What lies beneath that pond you’re skating on?

With weather perfect for skating on rinks created by Mother Nature, Owen Bjorgan and Kirstyn Smith take a moment to capture a photo. If you read Owen’s column on page 7, you will learn some interesting facts about the wildlife below the ice. (Owen Bjorgan)

Hirji concerned about reopenings being sustainable

Penny Coles
The Local

After a weekend of criticism and even threats to his safety, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Niagara’s acting chief medical officer of health has tweeted his thanks for the many emails and messages of support he received, which he said had been “humbled.”

But in an interview with The Local, and before regional councillors at a public health committee meeting Tuesday afternoon, although he voiced his thanks and appreciation for the support, he was more anxious to talk about Niagara moving into the grey zone this week, as well as his goals and concerns for the future.

Although he said he was not targeting restaurants with his recommendation to the province last week that Niagara go into the grey zone, they remain closed, and that’s where the anger and confusion has been coming from.

He said he agrees with restaurant owners that the venue doesn’t spread COVID, but the activity inherent in dining out with friends and family does.

In the fall, when he insti-It's small, but it doesn’t stop us. Unlike other groups, we are not targeting restaurants with our recommendation to the province last week that Niagara go into the grey zone, they remain closed, and that’s where the anger and confusion has been coming from. tuted a Section 22 order that restricted restaurant patrons to members of one household, numbers went down. The recent provincial lockdown, which included restaurant clos- continues, also brought numbers down, as did the lockdown last spring.

Each time, reopenings were not sustainable, and the last thing he wants is for the current move to colour-coded zoning to lead to another lockdown.

He told councillors when restaurants reopen, he likely will consider the Section 22 order.

Continued on page 4

Townline Road fire destroys a community

Penny Coles
The Local

The chicken barns on Townline Road wouldn’t have looked much to curious outsiders who checked out the property after the $2.5 million fire that destroyed them, but those who rented shops or storage units and knew the value of what was going on behind the scenes are grieving the loss of a community.

“It didn’t look like much from the outside,” says Gavin Young, one of the many who had vehicles stored on the property. “But what was going on inside was a community of people who had a place to gather together, help each other, and learn from each other. That’s the tragedy — the loss of an awesome community.”

Young is the president of the Niagara Military Vehicle Association, an incorporated, not-for-profit group for people who own, restore and exhibit vintage military vehicles dating from the First World War to the present.

Members of the group stored about 20 to 25 private-ly-owned military vehicles, some of the largest and most valuable — the ones they can’t park in their driveways — in a portion of one of the three former chicken barns. The association had 100 feet of barn, and one of the greenhouses between the barns, for storage.

Darren Werner, owner of the property, is a member of the association, and also had some vehicles stored there. Werner and Young both describe a community of those in their early 20s to the 70-plus age group, with shared interests in vehicles, repairing and restoring them, many with skilled trades. They all took pleasure in helping each other, especially some of the older, retired members, who would offer their assistance to the younger generation when they were stuck.

Most of the members of the military vehicle group are older, many former military, and some would visit the site daily, chatting with others and helping out when asked. Their vehicles were mostly restored, and might need a tune-up or oil change occasionally, but not a lot of work was involved, so they were always happy to assist anyone who could use a hand, says Young.

He is not a vet, he says, but was a sea cadet and is a master mariner in the Merchant Marine, a sea captain on the boats.

A lot of former military, once they’re separated from the service, find it leaves a hole in their lives, he says. “They find us at our shows, and we find them. A lot have vehicles they can drive, and together we do fundraisers or causes such as the Wounded War-riors and the Rankin Run, or for local legions. We don’t of- ten say no to a fundraiser.”

Their space on Townline Road has provided a meeting place, and became the “heart

Continued on page 12
Offshore workers arriving, working safely

Penny Coles
The Local

After a day of work in the greenhouses, Eileen Pillitteri-Smith of Seaway Farms in Niagara-on-the-Lake was feeling optimistic about the season to come.

Although it was a cold, wintry and snowed day, the sun was shining, and it was beginning to feel like spring was in sight.

Having gone through one season of a pandemic, going into the second one with similar protocols, lessons learned and some refinements that were making the lead-up to spring seem a little more organized.

The big question this time last year was the arrival of the offshore workers, as growers wanted to hear how the federal government was going to handle their entry into Canada, the border having been closed to all but Canadian citizens, with limited exceptions. Initially, seasonal farm workers had not been included in those exceptions, creating a delay before they were able to travel.

This year, the only concern is limited flights for arriving workers, says Pillitteri-Smith.

While there are new restrictions on people arriving in Canadian airports, they don’t affect essential travellers, which include offshore workers.

“They do everything they need to do to be safe,” she says. “They call them daily with screening questions, and they have a number to call if they have any questions.

Over the winter, she has had some renovations done to their living quarters. Large pieces of furniture have been removed, with new Ilfa wardrobes and beds ordered for each of the men and women who are coming to work on the farm. By getting rid of some furniture and moving things around, there is more room for them to spread out, she says.

Seaway has had two audits, one from federal inspectors and one from Public Health, to check they’re following all protocols. When some of the women arrived, the renovations of their living quarters was not finished, and they quarantined in a nearby hotel, where meals were provided.

The first group of 10 to arrive are now working, and like last year, she’s taking their food supplies delivered to the farm, and once they begin work, she says, “Once they’re here, they’re really anxious to work.”

During their quarantine, and once they begin work, she calls them daily with screening questions, and they have a number to call if they have any questions.

As for those still to come, with an expected arrival at the end of the month, the cancelation of flights makes that a question mark. “It could be any time, and we just have to be ready for it. We’re trying to be patient.”

“The one thing she wished she had done differently, she says, would have been to bring the earliest arrivals to the farm two weeks earlier, so they wouldn’t have been behind when the quarantine period was finished.

However, another lesson learned that has benefited the workers and the farm is a result of needing to keep those living together in cohorts when they’re working.

“They’re divided into crews, the cohorts having the same job each day, going out to work in the fields, or the women in different areas of the greenhouses, and she has found that it has helped things run smoothly, in an organized fashion she’ll keep for the future.

Now that it’s feeling like spring isn’t too far off, she’s been getting calls and emails from customers wanting to know when the garden centre is opening. She’s not ready to set a date just yet, unsure of provincial regulations that could change at any time, and waiting to want to open their doors, rather than doing curbside or appointment-only sales, which were necessary for a time last year.

“Every business has had to rework the way we do things. This last year has been a learning experience for all of us, but our workers mean the world to us, and we’ll do whatever it takes to make it work for all of us. They’re really our family, and every single grower I know feels the same.”

Patricia Arauz Hernandez, Guadalupe De Jesus Mena, Eileen Pillitteri-Smith and Alicia Digna De La Cruz work safely in the Seaway Farms greenhouses. (Photo supplied)

THE NOTL LOCAL

February 18, 2021

Megan Gilchrist
Special to The Local

During the month of February, members of the NOTL Sparks, Brownies, Girl Guides and Pathfinders have been creating welcome posters for the offshore workers to Niagara.

Patricia Arauz Hernandez, Guadalupe De Jesus Mena, Eileen Pillitteri-Smith and Alicia Digna De La Cruz work safely in the Seaway Farms greenhouses. (Photo supplied)

Girl Guide groups welcome offshore workers
Local restaurants react to grey zone lockdown

Penny Coles
The Local

There is no doubt local restaurant owners are disappointed they remain closed, while more retailers are permitted to open, but they’re not supporting the level of anger displayed by others against the decision.

After a week of knowing the same changes were coming for Niagara, the province announced Friday that Niagara would move into the grey-lockdown zone this Tuesday.

