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A small crowd attending Sunday's march crosses the intersection by the Meridian Credit Union, cars honking in support (Penny Coles)

Virgil Stampede a go this year

Penny Coles
The Local

After a two-year hiatus, organizers of the Virgil Stampede are gearing up for a spectacular celebration of the May long weekend.

In March, 2020, the events were planned, entertainment booked, and members of the Virgil Business Association were geared up to put on what always promises to be a great three-day event — one they learned had to be cancelled due to COVID lockdown.

This year, members are more excited than ever, pleased to be able to give back to their community with a crowd-pleasing event. It's a tradition that goes back 56 years, when an annual family fireworks display for locals taking place in Virgil grew to become first a popular two-day celebration of the long weekend, and then eventually to three days, drawing fami-

lies from across the region.

Each year organizers try to blend a mix of the favourite attractions with something new, but this year may be a little different, says VBA president Richard Wall. There will be the usual number of amusement rides, the same great food concessions, there will be games and entertainment, and the always-spectacular fireworks display Monday evening at dusk.

But because of the late decision made to go ahead with the stampede, once the lifting of COVID restrictions made it possible, there may be some changes, says Wall.

There will be no demolition derby, but that's due to lack of space. What used to be the corral area for an annual horse show — hence the name of the stampede — is now home to the skateboard

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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-

out 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 migrants."

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 for me. The wives have a lot of responsibility, taking care of the children alone without the support of the father.”

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 single 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 believe that we deserve dignified treatment, without racism or mistreatment, we deserve respect as workers and as human beings. With permanent residence we can keep our family together, we can have freedom that we don’t have right now.”

Christopher, a worker who didn’t get called back to a farm this year, spoke to the crowd

from his home in Jamaica, and had a similar story, and a plea for resident status.

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, little or no compensation for workers who are injured, “or end up dead on the job. And 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 table,” he continued, “most times in conditions that are unbearable, conditions that most Canadians 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 coming here to work.”

Farm workers are considered essential workers, he said, “so if we are seen as important 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 living conditions for all workers, equal rights and justice for all, fair compensation for injured



Marchers gather at the town hall. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Luisa Ortiz helped Garbriel, a Mexican farm-worker, translate his Spanish speech to English.



Organizer Kit Andres represents Migrant Workers Alliance for Change,

workers, proper compensation for families due to fatalities on the job, family unity, and full immigration status.”

Andres, who represents Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, told The Local she believes, in terms of community recognition and acceptance, the situation in Niagara is improving. “The workers are telling me they feel an increase in support, especially here in Niagara. They mention it seems like the small things are changing, 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 community, everyone supporting and acknowledging 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 shone a spotlight on living and working conditions as well as job insecurity 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, “and 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, organizer 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 history. This is Virgil’s first ever march. But one march doesn’t fix everything. We need to do this work every day. 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.”



Sonia signs the banner, ‘Niagara United Against Racism’, with her three children looking on. She brought them from St. Catharines, she said, so they could learn about the issues, and understand the importance of farmworkers who make sure Canadians have food to eat. Being at the march, she said, “is the right thing to do.”



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Toronto man hopes to locate graves in Negro Burial Ground

Penny Coles
The Local

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, he told councillors at a Monday night planning meeting.

The real hard work will come after that.

Russell is expecting about 14 graves will be discovered — 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 launch a design 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 historic plaque marking a grassy area on Mississauga Street that says: “Here stood a Baptist church erected in 1830 through the exertions of a former British soldier, John Oakley, who although white, became pastor of a predominantly negro congregation. In 1793 Upper Canada had passed an act forbidding further introduction of slaves and freeing the children of those in the colony at twenty-five. This was the first legisla-

tion of its kind in the British Empire. A long tradition of tolerance attracted refugee slaves to Niagara, many of whom lie buried here.”

Russell isn’t expecting to be able to put names to the graves where individuals are buried — he explains the ground-penetrating radar only detects anomalies, where the ground has been disturbed. But he does hope to come up with a list of the people who are buried there. That will be the hard part, and he’s planning on it taking a year or more to complete the necessary research. He’s hopeful, “although I’m not 100 per cent certain, that finding those names is possible.” He has spoken to Black history experts who believe it is, he added.

The small Baptist church was on the property until 1865, by which time members of the congregation had moved on, likely looking for work, and the wooden building probably just decomposed, he says. He’s hoping the Baptist Church Ontario headquarters will have the records preserved.

As for the graves, he has outlined three possibilities: either there were markers that were made of wood and decomposed; or they were made of stone, collapsed, and will be found lying under the ground — the best outcome he can hope for; or there were headstones that were stolen to be used as paving stones or in building foundations.

He would also like to produce a short film showing the progress of locating the graves with a five-minute monologue by a Black history expert about the history of Black folks in Niagara, he says.

Since incorporating MANKS Productions — named for the first letter of each of his children — he has produced several short films and now has four feature films on the go, he told The Local.

