



Anne Marie Regehr:
beloved for
her music
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Vic Tee helps kids cross York Road safely on their way to St. Davids Public School on Crossing Guard Day. (Mike Balsom)

Vic Tee recognized for looking after student safety

Wednesday is Ontario Crossing Guard Day

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

The car pulls up and parks on the small strip of asphalt next to the original wing of St. Davids Elementary School around 8:30 a.m. Seventy-three-year-old Vic Tee gets out and puts on his cap, with the words "I'm Nice" printed on the front.

Next, he dons his bright orange and yellow safety vest, and grabs his hand-held stop sign. He heads to the sidewalk in front of the crosswalk for his first of three shifts ensuring his young charges make it across the road safely.

As children approach the crosswalk, he greets all of them with a friendly smile that, though covered by a

mask these days, is evident in his eyes. He greets most of the youngsters by name. They wait for his instruction, and for him to take his place in front of the idling cars, before they eagerly shuffle across the street.

For the past eight years, the retired truck driver has been part of the fabric of life at the small community school. "I do it because I enjoy it," he says. "It gives me something to do, gets me out of the house."

And he loves working with the students. "I've seen them grow up. They're great kids. They watch out for everything, you know. They have always been a great bunch. I've lived in St. Davids for over 40 years, and I know their parents, and

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Booking system errors impact NOTL residents

Penny Coles
The Local

A glitch in the provincial vaccination booking system came to light last week that affected local residents in the 80-plus age group, and another error may also have been discovered Monday for the 75-plus applications, both uncovered thanks to local couples.

Residents in the 80-plus age group who have booked their vaccination at the Niagara-on-the-Lake community centre should check their ap-

pointment date to ensure it is for one of the correct dates, either March 31, April 1 or April 9.

And if anyone in the 75-and up age group trying to book an appointment through the online booking system discovered the NOTL clinics are full, that might also have been an error — or at least it was Monday.

Edith and Peter Klassen called The Local last Wednesday evening, March 17, to explain they thought they had booked appointments at the Anderson Lane community centre for April 7, only to find there are no

clinics in NOTL that day.

They had called the provincial phone number to straighten out the question of dates, but got nowhere, other than to have their appointment confirmed for April 7 at the community centre.

They were sure there must be an error, but didn't know whether it was in the appointment schedule or the booking system, and they weren't sure how to find out.

A series of phone calls and emails seems to have brought some resolution, but an un-

known number of local residents may have appointments for an incorrect date of either April 7 or April 8, when there are no clinics being held in NOTL.

A very concerned and cooperative woman reached through the Ontario booking system phone number last Wednesday first surmised the Niagara schedule had possibly changed since the regional schedule was released. She eventually acknowledged that

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Rene and Annie Bertschi have vaccination appointments this week in St. Catharines, but were disturbed to find there were no bookings available in NOTL. That, however, may have been a glitch in the system. (Photo supplied)



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Summer could look good if we limit social interaction now

Penny Coles
The Local

The bad news is cases of COVID-19 and variants of concern are on the rise, in Ontario and the Golden Horseshoe area.

The good news, says Dr. Mustafa Hirji, is what we could expect this summer: movie theatres and the Shaw reopening, although likely with restrictions, an increase in indoor dining, and more freedom to enjoy social interactions with friends and family.

During Monday’s weekly press briefing, the acting chief medical officer of health said, “I’m pessimistic about the next couple of months, and our ability to get through these two months without trigger-

ing a third wave.” But if we can get through the next two months without that happening, “I’m very optimistic for what this summer could look like,” he added.

“It’s all a question of what we do now that affects what happens over the next couple of months.”

He spoke of getting to the point this summer “where we’re actually able to really relax and recalibrate.”

But to get there, he continues to ask Niagara residents to do their part by staying at home except for essential reasons, wearing masks and limiting social interactions to our own households, for another two months.

After that, the increased number of vaccinations and

the warm weather will be on our side, he says.

While other medical health officials are calling current COVID numbers a third wave of infections, Hirji talks of moving toward one, and the possibility of avoiding it. There is no absolute number that says we’re in or nearing a third wave — judgement of where we’re at is “in the eye of the beholder” — all that matters is where the numbers take us, he says.

“We will only know after the fact” if we end up in a third wave, “or we’re able to curb it to a small ripple.”

Although previously the largest number of cases were through outbreaks, the cases Niagara is seeing now are mostly from community

spread, within households or through co-workers, extended family and friends, Hirji says.

With the rising trend of variant cases, he admitted to being surprised by the government’s rush to open up restaurants to 50 per cent of their capacity, although he said the restriction of tables to one household, as has been the case in Niagara since the region moved into red, will help limit the spread of infections.

Any further lockdown, he suggested, would have to include the Golden Horseshoe area, with the second-highest number of cases in Ontario.

In addition to our social behaviour, vaccinations are what will help us contain the spread, he says.

Almost all — 99 per cent

— of the 80-plus age group have either had their first vaccination or are booked to get it, says Hirji.

Beginning Monday, residents ages 75 to 79 were able to book their appointments, and those vaccinations could be completed in by mid-April.

Encouraging Niagara residents to take the opportunity for vaccination when offered, Hirji says the four vaccines approved in Canada will prevent 100 per cent of hospitalizations and deaths, so take the first one offered. “The first vaccine you can get is the best vaccine you can get.”

To date, Niagara has mostly received the Pfizer vaccine, along with a small quantity of Moderna, but he said AstraZeneca, which has received

some bad press recently, is also safe and effective. He pointed to a new U.S. study that shows it to be 78 per cent effective in preventing infections, and 100 per cent effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths.

It is also effective for the older age groups, he added.

While a few clinic sites around Niagara, including Niagara Falls, were almost fully booked this week, there are others with availability, he says.

Appointments can be booked at [Ontario.ca/bookvaccine](https://ontario.ca/bookvaccine) or by phone at 1-888-999-6488.

For the regional schedule of clinics until April 10, visit <https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/covid-19/vaccination/clinic-schedule.aspx>

Lord Mayor defends chief medical officer

Penny Coles
The Local

Lord Mayor Betty Disero says she stands by Dr. Mustafa Hirji and the medical decisions he makes to keep Niagara residents safe.

Disero was concerned about the criticism he received during his update to regional politicians Friday, a small number of whom said

they found his messaging too negative, and questioned his credibility.

During the meeting, he referenced other countries, including the U.K., Netherlands, Italy and Brazil, their handling of the pandemic and their outcomes.

The Netherlands vaccination program is going at a similar pace to Canada, is just a little ahead, he said, and that

country is “now in its fourth wave, and putting pressure on its hospitals.”

He also warned about the possibility that if the number of cases increases, more people in the 60 and 70-year old age group could become sick and die.

He told regional politicians people should be encouraged to stay at home and minimize interactions for the

next eight weeks, which will take us to the point where more people are vaccinated and the weather is warmer — otherwise, we face the likelihood there will be a third lockdown.

West Lincoln Mayor Dave Bylsma suggested public

health, with its negativity, is losing its credibility with the public.

He told Hirji “there seems to be a disconnect to large-scale realities,” citing the overall death rate in Canada as not indicating a pandemic, and that there is no advantage

to vaccinations.

Hirji addressed his concerns by explaining there haven’t been a huge number of deaths because of the measures that have been taken.

He also spoke to the eco-

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Niagara pharmacies hope to be included soon

Penny Coles
The Local

Sean Simpson hopes to be one of the pharmacies to offer a COVID vaccination, and he hopes to see that happening soon.

He could be vaccinating as many as 200 people a day, if needed, but he’s expecting the number to be more in the 50 to 100 range, he says. When that will begin to happen is unclear.

Simpson estimates most pharmacies will be able to handle about 40-plus vaccinations a day.

He was taken by surprise

when Premier Doug Ford announced Friday he would be expanding the number of pharmacies to offer the vaccine, with no further information about where or when.

Meanwhile, he’s getting “a ton of calls” from residents with questions about vaccinations.

He was disappointed by the lack of transparency, and the lack of any advance warning to pharmacy owners, who will need to be prepared when they learn vaccine is on its way.

Simpson, representing the Pharmacists Association of Niagara on the regional vaccination task force, is anxious to

get started administering vaccinations, and many NOTL residents will be happy to see that happen.

All three pharmacies in NOTL, along with others in the region, are hoping to be included on the provincial list of those to deliver vaccinations.

“If we have the opportunity, we’ll be ready,” says Simpson.

He expects they will receive the AstraZeneca, which seems headed to pharmacies, and is a little easier to handle as far as refrigeration.

Pharmacies will receive

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School crossing guard appreciated

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their grandparents."

Wednesday, March 24 is School Crossing Guard Appreciation Day in Ontario, a chance to recognize unsung heroes such as Tee, who assist young residents with their active and safe travel to and from school.

To recognize Vic, a number of students who cross with him worked on thank you cards in class to present to him on his special day. They also presented him with some special treats from Tim Hortons.

Principal Tracy Leemet says Tee "is warm and caring to the students he crosses. He never misses a day, and is out there through all kinds of weather. We are so very fortunate to have such a dedicated crossing guard. He's one of the best!"

Tee seems almost embarrassed that there is a day dedicated to crossing guards.

"I guess it should be appreciated," he finally agrees. "Being here three times a day, it kind of ties you down a bit, but I appreciate just being able to be out here in the fresh air, playing around

with the kids, getting to talk to their mothers and fathers as they are bringing them in. It's fun."

Tee notices one girl approaching his post. He calls her Gigi, and glances at his Apple watch. "She's a little earlier than usual," he tells The Local. It comes with the job, knowing when certain students are likely to arrive, and feeling his radar go off when a routine is broken.

On an average day, especially when the weather is as nice as it is today, Tee's Apple watch clocks around 10,000 steps. "I do a lot of walking. At lunch time I'm not

very busy, so I walk from here down towards the other end of the school and come back. Once the kids have crossed, there's not a lot for me to do, so I walk almost 40 minutes."

Working the crosswalk is just one way Tee gives back to his community. He has been a member of the St. Davids Lions Club and speaks highly of the programs they support with their fundraising efforts, many of which benefit the kids who visit his crosswalk daily. He would have also become a volunteer firefighter, but he says he prefers to wear his hair longer and often grows a beard.