That meant non-essential retailers, closed since Dec. 26, are allowed to open, with 25 per cent capacity.

With Niagara the only region in Ontario entering the grey zone, there was some issue about confusion about business, but it quickly became clear that in grey, they remain closed to indoor dining, able only to offer takeout only.

Hair salons, barber shops, gyms, and yoga studios also remain closed.

While the province was allowing for limited reopening in retail stores, they were also asking for individuals to adhere to the stay-at-home order, to mask up, to limit interactions to household contacts.

Restaurant owner Maria Mavridis of Firehall Place and Café Wine Bar and Eatery had been waiting for the announcement, hoping Niagara would be in red. She was anticipating being able to open this week, and had emailed her staff with schedules. Instead, she was hearing that could open with limited capacities, but not restaurants, and was testing to tell them they were staying home.

“Too many restrictions, too long,” she said, as she poised to open to the takeout of her establishment.

It wasn’t making a lot of sense to her or seeming very fair that stores could open at 25 per cent capacity, but restaurants could not, even though they could follow all the safety protocols and limit the number of people in their dining rooms.

Store owners aren’t expected to take names and phone numbers of those who shop, but restaurants were doing that before the shutdown, and are preparing to continue that.

Despite feeling some frustration over the province putting NOTL in grey, Mavridis says she wants nothing to do with a Facebook page that has apparently been the source of threats against Hirji, blaming him for the decision that is keeping restaurants closed in Niagara.

The group page, United Hospitality Niagara, was created in November to give restaurant owners and employees a place to discuss COVID-related challenges.

The level of anger and threats against Hirji, “are not what our family represents,” she says, noting that while she initially joined the Facebook page, she only checks it to see what members are saying, but doesn’t comment.

From what she has seen in recent days, none of the NOTL restaurant owners were a part of that. “They were definitely not from NOTL restaurants,” she says.

Although the level of threats had toned down by Tuesday, members were still pushing for him to be fired, with a list of all regional councillors’ email addresses along with a request to encourage them to support his firing.

Part of the frustration remaining is closed comes from the public perception there is a considerable amount of financial support for restaurant owners, but it quickly became clear that in grey, they remain closed to indoor dining, able only to offer takeout only.

“Everything is changing so quickly,” she said.

The decision to put Niagara in grey would have been made because at that point, there were some portions of the region where the numbers called for it, although the majority of municipalities were either in red, with one in orange. “How do you move everyone to a colour with less restrictions when there are still some in grey?” she asks.

“If there are still areas in grey, then the region has to be in grey.”

It will likely be no more than two weeks before Niagara is moved to red, as long as the numbers reflect that, she added.

Continued on page 11

Lord mayor offers support for public health chief

Penny Coles
The Local

Lord Mayor Betsy Dietero, aware of last weekend’s threats against Dr. Mustafa Hirji, the region’s acting medical officer of health, joined many others with her message of support for Hirji.

She had supported him when he first spoke of recommending Niagara be in the grey zone, with numbers in some municipalities that justified the lockdown restrictions that accompany grey, but said earlier this week numbers are coming down, and that could change.

“Dr. Hirji has dedicated his career to protecting the health and safety of the public. His recommendations are made to keep us all safe. Threats of violence are completely unacceptable,” she said.

“It’s been a long road, and we’re all exhausted and frustrated by the ongoing impacts of this pandemic. We must stay calm and united,” Dietero added.

On a personal note, Dietero added, “I am so ready to be out of lockdown. And it will happen. But until then, I’ll stay calm and continue to follow the rules to protect my family and others.”

“I think what was confusing was we were moved from lockdown to grey, but grey isn’t all that different,” he said.

People are stressed, businesses are challenged. And Dr. Hirji is doing his best. I don’t believe decisions are made entirely by himself. As the region moves forward, and health and wellness becomes part of daily life, most decisions are made by a group of people, and the people making those decisions are basing them on what is in the best interest of the community.”

Hirji has notified regional politicians he’s considering some further changes, and will let them know of any decisions before announcing them to the public, said Zalapa.

Regional councillor says decisions made to protect public

Penny Coles
The Local

Regional councillor Gary Zalapa had heard about the anger and threats from the hospitality industry toward the regional acting medical officer of Health, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, over the past weekend, but hadn’t heard from local businesses.

He has received a few emails, he said, that were professional, and respectful. Some were simply from people wanting to understand better the colour-coded restrictions, and others were asking ‘why’.

“I think what was confusing was we were moved from lockdown to grey, but grey isn’t all that different,” he said.

People are stressed, businesses are challenged. And Dr. Hirji is doing his best. I don’t believe decisions are made entirely by himself. As the region moves forward, and health and wellness becomes part of daily life, most decisions are made by a group of people, and the people making those decisions are basing them on what is in the best interest of the community.”

Hirji has notified regional politicians he’s considering some further changes, and will let them know of any decisions before announcing them to the public, said Zalapa.

Public health holds an update for regional councillors every other Friday, and with a meeting coming up this week, he expects councillors will be given information to help understand the decision-making process and an update on what could be coming.

“Anything could happen,” he said. While it’s possible the region could qualify for red, “it could also be another story.”

With the outbreak of variants we’re hearing about, I’m not an expert, but I don’t think we have a handle on how that transmission could affect us. I’m concerned about that.”

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For details about the above listings, please contact the above people.
**PUBLIC NOTICE OF HEARING**

**PROCEEDING COMMANCED UNDER subsection 29(5) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.O.18, as amended**

**Owners:** Dan D’Alessandro & Mary D’Alessandro  
**Subject:** Notice of Intention to Designate  
**Property Address:** 21 Prideaux Street  
**Legal Description:** PT LT 31 TP PL 86 NIAGARA AS IN RO432606  
**Municipality:** Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake  
**CRB Case Name:** CRB1918  
**CRB Case Name:** Black v. Niagara-on-the-Lake (Town)  

**PROCEEDING COMMANCED UNDER subsection 29(5) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.O.18, as amended**

**Owners:** Thomas Elltoft, Kimberley Elltoft  
**Subject:** Notice of Intention to Designate  
**Property Address:** 27 Prideaux Street  
**Legal Description:** PT LT 30 TP PL 86 NIAGARA AS IN RO434461  
**Municipality:** Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake  
**CRB Case Name:** CRB1919  
**CRB Case Name:** Black v. Niagara-on-the-Lake (Town)  

**PROCEEDING COMMANCED UNDER subsection 29(5) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.O.18, as amended**

**Owners:** John Colin Black  
**Subject:** Notice of Intention to Designate  
**Property Address:** 27 Prideaux Street  
**Legal Description:** PT LT 30 TP PL 86 NIAGARA AS IN NTW8087  
**Municipality:** Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake  
**CRB Case Name:** CRB1920  
**CRB Case Name:** Black v. Niagara-on-the-Lake (Town)  

The Conservation Review Board will conduct a hearing respecting this matter.

This hearing will be held:  
at: 9:30 am  
on: March 17, 18 & 19, 2021  
at: Microsoft Teams video conference call  

The Review Board has set aside three days for this hearing. Please contact the Review Board at conservation.review.board@ontario.ca no later than Friday, March 12, 2021 to obtain the video conference details.

If you do not attend at the commencement of the hearing or are not represented at this hearing, the Review Board may proceed in your absence and you will not be entitled to any further notice of the proceedings.

For recevoir des services en français, veuillez communiquer avec nous au (416) 212-6349, immédiatement.

We are committed to providing accessible services as set out in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. If you have any accessibility needs, please contact our Accessibility Coordinator as soon as possible. If you require documents in formats other than conventional print, or if you have specific accommodation needs, please let us know so we can make arrangements in advance. Please also identify any assistance you may require in the event of an emergency evacuation.

