Mori Gardens closes after 45 years of serving the community

Penny Coles
The Local

Mori Gardens has closed its doors for the last time. The next step is a bulldozer to demolish some of the buildings on the property, although part of the garden centre will remain.

For now, at least, the Mori Nursery building on Niagara Stone Road is expected to remain as an office, and the portion of the garden centre where Tonie had her office, to the right of the large yellow entrance to the garden centre, will also stay.

The Niagara Stone Road property, which had been for sale for about five years, has now passed into the hands of Two Sisters Corp., owned by Benny Marotta. Marotta told The Local last fall that he planned to turn his attention to "winery facilities," and expanding winery production on the property.

Although Saturday was officially the last day, and a busy one with sales to help clear out the property, she and other staff were still working Sunday, and Monday Tonie was doing deliveries to get rid of some final items.

They had been using social media to post items that were for sale, and then, finally, things they were giving away, such as counters. Many people were stopping by to take advantage of the sale, and also to say thank you and to pick up something as a memento of the local garden centre, which had been serving locals for about 45 years, says Tonie.

"So many people have told us over the last few months that this was their happy place," she says.

It was hers as well. "I used to bring my kids here when they were growing up." Her "girls," long-time staff members, have found jobs at Country Basket Garden Centre in Niagara Falls, and her son Miguel, who has a master’s degree in business and had looked after the garden centre, is now working for another local greenhouse operation in e-marketing.

The knowledgeable staff at the garden centre, some of whom have been there for more than 25 years and have provided valuable advice helping locals plan and landscape their gardens, will be hugely missed in the community.

Medical experts, not politicians, should make medical decisions serving the community

Penny Coles
The Local

Betty Disero supports local businesses.

The Lord Mayor chose not to sign an open letter that was organized by St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik and dated Feb. 24, endorsed by every one of Niagara’s mayors except for Disero, but her choice was not because she’s anti-business, or against businesses reopening, she says.

Last week, when the letter was made public, there was an expectation the province would move Niagara into the red zone, and also some concern that Niagara’s acting chief medical officer of health, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, would object to continuing a grey lockdown.

The province did move Niagara into red, and Hirji has expressed his concern about variants rapidly spreading and causing a third wave, but he was clear and other staff were still working Sunday, and Monday Tonie was doing deliveries to get rid of some final items.

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It was hers as well. "I used to bring my kids here when they were growing up." Her "girls," long-time staff members, have found jobs at Country Basket Garden Centre in Niagara Falls, and her son Miguel, who has a master’s degree in business and had looked after the garden centre, is now working for another local greenhouse operation in e-marketing.

"That makes me feel satisfied, knowing everybody’s taken care of," she says.

The knowledgeable staff at the garden centre, some of whom have been there for more than 25 years and have provided valuable advice helping locals plan and landscape their gardens, will be hugely missed in the community.
Sailboat grounded on U.S. side of Niagara River

Penny Coles
The Local

Folks on the other side of the Niagara River were as curious about the lone sailor and his boat as we were.

Last week, residents on the U.S. side saw something strange on the shore by Fort Niagara State Park, the Tribune/Sentinel reported. “After the ice floes, a small, abandoned sailboat was seen bobbling on the eastern end with the waves,” a story in that paper read.

The damaged boat apparently managed to break free from its mooring at the NOTL Sailing Club, and drifted across the river into U.S. waters.

The Local reported in February that once the boat was safely tied up at the sailing club, the man aboard it, who had been living on the boat anchored in the river since early December, had been taken to the hospital in St. Catharines by police. He was reported to be a loner, and an inexperienced sailor with mental health issues. His father, a resident of London, Ont., was expected to take him home.

Law enforcement on both sides of the border said they are fully aware of the presence of the boat now on the U.S. side, and its location is not considered a hazard. According to the U.S. Coast Guard station, the Tribune/Sentinel says, the owner has been contacted and the coast guard is awaiting the boat’s removal from the shoreline.

The same owner has abandoned two other boats of the same make and model in Lake Erie, where they remain.

Terry Duffy, editor-in-chief of a group of Western New York publications, sent this photo he took Monday, March 1 of the sailboat that was a mystery for a time on this side of the river. It became a curiosity on the New York side as well, until Duffy learned of the story behind the boat and its owner in The Local, and shared it with his readers. (Terry Duffy, Niagara Frontier Publications)

What’s new about red

Local staff

Niagara-on-the-Lake has been in the red-control zone of provincial restrictions since Monday, with the town, and Lord Mayor Betty Dese- ro, reminding residents to maintain safety precautions during this time of “cautious reopening.”

“The message to be vigilant continues: keep a safe distance, wash your hands, and wear a mask.”

The red zone allows in-person shopping for all retail stores, with capacity limits of 75 per cent for supermarkets and other stores that primarily sell groceries, as well as convenience stores and pharmacies; and 50 per cent for all other retail, including discount and big box retailers, liquor stores, hardware stores and garden centres.

It also allows restaurants, bars and wineries to reopen with a maximum of 10 people indoors.

Additional regulations imposed by the region require shopping and retail establishments and food and drink premises to adhere to measures which include retail store to actively monitor and manage compliance with physical distancing and masking requirements with their business, as well as in line-ups outside their location.

In restaurants, the regional restrictions include limiting patrons to one household per table, with some restrictions. Patrons must be seated, with a two-metre minimum distance between tables, or impermeable barrier, and a limit of four people seated together. Contact information is required from patrons, and face coverings are required except when eating or drinking. Establishments close at 10 p.m. and liquor can be served to 9 p.m. Dancing, singing and live performance of music are prohibited.

While community centres and multi-purpose facilities are permitted to reopen in red, the town’s community centre and arenas will remain closed, with the health and safety of the public and staff in mind.

This closure does not impact the general operation of the Niagara Nursery School or the Sweets & Swirls Cafe, located within the community centre, which will remain open for curbside pickup.

In the red zone, personal care services, including hair salons and barbershops, manicure and pedicure salons, aesthetician services and spas may open, with restrictions, that include wearing a mask.

Hotels, motels, cottages, resorts and other short-term rental businesses may open, subject to provincial conditions.

Town staff remain available to serve residents online, over the phone and through arranged curbside pickup.

Visit covid19.ontario.ca for the most up-to-date information from the province and notl.com/COVID-19 for information from the town.

Sweets & Swirls Cafe remains closed for now

Meals orders still available for pickup

Penny Coles
Local staff

The town is beginning to open more of its facilities for public use, but the community centre remains closed, for the safety of the public and town staff. That means Sweets & Swirls remains closed for now, although it still offers its weekly meal selections, which can be picked up three days a week.

The popular cafe was closed in March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was when owners James Cadeau and Erin Lockard developed their weekly meals to keep them working and bring in some income.

They were thrilled to be able to open to the public in September, when the community centre reopened, to be shut down again in December.

