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 Marczyk)

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 Provincial changes to autism policy affect us all page 5

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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)

It takes a village

By Penny Coles

The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake
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 His concern is that an outdated secondary plan enshrined in the document does not contain the protections he and others expected for their neighbourhood, he said, calling it meaningless,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 railway 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 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 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 on this one about the planning process as outlined in the official plan. Sometimes it says council “shall” 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.

As a result, St. Davids Ratepayers Association (SDRA), told councillors Monday.

He was speaking at the public meeting to pass on the compliments that SDRA brought to council for its work in St. Davids. "We have no secondary plan. We've moved up the Creek to Four Mile Creek Rd, Virgil and we're not in the dock area but we're in that corridor, so we're very interested in the dock area."

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The Local

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

Councillor 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.

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 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 Ben–ny 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 use to be made clear in the official plan.

Little said he would be making a more complete written submission to council about the Town’s draft official plan, promising a more detailed written submission.

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 there were a few 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
Niagara Gates 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 that the NDP says changes provincial policies to privatize health care.

The draft was leaked to the press by the NDP earlier this month. The legislation was introduced by Ontario Health Minister Eric Hoskins and includes provisions for areas under Ontario Health Teams, discussion on how to pay for health care, expansion of health care services, including Fort Erie and Niagara Falls riding, which includes the Niagara River, Sailing Club and Queens Park. The legislation would also include a bill to privatize health care services.

When Gates had his opportunity to speak about the bill in the legislature, he said, “It’s our kids and our seniors who will be affected, he added, “Our kids and our seniors don’t pay for health care. These dollars, he said, should be used to improve health care, not to pay for private parking fees.”

Canadians are passionate about their public health care system, Gates said, “Nobody should be charged for services such as diagnostic scans to the falls in the background, on ROck-on. In it he talks about the leaked draft legislation. Gates said an amendment concerning the Ontario Health Teams is in the draft legislation. The Ontario Health Teams were leaked to the press by the NDP. Gates said it was a mistake and that the legislation would be withdrawn.

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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 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-funded 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 autism spectrum, and costs $55 per hour. The policy change removed two of the 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 property, 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 seriously 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 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 I am 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 gate 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 exponential 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 working mother of three with a very busy husband, has a suggestion. “One solution would be travelling therapists going around the region 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.”
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 the municipality that 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 their grandkids, if you can thank those few who are paying attention, and who are asking for change that will more closely reflect what is best for the municipality, for realizing its importance.

Because although the official plan matters. And it certainly matters to you or your kids, or your grandkids, if you want to keep them close by.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Local

The trusted voice of our community

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Editorial

Penny Coles

Editor

The trusted voice of our community

Local finds

Spring lies deep in the valley of Queenston. Spring water, that is. Water bubbles 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,” says 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.”

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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 Redkop 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.
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 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 approximately 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 humanity and the importance of sharing. The library rotunda echoed with the beat of 100 hands.

The second, more adult-appropriate presentation acknowledges 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-Joséph 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 scapegoating, while others hold her up as a symbol of resistance. 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 child 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
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 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.

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 wine-maker Rob DiDomenico, but a good time for locals to stop by for a sampling with their friends, as locals 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 Reif, 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 Bellis.

By Penny Coles
The Local

Reif Winery has always been a generous supporter of our volunteer events at Newark and now they are going even further to help.

“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.”

Hilary Bellis

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

Bellis feels there are 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 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.”

Hilary Bellis

“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.”

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.

Smooooth

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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TAREN A. TRINDADE B.A., DD
J. GUS KORONEOS BSc., DD
Group provides judgement-free space

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and 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,” she said. “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. 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 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.

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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)

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 mums 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 Olivia 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 mom had prepared a list of several different bedtime rituals to ease Olivia 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 mom’s 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 comfortable 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 NOTL, they don’t need 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.

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“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 a 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.”

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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 market-place and networking hotspot for the charitable event.

