Former parks chair anticipates new challenges

Janice Thomson disappointed term has ended, overwhelmed by support she has received

By Penny Coles
The NOTL Local

Janice Thomson says the Niagara Parks Commission is in good shape for those who now have the responsibility of running it.

“Her support has reached either house if necessary — but the Town staff arrived quickly after her call,” she said. “They were very impressive. They did a fantastic job.”

and within two hours had cut down the tree and moved it to clear the laneway. “They were great,” she said, “very impressive. They did a fantastic job.”

Town staff ‘impressive’

Jessica Friesen came home from work late last Wednesday, the day of the wicked ice storm, to find a tree had fallen across the laneway to her St. Davids home, near Bevan Heights Drive. There are two houses on the lane, and three other cars, belonging to her husband and neighbours, were trapped on the side of the lane nearest the houses. They couldn’t get out, and she couldn’t get in, she said. It was a scary situation — emergency vehicles couldn’t have reached either house if necessary — but the Town staff arrived quickly after her call, and within two hours had cut down the tree and moved it to clear the laneway. “They were great,” she said, “very impressive. They did a fantastic job.”

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Region remediation plan includes filling in lagoons
Harmony still working toward heritage park with public access

By Penny Coles
The NOTL Local

Residents promoting a natural heritage park on Lakeshore Road are still hopeful they will see their vision fulfilled.

The Harmony Residents Group, which became organized in 2008 to present an alternative to Project Niagara, a proposal by two major orchestras to use the Parks Canada property for a music festival. The plan was for 50 concerts a season, an amphitheatre and other amenities that were projected to attract 250,000 visitors a year.

Many locals were opposed to the concept, worried about noise levels and the increase in traffic the festival would create. The Harmony group, also concerned about damage to the ecosystem, proposed an alternate — a park that would protect the forests, wetland and wildlife.

Ten years later, the sewage treatment plant on the property is finally about to be decommissioned, all most three years later than scheduled, and Harmony members are hoping once that has occurred and the Region has returned the site to its original condition, Parks Canada, which owns the property, will start thinking about opening it as a natural park, accessible to the public.

The Region, with Parks Canada, has been looking at options for the rehabilitation of the property, and announced last week, during an update on the new sewage treatment plant, that the lagoons will be filled in and the original course of Two Mile Creek, altered to accommodate the treatment plant, will be restored. That will allow for a Riverine Wetland — a marsh with natural flooding — councillors at Monday's meeting were told.

There had been other options on the table, including a constructed wetland, which can treat municipal or industrial waste water and remove pollutants from water. It is sometimes used in reclamation projects, and was the solution Coun. Gary Burroughs hoped Parks Canada would choose.

Now a town councillor after eight years as NOTL's regional representative, Burroughs is a member of the Harmony group. He wanted one of the two sewage lagoons closed, the other left as a constructed wetland to be part of the park. Burroughs was a supporter of a research project more than 20 years ago, involving town and regional representatives and members of the Friends of Fort George, on the Lakeshore Road property.

The research, led by the late Dr. Ed Lemon, proved a constructed wetland could effectively treat sewage in a cold climate — then considered a scientific breakthrough. Burroughs believes a permanent constructed wetland could become a valuable education resource, for locals and visitors to town.

He said he was "shocked" by the announcement that the lagoons would both be filled in — for the last eight years the region has been talking about options and public consultations, and now it seems the decision has been made, with a $12 million price tag, he said.

Regional interim CAO Ron Trapp told NOTL councillors at Monday's meeting the future of the lagoons had been finalized last fall, as the environmental assessment was wrapping up, with a decision made to pump the water from the ponds and fill them with soil. That option has been approved by Parks Canada, he said.

"A lot of us believed a constructed wetland was the answer. It was a shock to hear the decision was made," said Burroughs. "My understanding is they have to come back to the public before they proceed."

Finn Madsen, president of the Harmony group, says its goal is to see the federal property, from the former rifle range controlled by the Department of National Defence, east to Niagara Shores Park, become one long green space, with a public trail from one end to the other along the waterfront.

Although it's Madsen's opinion the ponds should be left as they are, rather than to come back to the public before they proceed.

"I'd like to see that done in the least expensive way possible and in partnership with the NPCA (Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority), and other agencies that can help maintain it," said Madsen. "That's been our vision for the last 10 years."

There are two ponds on the Lakeshore Road Parks Canada property where the old sewage treatment plant will be decommissioned. The region announced last week the ponds will be pumped out and filled in with soil.

After years of researching the decommissioning of ponds, as recently as December the group wrote to the region, outlining their concerns. Leaving the ponds as open water would not only be a less expensive option but would have the least impact on wildlife in the area, they said.

Gary Zalepa, NOTL's regional councillor, was at the Town meeting last week for the sewage update, and heard the discussion about the lagoons.

He also attended a Harmony group meeting to fill members in on the regional plans, and assured them there would be further consultation.

While the decision has been made to fill in the lagoons to fulfill the region's remediation obligation, there will be further details to work out for the design of the site, he said.

The engineering focus, leading up to the decommissioning of the lagoons, is to get them pumped out and filled in, along with correcting the flow of Two Mile Creek, but there will be further public consultation about what the area will look like. The NPCA is expected to be involved in the discussion, he added, and at that point any decisions about a park and public access will be in the hands of Parks Canada, the steward of the property.

During past meetings, the federal agency appeared to be on side with the idea of a natural park, but once the remediation work is done by the region, "it will be up to Parks Canada to decide on the next steps."

Asked about public consultations and next steps for the 106-hectare site, Parks Canada staff referred to a management plan for the area, which acknowledges there is "significant interest from the local community" in the property. It says there will be continued dialogue with a goal of facilitating public access by 2021 to 2022.
Plan is to become ‘one of most spectacular parks’

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

During her eight-and-a-half-year term, the fi- nal-stand plan for the organization went from four years of deficits to four years of surpluses to the tune of $17 million, which was used to finance capital maintenance proj- ects that had been de- ferred. The accumulated surplus will continue to pay for improvements into the future, she said.

When her term last fall, the board was one year into a 10-year strate- gic plan with a mandate of ensuring the 60-kilometre property along the Naiga- ra River “becomes one of the most spectacular parks in the world,” she said.

The goal is not to be on a top-10 list, she added, but to be one of the best in all considerations, with the values of preservation and conservation inform- ing every decision made by the board.

The mandate of cul- tural and environmental stewardship “controlled every decision we made,” but sometimes it present- ed a challenge, she added.

As an example, she referred to the decision to allow Nik Wallenda, a professional daredev- il, to cross the falls on a high-wire strung from the American side to the Ca- nadian in 2012, with mil- lions of viewers around the world watching.

Stunting is outlawed on parks property without the permission of commissi- oners, she said, but it was felt Wallenda’s profession- alism and the opportunity to highlight the falls, while bringing so many viewers around the world, was a benefit. The board decided that, as part of the overall strategy, the public should be involved in the decision, she added, highlighting the exceptional makeup of the board, with people who could bring different per- spectives to the table, but extreme pas- sion and commitment to their task, their common goals forming a bond be- tween them.

“People need to con- tinue to respect that. The people who created the project were brilliant, and that, along with the wonder of Ni- agara, gives us an enormous base to attract people.”