Tee grew up in the Old Town of NOTL, where he kept active in his younger days playing tennis, soccer, softball and then slo-pitch. He attended Parliament Oak and Niagara District Secondary School back then, but his wife Sandy attended St. Davids. He's pretty sure her father did as well.

Vic and Sandy's two boys, now in their 40s, were



Vic Tee helps students who walk and cycle to school. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

also Dragons. The Tees now have six grandchildren, and last September, they became great-grandparents, when twins were born to their eldest granddaughter.

Providing support to students arriving at school is a bit of a family business. Sandy drives a school bus, leaving just a little earlier than Vic every day to start her regular route.

Obviously, contributing to the community and helping out kids is important to both Vic and Sandy, but he's not sure how much longer they will continue in their support roles. They own

a trailer they keep in the Parry Sound area, where they spend much of their summer weeks. During colder days, when instead of getting all those steps in he whiles away time in his car, he admits it's not as much fun as it is in the spring. And they want to spend more time with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, too.

But for now, he's out there five days a week, three times a day, stopping cars and waving back at about every third driver who smiles and waves back, showing their appreciation for what he does each and every day.



Vic Tee waits on York Road for the morning rush to begin.

Glitches being worked out

Continued from page 1

the error must have been in the booking system. She could see that several other people had also booked for incorrect dates, but she couldn't say how many.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero was made aware of the error, as was the region's public health staff, but it was up to the province to fix it.

Disero was told the province would be contacting those residents to rebook, but in a video released Thursday, she suggested residents rebook, rather than wait.

The glitch of dates not matching locations had apparently occurred and been corrected in other places, the lord mayor was told, but not in NOTL, at least not that anyone had reported until Wednesday evening.

Peter was able to rebook their appointments, and he and Edith headed to the MacBain Centre in Niagara Falls last Friday for their vaccinations — although not until Peter visited his barber for the first time in six weeks, he said, where they were very pleased with how smooth the process was.

The number of phone calls that went back and forth to correct their situation, Peter said, "provided enough material for a one act play."

The Local was told by the region that any answers about a resolution to that problem, such as when and how it was resolved and how many residents were impacted, would have to come from the province. When contacted last Thursday, The Local was told

an answer would be forthcoming ASAP, first that day, and again on Monday morning, but at press time Tuesday, despite those assurances, no information had been provided.

Another error appears to affect those who may have tried to book appointments for the 75 and over age group through the booking system Monday morning.

Rene Bertschi contacted The Local to say he had tried to make a vaccination date at the NOTL clinic site Monday morning, when registration opened to his age group, but couldn't. After phoning the booking system number, he was told they were all booked.

He was frustrated to learn that after waiting almost an hour on the phone, there weren't enough appointments available in a town with such a high seniors population. Instead, he and his wife Annie were able to get dates for this week at the Seymour Hannah vaccination centre in St. Catharines. "This is great. It doesn't matter to me where we go," he said, adding he and his wife Annie will be happy to see their 10-year-old grandson, whom they haven't seen in months. But he was concerned and surprised that for those who wanted their vaccination clinic close by, within the radius the region had promised, there were no dates available.

"For a town with our seniors population, there should be a lot more than 1,500 appointments for NOTL. I bet if you calculated just those 75 and over, there would be at least 5,000."

However later that day, Dr.

Mustafa Hirji said there were still appointments available at most clinics across the region, including NOTL.

Trying to sort out the discrepancy, a regional representative said there were appointments available for the April 9 clinic. "Based on a couple of pieces of information we're received, we are exploring with the province whether there is an error that is preventing people from registering for that April 9 clinic," she said.



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Park rules and regulations explained in bylaw

Penny Coles
The Local

With warm weather in the forecast, council has approved a bylaw to impose some limits to activities in local parks, as a result of issues experienced with the arrival of a large number of visitors once the warm weather arrived last year.

The bylaw sets hours for parks to be open, and restrictions about barbecues, tents, alcohol, and organized activities, among other concerns.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor asked last week for a deferral to allow for some public input, which was missing in the drafting of the bylaw, but as Lord Mayor Betty Disero pointed out, while public feedback is important, the bylaw doesn't include anything "extreme," and this summer can be considered a trial period before deciding whether changes are required.

Director of operations Sheldon Randall explained the bylaw is not unusual, having been created based on similar legislation used by other municipalities in Niagara and across Ontario.

"We're four to six weeks

away" to the summer surge in park visitors, said Coun. Allan Bisback, with warm weekends already attracting people to parks, which were busy last weekend.

His concern, and that of other councillors, was the town's ability to enforce the bylaw.

There are many competing issues for the attention of the existing bylaw complement, and although there was a bylaw on the agenda Monday night for five more, two of them are assigned to the fire department for prevention and inspection, and the other three for parking, said Bisback, adding it's a concern he will continue to mention.

He said Monday he's worried that a bylaw creates an expectation with residents that there will be enforcement, and asked that staff look at how to schedule more enforcement staff for weekends.

The staff report on the park bylaw made it clear "there are multiple constraints" on bylaw enforcement, and that this one would add to the strain on existing staff. It advised the number of complaints would be tracked, and if needed, a business case for resources for more bylaw officers would be included in the

2022 operating budget.

Coun. Norm Arsenault agreed that it's a good bylaw, but asked at council before its final approval, "how are we going to enforce it on weekends when most of these problems are going to occur?"

"I'm not totally sure, to be honest with you," said Randall.

His plan is to allow for feedback throughout the summer, to see whether the bylaw is working or not. Parks staff will be out on weekends, and can approach and talk to people, ask them to stop illegal behaviour, and if necessary, call bylaw officers or the police.

"If we need police, without a bylaw there is nothing to enforce, nothing for police to assist us with," he said.

"I want to make sure we understand there are certain things we can't enforce without the assistance from the police," said Coun. Erwin Wiens, pointing to the ban on alcohol or firearms in the park. "Drunken revellers" can't be controlled by municipal bylaw officers, but the bylaw is a good tool to have, adding "hats off" to staff for creating the bylaw.

One change recommended

by Coun. Clare Cameron was the wording regarding metal detectors, which limited their use to specific areas, wanting "an all-out prohibition to metal detectors" in all areas, suggesting even ball diamonds could easily be dug up by someone looking for historic artifacts.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said he would like to see small propane or butane barbecues allowed in parks, which are safe, but couldn't get any support for his suggestion.

Disero disagreed with him, saying last summer residents complained about the smoke and tents, making public parks look more like campgrounds. "People should be looking around and enjoying the views in the parks," then going to one of the restaurants on Queen street or picking up something to eat at one of the grocery stores, not having a barbecue, she said.

Staff is recommending new signs to help park users identify the rules related to the bylaw, and park safety.

This signage will include a QR code, those black squares arranged in a square grid on a white background. When scanned using a smartphone

camera, the QR code will redirect the user to a webpage, accommodating for revisions to the bylaw that might be made in the future.

The report to councillors estimates 31 new signs will be required at a cost of \$150 each, for a total of \$4,650.

There is a provision in the bylaw for special occasion permits, with a processing fee, which, with council approval would be required for large events in Queen's Royal Park and Simcoe Park. They would be needed for events with expected attendance of 250 people or more; road closures exceeding 12 hours; and alcohol or food trucks on the property.

Barbecues and bonfires are outlawed without a special permit.

Picnics and organized gatherings or events for more than 50 people also require a permit.

Amplified music in a park, or music that is bothering others as determined by a bylaw officer, is outlawed.

Park hours set in the bylaw are: Simcoe Park and Queen's Royal Park will be open from 7 a.m. to midnight; Memorial, Niagara-on-the-Green and

Centennial Sports Parks from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.; and all other parks 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The park bylaw bans riotous, boisterous, violent, threatening, indecent, or illegal activity; activity that creates a public nuisance, including being intoxicated; loitering, spying, frightening, annoying or otherwise interfering with the use and enjoyment of the park; smoking in contravention of regional bylaws; activity that may cause injury or damage; carrying or discharging a firearm, or fireworks without a permit; releasing balloons, paper lanterns, glitter or confetti; operating motorized models of aircraft, watercraft or vehicles, or using a skateboard, non-motorized scooter, or rollerblades other than in designated areas; playing or practising golf; throwing any object that might hurt someone or damage something; or putting up a structure such as a tent or booth without a permit.

Shade shelters for children with an adult are permitted.

Anyone contravening the bylaw can be asked to stop the activity not permitted, asked to leave the park, or fined.

Construction to begin on Village apartments



Adam Hawley, vice-president of Traditional Neighbourhood Development (left), and John Hawley, president of TND, flank Tim Jennings, executive director of the Shaw Festival, who was invited to do the honour of the ground-turning. (Photo supplied)

Local Staff

Following a ground-breaking ceremony Monday, construction was ex-

pected to begin Tuesday on 20 new one and two-bedroom apartment units in three separate buildings in The Village.



The Hawleys have chosen to honour architectural connections to NOTL heritage with the design of three apartment buildings to be constructed in The Village.

"We are very excited to be bringing new rental housing to The Village. Providing a diversity of housing options has always been integral to our original vision and master plan, and rental housing is a key part of that," said John Hawley, president of Traditional Neighbourhood Developments Inc. (TND), in a press release issued Monday. "They're going to be beautiful buildings, with architectural connections to heritage properties in Niagara-on-the-Lake."

"When we started designing these apartments, we drew inspiration from the Willowbank Estate in Queenston, with its beautiful curved staircases and prominent entrance," said Adam Hawley, vice-president of TND. "They're going to be exceptional buildings to frame our neighbourhood, and the entrance to Old Town."

Parking will be accessed through the use of a private rear lane, and there will be ample bike storage.

An agreement is in place for the Shaw Festival, always looking for rental units for staff, to rent one building with seven units, beginning Nov. 1, 2021.

Those interested in learning more about The Village Apartments can join the mailing list at www.TheVillageNiagara.com/Apartments.

