



Valerie Pringle  
hosting  
PBS series  
page 5

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## Lizards at the library

A large group of children and accompanying adults listened and watched Sam Bylsma from Reptile Kingdom Canada describe a variety of reptiles, ranging from snakes, lizards, legless lizards, tortoises and crocodilians, at a presentation that kept everyone captivated at the library Tuesday morning. (David Gilchrist)

## Mahabharata breaks new ground for Shaw

Mike Balsom  
The Local

With two distinct parts and running almost five hours, plus an optional 70 minute Khana community meal in between, Shaw Festival's presentation of *Mahabharata* admittedly takes some commitment.

But this ground-breaking production is worth every second. It's like nothing that has come before it in the festival's previous 60 years.

The adaptation of the 4,000-year-old Sanskrit epic poem is a production of Toronto's Why Not Theatre, in association with Barbican, London, and commissioned and presented by the Shaw Festival. It realizes a dream that Shaw artistic director Tim Carroll has had since taking over the reins of the local company in 2017.

Avid Shaw theatrogoers

most likely won't recognize many faces on stage, as all but one of the actors are newcomers and not part of the usual Shaw ensemble. And fittingly, for a production that uses as source material one of the foundational epics of India, the cast and creative team are all from the South Asian diaspora and hail from around the world.

*Mahabharata* is visually and aurally stunning. It's a feast of storytelling, song and dance, presented in two distinct parts: *Karma — The Life We Inherit* and *Dharma — The Life We Choose*.

The curtain rises for *Karma* revealing a sparsely decorated stage, a circle of red sand its lone adornment, and a curtain of thick ropes hanging from the catwalk. Six musicians are arranged around the back of the circle,

Continued on page 4

## Expect slow-downs through Virgil for several months

Penny Coles  
The Local

When Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser updates councillors on regional issues at the last town council meeting this month, at the top of her list will be the roadwork through Virgil.

She realizes it's the issue most residents want

to hear about — the work and hold-ups we're seeing along Niagara Stone Road are not going to stop any time soon.

Also considered part of Regional Road 55, it is being reconstructed to address road capacity, road conditions, infrastructure improvements, streetscaping and urban design improvements, as well as

overhead utility conversions to underground.

The work is being done in partnership with the town and NOTL Hydro.

Town operations director Rome D'Angelo says that while it's a regional project, the town has been involved as a major stakeholder, mostly concerning streetscaping decisions, such as decorative light-

ing, landscaping features and any other enhancements.

"The region is doing all the work," he says. "The town just has a say in the look of the improvements."

The road improvements and streetscape enhancements will stretch along Niagara Stone Road

Continued on page 2



Ellora Patnaik as Kunti and Goldy Notay as Gandhari in Why Not Theatre's *Mahabharata*. (David Cooper)



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# Town's corporate services budget could rise by 46.4 per cent

**Zahraa Hmood**  
The Local

Talks continued last Thursday about 2023's operating budget, including plans to spend \$1.8 million on new projects, initiatives and municipal employees.

Council spent its third budget review meeting on March 9 going over every line in the budget, with questions for town staff about how their financial situation has changed this year, and debated what to keep and what could get pushed out of 2023's spending plan.

Of the \$1.8 million the town wants to allocate to new business cases for 2023, nearly \$991,000 will go to paying for the salaries of a new cohort of municipal employees and changing contracts for others.

That amount includes the salaries and associated employer-related costs, and is a blended cost based on the timing of recruitment and hiring.

Chief administrative officer Marnie Cluckie said senior staff ranked the new positions in order of highest to lowest priority, based on meeting legislative requirements, advancing the town's strategic plan and what council's priorities are for the year.

Many of the positions are under the corporate services department umbrella, including the top five ranked new employees.

"Corporate services represents the entire organization," Cluckie explained. "A lot of what we found is there was a need for positions across the organization that would help all of the organi-

zation."

The corporate services budget will rise by 46.4 per cent compared to 2022, and will impact the tax levy by 7.3 per cent. Altogether, the property tax levy could rise by as much as 8.56 per cent, or \$104.63, per household.

The top-ranked position is technically not a new one: a full-time employee contract for a communications coordinator, currently a temporary contract role held by Marah Minor. The town hopes to allocate \$90,671 for a yearly salary in 2023 from the tax levy. That figure is this position's total cost, including salary, benefits and associated employer-related costs.

This coordinator's responsibility is to handle communications within the town of Niagara-on-the-

Lake among staff, between the town and the public, publishing news releases and managing the town's social media platforms.

"This role and a number of other roles have been funded through grants," Cluckie said. "We would like to solidify this (role)."

While not high on the list, one role in particular generated lengthy discussion among councillors — a new secondary planner, with a pro-rated salary of \$69,372.

As Kirsten McCauley, the director of community and development services explained, this new planner is being brought on to take on a significant increase in applications over the years from the many developers seeking to build properties in town.

"We do need more

staff," she said. "We are very strapped in terms of our capacity to process the applications."

Coun. Erwin Wiens agreed. He and other councillors, including Coun. Tim Balasiuk, said hiring a planner should be higher on the list, as it's currently eighth in the ranking.

"We get the most amount of complaints about planning," Wiens said, adding that with Bill 23's changes to the Planning Act coming into effect July 1, he anticipates more applications coming down the pipeline, with strict timelines on when they need to be processed.

The salaries for the new employees on this list are higher than what they would have been in previous years, thanks to changes with the Ontario Municipal

Employees Retirement System, a public pension fund Niagara-on-the-Lake pays its employees who opt in.

Before 2023, municipal employees had to be on the job for two years before they could begin qualifying for this pension fund, but with these new rules implemented, Niagara-on-the-Lake is now required to provide that fund to its employees.

The budget review lasted two and a half hours, with Zalepa proposing that council once again push forward its date for approving the final budget beyond the currently planned Thursday, March 23.

The budget review committee will meet again on this date for another discussion on the operating budget, before meeting at a later date for one last talk, then approval.

# Residents speak out at Tawny Ridge public meeting

**Zahraa Hmood**  
The Local

St. Davids was well-represented during the town's public meeting on a contentious housing project being planned for Tanbark Road.

A couple dozen residents turned out to hear about the proposed Tawny Ridge Estates, which would add 86 new living spaces to a block of land in the west end of the village community.

For residents who spoke to council, the size of the residential subdivision will mean serious traffic safety and infrastructure overload issues for the surrounding area.

Plans to build a four-storey apartment facing Warner Road, additionally, will drive people away from the neighbourhood.

"This is a retirement community, and that's why we moved here," said Glenn Todd, a resident who said he's been living in St. Davids for a year with his spouse on Tulip Tree Road, next to Tawny Ridge's proposed site.

"We are not opposed to Tawny Ridge," Todd said, "but if there was an apartment here, we would not have been interested in this community."

The planning team representing the developer, River-



There was a full house at last week's public meeting to discuss the proposal for the Tawny Ridge subdivision. (Screenshot)

view Homes Niagara, however, say they've reviewed all concerns residents have brought forth since unveiling plans at an open house in early February, and gave defences for each planning decision made.

"There's been significant concerns provided," said Craig Rohe, senior planner for Upper Canada Consultants, speaking of the requested zoning amendment to allow for taller buildings and for greater lot coverage.

The developer also wants an Official Plan amendment to increase the housing density and allow the apartment building. Altogether, Tawny

Ridges Estates' current plans take up 3.7 hectares of land: one apartment building, 20 single-detached homes and six blocks of townhouses.

"The zoning by-law amendment is very similar to that of Courtland Valley," Rohe said, referencing the residential estate community which would be next-door to Tawny Ridge.

All 96 Courtland Valley residents signed a petition filed to the town in February calling for changes to the developer's plans, according to petition organizer and resident Bruno Laliberte. This was one of two petitions filed this winter.

"If I was the Courtland

Valley developer, I would've set it as a Residential R2 Zone," Rohe said, Riverview Homes' requested zoning amendment (Courtland Valley is zoned as Residential R1). "As our communities are growing, we need to find ways to use land efficiently."

Rohe spoke to public comments shared during the open house and in the petitions about potential issues with traffic congestion after adding 86 living units to the neighbourhood, as well as 121 or so vehicles, according to the second petition's organizer Gienek Ksiazkiewicz.

According to Rohe, the planning and develop-

ment team hired Paradigm Transportation to conduct a traffic study and found "both developments would have no impact on the existing network." This statement was met with laughter from the seated area of the Council chambers, where St. Davids residents were sitting.

Courtland Valley petitioners suggested connecting Tanbark Road to a road being planned for paving within the subdivision, called Street A. It would provide additional access for its residents to this arterial road, alongside planned access to Warner Road. Doing so would mean removing at least one lot where a

single-detached dwelling would go.

According to Rohe, this suggestion was reviewed and argued it would be too close to the Tanbark-Warner intersection and would invite jaywalking and the need for a pedestrian signal.

"The accesses, as proposed, are sufficient," he said.

Tawny Ridge Estates comes as Niagara-on-the-Lake faces a regionally-set target to increase local residential development by 25 per cent, part of the province's mission to boost housing options across Ontario.

In residents' view, however, with the price of homes and condominiums in the area increasing, the proposed development will not fulfill the province-wide need for affordable housing.

Town staff and the urban design committee will review Tawny Ridge Estates' plans and share its feedback with the developer, who will be able to respond or make revisions.