And for Thomson go- ing forward?

She’ll miss the many people who worked for the commission, who love it as she does, she said.

And she’ll miss the people she met from all over the world, many of them famous, all with sto- ries of their own.

She remembers So- phie, the countess of Wessex, walking into the Queenston Heights restaurant, and Lord Mayor of Niagara Falls, D throat standing there, handed over her hat and jacket for Thomson to hold before heading over to the Lincoln and Welland Regiment.

“When my term ex- pired in November, and although she re-applying, she felt she didn’t receive a re- sponse from the province.

She’s confident that, as so many of the eyes of the world to the wonder and majesty of the falls, and how the policy remains in place to support future consider- ations.

There is a formula that works to protect parks property, she said, and the policy of ending board meetings, which are open to the public, by ask- ing the gallery for ques- tions and comments.

“Why would people attend, and for the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission and the Niagara Falls Am and Parapan Ameri- cans Games committee in 2015. While she isn’t sure yet how she will fill that hole in her busy schedule, she feels certain the right opportunity will come along, and she looks for- ward to discovering her next challenge.

Those were all great experiences,” she said with her years with the parks commission. And as a single woman, she added, “I don’t have the responsibilities at home that others do. I’m able to choose where I put my time and efforts. There has been a lot of joy in knowing I was do- ing the best job I could.

I will remain open to other opportunities as they come along, and I’ll have learned from the amazing opportuni- ties I’ve had as the 14th chair of the parks com- mission.”

The friends and colleagues of Dr. Julian Adams celebrated his 50th anniversary of caring for local patients last week. Lunch and a cake were included in the event held at the Niagara Medical Clinic, which took the physician by surprise. He said when he and his wife came to NOTL, he expected to work for a few years and then move on to a bigger city. “And here we still are, 50 years later.” Although he has seen many changes in the last five decades, both in the town and the practice of medicine, he still loves what he does, he said. (Pammy Colles)
Town needs to make youth a priority in strategic plan

Affordable housing, good jobs essential to bring young families to NOTL and keep them here

By Penny Coles
The NOTL Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors have talked about the importance of supporting youth in town, but will they demonstrate that by their actions or are they simply paying lip service to what is considered a priority by many residents?

Lyndsay Gazzard is a parent who is waiting for the answer, and concerned it might not be what she is hoping to hear.

Council is about to undertake the process for developing a strategic plan that sets priorities for the next four years. The plan has been deferred while they sort out a process for hiring a consulting company to help with it.

The previous council, well aware of past struggles with the local school board, the closure of the only high school in NOTL and the only school in the Old Town, set education and youth among its top priorities,

Gazzard said.

It was during the last term of council that a Lord Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council was established, and that council followed through with support for Royal Oak Community School, a not-for-profit independent that stepped in to attract and keep families in the Old Town by providing education for their children.

“We needed this for the future of the community, for it to grow and be healthy,” Gazzard said of the support for the Old Town school.

“The previous council had more exposure to school closings. This council hasn’t gone through that.”

While the municipality can’t intervene directly in public education, it can show its intentions to keep young people in town, and attract young families, she said.

As an example she points to the high skills major program. Education Minister Stephen Lecce developed a partnership with the Catholic school board and Niagara District Airport, indicating some momentum toward supporting youth and giving young families a reason to settle in town.

“Does this council consider that a priority? We haven’t seen it yet. They don’t have a great deal of money to hand out. My sense is that things that attract tourism are more important.”

Lord Mayor Betty Disero and Coun. Clare Cameron have already shown support of young people, she said, “and we’re very hopeful we’ll see a strong strategic plan that will as well.”

In the one opportunity given this council to support youth, they turned down funding for a program Royal Oak had requested — not because of the costs of operations but for an outreach program to bring kids from across the community together during professional development days and March break.

“We feel they didn’t value what we are trying to do. Tourism is important and a big revenue-driver, but programs for children are equally important.”

While it’s too soon to critique council, she added, she’s concerned the last council made “significant strides” in prioritizing youth, and this term may not maintain that.

There are many great programs for kids, Gazzard said, and the library does a particularly good job for youngsters, but once they reach the ages of about 12 to 15, there is little for them to do. “That’s when you see them looking to other communities.”

Gazzard drives to St. Catharines three times a week for activities for her daughter which are not available locally, and while she’s there she uses the time to shop and buy groceries, which is taking money out of town.

Most of the activities teens choose, such as going to movies or the mall, require going outside of NOTL, she said.

But Gazzard said she feels confident that if teens can offer practical suggestions for activities in town, council will provide the resources.

Coun. Clare Cameron said she is committed to being a voice for youth, and is looking at the bigger picture for their future. Young people everywhere like the idea of sampling places that are bigger, and they think better, but she wants to ensure NOTL will be the place they come home to, where they can afford to buy houses, and where there are jobs to keep them here.

Supporting youth begins with the obvious, she said — funding organizations in Town which provide opportunities for them. Also important is council be- ing aware of and being present at youth activities, such as the annual Remembrance Day service at Crossroads Public School, and keeping those kids in mind as they make decisions that will affect their future.

“We need real and meaningful employment opportunities, we need enough viable commercial space for business to locate and grow, and for young people to start their new businesses.”

Working with the school boards and providing opportunities within town must also continue, she said. “The high school closure is still felt as a loss, but the Town can continue to build its relationship with Vineridge Academy,” she said about the interna- tional school that has taken over the former public high school building, as well as with the two public boards.

Once the strategic plan is completed for this term of municipal government, every need that comes before councillors will refer to how the information fits with the priorities they have chosen, she said. With youth as a pri- ority, even Official Plan discussions will take their needs into account, to ensure there is zoning that encourages affor- dable housing.

She agrees with Gazzard that the Town is “stereo- typed” as a retirement community, but believes that’s changing — the recent ap- pointment of young people who applied to sit on Town committees is one indica- tion, she said.

“We need to settle on the future of the community,” she said. “There are young families getting their start in town,” Cameron said.

In developing council’s strategic plan, “we need to be sure we include everybody, all ages and all communities.”

Disero says the Town is already thinking of youth, with some new committees that will embrace not only the young people but all residents.

She’s working with the youth advisory council to get young people “more engaged,” she said, “and to give them a bigger voice.”

The strategic plan needs to be based on keeping the town sustainable, healthy and prosperous for people of all ages, and providing services that meet the needs of residents, including youth.

In order to pay for those services, we need a good economic development plan. Residential taxes do not fully cover costs of pro- viding those services to the community. We need a good healthy community, and a strong youth community, to bring in more residents.

Disero thinks the town has a “development imbalance,” with a tax base which is not growing in the way it should be. She thinks the Town needs to attract good businesses to bring in good-paying jobs, that will attract and keep young people, she said.

Taylor Hulley is a young man who grew up in NOTL.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5
Steve and Rebecca deBoer of Zoom Leisure show off their new space, rebuilt with high ceilings and a basement for storage after an electrical fire last summer gutted the inside of the building on Mississagua Street. They hope to be open by April, in time for the wine touring season. (Fred Merczak)

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whinemaker at Coyote’s Run by day, and as a musician at any bar or event that offers some extra cash by night, he said. He also does some video recording for other musicians, and in the summer, works for his uncle building decks and railings.

