Although Mother Nature played a trick on us with Sunday’s storm, it didn’t deter this angler from trying his luck in Queenston, hoping for a salmon or trout. Sometimes fishermen say if they’re lucky they can catch walleye or steel-head. The river current is strong, so the trick is to find a spot where fish can rest, usually along the rocky banks. Although there was a time when the Niagara River was an important source of food, today most fish are thrown back in. (Fred Mercnik)
Coyote expert offers tips to residents

Tina Clement chats with coyote expert Lesley Sampson after a meeting at the community centre last week. (Penny Coles)

Penny Coles
The Local

Tina Clement, an urban transplant unaccustomed to living in a town where you’re never far from a rural area, is not comfortable sharing her neighbourhood with coyotes. When she heard about sightings on The Village streets where she walks her 15-pound dog, she bought a whistle and made sure to carry it with her. She also learned how to behave around the animals, so the afternoon she came face-to-face with one “trotting at a good clip” toward her, she quickly tucked her Yorkshire Terrier under her arm, blew the whistle and walked backward toward her Elizabeth Street home.

But she wasn’t happy about the encounter, and she didn’t mind saying she was afraid. “Fortunately we were close to home, but I was shaking like a leaf. The whole situation is frightening. I’m a Toronto girl, and this is new to me.”

The experience has driven her to walk her “furry” terrier on busy downtown streets “to demonstrate to her” that she’s more comfortable, “and she said. “She has made more than 800 presentations, mostly to municipalities, in the last 20 years, but her work with coyotes began in NOTL, and led to establishing Coyote Watch to educate people. That was her task two decades ago, when residents of the Williams and Nas sau Streets neighbourhood, afraid of a family of coyotes living nearby, wanted action from the Town.

She recalls going to see the late Bob Howse, then Town clerk, whom she describes as a trailblazer in terms of creating peaceful coexistence. With the help of his then-assistant Holly Dowd, it was arranged for her to speak at a meeting to educate the public:

Residents were calling for relocation, but Sampson convinced them they could protect their pets and live without fear for their own safety.

Coyotes become more visible when their habitat is being destroyed, and the media contributes to the fear of residing with myths about the animals’ behaviour, she said.

Understanding their behaviour should alleviate some of that fear, said Sampson, who attempted to dispel some of those myths:

“When I sit down with people from municipalities, it’s about talking about what works, and what’s safe for you,” she said.

Coyotes take cues from what humans are demonstrating, she explained, and they need to be given a clear message to stay away.

“Coyotes are not new to Ontario,” she added. “Maybe some of you are, but they’ve been here for a long time. They’ve suggested when pets disappear, there are other reasons more likely to be the cause than a coyote. “Bad things happen to animals. They get hit by a car, or someone else may take them. Unless you see it happen, it’s hard to blame a coyote. From a scientific viewpoint, it’s not likely.”

Sampson said she would investigate for any potential food sources, including bird feeders or cat food left outside for feral cats.

Both attract rodents, and rodents attract coyotes, as well as birds of prey.

“We’re not really here because of coyotes, we’re here because of the ecosystem of which they are a part,” Sampson said.

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Meals on Wheels takes Lord Mayor on deliveries

Penny Coles

A brief glimpse of the lives of people who receive Meals on Wheels in Niagara-on-the-Lake came as a surprise to Lord Mayor Betty Disero during some recent home visits, but also provided some insight into the needs of residents and what more can be done to help them.

The non-profit volunteer service is celebrating its 50th anniversary in Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls who are in need of well-balanced, nutritious meals. To recognize the milestone, to showcase the work that is done, to hear the stories of need and to highlight the service, Mayor Disero invited to help deliver meals Thursday to seven homes — six individuals living alone, and one couple. It was an eye-opener, she said.

The service is not based on economic need, as she soon discovered. It’s also not only seniors who qualify — it can be any body who is physically or mentally challenged. There is a cost to the meal, although it is kept reasonable with funds from the Province and administered through the Local Health Integration Network. But this branch is always underfunded, she was told, and depends on donations to make up the difference.

After picking up meals at the Niagara Falls hospital, Disero spent three hours driving through rural and urban areas with local volunteers Bobbie Corcoran and Kim McDowell. Both are seasoned drivers with Meals on Wheels, and at each stop they prepared the lord mayor for what to expect as she was introduced to a microcosm of need in NOTL.

In some cases, it’s a matter of putting a meal on a tray or table inside the home, with the client remaining unseen, by choice. Others enjoy a conversation — some more than the meal itself — and checking on the condition of the recipient is as much a part of the service as the nutritious meal, which this particular day included chicken, pasta, a vegetable, soup and dessert, kept hot in an insulated bag for the duration of the deliveries.

Others enjoy a family member or neighbour who puts Meals on Wheels in touch with clients, arranged as much for the added reassurance of someone checking in with their loved one as for the need for the meal itself.

“We see a large range of situations and economics,” said Corcoran, explaining some can be of concern because of poor living conditions, but help is offered when necessary, although not always accepted.

The volunteers, both from NOTL themselves, described one situation where the agency called in police when a meal dropped off hadn’t been touched when they returned with the next one, only to discover the client had died alone.

Another client was living with a relative in what seemed like an unsafe situation — volunteers felt the son might not actually be giving the meals to his aging mother, whose physical and mental health were deteriorating, and reported their fears to the agency. The client was taken to hospital, where she now awaits a room in a long-term care residence.

“This is one of the things about Meals on Wheels we want people to understand,” said McDowell. “We do more than deliver meals.”

At the first delivery, where a client couldn’t be seen and didn’t respond to a shout-out from the usual arrangement to leave the meal on a tray outside the door in this rural apartment, with its overwhelming odour of cat urine — McDowell said she would make a phone call to the office to have someone follow up to make sure the client was safe. In that case, she said, “It was a neighbour who reached out to us to say he felt this gentleman needed our help. The neighbour might be able to check up on him.”

Deliveries continued, to an immaculate bungalow where a woman, living on her own after the death of her husband, invited the volunteers into her cheery kitchen and wanted to chat.

She was happy to see the lord mayor and recalled clearly the conversation she and a friend had with her during the election campaign last fall. Animated and laughing as she spoke, she said she was glad Disero had won and was doing a great job.

