

# The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



Family  
hoping to  
get back to  
'new normal'  
page10

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## Flowers for seniors

Laurie Gunton (left) and Karen Horbach load flowers to be delivered to local seniors, grateful to be putting a smile on some faces. Gunton has been finding ways to volunteer in the community, and her recent mission has been delivering donated flowers from local growers to long-term care residences. Gunton's recent adventure was picking up flowers from Horbach's Farm and Greenhouse, and from Rick Juras at Niagara Flower Growers, to drop off at Niagara Long Term Care (formerly Chartwell). There are many generous people in NOTL looking for ways to help, she says. (Photo supplied)

## Outbreak at NOTL long-term care home not COVID-19

Penny Coles  
The Local

As of Saturday afternoon, there were no outbreaks of COVID-19 in Niagara-on-the-Lake long-term care facilities.

Last Tuesday, the Niagara Region website reported an outbreak of an unspecified respiratory illness at Niagara Long Term Care, formerly Chartwell. It hadn't been identified as COVID-19 — the organism causing the outbreak was unknown when the outbreak was declared.

The nature of the outbreak was declared Saturday to be a parainfluenza virus, also a respiratory illness, with similar symptoms to COVID-19.

During the pandemic, Lord Mayor Betty Disero said she and

town staff are in regular contact with the three local facilities, to ask if they need anything at all, and to find out what's happening in their facilities.

"So far they have the PPE (personal protective equipment) they need, and they're all fairing quite well under the circumstances we're in," she said.

Disero and Fire Chief Nick Ruller released a video Thursday talking about the three NOTL homes, and the process followed when there is an outbreak of any illness. Their intention was to alleviate any concern in the community about the outbreak at Niagara Long Term Care.

"To this minute, to this date," said Disero Thursday, "all is well in these facilities," but should the outbreak be upgrad-

ed to COVID-19, there would be a message to the public to let them know.

"We are blessed in Niagara-on-the-Lake to have three excellent long-term care facilities," said Disero, which she described as self-contained communities that are also a large part of the wider community.

She thanked the staff in the homes, who are "the faces the patients and residents see every day," while they are isolated from their family and the rest of the community.

The staff are also the voices of those patients and residents to the community, she added, and are risking their lives daily to help those who are most vulnerable.

Disero and Ruller outlined the process of declaring out-

breaks at long-term care facilities, saying the regional reporting is ongoing, and not limited to this time of the coronavirus pandemic.

Although these outbreaks are concerning to the public, they could happen six to 12 times a year, said Ruller.

Notification is important to first responders, so they can adjust their level of PPE if they enter one of the facilities with an outbreak, he explained.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the regional website showed cases of COVID-19 in the St. Catharines Hospital site, and in six long-term care homes in St. Catharines, Lincoln, Welland and Niagara Falls.

There were 385 reported cases in the region as of Tuesday, with 33 deaths.

## Red Roof's heroes: its exceptional volunteers

Penny Coles  
The Local

This is the 20th anniversary for Red Roof Retreat, which, like many other organizations, depends on volunteers to help run its events, programs, and fundraisers.

But all of those have been cancelled for the next while, and that includes an opportunity to celebrate the anniversary milestone with a volunteer tea.

The event was planned for this week, which is National Volunteer Week, set aside to recognize the commitment, dedication and selflessness of volunteers across Canada.

Before the pandemic cancelled or postponed events and gatherings, Red Roof staff were seeking out the many volunteers who have helped out during the last two decades, hoping for a reunion celebration, and an opportunity to thank them all for their contributions that have helped Red Roof grow to what it is today.

Although that couldn't happen, Steffanie Bjorgan, founder

and executive director of Red Roof, has five awards to present to her heroes — virtually, for now — all exceptional volunteers she wants to recognize for their commitment to helping the local organization that provides quality respite and recreational programs to children, youth and young adults with special needs and their families in the Niagara Region.

The first is for a local family, well-known for its volunteering for many different organizations. "A family that volunteers together, grows together," Bjorgan says, noting that four generations of van der Zalm's "have always, in some way, been contributing to Red Roof Retreat, since the very beginning. How do you teach philanthropy and volunteerism? You do it by leading by example, by being a role model. Others learn from you by what you do, not what you say."

Whether it is through donations, giving their time and skills, attending events or advocating on behalf of Red Roof, "there's

Continued on page 4



Moe Bjorgan, pictured with their son Garrett, is a "volunteer extraordinaire," says his wife Steffanie. (Photo supplied)

  
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# Out-of-town visitors continue to be a challenge

**Penny Coles**  
**The Local**

In their updates to council Monday, both Lord Mayor Betty Disero and interim CAO Sheldon Randall spoke of the large number of visitors still coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Chief of their concerns is the lack of public washrooms.

Disero has asked the Niagara Parks Commission to close their parking lots on Niagara River Parkway, “because people are coming into Niagara-on-the-Lake to use our washroom facilities, which are closed, so they are using bushes, construction sites, portable toilets, and behind buildings,” she said. “We have now asked the Niagara Parks Commission

to open their facilities, if they are keeping their parks open. We are waiting to hear back regarding this.”

She said tourists are stopping at grocery stores, gas stations and convenience stores, asking to use their facilities. “This is causing great stress to these operators.”

Randall agreed the town is having “some real challenges

with people visiting from out of town,” and also with locals who are driving downtown, when businesses are closed.

The Town has ordered two large, digital, solar or generator-powered signs, one for near the roundabout on Niagara Stone Road, and another on the Niagara River Parkway near John Street. They will remind people, “we don’t want your business right now, we want it later,” Randall said.

Hopefully, he added, they’ll get the message to turn around and go home.

Suggestions from council-

lors were to make the messaging on the signs simple and clear.

Coun. Clare Cameron said the signs are a great idea, but advised the message should “get to the heart of the matter,” such as “All washrooms are closed. No visitor services.”

Coun. Wendy Cheropita suggested another video, “with no pretty pictures at all,” making it “really really clear, hotels are closed, restaurants are closed.” The Town needs a “more effective message to let visitors know this is not the time to visit,” she said.

One of the problems, Ran-

dall said, is there is nothing illegal about visitors driving from Toronto, Hamilton or Niagara Falls, or elsewhere in the province, to visit NOTL. “And when our bylaw officers talk to them, they don’t care.”

It’s a challenge “to move them along,” he said.

The best thing to happen for Niagara-on-the-Lake would be for the Province to pass a no-travel ban to prevent visitors from coming to town, but at the moment that isn’t the case, he said. “We don’t want them to come, but they’re allowed to do that.”

## No lay-offs yet of full-time staff

**Penny Coles**  
**The Local**

The Town has not yet laid off any full-time staff, councillors heard Monday.

Interim CAO Sheldon Randall said all full-time staff are needed, and the complement now is the same as before COVID-19.

“We need to have them available to provide essential services,” he said, adding, “if we have an abundance of staff we don’t need, we will look at the need for lay-offs.”

However, the full-time contract staff numbers have changed, with about 10 laid off, and an additional 26 that would normally have been taken on at this time, whose hiring has been postponed. There are an additional 22 contract staff they are considering to put on notice that they won’t be called

back, he said, although they’re waiting to make that decision.

The full-time staff are also covering the work the contract staff would be doing, he said.

Coun. Stuart McCormack told councillors the NOTL Public Library has laid off staff, and NOTL Hydro, owned by the town, has also laid off half of its staff.

Since one of the difficulties the Town is facing is the arrival of tourists, McCormack said, he doesn’t think “making the town look pretty” is sending the right messages. “Do you thing it’s appropriate to consider planting on the main street an essential service?” he asked.

Randall said the Town is cleaning out the flower beds, will be putting down mulch, and is weeding and cutting grass, but as far as planting, that decision hasn’t been made yet.

In answer to a question

from McCormack, Randall said with the passing of emergency legislation, council’s approval on hiring or laying off staff isn’t required. “We make those decisions ourselves, to maintain important essential municipal services we need to provide.”