Then, planning staff will work on creating a report with recommendations to council, advising them on whether or not to approve the requested Official Plan and zoning by-law amendments, which will put the future of Tawny Ridge Estates to a vote.



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# After Shaw, *Mahabharata* heads off on world tour

Continued from page 1

providing a constantly throbbing, droning soundtrack with a mixture of exotic and more familiar modern instruments throughout the two-and-a-half-hour *Karma*.

Miriam Fernandes steps to the front of the stage as the storyteller, engaging the audience while narrating the saga of two families, the Pandavas and Kauravas, at war with one another through generation after generation. As tensions mount and hatred is passed down repeatedly from parent to child, war breaks out and tragedy ensues.

Part One is set in a dense, uninhabited forest, but Fernandes promises that in the heart of that forest flows a river of wisdom.

Having co-written the adaptation with director Ravi Jain, Fernandes is a natural as the narrator, so much so that the audience engages with her as much as it does the actors behind her. And in a tale with many characters through many generations, her interjections are essential in understanding the connections between the characters.

As Fernandes explained during the Khana dinner, the nature of *The Mahabharata* itself is a series of stories passed down from generation to generation, often in a setting much like the Khana.

Fernandes was joined at the Khana by artistic asso-



Darren Kuppan as Duryodhana, Navtej Sandhu as Karna, Sakuntala Ramanee as Shakuni, Harmage Singh Kalirai as Dhritarashtra, Sukania Venugopal as Bhishma and Shawn Ahmed as Yudhishtira in Why Not Theatre's *Mahabharata*. (David Cooper)

ciate Sharada K. Eswar, who did the text adaptation of the epic. Fernandes joked that Eswar was like her aunt, though Eswar insisted she was more like an older sister. The pair delved deeply into the philosophical riddles from *The Mahabharata*, told to each of the women by their own families as they were growing up.

Eswar pondered the omission from the production of some of the stories from the Hindu epic, such as that of the Yaksha, a nature spirit who can be either benevolent or mischievous. As Fernandes explained, the sheer magnitude of *The Mahabharata* is

such that omissions were necessary to create an adaptation that busy people would be willing to attend. After all, the previous production of the epic by Peter Brooks in 1985 was nine hours long.

While enjoying a delicious vegetarian meal of tarka daal, aloo gobi, mutter paneer, roti and basmati rice catered by Markham's Jalsa Kitchen, the audience learned more about the concepts of Karma, Dharma and Jain. The laid-back, friendly atmosphere of the Kahna proved essential to a deeper understanding of what went on in the first part of the play and what was to

come that evening.

Even so, nothing could have fully prepared the audience for the spectacle that is *Dharma*, the second two-and-a-half hours of *Mahabharata*.

The sparse stage is replaced by what seems to be the interior of a more modern home, with a giant video screen backdrop featuring projections designed by Hana S. Kim and Ann Slote. The artful video projections, with audio, provided a stark contrast, bridging the ancient, traditional elements of the story to modern, present times.

Neil D'Souza shines

during *Dharma* as Krishna, the eighth avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu and a supreme god in his own right. D'Souza brings a wry sense of humour to the important role of advisor to the Pandava clan's Arjuna, portrayed by Anaka Maharaj-Sandhu.

Part Two also includes an original Sanskrit operatic adaptation of *The Bhagavad Gita*, the most renowned, influential and significant passage of *The Mahabharata*. London, Ontario, soprano Meher Pavri, 2007's Miss India Canada, takes the spotlight with her powerful voice in a show stopping performance here.

The battle between the Pandavas and Kauravas takes place in Part Two, resulting in destruction, devastation and loss. During the battle, the dance by Jay Emmanuel as Shiva, with brightly painted face and flowing dreadlocks sweeping across his body, poetically emphasizes the violence.

The Pandavas emerge from the battle victorious, yet the question remains, what have they actually won? Or, perhaps, as Yudhishtira, played by Shawn Ahmed, finds out when he ascends into heaven, maybe they haven't really won anything at all.

This skilful production of *Mahabharata* hits like a hammer on some of the most important questions of life itself. Within the two separate performances are lessons about humanity and much of the philosophy and spirituality of Hindu culture.

One audience member of South Asian descent remarked to The Local how amazed she was to see her culture and traditional lore on display and performed so magnificently right here in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience, running only until March 26 at the Shaw Festival Theatre. After that, Why Not Theatre takes *Mahabharata* on a world-wide tour. See it, all of it, between now and then. Visit [shawfest.com](http://shawfest.com) for show times and tickets.

## Shaw Festival announces record operating revenue in 2022

Mike Balsom  
The Local

In front of the first in-person annual general meeting audience since March 2020 on Friday afternoon, Shaw Festival treasurer Greg Prince announced that the theatre company posted a record operating revenue of \$35.7 million for 2022.

But for reasons largely out of Shaw's control, that record-setting revenue translated into a meager operating surplus of only \$7,000.

"Let us not forget," reminded board chair Ian Joseph, "that we began the year still under restrictions, and

the seating capacity started under maximum 50 per cent restrictions, and remained that way until March. It's not surprising that by summer we continued to face challenges."

Ticket sales and earned revenue totalled \$13.54 million last year while Shaw had its best fundraising year ever, with \$11.8 million in philanthropic donations, up \$4 million over 2021. In addition, federal and provincial government support to the tune of \$10.3 million helped the organization set its new revenue record.

But Joseph pointed to border crossing issues under the ArriveCAN app, and hesitancy

of many to return to attending live events under the threat of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus, as further reasons for the challenges he mentioned. In addition, the unpredictability of 2022 resulted in dramatic increases in sick time and related staff coverage, causing a strain on revenues.

"Given the amount of agility that had to be demonstrated this year," Prince said about the small surplus, "it is truly remarkable that management was able to deliver this result. Compared to last year, when there was a surplus of about \$990,000, you can already see the challenges that we're experiencing on an operating basis this year."

Prince added that on an accounting basis, factoring in depreciation and amortization on assets, the Shaw actually posted a deficiency of \$1.1 million, reducing the total accumulated surplus to \$258,000.

There was, however, much to celebrate when looking back on Shaw's milestone 60th year. Only 28 of 811 scheduled performances were cancelled last year, a marked improvement when compared to more than 300 lost the previous year. Total attendance figures of 171,000 more than tripled 2021's num-

ber, though it was only about 65 per cent of pre-pandemic 2019 levels. As well, the festival brought education and outreach events, both live and digital, to almost 61,000 people, the most ever, while ticket sales for Shaw's holiday shows last year far surpassed those for 2021's performances.

Joseph and Prince both pointed to executive director and CEO Tim Jennings and artistic director Tim Carroll for their leadership in ensuring that their record of returning a surplus every year since their partnership began was not broken.

Carroll stepped to the podium and spoke about a return to "normal" for 2023.

"It's a sort of mystic place," he said. "We think we were there once, and we all sort of thought the past couple of years that one day we would get back there. But it turns out it's not there any more, there might not be any such place any more."

Carroll went on to point out that some of the initiatives begun during the pandemic, such as outdoor concerts on the BMO Stage, the Humenuk Foundation Stage and the explosions of music, dance and poetry that were presented in the gardens, are all here to stay.

"It's a funny thing," Carroll added, "how emergency stop-gap measures quite quickly have become indispensable parts of our normal. It's a new normal now, and perhaps that's a good thing."

Carroll gave credit to Shaw's front-of-house staff, who were called upon often at the last minute to call ticket holders about changes to the performance schedule. He also lauded the actors for their heroic efforts, filling in as understudies when a colleague got sick and learning lines that some never had a chance to deliver for an audience.

One of those actors entertainingly interrupted Carroll's speech. While he was attesting to the validity of the claim that every actor in 2022's *Everybody* knew the lines for every role, cast member Travis Seetoo arrived from the wings, reciting lines from multiple characters from that play, to the delight of those in attendance.

Carroll added that Seetoo's short monologue, as well as a later performance of *Little Lamb* from this year's *Gypsy* by music director Paul Sportelli and actor Julie Lumsden at the AGM, also marked part of Shaw's new normal.

Last to speak was Jen-

nings, who admitted that he once again derived great satisfaction from Shaw's ability to maintain employment and contracts for all 600 staff members and artists throughout the pandemic.

He also gave credit to the leadership of Carroll and associate artistic director Kimberley Rampersad throughout the 2022 season.

"TC (Carroll) and Kimberley led our artists and created our largest and longest season of live theatre, and the work was truly remarkable," said Jennings. "I witnessed first-hand how hard they both worked, and I'd like to thank the whole Shaw management team, staff, artists, Guild members and all four of our amazing boards for their work and continued faith in us."

Also announced at the AGM Friday was the addition of two new members to Shaw's boards. Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa was officially appointed to serve on the Board of Governors as an ex-officio member. And NOTL resident Mary Mizen, an active member of the Shaw Guild since 2014 and its current president, will sit on both the Shaw Festival's Board of Directors and Board of Governors as an ex-officio member.



Shaw artistic director Tim Carroll praised Shaw's front-of-house staff and ensemble for their 'heroic efforts' last season. (David Cooper)



# Valerie Pringle to host new season of PBS series

**Mike Balsom**  
The Local

Canadian broadcasting legend Valerie Pringle is excited to be hosting a PBS television show for the first time since 2009.

