

The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



Provincial
changes to
autism policy
affect us all
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Strummin' along

Don Peterson, 83, is one of the NOTL Ukesters, a group of local ukulele players and singers who meet Sunday afternoons at the community centre to practise. (Fred Mercnik)

It takes a village

By Penny Coles
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake may have a reputation as a retirement community, but it's rapidly changing: look for the faces of the future and you'll find them in every corner of town — on the street pushing a stroller, in the parks with their babies and toddlers, and as the driving force of several new businesses.

The young couples have arrived, found homes, settled in and are raising their

families.

And they will attract more young families, because they love the community where they have chosen to raise their kids, and are rapidly spreading the word.

Natalie Cooper moved to NOTL a little more than a year ago with her husband Adrian. Their little girl, Olive, was born last July. They came from Burlington, choosing NOTL because Natalie has extended family here: aunts, cousins, and her parents are close by. But after Olive was born,

Cooper began experiencing a sense of isolation. The friends she had left behind, who were also having babies, had a support system she was missing. They had stroller groups, with moms who would get together, “have coffee and chat about life after children,” she said.

Cooper conducted an “exhaustive search” for something similar in NOTL, but couldn't find it. She took advantage of services such as EarlyON, organized by



Natalie Cooper, with eight-month-old Olive, couldn't find a group for new moms and their babies in NOTL, so she created one. (Penny Coles)

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Residents want more official plan protection for dock area

Secondary plan doesn't reflect needs of neighbourhood, councillors told

By Penny Coles
The Local

After all the work that has gone into protecting the Dock Area in recent decades, residents of that neighbourhood don't like what they see in the draft official plan now going through the public consultation process.

Paul Shepherd spoke for many of his neighbours at Monday's meeting to discuss the long-awaited document, expected to be approved by council in April. His concern is that an outdated secondary plan enshrined in the document does not contain the protections he and others expected for their neighbourhood, he said, calling it meaningless, inconsistent and "even improper."

The meeting at the community centre drew about 100 people, with 20 presentations focusing mainly on agricultural protection, the wine industry, St. Davids and the Dock Area.

The structure of the official plan includes secondary plans for St. Davids, Queenston, Glendale and the Old Town — it was noted by Shepherd and others there is none

for Virgil. Although the main document is being updated from its last-approved 1994 version, the secondary plans are not, and they are also badly in need of being reviewed and amended to reflect a more relevant reflection of residents' choices for their communities.

The intention is to get the official plan passed, residents were told, and at some point in the future the secondary plans will be reviewed, but several speakers, including Shepherd, expressed their discomfort with that process.

While the draft official plan update was completed last December, the secondary plan for the Dock Area dates back to 2014, said Shepherd, and completely ignores a master plan that has been completed since then, following extensive consultation with residents.

The secondary plan allows the development of parkland and the beach by the railroad right-of-way, he said, changes the road and traffic patterns, and despite the extreme situation of two years ago, ignores necessary flood protection and storm drainage.

Although Shepherd is a resident of the Dock Area with

a waterfront property, he also took council to task for allowing development through the main corridor of Virgil, which has no secondary plan.

There was a draft design guideline document drawn up in 2015 to determine the streetscape and scope of development along the Niagara Stone Road corridor, but it was never approved by council.

What is happening along that corridor is very different from what locals envisioned during the public consultations for a plan that went nowhere.

Shepherd pointed out the height of two massive, "big box development" stores as the direction along the main street through the urban area, when what the people of Virgil would rather see is a much smaller scale of development.

The tall buildings under construction don't require the height they've been allowed for the business they will be conducting, he said. "How high can you stack those coffee cups?" he asked, referring to the Starbucks going up beside the little plaza where Pet Valu is located, overshadowing other businesses. "All this space is for something that

could be done in a single-storey structure."

Big box development is likely to continue as gaps are filled in along the corridor, and small businesses close and are replaced, he warned.

"This is absolutely destroying the streetscape of Virgil."

Shepherd closed with another warning: this one about the planning process as outlined in the official plan. Sometimes it says council "should"

call for public consultation, sometimes it says "may" call for public consultation.

In all cases, those words should be changed to "shall." Public consultation is most important," he finished.



Residents of the dock area like their neighbourhood as it is, and hoped for stronger protection policies in the draft official plan. (Fred Mercnik)

St. Davids neglected in official plan, residents say

Growing village needs protection for open spaces, heritage

By Penny Coles
The Local

The residents of St. Davids are feeling neglected.

Their corner of town, referred to as a "settlement area" in the official plan, has grown from a quaint village to a "rapidly developing urbanized community" that represents about 20 per cent of the population of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Mike Pearsall, vice-president of the St. Davids Ratepayers Association (SDRA), told councillors Monday.

He was speaking at the public meeting to pass on the group's objections to the latest draft of the Town's official plan.

After a lengthy process of updating the plan, during which the SDRA brought its concerns to council many times, "we are left with just an outdated secondary plan in Appendix 4," he said.

"While the supposedly updated plan purports to represent the entire municipality, it has ended up following the typical historic practice of focusing its entire attention on the Old Town area and a few rural areas of concern."

The specific issues he pointed out are being ignored include a request to council for St. Davids to be considered a Heritage Conservation District, to protect its historically significant streetscape and the feel of the village.

"We have received commitment from council for action on this," he said, and residents were disappointed to see no mention of it in the official plan, although there is a reference to an expansion area of

the Old Town heritage district.

This is the time for council to take action on their commitment, he said. "It is critical that the official plan update not be finalized until such time as this is added."

Pearsall said it is also a concern that the land use plan for St. Davids is outdated and appears to contain several errors. It fails to differentiate between residential and established residential areas, as it does for the Old Town and Queenston, and no parks or major open spaces have been identified within the village except as "community facilities," he said.

Pearsall said the SDRA wants the privately-owned St. Davids Golf Course designated on the official plan and the secondary plan as open space or parkland.

"And while not something that can be identified differently on the schedule, it would be remiss at this point if we didn't remind council again of the critical importance of the community pool in St. Davids."

He also used his opportunity to speak as a reminder to council the SDRA has also asked for a community safety zone to protect pedestrians in a busy traffic area, a community centre, improved sidewalks and transit service.

He was not alone with his objections to council about deficiencies in the plan as it relates to St. Davids.

Resident John Gartner also spoke to councillors about the rapid growth of St. Davids, and the outdated secondary plan, "which is obvi-

ously not as relevant as it was when it was put together." He too is concerned about the golf course, asking that it be considered open space and protected from development. The documents under discussion are intended to reflect the past and offer direction for the future, he said. "The secondary plan and draft official plan don't do that."

St. Davids resident Dorothy Walker also had a list of concerns, including the need for transit that connects St. Davids to the rest of town, she said. The author of a book about the history of St. Davids, which she calls "the village in the shadows," she referred to it also as "the village in the shadows of the official plan." St. Davids residents pay the same taxes as those in other areas of town, she pointed out, but are not treated equally when it comes to services. She also told councillors the community should have a library, one of "bricks and mortar," not just the lending lockers at the fire station. And although a community pool is not mentioned in the plan, "this is a hot topic. If it's not updated there will be a toxic reaction."

Pearsall summed up the villagers' dissatisfaction with the way their community is treated in the document under discussion, expected to be approved by council in April: Based on the hollow promises of the past, he said, the residents of St. Davids will not accept the official plan update being finalized until they have more than another hollow promise of a future update to the village's secondary plan.

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Vineyard manager asks for extra layers of agricultural protection

Former councillor also has some advice for new council

By Penny Coles
The Local

Several representatives of Niagara-on-the-Lake's agricultural community and wine industry spoke about the need for increased protections to be put in place regarding the updated official plan, which is going through the public consultation stage before being presented for final approval for council.

Although NOTL's agricultural industry is already covered by several layers of provincial, municipal and regional protection policies, Jamie Slingerland of Pillitteri Estates Winery, with a history of farming in his blood, asked council for some changes to the draft official plan "to protect my family and extended family interests regarding their right to earn a living in agriculture in NOTL."

With 40 per cent of the population of NOTL living in the rural area, he said, "I would request council heed the advice of your only farmer on council. Don't let the Old Town be your only focus."

He asked that "sights, sounds and smells of agriculture" as normal farming practices be included in the document to allow for clearing of land, spraying, bird bangers and wind machines, spraying manure, irrigation and even working through the night, in addition to oth-

er farming necessities that might bother neighbours.

He also said he's concerned that preserving cultural heritage resources and natural heritage systems might overlap and negatively impact a farmer's right to level soil, irrigate, construct or deconstruct a pond, remove trees or build a barn.

He suggested the current draft should include policies regarding wineries that were entrenched in the 1994 official plan, which was approved when he was a town councillor, but are not part of the 2018 revision. Those policies would require a farm winery to have at least 10 acres, an estate winery to have 20, and both to have 75 per cent of their property planted with grapes, to protect the agricultural use of the land.

There is no inclusion of those provisions for breweries or distilleries, he said, and very little to restrict them, "which seems a little unfair to wineries and is likely an oversight."

Allowing them on farmland "is a generous OP provision," he said, but keeping them small should prevent displacement of specialty crop land. He suggested micro-breweries and distilleries should be required to have a 10-acre minimum property with 75 per cent of it planted to crops.

But protecting farmland wasn't his only goal

in speaking to council.

