



Random testing on return to Canada confusing
page 4



'Extreme athlete' Carla Rienzo can be seen on the water in all conditions.
(David Gilchrist)

How to fix problems for seasonal workers?

Penny Coles
The Local

The concerns of rights and living conditions for seasonal farmworkers is one not easily resolved, although there are several processes in place intended to ensure consistent standards and treatment for all. Public health units are in charge of housing inspections, and are following a checklist of conditions, with the results reported to Service Canada, says Glen Hudgin, regional supervisor for living inspections.

Federal ministries are charged with other issues, such as labour problems, and there are annual reviews involving officials from all countries involved in the temporary workers program, says Ken Forth, president of the Foreign Agricultural Resource Man-

agement Services (FARMS), the non-profit organization that administers the program in Ontario. Those reviews are intended to highlight any problems, and find solutions, he says.

Yet we still hear of concerns over living conditions, and worse — workers badly treated, sometimes sent home if they complain or if they're sick or injured, some too scared to lodge complaints or speak out, with families depending on the income they earn in Canada.

Hudgin is the manager of environmental health for Niagara's public health department. It is his job to supervise inspections of housing for temporary farmworkers, and to report to Service Canada.

If housing doesn't pass any one of many items checked during a detailed

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Kayaker out year-round, in all sorts of weather

Mike Balsom
The Local

Avid kayaker Carla Rienzo doesn't let the lack of easy access to the water keep her from kayaking almost 365 days a year.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake resident took up the sport about 20 years ago. The fitness buff balances her kayaking with road cycling, running and trail hiking in the mornings, followed by hitting the water in the af-

ternoon or early evening. And somewhere along the line she finds time for some weight-lifting.

"I'm an extreme athlete," she tells The Local while waxing her kayak. "I had Olympic aspirations when I was a kid, and the spirit never left me. I just love physical activity, health, fitness, strength and endurance. I live and breathe it, and I love the outdoors."

Rienzo has captured the attention of local resi-

dents who have spotted her in her 17-foot sea kayak in all kinds of conditions. In the dead of winter she can be seen paddling on the cold water of Lake Ontario and the Niagara River. She is most definitely not a clear-weather kayaker.

"I've got all the gear and the attitude," she says. "Anything but really strong winds and I'm out there."

For winter paddling she climbs into a Gore-Tex dry-suit with latex gaskets on

the neck and wrists to keep water out. It has a waterproof zipper criss-crossing the front of her body, with attached booties to protect her feet. Underneath she dons a down jacket and thick polar fleece pants, and stuffs her feet, covered with three pairs of wool socks, into a pair of men's neoprene boots. She estimates she can swim for about 20 minutes before she would have to get out of the water.

She's on her third, or as

she says, her last kayak. It's a British sea kayak, a fibre-glass P & H Cetus LV, with a shallow V hull and four evenly distributed hatches for storage of essential items.

"I'm about 120 pounds," the retired dental hygienist says. "It's a boat that fits me well. It just hugs me perfectly. Even though it's a low volume kayak it has amazing storage. I can get out for two weeks in it and store enough food without starv-

ing. It's really sea-worthy."

Many of those two-week trips are spent on Georgian Bay, Rienzo's favourite spot to take to the water.

"It has to be the best," she says. "No matter where you go it's spectacular. It's dotted with islands the entire way around. We pick a spot, set up our tents, the water is turquoise and cold, you have these white cliffs all around you. It's

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Hirji disappointed in lack of mask mandate

Penny Coles
The Local

As the region's acting chief medical officer of health was saying he hoped a mask mandate would be reinstated, the province was announcing that wouldn't happen.

Talking to the press Monday, Dr. Mustafa Hirji called the mandate a "common sense measure," with cases of COVID on the rise across Ontario.

Dr. Kieren Moore, Ontario's chief medical officer of health, addressing the press and public Monday for the first time since early March, admitted "it's clear" we're now in a sixth wave, and that COVID cases have increased since the mask-wearing mandate was lifted, as have hospitalizations and test positivity rates.

He expects the wave could continue until the middle or end of May, he said, and that it could put up to 600 people in intensive care units across the province.

A provincial report shows the latest wastewater data suggests there could be up to 120,000 new cases of COVID daily.

Niagara wastewater treatment signals also show

an increase in infections, Hirji said. Niagara has an 18.9 per cent positivity rate, with minimal PCR testing, and an average of almost two more people hospitalized with COVID-19 every day.

"Two weeks ago was the time to respond," he said.

"A small increase has turned into a much worse increase."

And it's "pretty predictable" that it will continue to worsen.

While intensive care admissions and deaths are not yet on the rise, they are expected to follow the increase in hospitalizations.

Hirji said across the province, many communities are seeing more cases than during the peak of the omicron wave, and although Niagara isn't there yet, it could be in the next two weeks.

Hirji was also hoping to hear the province would be expanding access to COVID antiviral treatments, and increased availability for PCR testing.

Both of those were promised by Moore Monday, along with a strong recommendation for mask-wearing at indoor events, but no mandate.

As outbreaks continue in many schools, Hirji also

said he would like masks to be mandated for students and staff. Although no data has been available since the province discontinued a reporting requirement, there is evidence both students and staff are becoming infected with COVID at higher rates than during other waves, and some boards are experiencing huge staff shortages.

Some school board trustees across the province have asked for the mask mandate to return to schools, but Moore said Monday he is not planning to do that.

He did say if cases continue to rise, there could be a time when he would reconsider.

Hirji said while he could institute a local mask mandate, it would be more effective if the province makes that move. "If we're a little island, it's not going to work as well. It really needs to be province-wide."

Moore also asked people to self-test when they have symptoms, and to get vaccinated, whether for first, second or third doses.

Hirji would also like to see proof-of-vaccinations updated to include third doses, but the provincial announcement made no mention of bringing back proof-of-vac-



Dr. Mustafa Hirji (Photo supplied)

cination measures.

To prevent further spread of infection, Hirji called for paid sick days, and "a culture of staying home when people are sick."

He suggested those who are eligible for antiviral medication such as Paxlovid — the province released eligibility information Monday — should check with their primary care physicians as soon as possible to begin the pathway to treatment. That would lead to a referral to the assessment clinic in Niagara Falls, and an evaluation of whether anti-viral treatment is suitable, he said — there are issues about it mixing with other medications, and other medical factors to be

considered before it's prescribed.

It's especially important for those who are not vaccinated, to reduce the chance of a serious case of COVID and hospitalization, Hirji added, "but the people most in need of treatment are not taking COVID seriously," and are less likely to consider anti-viral treatment.

The province announced Monday that participating pharmacies should also be dispensing it to those with a prescription this week.

A positive test result is required to be assessed for antiviral treatment, and it must be started within five days of the onset of symptoms, Hirji said.

The new eligibility re-

quirements announced on Monday includes high-risk individuals who are immunocompromised and may be at higher risk of severe side effects after contracting COVID-19.

The following groups are now eligible for PCR testing and assessment for antiviral treatments such as Paxlovid:

- * Individuals aged 70 and up
- * Individuals aged 60 and up with fewer than three vaccine doses
- * Individuals aged 18 and up with fewer than three vaccine doses and at least one risk condition (For example, a chronic illness, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, etc.)

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‘Brazen’ coyote situation scaring residents

Penny Coles
The Local

Those who are following social media and the reports of coyotes in the Old Town will understand the gravity of the situation to residents.

Many are very fearful, and frustrated that more can't be done to make them feel safe on their own streets.

Others, as is expected online, are quick with their criticism, often directed at newcomers to town who they believe should learn to live with wildlife wandering through their neighbourhood.

Tina Clement was a relative newcomer to town when she attended a meeting at the community centre in 2019 to hear a presentation by Lesley Sampson of Coyote Watch Canada.

Clement was worried about her little 15-pound Yorkie, Megan, then, and she still is.

"I'm petrified," she says. "She's always been frightened of big dogs — happy dogs, never mind a big coyote that wants to attack her."

Megan just turned 10 years old and is starting to have health issues, and Clement has been taking her to other neighbourhoods to walk safely, but "having to haul her around in a car three times a day to walk her outside of 'The Village' isn't an ideal solution."

Clement has heard the story of the small dog that was picked up by a coyote while being walked in The Village — the dog was wearing a coat, and when the coyote shook it in its mouth, the little dog was shaken right out of its coat, and escaped to safety with its owner. It could easily have been Megan, says Clement.

That dog was lucky, she adds, warning people to be cautious of dogs wearing collars they could slip out of if they're being dragged to get away from a coyote.

Clement reminds dog owners of a tip she learned at the community centre in 2019: do not use extension leashes. "You can't reel them in as fast if you need your dog at your side pronto, plus these leashes have plastic handles that you could easily drop."

If you use a regular leash, she says, you can wrap the handle around your wrist.

She remembers other tips Sampson suggested that day, in-

cluding opening an umbrella or a garbage bag, creating noise to scare off a coyote.

Those are difficult if you have your hands full holding on to your dog, she said.

She does carry a can of coins for noise, and wears a whistle around her neck, which she has used.

Other tips she has learned: "never turn your back on a coyote and run, walk backwards and hold your other hand high. Make yourself large. I did that in 2019 when I had my encounter."

Also, yell as loud as you can, and carry an umbrella or a heavy stick to wave it around — she is seeing people in The Village now with umbrellas while walking their dogs.

Clement joins many others who express concern about the coyotes becoming more brazen, and that not only dogs but a person, even a child, could be hurt.

She knows there are people who don't agree with removing coyotes, who feel there are other solutions, like learning to live with coyotes. But there are elderly people who enjoy walking but are too scared to go out, she says. "We're being held hostage in our homes over this."

In 2019, she said, neighbours believed they were dealing with one rogue coyote, but today, "people I know who have lived in The Village for 20 years can't believe this is going on."

The town has stepped up its involvement, councillors heard at Monday's meeting.

CAO Marnie Cluckie acknowledged "this is an incredibly stressful situation for families. It causes a lot of angst, and understandably so. It can be very frightening."

"We want to solve this problem as quickly as we possibly can," she added.

But she also acknowledged, when questioned by Lord Mayor Betty Disero, the work that is being done today could take two seasons to accomplish its goals.

The good news is, she said, "that other communities have also experienced this, and we know by taking some of these steps that you can solve the problem by working with the partners that we're working with now."

In addition to issuing more letters and information about coyotes through mail-outs, the town is using a coyote sighting form on its website to map

where the coyotes are.

That information is being given to the Lincoln County Humane Society, which is sending out patrols to look for them, and for food sources that might be attracting them, and if necessary, "they are able to intervene," she said.

Disero explained after the meeting that information about food sources identified by the LCHS can also be given to town staff to investigate.

The town is posting more signs around the community, and has hand-delivered post-ers and letters in areas where there have been sightings, Cluckie said.

The message again is "they are looking for food sources," and to keep coyotes out of urban areas, it's important to remove those food sources, including garbage, bird feeders, and leaving food out for feral cats, or any wildlife.

Cluckie says staff are in the process of setting up a meeting with community partners such as Coyote Watch Canada, the Lincoln County Humane Society and the Minister of Natural Resources to explain how to address the situation, and how other municipalities have successfully handled it.

Disero thanked two town employees — she didn't have their names — who assisted a woman at Hunter Road and Niagara Stone Road in an encounter with a coyote. "It was going after her groceries, and she was afraid," said Disero. "Two staff members jumped out of their truck and scared away the coyote while she ran into her apartment building."

Disero also repeated the request not to put garbage out until the morning of pickup, not to put bird feeders out, or food for feral cats or any animals outside, "because all this attracts coyotes."

She asked Cluckie to explain when someone sees a coyote and runs into the house to fill out a sighting form online, "what happens from that point?"

Cluckie explained the forms "are extremely helpful to us because we map out where we're seeing the sightings, and that helps our partners to locate coyotes. They haven't located the coyotes' den yet, but by knowing where they are they can track them."

Some people are notifying the town through emails, she said, but without the mapping element of the forms, it makes it difficult to find them.

The town uses the mapping to help the Lincoln County Humane Society patrol neighbourhoods, she said.

