



Ray Guy
will be
missed by
many

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Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa addressed the audience in the Lounge at the 124 on Queen Hotel and Spa. (Mike Balsom)

Lord Mayor speaks of first 100 days in office

Mike Balsom
The Local

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa assessed the first 100 days of the new Niagara-on-the-Lake council in front of a friendly crowd gathered in the Lounge at the 124 on Queen Hotel and Spa last Wednesday evening.

It was the first event in a planned monthly speaker series in the modern new lounge space.

Zalepa began by thanking the evening's hosts, calling the new hotel a beautiful, great location.

"The expansion that has happened for this business," he said, "and it being part of the Heritage District here, is really special. We are able to share our town with our guests who come to visit in a truly exquisite, top-notch facility."

He then complimented the current council, who he said is "a really engaged group who is asking excellent questions, working very hard. They have the community's spirit in mind when they do what they do. I'm really impressed, and it's been a lot of fun to work with them."

Zalepa said one of the first things council has already begun working on is the tourism master plan, one of the top priorities for the current term.

"It's really an important instrument that we've never had before," the lord mayor said. "It's a guiding plan for the community to help manage the pressures that successful tourism brings. It's flattering that so many people know and come to Niagara-on-the-Lake, but

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Regional state of emergency inspires optimism for future

Mike Balsom
The Local

When Niagara's regional councillors voted on declaring a state of emergency over mental health, homelessness and opioid addiction recently, Niagara-on-the-Lake representative Andrea Kaiser was pleased that the motion passed the second time around.

"When I ran in the election, that was identified to me as a concern and prior-

ity for the region," she tells The Local. "It did come up often when knocking on doors."

The longtime NOTL town councillor (2003 to 2014) remembers meeting someone who was vocal, passionate and committed to the need for support within the community for issues surrounding mental illness back in 2019 when she ran in the federal election. That same advocate reached out to her again

during her campaign for the town's seat on regional council last year.

Welland resident Steven Soos first brought his demand for such a declaration to the region about a year and a half ago, but it was defeated. Soos and others were part of the more recent delegation that led to the successful vote on a motion put forth by Welland regional councillor Pat Chiocchio.

"When I learned that

they hadn't supported the state of emergency back then, I was very surprised," Kaiser says. "There was some discussion again this time about what it would actually accomplish, that it wasn't tied to specific actions or budget items. But this statement acknowledges that there is a problem."

When Kaiser and Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, who also sits on regional council, were deciding which

committees they would put their names forward to serve on, Kaiser wanted the opportunity to sit on the region's public health and social services committee.

"I have a keen interest in learning more about the health services we provide, including mental health," Kaiser says. "I am a big proponent of talking openly about mental illness and addictions. I feel that part of the problem that makes

it more difficult to receive treatment is the shame associated with mental illness and addictions."

Kaiser goes on to talk about efforts such as Bell's Let'sTalk campaign helping to shed the stigma attached to mental illness in recent years. And she shares her own personal story.

Her family has faced mental illness, as has she, Kaiser admits. "Myself, I

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Town cuts storm levy hike by \$38 for 2023 budget

Zahraa Hmood
The Local

More cuts have been made to this year's operating budget this week, as the town is eliminating \$300,000 from its planned expenses, which would have gone toward a full clean-out of two stormwater ponds, plus approximately \$54,000 after nixing plans to hire a full-time climate change coordinator to tackle the town's Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

The review committee met for a third discussion on the 2023 operating budget on Monday, March 20. They've been digging into the planned tax hike for Niagara-on-the-Lake homeowners of 8.56 per cent (based on this year's average assessed home value of \$541,000), or \$104 more in property taxes, compared to 2022.

For residents living in the urban areas of town, this would

have included another \$50.33 in taxes for stormwater management, bringing their total tax hike to 11.6 per cent.

However, finance director Kyle Freeborn told councillors staff have re-adjusted stormwater management plans for this year to bring the budget down to about \$970,000 from \$1.27 million. "The original intent was to do a full clean-out costing \$500,000," Freeborn said. "We reduced the overall cost to focus on pond maintenance and defer a full clean-out for three to four years."

The town will need to incur more costs going forward to finish the job, Freeborn said, but staff will pull together a longer-term operational maintenance plan to clean out its ponds in phases.

This translates to the stormwater bill for taxpayers going up by \$11.68, or \$38.65 in savings. Last year's stormwater budget was approximately \$879,000. It

leaves \$200,000 left in the budget for work on storm pond maintenance.

"We're working through the priority ponds right now," said Rome D'Angelo, director of operations. "We will be coming back with a report with all the ponds and putting a five to 10-year plan on how we're going to cash flow the capital in cleaning all the ponds."

Council and staff also continued its review of the new salaried business cases it plans to take on for 2023, including the hiring of full-time employees as well as contract jobs being converted to permanent positions. They went down the line of these positions in a prioritized rank.

After significant discussion about the merits of hiring a full-time climate change coordinator at a \$54,140 partial salary for 2023 (which would be \$83,293 for a full year in 2024), council voted to push the hiring of this employee

to next year in a 4-3 split decision (Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa was not in the room for the vote).

Coun. Nick Ruller introduced the motion, suggesting the town should be prioritizing its funding and hiring of staff for initiatives which already exist, such as a mechanic and a health and safety coordinator, both on the list for 2023.

"We need to support existing programs and existing initiatives," he said.

As explained by CAO Marnie Cluckie, the climate change coordinator would have been in charge of implementing the town's Climate Change Adaptation Plan, which council approved last spring. This would have included leading municipal projects to reduce flooding risks, developing an urban forestry management plan, improving stormwater management, and more.

It would also have included

tackling provincially-legislated requirements around energy conservation, including annual reporting, on which Cluckie said the municipality is behind.

O'Connor voiced her opposition to deferring this position, based on the importance of ensuring compliance with the provincial requirements, and potentially looking after conservation-related tasks: as Bill 23 comes into effect this year, the role of local conservation authorities will be limited. "If we don't pick it up," she said, "no one will pick it up."

O'Connor introduced a motion to defer the hiring of the two lowest-ranked positions on the town's list: a parks and recreation programming specialist and a digital records coordinator. That motion was defeated in a 5-4 split vote.

"I was in the arena a couple of weeks ago and it was a conversation I had with many residents, that they felt there could be fur-

ther support in the parks and recreation world for them, and I agree with that," Zalepa said. "They feel our staff are working very hard in the facilities... they feel they can't get the support they're looking for."

Following this defeat, O'Connor commented that she "can't believe where the priorities are" of the municipality with the decision to fund parks and recreation programming over a climate change coordinator, who would have addressed "real environmental risk" Zalepa called this comment "out of line."

"That's not appropriate," he responded. "There's no more discussion on it."

This was council's third review of the 2023 operating budget, and will be followed by a fourth discussion this Thursday, March 23, the date on which the committee originally planned to approve the final budget for this year, both capital and operating. It has been pushed to March 28, or possibly later.

Councillor isn't giving up on new St. Davids pool

Penny Coles
The Local

Long before Adriana Vizzari was considering running for councillor, she was advocating for a new pool in St. Davids.

She attended the meetings to discuss a new design, she was a member of the pool fundraising committee when it was formed, and she even organized an orderly protest of local families during the very hot summer of 2020, when the pool at Veterans Memorial Park was opened, but St. Davids remained closed.

Now Coun. Adriana Vizzari, a mother of four, is as determined as ever that there be a new pool in St. Davids.

There have been some bumps in the road. A design was chosen in 2019, estimated then to cost about \$5 million,

with a grant from upper levels of government expected to pay for the largest portion.

The grant, however, didn't materialize, and there were several discussions at council about what to do next, including revising the design or repairing the existing pool.

About a year ago, the former council talked of changing the mandate of the pool committee from fundraising for a new facility to include the possibility of helping to pay for repairs, but then-operations manager Sheldon Randall said in his opinion, that wasn't a good idea.

"I think we'd be looking at spending a lot of money to keep it going every year until we come up with a permanent solution," he said, and that repairing the pool is "definitely not part of the facility master

plan."

The committee was disbanded without changes as the last term of council ended, with \$52,000 having been raised without the committee really getting going, as it waited for a grant.

Vizzari says the new council has been working on forming new committees, and a pool fundraising committee will be one of the next batch to be approved. She says she definitely wants to be on it, and she is hoping for "a replacement pool."

There is a line in the current capital budget, expected to be approved at the end of the month, that sets aside \$100,000, plus the \$52,000 donated.

"Once we get the committee going, we'll talk about federal and provincial grants. It's not going to happen overnight," she says.

But she's not going to give up.

"We cannot lose our only facility in St. Davids. We have a growing community."

The pool was repainted for

the 2022 season, and as far as she knows, "the pool is opening this year," for lessons, a swim team, and hopefully a full schedule of programs.

Early in budget talks she asked about a replacement diving board for Veterans Memorial Park — it had been broken and out of use for swimmers the last two seasons. Coun. Nick

Ruller jumped into the discussion asking why a councillor had to request it be repaired or replaced, assuming it should be part of regular maintenance. All councillors agreed, and there will be a replacement board when the pool opens.

Like the diving board, the pool in St. Davids already exists, and is part of the St. Davids

community, says Vizzari. "We're not asking for a new pool — it's an asset we already have, and that needs to be replaced."

She hopes council will agree.

"This new council is very aware, and really out to support residents. It feels great to be part of it. We're all hoping to do good things for our community."

Hospital building condition 'poor' but OK for occupation

Zahraa Hmood
The Local

Plans for the old hospital site in Niagara-on-the-Lake continues to be the subject of debate, as council and staff discussed the financial implications its \$3.6 million debt on the building will have on the operating budget this year.


The former hospital on 176 Wellington St. was one of several topics discussed during the town's latest budget review committee meeting on Monday, during which town treasurer Kyle Freeborn reported the town will incur a deficit of \$67,820 in parks, recreation and facilities, largely as a result of debentures at the site.