He told them at his age of 61, the lord mayor and five of the councillors elected "have lived in NOTL for the same amount of years combined that I have lived in NOTL."

He said they should make every attempt to keep "tenured staff and legal representation for not only their talent but for the value of their institutional memory. Without that memory you will be lost in the future and condemned to repeat mistakes of the past."

He also told them to "stop all the OMB hearings and negotiate," with developers, although there is no more Ontario Municipal Board, which has been replaced by the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

"This council has appeared to be quick to go to the OMB and I hope that is not the case for the OP," he said.

"If the town lawyer says you can't win at the OMB, then you can't win," Slingerland warned them.

His last bit of advice to the new councillors: The interim control by-laws council has recently approved freeze development but also hurt the people who work in construction, not just the developers, and "won't alter in any way the developments presently being proposed."

SORE lawyer has concerns with official plan

There's no mention of 2011 amendments to John Street property, he tells council

By Penny Coles
The Local

While applauding council's commitment to getting the official plan approved, lawyer Patrick Little politely cautioned them at Monday's meeting "to get it right."

Representing SORE (Save Our Randwood Estate), Little said his clients are concerned about the omission in the official plan of any reference to 2011 site-specific zoning for property on John Street that had been approved for a hotel.

The 2011 amendments to the official plan were approved when the Romance Inn was being proposed by then-owners Trisha Romance, her husband Gary Peterson and a third business partner.

The property, purchased from them by Benny Marotta of Solmar and

Two Sisters Resorts, is now the subject of some legal actions, with Marotta asking for an amendment to allow a six-storey hotel, taller than what is allowed in the 2011 amendment.

Little said with the amount of time spent and input from the public, staff and the experts involved in the 2011 amendment, that decision should continue to be reflected in the current draft official plan.

"I expect it's an inadvertent error," he said, that specific policies were omitted.

He also drew council's attention to some inclusion of what should be agricultural property he pointed out is now shown on mapping in the official plan, without any consultation, as residential development. And he called for some buffering to be included to protect agricultural land bordering a

site to be developed as a subdivision.

He also spoke of land use compatibility, asking for criteria for change to land uses be made clear in the official plan.

Little said he would be making a more complete written submission to the Town regarding changes to the official plan this week.



SORE lawyer Patrick Little makes a brief presentation to council about the Town's draft official plan, promising a more detailed written submission.

If a tree falls . . .



The dramatic wind storm Niagara experienced Sunday, through to Monday morning, left many small branches on the ground for Town staff to clean up. One tree was down on McNab Road and a small one (pictured) came down on some hydro wires on Johnson Street in the Old Town. Brodie Mosher of NOTL Hydro said while there were a few wires down because of broken tree limbs, hydro poles, which have been tested and replaced where necessary over the last year, held up. There were power outages but none for an extended period of time, with both local crews working to get power restored quickly. (Fred Mercnik)



Former town councillors Jamie Slingerland and Austin Kirkby chat at Monday's official plan public meeting at the community centre. Slingerland and John Kirkby both made presentations about preservation of agricultural lands. (Penny Coles)

Niagara MPP speaks out about health care legislation

Wayne Gates stands up for public system, fearing proposed changes open the door to privatization

By Penny Coles
The Local

MPP Wayne Gates has spoken out in the legislature against draft legislation the NDP says shows provincial plans to privatize health care.

The draft was leaked to the press by the NDP earlier this month, and defended by Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott, who called the NDP position “fearmongering.” She said the people of Ontario will not have to pay for access to health care out of their own pockets.

She announced the changes in the new legislation Tuesday, saying the Local Integrated Health Networks will be disbanded and become part of other agencies. Other services will be grouped together under Ontario Health Teams, with some flexibility for areas to choose how its done.

But the concept of a super agency still exists, and is enough to convince Gates and the NDP it will open the door

to allow more privatization of services.

“I’ve spent my entire adult life speaking out against the privatization of health care and I’m not about to stop now,” he said in the legislature last week.

“From diagnostic scans to dental care to private parking lots that gouge residents in times of emergency, enough is enough. It’s time to talk about expanding our health care system, not selling it off.”

Gates, who represents the Niagara Falls riding, which includes Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake, referred to a move more than a decade ago to privatize hospital maintenance and cleaning, which he said led to an outbreak of C. difficile, from which patients died.

The number of infections since then has decreased with changes both to cleaning and other policies, including hand-washing.

Hospital parking revenue, which previously support-

ed health care, has also been privatized, and now a much smaller percentage of parking fees is returned to health care, he said.

Earlier this month Gates posted a video, recorded with the falls in the background, on Facebook. In it he talks about the leaked document showing plans of “potentially privatizing” parts of our health care system. The video, he said, reached more than half a million people.

“Thousands took the time to comment, share and engage with the video, and one thing was very clear . . . we say no to health care privatization. We believe in a medical care system that is publicly funded and publicly delivered based on health needs, not on the size of one’s credit card.”

When Gates had his opportunity to speak for about a minute and a half in the legislature last Thursday, he asked for the new Niagara Falls hospital to be moved forward, by “putting shovels in the

ground. We can do that. We can put local people to work, local businesses, and provide decent public health care in a reasonable time for our residents.”

When the documents were leaked, NDP leader Andrea Horwath held a press conference to speak of the privatization plans. In Elliott’s comments later, she said there would be no jumping lines for health care access, but she didn’t denounce the details in the draft legislation. Elliott said an announcement concerning health care would come later.

“Something as important as health care shouldn’t be done behind closed doors,” said Gates. “There was no consultation. This is being done in secrecy.”

He warns “a lot of people could make a lot of money from this, and a lot of people wouldn’t have access to health care.”

Those dollars, he said, should be used to improve health care, not to line the pockets of people providing privatized services.

Canadians are passionate

about their public health care system, created by Tommy Douglas of the NDP in 1961, said Gates. He believes by reaching out to his constituents in Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie, and to people across Ontario, he will convince them to speak out against the privatization of health care services before the introduction of the legislation he expects could come before the March 11 break.

If the legislation opening the door to further privatization goes through, he said, it could leave the aging population of NOTL and across Niagara hurting.

“With our high number of seniors, it would be a double whammy if we have to start paying for health care.”

But it’s not just the seniors who will be affected, he added, “it’s our kids and our grandkids.”

Senior Donald Combe is one of those who commented on the video Gates posted.

“Our health care system is the envy of all Americans, even if they do not know it. We are a kinder, gentler peo-

ple and obviously, health care is a given right and not the privilege of the rich. Why do we emulate the Americans? They are no longer the envy of the world, nor ought they to be. (Premier Doug) Ford is foolishly emulating Trump,” Combe posted.

Within today’s world, costs are rising and many, especially the elderly, struggle to make ends meet. One of the givens in Canada was that no one was denied access to health care. The basic Canadian belief is that we help one another, not deny support, when people are most vulnerable and ill.”

When Gates was young, the MPP said, his brother had a number of health problems, and without publicly-funded health care, it took his parents years to pay off the bills, as it does for people in the U.S. In that country, he pointed out, the number one cause of bankruptcy is the cost of privately-delivered health services.

“There is nothing more important to Canadians than our publicly-funded health care system.”



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225 RICARDO STREET #103 \$634,900

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3 HAMPTON COURT \$1,395,000

NEW LISTING



Recently updated interior finishes throughout. This elegant home is situated on a private mature lot as part of a cul-de-sac, 38 of an acre! 2400 sq ft, 3 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms. Features an open concept kitchen, conservatory, bright living room with vaulted ceilings and exposed wood beams. Brand new spacious deck, which overlooks charming pond and rock garden. Beautiful old town location, two blocks from golf course and Lake Ontario. **MLS 30714834. Christopher Bowron, Audrey Wright and Nicole Vanderperk.**

420 GATE STREET \$1,399,000

NEW LISTING



Fully renovated "modern farmhouse" two storey home just blocks away from the main street. 57.8 x 211 Lot with 3+1 bedrooms and 2.5 bathrooms. Hardwood floors throughout, spacious living spaces and fully finished basement. 18x18 covered back deck and board & batten fence for privacy. All new stainless steel appliances. **MLS 30714895. Cheryl Carmichael.**

14529 NIAGARA RIVER PARKWAY \$1,749,000

NEW LISTING



This beautiful custom built 4-bedroom, 4-bathroom home has been thoughtfully designed and impeccably maintained. With over 4000 sq. ft. of finished living space set on a municipally serviced, acre and a half lot on the scenic Niagara River Parkway, you will enjoy the beautiful wrap around veranda and porches that overlook conservation space. **MLS 30707534. Sarah Gleddie or Victoria Bolduc.**

341 LAKESHORE ROAD \$999,999



First time offered. A solid custom build home, Secluded, private setting. 2.49 acres. This well loved home is waiting for your own interior updating or build your forever home on this ideal hilltop location. With over 1900 sq ft, this multi-level side split has 4 bedrooms and 1.5 bathrooms. Enjoy the lush backyard on the patio with inground pool. Large detached outbuilding (with Hydro). Truly lovely and unique property, Infrastructure & amenities already in place, it is yours to do as you wish. **MLS 30684112. Chris Bowron, Audrey Wright & Nicole Vanderperk.**