"In most cases the idea is to prevent the coyotes from coming back"

Capturing and relocating them won't work — legislation only allows them to be relocated up a kilometre away, "and unfortunately the coyotes find their way back very quickly."

By instead identifying food sources, they can use "aversion control," training the animals "to stay out of the areas they shouldn't be in."

"I'm concerned this is not a fast process," said Disero. "I'm concerned someone is going to get hurt before we are able to train them and teach them not to come into the neighbourhoods."

The solution, Cluckie repeated, is removing the food source, which is how other municipalities have seen success, such as Thorold, although it took two seasons to accomplish their goal.

"It sounds like we as humans need to be retrained a little," said Coun. Clare Cameron. "It's hard to break habits and change behaviour."

Although the sighting forms

are useful, in an emergency situation, call 911 and the NRP will respond. Lincoln County Humane Society staff will also come out quickly, she said.

Disero said she'd noticed in her walks through parts of The Village that there are bird feeders on public property, and asked that they be removed.

She also heard that there is a coyote who has been seen running with a chicken in his mouth, and asked if staff can find the owner and talk to them to see if coyotes can be stopped from getting hold of the chickens.

Disero also asked Cluckie to go back again to the Ministry of Natural Resources to have another conversation about relocating the animals. "It just seems that this is going to take too long," she said, referring to the behavioural training that involves removing food sources.

Cluckie agreed to that, and also to again looking into wildlife reserves that might take the coyotes and their pups.

Disero said she's concerned about residents threatening coyotes with hockey sticks, "and that if we don't do something there could be an incident where someone could get hurt, or a dog could get hurt."

Free lunch, information session on Heritage Trail

Local Staff

The Heritage Trail committee is ready to kick off the next phase of trail restoration, with an Earth Day celebration to mark the occasion.

On Friday, April 22, the public is invited to a special information session and a barbecue luncheon at the home of Steffanie Bjorgan, at 404 Concession 1, where it ends at Line 9.

The time is 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Earth Day, with no charge for lunch.

"We ask only for a donation to the trail fund," says committee vice-chair Tony Chisholm.

The Heritage Trail restoration continues along the old railway bed from East and West Line, heading south and ending at York Road near the villages of Queenston and St. Davids, says Chisholm.

Phase two is the section along Concession 1 from East and West Line to Line 3. The trail's accessibility and promi-

nence has been compromised by years of disrepair, overgrowth of foliage and erosion.

The town is committed to the restoration project to support trail improvements, enhancements, and infrastructure repair. "The official committee plans to bring the Heritage Trail back to a state that will support eco-tourism, walking, cycling, and community engagement. The plan is to reconnect the trail as a side trail to the Bruce Trail, at the same time connecting

three different communities in Niagara-on-the-Lake," says Chisholm.

With the first phase successfully completed to East and West Line, the Heritage Trail committee is beginning to fundraise for the next section south. The cost of creating a proper trail through this section of phase two is about \$160,000 or \$100 per metre.

The committee is hoping for donations of \$100 (or more) to cover the cost of restoring one metre (or more) of this trail

during phase two, in return for a tax receipt from the town, and a name added to the trail website, at www.heritagetrail.ca

The committee plans to install a permanent plaque at an entrance when the second phase is completed, to recognize donations over \$99 in the donor's name or in honour of someone else.

Cheques can be made out to Heritage Trail, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and can be mailed to the town offices at Box 100, Virgil, On L0S 1T0.



Dick Coyne, Cheryl Morris, Tony Chisholm and Steffanie Bjorgan are planning an Earth Day celebration, with a barbecue lunch at Bjorgan's home, and an information session on the restoration of the Heritage Trail. (Photo supplied)



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NOTL man feels like a ‘prisoner in my own country’

Penny Coles
The Local

Ted Brindell is a senior who recently crossed the border into the U.S. with a passport and his proof of vaccination.

That part of his trip was easy. His problems began when he arrived at the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge on his way home to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The 78-year-old, who enjoyed the trip in his 1975 Pontiac Ventura, expected the same problem-free crossing on his return, but was singled out for one of the random COVID tests the federal government has warned about.

He had heard through the media that borders are open, and he would just need proof of vaccination. He had no idea the regulations were different to come home.

A traveller checking out the government site for land or air crossings will learn that as of April 1, pre-entry tests were no longer required, but a border services officer may notify you that you’ve been randomly selected for a mandatory arrival test.

It also tells you that you must use an ArriveCAN app to provide mandatory travel information before and after your entry to Canada.

“It only takes minutes to help keep each other safe. Available from Google Play Store and the App Store for iPhone,” the government website says.

Brindell, a retired journalist and photographer best-known for coverage

of vintage cars, and a radio blog on the same subject, says he gave up using a cell phone and computer years ago.

He reached out to The Local to warn travellers of what to expect if they are fully vaccinated, but chosen for random testing.

His first problem, he said, was he was unable to understand the border official who was talking to him through his car window, and he wasn’t at all sure of what he was being asked to do.

He suggests instead of saying pardon, which wasn’t helping him, “we should say something along the lines of ‘let me get this straight. This is what you are asking me to do.’”

He drove away with a test kit in his car, after being told, he thought, to take the test at home and mail it for processing.

He was also told he would not be able to leave Canada and return again during that period without quarantining for 14 days, making him, he said, “a pensioner who’s a prisoner in my own country.”

He discovered he actually had to send the test by Purolator, and wait up to 14 days for the results, but with no need to quarantine while he waits — that only happens if the test results are positive.

However, a look at the government website indicates he could have been made to quarantine at home for 14 days, could have been fined, and would not be able to leave the country if he doesn’t fill out the information requested on the

ArriveCAN app.

He has no phone, and no app, he said, although he may ask a friend to assist him out with that.

A very helpful travel agent, who didn’t want to be named, explained the random testing procedure to The Local.

The agency has a policy against talking to the press on COVID issues, because policies change rapidly, and they could be blamed for giving out information that is wrong by the next day — hence not giving out her name or that of the agency.

They advise their own clients throughout their trip of any changes, she said.

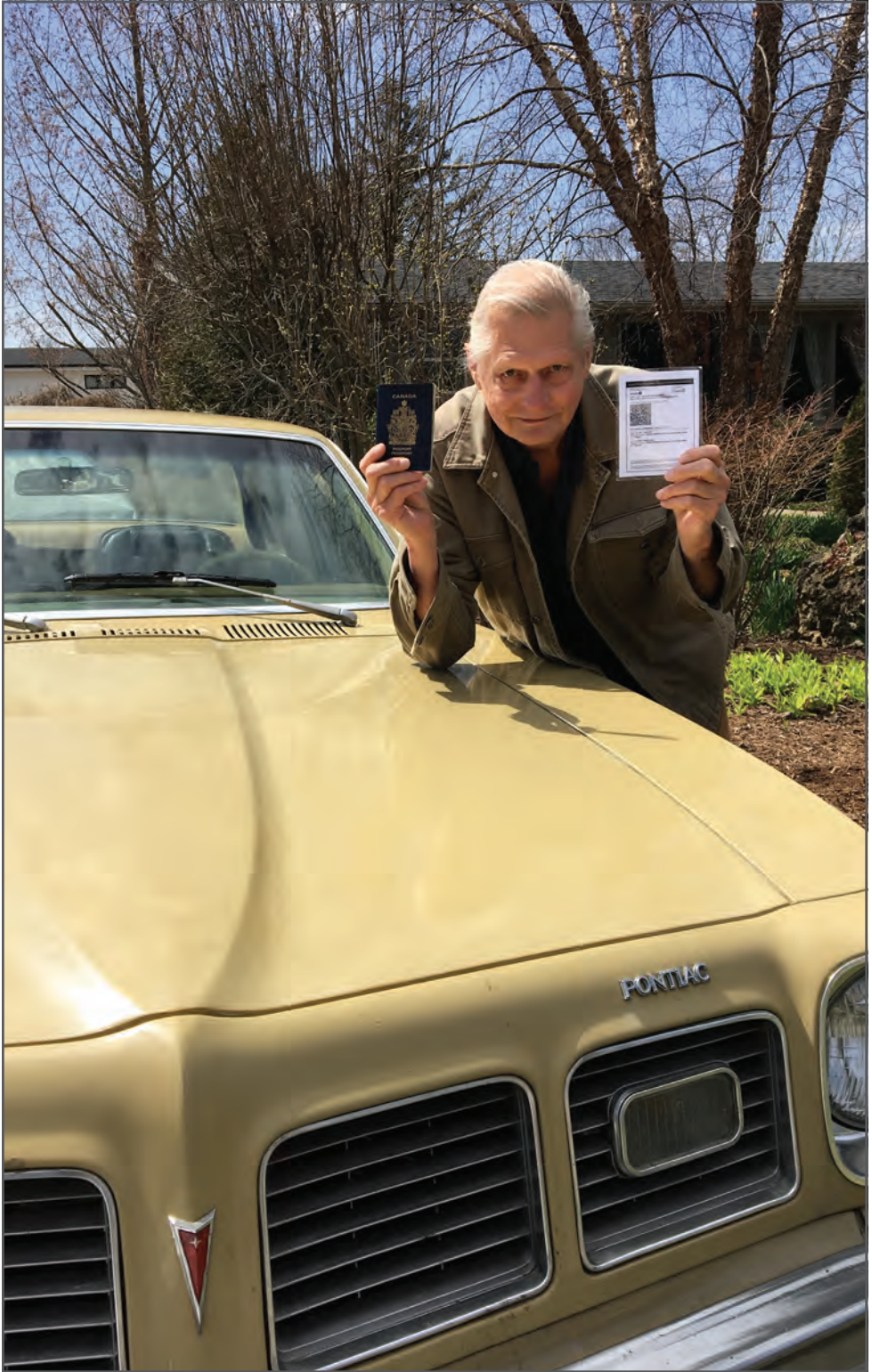
She agreed the government website is very difficult to navigate, with little information about random testing, which occurs at airports and land crossings.

Also, regulations for entry into other countries can vary widely — her advice is to ensure you understand all the protocols for travelling to your destination and for returning home to Canada before you leave, and check regularly for changes.

As of Monday, the random testing Brindell experienced was still occurring, although the federal government is being lobbied to drop it.

Government regulations require all travellers entering Canada to have the ArriveCAN app, so access to a computer, or a friend or relative to help out, is necessary at some point, she said, adding it would be a challenge for those who are not “tech-savvy.”

If you are chosen for a random test at a land crossing, it has to be carried out online with an official watching, and then, although the instructions use the term ‘mailing,’ it is to be sent by Purolator for testing. She said she believes Purolator will come to pick



Ted Brindell made a short visit to the U.S. in his vintage car, and found out a short while later he had a problem when he tried to cross the border to return home. (Dave Gilchrist)

it up, and she has heard of a testing response received the same day.

Brindell knew nothing about taking the test in front of someone online, and just did it himself and sent it off.

The travel agent also said travellers are expected to wear a mask and keep track of contacts for 14 days after they get home, in case they

test positive.

Minerva Ward, president of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, says chambers in Ontario remain concerned about the confusion around border restrictions, the requirements, and the process. “While we are thankful that the government of Canada heard the pleas of tourism and tourism-related business,

and made changes to Canada’s border restrictions, we are concerned about what this lack of clarity and confusion will mean for our tourism industry for the upcoming tourist season, and Niagara-on-the-Lake businesses that depend on visitors from the U.S.”

She said she has heard anecdotally that U.S. visitors are unaware or confused about the ArriveCAN app, especially for travellers who may not have smartphones or are not as technologically savvy.

“We have also heard from unvaccinated travellers who have opted to wait it out to visit Canada until border restrictions are fully lifted. We have heard from fully vaccinated travellers about the hesitation around still being subject to random PCR testing. Overall, the information and process around border crossing are confusing and still cumbersome.”

Just ask Ted Brindell. He will agree policies are confusing, and not just for American visitors to Canada. He never dreamed as a Canadian he would have such difficulty trying to get home, he said.