They lease their space in the building, but with the community centre closed, there is nobody in the building expect the nursery school children and staff, says Cadeau. All community centre programs are still cancelled, and even the public washrooms are unavailable for use.

The NOTL Public Library is opening to the public on a limited basis, but the connecting doors that lead to the community centre remain locked, Cadeau said.

“Our hands are tied.”

There is some confusion about if and when they can reopen, but it will be up to the town to make that decision.

Even if they had been able to reopen this week, with the region now in the red zone, the capacity restrictions for the seating area wouldn’t have made it worthwhile, said Cadeau.

2268 Niagara Stone Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake
$1,050,000
MLS #40070290

Sweents & Swirls Cafe

James Cadeau and Erin Lockard of the Sweets & Swirls Cafe continue to offer their meals, ordered for Tuesday, Saturday or Sunday pickup, at the community centre. (File photo)
Hearing Niagara had
Continued from page 1
Control of COVID spread in the hands of residents

Niagara just entered the red zone Monday, and Dr. Mustafa Hirji, our act-
ing chief medical officer of health, already has some concerns.

The most pressing is the rate at which the number of new variant cases in Niag-
a region. Last week, he was looking at a total of six suspected cases of the variant, but by Monday, it had increased to 33. While that seems a big jump, he cautions it’s still a small number of cases.

“Variants,” he added, “are what is now driving our cases to flatten out, as opposed to needing the decline that we were seeing earlier.”

Last week, variants made up about 20 per cent of cases in the province, but that number is expected to increase to about 40 per cent by next week, he said.

The R rate, or reproductive rate, indicates that number could double in four and a half days, al-
though the statistics from Toronto show the number of variant cases is taking about seven days to double.

While there is a lag in the testing of variants to determine what kind they are, the reporting of variant cases takes about two days, with a delay time the province is trying to short-

It's a matter of two different experts interpreting the same data, he notes.

Dr. Mustafa Hirji
Ontario medical officer of health. radiation, it can to support local busi-
nesses, and she personally has not as well all through the pandemic, advocating for more financial help from the province.

The town has done everything it can to support local busi-
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The next group of people to be vaccinated will be the 80-plus age group, but Hirji said he is also con-
cerned about those from 50 to 80 years old, a group still at a “relatively high risk of passing away” if infect-
ed with COVID, once the 80-plus and long-term care residents are vaccinated.

They are also the age group most likely to be hos-
pitalized, at a time when hospitals are already pre-
ty full, and staff, again, are needed for vaccinations, he said.

Continued from page 1

Spread of variants could lead to spike, third wave

that he had only been asked to supply the “context” for
the data that was considered by the province when the
decision to move the region into a less restrictive zone
was made.

The letter, says Disero,
businesses reopening, to do
prevent a steep increase in
the spread.

When asked at last
Thursday’s regional coun-
cil meeting about moving
into the less restrictive zone,
Hirji said he was not “super
certain” about reopening,
that he continues to be wor-
ded with caution, but he
stressed the best way to
prevent a steep increase in
cases is in the hands of res-
idents.

It's down to our person-
al behaviour as citizens now,
whether or not we avoid
that third wave, ” he stressed.

The new cases of vari-
ants in Niagara can be
linked to Toronto and other
areas, but there are a couple
cases of public Health has
been unable to trace, mak-
ing community spread possi-
bility, although those cases
were still being inves-
tigated, he said Monday.

With vaccinations ex-
pected to be the light at
the end of the tunnel, Hirji
said the registrations website
should be available mid-
March, allowing for vac-
cination clinics to begin as
soon as Niagara has vaccine
to move forward.

While there are contin-
gency plans for Niagara if
the provincial registrations
website is not ready on
time, that would take up
staff time and away from
vaccinations, which are key
to controlling the spread of
infection.

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Continued from page 1

Business always generous
at giving back to community

Well's Hope, garden tours,
and the Rotary Holiday
House Tour.

The two businesses, the
garden centre and the nurs-
ery, were entirely separate
entities, and as owner of
Mori Gardens, Tonic had a
long lease on the property,
and didn’t have to give it up,
but didn’t want to stand in
the way of the sale.

She still has some work

to clean up, and then will be
ready to turn her attention to
Perridio Estate Winery on
Warner Road, which she co-
owns with her partner
Joe Perri.

There is no break for her,
no rest in between, but she
likes being busy, and is look-

ing forward to getting more
involved with Perridio, and
moving on to the next stage
in her life.

Lindsay Ireland, Jolanda Henry and Sandra Manynissen are happy to have Regal Florist
and Garden Centre open to the public, especially with it looking a little spring-like.

Regal Florist and Garden Centre

Lord Mayor Betty Disero
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Regal Florist and Garden Centre

Spring is in the air

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS IN BUSINESS

BOOK NOW YOUR LAWN & GARDEN SERVICES BEFORE APRIL 1 FOR EARLY BOOKINGS

notlocal.com
Kaiser offering leadership on health, jobs, climate change

Penny Coles

Buoyed by the experience of running for the federal Liberal Party in 2019, and the support from voters, Andrea Kaiser is excited about the candidate to run for the Liberals in the next federal election, which is scheduled for October 2023, but with a minority government, could be called at any time before then.

A life-long Niagara-on-the-Lake resident, Kaiser is a businesswoman best known for her role in the wine industry. She is also a community leader, teacher, operated her family’s restaurant and motel in NOTL for 10 years, was a municipal councillor for three terms, and is the mother of two adult children.

On the October 2019 election night, when Kaiser lost to Conservative Tony Baldinelli, she told her supporters she was back, pledging to continue working to turn the riding red, and to be ready for the next election, ‘stronger than ever.’

Kaiser says the run-up to the last election was rushed, giving her about three months to campaign across the large geographical area of the Niagara Falls riding, which also includes Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

This time around, she will have a much better opportunity to cover the entire riding, and to spread her message about her three top priorities: ‘to protect our health, rebuild our local economy, and take decisive action on climate change.”

In addition to her career as director of marketing and tourism for Reif Estate Winery, she has her own business, Deus Wine Company, carrying on the legacy passed on by her father, Karl Kaiser, who was the co-founder of Inniskillin Wines, and is credited with the birth of modern Canadian winemaking.

These days, she is helping Reif navigate its way through the pandemic, “re-imagining” the response to the many changes in restrictions and protocols that have come along since last March, leading up to a second reopening this week.

While it’s an exhausting year, she says, she is completely energized by the thought of the upcoming campaign, prepared for whatever it might look like, and whatever twists and turns it might take, based not only on pandemic restrictions but also the timing of the election.

Kaiser was proud last election to have run a positive campaign, with positive spirit and energy, and she is focused on doing the same again, although she has some concern about the aggressive tone of some of the negative comments, especially as they may affect her children and people around her.

Winery Owner Klas Reif has been “super-supportive” of Kaiser’s political aspirations, she says. “He doesn’t always understand the journey I’m on,” she laughs, “but he respects it.” However, she tries to keep her political career separate from her work at the winery, in an attempt to shield it from any negativity toward her politics, she says.

