Parents, kids loved March Break tourney

Mom’s claim to fame funny family videos on TikTok

Virgin’s Krista London-Verticchio is finding online fame as the TikTok Mom. Her autismoma account on the social media platform has 260,500 followers and counting.

She uses the account to document life as a mother with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), raising three children, including two boys both diagnosed with autism.

London-Verticchio turned to the social media app near the start of the pandemic. The long-time Facebook user was becoming frustrated with the negativity, anger and vitriol she was seeing there.

“Everything was turning into COVID talk,” she says, “and it was really difficult to see that all the time. I noticed people posting funny TikTok videos onto Facebook, though, so I decided to check that out.”

Like many new to TikTok, she was originally inundated with the types of video content her own children were watching. That is, short clips of teens and young adults dancing to upbeat tunes.

“But TikTok has an algorithm, and it quickly learns what you like,” she says. “Every single user has its own ‘for you’ page. When you react to someone’s video with a like, a comment or a follow, TikTok makes note of it. Today, I don’t see any kids anymore. I see teachers, police officers, it’s all adults now.”

She began to post short videos to make light of what the effervescent London-Verticchio says is the humorous chaos in her household of five, including 16-year-old son Ryan, nine-year-old son Avery, Emma, six, and her husband Mike.

“It ended up turning into talking about the reality of what it’s like, having children with autism here in Ontario,” she says today. “It’s a struggle all over Canada, the lack of resources for autistic people in general, but I focus on the humour of the whole situation. If you’re not laughing at it, you’re crying or upset. I try to keep it as positive as possible.”

Though she creates many of her short videos in the family’s open concept main floor living room, she often retreats into her car to escape the chaos. In fact, when ‘The Local’ came calling that’s exactly where she chose for the interview.

Her followers quickly began to snowball last year. It was a bit of a shock for London-Verticchio to see how popular her posts were becoming.

Mike Balsom Special to The Local

Region calls end to State of Emergency

Penny Coles
The Local

The state of emergency declared two years ago in Niagara-on-the-Lake has been lifted.

In recent weeks, discussions at council have indicated that although NOTL made the decision to declare a state of emergency independently, about 10 days before the region followed suit, the town would join with other municipalities to end them as a region.

Chair Jim Bradley announced Monday that they would officially end in all 12 municipalities Tuesday, March 15 at 12:01 a.m., “as they are no longer necessary.”

When NOTL became the first municipality to declare a state of emergency, it was Lord Mayor Betty Disero’s decision, although it was supported by councillors and in consultation with the emergency control group. It was made in part out of concern over the many returning travellers at that time who were not self-isolating.

Lifting it now does not change much that would be visible to the public, impacting mostly administration procedures, such as deploying staff to other areas without contract negotiations, Disero said.

The town’s emergency control group met Monday, and although it isn’t obligated to continue meeting, it likely will to wrap up some remaining issues, mostly dealing with staff, she added.

NOTL councillors have been talking about resuming in-person meetings since last summer, with Disero making it obvious she would like to see at least a hybrid meeting.

Continued on page 3
Farmworker Hub set for a successful season

Penny Coles
The Local

Organizers of The Farmworker Hub are looking forward to their first full year in a permanent, central location, with early signs leading to a successful season.

And farmworkers arriving in Canada during a harsh, snowy winter were grateful it was there for them when it opened Sunday afternoon.

Hub coordinator Julia Buxton-Cox says she couldn’t be happier about the response to their new space, on the main floor of Cornerstone Community Church in Virgil.

“It was a really good turnout Sunday,” she says, especially considering the bulk of workers has not yet arrived in Niagara.

Some of those who visited the hub are here for their first season, she says, and were especially grateful for the warm winter clothing — the recent arrivals were finding it really cold.

“They were mostly looking for warm winter coats, boots, socks, hats and gloves,” Buxton-Cox says.

One man arrived in shorts, and picked up several pairs of pants — he and many others expressed appreciation for finding the hub operating and offering warm clothing — all of it free, helping them send more money home for their families.

When the hub opened in a portable in the church parking lot last July, it was intended to be temporary, set up quickly to respond to the lack of services for farmworkers due to the pandemic.

The Cornerstone location was considered perfect, central for the workers, near the old Virgil school where many of them go for new bikes or bike repairs, and close by for shopping, banking and other services when they get to town.

The hub has received funding through a federal grant to Karios Canada, an ecumenical, faith-based movement for ecological justice and human rights, intended to help temporary foreign workers during the pandemic, with a focus on the agricultural sector.

The funding helped get the hub started, and along with another generous donation, has covered the rent for the church space for a couple of months, Buxton-Cox says.

As farmworkers arrive in NOTL and need warm clothes, they are grateful for the hub offering them what they need — free. (Photos by Julia Buxton-Cox)

Police looking for video of ATV rollover

Penny Coles
The Local

Early Sunday morning, a St. Catharines teenager was discovered pinned under an all-terrain vehicle in a rollover in Garrison Village.

An 18-year-old male was flown to an out-of-region local hospital. He was later flown to a local hospital for further care.

Police are interested in recorded activity from 11:30 p.m. March 12 to 5 p.m. March 13.

Anyone with information is being asked to contact 905-688-4111, extension 1009265.

As workers arrive in NOTL and need warm clothes, they are grateful for the hub offering them what they need — free. (Photos by Julia Buxton-Cox)
No plans to expand mask mandate in Niagara

Penny Coles
The Local

The mask mandate will end across the province Monday, leaving residents and business owners free to make their own choices in Niagara-on-the-Lake and across the province.

And although Dr. Mushaf Haji, the region’s acting chief medical officer, has made it clear he believes it’s too soon to offer that choice, there is no plan for an order to continue making them mandatory in Niagara.

“We disagree with the province’s decision to end mandatory masking, and believe it should have aligned with when the infections from COVID-19 were much lower and the risk to the community was much less,” he said in a statement last week.

“We agree with the province that wearing masks is a recommended practice to protect oneself and those around us. We encourage everyone to wear masks past March 21, and support organizations who wish to continue with masking policies to protect their customers and staff.”

On the lifting of the mask mandate taking effect Monday, as students return to school after their March break, Haji’s said public health would review the announce- ment and discuss “how we may act going forward. With respect to a section 22 order, a decision on one would need to be based on local COVID-19 trends closer to March 21 when it might come into effect.”

“We are currently not planning such an order,” he added, “but will continually reassess the situation as we approach March 21 and beyond.”

Dr. Azim Kasmani, the region’s associate medical officer for Niagara Local, said “Tuesday” at this time there is no plan to continue a mask mandate in Niagara.

“It wouldn’t make sense to adjust the provincial mandate just for Niagara,” he said, “and he hasn’t seen any indication that other jurisdictions are considering it.”

However, “there is always the potential for a rebound” of cases, and if, through mon- itoring results of wastewater testing, hospitalizations and care admissions, that seems to be the case, that could change, he said.

Although there are school boards across the province which are continuing to re- quire the wearing of masks in school, Kasmani said public health hasn’t had any discussions with local school boards, and it would be up to the boards if that was their intention — they wouldn’t require regional input.

Lord Mayor Betty Dise- ro is encouraging people to make their own decisions, and to “wear a mask if they feel a risk at all, or if they feel uncomfortable in a public place.”

“Mask mandate, an important intervention, that doesn’t mean you can’t con- tinue to wear one,” she said. She has heard some busi- nesses might continue to re- quire them, and asks people to be kind to anyone who makes a decision to continue to wear one.

“The pandemic isn’t over. As in other municipalities, we’re just following the prov- ince on this,” she said.

When the mask mandate is removed Monday, people coming to the town will no longer be expected to wear a mask, but to just check the passive screening signs on the door.

As the mask restriction is lifted, there is a high rate of immunity across Niagara, with a large number of peo- ple vaccinated, Kasmani says, but he continues to encourage those who haven’t had a first, second or third dose to get those shots.

Now, one of the more traditional vaccinations that is not an mRNA, is now ap- proved and available, he said, and that could encourage people who have avoided vac- cinations so far to reconsider.