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tio sets” as temporary summer seating arrangements, just look at the outdoor living furniture at Penner’s. With this level of quality and style, you might not want to go back inside until fall. “People should be able to live in the same style and comfort outside as they do in their living rooms,” McLean says. “People can now look at their backyards as extensions of their indoor living spaces, not just add-ons.”

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EDITORIAL

Coyote problem may require patience to solve

Talk to a resident who is terrified of coyotes, and you can feel their fear.

The presence of coyotes in a residential neighbourhood is nothing like hearing their eerie howl at night in the woods or on farms. It might sound like a pack is nearby, but you know you're safe in your bed, and wherever they are, they'll be gone in the morning, or at least at a distance.

It's a whole different experience to go out for a walk in a residential neighbourhood, and see them walking on a sidewalk as if they owned it, not the least bit nervous or put off by the urban dwellers who actually do belong there.

We know they're looking for a good meal, and while it may be mice, rats and other small animals they're hunting, or the treats in the black bags we're discarding, it's not at all surprising they're easily distracted by a neighbourhood pet, not understanding the difference.

Lesley Sampson first

brought her message to NOTL about 20 years ago, when urban residents became fearful of coyotes who were wandering the Nassau Street area, with their den close by.

The late Bob Howse was the town clerk, a lovely man, and one you could never imagine being anything but calm, methodical and practical.

Somehow, too far in the past to remember the details, he discovered Lesley Sampson, and asked her to speak to councillors who were struggling with finding an answer for frightened residents who felt they were being invaded by coyotes, whose habitat they were encroaching upon.

That would have been early days in her career of working with municipalities, but certainly she has had many opportunities since, and the message doesn't change a lot.

She works hard at finding the right balance between helping residents feel at home and

safe on their own streets, and

protecting coyotes who have wandered out of their habitat.

Her message is that they are here, so it's best to learn how to safely coexist — but not too close by.

There is a ton of information available, but as was pointed out by Lord Mayor Betty Disero, the problem won't go away overnight, certainly not as quickly as it would be to relocate the animals, or worse, shoot them. And residents are too fearful to be patient.

Disero also mentioned an issue in Vancouver's Stanley Park, with a much more serious problem that included people being bitten and scratched by aggressive coyotes. The park was being used by late-night partiers who were leaving food garbage on the ground. A different situation, but the point is, we don't want to see any park or neighbourhood of NOTL get to that stage.

Town CAO Marnie Cluckie has promised to look for quicker solutions than the behavioural

training that is being suggested, and that will likely be repeated at a community meeting being arranged with several experts.

But looking for a solution is only part of the problem.

The other part is all those who don't feel the same fear. They may not have small pets, or children, they may feel more comfortable around wildlife and can accept that we have to learn

to coexist. That may turn out to be the only solution, but in the meantime, judging others who do feel fearful walking on their own streets is not okay. Criticizing or making fun of them on social media is not helpful. It's making the situation worse.

Whatever side of the debate you're on, these are residents who have a very real concern, and don't de-

serve to be maligned just because it's easy to do so on social media.

Hopefully people will start being more aware of preventing food sources, and the coyotes will move back to the fields and ravines and find their dinner critters there.

Penny Coles
The Local

More Kinder-brand chocolates recalled due to salmonella risk

A quick word of warning as we head into Easter weekend: the Canadian Food Inspection Agency says recalled chocolates should not be eaten.

A resident who saw the recall of her family's favourite Easter treats asked us to let our readers know a variety of Kinder Surprise eggs, popular with kids all year long but more so at Easter, are among

more than 20 chocolate products being recalled due to a risk of possible salmonella contamination. Ferrero Canada has announced it is recalling 23 products, including Easter chocolates, egg hunt kits and a variety of Kinder Surprise products.

Other countries have reported people have become sick from eating Ferrero products, but so far no ill-

nesses have been reported in Canada from consuming the recalled chocolates, which should either be returned to the store where they were purchased, or thrown out.

A complete list of recalled products is available at https://recalls-rappels.canada.ca/en/alert-recall/certain-kinder-brand-chocolate-products-recalled-due-possible-salmonella-0?utm_source=r_listserv

Can't we be concerned for humans and coyotes?



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

Newspaper articles and online social media banter have brought coyotes back to the forefront of conversation in NOTL. What do these incidents tell us about our relationship with these dynamic animals, and what are the potential solutions to consider?

When a problem is evolving in the background, it is often quiet. When the problem pokes its head to the surface in real time, that's when people finally take note. This applies to both the social and environmental world.

The predicament of more relaxed coyotes perusing

through NOTL's urban environments was a story waiting to happen, beginning over 10 years ago.

I have touched on this fact before in previous articles for The NOTL Local, but we need to consider how the green ring of forest and meadows surrounding NOTL's downtown urban boundary has been chopped up and fragmented considerably over the last two terms of council. The protected and relatively isolated green highway for animals was altered so severely in recent years, that coyotes have had to reinvent how they survive near downtown.

On a side note, it is stories like this that explain why I resigned from the town's environmental advisory committee after one year of service as the vice-chair. To the fault of nobody in particular, I was personally exhausted and

frustrated about the politics of having meetings about meetings, and by the next time a meeting rolled around, we had lost another plot of forest or another significant habitat.

The cruel irony is how the goals we spent so much time talking about were having their foundations removed from beneath. How can we productively combat climate change, poor water quality, biodiversity loss, and make improvements in living harmoniously with local species (such as coyotes) while we allow the teardown of the very ecosystems which help out with all of this?

On that note, let's talk about how the coyotes got into our backyards in a more noticeable way these days. Consider the following analogies and real life examples.

Imagine your home was destroyed — let your imagina-

tion fly with how it got ruined, but suppose it was by a force much larger than yourself. Your kitchen (hunting area), bedroom (safe shelter) and hallways (habitat corridors) are gone. You've survived the ordeal, but want to keep surviving. Where do you go, and how desperate will you get? Imagine moving into an unfamiliar neighbourhood to

support your family, only to be dismissed or perhaps even eradicated?

I remember filming a Hidden Corners nature documentary in Florida at the end of the dry season. When the unending plains of swamp and marsh had largely dried up to a handful of deeper watering holes, you could see species swimming, eating,

mating, and sheltering in the same tiny place. There was nowhere else suitable to go, but you could witness the collection of animals getting by, until the big rains came by again.

When I'm on a hiking tour, sometimes I'll roll over a log to find a mole. The mole

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View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

Two stories of romance and the human condition, both take place in the same country, both are tales of the privileged class. I love the latest sumptuous, subtle and complex version of Jane

Austin's *Emma*, produced in 2020; however, I am uncertain how I feel about the endless episodes of the *Bridgerton* series; it seems to take so long to crudely relay the same story. Whilst *Emma* has genuine fires and real flowers, *Bridgerton* delights itself with gas fires and masses of

plastic flowers.

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

'Adaptive compromise' is the best option

Continued from page 6

runs, immediately and with haste, to the next nearby log or sense of security. Imagine what moles would do if all of the logs in the area were removed. You'd see them taking big routes and big risks out in the open to find the next suitable place to hunker down.

The same human-animal parallels continue to unfold around the world with elephants in India, black bears up north, cassowaries in Australia, and alligators in Florida's backyard pools.

Consider our species is just another concoction of DNA and survival needs, and look at how we push other humans out of their traditional territory by means of war, violence and oppression. Imagine you had the opportunity to successfully escape that, only to be shunned and seen as a threat in another neighboring country due to your legitimized desperation?

To check in on a straightforward note, I have always been a firm believer to respect human fear. I completely and totally understand why locals around downtown NOTL are uneasy about the increased coyote presence. We have heard those voices, and they

are now vocal because of our previous choices.

Coyotes, being mammals like ourselves, are appreciably adaptable creatures. Reports of these small canids roaming urbanized areas in North America is not an old story, but it seems to strongly correlate with associated habitat loss in certain areas.

Do coyotes trod around farm fields and woodsy homes in broad daylight at the frequency we're reporting in Garrison Village and downtown NOTL? Broadly speaking, the answer is no.

Our past decision-makers over generations have quite literally paved the way for human animal conflict. So what are some potential solutions moving forward, considering we can't change the past?

My first thought is treating our local coyotes like locals treat black bears up north.

Walk with someone else or a small group when going for an outing. Make yourself look big and bold if you see a coyote. Don't leave open, stinking garbage out for longer than it has to.

On the note of garbage, akin to black bears once again, why wouldn't we invest in stronger animal-proof lids? Our green bins have this feature, but most garbage bins

and recycling containers do not. If a smart animal like the coyote repeatedly has no success in a certain area, it is far less likely to routinely make a visit. If people up north can do this for bears, why can't we do this for coyotes?

Someone may be reading this and think, "well, that sounds like a lot of modifications and adjustments and money to cater to coyotes."

What if we considered incentives, or fines, for those who participate in moving forward. Hey, we had no problem doing that to our fellow humans over the past two years, why not give a "carrot or the stick" approach for tackling a problem scenario like this, and apply such regulations at the ground level? Most of us went through the motions of adapting to new challenges with something as enormous as COVID-19, so why can't we try on our adaptability pants when it comes to a handful of coyotes roaming in urban areas that were once rural?

What I fear more than a coyote is this.

The day another bite or attack occurs, or the day another person in the park is briefly chased. These situations certainly warrant investigation and cause for concern. When



Looking toward an area of Carolinian Forest which was once able to shelter wild populations of animals, including coyotes. (Owen Bjorgan)

a coyote crosses the line, a line we have fabricated as human citizens, it is the four-legged mammal that will ultimately be labelled the villain.

When something gets given such a label, will we ever get to the point of exterminating "problem" coyotes in NOTL? To me, that will be a hard day to hold your chin high as a local. I would reckon that such a moment would put NOTL on

the map as a municipality that would rather take the easy and ruthless route, versus finding an adaptive compromise or, perhaps even addressing the root of the issue which I have howled about for over a dozen years.

So is one allowed to feel the concern for both locals and coyotes alike? Believe it or not, that is totally valid, even in a world where many

of us believe there can only be one side and one solution to something.

Remember, we have two stakeholders involved: ourselves and the coyotes. Can we both get along? Will NOTL allow the coyotes to have a figurative voice in this, or, will we take the privileged way out and vilify an intelligent animal that was here thousands of years before us?

Local LETTERS

St. Catharines takes lead on affordable housing

In regards to addressing the affordable housing crisis in our region, I want to congratulate the City of St. Catharines for taking the lead on being innovative and ensuring that the sale of City property drives affordable housing.

The City of St. Catharines recently approved the sale of roughly 3.8 acres of land previously occupied by the City's Community, Recreation and Culture Services administration building. The sale was approved provided it is used in part for affordable and social housing. Specifically, the developer must

develop the area with 43 per cent affordable housing, and 14 per cent social housing.

The developer has committed to a partnership with Habitat for Humanity Niagara to ensure that 32 townhouses are sold to Habitat at below market rates. In turn, Habitat will sell the townhouses at the same price as purchased to deserving families who could not otherwise be able to afford a home. Habitat will sell the homes through an equity share program. Profits generated off future sales of the townhomes will be split between the selling

family and Habitat, allowing for the organization to reinvest the profits in future affordable housing.

The partnership with Habitat on the 32 townhouses comes alongside requirements that 60 rental units be rented at affordable rates for the next 40 years.

This is an exciting initiative and will make an impact on the affordable housing crisis in Niagara and allow families to achieve greater stability.

Cindi LoForti Lepp
Chair of the Board of Directors

Local LETTERS

Queen Street losing its unique heritage distinction

Thirty years ago Queen Street and the Heritage District of Niagara-on-the-Lake were considered unique, and always to be protected.

There were only eight establishments on Queen/Picton where people could buy food, including two ice cream shops and the hotel restaurants.

Today, there are 38!

Store signage in heritage colours and size were controlled by town bylaws.

No sandwich boards were allowed on sidewalks.

No merchandise was allowed to hang outside stores. Today, many store signs are inappropriate in design, shape and colour, and products proliferate outdoors.

No chain stores were allowed . . . an unwritten rule

supported by merchants and the town council alike. Today they are here and there are more to come. A Dairy Queen is opening soon on Queen Street.

