



Laura Secord musical features NOTL teens

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Mwamba Mtonga-Clare and Grant Clare share their wedding photo, taken with marriage officiant Steffanie Bjorgan. They were married in 2021 during COVID, at a family member's farm in Stevensville. (Supplied)

'Every day is Valentine's Day'

Sharon Burns
The Local

Grant Clare and Mwamba Mtonga-Clare met online during the civic holiday weekend in 2018, and both affirm that for them, good communication is fundamental to a strong relationship.

"Communication is always a massive thing with any relationship," said Clare. "Open communication, honest communication. Communication that honestly explains our true feelings," added Mtonga-Clare. "I'm going to be honest with him, and I think that just leads to happiness."

Their first date was in a Port Dalhousie restaurant and "we just kind of hit it off from there," said Grant.

They were married by officiant Steffanie Bjorgan on July 3, 2021, during COVID, at a family member's farm in Stevensville.

"There was a lockdown right around that period. It had just finished and we set up our wedding in about 16 days," explained Clare.

The officiant they had originally booked for the wedding canceled at the last minute, and that is when the couple were surprised to learn that Bjorgan, their friend and distant family member, was an officiant.

"I've known her for a lot of years," said Grant, "but I was actually kind of surprised. She's pretty flexible at being able to compartmentalize herself."

She is "an extremely warm and almost carefree kind of personality. But she is also quite focused. I think we got in touch with her about a week before the wedding, maybe slightly before that, and she was like immediately, 'yep. Got it. No problem. Sure, we'll

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There's more than one way to be married

Sharon Burns
The Local

This Valentine's Day, there may be local lovers celebrating it with a proposal, so The Local interviewed three officiants to get their take on the business of love.

Steffanie Bjorgan, perhaps better known for her role in founding Red Roof Retreat, has been an officiant since 2019. Musician Rob Burke is also an officiant, as is Cathy Davis, founder of a Niagara business offering the services of nearly 25 people licensed to

perform wedding ceremonies.

An officiant's duty is to lead the ceremony, religious or secular, but much more is involved. They must meet several times with the couple, and can help to write the script, or vows. They also fill out the legal paperwork, file it, and make sure the newlyweds receive their marriage certificate.

Relationship-building seems to be the most important part of the job, all three officiants interviewed by The Local agreed.

For Bjorgan, getting to

know the couple is the most rewarding part. She asks them to fill out an interview form first, then meets with them "because I don't want to marry someone that I haven't spent time with."

"I love doing the interviews and getting the tidbits of information from them," she said. Bjorgan interviews the couple separately and together, "so they don't know the questions, and I love to see what they come up with." A common question she asks is when they knew the other was 'the one.'

"Sometimes they'll give me two totally different scenarios, or they'll look at each other like, I don't know, I never thought about that," laughed Bjorgan.

"I ask them to tell me their story: how they met, what are the pivotal moments in their relationship, what are their goals, hopes, dreams, and then I write a story. It's almost like being an emcee," she said.

After much input from the couple, "I finally get to deliver the script and I get to see these people transform, and then they're actually coming

down the aisle at me."

Bjorgan is officially a reverend, having completed the marriage and celebration of life courses at the Bancroft Spiritual Centre. She has performed 19 weddings so far and has eight more booked for this year.

She decided to pursue this path "on a whim" to surprise the family and friends of a couple she knows well, and, in secret, was asked by the couple to preside over their ceremony a few years ago.

"It's great to be part of such a huge milestone in people's

lives. It's pretty monumental," she said.

Bjorgan said she doesn't get nervous in this role because she feels as though she knows the couple, has a script, and sometimes the only coaxing she has to do is to encourage the bride or groom to "keep an eye on me and just breathe."

The same is true for Burke, who first became interested in officiating while attending a wedding. He tells the couple that he "is their rock," during

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Tawny Ridge closed session leaves residents with questions

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

The Tawny Ridge subdivision in St. Davids, proposed to build up to 74 homes, has been limited by council to just 12 in a first phase. But a closed session of council a week later has critics of the project wondering if the grand plans for the subdivision may still be approved.

At a Jan. 30 council meeting, a total of four votes were taken related to zoning bylaw and Official Plan amendments requested for the first and second phases of the development.

One of the key votes was to rezone the property to permit the development of a subdivision with just 12 lots for single-detached homes on Tanbark Road, as part of the first phase. This was approved, although Couns. Gary Burroughs and Sandra O'Connor voted against it.

In favour were Couns. Tim Balasiuk, Wendy Cheropita, Maria Mavridis, Adriana Vizzari and Nick Ruller. Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens, who participated in portions of the meeting virtually, were not present for

the vote.

A consideration to rezone the property to 20 lots for single-detached homes and 54 townhouses between Warner Avenue and Tanbark Road was shot down by council. Against this part of the plan were Couns. Balasiuk, Burroughs, O'Connor and Vizzari.

The result allows only a low-density development, not 74 homes.

But residents of St. Davids, including Bill Krahn, remain unsatisfied by that decision, with concerns about traffic, storm sewer capacity and lot sizes. Krahn said he also believes the dozens of homes proposed as phase two will eventually go through, and that council's decision has only put a pause on those plans until the developer revises the proposal and comes back to the town with an updated application.

Also complicating the situation is a motion by Coun. Adriana Vizzari at a Jan. 16 committee-of-the-whole meeting where some recommendations were made, including aligning roads in both phases to allow for a pedestrian crosswalk.

Council and staff met behind closed doors last Tuesday to receive legal advice

related to decisions made on the Tawny Road applications, then in public gave direction to staff that included suspending requirements to its procedural bylaw to allow the amending bylaws to be re-introduced.

Residents have said they fear the town may be opening the possibility of the plans for phase two still being approved.

The town also amended its zoning bylaw related to phase two and applied a holding provision on the property that restricts the land use until the requirements of the holding symbol have been met. In this case, the town has applied it to require a stormwater management strategy be addressed to the satisfaction of the town and prior to the final approval of the draft plan of subdivision.

St. Davids resident Gienek Ksiazkiewicz believes council's changes following the recent closed session have put the project back on track for 74 homes. He is outspoken in his opinion that council "surreptitiously" voted for the amendment that would allow the high-density project to move ahead after all — with meetings and votes held in private, it's impossible for residents to

know what's happening, he says.

The Local sent questions to town staff Friday asking for clarification about what the next potential steps for phase two could be as a result of the direction given to staff

following last week's closed session discussion, but answers were not provided by press time Tuesday.

Chamber of Commerce preparing for April eclipse

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

It's expected to last only about three minutes — but will be a major draw for local businesses and hotels, says Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake president Minerva Ward.

On April 8, Niagara will welcome an influx of visitors looking for an ideal spot to take in the solar eclipse, as the region is said to be one of the best places in Canada to experience the rare natural phenomenon. Experts are referring to Niagara as a location where viewers will witness it in totality.

The last total eclipse in North America was in 2017, and the next one won't occur until 2044.

said the day of the eclipse, Monday, April 8, and the weekend leading up to it, will be much busier than what is typically seen in town.

All the hotels will be sold out and it will be a beneficial time for restaurants, wineries and retail stores to take advantage of the guests who are planning to come to town.

"I'm anticipating the town will be full, and it will create opportunities for businesses to get people in their door," she said in an interview with The Local.

Ward said the tourism organization doesn't need to advertise outside the region that the eclipse is taking place and that this area will be one of the best to experience it because people already know.

"We don't need to market. They're already coming," she said.

NOTL Tourism's task will be sharing information about what is being offered for those who are coming, she added.

An event that has already been confirmed is one at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery, hosted by Grape Escape wine tours. "I suspect that a lot of busi-

nesses, right now, are planning for events," she said, adding that a call went out about two weeks ago asking what everyone has in mind.

It is anticipated that the Niagara region will see the arrival of millions of people as the path of totality will be directly over part of the peninsula, says the staff report by fire chief Jay Plato on Tuesday's agenda.


Regular regional meetings are taking place discussing measures each municipality is considering to maintain regular essential services, such as emergency services, said Plato. The town is represented in these meetings to learn of local events and make appropriate decisions about maintaining its essential services on the days leading up to, during and following the eclipse.

His report says town communications staff are actively participating in various eclipse preparedness efforts, including attending regular meetings with other communications teams from Niagara municipalities.

It was unknown at press time whether there was any discussion about the issue at Tuesday night's meeting.

District School Board of Niagara and Niagara Catholic District School Board have both declared the day of the eclipse a PA Day.


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Town to choose parking machine vendor soon

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

Coun. Gary Burroughs says he is “determined” to get new parking meters, approved in the 2024 budget, in use in time for the upcoming tourist season.

During a Feb. 6 special council meeting, when council was rubber stamping its capital budget plan, the councillor asked staff for an update on the timing of the new machines, which come at a cost of \$400,000.

Thirty of 57 machines in the

Old Town are expected to be replaced using a phased-in approach, the town said.

Fielding questions from Burroughs last week, treasurer Kyle Freeborn said the Request for Proposal process will close Feb. 15 and that a successful bidder will be chosen after that.

“We would be working with the successful proponent to develop that timeline,” he said.

Parking in the heritage district has been an ongoing topic since most of the meters in the area stopped accepting credit cards in early 2023, and began only taking coins or payment through the HonkMobile app.

A report to council on June 27, 2023, says the town’s current parking machines stopped accepting credit cards earlier in the year due to aging infrastructure and new credit card payment protocols. The town’s machines, installed about 10 years ago, only have magnetic stripe readers, while newer payment protocols require chip readers and pin pads to authorize transactions.

In October, Freeborn said it could be well into 2024 before any meters are available for purchase, citing supply chain issues as a major factor.

But last week, Burroughs

asked if the new machines could be up and running by this summer.

“That would be the intention, yes,” said Freeborn.

Burroughs said he hopes this is true, and that previous outlooks that it may not be until 2025 that machines are installed are no longer the case.

He said machines that simply accept credit cards should be explored.

“My concern is we’re about to get into another summer and we still have parking machines that don’t work,” said Burroughs in an interview with The Local.

He said during last month’s

Icewine Festival that there was confusion with the current machines, and people being unable to use them.

He said this causes “frustration from those who are trying to do the right thing” by paying and not simply walking away and taking the risk of a fine.

According to staff last year, the current parking machine vendor provided little notice to the town about a discontinuation of the necessary hardware.

The report says the municipality investigated updating the current system with its parking machine vendor, but the vendor was “unable to update the exist-

ing parking machine equipment as they had exited this sector of the business.”

The lack of notice provided by the vendor gave the town “no time to replace the machines before the machines ceased to work for credit card payments,” reads the report to council last year.

In a statement Tuesday, town spokesperson Marah Minor said vendors have indicated they could have up to 15 machines “ready to go” by this summer, with a second batch ready at a later date.

“Once the vendor is selected, staff will know more about installation dates,” said Minor.

Councillor wants audiovisual equipment in budget

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

An expenditure Coun. Gary Burroughs believes the town should be exploring didn’t make its way into the 2024 capital budget before it was approved last week, but he says he isn’t giving up.

Burroughs has raised an issue about the Anderson Lane community centre in the past, saying it should be equipped with screens and proper audio equipment to accommodate public meetings and contentious council issues that draw large crowds.

He brought it up again last week when council was having its final deliberations on its \$10.2 million capital spending

plan, and was advised he would need to recommend something that should be taken out of the budget to make room for the community centre.

That didn’t happen, and now Burroughs will need a two-thirds majority from his colleagues on council to remove one expenditure to make way for the cost associated with technological upgrades to the centre, which in the past has held large meetings.

