



Icewine Village
continues on
Queen Street
page 14-15



Hockey Hardware impressing local fans

Billy Morrison, who grew up playing hockey in town, has invented Hockey Hardware, a game of strategy, that is already starting to catch on, at least with those who know him and have tried it. For story see page 16. (Mike Balsom)

Local doctor waiting for Canadian certification

Penny Coles
The Local

As wait times for access to healthcare increase across the region and province, one Niagara-on-the-Lake doctor is frustrated by a lengthy process he is facing to become certified in Canada so he can practise medicine.

Dr. Ritesh Rajpatty has medical experience in Ireland, where he received his undergraduate degree in medicine, an extensive list of post-graduate studies, two master's degrees from the U.K., and years of work experience as a healthcare administrator and family doctor in Trinidad.

He was born in London, Ont., so is a Canadian citizen. After his birth his par-

ents returned to Trinidad, where he was raised, but in recent years, after a very unsettling experience when his father was robbed, his parents decided to return to Canada, and chose NOTL as a safe haven, away from the escalating crime in their home country.

Last August, after eight years of working full-time as a family doctor in Trinidad, Rajpatty, with his wife, who left behind a career as a clinical psychologist, made the move to NOTL to be with his parents.

That difficult decision to leave behind their careers, he says, "was not about better jobs or better finances," it was always about moving to a safer life, for themselves

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Healthcare wait times worsen across Niagara

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative reporter

"Terrible" and "shocking." These are two words used by Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates to describe wait times at hospitals and the lack of access to physicians in the region and the province. "It's the worst Ontario has ever been in terms of healthcare," Gates told The Local, pointing to the statistics in

a recent article published by The Trillium, a Village Media publication and affiliate of The Local. One in every 10 patients admitted to a hospital in Ontario from an emergency department waits at least two days before they get a bed, according to an internal government document obtained by The Trillium. Ontario Health tracks and charts emergency department metrics monthly. While the figures are com-

monly shared in healthcare administration in a "provincial summary" report, the document is labelled "not to be distributed without express permission from OH," said The Trillium's story. All of the doctors who spoke with The Trillium identified the time it takes to admit patients as the core problem and said it's due to a lack of available beds. It includes charts showing how Ontario Health collects its data, broken down by patient

type, such as those who are admitted to the hospital, and includes high-acuity patients — those who require a high level of care — who are not admitted. Bill 124, which at one point capped nurses' wages at a one per cent increase — it has been overturned by an Ontario court — impacted how healthcare is delivered, said Gates. Bill 60, the Conservative government's plan to expand the privatization of health-

care will also have negative impacts, said Gates. He pointed to private agencies pulling nurses from public systems by offering them much more money as a contributor to the problem. "They are really trying to destroy our public healthcare system," said Gates. "They're creating the crisis by not funding hospitals properly." Niagara-on-the-Lake's hospital closed in 2015, leaving residents to travel to Ni-

agara Falls or St. Catharines for an emergency room. For a town with a high senior population, this is problematic, said Gates, also pointing to a fight in Fort Erie regarding its urgent care centre being slated for closure and residents of that town being in a similar situation — having to travel long distances for care, and putting more stress on other Niagara hospitals.

Continued on page 8

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Maria Mavridis awaits integrity commissioner ruling

Mike Balsom
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake Coun. Maria Mavridis is still shocked and angry that her January began with a letter from the town's integrity commissioner.

In a post dated Jan. 5 on her blog at mariamavridis.com, she expressed her dismay at receiving the notice that until the completion of an investigation into whether or not she has a pecuniary interest in matters relating to temporary patios in town, she should declare a conflict of interest on those discussions.

Mavridis says it was an owner of another restaurant

in town that has a temporary patio who reported her to the integrity commissioner. She adds that she cannot identify that person because of confidentiality concerns.

According to the town's code of conduct, a conflict of interest is defined as any situation in which a member of council has competing interests or loyalties between their personal or private interests and their public interests as an elected representative, potentially influencing their decision in a particular matter.

Under the province's Municipal Code of Conduct Act, "the pecuniary interest, direct or indirect, of a parent or the spouse or any child of

the member shall, if known to the member, be deemed to be also the pecuniary interest of the member."

The provincial act also states that a council member has an indirect pecuniary interest in any matter if the member is a partner of a person or is in the employment of a person or body that has a pecuniary interest in the matter.

Previously, in January 2023, Mavridis had reached out to the integrity commissioner about a potential conflict on the same topic. She received a letter back confirming that there would be no conflict on any "item where pecuniary interest is shared in common with

electors generally."

Mavridis' father, Bob, owns Corks Wine Bar and Eatery and Firehall Flame, both located in the Queen Street Heritage District. The councillor insists that she has no ownership interest in either business and is just an employee hired by her father.

"It's my employment, end of story," she says. "I ran for council because I wanted to speak where my knowledge is, which is tourism and hospitality. To say that I can't vote on anything that has to do with a restaurant, does that mean I also can't vote on anything in the Heritage District?"

Firehall Flame has made

use of a temporary patio in the past while the patio at Corks, says Mavridis, is actually considered part of the eatery's indoor space.

"It's permanent," she says. "It has air conditioning and heating, it has a permanent floor and a roof. We pay property taxes on it."

Prior to receiving the notice of the complaint against her, Mavridis spoke up during council's discussion on the temporary patios. Acknowledging that the program had come to an end, she opined that if it is to continue, the businesses taking advantage of it, including Firehall Flame, should pay for the town's lost parking revenue from park-

ing spaces used by them.

"Is it because of that that they complained?" Mavridis questioned. "Or is it because I commented that the capacity of outdoor space shouldn't exceed their indoor capacity in fairness to non-licensed establishments that pay high rents on the street but can't increase their space outside?"

Mavridis says she made those comments, as well as others about her worry that continuing the patios will negatively affect the charm of the Heritage District streetscape, out of a concern for a balance between the interests of the town's

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Councillors say yes to seasonal patios

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

The sun will continue to shine on temporary patios in Niagara-on-the-Lake's heritage district.

At Tuesday night's committee-of-the-whole meeting, councillors voted to ask staff to create a seasonal program for food and drink

establishments — one that won't require the town to endorse it each year, which is the case of the temporary one currently in place since 2020, started as a result of COVID-19.

A result of a friendly amendment suggested by Coun. Burroughs, the recommendation no longer contained the word "permanent" when it was decided to move ahead with the program for

years to come.

A motion from Coun. Sandra O'Connor was discussed before the staff report on the next steps in keeping the patios open eight months a year.

She was seeking her colleagues' approval to sunset the temporary program, terminating it until a permanent one is enacted.

It was defeated by councillors, who later elected to al-

low local eateries to continue sitting patrons outside on patio extensions this year from March to October.

O'Connor argued that her motion should be considered because of the impact patios have on an already "inadequate" parking situation downtown, as well as public benches.

She's in favour of patios, but said she'd prefer to see less "patchwork," and have things paused until a larger plan can be created.

Allowing retail spaces to have outdoor areas is one example O'Connor said is something that hasn't been explored.

"We haven't looked at it in that context," she said.

The program started as a result of the COVID-19

pandemic, and is similar to efforts made in other municipalities in Niagara to support their respective local business communities.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita said she doesn't like the idea of cutting the temporary program, which started in 2020, from businesses who may have not fully recovered from the pandemic.

"To take something like this away is saying I'm not going to support the business community," said Cheropita.

Coun. Gary Burroughs said there is "a lot of work to be done" on the patio program, especially their appearance in the four months a year they're sitting unused.

"I don't like the way they look in the winter," added Burroughs, who believes they

make the Old Town look "abandoned" four months of the year.

Interim CAO Bruce Zvaniga said approving staff's recommendation endorses outdoor eating and drinking areas at establishments where they didn't previously exist before the program started in 2020, and extending it each year will not be necessary.

The situation will be monitored, and reports on how the program is operating will be brought to council, he said.

Planning director Kirsten McCauley said seven downtown businesses currently participate.

Coun. Maria Mavridis, whose family owns restaurants on Queen Street, declared a conflict of interest on this matter in the opening minutes of Tuesday's meeting.

She cited an integrity commissioner probe as the reason for doing so.

"I do have to declare a conflict until a resolution is found," she said.

When the town discussed this issue in November, she did not declare a conflict.



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Question arises of conflict covering Heritage District

Continued from page 2

taxpayers and its tourism stakeholders.

“That’s the main reason I ran,” she says. “The way I see it, this program does favour one side over the other, and I want it to be more even. And do you think my dad liked what I said about the streetscape?”

She adds that during a recent trip to her bank, her teller asked her about the whereabouts of a bench that he and his family had paid for to memorialize their late mother. Apparently, it had been removed by the town to accommodate a temporary patio.

“Piecemealing together things doesn’t make sense to me,” says Mavridis. “You have to have an overall vision. You have to step back and figure out what we want for Queen Street. Things need to get done, and they can’t get done being thrown together, and continuing a

program that the AGCO (Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario) ended two years ago.”

As well, though she has yet to receive another letter from the integrity commissioner, Mavridis says that there has been another inquiry about whether or not she should be claiming a conflict on anything that comes before council in the entire Heritage District.

“We work as a team on council,” says Mavridis. “We turn to Erwin (Wiens) when it comes to agriculture, we turn to Nick (Ruller) when it comes to fire department-related issues. Who is going to run for council in the future if they can’t use their expertise?”

At a council meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 16, Mavridis declared a conflict of interest when the topic of continuing the temporary patios was raised. She tells the Local that she will continue to do so until the forthcoming decision from the integ-



Coun. Maria Mavridis abstained from taking part in the discussion or voting on seasonal patios. (Kris Dube)

rity commissioner, whenever that might be.

In the meantime, Mavridis remains adamant

that she should have the right to vote on the issue.

“I do not believe that anything that comes before

council regarding Queen Street is a pecuniary interest,” she wrote in the blog, “or anything related to a

program for licensed establishments is a pecuniary interest. This is a stretch, in my eyes, ridiculous.”



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Staff recommending approvals for King St. requests

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

The public has known next to nothing about recent developments regarding the three-storey residential apartment proposed for King Street, which brought a barrage of opposition to the council chamber in September.

All discussions since then have been in closed sessions, including a special council meeting held last Tuesday with council going behind closed doors to deliberate for more than an hour and a half about the 17-unit apartment on King Street, south of Cottage Street.

But there will be more discussion — this time for public consumption — this Wednesday evening, Jan. 24, and leading up to it a report with staff recommendations is now available.

Before heading in-camera last week, Coun. Gary Burroughs questioned why council and staff needed to discuss the matter behind closed doors, and why a staff report up for debate was not then made public.

He considered it a public document that should be dealt with in that way, he said, although he assumed the response coming from staff would be that the project is before the Ontario Land Tribunal.

And that was the answer he was given by planning director Kirsten McCauley — that legal counsel advised any discussion about the project be held in-camera due to it being subject to litigation.

Continued on page 8

Town to reduce speed limit in Chautauqua

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

Concerns about speeding in the Chautauqua area of Niagara-on-the-Lake have been brought to council multiple times over the last three years, and have been again this year.

But this time changes have been promised when it comes to preventing lead-foot drivers in the lakefront neighbourhood.

A presentation by residents John Scott and Shaun Devlin on behalf of Friends of Ryerson Park and the Chautauqua Residents Association at last week's committee-of-the-whole meeting was asking for action to be taken against speeders.

"The community concerns of safety due to excessive speed have continued, and possibly increased," said Scott, adding that proponents for change in the area have been patient since being told after their first presentation three years ago to wait until the town's transportation master plan is completed, which, as he pointed out, has yet to occur.

Through a motion brought forward by Coun. Nick Ruller, speed limits will be reduced from 50 km/h to 30 km/h on all streets in the Chautauqua area for a one-year trial.

Ruller also asked that staff report back to council by comparing speed minder data collected last year to find "suitable, temporary traffic-calming measures" for Shakespeare Avenue between Addison Avenue and Lakeshore Road, as well as associated costs, by the end of March.

He also wants the town to ask Niagara Regional Police to increase enforcement in the area as resources allow.