In answer to a question from Coun. Clare Cameron about issues that require a more “fulsome discussion” than phone-in meetings allow, councillors heard from Lord Mayor Betty Disero that she hopes to get council back “to some kind of normal routine,” possibly by May 1, the next meeting after the scheduled special council meeting of April 27.

She would be discussing that with the emergency committee, she said, “to try to get us back to normal sooner rather than later.”

## Bylaw officers to start fining

**Penny Coles**  
**The Local**

There was good news for councillors this week: issues with migrant workers and concerns they’re not self-isolating are being resolved.

Community and development services director Craig Larmour says the public health department has been working to resolve “a good number” of complaints about migrant workers not maintaining physical distancing on farm properties.

A separate issue, of migrant workers in town, “seems to be resolved,” primarily by farmers providing more information to their workers, he said.

He told councillors that the first visit to a farm is to provide education, and on a second visit, fines will be issued.

With respect to public gath-

erings, the bylaw officers are continuing to see a “trend of increasing visitors to town,” he said.

Two bylaw officers have stopped 58 times to move people along in the last week, on streets and in parks that have restricted access, he said.

While signage and videos, as discussed earlier in the meeting, might help, Larmour suggested a more effective way to get word out would be to issue tickets to visitors.

Staff are currently exploring banning parking outright near parks, especially along the waterfront, where gatherings are the main issue.

Although bylaw officers are not seeing public urination, they are hearing about it, said Larmour, suggesting the best way to deal with it is to keep people out of parks and off local trails.

The department has hired

two more bylaw officers to enforce emergency COVID-19 orders, he told councillors, and is focusing on Thursday to Sunday, with more enhancement required during nice weather.

In answer to a question from Coun. Stuart McCormack about the possibility of road closures to discourage visitors coming to town, Larmour said staff have discussed that possibility. The problem is that the main roads coming into town are under the jurisdiction of either the regional government or the Niagara Parks Commission. “If we close one road, we might be loading up another minor road,” he said.


If the digital signs the Town has ordered are large enough, it would be appropriate to post information about fining any infractions of local regulations, Larmour said.



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**Nancy Bailey is the Coordinator of Niagara-on-the-Lake Special Olympics.**  
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# Water will be high, but not ‘catastrophic’

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

There is good news on the waterfront.

Dock Area resident Ron Simkus, a mining engineer who compiles data on the lake level and email blasts more than 100 people with updates, says although Lake Ontario is high, the forecast of what is to come is better than last year.

“The probability of a catastrophic situation is fading away quickly,” he says, based on recent predictions from the International Joint Commission, which also tracks water levels, and Environment Canada.

By last Wednesday, the lake level had jumped two and one-half inches over the week before, and was 10 inches higher than the same date in April, 2019, with a storm early in the week pushing the Niagara River to a record high and having

“a ‘knock-on’ result on the level of Lake Ontario,” says Simkus.

Earlier this year, the situation was described as potentially becoming catastrophic this spring, and although the lake level remains high, the numbers indicate it “will not test the range of 2019, but will persist as high,” says Simkus.

The optimism is especially welcome given the focus of all levels of government on protective measures during COVID-19, says Simkus. The reason behind the predictions are twofold — unlike last year, the Ottawa River “is totally under control,” and not looking like a threat for this year, and a “really benign April” as far as rainfall has been helpful, allowing the high water levels to be absorbed.

The one parameter that isn’t changing is that it will finish the year at a high level, says Simkus.

“We’re not back to normal yet, and who knows what 2021 will bring.”

Brett Ruck, the Town’s environmental supervisor, is hoping the predictions are correct, but he’s not counting on them. There is still a lot of snow to melt further north, and that plus the possibility of a heavy rain could make a

big difference.

“There is a little bit of a comfort level,” he says, “but I’m still geared up to be prepared.”

He is ready with all the measures that took place last year — sand bags, pumps, check valves in the sewers are at the ready if needed. “I’m pretty comfortable that

we can do what we need to do.

As for the work in the park that was planned for this year, it may or may not get done.

“It will depend on what’s happening here with the water elevations,” says Ruck.

With the town in a state of emergency, “we’re not

talking about it at this point.”

With the expenses of the municipality increased due to COVID-19, it may be a matter of funding the “absolute essentials. We have some money set aside for shoreline and erosion and flooding, but if it doesn’t happen, it may be these funds will be used elsewhere.”



The Town has erected barriers to keep visitors and vehicles out of the Dock Area parkette. (Ron Simkus)

# Let’s make some noise, Niagara-on-the-Lake

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

How much noise can Niagara-on-the-Lake residents make?

Lord Mayor Betty Disero hopes to find out this Saturday, at 6:30 p.m., when residents are being encouraged to go outside, stand on their front verandahs, shout from their windows, and make as much noise as they can.

“We wanted to do something to get the whole town involved in saying thank you to our front-line workers,” she says, as well as essential workers, services and stores staying open for the community. And to do all that while stressing the message of staying at home.

Use horns, noisemakers, yell, sing or clap, she says.

At each of the fire stations in town, members of the fire

department will be making noise all well.

Other municipalities are doing something similar, some at different times or different days, and knowing it would be an effort to get the news out to all residents, this day and time was chosen to allow the time and opportunity for people to learn about the plan.

“If everyone takes part, whether urban or rural, it would

have a great impact — the bigger the better,” says Disero.

Julia Buxton Cox has heard that Garrison Village residents have been making some noise, to say thank you by clapping from their porches, but her Chautauqua neighbourhood

has been quiet so far.

She’s been promoting #makenoisenotl on Facebook, in an effort to get more people involved, and has sent it to everyone in her email contacts to help spread the word to those who are not on Facebook

or Twitter.

She’s counting on the town to collectively get together and make this a success, hoping it will go viral.

“Let’s get everybody out there and make some noise,” she says.

# MAKE SOME NOISE

Let's Hear You!

April 25, 2020  
6:30 PM

#MAKENOISENOTL

## Free delivery service

Casey McNab, president of Community Transport Group, which provides the town’s public transit service, is offering free pick-up and delivery during COVID-19. The bus service has been halted for now, so McNab is offering a Monday to Saturday delivery service instead. For more information call 905-468-4132. (Photo supplied)

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♥ Thanks to local heroes, our volunteers! ♥

# Volunteers lead by example

Continued from page 1

always a van der Zalm somewhere involved in what we do.”

Each generation teaches the next the value of giving back to their community, she says. “Having watched some of the kids in the early years, helping around the property or coming to events, and now seeing them having families of their own, and teaching their kids to do the same, is proof that people lead by example,” says Bjorgan.

“On behalf of Red Roof Retreat, she says, “and all the other organizations that Team VDZ supports, thank you all. It takes a village, but in this case it takes a family.”

This year Bjorgan has a special award to be handed out for the first time. She explains that several years ago, a young woman walked onto the property asking if she could spend some time helping with the horses. “She had spent her younger years riding and showing horses, but after a fall and significant injuries, she was hesitant to come back and reconnect with her passion.”

She began working with the horses at Red Roof, and soon started riding and volunteering on a regular basis. “Her dedication and determination were admirable. It was an honour to witness the healing power of the horses and the property at Red Roof Retreat. This young lady was Laura Robertson.

Tragically, her beautiful soul left us in 2018,” says Bjorgan.

Robertson shared her love of Red Roof Retreat with Karley McKeigan, bringing her to the farm, where Karley caught the same passion of wanting to be there on a regular basis. “She has continued on to this day, helping when she can, as well as following in Laura’s footsteps to become a volunteer firefighter,” says Bjorgan. Karley and Laura shared a friendship, and a commitment to something bigger than themselves, “something we wish everyone could experience at least once in their lifetime.”

Karley continues to exemplify a true “horse spirit,” says Bjorgan, and is being recognized this year with the first Laura Robertson Memorial Award.