373 VICTORIA STREET \$749,000



Building lot- located 2.5 blocks from Queen Street in desirable location, Surrounded by beautiful neighbourhood. There currently is a small dwelling on the property which will be demolished as a condition of the severance. Call listing agent for more details. **MLS 30695479. Chris Bowron, Audrey Wright and Nicole Vanderperk.**

CONCESSION 1/LINE 6 LOT \$579,000



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268 JOHN STREET \$3,500 + UTILITIES



Brand new custom build in convenient location offering numerous amenities within walking distance including new community centre, library, wineries/breweries and only minutes from downtown Niagara on the Lake's shops, theatres and restaurants. This 3-bedroom 4-bathroom home features a blend of traditional and modern details with high-end finishes and appliances, main floor laundry and a main floor master bedroom suite. Convenient sunroom, walkout to back deck, attached double garage and double drive. Available immediately. **MLS 30705280. Thomas Elltoft & Kim Elltoft.**

5 DAVID SECORD DRIVE \$738,000



Quality built raised bungalow located in charming village of St. Davids amongst other newer homes, offering high quality finishes throughout and featuring cathedral ceiling, gas fireplace, double patio doors, wide trim and hand scraped, engineered flooring. Extra conveniences include home being wired for alarm system, surround sound throughout main floor, central vac and exterior gas BBQ hook up. Lower level has its own separate entrance and is fully finished to include a 2nd kitchen. Conveniently located close to QEW and US border. **MLS 30708141. Thomas Elltoft & Kim Elltoft.**

2 BAY BERRY LANE \$969,900



Beautiful bungalow in a highly desired neighborhood close to all the amenities the town offers. This stunning home has been updated with a designer look and model home feel. Features include quartzite counters, vaulted ceiling, gas fireplace with marble surround, jetted tub, wet bar, custom storage area, main floor laundry, hardwood floors, sprinkler system and professional landscaping. **MLS 30703152. Linda Williams.**

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Provincial policy changes hurt local families

Reduced funding affecting education for children on autism spectrum

By Lauren O'Malley
The NOTL Local

Starting in April, government funding for families with children on the autism spectrum will change. The provincial government has announced a shift to lump-sum payments for therapies, as opposed to the current system of subsidies and waiting lists.

Parents in need say the change is making a bad situation worse.

Two local mothers with autistic children share their experiences and their fears.

Stephanie Baxter's seven-year-old son Jayden was diagnosed with autism, ADHD, and OCD at the age of two. The family was one of thousands put on a waiting list for IBI — Intensive Behavioural Intervention — one of the only treatments proven to help children with autism learn basic skills like making eye contact, speaking, and eventually reading and writing.

The family waited for years with no therapy and no indication of when it might be available, and then, around Jayden's fifth birthday, they got a phone call telling them his name was no longer on the waiting list. Another mother (who prefers to remain anonymous; we'll call her Mrs. Smith) whose autistic son is in Jayden's class describes the same scenario, and tells of the social media hashtag "autism doesn't end at five."

Both mothers agree the situation was terrible — and the new changes will only make things worse.

Therapy was available briefly for Smith, and the family saw significant and measurable progress with it — but the government-fund-

ed resource was cut off on the boy's fifth birthday.

A minimum of 25 hours per week of therapy is recommended for children on the higher end of the autistic spectrum, and costs \$55 per hour. The policy change removed tens of thousands of names from waiting lists and will now provide annual sums to families to pay for supports and resources. But the recommended amount of therapy would cost more than \$70,000 per year, and the new policy will limit funding to families to a maximum of \$20,000 per year for kids five and under, and \$5,000 per year for children from the ages of six to 18.

Concerns about the cost and availability of treatments plague both women, but they're even more concerned about their sons' day-to-day life at school.

Both boys have been professionally assessed and deemed to require a full-time, dedicated educational assistant (EA). Sadly, neither has had that experience, and the consequences have been dramatic.

Safety is one issue among many.

When the policy changes take place, children on the autism spectrum will be flung out of therapy and into the school system, and neither part of that equation is prepared for the fallout. "There is a tsunami headed for the school system," says Ontario Autism Coalition president — and teacher — Laura Kirby-McIntosh, speaking at a recent press conference to denounce the policy changes.

"Somewhere out there there's a kid that's going to get off the school prop-

erty, that's going to get seriously hurt or worse. Somewhere there's going to be a kid that's going to be restrained for too long and is going to be seriously hurt. There's an education worker who's going to set off a kid who goes into a massive meltdown and someone's going to get really hurt," she says.

There is currently one EA in the boys' Grade 1 classroom at Crossroads Public School. She is responsible for the three children on the spectrum in the class. And she leaves at lunchtime, to be replaced in the afternoon by a different EA, who is "bouncing back and forth between two classes, responsible for five students, giving them the sensory breaks, movement breaks, and the one-on-one time they need," says Baxter.

Both boys are "runners:" when they feel overwhelmed, they leave the class. This is one of the reasons they each require their own dedicated EA. One day, Baxter received a call from the school. "The principal called me at work to ask me to come and pick up Jayden," she says. "She said he was running away and hiding. 'We couldn't find him for a while. We need you to come and get him because we can't watch him,'" she describes the principal as saying. "I pulled into the parking lot and a staff member brought Jayden out — he was smiling and happy. Because he'd had the sensory break, and some one-on-one time with someone in a quiet setting. This is exactly why he needs an EA," she says. "He needs help and I can't keep leaving work every week to take my kid

out of school." The frustrated parent continues, "I feel really bad for the teacher, because she's an expert in the field but can't provide what she knows is necessary."

On that same day, Smith's son had also run from the classroom. He was found several minutes later at the external gates of the school, spotted by a teacher looking out a window. "He was going home to get his toy truck," says the boy's alarmed mother. "He has this internal GPS in his head and would have just gone all the way home." Home is several blocks of busy roads away from the school.

Schools everywhere are already struggling with this issue. Last year, a survey of more than 2,300 EAs found that fewer than eight per cent were working with only one student, while 60 per cent surveyed were working with five or more. "This is not just going to affect families with autistic children — it will affect all families with children in school," says Smith.

With an influx of children with autism in classrooms and no sign of EAs being added to match it,

there will be exponentially more disruption. "The perception is that it's a private, personal issue, but it will affect all of us," says Smith. "You kind of hit a wall where you don't know what to do."

Baxter, a working mother of three with a very busy husband, has a suggestion. "One solution would be travelling therapists going around the re-

gion to schools," she says. "They could work with kids together in a group setting, learning proper behaviour, but not being forced to do it with children who are quote unquote normal."

Baxter sums it up simply: "This is my child and he's going to cause us problems and headaches, but he's my child and I will always love him."



Stephanie and David Baxter hold a picture of their autistic son Jayden (who was at school at the time of the photograph). (Lauren O'Malley)

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EDITORIAL

Please pay attention — this matters to you

The official plan is one of those things we all think won't impact our lives. Until it does.

The Town has recently hosted three meetings, required by the Planning Act, to discuss the latest draft version of the official plan, which will guide development for the future. It is intended to reflect the vision of what the municipality will look like in years to come, and establish the policies to get there.

Wait, don't let your attention wander, please stay with us long enough to read why something that is excruciatingly boring for many to even contemplate is important enough to give it a few minutes of your time.

It is sufficiently important that every single candidate in last fall's municipal election — and there were many of them — spoke of its progress to completion as a priority, and for many, it was at the top of their list.

Yet fewer than 100 people came to Monday's open house to discuss the current draft official plan, the one each candidate spoke of seeing through to a speedy approval.

You think it's dull, bureaucratic nonsense.

Until you find out the height of the building under construction across the street will spoil your view, or its windows will look down on to your backyard.

Or the number of units being proposed down the road will increase traffic through your neighbour-

hood and require you leaving earlier to get to work on time; the parkland you thought you'd always have just up the street for your daily dog walks is about to become another subdivision.

As one resident pointed out on Monday, the draft official plan now being discussed allows for a public path along the waterfront that not only crosses her property but will pass within 10 feet of her front door. That path for waterfront access wasn't in the document approved in 1994, but it is in this one.

What will it do to the value of her property, her most important financial asset? Who will want to buy a property with a public path across the backyard, 10 feet from the house? To her, the official plan matters. And sometimes gets it wrong.

It can affect your health, as it does in the wording of bike and walking paths that it says "may" be built, which one speaker asked to have corrected to "shall" be built.

It determines where there will be sidewalks so your kids can walk safely to school.

It can encourage the development of businesses that may provide jobs for you or your kids, or your grandkids, if you want to keep them close by.

It can permit what was referred to at Monday's meeting as "big box development" along Niagara Stone Road in Virgil, which is unnecessary for

the business that will be conducted in those buildings and will overshadow smaller businesses. When you drive through the Virgil of the future and it looks like Mississauga, you'll know why an official plan matters.

It can set out routes for public transit, for all those who don't drive or can't yet afford a car, so you can access the services you are supporting through your taxes.

It can preserve the natural spaces within town, the species that inhabit those spaces, the water quality of rivers and streams, the agricultural policies that protect the town's tender fruit industry and the grapes that are made into the wine we love to drink.

It can preserve the past, as several residents have asked that it do, and ensure a future that reflects what is best about Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Although the official plan and its approval is not something that interests many residents, it is important to all. We can thank those few who are paying attention, and who are asking for changes that will more closely reflect what is best for the municipality, for realizing its importance.

Because although the push to get the document approved is understandable after so many lengthy delays, as one speaker said Monday, it's far more important to get it right.

