



Local author,
illustrator
partner on
Christmas
story for kids
page 14



NOTL youth celebrate winter

Young people having tons of fun at WinterFest, beginning the NOTL Youth Collective winter sessions at Cornerstone Community Church last week, take a break for some hot chocolate and treats served up by volunteer program leader Brenda Ferguson (right). For more photos and story see page 20. (Mike Balsom)

**Good weather
for ducks, thanks
to climate change**

Penny Coles
The Local

Last Friday's heavy rain created the "perfect storm" for the flooding that occurred, and that will likely occur again, if not this winter then next, caused mostly because it should

have been snow. Local environmentalist Owen Bjorgan explains that we had a lot of rain when the ground was still partially frozen from the cold spell we had earlier last week —the first cold

Continued on page 4



Lucky duckies! At least the ducks are having fun as they swim on the lake created by last Friday's flooding. Karen Jeffries sent this photo of Four Mile Creek overflowing at Line 7. The water covered her driveway, attracting the ducks, but at least it didn't reach the barn or house, she says. (Charlotte Jeffries Tutu)

Speed camera not a money grab, says region

Penny Coles
The Local

The speed camera on Niagara Stone Road and the details of how it operates have been a topic of discussion among Niagara-on-the-Lake residents since early this year, when the camera became operational. Some of the questions are whether drivers can be caught speeding in both

directions, at what speed tickets will be issued, and where the revenue from those tickets ends up. Also, since the program got underway locally on Jan. 7, drivers who regularly use the stretch of road in front of Crossroads School may also be wondering whether their tickets will be arriving in the mail in the coming weeks, how many, and how much it will cost them. Scott Fraser, Niagara

Region's associate director of transportation, provided some of the answers to The Local, but others he is unwilling to share, or unable to because he just doesn't have the information yet. Although there are warning signs on both sides of Niagara Stone Road through the community safety zone in Virgil, the camera only records the speed of vehicles travelling south, he says. However Fraser is not

about to divulge the speed at which drivers will be ticketed — that is determined by the province, and won't be released to the public. "It's fair to say it's a modest threshold," he says, adding he doesn't want to create an impression that it's okay to speed within that threshold, and he reminds drivers the speed limit, 40 km/h from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. on school days and 50 km/h at other times, is there to be followed at all times.

The Ontario provincial offences website says the fine for speeding from one to 19 km/h through a community safety zone is \$5 per kilometre, and the amount goes up according to the excess speed. The fine will also include a victim surcharge, which is an amount based on the set fine, and a \$5 court cost. Some drivers might be surprised to learn that while they may consider the tickets "a money grab"

for the region, the revenue is first spent on the cost of the program, and any money left over is divided 50/50 between the region and the 12 Niagara municipalities, not based on the number of tickets recorded, but on property value assessment. "And all revenue from the program received by the region and municipalities is required to be spent on road safety initiatives,"

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Council rejects staff recommendations for King Street

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

Niagara-on-the-Lake town council has determined the position it will take at an upcoming Ontario Land Tribunal hearing regarding a three-storey residential development on King Street — it is turning down the recommendations of staff, and will argue that the property should remain under its current designation for low-density housing.

That density does not allow for a 17-unit apartment

building, a local developer's proposal which drew strong opposition from neighbours.

The discussion was held at a special meeting on Wednesday evening, with council first discussing the proposal in closed session before hearing from seven members of the public who voiced their concerns over the project.

Legal counsel and planners representing developer Josh Bice also spoke at the meeting.

This project has previously been discussed at several closed-door sessions, much to the chagrin of residents, but the majority of Wednesday's agenda was in the open, where councillors explained their stance on what they would like the town to argue at the three-day tribunal hearing set to begin Feb. 28.

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.

A motion was put on the table by Coun. Sandra O'Connor Wednesday that ahead of the tribunal process, the town "not redesignate" the property as the developer had requested, asking for zoning bylaw and Official Plan amendments, and that the town hire an outside planner to support this position at the tribunal.

"I do not feel it follows our Official Plan," said O'Connor, reiterating an argument made by a number of the residents who stepped up to the podium earlier in the special meeting.

She also said the development "doesn't fit with the neighbourhood," and that she has issues with parking and access.

Earlier in the meeting, Aaron Butler from NPG

Planning Solutions said the project should be seen as a way for the town to achieve provincially-mandated targets related to housing intensification.

O'Connor said the municipality is already on its way to hitting its mark and she believes this project doesn't need to be part of that equation.

"We will not do it at the expense of our heritage," she said, referring to the building being pitched in the Old Town, on King Street south of Cottage Street.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita agreed with O'Connor, saying the project is incompatible with its surroundings. "I think this is really the wrong area for it," she said.

Planning director Kirsten McCauley explained that a decision on this matter will be up to the tribunal and that the purpose of the report before council Wednesday was to choose what argument legal counsel would be presenting during that process.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, before voting against O'Connor's motion, admitted he has concerns about drainage and water related to the project, but that he was hoping for a "more robust conversation" before council swiftly endorsed O'Connor's motion.

He said moving ahead with O'Connor's recommendation is "telling a group of people what they want to hear," and that critics of the project may be disappointed when and if the tribunal rules in favour of the development.

Coun. Adriana Vizzari was the only other vote against O'Connor's motion. She asked staff to comment

on how emergency vehicles will access the site, considering a narrow laneway is being proposed as the main corridor to the building, and was told by McCauley that the fire department has no concerns, and that those details will also be worked on during the site plan process.

Vizzari told The Local she believes, "whether we like it or not, the staff planning report is in line with current provincial legislation. I look forward to having more conversations to achieve what is best for our town within our parameters," she said, "but I do not believe this motion accomplishes that. I would rather work hard to make amendments that support residents rather than spending taxpayers' money to hire an outside planner along with lawyers to fight this at the OLT."

Couns. Tim Balasiuk, Gary Burroughs, Wendy Cheropita, Maria Mavridis and O'Connor voted in favour of her motion against approving staff recommendations. Couns. Nick Ruller and Erwin Wiens were not at the meeting.

Butler, the planner representing the property owner, told council that the project offers something not currently available in town — an apartment or condo-style building which could be appealing to some potential occupants.

"What this project does is provide that additional housing choice and housing mix," he said.

Coun. Gary Burroughs said there could be other places in town where this development would be better suited, and that he doesn't see

it being needed for the town to meet growth requirements.

"We don't have any issue with meeting any provincial targets assigned to us," he said.

Why this location? This was a question Burroughs asked Butler, who again reiterated it being an "additional" choice for people.

One recurring argument made by delegates who opposed the project was that the town should follow its own Official Plan and not make adjustments for a developer.

"You have an Official Plan. Please respect it," said Patrick Gedge, who lives on Meritage Lane next door to the proposed apartment. He said council should also be following the position of the town's urban design committee, that the project should be only two storeys high.

One of the provisions the developer is asking for is that they are not required to create a children's play area. King Street resident Jason Quesnelle said he doesn't know why the rules are being "bent and broken" on this, and that because there are more than 10 units, a playground should be part of the plans.

Resident David Saunders suggested neighbours would not have been opposed to townhouses or a couple of homes. Council should just simply turn down the proposal, he said, and called the project a "utilitarian rectangular three-storey block" that doesn't fit into the neighbourhood.

Staff have recommended approving 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 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.

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



Sandra O'Connor made a motion to disregard staff recommendations to permit a three-storey apartment building on King Street and the majority of councillors agreed. (Kris Dube)

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International student restrictions impact community

Penny Coles
The Local

Colleges Ontario, the association representing the province's public colleges, says the federal government's recent announcement about measures to limit international students "is already causing significant and unnecessary upheaval for students, employers and communities."

The changes, a statement from the association says, "are creating havoc for students now."

And the decisions have been rushed, "resulting in a confusing and damaging early rollout."

Michael Wales, director of communications for Niagara College, says although he understands the motivation behind the changes to the program, agrees "they were rushed, and they lacked meaningful consultation. That is really reflected in the uncertainty and chaos it's already causing the students."

There are about 6,200 international students studying at Niagara campuses for the winter term, he says, and more applications are arriving for students who hope to begin

this spring.

An immediate concern with the spring term, Wales adds, is a new requirement for a "letter of attestation," effective immediately, and applying to all study permit applications.

"Provincial attestation letters serve as confirmation that an applicant has met the provincial requirements for study. There is currently no system in place to generate these documents in Ontario, or any province outside of Quebec," he says.

"This has essentially created a moratorium on study permit applications. It has also created significant uncertainty and worry for students, and we're assessing the potential impact on our spring term enrolment."

The new measures don't seem to take into account the role colleges play, he says, "and what international students bring to our community." They study programs in areas such as healthcare, hospitality and tourism, and skilled trades. Restricting the admission of those students "will have an impact right here in Niagara. This will compound the shortages that already exist," as many international students typically go on

to work in those fields.

"We know there is a critical shortage of frontline healthcare workers in Ontario, and we're certainly feeling it in Niagara. At Niagara College we graduate 1,000 healthcare students every year, and many of them go to work in hospitals, clinics and long-term care homes in Niagara."

Niagara College "also graduates hundreds of students in skilled trades, and this comes at a time when we're pursuing ambitious targets in new home constructions. This creates another hurdle in closing that gap in skilled trades," Wales says.

As well, the college has 19 post-graduate courses in areas such as tourism and hospitality, advanced care paramedics, automotive technicians and business programs "which are important in Niagara and beyond," he says, and will also be impacted by the restrictions.

While the cap on international students is also being tied to contributing to the housing crisis, Niagara College considers housing availability when accepting international students, and has a team working with students on various options, including on- and

off-campus housing, shared accommodations and home stay programs. The college is also in the process of building more residences on its NOTL and Welland campuses, Wales says.

In immigration minister Marc Miller's announcement of the changes, he called them "blunt measures" to improve "program integrity" and help ensure the success of international students. He likened the "bad actor" schools he says he's targeting to "puppy mills," reported The Trillium, a Village Media news website, and he described them as private colleges offering "sham commerce degrees" in office space above massage parlours that no one actually goes to, with their students driving Ubers instead.

Wales is confident in the ability of Niagara College to offer quality education through its private-public partnership. The college offers a suite of programs with the Toronto School of Management at Niagara College Toronto, he says, programs which are subject "to the same quality assurance and oversight as the programs that are delivered at our home campuses in Niagara."

