition, both France and Murray are concerned about their municipality's difficulties with controlling cannabis operations, which are federally regulated.

Murray says one of the municipal issues is that there is no form of inspections that would allow bylaw officers to walk onto a property and investigate what is occurring.

"The petition might be a way to at least get the conversation started."

One of the best protections for residents is for municipal setbacks that can be enforced, she says.

NOTL has been trying to pass a cannabis bylaw for years, and at the moment, has an interim control bylaw in effect while the most current attempt is under appeal.

While there are many provisions for control, the proposed setback was one of the most discussed items, as councillors tried to strike a balance between a distance that would afford the best protection for residents and that would hold up under appeal.

What they agreed to is

that "no lands, building or structure or portion thereof used for cannabis production and processing purposes that is equipped with air treatment control situated in the Rural (A) Zone may be located closer to any sensitive land use than 600 metres from the property line of the nearest sensitive use." It goes on to say that no production can take place without air treatment control in a rural area.

The appeal, by a company interested in outdoor growth on an Airport Road property, was the subject of a video case management conference call Tuesday.

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# Business looking up and out for Meyers Fruit Farms



Jim Meyers says the pandemic slowed down their expansion but business warrants moving ahead. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

## Mike Balsom Special to The Local

In a time when many business owners are experiencing myriad challenges to their livelihoods, forcing some to seriously consider the viability of continuing, it can be refreshing to see a local company pushing on with expansion plans despite the pandemic.

Standing at the construction site of Meyers Fruit Farms’ soon-to-be 590,000 square foot greenhouse, about 10 acres under glass, Jim Meyers admits that sluggish Easter sales forced him and his family to push back the timing of their expansion.

“Things were looking a lot better in June, and that’s when we decided to go through with it,” says the vice-president of sales and logistics for the organization. “So far, it’s been a lot more stable. It does change with every season, and there’s still some uncertainty, so we’re very careful with the decisions that we make. But we had a good fall and Christmas season.”

Meyers says the early uncertainty about

COVID-19 did put a damper on their outlook, but even with the second wave occurring, they feel confident going ahead with the project. “We’ve been fortunate to be able to continue operating in a safe manner,” he says. “For the most part people have adjusted. It doesn’t mean it’s easy, and it doesn’t mean things aren’t difficult, but we know more about it (COVID) and all the safety measures are in place.”

When completed, the impressive new Stewart Road facility will expand Meyers’ production capacity for potted plants, including kalanchoes, Easter lilies, chrysanthemums and poinsettias.

To make room for the greenhouse, a nectarine orchard on that site was bulldozed.

“It was a difficult decision to make,” Meyers laments. “But we see a lot of growth on the greenhouse side. Being a food producer is something that we take pride in, and we enjoy that part of the challenge. This particular site was the area best suited for this type of project because of its size,

configuration, and where the land is located.”

“A larger portion of our business is dedicated to the greenhouse,” Meyers continues. “It’s a four-season market, whereas tender fruit, it’s one season, one crop. The nice thing about having both is that it’s a nice complement to each other. The greenhouse demand is not very high in the summertime. It works out well for our labour force and our farm to have a good balance.”

Meyers says his labour force has included seasonal workers since the inception of the program, back when his grandparents, Jim and Clazina, who started the business in 1955, were at the helm. The year-round nature of that portion of the business, though, means they also hire a number of local people to keep things running all year. In their peak season they employ more than 100 people.

Jim is the third generation of the family, following his father Fred, president of operations, and aunt Elly Hoff, who is the vice-president of human resources



Meyers Fruit Farms still grows tender fruit, but greenhouse plants can be grown all year.



The Stewart Road expansion will add about 10 acres of crops under glass.

and administration. Elly’s son Aron took over the role of vice-president of production in 2006, about a year before Jim joined the leadership team after graduating with a political science and history degree from Western University. Neither cousin was new to the family farm on Irvine Road, as they spent much of their early years growing up amongst the orchards and greenhouses there.

The 40-year-old Meyers is proud that local contractors are involved in the construction, and is excited about the possibilities the expansion brings. “It will be a modernized facility,” he explains. “An important part of any greenhouse is

the movement of product. This greenhouse will be using conveyor belts for the first time. We’ve tried a few pieces of other technologies at our home site, but now we’re able to apply them here on a larger scale. This (new facility) will hopefully allow us to take opportunities that might be able to come our way in the future.”

Besides the new greenhouse space, the Stewart Road location will also house the organization’s packing and shipping operations. As well, their offices that are currently located on Irvine Road will be moving to the new facility.

“We didn’t really have

the space for an office expansion at the home farm,” Meyers tells The Local. “Because we will have the shipping here, we wanted to have our offices close by. It actually allows us the opportunity to create an office space that will make for a better environment for the team.”