Currently, three tenants are left in the building — a not-for-profit school, a massage therapist, and the local palliative care service. The family health team doctors who occupied offices downstairs have moved to a new home at the Village Medical Centre, which opened in February.


During the budget discussion, CAO Marnie Cluckie and director of operations Rome D'Angelo explained that while the building is safe for occupancy, it is rated as poor on the Facility Condition Index — the lowest rating on the FCI scale is critical.

"The roof needs to be redone in short order and

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Village Open Forums should be starting soon

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what comes with that is the pressure on a small community to serve millions of people.”

According to Zalepa, the town needs to find an effective balance by determining what the gaps are to ensure that the quality of life for residents is maintained, while at the same time sharing what the town has to offer with its visitors.

“We’ve just begun with that,” he pointed out. “In fact, on our website, you can now go and engage with the firm that is helping us with that. Tell us what is important to you. That work will be pulled in for consideration. And over the next few months we’ll be going out to meet with residents to get an understanding about what is important to them.”

On the topic of strategic planning, Zalepa stressed that the town needs to focus primarily on three or four high-level community priorities.

“We need to focus on building a plan around some action items,” he explained, “and then giving the staff the direction to get it done. A lot of the debate will come around growth management, health and wellness for our residents, sustainability in our delivery of services and the infrastructure to deliver those services.”

When the lord mayor told the crowd budgeting is a topic that is near and dear to his heart, it elicited many chuckles from the gathering.

“Council has begun the process,” he said, explaining that it has been a bit delayed because of the election. “We’ve been engaged in this process. We did shake it up a bit, doing a complete council involvement as opposed to a small group managing the budget.”

Council members have been participating in workshops on the three categories of the budget: capital, rate and operating sections. Zalepa said a committee of the whole meeting followed each workshop, giving councillors a chance to discuss the details of the



There was a friendly crowd gathered at the Lounge, which included Karen Skeoch, Tanya Peterson and Lauren Skeoch. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Elise Gasbarrino, Mel Ashcroft and Melina Gasbarrino attended what is considered to be the first of a series of speaker’s events in the Lounge at the 124 on Queen Hotel and Spa.

budget proposals, business plans and suggestions.

“It’s been really engaging,” he added. “I’m hoping to wrap that up soon and have a sustainable budget for the community that addresses the gaps in our infrastructure management and the ability to maintain our infrastructure going forward.”

Town hall meetings at each of the NOTL’s five villages should be starting within the next month, promised Zalepa.

“We’re calling them Village Open Forums,” he said. “They’ll be a workshop format, not an official council meeting. We’re going to ask the residents

what’s missing in their community, what they’d like to see. Do they have ideas? Do they have solutions? Council needs to listen to them. We won’t be there to talk.”

He went on to plant the seeds for some of that upcoming conversation, mentioning housing as a top issue of discussion.

“I really believe we’re in a generational issue with housing attainability,” the real estate executive stressed. “Housing needs to be available in our community for those earning a typical income in this community. When we don’t have that, it causes a dysfunction in the housing

market. It affects first-time home buyers and seniors who are looking at staying and aging in place.”

Acknowledging the supply of homes for those types of buyers is nearly non-existent in NOTL, Zalepa said the government has a role in changing that.

He suggested that those open forums starting soon are a great place to have the conversations about how flexible housing can fit into each of NOTL’s five villages.

Zalepa concluded his speech by talking about the town’s youth, whom he called inspiring and passionate.

“I’ve had a chance to

meet with the young people on the Lord Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council (LMYAC), and I’ll tell you, our jobs are at risk,” he laughed. “They’re excellent, thoughtful young people, and they’re really passionate about life here. I really look forward to engaging with them on their initiatives.”

His choice to conclude by speaking of the LMYAC was appropriate, as he then turned over the microphone to Caroline Polgrabia, who followed Zalepa with an update on the NOTL Youth Collective, begun earlier this year.

The evening was a fundraiser for the fledg-

ling community initiative, which has been providing a place for young students to gather after school, earn babysitting and other certifications, and attend movie nights and other special events.

“I’m pleased to involve the NOTL Youth Collective,” Zalepa said. “It’s really important work in our town. We know the pressures that young people have in our community. We’re so appreciative of the work being done by that group.”

Alana Hurov, director of marketing at 124 on Queen, said totals are not final, but 60 people attended the event, raising about \$1,200.

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Support for state of emergency 'gets conversation going'

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suffered at one point from anxiety. I didn't understand what it was. I thought something was physically wrong with me. I went for every test — MRIs, CT scans. I had no idea what was happening to me. Just understanding what it was made a world of difference in my life."

Kaiser acknowledges people are often surprised to hear that someone like herself, a politician and consultant with a successful design and marketing business of her own, could have problems with anxiety.

"Part of the reason why I am where I am today," she adds, "is that once I got diagnosed in my 30s as having general anxiety disorder, which tends to run in families, I understood what was happening and I was able to cope with it and treat it. It changes your perspective and ability to be strong."

Medication helped Kaiser for a short time, and she was able to turn to books and then began meditating, developing processes in her mind that helped her manage the anxiety.

"I'm really fortunate," says Kaiser, "that I have been able to live a very happy, successful public life. I could have easily gone down another path had I allowed that anxiety to impact my personal and professional life."

Kaiser says she shares her own story in the hope that it inspires others to understand that their own struggles are not so unusual.

"I'm very happy that the motion passed," she adds, "and if it gets some conversations started that lead to some creative ways to support people with mental illness in the community, that can't be a bad thing. It's the first meaningful step to help people in the community who have these challenges in their lives."

Brock University Department of Psychology lecturer Scott Neufeld supports Kaiser's opinion. And he's suitably impressed with how getting to this point began as a grassroots effort.

"You have to acknowledge the efforts of Steven Soos and others," Neufeld told The Local, "to demand from local politicians that this be noticed and acknowledged. For whatever

reason this declaration became a target for them, a tangible thing they wanted to see. It's a big win."

Neufeld holds out hope that the region's declaration and the correspondence to the provincial and federal governments that it calls for brings added attention to the problem.

"Things haven't been getting better," Neufeld added. "Perhaps this is a tool of advocacy to those higher levels of government. There have been questions around whether or not this is the right tool for the job. But added awareness can't hurt and any positive movement or acknowledgement from local politicians is a welcome sign."

On the opioid crisis part of the declaration, Neufeld would like to see a few specifics from the provincial and federal governments, including an expansion of the number, type and scope of supervised drug consumption sites, and decriminalization of personal possession of illicit substances.

"I would love to see decriminalization," added Neufeld. "But these measures are often way too late. The kind of thing we need

is the radical expansion of local harm reduction initiatives. To have a true emergency response to this we need the immediate removal of the arbitrary provincial cap on the number of these sites. And we need

overdose prevention sites." To Neufeld's concerns, one of the recommendations of the motion was that regional chair Jim Bradley is to, with the Federal Minister of Justice and Attorney General, David

Lametti, and Federal Minister of Health, Jean-Yves Duclos, urge the government to convene a task force to explore the legal regulation and decriminalization of all drugs in Canada.



Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser

Youth collective wraps up successful start

Mike Balsom
The Local

With the Niagara-on-the-Lake Youth Collective taking a much-needed break, Caroline Polgrabia, chair of the collective's planning committee, took a moment to reflect on the first eight weeks of running programs for the town's young people.

Unveiled at a presentation to an audience of community supporters at the new 124 on Queen Hotel and Spa last week, the numbers are indeed impressive.

Since they opened their doors on Jan. 16, 112 young people have signed up to participate in Youth Collective programs and activities, while volunteers have already amassed 563 hours supervising kids at the Cornerstone Community Church location, known as the Youth Campus.

Polgrabia pointed out, though, that that number doesn't reflect the hours spent behind the scenes on program planning, administration, youth registration, assessing volunteer applications and other important tasks.

"This is all done through the community rallying around this idea," Polgrabia told the group. "The

recognition has to go to the group of parents, mostly, who got this going. They got together and thought about how we could activate the space, how we could make it great."

"It was intensive," Polgrabia admitted. "You're dealing with kids, and kids are messy, people are messy. It's not an easy thing to stand up there and take care of other people's kids, and they did it. I thank them for that."

One of the keys to success, she added, has been consistency. During the eight-week sessions the organization ran daily after-school drop-ins and one evening event each week. There have also been a number of social events and movie nights.

She went on to thank the NOTL community as a whole for "coming out of the

woodwork to support our kids," and specifically lauded NOTL Realty for their sponsorship of the Santa Run this winter, as well as Ruffino's Pizza With Santa event, which helped raise \$5,000 for the collective.

With the help of The Garrison House and the NOTL Lions, 385 healthy snacks and 100 snacks-plus-meals on Wednesday evenings were provided to participants.

The NOTL Public Library has donated more than 200 books for the Youth Collective's little library as well as three desktop computers for the students to use while there.

Polgrabia pointed out the participants in the collective have already earned 90 certificates, including 34 Home SAFE, 36 Babysitter and 20 First Aid certificates. As well, they've

welcomed 20 local experts to give talks and lead programs and events.

The breather being taken now will give those involved a chance to look at what worked, what didn't, and what the possibilities are to expand the program starting up again in April.

"We're going to do a spring session," said Polgrabia. "I don't know what it looks like yet. Will we do a five-day program? Will we run movie nights? Will we run chess nights? Yeah, probably, but we have to sit

down and figure out what that looks like."

After holding their NOTL Heritage Moments - Youth Curators Contest in partnership with the NOTL Museum, they are looking forward to continuing that relationship, as well as expanding a partnership with the Shaw Festival to get kids into the theatre and bring people from Shaw to the collective, and work with the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre.

"And we're looking at the teens doing food safety

and Smart Serve training."