The entire objective back then was to keep Niagara-on-the-Lake different from everywhere else. Almost all other small towns, even if they had interesting or quaint centres, became so consumed by 'sameness' that they had become pointless to visit.

The Old Town is heading down a slippery slope with a confused or non-existent mission statement.

The Shaw Festival, high quality hotels and wineries attract patrons who support long-term, consistent business development an objective supported strongly in

previous years.

However, Queen Street is rapidly becoming a food court for the Outlet Mall, including chain outlets with their voracious appetites for fast-food customers who are shuttled from the 100 buses which daily, in season, at the Fort George parking lot for their one-hour layover, before heading to Niagara Falls.

This dichotomy needs to be on the agenda at the next tourism strategic planning discussion by those now responsible for keeping what's left of the precious old part of Niagara-on-the-Lake as different as possible from everywhere else.

Hamish Kerr
Retailer on Queen St.
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to you and your
family on this holiday.

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Tips for avoiding coyote conflicts

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PROTECT YOUR PROPERTY

- Store garbage indoors until collection day
- Secure garbage and compost in durable plastic or steel containers with locking lids
- Remove bird feeders and seed spillage that attracts rodents and their predators
- Feed pets indoors and always keep all pet food indoors

PROTECT YOUR PETS

- Keep cats indoors
- Keep dogs on a short 6' leash when out for a walk
- Check your property for wildlife before letting your pet outside
- Do not house rabbits, fowl, or other pets outdoors

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY

- Never leave young children unattended
- Teach children not to approach or harass wildlife
- Avoid walking at dusk and dawn or after dark in areas with coyotes
- Carry protection such as a personal alarm, umbrella, flashlight and a cell phone to call 911 in case of an emergency

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A COYOTE

- Stay calm and wait until they move away
- Do not turn your back or run
- If approached, stand tall, wave your arms, and make yourself as large as you can
- Clap, yell, shout, make startling movements or throw an object toward the animal
- Startle them by opening an umbrella or using a flashlight

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Important Note

Provincial Law prohibits the relocation of wildlife beyond a 1 km range. Therefore, coyote(s) relocated 1 km away often return to the area where it feels most comfortable.

It is vital that anyone in an emergency situation with a coyote, such as a coyote cornering a human, call 911 immediately. Police are authorized to handle these situations and frequently engage the Humane Society when they attend the call.

Tomorrow's Voices brings children together

Choir provides opportunities for children who might miss out



Todd Green explains the inspiration for Tomorrow's Voices. (Photos supplied)

Mike Balsom
The Local

St. Davids resident Todd Green knows the benefits of choir singing. After all, the Brock University Goodman School of Business professor has researched them thoroughly.

Green is one of the men behind Tomorrow's Voices, a non-profit children's choir that launched out of St. Catharines in 2017.

It all started a couple of years earlier with a chance for him to combine his love of music with his business background. While researching his paper, *An Exploration of Socially Responsible Music Consumption*, he came into contact with vocalist, songwriter and bass player Murray Foster.

Foster approached Green and the Goodman School with an idea to offer music training as a team-building activity for corporate entities.

"Singing is much easier than having four guitars, three basses and a whole bunch of drums coming into a corporate board room," laughs Green. "And singing is something that people can easily learn to do. When you put enough voices together pretty cool things happen."

His Goodman School students started researching the idea that became Choir Nation. He and Foster (and some other musicians) found their services in demand by organizations such as KPMG, Chubb, Indigo and Canada Goose. He laughs that as he was running to these head offices, the Choir Nation headquarters was housed in the basement of the St. Davids home he shares with his wife Jennifer and their seven-year-old son Liam.

Along with Foster and Choir Nation co-owner and Momentum Choir artistic and executive director Mendelt Hoekstra, they would swoop in to a head office, distribute lyric sheets and music, and train groups of executives in preparation for a final performance in front of coworkers or to be recorded on video.

The Choir Nation website lists improved productivity, cooperation and camaraderie as benefits. Group singing can also enhance focus and increase employee morale, leading to a significant shift in the efficiency of the workplace.

That led to open choir nights, bringing a diverse group of people together at venues such as the Mahtay Lounge in St. Catharines and locations in both Hamilton and Toronto. Com-

plete strangers would show up for the sheer joy of singing, learning songs by artists such as Devin Cuddy, Dan Mangan, Adele, the Tragically Hip and the Beatles.

He soon realized the benefits being reaped by the corporate executives were easily translated to these disparate groups.

"We saw the effect of a community growing through the open choirs," Green tells The Local. "People were giving each other hugs after our adult choir rehearsals. They were becoming friends outside the choir, going to concerts together and doing all kinds of stuff."

He was certain that children could experience the same benefits, and wanted to bring opportunities to those who might not have access to extra-curricular music activities. He enlisted Hoekstra and local musicians Katey Gatta and Sarah Jerrom and began working with kids in St. Catharines in 2017.

"I contacted Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold, and we connected with Big Brothers Big Sisters, too," he explains. "Caseworkers started referring kids to us, and Brock's Marilyn I. Walker School agreed to host our rehearsals for free. At first we had four kids signed up, and within a week we had 28."

Some of the kids involved are in foster care, and others have been diagnosed on the autism spectrum. One of the children involved had not even been sent to school until he was nine years old.

Stephanie, now 18 years old, joined Tomorrow's Voices about four years ago, following her sister Emily. The St. Catharines Collegiate graduate is now studying Early Childhood Education in Niagara College and successfully convinced Green to allow her to continue with the choir even though she's technically too old to participate.

"It gives me a highlight to look forward to every week," she says. "When I was in high school it was my favourite thing to do each week, going to choir, and meeting other people from other schools. I have always been one of the older ones in the choir and I enjoyed making connections with the younger kids."

In November, 2017, Tomorrow's Voices had their first public performance as a choir of more than 25 kids aged eight to 18 at a show by

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Virtual music trivia night coming up April 28

Continued from page 8

Juno Award-nominated Toronto musician Royal Wood at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre. Since then they have been invited to sing with Serena Ryder and even travelled to Toronto's Danforth Music Hall to back the talented Neko Case.

And as COVID restrictions have begun to ease up across the province, they sang *O Canada* at the Meridian Centre on March 12 to open a Niagara Ice Dogs game.

"It was really surreal meeting people who have made music their career," says DSBN Academy student and long-time Tomorrow's Voices member Rylee. "It was such a great opportunity that we wouldn't have gotten from anywhere else."

She goes on to talk about the community feeling of singing collectively.

"There is a real collective energy," she says. "You're not so nervous about all the focus being on you. If you mess up a bit, there are so many other voices lifting you up and helping you."

Though at first 10 per cent of Choir Nation proceeds helped fund Tomorrow's Voices, Green realized the benefits of incorporating the children's choir as a separate non-profit entity. Armed with charitable sta-

tus by the summer of 2018, Tomorrow's Voices expanded to include children's choirs in Toronto, Hamilton and most recently, Saskatoon.

Green has been able to maintain the connection between the young choir members during the pandemic. As some kids opted not to participate online, weekly Zoom sessions have been held combining about a third of the members of each of the three Ontario choirs.

Even online sessions prove to the former Seton Hall varsity tennis player how beneficial choir singing is for this age group. Supportive comments via the Zoom chat feature are a common sight. Green says the virtual gatherings have been helpful in reducing loneliness and stress during the pandemic.

"Even on their first session I see them making new friends," says Green of their in-person meetings, which he hopes to return to in the fall. "It's the idea of community, that the other kids in the choir are there for them, they're supportive. Self-confidence improves, especially when they get positive reinforcement from live audiences. And they are meeting some great, positive role models."

He continues, "research shows that heart rates sync

up during choir singing. It also addresses mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression. It creates such a strong network of social support. They are so excited to see each other."

Green, who holds an undergraduate degree in finance from Seton Hall as well as a master's degree from McMaster and a PhD from Simon Fraser University, both in marketing, never really was involved in music other than being a big fan. He credits that meeting with Foster for allowing him

to bring his love of music to his career at Brock.

Alan Cross, host of *The Ongoing History of New Music* podcast, was another music expert Green consulted while researching that paper. Last year Green enlisted the well known broadcaster to host an online music trivia night to support Tomorrow's Voices.

"We had 195 participants, and between the entry fees and the silent auction, we raised about \$6,000," Green informs The Local. "It helped us feel confident enough to expand

into Saskatoon."

Cross is back on board for another virtual music trivia night on April 28 at 7:30 p.m. Green says as soon as the longtime Toronto radio host's participation was announced, ticket sales began to soar.

"We support the kids' post-secondary education," adds Green. "Some of our fundraising goes toward awards and bursaries to our older kids. We've been able to provide funds to our graduating students to attend Sheridan College and Brock University. And we

have a couple graduating this year, too."

Stephanie says her bursary from Tomorrow's Voices was a big help for her first year at Niagara College.

Tickets are still available for the trivia night, at <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/tomorrows-voices-virtual-music-trivia-ft-alan-cross-tickets-274904866857>.

Green promises a great night of music trivia covering all genres and all decades of music. And you don't even have to leave home to enjoy it.



Tomorrow's Voices children's choir performs onstage.



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No easy solutions for program problems

Continued from page 1

inspection, public health notifies the farmer, who must make any necessary improvements to pass inspection with zero infractions before being allowed to hire temporary workers through the federal Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), he says.

Included in the extensive list of checks to tick are the size of the rooms, the availability of bathrooms, showers, sinks, stoves, and many other factors that also determine how many workers can be accommodated, says Hudgin.

His department has inspectors working pretty much year round, checking out living conditions to meet the varying timelines of farmers who have seasonal workers arriving at different times of year.

Ken Forth is an Ontario broccoli grower who is also president of FARMS, the non-profit organization that administers the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SWAP) in Ontario.

About 18,000 workers are expected to be placed at about 1,150 Ontario farms this growing season, he says.

SWAP, established in 1966 to respond to a short-

age of domestic agricultural workers, is considered a successful program that works not only for Canadian farmers, but is important to the home countries of the seasonal workers who come to Canada.

Forth strongly believes the hands-on oversight, the involvement of several agencies and federal officials, and an annual review with all countries involved ensure seasonal workers are treated fairly, whether the issues are labour-related or living conditions. They are guaranteed all the benefits that Canadian workers receive, including WSIB, some EI benefits, and CPP — all the rights that any Canadian agricultural worker would receive, he says. Farms employing seasonal workers are subject to random integrity audits, he adds, which would bring to light any irregularities — he has had several audits over his years as a grower.

“Our program has been successful for so long because it provides benefits to everyone who participates in it — from the growers who need supplemental seasonal labour, to Ontarians who are able to buy top-quality local foods at the grocery store, and the workers themselves who are

able to improve the quality of life of their families at home,” says Forth.

He says he knows of many seasonal workers who have put in their years in Canada, reached the age where they want to retire, and are collecting CPP in their home country.

EI offers some benefits, although not for the months farmworkers are at home — they sign a seasonal contract. They do get paid if they are injured, he says, and receive health insurance as soon as they land in Canada. “They have exactly the same rights as all Canadians. They also have the same coverage for health care.”

And as someone who ran the agricultural program with WSIB, he says, seasonal workers are treated the same as anyone else.

As for living conditions, he says he’s been having seasonal workers on the family farm for 53 years, “and we’ve been inspected 53 times in 53 years.”

Over the decades of the program, guidelines, like living conditions, have evolved, says Forth.

“Most of the farmers have done a heck of a good job. We wouldn’t get passed if we weren’t doing a good job. Inspectors wouldn’t sign off.”

So how do farmers continue to get a bad rap?

Forth is exasperated with the criticism, and exhausted trying to defend farmers.

Hudgin says he wishes he knew the answer to that.

Public health units across Ontario all have the same guidelines to follow for their safety inspections, and he knows his inspectors follow them to the letter.

He speculates that maybe some public health departments with larger farms in their areas, thus more workers and more housing to inspect, might be short on resources, but he’s worked in different areas and not seen evidence of that, he says.