"The idea is to put something in place for this season," he said about the neighbourhood popular with tourists who stay in nearby short-term rentals. It's also an area with no sidewalks and narrow roads, said Ruller.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said he supports efforts to increase public safety, but concerned Ruller's motion could jeopardize ongoing studies elsewhere in town, such as the rural areas where there have been fatalities.

"Will this motion make those delayed?" asked Wiens, to which acting director of operations Darren MacKenzie said it could result in groups and residents from other parts of town coming forward with similar requests.

"We just have to change some of our priorities," said MacKenzie, adding the transportation master plan is expected to be ready in July.

Later in the discussion, Wiens said, "if we're just changing signs, I'm okay with that."

Coun. Gary Burroughs supported that idea, questioning whether taking action would take up too much of staff resources.

"I thought all we'd be doing is affecting a bylaw and probably create a few signs that say 30."

Coun. Sandra O'Connor agreed with Coun. Wiens on his position that efforts should focus on rural areas where much more serious incidents have occurred, but also supported Ruller's motion.

"I think this is one we can use minimal resources to show we are doing something about traffic safety," she said.



There are several signs in the Chautauqua neighbourhood asking drivers to slow down, and also to beware of children playing. (Penny Coles)

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Local BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: Stewart Lawyers

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Stewart brothers open law office in Virgil

Visiting the Village Green Plaza in Virgil, it's impossible not to notice the new sign that proclaims the Stewart brothers are back in town.

Actually, they never really left, other than to attend university and in their early years establishing their careers.

Andrew and Adam Stewart, two brothers who grew up in St. Davids and are now bringing up their families here, have decided this is the community where they also want to continue their careers in law.

After high school, they both went to the University of Toronto for their undergrad studies. Two years apart in age, some of their time there overlapped, and continued to along their future paths.

While Adam went to Ottawa University for law school, Andrew attended Dalhousie University.

And then they both started their careers in law on Bay Street in Toronto, with the prestigious Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP, one of the

top-tier law firms in Canada, where again some of their time overlapped. Both Adam and Andrew were there for 4 years, although they went in slightly different directions in their careers after that.

Andrew became vice-president of a global insurance company running their Canadian Mergers & Acquisitions underwriting division, before returning to his home town.

Adam went to work at his father's law firm and when Andrew returned to Niagara a few years later, once again the brothers were working together, with their own specialties — Andrew in estates, real estate and corporate law, Adam in estates, employment, real estate, and litigation.

Once the pandemic began, Andrew, who was already holding virtual meetings, decided he could work from home and make his practice completely digital. To do that, he launched his own firm, The Closing Centre, an innovative law firm led by the young lawyer "with a passion for making a differ-

ence" in clients' lives, using the latest technology to provide the best experience possible for clients closing a real estate transaction, making it easy, affordable and transparent, and more accessible through video conferencing.

Adam, meanwhile, continued as a partner at the St. Catharines law firm, until Andrew decided to open an office in NOTL.

Andrew explains he felt it was time to have a "bricks and mortar" location where he can meet with clients, and develop more of a local presence.

"I had my eye on this unit," he says of one of the book-ends of the plaza. "I didn't need a lot of space, as staff would continue to work from home part-time—this would be perfect." He can and does still offer video conferencing and digital closings through The Closing Centre, but for those who want to meet in person for any reason, whether it's real estate-related or estate planning, he now has an accessible, purpose-designed



location to do that as well.

He had already chosen the Virgil store front, a space where he could start from scratch, design and build to his needs, and had started interior construction, when Adam, having decided he was ready to make a move, approached him about joining the office.

"It was perfect timing," says Adam. "We're brothers, and best friends, and at the end of the day it just feels really good to be working together again."

They are both invested in the Niagara-on-the-Lake community, with their homes here, their children in school — Adam's four at Crossroads and Andrew's three at St. Davids — and all the time they spend with other families at the arenas, and on the soccer and lacrosse fields, not only as spectators but coaching as well. They both feel passionate about their community, and believe it's important to invest in its future and theirs, making this the next logical step for them.

They both love their location, a busy plaza easy to access, and they have created a friendly, reliable staff for support.

"We both cut our teeth at the best of the best," says Adam of their early years in practice, and both are proud to now bring that level of expertise, passion and commitment to excellence to Niagara-on-the-Lake, feeling privileged to invest in the community they have always loved and considered home.

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EDITORIAL

No easy or quick fix, but \$15 million might help

It's unlikely there are many in Niagara-on-the-Lake or across the region who don't have a horrible story to tell about a long wait to see a doctor, or the horrendous scenes in emergency departments as very sick people wait for many hours to be attended to.

We've even heard of emergency departments apparently shut down for several hours, with no waiting room patients being seen and no information about what is occurring behind those doors.

Niagara Health has shared the state of emergency departments and healthcare, with wait times increasing, but they

don't share an average time. It is likely not a number they would want to be made public.

This is in no way a criticism of our hospital or healthcare employees. Our local healthcare system is made up of good people doing their best in an impossible situation.

We didn't get to this stage overnight, and we know it is a complicated problem without a quick, simple solution. Unfortunately it is always the people at the top, the politicians, making the decisions, too far removed from what's happening on the ground.

Niagara Health attributes the wait times to a lack of beds,

both in the hospital for those who need to be admitted, and in long-term care homes, also filled to capacity.

We know that when we hear about the shortage of beds, it's not always just about the lack of physical beds. There may be empty beds but not enough staff to care for the patients who need them, and if money and space could be made available for more beds, the situation still wouldn't change because of the staff shortage. It's a catch-22 that has long been an issue but became considerably more so during the pandemic, when hospitals were full of very sick people

and staff were becoming sick themselves, or just plain exhausted. And still are.

Saying our system is broken is nothing new. As grateful as Canadians are to have free healthcare, this one hasn't been working for some time, and it's not getting better any time soon.

Privatization isn't the answer — it just means spreading what staff is available even thinner. We need more nurses and doctors, and for that to happen there have to be incentives for people to put themselves in that position. We need people who choose a medical profession because they see

themselves helping others, but they need to believe they can have some kind of balance in their life, and at the moment this province can't offer that.

So yes, this is a rant about healthcare, saying nothing we haven't already heard and offering little in the way of solutions. But it is likely one of the biggest issues to impact our quality of life.

We have to be thankful the Marotta family is trying to help — their recent \$15 million injection of cash to the St. Catharines site is great news, but we have no idea of what it will be used for. Sprucing up the building isn't going to improve

healthcare. Let's hope it can be spent on something that will make a difference to those long wait times, such as some of the programs Niagara Health has been talking about.

It's a great deal of money, a gift not often seen, and an opportunity to improve the system, rather than the building.

It's easy to say, and likely true, that we also need a new provincial government with a fresh take and a commitment to change. Even that won't bring a quick fix, but at least it might feel like taking a step toward it.

Penny Coles
The Local

Incredible species could become extinct in our lifetime



Owen Bjorgan
The Local

As an educator, tour guide and nature documentary producer, I often straddle the line between messages of positivity and perceived negativity. Based on the ever-evolving climate of attitudes around nature, I continually try to understand what style of messaging works best, and when to use it.

In these articles, for example, I intentionally sway from cheery stories of our outdoor world to the dark realities of biological life. In both optimism and pessimism, realism must always be addressed.

I have compiled a list of

animals you have likely never heard before, and I am here to bring their realities to your attention this 2024. Any of the following species could become extinct in the remainder of our lifetimes. Some are at risk of disappearing within as little as a handful of years.

I wanted to focus on species that don't necessarily get a lot of limelight attention, unlike pandas and tigers. Surprisingly, some of these animals are seriously large mammals, notorious reptiles or aesthetically beautiful living things. They are diamonds in the rough of the ecological world, and they are disappearing.

Due to habitat loss, climate change and illegal poaching, all of these animals are listed as "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. This category is a level above 'endan-

gered' — a final and potentially fatal classification before a species goes extinct.

Our first stop is in a muddy hole to find a rhinoceros, but not the famous black and white rhinoceros species on the plains of Africa. In the tropical archipelago of southeast Asia lie the islands of Sumatra and Java. Historically, these long narrow islands were covered head to toe in tropical rainforest.

Nowadays, rainforests are severely shrunken in size, acting as the final strongholds for two relatively smaller and lesser-known species of rhinoceros. The Sumatran rhinoceros is a smaller animal than its African counterparts, and is sometimes known as the hairy rhinoceros due to its unusually stubbly body hair. Here's a hair-raising stat about these animals — there are only about 40 remaining in the wild. As for



The Javan rhinoceros (International Rhino Foundation)

the less hairy and even smaller Javan rhinoceros, there are said to be less than 70.

There is an alligator species on the brink of extinction living in one of the most densely

populated regions of the world in China. The Chinese alligator pales in popularity and population comparisons against the famous American alligator.

Less than 120 of these

magnificent reptiles remain, exclusively along banks of the mighty Yangtze River as it flows through endless farm fields and cities exploding in population. To make matters more fragile, it is only a certain few big bends in the river. I went onto Google Earth in an attempt to find any aerial evidence of intact marshlands, and it was nearly impossible to do so.

One can imagine the sense of dread and urgency for the scientists and conservation enthusiasts as they watch a magnificent reptile become

Continued on page 7

View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

As much as I wanted to like *Good Grief* (Netflix 2023), I found it somewhat tedious and belaboured. It seems Dan

Levy was trying too hard to explain what it is to grieve. He is a complex and deeply thoughtful actor whom I admire, but this film fell short of his goals.

Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who

loves to go to the movies. Until he resumes going to theatres, he has graciously agreed to share his opinions, through "short and sweet" exclusives, of online series and movies for The Local.

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Where's Ben?

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

Last week Doreen Korcock correctly identified Ben's location as the front step of St. Andrew's Church.

COMMENT

Local LETTERS Newark Neighbours says no large furniture please

A belated Happy New Year to the Niagara-on-the-Lake community from Newark Neighbours. With your support and generosity, we were able to ensure happy holidays to all of our food bank clients this year. As the saying goes, "We couldn't have done it without you." Your consistent support of donations to our thrift store ensures that we are always able to provide good quality items to our customers on an on-going basis. As you are aware, the revenue that is generated from our thrift store is dedicated to supporting our food bank.

Since our July 2023 move to our location at 1534 Niagara

Stone Road, we are fortunate to be able to accept a larger number of donated items for our thrift store. We are always pleased to receive the following items: women's, men's and children clothing, shoes, purses, bedding (sheets, pillowcases, bedspreads, duvets), towels (kitchen and bath), small appliances, home decoration items and more. We are now able to accept small pieces of furniture — small chairs, side or end tables, lamps, small bookcases or display furniture.

Unfortunately, there are items that we are not able to accept in our store, primarily due to space constraints. These

include large furniture or bookcases, kitchen or bath cabinets, carpets, mattresses, large appliances, books, CDs and DVDs, tools or machinery, building materials, medical equipment (wheelchairs, walkers, commodes, etc) and sports equipment. The attached picture of a large chair is an example of an item that we are unable to accept. The receipt of these items often results in additional cost to us for removal and disposal. We appreciate your consideration of this constraint and thank you in advance for your support.

If you have medical equipment to donate, you may wish to contact Niagara-on-the-Lake

Community Palliative Care Service. One of the services they provide is lending equipment free of charge. They may have a need for this type of donation.

If you have any questions about the items we are able to accept and those we cannot, please feel free to contact Newark Neighbours at 905-468-3519 during our business hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Saturday, and Thursday evenings until 7 p.m.

Thank you again for your ongoing and generous support of Newark Neighbours.

Cindy Grant,
Board of Directors
Newark Neighbours



Local LETTERS Thanks for support of Jewish Community of Niagara

The purpose of my letter is to express my gratitude for the recent support that the Jewish Community of Niagara has received from the council of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake as well as other politicians. Sunday, Jan. 14, 2024, marked 100 days

since the terrorist group Hamas invaded Israel. On that day, they killed over 1200 people, viciously raped women, mutilated people, burned families and babies alive and kidnapped over 200 people. We walked on Sunday, Jan. 14, to remind the world

that there are still more than 100 children, men and women being held captive by Hamas who must be brought home.