It works for him, he said, because the intensity of the wine industry is mostly in the winter, and everything else he does makes his summer busier. He can handle the winters, he said, the young ones could return

Niagara-on-the-Lake has plenty of spirit

The Spirit of Niagara awards evening has to be one of the best events organized by the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce, says president Janice Thomson.

“It’s a wonderful event for the community, seeing people being recognized, pleased and proud not only for themselves but with their family, friends and colleagues to witness it,” said Thomson.

Last year, Penner Building Centre was named Company of the Year, and two years before that, it was Pillitteri Estate Winery. Thomson recalls.

“It was great to see the families taking the stage, with several generations, and to see family businesses being recognized,” she said.

“We hear they enjoy seeing others recognized as well,” she said, and learnt about other businesses that are doing great work.

“We have such a diverse community.”

The evening the awards are handed out is a great chance to acknowledge the depth of the community, and also to honour those for whom the awards are named, who have set examples and become mentors for those who follow, she said.

“It makes you pause and remember the significance of what they did, and the example they set for others,” said Thomson.

“It’s also a great opportunity for newcomers to discover the strengths of the community, she added.

On many occasions, it’s been not just a business but groups of volunteers being recognized — she lists the War of 1812 committee, whose members organized commemorative events; volunteers who spearheaded the Shaw Festival Film Series; and the people behind the Royal Oak Community School, who have been given awards for being community-minded groups.

The awards “are about the heart and soul of the people of our community, and the great spirit — that’s what it’s all about.”

In anticipation of the March 5 awards night, the chamber is seeking nominations for the annual event in six different categories, including company of the year and citizen of the year.

Nomination forms are available online and must be returned by Feb. 18.

Niagara-on-the-Lake residents, businesses operating within the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and/or members of the Chamber of Commerce are eligible for nomination.

Awards will be presented at a social evening in the Grand Georgian Ballroom of the Queens Landing Conference Resort.

Categories include: the Celia Liu Award for Excellence in Hospitality; Christopher Newton Award for Extraordinary Vision in Business; Company of the Year Award; Chamber of Commerce Community Leadership Award; Peter Ling Award for the Entrepreneur of the Year, and the Lord Mayor’s Award of Excellence presented to the Citizen of the Year.

To nominate an individual, group or business for an award, or to purchase tickets, visit https://www.niagaraonthelake.com/spir-it-of-niagara.

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winemaker at Coyote’s Run by day, and as a musician at any bar or event that offers some extra cash by night, he said. He also does some video recording for other musicians, and in the summer, works for his uncle building decks and railings.

It works for him, he said, because the intensity of the wine industry is mostly in the winter, and everything else he does makes his summer busier. He can handle the winters, he said, the young ones could return

As someone who loved walking even as a teen, NOTL also provides many locations to enjoy the outdoors, he said, and it’s a great place to live.

Unfortunately, and ironically, since all his work, as a winemaker and as a musician, is reflective of the industry in NOTL, he can’t afford to live here.

He and his partner, Lau- rel Minnes, have just bought a four-bedroom house on a large piece of property that even has grapes growing on it, but it’s out on Highway 20 in south Thorold.

“We couldn’t even look in NOTL with the prices here,” he said.

So they are becoming commuters, although they’d much rather live in town.

He believes what is needed most to attract and keep young people is affordable housing, which for his budget is non-existent in his home town.

Even the few townhouses and condos — and there aren’t many — are out of his price range, he said.

“In town, I’m part of this culture, making wine and making music, and all of that is because I was inspired by this place where I grew up. But if you can’t afford the housing prices, you’re out of luck.”

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Youth, seniors, all ages should be priorities

As the town council moves toward developing its strategic plan — slowly, apparently — as the process that did get underway has not yet been approved — there is some concern about whether looking after our young people will be considered a priority.

And although they should be, the better attitude, as some politicians have pointed out, is that looking after everybody — youth, seniors and those in between — should be the priority. Developing a diverse, healthy and prosperous community should be the priority.

Before we lose our readers who think talk of a strategic plan is a snore — why should we care? — consider that every single report from town staff, every single decision made by this term of council in the coming years, is expected to be judged by the priorities councilors will set out in their strategic plan.

So a housing project that provides affordable housing, whether for seniors or youth or any other resident, could be high on the list of development projects to pass muster if affordable housing is deemed a priority.

And it should be — there are residents at both ends of the age spectrum who are being driven out of town because of the high cost of housing. Ditto commercial property and economic development projects that attract strong businesses and provide not only tax revenue but the kind of jobs that will keep young people in town permanently; not just those our teens will take as summer jobs to help them get through post-secondary education.

Politicians, parents, 30-somethings and teens weighed in this week with some interesting ideas about how to look after our young people, keep them in town and attract more young families.

Affordable housing is possibly the important factor, but not easily achieved. Other municipalities have found creative solutions, and if it’s a priority for NOTL, then those solutions have to be considered.

For example, the Town owns the former hospital property, and a chunk of the former high school. Could some thing decent yet affordable be provided there? It’s a conversation that needs to be had, and will be if the strategic plan drives it.

The same is true at the other end of the spectrum — seniors want and need downsized properties to be able to stay in town. They need a certain amount of transportation to retain their independence. These are factors that should drive municipal decisions.

Our young people are looking for something to occupy their time here in town, but there are fewer choices.

The idea of using the bandshell for concerts organized by young people worked in the past and could work again, with very little cost or effort on the part of the town.

Harder is providing other activities teens relish — going to a movie or to the mall.

Could the town supply a bus if the teens organized a day, time and destination? A bus that would take them straight to an outside mall with a movie theatre could be a regularly scheduled activity.

These are just ideas, and ideas should come from the kids themselves, not their decision-making adults will listen and act, and throw some resources their way to make it happen. It seems kids have been invisible in this town for too long — it’s time to show them they are valued.

We want them to grow into adults who want to live here, raise their families, and look back on NOTL as a pretty good place to live.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Local

The trusted voice of our community

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By Lauren O’Malley
The NOTL Local

Magic of seeds brings hope to dark month

Niagara Seedy Saturday beam ed a ray of hope into a season of “I can’t even-uary” last Saturday.

“The little event that could” brought hundreds of hopefuls to the Wellandport community centre to collect packets of seeds. Tiny seeds that will beget plants — which will, in turn, beget more seeds.

For those of us who grow our own food, this is perhaps the best moment of the year: when all is dreams and ideals, plots and seeds. Seeds are fact and metaphor, starting points, emblems of great growth.

Seeds of edible crops are even more magical: the thought that even four or five of these pinhead-sized things contain enough tomatoes to feed a family for at least one season, if not two or three. One or two summer squash seeds will feed a family and their neighbours and every stranger within hand-off reach — beware the zucchini-offender.

The main question most gardeners ponder is how to make their patch bigger and better. The second is why everyone doesn’t grow their own food. It’s a real head-scratcher. You could drive to the supermarket, choose the produce shipped from all over the world and increasingly over-packaged in non-renewable, unrecyclable wrapping, toss it all into single-use plastic bags and drive it back home — or you could wander out into a dewy summer morning and collect breakfast, lunch and dinner right off the plant.