He first visited NOTL in 1985, when he was

working on a story about water quality for The Toronto Star, and returned occasionally on work-related visits. He and his wife love NOTL, and come regularly, including a month-long stay they enjoyed in October at a short-term rental across from the Voices of Freedom Park. “That’s the longest time we’ve ever spent there,” he says, “and we’re really looking forward to coming back in September, and staying there again.”

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.”



James Russell



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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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 neighbourhood where they can continue to do that.

But the proliferation of short-term rentals is jeopardizing 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;

shovelled snow for Ruth when she broke her arm; offered support to Stephanie 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 question that we are experiencing 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 licensed tend to house many visitors having little or no regard for the community.

He also referred to them as commercial establishments "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 establishments be based on commercial rates, to slow the rate of growth.

Non-owner-occupied short-term rentals should be treated in the same manner as all other NOTL small business 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



Brian Crow, representing the Chautauqua Residents' Association, had a list of recommendations for the town to help control the growing number of short-term rentals in the neighbourhood. (Photo supplied)

charge commercial tax on residential-zoned housing, he suggested the town could set the annual licensing fee at the equivalent of the difference between commercial and residential tax.

He also said the municipal accommodation tax should apply to all un-hosted 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 licensed 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 commercial 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.

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EDITORIAL

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 angry 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 6 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 any more.

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 swinging 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 leaving 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



Celebrating the Irish

Members of the Brenyo Irish Dance company, run by Mark Brenyo and Michelle Pion, performed on Queen Street to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. After two years of cancelling the popular tradition, "it was so nice to have them perform again," says Shauna Dickson of Irish Design. "The sun came out just as the fog cleared, right in time for them to start. It really lifted everyone's spirits and was a big hit." The dancers asked the kids in the crowd to jump in, and her dad, Paul Dickson, jumped in as well. "So fun, and everyone seemed to enjoy it even more than years past, I think because we all need some joy in our lives again!"

View from the couch


Donald Combe
Special to The Local

The Bishop's Wife (Prime, 1947) is a good story, well played by highly skilled actors, Loretta Young, David Niven and Cary Grant.

There are problems, and there are correct solutions. Above all this is a story of hope and faith. I think I liked it because it was a tale from simpler times.

Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who

loves to go to movies. Until he resumes going to theatres, he has graciously agreed to share his opinions, through "short and sweet" exclusives, of Netflix series and movies for *The Local*.



Letters!

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The Niagara-on-the-Lake

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COMMENT

Owen's Appalachian road trip diary



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 charismas, the greater the odds our society will understand and respect its interconnectivity.

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

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 similarities to the ecosystems of the two Carolina states.

Over the past eight days, I essentially got to complete a dream of exploring what our forests are like on steroids. These mountainous woods were bigger, broader, wilder, and surprisingly cut off from modern civilization.

The journey began with a surreal feeling of simply crossing the border. America was just another place on the news for the past two years – so close, yet so far away.

I joke and say that I brought down the Canadian weather with me. In a one-shot drive to northern Georgia, I endured a dense and troublesome March snow storm. From Pittsburgh to North Carolina, I was driving in snow through the rugged Appalachian Mountains.

These mountains don't necessarily size up to the Rockies, the Andes, or the Alps, but they happen to be the oldest mountain range in the world. If you existed for nearly 480 million

years, you'd find yourself pretty weathered and eroded, too.

In a post-cabin fever frenzy, I was eager to maximize my time in the valleys and their riverine forests in an attempt to experience and document what lives there. Within 48 hours of my trip, in the mountains of the Georgia and South Carolina border, I already knew in my heart that this excursion was going to produce another Hidden Corners nature documentary of mine.

The forests in the southern Appalachians are located in the second wettest region of the U.S., after the northwest coast. Massive swaths of forest get slammed with humid, moisture laden rains from the Gulf of Mexico all year long. They also get plenty of hurricane leftovers every autumn.

The forests of the south look like the Amazon rainforest and northern Ontario had a baby. Funnily enough, this happens to be the latitudinal mark of the area in between both regions. Monstrous pines and hemlocks stand out amidst the sea of tulip trees and ancient oaks. All the while, lush green rhododendrons and countless fern species line every waterway and its rocky crags.

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 air in the mountains. I woke up shivering, but I was quickly rejuvenated by the puzzling scenery and some chats with local guys fishing for brook trout.

Inching my way northbound back to Canada over the next week or so, I found myself fabulously 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 U.S., 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 a six foot radius all around me. 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, spicebush, garter snakes and red-tailed hawks gave the land a sense of homeliness and familiarity. Imagine going to a house party where you know most of the guests, but you have the opportunity to excitedly 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 Tennessee bourbon by the fire in the evenings, while listening to owls and wood frogs call hauntingly into the night. Speaking of frogs, the multiple species I encountered down south were a month ahead of spring mating schedule compared to Niagara, which makes me happy to know I get to relive spring emergence twice in one year.