It is available in the region, and to find out when you can visit the COVID-19 Info-Line at 905-688-8248 or 1-888-505-6074, press 7, during the hours 8 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.

The other piece of good news, he added, is that there are at least two new medica- tions approved to help those who are infected with COVID, and that could re- duce the risk of serious illness and hospitalization. There are many factors to determine whether they are appropri- ate for patients with specific medical issues, so the first step, he said, is for anyone with early symptoms to con- tact their physician to make that determination. If they are candidates, they would be referred to a regional assess- ment clinic.

Continued from page 1

model sooner rather later. With the state of emergen- cy lifted, council meetings are now required to be held in person. And although Dr. Mushaf Haji, the region’s acting chief medical officer, has made it clear he believes it’s too soon to offer that choice, there is no plan for an order to continue making them mandatory in Niagara.

“We disagree with the province’s decision to end mandatory masking, and believe it should have aligned with when the infections from COVID-19 were much lower and the risk to the community was much less,” he said in a statement last week.

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Go-VAXX bringing vaccinations to NOTL

Local Staff

The GO-VAXX mobile vaccine clinic will be at the Niagara College Niagara- on-the-Lake campus March 17 to administer COVID-19 vaccines to students, employ- ees and members of the public.

On March 20, it will be at the Outlet Collection on Glen- dale Avenue.

Fully accessible buses will be providing first, second, and booster doses for adults and youth ages 12 and up, as well as the pediatric Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children aged five to 11.

The converted Metrolinx bus will be at Niagara College March 17 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Daniel J. Patterson Cam- pus in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in parking lot A2.

A map of the campus lots can be found on the NC web- site. Parking is free for those visiting the GO-VAXX bus.

The GO-VAXX clinic will also be at the Outlet Collection of Niagara on Glendale Avenue Sunday, March 20, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Book an appointment via the COVID-19 vaccination portal or provincial hotline at 1-833-943-3900. Walk-ins are also accepted.

The GO-VAXX bus oper- ates as a fully functioning vac- cine clinic with the necessary supplies and trained staff to provide assistance to people and ensure vaccines are admin- istered safely. All COVID-19 safety precautions will be fol- lowed, including the required pre-vaccination screening and post-vaccination monitoring.

Bring a health card if possi- ble, or another form of govern- ment-issued photo identifica- tion such as a driver’s licence, passport, status card, or birth certificate.

Do not visit the GO-VAXX bus with symptoms of COVID-19.

To learn more about the GO-VAXX bus, visit ontario.ca/page/go-vaxx-bus-schedule.
Airport receives $1.6 million for safe operations

Niagara District Airport

After the announcement, St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle, airport commission chair Robin Garrett, airport CEO Daniel Pilon, Niagara Centre MP Vance Badawey, and federal transport minister Omar Alghabra chat at the airport. (Photos by Randy Klaassen)

March 16, 2022
THE NOTL
notlocal.com

Niagara District Airport

CEO Daniel Pilon said the funding will allow the purchase of a new snowblower, sweeper, loader and snowplow. “Some of the current equipment is quite old, and we anticipate the new vehicles to be operational for the next winter season. We hope there will not be delivery delays due to issues of COVID, yet that seems to still be a factor in vehicle acquisitions.”

The intention, he added, is to purchase equipment within North America. The funding is in addition to the $470,000 in the capital assistance program funding provided to the airport in May 2021 for the purchase of a medium-sized snowblower.

The equipment will help the airport maintain safe operations for aircraft, passengers, crews and airport workers by keeping airside surfaces, such as runways and taxiways, clear of snow and ice.

Robin Garrett, chair of the Niagara District Airport Commission, said development plans for the airport are progressing with an aim to serve an expanding clientele. She credited the 2016 addition of Greater Toronto Airlines, with passenger service between Niagara and Toronto’s Billy Bishop Airport, as a major factor in the growth of the airport. “The vision is to expand with further business opportunities, especially since Niagara’s runway is much longer than Billy Bishop’s.”

Alghabra acknowledged other MPs who were in attendance for the announcement, and credited them for working behind the scenes to make the funding grant possible. MP for Niagara Centre, Vance Badawey and Chris Bittle, MP for St. Catharines each spoke of the importance of aviation services to the region.

Following the announcement Garrett was asked if the airport considered other projects for the funding, such as marketing Niagara as a unique destination for tourists. “The criteria for the grant was specific to make capital investments in safety, so for the commission the focus was clear,” she said. “The equipment we’ve identified is needed for critical safe operations of the airport, as we learned this past winter when 55 centimetres of snow closed the airport for the first time. Our staff did a tremendous job, but we could have done better, and this equipment will allow us to do so well into the future.”

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After the announcement, St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle, airport commission chair Robin Garrett, airport CEO Daniel Pilon, Niagara Centre MP Vance Badawey, and federal transport minister Omar Alghabra chat at the airport. (Photos by Randy Klaassen)

Do you enjoy greeting people and sharing your passion for beautiful and historic Niagara-on-the-Lake?

If your answer is YES, we’d love to talk to you about becoming a Niagara-on-the-Lake Ambassador

Ambassadors stroll along Queen Street on weekends from May to September to provide visitors with recommendations on all there is to see and do, to make their stay an extraordinary experience.

We are recruiting volunteers now for the summer of 2022.

Choose one of the following in-person information sessions to hear about the program:
10:00am - 11:00am on Thursday, March 24
2:00pm - 3:00pm on Wednesday, April 6

Registration is required to attend. Please email us at info@notl-ambassadors.ca.

If you can’t make it to either of these, you can still get involved. Contact us!

Website: notl-ambassadors.ca
Since the early days of this council term, when there was a public hearing to approve conducting a revised and updated official plan, residents in the dock area have lived with confusion over the area’s secondary plan and the master plan, which showed discrepancies between plans and what they thought had been approved.

Add to that the town’s recreational master plan, which also impacts the dock area, and the result is some confusion among councilors that arose during a recent discussion over moving forward with the secondary plan.

There were two main concerns: one that a portion of the dock area is not included in the secondary plan, and that would allow development to move forward on Melville Street, on the King George V property, if there are no protections in the area covered by the secondary plan, to protect it from development.

Betty Disero recently made a report on a paddle sports master plan, which showed discrepancies between plans. She was grateful Burroughs had anticipated those problems, and called on the town staff to help.

The other is a plan put forward by Tim Balasiuk, better-known locally as Tim Bala, presented to council last August. He would like the boat launch to return to Queen’s Royal Park, near the jet boat operation. It would also free up parking spaces on King Street, he said.

“And it would be a great way to show the town is becoming more inclusive with our access to water,” he said, adding that the launch could be designed for those with disabilities.

When he made his presentation, council agreed to refer his request to staff for a report on a paddle sports launch, to see how much it would cost.

But when Lord Mayor Betty Disero recently made a motion to shift $20,000 in the budget from consulting fees for dock area plans, to instead pay for the more immediate need for improved drainage in the area, and councillors agreed they didn’t realize they could effectively be delaying the boat launch, which they had endorsed.

Coun. Gary Burroughs brought that to the attention of councilors last week, out of concern for both issues, potential development on the unprotected portion along Melville Street and River Beach Drive, considering the jet boat operation is not returning, and the delay of a new boat launch.

Neither Disero nor other councilors had anticipated those problems, and called on councilors next Monday, for a discussion on how to proceed.

Last week’s meeting ended with assurances a staff report on the boat launch would come to councillors next Monday, for a discussion on how to proceed.

Disero said Tuesday she is concerned about drainage, and the issue of expanding the area covered by the secondary plan, to protect it from development.

She was grateful Burroughs pointed out the problem resulting from her motion, and still hopes to offer residents access to the water through a River Beach Drive boat launch. If the cost is reasonable, she doesn’t see why it couldn’t happen for this year.

Bala said he still hopes to move to River Beach Drive, and expand his paddle sports to include lessons for kids and adults on paddle boards and kayaks.

He was optimistic that council’s support he would be able to do that, and in anticipation, has already spent $20,000 on kayaks, paddles, and other equipment.

