



**Nikita
recovering
from coyote
attack**
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New tennis courts at Memorial Park

NOTL Tennis Club president Hugh Dow takes the first serve on the new tennis courts at Memorial Park Tuesday, as Kevin Turcotte, town manager of parks and recreation, looks on. Dow says the opening of the court is the culmination of a 10-year dream for the club. The \$125,000 project was included in the 2020 budget, with \$40,000 of the total funded by donations, and the other \$85,000 through reserve funds. (Mike Balsom)

**Tree planting
memorial also good
for environment**

**Mike Balsom
Special to The Local**

Planted about 250 metres behind the barn at Red Roof Retreat, a grove of 31 trees, all species native to Southern Ontario, will soon be a place of serene reflection.

It's Owen Bjorgan's latest project, a way for his business, Owen's Hiking and Adventures, to give back to the community and to the people who have shaped him and made him who he is today.

Fittingly, each of the 31 trees will be planted in memory of a loved one lost. Friends, family members, long-time Red Roof Retreat clients, and board members, each honoured by these lasting tributes to their lives.

Bjorgan began the project last week, with the planting of a black walnut tree in memory of his long-time friend Dan Herzog. His high school classmate and roommate at the University

of Guelph passed away in October, 2020 at only 28 years old.

"Dan was a little guy, with an enormous personality," says Bjorgan. "He was very daring, very original, very funny, and highly respected in the community. I intentionally wanted to get the biggest, most significant tree in the ground right away for Dan. It's pretty symbolic."

Below the newly-planted tree sits a longboard, a method of travel and entertainment over which Owen and Dan formed a bond, cementing their friendship. "He helped me pick it out when he first opened The Board Store (in St. Catharines, an arm of his family's St. Paul Street business)," Bjorgan points out. "He and I would shred around on that for many hours over the years, up and down the escarpment."

Dan's parents, Rob and Gisela, came out to the grove last week for the planting, tears

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NOTL Rotary strengthens family ties with library partnership

**Jane Andres
Special to The Local**

It was almost 10 years ago, but the memory of the visit remains clear.

I remember sitting at a table with Peter, whose daughter had passed away hours earlier in Jamaica, the day before her 21st birthday. He had missed her call when she tried to phone him earlier that day to say goodbye, knowing she only had a few hours to live.

Paying for her medication and hospital treatment had

required incredible sacrifice, and even going without meals. Having access to an internet-based messaging app such as WhatsApp could have allowed him the opportunity to see her face and hear her voice one last time.

There are about 2,000 Caribbean and Mexican farm workers in Niagara-on-the-Lake over the course of a season. These are not just statistics, but real lives that have been severely impacted due to lack of communication with loved ones,

especially during times of crisis. Although more employers are recognizing the necessity of internet access, there are still many local farms where employees have no alternative but to pay for expensive data plans to connect with family. Basic plans, starting at \$50 per month, allow them to have limited calls with their families back home via WhatsApp, but they cannot watch videos of important events, such as their child's first steps, or a family member's funeral.

The necessity of com-

municating with loved ones during the four months of hurricane season, or more recently the volcanic eruption on St. Vincent, creates unimaginable anxiety. To not know if your children are safe, or if your home has survived while you work long hours in the field, is unbearable. Especially during the pandemic, children need to be able to talk with their parents at night. We all deserve to be connected with our loved ones.

Dr. Janet McLaughlin is an

associate professor of health studies and a research associate with the International Migration Research Centre at Wilfrid Laurier University. She has been conducting research with migrant agricultural workers in Ontario, including Niagara, for the past 15 years.

"Throughout this time, I have learned about how socially isolated workers are, and how desperately they miss their families. Family separation also has major detrimental impacts on mi-

grant workers' children and spouses at home in countries like Mexico and Jamaica," she says.

McLaughlin affirms that access to internet, enabling regular family contact, has great potential to help ease some of the loneliness and family strain migrant workers experience.

Pre-flight COVID forms, travel documents that need to be submitted in order to board the flight home, and

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Canadians, locals embracing vaccinations

Penny Coles
The Local

In comparison with other countries, Canadians are doing a good job of embracing vaccinations as a way out of the pandemic, says Dr. Mustafa Hirji.

The acting chief medical officer of health says Canadians are less reticent to take the vaccine. He believes because Canadians do a better job of looking at what is better for society at large, and doing their civic duty, there has been a greater uptake for vaccinations in Canada.

The number of people being vaccinated in the U.K. has stalled, he says, and in the U.S., there are people, including politicians, who are opposed to any vaccinations.

Niagara-on-the-Lake resident John Holdom represents the Canadian Hirji is describing. At 63, he “leapt at the chance” to get his first dose of AstraZeneca at a pharmacy in Toronto, close to where he still has a condo, although he moved to NOTL when the COVID pandemic began. Four hours after that phone call, he was vaccinated.

When he learned there was

a window of opportunity to get a second dose, to use up the supply of AstraZeneca that is set to expire before the end of the month, he called the same pharmacy for an appointment. He was disappointed to learn the pharmacy had used up its allotment, but would let him know when more is available.

“I’m looking forward to it, and not the least bit hesitant.” He says he believes in the science that shows the risk is very low, and the vaccine is very effective.

“I consider it a privilege to be vaccinated, and an opportunity to contribute to the greater good. I believe most people, Canadians in general, and in our community especially, share my belief, and because of that, I think we’ll surpass the U.S. and possibly the U.K. It’s our way out of the pandemic. We are committed to the greater good, taking what’s on offer and getting vaccinated.”

He remembers how relieved he felt to have the first dose. “It was an extraordinary feeling, that it was the most important thing I’d done in a long time. It was emotional, and a huge relief.”

As vaccinations become



Marco Gruosso, 14, and Mateo Gruosso Roman, 16, both have appointments for vaccinations. It has been important for them as a family to get all of them vaccinated, says Mateo. (Photos supplied)

available for the younger generations, it seems the same message is holding true for many teens and their parents.

Although social media is showing some teens are hesitant about being vaccinated, others can’t wait for their turn.

Mateo Gruosso Roman, 16, and his brother Marco Gruosso, 14, will be getting vaccinated next week. When the 12 and over age group opened up Sunday morning, his mother went online to book them both appointments at one of the MacBain Community Centre clinics, and his nine-year-old brother will be the next in line when appointments open up for his age group.

“I’m very excited to get it,” says Mateo. “We’ve been waiting for this moment for a long time. I see it as going in the right direction for all of us.”

Mateo says he considers being vaccinated as a way to help himself and those around him, as well as being part of the solution, paving the way out of the pandemic and back to a more normal situation.

His grandparents and parents also have their first dose, so having everyone vaccinated in the family seems the right thing to do, he says.

“I share the same perspective as my parents. There’s a sense of doing something right during the lockdown. There is no hesitancy in my family.”

A Grade 10 student at Saint Paul Catholic School in Niag-

ara Falls, he is also looking forward to the day when in-person classes resume. He says several of his friends have had discussions about vaccines, and while his closest friend also has his appointment, “I have other friends who say they’ll wait and see how this pans out. I don’t see that waiting will change anything. But other people have a different perspective.”

It’s a topic his friends are talking about, now that vaccinations are available for younger age groups, he says. “It’s on everybody’s mind.”

He and his friends understand “nothing is going to change in an instant,” he adds but as someone who plays hockey and soccer, Mateo is hoping team sports will be able to resume at some point this summer. Having teens vaccinated is a step in the right direction, and any opening up of activities “will be a bonus.”

Janvi Ganatra, chair of the Lord Mayor’s Youth Advisory Committee, was on her phone at 8 a.m. the day vaccination appointments opened up for her age group. About 20 minutes later, she had an appointment booked, and will head to the MacBain Community

Centre in Niagara Falls to get her first dose June 4.

Is she excited? Not to have her arm jabbed — needles terrify her, she says.

But the A.N. Myer Secondary School student is happy, after what seems like a long wait, to finally have the opportunity for a vaccination.

It was never a discussion with her family, or an issue to discuss — as soon as it became available, her parents agreed she’d be getting it, she says.

Ganatra will be moving into student housing at the University of Waterloo in September, for a hybrid mode of education, and she’s looking forward to both online and in-person classes.

“I’ve decided it will be best to be there, at university, and it will definitely be better to be vaccinated,” she says.

She says although she’s seen hesitancy to be vaccinated from those her age on social media, her friends are all excited to get their first dose, and have their appointments booked.

“Everyone I talk to is really anxious to get it. I feel privileged to be able to be vaccinated.”

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Janvi Ganatra, 18, will head off to university with her first vaccination dose, and come home later in September for her second shot.



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Jack Clarke, 14 and in Grade 8 in St. Davids Public School, was ready to book a vaccination as soon as he heard he was eligible, and is excited to have an appointment for Monday.

Trees in memory of friends, family and Red Roof clients

Continued from page 1

welling up in their eyes as the tree found its rightful place, sitting like a sentinel for the other 30 trees soon to be planted.

"It's really important to us that Dan not be forgotten," says Rob. "He was a really special kid, outgoing, outdoorsy. Every other kid would be on their computers playing games, and he would be outdoors. He was a bit wild, snowboarding off our roof, stuff like that."

He and Gisela were both very appreciative of Owen memorializing their son with the black walnut tree, with Gisela becoming very emotional, he added. They plan to visit the site often, and have promised to have a plaque made up to mark the tree's significance.

