St. Davids families mourn our lost children

Maanak Gandhi and sister Maansi Gandhi of St. Davids sit with their memorial to the 215 children whose remains were found at a residential school in Kamloops, B.C. Their mother, Shriti Gandhi, wanted to be sure that as young as they are, they understand what we have learned about our Indigenous children. (David Gilchrist)

Penny Coles
The Local

Shriti Gandhi wanted to do more. But what could she do? She wanted to be sure her children understood what had happened to the 215 children buried on the property of the largest of the residential schools in Canada, this particular one in Kamloops, B.C.

The children she, like all of us, was shocked to hear about the discovery of their remains. Gandhi posted a notice in her Cannery Park neighbourhood of St. Davids Monday, asking for others to join her in creating a memorial, an opportunity to mourn the children, all the children taken from the families, and some of them buried far from home, outside of their own communities and apart from their loved ones.

"I’m not sure many people will see it," she says, hoping the poster would encourage others to put out teddy bears, or shoes, as other communities were doing, to mourn the little ones who were not returned to their families.

"I’m a mom, and this is the most I can do, to try to teach my kids," she says of her eight and five year old. "Just as kids have a pink shirt day to raise awareness about bullying, they have an orange shirt day as a reminder that every child matters, to raise awareness of residential schools and all the experience of children who attended them, she says.

"I’m not sure how much they talk about it in school," says Gandhi.

"Every year since my kids have been at St. Davids they’ve had an orange shirt day, and we’ve had a conversation with our kids. It can be pretty graphic, and upsetting, but I don’t want them to think it’s just like a crazy hat day or another fun day. We talk a lot about anti-racism. It’s really front-of-mind for us.”

Continued on page 3
Rise in Indian variant feared in Niagara

While the number of daily COVID cases continues to decline, Niagara and across the province, Niagara’s acting chief medical officer of health is worried the variant from India is on the rise in the region.

At a virtual press conference Monday, Dr. Mustafa Hirji explained the province screens to identify variants of concern, but has no test for the Indian variant. He is concerned some of the new daily cases may be that variant, with their number being underestimated.

“I think we are a little blind to what is happening, because we can’t screen for it,” said Hirji.

The B1617 variant spreads more quickly than others, and causes more serious illness, he added.

Also worrisome is that studies are showing the B1617 causes more serious illness, he said.

Hirji used the U.K. as an example of what could happen in Ontario. It lifted what appeared to be a successful lockdown when cases decreased to a level that looked safe for reopening, only to see cases rise again from the B1617 variant, due to its contact with India.

“Often what occurs in the U.K. comes to Ontario a month later,” he said.

“This is a warning cloud on the horizon for us.”

Hirji said the percentage of test positivity is coming down in Niagara, which should be good news, but he is concerned it means that people with mild symptoms are not getting tested.

He urges anyone with even mild symptoms to be tested to help with contact tracing and reduce any further spread of infection.

His other key message is the importance of a second vaccination dose, so that everybody is protected against B1617, thus preventing another wave as a result of the variant.

On Monday he said there were still “a few thousand” appointments available for second doses in Niagara, but he expected they would fill up quickly.

“It is going to be critical,” he said.

The second dose is going to be a must, he said.

The region has the capacity to vaccinate up to 10,000 doses a day, but it is only receiving enough vaccine to do about 5,500 to 6,000 a day.

Pharmacies and primary care physicians are receiving some vaccine, but not enough to do as many vaccinations as they could, he said.

Niagara Health has some second dose appointments

As of 8 a.m. on Monday, May 31, individuals turning 80 and over in 2021 were eligible to book an earlier second dose appointment at Niagara Health’s Seymour-Hannah arena clinic, as well as other clinics or pharmacies in the region.

This follows the provincial government’s announcement last week that Ontario is accelerating the rollout of second doses.

“The vaccination clinic team is prepared to respond quickly to support the provincial government’s goal of a two-dose summer,” said Linda Boith, executive vice president at Niagara Health, overseeing its vaccination program.

“We’ve worked hard over the last three months to accelerate the provincial commitment to our first and second doses at our Seymour-Hannah arena vaccination clinic. We are eager to move to the accelerated second-dose interval beginning with people aged 80 plus and moving through the sequencing based on provincial guidelines.”

Those eligible can book their second dose for an earlier date at any mass immunization clinic through the provincial booking system at https://covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine/ or by calling 1-833-943-9300.

Pharmacies and primary healthcare clinicians are also offering second doses.

Availability of appointment slots is based on vaccine supply, and second doses can be administered at a different location than the first dose.

Shaw Festival looking for support with ‘fairness issue’

Along with other arts organizations, the Shaw Festival is asking the province to reduce reopening restrictions on the performing arts.

On a post on social media, and in an open letter from the festival distributed through the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce newsletter Monday, the Shaw is asking for fairness with other organizations.

“We need to be very focused on what is happening, because to what is happening, because some of the new daily cases are still ‘a few thousand’,” Hirji said.

The Facebook post says the provincial government’s reopening plan is “a dead-end for performing arts, outdoor venues, festivals, and events.”

“After a year of shuttered venues, lost revenue-streams and amongst the most severe levels of unemployment compared to any other industry in Canada, we are ready to safely reopen our stages for artists and audiences. But the current directives would leave arts and culture behind, denying artists the equal access that restaurants, sports, and religious services will be allowed to offer,” the Shaw Festival Facebook post says.

The Shaw is calling on the government to allow them to resume rehearsals in the first step of reopening plan, so casts and crews will be ready when performances can begin in Step 2.

The post also asks the government to allow filming inside performance spaces during Step 1, which will begin at least 60 percent of adults have received at least one dose of a vaccination, and COVID-19 daily case numbers, hospitalizations and intensive care admissions continue to decline, so theatres can at least offer digital content.

“Under Step 1 it stands now up to 10 people can gather outdoors, outdoor dining will open up to four people per table,” he said.

Continued on page 4

Celebrating with Pride

The Pride flag was raised at town hall Tuesday to recognize Pride Month in Niagara, with Darryl Dyck, one of the directors of Pride Niagara, joining NOTL CAO Marriee Christ and Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

The post also asks the government to allow filming inside performance spaces during Step 1, which will begin at least 60 percent of adults have received at least one dose of a vaccination, and COVID-19 daily case numbers, hospitalizations and intensive care admissions continue to decline, so theatres can at least offer digital content.

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Continued on page 4
Some Cannery Park neighbours joined the Gandhi family in mourning the children who died in the Kamlipoo, B.C. residential school, including Bharati and Shrikant Gandhi, who left their home in Oakville. Dr. Kevin Clark and Dr. Rebecca Zabek-Clark, Dental Hygiene Team and their registered Dental Hygiene Team have recently joined the practice discussions, she says. “There needs to be an informed conversation about our feelings of what it’s like to live in Niagara-on-the-Lake.” And it’s important to her to be part of that discussion, she adds, to ensure the town she has chosen to raise her family is aware and inclusive.