“There are a couple of places I’m going to look,” he said, regarding what could potentially be removed as part of his pitch to the rest of council.

“My approach is going to have to be more complicated,” he added, referring to the two-thirds of council needed to support his plan.

The community centre could be better used for council meetings, elections, as well as private functions where members of the community rent the space if screens and audio equipment are installed.

“We’ve got a great facility with no equipment,” he said, adding that all that exists there now is a projector that is cast on a wall.

Some councillors may not be onboard with his idea, he fears, because a large turnout to meetings usually means a great percentage of those in attendance are individuals who plan to criticize the town and councillors about their decisions.

“We’re all elected by the residents, and we should be listening to them, and it should be convenient for them,” he said.

In October, a report was

provided by staff to outline what would be required if a meeting were to be relocated to the community centre from the council chambers.

The report says one meet-

ing at the community centre would cost about \$5,000 if an outside firm is brought in.

It would also result in more than \$1,400 of staff overtime, plus a rental fee of the centre of

more than \$400.

During that time, Burroughs argued that the town should look at investing in its own equipment, which he told The Local “is not that expensive.”



The town, expecting a bigger crowd than the council chamber could accommodate, held a meeting to discuss the Randwood Estate heritage attributes at the community centre last April, but there were issues with the sound. (Mike Balsom)

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Museum an important preserver of Niagara's Black history

Mike Balsom
The Local

With the role that Newark, the original name for Niagara-on-the-Lake, played as the first capital of Upper Canada, it is a given that much of the country's early Black history revolved around this town.

The Local paid a visit last week to museum managing director and curator Sarah Kaufman, who pointed out that significant events took place here as far back as the capital years, many of which had far-reaching impact across Canada and beyond.

"The story of Chloe Cool-ey had such an effect on en-slaved people who were com- ing across the border to find freedom here in Niagara," said Kaufman. "It was the first wave of that movement of people,

and it all happened here in Niagara-on-the-Lake."

The enslaved woman, taken by boat across the Niagara Riv- er to be sold to an American, inspired the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery, which eventually led to the barbaric practice being abol- ished across all British territories.

"Unfortunately, we have no stories about Chloe after she was removed from Canada," Kaufman laments. Because of that, no museum has many ar- tifacts that represent her life. But the fact that her name was writ- ten down in that legislation back then, we can treasure that."

Kaufman also mentions the Solomon Moseby affair as a significant event that took place in NOTL in 1837.

"He was found here by his enslaver and was charged with the theft of a horse," explained Kaufman. There was a huge

riot here when he was captured and jailed. The whole experi- ence led to some of the extradi- tion and refugee laws that still exist today in Canada."

Kaufman pulled out a num- ber of items of note from the museum's archives during the visit and explained their signif- icance, including a sketch of the log home once owned by Wil- liam Riley in what was known as Niagara's coloured village, the area bounded by King, William, Ann and Butler streets. Riley built the house in 1819.

"He was an escaped slave who lived and worked here," said Kaufman. "His grand- daughter Fanny became quite a wealthy woman. She owned the beautiful home across from Simcoe Park that became known as the Trisha Romance Gallery. That really demon- strates the transition in a fam-

ily that can happen when one breaks free from slavery."

The museum also holds some artifacts that were part of the Riley family's belongings. She shows off a stool that was made from the floorboards of the Riley home, a receipt that Riley signed with an X upon receiving two shillings and six- pence for transporting some- one to jail, and a candlestick.

"We also have some items that were brought into Can- ada by escaped slaves," add- ed Kaufman, donning gloves to handle a sugar bowl and a teapot made of pewter. "They would bring them with them from the south, hoping that they would have been of val- ue, something they could ex- change to help them establish themselves here."

The museum also has some archival pieces from the

first Baptist Church that was in the area. Kaufman is working closely with the Friends of the Forgotten group that is raising funds to commemorate those interred in that long-gone church's burial ground on Mis- sissagua Street.

"We also have the polling record from one of the wards back then, from the election of John Waters, the first Black town councillor we had here in 1874," she said. "That was quite a significant feat for that time period. It shows that he was elected in an all-white ward. He was a really well-known person in the community."

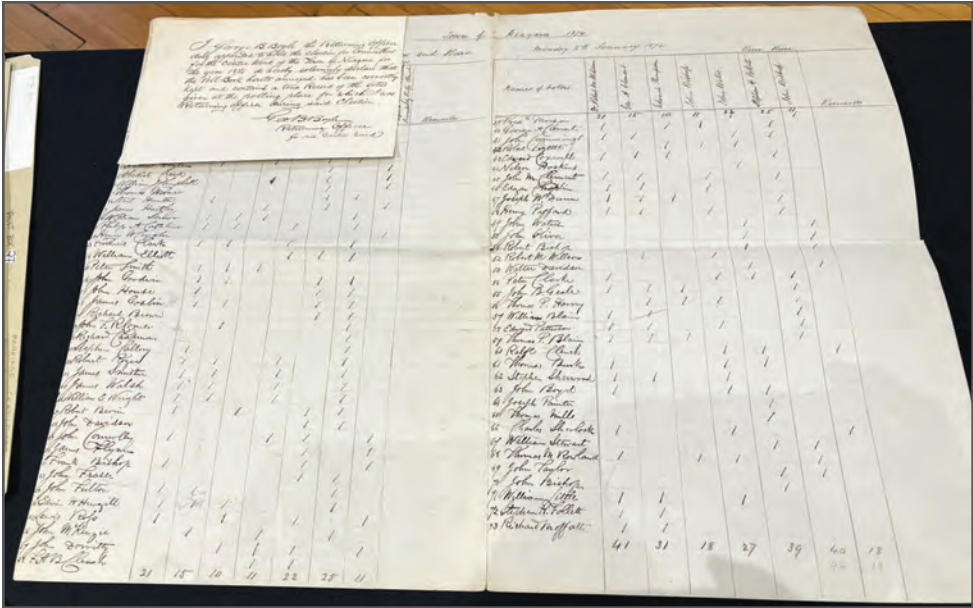
Kaufman adds that many museums across the country do not have much in the way of Black history artifacts.

"That's probably due to people not thinking of collect- ing and keeping items to tell

their stories," she says. "Fortu- nately this museum does have some excellent oral histories that were taken by earlier cura- tors in the early 1900s."

They are always on the lookout for more Black his- tory items of significance to add to their collection. As well, the museum has made much progress in recent years in digitizing images of much of their collection. And pan- els throughout the museum shed light on topics such as The Loyalists, John Butler and African Canadian Defenders of Canada during the War of 1812.

"We continue to try to grow the collection," says Kaufman. "It's hard to find good pieces that represent Black history, though, and whatever you find, there has to be a story be- hind it."



Artifacts at the museum include this voting register from the election of John Waters in 1874. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



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Differently-abled breakdancers spread positive thinking through theatrical dance.

Written by Abby Green

Families of all shapes and sizes are invited to the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre to celebrate Family Day and experience the awe-inspiring return of ILL-Abilities with their show *No Excuses, No Limits*.

Comprised of seven breakdancers with disabilities from around the world, ILL-Abilities will be sharing their positive thinking, motivational stories, and theatrical dance performances with audiences in Niagara. The crew was started by 39-year-old Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli from Montreal. Patuelli has a condition called Arthrogryposis, which results in joint stiffness primarily affecting his legs and his shoulder and often requiring him to use crutches to get around from day-to-day. A dancer since 2002, Patuelli said he was drawn breakdancing because of the ability to create moves that are unique to you.

"What I liked about breaking compared to other dance styles was that there was less pressure assigned to being like the other dancers, and more emphasis on just being (yourself)," he said. "That's something that I truly appreciate about this dance and its culture."

Patuelli created ILL-Abilities in 2007 as a "super crew" to shine a spotlight on dancers with disabilities. It started with four members: Patuelli, Tommy Guns, Kujo, and Checho, all with a shared goal to compete and perform internationally showing the world that anything is possible.

The crew has continued to transform over the years and now features eight dancers from seven different countries. Patuelli explained that each dancer lives in their home country and flies out for each performance. "We're not sta-

tioned or headquartered in one location," he said.

The name of the group is in fact a play-on-words. Although the word "ill" is often associated with being sick or unwell, in the hip-hop world means "amazing" or "incredible".

"So it really means amazing and incredible ability," he said. Aside from dancing, the show features the dancers telling their stories, and sharing about what it's like to live with a disability.

"We realized that we had the potential to really inspire," he said. "For me, I truly believe that dance has no limit. And whether you have a disability or not, there's always a way to move creatively to the music, and to your emotions that your disability shouldn't stop you from wanting to dance and wanting to express yourself in an artistic and creative way."



Comprised of seven breakdancers with disabilities from around the world, *ILL-Abilities™* will be sharing their positive thinking, motivational stories, and theatrical dance performances with audiences in Niagara, presented by The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre on MON 19 FEB.

Recently, the crew was in Taipei for the Taipei Bboy City competition, where they made it to the semi-finals as well as an appearance at the World Championships in Belgium. Having performed in Niagara before, Patuelli said he's looking forward to coming back. "The energy was super great," he said.

"The theatre is beautiful, and the team behind the scenes is really easy and amazing to work with."

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KIMIKO'S PEARL

EDITORIAL

Please come along with us on our new journey

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Local has some exciting news we are ready to share with our readers and advertisers. We are embarking on the next stage of our journey, and we would love all of you to come along with us. To embrace and adapt to the change in the way people tell us they receive their news today, we are putting all our focus on our hyperlocal news website under the umbrella of Village Media. It has been operating notllocal.com for the last year, along with other successful community news sites across Ontario, Canada, the U.S. and around the world.

When Karen Skeoch and I started The Local, we knew the days of producing a print newspaper were numbered. We thought of it as a way to establish a newspaper we believed this community we love deserved, and I can't thank Karen enough for her role in creating and developing a quality product we have

both been proud and honoured to have been a part of. We said from the beginning we would give it five years, and it has been almost exactly five years since we shared our first edition with you. Now we are preparing to share our final edition in print format, which will be delivered to your homes Feb. 28.

The Local, however, is not disappearing. It will continue, as will I in my role as editor, to produce the same quality journalism we and the folks at Village Media are known for — news that is balanced, fair and delivered with integrity.

This is a progressive, positive change, allowing us to share news with our readers daily, even hourly, in the format most people are now choosing to consume their information.

This has been a long time coming. Over the years the costs of producing and delivering a printed newspaper have increased, while print adver-

tising revenue has decreased industry-wide. And the numbers show us how many people are already reading The Local online. We deliver 9,500 newspapers to what Canada Post tells us are all the viable addresses in town, and we have about 6,800 people who have signed up for our daily newsletter — a number that grows daily. With no subscription charge, the newsletter arrives in their inbox every afternoon. That to us is a clear indication the resources put into printing and distribution would be better directed toward our online services.

We will continue to provide all the great stories about the people in this community, the information readers want to know about what is happening in town, and the opinions of readers on any given topic — we know our very engaged population has opinions!

And we will do that without

adding to the damage to the environment caused by printing and delivering a paper product, which we know is a concern to many of our readers.

Our team at The Local is a tightly-knit family, and every member is still as committed as ever to telling your stories. Our regular reporters, Mike Balsom, Sharon Burns, Owen Bjorgan with his environmental columns, Jane Andres who keeps us up-to-date on our very important community of farm-workers, Kris Dube covering municipal news, Dave Gilchrist with his photography, Donald Combe with his reviews and of course Where's Ben — where he will be is right here along with us — are all passionate about their work and will continue to do what they do so well. Along with them we have locals who also contribute occasionally. They all understand what this community wants, and they share a commitment

to being as involved as ever.