Penny Coles
Editor
The Local

LOCAL FINDS



Hope springs eternal by Lauren O'Malley

Spring lies deep in the valley of Queenston. Spring water, that is.

Water burbles along the path that runs along the Queenston docks in the Niagara River. At one point a pipe juts out from the stone, pouring cold, clear water onto mossy rocks and bunches of wild watercress. "It's presumed to be a spring because it's constantly running," say local Jim Armstrong, president of the Queenston Ratepayers Association.

"Whether it's groundwater runoff or a true spring I don't really know," he continues. Armstrong remembers a time when "people would drive down with large plastic carboys and swear it was the best water anywhere. It was heavily used by many."

He says the Niagara Parks Commission used to test the water for contaminants and post the results, which occasionally indicated harmful bacteria. "There must be some groundwater to have tested unsafe for coliform," he says, "it could be tainted by overflow from septic tanks?"

Rob Copeland, another Queenston resident, remembers the spring from as far back as the 1950s. "It was very active for a lot of years. People came from Niagara Falls to get water," he says. "Water's still pouring out of there — nice, pure, spring water."

In the past it was possible to drive your car right up to the pipe and fill up your containers. Since the jet boats' development of the area, fences and blockages have been put in place to prevent vehicle passage, but access is still available by foot or bicycle — or practical wagon.

A pedestrian filling two large plastic jugs says he visits the spring often, and finds the water delicious and uncontaminated. He discovered the source through a website called findaspring.com. The website says it's "definitely a mineral spring" due to its high TDS level (650-720). (Total dissolved solids are inorganic salts, such as calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium, bicarbonates, chlorides, and sulfates.) The website also confirms nearby water emanating from the stone wall as coming from the same source, saying, "It has exactly the same properties so you know it's coming from the exact same aquasource."

If you or anyone you know has more information about this find, please let us know.

Regarding last week's finds, Stella Rodgers, 93, said her mother was born in the big white farm house down the driveway from the pillars at Line 1 and Concession 2. Her grandfather was the farm manager, and her grandparents lived in the house, which she believes was built in the early 1890s. Debbie Redekop from Queenston also had some information to share: she and her husband live in the house that belonged originally to Alexander Lawson, the man who owned the farm where Rodgers' mother was born.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake

LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community

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Newark Neighbours thrift shop receives generous donations

By Cindy Grant

February is almost over which means spring is only a few weeks away. We've had such an up-and-down winter with freezing cold temperatures one week to almost spring-like weather the next, it will be so nice when this winter is behind us and spring arrives.

Despite the weather, we have been very busy at Newark Neighbours. It seems that many people in our community have been taking lessons from Marie Kondo, the Japanese Organizer who has popularized the idea that the first step to achieving inner peace is to give away the useless piles of things you have

been accumulating over the years. One of her quotes is, "Donate what doesn't spark joy for you. It may be for someone else." Well, we have certainly been seeing the results of this philosophy. Our donations seem to be at an all-time high. Our board and volunteers thank you for this — we are so pleased to see such a large amount of high quality clothing and other treasures as well as plenty of food items for our food bank.

Special thanks go out this week to the Niagara Mennonite Church, PigOut Catering, the Niagara North Family Health Team, and to several individuals for their generous donation

of food, other food bank supplies and cash donations. We appreciate and value the generosity of our community for your donations which allow us to continue our mission of "Serving our Community with Compassion, Care and Concern."

Remember 2019 brings our new membership year. Please consider joining Newark Neighbours as a supporting member. Each membership is only \$10 which helps to support our operations and our food bank. Membership forms are available in the Thrift Shop and also on our website www.newarkneighbours.ca.

We are beginning to

plan for our Easter food basket program for our registered food bank clients. If you are a registered food bank client and wish to receive an Easter basket, please register with us from March 8 to April 8. Please contact us at 905-468-3519 or stop by our location to talk to one of our volunteers to be sure we have you on our list.

Donations can be dropped off at 310 John Street East (just off Riverbend Inn driveway). The Newark barn is open Monday to Friday 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. (closed Saturday and Sunday). For more information call: 905-468-3519 or visit www.newarkneighbours.ca



Lots going on at library, including March break programs



By Debbie Krause
The NOTL Public Library

In the past, I have been thankful that February is a short month.

Twenty-eight days of dark, damp and cold is long enough. I usually hunker down, grit my teeth and wait for March and the first signs of spring. Not so this year. Yes, we've experienced winter at its worst, and yet I haven't felt the need, nor had the opportunity, to hibernate. February has been a busy month at the NOTL Public Library. In addition to all our regular programs, we have had the privilege of hosting several very special events.

On Saturday Feb. 16,

Babarinde Williams led approximate 50 people, young and young at heart, in a celebration of African culture using the art of story-telling and drumming. Each audience member was able to choose a djembe (African drum) and participate in telling a story about humility and the importance of sharing. The library rotunda echoed with the beat of 100 hands.

The second, more adult-appropriate presentation acknowledging Black History Month will be held on Feb. 28. Multi-disciplinary artist Howard Davis will be showing his film *C'est Moi*. This short and beautiful film tells the story of Marie-Josèphe Angélique, who, in 1734, was tried, tortured and convicted for burning down the city of Montreal. To some she is an example of racial discrimination and scape-

goating, while others hold her up as a symbol of rebellion. Space is filling up, so please register on our website for this creative and informative program.

Two weeks ago, our Wine and Words author series welcomed Tanya Talaga to The Hare Wine Co. Thank you to 124 on Queen Hotel and Spa and Ginger Restaurant for generously donating dinner and accommodation. More than 100 guests in attendance made this our largest Wine and Words event to date. Talaga spoke at length about her book, *Seven Fallen Feathers*, and introduced the audience to her latest book, *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward*. She spoke passionately about seven Indigenous children who died over a span of 10 years in Thunder Bay. The students were hundreds of miles away from their families, forced to leave their

reserve because there was no high school there for them to attend.

The audience sat quietly and listened intently to the historical horror of residential schools and the stories of abuse, neglect and senseless death that continue today. It was a powerful and poignant evening.

As we step into March, the library will continue to be a place of activity and culture. Come listen to Diana Panton perform jazz on March 8 — tickets available through the Niagara Jazz Festival website.

Register your children for the many March Break activities we have planned, or see what our new seed library is all about at its official launch on March 16.

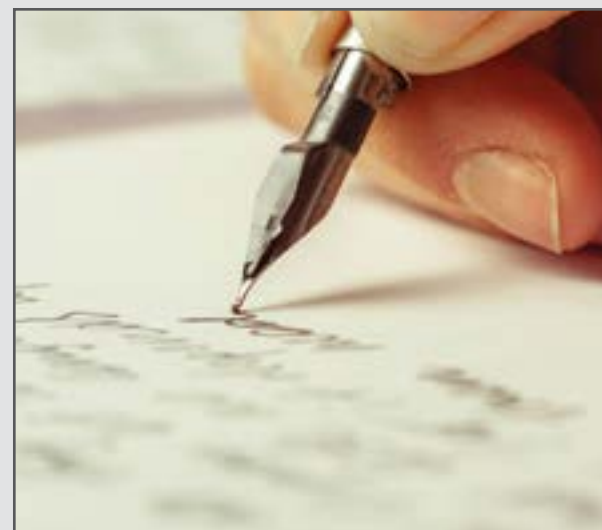
Hope to see you soon.

All programming information can be found at notlpubliclibrary.org



We want your photos!

We'd love to feature local photos, so if you have one you think our readers might enjoy, please email it to penny@notllocal.com. Deadline is Monday at noon. Thanks!



Letters! We want letters!

We have an opinion page put aside just for residents — we know you have opinions and we would love to share them. If you have a letter to the editor you'd like to see published, please send it to penny@notllocal.com. Please try to keep it to about 350 words. Sorry, but we won't publish anonymous letters. The deadline is Monday at noon.



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Friends thanking friends

By Lauren O'Malley
The Local

The Friends of Fort George are continuing their crusade of gratitude across Niagara-on-the-Lake, this time with the presentation of a commemorative plaque to Sean Simpson, owner of Simpson's Pharmasave and Simpson's Apothecary Pharmasave. Simpson learned at least some of his generosity at the knee of his generous father, Ward. Regarding donations to the Friends and other local charities, Simpson says, "It's

something my dad always did, and it's been carried forward. We get great support, so we give back to the community that supports us. It's an ongoing reciprocity of giving." He continues, "We're fortunate to be able to live and work here and do what we do. It's a great place to live and part of the responsibility as a local business owner is that we return some of the profits back into the community. It's an investment." The pharmacist and family man says, "We attend and enjoy Friends of Fort George events. Their undertakings are

important for the heritage and historic legacy of the town we live in. Another striking value of NOTL is history, and we should celebrate it." Tony Chisholm, president of the Friends, says, "Sean's generosity has proven to be a very helpful measure of support from the community. He is always willing to step forward for this local charity." The Friends of Fort George honour the history of Niagara-on-the-Lake and provide funds and other resources for events, activities and staff at Fort George.



