



Peller on a mission to take wine industry to next level

Mike Balsom
The Local

It's time for Niagara's wine industry to move to the next level, and John Peller is leading the charge to get it there.

With the support of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce, Peller gathered a group of movers and shakers from the local wine and tourism industries at Peller Estates Winery to outline his vision to transform Niagara into a premium wine destination.

After reflecting on his family's own 60-plus years in the wine industry, the president and CEO of Andrew Peller Ltd. outlined what he referred to as his "big idea" for Niagara's economy.

"There is no other industry that has a greater growth impact on economies than premium wine-based economies," Peller said. "It's a very bold statement, but it also happens to be true. It's an economic fact."

His mission, he stated to a group that included owners and winemakers from various wineries, owners of other businesses and representatives from NOTL council, is to unite all sectors of the local economy so they can fully grasp how a premium wine economy can have an effect on each of them.

"We need government and policy-makers to unite around this reality," he said, "that building a premium wine industry and economy has such incredible benefits, that it needs to be understood, validated and be irrefutable."

The Officer of the Order of Canada pointed out that France and Italy are number one and two in the world in tourism. In both of those countries, he added, tourism is responsible for at least 15 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In contrast, tourism accounts for only one per cent of Ontario's GDP.

Also in both of those countries, Peller added, grape growing is held up as the highest end of the chain in agriculture.

"The cost of land is expensive, and so is the cost of farming," Peller said. "You really need the right agricultural policies to support it, to support next-gen farming. That is where we've not done as well. We've done well making great wines, but there's another level we have to get to."

That level, Peller explained, is the premium wine level. He defined that as primarily reds that sell for at least \$50 a bottle. To illustrate such a wine, members of the Peller hospitality staff distributed glasses of the winery's JDP Signature Series Red, an \$80 bottle of wine made by winemaker Katie Dickieson.

"If there's any doubt whatsoever that we can make wine as good as the very best

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Taxation, government policy barriers to growth



John Peller outlining his premium wine strategy to a group of movers and shakers at Peller Estates Winery last Wednesday. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Shaw Executive Director and CEO Tim Jennings conducting a post-presentation Q&A with Peller.

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in the world,” Peller said, “this will prove we can.”

The University of Western Ontario law graduate went on to outline the value that a premium wine industry brings to all aspects of a local economy, using the transformation of California’s Napa Valley over the last 25 years as an example.

He pointed out the beauty of Niagara’s landscape, including the two lakes and the Niagara River, as well as Niagara College, Brock University and the Shaw Festival Theatre as incredible assets that can be built upon as his vision evolves.

“We need to shuttle people across the lake from Toronto,” he added. “We live on a lake, we’re called Niagara-on-the-Lake, and there’s so much to the lake that we have yet to exploit. And on the hospitality and tourism side, we’re doing a great job, but we need to have the courage to work and grow together.”

Andrew Peller Ltd. bought the Riverbend Inn, situated next to the Peller Estates property, in 2020. Peller explained to the gathering his company’s plans to transform Riverbend into an iconic, Four Seasons winery hotel that would put Niagara on the luxury map across the world.

“We’re working with everyone in the town to get their input and support,” he said about the potential project. “We think this will be a great thing for our town. If we have the ambition of being the best in the world then we need to be competitive at all levels with the best in the world.”

Besides working together, getting Niagara’s economy to that next level will take some advocacy at all levels of government.

“We have challenges with the policies that support the wine and hospitality here (in Ontario),” Peller said.

During a question and answer session hosted by Shaw

Festival executive director and CEO Tim Jennings, Peller lamented the economic pressures the wine industry faces due to taxation.

“We are a grossly over-taxed industry,” he said. “Sadly we’re more managed as an industry by the people who manage sin taxes and lotteries and gaming. It’s a bizarre aspect to our existence here. Normally around the world the wine industry is the flag bearer of the agricultural economy because of its value.”

He also lamented the pushback received by the LCBO when trying to ensure that domestic wines dominate the home market, and the inability of Ontario’s wine industry to distribute its products directly rather than through the provincially-controlled retail organization.

Following the presentation, Jamie Slingerland, director of viticulture at Pillitteri Estates Winery, agreed with Peller on those points.

“When you have one house,” Slingerland said, “there’s an advantage to being an importer selling wine in Ontario. Until the LCBO’s mandate changes from just making money to supporting the domestic industry, nothing will change. Government has been very resistant to that change.”

Slingerland agreed that not all of Niagara’s wineries would be able to step up to producing premium wines, but also agreed that Peller’s proposal would leave room for all levels and tiers of wines.

“When we talk about premium wines, it’s because we want the world to see what we are capable of producing,” he told The Local. “You establish your reputation on the premiums. For example, icewine has led the industry with regards to opening some doors. But if we win multiple international awards for our premium red wines, people will take notice.”

Debi Pratt, who was on the ground floor with Donald Ziraldo in the early days of Inniskillin Wines, ap-

plauded Peller’s approach, and said his experience and connections will do him well in moving forward on his vision.

“John made some really good points,” Pratt said during a post-presentation reception. “We’re 40 years in, and nothing’s changed with the taxes. And he’s done the right thing, just like Donald looked 40 years ago at California and Australia, and chose to plant new varietals back then. And John touched on how much our population and our government support our industry.”

“Four Niagara-on-the-Lake wineries were named in Ontario’s top 20 attractions,” Minerva Ward, president and CEO of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce and Tourism NOTL pointed out. “Konzelman, Reif, Chateau des Charmes and Peller Estates. This speaks to our prominence of our wine industry. The wine industry continues to drive our economic outcomes.”

“It’s really about uniting all the stakeholders in the Niagara Region,” Peller summed up, “and to organize and coordinate more our views and ambitions. It’s important to be driven by a vision.”



Image of the proposed Four Seasons hotel at Riverbend.

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Voice acting runs in musical family of young Kaia Oz

Mike Balsom
The Local

At only 10 years old, Kaia Ozdemir has already played a pony, a construction crane, a mer-pup (cross between a mermaid and a puppy) and a joke-telling aquarium fish. If you have children who watch *My Little Pony*, *PAW Patrol*, *Thomas & Friends* or *Lucas the Spider*, chances are her voice has rung out through your television speakers at some point in the past few months.

Now, the effervescent and energetic pre-teen, known professionally as Kaia Oz, can be seen playing herself in *Gisele's Mashup Adventures*, an

animated upper preschool series on CBC Gem where each three-minute episode takes inspiration from the creative ideas of children.

Kaia is already a four-year veteran of voice acting, having followed her father, Evren into the field. Evren is a musician, producer, composer and rapper, who has released music under his own name as well as under the name Strangers on a Plane, a duo he created with his wife and Kaia's mom, singer Courteney Brookes.

The close-knit family of four, including Kaia's soccer-playing older brother Zeren, moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2020, renting

a home off of Lakeshore Road, where they immediately fell in love with the rural lifestyle, raising chickens in their back yard.

A lifelong musician, Evren had been composing music for commercials for many years, recording and producing that music in his home studio in Toronto. When a voice actor missed a scheduled deadline to submit a file for one of his jobs, Evren volunteered to do a read and he's been voicing ad spots ever since.

"Within a year I had gotten all of these gigs, and I became a full ACTRA (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists) member," he tells The Local.

Evren was represented by Fountainhead Talent at the time. When his young daughter expressed some interest in doing voice acting of her own, he contacted his agent, who passed the information on to Roberta Romano, who took over Fountainhead and rebranded it as Element Artist Management.

"The feedback we got was that they loved her voice," he said about her first few auditions. "It was clear to everyone that there was something going on there, and she just started landing all these roles."

Kaia was only six when she started, and by then she had become a voracious reader.

"That was the remarkable

thing, that she was really good at reading," says her father. "And she's really comfortable around a mic. Both kids grew up around it."

She didn't get everything she auditioned for, though, and Kaia has a great attitude about that.

"She's done many auditions that she hasn't gotten," says Evren. "She doesn't obsess about it."

When asked if it bothers her, Kaia emphatically replies, "No, because I know I'll get more in the future. There will be more opportunities that will come. It's fine by me."

"I'm not like," she adds, putting her palm on her forehead and dramatically tilting her head back, "Oh no, I'm not going to get it, oh noooooo! I've done so many auditions for the same show for so many different characters."

And she's said no to scripts in the past as well.

"Sometimes it's for a character that she doesn't really feel for, that she doesn't feel comfortable doing," says Courteney. "So we give her that space to choose not to do it."

In conversation with her family about her career, Kaia, who is home-schooled, tosses off lines from her auditions and seamlessly slips into the voices of some of her characters. In reality, her normal speaking voice is not all that different from that of her animated doppelgangers.

And she sings, too, which is often required for many of her

roles.

Romano, a Brock University and Niagara College graduate, says it's common for her to turn to her adult clients to see if they have children who may be interested in doing voice work.

"For parents who work in the arts, it's kind of a nice way to introduce them," she says. "Evren and I talked, and I asked him if he wanted to audition Kaia, and it just kind of took off from there."

Romano adds that Kaia is pretty special, for a number of reasons.

"She is a super smart kid, so her reading ability is off the charts," enthuses the agent. "She grew up in the studio, so she had a really good understanding right from the start about what the business was. And her enthusiasm and ability to take direction, she just naturally got it. She's got this cute voice that people love, and she has the energy."