Last Thursday, Owen, his girlfriend Kirstyn Smith, brother Isaac and parents Steffanie and Moe, were working throughout the stifling hot afternoon and evening to plant the trees, all acquired at Gauld's Nursery.

A yellow buckeye sits on the back of an ATV, ready to be planted in memory of Owen's grandmother, Flora Bjorgan.

"It's a big shade tree," he says. "She's got that grandmother, matriarchal kind of figure, she provided shade over all of us as a family. The tree was a one-off that I got from Gauld's, a pretty special, unique tree to pick up. The nature of it, the way it grows, it's symbology, it represents the nature of people."

Bjorgan, a regular contributor to The Local, explains the multi-faceted reasoning behind his contribution to the grounds at Red Roof.

"There's the memorial tree aspect," he says, "but also, given the amount of trees that my business is able to donate and give back to the community here, this will actually add to the habitat corridor of one of Four Mile Creek's tributaries. As I've mentioned in many articles in The Local, our forest coverage in Niagara-on-the-Lake is around

10 per cent or less, and decreasing as we speak. So the time is today to plant a tree. What better way to give back to nature."

Eight different species are being planted in the area, most in a clearing through which Red Roof clients often enjoy horse and buggy rides. The path is wheelchair accessible, making it possible for all of those clients to fully experience nature. Bjorgan also explains the importance of the trees in continuing the habitat corridor, which he says is crucial for biodiversity, canopy coverage and the water quality of Four Mile Creek.

Another facet to the project, of course, is the mother-son connection. Owen is currently staying at the property, taking care of it as Red Roof Retreat, begun by his mother Steffanie 20 years ago, has been shut down for over 14 months.

Bjorgan's girlfriend Kirstyn, who shares his love of nature, is in awe of the way Owen and Steffanie both contribute to the betterment of their community.

"It's a beautiful thing, having a business of 20 to 25 years, and a business of five years, putting that same vibe out there, that they want to do more for the environment," says Smith. "I'm happy to be a part of it. Everybody should be able to come together to see the beauty of what they can do for others, instead of just themselves."

"Owen has been such a big part of this property," Steffanie adds. "We had the (Niagara Peninsula) Conservation Authority come here in 2010 and we rejigged a few things to establish the wetlands. He's been involved in that. With his background, I trust him completely. He gets super-pumped about this stuff."

COVID has given the Bjorgans time to finally get to this project, which was first conceptualized about four years ago. A major part of the memorial aspect is a chance to remember Red Roof clients who are no longer with them.

"All of our clients are special," says Steffanie, "but there are

some that came at a certain time when we were changing and growing, and their families were very involved. When we reached out to some of the families, everybody responded instantly."

Steffanie mentions Sam Austin, a client from day one, who died unexpectedly about seven years ago.

"He was a lifer, such a big piece here," she says. "He was always in the playground, so his tree is going to go near the playground. The family is all on board for that, and they'll be coming out to do their tree."

Jennifer Barclay was the first client in their day program.

"We opened up the program with her in mind," explains Steffanie. "We had to give her mom and sister a break. She was non-verbal, and tiny, but she had this power about her. I was so determined to find a way to serve her when no one else could. She was one of my most magnificent clients in terms of energy. Jenny and Sam were two iconic figures who helped steer us where we were going."

Jennifer passed away in February, 2011. Her mother and sister Gillian still visit Red Roof, almost every other day.

"Red Roof was everything to us and my sister," Gillian tells The Local. "When she turned 18, there was no programming for her. Steffanie and my mom and a lot of other people had to figure out what to do when our children became adults. Red Roof gave my sister a place to go."

Gillian says the options facing her sister included at-home care, day programs at nursing homes, or being admitted to a long-term care facility. None of those options fit Jennifer's personality.

"My sister was a typical teenager, who liked to party, hang out, watch shows, and listen to music. She didn't want to be cooped up. So Red Roof gave her that. It was amazing. With the horses out on the ranch, she was able to do a lot of animal therapy. It was huge for her to have something to do every day. And the respite program on the weekends gave us (Gillian and her mother) time to recharge."

She noticed an amazing change in Jennifer from the beginning of her time with Red Roof. Her mood was improved, she became more aware, more vibrant, a part of a community.

This year being the 10-year milestone of Jennifer's passing, the Barclays welcomed the chance to remember her with the tree planting.

"When I found out Owen was getting all of these trees, I thought that was fantastic," Gillian says. "But then when he offered to plant a tree in honour of my sister, that filled my heart with so much joy. It came just before Mother's Day, and really made my mom's day. Having a tree that is going to be a part of something that is so long-lasting, and putting my sister's name on one of these trees, it's amazing."

With the Barclays and the



Owen Bjorgan gets a hand from his mother Steffanie Bjorgan (left), executive director of Red Roof Retreat, and Kirstyn Smith.

Bjorgans tied together through Red Roof Retreat, Gillian knows her sister's tree will be watched over with love and care by Owen. As much as she admires Owen for his decision to memorialize Jennifer, she also is in awe of his commitment to nature.

In addition to the clients, trees will also be planted in memory of past board members. Long-time board chair Bill Francombe, who passed away in 2019, will be honoured with a tree. And one will be

placed in honour of long-time supporter Kevan O'Connor, the NOTL realtor who died suddenly in 2018.

"He was such a big force in our lives, even before Red Roof," Steffanie says of O'Connor. "He loved my kids. Even to this day there are moments that just grab me, that he's not here. He was such a huge presence."

There are 4,000 feet of linear trails through the Red Roof property, all of which lead back to the barn. It's impossible to get lost. But it will forever be possible

for all visitors, despite any disability, to experience nature and to enjoy the preserved wetlands. And to remember those who have had an impact on the Bjorgans and Red Roof Retreat.

"Even when I'm no longer here, these trees will be here for the public, the clients at Red Roof Retreat, and their family and friends to enjoy," says Owen. "As well as the animals. I'm so happy that I've had the time, the opportunity, and the window to give back like this. It feels really freakin' good!"

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Owen Bjorgan plants a black walnut for his longboarding friend, Dan Herzog, who died in October, 2020. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

There are still workers with no internet access

Continued from page 1

important vaccination or health information can only be found online. There are many systemic barriers preventing farm workers from accessing this necessary form of communication.

In recent years, public libraries in some rural areas have been responding to this urgent need by loaning mobile WiFi hotspots out for as long as six months, depending on the services required. Kitchener, Guelph, Meaford and Bradford loan out as many as 82 WiFi hotspots per library, which are often funded by the local Rotary or the Ontario Libraries Capacity Fund.

For the past three years, there have only been two hotspots available to loan to bunk house locations. It has been difficult to have to keep turning down requests, especially during the COVID crisis.

In addition, there are a few blackout pockets in NOTL where farm workers cannot make a phone call, even with a Canadian number. The WiFi hotspot has helped ensure a reliable connection with their families.

On Tuesday the NOTL Rotary Club presented a cheque for \$4,275 to cover the costs of the hardware for three new WiFi hotspots, and the two-year contract for each. There is presently a waiting list for bunkhouse locations where there is no WiFi available, and cell phone connections are an ongoing problem.

It costs the NOTL Library about \$100 to purchase the WiFi hotspot hardware, and \$1,200 for a two-year contract. That works out to about \$50 per month, serving up to 15 devices at a time, a substantial saving over an individual contract for the same amount.

On one of our trips to Jamaica, my friend Jodie Godwin, her daughter Leah, and I visited Peter and his wife. We walked together down the path behind their rural home to their daughter's gravesite overlooking the valley, the air sweet with the scent of the soft needled pines in the surrounding forest.

We reminisced about the painful circumstances under which we met, yet grateful for the treasured friendship which grew out of that initial visit. The conversations we shared also planted seeds of



Barb Babij, Jeanne Manning and Paul Lalonde of the NOTL Rotary Club present a cheque for \$4,275 for hardware for three wifi hotspots and the two-year contract for each, to Darryl Novak, chair of the NOTL Public Library board, Debbie Krause, library community engagement coordinator, Cathy Simpson, library CEO, and Dave Hunter, vice-chair of the library board. (Jane Andres)

new ideas. Providing reliable internet service is one example of how we can support

each other in new and positive ways as a community.

Thanks to the NOTL Ro-

tary and the NOTL Public Library, internet communication that helps to strengthen

family ties will now be possible for some of our essential neighbours on the farms.

Vaccinations resulting in declining COVID cases

Continued from page 2

ed at this point. We've all been waiting for so long. And it's pretty amazing that we are all getting it the same week."

She's also seen some signs on social media that some in her age group are looking at the vaccination as a path to freedom, and an invitation to begin meeting up with friends

"That's not the wisest decision. We're still in a stay-at-home order, and it's only the first dose. I see a lot of teens not

taking that into consideration."

Ganatra is fortunate to have a second dose booked for a Friday in September, the timing right to give her a long weekend back in Niagara.

Ellie Harrison, another 18-year-old from Niagara-on-the-Lake about to graduate from A.N. Myer, was also on the provincial online booking site as soon as appointments opened up to those in her age group, and is thrilled to be receiving her vaccination June 2. She too is heading off to the University of Waterloo

in September, to study biology, and wants to be vaccinated before she goes.

