Lake levels expected to continue rising
Environmental supervisor promises staff will be prepared to handle situation

Penny Coles
The Local
Dock Area residents have been warned to expect higher water levels than they experienced in 2017, and the Town is making plans to prepare for the impact.

Ron Simkus, a River Beach Drive resident and retired engineer, has been keeping his neighbours, Town staff and council abreast on water conditions throughout the spring. He sent an email message to about 100 people Friday warning the water level, now about where it was at its highest point in 2017, is expected to rise another 16 inches by the end of June.

That gives waterfront residents and Town staff time to prepare, he said, but they need to start on an action plan now.

At a council meeting held Saturday morning, Brett Ruck, Niagara-on-the-Lake’s environmental supervisor, delivered pretty much the same message to council Saturday morning, based on data from Environment Canada. He said he has been told to expect a 10-inch water level rise. He didn’t expect to see 2017 water levels again, but has come to realize, with climate change, this might become a recurring issue, and NOTL has to find a permanent solution. “This could be...”

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Erosion protection will help flooding prevention

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the new norm for us to deal with,” he said.

Ruck mapped out a plan for council to prepare for the rising lake level, making it clear to councillors there are two separate Dock Area issues — flood management, which is immediate, and shoreline erosion prevention, which has been ongoing and will continue for a number of years.

Yet high lake levels make the shoreline protection even more important, he indicated. He spoke of the large white metre bags, which hold a tonne of rocks, and are being used to plug holes and stop soil erosion as part of the shoreline protection program. In 2017, the waves came crashing over the rocks, he said. Shoreline protection breaks the wave action, and although he’d like to get the project finished, “it’s about the funding, and any grant opportunities we can find.”

There are smaller sand bags available for use by residents for flood protection, and the Town has more efficient pumps to combat water rising through storm drains, he said. There are also plans to look at other options for the future, he went on to say.

“And you’ll be ready?” asked Mayor Penny Betty Dussere, concerned about whether everything necessary to combat rising water levels would be in place in time. Ruck assured her it would be.

Councillors were also informed about an issue which surfaced last week, when some of the waterfront residents became irate about what seemed like unexpected path-widening involving heavy equipment. They were later assured by the Town it was necessary, but temporary. The work was part of the shoreline protection project started last year, and is expected to be phased in over a period of years.

“In a public notice issued after residents called and emailed their concerns, operations manager Sheldon Randall explained the Town was moving large rocks to the shoreline using the path in Ball’s Beach Park, which is the safest access point. “The path became unstable and equipment began to sink. Excavation is taking place to create a stable base for the path. The path will be restored to its original width, with top soil and grass, when the land dries out and weather permits. An update on restoration efforts will be provided to council at the end of June.”

That and flood management have become a priority since the flooding of 2017, said Randall, but completion of the shoreline erosion project will require about $165,000, money that is not in this year’s budget because the work is expected to be done in stages. Any change to that plan, financing it through debentures or grants, would have to be a decision of council, he explained.

Until further notice, the park remains closed for the safety of pedestrians. Randall said Simkus says the work of placing rocks along the waterfront should be completed as soon as possible in preparation for the rising water level. Although flooding is a separate concern from shoreline protection, he explained, “the two issues about each other.”

Indirectly, the rocks used to prevent soil erosion are also helpful in flood protection — by breaking up the waves, they lessen to some extent how much water washes up on land.

“The lake is heading for record levels,” said Simkus. "Everyone expected a repeat of what happened two years ago. No one expected it to be significantly worse.”

In 2017 the water reached its highest point on May 24, but this year is expected to continue to rise until mid-June, and potentially to July 1, with high levels remaining until November.

“We’re kind of going into unknown territory here. But at least this gives us time to think about it and plan for it,” said Simkus.

He referred to a mapping program the Town is using that can predict what various water levels will look like on the NOTL waterfront, and help to determine the impact on the shoreline and the neighbouring community. With an additional lake rise of 16 inches, he said, there could be flooding all the way up to Navy Hall.

Although once he learned the reason for the temporary path-widening was witnessed by residents last week, and agreed it was necessary, he felt the Town could have warned residents ahead of time to avoid “some of the kerfuffle” that resulted from a lack of communication. The notice came after residents had seen the heavy equipment and reacted, reaching out to the Town out of concern the path was being permanently widened without them receiving any advance warning. They have made it clear during several Dock Area studies they want the path left as is.

Randall explained to councillors Saturday his first priority was to get the work done, and there was no time to deal with communications beforehand.

But several councillors made the point that communications could be improved. Coun. Gary Burroughs compared the situation to the recent revelation that E. coli has been getting into the water at the bottom of King Street in recent years due to aging infrastructure. The message of the “great work” by staff and ongoing remediation of the sewer system was lost to the public, he said, because of the lack of communication.

Residents saw heavy equipment on the Dock Area path last week, and thought it was being widened. It was just being stabilized to allow for equipment to move rocks to the shoreline. (Photo supplied)

Ban on plastics will begin with Town facilities, events

Penny Coles
The Local

An attempt by councillors to “soften” a request to ban some single-use plastics was successful, allowing the Town to move forward with eliminating such materials at its own facilities, operations and events.

The amendment favoured by councillors means the conversation with private business owners will begin as one of encouragement, rather than dictating what they must do.

The change in wording didn’t come with approval from Coun. Norm Arsenault, who first made his motion requesting the ban and his case to support it during the May 13 council meeting.

However as the meeting wound up, to be reconvened Saturday, it was suggested he reconsider.

He had presented a plan for prohibiting single-use straws, stir sticks and utensils, saying he was hoping for unanimous support.

Although councillors applauded his intentions and said they agreed with the need to do something positive, several indicated concern with the idea of forcing the ban on businesses in town and suggested he would have to revise the wording of his motion to earn their support.

During a short presentation, Arsenault had told them, “climate change is real,” and getting worse, backing a

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Ravine aims for sustainability for future generations

The new conference centre, 4,000 square feet, will also have a 4,000 square-foot basement. (Penny Coles)

Penny Coles
The Local

Set back — way, way back — from York Road in St. Davids, there is a large construction site of steel girders, sitting incongruously amongst the backdrop of gently rolling hills of grapevines. The project is a large, enclosed conference centre, planned to ensure the future of Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery. The hope is that the business it attracts will protect the 32 acres within the urban boundary of the village from development, and will allow the next generation to continue to farm the land.