She’s lived in St. Davids for five years, “and I want to be sure this is a community that welcomes everyone. It’s definitely top of mind for more people than ever. And today is an opportunity to show our support, to recognize what has happened in the past, and to engage our children, to talk to them and let them understand. We don’t know a lot about this part of our history and we don’t talk enough about it. We need to learn the whole of our history, not just the good parts.”

It was a small group of neighbours who joined her memorial, but it was enough for her children to understand. It was a start.

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$825,900

Completely restored as an Airbnb, this bungalow has new luxury vinyl flooring, furnace, air conditioning, and roof. On the main level, there is a spacious bright living room, a galley kitchen and dining room with a walk-out to a large deck. Two bedrooms and a 4-piece bath complete the picture. Great opportunity to own a cottage or expand the footprint on the 227 ft. depth. All furnishings are included. Call Nancy at 905-371-4234 for more information.

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NANCY BAILEY

805-371-4234 nancybailey@evrealstate.com
Surrounded by its picket fence, it sits as a time capsule, overlooking Butler’s Barracks and the Commons. The Junior Commissariat Officer’s Quarters has played a role in over 200 years of military and community history.

One of the first buildings constructed as part of the Butler’s Barracks complex just after the War of 1812, the historic residence is currently undergoing a substantial renovation. Chris Zoetewey, Parks Canada technical officer (project officer) for the National Historic Sites in Southwestern Ontario, says just under 50 per cent of the building is still in its original state.

“There was a fairly substantial renovation done on it,” he says, “which replaced the roof systems, and that was done during the 1980s when Parks Canada was given the property by the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.”

Budgeted at about $800,000, the current work is part of a series of federal infrastructure investment projects initiated in 2015 at Butler’s Barracks National Historic Site. Zoetewey says that the program has invested a total of over $13 million in Niagara historical sites since that time.

Preserving the historic materials is an important priority for the current project. As much historic fabric as possible will be retained or reinforced throughout the work being done on the chimneys, kitchen walls, floors and foundation, the roofing system, and the siding, windows and shutters. As well, Parks Canada will be replacing the porch, making improvements to the drainage around the building’s exterior, and upgrading utilities.

The Parks Canada website lauds the Junior Commissariat Officer’s Quarters for its aesthetic design, a great example of an early 19th-century Georgian-styled frame cottage. Its balanced, well-proportioned composition with little ornamentation represents a functional, efficient response to the prevailing conditions where local materials were readily available. This can be seen, for example, in the extension that joins the originally detached kitchen to the main structure.

Zoetewey, who grew up in Niagara-on-the-Lake, explains that the building was used for administration.

“A commissariat officer was in charge of doing all the purchasing,” says Zoetewey, “sort of a logistics person for the army. He would be buying all the foods, the bedding and everything else. It was his own personal space and office at the same time.”

Acting as receiver and signatory for deliveries would have been part of the commissariat officer’s responsibilities. From his central location he would have had a great view of all the other activity on the base.

“When you look at the map of what is now what you see as Butler’s Barracks,” he explains, “there were a number of buildings around there. You see the Junior Commissariat Officer’s Quarters but you also see another building beside it, in the area where the Legion is now. That was the Commissariat Sergeant’s Quarters. Between the two of them, they had their own stuff, and they took care of getting everything that the military needed.”

The historic building witnessed the training of thousands of troops throughout the 1800s to the First and Second World Wars. That’s when the open landscape known as the Commons was converted into a “tented city” as part of Camp Niagara. The building became the Officer’s Club and photos show the officers enjoying the grounds of this serene setting. There is even a drink recipe scrawled on the chimney wall next to the former location of their bar.

The historic building also played a huge role in the connection between the military and the local community. From 1882 through the First World War, when Camp Niagara wasn’t being used by the military, the building served as the clubhouse for the Niagara Gold Club, originally located on the site. And some locals have fond memories of dances and other social events there during its time as a community center in the 1940s and 1960s. When Parks Canada took over the Junior Commissariat Officer’s Quarters in 1983, it was restored to its 1833 appearance.

This current project presents the unique challenge of re-habilitating the structure, while respecting the heritage character of the iconic building.

In 2010, Parks Canada conducted a structural assessment of the Junior Commissariat Officer’s Quarters to seek options as to how the interior could be finished based on potential uses of the structure and grounds.

Plans to restore the building were slated to begin in 2019. After careful review, it was determined that the original re-furbishment plan would result in the loss of too much historic fabric. Parks Canada went back to work with the consultant and, together, developed a revised plan that would ensure the structural integrity of the Junior Commissariat Officer’s Quarters, while preserving as much historic material as possible.

When it was determined that the original wall timbers should be preserved, the solution was to install new “sister” beams to provide additional support and ensure the proper stability over the long term.

As well, some contamination was discovered in some of the materials used in previous work on the structure. For structures from this era, it was common to use materials such as asbestos and lead paint, which had to be removed before the current refurbishment work could continue.

Zoetewey promises the restoration work will be sympathetic to the original building materials and techniques. The roof, for instance, will be re-created using traditional methods, with cedar shingles on a batten support system. Work on the project is expected to last until some time in October.

“There are some pressures on this project,” Zoetewey explains. “We have to look at, we have to abide by those regulations. We’re limited on staff. We’re managing those challenges. Work is progressing at a pretty steady rate.”

Once everything is complete, the Junior Commissariat Officer’s Quarters will have further potential in connecting visitors and local to the important role this national historic site played in Canadian history.

“Parks Canada will work with stakeholders and possibly the town and other individuals,” Zoetewey tells The Local, “to sort of look at the building and see what the future can hold for it, for the town and Parks Canada. It will be similar in interpretation to Fort Mississauga. It might be open for special occasions, when resources and staffing allow.”

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Continued from page 2

Outdoor religious services can be offered with limited capacities, and day camps and camp sites will be allowed to reopen. An open letter released by the festival Monday says “the dropping COVID case counts coupled with the opportunity to work outdoors and online, should offer a light at the end of the tunnel for performing arts organizations, outdoor venues, festivals and events.”

Instead, “as it stands, the government’s announced Roadmap to Reopen only offers a dead-end to the performing arts at a time when we are perhaps needed most. And we need your help.”

In the coming days and weeks, Ontario senior officials will meet to determine the specific regulatory details of the Roadmap to Reopen, including the offices of Chief Medical Officer Dr. David Williams, Ministers and Deputy Ministers, and public health officials.

The letter says the current guidelines will leave arts and culture behind, denying arts lovers the equal access that restaurants, sports, and religious services will be allowed to offer.

Provincial decisions and changes expected “in the next few days will determine the fate of our stages for the next year.” If we are treated with parity to equivalent peer sectors, we can look forward to a summer of outdoor performance and a robust theatre season next year.

But if we are denied equitable reopening, our stages will remain dark and our artists will remain out of work for many months to come!”

The letter calls for Shaw supporters to make their voices heard, demanding fairness for arts and culture in Ontario as part of the #FairnessForArt on Twitter campaign, and supporting performing arts organizations who have launched.