DATED at Toronto, Ontario this 10th day of February 2021.
Why So Blue?

This time of year, especially with the current climate of our time in particular, the Winter Blues can truly set in, creating feelings, or moods of unhappiness that are often associated with experiencing the cold of winter.

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"A well-used blue is a true stroke of confidence." — Hannah Yeo, Colour & design expert

Blue is a favourite for those interested in exploring colours "beyond" neutral. Shades of blue are synonymous with design dependability and classic style. Blues are livable, graceful, and whether you are looking to completely saturate your space with a blue hue, or add an accent of a bolder, deeper blue - we will always have the right blue for you to dive into.

Awaken feelings of serenity, tranquility and calm. Create aesthetics inspired by the ocean, sea and sky. The popularity of blue is palpable. From inspiration online, to advice from our experts in-store, let us help you find the best blue paint colours for any project.

If you aren't ready to go all the way with Blue in your home, then why not try an accent? Deep blue makes for a rich accent colour for hallways, entryways, home entryways – anywhere that you are looking for a stroke of drama. Consider charismatic cobalts like Big Country Blue 2066-30 and Patriot Blue 2064-20, or for a classic vibe, Old Navy 2063-10 is a favorite. In thoughtful amounts, these shades of blue bring a stylish spark of energy to any space, and move away from the somber stigma associated with these blue hues.

Blue can adapt to so many spaces, creating an inviting vibe to any contemporary or traditional space - so it comes as no surprise that there are so many variations of it. Brighten up those winter blues with a colour, or a few, that will give you, and your space, the lift you're looking for.

Looking for inspiration? Try Benjamin Moore’s Blue Stream 1668, which has a touch of sophistication, and also a touch of grey which allows it to coordinate beautifully and playfully with other colours - from our Classics Collection. Or try our Palladian Blue HC-144, which emits a calming and relaxing aesthetic, combining the blue tones of the sky with a touch of mother of pearl - from our Historical Collection.

Find the Blue, or hue, that’s right for you when you chat with the Colour Crew at Creek Road Paints, Benjamin Moore in Virgil! #BeHue.

Currently offering Curbside Pick-up & FREE Delivery on a Gallon or more! Monday to Friday 8 am to 4 pm.
As non-essential business reopen, carefully, and restaurants, a few different few days for many. There was some confusion at first with their initial thoughts on what opening in grey meant, for businesses, and individuals, and once the answers became evident, they weren't all what we wanted to hear.

Last week restaurant owners were excited, reaching out to staff about hours, some ordering food, getting their dining rooms spruced up and ready to open this week. Then, a rude awakening.

There would be no opening for restaurants, or for those associated with hospitality industry businesses. Some were thinking the stay-at-home order might change, maybe allowing for a bubble. No bubbles for Niagara.

The anger and frustration of restaurant owners is understandable as they suffer through this pandemic, likely feeling very alone, but as one person put it, another, from the prime minister down to local politicians, and even disappointed members of the public health committee meetings. He was questioned extensively on vaccinations, on colour coding restrictions, and on consideration for the economy, on sustainable re-opening, variants of concern and wildfire readiness for a third wave. It's obvious councillors have their own concerns, and were not so with Venus. Try not to be too lazy or too indulgent. And not so with Venus. Try not to be too lazy or too indulgent.

We have not been in our own households. Some were looking forward with their lives. This is an important lesson for everyone.

As non-essential businesses began to open this week, we have not been in our own households. Some were looking forward with their lives. This is an important lesson for everyone.

And instead of attacking those who are in the very difficult position of making the necessary decisions to keep us safe, whether we agree or not, we should understand they are doing their very difficult balancing act on our behalf. Whatever their jobs or expertise, they didn't sign up to earn minimum wage. Neither do we need to worry if we still have an office, or where ever we find it's in a pretty visible location, it's in a pretty visible location.

Then, a rude awakening.

The trusted voice of our community
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Your feedback is valued.

Diamir King admanager@notllocal.com

The Niagara-on-the-Lake

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One of the first municipalities to mandate masks, and this town was one of the first municipalities to mandate masks, and this town was one of the first municipalities to mandate masks.

And from individuals, who are suffering, and who are not getting the financial support they need from upper levels of government to make them mandatory, the region following suit some time later. At that point, I was still doing some person in person, and meetings with people for photos. I would wear a mask, but began to become fearful I might be putting others in danger needlessly.

While we are all working together to get through this, it's obvious in us now that we will likely continue to practise them for a long time after this pandemic is over.

At the beginning of the pandemic, helping each other was difficult in these times, and of a time we'll look back on as being different for all of us, as reflected in the pages of a different time.

However, we all miss meeting with people, making those personal connections, the empathy and kindness we enjoy when we volunteer, activities that are no longer available to us. We hope to have a new sign soon, and yes, we'll still be there. By the time we had made the decision to begin using the office again last September, it was in the middle of a construction zone. We had no parking, it was hard to find. In any case, we can't wait that another remark that apart from the financial restrictions, many people are dealing with difficult issues we don't know about, with their mental health, or with health, or with health problems that have become so much more difficult in these times, and of a time we'll look back on as being different for all of us, as reflected in the pages of a different time.

However, we all miss meeting with people, making those personal connections, the empathy and kindness we enjoy when we volunteer, activities that are no longer available to us. We hope to have a new sign soon, and yes, we'll still be there. By the time we had made the decision to begin using the office again last September, it was in the middle of a construction zone. We had no parking, it was hard to find. In any case, we can't wait. The trusted voice of our community.

As a community newspaper, we are the trusted voice of our community, and we want to be accessible to all the people who make up this community.
Owen Bjorgan ponders the biodiversity that lies beneath a frozen pond, taking a moment to balance a puck on his hockey stick. (Photo supplied)

Let’s consider the species which may frequent a typical rural Niagara-on-the-Lake pond. They’re probably out there right now, even as you read this in the middle of a wintry cold snap.

While my brother and I are shoveling each other around in the corner of the rink, perhaps a snapping turtle lies beneath our skates. We won’t see Ontario’s largest freshwater turtle until May, most likely, and that’s because they are all hunkered down in the warm, insulating mud of the pond’s bottom. One may even rest on top of the mud mat without moving for weeks, and what’s more, is that these reptiles have been witnessed swimming under the ice in the dead of winter. Their metabolism drops severally, and their heart rate of one beat per 10 minutes keeps the turtle alive enough. Imagine all of the biodiversity we’re skating over right now?” I pondered.

Some of us have awesome backyard rinks with wooden boards, where water is import ed from somewhere else to make a sleek rink. Others have access to ponds, or the know ledge of other natural water features which provide solid skating opportunities as well.

While skates, boots, and puck traverse across the ice, a pause is required to consider what living things may lurk on the underside of the face-off circle.

I am disappointed by the pandemic. Bullfrogs, green frogs, leopard frogs are the most common amphibians in our local ponds during winters where it may be -15 above the ground. Imagine the amphibian varieties we might see visiting the pond, we might be missing out on appreciation for the dragonfly larvae in limbo under the ice, resembling an alien action figure more than a beautiful adult dragonfly. It is freezing and dormant until move around to feast on moss- quitos in the spring. That’s right. Dragonflies will take on mosquitoes by our backyard pond as adults, but the mosquito control begins well before their familiar adult lives.