“I can’t believe she remembers that conversation,” said Disero.

The last stop was in a new and upscale subdivision of the Old Town, where an elderly and frail gentleman came to the door. Polite and appreciative, he accepted two meals, one for himself, the other for his wife. Without knowing the details of his situation, McDowell said it likely his wife is no longer able to cook, and as her caregiver, he can’t prepare nutritious meals for the two of them.

“It’s not about affordability,” she said. “There are many different reasons for wanting meals.”

You could live in the most expensive house in NOTL, and not be able to make a meal,” added Corcoran. “The need for assistance knows no economic barriers. Money can’t buy health.”

Corcoran typically delivers hot lunches every Thursday, alternating weeks with her husband and a friend along. Although it’s not always the same route and the same clients, she does get to know most of them.

Clients are encouraged to eat their meal when it’s received — flavour, food safety and nutritional value are compromised if it’s reheated, especially the entire day. If it’s too much for one sitting, soup and dessert can be kept for dinner, she said.

The meals are plated cold by Niagara Health staff at the St. Catharines hospital site. Menus are prepared on the advice of dieticians and special diets are taken into consideration. Although it’s a set menu, clients’ preferences are taken into account and alternatives offered when possible.

The food to be delivered to clients in Niagara Falls and NOTL is sent to the Niagara Falls hospital, where it is heated in the kitchen. The area becomes a beehive of activity as the meals are quickly and efficiently packed into bags and loaded by volunteers ready to begin their route.

McDowell delivers frozen meals every Tuesday, which is a separate service. Clients can order as many as they want, and have choices — in some cases, one delivery can be 14 meals, for two people each day of the week.

Some clients order a combination of hot meals for certain days of the week, and supplementary frozen meals for the other five.

Hot meals are $7.20 each and frozen meals range in price from $5.40 for the entire order to $8.50 for soup and dessert included.

The Niagara Falls NOTL location runs on bare bones staff: Marianne McKea is the executive director, and operates the program with two part-timers. The eight-person board and all drivers are volunteers. Gas money is offered, but most donate back to the program, said McDowell, although some seniors are coming on board and as gas prices rise are accepting it to offset the cost of volunteering.

In 2018, said McDowell, 3,896 meals were delivered to NOTL clients, an increase of 30 per cent over the year before. Some clients require meals only for a short time — in some cases during convalescence after they’ve been released from hospital and are recovering from surgery or an illness.

In other situations, it helps to keep clients living in their home, preventing or delaying the need for hospitalization or a long-term care residence.

Veterans receive Meals on Wheels free.

The local branch is always in need of volunteers and donations, said McDowell.

To volunteer, donate or for more information call 905-336-7545 or visit http://www.mealsonwheelsniagara.ca.

Cheques can be mailed to Meals on Wheels, c/o Box 1018, Niagara Falls, ON L2E 6X2.
Turning old bikes into new

Lauren O’Malley
The Local

Steve Irwin’s newest endeavour might have been in store for a life encounter. The owner of Vino Velo bike sales, rentals and repairs noticed a pair of Hispanic farm labourers slowing down as they rode by his Virgil shop, repeatedly. Finally, one day they asked to stop.

Irwin managed to get the story: One of the women had been riding a bike with only one pedal. On the other side, she just had the metal spindle on which to rest her foot. The workers wanted to know how much a repair would cost.

Irwin promptly replaced the spindle with a proper repair and sent the ladies on their way without charging a cent. He keeps the spindle with a proper repair would cost.

The issue they have yet to solve completely is lights and reflectors, for the safety of the cyclists who are often on the road after dark. Irwin has an idea. “I would like to do a reflector drive,” he says. “I’m thinking about going around and asking suppliers to print their logo onto reflective bands; I’m thinking about going to wineries and to community organizations.”

Weiner also has a solution. “Kurt Gwisdek, the owner of Liberty! Bicycles, has an idea. “I would love them to do a reflector drive, too. We’re getting those for $20, and we’re thinking about selling them to the farm workers for $10. We’ll cover the other $10 per set.”

“We are trying to make it easier for those who have money left over at the end of the year, then we haven’t given it where it was needed,” says Weiner.

Both Vino Velo and Bikes for Farmworkers provide free bike repairs for migrant workers, and both teams make a point of connecting with the visitors on a very human level. “I make eye contact and smile at them, which tends to surprise them,” says Irwin, who also donates used tires to the cause. “If you’re not going to use them and there’s any life left in them I’ll give them to BFF or directly to farm workers. I love to help.”

Steve Irwin looks fondly upon a piece salvaged while repairing a migrant worker’s broken bike pedal, which gave him an idea of how to help farm workers. (Lauren O’Malley)

Freecycling better than offloading at the dump

Lauren O’Malley
The Local

Where they’ve been bitten by the minimalism bug, or are just feeling the urge to purge for spring cleaning, there is a better option than the local dump for the things you’re jettisoning.

Freecycle is a website creating a network of gifting in communities all over the world. It’s a non-profit, grassroots, community-focused network of people who are giving away things they no longer need, to people who are grateful for receiving them. The classic adage, “one person’s trash is another person’s treasure,” is manifested online.

Local Nina Otulakowski used Freecycle to help a neighbour neighbour 30 years of stuff when they went into a retirement residence, she says. “It gave me a sense of satisfaction that it’s not going into the dump.”

Otulakowski has also given away portable heaters through the site — “It’s easier to give things away than to go all the trouble of selling them for a few bucks,” she says. “It’s less rewarding financially, but more so emotionally.”

She also describes the site as an “important resource that is underscored.”

Membership is required, and is free. Everything posted must be free, legal, and appropriate for all ages. There are specific rules of etiquette for the process, which tend to be followed.

Using the sharing site is simple; the rules and protocol are clearly laid out, and basically boil down to “be nice.” Also, no swaps or trades, and keep “wanted” posts to a minimum.

“It’s a nice network,” says another local fan of the sharing network, Julia Buxton Cox. She joined the Oakville and Burlington Freecycle groups before moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake, and was amazed by the generosity of the process.