She and her parents were a little concerned about which vaccination she would be receiving after the news connecting AstraZeneca to blood clots, and was reassured to discover those in her age group will be given only Pfizer or Moderna. She feels pretty confident about the safety of both of those, and her parents are very supportive of her receiving a vaccination, she says.

Her parents were both vac-

cinated early in the roll-out, because of their jobs, and there was no hesitancy about signing up when it was her turn. "I knew as soon as it became available I'd be getting it."

Being at home with family, COVID hasn't been much of a concern, but going off to live in residence will be different, says Harrison, who is hoping the roommate assigned to her will also be vaccinated. "If she isn't, that would be a concern," she says. "I hope to know a few weeks ahead of time. That's important information."

There are also a lot of questions to what university will look like, such as whether friends and family will be able to visit.

Of one thing she is sure — she's glad to be going off to university this September, rather than last year, before vaccinations, when many students stayed home for online studies or deferred their first year.

Like Ganatra, Harrison will be taking a hybrid of online and in-person classes, and pictures creating "a group of people around her," hopefully also

vaccinated, who are taking the same courses.

Vaccinations, especially among the younger groups, where outbreaks have been occurring, and in hotspots across the province, have contributed to the continuing downward trend in COVID cases in Ontario, says Hirji.

The increase in the distribution of vaccines to those hotspot areas accomplished what it was intended to do, reducing the number of cases province-wide, along with the number of hospital and intensive care admissions, which are down from more than 900, and are expected to be at about 400 by mid-June.

There has also been a decline in cases in Niagara, but not as steep, because there weren't the number of hotspots.

Hirji says he's "pretty optimistic" by mid-June a low number of cases, and high percentage of vaccinations, could allow for a safe reopening that would keep the number of cases down.

The province is actually on target to beat the goals it has set for vaccinations, he said, with a mid-June goal of 75 per cent of the population having a first dose seeming likely.

Ontario has now passed the 60 per cent, and in Niagara, more than 50 per cent of adults are vaccinated, with the number of younger people continuing to increase.

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Local BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: Peter Domarchuk

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The art of giving back: NOTL real estate salesperson's novel approach promotes local artists

Challenge question: Who can name five modern Canadian visual artists?

Niagara-on-the-Lake has an abundance of exceptionally talented artists. To promote their work, Royal LePage real estate salesperson Peter Domarchuk provides original artwork from Niagara artists, for people who buy and sell homes through him. He says he is inspired by iconic New York City artist Guy Stanley Philoche's effort to support and popularize modern visual artists in New York City. Peter is also influenced by Canadian actor Chief Dan George, who stated that "man must be surrounded by the beautiful if his soul is to grow." Peter believes that owning pieces of original art is the next big thing, and that artwork continually surrounds the owners in their home, through its presentation and narrative, as an item of intrigue and enrichment.

Fifteen years' experience in Niagara-on-the-Lake with Royal LePage NRC, Niagara's #1 real estate brokerage, has provided Peter with a long list of positive testimonials, and it has taught him that people can be anxious about the sale or purchase of



Niagara-on-the-Lake artist Sharon Frayne.

their home. Peter's approach is to repurpose sales into service to others, by making the seller's and the buyer's experience better than they could imagine.

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plans come together, made our purchase of a designated historic home virtually stress free. I would highly recommend Peter Domarchuk to anyone who expects and appreciates excellent service."

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EDITORIAL

Many parents, educators anxious to get kids back to school

As we head toward the end of the school year, it seems we may have given up on schools reopening. What would be the point for such a short time?

Science table representatives have said there would be a risk to opening schools in June, but that it could be manageable.

Dr. David Williams, Ontario's chief medical officer of health, said last week he would

like to see schools open, but it would depend on the number of new daily cases, and the vaccination rates of teachers and school staff, among other factors.

Schools across Ontario have been closed to in-person learning since mid-April, and if they don't open for a short time before the end of this school year, it's a long time before kids get to experience in-class learning again.

It was said often, earlier during the current lockdown, by health officials and politicians, that getting kids back to school was a priority.

That seems to no longer be the case by the decision-makers, but children's mental health experts still think it's important, and many parents and educators have said they would like to see it happen, even if for a

few weeks. It is easy to see how it would be good for the mental health and social well-being of kids to get them out of the house, with their friends, doing something that might seem normal. And it could be just the break parents need before facing a summer of trying to keep kids occupied, safe and happy.

In a public letter to Doug Ford, children's health experts

said recently, "Schools play an essential part in the recovery process. In-person school provides students with routine and structure, accountability, socialization and recognition of abuse and neglect."

The benefits of even a few weeks in a classroom, it added, "cannot be overstated."

Time is running out for the premier and his advisors to get

off the fence and make a decision about children returning to school. If the health experts can agree it's safe to do so, let's hope that decision is to allow kids to return to that place where they feel safe, loved, and cared for, before beginning their long summer break.

Penny Coles
The Local

Canadians doing a good job embracing vaccinations

Congratulations, Canadians. It seems for the most part, we're doing our civic duty, embracing vaccinations as serving the greater good, and leading us along a path out of this pandemic.

Our record, when compared to other countries early in the vaccination roll-out, was disappointing, and even embarrassing. We learned we are a country that had taken no steps toward a vaccination manufacturing capacity, and that our government turned down any opportunity to build one.

We relied on other countries for our supply, and then had to throw our hands in the air when it didn't come through as promised.

However, once vaccines began to arrive in the country, and were distributed to the provinces and finally regional health departments, progress moved quickly.

It wasn't perfect, with hold-

ups as a result mainly of technical glitches, but Canadians seemed as a whole to not only accept vaccinations but to jump at booking appointments as soon as possible.

And now, our continued efforts to do what seems right, not only for ourselves and our loved ones, but for the health of all those around us, are making our performance look pretty good in comparison to many other countries.

Of course there are nay-sayers, there are conspiracy theorists, and there are those who are simply waiting to see if the scientific advice can be trusted, because we all know there have been changes to digest that have created some concern. But for the most part, we as a society are looking for ways to get our vaccinations as quickly as possible.

The alternate would be to turn

away from the best solution we have found so far to get us out of this pandemic.

And then, as Canadians, we have to turn our heads to the global effort. As Dr. Mustafa Hirji reminded us this week, vaccinations may end the pandemic in Canada, but the end of the pandemic around the world is a long way off.

Protection for all, in every corner of the world, will mean better protection for us. It's that greater good, the bigger picture, that we as Canadians are good at seeing.

So as we're giving ourselves a pat on the back for doing such a good job at home, we will have to remember the job isn't finished until all are safe from COVID, everywhere.

Penny Coles
The Local



Auchterlonie on Astrology

Bill Auchterlonie
Special to The Local

Welcome to Auchterlonie on Astrology, a look at the week of May 27 through June 2, including Mercury turning retrograde on May 29 and the Sun connecting with the north node of the Moon on May 31.

On my podcast, you can also find out how to obtain your own personal birth chart including a forecast for the year ahead. The podcast is at www.auchterlonieonastrology.ca.

Now, the week ahead:

Thursday, May 27: It promises to be a stressful Thursday, as Venus and Neptune and the Moon are at three corners of a square in the sky, challenging at least one relationship to change in a couple of ways. First, to be more accommodating of big feelings. Second, to be more in touch with imagination and dreams while being less flirty and more factual. It was 21 years ago today, on May 27, 2000, that Montreal Canadiens right winger, Maurice Richard, took his last breath. Until Wayne Gretzky came along, the Rocket was the greatest player ever in the NHL.

Friday, May 28: The nagging feeling of "I'm not good enough" doesn't need to wreck your day. Either change what is disappointing by changing your behaviour, or change the rules by which you may be too harshly judging yourself. It was May 28, 1934 in Callandar, Ont. that five girls were born to the Dionne family, the first quintuplets known to have survived infancy.

Saturday, May 29: Today, Mercury goes retrograde at 24 degrees Gemini, and just before it changes direction, Mercury conjuncts Venus, also at 24 de-

grees Gemini. Most of the time, Mercury is faster than Venus, but this time, it is Venus that applies to Mercury. We will first feel or experience something (Venus), and then try to make sense of what happened (Mercury). You can have an experience that will turn you upside down. This experience can be so powerful, so emotionally and sensorially stimulating, that you may need weeks to process it. But this is what we have Mercury retrograde for. Mercury turns direct on June 22, 2021. Mary Pickford, the Toronto-born actress who was the darling of Hollywood in the Roaring Twenties, died on May 29, 1979. I had the honour of meeting her when I was a film student at York University five years before she passed away. She was the guest of the Dean of the Film Department, James Beveridge, and she hosted a Q&A session for fourth year students. She was one of the founders of United Artists, along with Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith and Douglas Fairbanks.

Sunday, May 30: Sometimes willpower seems more like 'won't' power and today is one of those days! Something needs to change, and there is enough positivity in the cosmos today to change a lot. Go for the best! It was May 30, 1920 that Canadian actor John Heavood was born. He is known for his work on Chitty Chitty Bang Bang (1968), The Slipper and the Rose: The Story of Cinderella (1976), and Better Late! (1958). He died on December 11, 1995 in England.