“We are not asking for special treatment,” the letter says, “only to be afforded the same reopening terms that equivalent peer industries have been given already.”

The letter, signed “four friends at the Shaw”, and the Shaw Festival’s Facebook post suggest supporters visit canadiantimewa-sica.ca/fairnessforart/ to send letters to the Premiers, Ministers, MPs, municipal leaders and representatives.
Whether a Biker or a Baptist

It doesn’t matter if you’re a Biker or a Baptist. If you prefer a church, a garden, or a pub. If you want stories and laughter or silent tranquility. A procession or a party. No matter what your budget, the only thing a funeral absolutely has to be is whatever you want it to be.

When your time comes, are you prepared? Will you burden your family with planning your funeral after you’re gone? Or will you pre-plan your funeral and have it done your way? You can help your family, even after you’ve passed.

You buy insurance in the event something might happen to your home or vehicle, you plan your finances, and you create a Will and Powers of Attorney to handle your affairs. Doesn’t it just make sense to pre-plan your funeral arrangements?

Morgan Funeral Home has been part of the Niagara-on-the-Lake community since 1959. Founded on the principle established by funeral directors Gordon & Betty Morgan “of serving families just as we would want to be served.” The team at Morgan Funeral Home continues to be available to help you or your family answer your pre-need and at-need funeral questions.

Call us to pre-arrange exactly what you want—traditional or contemporary.
the elders in their communities. We knew this, that there were residential schools, that Indigenous children were taken from their families. We’ve heard the stories of those who survived, and we may think we know what that history has done to the Indigenous people in our country and in our community. But we can’t really know, unless they are their children, or our ancestors.

In living rooms across the country, the adults and grandparents — were asking each other, what happened to these poor children? Why did they die? How did they die? Could they have just disappeared? Why were they not helping their communities, their families, the people they loved them?

Imagine a mom trying to explain to her children what they have here. What child could possibly understand?

Yet here, in our community and across our country, parents trying to understand themselves were having to explain to their children, what can’t be explained. That this country of ours, of which we were so proud, allowed this to happen and then acted as if it hadn’t happened at all. That some of the leaders in our country believe that this is a dead issue for Indigenous children would be better, somehow, if they were taken from the families they loved, to become part of a society and culture that was not their own.

The studies have been done. The reports have been written. And then nothing. Now, when we are shocked, heart-broken, anguished, heart-broken at this cause. What could possibly understand? What kind of horror and shock to the country, adults — parents asking each other, were they keeping secrets? Were they lying to the children they loved?

We knew this, that there were residential schools, that Indigenous children were taken from their families. We’ve heard the stories of those who survived, and we may think we know what that history has done to the Indigenous people in our country and in our community. But we can’t really know, unless they are their children, or our ancestors.

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So here is some good news:
We’re seeing more people getting their COVID-19 vaccinations, case numbers continue to decrease, the provincial stay-at-home order is slated to expire on June 2, and the province is preparing to launch its three-step recovery roadmap starting June 14 (pending achievement of its vaccination targets).

This is, no doubt, a time of great hope and we face a unique challenge of people getting it. The overwhelming number because of the vaccine and cause of fingers crossed, but tunnel, this time, not just be—

malcy in our lives. We can cautious steps toward regain—

when we can start taking looking forward to, a time—

gets). The town will continue to do its part to protect the health and safety of the public, using every available avenue to educate about provincial regulations and public health guidelines. However, our staff resources may be stretched even further, making it difficult for them to keep up. While the staff cannot be everywhere all the time, they will do the best they can to respond to inquiries and concerns.

As always, remember to be patient with yourself and with one another. Times of heightened stress, it is more important than ever to be kind to one another. I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again: we can and will get through this together.

Thank you, Niagara-on-the-Lake, for your kindness and generosity. This amazing generosity is allowing us to ship nine containers packed with food, cleaning supplies, baby items and water to help so many hurting people. Without your contributions, we would not have accomplished this undertaking. These items will be distributed to the needy and hurting residents of my village.

God bless you and thank you for your support and showing how much you care.

The Fletcher Family

Family friend Jayden Polgrabia, La Fleur Fletcher and her son Akeem show just some of the goods that have been sent to St. Vincent, donated by very generous locals, along with cash donations to help pay for goods and shipping. Fletcher purchased the empty barrels in St. Catharines and packed them with all kinds of goods, including food, toiletries and cleaning supplies. The barrels were cheaper for shipping than wooden crates, she said. (Photos supplied)
It might seem unusual to write a nature article about my personal vehicle, the maroon Pontiac Montana. The ultimate family van — the too-typical vessel filled with children on the way to soccer games and school (well, when both of those are open again).

After the May long weekend’s canoeing event in the Virgil Conservation Area, I felt an appreciable affinity for this vehicle all over again, which doesn’t owe me a penny. I wanted to explain how this van has gotten an outdoors enthusiast like myself into, and out of, countless nature adventures over the years. So, here’s an ode to the Purple Chariot.

The van may be the most commonplace type of vehicle for typical households. Funny enough though, I remember (and miss) Tuesday night hockey in Virgil with the guys. My van would pull into the arena, dwarfed by a sea of pickup trucks, and humorously sticking out like a sore thumb. I would always joke how a van is essentially just a pickup truck with a permanent cover. Of course, I’m not being serious. Or am I?

I hope this article inspires any van owners, especially those with children, to make the most of getting to natural areas with this ubiquitous vehicle.

One thing that a lot of my outdoorsy friends have a laugh at is regarding my canoe loading technique. I don’t have a roof rack or anything of that support. So, I slide the giant aluminum canoe up on top from the back of the van. There are two foam blocks attached to the front of the canoe, so if I play my angles right and don’t throw my back out, I can slide the nose of the canoe right to the front of the van. Sometimes, I tip up a little too far, and I hear said canoe nose grind the roof of the van for a moment. So, there are some appreciable linear scratches up there, the same way the Wisconsin ice sheet dragged its way across Niagara Peninsula 12,000 years ago and created the Niagara Escarpment.

For a van that just keeps on giving, and has been worked beyond its duties, who even looks at the top of someone else’s vehicle anyway? I’ll trade aesthetics — — Special Announcement — —

Helen Hendriks is turning 90
Tuesday June 8th

Help make it extra special for Helen.

We welcome you to walk by or drive by for Best Wishes
2-5 pm
788 Green Street,
Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Erwin and Dorothy Wiens are thrilled to announce the marriage of their daughter

Brianna Wiens to Daniel Harley
on Friday, May 21. The happy couple are now residing in Stratford.
Continued from page 8

for quality outdoor fun, any day.