He will also need a location to store his equipment, and envisions a large shipping container that could be made to look like a boat house, totally fitting in with its surroundings, to be used not only for storage but could also offer a small classroom area for kids if it begins to rain during their lessons.

Given the reaction he has heard from the public, he believes he has a lot of support for the boat launch.

But the first step is to have an answer from the town, and he’s going to run out of time before council moves forward, even if they accept the cost involved.

“I need to figure out my operations for Paddle Niagara for this year,” he says.

What he is expecting is to return to Queen’s Royal Beach, for 2022 at least, expand his operation to include the kayaks he has purchased, and offer a range of paddle sports to visitors and locals.

And he’ll hope for a boat launch he can use to access the water for the 2023 season.
We’ve been given choices, and should make them wisely

Across the country, and in Ontario, mask mandates are being dropped. Some scientists and medical experts fear we’re not quite there yet, while most of the population seems to feel ready for it, seeing it as a step forward to a more normal existence.

Our own Dr. Mustafa Hirji isn’t convinced it’s time — he has always erred on the side of caution, and he’s always been right. But the case has been made that COVID-19 is waning, and there is no overwhelming data to show it isn’t. So maskless we will go next week. If there is no overwhelming consensus, we are not quite comfortable, we are also putting others at risk. And so, far, that hasn’t worked out so well.

But the powers-that-be have made their decisions, we have our individual choices ahead of us, and we can only hope people make them wisely, with thoughts of others, and a reminder of what can’t be said too often as we enjoy this return to normalcy — the pandemic isn’t over yet. We don’t want to have to take another step backwards.

Penny Coles
The Local

Surely there is more we can do

There are no words for the scenes we are watching daily, coming at us from Ukraine. A photo of a pregnant woman we were shown over and over as she was taken from a bombed hospital, we now know is dead, as is her baby. Schools, kindergartens, bombed. Children have died. Families have died.

This is war, close up and personal. And no end in sight.

Members of the House of Commons and Senate listened Tuesday as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky pleaded for help. He spoke of his people suffering, dying. He made specific requests. A no-fly zone. For air space to close, to stop the bombing, the slaughter of his people. NATO has so far refused, but if Zelensky thinks it would help, surely he knows best.

This man is a hero, doing everything within his power to save his people, and certainly risking his life every day he stays to fight. He has called on Cana-
dia to do more. Not to wait. Surely he is telling that to every country he is able to talk to.

Sanctions have not stopped the war, and are not enough, he says. “You need to do more.”

We need to do more. We can’t in good conscience ignore his pleas for help.

Surely there is more we can do for an emergency session next week in Brussels, and will be talking about what else they can do.

How many more children will die by then? How many more families?

As we watch the trag- edies unfold, the horrible images on TV, we feel there must be something more to be done. We hope there is a plan, that it will work and the war will end soon. But it doesn’t look like there is a plan. We have thesmartest minds in the world working on this, talking about this. Surely one country, one man can be stopped.

Please, make it end.

Penny Coles
The Local

Health

ASSAULTED WOMEN’S HELP LINE
Mobile calls to: #SAFE (#7233)
1-866-863-0511
(Toll Free)

KIDS HELP PHONE
Service for youth
416-586-5437
1-800-668-6868
(Crisis Line)
kidshelpline.ca

CRIME STOPPERS
1-800-222-8477
(TIPS)
niagaratips.com
Text 274637 (CRIMES),
keyword: Niagara, then your tip

Mental Health and Addictions Access
(Toll Free)
1-866-550-5205

NEED HELP? MAKE THE CALL

DISTRESS CENTRE
For depression, distress and crisis.
24 hour help line:
905-688-3711

DONALD COMBE
Special to The Local

Michael Douglas and Alan Arkin star in The Kominsky Method (Netflix, 2021), a witty, bright series. The audience is soon intimately involved in the lives of these two old friends facing the very real problems of ageing and loss, while maintaining a sense of humour. Some of the epi-sodes are so engaging that I have watched them twice.

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

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March 16, 2022

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Local LETTERS

Solution to crosswalk debate

After watching the never-ending discussions over a rainbow crossing, I could no longer hold back my comments.

Yes, it is a great idea to show that Niagara-on-the-Lake is LGBTQ friendly but a simple road crossing will not indicate anything but a big money expenditure. This road painting will be at one intersection to be seen by only those crossing the street wherever that might be and not much to see in the winter. Money better spent would be to have a set of flag poles at the entrance to Old Town with the Canadian flag, the Ontario flag and the Pride flag. Also spend maybe a few hundred dollars on small pride window stickers to offer business owners, hotels, restaurants and B&Bs to place in their window to show they are LGBTQ friendly. That way everyone coming to the area will see them. Be different Niagara-on-the-Lake and take your own road forward instead of following the lead of others who have painted their roads. And that’s the way I see it.

Doug King
Queenston

Local LETTERS

Ukraine needs water and food

Surely, the Red Cross, and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees must demand that Russia allow allied bombers to bomb food and water for the besieged people of Mariupol, etc., as happened in 1945 when the Dutch were starving under Nazi occupation — as part of the terms of capitulation — and in this case as part of the conditions of Russia’s participation in world trade etc.

My late brother-in-law (a Royal Air Force pilot) said that it was the best bombing run he ever made.

Elizabeth Oliver-Malone
NOTL

Experts don’t all agree on mRNA

Re: Religious tract spreads misinformation (NOTL Local, Feb. 16). You quoted a woman saying the mRNA in vaccinations has not affected the DNA — many of the experts we trust have stressed that. “It has acted as an intermediary as a defence against the virus.” Note the qualifier, “many of the experts we trust,” in that statement. It rightly implies that others might, likewise, trust in experts who differ with their chosen subset. Wrongly, however, this clearly objects to any but specific trusted experts’ viewpoints being disseminated. Granted, the couple quoted in the article lay claim to an above-average experience in some areas of science, making their concerns about various dissenting assertions worthy of likewise above-average attention. However, the matter does not end there. For, as they should be among the first to concede, science is an ever-changing occupation in which today’s expertise can become tomorrow’s posterity of error. Accordingly, it might just be possible that, in the intensely congested realm of pandemic-related research, new research participants, new studies and new findings are to be expected, including those liable to expand certain envelopes of trustworthy sources. And, it is likewise possible that the latter’s findings might make their way into the hands of sober and keenly interested observers, such as those whose civic-mindedness and awareness of the adversarial editorial stances evident on virtually every mainstream platform in Canada might prompt them to take extraordinary efforts to share their own findings and opinions with their fellow Canadians.

By way of example, I invite their noteworthy skills to review the following, recently published paper, “Intracellular Reverse Transcription of Pfaier BUSN-Tech COVID-19 mRNA Vaccine BNT162b2 In Vitro in Human Liver Cell Line” (https://www.mdpi.com/1467-3045/44/3/73), which reports findings of precisely the kind of DNA-altering alluded to in the “offending” massive. Not such a wild-eyed prospector concerning, now, is it?

Are that study and its findings absolutely definitive? Perhaps not, but they do not have to be. Their very presence in current Issues in Molecular Biology, an international, scientific, peer-reviewed, open access journal on molecular biology, should suffice in granting it worthy of serious scholarly note, as opposed to some readily-ignored amateur endeavour.

As to whether The Local will accord this new and important development attention equal to others’ opinions, that remains to be seen, as will the possible walking back of the blanket assertion regarding the mRNA vaccines’ purportedly nonthreatening impact affecting/altering human DNA. For now, however, it is enough to point out that not everyone who challenges the official narrative is a legitimate candidate for automatic dismissal. Indeed, to contend that they are to give tyranny free reign.

Bruce Dickson
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. 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.

Local LETTERS

Horned Grebes

The NOTL Sailing Club acts, at times, almost like a catchment basin for migratory waterfowl, says photographer Dave Gilchrist. Out of the current of the Niagara River, and protected from days and nights of high winds, it acts as a haven during winter when boats are up on shore. This was where, in the fall, a pied bil gme was spotted. Recently a different grebe species has been observed in the basin. Photographed through the wire fencing at Nelson Park a pair of horned grebes has been active. These both appear, from their colour, to be non-breeding adults. At times, they venture out into the river to dive for food, but return to the sailing club basin where they are actively swimming and diving. They have very distinctive red eyes.

