Young local couple choose NOTL over world

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Uphill battle on Family Day

By Lauren O’Malley
The Local

“I know what I’m doing, I’m confident in it, well confident. Some people around here think I grow the best grapes.”

Linford “Dougie” Hall is a serene and self-assured man. He first came to Niagara-on-the-Lake from Linstead, Jamaica on June 5, 1978, on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and has been working in vineyards ever since. He went back to Jamaica off-season until 2005, when he decided to stay in Canada. “My work is here,” he says.

Hall just celebrated his 65th birthday (“I feel pretty good”), and continues to enjoy the hard work and great reward of vineyard management at Coyote’s Run Estate Winery.

“I know all about the grapes,” says the compact and elegant man, removing his well-worn baseball cap. “I learned it all in the field!” Hall started at Stonechurch Vineyards (now Small Talk Vineyards), and was patiently trained by then-owner Lambert Hunse. “He taught me everything I know,” the sincere man says with gratitude and respect.

Hall moved from Stonechurch to Coyote’s Run in 2012 — the same year he became a Canadian citizen. “It was hard to leave there and come here. Hank [Hunse, owner of Small Talk] came two years ago and asked me to come back. He said there’s a job for me there anytime.” The opportunity at Coyote’s Run was worth it though, and has paid off. “I was hired as a tractor driver and experienced vineyard person, and was promoted to vineyard manager.”

The field-schooled viticulturist is proud of his clean vineyards, and his clean record.

“People come from Niagara College to see what we’re doing,” he says. “How come your vineyards are so clean? What are you doing here?”

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**Penny Coles**

The Local

What would a good governance model look like for Niagara-on-the-Lake? One that leaves the all-important planning decision in the hands of local councils, said NOTL’s regional councillor.

The upper-tier discussion is whether the Province has any information about the 12 Niagara municipalities. “I think it’s important we work together and take to the Province.”

Niagara is “pretty unique” in Ontario, with different communities requiring different approaches to governance, he said. That needs to be reflected by Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Gary Zalepa, NOTL’s regional councilor, said: “We could take advantage of the many things we do better together, and have some things we do better locally.”

The key point in preparing for the municipal governance review is “we’re doing now that we can do better,” he said. It if’s all about cost-savings, “that’s a suspect reason for doing this,” he added — cost savings have not been the result following amalgamations. That’s not to say there aren’t ways to operate more efficiently, Disero said, and Niagara should embrace the opportunity to look at efficiencies, but wishes it weren’t under the threat of amalgamation.

“I’m not trying to fearmonger, but my experience with amalgamation is that everything went to the highest cost for the lowest level of services.”

Put a group of unions together to combine service delivery, and nobody says we’ll take the lower amount,” she said, “so the service level deteriorates because you have to look at other ways of saving.”

Coun. Stuart McCormack, living and working in Ottawa at the time of its amalgamation, said he experienced the same outcome — increased costs for more full-time councillors, and reduced levels of service delivery.

Disero says she isn’t interested in battling with the Province, and is happy to be part of a review that could lead to more efficient, better services.

But cutting out a local council or even reducing the number of councillors in NOTL, who make $13,000 a year, isn’t going to offer significant savings, she said.

“If that’s the intent, as a symbolic gesture, so be it, but the real savings is in looking at service delivery throughout the region,” she said.

There are services the Region provides “we do not need,” said Disero, and some which are best left to the 12 municipalities, while there are others that to her fall into a grey area.

“I’d list services in three columns,” she said.

On one side would be services local municipalities do a good job of delivering, such as looking after roads, planning, and building permits.

On the other side should put public health, social services and emergency services, which the Region does well.

In the middle are water and waste water, policing, and garbage collection, expensive items about which she is undecided — possibly the local municipalities could do a better job. “We should be having that discussion,” Disero said.

She and Town CAO Holly Dowd met recently with two men sent by the Province to talk to representatives from the 82 municipalities, with a goal of making recommendations by summer.

During a half-hour meeting with Michael Fenn and Ken Seiling, Disero said the men listened without sharing any information about what might be in the cards for Niagara.

“They didn’t say much at all. They’re tasked with conducting this review and putting recommendations before council. They’re just listening at the moment, without perceived notions.”

The outcome of the review “could be anything,” she said — four large municipalities, 12 local municipalities and one service board, one big city, or any other combination.

She said she is glad council is willing to start a discussion locally, to put their thoughts together “for our little corner of the world, and to provide some suggestions for streamlining. We have a couple of months to do this, so we have to start the ball rolling. The sooner we get started talking about it the better.”

Councillors were asked to submit questions for relevant information or suggestions to Dowd by the end of last week.

With the number of visitors NOTL gets each year it needs to keep its unique identity, not have amalgamation turn it into another suburb, Disero said. She is also concerned about NOTL, with its relatively low $1-million debt, having to take on responsibility for the higher debts of other municipalities, such as Pelham, with its $30-million liability.

“But it’s really difficult to comment on anything until we find out what we’re dealing with,” she said.

If municipalities had been given a provincial plan and asked to come up with a business case of their own to accomplish it, rather than having the threat of amalgamation hanging over them, “we would have been able to work without fear.”

Talking with Niagara, the Province is reviewing Halton, York, Durham, Waterloo, Peel, Muskoka District, Oxford County, the County of Simcoe and their lower-tier municipalities.

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**Gary Zalepa, NOTL’s regional councilor**

"I don't mean it has to be the exact same model as we have now. It could be a Niagara hybrid solution," said Zalepa.

He thinks local people need better decisions about their municipalities, especially when it comes to planning decisions, “but that doesn't mean it has to be the exact same model as we have now. It could be a Niagara hybrid solution,” said Zalepa.

"We could take advantage of the many things we do better together, and have some things we do better locally,“ he said.

The key point in preparing for the municipal governance review is “we’re doing now that we can do better,” he said. If it’s all about cost-savings, “that’s a suspect reason for doing this,” he added — cost savings have not been the result following amalgamations. That’s not to say there aren’t ways to operate more efficiently, Disero said, and Niagara should embrace the opportunity to look at efficiencies, but wishes it weren’t under the threat of amalgamation.

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Dock Area residents have concerns about lack of protection for their neighbourhood

By Penny Coles The Local

After years in the making and a newly-elected council determined to see it through to completion, the final approval of the Town's official plan is within reach, but Dock Area residents, fiercely protective of their neighbourhood, are not happy with what they've seen in it.

It includes a secondary plan for the Dock Area, which stretches from the Melville Street town-owned dock to King Street and the beach at Queenston Royal Park, but residents were dismayed to learn last week that some of what they thought would be protected in the plan is not.

Two open houses were held at a community centre last Wednesday, and a public meeting will be held Monday, leading to the adoption of the new official plan, which has been under development since 2015.

It replaces a document approved in 1994, and when passed by council, anticipated by the end of April, it will be sent to the Region for its approval.

The purpose of it, said consultant Rick Hunter at last week's open house, is to "reflect local priorities, needs and aspirations." It has to be consistent with provincial planning policies, he said, and some of the delay has been due to the 2017 reviews of the provincial Growth Plans, Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan, all of which impact the local official plan.

There have been several drafts presented in recent years—one in 2015, three in 2016 and the latest in December 2018, which incorporates comments made about earlier drafts, said Hunter.

It will still be an "interim situation," Hunter said, while the Region completes its growth management review now underway.

The two meetings drew about 100 residents, who were given a brief presentation outlining the process to date, with consultants and planning staff on hand to answer questions.

One of the main areas of concern mentioned by residents at both meetings was the Dock Area, which, planning director Craig Larmour explained, has three documents outlining potential development of the neighbourhood.

The official plan had an amendment approved in 2014 to incorporate the Dock Area secondary plan, but council was supposed to receive a final plan in 2015, as called for in the Dock Area Public Realm Landscape Design Concept. Residents remember the more recent process, and pointed out discrepancies in the plans.

