Many opportunities, many reasons for volunteering

Penny Coles  
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake is the volunteer capital of Canada, says Cheryl Morris, and as one of the busiest volunteers in town, contributing to several organizations, she would know.

The organization is most involved in at the moment is the Shaw Guild, likely one of the largest, if not the largest, volunteer groups in town, with 320 members who collectively donated 13,000 hours to help the Shaw Festival in varied capacities last year, saving the organization a huge cost of paying people to do the work done by volunteers.

The Shaw Guild Garden Tour, one of the two major fundraisers for the festival, alone requires a team of 120 volunteers to coordinate the tour, and be onsite in gardens to greet people, direct and welcome them.

It’s an organization that receives inquiries from people all the time, says Morris, with orientations they can attend to learn about the many ways they can become involved.

“There are always people interested in joining because the guild has so much to offer, so many different ways to volunteer. Whatever your interest is, there is something for you to do.”

Mary Mizen learned that nine years ago, when she attended one of the orientation sessions. She had decided when she retired that she wanted to do some sort of scheduled volunteering, she says. “It was my time to give back. When I first came for my orientation, we were having it in the festival lobby, and I looked outside and saw gardeners working in the garden. I love to garden, so I thought ‘that’s what I want to do’. And that was where I started.”

She has greeted patrons, done backstage tours, scanned tickets, and facilitated after-the-show chats. And of course there is the all important job of fundraising, and she has worked on both major events — the garden tour, and the annual Sip, Savour and Stroll, an elegant garden party with refreshments and music, coming up in May. This is Mizen’s first year as guild president, and as she says, “so far so good.”

Mizen says she and her husband used to visit NOTL, but husband used to visit NOTL, and loved going to the Shaw, so it was an easy decision to retire here. “Why would you want to live anywhere else,” she says. “Here. Why would you want to live anywhere else.”

Her first six years volunteering was with Hospice Niagara, serving on its board. It was a very rewarding experience, and the right time for her to be there, for personal reasons — her sister was a client, and it made sense for her to volunteer. Her next choice to give back was at the Shaw, which is a natural when you love theatre.

Mizen says she also loves the artistic environment, and that volunteering is a social event — you might go with a friend or neighbour, and you will meet other people.

And the festival is very good to us, so although we do this as a donation of our time, they allow us to get into things that the average patron wouldn’t. Sometimes we’re invited to dress rehearsals or we get to see the set designs being built. Sometimes we’ll be

Continued on page 5

Funding isn’t covering student food insecurity

Sharon Burns  
The Local

Local schools may have to pause their snack program prior to June because of “a perfect storm of obstacles,” said Jessica Stephenson, program manager at Niagara Nutrition Partners.

The not-for-profit program, established in 1998, is a region-wide initiative offering support and coordination for student nutrition programs in both elementary and secondary schools.

Student nutrition programs are often referred to as breakfast clubs, however, in many schools across Niagara, these programs give children access to breakfast, snacks and even lunch throughout the day.

“Niagara Nutrition Partners has experienced some incredible growth over the last year, just based on need alone,” said Stephenson. “We were serving 17,000 students every day last year and now we are up to 24,000 in 200 schools across the region, in all four school boards.”

The program has not received an increase in provincial funding, which covers only a portion of costs, since 2014, and they have had to fundraise in the community. “The issue is that the local community is feeling the pinch as well. Those funding pots that we used to tap into are dwindling quicker and there is less money available, with more agencies competing for those same dollars,” said Stephenson.

Inflation has increased their food cost and delivery cost to a level that we can’t maintain the same quality program that we have come to know, and that the kids deserve to have,” she continued.

With the funding they were able to cover student food insecurity last year, just based on need alone, “said Stephenson.

Continued on page 8
April 19, 2023

Physician recruitment plan needed for Niagara

Zahraa Hmood
The Local

It’s likely to be an uphill battle to bring new doctors to Niagara-on-the-Lake, as the Niagara Region’s specialist in physician recruitment says challenges lie ahead to meet the growing need for family healthcare.

Bill Croteau shared what’s in store for the town during last Tuesday’s committee of the whole meeting as it looks at filling in the gaps of its local healthcare system.

“Within Niagara, we have very few doctors that are currently accepting patients,” Croteau said. “We don’t have a lot of options for people.”

The Niagara region’s short-age mirrors the nation-wide scarcity of available doctors, with more than 6.5 million adult Canadians lacking a primary care practitioner (a family physician or nurse practitioner), according to a national survey conducted last fall.

“This is a very complicated file,” said Lord Mayor Gary Zakaefs of the local healthcare gap. “It’s a tough hill ahead.”

According to Croteau, there are currently 255 family doctors operating practices in the region, including 11 in Niagara-on-the-Lake. However, with an official population of 77,000 (as of 2021), the region is 91 physicians short of the amount needed to ensure everyone is represented.

For every 10,000 people in a municipality, there should be almost six doctors, Croteau said, and Niagara-on-the-Lake, which has grown to more than 19,000 and is expected to continue growing, will need to recruit at least three new doctors to meet its population’s needs.

“I know speaking to some of the other municipalities, they plan to double their population within the next 10 years, so it’s really important for us to come up with a strategy,” Croteau said.

During recent operating budget proceedings, Coun. Sandra O’Connor put forth a motion that the town add $20,000 to its budget this year for physician recruitment, which would go to a newly-hired physician to pay for their relocation (as an incentive in a competitive market).

This motion was approved, and the money has been earmarked in the 2023 budget. Croteau talked about challenges the region is facing when it comes to physician recruitment and retention, including lingering burnout after the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It is getting a bit better, but there is still an increased amount of burden,” she said, causing many doctors to opt for working in hospitals or public health care centres, rather than establishing family practices.

Rules also changed for Ontario’s family health organizations this year: Starting April 1, all clinics must have at least six physicians, making it more challenging to form new family physicians groups.

There are other challenges, in the industry, such as the workforce dwindling as physicians retire. Seventeen per cent of family doctors in Niagara are currently over 65 years old, and according to Croteau, up to seven per cent of the workforce is lost each year due to retirement or relocation.

Last year, for example, 19 physicians joined the workforce in Niagara — while another 19 left.

According to data from the Canadian Resident Matching Service, fewer medical school graduates are choosing to go into family medicine and open primary care practices. 36.7 per cent of Canadian students ranked family medicine as their top choice, versus 38 per cent in 2015.

O’Connor, who has been working this past year on the recruitment of a nurse practitioner for the municipality, pointed out to the town’s clinics have amassed a lengthy waitlist of hopeful patients.

“They’re no longer accepting names for their waitlist,” she said. “It’s much worse than it seems.”

For the goal of the town, Croteau said, should be to either find a way to expand the current family health organization, to identify where an additional space, or places, can be created.

“We definitely need to work together to develop a plan for clinic space going forward,” Croteau said.

Pollinator plants to be added to heritage trail

Zahraa Hmood
The Local

If all goes well, Niagara-on-the-Lake’s heritage trail should be a hive of activity for the birds and bees — and humans, too — this summer, as the work will include adding more pollinator plants along the recently-restored first section of the trail.

The Upper Canada Heritage Trail committee had its first meeting of the year on Monday, April 17, to talk about how it will kick off phase two of the reconstruction plan, for which it has raised approximately $79,000 of the required $160,000 to create the proper trail.

“We have the funds to go ahead now,” said meeting chair Tony Chisholm, adding that the committee has nearly $19,000 left from fundraising efforts, plus $60,400 it received in September from the Communities Initiative.

The second phase of reconstructing the heritage trail will take place along Concession 1 from East and West Line to Line 3.

However, the committee still needs to recruit more members to have a full roster and be able to achieve a quorum to vote on and approve major decisions on the restoration work.

According to parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte, there will be a second recruitment process coming soon.

Chisholm said he hopes to see this take place as soon as possible, to start work on the second restoration phase earlier rather than later this year.

“We’ve got to fill some gaps,” he said of the committee.

The main focus of the committee’s first meeting of the year, however, was a presentation from Janet Trogdon, a member of the Niagara Parks and Recreation Department who’s part of a group of locals dedicating themselves to increasing habitats that encourage pollinators.

Two years ago, Trogdon and her group spearheaded the creation of a pollinator garden at the trail’s entrance at John Street. Now, they want to introduce pollinator plants from John Street to The Promenade, an idea introduced to them by a local member of the committee, Sandra O’Connor.

“That got us all buzzing with excitement again,” she said.

The committee voted in favour of supporting the projects and asked Turcotte and the parks and recreation department staff to continue working with the group to start setting up the plantings this spring.

Planting natural vegetation for pollinator plants, including bees, butterflies, or small mammals, enhances the biodiversity of an outdoor space and gives a helping hand in particular to bees and other pollinating insects that face environmental challenges — particularly, these days, climate change.

“We wanted to start some kind of communication and education about establishing pollinator plantings within our community,” said Trogdon.

“I know speaking to some of the other municipalities, they plan to double their population within the next 10 years, so it’s really important for us to come up with a strategy,” Croteau said.

“…”This is wonderful,” said Chisholm of the project.