I was extremely disappointed to see on the provincial government notice that Niagara Region is the only one out of 27 municipalities in grey as of Feb. 16. Having reviewed The Local today, I find Dr. Mutuala Hirji, who is representing public health, may have been the cause of this hold-back. I find his reasoning for leaving us in grey lockdown don’t justify the negative effects on both residents who may only be looking forward to talking with neighbours from across the street and on small business restaurants which struggle from week to week to keep their businesses from going under. I don’t buy the precaution that Toronto residents may visit since the numbers collected to date make it unlikely they were the cause of the outbreaks we have had.

Again, our MP Tony Baldimetti has written a par tisan political article in The Local paper (Feb. 11, 2021) unfairly criticizing our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and government for the vaccine delay and business closures and loss of jobs caused by the pandemic. I am disappointed by the MP’s unhelpful tone and lack of substance, consistent with his public messages on Facebook and during Question Period in our House of Commons. A few weeks ago, he dem anded that our PM apologize for launching another, accessible, legible program (HASCAP) for small businesses most impacted by the pandemic (tourism, hospitality, arts and culture) without any ideas to make it better. Our government is doing better all the time, because they will take correction based on scient ific public health evidence. Just remember that our COVID-19 sickness rate per capita, is about 2-1/4 times less than our mighty neighbour, the U.S., as is the death rate. Canadians are doing better than many in the world because we are working together (mostly!).

We should be grateful to our governments and individuals when we all cooperate. For example: millions of dollars of federal money and rapid COVID-19 test kits sat unused until com plaints forced the Ontario government to dis pense to front line workers — schools, border, businesses, etc.

Though we mourn our lost loved ones and our distress and loneliness, we Canadians are resilient, and we will shift to what’s necessary to defeat this plague and variants based on best scientific and economic knowledge.

So, bring on the vaccines, and four other lots that instead of discrimination, we are very happy to see this inclusive and welcoming Niagara.

Karen Gansel
NOLT

Letters! We want letters!

If you have a letter to the editor you’d like to see published, please send it to penny@notllocal.com. Please try to keep it to about 300 words, so there is room for letters. And please stick to the issue at hand, rather than attacking those involved. The deadline is Monday at noon.

NOTL businesses: Call Karen at 905.641.5335 or email karen@notllocal.com. Business outside NOTL: Call Jul a at 905.934.1040 or email julia@notllocal.com

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NOLT LOCAL February 18, 2021

THE NOTL LOCAL

Owen Bjorgan ponders the biodiversity that lies beneath a frozen pond, taking a moment to balance a puck on his hockey stick. (Photo supplied)

while skates, boots, and puck traverse across the ice, a pause is required to consider what living things may lurk on the underside of the face-off circle.

The little kids call me over, but it’s actually a baby beetle, not a mosquito. Let’s remember, the leaves on the wall of the school. It’s now time, because they will take correction based on scientific public health evidence.

Imagine all of the biodiversity we’re skating over right now.” I pondered.

I am disappointed by the pandemic. Bullfrogs, green frogs, leopard frogs are the most common amphibians in our local ponds during winters where it may be -15 above the ground. Imagine the amphibian varieties we might see visiting the pond, we might be missing out on appreciation for the dragonfly larvae in limbo under the ice, resembling an alien action figure more than a beautiful adult dragonfly. It is freezing and dormant until move around to feast on mos- quitos in the spring. That’s right. Dragonflies will take on mosquitoes by our backyard pond as adults, but the mosquito control begins well before their familiar adult lives.

I was extremely disappointed to see on the provincial government notice that Niagara Region is the only one out of 27 municipalities in grey as of Feb. 16. Having reviewed The Local today, I find Dr. Mutuala Hirji, who is representing public health, may have been the cause of this hold-back. I find his reasoning for leaving us in grey lockdown don’t justify the negative effects on both residents who may only be looking forward to talking with neighbours from across the street and on small business restaurants which struggle from week to week to keep their businesses from going under. I don’t buy the precaution that Toronto residents may visit since the numbers collected to date make it unlikely they were the cause of the outbreaks we have had.

Again, our MP Tony Baldimetti has written a par tisan political article in The Local paper (Feb. 11, 2021) unfairly criticizing our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and government for the vaccine delay and business closures and loss of jobs caused by the pandemic. I am disappointed by the MP’s unhelpful tone and lack of substance, consistent with his public messages on Facebook and during Question Period in our House of Commons. A few weeks ago, he demanded that our PM apologize for launching another, accessible, legible program (HASCAP) for small businesses most impacted by the pandemic (tourism, hospitality, arts and culture) without any ideas to make it better. Our government is doing better all the time, because they will take correction based on scientific public health evidence. Just remember that our COVID-19 sickness rate per capita, is about 2-1/4 times less than our mighty neighbour, the U.S., as is the death rate. Canadians are doing better than many in the world because we are working together (mostly!).

We should be grateful to our governments and individuals when we all cooperate. For example: millions of dollars of federal money and rapid COVID-19 test kits sat unused until complaints forced the Ontario government to dispense to front line workers — schools, border, businesses, etc.

Though we mourn our lost loved ones and our distress and loneliness, we Canadians are resilient, and we will shift to what’s necessary to defeat this plague and variants based on best scientific and economic knowledge.

So, bring on the vaccines, and four other lots that in stead of discrimination, we are very happy to see this inclusive and welcoming Niagara.

Karen Gansel
NOLT

Letters! We want letters!

If you have a letter to the editor you’d like to see published, please send it to penny@notllocal.com. Please try to keep it to about 300 words, so there is room for letters. And please stick to the issue at hand, rather than attacking those involved. The deadline is Monday at noon.

NOTL businesses: Call Karen at 905.641.5335 or email karen@notllocal.com. Business outside NOTL: Call Julia at 905.934.1040 or email julia@notllocal.com

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Sally Carter and Black women in Moseby affair

Sarah Kaufman Special to The Local

Many local history enthusiasts are familiar with the name of Solomon Moseby, but few may know about those who were instrumental in securing his freedom during the Moseby affair in 1837.

Moseby, who was an escaped slave from Kentucky, was being held at the Niagara Courthouse jail (formerly located where Rye Park is today). Moseby had escaped bondage while delivering a message for his enslaver, David Castlemain, on horseback. Instead of delivering the message, he made his way to Niagara to secure his freedom. His former enslaver found him here and requested he be extradited for trial on charges of stealing. The Niagara sheriff detained Moseby, until the extradition decision was made.

Sally Carter, along with local schoolteacher Herbert Holmes, helped to organize 200-300 supporters, many of whom were Black people, from Black communities across the Niagara region to take vigil outside the jail and guard against any attempt to secretly deport Moseby.

When Lt.-Gov. Francis Bond Head ordered Moseby to be returned to the U.S., into his former enslaver's custody, hundreds of protesters, including some from the local white population, gathered at the jail. The Black women who were present also launched a series of tactics to aid his freedom. A group of women blocked the road to the Courthouse and sang hymns to act as a diversion, while others helped to make an escape possible. Some women were armed with weapons, while others had hidden stones in their stockings or aprons ready to throw.

One account described how some of the Black women put themselves in between the Black men and the White prison guards to prevent fights from breaking out. These tactics were instrumental in securing Moseby's freedom when he was brought out from the jail to a carriage.

Carter had formerly escaped slavery in Virginia at the age of 16. At this time, she was 45 years old, and lived at the corner of Ave and Simcoe Streets with her husband Samuel. In an interview around the time of the Moseby affair, she was asked whether she would consider living in Canada. In response, she said “Yes— that is, I was happy here — but now — I don’t know. I thought we were safe here! I'll go to the end of the world, I will!”

Carter knew what Moseby had gone through to obtain his freedom, and along with others at the Moseby affair was desperate to ensure he would not have to return to a life of bondage.