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Ivan Fredette, *Team Leader and Certified Utility Arborist* at Safe Tree, knows that his team assesses each tree with longevity in mind, ensuring that plant health care is at the forefront of each diagnosis. "Plant health-care helps to deal with any stressors, issues or pests that trees may have. At Safe Tree, we want to get the trees back to where

they were and help preserve the wonderful heritage that they may hold." As Team Leader, Fredette strives to educate Safe Tree clients on how professional tree maintenance benefits not only the value of their property now, but for generations to come. "We strategically assess each tree and landscape we encounter to ensure that they are treated with a full scaled approach. It is easy to start from scratch, but to preserve these ancient trees that contribute to our canopy is truly amazing."

The educated and trained arborists at Safe Tree take a comprehensive approach to assessing all factors of tree maintenance, ensuring that their customers' minds are put at ease. From types of soil that surround a tree to what species may be impacted by their removal, customers trust that Safe Tree considers all environmental elements. Performing with a sense of stewardship to the Niagara

canopy, the Safe Tree team leans into their strong moral compass and ensures that their clients are

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As municipalities expand and the economy continues to grow, Safe

“Tree maintenance benefits not only the value of their property now, but for generations to come.”



educated about their trees.

One of our team players at Safe Tree, *Plant Healthcare Specialist* Kaitlyn Simpson, believes in creating a stronger, greener urban forest for our community. "In Southern Ontario, urban forests are not only crucial for wildlife, but also us as humans. At Safe Tree, we are actively doing everything we can every day to protect and maintain the urban forest, and that is important to me both personally and

Tree strives to maintain the beautiful green heritage of Niagara. Safe Tree is further fuelling their meaningful approach to tree maintenance through Simpson who is passionate about her new journey. "To me, Safe Tree hits every beneficial factor for the urban forest. From maintenance to plant health-care to removal, we strategically look at the entire tree life cycle to ensure we are helping make the urban forest bigger and better and the future, much greener."

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EDITORIAL

Vaccinations important for all adults, not just seniors

It's great news to hear from locals who are rolling up their sleeve and being vaccinated. And even better when we hear the number of people across the region who have either been vaccinated or have their appointments, and will be

soon. The faster that number climbs, the sooner we can dig ourselves out of this pandemic. While we're not the experts, we listen to what the experts say, and they say it's important to be vaccinated. They tell us all four of the vaccines approved in

Canada are safe, are highly effective at preventing COVID-19, and even more so at preventing serious illness and death. That's the kind of news we like to hear. And as important, if we're vaccinated, the experts tell us we're helping to protect our loved

ones, and others we may come into contact with. Those who have received their first shot realize it doesn't give them unlimited freedom. They still have to be careful about following all the protocols, until they and others around them have both doses, and possibly beyond that. The experts will tell us when it's safe to resume our social activity, and that won't happen until most, if not all, of the adult population is vaccinated.

about those in their 30s and 40s getting sick, ending up in ICU beds, even dying. That's horrible to contemplate, but points out the need for all age groups to be vaccinated when their opportunity knocks.

more freely by the time the summer comes, going to a theatre, the Shaw Festival, some of the many outdoor events we've missed over the course of a year, and enjoying time with friends and family.

We're being told we've got about two more months to live as if we are in a lockdown, although to be clear, we aren't. We're actually seeing a little lessening on restrictions, allowing more people indoors and on outdoor patios.

We all, whatever our age and stage of life, have been missing out on something important to us, and we are so very close to enjoying those things again soon.

Every day, with every clinic and every arm vaccinated, it seems we're inching closer, but of course, we're not there yet.

When it's the turn of younger adults to make a decision, when the high-risk seniors, the front-line workers, teachers and paramedics, all those who put themselves at risk for us, have been vaccinated, hopefully they won't hesitate. For themselves, and for everyone else around them.

While we can enjoy our local restaurants, we still need to be on guard about our social interactions. That's what stands between us and another lockdown, we're told.

And so we can get back to enjoying all we love most about summer. The good weather is calling us.

And in the meantime, if we trust the experts who are encouraging us to be vaccinated the first chance we get, we may be able to move around much

Penny Coles
The Local

Auchterlonie on Astrology

Bill Auchterlonie
Special to The Local

The full week of Auchterlonie on Astrology can be found on the Facebook page for The NOTL Local, and on the website www.auchterlonieonastrology.ca

Sunday, March 28: Full Moon in Libra, and at this full Moon, the Sun, Venus and Chiron are conjunct in Aries. Aries is the sign of "I am."

The Moon is in Libra, the sign of the "other." Sometimes we understand ourselves through others. And other times we can only understand others when we truly understand ourselves. The process of putting oneself into other people's shoes is never easy (that's why relationships can be so complicated), but that's exactly what the full Moon in Libra will help us with. Also on March 28, Venus is conjunct Chiron at 8 degrees Aries. Chiron transits often come with what health professionals call a healing crisis, which means that healing is initially preceded by a worsening of the symptoms. However, this temporary sickness is, in fact, a sign that the treatment is succeeding, even if it doesn't feel that way. Simi-

larly, if we want to heal, we first have to bring our wounds out of the unconscious and into the conscious. Of course, once the wounds become conscious, they hurt. But that's a necessary – and unavoidable – part of the healing process. If we want to release the old wounds and traumas, we first must acknowledge and accept them. Venus conjunct Chiron is our chance to heal the heart, by bringing to the surface old, repressed feelings and emotions.

Lady Gaga turns 35 today. Her successes include 27 million albums, and 125 million singles.

Monday, March 29: The Sun is conjunct Chiron at 8 degrees Aries. Chiron has a special relationship with the Sun. In the Greek myth, Chiron was adopted by Apollo (the Greek name for the Sun) who taught him everything he knew. Chiron was abandoned by his parents, so it was the Sun who saved him. The Sun represents the Self, our divine mission. Chiron represents our primal wound, the wound of being born and disconnected from the source. The wound of existence. It is only by fully embracing ourselves, and our true purpose in life, that we

can transcend the wound of existence and become whole. And it was 173 years ago, on March 29, 1848, that the water stopped flowing over both the Rainbow and the Horseshoe Falls due to an ice jam on the upper river. The water started flowing after about 30 hours.

Tuesday, March 30: Mercury is conjunct Neptune at 21 degrees Pisces. Many astrologers call Mercury-Neptune transits confusing, and for good reasons. Mercury is all about facts, and what we can see with our senses. Neptune is everything we cannot see — our feelings, intuition, and imagination. But this doesn't mean that Mercury and Neptune can't work well together. In fact, when in conjunction, Mercury and Neptune are asked precisely that: to join forces and bring their best qualities to the table. A good motto for Mercury conjunct Neptune is "Close your eyes and see," because sometimes the essential is indeed invisible to the eye. It is the 53rd birthday of Celine Marie Claudette Dion. Her huge success in French was a precursor to her worldwide success mostly in English.

Thursday is April Fool's Day. Until next week, shine on.

Turkey vultures returning

David Gilchrist
Special to The Local

Soaring above the skies of town and surrounding region, many of us have recently admired the large raptors, turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) returning on their spring migration. With a possible wing span of close to two metres, they are easy to spot in the sky, especially on a windy day.

Their flight pattern often seems quite whimsical, shifting and drifting with the wind and the upwellings of warmer air. The ends of their wings resemble 'fingers' which makes it easier for us to identify them from the ground. We see them in the spring and fall in larger numbers as they migrate. No problems for them spending the winter in the south and crossing the border with the warmer weather during a pandemic! When a large number of them are spotted in the skies, this is known as 'kettling,' and occurs during their spring and fall migrations. They are less likely to be seen in the morning — they tend to wait until the afternoon, when there are stronger air currents and thermals carry them



Locals have been seeing turkey vultures flying on the wind as they arrive home after their winter migration. This photo was taken at Queenston Heights. (David Gilchrist)

further and faster.

When they fly south, they will travel past the areas in the U.S. where turkey vultures live year round, instead continuing until they get to places such as Venezuela and Argentina.

Despite the fact that the creatures have a face that best could be described as one that only a mother could love, vultures are quite fascinating. They resemble, from a distance, a wild turkey, but have no feath-

ers on their heads. As they have no voice box like other birds, they can only emit a grunting sound or a hiss. The red-faced turkey vulture is the most common species seen in the area, but the black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) is being spotted a lot more recently. Two weeks ago a number of the black vultures were spotted in the Queenston area.

I had only known about this species of birds since spotting them occasionally in the skies above Highway 6 and 10 while driving to Tobermory, Ontario, but, despite remarking on their flight and size, never knew too much about them. I can remember driving down the Niagara Parkway a few years ago, and becoming aware of these large creatures sitting on a post in a vineyard. I slowed down, and then realized there were quite a few, just sitting around. I had never actually seen them

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View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

U.S. American Football coach *Ted Lasso* (Apple TV, 2020) arrives in Britain to manage a struggling London football team (what we know as soc-

cer). *Lasso* demonstrates that change for the better is possible, both for football teams and people. I have absolutely no interest in football; however, I need to reconsider. You ought to think about joining Apple TV, so you can see this first rate series.

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.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake
Local
The Trusted Voice of Our Community

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COMMENT

Local LETTERS

Both NOTL pools should open this summer

It is my understanding that the town is currently debating the issue of whether or not to open our pools this summer, and further, whether or not lessons should be offered. I am writing this letter in support of the opening of both the town's pools with swim lessons running.

We are now a year into the pandemic. The citizens of Niagara-on-the-Lake have shown great strength, and have risen together as a community.

As summer approaches, we need to encourage our lord mayor and town council to open both pools and offer lessons for our youth.

The Lifesaving Society of Canada feels strongly that facilities where they teach swimming lessons, first-aid training and CPR should all be considered essential in order to save lives. By opening the pools, the town can provide this to its residents along with a safe, supervised place to swim. In the

last year, the Niagara Falls and St. Catharines YMCA locations have closed. This further reduces access to swimming, in addition to fewer jobs for young adults in the region.

I believe it is vital for mental health, physical health and the safety of our community that we prioritize swim lessons and the opening of both pools for summer 2021 in our town.

Adriana Vizzari
St. Davids

Letter pushes province on pharmacy vaccinations

Letter to Dr. David Williams, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health Ministry of Health

We are writing to you today (March 19) to request that the province include the Niagara region in the pharmacy vaccine rollout pilot program.

