Farmworkers ask for same rights as all Canadians

March against racism a ‘first for Virgil’

Penny Coles  The Local

Migrant workers just want the same rights as all Canadian residents. They leave their families for many months, miss out on many of the milestones with their kids we take for granted, and work in our country so we have food to eat.

The jobs they are doing are hard, their days are long, with no overtime pay, in freezing cold weather, in snow and rain, and on the hottest days of the summer, doing hard jobs that Canadians don’t want. They pay premiums to the Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance, yet they have no right to collect either.

Those are just some of the issues mentioned Sunday, that led to a rally at the town hall, and a march through Virgil to the Meridian Credit Union.

Some of the small crowd in attendance carried signs that called for “Status for All,” or “Unite Against Racism,” and signs with photos of some of the migrant workers who come to Niagara every summer.

The march in Virgil was one of 10 held across the country Sunday, and in another 16 locations in the Caribbean, where many of the farmworkers call home.

The march was held to mark the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, says organizer Kit Andres, and gave migrant workers the opportunity to urge Prime Minister Justin Trudeau “to make urgent and permanent changes to ensure immigration rights instead of partial, time-limited programs.”

Actions are being organized following the increased levels of racism during the Freedom Convoy, Andres said, where some protestors brought Nazi symbols and antisemitic and racist images to the Ottawa protest. The march also marked two years since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, “which continues to disproportionately impact racialized migrant workers.”

Gabriel, a local farmworker from Mexico, spoke to the small crowd, his words translated by Luisa Ortiz, one of the organizers.

He first left his home in the state of Tlaxcala to come to Canada 21 years ago, separated from his family and friends, “working 12 to 14 hours a day on my knees, crouching in the rain or intense heat . . . and because of the effort that had herniated discs in my spine. In 2010 I had open heart surgery in Hamilton, and it is very sad to be here in a hospital away from family and friends and not being able to speak the language. Although the doctors and nurses are very kind, one feels very sad, very alone,” he said.

“I have been bullied, mistreated by the bosses, even from my colleagues because . . .”

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Work needs to continue ‘every single day’

Continued from page 1

we are always competing with each other . . . because of the pressure from the bosses to get the job done quickly.

Workers live in trailers or houses with 15 or 20 people, he said, and “sometimes there are not enough utensils to prepare food. Sleeping in bunk beds is very uncomfortable, there is no time to take a shower with only two or three showers, getting up every day at 5 or 6 in the morning . . . and finish work at 7 or 8 at night, without being paid overtime, which is a right that we deserve.”

Leaving family at home is hard, he said. “In my case, I left my four-year-old daughter and my six-month-old son. I missed my baby’s first steps, his first words. This is very hard, he said. “In my case, I paid overtime, which is a right we are always competing with each other . . . because of the pressure from the bosses to get the job done quickly.”

Christopher, a worker who travels to other communities, said, “is the right thing to do.”

The seasonal workers program has been going on for 50 years, he said, and “it has never been a bed of roses, given the circumstances we have to undergo.”

He too spoke of separation from family, improper accommodation, fear, intimidation and bullying by employers, unjust and unfair deportation, and little or no compensation for workers who are injured, or “end up dead on the job.”

The long, dark list goes on, all in the name of migrant workers.”

“Don’t forget that we are the ones who brave extreme heat and cold to put food on your ta-
ble,” he continued, “most times in conditions that are unbearable, conditions that most Cana-
dians would never stand up to. We are also the ones who help to boost your economy, even in the face of this dreaded global pandemic. At a time when we should be home with our family we still take the chance of com-
ing here to work.”

Farm workers are con-
sidered essential workers, he said, “so if we are seen as im-
portant to maintain the life of your food chain, then we think it’s time for you to take a look in the right direction. As one voice, we are asking for better healthcare, better liv-
ing conditions for all workers, equal rights and justice for all, fair compensation for injured

There are many families who disintegrate, sometimes the children, due to the lack of a parental figure, get into trouble, and sometimes marriages break up from being apart for so long, he said.

“Many times we suffer the loss of our father, mother or children without being able to return in time. That is why I ask the government for permanent residence for all migrants, so that we don’t depend on a sin-
gle employer, that we can have a pension fair enough to live a dignified old age, because we have spent a large part of our lives helping the Canadian economy,” said Gabriel. “I be-
lieve that we deserve dignified treatment, without racism or mistreatment, we deserve re-
spect as workers and as human beings. With permanent res-
dence we can keep our family together, we can have freedom that we don’t have right now.”

Andres, who represents Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, told, “The Local she believes, in terms of com-

munity recognition and accep-
tance, the situation in Niagara is improving. "The workers are telling me that they feel an increase in support, especially here in Niagara. They mention it seems like the small things are chang-
ing, something simple as people saying ‘hi’ in the grocery store, that says to them, ‘we see you. It’s something we don’t think about, how such a simple thing can mean so much, and make them feel part of the communi-
ty, everyone supporting and ac-
knowledging each other in this community.”

Andres said when she travels to other communities, “workers say they want to come to Niagara-on-the-Lake, where they can ride their bikes, go to the grocery store, and see their buddies. In other communities, they’re bullied.”

The situation is improving in other areas, “but there is still a lot of work to be done.”

The pandemic shows a spotlight on living and working conditions as well as job inse-
curity of workers, Andres said, and on how they are treated. “But as that wanes, and nothing has changed, they’re frustrated. There are changes that are needed system-wide, not just in some regions.”

There are signs that on a large scale, people are ready for change, ready to take action, “workers are no exception. They may not feel comfortable coming to an event like this and speaking out, but they are taking action at home, on farms across Ontario.”

Before setting out to march along Niagara Stone Road, or-
ganizer Luisa Ortiz taught the crowd several chants shouting the question, “What do we want?” and getting the reply, just as loud and enthusiastic, “Status for all, “ “When do we want it? “Now! “No hate, no fear, refugees are welcome here,” and “The people united will never be defeated,” getting the crowd charged for their short walk.

Arriving in front of the credit union, Andres told those gathered, “you are part of his-
tory. This is Virgin’s first ever march. But one march doesn’t fix everything. We need to do this work everyday. It’s up to you to get it done. All of us together need to get it done. It’s up to everyone to promote change, every single one of us on every day of our lives.”
James Russell, a Toronto journalist-turned-film producer, is hoping to identify the people who are buried in the Negro Burial Ground by hiring a company that specializes in using ground penetrating radar for that purpose. He estimates it will cost about $2,000, probably take about three hours, and he is willing to pay for the service himself, be it to councilors at a Monday night planning meeting.

The real hard work will come after that.

Russell is expecting about 14 graves will be disclosed, that information is from Natasha Henry, president of the Ontario Black History Society — and he hopes to mark them temporarily, perhaps with a small Canadian flag, and outline them with grass-friendly, non-toxic spray paint.

And that, as a result of further research, more permanent markers will be designed, to be installed at some future date. "Given the wealth of glass, metal, and ceramic artists living in Niagara-on-the-Lake, I would ask the town to perhaps have a competition for permanent markers," he suggested.

"It breaks my heart to see the Negro Burial Ground disrespected," he told The Local. "I thought I should do something about it. The dead deserve more respect."

On the site now is a plaque for the Negro Burial Ground saying many of the refugee slaves who came to Niagara are buried there. "Their ancestors are still with us, " and he said, "Our dead are never forgotten."

Russell is really hoping for a successful outcome for the sake of descendants of the people whose graves he hopes to locate. "Their ancestors are still around, and they would love to know their relatives are safe and where to find them, and to know they can visit them."

He knows he has his work cut out for him — he's a journalist and film maker, different skill sets than the kind of research he's anticipating, he says. But he's expecting some help, from Kevin Turcotte, the town's director of parks and recreation, and from Sarah Kaufmann, the NOTL Museum's managing director and curator. They have already been helpful, he says, "and both will be great resources."

"I don't know how this is going to go," he told The Local, "but locating the graves and giving them temporary markers is a place to start."

Russell finished his presentation Monday with a quote from Mary Ann Evans, a Victorian novelist, poet and journalist, who said, "Our dead are never dead to us, until we have forgotten them," and a plea for councillors. "I'm hoping the town will not forget the 14 Canadians in the Negro Burial Ground."

The plaque for the Negro Burial Ground says many of the refugee slaves who came to Niagara are buried there. (Photo supplied)

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The plaque for the Negro Burial Ground says many of the refugee slaves who came to Niagara are buried there. (Photo supplied)
Chautauqua asks for help with short-term rentals

Penny Coles  
The Local

Chautauqua neighbours look out for each other, and they want to live in a neighbour- 
hood where they can continue to do that. But the proliferation of short-term rentals is jeopardiz- 
ing all they hold dear about their “storied area,” Chautauqua Residents’ Association member Brian Crow told councillors at Monday night’s planning meeting.

Chautauqua, he said, is “a close and mutually supportive group of people who deeply care about the well-being of their environment, their neighbourhood and each other.”

Neighbours pull together over issues of mutual concern, “whether they be assisting those confronting difficulties or developing sensible solutions to issues which have the potential to create an imbalance in our community” Crow spoke of neighbours looking out for each other. “Just in the past few weeks residents helped Margaret get needed medical care and assist with household errands when she broke her ankle slipping on the side of the street; shoveled snow for Ruth when she broke her arm; offered support to Steph-

anie and her family as they coped with the tragic loss of Shane; and have been providing assistance to Neil and Jody as they cope with a significant medical issue.”

In short, councillors — residents — demonstrate that we care every day.

The number of short-term rentals is “putting in jeopardy the critical balance between residents and visitors that has allowed us to maintain our amazing community, while at the same time affording visitors a great experience,” Crow said, adding the problem tipping the scale is the growth in short-term rental accommodations.

“Over the past several years this issue has expanded to the point that currently over 10 per cent of our homes are short-term rentals, representing somewhere in the neighbourhood of eight per cent of all STRs in NOTL. A minimal estimate indicates that STRs have displaced 40 to 50 residents from our valued community.”

Many long-term rentals have been converted to STRs, reducing the affordability and the availability for some to live here. The demand of STRs also adds to increased property costs, he said. “There is no ques-
tion that we are experienc- ing a hollowing-out process due to the number of non-owner-occupied short-term rentals operating in our neighbourhood”

Crow explained he is considering short-term rental accommodations to be “un-hosted homes being offered for very short-rental periods,” and even those li-
censed tend to house many visitors having little or no regard for the community.