Monday, May 31: At the end of the month, the Sun is the last planet to greet the north node of the Moon. The Sun has had quite a tough time this month:

Mercury, Venus, and even Mars, planets that used to listen to Sun's directives, have been totally out of control. They have been out of the bounds of the Sun. The Sun is now left with the "What was that all about?" "What if - only if, is it me that needs to change?" The Sun is the most predictable planet in astrology. It always rises and sets in the skies. It gives us the seasons, the signs and the houses. The Sun is pretty much the backbone of astrology, and the manager of our natal chart. The Sun sets the direction. The Sun is our life purpose. And now, when the Sun meets with the north node of purpose, this overall direction of our life is actualized and upgraded. Just like when we install a new software update on our computer, Sun conjunct north node can feel sluggish at the beginning. The new features may be difficult to learn at first. But it won't take long until we will not only get used to it, but wonder how we have been living without it all this time. In June, when we will have a total solar eclipse in Gemini, this new direction will become clearer. Today Clint Eastwood turns 91. As usual, he'll ask somebody to 'make my day'.

Tuesday, June 1: The Moon moves from Aquarius into Pisces today, but there's not a lot happening other than the shift from things beginning to feel less electric and begin to feel a lot more dreamy. Today, Ottawa-born Alanis Morissette celebrates her birthday. Now 47, she has sold over 60 million albums and has won 16 Junos and seven Grammys.

Wednesday, June 2: As Venus moves from lively Gemini into homey Cancer, the central focus is on healing an old wound. Today is the third quarter Moon in Pisces, adding a challenge to that healing project. And it was 68 years ago today that Princess Elizabeth was crowned as Queen of the British Empire, in a lavish ceremony at Westminster Abby in London, England.

And that's AonA for this week. Next time it's Venus and Jupiter along with the Sun and Saturn connecting, as we head towards the solar eclipse on June 10.

Until then, "We are stardust. We are golden. So, shine on."



View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

In *The Baker and the Beauty* (Netflix, 2020), a caring Cuban family values love, respect and hard work in their new lives as bakers in Miami. They face var-

ied challenges, but the greatest challenge is their eldest son's relationship with an international superstar. The series is glamorous and fun, but focuses on personal values. Everyone will admire this good family.

Donald Combe is a retired

English teacher who loves to go to movies. Until he resumes going to theatres, he has graciously agreed to share his opinions, through "short and sweet" exclusives, of Netflix series and movies for The Local.



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. Please try to keep it to about 350 words. Sorry, but we won't publish anonymous letters. And please stick to the issue at hand, rather than attacking those involved. The deadline is Monday at noon.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake
Local
The Trusted Voice of Our Community

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COMMENT

What to do after the tulips, daffodils have bloomed



Bette Ann James
Member and Vice-Chair,
Communities in Bloom
Committee

So, what should you do with all those tulips after they bloom? To keep tulips blooming year after year, they need to be put to bed properly.

Allowing the spent blooms to remain on tulips forces them to form seed heads. And although it may sound like a good thing, the process robs precious energy from the bulbs below.

How you put tulips to bed can greatly affect the quality, size, and colour of their blooms the following year, by taking the energy they need to preserve and use the following year to produce more big, bright and beautiful blooms.

Likewise, it can be tempting

to simply cut all of your tulips down to the ground once they bloom. Unfortunately, this too will have a negative impact on the following year's blooms.

The stems and foliage of tulips provide power back to the bulb as they die off. And cutting them off too early robs the bulbs of the energy they need for the next growing season.

So, what is the best way to care for your tulip bulbs after they begin to fade? The answer lies in a simple, two-step process.

As the bloom begins to fade, it is important to remove only the flower head, and not the foliage. Simply clip the fading blooms off right below the base of the flower. This keeps the tulip from creating a seed head but allows the foliage and stems to remain.

After a week or two, the remaining foliage will die back and slowly turn a yellowish-brown color. As it does, it is then safe to cut the tulips back completely to the ground. This gives the bulbs plenty of time to absorb the nu-

trients back from the decaying foliage, and gets the bulbs ready for next year's blooms.

The same process is used for daffodils.

This is the first of a 10-week gardening column series, organized by the Niagara-on-the-Lake Communities in Bloom Committee.

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Communities in Bloom Committee has launched the first virtual Garden of the Week Contest. NOTL residents can submit photos of their gardens or garden features for consideration in any of the 10 categories. Submissions will be accepted over a 10-week period, following which the Communities in Bloom Committee will narrow down each category to the top three submissions, rather than a winning garden being announced every week. The public will be invited to vote on the shortlisted selections to determine the final winner in each category. For more information visit www.jointheconversationnotl.org/garden.



The tulips on Queen Street are always spectacular. (Photo submitted)

Local VOICES:

A look at volunteering at vaccination clinics

Cheryl Morris
Special to The Local

When I first saw the call for volunteers posted by Niagara Region Public Health in March, my first thought was "Yes! I want to do this!" It was an automatic reaction, that, surprisingly, did not invoke any fear in me of contracting COVID-19 from exposure to countless strangers. I suppose some people might have felt some trepidation, but for me, this seemed to be a way I could make a personal contribution to help get us back to "normality." It was time to get involved.

I moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2012, and since then I have volunteered for several organizations in town. The Shaw Guild, Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre, Heritage Trail Committee and occasionally for the Niagara Historical Museum and Music Niagara. I was also hired by the town twice: for the War of 1812 Bicentennial Committee, and then for the Canada 150 Committee. The latter was an amazing experience — hard work for sure, but it helped me to make lasting connections and friendships with so many people and organizations here.

Volunteering had become part of my life, so I sent in my application to Niagara Region Public Health and waited. It seems they were overwhelmed with applications, and cut them off right after I applied. I received notification that I was being considered, but would have to go through some online training before being accepted. The online training took six hours over two days (there was a deadline!). But it paid off, as I was confirmed as a volunteer.

Each shift is six hours long, with a half-hour break, and volunteers have to commit to one or two days a week until September. No problem for me, as most of my other volunteer activities had ceased. I signed up for my first shift in March, but even before that happened, I received a call on a Saturday evening that if I could get to

the MacBain Centre in Niagara Falls within half an hour, I could get vaccinated. I was elated. They were offering this to all the volunteers — what a great perk!

The vaccination clinics are scattered all over Niagara Region, from Port Colborne to West Lincoln, to Pelham to Fort Erie, etc., and I wanted to try to get to as many as possible. Each handles varying numbers of people, depending on the size of the facility, from 500 to 2200-plus. Staff and volunteers are recognized by the colour of their T-shirt: bright blue for administrators, dark blue for nurses and grey for volunteers. Name badges, medical masks and safety goggles or face shields are mandatory.

The tasks performed by a volunteer are all related to helping the traffic flow of people moving from one point to another — none of them glamorous, and all of them requiring standing for six hours. Some of the tasks are greeting people and giving them a medical mask and hand sanitizer, directing people to a check-in desk or a vaccination table, sanitizing chairs in the recovery area where people have to sit for 15 minutes after receiving a shot, and showing people where to exit.

People coming in are very impressed by the efficiency and the positive atmosphere in the clinics. In most cases, the total time that someone spends from entry to exit is less than 30 minutes, which is pretty remarkable. The demographics have changed dramatically since the clinics began, from 75-plus to now 12-plus. One of the most gratifying aspects is seeing people who come in a bit nervous (or very nervous), and then depart, relieved and happy. Although some people might experience some pain or a mild reaction from the vaccine, the care and personal attention from the nurses is extraordinary and reassuring. I remember someone who left a rose on a nurse's table. Very touching.



Cheryl Morris was at her station at the MacBain Community Centre clinic in Niagara Falls Monday. (Photo submitted)

On Monday I was volunteering at the MacBain Centre. The clinic expected only about 500 people, which is quite small for this facility. The demographic was Indigenous, and most people were coming in for their second shot, so many were relaxed and smiling (you can tell, even through the mask). There was a group from the Niagara Native Regional Centre (<https://nrnc.ca/>), who were there to act as a calming force for anyone who felt nervous, but really were there to reconnect with the community, who hadn't been able to meet in person for a year.

I am so happy to be working as a volunteer at the clinics. For me, it has brought only positive experiences and the gratification that I have been able to help the immunization efforts needed to bring back the world we've missed: gatherings with friends and family, travel, the Shaw Festival, tourists, dining out, and just being spontaneous when we go shopping. We will get there soon, with just a little more patience, consideration and kindness.

Local Voices is an opportunity for residents to speak out, in what we plan to make a regular feature in The Local. If anyone is interested in submitting a column, please email penny@notllocal.com.

ATTENTION NOTL HIGH SCHOOL, COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY GRADUATES AND FAMILIES!!

We would love to help celebrate your 2021 graduation in The *Local* in our June 30th issue.

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If you would like to see your photo in the paper, please email it along with your name and school name to:

karen@notllocal.com

Ziraldo back where he began: at Inniskillin

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Creating a great wine starts with the roots, and one legend of the local wine industry is returning to his.

Donald Ziraldo announced this month that his Ziraldo Estate icewine will now be produced at Inniskillin, the winery he co-founded with the late Karl Kaiser in 1975.



“It was a long time coming,” Ziraldo says from his Niagara-on-the-Lake home.

“Two years ago the Teachers Pension Fund bought the Canadian operations of Constellation (including Inniskillin),” he explains. “(Arterra President) Jay Wright came to me and said ‘Donald, we’d like to do a video and revitalize the brand.’ I gave him two conditions. One, he had to fix the winery up. And then I

said I would like to move my production from Reif to Inniskillin.”