All proceeds of this second annual happening will go to support Gillian’s Place, a place and networking hotspot for the charitable event.

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 networking event’s slogan is, “Be-kind 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 spiritual 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 “most-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, womenempoweringwomenniagara.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 (womenemniagara) 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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Creek Road woman wants to get to know her neighbours. (Lauren O’Malley)

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.”
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 is intended to be a sensitive and respectful discussion.

Herb Nelson, renowned as the "wizard of the scene shop" at the Shaw, was a multi-talented man who left behind a legacy of creativity. Nelson's death has left many wondering why he disappeared for several days, catalyst for a discussion on mental illness and suicide.

"There was nothing he couldn't do; nobody he couldn't help." Reif, a former bandmate of Nelson's, expressed his shock at Nelson's sudden disappearance. Nelson's wild spirit and boundless creativity were his trademarks, according to his friends and family.

"His eyes shine with delight when you look at him," says Michelle Dundee, Reif's partner. "He was a teacher, a mentor; he was the best person I ever knew." According to Dundee, Nelson was a vibrant person that he won't soon forget.

"He was a genius walking the line of sanity, veering slightly from one side to the other," says Reif. "It was one thing to diagnose depression; it's another thing to live with it." Dundee confirms this. "He was bound by his depression," she says. "He didn't like his life as a whole."

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

"Suicide was always a possibility. I know this," says Michelle Dundee, Nelson's partner. "He was a genius walking the line of sanity, veering slightly from one side to the other."

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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, let it go — to one not-so-delightful, let it go, if your shape is feeling sometimes frightful, and if your shape is feeling frightful, and if your shape is feeling frightful, and if your shape is feeling frightful, and if your shape is feeling frightful, and if your shape is feeling frightful, and if your shape is feeling frightful, and if your shape is feeling frightful.

Richard Mell, one of three owners of the expanding Escape realm, says his vision 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-focused 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 Jacquie 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 Grandmas,” a group of regulars who recently reached the 100-km mark. “You’re paired with food from local eateries. “It’s like the carrot before the donkey,” says Gallop. Saturday’s ride was “Pedal and a Pint” 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 benefits 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 marvellous forests.
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
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

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/notlhomeshow/.
LOCAL SPORTS

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)
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 FOR RENT (for all occasions). Complete facility with kitchen. St. Davids Lions Hall, 1462 York Road, St. Davids. Call 905-262-4844; please ask for Trish.

RENTAL SPACE

Rental space for a counsellor/therapist focusing on spiritual, emotional and/or mental health and well-being. Rates vary from $20 to $25/hour. Variable rates and times can be discussed. If interested, call Karen at 289-868-9800.

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Furniture Refinishing
Refurbish vintage & outdated furniture

*Custom Work Available

Painted China Cabinet
Painted with Fusion's Chateau with metallic pewter
Dimensions: 39" H x 30" W x 16" D
Price: $300.00

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Visit us online: https://facebook.com/myreclaimtofame/

HELP WANTED

Lakelt Farms: General farm labourers required for vineyard work. Hiring 4 full-time, permanent positions, min. 40 hrs/week at $14.00 per hour. Physical tasks involve pruning, tying, suckering, hoing and harvesting grapes. Bending, crouching, lifting, working outside in all weather conditions. No education required. Experience not required but would be an asset. Located in a rural area, 1028 Line 2, Virgil. No education required. Experience not required but would be an asset. Located in a rural area, 1028 Line 2, Virgil. Apply to Bruce Keating at 289-868-9800.

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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 6th in Pre-Novice Women and Mira Strickland a 6th in STAR 5-U10; Soraya Felice a 6th in STAR 5-U13 and Marin McLaughlin a 6th in Pre-Novice Women; Jeong Lee came 6th 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 9 and STAR 10; Ashley Backshall was 13th in STAR 10 and Audrey Morrison 13th in Novice Women; and Mira Strickland was 14th in STAR 7. Picture (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

The 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 Riverview 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)
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 Meronik)