I am grateful to Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens and another local citizen for joining us on Sunday to show the

Jewish Community support during this very difficult time.

I also want to thank our MP Tony Baldinelli; our MPP, Wayne Gates; Coun. Wendy Cheropita; the Mayor of Niagara Falls, Jim Diodati; our former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rob

Nicholson; former President of TPN, Anthony Annunziata; as well as Vaughn Goettler, Cindy and George Lepp, and the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre members for joining us to show their support this past December, during Hanukkah, when

we gathered to unite the Niagara Jewish Community in light of recent tragic events.

I am extremely proud and thankful to be represented by this council, MP and MPP.

Veronica Balaj
NOTL Resident

Local LETTERS Please stop by, sign the flag

Many of you since the war against Ukraine began have generously donated. The first Christmas I would say was the hardest on these and other families. However, NOTLers reached out and we were able to bring some warmth and

joy to the parents and their children, whether it be dropping off Christmas trees and decorations, new clothes and boots, toys and backpacks full of specialty items that put a smile on their faces. Many of you donated to various organi-

zations and I know they are all thankful and grateful. The war still continues.

I have purchased a Canadian flag with the intention of having NOTLers who, over the last couple of years, donated or dropped off items that helped

these and other families, sign this Canadian flag which will be shipped to my cousin in Ukraine who works for an organization that solves humanitarian challenges in the midst of disaster. They have provided significant relief aid to 983 cit-

ies, towns and villages.

Correction to a recent article in The Local ... I was flying a Ukrainian flag outside my home which unfortunately was demolished in an accident and will be replaced this spring.

The Canadian flag will be

at The Local office, 1596 Four Mile Creek Road opposite the town hall Jan. 26 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., otherwise you can text me at 905-468-2325 to make arrangements.

Shirley Madsen
NOTL

Local LETTERS Response to staff report on King St. apartment proposal

I'd like to begin by summarizing the story line on the proposed King Street apartment development ... so far.

Town staff and council appear to be bamboozled by the developer's end run.

Despite intense community opposition to the proposal, town staff essentially recommends we abandon the Official Plan and let developers just do what they want in Old Town.

The key issue relates to the density (the size of the building) and setting a precedent that undercuts the Official Plan, which will assuredly result in an overbuilt Old Town.

The developer is requesting

that the area be reclassified from low density residential to medium density. Beyond that, the proposal requests a density that exceeds the maximum medium density by 76 per cent. The proposal results in a density of 52.8 units per hectare vs a maximum medium density of 30 units.

However, compared to the property's current low density residential designation, the proposal's density of 52.8 units/hectare is 277 per cent greater than the low density maximum of 14 units per hectare.

Supporting a proposal that increases the lot's density 277 per cent from its current Official Plan designation and establishes

that as a new precedent for future development is unacceptable.

This is massive overdevelopment and it is unnecessary to achieve our intensification targets.

Now, visualize for a moment the number of empty and large lots that can be subdivided in Old Town. The prospect of gross overdevelopment on those properties is shocking and will be to the detriment of our community and its residents ... forever.

The report goes on to say that "Staff are of the opinion that the proposed density is appropriate."

They may think so, but the impacted community has been singular, loud and clear in their

view that this development will adversely impact the quality of the neighbourhood.

There's a cute quote going around that it's like trying to fit a size 9 foot in a size 6 shoe. I did the math, and it's actually trying to fit a 22.5 size foot in a size 6 shoe.

If approved, this will set a horrendous precedent, effectively paving the way for developers to randomly over-build in many settings in Old Town. The developers will render the Official Plan obsolete in their pursuit of maximizing their profits, at the expense of the town's residents.

The Official Plan was estab-

lished to enable and to direct development in our community. The Official Plan is an agreement, a contract between the town staff, the councillors and the residents that defines the future of our community.

As co-authors and elected

representatives of the community, councillors need to heed the will of the residents and honour that agreement.

This proposal must be stopped.

Bill French
NOTL

Conservation awareness is key

Continued from page 6

reduced to a few desperately small marshes on an increasingly polluted river.

One concept I find astonishing is how a large animal can remain hidden from scientific discovery for so long. The cruel irony of discovering such a creature so late in the game is that it may be too late to save it. Enter the saola.

You haven't heard of the saola before? Me neither, un-

til I did some research. Imagine a species of bovine (cattle, buffalo and bison species) discovered in 1992, only to know that it is already likely too late to save before it goes extinct. That's where the bizarre and magnificent saola, or the 'Asian unicorn' makes its meek mark in our mishandled history of protecting biodiversity.

Living in the jungle-clad mountains of Vietnam and Laos, the saola takes on the appearance of a cow, a deer and a gazelle all combined into one.

It has a chocolate brown body with beautiful white stripes running along its narrow, peculiarly pointed face. Horns up to 20 inches long grow upwards with impressively sharp-tipped ends.

This species would have been crashing through the dense jungles as troops did during the Vietnam War while remaining undetected to science. With no official studies on its population completed to this day, the IUCN estimates that its population could be around 750, and that is a gen-

erous estimate.

Writing this article hits an emotional yet impractical nerve with me. I would love nothing more than the time and the funds to simply get on a plane and fly to these locations. What a privilege it would be to link up with local scientists and Indigenous guides to go and see these animals in the wild, not just for the personal experience, but for the sake of conservation awareness.

For now, I hope this article does something in lieu of that.

Ricky Rap

Ricky Rap is 10 thoughts and offerings from Niagara's own Rick Mills. Retired from more than 30 years of management within the steel in-

dustry, he continues pastoral ministry here in town. Ricky Rap, he says, is intended to help us to believe in and laugh at ourselves.

1. My hair is further proof that God is both creative, and merciful.
2. Cranium is so big that if I'd gone bald, they'd put me in a circus.
3. Had a friend here in the spring from out of province who loves hats.
4. We always visit BeauChapeau Hat Shop in Old Town.
5. Found matching hats — his was small, mine XL.
6. At 12 years old I convinced my dad to let me go to Mom's local hair stylist, Mr. Barry, instead of the regular barbers cut from Angelo's in Virgil.
7. At Mr. Barry's, the stylist made a big deal of my hair, inviting other women to run their fingers through it.
8. Once home, I said, "I'm going back to Angelo's."
9. A year or so later, puberty kicked in.
10. Back to Mr. Barry's.



Shortage of beds high on list of holdups

Continued from page 1

To ease pressure on emergency rooms, places like Fort Erie and Port Colborne need to retain their sites, he said.

“The best way to do that is to make sure our urgent care centres are open 24/7,” said Gates, adding that local doctors and nurses are working as hard as they can but are becoming burnt out.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, Gates has supported the town’s efforts to bring in a nurse practitioner to assist the community with its medical needs, which the province at one point promised to fund, but so far hasn’t followed through.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor has been highly involved on this file.

It’s been a year and a half since the province gave the municipality, in writing, notice that the government would be equipping the community with a nurse practitioner.

“Everybody is very frustrated because we don’t know where the holdup is,” she told The Local, adding that this would be another way to reduce the number of trips to one of the three emergency rooms in Niagara.

Through the region’s phy-

sician recruitment program, the town recently brought in two new family doctors — but O’Connor estimates there are thousands in town who still don’t have one, or have to travel outside the region to see theirs.

The Canadian Medical Association says many emergency rooms across the country are overflowing and patients across Canada are waiting far too long to receive necessary care.

“The scene is not new, but unless we make major systemic changes, it will continue to repeat itself,” wrote CMA president Dr. Kathleen Ross.

“Despite the tireless efforts of physicians, nurses and other health providers, testimonies from around the country illustrate that patients in some jurisdictions are waiting as long as 20 hours or longer to receive care,” she said.

The CMA believes it is “well past time to transform and rebuild” the healthcare system, including investing upstream in team-based primary care.

The association is calling on provinces and territories to prioritize signing and implementing action plans to significantly increase access, improve working conditions

and modernize Canada’s health systems.

Niagara Health programs and services, especially its emergency departments, like most hospitals across the province, are “under critical pressure as we deal with high patient volumes, long wait times and sicker patients,” the health system said in a statement to The Local.

On several occasions in recent weeks, Niagara Health has seen a record breaking 600-plus patients a day visiting its three emergency departments — Welland, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls.

“That’s compared to an average of closer to 415,” said the statement.

Preliminary data suggests that so far this year, wait times to see a doctor have increased by nearly two hours.

Niagara Health did not provide an exact figure when it comes to what the average wait time is at the three sites, but the many horror stories makes it obvious how bad the situation can be at times — one Niagara resident recounted a 14-hour wait for her mother with chest pains, during which time the St. Catharines emergency room appeared to shut down for about four hours, while patients were taken from the emergency department on

stretchers, presumably to other hospitals.

There are a number of factors outside the hospital that contribute to wait times, said Niagara Health.

“We are caring for patients for non-emergency matters in our ED (emergency department) because they do not have access to a family doctor or other primary care provider,” said Niagara Health in its statement.

According to Niagara Region’s data, the region is short more than 100 primary care providers.

“Further, on any given day, we have up to 100 patients waiting in hospital beds for services to become available in the community, including home care and long-term care settings,” said Niagara Health.

“This means patients remain on stretchers in the EDs, where they are cared for by our staff and physicians while they wait for community beds to become available. This, in turn, leads to longer wait times.”

The increase in season-

al respiratory illness plays a significant role in the larger than usual volumes being witnessed, but the health system is also seeing sicker people seeking care, “grappling with an ongoing shortage of health human resources and providing care to patients who would be better suited to see a primary care provider.”

Niagara Health is “struggling with its own physician shortages,” including in emergency departments, like all hospitals across the country, they said.

“We understand that this is a difficult situation for patients, families and our staff. We ask for kindness and patience as our teams work tirelessly to accommodate our patients,” reads the statement.

There is no easy fix, according to Niagara Health.

These pressures have “existed for decades” and are related to a number of factors including an aging population, an increase in chronic conditions and health human resources shortages both

in the hospital and in the community.

“Solving this issue is going to take input and innovative ideas from all partners.”

Niagara Health says they are adding new staff to its emergency departments, including social workers and technicians, trained paramedics who work in collaboration with nurses to assist with basic assessments, monitoring, interventions and care for stable, offloaded patients.

They are also working on programs like Fit-to-Sit, which identifies patients who are stable enough to be offloaded by ambulances directly to the waiting room, where they are monitored until they can see a doctor.

Also in the works is “innovative programming” such as SCOPE, a platform through which primary care providers can better link their patients to a range of services and specialists.

“All of these initiatives are meant to help improve flow across the hospitals, including in the EDs.”

Public concerns ignored

Continued from page 4

But after the closed meeting ended and council and staff returned to open session, a recommendation was passed saying that legal counsel proceed as directed. The motion, read by acting clerk Shaunna Arenburg, also said a special meeting should be called for Jan. 24 and that the report “be included on the agenda for public review.”

The agenda for Wednesday’s special meeting shows nine people registered as delegates on the matter, one of them Tom Richardson from Sullivan Mahoney and the other Aaron Butler from NPG Planning Solutions. The remaining seven are members of the public.

Zoning bylaw and Official Plan amendment applications have been submitted to the town by property owner Josh Bice.

In staff’s report on Wednesday’s agenda, it is recommended that these amendments be approved.

Burroughs told The Local Wednesday he’s “very pleased” that the public will be able to read the upcoming report and hear the discussion between council and staff next week.

“I hope that sets a standard,” he said, referring to other projects headed to the tribunal.

Burroughs said there has been progress made

that helped council and staff come to a conclusion that a special meeting on the development in closed session could be beneficial, although he couldn’t provide any more details.

“That’s how we moved ahead,” he said last week.

Staff also provides an explanation in its now-public report on why the project is headed to the tribunal.

The applications were deemed by the town to be complete in June 2023, starting the process of an open house, a public meeting, and review by the town’s urban design committee.

Throughout the application review process, staff have communicated with Bice’s consultant to provide comments from internal and external agency staff as well as the public, reads the report on Wednesday’s agenda.