I then pick a random beach or bath towel. The most recent one has a psychedelic-looking jaguar face on it. It will do! I fold and layer it like some kind of homemade pasta dish in whatever parking space I'm at, and place it under the back end of the canoe. The canoe at this point is upside down, of course, so I then use my head, and press up against these spaces to jump into the vehicle. However, I don't have the clearance, or robust suspension of a pickup truck or SUV. Thus, I push the van through the sandy backroads of Norfolk County, the winter highways of Muskoka, and the gravel of Niagara's country lanes. On the other end of the spectrum, you might catch me on the main street of Niagara-on-the-Lake. You can only treat a van like a truck for so long, though. The underbelly of the vehicle has a shoe string tool, known as duct tape, is seen holding together other variables on the vehicle. The van still continues to do epic road trips and can't seem to lock itself down. There is simply too much nature to explore out there, and I am nearly as grateful for my van as I am these very green spaces it takes me to.

Owen Bjorgan's Purple Chariot takes him on adventures from NOTL's main street to many different natural environments. (Owen Bjorgan)
Varied background combines security, policy
New Brock vp settling into new NOTL home

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Spotting a deer in the backyard of their Old Town home this week, Ken Chan and his husband Warren were quite certain they weren’t liv ing in downtown Toronto any longer.

When Chan was named Brock University’s new vice-president, administration, back in January, the couple began hunting for a home in their favourite spot in the Niagara Region. She and here two weeks ago brings them closer to Warren’s mother in Grimsby, and also allows for the more relaxed, yet active lifestyle they enjoy.

“I’ve been exploring the trails in Niagara-on-the-Lake both on foot, and on bicycle,” says the 46-year-old Chan. “Niagara-on-the-Lake has always been one of the communities that has always been familiar to us. I’m a history buff. It’s one of the communities that is seminal to the history of Canada. I’m also a fan of tourism and culture. Niagara-on-the-Lake offers all of that.”

Since their arrival, the avid runner has also posted shots snapping up the surroundings of their new environment. His Twitter account (@bchanm) is full of great photos of Fort Mississauga, Queen Street and theVoices of Freedom Park.

The self-described newspaper junkie has also posted photos of the waterfront leafing through The NOTL Local, walking Queen Street, and the barracksa, you just realize the history and the heritage of the surroundings,” Chan says. “That’s something that is so appealing. We’re so fortunate to be able to live in such a region.”

Upon assuming his new role at Brock on Tuesday, June 1, Chan says his first order of business is to get to know the people at the university, as well as business and community leaders in Niagara.

As VP, administration, Chan is responsible for providing leadership for the finance and information technology departments. He will also oversee campus security, infrastructure and facilities, dining services and residences.

“It’s quite a diverse portfolio,” he tells The Local.

Diversity is a word that applies perfectly to the career path that brought Chan to Niagara. In 1997, after completing a master’s degree in business administration at City University of Seattle, Chan worked as an immigration officer for a year before he was hired by Peel Regional Police in 1999.

“I started out as a patrol officer, and then spent a year in Drugs, then a little over a year in Homicide. Then, from there I went to the province, working for a cabinet minister,” Chan says.

Chan spent more than four years as a senior advisor and policy director for the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, before moving to the U.K. in 2008, where he worked for two years before returning to the Ontario government. During his stint overseas, he served as then-London mayor Boris Johnson’s policing and community security advisor.

“It was really one of those roles that brought together my time as a police officer and experience as a policy advisor,” he says.

Of Johnson, the current British Prime Minister and a polarizing figure to many, Chan says, “what you see on TV is what you get in person. He certainly has a background in the media. Whether he is speaking to five people or 500, he’s the same.”

Chan also spent time in the biotech field, and has experience in the nonprofit sector as well. From 2011 to 2015 he was vice-president, advocacy, research and healthcare for Cystic Fibrosis Canada. As well, he currently sits on the board of the ALS Society of Canada.

From 2017 until just recently, Chan had been an assistant deputy minister role with the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture to one that put him in the thick of things with the province’s COVID-19 vaccination rollout.

As the assistant deputy minister with the vaccine distribution secretariat at the Ministry of the Solicitor General, Chan started up and then led the secretariat responsible for supporting the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force.

“The vaccine rollout is a project that one would expect to have all hands on deck,” Chan says. “We’ve got multiple departments within the Ontario government and beyond, including the public health units, the hospitals, the municipalities and the private sector working together. The task force played a key role in advising the government on the rollout.”

“The role of the secretariat is to support the task force,” Chan adds. “The role I played was to support the chair (first, retired General Rick Hillier; then Dr. Homer Tien), the ministers and the deputy ministers in connecting the dots and pulling together the various work streams responsible for the rollout in a way that took a much more strategic view.”

He’s been following the progress of Niagara’s vaccinations, and at press time was happy to discover that the region had surpassed the 250,000 doses milestone.

His experience with the secretariat perhaps makes Chan an ideal candidate to lead Brock into its post-pandemic future.

“I see a lot of potential there, and look forward to providing leadership and working with our partners both on campus and off in realizing what the post-pandemic environment has to offer all of us,” he says. “There are very exciting times ahead for Brock.”

Chan sat in on a community engagement session at the end of March, which brought business leaders together with representatives from the university. The experience made him realize that Brock needs to play an important role in both drawing talent to Niagara and retaining it.

“We heard loud and clear what the community expects of Brock as an anchor in terms of helping the region grow,” states Chan, “not only from an academic standpoint, but certainly in being an enabler of the region playing a much more critical role in overall provincial and national growth. A stronger province and country will mean much higher potential for the region.”

The recent announcement of the departure of Brock President Gervan Fearon came as a surprise to Chan. However, he remains impressed by what Fearon accomplished in his role, and looks forward to working with current Provost Lynn Wells, who will become interim president of the university on July 1.

With his vast experience in many sectors of business, the Brock appointment is Chan’s first in the world of academia. The lifelong learner, however, is no stranger to the academic world. He holds a number of degrees from various universities, most recently a master of forensic accounting from the University of Toronto. And he has had input in post-secondary decision-making in the past.

“He’s been involved in the education sector for a number of years,” Chan explains. “I was an alumnus member of the academic board at the University of Toronto. I was also on the board of Lambeth College in London, England. I started an executive PhD in business at ESCP (Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Paris) in France. So I myself am now a graduate student and a grad researcher as well.”

As he settles in to his new job at Brock, and as he and Warren, who works for Capital One, continue to settle in to their new home in NOTL, he looks forward to a post-pandemic environment where the couple can get out and fully explore not just their immediate surroundings, but everything the Niagara region has to offer.

For now, though, they are happy to stay in town mostly, supporting local businesses, and sampling the fare of restaurants such as the Irish Harp, Niagara’s Finest Thai, pZa, Pizzaer and Butler’s Sports Bar. But Chan is really anticipating sampling one local delicacy in particular.

“The one that I really look forward to trying,” enthuses Chan, “is the fish and chips over at the Legion hall I hear that they do make a good fish and chips, so that’s certainly on my list.”