“To me, this campaign is all about being respectful to everyone, including those with a different view and other politicians. I don’t want to bring anything negative into the workplace because of my politics. It’s not fair to the company that’s supporting me, and is so respectful of what I’m doing. I want to be cautious of that.”

She also worries about negative affecting her children. Her son, 24, doesn’t spend a lot of time on social media, but her daughter, 22, is helping with the campaign, and is more exposed to the comments “that are not so positive.”

Leading up to the 2019 election, her daughter Madison Reif did some door-to-door campaigning, and most people at the door “were quite lovely with her,” says Kaiser, “but I still had to have a conversation about what to expect. Unfortunately, it’s sad to say that is sort of a norm on social media. People think it’s okay to make negative comments,” especially on particular platforms that attract political conversations of a combative nature that surprises her. “I’m really quite dumbfounded that people think it’s okay to talk like that. It’s not okay.”

Kaiser it looking forward to getting out on the campaign trail, whatever that will mean in a pandemic, and which, among other factors, will depend on when the election is called.

Despite criticism from the opposition, whose role it is to “question and push to make sure the government is doing its job,” she is extremely proud of the Liberal government’s response to the pandemic, how they dealt with a health crisis, the possibility of an economic crisis, and having to make decisions very quickly, very early on, without the science that is available today.

The financial aids that were made available, such as the emergency wage subsidy and CERB (the Canada Emergency Response Benefit), “were honestly brilliant,” she says, “in that they provided the help that was needed quickly, and kept the economy going. They kept businesses afloat and kept food on the table,” she says. “Yes, mistakes were made here and there, but in terms of the scope of the crisis and the response to it, I feel really proud to be knocking on doors representing the Liberal party.”

Kaiser says growing up, she considered politics more about the community, rather than any particular party, but looking back on her upbringing and the values her parents lived by, has come to realize “my whole life was lived by Liberal values.”

“Their doors were always open, to exchange students over many years, and to any one in need, she says. Her father was a quiet man, who wanted to see people do better.” He was a strong believer in education as a way to achieve that, and “quietly helped people who needed it.”

It was because of her parents that she has “this drive to participate, to make things better. It’s just part of who I am.”

She’s taken on leadership roles in the wine industry and the community, and in 2019, when her daughter Madison became an activist for climate change, Kaiser says she decided she wanted to be part of the solution for the next generation. “I realized I could make a difference for my kids’ future, with the climate changes, and the local economy.”

She says she sees the stress every day for employ- ers who are navigating their way through the pandemic. “Klaus (Reif) treats us like a family, and he bears that weight for his employees.”

As a single mom during many years of struggling to
Campaign planning underway to cover all scenarios

look after her family, Kaiser says, “I get that it can be really stressful for a lot of people.”

In addition to economic issues, Kaiser says, COVID has highlighted another priority for her, the need to reform long-term care. She was pleased to hear the federal government say it wants to work with provinces to set national standards for long-term care.

“I feel compelled to be part of a better future. I know that sounds corny,” she says, adding it’s a value instilled in her by her family.

“I’m excited about the opportunity to provide a strong and experienced leadership in Ontario.”

Her vision, she says, will position Niagara “to take full advantage of the post-COVID economy.”

The fact that she did so well in the 2019 election was also a factor that encouraged her to run.

As the Liberal candidate in the 2019 election, Kaiser won more votes than any other Liberal candidate — federal or provincial — in the history of the riding of Niagara Falls. “I have to give it a go. We created such momentum in such a short time leading up to that election, I was so proud of what we accomplished in just three months. Of course it wasn’t the outcome I hoped for, but in that little bit of time I got to know the three communities better, and I was honoured to have so many people supporting me. The election was one of the best experiences of my life. Even though it was tough to lose, I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

And the beauty of being nominated early for this election means she can take the time she needs to spend in all corners of an unusually large riding, both in terms of geography and voters, she says.

While it is difficult to plan a campaign, knowing there could be a snap election, “with a minority government, we have to be prepared. We are looking at all possibilities to be sure there is a plan in place, a plan for all scenarios.”

Especially during a pandemic, Kaiser adds, “we have to be ready for all possibilities. It’s ironic to think that life in 2020 has prepared us for this.”

Community members who share Andrea’s vision for Niagara and Canada are encouraged to support her grassroots campaign at www.votekaiser.ca.

Find her on Facebook at VoteKaiser, Instagram @VoteKaiser, and Twitter @VoteKaiser.

Andrea Kaiser visited a Niagara Falls restaurant with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during the 2019 federal election campaign. (Photo supplied)
It was a sad day when we learned that Mori Gardens was closing. But now it’s happened, and every time we drive through Virgil along Niagara Stone Road we will be reminded. It’s been 45 years for the garden centre, and the nursery was open much longer, before Leno Mori decided it was time to retire.

That drive through Virgil has already changed greatly, and will continue to. This particular change does not feel like progress, it feels like a huge, important loss to the community, a gap that can’t be filled.

The highly respected family business that was valued enormously by its customers and magic live. Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to go to movies. Until he resumes going to the theatres, he has graciously agreed to share his opinions, through “short and sweet” exclusives, of Netflix series and movies for The Local.

It’s a sad day when we lose such a great community business

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Town committee to provide vaccine updates

Community Health and Wellness Committee

Many in our community share concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and have questions about access to vaccinations. You are not alone. We acknowledge that information about COVID-19 vaccination planning and distribution is constantly evolving. We know that the availability of vaccines in our community, and priority groups who will be receiving them, is valued information.

As such, the Community Wellness Committee chair will work with the Town to assist with written responses and updates following major announcements concerning the COVID-19 vaccination process, and distill messaging from multiple levels of government into information that is most relevant to residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Links to websites for more complete details and information will be included as needed.

These updates will be published on the Town’s website (notl.com/COVID-19) and in the local newspaper(s) and will be intended to encourage residents to stay informed about this process and assist in sharing important information with residents who do not have access to the internet.

Additionally, posters providing information regarding COVID-19 vaccination information, including the Niagara Region Public Health website address and a phone number, will be posted in the local post offices.

It is our current understanding that Niagara Region Public Health is leading the vaccination planning and distribution process. It is expected that our local health care providers will be working with the Public Health teams to deliver the vaccine. For more details, and the most current information, please visit the Niagara Region website at https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/covid-19/default.aspx.

As you may have seen or heard in newspapers and other media outlets, all appointments for vaccines will be completed via a centralized booking system. More details about this will be made available in the days and weeks to come as we learn more from Niagara Region Public Health.

It is important to know that 100 per cent of residents who wished to receive the vaccine, in our three long-term care homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake have received both their first and second doses. This is certainly reassuring news for that portion of residents living in our community.