Tony Chisholm, president of the Friends of Fort George, presents Sean Simpson with a commemorative plaque thanking him for his generosity to the organization. (Lauren O'Malley)

Taste for Hunger to help those in need

Reif, Newark Neighbours collaborate on food drive

By Penny Coles
The Local

A local business and Newark Neighbours have partnered to come up with a novel way to fill the food bank's shelves at the time when they are the lowest. Reif Estate Winery is asking locals who drop in for a tasting to bring a non-perishable food item: thus the name of the initiative that starts this weekend, "Taste for Hunger."

It's a slow time for the winery, said winemaker Rob DiDomenico, but a good time for locals to stop by for a sampling with their friends, as locals often do — similar to stopping in at a pub "where everyone knows your name," he joked.

It's also a time when the shelves at Newark Neighbours are depleted, with the Christmas food drives over, said Newark chair Hilary Bellis.

About a year ago, she and Andrea Kaiser, marketing director at Reif, began talking about a way to collaborate on a food drive.

Newark provides two weeks' worth of groceries at a time to clients who qualify, with about 35 to 40 individuals or families on their list at any one time, said Bel-

lis, but in addition they also provide all the ingredients to help clients have a holiday dinner. This partnership with Reif will replenish food supplies depleted at Christmas, help fulfill clients' biweekly food donations and prepare for Easter dinners, she said. "It's also a great opportunity to bring awareness to locals that we provide extra help over the holidays." Bellis feels there are

as meats and legumes, as well as canned vegetables. Specialty items could be scallop potato mixes, canned pineapple and peaches. Any non-perishable, non-expired food donations are welcome, said Bellis. "Contrary to what many people think, we still have people in need in our own neighbourhood and Newark Neighbours is there to lend a helping hand."

“It's also a great opportunity to bring awareness to locals that we provide extra help over the holidays.”

Hilary Bellis

individuals and families, including seniors, who may not be aware they qualify for help. There are also likely to be some in need who don't have transportation to the John Street food bank, she said. She encourages family members, friends and neighbours who know someone requiring help to reach out to Newark. They can call 905-468-3519, or visit newarkneighbours.ca. Items that would be appreciated include canned proteins such

Reif Winery has always been a generous supporter of our volunteer events at Newark and now they are going even further to help." Reif has a long history of giving back, said DiDomenico. "We've worked with the community from the beginning. Reif has been involved with helping a lot of organizations, including the Niagara Children's Centre, Red Roof Retreat, and Willowbank. We also provide wine for local gatherings. Why wouldn't we? This is home."

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Hilary Bellis, chair of Newark Neighbours, and Reif winemaker Rob DiDomenico trade canned goods for wine tastings to replenish the food bank stock. (Penny Coles)

Twisted Vine construction delayed

By Lauren O'Malley
The Local

Rumours abound regarding the development of the next eatery to join the Virgil dining explosion: The Twisted Vine (located at 1504 Niagara Stone Road, in what used to be the Lawrenceville restaurant).

Joe Marchese, owner of the Italian restaurant and market, says there have just been a few hiccups with contractors that have set things back a bit. Rumours of an overbuilt patio, as well as financial insolvency, are false. "I'm just waiting on a few tradespeople," says the genial restaurateur, "and I'm doing some hiring."

It is true that Marchese's upscale St. Catharines entity, La Scala, was closed in 2018 — but he assures The Local this was strictly due to a decision made by the building's new landlord.

The north Niagara Falls resident is one of four people who own the property, which includes a B&B and two parking lots, but he is the sole proprietor of the restaurant. The B&B will remain as-is, and continues to be in operation.

Marchese is a fan of fresh, local produce, and hopes to connect with local growers to supply his kitchen. He credits his Italian heritage for his passion for outdoor markets, and hopes to host small such events on the property — perhaps even roasting chestnuts.

The business will feature a line of gluten-free products, as well as gelato. Traditional European breakfast will also be served.

Marchese predicts locals will be eating his wood-fired pizza and traditional Italian foods and pastries by early April.



Joe Marchese has had some hiccups with contractors that have delayed the opening of his Virgil restaurant. (Lauren O'Malley)

Smoooooth



Dann Wilson, Judith Callender, Town Crier Tom Pekar, Susan Speck and Jocelyne Gagne enjoy the Forty Creek whisky-tasting at Navy Hall Friday evening. The event is a fundraiser for the Friends of Fort George. Chris Thompson (toasting), the North American brand ambassador, was the host. (Fred Mercnik)





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Group provides judgement-free space

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the Region, where she found the public health nurses and the support and services they offer new mothers were helpful, she said. But although they provided valuable resources, she longed for something in addition to that. She was looking for a more informal sharing of experiences, she said, with women who lived close by and were at the same stage of their lives. Practical tips for raising babies are helpful, but she was also hoping for the emotional support so important for new moms, who share the same fears and insecurities and who need to hear from others they're not alone.

So she set about finding them. She chose the cafe in the community centre as a meeting place, set a time, and posted it on every Facebook page she thought might be seen by local moms. She put posters up around town, advertising an unstructured, free, drop-in meeting place for moms and their children, called NOTL Mamas & Babies, and at that first gathering on a Tuesday morning last October, she had five other moms join her and Olive.

The group now has 42 members, from all corners

of town, including Virgil and St. Davids. Although it may only attract seven to 10 moms on any given Tuesday, it has outgrown the cafe, mostly because it includes several very active toddlers who can't be contained, said Cooper.

"The newborns would sleep, but we have toddlers too, who are always so crazy busy. We needed somewhere safe for them to play."

Enter Debbie Krause, the program co-ordinator at the NOTL Public Library, who had seen the moms and kids congregating in the cafe area of the community centre. She offered the use of the library's Rotary Room, and every Tuesday she ensures there are toys out for the toddlers, including soft blocks and a ball pit, Duplo, musical instruments and lots of materials for crafts. The group has been merged with the library's Power Off and Play group, a program already offered but not well-attended.

It is now.

And it has become everything Cooper had imagined. The women connect outside of their Tuesday mornings. They have become friends. They share. Sometimes it's the triumph of the little accomplishments so important to celebrate. Often

it's guilt about something they fear makes them a bad mom, until it's out in the open and discussed, always without judgement. They learn they're not alone, in their circumstances or their emotions, and the stress of being a new mom is suddenly made so much lighter.

The group also has an active Facebook community, "where we share advice, ideas and 'baby hacks' in a safe, judgement-free space."

Cooper and two other young moms — bright, engaging and loving their new role in life — enthusiastically spoke about all the weekly meetings do for them, and agreed: The lack of judgement is not only appreciated, it's vital.

They discuss issues such as health concerns, sourcing child care, finding healthy snacks, and that all-important issue with babies — sleeping, or lack of it. They can talk openly. Moms come to the meetings when it works for them, but the support is always there for them, said Cooper.

"And there is no shame in talking about anything."

Anjali Garcha (Kapoor) says her active 20-month old Jai Garcha loves to play with the other toddlers in the group. An optometrist, she has gone back to work

part-time, and drops in when her schedule allows.

Because she was working full-time when she first moved to NOTL, she didn't have much opportunity to get out to meet people, so the moms group has become a lifeline for her.

"We can talk about how we're feeling, about feeding and sleeping and the birth experience. At the end of the day all that matters is we all love our kids."

She said although the women only met a short time ago, "It seems like we've known each other forever."

Ashley Robertson met her husband, Justin Pepe, when she was living in BC. He is a NOTL native, and they chose his hometown as the place to raise their family.

They have a 14-month-old son, Maverick, and eight-week-old daughter Lennon.

"It is definitely a different community" from her husband's years growing up in town and attending Parliament Oak School, now closed, said Robertson, "but it's still a really great community for raising a family."

Her husband has local friends from his childhood, she said, "but this is nice for



Ashley Robertson with her eight-week-old daughter Lennon Pepe (Penny Coles)



Joshua Garcha, with Anjali Garcha (Kapoor) and their son Jai. (Penny Coles)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

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Women meet at the community centre for their Tuesday morning gathering with babies and strollers. (Photo supplied)



The dads were invited to a drop-in group for moms and babies at the library. (Photo supplied)

‘Our family away from family’

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

me to be able to meet my own friends and get out, for my own sanity.”

“It’s amazing to have a baby, and have this network of moms as a support group to be able to share experiences,” said Cooper, who explained she had a week not too long ago where she had had only about eight hours of sleep, because Olive couldn’t settle. Several moms offered suggestions — Robertson joked that she kept quiet on the subject because her baby was sleeping through the night by the time she was two weeks old, and she didn’t want everyone to hate her. Cooper said one mother prepared a list of several different bedtime rituals to ease Olive into sleep. She tried the ones she felt most comfortable with, and it made a huge difference — she was finally feeling less exhausted and much better able to cope. “I felt like a new person the next week. It really does take a village to raise a child.”

Without having family nearby, said Garcha, “Jai hasn’t had a lot of other people in his life. He was a little anxious in a new setting (of the moms group), but now he’s having a chance to play with other kids, and he’s become a lot more social than he was.”

Robertson said she also relies on advice from the other moms, and feels comfort knowing if she needs help, they are there for her, and not only at Tuesday morning gatherings. If she wants to seek reassurance, her new friends are only a text or phone call away. For instance, she said, there was

a time when her baby had a fever, and she reached out for advice. She was concerned there might be a trip to the hospital emergency room required, and she knew she could count on one of the other moms looking after Maverick if necessary — which, thankfully, it wasn’t.

Most of the members of the group have moved here from other cities for a variety of reasons. Always at the top of their list is a great place to raise a family, yet missing the support system often found from parents and families living close by.

