Lessons learned from pandemic in Niagara

Penny Coles
The Local

Three years ago, we were just beginning to learn of a new virus that would lead to a time of upheaval from which we are still recovering.

The first case had been confirmed in Canada on Jan. 25, 2020, and by March 11 the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Just two days later, on March 23, the Ontario government announced a state of emergency. By April 3, Niagara Region and Niagara’s 12 local area municipalities had jointly declared a state of emergency.

What followed has been a swell of COVID waves as the number of cases, deaths and pressure on hospitals rose, peaked and declined — temporarily, as variants emerged, each wave leading to restrictions of different levels on society and businesses, enacted by federal, provincial and municipal governments.

Niagara acting medical officer of health, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, has been at the helm of the region’s public health department throughout, and not always in step with provincial regulations, or even Niagara municipalities.

He spoke with The Local recently about his handling of the pandemic, what lessons have been learned and what we might do better in the future.

“I think there’s a whole laundry list of these things, and the list will probably continue to grow,” he says. He’s hoping there will be some kind of commission struck that will have a look at our response and learn from it.

“The last two-and-a-half to three years’ experience certainly have had a huge impact on our society.”

He spoke of the 2003 outbreak of SARS, a severe respiratory syndrome coronavirus, which was often mentioned early on in this pandemic in reference to lessons we should have learned, but didn’t.

It was March 13, 2003, that Health Canada was notified of a cluster of cases in the Toronto area, and following that outbreak, much research was done on how to prevent the spread of the next infectious disease that would come along. Reports and recommendations that came out were not all implemented.

One example Hirji pointed to was that masks and personal protective equipment were stockpiled to be ready when needed, but then were stopped paying attention, and the PPE was thrown out when past its due date, never to be replenished.

“We learned a lesson, but didn’t continue to follow it,” says Hirji. “We need to learn this is a cost, one we won’t have to pay any more if we learn those lessons about how to prepare for infectious diseases of the future.

It’s important we don’t become complacent, and that we remain concerned in the long term, keeping issues ‘top of mind,’” he says, “but I’m not sure how we deal with that.”

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No criminal offence at Anne Street home, police say

Mike Balsom
The Local

While investigating a call of a disturbance Sunday afternoon at a Niagara-on-the-Lake home that indicated a weapon might be involved, Niagara Regional Police arrested one person who was later released from custody unconditionally.

Detectives searched the home and found nothing that would lead to a charge for a criminal offence, they said Monday morning. After being told a firearm might have been involved in an incident on Anne Street near Mississauga Street, officers from Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake, with help from St. Catharines, the traffic enforcement unit, and “out of an abundance of caution” the emergency task unit as well as crisis negotiators, were all called to Anne Street.

Officers with what appeared to be automatic weapons were seen walking along the street. A pickup truck was spotted on Anne Street between the cordons, with officers speaking to someone near the truck.

Pedestrians were being redirected around the area, one of whom informed The Local they were told the police were detaining someone.

An NRP tactical truck was parked at the Anderson Lane community centre, where by about 5:20 p.m., some of the police congregated. They continued to have a block of Anne Street between Mississauga and Simcoe Streets cordoned off, with the investigation continuing.

The house was cleared for safety, the police report said, and no one was injured. Police said no further information about the person who had been arrested and released would be made public, adding that there was “no ongoing public safety threat stemming from this incident.”

Anyone with information is asked to contact 905-688-4111, option 3, extension 1009219.

Members of the public who wish to provide information anonymously can contact Crime Stoppers of Niagara online or by calling 1-800-222-8477. Crime Stoppers offers cash rewards to persons who contact the program with information which leads to an arrest.
**Apartment plans for Mary Street ‘betrayal’ to Old Town**

Zahraa Hmood Special to The Local

Another proposal to build an apartment complex in Old Town is being met with criticism from neighbours — this time, on Mary Street in the heritage district.

An open house took place on Thursday, Jan. 26, sharing details of the 3.5-storey, 41-unit apartment being proposed by Veronica and Mihai Balaj, owners of the 17.884 square metre property on Mary Street.

This is the second time the Balajs are proposing an apartment at this location since fall 2016, when Niagara-on-the-Lake’s council shot down their proposal to develop a future seven, 76-unit building there.

Despite changes to the plans seven years later, the Balajs’ recent proposal still garnered questions and concerns during the open house from Old Town residents concerned about disturbing the traditional look and feel of the community.

During the virtual meeting, local resident Andrew Taylor, who’s lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake for 25 years and co-owns three heritage properties in the Old Town, said he wants to see the building's height and size scaled back substantially.

To put that building into what would be considered, by most people in Niagara-on-the-Lake, to be the Old Town is just frankly a betrayal of the trust (of) generations of people who have built Niagara-on-the-Lake," he said.

The Balajs are requesting permission to permit a building with a height of 18 metres, a density of 40 units per acre, front and rear yard setbacks for an underground parking lot, a patio encroachment in the back, and removing the requirement to have a children’s play area.

“We did try to go out and talk with many people," said the Balaj’s daughter, Ada, who attended the virtual meeting. “We are very interested in hearing everybody’s comments.”

The new plans mean that while there will be three full building stories, the top floor will be built into, not below, the building’s roof, making it a half-storey.

According to a letter Veronica sent to several neighbours, the Balajs hope to provide an alternative type of housing for retirees who want to continue living in town — tying into the practice of “downsizing” from a large home to an apartment or condo.

The building would cover an area of 1,553 square metres, while 1,884 square metres will be covered by landscaped open space. It would have 24 one-bedroom and 17 two-bedroom units, ranging from 800 to 1,200 square feet.

Plans include “significant” and “increased” setbacks, said NPG Planning Solutions planner Jesse Auspitz, formerly a staff planner with the town, on three different sides of the property. 85 metres on the east side yard (next to Mississagua Street), 13.5 metres on the west side yard (next to Simcoe Street), and 9.2 metres in the rear yard (facing William Street).

Auspitz said the developers and planners hope that will improve potential privacy concerns for residents who live next to where the building would go, who have voiced concerns about their visibility from the top storeys of the apartment.

“We are proposing a taller building, but we’re also having larger setbacks,” he said.

The Mary Street apartment also includes plans for a roof-top pool and an outdoor terrace to in- crease privacy and mitigate outdoor noise, the project’s architect Michael Allen said they plan to put up landscap ing and screens around these settings.

Still, the size of the proposal, in a neighbourhood surrounded by smaller residen tial homes and one-storey commercial build ings is an issue for the residents who spoke during the meeting.

“It’s smaller than the first proposal, but it’s still extraordi narily dense,” said Gracia Jones, president of the NOTL Conservancy. “It will set a precedent.”

Auspitz, Allen and oth ers on the planning and de velopment team took down questions from residents and said they hope to ac commodate what they want to see with respect to urban design.

For the building density, however, it seems they’re planning to stick to their guns.

“We are proposing a 41-unit apartment building and that’s not something that we’re really open to changing,” said Auspitz.

The development propos al will come before the town council committee of the whole plan ning meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 14.

**Youth collective teams up with museum**

**Local Staff**

The Niagara Youth Collective is in its third week of an eight-week winter session, and the planning continues, says organizer Caroline Polgrabia, as they build partnerships to connect the collective and the community in interesting and engaging ways to benefit youth.

One of the new programs being unveiled this week is the The Niagara-on-the-Lake Heritage Moments — Youth Curators Contest. The idea is for NOTL youth, Grade 7 to 12, to submit four artifacts this month that present an authentic NOTL artifact to the youth, and give them two weeks to research and curate (digital, still or live) content on the history of the artifact.

The full program and contest details will be unveiled this Wednesday evening during the regular drop-in program between 4 to 5 p.m. at the youth collective home at the Cornerstone Town Camp, at 1750 Niagara Stone Road in Virgil.

Shawna Butts, museum assistant curator, will present a few intriguing details about the artifact to the youth, who will have an opportunity to ask questions. A picture of the artifact will remain at the camp, and the original will be available at the museum.

The museum is open daily from 1 to 5 p.m. during the winter (it’s free during February), so kids can visit any day or multiple times to research, collect information, and ask museum staff questions to build their content for the contest. During the curation development period, the kids (individually or in teams) would curate digital, creative display or live youth-focused content on the artifact and its history value and significance in NOTL history.

The contest is open to all NOTL youth, Grade 7 to 12. You must be registered with the NOTL Youth Collective (go to NOTLYouth.com for more information) in order to participate in the collective programs.

At the end of the month, on Wednesday, Feb. 22, kids who participate will present their Curators Content in a speech of under three minutes, a video, images, movie production style motion, dramatization, a short play, poster, sculpture, poems — whatever they choose to create — to the other kids, who will then vote for their favourites.

Dr. Marianne Hopkins of Dr. Hopkins and Associates Optometry heard about the idea and immediately wanted to get involved. “The NOTL Youth Collective is just getting started, and when I heard about the NOTL Heritage Moments — Youth Curator Contest, I thought it was a wonderful way to connect youth to the town past,” So much so that Dr. Hopkins wants to reward youth for self-seeking knowledge and creative endeavours, and has offered up a $250 cash prize for the winning Curated Content selected by the kids.