As you know, Niagara has the third highest concentration of seniors in the entire country. We have many senior areas in the community and that includes areas that are often composed of over 50 per cent senior residents — if there is a place that needs to protect those residents who built this province, it is Niagara.

Over the last few months, our chief medical health officer, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Niagara Public Health and Niagara Health have quickly vaccinated some of our most vulnerable residents. According to Public Health and Niagara Health, 31 per cent of the 80 and above population of Niagara had already been vaccinated with one dose at the start of the week. In total, we have vaccinated or scheduled a vaccine for over 83 per cent of that vulnerable age

cohort (by Monday, that number was almost 100 per cent vaccinated or scheduled). We will continue to expeditiously ensure that any and all vaccines given to our region are given to the public as soon as possible upon receipt. However, despite our best efforts, it still remains difficult to vaccinate those under the age of 80 with the allotment of vaccines made available to us.

Recognizing the unique concentration of a senior population in Niagara, we are asking for you to immediately act and provide additional specific vaccine relief for Niagara and include our local pharmacies in the provincial pilot program immediately. We have asked our pharmacies in Niagara and it is not only clear that they have capacity, but that they are eager to start putting vaccines in the arms of their elderly residents due to the high demand. For example, Simpson's Pharmacy, an incredible local community partner, has told us they have the capacity to immediately help in the fight against this virus - already they have a waitlist that exceeds 3,500 seniors wait-

ing for government approval. They are not alone among the local pharmacies willing to play a role in defeating this virus. We implore you to let these local heroes do what they do best and help save lives.

According to the science table, the majority of intensive care admissions in Ontario are within the age group of 60 to 70 years old. It is urgent to ensure we have a vaccination rollout strategy that includes piloting pharmacies in Niagara in order to keep pace with other younger populations across the province. You must act now and include Niagara pharmacies being brought on board with the provincial pharmacy pilot and expand delivery channels in our region.

We will work with you to whatever degree you need to make this request a reality. Our offices look forward to discussing this matter further with you.

Sincerely,

MPP Jennie Stevens
St. Catharines
MPP Wayne Gates
Niagara Falls, Fort Erie & Niagara-on-the-Lake

Local LETTERS

Not all snowbirds so lucky

This letter is in regard to your recent story (The Local, March 3) about a Niagara-on-the-Lake couple who, despite federal and provincial requests not to travel outside of Canada during the current pandemic, did so at risk to both themselves and Canadians they might infect on their return.

In short, two NOTL citizens journeyed to Florida for the winter despite Florida being a dangerous hot spot for COVID-19. In your story, they speak about how they broke the rules and are safely ensconced on their motor yacht at a Florida marina. In fact, they were even invited to be vaccinated down there as Canadians limp along up here. I guess the rest of us are suckers for staying home, following the safety protocols, giving up seeing our families, and generally turning ourselves into winter hermits in the hope we can defeat the COVID-19

virus through responsible behaviour.

Consider, available statistics tell us there have been more than two million COVID-19 cases in Florida, more than 37,000 deaths in the state and 137 deaths every day. And even now there are active right-wing campaigns to discourage their own people from taking the vaccine creating even more danger for our NOTL buccaneers.

Our NOTL citizens have been lucky as far as we know, however, not so for everyone who breaks the rules. Third-party acquaintances (the Mailmans) from Nova Scotia, who claim the winter is hard on their bodies, did something similar. Unfortunately, they didn't time their health insurance needs properly and both contracted COVID-19. While we still don't know the long term health results, we do know

they are facing monstrous medical bills over \$300k US that will likely destroy them financially. They left Nova Scotia where 31 cases of COVID were reported. Where do you think they got COVID?

I suppose I object strongly to two things: the tone adopted by our Florida boat dwellers, and the fact that The Local printed such a story. Surely, through lauding their success by giving them a voice in the community, you are encouraging others to also flaunt the rules. This can only result in more COVID cases, more deaths and a further delay in getting back to any semblance of normalcy.

Responsible journalism means being able to resist a "tabloid draw" such as the aforementioned story and instead simply report the news.

Robert Moorhead
NOTL

Photography a challenge

Continued from page 6

that close before. Then, two years ago, a large number of them appeared behind a neighbour's house across the street. I counted about 35 of them roosting in several trees on their property. Upon investigation, we found a dead raccoon in the yard that the vultures were taking turns to devour. Turkey vultures have an amazing sense of smell.

As they drift closer to the ground, they use this sense to detect the presence of carrion. As such, they act as nature's clean-up crew, and are quite important for that reason. Last summer, while visiting the Lake Erie shoreline at Morgan's Point, I saw several vultures cleaning up dead fish that had drifted ashore, ending up on the rocky shoreline. Without such animals performing the task of cleaning up, rotting carcasses would be a source of bacteria and disease.

This year, when I started spotting them in the air and seeing some photos posted on

Facebook, from other photographers, I once again decided to head down the Niagara Parkway toward Queenston. At first, I was keeping an eye on the fence posts along the way, but no luck.

As I headed up the escarpment at Queenston and rounded the bend, I spotted several sitting in a tree across the roadway. I managed to quickly pull into the laneway on the right, where the steps leading up to Brock's Monument are located. I parked and slowly climbed out of my vehicle. I eased my camera strap over my head and around my neck before carefully crossing the road. I didn't want to scare them off. They appeared to be quite uninterested in my presence.


The sun, however, was behind them, making it difficult to get photos that were simply not silhouettes. I did manage a few though. It was on this occasion that I first witnessed one of the four spread its wings and hold them out for an extended period. This is known as the 'horaltic' pose. When doing this, the vulture is either drying

its wings if they are wet, or regulating its body temperature, trying to cool down or warm up. Another species of bird that can commonly be observed posing in this fashion is the cormorant. I stood fascinated for several minutes when it appeared another one was coming in for a landing. The first four, however, quickly winged up and flew away. The moment had passed!

Looking closer at the new arrival, I noticed that the new vulture was actually a red-tailed hawk. It had landed on the same branch that one of the vultures had so recently occupied. The vultures sure did not wait around long to make introductions with the new arrival.

Returning to the area on another day, I, along with another photographer, found a location that offered an opportunity to photograph a few roosting turkey vultures enjoying the morning sun.

They remained in location for some time before winging up and drifting leisurely over the gorge in search of food, or simply another tree farther away from our lenses.



Letters! We want letters!

If you have a letter to the editor you'd like to see published, please send it to penny@notllocal.com. Please try to keep it to about 350 words. Sorry, but we won't publish anonymous letters. And please stick to the issue at hand, rather than attacking those involved. The deadline is Monday at noon.

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Horse lost to equine virus, local stable in quarantine

Penny Coles
The Local

A highly infectious disease has taken the life of a thoroughbred being groomed as a show horse for the coming season, and quarantined a local horse farm.

Pippin, an almost-14-year-old retired race horse who had been boarded by his family at Benchview Equestrian Centre for about eight years, became ill, was tested and found positive for EHV-1, a highly contagious and deadly equine virus, says Benchview's Jasmine Darte. If caught and treated early, some horses survive, but Pippin's health declined rapidly over just 12 hours, and could not be saved.

That was Sunday, March 14, and if it had been passed to any other of their 28 horses, they would be expected to have shown symptoms within five to nine days, so it seems to have been an isolated case — none of the other horses were showing any signs of the disease this week. "It looks like we're good so far," she says, with the vet telling them they can breathe a little easier while they ride out the quarantine. However, the equestrian centre and its horses remain in isolation for a total of 21 days, during which time they have a very extensive and expensive sanitization and sterilization program in place.

Aside from staff, the centre is closed to anyone else, she says.

Designated staff monitor the horses around the clock, taking their temperatures and watching for any signs of illness.

"We watch their movement, to see if something's off. Sometimes they have swelling, they may have bladder issues, or may be

leaning up against the fence," she says.

Their vet also checks in with them several times a day, she says. "He's very confident with communicating regularly, and he would be here in half an hour to administer medication if necessary."

The protocols are eerily similar to what people are going through with COVID, and can be a respiratory illness, although in Pippin's case, it was a neurological disease, and one of the worst strains.

While it only affects horses, people can pass the disease from one farm to another if they come in contact with it, carrying it on their hands or clothes, transmitted through the air by droplets from the horse's nose — which is why people are not allowed on the farm, except for staff, she explains. "We can't have clients here taking lessons."

It's very common, with a large number of horses becoming infected before they reach the age of two, says Darte, although many never show any symptoms. The disease can remain dormant, and come out at times of high stress, similar to chicken pox and shingles in humans.

For a male such as Pippin, the spring mating system is enough to cause stress levels to increase, with female horses nearby but fenced off. He was showing signs of stress, just looking a little off, before he started displaying indications of the virus, says Darte. "But there is really no way to be sure why it happened. It could have been anything."

Although horses need to be isolated, they can be kept in the pods they were with before the virus was discovered.

"We have different groups of horses, small groups that

go out with each other regularly. As long as they don't show symptoms, they can continue to do that."

Only two horses that were in contact with Pippin needed to be separated from their group, she says.

Although people might think having a sick horse is the result of poor hygiene or not vaccinating their horses, "it can happen to anybody."

A nearby farm lost a foal around the same time as they lost Pippin, but not from the same virus.

Although there isn't anyone close by going through the same thing, there are many other farms in Ontario, the closest in Grimsby, who are going through it at the same time. One in Acton has lost three of their 85 horses recently, she says.

"This just blindsided me. We're very cautious. When we do a show, we ask the kids not to touch any other horses. We didn't do any shows last year because of COVID. This really threw us off."

Even Florida is having a hard time battling the virus, she says, with several Olympic-level events cancelled because of it.

It's putting a real financial strain on the centre, which has gone through two lockdowns, for a total of six months, and had only opened again two weeks ago after the most recent lockdown that began in December.

When they were allowed to open, "people were getting their kids out the door as soon as possible. They had missed that during the lockdowns. We were busier than ever."

But not any more, and with no way of knowing, even after the current quarantine due to the equine virus, what the restrictions will be.

An auction is being organized by a friend to help

Benchview, to cover the expenses of sanitizing and sterilizing the farm.