Students currently enrolled



Enrolment in nursing programs at Niagara College will be affected by new restrictions on international students, and create more shortages in healthcare. (Supplied)

at Niagara College Toronto remain eligible to apply for a post-graduate work permit, he adds, but "we're still assessing the longer-term implications of the federal government's new measures that come into effect in September."

The cap on international students creates a reduction of 35 per cent across Canada, but the impact in Ontario is likely to be greater, Wales says. "It's hard for us to say with any certainty what that will mean for our fall enrolments, as we don't know how the province will allocate study permits within Ontario."

The moratorium on new public-private college partnerships is also expected to cut off an important source of revenue for colleges, feeding the fear of rising tuition for local students.

Possibly coming for colleges, Wales says, is a slight rise of domestic post-secondary tuition, which is now frozen in Ontario. "Colleges have asked for a modest increase in domestic tuition — approximately \$135 per student."

Ontario colleges, Niagara College included, are already working together, he says, "advocating for more realistic timelines, to slow this down," and to take into account the impact not only on students and colleges, but also the negative impact these measures will have on local economies.



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Expect to see more flooding in future winters

Continued from page 1

snap we have had this winter. We had also just experienced our first heavy snow of the season, which melted more quickly than it typically would, he explains, because the temperature had warmed up

and the rain was melting the snow. “I think this particular high water event was a combination of the ground being somewhat frozen, the heavy snow pack on the ground, and a ton of rain,” says Bjorgan. “Normally at this time of year that would have been a big snow storm. Instead, thanks to climate change, we had a lot of precipitation, but it was rain.” “We can anticipate,” continues Bjorgan, “with what the experts are telling us to expect from climate change, we’ll see more of this in the future. Our municipalities should take heed and be prepared.”



Two Mile Creek overflowed its banks.



Stratus Winery was surrounded by water. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



The Two Mile Creek path was also flooded.



Flooding on Concession 7 and Line 8.



A section of Simcoe Park was submerged last Friday.

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Character study examines heritage of Rand properties

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

The property where the Rand Estate subdivision is being proposed is a “special place,” one with heritage features that should be protected as development takes place nearby.

That’s according to Gracia Janes, one of three residents who participated in a virtual open house Monday night related to a character study being undertaken by Urban Strategies, a firm hired by the municipality to produce the report, a 74-page document that will define the character of the area and identify appropriate policies, regulations and design criteria that will help guide change through the town’s Official Plan.

Tim Smith, from Urban Strategies, said the study is separate from an ongoing process involving an application from a developer for Official Plan and zoning bylaw amendments.

Developer Benny Marotta and his company Solmar hope to build 172 residential units on The Rand Estate and the two properties the character study encompasses, 200 John and 588 Charlotte Streets.

The other three sites the character study has analyzed are 144 and 176 John Street, as well as 210 John Street, the historic home first known as Brunswick Place, more recently, the Romance home and now the McArthur Estate.

“Our study is happening really independently of that application,” said Smith about the Rand Estate subdivision, which is also set to be the subject of an upcoming Ontario Land Tribunal hearing.

A public meeting about the study will take place Tues. Feb. 6 in council chambers.

Monday’s meeting did not require participation



The entrance to 200 John Street and the Rand Estate property could be used as access to the subdivision. (Penny Coles)

from members of council, but was led by planning director Kirsten McCauley.

Smith’s presentation said the steps following next week’s public meeting will be to collect, review and respond to public feedback on the recommendations.

This will lead to a revised Official Plan amendment for council to consider.

In the study, there are seven “principles” the consultant is recommending, each coming with several recommendations.

These include efforts to conserve, integrate and maintain significant cultural heritage features, while also protecting, enhancing and maintaining significant natural features and functions.

Other purposes of the study include ensuring that cultural and natural heritage features are visible to the public, and that compatibility and cohesion between distinct places are maintained.

Development in the area should accommodate a mix of housing types and sizes and compatible commercial uses, and also respect the scale and character of existing development in the area and in adjacent neighbourhoods, the study says.

Smith said larger homes in the area will still be suitable when they have a lot of greenspace to work with and don’t overpower other smaller ones, referring to the study’s recommendation that a mix of housing be made available, and adding that townhouses could be included.

Resident Dianne Ticknor raised concerns about traffic and parking if townhouses are built in the neighbourhood, as it would mean more people living there.

“Overall, the density wouldn’t be that high,” said Smith to Ticknor regarding townhouses. He told the few people tuned in to

the online meeting that the study does include guidelines, but that policies the study will later create are more important.

“Once adopted, they have a lot of teeth to them,” he said.

The character study area

includes the land bounded by the Heritage Trail, Charlotte Street and John Street East, and is close to the urban area boundary of the Old Town.

Council recently decided to offer Solmar a portion of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail to use as access to the subdivision from Charlotte Street.

But earlier this month, council passed two resolutions — one of them that the town withdraw its consent for the access over town-owned property.

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EDITORIAL

Students being blamed for problems they didn't create

Are there problems with some private institutions taking advantage of international students?

Are there “bad actors” in those schools who churn out students with degrees they haven’t earned?

If there are, if some of those private schools are exploiting young students who have travelled a long way from their homes and families seeking an education, why aren’t we targeting those schools with tough legislation that closes them down? Isn’t that what we do in this country? Isn’t that what we do with bad actors? Or do we blame the exploited?

Why have we very suddenly decided to restrict the number of international students who want to come to Canada for a good education, to take away their eligibility for work permits, and thus pretty much guarantee they will never fulfill their dreams of a better life, for themselves or their families, here or in their home country, despite their desire to learn and to work hard?

And while we do that, while we stop them from coming to Canada, our labour shortage will only worsen. Who will take those jobs in healthcare that will help shorten the long waits for emergency care in hospitals? Who will help our loved ones when they need long-term care? Who will help our tourism and hospitality industry get back on its feet? Who will build the houses we so desperately need?

We are saying no to bright young people who can only enrich our communities, and they deserve to be treated as such. If they need housing, let’s put our efforts toward finding it for them, and for all of us, rather than blaming them for a crisis that is not new and was certainly not created by them. They are not responsible for this problem, and in fact they provide a revenue stream for domestic students who may well face increased tuition fees as that revenue shrinks.

Instead of restricting international students who choose to come to Canada, it would be more helpful to support them by ensuring educational institutions serve them well, and by welcoming them to the inclusive communities we say we are striving to create.

Penny Coles
The Local

Flooding reminder of need for wetlands, sound politicians



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

The Great Flood of 2024, is what I’ve coined it. We all know what happened late last week. The perfect storm of unseasonably warm temperatures, rain and snowpack ripe for melting gave way to a surprise that Niagara hasn’t seen in decades.

More frequent readers of my column might be thinking, ‘here is another article regarding Owen’s shameless soundboard for loving wetlands,’ but I am going to shift the attention to our elected officials.

Although they didn’t create the natural conditions that are responsible for localized flooding, they certainly facilitated the severity of the floods. This flood could realistically be the warmup act for a bigger challenge to come.

Thankfully, no lives were lost last week. Our ‘little big’ Niagara flood pales in comparison to what has happened in Libya, Australia or even the southern states over the past year. However, it was big for us, and it is worthy of conversation and criticism alike.

Ditches turned into creeks, and creeks turned into small rivers as subtropical moisture from the U.S. funnelled into southern Ontario for a super-soaker situation. Water pooled and collected on the sub-frozen ground in areas where it normally wouldn’t.

As I’ve learned and witnessed around the world in my documentary travels, floods act exponentially in their growth. Along Line 9 near my house, culverts became clogged with the water and logs, therefore suddenly thrusting water up into front yards where it would normally never go. Flood water oozes into other areas that it would usually never find, and then we have unprecedented problems at our ankles.

That’s just what I saw. According to the popular and steadfast Facebook page Niagara 411, which has more than 136,000 followers, nowhere on the Niagara Peninsula was spared. On a side note, I highly recommend following this page, where a local man graciously volunteers his time to update Niagara about anything from traffic to crime and weather.

On that site, there were photos of Golden Horseshoe Estates in Lincoln. Brown water is seen blanketing the roads, driveways and flowing under vehicles. In a similar area, Victoria Avenue was flooded underneath a train bridge overpass, creating a daunting situation on this busy regional road.

One of Cushman Road’s ditches in St. Catharines swallowed a vehicle off the bitumen, and Glendale Avenue near the GM plant was inundated with water over the road. A vehicle on Fourth Avenue in St. Catharines was flooded past the door, and had to be towed away, while a vehicle on Netherby Road in Fort Erie hydroplaned onto a swollen farm field.



Owen Bjorgan’s jeep at Woodend Conservation Area on the way to work the morning after peak flood time. The flooded area on the right is inches from breaching the road, and about six feet deep. (Owen Bjorgan)

on the banks of hundreds of forested wetland pools in the area. As Niagara Falls’ urban area expanded aggressively southward and westward, Niagara Falls city council, the Niagara Region, and even the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority at the time pushed for development over swampland. Now, we act shocked when water shows up where it normally doesn’t.

Instead of funnelling our money into a carbon tax which hurts livelihoods, maybe we should consider retaining and protecting the wetlands we are lucky to still have. These free-of-charge ecosystem services act as sponges for both water and

Continued on page 7

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**View from the couch**

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

When the Martins’ idyllic vacation takes an unthinkable turn, widow Ellen Martin begins an investigation that leads her into a labyrinth of deception and corruption. *The Laundromat* (Netflix 2019) shows us the modern systems of protecting wealth have left the unsuspecting more uncertain as to what the truth is than ever before. Meryl Streep does a wonderful job of portraying the duped widow. This is a highly unsettling film, but one that should be seen by everyone.

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, Ben was at the NOTL Hydro office in Virgil.

COMMENT

Local LETTERS Town Council rises to the occasion

Thank you to the ‘people’s’ councillors (Sandra O’Connor, Gary Burroughs, Wendy Cheropita, Tim Balasiuk and Maria Mavridis) who passed a motion to overrule the town staff’s recommendation to approve the King St. condo/apartment proposal.

The town staff’s ill-advised recommendation made light of

the developer’s request for a 277 per cent increase in density, and failed to recognize that this gross overdevelopment isn’t required to meet our intensification goals.

Coun. Burroughs established the fact that we are well-positioned to meet our intensification goals (a population growth of 9,900 by 2051) based on the current proposed and

known projects in the pipeline.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa opposed the motion. He demonstrated that his personal opinion supersedes the fact that the proposed development is wildly inconsistent with the Official Plan, and that the community is adamantly opposed.