Forty-year-old Paul Harber is the frontman for the family-owned winery, although his parents, Norma Jane and Blair Harber, continue to be very much involved. Blair stops in at the end of every business day on his way home from his Fort Erie manufacturing operation, and Norma Jane is at the winery every day, says Paul, always making sure everything looks as it should — the perfect combination of rustic elegance.

Paul talks of the long family history of the land that goes back to his great-grandfather, David Jackson Lowrey, who established a family farm on the property in 1867. It has been passed down through successive generations. His grandfather, Howard Borden Lowrey, operated the farm from the early 1950s until 2001, during which time most of the fruit orchards were removed and replaced with grapes. In 2004, Blair and Norma Jane purchased the property from her siblings and her mother, and started replanting new vineyards.

But the land is inside the St. Davids urban boundary, and was slated by the Town for commercial and residential land use. There was pressure to develop it to recoup some of the cost of the new sewer system, said Paul, “The Town wanted the tax dollars. This was never supposed to be winery, it was supposed to be a subdivision.”

Instead the family forged ahead, planting grapes and fulfilling their plans for the winery they hoped would ensure the financial sustainability of the family farm for future generations.

“If it wasn’t for the four generations that came before us,” he said, “and the pride we have for the family farm, it would be hard to do what we’re doing.”

This new construction has always been part of the original plan, and although it wasn’t foreseen to be undertaken quite so soon, it has become evident the $4-million investment is a necessary part of that sustainability.

In recent discussions about the Town’s Official Plan it was revealed only 50 per cent of Niagara wineries are making a profit. The Harber family wants to ensure Ravine does not fall into that category, now or in the future.

According to Town bylaws, wineries are only allowed to hold 24 outside, under-a-tent events a year, most often wedding receptions, which bring in much-needed revenue.

The restriction is to ensure neighbours aren’t unduly bothered by noise, and the limit allows for two events 12 weeks of the year, which aligns with the weather for outdoor events.

Ravine’s new project, an enclosed conference centre, means it doesn’t have to live within those boundaries. And the dream far exceeds the boundaries of a tent.

There are two full floors to the building, 4,000 square feet above ground, overlooking vineyards, with large windows facing the vineyards and a wrap-around porch to extend the space. There will be a similar-sized basement with a huge kitchen, storage areas, and underground corridors to the existing buildings — the historic packing barn that was rebuit as a restaurant, after being torched by an arsonist, and the house that was built in 1802, burned in the War of 1812, rebuilt in 1814, moved in 1969, taken apart, stored and moved again in pieces until it was rebuit again onsite as the retail centre.

There will be more outdoor space in the summer, and a skating rink in the winter, he said.

Paul speaks with excitement of a business conference Ravine has already attracted — Singularity, from Silicon Valley, owned by Google and NASA. The conference filled two Vintage Hotels last year but held meetings at the winery, with plans to return. It has its own university, taking just 30 to 60 students a year with unimaginably high qualifications — being a world leader or inventing technology that will change the world might get you in — and the technology they are working on exceeds what most of us can imagine, he said.

“They stumped upon us. I’m not sure how. But it was a great shot in the arm, giving us the ability to extend our season. We have 142 employees in the summer, and we want to see 142 employees — or more — on our payroll all year long.”

He said for financial reasons it would have been advantageous to wait another year before beginning the construction project, but “we knew from the beginning we had to do something more than a winery, to create a business that would defend the property from developers. And we’re hoping this will improve relationships with the neighbours who have problems with noise.”

Most of the neighbours enjoy having a winery and restaurant in their midst. They come for coffee in the morning, where they can sit and enjoy one of the prettiest and most peaceful views in town, and pick up a loaf of fresh bread while they’re there, along with wine, cider, barbecue or honey mustard sauce, and other products made onsite.

Without a cannery in St. Davids, Ravine is using left-over fruit that would have been processed across the road. The winery makes apple, pear, strawberry and peach cider, returning to family roots with the concept of using up every last bit of fruit.

There are plans for a cold-press juice operation, possibly as a cooperative, says Paul, to ensure unused fruit doesn’t go to waste. Any of the wineries would be able to use the fruit, he explains, but not all are set up to press it.

He is not going to leave any stone unturned in pursuing value-added revenue.

“I don’t want to be the generation that puts an end to farming on this property,” he says, “I don’t like talking about doomsday thoughts, but I can say, ‘over my dead body!’”

Paul Harber plans to ensure there will be a family farm and winery for future generations. (Penny Coles)
Event for migrant farm workers teaches bike safety

Penny Coles
The Local

The local safety committee has changed over more than 25 years since it was formed, but what hasn’t changed is its goal of protecting migrant farm workers who depend on bicycles for transportation.

Each year for almost three decades the committee, originally organized as a liaison with the Niagara Regional Police, has held an event the Sunday after the May long weekend to teach bicycle safety to the men and women who come from Toronto every year to perform in the Centennial Arena.

It’s become a social gathering for the workers, who are given a barbecued dinner, and provided with entertainment by Enlace, a group of Spanish dancers who come from Toronto every year to perform in the Centennial Arena.

But the focus of the event is bike safety, which is how Mark Gaudet got involved. He and Terry Weiner, with a group of volunteers, collect and restore bikes for farm workers in the former Virgil Public School, putting used, donated bikes through a 50-point check to make them roadworthy. Gaudet calls it the 3 Rs for bikes — they refurbish bikes for safety, they recycle in that bikes too damaged to be fixed are stripped to recoup useable parts, and they repair the bikes for an increasing number of farmworkers who bring in their own bikes for maintenance.

“I think we have more parts on hand than any bike store,” says Gaudet.

They gladly accept donations of used bikes, and sometimes when farm workers come for repairs, they trade up to one of the better quality bikes, donating their old ones to be refurbished.

The volunteer organization, Bikes for Farmworkers, even keeps a “small fleet” of loaners for the workers to use for a week if repairs can’t be done on the spot and they have to leave their bikes, Gaudet says.