The NOTL Kinsmen represent the meaning of community, and show “many hands make light work,” says Bjorgan.

Club members have become true heroes for Red Roof, helping since the beginning.

“On a warm June night, 20 years ago, and literally the night before the first day Red Roof Retreat opened, a group of NOTL Kinsmen were helping to put the finishing touches on a chicken coop in anticipation of our first special needs class visit,” says Bjorgan.

“Working in the dark, under a flood light, it got done. This is symbolic of the Kinsmen Club. They are the ‘doers’ in the community. Over the

years, Red Roof has reached out to the club for support in a variety of ways, and the answer has always been yes.”

This solid group of community volunteers stays humble and kind, she says, and epitomizes what it means to give selflessly. “Always with a smile and good fun in mind, they go about quietly doing their good deeds for the benefit of others. Red Roof Retreat is honoured by their long-standing support and proud to be recognizing them during our 20th anniversary. Here’s to 20 more.”

Niagara Serve is a Christian-based organization that gives high school students from Canada volunteer opportunities that can benefit charitable organizations.

Since 2005, leaders from Niagara Serve have voluntarily organized build projects at Red Roof Retreat. “They recruit community volunteers who have the building skills, tools and resources, and they oversee and teach young volunteers everything from building, painting, gardening, fence-building, or working in our summer camp with our special needs clients. They are never afraid of hard work, no matter the weather, and ask for nothing in return,” she says.

“Without leaders such as Ron, Annelise and Uncle Henk, the volunteer experience would never exist, and the building of Red Roof Retreat would never

have come this far.”

And for the last award, says Bjorgan, “Remember that saying, ‘behind every good man is a good woman?’ Some people might take offence to that, but in my case, I’d like to reverse that saying.”

The award is her opportunity to publicly thank her husband, Moe Bjorgan, for being beside her on their journey of the last 20 years.

“I have been the face of Red Roof Retreat, and humbly accepted recognition and accolades on the charity’s behalf. It has been my vision, but I would never have been able to make it a reality without a good man behind me,” she says.

“Raising a child with special needs is no easy task. Trust me, I could write a book about all the things I never expected to be doing. But that story is for another time. For now, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for the man who always, and I mean always, supported me to bring this vision to life, while at the same time being the best friend, husband and father I could ask for.

“It’s not easy having your wife for a boss (I can hear everyone chuckling), but from doing emergency repairs, to capital improvement projects, and of course his infamous golf tournament, which has been raising money for charity for over 20 years, he has volunteered willingly and with love. When Red Roof needs my un-



The NOTL Kinsmen have helped Red Roof Retreat with everything from building projects to fundraising. Ward Simpson, Stefanie Bjorgan and Ken Slingerland help Red Roof at an annual fundraiser. (Photo supplied)



Karley McKeigan became a volunteer at Red Roof when her friend Laura Robertson introduced her to the farm and its horses. (Photo supplied)

divided attention, he is there on the home front. He has supported Red Roof Retreat and our special family in every aspect, in every way he could. Moe has been there from the beginning, and I know he will be there for all time,” she says.

“How lucky is Red Roof

Retreat? How lucky am I? And it is because of this, that Moe is being recognized for the first and only Volunteer Extraordinaire Award for his dedication, and for following the motto of ‘Be a man who did a good act, not for himself, but for the cause of good.’”

## Hair colour product in exchange for food



Jaime Chevalier of Textures Hair Salon is offering to help her regular clients in need of a hair colour touch-up, in return for some help for her church community. She has learned of families in need of food, and wants to do something to help. On Saturday April 25, her Niagara Stone Road salon will be open for hair colour pickup from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., in exchange for donations of food and other supplies. She is limited on what she can offer. If you are a client with hair colour details on file, call her between those hours at 905-468-1558 and if she has your product, she will prepare it for pickup. For more information about needed food and supplies, visit the Textures Hair Salon facebook page. (Photo supplied)



Four generations of the van der Zalm family have volunteered with Red Roof, and many other local organizations. (Photo supplied)

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# Thanks to local heroes, our volunteers!

## Arts, culture organizations thank their volunteers

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Back in March, before the world changed, a group of people from various Niagara-on-the-Lake arts and culture organizations planned a meeting to discuss celebrating their volunteers.

This week, April 19 to 25, is National Volunteer Week, and, Cheryl Morris, member of the Shaw Guild and Niagara Pump-house Arts Centre, had planned the meeting to collaborate on how best to recognize the volunteers who are a driving force behind hundreds of arts and cultural events that happen in the community each year.

Many of the organizations host annual events for their volunteers, and one of the topics for discussion could have been about a collaborative celebration, but of course that meeting couldn't happen, says Morris.

"We never got the chance to talk about it," she says.

Instead, during this time of uncertainty, NOTL's arts and cultural organizations are joining together to send a shout-out

to their volunteers.

Volunteers work tirelessly and make a difference every day of the year, bringing expertise, energy and dedication to everything they do, but during this time of staying at home and physical distancing, much of their work has been put on hold.

At this time of year, says Morris, members of the Shaw Guild would be busy with performances, hosting and greeting patrons, working in the gardens, and getting ready for the popular annual garden tour. Instead performances have been cancelled until June 30, and the annual garden tour has been postponed until 2021.

It's difficult for volunteers who want to get out and help by doing what they enjoy doing, she says, but they've continued to communicate, keep in touch and share stories, she says.

"Whether their role is greeting guests, organizing and participating in events and exhibits, fundraising, or answering a call for help, their gift of time sustains artistic and cultural organizations allowing them to do what

they do best — illuminate lives and enrich the world through their dedicated support," says Morris in a recent news release to honour volunteers.

"Besides the value volunteers bring to each organization, their contribution to the worldwide renown of Niagara-on-the-Lake as a premier tourist destination is unmatched."

Despite the cancellation of so many events, says Morris, it's important to recognize and thank volunteers.

To each and every volunteer, the following organizations send a collective thank you.

*"Cheers to the Guild's team of 350 volunteers! Your donation of over 13,500 hours last year and your fundraising efforts to support the production of A Christmas Carol contributed to a terrific 2019 season at the Shaw Festival."*

*The Shaw Guild*  
Laurie Harley, President  
president@shawguild.ca

*"Volunteers are the heart and soul of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum. They are hardworking, passionate, smart, and just as im-*

*portant, they are fun. Their commitment provides an invaluable support to the staff, and without them the ongoing success of the Museum would not be possible."*

*Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum*  
Sarah Kaufman, managing director/curator  
skaufman@nhsn.ca

*"The Board and Staff of the Niagara Pump-house Arts Centre would like to send our heart-felt thanks to our volunteers for their contribution not only to the success of all of our special events from artists' exhibits, to the Fashion Show, Art At The Pump-house, Moonlight Picnic and Artful Treasures, but also to the volunteers who tirelessly worked on the renovation. We can't wait for our doors to open again."*

*Niagara Pump-house Arts Centre*  
Patti Knipe, volunteer relations chair  
volunteers@niagarapumphouse.ca

*successful 2019 art sale fundraiser."*

*RiverBrink Art Museum*  
Debra Antoncic, director/curator  
dantoncic@riverbrink.org

*"Thanks to each and every TD Niagara Jazz Festival volunteer for your dedication and support. We couldn't do it without you and we truly appreciate all that you do. A special shout out to Mary Garratt, our Volunteer Administrator, whose efforts make it all possible."*

*Niagara Jazz Festival*  
Juliet Dunn, executive director/  
artistic producer/co-creator  
juliet@niagarajazzfestival.com

*"For 22 years, Music Niagara Festival has presented world-class experiences in unique and intimate settings that connect the community and beyond, educate and inspire audiences and artists, and enhance Niagara-on-the-Lake's rich heritage and culture. Music Niagara would not be possible without the support of our dedicated volunteers. A huge thank you to our loyal volunteers that helped us evolve into a world-class summer music festival."*

*Music Niagara Festival*  
Karen Lade, general manager  
klade@musicniagara.org

## Thank you to our local heroes



**Wayne Gates, MPP**  
Special to The Local

for so long.