Polgrabia said the goal for this year was to involve 200 unique registrants in the collective programs, and with 112 already signed up, they are halfway to that target.

"In the absence of having a high school in town, we wanted to have a safe place for kids to come together to connect and to network," she said. "From the moment we opened the doors it took on a life of its own. I think we've exceeded our own expectations."



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EDITORIAL

The truth behind TikTok — will we ever know, and should we care?

TikTok has become quite the topic these days, worldwide.

Governments at the highest levels are banning it or restricting access in certain circumstances, and in Canada that has filtered down to provinces, regions, police forces, the Bank of Canada, and more recently to municipalities, which are removing the app from computers in municipal spaces and town-owned phones, due to security concerns.

Niagara-on-the-Lake isn't there yet, but will be having discussions about it.

Niagara Region, Lincoln, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Grimsby and Thorold, as well as Niagara Regional Police, have banned TikTok from their

networks.

Other municipalities either have never permitted TikTok on corporate internet networks or devices, or are reviewing their policies.

It doesn't seem like so long ago that we were first hearing about the social media platform, which seemed mostly to appeal to young people who posted videos for their friends to watch — often of themselves dancing or doing crazy things.

It's popularity quickly spread, though, and is now used by all ages for all kinds of purposes.

It is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese internet technology company, and that seems to be its biggest problem — fears of data collection and the possibility of cyber attacks have been

raised in countries around the world. Some countries have banned or are talking about banning it completely, from any use.

Locally, Thorold was the latest to weigh in on the issue, with the city becoming the most recent in Niagara to ban the app. Thorold has never allowed TikTok on any corporate devices, and the city is now following the direction from upper levels of government to further protect from possible security and privacy threats by banning the use of it on all city network

Marnie Cluckie, NOTL's chief administrative officer, told The Local Monday that "currently, the town has not banned the use of TikTok on corporate devices. However, town staff are internally reviewing the priva-

cy and security concerns of the app, the town's information and technology policies and whether the corporation should ban TikTok on corporate devices."

The federal government announced in late February it was removing the platform from all federal government devices, citing security reasons. Ontario followed suit on March 9, last of the provinces and territories to do so.

News outlets around the world are explaining the dangers of TikTok, which like most social media platforms collects information about us, but goes much further in the scope of the data.

On a different but in some ways related topic, at a town budget committee this week, there was discussion about the

number of staff needed to look after communications and social media, and how much that is going to cost taxpayers. It has now become a priority for governments and government figures to use social media, which has evolved from harmless ways of families and friends communicating to include businesses, governments and government representatives using online platforms for communication and promotion.

TikTok is being singled out now because it's owned by a Chinese company and is reportedly able to collect data that will tell them at any time where one of the more than 1.5 billion users of the platform is physically located, should they want to know.

It's unlikely those who still enjoy TikTok for its entertaining videos, or those who make money from them, will stop using it, but with all the social media alternatives out there, is it necessary for our government representatives, with computers and phones paid for by taxpayers, to continue?

It would seem the time has come to say no to at least that one platform. Surely there are enough other options for getting their messages out?

Or is it being shut down by our governments, as some people believe, to prevent us from knowing what they don't want us to know? Hmm, what do you think?

Penny Coles
The Local

Don't miss visiting Bjorgan's favourite Ontario area — so far



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

I always joked and declared that Ontario was one of the best places in the world to endure lockdown life for a couple of years. When options of how to execute your spare time became limited overnight, we went to the outdoors within our own province like never before.

Ontario is like a country within the country. Globally speaking, our province fits several European nations within its borders, and the greatest statistical gift of it all pertains to how wild most of Ontario still is — let alone the sheer

variety of climates and their associated ecosystems and human cultures. Our backyard is a smorgasbord of opportunity to travel, and it is amazing.

With spring on our doorsteps, I'd like to highlight "Owen's Picks" for the most fascinating natural regions of the province, some of which I only discovered by creatively digging deeper during those unprecedented past two years. Others I have been visiting and learning about since childhood.

Feel free to use this article to inspire your next warm weather trip. The positive ripple effects of Canadians exploring more of their own big backyard is that we support local and, perhaps, subconsciously feel more inclined to show stewardship toward our land — especially in times of Ontario's Bill 23, when some of southern Ontario's most precious coun-

tryside destinations are at risk of being changed forever.

In no particular order though, let's leave the south and start adventurously up north. Way up north.

Imagine a bath tub where the water only runs cold, and it is nearly half a kilometre deep. Lake Superior's chilly, Gatorade-blue waters cover the largest surface area of any of the world's freshwater lakes, making it the second largest in the world by volume after Russia's Lake Baikal.

In southern Ontario, we feel like the Niagara Escarpment is our mini mountain. As we drive north into the Canadian Shield's granite lands of lakes and forests, we suddenly redefine what a big hill is. Still not technically a mountain around, though.

When we drive nearly 12 hours out to Lake Superior, you see cliffs and scenery that I would best describe as a tiny replica of the B.C. coast. It's a whole other tier of massiveness unknown to most. Again, still not mountains by definition, but for conversation's sake, these are Ontario's mountains.

Mist-clad rugged landscapes sit with authority as the ancient cliffs gaze over Lake



This gorge on the Lake Superior shoreline region is more than three times the depth of the Niagara Gorge. It's a spot in Ontario all residents should experience at least once. (Owen Bjorgan)

View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

From Scratch (Netflix, 2022), the true story of an American art student and a Sicilian chef, affirms that nothing last forever; neither

great joy, nor great grief is permanent and that only love in its many guises and complexities redeems us. Its poignancy makes it difficult to experience, but the truth it speaks is of inestimable value.

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.

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The Niagara-on-the-Lake Local

The Trusted Voice of Our Community

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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, Jennifer Waine was the first to identify a location we thought might be a tough one. Ben was at the community centre Rotary Disc Golf Course — if you looked closely, you'd see one of the disk baskets peaking out from the side of the photo.

COMMENT

— *Local* LETTERS Looking at TikTok, other issues as ‘straw man’ arguments —

Ted Mouradian, in the most recent of his comment columns (The Local, March 8) makes a few claims about a few things that have the whiff of straw men arguments about them. Within the sandbox confines of that column, those might play out nicely enough; but, in a wider and more worldly context, their troubling illogic and lack of research become easier to see.

For example, the claim is made that data privacy concerns over the wildly popular app, TikTok, are the overheated fixation of an angry 2 per cent — an emotional reaction shared, also, with the subjects of, quote, “drag queens and trans people.”

Since the objective basis for the writer’s 2 per cent versus 98 per cent dichotomy on these topics is not offered, readers are free to infer that it’s just something created, perhaps, in the interest of framing this argument.

Then, having done the audience the favour of identifying these cohorts, the article goes on to describe their most pertinent characteristics (e.g., members of his 2 per cent are universally “angry” and operating out of ig-

norance/intolerance; and members of the 98 per cent are universally susceptible to adopting their intellectual infirmity on these matters). Well, why not? Having as much as invented these straw men, what better than the same article to tell us what’s in their grassy hearts and heads?

(For reader reference, a “straw man argument” is, formally, a logical fallacy whereby a false counterparty and/or position is/are substituted for “the actuals” so that their debunking might be mistaken, quite fallaciously, as a victory over the latter.)

However, out here where, we very real and straw-free people interact, it’s quite common to observe that simply disagreeing with someone else does not necessarily connote anger. While one might see how claiming the opposite might help dismiss opponents and critics before even considering the actual substance of their counter arguments, it’s not an approach that fosters honest and productive debate. It is, instead, a ploy often associated with sophistry and demagoguery.

Having attempted the “based-on-tone” (i.e., “they’re just angry”) dismissal, the article claims just what its alleged two per cent is angry about, things that scare its members due to their ignorance and intolerance. Accordingly and to wit: critics of TikTok don’t understand how both that platform, and the online world in general, operate; drag queens are simply people who want to perform; and trans people are just folks wanting to get on with their own lives in ways that are no one’s business but their own. All well and good, perhaps, except those are not at all accurate depictions of numerous, actual, representative, real-life critics (hence the straw man charge.)

Take TikTok, for starters. Saying that, “if the Chinese want you,” (with or without that app), “they have you,” underscores the risks of taking the example of someone (“I, for one, am not concerned”) wading into a highly complex technological swamp while confessing, “Of course, I don’t have all the details.”

Far better informed critics of that platform object to it for extremely well-delineated

reasons, such as its default settings that allow the provider near-unlimited access to other, unrelated data (e.g., contacts lists, message content, camera & mic functions, pictures & images, GPS information, time stamp data, browser history and interactions with other sites & services). Indeed, even taking the time and meticulous care required supposedly to block or curtail such access simply results (so claim the owners) in preventing the sharing of such potentially compromising data with third parties — but not with TikTok itself, which, among a great host of other things, will use those data to amass deep-learning profiles of individual and variously-aggregated users to feed them additional content, the pursuit of which has been demonstrated to influence their opinions.

Also overlooked is the fact that a process of burrowing into the multi-terabytes of data swirling about the inter webs in order to pick out individuals of particular interest or possible exploitation is immensely aided and abetted by interactive services such as TikTok. Put another way, it’s a terrific tool for parties such as Chinese Intelligence to use in order to determine whom, exactly, it just might “want” at any given time.

These are just some of those pesky “details” the author evidently considers to be unworthy of concern. And, trust me, those but scratch the surface — hence the expert-based decision of the federal government to ban the app from its devices. (See what happens when competent parties equip themselves with “the details”? And not a hint of anger

in their evaluation process.)

As for the solace the article seems to derive from the platform’s owners being sovereign to themselves, just ask Jimmy Lai (well known to NOTLers of most vintages) and Jack Mah (formerly of Alibaba) about the sovereignty they enjoyed from the priorities and interests of the governments and officials of the People’s Republic of China. Indeed, in their cases, anger might be a virtue, as opposed to a slight.