For the most up-to-date statistics on the progress of vaccination delivery in our region, please visit the Niagara Region website, as noted above, and the Niagara Health System website at www.niagarahealth.on.ca/site/vaccination-clinic. The Niagara Health website reports the vaccination progress for essential health care workers.

It is the intention that every Niagara-on-the-Lake resident will stay home whenever possible. Practice physical distancing – maintain two metres from anyone who is not from your household. Practise frequent hand washing. Wear a mask or face covering in indoor spaces and when two metres physical distancing isn’t possible.

Take a self-assessment if you are feeling unwell: https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/

Stay up-to-date with the latest information about COVID-19 in Ontario. Visit covid.19.ontario.ca for the most up-to-date information from the provincial government, niagararegion.ca for information from the Niagara Region, and notl.com/COVID-19 for information regarding impacts to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Response to an interested reader

The Local received this question this week from reader Mary Sugden, who had driven along the Niagara River Parkway last weekend for Tryon’s Folly, a house across the Niagara River mentioned in last week’s story by Jane Andrews, of the Underground Railroad (The Local, Feb 24). Jane responded with more information:

Thank you for your interest in the story. It certainly has been fascinating to research.

It’s currently a private residence and not open to the public. It’s only visible from our side of the river during the winter when there are no leaves on the trees or vegetation.

Because there is so much private property on the Canadian side it is not easily accessible. One vantage point is the side parkette at the RiverBink Art Gallery. This is an interesting view because you can see that it’s actually quite a large structure at the bottom of the cliffs.

Of course if you know anyone with a boat you could get a great view of the house from the river, or from the Queenston boat launch.

Here’s a link to some information as well as photos of the passages in the house that led to the secret places. I talked to the curator of a little museum in Lewiston whose friend had to do some work in the house recently, and remarked how very tight the tunnel and the squeezing was.

http://historyclewiston.com/freeedomcrossing/

Letters! We want letters!

If you have a letter to the editor you’d like to see published, please send it to penny@notllocal.com. Please try to keep it about 350 words. Sorry, but we won’t publish anonymous letters. And please stick to the issue at hand, rather than attacking those involved. The deadline is Monday at noon.

Letters

Letters to the Editor are welcome. The Local reserves the right to edit submitted letters for length and clarity.

Community Health and Wellness Committee

Canadians deserve better

Continued from page 6

Force appears as witnesses. One of my questions was for Mulcair, although he was picked up by the National Post.

Members of the Official Opposition are critical of this task force, which is responsible for making recommendations to the federal government on which vaccines to purchase and on which Canadian companies to back with funding for research and development of COVID vaccines.

While several of my colleagues brought up matters concerning potential conflicts of interests of task force members, and the lack of transparency and disclosure of the task force itself, I concentrated my questioning on the Canadian–Sino Biologics agreement between Canada and CanSino Biologics – a Chinese firm that was engaged to test its vaccine in Canada. Only three days after the prime minister made the announcement of this agreement, the Chinese government refused to ship early samples to Canada and broke apart the agreement.

The government decision to engage CanSino happened in May 2020. When the agreement collapsed, the task force was established but did not meet until June, and then it took until August for the government to order vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna.

Given this timeline and wasted efforts with CanSino, I asked why the government had almost three precious months during a national pandemic crisis in its efforts to secure agreements for needed vaccines.

As a result of this three-month delay, Canada now finds itself far behind other nations in terms of waiting for vaccine deliveries. As of March 2, Canada ranks 53rd in the world in terms of vaccines administered per 100 people. This massive failure rests entirely with this federal government. Their notion that they have procured the most robust portfolio of vaccines in the world rings hollow, when Canadians cannot get vaccinated.

Consequently, the Trudeau government has left Canada with the lowest vaccination rate, the biggest deficit, and one of the highest unemployment rates in the G7.

In January, another 213,000 Canadians lost their jobs, and according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, they fear another 160,000 to 200,000 small businesses will permanently close due to COVID-19.

This isn’t how it should be. Canada can do much better and Canadians deserve much better.

It is incumbent on the federal government to secure our vaccine supply in a timely manner, and to present a detailed plan for economic recovery on the other side of this pandemic. I am hopeful to see this in the 2021 federal budget, when it is presented.

As your Member of Parliament, I will continue to ask the tough questions of this federal government, whether it be at committee or in Question Period or while engaging in debate in the House of Commons.

http://notllocal.com

March 3, 2021
Tree clearing underway for diamond interchange

Penny Coles  
The Local

Work on the diverging diamond interchange that will replace the Glendale overpass above the QEW started last week, with the removal of trees beside the existing ramps, in preparation for construction of a $53.8 million joint project of the Ministry of Transportation and the Niagara Region.

It’s the first interchange of its kind in Ontario, with only two others in Canada.

The first to be built was in Calgary, opening in 2017. It was planned to reduce congestion in a fast-growing community, with a mixture of commercial and residential development nearby, similar to Glendale. Drivers, reported CBC, unaccustomed to the design of a diverging diamond intersection, could be expected to have a sense of dislocation as they move from the right side of the road to the left on the bridge, which allows drivers to make left-hand turns without having to cross traffic.

The Calgary interchange was expected to reduce the number of collisions, by reducing the number of collision points compared with more traditional interchanges, and help with traffic flow. The Glendale overpass has in past years been one of the sites with the highest number of collisions, although not serious or fatal ones.

Brennan Paving and Construction Ltd. has been awarded the contract of the large project, which is expected to be open to traffic until November, 2022, with completion in 2023.

A four-metre-wide pedestrian and cycling path will run through the middle of the bridge, with signal crossings at each end.

A new parking lot for commuters to car pool will also be constructed.

A four-metre-wide pedestrian and cycling path will run through the middle of the bridge, with signal crossings at each end.

Last week many trees were pushed over by heavy equipment, clearing two large woodlots in preparation for construction, he said, but there were also many trees left standing.

He estimated on each lot, one-half to two-thirds of the trees were removed to clear a path for the overpass.

That job was expected to continue this week, and the lumber was chopped up and trucked away, he said.

The Ministry of Transportation has asked for and was given an exemption from the NOTL noise bylaw during construction, to complete the project quickly and reduce the impact on the community.

In order for the aggressive timeline for construction to be met, the town has agreed that work can continue from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., including Sundays, allowing the contractor to schedule multiple crews.

According to regional reports, the Glendale Avenue and York Road intersection will also be constructed to a single-lane roundabout, along with a new Airport Road loop ramp and connection road from Glendale Avenue to the York Road and Airport Road intersection.

Calling small business owners

COVID-19 support could be available to you.

- Grants of up to $20,000 through the Ontario Small Business Support Grant
- Up to $1,000 in support for purchasing PPE through Ontario’s Main Street Relief Grant
- Rebates for property tax and energy costs

We’re working to ensure small businesses can keep employing people and serving their communities now and when COVID-19 is behind us.