He also referred to them as commercial establish-

ments “that should be subjected to the identical criteria applied to all commercial enterprises in Niagara-on-the-Lake.”

Crow and the CRA are recommending that property taxes for such establish-

ments be based on commercial rates, to slow the rate of growth.

Non-owner-occupied short-term rentals should be treated in the same man-

ner as all other NOTL small businesses and operations that currently do pay commercial property tax — the playing field must be level, Crow said. If provincial legislation doesn’t allow the town to charge commercial tax on residential-zoned housing, he suggested the town could set the annual licensing fee at the equivalent of the difference between commer-
cial and residential tax.

He also said the municipal accommodation tax should apply to all un-host-
ed short-term rentals, and that a capped number of STRs be allowed in the neighbourhood, either per-street or per-area, with the town creating a formula for density in Chautauqua to determine the cap.

He is also looking for a cap to the number of guests based on the number of li-
censed bedrooms, or one car per licensed bedroom to the maximum number of onsite spaces.

And finally, he requested “strong enforcement with meaningful penalties to encourage street adherence to the rules. “It’s time that NOTL took definitive action to protect, preserve and grow our neighbourhoods.”

After some questions regarding zoning STRs com-
cerned in order for them to pay commercial taxes, councillors voted to refer Crow’s requests to staff for a report.

Crow said after the meeting he looks forward to working with staff and council on solutions for Chautauqua’s challenges.

Brian Crow, representing the Chautauqua Residents’ Association, had a list of recommenda-
tions for the town to help control the growing number of short-term rentals in the neighbour- 
hood. (Photo supplied)
Time to open things up.

IT’S SPRING. We’re open to fresh possibilities. Join us as we celebrate a fresh new season and local goodness. Enjoy free goodies, meet our farmers, take part in family fun activities and take home our special Ukrainian flag cookies with proceeds going to local Ukrainian churches.

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Welcome to our

OPEN HOUSE
SATURDAY MARCH 26 9:00AM TO 5:00PM

Complimentary coffee and cider ■ Free treats ■ Marshmallow roasting and cookie decorating for the kids ■ Meet our local farmers ■ Special Ukrainian flag cookies baked for a good cause ■ A taste of what’s coming with new brisket and porchetta sandwiches ——— Proceeds go to YWCA Niagara and local Ukrainian churches.

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A rant about angry people — what’s the solution?

“Being a Canadian citizen is like winning the lottery.” Those were Jean Charest’s words recently, in a CBC interview about his bid for the Conservative party leadership. He wants this country, and those fortunate enough to live in it, to live up to their potential.

Whether or not he’s the right person for the job, or to help us live up to our potential, his words can’t help but resonate as we watch the atrocities in Ukraine. Surely, if there was ever any doubt, what we see on the news daily has to remind us of how lucky we are.

Hopefully, it will make us feel wealthy enough to share with those in need — not huge riches, but by helping to put a safe roof over their heads, providing food and clothing for their families, and beds for their children.

Yet Canadians, for all the outpouring of emotion and generosity for the people of Ukraine, are seemingly much less generous of spirit.

It seems everyone is angry about something, and those who are trying really hard not to be angry are wondering what can be done to stop it. Of course we’ve figured out the blame lies with social media. It provides an outlet for people to express their anger with others, to judge, to argue over differences of opinions, without feeling accountable. We can watch it unfold before us, people getting involved in threads that go on and on, arguing back and forth, becoming more and more aggressive and judgemental, usually over something that started off as nothing.

An innocent post, maybe a question or a comment, can quickly become something entirely different. The lesson many are learning is to just not comment. Yet still we check to see what others are saying.

There are serious issues out there, issues that are very real and very divisive.

We can look at the American election, and see that social media helped organize and provoke the January 6th insurrection, in a country now so divided and people so angry that it is teetering on the edge of democracy.

We’ve had our own so-called freedom convoy do the same this side of the border. The vaccine mandates are being dropped, we don’t have to wear masks in most provinces, but the anger hasn’t gone away. People still talk about conspiracies, about overthrowing a government which is not perfect, but there aren’t many around that are better.

We’re asked not to judge whether or not people are vaccinated, or to look askance at people still wearing masks, or if we are wearing one, not to roll our eyes at those who aren’t. And those requests, often repeated, seem to be making things worse, as if people are just looking for something to argue about. Maybe it’s been magnified by the frustration of COVID, and the differences in how people deal with it. It’s certainly been a stressful time, we’re on edge, and we strike out.

We see it in our politicians. There are always going to be different parties lashing out at each other, but it is getting worse — listening to the Conservatives, it’s even coming from within their own party as they vie for positions in the leadership race.

If only there was a way to take a step back. Dial it down. Reduce aggression. Remember how to be the polite Canadians other countries would open their arms to when we visited. We aren’t those people anymore.

Social media isn’t going to go away, so what are we going to do to change it? To turn it into something positive again? To turn ourselves into the people we have the potential to be?

There are no easy answers, maybe no answers at all. Even this sounds like an angry rant, one that comes from a place of frustration, which seems to be the new norm.

We often hear about the swelling pendulum, the changes in society that occur in one generation, but always seem to find their way back, a little like fashion trends.

Those of us who are parents and grandparents worry about housing prices the next generation will face, about the proliferation of digital devices and what they are doing to kids.

We are concerned about climate change and what kind of world we’ll be eating our kids. We talk a lot about cleaning up the environment.

What about this angry world we’re leaving for the next generation? Will the pendulum swing back? It will take a conscious decision to let go of anger, but it would be so worth it.

We shouldn’t need reminders of how much worse our lives could be — we see it on the news. We do need to smarten up and think of what is important. Look around us, not only at this great country we live in, but a town that is the envy of others, a place people love to visit. Appreciate how fortunate we are. We’re Canadians. We’ve already won the lottery.

Penny Coles
The Local

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.

March 23, 2022
Owen Bjorgan Special to The Local

After a two-year stint of waiting for travel restrictions to be removed, it was time.

For the past two cycles around the sun, the world was largely prohibited or discouraged from travelling. From what I’ve gathered, travel is important to our species in terms of the relationship to not just other cultures of our wonderful world, but the natural environment as well. The more we expose ourselves to different lands and their various cultures, the greater the odds our society will understand and respect its interconnectedness.

With delayed gratification locked and loaded, I went on an Appalachian Mountain road trip in the US.

You may be wondering what this back country adventure has to do with NOTL. I have discussed how the small but rich segments of forest here in southern Ontario are called Carolinian Forests, the title of such lumber alluding to its origins within the two Carolina states. The forests in the southern Appalachians are located in the two southernmost regions of the US, after the northwest coast. Massive swathes of forest get sterilised with humid, moisture laden rains from the Gulf of Mexico all year long. They also get plenty of hurricane laden heavy rains.

The forests of the south look like the Amazon rainforest and northern Ontario had a similar profile. This area has the most jarring poverty I have ever encountered - the land’s surface is littered down south were a month ahead of spring mating schedule compared to Niagara, which was quite shocking. I ended up south of Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. The forests of the south are like on steroids. The forests in the southern Appalachians are the title of the area left a lingering mass of sea of tulip trees and ancient oaks. All the while, lush green trees, bloodroot, spicebush, turkeys, bloodroot, spicebush, turkeys, all the while, lush green forests are like on steroids.

My first night in the Georgia mountains was ironically the coldest considering I was so far south. The cold front which previously blasted through the area left a lingering mass of a cold in the mountains. I woke up shivering, but I was quickly rejuvenated by the puzzling scenery and some chats with locals fishing for brownies.

Inching my way northward back to Canada over the next week or so, I found myself deeply captivated by the area where Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina meet. Like spring here in Niagara, there were no biting insects, poison ivy, or tourists. I had the entire mansion of nature to myself on many occasions.

The sensation of solitude was also achieved by having no cell phone reception for all of my camping and hiking areas. There was a sense of vulnerability being tucked into the wilds of the eastern US, but I have been fortunate to have done this sort of thing so many times that I feel like my comfort zone is carried within me all the way. When you are in bear country and nobody would hear you scream, let alone a gun shot, with no phone reception in the off-season, you have truly immersed yourself into a hidden corner of the world.

The familiarities of tulip trees, bloodroot, speckled, garter snakes and red-tailed hawks gave the land a sense of homelessness and familiarity. Imagine going to a house party where you know most of the guests, but you have the opportunity to exactly meet others that you may never see again. I found three species of salamander I have never seen or recorded in my life. That’s the kind of thing that puts me in the mood to celebrate with fireworks and bonfire by the fire in the evenings, while listening to owls and wood frogs call hauntingly into the night. Speaking of frogs, I saw bourbon by the fire in the kind of density that Canadian geese leave on local parklands. I knew the odds of seeing one of these majestic animals was going to be high.

As a jeep driver, you often attract the attention of fellow keepers. All of a sudden, some slobbly ladies of my age, one dressed in camouflage, pulled up to my vehicle to ask if I wanted to hop into their vehicle to go film the animals. To which I said yes, and succeeded in doing so.

These enormous mammals were not only intriguing, but two males were clashing antlers right before my eyes as I filmed out of this total stranger’s Jeep. It was a moment like this where I thought, thank goodness for locals, a sense of trust, and epic wildlife while living the wild life. I am happy to report that I have never been happier than this moment. The day of my trip, which was going to produce another Hidden Corners nature documentary of mine.

The forests of the southern Appalachians are located in the two southernmost regions of the US, after the northwest coast. Massive swathes of forest get sterilised with humid, moisture laden rains from the Gulf of Mexico all year long. They also get plenty of hurricane laden heavy rains.

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I had intentionally mapped out this trip to visit the deepest areas of the Appalachian mountains. I was greeted aggressively by roads that carved intimately deep into the hills. At a few points while driving, I gasped - how am I still driving downwards?

In western Virginia, the peaks are perched down at a forgotten America. Some of the most jarring poverty I have ever seen of anywhere in the world was sitting in these valleys. I was driving through the most impoverished county in the whole country, witnessing coal mining towns that are shrinking up in real time. There is some cruel and odd reality of these depressing dwellings nestled into an area of profound natural beauty, where decades ago, these villages were in their prime as they mined coal from the denuded mountainsides.

While nature indifferently goes on and recovers, I found myself losing reception and daylight alike as I drive through these twisted mountains. A local gas shop owner told me to “get out” before dark fell, as this was a region I wouldn’t want to find myself stuck in. I was still out here at night, he said. As we may say in NOTL, always trust the locals. He couldn’t even offer me a map - just his Wi-Fi where I could take screen grab images of the route out of the mountains.