NOTL LOCAL

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Red Roof reopening slowly, one program at a time

Penny Coles
The Local

After a revolving door of being open and closed during the pandemic, Red Roof Retreat is now optimistic about getting back to doing what they do best — helping their special needs kids and their families.

Executive director Steffanie Bjorgan says she and the other staff members are looking forward to being open in whatever capacity they can be for the moment, and to expanding their services in the coming weeks and months.

Two years ago, in March 2020, Red Roof was looking ahead at a year of celebrations for its 20th anniversary.

Instead, they were shut down. Although they were excited to finally open again last September, before they really got underway they were shut down again in December, and stayed closed until last month.

Pre-pandemic, Red Roof Retreat had three locations, including a relatively new one in St. Catharines that had allowed them to expand their programs. They had 212 families on their register, and almost 30 staff, including five in administrative positions, says Bjorgan.

Currently, they are down to one site, three clients a day, "until we get more staff," says Bjorgan.

Summer camp is usually open to 20 to 25 campers per week for six weeks. "Last year we had 10 campers due to social distancing," says Bjorgan, who is hoping to get closer to full capacity this season "if all restrictions are lifted and more staff are available."

"Other recreation programs will wait until fall 2022," she added.

When Red Roof first had to close, including Bjorgan, were laid off and on employment insurance. "I keep getting approached by people thinking I’m still getting paid, and that I own the properties," she says, laughing. "I wish . . . I’m on EI myself, and I’m still getting paid, and that I own the properties," she says. "So basically, with each new ready staff, we can expand capacity. As capacity grows, the rest of the admin roles will be reinstated."

Last fall, Red Roof developed a partnership with Cornerstone Community Church, which was interested in doing outreach projects through that partnership. "But despite excitement on both sides for moving forward with programs at the church, another lockdown occurred postponing that project. "We are hoping to get back into Cornerstone Community Church as soon as they have donated space," says Bjorgan.

That will help make up for the space Red Roof lost by closing their St Catharines location, necessary for budget reasons during the pandemic. "Until we have the capacity to bring back the volunteer special events coordinator, we are looking for community volunteers to help with events such as Bingo with OLG and to promote events and schedule volunteers. They also need help with outdoor spring projects. If anyone is interested they can email steffanie@redroofretreat.com."

Without their traditional pasta dinner fundraiser for two years, Red Roof has had to rely on donations, and is also in need of financial support.

"Thank you to everyone who continued to support us, especially through our Gifts from the Heart Campaign and our Red Rovers Monthly Giving Program," says Bjorgan.

Despite the many challenges, Bjorgan always remains optimistic for the future, grateful to be open, knowing there are great people to train, and moving forward “slow and steady” to a time when Red Roof will be back to what it was pre-pandemic.

For more information about volunteering, donations or legacy giving, visit https://www.redroofretreat.com/.

Kaitlyn has some help baking treats at a Red Roof program. (Photos supplied)

Naomi shares apples with Mikey the horse at the Red Roof Ranch.

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Proceeds to Ukraine for humanitarian aid

Penny Coles
The Local

When Joseph Pohorly, founder of Josephs Estates Wines, died Sept. 12, 2020 at the age of 88, it was during the height of COVID, when funeral gatherings were significantly restricted.

Katherine Reid, winemaker and longtime friend of Pohorly’s, feels it’s time to celebrate his life and his contributions to the wine industry, and is organizing an event to be held at the winery on Tuesday, March 29, from 1 to 4 p.m.

It is also appropriate to recognize his heritage, with ties to the area close to the border with Poland, says Reid, and 100 per cent of the proceeds from the event will go to humanitarian aid for Ukrainians through Lions International in Poland.

Pohorly’s parents came to Canada from Poland, she says, and he spoke both Ukrainian and Polish.

Reid says she and Pohorly spoke of their common background, which she learned more about during COVID, when she had time to do some research about her own heritage and discovered she had relatives living in Ivano-Frankivsk, the city where its airport was hit by a missile early in the Russian attacks on Ukraine.

They both talked about making trips to the area, but neither of them made it. She still hopes to when she retires.

Pohorly became a member of the St. Davids Lions in his later years, and after his death a small ceremony was held at the club hall. His family held a private service.

Reid expects Lions local governor Geoff Crane, from the Merritton Lions Club, and is hoping Canadian international director Al Snider, from St. Davids Lions, will be on hand to say a few words.

The event will offer the calming effect of colouring for the Ukraine, with local owner Nancy Boorze of Colour Me Happy providing the materials to colour a picture supporting Ukraine, while enjoying a glass of wine, both included in the $25 ticket price.

Sweets & Swirls Cafe will be supplying treats. Reid has also chosen the date to ensure it will be held in March, the month to celebrate St. Joseph.

“Needless to say, there are a few of us excited about this. We have not had something to look forward to in a long time,” she says, offering to assist in any way she can.

Skubel, who was Polish, died in August, 2020, at the age of 66. He was a lifetime member of the Niagara Lions Club, and organizer of the annual Christmas tree fundraiser.

She adds she would like to see all Lions clubs find ways to help.

“People want to help Ukrainians, and this is the safest outlet I know,” through Lions International, with no administration costs,” says Reid. “Lions International is usually the first on the ground to help people. This is another way to celebrate Joe, and to help with humanitarian relief.”

There are Lions clubs in Ukraine, she says, “but I don’t think it’s as safe to send aid there.”

Known as an outstanding member of St. Davids Lions, Pohorly had been helping the service club for years, before he finally decided to join in 2014, and even before becoming a member, he worked on various community projects, such as the Centennial Pavilion at the Lions Park, which he designed and funded. He also helped the club by applying for grants to fund projects for the Lions, including renovating and expanding the club hall, and was generous with donations himself.

Those who are not able to attend can make a donation at the winery boutique, at 1811 Niagara Stone Road, and will receive a tax receipt, says Reid, or donate at https://www.lionscanada.ca/our-foundations.
Red Brick Church asks for help with quilts for Ukraine

Penny Coles
The Local

A group of Niagara United Mennonite Church women have been meeting Tuesday mornings for decades — the best guess is 40 or 50 years — to share a tradition that is steeped in history and passed down through generations.

They like to socialize and enjoy coffee together, but their main purpose is create quilts to warm those in need, in communities close to home and far away.

This time the help that is needed is far away, and immediate.

Because of the pandemic the women haven’t been able to get together as a group for about a year and a half, but they will on Saturday, March 26, at what is known locally as the Red Brick Church, and they would welcome help from the public.

Their goal is to tie quilts to send to Ukraine, through the Mennonite Central Committee.

Their quilts have been distributed all over the world through the MCC, but this time the greatest need is for Ukrainians under attack by Russians, many of them, mostly women and children, driven from their homes to find safety from the military, says church administrator Emily Fieguth.

As the number of quilting members declined to a group that now numbers 20 women, they began putting the layers of quilting together, she says, and then tying them, a method which is much easier and faster than traditional quilting.

A successful quilt-tying event, with help from the public, was held at the church in January, 2020, and everyone had so much fun they wanted to do it again, but it couldn’t proceed last year with COVID regulations.

“Comforters are an excellent metaphor for the nature of our work around the world at MCC,” says Rick Cober Bauman, executive director of MCC Canada.

“When our volunteers and supporters come together to create comforters, they will make a difference in the lives of people affected by conflict and disaster.”

Last year, he says, more than 45,000 comforters were shipped by MCC to Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Ukraine, and Zambia as well as through-out Canada and the U.S. The project started in 1929, helping families affected by war and famine in Ukraine.

For more information contact office@redbrickchurch.ca or go to www.redbrickchurch.ca for details.
Learn and Live initiative continues at NOTL Library
Program starting off small, with plans to expand

Penny Coles
The Local

The Learn and Live program initiated last fall is offering two more series at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library this spring. The project arose from one of the towns Community Wellness Committee’s recommendations to council to create educational programs for all ages.