During Zalepa’s run for leadership, he campaigned on

adopting the Official Plan and “listening more.” He failed on both accounts. Our Official Plan has now established the accepted and reasonable plans for the future development of NOTL in a way that best serves the needs of its residents. It must be respected.

I’d like to thank the councillors who had the courage

and insight to support Coun. O’Connor’s motion. The NOTL Official Plan was years in the making. It is a contract between the town, our represented officials and the residents. I’d like to ask all our town council to respect the wishes of our community, and the integrity of our Official Plan in the future to preserve the quality of life that

our residents deserve.

I’d also like to thank those developers that work with the town and community in the context of the Official Plan. Their projects get approved quickly with limited extra expenses, completed much faster and have solid community support.

Bill French
NOTL

Local LETTERS Sandlewood Street reservoir at capacity after recent rain

Upper Canada Consultants (UCC) and Rick Wilson of the town’s planning department had strongly stated that there wouldn’t be any drainage issues with the proposed density zoning amendments requested. Rick Wilson relied on UCC’s assertions in his recommendation.

Town council was advised by residents that flooding was an issue. And, that sewage capacity was insufficient to accommodate the proposed zoning amendments.

We have had rain recently and contrary to what UCC and Rick Wilson had indicated, ex-

isting water runoff is a problem, with the 9.2 acres absorbing a considerable amount of water. The proposed densification of Tawny Ridge will undoubtedly overload the hydrological capabilities of what exists now. Climate change will result in additional water crises.

The Sandlewood Street reservoir that accommodates water runoff from St. Davids, including Tawny Ridge, is full to capacity with the retaining wall bulging. Homes near this reservoir and their grinder pumps may have their basements compromised, and leakage from the

grinder pump containers may overflow into the reservoir causing health issues. Grates on the road were full of water, which was only a foot from the top of the grate.

In addition, if that reservoir breaks, flooding the vineyard, liability issues will result in finan-

cial damages being incurred.

How can Rick Wilson and town council trust the assertions of Upper Canada Consultants?

The proposed zoning amendments do not warrant approval by town council.

Gienek Ksiazkiewicz
St. Davids

Library interview with author Edite Sammons

Adriana Vizzari
Town councillor,
Library board member

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library board and staff are interested in exploring the special place books, reading, storytelling and libraries hold in the hearts of our community members. The power of the written and spoken word, the enchantment of libraries and childhood memories of time spent with books, creates a profound tapestry of emotions and experiences.

This questionnaire prompts introspection and reflection, offering a unique lens through which to examine the bond between readers and their connection to books, storytelling and libraries.

Watch this space for inter-

views with an array of interesting community members.

Edite Sammons, a retired teacher, author, AIM Language (Accelerative Integrated Methodology) curriculum consultant, Shannon Passero model, Grape Escape wine tour guide, avid traveller and lifelong reader, brings a wealth of literary passion and knowledge to our St. Davids community. Born in Toronto and educated at the University of Toronto, Edite’s love of literature led her to major in French and Spanish, sparking a deep love for education and teaching.

Her teaching career reflects her commitment to fostering language and literacy. Inspired by her UofT professor David Booth, Edite embraced innovative approaches to language

education.

Beyond the classroom, Edite’s connection to literature blossomed into authorship, particularly with the AIM Language Learning program. Her books, featuring her lovable dog Murphy and my four children resonate with young readers, showcasing her ability to make language and literacy accessible to learners of all ages and are found in classrooms around the world.

In this interview, Edite shares her reading habits, memories of childhood libraries, and the profound impact of literature. She describes reading as the “thread” that she has carried throughout different chapters of her life.

Q: What are your earliest memories of reading?

My mom was an avid reader. She read to me in both Latvian and English. I recall our visits to the Cedarbrae Library in Scarborough, where I would eagerly pick out books and sit quietly and read.

Q: What are you reading right now?

Currently, I’m reading *A History of Burning* by Janika Oza, a former student of mine from Havergal College. Selected as one of the 100 notable books of 2023 by the NY Times Book Review, this epic first novel is about an extended Indo-Ugandan family that is displaced, settled and displaced again. It spans a century of time, four generations of family, five continents and multiple languages. In a story told from the perspectives of 10 characters, the author skilfully speaks to the complexities of class, trauma, survival, inheritance, immigration, colonialism and racism and how these themes transmute from generation to generation and character to character. The intimate stories of one family speak to a larger, panoramic picture: how rights and privileges, freedom and restrictions become drivers for migrations and destinies.

Q: What makes you love or recommend a book?

I appreciate personal recommendations from friends and enjoy exploring various genres. Historical fiction resonates with me, like *All the Light We Cannot See*, and *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, which I loved and connected with on a personal level due to my parents’ history. They fled Latvia and ended up in a displaced



Edite Sammons is an author of kids’ books to help them learn French. With her are Adriana Vizzari’s children, Antonia, Loretta, Gigi and Matthew. (Supplied)

persons camp in Poland.

Q: Do you belong to a book club?

I’m in the process of starting one with friends from the Grape Escape Wine Tour. We are aiming for a casual, inclusive environment to share our thoughts on books. The concept is we will not have to read the same book, but chat about books and what we are all currently reading.

Q: Did you belong to a library as a child?

Yes! Although we would visit our local library branch often, it was a half hour walk. Luckily, our neighbourhood was also served by a Bookmobile that circulated regularly, making library services very accessible.

Q: What inspired you to write books teaching kids French, considering your years of experience as a French teacher?

Over the years, I’ve observed that children learn lan-

guage best through authentic and spontaneous immersion, much like how they acquire their first language. My approach involves engaging kids through relatable stories where they can see themselves, relate to the characters, and become part of the narrative. Unlike traditional methods that focus on isolated topics like colours or weather, I’ve written books based on real-life experiences involving my dog and kids. These stories are designed to be accessible, ensuring that the language is relatable and doesn’t overwhelm young readers, fostering comprehension and fluency in an enjoyable way. The third book is currently in production, and the fourth is almost complete.

Edite Sammons’ journey from childhood library visits to her current role as an avid reader and author underscores the enduring importance of libraries in nurturing a love of literature within our community.

Flooding not a surprise

Continued from page 6

carbon alike.

To be clear, this is not a political jab. Both perceived sides of politics have underwhelming and lazy records with making a difference locally and abroad.

Like spotting a rare animal in the wild, I was satisfied and refreshed to spot some common sense in the comment sections of the Niagara 411 posts. I don’t expect that on social media, much like not expecting to find a rare animal out in nature. A substantial number of people were commenting on how we shouldn’t be surprised when we build developments on wetlands and floodplains.

Our elected officials let developers build on floodplains and create concrete where there was once a natural sponge. We allow a few to get rich while biodiversity, the climate and regular citizens take the hit.

On a parting note, I find myself reflecting on Niaga-

ra Falls’ Thundering Waters Forest protection days from 2014 to 2017. Our elected officials collaborated to please a foreign investor so an area of historic swampland could be ruined and paved over.

The very politicians, de-

velopers, and decision-makers who pushed that through should be mandated to put on chest waders and help clean out flooded basements when the big one comes. I will be there to film and interview them when that day arrives.



Forty Mile Creek gushes down the Niagara Escarpment, still running high two days after the peak flood. (Owen Bjorgan)

STAY IN THE LOOP

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Budget approval should be coming soon

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalist
Initiative Reporter

The town’s 2024 budget has yet to be approved, but currently reflects a 9.4-per-cent increase that local taxpayers will be faced with if it is rubber-stamped in its current state.

The last budget review committee was held in December, and there are no more scheduled discussions about the proposed \$10.4 million capital and \$16.5 million operating budgets.

The next piece in moving forward was expected to take place at Tuesday night’s council meeting, with a closed session update about the town’s employee bargaining group agreement for unionized employees.

This matter has been ongoing and needs to be approved before staff bring the budget back to council for final approval, treasurer Kyle Freeborn told The Local Monday.

The employee agreement typically impacts the annual budget by about 35 per cent, he said. “We want to wait until we know the number,” said Freeborn, before seeking official endorsement of the budgets from council.

“We believe they’ve struck a deal,” he added — it’s expected a special council meeting will be called next week for local politicians to have one last look at the 2024 spending plan.

The budget, as it stands now, equates to an average increase of about \$124, he said. But this could change next week when councillors go over it again. “There are usually some things that pop up in the last meeting.”

The town could have asked for budget approval sooner, but staff wanted both the capital and operating budgets to wait until the bargaining agreement is completed.

Dealing with inflation, and the creation of “more intense service delivery options,” such as an additional bylaw officer, a new climate change co-ordinator position, and an increase in senior planning resources, means an increase is needed on the operational side of the town, Freeborn said.

The capital budget is mostly driven by road work.

There are five projects that make up more than 50 per cent of the capital envelope, the most expensive being the second phase of a reconstruction of Concession 6 Road between Warner and York Roads. It is projected to have an impact of \$1.9 million on the capital budget.

The project with the second-highest price tag in the town’s capital plan is a Hunter Road water-main replacement between Four Mile Creek Road and Concession 4, at \$1.65 million.

This is followed by \$750,000 in work to a culvert on Dorchester Street, a \$500,000 replacement of a 2009 dump truck and \$400,000 for new parking machines.

Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens told the Local he has no concerns with the budget not being approved by late January, and said getting the four-year employee agreement ratified before finalizing the budget is key.

“We’ve gone into March before,” he said. “It’s important to wait for that to finish.”

Day-to-day operations are continuing, he said, and the municipality isn’t missing out on opportunities to tender for infrastructure projects by working without an approved budget. He pointed to a decision made late last year by council to approve giving staff 50 per cent of last year’s budget to work with in the meantime, on projects that require staff to move ahead with requests for proposals.

“The business of the town is still ongoing,” he said. “We’re still moving on and nothing has been slowed up.”



Town treasurer Kyle Freeborn and Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens.

Results will be studied to assess safety benefit

Continued from page 1

Fraser says.

The automated speed enforcement program is part of the region's Vision Zero road safety initiative, with a goal of eliminating serious or fatal incidents, and reducing all collisions. It includes the red light program, which is at work in other areas across the region but has not yet made its way to NOTL.

While the community safety zone cameras are being moved every 90 days through Niagara municipalities, the red light cameras will remain in place.

Niagara has four speed cameras rotating across the region, which have so far been used only in front of schools or near an access road to a school, Fraser explains. On its next rotation, the camera on Niagara Stone Road will move to York Road in front of St. Davids Public School, monitoring speeds from Queenston Road to Concession 3.