Those offices should be occupied some time in August, 2021, when the construction wraps up. And Meyers’ two young children and their cousins, potentially the fourth generation of the family to get involved in the business, will begin spending a lot of their time on Stewart Road, just as their fathers did at the home farm.



# Monet-inspired garden open to the public

**Mike Balsom**  
Special to The Local

Even on a dreary, grey January afternoon, the new garden at Pillar and Post can brighten spirits.

The Local had a chance this week to traverse the landscape with Vintage Hotels vice-president of operations Paul MacIntyre early this week.

"It's actually laid out like Monet's garden," explains MacIntyre. "We went to France to visit the Monet garden, and we actually have 7,500 different types of species in this garden. A lot of them are typical to the Monet gardens, but many of them are also normally found here in Niagara as well. There's a lot of overlap."

Upon entering the open gate, one is struck by the pathway leading to the centre court area, currently occupied by a 26-foot-tall Christmas tree. MacIntyre explains that come summer, the archways along this promenade will be adorned with roses.

To the left of the promenade sits the pond that truly captures the spirit of a Monet painting. Crossing the Monet Bridge, MacIntyre explains that though the an-

gles have been shifted a bit to fit the space, the pond is true to form. During the warmer months this area will be adorned with hydrangeas which will climb up the metal obelisks dotting the landscape. On the King Street side of the pond, a gently-flowing waterfall cascades down under a lower walkway that is currently closed due to icing.

According to MacIntyre, the almost six-acre property can host three weddings at a time. The barn at the south corner of the Monet garden, built with reclaimed boards from farms across Ontario, has a capacity of 120 people (under non-COVID times). A wedding gazebo is planned for another section of the garden as well.

The accessory building sits next to an artificial turf surface that was installed for the purpose of holding the skating rink that they plan to erect next winter, under normal circumstances. The rolling overhead doors of the building can be opened to serve food and refreshments for skaters who visit. Before Boxing Day, hotel guests were able to enjoy holiday movies under the stars, projected on the side of a Vintage Inns van parked on the turf.

More than 350 new trees were brought in and added to the canopy on the block. The Christmas tree, however, is temporary, and was brought in with a giant crane. MacIntyre says, though, that it fits so perfectly they may decide to plant one in that same space, known as the promenade circle.

MacIntyre has been involved with the multi-million dollar project from the start. He is clearly proud of the way it has all turned out. "It took about seven years to get approved," he says, "and another year and a half to clean up the site. C & C Yachts left behind a lot of resin and chemicals that we had to clean up."

There are plans to construct a new conference building beyond the south wall facing Anne Street. That project was originally scheduled to start this year but has been pushed back. "This was going to help take the Pillar to a place where it would be a little more busy. But now (with the pandemic) we have extra conference space, and it will most likely be like that until at least 2024. We may end up not even needing that extra space."

Though the main purpose of the garden is to host



Vintage Hotels' Paul MacIntyre points out some of the features of the Pillar and Post's Monet-inspired garden to local resident David Peck, who was out for an afternoon walk (Mike Balsom)

weddings and other special events, MacIntyre promises that Vintage Hotels will continue to open the space to the public when it is not in use for bookings. Once all the flow-

ers are in bloom this spring and summer, there will be no shortage of selfie stations suitable for all social media platforms.

The Gardens at the Pillar

and Post are currently open to the public each day from 10 a.m. until about 2 p.m. The entrance is on John Street through the main gate onto the promenade.



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# Youth advisory committee has ideas for virtual events

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

When Janvi Ganatra put out a call for new members to the Lord Mayor's Youth Advisory Council last fall, she was hoping to hear from at least six to eight Niagara-on-the-Lake students from public school to high school.

She is delighted to have built the membership to 15 young people from the community, the largest council since the committee began meeting in 2017, all anxious to be a voice for the youth of NOTL.

The Grade 12 A.N. Meyer student from Glendale has been a member from its formation, when she was in her first year of high school, and took over from previous chair Bethany Poltl, who is now in university. At the beginning of this school year, there were just two returning members, Ganatra and a Crossroads Public School student.

They also have three advisors on the committee, town community engagement coordinator Lauren Kruitbosch, local business woman Maria Mavridis and Coun. Clare Cameron.

The committee welcomes youth from NOTL from public school to high school, ages 13 to 18.

She's grateful for the new members, and the new ideas they bring with them to the new committee.

They have had to meet virtually, and have been brainstorming ideas about how to reach teens virtually, and how to pivot events held in past years to formats that can be held online.

The council met once in November and December, and in the new year, plan to meet every other week, she says.