Staff says this communication is intended to ensure that all requirements have been met before putting a recommendation on the table.

In late October, Bice filed an appeal to the tribunal, saying council had not made decisions on the application within the time period outlined in the Planning Act, which is 120 days since the Official Plan and zoning bylaw amendment applications.

The hearing is scheduled to begin Feb. 28 and is expected to last three days.

At an open meeting in September, there were 83 registered speakers listed to provide input on the plans, and more than 400 letters in opposition to the proposal that had been submitted to the town.

Staff have recommended a lot frontage reduction, that a children’s play area not be required, and that an ornamental iron fence be permitted, not the wooden one usually required.

The biggest loss for residents who have opposed the building is that a higher density is recommended for approval.

The town’s committee of adjustment approved a minor variance last October to permit an increase in lot coverage, and three lots were consolidated into one.

One resident who is part of a large group in opposition to the King Street project told The Local they have prepared a presentation calling into question several of the statements in the town report, which they feel are based on errors, including issues such as density and drainage.

The property is currently vacant and consists of 3,248 square metres of property.

Butler, from NPG Planning Solutions, said in September that the development is a “positive response to the need for housing diversity,” and the need for housing in general.

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NOTL chosen as a safe location for family

Continued from page 1

and the family they hope to have.

“It hit home” he says, “that living in Trinidad, every time we went out, every time we went to work we were saying our prayers” that they would return home safely. “We looked at our options and what kinds of sacrifices needed to be made,” and decided “our safety is our priority.”

And despite the challenges they face, “we have a lot to be grateful for. And we definitely sleep better at night.”

Rajpatty describes a long list of the complicated steps, involving several medical organizations and various exams, needed to become certified to practise medicine in Canada, the time each step can take, the options along the way that might shorten the wait, the cost involved, and the need to earn a living during that time.

He has been navigating his way through those challenges for about two years now, and says he likely has another 18 months to two years before he can practise medicine here.

His goal is to be able to live and work in Niagara — he would love to one day

practise medicine as a family physician with the Niagara North Family Health Team.

Dr. Steve Durocher of the local family health team has taken him under his wing — some of Durocher’s patients have met Rajpatty, and had him sit in, with their permission, during a doctor’s appointment.

He greatly appreciates that support, from Durocher and his patients — Rajpatty says it helps to keep his mind active in the medical field.

He also has high praise and gratitude for Simpson’s Pharmasave for taking him on as a pharmacy assistant — many doctors waiting for Canadian certification are without jobs, constantly being told they are overqualified, while they are unable to do the job they are qualified for, he says.

The process of becoming qualified, apart from living expenses during the long wait, would be a minimum of \$5,000, and could easily be as much as \$10,000. For example, he has signed up for a practice oral exam to help him prepare for a September exam date — not essential but important for success — at a cost of \$3,500. Just applying for that oral exam is \$3,000, he

says.

His hope at the moment is to receive a restricted licence from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, which would allow him to practise under the supervision of another doctor. He has met six of the seven conditions to write a certification exam by the College of Family Physicians of Canada — the one he cannot meet is having a family practice in Canada for two years, and to do that, he needs a restricted licence to get that two years of experience.

He has also received an LMCC (Licentiate of the Medical Council of Canada) “which strengthens my academic qualifications within the Canadian system.” That designation is considered by the Medical Council of Canada as an important pathway for international medical graduates and internationally trained physicians to practise in Canada.

“The hope is that I can be provided a restricted registration, complete my two years of supervised practice, write the certification exam, and gain full registration to build a solid family medicine practice to assist with the future needs of our citizenry.”

He’s trying to be patient,



Dr. Ritesh Rajpatty is going through the certificate process, hoping to practise in NOTL. (Supplied)

he says, as he looks forward to again practising family medicine. “I enjoy getting to know patients, the interaction you can have with them as a family doctor, understanding who your patient is and being able to have the time to provide

care management for them.”

He is very grateful to the community of Niagara-on-the-Lake, those he has met at Simpson’s and the family health team clinic, his neighbours who have taken an interest, and while he waits, he says, it’s frus-

trating to hear about the shortage of doctors and the long wait time for patients to access healthcare.

He is anxious to be part of the solution. He and his wife, he says, “want to be able to feel like we’re helping.”

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A Taste of Niagara event in danger of folding

Sharon Burns
The Local

This year's A Taste of Niagara, a beloved dinner event that has run for the past 20 years, is in danger of being the last one.

Doug Johnson has been organizing A Taste of Niagara-on-the-Lake progressive dinner parties since shortly after he and his wife Phyllis moved from Toronto to run Weather-Pine Inn in the Old Town.

"I was trying to generate business in the winter and thought we could do a progressive dinner through five

different B&Bs in town," he said.

However, bylaws indicated that bed and breakfasts were not licensed to supply dinner and wine, so Johnson approached five restaurants and five wineries, booked a bus, and split the guests into five groups. Guests booked rooms at local B&Bs and hotels, and were treated to a Friday evening wine and cheese followed by the progressive dinner on Saturday.

They had 100 guests the first year. "It went really well and people all said, 'we're bringing friends next year.'"

From there, Johnson organized three progressive dinners a year, until recently when time commitments reduced it to one a year. The couple no longer has a vested interest in the concept, having sold Weather-Pine last May. Now their time is devoted to volunteer work and travel, and the annual dinner is in jeopardy.

Eventually Johnson reduced the number of restaurants to four because people said there was too much food. At each location the chef and winemaker explain the dish and paired wine. Participating wineries offer extra tasting if

guests bring their receipt to their wineries anytime over the weekend.

In 2014 Johnson was bestowed the Peter Ling Award for Entrepreneur of the Year by the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, because of the success of his Taste of Niagara dinners.

When Johnson decided it was time to pass the torch, he hoped the Chamber of Commerce would take over the event and its objective to try to bring people in from out of town, but the cost was an issue. Then he approached the Bed and Breakfast Association, but was turned down for lack of someone to run it.

However, he believes everything is in place to take it over. "You send out the dates to everybody who's been there before, you contact the restaurants, and they make up a menu. You contact the wineries and they tell you which wines."

All participants agree on a set amount per person, Johnson updates the website and the event is ready, he said.

"It's pretty straightforward for someone to take it on."

Because of the busing, Johnson chose to keep all restaurants within the Old Town: Bistro Six One, Treadwell Cuisine, the Epicurean, The Old Winery, Caroline Cellars, Bella Terra Vineyards, Konzelmann Estate Winery and Palatine Hills Estate Winery.

Tickets for the April 12-13 event are available at atasteofniagara.ca at \$175 per person, inclusive of taxes, tips, dinner and wine.

Johnson recalls he and Phyllis grew up in Toronto and visited NOTL for a wedding, staying at a B&B across from The Pillar and Post Inn. Six months later, "we served our first breakfast" as new owners, he said.

Phyllis had been a school secretary, and Johnson worked in telecom. For 29 years, Johnson was in the Canadian Army Reserve and completed one tour in Afghanistan in 2009.

He also served under Lieut. Gov. Elizabeth Dowdeswell as an assistant. "Basically my job was to escort the Lieutenant Governor and coordinate things with the organizers (of events) and make sure that protocol is followed, and just keep an eye on timings and things like that. I always carry her speech for her so when she's ready I put that up on the podium for her."

He was a volunteer firefighter for 14 years at Station 1, and currently sits on the executive at the Royal Canadian Legion. "This is home now," he says.



Doug and Phyllis Johnson have sold their B&B and would like to find someone to take over the Taste of Niagara progressive dinner, which has been successful for many years. (Supplied)



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Local woman cleans up patch of road regularly

Sharon Burns
The Local

wine bottles here."

A beer can and vodka bottle, as well as numerous take-out containers, were on the side of the road waiting to be deposited into Redekop's bright orange garbage bag.

In the past few years she and Walt have noticed that poison ivy was choking the trees near the small parking lot at the top of Concession 2. "If you drove by here a few years ago, this was totally all weeds," she said, referring to both sides of the road.

"During the pandemic, my husband and I decided to clear this whole section so people can park and it's not totally overgrown."

The parking lot is often used by people hiking a Bruce Trail side trail that climbs the Niagara Escarpment.

On the day The Local spoke to Redekop, she had found a

wallet with a driver's licence, health card, credit cards and photos, wet, but still intact. She said she often finds ID and credit cards and tries her best to turn them in to someone who will track down the owners.

The Local reunited the wallet and its contents to its rightful owner by conducting a quick Facebook search. He said the wallet had been stolen out of his vehicle while he was working on York Road two weeks ago. Nearly \$500 in cash was missing from the wallet, as well as a gold ring he kept to remember his deceased uncle.

Redekop grew up in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and her husband is "a Virgil boy," she said, "so we figured we must just try to do our bit. If everyone would just clean up along the side of the roads by their house, what a difference it would make in this area."



Debbie Redekop looks after a portion of Concession 2 by picking up garbage regularly. (Sharon Burns)



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Love Where You Live: SUPPORT *Local*

NOTL expert in climate change discusses future possibilities

Sharon Burns
The Local

Climate change scientists tracking global climate records “are starting to feel the squeeze a little bit,” says one local expert, who notes that July 2023 was the hottest on record, likely going back centuries and possibly even further.

The Niagara District Council of Women hosted Dr. Adam Martin for an informative session over Zoom on the effects of climate change in the Niagara Region.

Martin, who grew up in Welland and recently moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake with his young family, teaches in the Department of Physical and Environmental Sciences at the University of Toronto.

In his presentation on Jan. 17, Martin acknowledged that movies, popular fiction and even headlines around the world paint a picture of climate change leading to a future earth that is a barren post-apocalyptic wasteland.

“This past summer, NASA and other climate science agencies noted that July 2023 was the hottest month on record since 1880,” he said, and added it was only then that scientists

started to track global climate records.

“You can probably make the inference that this has been the hottest record dating back centuries, if not in some cases, millennia, probably back to the onset of the last ice age. So we’re starting to feel the squeeze a little bit.”

However, Martin’s focus on predictions about climate change and the science of climate change “is pretty important because we might think that, although we had the hottest summer on record, research and news polls paint a bit of a different picture.”

“Here in NOTL,” cited Martin as one example, “we were spared the worst of it,” because of our placement between two Great Lakes.

He explained that the core of climate change is generally increase in temperature. Furthermore, there is a difference between climate and weather. “Meteorological weather is simply the atmospheric conditions for a short period of time,” such as cold snaps, heat waves or the “next big storm,” he said. Climate change measures “alterations to the way the atmosphere ‘behaves’ over long periods of time.”

Martin screen-shared

graphs that predicted what climate change, most specifically warming trends and precipitation, will look like in three different time frames: short-term climate change in the next 20 years, medium term, by the end of 2060, and long term, by the end of the century.

Using science, graphs, figures and predictions from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Martin shared scenarios varying from a dedicated and severe reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, to maintaining status quo, and finally a situation in which the rate of greenhouse gas emissions continues to increase.

Complicating prediction models, however, are “laws, regulations, economics, human behaviour and how our ecosystems are going to respond to these.”

“We do know we’re trending towards warmer temperatures, and the other part of it is, we know that because the world is warming, world precipitation regimes are changing,” said Martin.

“The world has already warmed up by one degree, and we think that if we cut greenhouse gas emissions, it will only warm up just a little bit more, keeping



Working with Niagara College, Dr. Adam Martin is looking at how climate change might affect vineyards. (Supplied)

global warming to less than two degrees by the end of this century.”

It’s an example of committed warming, which refers to the concept that “even if the world were to totally shut down everything and not emit a single drop more of carbon dioxide, the world is still going to continue to get warmer by a little bit.” There is a lag time in world warming, explained Martin.

Overall, “if we curb greenhouse gas emissions, the world will warm up just a little more, less than two degrees by the end of the century. The moderate scenario can keep warming to just below three degrees” in the same time span, and if emissions keep increasing, the world will warm by four to five degrees by 2100.

Most notably, polar regions such as the Arctic will experience significant and serious global warming of “five to six degrees.”