Joy Sanguedolce has built a great relationship with our advertisers and will continue to work with them. Those we have had the opportunity to speak with as this transition unfolds are onboard with exploring the world of online advertising, if they're not there already, acknowledging the future is now.

Julia Coles, a highly experienced newspaper salesperson with us from the beginning, provided our advertisers with advice and creative themes to get their message to our audience. Julia is going to take a break and enjoy some "me" time and we will miss her insights and energy.

If there is one really hard part of leaving our printed edition behind, it is the great people we have worked with over the years who won't have a role going forward — Rosie our graphic designer, and Carrie our proofreader (she has writ-

ten stories for us, and may show up online in that role). They are our friends, and we will continue to be, but we will miss our work relationship all the same.

While this was initially a difficult decision, it is no longer. It is the right decision, and we are delighted to be moving forward.

To come along with us, all you have to do is visit notllocal.com to read all our news, and scroll to the bottom to sign up for our newsletter to show up in your inbox at 3 p.m.

Or visit notllocal.com/daily directly to sign up.

Another opportunity, especially if you're a morning person, is to receive our 6 a.m. daily roundup of Canadian news — sign up for it at villagereport.ca/signup.

That's how easy it is to stay well-informed, every hour of every day, if you're not already there with us!

Penny Coles
The Local

Tips to make camping more comfortable



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

It's amazing how once February hits, the chatter of the New Year slows and the excitement for spring warmth and summer plans emerge. Unless you're like me and consider winter a suitable camping season, camping is generally all

about the warm months ahead.

Perhaps you are already securing your weekend getaways in your calendar. Much like planning your summer schedule, a successful camping trip is planned in advance.

I'd like to share helpful "can't go wrong" tips on packing and enjoying the camping experience to the maximum potential. Part of a perfect outdoorsy getaway is about being comfortable, so take these totally affordable tips to heart whether it is your first, second, or 100th camping trip. These

ideas can be applied with trips involving family, kids or even just yourself, and can be used for anything from car-friendly sites to backcountry odysseys.

Firstly, there is what I call "working in reverse" theory. I apply this self-nominated term to all areas of my life, and I find it is especially handy during camping. Essentially, do the work that you don't exactly want to do, but are obliged to do, first and foremost.

For example, when you get to your campsite, get right to work on setting up your tent, bedding situation and cooking area. You will thank yourself immensely when evening falls and everything is in its right place. When you do the mandatory setup first, it allows you more mental relaxation and freedom to truly enjoy the site and its surrounding scenery. Isn't that what you came here to do? There is also nothing like diving into a pre-made bed at the end of a wild night around the campfire.

On that note, you should al-

ways look up before setting up the tent in its picture-perfect location. You want to be aware of any potential "widow-makers" in the area — tree limbs that are hanging by a thread and could fall to the ground at any moment.

The silly name is serious in connotation, as it implies the loss of life of men who historically explored the wooded lands of North America, and sometimes didn't look up before setting up their sleeping area. Countless ended up crushed or impaled, but it didn't have to be this way. There have been many times where I have moved my

tent from an ideal spot in lieu of not having a dangerous tree part fall on my quarters.

Historic settlers, traders and explorers didn't have the luxury of wearing crocs or flip flops in the forest. However, you certainly do. No matter what degree of camping you're committing to, a secondary set of footwear for hanging out at the campsite is an essential, in my opinion.

Letting your feet breathe fresh air after being trapped in shoes or rubber boots all day is essential for making your feet and general being sing with

happiness. Besides, when nature calls and you must leave your tent in the middle of the night, simply sliding on some light footwear makes the situation seem way less daunting.

Naturally, this leads me to the ultimate investment for camping life. I'd say that using a headlamp is an absolute game-changer.

Ranging from \$30 to \$300, you can accomplish all of your goals around the campsite with the lower end of the budget. Instead of relying on your phone

Continued on page 7



View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

My Life with the Walter Boys (Netflix 2023, Season One): When Jackie, a born and bred New Yorker, finds that following the tragic death of her family she is to go live with the Walter family

on a ranch in Colorado, the drama begins. The culture shock is enormous for everyone, but after assorted challenges she begins to find her place in the family and happiness with her new home. Even though it sounds corny, I suspect you will soon develop a considerable interest in the trials

of teenaged Jackie.

Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to go to the movies. Until he resumes going to theatres, he has graciously agreed to share his opinions, through "short and sweet" exclusives, of online series and movies for The Local.

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Where's Ben?

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

Last week, Ben was at what was previously a picnic area opposite McDonald's.

COMMENT

Library interview with Suzanne Hebert

Susan Elliott
Library Board Member

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library board and staff are interested in exploring the special place books, reading, storytelling and libraries hold in the hearts of our community members. The power of the written and spoken word, the enchantment of libraries and childhood memories of time spent with books, creates a profound tapestry of emotions and experiences. This questionnaire prompts introspection and reflection, offering a unique lens through which to examine the bond between readers and their connection to books, storytelling and libraries. Watch this space for interviews with an array of interesting community members.

I met with Niagara resident and Mystery Book Club founder Suzanne Hebert to talk about her love of libraries and reading. She grew up in Montreal and moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2001 after an international career. She joined Newcomers, found great reading friends, and began a Mystery Fiction Book Club. The club has lasted for more than 20 years, with several original members still

attending! A lifelong reader and library enthusiast, she has kept a list of all the books she has read for many years.

Q. How did Niagara-on-the-Lake become your home?

I retired in 2000 and I moved here in 2001 from Montreal, basically for the weather! I liked it here immediately. It's probably the longest I've ever lived anywhere.

Q. What are your early memories of reading and what were your favourite books as a young person?

I grew up in Outremont in Montreal. As far as I remember I've always been a reader. I must have been maybe eight years old and for Christmas, my parents gave me a series of books — six or seven — by Alexandre Dumas. I just fell in love with the books right then and there. Dumas is still my favourite author. I can't even say which ones are my favourites.

School wasn't very conducive to reading. I kept asking my parents to change my school because I didn't think I was learning anything. Eventually, the nuns put me behind a column, which was good because I could

read all day! They knew I wasn't listening to anything they were talking about, although I did like learning Latin.

I don't remember going to any particular library in Montreal. I do remember at the time in Quebec was a lot of censorship — books you weren't supposed to read. But my parents bought me books. They both encouraged me to read beyond books for my age. Growing up I also had a really good friend who would read the same books as me. Then we would talk on the phone about the books we read. We had our own book club.

Q. How did you maintain your love of reading as an adult?

I ended up doing a Masters in political science. I've lived in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Hong Kong. My job involved a lot of travel. Every two months I would be away for two or three weeks. It was difficult to be a reader then — nowadays you can put books on your phone or your tablet, but back then I couldn't really put all the books I wanted to read into my suitcase. I've been reading mysteries for a long time. I just love the genre.

Q. How does your Mystery Fiction Book Club work?

We like to keep our group to 10 people, because that is the number of people our houses can handle. We don't choose particular books for our club. We choose an author instead. It makes it easier for our members to get the books we want to talk about from the library.

Sometimes people in the group read the same book but not always. I find it really interesting to have us read different books. I might find one by an author and not like the book and someone else will have read another of the author's books and really liked it. So I say, okay, maybe I'll try the book they read. Often it turns out that I like something they read.

At our meetings we talk about the author. We talk about the style and a little about the story but not the plot of course. In our club we don't go into too much detail about the books we read because we haven't all read the same book. If someone recommends a particular book that I haven't read before, I might try it! We socialize too. Mystery

book clubs are not that serious.

For most of us, our favourite authors are from the Nordic countries. Those authors write "dark". They seem to write a lot of good mysteries. There are tons to choose from. Unlike some book clubs, the people in our club really do read the books.

In our club, everybody suggests authors for us to read from their own research. If you think about it, we've been going on for more than 22 years with more than 12 authors per year. That's more than 260 books!

We thought we were running out of authors but we started searching and came up with a huge list. We found a really interesting British mystery author of Indian origin, Abir Mukerjee, for example. I read three of his books. There aren't a lot of Canadian mystery writers we have read, though there are some. Louise Penny of course. She's not my favourite, although other people in our group really like her work.

Right now I'm reading one called *One Step Behind*, by Henning Mankell. I thought I read all his books and I discovered that I hadn't read this one. I'm reading it on my own, not for the club.

Q. Why do you like this author?

I like his descriptions — you feel you're there. His detectives are interesting too. His main character is a poor soul, rather unhappy. Maybe it's because he comes from Scandinavia, where it's dark all the time in the winter. They're people with problems. Mankell takes you right there — to Scandinavia. I've never been there in person, but his books take me there.

Q. How else do you find books to read?

Every morning I get an email from BookBub. They send you a list of six or seven books. You can download them for about a dollar or make a note to look up the book somewhere else. You can choose the types of books they recommend.

There's another author named Ian Hamilton who I really like. A lot of his books take place in Asia, although the heroine in his stories is a woman in Toronto. I met him when he did an author talk at the Niagara-on-the-Lake library. We email each other from time to time.

It turns out he knows Asia quite well from his earlier work in the grocery industry. And I know Asia well too from my work. I really liked it when the library used to host different authors. I think it stopped because of COVID but I wish it would start up again. Those sessions were so well-attended and people really liked meeting the authors.

Q. Do you read outside of the mystery genre?

I also belong to another regular book club. We usually choose fiction. Our club year starts in September; everybody chooses one book. One book I suggested was *Women Talking* by Miriam Toews. I haven't ac-

tually bought a physical book in years. I had a giant bookshelf but now I just keep a few books. Most of them you don't re-read. I do keep my *The Three Musketeers*! One thing I find is that books in French are more expensive than English ones and I'm not sure why. I still read French books but I don't read a lot of them.

Most of the time I buy e-books or get my books out of our library. I like the Niagara region-wide inter-library service where they can get a book from another branch. The network is absolutely wonderful. It gives us much greater access than we'd normally have in a small town.



Suzanne Hebert (Supplied)

Outdoor essentials

Continued from page 6

battery, enjoy the comfort of a solid light that allows both of your hands to be free at the same time. Similarly, keeping candles located at strategic spots around the campsite not only creates a reliable waypoint to get to important areas, but it also makes for a great vibe. That is, providing there are no fire bans.

You should also consider the power of a basic tarp. The tarp is arguably the most versatile yet ordinary item to add to your camping essentials list.

It can be used as a cover from rain, which becomes a valuable object when you are cooking outside or just trying to hang out in an area besides the tent. If it is cold overnight, throwing the tarp over your entire tent will keep body heat trapped in the dome, allowing for a substantially warmer environment. You can also use the tarp to bundle and drag big

loads of firewood from the bush to your site. It could even be used as a privacy wall for where people take washroom breaks.

Lastly, don't forget to be kind to yourself. You are not at work and you have chosen to experience the great outdoors with people you care about. I can tell you that whether you are "glamping" (glamorous camping), car camping or back-country roughing it, you should give yourself a little prize at the finish line of the experience.

It sounds basic, but I always pack my coziest socks, underwear, pants and shirt for the end of camping time. Driving home in the comfiest, driest clothes you own feels appreciably remarkable when you are cruising back into civilization.

Whether you're planning a weekend of catching fish in the wilderness or telling stories to your kids around the fire, you won't regret that respect for yourself when it arrives.

