

The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



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notllocal.com June 4, 2020 Volume 2 · Issue 23



Chris Allen is a man of many talents, not the least of which is his skill for planting beautiful gardens and window boxes. (Penny Coles)

Bringing cheer to Queen Street

Penny Coles
The Local

Chris Allen is a man of many talents.

He could easily be described as a Renaissance man — someone who has a high level of skills in many areas, creative, and good at whatever he turns his hands to.

This week, and every week for the next five months, that means he can be found on Queen Street every day, from early in the morning when the street is quiet until he is finished his meticulous tending of the many window boxes and gardens he tends for his clients, and the beautification of the town he loves.

He's best known for the floral display that surrounds the Shaw Cafe, a scene that is sure to stop passersby with their cameras, but there are other businesses that benefit from his high standards, including The Epicurean, Serendipity, and a stretch of businesses along King Street — the Irish Harp, Simpson's Pharmacy, Grill on King and the

Bosley Real Estate office.

Allen spent a large chunk of his working life working for boat builders, when that industry was one of the largest in town. He started at Shepherd Boat Works, with their much sought-after mahogany boats; then it was on to Hinterhoeller Yachts, and finally C&C Yachts until it closed in the early 90s. They all produced exceptionally high-quality boats, and he had worked in every part of the plant, he says. "I'd still be there if I could. It was very rewarding."

Allen says when C&C closed, he had to ask himself what he would turn his hand to next. "I looked at what else would appeal to me. I know I liked the outdoors, and plants."

And NOTL "is a great gardening town," he says.

He has good clients — as many as he can handle — who let him do whatever he wants to do, "as long as it looks good."

And it's his nature that if he's going to do a job, he does it well.

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Farmers 'doubling down' on migrant worker protocols

Public health struggling with COVID-19 outbreak in St. Catharines

Penny Coles
The Local

Reports of COVID-19 outbreaks among migrant workers in other Ontario farming communities has local farmers "doubling down" in their diligence to protect their workers.

Coun. Erwin Wiens, who has taken the lead on the issue since the pandemic threatened

the arrival of migrant workers, considered essential to the agricultural community, told councillors Monday he has been in touch with some of the local growers. He reached out following the news that 17 employees at Pioneer Flower Farms in St. Catharines have tested positive.

That number was as of Tuesday, with more test results

pending.

Niagara's acting medical officer of health, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, says farm workers living in close quarters face a similar risk of the virus spreading as through family members in a household, suggesting they should still be keeping a physical distance when possible.

The migrant workers that have tested positive are now

isolated from the others, who have been divided into two groups, those considered at high risk because of their contact with those who have tested positive, and those at low risk, Hirji said.

Although there was some discussion at the provincial level about testing all migrant workers, Hirji said he believes "we're not there yet."

The public health department has contacted all farmers in Niagara to ensure they understand their responsibilities,

which include checking in with workers daily to ask if they have any symptoms, and making sure there are adequate quarters for self-isolating if necessary.

The local outbreak has been an opportunity to "learn some lessons" on how to reduce the risk of it spreading amongst other groups of workers, said Hirji, including the importance of being tested right away, with even mild symptoms.

Some people feel they can "just power through" the dis-

ease, instead of coming forward for testing, he said.

Pioneer Flower Farm owners have said their workers will continue to be paid while isolating.

"Everybody's on pins and needles," Wiens told every councillors Monday.

"Every operation with migrant workers has to follow all the protocols," including asking daily if they have symptoms. "Hopefully this won't happen

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Long-time retailer might not weather this storm

Penny Coles
The Local

Ruth Aspinall has weathered almost 30 years of ups and downs on Queen Street.

The impact of this pandemic may be the devastation from which there is no return, she says.

Aspinall and her husband Scott, now in long-term care at Upper Canada Lodge, are among the long-term business owners in the Old Town who helped build the popularity of

the main street during the last three decades. Scott, affable, well-liked and respected on Queen Street, was a fixture at The Epicurean, a restaurant that appealed to locals and visitors. Four years ago, when it was no longer safe for Ruth to keep Scott, who had been sliding into dementia for more than a decade, at home, she sold the restaurant, but kept Serendipity.

She's had other stores at other locations, and is now also part-owner of an art

gallery. When she had the chance to move Serendipity, which she opened 27 years ago, onto the main street into a 500-square-foot space at the corner of Queen and Victoria Streets, she jumped at it.

When she sold The Epicurean, she hung on to the store to give herself something to do, and to keep it going for "the great people who work here. I want to keep it going for them, but I don't know how long I'll be able to do that."

Last summer was great, she says, and she was optimistic she would see a repeat of that heading into this year.