Janvi Ganatra, chair of the Lord Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee, is excited about new ideas and events to explore, beginning this month. (Photo supplied)

Their virtual meetings came together pretty easily, with students already adapting to online classes.

They've divided the group into three subcommittees, including outreach, advocacy and mental wellness, following on a decision made last year, with five members on each.

Mental wellness includes physical and mental health issues; advocacy refers to local issues, including social engagement; and outreach focuses on social media and events for the enjoyment of the youth community.

"We're trying to come up with things we can do visually, such as a games night on Zoom," says Ganatra. "We're still looking into how we can do that as a way to get together."

Although it poses some problems to overcome, "we think we can still make an impact on youth in town," she says.

One of the past accomplishments of the council, the Mental Health and Wellness

Conference for Grade 8 students from all NOTL schools, was held as a virtual series of speakers earlier this year, once COVID shut down schools.

For 2021, says Ganatra, the council is hoping to hold a virtual meeting, with breakout rooms on specific subjects, which is closer to the format of the meetings held in the community centre in 2017 and 2018.

"In January, we'll be doing more brainstorming for new ideas," she says.

The group has been getting "great support from the Town," and from the Niagara-on-the-Lake Rotary Club, which wants to be more involved with youth in the future.

"The Rotary Club is partnering with us again this year," says Ganatra. "They have offered assistance in funding, and adult mentors for our wellness subcommittee. And we are also looking into an opportunity of making an Interact Group with LMYAC through the Rotary Club."

## Ravine to hold fundraising event for museum, Friends of Fort George

**Local Staff**

The Friends of Fort George, the Niagara Historical Society, and Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery are organizing their second at-home fundraising dinner, this one celebrating Black History Month.

A special History in the Vineyard event will be held Feb. 11, with a gourmet take-out dinner, with all three restaurants that participated in the first event, leading up to Christmas, once again taking part.

"The Niagara Historical Society and the Friends of Fort George were so thrilled with the community support we received with our December fundraiser event," says Amy Klassen from the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum.

"We raised close to \$8,000 in support of the Niagara Historical Society and Friends of Fort George, while also supporting three local restaurants: Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery, The Garrison House, and Ruffino's Pasta Bar & Grill."

Chefs have prepared a special menu with lots of choices, and the food will be distributed in special containers that can go directly in the oven to be heated up, providing gourmet options for a three-course meal, says Tony Chisholm, president of the Friends of Fort George. With each ticket, a bottle of Ravine's Sand & Gravel wine can be purchased for \$10, with a limit of two per ticket.

The evening will also include links to celebrate Black History Month.

Tickets for this event are now on sale at <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/niagara-historical-society/events/history-in-the-vineyard-at-home/>.

Tickets are \$100 per person, and include a \$40 tax receipt.

Contact the Friends of Fort George (905-468-6621 or [admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca](mailto:admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca)) or the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum (905-468-3912 or [contact@nhsm.ca](mailto:contact@nhsm.ca)) for more information.

All proceeds from the evening will help to support ongoing projects of the Friends of Fort George and the Niagara Historical Society and Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum.



A group of museum and Friends of Fort George representatives were ready to hand out three-course gourmet takeout meals during a December fundraiser at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery. (Penny Coles)

### LOCAL HAPPENINGS

#### TD NIAGARA JAZZ FESTIVAL

January 17 @ 7 - 8:30 p.m.  
Twilight Jazz Series  
featuring the Sophia Perlman Duo  
Livestreamed online - dinner and show or show only

[niagarajazzfestival.com](http://niagarajazzfestival.com)


#### THE FOSTER FESTIVAL

January 26 to February 18  
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[fosterfestival.com](http://fosterfestival.com)

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### Auchterlonie on Astrology

**Bill Auchterlonie**  
**Special to The Local**

The full week of Auchterlonie on Astrology can be found on the Facebook page for The NOTL Local, and on the website <https://www.auchterlonieonastrology.com>.

Thursday, Jan. 14: Today, Uranus turns direct. And is square to Jupiter. Beware of blowing things out of proportion. This is a potentially explosive day. It's also the 52nd birthday of Jason Bateman. His starring roles include *Arrested Development* and *Ozark*.

Tuesday, Jan. 19: It's the first day of Aquarius as the Sun moves from earthy Capricorn into airy Aquarius at 3:39 p.m. This brings a total of four planets in Aquarius: Mercury, Saturn, Jupiter and now the Sun. Soon to be followed by Venus in February. It's time for change! One of the world's most gifted entertainers and dedicated philanthropists, Dolly Parton celebrates her 75th birthday today.