There is a middle ground, of course, which would be something like cycling to the farmers market and filling your reusable bags with naturally-grown local produce. Awesome — but you know what’s even more fun? Exchanging growing information with farmers at the market, and going home to try their brilliant tips. There is no better for this than Rose Bartel, who is as happy to hear about your successful garden as she is to sell you her organic produce and flowers.

Another option is to purchase seedlings from local Amika Verstee gen, who starts all of her plants with Safe Seed Pledge-certified seeds, and grows them naturally in her basement, garage, and house. “We put them anywhere there is sun,” says the mother of three.

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Luxury of a private train stop

By Lauren O’Malley

This skeleton of a shelter sits just off the Upper Canada Heritage Trail between Charlotte Street and East and West Line. It was originally built as a private train stop for George Rand in the 1800s, says local historian Jim Smith.

The Upper Canada trail follows the former Erie & Ontario railway line.

According to Smith, Rand would take the train to Buffalo every day from this stop at the back of his property. Rand owned WGR (for “George Rand”) Radio in Buffalo, as well as the Randwood Estate in NOTL.

Thanks to Jim Reynolds and Jim Smith for the details regarding this local find.

Apologies for late delivery

Brian Minor, acting supervisor for the Queen Street post office, let us know on Monday that all four Niagara-on-the-Lake post offices closed last Wednesday due to ice and dangerous road conditions. It was a decision made for the safety of staff, he said. Although The Local was delivered to all NOTL post offices early last Wednesday morning, delivery got backed up, he said, and some Local papers were still being put in mail boxes Monday. He assured us that everyone would have their paper at the latest Tuesday morning.

He apologized for the inconvenience, and the NOTL Local also extends apologies to our readers and advertisers for the late delivery.

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How easy is it to be a vegan in NOTL?

By Alexcia Cofell
Youth Member of The Local Community Advisory Board

For those of us looking for a healthy diet, what does the Niagara-on-the-Lake food industry have in store for us?

The most popular diets for 2019 are the ketogenic, low-carb, high-fat diet; the paleo, focusing on whole ingredients, consuming no refined sugars, flours, oils or any grains, dairy, and legumes; and the vegan diet, which means no animal products.

Veganism has grown exponentially over the past few years, with vegan restaurants popping up left and right all over the world — however, what about NOTL?

Vegetarians and vegans now account for 10 per cent of the Canadian population, and veganism is expected to grow immensely in this year. Will NOTL restaurants be able to accommodate the vegan wave?

Canada's food guide has put a larger emphasis on plant-based proteins, and there is no question that veganism is set to rise in Canada. So what does this mean for the youth of NOTL? The majority of Canadian vegetarians and vegans are under the age of 35, meaning millennials are driving the trend, and there is a large demand for vegan restaurants and businesses in Niagara.

The nearest and only vegan restaurants within 30 minutes of town are located in St. Catharines. But there are many restaurants that are willing to accommodate vegans and incorporate vegan options into their menus.

“Created enough vegan stuff that also has that vegan flare to it,” says head chef Jeremy Clark Gilligan at the Virgil restaurant, Bricks & Barley. “I do have options for both vegans and vegetarians on the menu,” he says.

At Bricks & Barley there is a large selection of vegan dishes such as salads, appetizers, fries, the Beyond Meat Burger, and more. “We will try to do something like couscous and quinoa and start to work other things in,” for vegans who come into the restaurant, he said. The chef says it is still very well able to accommodate all different types of diets. “I always consider everybody.”

While the menu is not completely vegan, Gilligan says vegan “is always on the back of my mind.”

Like many adults, youth have the same sentiments towards veganism in Niagara. Although there are many vegan restaurants and bakeries in St. Catharines, I struggle to find vegan restaurants and businesses in NOTL,” says Katie Miller, a 17-year-old NOTL resident. Kyle Cofell, another NOTL youth, agrees: “We need vegan restaurants in NOTL.”

Although NOTL does not have any fully vegan restaurants, bakeries or cafes there are many restaurants that do offer vegan options such as Niagara’s Finest Thai where you have the ability to upgrade your meal to vegan; Play Urban Cafe, offering a fully vegan section to their menu including a healthy nut salad, a zen burger, and a nilly burger which includes a vegan take on “beef” strips.

Vegans of NOTL, including youth, are eager to see what may be in store for the future regarding veganism.
Book club has unusual focus
St. Mark’s Archives Committee is a ‘uniquely NOTL experience’

By Lauren O’Malley
The NOTL Local

Cryptograms. Remem-

bers these? Cracking that
code, figuring out what
the letter “A” represents in this
puzzle. Some members of
the archives committee at
St. Mark’s Anglican Church
are keen fans of this type of
brain teaser.

Since 2014, three schol-

ars-of-hands have spent
Tuesday mornings in the
Addison Library — “some
hours spent in pleasant
discussion,” says Don-
ald Combe — looking to
make the best sense of the
collection within. “The ar-
chives committee is a very
intriguing group of peo-
ple who gathered together
principally because we like
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‘This is the closest place to paradise’

Well-travelled family settling into NOTL, a carefully chosen permanent home

By Lauren O’Malley

The NOTL Local

On any given day, Niagra-on-the-Lake welcomes people from all over the world. In August of 2018, we opened our arms to a family from Belarus and Algeria, by way of Bahrain. Aksana Kavaliova-Moussi, her husband Lakhdar Moussi, and their eight-and-a-half-year-old daughter Elina proudly joined our community six months ago, choosing NOTL over Melbourne, Australia. “This is the closest place to paradise,” the family says.

They began to phone one another, and then began a relationship that has now lasted 19 years. “He invited me to move from Belarus to Bahrain,” she says. “That was it.”

While they hadn’t had much time to build a social network and settle into local life, Audrey Wright, their realtor, has become a good friend. “You have to be a bit of a psychologist to be a realtor,” says Kavaliova-Moussi, suggesting a point in common for the two women. She has joined the local newcomers club, but his working mother and student finds she has little time for the activities on offer, despite their seeming appeal.

Moussi finds himself working more than he anticipated, but looks forward to some down time soon for socializing. “As a newcomer you have to build up the social network — it takes time,” he says. “It’s not a hurdle, you just need to take the time. I will eventually integrate into society in a smooth manner. I’m not a drinker and I’m lazy. He laughs. “I might play golf — very slowly.”

One of the consultant’s dreams has been to become a pilot, so perhaps you’ll look up and see him one day.

In the meantime, Kavaliova-Moussi says, “NOTL is so unique in how close it is to nature — we drive to the lake-shore to map pictures because it is so beautiful. And Miss Eli- na needs her pizza every week from Bistro 61.”

Aksana Kavaliova-Moussi, Elina Moussi and Lakhdar Moussi. (Lauren O’Malley)

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Aksana Kavaliova-Moussi, Elina Moussi and Lakhdar Moussi. (Lauren O’Malley)
Lions helping to test kids for vision problems

Volunteers partner with public health to provide mandatory vision screening

By Penny Coles
The NOTL Local

Three simple little tests performed by Lions Club volunteers could be saving local youngsters from permanent blindness.