“From a public education standpoint I think this could enhance the trail quite a bit.”

Meanwhile, the committee is still fundraising to support its work, members are looking for additional space, or places, can be created.

Last year’s successful event was a Fun Run/Walk and Dog Walk, but this year the committee’s major fundraising event for 2023 is all about dogs.

The event includes dog-themed activities, such as dog massages, a dog kissing booth, dog photographer, and dog communicator.

May 20 is also Dog Rescue Day, and there will be a dog rescue organization onsite.

Registration is limited. For more information or to register visit heritagetrail.ca or niagaradental.ca.

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Stone Eagle gets first nod to move forward

Zahraa Hmood
The Local

Plans for a new $40-million estate winery — one of its developers say will offer a "premium" experience for its guests — has been given the thumbs up from the town.

Council approved Two Sisters’ zoning bylaw amendment request they sought for Stone Eagle Winery, a 16.2 hectare vineyard and wine production site to be built on Niagara Stone Road at Niven and Hunter Roads.

Design details for this new winery were unveiled more than a year ago at a public meeting in April by Two Sisters’ Melissa Marotta-Paolicelli and Angela Marotta. Marotta said Stone Eagle will offer a "premium winery experience," building off their work at Two Sisters Winery on John Street East.

It was a near-unanimous decision of 7-1 to approve the zoning bylaw amendment on Tuesday evening, April 11, during a committee-of-the-whole meeting.

The amendment is for a site-specific rural zone with secondary uses, including selling wine and offering wine tastings, operating a restaurant and special functions room, and an outdoor hospitality area.

As written in the staff report, the existing zoning bylaw provisions for estate wineries were approved by the town in 1994. Since then, the wine industry has seen "significant change," including in Niagra-on-the-Lake.

“The majority of estate winery proposals exceed the floor area provisions of the bylaw with wineries providing hospitality spaces and a different wine experience for their patrons,” noting other wineries in the town with similar secondary uses, such as Peller Estates Winery, Pillitteri Estates Winery, and Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor voted against approval due to changes made to the plans, namely, height increases on parts of the estate’s property.

“There has been a significant increase in the three heights from our statutory public meeting, and the public has not had a chance to address these increases,” O’Connor said.

The approved heights at the building’s peak are represented by its parapet, pitched roof, and clock tower, coming in at 12.8 metres, 15.4 metres, and 25.2 metres respectively.

O’Connor put forth a motion that these planned heights be reduced to those presented at the public meeting on the Stone Eagle Winery in 2022, or that an additional public meeting be held for people to weigh in on the adjustments made.

According to Rick Wilson, the town’s manager of planning, the application has been revised throughout the past year and a half.

“Staff have reviewed those changes and are recommending approval given the size of the property (and) its setbacks,” Wilson said. “There are similar heights proposed directly to the east for a hotel and assembly hall in The Village.”

O’Connor’s motion to either reduce these three heights or host another public meeting on the application was defeated in a 1-7 vote.

One final amendment was made to the application on April 11 at the request of Mary Lou Tanner, with NPG Planning Solutions, on behalf of the planning applicant, for an existing house at 470 Hunter Road to be used as a year-round accommodation for farm workers, rather than seasonal housing.

This amendment was passed and included in the application.

Work has already begun on the property, including the planting of vineyards and 60 trees, with plans to plant 60 more.

“This is a large investment,” Tanner said of the Stone Eagle Winery plans. “It’s been a complicated process, but we are very pleased with the staff report.”

Council is expected to give final approval at this week’s meeting.

REMINDER:
Special Council Meeting, Monday, April 24 @ 5:00 p.m.
at the Community Centre

Residents are reminded of a special in-person Council meeting at 5 p.m. on Monday April 24 at the Community Centre.

The meeting is to enable Council to hear a presentation from staff and delegations from the Marotta group, SORE and members of the public on whether the Marotta group should be granted permits to demolish designated heritage structures and designed landscapes to facilitate a subdivision on the Rand Estate.

Staff have recommended that almost all of these requests be DENIED.

Assuming Council accepts the staff recommendation, the denial of these requests will then be appealed by the Marotta group to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) and heard together with the Planning Act applications for the proposed Marotta Rand subdivision. That hearing is scheduled for March of 2024. A reminder that it was the Marotta group that took the fate of the subdivision away from Council by appealing directly to the OLT some time ago.

The Town has booked the Community Centre for this special meeting in anticipation of a large crowd. A previous public meeting on the Marotta hotel and convention centre proposal for the Rand Estate drew an overflow crowd of at least 600 people to the Community Centre in January of 2018.

Given recent events involving the developer in question, concerned citizens hope to see a large crowd at the Community Centre on April 24. A reminder also that any member of the public who wishes to address Council that evening, as to whether Council should approve or deny the Marotta group’s demolition requests, must register with the Town in advance.

Save Our Randwood Estate
Heritage preservation key for Rand subdivision, planner says

Zahraa Hmood  
The Local

Preservation, not demolition, is what the future should hold for the historic Rand Estate, the Niagara-on-the-Lake municipal heritage committee is recommending.

During the committee’s meeting on Wednesday evening, April 12, it voted to accept a staff report authored by heritage planner Denise Horne, which rejected the majority of the requests to either alter, move, or demolish aspects of the estate on John Street East and Charlotte Street.

“The Rand Estate represents a cultural estate with a high value of historical property,” said Horne, noting it is a rare example of a country estate in town, representing the history of Niagara-on-the-Lake as a popular spot for summer homes.

The report was published March 29, and recommends approval of eight alterations the Solmar group proposed, including the demolition of the Calvin Rand summer house and the main residence on Charlotte Street, a collection of former stables and barns. However, Horne’s report recommends refusing 15 other proposals, including the carriage house on John Street East and two smaller sheds on Charlotte Street, and the removal and relocation of heritage elements such as the Mound Garden and the Dunington-Grubb-designed swimming pool garden into the new subdivision.

“Given the unique and rare heritage value of the properties, and the high level of heritage integrity, I have recommended preservation as the primary conservation approach,” Horne said. “Preservation involves protecting, maintaining, and stabilizing the existing form, material, and integrity of a historic place.”

The committee took it one step further, voting to specifically endorse Horne’s recommendation that the carriage house not be torn down.

The team with Solmar Development and Two Sisters Resorts, who are planning to build a residential subdivision on these properties, shared their conservation plan for the historical aspects of the property, some of which they would be incorporating into the new subdivision.

“We, frankly, were rather disappointed with some of the recommendations,” said Mark Flowers, a lawyer with SGL Planning & Design, representing Solmar.

Flowers said the team takes issue with the report’s assertion that further information is required from the applicant. Flowers said the consulting team has been working with staff to provide them additional information since it first tried to submit its heritage permit applications in October, then deemed incomplete.

When they received notice on Feb. 7 that the applications were complete, it included a caveat that additional materials may be required.

“No to the best of my knowledge, no such further requests for information were made to the applicant,” he said. “Consequently, we were quite surprised and disappointed that some of the alterations have been recommended for refusal.”

However, senior landscape architect David Waverman, with Stanton Consulting, said they are revising their commemoration plan to follow some of the recommendations: for John Street East, restoring the peony gardens, Whistle Stop, tea pavilion/house, all the plantings with the pool area, and for Charlotte Street, restoring the sheds and outbuildings as per the report conditions.

Still, the team argued against planting Austrian pine trees around the mound garden, reinstating the original walkway with gravel, removing the concrete pool to restore the original reflecting pool, and the refusal to allow more than one tree to be removed from the boundary wall.

Of the carriage house, Waverman said the owner is willing to offer financial assistance to relocate rather than demolish it.

“All of these points are more dialogue with the town and where we can direct things to different options,” he said.

During the meeting, residential group Save Our Rand Estate (SORE) reiterated their position for the preservation of the property and a development that is more sensitive to the heritage value on these sites.

“This is one of the last summer estates surviving in Niagara-on-the-Lake,” said Kate Lyons. “The site is literal- ly a treasure and the developer proposes to demolish and alter what remains.”

A public meeting will be held on these heritage permit applications on Monday, April 24, which is expected to feature presentations from Home, Solmar, SORE, and also include public delegations.

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**Public Notice**

**Road Closure – Concession 6 Road**

**WHAT:** The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, through its contractor Walker Construction, will commence with the road reconstruction of Concession 6 Road, North of Mewburn Bridge (Niagara-on-the-Lake / Niagara Falls Limit) to North of Warner Road.

A detour route will be provided around the site for traffic. This closure is necessary due to the narrow roadway and to facilitate a shorter construction schedule for road reconstruction.

**WHEN:** The road closure will begin on Monday, May 1, 2023, and be in place for 16 weeks.

**CONTACT:** Any inquiries concerning this road reconstruction may be directed to Mike Komljenovic, Engineering Supervisor, at mike.komljenovic@notl.com or 905-468-3266 ext. 240.

Emergency Services have been informed of this closure and have developed a plan to ensure emergency service to the properties in the area of the closure remains unaffected.
Funding needed to meet increasing need

& Promoting Healthy Eating Habits for Life!