Pringle takes the helm as the new host of the 30-minute interview show *Canada Files* this weekend. Her debut episode of the program's fourth season, which sees her speaking with 13 famous and accomplished Canadians, airs March 19 on the U.S. public broadcaster's Buffalo outlet, WNED.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Pringle's start in broadcasting at Toronto radio station CFRB while still a university student. In 1984, she left radio to be one of the original hosts of CBC Television's *Midday*. Eight years later she jumped to CTV as co-host of *Canada AM*.

Pringle became one of the most trusted and revered broadcasters in Canada, hosting much of CTV's special events programming, including the network's coverage of the 1993 election and 1995's Quebec referendum, as well as the 1994 Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway.

Pringle remained with *Canada AM* until 2001, then went on to host a travel show called *Valerie Pringle Has Left the Building*. She also produced documentary specials for Discovery Channel Canada, and hosted the Canadian edition of *Antiques Roadshow* on CBC.

Since her last project, a documentary on the Great Lakes, fell through in 2009, the Member of the Order of Canada (2006) had shifted gears to the nonprofit sector. She was instrumental in the completion of the Trans Canada Trail as one of the country's major Canada 150 projects. Local supporters of the Laura Secord Trail will remember Pringle's involvement in that leg of the bigger route.

Her other passion became advocating for mental health through her position on the board of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Pringle is currently the chair of that board.

"I felt lucky to be working on two things I felt really passionate about," says Pringle from the historic Niagara-on-the-Lake home she has shared with her husband, Andy, for 15 years. "I didn't miss broadcasting. I had done some amazing stuff and I had a great run."

But last March, her friend, veteran Toronto broadcaster Jim Deeks, contacted her. He had created *Canada Files* and had been hosting it for three years. Deeks wanted to retire and asked Valerie to take his place. At first she was hesitant. But Andy encouraged her to give it a go, and she came

around after speaking with a longtime friend and colleague who was a member of the same book club.

"I talked to Jennifer Scott, who I worked with at *Midday*," says Pringle. "I needed a producer who was super-organized. She agreed to come onboard, and that helped me make up my mind."

Pringle sees *Canada Files* as a throwback to old-school broadcasting.

"A half hour interview with fabulous people," marvels Pringle in her home office. "This just doesn't exist anymore. It's my kind of thing. I don't like reality TV, or chat-show TV where everyone is talking over one another."

She was given complete control of the show. Pringle picks the interviews she wants, chooses her own questions and supervises the editing process.

Her list of guests for the coming weeks is fascinating. It includes musicians and authors, an architect and an actor, a former Governor General, an astronaut, a United Nations chief prosecutor, the former governor of the Bank of Canada and more.

"I just started making lists," says Pringle about how she chose her subjects. "There were some like Malcolm Gladwell and Martin Short that I tried to get, but they couldn't do it. Sarah Polley is another one, but once we got to Christmas I thought it would be best to wait until after Oscar season. Maybe next year."

Most of the episodes were shot in WNED's condo in Toronto, where the Pringles have a second home. Others were shot on location in Ottawa, Los Angeles and New York City.

Sunday's first episode features Toronto-born author Louise Penny, who bares her soul to Pringle.

"She talks about her alcoholism, and how she really wanted to end her own life in her early 30s," Pringle says. "What turned her life around was getting sober and finding the love of her life, who supported her and got her going in her amazing career as a writer."

Olympic medalist Clara Hughes is just as open and honest in a later episode speaking about her dysfunctional family and her tough childhood.

Pringle was amazed at how historian and Oxford professor Margaret MacMillan was so clear and precise with her answers during their meeting.

"She is so smart, such a great teacher," Pringle says. "You can tell she's been teaching for years, she's so clear in what she says. And (architect) Moshe Safdie was fabulous talking about his frustration with America and the way things are built here, and the

success he's had in Singapore."

Mark Carney tells Pringle in episode nine how his new role as UN Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance is even more challenging than his previous jobs as governor of the Bank of Canada and then the Bank of England.

In episode seven Pringle reunites with former Governor General Michaëlle Jean, who presented the Windsor native with her Order of Canada and did an event for the Trans Canada Trail.

"She tells this great story about (U.S. President Barack) Obama coming to Canada," says Pringle. "He came down the stairs from Air Force One and asked her to imagine that the U.S. and Canadian Commanders in Chief, both of African descent, meeting at this time. What a great story."

Randy Bachman's book *Vinyl Tap Stories* sits next to Pringle at her desk. She's been researching the former member of the Guess Who and Bachman-Turner Overdrive's life in preparation for one of two *Canada Files* episodes that have yet to be shot. The other features Cindy Blackstock, a member of the Gitksan First Nation and a tireless advocate for Indigenous children in Canada.

Pringle admits she felt a bit nervous returning to the studio to shoot her first interview, which was with astronaut Roberta Bondar, for episode five.

"But it quickly felt so normal," she laughs. "It's like Malcolm Gladwell says, about the 10,000 hours. When it came to the research, the interview structure, how I was going to do this, I totally knew how to do this. Once I was sitting in the chair it was such a wonderful feeling."

Pringle strongly believes in the importance of being prepared, but not so prepared that she doesn't let the conversation flow naturally.

"It takes a long time and a lot of skill to get that comfortable," she says. "You need to have a game plan, a structure, you need to know a lot about that person, but you have to let the conversation begin and let it take you where it takes you."

Case in point — her episode with Eugene Levy (episode six) progresses like a chat in Valerie's living room. And after almost 50 years of doing this sort of thing, Pringle can still find and express wonder in hearing some of Levy's fascinating stories.

When it is suggested that Pringle herself is a famous Canadian who may deserve to be a guest on her own program, she sloughs that theory off quickly. And she says she doesn't often get recognized while out and about in NOTL.

"My days of being recognizable are long over," she laughs. "I've been off daily TV since 2001. Some peo-

ple might say my voice is sort of familiar, if anything. This is a low-key place, and we love being in Niagara-on-the-Lake. It's heavenly."

PBS will be posting her *Canada Files* segments on their website and YouTube channel, but Pringle can't wait to see it broadcast on her television Sunday night.

"I know for many people the only way they'll see these is to look online," she admits.

"And the fact that they can live on and be accessible is wonderful to me. But there's nothing like sitting there watching it for the first time."

Though the mother of three and grandmother of five is thoroughly enjoying her return to television and is looking forward to working on her wishlist for season five, she has no desire to look for other on-air opportunities.

"*Canada Files* is perfect,"

she says. "It's long interviews with really terrific people, and a chance to really explore these things and get to know them. This kind of thing doesn't happen on television anymore. The long-form interview on television has gone the way of the dodo. This is exactly what I love to do."

The first episode of season four of *Canada Files* airs on PBS Sunday night at 6 p.m.



The first episode, which is Sunday night, features Canadian author Louise Penny being interviewed by host Valerie Pringle. (Photos supplied)



Valerie Pringle on set, interviewing actor Eugene Levy.



Historian and Oxford professor Margaret MacMillan chats with Valerie Pringle.



# EDITORIAL

## Closure of Upper Canada Lodge in 2024 raises questions

The region has been saying since 2019 it would be closing Upper Canada Lodge, originally slated for 2022, but now it really is nearing the time to do that. What's the plan for those who call the much-loved local long-term care residence home?

Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser says she's been assured that when it closes, "everyone living in Upper Canada Lodge will be accommodated. Nobody will be left without a spot." Not all residents at UCL now are local, she says — there is a mix of those from town and others from across the region.

Although residents of course desire to be close to home, when long-term care is required, they might have op-

tions to choose from, but seniors and their families sometimes have to go with what's available at the time.

When the decision was made to close UCL, two other regional homes were chosen for expansion, and have been under construction to accommodate more residents — Gilmore Lodge in Fort Erie and Linhaven Long-term Care in St. Catharines.

While the thinking of families at the time the closure was announced seemed to be that the smaller the home, the better the care would be, a theory that certainly seemed true at UCL, redevelopment to bring it up to provincial standards was not considered feasible. At the same time the goal at the region was

for newer, larger homes that were considered not only to be more economical and efficient, but more desirable, able to offer more amenities and programs in a community-hub setting.

So here we are. The region is saying Upper Canada Lodge will be open and accepting residents for admission until shortly before the home closes, which is anticipated in early 2024. Will Gilmore Lodge or Linhaven be ready for them?

Gilmore Lodge is anticipated to be completed and available for residents to move in to its expansion early in 2024, and Linhaven's construction completion is anticipated for the spring of 2024.

The region is assuring residents at UCL and their fami-

lies that in collaboration with Home and Community Care, support will be provided related to transition plans. They will be confirming residents' preferred relocation options, the region says, and working with UCL staff "to update resident assessments as necessary."

Any residents who live at Upper Canada Lodge or who are planning to move in before its closure will be given the opportunity to identify which long-term care home they would like to move to when UCL closes, the region says.

While the well-being of residents is the top priority, once they have been moved, what happens to the building? It's operated as a lease, on property owned by Parks Canada — an unusual situation.

The region will only say at this point that it is working with Parks Canada to discuss options for the future of the building, and "once they have fully explored the best way to move forward," more information will be available.

It will have to be an open and transparent process, says Kaiser, and will need to meet the particular uses permitted on that property, including that it be a non-profit.