As for NOTL, in the best case scenario, “we’re looking at temperatures that are two to three degrees warmer than pre-industrial times and probably one to two degrees warmer than we’ve experienced in the last decade.”

Understandably, “under high emissions it looks a little more grim, and this is where things look kind of devastating by the end of the century when the Niagara region is expected to increase by six degrees on average.”

From a precipitation perspective, Niagara Region is “actually kind of stable, because we’re smack dab in between two Great Lakes.”

“The Great Lakes, from a precipitation perspective, buffer our climate system from the bigger climate change that’s unfolding around us,” he said.

“If you’re not totally crazy about snow, here’s some good news for you,” Martin added. The long-term high emission scenario through to the end of the century predicts reductions in snowfall here in the region.

In short, “in the Niagara Region, we have predictions of increases in temperature, like pretty much all parts of the world and we know that precipitation is going to change, but not as drastically as in other parts of the world.”

Scientific evidence strongly backs up these predictions, said Martin, but there are always unknowns.

With forest fires, for example, “climate change is making certain things happen in the natural world that are making climate change worse.” Climate change makes forests drier, then forests burn and emit carbon, making climate change worse. Slash and burn tactics are no better, suggested Martin, who said that the carbon that is locked up in the trees goes back into the air when the trees are cut down.

Tree planting is a contri-

bution, however, “we can’t really plant our way out of climate change,” Martin said.

Martin, who is working with Niagara College to study the impact of climate change on vineyards, said understanding and predicting how wine grapes are responding to environmental change takes many forms.

“Perhaps most familiar would be measuring changes in grape yield or quality,” he explained, but added that vine and vineyard responses to environmental change can be measured in different ways, including looking at plant characteristics such as leaves, roots, stems or other parts of the plant.

“Our research focuses mainly on measuring leaf characteristics that are related to plant drought and heat stress tolerance,” he said.

“One thing we are now exploring is using drones equipped with fancy cameras — we call this ‘multispectral sensing’ — to measure these same things from the sky across entire vineyards.”

Yield and quality are largely the domain of farmers and viticulture scientists, he said, while his research is looking at the biological and physiological aspects of vines that play a role in determining yield and quality.

Those who are interested may access data and graphs for Niagara-on-the-Lake weather and climate at climate-data.org.

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Pumphouse classes appeal to various artistic interests

Maria H. Klassen
The Local

The current exhibit in the Walker Room Gallery at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre features the Instructors Group Show, presenting work from the art centre's instructors. This collection showcases the artistic styles and mediums of the centre's program offerings.

If you are interested in working with a kiln, included in this exhibit are two ceramic works by Rob Dorante. *Stoneware Fancy Bowl* and *Round Tile* are pieces by Debbie Whitehouse.

Mixed media art refers to working with more than one medium or material.

This can be seen in the artistic piece *Gilded Feather* by Valerie Martin and the technique found in *Suzuki* by George Doros.

Win Henstock's *Here Comes the Sun* and *Sunlit Creek*, as well as Paul Eppler's *Into the Woods #1*, use acrylic paints in their pieces.

Anne Reimer's work in oils includes *Morningstar Mill* and *Winter Stream*.

Different techniques are used in the two pieces by Aidan Frenette. Polaroid emulsion modifies integral film pictures while they are developing in her *Stasis 3*, while she uses graphite/pen in *Study 1*.

Julia Kane has mastered the art of fused glass in her

two pieces, *HOPE IN MY VIEW* and *THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE*.

Embroidery craftsmanship has been taken to a whole new level in *Isolation Portrait 1* by Dayna Riemland.

Study for a Passion Flower is a watercolour piece by Julie Donec. Her second piece, *Katrina*, uses egg tempera, mixing egg yolk with powdered pigments and a little water.

Helen McCusker's artistic skill lies in digital collage. This is piecing and layering together a variety of virtual images and textures from different sources to create a whole new work of art. Her works are entitled *Upward*

Mobility and *New World on the Horizon*.

Sandra Nass Misiak uses prismacolor (pencil sets) in her creation *Northern Flicker*.

All these artists are active instructors at the Pumphouse. Programs are offered regularly, some are weekly classes, others are workshops. Class size varies depending on the medium — pottery classes are smaller while painting classes are larger. Most are classes paid by the students, while some are supported by grants and sponsorships and are free.

Instruction for various artistic interests have been offered since the Pumphouse was founded in 1994.

Private art workshops can also be made available for interested groups.

The current exhibit runs until March 24. Admission

to the art gallery is free. It is open Tuesday to Sunday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come in to see

the talent in the community, and find where your interest might lie.



Katrina, by J. Donec, was painted with egg tempera. (Photos by Maria H. Klassen)



The embroidery craftsmanship of Dayna Riemland created *Isolation Portrait 1*.

Youth collective begins winter season

Local Staff

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Youth Collective is back with their winter session starting on Wednesday Jan. 24, beginning with WinterFEST, a fun, casual social event for local youth.

It will run from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Cornerstone Community Church Town Campus location, 1570 Niagara Stone Road.

"We are excited to get the winter session underway," said Brenda Ferguson, programming lead for the Youth Collective. "We know the kids love just coming to the campus and hanging out with their friends, so the social nights are really about getting together and having some fun."

The NOTL Youth Collective cannot exist without the wonderful support of the NOTL community, she explains. "We want to ensure the programs and events are offered to everyone without financial barriers, so when organizations like our host location Cornerstone Community Church, Sweets & Swirls Cafe, The Queenston Firefighters, NOTL Realty Ltd.

and others continue to step up and support the program, we can keep things accessible for everyone."

Starting on Monday Jan. 29, the collective will launch Ready Set GO, a youth-led program focused on building independence, starting with good time management.

Leila Ridesic, a local Grade 9 student, is spearheading the night with her friend Ruby Elltoft. "We're really excited to have the opportunity to help youth practice building strong consistent habits and to connect with our community, especially as we're getting older," Leila explained. The girls hope the Monday night group grows into a fun study hall-type atmosphere, eventually seeing a youth-led group for each of Grades 6 through 12.

"We want to keep it fun, and just talk about everyone's social activities, then help set out a plan to get weekly school assignments done within their busy week. We will also help anyone with an assignment, if they want the help."

Tuesday the collective will introduce Get into IT!, a hands-on workshop-type

program focused on building respect and self-confidence.

Kekoo Gatta and Wally Wilms, new volunteers to the collective, are both long-time residents looking to give back to the community, offering to share hands-on skills such as carpentry, and even wrestling.

Wednesdays will look very familiar to most, as many of the inaugural 2023 favourites will return. A variety of programs will be aimed at building youth creativity, such as card-making, paint nights and other life skills needed to develop strong, confident youth ready to take on more independence.

You can be sure to see NYC favourites such as In the Kitchen with Erinn and there are some fun cultural celebrations in the works. Stay tuned — more detail to come.

Families can visit NOTL Youth.com and also follow the collective (@NOTLYouth) on social media for details on the upcoming winter session.

If you have a new program idea or are interested in learning more about how you can get involved, donate and support NOTL Youth, please reach out to INFO@NOTLYouth.com.



Last year's winter session included St. John Ambulance classes. (Supplied)

Local HOME of the WEEK

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This lovely home features a wood-burning fireplace, big windows and sliding doors leading to back deck. The main floor plan offers an effortless flow from both the front spacious foyer through to the living room, dining room, kitchen and family room. Main floor also offers convenient laundry/mudroom with interior garage entrance and exterior access. Upper level is comprised of a primary bedroom with 5 piece ensuite-privilege bathroom and two additional bedrooms. Exterior boasts an entertainment size deck with retractable sun shade & large pool-size fenced rear yard. Recent updates and maintenance include windows (2019), luxury vinyl plank flooring (2022), shingles (2022), sump pump (2021), furnace motor and A/C (2023). This is an attractive home located in a sought after neighbourhood.

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Icewine Village events warm the heart

Penny Coles
The Local

The weather couldn't have been more perfect for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Icewine Festival — this weekend brought snow flurries and the freezing temperatures to harvest icewine grapes, and

to celebrate the result. This year, for the first time, the NOTL Chamber of Commerce and Tourism NOTL decided to offer three weekends of icewine events, beginning with a small icewine village at the Outlet Collection at Niagara last weekend, and moving to its

traditional location, the annual centrepiece of the festival, the Icewine Village on Queen Street this past weekend and next. Those attending the festival were dressed warmly, huddled around fire pits, and danced on the streets to the sound of the band playing.

One couple, Pat and Kathy Donaghue from Rochester, New York, said they gave each other a three-day trip to NOTL as their Christmas present. Relaxing by a fire pit in the VIP lounge, they said they were staying at the Gatekeeper's Retreat on Lakeshore Road, had en-

joyed a dinner at the newly-renovated Ginger's Restaurant, and "we love, love icewine. We are here for the Icewine Festival, and we've loved the whole weekend." The Sparkle and Ice Celebration, a combination of a gala and Icewine Cocktail Competition, will be host-

ed on Jan. 26 at the historic Court House on Queen Street, with a fireworks display to complete the evening. For more information about the festival, details on the Sparkle and Ice event, and VIP access to the Icewine Village, visit niagaraonthelake.com.



Trish Taylor and Tina Stewart having some fun with an ice sculpture. (Mike Balsom)



Nelly Rushanyun from Israel and Erik Aragyan from Armenia were visiting friends from Toronto, with canine friends Uta and Monique. (Penny Coles)



The Icewine Village fire pits were a popular place to hang out this weekend. (Penny Coles)



There are several icewine sculptures on Queen Street and great opportunities for photos. (Penny Coles)



Brooke Sittler and Maddy Leung were pouring at the Chateau des Charmes booth Saturday. (Mike Balsom)



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Great music means dancing in the street



Dancing to live music was one way of keeping warm at the Icewine Festival Sunday. (Penny Coles)



Inniskillin icewine is served at the Icewine Festival. (Penny Coles)



A couple from Rochester enjoy the VIP tent and a selection of icewine tastings. (Penny Coles)



Megan Dyer, Carter Burke and Jennifer Hardie were representing Inniskillin. (Mike Balsom)



Olivia Bosetti and Meghan Reid pouring icewine from Reif Estate Winery. (Mike Balsom)



Devesh Pania of DeSimone Vineyard is ready to pour some icewine, and also answer some of the many questions those at the festival have had about the production of icewine Saturday. (Mike Balsom)



Zavier Allard of Cheese Secrets pulls the "ooey gooey" cheese sandwiches he was serving at the Icewine Village. (Penny Coles)



Great live music from a local band, Back in the Daze, gave people a reason to dance in the street. (Penny Coles)



NOTL's Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser keeps warm at a fire pit while waiting to speak to the crowd Saturday. (Mike Balsom)



Andrea Miytny of Niagara Falls poses for a photo by one of the many icewine sculptures on Queen Street Saturday. (Mike Balsom)



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Hockey Hardware scoring with fans in NOTL

Mike Balsom
The Local

People who know Billy Morrison know that he dreams big. They also know that the former Niagara-on-the-Lake resident currently working in Ottawa, where he lives with his wife Katherine, puts in the work needed to realize his dreams and follow his passions.

So it's no surprise to those people that the 32-year-old was busy Monday evening at Ludology Boardgame Cafe in St. Catharines showing off Hockey Hardware, his new strategy game, to friends, supporters and acquaintances, and promoting his Kickstarter campaign to fund its production.

Hockey Hardware is the result of an idea that came to Morrison five years ago.

"I love fantasy hockey," Morrison tells The Local. "One night I started thinking, why isn't there a game that brings people together in the real world based on hockey? I grabbed a pen and paper and started putting some ideas together. I ended up not sleeping that night because the ideas were just flowing."

The lifelong hockey fan and former NOTL Wolves player knew he wanted Hockey Hardware to be based on up to four players of the game accumulat-

ing statistics to earn different trophies, or hardware. The player with the most trophies at the end of the game wins and "takes home" the Champion's Cup.

The astute son of Bill and Karin Morrison dubbed his business Face-Off Games and started searching "Hockey Hardware" on the internet. Seeing that no one was using that name, he locked up the URL in both .com and .ca iterations.

Then came the nuts and bolts. What form would the game take?