In our community we have extraordinary examples. For years, I have always believed we must support our local businesses and now COVID-19 has taught us why. When we are at our weakest, it's our local businesses who have refused to take advantage of us but instead rose to the occasion by offering their services in times of need, often at great expense to themselves. When I first heard that pharmacies in Ontario were going to start charging quickly growing dispensing fees, I picked up the phone and called our local businesses.

It was pharmacies like Simpson's who told me they would reject this opportunity and instead put community first to help our seniors. Everywhere I have called in Niagara-on-the-Lake, businesses have realized our population remains specifically at risk, and they have stepped up to the plate, to come together and to work to shield us from the worst effects of COVID-19.

Shortly before this began, there was a competition to see which Canadian hero belonged on our five dollar bill — I wonder if it's too late to nominate the healthcare workers, the small businesses and all those who wake up every morning and still drive to work from NOTL?

Together, we'll get through this!

You cannot begin a note thanking our local heroes without acknowledging our truly heroic frontline healthcare workers. Every day, they risk their lives, and endure painful time away from their children in the relentless pursuit of keeping our community safe. When this crisis passes — and it will pass — it is these heroes who will come to epitomize our response.

However, as the days in our isolation people began to realize that there were other heroes emerging alongside front-line healthcare staff; unsung heroes whose faces we knew. Our neighbours who staffed our grocery stores, who collected our waste, who kept our gas stations open and who provided a myriad of services that allowed us to remain safe in our homes every day while they risked health and life to keep our needs met. I would name them all if I could, but we know them and I hope you're taking the time to give them the deeply heartfelt "thank you, I appreciate your courage" when you see them fulfilling these daily tasks so many of us took for granted

## Canvassing cancelled for 50-year volunteer

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

This is the first year since 1970 that Sheila Tierney will not be canvassing for the Canadian Cancer Society.

She and her husband Ed began volunteering with the cancer society after their son, at the age of two, was diagnosed with cancer, and recovered after 18 months of chemotherapy.

As co-chair of the town campaign, she said at the February cancer society volunteer tea this would be her last year. She hustled to organize her captains and canvassers, getting them their kits so she and Ed could head south in time to celebrate her sister's 90th birthday in Atlanta with a large group of family members.

But there was no need — the campaign has been cancelled, as was her trip, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Her sister, who was battling leukemia, died just days before her birthday, in isolation, without seeing any of her family

members, but Tierney looks forward to a trip south for a family gathering to celebrate her sister's life, once travel restrictions are lifted.

Although the door-to-door campaign has been cancelled, the first time since she began canvassing, next year she will again help out, hopefully with someone else to take over, she says.

At 83, Tierney still canvasses, organizes the captains and volunteers, and does all the paperwork that goes along with the campaign. Ed is a huge help as well, she says.

Last year Niagara-on-the-Lake volunteers raised \$33,000 from the door-to-door campaign and daffodil pin sales, and that is money the cancer society will be missing, along with cancelled campaigns across the country.

"More than 1 million Canadians are living with and beyond cancer," says the Ontario Cancer Society website. "Those with cancer are among the most vulnerable in our communities right now, and are at greater risk of more serious outcomes from COVID-19. Unfortunately,



At a volunteer tea in February, Beth Dandridge, community coordinator for the Niagara office of the Canadian Cancer Society, presents volunteer Sheila Tierney with a certificate for her years of volunteering. (Penny Coles)

ly, cancer doesn't stop being a life-changing and life-threatening disease in the middle of a global health crisis. Our highest priority is to support people with cancer — this means being good citizens and doing everything we can to minimize the impact and

duration of this pandemic."

For information about services the Canadian Cancer Society continues to provide, call 905-684-6455 or 1-888-939-3333.

Online donations are needed more than ever, and can be made at Cancer.ca.

On behalf of our community, thank you to our front-line healthcare workers, businesses and so, so many others for coming together in this tough time.

If you can safely, please continue to support our local small businesses and local papers!



**Wayne Gates**

MPP Niagara Falls representing Niagara-on-the-Lake & Fort Erie

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# EDITORIAL

## Thank you, volunteers, through good times and bad

This is National Volunteer Week, a time to celebrate the dedication and selflessness of volunteers, across the country, and in our communities.

The irony is the theme chosen for this year: “It’s time to applaud this country’s volunteers.” Very appropriate, when all we can do is applaud, virtually, since there are no gatherings or celebrations to recognize those who do so much for their communities.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is a community that thrives with the aid of volunteers, and also does an exceptional job of recognizing its volunteers, with two long-standing traditions of awards from the Chamber of Commerce and from the Town.

Of course, we can never say thank you often enough to all the fine men, women and youth who give up their time to make this amazing community an even better place to live, work and play.

In every segment of society, the arts and cultural organizations, the schools and churches, the sports associations and service clubs, volunteers help every step of the way, for the benefit of their friends, family, for all of us.

But this, of course, is a different time. Volunteers are not able to do what they would normally be doing, because nothing about our lives these days is normal.

What we are finding, though, is that volunteers by nature never seem to quit. They seem instinctively to gravitate toward avenues of assistance, always find a way to help out, something else that needs to be done, somewhere to pitch in. We are witness to that in this great community every day, learning about new initiatives to help get through these difficult times, by making and distributing masks and other protective equipment, going shopping for and delivering groceries for those who can’t go out, delivering flowers to provide a bit of cheer on dreary days, offering virtual activities — finding all kinds of very clever ways to make our days a little easier.

To all of you who volunteer all year round, to those who are thinking of ways to improve the situations of your friends and neighbours during this time, to all of you who are finding ways to help in your community, to provide some cheer during anxious times, thank you. We applaud you. Virtually.

Finally, from Lord Mayor Betty Disero during her Monday evening update: “I want to express our gratitude to the thousands of volunteers we have in Niagara-on-the-Lake who really are the essence of civic pride and community-building in our town. It is their daily efforts that make NOTL cleaner, more vibrant, friendly, bring music, arts and culture to our soul, feed us, keep us company in times of need, take us to places and spaces that are important to us, and keep those places and spaces special for us.”

For Volunteer Week, the Town is asking NOTLers to nominate a local they know doing amazing volunteer work to help people through this difficult time. Send in their names, along with the details of their volunteer work and a picture (if you have one) to [notlvolunteers@notl.com](mailto:notlvolunteers@notl.com). The Town will be naming names on social media throughout the week, to give thanks to the dedication of these individuals.

Penny Coles  
The Local

## From one small community to another, we send our love

When tragedy occurs, people in small, close-knit communities come together. We’ve seen that happen many times in our own community, where friends and neighbours circle those who are suffering to offer solace and comfort.

But how do you do that in a community that is experiencing such anguish, such agony over a senseless act of violence, one we are all mourning, although from a distance.

Nova Scotia is a province of small communities, of people who are accustomed to looking out for each other and reaching out to each other when bad things happen. But no one could fathom that the worst mass shooting in our peaceful country, something beyond comprehension and so alien to all of us, could occur anywhere, never mind such an area so quaint, so pretty — so safe and serene that people chose to retire there.

There have been virtual tributes, and there will be a virtual vigil Friday evening at 7 p.m. on a Facebook site, Colchester-Supporting our Communities.

At least one candlelight vigil has already been held here, in Virgil as residents of the Glenbrook condominiums stood on their front steps Monday evening, with candles to remember and pay tribute to the lives lost in Nova Scotia.

For now, a virtual hug around the Nova Scotia communities where these tragedies took place will have to suffice.

Know this, Nova Scotia, all of us across this vast country share your anguish, mourn with you, and send our thoughts and prayers in the hope they will help, in some tiny way.