As much as Brock, and Niagara Region, is in for a treat with the experience Chan brings to his new role, Chan himself is in for a treat one upcoming Thursday night.
The Foster Festival has a premiere ready to show with the public, but for now, it has to be virtual. Hopefully, for the last time, says festival artistic director Emily Oriold. The festival has made its home in Niagara at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, and Oriold says the hope was to be able to present outdoor productions this summer. But with the province's three-step reopening plan, they would be restricted to performances to audiences of 10 people starting June 14, and then 25 people three weeks later — and that's if reopening proceeds as planned. The festival, founded in 2016, relies on "earned revenue" to fund its productions, and can't afford to premiere a new play under these circumstances, she explains. Community theatres and festivals that have a longer history behind them have been recipients of government grants for the arts to offset production costs, Oriold says, but as a new group without that history, the Foster Festival wasn't eligible to receive pandemic financial support.

Once the audience is allowed to be larger, hopefully in September, they will look at multiple outdoor settings, she says, with one of Foster's "greatest hits," although they're not ready to announce the locations or the play just yet.

For now, the festival is excited to be offering the world premiere of Foster's new play, 1812, as a virtual reading this Sunday, June 6.

Orlando written as a musical, with Canadian musical theatre composer Leslie Arden, Foster decided, with Arden's blessing, to reduce the scope of it and transition to a production of a virtual reading.

"We're seeing this pandemic as an opportunity, not a hindrance," says Oriold.

"We've kept things small, and we've kept on with online offerings," the festival is also able to offer new outlets, such as the four-week playwriting workshops with Norm Foster, something different that has been offered for the first time on Zoom during the pandemic, she says.

And it's also allowed Foster to write more than he ever has before. Two new plays would be typical in any given year, to premiere at the festival, with productions that would take up a lot of his time. Instead, he's had quiet time in Fredericton, New Brunswick, "sitting at home, writing, keeping his brain and imagination active. He thinks of an idea, and he has to write it." He's written seven new plays since June 2020, says Oriold, which will be produced "as quickly as possible," likely beginning next year.

"He's always exploring new genres," Oriold says of the historical background of that play, which began with a "spark of inspiration based on a true story!" It's about two towns, St. Stephen, New Brunswick, and Calais, Maine, divided by a border, but connected by a bridge, and life-long friendships between people in the two communities, who are accustomed to regularly crossing the bridge to visit each other. Over night, a war changes their lives forever, and true to Foster plays, 1812 is built around friendship, love and loyalty, "with a lot of laughter and heart-felt moments Norm Foster followers love to see." The historical element and setting may be new, "but his plays are always about a group of people, and shared experiences," says Oriold.

In any given season there might be 150 Foster plays being produced, not just across Canada, but internationally as well.

Currently, he has plays in production in Russia, Poland and Italy, translated into those languages, she says.

The beauty of a virtual reading locally, presented by the festival, the home of Foster premieres, says Oriold, is the ability to engage and support artists from all over.

But what she misses, and looks forward to getting back to, is standing at the back of house and listening to the laughter of the audience. "Norm misses that as well. It's so much a part of why we do what we do, and we want to get back to that. We've missed two seasons now, and although this is reality, it still seems so surreal. We thought we'd be back in August, but that's changed. And we understand. We just have to wait. And we'll keep changing the plan, until this is over."

Directing 1812 is Jim Mezon, who has acted with many major theatres across Canada, but is most closely associated with the Shaw Festival. He joined the ensemble in 1980. He and his wife, Catharine McGregor, also a Shaw veteran, appeared together in a staged reading of the Christmas Tree in December, presented by the Foster Festival in 12 Niagara locations, with 12 real-life couples sharing the stage for one performance each.

Mezon has also directed for the Foster Festival, including Wrong for Each Other in 2018, and Hilda's Yard in 2019. Also working with 1812 is Jon-Alex MacFarlane plays Frederick Thomas from Calais, Maine, with a musket from the NOTL Museum as a prop for (Photo supplied)
Companion planting: planting different plants in close proximity to one another for their mutual benefit. An easy topic, so I thought.

I could share the list passed on by my mother. But after some reading, I found most old lists were not science-based. The new information is much more complicated than anticipated.

If you are committed to companion planting, let me introduce you to Plant Partners (2020), by Jessica Walliser and Jeff Gillman. This book details companion planting for large- and small-scale farming, which I couldn’t do justice to in a short column.

For now, here are some tips to meet your small-scale companion planting needs.

1. Everyone wants their own tomatoes. Basil planted around the base of your tomatoes will fend off hornworms, thrips and mosquitoes, plus enhances the tomatoes’ flavour. If some of the basil flowers, the bees will love it. Planting onions (leeks, shallots) near tomatoes attracts many beneficial insects, which in turn may eat the pests on the tomatoes.

2. Borage is another good companion for strawberries and also enhances the flavour.

3. Planting the three sisters, corn, beans and squash, together makes a perfect trio. The large leaves of squash smother weeds, and beans use the corn as support while fixing nitrogen around the roots.

4. For peppers of any kind, plant with green onions and chives, or plant with flowers such as cosmos, zinnias (single petal variety), yarrow or peppermint. These attract lady bugs, which eat the aphids, and parasitic wasps, which eat the leaf miners. If your pepper problem is white fly, then planting crimson clover nearby lures bugs which will gorge on them.

5. Nasturtiums lure insects from crops and attract caterpillars away from brassicas like cabbages.

6. Peas and beans have nitrogen fixing abilities, and have increased the size of potato tubers when grown together.

7. Beets work well with mint, sage, calendula, garlic, bush beans and corn, adding minerals to the soil. Onions, garlic and chives repel red spider mites.

8. Peppermint repels rodents and insects, while parsley attracts hoverflies, aphids and swallowtail butterflies. Finally, marigolds repel plant parasitic nematodes, which can cause twisted leaves, stems, and carry viruses and bacterial diseases. Marigolds also attract damsel bugs, which kill white fly. So plant them everywhere in your garden. (Mom was right about marigolds — she was always right.)

Go ahead! Create diversity in your garden and forget monocultures.
Virtual Garden of the Week contest underway

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, followed by 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.

Penny Coles
The Local

The town is receiving photos of beautiful gardens for its virtual Garden of the Week contest, organized by the Communities in Bloom committee. If you have an area of your garden that fits into one of the 10 contest categories, don’t be shy! Learn more about the contest and how to submit your photo at jointheconversationnotl.org/garden.

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Cold weather, warm welcome for market vendors

It was a cold day for the Market @ The Village opening Saturday, but for Tracy Hanson, it had all the warmth of a homecoming.

She raced home three times to get warmer clothing, she says, but despite the weather, it felt great to be outside, selling her products, and chatting with old friends and neighbors. It’s been more than 25 years since Hanson began making wine jellies from her Garrison Village home, where her husband was often away on business and she was raising three small children.

She started out painting wine glasses for local wineries to sell, she says, and then began developing wine jellies, combining local fruit with wine from Pillitteri Estates Winery and Riverview Cellars Estate Winery. Her wide range of products now includes jellies made with Niagara College craft beer, jelly with Lakeview Cellars Vidal Icewine, and lavender jelly made for the NEOB Lavender Boutique.

A lot has changed in her life since the early days, and during that time, the business was one of the constants in her life, the stability that helped see her through some difficult years.

At one point, the company her husband Drew was working for was restructured and sold, and he joined her, working full-time in the home business.