Since it isn't likely to be used for senior living, what's the next best solution? There is talk in the community that the Shaw Festival is interested, and since it is a neighbour to UCL, and is always looking for more space for its operations and for employee housing, it seems like a good solution. Added to that, the Shaw already has a partnership with Parks Canada for the very land the Festival Theatre, the Studio Theatre and administration offices occupy.

Top of the list of course has to be about making sure UCL residents and their families are looked after, but also important is seeing that property is used wisely. We look forward to hearing the region and Parks Canada's plans for moving forward.

On another note, we have heard rumblings that Pleasant Manor in Virgil is not moving forward with its expansion to accommodate more long-term care residents. Understandable, since there has been no indication of construction to begin, but is it true?

Absolutely not, assures Tim Siemens, CEO of Radiant Care's Pleasant Manor — the expansion is going "full-steam ahead." It's now at the stage of going through pre-consul-

tation with the town and region, says Siemens, hoping for final approval in August, and construction to begin in September for an expansion that should see a facility for 160 new beds finished and ready to be occupied by those who require long-term care.

When the region made the decision in 2019 to close UCL, it was made less painful by the knowledge then that Pleasant Manor had provincial approval for their new facility.

At that time, the opening date was anticipated to be in 2022, aligning with the completion of the two regional facilities and the closure of Upper Canada Lodge.

But when it comes to construction and government layers of approval, nothing is that simple.

Through a series of changes of plans and required approvals, an opening of the new Pleasant Manor facility is now looking like 2025, a ways off, but the good news is there will eventually be long-term care rooms available close to home, right here in Virgil, for local residents who need them.

### View from the couch

**Donald Combe**  
Special to The Local

In *The Reluctant Traveler with Eugene Levy* (Apple TV+ 2023), Levy admits he does not like to travel, as it is disruptive to his comfort level, so he brings a different kind of

perspective to this travelogue series. He is a man who is courteous and curious, and eager to learn in spite of his apprehensions, but he teaches us viewers how to travel and be deeply rewarded. The locations he visits are spectacular and quite beyond the ordinary traveller.

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

### Local LETTERS

#### Baha'is celebrate Naw-Ruz, or new year

The spring equinox (March 21) is celebrated by Baha'is here in Niagara-on-the-Lake and around the world. It is called Naw-Ruz, literally "New Day," but actually "New Year."

Naw-Ruz is one of the oldest celebrations in the world, orig-

inating with the Assyrians and adopted over 3,500 years ago by the Zoroastrian religion, which was the state religion of the Persian Empire.

Today Baha'is celebrate Naw-Ruz for two reasons: it marks the end of an annual 19-

day sunrise to sunset fast and it begins a new calendar year.

Naw-Ruz is celebrated by Muslims and Zoroastrians. Christians will recognize in it many similarities with Easter. Although there are no particular Baha'i customs associated with Naw-Ruz, most Baha'is here have Iranian friends, and western Baha'is — including me — enjoy the colourful, indeed beautiful customs of Iran so much that we have adopted some Naw-Ruz customs from our co-religionists who also celebrate this first day of spring.

Your Baha'i friends and neighbours wish everyone a very happy and joyous Naw-Ruz!

**Hugh Church**  
NOTL

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Where's Ben?



Eden student Ben Foster continues to discover new locations in NOTL, wondering how familiar others may be with them. If you know where this photo was taken, email penny@notllocal.com. Last week, Crispin Bottomley correctly identified Ben's location as the Redan Battery at Queenston Heights.



# COMMENT

## — *Local* LETTERS Courtland Valley residents oppose increasing density in village —

On Tuesday March 7, a public meeting was held regarding the Tawny Ridge Estates proposed subdivision, phases 1 and 2. I live in St. Davids and spoke on behalf of 100 per cent of all neighbouring Courtland Valley residents who signed a petition. We can all agree that 100 per cent speaks for itself.

There are 1,030 pages of documents that are available on the town's website. All the information provided can be quite overwhelming and confusing, so let me summarize what is actually being requested.

For the 32 proposed lots designated for single-detached dwellings, an amendment is being requested to rezone these 32 lots to a residential R2 zone, with excessive

site-specific amendments. The proposed 32 lots are basically the same size as the lots in Courtland Valley for single-detached dwellings. In Courtland Valley, all lots for the 36 single-detached dwellings are designated low density residential R1 and were granted 7.2 units per acre, remaining low density.

At the open house meeting, the consultant was asked to provide the rationale behind the request to rezone from R1 to R2 for the 32 lots designated for single-detached dwellings. So many reasons were given, but bottom line is to allow for bigger homes to be built on these lots. Bigger profit ... and this has absolutely nothing to do with Bill 23. Instead, the developer should consider

amending the size, style, geometry and design of the single-detached dwellings to meet the requirements under R1 zoning with minimal site-specific changes, as it was done for Courtland Valley.

Another concern is to extend Street A to Tanbark Road, as illustrated in the 2006 staff reports for Courtland Valley Estates and the staff report for St. Davids Estates. We understand the street network design illustrated in the staff reports is conceptual. However, we must consider the fact that St. Davids Estates and Courtland Valley subdivisions kept with the original conceptual street network designs, almost a perfect match. So why deviate from that approach when it comes to Tawny Ridge?

The consultant claims that Street A would be too close to Hickory Avenue. The distance between Street A and Hickory to the south would be about 128 metres (420 feet), and the distance between Street A and Warner Road to the north would be approximately 144 metres (475 feet), which is quite a fair distance between streets. To put things in perspective, the distance between Hickory Avenue and Apricot Glenn to the south is about 130 metres (425 feet), which is about the same distance between Street A and Hickory. And on the east side of Tanbark, the distance between Pincroft Drive and Sawmill Lane is about 45 metres (147 feet). Considering what is at stake, the extension of Street A

to Tanbark should be embraced and not even be up for discussion. So bottom line, logic, common sense, practicality and above all, "safety" must prevail.

As far as the proposed lots for single-detached dwellings are concerned, Ford's Bill 23 has absolutely nothing to do with it. Unfortunately, too many developers are using this as an excuse or justification to bully their way into small villages, communities and neighbourhoods, which they completely destroy.

All Courtland Valley residents are asking the newly-elected town councillors and officials is that Street A be extended to Tanbark Road, and that the 32 lots for single-detached dwellings be designated as low density. We strongly believe that

our requests are very reasonable and a fair compromise.

No one is against growth and developments, but it has to be done right. Development projects such as this one have to be handled properly and carefully in order to protect the interests of all residents, owners and taxpayers, and also to protect and maintain the integrity, the charm, the attractiveness and the historic value of the St. Davids community as a whole. Otherwise, we can end up with a project similar to the one at the corner of Four Mile Creek and York Road (behind the Avondale) which is an absolute disaster, as it basically destroyed the core of St. Davids village.

**Bruno Laliberte**  
St. Davids

## — *Local* LETTERS Creative, cultural hub would help drive economy —

The Niagara Creative Cultural Hub representatives have proposed a new use for the old hospital site that makes sense. Arts and culture play an important role in NOTL. We have the Shaw Festival, Bravo Niagara, Music Niagara and a plethora of galleries and museums. These institutions employ hundreds of people and not just artists; they hire technicians, office staff, craftspeople, maintenance workers, etc.

But the biggest driver of NOTL's economy, outside of agriculture, is

tourism, which employs 3,350 people and generates millions in revenue for the town and local businesses. Tourists come here for NOTL's beauty and to have an experience they can't get elsewhere: attend a play at a world-class theatre, go wine- or beer-tasting, see a musical performance at Jackson-Triggs, or learn about the area's history at the museum.

John Peller recently spoke publicly about the importance of building a premium wine-based experience in NOTL to

sustain and grow our economy. This is vital in providing career opportunities for young adults who want to live and raise their families in NOTL.

Drive through Napa on any weekend and many of the wineries offer live music or art shows to enhance the wine and food experience. Live music is "sticky" and a premium experience that keeps visitors at the wineries longer and spending more money.

How does the Niagara Creative Cultural Hub fit into this? They are propos-

ing a major renovation to the hospital that will then house numerous cultural groups including The Shaw, Plenty Canada, Yellow Door Theatre and Royal Oak Community School. They have already secured \$2 million in funding from donations and are not asking the town for money.

Educating artists and creators is part of the hub's plan. If we are to enhance the cultural experience in NOTL we need artisans and performers who are trained in their crafts and want to live and work in

the area. A facility that supports artists and other cultural workers with education, community and work space is a big piece in making this happen.

Niagara College is crucial to NOTL's tourism industry, offering relevant education in food and beverage, wine-making, beer brewing and more.

Go to almost any winery or restaurant in NOTL and you will see Niagara College graduates at work. Imagine how much more difficult it would be for these businesses to find

qualified workers if not for the college. The hub could provide a similar role for arts and culture.

With the recent sale of Laura Secord School in Queenston to a private developer, facilities in NOTL that offer space for artisans to learn and create are rare. I urge council to support this initiative and not waste an opportunity to transform the hospital into a community facility that benefits both residents and the tourism industry.

**Stewart Hall**  
NOTL

## — *Local* LETTERS Why isn't town looking at health care solutions —

I have been following with great interest the articles in the local newspapers concerning the old hospital building and property. I am astonished that I have not read one article about any proposal related to healthcare of Niagara-on-the-Lake's aging population.