We are so very, very sorry for your loss.

Penny Coles  
The Local



## Auchterlonie on Astrology


Bill Auchterlonie  
Special to The Local

While the pandemic shrinks the number of pages of The Local, Auchterlonie on Astrology will also downsize to one paragraph. The highlight this week is for Thursday, April. 23:

Taurus is cool. Taurus is calm. Taurus is quiet. Except today, when the Moon in Taurus connects with Uranus and sets off fireworks, and lights that shine years into the future. Today is the birthday of Canada’s 14th Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson, who governed from 1963

to 1968, and who also won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in calming the waters in the Suez Canal. Michael “Bowling for Columbine” Moore turns 66 today.

For the full week, please visit [notllocal.com](http://notllocal.com) or The NOTL Local Facebook page.



### Letters!

### We want letters!

If you have a letter to the editor you’d like to see published, please send it to [penny@notllocal.com](mailto:penny@notllocal.com). Please try to keep it to about 350 words. Sorry, but we won’t publish anonymous letters. The deadline is Monday at noon.



### Canadian Cancer Society

### Société canadienne du cancer

For information about services the Canadian Cancer Society continues to provide during the COVID-19 pandemic, call 905-684-6455, or 1-888-939-3333.

Online donations are needed more than ever, and can be made at [Cancer.ca](http://Cancer.ca)

## The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community

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<b>GAMBLER’S ANONYMOUS</b> <b>905-351-1616</b>		

# Lifestyle changes can decrease risk of all disease



**Larry W. Chambers**  
**Hanna Levy**  
**Eva Liu**  
**Special to The Local**

Society has always had one disease that causes dread.

Polio is still an infectious disease that is untreatable, and which slowly weakens and destroys the person before death claims its victim. Fortunately, in the 1950s, polio became preventable with the discovery of the polio vaccine, and became just another disease. Better not to have it than to have it, of course, but it was something the medical profession could deal with.

COVID-19 is the new disease that people dread, a new infectious disease that has caused life to change in a matter of weeks, with uncertainty as to when we will return to our comfortable pre-COVID-19 routines.

The fear of COVID-19 is complicated by the fear of aging, early reports indicated older individuals are at higher risk for severe cases of COVID-19. However, new scientific evidence points toward a more positive and nuanced interpretation of the results. Consistent findings from China, Italy, and the U.S. suggest patients with underlying health conditions and risk factors, including but not limited to diabetes, high blood pressure, long-term lung disease, heart disease, stroke, long-term kidney disease, and smoking, are at higher risk for severe disease or death from COVID-19.

The implications of this are significant. As these are conditions which predominantly affect people as they grow older, we need to ensure we respond to each of these conditions properly, because if we prevent high blood pressure for example, the risks of developing COVID-19 decrease, and the same can be true for conditions like irregular pulse (atrial fibrillation)

and many others.

Not only should we prevent and treat these conditions properly, responding to these conditions will decrease the risk of developing other conditions, such as COVID-19, irregular heartbeats and many others. Note too that not all drugs are good for you and some can cause problems, not only making COVID-19 worse, but making the quality of life for people taking them much worse.

Residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake with underlying health conditions who have symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, cough, or shortness of breath, should immediately contact their health care provider. Whether or not they have symptoms, these people should use proper hygiene practices to protect themselves from COVID-19, such as thorough hand washing and cleaning, and disinfecting high-touch surfaces. It is particularly important that those with underlying health conditions practice physical distancing, meaning that they should stay at home, avoid crowds, gatherings, travel, and contact with people who are ill. Residents also should maintain at least a 30-day supply of medication, and a two-week supply of food and other necessities, and be aware of COVID-19 symptoms.

Those without underlying medical conditions also should do their best to protect themselves and others from COVID-19. Everyone who is ill should stay home, except to get medical care, should not go to work, and should practise physical distancing. This is especially important for those who work with residents with underlying conditions or who otherwise are at high risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19.

COVID-19 is a serious problem. However, we now know that much can be done to reduce the risk of contracting the virus, and to improve outcomes if it does develop. Consequently, we must focus on the positive, on actions we can take to reduce risks. The good news is that tak-

ing these steps will not only reduce your risk of developing COVID-19, it will also improve your general health, reduce your risk of physical frailty and increase your brain health.

Imagine there are 1,000 people and that 100 of them will develop COVID-19 before they die (these numbers are not accurate - they have been chosen to illustrate a point). Now imagine that after reading our article and implementing our advice, only 70 developed COVID-19 instead of 100. If our only objective was the prevention of COVID-19, we would be delighted, because that would be a 30 per cent reduction in the number of people developing COVID-19. Although the other 900 people do not see an advantage in terms of COVID-19 infection, they will see the following benefits:

- develop fewer diseases
- keep their brains healthier and their minds sharper
- be more independent and active
- be less likely to have to go into a care home and
- feel physically and mentally better

We are not saying that all health conditions are preventable, and certainly conditions can develop even with perfect health habits. These are simply ways to reduce the likelihood of disease. Many 21st century health problems are the result of a combination of inactivity and diet. For example, type II diabetes and high cholesterol levels are due to both reduced activity levels and increased calorie intake in most people. Another example is high blood pressure, which can occur in anyone, but most commonly occurs in those who are overweight and sedentary. Therefore, it is very likely that keeping your weight down will help prevent high blood pressure, or reduce it if it has already been diagnosed.

Many of the underlying health conditions increasing risk of COVID-19 (diabetes, high blood pressure, long-term lung disease, heart dis-

ease, stroke, long-term kidney disease) are closely related to inactivity and diet. Although this can be disheartening, because the modern environment greatly contributes to many health risks, it also means that a few simple lifestyle changes can decrease the risk for all of them. The evidence about the benefits of staying healthy is very strong, and universally accepted.

Three general areas needed to keep healthy are:

- 1) Physical Health – get more active, reduce the impact of stress, have good sleep habits, and be wary of over-medication.
- 2) Blood Supply – do not smoke, keep your blood pressure low, your weight down, and decrease the sugar and

cholesterol in your diet.

3) Brain Capability – get active and involved in the community (through virtual methods at the moment), increase intellectual activity and check your hearing and vision. COVID-19 helps to shed light on some important aspects of health and ageing. Ageing alone is not a cause of major problems until the later '90s — look at Christopher Plummer, who received Academy Award nominations at ages 88 and 90.

Nevertheless, residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake should support each other through collective physical distancing and proper hygiene practices, to protect those who are the most vulnerable to severe cases of COVID-19. Additionally,

it is important to take time to check on friends and family, as the recent social changes also can have emotional impact on our loved ones. Finally, the outbreak is a reminder for us to continue practices that increase our physical and brain fitness, which are protective against a wide range of illnesses.

*Larry W. Chambers has authored articles and books on disease prevention, improvements in long-term care homes, and innovative approaches for continuing professional development. He is research director of the Niagara Regional Campus, School of Medicine, McMaster University. Eva Liu and Hanna Levy are medical students at the Niagara Regional Campus of the McMaster University School of Medicine.*

## LETTERS

### A note of thanks to Shaw volunteers

A big thank you goes out to all of the production/wardrobe crew and seamstresses at the Shaw Festival for putting together re-usable isolation gowns for our team. The Niagara North Family Health Team has seven locations – five in St. Catharines and two in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and we have been struggling with maintaining enough personal protective equipment (PPE)

for use during patient visits, particularly the disposable isolation gowns. While patterns are easily available, materials and sewers were not. Tim Jennings, Executive Director and Don Finlayson, Production Director were quick to lend their support to the project. The wardrobe crew has put together over 80 gowns to date and continue to leverage their resources to get fabric and supplies.

The Niagara North Family Health Team is grateful for all of their work which will allow us to continue our work while protecting our staff and patients. Their work is truly a reflection of the community spirit that can shine through during a crisis. A big thank you once again to all of the team at the Shaw.