Wednesday, Jan. 20: It's a challenge, as First Quarter Moon days routinely are. This one is extra challenged as Mars and Uranus make a conjunction in Taurus, a conjunction whose effects may roll into tomorrow. Today, stand-up comedian and satirist, host of Real Time with Bill Maher, yes, it's his birthday. Bill Maher is 65.

Until next time, shine on!

### LOCAL WORSHIP



**Sunday, January 17th**

10 a.m. Worship Gathering (Online Only)

Speaker: Kevin Bayne

Message: Growing in 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.

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34 Rowboat lever

35 The Pope

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61 Senses

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63 Agency which initiated the Waco siege
- 11 Author unknown

12 Mathematician --- Descartes

13 Adele's dancing brother

21 Pigs out

23 Locks or strands

25 Ram's dam

28 Tip sellers

29 Largest Moroccan city

30 Portable player

31 "Two Mules for Sister ---": Eastwood/MacLaine film

32 Pulitzer winner Jennifer ---

33 Salad sauce

35 Fulcrums

37 Loathed

38 Enterprises

40 Young ladies

41 Intelligence agency

43 Prize monies

45 Hazard

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OBITUARY



**ALVAREZ, DENISE**—Denise (Nini) Margaret Alvarez left us peacefully on the morning of Sunday, January 3rd, 2021, at the Niagara General Hospital.

On the 13th of March, 1952 in Quebec City, Denise became the second-born child of seven to the late German & Berthe (de Chavigny de la Chevrotiere) Alvarez. Denise

was a woman of many talents - jewelry making, sewing, knitting, cooking, and writing. Her creativity was greatly appreciated by those who loved her.

She is predeceased by her loving partner Rick (Thomson), and her sister Helen. She is survived by her son Matthew, and his father Mark (Hanlon), and also her siblings German, George (Lori), Michael (Sandra), Louis, & Suzanne (Stephen). She is survived also by her nieces and nephews: Justin (Lindsay) and their sons Zach and Nate, Jeanine (Antonio), Gina (Ryan) and their kids Anika & Hendrickus, Robert (Karen), Damien, Michael (Laura), and Louis (Hannah). Finally, she is survived by her many loving cousins in Quebec & Mexico.

One of her last sentiments before passing was how overwhelmed she felt by the love and affection from various friends and family who contacted her upon finding out that she had taken ill. She also wanted to acknowledge Mark, and her brother Louis, for dedicating their time every day to care for her, and to provide her the things she needed to be comfortable.

There will be a dispersal of ashes, held at a later date as yet to be determined.



**ENNS, SINAIIDA (SINA)**—Sept.18, 1924 - Jan. 6, 2021

After a life filled with faith and family, she received her Angel's Wings at the age of 96 on January 6, 2021 at Douglas Memorial Hospital. Sina was called into the arms of her Lord while in the company of her husband Gerald, and children George, Ellen (Bob) Smith and Christa (Ken) Wright. She was predeceased by her loving

grandson Christopher. A family-only service will be held 10 a.m. January 12 at Tallman Funeral Home. If you would like to view the live stream, please head to the Tallman Funeral Home Facebook page. Interment following at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery. For those who wish, memorial donations may be made to Operation Smile. Online condolences at tallmanfuneralhomes.ca.

STRONGER

Together

BUT 6 FEET APART!

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from January 7, 2021

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

**Across:** 1 Was, 4 Frail, 9 Scarf, 14 H M O, 15 On ice, 16 Tuner, 17 Enu, 18 Ramos, 19 Alone, 20 Range, 22 Enshrined, 24 Endowed, 26 Tare, 27 Brow, 28 This, 29 C is, 32 Emigre, 34 Or, 35 Papa, 36 Gated, 37 Dun, 38 Visor, 39 Ayes, 40 Get, 41 Nevada, 42 Nos, 43 Pass, 44 Snob, 45 Pulp, 46 Rattled, 49 Riverside, 53 Usage, 54 Odors, 55 Savor, 57 N Y C, 58 Ollie, 59 Elude, 60 C P A, 61 Feels, 62 Deeds, 63 A T F.

**Down:** 1 Where, 2 Arman, 3 Sound bites, 4 Foreword, 5 R N A, 6 Aimed, 7 Icon, 8 Less than, 9 Stars, 10 Cutie, 11 Anon, 12 Rene, 13 Fred, 21 Gorges, 23 Hair, 25 Ewe, 28 Tous, 29 Casablanca, 30 iPod, 31 Sara, 32 Egan, 33 Mayo, 35 Pivots, 37 Despised, 38 Ventures, 40 Gals, 41 N S A, 43 Purses, 45 Peril, 46 Revue, 47 Egypt, 48 Decat, 49 Roof, 50 Idle, 51 Vole, 52 Dale, 56 Odd.

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