Cindy Grant, chair of the committee, says the program is not organized by the town committee, but was spawned in an effort to carry out its recommendations.

A small steering committee of local people began meeting in the spring of 2021 to develop this initiative, and created a program that will present a curriculum of themed seminars and discussion groups around a variety of topics, and delivered over a period of several months.

At the moment, the sessions are being kept small, held in the library’s Rotary Room with about 20 people. The speakers are local, gleaned from members of local networks.

As the popularity of the series grows, Grant envisions the days when she can cast further afield for speakers, and fill a room at the community centre, expecting there to be a cost for the sessions. Subjects she would like to see offered include environment and climate change in Niagara, music, and museums.

The program is intended to offer a variety of interesting topics that would appeal to a large number of people, and that will help keep ageing minds active.

“We had a geriatrician speak in the fall, who talked a lot about preventing frailty as we age. He talked about the need to keep active and physically fit, but also to keep our minds active,” says Grant.

That was the goal of the wellness committee’s recommendation for continued learning.

For now, Learn and Live: Enriched Learning For All Ages, is integrated with other library programming, held Monday evenings from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The next series will be held over two weeks, April 4 and 11, and is presented by Bonnie Bagiulo, executive director of NOTL Community Palliative Care Service, with consultant and therapist Sandra Kesselman-Hardy.

The sessions, called Partnering with Losses, will focus on understanding losses in an interactive, audience-participating session format, helping to move from losing what we had to having what we lost,” the program description says.

Beginning Monday, April 25, and continuing May 2 and 9, the topic is Creativity and Applied Imagination, with Barb Babj, who will speak about the person, the process, the product, and the place (environment), the 4Ps of creativity, and learning new perspectives and tools, and how to apply them.

Registration is required at notlpubliclibrary.org, or call 905-468-2023. Registration is limited to 20 people, but the sessions will be available on the library’s YouTube channel.

Pre-pandemic, Cindy Grant was able to present the Wellness Committee’s report to council. The Learn and Live program is an initiative that arose from one of the recommendations in that report. (File photo)
Videos show humour in difficult situations

Continued from page 1

“She first one that went viral was when Avery was in a Zoom class, and the teacher asked a math question, she laughs. “I wrote down the answer to the question in a math book when he asked it, then I wrote it on a piece of paper. He gave the answer to the teacher but she said ‘oh, sweetie, good try, but that’s not the answer’. It went viral because it highlighted the struggles of all parents with school in a pandemic.

“When I first realized I had my platform, I started going to Old Town stores to shop, and I would put it on TikTok,” she says. “Whenever I would use Niagaraonthelake, I’d get hundreds of thousands of views. It’s so nice to know I am able to help small businesses because of the platform I’ve built.”

As a popular content creator, she was approached by TikTok in February with an invitation to apply to their Creator Fund, expected to be open to Canadians in mid-2022. It will allow her to earn money directly through the platform for her creation of original, entertaining, and engaging content.

Her many videos look slick and professional, though she admits the learning curve was quite steep at first. For help in the early days of her TikTok journey she turned to her son Ryan, a student at Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School.

Her two older children appear regularly in her videos. Ryan is often her go-to straight man, acting embarrassed and annoyed by his mother’s online fame, though she says he secretly enjoys the attention. When she was approaching 100,000 followers, a goal Ryan thought she would never reach, she made a deal that he would have to wear a T-shirt saying ‘My Mom’s funny on TikTok’ for a week. He lost that bet.

Last month, at a family breakfast at the Stagecoach Restaurant in NOTL, a waitress recognized Krista. Before she could respond, Avery removed his mask and said, “do you recognize me? I’m kind of TikTok famous.”

Despite the attention, she assures anyone who asks that she does guard the family’s privacy. Mike, an accountant for a non-profit whom she describes as a bit shy, has only appeared in a couple of her TikTok posts. And they all set the parameters for the posts. There would be no humiliation, no videos of the kids having meltdowns or sleeping.

“When I have the children on TikTok, I try to keep their appearances very brief. I always ask first before I post, let them know what my plans are. If any of them ever asks me to set any of the videos to private, I would do that immediately.”

With her massive following, London-Verticchio feels a bit of added pressure to post up to three videos a day, as many as 14 a week.

“If you don’t post for a few days, it slows down the algorithm. The views go way, way down. It sounds kind of silly to most users to worry about that. But I work with brands who pay me to do TikTok and Instagram posts. If I don’t post content that I’m not paid for, then I don’t get to work, if that makes sense.”

She’s reached a point with TikTok that she has to set any of the videos to private, I would do that immediately.”

Continued on page 13
TikTok helps promote local businesses

Continued from page 12

Krista London-Verticchio sometimes finds her car a quiet place to make her TikTok videos. She has a huge following of people who enjoy her humour, and is able to make some money from her popular videos. (Photos supplied)

Krista London-Verticchio is also rewarded with feedback in the form of messages from her many followers, most of whom thank her for making light of living in a household where ADHD and autism are present. With a waitlist of over 51,000 families for autism support services in Ontario, many could use her help.

“I really enjoy connecting with people, and sharing information about ADHD and autism,” she says. “A lot of people misunderstand both. I would love to get to the point where I’m maybe talking to people in larger groups to support them. I would like to continue educating people and sharing our stories.”

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Interview with Gabe

Q. What do you want to be when you grow up?
A. I am not sure. Maybe an engineer. I like to build and make stuff. The last thing I made was a sword made out of wood.

Q. How would you change the world if you could?
A. I would get rid of pollution. All kinds of pollution.

Q. What is your ideal day in NOTL?
A. I’d wake up and see my friend at my door. Then Saxon and I would go to Stagecoach for breakfast. Then we would meet up with a couple more friends and play some sports then go swimming in the lake. We’d end the day by going to hockey.

Q. What is your favourite movie?
A. The new Ghostbusters, we saw it in the theater. I liked how it was with kids this time. The kids are smart and nerdy (in a good way).

Q. What is a fun tradition your family has?
A. We make pasta a lot. We also play ‘Kris Kringle’ with my mom’s family, about 20 people, at Christmas. That’s where you buy a gender neutral gift for someone, like a box of chocolates or a diffuser, then we put numbers in a hat and whoever has the first number gets the first gift and you can steal a gift. That’s how we got our chia pet. We also like to travel together.

Q. What is something special about you?
A. I have been cooking for a few years now. I really enjoy it and I like cooking for people. My favourite thing to make right now is pasta sauce. I gifted it as Christmas gifts this year. I also like to make lasagna for people.

Q. What is your favourite thing about NOTL?
A. Probably how close to the water it is. I like to swim and go tubing on the water.

Q. How did you keep busy during the COVID lockdowns?
A. I would go biking around town and I watched a lot of Tik-Tok. Oh, I also played the drums.

Local News

Tomorrow is Saint Patrick’s day! Be sure to wear green to avoid those pinches! Also, just four short days until spring. Almost time to put away the snowsuits and get out the bathing suits! What are some fun things you have planned? Email joyousnotlkids@gmail.com and let us know.

Movie Review

by Taleah Bucci, II

Today I will review the movie Spirit Untamed by DreamWorks Animation. It’s the story of a girl named Lucky who forms a bond with a wild horse named Spirit. When Spirit’s herd gets captured by a wrangler, Lucky and her friends have to help Spirit rescue them. This movie is very exciting and adventurous. There’s also a movie called Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron and a TV series called Spirit: Riding Free; both of these are also made by DreamWorks. I recommend Spirit Untamed for horse-lovers, and I’m giving it four stars out of five.

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CHARITY

We are looking for charities in which kids can participate. If you would like your organization to be highlighted here, please send your information to joyousnotlkids@gmail.com.