Then, in 2007, Drew died suddenly at the age of 51. With her kids in college and university, “the business kept me going through that time,” she says. “It was the one consistent part of my life.”

She recalls when she first began making wine jellies, she was driven by the desire to own a horse, which she couldn’t afford. Riding had been a big part of her life as a young girl, she says, and as soon as she was able, she bought herself a horse. It’s now boarded at Gallop Stables in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where she continues to ride three times a week on the nearby trails, or indoors in the winter.

Her children are now adults, her son Ben helping out with what became a family-run business with award-winning products sold at some of the largest markets and craft shows, as well as with wholesale and retail markets.

And by her side is her husband Vito Gelose, helping her with the business.

Hanson took her products to the Niven Road market in its early days, but since then, as her business has grown, she has become involved in some of the larger summer shows in Toronto and Ottawa, including the three-week CNE in August and Fall’s Falls in October. She wasn’t able to commute to the weekly farmers’ market in The Village, as convenient as it was just minutes from her Colonel Butler Crescent home, where she has a commercial kitchen set up in her garage.

But with those shows cancelled for the second year, she decided to return to the market, and she’s glad she did.

“It actually felt really amazing to be back with people. I’ve missed that. I like talking one-on-one with people. Selling online seems like a foreign thing to me, although we had to do it to keep the business going. I love the contact with people, engaging in conversation. I met lots of people I’ve known over the years. It was really nice to touch base with them, and I also met lots of newcomers to town.”

It was a good opportunity to reconnect with many of the farmers and vendors she’s known over the years, “lovely, grounded people,” she says. “It felt really good to see them again. Everyone is still helping each other out, like a family.”

At one point, she would travel to 50 shows a year, then whittled it down to 10 of the largest, but Hanson says she’s happy to be part of the local market again. “It’s a nice way to get out and still stay close to home. I feel like I’ve come full circle.”

For more information about Hanson’s range of products, visit Tracy’s Wine and Craft Beer Jellies at tracyswinejellies.com.
Keep yer hat on your head, the woodpeckers are out

David Gilchrist
Special to The Local

I can’t quite remember when I first heard that expression, but I think someone was calling it out a window to someone below. I sometimes use it on my grandchildren, to be greeted by strange looks! Indeed, when I hear the tap, tap, tap in the trees above, it becomes a habit to readjust my own hat. It is easy to become confused. The hairy woodpecker and the northern flicker I’m always on the lookout for a red-headed woodpecker but they seem to be scarce in this part of the peninsula.

The downy, hairy and red-bellied species can often be observed in your backyard, and it was in the backyard, on the ground, that I first observed two northern flickers a few years ago. Other species of woodpeckers, known to occur in Ontario are the black woodpecker, the pileated woodpecker and the yellow-bellied sapsucker.

We’ve been fortunate to have attracted a pair of downy woodpeckers regularly, a red-bellied woodpecker and at least one hairy woodpecker occasionally to our backyard feeders. I’ve even invested some money on special woodpecker treats for one of the feeders that, unfortunately, a couple of grey squirrels seem to enjoy as well. The woodpeckers make daily trips to the feeders and are great to observe.

The downy and hairy woodpeckers are a large bird, with longer beak than its smaller cousin. The tail feathers are also different, but that is often hard to see unless examining a photograph. The males of the downy and hairy woodpecker have a red patch on their head, which is lacking in the female. A lot of people, when they spot a red-bellied woodpecker, identify them as red-headed, but, although there is a patch of red on their head, it is not a full ‘helmet’ that you would see on the red-headed species. It’s an easy mistake, as the redfish belly on the other is sometimes hard to observe, and some birders feel this species is poorly named for that reason. The red colouration on the male red-bellied extends all the way to the crown, but doesn’t on the female.

I’ve found the northern flicker to be a most attractive and colourful woodpecker species. I first observed two in our backyard a few years ago through one of our bedroom windows. More recently, I spotted a single one on the side of the road near John Street and the Niagara River Parkway. I’ve never seen other woodpeckers on the ground before and, as it turns out, flickers are known to feed on insects on the ground. On a wander through the Niagara Shores area a few weeks ago, I heard a disturbance in a tree near the shoreline and found it to be two northern flickers flapping at each other. What I thought to be a mating ritual turned out to be a territorial dispute between two males.

The drumming sound created by the woodpecker when it is pecking at a tree is an obvious clue to their proximity. The fact that they can keep this pecking up for extended periods is made possible by a bone in their head called a hyoid bone. This bone, which wraps around the birds head, acts as a kind of shock absorber, and protects them from injuring themselves when pecking. They seem to prefer pecking on a hole in dead trees as the heartwood in the dead tree is softer. Also, many more of the insects and the insect larvae that woodpeckers eat are to be found in this softer wood in a dead tree.

The holes they create by pecking are used as nesting holes. If you hear a woodpecker drumming on metal fixture on your house, don’t worry. They may only be doing this to mark their territory or attract a mate. Fortunately, woodpeckers don’t peck at night. They are diurnal, and rest at night, but they may be another ‘early’ bird in the neighbourhood.

Another interesting feature of woodpeckers is their tongue. It tends to be very long and sticky — all the better to capture their favourite delicacies. They are also known to go to hummingbird feeders occasionally as their tongue can be used to get to the sweet syrup in these.

I have to admit, I’ve never observed this happen at the hummingbird feeder in our backyard.

Woodpeckers have an amazing climbing ability enabled by the fact that most of the species have feet that have two forward-facing toes and two rear facing toes (zygodactyl feet). These also serve to help them increase their leverage when pecking at a surface. Their rigid tail feathers help to keep them in place on a tree.

Well, with another weekend approaching, my camera will be in my hands and my hat will be firmly on my head as I search for the elusive red-headed woodpecker, or maybe even the pileated woodpecker.

As with other woodpeckers, the red-bellied woodpecker has expanded its range north, and is often found now in southern Ontario.

The red-bellied woodpecker has expanded its range north, and is often found now in southern Ontario.

This photo of a male hairy woodpecker shows a longer beak, about the same length as its head on this species.

A male northern flicker rests after a territorial dispute with another male. Males are identified by the black ‘moustache’ on either side of their beak.

A female downy woodpecker searches for food on a tree branch.

A male downy woodpecker hangs on to the underside of a tree branch. Males of this species, like the hairy woodpecker, have a dab of red on their heads. Note the shorter beak and smaller size body.

(Photos by David Gilchrist)
Friends of Fort George plan Canada Day celebration

Local Staff

The Friends of Fort George will offer Canada Day packages for the second year, to help locals celebrate Canada Day safely at home.

“We are very excited to be partnering with Parks Canada, and Willow Cakes & Pastries, to bring the community as many aspects of Canada Day as we can,” says Amanda Gamble, executive director of the Friends of Fort George. Willow Cakes & Pastries will be creating packages of six Canada Day cupcakes, that will be packaged with flags, pins, glow sticks, Parks Canada swag, balloons and more.