The secondary plans, which include those for St. Davids, Queenston and Glendale, as well as the Dock Area, form part of the official plan and are binding.

"The Dock Area master plan is not part of the official plan—which is all very confusing," almost dizzily, saying that in some cases they appear to be contradictory, says Dock Area resident Paul Shepherd.

He was concerned to learn at the meeting that issues he thought were settled about the future of his neighbourhood are not, or if they are, not in the way most residents would want them to be.

"A lot of what shows up in the secondary plan isn't what we agreed on in the latest discussion," said Shepherd.

For example, he was surprised to learn the secondary plan calls for the paving of a path along the waterfront, which residents had asked to be left in a natural state.

It shows more development, and larger houses, when many residents thought they would be protected from homes that overpowered their smaller neighbours, he said.

"There are a lot of other bits and pieces, such as chang- es to road patterns. It seems the official plan is not protecting the Dock Area in the way we expected it would," he said.

He was disappointed to learn, after following up with the planning director, that the master plan, which reflects what most residents want for their neighbourhood, is not a binding document, he said.

While he was also told the secondary plan would be reviewed, "I'm concerned we're relying on a review that will come after, of a document that now includes some items we're not happy with now."

The statutory public meeting under the Planning Act will be held Feb. 25, during the committee-of-the-whole meeting which begins at 6 p.m. in the Town Hall.

Public comments must be received by the Town by March 15.

Dock Area resident Paul Shepherd indicates his concerns for his neighbourhood to Lord Mayor Betty Disero at a recent meeting to discuss the draft official plan. (Penny Coles)
NOTL airport hoping to attract even more traffic
Number of scheduled flights and private planes both increasing

By Penny Coles
The Local

Thanks to expansions at the Niagara District Airport, Niagara-on-the-Lake is becoming a destination for the rich and famous, at least at its gateway.

Use of the Niagara District Airport has grown significantly in recent years, but plans are to increase traffic, build more hangars, and further improve the treatment of VIPs who fly their private jets into NOTL.

Residents would be surprised at the number of very high-profile visitors to the area who arrive in their private planes at the local airport, says Coun. Gary Burroughs, newly appointed to the airport commission. It manages the facility on behalf of NOTL, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, and is made up of nine members responsible for strategic direction, operating policies, developing and overseeing a budget and appointing the airport manager.

The regularly-scheduled FlyGTA flights between the Niagara airport and Billy Bishop in Toronto have increased, and once its third year of service is completed and passenger targets are met, said Burroughs, the airport becomes eligible for “big dollars” in federal funding to cover capital projects for improvements. The airport has a capital budget of $326,000 for 2019, funded by the three municipalities, and a proposed operating budget of almost $775,000.

FlyGTA expects to expand its schedule, which is mostly aimed at business commuters. Its fleet of eight planes fly Niagara-to-Toronto four times most weekdays, with two flights each way scheduled for weekends.

“The demand has increased significantly,” said Burroughs. “This is totally a success story.”

The airline advertises a flight of 12 minutes, “with a stunning view.”

“More and more people are trying it. You can get to Toronto in the morning, attend a meeting and come home at noon. It’s very comfortable, and a really great experience.”

There is a 24-hour, phone-ahead customs clearing service available for International flights landing, said Burroughs, and there are “a large number of private jets coming in. Names aren’t recorded, but you’d be surprised by who is flying into NOTL,” he said.

“I’m told Mick Jagger has landed here, and there are a lot of big players, business owners and industry leaders who come for meetings. Some don’t even leave the airport — they have their meetings here and then fly off. It’s quite a change for the airport.”

“It’s that private plane traffic driving the need for VIP airside service improvements, he said. It was $11 million in federal funding that allowed for recent improvements leading to regularly scheduled flights, he said, but that was only the beginning.

“We’re hoping the new Regional council won’t be so hung up on partisanship, and will support the continued expansion of the airport. We can’t be a successful region without a successful regional airport. It’s a real resource for Niagara.”

The airport is a “long way from 737s” flying in, said Burroughs — its plans for expansions include more hangar space for people who are moving to Niagara and need space for their planes.

“We need dozens more — as soon as we can build them, we can rent them out,” said Burroughs.

As Pearson in Toronto reaches its flight capacity, a group of 10 airports is working to prepare for a time when they could take over some of the traffic.

“Our part of it is small, but there is a future for growth. Projections for the future are terrific, and we’re doing what needs to be done in the right time frame,” said Burroughs.

Construction on Mewburn Bridge to begin soon
Completion should ease traffic congestion through St. Davids

By Penny Coles
The NOTL Local

A much-discussed route to ease traffic in and out of Niagara-on-the-Lake is a step closer to becoming a reality.

A decade ago, Concession 6 was well-travelled as a route to and from Niagara Falls. It connects with Mewburn Road south of Warner Road, by way of an old, narrow and crumbling bridge owned by CN, closed since 2009 for safety reasons.

Since then, traffic through the St. Davids intersection at York Road and Four Mile Creek Road has increased significantly, residents say. The pressure at that four-way stop intersection is expected to ease once the bridge is rebuilt.

Ron Tripp, interim Regional CAO, at council recently to provide an update on the NOTL sewage treatment plant, was asked about progress on the Mewburn Bridge.

“What’s actually happening,” questioned Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

The project “has been tendered and awarded by the city of Niagara Falls,” Tripp said, explaining Niagara Falls will be managing construction. “It’s moving forward.”

Both Concession 6 and Mewburn are local roads, he said, and Niagara Falls has plans to upgrade their portion as far as Mountain Road once the bridge construction is complete.

The long delay in replacing the bridge was first to determine who was going to pay for it — CN was willing only to replace the narrow bridge that was there, while both NOTL and Niagara Falls said it needed to be wider for today’s traffic.

The financing has been in place for the bridge replacement since 2017, and design was completed last year, with a scheduled construction start expected last December. It is now projected to begin this winter.

NOTL has committed $250,000 toward the $5 million bridge reconstruction, while CN has now agreed to contribute $1.5 million. The remainder of the project will be shared by the Region and the City of Niagara Falls.
Late bus for kids into after-school activities

By Lauren O’Malley

Maybe you don’t know about “late buses” because you don’t have a kid in high school, or because your kid in high school didn’t choose to share that little piece of information with you. Because maybe they prefer to have you pick them up at school after band/football practice.

Late buses are available to deliver high school students back into Niagara-on-the-Lake from public high schools in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls. The service is organized — as is all public school bus transit — by Niagara Student Transportation Services.

Heather Kyle, operations manager at NSTS, explains that buses are scheduled to wait at the schools for which buses are scheduled to drop students off at school after band/football practice. “There’s no one ticket since. He recounts with pride, ‘I was pulled over by a cop a few years ago. He told me I was speeding, and I knew I wasn’t, because I never speed. He took my driver’s licence and scanned it and said, ‘This guy is so clean. He let me go’.”

One of Hall’s sons is a chemical engineer, currently working at the winery until he lands a more permanent position. “I try to work with an ultrasound technician. His offspring seem to have inherited Hall’s clear, logical mind. Even Hall’s fingernails are clean. He met and wooed his second wife, Mary, at her nail salon, where he would go regularly to get manicures. They’ve been married for five years now. Hall feels short and well-maintained nails are a crucial aspect of vineyard management, where any fungus, insect or residue could be tracked from one vine to another. He keeps his strong and immaculate hands, fingers that can sense the life and health of a plant through simple touch.

Part of keeping healthy vines is maintenance and dedication. Hall believes he is often found on the property as early as 4:30 a.m., and on weekends. “I scout the vineyards every weekend, so all the tractor driving myself,” he says. “I keep chemicals to a minimum, and check the berries. I follow labels and weather.”