Niagara has about 3,000 seasonal workers and about 500 housing units to be inspected.

Farms are typically smaller, and living conditions are good, more likely to be in houses than large dormitory-style bunkhouses, says Hudgin.

The last update to guidelines was made in 2010, and with current standards, he says, he can’t understand why workers are still experiencing some of the issues that are reported in the press.

“I’m not aware we have those things going on here. Our operations are pretty good, they provide good housing. I can’t say what’s happening in other communities.”

In Niagara, though, he’s been “quite impressed” by what he’s seen.

“We have a good program, we have good farmers and good conditions. Some farmers get the same workers to come back every year, and they treat them like family. In essence they have the same rights as any resident in Niagara.”

But Hudgin adds, “we can’t control how a farmer treats his workers. I don’t know how you control that.”

He mentions Quest as a resource for workers. It is an organization made up

of a group of partners who came together to provide accessible, high quality care for seasonal workers in Niagara, including health care services and promotion, developed in collaboration with local community stakeholders. Services are currently delivered across the region, including Virgil, and through farm visits.

Hudgin says if workers have specific complaints or concerns, there are signs in different languages posted in their housing, “with numbers to call if there are any concerns about their work or living environment.”

Public health departments have had the responsibility of inspecting housing “for many, many years. There was an update in 2010, but we’ve been doing these housing inspections a long time.”

Although few complaints come directly to public health, he adds, “if we see something that falls into the category of safety, such as a rodent infestation, we can issue a section 13 order under public health protection.”

Forth says of the complaints he hears, if there are farmers who don’t treat their workers well, “there are damn few. And if there is any truth in it, I don’t know where it is.”

Activists for farmworkers are hesitant to speak out about specifics, as are the workers, for fear of retribution, or of hindering their efforts to help. They stress not all farmers are being painted by the same brush, and that the existence of a few “bad actors” is not the issue — the problem is a system that allows them to continue, unhindered and unaccountable.

One seasonal worker at the rally and march through Virgil recently was willing to speak about a farm with horrific conditions — not in Niagara — and although he is not at that farm, he is

worried about friends who are.

Of great concern for them is getting hurt — many farmworkers know someone who has been injured by farm equipment, and have experienced an eight-week delay, with no financial support for themselves or their families, until EI kicks in eight weeks later.

There are also instances about workers permanently injured, cut off from WSIB, unable to afford the treatment they need at home or to care for their families.

Jane Andres writes of one such worker for this week’s Local. She has chronicled his situation in the past, but she is concerned that he is getting worse.

“Over the past 17 years I have personally met men who have been injured, yet did not receive compensation or adequate treatment for their injuries,” says Andres. “There are many farmworkers who know of people in their communities back home who can verify that it still happens. There has been much improvement in the health care and response to injuries in the past few years due to growing public awareness, but there are still people who fall through the cracks.”

It gets even more complicated when WSIB rewards employers who report fewer accidents. As a result a few employers have put more pressure on their workers to not report it as a “work-related” injury.”

There is no doubt, all agree, the seasonal workers program is good for all of us, our food supply, our farmers and the temporary workers who come to work on Canadian farms. But they also agree it’s not perfect — and if the workers and those who help them are afraid to speak out with specifics, if all the safeguards in place can’t protect them, if the farmers won’t police each other, how will it change?

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Husband, father, friend: more than a migrant worker

Jane Andres
Special to The Local

How do you write a eulogy for a dear friend who has not yet passed from this world, a man whose life was ruled by his magnanimous heart and a faith that pressed him into serving others with a joie de vivre that couldn't help but inspire?

According to Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), nearly a third of farm injury claims that require treatment are migrant workers, but only six per cent are recognized by the WSIB where there is permanent injury. Here is one of these workers' stories.

Jeel Stewart grew up in a rural area in Manchester, Jamaica, attending the local school and enjoying a care-free childhood with a loving extended family. His father was gone for six to eight months of the year cutting cane on the farm work program in Florida. It was a dangerous job, and one year he didn't return.

Jeel's mother was informed that her husband did not survive a serious accident at work. The family was cut off from any further information, received no compensation and could not afford a lawyer. At 13, Jeel was forced to quit school and became the breadwinner for his family.

Years later, in 2007, he applied to join the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program in Canada as a way to support his wife Suzana and four children. He arrived in early spring in Niagara-on-the-Lake and plunged into his new job with great enthusiasm, easily making friends with his new coworkers. We met on a Sunday night at the Caribbean Workers Outreach Project church service at Bethany Mennonite Church, when he jumped up to join the music team for a post-service singalong. We connected a few more times over music and family dinners before he returned home in November.

Six months later my friend Jodie Godwin and I took him up on an offer to meet his family in St. Catharines, Jamaica. We received a warm welcome, with extended family and neighbours joining in on the feast and the lively music that followed. The respect and affection for Jeel was obvious. Although he was a man of large stature, he had the nurturing heart of a mother hen with the children and teens in the neighbourhood.

We looked forward to his return to Niagara in spring. We could never have imagined the coming turn of events which radically impacted Jeel and his fam-

ily's life for the 15 years that followed, and ours as well. Only a few weeks after his return to the farm, he was working on a loading dock. An error by the forklift operator caused it to slip and crush Jeel's hand, severing his nerves and tendons. He was given a local anaesthetic but remained fully conscious and watched the three-hour surgery that followed on a monitor screen.

The following weeks were agony, the pain medication providing little relief. He had no money for food, as sick benefits available through Employment Insurance were only available after an eight-week period. He remained alone in the bunkhouse during the day for the next few months, unable to prepare meals or enjoy a diversion of any kind to occupy his mind.

The community provided him with groceries until he returned home in August with assurances from the Jamaican liaison officer that he would receive physiotherapy and sick benefits from WSIB. We gathered donations and with the help of his coworkers, shipped a barrel full of necessities and dry goods to help his family get through the following winter. The sick benefits were barely enough to feed the family but there was hope that the physiotherapy in Kingston would restore at least partial use of his hand.

In 2010 he received a letter from WSIB informing him that because the damage to his hand was considered permanent by the doctor, he would no longer receive benefits or therapy. In a process known as deeming, WSIB stated that because there was a cashier job available at a gas bar in Niagara-on-the-Lake which he could perform with one hand, he would no longer qualify for assistance.

We were stunned. Surely it was a mistake. We assumed WSIB had made an obvious error as Jeel lived in Jamaica, not in Niagara where he could apply at the local gas station. We knew there was no chance that the Canadian government would issue a work permit for a cashier job.

It has now been 12 years. We have run out of time. We have run out of hope.

Godwin and her husband Dave Parker have provided practical support for the Stewart family during these difficult years. Their two children, Leah and Sam, were just youngsters when the family hosted a farewell get together for Jeel at their home in 2008. They are now adults and have visited Jeel and his family on multiple occasions in Jamaica. They started a GoFundMe last year to try to ensure



Jodie Godwin visited Jeel Stewart and his wife Suzana in 2017, with Jane Andres. His health had already significantly deteriorated. (Photos supplied)

that the two youngest children can attend school.

Jeel has developed diabetes in recent years because the family cannot afford fresh vegetables and protein necessary for good health.

He is presently in the hospital for the second time in two weeks. His face is hollow, his body a mere shadow of the physically strong man he once was. His diabetes is out of control and he cannot afford the necessary medication. His heart is failing. We hope and pray that help does not come too late.

WSIB recently issued a press release boasting of its surplus of \$1.4 billion. Jeel is one of many seriously injured farm workers whose

suffering has allowed others to benefit from rebates and dividends.

On March 20, people gathered worldwide in parks, churches, and streets to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In the little village of Virgil about 50 people gathered across different faith communities, immigration status, and ages to take part in a walk through the village, affirming the full humanity of our migrant, refugee, and racialized neighbours. We joined them in honour of the Stewart family's struggle for survival.

Farmworkers are more than migrant workers.

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Jeel Stewart, after having his hand reconstructed.

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# OF NEW LISTINGS	# OF NEW LISTINGS	# OF NEW LISTINGS
10	8	3
# OF SOLDS	# OF SOLDS	# OF SOLDS
17	10	5
DAYS ON MARKET	DAYS ON MARKET	DAYS ON MARKET
\$1,468,600	\$1,141,000	\$1,430,400
HOME PRICE INDEX*	HOME PRICE INDEX*	HOME PRICE INDEX*
\$668	\$719	\$477
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Full-time realtor loves part-time coaching

Mike Balsom
The Local

Part-time hockey coach Matt Miller has developed characteristics and skills both playing and coaching hockey at a high level over many years.

"Sports are terrific for making you work well with others, recognizing that everyone has something to bring to the table," says the 33-year-old.

"Leadership qualities for sure, organizational skills, communication and time management is a huge one."

He adds competitiveness to the list, and his recent experience in coaching competitive levels of hockey stand as proof that he can hang in there when the heat is on.

They are all also skills that also help him in his full-time job as a sales representative with the Miller Group, including managing his time with showings for clients and buyers.

Growing up in the Ajax/Pickering area, Miller rose through the junior hockey ranks to play first with the Durham Fury, and then with the Cobourg Cougars of the Ontario Junior Hockey League (OJHL). In 2009, he went on to earn a spot with the NCAA Division 3

SUNY Potsdam Bears of the SUNY Athletic Conference.

After two years at Potsdam, Miller, whose family by then had moved to Niagara, finished a BA at Brock University, with a minor of sorts in sports management.

From there, Miller caught on with The Skating Lab, a Toronto facility that offers high-performance off-ice training to hockey players specific to their skills levels and needs. Soon he was working for Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment in their ticket sales department, while also doubling up in their hockey development ranks while helping to operate hockey camps.

That's when his networking efforts resulted in his move to coaching, working first with the Don Mills Flyers AAA organization before joining the Toronto Marlboros AAA program. There, he worked with players such as Jamie Drysdale, the NHL's number six overall draft pick in 2020, now playing for the Anaheim Ducks, and left winger Will Cuylle of the Windsor Spitfires, who was chosen by the New York Rangers in the second round that same year.

When he decided to

leave Toronto to join his mother Sally and his older brother Will in their real estate company, he immediately put his name forward to the Niagara North Stars AAA organization.

"We had a successful season my first year as (U16) head coach," Miller says. "I took over a seventh place team and we finished in second on the season and advanced to the Ontario Minor Hockey Association (OMHA) championships just before COVID hit."

Minor hockey's U16 age group is known as the Ontario Hockey League's (OHL) draft year. Two members of Miller's 2020 Niagara team found spots in the league: Tai York (Barrie Colts) and Derek Smythe (Ottawa 67's). The following year, cut short by COVID, both Nate Day (Flint Firebirds) and Jordan Schanbacher (Barrie Colts) were drafted into the OHL.

NOTL resident A.J. Harland's son Evan played on Miller's team in his second year coaching the North Stars. Evan only experienced Matt's expertise for a short period of time.

"We really enjoyed his junior-style practices that were always well executed," A.J. said. "He spent a lot of time correcting and



Matt Miller on the ice in Virgil with Will Cuylle, Jamie Drysdale, and Reid Valade. (Photos supplied)

explaining different things. He was one of the most transparent and honest professional coaches we have ever had, and he took a zero-parent influence policy, which was quite refreshing. I could see him coaching even above Junior B and heading onto an OHL bench like a seasoned vet."

This year Miller moved on to take an associate coach role with the St. Catharines Junior B Falcons. They are currently in the first round of the playoffs in the Greater Ontario Junior B Hockey League's (GOJHL) playoffs.

"They're an excellent organization," Miller says. "It's a great culture, they provide a great environment for the players. There's a certain expectation for the players' behaviour both on and off the ice. And the number of volunteers involved, it's second-to-none in the Niagara region."

Miller, who just got married to Andrea last summer (they met years ago when they both worked at Bistro 61 on Queen Street) and does not have children of his own yet, says his focus in coaching has always been on development.

"That's with respect to skill development and personal character development," Miller insists. "And work ethic, too. I would identify myself as a player's coach who takes an interest in each of my players' lives, and treats them with respect and care. In return, I expect a good attitude and hard work. Success will come with that."