The Lions have formed a partnership with the Niagara public health department and since November have been going into Niagara schools to screen Senior Kindergarten students for vision problems. Their task is to make parents aware not only when there is an issue with a child who needs to be attended to by an optometrist, but equally important, to let them know comprehensive vision evaluations are covered by provincial health insurance and are important for young kids.

St. David’s Lions Bradd Anderson was at Crossroads Public School recently to carry out the vision screening tests with the help of a volunteer. Anderson tested about 50 children, and he found two whom the tests identified as having potential problems. Letters provided by the health department were sent home to notify their parents, and a second letter will be sent as a reminder.

“Lions have been wanting to do this for a long time,” said Anderson, “but we were frustrated — we couldn’t find the right door to open.”

A provincial mandate passed by the previous Liberal government to begin vision screening in schools opened that door, he said. All public health units in Ontario operate under provincial standards, and those standards were changed in January 2018 to include mandatory vision testing for Senior Kindergarten students, “within existing budgets,” said Christene deVlaming-Kot, the regional manager of school health.

With the screening legislated, the health department reached out to the local Lions, aware they wanted to help — vision and eye care is an important cause in international Lionism, and there are other municipalities in Ontario where clubs offer a similar service, working with school boards rather than public health departments, she said. In Niagara, the public health unit provides the administration of the program, while the Lions volunteers go into the schools.

“This has become a model for others to follow — the Niagara Health folks were the first to take this and run with it,” said Anderson.

The two public school boards and the French board are all included in the program, he said. There was a major investment in an optical camera, which 33

This has become a model for others to follow — the Niagara Health folks were the first to take this and run with it.

Bradd Anderson

volunteers from Niagara and Halondemand Norfolk clubs have been trained to use, along with learning how to administer the HOTV test (the one where letters get smaller with each line) and another Anderson refers to as the “Band dot” test which checks for colour vision.

Some kids are a little nervous, some very “non-chalant,” said Anderson, but as a volunteer, “I’m having so much fun doing this with children. The tests are absolutely non-threatening, the kids are very attuned to what we’re doing, and they are as patient with us as we are with them. I can’t say enough about how much I am getting out of this.”

And that’s in addition to obeying basic tenants of Lionism, one of which is a commitment made to Helen Keller to be “knights of the blind,” he said, and the other is living the Lions motto, “We serve.”

The enthusiasm of the Lions, and the experience of Lions clubs working with kids in other areas, were what convinced public health staff it made sense to collaborate, said deVlaming Kot.

The goal of the program is two-fold — to identify potential problems, and to take over and “rewire” to avoid the eye with the problem, she explained, and can cause blindness that is not reversible. It can be avoided if caught early — by the age of seven, it can be too late.

The program started out last fall as a pilot project, which saw children tested in 19 Niagara schools. It wrapped up in January, after the health department, through “close collaboration with the Lions,” worked some start-up snags out of the process, said Gloria Morris, manager of the public health dental program.

“The pilot project was to find a model that would work, with limited resources,” she said, “and to test the feasibility of moving forward with full implementation of the volunteer model.”

Each school visited “taught us something a little different and helped us refine the process.”

With the pilot project behind them, the hope is to visit 150 Niagara schools before the end of June.

Although the province has decided the program should be directed at SK students, it’s not because that’s the ideal age for testing, said Morris, who suggests it would be better to start screening with toddlers.

The Lions have targeted SK students because of their ability to cooperate, and the testing can get good results, she said.

The Niagara public health department, said Morris, was invited to present its model for vision screening in a workshop at the annual binar to other health units across the province as a template, although other health units have different ways to implement their programs.

“They won’t all look the same,” she said. Other units have staff carrying out the screening, or are working with other external partners.

“This model is working for us,” said deVlaming-Kot, “because we have such an extremely dedicated group of Lions volunteers. It’s their dedication and passion that is making this work. I’ve learned so much about the Lions, and their desire to help. We couldn’t do it without them.”

And, the Lions are helping to spread that all-important message, said Morris: “Take your child to an eye doctor.”
Take a seat, get fit

By Lauren O’Malley
The NOTL Local

Exercise doesn’t have to mean thumping beats, jumping around, and rivulets of sweat. At the Niagara-on-the-Lake community centre there are classes on offer designed for people who might have limited mobility, but still seek strength and flexibility.

Three classes in particular are done seated, yet still challenge and strengthen the body. Chair Fitness, Chair Yoga, and Laugh Yourself Healthy are all viable options for anyone who prefers their fitness from a seated standpoint. Whether you’re in a wheelchair, using walking aids, have had recent surgery, or perhaps have limiting arthritis or other joint pain, these classes can accommodate your needs and still get your heart rate up and your muscles working.

Sam Dith is a certified personal trainer. The bulk of his business is home visits, offering training sessions of all levels. But he found a demographic in NOTL of all levels. But he found it even while he was offering this class for four years now, and has a dedicated following. “We work on strength, flexibility, and balance,” says the certified yoga instructor. “But we also have guided relaxation and breathing exercises, and we finish with one minute of meditation. This is inclusive: we take care of your physical and mental health.”

Most of the class is done seated, with about 10 minutes of standing for balance work. Campbell says modifications can easily be made as needed for people unable to stand, but emphasizes the importance of balance improvement in an aging population, to minimize falls.

But, “this isn’t just for seniors,” says Campbell. “Anyone who sits in an office — if they took one minute to do a sequence, they would feel so much better.”

She says the class is slow, with an emphasis on deep breathing, and features very few repetitions, to minimize stress on joints and muscles. But lest it sound too serious, she also points out, “We laugh, we have fun. People know each other, and new people feel welcomed.”

Chair Yoga classes are $10 per drop-in, or $8 per if you sign up for an eight-week session. More information can be found on Campbell’s website, at http://trueheartniagara.ca/, or by calling her at 289-479-0949.

And now for something completely different: Carolyn Shannon’s Laugh Yourself Healthy classes are a unique and effective form of seated exercise, centred around laughter.

“Chair Yoga is also available, on Tuesday afternoons from 1 to 2 p.m. Sophie Campbell has been offering this class for four years now, and has a dedicated following. “We work on strength, flexibility, and balance,” says the certiﬁed yoga instructor. “But we also have guided relaxation and breathing exercises, and we finish with one minute of meditation. This is inclusive: we take care of your physical and mental health.”

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Family Day is all about, well, hanging out with family

Museum and fort open Family Day, as is outdoor rink at Fort George

By Lauren O’Malley
The NOTL Local

The aptly named Family Day is just that: a time set aside to devote yourself to your immediate, beloved kin. Unlike some holidays, this one doesn’t force you to spend time with distant relatives and set you up for disagreements with uncles and in-laws. Instead, the third Monday of February (or Fed-up-uary) is cuddle-with-the-kids time, or bust-out-the-board-game time.

In fact, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, many of the amenities we associate with kids and family — the library, for example — are closed. Presumably so staff can also indulge in dedicated family time.

The Historical Society and Museum is open — and offering free entry for the whole month of February — so if you want to get your history on, that’s the place. Staying in the historical groove, Fort George is open and featuring tours and musket demonstrations, and, as usual, entry is free for youths 17 and under.

The outdoor Vintage-Parks Canada ice rink at Fort George is also open, and is offering music, concessions, skate rentals, crafts, face painting, and games from Niagara Inflatables.