Romano is not at all surprised that Kaia gets callback after callback for her auditions. And the agent's original nervousness about the youngster being overworked has been allayed.

"I asked her Dad if he thought she should slow down," Romano laughs. "But he assured me that she loves it. I think the fact that she's home-schooled, there's a little less pressure on her as far as having a schedule to adhere to. And Dad is all set up at home. It's a perfect set-up for a kid like her

to blossom."

As Kaia's career continues to blossom, she isn't resting on her laurels. She's begun taking musical theatre classes through Virgil's Yellow Door Theatre Project, working on other aspects of performance. She hopes to win a role in one of the non-profit theatre company's upcoming onstage productions.

Late last year she auditioned for a new animated preschool series called *Millie Magnificent*, to be produced by Corus Entertainment's Nelvana, based on Canadian author and illustrator Ashley Spires' book *The Most Magnificent Thing*. The 52-episode series has been green-lit and will launch next year with Kaia playing the titular character.

And Dad has been busy building a set in the family's barn on their rented property for an original children's show he hopes to write and produce that will see him and Kaia on screen together. He's planning to involve the entire family in the recording of a children's album in the very near future.

In the meantime, there's another magnificent Millie that needs tending to at home, in the form of the new family puppy, Millie Whitepaw, currently assimilating to life in the Ozdemir/Brookes home. And like the *Magnificent Millie* whose voice is to be provided by Kaia for 52 episodes, she is very, very animated, albeit in a very different way.



Kaia holding a stuffed animal of the character from *PAW Patrol*, Coral, that she voiced. (Photos supplied)



Voice actor Kaia Oz records in her dad's home studio.



Kaia with older brother Zeren, mom Courteney Brookes, and dad Evren Ozdemir.

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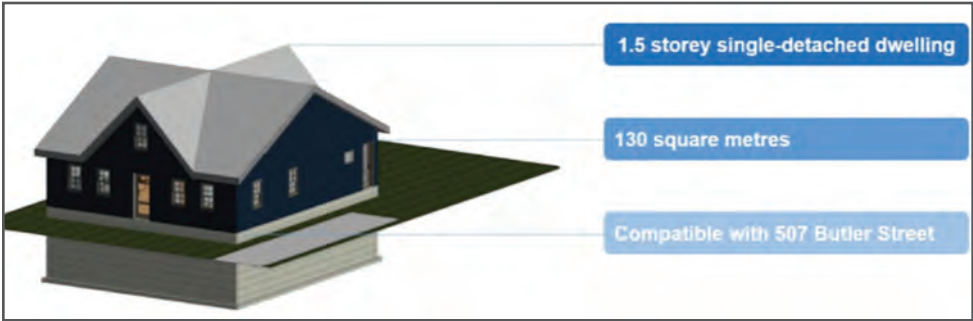
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Little opposition to plans for lot next to historic site



A drawing to show the design of the house to be built on a lot severed from the William and Susannah Steward House. (Supplied)

Mike Balsom The Local

Unlike the outcry against a much larger development a stone's throw away at the corner of Mary and Mississagua streets, there was little public opposition at last week's public meeting to an application to sever a lot at 507 Butler Street.

Owner Bruce Harvey has owned the land since 2009. It is currently part of the William and Susannah Steward Homestead, a historic site and the last remaining example of a house owned by Niagara-on-the-Lake's early Black settlers.

William Steward was an African American teamster and carpenter. He and his wife Susannah bought the lot in 1834. The 1.5-storey home was part of what became known as Niagara's 'coloured village,' a community of former Canadian slaves, Black Loyalists and African American refugees who owned about 10 per cent of the lots in town by the middle of the century. The majority of the Black families lived south of William Street between Regent and Simcoe streets.

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

The Steward house was designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in 2003, covering the exterior facade, the structure of the house, and the chimney. In 2006, the Foundation applied for and received a zoning change to institutional with the intention of creating a museum or research facility on the property.

That never happened. Harvey, who was a board member of the Niagara Foundation at the time, suggests that the

structure was too small to accommodate such a use.

There was a previous application in 2008 by the Foundation to sever the lot behind the house, but it was turned down by the town's committee of adjustment because it was too small.

Though the Steward House is currently zoned institutional, Harvey rents the house to a tenant.

Last Tuesday, Victoria Nikoltcheva from the Town's planning department outlined the particulars of Harvey's application for the property, as well as his intention to build a 1.5-storey single family home on the lot he hopes to sever.

The first step in Harvey's application, explained Nikoltcheva, is to request a bylaw amendment to rezone the entire site, including the current Steward House, to R1-Residential.

Assuming that approval, the severance application would follow. Harvey's application requests a minimum lot frontage reduction from 18.0 metres to 16.8, a minimum lot area reduction from 668 square metres to 428, and a minimum front yard setback change to three metres from 7.5.

Part three of his application would deal with the design of the proposed dwelling, including a temporary protection plan to ensure there would be no damage to the heritage property currently on site.

Nikoltcheva informed council that the town had received three letters in opposition to Harvey's plans. However, only two people spoke at last Tuesday's meeting, and neither put forth any actual opposition to either a severance or a home being built on the currently unused land.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor raised questions about protecting any current trees on the property, while Coun. Gary Burroughs said he hoped that

a driveway could be placed on the east side of the new home, which would potentially help protect the Steward House from any damage during excavation and construction.

Paul Shepherd, a former president and current director of the Niagara Foundation, said at the meeting that he was disappointed at the prospect of the severance of the land, given its history.

Shepherd's concern, focused on the possibility of any important historical artifacts potentially being found on the lot, was first raised at the Jan. 30 open house.

However, after getting clarification from NPG Planning Solutions, who are involved in Harvey's application, that three archaeological surveys turned up nothing of historical significance, he said he is now able to accept the severance.

Shepherd went on to urge the town to include in the conditions for the severance a natural barrier of trees rather than a fence to separate the Steward House from the newly severed lot.

The only other speaker about the project was lawyer Patrick Maloney, on behalf of Tim Moxon, who owns the home adjacent to the vacant part of the lot.

"On its face, my client is opposed to any development on the subject lands," said Maloney. "My client has concerns with the location of the potential dwelling and concerns about drainage from the subject lands onto his property."

Maloney went on to say, however, that Moxon is taking a cooperative approach with NPG and Harvey, hoping that his conditions could be met.

In contrast to what Burroughs suggested, Maloney said Moxon would like the driveway for a new home to be built next to his property, which would provide more privacy.

Maloney also requested that a lot grading and drainage plan be provided to Moxon prior to any building project being approved, to ensure no additional drainage will encroach on his property.

As well, Maloney wanted assurances that the trees currently buffering Moxon's house from the lot in question be preserved, and that some additional vegetation be planted to ensure privacy.



The historic William and Susannah Steward House. (File photo)



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These volunteers continued support and assistance during parade day makes it all come together!

An especially grateful thank you to Committee members Darka Jensen, Paul Mace, John Strecker, Pat Tebbutt, Kevin Turcotte, and Erwin Wiens.



EDITORIAL

The winter that wasn't — and what it means for spring



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

One question I frequently get asked is how a perceived early spring will impact our local plants and wildlife. The warm spells followed by sudden cold snaps must be tricky for their survival, right?

Just the other day, on Feb. 15, the Gulf of Mexico delivered a belated Valentines warm hug of 17 C to the Niagara Region, breaking the 1970s record of 10 C.

I see it in our gardens. Some plants began bursting their way through the soil in modest but noteworthy showings of fresh greenery even before Valentines Day. Of course, this statistically unusual phenomenon is driven by a historically mild year, with minimal ground freezing or blankets of snow available to keep herbal life suppressed.

It is easy for us to personify how a living thing

must struggle with all of this teasing warmth, only to be frozen back into place with the next severe cold snap or snow storm. Believe me, generally speaking, our forests, wetlands and meadows will be just fine. It's our tender fruit that will potentially feel the hurt.

Let's consider how the shagbark hickories, wild raspberry bushes, tulip trees, and silver maples will be totally okay in comparison to our apple and pear orchards. The aforementioned wild species have had thousands, if not millions, of years to develop resiliency and stability in our volatile four-season region of the world.

Wild plants and animals in southern Ontario have had plenty of genetic 'practice' at surviving surprising warm spells followed by a cold smashdown. Our human-bred tender fruits, with their buds and blossoms taking off in spring, are a significantly younger species, more prone to the impact of a late spring frost.

It's like seeing if the wolf or the chihuahua will survive the winter if left outside.

The 250-year-old tulip tree in the Niagara Gorge, compared to the cherry tree in a local orchard, has done comfortably well with that over the centuries because it has been around for millions of years as a species.

Although I am fortunate to know the inner workings of ecosystems and how they respond to stressors, even I can 'feel bad' for the frogs who laid their spring egg clutches early, or the honeybee who ventured into flight before a late snow storm. Wouldn't the eggs freeze? Wouldn't the awakened honeybee freeze to death? It may come as a surprise that these resilient organisms are historically wired to deal with these fluctuations too.