"It started out as a card game only," Morrison says. "But one day, early on, I played with a friend and he suggested that I think about adding dice. That's how we got to where we are today."

He settled on seven dice, two of which are eight-sided and five of which are custom-designed six-sided dice. For cards he landed on a total of 108, including 66 Game cards, 30 Adversity cards, and 12 Trophy cards. He designed a sheet for players to tally their statistics, and tokens to signify player position, forward line or defensive pairing number, and division.

The former student council president at Niagara District Secondary School who fought hard to try to keep the school from closing then set about researching how to get 20 prototypes made. He was adamant

that he wanted the game to be produced in Canada.

After extensive research, including contacting others in the game design business, he ended up having to source the dice overseas. But all other components come from a company based just outside of Montreal.

Morrison, who holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Governance, Criminal Justice and Public Policy from the University of Guelph and a masters in Political Management from Carleton University, priced out how much it would cost to get the games made and shipped.

He added to that figure the portion that Kickstarter would take for the use of their platform as well as the cost of a few add-on prizes for high-level supporters, and determined \$125,000 was the right goal for the crowdfunding campaign, which began on Jan. 8 and closes Sunday, Feb. 18. Morrison has taken a three-week leave of absence from his role as Niagara Falls MP Tony Baldinelli's legislative assistant to concentrate on promoting the Kickstarter page.

"It is an ambitious goal," Morrison says, "so I want to focus on ensuring we have a great campaign with a lot of events along the way to keep the interest going, to build momentum to push to that \$125,000. We want to get as many people as possible to discover it so that they can support it through our Kickstarter campaign or share the word about it to their family and friends."

Last week he made a trip to Guelph to take in the annual Frosty Mug game between the Gryphons and Lakehead. While in Guelph he held a Hockey Hardware event at The Roundtable Board Game Cafe in that city.

About 40 people packed into Ludology in St. Catharines this past Monday and were duly impressed with the game.

"They were really excited



Billy's brother Alex Morrison with friends Owen Bjorgan and Giacomo Ladas, all of whom grew up in NOTL.

to see the game," he says. "They had a lot of fun playing it, and we saw some people who weren't so familiar with hockey winning their games. There was a lot of enthusiasm, and it resulted in our second biggest day on the Kickstarter campaign since the launch."

The game is indeed easy to play. Morrison met this reporter Saturday at the NOTL Community Centre, where, over coffees from Sweets and Swirls, he laid out the parts and explained the objectives and how a typical game flows.

It didn't take long for this novice to catch on. Usually players participate in 15 total rounds, five per period for three periods, based on a hockey game, of course. Due to time constraints, Saturday's game only lasted for five quick rounds, and the creator of the game may have been a little embarrassed that he came out on the losing side of the trophy count.

Besides being easy to learn, it is lots of fun. There is a bit

of luck involved, sure, in the draw of the cards and the roll of the dice. But there is more than enough strategy to keep any player interested through all fifteen rounds. And one can see how each game has the potential to be very, very different from the previous one.

Morrison plans to continue his promotional efforts in Toronto during next week's NHL All Star festivities. He has partnered with the Carnegie Initiative Summit Jan. 30 and 31, named for Herb Carnegie, known as the best Black hockey player to have never made it to the NHL.

"It's to bring people from the hockey world, the corporate world and academics together to grow the game and make it more welcoming and inclusive," he says. "I really believe that this game can help grow hockey and make it more accessible. Anybody can pick it up and play it."

He hopes that it will catch the attention of some of the NHL executives who will be at-

tending. He admits that it would be a huge dream of his to somehow have Hockey Hardware connected with the NHL.

"It would be a great game for hockey players of any level to play while they're on the bus to their next game," Morrison adds.

And he'll be at the Sports Card and Collectibles Show at Holiday Inn and Suites in St. Catharines on Sunday, Feb. 4 showing off his prototype.

"It's all about the promotion and getting discovered," an enthusiastic Morrison concludes. "Regardless of how the campaign goes, there will be a track record, and that gives us something to build from and go forward. If we reach our target, then we'll have what we need to move on and bring this game to life."

Those who know Billy Morrison surely wouldn't doubt him.

To learn more, visit his website at hockeyhardware.com or search for Hockey Hardware at Kickstarter.com.



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa meets with Billy Morrison at the Meridian Credit Union Arena to learn all about Hockey Hardware — Morrison developed his love of hockey playing in Virgil, at the time when Zalepa was refereeing. (Photos supplied)

Volunteers needed for World Rowing Championships

Mike Balsom
The Local

If you're looking for something to do in mid- to late-August, Sport Niagara has just the thing for you.

The not-for-profit organization established to carry on the sport legacy from the Niagara 2022 Canada Games is looking for volunteers to help with the 2024 World Rowing Championships. Scheduled to take place Aug. 18 to 25 at the Henley Course in Niagara, the best in the world at the senior, Under 23 and Under 19 age groups will be competing for medals.

With 2,500 athletes from as many as 80 nations participating over eight days, organizing committee member Vittoria Wikston says 750 volunteers are needed to ensure events run smoothly.

"We are hoping to get volunteers from across the region,"

Wikston told The Local recently. "We have so many roles, more than 75 different ones. When people register, we ask them to check off their top five choices. We'll talk to the volunteers one at a time to find out where they are best suited."

Roles include flag bearers, boat holders, transportation providers, parking attendants, ushers and much more. Opportunities are available, as well, for the fan festival, which takes place at Rennie Park in Port Dalhousie from Aug. 21 to 24 and features musical acts The Trews, Mimi O'Bonsawin, Scott Helman and others.

Wikston says each volunteer is asked to commit to about 16 hours in total, split up over two days during the course of the competition.

This is the third time for St. Catharines to hold the World Rowing Championships, the most recent being the 1999 event.

Wikston points out that through more recent events such as the 2018 U18 Men's FIBA Americas Basketball Championship, the 2019 Canadian Wrestling Trials, and the 2022 Canada Summer Games, all hosted in the region, Sport Niagara has developed a method for hosting events of this magnitude.

Organizing committee chair Bill Schenck adds the 2015 Pan Am Games to that list of past events. Though those games were primarily hosted by Toronto, the rowing competition was held on the Henley course that year.

The athletes' village will be at Brock University this summer, providing a number of volunteer opportunities at that location.

"That's one of the things that makes this unique," Schenck says. "The athletes and coaches will all be staying under one roof, eating together, and being transported to and

from the same location. It will be an exciting time."

Schenck, a past president and long-time director of the Canadian Henley Rowing Corporation and the Henley Regatta commissioner for two decades, expects many who volunteered at past regattas as well as those other recent events will take part this August.

"We have a core group who volunteer at all the local regattas, including the high school championships," Schenck says. "Many of them have expressed interest in being involved. But there are many roles and responsibilities that we don't use for those regattas. And the magnitude of this event requires many more people to be involved."

The volunteer registration portal opened just over a week ago and Wikston says the response has been great.

The portal will remain open through the end of Feb-



The 2022 Summer Games also relied on volunteers to help events run smoothly. (Supplied)

ruary. The committee will then take three months to go over the applications, match volunteers with roles and contact successful applicants.

There will be some general volunteer training in July and role-specific training and orientation will be provided for all volunteers on Aug. 8. Each participant will receive an exclusive event uniform kit that includes volunteer shirts.

Volunteers must be at least 16 years old, and high school students can use their hours toward their graduation requirements.

"It's a great way to share new experiences and make new friends," Wikston says. "And to be a part of a great rowing tradition in Niagara."

To apply, visit stcrowing2024.com/en/about-us/volunteer.

Angel Inn stars in episode of CBC's *Ghosting*

Mike Balsom
The Local

When Luke Hutchie and Matthew Finlan began mapping out purportedly haunted locations to feature in their new CBC series *Ghosting*, both knew Niagara-on-the-Lake's Olde Angel Inn had to be one of them.

Hutchie, 27, and Finlan, 29, are executive producers and the stars of the new unscripted comedy, in collaboration with Blue Ant Studios. The two actors, both best known for their work in the horror genre, visit eight different spooky locations across Ontario on their quest to find out if they are truly haunted, bringing along a different friend for each episode.

The idea for the program came to them following a trip the pair made with their friend, fellow actor Bukola Ayoka (*Robyn Hood*), to a movie premiere in San Francisco. While there, Hutchie realized the Alcatraz prison, with a reputation for being haunted, was across the shore. He became adamant they get there for a visit.

"We convinced this guy with a rickety wooden boat to take us across, but we only got halfway there before he had to turn back," Hutchie recalls. "We got so close I could have swam there. The boat guy, his name was Skipper, he wouldn't let me. He totally hated us."

"Once we got back to

shore," Finlan says, "we realized that it would be quite entertaining to watch two actors in the horror realm who have no business being in Alcatraz trying to decipher whether or not it was haunted. The idea was so good that it stuck with us."

When they returned to Toronto, Hutchie, who produced and starred in his own vampire series called *EZRA* for OUTtv, and Finlan, who first met Hutchie on the set of that show, sat down and expanded on the idea. To their surprise, CBC picked it up for eight episodes.

"Their website said they do not accept paranormal shows," laughs Finlan. "But we stuck to our guns because we felt this was much more than just a paranormal show."

"Because this show is really more of an unscripted comedy that touches on the paranormal," Hutchie adds. "And it's celebrity driven. When CBC started this process with us it was imperative that we had their support, that they believed in the show. I think they really understand the power of streaming, and all the content being created right here in Canada."

Hutchie and Finlan created a wish list, including Ayoka, whom they wanted to invite on as guests. And they Googled the most haunted places in Canada, comparing notes to whittle down their list of sites. But they didn't have to rely on a search to find out about the Olde Angel

Inn and its haunted reputation.

Hutchie grew up in Niagara Falls, graduating from A.N. Myer Secondary School in 2014. And Peterborough, Ont., native Finlan spent 2016 living in the Chautauqua neighbourhood and appearing in the Shaw Festival's *A Woman of No Importance* and *Engaged*.

"Luke and I came with a loaded history attached to Niagara-on-the-Lake," says Finlan. "There's a slew of haunted places there. We actually considered a number of different locations there."

"I love the story about the ghost of the woman (Molly McGuire) who stands at the window at the Prince of Wales Hotel," adds Hutchie. "But the Olde Angel Inn is really old. It has that look that really sells you the history. Everybody knows about the guy in the barrel (Captain Colin Swayze). I don't even know where I learned it, it's such common folklore."

The Merrill House in Picton is featured in episode one of *Ghosting*, while the results of September's three days of production in NOTL appear in episode two. Other instalments feature Castle Kilbride in Baden, Cornwall's SDG Jail, the McDonald Log Cabin in Simcoe County, Hamilton's Auchmar Mansion, the Wellington County Poorhouse and the Orillia Opera House. All have their own legends and rumours of paranormal activity.



Luke Hutchie, Zoe de Grand'Maison and Matthew Finlan in front of the Olde Angel Inn, where they filmed an episode of *Ghosting* for CBC. (Supplied)

The guest for the Olde Angel Inn episode is Zoe de Grand'Maison, who played Evelyn Evernever on CW's *Riverdale* and Gracie Johanssen on BBC America's sci-fi thriller *Orphan Black*.

"She brought a great deal of levity to the episode," Hutchie says. "We're dealing with a story about heartbreak and the War of 1812, and she was able to provide an audience point of view, as she was learning the story for the first time."

"This was the only episode where Luke and I knew much about the location before we got there," says Finlan. "But I had never been to the rooms upstairs or to the cellar. Normally we try to go in knowing

as little as possible to allow the most to happen."

"And our guests didn't even know where we were taking them," laughs Hutchie. "We wouldn't tell them until maybe an hour before we got there. They had this false trust. It was always so funny once we got there."

They arrive with the paranormal equipment familiar to fans of such programs. That includes a REM pod, an EMF (electromagnetic field) meter, a ouija board and other devices that Finlan, a self-professed paranormal program geek, chose for each site based on the type of activity they expected.