Canada Day packages can be ordered online through the Friends of Fort George gift shop at https://friendsoffortgeorge.ca/shop. Packages are $35 each and can be picked up from Fort George on June 30. Delivery is also available within Niagara-on-the-Lake for $6 per location.

Last year more than 200 packages were sold, says Gamble, adding the Friends of Fort George were “completely blown away by the community support we received.”

There are a limited number of packages available with a deadline of June 25 for orders.

The Friends of Fort George have also created the hashtag #CanadaDay-NOTTL, in hope community members will use this hashtag to share images of how they are celebrating Canada Day this year.

The Friends will be sharing images of Canada Day festivities from previous years through its social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), and will be creating some special content to be shared on Canada Day. “We hope that the community will join us as we celebrate the 154th anniversary of Confederation,” says Gamble, “and we can’t wait to celebrate the 155th anniversary with everyone in 2022.”

Fort George could use some help with summer program

Local Staff

The Friends of Fort George have received partial funding for summer employment positions at Fort George National Historic Site and Brock’s Monument.

“In a normal year, the Friends of Fort George have provided work for up to 15 and 20 students to work in our Gift Shop at Fort George, as heritage interpreters at Brock’s Monument, or as part of the Infantry/squad at Fort George,” says Amanda Gamble, executive director of Fort George.

“Last year, we were able to bring on four students, and this year, we will be hiring six students and are so excited to provide Niagara’s youth with this unique employment opportunity.”

Craig Burney was hired by the Friends of Fort George in 2013, and worked as an interpreter at Fort George for five seasons. “When I started working as a student at Fort George in May of 2013,” says Burney, “my colleague informed me off-hand that this would be ‘the best job you’ll ever have.’ He could not have been more correct. Beyond the immersive experiences of embodying history, with colourful uniforms, drums, canons, and fire-smoke, there is no singular experience I have accumulated that has done as much to broaden and enrich my understanding of Canada, its people, and the world we live in.”

Burney says there is no shortage of transferrable skills “cultivated passively and actively through being a summer student.”

Responsibility and care are key, he adds, “as you are required to maintain uniforms and equipment, and operate them properly. You will be working around artifacts and heritage objects. Likewise, you hone your interpersonal, rhetorical, dialectic, and how to connect with audiences from children to well-versed experts. From hundreds of spectators to one-on-one connections, initiative and skills improvement are facilitated, encouraged, and rewarded, too.”

To this day, Burney says, “I often still reference my experiences working as a summer student through the Friends of Fort George in professional contexts. If there is a situation I encounter, there is always a piece of knowledge or experience as a summer student that relates. This program has equipped me in a myriad of ways, and I am extremely thankful I could benefit from this experience, and give benefit to others through it, too. I know of no one who has not been positively affected by their experiences here — it truly is the best job I have ever had.”

But grants only cover part of the wages of staff, and for the six positions. The Friends of Fort George needs to raise more than $17,000, says Gamble. “Like all business and non-profits, we have been impacted by the pandemic and are requesting your help.”

Throughout the month of June, Canada Helps is running the Great Canadian Giving Challenge. For every dollar donated through Canada Helps, the Friends of Fort George will be entered to win $20,000.

Help the Friends of Fort George support Niagara youth with these unique summer experiences by making a donation at http://www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca/donate/index.html

One fundraiser ends, another begins for NNS

Penny Coles

The Local

As the Niagara Nursery School and Child Care Centre wraps up one very successful campaign, it launches another.

The board and staff have sent out thanks to the community members, we were able to raise over $10,000, which will be matched by an anonymous donor, bringing the total to over $20,000 in donations to support our nursery school expansion,” says executive director Candice Penny. “I am speechless, the community support has been so incredible,” she says, adding, “we are so fortunate to be part of such a caring and supportive community.”

But their efforts are not over. Throughout the month of June, Canada Helps is running the Great Canadian Giving Challenge. For every dollar donated through Canada Helps, Niagara Nursery School will be entered to win $20,000.

The Niagara Nursery School and Child Care Centre is committed to raising $10,000 toward the expansion, with a total projected cost of $2,018,889, and a goal of being completed in time for a September opening.

Help support the expansion program by donating at https://www.canadahelps.org/en/pages/niagara-nursery-school-expansion-fund/
**Mike Balsom Special to The Local**

Last Tuesday’s official opening of two shiny new courts at Memorial Park put an exclamation point on the previous weekend’s return of tennis in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte visited the court Tuesday afternoon, standing by as NOTL Tennis Club president Hugh Dow and club professional Shwama Macfarlane exchanged volleys, slaming brand new tennis balls across nets that had just been installed the day before.

Visitors to the park will notice a striking difference between the new courts and the four older, acrylic-coated cushioned asphalt surfaces, which were installed in 2012.

“We conducted a poll amongst the members to see what colour combination they preferred,” Dow explains. “The two choices were the green-on-green of the four existing courts, or the blue-on-green, which tends to be the colour combination that most of the major tournaments are now using. The results came back 70 per cent in favour of the blue.”

Though the new blue surface looks different, Dow is happy it is essentially the same as the established green surface that sits next to it.

“Court Contractors (of Mississauga), who built the courts for us, did a fantastic job,” Dow says. “They built the existing courts for us, too. We really wanted to maintain the same type of surface, which is why we were hoping they would be selected (via the town’s bid-and-tender process). They build a really good quality court!”

With the tennis competition for next summer’s Canada Summer Games scheduled to be played at Memorial Park, the blue courts make sense for a tournament of that magnitude.

“We’re looking at some possible renovations for the Canada Summer Games (next summer),” says Turcotte. “We’re bringing a report in June to talk a little bit more about them. There may be an opportunity to change the colour (of the older courts) to match!”

With the selection of Memorial Park as a host site for the games, Turcotte expects the Host Society to provide the town with about $40,000 for any changes, additions or improvements to Memorial Park.

The new courts opened on schedule, and came in on budget, says Turcotte.

“It’s a liquid asphalt installation, and it’s kind of special,” Turcotte tells The Local. “We knew it was going to stretch over two years. We contracted in the fall for the base, and you have to let the asphalt breathe a little bit. We knew we were going to paint it in the spring. We wanted to try to get them open for summer of ’21.”

Dow says club members have been effective with their praise of the new courts thus far. And all six courts have been busy since the province opened outdoor activities with some restrictions on May 22.

“The feedback has been very positive,” says Dow. “We’ve been pretty fully booked most of the time. Everyone’s anxious of course to try them out and to see what they’re like.”

Under current regulations, only singles games can be played on local courts. According to Dow, the bulk of the action amongst club members usually centres around doubles games.

“The majority of players prefer to play doubles,” he says. “There are many people who do not like playing singles. It’s a much more demanding game physically than doubles. As soon as we get clearance to play doubles we’ll begin our doubles leagues, which are Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings (men’s, women’s, and mixed leagues, respectively).”

With a boost this year in doubles play, Dow says the more than 75 members of the club expect those league nights will be more popular than ever. Dow says the more than 50 who have registered for the men’s doubles league are itching to compete.