On that note, I passed through some grandiose stretches of demanding land in West Virginia. This state's slogan is "Wild and Wonderful" and it certainly lived up to its name.

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

In western West Virginia, the peaks are peeking 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 shrivelling 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 mountaintops.

While nature indifferently

gazes on and recovers, I found myself losing reception and daylight alike as I drove 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 if 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 natural and cultural eye opener, I found myself driving north to Pennsylvania contemplating the area I just experienced. As I approached a small town called Weedville, which I jokingly selected on the map in an unending area of forest, I also learned that this town is home to the only wild herd of elk in the eastern U.S. Just an hour and a bit from Ellicottville, New York.

As I set my tent up along a crystal clear babbling brook near Weedville, large hoof prints and elk (also called wapiti) scat was littered everywhere, 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 Jeepers. All of a sudden, two ladies my age, one dressed in camouflage, pulled up to my camping area. They told me they have seen the elk, and asked 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 grazing, 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.

On the note of gratitude, and this story nearing the Canadian border, I want to thank my Jeep for pulling the load and keeping me safe on the road. I want to thank my parents who continue to support me on these expeditions. I also want to thank the lovely locals of the Appalachian region of the U.S.

To top it all off, and to leave you with a sense of mystery of the world outside your borders,

the last location I filmed was in upstate New York. There is a fire located behind a waterfall. You read that correctly, and that's thanks to a natural methane gas emission out of sedimentary rock. I enjoyed showing my parents the Eternal Flame Falls when they met me on my last

night in Ellicottville.

I will always have an eternal flame for the great outdoors, and the Appalachian Mountains only stoked that fire. I encourage you to explore places that make you feel truly wild, as nature is just that good for the soul.



Twin Falls, South Carolina (Photos by Owen Bjorgan)



A cold campsite along the Chattooga River, with Georgia on one side of the river and South Carolina on the other.



Owen Bjorgan standing at the bottom of the New River Gorge, West Virginia at sunset.

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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 air-brush 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 Albion Attractions all three days, with bracelets for all-day rides. Although rides were traditionally 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 Albion.

Bracelets 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 whatever funds are 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 Kallaur property, once peach orchards where outfielders



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

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 when 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 multi-generational feel we were looking for, a family-oriented park that is well-used. 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.

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- Stuffing Mix
- Canned Gravy
- Cranberry Sauce
- Snack Crackers - any kind
- Bottled Juice - Cranberry or Apple
- Cookies - any kind or flavour
- Chocolates - for Easter baskets

General Food Bank Supplies

• Canned Salmon	• Peanut Butter
• Flakes of Ham, Chicken or Turkey	• Oatmeal
• Canned Chili or Spaghetti or Ravioli	• Cereal (any kind)
• Canned Beef Stew	• Granola Bars
• Habitant Soups	• Canned Baked Beans
• Chunky Soups (beef or chicken)	• Jello - any flavour
• Canned Red Kidney Beans	• Jams - any flavour
• Canned Ham, Corned Beef or Spam	• Ketchup/Mustard/Mayonnaise/ Green Relish
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We appreciate all donations of food supplies; however, we are currently well stocked on the following items:

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Town operations director retiring after 25 years

Penny Coles
The Local

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 Disero. 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 Bisback also thanked Randall, es-

pecially for the help and knowledge he offered a first-time councillor.

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)

Plea from one resident to Local readers

Local Staff

The seed has been planted, so to speak.

Shirley Madsen’s SunflowersforUkraine.ca initiative is moving forward with great success, and she continues to call on groups, clubs, and organizations to register their sunflower gardens by Wednesday, April 20.

But as she works on her sunflower garden project, she is reaching out with a personal request for readers, she says.

“I have had a request from a cousin who is now helping the army in Ukraine. I have been asked to see if I can get medical supplies shipped to him. MEEST courier in Etobicoke under their humanitarian program is letting individuals ship two boxes per person per day, with a maximum 30 kg at \$5 per kg and is still delivering to the area where the need is, north of Lviv, Ukraine,” says Madsen.

“They are in need of the following. Should anyone have any of these items to donate or would like to donate funds so these items can be purchased and then shipped, your support would be appreciated:

- Tourniquets to stop bleeding
- Penrose drains Xray opaque 18” x 1/4” (45.72 cm x 0.64 cm)
- Absorbent dressings with superabsorber 10x10 cm / 4X4”
- Non-adhesive foam film dressing and non adhesive foam 6 X 6” (15 cm X 15 cm)
- Cohesive bandages (6 cm X 20 m)

Items or cash donations can be dropped off at The NOTL Local, 1596 Four Mile Creek Rd. (across the street from the town hall) Tuesday, March 29 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.





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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 a four-hour planning meeting Monday, with everything from increased parking, an 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 by two expert 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 are just talking ideas for the future.

One of his priorities is increased parking to handle large events, done in two stages to eventually add another 345 spaces. Councillors weren't all convinced of 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 was 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, acknowledging they don't have a design for the space but rather are looking for the opportunity to work with the town and staff to envision "a best practices creative inclusive space."