“Everyone is from somewhere else,” said Robertson.

“This is our family away from family.”

They’ve also learned to share tips about NOTL, such as where to get natural, healthy snacks for their children — they wish there was more selection at the grocery stores, rather than having to travel to St. Catharines for some of the brands they like.

They also would like to see more daycare — there is very little for moms who want to go back to work when their maternity leave is up. They agreed they have heard rave reviews about Niagara Nursery School and Child Care Centre at the community centre, but it doesn’t take kids until they’re 27 months old.

“If you want to go back to work after mat leave, it’s a challenge,” said Cooper. “We need something for younger kids. Not everyone feels comfortable with in-home daycare — it would be nice to have more options.”

“It seems you have to get on a waiting list before you

even know you’re pregnant,” added Robertson.”

The women are having so much fun with their group, and getting so much out of their interactions the dads were getting jealous, they said, so they held one Tuesday morning meeting for the men recently to attend with the kids, which was so successful they are planning to hold a second one.

Joshua Garcha said it would be great to see a similar regular drop-in group for dads, maybe on the weekend, so they could have some guy time together but still hang out with their kids. With a grin to underscore he knew he would be sounding like a typical, predictable dad, he said they wouldn’t be looking for the same kind of emotional support the women are — the conversation would probably be about the most recent hockey game or football — “but to be able to do that and still have bonding time with the kids would be great.”

The women are already looking forward to a time when they can get together as friends when their kids are a little older, maybe go out for an evening or on a wine tour, and when they do, they can’t imagine a better place to do that than in NOTL.

“We’ll get to that stage,” said Cooper. “This is absolutely the best place to bring up a family.”

Robertson agreed. “We love it here,” the two women said in unison.

The group meetings are listed under Power Off and Play, the original name of the NOTL Public Library program, from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Tuesdays.

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Savanna Stirrett, hospitality sales manager at Jackson Triggs, in the great hall at the winery which will host the Women Empowering Women event on March 1. (Lauren O'Malley)

Women Empowering Women fundraiser Saturday

By Lauren O'Malley
The Local

Sisters are doing it for themselves — and for each other — at the Women Empowering Women event. On Friday March 1, Jackson Triggs Estate Winery will be transformed into a marketplace and networking hotspot for the charitable event. All proceeds of this second annual happening will go to support Gillian's Place, a

shelter for abused women and children also offering non-residential programs to help break the cycle of domestic violence. Last year they were able to donate \$3,000 to the charity, and the organizers say they're hoping for even more this year. The brains behind WEW belong to Lisa Martin and Bryony Hawthorn. "We want to have a place for women to have fun and support each other," says Martin. The net-

working event's slogan is, "Behind every successful woman is a tribe of other successful women who have her back." Martin promises "live music, a silent auction, prizes, a penny sale table, tons of vendors and wine sold by the glass." Savanna Stirrett, the hospitality sales manager at Jackson Triggs, says the event was a pleasure to host last year, and there was no question about turning the winery's public spaces over to it again this year.

"Given that it's not for profit, we're donating the space, just to be able to support a great cause," she says. The great hall, barrel cellar, and dining area of the dramatically-designed building will all be used for vendors, speeches, penny sales, and silent auction items, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Part of the evening is being billed as an "informative presentation to improve your mind, body, and wallet." For about 15 minutes at 7:30 p.m., Martin (a mortgage agent) and Hawthorn (a realtor) will speak about the housing market, mortgage options and niche products. "That's the 'wallet' side," says Martin. Carol Cowan is a social worker, yoga instructor, and intuitive EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) therapist. She will be offering the mind, body and spir-

itual side, says the organizer. Martin encourages guests to approach the organizers and "reach out to us regarding our field of expertise." The most important thing, though, is to "have fun and network," she says enthusiastically. Ann Marie Zammit, currently performing at Oh Canada Eh dinner theatre, will be providing live entertainment, singing "the songs of powerful women," says Martin. Sustenance will be provided in the form of a taco station, charcuterie boards, and a sweets table. More than 20 vendors will have products that are "mostly women-related — but men are welcome," says Martin. All prizes — at the penny table, silent auction, and door prizes — have been donated, and include a four-day stay

in a condominium at Blue Mountain, a five-hour limousine ride, gift cards from restaurants and more. WEW started last year, with this event. Martin says, "It's a tribe of women giving support to one another; we're encouraging women to inspire each other and help each other grow." Their website, womenempoweringwomeniagara.com will be live soon, with the goal of "helping and supporting women in a number of ways." In the meantime, women are encouraged to follow the Facebook page (@wewniagara) to share their stories and successes, and cheer each other on. "It takes a tribe," says Martin. Entry fee for the event is \$10 at the door, and includes food.

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WEDDING

ANNIVERSARY

Neighbour reaches out with free bowls of chili

By Lauren O'Malley
The Local

"Who doesn't love free food?" Sarah, a resident of Four Mile Creek Road in Virgil, figured that would be just the ticket. "It's been in my heart to get to know my neighbours," says the mother of three. "We talk

about living in the community but it starts with neighbours." On Saturday afternoon she braved the colder-than-expected temperature and set up a table in front of her house. On it were a container of homemade cookies from a friend, and a large pot of hot chili, wrapped in blankets. By 1:30 p.m. she had only

served four people. She sighs and says, "It's not something they're used to," about her neighbours of eight years. But the community crusader is not daunted. "It will take me a few more times to get people used to it," she says with optimism. "Maybe it will take off, and more people will do it."



Creek Road woman wants to get to know her neighbours. (Lauren O'Malley)

Friends tell the tale of a multi-talented and troubled man

By Lauren O'Malley
The Local

This tribute deals with mental illness and suicide and could be triggering to some.

Herb Nelson conjured things from nothing, produced smiles on all who knew him, and was a magician with words, music and mechanical things. But his world of magic was also the domain of demons.

At the age of 60, on Monday, Feb. 11, Nelson made himself disappear, forever.

Ask 100 people to describe the larger-than-life artist and bon vivant, and you would get 100 versions of "creative genius."

"There was nothing he couldn't do, nobody he couldn't help," says Nelson's very close and very devastated friend, Klaus Reif. "He was an absolute genius in music, art, he created sculptures. When I was losing my head over something with a car, I would call Herb — he would look at the car, touch something, and it was perfect."

"He was a brilliant guy," says another close and shattered friend, Penner MacKay. "Herb's mind worked faster than anyone's."

"We lost somebody who had a wild spirit and creative streak that expressed itself in many different ways," says friend and former bandmate Hank Wissensz. Nelson's wild spirit was silenced by a noose of his own making.

Nelson's careers have run the gamut. He was by turns a set-builder, welder, electrician, mechanic, artist, musician, handyman, entrepreneur, and, most recently, transport truck driver. But "when he had had enough, he'd had enough," says Eva Kessels, Reif's partner and another friend of Nelson's. After several years behind the scenes — literally, in that he was building them — at the Shaw Festival, Nelson surprised everyone (and no one) by leaving a very respected position.

MacKay says, "Herb was known as the 'wizard of the scene shop' at the Shaw. He could do anything."

Anything to do with hydraulics or pneumatics Herb was all over it — creating moving sets was his thing," says Wissensz.

That ethos applied to marriages as well: Nelson had several. Dave Norris, another former bandmate of Nelson's, remembers going to do some work in the library in Port Colborne, Nelson's native city. He joked with the librarian, saying, "I know one man from Port Colborne. I wonder if you know him too? Herb Nelson." He says she smiled slowly and said, "Herb Nelson," and paused. "My first husband."

Apparently having had enough of one marriage, he disappeared for several days, and turned up in Mexico.

His many, many friends are left wondering why Nel-

son decided he had had enough of life.

A teary Reif — who says he felt Nelson was more of a brother than a friend — says pensively, "He suffered so badly. He always felt he was lonely, even though he had so many friends."

"I knew he was lonely," says Michelle Dundee, Nelson's closest friend for the last eight years. "There were nights when we'd all know he had too much to drink and was crying out to all of us. He would text, text, text."

"With depression, sometimes it's hard to help yourself," says Reif of the isolation caused by mental illness.

"Maybe his light banter and quick wit were a cover for his depression, like Robin Williams," says Wissensz.

Candidly, Reif explains he accompanied Nelson to some counselling sessions after his friend had been diagnosed at age 50 with clinical depression and/or bipolar disorder. "It's one thing to diagnose depression; it's another thing to try to treat it," he says. "They gave him so many pills, he was on a rollercoaster trying to find the right one."

Dundee confirms this. "He was bound by his depression," she says. "He didn't like his

music with Nelson as "two minds, one thought. We'd look at each other and just know."

The Niagara chapter of the Distinguished Gentleman's Ride raised \$7,737. A glance at the website shows the top three riders; Nelson was number three.

Kessels remembers great joy. "His happiest times were when he was under a car or playing music," she says with a smile.

Nelson also seemed to have found joy working for Ted van der Zalm and his Wells of Hope organization. Dundee says, "Ted was the most important person to Herb in the world. He thought Ted was a saint." Dundee and Nelson followed van der Zalm to Guatemala for the first time last year, and had only just returned from their most recent trip before Nelson died.

"Herb completely gave of himself to Ted," Dundee says. "Ted was his spiritual mentor. If Ted called, Herb was there. 'Anything you need, Ted.'" She concurs: "Ted is my greatest mentor."