In the weather department, this year has been a doozy. Hall has been monitoring the vines to determine whether or not they have survived the brutal cold snaps, as well as the ice and warm spells. He explains the process: “I went to each block and collect 10 canes with 12 buds on each at random from across the block;” he says. “I put all the canes in water and left them for four or five days, and I could see the buds swelling up — then I cut them open to see which ones were alive. This way I can tell right away how many canes are alive or dead in any vineyard.”

It looks like the brutal winter hasn’t done much damage as it might have; most of the varietals at Coyote’s Run are at an 85 per cent or higher success rate. Hall has plans to mitigate any losses. “If there are dead buds on a vine I will leave more wounds on the trunk to compensate. I might have to leave a longer cane, but I can still compensate,” he says confidently.

While in the summer and harvest seasons Hall runs a staff of 20 to 30, but in the wintertime, he has plenty to do throughout the winter too. “I’m busy here all year around — I’m responsible for all of the machinery, servicing the tractor and ATVs. All the machinery I maintain myself, winterize them, put them away,” he says. “The fifth of 11 children, Hall makes time to visit his friends and family in Jamaica regularly. “I have lots of siblings and brothers there. I miss it sometimes — especially now, in February,” he laughs, looking out the window at the property sized in ice. “At one point I thought maybe I’d retire to Jamaica, but now more and more it’s no.”

While he has siblings in Jamaica, Hall’s family is here. “I have chosen a family here as well, in Coyote’s Run winemaker, Taylor Hurley, and his partner Laurel Minnies who took him to Silks Country Kitchen in Virginia for his birthday. ‘That’s like family.’ I like to hang out with Taylor, he’s such a nice guy” says a gracious and grateful Hall. “Taylor and I make a happy working crew. It’s beautiful working with Taylor — he’s so easy to get along with.”

The two men clearly have a surplus of respect for each other. Hill has much good to say about Hall. “Dennis is a good man and a great teacher. I am constantly learning from him. He has a way of understanding things from the inside out. Whether his fixing engines or growing grapes he just seems to inhabit whatever he sets his mind on. It’s that empathetic thought process that I most admire about him,” says the winemaker. “I think that’s also what drives his fierce loyalty and sense of duty to the people in his life. He knows what it’s like to go through tough times and when he sees someone in need he’s always there to help.”

When asked, Hall says his experience with racism as a person of colour in Niagara has been blessedly limited, “And if there ever is one person who is rude, the majority of people really are just blanket over anyone who isn’t.”

This good man’s sensible sense of the rules, the law-abiding citizen, and I am honest — it’s a great way to be. The only way to be.”

High school kids can be dropped off at the community centre cafe, where they can do homework, stay warm and even have a bite to eat while they wait to be picked up. Lauren O’Malley
A quick look at research on past amalgamations of Ontario municipalities shows little good has come of it.

"Study after study has found that the benefits of municipal amalgamation have failed to materialize," says a report by the Fraser Institute, the great Canadian think-tank that offers non-partisan information and analysis.

Its report states, as evidenced by those who have lived through it in Ontario, costs generally increase due to harmonization of costs and wages. This reflects the experience of Mayor Betty Disero, who went through it as a Toronto politician — nobody ever agreed to the cheapest wage. The Fraser Institute study also backs up her assertion of a reduced service delivery, when the point of amalgamation has always been to increase the quality of services we receive — or so we're told.

"Municipal mergers reduce competition between municipalities, which weakens incentives for efficiency and responsiveness to local needs," the research discovered.

"With so many negative aspects, it's no surprise that local restructuring proposals have often been met with stiff resistance from local residents."

Yup, that's pretty much the local reaction to potential restructuring proposals which could severely damage Niagara-on-the-Lake's identity as a small community that is an amazing place to live, work and visit.

In fact, given the research showing higher costs and lower service levels as a result of amalgamation, it may already decided that the provincial government can avoid making a convincing case — necessarily for the status quo, because that's the least likely scenario — but for some improvements that actually make sense locally.

And trust (oh how terribly naive that sounds) that the provincial government will listen. And if such is the case there is not much any municipality can do about it.

So the Fraser Institute report says, as suggested by municipalities such as Toronto.

There are two significant problems with the current provincial government's approach to this review that is taking its show on the road to 82 municipalities: it's carefully holding its cards close and not sharing the rules of the game — possibly because rules are being made up on the fly — and it seems to be carrying out a large-scale review in a bit of a rush.

Input from municipalities, if it is to be heeded at all, will take time to gather and assimilate into a comprehensive report with recommendations calling for extensive change and potentially undesirable consequences, yet we're told it will happen this summer.

The fear, of course, is that although we all hope this is an exercise to actually save money and improve services, it may be already decided that the property will be sold to accommodate levels of government.

And if such is the case there is not much any municipality can do about it.

All any of us can do is support our politicians in whatever review they undertake. We can hope they make a convincing case — not necessarily for the status quo, because that's the least likely scenario — but for some improvements that actually make sense locally.

Thanks to touching tribute, Egon Epp was an amazing place to live, as a small community that was looking for a man who is missing, and he is wearing a brown cap and a brown jacket, as you are, so I thought you might be him." Before I let her go, I thanked her, as on behalf of all of us, for her contribution. "No, I answered, "I am not familiar with that name." "Oh," she said, "we are looking for a man who is missing, and he is wearing a brown cap and a brown jacket, as you are, so I thought you might be him." Before I let her go, I thanked her, as on behalf of all of us, for her cooperation, hoping he would be found.

That day, I did not know Egon Epp.

I was touched to read the account in your paper of the sad passing of Mr. Egon Epp. Lauren O’Malley gave us a compassionate, heart-warming story of a man. A good man; loved yet, though now lost. We learned of his skill as a woodworker, and the quiet generosity that flowed from that. We were told of his love for family and of how shared gardening was there entwined. We heard of the wide outpouring of concern and affection during the search, which speaks to how highly Mr. Epp was valued in the community.

Your reporter took time to describe in detail the search and outcome, not the least in a clinical way, but wonderfully. The progress of the search unfolded through the stories and reminiscences of the countless friends and neighbours of Egon that Lauren encountered on that day. Would we not all wish for a eulogy such as she has written for this "perfect little gentleman." I went back to the paper today, to read the story again. Strangely, it was not at all as I had remembered it. My memory had kept no details of the search, but it held every single thing that Lauren had told us about the man.

I never met Mr. Epp myself, but I now feel a kinship with him; perhaps because I share with him old age and interests, and because of an odd thing that happened to me on that sad day. I was walking home from the post office, down Victoria Street, when a grey SUV stopped suddenly and a woman jumped out. "Are you Egon Epp?" she called. Puzzled, (and my hearing not being what it should be), I asked her to repeat what she had said. She came over to me and repeated her question. "No," I answered, "I am not familiar with that name." "Oh," she said, "we are looking for a man who is missing, and he is wearing a brown cap and a brown jacket, as you are, so I thought you might be him." Before I let her go, I thanked her, as on behalf of all of us, for her cooperation, hoping he would be found.

That day, I did not know Egon Epp. Now I do, and I will not soon forget him. Thank you, Lauren.

Andrew Henwood
Youth need to begin taking responsibility for environment

By Bethany Pollt
Youth Advisory Group, The Local Community Advisory Board

We are the generation that has knowledge at our fingertips. A simple search and click and we can find out whatever we want. Information on our phones, our laptops, our desktops, is so easy to obtain. Technology allows us to become more informed and with that information, we can react and we can act. Knowledge is power.

Greta Thunberg is a 16-year-old from Sweden who is taking action. She went on strike from school to protest climate change, to go on a two-week journey across the Atlantic, and has met with huge youth following, is making waves, and has been spoken to government officials and the United Nations. Thunberg has motivated other youth around the world to stand up and speak out about climate change. Her focus is to hold governments and businesses accountable.