When asked who his



Matt Miller on the bench coaching his U16 Niagara North Stars team.

coaching mentors were, Miller points to Billy Carroll, a former NHL player who won three Stanley Cups with the New York Islanders and one with the Edmonton Oilers in the 1980s. He also mentions Wayne Marchment, his Junior coach back in his Cobourg days.

"I was a vocal, charismatic player in those days, with a smart hockey IQ," Miller says. "I think both of those guys recognized that I had potential to be a coach back then."

Outside of his current role with the Falcons, Miller continues to run his self-named hockey school and camps, which in the past have taken him as far away as Minnesota and China. And he has run a number of camps in the Niagara region, especially when he was involved with the North Stars.

Miller continues to coach for all the right reasons. He does it because he loves it. It's his passion. Though he admits it would be a dream to make hockey his full time job, he also has

a practical side that means he has to make the difficult decision to miss a practice or arrive 10 minutes late from time to time.

"People want to see homes when they are home from work," he explains, "which is generally evenings and weekends. Well, that's generally when hockey is. I've become a master navigator of my time, I manage my schedule to a 'T'. I never jeopardize my real estate work with hockey. Real estate takes the front seat, and hockey goes to the back."

"We won't back down, we negotiate very hard for our clients," he says of the Miller team. "We're not afraid of an agent, or a difficult buyer or seller on the other side. We try to represent our client's interests as best as we can."

Even if he does some day find full-time work behind a hockey bench, Miller says he will always be involved in the family business, which he loves just as much as his favourite sport. And after all, as he points out, he loves the competition.

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Preparations in full swing for safe Bunny Trail

Penny Coles
The Local

Preparations are in full-swing for the popular annual Bunny Trail event, back after a two-year absence.

While the new Niagara Nursery School multiple-room space is working out well, says executive director Candice Penny, it won't be available for

the event, which is being planned entirely outdoors, with an eye on safety precautions against COVID.

"We're following best practices for the event," she says, and that includes outdoors with events planned to allow room for distancing. "Activities are spread out to discourage major gatherings in any one spot as much as possible," with

lots of sanitizing throughout.

Decisions had to be made about the event without knowing whether there would be restrictions mandated, so they prepared for that scenario by keeping it outdoors.

Hand sanitizers will be available, "and we're encouraging people to wear masks," says Penny.

The event will be held "rain or shine, unless we have really something really extreme," she says, "so come dressed for the weather."

"We're definitely excited to be going ahead with this, but also cautious, prepared to do what we need to do."

They've tried to keep it simple, with a limited number of activities, mindful

both of safety but also providing lots of fun for families, including a bake sale, touch-a-tractor, balloon animals, and an Easter photo booth.

NNS is still accepting suggestions of names for their new "bunny friend." Suggestions can be sent to niagaranurserydirector2@gmail.com by April 14.

The winning name will

be announced on social media on Friday, April 15.

The Bunny Trail is Saturday, April 16, from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the Niagara-on-the-Lake community centre.

The Kinsmen Egg Hunt starts at 10 a.m. sharp, with age groups for three and under, four to six, and seven to 10, and a special prize for each age group.



Scarlett Plut, in the toddler program, concentrates on her craft. (Photos supplied)



Paige Chow, in the preschool program, decorates an Easter egg.



Colton Baxter, in the infant room of NNS, prepares for the Bunny Trail with Easter crafts.

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Museum research room open for sleuths, curious public

Barbara Worthy
NOTL Museum

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum research room has opened, for now every Tuesday by appointment, and all sleuths, detectives, genealogists, and the curious public are once again invited back to explore the secrets of boxes, drawers, and files of historical archives.

The NOTL Museum's collection database site at www.notlmuseum.ca is the first place to start. After an initial exploration, researchers must book an appointment with the museum. Requests are received, and

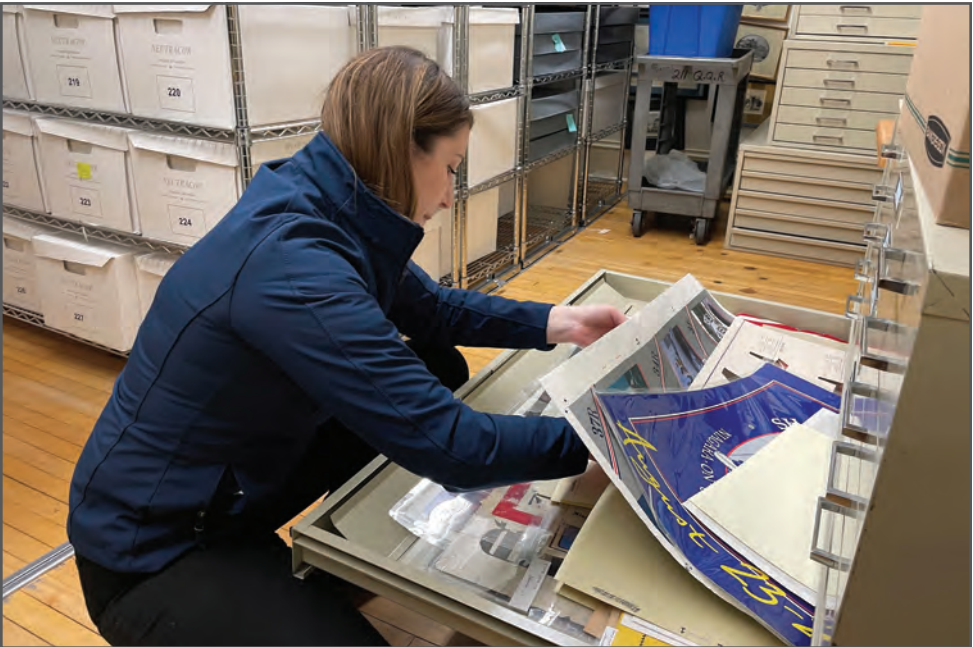
a detailed inventory of relevant information on a particular subject is drawn up by museum staff. Researchers are then able to determine exactly what archival material they would like to physically examine.

The museum is home to more than 50,000 items, out of which approximately 41,000 fall into the photographic, paper and print categories. And as this museum houses one of the oldest and most significant collections of life in Upper Canada for the past 10,000 years, the job of clue-hunting is not for the faint of heart. Diaries, war claims, oral histo-

ries, military and court records, properties, families, names, and early settlement records, all make up the extensive collection, and make researching even the most obscure article a fascinating adventure.

All researchers are asked to phone ahead to make a Tuesday appointment, and to provide initial areas of interest. Research fees are \$15 per visit for non-members, and free to members.

For more information check out the NOTL Museum website at www.notlmuseum.ca/research, or send an email to: contact@nhsm.ca



Museum assistant curator Shawna Butts works in one of the archive rooms. (Photo supplied)

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Central Community Church opening for Easter service

Mike Balsom
The Local

For lead pastor Bill Markham it's more than serendipity or coincidence that the new York Road location of Central Community Church will open its doors for the first time for an Easter Sunday service this weekend.

"I believe that there is an order and a reason for everything," Markham says, standing in the large, spacious foyer. "Not only are we getting to open on Easter Sunday, the highlight of our calendar, but people are able to come without registering and we can actually have a mass celebration. I give credit to God for that. He knew the timing would be perfect."

This weekend's opening is the fulfilment of a dream that began with an idea about 14 years ago, when it became clear that Central's 900-capacity Scott Street church was beginning to burst at the seams. A fundraising campaign was begun, and ground was broken on the new site in 2019.

Construction delays forced by two years of the pandemic did slow things down for much of 2020, but project manager and congregation member Grant McArthur says the \$20 million building is ready to open its doors to the public.

"There's just a bit of clean-up to do," McArthur tells The Local. "We have to double-check everything, put up a few banners, move some things around, just some last minute details. We're ready to go. It's not a rush to the end, it's exactly what we planned."

"We're actually doing a three-week opening," Markham explains. "The first week is, of course, the celebration of Easter, a regular service that celebrates what Jesus did. Week two we're going to talk about what this all means for our church, and week three on May 1 is for the

community, with the mayors coming to cut the ribbon and all the fanfare."

Over the past few weeks, Markham has welcomed members of Central's volunteer committees, who number in the hundreds, as well as members of the congregation who contributed to the financial campaign for the new building. Feedback from them has been overwhelmingly positive.

"The first impression, I think, will be amazing for everyone," predicts Markham. "Many gave sacrificially to this project. For them, it will be just an amazing moment and experience as a family. It's a testament to the belief of the church family, and I hope it's a statement that anything is possible."

Both Markham and McArthur stress that 680 York Road is not just a church but also a community centre. From the beginning, the vision was to have the building become a central part of the Niagara community, built to host everything from weddings and celebrations to concerts and conferences.

As well, the church space itself, with a capacity of 1,500 on the floor and another 300 in the balcony, features no permanent seating, making it flexible enough to host sports groups during the week.

"There's no space that is single use," Markham says. "That was a critical piece in the design of this space. And we still have space that we can develop. Yes, we are a church family, but we did everything with the greater community in mind."

"It's bright, it's grand, it's open," continues Markham. "The goal was to make you feel welcome when you walk in. It's a way to say that this is a place for you."

McArthur says new events coordinator Sarah Pritula has already booked an upcoming concert and a major youth conference. A number

of weddings are planned for the smaller room, which will be used for youth ministry on Sundays, and a volleyball group has booked the main church for its teams. The annual Community Crew fundraising gala will be held on the site as well.

Final preparations to open the on-site daycare centre are still being completed. Childcare supervisor Christine Lett says inspections by the region should be happening soon, and the playground equipment has yet to arrive. She expects the daycare, with spaces for 65 children, should be open in a month.

Standing inside the church space it's difficult not to be impressed. The massive stage may be the largest permanent stage in the region. It's flanked on either side by large projection screens, 24' wide by 13.5' high, and racks of LED lighting. The hardwood floor, not yet lined for volleyball or basketball, goes wall-to-wall.

An island with television cameras sits about two-thirds back from the stage, connected to the sound and lighting board installed in the balcony. The audio system sounds fantastic, a promising factor for future concert bookings.

Visitors for Sunday service, with sessions at both 9 a.m. and 11 a.m., will enter the foyer, greeted by volunteers identified by their brightly coloured T-shirts. They'll have a chance to take a photo by the large A PLACE FOR YOU sign.

There are monitors and speakers in the foyer that will show the service, perfect for any overflow or for those who may be overwhelmed by the number of people inside the church. The cafe in the foyer will be open Sunday as well.

Markham and his team are busy preparing for this weekend, with a full run-through with lights and sound happening this Thursday evening.



'A PLACE FOR YOU' sign welcomes all who enter the church. (Mike Balsom)

"They have worked really hard," Markham enthuses about his team. "They are super positive, super excited. We're really excited to invite new people who have maybe never been to our community of faith, who may have never been to church before. It is very different than maybe

what most people expect."

The final Sunday service was held at their long-time Scott Street location last weekend. For Good Friday, Markham and his worship team will bid a final adieu along with the congregation there, symbolically closing that chapter before the debut

on York Road.

"We were there for 21 years," Markham says. "My daughter took a picture there with my grandson. That's where she grew up, where all the major transformative moments of her life took place. This will be his place, the place for the next generation."

Happy Anniversary!



Sally McGarr is celebrating her 40th . . . that is 40 years of selling real estate throughout Niagara. She is seen here with the team of realtors, at a McGarr listing located at 228 Queen Street in Old Town. McGarr is proud to assist their clients across the peninsula. Happy Anniversary Sally! (Bill Cochrane)

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North Shores Park showing signs of coming alive

David Gilchrist
Special to The Local

As we celebrate National Wildlife Week it is wonderful to spend some time in our local conservation areas.