The frog eggs, often attached to submerged twigs or logs in ephemeral wetland pools, can survive under a thin layer of ice, should we get a March freeze event. The honeybee will get back to the hive, slow down a few notches, and fly freely again when the proper spring sun bestows itself upon the tree.

I've seen garter snakes poke their heads out in March's first double digit temperatures, only to see a dusting of snow in April or May with puddles brief-

ly icing over. Weren't they just mating, and weren't we wearing T-shirts a few days ago? Assured, they will be just fine, even as farmers fear the potential disaster to their evolutionary juvenile plants and trees.

This year has been interesting so far, though. Record-breaking winter temperatures. A lack of snowfall and frozen ground. The silver and red maples in my yard have had their red buds swelling since early February, which I have never seen before. I wouldn't be surprised at this rate if we hear the first frog calls in early March, versus the typical end of March. Robins have been singing their morning chorus for a couple of weeks now — about a month earlier than usual.

I don't fear for the forest. However, I hope that farm-

ers don't have their properties shocked by an early budding and severely cold event to follow.

To me, it goes to show that nature as an entity likes to think in laws of averages, with long-term success deeply embedded in its genetic playbook. See for yourself if you observe any unusual signs of an early spring! I'd love to hear about it.



Dekay's brownsnake is an indication of spring, and can tolerate wild swings in temperature. But how will our domestic plants and animals fare in comparison, though? (Photo supplied)

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View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

Philomena (Netflix, 2013) is the powerful story of a mother seeking a son she was forced to give up for adoption 50 years previously. Add the flawless performances of Judi Dench and Steve Coogan and you have a profound film experience.

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

Where's Ben?



Eden student Ben Foster continues to discover new locations in NOTL, wondering how familiar others may be with them. If you know where this photo was taken, email penny@notllocal.com. Rhonda Blake recognized that last week Ben was at McNab Anglican Church, at the corner of Lakeshore and McNab Road.

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COMMENT

Development debate not all bad

Ted Mouradian
Special to The Local

Is development good or bad? This question haunts Niagara's municipalities on a regular basis. People move to certain parts of the Region for a reason. Some for a job, some for school, some for ethnicity and some for the ambiance or small-town feel.

When the reason that brought them here in the first place seems threatened, people become disgruntled and we hear comments such as "this isn't the town I used to know," or "I moved here to get away from that sort of thing."

In Pelham, there was a huge fight over the civic center, plaza and housing development along Hwy 20, which cost many their seat on council. In Port Dalhousie, there has been a battle over a tower development since 2004. And now in Niagara-on-the-Lake there is a new hotel proposal for the old school site. Already the lines are being drawn and the camps formed.

As I don't have a horse in the race, the outcome of this particular development project is not a big concern for me. But, having said that, here are some general thoughts to consider as we lead up to another development debate.

First off, all cities need to

grow and develop to be able to maintain the tax base that pays for vital services that ratepayers need and want. The question then becomes: what is good development and what is bad development?

Way back in the 1970s, the first townhouses, semi-detached homes and condo buildings came to Niagara. The outcry was loud and clear: NOT IN MY BACKYARD! Yet, when we look around most cities, these types of housing are now commonplace. As a matter of fact, many of them are pretty upscale. Times do change and the demands of future generations change.

Secondly, let's consider commercial development. Years ago you would never have seen a Tim Hortons, Starbucks or McDonald's in NOTL — now we have all three. Here is the key: they fit well into the personality of the streetscape.

I firmly believe that the outside appearance and the scale of any new development, residential or commercial, should reflect the personality of that particular neighborhood or community.

Thirdly, keep in mind that NOTL is a tourist destination of some significance. It is where it all began in Canada and people want to see it and take in its history. I am sure that many of you travel and have visited places like Rome, Paris or London,

all of which are more historical than Niagara. When you travel to these places, you are doing the same thing as tourists who visit Niagara, and you want a good place to stay, a good place to eat and local attractions to visit.

So, we get another hotel, another restaurant, another attraction and, of course, another tour bus. Whether we like it or not, we live in a tourist area and there is a demand for what we have.

And finally, as you line up on either the 'yes' or the 'no' side of the current debate, try to keep it civilized and respectful. It is okay to be for or against something, and discussion is healthy for a community, but it can be done without personal attacks on politicians or neighbours.

Something will either get built or it won't, based on our by-laws and good planning. Educate yourself about the process and look at a development as something that will either be good for the community or not. But do not base your sole objection on the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) theory.

Losing a friend or a good city councilor simply because you don't like something is not a way to be part of a community. If a project gets built or not, we all still live in our community, and the world is already too divided.

Christopher Allen
NOTL

Local LETTERS

Vrooman's Point should be changed to Chloe Cooley's Point

I was very pleased when you featured the story of Chloe Cooley on the front page (The Local, Feb. 8), as we commemorate Black History. It set me thinking. Passing by Vrooman's Point on my way down the Niagara River Parkway Trail always brings to my mind this enslaved woman with her fighting spirit. Vrooman's Point, eh? Hmmm. I think not. Adam Vrooman was a bit player at the end of a long and cruel era of our history. In contrast, Chloe Cooley was a person who attracted the attention of the government of Upper Canada and set the wheels in motion for the abolition of slavery in our country.

Now, I am not generally in

favour of changing place names; they remind us of our past, sometimes for as far back as thousands of years, and should be respected, so we must be very careful when we choose to play with them.

But let us look at this. Who will we rightly remember and honour here with sadness and respect? Who should be remembered in a place name here a thousand years from now? I am not saying we should erase Vrooman's name from the history books. The evil done in the past must never be forgotten, lest we should repeat it. But the best place names tell a story: 'Niagara Stone Road' — how evocative can

you get? That name exudes pride and says 'this was our big achievement' in the day when roads were all treacherous: rutted and potholed, dusty in summer and a quagmire when the rains came.

So as we follow the Niagara River upstream, noting the high banks, the strong currents, the little whirlpools and back currents, we can think of the small boat waiting 50 feet down that steep edge and imagine Vrooman and his henchmen wrestling Chloe to the ground and dragging her away.

For me, that spot will always be 'Chloe Cooley's Point.' I think we should change the name.

Andrew Henwood
NOTL

Nurses part of the solution, not privatization

I am writing to respond to opinions posted in The Local paper on Jan. 25 and Feb. 8, from Alexander Evans.

I am unfamiliar with him, or any previous writings on healthcare or other topics he may have submitted. I am also not familiar in any way with his personal or professional background. I am, however, certain that his knowledge of nursing, and healthcare in general, is woefully inadequate at best. The initial opinion he shared that privatization would lead to improved patient wait times and patient services is ludicrous. While it may improve those things for a small proportion of society who can afford it, privatized healthcare will only deepen the divide between the haves and the have-nots.

Privatization will result in lining the pockets of businessmen (of which Mr. Evans may be one?) but it will not, in any way, benefit the majority of Ontarians. Despite Premier Doug Ford's suggestions that everyone will have equal access to healthcare, at no additional cost, how can that be, when it is not true now? Access to healthcare for most Ontarians would only be worsened by privatization, impacting a greater majority of the population.

Further, Mr. Evans has not contemplated who would staff these entrepreneurial 'private clinics' and services. Staff for these clinics would be diverted from our publicly-funded system, taken from the current

stretched and depleted healthcare system — hospitals, home care, and long-term care settings, where serious underfunding over the past two to three decades has left them with a shortage of necessary resources and inadequate supports. Currently, nurses are leaving the profession, retiring early or for other careers, needing medical leaves for stress, burnout and PTSD due to their lived experiences. Scarier yet, these clinics may be staffed with unregulated staff, who through no fault of their own will receive minimal training to perform a task, and will not receive the in-depth education, knowledge and skills nurses receive over four years of post-secondary education that prepare them to anticipate and intervene, in the best interest of their patients.

Mr. Evans' follow-up opinion on Feb. 8 opens with a backhanded compliment to nurses that is disgraceful. He clearly has not accessed or been involved in Ontario's healthcare system in the past decade, let alone since the onset of the COVID pandemic. He is most certainly out of touch with the current healthcare climate.

More than 50 years ago, Tommy Douglas, the Father of modern Medicare, set about establishing a program where a fee per capita system was established to cover healthcare costs for all. All, meaning marginalized, disadvantaged and others, including low-income earners, the poor and the homeless and also those

who can afford to pay more. The people who will struggle with a privatized healthcare system will be those who lack benefits, extra income, and effective support systems, and who require public transit services. Privatization will discriminate and harm the most vulnerable citizens of our society and harm those most in need in our communities, and all because of government and administrative mismanagement of funding.

Let's look at the facts, the real problems in our system, and not further disadvantage those already disadvantaged in the current crumbling healthcare system, such as children, the elderly and the poor. Let's hold government and healthcare administrators accountable, and let's provide the level of care we all want and deserve: access to care 24/7, to be cared for by a knowledgeable, expert and skilled clinician — nurses who are there 24/7, 365 days a year. They resuscitate you, or hold your hand as you leave this world, and they welcome safely your new baby, along with everything else in between.

As a registered nurse for more than 40 years, I ask that we examine the facts and evidence, and fight for an effective and safe, publicly-funded healthcare system. Let's not simply share damaging opinions. Everyone may have them, but it doesn't make them right, or valuable.