Meghann Riley, Lina Lianga, Jessica Stephenson, Lauren Guay and Lindsay Edgar of Niagara Nutrition Partners are trying to keep up with the need for snacks in schools. (Supplied)

Continued from page 1

receive from the nutrition partners group, schools can offer breakfast, lunch and snack programs. St. Michael Catholic School, Crossroads and St. Davids public schools all offer a bin of snacks that is delivered to the back of the classrooms, or placed in a hallway.

Lucy Thompson, a teacher at St. Michael, values their snack program. “We have volunteers who run it, and we offer healthy and nutritional snacks,” she said. “Our mandate is to have it accessible to all kids at all times, and if they’re hungry there are no questions asked. We do that in an attempt to remove stigma,” explained Stephenson. “We all know that hunger is not isolated to economic issues. There are many reasons why kids come to school hungry. Poverty also doesn’t have a neighbourhood and we try to level that playing field. Eliminating hunger is a good way to do that.

“There are many assets to having a full stomach,” she added, “including greater attention and focus in the classroom, and less absenteeism.”

Students in the group she represents is calling on the local community to help any way that they are able, whether that be financial or through a food drive. Advocacy work, too.”

Petition local MPs about provincial funding, she added, “and highlight the fact that even though Ontario has the highest saturation of student nutrition programs in the country, we are the only province that did not receive an increase in funding this year.”

Stephenson said that “many schools have reduced their capacity, so instead of serving three food groups, they are serving one. It’s an unfortunate set of circumstances to close out this school year.”

A ‘donate now’ button is on their website at niagara nutritionpartners.ca.

Legion has some large expenses looming

Penny Coles
The Local

The local Branch 124 of the Royal Canadian Legion is facing some expenses, and planning on looking for public support to cover them.

The most immediate concern is the need for a new roof on their King Street hall.

President Al Howse says the legion has asked roofers for estimates, and has received four responses. There is a process to follow, he explains — the estimates are not made public to members. A committee will look at the estimates, and make a recommendation to the board.

Once a board decision is made, he says, due to the cost involved, the branch needs permission from Provincial Command, both for the expense and where the funds will come from, before they proceed.

Once they have an idea of how much the roof will cost, Howse says, there will be discussions about how to raise the money, including organizing some events during the summer. One possibility is for a special concert as part of their annual Canada Day celebration to be used as a fundraiser for the roof.

Concern has been raised by vice-president Diane O’Donoghue in an email to The Local that the Legion executive is considering a mortgage on the property, and that with the revenue the legion brings in, she worries they couldn’t afford the payments, and the King Street property could fall into the hands of a developer.

Although Howse says she did mention her fear at a finance meeting where the expense of the roof was discussed, but her concern is “misplaced.” The executive is not talking about or considering a mortgage, he says. He calls the mention of a mortgage “a red herring for members.”

Any plan that includes a mortgage would also require approval from Provincial Command, he added. And ultimately, before a final decision is made, “the membership will see the estimate and will vote.”

If a new roof becomes an emergency situation, there are other options for financing it, including money in the bank, Howse says, and a line of credit if necessary.

The other discussion that has been going on for years is the need for an elevator to make the top floor accessible to all. Howse says for a time they had legislation hanging over their heads dictating accessibility by 2025, but that has changed. Now accessibility is part of the building code, which says if the building is updated, it needs to be made accessible.

The branch is looking at the possibility of a grant to fund it, says Howse.

“We want to install an elevator, and we’re going to have to do it sometime, but at least we don’t have that date hanging over us.”

O’Donoghue mentions a meeting and vote next Wednesday, April 26, and urges members to come out and vote.

Howse too would like to see a good turnout, explaining the vote is the annual election for executives.

There will be a time when the members vote on funding for the roof, he says, but that’s not next week.

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Throughout their storied 43-year history, the Yellowjackets have recorded 26 albums, received 18 Grammy nomination awards — won 2 — performed countless sold-out tours, and enjoyed worldwide critical acclaim for their signature electro-acoustic soundscapes. Their latest album Parallel Motion, released in 2022, is nominated for the 2023 Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Jazz Album.

Saturday April 29, 2023
7:30PM

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2023 TD JAZZ SERIES
The Niagara-on-the-Lake. Volunteers share their time and energy, their passion and commitment, connecting the community through their actions. Many are newcomers, and very quickly find they are helping each other and creating friendships as they do so. NOTL offers a long roster of opportunities for volunteers, and already has a rich community of those who give their time and energy, as the theme says, while weaving the community together.

Each and every week, 52 weeks of the year, The Local tells stories of the organization and volunteers who make this community one that others covet, and are drawn to as visitors or new residents. There are so many more volunteers we don’t know about, and yet there are never enough. Pick your passion — sports, arts and culture, fundraising, working with youth, helping seniors or the needy, addressing food insecurity, preserving heritage, organizing, events, or ... is. Doubt that while enriching their community, volunteers enrich their own lives. If you’re not one of them, join them. You won’t be sorry.

Penny Coles

Local LETTERS

Parliament Oak future should be best for community

Dear Mr. Lord Mayor and council:

I understand the property located at 325 King St. in the Old Town is zoned institutional or Greenbelt and the developer was well aware of this zoning and what he was allowed to build when he purchased the land.

If you appoint the members of council will agree their responsibility is to determine what is the ultimate and best use of this land and what will offer the greatest benefit to the community and not necessarily the greatest benefit to the developer.

This is simply a land-use issue and at this very preliminary stage, the design of the building in this proposal is totally irrelevant (although it’s a building I would expect to see in Paris or Brussels, not in Niagara).

I make the following comments as a resident in the area and as an architect, who has been involved in the design and operation of almost every hotel in the Old Town of NOTL. This block of land is surrounded on all four sides by small single-family houses. The reason that one should never impose an intensive use site such as a large commercial hotel and conference centre in the middle of small single-family houses is not theoretical; it’s very logical. The hotel operation requires a large number of service trucks bringing tons of food, beverages and supplies daily and removing garbage, recycling materials and waste. These trucks will use the shortest and quickest routes to get to the hotel and those routes are Regent Street, Centre Street, and Gage Street. As you can see from site plans, all servicing and deliveries take place on Centre and Gage Streets.

Dozens of trucks will be travelling four and a half blocks from Mississauga Street through narrow village roads to reach these service areas. These are not pickup trucks. If you’ve ever seen Sysco or Gordon Food Service trucks, you’ll know these are transport trucks and big trucks and small homes aren’t compatible. That’s basically why a large hotel shouldn’t be located in the middle of a neighbour-hood consisting only of single-family houses.

But it’s not only trucks that are a concern, the parking area will also be a problem since the hundreds of staff will be driving from other areas in the peninsula to work at the hotel. Although I commented earlier that we shouldn’t pay any attention to the design of the proposed building, I calculated from the drawings submitted that there will be over 700 dining and lounge seats. Yet only about one third of those seats will be occupied by the ho-
Given the considerable investment Niagara-on-the-Lake made to create its Voices of Freedom Park, I find the town's apparent reluctance to fully restore and commemorate the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground on Mississauga Street (formerly known as the Negro Burial Ground) somewhat surprising. The burial ground dates from 1831 and is directly related to a significant and important period in the history of our town and region, when Niagara was a key stop on the underground railroad that carried enslaved Black people to freedom in Canada. It was also one of the first Black-owned businesses in the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. I commend NOTL for being aware of this important past, but the town needs to respect the laws and regulations that govern the restoration and preservation of graveyards, and amend OBLT for following due process in this regard. It’s important to ensure the work is carried out properly, in a way that respects the people whose remains are buried in the graveyard as well as their ancestors. However, the town should not use this requirement as an impediment to undertaking the restoration project. Instead, I hope that the opportunity to commemorate and celebrate the historical role our town and region played as a place where Black people could live in freedom. Together, a restored burial ground, the Voices of Freedom Park with the William and Susannah Steward House on Butler Street, would tell a remarkable and valuable story, one we can still draw insight from today. They offer the potential to boost tourism, enhance public understanding of our town’s rich history and, I hope, help Niagara-on-the-Lake to be an even more inclusive, welcoming community. In retrospect, it probably makes sense to restore the burial ground, including his protest efforts in the face of a year and a half of indifference on the part of council. I’m sure I will not be the only Toronto resident who will decline to spend their tourist dollars in NOTL if this issue is not resolved in a way that respects Ontario’s Black heritage. I will be raising this issue on my social media platforms with friends who I’m certain will share my concerns.

Terry Davis
NOTL

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and council members, I am writing to urge you in the strongest possible terms to direct the necessary funds to properly restore the Negro Burial Ground in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The way that underground railroadit that carried enslaved Black people to freedom in Canada. It was also one of the first Black-owned businesses in the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. I commend NOTL for being aware of this important past, but the town needs to respect the laws and regulations that govern the restoration and preservation of graveyards, and amend OBLT for following due process in this regard. It’s important to ensure the work is carried out properly, in a way that respects the people whose remains are buried in the graveyard as well as their ancestors. However, the town should not use this requirement as an impediment to undertaking the restoration project. Instead, I hope that the opportunity to commemorate and celebrate the historical role our town and region played as a place where Black people could live in freedom. Together, a restored burial ground, the Voices of Freedom Park with the William and Susannah Steward House on Butler Street, would tell a remarkable and valuable story, one we can still draw insight from today. They offer the potential to boost tourism, enhance public understanding of our town’s rich history and, I hope, help Niagara-on-the-Lake to be an even more inclusive, welcoming community. In retrospect, it probably makes sense to restore the burial ground, including his protest efforts in the face of a year and a half of indifference on the part of council. I’m sure I will not be the only Toronto resident who will decline to spend their tourist dollars in NOTL if this issue is not resolved in a way that respects Ontario’s Black heritage. I will be raising this issue on my social media platforms with friends who I’m certain will share my concerns.