After that unforgettable experience, I found three species of salamander - I have never seen or recorded in my life. That’s the kind of thing that puts me in the mood to celebrate with fireworks and bonfire by the fire in the evenings, while listening to owls and wood frogs call hauntingly into the night. Speaking of frogs, I saw bourbon by the fire in the kind of density that Canadian geese leave on local parklands. I knew the odds of seeing one of these majestic animals was going to be high.

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Some changes to the fun-packed event

Continued from page 1

park. It opened in September 2020, with a $150,000 donation toward its cost by the VBA, and will be available for enjoyment throughout the hours of the stampede.

Also, the decision was made by VBA members this year to limit the entertainment to what can be held outdoors, says Wall, so there might not be as many performers as other years.

While there are no activities planned inside the arena, the Kids’ Pavilion will be back, although at this point Wall can’t say definitely what entertainment will be offered. He can say the popular airbrush face painting that kids love will be part of this year’s stampede. It is offered by a family of artists who do their best to make sure the line-up is never too long for youngsters to wait.

There will also be free pony rides for the kids all three days.

The Miniature Horse Show couldn’t be organized in time for this year, but plans are to bring it back next year.

And the nickel sale will also be put off for this year. It requires licensing, many volunteers, and has traditionally been held inside the arena, so with the possibility of restrictions changing, the decision was made to wait for next year.

Amusement rides are being provided by Albon Attractions all three days, with brackets for all-day rides. Although rides were tradition ally provided by Homeniuk, a family-owned business, one of the family members passed away recently, but Randy Homeniuk who has been on-site for decades of stampedes, is partnering with Albon.

Braceltets will be available at Phil’s Independent in Virgil at a discounted price until Friday May 20, at 9 p.m.

The event will wrap up with the traditional Victoria Day fireworks, Monday at dusk.

Wall says he has memories of the stampede since his early childhood, and says the goal of the VBA has always been first and foremost to create a fun family event for the community.

Consideration of costs has always been to make the event affordable for families to enjoy, and any funds raised are also put back in the community, usually for a specified project, and that philosophy continues.

Wall wasn’t born when the VBA was formed, or for the earliest days of the stampede, but he does remember family conversations with his father, Dave Wall, who was one of the founders of the VBA, its first president, and very proud of its accomplishments.

Richard recalls the story of the year the VBA was formed, and a fundraising committee was created, of which his father was also president.

The goal was to raise money for the Centennial Arena.

There were people who thought the arena was too ambitious a project for a small town, he says. “There was push-back from a small group of people, but the vast majority of the community was behind it, and the VBA was the driving factor.”

The fundraising committee raised $158,000 in 1967 to add to federal and provincial grants, and Dave received certificates from both levels of government for the biggest centennial project per capita in the country.

Over the years the VBA has donated more than $1.2 million for a long list of facilities, playgrounds, schools, and other projects, including the Crossroads accessible playground.

But perhaps the proudest accomplishment, says Wall, is the Sports Park.

The vision of the VBA was always to create a multi-generational park, and the purchase of the former Kallaurs property, once peach orchards where outdoor facilities would search for hard-hit home runs, allowed for the expansion.

When that property was still an orchard, the VBA had the vision of one day adding it to the sports park, and members approached the Kallaurs to ask for right of first refusal if they were ready to sell. When the time came, the VBA “spearheaded the sale,” says Wall, approaching the town to talk about their vision.

A significant amount of taxpayers’ money went into the purchase, along with $50,000 from the VBA. The park now extends from the ball diamonds to Loretta Drive, including the soccer fields, and the park has become a place where a young family can have one child playing baseball or soccer, others in the splash pad or on playground equipment — both of which the VBA made a significant donation to — and most recently, older kids enjoying the skate park, the second one the VBA has helped to fund.

The first, a simple structure, was built in the mid-90s, also with VBA support, and served local kids until the town decided, about 10 years later, it would be replaced by a relocated skate park.

The park also has washrooms in two different areas, two pavilions, and people of all ages using the walking path or the pickleball courts.

“The whole concept has that vision of one day adding it to the Crossroads accessible playground. That was our mission, and I think we accomplished it,” says Wall.

And a park where 56 years later, the Virgil Stampede continues to be held for families to enjoy, and to give back to the community.

This year, with so much uncertainty, the VBA has not yet committed funds to a specific project.

Gates are open at the Virgil Sports Park Saturday, May 21 from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sunday, May 22, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Monday, May 23 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Gate admission is $5 for adults Saturday and Monday, free to kids under 10. If a wrist band is purchased in advance, entry is free. There is no gate fee Sunday.

There will be enhanced security on the property, and security guards will be checking bags as people enter, “to ensure we continue to have a great family event for everyone,” says Wall.

Free pony rides will be back all three days of the 2022 version of the Virgil Stampede. (File photo)

LIST OF FOOD REQUIREMENTS 2022 EASTER HAMPER

- Canned Green Beans
- Canned Peas
- Canned Pineapple
- Stuffing Mix
- Canned Gravy
- Cranberry Sauce
- Canned Baked Beans
- Canned Rice
- Peanut Butter
- Oatmeal
- Cereal (any kind)
- Granola Bars
- Jello – any flavour
- Jams – any flapjacks
- Ketchup/Mustard/Mayonnaise
- Green Relish
- Sugar / Flour / Baking Ingredients
- Coffee or Tea
- Macaroni & Cheese
- Shampoo & Conditioner
- Toothpaste
- Paper Towels/Toilet Paper

We appreciate all donations of food supplies; however, we are currently well stocked on the following items:

Canned Tuna, Pasta, Canned Corn, Cream of Mushroom, Chicken Noodle or Tomato (Campbell’s) soups

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Town operations director retiring after 25 years

Sheldon Randall, a 25-year town employee, is retiring.

The director of operations will work his last day at the town hall April 1. "Sheldon’s commitment to Niagara-on-the-Lake is clear in his many years of loyal service," said Lord Mayor Betty Deseo. She praised his friendly personality and that he was always willing to lend a helping hand, thanking him especially for working together during the two pandemic years.

"I'm going to miss his practical, innovative ideas the most," she said.

Coun. Allan Bieback also thanked Randall, especially for the help and knowledge he offered as a first-time councilor. Coun. Erwin Wiens said "it’s no secret Sheldon and I have become very good friends." Randall worked hard for the community, said Wiens, and always wanted to do the right thing for the community. "We’re going to miss him, and I don’t think we know how much. He’s a great person and has been a good friend." Randall began his career with the town as an engineering technician in 1996, and worked his way to become the director of corporate services before moving into his current role of director of operations in 2015. He has also served several short-term assignments as interim CAO.

He was pivotal in responding to COVID-19, the town news release says, "working hard to guide the corporation through the challenges of the pandemic.

"When I started my role as CAO, Sheldon was the first to welcome me to the town, meet me in the office and give me a tour," said CAO Marnie Cluckie. "I will always remember and be grateful for his kind assistance as I transitioned to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

A recruitment process will be initiated soon to fulfill this role.

More information will be announced shortly regarding the appointment of an acting director of operations.

Sheldon Randall is retiring after 25 years as a town employee, most recently as the director of operations. (File photo)
Future plans discussed for community centre property

Could include an inclusive, accessible concept garden

Penny Coles  The Local

Future visions for the use of the community centre property were a large part of Monday’s four-hour planning meeting, with everything from increased parking to expansion to the Anderson Lane fire station, a gymnasium for basketball and other sports along with washrooms, change rooms and showers, and even nine holes of disco golf, included in a presentation by parks and recreation director Kevin Turcotte.

A separate but related discussion brought forward by two concept gardeners representing a host of other interested parties presented their vision of a concept garden, hoping it will be included in future discussions of the property. Turcotte made it clear his presentation was based on a visioning project by town staff, although he mentioned elements of it have been brought forward to council and approved. Some of the components he spoke have timelines, such as the fire station expansion, but most were just talking ideas for the future.

One of his priorities is increased parking to handle large events, done in two phases to eventually add another 345 spaces. Councilor Turcotte noted the need for that many spaces, or the need to reduce the greenspace on the property, but there is no plan to start paving immediately, said Turcotte.

Disc golf, however, was well-received, considered a low-cost activity for family fun and all ages.

Hoping to be included in planning discussions is a group of committed, capable individuals who want to be involved in the development of the green spaces around and behind the library.

Representing the group, master gardener Betty Knight spoke to councillors Monday about ensuring best practices come into play with development. With her attending the planning committee meeting virtually, virtually with Joanne Young, with a lifetime of professional expertise in landscape design, and well-known as a designer at Mori Gardens for many years.

Knight explained they are referring to their project as a concept garden, ac-knowledging they don’t have a design for the space but rather are looking at the opportunity to work with the town and staff to envi- sion “a best practices creative inclusive space.”

The two experts are working with Robin Fos- ter, Pamela Wilson and Liz Klose, Knight said. Foster chairs the Early Years Task Force for the Canadian Pediat- ric Society. Klose has been involved with horticulture on a provincial and national level most of her life and Wilson has a history of community engagement and a passion for developing in- clusive creative communities.

“We are speaking today with the blessing of the Well- ness Committee and the library board,” said Knight.

“This idea is supported by the co-chairs of the Diver- sity, Equity and Inclusivity Committee. We would want their involvement in any discussions about incorpo-
ating DEI principles and concepts.”

An information report concerning a Circle of Life garden previously presented to council was included as part of Monday’s agenda, said Knight. That was a proposal brought forward by Pam Wilson, but Knight explained with Wilson in- volved, “we are now looking beyond this to a more inclusive creative space.”

One that is an environment- ally sustainable, accessible multi-use, multi-genera- tional space “designed for and with an awareness of people of all abilities.” They asked, said Knight, “is to en- courage the town to lead a process to engage all inter- ested partners in the develop- ment of the mini master plan for the community centre, and to invite a tal- ented, visionary group to the table to work collaboratively through this process.”

The group is aware of Turcotte’s plan, and appreci- ates development would take place over time and with various phases, said Knight.

“We realize something of this scale costs money and we are committed to creative fundraising and grant research, partner- ships and discussions with foundations. There would certainly be space for other partners in the concept garden initiative, and this would be a community building partnership.”

Young spoke of some of the ideas for the space, in- cluding an Indigenous community, a pollinator garden, a sensory garden, a rain garden, and a learning com- ponent. She also mentioned a bosque area with memori- al opportunities, and a garden that would provide horticultural therapy. Each with its own special features would allow people to en- joy a full range of benefits, including mental, physical, emotional, and social, she said.