Do I agree with “striking” and skipping out of school? No. But I do believe in actions speaking louder than words and that action is necessary. I do think her movement is vital to making the adults listen.

So what type of action can the youth, take?

Firstly, we must be accurately informed, we need to review the facts and see both sides of the argument. Once we have a firm grasp of the matter we then must think of solutions.

What is the purpose of calling for change if you do not productively offer up solutions? And those solutions should be viable and realistic.

Here is a very brief summation of what I have found in the research.

According to NASA Science, there have been seven cycles of climate change over the last 650,000 years.

Most of these climate changes can be attributed to changes in the earth’s orbit that would change the amount of solar energy our planet would receive. The planet has gone through warming and cooling trends.

Where some scientists say it could just be warming, there is a growing number who are certain that warming is caused by human activity. Most of this warming has occurred over the last 35 years and it continues to get warmer.

Evidence of climate warming has been documented in nine areas: global temperature rise, shrinking ice sheets, warming oceans, glacial retreat, less snow coverage, sea levels rising, declining Arctic sea ice, ocean acidification, and extreme weather.

After the past couple of weeks in NOTL where we have experienced snow, ice, rain, high winds and seven days of school disruption, extreme weather seems to be bring up in its reputation.

NOTL’s 16-year-old Sophia Galiana says, “I think climate change is a real issue and one of the first steps to putting an end to it is admitting it’s a real problem and not living in denial. We need to own up to our actions and the impact we have on our Earth."

Our responsibility to our planet, our home, is a pressing issue. While we like to focus on the production of our business and pass the blame, individuals need to take action. For as laws and regulatory bodies should be taking care of the big contributors, we as individuals make up seven billion people contributing to the good and the bad.

But what can we do? We can start by being more conscious of the choices we make. Simply reducing, reusing, and recycling is a great way to start. We can begin to make small changes, like choosing public transportation or biking instead of driving yet; however, this is something else for youth to be carrying the change. Since this was written, the youth have shown that they can make a significant change by coming together for action. Youth can be successful at doing this. We have seen an increase in activism and social movements that are working towards a better future.

This photo was taken during the February ice storm in NOTL.

Extreme weather patterns, such as ice storms like the one we saw recently, are an indicator of climate change. (Bethany Pollt)

We have to act now before it’s too late. The Earth is in a crisis and something needs to be done about it.

I have read about garbage pickup issues in NOTL. I challenge us all to not need weekly garbage pickup, for the environmental benefit. We have been voted the prettiest town in Canada. Can you imagine if we became the most environmentally advanced town in Canada?

Local teen Grace Hannah agrees. “The world we are creating through pollution is not a world we should want to live in or leave for future generations. We need to change our way of thinking and acting. It’s not just our generation that needs to understand and work towards protecting our Earth — everyone has to work together to make a difference.”

A quick search and I found out we have five electric car charging stations here in NOTL. I am not old enough to drive yet; however, this is something else for youth to be carrying the change. Since this was written, there have been many electric car charging stations installed in NOTL.

In the research: A quick search and I found out we have five electric car charging stations here in NOTL. I am not old enough to drive yet; however, this is something else for youth to be carrying the change. Since this was written, there have been many electric car charging stations installed in NOTL.

By April 2020, 10% of vehicles on our roads will be electric. How will this impact our community?

Our responsibility to our environment is an ongoing battle. The end will be when we, the youth, take action. Let’s show we mean business. Change begins with us. We need to be willing to change, to be willing to listen, and to make decisions that are good for the environment.

For more information on climate change visit: climatechange.gc.ca

The NOTL Local
February 21, 2019

Comment

Time to rethink approach to annual grants

It is unfortunate that NOTL council did not set a target that kept planned increases to our 2019 mu-

Rtual taxes at or below the cost of living index. That, plus setting realistic priorities for ongoing and future spending, should have been at the heart of its budget deliberations this year.

I recognize that final-izing a budget and deter-

This community centre on statutory holidays in 2019, including Family Day, while pro-

viing funding to Niag-

ara College, the Niagara District Airport, and the NOTL Chamber of Com-

merce, among other or-

izations.

Niagara College, ac-

According to media reports, had a $13-million surplus in 2017-18 and receives substantial provincial funding. Surely it did not need a $20,000 grant from NOTL.

The chamber exists to represent and benefit its members, which fund the organization through their membership dues. While it may make sense for NOTL to contract with the chamber to list and sell tickets for local events, there is an argument to be made that providing annual funding to the chamber to promote tourism does not.

Many residents believe that NOTL attracts more than enough tourists already, which has resulted in traffic and pedestrian congestion, poor air quality, and noise issues, and local events being inundated with out-of-towners, mak-

ing NOTL a less attractive place to live and work. Tourists may be good for the chamber’s members, but they’re not necessarily good for town.

As for the airport, I can see council providing one-time financial support for capital projects, but providing annual funding toward the airport’s operation does not make sense over the long term. While there is a realistic expectation - backed by a strong business plan - that the airport can become a viable enterprise that will generate economic or other benefits to local residents and businesses. The bottom line is that grants from council to third parties should not be annual line items in the municipal budget. They should only be con- sidered in years when the Town can provide them without reducing the value of services it provides to residents, or raising prop-

erty or business taxes, and only in exceptional cir-

stances.

Terry Davis

Reader suggests auction to help

As a local resident who attends the market and the Wednesday evening food truck events, I can suggest an auction to raise funds to cover the repair of the tent.

I would be happy to donate one of my latest oil paintings for an auction to repair the tent.

They are framed, 9"x10" oil paintings with a value of $600.

Ron Boaks

If anyone is interested in helping out, Sharon Brinsmade Taylor, The market co-ordinator, can be reached at notl.market@gmail.com.

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LETTERS

COMMENT

YES

NO
Tales by Moonlight

Caroline Higby joined about 45 people at the NOTL Public Library Saturday for the opportunity to make some noise with djembes (a type of West African hand drum) at an event held to celebrate Black History Month. GTA-based drummer Babarinde (Baba) Williams (right) led the event.

At the recent Wine & Words event organized by the NOTL Public Library author Tanya Talaga gives a riveting and tragic account of seven Indigenous students. (Lauren O’Malley)

Author tells of missing, dead Indigenous teens

Vivid attention to detail brings stories to life

By Lauren O’Malley
The Local

To list Tanya Talaga’s achievements in making activism and activism would take much longer than to explain this peninsular drive to force people to pay attention to dif-
ficult truths.

Debbie Krause is our public library’s program and outreach coordinator, and as such the coordinator of the li-
brary’s Wine & Words series. Of Talaga’s presentation on Wednesday night at the Hare
Wine Co. on Niagara Stone Road, she says, “She had the audience, and she really told a story.” The event was sold out. 100 rapt audience were silently riveted to the dynam-
ic, intelligent and compelling speaker and her very difficult — and necessary — stories.

“To the library’s credit, Talaga spoke about other writers — and necessary — stories. Her editor supported it and to call out racism when you see it. I can do that.”

Local Terry Mactaggart says she was curious to attend the event for a number of rea-
sons, including the fact her daughter has a master’s degree in Native Canadian women writers. “It’s so frustrating be-
cause we’ve been looking at this issue for so long and nothing has been done,” she says, re-
garding removing Indigenous youth from their environment for education — which began with the Indian Act in 1867 and continues to this day.

Mactaggart says, “We are refugees in Canada, the Na-
tives belong here.”

Talaga is asked during a Q&A session whether she has hope, and she says she does. She also says it’s important we all call people around us on their subtle — or not so — forms of racism. “Educate the people in your circle.”