Ricky Rap

Ricky Rap is a list of 10 thoughts and offerings from Niagara's own Rick Mills. Retired from more than 30 years of management in the steel industry, he continues pastoral ministry here in town. Ricky Rap, he says, is intended to help us to believe in and laugh at ourselves.

1. Some people wanna fill the world with silly love songs...
2. And what's wrong with that?*
3. 40+ years of marriage and apparently I still cannot properly load a dishwasher or fold a towel.
4. Getting better at making a bed.
5. I think she appreciates the effort.
6. Marriage isn't about being in love as much as it is staying in love.
7. We last the long race by running the short ones.
8. An absolute I know...
9. Love endures.
10. Happy Valentine's.



*Paul McCartney

Rick and Cathy Mills (Supplied)



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Bell Media layoffs create worry about Canada's media landscape



Mike Balsom
The Local

Bell Media's recent announcement of widespread layoffs and the sale of 45 of its regional radio stations to smaller owners has the potential to seriously disrupt the country's media landscape. The move, which also includes the cancellation of all weekday noon newscasts at CTV stations except in Toronto as well as its 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. weekend newscasts at all CTV and CTV2 stations except Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa, raised the ire of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. He was quoted in the Canadian Press as saying he was

"pissed off" about the decision. "We need those local voices, and over the past years, corporate Canada — and there are many culprits on this — have abdicated their responsibilities toward the communities that they have always made very good profits off of," said Trudeau. Besides fewer national newscasts to watch, Niagara residents will also be affected by the sale of Bell Media radio stations CKTB 610 AM, CHRE 105.7 FM (Move 105.7) and CHTZ 97.7 FM (HTZ-FM) based in St. Catharines to Oakville-based Whiteoaks Communications Group Ltd. When it comes to radio, especially local radio, those in the business have become used to layoffs and ownership changes. Long before my days writing for The Local, even before the start of my career as a high

school teacher in Gananoque in 1993, I worked part time in local radio. My first job was as an over-night operator at CHRE FM in the days when it was owned by Robert E. Redmond. From there I became the weekend evening announcer and then helmed the weekend morning shifts at CHOW 1470 AM, a country station owned at the time by Gordon and Suzanne Rochon Burnett. I also later worked for Doug Settrington in the last days of 1220 CHSC AM in the late 1990s. When Bell Media purchased those three St. Catharines radio stations in 2013, they became the fourth owner of them since 1997. Each time a sale occurred, and often during Bell Media's tenure, I watched as many of my friends and colleagues fell victim to the axe. That indeed might happen again with

this recent sale. Niagara-on-the-Lake Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa reached out to The Local to talk about the importance of local media such as radio. "Any loss of local radio would significantly affect our residents' ability to gain information, to learn about things," Zalepa said. "We don't know how this will shake down yet. When they announced that it's an Oakville company that is buying them it gave me hope that maybe someone there will find the business plan that can make it work." Like Zalepa, Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates listens to CKTB regularly. In fact, on Monday afternoon, Gates was heading to the Yates Street home of the Bell Media stations for a live interview about the Ontario Court of Appeal ruling on the provincial Bill 124 that day.

"Niagara-on-the-Lake relies on local media to engage its community," Gates says. "I don't think there's a community that's more engaged than Niagara-on-the-Lake. As an MPP, when I need to get a message across, local media, including radio, is a way to communicate with my community. That's what my job is." With one less voice on the airwaves, which are regulated by the federal Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), Gates is more than a little worried about where his constituents may turn to for news. "When it's not being governed by anybody, you may not be getting the exact true story," says Gates. "That's something that's really important. People want to know the truth." Despite the dire news from Bell Media, despite Trudeau's

anger, there actually could be a silver lining in the sale of the three stations. Since the last Bell Media cuts hit the St. Catharines trio, CKTB has been running limited local programming during the weekdays. Niagara in the Morning with Tim Denis signs off at 9 a.m. each day. Until former St. Catharines mayor Walter Sendzik signs on at 2 p.m. for the afternoon drive show, all programming on the station originates from Bell Media studios in Toronto. One hopes that Whiteoaks sees the value in local content and fills that time slot with new hosts who will engage the Niagara community and fill in the gap that has been missing anyway from that station the past few years. But I'm not holding my breath waiting for that, not even while I drive through the Thorold Tunnel.

One senior is happy to read his news online

Penny Coles
The Local

When The Local contacted Donald Combe to tell him about the end of this community newspaper's print edition, his response was interesting, although not surprising.

"This is the correct decision. It is the responsible decision," Combe said. Combe, who will turn 93 this year, is well known in the Niagara-on-the-Lake community. He loves The Local, he says, because there is seldom a story that doesn't mention someone he knows,

or at least is aware of. In his social circle, the long-time Old Town resident and very active volunteer with St. Mark's Church comes in contact with many seniors. When asked about how seniors in the community may be affected by the elim-

ination of a print edition of the paper, Combe says he doesn't think there will be many seniors who cannot access news online. "We've had a long time to learn to use a computer," he says, jokingly adding, "even those of us who aren't so bright." He was immediately and enthusiastically onboard with The Local's decision to go all digital. "There is no question about it," he said. "I completely agree. I'm not at all surprised."

ed he can skip over it, whereas he finds newspapers draw him in, but maybe the biggest benefit to him is that he can read it on a large screen, with big print that is much easier to see than what is on a newspaper page. "You are doing me a great favour by having it online, right in front of me." Does he see a downside? Possibly there are residents

in assisted living who don't have access to an electronic device, but hopefully volunteers or family members will read the news to them, if they are interested, he suggests. Eliminating a print edition may not be a perfect solution for everyone, but Combe is one senior who is adamant that it's the correct one.

More support for Red Roof Retreat



Steffanie Bjorgan receives a donation for Red Roof Retreat from Joe Pillitteri prior to Red Roof's fundraiser at Sandtrap Pub & Grill on Super Bowl Sunday. Another Red Roof fundraiser opportunity will soon be available. Bliss Aveda Salon in Virgil will be cutting hair for donations from 12 a.m. until 12 p.m. on Feb. 24. Join NOTLers such as Lord Mayor (and former Red Roof board member) Gary Zalepa and Red Roof founder Bjorgan as they get their hair cut. Call Aveda for an appointment.

He mentioned the harm to the environment, unnecessarily killing trees and burning fuel to offer a print edition, and says online is the responsible way to deliver the news. "It's appalling the amount of waste from the papers that are left at the post office," he says, "there is so much going into the garbage." Combe has been reading The Local online for some time, he says, and although many of the issues are familiar to him, "I appreciate reading another dimension to them. I feel like I learn a different way to look at things, and in some cases what I read changes my mind." He can choose what he reads, and if he's not interest-



Donald Combe and his constant companion Maggie. (Supplied)





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Region, Parks Canada negotiating with potential tenant

Penny Coles
The Local

It's no secret the Shaw Festival has been interested in taking over Upper Canada Lodge when it closes. The regional long-term care home is scheduled to close in June, and Shaw CEO Tim Jennings told The Local some time ago the Shaw was

interested in taking over the lease and turning the building into accommodations for Shaw employees. Asked recently for an update, Jennings told The Local nothing has been settled, "so I cannot actually comment on anything other than that we submitted an application for use under their RFP (request for proposals). The region and

Parks Canada have a joint process and we are bound by that." Todd Harrison, the region's commissioner of corporate services, told The Local they received an "enormous number of submissions" in response to their request for proposals, and after a break in the process last fall, it has restarted, and the process is ongoing.

It's at the stage where the region has recommended the "preferred candidate" as set out by the RFP, and the negotiations are now between Parks Canada and the proponent, Harrison explained. "It's a unique facility, a regional building with a lease on Parks Canada land," he says, explaining that once the negotiations end, the regional

lease, possibly with modifications, will be turned over to Parks Canada and the successful proponent. Negotiations are not finished, but they are getting there, with a successful end that can be reported to the public possible by the end of March, although he also mentioned the process could go through April.

With the opening of Gilmore Lodge in Fort Erie anticipated in June, where many Upper Canada Lodge residents will be moved, "there is some time," he says. And with communication services working with residents to complete the transitions, "we're hopeful negotiations will be completed in lots of time."

Sibling kittens looking for a good home

Local Staff

Tanya Rice, a volunteer and director of fundraising for NOTL Cat Rescue, says in celebration of Valentine's Day a private donation of \$100 has been pledged towards the

adoption fees for four beautiful kittens now in foster care. The nine-month-old kittens are looking to be adopted in pairs, she says. One pair, Miesha and Paisley, have an adoption pending. The other, brothers

Prince and Phoenix, are still available for adoption. The benefactor is offering a gift of \$100 for each kitten, which would otherwise be \$200. NOTL Cats partners with Virgil Pet Valu on Niagara

Stone Road with monthly meet and greets, rotating Saturdays and Sundays, and Prince and Phoenix are expected to be there next Sunday, if they haven't found a forever home by then. Both are fully vetted: neutered, micro-

chipped and vaccinated. Rice strongly encourages prospective adopters to review the kittens' bios on the NOTL Cats website to ensure their lifestyle meets adoption requirements. NOTL Cats is 100 per cent

volunteer-driven, non-profit and foster-based, with a proven record of successful adoptions. If you are aware of a cat needing services, or would like to donate your time, cat products or money, please visit notlcats.weebly.com.



Miesha and Paisley (Photos supplied)



Phoenix



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NOTL teens take leads in Laura Secord musical

Mike Balsom
The Local

NOTE: Due to a contract stipulation between Laura Secord Secondary School and the rights holder, Theatre Music International, The Local is prohibited from providing the name of the musical for this article.

Those attending Laura Secord's musical, which opens at the St. Catharines secondary school on Feb. 22, could be forgiven for thinking they've stumbled onto an unannounced Yellow Door Theatre Project (YDTP) production.

That's because the three lead roles, played by Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda in the 1980 feature film on which the musical is based, are taken on by Secord students Ayla Jamal, Catherine Dubois and Leah Hyatt, all of whom have appeared in YDTP shows.

Other roles are also filled by YDTP regulars, including Liam Marriott, whose parents are both Shaw Theatre veterans, and Diego Rey.

The popular film, which truly cemented Dolly Par-

ton as a fixture in the entertainment world outside of the country music realm, grossed over \$103 million 44 years ago, inspired a television series that enjoyed a five-year run that same decade, and finally received the musical treatment in 2009, with songs written by Parton herself.

The musical is a tale of female empowerment that breaks down the misogynistic, oppressive, sexist walls that were the nature of the office workplace for decades.

Grade 12 student Ayla Jamal plays Doralee, complete with Parton's southern drawl, which she expertly brings to her off-screen narration, her on-stage acting and, remarkably, to her singing.

"What's really awesome about this show is that there's really three leading ladies," Jamal says. "We all get a chance to sing on the big opening number, and all three of us get to carry the songs throughout. But I do get to sing the more fun country riffs and I love that."

Her character brings a

folksy, happy-go-lucky and naive attitude to the office every day, unaware that the rest of the staff thinks she is having an affair with their overbearing, hypocritical boss. When she finally finds out about the rumour, she bands together with the other two women to take down their oppressor.

Jamal says working with Dubois and Hyatt comes naturally.

"They're two girls that I've worked with for a very long time," she explains. "We went to the same theatre company, we've had the same vocal coach. It's really nice to be able to work alongside them and see them shine."