“From the beginning, it has been a goal for the collective to connect youth to the community. Now that the NOTL Youth Collective is up and running, the volunteer team is turning our attention to building unique and engaging opportunities for the youth,” said Polgrabia, one of the founding members of the collective. “We think it is so critical for everyone to understand how important NOTL is to Canadian history, from Confederation, to Indigenous contributions and teachings, to Black heritage, agriculture, power generation . . . I get excited thinking about it,” she continued.

The winning submission(s) will earn prize money, plus the glory of being posted on the NOTL Youth Collective digital assets as part of the ‘The NOTL Heritage Moments’ Youth Curators Collection.
Lots done right across Canada, Hirji says

Continued from page 1

One of the problems has been having funding redirect-
ed over time, and funding that should have been spent on pre-
paredness was reduced.

“We need to find a way to fund it, 100%, like insurance. It’s expensive, but you have to be prepared for the future.”

Another lesson learned, he says is about the more vulnera-
bility in our society.

We learned that those most at risk in addition to those with certain health conditions, were Indigenous people, minority races, and those living on low incomes who, among other problems, might have less ac-
cess to primary caregivers for early intervention.

Some of those vulnerabili-
ties are systemic, and some that can be changed, he says, but there is no doubt some were more vulnerable than others in terms of suffering the impact of the pandemic.

The vulnerable might be frontline workers, such as those working in grocery stores, peo-
ple living in crowded homes, those with poor ventilation, or those who were slower on the uptake of vaccinations. “There is more to it than that, but we do see those vulnerabilities now,” he says.

“We don’t really under-
stand all the dimensions of that, but we saw it clearly in the data around the world.”

He says looking back at the early days of the pandemic, an-
other lesson learned is the need to react quickly, at all levels.

“We weren’t always very quick at absorbing new knowl-
edge,” he says. He recalls the need for scientific data to back up actions, but wonders if there could have been a better balance between waiting for science and the need to move quickly.

The importance of mask-
ing is a good example, he says.

By the summer of 2020, mu-
icipalities were talking about mask mandates, and on July 16, Niagara-on-the-Lake passed its mask bylaw, as other mu-
icipalities in Niagara were ei-
ther considering or approving theirs. Some were waiting for a region-wide policy.

At that time Hirji was pro-
moting the other practices that became routine: physical distancing, frequent hand-
washing, keeping our hands away from our faces, and wear-
ing a mask when physical dis-
tancing wasn’t possible.

After a discussion about masking during a mid-July re-
gional council meeting, coun-
cillors voted to defer a mandate, on Hirji’s advice. He said then that when issuing an order to deprive someone of an element of their freedom, he needed to have science behind it, and he didn’t think it had reached that threshold. It wasn’t until July 31 that a regional mask bylaw was approved.

“I thought that summer early evidence was showing masking worked, and was something we should recom-
 mend,” he says now, without what he thought was strong enough evidence to mandate them.

“But maybe that wasn’t the right position. Maybe I should have been quicker to endorse mandatory masking.”

He adds the science was slow in recognizing the virus was airborne. “We largely be-
lieved it was spread by drop-
lets.”

That’s where that balance between science and acting quickly is important, “and I don’t know if we always got the balance right.”

It also took some time to re-
alize a two-metre distance was not enough, he added — the scientific community was slow to accept that.

But there was lots that was done right, in Niagara and across the country, he says.

“Canada as a whole took the pandemic seriously. We avoided it being politi-
cized the way it was in the U.S. I think we really prioritized to protect people.”

The restrictions in place in Ni-
agara, compared to the U.S., he says, “saved 1,400 lives in Niagara. We occasionally had to accept lockdowns, and we got people vaccinated. If we’ll followed the pattern of the U.S. we would have lost many more lives. Thats one thing we should be proud of. We made some hard decisions, but we did the best we could.”

Hirji points to Canada’s roll-out of vaccinations as one of the best in the western world, in terms of the percentage of people who were vaccinated. Although there was some crit-
icism of the time it took to get enough supply of vaccine, “we had the fastest roll-out and one of the highest percentage of people vaccinated in the world.”

The biggest error in On-
tario was the initial provincial plan in the roll-out of shots, he says, where the decision was made to prioritize healthcare workers in some communities, rather than the most vulnerable populations in all communities. “The group most at risk of dying was in long-term care. We needed to get vaccinations out to those in long-term care first in every community. I think that was the single biggest er-
ror. Niagara was not one of the areas selected to get vaccines early on, and sadly we saw a lot of people dying in long-term care homes.”

It was distributed to the areas that saw the highest number of cases, through De-
cember 2020 into January and February 2021, “while the virus was spreading quickly in long-
term care and we weren’t priorit-
ing them for vaccinations.”

And although Toronto was considered a hot-spot, with a greater need for vaccinations, “it was just a few days away” from reaching Niagara, he says.

In January 2021, there were 177 deaths from COVID, and 136 of those who died were in long-term care.

“They didn’t get the vaccina-
tions until the fourth week of January. If in mid-December the province had made the de-
cision to send it to our region and prioritize long-term care residents, in Niagara we would have saved lives, and I think that’s true across the province.”

The provincial priority to vaccinate healthcare workers, and only in parts of the prov-
ince, “was the wrong decision. The death numbers in Niagara speak to that.”

When the region received vaccine in January 2021, the lo-\ncal roll-out “was a real success. We vaccinated all long-term care residents in nine days. We moved quickly to get them vac-
ccinated as soon as possible and we got from where we were to where we are to the point of deaths we were seeing.”

By March, Niagara was able to offer vaccinations to the public, and was using up vaccines as soon as they were received, says Hirji, prioritiz-
ing those with certain health conditions, and some of those considered vulnerable.

Yet another lesson could be doing a better job of educating people about the importance of vaccinations, Hirji added.

As for the future, he hasn’t changed his mind, it’s just going to move forward. He contin-
ues to promote the importance of booster shots, which have a much lower cap than the first set of vaccinations. If we don’t think we need to do it for ourselves, we should consider the need to protect the vulner-
bale in society, especially those in long-term care. And he will encourage people to have an-
ual or six-month shots once we get to that stage. “There is a need to vaccinate for all of us, to protect our fellow citizens who are at higher risk,” he says.

“We could be as high as 95 per cent vaccinated. How do we get from where we are to where we could be?”

With COVID causing only mild symptoms now, especially for those fully vaccinated, there is a sense of complacency, that it’s not such a big danger as it was before, “but people need to understand it still can be se-
rious. It’s still the third leading cause of death,” behind cancer and heart disease.

“Even if you don’t get sick, someone else in your life might.” Or you could be part of a chain of people who will pass it on to someone who will

Continued on page 8

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Dr. Marianne Hopkins, our local optometrist on Mary Street, is more than your average eye doctor.

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"Eye care is not just for people who wear glasses or contact lenses, it is an essential part of the health and well-being of my patients, and is vital to optimize learning and development in children," says Hopkins. Many parents who bring their children to the optometrist office often do so as a reaction to their own visual concerns, or if the child is not flourishing in school. All children, however, should have their vision and ocular health assessed from infancy through to adulthood to ensure they have the visual resources they need to grow and develop to be their best.

"Studies show that many children with learning disabilities also have visual issues that can make it even more difficult to learn," says Hopkins, "and sometimes, visual problems are misdiagnosed as ADHD or a learning disability, because they share some of the same symptoms.

Having great vision goes beyond 20/20, as there are more than 17 important visual skills required to function efficiently to perform well in school or sports. With more than 300 continuing education hours in vision therapy, vision development and rehabilitation, Dr. Hopkins is an expert in the field of vision, and how to optimize this very essential sense.

"Over 80 per cent of the brain is involved in visual processing – vision is our primary sense. Our eyes are literally the moving parts of the brain, and we should value their health. I have made it my life’s work to build awareness for the significance of great eye care for all ages, starting with the developing visual systems of children."

This eye-brain connection is well demonstrated in cases of brain injury, including concussions and strokes. At Dr. Hopkins’ Niagara Vision Therapy Centre on Second Drive in St. Catharines, she and her team of highly-trained therapists rehabilitate patients who have suffered traumatic brain injuries. "I wear glasses or contact lenses, it is an essential part of the health and well-being of my patients, and is vital to optimize learning and development in children," says Hopkins.

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"Of course, I cannot do this work alone and I am grateful for my team of staff and doctors who every day show up for our patients. The last three years have been challenging to say the least, from COVID-related closures to (unresolved) disputes with the government, we have had several ups and downs. We are very thankful for our patient family for providing us with ongoing support."

Dr. Hopkins is looking forward to 2023, with plans of attending several conferences with her team to learn ways to better serve our community through great vision care.

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Every February we celebrate Black History. We talk about it, learn about it, but do we really take it into our minds and our hearts? Do we open our eyes to the truths we’re being told?