Sarah Kaufman is the managing director and curator of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum.

See related story on page 15 of this issue.

Museum presents The First Cut is the Deepest

2021 MUNICIPAL TAX REMINDER NOTICE INTERIM FIRST INSTALLMENT DUE FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2021

Tax Rates as per Interim By-Law No. 5283-20

Payment may be made by mail or by drop off at the Town Municipal Offices at 1593 Four Mile Creek Road (PO Box 100, Virgil ON L0S 1T0). A 24-hour mail slot is located at the front (accessible drop box) and side entrances of the Town office for your convenience. Post-dated cheques are accepted. Payment can also be made electronically from your bank account using the 19-digit roll number.

If payment is made at a bank or other pay station, your account will be credited only after the Town has received settlement from the bank. Please allow ten (10) working days for payment processing.

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Niagara-on-the-Lake

18th century, the various medical substances used at that time, as well as displays of some of the surgeon’s tools of the trade. Staplers of the surgeon’s toolbox were leeches, bone saws, chisels, pliers, clamps and drills, and not an anesthetic in sight. That’s where the whiskey came in useful. And much of the immedi- ate nursing of the wounded and dying on the battlefield was left to camp followers, the wives and women who followed their men in battle.

The life of a soldier in military camps during the 18th century would have been dirty, cramped, bleak, a perfect place for disease and illness to spread, and battle wounds to heal. But everything they learned in those harsh conditions would influence the future of medical care.

The virtual lecture is Wednesday Feb. 24, at 11 a.m., and “be ready for your toes to cut!”

Scott Finlay has been an interpretation officer and corporate events coordina- tor with Parks Canada since 2010. He is well-known in Niagara for his portrayal of General Isaac Brock in many re-enactments, and is a popular emcee for many community events.

As a professional corporate entre- tainer, facilitator and creative director for 25 years, Finlay has performed at more than a thousand conferences and participat- ed in numerous corporate videos and television pre- sentations.

Registration is required for the lecture at www.nhsm.ca/events.

For more info email alaksen@nhsm.ca.

Scott Finlay plays Sir Isaac Brock in the next museum lecture, which comes with a warning: not for the faint-of-heart. Scott Finlay will explore the life and battles of Sir Isaac Brock with Parks Canada since 2010. He is well-known in Niagara for his portrayal of General Isaac Brock in many re-enactments, and is a popular emcee for many community events.

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Registration is required for the lecture at www.nhsm.ca/events.

For more info email alaksen@nhsm.ca.
Ravine holds successful Black history fundraiser

Tony Chisholm
Special to The Local

Our second History in the Vineyard (at home) takeover event last Thursday was an unqualified successful event.

The committee that worked on the event was chaired by Mona Babin, treasurer of the Niagara Historical Society. We all worked closely with Paul Harber, both of whom deserve a huge credit for this success.

In all, 220 meals were prepared and distributed, and 15 cases of Ravine wine were sold.

Amy Klassen of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum writes: “So many people were excited to pick our dinner and had to let you know we are sooooo pleased. Everyone was pleased with how smoothly the event moved, despite the high volume of meals. The organization of the meal choices, pickup times and delivery and wine distribution went without a hitch. This time we added a delivery option that allowed many more people to participate without having to drive to St. Davids.”

Special thanks to Paul Harber of Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery for his eager participation, and the chefs of The Garrison House and Ruffino’s Pasta Bar and Grill for providing such delicious gourmet meals.

Here are just a few comments received the evening of the event:

“Just arrived back with our dinner and had to let you know we are sooooo impressed with all the organization from instructions and food containers to historical information for Black history. You and your team have done an amazing job, irrespective of how good the ingestible part was!! AND we are looking forward to our dinner as well. Many thanks and congrats on your successful fundraiser.”

“Loved our wonderful dinner. Everything was SO O-O-O-O delicious. Thanks to you and to the Museum/Friends of Fort George staff and to Paul Harber for having put on a sensational event/taste bud treat!!”

“I wanted to thank you and compliment the Historical Society on History in the Vineyard. I know from experience how difficult it is to find COVID-friend-ly fundraising initiatives these days and how much organizing is involved. Well done!”

Event organizer Mona Babin, Paul Harber of Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery, Amanda Gamble of the Friends of Fort George, and, Sarah Kaufman and Amy Klassen of the NOTL Museum held another successful fundraiser for the Friends and the museum.

(Tony Chisholm)
Niagara’s dog whisperer tracks run-away pets

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Some refer to her as a dog whisperer, but a more accurate title for Char Spinosa might be a dog profiler. Unlike those television characters, though, Spinosa works her magic on those of the canine persuasion.

Spinosa, who hangs her shingle out as Niagara’s K9 Tracker, is able to quickly read a dog’s personality and predict its behaviour. That ability has come in handy over the past 10 years as she has aided in the search and rescue of more than 100 dogs, most of them in the Niagara region.

With her self-published new book, K9 Tracker S & R—Lost Pet Recovery, Spinosa is hoping to help even more distressed pet owners reunite with their lost friends. Sub-titled Tools, Tips, Techniques & Tails, the book is the culmination of six years of Spinosa chronicling her rescue stories and developing her own methods for search and recovery.

“What good is knowledge if you can’t share it?” Spinosa asks. “Originally, I was going to write a book about the stories over the years. Then it flipped, because I thought I can do more with this if I include more.”

She breaks down the subtitle. “I go through different tools, and explain their use, when they’re good and when they’re not so good. Then, the technique, the different ways that you can use the tools, where to use them, how to use them. The tips are what I’ve learned, and that comes into lost dog behaviours. And I give them a tutorial on how to do a poster, and how to put it up.”

Finally, of course, there are the tails, which are actually tales of successful search and rescue operations mounted by Spinosa. One of those tales stars Louie, a tiny Malipoo rescued by a dog walker while his companion, Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Barbara Worthy, was away in Africa.

“She (the boarder) opened the door, and Louise got out,” says Worthy. “My friend Louise put up a Facebook post and she (Spinosa) saw it. It was only up for an hour, and she phoned Louise and said ‘there’s a dog missing. I think I can find it.’ The whole town was out looking for Louise and she told everyone to go home and leave it all to her, and she found him.”

Char remembers that search fondly. “Louie took off and everybody was out trying to find him. I got the details from her (Louise) and she called me around 9 p.m. and told me the dog was sighted running towards the library. So I drove over there, looked to see if he was in any of the doorways, but he wasn’t. So I ran randomly drove, and I had a talk with God.”

This is a common theme in many of Spinosa’s stories. She claims that time and time again it seems some sort of divine intervention has led her to be in the right place at the right time.

“I asked God to bring me to Louise,” she continues. “I’m just randomly driving in that area, turning left, turning right, driving through new construction, and I come to ‘T’in the road. I look to the left, and here’s one of the Sentinal Carriages heading back to the barn. I asked her if by any chance she had seen a little ball of white and they walked up to her with their paws bleed. Whereas a chihuahua, you’ll find it in the flowers, hidding behind a bush. They stay in well-lit areas.”

She boils it down to what she calls the “five Ps”—pro-filing the dog, profiling the breed, profiling the history, profiling the owner, and profiling the environment.

“You want to tie that all in with what I call the mechanism of the run,” she adds. “That’s my starting point. And when you go to my website (k9tracker.ca), I have a form. It tells you everything that you need to know before I call you. Then I fill in the finer details. By the time I do that, I already have a mindset of where I’m going and what I’m doing.”

Spinosa, who once trained as a private investigator after a career in the downtown Toronto brokerage industry, only started offering her services as a business about four years ago. Her successful search for Harry Houdini, who she eventually tracked to Penner Home Hardware, resulted in her being handed a cheque by well-known Danny and Roni Rescue in Florida, from where Harry had been adopted.