Though the man who first had the vision to plant vinifera grapes in the region in 1974 was happy with his agreement with Klaus Reif, he admits there was often much confusion when visitors to Reif Estate came across bottles marked with the distinctive Ziraldo art deco labels.

The move to where it all started will alleviate that confusion.

Ziraldo is pleased as punch to be working with Arterra’s head winemaker Marco Piccoli, who hails from the same Friuli region of Italy as Ziraldo’s parents. Piccoli arrived in Niagara in the early 2000s as a student from Italy’s University of Udine. Ziraldo connected with him via his role with Brock University’s Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI).

Piccoli also studied in Germany, where his interest in icewine was further piqued. In 2004, he interned at Inniskillin, then rose through the ranks at Jackson-Triggs and Constellation.

“I picked him (to produce the new vintages), because he’s kind of my protege,” Ziraldo says. “He’s from Friuli, we speak the same language, and we’ve done the collaboration with CCOVI and Udine. And



The pandemic has made more time for Donald Ziraldo to stay close to home, and enjoy the vineyards with his son Aspen. (Photos supplied)

I wanted somebody to distinguish it, so the wine is made by another artist, because this will make it distinct.”

Back when Ziraldo split from Inniskillin, he planted a vineyard of riesling grapes near the original old barn, and that continues to be the basis of the Ziraldo Estate wines. The first collaboration between the two Friuliani, the 2019 Vidal Icewine currently being bottled, will be released in mid-summer. This fall will see the 2020 riesling hit the market.

“The 2020 Riesling is still in the tank,” explains Ziraldo. “I’ve tasted it, it’s spectacular. It’s 308 grams of sugar per litre. The 2020 crop was down by 50 per cent because of the summer drought and the late picking because of the dehydration. It’s going to be spectacular quality.”

Ziraldo also looks forward to bringing some of the cachet back to his original winery.

“I don’t intend to get involved in the day-to-day, I’ve been there and done that,” he says. “When Karl left, when he retired, I packed it in. I stayed for three months with Constellation, but it just didn’t fit. But I’m going to go back. I’m right here, it all works out nicely.”

In the wine industry, it’s always good to have an association with an individual, a face of the winery. “Inniskillin didn’t have that anymore,” Ziraldo says. “After Karl and I left, Debi Pratt was that for a while, but now she’s gone, too. So I will spend some time there.”

These past few years, Ziraldo has seen some of his wine pioneer contemporaries pass on. He reflects on them fondly and often.

“Karl was the genius behind icewine,” he raves about his former colleague, who died in 2017. “He took something the Germans had been playing with since the 17th century and turned it into a luxury brand. We made a good team. He was a great partner. He made great wine, and I sold it.”

Joseph Pohorly is another who comes to mind. “Joe was a character,” Ziraldo laughs.

“He did some engineering for Karl, so they were always hanging around together here at the winery. Another one was Ewald Reif, Karl’s friend, and Klaus’ uncle. They were the ones who were first playing around with icewine.”

The pandemic has kept the world traveller grounded here in NOTL, allowing him to spend much more time at home with his son Aspen.

The eight year old, who enjoys helping his father in the vineyard, is currently learning Italian online. Ziraldo knows that pales in comparison to his son being able to immerse himself in the Italian language and lifestyle in the piazzas of Florence.

“I used to spend about 200 days a year outside of Canada,” he says. “Most of it in the United States, Europe and Asia. And I had that gig in Portugal for about six years, with a mining company. I haven’t been in an airplane now in almost two years.”

He also had a vineyard in the town of Fagagna, where his parents were born. There, he planted 1000 vines on the hillside of the Castello, which he harvested in 2008 to produce a Picolit-style Italian dessert wine as a tribute to his parents. The Ziraldo Bianco di Fagagna is available in Italy. Ziraldo would love to return to Friuli to start a more serious, long-term venture.

“We’ll head back there this summer when things open up again,” he says. “But Italy is in trouble. They just basically shut down. They’re not shipping anything, because export has basically shut down. Tourism has been devastated, and they’re just not drinking the wines.”

He worries, as well, about the future of the wine and restaurant industries in Canada.

“I know that with Arterra, the premium side of the business is almost non-existent (due to COVID),” Ziraldo claims. “They’ve gone from one shift producing bag-in-a-box to three shifts. My theory is that people buy wine to show off to their friends. With everyone locked up, you don’t have guests, so everybody’s

buying bag-in-a-box.”

The longer the pandemic lasts, the more the market will shift. He wonders as well how many restaurants will reopen after struggling for so long. And he thinks that what he calls ‘the new order’ will figure out ways to reinvent the restaurant business, with new protocols for diners.

Ziraldo foresees a modern version of the roaring 20s happening when life gets closer to normal.

“People have got a lot of money,” he explains. “You’re not travelling, you’re not going out for fancy dinners, you’re not buying a new suit. All that money is building up in bank accounts.”

The fact that the new order will be launched with the 2020 vintage, and a lot of wineries have been helped out by (Prime Minister) Justin Trudeau, should make for a good recovery, he adds.

At the same time Ziraldo acknowledges that many of the workers in his industry and others that have taken the biggest beating financially, as well as farmers, will make for a lot of belt-tightening.

Until the recovery begins, he and Aspen will continue to enjoy their extended time on the Ziraldo estate, Aspen digging trenches in the vineyard, and father and son playing host to barbecues for Aspen and his friends.

To celebrate Ziraldo’s return to his roots, Inniskillin will be offering a limited-edition gift-pack featuring the classic 2019 Inniskillin Niagara Estate VQA Riesling Icewine and 2014 Ziraldo VQA Riesling Icewine, produced under his previous arrangement with Reif. This gift-pack will be available for purchase at the Inniskillin Niagara Estate winery boutique in the coming months, as COVID restrictions are lifted.

And when the new vintages are launched, Ziraldo will make the short trek from his home to be on site at Inniskillin, and he’ll be lending his persona via their branding messages, returning to his rightful role as the face of the winery that started it all.

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LOCAL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: BRICKS AND BARLEY

By Mike Balsom, Special to The Local

It's time to celebrate the local food and drink scene in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Bricks and Barley, a new restaurant and brewery, is set to open in the heart of the town. The owners, a husband and wife team, have spent months planning and building this dream. They have sourced the best ingredients and hired the best talent. The restaurant will offer a variety of locally sourced dishes, and the brewery will produce a range of craft beers. This is a true labor of love, and we are excited to see it come to life.

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LOCAL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: SWAG HAIR COMPANY

By Mike Balsom, Special to The Local

If you have been looking for a place to get your hair done, look no further than Swag Hair Company. This is a new business that has opened in the heart of the town. The owners, a husband and wife team, have spent months planning and building this dream. They have sourced the best ingredients and hired the best talent. The company will offer a variety of hair services, and the owners are committed to providing the best customer service. This is a true labor of love, and we are excited to see it come to life.

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Seeing mother at lodge 'a wonderful surprise'

David Gilchrist
Special to The Local

Late on Friday afternoon I had, as the title suggests, a wonderful surprise. I received an email from Upper Canada Lodge: 'Reinstalling Outdoor Visits in Long Term Care — May 21, 2021.'

Attached was a letter from Henri Koning, director of senior services, regarding changes to these visits that had recently been announced by the province. This is what a number of us, with parents or relatives in Upper Canada Lodge and other long-term care facilities, had been waiting for.

What was especially wonderful is how quickly the staff at Upper Canada Lodge (UCL) had reacted to this surprising announcement preceding a long weekend. We understand this may not have been possible at a number of other long-term care facilities in the province.

Management had "quickly arranged for extra staff to be available on the weekend to assist with facilitating the

visiting," the email said. After reading it, I did not hesitate to call UCL to make arrangements for my brother and I to have an outdoor visit with our mother at 10:30 a.m. the next day.

As with many of us in this situation, the pandemic has made it very difficult, or, in many cases, impossible to actually have physical contact with our loved ones in long-term care homes. Rules that came out to protect them during the pandemic may have been felt to be draconian. They did, however, help the situation after hearing about the long-term care horror stories throughout the province during the first and second waves. We, the residents and families of the Upper Canada Lodge, have been very fortunate. The actions taken by the region and the wonderful staff at UCL resulted in no outbreaks in the home during the entire length of the pandemic. Our family members were kept very comfortable, safe and well looked after.

We continued to have con-

tact by telephone with Mom, of course. She enjoys the calls and always inquired how we were all doing, especially her great-grandchildren. She was especially appreciative of our daily calls to remind her when her favourite TV shows were coming on, especially Coronation Street. The home was able to institute FaceTime calls once a week, and we looked forward to these sessions. It was nice to be able to share photos of the family during these FaceTime calls.

Mom is not able to phone her younger brother or older sister who live in Scotland. We would do that for her during visits, before the pandemic, and she would be able to speak with them. They do phone her, but it is often hit or miss due to the time difference and if she is sleeping during the day. That regular contact with her siblings is one thing she has missed. We have also found it difficult to bring things in to her, like snacks that she once enjoyed. Items like this are dropped off and the staff holds them for two days before they are



Alan Gilchrist enjoying his first visit with his mother, Mary Gilchrist, in months at Upper Canada Lodge. (David Gilchrist)

delivered to her room. Her memory is such that she does not remember if she got them, however. Another difficulty has been trying to buy her new clothes. Having to order items online, delivering them and then being unable to see if they fit correctly has been a concern. But the staff has been helpful.