With the arrival of COVID-19 and its impact on downtown businesses, she says she will give reopening a couple of months before having to make a decision about closing the store for good, although she hopes it doesn't come to that, for the sake of her staff.

She opened her store Friday, and although there were people on the street over the weekend, they weren't shopping. Her sales for the day were what she would have done in a couple of hours at this time last year, she says. "At this rate, it's just not sustainable. With the rent and taxes, we have to do enough in the summer to have money in the bank Dec. 31 to see us through the winter. I don't see being even close. At this point we can't pay the rent. I never thought this would happen."

Her landlord is taking advantage of the rent subsidy, she says, and that is helping enormously.

"We have a good landlord, very sympathetic, but

the subsidy is only for three months. And what is going to change?"

Everything that drives business on Queen Street, she says, including the Shaw Festival, restaurants, and tourists from the U.S., Europe and Asia, is on hold, with no way of knowing when that will change.

"At this time of year, the Shaw has had its openings, and the stores are crowded. It's unrealistic to think people are coming here and filling the stores. The day-trippers from Toronto are just not going to do it. They're coming here for a day out, not to shop."

There are three empty store fronts, there will likely be more before the season is over, "and there are no tenants lining up to sign leases," she says.

It took a few extra days to get the plexiglass installed for cashiers, says Aspinall — it's in short supply — and she is restricting the number of customers to four at a time, but there has been no lineup of customers waiting to shop, she says.

At least Aspinall doesn't have to worry about Scott.

He's being well-cared for at Upper Canada Lodge, and although his dementia has got to the point where he doesn't recognize his wife, she says he's still the happy, easy-going guy he always was, and for that she's grateful. "In that sense, he hasn't changed."

In addition to all the other expenses of being in business, she, like most tenants on Queen Street, has a "triple net lease. I pay rent, property taxes and maintenance. And we have no customers. We're all in this together. The agricultural sector, the Shaw, restaurants, wineries and all of Queen Street, we all support each other. Take one of us out of the equation and we all have a problem. We've all had our struggles, but nothing that stopped the world."

Aspinall has also been a business owner during the many times they've battled with the Town over the heritage tax rebate, from the time property taxes increased following the provincial move to market value assessments. The Town is again considering the tax rebate, but, says Aspinall, "it should have been done years ago."



Ruth Aspinall, a Queen Street retailer for almost 30 years, is not sure she'll be in business to see another summer. Gardener Chris Allen has been planting her window boxes for as long as she's been on Queen Street. (Penny Coles)

Gardens lush, colourful and bring cheer to passers-by

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His goal is always to ensure the gardens and boxes he plants look full, lush and colourful immediately, ready for visitors to town to admire.

And they do, he says, often stopping to comment.

He buys most of his plant material at Mori Gardens and Regal Florist, but this year, not all the varieties he usually plants were available, although he was pleased with the selection they had. He loads up his Taurus, he says, and gets everything planted in one week.

"I like my gardens to be eye-catching, really over-the-top, packed full. I have a creative style of planting, and it really does seem to work."

And although he has a distinctive style, he makes sure

each one looks a little different.

Once the planting is finished, he is downtown every day, watering, trimming, dead-heading blooms and making sure his plantings continue to look their best. "They have to look great for five months, and if anything happens to them, I can't replace them. I don't take a day off."

He is grateful to his clients that they all said to go ahead this year "and do it the way you always do," despite the fact they didn't know if or when they would be able to open.

It's definitely labour-intensive, he says, but it's become a tradition that he is determined to maintain.

As busy as he is during the five gardening months of the year, Allen finds time to pursue his other interests, especially in

the winter.

He is a collector of artifacts, with a love of local history, volunteering for the NOTL Museum's collection management committee. He is described by the museum as having "a keen eye for identifying significant pieces that tell the story of our town. An avid collector himself, he has donated hundreds of artifacts to the museum's collection over the years and has contributed to several of our exhibitions."

His love of collecting artifacts, and for town history, began when he was about 10 years old, he says, when he would search for cannonballs and other remnants of the area's military history. Over the years, as the town got built over two or three times, he says, they became harder to find, although

he didn't give up looking. One of the "odd jobs" he continues to do is digging cremation holes for St. Mark's Cemetery. He describes them as about 12 inches by eight inches, and almost two feet deep to allow for soil on top of a tall urn. "St. Mark's now has a designated cremation area, but many are placed in front of already-existing family stones which are all over the entire, very historic graveyard," he says. It can be difficult, given the many big, old trees and their roots, he adds, and on occasion runs into another previous early grave, or bones, since early records are not always accurate. "It's interesting work, as I often know personally who I am digging for . . . and you never know what might turn up."