It will be held online, from 8 p.m. March 26 to March 28 at 8 p.m.

If anyone has a prize to donate for the auction, you can message Sam Darte Miller, or Deanna Mazachowsky.

Information about the auction can be found on-

line on the Benchview Equestrian Centre Facebook page, or for the auction itself to: <https://www.facebook.com/events/3646606702118786/>



Pippin, a horse recently lost to an equine virus, receives some loving attention from owner Jennifer Poynton. (Dave Reyno)



Pippin enjoyed visits from his family's dog Marty. (Justine Driedger)

Job includes 'hard truths'

Continued from page 2

conomic hardship created by some of those measures, and said while businesses are suffering, there is "no good outcome," but rather "a bad outcome versus a worse outcome," and that everything possible should be done to help local businesses.

Mayor Walter Sendzik of St. Catharines suggested a need to ensure "we're balancing information," adding "doom and gloom" is not helpful.

He accused Hirji of saying he wants to shut down Niagara, when the region could be in yellow or orange, but Hirji said he was not advising changing restrictions, only that residents limit contacts and stay at home as much as possible.

Mayor Jim Diodati also asked Hirji to be careful with his words, and reminded him of the need to be balanced. Diodati said messaging, as portrayed in media headlines, causes "increased fear, anxiety, and depression, while admitting what is said in the press is not under Hirji's control.

"I think people know I support following medical experts," Disero told The Local following the public health update.

Niagara-on-the-Lake residents are being given the same message that Hirji shares, she says.

"They talk about putting a positive spin" on the messaging, she adds, "but how do you put a positive spin on the number of cases going up? You could say 'there's a light at the end of the tunnel,' but how do you put a spin on a

third wave?"

The light at the end of the tunnel, as Hirji keeps repeating, is the arrival of vaccines, says Disero, and having people vaccinated, "but we're not there yet."

Hirji is the medical expert, "and what he tells us is what I say to the public. I don't want to give anyone anything other than the medical advice from the experts."

Regional chair Jim Bradley agreed, telling Hirji his best medical judgement and advice is what is required, "not just good news."

Hirji said he'd love to be able to tell only good news "and hand out cupcakes and nice things," but it's his responsibility to tell "the hard truths. I know no councillor wants me to come here and tell false stories, just the straight goods."

Region lobbying province

Continued from page 2

\$13 from the province for each vaccination, but it's not a money-maker, with the time involved and the cost of supplies, including personal protective equipment and syringes, he says.

He expects pharmacies will also have to set up their own online booking system, to link to the provincial site.

"Pharmacies are a very safe space for vaccinations," he says. "We're looking forward

to being onboard as soon as we can, but the timing is up to the province."

He says in the meantime he would encourage people to get vaccinated as soon as possible, "no matter where."

Dr. Mustafa Hirji says the region is pushing the province to include Niagara pharmacies as the number of sites is expanded.

He says the region is "lobbying hard" to be a location where pharmacies and primary care clinics get more vaccines.

He is "obviously disappointed" Niagara has not been included in the regions now receiving vaccines for pharmacies, but hopes that will change soon.

"I'm hoping we don't see a repeat, that it takes another month," he said, referring to the delay in receiving vaccines from the province earlier this year.

"We're one of 13 hotspots in the province. I hope in the next round of pharmacies and primary health care clinics, we'll be included."

St. Davids pool opening depends on mechanics

Penny Coles
The Local

Last year, St. Davids families protested the town's decision not to open the pool.

They are hoping not to have to do that again.

St. Davids parent Adriana Vizzari is one of them, and is concerned the town is currently debating the issue of whether or not to open the two pools this summer, and whether each will offer lessons. She is hoping both pools will open.

Parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte says so far the pool discussion has been with councillors during the budget process, when he was asked about St. Davids.

His plan, he says, is to try to open the St. Davids pool as is customary, about mid-June, around two weeks before it would open to the public.

However, he cautioned councillors that although it has always been properly winterized, it's an old pool which has been closed for two winters, and there could be mechanical problems.

"I just wanted them to be aware there could be problems. If something does come up, we'll address it, based on the cost of repairs."

He's hoping that isn't the case, but he won't know until he tries, he says.

If there is an issue, what happens next depends on how expensive it would be to repair. The decision would be one for council to make at that point, he says.

"We'd have to give council a business case to consider. Ultimately it would be up to council to decide and approve the expense. It's not something that's in the budget."

As far as swimming lessons, a decision will be made when he knows more about the restrictions imposed by the province, he says.

"My plan is to open the pool, and see what colour we're in, and what programs we're able to offer."

Last season, once the province cleared the way for pool openings, the town announced it would be operating the Memorial Park pool and the Virgil splash pad.



Last July, St. Davids families protested the town's decision not to open the pool. They're hoping the decision will be a different one this summer. (File photo)

The decision to leave the St. Davids Pool closed was made by the town's emergency control group, based on cost.

"If it weren't for costs relating to the pandemic, I would open it and deal with mechanical problems, if there are any," Turcotte said last season. But the Old Town pool is newer and more reliable than the St. Davids facility, which is expected to be

replaced.

The original timeline for a new pool, which depended on receiving a major grant from the provincial and federal governments, would have seen the old one open for 2020, with work beginning on the new, \$5 million pool when it closed last fall. However, that grant didn't come through, and any future timeline depends on a successful result for new

grant applications, Turcotte says, but his plan, when that happens, is to time construction without losing a season.

A fundraising committee has been struck, but has no target, until they know they have secured a grant and how much it's for. Their discussions to date have been about going after grants, as well as naming opportunities from a large sponsor, such as Bell Canada.

The town has \$100,000 put aside in its capital budget, which shows council's support of a new pool, Turcotte says, and donations so far have contributed about \$48,000.

The pool is a huge part of the St. Davids community, says Vizzari, where children can meet their friends and learn to swim. She's hoping they can do so again this summer.



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|  <p>15 SAMUEL STREET \$1,057,000 MLS 40022549 • Christopher Bowron and Nicole Vanderperk</p> |  <p>169 KING STREET \$898,000 MLS 40072958 • Thomas Elltoft and Kim Elltoft</p> |  <p>177 KING STREET \$3,898,000 MLS 40072950 • Thomas Elltoft and Kim Elltoft</p> |  <p>94 PRIDEAUX STREET \$2,998,000 MLS 40080197 • Thomas Elltoft and Kim Elltoft</p> |

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Grace United gets reserved parking for \$1

Penny Coles
The Local

It may only have been a handshake, but a deal is a deal.

And the deal with Grace United Church on Victoria Street over parking spaces, even if only verbal, should be respected, said Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

In response to a request from Grace United Church members for a reserved space for the minister and three parking spaces in front of the church to be enforced as belonging to the church, councillors have agreed to help ease their parking difficulties.

But the majority of council did not agree with the staff report that the church pay for those parking spaces.

The church had installed four signs, one reserving a parking spot for the minister, the other three reserved for one-hour parking for church members, based on what church representatives thought was an agreement with the town forty years ago. Councillors told them in December they couldn't use those signs until council had a staff report and a vote to support the use of those signs, which have remained covered since.

But because town staff could find no documented evidence that, as the church had suggested, the town had agreed to those parking spaces for the church decades ago, the staff report recommended the church would have to pay for the park-

ing spots.

In past times, it was not unusual for municipal agreements to be confirmed with a handshake, said Disero.

"I really believe when you give your word, you give your word," said Disero, adding she believed the town and church had come to the agreement of parking spaces in the 1960s.

"I believe in my heart of hearts that an agreement was made with the church, in good faith, and we should honour that agreement."

On Monday, she suggested an amendment to the motions councillors approved, which was to lease the four spaces to the church for \$1, with third party responsibility for insurance, permitting and enforcement, and council approved.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor agreed with Disero about the cost, referring at the planning committee meeting, reminding councillors that Mary Snider, a member of the church in the 1960s "who has a room named after her in the Virgil arena," remembered that parking spaces were reserved for the church.

Just because written documents couldn't be located, doesn't mean an agreement didn't exist, said O'Connor.

It was suggested construction trucks and others who use the spaces could be ticketed, but continue to park there all day, so town staff proposed the parking be allowed for one hour only.

It encourage parking turnover, allowing some parking for

businesses in the area and give church members there during the week on church business an opportunity to use the space.

"I'm disappointed to hear about the importance of parking turnover," said Coun. Clare Cameron.

"Churches are a major part of what remains to help stitch people together, and connect people," encouraging a sense of community.

"I'm extremely supportive of this. Churches are facing enough challenges as it is," adding the parking spaces are "a simple ask."

The approval of the signs provides a solution to problems that go back to the building of the church in a location that has no property for parking.

When church trustee David Gilchrist asked council for some help with the situation in December, going over some of the history of parking issues, he was told a report would be prepared for council, who would make a decision on the spaces.

The church members had decided to install the signs reserving parking spaces based on what they thought was a decision made years ago, although they didn't feel they needed to put the signs up until recently.

Instead, the town asked that the signs be bagged until council could deal with the issue.

For new people coming to town, staff at local businesses, the hotel, store and condominium construction workers, and even the immediate residents of nearby apartments, the un-

signed spaces intended for the church had become free parking, sometimes for the entire day, overnight and for the weekend, Gilchrist said.

Accessibility to the church became increasingly difficult for some of the older members, especially those with disability issues, with the one spot well-marked in front of a wheelchair ramp often taken.

The agreement approved by council Monday formalizes an arrangement made 55 to

60 years ago, when things were much simpler, said Gilchrist.

He especially liked Cameron's sentiments expressed last week, regarding community social interactions, specifically around Grace United, being more important than parking turnover.

"It's a beautiful place and I think it's really important that as part of a complete community, it's important we have things going on in the Old Town aside from shopping and commercial

activities," Cameron said.

Gilchrist is relieved there is no one-hour parking restriction, which wouldn't work for church members or any of the groups who use the church regularly.

Staff seemed to be more concerned about a business across the street that has only been open a short time, rather than an institution that has been located in the centre of the Old Town for well over a century and a half, said Gilchrist.



Grace United Church on Victoria Street is now permitted to use parking signs that reserve four spaces for them. (Photos by David Gilchrist)



Early Tuesday morning, trucks were still parking outside Grace United Church, including in the space reserved for the minister.