**Mary Keith**  
**Niagara North Health Team**

## LETTERS

### Post office employees my heroes

I'd like to add to the heroes that you commemorated on the front page of The Local on April 16.

I visit Canada Post in Virgil on a daily basis, both for work and personal mail. Without fail, there are three amazing employees that greet me with a smile and ensure that my mail is delivered timely to my box. I also see that they accept and carry numerous boxed orders for wine club members to pick up, Amazon orders, on-line orders, with

packages and boxes of every size and shape lining their floors. Additionally, they stop their daily tasks to take time to deal with our many inquiries about the how, when, why and what of ensuring our mail is forwarded and received in a timely fashion.

Today I want to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to Cindy, Quinn and Brenda (Virgil site) and also to the Canada Post staff that are stationed at the NOTL site, who are essential workers

making sure we get all those above-mentioned items!

**Karen Ediger**  
**Virgil**

*Editor's Note: As I drop papers off at all four post offices in Niagara-on-the-Lake, I'm greeted by staff who are always friendly, helpful, and are doing an essential and amazing job during difficult times. So thank you to the staff at all post offices. And it would help them if residents would take all their mail home and recycle it.*



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Photographer and videographer Rene Bertschi would like to see every home in NOTL fly a Canadian flag to say thank you to essential workers. (Rene Bertschi)

# Flags say ‘thank you’ to essential workers

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Many homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and across the country, are proud to fly their nation's flag on Canada Day. Rene Bertschi believes our flags could be a symbol of a country united against a disease, and in

showing appreciation to all those who are putting their lives at risk to keep others safe. “This is like World War III” he says, not unlike

when soldiers put their lives in danger to protect the freedom and future of their countries. “We have to do whatever we can do to thank all the front-line workers for their sacrifices,” says Bertschi. “When you look at the number of people devastated by the disease, the people who have died

from this disease, the numbers are horrendous. This is not only a thank you, it's a sign of respect, to those who have shown an understanding that we need to beat this virus, through distancing, to protect ourselves and our essential workers. Flying the flag means we're all in this together.”

Bertschi says, as Canadians, “we seem to be so quiet over the achievements of our country. What better way to say thank you to front-line workers. Our nurses, doctors, and other workers in the hospitals, the police, paramedics and firefighters, they're all out there every day.”

Bertschi lives on Shaw's Lane in the Old Town, and several of his neighbours have brought out their flags, usually reserved for Canada Day, to join him in saying thank you.

Some locals have flag poles that are used once a year, and others are finding respectful ways to display their flag, he says.

To his neighbours, Bertschi says, “Let's do it.”

And if you have a spare flag, “put one out for your neighbour. And pass the message on to as many people as possible.”

He's hoping for an “avalanche” of flags, not just in NOTL, but the region, the province, and across the country. “It's a way of connecting our country.”

But it doesn't have to end there.

Bertschi has spoken to his sister in Switzerland, a friend in South Africa, and another in Germany, about flying their country's flags. “They all thought it was a great idea,” he said “I hope everyone will be doing it. Let's leave politics out of it, and let the citizens say thank you.”

# MAKE SOME NOISE

Let's Hear You!

April 25, 2020  
6:30 PM

Raise your voice, honk your horn, and make some **noise** to honour front-line workers.  
*One community, one sound.*

#MAKENOISENOTL  
notl.com/covid-19 for details

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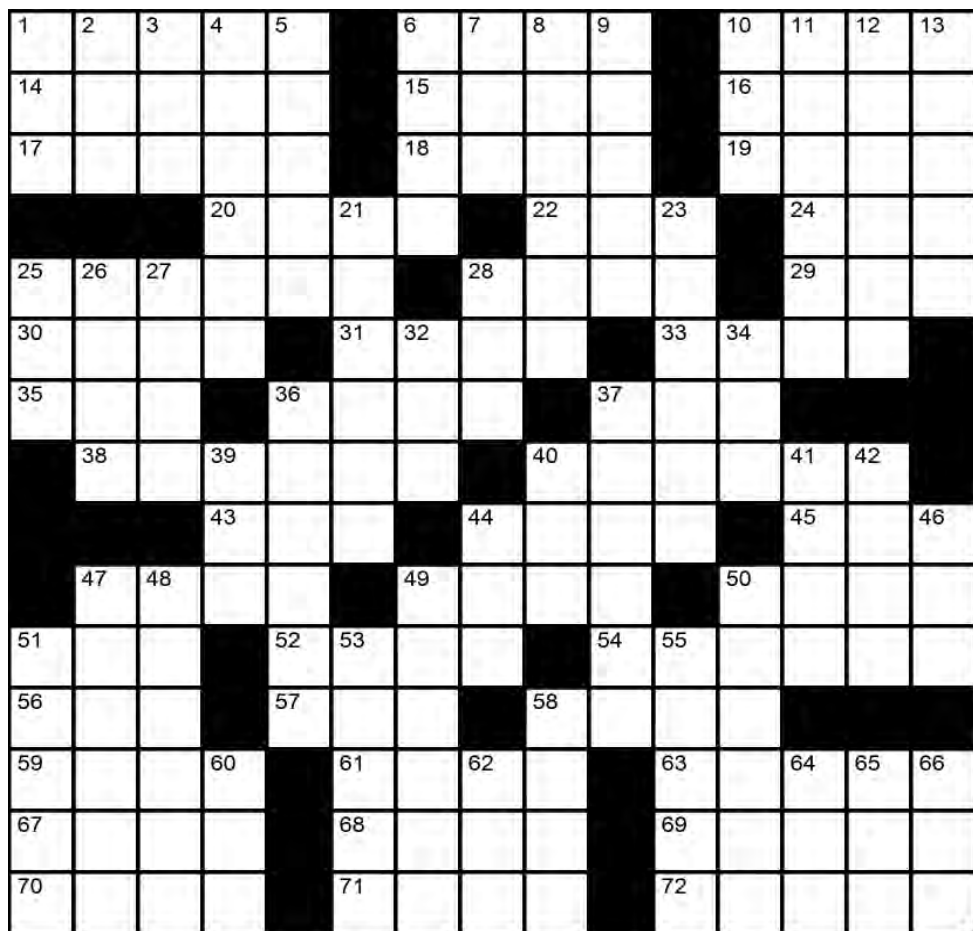
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## CROSSWORD PUZZLE



## Across:

- 1 Grouches
- 6 Female supporters
- 10 Flat-topped hill
- 14 Misbehave
- 15 Arizona city on the Colorado
- 16 In addition
- 17 Latin American dance
- 18 Side
- 19 --- Christian Andersen
- 20 Sharp flavor
- 22 Note hastily
- 24 34th President
- 25 Moonshot program
- 28 Sound of a lion
- 29 Louse egg
- 30 Washed out
- 31 Watch --- step!
- 33 Not odd
- 35 Free
- 36 Settlement
- 37 Nudge repeatedly
- 38 Aloof
- 40 Conductive elements
- 43 Hoppy brew
- 44 Conforms
- 45 Blockhead
- 47 Pirate's plunder
- 49 Mischievous
- 50 Solitary
- 51 "L" operator

## Down:

- 52 Unpleasant to look at
- 54 Conjured up
- 56 Attila, e.g.
- 57 Aught
- 58 Political top dog (Abbr.)
- 59 Brief swim
- 61 It's worth ---!
- 63 Start playing tennis
- 67 Skin
- 68 Film genre
- 69 Flowing and ebbing
- 70 Roman wear
- 71 Large and scholarly book
- 72 Heap
- 1 Coverts rotary motion into linear motion
- 2 Appliance and electronics maker
- 3 Bill dispenser
- 4 Hollow gas globule
- 5 Mar
- 6 Unit of computer memory
- 7 Regret
- 8 Key with three sharps
- 9 Pacific country
- 10 Speed measure
- 11 Seinfeld cohort --- Benes
- 12 Clicked
- 13 Valuable possession
- 21 Prius maker