Some local parents suggest their ideas for a meaningful Family Day: Meredith Raso, mother of four kids between the ages of 8 and 13, plans to extend the holiday through the weekend, including the PA day on Friday. She says, “Friday we will be having breakfast with friends along with skating at Fort George (weather permitting). We’ll make a trip to see family in London, and have dinner Sunday night with friends. Monday, a walk into town with family over for dinner. Just a weekend of spending time with friends and family.”

Amika Versteegen, mother of three young children, has some ideas from the past, and for the near future. “We went to the Welland Canal museum a couple of times as admission is by donation on Family Day, and they have had a lot of fun activities. We once had a Victorian-era style tea party where everyone could bring their teddy or doll. This year we are hosting a family fun craft program over at the Allanburg community centre in the Small Scale Farms food kitchen. We will be making garden-friendly bug puppets, planting seeds and we will host a live puppet show where kids in the audience can use their bug friend as part of our show. My girls wrote most of the story/play about three friendly fairies getting into all sorts of adventures. Also thinking of squeezing in a walk with the rest of the family — out in nature no matter what the temperature is the best time to spend together.”

Coun. Clare Cameron, who doubles as a local resident and parent, shares her plans for a loving weekend. “We are planning a dinner party at home with friends and the kids on Sunday, and hoping for snow so we can take Harold out for a ride in his sled along the Parkway on Monday. If there’s no snow, we will go for a skate at the Fort George rink. Looking forward to spending time together.”

Suggestions from local tweens included lots of hot cocoa, board games, movies, and baking, all done en famille.

Happy Family Day from our families to yours.

Species at Risk

Interested in learning more about the multispecies action plan for Niagara National Historic Sites (NNHS)? Join us for a field visit to NNHS properties and/or a public open house to discover more about species at risk in the Niagara region.

Field Visit
Tuesday, February 26, 2019.
1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Meet at Navy Hall, 305 Ricardo St, Niagara-on-the-Lake
Pre-registration required, please call: 905-468-6602.

Public Open House
Navy Hall, 305 Ricardo St, Niagara-on-the-Lake
Tuesday, February 26, 2019.
7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
For more information
parkscanada.gc.ca/fortgeorge • ont-niagara@pc.gc.ca • 905-468-6602
It takes a neighbourhood to build a home

Kathy and Jan Goulding with their prized evergreen and birch trees. (Lauren O’Malley)

By Lauren O’Malley

The NOTL Local

Building a house by com-
mitee is not generally a very popular way to go. But when Kathy and Jan Goulding started work on their Char-
lotte Street home, a commit-
tee of neighbours appeared and offered “suggestions.”

The first thing the Toronto-transplants wanted was that they must preserve the weep-
ing cherry tree at the front of the lot. Several neighbours offered photos of the tree in full bloom, and cautioned the couple to design around it.

“We started getting the impression this weeping cherry tree was something special,” says Kathy. “It had been used by an art teacher as a subject for a class. People tell us it is the most beautiful tree in the lot. Several neighbours appeared offering photos of the tree in bloom, and wanted to know if they must preserve the weeping cherry tree at the front of the house. Several neighbours offered photos of the tree in full bloom, and cautioned the couple to design around it.

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“At a point where our feelings were,” recalls Kathy, “I asked if he could save the bush. He said they weren’t equipped for landscaping, but that he would try. He scooped a big hole with the excavator in the front, and scooped the bush into the hole. It’s not in the most appropriate spot, but hopefully it has been saved.”

Kathy has also dug up and replanted black-eyed Susans, and saved hydrangeas and rose bushes—“They tell the stories of the people who have lived here before,” she says.

“The Gouldings have been renting nearby properties so as to be able to be on-site as much as possible, which has also led the very gracious couple to get to know their new surroundings and those who inhabit them. “We’ve met a lot of people,” says Jan, who confesses he will talk to pretty much anyone who wants to chat.

The original design for the site was a very mod-
ern, two-storey project. “We’re prototypers,” says Jan Goulding, who built a model of a single storey house. “We wanted to build a house without alien-
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ing new community,” he says.
St. Michael Catholic elementary students from Grades 5 and 7 presented their science fair projects recently. The students worked for months on their presentations, and had to be prepared to share their research and findings with their peers, and any parents and teachers who passed through the gymnasium. Some students from each grade were moved on to the next level, and will compete regionally, potentially provincially, and even nationally. (Photos by Lauren O’Malley, text supplied by St. Michael)

Ava Randall did her science project on how vision affects balance in ballet. She chose this project because she does ballet and wanted to know how a blind person would perform. She discovered balance is made up of four systems that all work together and if you lose one of those systems it will throw off your balance.

Juliet Pillitteri studied how to make a rocketship out of a pop bottle, some baking soda, vinegar, duct tape and pencils. Her experiment was to determine the best mix of vinegar and baking soda for the optimum launch.

Logan Smyth and Samuel Van Egmond did their experiment on whether gum would make them less dumb. They chose this project because they wanted to see if chewing gum would improve their test scores and or test time. They also would really like gum to be permitted in school. They discovered that gum does improve your test scores but showed the test took longer.

Kalan Hillis did his project on making a solar panel from household items. He chose this experiment because he is very interested in solar energy and how it’s free. He learned about grid living, houses and communities living just by solar power, and that you can make a solar panel at home.

Ethan Dulas and Connor Mori try to find the perfect cupcake recipe. Did they do it?

What happens when you talk to plants? Cal Wilkins found out.

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Third Wednesday of Every Month

20% off*

*Regular-priced merchandise only. Excludes prescriptions, Philips Sonicare & Muse products, special orders and codeine products. Applicable to 60 and over.

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Museum offers free admission this month

Niagara Historical Museum will open Monday for Family Day, with 1812 period clothing for kids who want to play dress-up

By Lauren O’Malley
The NOTL Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Historical Society and Museum has launched an effort to brighten up this dreary month.

Entrance to the local museum — the first purpose-built museum in Ontario, in our midst since 1907 — is free for the shortest month of the year. Which might get you there sooner.

The current featured exhibit, Painting Niagara-on-the-Lake, shines a spotlight on contemporary and historical paintings depicting our town’s landscape and built heritage. It features rare and never-before exhibited works of local painters such as Betty Lane, Captain John Shawe, Margaret Peake-Benton, RJR Pottery and others. Lane’s son has donated 16 paintings to the museum’s collection, and other works by the painter have been brought in from private collections. Lane lived and painted in NOTL throughout much of the 20th century.

This exhibition runs until May 4.

The museum’s regular exhibits are also accessible, including the opportunity to try on period clothing and accessories.

Family Day, Feb. 18, the museum is ready to receive with open arms and plenty to amuse and enlighten family members of all ages.

On Feb. 25 the museum’s monthly Community Days series continues, with the Famous and Infamous series. “This is a real community-driven program,” says the museum’s acting managing director Amy Klassen. “The series was developed by local residents and is organized and promoted through its participants. As a community institution, we love to see our members and the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake using the Museum for this kind of programming.”

This month’s featured “famous and infamous” personage is the Shah of Iran (Part 2). Residents will discuss and learn about his life and times.

The Famous and Infamous events typically take place on the fourth Monday of each month, and are free to residents.