Heinz Probst and others have been busy preparing for Grace United's Jam and Easter Bake Sale Saturday, April 3 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., with pickup outside the church.

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Anne Marie Regehr generously shared love of music

Penny Coles
The Local

St. Patrick's Day at Irish Design was just not the same this year.

Anne Marie Regehr was not there to play her Irish music, as she has for the last 30 years, first on her fiddle, then on an Irish harp, which she learned to play at the age of 60.

It was certainly not the same for her family on their mother's favourite day. They are missing their mother, and her love of music, of Ireland and of all things Irish, says her daughter Diane Haliski.

Anne Marie, who was dedicating much of her time looking after her ailing husband, died suddenly at the age of 83 after suffering a stroke.

Born April 23, 1937 in the Cottage Hospital, she died March 8, "peacefully, with grace, and surrounded by family."

Anne Marie is well-known for playing her music at festivals, concerts, weddings and funerals around the region. She also played for seniors in long-term care residences, and would intersperse her tunes with amusing anecdotes of family history or Irish tales, says Diane, calling herself the Wandering Minstrel.

Generous with her time, and loving to share her passion for music, she would play anywhere she was asked. If she charged for her time, it was a small amount, but anything she made she would save for her next trip to Ireland, says Haliski.

From the time she was a child, Anne Marie longed to visit Ireland, which she did at least 24 times, all but two of them on her own.

"I knew she loved to travel and had been to Ireland several times, but I was shocked to learn she had been that many times," says Diane.

The last time was two years ago, when she was continuing to explore family history. She loved to visit castles and cemeteries, looking for information about her ancestors.

"She felt more at home in Ireland than anywhere," says Diane.

Her first visit was with

friends, but she decided she would see more on her own if she went alone — full of energy and enthusiasm, she would pack as much as she could into every moment of every day when she was away, living "like a gypsy" and enjoying her solitude.

She also made one trip that included Diane and a large group of Irish dancers, who she accompanied to a dance competition.

Her husband Dan, her childhood sweetheart of 63 years, stayed at home, and was always very supportive of his wife and her dreams, says Diane.

Going through her mother's musical history, Diane found six binders packed full of information about places Anne Marie had played, the many people she had connected with and performed with, as she travelled to many locations around Europe and Great Britain, pursuing her love of music.

One tidbit Diane came across was an item about a contest Anne Marie had entered in a pub in Ireland, a traditional door dancing contest — an old door is laid on the floor, on top of a rock, explains Diane.

Her mother not only step-danced on the door, but played her fiddle while she danced, "which gave the Canadian lady the win," she says.

Growing up in St. Davids, Anne Marie was encouraged to play the piano as a child. When she turned 40, she took up the fiddle. She had accompanied many fiddle players on the piano, says Diane, and wanted to learn the instrument herself. She proudly played the hand-made black walnut violin her husband gave her for Christmas one year.

Diane remembers a home filled with music, for her as a child and recently with grandchildren. "We were so lucky to always have music in our lives," she said. And in addition to the many performances on her own, Anne Marie was also musical director for St. Davids Presbyterian Church, and a member of the Niagara Old Time Fiddlers Association and various other groups over the years.

She also remembers great summers in Muskoka, where

her mother had worked at a lodge as a young woman. She had great memories of that time, and took her family back there every summer for many years, creating great memories for them as well, says Diane.

Two of the highlights of her mother's life were opening for American musician Willie Nelson, at one of the Niagara Falls casinos — Diane isn't sure whether that was in the U.S. or Canadian side — and taking the stage to play with the Chieftains, a traditional Irish band formed in Dublin, when they performed in Hamilton.

Anne Marie was also an amateur historian, and loved to traipse through old cemeteries. "She'd drive far just to visit an elderly soul, on the off-chance they may have a story to share about some distant relative," says Diane. "That was exciting for her."

Many of these stories were used in the compilation of her Family History Book. When it was being published, she was advised just to make 100 copies, says Diane, and was surprised to have it sell out at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum.

It included her father and grandfather, Nixon and Ed, who published the Niagara Advance, the local newspaper that almost reached its 100th anniversary before it was shut down.

Ed, her grandfather, came to town in 1919 specifically to start the newspaper, and his son Nixon, Anne Marie's father, took it over and ran it until he sold it in the early 1930s. While Anne Marie was born after her father sold it, she loved to hear the stories her father would tell of those years — he too was a great story-teller — and she was proud of that connection.

When she died, she was working on another family history, this one telling the stories of the men in her family, going back generations, who had served in the military.

Anne Marie had wanted to give it to Diane's son, a captain in the Canadian Armed Forces. Diane says she hasn't been able to find it yet, but she will keep looking — there is so much to go through as a result of her mother's very busy life and

many interests.

Diane says she walked with her mother regularly, and had a hard time keeping up with her — she was very active, dancing and playing her music right up until her stroke. "She seemed so young" says Diane. "She really surprised us."

Her mother was always upbeat, always positive, "and always really supportive of anything we wanted to do. She let us find our own ways, and was always so helpful. She would

help anyone with anything."

She also loved to be out in the community, and going out for dinner with Dan, especially the NOTL Golf Club. They were out for dinner just before her stroke, says Diane. "I'm glad they had that one last time before she died."

A small graveside Celtic service, with some local musician friends, including Doug Miller on flute and Debbie Whitehouse singing some of Anne Marie's favourite Irish

music, was held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

Anne Marie is survived by her husband Daniel, children Heather Williams (Mark), Diane Haliski (Mark Holmes) and Teresa; four grandchildren, three great-grandchildren and her siblings Kathleen Sharpe and Terry Brennan.

She is predeceased by her son Desmond, parents Nixon and Elsie Brennan (Dawson), and brothers Michael, Harry and Dennis.



Anne Marie learned to play the Irish harp at the age of 60.

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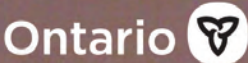
Anne Marie loved to play music with her children and grandchildren, whom she began teaching at a young age. She's shown here with grandkids Cody and Bailey Regehr in 1989 in her music room. (Photos supplied)



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Popular author to do virtual session at library

Penny Coles
The Local

Ian Hamilton, the popular author of the best-selling Ava Lee novels and the more recent Uncle series, will be offering a virtual reading and discussion at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Library.

It was planned for January, says program coordinator Debbie Krause, but had to be cancelled due to the lockdown, with a new date arranged for the Burlington author as soon as the library was able to open again.

While there are no in-person Wine and Words events, she suggests fans of his books can still have a glass of wine and listen to Hamilton from the comfort of their homes.

Although it's a virtual session, Hamilton specifically wanted to hold it at the library. He's very comfortable with organizing online meetings from home, and has his "techie" wife nearby if there are any problems, he says, but he loves to come to Niagara-on-the-Lake. He has friends in town and hopes to be able to fit in a visit of some sort.

He's also looking forward to getting out and about, he says, after a year with a full lineup of events cancelled.

His reading will be from *Fortune*, the newest in what was supposed to be an Uncle Chow Tung trilogy — he knows there will be at least one more spin-off from the Ava Lee books, of which there are now 14.

Ava Lee is a young Chinese-Canadian forensic accountant who specializes in collecting massive debts that aren't likely to be recovered through traditional methods, and Uncle is her Hong Kong partner, helping her deal with the organized corruption that seems to inevitably factor into her work.

Hamilton, now 74, has had an extremely varied and unconventional career himself. He's been a journalist, a civil servant with several different departments of the federal government, and a businessman running seafood companies. He's worked in more than 30 countries, and has travelled to China at least 50 times since he first visited the country in 1989.

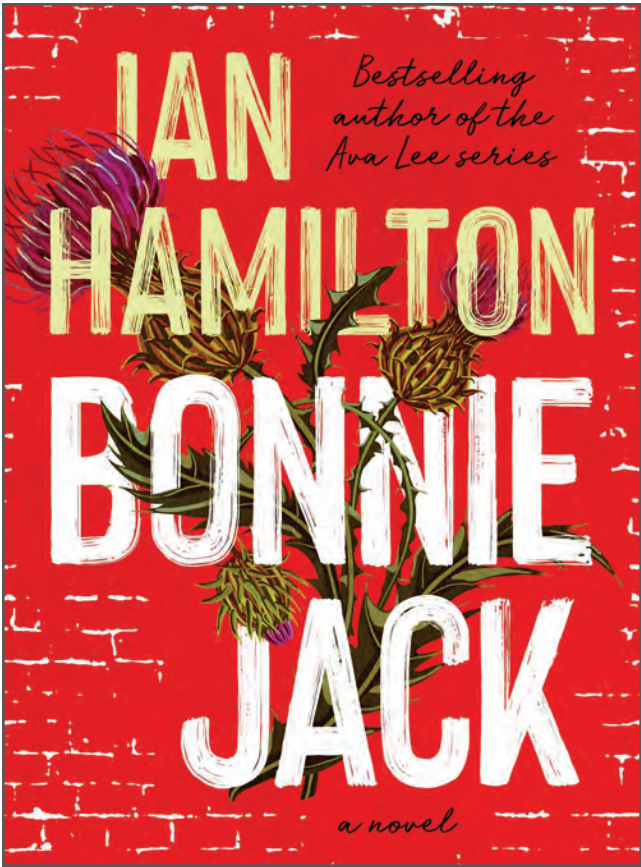
In 2009, while still working, he suffered an aneurism and underwent major surgery. When he recovered, he decided to change his life and spend his remaining time doing exactly what he wanted to do.

So he began taking himself downstairs in his Burlington home every morning, cup of coffee in hand, to write about the exploits of his favourite heroine, drawing on his familiarity with Chinese culture, history, people and food as the backdrop, as well as the many strong women in his family who have surrounded him all his life.

Since then, he's become a prolific and popular author, and will be making his fourth ap-



Ian Hamilton, a prolific and popular author, will make his fourth appearance for a reading at the NOTL library, this time virtually. (Photos supplied)



Ian Hamilton will read from his newest release in the Uncle trilogy, but may also do a reading from *Bonnie Jack*, his latest, a stand-alone novel.

pearance at the NOTL library, where he is always well received, says Krause.