For their part library staff plan to continue their Mocca-
sin Talk series regarding Indig-
enous issues, and also feature a permanent FMNI First Na-
tions, Métis, and Inuit collec-
tion throughout their stacks.
Young man from NOTL flying for WestJet

By Mike Balsom

Special to The Local

He's the comments. He's seen the looks.

First, it was the flight at-tendant. Her eyes gave it away. “You’re 21?” she asked, incred-uously. Then there was the passenger on the WestJet En-core flight. As he was dis-mantling, stepped on and asked, “Are you sure you’re old enough to fly this thing?”

“This thing” is a Bombardier Q-400 TurboProp. It boasts a 93-foot wing span and cruises at a top speed of 667 kph at a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet. Bombardier bills it as the “fastest and most advanced turboprop aircraft” around. As First Officer, 21-year-old Tyler Hill of Virgil is one of two pilots responsible for the safety of the 78 passengers on board. And yes, he is indeed old enough to fly “this thing.”

Hill moved to Calgary last March to begin his career as a professional pilot with WestJet, following a six-month vet-ting process with the carrier. He had already earned his private pilot’s licence in Virgil from England when Tyler was about seven years old. From as far back as he can remember, he wanted to be a pilot. “Whenever we went on vaca-tion, the most exciting thing for me was being on the plane. I got to know all of the instruc-tors and crew from A to B safely and efficiently. ”

He would like to progress up to WestJet hierarchy, moving on from the Q-400 to its fleet of Boeing jets. Eventually, he sees himself working for an interna-tional carrier overseas, special-izing in transatlantic flights.

He encourages young people to consider a career as a pilot. “There’s never been a better time to be a pilot, with so many opportunities out there.” Clearly, for Tyler Hill, the sky’s the limit.
Robert Jupiter, a hero in our own back yard

By Jane Andres Special to The Local

For many years my daily dog walking expeditions involved sloshing through the Four Mile Creek with a pair of rubber boots and visiting the old Servos family cemetery overlooking the hulking valley of the Four Mile watershed.

Over the past 20 years we’ve had the pleasure of Servos descendants staying at our bed and breakfast, sharing stories of their ancestors who lived out their lives on Palatine Hill.

It was through a guest that I first heard the name Robert Jupiter, one of the first men to be freed from slavery in Niagara, and who was buried in the little cemetery. The fact that he would be interred beside a family of prominent white settlers was intriguing. It was the beginning of an illuminating journey as I sought to learn more about one of the hidden heroes in our back yard.

June 1778, on the picturesque Servos estate set in the gentle hills of New York, Thomas Servos, his wife, daughter-in-law and three-year-old granddaughter Maggie had just finished supper. Rumours were rampant throughout the Mohawk Valley that General Washington had dispatched troops to uproot and arrest those who had pledged allegiance to the King. The 1,500 acre Servos property was an established and prosperous estate, with a large number of mills and orchards lining the fertile banks of the Charlotte River. Thomas and his sons knew it would be just a matter of time before they became a prime target of the patriot raids.

The estate required a substantial work force of enslaved men and women to tend to its large operations. Those in the service of Butler’s Rangers were exempt from the hardships of the raids and would be part of the chattel to be confiscated and sold, wounding the fragile self-worth already under construction. A substantial labour force consisting of both freed and enslaved black men, military, and loyalists was required in order to have the second mill completed and in production by 1783. Palatine Hill quickly became the commercial hub of Newark.

Acquiring land to settle was a priority for the British in order to alleviate the overcrowded misery at the fort. A treaty was signed between Reverend Isaac the Iroquois and the British crown for a four-mile wide strip of land bounded by the Niagara River, from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. Daniel Servos was granted 400 acres of choice land along the Four Mile Creek and a saw mill already under construction. It is estimated that of the 4,000 Black people who lived in Upper and Lower Canada in 1784, almost half were enslaved. It is not clear whether Jupiter was a free man at this point but he continued to work closely with Daniel, again handling much of the responsibility of building the mill and clearing the land.

When newly appointed Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe arrived in 1791, he was disturbed by the cruelty and acts of enslavement he witnessed in the settlement.

By late 1792 news began circulating that he intended to propose legislation to abolish slavery. Merchants and farmers who owned slaves protested, predicting financial ruin. Disagreements due to the complexity of new economic and social structures created divisions within the community.

Rumours were rampant that the women and children would not be freed until the age of 25. Some owners freed their slaves only to relocate them as indentured servants, hoping they could never pay off their debt. The act now placed a limit of nine years on indentured services or servants.

The time of transition was a complex and emotional one, as those who were freed continued to live alongside friends and neighbours who remained in bondage until their death.

Some of the black loyalists who had fought under Butler’s Rangers as free men petitioned for land, hoping to establish a black community which they would never lose. A few however served as full citizens who paid taxes and had the right to vote.

After years of deprivations and contempt, Jupiter was free but realized he had to settle down and establish his future. He was treated as a member of the Servos family, who built a comfortable shelter for him next to the mill. His responsibilities at Palatine Hill quickly became an important part in establishing it as a strategic commercial hub.

Palatine Hill quickly became a prime target of the patriot raids.

Influential leaders refused to free their slaves. They continued to sell the slaves and their children’s children to their heirs. The legislature refused to free or immediately abolish the sale or purchase of those in bondage. Advertisements in Niagara newspapers posted by owners who sought to track down and capture fugitive slaves within the province were common. Canvasses across the river. Rumours began to circulate throughout the community as enslaved family members and friends began to disappear. Jupiter made the decision to take his chances with Butler’s Rangers, clinging to the hope he would one day be a free man.

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Life was not easy for Jupiter, even as a free man.

He was well-known as a man of exceptional character and was deeply respected by the community, regardless of their race.

The house and barn were soon overflowing with refugees seeking shelter. A major snowstorm had blanketed the area with three feet of snow just days before. Women pulled their children and elderly on tea trays, dresser drawers and scraps of wood, struggling through the deep drifts along the lakeshore. It is difficult to imagine how Robert Jupiter’s wife could save their four children from the bitter cold. Her young daughter was already suffering seizures, there was little hope for her survival.

The British revenge galvanized within days. John Dease Servos (Daniel’s son) commanded the troops, Jupiter among them, as they disembarked from their ships in the Four Mile Harbor. The troops pushed their bateaux down the frozen Four Mile Creek to East West Line. From there it was a direct route to the deep cut in the river banks at the present MacFarland Park. Lowing the boats down into the swift current of the Niagara River they drifted in silence, guiding their boats to shore below Fort Niagara.

Storming the fort, they caught the Americans by surprise and within hours had captured the site.

Much hardship followed. The war-weary who returned to the remains of the town. The process of rebuilding was short-lived when rumors of political unrest began to circulate.

The local military eventually allowed him to raise a commonwealth. The slaves were still in effect. Freedom and fall under the law of the U.S. The stakes were high: Britain declared war with America.

The government offered grants of 200 acres of prime farmland in Niagara to the British soldiers, while members of the Coloured Corps were offered 100 acres of land in Garafraxa and Oro Townships north of Toronto. They would not receive title to the land unless they cleared ten acres and had a house of adequate size completed on it. They cleared adjacent roads and paid the fees. The land consisted mainly of swamp and rocky soil.

Some tried and gave up, moving to Penetanguishene and Owen Sound searching for employment in the lumber and fur trade. Some didn’t survive.

Jupiter, Mary Ann and the children made the trek north and attempted to start over. Despite their best efforts, within a few years the extreme hardship took its toll on him now in his early 50s. He contracted a respiratory ailment from which he was unable to recover. He never was able to realize his dream of having a home of his own or see his children flourish.

He had requested that he be buried on Palatine Hill to be close to the family and community he so dearly loved.

The Servos family acknowledged his wish and he was buried underneath a centuries-old maple which presided over his grave until recent years. He was well-known as a man of exceptional character and was deeply respected by the community, regardless of race.