“A few immersion blenders was my first receive,” she recalls. “I thought, ‘What? Someone is giving this away for free?’ And I just kept getting gifts from there on.”

Buxton Cox says she loves being part of this community of gifting, and particularly enjoys the “sense of community rather than a business transaction. It just made us feel good because it wasn’t going to the dump, or for profit.”

Over the years she and her husband have given away any number of things, and have received moving boxes, patio stones for landscaping, an ice cream maker from B&Q, a hand immersion blender, even a VHS of the fifth in The Land Before Time series, completing their daughter’s collection.

“I like it, and a lot of people don’t know about it,” says Buxton Cox, eager to share the experience of “gifting and generosity; repurposing and reusing. Why spend money when you can reuse?”

There are currently active groups in NOTL, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls. Someone in town, for example, was recently looking for an indoor clothes drying rack, while in St. Catharines someone was offering a retro kitchen scale, and someone else was seeking crafts supplies. In Niagara Falls there was a calico cat on offer, and for need for buttons.

Buxton Cox sees further opportunities for the site, including sharing volunteer services.

“People would be willing to share their services for free could post them,” she says optimistically. “She also sees potential for seed sharing, for example.

More information can be found at freecycle.org.
Queenston cleanup has become an annual tradition

Lauren O’Malley
The Local

The Queenston cleanup started with three residents who called themselves the Friends of Queenston: Jim Armstrong, Graham Keene, and Doug King. The idea may or may not have been developed in a hot tub.

This was several years ago, and the event was subsequently paused for several years. Three years ago Adrian Schoot Uiterkamp and Armstrong started it up again, “because Jim and I are very nature-oriented and environmentally friendly,” says Schoot Uiterkamp.

“This is also about trying to connect with Queenstoners,” says the community-minded man from the Netherlands. “Cleanup has two meanings: cleaning up the town physically, as well as a loose active connection, an informal getting together.”

The 24-year Queenston resident goes on to explain it’s a Queenston Residents Association event: everyone from the community is welcome. “Number one, it’s about nature. Number two, meet your community residents in a different way,” he says.

According to Schoot Uiterkamp, most people — about a dozen of them — return every year. “It’s just good fun.”

Resident Sue Stecyk makes homemade goodies, cookies and muffins: “We start and finish with those,” he says, and points out it will only be cancelled in the event of heavy rain.

Schoot Uiterkamp says the bulk of the collection takes place on Niagara Parks Commission property, along the river’s edge, paths, and at the lookout point. “We start at the library and then send groups out, depending on how many people show up,” he says.

He says between the wind and the raccoons — who take out the whole garbage bag to find what they want — there is a lot of trash around. “Off-season, Niagara Parks can’t keep up with the garbage bins. I don’t blame too many people — I don’t even blame the raccoons.”

The local tells of Scott, “an early morning person in town, who walks every morning with a garbage bag and picks stuff up,” says Schoot Uiterkamp.

“He says he sees things in the same spot everyday: coffee cups, beer cans.” Schoot Uiterkamp speculates the wind blows things out of pick-up truck beds, where people toss them, innocently believing they’re not littering.

“Last year we collected 30 bags of trash,” says the event organizer. “We try to separate the recycling into clear bags so it can be processed. We have found full tires — people are dumping sometimes,” he says. “We have found TVs, boards, odds and ends, metal chains, and planks and other material from renovations.”

“I pick up the filled bags in my truck and drop them off at the overflow parking lot of the boat ramp, and then I let [the NPC] know,” he says. “They pick everything up between 1 and 2 p.m. and dispose of the waste.”

“This is a nice story,” says the former stay-at-home dad who now works for the parks commission.

“The first year we did a cleanup, I collected the bags in my truck and delivered them to the drop-off point, then parked my truck in my driveway. Another truck drove by, and the driver stopped and asked if I had been dumping garbage. He had seen me drop off the bags and was concerned. I explained the situation, and was grateful he followed up, especially since he did so without confrontation. I like that people speak up about dumping.”

“Now we have safety vests for safety, and for professionalism,” Schoot Uiterkamp explains the potential confusion of the event’s name. Earth Day is officially April 22, and his event is on April 6. “I called it ‘Earth Day’ cleanup on purpose and not on Earth Day,” he says.

“There are so many events going on that this provides an alternative day. But even if there was no Earth Day we would do this. It’s a community event. I don’t care about the date, Earth Day should be every day; Earth Hour should be every hour. We should be conscious every day,” he says.

“We should all do as many things as we can do to take care of the Earth,” he says with conviction.

To participate in the cleanup, meet at the Queenston library on Saturday, April 6 at 10 a.m. Garbage and recycling bags are supplied, as are trash grabbers and safety vests.

It is recommended people bring their own gloves. Cleanup ends at 12 p.m. Questions can be emailed to Schoot Uiterkamp at advills5@gmail.com.

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Out like a lion

The flag flying above snow-covered trees shows March was true to form in Queenston: It came in like a lamb and went out like a lion. Residents are hoping for a better day Saturday for their annual cleanup. (Fred Mercnik)

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Learning to live in farm country

When you’re surrounded by woods, conservation areas and farm country, on a still night, the eerie howling of coyotes can often be heard, sometimes sounding as if a pack is travelling near by.

It can be disconcerting for residents whose houses are smack dab in the middle of the woods, conservation areas and vineyards, and houses in closer proximity. Fair enough. It could be there could be a ‘Join the Conversation’ about life in a rural area, such as the need for farmers to spray, use bird bangers or wind machines, and any relevant policies or bylaws that might be helpful for newcomers to know.

How to coexist with coyotes might be another part of the conversation. If the Town could be pro-active about providing such helpful information, possibly even printing brochures that could be distributed through the local Newcomers Club, we might have fewer unhappy residents trying to deal with the realities of living near farm country, and having coyotes as their new neighbours.

Penny Coles

LOCAL FINDS

What’s the story?

by Donald Combe
Special to The Local

This expensive Wallace stone in St. Mark’s cemetery raises many questions. Unlike contemporary monuments, which typically give names and dates, there is a story told or suggested. Readers can draw their own conclusions. What is on the stone was what Wallace thought important—he was not the bastard son and the location of the family was important.