Loirie Daniels
RN BScN, MN

Local LETTERS

Four-storey buildings in two-storey neighbourhoods unacceptable

I am not against development if the project fits the neighbourhood. The Mary Street apartment proposal is massive and towers over the whole neighbourhood. Imagine putting something like Queen's Landing Hotel on that lot with the entire surrounding neighbourhood being two storeys in height, and it is only three storeys high. This newly proposed building is four storeys high.

I know the design is always a matter of opinion, but my thought is this project is out of place, poorly thought out, and an architectural mess. This project is a threat to the neighbourhood, and as one recent headline said, the apartment plan for Mary Street is a betrayal to Old Town.

If some restrictions and/

or some changes are not put in place by the town, we are in big trouble. Developers and their cash — that's all it seems to take to rubber stamp any of these offensive proposals that we are told we need in these historic areas.

Sorry, more to come. Just what we need, another hotel and event centre! We already have at least six other hotels within shouting distance of each other in our Old Town historic areas ... and we already have numerous other, though smaller, close-by accommodations.

I have to repeat ... another out of place, massive, four-storey building towering over a historic two-storey neighbourhood is really completely unacceptable in my view. But to be fair, the

actual design and overall look of the hotel in the correct setting may fit some other area, but not in this low, two-storey residential area. High-end lawyers and endless cash seem to be the developers' pressure kit. It seems it must either impress or frighten our local powers-that-be. Some real second thought and re-thinking here seems absolutely essential. If the saying 'getting one foot in the door' applies here then we are in big trouble. There will be no stopping these badly thought-out and inappropriate proposals happening all over town. Maybe in your own back yard?

Now is the time to speak up. No second chances here.

Christopher Allen
NOTL

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New St Davids School principal feels at home

Mike Balsom
The Local

It's not exactly *Welcome Back, Kotter*, but it's about as close as it gets.

Carl Glauser wasn't a sweat-hog, and didn't actually attend St. Davids Public School, but the graduate of Parliament Oak and Niagara District Secondary School is proud to oversee the 410 students as their principal.

Glauser took over the reins of the close-knit community school in September, after stints as principal of Welland's Plymouth Public School, Pine Grove Elementary in St. Catharines and Greendale Public School in Niagara Falls.

Growing up in Niagara-on-the-Lake's Garrison Village subdivision, Glauser never actually set out to be a teacher. But he does remember a Grade 8 project putting a small kernel of a seed of an idea into his head.

"We had a career assignment that year," Glauser remembers. "Andy Boldt and I went to visit Mr. McCarthy, the physical education teacher at Niagara District, to find out what it took to become a phys. ed. teacher. That was the first time I ever thought about it."

Later, while attending NDSS, Glauser and another friend, Andy Willms, began coaching a NOTL Minor Hockey team. He says today that it was one of the best experiences he had had to

that point in his life.

After graduating from District, Glauser pursued a business degree at Hamilton's McMaster University, where, during his third year of studies and after switching his major to geography and environmental studies, he met his wife Karen.

"She was passionate that she wanted to be a teacher," he says. "She was doing some volunteer work in east Hamilton schools, so I joined her. I realized how awesome that volunteer work was. I knew at that point that teaching was a possibility."

After earning his degree at McMaster, he attended teacher's college at Niagara University in Niagara Falls, New York, and was hired by the District School Board of Niagara in 1996 as a supply teacher. While striving to earn a contract position with the DSBN, he continued working as a server at the Prince of Wales Hotel.

His first contract position came a couple of years later, at his alma mater, Parliament Oak.

"I was hired to replace my own Grade 8 teacher, Dean Steele, when he retired," he laughs. "I loved it, but I was the young guy, and we had declining enrolment. I knew that I may become surplus there at some point, so I was proactive and transferred to Woodland School on Seventh Street."

The avid golfer loved that Woodland was on his way to

Rockway Glen Golf Course, and it was during his five years teaching there that he began taking on leadership roles.

"I coached a lot of teams," he recalls. "And as a Grade 8 teacher, I was organizing school trips, I was organizing graduation, I was working with the parent community. And then the principal, Tony D'Alessandro, gently suggested that I consider leadership."

So Glauser enrolled in the DSBN's leadership program, accepted a transfer to Prince Philip School in Niagara Falls, and was later seconded to help implement daily physical activity in 15 of the DSBN's elementary schools. In 2006, he became the vice-principal of Orchard Park School, where he spent two years.

Glauser speaks with fondness of each of his career stops along the way, but it's clear via his ever-present smile that his current role at St. Davids brings him the greatest amount of joy.

"It was like a dream come true," he says of coming back to NOTL. As Carl and Karen raised their own kids while living in the Glendale subdivision, both of their boys, Ben and Taylor, attended St. Davids.

"That's one of the things that made coming here so cool," he says. "Taylor was in the last Grade 3 class at Laura Second Elementary School when it closed. I was here as

a parent, watching both boys play sports. I got to see so many great things about St. Davids School as a parent."

As his own boys grew up, Glauser volunteered his time to coach youth soccer and hockey in NOTL, so he got to know many families involved in those activities. He says many of the current St. Davids students recognize Glauser from the arenas in Virgil.

"This feels like a true community school," he says. "In July, the first or second day I came here, a community group came and talked to me about planting a pollinator garden in the front of the school. Right away they got it done. That was really awesome."

He speaks with pride about the achievements of the students on provincial assessments, and about the success of their athletics.

"Lots of our sports teams do exceptionally well," he almost brags while wearing a purple school polo shirt emblazoned with the team logo. "We're the Dragons. Basketball carries the legacy of Wynand Groen, who the gym is named after. And volleyball and soccer, too."

And he's really looking forward to the junior-intermediate group's presentation of the play *Into the Woods* in May.

"Staff is hard working," he adds. "They're amazing. That's what makes it a joy to come to school every day. We've nominated (teacher) Bryce (Honsinger) for a Prime Minister's Award, for the things he does such as robotics and the heritage fair. He's a real leader."

Walking through the halls, students gravitate toward the principal. When Glauser drops in on the Kindergarten classes, the faces of the students light up as they proudly show off their Valentine's Day crafts. One of them asks Glauser if he wears that purple shirt every day.

"I walk by the grad photos and I see my boys on the walls," he proudly points out to The Local. "And I see some of their teachers. I also see some of my friends' kids here, some of the kids of guys I play hockey with. It feels like a family."

He is warmly welcomed into the senior classrooms by the students of Honsinger and Grade 8 teacher Sean Hall. Glauser easily converses with them about their literacy and math work for the day.

With the St. Davids community quickly growing, and massive growth slated for the future in the Glendale area, Glauser sees St. Davids Public School, which currently uses three portables, as an important community asset.

"It's a growing community," he says. "It's always exciting in a school when you're growing. With it, your staff grows. And it's become a much more diverse community, as well. It's definitely changed the school, even from when my boys were here. It was much smaller even then. It really has a different feel."

Having been principal at three other schools prior to St. Davids, Glauser is no stranger to the regular shuffling of school administrators across the DSBN and other school boards. But he's hoping that he can ride out at least the next few years right where he feels at home, helping to guide that growth.

"Living in the community, it's neat to bump into students," he says. "I'm proud to be from Niagara-on-the-Lake and I take pride in serving the community."

I'm excited to see young people succeed, and I always look forward to seeing what the future holds for some of these students, knowing that I had some small contribution to that."

He feels he has the best job in the world. "When you're having a bad day," he laughs, "all you have to do is walk into a kindergarten room. Nothing brings me more joy than seeing four- and five-year-olds at play. They smile and give me high fives. 'What's better than that?'"



St. Davids School principal Carl Glauser talks with JK and SK students about their Valentine's Day crafts. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Principal Glauser pointing out his son Taylor's grad photo.



Glauser helps a senior student with a math problem.



A wing of the school is named for the former Queenston school.



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Town looking at \$2.2 million in debt for capital budget

Zahraa Hmood
Special to The Local

There's one month left until council passes its annual budget for the year, and so far, Niagara-on-the-Lake plans to spend \$9.5 million for work on roads, improving streetscapes and other capital expenses.

However, as the current budget draft includes plans to take on \$2.19 million in debt to finance big-ticket projects, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa voiced concerns about "significant" challenges going forward for the town.

The committee met for its first look at the capital budget on Thursday, Feb. 16, during which director of finance Kyle Freeborn presented the budget creat-

ed by municipal staff.

Freeborn shared what the municipality's big-ticket projects will likely be for 2023: reconstruction on Line 3 Road (the second phase of a project extending from Four Mile Creek Road to Concession 6) at \$2.4 million; replacing the water main on Line 5 at \$1.25 million; and replacing a culvert bridge on Simcoe Street, at \$538,000.

There are also plans for enhancing the streetscapes of both Niagara Stone Road and Glendale Avenue at York Road, at \$860,000 and \$400,000 respectively.

Freeborn outlined some of the pros and cons of taking on debt as a municipality: on the plus side, taking on a debenture means they can pay for projects in increments every year for a

decade or two, instead of giving up a chunk of cash in one go.

"If we do not have the funds up front, then it allows us to spread the funds over 10, 20, 30 years," he said. "Users in the future will also end up paying for that as opposed to everybody paying for it now."

However, he said, taking on too much debt may impact both the level and the quality of the services the town provides, like water and wastewater management, road access, fire and emergency services, and more.