His most recent novel is a stand-alone story that not surprisingly has been kicking around in his head for several years, based on his own father's life.

His father, says Hamilton, was six years old when his mother took him and his sister to a Glasgow movie theatre, and left him there.

"He was raised by his father and was treated abysmally," says Hamilton. "He was bright as hell and evidently a good student, but was forced to leave school when he was 14, and was apprenticed as a bricklayer. The book is dedicated to him, and it reads in part, 'he was a man who struggled to escape his demons, and never quite could.' And that basically sums up his life."

Hamilton's mother didn't know the story of her husband being abandoned and having a sister — he had told her he was an only child. After revealing the story about his childhood one night over dinner, years into their marriage, they decided to travel to England to meet his sister. There they discovered his

mother had been pregnant when she left him, and he had another sister, as well as a half-sister.

They were able to meet all three women, but only one of those meetings went well, says Hamilton.

In *Bonnie Jack*, it was Jack Anderson who was abandoned by his mother in a Glasgow movie theatre. Now living in the U.S. and facing his impending retirement, Jack and his wife Anne travel to Scotland to track down his long-lost sister, where he becomes entangled in local affairs and confronts uncomfortable truths about family.

But true to form, it's Jack's wife whose strength becomes evident at the end of the book, leaving the possibility open that she could feature in future novels.

Hamilton says he might consider doing a reading of this yet-to-be-released novel, although that wasn't originally his plan.

His appearance at the library is a free event presented over Zoom. Attendance is limited, and registration is required.

Zoom log-in information will be emailed to all participants at least 24 hours before each event.

SCHOOLS

ROYAL OAK
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Royal Oak School started a Local Lunch program this year to provide healthy, hot lunches to our students and staff, but also to support our local restaurants that have had a difficult year. Evi Hassan enjoys an Olde Angel Inn lunch in the Early Years room. (Photos supplied)

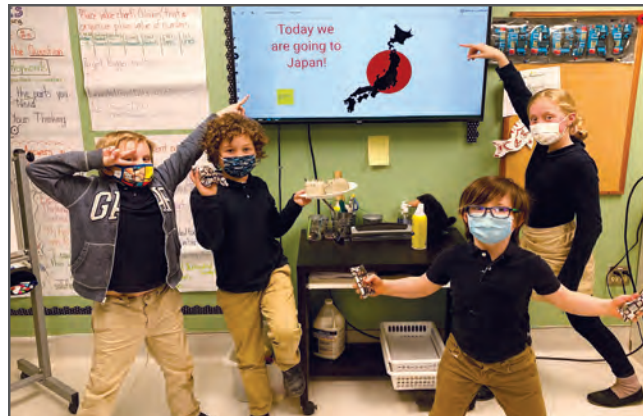
Silas Agate enjoys his freshly rolled sushi made in Passport Club. Though finding opportunities for extracurricular involvement has been difficult this year, Royal Oak is committed to continuing their clubs by cohorting students with their own teachers in afterschool activities and continuing these important social and enriched learning opportunities for their students.



Max Yerich has a healthy salad bowl from Freshii as part of the Local Lunch program.



Riley Murray and Michael Kamatovic show off their bridge engineering skills in STEM Club.



Saxon Reese, Aspen Ziraldo, Silas Agate and Kamila Domaradzki ham it up for the camera.

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LocalSPORTS

Friesens racing each other in NASCAR Truck series

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

This upcoming weekend is a huge one for Niagara-on-the-Lake's Stewart Friesen and his wife Jessica.

On Saturday, March 27, Stewart's Halmar Friesen Racing (HFR) teammate Jessica will join her husband on the track in a NASCAR Camping World Truck Series event in Bristol, Tennessee. The couple have raced as teammates in a number of dirt car events, but this weekend's Pinty's Truck Race on Dirt will be Jessica's debut behind the wheel of a truck in competition.

Jessica will be driving the number 62 Toyota Tundra, while her husband will be strapped into his familiar number 52. It marks the first time the HFR team has fielded two trucks in the same race. The Friesens become the first husband and wife to compete as teammates in the same NASCAR event, while they also become only the second married duo to drive in the same NASCAR race, since Elton Sawyer and Patty Moise in the early 1990s.

"I've been racing sprint cars and modifieds on dirt for my entire racing career," Jessica said in a press release. "It's amazing to get an opportunity to compete at this level. I'm looking forward to the experience of driving a truck for the first time."

Like her husband, Jessica grew up in racing, starting with go-karts at age seven, and working her way up to larger vehicles. In recent years her focus has turned



Stewart Friesen, his wife Jessica and Parker (centre) in the winning circle of the Sunshine Swing contest in Florida in February, 2020. (Photo supplied)

to her family, especially the couple's young son, Parker, who will turn six this year. She also runs a screen-printing business, One Zee Tees, out of their home base in New York state.

But this year she's been more active on the Northeast Dirt Modified circuit, where they often compete together. Last weekend in Port Royal, Pennsylvania, Stewart and Jessica finished third and fourth in a 40-lap Short Track Super Series event won by St. Catharines native Mat Williamson. The couple both began the race in the front row after finishing their heat in first and second.

In a video call with reporters last week, Jessica said Parker is trying to wrap his head around the idea of both of his parents competing in

the trucks. To Parker, Dad races the truck, while Mom races the modifieds.

It's a story Jessica says will be great to tell their grandkids someday. Stewart has been giving Jessica some pointers for her first time in the truck, and she admits his experience on the circuit is valuable.

On the line from the shop Tuesday, where both trucks were being prepared, Stewart says Jessica will take a few days to learn the transmission in preparation for Saturday's race.

"Last weekend in Georgetown, a friend of ours brought his pro-stock and she ran it for a bunch of laps," he adds. "There's a lot of similarities between the truck and the pro-stock. She got the feel of a full-fendered vehicle, sitting on the left-hand side. She looked really good, got really comfortable, and turned a lot of good laps."

Being with the HFR crew for many of her husband's truck races will also serve as valuable experience. "She was at Eldora (Speedway, in Ohio) for every one of our truck starts there," he remembers. "She was on the radio as one of my spotters when we won there in 2019.

She gets it, she knows how the race is played out."

On Sunday, March 28, the big weekend continues for Stewart.

He will be driving the number 77 Spire Motorsports car, sponsored by Halmar International, in his first NASCAR Cup Series event. Also being held at Bristol Motor Speedway, the Food City Dirt Race is 133 miles long, requiring 250 laps to compete.

Having grown up with the family involved in Niagara's dirt track circuit, Stewart will be right at home this weekend. He has over 330 career wins in dirt modified racing behind him, and his first victory in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series came on the clay at Eldora in 2019.

He knows his experience and success on the surface is what attracted Spire to give him this weekend's opportunity. Though he does say it feels kind of surreal to be driving in his first Cup Series event, the 37-year-old credits the hard work of his sponsors and his crew members for helping him get to this point.

"It's a dream come true to compete in the Cup Series,"

he said in a second press release. "It's the pinnacle of motorsports in North America. As a race fan myself, it has always been something I've dreamed about doing."

The process to transform the all-concrete track at Bristol into a red clay surface for this weekend began about three months ago. Over 2,000 loads of dirt, 23,000 cubic yards full, were hauled in to construct the multi-layered surface. Global Satellite Positioning (GPS) equipment on the bulldozers and graders were used to place the Bluff City clay onto the right spots on the track.

It took between nine and 10 feet of dirt to bring the banking at the corners to 19 degrees, while along the front and back stretches it will be one to two feet deep. The total racing surface on the track will be about 50 feet wide.

Stewart sees little difference between the permanent dirt tracks he grew up on and the transformed Bristol tracks. He does say, however, that the NASCAR vehicle he will drive for Spire will not be purpose-made for the surface. That means he will have to get used to how the track smooths out over the

250 laps.

He's looking forward to working with Spire crew chief Kevin Bellicourt, and has felt truly welcomed by the entire team. His usual HALMAR-Friesen crew chief, Tripp Bruce, will be part of that team Sunday, lending his support and guidance on race day. Stewart is hoping he can apply the lessons he learned racing the truck on the Eldora dirt track to compete at a high level at Bristol.

The two drivers will get limited practice laps on Friday. On Friday and Saturday, when both Stewart and Jessica are busy with those practice laps and with the Pinty's Truck Race, Stewart's parents Jamie and Yvonne will be there with Parker to watch how it all unfolds.

Qualifying heats for the truck race will take place Saturday between 4:30 p.m. and 5:15 p.m., with the Pinty's Truck Race on Dirt scheduled for 8 p.m.

The Cup Series qualifiers run from 6 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. Saturday, while the Food City Dirt Race will start at 3:30 p.m. Sunday. Fans of both Friesens can follow the action Saturday on TSN, and Sunday on Fox.

LocalHAPPENINGS

APRIL BREAK AT THE LIBRARY

March 25 @ 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

APRIL BREAK Programs at the NOTL Public Library are now up and OPEN for registration. Please visit <https://notlpubliclibrary.org> for each day's activity details and to register.