Visit ontario.ca/COVIDsupport to apply

Those who have seen David Gilchrist’s photos on social media know he does an exquisite job of capturing local birds, including a nuthatch at a bird feeder, a house finch and a horned lark.
St. Davids fish fry set to resume this Friday

Penny Coles
The Local

After a short break, the popular St. Davids Lions fish fry returns this Friday, March 5, following all the necessary protocols and with an efficiency learned through trial and error last fall.

The intention was to mirror the wildly popular Lions burger Friday drive-thru the club held during the summer, creating a successful fundraising event that would allow the club to continue contributing to the community, which it did.

Club member Brad Anderson says they will have a table with Lions members inside the door of the hall, where orders and money will be taken. People will be permitted to wait for their order inside, with distancing and masks.

He’s a huge fan and supporter of the Leo club members, the younger version of Lions, who will be working “front of house,” offering hand sanitizer, taking orders and doing the running, a welcome assistance to the Lions. They’ve been a great help, both during the fish fries and the summer barbecue,” he says.

What the club has learned from its earlier efforts, Anderson says, was how to get the food out faster. They have got their wait time from ordering to receiving food down to about 10 minutes, but he hopes that would be a maximum, with most faster than that.

In addition to raising some funds for the community and meeting their "budgeted items," including donations to local sports,
Learn to prepare soil for planting at library workshop

Betty Knight has been gardening for decades, but is now considering the importance of the soil, and is choosing plants that will attract beneficial pollinators and insects, such as bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies. (Photos supplied)

This virtual workshop is presented over Zoom. Attendance is limited, so register as soon as possible. For those who are interested, Dishin’ the Dirt will be held the same day the seed library opens. The free seed project helps create a culture of learning, sharing, and community, and encourages the tradition of seed saving, nurturing locally-adapted plant varieties, and fostering a community culture of sharing. March 11 is the day library patrons can begin reserving seeds. For more information visit https://notlpubliclibrary.libnet.info/event/4853915.

Betty Knight has been gardening for decades, but is now considering the importance of the soil, and is choosing plants that will attract beneficial pollinators and insects, such as bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies. (Photos supplied)
Decision on carnival opening still up in the air

Continued from page 9

and summer camps for children with diabetes or are blind, the Friday evening volunteer work is also good for the Lions members who want to stay active, and for the Leos, who are anxious to help out. With regular meetings and other events cancelled during the pandemic, the Leos are always asking for shifts at the fish fries, says Anderson.

“They’ve taught me how good life can be,” he adds, full of praise for the enthusiasm and work ethic of the young Leos. “They are so eager to volunteer.”

The fish fries are every other Friday, beginning March 5, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the St. Davids Lions Hall at 1462 York Rd.

In another effort to aid the community, the St. Davids Lions are distributing their second lot of casserole meal packages, with about 166 meal kits being assembled Wednesday, March 3, to be provided to Newark Neighbours, St. Catharines Community Care and the Westview Centre for Women in St. Catharines.

The kits contain the ingredients and a recipe that will provide a meal for four to six people. Most of the food ingredients were donated by Lions and Lioness, and also through contributions from community grocery store partners, says Anderson.

The club had a budget to purchase the other ingredients that were needed, he says.

He estimated each meal at about $5.25, and thanks to donations, the club was able to put the kits together spending only 80 cents per meal.

Between all of those fundraisers, and the extremely successful Christmas tree sale, which saw the trees sold out about a week and a half earlier than usual, president Ted Burrows says the club was able to fulfill its budgeted donations to the charities they give to every year, but he’s not sure how long that can last.

“Now we’re trying to plan ahead, to see if we can meet those obligations next year.”

The answer to that may depend on whether or not the Lions hold their annual carnival in July, says Burrows.

One thing he’s pretty sure about is that whatever happens with the carnival, the popular hamburger and fries, says Burrows.

“The club has booked the amusement rides and pony rides for the event, but it’s far from a certainty it will take place.

“We’re waiting to see what happens,” he says. “We’ll have to make a decision, no later than the beginning of June, but maybe earlier.”

Some suggestions put forward by members are options for a scaled-down event, that won’t generate crowds of people, says Burrows.

One thing he’s pretty sure about is that whatever happens with the carnival, the popular hamburger and fries are likely to continue. Everyone had fun, the volunteers and the customers, many of whom picked up their dinner and then spread out across the grass between the club house and the swimming pool to enjoy their dinner.

His only hesitation in considering running the barbecue again, he says, “is we don’t want to wear out our volunteers.”

And there is always the concern of pandemic restrictions, that have to be factored in to every decision, says Burrows.

“Because, just when you think you’ve got it figured out, something changes again.”
The Grist a labour of love for local couple

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Rob Begin’s eyes well up with tears when he reflects on the three-year journey he and his wife Danielle have been on to get their new St. Davids restaurant off the ground.

Standing inside the converted barn at 78 Four Mile Creek Road, it’s clear to any onlooker that The Grist is truly a labour of love for the couple.

“This has been a really difficult project,” Rob says. Danielle, he adds, “has helped with every single aspect of it. Had I not had her support with this whole thing, we would have never gotten to the stage we’re at now.”

What stage are they at? The couple is almost ready to open the doors to The Grist, which promises a fun, casual dining atmosphere along with an on-site brewery in what Danielle calls a rustic modern interior.

“They’ve gone to great lengths to honour the roots of the barn, once used as a fruit packing shed by the Fedorow family, who farmed 60 acres now mostly occupied by a subdivision. The walls of The Grist are decorated with wood slats and panels repurposed from the original building, while the elaborate custom lighting and bright red, state-of-the-art pizza oven provide a modern contrast.

Three years ago Rob decided to leave a successful sales job with Niagara Falls manufacturer Criveller Company of Canada to take this leap of faith.

“I had a great career,” he says. “I left at the height of my sales. You can imagine what level of commitment that is to walk away from your best year ever after 24 years.”

Begin admits, though, that the success he was achieving helping other aspiring brewers and restaurateurs realize their dreams pushed him to move forward with his own venture.

“I realized I wasn’t happy anymore,” he adds. “And money became less important to me than our quality of life. After a while you say to yourself, ‘am I prepared to keep going down this path and making the same money, or do we change everything in our life?’”

Change everything they did. They sold their NOTL house and, as they say on their website, they decided to blow every bit of their kids’ inheritance, to finance the purchase of the barn. The couple now rents a home and spends 70 to 80 hours a week at the restaurant, preparing for that moment when they can open.

The Begens are reentering the Niagara-on-the-Lake culinary landscape after selling their previous local eatery, Garciolli’s, in 1997. Located in the Mary Street plaza that now houses The Sandtrap, Garciolli’s was well-known for its Italian pilsner and an IPA cord stout, a red cream ale, brews when they open: a Seasonal Pilsner and an IPA called Burning Down the House, which honours the history of St. Davids during the War of 1812. Those will be complemented by four or five seasonal brews, as well as some guest taps reserved for other local brewers. Other drinks will include local wines. In fact, the day The Local visited The Grist, the Begens had just returned from a tasting at Queenston Mile Vineyard in an effort to curate their final wine list.