Of these five projects, which represent over half the budget at \$5.4 million, three of them will be funded with debentures: part of Line 3's reconstruction, part of Niagara Stone

Road's enhancements, and all of Glendale Avenue's enhancements.

All together, the budget is allocating \$5.7 million for roads, the lion's share at approximately 62.4 per cent. The next three departments receiving the most funding are water services (\$1.6 million), wastewater (\$620,000), and fire and emergency services (\$568,000).

The committee discussed the state of the municipality's reserves, pockets of money saved for each department in the capital program, used to pay for capital expenses throughout the year.

The town's contributions to its capital reserves have fluctuated over the last 10 years: from 2018 to 2019, the town transferred

\$380,000 away from its capital reserve in order to lower property taxes. While it added \$100,000 back in the next year, the reserve has remained at \$2.12 million since 2020.

Zalepa called the town's capital issues "significant," and said improving its funding situation is going to be difficult, due in part, he said, to the loss of provincial and federal contributions to municipal capital reserves, which have gone from 60 per cent of total reserves for the last several decades to 17 per cent today.

"Municipalities are the most underfunded government level in this country, and we're heading towards an infrastructure cliff," he said.

This year, the town

plans to transfer \$150,000, bringing the capital reserve to \$2.27 million. Still, this is \$130,000 shy of the town's last reserve high of the past decade, which was \$2.4 million in 2018.

"When we increase it we can do that much more work, and every future year after that if that increase stays it'll be that much higher," Freeborn said.

Committee members are meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 22 for another look at plans for capital spending, during which funds may be reallocated. Two reviews of the operating budget will follow on Wednesday, March 1 and Thursday, March 9, which will also involve revisiting that budget.

Council plans to give the 2023 budget its final approval on Thursday, March 23.

Get involved — help plant two billion trees

Local Staff

In a recent news release, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority has announced a program that aims to get local landowners involved in a tree-planting program.

The Niagara Peninsula Tree Planting Partnership (NPTPP) encourages private landowners to join in a collective effort to bring millions of trees to the Niagara Peninsula watershed in support of Canada's goal to plant two billion trees over 10 years.

The Government of Canada's 2 Billion Trees Program seeks to partner with governments and organizations to plant two billion trees — trees that will capture and store carbon from the atmosphere, improve air and water quality, help to restore nature and biodiversity, cool urban centres and create and support thousands of green jobs. As such, community groups, environmental agencies, and governmental organizations in the Niagara Peninsula watershed have joined to create the local program with the common interest of supporting this initiative at the local level.

The Niagara Peninsula watershed is known as a

natural wonder with many environmental assets and unique phenomena and is situated between two Great Lakes. It is the most biodiverse but also threatened ecoregion in all of Canada, part of the Carolinian Zone, and home to globally significant ecosystems, 40 per cent of Canada's species, and more than 150 species at risk. However, the landscape currently only contributes an estimated 56 per cent of what science recommends as the minimum ecological objective required for healthy and viable ecosystems.

One of the earliest conservation efforts to help mitigate watershed-scale problems such as erosion, flooding, and decades of degraded land and water quality, was planting trees to restore forests. Restoration efforts have since progressed to understand that involving communities helps connect people to their natural environment and leads to better outcomes.

Niagara's new Trees For All initiative for the Niagara Peninsula watershed will engage private landowners from Niagara, Haldimand and Hamilton to build the capacity necessary to participate in the Government of Canada's

national tree program, and collectively deliver a local, long-term tree planting plan for impactful and measured results, the news release says.

The goal is simple: landowners are encouraged to express their interest and register their property for potential consideration in future tree plantings. This first data-gathering phase solely aims to gauge landowner interest to help shape the future of the Trees For All program, with no obligation.

"The opportunity to engage watershed residents in enhancing our unique forests and urban tree canopy is significant," says Chandra Sharma, chief administrative officer at NPCA. "As so much of the land is private owned, large-scale reforestation initiatives like the federal 2 Billion Trees provide local stewardship opportunities and

help incentivize landowners to participate in tree-planting programs. The Trees For All initiative will help strengthen and surpass our existing commitments to add 600 hectares of natural cover, plant more than one million native trees across the watershed by 2031 and help mitigate the impacts of climate change in the Niagara Peninsula watershed."

Private landowners are asked to visit the Get Involved NPCA portal to learn more and proceed with registration. This portal is home to important documents for interested participants, a project timeline on this exciting initiative, a confidential mapping tool to register interest and pin locations, and great online engagement tools to provide feedback and share stories and ideas.

For more information



The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority is launching a new 'Trees For All' initiative to encourage landowners to plant trees on their property. (Shutterstock)

about the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, visit www.npca.ca. Follow on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for more updates.

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Audience loved 'happy vibe' at drag queen show

Sharon Burns
Special to The Local

Last Friday night, three drag queens from Pride Niagara performed for a full house at Ironwood Cider House in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

High energy dance music, colourful wigs and a sea of sparkling sequins filled the

room while spectators enjoyed themselves.

During the 90-minute show, drag queens Rhonda Richards, Macy Manolo and Empress Claudia Silva lip-synched to high energy artists such as Mariah Carey, Madonna and Whitney Houston and during costume changes, interacted with audi-

ence members with jokes and stories.

Pride Niagara is a not-for-profit organization that "celebrates Niagara's sexual and gender diverse community and its supporters," said board member Enzo De Divitiis. "Pride Niagara develops positive and safe spaces across Niagara, providing social connectivity, community outreach, and information throughout the Niagara Region."

Known as the Queen Mother of Drag, Rhonda Richards explains, "I am a man who dresses as a woman, and performs as a woman," said Richards, "and when I take it all off, I'm still a man underneath. That's a drag queen."

Frank Roberto, from Niagara Falls, has seen this performance five times because he "enjoys the liveliness of the performance, the outfits, the personalities and the general

charisma of the event." He is also friends with drag queen and Pride Niagara Ambassador Macy Manolo.

Richards wants her audience members to "just relax and enjoy yourself. Take it in." Richards, who works in the hotel industry, says "you might be shocked because you don't know who is under all this. Just be yourself," she advises.

The evening closed with a duet of Abba's Mama Mia by Manolo and Silva, the audience singing, clapping and laughing along. Julia Lidgett, from Niagara Falls, summed up the evening as "wonderful, and the vibe was so happy, cheerful and friendly."

"With International Pride month quickly approaching," said Divitiis, "planning for Pride Niagara's festival is in full swing." This year's Pride Festival runs May 27 to June 4, with various events throughout Niagara.



Fans Julia Lidgett and Frank Roberto enjoyed the show. (Photos by Sharon Burns)



Rhonda Richards, 'mother of drag,' at Ironwood show.

OLG Stage biggest venue in Niagara

Mike Balsom
The Local

The new 5,000-seat OLG Stage entertainment venue at Fallsview Casino Resort is like nothing else in Niagara.

Modeled after the Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, its fan-shaped design gives every spectator a view of the front of the stage. And each seat is no more than 150 feet away from it, even in the second balcony.

Officials from OLG (Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation), MGE Niagara Entertainment Inc. (Mohegan) and ARK Architects walked members of the media through the impressive new venue last week. And to give them a feel for the acoustics of Niagara's newest live music and arts venue, they were treated to an eight-song set by Toronto rock band The Beaches.

Sitting in one of the 1,100 lower orchestra section seats, the sound and the sightlines were perfect. A quick walk

around the upper orchestra section, where another 1,900 seats are situated, seemed to bring no change in either sound quality or the ability to see the action on stage.

In a Q&A session following their set, the four members of the all-female Juno Award-winning band gave rave reviews of the venue.

"One thing I noticed is how amazing it sounded onstage," said drummer Eliza Enman McDaniel. "And it's a really professional staff who work here. They've been super helpful."

The Niagara Falls facility employs 24 staff daily for operational maintenance and another 15 on show days.

Added lead singer and bassist Jordan Miller, "It's really cool to be able to play to so many levels as well. You don't often have that opportunity, it allows for some more fun blocking."

Miller was referring to the two balcony levels in the venue, similar to the layout of Caesars Colosseum or Massey

Hall in Toronto. Both of those facilities, in comparison, have a capacity that is lower than that of the new OLG Stage. The casino's Avalon Theatre, which is slated to remain open, only holds 1,500.

"It's another unique venue," said Niagara Casinos director of marketing services Jennifer Ferguson. "We're going to be able to bring larger acts into the property and give more people a better experience. Everything about it is state-of-the-art. It will continue to elevate the concert experience."

Construction on the \$130 million facility began in 2017 and involved 4,000 tonnes of structural steel. Work was completed by June, 2020, and country singer Brad Paisley was scheduled to open the venue. But the pandemic pushed any on-stage activity back until live gatherings were permitted.

That gave officials time to tweak the sound system and the acoustics and complete some other finishing touches.

CTV's Canada's Got Talent

was the first to use the stage, shooting its upcoming season there, beginning last October. Since then, there have been a handful of concerts in the space, but the grand opening performance featuring Billy Joel, which received much attention due to the price of the tickets, is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 25.