Our visit on Saturday was very nice. Protocol remained that we were actively screened by staff upon arrival, masked, and were asked to maintain physical distancing while on our outside visit. Currently, two general visitors is the maximum allowed at any one time. Staff had arranged comfortable seating areas at

the front of the building. We could see others who were also taking advantage of the opportunity to visit loved ones.

It was a lovely morning and my brother and I were both appreciative of the staff for being able to visit our mother after so many months.



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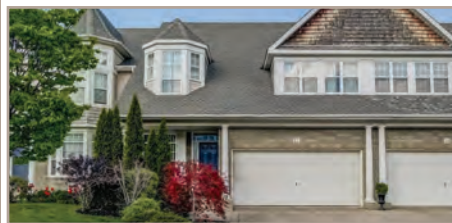
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Royal Oak masters online classes, anxious to return to in-person

Penny Coles
The Local

With the smaller classes at Royal Oak Community School, parents have been disappointed to have in-person education shut down, but say teachers have done a great job of recognizing the needs of their students during recent weeks of online learning, and acting accordingly.

The school is also well-equipped to respond to the needs of individual students, again, a significant result of several factors, chiefly the small classes giving the ability of teachers to see their needs and respond immediately.

As an example, says parent Tracy Mackie, her 11-year-old daughter began Grade 5 at Royal Oak with a demanding schedule that needed to be accommodated. Anissa is a competitive dancer, and was cast in the role of Baby June in *Gypsy*, which the Shaw Festival was planning to stage for 2020, and then, when that season was cancelled, for 2021. Her previous public school had not been terribly understanding of her missing classes and needing to have her work given to her to complete at home, suggesting academics should come first.

But Royal Oak was supportive from the beginning, says Mackie, willing to help Anissa any way they could, “with absolutely no push-back,” although unfortunately the production was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Mackie also felt Anissa would benefit from some extra help at the public school she was attending last year, which was not made available. She was afraid her daughter was falling behind on one subject, and was “falling through the cracks” of the public school system, just because she required a little more one-on-one attention. Mackie was looking into tutoring or extra-curricular learning when she heard from a friend about Royal Oak and its flexible program. She investigated, and decided that was the solution she was looking for.

Anissa has been able to move forward with the help she received, jumping two levels in the subject she was having difficulty with, during just eight

months at the independent, not-for-profit school, now operating out of the former hospital on Wellington Street. And Anissa loves it there, adds her mom.

There were other reasons for choosing the small school, says Mackie.

When schools were closed last year, the online classes Anissa attended in the public school system were “an unorganized, disastrous situation,” she says, with a lack of communication when she reached out to both her daughter’s teacher and principal. The experience “was beyond disappointing,” she adds, and one she didn’t want to repeat in September. Mackie also has health issues that put her at risk for COVID, and she was impressed with the extra precautions Royal Oak was taking when it opened to in-person classes in the fall, while also offering an online component, so students could choose a combination that accommodated their individual needs and scheduling.

She is pleased with the philosophy of the school that focuses on the individual needs of students, the level of engagement between teachers and students, even when forced to go online, and also the communication with parents.

Anissa, she says, “has grown so much as a student, even with all the challenges of scheduling and online learning.”

She’s appreciative of the specialized teaching, the support for students and parents, and the sensitivity with which the needs of students are handled, she says.

Mackie also loves the sense of community Royal Oak offers. “It is the most incredible organization I have ever seen. It’s a privilege to be associated with it. It is a spectacular little place,” she says, “and it has been an incredible experience.”

Cindy Yerich, a mother of four, has had a similar experience this year. She planned to move her son Theo, now seven, to Royal Oak for Grade 1 from a Niagara Falls school last September, because he was falling behind in reading. She investigated several different options, and by the time she’d settled on Royal Oak, decided it was also the right choice for Theo’s twin

brother Max, and her daughter Elizabeth, who was going into Grade 4. Her older daughter, Violet, was doing well at school, and Yerich said she thought Violet would want to stay with her friends, but when she heard about Royal Oak, decided instead she’d like to go there with her siblings.

“It’s the best decision I’ve ever made for my kids,” Yerich says. “For Theo, it’s been the difference between night and day.”

He’s become a voracious reader, above his grade level, and the others as well have improved their skills, she says, with one daughter going from the 50th percentile in math to the 90th, in the Caribou Mathematics Competition, a worldwide online contest in which Royal Oak students can participate.

Her kids are missing the in-person experience of being with their friends, but Royal Oak does everything it can to make up for that, including giving students time at lunch to share with their friends. They also provide some time for kids to break into smaller groups for STEM or craft activities, and for the older kids to spend with the younger ones, mentoring them for reading and other projects.

Teachers also do their best to make classes both educational and fun. In their French class, Yerich says, she’s heard her kids “laughing and giggling” with friends over a particular lesson, so the class doesn’t feel so structured to them, or having fun in their physical education class. “They’re working out virtually and they’re really enjoying it,” she says.

“It’s still a vigorous academic workload, but they’re having fun.”

Yerich says she was really impressed with how her boys’ teacher recognized the kids in Grade 1/2 were indicating a decline in their attention span from the morning to afternoon classes, and decided they would have online classes in the morning, and then have some time away from the screen, to maybe go for a walk, have a rest or do some independent learning.

The school also offers a screen-free time on Wednes-

days, as part of student schedules, which they can use for “pencil and paper” assignments, although the teachers are still available online if the kids need them.

“They like that break, and they can have a reward, like going out on an adventure. It’s important to have that, especially with the younger grades.”

The kids would like to be back at school with their friends, says Yerich, but she doesn’t feel they’ve lost anything from an educational perspective, and she likes the fact that Royal Oak will continue to offer a combination of remote and in-person learning.

“I hope we can be back in school soon, but it’s good to be able to take advantage of online learning as well.

“I think Royal Oak has done a great job of engaging kids, and providing them with a good sense of community. And we’re really lucky to have Julia (Murray, head of school). She seems to know the kids really well, and when there are changes to be made to benefit the kids, such as the online class in the morning, she’s able to make it happen. With the bigger machine of the public schools, it’s harder to see what needs to be changed, and even more difficult to implement it.”

Murray says as an independent school, although they follow the provincial school curriculum, they can be more flexible with how they deliver it to suit the needs of their students.

However, they have to follow the provincial stay-at-home order and school closures.

“If we didn’t have to, we’d be running in-person classes,” she says, confident they can deliver it safely, and that it would be better for the mental health of the kids.

When school closures were mandated, she asked if she could offer some classes, such as physical education, outside, but was told she couldn’t.

Although the Royal Oak school year is shorter than that of the public boards, coming to an end mid-June, if the province opens schools before then, she thinks it would be a good experience for the kids to go back, even if just for a week. It

would allow them the opportunity to feel the joy and celebration of returning and being with their friends, she says.

In September, assuming in-person classes are permitted, Royal Oak will continue to offer remote and synchronous learning to all students.

“That’s what is so nice about having such small class sizes,” she says. “Each one of our classes had one student learning from home. The teachers have mastered that, and the students

have adjusted.”

That’s a very different experience than for schools that will be offering that for the first time, says Murray.

“I really feel our students have had a good experience. Our teachers have been incredibly creative, and really amazing. The kids put their best foot forward every day. The teachers, students and parents have all been great, and they are all an important part of making this work.”



Anissa Mackie reads for one of her online school assignments.



Violet Yerich shares lunch with her class. This time was supervised by French teacher Madame Salem, with students speaking French and making pizza.



Theo Yerich designs a doughnut for his assignment. (Photos supplied)



Elizabeth Yerich is doing a STEM project with friends.



Max Yerich enjoys an online art project.

Teachers doing their best to keep kids engaged, happy

Penny Coles
The Local

Although the weeks are dwindling until school breaks for the summer, many parents are saying they'd be happy for schools to open, even if just for a few weeks.

While many health officials across the province have said schools are safe, and could be re-opened, so far the province has not seemed inclined to do so.

Amanda Gamble is one of those parents who hopes to see schools reopen, even for a short time. Working from home at a computer at two jobs, with her four-year-old daughter beside her attending Junior Kindergarten at Crossroads Public School virtually, has presented some challenges, she says.

Although she appreciates the time she and Evelyn get to spend together, and realizes how much harder it must be for older kids, she can't help thinking her daughter would be better off with her friends at school. When Evelyn started JK, "she loved it," says Gamble, "and she thrived. She misses it a lot."

She got used to her teachers and students wearing masks, and playing in small groups of children — that became normal.

Online for kids that age can be difficult, and some days are better than others, says Gamble. It's hard to motivate someone that young to sit at a computer for any length of time. If Evelyn spends an hour online, that's about her limit. Teachers are trying to keep kids busy and having fun, but also are understanding if students aren't spending as much time online as they're supposed to be.

They also allow for play time, when kids can have fun with their friends — virtually. "It's really cute hearing all the little voices talking to each other," says Gamble.

She credits the teachers with their creativity and their efforts to keep students engaged, and says if they could go back to school for a couple of weeks, it might be difficult for teachers, but it would be great for the kids.

Crossroads teachers and the principal have also been good with connecting with parents and supporting them in any way they can, she says. "I get the sense they're trying to do the very best they can, and that mental health is always the top priority for the kids. I also get the sense that they really care about the kids."