He worked for the Shaw

Festival when it first arrived in town — lots of locals helped out and were involved in getting the theatre going, he says. He worked in sets and props, and also did a short stint in Toronto with the Canadian Opera Company.

Allen was also involved in the early days of the Niagara Pump House Arts Centre, and has restored the water pump outside the building a few times. He's been an artist all his life, he says, interested in designing jewelry, sculpting and wood-working, and has had his work on display at the Pump House.

More recently, he's been involved in a project to preserve the Teenie H, a fishing boat built in 1939 and one of the oldest still in existence locally.

This past winter, he says, he restored a 100-year-old Walter

Dean-designed Sunnyside Torpedo canoe, a very rare find, he says. It was in the rafters of a friend's garage, and Allen finally convinced his friend to part with it. After spending months "bringing it back to life," he expects he will donate it to the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough.

But for now, he's concentrating his time downtown, doing one of the jobs he loves. He especially likes the atmosphere early in the morning, when the streets are empty and quiet, except for the few locals out for their morning exercise, or walking their dogs.

"People come up to me and thank me for doing it, because everything looks so full, bright and cheerful. I just create the look — the business owners make it possible."

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Shaw head feels weight of responsibility

Penny Coles
The Local

When Tim Jennings speaks about the Shaw Festival, his commitment and strong sense of responsibility are evident — to the continued success of the festival, to all those who rely on it for their paycheque, and to the patrons who are missing it.

It's also quickly obvious, though, that the bigger picture also weighs heavily on the executive director of the festival. He feels deeply the impact of the festival locally, and the ripple effect of the cancellation of the season so far, in town and across the region.

Unlike the Stratford Festival and Toronto's Mirvish Productions, Jennings still has hope there will be performances on Shaw stages this season, but not before August.

"In keeping with the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's municipal order limiting organized mass gatherings," says Jennings in an announcement Friday, all plays and public events are cancelled until the end of July.

Jennings has been working with Lord Mayor Betty Disero,

who gathered the head of the Shaw, Paul MacIntyre of Vintage Inns, who is the chair of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, Del Rollo, a wine industry leader, and Richard Wall, president of the Virgil Business Association, to help the Town's emergency control group through the recovery period.

The need for the shutdown extension came as no surprise, Jennings says, and he agrees with it. "It is quite right to restrict mass gatherings, and the smart thing to do."

Financially, a forward-thinking insurance policy that covers disasters such as the pandemic, taken out when Jennings arrived at the Shaw in 2016, is helping to keep open the possibility of offering stage performances this season, he says. "It's giving us the resources to be able to go on in ways others haven't," he says.

In the meantime, another smart move of suspending contract workers and rehiring them as temporary, full-time employees under the federal wage subsidy program, has kept them close by, employed, and ready to return to the stage as soon as it is safe to do so, and

emergency orders from the Town and Province permit.

Opening to the public, even in some limited way, is important not just for the Shaw and its family, but to help jumpstart the Niagara economy, and to improve the lives and livelihood of the thousands of people who rely on and benefit from the tourism sector, says Jennings.

"Every day we look around and say, 'how can we help?' A lot of us are focused on making this easier."

Everyone is making the best decisions they can with the resources available, understanding the economic impact to the community as the recovery unfolds, he says.

There could be a tipping point when the Shaw may have to cancel the season, but there are so many moving parts that are out of their control, it's impossible to say when it would be.

Every day, he says, artistic director Tim Carrol is looking at the possibilities, and there are discussions about the many scenarios that will depend on when they're told they can open, and what they're able to



Shaw Festival CEO Tim Jennings is doing what he can to keep staff working and the community virtually engaged, hoping there will be live theatre before the season is over. (Photo supplied)

do — without having any way of knowing how much lead time they might be given.

And every day, Jennings is asked questions "I wish I had the answer to, and I ask for patience."

At any given time, he could have 100 different answers to each question, all dependant on factors out of his control, all the while it could be the one answer they have not yet considered, in response to a provincial announcement that is not what they have anticipated.

While they wait for that direction from the Province, the 80 artists hired back as education and community outreach specialists (ECOS) — or, as Jennings says, what they are calling the new ecosystem — are working at engaging the pub-

lic, strengthening the festival's connection to its community, by engaging Shaw patrons and developing resources for education partners through online events — initiatives Carroll was interested in implementing long before the pandemic.

"We see this as a huge positive coming out of this time."

While it's not the same as working toward onstage productions, says Jennings, the artists are happy to have the work that at least allows them to engage with the public.

Jennings says they've "pivoted pretty well — every time we come up against a new roadblock, we've found a solution."