The two experts are working with Robin Foster, Pamela Wilson and Liz Klose, Knight said. Foster chairs the Early Years Taskforce for the Canadian Pediatric 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 inclusive communities.

"We are speaking today with the blessing of the Wellness Committee and the library board," said Knight. "This idea is supported by the co-chairs of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity Committee. We would want their involvement in any discussions about incorpo-



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 deputations, attended virtually. (Screenshot)

rating 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 involved, "we are now looking beyond this to a more inclusive creative greenspace," one that is an environmentally sustainable, accessible multi-use, multi-generational space "designed for and with an awareness of people of all abilities." Their ask, said Knight, "is to encourage the town to lead a

process to engage all interested partners in the development of the mini master plan for the community centre, and to invite a talented, visionary group to the table to work collaboratively through this process."

The group is aware of Turcotte's plan, and appreciates development would take place over time and with various phases, said Knight.

"We realize something of this scope costs money and we are committed to creative fundraising and grant research, partnerships and discussions with foundations. There would certainly be space for oth-

er partners in the concept garden initiative, and this would be a community building partnership."

Young spoke of some of the ideas for the space, including an Indigenous component, a pollinator garden, a sensory garden, a rain garden, and a learning component. She also mentioned a hospice area with memorial opportunities, and a garden that would provide horticultural therapy. Each with its own special features would allow people to enjoy a full range of benefits, including mental, physical, emotional, and social, she said.

In a post-COVID-19 world, said Knight, "this project could be a magical, enabling and inclusive opportunity for town staff to work with committed volunteers to create a concept garden that makes space for all of our stories along different paths."

On a motion by Lord Mayor Betty Disero, the concept garden proposal and request to work with staff was referred for a report, including 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 recreation master plan, along with the vision he presented. That would include public engagement, he added.

Disero agreed with making the garden discussion part of the recreation master plan, and suggested the proposal involves a group of people representing different 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 Alexanderthal, in Russian Ukraine. Two of Sarah's sisters died and were buried there. In 1926, when Sarah was three, their clan came across the ocean. She remembers rolling from one side to the other in the dining room with her brother as the sea tossed the ship about.

Once arriving in Canada, they settled in Arnaud, Manitoba. In a country school, she was able to finish grade 8. Then she quit to help out with their large family. She was always a quick thinker. At age 13, Sarah had to look after her baby sister, Clara, who was a premie born at home in Arnaud, Manitoba. Sarah and her father out of necessity made a homemade incubator to keep the baby alive. This sister, Clara, just turned 87!

Once when Sarah's father was cleaning gooseberries on the farm in Arnaud, he threw one in the air and caught it with his mouth, hoping to eat it. The gooseberry stuck in his throat and he began choking on it. Sarah's brothers thought he was joking, but Sarah, with her quick thinking and her 'love for nursing,' saw the emergency for what it was. She banged him on the back and out popped the gooseberry—her father gave her the credit for saving his life.

Another time Sarah's quick thinking came into good use was when her little brother, Jake, was playing by the pond on their clan's homestead. He was on the little dock and, leaning over the edge too far, he fell in. By the time their older brother pulled him out, he had quit breathing. Sarah quickly grabbed him by his feet and threw him over her shoulder. As she ran to the house, all the water drained from his mouth, and he was able to breathe.

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 her life—becoming a nurse. She then worked at St. Catharines General Hospital for 35 years as an RNA. Her "quick thinking" came to good use during her nursing career.

Sarah lived for years at 23 Hewko Street with her father and sister Kae. After her father's death and Kae's marriage, Sarah lived alone there for a while. Eventually, she sold the house and moved to Tabor Apartments. She would often go over to the long-term care wing where she was everybody's caregiver. Currently, she is a resident in Tabor Manor Long Term Care. She often expresses thankfulness to 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 sure has deserved it!

As the oldest sister in the family, she has become the loving 'matriarch' to all of us—her siblings, nieces/nephews, great-nieces/nephews, and great-great nieces/nephews. Her "Air of Royalty", her wonderful perfumed scent, and her coiffed hair make her stand out in a crowd. Her love and faith in God have carried her through hard times as they traveled from Russia to Canada, as they struggled against the elements after their move to Arnaud, and as she worked as a nurse. She loved her church in St. Catharines, Grantham Mennonite Brethren. She was known to pray for the youth and was interested in their activities.

She is an inspiration to all!

Sharon (Durksen) Schnupp Kuepfer
for the Durksen Clan

MARCH IS WORKPLACE EYE WELLNESS MONTH



Digital screen time is at an all-time high, in large part due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some jobs 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!



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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 beginnings to its present incarnation.