Brenda Ferguson is a mom of three girls at St. Michael Catholic School. When school opened last September and parents had the choice between students attending classes or learning online, "we put our faith in St. Mike's," she says. "The school is wonderful, and we felt they would do what they had to do to keep our schools safe. Our girls definitely flourished being back at school."

This last shutdown that began in April has been hard on



Evelyn Anderson, 4, wears her thinking cap to make deductions while her Crossroads Junior Kindergarten class reads a story together online. (Photos supplied)



Olivia, Peyton and Emily, students at St. Michael Catholic School, burn off some energy during a break from online learning.



Holly Neuhoof is hard at work at her Grade 1 online classes at Crossroads. Her mom, Audrey Epp Neuhoof, says she'd like to see in-school learning return, even if just for a week, however, she feels fortunate to have been able to work from home, unlike other parents. Holly's teacher has been amazing, and although Holly stays connected virtually, she misses the social interaction and hands-on learning, says her mom.

the kids, and very confusing, she says, without any idea of what is happening in the future.

"It's difficult to know what to say to the kids when they're having a rough day?"

With five weeks left of school, Ferguson says she'd be happy to see them reopen. "I think right now kids are at a stage where it's important for their mental health."

Some kids have been staying at home for so long now, they are hesitant to go out anywhere, and that's concerning, she says.

"I think even for three weeks, a little bit of normalcy would be beneficial. For my kids, the first day of school in September can be overwhelming, even though they're happy to be back. I can't imagine the transition of going from April to September. For some it could be extremely overwhelming."

"The teachers are trying so hard, and they're doing a phenomenal job, doing everything they can to keep things exciting, with all the fun classes, like gym, art and library, trying to keep kids engaged. These poor teachers, trying to keep everyone calm, when the kids are so easily distracted by whatever is going on around them. I'm sure these teachers never thought they'd be

spending their days on a computer, on a screen. I don't think any of them signed up for this, but they're doing everything they can to make it work. And they tell us the same, 'do whatever you can do. That's all we can hope for. I feel like we're all in this together.'"

St. Michael principal Janice Barretto-Mendonca agrees that, "not in any way, shape or form is online learning ideal."

Teachers have done so well in making the transition, and rising to the challenges before them, but for kids, spending a day online remains difficult.

"We want the kids in front of us," she says.

It's been challenging for all, she adds, with so many changes and teachers having to constantly learn something new, often on the fly, "but overall, we're plodding through."

She says she would welcome an opportunity to be back in school before the end of the year. "It would be rejuvenating for all of us, knowing the kids were here, under our care," even for a short time.

Mental health is not measurable, but is such a key factor during this time, she adds.

"That's why they need to be here."



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YOU'RE INVITED

Attend a series of virtual public information centres to learn more about key draft policy directives and core policy content that is intended to be part of the Niagara Official Plan.

Updates on other key sections of the official plan will also be provided. Background information and draft policies are now available for review through niagararegion.ca/official-plan.

If you require any accommodations for a disability in order to attend and participate in meetings or events, contact the Niagara Region's Accessibility Coordinator at 905-980-6000 ext. 3252 or accessibility@niagararegion.ca.

Information will be collected in accordance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. With the exception of personal information, all comments will become part of the public record.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC INFORMATION CENTRES

Register for each of the following session at niagararegion.ca/official-plan. Video recordings will also be available online following the sessions.

If you are not able to attend, you can provide input or ask questions by emailing makingourmark@niagararegion.ca or contact David Heyworth, Official Plan Policy Consultant at 905-980-6000 ext. 3476.

Wed., June 9 | 6 p.m. GROWING REGION

- Growth Allocation and Land Needs - Draft Policies
- Regional Structure - Draft Policies
- Housing - Draft Policies
- Settlement Area Boundary Reviews -Update

Thurs., June 10 | 6 p.m. VIBRANT REGION

- District & Secondary Planning - Draft Policies
- Urban Design - Draft Policies
- Archaeology - Update

Wed., June 16 | 6 p.m. COMPETITIVE REGION

- Agriculture - Draft Policies
- Employment areas - Draft Policies
- Aggregates - Draft Policies

Thurs., June 17 | 6 p.m. CONNECTED REGION

- Transportation - Draft Policies
- Infrastructure - Draft Policies

Wed., June 23 | 6 p.m. SUSTAINABLE REGION

- Natural Environment System - Update
- Watershed Planning - Update
- Climate change - Update

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Niagara  Region

Coyote wandering in Virgil attacks 'wee dog'

Penny Coles

The Local

Last Thursday evening, just as it was getting dark, Timothy Tranter was outside with his nine-year-old dog Nikita.

He was behind his house on Field Road — he lives in what was once the principal's house of the former Virgil public school — and she was around the corner of the house, in the driveway, when he heard a commotion. He ran around to see what was happening, and discovered Nikita screaming. A coyote had her gripped tight between his teeth.

"I picked up a chair and threw it at him — I didn't know what else to do. He dropped her and just sauntered off across the street. He wasn't scared of me at all."

He has seen a coyote in the area before, and has since heard several stories from his neighbours who have seen the same coyote wandering around the residential neighbourhood.

"It seems everyone has a story about this one coyote," he says. "Everyone seems to know about it. I had to find out about it the hard way. But the more I talk to peo-

Nikita is just a “wee dog,” a 10-pound rat terrier, and is “totally lucky to be alive,” he says.

"If I'd been somewhere else, just a little further away, she would have been gone when I got there."

There is no fencing around his home, and he and Nikita walk everywhere together. On the sidewalk she's on a leash, but when they take a stroll through nearby fields and orchards, she is not.

"This caught me completely by surprise," he says. "Things are going to change for me for sure. I guess I was too trusting. I didn't think they'd come right up my driveway."

He says with COVID, “so many people have new dogs and puppies. I’ve seen many of them around, going for walks. People have to be aware of how close the coyotes are coming to our homes.”

Nikita was fortunate that the coyote got hold of her by her back end, causing some puncture wounds, but not to any organs. She was still in shock when he took her to the veterinarian, who gave her antibiotics to be sure her

wounds won't be infected.

"I'm happy she's going to make it," he says. "I'm just hoping she heals well."

In just a few days, he added, "she seems to be doing better than me. I can still hear her screaming. But dogs are resilient. She seems pretty good."

Tranter says he understands coyotes are being dis-

Nikita might be small, he added, but she thinks she's fierce, guarding her property when other neighbours and dogs walk by. "She's a little 10-pound watch dog."

He's called the town to

see if anything can be done about it, but he is learning that isn't likely to happen.

He will be watching carefully over Nikita in the future, and urges others in the area with small dogs or cats to do the same.

Fact sheets entitled *Coyote Proofing Your Property, Encounters with Coyotes and Protecting Your Property* can be found at ontario.ca



Nikita, a 10-pound rat terrier, was grabbed by a coyote on her left hind leg, leaving puncture marks. She's recovering nicely, says Timothy Tranter. *(Photo supplied)*

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LocalSPORTS

Courts, golf course busy for Saturday opening

Penny Coles
The Local

Sports enthusiasts were thrilled to be back on the courts and golf courses Saturday, delighted to have a great day for the provincial opening

of outdoor amenities. The Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club is booking members only until the end of May, and had no problem filling their tee times. They will begin booking times for the public June 1. Joe Doria, Noel Morris, Rob

Reimer and Roman Mamalyga were the first foursome on the course Saturday morning.

They were elated to get out and play for the first time in weeks. Doria said it was his second time this year being the first to tee off. There were 12 club members, who had the first three tee times booked for the day, regulars who like to play early in the morning.

NOTL Tennis Club members were out on the Memorial Park courts first thing, as were

pickleball players in Virgil, as soon as they were legally allowed to take part in the sports they love.

The splash pad and skate-board park in Virgil were also busy with the younger crowd happy to have some outdoor fun permitted by the province.

There are restrictions and protocols to follow, but at least they were able to get outside in the good weather, and do more than walk, jog or cycle, enjoying the social contact they've

been missing as much as the physical activity.

While NOTL Pickleball Club members were out and ready to play when the courts opened at 8 a.m., the club has not reopened nor has a date been determined for that to happen, and the schedule is still being finalized, with lots of time for the public as well.

"Hard-core" members Elaine Somerville, Andrew Calnek, and Jerry and Barb Eitze were happy to be out, say-

ing they played on winter days when they had to shovel snow off the courts, so Saturday felt pretty good. NOTL has one of the best facilities in the region, and attracts members from all over, says Calnek, some of them out for the socializing as much as the game, and others very competitive players. Although most of the NOTL club has a reputation for being more a recreational club, it at-

Continued on page 16



Joe Doria, Noel Morris, Rob Reimer and Roman Mamalyga, a foursome of regulars, got the first tee time for Saturday's opening of the NOTL Golf Club. (Mike Balsom)



Joe Doria watches Rob Reimer take his first swing at the NOTL Golf Club Saturday. They were part of a foursome who got the first tee time at the reopening of the club. (Mike Balsom)



Noel Morris tees off at the NOTL Golf Course, with Joe Doria watching. (Mike Balsom)



Bill and Patty Garriock enjoy a beautiful day on the NOTL Golf Course. (David Gilchrist)



Nancy Berkhout and Shaf Keshavjee enjoy an early game, the first of the reopening at the NOTL Tennis Club. (Mike Balsom)



Karen Wright and Sunny Cao were excited to be out and playing tennis again on the Memorial Park courts. (Mike Balsom)

LocalHAPPENINGS

JUNE MAKER KIT: MUG MAKERS

May 27 @ 9 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Mandalas & Monograms on mugs – oh my! Create some customized colourful mugs using special ceramic paints. Please go to <https://notlpubliclibrary.org/> to register for June 1st and to reserve your kit with six mugs. One kit per family. While supplies last. Once registered, you will receive an email with details on how and when you can pick up your kit at the library. While this workshop is offered free of charge, we do welcome donations to support the NOTL Library so we can continue to offer great and diverse program offerings. You can donate here: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/niagara-on-the-lake-public-library/>

INFOHEALTH – LOW BACK PAIN

May 27 @ 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.