In a post-COVID world, said Knight, “this project could be a magical, enabling and inclusive opportunity for town staff to work with committed vol- unteers to create a concept garden that makes space for all of our stories along differ- ent paths.”

On a motion by Lord Mayor Betty Dunlop, the con- cept garden proposal and re- quest to work with staff was referred for a report, includ- ing costs, but Turcotte, when asked, said the referral “has murky waters from a staff perspective.” The project is not on his work plan, and he suggested it should probably be discussed with the rec- reation master plan, along with the vision he presented.

That would include public engagement, he added.

Users agreed with mak- ing the garden discussion part of the recreation master plan, and suggested the proposal involves a group of people representing differ- ent organizations, “all trying to do something in the same place.” They need to all get together, she said, “and bring something to the table that we can consider.”

In honor of Sarah Durksen’s 100th Birthday, her niece has written a short story of her life.

Our Aunt Sarah Durksen was born on March 25, 1922, in the village of Alexanderaid, in Russia Ukraine. Two of Sarah’s sisters died and were buried there. In 1926, when Sarah was six, their clan came across the ocean. She remembers rolling forward side to the oth- er in the dining room with her brother as the sea tossed the ship about.

Once arriving in Canada, they settled in Amnald, Manitoba. Sarah and her father’s lack of necessity made a homemade incubator to keep the baby alive. This sister, Clara, just turned 87! As the oldest sister in the family, she has be- come the family’s go-to person. She often expresses thank- fulness for saving his life. She is an inspiration to all!

Around 1948, the family moved to St. Catharines. Sarah was able to go to Kingston to take the practical nurse’s training course. Finally, at age 28, she was able to reach the dream of being a nurse—becoming a nurse. She then worked at St. Catharines General Hos- pital for 35 years as a R.N.A.

“Our quick thinking” came to good use during her nursing career.

Sarah lived for 3 years at 23 Hewko Street with her father and sister Kate. Af- ter her father’s death and Kate’s marriage, Sarah lived alone there for a while. Eventually, she sold the house and moved to Tobor Apartments. She often goes over to the long-term care where she was everybody’s caregiver. Currently, she is a resident in Tabo Mais Long Term Care. She often expresses thank- fulness for the staff who are so kind and for the great food. “I have nothing to complain about.” Recently she said that she’s enjoying being a Lady of Leisure. She even Dawned it all! Digital screen time is at an all-time high, in large part due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some kids have gone from being in office to being at home office, which may not be such a bad thing except for the increase in digital screen time. If you work at a computer all day, consider getting computer glasses to reduce eye strain. Those working with chemicals, mechanical irritants, and other hazards should protect their eyes with safety eyewear. If you work outdoors, don’t forget your sunglasses.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor chaired Monday’s first in-person planning meeting in two years, with all but one councillor in the council chambers. Betty Knight (top) and Joanne Young, along with others making developments, attended virtually. (Screenshot)
Entertaining look at 60 years of Shaw history

Kim Wade Special to The Local

The Academic and the Actress. A discussion of six decades of the Shaw Festival.

The Niagara on the Lake Museum welcomed the “academic and the actress” for a virtual event last week celebrating 60 Years of the Shaw Festival.

Last Wednesday morning, Leonard Conolly and Barbara Worthy sat down in their respective homes for a chat about the Shaw Festival over the past six decades, from its humble beginning to its present incarnation.

Leonard Conolly, “The Shaw’s resident scholar and literary advisor of the Bernard Shaw estate, joined Shaw ensemble alumnus member and NOTL Museum staff member Barbara Worthy, “to celebrate, debate and remember 60 years of one of the world’s great theatre companies,” says Worthy.

In his role as the academic on the panel, Conolly has substantial scholarly credentials. Worthy, a former artistic director, includes as “the past president and co-founder of the Shaw Festival, and member assistant. He has produced a long list of historical documentaries, with a special focus on the Shaw Festival. Rather than the museum’s typical lecture format, Worthy and Conolly engaged in a thought-provoking conversation for the virtual presentation, starting with a discussion of Bernard Shaw’s controversial political views. Conolly explains that although those views were not initially a factor in the inception of the Shaw theatre being established in Niagara-on-the-Lake, they have since been challenged by groups opposed to his anti-democratic plays and his support of former leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin. “We must separate Shaw the man, the political thinker, from Shaw the playwright,” Conolly concludes.

What we celebrate at the Shaw are the plays,” he said, and if you start banishing playwrights and novelists not on the basis of their creative work but on the basis of their politics, “you are on a very slippery slope.”

The two discuss the festival’s founders, Brian Doherty and Calvin Rad, Doherty as a former lawyer and playwright who retired to NOTL and wanted to “energize” the sleepy little town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and celebrate its past with a festival. They also discussed other past contributors essential to the success of the festival and the effect of this success on the town.

Their goal, said Worthy, was to “remind us of the high and lows of the Shaw Festival, its most famous performances. To make hope and dreams about the Shaw Festival into a virtual event with any current health restrictions. To make hope and dreams about the Shaw Festival into a virtual event with any current health restrictions. To make hope and dreams about the Shaw Festival into a virtual event with any current health restrictions.

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Music Trivia host Lee Beaupre is back at the NOTL Golf Club for his regular Thursday night for the next five weeks.

Lee Beaupre calls himself a big fan of cheesy music. For the host of music trivia nights, returning for five weeks beginning this Thursday at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club, that often makes for some fun conversations.

“I love playing songs that you hear and say ‘oh my God, I haven’t heard this since that summer when I was in college,’” says the Pembroke, Ontario native. “Music can take you back to a memory instantaneously. I like those songs that maybe weren’t the big, number one hits, but the ones that will put a smile on your face.”

Beaupre is an in-demand music trivia specialist across the region. His Facebook page lists a number of regular gigs at various locations in Niagara Falls. NOTL revelers will also recognize Beaupre from similar evenings at the Irish Harp and the Olde Angel Inn. With the start of the Thursdays at the golf club, he will be going four nights a week.

The former radio disc jockey has been running music trivia nights for 10 years. Beaupre studied radio broadcasting at Canadore College and spent about four years working for CHVR radio in North Bay, Ontario. When the owners moved to a satellite service for all but three hours of programming a day, he was left looking for a new job.

He then worked for a newspaper for a few years, back in his hometown, before deciding to make the move to Niagara Falls, where some family members lived. When he got to Niagara a decade ago he noticed a dearth of music trivia in the region.

“I was always a music fan, but I have no musical ability myself whatsoever,” Beaupre laughs. “I always loved music trivia, but when I got here, there were only a couple of bars doing it regularly in St. Catharines. So I decided to do it myself.”

Beaupre balances the music trivia evenings with his day job, handling marketing, web design and social media for a restaurant chain.

This is his eighth year at the NOTL Golf Club. It’s become a bit of a tradition that when the restaurant at the club opens, music trivia helps to fill the seats in the evenings before the golfers are out on the course in full force. As the restaurant has just opened this Wednesday, Beaupre’s first trivia night takes place on day two.

He also provides entertainment for the postseason after the course closes, an eight- or nine-week stretch beginning in mid- to late-October. The golf club takes care of arranging for the prizes, which are often gift cards. Beaupre says there are three prizes a night. A few years ago he shifted from awarding teams who place first, second and third to holding a random draw, giving all participants a chance to win.

“Sometimes you get a night where there’s a team of 10, and a team of four and a team of two,” he explains. “When that happens, it’s not really fair. So it doesn’t matter how big or small your team is or even how good or bad you are at the trivia.”

But make no mistake, it is a competition, even if it is just for bragging rights.

“What’s also true of every one of the music trivia nights at the NOTL Golf Club is that they are very, very popular. Reservations are recommended as the tables fill up quite quickly.”

It is a “name that tune” type of evening, by the way. That means Beaupre will play a 30- to 60-second snippet of a song from any decade, from the 50s up to today, and participants have to identify the song title and artist. Points accumulate through the night for correct answers.

Music genres cover the gamut from classic rock and pop to country, hip hop and disco. There are three rounds of questions to accumulate points, with a theme often tying together the songs. Then Beaupre holds a final ‘Jeopardy’-style, where teams can bet points with their answers.

MusicTrivia host Lee Beaupre is back at the NOTL Golf Club for his regular Thursday night for the next five weeks. (Photo supplied)
'Name that tune' competition a popular draw

Continued from page 12

“We cover all decades, so the best teams are the ones that are well-rounded,” he tells The Local. “You need to have people with you who know a little bit of everything. I like bringing people together. We get a lot of families who bring all generations. It gets them out of the house, talking and conversing.”

The game usually takes between an hour and a half and two hours, and is free to play. And it’s an early start at the NOTL Golf Club, at 6 p.m., perfect to enjoy dinner and a few drinks. And as you do, Beaupre reminds you to turn that cell phone off and don’t even try to use Shazam or Soundhound to cheat!

He also provides entertainment for the postseason after the course closes, an eight or nine week stretch beginning in mid- to late-October.

“It’s exciting to have him in,” NOTL Golf Club owner John Wiens says. “The members love him and the community loves Name that Tune. We get a packed house every Thursday. It’s a great way to get the season started in the spring. And Lee does a fantastic job and is well-liked by everybody.

“In the fall it’s nice to start winding down with music trivia, too,” he adds. “It gives everyone something to do in November and December and enhances the community feeling at the club.”

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Bunny Trail, Easter egg hunt a go this year

Local Staff

The popular annual Bunny Trail and Kinsmen egg hunt, popular traditions for local families, are back.

The event returns April 16 at the community centre, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

“We are so excited to be planning for an in-person Bunny Trail and Kinsman egg hunt event,” says Candice Penny, executive director of Niagara Nursery School and Child Care Centre. “Our staff and fundraising committee are hard at work putting together a great event for the community. We have really missed doing this over the last couple of years, and can’t wait to welcome everyone back.”

A full list of event details can be expected soon, organizers promised.

Ken Slingerland of the NOTL Kinsman Club explained the two events are separate, “but we have run them on the same day and at the same place for about 20 years.” The egg hunt starts at 10 a.m. Saturday morning, he says.

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The St. Davids Golf Club was in full swing (credit Mike Balsom for the pun) Monday. This group of Regis Marion, Nat Dick, Alain Robert and Maurice Robert teed off at 1 p.m.