And all this doesn’t even begin to touch on the many, many ways Chinese Intelligence surveils and “influences” (read, “controls”) that country’s diaspora via technological means, such as TikTok. For a nation currently aghast at the alleged degree of Chinese influence in its last two federal elections, Canada being unconcerned about such matters seems worse than inattentive.

As for drag queens and “trans people,” they have been around for many, many years, enjoying widespread acknowledgement and, by and large among adults, acceptance. (No, nothing is perfect in that regard; but no one is promised a rose garden. Real life can be tough for many in many ways. Sometimes we all just need to “deal with it.”)

So why, all of a sudden, the growing expressions of concern?

The likely known but unacknowledged answer is the recent and energetic efforts of some (and, I must stress, only some) among the engaged parties in directing their explicit presence, activities and messaging towards impressionable youths, children and even babies. This is

a trend from which noteworthy numbers in the LGBTQ+ community, also, are taking pains to distance themselves, fearing that it might undermine their efforts to be generally understood, accepted and respected. (So much for that 2 per cent assertion.)

That such strategic pushes are arousing defensive instincts among a sizeable demographic for which protection of the vulnerable is a unifying characteristic should neither come as a surprise nor need it suggest a dysfunctional response, things that no amount of hyperbolic label-throwing (distractions from civil discourse, all) can actually prove.

Also — and to tie these threads more tightly together — it so happens that TikTok has become a leading platform for getting such formerly, adults-only exhibitionism and proselytizing in the face and hands of surprisingly young audiences, free of parental knowledge or supervision. (It is not at all difficult for underage users to misrepresent themselves as being older than they truly are.

In summary, then, contrary to claims that there’s nothing much to see, closer inspection indicates that reasons for concern are neither as few nor as unfounded as the article maintains.

Let a more fully-apprised “98 per cent” now decide, in all rationality and devoid of ignorance or fear, entirely for themselves. I have every confidence in their ability to do so without the risk of contagion from a conjured-up and hyperventilating 2 per cent.

Bruce Dickson,
NOTL

Check out sites closer to home

Continued from page 6

Superior’s restless waters. Creeks and waterfalls, some without names, pour into the Great Lake out of giant rock chasms, or sometimes meander gently through impressively surprising stretches of sandy beaches. After being up that way three times over the past few years, I fell in love with one of Ontario’s last accessible wild frontiers.

In the summer, when those beaches get toasty, they are just as busy as Crystal Beach in Fort Erie.

On that note, let’s head all the way down to Lake Erie’s coastline, where I am currently working on an upcoming Hidden Corners nature documentary. This significantly more shallow and smaller Great Lake may be Ontario’s, if not Canada’s ultimate summer getaway.

This is where beaches and biodiversity collide in spectacular fashion. The most species-rich region of the entire country is still preserved in pockets of protected land all along this lake, but the stretch of woods

and water in Norfolk and Haldimand Regions are enjoyable beyond belief.

You can be hiking among some of the tallest and rarest trees without the sounds of traffic. For example, one of Canada’s most discrete stands of black gum trees. Then, you can hop in your vehicle and be on one of the world’s largest freshwater beaches in minutes. Cutesy but lively towns are always within reach for all of your family needs, but it takes only moments to feel swallowed up and deeply immersed by the rolling sandy forest hills.

Not all coastlines are this gentle, though.

Let’s go to my “second home” peninsula, the Bruce Peninsula.

One of the more awe-inspiring moments, which happens every day of the year, is watching the Caribbean-like waters of Georgian Bay crash into the sheer wall of the Niagara Escarpment as it plunges directly into the water. Nothing quite like water that fell out of the sky seconds ago smashing

into 420 million years of rock layering.

Bruce Peninsula National Park offers the full spread of shorter family-friendly trails to demanding backcountry remote experiences. Either way, there is something special about being cloaked in a dark, dense cedar forest, only to pop out to an astonishing view of beach rock, vertical cliffs, and the bluest of blue water.

In fact, the entire stretch of Bruce Peninsula from Owen Sound to Tobermory is jam-packed with scenery like this. I always refer to the Bruce Peninsula as Ontario’s “other up north” in comparison to Muskoka and beyond, and is just four hours away from Niagara.

Twelve hours, four hours, or less than two. I’ve given you three outstanding areas of Ontario that are not only special to our province, but the world.

Keep it local, Niagara! Pick your adventure, and sink your outdoorsy teeth into these three wonderful regions as our weather warms up.



— *Local* LETTERS —

Buying home becoming more of a fantasy

“No one is against growth and developments, but it has to be done right.” These are the very words that haunt me. I wake up sweating at nights to these very words. I currently fantasize — I stress fantasize — about owning my first home but am always shocked back to reality by those very insidious words.

Forget that most people that utter this statement are being disingenuous at best

but what it really drives home is the misguided belief that people have any right to say what someone can and cannot do with their own property. Developers should not have to prostrate themselves before, “100 per cent of all neighbouring” residents to get approval to build whatever they damn well please. Complaints over development around your property belong in a court room, not

in a town council.

Please people, if you’re going to devote your time and effort to keeping people like myself out of affording their first home, at least be honest and say it loud and proud: “I’m against growth and development.” Then, and maybe then, people like me would have a fighting chance.

Alexander Evans
NOTL

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Town has lost a remarkable friend, family a great dad

Penny Coles
The Local

Ray Guy, at one time president of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce and member of the NOTL Rotary Club and The St. Andrew's Society, has died at the age of 83. He passed away at the Niagara Falls hospital site early in the morning of March 11, after a lengthy illness.

The accolades from family and friends following his death are evidence of a life well-lived, and a man who will be missed.

Ray had been sick for about the last 18 months, says Dave Dick of his good friend, whom he described as having a "brilliant, beautiful mind," and a desire "to achieve good for the community" he held dear.

Dick says it wasn't long after meeting Ray that he realized "he was a really special person."

The two first got to know each other when they both joined a committee to save Niagara District Secondary School. "We spent a lot of time together on that, and Ray did a lot of work on it. He had a vision and a process. He also had some very special talents," says Dick.

In addition to being passionate about education, Ray had been a great athlete during his university years, was very widely travelled, and had had an interesting and very distinguished career, but you would never know that about Ray unless you encouraged him to talk about himself, says Dick. "He never spoke out about his past accomplishments, and there were many."

Dick recalls learning Ray had held positions at Canadian embassies around the world, and that he had represented Canada in the U.S., meeting then-president Ronald Reagan to talk about trade with Can-



Ray Guy at the Court House, pre-COVID, with Richard Coyne. (Photos supplied)

ada. He retired as a Senior Trade Commissioner at the Canadian Consulate General in Detroit after a career of more than 30 years.

"He didn't talk about that either, but I've seen him in action in meetings locally — I've seen his diplomatic side. He was too smart to get in an argument. He knew how to bring the temperature down. He was really inspirational — if you wanted to get work done, he was the go-to guy."

When Dick discovered from someone else that he and Ray had a history of rowing in common in their younger years, he had to push Ray to talk about it.

"I was never at the level he was — Ray was an Olympic-calibre rower. He had so many medals — I had to coax him to show them to me."

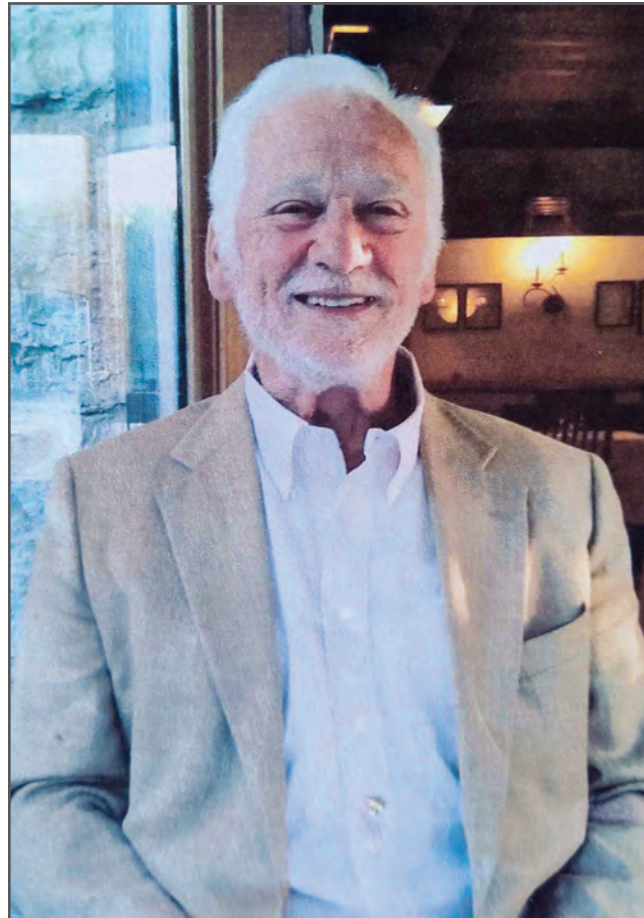
Ray was inducted into the McMaster Athletics Hall of Fame in 1999, and was considered "an inspiration

to all who knew him."

"Ray's McMaster story is unforgettable," says the university's Hall of Fame website. "A member of the varsity rowing team from 1964 to 1968, Ray was the captain in his final three years. While rowing for Mac, he twice led his team to a provincial university championship title."

But perhaps more impressive than a championship title, the website says, "is the story of Ray's return to rowing after a life-threatening car accident in 1966. Not expected to survive the accident, Ray recovered and returned to the McMaster rowing roster to anchor the lightweight team to a first place finish."

He was also a member of Canada's National Rowing Team in 1966 and 1967, participated in the 1967 Pan-Am Games, and won a total of 11 Canadian championships and two U.S. championships.