Bikes for Farmworkers will set up four repair stations at the event Sunday, and volunteers “will do what we can” to ensure any bikes brought to the rodeo leave in safe and roadworthy condition, says Gaudet.

There are 35 “great bikes” and other prizes to be won, plus two new bikes donated by the Town of NOTL for its safety committee to give away.

The annual migrant workers’ bike and safety rodeo is this Sunday, May 26, at the Centennial Arena in Virgil, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

To donate a used bike, call Gaudet at 289-783-1684.

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One councillor opposes plastics ban

John Wiens.

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Keke Boutique is a women's boutique located inside Penner Building Centre, in the loft area above the paint department. This stylish boutique is a quaint shop with lots of selection and style. There are many brand names in store for all styles and price ranges, such as Dex, Gentle Fawn, C'est Moi bamboo, Smash & Tess, Priv, Piper-west, Quay and more. They have a great selection of jewelry, clothing, accessories, and giftware.

Owners Marcia Penner and Kelsey Penner-Overbeke say opening a boutique has been something this mother-daughter duo have wanted to do for some time. Both have a strong passion for clothing and fashion, and are excited to share that with their customers. The boutique is named after Kelsey. Keke is a nickname given to her by her brother as a young child when he was unable to say her full name. The nickname stuck, and she has been Keke ever since.

Penner Building Centre has been a thriving family business for 70 years. Third generation owners Kevin & Marcia Penner are always looking for ways to grow and expand their business. A boutique is another step in the right direction for doing that, says Marcia. Keke Boutique strives to make their customers' shopping experience nothing less than amazing, with one-on-one shopping, and lots of knowledge of materials and products, they promise to make sure you are getting exactly what you are looking for!

They want to give their customers variety and create a one-stop shop for them. Not only is the boutique quintessential to their large women-based customers, but the gentlemen are able to buy their significant other gifts for every occasion, while shopping for their hardware and lumber needs.

All new spring and summer fashions are making their way into the store! This year, the trends seem to be bright yellow, mauve, and navy, as well as beautiful florals. We are so excited for this year's fashions to come in!

We look forward to helping you with all your spring fashion needs, and wardrobe essentials.
Communication fosters trust

Continued from page 1

serious health issue, not a matter of a bit of gravel that would eventually be covered over, as in the Dock Area.

The facts may not warrant such a harsh judgment, but it's difficult to say, when we'll never know what was discussed in a closed-door meeting.

In an attempt to be as open as possible about that situation, without disclosing that which cannot be disclosed — especially to the media — CAO Holly Dowd, operations manager Sheldon Randall and town clerk Peter Todd talked to The Local and explained as much as they could about how the process unfolded following the discovery of bacteria in the lake and creek.

And all they agreed there was never any indication of risk to the public. A report finally made public recently explained, the discovery of E. coli about two years ago was discussed behind closed doors. That was done because of the decisions made to withhold that information from the public. Or was it simply a case of getting on with the job at hand?

Dowd, Todd and Randall all said that there had been any risk to the public, they would have released that information immediately, and really, do we have any reason to believe otherwise?

The Ministry of the Environment was testing water quality, and likely all three levels of government, including every member of council and staff at that closed-door meeting, would have kept quiet if there was a health risk to anyone.

Penny Coles
The Local

Knowing Deb Wiecha ‘was a bonus’

Deb Wiecha was a larger-than-life personality who touched everyone she met with love and kindness. I really enjoyed her sister Jane Andre’s story about Deb’s life. It’s nice to know more about her and her family.

I manage a farmers market at the Wychood Farms in Toronto, and people there clamored for Deb’s peaches every year. No matter how many other peaches were available, everyone wanted Deb’s because they thought they were special. I was skeptical about the hype, but I recalled the first time she arrived and opened up the back of her truck and I could smell the perfume of ripe peaches, and I knew folks were on to something special.

Getting to know Debbie was a bonus for me because she genuinely cared for me. Once, when I was quite sick, she called me at home out of the blue and really talked me into caring more for myself, into being my own advocate. She told me about a time she had been sick with a knee injury that led to a serious health issue, not as serious as it was. We talked for over an hour that day, and she gave me permission to realize how much I was scared and how much I wanted to get well.

I know now that I barely knew her, that there was more to her than I ever got to know, and that’s my loss. I am so glad she was someone who reached out to touch my life. She was a gift and I’ll miss her dearly.

Cookie Roscoe

Fond memories of planting Daffodils Gardens of Hope

I just want to say what a delight it was to see the lovely, cheerful photo of daffodils in the Garden of Hope at Simcoe Park on the front page of The Local last week.

It brought back wonderful thoughts of how much fun we had when the gardens were being planted, and some of the memories of the people we met.

One that really stayed with me is of a young boy who was planting bulbs in memory of his grandfather, who had passed away from cancer. The youngster was worried about which side of the garden he should plant them on, so he would see them when he was coming into the garden and when he was leaving. In the end he decided he needed more bulbs, so he could plant them on both sides.

It was always such a joy to have children involved in the plantings. It also reminds me of the many gardening columns I wrote for the Niagara Advance over the years, about the daffodils and many other subjects. I loved doing that.

I’d like to remind everyone who sees the daffodil gardens blooming around town and appreciates their message of hope that they can always make a donation to the Canadian Cancer Society, to help it keep up all the great work that’s been done.

Jean Cochrane
Upper Canada Lodge
Coyotes have become our neighbours

Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

I fear the day a coyote becomes the victim.

Over the past five years or so, I've noticed many articles covering peculiar and sometimes startling coyote encounters.

What makes these stories noteworthy is the fact that coyotes are showing up in our backyards, sometime literally, and more often than they used to.

When we read about a coyote experience in an urban setting, it may seem easy to skim the surface and feel like our space has been invaded. Space is the driving factor for the rising number of coyote stories.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, and in southern Ontario, humans have created this situation, which will likely continue to grow. A coyote much prefers the forests, scrub brush, and meadow areas of NOTL, but with those sorts of habitats disappearing, the coyote is losing ideal areas to forage, travel, and rest. The coyote is an interesting creature though, because of its remarkable adaptability.

In all of its native distribution, the coyote has demonstrated ed it can survive in human-modified landscapes pretty comfortably.