- 23 Choice morsels
- 25 Interest charge
- 26 Two identical things
- 27 Shoppe adjective
- 28 Manage
- 32 Be in debt
- 34 Old kind of computer monitor
- 36 Fighter ace
- 37 Lower
- 39 "Rosemary's Baby" actress --- Farrow
- 40 Provides input for an amp.
- 41 Observe
- 42 Levelheaded
- 44 Cook in hot oil
- 46 Central bank
- 47 Artist's workshop
- 48 Diminishing
- 49 Extremely
- 50 Snap
- 51 Map
- 53 Enormous
- 55 Kevlar garments
- 58 Funeral woodpile
- 60 Electronic helper just for you
- 62 Border
- 64 Old food label letters
- 65 Carpet cleaner (Abbr.)
- 66 Moose

## OBITUARY



**DYCK, MARTIN**—Martin was born on August 15, 1958 to Henry and Elisabeth Dyck in the Niagara-on-the-Lake Hospital. He completed the family of five children. He enjoyed his youth in Virgil and, upon completing high school and college, entered the workforce at Stelco in the Quality Control Department. From there his interest in technology led him to employment at Philips. There he excelled in skills and knowledge and quickly moved into management positions. His specialty became amalgamation of offices and practices, and streamlining procedures to improve performance and profits. After several years, Philips was merged with Fujitsu where Martin again assumed leadership and management positions.

Soon thereafter, he followed his dreams and ventured out on his own and founded Port Whitby Marine Supplies. His love for boating and marine interests led him to start several other companies, one of which is Skippers Products. He participated at Boat Shows in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Florida. He excelled in satisfying his customers. His motto was: "Exceed your customers' expectations." After 30 years, Martin sold Port Whitby Marine Supplies due to his failing health, but remained very active in helping the new owner. His positive attitude and hard work ethic has left a mark in Whitby. His involvement in the community was apparent in that he taught a Power Squadron course at Durham College for many years, also helping at the soup kitchen, and others less fortunate.

After struggling with his health issues for several years, he received unwelcome news just before Christmas of 2019. Martin never complained but often stated: "I will do my best and God will do the rest." God saw fit to take him into his arms on April 12, 2020.

Predeceased by his parents, Henry and Elisabeth Dyck, he leaves to mourn his siblings, Elizabeth (Denis) Wiebe, Henry (Nettie) Dyck, John (Kathy) Dyck, Neta (Ron) Willms, and many nephews and nieces.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, there will be a private family interment. A Celebration of Life will be held at a future date.


Donations can be made to the Canadian Cancer Society. Online condolences at [www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca](http://www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca).

## PUZZLE ANSWERS

65 Vac, 66 Elk,  
60 P D A, 62 Rim, 64 R D A,  
53 Giant, 55 Vests, 58 Pyre,  
too, 50 Lose it, 51 Chart,  
47 Studio, 48 Warning, 49 All  
Sane, 44 Fry, 46 Fed,  
39 Mia, 40 Mic, 41 Look, 42  
V G A, 36 Top gun, 37 Nether,  
27 Olde, 28 Run, 32 Owe, 34  
23 Treats, 25 A P R, 26 Pair,  
in, 13 Asset, 21 Toyota,  
10 M p h, 11 Elaine, 12 Sunk  
7 Rue, 8 A major, 9 Samoa,  
M, 4 Bubble, 5 Spill, 6 Byte,  
Down: 1 Cam, 2 R C A, 3 A T  
70 Toga, 71 Tome, 72 Stack,  
Rind, 68 Noir, 69 Tidal,  
59 A dip, 61 A try, 63 Serve, 67  
56 Hun, 57 Nil, 58 Pres,  
51 C T A, 52 Ugly, 54 Evoked,  
47 Swag, 49 Arch, 50 Lone,  
43 I P A, 44 Fits, 45 Oaf,  
37 Nag, 38 Remote, 40 Metals,  
33 Even, 35 Rid, 36 Town,  
29 Nit, 30 Pale, 31 Your,  
24 like, 25 Apollo, 28 Roar,  
19 Hans, 20 Bite, 22 Jot,  
16 Plus, 17 Mambo, 18 Team,  
10 Mesa, 14 Act up, 15 Yuma,  
Across: 1 Crabs, 6 Bras,

## IN MEMORIAM

*In Loving Memory*  
**Jessie Thomson**



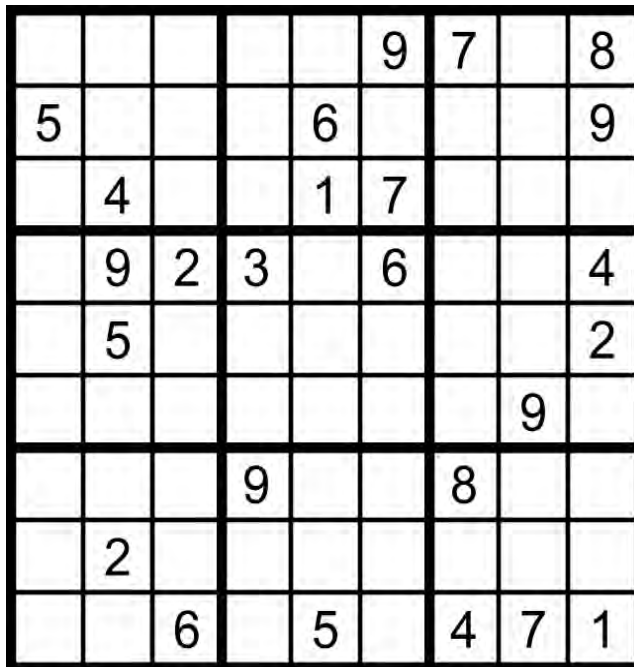
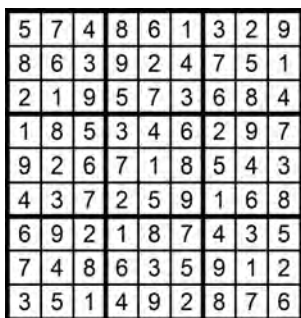
Forever held dear by all fortunate enough  
to be part of her circle of family and friends.

Five years have already passed since April 21, 2015.

There is a link death cannot sever,  
Love and remembrance last forever.

Forever missed by John and  
family, Janice, John (Sue), Jim  
and the grandchildren,  
Andrew, Lindsey, Megan,  
Kaitlyn and James.

## SUDOKU PUZZLE

Sudoku solution  
from April 16, 2020



# Health issues, business closures tough on local family

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Niki Claus has so many reasons to be grateful, and she is.

She and her family have had a rough time in the past, and her struggle now is dealing with the present, and looking forward to a brighter future.

Her story is proof positive that good health is precious, and without it, how quickly life can be turned upside down.

In September, 2018, Claus was successfully operating a day spa out of her Virgil home. With so many clients, she could have worked seven days a week, but was balancing a heavy work load with caring

for her kids. But then, she began having seizures, and other symptoms, but of what, she didn't know. She was hospitalized several times, and was finally, about six months later, diagnosed with functional neurological disorder. It can cause a range of symptoms, including non-epileptic seizures, weakness, chronic pain and fatigue, all of which she suffered, sometimes to a degree that she couldn't get out of bed.

It's a condition of the nervous system, creating problems with how the brain receives signals, Claus explains. She got to the point where she was having several seizures a day, sometimes lasting for several hours.

"Some days, it was constant," she says. "I couldn't walk, I was bedridden, and on so much medication I really couldn't do anything. I couldn't work, there was no money coming in. I couldn't care for my kids, and John had to stay home to look after them. I was terrified."

Claus has always considered herself the caregiver in the family, looking after aging parents, and helping out her sister, who is raising a disabled son on her own. But at that time, John had just lost his father, her parents' health was failing, and she couldn't help herself, never mind anyone else in the family. "My body was not function-

ing," she says. "It was a time that was really harder on my family than it was on me, I was so out of it."