Ray Guy, a man of distinction, say his friends.

It was during his time in Detroit, which included taking people on tours of Canada, that he and his wife Val first discovered NOTL, says their youngest daughter, Olivia Guy.

When Ray retired from his position with the federal government and they came to Niagara, he joined Niagara College as a program coordinator for the post-diploma and undergraduate programs in international business management, and remained a professor emeritus with the college after he retired in 2007.

"They decided this was absolutely the place to retire," Olivia says, although they had been considering moving permanently to the family cottage. She was grateful they chose NOTL — as the youngest, Olivia was the only one still at school, and got to finish off her high school years at Ridley College.

That was after years of moving around and living in countries all over the world, she explains.

"We have some wild stories about living overseas, with four kids," she laughs. "I don't think any of my friends can imagine what life was like for us. We'd be moving every three or four years. There was lots of travelling, lots of amazing adventures in our lives. We got to see the world several times round. His work provided us with something quite special."

"He was very charming, and a very funny man," she continued. "He was a great storyteller, and a brilliant conversationalist who would make people think. We would have fascinating conversations with him, often over a cocktail or cigar. He would talk about what was going on in the world, but he would never force

his opinions on us — he just wanted us to use our minds."

He and Val did a lot of entertaining — that was part of his job. They would have diplomats to their home, and were "fabulous hosts," she says.

While Ray was known to be quite a chef after Val died, "Mom was an incredible chef. She thought him all her tricks," says Olivia, who recounts her father's love of making what he called Ray's World Famous Pancakes. They were just plain pancakes, made with a recipe from the *Joy of Cooking*, but they were special because he loved to make them for his family, "and they were world famous because he had made them all over the world," says Olivia.

After moving to NOTL, in addition to teaching at Niagara College, Ray soon became involved in the community.

Janice Thomson worked with him when she was the executive director of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, and he served as president. He and Val, who passed away in 2008, had purchased a beautiful bed and breakfast when they came to town, and he was active in the B&B community.

"Hearing the sad news of Ray Guy passing away has caused me to reflect on memories going back to the early 2000s," Thomson told The Local.

"Ray served as president of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce for several terms, and provided a strong liaison between the B&B community and the Chamber. Always one to seek accord, Ray's approach to introducing solutions and innovative ways to achieve progress resulted in the

Chamber building a strong, visitor-friendly accommodation reservation system that served well for many years," says Thomson.

"Ray's confidence in and support for the Chamber staff was constant. He encouraged and backed up new ideas with enthusiasm. His involvement in the Spirit of Niagara awards program saw dozens of residents recognized for their contributions to NOTL, in both commercial and residential sectors. He and Val were the epitome of elegance and old-world charm, bringing their decades of international posting experiences to our town."

In recognition of Ray's commitment to the community through the Chamber, explains Thomson, an annual student bursary was established at Niagara College in his name. "This was an immense point of pride for Ray, as providing inspiration, guidance and support for students was extremely important to him. His work at Niagara College in the areas of hospitality, tourism and international relations provided leadership to many Canadian and international students."

Recognizing the importance of solid educational facilities to support an entire community, Thomson says, "Ray fought hard for the preservation of a high school in NOTL, encouraging Chamber members to become involved in the lobbying to the school board."

"We will remember Ray on Jan. 25 every year — resplendent in full Scottish kilt and jacket, he loved to present the Toast to the Haggis on Robbie Burns Day with true gusto and respect to his country of birth."

Dave Dick says Ray was someone he really enjoyed spending time with, "just chatting. I learned so much from him. The town has lost a wonderful citizen, and I've lost a good friend. I'm going to miss him, and just popping in to sit and chat. I thought there would be more time with him."

As Olivia, the only one of her siblings who lives in NOTL, recalls the wonderful home her parents always provided for them, even though they moved so often, she says wherever they went it was the same.

"It was always a solid home, our home, even though it may have been in somewhere like Abu Dhabi."

Ray leaves his four children, Belinda, Laura, Andrew and Olivia, and four grandchildren, Liam Morgan and Alex, and Rob Dundon and Elyse.

The family will hold a celebration of life for Ray at the NOTL Golf Club April 10, from 2 to 4 p.m.

Hospital future uncertain

Continued from page 3

there are other significant investments that need to be put into that building, from a capital perspective," Cluckie said.

Currently, the town pays a little more than \$61,000 every year in interest on its long-term debt of \$3.6 million for this site. The town has borrowed the funds to pay this interest every year from development charges.

According to Freeborn, this interest rate is based on its 2019 background study on development charges, but once the study is redone for 2024, the rate will increase significantly. "I would expect

that to go up in 2024, and certainly to go up if we turn that into a real debenture," he said.

The town is still seeking ways to fund the capital investments needed and to give the hospital site a new purpose. As for the planned \$67,820 impact to the net levy, "it'll be a council decision what to do with that building going forward," said Coun. Erwin Wiens, chair of the meeting, which will then impact this budget.

During its Feb. 28 council meeting, councillors heard a proposal to turn the site into the Niagara Creative, Cultural and Community Hub, presented by Robin Ridesic, representing a number of

non-profit organizations, along with Tim Jennings, executive director of the Shaw Festival, and Tim Johnson, an advisor and activist on Indigenous education.

At the group's request, Cluckie said the town is looking at the potential of extending its short-term leases for the current occupants of the building, and a usage case for the site, including the finances involved.

D'Angelo said he would be meeting with the group proposing the hub on Tuesday, March 21 to discuss their vision for the site.

"From our end, it's really the capital needs that are required in that building to make it sustainable," he said.

Ivan Coyote’s *Care Of* is this year’s regional library choice

Sharon Burns
The Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library is part of a region-wide library event where members read and discuss the same book, culminating in an evening spent with the author.

“Last year, the libraries got together because we wanted to try a new initiative called ‘One Book, One Community,’” said Debbie Krause, community engagement coordinator for the NOTL library.

According to a press release sent out by the One Book, One Community steering committee, “One Book community events are important because they invite the entire community to come together and start a conversation surrounding important topics. Additionally, they provide all community members an equal opportunity to participate as these events are free and open to all community members.”

Furthermore, it said that “creating a healthy and vibrant community is one of the Niagara Region’s Strategic Priorities.”

“Our One Book, One Niagara event is our way of helping to achieve this goal by providing all Niagara residents with the opportunity to come together to read, grow and discuss.”

This year’s selected title, *Care Of*, by Ivan Coyote, was chosen by representatives from each of the eleven public libraries in Niagara, as well as a representative from the Niagara College Library and Brock University Library.

“The Niagara Region has put forward a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan 2023-2027 that identifies programs and services that meet the needs of everyone as an area of focus. The choosing of *Care Of* is a way that our Niagara libraries are able to work to fulfill this focus,” stated the release by the steering committee.

“Members of Niagara-on-the-Lake’s library in-house book club, Fireside Reads, read *Care Of* in December,” said Krause. “In February, they welcomed Celeste Turner, LGBTQ2+ Support Coordinator at the Niagara Falls Community Health Centre, to discuss what it means to be an ally and accomplice.”

“Celeste’s presentation highlighted the importance of empathy and the many ways in which we can foster acceptance and connection in our community,” said Krause.

Coyote is a Canadian writer and storyteller who has written 13 books, and created four films, six stage shows, and three al-



Debbie Krause shows off a display of Ivan Coyote’s books. The Canadian author will be speaking at Brock University March 29 at 7 p.m. (Supplied)

bums that combine storytelling with music. Their books have won numerous awards, been named a Stonewall Honour Book, and was long-listed for Canada Reads.

“*Care Of* combines communications received

from readers and audience members with Coyote’s responses, creating a body of correspondence of startling intimacy, breathtaking beauty, and heartbreaking honesty and openness,” stated the steering committee. “Taken together, they

become an affirming and joyous reflection on many of the themes central to Coyote’s celebrated work—compassion and empathy, family fragility, non-binary and trans identity, and the unending beauty of simply being alive, a giant love

letter to the idea of human connection, and the power of truly listening to each other.”

“The culminating event is happening on March 29 at 7 p.m at Brock University where Ivan Coyote will be speaking,” said Krause.



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Farmworker Hub offers ‘home away from home’ for socializing

Sharon Burns
The Local

The Farmworker Hub is only in its third season but the bustle and excitement were high as old friends were once again reunited at its open house at Cornerstone Community Church in Virgil Sunday.

Hub director Julia Buxton-Cox enthusiastically greeted new and returning farmworkers at the door while speaking both Spanish and English, and greeting some with ‘knuckles’ and others with hugs before encourag-

ing them to help themselves to warm clothing and household items.

“We recognize that warm clothes are a necessity while they are here, and it helps them to save money to bring home,” said Buxton-Cox.

Volunteer Jodie Godwin helped to bag items for Markland Barrett, who works at Thwaites Farms growing asparagus. The community “can donate men’s winter boots and other winter gear, and pots and pans,” said Godwin. “Hoodies, too,” she suggested.

Barrett, who arrived here

in February, agreed that hoodies are important when working in the field. He also suggested that farmworkers need garden tools, power tools, and hand tools.

The Farmworker Hub was created in “March 2021 during COVID, because everything was closed and the men needed warm clothing,” said Buxton-Cox. “It started in our garages and we didn’t know it was going to be so big.”

“At the height of the season last year,” she added, “100 to 150 men and women vis-

Continued on page 11



Markland Barrett is welcomed by volunteer Jodie Godwin. (Sharon Burns)



Farmworkers visiting the hub Sunday were happy to be able to pick up some free warm clothes, a necessity for them at this time of year. Donations are welcome. (Julia Buxton-Cox)



Jamie Knight of the NOTL Rotary Club presents a cheque to Julia Buxton-Cox to help pay the rent as the season gets underway at the hub. (Barry Newcombe)

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Warm clothing, winter boots, household items needed

Continued from page 10

ited the hub every Sunday. "Last year we had 30 workers opening day and today we already surpassed that."