These animals have lost most of their original habitat, so it is no wonder we see them out in open view more often, galavanting across the landscape, or perhaps lurking for easy food sources on the outskirts of town. Sometimes, even in downtown, as locals have seen.

We generally don't need to fear the presence of these animals, as they are far more scared of us than we are of them. Give the coyote its space, as it would rather not engage with us in any way.

This isn't a matter of "specimen," or debating the superiority of the human and the coyote — it's about the modifications to our natural areas, and how we're now beginning to live with these ripple effects. This is the sobering but realistic theme from all corners of the world.

The coyote is a cunning creature that exemplifies shifts in the landscape. Some species will adapt and carry on in our presence, but sometimes closer than we're used to. In most cases, the other species disappear with their habitat.

Coyotes are so far proving to be a successful adaptor to the situations unfolding in NOTL. With the recent loss of forest and scrub near John Street and The Promenade, the green "ring" around NOTL was further disconnected.

This habitat corridor, an essential travel route for animals like the coyote, has been interrupted. The animals also experience more exposure to our domestic temptations. What's that smell in that garbage bin? Is that a dog in your backyard? Wow, so many rabbits and mice to eat in these agricultural areas.

Some coyotes are learning how to live in NOTL quite easily, as others continue to live in deeper woods of Niagara and Ontario.

In this equation, we have how to live in NOTL quite easily, and more often, galavanting in our backyards, sometimes literally, sometimes more scared of us than we are of them.

What would happen next? Would there be laws and destruction permits against these animals if they are deemed as a threat? I would hope not.

I don't want to see the day when the coyote is seen as the victim. Let's keep our heads up, be aware, be patient, and respect the space of our neighbours as we inevitably move in a little closer to one another.

This photo is a reflection, says Owen Bjorgan. "When coyotes start showing up in human environments, it is a reflection of what is happening to their natural homes. This puddle was in a forested area of NOTL that now no longer exists." (Owen Bjorgan)
Anne Kelly has survived 30 treatments of chemotherapy.

She received a diagnosis of breast cancer when she was 33, and it returned nine years later. Now 44, her cancer is controlled, but not in remission. Although she is cancer-free, she takes a chemo pill every day, and will for the rest of her life. “I’m termed a progression-free survivor,” she says. “That’s the stage I’m in, although it’s not a term many people know.”

She has spent a lot of time at the hospital, and it hasn’t all been a pleasant experience. “Because of the extensive chemotherapy treatments, she’s had more than her share of bad days. And most weeks, sometimes more than once a week, she attends an Arts in Medicine program, intended for cancer patients and survivors.”

Recently, she said, the program “creates a sense of community. It’s welcoming, there is an open door for patients who are still in treatment, and for those who have finished and want to continue. I tell them there is no expiry date,” she jokes. “Being together in the same room seems to help. They might talk a little about cancer, they might talk about what to have for dinner. There is an unspoken acknowledge- ment between them. A lot of things change in your life when you’re going through cancer. ‘This is a way to relax in a familiar environment, with people who understand what you’re going through.’”

And it’s a good time, for those who attend the sessions and for the volunteers who offer them. “Karen Douglas from Niagara-on-the-Lake was at the floral arranging session recently to help out. She’s a member of the garden club, which has a regional membership with a large NOTL contingent. Leading the session was Diane Hockery from Niagara Falls. Club members rotate teaching the program, she said, coming up with a design and coordinating the material, and always bringing a helper or two along.

Douglas says the volunteer program “is an extension of what the club does. We love flowers, and we love to help others enjoy them.”

The May floral arrangement workshop was only her second time volunteering for the Arts In Medicine program, she said. “It’s a way for us to give back to the community, and that is exemplified by what we do here.”

It’s also an uplifting experience, with lots of laughter, and bright, smiling faces sharing friendships and enjoying the camaraderie, as well as their pride with the finished product. “It’s been a lot of fun,” said Douglas, adding she’ll look forward to coming back again when it’s her turn.

Lori Neufeld and Anne Kelly have enjoyed several different sessions since she began attending last October — she said she never would have believed she could paint until she tried it as part of the Niagara Health program. She has had to give up her job in the Niagara Falls public health department, and says the program “has definitely helped. It’s a great opportunity to connect with other people.”

Neufeld says she does the best she can to be supportive, and “having something you love touched by cancer teaches you to be more sensitive to what they’re going through, but if you think you can understand it, you can’t.”

Kelly has two teenaged children, one in university and one in high school, and her husband “is amazing,” she said. “He’s been with me every step of the way.”

She knows she has a “huge group of cheerleaders,” people who are helping her heal, she said, and who have made a world of difference throughout her treatment.

Program coordinator Laurie Sadowski says the program “creates a sense of community. It’s welcoming, there is an open door for patients who are still in treatment, and for those who have finished and want to continue. I tell them there is no expiry date,” she jokes. “Being together in the same room seems to help. They might talk a little about cancer, they might talk about what to have for dinner. There is an unspoken acknowledge- ment between them. A lot of things change in your life when you’re going through cancer. ‘This is a way to relax in a familiar environment, with people who understand what you’re going through.’”

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Several factors leading to decline in bees

Lauren O’Malley
The Local

“With bees you’re always learning things. You always get a surprise,” says Ron Zimmerman, co-owner of B&Z Honey in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This spring has been no exception. Zimmerman and his B&Z partner Howard Bogusat have found most of their hives survived the winter. Bogusat says they only lost two hives out of 14 this year, compared to the shattering 11 out of 14 lost last year. He attributes last year’s losses were significant. “It’s not much. Some farmers might have to seek out new suppliers of pollination bees.”

Zimmerman concurs. “It’s every-thing together. They should be looking after themselves better — if they’re being weakened by pesticides they can’t control their health as well. Diseases will affect them so much more — mites, and now have beetles which are new to southern Onta-rio and are moving north.”

Regarding the depletion of bees, Dubanow says the agri-cultural world won’t be too deeply affected. “Pollination will get done. This doesn’t change much. Some farmers might be able to bring in new hives. They need something, and the small hive beetles and wax moths.”