Mary Ann moved back to Newark with her children. She was unable to sell the land they had worked so hard on because she did not hold the title.

To add to her hardship her son James drowned shortly after her return. In 1827 Humphrey Waters’ wife, Catherine Servos, petitioned on Mary Ann behalf for compensation of property lost in the war. She was destitute and unable to support her children, one of whom suffered from epilepsy. She received a small amount to cover the loss of their horse, some harness, and livestock.

Many of the black families did not receive any of the compensation owed them.

Jupiter’s story is worthy of our remembering, a hero in our own backyard.

Note: The information provided by the Niagara Historical Museum, and the book Slavery and Freedom by Nancy Butler and Michael Power. The owner of a B&B, she has also had Jupiter’s descendants visit with her over the last 20 years, talking about their research, and providing her with copies of their documents.
By Lauren O’Malley

You can spot a gardener in February: They’re the ones with hope in their eyes.

While most people are weighed down by ice and grey skies, able to see only the cruelty of the year’s second month, the blessed gardeners are eyeing their garden journals, their seed catalogues, their flats and pots and plant markers.

If you’ve been buying hardy seedlings and plants every spring and growing your own food, maybe it’s time to take it to the next level, from seed starting.

There is a passion in this ex-calcation that can get a little fer- vent — in a good way. So many choices, so much knowledge, such a steep learning curve. And all inherently doable.

Starting from seed also allows you to create community by sharing your stash. Each seed starts usually coming from between 50 and 200 seeds, and it’s pretty safe to say you’re not going to use those up in the one or two seasons seeds are thought to remain viable. So have a seed-sharing party or put check in with fellow gardeners to do a “need ‘em, got ‘em” swap. This adds to the economical factor of the process too.

Another advantage of the packet-to-table food is knowing what’s gone into it at every step of the way. In an era of pol- linator scarcity, there’s peace in knowing your plants contain no neonicotinoids, common in store-bought plants and fa- tal to flying things.

Rose Bartel — aka the Mi- das of the green world — of local farm Bartel Organics has some guidance. Roolly Head- ing, local botanist extraordi- naire, also weighs in.

As a general rule of (green) thumb, ask six growers a ques- tion and you’ll get six different answers, so it’s not surprising that Bartel and Heading have differing ideas on how to start seeds. It’s also relevant that Bartel is growing for the mass- es, while Heading is guiding you toward something more like a kitchen garden.

Choosing seeds

Either way, starting from seed gives you a dizzying amount of choice, particular- ly if you can crack a catalogue or two, or visit some inspiring websites. While you might find four or five varieties of lettuce at the market or grocery store, you can access literally dozens of varieties with heir-loom seeds.

Both growers recommend avoiding GMO seeds; some gardeners — amateur and pro- fessional — are keen to keep things as natural as possible. Organic seeds are available through any number of sources, and you can also check with the Council for Responsible Genetics if you’re concerned about this particular topic. Bar- nel recommends Wil- liam Dam Seeds, other favou- rites are Seed Saver Exchange Heirloom Seeds and Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Com- pany, with some very unusual heirloom varieties available from all three. (A quick glance at our cam- era, grape tomato, pomegranate fruit, and ancient watermelon.)

Bartel recommends you start with your favourites, and only a few of them. “It’s sim- ply just what you want, and add some new ones,” says Heading. He suggests selecting vegetable varieties that are known to do well in Niagara.

Starting seeds

“Hot weather plants like tomatoes, peppers, and egg plants have to be started six weeks before planting out- side at the end of May,” says Heading. Some varieties will take longer, some shorter, and some will be directly sown into the garden. Reading seed packets will help to determine the time to maturity.

Seed packets and helpful websites also will provide in- formation about the spacing and number of seeds per packet. A general rule is the seed should be as deep in the soil as it is large, i.e. don’t put a little pin- head lettuce seed an inch un- derground, and don’t float a big macuschi seed a quarter of an inch under the surface.

When planting seeds, it is very (very) difficult not to get carried away. Remember the size and yield of the adult plants you’re starting. Do you really need 12 tomato plants and five summer squash vines for your family of four? Try to be discriminating — which can be challenging, with all of the aforementioned varieties.

“Don’t go off the deep end!” advises Bartel, “because you’ll sacrifice quality.”

In Bartel’s books, seeds are started in potting soil or specific seed-starting soil, in flats small or large, with clear plastic wrap. An alternative is starting the experiment with the clamshell biras from your grocery greens or the spinach. In bluebird, he alone cheat and use plastic container. Clear plastic wrap can also be used to create a greenhouse environment over a flat of seeds.

Heading has a different perspective, equally viable. “For vegetable plants, start with large eight-inch pots, filled with light sterile soil, and support individual plants with stakes. If you lose more than a week of growth,” he says, “Place the whole pot in a half plate and water from the bottom.”

In either case, remember germination doesn’t need light, only heat and moisture. “Not overly, but that’s the damp part,” says Bartel. Perfecting the balance is part of the learning curve. “Don’t let the tempera- ture get too high or the seeds will percolate,” she says. But peppers — both hot and sweet — need extra warmth to be in- spired to shoot their roots and shoots. (Just like some of us on cold winter days.) Peppers are the picket — they need the most heat. The following rule of thumb from Bartel, who grows a vast variety of sweet and spicy specimens. “In general, seeds can be placed on a heat mat, suggests Bartel, and grow lights are an option for those with less-than-ideal win- dow exposure. Heading recom- mends the pots be kept off the ground, to keep them cool.

The emerging seedlings, however, do require light, and plenty of it, which is why it’s recommended to start your seeds in mid-March, when there is more natural light available. “If you start too ear- ly,” says Bartel, “you get leggy plants which means they’re weaker and more prone to breakage and disease.”

“Go slow, and take notes,” are Bartel’s main recommen- dations. “Just start small! A little ‘heirloom garden from seed is a steep learning curve,” she adds, “and keeping everything down in a garden journal the dates, details, how you started them, and when they germinated, everything.” That way, she says, you can learn from your successes and failures and lean more toward the for- mer in years to come.

Some seeds are direct-sown into the soil, and some tolerate and hardy ones can be plant- ed in the late spring. Radishes; many greens including the Chinese (bok choy, tatsois); and Italian varieties (rapini), and some vines, for example, for this stage too. Keep your hardening seedlings up on balconies or benches.

Transplanting

While already over-ex- panded patience might be needed to find the right place. This weekend is generally a good start for transplanting the most of your vegetables.

“An overcast day is better than a sunny day. This will prevent wilting,” says Heading. “You can’t trans- plantable plant deeper into the soil than the level of the flower pot since the plant will send out roots if buried!”

Space your plants accord- ing to the seed packet instruc- tions, as difficult as that may seem. While your little plant- lets may look lost and lonely spread so far apart, you must imagine them full-grown and fighting each other for light and nourishment.

Water each plant more than you think they need, for their roots to be entirely soaked, and any air pockets created in the plant- in need to be filled with soil and water so roots don’t poke around and find only air. Heading recommends mulching and supplement- ing with aged wood chips to keep seeds down, maintain moisture, and to continual- ly amend and improve the soil. He suggests sourcing some of last year’s chips from de- downsed ash trees, stating that while wood from ash trees cannot be taken outside the region, it is safe to use within it. Heading says, “A contract tree remover with a chipper will either dump free for your drive- way or for a few bucks.”

Growing from seed is as rewarding as it can be chal- lenging. Bartel advises finding a mentor or two, and even looks to the local farms market system to find a partner or master gard- eners on site every week to give advice and information. The library is a great resource as well, as is the friendly wave to a thriv- ing veggie patch.
Program helps seniors remain at home safely

By Lauren O’Malley

In an era of troubled health care, and in a town where the demographic bulge is in the 60-plus set, McMaster University’s Health Tapestry program is a beacon of hope and support.