SUBMISSION INFO

The hope for this page is to get kids involved and interacting with the community in a positive way. We welcome submissions for all categories from kids of any age. Please keep the reviews positive and all submitted content appropriate for kids of all ages. Please send all submissions to joyousnotlkids@gmail.com and in the subject line please put the category for which you are submitting. Thank you.
Singer/storyteller Bambrick on stage Monday

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Referring to a woman as a ‘dame’ might not win one a lot of friends in the 2020s, but 100 years ago it was quite common.

The roaring 20s feel of Lakeshore Road’s Spirit in Niagara Distillery is what inspired TD Niagara Jazz Festival executive director, co-creator and artistic director Juliet Dunn to use that sobriquet, dubbing a group of shows headlined by female artists the Dames in the Distillery Series.

But as the local jazz channel explains, it’s not the first time she’s dusted off that word for a Jazz Festival show.

“It was a show with Heather Bambrick, June Garber and Barb Manintini,” Dunn recalls, “the first year the Wayne Gretzky Distillery opened. I wanted a word that goes well with ‘distillery’ and I thought of ‘dames,’ as we had three women that night.”

Bambrick is back this Monday, March 21 for the second show in the series, following Betsy Aarons well-attended kick-off at Spirit in Niagara March 7. The Cheri Maracle Quintet completes the troika of Dames in the Distillery performances on Monday, May 30.

Dedicated jazz FM listeners will know Bambrick from her morning radio show on 91.1 FM. The Juno-nominateed singer’s voice may also be heard on various television and radio commercials as well as on a number of successful animated television programs, including The Wild Kratts.

Dunn and her husband, Jazz Festival co-creator and artistic consultant Peter Shea, promise an evening of great music and storytelling from Bambrick, whose shows have been described as what happens when Ella Fitzgerald meets Carol Burnett at a Newfoundland kitchen party.

“She’s from Newfoundland, and she has a great personality,” Dunn explains. “She’s a lot of fun on stage. The storytelling in between is great, and she’ll do some east coast-style pieces along with jazz standards. She’s really good at swinging hard.”

She has known Bambrick since their days studying jazz in the early 1990s in the University of Toronto music program, where they often played together. He has backed up Bambrick on drums for some of her previous TD Niagara Jazz Festival shows.

“We were good friends back in university, and ever since then we’ve had a kindred connection,” adds Shea. “Musically, she’s a consummate professional. She’s an amazing singer and acts like Ella Fitzgerald. She’s hysterically funny, she does impressions. She’s very well rounded.”

Shea will be sitting in the audience rather than behind the kit for this one, as Bambrick will be joined by pianist Adrean Farrugia and bassist Ross MacIntyre, both of whom appear on her most recent album, 2019’s Fire State.

Farrugia is recognized as one of Canada’s finest pianists and composers. He has appeared on more than 40 albums and has been nominated for four Juno Awards, winning one. He is on the faculties of both Mohawk and Humber Colleges.

MacIntyre, meanwhile, has shared the stage with the likes of Matt Dusk, Emilie-Claire Barlow, Guido Basso, Elizabeth Shepherd, Laila Biali, Jesse Cook and the Shuffle Demons. His work appears on hundreds of recordings, including 11 that have either won or were nominated for Juno Awards.

Monday’s program will include a brief opening set by rising star Jacob Chung. The 21-year old Canadian saxophonist and composer has earned multiple awards for his playing during his studies at the University of Toronto. He has also garnered several non-academic accolades including the 2021 Hnatyshyn Foundation Oscar Peterson Grant and the 2019 Prince Edward County Jazz Festival Rising Young Star Award. Shea will accompany Chung on piano.

The Dames in the Distillery shows are a subset of the festival’s Twilight Jazz and Blooz Series. NOTL Edition, all taking place on Mondays at Spirit in Niagara. Food and drinks are available, but not included in the ticket prices.

What we like to do for these shows is have theatre-style seating for those who are just coming for the show and drinks, so they can sit like they’re in a theatre,” Dunn explains. “Those who are going to have dinner can sit on the sides or in the back to enjoy their food. It’s like a dinner theatre set-up. It’s a great venue — we love it.”

The fundraising end of things is also running a concurrent Twilight Jazz and Blooz Series on Sundays at St. Catharines at the McAlty Cafe. Upcoming shows there include the Jefrey Arthur Quartet on April 10 and Melissa Lauren’s CD Release Party on May 8.

Some may wonder when Dunn and Shea themselves might soon be taking to the stage for a Jazz Festival presentation.

“The musical power couple will be bringing in Le Trio Parisien to Stratus Vineyards on Saturday, April 30 to mark International Jazz Day,” Dunn says. “The fundraising concert will include French hors d’oeuvres and a welcome cocktail with the ticket price, as well as door prizes, a silent auction and a 50/50 draw.

On the fundraising end of things, Dunn is encouraging supporters of the TD Niagara Jazz Festival to consider making a monthly donation to the non-profit through Canada Helps. During the month of March, Canada Helps will chip in an extra one-time donation of $20 for every new monthly donation of $20 or more.

Tickets for the Heath-er Bambrick Trio, Monday March 21 from 6 to 9 p.m., are $49 plus HST in advance or $59 the day of the show. Musicians, arts workers and students can buy their tickets for $23 plus HST. Visit niagarajazzfestival.com for tickets and information.

Newfoundlander Heather Bambrick has a great voice and on-stage personality, promising an entertaining evening Monday.

(Photo supplied)
March break tourney big hit with kids, parents

**Mike Balsom**

Special to The Local

Both the Centennial and Meridian Credit Union arena were buzzing with activity this past weekend as 42 minor hockey teams descended upon the town for the annual Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves March Break Tournament. It was a welcome return for what became one of the first casualties of the pandemic two years ago.

"When COVID hit, at 8 o'clock at night, I was here setting up the posters and the trophies," tournament organizer Gino Patterson recalls. "The fridge was stocked with supplies. I was here all night. We got a text message from our president Greg Wiens that Ontario was shutting down and the tournament had to be cancelled."

That was about eight hours prior to the first game of the tournament Friday, March 13, 2020. Patterson had to communicate with the teams who were planning to visit that day. Trophies were held onto for future re-playing, and he rushed to return some of the food for refunds. But the club took a big financial hit that year. The March Break tournament is one of their most important fundraising events each season.

"For NOTL Hockey, we don't have a lot of sources of revenue," Patterson explains. "We do some work with development, with David Cullen. He's been great. But our only chance at revenue. Without successful tournaments are basically our only chance at revenue."

Patterson continues to volunteer as web master and tournament convenor for the club, despite the fact that his own kids no longer play in the organisation. This year he used an online tournament organizer that allowed volunteers to sign up for the over 300 time slots over the 4 days. "300 time slots over the 4 days!"

"It's lots of work," Patterson admits. "We've built such a strong organisation and we're doing well financially because of the tournaments. I do it strictly for the kids and the organisation. I have a lot of fun doing it and it's important to give back to the community!"

He was rewarded this weekend with the feedback he received from happy parents and children.

"Everybody's just happy to be playing hockey and feeling normal again," he laughs. "I've had a few people come up and say 'my gosh, I'm at a tournament and I'm getting a hamburger at a barbeque.' It's just the little things that we take for granted. People are so excited to just be playing sports together!"

Indeed, both arenas were choked full of family members cheering on their kids and trying hard to wrangle them all together between games.

During a U15 game between a Wolves team and Listowel on Sunday (NOTL won the game 5-1), Marjorie, a Listowel parent, raved about the chance to visit for the weekend. The team stayed at the Ramada Inn in Niagara Falls.

"Just to have kids be kids again," she told The Local, "that's what the tournament is all about, team building. We went bowling as a team, hung out in the hotel as a team. These kids couldn't even see each other for the last two years. It's just so great to just be able to be here as a team."

Patterson also organized the November Harvest Classic Tournament for rep teams. That one was scheduled early enough to miss the December shut-down of all non-elite sports in the province. The March Break Tournament is strictly for local league and house league teams. For some kids it is the only tournament they get to play in all year.

"For our U9 teams, they actually didn't have full games until February," says Patterson. "For almost all of the U9 teams here this is their first tournament. We had 16 U9 teams in the tournament and I turned away another 15. It's great to get the young kids in, though, because it builds a really strong tournament for years to come."