Maybe some of us do, but likely the majority of people get on with their lives and don’t give much thought to those who have a very different history, and a very different life. We don’t give much thought to those likely the majority of people who spoke at the rally, helped open the door to a conversation that was not only overdue but that many insisted wasn’t needed. And that a few things about the Local Sunday, nothing has changed since then. It seems when we are rendered gently of Black history through a special month, or confronted directly by it with horrid stories on the news of those who have suffered and died because of their race or culture, we have an opportunity to look at it as a wake-up call for those willing to accept the truth. They have been put in front of us, and we are asked to make them work to change it.

But if nothing has changed for us since that rally, if we are a society just as conflicted by not forcing it to be better, what have we learned?

We must take our need for education seriously. We were asked by Yvonne at the 2020 rally to raise our hands if we would like to live as a Black person in this society. She asked a second time. She didn’t expect to see any hands raised and there weren’t. She would likely get the same response today, as the entire wedding party is taken hostage by a gang of pirates. This is not my kind of film, but somehow I got hooked and had a really good time. You like Jennifer Lopez, and she, this film is for you.

Donal Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to go to the movies. Until he resumes going to theatres, he has gratefully agreed to share his opinions, through “short and sweet” exclusives, of Netflix series and movies for The Local.


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The Niagara-on-the-Lake

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**Editorial**

February 1, 2023

**Black History Month: Let’s open our minds and learn**

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**Take a nature walk on the drive to work**

Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

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Finally, there is a dose of cold weather this week in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Before anyone complains, we need to consider that our town and the rest of eastern North America are getting set to break records as the mildest winter since record-keeping began.

With a chilling reminder of typical winter coming up over the next few days, I have decided to give you a unique virtual nature tour from the comfort and care of your vehicle.

Many of us exhibit repeated driving routes and behaviours, so I have pinpointed some high traffic and familiar areas in Niagara-on-the-Lake that will hopefully never make you look at the dip in the road the same way again.

This tour, hopefully completed with heated seats and good music, figuratively begins on East and West Line as if you’re driving toward the Niagara River Parkway. Looking out the right side of your vehicle, you are graced with an un-\*familiar turquoise water, created by limestone erosion, is often the main attraction. However, odds are you are peering through one of Canada’s rarest ecosystems, known as the black oak savanna.

The word savanna immediately conjures up images of endless grasslands polka-dotted with sparsely trees somewhere in Africa. Prior to European settlement, such savannas (minus the rhinos and cheetahs) existed right here in NOTL. By means of a natural floor plan, 35 to 65 per cent of the canopy remains open to sunlight, inviting native grasses and love-living creatures to dance victoriously in the sun.

The largest trees seen here are pushing 250 years old. Black oaks grow almost nowhere else in the country other than right here in extreme southern Ontario, making the black oak savannas a national rarity for ecosystems.

After cruising through the prettiest town in the world, you can take Niagara Stone Road, also known as Hwy 55 (although it’s been a regional road, not a highway, for decades) back out of downtown. It is one of the longest and straightest roads in Niagara, and sadly, the same can be said about the shape of the many creeks that pass underneath it.

The first big dip in the road occurs before Garrison Village. Through the large trees, you can see the Margaret River, created by limestone erosion, is often the main attraction. However, odds are you are peering through one of Canada’s rarest ecosystems, known as the black oak savanna.

Continuing on a nearly perfect southwest tangent, the next big dip in the road occurs before Garrison Village. Through the large trees, you can see the Margaret River, created by limestone erosion, is often the main attraction. However, odds are you are peering through one of Canada’s rarest ecosystems, known as the black oak savanna.

**Where Is Ben?**

Eden students Ben Foster has wrapped up his co-op with The Local and is continuing to discover new locations in NOTL, wondering if familiar others may be with them. If you know where this photo was taken, email penny@notllocal.com. The Local had many responses last week, the first from Dennis Razzuto, who recognized the entrance to the NOTL Chamber of Commerce.
Ted’s thoughts: on Black history and white male privilege

Ted Mouradian
Special to the Local

February is Black History Month, where we stop and reflect as we learn about Black history here in Niagara. We should be proud of the part Niagara played in the final stop on the Underground Railroad, its anti-slavery legislation and the contribution of Black settlers and soldiers to the Niagara Region.

I would like to give you a perspective on that important annual event today, and what we need still to learn from it.

I lived with a Black man for 12 years and quite often when we were at events people would ask him where he came from and he would answer, “I’m Canadian.” They would ask again, “No, where did you come from?” Again, the answer, “I’m Canadian.” Again, “No, where did your people come from?” His answer again was Canada.

Here’s the thing — he was more Canadian than I am. He is from Halifax, and his ancestors came to Canada in the 1600s, while my ancestors fled...
Of the virus. “It’s a little bit of a nuisance, but it really does change the dynamics of how we work in a long-term care facility, or someone either visiting or living in the home that will be the cause of harm,” says Hirji. “It’s a hard question to answer, but it was totally a subjective decision. That gives me a lot of confidence in new buildings.”

“Told you, at this look, and let me tell you where it’s been.”

That’s how she feels now. Harper says she’s grown up feeling invisible, insignificant, and that only white people were smart and could go to uni-versity.

“I came out of that stronger because of it. I’m confident in my skin,” she conditioned herself so that when someone used a racial slur or implied bigotry to her, she wouldn’t recognize it.”

“Today, when white people are comforted by us, I make them comfortable. It’s not a great thing to have to do, but I do it. I’m happy and proud to be a Canadian, and to be a Black Canadian.”

Niagara regional council endorsed a motion earlier this year to recommend the prov-ince and federal governments update building codes and make funding available for small businesses to invest in ventilation, he adds.

“As Hirji and the public health department continue to work to keep people safe, after almost three very difficult years, The Local asked how he personally has dealt with these challenges.

“It’s a hard question to an-swer,” he responds, not sur-prised; however, as someone who is known for protecting his pri-vacy, and for good reason — during the height of the pan-demic, his home was targeted by protesters against vaccina-tions, especially for children, and who blamed him for the loss of jobs for those who re-fused to be vaccinated.

Despite some of the chal-lenges, including regional councillors who questioned some of his recommendations and argued that he never as a councilman voted against him — he says, “it felt a little bit normal.”

He spoke highly of a real-ly incredible team at Niagara Health. Having that great team means you don’t feel like you’re dealing with it alone. Also, there were conversations with colleagues across the prov-ince. Feeling like you’re part of a team is one element that helped.

As someone “oriented in science, like any physician,” he says, “you’re used to dealing with bad news. You focus on the science and know you’re not always going to get it right, but you do your best and make your decisions. That gives me a lot of peace of mind, knowing that I did what I thought was best.”

Criticism is nothing new in the role he plays, he says.

“One person is upset with rules, some people are against vaccinations, but they’re just voices that are a lit-tle louder.”

As for regional councillors who didn’t always agree with him, he says that was another lesson he has taken away from the pandemic. He realized he wasn’t doing a great job of communicating, and that there was a better way to engage with councillors, so they would have a better understanding of what he was proposing and why.

One last question for the region’s acting medical officer of health was not his to answer, he says.

“What does he have to do to get rid of the “acting” in his title?”

He’s been the acting med-ical officer of health since Dr. Valerie Jaeger left the position about five years ago, when he moved from assistant medical officer into her job.

“The next step is “a decision of regional council,” he says. “We don’t play a role in that. It’s their process, and it’s up to them.”
Joe Pillitteri was one of six comics to perform at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery Saturday night at the gala CBC performance, recorded to be part of a CBC radio show. All were well-received by the crowd, but not surprisingly, Pillitteri got the loudest laughs.

(Penny Coles)

Local funny guy Joe Pillitteri wows the crowd at Oast.

(Sharon Burns)

Matt Wayland and Mark Cherney at Oast to see Joe Pillitteri (centre) perform, both spoke highly of the venue and Pillitteri’s comedy.

(Sharon Burns)

Lots of laughs for Pillitteri’s Icebreakers performance

Sharon Burns
Special to The Local

Local comic Joe Pillitteri kicked off the ninth annual Icebreakers Comedy Festival with hilarious anecdotes about his wife, parents and family. But before he spoke, event organizers Jeff Paul and Tim Balasiuk, clad in matching velour tracksuits, welcomed everyone Pillitteri to the stage. Born and raised in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pillitteri is also an inspirational speaker, motivational leader and past Citizen of the Year. “The local hero is always Joe Pillitteri and I always appreciate what he brings to the table,” said Virgil’s Mark Cherney. “He’s a shining example of who we are here in Niagara.”

During his bit, Pillitteri left no family member untouched in the packed house at Oast House Brewers on Jan. 26, which starts off three nights of comedy in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Over a dozen comedians appeared at Oast, Corks Winebar and Ravine Vineyard.

Derek Seguin, a Montreal native who has performed at the prestigious invitation-only Just for Laughs Festival an astounding 11 times, made the full house at Oast roar with laughter at his take on the pandemic. “Everyone has been tired of COVID for so long, it was good to laugh about it instead of stress about it,” said Virgil resident Alice Sirard.

Cherney is grateful this festival “happens in our own backyard. We need more of this in our small community, not only for the tourism sector but for the locals to get out and appreciate and enjoy what really goes on here.”