Jamal, a graduate of St. Davids Public School, began working with YDTP at nine years old. She credits her experience performing at the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre in many of their past productions, as well as the opportunities she has had to work alongside many theatre professionals, for her success in landing major roles in this project as well as the school's previous production, *Mamma Mia*.

Catherine Dubois, Grade 11, plays Violet, the role made famous by Lily Tomlin in the film. A long-time employee at the firm, Violet continues to be passed up for promotions. When she realizes women just never seem to advance within the company, she vows to help make a change in the corporate culture.

Dubois admits she watched the 1980 movie to get an understanding of her character's struggles.

"I thought it was great, a really good resource," says Dubois, who came to Secord from Crossroads Public School. "But I watched the musical, too, and that gave me such great insight. It was cool to see the differences."

She marvels at some of the office equipment from the time period that has become production props.

"We had to learn to use things that offices don't have today," laughs Dubois. "We have cool different types of phones, typewriters, there is an adding machine and a Rolodex too. And there are some words in the songs that we never heard before."

The third lead, the newly-

divorced newcomer to the office named Judy, is played by another YDTP regular, Leah Hyatt, who is in her first year attending Laura Secord. She takes on some of the most emotional numbers as a fish out of water in her first job with no work experience behind her.

"She's in Grade 9," director and drama teacher Paige Falardeau tells The Local, "and she's doing such a great job. It's really been quite amazing to see how the three lead actors have been supporting each other throughout the whole process, sharing in their experience and helping each other grow."

For months now the cast and crew have been putting in long hours after school and on weekends to prepare for the upcoming opening night and a total of ten performances of the play, including three matinees for elementary school audiences.

"There's so much talent here at Secord," Jamal enthuses. "You see all these kids in their art classes, in the background, working

on this show to make it a great performance. Set design people, musicians, everyone working toward the same goal."

Falardeau says beyond the cast of 32 students, there are more than 100 others involved in the production. Music students, led by band teacher A.J. Alexander, provide live accompaniment unseen from behind the set, which was designed and constructed by art and technology students. And student crews help the actors with hair, makeup and costumes.

"We really have such a passionate group of students who are committed to the performing arts in all aspects," Falardeau says. "It's a real pleasure to see them grow and thrive in this environment."

Performances are scheduled for Feb. 22, 23, 24, 29 and March 1 and 2 at 7 p.m. There is a matinee on Sunday, Feb. 25 at 2 p.m. Doors open a half hour before showtime. Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$15 for seniors and \$10 for students and are available at laurasecord.dsbnschools.org.



Ayla Jamal from St. Davids as Doralee takes dictation from her oppressive boss, played by Jack Bull. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Ayla Jamal centre stage in a musical number with Diego Rey (far left).



Ayla Jamal as Doralee.



Catherine Dubois as Violet in the Laura Secord musical.



Leah Hyatt, Catherine Dubois and Ayla Jamal on stage at Laura Secord Secondary School.



Leah Hyatt as Judy and Liam Marriott as her ex-husband.

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REAL ESTATE WILLS BUSINESS

A true romance of Shavian proportions

Mike Balsom
The Local

Sometimes art imitates life, which in turn imitates art.

That could be an apt explanation for the way the romance between Peter Hinton-Davis and Howard J. Davis blossomed while both were working on Shaw Festival's production of *Pygmalion* in 2015.

Howard was a member of the ensemble that year, while Peter was in the director's chair. At 61, Peter, a member of the Order of Canada, had reimagined the classic Shavian play for modern times, applying current technology to the tale that takes on classism and social values.

"I always had a personal rule that I don't get involved with directors that I work with," laughs Howard. "It was Peter who asked me out, and I broke my rule. He was the first person to ever ask me out, too. It was such a beautiful time and the first courtship I had ever experienced."

Their first date was for dinner at the Charles Inn on Queen Street.

"We took our time, nothing was rushed," says Howard. "It was incredibly



Peter Hinton-Davis and Howard J. Davis worked together on the Shaw Festival's production of *Pygmalion* in 2015 and were married in 2018 at a ceremony officiated by Metis singer and performer Jani Lauzon. (Supplied)

romantic."

The couple were married in 2018 at a ceremony officiated by their close friend, Metis singer and performer Jani Lauzon.

"We got married in our home with a small intimate gathering of friends," recalls Howard. "We wrote vows for one another, and I sang mine. It was unforgettable."

The two support each other's creative work and

from time to time have found other opportunities to work together. Last year, for instance, Howard created a video installation for Peter's production of Edith Wharton's lost play *The Shadow of a Doubt*.

"We are a bit choosy as to what we work on now," says Howard. "*The Shadow of a Doubt* was such a fun piece to do together, to really break form and blur film and theatre. We real-

ly wanted to see how we could be innovative with design. Design can be such an integral part of storytelling. Peter and I really nerded out over that project together."

He says like their marriage, they have a fantastic working relationship. The work flow can be time-consuming but he claims it is very organic.

"It can be very hard to not bring it home with us,"

he laughs. "But that's one of the reasons we fell in love with each other. We love art, we love that dialogue and exchange. Some people can leave it at work, but I don't like to separate myself from what I do. We get inspiration for our work at times when you think we are away from it."

Howard says the couple has a gorgeous relationship that thrives on their shared love of art and travel. And

often, their travels as a couple spark that inspiration.

"We travel quite a bit together, and Peter is the best travel partner," says the 33-year-old Howard. "In 2017 we went to Rome together for work and pleasure. It was when we went to Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli that I knew I wanted to marry Peter. We've also been to France and England."

Though he admits it may sound a bit corny to say it, he feels he and Peter are soulmates, that each has truly met his perfect match. And when asked for his secret to a happy marriage, the artist, who often works under the name HAUI (Hybrid Artist Unique Interpretation) says there really isn't one.

"I think what ultimately makes a great pair is knowing how your differences can complement each other," he says. "No couple can be at 100 per cent all the time. It's not realistic or sustainable. If one can only meet the other at 30 per cent, it's the other person's job to try their best to be as supportive as possible. And sometimes we are both at 10 per cent, which calls for extra care and kindness."

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Photo by Peter Andrew Luszyk

Love is still in the air, only now there are three

Continued from page 1

do it.”

The couple live in Niagara Falls. Clare is an engineer and Mtonga-Clare is an economic analyst, however they both have something else to concentrate on right now; six-month-old daughter Astoria.

Parenting can create a strain when considering celebrating events such as Valentine’s Day.

“Every day is Valentine’s Day for us,” said Mtonga-Clare. “So, on that day, sometimes we celebrate, sometimes we don’t. We should be in love every single day, and if we have to exchange gifts, that can

happen any day, we don’t really have to wait.”

“I generally hate the holiday,” said Clare, “because we’re in the middle of winter, it’s depressing and then you put a lot of stress on trying to impress someone on a specific day.”

This year, because they had an evening of care provided for their daughter, they celebrated their love with a rare evening out a few weeks ago.

“It was an amazing experience because we didn’t put a lot of stress on it and we were so relaxed. It was actually a really good affirmation of our love,” said Clare.

Other tips for a happy

marriage from the couple include accepting change, and following your heart.

“I need to constantly remind myself and understand that people change, and change is always going to happen,” said Clare. “It’s probably going to be for the better.”

“Relationships are constantly ongoing,” he continued. “They’re living things. They aren’t just like ‘hey, you got this one thing set up and that’s the way it’s always going to be.’ So it’s really embracing how relationships can change over time.”

Follow your heart, suggested Mtonga-Clare. On the first day they met, “we kind of both knew that we

were going to meet again. So we had a second date and the rest is history.”

“There wasn’t any doubt of getting married at all. It was just like getting married to my best friend, somebody I’ve known for three years,” she added.

Mtonga-Clare added that “love has no colour. If people are in love, it doesn’t matter what race they are.”

Besides learning how to be first-time parents, the couple both “love math” and enjoy solving math and software-related problems together. In their spare time, they exercise together, take walks, watch movies, cook and bake.



Mwamba Mtonga-Clare and Grant Clare with their daughter Astoria. (Supplied)

This couple got married twice: to each other

Sharon Burns
The Local

Karley McKeigan and Trevor Cowan are so in love they wanted two weddings.

“We had always planned on a wedding at Red Roof Retreat,” said McKeigan, who volunteers her time there feeding the animals and mucking out stalls. “But sort of on a whim, we decided that we didn’t really want to plan a big wedding” and decided to have two smaller

celebrations.

When McKeigan proposed to Cowan, he wasn’t phased.

“It was just a random thought one day,” said McKeigan, “and I said, ‘hey, Trev, how about we get married out west this summer.’”

“I hadn’t even proposed to Kar at this time,” laughed Cowan. “I pretty much got proposed to is how I look at it.”

However, a few months later, Cowan surprised McKeigan by setting up

some music and champagne on ice near the horse paddock at Red Roof.

“Steff (Bjorgan) was in this plot with me to get Kar there,” explained Cowan. “I was hiding behind a tree and my plan was just to have her organically see me (while on a walk with Steff) and being there on my one knee.”

“It went really well,” he said.

So it made sense to get married, legally, by Steffanie Bjorgan at the end of May

2022 at the Red Roof Retreat property, and then have a ceremony at McKeigan’s brother’s brewery in British Columbia shortly after.

The original plan was for Bjorgan to travel with them to B.C., and to have only one wedding. But because of the timing, including Bjorgan’s previous commitments, and travel issues during the pandemic, the couple decided to have Bjorgan officially marry them in Niagara-on-the-Lake, then have a ceremony out west.

McKeigan, the fire prevention officer in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Cowan, a chartered accountant, met through an online dating app. “Karley was with her friend while she was scrolling on the app and her friend knows who I am. So when she came across me

on the app, I got a raving endorsement from her,” said Cowan.

They discovered they had a good handful of mutual friends, and were surprised they hadn’t met in person. They met at Bricks and Barley for their first date.

The couple use Valentine’s Day as an excuse to cook a nice dinner and get each other silly cards, said McKeigan. “We think it’s nice to have a day to pause and think about why you appreciate your partner, but we don’t go crazy over it.”

According to Cowan, a strong relationship is built on the foundation of respecting individuality. “Just because someone may not think the same way you do, doesn’t mean that it’s wrong or in opposition to how you

feel. You can work in harmony with the other person.”

McKeigan adds that “taking time to do the things that the two of you enjoy is important. Life can get pretty busy and pretty crazy, but scheduling time for yourselves to do things together that make you happy is really important, and helps keep your relationship exciting and adventurous.”

The Virgil couple share their love of outdoor activities such as skiing and snowboarding, car and canoe camping, hiking and as much travel as possible. They also share a ‘mutt,’ a husky/shepherd named Tom, who joined them for their trip to B.C. Of the two wedding anniversaries, they celebrate June 8, the date of their B.C. wedding.

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Karley McKeigan and Trevor Cowan at their first wedding, held at Red Roof Retreat. (Supplied)

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Mom, your love fills my heart with joy. Your strength, kindness, and wisdom inspire me daily. I love you endlessly. – Stewart

My sweet love,
Axl, Mommy had you
at 41, you're my
angel, cherish you
everyday, just
love you so
much!



Happy Valentine's Day to my husband. I love you today as much as the day I met you xo



To our Nonna's, we love you the MOST!!! Love and kisses from Julian, Jimmy & Matt

To all of the people
who are loving and
kind to each other,
thank you for
spreading
sunshine into
lives.
Heidi



Hal, you are a loving person; I am so happy to have you in my life. – Danielle Gault



To my sweet angel "Sinead" we love you more than you could ever know. You are the best!