Has anyone thought of an urgent care facility, diagnostic imaging clinic or

a senior's residence that could also house these services? Perhaps rather than a cultural hub proposal, a healthcare proposal might better service NOTL.

It seems to me residents in the 1950's had more foresight and interest in the well-being of the people who live here to be able to find the resources to construct a small hospital that adequately served its

population. We all know that our healthcare system is broken and probably won't be repaired in my life time, but something has to be done now to address the wait times to make an appointment to receive a CT scan, MRI and ultrasound, not to mention the wait times in the emergency room departments of our local hospitals. We all have horror stories about


St. Catharines and Niagara Falls hospitals.

I know that my opinion won't have any impact on

the decision for the hospital property but I would like our elected officials and decision-makers to

think about the healthcare of the locals.

**Marlene Sibbald**  
NOTL



### 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](mailto:penny@notllocal.com). Please try to keep it to 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.



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# Host a hive, preserve Niagara's beauty, biodiversity

**Sandra Ozkur**  
Special to The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake prides itself on being one of the prettiest towns in Canada, but what would it be without the flowers and trees?

Residents landscape their yards with fruit trees, shrubs, vegetables and flowers, taking for granted that they will produce, but do we ever consider how the magic happens? Plants require good soil, sun and rain, but more importantly pollination to produce flowers, fruits, vegetables and seeds.

The pollinating is done mostly by insects and bees that show up every year to get the job done, but what if they don't show up anymore? Bees are responsible for pollinating more than one-third of all food-producing plants and trees, but are decreasing at an alarming rate, so without bees to pollinate, Niagara could soon look very different.

Unfortunately, native bee and honey bee populations throughout Canada are dying at an unprecedented rate. The cause is not conclusive, but beekeepers and scientists point to environmental toxins, parasite infestations, climate change and loss of habitat as contributing factors.

This has taken its toll on beekeepers and commercial pollinators who cannot afford

to buy replacement bees this spring. Many local beekeepers are calling it quits because they've lost 75 to 90 per cent of their bees in just the last two years. As apiaries shut down, there will be a loss of thousands of hives from the Niagara region. This absence of honeybees will affect local crops, gardens, orchards, flowers, trees and nurseries who benefit from the presence of the bee farms nearby. The pollination job will be left to the wild bee population which does not have the capacity to do the work that hundreds of thousands of honey bees have been performing.

The European honeybee is not native to North America but has been living here for more than 200 years as a naturalized species. Beekeeping was brought to North America by European settlers, and people have been benefitting from the honey and pollination services of the bees ever since. Traditionally, beekeeping skills are passed down from generation to generation. Beekeeping courses are offered at Niagara College, where the basics can be learned, but years of experience are required to be successful. So, when generational beekeepers leave the profession, they take their knowledge and wisdom with them.

Is there an answer to keeping this ancient skill alive to pass on to future generations?

Niagara Beeway has come up with a new solution from a very old idea — a revival of backyard beekeeping. As a multi-generation beekeeper, George Scott and his team at Niagara Beeway have launched a grassroots initiative to help preserve beekeeping skills and sustain the bee population in Niagara. Their novel program is designed to reduce the environmental threats to honeybees by placing small groups of hives in safe zones. This initiative aims to create a network of evenly distributed beehives throughout the region. The idea is to reduce the possibility of mass exposure to toxins by placing the hives in hundreds of locations. The bee colonies will provide pollination services for the area and protect bee populations from complete destruction. Alongside this Host A Hive initiative, Niagara Beeway promotes bee education and pollinator habitat restoration projects within the region.

Host A Hive aims to place beehives on unpolluted properties where the bees can forage on pesticide-free plants and clean water. Traditional apiaries congregate their hives all together for ease of management, but this means that thousands of hives can be wiped out at once. Niagara Beeway wants to revert to beekeeping practices of the past when families often kept beehives in



Hosting a beehive is good for food-producing plants and trees. (Photos supplied)

their backyard. Host A Hive is looking for individual land owners, clubs or organizations that have one acre or more of pesticide-free land who would like to host some hives. When you sponsor hives on your property, Niagara Beeway will provide the equipment, bees and beekeeping service for the first year. The sponsor can then take over the ownership and beekeeping responsibilities in the second year or renew their sponsorship, and the beekeeper will continue to look after everything.

Hosting bees on your property facilitates a healthy ecosystem by providing pollination services which result in an abundance of fruits, vegetables, seeds and honey that feed birds, animals and humans. This is a way to maintain biodiversity on land that is rapidly being converted into housing developments. In 2022, Niagara Beeway placed 30 hives at 15 different locations, thanks to the generosity of private citizens and charity organizations such as Rotary. A portion of the honey from the hives was

donated to underprivileged families and charity groups such as Red Roof Retreat and Small-Scale Farms.

Representatives from Niagara Beeway are happy to speak to your group in person or via Zoom about bees, pollinator habitat restoration or Host A Hive.

If you or your organization would like to support the Host A Hive initiative, contact Niagara Beeway for more information at [Niagarabeeway@gmail.com](mailto:Niagarabeeway@gmail.com) or visit [www.niagarabeeway.com](http://www.niagarabeeway.com).

## Take the tourism strategy survey

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake recognizes the importance of a comprehensive Tourism Strategy that will provide a foundational framework for a sustainable tourism economy.

With this, the Town, along with the CBRE Tourism Consulting team, are soliciting feedback from all residents and visitors via two separate surveys. The intent of the surveys is to help guide the Tourism Strategy process with input from those who live in and visit the Town.

The surveys will be open from Wednesday, March 15, to Wednesday, April 5.

Residents and visitors of Niagara-on-the-Lake can participate. Registration for both surveys is required. Participate for a chance to win \$50!

Take the survey at [jointheconversationnotl.org/tourism-strategy](http://jointheconversationnotl.org/tourism-strategy).



George Scott of Niagara Beeway will help those who want to host a hive and contribute to a healthy ecosystem.

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# Red Roof looking for raffle prizes and auction items

**Sharon Burns**  
**The Local**

After three years of the cancellation of a favourite event, Ashlee Dagenais was so determined to get tickets for this year's Red Roof Retreat pasta dinner that she set an alarm on her phone.

"I have been going to the pasta dinner since I moved here," said Dagenais, a client who has been attending recreational programming and respite at Red Roof Retreat for the past several years.

The annual pasta dinner, a major fundraiser for Red Roof

Retreat, has been cancelled for the past few years due to COVID.

Executive director and founder Steffanie Bjorgan said that Red Roof Retreat "is a Niagara-on-the-Lake non-profit that has been operating since 2000. We provide respite and recreational services for children and young adults with special needs. Our most important program is respite, which offers weekend overnight stays to give caregivers a break"

Scott Botbyl has been using their services for more than 10 years for son Devon. "Respite is an important thing for us. It

gives people like Devon another opportunity to get out and be with other kids and it gives our family an opportunity to spend more time together."

"Having an avenue like this just really helps keep other relationships with your family, your spouse and your children important as well," he said.

While tickets for the dinner, held at John Michael's Banquet Centre April 30, sold out in two weeks, there is still a need for financial support. "Times have changed, and Red Roof will incur more costs than usual," said Bjorgan. "Many businesses that supported us in the past ar-

en't around anymore, or in the same position they were four years ago."

Bjorgan is looking for new donors to support the children's raffle table and silent auction with prizes. Larger prizes are needed for the live auction. Sponsorships for the event are also welcome, with donor logos prominently displayed at the event and in social media.

"We use funds from this event to keep all of our programs, especially respite, affordable to families," said Bjorgan, who adds that "this year's dinner is client-centred. We will highlight our clients with

personal portfolios hanging around the hall, and clients are creating the centre pieces."

Cathy van der Zalm is a community member who "appreciates the need for support for families who have children with disabilities. We have attended every pasta dinner and the children look forward to it," she said. "We have a third generation attending now."

Dagenais is looking forward to the food. "They make a special pasta for me because of my food allergies," she said. She is also excited "to meet up with the people I don't get to see except at pasta dinner." When

asked about the raffles, Dagenais was passionate. "Oh that's my favourite. I started saving for raffle tickets the beginning of September in hopes that the pasta dinner would come this year"

Botbyl notes that "there is not a lot out there for children with special needs, and we are so fortunate to have this in our community. Our community is special."

For more information about Red Roof Retreat, visit [redroofretreat.com](http://redroofretreat.com). To donate or sponsor the pasta dinner, which raised \$90,000 in 2019, contact [claire@redroofretreat.com](mailto:claire@redroofretreat.com).



Client Devon Botbyl with his sister Elise Botbyl. Devon's father, Scott, says Red Roof's respite program is important to Devon and the family. (Photos supplied)



Red Roof clients Ashlee Dagenais and Garrett Bjorgan — Ashlee loves the pasta dinner, especially the raffle prizes.



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# Local author Diane Martin hosting children’s book event

Mike Balsom  
The Local

First-time children’s author Diane Martin believes it’s important to find something magical in each and every day. In her new book, *When Time Stands Still*, the first entry in what she is calling the *Medallion Mysteries*, her young protagonists do exactly that.

Inspired somewhat by Mary Pope Osborne’s popular *Magic Tree House* books, Martin’s debut entry in her own series follows siblings Megan, Nicholas and Brooke on a magical journey through a watery portal to a land filled with glowing orbs, fairies, magic footprints and a giant yet timid monster. Their youngest sibling, Tanner, stays behind fishing with his father and stumbles onto clues to their whereabouts.