For more information about the museum, exhibits, free entry and events, visit niagarahistorical.museum or call 905-468-3912. The museum is located at 43 Castleridge Street, and is open daily from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Oscar Peterson jazz festival this weekend

Staff
The NOTL Local

The second annual Oscar Peterson International Jazz Festival, with artistic director Renee Rosnes at the helm, will feature top jazz artists from both Canada and the U.S. in collaborative performances, some of them here in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The festival begins Friday, with six concerts spread over the weekend, including a gala to wrap it up Sunday evening.

Friday's 8 p.m. concert features the Juno award-winning Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra, with trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, performing at St. Mark's Church.

Christine is a force in Canadian music, both a major voice on the saxophone and a lauded composer. JazzTimes had this to say about her: “Jensen's formidable orchestra is the glistening sunlight, the tranquility and force of the ocean, and the majestic trees that her music imagines.”

The concert is expected to be an evening of pure Canadian jazz that will spotlight Christine’s sister, Ingrid, who is also an inventive and prolific talent. The band is brimming with Canadian jazz stars: guitarist Lorne Lofsky, saxophonists Joel Miller, Perry White and Kelly Jefferson, among others, will perform.

A highlight of the evening is sure to be the world premiere of Christine Jensen's composition in tribute to Oscar Peterson, Something In His Smile, commissioned by the Oscar Peterson International Jazz Festival.

Saturday afternoon the festival moves to the Cairns Recital Hall in the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre on St. Paul Street in St. Catharines, where a lecture and performance will be delivered by Bill Charlap: “George Gershwin, the Blues and the American Soul.”

Charlap, an acclaimed Grammy award-winning pianist, is also an educator and story-teller who will discuss and demonstrate the important influence of jazz and the blues in Gershwin’s music.

Saturday evening’s concert, at 8 p.m. in the Partridge Hall of the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, is Singin’ and Swingin’: A Jazz Summit, featuring Joe Lovano, Jeremy Pelt, Niki Haris, Renee Rosnes, Russell Malone, Peter Washington and Lewis Nash.

Sunday, the festival moves to Stratus Vineyards with Music with No Borders at 1 p.m. featuring Kenny Barron, Kirk MacDonald, Reg Schwager, Neil Swainson and Lewis Nash, showcasing top musicians from Canada and the U.S.

The festival wraps up Sunday with the Canadian Jazz Master Awards Gala Dinner, again at Stratus, at 6:30 p.m.

Under the auspices of the Oscar Peterson International Jazz Festival, the annual Canadian Jazz Master Awards was founded to honour Canadian jazz musicians of the highest artistic excellence who are deserving of national recognition. Each year two awards are presented, to one living and one past legend of Canadian jazz.

The 2019 Canadian Jazz Master Awards will be presented to clarinetist, composer, and educator Phil Nimmons and to the family of influential trumpeter and composer Kenny Wheeler.

“I couldn’t be more excited about this 2019 lineup of the Oscar Peterson International Jazz Festival,” said artistic director Renee Rosnes in a press release about the festival. “Every concert will be filled with unforgettable performances by some of the greatest jazz musicians alive today.”

This year’s Festival includes Butaro Six One, The Cannery at the Pillar & Post, Noble at the Prince of Wales, Hobnob Restaurant & Wine Bar, LIV Restaurant at White Oaks Resort & Spa, Masala Sushi, Niagara’s Finest Thai, Fuller Estates Winery Restaurant, Renee Vineyard Estate Winery, Restaurant Oban Inn, Tiara Restaurant at Queen’s Landing, Bistro Winery Restaurant, and Zees Grill.

For more information or tickets visit https://www.opjazzfestival.org/about/

Fabulicious a week-long dining event for locals

Staff
The NOTL Local

Get set to enjoy a week of Fabulicious, an invitation for locals to visit some of Niagara-on-the-Lake’s best restaurants and enjoy special menus and prices.

The annual event, organized by the NOTL Chamber of Commerce and the Signature Kitchen group of chefs, runs from Feb. 21 to 28.

Thirteen local restaurants will offer lunch, dinner or both, with a fixed price menu that allows for some flexibility, said Janice Thomson, chamber president.

“Fabulicious is always a week in February, organized really to give locals a chance to go to what we call ‘special occasion’ restaurants. Our chefs put great effort into building special menus for locals to enjoy as we head into spring.”

This year there has been a slight change to the menus, based on public feedback, she said. Instead of all restaurants offering three-course meals, some have bunched their prices on two courses, with dinners given the choice of an appetizer or dessert in addition to the entree.

“This has allowed for some built-in flexibility, while keeping prices low,” said Thomson.

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For more information and menus visit https://www.niagarao nthelake.com/fabulicious.

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For more information and menus visit https://www.niagarao nthelake.com/fabulicious.
Bottoms up for Friends of Fort George

By Lauren O’Malley
The NOTL Local

“Whisky was the first drink I was stealing from my parents liquor cabinet,” says Chris Thompson with Northern Whisky Distillery. That early passion has led him to his dream job, brand ambassador for Forty Creek Distilleries, maker of fine whiskies.

When the Friends of Fort George decided to host a whisky tasting, they knew exactly who to involve.

Last year was the first annual whisky tasting fundraiser for the Friends, and it’s now coming up on time for the second. On Feb. 22, Navy Hall will return to its roots as a mess hall for rowdy soldiers — or locals. The fire will be lit, says Petra Browning, to give the hall a cozy and historic feeling. The executive director of the Friends of Fort George says, “Soldiers would have done a lot of drinking at Navy Hall, so it’s a nice connection.” She goes on to point out just how prominently alcohol was mentioned in the men-at-arms, which is evidenced by the many — many — mentions of brandy in the detailed mess rules. Vis faç number 14: “No Gentleman during Mess time, is to read Books, Letters etc. without leave of the President — a Bottle of Wine to be paid for every day.”

So whisky and Navy Hall and fundraising for the Fort are a perfect fit — just like Thompson at Forty Creek. “My next door neighbour introduced me to Forty Creek whisky. He said, ‘They’re just down the road in Grimsby.’ A year after I lived there, I started drinking Forty Creek whisky. There will be seven samples in total, each with its own unique story. ‘I’ll get up and talk for five to 10 minutes about each varietal — the Wend backgrounds behind each one,’ says the professional entertainer. ‘I’ll do a little bit of a deep dive, depending on how nerdy the group is and how much detail they want. How this whisky came to be, the trials and tribulations of each type. All of the whiskies are very different.’

He promises the night will be “a real eye-opener, especially for people who don’t necessarily appreciate whisky.” He says there will be a bit of education, and a lot of fun.

Thompson will guide guests through a structured night of sampling and food pairing, along with “good storytelling.”

Forty Creek Distilleries is donating all of the alcohol, as well as Thompson’s time. Tickets are $45 for this Friends of Fort George fundraiser. Proceeds go toward supporting student employment at the fort. “We are hoping to continue supporting Niagara’s youth with meaningful summer employment, and events like this allow us to raise much-needed funds to cover wages,” says Tony Chisholm, president of the Friends of Fort George.

For more information or for reservations, call the Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621 or email admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca.