Dear Mrs. Ruller's
Gr. 4 Class,
Thanks for always
being so funny,
curious, kind, and
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Mrs. Ruller



Dear Bri, you make me laugh and smile I love your style, love J



Happy Valentine's Day to Irish Town friends and neighbours! xoxo JB

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To James, you are my special valentines every moment with you is my favourite, Love Bri

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Weddings come in all sizes, for all ages

Continued from page 1

the ceremony.

“I just figured I could do this,” he said. “I’m a singer, I’m a performer and I love acting.” Locals might recognize Burke from his Doors cover band, Riders of the Storm, A Live Celebration of the Doors. “Next thing you know,” he added, “I’m getting my licence.”

Burke became licensed through Celebrating Life Ministries and has now performed nearly 100 weddings in three seasons, many of them in NOTL, while maintaining his job as an early childhood educator with the Niagara Region.

Burke admits he “feeds

off of happiness and joy, so when I first meet couples it’s already a positive, happy atmosphere.”

The contents of Burke’s binder are planned by Burke and the couple. He arrives early to meet with vendors to create a positive relationship, and “now it’s just delivering the words, adding passion and love to what you’re saying. And then boom, you’ve got a great wedding.”

Burke joined the team at Cathy Davis and Company, and had a mentor there who “taught me so much and we got along very easily, and then you just grow every season. You just grow into a better officiant.”

Davis began her career in

the funeral industry, presiding over celebrating life ceremonies, while supervising weddings at The Pillar and Post. Twenty years ago, said Davis, it was challenging to obtain an officiant’s licence, and most officiants were men.

Her team is diverse in religion, culture and languages, and, like Burke and Bjorgan, offers non-denominational ceremonies, or ceremonies where the couple can add a verse from their religion or a custom from their culture.

“The ages of our couples are typically on average around 32 years old but as young as 18 and as old as 88,” said Davis. “Quite a diverse market for us to cater to!”

She has married a couple on the SkyWheel in Niagara Falls, and on the Hornblower. “The mist,” she said, “made it hard to do a wedding within the few minutes from the time they leave the dock to the time you’re underwater.”

Staying professional is key, she said, even during mosquito-infested barn weddings or bee stings to the officiant. “You just have to breathe in and carry on.”

Davis has married around 1,000 couples in everything from the smallest of weddings — the couple, two witnesses and officiant, are the legal minimum number of people to have for a ceremony — to large scale weddings at wineries or private homes. The

kinds of weddings are just as diverse, she said.

“I’m marrying a couple in Niagara-on-the-Lake in a few weeks. They have already been together for 30 years, and now they’ve got kids and grandkids participating in the ceremony in some way.”

Cathy Davis and Company have 50 ceremonies to choose from on their website, or they can cut and paste and mix and match.

Building relationships with couples and families is important, she said, but so is building relationships with wedding vendors and the venues. Knowing when to back away from the couple during ‘the kiss’ so that photographers can capture the

moment is key.

Her company offers packages with other spaces, such as 124 on Queen Hotel and Spa in Old Town, where they have paired up with a photographer and florist to offer a whole package that is affordable.

Called microweddings, or pop-up weddings, they are becoming more popular. “We’re seeing that a lot of venues have become too expensive,” said Davis. “Everything’s included for that price, and they have two hours, then basically share the venue on the day of their wedding with two other couples.”

The fees for officiants can range from \$300 to more than \$500.



Amanda Ruzylo and Alex Eddie were married by Cathy Davis at a relative’s home on one of the firelanes in NOTL. (Amos Photography)



Rob Burke, musician and actor, is now also a wedding officiant. (Angela Martin, Gemini Photography)



Bianca Oakes and Vince Luliano were married by Cathy Davis in September 2022 at Gracewood Estate in NOTL. (Carey Nash)

Valentine’s Day card post-1850 features peaches

Sharon Burns
The Local

The image on the front of a Valentine’s Day card from post-1850 contains forget-me-nots and, surprisingly, but appropriately for this area, peaches.

The card, supplied by the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum,

is inscribed with the following words:

St. Valentine

*If I could claim the richest gem
that now lies in the sea
far rather than have that pearl
I’d have one thought from thee*

*If all the world’s gay pleasure
were now spread out to me
and I were told to*

*make a choice
I’d take a thought from thee*

A quick Wikipedia search finds that Valentine’s Day originated as a Christian feast day to celebrate Saint Valentine, a third-century Roman

clergyman who suffered religious persecution. On Feb. 14, his body was buried on an ancient Roman road leading from Rome over the Apennine Mountains.

While the card from the museum does not include the

name of either the card writer, or the recipient, its style of writing maintains the tradition of courtly love, a concept of love that emphasizes nobility and chivalry.

Saint Valentine is also the saint of beekeeping and epi-

lepsy, and in Italy, a metal key charm named after the saint is believed to offer a cure for epilepsy, a condition known as Saint Valentine’s Malady. The key is also gifted as a romantic symbol, an invitation to ‘unlock the giver’s heart.’

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This Valentine’s Day card, front and back, features peaches and a love poem. (NOTL Museum)

Local musician hosting vinyl release party at Oast

Mike Balsom
The Local

It makes perfect sense for Scott Gossen to hold his vinyl release party on Feb. 24 at Niagara Oast House Brewers. After all, the collection of 10 original songs, credited to his solo music persona Go Son, is entitled *February*.

The Eden High School graduate wrote the wistful, reflective lyrics and laid down guitar parts in the loft behind his house in Virgil last February. The owner of a lawn care business and father of three kids, now 14, 10 and 8 years old, took the

time that month to get back to creating original music after having put the pursuit aside for many years while concentrating on raising his family and his business.

"I came up here every single day," remembers Gossen of February 2023. "I didn't have much work to do for the business, so I recorded a ton of songs. I took them to my friend Derek Elliotson in St. Catharines. He has a great studio, he played the drums and the keyboards and mixed it all together."

Gossen describes his sound as chill, with heart-felt, introspective lyrics

drawing from his own life experiences. The songs are nostalgic, reflecting upon simpler times as well as friends loved and lost and family members no longer with him.

To a gentle acoustic guitar rhythm on opening track *Reaching*, he recalls hanging out in a friend's basement, remembers a girl named Marcy who liked to hang out with the boys, and laments about Dave, whose demons Gossen wished he could have helped with.

There's a 1970s AM radio feel to *Used To*, with Gossen fiddling with a \$50 stylophone that he bought off of Amazon. *Raised* is his lament about the effects of social media and other influences on a younger generation.

"You learn it like it's free," he sings, "who you want to be, it's so uncanny, not worth a penny."

Stop Thinking, the first track on side two, is a reminder to himself to stop worrying about the outcomes that he never saw come to light.

"Time to move on, stop staring at the sun and pick up right where I belong," sings Gossen.

Gossen's style and lyrical bent reflect his indie folk influences. He credits singer-



Scott Gossen with his favourite Fender Strat in his loft in Virgil. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Cover artwork by Scott Gossen's bandmate Evan Wiens.

songwriters such as M. Ward, Michael Nau, Jonathan Wilson, Andy Shauf and Damien Jurado as some of his favourites.

The 41-year-old Gossen fell in love with music at 11 years old, when he began playing the drums. A year later he switched to guitar after his father taught him a few chords. That began a lifelong journey of writing and recording his own music.

He eschewed post-secondary education to help his dad with the lawn care business, continuing to pursue music while playing in cover bands at places like The Hideaway and the Merchant Ale House in St. Catharines.

In his 20s, Gossen connected with a producer out of Montreal and released two CDs under the name of Scott Normandy, a nod to his grandfather. The Concordian said his 2007 record *My Future My Past* boasted "honest lyrics and catchy hook choruses tightly wrapped in pristine pop/rock folk. Just think John

Mayer minus the ego."

He and his wife Brun started their family right around the time Gossen took over his father's company, and he put music further to the side, other than contributing as both Scott Gossen and Scott Normandy to the soundtrack for the film *The Angel Inn*, directed by NOTL's Kirk Schrieffer.

Now he's back, and he's bouncing with excitement. His loft, a former peach-packing shed, is lined wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling with music equipment and he has an impressive array of guitar effects pedals that bring a beaming smile to his face.

He has more music in the works, too. He has a single called *To You* ready to hit streaming services in a couple of weeks as well as a full album of songs with a band yet to be named.

"It's really spurred on my desire to write, record and complete things," he says of that month in the loft last February. "Some of these songs I've had kicking around for years and years.

I'm finally finishing them up."

After he and Elliotson wrapped *February*, Gossen uploaded the songs to Spotify, Apple Music and other streaming services and had 50 albums pressed on white vinyl. Now he's itching to get them into the hands of listeners.

For the gig at Oast, he has assembled a band featuring Evan Wiens, who designed *February's* album cover, on bass; drummer Al Campopiano; and Joel Durksen on rhythm guitar. Durksen will do a short solo set at 7 p.m. before the full band runs through all 10 songs from the new record.

"I'm not selling the records," Gossen adds. "I'm giving them away. If you come to the show and you want one, grab a vinyl. If there comes a time that I can start selling stuff I will. But right now I just want people to have it, to enjoy it."

Admission to the all ages vinyl release party, in the Oast Hayloft, is free, as well.

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Pickleball club members learn from gold medalist

Mike Balsom
The Local

As the Niagara-on-the-Lake Pickleball Club continues to grow in both number and skill level, president John Hindle is adamant that player development needs to be a priority.

To that end, club pro Adam Eatock invited 2023 Canadian National Pickleball gold medalist Mark Cleminson to the NOTL Community Centre last weekend for four special skills clinics geared toward the club's best players.

Hindle explains that as the club's players continue to get better at their sport and compete at tournaments across the province, it's imperative that the local organization support their growth.

"These are our players at the top end of the club," Hindle said Saturday, "our 3.5, 4.0 and 4.5 players (pickleball rankings) getting some coaching from top-end professional players. Mark has some interesting techniques that have brought him success and he's



Twelve NOTL Pickleball Club members from the skills session held Saturday afternoon pose with pros Mark Cleminson and Adam Eatock (ninth and 10th from left). (Mike Balsom)

teaching those today."

The 48 slots for the sessions filled up quickly. Enrolment was limited to 12 players per session so that Cleminson and Eatock could provide personal instruction to each participant during the two hour time slots.

One participant, Ken Dobson, has been playing pickleball for a number of years. As he has moved into competition the last two years or so, he's come up against people who hit the

ball a lot harder and faster, who use strategy that he says is "off the charts."

"They've gotten a lot faster and I've gotten a lot older," Dobson laughed. "I have a bit of a bad wrist so I've been using a two-handed backhand. Mark showed me some techniques that will help me get a little bit better at that than I have been."

That two-handed backhand is one of the shots that Cleminson is known for.

"When you get shots outside of your body, to the left of your backhand," explained Cleminson, "you lack a lot of power when the ball is coming fast on you. When you're able to get the second hand on it you can suddenly get your body behind the shot. It gives you overall control and consistency."

The 30-year-old former hockey goalie started playing pickleball about eight years ago, playing in his first tournament

in 2018.

"There's a lot that transfers over from being a goalie to playing pickleball," Cleminson told The Local. "The quick reflexes, and the use of the blocker — I find that position, the way you use the blocker, it's really useful in pickleball."

Cleminson has won both gold and silver at the Canadian Nationals and was drafted 14th overall to the Canadian National Pickleball League's

Southwestern Ontario Brewers, the same team that NOTL club member Reese George plays for. He and his partner Jeff Elwood have ranked at the top in the league in men's doubles.