“Bees on the outside of a thriving hive on Ron Zimmerman’s Lakeshore Road property. Their bright orange “souls” are the pollen they’ve carried back to the hive. (Lauren O’Malley)
Chris McKay gets dressed for Officers’ Day at Fort George, with help from batman (an officer’s servant) Abel Land. (Fred Mercnik)

Three officers wait for the fun to begin at Saturday’s War of 1812 Officers’ Day, an event to show what life was like in the colonies. (Fred Mercnik)

The Officers’ Dinner at Fort George Saturday, an event with re-enactors organized by Parks Canada staff, was a feast fit for a king. (Fred Mercnik)

Parks Canada announces events

Parks Canada staff at Fort George National Historic Site have been gearing up for the 2019 season, which began Saturday with the War of 1812 Officers’ Day, when re-enactors showed what upper class life was like in the colonies.

This weekend, two back-to-back events will take to the stage with a Fort George Murder Mystery on Friday, May 24, and Artillery Day, celebrating the Canadian Royal Regiment of Artillery’s 303rd anniversary on Saturday, May 25.

Over the June 22 to 23 weekend, re-enactors from across North America will portray Fort George in the Great War: A First World War commemoration with military training demonstrations and displays.

Fort George National Historic Site is now open seven days a week for visitors to explore the period buildings, or take in a musket demonstration every hour on the hour. They can also learn some fascinating facts during featured presentations on Saturdays and Sundays.

Parks Canada to fund restoration of historic building

Tony Chisholm
Special to The Local

Parks Canada has informed the Friends of Fort George that they are planning the restoration of the Junior Commissariat Officers Quarters (JCOQ) at Butler’s Barracks, starting late summer.

The JCOQ is the oldest of only four remaining 19th century military buildings that make up Butler’s Barracks National Historic Site. It was built in 1816 by the Royal Engineers and was used by the military throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

It is a wonderful example of Georgian era architecture with its simplistic, symmetrical, and balanced appearance.

The Friends of Fort George, in partnership with Parks Canada, held a special fundraising event there in June of 2015. Several thousand dollars were raised to contribute to the restoration of the building.

The good news is that the restoration and stabilization are due to start soon.

The initial objectives are to evaluate and correct structural elements such as failing timbers.

Parks Canada has announced that the building is currently under design review with Resource Conservation, Federal Heritage Building Review office and more. The estimated cost of the work is more than $1 million.

ESkoot for fun and Fort George

On Sunday, May 26 ESkoot is offering the second annual Ride for Fort George fundraiser. All scooter rental fees collected that day will be donated to the Friends to help support their student employment program for the 2019 season. Posing at ESkoot on Mississauga Street are (standing) Colin Tefler and Jennifer Elliott of ESkoot, and Tom Pekar and Tony Chisholm of the Friends of Fort George. Show your support and see the town on a quiet, environmentally-friendly electric scooter. Reserve in advance at eskoot.com, pay when you ride. (Penny Coles)
“I always like new experiences and adventures,” says Virgil resident Jacqueline Stearns, “which might explain why the busy mother of five kids between the ages of 10 and 18 has a chicken coop in her back yard. An educational assistant with the District School Board of Niagara, Stearns says, “one school I worked at had hatched eggs they’d gotten from a co-op for the classroom. I thought, ‘I’ve always wanted to try having chickens,’ so we took in seven 12-week-old meat birds.”

“My dad started to help me make a coop with the kids,” she recalls. “We were trying to use an old swing set but we ultimately wanted laying hens, so we decided we should start from scratch. As we were building it, my husband said, ‘that doesn’t look like a one-season coop!’” The family’s original flock wasn’t meant to last long. Meat chickens are genetically engineered to mature quickly and in such a way as to make them not viable for anything other than their intended purpose. Their breasts and legs grow so disproportionately large they can’t even walk after a certain point. “We slaughtered the meat birds with my dad’s help,” says Stearns. “I did the whole thing with one bird, I had the tears — about this being the other end of it. I thought it was important that the kids know when we go and buy it at the grocery store this is what we’re getting. The kids took part in the process, in bits and pieces,” she says.

“My son used one rooster for a biology project, dissecting the bird to see how things work.” They wanted more birds, longer term, and not only because they had a lovely coop to fill. The family had discovered the joys of chicken-keeping. “I’ve quite fallen in love with it,” says Stearns. “It’s not too much work — you just have to feed water them and give them a little bit of love.”

They borrowed an incubator from school, and hatched a friend’s chickens’ fertilized eggs. “We got a few more off Kiiti from people who didn’t want to overwinter them,” says Stearns. “Those ones were laying eggs before our little ones started, at Christmas time.”

Evidently the enthusiasm is contagious. “We have started a ripple effect. It’s been neat because I’ve talked to some parents who are thinking about taking baby chicks,” says Stearns. “I think it’s part of an ongoing trend of people in society trying to eat healthier and take care of themselves. A trend of raising your own food.”

She also behaves more people are wanting to know where their food comes from, and are eating less processed food. “We still go out to McDonald’s and stuff like that, but I like the idea that I’m making our own food from scratch. I’ve always tried to do that as much as possible and teach the kids to do the same,” says Stearns, who now lives in the house her parents brought her to as a newborn. She and her family moved there from Mississauga 12 years ago. “Our property backs onto Four Mile Creek,” she says. “I like having the wilds around us, so the kids can go out and play in the conservation area.”

Last fall, the family shared their passion with an entire camp. “We went to a summer camp as a family in the role of looking after the staff, which consisted of high school and university students,” recalls Stearns. “It can be hard for kids to be away from home for 10 weeks. My husband and I acted like the mom and the dad for the staff,” she says.

“We brought an incubator and fertilized eggs to the camp. The campers would monitor the eggs — they were like little mothers here. The last week of family camp, the little kids got to hold the hatchlings. The birds almost became like therapy chickens for the kids who raised their families — they would play with them and cuddle them.”

Stearns finds time to try new things often. “We like to experiment like pioneers. We ask ourselves, ‘Can we do this, how does it work out?’ They make bread often, and have taken to sprouting grains and grinding them to make sprouted flour. “Last winter I did some research and learned about sproutching wheatgrass. Now my family applies about the kitchen counter being taken over with my growing experiments.”