Leonard Conolly, "the Shaw's resident scholar and literary advisor of the Bernard Shaw estate, joined Shaw ensemble alumna 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 lists his many accomplishments as "the past president and vice-chancellor of Trent University, holds degrees from four universities around the world, was professor of English at the Universities of Saskatch-

ewan, Alberta, Guelph, and Trent, and has authored more than 60 articles and 20 books, including many about Bernard Shaw. He also founded the theatre archives at the University of Guelph, the largest collection of Canadian theatre archives available, and one of the world's most important collections of Bernard Shaw material."

In her role as the actress, Barbara Worthy has many accomplishments of her own. At the Shaw Festival, she has worked as an actor in the former artistic director Christopher Newton company, directed and wrote under former artistic director Jackie Maxwell, who followed Newton, and taught during the time of current artistic director Tim Carroll.

In addition, she produced the Bell Canada Shaw Festival Series for a decade with CBC Radio. She now works for the NOTL Museum as the visitors and member assistant and has produced a long list of historical documentaries, with a special focus on the Niagara region.

Rather than the museum's typical lecture format, Worthy and Conolly engaged in a guided conversation for the virtual presentation, starting with a discussion of Bernard Shaw's con-

troversial 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 politics, "you are on a very slippery slope."

The two discuss the festival's founders, Brian Doherty and Calvin Rand, Doherty as a former lawyer and playwright who retired to NOTL and wanted to "energize" the sleepy little town with his commitment to Shaw as a playwright. With Rand's financial backing, they were able to slowly bring Doherty's vision to fruition.

A cottage industry of sorts sprang up around the festival with people using their own sewing machines to make costumes and bringing in items from their houses for props.

The community also played a part either directly or indirectly in supporting the festival. Conolly told a story about Rand begging residents up and down Queen Street to supply fans to cool down the overheated Court House theatre. The community participated indirectly, he adds, by supplying additional ambience to the inaugural production of Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell* in the form of screaming from a detoxifying overnight resident from the depths of the town jail, downstairs in the building.

The oral stories about the Shaw Festival in the lecture were both informative and entertaining. Worthy and Conolly continued to reminisce as old friends sharing stories and anecdotes. They followed the history of the festival chronologically through the artistic directors, from Barry Morse, Newton, and Maxwell to Tim Carroll, and their contributions, challenges and innovations. 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 "reminisce on the highs and lows of the Shaw Festival, its enormous impact on NOTL, and the personalities and performances that have made it one of



Actor and writer Barbara Worthy discusses the history of the Shaw Festival for a Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum series. (Photo supplied)

the world's great English-speaking theatre companies." The goal was accomplished, but as with all great performances, left the viewer a little hungry for more. Worthy told The Local she and Conolly would like to continue their collaboration in a possible series of articles or a booklet with more stories and research about those early decades of the Shaw.

Worthy also talked to The Local about the personal impact the Shaw Festival has had on her life. "I wouldn't be here today if Christopher hadn't hired me... wouldn't have married, and had my son... wouldn't have gone on to the CBC. The son part is

the big one. The Shaw was fundamental to my career, and I believe it's given back not just to me, but to the entire community, many times over."

She is "astonished, amazed" at the Shaw Festival turning 60. "All these years! Such an accomplishment, thanks to visionary leaders, fine management, and artistic triumphs," and adds that she is "proud to have been a small part of its history."

To tune into the recording of this event from the Museum's website visit www.notlmuseum.ca or directly from YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czu0WWaNB0>.

Sourpalooza back for beer-lovers

Kim Wade
Special to The Local

The Exchange Brewery had a vision in 2018 to promote and celebrate sour beers, an endeavour that culminated in Sourpalooza, "Niagara's first and only sour beer focused festival."

The event created for sour beer lovers has "the mission of celebrating some of the best sour beers from Ontario and highlighting the talent of the passionate brewers and people behind this craft said Audrey Le Goff, marketing coordinator at The Exchange Brewery.

First celebrated in 2018 at the Old Courthouse, with 11 breweries participating, their mission included celebrating

sour beers but also educating the public about this ancient type of beer process.

A sour beer is produced by the introduction of yeast and bacteria into the brew, which can be added together into the brew directly for greater control of results. Although different types of bacteria can be used, one of the most common is lactobacillus, which is commonly used in yoghurt. In contrast to the direct addition of a specific yeast or bacteria, some breweries may choose to follow an "old school Belgian way" of producing sour beer. This Lambic type of beer production involves exposing the brew to airborne wild yeasts and bacteria just as the monks did hundreds of years ago. This tradition does

not have the same control over the outcome but can make for some interesting brews.

By 2019, the festival had grown as the popularity of sour beers increased, with 12 breweries participating from Ontario, Quebec and the US. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the 2020 Sourpalooza Festival had to get creative. The festival was moved to an online event with six breweries participating. Each brewery put their best sours forward to add to a tasting box that was either shipped to ticketholders or picked up at participating brewery locations. The Exchange sold more than 70 Sourpalooza boxes and between 100 to 150 people tuned in for each virtual live tasting session.