The financial model of the program is that the camera vendor, Verra Mobility, an Arizona transportation tech company, receives their daily rental fee for the cameras, along with

the cost of installation, operation and maintenance. They do not receive a portion of the revenue from tickets.

Other operational costs, such as provincial offence court fees and the review of images to determine who is fined, are also covered by the ticket revenue, says Fraser.

The images captured by the cameras are sent to a joint processing centre in Toronto that serves all automated speed enforcement programs in Ontario, and there it is decided whether the evidence supports a violation being issued.

Fraser explains that Ontario municipalities planning to adopt the program worked together on a request for proposals through a cooperative procurement process, "so we could all share and pool our resources to acquire this system. We partner with the City of Toronto and other municipalities as part of that contract, and we all make a contribution to the joint processing centre to have the City of Toronto process the images on our behalf."

It's too early for the region to know how much will be recovered in revenue, "because we are still very much in the early days

of the program," says Fraser. "We initiated the automated speed enforcement program rotation in September and are still in the process of collecting that early information."

His department "will go back to the region's public works committee early in Q2 of this year, and that's when we'll be sharing our preliminary assessments of how the program's been running, what safety benefits we've seen from the program, as well as the stats we're seeing of the number of charges this year."

The information, he adds, is coming from status reports of the cameras themselves, from the joint processing centre, "and most critically from our own independent data collection to be able to demonstrate the safety benefits associated with the camera."

"We're completing before, during and after assessments of speed and road safety improvements as we roll the cameras out," he continues, "and that's taking place not only where the cameras are located but also on other parallel routes, to demonstrate that the benefits associated with the camera are directly related to the camera being in place."



The speed camera is catching drivers travelling south. (Penny Coles)

Before adopting the program, municipalities were able to look at statistics where it has been used in other areas, says Fraser, and ultimately, as a result of a "rigorous, detailed analysis based on the best research and large-size studies," it was decided to try it across Niagara.

The region has been exploring the use of photo radar to improve road safety for several years, based on changes in provincial legislation that allow it. A September 2022 report dis-

cussing implementing the program in Niagara said all schools with entrances on regional roads had been analyzed, including the operating speed of vehicles, which was found to be about 14km/h over the posted speed within the school zones.

Collision analysis in Niagara school zones showed an average of 5.6 collisions per location per year.

Although there may be criticism of the speed cameras around the region, Fraser says he has also heard a

positive reaction. "I hear a lot of support, and a number of requests for additional cameras. It's not just push-back."

The speed cameras will be considered successful when the results "demonstrate the safety benefits of the cameras being present, and hopefully a lasting change in driver behaviour," he says, and also when there are no violations and no revenue from tickets "because people are obeying the speed limit on our roads."

The 9 Lives of a Domestic Shorthair



There's a saying "every cat has 9 lives", if only we could guarantee that for our furry friends. But for one, I can certainly attest to this statement, as my Tarzan-AKA Little T, -is currently living his best 9th life.

Almost eight years ago, a client stopped in our hospital with the most beautiful tabby kitten that she found in her window well, with no mother to be found. After a quick exam from our Veterinarians, it was determined this little one was male, about 5 weeks old, abandoned, and in need of a good home. Now who can turn down a kitten in need of a good home? Certainly not me. I packed him up, grabbed some kitten food and brought him home. Being a Disney family, we thought the name Tarzan was very fitting, as he was a fighter and a survivor.

Tarzan fit well in our home. He adjusted to our other cat, Jenny, and rambunctious boxer, Theo; or maybe it was them that adjusted to him, as he ruled the roost from day one. He was an adventurer, a hunter, a trouble maker, but also so affectionate, cuddly and a great companion.

Tarzan's curiosity would get him into trouble now and then; locking himself in a closet, unravelling an entire toilet roll, opening the back door and letting himself outside, you know...usual kitten behavior. But he was always a happy, healthy, bright-eyed kitten. That is until one morning when my very food motivated kitten wouldn't eat. And worse yet, he began to vomit. Only slightly worried, I brought him in to work for an exam to see what was going on. Bloodwork and radiographs revealed a likely obstruction in his intestines. I am very fortunate to work with a very supportive group that quickly prepped him for surgery, and Dr. Turpel went in to reveal the tiny tip of a children's nerf-gun bullet, the perfect size to block such a small little guy.

He recovered well, I removed every trace of nerf-gun paraphernalia from my home and life went back to normal. Until the next time, and the next, and the next. Fast forward 7 years and my sweet boy has been in and out of our surgical suite far too many times, ingesting far too many inedible items, likely record setting in the veterinary industry. He always bounced back with just a little more spunk and attitude. Until this past fall.

It was a Monday morning and my sweet boy didn't want breakfast. A quick call to the hospital to let them know he was coming in with me that day, and we were off. Upon arrival our Pet Health Care Team took over. Tarzan was examined, we did an x-ray and an ultrasound, and it was determined, yet again, there was an obstruction. Once again Dr. Turpel and my incredible team prepped him for surgery.

We are so careful with him at home, nothing is left out, doors now have child protective handles, it's literally Tarzan proof. But that weekend as we were cleaning the yard and preparing for winter, he escaped and ate the ornamental grasses in the garden. Low and behold, a clump of ornamental grass was found, causing a serious blockage. Surgery went well, the grass was removed, he did great under anesthetic and he was moved to our recovery area.

I went home that evening and prepared his usual house so he could heal peacefully.

Tuesday morning, I headed into work excited to give my little guy his breakfast. He never misses a meal, even post-surgery, so my assumption was he would be ravenous. But this time he wasn't. He looked up at me, meowed and went back under his blanket. Upon exam everything seemed ok at this point. No fever, his pain was managed, so I thought ok, he's older now, maybe he needs a bit more time to recover from this one. We gave him an hour and still no appetite. In that time, he had developed a high fever, his bloodwork showed rapid progression of serious concerns, ultrasound showed fluid in his abdomen, and it was determined his incision site had broken open internally (an unfortunate risk with any abdominal surgery) meaning fluid from his intestines was leaking into his abdomen. Tarzan had rapidly developed life-threatening septic peritonitis.

This is one of the biggest risks of a foreign body surgery, but I had never thought we would have to face it, as he had always done so well. I was devastated to face one of two options. One, Dr. Turpel goes back into surgery and repairs the tear with a 50/50 chance of survival, as he was so sick. Two, we say goodbye. Nothing prepared me for this decision. How did I go from having a perfectly happy and healthy cat just two days ago, to facing a decision like this? How could I go home and tell my family that he was gone?

I have worked for Dr. Turpel for 12 years. We have been through many ups and downs in our hospital, supported our staff and clients through very sad moments, and celebrated the good moments. He has been my mentor and a dear friend to me. So, when he took me aside and said we need to give him a fighting chance that was all I needed to hear, and for the second time in less than 24 hours, our team scrubbed in for surgery, Tarzan's 9th surgery.

My little one held strong, and survived, but his progress over the next few days was critical. Dr. Turpel took him home for 24-hour care over the next 2 nights, administering medications as scheduled all through the night, and our team nursed him throughout the day. Tarzan had a drain in his abdomen to help remove the remaining fluid, a feeding tube placed to ensure he was intaking food and medications, as well as a cone and an enormous bandage covering most of his body. But by Friday, he finally started to eat on his own and he was ready to come home, receiving medication every 4-6 hours.

He returned to work with me a few times to check his blood and ensure he continued to heal. I am thrilled to say he improved every day, and now, other than the patches of shaved hair, you'd never know what he had endured. Tarzan is a true fighter and survivor.

I will be eternally grateful to Dr. Jim and to my work family here at Upper Canada Animal Hospital. They held my hand, wiped my tears and supported me through it all, and most important, did everything in their power to ensure Tarzan could come home again.

Tracey Niven
Hospital Manager - Upper Canada Animal Hospital



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Local LOVE

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Seasoned Popcorn ~~\$6~~ **\$3**

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Pepperoni Chips served w/ ranch dip ~~\$40~~ **\$5**

Warm Olives served warm w/ naan ~~\$12~~ **\$6**

Sourdough Pretzel served warm w/ 3 dips ~~\$14~~ **\$7**

Bruschetta served on a toasted baguette ~~\$17~~ **\$8.50**

Roasted Eggplant Dip served 2 ways w/ warm naan ~~\$17~~ **\$8.50**

Baked Brie wheel served w/ gluten free crackers ~~\$22~~ **\$11**

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Soup of the Day rotating house-made soup ~~\$13~~ **\$6.50**

Kale Salad w/ pumpkin seeds, pine nuts & diced apple ~~\$16~~ **\$8**

Arugula Salad w/ dried cranberries, goat cheese, pecans & prosciutto ~~\$18~~ **\$9**



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Cheese Melt swiss cheese on toasted sourdough bread ~~\$16~~ **\$8**
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Margherita ~~\$20~~ **\$10**

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Thursdays

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Every can of Exchange beer counts when it's for charity

Local staff

The Exchange Brewery, a local craft brewery located in the heart of Niagara-on-the-Lake's heritage district, specializes in brewing a range of American styles along with sour and funky Belgian-style beers and ales.

Now it's officially 2024, and at the Exchange Brewery that means new charity beers, and also giving back to charitable organizations.

Every year the staff at the brewery pick a charity or organization that has affected them personally, attach it to a style of beer and donate all proceeds from that specific brew to the charity or organization of their choice, explains a news release from the brewery.

Last year marketing manager Sara Divinski chose Plenty Canada to donate to in memory of her grandmother. "We have people come to the brewery from all over just to help a cause that they can personally relate to," she says. "It really is amazing to see how something so simple as a beer can bring people togeth-

er, spread awareness and even contribute to changing some lives."

This year, The Exchange Brewery is excited to announce that they will be raising funds for Earth Day, the LGBTQ+ community and the autism community through their Charity Brew Program. They release these beers periodically throughout the year, so keep an eye out for the next release. In 2023, the program included a long list of recipients: Brave Noise, CMHA Niagara, Guza, Colorectal Cancer Canada, White Rabbit — MS Society of Canada, Light the Way, Plenty Canada, Certified Good Boy and Canadian Veterans Service Dog Unit.

This year, charity beers currently available include Light The Way, Wild Ale with Herbs — 6.7 per cent. This barrel-aged wild ale was brewed with chamomile flower, dried orange peel and lemongrass. The moderately sour and complex beer showcases these flavours along with notes of mint, coconut and pineapple.

All proceeds will be donated to Plenty Canada to help facilitate access and share resources with Indigenous peoples and other community groups around the world in support of their environmental protection and sustainable development goals, says the news release.