Cleminson, a Tecumseh, Ontario native, was impressed with the NOTL members who took part in the Saturday afternoon session.

"They were very fast learners," he said, "very open to learning. They were very receptive to the two-handed shots. A few years ago very few people were doing those shots, so it's cool to see them catch on."

Hindle expects the club to hold more sessions like the ones last weekend some time in the near future.

"We aim for our club to be full service," Hindle said. "After a little while, some of our recreational players move to the competitive side. They want something more challenging and enriching. This fulfills a promise that we will take them as high as they want to go, and it helps to draw some younger players to move into the sport as well."

Wright in fighting form for Olympic qualifier

Mike Balsom
The Local

St. Davids resident and Olympic boxing hopeful McKenzie Wright thought she had at least two more weeks before she had to leave for Busto Arsizio, Italy, for a qualifying tournament that begins on February 29.

But her Team Canada coaches contacted her last Monday to tell her to be ready to depart four days later, on February 9, for a team training camp.

The Local caught up to Wright during a training session with her coach Jesse Sallows at City Boxing Club in Niagara Falls.

"It will be an international camp again," said Wright, comparing the Italy camp to the Canadian team's preparation for last fall's Pan Am Games in Santiago, Chile. "There will be about 300 athletes there, including many that I will be competing against, from Europe, Asia and the Americas. I'll have a chance to get some sparring matches in with them. It's a good way to get a feel for



McKenzie Wright tapes up her hands prior to her training session with coach Jesse Sallows. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

their style."

In Santiago, Wright lost in the semi-final to the eventual winner, Jennifer Lozano of the U.S. That forced her to defend her position as Canada's international representative in the 50 kg class at the Olympic team trials in Montreal in December. She cruised to victory there to earn her chance to fight in Italy to qualify for Paris 2024.

The 33-year-old is laser-focused on punching her ticket to Roland Garros, the site of the Olympic boxing matches this summer. She had been plan-

ning to take her nursing exam in January but quickly realized that her training schedule would not allow her sufficient time to prepare.

"I put that on the backburner," she says. "This is once in a lifetime. Nursing can wait."

Wright has been training hard with two sessions per day and barely a day off. That includes a morning conditioning workout and an evening session in the gym in Niagara Falls.

Tonight she tapes up her hands and spends about 15 minutes warming up with some shadow boxing, working on her footwork before she steps into the ring. Sallows, who wears target mitts, climbs in with her. The coach shouts out commands in quick succession as Wright works on her quick reflexes and reaction time.

"My best skill is my speed," she says. "I'm not the hardest puncher, but there's no one faster than me in the ring."

Then Wright dons her headgear and spars toe to toe

for a couple of rounds against a much younger City Club boxer, Adam Saleh. Finally, she's off to hit the water bag before a cool down session.

The Lundy's Lane location of City Boxing Club shares a parking lot with a Harvey's franchise right next door. Wright admits that some nights when she leaves the gym the aroma that wafts over is sometimes very difficult to resist.

"I don't go in there, though," she laughs, "but I eat well. When we're in camp in Italy they provide three meals a day, lots of pasta and things like that. I'll bring my own supplements and some protein bars over there. My pre-bout meal, believe it or not, is a peanut butter and jelly sandwich."

As it was prior to Montreal, Wright's loss at the Pan Am Games to Lozano remains a big motivation as she heads to Italy, where the top four boxers in each class will qualify for the Olympics.

"It's been four months," says Wright, "and it's still a wound that has not closed. That one really hurt. On one hand it was my most proud accomplishment in the sport, but on the other it was also the biggest heartbreak I've ever had, to be so close and to see it slip away. But this is my opportunity to redeem myself, to get it back and still qualify."

The tournament at Busto Arsizio wraps up on March 12. By then, Wright will have either earned her chance to represent Canada at Paris 2024 or will be forced to fight her way in at the final Olympic qualifier in Bangkok from May 23 to June 3.

kok from May 23 to June 3.

"I'm ready," an eager Wright tells The Local. "There are eight spots left in my category (50 kg). If I can snag one of these

four in Italy that will be a big pressure relief, not having to be in that final one, trying to get one of the last four spots in Bangkok."



McKenzie hitting the water bag.



Wright in the ring with coach Jesse Sallows.

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- ½ tsp. sea salt
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- 1 Cup Semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 3 eggs
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ cup cocoa powder



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



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Preds finishing season in playoff mode

Mike Balsom
The Local

With one game left to play this Friday in their Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League regular season, the Niagara Predators are all but firmly ensconced in sixth place in the South Division.

Judging by the three games they completed last weekend — a win over Tottenham and two losses to the St. George Ravens, each decided by a single goal, two via a shootout — they are already in playoff mode.

“It was a great weekend,” head coach Kevin Taylor said Monday. “We’re playing some of our best hockey right now. We’re not putting the puck in the net a lot right now, but we’re playing tight games, we’re covering our men, we’re playing playoff hockey.”

The weekend started Friday night at home with a 1-0 loss to the Ravens.

It was a classic goaltender’s battle, with St. George’s Justin Sheets and Niagara’s Zane Clausen

clearly earning their first and second star post-game honours, respectively. Sheets kicked away all 34 shots on goal by the Preds, while Clausen made 30 saves himself.

The game’s only goal came just under five minutes into the second period off the stick of the Ravens’ leading scorer Reece Furtado. A second after the Ravens won a faceoff in the Preds’ zone, Furtado got the puck and quickly found the far side of the net before Clausen had a chance to adjust to Furtado’s position.

“Their faceoffs have killed us all year,” Taylor said. “They use the same play, and for whatever reason we just haven’t been smart enough to pick it up. It’s a play they worked on, that they perfected, and we just never really had a chance to figure it out.”

The Preds visited fifth place Tottenham Saturday night and escaped with a 3-2 shootout victory.

Isaac Locker scored the game’s first goal on a power play with about three minutes left in the first pe-

riod. Nolan Wyers put the Preds up 2-0 in the second, but Alexis Paradis got the Railers on the board in the final two minutes during a Tottenham power play.

Ryan Anderson netted the tying goal with five minutes remaining in the third, forcing the overtime period, which ended scoreless. Preds forward Declan Fogarty, Niagara’s first shooter, was the game’s hero in the shootout with a last second deke to goalie Nicolas Perrault’s blocker side and a quick backhand around his outstretched leg. Clausen stopped all three Tottenham attempts.

It was a chippy game in the first and second periods, with 47 penalty minutes served and a game disqualification for Niagara’s Tyler Gearing.

“A lot of questionable calls on both sides,” Taylor opined. “We battled for that win. We had them 2-0, the penalties helped let them back in, and Declan scored a beautiful shootout goal for the win.”

It was another shootout Saturday in St. George, but this time the opposing team came out on top.

Again, the Preds scored first. It was Nicholas Nicoletti who tucked in a rebound off of Ravens’ goaltender Gleb Rakov to put the Preds on the board.

Cole Ellis responded for the Ravens in the second with a power play goal, while the third period ended scoreless. It was Owen Toddington who beat Preds’ goalie Mike Mankowski for the shootout win.

“It was probably one of the best games I’ve seen the guys play in a while,” Taylor said. “We only had 11 forwards and four defencemen. Players like Wyers played with a real edge. We were missing some top forwards and top defenders. I was really happy with how the guys played.”

The Preds are two points behind Tottenham in the standings. Niagara finishes the season at home Friday against first-place North York, while the Railers face the last place Toronto Flyers Saturday. Barring any wild, high scoring upsets in those games, Niagara will face third-place Durham in Oshawa for the first game of a best-of-three playoff series on Monday, February 19.

“I think we match up well with them,” Taylor said. “We beat them twice. We know we’re going to have to play a disciplined,

1-2-2 system, clog up the middle and play from there. That’s what we focused on yesterday. And we’re going to do the same thing Friday against North York.”

Taylor is looking to Wyers to continue his strong play as the team heads into the playoffs, and is hoping other team leaders will be the difference against the Renegades Friday, as well as the Roadrunners.

“We need (Luca) Fernandez to find his scoring touch again,” said Taylor. “And Logan Baillie, I’ve really been impressed with how he’s come along. We need him to continue to play the strong defensive game that we need

from him, to continue to be a shut-down defenceman. That will allow guys like (Guy) Manco, (Nick) Savoie and (Dylan) Denning to focus on putting the puck into the net.”

The Preds close out the regular season Friday night at 7 p.m. at Virgil’s Meridian Credit Union Arena.



Nick Savoie follows through on a shot against St. George Friday. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Nolan Wyers beats the Ravens goalie on this move, but lost the puck.



Ravens goalie Justin Sheets stops Preds Luca Fernandez on this attempt.

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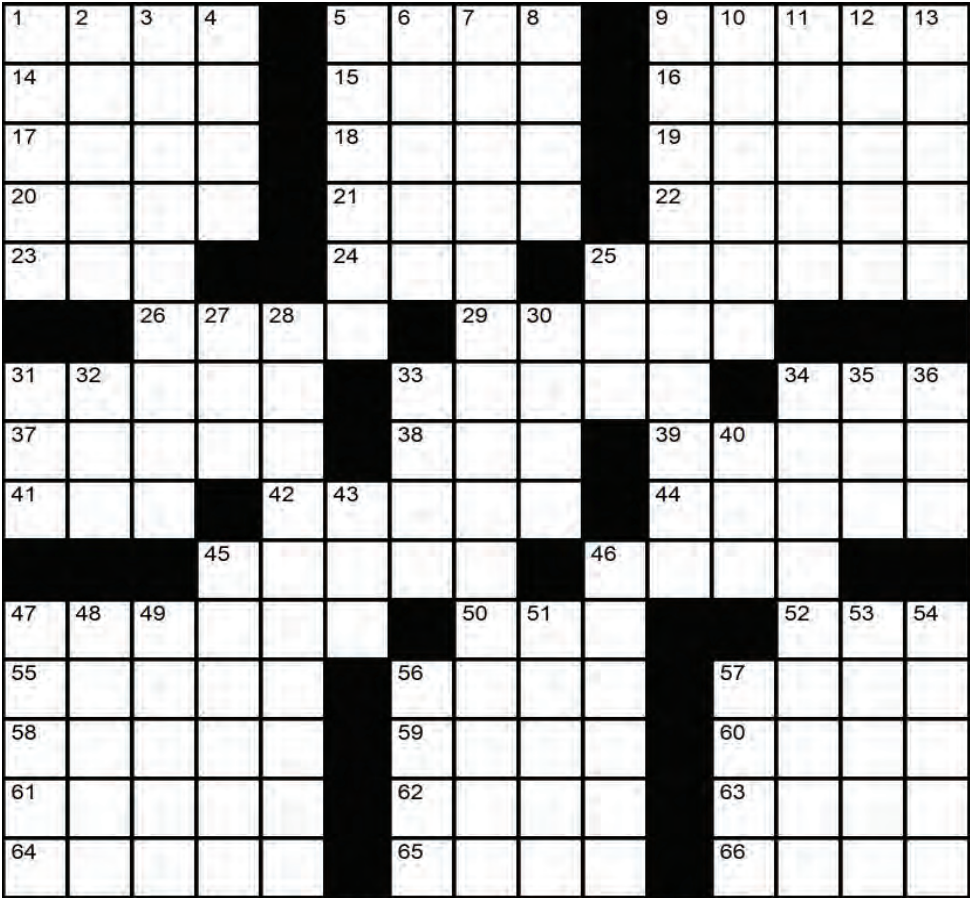
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- Across:
1 Pitcher's error
5 Hall amphibian?
9 Enhancement
14 Country singer/songwriter Jake ---
15 S American flightless bird
16 Light gray-brown
17 How to start a pudding race?
18 Bring in
19 Garden tool
20 Slant
21 Marx or Warners, e.g.
22 Adjusted
23 Longing
24 Place for experiments
25 Series of church intercessions
26 Prom partner
29 Sarcastic praise
31 Reluctant
33 Ugly encounter
34 Oil well equipment
37 Arc
38 Apollo 11 lander
39 New in Tijuana
41 Arid
42 Stand-in
44 Wept
45 Thin pancake
46 The Volunteer State (Abbr.)
47 Wooden hammer
50 Batter's stat.
52 A long way
55 Castaway locations
56 Bathtub residue
57 Where to find Pikes Peak (Abbr.)
58 Trim
59 Rent
60 Saturnalia
61 "Peace on earth, good will ---"
62 A k a C C C P
63 College sporting org.
64 Commence
65 Court dividers
66 Unload for cash
- Down:
1 Dictatorial
2 Up
3 Fabled
4 Recognize
5 Junior's voice
6 Vivien Leigh's G W T W role
7 Strenuous activity
8 Aykroyd and Quayle
9 Teetotalism
10 Second-in-command
11 Actress --- Rigg
12 Poet --- Nash
13 Wanting
25 Wolf Man --- Chaney
27 Off-roader
28 Now
30 --- Martin, cognac
31 Flat panel TV type
32 Belonging to us
33 Pigswill
34 Strengthen
35 "--- Got No Strings..." (Pinnocchio)
36 Deity
40 Gravetop vase
43 On a pension (Abbr.)
45 Brainy
46 Stopwatches, e.g.
47 Light fogs
48 --- in the arm
49 South American ruminant
51 Pop
53 Kind of pond bloom
54 Kingly
56 Ostracize
57 Drawbacks