Buxton-Cox also encouraged farmworkers to visit a newly created social space upstairs, decorated with flags and smelling of fresh coffee. The pool table was being put to good use while the baseball game played on a large screen.

"This is a spot to call home away from home," Buxton-Cox told farmworkers.

"The thing that I am most proud of about this place is not the free stuff, which is

neighbours helping neighbours," she said, "but it's when you see someone like John Henry who comes in and it's a big hug and 'oh my gosh, welcome back!'"

Rotarian Jamie Knight was on hand to present Buxton-Cox with a cheque "that will help cover a few months of rent," she said.

The Farmworker Hub needs volunteers, both at the Virgil site, and to help with driving farmworkers to the hub on Sundays. According to thehubnotl.ca, donations are also gratefully accepted.

"This place is just so joyful," said Buxton-Cox.



A large room upstairs at Cornerstone Community Church is available for those visiting The Farmworker Hub to hang out and socialize. (Julia Buxton-Cox)

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Actual Kid-Friendly News

Kids

GAZETTE

JOYOUS
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RIDDLE



Why are waterbeds so bouncy?

Answer: They're filled with spring water.

Local News

To celebrate spring, Joyous NOTL is holding a photo contest! While you are out and about around town, take a photo of any “sign of spring” and submit the photo to joyousnotlkids@gmail.com. No camera? No problem! If you don’t

have a camera, draw a picture of something you see around town that tells you spring is on the way! Ideas for these submissions include buzzing bees, daffodils blossoming, trees budding, and birds nesting. The winner will receive

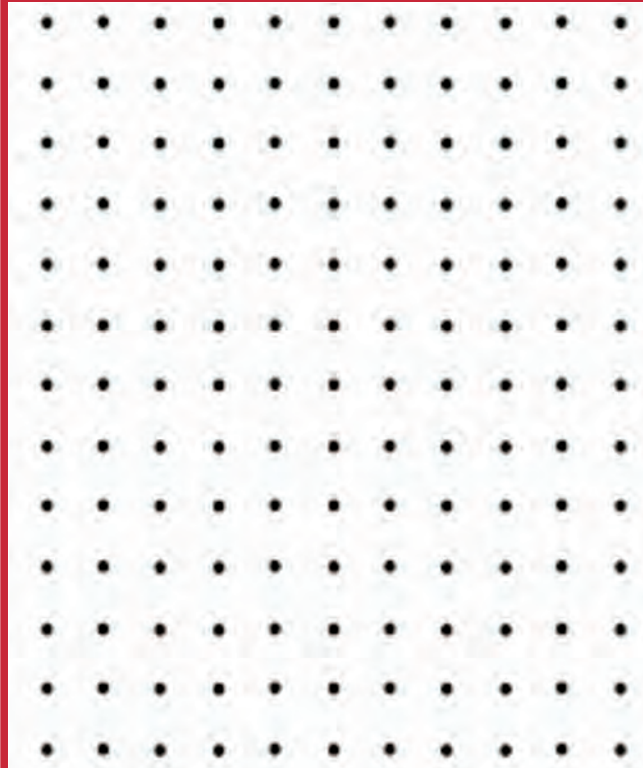
a \$20 gift card to Cows ice cream! We want you to have plenty of time to get out and enjoy nature while looking for these signs so we are giving this contest an entire month. The winner will be announced around April 20.

Artist’s Corner

“Inside Look”
Ibrahim S. - 7 years old



DOTS & BOXES



- Each turn, draw a line between two horizontally or vertically adjacent dots.
- Drawing the 4th wall of a box wins it, earning you a point. When you close a box you must move again.
- Lines are drawn until all squares are claimed. The player with the most claimed squares wins!

Interview with Sophie

- Q. What is your ideal day in Niagara-on-the-Lake?**

A. I’d just stay at home. That’s my ideal day ... staying at home.

Q. In your free time, what do you like to do?

A. Cook, read, ride my horse (I keep my horse at Benchview), shop, stuff like that. I like to go to bookstores.

Q. What do you want to do after high school?

A. I am going to George Brown’s culinary school. It was the only place I wanted to go and I got early acceptance. My favourite thing to cook is steak dinners.

Q. What is your favourite book?

A. The *Mortal Instruments* series. It’s a fantasy set in modern times. It’s about fairies and angels and demons and people hunting demons. It’s a very interesting series about a girl who is a half-angel demon hunter but doesn’t know it at the beginning.

Q. What is your favourite TV show?

A. Probably *The Office*, it’s hysterical (though probably not appropriate for young kids). I’ve seen *The Office* all the way through eight times.

Q. What is your favourite food?

A. Tacos. Steak tacos. There’s
- a steak theme going on here, I like steak.

Q. If you could be an animal for a day, what would you be and why?

A. A cat. I just like cats because they seem so lazy!

Q. What kind of music do you listen to?

A. Most genres of music. I don’t have a favourite. Different moods mean I listen to different music.

Q. What is your favourite flavour of ice cream?

A. Mint chip. I grew up eating mint chip. It was my grandmother’s favourite — it always had to be the green one.

Q. If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be?

A. I would go to Italy! For the food and scenery. I want to travel all over Italy but if I could only pick one city there it would be Rome.

Q. What are three awesome things about yourself?

A. 1. I’m ALIVE! I had a health scare in December so being alive is pretty awesome.
2. I received early acceptance into the college program of my choice.
3. (Sophie was having a hard time so a friend stepped in and answered the third one) She is a good friend and a great listener.





Sophie McClure, 17

Family-Friendly monthly project courtesy of The Niagara Pumphouse
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Make floral-themed cards & prints

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FOR LAUGHS

- Why is Star Wars’ Yoda such a good gardener?

Answer: He has a green thumb.
- 
- What is a flower’s favourite kind of pickle?

Answer: A daffo-dill.

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.

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.

Local SPORTS

Native Centre basketball team on the road to success

Mike Balsom
The Local

A nascent basketball program running out of the Niagara Regional Native Centre (NRNC) is already making its mark across the province.

At the recent Ontario Native Basketball Invitational tournament in Sudbury, organized by Indigenous Wellness and Sport Ontario, Team NRNC, made up of local high school-aged boys, went 3-1, going undefeated in the round-robin stage. They finished the tournament in fourth place, stunning some teams from other locations across the province.

"We lost to a team that was well-coached, very well-rounded," says coach Quinn Hill. "They went on to win the tournament. We're still a young team, we lacked size against them, but we gave them a good fight. It's a good sign that we kept up with those guys."

Hill says people approached him in Sudbury to let him know how impressed they were with Team NRNC's performance in their semifinal loss against the squad from Jumpball Player Development, a long-established program from the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation in Renfrew County.

In contrast, the local program began this January at the urging of Pow Wow outreach and fundraising coordinator Willow Shawanoo.

"We had basketball teams years ago, but we had some co-workers who changed positions," says Wasa-Nabin youth program coordinator Mia Bakker. "Willow really wanted to bring it back. She did all the logistics, and we went to our first tournament at Six Nations in the beginning of February."

The team practices in the Airport Road native centre gym, which lacks permanently mounted hoops and on a floor not properly marked out for the sport. They roll in two outdoor basketball nets at either end of the gym so Hill and the other coaches can run scrimmages. Watching a recent practice there, though, it doesn't seem to bother the coaches or the players.

"We'd love to get some permanent hoops mounted," admits Hill, who recently began working at the NRNC as its healthy living coordinator for youth. "We're looking to get into a high school in the area, but it would be nice to have our own facilities here for basketball."

Right now, most of the funding for the program goes toward getting the kids to the tournaments. The native centre provides the means of travel as well as accommodations, food and the entry fees for the players.

"We have quite a few youth for whom this could never have happened on their own," Bakker says. "For families with five

or six kids, this isn't something they would be able to do. This gives them an opportunity they wouldn't otherwise have."

The program goes a long way toward building the confidence of those involved, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic and, as Bakker adds, the fallout from the discovery of so many unmarked graves at old residential school sites in the last two years.

"We still feel that trauma today," Bakker says. "These youth are feeling it. These kids are trying to find their way and feel safe. Being on this basketball team gives them a safe space where they can fit in and work together. They've found good friends in each other."

At the recent provincial tournament the boys were still getting to know one another. But a week later Bakker witnessed them bonding at a Youth and Elders session in Fort Erie, joking and sharing stories together.

Hill, who lives in Fort Erie, was one of the players who represented the NRNC at tournaments from 2014 to 2018, when they won both the Six Nations Rez Hoops Tournament and another event in Thunder Bay. But he says there wasn't really a program back then. It was more of a team that was pieced together for the purpose of entering those tournaments.

Hill was trying to get the program started up in 2020, but the pandemic made that impossible. Now 22 years old, he is too old to compete in the tournaments, but was happy to step up and organize the practices on Wednesday and Friday evenings at the centre.

"I'm only two or three years older than some of them," Hill says. "It's fun to hang around with them, and I feel they do respect me and the other coaches. We're all young, and we're all learning together, which I think is pretty good."

Bakker says that as an urban Indigenous community centre, no one is turned away from the NRNC's new basketball program. That means that Team NRNC is not solely made up of youth with Indigenous roots but also includes some friends of members of the native centre, such as its youngest player, Demarco Perry.

"My friend at school is Native, and he told me to come and try out for the team," says the Grade 9 student at Denis Morris Catholic Secondary School. "It's been a lot of fun playing with these guys. And I had a great time at the tournament."

Shawanoo does the groundwork, hunting down the Indigenous tournaments for the team to enter. Some tournaments, however, demand that all players have Indigenous status. That means players such as Perry have to sit those out.

Basketball mixes with cultural sessions and performances at these Native tournaments, too. Both Hill and Bakker spoke highly of the singing, drumming and dancing which were part of the opening ceremonies in Sudbury.