Very limited cans are left of Certified Good Boy Grätzer — 3 per cent. This smoked wheat beer hails from the city of Grodzisk, Poland. Popular in the 18th century, this historic style has seen a revival in recent years. All proceeds will be donated to the Canadian Veteran Service Dog Unit to help provide service dogs to veterans and first responders suffering from PTSD.

And there are more to come in 2024. The Exchange Brewery is excited to announce their new partnership with oddBar at 12 King St. in St. Catharines. They will be serving their famous pizza at The Exchange Brewery starting Feb. 1.

To celebrate, all food on their menu will be 50 per cent off from Feb. 1 to 29. Be sure to stop in and grab a slice while you're checking out their charity beers.



Exchange owner Robin Ridesic with marketing manager Sara Divinski. The brewery has selected Plenty Canada as one of the charities they will support in honour of Divinski's grandmother, who was a member of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte. OddBar pizza, also shown, will be served at the brewery this week.



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**Local Love Recipe
presented by:**



Brownie Bites

Ingredients:

- ½ cup of OLIV Blood Orange EVOO
- 1 ⅓ cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- ¾ cup flour
- 2 tsp. OLIV Chocolate Raspberry Balsamic Vinegar
- 1 Cup Semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 3 eggs
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ cup cocoa powder



Directions : Preheat oven to 350°F and oil your preferred brownie pan. In a mixing bowl, combine OLIV Blood Orange EVOO, egg, sugar, vanilla, baking powder, salt, cocoa powder and OLIV Balsamic Vinegar. Lastly, add the flour and fold in chocolate chips. Pour batter into pan and bake for 20-25 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean in the centre. Remove from oven and let cool for at least 10 minutes. When serving add an additional drizzle of OLIV Balsamic Vinegar. ENJOY!

Love Where You Live: SUPPORT *Local*

Regional council in uproar over Palestine discussion

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

The council chamber at Niagara Region headquarters was in an uproar Thursday after councillors chose to remove an item from the agenda, a motion brought forward by St. Catharines representative Haley Bateman asking the regional government to call for an immediate ceasefire in the Palestine-Israel conflict.

At the start of the meeting, St. Catharines mayor Mat Siscoe made a motion to have Bateman’s proposed recommendations removed from the agenda, which were to be considered several items down the list of items on the agenda.

“This matter does not pertain to any area of Niagara Region business or mandate,” said Siscoe.

“The end result would be division in our community,” regardless of how council ended up voting on the matter later in the evening, he said.

A recorded vote on whether or not to call the question was supported by 24 members of council, opposed by only Bateman and Niagara-on-the-Lake Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser, eliminating the possibility of further discussion.

A vote to strike Bateman’s

motion from the agenda was also supported by council, leading to chair Jim Bradley informing the packed gallery that registered speakers would also not be able to make presentations.

There were 18 people listed as speakers to address the issue.

This prompted dozens of people in the gallery to become frustrated, repeatedly shouting “cease fire now.”

Chair Bradley then declared a 10-minute recess, saying that regional council’s procedural bylaw does not permit delegations speaking to non-agenda items.

On the livestream of the meeting, Bateman could be seen walking out of the chamber after council voted.

Social media quickly picked up on what was happening at the regional council meeting, the crowd that had gathered outside the headquarters to protest the decision made, and the speeches that were then delivered outside by people who were signed up to speak at the meeting.

Kaiser said she voted against calling the question in order to generate more discussion, and also did not support Bateman’s motion. But she’s “not faulting anyone” and can see why others voted differently.

“I do understand the rationale behind both perspectives,” she told The Local on Friday.

She also understands there is a “time and a place” for certain discussions, she added.

But council has previously discussed motions regarding the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, which to her is one reason why the motion her fellow councillor was putting on the table should not have been dismissed.

“As a councillor, I’d like to be consistent with that,” said Kaiser. “If we decide that’s not in our lane, then we should do that across the board.”

Asked whether she believed Bateman’s motion could result in the federal government taking action, she said there were parts of the motion that she did not support.

“But we never got to that conversation,” she said.

A news release late Thursday night from the Niagara Movement for Justice in Palestine-Israel said that once delegates were told they were unable to speak to Council, delegates and audience members gathered outside “in an impromptu rally to make the speeches they were denied by council.”

“The Niagara Region,” the statement continues, “has lit their headquarters in the colours of Israel’s flag ‘as a symbol of solidarity with Israel, and Niagara’s Jewish residents.’ Bateman’s motion had included calling for “similar lighting



The regional chamber gallery was packed with those waiting to present a delegation, many of whom began chanting when it was denied. (Screenshot)

in the colours of the Palestinian flag, done earlier by Edmonton, for Palestine and Niagara’s nearly 500 residents of Palestinian origin.”

Bateman’s recommendation began with a request that council “offers support” to all the Israelis and Palestinian Canadians living in Niagara.

Bateman’s motion asked that the Region ask the federal government to remove the cap on the “number of Palestinians who can seek refuge with their Canadian extended family members from the violence in the Gaza Strip.” The motion said “many organizations who support those who have been so deeply affected have noted that that number is insufficient and not reflective of the extent of the crisis.”

In addition, her motion requested that the region ask the federal government to treat those leaving the conflict zones and Palestinian territories as Ukrainians leaving that conflict, “including the removal of application fees, and social assistance when they arrive to Canada.”

Bateman said in her motion that it is not intended to foster racism, antisemitism and targeting of Jewish people living in Niagara, anti-Palestinian racism or Islamophobia.

“Instead, it is a reason to show solidarity and compassion for those who are living in Israel and Palestine.”

Bateman told The Local Friday morning that her mo-

tion being blocked was calculated, and that there still should have been a conversation.

“Many motions come to council that are not exactly within our mandate, but we discuss, and we vote,” she said. “My colleagues did not afford me that opportunity and did not afford residents an opportunity to speak to their experiences as Palestinians and Israelis living in Niagara,” she added.

If her motion were to have passed, she said it would have

shown Palestinian residents that Niagara Region is “empathetic to all they are going through,” and supportive of Humanitarian aid efforts to getting their loved ones what they need.

In response to Siscoe’s comment that the motion being debated would cause divide in Niagara, she said his position is “not a reflection of our community,” and that what she feels is most unfortunate is that people who wanted to be heard were not.



St Catharines Regional Coun. Haley Bateman was denied her opportunity to present a motion of Palestinian support. (Supplied)



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Regional chair speaks out about motion denied

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

In a statement regarding Thursday's Niagara Region council meeting and a motion to remove the Palestine-Israeli conflict discussion from the agenda, chair Jim Bradley said everything that occurred was in accordance with the Region's procedural bylaw.

A motion made by St.

Catharines Mayor Mat Siscoe to remove the item from the agenda "provided specific rationale that the item in question was clearly outside the jurisdiction of the Region," he said, adding the result was a decision of council. Haley Bateman, who had planned to make the motion, and NOTL Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser, were the only councillors who voted to allow it to go forward.

As chair, Bradley only

votes to break ties. "However, I wish to state that I agree with my colleagues and I view the item in question as not being within the jurisdiction of the Region. This agenda item was not appropriate for our consideration," he said. Councillors should always be cautious when bringing items forward that are outside regional council's core mandate, he added. "When we stray from our central business there is always a potential that council may decline to hear the motion."

As chair, he is charged to maintain the decorum and civility in council chambers, he said in his statement. "I believe that councillors expect me to take the necessary steps to ensure the business of the Region can be completed and I believe that is what we accomplished."

"While tonight's meeting was unorthodox," he continued, "regional council concluded all of the necessary components of our agenda in service of our constituents."

Although there may be some "who chose to view through a different lens," Bradley said he wants to "ensure the public that this was matter of procedure, and council made their decision



NOTL Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser voted to allow the motion to be heard. (File photo)

based on not wanting to debate an issue outside of their jurisdiction."

He said it's unfortunate so many residents attended council with the intent of speaking given the "low likelihood" that council would be willing to debate an item outside their jurisdiction. "I believe this is a lesson for all members to be vigilant of what they bring to chambers and not to set unrealistic expectations with our constituents going forward," he said.

In the Region's procedural bylaw, the only rules

about notice of motions are that they are presented at a meeting of council, but shall not be debated until the next regular meeting of council. They can be delivered to the clerk not less than seven days prior to the date of the meeting at which the motion is to be introduced, reads the bylaw.

Another section of the bylaw says the chair shall "receive and submit to a vote all motions presented by the members of council or committee, as the case may be, which do not contravene the rules of procedure." But

the chair also has the ability to "decline to put to a vote motions which are contrary to the rules of procedure or which are beyond the jurisdiction of council."

Asked whether requests to make a delegation are automatically granted, Bradley's office explained that as long as the individual has not already spoken to the issue at committee and is conforming to the Region's rules of conduct, that they can't be offensive, disrespectful or disobey the rules of procedure or the chair, they can speak to an agenda item.



Regional chair Jim Bradley (Supplied)

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Partnership results in charming kids' book

Mike Balsom
The Local

In a new children's book entitled *River's Perfect Christmas*, a young boy overhears his neighbour sharing the sad news that there would be no presents for her family on Christmas day due to the difficulties of the past year.

The boy, River, decides that something must be done. Seemingly unbeknownst to his own parents, he takes action to ensure the Quigleys and their six children will experience a memorable Christmas.

River's Perfect Christmas is the brainchild of Niagara-on-the-Lake business owner Al Huberts. It's a timely, positive story about how one caring person can make a big difference in the lives of others.

The owner of York Road's Nature's Aid had the basics of the story a few years ago but put it aside after a few attempts at finding the right illustrator to bring it to life.

"It's been a real passion project for me, and I wanted to revisit it," says Huberts. "When a friend connected me with Becca, it really took off."

"Becca" is Becca Marshall, an art and social sciences teacher at Westlane Secondary School in Niagara Falls. The Wingham, Ontario-born Marshall has previously illustrated books for Listowel-based au-



Becca Marshall and Al Huberts with *River's Perfect Christmas*. (Mike Balsom)

thor Jennifer Courtney (*Santa Meets his Match*; *I Don't Think I'll Be a Princess*) and a couple of other writers. Her work has a unique, whimsical style, her human characters often featuring wavy, curly hair and big, expressive eyes, conveying emotion and helping to drive the story.

Meeting with the two of them together in the Nature's Aid office, it becomes quickly obvious that they have developed a great working relationship. Each often steps in to finish a sentence or thought for the other, and they both clearly have a passion for the story and the project.