The family also raises monarchs, and grows their own vegetables. In the ongoing spirit of learning and empowerment, Stearns has shared the responsibility of the chickens evenly. “The kids helped out at the beginning, and they still do,” she says. Their flock now consists of several different breeds, from the classic barnyard mixes to Silkie, Rhode Island Red to Australorp. They tried some fancy Polish Lace birds, known for their “rockstar” hairdo, but they didn’t last long. “Their plumage makes it so they can’t see predators, so all of ours got eaten by hawks. A neighbour pointed out to a Cooper’s hawk — we could see its nest in the top of the trees.”

“We don’t keep roosters, to be kind to our neighbours,” says Stearns. “Martin Mazza took a bunch of them — and some of our roosters we did eat.”

Not far away, Mazza runs a five-acre farm off Hunter Road. He has a herd of birds, and some that don’t fit in the barn at all. His 90-old chickens have the run of the roost, and enjoy free-range grazing. They mingle with two Rovan and two Muscovy ducks Mazza says were dropped off at his property. “The birds are interbreeding so I can’t tell what the new ones are,” he says. “A dozen sold mallards come in to sleep on the pond and are gone in the morning — there is a huge racket for 10 minutes at sundown each day, and then everybody settles down and goes to sleep.”

The hobby farmer says two Canadian geese have appeared every spring for eight or nine years to nest and have goslings. “Geese make me nervous. They’re territorial and they hiss at me when I cut the grass.”

Mazza has had chickens for about 15 years. “The idea was to keep my dad active,” he says. “He checks on the chickens in the morning, collects the eggs — it keeps him busy and engaged. He goes a few times a day,” he says of his 76-year-old father Vince, a retired peach farmer.

Ironically, Mazza says, “I don’t like eggs, I don’t eat eggs. This is just a hobby. Being able to share the eggs is neat. The birds are small and don’t eat a lot, and as long as I keep the genders balanced it all works out nicely.”

He goes on to further describe his father’s focus. “My dad enjoys it — it reminds him of back home in Italy. My mom likes the social aspect,” he says. “My mother brings out the individuals to cuddle who wants to cuddle and eat for eggs. It’s costing us money but it gives them something to do.”

The owner of Italian Pizza and Subs also grows his own vegetables, using the tomatoes and eggplant on the sandwich he sells in his local hotspots. Last year he had 45 tomato plants, and between 60 and 80 each of eggplant and pepper plants, he says. “Last fall, I didn’t clean out the 75-foot-by-25-foot vegetable garden,” says Mazza. “In- stead, I made a little chicken door in the fence around it, and in a two-week period, the birds cleaned out the whole plot, eating every last plant. Then I tilled the whole thing, and gave them this year to see if my experiment worked.”
Only limit to world of miniatures is imagination

Penny Coles
The Local

For Cindy Carter and Linda McDermid, creating a miniature world is an escape into fantasy, where that tiny world can be whatever they want it to be.

The two Niagara-on-the-Lake women have been meeting weekly for about a decade, at the beginning, as part of a larger group, but more recently just themselves, working on little projects that test their imaginations and provide them with hours of pleasurable creativity.

Their hobby brings tiny worlds to life, and occasionally, they are lucky enough to find somewhere to display them. One of their favourites, a 1950s-era school room they call School Daze, was donated to the NOTL Public Library, and sits on top of a glass cabinet that holds a few of their smaller projects.

Part of the pleasure of their hobby is scavenging for tiny little bits of materials and imagining how they can be reused — they find their treasures in dollar stores, hardware stores, and in regular household garbage.

For example, in the school room, there is a waste paper basket beside the teacher's desk. Look closely and you'll see it's one of those little plastic milk packets you get in restaurants, which she's painted black.

Or plates on a table, in a miniature world, can be made of the plastic pull tabs from a juice or cream container. The round plastic disks with little legs that sometime come in pizza boxes make great tables once they're painted, says McDermid.

They also use a material called foamcore, a dollar store find, which is light, easy to work with and can be cut into whatever shape they require. The wooden desks in the school room are foamcore, says McDermid, and the metal parts that make the legs are made from cardboard file folders painted black. Clothing for that project was made from fabric, but it's just as often scraps of material called foamcore, which are often free. “Miniaturists are the best recyclers. We reuse whatever bits and pieces we can find,” says McDermid, who has a hard time explaining why she's drawn to the world of miniatures.

“Remember the Eaton's window displays? They weren't in miniature, but they created a kind of fantasy that drew you into another world. Miniatures are like that. They allow you to be anywhere you want to be in your imagination,”

The women would like to build a club again, to have a few members with whom they can exchange ideas and skills, to come up with new themes, and learn from each other.

“You don't have to be experience, you just have to be interested in making things. We're not experts ourselves. If anybody has any special skills, we'd be interested in learning from them,” says McDermid. If anyone is interested in forming a club, they suggest contacting the library, either by talking to someone at the desk, or call 904-468-2023.

“That tradition. The two women usually have a project they're working on together. They'll meet, talk about the design, and what each wants to do — “Linda is Picasso with a paint brush,” says Carter — and then they'll go away and spend hours at home, immersed in the miniature worlds they're creating.

Carter considers the time she spends on her hobby an outlet for stress. “I can go into the room in my house where my workshop is and sit for hours. It's my happy place. I can be upset about something and five minutes later, when I'm done, I'll have forgotten what I was upset about.”

“I love that there are so many different skills you learn from making miniatures,” says McDermid, who lists dressmaking, sculpting, painting and building furniture as some of the ones she's accomplished. They've even used the 3-D printer at the library to make some of their minis, such as a gas pump to stand outside a general store.

Carter says she used to be a quilter — now when she quits, it's in miniature. “Any craft you enjoy, you can use it in miniatures,” she says.

The project they are working on now is a replica wine barrel, with little mice as people.

“I don't know what we'll do with it when we're finished,” says Carter. “Maybe we can give it to a winery in exchange for some wine,” she jokes.

An exquisite doll house Carter made a few years back was donated to Pet Valu as a raffle prize, and earned $2,000 for the Niagara Falls Humane Society, says Carter. But most of their projects adorn shelves in their homes and workshops, pleasant reminders of the fun they've had creating them.

They get their inspiration from books, from online sites devoted to miniatures, and from their imagination, they say.