Martin started writing *When Time Stands Still* 16 years ago when she was pregnant with her fourth child, also named Tanner. The Eden Secondary School student appears as his younger self in the book, as do Martin’s older children, Megan, 27, Nick, 25, and Brooke, 19.

“I was up late one night,”

Martin recalls, “and an idea came into my head, so I just started writing. When I was done, I was proud of myself, and I sent it out to all of these publishing houses and was rejected. So I just put it away.”

It was Ridley College grad Brooke, now attending the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, on a hockey scholarship, who urged her mother to put the book out there for the world to read last year.

She didn’t want to knock on the publishing house doors all over again, though. Having read about other authors going the self-publishing route, Martin looked into some options and settled on Vancouver, B.C.’s Tellwell Talent.

“They helped me go through the whole process,” says Martin. “I had someone there edit the book, and I’m working with their marketing person right now. They also offered an illustration package but I wasn’t happy with it, so I decided to get it done on my own.”

Geared primarily toward ages 8 to 12, *When Time Stands Still* features illustrations at the start of each of its 10 chapters.

Martin’s son Nick is studying fine arts at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where Diane and her husband Fab own a construction company. She asked Nick to do the illustrations, but he wasn’t comfortable drawing cartoon-like images. So he connected Diane with his friend Emma McLay, who was happy to come up with likenesses of her pal and his siblings.

The likenesses don’t end with the drawings. In fact, Martin insists that she captured the personalities of the younger versions of her children in her writing.

“This is how they spoke,” she laughs. “It may be a little bit exaggerated for content purposes. But they’ll tell me ‘I never said that’ or ‘I didn’t do that,’ but yeah, they did. They like it. Tanner thinks it’s funny, and Nick’s a go-with-the-flow kind of kid.”

When pressed for specifics, Martin says the younger Brooke really did confuse words such as “definitely” with “defiantly” and “debrief” for “debris,” as does her character in the book, and the younger Tanner really did point at people when he spoke to them. As well, Megan, who is now in her final semester studying



Diane Martin holds up copies of her book, *When Time Stands Still*, and accompanying activity book that she had made to distribute at her book launch gathering, meant to be a fun event for kids, next Wednesday, March 22 at the Simpson Room in the community centre from 7 to 9 p.m. (Mike Balsom)

psychology at university, is captured at that awkward tween stage when her three younger siblings annoyed her just by being present.

“They still get along together, they have so much fun together, but they do have their moments,” Martin adds. “Some kids who have read the book have told me that it’s just like their family, how they get along with their siblings the same way.”

The plot centres on Brooke discovering an

Continued on page 11

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# Book launch will include face painters, scavenger hunt

Continued from page 10

old photograph of their great-grandfather Brian at a campground that the family just happens to be packing to go to. That leads to a story about the mysterious disappearance of Brian's brother Jack many years ago.

Once the chaos of packing is worked through, the family leaves for their trip. After setting up camp, intrigued by the story of their great-uncle Jack, the three oldest children pack some snacks and a first aid kit and set off to explore. They discover a shoe that seems to

have belonged to Jack, and it leads them to a waterfall, which turns out to be a portal to another world.

There they meet all kinds of strange creatures and experience adventures scary at times and magical at others. Through it all the three kids grow closer together. It's a well-written tale that will appeal to young and old alike.

Martin based the camping experience on a location in the Canadian Rockies that their own family frequently travelled to. The idea of exploring seems second nature to her — she organized elaborate scaven-

ger hunts for Halloween and Christmas, and she insists that her four children were never the type to sit around on screens all day.

"They were always building forts, inside or outside," says Martin. "I think kids should do that. Get off the electronics and go outside and explore."

Martin is giving local readers, both kids and adults, a chance to explore live and in person next Wednesday, March 22, at the Simpson Room in the community centre. She's holding a book launch event from 7 to 9 p.m., and it will not be

your usual author reading.

"I have face painters coming, and I have a big cardboard cutout of the monster," says Martin. "I got a backdrop of the castle made, too. I also made a fairy diorama, and Brooke helped me make a sheet of clues for a scavenger hunt. I just want it to be fun for the kids."

McLay also helped Martin create activity books, chock full of crosswords, mazes, word searches and pages to colour. Those who purchase a new copy of *When Time Stands Still* for \$15 that night, or bring in

the book purchased previously through Amazon, Chapters or Barnes and Noble, will receive a raffle ticket for an age-appropriate gift basket.

Martin proudly tells The Local that shortly after her book debuted in December it topped Amazon's Hot New Releases list for more than a week. It also spent a few weeks as the number one mystery/detective story on their website.

The reviews she is getting from family and friends, especially from the kids, were encouraging enough to convince her to release

book two in the *Medallion Mysteries* series, which will happen some time in 2023. She finished writing it during the first COVID lockdown and promised to work the names of some of her local young fans into the new adventure.

And Martin has already begun filling her coil-bound notebooks with material for book three, which may take the four siblings away from the campground of the first two books and into other enchanted lands.

Next Wednesday's event at the NOTL Community Centre is free to attend.

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# LocalSPORTS

## Predators hand out awards, bid goodbye to those not returning

Mike Balsom  
The Local

The Niagara Predators recognized their team leaders with their annual awards this week.

Leading the pack as Most Valuable Player is Niagara Falls native Anthony Tropea, the Preds' regular season leader in both goals (27) and points (48).

"He came out early in the season as one of the better players on the team," says head coach Kevin Taylor, "and he was consistent throughout the year with that. It wasn't just his points, but also his work ethic and his desire to win. He has a competitive nature that rubs off on other people as well."

Logan Baillie was named as the Most Sportsmanlike Player. The 18-year-old from Niagara Falls was one of only four returning players on the team this year, completing his second straight season on the blueline without being assessed a single penalty.

"He's a quiet player on the ice," Taylor says, "but in the room, he's very different. With the boys, he was a guy who brought people together. He never complained, he was a coach's dream."

Rookie of the Year Nolan Wyers represented the Predators at the Greater Metro Ju-

nior A Hockey League's rookie all-star game earlier this season. He finished fourth on the Predators in scoring, with 12 goals and 18 assists.

"Nick (Savoie) and Leo (Savin) also had great rookie years," Taylor adds, "but when Wyers brought his A-game, he didn't play like a rookie. He put up some great numbers. He has a lot of talent, and hopefully he will stick around with us."

Nineteen-year-old Guy Manco edged Thomas McGrath for Most Improved Player.

"We saw him as a fifth or sixth defenceman at first," Taylor says of Manco. "We're now building our defensive core around him and Nick Savoie. He made some little adjustments in one-on-ones in practices and I don't think he ever got beaten after that."

Savoie earned recognition as the best defenceman on the team. Taylor points out how much the St. Catharines native elevated his game in the second half of the season, so much so that he became a mainstay on the power play. At 5' 7" he played much bigger than his size.

Declan Fogarty, Niagara's third highest scorer, received the Best Defensive Forward award.

"He was the guy we counted on for penalty kills," Taylor

explains. "He brought offensive scoring to the front end as well. He came out as one of the most important forwards on our team because he was so versatile."

The final honour of the season, the Cayden Edwards Award, goes to goaltender Ryan Santini. Named for a former trainer of the team in honour of his late mother, the award goes to a graduating player who is held in high regard by his fellow players.

As the Predators' number one goalie, Santini played in 19 games this season, winning six and losing 11, though many of those losses came against the top three teams in the league's South Division. His goals-against average of 4.05 and 0.906 save percentage were inflated due to those challenges. He also missed six weeks of the season with a shoulder injury.

"Stats don't always tell the whole story," Santini says. "I think my season went well. Even though there were some losses, they were fun games. I'm thankful that the coaches trusted me enough to be in net in those types of games, and that the guys felt confident with me in those situations."

He's thankful for the friendships he made with his fellow Predators and hopes to keep in touch with many of them as

he moves on. By press time, the 21-year-old will be on his way back home to Montreal.

Santini says it was a year for hockey but more importantly a year for growth. It was a challenging task to convince his parents to let him come to play in Niagara. It was a chance for him to be on his own for the first time and to find out exactly where he wants to go with his life.

Santini will be helping at a Montreal hockey camp with one of his former goalie coaches this summer, and hoping to catch on with a university or college team.

"As much as I love the sport, I'm not ready to play pro yet," he says. "At this point, I'd rather go to school, get a good degree and start working. I hope I can play hockey somewhere, but school comes first."

Other players graduating from this year's roster include Tropea, Ethan Boyd, Askar Aimanbetov and Alexander Andrews. But there should be a good core of players sticking around to take the team to the next level.

The Predators finished the regular season with a record of 20-18-4, finishing fourth in the South. They beat St. George 2-1 in the first round of the playoffs, then lost to the first place



Anthony Tropea earned the Preds' Most Valuable Player award. (Supplied)

North York Renegades in three straight in the semi-finals.

"I was happy with the season," Taylor says, "but not happy with how it ended. We accomplished some team goals, our plus-minus dramatically improved and we have lots to build on for next year."

Taylor will spend some of his time in the coming months scouting some new players to add to the 2023-2024 squad, to replace those who have aged out of the league.

"The difference this year is I know now what I have, and I know what I'm looking for," he says. "I was new last year, but

this year I'll be more involved in selecting players, more picky. I'm looking to build a good, balanced team."