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Local Staff
Friends of Fort George celebrates 35 years

Penny Coles
The Local

When the Friends of Fort George was organized in 1987, Erika and Jim Alexander were happy to be onboard. They have scaled back their activities, due to COVID-19 and retirement, but their influence during the early days continues to have an impact on the organization as it celebrates its 35th anniversary.

Their son Peter was already a volunteer member of the Fife and Drum Corps, and the Alexanders spent a lot of time at summer events. They had developed friendships that made them aware of potential opportunities to support the fort, says Jim, and it seemed a natural progression when Parks Canada started looking for local community members to become more involved, not just at Fort George, but across Canada in other national parks and historic sites.

A bunch of things came together at the same time,” says Erika. “Parks Canada was looking for community involvement, and we had become friends with Dan Glenney (then Chief of Visitors’ Activities at Fort George National Historic Site)." Glenney and Walter Haldorson, fort superintendent, approached Jim, who jumped at the chance to help, and Erika also became involved. Parks Canada had found itself in a situation where it could no longer apply for grants to support a federal student employment program, which staffed interpreters at its national historic sites across the country. For a few years, the Queenston-Lewiston Rotary Club applied for the grants on behalf of the fort, says Jim. But the permanent solution for historic sites across Canada was to invite community members to form Friends organizations to partner with the agency. "And we've been doing that for 35 years, allowing us to..."
Continued from page 14

run the program for Parks Canada,” says Jim.

Erika says some years they had money to hire six to eight students, others up to 15 — they didn’t always receive a grant — but over the years they have had about 300 students go through the program, some who went on to forge careers with Parks Canada.

The Friends organization also gave them the opportunity to organize the many events locals and visitors were accustomed to enjoying pre-pandemic, and expect to again, such as Canada Day festivities, the New Year’s Day levee, military demonstrations as Canada Day festivities, and support Niagara’s national historic sites. “We all enjoyed what we were doing, we enjoyed each other’s company, and we had a lot of fun,” says Jim.

As the group celebrates its 35th anniversary this year, the Alexanders may have stepped back in their role, but for more than three decades, the Friends organization, with a mandate to support Parks Canada for the protection, preservation, development and interpretation of the Niagara’s national historic sites, played a significant part in their lives.

“All after those years of working seven days a week, we’re enjoying having a little more time to ourselves now,” says Erika.

Their involvement in organizing special events and administrative work, much of it done together, “was all-encompassing for a long time,” Chisholm says.

Tony Chisholm, president of the Friends for the last five years, says the group is hoping to get fund-raising and events back on track, after so much was put on hold for two years. On the list of events he mentions are in-person historic dinner, some level of Canada Day festivities, and an opportunity to show off Fort Mississauga, which has recently been restored.

But discussions are just beginning, and they are in the very early stages of working out the details of what they can do.

He’s already spoken to Catherine O’Donnell of Willow Cakes & Pastries, to see if she’s onboard for making the Canada Day cake and being part of the Friends organization.

It was the site of the first capital of Upper Canada, saw many battles through out the War of 1812, and played a crucial role in training soldiers during the First and Second World Wars. “Canadian contributions to these world-chang- ing events led to the creation of a number of national historic sites, many of which are located right here in our community. We are fortunate that Parks Canada administers many of these historic sites in Niagara, but about 40 years ago, they realized that they needed some grass roots support to get Canadians involved in the protection, preservation and presentation of these special places,” she says.

Niagara’s national historic sites include Fort George, Brock’s Monument, Butler’s Barracks, Fort Mississauga, Lake-shore properties, and the Military Reserve known as The Commons.

“Over the past 35 years,” says Gamble, “the Friends have developed a world-wide membership base with over 200 active members, and have a dedicated volunteer corps where community members come together to raise awareness and support Niagara’s national historic sites.”

In addition to the successful summer employment program, the Friends raise funds through the gift shops at Fort George and Brock’s Monument, the interpretive programming at Brock’s Monument, the Fort George Ghost Tours, as well as many special events, she says.

“We are looking forward to bringing back many of our educational programs and special events for the 2022 season.”

The Friends is looking for new members to support its mandate, she says, and membership perks include a discount in the gift shop, free admission at Brock’s Monument, advance notice of special events and more.

For more information visit www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca or email admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca.

The Friends of Fort George are currently accepting applications for students interested in working in the squad, the gift shop, and Brock’s Monument. For more information on available positions, visit www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca.

Or consider becoming a member of the Friends of Fort George for the 2022 season, at www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca.

The Commons.

Military Reserve known as the Queen Street, and received a resounding yes. “That doesn’t mean we’re necessarily going to have a cake walk, but it’s a starting point for discussions,” he says.

While it’s a challenge organizing events quickly, “every charity must be going through the same thing,” says Chisholm.

He credits the early Friends members for laying the groundwork for many of their activities, and Er- ika Alexander in particu- lar for taking on the grant program to hire summer students.

It helps the Friends to know they can hire some students this summer, he says — students who will spend less time and support Niagara’s national historic sites. “We are looking forward to getting the Friends on a firm financial basis. A lot of Friends groups formed around the same time didn’t survive.”

Niagara-on-the-Lake is a special community, steeped in Canada’s found- ing history, says Amanda Gamble, who is now the executive director of the Friends organization.

It was the site of the first capital of Upper Canada, saw many battles through out the War of 1812, and played a crucial role in training soldiers during the First and Second World Wars. “Canadian contributions to these world-chang- ing events led to the creation of a number of national historic sites, many of which are located right here in our community. We are fortunate that Parks Canada administers many of these historic sites in Niagara, but about 40 years ago, they realized that they needed some grass roots support to get Canadians involved in the protection, preservation and presentation of these special places,” she says.

Niagara’s national historic sites include Fort George, Brock’s Monument, Butler’s Barracks, Fort Mississauga, Lake-shore properties, and the Military Reserve known as The Commons.

“Over the past 35 years,” says Gamble, “the Friends have developed a world-wide membership base with over 200 active members, and have a dedicated volunteer corps where community members come together to raise awareness and support Niagara’s national historic sites.”

In addition to the successful summer employment program, the Friends raise funds through the gift shops at Fort George and Brock’s Monument, the interpretive programming at Brock’s Monument, the Fort George Ghost Tours, as well as many special events, she says.

“We are looking forward to bringing back many of our educational programs and special events for the 2022 season.”

The Friends is looking for new members to support its mandate, she says, and membership perks include a discount in the gift shop, free admission at Brock’s Monument, advance notice of special events and more.

For more information visit www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca or email admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca.

The Friends of Fort George are currently accepting applications for students interested in working in the squad, the gift shop, and Brock’s Monument. For more information on available positions, visit www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca.

Or consider becoming a member of the Friends of Fort George for the 2022 season, at www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca.

The Commons.

Military Reserve known as the Queen Street, and received a resounding yes. “That doesn’t mean we’re necessarily going to have a cake walk, but it’s a starting point for discussions,” he says.

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Dock area issues discussed and clarified

Small dock and kayak launch off the table for now

Penny Coles
The Local

Another discussion Monday night about the dock area, and the question of giving the public false expectations about work that could still take place, led to a request from some councillors to clarify what is still to be done in the dock area.

At issue was an information report from staff, which councillors agreed was a good, even “excellent, spectacular” information report, but one that laid out council motions upon motions made in this term of council and even previous councils, with actions still not carried out, and no budget to do so.

Words like chaos, confusion and misinformation – unintentional, said Coun. Allan Bishack, comparing dock area conversations amongst many interested parties to a game of telephone tag — were used to describe the current state of plans for the dock area, as outlined in the 11-page report.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero questioned the confusion, at least of councillors, summarizing what she saw in the report.

“I’m a little bit concerned there are so many members of council confused,” she said.

There is a master plan council that staff have been trying to follow, approved more than five years ago, but dock area improvements were delayed “with a crisis on our hands, in the 2019 flood.”

Money was spent as staff responded, “or it could have been an even worse disaster,” she said, and it’s taken some time to move forward from that.

There are currently only two actions on the table to be addressed, she explained. Drainage, with $20,000 now earmarked for that, moved from a plan to spend it on consultants, is still to be completed, and is expected to be carried out this spring.

The other action to be taken is completion of the public parking lot beside the River Beach town homes, work that is also in the master plan, but with more information to come about surface treatments, cost, and where the money will come from. There is also a discussion to be had about making it metered parking.

“If we do those two things, it puts us a step forward in the master plan,” Disero said.

Completing the dock area secondary plan is a separate issue, but a crucial one, she added, and needs to be finished to protect a strip of property along Melville Street.

“Once we’ve done the secondary plan review and these two other pieces, we’ll have some time to go back and have another look,” she said.

After clarifying the issues, she told councillors Monday night should be “embarrassing to admit we don’t know what we’re doing.”

But whether or not councillors understand dock area improvements, some residents have also been confused, looking for clarifications, and to do that, Disero met with them Monday morning to walk around the public and explain, as she did last week with The Local.

The first and most important issue is the potential for flooding in people’s homes, and the urgent need to complete the drainage work.

The $20,000 Disero asked to be earmarked for improved drainage was initially to be spent on consultants to review the town master plan, which was approved in 2015, and was to be updated. Very little of that plan has been carried out, she says, and the pressing need is to improve drainage in the reservoir behind the historic culvert.

Earlier this year, engineer and Balls Beach resident Ron Simkus impressed upon Disero that residents in the area are fearful, and want that work completed as soon as possible.

Having followed and been involved in dock area work over several years, including keeping tabs on water levels for residents, Simkus has compiled a spreadsheet of what has been done in the area, how much money has been spent, with what he sees as little result.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, his photo of the reservoir behind the historic culvert explains his concern. Not showing in the photo are the homes nearby.

“Today, the ground beside the foot path is a metre higher than it was when the photo was taken, and the reservoir where the water will pool is also a metre higher. Many nearby homes were flooded in 2017, and the situation is even more dire this year,” he says.

In 2019, town staff had a budget to spend $300,000 from the dock area reserve fund to advance — but not finish — the shoreline stabilization work that began in 2017, Simkus says. Work stopped in the fall of 2020 after $200,000 of stone work was completed.

The remainder of the budget, $100,000, was earmarked for regrading the new slopes to get the water out of the new catchment created by the shoreline work, leaving it as it is now, a metre higher.

“In 2021, none of the planned work was done, but over the year consultants’ fees managed to chip the budget from $100,000 to less than $80,000 remaining. In 2022, consultant studies managed to suck away the last $80,000. The work is still on hold and it’s starting to rain,” Simkus said recently.