There's little doubt that the Piano Man will be happy with the 6,400 square foot stage, flanked on both sides by 30' by 18' high-definition screens. Senior property asset manager Rob Divencha claimed the stage is the largest in the region.

And Joel will certainly feel comfortable backstage, in both the large dressing room and bright, spacious green room provided to performers and their entourages.

His crew, as well, will be happy to pull their buses, limos and trucks right inside the building, and to use the tractor-trailer-sized freight elevator to unload their gear and bring it to stage level.

"We've had rave reviews from those who have performed here," Divencha told the media. "They're talking about the acoustics, they're talking about the lighting, they're talking about the technical support and features, and the performer amenities too."

As members of the media rode the escalator up to the 400-level balcony, Christophe Gauthier, managing partner at ARK, explained to The Local that the lobby areas were designed to be bright, open spaces visible through floor-to-ceiling glass to onlookers on the street below.

"That way they will see that something is going on here," he said, "and they will want to be a part of it."

Gauthier also pointed to the animated and moving lighting that can be fine-tuned for specific purposes in those lobby spaces. And he stressed that accessibility and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) principles were foremost on the ar-

chitects' minds throughout the design process.

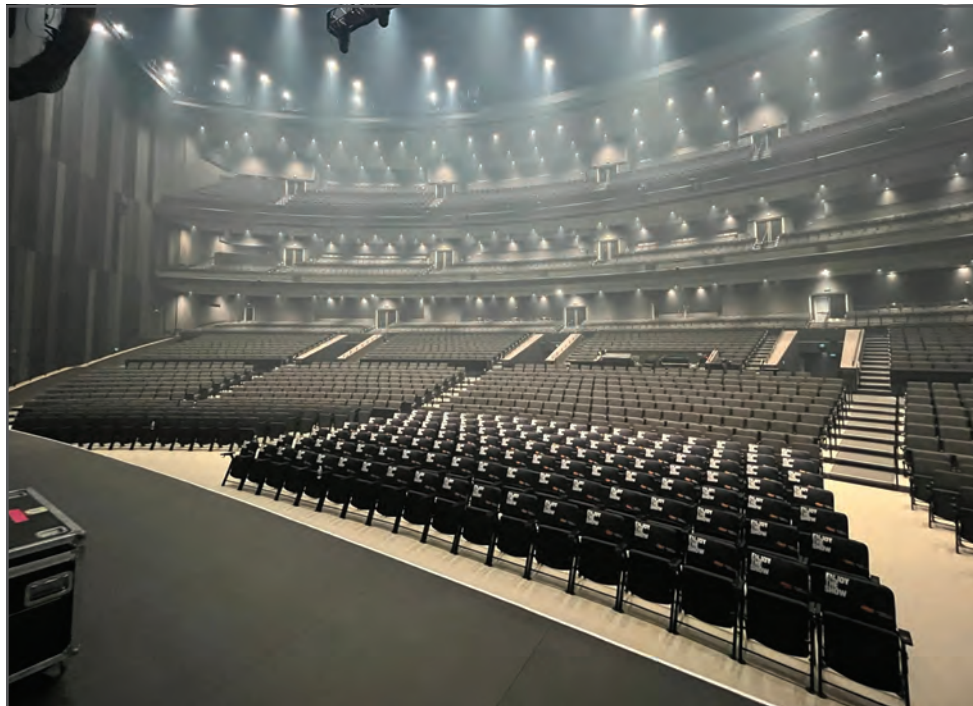
Walking through the 200,000 square foot building, which took a total of 685,000 onsite person hours to build, with up to 300 workers onsite per day, it's easy to forget that it was all constructed on top of the existing Hilton Hotel parking garage.

And though the exterior doesn't jump out at passers-by on Stanley Avenue, it is an awe-inspiring experience once inside.

A list of upcoming shows speaks to Ferguson's promise of attracting bigger acts to the Niagara Region. Following Joel, another Billy, last name Idol, plays the venue on May 5. Rock band Cheap Trick visits May 27, and John Fogerty, fresh off of a recent court decision that finally gives him royalties on the songs he wrote as the leader of Creedence Clearwater Revival, takes to the stage in June. And September will see Rod Stewart and Kenny Loggins performing there.



The Beaches, a Toronto band, play a set on media day. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



View of the entertainment venue from the OLG Stage.

Passion for quilting leads to helping others

Penny Coles
The Local

Barbara Khan calls quilting her “passionate obsession.”

And as much as she loves quilting, she loves seeing her quilts go to people who will enjoy them.

Some are quilted by machine-work, others by hand, she says.

And some take a couple of weeks to make, while others can take a couple of years, but all are made with love.

Khan always has a project on the go, and since she started quilting more than 35 years ago, she has given many away, most often to family and friends.

And she is proud to say she has entered her share of competitions, and won

a few ribbons.

Around Christmas, she says, she read about Ukrainian families in need in The Local, and all that resident Shirley Madsen has been doing to help them.

“When I read that, I

thought, ‘I can make a quilt.’ That article spurred me on to do that.”

“I enjoy making a quilt for someone I know,” she adds, “and I also enjoy making a quilt for someone I don’t know, but I know it will be well-loved

and well-used.”

And as Madsen can affirm, the two women who were given the quilts were extremely appreciative, leaving no doubt Khan’s quilts will be both well-loved and well-used.



Valeriia (left) and Vera (centre) were the recipients of two quilts made by Barbara Khan (right) and given with love. (Supplied)



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Simmonds soaring to ultimate frisbee championship

Mike Balsom
The Local

A sport that he began playing in Grade 9 at A.N. Myer Secondary School is taking Niagara-on-the-Lake's Ben Simmonds to the UK to repre-

sent his country. Simmonds, who is teaching physical education at a small private school in Ottawa and hoping to attend teacher's college in the future, has earned a spot as a defender on Canada's Under-24 (U24) Ultimate Fris-

bee mixed team. He will be competing with that squad in July at the World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) championships in Nottingham.

"I saw a poster and talked to the coach (English teacher John Kent) about it," the 22-year-old Parliament Oak graduate remembers about his start in the sport. "Learning to play was a lot of fun, but when I moved to Carleton (University), I realized I had a lot to learn."

As a first-year student in media production and design, with a minor in film studies, Simmonds had brought a disc to campus and was spotted tossing it to a friend by members of the Ravens women's team. They gave the young man a flyer for a clinic they were hosting later that week.

Simmonds attended the clinic, connected with the captains of the school's men's team, and made the university's B squad, "as the worst player," he says. "I was just there to run and be fast and try to play defence, because coming from Niagara, I only kind of knew just enough about throwing to get by."

For the uninitiated, ultimate frisbee, or simply ultimate, as most of its purvey-

ors call it, can be compared to a mixture of basketball and football. It involves seven players on each team competing on a 100-yard field.

The team starting on defence tosses the disc to their opponents, whose objective is to work the disc down the field by throwing it. Unlike football, though, once the disc is caught, the player cannot run with it. The other six players on the team do run, though, in an attempt to get open to catch the disc when it is thrown.

A point is scored when the disc is caught in the opposing team's end zone.

Simmonds played on Carleton's men's team, but the U24 national team is a mixed team, combining men and women on the field at the same time.

The former offensively-minded hockey and soccer player relishes his role on defence, and it's taken him through inter-university play while at Carleton and into the club and professional ultimate circuits. Last summer, Simmonds played with the Ottawa Outlaws of the American Ultimate Disc League (AUDL). He has also played with club teams in both Hamilton

and Ottawa, the latter with his younger brother, Nick, who also took up the sport at A.N. Myer.

"When you're playing defence in ultimate," he explains, "you can score on defence. To score on defence, it's called a break. You're not going to get a block every time, but you're constantly fighting to make sure that if your guy is getting thrown to, you can get a block, an attempt at a point. For me, it's far more exciting playing defence."

Simmonds says each team consists of three types of players: cutters, who play downfield and make smaller throws, handlers who make the bigger throws, and hybrids, who do both.

"I'm a defensive cutter," he says. "I go onto the defensive line to mark (guard) their cutters who are downfield. And when the disc turns over, I'm a cutter on the defensive line while we play offense."

At Carleton, Simmonds played both indoor and outdoor ultimate, captaining the Ravens men's outdoor team in his third year there. His last two years on the Ravens, they beat Western University and the University of Toronto Blues to capture back-to-

back division 2 provincial championships.

The oldest son of Toby and the late Keith Simmonds says his confidence level really picked up last summer after playing against the best in the sport with the Outlaws, enough so that he felt ready to attempt to make the national team.

"I applied and got accepted," he says of the try-outs in Burnaby, British Columbia. "I just put it all out there. I had been focusing on it for months, dealing with injuries and training, making sure my body was prepared. It was two days, an amazing experience playing ultimate there in November, with beautiful weather and the mountains in the background."

He was overwhelmed when he found out he made the cut, even while feeling that he had done all he could to deserve a spot on the team.

"The week before (the Ottawa Outlaws) announced that they were folding," remembers Simmonds. "So I was pretty bummed out that I would have to try out for another

Continued on page 13



Ben Simmonds in his Ottawa Outlaws jersey. (Photo supplied)


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Fundraiser to support national U24 ultimate team

Continued from page 12

team. It was sad and stressful. When one of the coaches called to say I was chosen, it was overwhelming and exciting."