Raising a flag for autism awareness

The 12th annual World Autism Awareness Day was recognized Tuesday at the town hall, as Niagara-on-the-Lake joined communities around the world. Raising the flag for autism awareness was Coun. Stuart McCormack, Lord Mayor Betty Disero, Amy Dunn, vice-president of the Niagara chapter of Autism Ontario, her father John Dunn, and her son Connor Tilley, a volunteer with Autism Ontario. (Photo supplied)
Bruce Trail there for all to explore
Tough solo trek created 37 days of memories for young hiker

Growing up in Queenston, the quiet and impossibly picturesque village of NOTL, I was exposed to the Niagara Escarpment every day. This neighbourhood was, and arguably still is, the ultimate playground for kids in NOTL. At any age in my life, the Bruce Trail has served as the best way to access the forests, steep hills, and streams that dapple the escarpment. My relationship with Canada’s oldest and longest marked hiking trail was set in stone in 2014 when I decided to hike all 890 kilometres of it.

You might suppose having the Bruce Trail right in my backyard made it a constant tease and source of wonder from the get-go. It is there for you to explore any day, too. I started thinking about it as early as Grade 10. In order to size up the possibility of doing a multi-week solo trek, I even wrote a fictional but totally forgettable little novel about hiking it. Nothing came of that, but the thought of attempting this long-brewing life goal kept me awake for many nights, staring at the ceiling.

In 2013, a switch flipped on inside me, and I knew spring 2014 was the time to try it. I would get dropped off in Tobermory on the remote Northern Bruce Peninsula, and hike home to Queenston in one piece, hiking, sleeping, eating, and living it up on that trail. I was locked in. In the winter leading up to that, I was working an overloaded school semester, bartending until 4 a.m., and training in the early winter mornings between 4 and 6 a.m. I told myself hiking something of this magnitude in one shot would require a stamina upgrade of sorts, so in both Guelph and NOTL I trained lots in the nastiest winter nights, outdoors. Funny how I ended up hiking back over the same spots I used for training.

Somewhere on a cold winter night in Queenston, at a stupidly late hour, there was a guy with his backpack loaded with textbooks and dumbbells just running around. I’m glad I took the time to prepare myself, because mother nature has a fascinating way of making you feel unprepared. You don’t train yourself to lose toenails or get hypothermia. But I sincerely enjoyed the challenge — when the rain was heavy, the storms were nasty, and the bugs and mud covered every bit of me, I thrived in its uniqueness.

I had to find humour and excitement through adversity at times. I walked ankle-deep through icy floodwaters, dealt with a tornado warning, and pushed through hoards of mosquitoes and black flies. Snow, sunburn, bugs — I saw it all, in beautiful and ecologically diverse southern Ontario landscapes. Yes, I would do it again in a heartbeat.

What’s the most extraordinary memory for me on that hike in the spring of 2014? Walking home over the course of 37 days and ending in my own backyard in Queenston, Tobermory and its cairn at the end of this mammoth trail, and Queenston Heights at the other, boasting the only other cairn. By the 37th day of this expedition, I had been completely alone for the vast majority of it, including the nights. My feet had been gliding over territory new to my eyes. Knowing where I was on the map (most of the time) was just something familiar on paper, but excitingly new to me. It fueled my trip.

Not day 37 though. I was in this mesmerized state, but wide awake to surroundings I had seen hundreds of times before. I was back on NOTL’s section of the Bruce Trail, where my journey ended. I have written of these thick forests in previous articles, containing nationally rare tree species and complex habitats.

The epiphanies washed over my muddied, battered body as I walked this stretch. I remembered that spot where my St. Davids school buddies and I stopped to have some life chats and go for a swim. That spot my mountain bike and knee smashed into, twice.

There’s that one big tree near Queenston where I celebrated my sixth birthday at the base with my friends (yep, full-blown nature geek). Maybe of you know which one I’m talking about. The flashbacks were awesome.

And so is the town of NOTL, plus my family and friends — more than $27,000 was raised for local charities through this hike. It makes me realize what a treasure it is to have this public hiking trail here in town, accessible from about eight different points within NOTL’s boundaries.

The Bruce Trail around here has stunning sections to explore in all seasons. I particularly like the whole stretch between Queenston Heights and Four Mile Creek Road, especially approaching sunset hours.

Remember to always go prepared, whether it’s five weeks or five minutes on the Bruce Trail.

Feel free to check out Trail of Life Charity Hike on YouTube: whikes@gmail.com

A stretch of Bruce Trail near St. Davids taken this weekend, after the classic winter’s-not-over storm dropped some snow. (Owen Bjorgan)
I love and respect Takeshi. I love and respect them all of the chefs. Also, it reminded me of how talented Monday with Ganassini as a contestant, seven of Top Chef Canada, off: The first episode of season 10: " says the 31-year-old. "You feel wildly uncomfortable. To reach the next echelon, focus on growth as an individual — to really level up as a person — to really necessary — if you want to achieve the feel of the show as “the most protective. He is the most supportive. He is the most supportive. He is the most supportive.

Ganassini got her acceptance call while prepping products for her plant-based food service, Staff Meal Niagara. The show’s producer says, “I need you to be in Toronto tomorrow morning with your audition dish. I’m just letting you know; the competition starts now!” Ganassini says she recognized how things would go, what the demands would be like, when she got that call. I felt very relaxed about it. I didn’t put any pressure on myself. I decided to just enjoy the moment. I truly believe that people are the most successful are those who lose themselves in the moment.”

On camera. I love being challenged to step out of my comfort zone,” she says. She placed second on the television series Chopped in 2015 — “I lost to the nicest man in the world,” she says, with no remorse. “I always forget what the city was like,” says the former Torontonian. “I had to pack three blocks away from the interviews, and drag a cooler while carrying a Vitamix with a bag around my shoulder,” she mimes the awkwardness. “Three blocks. Not one person offered to help,” she laughs.

Overall Ganassini describes the feel of the show as “the most cordial Canadian show. Seriously, I love the judges so much. I would want to hang with them. I truly felt they were rooting us on — not that we weren’t tough on us.” She continues. “They are really good at what they do, I truly respected their input. I really got the feeling they were in our court, not out to lambaste us — they really wanted to be positive.”