A popular area for both townsfolk and visitors is the Niagara Shores area along Lakeshore Road. In the last few weeks, after the long winter, the area is showing many signs of 'coming alive' again. The Canada geese are loudly making their presence known in the pond area. A turtle was spotted sunning itself on a log on the far side. A pair of mute swans have returned and appear to be nesting at the far end of the pond. A mallard drake, seemingly lonely was quacking away. A carp was jumping and my favourites - the belted kingfishers were quite active along the

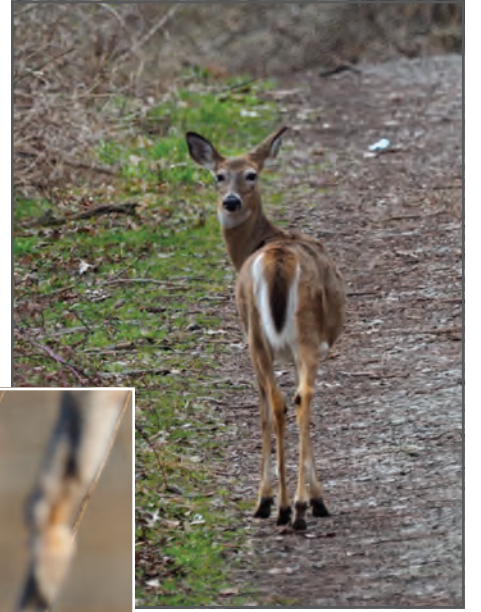
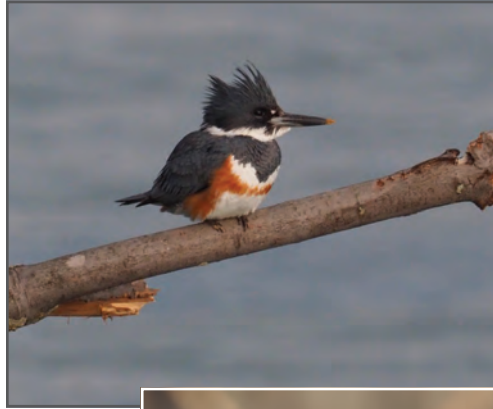
Lake Ontario shoreline with their noticeable 'chattering' as they fly about. Last week, I was pleasantly surprised to spot a deer as I was leaving the area. It allowed a few photos while it was in the open and stopped after it went off the access road. We spent a few more minutes watching each other before it melted into the wooded area.

It's great to see people out walking the trails and encouraging to see many of the folks with dogs keeping them leashed in the area, as Parks Canada requests. Given that we have fewer and fewer areas locally for wildlife, it's important that they aren't being chased by dogs on the loose.

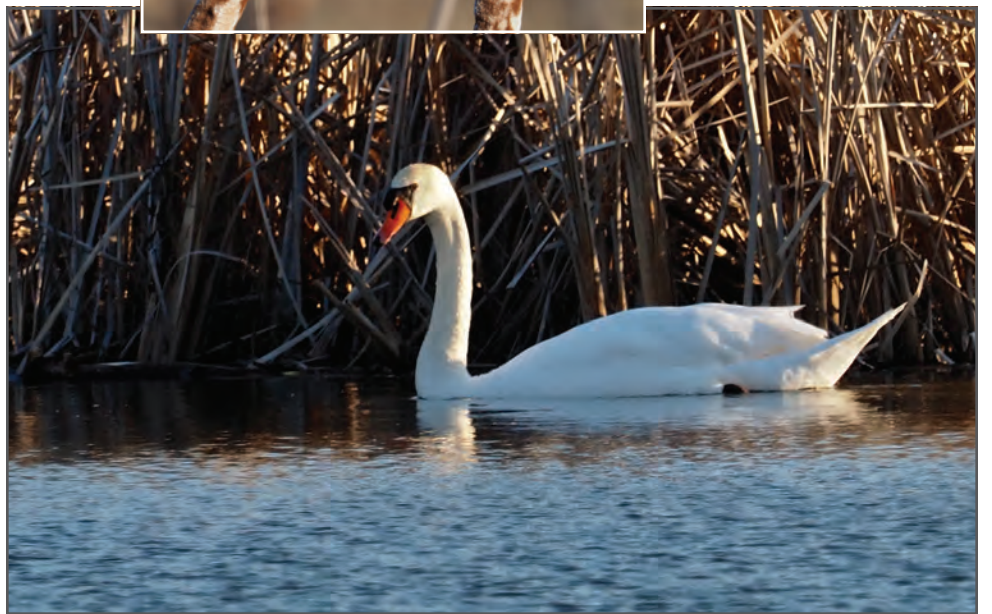
I'm hoping that vehicle access to this relatively small area will remain restricted, as I fear it will cause many

problems, especially for species at risk like the bank swallows that will soon be reappearing.

It's very important for us to remember that with the ongoing development of so much of our surrounding lands, these dwindling natural areas will face extraordinary pressure. Maintaining their wise use will become very important.



On recent walks through North Shores Park, photographer David Gilchrist was able to capture a photo of a deer, lots of Canada geese, with a sun-bathing turtle, mallard ducks, red-winged blackbirds, swans, and a belted kingfisher.



Kayaker not happy about paid parking

Continued from page 1

incomparable."

She's paddled all five of the Great Lakes, enjoying the peace and solitude of her endeavour across the province. And she says paddling right here at home is an amazing experience.

"It's different every time I come out here," Rienzo marvels. "It's you, the sound of your blades cleanly slicing through the water. It's the prospect of running into wildlife - red fox, deer, racoons, waterfowl. There's even a beaver on the upper river near Brown's Point."

Rienzo says she also used to camp overnight on Navy Island in Niagara Falls.

"For years you used to be able to land your boat there and spend the night," she says. "I'm a no-trace camper, I did not harm. In fact, I would clean up other people's messes. Now Parks Canada has taken over, and they put up 'no trespassing' signs all over the island. Now no one has access. My world is getting smaller and smaller."

Rienzo recently replaced her Honda Fit with a Suba-

ru Forester. She has outfitted the vehicle with a Thule Hullavator system, which allows her to lift her kayak to waist height and let the Hullavator do most of the work to get the vessel on the roof.

The Subaru allows her to easily navigate the road down to Smuggler's Cove where she usually launches her boat. Navy Hall is another frequent launch location, but she says access there is not easy, with the dock sitting too high off the water. And a few months ago a pile of boulders were dumped near the dock, making access even more difficult.

With the recent announcement that the town does not have enough money left in the budget to add an accessible dock near Balls Beach, she continues to be frustrated by what she sees as the town's lack of support for water enthusiasts like herself.

There had been much talk in recent years that plans were coming together for such an installation, but the aftermath of the 2019 flooding in the dock area meant funds had to be fun-

nelled to the clean-up and efforts to ensure more effective drainage in the future.

Rienzo feels the town is missing an opportunity to attract a certain kind of tourist. With an average kayak coming in at around \$2,000, and additional money spent on roof racks, life jackets, spray skirts and bilge pumps for the boat, kayakers usually have money to spend at NOTL hotels, bars and restaurants.

There is some hope, though, as Lord Mayor Betty Disero told The Local recently, that there is an area along Balls Beach, closer to a parking area on Turntable Way, where a simple launch for kayakers could be made at little cost. Disero said she and Town CAO Marnie Cluckie will be monitoring that location for kayakers to see if any improvements need to be made.

Disero added that there will be parking meters connected to Honk Mobile at Turntable Way. That would allow Rienzo and others to pay for extended parking using the app on their phone, and to top up their time remotely, even from the river.

"I refuse to pay to put my boat in the water," an angry Rienzo says. "It's absurd. We as a species should not be limited to where we can access water, period. Lakes, rivers, oceans - it shouldn't matter. We don't have a shortage of tax dollars, we have a problem with politicians who don't know how to spend it responsibly. We need politicians who are athletes, someone like me, who wants to access our

parks and our waterfronts."

"We've got water here, but we're landlocked for kayakers," Rienzo says. "That is a big problem here and it isn't fair. Niagara-on-the-Lake is not kayak-, canoe- or small motor boat-friendly. And there is not a single beach that is wheelchair- or senior citizen-friendly."

She plans to add her voice to that of Tim Bala-siuk, owner of Paddle Niagara, and others who have

been pushing for some kind of easier access for kayaks and paddle boards for a number of years.

As she finishes waxing her vessel, she plans to head out later the same day, hoping to run into that beaver near Brown's Point.

"I haven't given him a name yet," she laughs. "I figure every time I go out, there's about a 60 per cent chance I'm going to see him."



Carla Rienzo has a kayak and all the equipment she needs to keep her safe and warm on the coldest days. (David Gilchrist)

Club pro, assistant welcome start of season

Mike Balsom
The Local

Though it was perhaps a bit chilly Friday, for Keith Vant there couldn't have been a better day to open the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club.

Sunshine greeted the first group of golfers to tee off at 8 a.m., and the 29-year-old Niagara Falls native played his first round as the club's new head professional about an hour or so later.

"It was a great opening day," Vant tells The Local. "We had a total of about 85 golfers come out, and we had no rain. I met a lot of the members Friday."

Vant takes the reins from long-time head pro Billy Simkin, who departed for a head teaching professional job at Fonthill's Peninsula Lakes Golf Club. Vant, a Stamford Collegiate graduate, is thrilled to be overseeing the golf side of things at the oldest surviving golf course in North America.

Vant is one of those guys who has never met a sport he didn't like. Ask which sports he participated in when he was younger, the list is endless: basketball, volleyball, tennis, football, hockey, cross country, soccer and rugby all come up. He holds a black belt in karate, too.

"Golf was always just a fun thing to do with my dad for the longest time," Vant says. "Then I tore my ACL and broke my collarbone in different years playing rugby. I figured I wouldn't be able to play all those sports my whole life, but one I could play for a long time is golf, so I started taking it more seriously."

Following graduation from Stamford, he took a gap year, then enrolled at Niagara College. He jumped to Humber's golf program for a year, then came back to

Niagara to graduate.

Vant says his father Jason first put clubs in his hands when he was about three years old. He would accompany his dad to various courses across Niagara and later became a junior member at Stevensville's International Country Club (now Niagara National).

He earned his pro card while working part-time at ICC, then jumped to Legends on the Niagara as their assistant pro, a role he held for seven years.

Vant sees some similarities between Legends and NOTL, as well as some stark contrasts.

"Between the two clubs, the customer service has to be top-notch," Vant reflects. "At Legends, though, golfers were there vacationing, you didn't get the repeat clientele that you do at Niagara-on-the-Lake. This club is a lot more social, a lot more tight-knit. People are friends here, or looking to meet new friends."

"It's a complex job," he continues. "There's a lot I've had to step into to get going right away, with the number of leagues we have, and the amount of people that are in our leagues. Business ladies and Thursday nights men's leagues are both over 150 players. I've had a lot of requests for lessons as well."

In the month or so since he's been at the NOTL club he's had a chance to meet many of the members, and he's been impressed at how welcoming and helpful everyone has been.

His goal is to create some fun games and activities to enhance the social aspect that both he and club proprietor John Wiens see as one of the biggest assets of the club.

"It will be easier this year now that COVID rules are lifted," Vant says. "We can go back to shotgun starts

for league play, we can have people back inside the dining room all at the same time afterwards. We'll be able to do prizes and dinners and get to know each other through that."

Coming off the course Friday morning Vant couldn't help but reflect on the scenery.

"What beautiful views, it's just awesome," Vant marvelled. "I noticed how tree-lined the fairways are. It will be even tighter once the leaves are on them come summer. I'll have to be hitting a straight ball all along. And with the wind coming off the lake, that will add to the challenge but also feel like a blessing during the dog days of summer."

Assistant pro Cam Zeppa gives credit to the grounds crew, led by superintendent Mike Magwood, for getting the course ready for Friday's first rounds.

"He's done a great job," Zeppa says. "I know he has some plans to do a little more in the next few weeks, but the course is drier than we anticipated. They've done a lot of tree-trimming and getting the bunkers ready. There's no real winter-wear on the grass, either."

Zeppa came to NOTL last spring from Hamilton's Glendale Golf and Country Club, a Club Link course. He steps into the role left behind last fall by NOTL native Ricky Watson, who is now working in real estate.

Like Vant, Zeppa is eager to see the social aspect of the club return after two summers of play-and-leave being the order of the day.