“There is some impatience from a number of members,” Dow adds, “and a bit of pressure being put on the town to relax the rules and allow us to play doubles. We are aware that in Toronto they are allowing the community clubs to play doubles.

Indeed, research into the Gwendolen, Swansea and Central Tennis Clubs in the GTA shows them that being allowed to play doubles is a focal point of the club. Dow adds that doubles play is also being allowed at the Welland Tennis Club, as well as in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, though the Local was unable to confirm this at press time.

“All of the municipalities basically make their own decisions on things like this,” Dow explains. “All municipalities have different situations and different opinions. That’s why you get some inconsistent applications across the province. In Welland, they can play doubles, but they can’t put people on adjacent courts, apparently. “I sent (town CAO) Marnie Clackie the Toronto regulations,” he continues, “and asked her to take a look at them. She was very responsive, and said she would study them, and she would table them at the next Emergency Control Group (ECG) Meeting.”

That ECG meeting was held Monday morning. At press time the town was awaiting advice from Niagara’s medical officer of health on doubles play.

“We hope with that, and obviously we’ll be very grateful if in fact there is a change in the regulation,” Dow adds. “There will be a stampede to get on the courts, I can tell you.”

The public courts at Rye Street, St. Davids Lions Club and Garrison Village Parks are also open for play. Courts in those locations are used on a first-come, first-served basis. These parks are open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Users are reminded that groups are limited to five people, including members of different households, while maintaining physical distance.

**Walking for MS**

Local Claudia Gilchrist, supported by family and friends, participated in the Annual Walk for MS on Sunday. Gilchrist has been walking for MS for 20 years with a group called Golkie’s Gang in Welland, but due to COVID-19, the walk was virtual this year and people walked individually in their own communities. Sunday morning was cool but sunny, and she completed 8,000-plus steps on her walk through the Old Town. This year she raised slightly more than $3,000 with the help of her supporters, and over the years she has raised more than $24,000. The team has raised more than $95,000 for research into multiple sclerosis. (David Gilchrist)
NOTL Soccer Club plots path forward this summer

Mike Balsom Special to The Local

Barring any hitches that might prevent Ontario from moving into Stage 1 of the new Roadmap to Safely Reopen the Province, Niagara-on-the-Lake youth soccer will be back on local division pitches on June 21. It will be the first soccer action in local parks since 2019.

The NOTL Soccer Club released details of its upcoming season last week following months of board meetings. With ongoing uncertainty about government-imposed restrictions on outdoor play, it wasn’t easy to plan for the summer.

“We spent a lot of time trying to find a path forward based on the criteria that Ontario Soccer (OSA) put forth based on the provincial system of colour zones,” explains club president Ted VanderKaay. “Just when we had all that in place, we had to start from scratch with a blank canvas. We had to figure out all over again how to manage this reopening, without having true guidance.”

Last week, the club published a letter via their website and social media platforms outlining the tentative plans for this summer. The sport will be organized very differently from previous seasons.

For one, all players are invited to register for house league programs only. The travel soccer program has not been confirmed, as the club awaits direction from the Niagara Soccer Association. Those who are part of that program can transition if the local Niagara Soccer League does have a season.

As well, the structure of the club’s age divisions will be based on registration numbers. All house league players will be placed into training groups, rather than teams. These groups will be capped at nine or less so that a safe maximum of no more than 10 people in one group, including a coach, can be maintained.

Every week, each training group will have the same practice plan per division, coordinated by the league, distributed to session leaders (former coaches), and implemented at the same time. The club speculates that the training groups may change in size and scope as regulations allow.

With the province planning a three-week miniseason on each of the steps to reopening, that would mean by July 5, the club will be able to introduce teams playing games played between training groups, pending the rules of the day. Unlike previous years, though, no NOTL teams will be playing games in other communities through the informal interlock leagues usually set up for the older age groups.

“It has been a long journey for the club to get to this point. Much consultation with the towns parks and recreation department, the OSA and Niagara Region Public Health was necessary to effectively plan for a safe summer of soccer,” says Kevin Turcotte, manager of parks and recreation, who is adamant that the town of soccer that their child once knew about no longer will be possible this year.

“We cannot stress enough that this is our tenacious plan,” VanderKaay adds. “Our intent is to get out (on the pitch) as soon as we can, and this system provides us flexibility. However, this is all subject to regulations that are put in place by the Province of Ontario, and regulated by Ontario Soccer.”

“To register your child, visit notlsoccer.ca.
The Niagara District Airport Commission held its annual general meeting last week, releasing information about expected future growth.

Niagara District Airport to have major role in region’s economic recovery

Randy Klaassen
Special to The Local

As the COVID-19 pandemic begins to subside, the Niagara District Airport is positioning itself to be a major part of the region’s economic recovery.

At last week’s annual general meeting Robin Garrett, chair of the Niagara District Airport Commission, acknowledged the skill and expertise of Daniel Pilon, chief executive officer, in enduring the pandemic. With a small staff doing a lot of work, the airport is ready to get back into operations as soon as allowed, he said.

Garrett announced the intentions of the St. Catharines Flying Club, with its 90-year history, to be back in operations this week. Soon to follow will be Greater Toronto Airlines with their passenger service connecting to the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport on Toronto Island.

The three municipalities that own the airport are Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines. St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik affirmed the airport’s role in economic growth for tourism, the wine industry and international businesses.

The airport commission has engaged professional planner Rino Mostacci to develop a Master Plan for future development. Mostacci highlighted the region’s estimated population growth of 37 per cent over the next 30 years, which will need expanded air transportation services.

Mostacci outlined the airport’s proposal to change the runway known as 01/19 to a taxiway, to allow commercial development at the southwest corner of the airport. Also anticipated will be additional hangar facilities at the southeast end of the airport. A review of the terminal facilities, with an eye to expansion, will be needed to accommodate future passenger service.

Pilon reported that during the pandemic, Great Lakes Helicopters, based in Waterloo, has operated with success. In addition to Greater Toronto Airlines resuming service, there have been a number of other regional airline start-ups looking for facilities and servicing centres from which to operate. Pilon and staff have been working to ensure Niagara District is in a good position to be an attractive location.

Currently Niagara District Airport is one of 55 in Canada to have services of Nav Canada, which operates the Control Tower. While the Canadian Border Services Agency suspended services for international travellers last May, the resumption of those services is expected to enhance the airport’s viability for travellers, those at the AGM were told.

Pilon acknowledged the important role Ornge Medical Helicopters has in using Niagara District Airport as a patient transfer centre. Other emergency services include the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association, which supports Canadian Forces, 424 Squadron Search and Rescue.

Greg Wight, treasurer of the airport commission, reported that given the reductions of the past year, the airport’s financial situation adapted, and is in reasonable shape. While COVID-19 has been devastating for the aviation industry as a whole, Niagara District is in good standing to take advantage of the public’s pent-up energy to get moving again, those at the AGM heard.

This was the airport commission’s second annual meeting with representatives connecting by internet. Garrett concluded with anticipation of next year’s meeting being in person.