Terry Davis
NOTL

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and council members, I am writing to urge you in the strongest possible terms to direct the necessary funds to properly restore the Negro Burial Ground in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The way that underground railroadit that carried enslaved Black people to freedom in Canada. It was also one of the first Black-owned businesses in the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. I commend NOTL for being aware of this important past, but the town needs to respect the laws and regulations that govern the restoration and preservation of graveyards, and amend OBLT for following due process in this regard. It’s important to ensure the work is carried out properly, in a way that respects the people whose remains are buried in the graveyard as well as their ancestors. However, the town should not use this requirement as an impediment to undertaking the restoration project. Instead, I hope that the opportunity to commemorate and celebrate the historical role our town and region played as a place where Black people could live in freedom. Together, a restored burial ground, the Voices of Freedom Park with the William and Susannah Steward House on Butler Street, would tell a remarkable and valuable story, one we can still draw insight from today. They offer the potential to boost tourism, enhance public understanding of our town’s rich history and, I hope, help Niagara-on-the-Lake to be an even more inclusive, welcoming community. In retrospect, it probably makes sense to restore the burial ground, including his protest efforts in the face of a year and a half of indifference on the part of council. I’m sure I will not be the only Toronto resident who will decline to spend their tourist dollars in NOTL if this issue is not resolved in a way that respects Ontario’s Black heritage. I will be raising this issue on my social media platforms with friends who I’m certain will share my concerns.

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Mike Balsom
The Local

The way James Russell sees it, there are some similarities between what he was doing at Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Negro Burial Ground and what the Friends of the Forgotten fundraising committee envisaged for the former Mississauga Road cemetery. But the differences between the two factions are huge.

“We both want to restore respect to the folks that are buried there,” says Russell. “My goal is very simple, though. I want the headstones unearthed, cleaned and restored, and I want the town to pay for it. They seem to be flailing as to whether the headstones ought to be unearthed at all.”

George Webber, spokesperson for the town committee, told The Local on Monday, April 10, the day Russell claimed himself in protest to the placate at the burial ground, that his group is not interested in digging up what Russell believes to be 19 headstones buried on the site, as suggested from a ground-penetrating radar survey he paid for last May.

“We don’t want to dig up headstones,” Webber said at the time. “That’s too expensive.” Our approach is to put up a memorial of some kind with the names of the people who were buried here. I would rather that we do some thorough research and then create a memorial.”

But, as Russell says, that’s putting the cart before the horse.

“I don’t see the purpose of creating a memorial if you don’t know exactly who you are memorializing?” Russell counterpoint. “We have to dig up the headstones to learn more about who is actually buried there. And of course, they want to pay for this out of donations from the public.” That’s another way the two groups seem to differ.

To Russell, it’s about righting a wrong. The town has owned the former site of a Baptist church for 147 years, and they’ve had plenty of time to make right by the people, most of whom are expected to have been Black parishioners, some perhaps freedom seekers, who are buried there.

“It’s always been the town’s responsibility,” he says. “My contention is that it was town staff who buried the headstones back in the 70s or 80s. They’ve actually created this issue and therefore created this added expense.”

Russell arrived on site last Monday at noon and stayed in place until about 6 p.m. Tuesday, when an emergency clucked him back to his home in Toronto. That forced him to end his plan to continue a sit-in hunger strike at the burial ground until Lord Mayor Gary Bradic promised to find room in the town’s budget to restore the cemetery to its one-time state, which Russell says Archeological Research Associates Ltd. (ARA) has estimated will cost $59,000.

Many stopped by to speak with Russell over the 30 hours he spent on site, including town councillor Maria Mavridis, who was very sympathetic to the activists cause. But after requesting more information about the saga that has been ongoing for more than a year from town CAO Marnie Cluckie at last Tuesday’s committee of the whole meeting, Mavridis also has a few reservations about the conflict between Russell and the town’s fundraising committee.

“Digging deeper into it,” Mavridis told The Local this week, “there’s more to it than that $59,000. The stage one archeological assessment, which is where we are now, costs $5,000. Then there’s stage two, and stage three. Plus we have to align with the Bereavement Association of Ontario.”

But Russell says the three stages of archeological assessment are included in the ARA estimate. All the town has to do is agree to pay for it, and he feels Cluckie is stalling.

Mavridis came out to visit Russell during his protest as he was concerned about a 76-year-old man staying out in the elements indefinitely. She listened to his explanation about the hopes for the site and under the differences between Russell and the town committee.

“To be honest, I don’t want to see a memorial at all,” Russell counters. “It’s a cemetery. I went to visit a family member there, I don’t want there to be a bunch of tourists there.”

“A cemetery is an area of respect, of solemn reflection,” Russell says. “It’s a sacred area, where folks are buried.”

As it stands, the town is agreeing to pay for an archeological assessment and the town’s fundraising committee is agreeing to pay for a proposal for new positions, though, and we may have to ask the town to place some additional fundraising in the budget, “she added, “but we don’t have enough staff to keep up with the list of things we need to get done. When we get a new proposal for positions, we’re left to decide what is more important. We cut as we go, but it’s a small team down there. It will take us another two or three years to get everything done, and this was already on that list.”

Looking back on their visit to Russell during his sit-in hunger strike last week, Mavridis added that many of her cohorts on council were less than enthusiastic with her request for help in supporting Russell’s demands.

“They advised me not to engage with him,” she explains, “I just went down there anyway. And when I continued to reach out, they asked why I didn’t contact them directly. One said he was doing it for a bit of a PR effort. Others said it’s been in motion for a long time, and they didn’t understand why he chained himself to the post.”

“I think James has turned off a lot of people with his antics,” added Mavridis. “I think he’s driving a bigger wedge between him and the Friends of the Forgotten, and even between him and some residents.”

Russell is pleased that Mavridis asked Cluckie for clarification at last week’s meeting, and acknowledges that his efforts have brought a lot of attention to his cause. At the same time, he also recognizes he may be seen as an outsider to those in town with any kind of interest in the Negro Burial Ground.

“Perhaps it’s because an outsider has called attention to this neglect that they have been living with for unspent years,” he speculates.
MELANIE SCOTT has a prayer for the people of Ukraine she wants to share.

And she has chosen to share it in a unique way: when she saw a torn Ukrainian flag flying from a light post as she rode her bike through the village of Queenston, the flag, intended as a show of support, she decided she wanted to mend it.

Scott says if something is broken or torn, when it’s fixed or restored, “it is stronger and more beautiful because of the work.”

Like people, she says, who have gone through times of adversity, are made stronger by their struggle, and are able to help others going through difficult times.

And that, she decided, applies as well to the flags that remind people of Ukraine that we are behind them, thinking about them and praying for them.

She quotes Corinthians, that love is kind, love is patient, it never boasts, and is not quick to anger.

“Show her love, she felt that in the case of the flag, the special care and attention she could give it would be ‘out of love. That flag was torn, much like the country. I gave a lot of time and attention to that flag,’ says Scott. Showing love and support is ‘what we need to do for mothers, daughters, fathers, and sons that are in Ukraine, and who have come here from Ukraine.’

Last spring, Jim Armstrong and the Queenston Residents’ Association worked with the town to have Ukrainian flags flying from town light posts, but one was badly ripped after the winter, he says, having caught on a snowflake on the same pole, the town’s contribution to Christmas decorations.

J.B. Hopkins, the town park’s supervisor, recently took it down and gave it to Armstrong.

The photo of the torn flag that Melanie has framed.

Later that same day, Armstrong says, before he could figure out what he should do with it, Scott came knocking on his door.

She knew exactly what she hoped to do with it, and Armstrong was pleased to hear about her project.

“I thought it was a great idea,” he tells The Local. “I had been concerned about it when I saw it in tatters, and when she asked if she could repair it, and explained the symbolism of repairing it, I was happy to give it to her.”

She knocked on his door again last week, saying the flag was ready to fly again.

“I was very impressed with the amount of work she put into it,” says Armstrong.

Scott added material to the places that were ripped to make the flag stronger, and over one hole, she sewed a piece of fabric decorated with a sunflower, the national flower of Ukraine.

Armstrong showed her which post she could hang it on, and with the help of her father-in-law, David Scott, and his ladder, it was flying once again.

“When it’s still, you can’t really see where it was mend- ed,” she says. “But when the wind catches it, you can, and you can see the sunflower.”

She laughs about the mending job, saying she has over the years enthusiastically undertaken many DIY projects, “but none of them ever worked out.”