"This year we're really trying to bring back the pre-COVID club atmosphere," Zeppa says. "We weren't able to clean our members' clubs last year because it was a COVID risk. We are able to bring that service back to our members. And we hope



Assistant Cam Zeppa and golf club pro Keith Vant are hoping to develop more social activities at the club, now that pandemic restrictions are lifted. (Photo supplied)



Reigning NOTL Golf Club men's champion James Grigjanis-Meusel, and John Sobil, winner of the Goldup trophy, played the first round of golf for the season at the NOTL Golf Club Friday morning with Joe Doria, the first to sign up. He was also part of a foursome that opened the season last year. "It's been a long, tough winter," said Doria Friday. "We were really anxious for the club to open." (Penny Coles)

our members will stay after their round, have a drink, some food and socialize"

Zeppa says he and Vant have been working well together so far.

"We bring in our own styles, which are very similar," Zeppa explains. "He

brings the public aspect from working at Legends, where my experience has been more membership-based. We complement each other."

And they've both enjoyed working for John and Jill Wiens.

"They are fantastic — what nice people," Vant says. "I know I've only been here a month, but I've communicated almost every day with them. They've been so helpful and supportive. I think it will be a good long-term relationship. What lovely people."

As the golf season progresses, Vant and Zeppa are

hoping to hire another assistant to help them with the high demand for lessons. They are also planning to run four junior camps, one more than usual, during the summer months.

And Vant hopes he can carve some time out periodically to hit the links once again with his father, as well as with his mother, Kandy, who took up the game about 15 years ago.

"I golf with my mother now almost as much as I do with my father," laughs Vant. "She gives my dad a run for his money almost every time we play."

You're hired!



A job fair organized by the NOTL Chamber of Commerce — the first ever, in response to a shortage of employees in restaurants, hotels, wineries and the hospitality industry after two years of staff looking for more secure jobs — went really well, says Nicole Cripps, chamber director of marketing and events. It was held Tuesday afternoon at the Meridian Credit Union Arena, with some hires on the spot happening, she said. (Photo supplied)

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LocalSPORTS

Town looking for Sports Wall of Fame nominations



The late Doug Garrett, with emcee and committee chair Ward Simpson beside him, recalled his golfing days during the Sports Wall of Fame induction ceremony in 2019. There hasn't been one since. (File photos)



Accompanied by his son Richard, the late Dave Wall shared memories at his 2019 induction into the Sports Wall of Fame at the Meridian Credit Union Arena.

Mike Balsom The Local

Ward Simpson, chair of Niagara-on-the-Lake's Sports Wall of Fame committee, is happy the town will be able to honour at least two new members this year on the wall of the Meridian Credit Union Arena.

"We struggled with whether to do it or not during COVID," says Simpson, himself a Wall of Fame member, inducted in 2011 for his own contributions to local sports. "The right decision was to not do it because one of the best parts of the whole thing is the

evening when we present the awards. With COVID, we couldn't do that."

The last ceremony was held at the arena in late August, 2019. That night about 60 family members and friends gathered in the corridor to celebrate the induction of Doug Garrett as an athlete and Dave Wall for his behind-the-scenes efforts as a builder.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Sports Wall of Fame was established to acknowledge those men and women who have made a significant contribution to sports in our community. Since its inception in 2003, 26 others

have joined Simpson in the photo gallery at the arena.

The town is accepting nominations for the Wall of Fame until May 6. After that date, the committee will meet to evaluate all the names put forward.

"It's always tough, because we keep all the past nominations and go back through them," explains Simpson. "When we did it last time, we only had one or two new submissions. Hopefully we will get more new submissions this year to make the decision harder. It's always good to have new names brought in."

NOTL manager of

parks and recreation Kevin Turcotte says the nominations are actually always open, but the town didn't promote it during the pandemic. Because of that no nominations were received the past two years.

"Normally the committee selects two people each year," Turcotte tells The Local, when asked whether or not more members will be welcomed this year to make up for the two years missed. "Our committee won't meet until after the nominations close, and that's something that we might discuss then."

Only twice before were more than two members

inducted. Four were welcomed in 2008 (Harry Steele, Bill Danychuk, Jeremy Rempel and Susan Grimstead) and three in 2017 (Bill Dickson, Marv Edwards and Jack Lowery). In 2006, Alan, Vera and Mark Derbyshire were inducted together as athletes, and Art and Ted Wiens were welcomed as a tandem of builders in 2016.

In 2018, the committee made the rare decision to induct only Bob Hunter in the builder category for his contributions to minor hockey.

"It's not necessarily always an athlete and a builder," Turcotte says. "It's based on the applications we receive, and the committee's recommendations that get brought forward. It depends on which applications are supported by the majority of the committee."

To nominate an athlete or a builder, Turcotte asserts there must be support from at least five people in the community on the official form. That lends more weight and support to each

particular nomination.

Simpson adds that whether an athlete or a builder, each member of the Wall of Fame must have been a resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake while initiating his or her athletic endeavour.

"It's fairly strict," Simpson explains. "We've had people who have moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake in their later years who were great athletes, but not really in Niagara. We're not able to accept those applications because they're not Niagara natives."

One of Simpson's favourite parts of chairing the committee is discovering the contributions of people he didn't realize had contributed so much to the community.

"We hear about some people who we didn't really recognize as sports heroes," Simpson says. "That makes it a lot more interesting. And it makes the decision process challenging, too."

"There's a real sense of community, and I think you can see that on the wall," says Turcotte. "People enjoy telling people that they are from Niagara-on-the-Lake. And people are proud of the efforts of others to build sports facilities and leagues. It's a celebration of sports in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The wall is indicative of people contributing to the community in whatever way they can."

Funding for the plaques and frames comes from various organizations and sponsors, including the Niagara-on-the-Lake Kinsmen Club and Rotary Club.

Nomination forms can be found at <https://notl.civicweb.net/document/22530>.

LocalHAPPENINGS

St. Davids and District Lions Club
1462 York Rd., St. Davids (NOTL)



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Easter

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OBITUARY

WALTHER, MARIANA MARLENE (1950–2022) — Mariana Marlene Walther passed away peacefully and surrounded by family on April 4, 2022. Marlene will be deeply missed by her devoted husband of over 50 years, Roland, her loving sons, Stefan and Mark, and her cherished daughter-in-law, Larisa.

Teaching was Marlene’s great passion and it gave her pleasure when she could help others learn. Marlene began her career in education in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. She then taught for 25 years for the Lakehead Board of Education in Thunder Bay, completed her Master in Education degree, and became Business Chair at Westgate High School. A big career highlight was teaching the children of the Canadian Forces in Lahr, Germany, working for the Department of National Defence in the mid-1980s. This also gave the Walthers the opportunity to visit and really become acquainted with their large German family including Roland’s mother, four sisters and brother. Another milestone came in 2001 when Marlene was honoured by being nominated and receiving the Prime Minister’s Award for Teaching Excellence; family joined her for the ceremony on Parliament Hill where the award was personally presented by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Always looking for adventure and challenges, Marlene pursued further teaching opportunities in the Middle East after retirement.

Marlene met her husband, Roland, “the rock of her life,” at a night-school art class when she was 18. They spent more than 50 wonderful years together, raising their two sons, and supporting each other while working and travelling around the world.

Welcoming visitors into her home to experience the Walther hospitality, accentuated by her husband’s delicious German cooking, gave Marlene much pleasure — she loved being a hostess and tour guide, enthusiastically introducing their family and friends to the many places they called home: Thunder Bay and Lake Superior, Germany and Europe, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and the Emirates, the Fraser Valley in British Columbia, and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Marlene enjoyed teaching and playing bridge and was very active with the game in Niagara-on-the-Lake. In 2010, she started her website, ATeacherFirst.com, to help people learn bridge. Players from around the world have purchased, and continue to purchase, her Bridge Pocket Guide and other online offerings. Her legacy will live on, as her family is continuing the popular website. Marlene also enjoyed playing tennis and Mahjong.

Marlene spent her last 15 years in Niagara-on-the-Lake and thoroughly enjoyed all it has to offer: great restaurants and wineries, a gentler climate, active social groups and wonderful friends. She was an avid theatre lover and volunteered for the Shaw Festival since she moved to NOTL in 2007, serving as an usher, docent, membership chair, garden sitter, and helping in many other ways. She served on the NOTL Newcomers Board, as treasurer, then president, and webmaster.

A Celebration of Life will occur this summer for family and close friends in Marlene’s favourite place, her beautiful garden.

Marlene loved and was surrounded by animals her whole life, she was particularly fond of cats. For those wishing to offer condolences or a tribute, the family would greatly appreciate a donation to the Niagara SPCA and Humane Society: www.NiagaraSPCA.com.

SUDOKU

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

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from
April 6, 2022

7	5	1	6	3	8	9	2	4
2	6	8	5	9	4	7	3	1
9	3	4	1	2	7	6	5	8
3	2	9	8	7	6	4	1	5
5	4	6	9	1	2	8	7	3
1	8	7	3	4	5	2	6	9
6	1	2	4	5	9	3	8	7
8	9	3	7	6	1	5	4	2
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SIEMENS, KATHARINA (TINA) — It is with sorrow filled hearts that we announce the passing of Katharina (Tina) Siemens on April 10, 2022 at the age of 91. After a brief battle with cancer and with her loving husband Peter by her side, Tina peacefully returned to our Lord.

She was the beloved wife of nearly 66 years to Peter Siemens, and together they raised four children Peter (Chenrong), Maggie (David), Kathy (Ernie) and Gerhard (Eleanor). She was a cherished grandmother to Melissa, Sara, Jessica, Lisa, Tammi and Rebecca and loving GG to her six great grandchildren Charlie, Aiden, Maya, Bennett, Carolina and Mara.

Tina was born in Neundorf, Ukraine as the third of eleven children for Gerhard and Katherina Kroeker. She immigrated with her family to Paraguay in 1948, where she met Peter, whom she later married in 1956. Their first child arrived shortly before they immigrated to Canada in 1957, settling in Virgil and raising their family in the white brick home they built together. Tina spent much of her life working with local farmers, was an expert seamstress, and exceptional cook welcoming all to “Tina’s Diner”, as her kitchen was affectionately known. She was deeply religious and lived a life of selflessness, charity and compassion, which was most recently demonstrated through her sponsorship of children through World Vision and the hundreds of quilts she sewed for children in need.

The family would like to acknowledge the compassionate medical care Tina received over the last three weeks from Dr. Berti and the nursing team from St. Elizabeth’s (Merrick and Alex).

In lieu of flowers, please consider donations to Hospice Niagara.

Family and friends are welcome to celebrate Tina’s life at Calvary Church, 89 Scott Street, St. Catharines on Wednesday April 13th at 11 am for the funeral service. A private burial will take place before the ceremony.

Online condolences at www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca

Queenston village supports Ukraine with flags, funds

Penny Coles
The Local

Queenston Residents Association president Jim Armstrong was hoping to raise a Ukrainian flag on the village flag post, with a little ceremony, outside the library.

When he learned town regulations made that impossible, he quickly found another option.

A drive through the village will show three Ukrainian flags hanging from hydro poles in the village, along with several residents flying flags on their own properties.

The three 3' by 5' flags, as well as the flagpoles, were paid for through donations to the QRA, with town staff assisting by installing them, says Armstrong.

"The staff were very enthusiastic, and when we thanked them for their help, they thanked us for what we were doing. The feeling out there is that everyone wants to do as much as they can."

The QRA has also been raising funds for Ukraine, with a matching campaign, and will be sending \$1,500 for Ukrainian relief. It took a bit of time, "but we exceeded what we had anticipated," said Armstrong.

The flags are symbolic, but the donations are what is really important, with so much needed in the way of humanitarian aid, he added.

Queenston resident Adrian Schoot Uiterkamp said villagers seeing the brutality of Russian attacks felt they wanted to do something to support Ukraine, even those without family connections. "We're all humans belonging to the world," he said.

Village residents Doug King, Sue Stecyk with Daisy, Marilyn and Jim Armstrong, and Adrian Schoot Uiterkamp celebrate the new Ukrainian flags in the village, with flags and poles paid for through donations by residents. (Penny Coles)



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