The program partners trained volunteers with resident 70 years of age or older to determine any health care needs that may not be being met by their current resources. The volunteers are provided, certified, and trained by the Red Cross. A pair of them visits a senior at home, bringing with them an iPad loaded with an in-depth questionnaire.

The home visit allows volunteers to survey the living situation in a way a family physician couldn’t, and also gives them the luxury of time for questions and answers, to create a thorough assessment of the patient’s health.

As Dr. David Price — one of the originators of the program — explains it, “I always hear from clinicians that volunteers bring back information they didn’t know. If they come into our office for a diabetes check-up, they don’t tend to say, ‘By the way doc, I’ve had a couple of falls recently.’” He continues, “We can’t ask every single question, in the short period of time of an office visit.”

The volunteers have sat in their living room with them and had tea and asked questions, he says. “We’re always surprised by the depth of information. They’re able to identify early health issues that are beginning to arise, and we can assign resources to patients before they need intervention, which is what makes it a big difference.”

The physician recounts a personal experience with the program: “A couple in their mid-seventies had been my patients for 19 years. Seventeen years ago I delivered their grandchild. He says, ‘I thought I knew that family really well, but I was surprised by the information that came back with volunteers about that couple. They were more frail than I had realized, they had more potential health issues. This enabled me to be more proactive than reactive.’”

“Don’t want people stuck in the hospital,” she says. “We need to put enough supports in place to keep people at home. Many patients need someone two to three times a day to make sure they’re eating properly, taking meds, getting ready for bed — that’s where we need the money for health care. This is a very helpful program, because a lot of people don’t know how to access supports.”

Debbi and David Frisby live in Vinyl, and have completed their round of interviews with the Tapestry program.

Debbi was diagnosed with Parkinsonian Disease in 2011, and subsequently had a bad fall at home, two days before Christmas, in 2016. These two health issues left the retired nurse homebound, and got her husband, David, to work as a full-time caregiver. “Life can throw you a curve ball,” says David wryly.

David — also retired from the medical industry — learned many of his skills in this new field during Deb’s extended stay in the hospital. The fall, it turns out, had been serious enough to break her spine (this was tragically discovered after a misdiagnosis and prolonged agonizing pain). Both of the Frisbys are extremely grateful to their family physician Dr. Tim Bastedo of the Niagara North Family Health Team, for everything he has done for them — including encouraging them to sign up for the program. “I can’t praise him enough,” says David, teardrops to his eyes.

Through the program Debbi was seen at the Swallowing Clinic in St. Catharines, to ensure the Parkinson’s was not interfering with her nourishment and hydration. And an occupational therapist was sent to their house to show Debbi some things she could do differently to avoid further falls. The Frisbys had already arranged for a personal support worker and a March of Dimes volunteer to help Debbi with bathing and dressing. “I’m not in a hospital or a home,” Debbi says with some relief. “We take everything in our stride,” says David.

Patients of the Niagara North Family Health Team can self-refer to the Health Tapestry program via the clinic, or can be referred by their physician or a family member. You must be 70 years of age or older to participate. More info is available through the Niagara North Family Health Team, or at http://healthtapestry.ca/.

As Dr. Price says about the only program of its type in the world, “I don’t think anybody who hears about it thinks it’s a dumb idea.”
Two young chefs choose NOTL over the world

By Lauren O’Malley
The Local

Someone forgot to send Tania Ganassini and John Vetere the memo about Niagara-on-the-Lake being one of those places looking for a peaceful life. The two young chefs visit the region every year, falling in love with the community on a whim. “We had never really thought of NOTL as a place to live,” says Vetere, a considerate, gentle hipster. “When we visited it just happened to smell like concord grapes. We just knew right away — it just felt right.” He continues, “We spotted gaps in the market for things that we need to do this collectively for the growth of the and proximity to each other,” says Ganassini. Of her own decision to move here, “It was not planned, we were done with the grind; this just felt fresh, a nice place to be.”

Both cuisiniers had very successful, even enviable careers in the Toronto culinary scene. Vetere had a reputation for successful restaurant openings, and was a much lauded and sought-after entity. Ganassini had stints in the city’s darlings like Cafe Boulud in the Four Seasons Hotel, and Canoe Restaurant. “It was so anti-vegetarian when I was in the kitchen at Canoe. When an order for a vegan substitution would come up, I would swear and yell, ‘Why don’t they just go to a vegan restaurant!’” It is difficult to imagine this radiantly peaceful now-vegan person cursing. “It was a stressful environment, and the kitchen wasn’t set up to handle vegan options in a simple, easily managed way. It wasn’t built in, we were swamped and stressed — chef at Brushfire Smoke BBQ, the food arm of Oast House Brewers. ‘At the end of the day we’re a barbecue restaurant,’ says the accomplished 80-year-old.” But our business is always to make everything as tasty as possible — and our vegan option ‘was as good as or better than our traditional options.’

Again, the impression is one that a unique restaurant as part of a micro-brewery would cater to carnivores, but in fact, Vetere says, ‘There’s absolutely tons of demand for vegan foods at Oast. Huge traction. It’s unique, and there is such appreciation — so many vegetarians and vegans saying ‘that’s exactly the kind of thing we’re making us feel heard and appreciated.’ It’s really cool to see.”

While Vetere ‘comes home so happy’ from his job at Oast, it wasn’t an easy start for the pair in Niagara. “We jumped in blind,” says Ganassini. “We moved here with no job, no friends, nowhere. We had never had a problem finding work in our field, and didn’t expect to have trouble getting jobs.” But they did struggle at first. “Our timing was off, we couldn’t find work right away,” says Vetere. “In Toronto it’s too daunting to be an entrepreneur — it wasn’t even an option for us. But here it was a possibility. The Norton Underground came out of our diresituation.”

The Norton Undergound was a virtual restaurant, a series of food delivery business. “It’s a bursary, and subsequentincidences led to Staff Meal Niagara winning the 2018 award for Best Concept. sediment to drum up fol lowers. For two years we had events all over Niagara. The pair was nomi nated for Niagara’s Young Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2015 thanks to the success of the dinner parties that saw people ‘arrive as strangers, and leave as friends,” accord ing to Ganassini. Proving the truth of her statement that “My hobby outside of cooking is cooking,” the hard working Ganassini was soon running the kitchen at Southbrook Vine yards, and Vetere found himself as the chef de cuisine at Ravine Vine yard Estate Winery. The Underground became more and more of an undertaking, and soon had to be let go. Ganassini looked for a change of scenery, and found it in working re tail at Oast. Here she met Amanda Ali, who soon became a co-conspirator in a new side-hustle. Staff Meal Niagara. Ali has a background in biology, international development, international nutrition management, has worked in Kenya and held nutrition workshops in third world countries — and she grew up in Niagara. The two bonded over food and fun. “We used to communicate via text using food puns, almost ex clusively,” says Ganassini. “We’re putting together a food delivery business. ‘The break has given us a direct connection with people,” says Ganassini with great enthusiasm. “The break has given us a chance to take a beat and re-evaluate. How contra dictory to be in the well ness industry and not take care of ourselves.”

Ganassini and Vetere are taking good care of themselves. Vetere walks to and from work, often heading in with the ris ing sun. The pair enjoys exercising together at the community centre gym, and Ganassini is a big fan of local FoxDen Yoga. While she exer cises and cares for her health, Ganassini is also nurturing an expanded concept. “I have visions of a wellness centre, a community hub, maybe a place where farmers could drop off their sec onds,” for use in healthy vegan foods.

The two young chefs choose NOTL over the world. The business grew and grew — they even made appearances at the Farmers Market in the Village on Saturday mornings. The problem was their kitchen, they had one. “We would scrimp everything to our food prep space, and build a kitchen, make the food, tear the kitchen back down again, and take it home.” For obvious reasons, this arrangement ceased to be reasonable, and Staff Meal is on hiatus while the pair looks for a viable prep kitchen.