Dundee says Nelson was doing mechanical work in Guatemala, helping with the drilling of wells and the building of bridges, houses and schools. His death

“ He was a genius walking the line of sanity, veering slightly from one side to the other. ”

Klaus Reif

meds. He would say, "They make me feel nothing, and I want to feel things."

"Pills or no pills, you just can't solve depression," says Reif. He goes on to describe his and Nelson's involvement in the Distinguished Gentleman's Ride last September, a global event to raise awareness of prostate cancer and — ironically — male suicide prevention. "It was cold — so cold — and there was no way we weren't going to do this," says Reif. Thirty-eight finely-dressed motorcyclists cruised along the Niagara River Parkway and ended the ride with a party behind Reif's winery, entertained by MacKay and Nelson. "It was like magic," says Reif, with a child's wonder.

His eyes shine with delight as he describes Nelson's musical talent. "He played music, but couldn't read notes. Can you imagine how complicated that is?" He goes on to describe a song the musicians improvised at the event, calling it "The Parkway Funk." As Reif plays a video on his phone, Kessels says, swaying her body, "You can feel the curves of the Parkway when you listen to it." She pauses. "We lost a good one."

MacKay describes playing

"hit Ted hard; he had a very special place in his heart for Herb. Like with Klaus, it was a brotherhood."

A larger-than-life person leaves a larger-than-life-sized hole when he decides to go. This very substantial person left a legacy as well. "I learned so much from him," says Dundee. "I'm glad he was such a vibrant person that he won't go away."

"We're going to miss him for a long time," says MacKay. "He just impacted so many lives in so many ways. Everywhere you look, he built that, he made that — he built a lot of stuff all over town."

Kessels also says, "Not many places you can look and not see Herb."

The light and dark, the ups and downs, the good and bad all existed in Nelson, in extremes. "Herbie filled a room," says Kessels. "He was smart, articulate, worldly."

"He was a teacher, a mentor," says Reif.

"There was so much to him," says Dundee. "He was the best person I ever knew."

"He could play music, take your car apart and put it back together, race your car, build and make anything," says MacKay. "He made a porch, a metal gate — Herb looked at



Herb Nelson (centre) helped raise awareness of men's mental health through the Distinguished Gentleman's Ride. (Photo supplied)

metal as being malleable, like a piece of wood — he could weld, could fix electronics, and in his 50s he got a licence to drive semis," he continues. "And Herb was just such a beautiful friend."

These people who were closest to Nelson also reflect on the flip side, the darkness. "I've watched him suffer," says MacKay. "One minute he's crying, the next he's laughing—he was the poster child for this s**t."

Reflecting the complexity of her friend, Dundee says, "Suicide was always a possibility." She also says, "I'll never forget how joyous he was." And, "I know he's not suffering anymore."

"He was a genius walking the line of sanity, veering slightly from one side to the other," says Reif, weaving his hand around an imaginary line. "Maybe he'd just had enough of this. He's gone to live in a different dimension."

Nelson wrote many songs, one that became his signature: Everything's Gonna Be Okay.

"No it's not," says Reif, looking at the ceiling. "Look what you did."

"There were times when I knew he was close to the edge. We texted and texted until he would say 'everything's gonna be okay.' But this time, nothing," says Reif, in tears again. "He had stuff planned with cars, with Ron [van der Zalm] and the greenhouse, with Penner. He was making plans. There was no indication... It's still hard to find the right words," says the stalwart German businessman, overcome with emotion.

"It's easier to deal with death if someone dies of old age, even of an accident, but this takes it to a whole new dimension," says Reif. "As a society we need to look at ourselves: Why so much suicide? I'm asking myself. We need to ask ourselves."

Dundee concludes: "How we love is our measure. Herb loved well."

A celebration of Nelson's life is tentatively planned for June.

If you are depressed, in distress or in a crisis, call the Distress Centre at 905-688-3711. If you are in danger, call 911 immediately. If you need urgent medical or psychiatric attention, go to the nearest hospital.

LOCAL HAPPENINGS



FAMILY FISH FRY

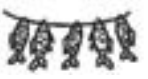
Friday, March 1st ~ 4:30 - 7pm

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SHAW FESTIVAL ANNUAL MEETING

March 1 @ 2:30 pm

Reports will be delivered by the Chair, Treasurer, Executive Director and Artistic Director for fiscal year 2018.

FIRST ONTARIO PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

Wednesday, March 6

Antonio Sanchez BIRDMAN Live!

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NOBEL PRIZE SERIES

March 12 @ 2:00 am - 3:00 pm

Have you ever wondered about the process for awarding the Nobel Prizes? Dr. Bill Brown discusses the criteria used to nominate and finally choose the various Nobel Prizes. The March talk is about the Nobel Prize in Economics. Register online. At the NOTL Public Library on Anderson Lane.

INFOHEALTH

March 12 @ 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Clinical Trials: 10 Good Reasons to Join — in the Rotary Room at the NOTL Public Library. 1 pm

HISTORICAL LECTURES AT ST. ANDREW'S

March 20 @ 10:00 am - 11:00 am

Historical lectures at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church to honour their 225th anniversary. Lectures are held Wednesday mornings at 10 am and admission is by donation. Refreshments to follow in the Kirk Hall, 323 Simcoe Street. March 20: THE MC-FARLANDS OF ST. ANDREWS — David Hemmings



Jacque Goodman leads the evening shift of spinners in a class at the new Wellness Escape facility. (Lauren O'Malley)

Winter fitness options available in NOTL

By Lauren O'Malley
The Local

The weather outside is sometimes frightful, and if your shape is feeling not-so-delightful, let it go, let it go — to one of the many indoor fitness facilities in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The newest kid on the toning block is Wellness Escape, part of the Grape Escape empire. Located above the bicycle rental shop on Niagara Stone Road, the facility still smells a bit like fresh paint — it's that new.

Richard Mell, one of three owners of the expanding Escape realm, says his vision is of "smaller boutique-style classes," with six to 10 people, citing an excellent teacher-to-student ratio. There are three main rooms: two smaller ones — one dedicated mostly to spinning classes — and one slightly larger one, for popular classes like POUND and yoga.

POUND, Mell explains, is a high-energy fitness class done to a percussion-

cused soundtrack of current pop tunes. The fit entrepreneur enjoys these classes himself, he says.

Also on the schedule of "about 100 classes per month" are High-Intensity Interval Training, yoga, spinning, meditation, and stretch and unwind sessions. Monthly membership provides unlimited access to classes. The space also has change rooms and a shower.

Local trainers such as Rae Ann Reimer and Jacque Goodman are among the instructors at the new gym.

True to their name, Grape Escape and Wellness Escape are also in the midst of building an escape room, themed around an old-fashioned barber shop. Mell says this new addition is slated to open in April.

Another summer business upping its winter game is Vino Velo, also on Niagara Stone Road in Virgil. Steve Irwin, a former bicycle racer and current cycling fanatic, compares the classes offered in the back building to riding outside. "This is indoor

cycling, as opposed to spinning," he explains at a Saturday morning class. "Rather than face you and yell at you over loud music," Irwin joins participants in facing a large screen showing cyclists in stunning environments, such as the German road cycling team rolling through eight Italian towns. "It's a bit like spin, but at the end you don't hate me," quips the whimsical former racer.

Along with his partner Pam Gallop, Irwin carefully sets up each rider, customizing the bikes to their needs and preferences. All levels are accommodated, including people with recent surgeries, and the "Cycling Grannies," a group of regulars who recently reached the 100-km mark.

The rides are often paired with food from local eateries. "It's like the carrot before the donkey," says Gallop. Saturday's ride was "Pedal and a Panini," with arrangements made with Teenie Panini around the corner to expect the group for lunch. The price of the classes includes the food.

"Pedal and a Pint" is in partnership with another neighbour, Silversmith Brewing. These pairings create community between the riders and within the neighbourhood.

Other opportunities for warm and out-of-the-wind, off-the-ice exercise include our own community centre, with dozens of classes per week, as well as the upstairs fitness centre, with a track, aerobic equipment, weights and more at a very accessible price.

For the bendy types — or those who would like to be more so — there are classes at FoxDen Yoga in The Village, as well as at the community centre. White Oaks and Vintage Hotels also provide a variety of gym amenities to local members as well as visitors to town.

Niagara Fitness and Rehabilitation on Mary Street offers several boot camp classes per week, as well as personal training options, including one-on-one training and group exercise classes for seniors. In order to achieve optimal health ben-

efits and to improve functional abilities, the experts at Niagara Fitness encourage seniors to accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more.

And of course, when Mother Nature isn't punishing us for our naughtiness, there's nothing quite like taking a brisk walk on our local streets and recreational paths, and in our marvel-filled forests.



Pam Gallop, partner at Vino Velo, helps a first-time indoor cyclist find his feet. (Lauren O'Malley)

LOCAL WORSHIP



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Steve Irwin (left) leads an indoor cycling class at his Vino Velo shop, and then leads the riders to Teenie Panini for lunch. (Lauren O'Malley)

Pinch pot pleasures at the Pumphouse



The Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre's family drop-in on Sunday was a popular place to stay out of the wind, and make some delightful little pinch pots with clay. Jenna and Jenny Kwon, Emeline Charette and Adelyne Williams enjoyed creating. Photos by Lauren O'Malley



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SCHOOLS

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Gearing up for Saturday

Students, parents, staff and sponsors at Crossroads are excited about this Saturday's Home, Garden, and Craft Show. They're creating banners and posters, baking treats, organizing themed baskets for the raffle, and planning to transform the entire ground floor of the school into great spaces for vendors and browsers.