Unfortunately further

COVID-19 restrictions took their toll and the festival had to be cancelled in 2021. However, this year, Le Goff says, "The Exchange Brewery team is very excited to be working again on a 'real' physical Sourpalooza Festival, and is looking forward to meet again in-person with craft beer lovers from Ontario and beyond."

For the 2022 edition of the festival, eight breweries from around Ontario will be participating including: Bellwoods Brewery; Blood Brothers Brewing; Collective Arts Brewing; The Exchange Brewery; Indie Ale House Brewing Co.; Merit Brewing; Short Finger Brewing Co.; and Small Pony Barrel Works.

Tickets are \$75 per person, available at exchangebrewery.com until Friday, March 25.



Exchange Brewery owner Robin Ridesic during the 2019 Sourpalooza. (File photo)

There are three different sessions to choose from: 12 p.m. to 3 p.m.; 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Each ticket includes a personal table during your reserved time, various snacks, and a Sourpalooza kit, including a

branded Souvenir glass, a bottle of water and a sampling passport to sample two beers from each participating brewery.

All seating and tasting will be outdoors and in compliance with any current health protocols.



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Popular trivia night returns to golf club

Mike Balsom
The Local

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 revellers 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 fourth-round final-Jeopardy-style, where teams can bet points with their answers.

Continued on page 13



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

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'Name that tune' competition a popular draw

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"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."

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.

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 put-

ting 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.

A fine day for golf



Nat Dick happy to be out on the course.



Maurice Robert takes his swing.



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.



Regis Marion at the tee. Photos by Mike Balsom)

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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 at the time, 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

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Amanda Gamble, Peter Martin, Erika Alexander, Tony Chisolm, and Jim Alexander with animators hired through the Fort George summer student program and Parks Canada’s Fife and Drum Corp. (File photo)



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Some programs, events to return this summer

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 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 and others which for 35 years have been organized by Friends of Fort George volunteers.

During much of that time, the Alexanders both had "regular jobs," says Erika — Jim says he probably should have spent less time as a volunteer and more time on his day job, as a cabinet maker and expert on the restoration of homes. He's making up for time he should have spent on their

own home now, he adds.

Erika was eventually hired by the board as executive director, which put her in charge of the gift shop, a job she loved, and Jim became an ad hoc director on the Friends' board of directors, together moving forward in the same direction as programs at the fort expanded.

They credit a large number of dedicated members of the board for travelling that journey with them. "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.

"After all 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."

Tony Chisholm, president of the Friends for the last five years, says the group is hoping to get fundraising 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 dinners, 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 cake walk, the parade along 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 quick-

ly, "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 Erika Alexander in particular 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 be more important than ever as they try to staff fort programs when it reopens in May.

"Erika was very helpful in 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 founding 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 throughout the War of 1812, and played a crucial role in training soldiers during the First and Second World Wars. "Canadian contribu-

tions to these world-changing 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 even more 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, Lakeshore properties, and the Military Reserve known as The Commons.

"Over the past 35 years," says Gamble, "the Friends have developed a worldwide 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, and 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.

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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 Bisback, 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.”

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

But whether or not councillors understand where dock area improvements stand, some residents have also been confused, looking for clarifications, and to do that, Disero met with them

Monday morning to walk around the area 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’s 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 stonework 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 not let 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 simplifies what may seem a complicated issue, but is much less so when confronted with the level of the path, and the reservoir below it.

There is a drainage pipe that should be doing its job,

Continued on page 17



This picture of the park behind Balls Beach was taken 5 years ago during the first record high lake level. Today the foot path is a metre higher, as is the reservoir where water can pool, with dock area homes bordering the reservoir. (Ron Simkus)

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 some digging along the path. There is also a question of a water garden behind the culvert, but she is quick to explain 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, greenspace, 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 Balasiuk of Paddle 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 Fog 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.

Also at 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.

Balasiuk had been hopeful that project would proceed, and had made plans to expand his business this season, but had to come to the conclusion the dock and kayak launch wouldn't happen this year. His only option 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 docking/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 revenues 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 with \$2,280,693 being committed to various projects over the 27-year period. Beginning in 2020, additional reserve transfers funded from property taxation revenue were included to support projects in the dock area. For 2020, an additional \$300,000 was included in the operating budget and in 2021, this was reduced to \$100,000. For 2022, \$100,000 remains budgeted to continue to support this reserve into the future. Licensing revenues ceased flowing in 2020, largely 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 pad-



Lord Mayor Betty Disero stands at the location discussed for a small dock and kayak launch, which is now off the table, due to cost. She hopes an area closer to the Turntable Way parking area can be used by kayakers. (Photos by Penny Coles)



River Beach Drive offers a popular spot for locals to fish. Petrocan owner Bashar Haddad was out last week trying to catch some trout with his son Shebl, 6, who was enjoying spending some March break time with his dad.

dlesport 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 definite 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."