"I've worked with other people on books," says Huberts, referring to a series of Canadian history colouring books he previously authored. "Becca's better than anyone else I've ever worked with in that she gets where the story comes from, even before she begins drawing. We don't have any real disagreements."

"What's fun for me," says Marshall, "is to get those little glimpses into the story. And sometimes I get to meet the people that I'm basing the characters on. I remember Al describing his grandchildren. I then pull pieces of people's personalities, their mannerisms,

maybe things they wear and put that into the drawings. That makes it really fun."

The main character is based on a 12-year-old named River who lives in British Columbia, the grandson of Al and his wife Louise. Marshall has never had the chance to meet him, but she has heard many stories from his grandparents. Al adds he began formulating the story when River was six.

To create her drawings, Marshall uses an app called Procreate on her iPad. For previous commissions she started out working on paper. But when changes needed to be made after meeting with the author, she often had to start the entire painting process all over again.

"We will redo lots of little things," Hubert laughs, "sometimes just changing a smile or something. We did one just this morning. I can't imagine if you had to redo all of those changes from scratch."

"I use an Apple pencil, and it's pressure-sensitive," says Marshall. "It works just like pen and paper, and they have brush sets where it acts like paints. A lot of this is done with a gloss brush, then I go over it with a pen called ink bleed. I like a little bit of messier line work, because I feel it has a little more movement in it."

"The beauty of it is that it looks just like watercolour," adds a clearly pleased Huberts.

Typically, an illustrator is hired to create the illustrations for a book such as *River's Perfect Christmas* and paid accordingly. But Huberts brought Marshall in as an equal partner on the project.

"This is my first time doing this as a partnership," says Marshall. "It's been fun to learn so much about the author's process, and what goes on behind the scenes. I'm so glad Al has a brain for business, too, because I don't have any of that."

"The first time I saw her work I knew I needed her," says Hubert. "The same book without this type of illustration would be just okay. In my view, illustrations are more important, and that's why we're partners."

A savvy serial entrepreneur, Huberts knew when he started

the project he wanted it to lead to potential sequels.

"Of all the things I have been involved in, I love this most," he says. "I want a book that can lead into multiple books, and to do that the illustrator has to be the same. I decided to make River's family bi-racial partially because that lends itself to some different stories, some different issues."

He has already mind-mapped a book that follows River's sister through the alphabet at the zoo, and another that focuses on numbers. And Marshall has already suggested some ideas for the illustrations.

With *River's Perfect Christmas* now completed, the next step for Huberts and Marshall is to get a website up and running, and then to launch a Kickstarter campaign in March.

Huberts has followed a number of projects on the crowdfunding website and believes he has figured out what it takes to run a successful cam-

paign on the platform. He's factored in the shipping costs and figured out some promotional techniques that he is sure will help the book find its readers.

"We're going to drive people to go to the website first," he says. "We'll collect email contact information and notify people in advance of the launch date. Then Becca and I will sign the first 2,000 books sold on Kickstarter. You really have to stand out to be successful there."

As for the book itself, it's a fun, positive story with brightly-coloured images done in Marshall's realistic yet fun and casual style.

"He's so good at describing the way he wants the page to make a person feel when they're reading it," Marshall says. "It really helps me know where to focus."

"She can figure out exactly what I'm aiming for when I give her an idea of what I have in my head," says Huberts. "I see us doing lots of books together."

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Author Al Huberts and illustrator Becca Marshall hope they have created the perfect Christmas book.

Museum tells the stories for Black History Month

Barbara Worthy
NOTL Museum

“Keep telling the story,” said a visitor to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum after viewing the 2023 exhibit, *Bound and Determined: Chloe Cooley, Enslavement, and the Fight for Freedom*.

“The time has come to understand the whole truth. People should not be threatened by past history but use it to determine current history.”

And when actor, writer and educator Marcel Stewart said, “When I think of Black history in Niagara, I think of textbook pages that have been glued together,” the museum’s curator and managing director Sarah Kaufman knew that the NOTL Museum was uniquely placed to tell those stories. And to keep telling them, which is the goal of the museum’s current expansion plans.

“It was the voices of people like Chloe Cooley and Solomon Moseby, right here

in Niagara, that brought to light the injustices and inequities of a system here in Upper Canada that was discriminatory and racist,” said Kaufman. In each case, their actions changed the course of history.

The passionate cries of resistance by the enslaved Chloe Cooley initiated the first anti-slavery legislation in the British Empire, right here in Upper Canada in 1793. And Canadian extradition and refugee policies being used today were first introduced in 1838 to secure the release from a Niagara courthouse of the enslaved Solomon Moseby, following a public riot led by local residents fighting for Moseby.

The NOTL Museum has been sharing these rarely-told stories through exhibitions, lectures and interpretative experiences, such as the Voices of Freedom Park in Niagara-on-the-Lake’s heritage district with its annual July 9 Chloe

Cooley Day commemorating the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery. In this way the museum is helping to preserve and promote the diversity of local history, ensuring that educators, residents and tourists alike all benefit from the knowledge.

The museum works closely with scholars, experts and representatives of the Black community, such as the Ontario Black History Society; Rochelle Bush, a freedom seeker descendant and Trustee/Historian of the Salem Chapel BME Church, Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historic Site in St. Catharines; and Natasha Henry-Dixon, author, lecturer and PhD candidate in the Department of History at York University. Together they offer guidance and invaluable research for museum initiatives, helping to tell the stories, “and open those textbook pages,” said Kaufman.

Recently at the museum,

a mixed medium original art piece from Wayne Moore recreated the Chloe Cooley story; a musicology lecture from Carlos Morgan told the history of Black music in Canada; and regular museum Black History walking tours offered an in-depth look at early Black settlers who made significant contributions to Niagara, from teaching and farming, to business and local politics.

Currently, the museum is kicking off Black History month with the Museum Doc Club series presenting the award-winning documentary, *Becoming*, which follows Michelle Obama on her 30-city book tour across the U.S., Feb. 2 at 10 a.m.

That will be followed with an upcoming virtual lecture on Feb. 7 at 11 a.m. with Julian Sher, author of *The North Star: Canada and the Civil War Plots Against Lincoln*, which tells the story of Canadians and Confederate agents working together here in Canada, and the role they played in supporting the enslaved South.

And on Feb. 21, at 11 a.m., the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Center will present *The Borderland: Black Agency and Resistance Between Two Nations*, a virtual lecture on the fiercely passionate Black resistance



Wayne Moore’s mixed media *Chloe Cooley* at the NOTL Museum. (Supplied)

movement on Niagara’s border with Upper New York.

All those interested are invited to check the museum webpage for more information on all current and past Black History programming, including past lecture recordings, short documentaries, and research opportunities into early Black settlements.

Said Kaufman, “Another visitor said to me, thank you for telling these stories of humanity, struggle, transition and freedom. And that’s exactly what the NOTL Museum intends to keep doing, and not just for one month, but throughout the year.”

For more information visit notlmuseum.ca or phone 905-468-3912.

Rotary supports children’s summer art programs

Maria H. Klassen
The Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Rotary Club has ensured a healing program for kids can be offered at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre.

Chris Hatch, the club’s chair of community service, recently presented a donation of \$8,695 to Pumphouse art director Rima Boles to help sponsor Healing Arts for Kids.

The Pumphouse considers art programs powerful catalysts for the holistic development of children and youth, offering a unique avenue for self-expression, comfort and healing.

Healing Arts for Kids offers a no-charge summer camp for disadvantaged children and youth in the Niagara Region, a recent news release from the Pumphouse says.

Now in its fifth year, “this program has evolved into a vital community resource, harnessing the transformative potential of art to enrich the lives of the children who need it most.”

The NOTL Rotary Club has been a key partner in delivering this program, one of the many local initiatives supported by the club, says the news release.

“This partnership signifies our dedication to ensuring that children in need can benefit from artistic expression,” says Hatch. “Together with the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre, we are building a supportive community that embraces the power of art in the lives of our children.”

Summer art camps are full-day programs for children aged four to eight, and for those aged nine to 12. The children spend the week cre-

ating art projects that include drawing, painting, collage and sculpture. Lessons are supported by visual examples from art history or artworks in the gallery. Campers spend time outside with plein-air painting, lunch breaks and games.

Thanks to the partnership with NOTL Rotary Club, designated spots at no charge are reserved for the Healing Arts for Kids program. Rima Boles expresses gratitude for the ongoing support from the club, saying, “Together we open the door to art camp experiences for deserving children, providing joy in the lives of those who may not have encountered the magic of summer camp.”

For more information, interested parties can contact the Pumphouse at 905-468-5455 or via email at office@niagarapumphouse.ca.



Pumphouse director Rima Boles, with Chris Hatch of the Rotary Club of NOTL presenting a cheque for the Healing Arts for Kids program. (Supplied)

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LocalSPORTS

NOTL Pickleball Club members get around

Mike Balsom
The Local

Australia, the Bahamas, the Caribbean Sea, Costa Rica, Florida, Las Vegas, New York, Pennsylvania, Quebec, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia. No matter where they go, it seems Niagara-on-the-Lake Pickleball Club members enjoy taking their love of the sport on vacation with them.

The Local reached out to club members and found that for many of them, the game is a big factor in their vacation experience.

Blair Cribb and his wife Leslee McCabe joined the NOTL Pickleball Club in the fall of 2022. Last February the couple decided to go on a Caribbean cruise. It was imperative to them that the cruise ship they chose offered pickleball courts.

"We looked at a celebrity cruise," says Cribb, a member of the NOTL Golf Club who also curls regularly in St. Catharines, "but they don't have any pickleball courts right now. So we chose Holland America's Nieuw Statendam, one of their newer ships. They converted their basketball courts into two pickleball courts."

Cribb told The Local that the ship had a pickleball pro on board to give introductory lessons to new players. There were tournaments during the week as well. The couple connected with two others of similar skill level and met up every morning before the courts got busy.

Having only played the game indoors in NOTL, Cribb and McCabe found they had to make adjustments because of the wind. Atop a moving cruise liner, when playing on the upwind end of the court, a hard smash is an excellent strategy, but not so much when on the downwind end.

Holland America, meanwhile, has thrown itself into pickleball mania as the exclusive cruise line partner of the Professional Pickleball Association. All of their cruise ships now feature pickleball courts with top-deck views. Weather permitting, the equipment and courts are available for a match anytime. Complimentary beginner's lessons are offered, and branded starter equipment kits are now available at their gift shops.