She claims that when she does charge for a rescue, it’s usually just enough to cover her costs.

Spinosa outlines many of the methods and tricks of her trade in the new book, hoping to stop pet owners from doing the wrong things in their searches.

“Nobody, however, on how I can tell the reader to access that divine information, remembering what it felt like to finally reunite each loving owner with their furry friends.

Along with her belief that her successes are guided by a higher power, Spinosa relies on tools such that snap py snare, as well as harnesses, muzzles, slip leashes, and a trap armed with an electromagnetic lock and a photo beam that safely captures the roaming canine.

While others not in the know often pursue lost animals with a posse, making noise and laying out food to entice them, Spinosa uses a different approach. In fact, it all depends on how she profiles each individual animal.

“I learned very early on that a dog is not a dog,” she explains. “I will not look for a chihuahua the same way I would a bullmastiff. A bullmastiff won’t run, they walk aimlessly until their paws bleed. Whereas a chihuahua, you’ll find it in the flowers, hidding behind a house. They stay in

Dog whisperer Char Spinosa is pictured with Jazz, one of the dogs she’s found over the years. Jazz was a rescue from Louisiana that ran away from an adopt-a-thon event in St. Catharines. Spinosa tracked her in Fort Hill Cemetery. The photo was taken after decompensation in her ‘furev’ home. (Photo supplied)
The Sandtrap is making the most of takeout orders while the dining room remains closed. "That is out of our hands. We just have to keep going with whatever they throw at us," says Dietsch. "We're not one to spend much time on Facebook, choosing to avoid the negativity. 'I don't want to get riled up. I try to be a positive person, although it's not always easy these days.'"

She's accustomed to long winters on Queen Street, anticipating a good spring and summer, but it's difficult to know what to expect this year. Instead, it makes sense to be proactive now, she says, "and hope this gets better. There's no fast fix. It's tough, but we have to be patient." Matt Dietsch, who with his brother Paul owns Sandtrap Pub and Grill, says he's disappointed he can't reopen, but current restrictions have so far "done a good job of getting us where we need to be."

Continued from page 3

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About the threats from others in the hospitality industry, "there is no point taking your frustration on people who are trying to do their job. All our politicians and public health officials are doing the best they can to keep us safe. It's a crazy situation we're all going through," says Dietsch. "We're just trying to follow all the rules to get through this, and open up again soon. It's been a long, hard winter for a lot of us. Just the fact that there's talk about another lockdown, a third wave, makes it even more difficult."

As hard as it is to be a restaurant owner right now, being a parent is also a challenge, he says. The father of two young boys, Dietsch says he's happy that at least schools have reopened, having seen how hard it is on their kids’ mental health. "This is the best thing for them," and for the parents, he adds. He also feels for those in long term care, and their loved ones. "It breaks my heart to think about what they're going through, and the mental health struggles some people face. I just hope this is over soon. I'm really looking forward to spring, and hopefully better times ahead."

Province needs to step up

In the meantime, she urges people to follow the rules and work with Dr. Hiri to continue to bring those case numbers down.

The solution to helping Niagara businesses is not opening up before it's safe, but for the province to help out with more financial aid for businesses that are suffering, she said.

Many of the current programs make it impossible for businesses, including some that are still closed, to meet the criteria for assistance, and that should change.

"That's how the province can help. The province has a bigger pool of funding to access than municipalities do. We've all having to tighten our belts," Dietsch says municipalities should be calling on the province to look at how it can help businesses through the pandemic.

"Public health makes decisions to keep people safe. Reopening is the job of cabinet, and the province should be making decisions that help the economy."
Veterans liked to help young people with repairs

Continued from page 1

and soul of our operation."

On Feb. 9, he and a 72-year-old member of the group arrived soon after the fire had started, because of where their unit was located, managed to push almost all of the vehicles outside to safety.

They display their vehicles for many fundraisers, and are well-known for their annual participation in the pre-pan-

demic Friends of Fort George Timeline event, when they parade their First and Second World War relics through the main street of town.

Someone who sees them at a show might have an item in their basement or garage they want to donate — a radio, uniform or canteen that belonged to their grandfather, and they can’t throw it out. They’d stop by the shop, and occasionally one would decide to join, says Young.

"It was a place for a lot of people to use as a get-away, work in their shops, and our vets liked to help out,“ he says.

Some of the vehicles are still stored outside, and some of the smaller ones members have taken home for now.

Young says he’s not sure what they’ll do long-term.

He’s concerned about the older members, who would putter around at the shop every day. "I just hope this doesn’t turn out to be the straw that breaks the camels back,” he says, concerned about how they will move forward from the loss of their gathering place.

At least each vehicle is privately owned and insured, so they’re not worrying about financial losses, he says.

Not all on the site were so fortunate.

Some of the younger guys who had cars that were "projects," being rebuilt or restored, were not insured — they would have waited until their vehicle was road-ready, he says.

Allen Gilleta was another of the not-so-fortunate. The 70-year-old owner of Gilleta Flooring worked with home builders and hotels in Niagara-on-the-Lake for 35 years, and for about the last 15 years, his hobby has been collecting vehicles — first antique cars, then hot rods and motorcycle.

Werner is a friend of his, and when he got out of chicken farming, Gilleta asked if he could convert part of one of the barns to store some of his vehicles. He was Werner’s first tenant, he says, and in the intervening years, says he spent so much time there he may as well have lived on the property. Over the last five years, he had a team of two drivers, his son, Allen Jr., and Shaun Sliter, racing sprints.

He builds the cars, and they compete at Humblestone, Oshweken and Merrittville Speedways, which he says have all been very supportive of him and his team. At other Ontario tracks as well, and in the U.S. In addition to the cars, and one vintage racing car, he also had tires, a tire machine, and all the tools and equipment that goes along with restoring and maintaining the racing cars. When he got there that Tuesday of the fire, he says, the firefighters were already on site, and wouldn’t let anyone around the back where his shop was located.

He lost everything, even a car on a trailer outside the shop. "There was so much heat from that fire it was unbelievable."

He estimates his personal loss at about $300,000. It’s hard to find a company that will insure racing cars, and he had no insurance, he says. "This was my hobby. It was what I did in that community."

A week after the fire, he was planning on rebuilding his team, but not sure how, hoping support from a GoFundMe page — search Allen Gilleta — would get the team up and racing again.

"I’m going to have to start over, replacing every single nut and bolt. We didn’t have a chance to get anything out at all. It was too dangerous."

Gilleta Sr. says he has spent $40,000 on the property, stop by to chat and ask questions.

"There was always a lot going on,” he says, agreeing with the others that it was more than a place for storage — it created a community for like-minded people of all ages.

“There was a lot of camaraderie. I’m going to miss that.”

Werner, who lives in a house on the property which was not local.com

Continued on page 13
Friends lost their shop, tools and cars

Penny Coles
The Local

As Kyle Penner watched a car he loved burn last Tuesday, he also said goodbye to a lifestyle. Although that’s only temporary, he said.

He and a group of friends shared one of the larger storage units on Townline Road that was the site of last week’s $2.5 million fire, he says.

But it was more than that to them. It was a shop where they could work on their cars, share their hobby and love of cars, and hang out together after work and on weekends, when permitted and following pandemic restrictions, says Kyle.

In the summer, they spent less time there, “because we’d be out driving around in our cars.”

He and his father Kevin were on Lakeshore Road when Kyle received a call from his friend, whose car was in the same unit, and they headed straight there.

“We got there about 20 minutes after it started, and started pulling stuff out with my dad,” he says.