In the meantime the workshops will continue. “You wonder if you have an impact, and work shows you that directly. It’s a lot of work, but I love it so much: a direct connection with people,” says Ganassini with great enthusiasm. “The break has given us a chance to take a beat and re-evaluate. How contradictory to be in the wellness industry and not take care of ourselves.”

Ganassini and Vetere are taking good care of themselves. Vetere walks to and from work, often heading in with the rising sun. The pair enjoys exercising together at the community centre gym, and Ganassini is a big fan of local FoxDen Yoga. While she exercises and cares for her health, Ganassini is also nurturing an expanded concept. “I have visions of a wellness centre, a community hub, maybe a place where farmers could drop off their seconds,” for use in healthy vegan foods.
Kindergarten Open House

Royal Oak Community School welcomes families to explore its Early Years Program with a school and class visit. It’s an opportunity to talk to the teachers and students about what they are doing and to see why the school’s small class sizes are so beneficial to student growth and development. It’s also a chance to showcase what makes Royal Oak Community School so incredible and special, said learning strategy specialist Christine McIsaac.

The independent school uses the Ministry Curriculum Documents as a starting point, allowing for students to grow and challenge themselves as they are ready. The Kindergarten open house is Feb. 26, from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Families can have their children do a mini tri-at in the class by calling or emailing the school at royaloakcommunityschool@gmail.com.

Nathan Turner, principal for a day, called for a dress-down day and lunch at The Angel Inn.

Students at ROCS have their physical education classes at the community centre. (Photos supplied)

Students have story time and the opportunity to find books to read at the NOTL Public Library.

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We’ve Moved up the Creek to Four Mile Creek Rd, Virgil

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Winter and summer, bowling is a great social activity

By Penny Coles
The Local

There are carpet bowlers in town, and there are lawn bowlers — and then there are those who are happy to bowl all seasons.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Carpet Bowling Club has about 50 members, 30 of whom can be counted on to show up most Monday and Thursday afternoons. The carpets get pulled out onto the smooth, perfectly even floor of the community centre auditorium, and the seniors get some exercise and enjoy a social time.

Paul McHoull is one of the winter bowlers who looks forward to spring, and the beginning of the season for the NOTL Lawn Bowling Club.

Carpet bowling, he said, began in 1998 in the gymnasium of the former high school. Then it got moved to the old Platoff Street community centre, where the floor was “interesting,” said McHoull — not only was it old and uneven, but it had drains located at various spots that the bowls would hit and “make a funny little hop over them.”

It was a challenge to play, and members feel fortunate now to be in the community centre, although McHoull said they were disappoint ed the Town made the decision to close the building for Family Day, cancelling their outing.

They still have to unroll and roll up the carpets each session, but “I’m not complaining,” said McHoull. “This is a huge improvement,” he said of the new facility.

He would like to be able to offer beginners more training and practice time, but that’s not possible when the carpets are only available for the duration of afternoon games.

Members pay $50 for the season, but drop-ins can pay $5 an afternoon. There are teas held monthly, birthdays are celebrated and there’s a pot-luck at the end of the season, he said.

Some members prefer it to outside and don’t lawn bowl. They don’t have to worry about the weather, or getting too much sun.”

The two games have some differences — chiefly that the lawn bowling lane, at 90 feet, is twice the length of the carpet, which has a block in the middle so players can’t just hurl the bowl straight down. “You have to go around it — you can’t just heave it,” says McHoull.

While it’s more of a social game, with teams drawn randomly each afternoon, some members are more competitive than others, he said.

Some people come out and use the carpet bowling matches as a learning period before joining the lawn bowling club, but those who want to join the outdoor club this season will be able to get in some practice time outside of the games.

Typically, McHoull says, beginners can come out three times to give the sport a try before paying. Carpet bowlers still have a few sessions left this season before heading outside. Registration for lawn bowling is in April, and opening day is in May, says McHoull.

By Penny Coles
The Local

The novice Wolves of the NOTL Minor Hockey League were on a roll Saturday when they played the Dunnville Mudcats at the Centennial Arena, defeating them 2-1 for their third win in a row.

Fred Mercnik

Ely Warren bowls on the carpet in the winter and moves outdoors to lawn bowling in May. (Fred Mercnik)
The NOTL Atom Rep Wolves of the NOTL Minor Hockey League, sponsored by Buckner’s Source for Sports, have advanced to the semi-finals of the Ontario Minor Hockey Association playdowns after a 3-0 series sweep of the Thorold Blackhawks. The Wolves’ first game against the Grimsby Kings was to be played Tuesday at the Centennial Arena. They are awaiting the winner of a series between St. Marys and Erin-Hillsburgh. The schedule for the semi-finals will be posted on www.notlhockey.com. The Wolves would love a strong show of support from the community as they make their push for a provincial title.

Playing on the atom team are (front left) Eddy Szewczyk, Devin Hunter, Mitchell Olsen, Levi Bayne, Ben Parker, and (back) Gavin Tomczuk, Andrew Bayne, Sheldon Walker, Ethan Abraham, Marco Angershi, Mason Neal, Riley Smith, Liam Fenwick, and Nolan Gresal. The coaching staff are Trevor Parker, Steve Walker, Kevin Bayne, Rob Read and Alex Read.

Family skate

Esther, 6, mom Trisha Weaver, Mary, 3, Naomi, 5, grandpa Dave Dick and Claudia, 8, make use of the ice for some family time at the Centennial Arena Friday. Weaver says she skates with her girls once a week, and her dad takes a break from work to spend some time with his granddaughters and help out on the ice. (Penny Copley)
Lakeit Farms: General farm labourers required for vineyard work, hiring 4 full-time, permanent positions, min. 40 hrs/ week at $14.00 per hour. Physical tasks involve pruning, tying, suckering, hoeing and harvesting grapes. Bending, crouching, lifting, walking outside in all weather conditions. No education required. Experience not required but would be an asset. Located in a rural area, 1028 Line 2, Virgil.

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The NOTL Nationals lost at home 7-4 to the Niagara Whalers from Port Colborne Friday, their last regular game of the season. They had some players sitting out, knowing the result would not affect the team’s 5th place standing. The Nationals had a 3-2 lead going into the third and ran out of gas with a short bench. Coach Spencer De Wolfe said he was proud of the team effort during the first two periods. “It’s hard to play a full 60 minutes with a short bench and mistakes were made because of guys being tired,” he said of the third period. The Nationals will play away against the Kingsville Kings Friday for their series opener. De Wolfe says it looks like Sunday will be at home, but he’s waiting for confirmation — check the team’s website or Facebook page for more information. (Fred Mercnik)
At the Oscar Peterson International Jazz Festival “Music with No Borders” concert Sunday, produced by Bravo Niagara! Festival of the Arts at Stratus Vineyards, the audience was treated to a performance by NEA Jazz Master Kenny Barron (piano), Kirk MacDonald (tenor sax), Reg Schwager (guitar), Neil Swainson (bass) and Lewis Nash (drums). (Alex Heidbuechel)

Heather Ricardo holds up daughter Farra, preventing her from falling. Eventually Farra starts to stand up by herself. (Fred Mercnik)

The Burns family decide to go tobogganing on the hill at Fort George and have a blast. The heavy snowfall Monday morning and a relatively mild day made it perfect for outdoor family activities. (Fred Mercnik)

Baba Williams packs up his minivan with 80 jembe drums after a Black History Month event at the NOTL Public Library. (Photo by Lauren O’Malley)

Patricia Harb (centre) holds hands with Kristan and Lauren while they enjoy skating at the outdoor rink at Fort George. (Fred Mercnik)