In the winter, NOTL club member Larry Mantle plays at a multi-sport country club in central Florida. He has learned to make his own adjustments to how the wind affects ball flight, despite outdoor balls typically being heavier, harder, and having more holes.

Everyone at the Florida club is friendly and welcoming, he says, just like in NOTL. And the managing director's son, five-time U.S. Open champion Kyle Yates, occasionally visits the club there for exhibition play.

In November, Linda Woods and her husband Marcello Milani played the game for the first time in Naples, Florida, where the East Naples Community

Centre boasts 64 courts. She says easy friendships were made there, but unlike the NOTL club, Naples has no online booking system and often their telephone registration system created confusion.

Lucy and Jeff Brookhouser also first learned the game on vacation in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The city's parks and recreation department offers indoor facilities at two gyms, each with eight courts, and an outdoor location with four courts. The city is currently fundraising to construct eight more outdoor courts in the near future.

The Brookhousers are former tennis players who decided to give the game a try and loved it immediately. They joined the NOTL club when they returned home about a year ago this April.

"It has been fantastic, it's a great workout and a lot of fun," Jeff says. "The people are great, and that's why the sport has been growing so much."

They're not the only Canadians who play there, either. Both Lucy and Jeff say they regularly meet other pickleball players from across Ontario while they are on the North Myrtle Beach courts.

Another NOTL club member, Maggie Babcock, spends winters in Australia where, for the past three years, pickleball has been part of her routine. Christine Bozek has played across Ontario as well as in Quebec City, Las Vegas, Utah and Indianapolis. And Deb Young first learned the game in

the Cayman Islands.

Scott Lapointe and his wife, Brenda Haskins Lapointe, have taken their boat up and down the east coast the past three winters, making strategic pickleball stops along the way.

"I play at a higher level," says Scott, who is ranked as a 4.5-level player. "So I generally like the places with the most courts, because they allow more levelled play. Places like Hilton Head, Daytona and Naples are some of our favourites."

In Hilton Head, they often play at a club called Palmetto Dunes. Scott estimates that the island's reputation as a tourist destination means that as many as 90 per cent of the people they have met there have been travelers on vacation.

Though she also lists Hilton Head as a favourite, Brenda, a 3.5-rated player, adds that she also loves a tiny island in Virginia called Chincoteague.

"They only have a few courts there," she says, "but they really have it figured out. I think the population there is only about 250, but 100 of them play pickleball. It's lots of fun to play there."

With NOTL also a tourist destination, club president John Hindle says visitors to town often reach out to inquire about booking a court at the NOTL Community Centre or Central Community Centre.

"I get calls almost weekly," Hindle says. "But we're caught between a rock and a hard place because of our insurance, and



Kenny Loggins and his girlfriend Lisa were able to get in a doubles match at the NOTL Community Centre against NOTL Pickleball Club members Joy Sanguedolce (left) and Ryan D'Souza (right) before his Sept. 8 concert in Niagara Falls. Here they are standing in the 'Danger Zone', otherwise known in pickleball circles as the kitchen, where you don't want your ball to land. (Supplied)

because most of our sessions are fully booked. It was easier when we had the outdoor courts (at the Virgil Sports Park). The community centre has been helpful, though, as they will take a single-court booking for \$12."

The staff at the community centre stepped up back in early September when two-time Grammy Award winner Kenny Loggins was in Niagara to play a concert at the OLG Stage in Niagara Falls.

Kim Miller Cantin, who has a home in NOTL but lives most of the year in Santa Barbara, has known Loggins for a number of years. She reached out and invited him and his girlfriend Lisa to come to town a day earlier.

Miller Cantin planned a carriage ride and a stroll down Queen Street for the singer/songwriter, and then asked him

what he wanted to do while he was here.

"He and Lisa really like pickleball, they play a lot," she explains. "He travels with his paddles. I googled the pickleball club, and (club director) Joy Sanguedolce called me back. She contacted the NOTL Community Centre and they set it up. They needed partners for doubles, so Joy contacted fellow club member Ryan D'Souza and it was game on."

"We created a private VIP experience for him," says Sanguedolce. "It was a lot of fun. And both of them were really good players."

Hindle can't recall other celebrities playing pickleball in NOTL.

"No names that I can drop," he laughs, "but I consider all of our club's members celebrities."

Nine different Preds score in win over Toronto

Mike Balsom
The Local

Almost half of the Niagara Predators who were dressed for last Saturday's 9-2 win against the Toronto Flyers found the back of the net at the Paramount Ice Complex in Thornhill.

Isaac Locker, Reece Bisci and Cameron Savoie all scored in the first period to stake the Predators to a 3-1 lead over the Flyers.

A huge second period began with defender Tyler DeCoff picking up his first Greater Metro Junior A Hockey goal. DeCoff intercepted a Toronto clearing pass at the Flyers' blue line, skated through three Toronto defenders and wristed the shot past goaltender Lucas DiRisio's outstretched blocker to put the Preds up 4-1.

Nolan Wyers, Georgy

Kholmovsky, Luca Fernandez and Tyler Gearing followed suit in the five-goal middle frame for the Preds, while Toronto's Kobe Lyn beat Niagara goalie Zane Clausen with three seconds left to close the period out with an 8-2 score.

Defenceman Nicholas Nicoletti notched the Predators' final goal of the game 13 minutes into the third and the Predators skated the rest of the way toward a 9-2 victory.

When it was over, 14 of the 20 Predators' skaters who saw ice time picked up at least one point in the game.

"It was a really enjoyable game to watch," head coach Kevin Taylor said of the team's lone outing last weekend. "They were more in tune with what was happening. The boys were having a lot of fun. Maybe

it was because they were scoring goals. It was just a fun game to coach."

Taylor was pleased with the team's effort to follow the game plan against the Flyers.

"They did everything that we asked them to do," he said. "They forechecked nicely, we got shots on net, we were moving the puck well, even keeping their man wide they did well on. If we continue the way we did, with the confidence we showed Saturday, we're going to make some noise in the playoffs."

The Preds have another Friday night off this week, with their only game, a home ice rematch against the Flyers, scheduled for Sunday afternoon in Virgil. The task is to stay fresh with practices this week on Tuesday and Wednesday, followed by a Thursday skills session.

"I'm expecting the guys to play a little harder this Sunday," Taylor said. "But I'm not expecting the same type of score in this game."

After Sunday, the Preds have four games remaining on their schedule. They host St. George on Feb. 9, then travel to Tottenham Feb. 10 and close out that weekend with a trip to St. George. Their regular season concludes Friday, Feb. 16 at home against the North York Renegades.

North York sits atop the Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League's South Division with 54 points, while the Bradford Bulls are eight points back in second. Only eight points separate the third pace Durham Roadrunners from the sixth place Preds.

"We still have an outside chance to finish third," Taylor says. "We're definitely aiming



Tyler Gearing found some open ice in a recent game against West Nipissing, and again in Toronto. (Mike Balsom)

for at least fourth. We just have to clean a few mistakes before the playoffs. Tottenham just lost one of their best players for the rest of the year, but St. George is playing well right

now. It all depends on which Niagara Predators team shows up for those games."

Game time Sunday at Virgil's Meridian Credit Union Arena is 3:30 p.m.

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New head pro takes over at NOTL Golf Club

Mike Balsom
The Local

After only two summers in the pro shop, Keith Vant has left his position as the head professional at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club, to be replaced by new head pro Max Murphy, who takes over on Feb. 5.

"We are thrilled to announce the newest addition to our Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club family," said a press release from the club Tuesday afternoon. "Max Murphy will be joining us as the head professional at our esteemed golf club. This announcement marks a significant step forward in our commitment to delivering an exceptional golf experience for all of our members at North America's oldest golf course."

The email went on to espouse Murphy's impressive background in golf and his passion for enhancing the golfing experience.

The 27-year-old comes to NOTL from the Cherry Hill Club, a private course in nearby Ridgeway. The Thorold native is extremely excited to step into his

first head professional role in NOTL.

"I've always wanted to run my own operation," Murphy says, "so to take this next step is huge. It's what I've been working for."

Murphy graduated from Georgian College in 2018 with a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree in golf management. Along the way he has worked in turf maintenance at Muskoka Lakes Golf and Country Club, as a golf retail associate at Fairmont Banff Springs and spent seven years at Cherry Hill, the past six as their assistant professional.

Murphy says it was one of the NOTL club's owners, Marc Forbes, who reached out to him about the job when he was golfing at Cherry Hill one day.

"He's a member at Cherry Hill," Murphy says of Forbes. "Knowing that he was an owner in Niagara-on-the-Lake, I've always wanted to play there, but I have never really had the chance. I can't wait to get out onto the course the first few weeks once it opens. It's one of the first things I'm going to do."

Murphy knows there

will be some big changes in moving from a private 18-hole tract to a 9-hole layout that caters to members as well as the public. But he sees the job itself as not all that different.

"It's all about the standard that you set for yourself in the operation," Murphy explains. "You have to create a balance between the members and the public golfers. It's all about creating the experience at the end of the day, one that will get people coming back. I've always been a customer service person, about creating a top-level experience."

Besides his work in the pro shop Murphy looks forward to getting to know the members and revamping the summer program for kids.

"At Cherry Hill I ran the junior program," says the graduate of Denis Morris Catholic Secondary School. "I have quite the experience working with the young players. We did six-week camps there with about 50 kids over three or four age divisions. I love working with the kids."

"Max's expertise in league and tournament



Max Murphy, NOTL Golf Club's new head professional. (Supplied)

management, golf instruction, and his dedication to providing top-notch service, align perfectly with our club's values," continued the club's press release. "We believe that (he) will play a pivotal role in elevating our golf operations by providing a welcoming atmosphere and contributing to the overall success of the Niagara-on-the-Lake

Golf Club."

Murphy tells The Local that the first order of business come Monday is beginning to take the steps to get the pro shop ready for spring.

"Sitting down, contacting all of our suppliers, letting them know I'm the new pro," he says. "There's a lot on the table for that first day. After that it will

be a month or so of slowly getting the shop ready. I always say you don't know how much room you have in a pro shop until it's full of boxes you have to unpack. And I'll be double-checking on the tournament schedule here, too."

"I'm super-excited for this opportunity," he adds. "It's exactly what I've been working towards."