There were eight cars in the shop which he shared with seven friends, a 30 by 60-foot space, one of the larger ones, with eight cars in it the day of the fire.

He and others were on the scene when the fire started or who had raced there when they heard the news were getting what they could out of the units, including cars and tools.

With firefighters on the scene, appearing early on to be getting the fire under control, Kyle and his friends were able to move the two cars closest to the door in his unit outside to a safe location. His car was next.

“I was almost in the driver’s seat,” he says of his 2015 Nissan 370Z NISMO, his prized possession. He had taken the car to the unit so he could work on it — he didn’t know if it was there, he says.

He sensed the fire coming closer, but felt it was still far enough in the distance for him to safely move his car, and maybe his friend’s Scion, the one next to his.

The firefighters, however, were by then telling tenants of the shops to leave the units and move away from the fire, which they did.

“We were all in this together, and we lost our cars together,” he says.

His car and the other five still in the shop were destroyed by the fire. All he was able to save of his own was a set of wheels.

When he first arrived at the site, he says, “I didn’t think it was going to be that bad. Then the smoke started pouring through the roof, and within about 45 minutes, it just became the craziest thing I’ve ever seen. It had really looked like the firefighters were going to get it under control, that it was being contained. But then it took off.”

He said it was stressful when he was hoping to get his car out, but once he saw the fire spreading and had to give up on that, he stood back and watched, impressed with the professionalism of the firefighters, seeing they were doing everything they could in a difficult situation.

“Once the fire went into the roof, we could see there wasn’t much they could do. I don’t think they could have done any better than they did. I know a lot of the firefighters. Some of them, and some of the police who were there, are my friends. There just wasn’t anything more they could do.”

He has insurance, as do his friends who share the shop, he says. They will be dealing with that in the coming weeks, with no idea how long it could take to be settled.

In the meantime, he has already been looking at cars to replace the Nissan, which values at about $35,000.

He also needs to buy new tools, and he and his friends will be hunting for a new shop and storage space.

“Just was a hobby for us, something to do in the winter. I don’t drive my car that often, mostly just in the summer. It’s something we do as a pastime.”

He had first rented a smaller shop on the property about two or three years ago, then moved to a larger one with his friends, he says. Being able to spend time there, hanging out together and working on their cars, meant a lot to all of them.

“We put so much into it. We were there often, working on our cars. It was something for all of us to do in the winter.”

He and his friends are all going to be looking at cars to replace what they lost, and for a new shop, which might be harder to find, but they’ll do it together, he says.

“We’ll get it figured out.”

Shops won’t be rebuilt on greenbelt property

Continued from page 12

He might even be able to put up a canvas covering for some of the military vehicles. What they are doing helps tell the story about this country and the people who fought for it, he says, and also provides some pleasure for veterans and their family members, as well as some who have PTSD and find value in being part of the group.

But he has no illusions about rebuilding the storage units, which were a non-complying operation on Ontario Greenbelt property.

A 57-year-old industrial mechanic and midwife by trade who also ran the chicken farm for 21 years while he worked at a day job, Werner says when he decided to give up raising chickens, which is not the healthiest way to earn a living, he didn’t set out to turn the barns into a storage business.

One friend, and then another, would ask about storing items on his property, and he had the space, he agreed. As a member of the military vehicle association, he was happy to help the other members, he says, who were looking for indoor space for their most valuable vehicles. At each step of the conversion over a period of many years on the 10-acre site, he always made sure work was done properly and to code, and before he knew it, he had this great community of people who gathered on his property.

“I wasn’t getting rich from it, and I never intended to be running a commercial business,” he says, “but it was a really cool thing for everybody who was there. It was a business model that worked, and I really liked what I was doing.”

He loved to walk around and talk to people, enjoying their presence as much as they enjoyed being there. He loved that the older people with skilled trades would help out the younger ones, and with a complete machine shop on the site, he often helped them himself. He could have charged a lot more for the 30 units he rented out, he says, but the model he had created gradually, over time, became something that worked.

Although the cause of the fire hasn’t been released by the office of the Ontario Fire Marshal, Werner believes it was electrical, and started near his office. His property was fully insured, and he’s considering the possibility of creating something similar on a commercial property.

“It was a model that was needed. It’s something we’re meant to have in our lives, helping each other and learning from each other. We need more of that in our society. Everyone had each other’s backs. We always said we had the best security, because everyone treated it like it was their own. It’s not the loss of the buildings that I lose sleep over. My sleepless nights are because of the loss of the community. It meant everything to these guys over so many years, and now it’s gone.”

He talks about the site as a village unto itself, with most people outside the village not aware it existed. But for those who were part of it, “it was huge. If it takes a village to raise a child, that’s what was going on here. It gave a group of young people a place to learn, a place to see what they could accomplish, a purpose. It gave them something they could believe in, something they could see that was tangible. There was a lot of talent here, a lot of skills and a lot of good people. Everybody who was here needed to be here.”

He’s trying to remain positive, feeling it’s his responsibility to remain strong for others, and says despite the loss of something that has been a huge part of his life in recent years, above all else, he’s extremely grateful nobody was hurt. He misses what was going on, as does his two-year-old German shepherd, who goes out each day “looking for his buddies. This was an awesome community. We used to say, all roads lead here, although not a lot of people knew about it. It was a labour of love.”

There was a lot of wood stored on the property, which was also the site of a custom furniture store, Reclaimed from Roots. (Gavin Young)

The chicken barns, which had plywood ceilings and a tin roof, were destroyed when the fire spread above the ceiling and the length of the 500-foot barns. (Darren Wiener)
Local girl heading to U.S. to play hockey

Bill Potrecz
Special to The Local

Brooke Loranger could not have asked for a better Christmas gift.

The 16-year-old, Grade 11 student at Ridley College found out about a week before Christmas she had been accepted to play hockey on a full scholarship at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts.

Loranger is thrilled with the opportunity to tend goal at a NCAA Division I school.

“It’s amazing,” she said. “I’m really lucky and so happy to have this opportunity. It’s obviously something that I’ve dreamt about, and a lot of other girls have too.

“It’s an amazing feeling to finally get there and have that accomplishment.”

Loranger says she started playing hockey when she was five. She was living in Edmonton, and with an older brother who is also a goalie, thought it was something she’d like to try.

“We’ve always been a big hockey family,” she says.

The family moved to a home on Lakeshore Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake when she was 11, and she wanted to continue playing hockey, but her only choice was on a boys’ team with the NOTL Minor Hockey League. She was in the pee-wee B division, “and I was the only girl. There might have been one or two on other teams, but on mine, there were no other girls, just me,” she says.

She played in NOTL for two years, development years for her, she says. She loved it, loved playing on the team. It was a lot of fun, a really great experience.

But she was becoming a more competitive player, and girls on boys’ teams don’t get scouted. If she wanted to get better, she knew she had to move on.

Her second year playing for NOTL was a “very busy year” for her, she says. She also tended goal for the Brock Badgers women’s team, playing up an age category at the bantam level. She had attended Ridley since she arrived in NOTL, and that year also traveled with the school’s girls’ hockey team to the U.S., playing her first game with them.

“I was sort of bouncing around that year, with three different teams. I was pretty much playing hockey seven days a week,” Ridley, she says, has “a really amazing girls’ hockey program,” and that is where she has played since.

“Brooke is a dedicated student-athlete who began the Prep Girls Hockey program at Ridley in Grade 7,” said Jason Barron, head of girls’ hockey development at Ridley. “She has shown great growth both on and off of the ice during that time and has become a leader within our program and the Ridley school community.