Sean Vanderklis, recently appointed a director at the NRNC, was along for the ride to the provincial tournament to watch his son, Nodin Buck, and his nephew compete.

Vanderklis feels that the tournament was a big success for the fledgling program.

"They've only been playing together for two months," he marvels. "A lot of the teams that we were playing have been working together for five-plus years. They have a sense of cohesion that we are still in the process of developing."

He continues, "Some of our boys have never played anything more than schoolyard basketball. They're still learning. They're at various levels of basketball IQ. My son, for example, is very good at pick-and-rolls, he knows where teammates should go, whereas others are still learning."

Also along for the ride to Sudbury were four young female basketball players from the local Native centre, playing as part of the regional Team Flight, who captured the bronze medal at the provincial tournament.

"A lot of the community wanted a girls team, too," Bakker says. "We didn't have a lot of girls that came out. So Willow decided to connect with this regional team, and four of our girls now play with them."

Team Flight was begun in 2014 by former Six Nations resident Jon Nolan, now living in Gravenhurst. It's an elite Native girls' team featuring Indigenous female basketball players aged 14 to 18 years old from across Ontario.

Bakker says the NRNC girls had never really had a chance to practice with their teammates until they went to the Rez Hoops tournament at Six Nations in February, where they won a silver medal. And they will finally get a full practice session on March 19, when they travel to Rama to gather with their teammates.

Team Flight will be heading back up to Sudbury next month for another tournament, while Hill hopes to take Team NRNC to Winnipeg's Hoop It Up tournament in May, another Indigenous tournament in Ottawa and potentially one in Arizona.

As far as the boys' team is concerned, Vanderklis says they couldn't have a better leader than Hill.

"He's taken the helm of the ship this year," Vanderklis says, "providing strategic direction. He's a phenomenal coach and a great role model and mentor. The kids have really taken to him."



Team NRNC competed in the recent Ontario Native Basketball Invitational tournament in Sudbury, and has several upcoming tournaments planned. On the team are (back left) Brandon Bell, Aaron Mitchell, Malcom Perrin, Quinn Hill (coach), Nodin Buck, Korde Hill, Jackson Davis, Braydyn Isaac (coach), Max Grant (coach), and (front left) Kalise Hill (#1 Fan), Hunter Hidalgo, Zion Russell, Miguel Funes, Demarco Perry, Danny Orr, and Xavier Bakkar. Missing from the photo are Kalen Bennett, Lucas Longboat, and Brennan Middlemiss. (Supplied)



Kalen Bennett makes a move on Demarco Perry during practice. (Mike Balsom)



Demarco Perry drives past coach Quinn Hill while Kalen Bennett looks on. (Mike Balsom)



Brandon Bell prepares to take a shot at a recent practice at the Niagara Regional Native Centre. (Mike Balsom)

LocalSPORTS

U18 Wolves rep team championships coming up

Several playing final games with NOTL Minor Hockey

Mike Balsom
The Local

This Thursday the Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves Under-18 rep hockey team begins a best-of-three series against the Fort Erie Meteors to decide the Niagara District Hockey League's Tier One championship.

The following weekend, both teams will be making the trip to Barrie for the Ontario Minor Hockey Association championships against 10 other teams from across the province.

These two weekends will mark the final hurrah for more than half of the Wolves, who will be too old to play minor hockey next year.

For 17-year-old Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School student Sam Walker, the feeling is very bittersweet, as he is unable to play in any upcoming games due to a wrist injury.

"I'm glad that my last year is with these guys," Walker told The Local at Monday night's practice. "We talked a lot about it earlier in the season, but

we're really just giving it all we have. Even the kids that still have next year to play, they've come together knowing it's our last year. It's been special. It's a great group of guys."

The Wolves roared out of the gates in their first four games back in October, reeling off two wins and two ties in league competition. But that was followed by seven straight losses during which they were shut out three times and totalled only seven goals.

"And in our first two tournaments," assistant captain Walker added, "we really struggled to put the puck in the net."

But they turned things around when they really needed to in February, entering the four-team round robin playoffs against Fort Erie, Pelham and Port Colborne. The Wolves finished with a record of 3-2-1, capping it off with a 3-1 win over the Meteors in Virgil to take second place and earn the berth at the provincial championships.

"We really pulled things together," head coach Tim

Marotta said Monday. "We had a lot of injuries. Once everybody got healthy, that's when they really started to challenge some of the other teams. They kept working hard and sticking to their game, and they played very well, played some really smart hockey in the playoffs."

Speaking to Marotta and a number of team members Monday, it was clear that many felt the team's two goaltenders, Theo VanderKaay and Mateo Gruosso, were perhaps the biggest factors in qualifying for the chance to go to Barrie.

Gruosso was missing from practice Monday as he was in Abruzzo, Italy, showcasing his talents as a centre midfielder for Pescara Calcio, a Serie C professional soccer club.

The Queenston Road resident started his minor hockey journey in NOTL, but at 11 years old he moved up to AA hockey. A year later Gruosso jumped to the Hamilton Bulldogs AAA program. Last year, he took a step closer to coming home by playing with the Niagara North Stars AAA team. Then came the Ontario Hockey League draft.

"I got interviewed by a couple of teams," Gruosso said on the line from Pescara. "Nothing really came of it. I had a decision to make, do I try to catch on with a junior team? Instead, I decided to go back to what I was most comfortable with, to where I can make the most memories down the road."

Returning to NOTL meant a chance for the St. Paul Catholic High School student to play with his younger brother Marco.

"I wouldn't change this decision for the world," Gruosso says. "I am playing with my best friend, my goalie partner Theo, and my brother on defence. It's something I'll never forget.



Members of the team 'graduating' from minor hockey are Sam Walker, Alex Reile, Ethan Peters, Will Denham, Theo VanderKaay, Griffin Dyck, Jack Marotta, Cole Holmes, Reese Gordon and Blair Burland. Absent seniors from the photo are Mateo Gruosso and Noah Ostromecki. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Trainer Jeff Dyck on the bench, assistant coach Jim Denham talking to the team, and head coach Tim Marotta on the ice prepare the players for their upcoming championship games.

Coming back to play with the guys I grew up with has been amazing. It means so much to me, way more than any other team I've played on."

For Gruosso's teammate and assistant captain, Glendale resident Cole Holmes, it will be the first time playing at the provincial championships, where he knows his team will be underdogs.

"Going into the playoffs we knew what we could do," said the A.N. Myer Secondary School student. "We're excited that we got here and we're just going to continue it. We know we're underdogs, but that's not going to stop us."

After hockey was interrupted by the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, Holmes says it wasn't difficult to convince this group of guys to get back onto the ice.

"Everybody was ready to come back," he says. "It's what we've done our entire lives, and it's always been fun. I played one year in Niagara Falls, and another year in St. Catharines. But I came back a few years ago and stayed. This is where I like to play."

Another assistant captain, Marotta's son Jack, is also aging out of minor hockey after the Barrie provincials. As Jack's Wolves career nears its end, Ma-

rotta reflected on the potential end of his coaching career with NOTL hockey.

"As much as it's his hockey, it's our hockey," he says. "It's going to be a bit tough not coming to the rink anymore. It's been a real bonding experience with him."

But he does think that Jack will have options to play the game in the future.

"He's planning to go to the University of Guelph," Marotta said of his son. "I don't know if he'll continue to play hockey at a rec level, or if he'll take time off then come back as an adult to play in a men's league. The nice thing is the past couple of years these boys have figured out how to make pick-up games, especially during the pandemic. I can see them getting back together at Christmas to play."

Before that, and before the provincials, there's the series against Fort Erie. Winning it would certainly give the NOTL team bragging rights and added confidence heading to Barrie.

"They've been a thorn in our side all year," Walker said of the Meteors, against whom the Wolves went 2-7 this season. "They put a good beating on us. But the last two games we've really played well against them (a 2-1 loss and a 3-1 win against Fort Erie in the

round robin). It would be nice to prove that we're a better team than them."

Game one of the Niagara league's Tier One championships goes Thursday night at 7 p.m. in Fort Erie, while game two is scheduled for Saturday at 6 p.m. at Virgil's Meridian Credit Union Arena. If a game three is necessary, it will be back in Fort Erie Sunday night at 7 p.m.

At Saturday's game in Virgil, the 12 seniors on the team who are 'graduating' this year, most of whom have at least 10 years of NOTL minor hockey experience under their belts, will be honoured.

"It would be great to pack the arena that night," said trainer Jeff Dyck, whose son Griffin, the team's captain, is one of those graduates. "Come on out and show your support."

Also playing for championships this weekend are some of the Wolves' house league, or local league teams.

Coach Gary Friesen's U11's, Matt Unruh's U13, and James Cadeau's U18 teams will be vying for titles over the next few days.

As well, coach Joe Pagnotta's U11 rep team will play in their division's OMHA tournament the weekend of April 8.