“So we begged the Lord Mayor to let not the consultants have the last $20,000 left in the exhausted dock area reserve fund, and asked council to please put shovels in the ground, slope the dirt towards the bottom right corner, dig out the drain pipe buried underneath and put a concrete box to collect the water.”

Disero agreed with the urgency of the situation, and gained councillors’ support for spending that $20,000 on a practical solution to a pressing problem.

Walking along the waterfront at Balls Beach, Disero simplified what may look a complicated issue, but is much less so when confronted with the level of the path, and the reservoir below it.

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There is a drainage pipe that should be doing its job, Continued on page 17
Little left in budget for dock area work

Continued from page 16

but isn’t, she says, and needs to be fixed, which will require more digging along the path. There is also a question of a water garden behind the culvert, but she quickly explains it’s not intended to be ornamental, it’s to encourage drainage.

Over by the Melville dock, she points to one of the other much-discussed issues waiting resolution in the area, the completion of the secondary plan, which appears to omit a strip of land along Melville Street, where the King George V is located. That strip has been purchased by a developer, and with no secondary plan to guide it, is open for potential development. That is a separate issue, but one council will also have to tackle, she says.

Going back to the master plan, she indicates the parking lot on River Beach Drive beside the townhomes, that still needs to be updated. It has already been expanded, but Disero says the intention of the master plan is to retain and increase, not reduce, green space, and she expects it to be put back the way it was, still leaving sufficient parking space, and refinished with decorated or environmental paving stones rather than asphalt. Staff are still looking into surface possibilities and cost.

Another discussion at council, which began in August, 2021, is also separate from those issues, but became part of the discussion for the future of the area. It’s the issue some councillors say has led to exalted public expectations from a positive reaction and support for a proposal from Tim Balasuk of Faddle Niagara. He spoke to councillors last summer about a floating dock and small paddlesport launch in an area at the south end of River Beach Drive, between the Frog Horn and the Melville Street dock, where there is now a small pile of rocks. At that time councillors asked for a staff report on the cost of such a launch, which would also require a path, and would allow the use of the River Beach parking lot.

That’s the Monday’s planning meeting was the discussion of a small storage container for kayaks and other boating equipment, which was to be located in the parking lot.

Balasuk had been hopeful that project would proceed, and had made plans to expand his business this season, but had to concede to the conclusion the dock and kayak launch wouldn’t happen this year. His only hope was to create a business plan accordingly, and he has, with plans to expand at Queen’s Royal Park.

The report to councillors Monday indicated it would cost about $65,000 plus for the installation of a small floating dock and staff resources. The report also pointed out that since there could be competing businesses for the launch, ‘staff would advise council to conduct an open and transparent procurement process that meets the intent of the town’s purchasing bylaw. In order to move forward with the direction from council, capital funding would also be required to install a dock/launch facility in River Beach Park. This would require a funding request from council for approximately $65,000.”

It became clear Monday that proposal is off the table, for now at least, with no money in the budget to fund it.

Instead, Disero says, there is an area along Balls Beach, closer to a parking area on Turntable Way, where a simple launch for kayaks could be made at little cost. Explaining the historic financial situation, the report says beginning in 2011, portions of the licensing revenue (meaning the jet boat operation) began supporting the town’s general revenue in lowering the overall tax burden.

“Since 1995,” the report says, “$2,197,986 has been collected in overall licensing revenue, with $286,914 supporting the town’s operating levy since 2011, and further reduced by $39,570 due to the pandemic, as cited by the (jet boat) operator.”

There continue to be negotiations with the jet boat operator, says Disero, to resolve that issue, with a contract still in effect.

The balance of that budget is shown as $40,000, but that is expected to be reduced by $39,570 “due to uncollected amounts that are not expected to be collected.”

An appendix to the report received Monday lists the money left over to be about $1,200. And that means, says Disero, there is no money left for the paddlesport launch.

It is also clear that revenue from the jet boat operation licensing fee, which she believes was intended for dock area improvements, has been used in recent years to offset tax increases, rather than fund dock area improvements.

“It has always been my understanding it was to help make improvements and to implement the master plan in the dock area,” she says. “I don’t know if that was a deliberate understanding before my time, but I would say it was considered a revenue stream that we would have so we wouldn’t have to add anything to the tax base to make improvements to the dock area.”
Mike Balsom
The Local

Monday, April 4 is shaping up to be a Red Letter Day for Niagara-on-the-Lake Yellow Door Theatre Project. That’s the night of the premiere of the hour-long original musical film written by Leslie Wade and Scott Christian, and starring a young cast that includes a number of local students.

Wade is still in the process of editing down footage from almost five months of six-hours-a-day filming last summer. It’s a daunting task at times. "It’s massive," she says of the process. "It was a guerrilla shoot. I have a whole bunch of b-roll that I have to go through for reaction shots. Some clips, there might be five takes, and one take there might have been a light showing, in another a bug might have flown by, and another a tourist might have walked through the scene."

The film centres around the graduation of the fictional all-girls school High Gate Academy. Scenes were shot across NOTL, including at the gazebo, at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre, the St. Mark’s Church cemetery, Queenston Heights, Royal Oak Community School and Niagara Shores Park. The old Laura Secord Memorial School in Queenston fills in for the academy.

"The couple who are there doing restoration work were so amazing," Wade says of their Old Town home. They actually let us into the school to shoot in the hallway at the main entrance. And we shot in the schoolyard there, too.

A number of scenes were also shot in Niagara Falls at the Butterfly Conservatory, while Queen Victoria Park fills in for a segment of the film that takes place in Paris. As well, a green screen was set up at Yellow Door’s studio for some of the other settings in France.

Yellow Door’s founder and artistic producer Andorelle Hillstrom expresses her admiration for all the work Wade has done on this project. Wade wrote the book and lyrics, handled all the camera work on the shoot, directed the musical and is editing the film. She’s worked on a number of projects with Christian, who wrote the music for the sixteen songs in the film. The pair previously collaborated with Yellow Door on a shorter film, Dead Reckoning, as well as last year’s musical adaptation of Hamlet and Gretel, performed at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre.

For Red Letter Day, Hillstrom put out a casting call across the Ontario theatre world, not expecting the interest that would generate.

“We had firsts from Stratford, St. Thomas, Toronto, Richmond Hill and London auditioning," says Hillstrom. "Frankly, there may not have been as much interest if the pandemic hadn’t been on. These kids were so looking for something to do. And this is enormous for them to be involved in a project with artists of the calibre of Scott and Leslie." \n
Yellow Door regulars Hannah and Ayla Jamal, Sydney Cornett (who also served as production assistant), Mariarah Rackal, Emily Fulton and Catherine Dubois all have important roles in Red Letter Day. \n
Crossroads Public School graduate and current Grade 10 Laura Secord Secondary School student Dubois plays Yasmina, a math and science genius pondering her true calling as graduation looms. \n
"She’s a great student, but the kind of struggles with whether or not that’s the path she wants to take," says Dubois. "She’s got into a very good school but then she takes a trip to Paris, where she sees the painting Portrait of Madeleine (by French artist Marie-Guillemine Benoist), which changes everything and makes her question her future."

Dubois loved the filming process last summer, even those 12-hour days of 40 degree Celsius temperatures, and like the other actors, will be seeing the film on April 4 for the first time. \n
"I am so excited to see it," she says. "There’s a lot I don’t know (about the other scenes in the film). I know what I did, and I know the graduation. It’s going to be really cool to see what my friends did. Even though I’m in it, I don’t know everything about it."

As the script had not yet been completed by the time the casting process began, Wade and Christian were able to tailor much of the storyline and the songs to the actors who would be taking on the roles. \n
"Lezlie had a rough idea of what we wanted to do," Christian says, "but it’s only after we met the participants that the individual stories and songs for each of them came to life. The cool thing is that each actor has their bespoke role and a bespoke song that is written just for them and their experience." Christian adds that the songs run the gamut from pop, to rock to EDM (electronic dance music). Each number looks at that typical teen face and avoids the happiness of an After School Special. "Our mission with this was to create a body of work and a collection of songs that would really thrill teenage singers," he explains. "I’m really proud that even when divorced from the video, it works as an album. And it’s a small miracle that the kids we got are just phenomenal. They sound like a professional cast."

In preparation for writing the lyrics, Wade dug through the old journals she kept during her own high school years. The process made it easier to know in what direction they needed to go and that of a 17-year-old about to graduate. Of the storyline, Wade says it’s "lots of funny moments, but also some deep drama throughout Red Letter Day. It’s a lot spookier and haunting than I thought it was going to be," she marvels. "Part of it is because there is a girl in this class who is killed in a hit-and-run accident. One of the other girls is secretly in love with her, and she has to learn how to let go. The whole story anchors on that girl who is pregnant.

Hillstrom is quick to credit the financial support of the Lauren and Wade Hillstrom Foundation for making the movie happen. And she adds that the parents of the cast were very supportive, allowing the kids around to the various sites and appearing as extras in the graduation scene, shot at Queenston Heights. And for the barbecue scene, Joe Otto actually cooked for the entire cast and crew. \n
It’s not lost on the participants that many of the students involved weren’t able to have their own real-life graduation ceremonies during the past two years. Dubois, for example, was not able to attend a Grade 8 graduation from Crossroads in 2020. They came together and had this experience," reflects Wade, "They really bonded by having this graduation experience. When you look at the film, it really feels like they have known each other for quite some time."

Christian adds that when it comes right down to it, Red Letter Day is more about the experience for the kids than it is about the final product, as great as it might be. Though there may be future screenings of the film beyond the month of April, it might be the kids who get the best experience. And Wade doesn’t rule out adapting the script for a future performance on stage.

The premiere of Red Letter Day is Monday, April 4 at 7 p.m. at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre’s Film House in St. Catharines. Tickets are $17 and can be purchased at firstontario.ca.
Filmed at Peller Estates, rom-com not too syrupy

Mike Balsom
The Local

The Perfect Pairing is standard Hallmark Channel fare, but with a local twist. Much of it was shot last spring at Peller Estates Winery. The film has all the elements you would expect from a Hallmark production. That includes a pair of attractive strangers obviously destined to be together, a set of circumstances that lead to the (rom-)comical meet-cute, and a number of cues from ancillary characters that hint at the fate of the couple at the centre of the film, whether they realize it or not.