Unlike the other age groups, where all the teams were either house league or local league participants, the U9 was split into three divisions, one each for house league, rep, and rep division 1, to ensure fair competition.

In the end, only one of the eight NOTL teams made it into the final for their division. Thorsby beat the Wolves 9-2 Monday to take the U15 tournament crown. Other divisions were won by teams from Hespeler, Caledonia, Port Stanley, Tilsbury and Sudbury.

"But it clearly wasn't about winning," Jordan, a parent of a child on the Hespeler Shamrocks team that won the U13 Division, told The Local, "it's an excellent bonding experience for the kids. We'll definitely be back here for this tournament next year!"
Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves U11 house league hockey coach Mike Cwiertniewski was busy this weekend coaching his team at the club’s annual March Break Tournament. Though his Wolves lost all three games they played, there was a general feeling of positivity amongst the players for having participated in the event.

That positivity fostered by the first-year hockey coach has led to Cwiertniewski being named the Ontario Minor Hockey Association’s Coach of the Month for February.

Local resident Adriana Miele, whose son Michael is a 10-year-old daughter Ella decided during the pandemic, she decided she wanted to play hockey. "She was in the CanSkate program, then figure skating, " she raves, "I wrote a letter to the OMHA to nominate coach Mike and coach Dan (Plomish)," Miele recalls. "I told another parent and she sent something in too. Two weeks later we got a letter that he was getting the award." 

In a season during which Mike says the team has only won a single game, Cwiertniewski’s encouragement and upbeat attitude at both practices and games has been a key factor in instilling a love of the game amongst his young charges. "His fantastic, " she raves, "wonderful with the kids all the way around. He’s encouraging to every one of them, encourages their strengths, makes practices fun every time. Even when we lose he only focuses on the positives."

The St. Michael Catholic Elementary and Denis Morris High School grad says the three girls and nine boys on his team were stoked to play in this weekend’s tournament.

“Every game these kids go in with the attitude that they’re going to win," he says. "But it doesn’t matter what the score is. We had the tunes going in the dressing room before each game, they were happy, pumped up and ready to go. Every goal we get ignites them like crazy."

He credits giving credit to fellow coach Plomish for contributing to their combined effort to approach every game with the aim of ensuring the kids have fun no matter what the score might be. "Our focus is to stay positive, have fun and to keep that mentality throughout the game," Cwiertniewski says. "He’s fantastic, " she raves, "We don’t ask for anything more than that from these kids. We always say ‘we don’t know this team, may we can get a win today’, and that keeps them going."

Cwiertniewski says Wolves coaching partner Joe Pagnotto recruited him to take on a role behind the bench when Mike’s 10-year-old daughter Ella decided she wanted to play hockey. "She was in the CanSkate program, then figure skating," Cwiertniewski says. "Then, during the pandemic, she needed new skates. One of our friends gave her a pair of hockey skates. She played on a pond with a bunch of friends and had a blast, so this year she asked if she could play hockey." 

Ella is hooked, and he calls her one of the hardest workers on the team. She’s following in her father’s footsteps in a way, as Cwiertniewski himself played minor hockey in NOTL before moving on to AAA in Niagara Falls. Later, he played for four years with the Junior B Thorold Blackhawks.

"He thinks Ella will play hockey for many more years to come, and she’s expressed a desire to continue playing in the community where she lives with her father, mother Alison and five-year-old brother Austin."

Mike, by the way, still laces up his own skates weekly. On Tuesdays and Sundays he plays in NOTL, while on Thursdays, his co-workers at Monkey Sports, a Niagara Falls-based sports retailer and outfitter, have a regular time slot for a pick-up game at the Gale Centre.

With so many different skill sets on his U11 team, one of two NOTL house league teams at that age group, he and Plomish put in extra effort to balance the players equally between each line. He’s quick to credit each of his dozen players for working their hearts out every single game.

During Monday practices he emphasizes positioning and staying “in your lane” on the ice. "At the U11 age group the kids are still trying to figure out the game," he says, “and they tend to chase the puck together and bunch up in the same spot on the ice."

Both U11 teams practice at the same time, working through drills together before splitting up into opposite ends of the ice.

At the end of each session, they play games such as ball tag, ice soccer, or even a shootout where they can be creative and try whatever move they want. "It keeps them motivated," he says, "but what they don’t realize is that it’s helping them with other skills such as balance, stick-handling and shooting."

Having played competitive himself, he’s had to shift his way of thinking toward a more developmental mindset with his U11 players. "It’s about where to be on the ice, or how to make a quick line change," he explains. "Keeping your head up, not bunching up. Focusing on the real little things right now that kids at this level have to develop more and more. It’s about building their awareness of the fundamentals of the game."

Cwiertniewski also credits the parents for buying into the philosophy espoused by him and Plomish. And that has led to steady development for each player as the season has progressed.

"A lot of the kids started quiet, but now they’re getting into the game," he enthusiastically explains. "We got our first win in Fort Erie, I think we had seven or eight goals that game. It really fired them up. You can really see the progression that keeps coming and coming." 

He’s especially impressed by the improvement shown by Miele’s son Michael between the pipes. "You gotta see him play, he’s like (former Buffalo Sabres goalie) Domenic Hasek out there," Cwiertniewski raves. "He’s diving and kid-saving everything. But when you think he’s been but he’s making a glove save or a kick save. He’s grown so much, I think next year he will make a BB or AA team, " says Adriana, "one game Michael faced 63 shots on net. After the game coach Mike said Michael, think about it, you saved 54 shots today! He always looks for the positive. For every game he makes them feel that they did their best. They always walk out of the arena with a smile on their faces." 

And Cwiertniewski himself smiles the entire time he speaks about his team to The Local. "I just want the kids to enjoy playing the game," he says. "I guess the fact I got this nomination means they are happy. When they’re happy that makes me happy too. It’s fun, I’m 40, and I want to see them still loving the game at 40 like I do."

Mike Cwiertniewski at Monkey Sports in Niagara Falls, where he works. (Mike Balsom)
Preds sweep Plattsville in first round of playoffs

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

It’s on to the semi-finals for the Niagara Predators after sweeping the Plattsville Lakers to take the best-of-three first round series 2-0 in the Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League’s Russell Cup playoffs.

Niagara hosted the first game of the series on Wednesday, March 9 at Port Colborne’s Vale Health and Wellness Centre. With NOTL Wolves Minor Hockey Club hosting their annual March Break Tournament, there was a dire lack of available ice time at Virgil’s Meridian Credit Union Arena.

The change in venue didn’t hurt their cause as the Predators skated to a 2-1 victory in a fast-paced game that saw only a single penalty called in 60 minutes.

Niagara controlled the play from the outset, peppering Lakers goalie Rahul Bola with 50 shots, including 22 in the second period alone. After a number of chances, defenceman Nathan Fehr set up Reese Bisci with a perfect pass. Bisci skated into the faceoff circle in the Plattsville end and tripped, pushing the puck to George Khomovisky who slid it past Bola about 15 minutes into the game.

Plattsville’s Kyle Struth tied it up early in the second period when a weak clearing effort by the Predators resulted in a turnover in front of the net. The tie lasted only five minutes when Dante Massi set up his younger brother Alessandro for what turned out to be the winning goal with eleven seconds left in the second.

The third period saw Plattsville turn the tables on Niagara in the shots on goal category, challenging Predators goalie Morgan Penwell with 14 attempts, but the big goaltender held on for the victory.

Head coach, general manager and team owner Robert Turnbull commended his squad on a full team effort.

“Everybody worked their butts off,” Turnbull told The Local. “The third period especially they got to the puck first and they got to their man first. Not so much in the second, when we gave them great opportunities. Morgan was absolutely outstanding. Reese won 80 per cent of his faceoffs, and Dante went into the corners on every shift. And Dawson (Walker) and Logan (Baillie) shut them down on defence.”

Despite the lack of penalties, Wednesday’s match was a physical game. Per total there were some hard checks, knocking both Chaseon Sieling and Lucas Bright to the ice on two of his hardest hits.