Matt Wayland thought this was “a very good kick start to the winter season for our festivals.” He also noted that it was “a really great crowd here tonight — a packed house and these comedians really lit it up.”

Local funny guy Joe Pillitteri wows the crowd at Oast. (Sharon Burns)
Culinary community mourning local chef Daniel Tong

Mike Balsom
The Local

Staff and customers from Ruffino’s, as well as the entire Niagara culinary community, are mourning the sudden loss last week of 32-year-old chef Daniel Tong in a tragic car crash. Executive chef and owner Ryan Crawford is mobilizing this Thursday with a special event to raise funds to support Tong’s family.

Early Saturday morning, Jan. 21, while on his way to work, the father of two was involved in a collision on the Fort Erie bound QEW near the Ontario Street, Beamsville exit. According to the OPP, the first collision was followed by two more, when a tractor-trailer hit one of the vehicles and then another subsequently ran into the back of the tractor-trailer.

Tong was transported to an out-of-town hospital where he was pronounced deceased. One other male was transported to a local hospital in stable condition.

Crawford immediately closed the restaurant last Saturday, posting on Facebook that there had been an unforeseen emergency. Two days later he announced the loss of his close friend and colleague via the social media site.

Tong leaves behind his wife Melanie and two young children: Olivia, seven, and Atlas, four. His parents, Joanne and Wally Tong, are mourning his loss, as are his twin brother Simon and their older sisters Jennifer, Lisa, Teresa and Jessica. "Dan was part of our restaurant family for five years," Crawford wrote in a message to The Local. "He always greeted you with a funny nickname. He was a king of the one liner. He would leave you mystified by its timing and of course, you’d be in stitches laughing."

Crawford credits Tong as an integral member of the Backhouse staff, and instrumental in the transition to Ruffino’s Pasta Bar and Grill and the opening of BarBea Wine Shop and Snack Bar.

During the pandemic, Tong and Donald Shi would often prepare Chinese-inspired meals for the staff at Ruffino’s. Crawford offered them the kitchen one night for a pop-up that ended up becoming extremely popular. It returned again this year as a regular night under the new name Wang Tong Foods, a.k.a. WTF Chinese.

"Dan cooked with the heart of a lion," added Crawford. "He was the coolest human under pressure. He inspired and led so many young culinary minds during his career. His work ethic and passion for food were unmatched. His shoes are big ones to fill, and he is dearly missed."

Melanie’s long-time friend Lauren Roberts began a GoFundMe page last week to support Tong’s young family with a goal of raising $18,000. By press time more than $53,000 had been donated via her efforts. "I am extremely surprised," says Roberts about nearly tripling her goal for donations. "We had a couple of people from the culinary community reaching out, that’s why we started the campaign. We didn’t want to ask for much. This has been amazing, and it’s going to go such a long way to helping Melanie."

"Dan was a family man first and foremost," Roberts adds. "He would do anything he could to be there for them, and his extended family, too. He was sweet, thoughtful and happy to help anyone out in times of need."

Roberts says Daniel and Melanie, who now works part-time as an early childhood educator, met when they were both in the culinary program at Niagara College. Before getting hired at Backhouse, Daniel worked at Spencer’s on the Water in Burlington and then Queen Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake’s The Epicurean.

"He had a huge influence on the chef community in the region," Roberts says, echoing Crawford. "He was super proud to be able to bring his authentic Chinese food into the community, and so happy that Ryan was so on board with that."

Following the celebration of his life this past Friday, many from the larger Niagara culinary community came together at Ruffino’s and BarBea to honour Dan’s memory and to support his family.

Crawford reeled off a list of representatives from Garrison House, Ravine Vineyards, Oast Brushfire Smoke BBQ and Patina Pizza, OddBird, Tide and Vine, Stratus, Meldville, Forty Creek, Bar ‘n’ Bitter, and current and former Ruffino’s and BarBea staff who donated their time to the gathering.

"We are astounded and forever grateful," Crawford said. "It was an honour to introduce Dan’s family to our community. Dan was so humble, and this event made it especially evident. Dan was so on board with that."

This Thursday, Feb. 2, Ruffino’s and BarBea are hosting a fundraiser in support of the Tong family. Already sold out, both restaurants will be offering a special set Chinese menu from Wang Tong Foods from 6 to 9 p.m. with proceeds going to the family. Crawford adds that their takeout and delivery menu will be offered from 4 to 6 p.m. only that day, with pre-orders required. Again, proceeds from takeout and delivery will be for Tong’s family.

As well, Roberts promises that the GoFundMe page will stay up through the end of this week and perhaps longer. Donations to the family can be made at gofundme.com.

Chef Daniel Tong was part of the Backhouse staff, transitioned to Ruffino’s Pasta Bar and Grill and was also a big part of the opening of BarBea Wine Shop and Snack Bar. (Photos supplied)

Daniel Tong with his wife Melanie, daughter Olivia and son Atlas.
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How to choose an air purifier

Helpful tips for people living with a chronic condition

Being diagnosed with a chronic condition can significantly impact your psychological, physical, social and even financial well-being. Life-changing decisions are often needed, but the good news is that many can overcome challenges by adopting healthier lifestyles. The following tips provide easy-to-implement actions to achieve optimal health in the face of a chronic illness.

1. Educate yourself with appropriate sources
   Following your initial diagnosis, you may not know which steps to take, so the best way to combat any uncertainties is to seek advice from your healthcare provider. They will guide you through appropriate treatment plans, present you the Dos and Don'ts, and point out other reliable sources to consult if further help is required.

2. Connect with others for support
   Living with a chronic illness can feel isolating, but you are rarely alone. In Canada, a large number of adults live with common chronic conditions. Many rely on support groups and communities with people sharing similar health conditions to help them tackle physical and social challenges. Your support people can also benefit from additional community as they encounter new responsibilities.

3. Stay active and nourished
   Healthy habits such as regular exercise can strengthen your body, help you sleep better, support your immune system and protect your cognitive health — all of which can help fight the symptoms of chronic illness. Similarly, eating foods as recommended by your doctor or dietitian and using a meal planner like the one online at the Kidney Community Kitchen will help you keep proper nutrition and help you effectively care for yourself.

4. Participate in knowledge-sharing events
   Participate in knowledge-sharing events. Educational sessions about your condition are a great way to discover new treatments, research and advice. They also allow you to meet new people with whom you can exchange insights, stories and more. The Kidney Foundation of Canada offers multiple patient-facing webinars for this purpose and encourages anyone facing a chronic illness to engage in information sessions designed for them.

How to spot reliable health information

(NC) Sometimes it seems like everyone thinks they’re an expert on health, and many people are quick to offer opinions on health information. How can you be certain you’re finding the best information from reputable sources?

1. Be skeptical
   Take every read with a grain of salt. Information circulates quickly online, so it can be easy to think that what you’re reading has been fact-checked. However, that isn’t always the case.

Misinformation abounds because people can post opinions and make comments on health matters without credentials or sources cited. To ensure that you’re accessing the most reliable information, the key first step is to recognize that not everything you hear is true, especially if the information is associated with the sale of a product or service.

2. Access official sources
   While you might be interested in the unit and forcing that air through a filter that captures microscopic pollutants. It then returns cleaner, fresh air back into the room.

When purchasing an air purifier, look for the Clean Air Delivery Rate (CADR) symbol on the purifier's packaging to know the recommended room size and the clean air delivery rate. The higher the CADR number, the faster it will clean the air in that room.

High efficiency particulate air filters, known as HEPA filters, are considered the gold standard in air purification, used by doctors for treating patients. An air purifier with a HEPA filter, like Honeywell options, can filter as much as 99.97 per cent of microscopic particles from the air that passes through the filter, as small as 0.3 microns or larger. Some air purifiers also come with carbon activat-ed pre-filters that help trap larger particles and reduce odours and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These also help to extend the life of the HEPA filter.

There are many different sizes and types of air purifiers. To get the best results, it’s important to get an air purifier that is the right size for your room. You can find a guide for room sizes at honeywell-pluggedin.ca.

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(NC) Having your own home comes with many perks from privacy, to added space, to your own unique décor. But one thing’s for sure – it takes some work to keep the place organized and safe.

To help keep your home running smoothly, here’s when to tackle some important home safety tasks.

**Winter wonderland**

Look for bare patches on your roof after a snow-fall to see if your roof or attic insulation may need repair.

Check for water leaks indoors during minor thaws to get ahead of water damage and mould.

Test for high levels of radon gas in your home with a simple DIY test, or call in a pro.

Make sure important documents are stored off the floor and not in the basement ahead of spring thaws and floods.

**Spring showers**

Refresh your emergency kit if needed, and add any season-specific items, such as a battery-operated fan if you lose air conditioning in a summer power outage.

Angle your downspouts away from your home to prevent flood damage.

Consider adding a sump pump with backup power or reverse-flow valves in basement drains.

Clear gutters and debris left over from winter storms and do time-sensitive repairs.

Inspect your roof and repair any damage.

Consider applying sealant around basement windows and at the base of exterior doors.

Check your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms each spring and fall.