“Sometimes we use kits, but mostly we use our imagination and whatever bits and pieces we can find,” says McDermid, who has a hard time explaining why she's drawn to the world of miniatures.

“School Daze, one of the miniature creations by Linda McDermid and Cindy Carter, is on display at the NOTL Public Library. (Penny Coles)"
VEX Robotics Competition 2019

The Grade 8 students at St. Michael demonstrated their inquiry and learning through the building and manipulation of the VEX Robotics systems.

Students used their technological skills and learned how to construct and code their personal robot to perform various tasks such as lifting objects and maneuvering itself through a maze course.

To close Catholic Education week, eight students ventured off to Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in Grimsby to take part in the VEX Robotics competition. Students applied their STEM concepts and displayed their skills in working with one another, and alongside other teams to perform various tasks and challenges that require thinking and hands on application.

Students were successful at the competition and had a fun day working with their robots.

Talent Show

St. Michael School recently held a Celebration of Talents. Grade 8 students Mateo, Theo, and Liam G. excited the event every class brought their range of talent to the stage.

The variety of unique performances and talents on display was remarkable. Singing songs, reciting poems, playing instruments such as the ukulele and the recorder, and the dances…so many dances. The Grade 7s danced through the decades, and Grade 8 classes topped it all off with a classroom ‘stomp’ and a flash mob. The talent show was very well attended with our two shows, morning and afternoon. The crowd was lively, everyone enjoying the energy and excitement of the students.

Irish Dancing

This year the Irish Dance Club at St. Michael Catholic Elementary School was a hit with students.

Both the primary and junior members showed their dedication to Irish Dance by attending many practices from January through May.

The primary club learned and performed a Riverdance-inspired dance which included two beginner pieces, a reel and a light jig.

The junior club members showcased a more complex slipjig, combined with Pink’s A Million Dreams, giving them the opportunity to express their creativity during a freestyle portion of the dance.

Milk Bag Update

Thanks to the amazing support of St. Michael families, students, staff and the community of NOTL, the Grade 1 class has managed to reach its goal of collecting 500 milk bags for the Niagara Warehouse of Hope. The class decided to continue the collection for the remainder of the school year to see how many more bags students can collect. A great big thank you to all who donated. Not only did you help to empower the future generation of youth in learning they can make a difference, you also kept a significant amount of single-use plastic out of landfill. Please help students forge forward as they continue to make a difference in both their own community and the greater global community.

Attending the robotics competition were Sophie McClure, Luke Skubel, Jack Friesen and Shay Vidal. (Photos supplied)

Several classes show off their dances in the Celebration of Talents held at St. Michael recently.

Attending the robotics competition were Sophie McClure, Luke Skubel, Jack Friesen and Shay Vidal. (Photos supplied)

Stevie Pillitteri-Smith and Tommy Wilson display their Make-do project, an open-ended toy construction system employing reusable tools with cardboard. St. Michael students used their ingenuity to build a cardboard community. (Photo supplied)
Fun at the Virgil Stampede

Blake Sunstrun’s green face draws attention on a ride at the stampede. (Fred Mercnik)

Four-year-old Nash Funk was having a great time at the Virgil Stampede, but he really wanted to win one of the big pikachu stuffed animals. His mom Amy said that would be expensive, and when Nash saw a group of teenagers later in the day, one with a goat stuffed pikachu, the youngster asked the teen if he had won it. “To Nash’s surprise, the teenage boy gave him the giant stuffy to keep,” said Amy. And Nash’s response, she said, was, “this is the best day of my life.” (Photo supplied)

Abigail Collison of NOTL has a ride on an Atkins pony at the stampede. (Fred Mercnik)

Siblings Emilia and Elliott Epp and their cousin Holly Neuhof visited the face-painting booth at the Virgil Stampede Saturday before posing for a photo for their grandmother Idy Epp.

Bill Schulz and Rick Possebon flip burgers at the Virgil Stampede. (Cathy Wall)

Cathy Wall, Julie Paul and June Possebon clown around while volunteering at the food booth at the Virgil Stampede. (Penny Coles)

Alex Olowski holds on to Slick, a blue-tongued skink, for Gabby Froese to pet. (Penny Coles)

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We’ve Moved up the Creek to 1573 Four Mile Creek Rd, Virgil
Outlet mall great place for socializing dogs

Lauren O’Malley
The Local

Doobie is a three-month-old dog with a lot of responsibilities. The German shepherd pup belongs to Moe and Steffanie Bjorgan, which means she needs certain levels of training and reliability to be allowed to fraternize with the residents and visitors at Red Roof Retreat, which offers programs and respite care to those with special needs. Doobie is also required to be a delightful family pet, which she seems to have mastered already. Along with receiving professional training, Doobie goes on family outings to the Outlet Collection at Niagara outdoor mall, where she is exposed to a wide variety of people and situations. Not usually much of a shopper, Steffanie says, “bringing the dog to the mall has cost me a lot of money.”

Moe says he takes Doobie to the mall at least once a week. “It’s good for the dog, and good for people to stray from their materialistic endeavours to pat some reality,” he says. “People probably remember the interaction with the dog more than they remember the stores.”

He watches for people who look at the dog and make eye contact with him, and then he invites them to pet her. Moe keeps up a running conversation with the puppy as he lets her sniff around and choose her own path, asking her companionably what she smells, where she wants to go.

“Our puppy is adorable,” is heard often. Many stop to comment. One person on her cell phone says, “hang on Mom, I’m just patting a dog.”

Noting the predominantly female interest in the puppy, Moe says, “now that Owen (his adult son) is single, he enjoys bringing the puppy to the mall.”

When people ask to pet her, Moe answers, “you can. That’s why she’s here.” And they thank him before and after petting the pup. Everyone who stops expresses enormous gratitude, as though petting a dog was just exactly the thing they needed most.

“We take her to seniors’ homes, to visit my mother, for example,” says Moe, citing other ways they work at socializing the dog and getting her used to any number of scenarios.

“How can you not pet that cute dog?” asks another person, leaning into the irresistible.

“Bring her here to meet not just people, but other dogs as well,” says Moe, as they approach an enormous grey Cane Corso. The two dogs have a civil sniff, with the other owner saying he, too, brings his dog to the mall for socializing. The Outlet Collection encourages people to shop with their four-legged friends, the majority of stores boasting a sticker that defines them as dog-friendly.