Head judge and restaurateur Mark McEwan is “really empathetic,” she says. Of the show’s host (and restaurant co-owner) Eden Grinshpan, she says, “If she lived here in Niagara-on-the-Lake I would want to be her best friend. She made me feel so comfortable, a vegan smoked carrot tartare with whipped cashews, za’atar, erkaft cream, with pickled vegetables and fresh herbs. She made an “everything” bagel with all the trimmings.

The host sets the tone for the whole show — she is exactly the same off camera as on.”

“Canada’s Top Chef is very light on melodrama, it’s much more about the quality of the food produced. I genuinely feel like the quality of the food is the utmost, but the drama gets in there.”

While the season is being aired, Ganassini can’t even hunt at her future standing or on-camera seasons. And she can, does, describe the overall experience. “It was a mixed bag of characters. It was hard to fit into a social dynamic, especially for me not being in a restaurant,” she says. While Ganassini has had plenty of experience in professional kitchens, she has been outside the restaurant realm for the last five years. And another factor in her unravelling. “Social anxiety is something I’ve struggled with since I was 10 years old,” she says. “This situation was an actual nightmare for that. I wish I didn’t feel that way but it’s in my DNA and it’s just something I had to get over.”

She goes on to say, “The challenges are hard but your motor skills take over. Your mental state dictates your performance. Confidence is a massive component, and it’s really easy to doubt yourself, especially when being judged.”

Another element weighed in on — or before — May 20th, as the final episode of the season airs. The host sets the tone for the whole show — she is exactly the same off camera as on.”

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Learn about the Crooks at church lecture

Museum partners with St. Andrew’s for 225th anniversary

Lauren O’Malley
The Local

According to Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Rick Meloen, there were movers and shakers in town as far back as the early 1800s. The Crooks family emigrated from Scotland in Niagara’s burgeoning years. Two of the area’s most successful merchants, one of whom graduated to owning a couple of mills. According to Meloen, “Mill owners were people of significance at that time.”

Youngest brother John Crooks was the first person to be buried in the cemetery of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, in 1833. As part of the church’s 225th anniversary, Meloen will be sharing his passion for local history by speaking about the lives of the Crooks at the Niagara Historical Society & Museum’s joint effort with St. Andrew’s on Wednesday, April 10 at 10 a.m.

Meloen, who moved to NOTL at the tender age of two and grew up in Chautauqua, began indulging his fascination with history nine years ago. That was when he retired from his three decades of work with the Town, lastly as the roads supervisor. During the time he was responsible for 240 kilometres of roads, 40 kilometres of sidewalks, and all of the attendant drainage, sewers, trees, construction, and repairs, “he says. “I retired nine years ago, and jumped right into the War of 1812 bicentennial committee, the Canada 150 committee, and the Heritage Trail committee. My wife says she sees me less now than when I was working.”

“For the War of 1812 initiatives, I took on the persona of Reverend John Burns, who was the Presbyterian minister during that time,” he says. As a result he became quite knowledgeable about St. Andrew’s.

“One of the unusual aspects of the venerable church is its square pews. Meloen explains, “Box pews were common in those days. St. Mark’s (Anglican Church) also had them, but removed them in 1892. People would rent, or purchased pew in those days, that’s how it worked. There was no central heating, so this was a way of keeping yourself warm. People would have brought in little braziers filled with hot coals to keep the boxes warm.”

“My interest in the Crooks family came out of my work with the 1812 committee,” says Meloen of his lecture’s subject. “Maps of old Niagara-on-the-Lake show Crookston, which was in the area of Mississauga Beach in Chautauqua, near property owned by the Crooks. Brothers James and William Crooks were merchants in the early stages of the town’s development, arriving in 1792. They went on to hold positions of power in Upper Canada, and both fought in the military.”

“I can’t tell you much more, because if I do no one will come to the lecture,” says the small-scale farmer, with his typical humour and humility.

The Crooks Family: Movers and Shakers in Upper Canada lecture will take place in the church’s sanctuary, at 323 Simcoe St. Refreshments will follow in Kirk Hall. Admission is free, with donations to the church and the museum welcome.

The final lecture in the series, “Tommy, Ows Yer Soul? – Church Parades of the Niagara Garrison,” led by Ron Dale, will take place on May 8.
Spring into Music series set to start

Staff
The Local

 Bravo Niagara’s sixth annual Spring into Music Series begins next week with two concerts at Stratus Vineyards.

On Friday, April 12, Cheng Duo will be featured at the winery. Named one of CBC Music’s 30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30, the brother-and-sister duo of 21-year-old cellist Bryan Cheng and pianist Silvie Cheng will perform.


On April 13, the series continues with Nat Cole. A King’s Centennial, Celine Peterson (daughter of legendary jazz pianist Oscar Peterson) has brought together four dynamic artists to present a unique tribute in honour of Nat’s life and career. Led by vocalist Paul Martinson, hailed as having “one of the most beautiful vocal instruments in the business today” (Chicago Tribune), this show delves into the repertoire of Cole’s that many have yet to discover. This special tribute features the trio of acclaimed pianist Ben Paterson, winner of the 2018 Ellis Marsalis International Piano Competition. Paterson will be joined by JUNO Award-winning artists Mike Downes on bass and Jim Donaus on drums.

The series continues May 11, 12 and 25. On May 11 Grammy-nominated Cuban jazz pianist Alfredo Rodriguez and percussionist Pedrito Martinez will be taking listeners on a unique and exciting journey. A protege of Quincy Jones, Rodriguez was schooled in the rigorous classical conservatories of Havana. Martinez’s musical training came directly from the streets of Old Havana. He has performed with artists such as Sting, Paul Simon, and Wynton Marsalis.

On May 12, The New Gen project pairs two of Canada’s rising classical musicians—Brian Mangrum (horn) and Boson Mo (violin), with veteran artist James Parker in a concert of solo and chamber works. He has been described as “one of the most searching mind’s intellects and 10 of the nimblest fingers in the business” by The Globe and Mail. And to wrap up the series, on May 25 the Piano Six Gala Concert features internationally-renowned Canadian concert pianists Murika Bournaki, David Jibir, Angela Park, Ian Parker, Anastasia Rizikov, and Daniel Wlasowski.