**Sunny summer**

Do more extensive safety updates in summer when weather is clear, such as fixing a leaky foundation.

Ensure that your landscaping is graded to slope away from your home.

Trim any trees or bushes that are getting close to power lines.

Check your ventilation by holding a tissue up to your bathroom fan – the suction should cause it to noticeably flutter.

Clear your eaves troughs and downspouts of leaves and debris.

Refresh your emergency kit with supplies to last you for several days.

Confirm that your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are in good working order and replace the backup batteries.

Whatever the season, make sure you know the risks in your area so you can properly prepare your home for them. Do you live near a river that floods away from your home?

Trim any trees or bushes that are getting close to power lines.

Check your ventilation by holding a tissue up to your bathroom fan – the suction should cause it to noticeably flutter.

Run a dehumidifier to prevent mould if you live in a humid place or detect a musty smell.

Confirm that your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are in good working order and replace the backup batteries.

Whatever the season, make sure you know the risks in your area so you can properly prepare your home for them. Do you live near a river that floods in your area every spring? Or, are you at risk for wildfires in summer? Are you likely to face severe winter storms or power outages in winter? A little preparation, can help you be ready for just about anything.

Find out about your regional risks and learn more safety tips at getprepared.ca.

**Fall fixes**

Winterize or drain outdoor faucets and pipes ahead of cold weather to avoid frozen, burst pipes.

Check and replace weatherstripping to ensure your home is protected from the elements.

Clear gutters and debris left over from winter storms and do time-sensitive repairs.

Inspect your roof and repair any damage.

Consider applying sealant around basement windows and at the base of exterior doors.

Check your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms each spring and fall.

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New home proposed for lot next to Steward House

Mike Balsom
The Local

A proposal to build a home on a severed lot at 507 Butler Street is leaving at least one local resident with questions.

The house is to be built on land that is part of the William and Susannah Steward historical site at the corner of Butler and John Streets in the Old Town.

William Steward was an African American teamster and carpenter. He and his wife Susannah bought the lot in 1834. By the middle of that decade, Niagara’s Black community was about 400 strong and owned about 10 per cent of the lots in the town.

The 1.5-storey home was part of what became known as Niagara’s co-located stage, a community of former Canadian slaves, Black Loyalists and African American refugees. The majority of the Black families lived south of William Street between Regent and Charlotte Streets.

The Niagara Foundation purchased the Steward House, which had experienced many changes through the years, to rescue it from development. The group completed the exterior in 2006, restoring it to its earlier form.

In 2003, the house was designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, covering the exterior facade, the structure of the house, and the chimney. Three years later the property was zoned institutional with the intention of creating a museum or research facility on the property.

In 2008 an application was put forth by the foundation to sever the lot behind the house. That application was turned down by the town’s committee of adjustment because it was too small.

Bruce Harvey, a former member of the Niagara Foundation, bought the property in 2009. He currently rents the historical home to a tenant.

Harvey was given approval under the Ontario Heritage Act in 2011 to sever the lot as long as the town’s municipal heritage committee approved the design of any house built there and the committee of adjustments accepted the severance.

The town held an online open house Monday to present information about Harvey’s application. Representatives from NPG Planning Solutions of Niagara Falls, under contract with Harvey, outlined his plans.

NPG’s representative stated that the required heritage impact assessment, planning justification report and streetscape survey were already on file with the town.

In order to build on the lot, Harvey has three applications on file with the town. One is to rezone the property from institutional back to residential. The second one is to attain consent to sever the open lot behind the historic house. The third is to receive a heritage permit to accept the design of the proposed dwelling.

The third condition would also require a temporary protection plan to ensure that any excavation for the new construction would not adversely impact the significant built heritage of the existing house.

Reached at his home Tuesday, Harvey indicated that the 1.5-storey house he is proposing for the severed lot is only 20 feet high, which is actually lower than the peak of the existing Steward House on the property. And the lot he is severing is larger than the one that he proposed to sever back in 2008, which was turned down.

“The footprint of the house,” Harvey said, “is 35 feet wide by 40 feet deep. It’s 1,700 square feet. And its design fits in with the design of the surrounding houses on John Street.”

The lone participant in the open house Monday was Old Town resident Paul Shepherd, a former president and current director of the Niagara Foundation.

Shepherd questioned NPG about whether or not the entire property was actually protected under a heritage designation.

NPG’s Mary Lou Tanner explained, “There are actually two designations on the property, the first deals with the structure, the second deals with the land area as it relates to archaeological resources. As part of the preparation for this application we’ve had three stage archaeological assessments completed in order to meet the requirements of the province, the region and the town.”

Turner explained that the designation related to the land in question is not on the land but instead on any archaeological finds that may have been historically significant. She went on to explain that the stage three dig conducted by North Bay-based Horizon Archaeology, attended and observed by the NPG, was turned up nothing of significance.

“The region and the province confirm whether or not a stage four dig is required,” she said, “and stage four was not required.”

Harvey read to The Local the letter he received in May from the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Cultural Industries following the work completed by Horizon.

“The William Steward site does not meet the criteria as having cultural heritage value and interest. As such, it is recommended that the William Steward site should be considered cleared of further archaeological concerns.”

Harvey added, “All they found in the dig was basically the dump site of William Steward. It was bits of nails, bits of porcelain, just garbage. They didn’t find anything of interest.”

Shepherd was the only resident to speak up about Harvey’s proposal during the open house. At the end of the meeting he said he was hoping to see the results of the stage three archaeological survey, and Tanner offered to send him that report at a later date.

The next step in Harvey’s application will be a public meeting scheduled to be held on Tuesday, Feb. 14.

Pre-registration is required through the clerk’s office to attend in person.
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NOTL couple exploring Thailand on motorcycles — again

Sharon Burns
Special to The Local

“They call Thailand ‘The Land of Smiles’ for good reason,” said Roberta Harper, who, with husband Bruce Harper, is on their third self-guided motorcycle tour of Thailand in a year.

The Harpers spoke to The Local from Chiang Rai, a city in the northernmost province in Thailand.

The Garrison Village couple extol the friendly and kind people, magnificent food and stunning panoramas.

“The shrimp is amazing,” said Roberta. “It’s never been frozen. They really know how to cook.” Bruce adds that the street food and breakfast buffets are “phenomenal.”

About two weeks ago Bruce and Roberta travelled from Chiang Rai to the Golden Triangle, where the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar meet. “We’re not going the route of all the backpackers. We are avoiding all that and going on a different path. There’s not a lot of tourists going where we’re going. There are 77 provinces in Thailand, and each province is different and unique,” said Roberta.

Their first motorcycle trip, in February 2022, “evolved through COVID,” said Bruce. “YouTube had a huge influence. I started watching travel blogs and got interested in a couple who were riding in these places, and that’s when we decided to get our licence. Or licences, “because I said I’m not riding on the back of your bike,” laughed Roberta. “I lived in Japan for almost a year after university and I spent a month in Thailand in the 80s. I wanted to take Bruce to Japan because I speak Japanese, but the pandemic cancelled their plans.

After many hurdles, including Thailand’s Test and Go COVID-testing program, the Harpers embarked on their adventure, and followed up quickly with a second trip last year, in October. Roberta says they fell in love with the place. “There is so much to discover and learn. We don’t like to just hop into a place, do the tours and leave, we like to hop into a place and learn it, get comfortable for a bit.”

A former high school teacher, Roberta taught Japanese at A.N. Myer in Niagara Falls before retiring as the head of the guidance department. However, she notes, the Thai language is extremely complex. “Unless you have an understanding of their writing system it’s really hard to figure out, because our letters do not transcribe to Thai. They have sounds that we don’t have and it depends on which translation system you’re looking at. ‘Sawasdee’ (hello) can be spelled five different ways. There are 44 consonants and 21 vowels, and vowels can come in front of the consonant, or after the consonant, or above or below or wrap around,” she said.

While Roberta learns the language — “I can count to 10 and order a beer,” she jokes — “Bruce is the logistics guy.” He plans the journey using technology such as Google Maps, which, she notes, isn’t always trustworthy. “We were going up and up and up a mountain, looking for a lookout. We never even got to the lookout because the Google Maps road ended and all of a sudden we weren’t even on the freaking map anymore. We took a wrong turn.”

Bruce and Roberta wear motorcycle helmets with a speaker system, and are riding dual sports bikes, Honda CRF250L, which are “like dirt bikes with lights. Very torquey,” said Bruce. “We are getting better each time,” added Roberta. “I like these ones a lot more — you’re a lot higher up off the road.”

“Some of the inclines here are incredibly steep. You come around the corner and you see this wall and the bike is capable of just going up,” said Bruce. “When they warn you of a steep incline of eight per cent, you know they’re way worse than they say.”

Continued on page 17
Three-month tour includes exploring Vietnam

Continued from page 16

than that,” he jokes. “That’s the
only sign they have.”

For new riders in a foreign
land, Bruce and Roberta have
experienced very few mishaps
on the road. “Watch out for
coconuts,” said Roberta. “They
do warn you that there are wild
elephants,” added Bruce. “One
time we came around the cor-
ner and there’s a whole family
of monkeys hanging out in
the road. They look at you like
‘we’re not moving.’ We tiptoed
through those guys.”