After earning his spot with the national team, Simmonds decided to cancel a planned trip to Montreal this weekend, forgo pursuing another professional opportunity, and instead concentrate on getting ready for the WFDF championships.

He recently attended the first team training camp and participated in some

organized scrimmages in Orlando, Florida. It was his first time together with the rest of the roster, including one of his Outlaws teammates who also made the team and a few players he played club with. One of the national team coaches is also a former teammate.

"We're also going to an American mixed tournament in Boston in a couple of months," he adds, "as well as an exhibition tournament in Toronto before we go to England in July. There's lots of travel."

To cover the costs of food, travel and uniforms,

the team is holding a fundraiser. They are designing warm-up jerseys that will be worn by the team on their trip to the UK that will include the names of up to 350 family members, friends and supporters who donate \$25 or more to their quest for the world title. To contribute to the cause, visit tinyurl.com/2hr9zc28.

"They're trying to make this experience more accessible for everyone on the team," Simmonds says of the fundraiser. "It's a fun way to have your name and to take part with us in this in some way."



Ben Simmonds is among the men and women ultimate frisbee players representing Canada at the U24 World Championships in England in July 2023. (Photo supplied)

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LocalSPORTS

Preds to host Ravens in first playoff game Friday

Mike Balsom
The Local

The Niagara Predators completed their regular season schedule with a 6-4 loss to the Stars in Northumberland Saturday night.

They now head into the Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League's Russell Cup Playoffs as the fourth seed in the South Division. And, after St. George's 10-4 defeat of Windsor Sunday in their final regular season game, the Preds will host the rival fifth-place Ravens Friday night to begin their first round best-of-three series.

It's the outcome Niagara head coach Kevin Taylor was hoping for heading into the postseason. The Predators were 2-3-1 head-to-head against the Ravens this year and finished just three points ahead of them in the standings. They are two evenly-matched teams, but he feels his squad has the upper edge.

"I think our defensive game is a bit better than St. George's," he tells The Local. "And I'm counting on our goaltending to be better. And

it's the playoffs, so you always hope for some unsung hero to step it up."

On Saturday night, the Predators were assessed a delay of game penalty before the opening faceoff and began the game shorthanded. After blanking the Stars during those two minutes, power play goals by the Savoie brothers, Nick and Cameron, gave Niagara a 2-0 lead in the first eight minutes.

But the Stars bounced back to tie things up with goals by Loenzzo Sullivan and Pavel Smirnov. Then, in the final minute of the period, Preds defenceman Ethan Boyd restored the lead with the team's third power play goal. Niagara led 3-2 at the end of the first.

The Preds outshot Northumberland 20-10 in the second period but Stars goaltender Alexander Smirnov kept them off the scoresheet for the entire 20 minutes. At the other end of the ice, Thomas Murphy locked it up at 3-3 when he beat Predators goalie Cameron Huff with four minutes remaining.

But Taylor rested some of



Tyler Gearing fights his way through the Streetsville defence Friday. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

his starters in the third period in a game that was essentially meaningless to Niagara. That may have had something to do with the Stars jumping to a 6-3 lead on third period goals by Murphy, Kyle Boyd and Kurt Gibbs. Jaroslav Dohnal narrowed the gap for the Preds to 6-4 when he was set up for a

goal by Reese Bisci and Thomas McGrath, but that's how the game would end.

The previous night, Niagara finally beat the Streetsville Flyers in Virgil after losing to them three times over the previous two weeks, once in a shoot-out.

Declan Fogarty and Cameron Savoie led the Preds Friday with a goal and three assists each, while Anthony Tropea, who finished the season as Niagara's leader in goals (27) and points (48), notched two goals and an assist.

Niagara finishes the 42-game regular season with a record of 20-18-4. That's eight fewer wins than last year's shortened season, when they skated to a 28-9-1 record and placed third in the division.

"We only had three returning players," Taylor says, referring to Bisci, Logan Bailie and Dawson Walker. A fourth, Max Bredin, was traded at his request at the trade deadline in early February.

"We had an entire new team, all new goaltending, a new coach," he continues. "It's a much younger team, and hopefully we'll be able to retain and bring them back

next year. There's been a lot of growth this year."

Looking at the team's final record, he adds, "We were above .500. And, around Christmas, I think our goal differential was almost minus-30. We ended up at plus-six. Yeah, there should have been a couple more wins, but it shows the program is moving in the right direction."

With the emergence of young players such as Nick Savoie and Nolan Wyers in the second half of the season, and late additions such as Askar Aimanbetov, Timur Mirzaizants and Alex Andrews, Taylor feels the Predators have the formula to take two out of three against the Ravens.

"You need those guys who can step up their game," Taylor said. "You can count on different guys to give you different things. It gives you more of an arsenal, and also more depth. If St. George does shut down some of our guys, we have others that can step into that role."

Niagara will be without Dohnal, who is returning to the Czech Republic for school. Other than that, the

team is healthy heading into the playoffs.

If they get by the Ravens, round two will likely require the Preds to face the first place North York Renegades, who closed the season this weekend with a record of 36-6-0.

"You have to keep things in perspective," Taylor says. "If you do look past St. George, we'd be facing North York. We matched up pretty well against them. We had some good games against them (a 5-3 loss and a 6-5 overtime loss; the Preds also lost 9-0 and 10-1 to the Renegades). But it's a new series, a new season. As a coach, you have to come up with different plans to shut down their top guys, too."

Game one against the Ravens starts at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Virgil's Meridian Credit Union Arena. Though the full schedule hasn't been posted yet, Taylor expects to play Sunday in St. George, then return to Virgil for game three on Tuesday evening.

"It's going to be a good series," he says enthusiastically, "a fun series for the players and for the fans to watch. It will be some good hockey."



Pred goalie Ryan Santini was back in net for Friday's win in Streetsville for after an injury three weeks ago.



Pred Declan Fogarty is taken down in front of the Streetsville net Friday.

LocalWORSHIP

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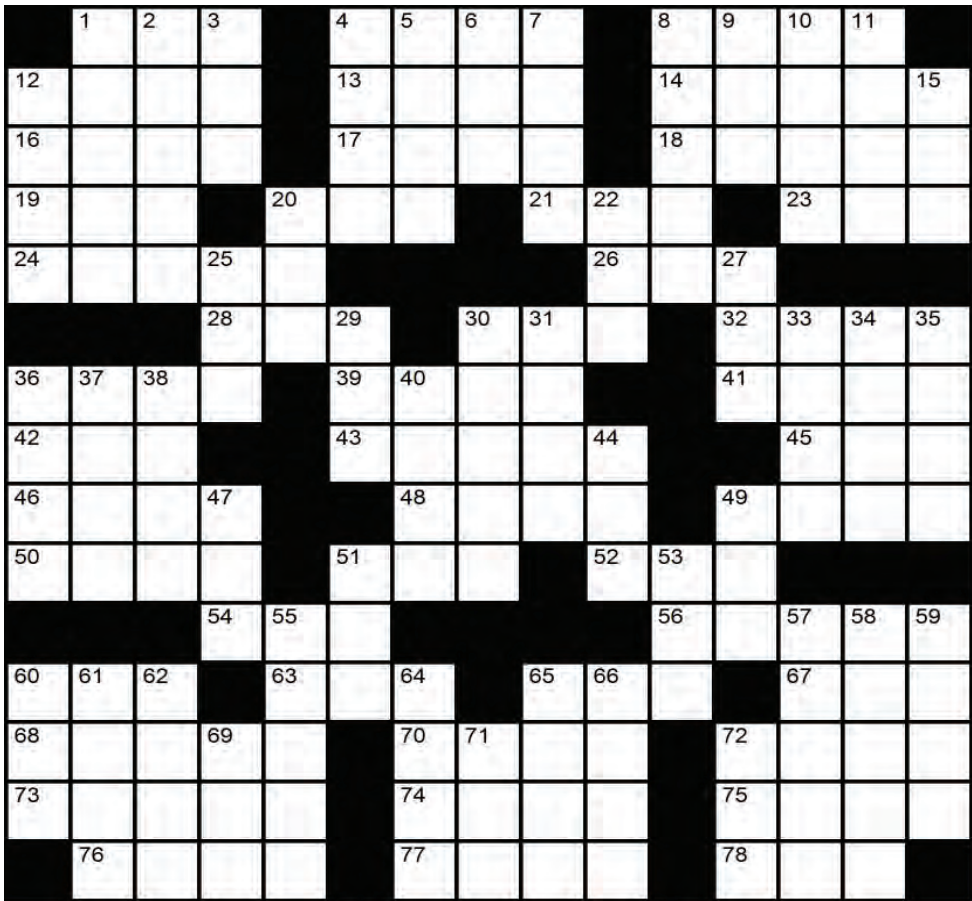
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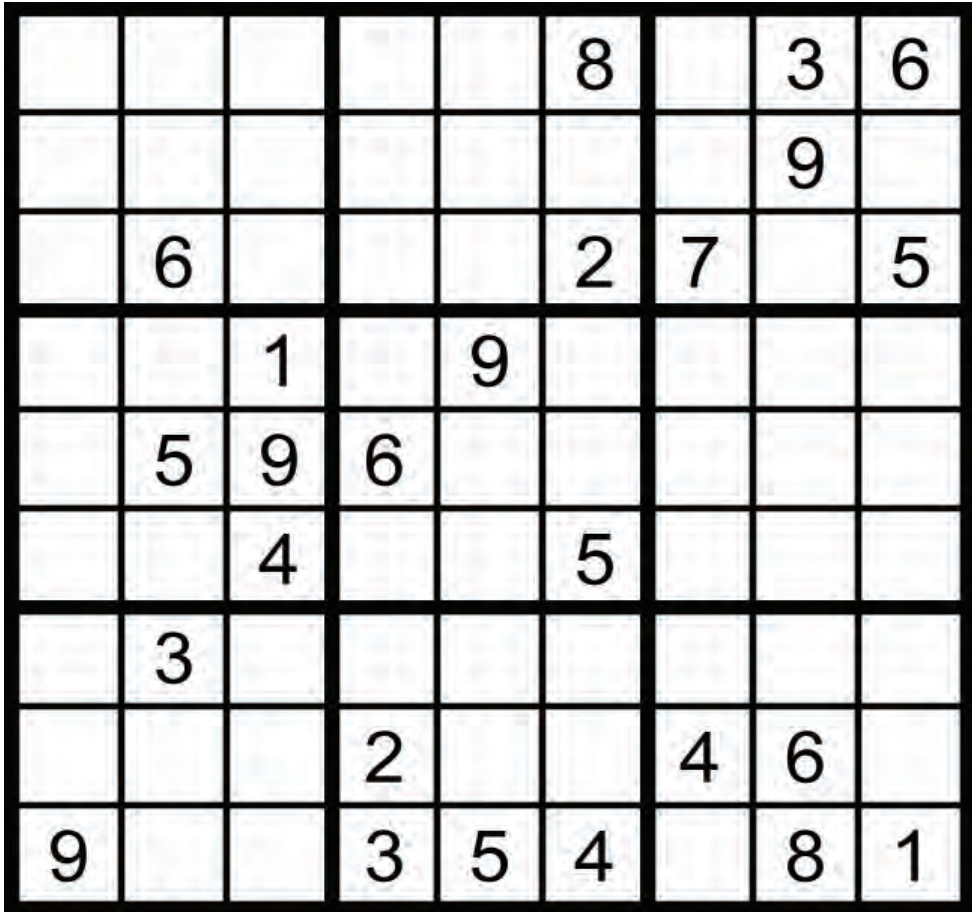