He expects to hold the first open skates for players interested in earning a spot on the Predators some time in late April or early May, with more open skates scheduled throughout the summer.

Meanwhile, the Bradford Bulls knocked out the Durham Roadrunners in three straight to win the other GMHL South Division semi-final series. They begin the best-of-seven division final Wednesday, March 15 at home against North York.

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# LocalSPORTS

## Two NOTL minor hockey teams win tournament trophies

**Mike Balsom**  
The Local

Ten Niagara-on-the-Lake minor hockey teams were among the 43 that competed in the annual March Break Tournament that took over both rinks at Virgil's Meridian Credit Union Arena from Friday through Monday.

The annual four-day event is one of the NOTL Wolves' most important fundraisers each season.

"For NOTL Hockey, we don't have a lot of sources of revenue," tournament convenor Gino Patterson told The Local. "Our tournaments are basically our only chance at revenue. Without successful tournaments, we don't have a successful club."

The March Break Tournament is one of two hosted by the club each year. The December Harvest Classic is a rep, or travel team, competition, while the spring tournament is primarily for house league teams.

House league teams from all over Ontario gathered in town to play in U9, U11, U13, U15 and U18 divisions.

"We also sprinkle in the U9 Selects, because they don't have an opportunity to play full ice until Janu-

ary," Patterson explained. "We have a great turnout for that every year. We actually had to turn away a bunch of teams for that division. For a lot of those teams this is their first tournament."

When The Local arrived Friday morning, two Wolves teams in the U18 age group were facing off against each other, presenting a situation where one NOTL team had to lose that game.

"We also have three NOTL teams in the U11 category and two in the U15 group," Patterson added.

The lifeblood of both NOTL minor hockey tournaments is the volunteer participation. Patterson pointed out that there were 256 slots for parents and supporters to enter their names to help out over the four days.

"We have a lot of high school kids signing up to help too," Patterson said. "It's their March break, and they have the time, and it's a great way for them to earn community hours. And who doesn't love hanging around the arena?"

Tasks included helping Jo Zambito on the popular barbecue, where board member Carrie Plaskett estimates they sold 640

burgers and 360 hot dogs. Volunteers were also needed for running the score clocks, playing music and helping distribute medals and trophies to the winning teams.

"Plus there's all the preparation work that nobody really sees," Patterson added. "Filling in the rosters, printing the schedules and inputting the game sheet. Thank God my son Jaden can help me with that, he's such a computer whiz."

He also credited the support of sponsors such as Niagara Trailers, who donated the Most Valuable Player trophies for each team, and Phil's Your Independent Grocers for putting together the team welcome packages with snacks.

Friday's snow storm caused a little bit of consternation for Patterson and members of the Wolves board, but it didn't seem to keep teams or spectators away from the packed arenas. And the games were starting exactly on time throughout the entire weekend.

"I always try to keep the local teams scheduled to play at the beginning of the day," Patterson explained. "That way it gives teams from further away a little

extra travel time. Last night, I was worried that some teams might not make it. Missing a game sets everything back. But so far so good, everyone has shown up on time."

In the end, three NOTL teams clawed their way into championship games in their divisions.

Matt Unruh's U13 team had to beat another NOTL team coached by Mike Cwierniewski in the semi-final, going into overtime, to earn their way into the championship game.

The championship game ended with Unruh's Wolves in another tie with Clearview. The game went to triple overtime, then to a shootout that ended up being just as close. Silas Unruh buried what turned out to be the winning penalty shot after goalie Zander Rigas made a clutch save on Clearview's final attempt, sealing the 5-4 shootout win and the championship for the Wolves.

Steve Lidstone's U15 Wolves dominated the Essa Eagles, beating them 6-1 to take the trophy for their age group. And Rob Carroll's U18 squad met a very tough DeJardins team from Northern Ontario and ended up taking home silver medals.



The U11#1 Wolves watch their teammates. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



NOTL's U13 Silas Unruh scores the winning goal for the championship in a shootout, after triple overtime.



The U11#2 (in orange) played the Heartland Dragons Saturday.



The U15 Wolves raise their trophy in celebration of a 6-1 win against the Essa Eagles.



The U13 Wolves win their championship 5-4 in a shootout.

## Skating to provincials



Niagara-on-the-Lake Skating Club members Ashleen Hale, Samantha Frydryk, and Ophelia Xie have qualified to compete in the Skate Ontario Provincial Championships being held at the Stratford Rotary Complex from March 24 to 26. Hale has earned a return trip in both her top events, ranking #1 in Ontario in her STAR 9 O14 Women event and #5 in GOLD Women at the end of the qualifying round. Samantha Frydryk has qualified for her first trip to the provincials with a ranking of 24th in her STAR 5 O13 event. Ophelia Xie finished in 33rd place in her STAR 6 Women's event, also qualifying for a return to the championships, explains Darlene Dortono of the NOTL Skating Club. The championships will be live streamed again this year, says Dortono, with the skating club posting the links with approximate skating times on their Facebook page once they are available. (Supplied)



# LocalSPORTS

## NOTL athletes wrestle to success at OFSAA

**Mike Balsom**  
The Local

Four athletes from Niagara-on-the-Lake travelled to Ottawa last week for the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OFSAA) wrestling championships. Two returned home with medals, one with a fifth

place ribbon, and another with a driving desire to take the podium next year.

Grade 12 Eden High School student Zubin Gatta capped off his high school wrestling career with his second OFSAA gold. Wrestling in the 57.5 kilogram class, Gatta went undefeated in his three qualifying bouts, and

took down Robbie Dunbar of Simcoe County's St. Peter's Catholic Secondary School for the title.

It was really nice," Gatta says of winning the gold. "The pressure had been building up the whole year since winning the Canada Games qualifier and being on Team Ontario last summer. I finally relieved

that pressure by winning the gold."

In Gatta's first match Tuesday, he faced an unfamiliar opponent in Leo Kitambala of London.

"He was a lot stronger than I thought," Zubin told The Local. "He grabbed hold of me and he started rag-dolling me. So I had to change

my strategy a little bit. I ended up pinning him."

His second opponent that same day, Josh John of Newtonbrook Secondary School in North York, was another unfamiliar, surprisingly strong opponent. Gatta drew upon his experience from his first bout, but a nagging soreness in his knee forced him to tweak his moves a bit. He ended up winning that match 10-0 on technical superiority.

The two wins qualified Gatta for the semi-final Wednesday against Carson Patel of Barrie.

"Again, he was very strong," Gatta says. "I was wrestling up a weight class (he usually competes at 51 kg). He pushed me out twice and I was down 2-0. But I took him down, and I turned him eight times. I won 12-2."

In the final, he finally faced a very familiar opponent in Dunbar.

"I know his style, so I just wrestled smart," Gatta explains. "I didn't try any funky moves. I shut down his moves and capitalized whenever he made little mistakes."

Gatta won the match 11-0. His gold medal at 57.5 kilograms will find a place next to the one he won at 38 kilograms four years ago while in Grade 9. There was no OFSAA event in 2021 or 2022.

Gatta's teammate Charlotte Bowslaugh was very impressive in her first OFSAA competition. The Grade 10 Eden student rolled into the final match in the 64 kilogram category by pinning all three of her opponents to that point.

In the final, however, she was pinned by Mayfield Secondary School's Tarleen Saroya and had to settle for the silver medal.

Bowslaugh's best friend and fellow Eden student Jorja Lepp also qualified for OFSAA. She went 1-2, pinning Rebecca Hartman of Oshawa's Maxwell Heights Secondary School for her sole win in her second match. She finished out of the medals, but it was an experience she won't forget.

"It was a really fun experience," Lepp says. "I think I

wrestled well, even though I didn't win. Seeing how good some of the other girls were made me more determined to train even harder for next year."

Ezekiel Ivri, a Grade 10 student at A.N. Myer Secondary School, took a longer route than Gatta or Bowslaugh to the podium, finishing in fifth place in the 51 kilogram division.

Ivri pinned both of his opponents Tuesday, but lost to Yasser Saleh of Brampton's Turner Fenton Secondary School 12-2 Wednesday.

"After my first takedown, I should have kept shooting," Ivri wrote in an email to The Local. "I didn't maintain the same focus I had on day one. This one match cost me my shot at gold and it also affected my next match, which cost me the bronze."

He went on to defeat Roshawn Daley of Mississauga 10-0 later that day, and then pinned Jacob Abbott of Lindsay to take fifth place.

"I regained my composure and came in with a can't lose mentality," Ivri said of his final match. "If I had stayed focused like this, my match against Yasser would have been very different."

The four wrestlers all train as part of the Brock Junior Badgers Wrestling Team at Thorold Secondary School.

"I've been wrestling with Zeke since I was six, I think," Gatta says. "This was his first OFSAA, too. It was the first OFSAA for all the kids under Grade 12. It was kind of nice to mentor them. I was cheering them on, we all supported each other."

Ivri and Bowslaugh will now prepare for the Nationals in Vancouver at the end of March as representatives of the Brock Junior Badgers Wrestling Team.

Gatta, also a Junior Badger, was slated to compete there as well, but an injury suffered just two days after winning the OFSAA gold will keep him off the mat.

He was wrestling Friday at the Canadian Cadet team trials for a chance to compete at the Pan American Games in Santiago, Chile, this October.