However that didn’t discourage her from sitting down at her sewing machine, and while the stitching on the flag might not be perfect, “not that the point — it’s the message she hopes her story tells that is important to her.

Below the flag, she put an 8 x 10” framed photo of it when it was flying, in pieces, and to the photo she added the words: “A torn flag: A sign of defiance or hope. The country, though battered and torn, is still standing and will survive.”

Below that she has posted these words: “My prayer for the war-torn people (mothers, children, sisters, brothers, fathers) of Ukraine, is that love triumphs, that the unhurkable harm done to your souls does not turn into hate and resentment. I humbly ask God to allow forgiveness into your hearts.”

The meaning of the mended flag, she adds, is that “although you can see it was torn, ravaged, severely damaged, it is stronger. This can only be the case if love prevails. This is my prayer.”

On Monday morning, the flag photo and prayer were gone, Armstrong says, removed due to the bad weather expected this week and concern for the fragility of the repair.

He and Scott talked about it likely not lasting long, and what would happen to it in the future.

He thinks a fitting place, at least temporarily, might be to display it in the Queenston Library and Community Centre, and Scott says she can put the flag in a large frame to hang it on a wall.

The future of it after that will be up to Scott, he says.

At the moment, she has it on display at her Red Brick Church, but her plan is to put it back up on the post when the weather is nice, for a short time at least.

A mother of three young children, Scott took Rachel, one of her daughters, with her to Queenston when the flag was repaired and ready to fly again.

To help Rachel understand why this was so important to her, she explained that “if you think you are too small to make a difference, get in bed with a mosquito. It’s very small, but it can make a very big difference.”

Scott feels her contribution was small, but hopes her message can make a difference.

Melanie Scott and Rachel stand below the mended flag, along with a poster and photo on the light post to share what it looked like when it was torn, and her prayer for the people of Ukraine, as symbolized by the repaired flag. (Photos supplied)
Newark Neighbours benefits from community gardens

Sharon Burns
The Local

Cindy Grant knows that many families in Niagara-on-the-Lake are experiencing food insecurity.

“We currently have about 80 families that are registered with us, representing 150 individuals,” said Grant, a volunteer at Newark Neighbours who manages its food bank. “Since January, we have registered 15 families. There are more people in Niagara-on-the-Lake that we could be helping that have just not come to us yet.”

Newark Neighbours has been in operation for about 50 years and has had a thrift store and a food bank for most of that time, she said. “All the profits from the thrift store go into our food bank.”

Newark Neighbours is a member of Feed Ontario, a food bank network, and Feed Niagara, which is made up of the 10 food banks in the Niagara Region.

Three gardens donate produce to Newark Neighbours. The garden behind the Community Centre is tended by a group of volunteers. Another community garden on Niven Road will be donated to two plots to families registered with Newark Neighbours, and produce from two more plots will also be donated to the food bank.

Lifepointe Bible Church recently announced that produce from its new plots will also be donated to Newark Neighbours.

“We are going to be well and truly stocked with vegetables all summer,” said Grant, who started volunteering at Newark Neighbours one summer day in 2015 when she noticed how busy the thrift store was.

“It was chaos there that day and I said, ‘oh, I have a couple of hours, let me help.’ I started volunteering here and one thing led to another and I got asked to sit on the board. Then I became the food bank manager, and haven’t been able to leave ever since,” she laughed.

Helping others is a large part of Grant’s life. Besides her work at Newark Neighbours, she is the treasurer for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Palliative Service and sits on the board of directors for both the Niagara North Family Health Team and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Historical Society.

She is also one of the “Naymanns of Niagara,” a branch of over 240 grandmother groups across Canada raising money for the Stephen Lewis Foundation’s Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign. Funds provide food, housing, school fees, grief counselling and more to grandchildren orphaned from AIDS in 15 sub-Saharan African countries.

“Volunteering keeps me busy,” said Grant. “And I need to stay on my way of giving back to this community. This community is so amazing, generous, active and engaged. I had a busy career for almost 40 years and didn’t give back to any community that I lived in, so this is my way of paying forward and staying busy and active.”

About 40 volunteers work at Newark Neighbours. “We are completely volunteer-run,” said Grant. “The volunteers are the lifeblood of the organization and we literally couldn’t do without them,” said Grant. “We are so grateful for our volunteers.”

According to the Newark Neighbours website, “all our food bank clients must be residents of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, whose boundaries include the Old Town, Virgil, Niagara-on-the-Green, St. Davids, Queenston and everywhere in between.” Registration information is also available on their website.

Vicky Downes is the lead volunteer for the community centre gardens and the two plots on Niven Road.

“I enjoy helping,” she said. “I love gardening. I met wonderful people in the past 20-plus years I have been in town. You get wrapped up into things — just connecting and finding opportunities and wanting to be a part of all of that excitement.”

Downes works with nine “wonderful volunteers, and we are a team. I do the organizing and we just work together and make sure the garden is taken care of, food goes where it needs to go, and food is picked when it needs to be picked. It is a team effort.”

While Newark Neighbours is a primary recipient of the gardens’ produce, The Farm Hub has also benefited. “We also put food on the farm stand inside the library for any resident in town at no charge, just donations if you wish,” said Downes.

Shaw Guild One organization offering many volunteer options

Continued from page 1

Shirley Levers, Michael Raileanu, Liz Abraham and Daina Meusel volunteered in the community garden behind the library. (Supplied)

have chat with the head of wigs or head of wardrobe. We can go on backstage tours, and some of us actually deliver the backstage tours, so we’re going behind the scenes. They really make us part of the company, and so if you’re interested in theatre at all, it’s a great way to volunteer.”

Mizen adds the guild is well-organized, and has a good reputation in town, which also helps to attract volunteers, especially those who are passionate about the theatre.

“And it’s such a fun place. Perhaps people enjoy it because it’s safe to do it from somewhere. It’s so creative, it sparks the imagination and gets the juices going. For some of us it’s doing something totally different from what we did as a day-to-day job. It’s exciting to be exposed to that kind of environment, and to be part of it.”

“It’s a good volunteer gig, no question,” Mizen continues. “I really enjoy doing this. I thrive on being busy and being involved. This is a good fit for me, no question.”

And, with a laugh, she adds, “I can walk to it from my house.”

Morris can’t help but agree that the guild is a great place to volunteer, although she has worked and still does to help other groups in town. “I volunteer with several organizations,” she says. “It’s so much fun it’s hard to say no. And I get to use my skills from a previous life.”

After retiring from a career in communications with IBM, she moved to NOTL, and in 2012 began volunteering with the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre.

Although the Shaw Guild is what keeps her busy these days, she helped organize the ambassador program that has locals greeting visitors on Queen Street — it began as a Shaw Guild offshoot during the pandemic, primarily to share information about restrictions to people as they arrived in town, and quickly became so popular it has been taken over by the town. About 30 volunteer ambassadors will greet visitors, answer questions about the town and its history and help with whatever sites and attractions interest them.

Morris doesn’t put on a guide uniform, or say “hello” to people in Queen Street any more, but she helps them with other things such as marketing and their website. I really enjoyed it, but I found the guild is a really good fit for me, it’s the best fit for my communications skills.”

And she is also on the Heritage Trail committee, the fundraising committee for the Negro Burial Ground, and during the pandemic, volunteered at vaccination clinics.

“I like to be busy,” she says. And there are so many opportunities and volunteer opportunities, everybody overlaps. You don’t just volunteer for one organization. You meet other people and you help each other out. It really builds community, and it helps you become part of the community.”

“I only knew one person when I moved to NOTL,” she says, “and once I volunteered at the Pumphouse it mushroomed from there. I have friends here, and I really feel like part of the community.”

A community Morris will soon be leaving, and one where she will be missed.

She is planning a move to Florida in May. “She spent a time in her life living there three months a year, she says, and loves being able to return to live one day.

“This is the time in her life to do it, she’s decided, and as accustomed as she is to working remotely; she can stay involved with NOTL organizations, not only those in which she is actively involved, but a host of others for which she does background work such as communications and websites. And she already has a plan to become involved in her community when she moves.

“There is a festival every summer there, with music and theatre and art, and I definitely want to get involved in that. I really do want to get involved. It’s the only way to get to know people and feel part of the community.”

Mary Mizen has volunteered for most Shaw Guild positions, and is now president. (Photos supplied)
Polgrabia’s priority: a safe place for youth

**Sharon Burns**

**The Local**

Caroline Polgrabia has been on the board of The Niagara Foundation for Family and Children’s Services for seven years. She raised funds and awareness in the community in order to protect, support and give. I saw my parents do it. It’s something that if you see something and you’re interested, reach out.”

Caroline Polgrabia

“Volunteering keeps me engaged and I have kept this up most my adult life. And now I am retired and I have more time to give.”

Edgar says she will be 74 in July and she retired at 63. “I got bored quickly so I said, okay, I need to find something to do.”

She has been helping staff “hands-on for almost 10 years now. I can’t think of anywhere else where I walk in and I get a huge smile and a big hug.”

“If we can get other retired people interested in volunteering, that’s fantastic. You get far more out of it than you could possibly give,” Edgar said.