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Local ARTS & CULTURE

Red Letter Day to premiere Monday at PAC

Mike Balsom
The Local

Monday, April 4 is shaping up to be a *Red Letter Day* for Niagara-on-the-Lake's Yellow Door Theatre Project. That's the night of the premiere of the hour-long original musical film written by Lezlie 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 Pump House 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 from her 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 Andorlie 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 *Hansel 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 it would generate.

"We had teens 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 Lezlie."

Yellow Door regulars Hannah and Ayla Jamal, Sydney Cornet (who also served as production assistant), Mariah Rackal, Emily Fulton and

Catherine Dubois all have important roles in *Red Letter Day*.

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.

"She's a great student, but she kind of struggles with whether or not that's the path she wants to take," says Dubois. "She 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.

"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.

"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 a 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 issues that typical teens face and avoids the sappiness 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 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 put herself into the shoes of a 17-year-old about to graduate.

Of the storyline, Wade says there are 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 gone."

Hillstrom is quick to credit the financial support of the Lauren and Vaughn Goettler Foundation for making the movie happen. And she adds that the parents of the cast were very supportive, driving 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 Otta actually cooked for the entire cast and crew.

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 next month's premiere, he is really hoping the play and the songs will be used by youth everywhere for future auditions. 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 firstontariopac.ca.



A group of students gather outside their academy for *Red Letter Day*. (Photos supplied)



Hannah Jamal and Sydney Cornett have two of the leading roles in *Red Letter Day*.



Former Crossroads Public School graduate and current Grade 10 Laura Secord Secondary School student Catherine Dubois plays Yasmina, a math and science genius pondering her true calling as graduation looms.



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The Perfect Pairing filmed in town available for viewing

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 a (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 restaurateurs 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, while the disastrous review did the same for Hollingbrook heir Michael, played by another Hallmark Channel regular, Brennan Elliot.

Michael and his father John, portrayed by Canadian screen veteran Art Hindle (*Porky's*, *North of 60*, *Paradise Falls*) are still stinging 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 for Hollingbrook Vineyard. Interior scenes in the barrel cellar and the icewine lounge, along with exteriors at the grand entrance, the outside patio area and in three temporary artificial rows of icewine vines erected next to Peller's actual vineyard were shot last March. At the time of shooting, the film's working title was *Love and Icewine*.

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 that 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 Parkway and the 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 Chesler Perlmutter'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)

The Perfect Pairing is not as syrupy as two previous films shot in Niagara-on-the-Lake. 2018's *The Holiday Calendar* showcased locations including Simcoe Park, Balzac's Coffee Roasters and the Prince of

Wales Hotel and *Christmas Inheritance*, a 2017 Netflix release for which many scenes were shot at the Grand Victorian Bed and Breakfast on the Niagara Parkway.

As rom-com's go, it's an en-

gaging slice of light entertainment, at times as sweet as the icewine that lent the film its original title, and well worth the hour-and-a-half run time. As Michael's assistant Dianne, played by the charming

Genelle Williams, tells Christine, "some of the best things in life happen when you take a little detour."

The movie is available for streaming via the W Network or on the River TV app.



Last March, on a warm day, actors Nazneen Contractor and Brennan Elliot helped block out a winter scene in a Peller vineyard, with fake snow and fake grapes on the vines. (Mike Balsom)

LocalSPORTS

Preds end their season at home Sunday

Mike Balsom
The Local

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 the best-of-five GMHL Russell Cup semi-final three games to one, eliminating them from the playoffs and bringing to an end their first season playing out of Virgil's 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 from a lack of trying. The other team playing better than we did. Darryl (Renegades coach Darryl Lloyd) had the whole team playing great positional hockey, and we didn't initiate 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 Nicholas Lewicky. Alexander Insulander capitalized on his position in front of the crease and tucked away the rebound to give the Preds a 1-0 lead. But it didn't last long.

Less than a minute later, Renegades forward Brandon Stojcevski weakly backhanded the puck from behind the net, where it bounced off the back of Predators goalie Morgan

Penwell's skate and past the goal line to tie it up.

Niagara defenceman Nathan Fehr was sent to the penalty box for interference a few minutes after that. During the power play, Stojcevski took a shot from the right point where it caromed off the stick of teammate Christopher Rende and past Penwell to give North York the lead.

The two fluke goals seemed to knock the wind out of the Predators. They had problems moving the puck out of their end for most of the game, and when they did, Lewicky had few real challenges from the Niagara attack.

Stojcevski notched his second goal and Nikolai Salov added another to give North York a 4-1 lead in the second, before Jason Humphries took a perfect pass from Page for the Predators second goal.

With the momentum possibly turning Niagara's way, Turnbull decided to replace Penwell with Iain Riordan to give the team some added spark. But Dylan Labelle added an unassisted goal with 2:21 left in the second to restore the Renegades three-goal lead.

Labelle added his second goal in the third period, making it 6-2 for North York. Humphries had another chance shortly after that when he was left alone for a short breakaway, but Lewicky once again shut the door, as he had been doing for much of the series. The Predators subsequently mounted a couple of ineffective 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's way.