“Brooke is a student-athlete who takes great pride in her work and that is something that I am confident will continue during her time at Holy Cross. Brooke is a competitor who leaves no stone unturned in her development,” he said. “She is always looking for ways to continue to grow her game. That competitive nature is something that has always been instinctive for her from a young age.”

Loranger feels her time at Ridley has been a key component in her development.

“I think it’s helped tremendously. It’s the largest reason I am where I am now with my coaches, they’ve been a really big part of that, being so supportive and helpful,” she said. “They really push you to be your best constantly. I really owe a lot of thanks to Amanda (Wark) and Celeste (Doucet). I really don’t think I would be where I am if they hadn’t given me the chance to play on their team.”

She will begin attending the Massachusetts school in the fall of 2022.

“It was actually a really big stress relief off my shoulders,” she said. “I was waiting for that opportunity for such a long time, since I started at Ridley. It’s been a long trek, but I’m glad I finally got there.”

Holy Cross was high on her list, after visiting a friend there a couple of years ago.

“It was a really gorgeous campus. My friend had such amazing things to say about the school’s academics, and really good things to say about their women’s team and that their program was heading in an amazing direction with the new coaches they have there now.

“It was a mixture of things. Since the classes are so small, you get to know your professors really well which helps with academics and the connections you make are really helpful beyond school”

Loranger, who plans to major in business management, is looking forward to the challenge of playing at the NCAA level.

“The hockey is going to be really great. I think there’s going to be a lot of opportunities for the team, and for me to prove myself once I get there,” she said. “I’m going to try it to be a really big transition, but think if you really keep working hard and really try to project further and aim higher, you are some what prepared for it, and it won’t be a big shock.”

Meanwhile, she is doing her best to keep as active as possible during the lockdown.

“I’m working out a couple of times a day trying to keep active and be prepared for when we finally do go back,” she said. “It’s definitely hard. It’s been your life, it’s all you do for such a long time and then for it just to be taken away so quickly, it has been difficult. It’s an outlet for myself and a lot of other people to let off some stress and just have a little bit of fun and take your mind away from school and everything else.”

Bill Potrecz spent 32 years as a sportswriter for Niagara dailies, covering almost every sport imaginable from high school, to junior hockey, to a World Series and Stanley Cup final. By his estimation he has covered more than 1,500 junior hockey games. He now provides regional sports coverage through BP Sports Niagara.
BROWN, JAMES—With heavy hearts, the family of James Brown announce his peaceful passing on the early morning of February 12, 2021 at his home, with family by his side. Jim was born on December 25th, 1937 to Tom and Iris Brown in Mothwen, Scotland. He spent his childhood there getting his education as a draughtsman, as well as discovering a love of golf that would last a life time.

In 1959, he was conscripted into National Service with The Kings Own Scottish Borderers and served in Rank as Lance Corporal for 2 years, about which he was deeply proud.

He met his beloved wife of 60 years, Helen Rose Hepburn, at the dancing Kiwanis. Jim enjoyed art and jazz, regularly visiting galleries and clubs with his family in Toronto. And recently, he enjoyed supporting the Jazz Festivals held in Niagara. Jim had a strong faith and was honored with The Legends Trophy. Jim enjoyed art and jazz, regularly visiting galleries and clubs with his family in Toronto. And recently, he enjoyed supporting the Jazz Festivals held in Niagara. Jim had a strong faith and was honored with The Legends Trophy.

His charismatic nature, clever wit, loving, kind, generous drew people to him. He was a mentor, guide, and a good friend to all.

Jim began his life long career as a respected mechanical engineer at Provincial Crane in Niagara Falls. Of note was his contribution to the retractable roof for The Emirates in Niagara Falls.

Jim was deeply proud of and had a great love for his four grandchildren. He agreed.

John’s big heart, humour, sharp wit and one-liners will be dearly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

Although ailing health ended his regular gatherings with hunt camp pals and close friends, the treasured memories of those days, especially his days of service to the Volunteer Fire Department in Virgil, kept him going. A Celebration of Life will be held at a later date when COVID restrictions are lifted.

Memorial Donations in John’s name may be made to any Mental Health organization of your choice or Palliative Care organization to better support those in need, should you wish.

Online tributes and condolences may be made at www.hetheringtonanddeans.com
Tyson finally safe from dog attacks

Penny Coles

A frightening ordeal has come to an end for the Gossen family and their dog, Tyson.

Last Friday Diago, a dog who lives across the street from the Line 4 family, once again got loose, came bounding over onto the Gossen property, and viciously attacked Tyson in his own doghouse on their porch.

By late Friday night, after spending hours with the veterinarian, they were able or willing to make him safe for the future. Diago's owner was finally convinced he had to give him up.

Rachel, who exudes positivity and kindness in conversation and on social media, says she has lived in fear for the safety of her family since the first attack, knowing it could be one of her four kids outside with Tyson when Diago showed up. Her husband Steve has a hard enough time when the dog runs across the street and jumps on him, she says, and she can't help envisioning what would happen if it was one of her kids or their friends. He could easily knock down. She has also felt the ongoing frustration of calling the town, the town's canine control officer, the Niagara Falls Humane Society and even the Niagara Regional Police, who have all responded to her calls and been involved at one time or another over the years, but none of them able or willing to make the attacks stop.

She describes the most recent assault on Tyson Friday, a day off school for the kids with teachers having a professional development day. She and her daughter Gracynn, the youngest of four siblings, were in the car and about to go shopping for baking supplies to make cookies for Valentine’s Day. Steve was in the driveway when the two dogs from across the street came running up, their owner, Paul Ermanian, behind them. Although they were both loose, only Diago, the male is the more aggressive with Tyson, Ermanian says because his other dog is female and Diago’s jealousy.

The attacks have occurred, says Rachel, because Ermanian is unable to keep Diago contained, although he has always said he is trying.

After Diago's attack on Tyson last November, Ermanian says he had considered finding a new home for his dog, but decided he would keep him, and do his best to prevent any more incidents.

Gossen has said from the beginning of the problem with the dog, she has tried not to turn it into a fight between neighbours. They’ve always gotten along, and Ermanian has been a great neighbour, a good person, and has tried to keep Diago on his property. It works for a while, until he gets out again and heads across the road to hurt Tyson.

After the November attack, the Gossens, frustrated about the lack of action or a solution, had a lawyer and family friend send a letter to the town outlining their concerns.

Ken Reid, the town’s canine control officer, had said he couldn’t take the dog, it was the responsibility of the humane society. The SPCA has been nothing but cooperative and supportive throughout, says Gossen, who is grateful for their help, but they said it was a municipal responsibility, and although the lord mayor and councillors seemed sympathetic, nothing was done.

The lawyer’s letter to the town included details of the attack and reports made to the humane society, the canine control officer, and the police.

Rachel credits her lawyer for finally making some headway with the letter, with the result that when the animal control officer issued the appropriate fines Friday and encouraged her neighbour to give up his dog, the Niagara Falls Humane Society, which finds homeless and unwanted dogs a new home, came to collect it.

It is because the friend stepped up, "made contact and stood in the gap for us at a time when we really needed someone to," that Tyson and the Gossen family can sleep at night, Rachel said.

"This, to us, was the very picture of true friendship, and we are truly beyond grateful to her.

Rachel says she reached out to Ermanian after she learned he had given up his dog, and said they were very sorry that it had come to that, "but we felt like we had no choice for the safety of our family. We hope that we can have peace again as neighbours.

Ermanian said he had always intended to rectify the situation, and was sorry for the problem he had caused the Gossen family. "Having to give Diago up was heart-breaking for me, but I felt that it was the best, as I fully understand your position," he responded.