“Experience the joys and rewards of volunteering. It takes me out of me, and helps others in return,” said Bertrand. “Give, just give.”

*Volunteers Marc Bertrand and Glenda Edgar with Garrett Bjorgan, Wonder the horse and Cocotte at Red Roof Retreat.*

(Photos supplied)
To all NOTL’s dedicated volunteers, we say THANK YOU

The binational club has traditionally cooked hot dogs in Simcoe Park on the day of the Terry Fox Run, but missed the COVID years and couldn’t make it work for last year’s run. This year, September 18, proceeds from sales go to the local run. Cooking hot dogs are Rotarians Greg Lidstone, incoming president from this side of the border, and John Cliff from Lewiston. (Supplied)

Kathy Mann joined Red Roof Retreat five years ago, feeding and caring for the animals. “I have a set day, every Wednesday, I’m there. It’s a way to be useful, and that centres me,” she said. “I love that time. It’s hard to put into words of her chores: a chorus of meowing cats, the whinnies from Won- der the horse, the crowing from Wilber the pig, and the braying of Murray, the donkey, all wanting to be fed. It’s hard to figure out who to feed first, as they are all so vocal.”

Sharon Burns

Aspiring Geopark, going. “The Niagara UNESCO Global Geopark is a region-wide effort to manage and protect Niagara’s geoheritage, while simultaneously developing well-managed tourism experiences that improve local livelihoods.”

“Most people volunteer in order to positively affect a community,” said Perry. “For me, there are a lot of extra perks. Helping to create the Niagara UNESCO Global Geopark has appealed to my entrepreneurial spirit and I have learned a ton.”

“Also, he added, “even as we are just getting this project started, I have met a myriad of people and have formed some very meaningful relationships. That might be the best part.”

Kathy Mann

I come to Canada. It’s so different. At home when you go to work or out with friends, everyone on this side hears the same news, has the same thoughts and opinions. When you go to Rotary, you hear different thoughts, different opinions, different ways of looking at things. I really enjoy that.”

Anyone interested in join- ing, Gerbasia, can call him at 716-754-2464, or email Lidstone at rglidstone@gmail.com.

Animals at Red Roof a joy to look after

Sharon Burns

The Local

Perry and Shari Hartwick have made community and volunteer- ing part of their lives.

Kathy Mann

We live in border communities, and the culture of our members is being accusto- mized to crossing back and forth.”

He notices that when he comes to NOTL, he still isn’t used to doing as many Canadian card is helpful. “You become a border community.”

The re-opening of the border to tourism and holding fundrais- ing events has been key for the club, he says, and members now pass back and forth with little complaint, although it’s still a little easi- er for the Americans, he be- lieves. For those on this side of the border.

Animals at Red Roof

are no strangers to the con- nected Lewiston and Queen- sted Lewiston/NOTL celebrates 85th year

The binational club has traditionally cooked hot dogs in Sim- coe Park on the day of the Terry Fox Run, but missed the COVID years and couldn’t make it work for last year’s run. The park this September. Proceeds from sales go to the local run. Cooking hot dogs are Rotarians Greg Lidstone, incoming president from this side of the border, and John Cliff from Lewiston. (Supplied)

Penny Coles

The Local

This Thursday, the Ro- tary Club of Lewiston/ Niagara-on-the-Lake will cel- ebrate its 85th anniversary.

There were more than 46,000 Rotary Clubs around the world, and more than 1.4 million Rotarians, but only a few that draw their mem- bers from more than one country, he says, and the Ro- tary Club of Lewiston/Ni- agara-on-the-Lake is one of them.

“The is the only one in the world in which meetings are held in two separate nations,” he says.

It was founded on April 20, 1938, when there wasn’t a Rotary Club in the area on either side of the river, and crossing the border was as easy as walking across the suspension bridge that con- nected Lewiston and Queen- sted. Residents of both towns did that regularly, he says, to shop at a particular store or have a meal out.

In Canada, the club met at various places, mostly at the Queenston Heights Restaurant in the early days, and was con- sidered an “enormous club,” with about 100 members.

“The binational nature of the club epitomizes Rotary’s international federation at work right at the club level,” Gerbasia says.

“Speakers from both na- tions have provided lovely and thought-provoking programs that encompass a wide diver- sity of thought.”

Rotary “has always val- ued diversity. Members are not only welcomed by all ages, all genders, all fields of endeavor, all socioeconomic strata, all political opinions, all national origins and all races, but are actively sought after.”

Eventually, some Cana- dian members who either wanted a lunch instead of evening meeting or didn’t like the travel broke off and formed the Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake, he ex- plained.

The remaining Canadian members of the binational club are mostly long-time lo- cals.

“The Local

Perry and Shari Hartwick are no strangers to the concept of volunteering.

In 2009, they started the Niagara branch of KidSport, an organization which pro- vides grants to help cover registration fees so that youth aged 8 and under can play a season of their fa- vorite sport.

“We stopped running KidSport Niagara when the COVID pandemic hit. It became too difficult to administer funds with the uncertainty of when particip- ing in sports would be safe again,” Shari said.

One of KidSports’ ma- jor fundraisers was an event called Monster Bash, held at Willowbank in Queenston every Halloween.

“After Perry and I decid- ed to close up the KidSport Niagara chapter after 10 years, we continued with our Halloween fundraiser, and Red Roof was our logical recipient last year,” said Shari.

Shari, whose background is in special education, met Steffanie Bjorgan, founder of Red Roof Retreat, while working at Parliament Oak School. “I was an educational assistant in her classroom before Red Roof Retreat started,” said Shari.

“I worked with Red Roof when the summer camp first started,” she said. “The con- cept was unique for the area, and I knew it would be a huge success because of the passion and commitment to the cause,” explained Shari.

“There was and still is a huge need for respite and fun camps for people with special needs.”

“During the pandemic,” she added, “Perry shifted his energies to getting another not-for-profit, the UNESCO Aspiring Geopark, going.”

Perry is chair and res- ident geologist and chair of the Geology Working Group. According to nioniagara.com, “the Ni- agara Peninsula Geopark is a region-wide effort to manage and protect Niagara’s geoheritage, while simultaneously developing well-managed tourism experiences that improve local livelihoods.”

“Most people volunteer in order to positively affect a community,” said Perry. “For me, there are a lot of extra perks. Helping to create the Niagara UNESCO Global Geopark has appealed to my entrepreneurial spirit and I have learned a ton.”

“Also,” he added, “even...
Local woman travels to Philippines to learn about coffee project

Linda Friesen Special to The Local

Earlier this year, af- ter a lengthy flight via To- mo, Vancouver, and finally Manila, Doro- thea Enns from Na- guarana-on-the-Lake in the Philippines. She was travelling with her cousin Anita Dong from Toronto. Among their other par- ticipants in the Moncton Church Canada (MCC) Philip- pines Learning Tour — a tour they say was an experience that left them resolved to take part in making a capital project, Coffee for Peace, come to fru- ition. It was impossible to miss the enthusiasm in their voices as they shared some of what they had seen and experienced.

When Dorothea decided to join the tour, totally spur of the moment, she asked Anita if she wanted to go along, and soon they were booking their flights. Dorothea said when they saw the itinerary for the first time very, very quickly, “we said, ‘yes, al- so, they realized it really was an intense learning tour about the Coffee for Peace project, which works with local coffee farmers to ensure a fair return for their product and responsible envi- ronmental practices.

From Manila it was off to Davao, on the south island of the Philippines in the Mindan- anao province. Here the tour participants met up with the founders of Coffee for Peace, Danny and Joji Pantao. This couple had already returned to Canada after some years in the Philippines with MCC, but felt compelled to go back. Their motivation was the ministry is peace building, and Joji had opened up a coffee shop to sell Philippines coffee to support it, calling it the Cof- fee for Peace Cafe.

Danny and Joji are teaching local islanders how to grow quality coffee to be sold and exported, in conjunc- tion with the Peacebuilders Community Inc., founded by Danny and Joji to teach and train farmers how to peace- fully cultivate all MCC tribes, various political parties and corporations also competing for the land. Peacebuilders Community encompasses 80 Indigenous tribes.

This area of the Philippines has historically been the site of high conflict. Dorothea ex- plains Coffee for Peace is helping the Indigenous Peoples, the poor, who have been des- troyed in conflict zones. When the project started 15 years ago, conflict was especially high — it was at that time that Ferdi- nand Marcos was plundering the country.

The training and teaching of how to grow the best coffee using best practices, is already successfully underway. The project can’t exist without the peace of the farmers, who have been damaged and destroyed. The project is about how to help the community and the corporation has needs, and the corporation has needs. Can they work in harmony, and the participants believe it is possible to make peace between tribes and corpora- tions.

When the group arrived at the Bagobo Tagabawa tribe settlement, the third tribe on the itinerary, they were greet- ed by school children who performed some indigenous dances with modern dances, with several young boys drumming on indige- nous instruments. Anita said they were trying very hard in these communities to unhinge traditional cultural teaching.

Here they met one of the women whose husbands were killed in the Rana Massacre on June 25, 1989 by Communist rebels that had entered into a church and killed all the wor- shippers — 38 members of this tribe perished in the massacre that day while they were gath- ered for worship in the United Church of Christ.