The couple, who have been married for 28 years, have taken inspiration from many different sources for the design of the restaurant. They point to a few eateries they frequented while they spent time in Florida, places where the atmosphere was so great, they couldn’t wait to go back with their daughters Devin and Brooklynn, both now in their mid-twenties.

‘The interior design was all in Rob’s head, Danielle says. “He’s got a vision that most don’t see, and it’s come to fruition.”

Rob says he wanted to do something that was different, where every wall has some character to it. Surprises abound in every corner. The staircase to the second floor

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Restaurant to offer full menu, with focus on pizza

Continued from page 12

loft, for example, features slats from old barrels basket-weaved together. Even the men’s room features a support beam and doors re-purposed from the old barn interior. It’s obvious that much thought has gone into every detail.

That loft features a full bar area and a bandstand, with a capacity of 50, while the main floor can seat 90 at booths and tables, with another full bar looking out upon Four Mile Creek Road. And it will be easy to look out from various parts of the restaurant, with the many garage doors open during the summer months.

Besides the barn, the Begins also restored another farm building on the lot. The Fedorkows’ old tractor garage and maintenance shed will play a big role in the second phase of The Grist, when they plan to open a coffee shop and Italian ice creamery to complement the restaurant. There is another 1,000 square feet of space there they hope to rent out to create another reason for their venture to become a destination for locals and tourists alike.

If the buzz created by all the action on the site is any indication, locals are ready to try out the latest new eatery in NOTL.

“We knocked on every single door to let the neighbours know what we were planning to do,” Rob says. “Every one of them was phenomenally nice to us. Since then they’ve been our biggest supporters all the way through, showing up with coffee and doughnuts. And the Fedorkows, who still live next door, have helped us with stuff that was part of the barn.”

They didn’t expect the process to take so long, but the pandemic has obviously created a road block of sorts. It’s forced them to think about scaling down their menu a bit for a potentially smaller COVID-related capacity, and it’s created a bit of stress at times. But Danielle says it’s probably better that they weren’t able to open before the pandemic, and then forced to shut down, as the overhead would have been that much more expensive.

And she is full of admiration for her husband, who has acted as his own contractor, overseeing everything every step of the way. “He’s been here every second of every day, in freezing cold, no heat,” adds Danielle. “It may have made for a long process, but he’s been here to see it all through.”

“We have a great relationship,” says Rob. “She’s fantastic. You couldn’t ask for a better person. When we get out of this thing (the pandemic) I’ll make us only stronger. We’ve actually gained strength in all of the difficulty that we’ve gone through. It actually strengthened our relationship.”

He adds, “if we’re able to do this, and still have this kind of connection, when we open up it’s going to be that much sweeter. It’s really been a godsend.”

And when they finally do open the doors, you can expect Rob and Danielle to be there each and every day, happily welcoming guests and ensuring they experience a friendly, welcoming atmosphere.

The Begins have devoted the last three years to The Grist, and are now seeing their work come to fruition. (Mike Balsom)
March 3, 2021

**Penny Coles**

The Local

Melissa Woodworth was introduced to the ketogenic diet long before it became a popular method to lose weight.

Relying on low carbohydrates, high fat and moderate protein, the value of the ketogenic diet in treating serious illnesses was recognized centuries ago, and that’s what led her on a journey she is now passionate about sharing.

“It is the real ‘why’ behind what we’re doing,” she says of her decision to foray into the business world as an owner.

Between the age of three and four years old, her son Sam, now 19, suffered thousands of major seizures. Doctors at Sick Kids in Toronto could find no cause behind the seizures, and found him unresponsive to any medication they tried.

Then she met someone who recommended the pediatric neurological team at McMaster Children’s Hospital, where the ketogenic diet was suggested as a treatment for Sam.

It has been considered an alternative therapy for its ability to reduce inflammation, she says, and there is some research that connects it with the importance to reduce inflammation, and that’s what led her on a journey she is now passionate about sharing.

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It has been consid...
NOTL couple feel safe wintering in Florida

Will be driving home and quarantining in April

Penny Coles
The Local

Jen Elliott and Colin Telfer did not make the decision to travel to Florida this winter lightly, having thoroughly researched and investigated their options before heading south. Likewise, they have done their research before deciding how they will return home in April.

“We weren’t at all cavalier about making this decision,” she says. As owners of ESkoot Niagara-on-the-Lake, which is shut down during the winter months, the couple’s lifestyle lends itself to wintering in a warmer climate.

“There would be little to do for them at home, says Elliott, adding they don’t consider their trip south a vacation. They have two different homes, one in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and one in Florida, and they felt they could be just as safe wintering in Florida.

“We spend half our life in Canada and half our life here. It’s not like we go crazy like young people on March break. They live on the Au-drey-Joan, a 44-foot boat named after both their moth-ers, going out mainly for groceries.

They left in early November, and although they would typically drive, with borders closed, they had to fly south. They had ebikes waiting for them at the marina, which they can use to get around on land, but they don’t go far, says Eli-llott, using them mostly to get groceries.

Their boat is moored at a marina in Clearwater, on the gulf in an area of the state where COVID cases have been low, says Elliott. “We’re nowhere near the hotspots. We looked at every angle and at the end of the day we decided to do what suits our lifestyle.”

They have moved recently to the smaller community of Cortez, which they are real-ly enjoying, and can use their ebikes to do a bit of sight-see-ing.

But again, they have little interaction with others, spend-ing most of their day outside on the boat.

Throughout, there has also been pretty amazing as well. It was really surprising how busy we were at eSkoot,” she says, because they much prefer the extra travel restrictions, she says, because they much prefer the drive, and feel the restric-tions make it as safe, if not safer, to travel in a car on their own.

They had decided to drive home toward the end of April, having discovered they can rent a car from an agency that allows a one-way trip, and a drop-off in Canada.

They had made that deci-sion before they knew about the extra travel restrictions, she says, because they much prefer the drive, and feel the restric-tions make it as safe, if not safer, to travel in a car on their own. They know they will require proof of a recent COVID test before crossing the border, and they will quarantine when they get home, happy to follow all the rules, as they did last year. They also expect to have anoth-er test toward the end of their quarantine in Niagara.

And they look forward to another good summer, and a busy one, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, despite the pandemic.

“It was really surprising how busy we were at eSkoot,” she says. “At first we weren’t allowed to open, but when we were, everyone wanted an outdoor experience. We had a phenom-enal summer.”

And their winter, as their friends know from their Face-book posts and photos, has been pretty amazing as well.