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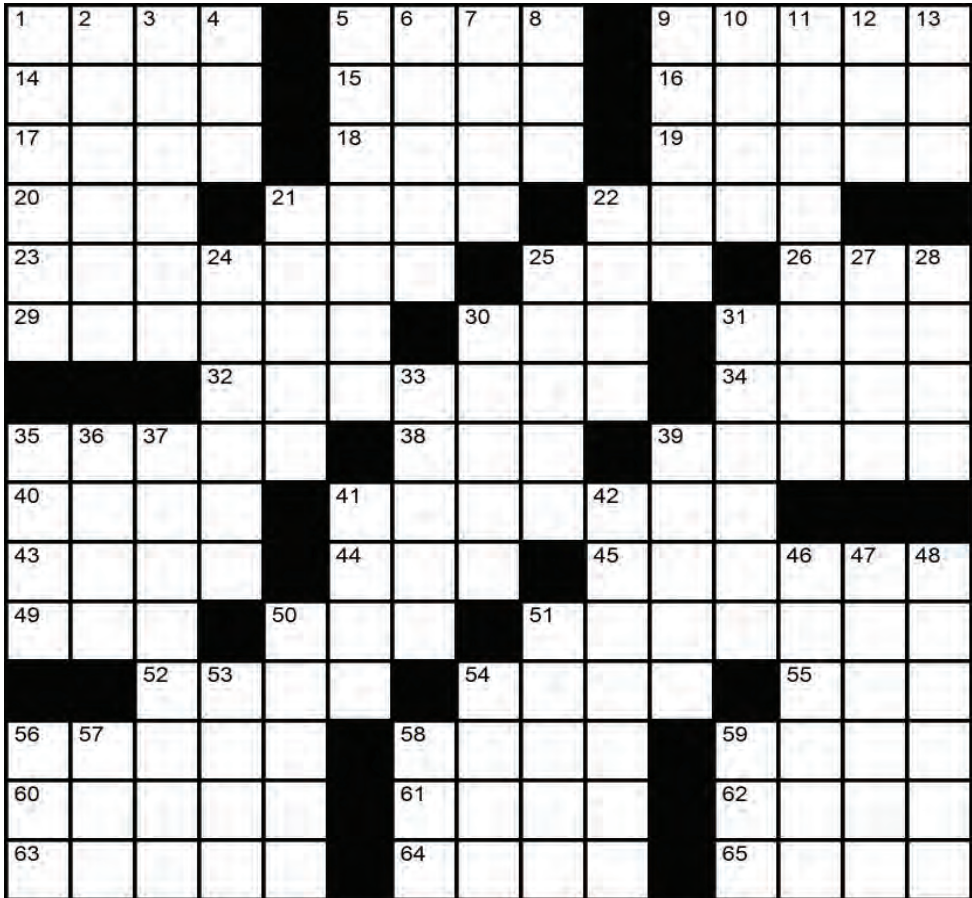
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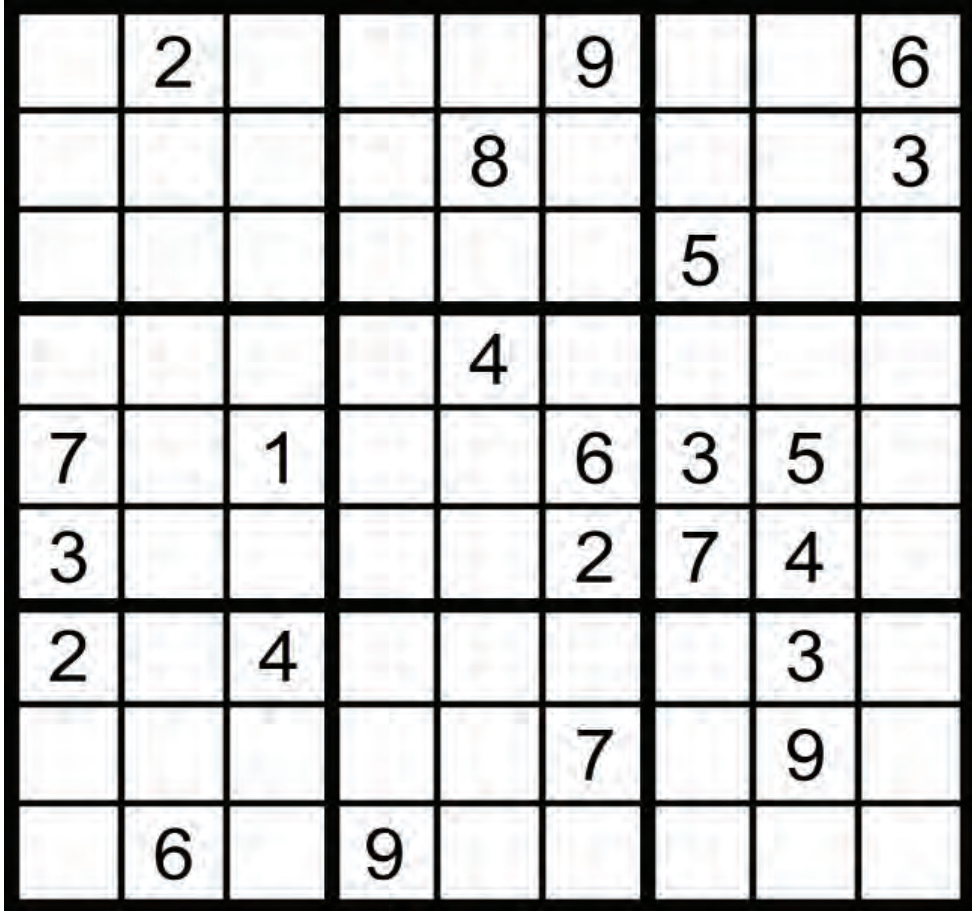
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- Across:**
- 1 Urban air pollution problem
 - 5 That's in Paris
 - 9 Prim
 - 14 Formerly French Sudan
 - 15 E.g. Rice, Harvard (Abbr.)
 - 16 Snake vulnerable to the mongoose
 - 17 Not dissimilar
 - 18 Salespeople
 - 19 Syrian dynasty
 - 20 Padre (Abbr.)
 - 21 Prepares for war
 - 22 Roughly speaking
 - 23 Traditional voting day
 - 25 West Atlantic international grp.
 - 26 Flat panel TV type
 - 29 Ankle injury
 - 30 Parking area
 - 31 Doozie
 - 32 Undersides
 - 34 2,000 lbs
 - 35 Foundation
 - 38 Tear
 - 39 Shorthand inventor John Robert ---
 - 40 --- calling!
 - 41 Maturity
 - 43 Stiff sentence
 - 44 Missions (Abbr.)
 - 45 Goad
 - 49 Banned insecticide
 - 50 Distress message
 - 51 Chivvied
 - 52 Comedians
 - 54 Drugs (Abbr.)
 - 55 Threat to fighters
 - 56 Alan Ladd gunfighter role
 - 58 Loopy
 - 59 D-Day beach
 - 60 Main artery
 - 61 Piece for two
 - 62 "Time --- My Side" (The Rolling Stones)
 - 63 Awesome
 - 64 Stack
 - 65 Fix
 - 12 Plan sponsored by Sen. William Roth
 - 13 Family guy
 - 21 Spanish farewell
 - 22 Stable food
 - 24 Californian pine
 - 25 Vavavoom
 - 27 Block
 - 28 Ordure
 - 30 Lower abdomen
 - 31 Pantry
 - 33 Ensnarers
 - 35 Hairless
 - 36 Keen
 - 37 Computer code
 - 39 Attendees
 - 41 Low sounds?
 - 42 Out with a potential partner
 - 46 Neglect
 - 47 Pressurize
 - 48 Comet finder --- Halley
 - 50 Bargain
 - 51 German philosopher
 - 53 Cosmopolitan (Abbr.)
 - 54 Second-largest Hawaiian island
 - 56 Nordic airline
 - 57 By what means?
 - 58 National economic indicator
 - 59 Actor --- Carrey
- Down:**
- 1 Mental ability
 - 2 Bury the hatchet
 - 3 Director/producer --- Stone
 - 4 Kind of rummy
 - 5 Small seedless raisin
 - 6 Foe
 - 7 Drinks slowly
 - 8 Corner consoles?
 - 9 Operation mementos
 - 10 Decide with a coin
 - 11 Pure



OBITUARY



KOPEECHUK, EDWARD RONALD — Passed away peacefully at his home in St. Davids with his wife and daughters at his side on Tuesday, March 7, 2023 at the age of 82.

Loving husband of Margaret (nee Lindsay) for 56 years. Beloved father of Linda (Glenn), the late Sharon (Brian), Carolyn (Conor). Proud grandfather of Eoin, Victoria and Fiona.

A service was held at Roadhouse and Rose Funeral Home on March 13, 2023. Memorial donations can be made to the Canadian Cancer Society.



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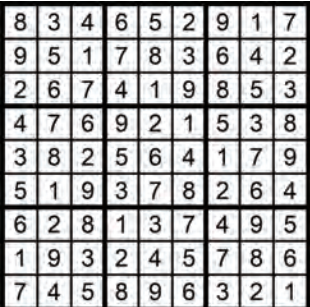
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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from March 15, 2023



Across: 1 Smog, 5 Crest, 9 Staid, 14 Mail, 15 Univ, 16 Cobra, 17 Akin, 18 Reps, 19 Assad, 20 Rev, 21 Arms, 22 Or so, 23 Tuesday, 25 O A S, 26 L C D, 29 Sprain, 30 Lot, 31 Lulu, 32 Bottoms, 34 A ton, 35 Basis, 38 Rip, 39 Gregg, 40 Avon, 41 Manhood, 43 Lite, 44 Ops, 45 Needle, 49 DDT, 50 S O S, 51 Harried, 52 Wits, 54 Meds, 55 S A M, 56 Shane, 58 Gage, 59 Juno, 60 Aorta, 61 Duet, 62 Is on, 63 Swell, 64 Pile, 65 Mend.

Down: 1 Smarts, 2 Make up, 3 Oliver, 4 Gin, 5 Currant, 6 Enemy, 7 Sips, 8 TVs, 9 Scars, 10 Toss, 11 Absolute, 12 I R A, 13 Dad, 21 Adios, 22 Oats, 24 Sabine, 25 Comp, 27 Clog, 28 Dung, 30 Loins, 31 Larder, 33 Traps, 35 Bald, 36 Avid, 37 Software, 39 Goers, 41 Moos, 42 On a date, 46 Disuse, 47 Lean on, 48 Edmund, 50 Steal, 51 Hegel, 53 Int'l, 54 Mau, 56 S A S, 57 How, 58 G D P, 59 Jim.

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