The tour group enjoyed the most authentic food here, chicken cooked in a bamboo tun- ne, fresh coconut and frog, among numerous other dishes. Dorothea and Anita said they themselves refrained from in- dulging in the frog dish.

And finally, the group visit- ed the area where the Coffee for Peace project is located, where they roast the coffee beans. In- digenous farmers have learned to grow in the best possible way, to produce a high quality product. Called the Malapawer Peace Hub, near Mount Apo, this will be the central loca- tion for the project. The last bit of road to the Peace Hub was unimproved and the group walked this final stretch to the buildings, on Indigenous lands where Coffee for Peace is pay- ing a fair lease.

Coffee for Peace is already established as an organization and business model selling coffee to sustain itself and the community. The completion of this capital project will help raise up many farmers from the deep level of poverty they are currently experiencing, and give them hope, a means to a better quality of life and education for their children. As Dorothea and Anita explained, the tour was set- tling to over the days they were in the Philippines. They are currently planning strategy for their fundraising goals.

For anyone interested in hearing more, seeing photos and meeting Dorothea and Anita, you are invited to join the brunch worship service in the auditorium at Niagara United Menno- menee Church, the Red Brick Church, 1775 Niagara Stone Road, NOTL on Sunday April 23 at 10:30 a.m.

Pillitteri Estates Winery welcomes visitors

Brock University President Leslie Rigg and her senior management team visit Pillitteri Estates Winery, owned by the Pillitteri family, who have been farming and growing grapes in Niagara for over 40 years.

The tour included a visit to the Pinot Noir vineyard, which was established in 1989, and has been the focus of much research in Niagara. The vineyard is currently undergoing an extensive renovation, with the goal of improving the quality of the grapes produced. The tour also included a visit to the winery facilities, where the grapes are harvested and processed into wine. The winery is located in the historic town of St. Catharines, and is noted for its commitment to sustainability and environmental practices. The tour was a great opportunity to learn about the wine-making process, and to see the beautiful vineyards and facilities. The tour ended with a tasting of the current releases, which were all of high quality. Overall, the tour was a wonderful experience and a great way to learn about the wine industry and the local community.
Norm Foster’s Whit’s End debuts in NOTL with readings

Mike Balsom
The Local

Foster Festival fans and supporters have two chances to participate in the creative process with Canada’s most prolific playwright this weekend.

Norm Foster’s new play Whit’s End will make its debut in reading form this Saturday and Sunday afternoon at the picturesque Shiny Cider and Fresh Wines (formerly Small Talk Vineyard) on Irvine Road. Director Jamie Williams is looking forward to the opportunity to gauge the audience’s reaction to the playwright’s work.

“Norm will Zoom in for both of the readings,” says Williams, the Foster Festival’s new artistic associate. “Not only does he get to hear the actors together, to hear those voices come to life, but he also gets to hear the audience’s response.

That’s integral, it indicates whether they’re getting the logic of the story, or the logic of the joke.”

Whit’s End has yet to be produced on stage, meaning this weekend’s audiences will be the first to experience the story that Williams describes as a very funny look at family and the assumptions that people take for granted about each other.

The main character has flown back into town to drop some big news onto his adult daughter and son. He’s accompanied by a woman they have never met, with whom he tells them he’s about to embark on a new adventure in his life.

Whit’s kids, of course, counter with some big news of their own. The self-absorption of each of the family members and the reactions they have to each other leads to many hilarious revelations.

“It’s a comedy of miscommunication,” says Williams, who has appeared in and directed a number of Foster’s plays through the years. “And it exposes double standards in the way Whit feels with his son versus how he feels with his daughter. It highlights the dynamic that exists in all families, and enables us to laugh at it.”

Williams also points out that Whit’s End is just as much a play about commitment. Each character is dealing with new relationships, raising many questions about what commitment actually means to each of them.

Williams, who lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake from 2006 to 2015 with his wife, actor Melanie Janzen, and daughter Sadie Williams, has assembled a perfect cast to embody Foster’s characters.

Fans of the hit CBC Television program Street Legal will recognize C. David Johnson and Sonja Smits, who played Chuck and Carrie from 1987 until 1994. Johnson portrays Whit while Smits shows up as his new paramour.

“We were really fortunate to get ahold of C. David and Sonja,” says Williams. “C. David was involved with some of the first plays written by Norm. I reached out to him because I thought he would be perfect as Whit. When he said he was interested, I contacted Sonja.

Having two such recognizable actors reading those parts is a bit of a coup for the St. Catharines-based theatre company. Donors will get to see Johnson and Smits up close at Shiny Cidery, as they will Mairi Babb and Darren Keay, who read the roles of Whit’s children.

Keay, who is married to Foster Festival co-founder and artistic producer Emily Oriold, says he is still putting the finishing touches on exactly who his sarcastic, acerbic character Steven really is.

“This is the beauty of getting to do a workshop like this,” Keay says. “Even the script I have from Mike Balsom

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Continued on page 15
The play is about relationships, and Keay sheds some light on the brother-sister dynamic between his and Babb’s characters. Steven, he says, is a quiet big brother in terms of his relationship with his sister. “There’s some knowing humour between them,” he adds. “In terms of him out there in the world, though, we get a lot of information about Steven from what Norm says about his son dating many different girls. I see him as a quiet guy with a good sense of humour. I get to throw out some zingers here and there.”

Keay loves Foster’s work for its cleanliness and the efficiency in his writing. He says Foster leaves no fat on his jokes, no extra words, no extra beats or moments. It gives actors room to play, as they can let the words do the work, bringing humour to human situations in all of his plays.

“Doing a read in front of an audience is a real fine opportunity to find the rhythm,” Keay explains. “With a reading you really get the rhythm of the words. With a full production you have movement and props and much more that can add to it. But a straight reading can really serve the script.”

Williams adds that a reading can sometimes point out to a director and a playwright those rare situations where logic points are missed, redundancies creep in or the audience is asked to make too much of a jump. Watching an audience react to the words gives the creative team a chance to ensure the play has the clarity, humour and rhythm it needs before it goes to a full production.

“What Norm does really well is one of the hardest things to do while you’re writing,” says Williams, himself a playwright, “and that’s to maintain the perspective of hearing the words in his mind like a first-time audience. The audience is only going to hear it once. You have one attempt to bring the audience along for the ride. You have to keep that in mind.”

This weekend’s two readings may be part of the team’s creative process, but it’s also an event, and Williams feels that Shiny Ciderery is a perfect venue. “There is literally a colourfulness to the place that really suits comedy,” he says. “And their product and the experience there will really support the event. Our donors are going to enjoy being in such a comfortable and fun environment, just what we want for an event hosting Norm’s comedy.”

Whit’s End will be read by the actors on April 22 and 23 at 2 p.m. both days. Each $100 ticket includes a membership to the Foster Festivals 100 Club and a tax receipt for the full amount. A complimentary glass of Sparkling Rose by Fresh Wines or Apple Cider by Shiny will be offered to each member upon arrival, and charcuterie or apple and brie boxes will be available for purchase. Visit fosterfestival.com/support/donate-100-club for tickets and information.

Play about family, with typical Foster humour
Tickets selling quickly for biggest lineup yet

Mike Balsom
The Local

To mark the 30th anniversary of Jackson-Triggs in Niagara, the winery is presenting its biggest ever summer concert series.

The lineup features a total of 23 concerts between June 9 and Sept. 15, including amphitheatre mainstays the Sam Roberts Band, Chantal Kreviazuk, Senna Ryder and the Trews. And bonafide Canadian music legends Randy Bachman, Jann Arden and Colin James will all be performing at the Mississagua Road outdoor venue.

“Thirty is a milestone year for us and we’re thrilled to be hosting 18 of Canada’s top artists and bands for a remarkable year in concert series history,” says Sreejith Sasikumar, estate manager at Jackson-Triggs. “Every seat in the amphitheatre offers an intimate concert experience and a night to remember for any music fan. Artists keep returning to this venue because it offers a performance like no other where they can genuinely engage with audiences.”

The series kicks off with its traditional opening weekend of two performances by Roberts and his band, who recently released Picture of Love, the first single from their upcoming album to be released this fall. “Performing at Jackson-Triggs is one of our bands longest running summer traditions,” says Roberts in a press release. “We keep coming back for that close connection we feel with the crowd. We’re excited to kick off the series this year and keep the tradition going.”

That connection may be even closer than Roberts thinks. Sasikumar told The Local Tuesday morning that both of the Sam Roberts Band shows sold out in 15 minutes, as did the Jann Arden and Dwayne Gretzky dates. He is working on trying to get permits to add even more concerts this summer to meet the demand.

Making her debut at the Jackson-Triggs amphitheatre on Aug. 18 is electro-jazz/pop singer Charlotte Cardin, who won three Juno Awards last year, including Artist of the Year. The St. Catharines-based country singer-songwriter Tim Hicks will take the winery’s stage for the first time on July 8. “I’ve been to Jackson-Triggs a zillion times,” Hicks tells The Local, “but I’ve never performed there, and I’ve never actually seen a show there. I’m so pleased that I’m included in this year’s lineup. It’s always special to play close to home, an opportunity to play for friends and family I don’t often get to play for. And I get to sleep in my own bed at the end of the night.”