Connecting with nature in winter

Local photographer David Gilchrist enjoys taking photos of nature, and recently captured vineyards in the winter, and icicles by the water.
Staying in your home has proven to be a safer option during COVID-19. Older adults can more easily isolate in their own homes than in a congregate living setting or a care home. However, not all older adults prefer moving into accommodation. Few older people in Ontario 65 years and older live in other types of accommodation. Few older adults prefer moving into care homes, and many are looking for ways to stay in their home for as long as possible. Younger people often unknowingly harbour ageist attitudes, thinking it is best to do things for older adults, rather than enabling older adults with the tools to continue living independently. Unfortunately, these attitudes have become entrenched in Canadian health and social legislation, including in the understanding of ‘care’.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) in August 2020 reported that most older adults want to live at home for as long as possible, and that more of them could.

Care homes admit individuals who are frail, or those living with dementia. CIHI reviewed the health status of people admitted to care homes over a one-year period. The project found that, among those living in care homes, about one in nine new admissions could potentially have been cared for at home, provided they had access to ongoing home-care services and supports.

We cannot separate the health and social aspects of living as frail older adults. When we are frail, we have a spectrum of health events (from acute episodes to more complex, long-term conditions) and we require a spectrum of approaches (from single interventions to long-term, health-promotion interventions), where distinctions between health and social aspects of life are largely meaningless.

As the per cent of Ontarians who are 60 years of age and older increases, more older adults are living with complex and long-term conditions. This requires a new approach in the distribution of finite health resources: that is, what proportion of our tax dollars should be allocated to care homes versus a range of community services to assist with the tasks of everyday life, to help stay at home at what’s more, care homes should be embraced as part of the community. For example, their restaurant can be offered for meals on wheels and similar services to meals among people living in their own homes.

The Canadian health care system, and the Canada Health Act places hospitals at the topmost priority. While this choice was justified in the last century to meet the needs of a younger population, it is less appropriate today in the context of an aging population with complex and long-term conditions and disabilities. When the Canada Health Act was the core of the health-care system, it comprised eight per cent of finite health resources: that is, what proportion of our tax dollars should be allocated to care homes versus a range of community services to support older adults in their everyday life, wherever they live. These tasks may include the six Activities of Daily Living (ADLs). ADLs include: eating, bathing, dressing, toileting, continence, and transferring (ability to get out of bed/ chair). In general, if you cannot do two or more of these activities, or if you are living with dementia, you will most likely need assistance. This assistance is not always dependent on your situation, and can be provided at home as well as at care homes or assisted living centres.

ADLs include shopping, cooking, managing medications, using the phone and looking up numbers, doing housework, doing laundry, driving or using public transportation, and managing finances. These activities allow an individual to live independently in a community. Although not required to carry out ADLs, the ability to perform IADLs can significantly improve the quality of their daily life. Often, support of one or two IADLs makes the difference in being able to stay at home versus moving to a care home.

The Ontario Ministry of Health has for an “additional” $111 million in 2021-2022 for the High Intensity Supports at Home program to help people with high needs transition out of hospital to home.

In October 2020, the Ministry announced a $461 million “temporary wage increase” for personal support workers in both home-care and long-term care settings during COVID-19. Recently, the Ministry said it was investing up to $30 million for a community paramedicine program to support older adults in their homes while they wait for a bed in a long-term care home. However, both the National Institute on Ageing and the Ontario Community Support Association have reported supporting people in their own home, rather than as a temporary answer until older adults locate a space in a care home.

Supporting people to stay in their home is significant less expensive than living in a care home. In Ontario, 38,000 people are waiting for a government-funded long-term care home bed.

To address this waiting list, the Ontario government has promised to build 15,000 new long-term care beds and update 15,000 more. Given the increasing exponential increase of older adults, this plan, which will cost taxpayers billions of dollars, is not a long-term solution. This money could be better invested at a lower cost - in adopting policies based on the principle that every citizen should have the right to choose where they live. Instead of deeming outdated policies that have an “institutional” mindset, a successful aging in place philosophy should be used when building infrastructure.

By increasing emphasis on keeping older adults in their homes, such future investments will allow more older people to age in the place of their choice. Aging in place, or staying in one’s home while getting older, is a worthy consideration that provides important benefits, including honouring dignity and independence, decreasing recovery times and reducing the risk of illness, enjoying companionship with loved ones, and promoting healthy aging.

Healthy aging is mostly about busting the myths of being old. Senescence, the normal biological process of aging, limits the maximal level of physical activity, but what does the science tell us about the effects of aging on the brain? Luck is required to avoid the diseases that cannot be prevented, notably stroke and Alzheimer’s disease. However, it is now recognized that the risk of dementia can be reduced by at least a third, and possibly more, by limiting the overdose of drugs both prescribed and self-prescribed, including avoiding alcohol. There is also strong evidence that all that we know about preventing heart disease, including physical activity, reduces the risk of dementia.

Perhaps most interesting of all is the risk of isolation and the benefit of social engagement, ideally in paid or voluntary work – the more challenging the better, to build long-enduring potential for neuroplastics.

We should value equipping older people with the opportunity to remain in their own houses, rather than relegating them to being passive recipients of ‘care’. The older adult demographic is looking for a life that enables them to play an even more important role in meeting society’s challenges and, as individuals, to live longer, together.

Larry W. Chambers has authored 175 articles and books concerning disease prevention (e.g. dementia), equal- ity improvement in long-term care homes and innovative approaches for continuing professional development. He is research director of the Niagara Regional Campus, School of Medicine, McMaster University. Madeleine Smith is a medical student at the Niagara Regional Campus, Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine, McMaster University.

Larry W. Chambers

Madeleine Smith

Special to The Local

Response to the human tragedy in care home facilities

Seniors can and should be allowed to age at home longer.

Dr. Larry Chambers says seniors can, and should, be allowed to age at home longer, with the care they need to remain there.
Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Petrick training next generation of tennis stars

She trained with the likes of Eugenie Bouchard, played in the same professional tour-
naments as Venus and Serena Williams, and won Canadian championships at the U14 and U18 levels.

Today, former Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Char-
lotte Petrick is training the next generation of Canadian tennis superstars at a Toronto-area facility.

At 24 years old, Petrick has been retired from competitive tennis for three years. But she remains involved in the sport that has been part of her life since as long as she can re-
member. Now a Level 2 Tennis Canada certified coach, Petrick works out of the Ontario Rac-
et Club, where she trains youth aged six to eight in both the Performance and Progres-
sive streams, as well as teens in a Transition program. She also runs six or seven adult clinics per week.

Frank Petrick plays tennis with his daughter Charlotte in Rye Park when she comes home to NOTL. (Photo supplied)

Charlotte has traded in competition for training youngsters, and is loving it.

Charlotte was about seven. And I kept tearing this tendon in my left wrist, “ she says. “No one dealt with back injuries and a lack of strength in her forearm, was almost an inch longer than her right, which was straining the tendon in the point that it would continuous-
ly tear.

Charlotte has traded in competition for training youngsters, and is loving it.

Petrick realized the toll that the rest is just learning how to do it, and she is always willing to learn, and the kids re-
late well to her.”