Pillitteri takes a shot at hockey change rooms



Darrin Rose, Tamara Shevon and Joe Pillitteri offered a great night of laughs during the Icebreakers Festival opening night at Oast House Brewery. (Photos by Petra Halbgebauer)



Joe Pillitteri killed it at his recent Icebreakers Festival appearance, opening with a joke about how many men in the audience he has seen naked in hockey change rooms over the years. Using his family as a foil, Pillitteri as always garnered many laughs.

Giampa nominated for prestigious hockey award

Mike Balsom
The Local

As a freshman playing on the Canisius University Golden Griffins men's hockey team, Virgil's Matteo Giampa would never have predicted he would hear his name mentioned as a potential finalist for the NCAA's Hobey Baker Award.

On Friday, though, he was on the list of just over 80 student-athletes representing 64 National Collegiate Athletics Association Division I schools to be nominated in the first phase of the award process.

"I didn't even know I was nominated for it," says Giampa. "My sister (Madison) texted me that morning and asked me why I didn't tell her I was nominated. That's how I found out. It's definitely a huge honour, very exciting."

The Hobey Baker Award is presented annually to the top NCAA men's ice hockey player in the United States. Past winners have included former and current NHL players Neal



Canisius coach Trevor Large says Matteo Giampa is a strong skater with a potent shot. (Photos by Tom Wolf/Canisius University Athletics)

Broten, Paul Kariya, Chris Drury, Jack Eichel, Johnny Gaudreau and Cole Cau-field.

Canisius head coach Trevor Large isn't surprised that his young forward is getting such attention.

"He's second right now in goals in the nation for first-year players," Large says. "Whenever you're in that category you're going to garner recognition for some major awards. The Hobey Baker is the biggest one we have in college hockey. He deserves to be on this first list."

Giampa should be getting used to such attention. After leading the Griffs in goals, assists and points following their first nine games, he was named the Atlantic Hockey Association Conference's Rookie and Player of the Month for November.

With the Griffins having now played 27 games, Giampa's 16 goals and 27 points continue to lead his

teammates in those categories. He's contributing at a pace of 1.04 points per game in the 26 games in which he has suited up.

"I've always believed in myself," Giampa says. "I definitely knew I was going to keep up this pace. And my teammates are doing really well right now, too. So it's good to see everybody else getting success. When other guys are having success, that's when our team wins. We just need to keep doing that."

Drafted by the OHL's London Knights in 2019, Giampa decided to instead go the prep school route, attending the Frederick Gunn School in Washington, Connecticut, from 2019 to 2021, playing for

their Gunnery team in 2019-2020.

After COVID made the 2020-2021 season a washout for hockey, Giampa played two seasons with the Bonnyville Pontiacs of the Alberta Junior A Hockey League. There, he amassed 45 goals and 135 points over 107 games, catching the eye of a number of NCAA scouts.

"We're all in this wonderful world of recruiting," Large says. "Everybody has a chance to see every prospect. Other coaches knew about Matteo coming out of junior hockey. They make sure now that he gets their full attention every time they play us."

"The fact that I didn't play in the OHL is kind of

a blessing in disguise," the business major says. "I believe everything happens for a reason. I'm definitely happy the way things are playing out right now with Canisius. I knew the NCAA was going to be the right decision for me."

Giampa gives much credit to Large for giving him the chance to shine as a freshman.

"We have a really good connection," he says of the head coach, in his 10th year at the helm of the Canisius program. "I had only really spoken to him a couple of times before the school year. Our relationship has really developed a lot over the last few months."

"He's a special talent," Large says of the 20-year-old. "His joy for the game is contagious. I haven't had a player come out of the gate so quickly to do what he is doing. He reminds me of some of the best players Canisius has had, like (current AHL player) Dylan McLaughlin, Cory Conacher and Vinny Scarsella. But Matteo's numbers trump theirs already. The future looks bright for him and our program."

Hobey Baker candidates must demonstrate strength of character both on and off the ice, contribute to the integrity of their team and display outstanding skills in all phases of the game. Consideration is also given to scholastic achievement and sportsmanship.

Following the conclusion of phase one of the award process on March 10, the list will be narrowed down to the top 10, announced on March 20. The three finalists, known as the Hobey Hat Trick, will be announced on April 4, and the Hobey Baker winner will be named on April 12 at the NCAA Frozen Four Championship in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Fans can cast their vote for Giampa daily by going to the Hobey Baker website at hobeybaker.com/vote.

The next game for the Griffins, meanwhile, is Tuesday, Feb. 6 against the rival 10-13-1 Niagara University Purple Eagles at Buffalo's LECOM Harborcenter. With a record of 9-15-3, Giampa is confident his team is peaking at the right time.

"We have a really good team here," says Giampa. "Everybody makes the playoffs in our conference. We just need to get hot at the right moments. We are starting to play our best hockey, and that's what's important right now."



Matteo Giampa in action for Canisius University Golden Griffins men's hockey team.

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1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14						15					16			
17						18				19				
20					21				22					
23			24	25				26						
		27						28				29	30	31
32	33							34				35		
36					37	38					39			
40				41					42	43				
44			45						46					
			47						48			49	50	
51	52	53					54	55				56		
57							58				59	60		
61						62					63			
64						65					66			

- Across:**

1 Cagney's partner

6 Poker variant

10 Nipper

14 Got up

15 W L A N

16 "I'm --- here!"

17 Identifies

18 Papal

20 Slow-witted

21 The Tiffany network

22 --- quarters: precedes Taps

23 Symbol of disgrace

26 Earth

27 Drawn tight

28 "Idylls of the King" writer

32 The blink of an eye

34 Harangue

35 Computer brain

36 Ice skating jump

37 Put back into service

39 St. Paul's Cathedral designer

40 Follows why, by the sound of it

41 Iridescent gem

42 Scrubs

44 Mental illness

46 Waterproofed canvas (Abbr.)
- 47 Measure of sound intensity

48 Swellings

51 Music for voices

54 It means "central"

56 Globally calamitous happening

57 Home to Everest

59 Release

61 First lady's partner

62 Wander about

63 Understand

64 Lairs

65 Simple arithmetic

66 Terminates
- Down:**

1 Comes ashore

2 Anticipate

3 Advisory or decision-making groups

4 Scrape

5 Agreeable response

6 Wad of cleaning cloth

7 Gratuities

8 Mysterious radar image

9 Fragmented

10 Nervelessly

11 Brief let-up

12 On the job

13 Texas siege city
- 19 Sully

21 Butterfly larvae

24 Winner of three Olympic golds, --- Devers

25 Perform in a pantomime

26 Large bodies of salt water partially enclosed by land

28 Sincerely

29 Can be recycled?

30 Exposed

31 Convent inmates

32 E.g. Speer, Himmler

33 Draft cattle

38 Dines

39 Used to be

41 Oscar winner Tatum ---

43 Youth

45 Tank type

49 Top celebrities

50 Percolates

51 Large African lake

52 Conceal

53 Persian Gulf monarchy

54 Courteous address to a lady

55 Sets of beliefs

58 Not me

59 Expression of disgust

60 Gun owners' grp.

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from January 24, 2024

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

Down: 1 Lands, 2 Await, 3 Committees, 4 Eke, 5 Yes, 6 Swab, 7 Tips, 8 U F O, 9 Disconnected, 10 Coolly, 11 Lull, 12 At it, 13 Waco, 19 Taint, 21 Caterpillars, 24 Gall, 25 Mum, 26 Seas, 28 Truly, 29 Scrap metal, 30 Open, 31 Nuns, 32 Nazi, 33 Oxen, 38 Eats, 39 Were, 41 O'Neal, 43 Lad, 45 Abrams, 49 A-list, 50 Seeps, 51 Chad, 52 Hide, 53 Oman, 54 Ma'am, 55 Isms, 58 You, 59 Ugh, 60 N R A.

Across: 1 Lacey, 6 Stud, 10 Claw, 14 Awake, 15 Wif-fi, 16 Oute, 17 Names, 18 Apostolic, 20 Dim, 21 C B S, 22 Call to, 23 Stigma, 26 Soil, 27 Taut, 28 Tennyson, 32 No time, 34 Rant, 35 C P U, 36 Axel, 37 Reuse, 39 Wren, 40 Zee, 41 Opal, 42 Cleans, 44 Insanity, 46 Tarp, 47 Bels, 48 Edemas, 51 Choral, 54 Mid, 56 E-L-E, 57 Himalayas, 59 Untie, 61 Adam, 62 Roam, 63 Crasp, 64 Dens, 65 Sums, 66 Halts.

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



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Youth Collective launches its winter sessions

Mike Balsom
The Local

Monday evening saw the beginning of Niagara-on-the-Lake Youth Collective organized programs, with Ready Set GO, led by local Grade 9 students Leila Ridesic and Ruby Elltoft.

The program focuses on helping intermediate students transition to high school by building independence, starting by learning methods to develop effective time management skills.

"We really feel it is important that our activities be led by our youth," said organizing committee member Caroline Polgrabia. "All of our activities have some element of that."

The winter sessions of the Youth Collective were introduced last Wednesday night, with a fun event — 24 youth from Niagara-on-the-Lake having tons of fun as it kicked off the season with a casual social event called WinterFEST.

Kids were participating in a number of different activities. Some competed in a snowblower game, played with a cotton ball and a straw. Others played guitar while others were getting a head start on activities that began this Monday.

"We didn't want to have it too organized for our first night back," program leader Brenda Ferguson told The Local

of WinterFest. "They love this building, so we gave them a chance to run around and play hide-and-seek." They had "a really great group of kids," she said, from Crossroads School, St. Michael Catholic Elementary and Royal Oak Community School.

Moving forward, Tuesdays are planned to be woodworking night with Wally Willms and Kekoo Gatta, with participants starting by putting together coffee tables for the youth campus. Wednesdays will see the return of popular programs from previous sessions, such as cooking with Erinn Lockhard. Swedish meat-

balls, says Polgrabia, may be on the menu soon.

And she also promises the return of movie nights and a cultural celebration as the session progresses.

Polgrabia stressed as well that Cornerstone Community Church will be running its own youth programs on Thursdays and Fridays, meaning there will be something for local youth to participate in five nights a week.

For information, visit notlyouth.com.



Ethan Bessey strumming a few chords on guitar.



Eric Warren showing off his hot chocolate creation.



Greta Sobol, Zuzana Bator, Miller McGeachin and Yuna Versteegen play the snowblower game Wednesday at the NOTL Youth Campus. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Grade 9 students Ruby Elltoft and Leila Ridesic lead the first Ready Set GO session on time management and organization at the NOTL Youth Collective Monday.



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