Hicks’ performance, billed as a Campfire Troubadour show, will see him take to the stage in a tris format for an acoustic run-through of some of his biggest hits. The trio consists of Hicks on guitar and vocals, Chris Altmann on banjo and steel guitar, and Geoff Willingham on guitar. It will be a first for him to play a show like this in the Niagara area.

“I tell lots of stories, and the setlist for these shows changes on a whim,” he laughs. “I’ll just call out a song from time to time and the guys just roll their eyes and go along with me. It makes for a fun show!”

Asked who else from this summer’s lineup Hicks himself might show up to see, he immediately lists another first-timer, Donovan Woods (June 24), as his first choice. “I’ve written with Donovan, but I’ve never seen him perform live,” says Hicks. “I’ve done lots of stuff with the Trews (they perform on June 16). Hicks has toured with the band in the past, and I’m such a fan of them. They are the real deal.”

On April 29, Hicks points out as a side note, he will appear with Colin and John Angus MacDonald of the Trews at Central Community Centre on York Road in a songwriter in the round performance in support of the Education Foundation of Niagara.

The writer and singer of hit songs such as Stronger Beer, Stompin’ Ground and Here Comes the Thunder says he is humbled to be on a list of shows that includes such big names. “If you would have told 15-year-old me that one day I’d be included in a lineup of shows with some of these artists,” he says, “I would have fell over. It’s still surreal, even 10 years in. I’m just thankful that I’m still able to put out records and people seem to be interested.”

Since its first shows in 2001, the 500-seat open-air amphitheatre has hosted more than 150 of Canada’s finest musicians, becoming synonymous with Canadian music history.

“The artists want to come here because we are such a well-known player in the music industry,” Sasikumar explains. “And people love to come here to enjoy the shows. It’s such a great atmosphere.”

When it comes to Canadian music history, there’s probably no one who can match Randy Bachman, whose first international hit with the Guess Who, Shakin’ All Over, came in 1965. That’s almost 60 years of rocking and rolling. Bachman is scheduled to play on Aug. 10 and 11.

“When we first approached him he was super excited,” says Sasikumar, “so much so that we decided to ask him to play a second night. He was down for it immediately.”

Also appearing this summer at Jackson-Triggs are the Strumbellas, the Rural Alberta Advantage, the James Barker Band, Matt Andersen, Bahamas, William Prince and the Reklaws. “Ten-piece Toronto-based cover band Dwayne Gretzky closes out the season on Sept. 15. Tickets are on sale now. The full lineup with dates and tickets can be accessed at tixr.com/groups/jacksontriggs/events/jack- son-triggs-summer-concert-series-2023-65319.

Cover band Dwayne Gretzky closes out the Jackson-Triggs concert season Sept. 15 (Supplied)

Shaken, not stirred

AKA organizer Ken Lamb shares a martini at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery with Angela Seeger, who will bring the Songs of Bond to life on April 21. For additional information or to book tickets visit the Ravine website at explorestock.com/ravinevineyard. (Supplied)
April showers bring May flowers, as they say. Funny enough, I have to admit that I have been living a lie for 30 years, as it only occurred to me this weekend that it’s not bringing ‘me’ flowers.

I couldn’t believe I could hike, paddle, and do yardwork shirtless and sweating in the middle of April like that! It felt psychologically off, and I believe that stems from all the trees still being bare. On that note, I have a smorgasbord of interesting and intriguing updates for the books about what I experienced during the April heatwave.

Firstly, I was thrilled to have participated in Niagara College’s annual BioBlitz at the beautiful and biodiverse NOTL campus. This is an immersive and superbly fun day catered to families getting outdoors and contributing to citizen science.

Along with other experts, I got to lead themed hikes around the campus wetlands and Niagara Escarpment forests, covering everything from insects to birds to general ecology. My particular hike sessions were a family-friendly ‘Best of Biodiversity’ adventure, and although family-friendly, we did watch piles of frogs and toads aggressively mate with one another, sometimes up to six toads at a time comically clambering onto each other.

The day was also a valuable opportunity for me to get a refresh and upgrade on my bird knowledge. I love the books of other experts and appreciating the years of knowledge they have accumulated and are willing to share with others.

As if nine hours in that toasty sun weren’t enough at Niagara College, I further capitalized on the seasonally bizarre temperatures and got out on the canoe. I’m nearly done picking away at pre-scouting my canoe routes for my eco-canoe tours this year, and while testing out the routes, I have made some rare discoveries that truly fired me up.

That’s correct. Encountering certain species and habitat types makes me elated. That is exactly how I felt when I paddled over a couple of spotted gar in Fort Erie this weekend.

There is no other fish shaped like this, so observing one in the wild isn’t enough at all. That is exactly how I felt when I paddled over a couple of spotted gar in Fort Erie this weekend.

While paddling back out of this creek and briefly onto the Niagara River, I saw something that we normally don’t see out here. Loons!

This was a coincidental sighting — or was it? Just a day before, I was asking the professional birders if they have ever seen or heard the iconic bird in Niagara, because I believe I’ve only seen it once a very long time ago. Sure enough, two loons floated around and graciously dove under right in front of my canoe, with the uncanny backdrop of giant industrial buildings on the American side of the river.

As if things couldn’t get any more Canadian, a guy on the shoreline was fishing and soaking up the lovely temperatures. He cast his line in the water and called out, “Hey buddy, do you want a hand loading your canoe up?” To which I replied, “I appreciate it, but it’s all good man!” The kindness of both the weather and our Canadian culture made me smile.

I hope all of you enjoyed the friendly sunny days that have just passed us. It really brings out the best Canadian moods, in humans and wildlife alike.

Collectors take note: learn to be a museum curator

The next series of the Learn and Live program is made for collectors of handicrafts, art, or other treasures who might enjoy a few lessons on being a curator.

Terry MacTaggart, one of the founders of the series, explains the four-part Tiny Museum Exhibition Course will be offered throughout the month of May.

It offers a “crash course” on what it takes to be a museum curator, and at the end of the four sessions (May 1, 8, 15, 22 from 6:30 to 8 p.m.) participants will get to install a group exhibit in the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum’s Tiny Museum and show off all their hard work to friends and family.

Space is limited. Call the NOTL Museum at 905-468-3912 to secure your spot.

Although Learn and Live programs are usually held at the library, these sessions are at the museum, and registering is for all four sessions.

For more information on what to expect, see the course schedule on the museum’s website under What’s Up and Events Calendar at www.notl museum.ca

The four-session program ends with an opportunity to curate an exhibit in the Tiny Museum. (Supplied)
Perfect day for lawn bowling

Mike Balsom
The Local

Almost 30 people lined up to register with the Niagara-on-the-Lake Lawn Bowling Club Saturday afternoon at the Community Centre. The beautiful afternoon weather prompted most of them to don their Saturday whites to hit the green for their first outside lawn bowl of 2023.

Club vice-president Paul Dow said about 51 members had been participating over the winter months in short-outr lawn bowling at the community centre. But it was clear they couldn’t wait to get back to the great outdoors.

It was a very early start for the club, with more than 70 members expected to participate this year. The official opening day for the oldest lawn bowling club in Canada is scheduled for May 13, with afternoon open houses for interested bowlers scheduled for June 4 and 11, both Sundays.

The club runs a traditional bowl every Saturday afternoon at 1:30 p.m., with a tea party held between games. Monday and Wednesday jitneys are held between games. Monday evening at 6:30 p.m. they play a 4-3-2-1 match.

For information about the NOTL Lawn Bowling Club, visit notlbowls.ca.

“Shawna Macfarlane gives some instruction to the full group Saturday. (Mike Balsom)”

Shawna Macfarlane gives some instruction to the full group Saturday. (Mike Balsom)

Shawna Macfarlane gives some instruction to the full group Saturday. (Mike Balsom)
OBITUARY

HULLEY, GORDON “DOUG”

Doug was a caring partner, father, brother and friend. He passed surrounded by family on April 12, 2023, at the age of 68. Doug will be forever cherished by his partner and best friend, Teresa Debicki, and lovingly remembered by his sons: Logan (Carly), Taylor (Laurel) and stepson, Michael (Karen), and David (Lorraine). He was predeceased by his parents, Gord and Joan.

Cremation has taken place. A Celebration of Life will be held from 2-5 pm on Friday, May 12th at Pillitteri Estates Winery, 1696 Niagara Stone Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara-on-the-Lake. We invite anyone who knew Doug to attend and remember his wonderful life. We ask attendees to dress casually. Memorial donations can be made to the MS Society of Canada. Arrangements entrusted to Considerate Cremation & Burial Services, 26 Nihan Drive, St. Catharines (between Lake Street & Scott Street), 289-362-1144. Online condolences may be made at CCBSCares.ca.
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Angelika Zammit is proud to have been recognized as the exclusive McGillivray Trusted Agent in the Niagara-on-the-Lake market.