At 5’9” and 6’3”, Roberta
and Bruce literally stand out
in Thailand. “I pull off my hel-
met and they’re impressed,”
said Roberta. “Sometimes
the grandparents will run and get
the kids to come out and take a
look at me.”

Roberta and Bruce are
equally as impressed with Thai
scooter skills. “Women can ride
scooters, talking on the phone
with a baby on one hand and a
kid riding in the back,” said Ro-
berta. Bruce described a man
they had just seen the day be-
fore. “He was in flip flops, had
a tray of beer and ice, and was
driving down this hungry dirt
track, on this semi-automatic
bike, also with our food!”

Bruce and Roberta plan
to tour Thailand for two more
weeks before exploring Viet-
nam. Their three-month tour
will end with more self-guided
rides through southeast Thai-
land, averaging around 100 ki-
lometres per day and taking as
much time as needed.

Roberta said they have
learned to slow down and take
day by day. Bruce adds they
have learned how to ride a
motorcycle, how to ride on the
left-hand side of the road and
to negotiate Thai highways.

“Driving on the highway is
something,” said Roberta. “Just
picture the QEW and instead
of off-ramps, there are just
U-turns in the middle of the
highway.”

The Local hopes to catch
up with the Harpers as they
journey through Vietnam and
southeast Thailand, and maybe
their next trip as well — they
are already planning another
motorcycle ride through Viet-
nam, Laos and Malaysia.

The Harpers are seeing beautiful, off the beaten track sights of Thailand.
Mike Balsom
The Local

The TD Niagara Jazz Festival celebrates Black History Month with upcoming performances at the Hare Wine Company on Niagara Stone Road and Mathtay Cafe in downtown St. Catharines.


A highlight of all three events is an opening presentation by social anthropologist and musicologist Wade Pfaff, originally from St. Catharines.

“We really wanted to focus on Black artists for the month of February,” festival co-creator, executive director and artistic director Juliet Dunn tells The Local. “And we’re super excited to have Wade talking about Canadian black jazz history.”

Pfaff is a research assistant for a Black Peoples History of Canada, a three-year project to bring more Black history into Canadian schools, run out of Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He also conducts research for the Centre for Sound Communities, an arts-led social innovation lab at Cape Breton University.

“My research focuses on Canadian Black jazz history before World War II,” Pfaff says on the phone from St. Catharines, where he is visiting with an old school friend. “My PhD that I am working on now covers all across Canada, throughout the United States, the Caribbean and Europe, all the areas where black music came out.”

The guitarist, drummer and bass player goes into a lengthy description of the various sub-genres of jazz music and some of his personal favourite musicians before landing on one of his potential subjects for the February festival events.

“One topic would be Mynie Sutton and the Canadian Ambassadors,” says Pfaff. “He is one of the true heroes from the Niagara Region. To me, he is the one who broke all the colour barriers in Canada.

“He lived and played in Montreal in the 1920s and 1930s. His Canadian Ambassadors were the best of the best. They played from about 1928 until 1941 in every major city in Canada and the U.S.”

Sutton is enshrined in the city of Niagara Falls Arts and Culture Wall of Fame, soon to find its new home at the under-construction Cultural Hub. The pianist, saxophonist and trumpeter moved back to his hometown after his father passed away, and worked as a welder.

“He slowly got back into music, and then the union approached him, and asked him to be the co-president of the new integrated union, the first one in southern Ontario,” says Pfaff. “He started a new band called The Casuals. He wrote several songs that are still played today.”

Sutton spent more than 30 years on the executive board of the Regional Musicians’ Association, and also founded the Canadian Brotherhood Club of Niagara Falls in 1945, where he acted as president until his death in 1982.

Pfaff is also considering a presentation on women in Canadian jazz and blues, a topic he feels is extremely relevant in relation to Dunn’s role with the TD Niagara Jazz Festival.

“When I left Niagara there certainly wasn’t a jazz festival here,” Pfaff says. “When I found out that the organizer was Black, I thought that was very interesting. It was right before Emancipation Day last year, and she had booked a number of Black artists. I agreed to interview them for a production they were working on.”

“The role of music, and in particular jazz in social justice, is another topic near to Pfaff’s heart.

“Musicians often lead the way when it comes to issues of identity, place and individuality,” Pfaff insists. “Music is so infectious that people just can’t stay away. When you start playing music the colour of your skin doesn’t matter anymore. Music is the great harmonizer.”

Pfaff will make his first appearance in Niagara in support of Cuban-born Baro. History is also important to the bandleader, whose 2022 album Mi Raiz pays tribute to the Cuban musicians and composers who have contributed to bringing the trumpet’s distinctive sound to prominence around the world.

“The former member of hard-bop jazz ensemble Kollage moved to Toronto from Havana in 2001 after working with Baile Viejo Social Club superstar singer Omara Portuondo and band, and at only 19 years old, playing lead trumpet for that country’s National Radio and Television Orchestra.

“His jazz is his seventh album and the follow-up to his 2018 release, Sandstorm, which was nominated for a 2019 Juno for Jazz Album of the Year. Solo. The new release begins with the martial, military-style cadence of Campo de Batalla and winds through the conga sounds of Tío Lejos, the festive feel of En Son de Desprecio, and the funky jazzy Timba Jam.

“For the Feb. 6 show in Niagara-on-the-Lake he’ll be accompanied by fellow Cuban-Canadians Yos Rodriguez on bass and Amhed Mitchell on drums, with pianist Jeremy Ledbetter rounding out the quartet. All three played on Mi Raiz, which means that some of that album is likely to take centre stage at the Hare Wine Company.

“Wliel play a mixture of everything,” says Baro. “Each album has something interesting that I like to share. I will play music from at least three or four of my albums. On all my records each song has a different ensemble. We’ll play the numbers that work best with the four-piece band.”

“Two weeks later, the Neil Brathwaite Group, led by the saxophonist whose nickname is Bee, plays selections from their 2013 debut album Bee Thankful. The group includes Clark Johnson on bass, pianist Eric Boucher and Wilson Laurienon on drums. Alexis Baro, by the way, guests on one track from Bee Thankful.

“As a sideman, Brathwaite has straddled a number of genres, including R&B, rock, blues, pop, country, and world music, working with artists such as George Clinton, Danilo Perez, Wynonna, John Cale, and, piano, Emily Johnson, the Headstones, the Headstones, and Headstones. The in-demand composer, conductor and vocalist won Best Jazz Vocal at the New Mexico Music Awards for her multicultural (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian) 2013 debut album Bright Eyes.”

Amour’s trio will be rounded out by local resident Ross McIntyre on bass and pianist Stu Harrison.

Tickets for all three Black History Month performances are available at niagarajazzfestival.com.
Clear that they absolutely have but these students were reallyists just want excellent grades, an absolute need. Often
inclusionism. “It’s not that they want
he can’t mess up or my future is
time to grieve some of your
 Also, there are links and over-
overlap between obsessive compulsive disorder and perfection-
ism,” said Sirianni Molnar.
What can parents look for?
“Watch for the perfect mask
where the youth wants every-
one to think that they have it
together when underneath there is a struggle.” She contin-
es, “Some young people will
exhibit worry about making mistakes, especially in front of
other people and act like it’s the
end of the world and “everyone
is going to think I am stupid.”

Other markers may be fear,
for example, when a young
person won’t take risks for fear
of failure, they often think “un-
less I know I can do it perfectly,
I don’t want to risk it,” said Sirianni Molnar. She found that
in her study with educators, teachers identified perfection-
ists as high achievers, but also
procrastinators. “They’re afraid
of handing in anything less
than perfect.” Other signs may
include rigidity in an approach
to an assignment or task, an
unreasonable emphasis on or-
ganization, and the feeling of
social disconnection.
“A lot of research has shown
that perfectionism is associated
with higher levels of depression
and anxiety, but the physical
health aspect has fascinated me
for some time,” said Sirianni Molnar.
“30 of young peo-
ple experience physical health
problems which can range from
getting ill more often to immune system functions get-
ting eroded by chronic high
levels of stress.”
Sirianni Molnar is quick
to indicate parents or educa-
tors are not to blame. They
have good intentions, howev-
er, “parental expectations and
criticism can be one factor
that attributes to a young person
feeling as if they need to be
‘perfect.’
Acceptance to post-
secondary institutions and
scholarships are tied to marks,
said Sirianni Molnar, and sometimes what happens is
young people interpret this as
‘parents expect perfection. I
can’t mess up or my future is
not going to be what I want it
to be.” Also, some youth in
Sirianni Molnar’s study indicat-
ed that they realize life has been
hard and if they perform well, it
will take the worry and stress
off of parents.

Educators may also have
a role. “Kids get praised quite
a bit for a successful moment
but that praise may be lack-
ing when things don’t go as
planned and kids can interpret
that as ‘Ih, the acceptance and
the love and the belonging is
crucial so we’re performing at
this level.”
Sirianni Molnar recom-
mands that adults help young
people to understand that they
have many options and that
there are several different path-
ways towards their goals, not
one pathway isn’t linear. Expect
barriers and setbacks.”