OBITUARY



STEELE, Alice Irene
March 24, 1928 - February 7, 2024

It is with deep sorrow that we announce the peaceful passing of Alice Irene Steele, age 95, on Wednesday, February 7, 2024, at Upper Canada Lodge, Niagara-on-the-Lake. Born in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Alice was the cherished wife of the late James Albert Steele (1971).

Alice is survived by her only daughter, Sandra Spiller, and her husband George, as well as her granddaughter, Michelle. She was a devoted and loving mother and grandmother, whose warmth and kindness touched the

lives of all who knew her.

During her remarkable life, Alice dedicated over 40 years of service as the Executive Assistant to the Publisher at the St. Catharines Standard newspaper. Her commitment and hard work left an indelible mark on the publication and the lives of her colleagues.

Alice was a long-time and devoted parishioner of St. Vincent de Paul Church, where her faith played a central role in her life. Her presence and contributions to the church community were valued and appreciated by all.

A Funeral Mass to celebrate Alice's life will be held on Thursday, February 15, 2024 at 1 p.m., at St. Vincent de Paul Church, 73 Picton St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON. The Rite of Committal will follow in the church cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations to be made either to the church or the Canadian Cancer Society, a cause that held special meaning for Alice.

The family wishes to express their gratitude to the staff at Upper Canada Lodge for their compassionate care during Alice's final days. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com



Thiessen, Conrad — It is with sadness and also thankfulness for peace and rest, that we announce the passing of Conrad Thiessen on February 7, 2024 in St. Catharines, ON. Conrad was born June 11, 1955 to Conrad and Clara Thiessen. He is survived by his wife Mary, beloved partner of 46 years, his children Amanda & Scott Wallace and Emily & Drew Unruh, and his granddaughters, Penny, Reid and Genevieve. Conrad was brother to Klara & Mick Spaxman and Anna Wiens and brother-in-law to Laura (Helmet), Agatha (AI), Theresa & Frank, Jack & Laverna, Elsie & Don, Peter & Gabe, Eleanor & Bruce.

Conrad was a truck driver all his life and loved the open road. Whether hauling yachts with ATL, helicopters with IMT, or recycled paper with Baker Trucking, he took pride in his work and made many amazing friends along the way.

In lieu of flowers the family invites you to donate to Hospice Niagara, an organization and staff which were such a gift to all of us, or to the Burundi Fund which was is an ongoing project being run through Cornerstone Community Church.

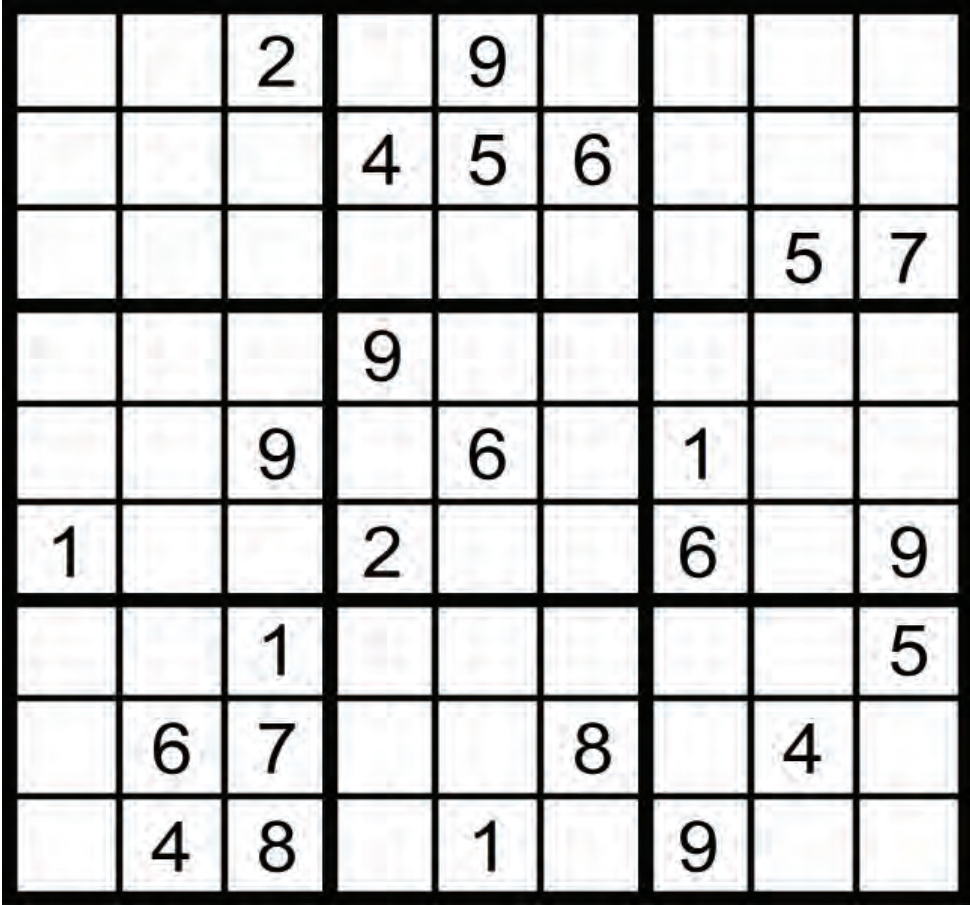
A service in remembrance of Conrad will be held at Cornerstone Community Church, 434 Hunter Rd, Niagara on the Lake, on Saturday, February 10th at 11am. A live stream of the service will be available on the church website. Online condolences at www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from
February 7, 2024

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

Across: 1 Balk, 5 Toad, 9 Add-on, 14 Owen, 15 Rhea, 16 Beige, 17 Sago, 18 Earn, 19 Spade, 20 Skew, 21 Bros, 22 Tuned, 23 Yen, 24 Lab, 25 Litany, 26 Date, 29 Irony, 31 Loath, 33 Scene, 34 Rig, 37 Curve, 38 L E M, 39 Nuevo, 41 Dry, 42 Proxy, 44 Cried, 45 Crepe, 46 Tenn, 47 Mallet, 50 R B I, 52 Far, 55 Isles, 56 Scum, 57 Colo, 58 Shave, 59 Hire, 60 Orgy, 61 To men, 62 U S S R, 63 N C A A, 64 Start, 65 Nets, 66 Sell.
Down: 1 Bossy, 2 Awake, 3 Legendary, 4 Know, 5 Treble, 6 O'Hara, 7 Aerobic exercise, 8 Dams, 9 Abstinence, 10 Deputy, 11 Diana, 12 Ogden, 13 Needy, 25 Lon, 27 A-T V, 28 The present, 30 Remy, 31 L C D, 32 Our, 33 Stop, 34 Reintroduce, 35 I've, 36 God, 40 Urm, 43 Ret, 45 Clever, 46 Timers, 47 Mists, 48 A shot, 49 Llama, 51 Burst, 53 Algal, 54 Royal, 56 Shun, 57 Cons.



Scotsman Hotel brings an upscale experience to NOTL

Mike Balsom
The Local

Inspired by her frequent trips to Edinburgh, Scotland, with her husband, Blair, Brenda McArthur wanted to bring an old-world, classic rural vibe to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

With the help of world-famous designer Lori Morris, she's done exactly that via a major renovation of what used to be called the Post House at the corner of Victoria and Johnson Streets in the Old Town.

An invitation-only grand opening celebration was sched-

uled for Tuesday and Wednesday this week, an event that had to be pushed back multiple times as the completion of the renovations was delayed due to repeated slowdowns in the construction industry.

The McArthurs bought the property almost four years ago with the vision of replicating the feeling they got when they stayed at Prestonfield House, a 23-room luxury hotel just outside Scotland's capital city.

"It was the most incredible stay I have ever had at a hotel," McArthur tells The Local. "It was so charming, the service

was impeccable, candles were lit throughout. This one really hit home for us. I felt that I wanted to bring that feeling here to Niagara-on-the-Lake."

The lush, high-end decor at what is now called The Scotsman Hotel is truly impressive. The main floor features a cozy lounge called the Champagne Room just to the left of the front desk. A short walk past the desk and to the right will take you through the Whiskey Room and then down to a lower level where an impressive bar and a grand piano are focal points of the bright space.

Each of the five suites carry Scottish names, such as the Calle, the Dornoch and, of course, the Prestonfield. They are all uniquely and elegantly decorated and feature their own luxurious bathrooms, outfitted with clawfoot tubs and floor-to-ceiling showers.

"We've had some friends stay to give us a trial over the past three weeks," says McArthur. "We asked for their input, what should stay, what should go. They all said that this is one of the coziest places, and they never wanted to leave the hotel."

McArthur has connected

with Sentineal Carriages to have visitors to the Scotsman picked up in front of the hotel when requested. Though they won't be serving wine, McArthur says they have struck agreements with both Big Head Winery and Peller Estates to offer their wines for sale by the bottle.

"It creates a really nice atmosphere," says McArthur. "They can pour their own wine, make their own drinks and enjoy them while sitting in any of the lounges that they like. And we have their own personal bar carts they can put together. If they want to sit in the Cham-

pagne Room staff will fill their bar cart with all the accessories they need."

And the large patio, with multiple seating areas, is outfitted with fireplaces that McArthur says will stay lit until the last guest goes back to their suite.

Every corner of the Scotsman is impressively furnished, every detail has been given the utmost attention by designer Morris, who has brought McArthur's goal of Scottish country life with a modern, elegant twist, to life.

The Scotsman opens for bookings on Feb. 16.



Brenda McArthur standing at the Yamaha Grand Piano, a focal point in the bar area of the Scotsman. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



The Champagne Room lounge is ready to greet guests.

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