Christine (Hallmark Channel regular Nazneen Contractor) is a food and wine writer known by her pen name, CJ Osborne. She's feared somewhat by restauranteurs and winemakers as a tough critic, unwilling to grant her subjects a fair chance. Her editor sends her to the Hudson Valley Winter Wine Festival for her next assignment. It's Osborne's first wine review since a scathing indictment of a Hollingbrook Vineyard and Winery vintage of corked Merlot. The wine left an awful taste in her mouth, and while the disastrous review did the same for Hollingbrook hers, Michael, played by another Hallmark Channel regular, Brennan Elliot.

Michael and his father John, portrayed by Canadian screen veteran Art Hindle (Parakey, North of 60, Paradise Falls) are still stingy from that Osborne review. Michael has devised a plan to release Hollingbrook's first icewine vintage in an effort to dig them out of the mire, but the elder Hollingbrook is beyond reluctant. Peller Estates Winery stands in the film's scenic Vineyard. Interior scenes in the barrel cellar and the icewine lounge, along with exteriors at the grand entrance, the kitchen. After a brief scene in the faux vineyard, the winery's barrel cellar makes an appearance within the first 10 minutes of the film, as Michael and his assistant Dianne walk through making preparations for their barrel-tapping event. Osborne, meanwhile, agrees to the assignment, planning to avoid Hollingbrook in favour of a few of the other dozen or so wineries in the valley. As she arrives in town via train, she loses her luggage. She then steps into the wrong shuttle vehicle which takes her not to the Hudson House B&B but to Hollingbrook Vineyard. As the Hollingbrook sign is just being re-erected on the roundabout island, Osborne assumes the grand entrance will lead to her pre-arranged accommodations.

This is, of course, where the meet-cute occurs. Christine, unaware that she has arrived at the winery where her review almost ruined, meets Michael. After some confusion, he informs her where she is, and she is horrified. Before Michael can discover that Christine is really CJ, she tries to make her escape, slips on the sidewalk, hitting her head and breaking her phone. Of course, she winds up with amnesia, and because she's lost her luggage, she has no idea who she is. The Hollingbrook family takes her in and she immediately bonds with Michael's young daughter Britney, whose mother passed away three years prior. And yes, she grows closer and closer to Michael while trying to discover the real Christine.

As Christine turns to the Hollingbrook kitchen in an attempt to use scent and taste to regain her memory, the romance between her and Michael begins to develop. There is excellent chemistry between Contractor and Elliot, and Zarina Rocha is a treat as the young Britney, eager to help in the kitchen.

Complications ensue throughout, including the arrival of both CJ's boyfriend and her former writing partner for the Winter Wine Festival. They all lead up to the climactic unveiling of the Hollingbrook icewine vintage in the outdoor space. Locals will enjoy spotting familiar locations, such as the aerial shot of the Niagara River and the outdoor scenes filmed both inside and around Peller Estates Winery. Some interiors were shot in Toronto, while a trip into town from the winery had to be filmed in Cambridge after NOTL council turned down production company Cheddar Pemmutter's request for a permit for Queen Street that month.

Having observed in person a scene featuring Contractor and Elliot strolling through the faux vineyard set up for the shoot, it was amazing to see the completed film. Simulated snow was laid on the grass for the shoot that took place on a spring afternoon when the temperature peaked at 17 Celsius following a freak thunderstorm the previous evening. Director Don McBrearty and his crew have done an excellent job in convincing the viewer that the outdoor scenes are taking place during a cold January.

Hallmark regulars Nazneen Contractor and Brennan Elliot star in The Perfect Pairing, a Christmas movie about love and icewine, it was partly filmed at Peller Estates, outside, in a vineyard and in the cellar. (Photos supplied)
Bravo Niagara! season begins with two April concerts

Mike Balsom
The Local

The spring 2022 Bravo Niagara! Festival season gets underway next Saturday, April 2 at 7 p.m. with a virtual concert by the Chinese-Canadian brother-and-sister duo of Bryan and Sylvie Cheng, known as Cheng.

And six days later, Québec-born pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin kicks off a series of live performances with an intimate concert of music by composers Franck, Ravel, and Chopin at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines.

Richard-Hamelin says he is honoured to be part of Bravo Niagara’s Maestro Series, along with Jan Lisiecki (April 28) and Jon Kimura Parker (May 29). The program for his performance at the Robertson Theatre is split into two halves, one featuring works by French composer César Franck and Belgian Joseph-Maurice Ravel, the other focused on Frédéric Chopin, of Poland.

“it’s sort of my specialty the last few years, Chopin,” says Richard-Hamelin, “especially since the Chopin Competition. I’ll be playing the 24 Préludes, which is one of his most epic cycles. It runs more than 40 minutes when played all in a row.”

Richard-Hamelin has released eight records on the Analekta label since 2015, the most recent a 2021 recording of those very same Préludes. In fact, half of those eight albums are works by Chopin.

The internationally acclaimed pianist was the silver medalist and laureate of the Krystian Zimerman Prize at the 2015 International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, Poland. He has also taken the second prize at the Seoul International Musical Competition and the third prize at the Seoul International Music Competition in South Korea, both in 2014.

He values the experience that he gained by playing in such challenging conditions.

“The discipline and the hard work it takes to get through a program like that in such stressful conditions,” he reflects, “it’s kind of the perfect way to set you up for what’s to come if you do succeed. The point of doing the competitions is not to win, because if you set that as your goal you set yourself up for disaster. I encourage my students today to do as many competitions as they can. You learn your craft on the stage under pressure.”

Franck’s “Prélude, Aria et Final” will start the evening, a composition that Richard-Hamelin claims is rarely played. He’ll follow that up with Ravel’s “Le Tombeau de Couperin”, a baroque piece written in six movements.

“Three pieces on the programme, three big cycles,” Richard-Hamelin says. “Three of the greatest masterpieces for the instrument. Most programmes would feature only one of those three. But it is very balanced.”

He describes Franck as more cerebral, with a lot of gravitas. The Ravel selection is lighter in texture, more transparent, balancing well with the thickness of the Franck piece. And capping it off with such a large composition by Chopin, with so much variety between its slower and faster movements, gives him and the audience a lot of room to breathe within it.

When asked how he puts his own stamp on the work of the great composers, the 32-year-old musician says it is never a conscious decision.

“We all love this music in our own unique ways,” he explains. “If there’s a favourite thing that I really love in one Prelude, I will tend to highlight a phrase that will be different from other people. If you think you have to play something differently, it can tend to sound mannered and against the composer’s wishes. Inherently, my own personality will just come out.”

He is looking forward to arriving at the PAC on April 8, when he will take the time to get accustomed to the facility’s Steinway grand piano.

“I usually take at least two hours to play through everything on the instrument,” says Richard-Hamelin, “so I can see how it sounds, how it feels, and to try to highlight the best qualities of the instrument. And if there are weaknesses, to try to hide them the best I can.”

With live performances getting back on track now that pandemic restrictions are easing, Richard-Hamelin is looking forward to returning to his busy schedule of 60 to 70 concerts annually. He has an upcoming month-long tour of Korea and Japan and will also be recording an album of Robert Schumann’s Sonatas with violinist and concertmaster Andrew Wan of Orchestre symphonique de Montreal.

For Richard-Hamelin, like any other working musician will attest, there is nothing like performing live.

“The people who show up to concerts are incredibly appreciative, and the musicians are too,” he says.

“We know it’s not ideal conditions to wear a mask. What makes going out to a concert fun – meeting the audience after, having a reception - all of that was lost. But it’s slowly coming back to normal. I played in Victoria last week, and it was refreshing to see an audience without masks.”

The online performance by the Cheng duo April 2 is free of charge. Cellist Bryan Cheng and his pianist sister Silvie have been named one of CBC Music’s 30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30. Since 2013, the siblings have commissioned nearly a dozen new works and curated concert experiences that meld classical and contemporary music with jazz, poetry, and visual/media arts. Registration is required prior to April 2. Information is available at bravoniagara.org.

Tickets for Charles Richard-Hamelin’s in-person performance at the PAC’s Robertson Theatre are $50, $25 for students and youth. There are also flex packs and Maestro Series packages available at discounted prices. Visit bravoniagara.org for tickets.
There were some emotional moments at the end of Sunday's Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League game. With the scoreboard emphasizing the final result, a 6-2 loss to the North York Renegades, the Niagara Predators wanted to stay on the ice as long as they could. Team owner, head coach and general manager Robert Turnbull stood by the open door, greeting each player as they stepped from the ice toward the dressing room, thanking them for a great season. Forward Alexander Page hugged the 72-year-old hockey lifer and said "thank you, coach, for giving me a chance to play." The Predators lost not only the game but also their best-of-five GMHL Russell Cup semi-final series, ending their first season playing out of Virgil Meridian Credit Union Arena.

"They're an exceptional group of young men," Turnbull told The Local after the game. "It didn't turn out the way we wanted it to, but it wasn't a lack of trying. The other team played better than we did." Darrel (Renegades coach Darryl Lloyd) had the whole team playing great positional hockey, and we didn't muster any contact whatsoever today."

Niagara opened the scoring Sunday on the power play, when defenceman Pontus Madsen skated down the left side into the North York end and unleashed a shot that was stopped by Renegades goaltender Nikolai Salon. But Lewicky once again shut the door, as he had been doing for much of the series. The Predators subsequently mounted a couple of ineffectual power plays, including one during which they failed to get even one shot on net.

There were some desperate attempts in the last half of the third, and some pushing and shoving as tempers flared between Fehr and North York's Niko Andreopoulos. But Niagara's fate was sealed long before the buzzer sounded to end the game. It was a disappointing end to a series that could have gone Niagara way.

Through the Renegades scored two shorthanded goals early in game one on Tuesday, March 15, and skated to a 3-2 lead in the first, Niagara roared back that night in North York to move out front 5-3 early in the third period. The Predators actually chased Lewicky out of the game after Dante Massi's third-period goal.

But the wheels fell off a minute later, as two quick goals by Vadim Karpenko and Santino Foti tied it up. The true turning point seemed to be right after that, when Niagara's Noah Caperchione was awarded a penalty shot after being taken down on a clear break. Caperchione skated in on Lewicky's replacement, Gurin Janiuk, who stopped the forward's attempt to deke him out on the left side. The Renegades scored two unanswered goals for an 8-5 win in the overtime. Game two went Niagara way last Wednesday, with Alessandro Massi opening the scoring late in the first period with a shot that bounced off the crossbar and in. Reese Bisci and Georgy Kholmovsky found the net in the second period, giving the Preds a 3-0 lead heading into the final 20 minutes.