“Young can have ‘self-
compassion,’ ‘self-perfection,’
and should take into account
the broader picture, because
society has changed,” said
Sirianni Molnar. “Give yourself
room to breathe and accept that
Appreciate the world that you’re in,
and all that you’ve done, it’s too
time to grieve some of your
losses too,” said Sirianni Mol-
nar. “In the past few years youth
have missed graduation, have
to learn online or in hybrid
models, and been subjected to
‘lockdown.’ Give yourself a pat
on the back.”

Mental health support is
available in the region. The
Pathstone walk-in clinic has re-
opened at the Pen Centre, and
the Pathstone Crisis Support
Line, an intervention service
providing immediate tele-
phone counselling, operates 24
hours a day, seven days a week
for children and youth up to
the age of 18 and their families.
The Crisis Support Line phone
call is 1-800-263-4944.
Softball club offers everything from Learn to Play to slo-pitch

Mike Balsom
The Local

Registration for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Softball Club is opening on Feb. 10. The club is hoping to run programs for children aged three through 18 this summer.

Continuing with changes to the age groups the club made in 2021, the Learn to Play division is for kids aged three to six, while the Coaches Pitch division covers the ages seven through 10.

The Learn to Play division is set up into two separate groups, one for ages three and four, and the other for five and six.

The overall emphasis for NOTL Minor Softball has always been on developing skills and a love for the game. Club president Peter Flynn says the organization has become comfortable in its role as a "starter point" for youth interested in baseball and softball.

Over the past few years he has seen some of the Pee Wee players (ages 12 to 14) moving on to play hardball in St. Catharines or Niagara Falls, or fast-pitch at the Grantham Optimist Club in St. Catharines.

Having struggled in the past few years to encourage enough older kids to sign up to play, last year the club began offering a Kids Slo-Pitch league for ages 11 to 14. Flynn points out that the game is easier to learn, easier to play, and is more likely to encourage kids to continue playing ball into their adult years.

"It went so well last year," Flynn says, "that we are offering slo-pitch for ages 15 to 18 if enough registrations come in. It's perfect for those older kids who are working, they can get out to play one night a week."

The specific nights for the age groups have not yet been finalized. Flynn and Niagara-on-the-Lake Soccer Club president Carrie Plaskett are working together on scheduling to ensure that kids who want to play both soccer and softball won't have conflicts.

For information about the NOTL Softball club and to register beginning on Feb. 10, call Flynn at 905-327-1620, or send an email to info@notlsoftball.org.

Under-9 NOTL Wolves win 3, tie 1 and come home champs

Mike Balsom
The Local

Photo submitted

The Wolves ended up facing the same host Bulldogs that ended the U-9 Wolves season once again in the championship game Sunday. It turned out to be another close battle, ending up tied 2-2 at the end of the third period.

The Wolves came out top in overtime, when Dean Pagnotta set up Ryan Riddle, who knocked in the game-winning goal in exciting style. Stellar goaltending from Peter Kotsanis was key to the Wolves' success throughout the weekend.

Celebrating being #1 are (back left) Hunter Berry, Will Lidstone, Bentley Berry, Colton Meleskie, Dean Pagnotta, Leo Piliptiti, (middle) Nash Funk, Ryan Riddle, Nicholas Riddle, Russell Palmer, Owen Thorimbert, Jacob Rogers; and (front) goalie Peter Kotsanis. Coaching the team are Chris Riddle, Dave Funk, Mario Kotsanis, Jay Thorimbert, Mike Palmer, Brandon Berry, Joe Pagnotta and Steve Lidstone.

SUDOKU PUZZLE (MORE PUZZLES ON PAGE 23)

Mike Balsom
The Local

Heading into the second post-pandemic summer, and with the recent World Cup having been a bit of buzz for the sport, Niagara-on-the-Lake Soccer Club president Carrie Plaskett is expecting registration to be even stronger this year.

Just under 350 kids played soccer in NOTL last summer, including exactly 100 in the age four and five Timbits division. And since registration opened at notlsoccer.ca only two weeks ago, already 132 children have signed up.

"We had a waitlist last year for the U9/10 division," Plaskett says. "With the Timbits, we were able to get some last minute uniforms and ensure that all 100 kids had a chance to play. We only had 10 registered for the U13-17 age group and had to cancel that one."

Plaskett is hoping that getting the word out early enough will encourage enough of that older age group to register so the club can run a program for them this summer.

The focus for the club seems to once again be mostly on house league, with only two Niagara Soccer League travel teams running out of NOTL. There will be a U-9 girls team, moving up from the U-8 division last year, and a U-8 boys team.

"The travel program usually depends on having the coaches who want to commit to it," says Plaskett. "We did have some interest last year in another age group, and we lined up a coach, but it was too late, and some of the players had already moved on to play at other centres."

The summer season will kick off on Saturday, August 26 with the celebratory year-end festival. It was so great to have that back last year," Plaskett says of the final soccer Saturday in 2022. "So fun. It wraps it all up. The kids get so excited, they are all together that day. They love getting their medals. And the opening festival is great too, because you can see how successful our program really is with all the kids in one spot."

Plaskett adds that coaches are still needed for this summer, and encourages parents of registered children to consider helping out with a team. And the club is still looking for sponsorship for the program.

"We really value our partnerships with local businesses," she says. "That’s how our club runs successfully, through the generosity of all these local businesses who support us. We have a few lined up, but we're hoping for a few more."

NOTL Soccer expecting good turn-out for variety of programs
Mike Balsom  The Local

After beating Tottenham Friday and Windsor Saturday, the Niagara Predators continued to hold onto fourth place in the Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League’s South Division. And though only four points separate them from the next three teams, the Preds have played fewer games than Northumberland, St. George and Tottenham.

"With the addition of some new players in recent weeks, Niagara seems to be peaking at the right time. "All the players that we have brought in have added to the team," head coach Kevin Taylor said. "They vary in different ways, but they vary in different ways, and I think we’ve made improvements, and we’re a good team now. Good teams find a way to win."  

Forward Declan Fogarty led the way in Friday night’s 7-1 win over the Thunder. After Fogarty netted four goals, linemate Cameron Savoie added a goal and four assists, and Nick Savoie notched three helpers in a game dominated by the Preds at both ends of the ice.

Leo Savin, Tumur Mirzaiants and Aimanbetov only arrived in Canada last Tuesday. It took months for his travel arrangements to be finalized. "The way they see each other, the way they move the puck is phenomenal. Leo in particular really stepped up his defensive game," says head coach Kevin Taylor.

"The way he carries himself is impressive," raves a very impressed Taylor. "The way he carries himself is great. He doesn’t put up with much from the other guys on the bench. He was a real leader on Saturday. He said some things in that game and the guys tended to listen to him."

With Niagara’s number one goalie Ryan Santini potentially out for two more weeks after re-aggravating a shoulder injury, Taylor will be relying more heavily on the newly acquired Claussen. At 6’4” and 201 pounds, the 20-year-old from North Dakota strikes an imposing figure.

"He’s a huge presence in net," Taylor agrees. "It’s nice having that intimidation factor when they come down the ice. They think they have a spot but they don’t because he’s so big that he covers a lot of the net.

With the two wins, the Predators have 33 points on the season. Northumberland is in fifth in the South Division with 32, followed by St. George, with 31 and Tottenham with 29. Niagara hosts the St. George Ravens Friday night.

“They’ve gotten better, they’ve added some players," Taylor says about the Ravens. "This is a game we have to win. With all the games (nine) we have coming up, to be realistic, I’m giving us one more loss."  

The potential loss he is referring to is on Feb. 13, when the Predators visit Durham, a team they have yet to beat this season. The other games include four against last place Streetsville, another against the Ravens, one in Tottenham and one against Northumberland.

Puck drop is 7:30 p.m. Friday night at Virgil’s Meridian Credit Union Arena.

Cameron Savoie takes a shot as Alex Andrews screens Thunder goalie Marco Squeo in Friday’s home game. 

Wolves U16 A team brings home gold

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves U16 A played four games over a three-day tournament last weekend and finished undefeated with an impressive 0-0, 1-0 and 3-0 win to overtake West Niagara in the finals 2-1. The annual Doug Robinson All Star Challenge is hosted by West Niagara Minor Hockey Association. Playing for the Wolves were Calo Zambito (C), Marcus Williams (A), Noah Whyte (A), Easton Andres (A), Quinten Davis (G), Braden Sawyer (G), Brandon Falk, Billy Pilliteri-Smith, Ben DiPietro, Braedon Dyck, Jarvis Neuferl, Jacob Dulas, Joshua Dulas, James Quinn, Jacob Cook, Mitch Olsen, and Andrew Bayne. (Photo supplied)

Preds hold onto fourth place after two weekend wins

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves U16 A played four games over a three-day tournament last weekend and finished undefeated with an impressive 0-0, 1-0 and 3-0 win to overtake West Niagara in the finals 2-1. The annual Doug Robinson All Star Challenge is hosted by West Niagara Minor Hockey Association. Playing for the Wolves were Calo Zambito (C), Marcus Williams (A), Noah Whyte (A), Easton Andres (A), Quinten Davis (G), Braden Sawyer (G), Brandon Falk, Billy Pilliteri-Smith, Ben DiPietro, Braedon Dyck, Jarvis Neuferl, Jacob Dulas, Joshua Dulas, James Quinn, Jacob Cook, Mitch Olsen, and Andrew Bayne. (Photo supplied)
A total team effort led to the second straight win, 55-40 over the visiting Grimsby Grizzlies, to start the season for the Under-19 Niagara Rangers girls basketball team.