This annual fundraiser is also a community celebration as neighbours, alumni, students and local businesses join together to shop, eat, play and mingle. While parents are browsing, their

children can play in the Kids' Zone, featuring Niagara Inflatables. It's free, as is parking.

The Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre will put on a show at 9:30 a.m., followed by Mad Science at 11:30 a.m. Lord Mayor Betty Disero will draw the grand prize of a Galaxy Tablet at 2:30 p.m.

All money raised on Saturday goes to students. This year's ambitious goal is to purchase a set of musical instruments, support the school's nutrition program, support Phase 1 of a new Outdoor Learning Space,

partner with the Shaw Festival's Actors in the Classroom, support Scientists in the School, and subsidize school sports. Funds will also go to the upkeep of the school's playground equipment, subsidize technology purchases and provide performances for the students.

Thankful to our incredible Home Show Committee (made up of parents from the school and staff).

Thankful to our Sponsors.

Thankful to our students.
Gerda Klassen
Principal, Crossroads Public School



Students from all grades at Crossroads Public School have been busy creating art work for Saturday's annual home show. The message they want to convey: "Thanks to all the parents, staff, committee members and sponsors for helping to host this fundraising event." (Photos supplied)



Home show happenings

- This year there will be 90 vendors, ranging from home and garden to crafters and many others.
- A big thank you to Emerald Retirement Residence, Davids & DeLaat, Dixon Ink, Peninsula Flooring, Phil's Valu-mart, The Niagara-on-the-Lake Advance, The NOTL Local and The River 105.1.
- Mad Science will put on a show for the kids at 11:30 a.m., followed by a fun booth full of bubble demos, making slime and more.
- There will be raffle prizes, a barbecue lunch and a bake sale.
- The Coyote Hunt is back by popular demand this year.
- New this year, there will be a coat check, sponsored by the Shaw Festival.

Check out the home show Facebook page for more information and vendor spotlights at www.facebook.com/notl.homeshow/.

Atoms skate hard but come up short



The atom team of the NOTL Minor Hockey League played the Lincoln Blades, a team of great skaters, in the Centennial Arena Saturday. The home team lost 4-2. *(Fred Mercnik)*



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13				14					15		16		
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55	56						57			58			
59					60	61				62		63	
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67						68					69		

ACROSS

- 1 Concert appearance
4 Dirty
9 Cooking meas.
13 100 square meters
14 Contradiction
16 Chief Hawaiian island
17 Short for the least
18 Tennis great --- Gonzales
19 Tax
20 Applications
22 Tap's partner
23 Hoop dunk
25 Added for free
27 About this size
28 Surrounded by
30 Subject of spectacular bankruptcy case
33 Very similar to
35 Flashy
37 Tokyo Yoko
38 The Pobble had none
39 Engender
41 One of four
42 "You've Got Mail" company
43 "The hour --- hand": St Matthew's Gospel
44 Dangerous feats
46 G W T W's --- Butler

- 48 Green, blotchy frog type
50 Toque wearers
52 To do with plants
55 A machine's productive hours
57 Honorific title in India
58 --- of the above
59 Happy feline rumble
60 Letters, these days
63 Of a thing
64 Surrounded by
65 I'm sorry --- you waiting
66 "The sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat-bobbing ---" (Dylan Thomas)
67 Egg holders
68 Peter Pan's pal
69 Blunder

DOWN

- 1 Complete range
2 Whiskey choice
3 Thomas Edison was once a director of it
4 National economic indicator
5 State of preparedness
6 Baseball segment
7 Clickers or squeakers
8 Expression of derision
9 Add as a bonus

- 10 Hi-fi is not supposed to suffer from it
11 Card dispenser
12 Golfing short shot
15 Gray wolf
21 18-wheelers
24 Sleeping
26 Stir-fryer
27 Pack
29 Election list
31 That show's going to be --- 9 pm
32 Silently indicates assent
33 State emblem on Old Glory
34 Expression of amazement
36 Pristine
40 Chums
41 Holy book of Islam
43 Agenda topic
45 Make lace
47 Musical intervals
49 "1984" antagonist
51 Bases
53 Bury
54 Hotelier --- Ritz
55 Poisonous Javanese tree
56 Catamountain
57 Japanese rice wine
61 Cut
62 Intelligence officer

FOUND

FOUND: A ring, possibly a wedding ring, found in a bag of dead batteries left in the bin of batteries that are collected for Hotel Dieu Shaver Rehabilitation Centre, in the Virgil Village Green Plaza. Has an inscription and symbol inside. The ring had been there since before Christmas. Please call Rosemary at 905-688-3673

HALL RENTALS

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

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

Across: 1 Gig, 4 Grimy, 9 Tbsp, 13 Arc, 14 Denial, 16 Oahu, 17 Min, 18 Panchu, 19 Scor, 20 Ues, 22 Die, 23 Basket, 25 Threw in, 27 So big, 28 Amongst, 30 Enron, 33 So like, 35 Loud, 37 Ono, 38 Toes, 39 Spawn, 41 Quad, 42 A O L, 43 Is at, 44 Stunns, 46 Rhert, 48 Leopard, 50 Chets, 52 Botanic, 55 Uptime, 57 Sri, 58 None, 59 Putt, 60 E-mails, 63 Its, 64 Amld, 65 To keep, 66 Sea, 67 Sacs, 68 Wendy, 69 Err.
Down: 1 Gamut, 2 Irish, 3 General Electric, 4 G D R, 5 Readiness, 6 Inning, 7 Mice, 8 Yah, 9 Toss in, 10 Background noise, 11 Shoe, 12 Putt, 15 Lobo, 21 Semis, 24 Abed, 26 Wok, 27 Stow, 29 Slate, 31 On at, 32 Nods, 33 Star, 34 Ooh, 36 Unspoiled, 40 Pals, 41 Q'ran, 43 Item, 45 Tar, 47 Thids, 49 O'Brien, 51 Feet, 53 Inter, 54 Cesar, 55 Upas, 56 Puma, 57 Sake, 61 Mow, 62 Spy.

SUDOKU PUZZLE

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



Proud NOTL skaters

Members of the NOTL Skating Club competed in the Super Series Brampton Flower City Invitational Competition held February recently in Brampton. Kyra Marotta earned a first in Pre-Novice Women; Ashleen Hale a 5th in Pre-Novice Women and Mira Strickland a 5th in STAR 5-U10; Soraya Felice a 6th in STAR 5-U13 and Marin McLaughlin a 6th in Pre-Novice Women; Jeong Lee came 8th in STAR 5-U13; Ashley Backshall was 10th in STAR 9; Tatum Lyric Bidal was 11th in Juvenile Women-U14 and Rachael Hunter 11th in STAR 8 and STAR 9; Ashley Backshall was 13th in STAR 10 and Audrey Morrison 13th in Novice Women; and Mira Strickland was 14th in STAR 7. Pictured (left) are Morrison, Lee, McLaughlin, Backshall, Marotta, Hale, Bidal, Felice and Strickland. Hunter is absent from the photo. (Photo supplied)

Bantam select Wolves are champions



This weekend the NOTL bantam select Wolves proved themselves champions at the 2019 Gene Harrington Memorial Tournament held in Niagara Falls and Buffalo, NY. Each player chosen displayed outstanding attitude, relentless effort on every shift, and sportsmanship that earned the pride of parents and coaches and the respect of their opponents, said the team management. Sponsored by Lakeview Vineyard Equipment, the team played five games in three days on their way to victory, including an amazing outdoor game at the Riverworks Arena in Buffalo on Friday night. Intense forechecking and outstanding defence that included great goaltending made the team stand out as exceptional, outscoring their opponents 25-4 over the five games played. (Photos supplied)

Atoms, peewee rep teams in playoffs



Two Niagara-on-the-Lake Minor Hockey League rep teams have home games in the all-Ontario semifinals this weekend. The peewee rep team hosts St Mary's in game three of their series on Saturday, March 2 at 11:40 a.m. in the Meridian Credit Union Arena in Virgil. The atom rep team is hosting Erin-Hillsburgh for game two Saturday at 3 p.m. and game three Sunday, March 3 at 4:30 p.m. Both atom games are in the Centennial Arena. The Wolves would love a strong show of support from the community. (Photos supplied)

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LOCAL SPORTS

Nationals done for the season



The NOTL Nationals lost the first two games of their Jr. A three-game series against the Kingsville Kings to end their playoff run and the season. The first game Friday evening ended 8-2, Bailey Pritchard scoring both goals. Lack of discipline was a key factor in the loss, said coach Spencer De Wolfe. The Kings scored several goals on power plays, and the Nationals played 24 minutes short-handed. Game two the NOTL team of the Greater Metro Hockey League lost 4-2 with an empty net. Bailey Pritchard scored both goals, and Iskander Shamsiev played stellar in net, giving the Nationals a chance to win the Monday afternoon game at home. The second period fell apart and penalties lost the Nationals lead and trailing the rest of the game. Bricks and Barleys was the team's main sponsor this season. *(Fred Mercnik)*