Again, the wheels fell off a bit in the third, with Stojcevski scoring two for the Renegades, before Dante Massi took a pass from Page and beat North York goaltender Janiuk for what turned out to be the winning goal, after the Renegades Chris tian D'Amico closed the margin to one later in the period. Janiuk Riordan was superb in net for the Preds in game two, stopping a number of desperate attempts by the Renegades when they sent Janiuk to the bench in favour of the extra attacker, which actually made it five-on-five as North York's Frank Mochnik closed out the game serving time in the box.

That win guaranteed the Predators a chance to close out the series with the home-ice advantage, with games scheduled in Virgil Friday and Sunday. An added bonus - smooth-skating, high-scoring Swedish forward Jesper Eriksson was to return for the remainder of the season after his season with Friska IF of Sweden's HockeyLiغا league ended.

Despite the lopsided lap from having flown in early Friday morning, Eriksson made an almost immediate impact. Ten minutes into the game Eriksson found the puck after Lewicky stopped defenceman Brenden Morris and put the Predators on the scoreboard for the only goal in the first period.

But that would be about as far as the Swede's storybook return would go. Stojcevski and Foti scored early in the second and the Renegades held 2-1 until Page aimed a nifty backhand shot into the top shelf to tie it up with twelve seconds remaining in the period. Again in the third, North York scored two early goals, one on a failed clearing attempt by the Predators and another on a two-on-one break. The Preds had four power plays during the period and failed to capitalize on all but the last one, when Caperchione narrowed the margin to a single goal.

In the final two minutes Niagara made an all-out effort to try to force overtime but ultimately came up short.

Throughout the series the Renegades seemed to have more fire and to be peaking at the right time. As well, when their leading scorer Foti was being checked closely, players like Stojcevski and Karpenko were stepping up their game. The trio racked up 12 goals and 17 assists between them over the four games. In contrast, the trio of Dante Massi, Caperchione and Bisci, who were putting up big numbers in the last few regular season games, was held to a total of four goals and one assist in the series. As well, Lewicky frequently came up big on saves on some of the Preds best chances.

At the end of Sunday's game, Turnbull presented each of the Predators with their yellow home jerseys to take home with them. And he reflected on a rewarding year with a group of players who gave their all for him after he took over as coach and general manager following the departure of Andrew Wha len and Johan Eriksson in those respective roles.

"Having to step in and do this, and driving from Pickering for the games and practices," he said, "it's been a very rewarding year. I didn't want to come off the ice either, but that was our moment. We'll all get back together soon for a banquet and celebrate the year." He promised he would not be back behind the bench for 2022-2023 under any circumstances.

"It took more of me than you could imagine," he laughed. "Those long drives, getting home at two or three a.m., and then the next day I would be exhausted. But it's been a pleasure." Turnbull will continue to work with the players through the off-season to connect them with scouts and officials in NCAA schools and pro leagues. And he anticipates talking to NOTL parks and recreation staff about their plans moving forward in the Virgil arenas.

The other Turnbull-owned GMHL team, the St. George Ravens, gave the first place Durham Roadrunners a battle in the other Southern Division semi-final. After fighting a fifth game with an 8-0 home drubbing Sunday, they fell 5-1 to the Roadrunners Monday night. Durham was scheduled to host the Renegades in the Southern Division best-of-seven finals opening game Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.
When former Niagara Predators general manager Johan Eriksson left that role in December to accept a position as director of hockey operations with Marych Sports Agency, he had no clue he would find himself in the midst of a major conflict.

Based as it is in Ukraine, the agency is dealing with a number of players born in that country, and some playing there while the nation continues to be attacked by Russian forces.

Andrii Marych came to me in December and offered me a partnership of sorts,” Eriksson explains. “We are three guys, one who covers the US, I do Scandinavia and Canada and some of Europe, and Andrii does Eastern Europe.”

Leading up to the day Russia moved on Ukraine, Eriksson wasn’t expecting Putin’s forces to actually invade the country.

“I just thought this is what Russia does,” he tells The Local from his Welland home. “I didn’t think they would actually do anything. This is a game changer on every single level. We have about 20 players still in Ukraine, and some of them are fighting age, which is 18 and over. Those guys are not allowed to leave Ukraine.”

The concern Eriksson and Marych have is that these young hockey players may be enlisted to join the war effort if the invasion continues. Marych himself is also considering fighting age and is currently unable to leave the country as well.

In addition, there are a number of Ukrainian players signed with the Marych Agency who have been playing in the U.S. and Sweden. The prospect of them returning home during the conflict is out of the question right now.

The question is, where do they go?” says Eriksson. “For them not to go, do they go?” says Eriksson. “They have to pay for their gear. Now, money can’t easily go out of Ukraine as well. They need somewhere to stay. Their current contracts and accommodations only last until late March. Where are they going to go? It’s been a few crazy weeks for all of us.”

The native of Sweden credits the hockey community in his homeland for doing whatever they can to help out the young players facing this predicament.

“The young guys we have in Sweden, three of them played Junior 20 this past season,” he explains. “They have to pay for their own food, apartments and gear. Now, money can’t easily go out of Ukraine for them. One team held a fundraiser to help them continue to live there, and arranged summer jobs for them. Now they will be able to stay in Nässjö next year.”

Eriksson says that Marych was able to get one of their top Ukrainian prospects, 17-year-old Veniamin Trandafilov out of the country with his family, and secured a spot for him on a Swedish team. (Photos supplied)

Hockey players can’t leave war-torn country Ukraine, but former Preds GM was able to get 17-year-old Veniamin Trandafilov out of the country with his family, and secured a spot for him on a Swedish team. (Photos supplied)

Johan Eriksson in Virgil before leaving the team.

Mike Balsom The Local

Marych was able to get 17-year-old Veniamin Trandafilov out of the country with his family, and secured a spot for him on a Swedish team.

Eriksson reached out to one of his contacts in Sweden and got Trandafilov a deal to play in Sweden. He is expected to arrive in his new hockey home in three weeks.

“He’s been playing there professionally for the past two years. His family home is no longer standing. They had to leave his dad behind, and Andrii got Veniamin and his family to Hungary.”

Once they were safe, Eriksson reached out to one of his contacts in Sweden and got Trandafilov a deal to play in Sweden. He is expected to arrive in his new hockey home in three weeks.

His housing is being paid for, they got him a sponsor to get him all new gear, and they got him in contact with the government so they could start the process to bring his family over, too. The town is now collecting money to buy him clothing. “It’s quite amazing,” says Eriksson.

He doesn’t rule out the possibility of some Ukrainian hockey players coming to Canada in the future to play the game, but

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PASQUALE S. MIELE
APRIL 21, 1933 - MARCH 20, 2019

My wonderful Dad, you cared about me, you always loved me. We were the best of friends, you taught me so much, Dad. I did what I could Dad, I was never given the opportunity to hold you or see you as you left this earthly existence. I will see you in the future and I'll hold you in my arms a long, long time and Mom also. Then we'll always be together.

I'll keep crying for you until we meet again.

Your favourite son, Romeo S. Miele

PAUL, D. GORDON—August 10, 1929 - March 16, 2022

Gordon Paul passed away on March 16th, 2022 in Hamilton, Bermuda at the age of 92. Dad worked for 40 years at the family business on Clifton Hill in Niagara Falls. As a founder, chairman and lifetime member of the Niagara Falls Canada Visitor and Convention Bureau, his passion was in the promotion of tourism at both the local and international levels. He valued the many friendships he developed over the years in the tourism community.

Predeceased by his loving wife, Mary Anne. Dad will be in the hearts of his children, Dudley (Janet), Cyndie (Todd), and Ian (Paula). Proud grandfather of Nathaniel, Micah, Jonathan, Blair, Anthea, James, Sarah, and of great-grandchildren Ezra and Sacha. Dear brother of the late William Paul (Juanita) and Don Paul and his late wife Joan.

In keeping with Dad’s wishes, he will be laid to rest in Hamilton Parish, Bermuda, alongside our Mum.

SPAGNOL, BONNIE-JEAN—Bonnie-Jean Spagnol 1954 - 2022

Peacefully, in the presence of family, Bonnie-Jean Spagnol nee Stewart, 68, of Niagara Falls Ontario, passed away on March 18th 2022 after a 2+ year battle with cancer. Bonnie was born on January 21st 1954 to Reginald and Dorothy in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Bonnie is survived by the love of her life John, whom she was married to for 48 years; her sister Valerie (Terry) Terryberry; her children Christopher (Catharine), Joshua (Lyndsay), and Natalie (Marc); her grandchildren Hannah, Taylor, William and Lucille. Bonnie is pre-deceased by her brother, Reginald Jr. (2014).

Public visitation will take place at MORSE & SON Funeral Home, 5917 Main St., Niagara Falls, on Saturday, March 26th, 2022 from 12:00 to 2:00pm followed by a private celebration of life. In lieu of flowers, you are welcome to donate to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada (https://www.bloodcancers.ca/). By request of the family, guests are encouraged to wear a face mask when attending the visitation and service.

Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morseandson.com

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905.934.1040
Deadline is Tuesdays at 1 p.m.
European teams won’t sign Russian players

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points out that living and playing in Canada is expensive, and there has yet to be a promise of any concrete government financial support for refugees.

Beyond the Marchch-signed players, Eriksson ponders the future of European hockey in general.

“The whole hockey map in Europe is already starting to change,” he tells The Local. “Pro teams are telling me they won’t sign Russians. They are afraid to lose sponsorships. It’s opening spots in leagues in places like Poland, which traditionally has a lot of Russian players.”

“As well,” he continues, “no imports are going to go to play in the Russian (pro) KHL (Kontinental Hockey League) league either. Teams from other countries in the KHL are beginning to pull out of the league, too.”

Indeed, Finland’s Jokerit Helsinki pulled out of the playoffs last week. He was followed by Latvia’s Dinamo Riga the next day.

“This is going to affect every league in Europe,” Eriksson predicts. “I can’t remember ever a time in my life when Swedes have been this nervous,” he says. “Though it’s not part of NATO, Sweden has NATO bases, and we’ve sent troops to help Ukraine. It’s really the first time people in Sweden have talked about a war as an actual possibility since the 1800s.”

“We take it hour by hour,” Eriksson concludes. “We don’t know what’s going to happen in a few days, or even in 10 minutes. Anything can change in any given moment.”

Meet the 2021-2022 Predators


FREE HOME EVALUATION

We are so excited to announce the official opening of our brand new office, located upstairs in the Virgil Meridian Credit Union. Pop in five days a week between 9am and 5pm to say hi to Greg!