Each episode includes a bit of history about the location and its legends. Hutchie plays

the skeptical foil to Finlan's believer. Their high-energy back-and-forth is hilarious and, yes, sometimes spooky, as the pair work with their guest to come to a conclusion as to whether or not the building is indeed haunted.

Their conclusion about the Olde Angel Inn? They're keeping the results of their findings under wraps until Jan. 26, when all eight episodes of *Ghosting* premiere on the streaming service CBC Gem.

"The Olde Angel was definitely chaotic, such a wild ride with many ups and downs," Hutchie says. "I think this episode does a great job in explaining history in a very fun and bizarre way, definitely not like this before."

Naval Dinner raises money for summer student program

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

The Friends of Fort George is still tallying what was raised at Friday's inaugural Naval Dinner, but executive director Amanda Gamble says it will have a positive impact on its cause — to collect financial support to help cover the cost of hiring summer students.

The event also sought to 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.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 15 to 20 students were part of operations during the summer months at Fort George, as well as at Brock's Monument.

But in recent years, that number dwindled to less than a dozen, and what was raised at Friday's event, along with available government grants, the Friends are hoping to get back to pre-pandemic numbers.

The Naval Dinner was held at Navy Hall featuring Lord

Mayor Gary Zalepa as the evening's "captain," and welcomed 60 guests.

"Overall, I think the event was very successful," said Gamble, adding that a lot of awareness was raised about the youth jobs program, as well as what Friends of Fort George does.

A theme of the evening was naval activity that took place on Lake Ontario during the War of 1812, with Parks Canada displaying artifacts and sharing information about the significance of waterways during the conflict.

Being hired as a summer student could also mean the start of a decades-long career.

Dan Laroche wasn't certain what he wanted as a career when he was 19 years old — but figured it out quickly after he started as a summer student at Fort George.

It was 1988 and he was finishing high school when he landed a gig at the Parks Canada historic site in Niagara-on-the-Lake — working the first couple of years with a few roles — as an interpreter giving history lessons to guests, as well as a gift shop employee. He also worked in the blacksmith shop.

Many summer students at the site, whose positions are paid for entirely through fundraising efforts such as the

Naval Dinner, will spend a few seasons and then move on to another field.

But Laroche, site supervisor for more than 12 years, is one of a few staff members who have been at Fort George for more than 30 years, starting his employment while in high school or pursuing a post-secondary education.

"Once I started here, really by my second summer, I think it really influenced me to say this is what I want to do," said Laroche, who held a number of positions at Fort George before becoming the site's head administrator.

He also considers himself a people person, which made him effective at his job back then today and still does today.

"That's what did it for me, talking with the public," he says, adding that guests getting a "spark in their eyes" from interesting historic factoids explained to them is one of the most rewarding parts of working at Fort George.

Laroche said even though it helps if students applying for jobs have a knack for local history, it's not a requirement.

"What we're looking for are people who really enjoy speaking with other people," said Laroche. "The rest of it we can teach."

The students hired will work at Fort George as well as



Dan Laroche, a 30-year Parks Canada employee, began working at Fort George as a summer student. Knowing there might be an opportunity to help set off a three-pound cannon could be enough to convince summer students to consider a career with Parks Canada. (Penny Coles)

Brock's Monument.

Fort George will also serve a full schedule of events this year, many of them for the first time since the pandemic arrived in 2020.

The next fundraiser to support student jobs will be a whisky tasting in partnership with Forty Creek.

Fireside Lectures will be held every Friday in February, and there will be a War of 1812 Officers Day in May.

Recent renovations to Fort

Mississauga will be available for the public to see, also in late May.

There will be a First World War re-enactment in June, Canada Day celebrations on July 1, a Jane Austen Tea Party in August, as well as a fife and drum event that same month.

For more information, contact the Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621 or email admin@friendsoffort-george.ca.



Gary Zalepa, portraying the Captain at the Naval Dinner, was quizzed by Peter Martin with tough nautical questions, but apparently ended up as a regular seaman having to mop the floor. (Tony Chisholm)

Clausen wins for Preds in shootout against Ravens

Mike Balsom
The Local

After sweeping the Northumberland Stars the previous weekend, head coach Kevin Taylor was expecting his Niagara Predators to come out on the attack last Friday night against the Tottenham Railers.

When forward Reese Bisci picked up a loose puck at the Railers blue line and beat visiting goaltender Nicolas Perreault with a wrist shot for the game's first goal just 1:01 into the game, it seemed his wish was to come true.

But Niagara played a lacklustre, almost feckless style of hockey the rest of the way, allowing Tottenham to pin them in their own end for

much of the contest.

With goals in the first and second periods, and an empty netter with 59 seconds left, the Railers won the match between two teams who were locked into a tie for fifth place in the Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League's South Division at the time.

Niagara goalie Zane Clausen was screened on Martin's goal, while the game winner came with Clausen stuck on his back after making two saves before the second rebound went in above him.

"Zane played well, it's just unfortunate that we didn't get the offence going tonight," said Taylor. "They made some nice plays off our guys, and their goalie (Perrault) played a great game, too."

With constant pressure at the Preds' blueline from the Railers, Niagara's forwards were continuously forced to lag down into their own zone, taking away the opportunity for them to stay high for a pass. Down 2-1 heading into the third period, the Preds barely mounted an effective offensive attack for the final 20 minutes.

"The game plan was to pressure their defence more, and we just didn't," Taylor said after Friday's game. "I didn't think we played that bad, but they (Tottenham) just wanted it. They knew how important this game was for them. They got in front of our shots, they did the things they had to do to win the game."

The Preds followed that loss by picking up their first shootout win of the season Sunday, a 6-5 win in St. George against the fourth place Ravens.

Cameron Savoie had three goals and an assist in the game, including the shootout winner. His brother Nick added a goal and an assist, while Cameron's line-mate Declan Fogarty chipped in with a goal and four assists.

Nolan Wyers added the fifth goal for the Preds, giving them a 5-3 lead in the third. But the Ravens closed the gap with just over six minutes left to play in regulation.

Then, about five minutes later, the Preds iced the puck and were forced to have a face-off in their zone. The Ravens won the draw and their leading scorer Reece Furtado fired it past Clausen before the netminder had a chance to adjust, with 72 seconds left in the third.

Both teams had some decent chances during the three-on-three overtime period, but that also ended in a tie, forcing the teams into a shootout.

Cameron Savoie was the first to shoot. He beat St. George goaltender Gleb Rakov high on the left side to score. Clausen went on to make saves on all three Ravens' shooters — Jake Thompson, Anthony Arthurs and Addison Rogers — to give the Preds the much-needed victory.

"We played a great game," Taylor said of Sunday's win. "There were a couple of lapses that let them back into the game, and some questionable penalties on us, too, especially on that fourth goal. We got two points, I wish we hadn't



Reese Bisci celebrates scoring the game's first goal just over a minute into the first period against Tottenham. (Mike Balsom)

given them one, though. We just have to start tidying things up more."

As Tottenham went on to win their Saturday and Sunday games against the Toronto Flyers, the Predators are now back in sixth place, four points behind the Railers.

Niagara has a rare Friday night off this weekend and next. They travel to Thornhill Saturday to take on the last place Toronto Flyers, then the Flyers come to Virgil's Meridian Credit Union Arena on Sunday, Feb. 4.

After that, it's two more against St. George and one each against Tottenham and the first place North York Renegades.

"At this point all of our games are must-wins," Taylor said. "We can move up in the standings. We are still hoping for fourth but we'll need some help from other teams."

two games last weekend for the Predators. The 21-year-old previously played two seasons in the Greater Ontario Junior B Hockey League and one for the Sioux Lookout Bombers of the Superior International Junior A Hockey League.

The GMHL published its player power rankings on Jan. 19. Niagara goalie Zane Clausen, with 1,115 minutes played, 690 saves and a save percentage of 0.908, was ranked number one in the South division. Coming in at number five amongst the skaters was Preds' leading scorer, forward Luca Fernandez, with 23 goals and 23 assists this season.

Goalie Ryan Santini, a Montreal native who went 6-11-0 for the Predators in 2022-2023, has committed to play hockey for the University of Toledo Rockets, who play in the American Collegiate Hockey Association's Division I.

PREDATORS NOTES

New defenceman Tyler DeCoff played in his first

Tournament benefits minor hockey



Mackenzie, Madison and Carolyn Berg present a \$6,000 cheque to Peter Flynn, president of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves Minor Hockey Association. The funds were raised at the second annual James Berg Memorial Hockey Tournament held in Virgil on December 23. Further proceeds from the successful tournament will go toward the James Berg Memorial Scholarship for a Wolves U18 player in their final year of high school heading to post-secondary studies. Applications for the scholarship and eligibility requirements will be available from the coaches of the Wolves U18 teams soon. (Supplied)

Big win for Wolves



The NOTL Wolves Under-18 LL Team 1 didn't just win the Nelson Emerson Tournament in Waterford this past weekend — they blew away the competition. The team played an impressive four games, won four games with four shutouts, and recorded 19 goals. "The team played excellent hockey," says coach James Cadeau. (Supplied)

■

Local

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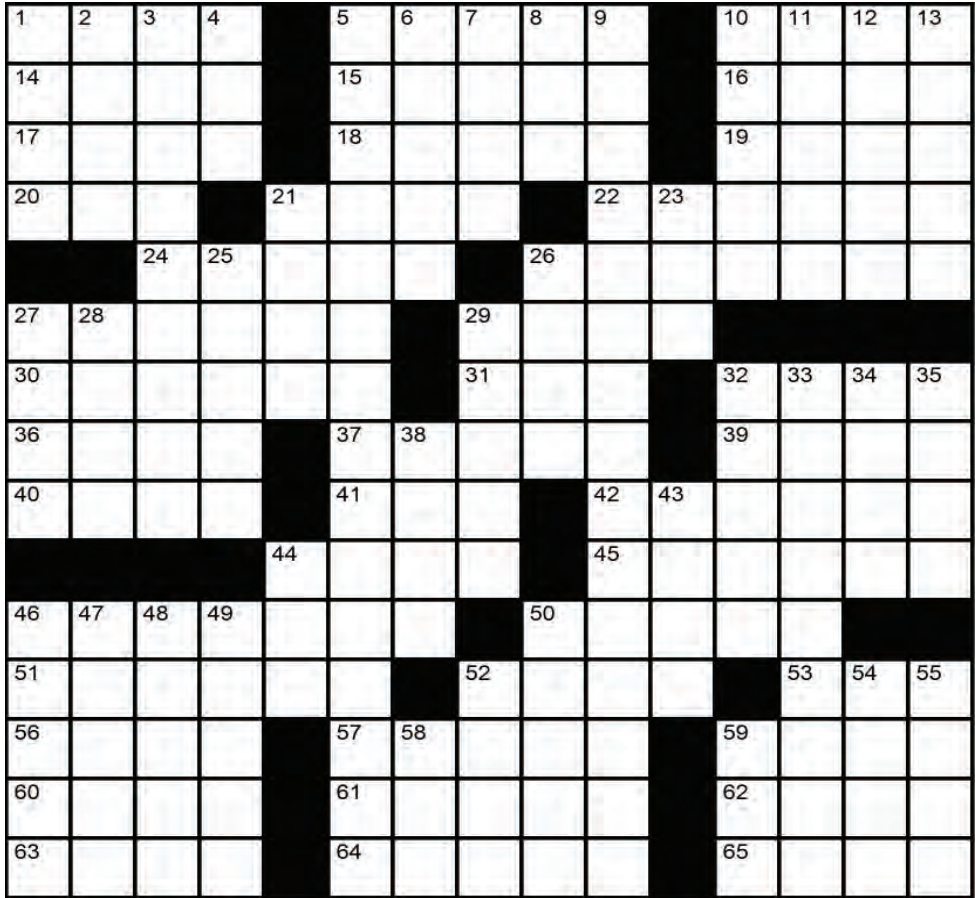
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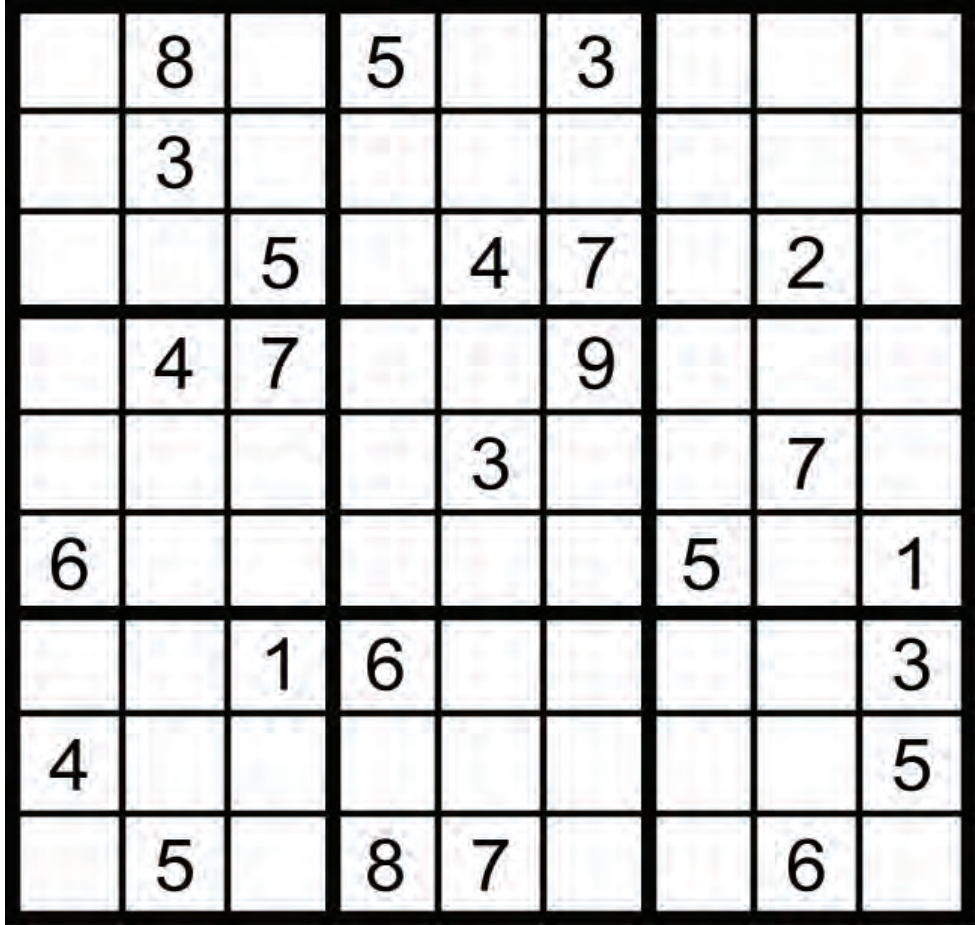
CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU



- Across:**

 - 1 Scorch
 - 5 Constructor
 - 10 Antarctic sea
 - 14 Trusted assistant
 - 15 Handy
 - 16 Very dark
 - 17 Please answer
 - 18 Civil wrongs
 - 19 On-screen Bean
 - 20 Tire inflation measure
 - 21 Close
 - 22 Ready to entertain
 - 24 Brace
 - 26 Circumspect
 - 27 Closer
 - 29 Prickly seed vessel
 - 30 Musical collections
 - 31 Type of lamp
 - 32 Campus house, maybe
 - 36 Troubles
 - 37 Inordinate
 - 39 Make over
 - 40 Sediment
 - 41 Short dog with a flat muzzle
 - 42 Taken in
 - 44 Surrender
 - 45 Not allee
- Down:**

 - 1 Complain
 - 2 Convicted spy Alger ---
 - 3 Recommended
 - 4 Agent
 - 5 Convent heads
 - 6 Entangled
 - 7 "Slaughterhouse Five" author --- Vonnegut
 - 8 Time in Boston
 - 9 Ability
 - 10 Vertical pipe
 - 11 Upright
- 46 Close to the coast
 - 50 Held fast
 - 51 People found in the Horn of Africa
 - 52 Puts on
 - 53 Global currency body
 - 56 Fine
 - 57 Yellow-green color
 - 59 Hard up
 - 60 Sack
 - 61 Enthuses wildly
 - 62 Toothpaste container
 - 63 Minnesota ---, pool player
 - 64 Moves back and forth
 - 65 Aide (Abbr.)
- 12 Edible ray
 - 13 Ecclesiastical council
 - 21 Appear
 - 23 Average golf score
 - 25 Tie up
 - 26 Recognized leader
 - 27 Pin down
 - 28 Fashion magazine
 - 29 Emblem
 - 32 Scowl
 - 33 Spiritual
 - 34 Yemeni port
 - 35 Sweeney ---
 - 38 Uncovered
 - 43 Literary work
 - 44 Mountain pass
 - 46 Has gone
 - 47 Cell maker
 - 48 Well turned out
 - 49 Ira ---, Iwo Jima flagraiser
 - 50 Small flock
 - 52 Prima donna
 - 54 Rabblies
 - 55 Abrade
 - 58 Statute
 - 59 Harper Valley org.



IN MEMORIAM

TONY RAVESI
JANUARY 26, 2023

In loving memory of a beloved husband, father, and grandfather on the first anniversary of his passing.
May the winds of heaven blow softly
and whisper in your ear,
How much we love and miss you
and wish that you were here.
You will always live on in the hearts and minds of the loving family you left behind.
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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from
January 17, 2024

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

Across: 1 Char, 5 Maker, 10 Ross, 14 Aide, 15 Of use, 16 Inky, 17 R S V P, 18 Torts, 19 Sean, 20 P s i, 21 Shut, 22 Open to, 24 Steel, 26 Guarded, 27 Neared, 29 Burr, 30 Albums, 31 Arc, 32 Frat, 36 Ills, 37 Undue, 39 Redd, 40 Lees, 41 Pug, 42 Fooled, 44 Cede, 45 Upwind, 46 Inshore, 50 Clung, 51 Somali, 52 Dons, 53 I M F, 56 Okay, 57 Olive, 59 Poor, 60 Fire, 61 Ravens, 62 Tube, 63 Fats, 64 Sways, 65 Asst.

Down: 1 Carp, 2 Hiss, 3 Advisable, 4 Rep, 5 Mother superior, 6 Afoul, 7 Kurt, 8 E S T, 9 Resourcefulness, 10 Riser, 11 On end, 12 Skate, 13 Synod, 21 Seem, 23 Par, 25 Truss, 26 Gurn, 27 Nail, 28 Elle, 29 Badge, 32 Frown, 33 Religious, 34 Aden, 35 Todd, 38 Nude, 43 Opus, 44 Col, 46 Is off, 47 Nokia, 48 Smart, 49 Hayes, 50 Covey, 52 Diva, 54 Mobs, 55 Fret, 58 Law, 59 P T A.

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THIS NEWSPAPER

The Niagara-on-the-Lake
Local
The Trusted Voice of Our Community

GateWay Community Church hosting open house

Penny Coles
The Local

GateWay Community Church has moved to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre, and wants to welcome locals to an open house at its new location this Sunday.

Founded in 1998 by Rev. Mike Gordon as the first Pentecostal church in town, its first home was in the former Eden School on Niagara Stone Road, says Georgina Keller, parishioner and children's program director.

Since then it has moved a few times, operating as an independent Christian church, but has remained in NOTL

— after Eden it used the theatre in the former high school, and then moved to the public school on Four Mile Creek Road before three years in the Niagara Stone Road plaza. “We’ve moved around, but we’re not going anywhere. We are committed to being part of the community,” says Keller.

In addition to its new home, the church also has a new interim pastor, while it looks for a permanent replacement for Michelle Mercer, whose time with Gateway goes back to its days in the former Virgil school.

Paster Dan Magcalas is from Hamilton, and comes to NOTL for Sunday services “and other days when we need

him,” says Keller. “He will walk us through the process of looking for a new pastor.”

Gateway has a small, devoted congregation of about 40 people, mostly from NOTL, with Sunday services, a children's program and several outreach activities, says Keller.

That includes the Bikes for Farmworkers project parishioner Ken Eden has continued to operate since his days as a volunteer with the project, still at the former Virgil school, although it is now closed for the season.

When GateWay moved from the school to the plaza on Niagara Stone Road and the corner of Line 1, they had a space for services and for

an office. Rent was “very expensive,” says Keller, “and we weren’t using the space fully for the amount we were paying, just using it one day a week.”

They have kept an office space there, and since October have been renting space at the community centre Sunday mornings. The Simpson Room for their church service and Mori Room for the kids’ program is ideal for them, and frees up some of their revenue for outreach projects.

Donna Stewart-Brown is a member of the church’s Pastor’s Council, and continues as a Migrant Workers Outreach Coordinator, helping out at the Farmworkers Hub,

although not as much as she was, says Keller. The church still contributes to the farmworkers’ welcome bags, and also has a couple of missionaries it helps, one for Honduras and one for Haiti.

As well, GateWay has a collection box for food for Newark Neighbours, and collects cash “for whatever they need for their food shelves.”

“We love it,” says Keller about the community centre space. “They set up the chairs for us, they have a portable projector for us, and there is a small kitchen attached. It’s a great community space.”

Keller says the Simpson Room is a comfortable size, with room to grow — they hope

the open house Sunday may attract some new members.

“The goal of the open house is for us to let people know they are welcome to come out and join our church, and for them to meet our new pastor. We will have a short service, music, some interactive games and displays of some of the activities we’re involved in and support. We’re a welcoming community and a smaller community, more intimate. That makes it easy to get to know us, and the pastor as well.”

The open house begins at 10:30 a.m. in the Simpson Room of the community centre on Anderson Lane this Sunday, Jan. 28.



Alma and Dan Magcalas — Dan is the interim pastor at GateWay, and will be helping with the process of finding a new pastor. (Photos supplied)



Ken Eden operates the Bikes for Farmworkers project at the former Virgil school, with support from the church.



Georgina Keller, the church's children's program coordinator, with Elijah and Josie Kuehnell.

testimonials

Angelika is Niagara on the Lakes premier realtor. She helped us navigate the process of selling our Old Town home and purchasing a new place. She provided superior customer service and follow up, professional brochures and pamphlets, plus personalized one on one negotiation support as well as savvy marketing strategies. We have purchased and sold over 16 properties in our lifetime. Angelika's commitment and professionalism have been outstanding. We recommend her service to any one looking to buy or sell in the region. Thank you for helping us... we so appreciated your incredible support, kindness and knowledge.

Brenda and Anthony
Gate Street and George Manor, NOTL to Queenston

Angelika Zammit is absolutely amazing! We are a couple in our 80's. Angelika said she could move us virtually if we could not remain in person at our home in Niagara-On-The-Lake. After 43 years of living in that home, that was a big task! Angelika, along with her great assistants, totally came through for us.

From our home in Toronto, we did a FaceTime Virtual packing little by little until it was all done. Moving day will be a breeze and it's all due to Angelika's wonderful nature!

Jane G.
King Street, NOTL to Toronto

We are thrilled with the seamless process that Angelika Zammit executed on our behalf with regard to the sale of our house in Niagara-On-The-Lake. Angelika's professionalism and deep knowledge of the real estate market in Niagara consistently impressed us, as did her exceptional attention to detail when it came to staging, photography, marketing, home presentation and most importantly her business outreach, which benefitted us beyond our expectations. It is therefore with great pleasure that we recommend Angelika to anyone, who is looking for a competent and capable real estate agent, that sincerely cares about her clients in the Niagara Market!

Irene & Viggo Zingenberg
John Street (Old Town)

After 13 wonderful years in NOTL Pierre and I are moving. Thank you to the amazing Angelika Zammit, who not only sold our house in one day but also helped us find our condo in Burlington. I can't recommend her highly enough! While we will miss our wonderful friends here in NOTL, we are looking forward to what comes next.

Kathryn and Pierre
Karsam Crt. , NOTL to Burlington

Angelika helped not only with the purchase of my new home, she managed to sell my existing home during the second month of the pandemic when nothing was moving. Very thorough and ensured any stress was eliminated from the process. Highly recommended and will use her services again!

John S.
Burlington to Niagara Falls

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