By April, 2019, having finally received a diagnosis for her condition, and realizing she had to avoid stress and other triggers, she slowly began to improve. However, stress proved difficult to avoid. Her mom passed away, as did John's. And her father, who depends on her for help, was getting worse, and needed her more than ever.

Claus knows she has so much for which to be grateful. She first met John when she was 19. Decades later, in 2010, they reconnected and rekindled a friendship. They became a couple, married, and began fostering babies, eventually adopting their daughter, Trinity, now four. They were hoping for a second child, and spent their savings to create embryos. Her cousin, a mother of three, offered to be a surrogate for them, and Niki and John are also now proud parents of three-year-old Jaden.

"We tell them they both grew in someone else's tummy, and God gave them to us," she says. When Claus, a certified aesthetician, was so sick she was unable to operate her In Touch Day Spa, she was devastated by the loss of most of her NOTL clientele. Once her health im-

proved, she began the slow process of rebuilding, and John was able to get back into the music community and begin performing again. In addition, last September, hoping to supplement the family income, she and John, a guitarist who performs around the region with his band, Klawz, decided to start a delivery service. They would pick up groceries and other supplies, mostly for seniors who were no longer driving.

With the arrival of COVID-19 in Canada, Claus, who didn't want to be taking advantage of people during such a difficult time, was re-

Continued on page 11



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# Staying positive, waiting for time to rebuild

Continued from page 10

lieved to see volunteers offering to help those who couldn't get out to do their own shopping.

She did, however, have some regular customers for whom she continued to order online groceries, which she and John would pick up and deliver. It helped that they could take their kids with them. She also did some shopping for those who weren't comfortable ordering online.

But as this corner of the world learned more about the virus, she shut down her day spa, although she continued to offer products for sale, leaving them on her porch or

delivering them.

Then came yet another setback. She and her kids were showing cold symptoms, and she realized the last spa client she had seen, had recently returned from Italy, where the disease had really taken hold. After calling a public health assessment centre for information, she was told she and her family must self-isolate for 14 days.

Because of her additional health issues, she was eventually called and given an appointment to be tested.

"That was scary, but when I got to the Niagara Falls clinic, it was Dr. Berti (from NOTL) who was doing the testing. It was all very well set up, and it

felt safe, one person at a time."

Eight days later, she was finally told the test was negative for COVID-19, and she could stop her quarantine, which had been stretched out 10 days past the 14 days, while she waited for her test result.

Now, her spa is closed, musicians are no longer performing, and the family's last source of income, the delivery service, remains shut down, at least temporarily.

The stress of recent weeks has caused her some relapses, and she is concentrating on her family, with her focus on staying healthy so she can look after them and her father, who is unable to leave his home and

relies on her for company and supplies.

"My dad needs me, and I don't want to put my kids at risk. As much as I want to help, I have to think of my family first."

She does what she can to avoid stress, trying to keep her kids occupied, making the most of her time with family, and hoping her health improves.

"And I try to stay positive, and trust that everything will be okay," she says. "I take things day by day, rest when I need to rest, and try to stay calm. Some days I feel fine, other days I'm kind of groggy, and I know I need to take it easy."

She hopes to be able to re-



John and Niki Claus, with Jaden and Trinity, look forward to better times. (Photo submitted)

build both businesses eventually, she says. "I have this inner faith, not a religious thing, but a trust in the universe, that this

is happening for a reason, and that when we come out of it, we can begin again to create our new normal."



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# Students launch game on Steam

Mike Balsom  
Special to The Local

The digital art created by Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Emma Perretta is being enjoyed by video game enthusiasts around the world.

Perretta, who turns 25 in June, is part of a team of Niagara College students who created *The Fallen*, a new fantasy melee combat game that is now available on Steam, one of the world's biggest and most well-known video game platforms.

It's a feather in the cap for the St. Michael Catholic Elementary and Holy Cross Secondary School graduate, who just completed her studies in the Game Development program at the college. She plans to pursue a career in the gaming industry, either on a freelance basis or as part of a development team working for a studio.

"From starting to make characters around 2013," she says, "I knew I kind of wanted to go further into making games, and being part of the game industry."

Perretta was the only woman on the team of nine, now known professionally as Six Pillars Studios.

*The Fallen* is the result of the students working together on their third-year Capstone project, which challenges them to take a game from concept to completion. Though their project

was finished in April, 2019, Perretta and the others worked through the summer to make changes and additions. Their aim was to have it ready for a School of Media Studies showcase last October.

According to Perretta, it was after that showcase when professors decided to encourage the group to move forward under an incubator project, giving them more time, and some grant money, to prepare it for the March 4 launch on Steam.

Modelled somewhat after a popular franchise called *Dark Souls*, *The Fallen* requires the player to assume the role of a disgraced knight, who has awakened within the Land of the Fallen, a desolate realm of purgatory. The user must defeat the Fallen Guardians in order to reclaim his or her honour, and to find long-awaited rest.

One of six artists who worked on the project, Perretta worked primarily on environments for the visual elements of the game. Though her interests usually lean toward character creation, her role on *The Fallen* forced her to draw on some new skills in 3D modelling to create props and artifacts.

"I created what are known as assets," she explains. "I made some skulls, and some statues that are in the crypt, that helped me practise getting into more character design."

Perretta credits the Game

Development program, and the Capstone project in particular, for building her collaboration skills.

"The program teaches you step-by-step how to be a professional game developer," she says. "I learned how to work together with a team. It started with some brainstorming, and we tried to communicate a lot, and there was a lot of negotiation involved."

The overall goal, she adds, was to make a game that would be a memorable experience for the player.

In a press release from Niagara College, professor Conor MacNeill noted that, "putting the final touches on a game can be daunting, (so) the fact that the students took their project all the way to distribution, and a launch on Steam, is an amazing accomplishment."

"In the gaming world, all it takes is for one influential streamer to play the game and you could see a massive spike in interest from their followers," he added.

Another artist on the project, Andres Coimbra Castedo, originally from Bolivia, says, "we've been hitting social media, spreading the word ourselves on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. We've actually had a few streamers and YouTubers make videos, who have discovered the game on their own."

He adds that, as a team,

they continue to collaborate and to look for new ideas that perhaps Six Pillars can pursue in the future. COVID-19, of course, means they can't collaborate in person, but in the game designing world, that's not a huge roadblock to progress.

The current situation, however, did mean that an official launch of *The Fallen*, scheduled originally for late March, had to be cancelled.

Though she didn't reap the attention amid the pomp and circumstance that would have accompanied the in-person launch, Perretta is happy to know the game she helped create is available on a popular worldwide platform.

"When we started the project, I never expected we would see the game on Steam," she says.

With the success of *The Fallen*, she can now make a direct link between her long-time love of drawing to a future career in game development.

Reviews for the game on the Steam online platform are unanimously positive thus far, which bodes well for the Six Pillars name.

The other members of the development team behind Six Pillars Studios includes programmers Andrew Chiarelli (Dunnville), Philip Ellis (Niagara Falls), and Duncan Brudlo (Oakville); as well as artists Kristopher McArthur (St. Catharines), Doug McKay



Andrew Chiarelli, Philip Ellis, Andres Coimbra Castedo, Emma Perretta, helped create *The Fallen*. (Photo supplied by Niagara College)



This image showcases Emma's 3D art from the game created by Niagara College students. (Photo supplied)

(Dunnville), Cole Robertson (Greenbank, Ont./Claremont, Ont.), and Mathieu A. Chartrand (Lafontaine, Ont./Gatineau, QC).

For more information about *The Fallen* or Six Pillars Studios, visit [thefallgame.com](http://thefallgame.com).

*The Fallen* is available for free download on Steam. To download, visit [store.steampowered.com/app/1251060/The\\_Fallen/](http://store.steampowered.com/app/1251060/The_Fallen/).

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