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LocalWORSHIP

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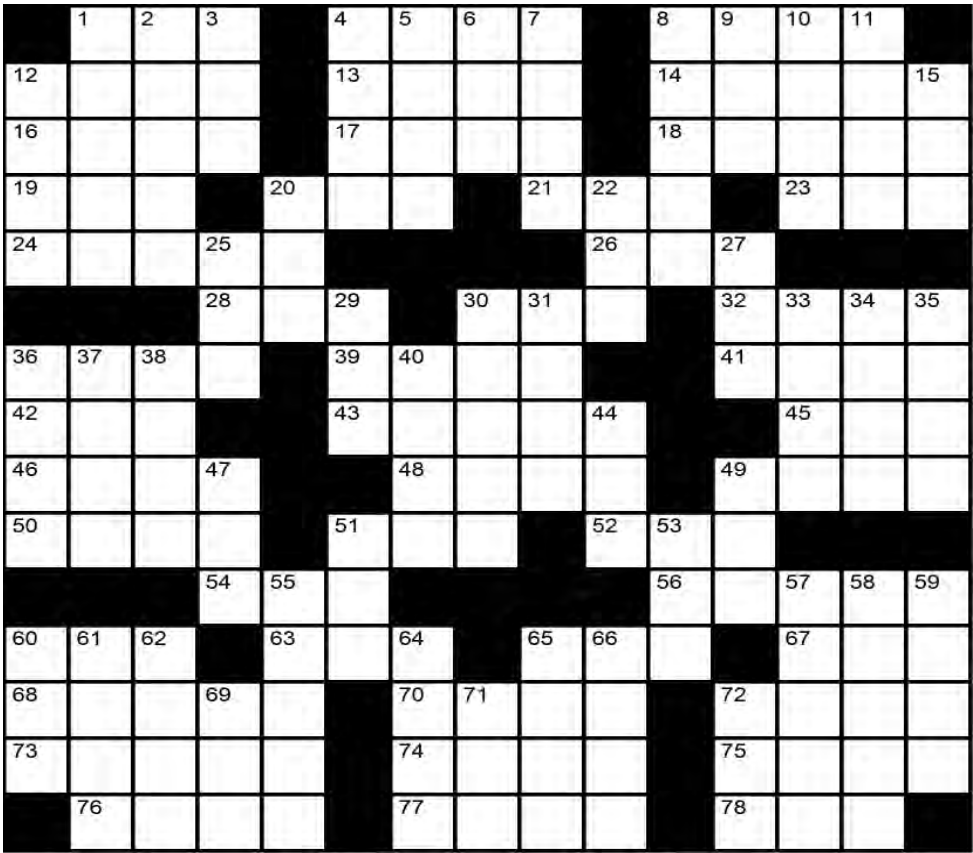
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CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU



- Across:**

 - 1 Spanish hero El ---
 - 4 Deep cut
 - 8 Big cheeses
 - 12 Flower jar
 - 13 --- Falco, Nurse Jackie
 - 14 Paragon
 - 16 Formerly Persia
 - 17 Rich, in Spain
 - 18 Soothing ointment
 - 19 Small cell
 - 20 Author
 - 21 Oregon summer clock setting
 - 23 Lone Star State (Abbr.)
 - 24 One over a major
 - 26 Small amount
 - 28 Neighbor of Neb.
 - 30 Noncom
 - 32 Irritate
 - 36 Open pastry dessert
 - 39 Carnival
 - 41 Nothing
 - 42 Lubricate
 - 43 Untamed
 - 45 Chafe
 - 46 Speck
 - 48 Enticement
 - 49 Software menu option
 - 50 Crystal ---
 - 51 Tucson time
 - 52 West Atlantic international grp.
 - 54 Menagerie
- Down:**

 - 1 Diamond weight unit
 - 2 Writer --- Asimov
 - 3 Room for relaxing
 - 4 Buddhist actor Richard ---
 - 5 Tennis server's edge
 - 6 Attack command
 - 7 Abundance
 - 8 Grand view
 - 9 Actress/director/producer --- Lupino
 - 10 Bombard
 - 11 Preserve
 - 12 Pharmacist's container
 - 15 Latin law
 - 20 Provide
- 56 "A Doll's House" dramatist
 - 60 Atlanta-based health grp.
 - 63 Lettuce variety
 - 65 Building extension at a right angle
 - 67 Gaza Strip grp.
 - 68 Pray in Latin
 - 70 Minnelli with a zee
 - 72 Weeders' tools
 - 73 Country music's --- Tucker
 - 74 "--- in the Dark" (Streep movie)
 - 75 Appetite
 - 76 "--- there, done that"
 - 77 Podded vegetables
 - 78 "--- Porter" (Johnny Cash song)
 - 22 Banned insecticide
 - 25 Possess
 - 27 Show --- (entertainment industry)
 - 29 Rancid
 - 30 Support column
 - 31 Apparatus
 - 33 Slender fork-tailed gull
 - 34 Gunk
 - 35 Drifter
 - 36 Floating bubbles
 - 37 Low calorie variety
 - 38 Loads
 - 40 Long slippery fish
 - 44 Fifth sign of the zodiac
 - 47 Freq. unit
 - 49 Type of computer connection
 - 51 Low
 - 53 Suffer
 - 55 Huge amount
 - 57 Pollen grain
 - 58 Lament
 - 59 Small winning margin
 - 60 Military bed
 - 61 Dingy
 - 62 Malacca
 - 64 Strike with an open hand
 - 65 Writer --- Pound
 - 66 Sung poems
 - 69 Whiskey variety
 - 71 Diamonds
 - 72 Bewildered response

NOTICE

THANKSGIVING

Our heartfelt thanks to Almighty God, Our Blessed Mother Mary, St. Joseph, St. Anne, Our Lady of Guadeloupe, Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Gerard Majella, St. Jude, St. Rita, St. Anthony, St. Therese – the Little Flower, St. Lucy, St. Dymphna and St. Brother Andre for a miracle.

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from
March 17, 2021

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

Across: 1 Cid, 4 Gash, 8 V I Ps, 12 Vase, 13 Edlie, 14 Ideal, 16 Iran, 17 Rica, 18 Salve, 19 AAA, 20 Pen, 21 P D T, 23 Tex, 24 Lt Col, 26 Dab, 28 Wyo, 30 Sgt, 32 Itch, 36 Flan, 39 Fete, 41 Zero, 42 Oil, 43 Feral, 45 Rub, 46 Atom, 48 Lure, 49 Undo, 50 Meth, 51 M S T, 52 O A S, 54 Zoo, 56 Ibsen, 60 C D C, 63 Cos, 65 Ell, 67 P L O, 68 Orare, 70 Liza, 72 Hoos, 73 Tanya, 74 A cry, 75 Urge, 76 Been, 77 Peas, 78 Hey.

Down: 1 Carat, 2 Isaac, 3 Den, 4 Gere, 5 Ad in, 6 Sic, 7 Heap, 8 Vista, 9 Ida, 10 Pelt, 11 Save, 12 Vial, 15 Lex, 20 Ply, 22 DD, 25 Own, 27 Biz, 29 Off, 30 Strut, 31 Gear, 33 Tern, 34 Crud, 35 Hobo, 36 Foam, 37 Lite, 38 A lot, 40 Eels, 44 Leo, 47 MHz, 49 U S B, 51 Moo, 53 All, 55 Ocean, 57 Spore, 58 Elegy, 59 Nose, 60 Cot, 61 Drab, 62 Cane, 64 Slap, 65 Ezra, 66 Lays, 69 Rye, 71 Ice, 72 Huh.

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

PLEASE RECYCLE
THIS NEWSPAPER

The Niagara-on-the-Lake
LOCAL
The trusted voice of our community.

LocalSPORTS

Minor soccer moving ahead with plans for this season

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

With summer on the horizon, Niagara-on-the-Lake Soccer Club president Ted VanderKaay is optimistic that young people will be on the pitch beginning the last weekend of May.

Registration via the online portal opened last week. VanderKaay is encouraging parents to begin signing up their children for divisions from Timbits (U4/5 - born in 2016 or 2017) up to U17 - born in 2004).

According to the 77-page Ontario Soccer Association's (OSA) Return to Play guide, minor soccer games can be played as long as the local public health unit is in either the orange, yellow or green zone of the province's colour-coded system. In the grey and Niagara's current red zone status, games are prohibited, though limited outdoor training is allowed.

"We all kind of hope and expect that we get to the orange rating sooner rather than later," says VanderKaay. "It may not be next week, but we're hoping by

May that we will be. We're saying register now, and we expect to be playing as the region opens up to the orange zone, and we'll have policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety of our participants and our spectators."

The volunteer board has been busily working through the winter on developing those policies and procedures to meet with both OSA and public health guidelines. Changes include instituting a maximum soccer "bubble" of 100 to be enforced this summer, with no intermingling outside of those bubbles.

As well, for the first time the club will have field marshals at all games. Their role will be to ensure that both players and spectators adhere to the COVID-19 rules. There will also be a self-check assessment recorded on game sheets and contact tracing logs. Masks will not be worn on the field, but players will have to put them on while they are on the bench.

In 2020, the almost 400 NOTL youth who usually play in town were kept off the pitch due to COVID-19. VanderKaay

says it was the uncertainty of the early stages of the pandemic that forced the decision.

"The town, the region, the government, no one knew what to expect. There were park closures (by the town) because no one knew what to expect with that. The bright side this year is that there is more knowledge in terms of outdoor activities. I had a meeting with public health last week, and the town the week before. Both are pretty optimistic and encouraging for getting youth activities going outdoors."

He continues, "there's more public guidance in terms of social distancing, sanitation, those types of things. The fact of the matter is, after a year of this, all the governing bodies have a better knowledge base to make decisions on and guidance for the players and spectators outdoors this year."

Most of the kids who play in town participate in house league programs every year, but the club does run a few local travel, or rep teams. As of press time, the particulars that apply to their competition had not yet

been ironed out.

"We hope to run four travel teams this year," VanderKaay explains, "but right now I know nothing about how the NSL (Niagara Soccer League) is going to manage the leagues and what we can expect. We're still waiting for direction from them."

There is no doubt that, with all that children have had to deal with for the past year, a return to some physical activity would be a big boost to their mental health. A University of Michigan department of psychology study has shown that for children and adolescents, moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and exercise are associated with elevations in self-esteem, improved concentration, reductions in depression, and improvements in sleep. And the World Health Organization says that for children, regular physical activity helps support healthy growth and development.

"The town and the region are really behind us, trying to get kids outdoors," an enthusiastic VanderKaay says. "It's good for their mental health, it's good for their physical and social

well-being, and with the guidance from them, and Ontario Soccer, we can forge forward with confidence saying we can do this."

The not-for-profit club is still actively recruiting local businesses for sponsorship of teams for the upcoming season, though club officials recognize that many business owners are feeling a financial pinch from the pandemic. In spite of that, registration fees for 2021 are

holding at the same price as they were back in 2019.

VanderKaay adds that all registrations are being done online this year, to avoid any in-person contact. As well, a move to a new platform provided by Power-Up Sports means that families who had previously been in the club's system may have to create a new account.

To register your child for soccer this summer visit notlsoccer.ca.



NOTL Soccer Club president Ted VanderKaay is hoping there will be games on the soccer field by May. (Photo supplied)

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