The Rangers starting five made quick work of the Grizzlies, dominating play at both ends of the court. Ava Froese led the way during the first quarter, drawing fouls under the Grimsby basket and draining the corresponding free throws. The Grizzlies only managed one successful free throw and a three-point shot, with the Rangers enjoying a 10-4 lead at the end of the first.

The Rangers defence continuously forced turnovers and translated many of those opportunities into quick baskets. As the third quarter progressed, Niagara climbed to a 32-point lead over Grimsby, and was on the positive side of a 49-19 score heading into the fourth.

Coach Shawn Pylypiw saw that margin as the perfect time to turn to his bench to spell off his starters.

"We wanted to allow our bench players to get some game time experience," Pylypiw told The Local. "This being our second game of the season, it was good to see the girls come together and work well as a unit."

Grimsby began chipping away at the Rangers lead but couldn’t catch up, despite outscoring Niagara 21-6 in the final frame.

"It’s important for me to provide some valuable court experience and to help build their confidence and knowledge," Pylypiw said, "so that they can be put into the thick of things and believe in themselves and play the game they know how to play and not over think. They communicated well on the court and helped one another when needed."

Pylypiw credits Jailah Gabbidon and Julia Diemer who took over the primary ball-handling duties off the bench, as well as Morgan Lambert and Sydney Chavez for playing vital minutes with tough, tenacious defense to continue frustrating the Grizzlies.

On the scoreboard, Froese led the way for the Rangers with 20 points in the winning effort. Mikayla Wallace and Kyla Pylypiw each contributed seven.

The Rangers travel to Beamsville District Secondary School Feb. 4 for four games in the Grizzlies Invitational Tournament. Saturday will see them playing at 10:30 a.m. against the Burlington Force, and 4:30 p.m., when they face the Toronto Triple Threat.

Their Sunday, 9 a.m. tipoff is against the Parry Sound Stingray. The start time for their fourth game Sunday is to be determined by where they place after the three games.
Across:
1. Statue of Liberty material
2. Buddy
3. Thick slice
4. Homeless child dumped in Boston harbor
5. Large handbag --- Bryant
6. "Thanatopsis" poet W
7. Stand-up guy
8. First lady
9. Affirmative signal
10. Flower of Rhode Island
11. Lawyers' grp.
12. Dry gulch
13. Got together
14. Statue of Liberty material
15. Stand-up guy
16. Thick slice
17. Homeless child dumped in Boston harbor
18. Large handbag --- Bryant
19. "Thanatopsis" poet W
20. Stand-up guy
21. First lady
22. Large handbag
23. Thirteen apostles post William
24. Stand-up guy
25. Thick slice
26. Large handbag
27. Noah's boat
28. Drowned in Boston harbor
29. Homeless child
30. Thick slice
31. Thick slice
32. Thick slice
33. Thick slice
34. Thick slice
35. Thick slice
36. Thick slice
37. Thick slice
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63. Thick slice
64. Thick slice
65. Thick slice
66. Thick slice
67. Thick slice
68. Thick slice
69. Thick slice
70. Thick slice

Down:
1. Into the valley
2. Are you out ---? (Poker)
3. Nudge
4. Cops in general
5. Intention of
6. Baloney
7. Postal delivery
8. Anticipate
9. Cold comforts?
10. Control board
11. Adrift
12. Burdened
13. Correlation
14. Hapthologist's specialty
15. Little lady
16. Pulses
17. Lots of things to do
18. Plans
19. Cuss
20. Former Yugoslav dictator
21. Sins
22. Sin
23. -- the clap of dawn
24. Profitable
25. Coordinate
26. Rising curr
27. Coordinate
28. Is protein
29. Zilch
30. Sires
31. Former Yugoslavia
32. Pairs
33. Lots of things to do
34. Burdened
35. Control board
36. Up at
37. Pays
38. Sync
39. Thermal tissues
40. Panel
41. Above
42. Laden
43. Track and field
44. Or in
45. Prod
46. Police force
47. Eye to
48. Rot
49. Mail
50. Expect
51. Acid
52. Begets
53. Nada
54. Up at
55. TBA.
56. TBA.
57. TBA.
58. TBA.
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70. TBA.

OBITUARY

RAVESI, ANTHONY “TONY”—It is with heavy hearts that we announce the passing of our beloved Tony on January 29, 2023, at the age of 76. Tony suffered from Parkinson’s and sadly succumbed to complications of Covid. He is predeceased by his parents Domenico and Maria Ravesi.

Tony leaves behind his loving Soulmate, Judy, his daughter Angela (John) and his son Tony (Kelly), and his adored grandchildren Alex, Giada and Lucas.

Also left behind are his stepdaughter, Kelly and stepson, Michael, as well as step grandchildren Chelsea, Jordan, Chloe, Mackenzie and Andrew.

Left to share in our loving memories of Tony are his sisters Stella (late Gerry), Elvira (Ron), Columba (late Domenic) and brother Joe (Lynn). He will be lovingly remembered by many nieces, nephews and cousins.

Tony was employed for 42 years at W.S. Tyler Co. in St. Catharines, as a Fine Wire Weaver. He was a proud union president for 30 years, working tirelessly to improve working conditions for the members.

Tony was also a member of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 124 in NOTL for 40 years, and a member of the Lions Club (NOTL branch) before his illness.

Sincere thanks to the staff at Upper Canada Lodge, especially Queenston House, for their support and kindness throughout Tony’s stay, and for their guidance through our long goodbye.

Cremation has taken place. Visitation will be held at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake, on Friday, February 3rd from 2-4 & 6-8 pm. A memorial service will be held at the funeral home on Saturday morning, February 4th at 11 o’clock. For those who wish, memorial donations may be made to a charity of your choice.

“Dad, may you be at peace and soar with the birds.”

Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com

OBITUARY

MALINS, MIRZDA—Mirdza Malins passed away the morning of January 30, 2023 at Upper Canada Lodge at 98 years old. We would like to thank the incredible staff for their attentive and incomparable supportive care during her four years there, and, in particular, during the palliative stage over the last 2 weeks.

Mirdza lived a long life, with a unique perspective on the world’s changing landscape over the century of her life span. She was a true survivor and was fiercely independent, making her way from her hometown of Riga, Latvia, living through the second world war and finally immigrating to Toronto at the tender age of 22.

We are grateful for having moved her to Niagara-on-the-Lake at the age of 92 (first to Pleasant Manor and then to Upper Canada Lodge) to assure her physical and emotional proximity to her family during the last 6 years of her life.

Full of energy and resilience, she was a source of wonder to all who met her, as she ‘roasted’ her way around the building and grounds in order to feel the wind on her back and the sunshine on her face.

With devotion, Ilmants Malins and Suzin Schill

OBITUARY

VEENENDAAL (MACDONALD), ANNE—With heavy hearts we announce the passing of Anne Veenendaal (nee MacDonald), age 63, of Burlington, Ontario with her loving family by her side. January 22, 2023, marks the end of a 12 year, hard-fought battle with Huntington’s disease.

Anne was born and raised in Sioux Lookout, Ontario where she met and married the love of her life, Tony Veenendaal. Following the birth of their first daughter, Jennifer, in 1981 they moved to Stratford, ON. Their second daughter, Lindsay, arrived in 1984. In 1994, they moved the last time to Burlington, Ontario. A devoted wife and mother, Anne was predeceased by her parents, Marie (1987) and Bernie (2011), her daughter Lindsay (2016), and her brother Jack (2022). Anne leaves behind her husband of 43 years, Tony, along with her daughter, Jennifer (Jeff), grandchildren Kate and David Zimmerman, siblings Sharon (Chuck) Gera, Janet (Mel) Landry, Raymond (Linda) MacDonald, and Joyce (Gary) Marton. Anne will be forever missed by her in-laws, Karen MacDonald (Jack), Bert Veenendaal (Lise), Herman Veenendaal (Rosemary), Helena Copeland (Rob), numerous nieces and nephews, and the many people she befriended in the town she loved.

Visitation and funeral took place January 27, 2023 and Anne will be laid to rest alongside her daughter, Lindsay. Those wishing to do so are asked to make a donation to the Huntington Society of Canada or a charity of your choice.

Online condolences can be left at www.dbburlington.com
Top Agent, Angelika Zammit, earns the HGTV Celebrity, Scott McGillivray Trusted Agent endorsement for Niagara-on-the-Lake!

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Angelika Zammit is proud to have been recognized as the exclusive McGillivray Trusted Agent in the Niagara-on-the-Lake market.

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