A health information workshop. InfoHealth is a monthly presentation that aims to inform and educate the community about achieving and maintaining healthy lifestyles, disease prevention, the detection and management of specific diseases, and how to navigate the health system here in the Niagara region. Please visit <https://notlpubliclibrary.org/> to register for June 2nd. Attendance is limited, please register as soon as possible. Zoom log-in information will be emailed to all participants at least 24 hours before each event.

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LocalWORSHIP

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OBITUARY



PLAYLE, K. Yvonne — 1924 – 2021 - Kathleen Yvonne Playle passed peacefully at her home in Niagara-on-the-Lake on May 3, 2021. She had just celebrated her 97th birthday and was blessed to see many of her family and friends during the final weeks of her life.

Yvonne was born in Scarborough, Ontario but moved to Montreal at an early age with her parents Bert and May Bedwell. She earned her Bachelor of Arts from McGill University in 1944, and was a member of the McGill fencing club during her studies. She met her husband Colin at an Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship event at McGill while he was visiting on a break from his engineering studies at the University of Toronto. Yvonne and Colin married in the Town of Mount Royal in 1948 and soon settled in Niagara Falls, where they had their four children over a span of 13 years. After more than a decade as a homemaker and mother, Yvonne embarked on a second career in 1962 by starting her training as a Laboratory Technologist at the Greater Niagara General Hospital. After graduating in 1964 she worked for many years in the GNGH laboratory. Once their three eldest children left home for university, Yvonne and Colin moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake where they lived out the rest of their years.

Yvonne and Colin were members of St. Martin's and St. John's Anglican churches in Niagara Falls, followed by St. Mark's Anglican Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Yvonne served on the church altar guilds for many years. After retiring, Yvonne volunteered at both GNGH and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Hospital. She was a member of the Niagara Falls University Women's Club, played badminton into her 90s, and was an avid bridge player. Yvonne also enjoyed summer camping with Colin and their children, and travelled extensively first with Colin and then with friends and family throughout Canada, the UK, Europe and New Zealand, and she also went on numerous cruises.

Yvonne is survived by her son Christopher Kim (Claude) and daughter Diane (Mike), as well as her four grandchildren Evelyn, Colin, Nicholas and Emma. She was predeceased by her husband Colin in 1994 and her children Rick (Anne) in 2005 and Kate in 2009.

Yvonne's ashes will be interred in the Memorial Garden of St. Mark's Niagara-on-the-Lake at a private family service in late May. A Celebration of Yvonne's Life is expected to be held this autumn.

In lieu of flowers, donations in memory of Yvonne can be made to Doctors Without Borders or to a charity of your choice. Memories, photos and condolences can be shared at www.morganfuneral.com



HOUSE SITTING

HOUSE SITTING (While you are away)
Location Niagara-on-the-Lake. Oct 15th 2021 to April 15th 2022 Inclusive. No Pets. Contact John email hammerjd1867@gmail.com

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CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU

- Across:**
- 1 Concert appearance
 - 4 Dirty
 - 9 Cooking meas.
 - 13 100 square meters
 - 14 Contradiction
 - 16 Chief Hawaiian island
 - 17 Short for the least
 - 18 Tennis great --- Gonzales
 - 19 Tax
 - 20 Applications
 - 22 Tap's partner
 - 23 Hoop dunk
 - 25 Added for free
 - 27 About this size
 - 28 Surrounded by
 - 30 Subject of spectacular bankruptcy case
 - 33 Very similar to
 - 35 Flashy
 - 37 Tokyo Yoko
 - 38 The Pobble had none
 - 39 Engender
 - 41 One of four
 - 42 "You've Got Mail" company
 - 43 "The hour --- hand": St Matthew's Gospel
 - 44 Dangerous feats
 - 46 G W T W's --- Butler
 - 48 Green, blotchy frog type
 - 50 Toque wearers
 - 52 To do with plants
 - 55 A machine's productive hours
 - 57 Honoric title in India
 - 58 --- of the above
 - 59 Happy feline rumble
 - 60 Letters, these days
 - 63 Of a thing
 - 64 Surrounded by
 - 65 I'm sorry --- you waiting
 - 66 "The sloebblack, slow,

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13			14				15		16		
17			18						19		
20			21		22			23	24		
25			26				27				
	28					29		30		31	32
33	34					35		36		37	
38				39	40				41		
42			43				44	45			
46			47			48	49				
		50			51		52			53	54
55	56					57			58		
59				60	61			62		63	
64				65					66		
67					68				69		

Down:

- 1 Complete range
- 2 Whiskey choice
- 3 Thomas Edison was once a director of it
- 4 National economic indicator
- 5 State of preparedness
- 6 Baseball segment
- 7 Clickers or squeakers
- 8 Expression of derision
- 9 Add as a bonus
- 10 Hi-fi is not supposed to suffer from it
- 11 Card dispenser
- 12 Golfing short shot
- 15 Gray wolf
- 21 18-wheelers
- 24 Sleeping
- 26 Stir-fryer
- 27 Pack
- 29 Election list
- 31 That show's going to be --- 9 pm
- 32 Silently indicates assent
- 33 State emblem on Old Glory
- 34 Expression of amazement
- 36 Pristine
- 40 Chums
- 41 Holy book of Islam
- 43 Agenda topic
- 45 Make lace
- 47 Musical intervals
- 49 "1984" antagonist
- 51 Bases
- 53 Bury
- 54 Hotelier --- Ritz
- 55 Poisonous Javanese tree
- 56 Catamountain
- 57 Japanese rice wine
- 61 Cut
- 62 Intelligence officer

IN MEMORIAM



Matthew John Magee
March 9, 1947 - May 27, 2019

**Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for
this moment to arise**

**Happy travels Matthew.
I love you.**

**Blackbird fly, blackbird fly
Into the light of the dark black night**



PUZZLE ANSWERS

**Sudoku solution from
May 19, 2021**

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

Across: 1 Glig, 4 Grimy, 9 Tbsp, 13 Are, 14 Denial, 16 Oahy, 17 Min, 18 Pancha, 19 Scott, 20 Uses, 22 Die, 23 Basket, 25 Threw in, 27 So big, 28 Amnongst, 30 Enron, 33 So like, 35 Loud, 37 Ono, 38 Toes, 39 Spawm, 41 Quad, 42 A O L, 43 Is at, 44 Stunts, 46 Rhett, 48 Leopard, 50 Chets, 52 Botanic, 55 Uptime, 57 Sn, 58 None, 59 Purn, 60 E-mails, 63 Its, 64 Amid, 65 To keep, 66 Sea, 67 Sacs, 68 Wendy, 69 Err.

Down: 1 Garnit, 2 lish, 3 General Electric, 4 G D P, 5 Readiness, 6 On at, 32 Nods, 33 Star, 34 Ooch, 36 Unspoiled, 40 Pais, 41 Cur'an, 43 Item, 45 Tat, 47 Thirids, 49 O'Brien, 51 Feet, 53 Inter, 54 Cesar, 55 Uplas, 56 Purna, 57 Sake, 61 Mow, 62 Spy.



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Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine plan is helping to stop the spread and save lives. Thousands of people across the province are getting vaccinated every day.

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Find out when, where and how to get vaccinated at ontario.ca/covidvaccineplan or call 1-888-999-6488 for assistance in more than 300 languages.

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It couldn't have been better weather for the opening of the splashpad in the Virgil Sports Park Saturday, as families brought their kids out to cool off. (Photos by David Gilchrist)

Sports park a busy place

Continued from page 14

tracts players of all skills levels, he adds.

When the club reopens, for insurance purposes, only members of both the NOTL Pickleball Club and Pickleball Canada will be permitted to play during the club scheduled times, says club president John Hindle.

The use of these courts are free, he adds. He wants to be sure residents of NOTL understand it is not the intention of the club to dominate the use of these courts, so they should be confident that even during club scheduled times, residents are always welcome to join in (for a maximum of three times) and then hopefully will choose to become a member.

All non-club scheduled times are open to the public for residents' use between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily, says Hindle.

Anyone interested in playing, or joining the club, should visit notlpickleball.ca. Or to ask a question, book a family session to learn how to play, or share a compliment or complaint, says Hindle, email admin@notlpickleball.ca.



Owen Danes and Cole McMann were out Saturday morning enjoying the pickleball courts in Virgil. (Mike Balsom)



Calvin MacNally begins his run at the Virgil State Park Saturday, with Devin Spencer waiting his turn on his bike, and Marlow Davis and Ronan MacNally on their boards.