Outlet Collection’s marketing and tourism manager Carly Rupcic says the mall has been dog-friendly since it opened its doors five years ago. “We like to encourage people to bring their whole families to the mall,” she says, “and for many people that includes their dogs.” She also says they didn’t want people to feel guilty leaving their dogs at home while shopping, and stresses the safety factor as well. “We don’t want people leaving their pets in cars while they shop, so this is another way to prevent that.” She says their security staff also monitor for pets in cars.

Rupcic, the owner of two Great Pyrenees dogs, says she brings them to the mall to socialize, and finds that extends to people. “You often see people having a conversation who might not normally connect, but the dogs are an icebreaker.”
Gwynne Giles, Derek Sher- vill, Mary Watson, David Janaszik (who piped in club members), Elly Warren, club president, and Paul McHoull celebrate the opening of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Bowling Club, the oldest in Canada. After its 1877 begin- ning on the grounds of the Queen’s Royal Niagara Hotel, the club moved to a green at the corner of Re- gent and Johnson Streets in 1922, where it remained until its move to the commu- nity centre in 2011. The new location has the benefit of a regulation-size green with an artificial surface. The club has a full slate of activities, including bowling and social- izing. For more information visit notlbowls.ca.

Lawn bowling underway

Church fundraising

Horticultural Society members share their plants

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Minister: Rev Paul James

Sunday Worship: 10:30 am
Sunday School

LOCAL WORSHIP

FORT GEORGE – ARTILLERY DAY

May 25 @ 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Join us to celebrate The Canadian Royal Regiment of Artillery’s 303rd Birthday! From the War of 1812 to World War II and beyond Fort George will be celebrating with a BANG! Cannons and mortars will roar to life with firing demonstrations along with specialized programing that will highlight the “Heavy Metal” from past to present.

25 YEARS OF STYLE & BEAUTY FASHION SHOW

May 26 @ 12 - 5 p.m.

Celebrating Niagara Pumphouse’s 25th anniversary at the Hilton Garden Inn, 500 York Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake. This year’s fashion show will be recognizing women of ageless beauty. In addition to showcasing fashion, the event will be professionally M/C’d and music will be provided by a DJ. Tickets: $75. A charitable tax receipt for $35 will be issued. Reserve a table for you and up to 7 of your friends by calling or visiting the Niagara Pumphouse OR Purchase an individual seat and share a table with new friends.

FORT GEORGE MURDER MYSTERY

May 24 @ 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Muster most un-FORT-unate at Fort George with a brand new Mystery! Major Blue is looking for some keen detectives to help uncover a murderer in a classic “who done it?” with an historical twist. Explore the Fort to uncover clues and interview sus- pects with hopes of finding the guilty party. A spe- cial event rate applies. For more information, call Parks Canada at 905-468-6614.

THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY GARAGE SALE

May 25 @ 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Community Garage Sale, multiple homes in the Village. Niagara-on-the-Lake: Niagara Stone Rd. and Garrison Village Dr.

FAMOUS AND INFAMOUS

May 27 @ 2 - 3 p.m.

On the third Monday of the month the Niagara Historical Museum offers a free community day and the popular Famous & Infamous biography series open to all. On May 27 the discussion will be about Theodore Roosevelt.

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LOCAL HAPPENINGS

AA MEETING
every
Wednesday evening,
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS
1 Pitcher’s error
5 Hull amphibian?
9 Enhancement
14 Country singer/songwriter Jake ---
15 S American flightless bird
16 Light gray-brown
17 How to start a pudding race
18 Bring in
19 Garden tool
20 Slant
21 Marx or Warners, e.g.
22 Adjusted
23 Longing
24 Place for experiments
25 Series of church intercessions
26 Points partner
29 Sarcastic praise
31 Reluctant
33 Ugly encounter
34 Oil well equipment
37 Ate
38 Apollo 11 lander
39 New in Tijuana
41 Arid
42 Stand-in
44 Wipe
45 Thin pancake
46 The Volunteer State (Abbr.)
47 Wooden hammer
50 Batter’s star.
52 A long way.
55 Castaway locations
56 Bathtub residual
57 Where to find Pikes Peak (Abbr.)
58 Trim
59 Rent
60 Saturnalia
61 “Place on earth, good will ---”
62 Aka C C C P
63 College sporting org.
64 Commence
65 Court dividers
66 Unload for cash

DOWN
1 Dictatorial
2 Up
3 Thud
4 Recognize
5 Junior’s voice
6 Vivien Leigh’s G W T W role
7 Tenuous activity
8 Aykroyd and Quayle
9 Tectonial
10 Second-in-command
11 Actress who’s Rigg
12 Dust — Niash
13 Wanting
25 Wolf Man — Chaney
27 Off-reader
28 Now
30 --- Martine, cognac
31 Flat panel TV type
32 Belonging to us
33 Pigwoll
34 Strengthen
35 --- Got No Strings...” (Pinnockah)
36 Daryl
40 Gravestone vase
43 On a pension (Abbr.)
45 Brainy
46 Stopwatches, e.g.
47 Lights fogs
48 --- in the arm
49 South American ruminant
51 Pop
53 Kind of pond bloom
54 Knugly
56 Ostracize
57 Drawzace

SUDOKU PUZZLE

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FOR SALE

BURKES MASONRY
Brick
Stone
Step repairs
Tuckpointing
Parging
References
905.682.7061

GARAGE SALE

May 25 & May 26
9 a.m. – 2 p.m.
20 Coach Dr, NOTL

PUZZLE ANSWERS

6 8
9 5
3 4
1 7
2 6

Afternoon Delight, sail number 909, won the opening Furline Series at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Sailing Club. Afternoon Delight is owned by Chris Bowron but skippered by Rob Vander Perk. The cool, wet conditions did not hinder any races, but one race was cancelled due to too much ice at The River’s mouth.

Furline Series Results:
First: Afternoon Delight – skippered by Rob Vander Perk
Second: Cap’n Crunch – skippered by Josh Wiwcharyk
Third: Rampant – skippered by Levi Harper

(Photo supplied)

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