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May Court Club helps women, children

Penny Coles
The Local

A group of Niagara-on-the-Lake women, members of the oldest service club in Canada, are preparing for a fun and fundraising day Sunday that will benefit Niagara women and children.

Joyce Babcock, one of the NOTL organizers of the event, is a former elementary school teacher with the local school board who wanted to do something meaningful following her retirement in 2013.

She became acquainted with the May Court Club at a Christmas Tree raffle in St. Catharines. She had bought a ticket and won a beautifully-decorated tree, and liked the club’s approach to donating to a variety of non-profit organizations helping local women and children.

“I decided to join, and I haven’t looked back,” she said. She is vice-president of the Niagara branch, and will take the leadership role next year.

The May Court Club was founded in Ottawa by Lady Aberdeen in 1898. Born Ishbel Marie Marjoribanks, with Scottish and Irish heritage, she married John Campbell Hamilton-Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen, then governor general of Canada, and continues as the club patron today.

“She had a vision,” said Babcock. “She knew there was a lot of prosperity, and saw young women from privileged backgrounds who needed to have something worthwhile to do with their time. They needed a challenge, and some work experience, so she started the club to encourage volunteerism.”

Lady Aberdeen was a woman ahead of her time, well-meaning and compassionate — and also a lady of action. In the five years she was in Canada from 1893 to 1898, she also founded the Victorian Order of Nurses and the Council of Women. She was sensitive to social ills and at the forefront of the reform movement in Canada, believing in and working toward social justice for all.

In addition to the annual tree raffle and this Sunday’s event, the club holds a toy drive at Christmas for Community Care, and smaller informal auctions throughout the year, says Babcock.

The women donate to a long list of charities, including FACS, Gillian’s Place, RAFT, The Child Advocacy Centre, Niagara Nutrition Partners, Pathstone Mental Health Centre, the Niagara Children’s Centre and many others, typically each agency receiving $2,000 of the $40,000 to $50,000 the club raises each year, said Babcock.

This Sunday’s event, Ladies who Lunch and Shop, features more than 30 vendors selling jewellery, fashion, beauty and lifestyle items, Easter flowers, goodie baskets and baked goods.

Tickets are $45 and include lunch, and can be purchased online at www.eventbrite.ca.

The fundraising shopping opportunity is being held at the Holiday Inn and Suites at 327 Ontario St. in St. Catharines, Sunday, April 7, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

May Court Club St. Catharines, established in 1935, has more than 100 members, some recruited through the local Newcomers Club, said Babcock, attracting women who enjoy the challenge of raising money for such good causes.

The Niagara chapter is one of nine active Ontario branches, the others in Barrie, Brockville, Chatham, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, Oakville, Ottawa, and Windsor. Across the province there are 1,500 women donating more than 140,000 hours to raise more than $1,000,000 annually.

Nancy Kemball and Joyce Babcock of NOTL are helping to organize a fundraiser to help women and children across Niagara. (Photo supplied)
Anchors Away for students at Crossroads Public School

Gerda Klassen
Crossroads Principal

Excitement is rising as students and staff plan final rehearsals and add last touches for this year’s swashbuckling musical, Treasure Island.

With a cast and crew of Grades 4 to 8, the whole school is awash with the adventures of Jim Hawkins, perilous pirates, and buried treasure.

The musical is a biannual highlight for the school. Students perform as actors, singers, dancers, artists, T-shirt designers, and technical crew. Volunteer staff produce, direct, choreograph, create costumes, gather props, manage ticket sales, and train the techies.

Parents help with make-up, costumes, and rehearsals, with one parent single-handedly painting the full set!

Here’s what students are saying about the experience:

“Everyone made it an amazing experience that I’ll not soon forget” (Sky-lar)

“Being backstage has given me a new insight on what it takes to put together a production. Everybody is so hard working and this will truly be one to remember” (Sophie)

“I made so many new friends. Over these past weeks, I have watched this play come together and I think that Treasure Island will be one of the best plays we’ve done. I have learned so many things, and will be quite sad when we finish our final show.” (Jack)

“I feel like this production has not only brought my class closer but the school as well. It has truly made our school even more of a big family.” (Ashleen)

With just a few rehearsals left, students and staff urge you to buy tickets soon.

Treasure Island
Crossroads Public School
April 10, 7 p.m.
(Doors open at 6:30 p.m.)
April 11, 1:30 p.m.
(Doors open at 1 p.m.)
and 7 p.m. (Doors open at 6:30 p.m.)

Advance tickets can be purchased by calling the school at 905-468-7793.
Mori Gardens planting instructions

Submitted by Mori Gardens

Looking to plant a tree, shrub, rose or perennial? Let’s make sure it will be an addition that will last for years to come!

For planting in most soils:
1. Dig a hole 1.5 times wider and a few inches deeper than the pot, then add triple-mix to the removed soil (triple-mix contains top-soil, peat moss and manure). Amending the soil is recommended at this time.

2. Remove the plant from the pot. Gently roughen the root ball with your fingers to loosen the roots. Gently rub a transplant fertilizer around the root ball. An Acti-Sol natural transplant fertilizer containing bone meal is recommended. This fertilizer is natural and will not burn your plants from over-use.

3. Place plant at the centre of the hole. Place the root in the hole so the top comes level with the ground.

4. Fill with the amended soil mix, pack firmly then water thoroughly. Spread your Acti-Sol natural transplant slow-release fertilizer on top of the soil surrounding the plant, to be watered in over the coming weeks. Use once every six weeks on top of the soil and around the roots.

5. Now apply your mulch of preference. Mulch will help retain water in the soil, prevent weeds and add an extra element of interest as it naturally assists plants to stand out. Remember, deep watering encourages a deep root system, and a more drought-tolerant plant. Deep watering means a long, slow, and thorough watering, leaving the hose at the base of the plant for several minutes with a slow to moderate flow. Continue this deep watering every few days until the plant is well-established and growing.

For any questions, please call Mori Gardens at 905-468-7863 or email info@morigardens.com.