"Thirty seconds into his first match," explains Zubin's father, Kekoo, "he defended a gut wrench move and popped his elbow out. He was competing against wrestlers as old as second-year university students. His season, unfortunately, is over."

Most likely, though, Zubin will fly out with Bowslaugh and Ivri and other members of his team to provide moral support. And he'll be wrestling for Brock University as a member of their varsity team come September, having recently accepted an offer to study business there.



Zubin Gatta returns from OFSAA with a gold medal. (Eldean Ivri)



Charlotte Bowslaugh (left) comes home from OFSAA with a silver medal. (Kekoo Gatta)



Jorja Lepp (right) is determined to train harder and improve her performance at next year's OFSAA competition. (Eldean Ivri)



Ezekiel Ivri, shown with A.N. Myer coach Gary MacDonald, finished at OFSAA in fifth place. (Eldean Ivri)

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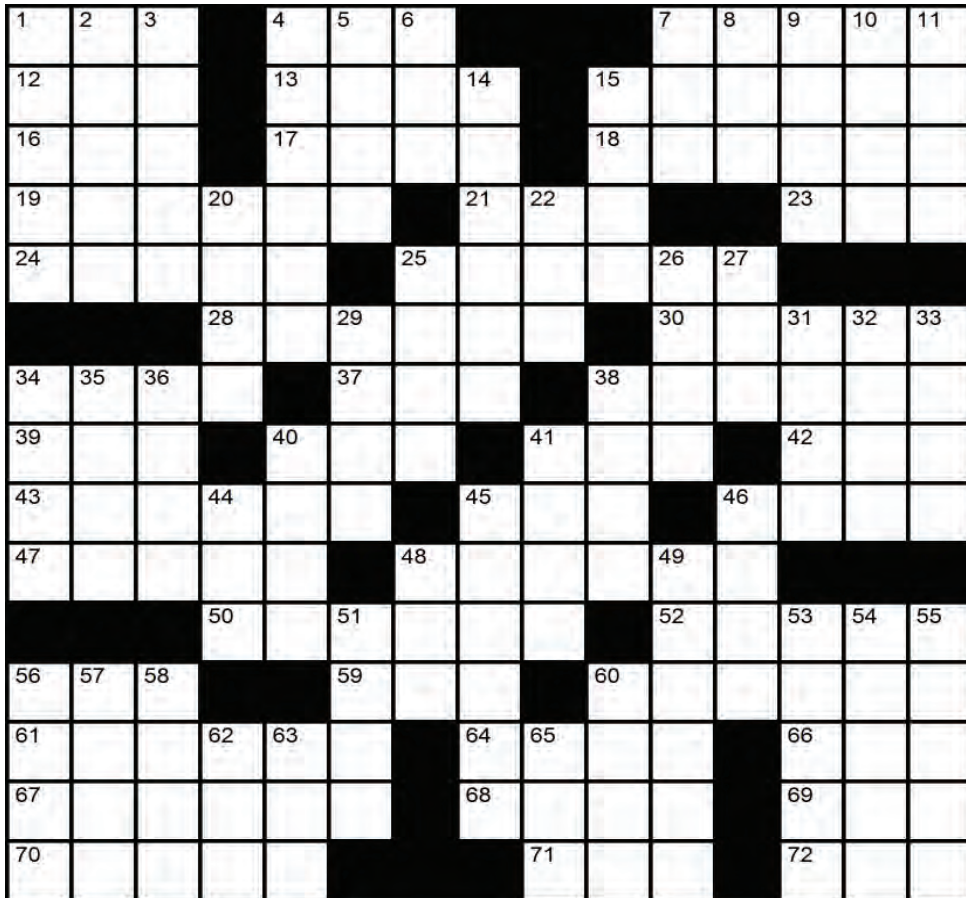
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13 Molten rock  
15 Deceive  
16 Letters after business names  
17 Colorist  
18 Merkel or Lansbury  
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34 Jekyll's alter ego  
37 Cereal grain  
38 Outcry  
39 The Emirates  
40 Ft. divisions  
41 Hit  
42 NASDAQ debut  
43 Vino selection  
45 Heated argument  
46 Ran off  
47 Detect  
48 Ship  
50 Some music storage media  
52 Tars

56 Retains a reservoir  
59 Admiration  
60 Canadian capital  
61 In the slightest  
64 Levee  
66 "Before Abraham was, ---" (Jesus)  
67 Farm fertilizer  
68 Yesteryear  
69 Chest bone  
70 Ooze  
71 Theater for some vets, briefly  
72 Double helix molecule (Abbr.)

**Down:**

- 1 Egg beater
- 2 Spanish card game
- 3 Rot
- 4 Type of Venetian type
- 5 Howls at the moon
- 6 Hail
- 7 --- Solo (Harrison Ford character)
- 8 Heart test
- 9 Career
- 10 Vitriol
- 11 Catch
- 14 "Arrested Development" star Will ---
- 15 Sensitivity
- 20 Team
- 22 Social gathering

25 In order  
26 Aid  
27 "The Locomotion" singer  
Little ---  
29 Forbidden activity  
31 Track legend --- Zatopek  
32 Informal negative  
33 Stepped  
34 Centers  
35 Connecticut university  
36 College head  
38 Intimidates  
40 Chilled  
41 Top banana  
44 White House defense  
advisory grp.  
45 Medicament  
46 Tire problem  
48 Promise  
49 Regard  
51 Speed  
53 Scottish land proprietor  
54 Clemens' pen name  
55 Rio de Janeiro dance  
56 Hemispherical roof  
57 Lizzie Borden took ---, ...  
58 Restaurant card  
60 Southern soup ingredient  
62 Chum  
63 Wrath  
65 Distant but within sight

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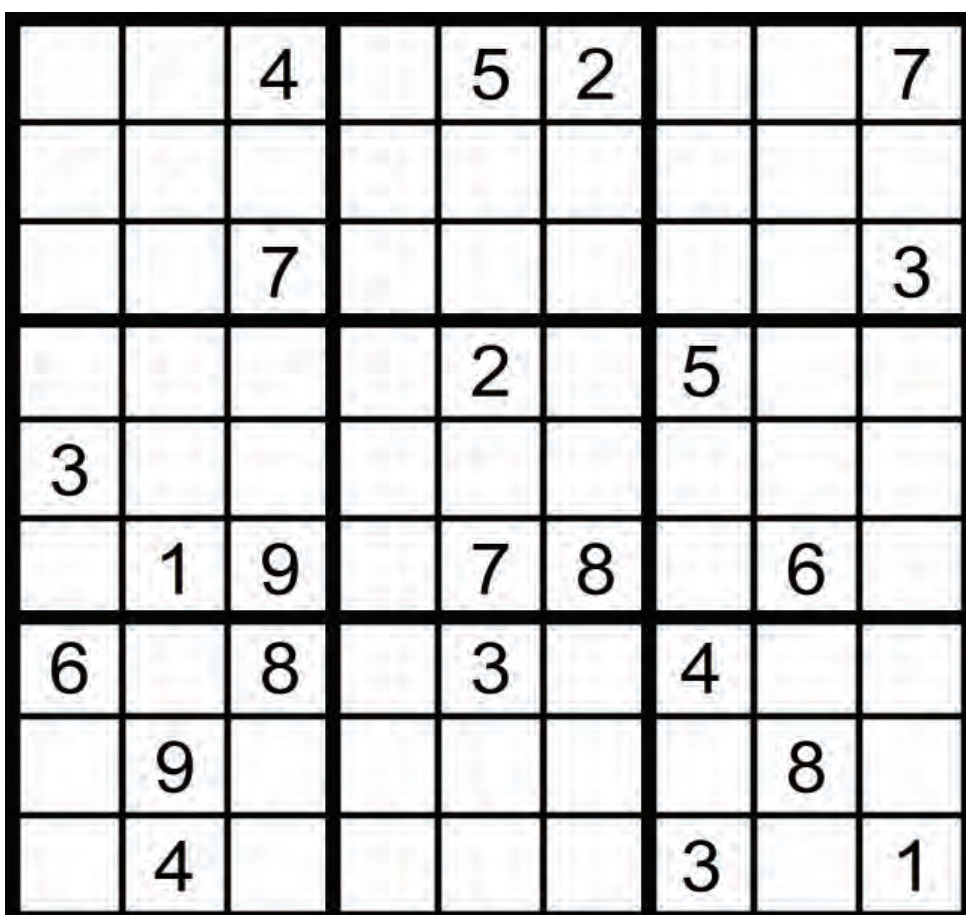
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**Down:** 1 Whisk, 2 Monte, 3 Decay, 4 Aldine, 5 Bays, 6 Ave, 7 Han, 8 E K G, 9 Reel, 10 Bile, 11 Snag, 14 Arnett, 15 Tact, 20 Side, 22 Bee, 25 So as, 26 Help, 27 Eva, 29 No-no, 31 Emil, 32 Nope, 33 Trod, 34 Hubs, 35 Yale, 36 Dean, 38 Cows, 40 Iced, 41 Boss, 44 N S C, 45 Remedy, 46 Flat, 48 Vow, 49 Esteem, 51 Rate, 53 Laird, 54 T'wain, 55 Samba, 56 Dome, 57 An ax, 58 Menu, 60 Okra, 62 Bud, 63 Ire, 65 Yon.



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