The action shots of Charlotte Petrick are in San Diego, in a $25K pro tournament where she was staying with a NOTL couple, Sonja Schindeler and Rick Hrga. Sonja was the best cheerleader, says Petrick.

That, of course, is one sil-
ver lining. The other is related to the Toronto facility where she has worked on getting her game back after both surgeries.

Frank Petrick is in town which is where I met my boyfriend,” she

Charlotte was about seven.

Charlotte has traded in competition for training youngsters, and is loving it.

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Charlotte Petrick and her mother Colleen, who was also a competitive tennis player, outside their NOTL home when Charlotte was about seven.

Frank Petrick plays tennis with his daughter Charlotte in Rye Park when she comes home to NOTL. (Photo supplied)

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Charlotte was about seven.

Charlotte has traded in competition for training youngsters, and is loving it.
Emma Penner is following in her twin sister’s footsteps. Every Penner graduated from Ridley College in 2020, after committing to the University of Prince Edward Island to study kinesiology and play on the women’s hockey team. Emma graduated from Ridley last year as well but only recently decided she would also head to the East Coast, committing to Dalhousie University in Halifax, where she will play on the women’s hockey team and major in, you guessed it, kinesiology.

She grew up in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where she attended St. Michael Catholic Elementary School, and participated in a wide variety of sports — lacrosse, baseball, basketball, soccer, volleyball, track and field and cross country.

“It’s such a small town, pretty much everyone you are playing hockey with are also playing other sports with,” she said. “Not many girls play sports in Niagara-on-the-Lake, so I was constantly playing with the guys.

“They can sometimes be a lot stronger, faster and more competitive, but it gave me a little bit more drive.”

Emma leaned on her sister for advice when making her final decision about her future.

“She loves it out there, and I’ve been a few times as well so knew the East Coast was where I wanted to be,” Emma said.

“She went first and got her freshman year out of the way so she could show me the ropes about what university hockey is like.

“She has nothing but great things to say about her program and what it’s like to be on the East Coast. It made the decision a lot easier for me.”

Emma did her due diligence as she sorted her way through various schools.

“I reached out to a number of schools in the last three years,” she said. “In September, I contacted the coach at Dalhousie and got the ball rolling. We had a few meetings and instantly I knew that’s where I wanted to go.

“I’m so excited. I’ve known for a while now that I’ve wanted to go away for school and play hockey at the next level, so Dalhousie was an easy choice for me.”

Dalhousie Tigers women’s hockey head coach, Troy Ryan, is excited to have the 18-year-old forward on board.

“She was highly recommend by an old coach at Ridley, and I have been very impressed with her professionalism, values and character throughout the recruiting process,” Ryan said in a story posted on the school’s web site. “Emma wants to win, and I’m eager to get started.”

Ridley coach Amanda Wark feels Penner will excel at the next level.

“Emma is a talented player with great leadership skills, and a willingness to compete that is second to none. She will continue to grow and develop in a great program surrounded by premier coaches,” Wark said.

“We will miss Emma on campus and on our team. She has left her footprint on our program, and made our team better. That’s exactly what we were looking for, and all we can ask for.”

Penner, who earned the most improved player award at Ridley College for her efforts in the 2019-20 season, attended Holy Cross Secondary School for two years before switching to Ridley in Grade 11.

“It’s an amazing program. I wouldn’t have the opportunities I have today were it not for Ridley,” she said.

Penner is taking part in grad courses at Ridley this year, and working out with the hockey team in lieu of games due to the pandemic.

“I’ve just kept a positive mindset,” she said. “I was looking to play this year, but we’re still fortunate at Ridley to be able to practice and train everyday with the team, because I know most teams aren’t doing that.”

Bill Potrecz spent 32 years as a sportswriter for Niagara dailies, covering almost every sport imaginable from high school, junior hockey, to a World Series and Stanley Cup final. By his estimation he has covered more than 1,500 junior hockey games. He now provides regional sports coverage through BP Sports Niagara.
Matteo Giampa is heading to Alberta to play hockey, hoping to develop his skills with the junior hockey league. (Photo supplied)

Giampa heading out west

Bill Potrecz
Special to The Local

Matteo Giampa is on the move.

The 17-year-old Niagara-on-the-Lake teen has already made arrangements for next season, committing to the Brooks Bandits of the Alberta Junior Hockey League.

“It was a hard decision, because I wanted to make the right one, but it really came down to wanting to play on the best team, and having the ability to develop as much as I can so I can move on to the next level,” Giampa said. “I didn’t really care what league. The ultimate goal is to go to the best situation and the best place.”

Giampa, a six-foot, 176-pound forward, was selected in the seventh round (142nd overall) by the London Knights in the 2019 Ontario Hockey League draft. He spent last season at The Gunnery, a prep school in Connecticut, where he netted nine goals and 19 points in 35 games as a 16-year-old rookie.

Giampa hooked up with the St. Catharines Falcons of the Greater Ontario Junior Hockey League for this season, but has been kept off the ice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He is still hoping to get on the ice at some point — the GOJHL hasn’t officially canceled their season — but is grateful to have his affairs in order looking forward.

“I’m extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to know for sure where I’m going to play next year,” he said. “Especially today, when there is a lot of uncertainty in the world, it’s a great feeling. I can just have my mind set on one thing and just focus on that.

“It’s definitely a good thing.”

Giampa was tipped off to the Bandits by a buddy.

“A friend was trying to get into a prep school and he introduced me to a guy and he was a scout for Brooks and that got the ball rolling. He’s been watching me, and set up some meetings with the coaches and managers,” Giampa said.

Falcons coach Tyler Bielby, who recruited Giampa for this season, feels the hard-working forward will excel in the AJHL.

“There is some really good hockey played in the AJ. Matteo is motivated to be better every day, and I think Brooks will be happy to have him. He brings a mindset and work ethic that will allow him to adapt early. Once he gets settled, I imagine he will have an immediate impact.

“His mindset is matched by few, and that is his biggest asset. He will go into camp wanting to be the best player on the ice. That attitude, mixed with his natural skill set, won’t see him be denied. This is the next step in his hockey journey, but it won’t be his last.”

Giampa, who continues to take classes virtually from The Gunnery, misses everything about being a hockey player.

“Definitely missing the locker room with the guys on my team. I miss competing against people and different teams,” he said. “Showing up to the rink every day playing hockey, that’s kind of what I live for.”

He is still holding out faint hope of skating for the Falcons this season, although time appears to be running out.

“I haven’t heard anything, but just crossing my fingers that it starts up again,” he said. “It sucks, but I’ve been working out, skating, and doing school work. That’s all I really have done. You just try and keep yourself busy. That’s the best you can do now anyway.”

Bill Potrecz spent 32 years as a sportswriter for Niagara dailies, covering almost every sport imaginable from high school, to junior hockey, to a World Series and Stanley Cup final. By his estimation he has covered more than 1,500 junior hockey games. He now provides regional sports coverage through BP Sports Niagara.