Illustration of an 1812-era mess hall, and perhaps a taste of things to come. (Image supplied)

Choices ahead for Virgil building and its owner

Petra Browning is looking for tenants, and enjoying spending more time with kids

By Penny Coles
The NOTL Local

After almost 70 years of service, Lincoln Interiors doors have closed for the last time.

The store on Niagara Stone Road was a favourite stop for its quality fabric fixtures for those driving through Virgil, is completely empty.

Owner Petra Browning has hung on to a few bits and bobs in the back office, although most of the office furniture has also been sold, but she’s still doing a bit of cleaning up after biggest sale in the 70-year history of Lincoln Interiors.

For a while, she worried she’d never see the end of it all, but she did.

In 1957, Siegfried Wiens, her father, was a salesman at Lincoln Interiors, a small business he owned himself, then by Henry Wiens — not a relative, and later owner of the Prince of Wales Hotel. Siegfried’s brother-in-law, Henry Esau, was an upholsterer there.

Virgil was a close-knit community, long a family business in Virgil owned by friends and relatives, and later owner of the Prince of Wales Hotel. Siegfried’s brother-in-law, Henry Esau, was an upholsterer there.

Virgil was a close-knit village, where people were friendly and related to each other, and local families owned the small businesses, says Browning.

When a fire closed down the store for a year in 1962, Siegfried took the opportunity to travel to Germany. It was there he met and later married Helga. A year later, back in Virgil, Siegfried decided to open his own business, and launched Peninsula Upholstering (now Peninsula Flooring). Helga was soon a busy part of the business, learning to sew and upholster as well as managing the business office.

Owners at that time carried out every aspect of the business themselves. Browning says, so Helga remembers cleaning and washing windows as part of her duties. When Siegfried was the salesman, he helped by stripping furniture and filling cupboards. They both worked long hours and it was hard work, Browning says — and it was soon to become easier.

In 1978, Siegfried and Helga purchased Lincoln Interiors. The upholstery end of Peninsula became part of Lincoln shortly after, and Peninsula turned to specializing in flooring, as it does today.

There were many growth spurts in Lincoln Interiors. Browning says, as her father sought fabrics and furnishings for the markets. And there were some frantic moments, too.

In 1980, lightning caused a fire at the Irvine Road warehouse, and a lot of fabrics and materials were lost.

The ‘80s were years of considerable change, says Browning.

A growing interest in making one’s home beauti- ful, comfortable and easy to live in has been the prime concern of Browning, she says. Meanwhile, the best upholsterers and seamstresses who became experts in their field.

As did her parents, she has seen many changes, especially in the workplace. She remembers furniture sales being a male-dominat- ed industry when she first became involved. Managers and sales reps were all men, and she had to learn to stand up for themselves. But it turned around — in later years there were a lot more women on the sales floor, and many businesses are run by women now, she added. Commonly owned companies also mostly women, making up to 90 per cent of the purchases. There is no more furniture left in the store to buy, no more purchases to be made. She hoped to be closed by the end of the year, but that took much extra time to truly get rid of everything, and the doors of the empty store were closed for the last time at the end of January.

To those who ask “what next,” Browning doesn’t have a complete answer.

She looks around the large, empty store and says she has had enquiries from prospective buyers, but it’s a big space, and she envisions dividing it up and renting it out to more than one business. She’s waiting to see who wants what part of it before making plans for renovation — she will do the work to suit future needs, she said.

Meanwhile, she’s unsure of what is next for her, she said, and not in a hurry to decide. “I’m not in any rush. I will work again, but my kids are still young.”

Her aging parents need care, and as a single mom who lost her husband four years ago to cancer, she said, “I’m on my own now, and I’m really looking forward to having more time to spend with my kids. They need me now.”

The ‘for lease’ sign is in the window, and anyone interested in renting some or all of the space can contact her at 905-213-6679.
**CROSSWORD PUZZLE**

**ACROSS**
1. Opposite of neither 11. Gentry
2. Porez 12. Pink
3. ‘Four and twenty blackbirds baked in — ’ 13. Life
4. On the ocean 14. 2 or 3 days a week
5. Publish 15. Compulsive
7. Via 17. Knucklehead
8. Serviced 18. Newspaper
9. (between Ontario Street & South Service Road) 19. Pole
10. Scott Street West, St. Catharines 20. Root
21. No Pressure ... Just Your Wishes 22. Pole
23. Up 24. Pulls
26. Cotton Club setting 27. Via
28. Drip slowly 29. Via
30. Knucklehead 31. Hunted
32. Light metal 33. Single-masted sailboat
34. German state 35. Comic --- Martin
36. Comic --- Martin (Dickens: “Martin Chuzzlewit”) 37. Comic --- Martin
38. Duration 39. Suspension
40. First to die in the Bible 41. Pulls
42. Duration 43. Suspension
44. First to die in the Bible 45. Pulls
46. First to die in the Bible 47. Pulls
48. First to die in the Bible 49. Pulls
50. First to die in the Bible 51. Pulls
52. First to die in the Bible 53. Pulls
54. First to die in the Bible 55. Pulls
56. First to die in the Bible 57. Pulls
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62. First to die in the Bible 63. Pulls
64. First to die in the Bible 65. Pulls
66. First to die in the Bible 67. Pulls
68. First to die in the Bible 69. Pulls
70. First to die in the Bible 71. Pulls
72. First to die in the Bible 73. Pulls

**DOWN**
1. Tub 1. Custom Made
2. Workplace regulation agency 2. Spanish
3. English bulldog 3. Spanish
4. Pits 4. Spanish
5. Ingestive sales devices 5. Spanish
7. Expression of incertitude 7. Spanish
8. Scrap 8. Spanish
10. Patched 10. Spanish
15. Touchdown forecasts 15. Spanish

**PUZZLE ANSWERS**
Peewee Wolves defeat Lincoln Blades

The peewee Wolves of the NOTL Minor Hockey League beat the Lincoln Blades 6-1 at the Meridian Credit Union Arena Saturday. (Fred Mercnik)

Practise makes perfect sense

Girls aged 9 to 13 practise at the Centennial Arena Saturday afternoon during all-female ice time organized by the NOTL Minor Hockey League. The skills development program is the only opportunity for the girls to be on the ice themselves. (Fred Mercnik)
The Niagara-on-the-Lake Nationals lost 2 of 3 games heading into playoffs.

By Penny Coles
The NOTL Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Nationals won at home 5-4 against Tottenham Friday, but couldn’t keep the momentum going over the weekend.

The win was followed by a 5-4 loss Saturday in overtime against the same team on their turf. Next came an 8-6 loss at home Sunday to Tillsonburg, the second-place team in the division, says coach Spencer De Wolfe.

Aiding in Friday’s win were Bailey Pritchard with a goal and two assists, and Jake Anderson with two goals.

Saturday Caleb Mussat earned a hat trick, but the key factor in the weekend’s two losses was an “undisciplined” team, said De Wolfe.

Sunday’s home game saw Antoine Michaud earn two goals and two assists.

“We came out and played hard for the first 40 minutes,” said De Wolfe, followed by “a third period collapse against a highly skilled team.”

The Nationals play at home Friday, Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. against the Niagara Whalers for their last regular season game, before the start of playoffs in their division.

The local team of the Greater Metro Hockey League will finish 5th and play the Kingsville Kings in the first round, said De Wolfe.