The physicality continued Friday night in game two at the Plattsville Arena. As well, the return of forward Noah Caperciione seemed to spark the Predators toward their 4-2 victory, clinching the series.

Caperciione, who scored 22 goals in 21 games in the regular season, missed some time after being involved in a car collision earlier this month.

“Got a call from him saying the doctor had just cleared him to play,” Turnbull said. “I wasn’t sure how well he was going to play, so I had moved him to a different line initially. We got some chances in the first, but then Alessandro suggested he switch lines with him. We moved him back with Dante and Reese.”

After Dante Massi opened the scoring in the second, the line juggling paid off, as Caperciione scored the first of Niagara’s three goals just under seven minutes into the third period. Struth cut the lead to 2-1 just 22 seconds later, but a mere 20 seconds after that Pontus Madsen scored the eventual game winner, an unassisted goal that put the Preds back up by two.

The physical nature of the game came to a head in that period, with a total of nine penalties dished out, five to the Predators. Bright scored on the power play for the Lakers at 10:33, but Caperciione iced the game with his second of the night, an unassisted powerplay marker into the upper corner behind Bola with a minute and a half remaining.

Heading into the best-of-five semi-final series, the Predators are well-matched against the North York Renegades, who have won the last three times in the regular season, with the second place Renegades winning the season series 2-1. Home teams won each game during the season.

Niagara will have to keep Santino Foti off the scoreboard. The forward scored the eventual game winner, an unassisted goal that put the Preds back up by two.

Meet the Predators

Name: Morgan Penwell
Jersey number: 30
Age: 21
Birthplace: July 12, 2000
Hometown: Port Carling, Ontario
Nickname: Penner
Favourite hockey player: Marc-André Fleury
Favourite 'hyp' song: Narcos by Migos
Hockey highlight: Sweeping St. George in the playoffs 2022
Other sports you play: Golf
Secret talent: Golf

Local HAPPENINGS

St. Davids and District Lions Club
1462 York Rd., St. Davids (NOTL)

JOIN US
Friday Fish Fry
March 18th
4:30 to 7 p.m.
1 piece dinner $11
2 piece dinner $15
Haddock & Chips
or Baked Potato
Coleslaw, Tartar Sauce,
Bread, Tea/Coffee

TAKED OUT & EAT IN
stdavidsions.ca @stdavidsions on Facebook

LOCAL WORSHIP

CORNERSTONE CHURCH
Sunday, March 20th
10:00 a.m.
Worship Gathering
Online & In-Person

Message:
Kevin Bayne
Our services are also streamed online.
Including your Local Prizes starting at $50.
Deadline: Monday 3 p.m. Call Karen 905-641-5335 or email: classified@notllocal.com

PLACE YOUR COMING EVENT COMMUNITY HERE

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GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT (3-YEAR TERM)
St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, 323 Simcoe Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake

Tender packages can be picked up at the Church Office (corner of Simcoe and Gage St.), Niagara-on-the-Lake from Mon - Fri from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Closing Date: March 31, 2022

CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU

Across:
1 Statue of Liberty material 50 Wetland 12 Sundried
2 Got together 51 Snitches 13 Hapmarsh’s specialty 14 Heptathlete’s specialty
7 Got together 52 “Mamma Mia” mamma 15 A B A 15 Violet
10 Buddy 53 Fidgety 16 Taxi 16 Violet
13 Buddy 54 Ascends 17 Rips 17 Rips
14 Cab 56 limbs 18 Affirmative signal 18 Nod
15 Flowers of Rhode Island 56 Repeat 19 Call the whole thing off 19 End it
16 Flowers of Rhode Island 56 Repeat 20 Very strong winds 20 Gales
21 First lady 58 Medical prioritization 21 Eve 21 Eve
22 Stand-up guy 59 National boys’ gp. 22 Comic 22 Comic
24 “Thanatopsis” poet William 60 Gun-barrel cleaners 24 Cullen 24 Cullen
26 Large handbag 61 Trunk 26 Tote 26 Tote
29 Noah’s boat 62 Arm 29 Ark 62 Arm
30 Dumped in Boston harbor 63 Meal 30 Tea 63 Meal
31 Homeless child 64 Triage 31 Waif 64 Triage
32 Thick slice 65 B S A 32 Slab 65 B S A
34 First light 66 Acid 34 Sunup 66 Acid
38 Bart Simpson’s driver: 67 Bestow 39 Hines 67 Bestow
39 Cheryl — of “Suburgatory” 68 Son 39 Hines 68 Son
41 Wine valley 69 Led 41 Napa 69 Led
42 Overhead Door Co. St. Catharines Ltd. is seeking a garage door installer/service person. Will train. Must have own tools and steel-toed safety shoes, be bondable and have a valid driver’s licence. The job is physically demanding and requires attention to detail as well as professionalism in customer service. Must be able to lift more than 45 kg (100 lbs), work outdoors at heights. Must be punctual. Overtime may be required.

Apply by email to
overhead@cogeco.net

Sudoku solution from March 9, 2022

Across:

Down:
1 Cave, 2 Or in, 3 Prod, 4 Police force, 5 Eye to, 6 Rot, 7 Mail, 8 Expect, 9 Tissues, 10 Panel, 11 Above, 12 Laden, 14 Track and field, 20 Girlie, 23 Mash, 25 Laundry list, 26 Twos, 27 Oath, 28 Tito, 33 Begets, 35 Nada, 36 Up at, 37 Pays, 40 Sync, 43 Thermal, 47 Apiece, 50 Swabs, 51 Torso, 52 Roman, 54 Hares, 57 Said, 59 Late, 60 Igor, 61 News, 64 T B A.
Home game Friday

Continued from page 18

"I was third in the GMHL in both goals, with 53, and points, with 109. As well, goaltender Nicholas Lewicky has confounded the Predators somewhat this year."

"Penwell will start in net, " Turnbull said about his own goaltender, whom he acquired from his other team, the St. George Ravens. "I knew how good he was, but I wasn't sure how good he would actually be, not having played at all this year. But he practiced hard and quickly got back into game shape. He played very, very well in both (Lakers) games. We'll have to be at the top of our game to win."

Of the Renegades, Turnbull says, "they've been a very, very good team. We've had two great games against them. This series will be very interesting. We have to get to the puck first and take the man to have a chance. I'm looking for competitive games against them."

After having to move the home games against Plattsburg to Port Colborne, Turnbull is happy the minor hockey club was able to carve out home games for the Predators this Friday night at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday afternoon at 3:30 p.m., if a fourth game is needed. Adult tickets are $10 for those games.

"The Predators open the series in North York Tuesday at 8 p.m. (results were not available at press time) and follow that with a 5 p.m. start time in that same arena Wednesday. If necessary, game five will also be in North York. Those road games will be streamed live at gmhl.tv."

The GMHL announced its 2022 awards on Monday. Alex Andrews of the Predators was named first runner-up for best defensive forward in the South Division, behind Durham's Kevin Serio. As well, Pontus Madsen was first runner-up for best defenceman, behind Christian Bascio of the Renegades.

Robert Turnbull was second runner-up for coach of the year in the South, and took home honours as team executive of the year for the first time in his GMHL tenure. League commissioner Ken Girard praised the owner of two South Division teams.

"He's done a great job with both Niagara and St. George, " Girard told The Local. "He handled the move from Toronto to Niagara quite well, and put a good product on the ice. And he's always helping with pushing the league forward with great ideas. He's an asset as a member of the GMHL."

"I was surprised," Turnbull said. "I was quite honored. They called me and gave me a whole list of reasons, which was very nice. I would like to think it has a lot to do with helping other kids in the league as well as our own to get them into an education program while playing hockey. It's something I've done for years, and hope to continue to do for many more."

Turnbull began this season with one role, as owner of the Predators. But he stepped into the head coach's position in October when Andrew Whalen left for family reasons, and assumed the general manager's role when Johan Ericsson resigned from that post. He is also a member of the GMHL's executive committee.

The Local

Robert Turnbull

Morgan Penwell (Mike Balsom)