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- Across:**
- 1 Spanish hero El ---
 - 4 Deep cut
 - 8 Big cheeses
 - 12 Flower jar
 - 13 --- Falco, Nurse Jackie
 - 14 Paragon
 - 16 Formerly Persia
 - 17 Rich, in Spain
 - 18 Soothing ointment
 - 19 Small cell
 - 20 Author
 - 21 Oregon summer clock setting
 - 23 Lone Star State (Abbr.)
 - 24 One over a major
 - 26 Small amount
 - 28 Neighbor of Neb.
 - 30 Noncom
 - 32 Irritate
 - 36 Open pastry dessert
 - 39 Carnival
 - 41 Nothing
 - 42 Lubricate
 - 43 Untamed
 - 45 Chafe
 - 46 Speck
 - 48 Enticement
 - 49 Software menu option
 - 50 Crystal ---
 - 51 Tucson time
 - 52 West Atlantic international grp.
 - 54 Menagerie
 - 56 "A Doll's House" dramatist
 - 60 Atlanta-based health grp.
 - 63 Lettuce variety
 - 65 Building extension at a right angle
 - 67 Gaza Strip grp.
 - 68 Pray in Latin
 - 70 Minnelli with a zee
 - 72 Weeder's tools
 - 73 Country music's --- Tucker
 - 74 "--- in the Dark" (Streep movie)
 - 75 Appetite
 - 76 "--- there, done that"
 - 77 Podded vegetables
 - 78 "--- Porter" (Johnny Cash song)
 - Down:**
 - 1 Diamond weight unit
 - 2 Writer --- Asimov
 - 3 Room for relaxing
 - 4 Buddhist actor Richard ---
 - 5 Tennis server's edge
 - 6 Attack command
 - 7 Abundance
 - 8 Grand view
 - 9 Actress/director/producer --- Lupino
 - 10 Bombard
 - 11 Preserve
 - 12 Pharmacist's container
 - 15 Latin law
 - 20 Provide
 - 22 Banned insecticide
 - 25 Possess
 - 27 Show --- (entertainment industry)
 - 29 Rancid
 - 30 Support column
 - 31 Apparatus
 - 33 Slender fork-tailed gull
 - 34 Gunk
 - 35 Drifter
 - 36 Floating bubbles
 - 37 Low calorie variety
 - 38 Loads
 - 40 Long slippery fish
 - 44 Fifth sign of the zodiac
 - 47 Freq. unit
 - 49 Type of computer connection
 - 51 Low
 - 53 Suffer
 - 55 Huge amount
 - 57 Pollen grain
 - 58 Lament
 - 59 Small winning margin
 - 60 Military bed
 - 61 Dingy
 - 62 Malacca
 - 64 Strike with an open hand
 - 65 Writer --- Pound
 - 66 Sung poems
 - 69 Whiskey variety
 - 71 Diamonds
 - 72 Bewildered response



OBITUARY



SHERYL ANNE COBBAN (NEE WHITE) 1945-2023

After a battle with cancer, Sheryl passed at her home in Grimsby with family by her side on February 4, 2023 at the age of 77. Sheryl knew her loving Jesus as her personal saviour and knew that Heaven is a promise of peace, love and eternal life for each one who believes.

Sheryl was born in Toronto, Ontario on December 27, 1945 and on February 19, 1946 was placed with her adoptive parents Fredrick Stanley and Helen Mary (nee Hopkins) White in Sarnia, Ontario.

Sheryl attended SS#5 West (School Section #5) for elementary and graduated from Northern Collegiate High School in 1963. Sheryl lived with some girlfriends, worked at a bank, did some travelling before she married Ronald in 1970. They moved to St. Catharines, started a family and she was a part-time bookkeeper and tax preparer.

Sheryl is survived by her children Heather (Jamie) Verrier and Daniel (Lina) Cobban. Sheryl prided herself in her 5 grandchildren: Micah, Kendra, Ethan, Helena and Sophia.

At the age of 65, Sheryl's father had died (1983) and her mother was suffering from dementia so Sheryl inquired with Sarnia-Lampton Children's Aid to find her biological family. She connected with siblings two weeks later, learned her biological mother had died in 1990 and they had been searching for her ever since. After being an only child, Sheryl found out she was 5th of 10 kids and her biological name was Phyllis Jeanette. Over the last 12 years, she united with her many of her 9 siblings; Ray, Carol, Ruth (deceased), Donna (deceased), Pat, Tom, Debbie, Steven and Bill. She also learned her mother sent her to Sarnia as there were other biological relatives. She had even been in school with and been friends with biological cousins.

Sheryl loved being with people, often playing cards, being "mom" to many International students over two decades, travelling with or going to see friends and family almost anywhere, and supporting her children and grandchildren at sporting, artistic or school events.

Sheryl loved parties so we want to send her to Heaven in style. A Celebration of a full life (John 10:10) will take place Saturday March 11th, 2023 at Lakemount Worship Centre (West Hall), 54 North Service Road, Grimsby at 11 am. A lunch will follow the Celebration of Life.

Sheryl will be interred with her beloved parents in Lakeview Cemetery in Sarnia, 1016 Colborne Road, on Thursday March 23rd, 2023 at 3pm (Section P, Lot 35) with her biological mother resting nearby.

Online Condolences at www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from February 15, 2023

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

Across: 1 Cid, 4 Gash, 8 V I Ps, 12 Vase, 13 Edie, 14 Ideal, 16 Iran, 17 Rica, 18 Save, 19 AAA, 20 Pen, 21 P D T, 23 Tex, 24 Lt Col, 26 Dab, 28 Wyo, 30 Sgt, 32 Itch, 36 Flan, 39 Fete, 41 Zero, 42 Oil, 43 Feral, 45 Rub, 46 Atom, 48 Lure, 49 Undo, 50 Meth, 51 M S T, 52 O A S, 54 Zoo, 56 Ibsen, 60 C D C, 63 Cos, 65 Ell, 67 P L O, 68 Orare, 70 Liza, 72 Hoes, 73 Tanya, 74 A cry, 75 Urge, 76 Been, 77 Peas, 78 Hey.

Down: 1 Carat, 2 Isaac, 3 Den, 4 Gere, 5 Ad in, 6 Sic, 7 Heap, 8 Vista, 9 Ida, 10 Pelt, 11 Save, 12 Lex, 15 Lex, 20 Ply, 22 DDT, 25 Own, 27 Biz, 29 Off, 30 Strut, 31 Gear, 33 Tern, 34 Crud, 35 Hobo, 36 Foam, 37 Lite, 38 A lot, 40 Eels, 44 Leo, 47 MHz, 49 U S B, 51 Moo, 53 All, 55 Ocean, 57 Spore, 58 Elegy, 59 Nose, 60 Cot, 61 Drab, 62 Cane, 64 Slap, 65 Ezra, 66 Lays, 69 Rye, 71 Ice, 72 Huh.

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