Mori Gardens is here to assist in your garden experience, from Dream to Enjoyment. Let’s GROW something beautiful!
Watch for more HOME IMPROVEMENT ADVICE in our April 11 and 18 issues

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Outside NOTL Businesses call Julia 905-934-1040 or email: julia@notllocal.com

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Perk up your patio

Submitted by Darrell Boer and Jolanda Broekema
Regal Florist & Garden Centre

Our 2019 patio collections are here! It’s never too early to dream (plan) your garden paradise. Expanding your living space outdoors is as easy as enjoying a stroll through Regal’s Garden Centre. Create a casual seating area; a sophisticated dining space; or a complete outdoor living room. Regal has a large selection of patio furniture and accent pieces that will make your outdoor living room as comfortable as your indoor one. Conversation, dining and bistro sets are available in a variety of materials and styles just perfect for your patio or garden. You will find cabinets, shelving units, benches and so much more. Regal carries a great selection of quality furniture with cast aluminum rust-proof frames, weather resistant and built for outdoor life. Our wicker sets feature PVC rattan, durable and long-lasting. Custom orders are available from Jensen Leisure IPE wood (better than teak) and Woodard, famous for their fine quality.

Let our friendly staff show you the endless possibilities for a great looking backyard oasis. At Regal you will always find the finest quality products at the best prices.

#OutdoorLivingAtItsBest

Spring has sprung and it’s time to get in the garden

Submitted by Marcia Penner
Penner Building Centre

If you are looking for a way to save lots of time and make your garden look terrific, look no further.

Mulching can be one of the most beneficial things you can do for both your soil and plants. If you do not mulch your gardens, you may want to reconsider. A layer of mulch prevents the germination of weeds, reducing the need for cultivation or the use of herbicides. Along with reducing the need for waterering, mulch helps moderate soil temperature and retain moisture during dry, hot temperatures. It may also encourage the growth of worms, and other beneficial soil organisms that can help provide nutrients for plants. Mulches are also used to enhance the look of your garden. The rich colours of the mulches contrast with the plants, making them “pop,” and really add definition to any garden. Mulch also helps to keep plants clean and avoid soil splashing on them during rain storms. You may be asking yourself, “Which mulch should I choose?” Here are some quick facts about the different kinds of mulches we carry.

Pine: This mulch has a uniform texture, and a great aroma. The acidic pH helps condition soil and decomposing pine enriches sub-soil.

Cedar: This mulch is a freshly-ground white cedar bark. It has fibrous texture and knits together to accommodate sloping beds. Along with a great cedar aroma, it is long-lasting and slow-decomposing. hardwood blend: This mulch is processed from freshly-ground white cedar bark. It ground and aged for stability, making it uniform and somewhat fibrous. This mulch is economical, making it a number one choice for commercial work.

Black mulch: This most popular mulch, made with a food grade dye that is harmless to the environment, your plants and soil, and you, the user. The intense black colour creates a beautiful pop to all your flowers and shrubs. We carry a variety of mulches with a wide selection of colours. Our mulches are sold in bags as well as in bulk, by the half or full yard. We also offer convenient delivery for those who need it. We encourage our customers to come in and take a look at our different mulches and talk to our knowledgeable staff, to ensure the right mulch is chosen to suit your needs. So add some mulch to your soil and watch the benefits grow!

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50 years of volunteering for Canadian Cancer Society

Penny Coles
The Local

Sheila Tierney isn’t sure of the exact year she began canvassing for the Canadian Cancer Society, but she knows it was about 50 years ago.

She began the door-to-door quest for funds while living in St. Catharines, before moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake and knocking on local doors. For a while she did both, not wanting to give up the city route before finding someone to cover it so she could concentrate on NOTL.

She and her husband Ed were both motivated to help the cancer society after a gruelling and stressful couple of years while their son, diagnosed with cancer at the age of 8, had been touched by cancer. “She’s been in chemotherapy for leukemia. ‘She’s been in chemo for 15 months,’” says Tierney, adding her son’s attitude is “100 per cent” determined to beat this. Although she began as a canvasser, Tierney quickly became a captain for Virgil, and then co-chair — she has always had a co-chair to take charge of the Old Town, while she looks after the rest of the urban and rural areas.

It has become increasingly difficult in recent years as the number of canvassers decreases, says Tierney, and the volunteers are hard to find. “I have nobody for St. Davids, not even one canvasser,” said Tierney, yet the number of homes in the village has tripled in recent years. She is accustomed to 75 or 80 volunteers helping her canvass, but this year she has 60, and with all the new houses to visit she could use double that.

Nest Mehotrula of the UPS store, Old Town co-chair, “is in an even more desperate situation than I am,” says Tierney — she requires six captains, and has only one at this point. She also needs more canvassers.

The reason for the problem is likely a number of factors — the seniors who have done it for years are getting older, and the young people in town are leading such busy lives they don’t have time. “We have some wonderful people helping out — some of them will take on more routes that aren’t covered — but we still need many more canvassers.”

The residential campaign isn’t what it once was — there are so many other ways for people to donate to the cancer society, with the proliferation of events such as walks, runs, stair climbs and other fundraisers, says Tierney. “You often get the response, ‘I’ve already given to the cancer society in other ways,’” she says. At 82, Tierney still canvasses herself, organizes the other volunteers and does all the paperwork that goes along with the campaign. Ed is a huge help as well, she adds. “I couldn’t do it without him.” Last year volunteers raised $26,800 from the door-to-door campaign, and brought the total up to $33,000 with daffodil pin sales and two large individual donations.

Tierney says her goal for this year is to match last year’s total, and although Saturday was a dreadful day for daffodil pin sales, 25 “wonderful volunteers” out in the pouring rain raised $1,500, just a little less than last year, although there weren’t many people out shopping, she says. To canvass, or make a donation, call Tierney at 905-468-2200. The campaign lasts all month, and many canvassers wait for the better weather, she says.