Though the Renegades scored two shorthanded goals



The Preds were not in a hurry to leave the ice after losing the best 2 of 3 playoff series Sunday. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Noah Caperchione reaches for the puck at home Sunday.

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 few minutes 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, Garin Janiuk, who stopped the forward's attempt to deke him out on the left side. The Renegades went on to score three more

unanswered goals for an 8-5 win in the opener.

Game two went Niagara's 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 Christian D'Amico closed the margin to one later in the period.

Iain 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 Monachino 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 series after his season with Forshaga IF of Sweden's HockeyEttan league ended.

Despite the likely jet lag 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 defenseman Brenden Morin 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 that 2-1 lead 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 capitalise 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 with big 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 Whalen 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 their 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 out 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 forcing 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 final's opening game Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.



Dante Massi thanks coach Robert Turnbull after Sunday's game in Virgil, that last one of the season for the Niagara team.

LocalSPORTS

Former Predators GM working with Ukrainian players

Mike Balsom
The Local

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



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.

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 considered 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 back home, they need a contract, they need a team, they need somewhere to stay. Their current con-

tracts 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 and to Hungary with his family. Trandafilov was born in the Donbass region, which is one of the main targets of the Putin regime due to the presence of separatist forces there. It's been a site of a low-intensity war between

Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces for almost eight years, leaving more than 14,000 people dead.

"It was one of the areas first attacked," Eriksson says. "He's been playing there professionally for the past two years. His family house 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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I'll keep crying for you until we meet again.

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5	7	2	3	9	8	6	1	4
3	6	9	1	2	4	8	7	5
4	8	1	7	5	6	3	9	2
7	9	5	6	8	1	2	4	3
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1	2	4	9	3	5	7	8	6

NOTICES

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NOTICES

To place an Obituary or
In Memoriam in our Classifieds,
please contact Julia at:
julia@notllocal.com or
905.934.1040

Deadline is Tuesdays at 1 p.m.

OBITUARY



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



WIENS, HELGA—Helga Wiens (nee Janzen) passed away Friday, March 18, 2022, into the loving arms of Jesus with her family by her side, at Pleasant Manor in Virgil. She was 82 years old.

Helga was born on November 11, 1939 in Santa Catarina, Brazil to Heinrich & Anna Janzen. It was there, at her youth group, that she captured the eye of Abram Wiens. They were married on June 7, 1958. The family of 5 immigrated to Canada in 1967 and settled in St. Catharines. In 1987 Helga & Abe moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake. They made many wonderful memories together traveling & camping, and in more recent years spending extended time in Florida.

Helga will be remembered & missed by her loving husband, Abram and by her children: Dori (Ernie), Carlos (Carole) and John (Patty). She adored her 10 grandchildren and their spouses, and was so full of love for her 19 great-grandchildren. She was pre-deceased by her infant granddaughter Jacqueline in 1987.

She is also survived by her sisters, Olga Schlapp, Anni Mandau and her brother Rudi Janzen, her sister-in-laws & brother-in-laws and many nieces & nephews.

Visitation will be Wednesday, March 23rd from 6:00-8:00 pm at Scott St. MB Church, 339 Scott St., St. Catharines. Memorial Service will be on Thursday at 1:30 pm at Scott St. MB Church. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Radiant Care Pleasant Manor or Camp Crossroads.

A special thank you to Sally Baerg & her team and also to the staff at Pleasant Manor for their wonderful and loving care.

Online condolences at www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca

European teams won't sign Russian players

Continued from page 22

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 Marych-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 Dynamo Riga the next day.

"This is going to affect every league in Europe," Eriksson predicts.

And it's affecting every nation in Europe, confirms

the 38-year-old.

"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



Back: Georgy Kholmovsky, Josh Davidson, Dawson Walker, Jason Humphries, Brenden Morin, Alex Page, Max Bredin, Logan Baillie
Middle: Tracy Dunk (Ticket Sales, COVID Ambassador), David White, Mario Zitella, Reese Bisci, Alex Andrews, Brett Lee, Alessandro Massi, Nathan Fehr, Jason Collaco, Nicholas Dunk (Equipment Manager)
Front: Morgan Penwell, Noah Caperchione, Dante Massi, Connor Shipton (Assistant Coach, Assistant GM), Pontus Madsen, Samantha Marson (Trainer, Assistant GM), Alexander Insulander, Iain Riordan
Missing: Justin Appleton, Gino Carter-Squire, Emil Eriksson, Jesper Eriksson, William Fagemo, Alexander Jarnikov, Henry-Pierre Jayet, Mackenzie Okumura, Josh Piexoto, Oskar Spinnars Nordin, Robert Turnbull (Coach, GM)



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Spring has Sprung!

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!

GREG SYKES real estate TEAM



JEFF WHITE DEBI CHEWERDA GREG SYKES CAMERON JONES SHANNON LEIGH BEATTIE