Lord Mayor Betty Desero, Canadian Cancer Society campaign co-chair Sheila Tierney, Donna Seymour, Kathy Neufeld, Susan Weaver, Walt Weaver, Jeannie Codrington and Ed Tierney raise the cancer society flag for the month of April, during the residential campaign. (Penny Coles)

Ed and Sheila Tierney and Jeannie Codrington, all long-time volunteers with the Canadian Cancer Society, were selling daffodil pins outside Phil’s Valu-mart in Virgil Saturday. (Fred Mercnik)
Shinny hockey a 40-year local tradition

Mike Balsom Special to The Local

With the ice coming out of both arenas in Virgil this week, a certain group of hockey enthusiasts will be forced to find another daily routine for their lunch hour.

For more than 40 years, a form of shinny has been played at the Centennial Arena in Virgil. It’s a long-standing tradition, filling the noon-to-1 p.m. time slot Monday to Friday at the old barn. Though none of the original players come out regularly, it continues to attract lawyers, farmers, real estate agents, accountants, post-secondary students, business owners, and even a pastor, each year.

The NOTL Local met with the unofficial league executive on the eve of their final game of the season last week. Accountant Barry Boese, 54 years old, is the greeter; real estate agent Andrew Perrie is the publicist; and lawyer Dave Butler acts as the quiet historian.

The three were excited to talk about their pastime, but Butler acts as the quiet historian, “the daily sponge puck league is the best-kept secret in Niagara. Up to 100 men (and some women) have shown up to play. They come from across the region and beyond. Ages have ranged from 18 to 74, and the skill level from those new to the game all the way to players with professional hockey experience.”

Butler is one of those at the top rung of the experience ladder. The 43-year-old played university hockey at McGill in Montreal. Once a product of the Florida Panthers organization, he played in Corpus Christi and Lubbock, Texas, and Monroe, Louisiana, all in the Western Professional Hockey League, from 1998 to 2000. He also did time with four teams in the United Hockey League, finishing in Illinois as a member of the Rockford IceHogs in 2000-2001. A year in Germany capped off his pro career in 2003-2004.

He’s one of the regulars, each pay $14.50 for the season. Others, who prefer less commitment, showing up when they can, bring $5 to drop in the bucket for each session.

It’s the only hockey Butler plays these days. He’s there Monday to Friday no matter the weather. “There’s no pressure to perform well,” says Perrie, which has wrapped up for another season. (Mike Balsom)

Any number of shinny players can show up on any given day, but this day there were 10 on the ice: Matt Uhrin (back left), Kyle Pauls, Bill, Rob Vanderveen, Andrew Perrie, and Barry Boese (bottom), Dave Wilson, David Butler, and Jeff Martens. (Fred Mencnik)

According to the “executive,” the daily sponge puck hockey league is the best-kept

Any number of shinny players can show up on any given day, but this day there were 10 on the ice: Matt Uhrin (back left), Kyle Pauls, Bill, Rob Vanderveen, Andrew Perrie, and Barry Boese (bottom), Dave Wilson, David Butler, and Jeff Martens. (Fred Mencnik)

Adam Butler, Barry Boese and Andrew Perrie talk about their noon sponge puck league, which has wrapped up for another season. (Mike Balsom)

With the ice gone now, they will continue to “chew” each other on their Facebook chat group reserved for the sponge puck participants.

Rumour has it that film and TV director Michael Po- borty, who now lives in Vancouver, checks in on the chat once in awhile. He’s worked on Prison Break and Hanni- bal, as well as feature films The Uninvited and White Chicks. The NOTL native hasn’t played in Virgil in many years, but the guys say he still follows the chat and chimes in every now and then.

After last Friday’s game, they gathered at the NOTL Golf Club for an end-of-season celebration. You can be sure that a lot of talk that day focused on next September, when a fresh sheet of ice will be laid down. Boese and Perrie, and anyone else who can make it, will be at the arena at noon that first day, ready for the first six months of daily sponge puck workouts.

Adam Butler, Barry Boese and Andrew Perrie talk about their noon sponge puck league, which has wrapped up for another season. (Mike Balsom)

Jeff Martens hangs on to the puck. (Fred Mencnik)
**Success for local skaters**

Seven NOTL Skating Club members competed at the Ontario Provincial Championships in Mississauga. Results from left: Mira Strickland – STAR 5 U10 was sixth; Tatum Lyric Bidal – Juvenile Women U14, 21st; Ashleen Hale – Pre-Novice Women, 12th; Kyra Marotta – Pre-Novice Women, first; Marcin McLaughlin – Pre-Novice Women, 11th; Ashley Backshall – STAR 10 Women, 17th; and Audrey Morrison – Novice Women, 21st. (Photo supplied)

**Firefighters support minor hockey**

The St. Davids Fire Association donated $1,000 to the NOTL Minor Hockey League as the season wrapped up with a final tournament last weekend. Pictured are Bryce Ivanchuck, Colin Hunter, Steve Lebrasseur, Maddy Skubel and Rob Macleod, with Glenn Davis in the back row. (Photo supplied)

**Champion on ice**

Kyra Marotta, 16, earned a personal best and won her event at the Skate Ontario Provincial Championships in Mississauga recently, becoming the 2019 Skate Ontario Pre-Novice Women champion. (Photo supplied)
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Dewberry, Darla
October 13, 1973 – March 24, 2019

Daria Ann Dewberry was welcomed into this world by her proud parents, Mary and Doug Dewberry on October 13, 1973 and was taken from us much too soon. It is with great sadness we announce that our beloved daughter, sister, aunt and friend, passed away on March 24 while surrounded by the ones she loved with, lived for and loved.

Daria’s fond friendships grew from her days at St. Davids Public School, Niagara District High School and Niagara College. Many met her on the basketball or volleyball court, at the baseball diamond, on the dance floor, at Alfredo’s Pizzeria, at concert venues or in meeting rooms at the Embassy Suites. Daria was a wonderful woman whose kind and genuine smile brought joy, every day, to those around her. She lived her life reminding us to be our best and to do what makes us happy; she showed us how to be brave and courageous.

Daria will be deeply missed by Mary, Dan, Scott, Devon, Elise, Dawn, Darryl, Jessica, Olivia and many friends. “Thank you for the beautiful ways you have touched our lives.”

Creation and a private service have taken place. Please visit www.rememberingdewberry.com to reminisce while looking at photos, share memories or leave condolences. The family asks that you consider memorial donations to the Walker Family Cancer Centre.

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