But as "proud and happy" as they are to have maintained a connection to the commu-

nity, they're "desperate" to get back to what they do best, providing live theatre, abiding by whatever regulations necessary to keep people safe, not only for Shaw patrons but for the future economic recovery so many depend on. "We're working on doing that any way we can," says Jennings.

The Shaw Festival administrative and box offices are closed by provincial mandate until June 9. Ticket holders to cancelled performances will have the full value of their tickets held on their account. A small team of box office representatives is currently working remotely to contact ticket holders to discuss options such as holding money on account for future exchanges, converting the ticket value to a charitable donation or issuing a refund.

Library preparing for pickups beginning Monday

Penny Coles
The Local

Beginning Monday, June 8, members of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library will be able to pick up library books.

The curbside program is being run similar to book holds, with staff leaving the books outside on a mobile cart.

"People can drive up and grab their books, and it's completely contactless," says chief librarian and CEO Cathy Simpson.

Holds can be placed online, or by phone, she says.

Books can also be dropped off, and will be quarantined for 72 hours before being placed back on the shelves.

Members requesting books will be notified of a time to pick them up, and when they arrive at that time, will pull into the drive-through at the front entrance. Books will be labelled and waiting, and there is no limit on the number of books that can be picked up.

Holds can be picked up Monday through Friday, and there will be some evening hours Thursday for those working during the day, says Simpson.

Monday, the first day for pickups, is already fully booked, says Simpson. Pickups are 10 minutes apart, with about 25 arranged for each day, although more can be added if there is sufficient



Sarah Bowers is prepared to begin stocking a mobile cart with books ordered by library members, to begin pickup Monday. (Photo supplied)

demand.

"Staff are not all back full-time at this point," she says.

At this point, Debbie Krause and Sarah Bowers, both familiar faces at the library, have been called back to look after the pickup program.

There are also plans to deliver books to those who are self-isolating and can't get out

to pick them up, adds Simpson.

To place a book on hold by phone, call 905-468-2023 and leave a voicemail. Staff will get back to you, and can also help with selecting items.

The library is also offering curbside pickup of printing (through the Print From Home program, at notlpubliclibrary.org/copyprintscan.

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Heritage tax rebate to be considered for 2021

Audit committee searching for other avenues of relief

Penny Coles
The Local

After discussing a request from a group of merchants in the heritage district for a tax rebate program, members of the Town's audit committee recommended a consultant be hired to design a program for implementation in 2021.

The merchants are looking for immediate tax relief to help them during the closure and recovery period of the pandemic, concerned they may not survive with no Shaw Festival to draw tourists and no international travel to bring

them to town.

Most tenants on Queen Street have triple net leases, councillors learned, combining property tax, rent and maintenance on their buildings. Property taxes are based on market value assessment, the merchants told councillors in a letter requesting help, and that market value isn't applicable at this time.

The heritage tax rebate program was instituted by the Province in 2001, and has been before previous councils, "many, many times," said Coun. Allan Bisback at the audit committee meeting last

Tuesday.

Director of operations Kyle Freeborn told councillors the program would allow rebates of between 10 to 40 per cent, as decided by the Town, with the purpose of preserving and maintaining heritage buildings. The Region could participate but isn't required to, and the Province does offer a rebate if the municipality institutes the program.

In addition to the percentage, there is also a choice of which properties would be eligible for the rebate, both factors which would impact the cost to the municipality,

Freeborn explained.

All four councillors on the audit committee, which includes Bisback, Norm Arsenault, Stuart McCormack and Gary Burroughs, were in favour of adopting the program, but Burroughs said he wanted help for the merchants immediately.

He suggested councillors look at the merchants' property taxes. "They won't be able to pay them this year. There is no Shaw, and there is no potential for recovery. We need to act now."

Burroughs was the only councillor who did not sup-

port hiring a consultant for implementation of the program next year.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero was listening to the discussion, but is not a member of the committee.

She said she supports the program but believes it may not be the right vehicle for immediate relief, and asked the audit committee to come up with something that would provide help for store owners quickly, focusing on the immediate need of the tourism sector.

In addition to recommending the hiring of a consultant with a goal of im-

plementing the heritage tax rebate program as part of the 2021 budget, the audit committee supported a motion to have Freeborn and Bisback canvass other municipalities to look for methods of immediate relief for merchants, focusing on the tourism sector.

The committee also recommended that Disero and Coun. Wendy Cheropita, the municipal representative on the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce board, approach the provincial and federal governments to ask for urgent relief for merchants in the heritage district.

Risk of disease spread with workers living in close quarters

Continued from page 1

in NOTL."

It's devastating for the farms and workers who have contracted the virus, and it would be devastating if it happened here, he said.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero says she and Wiens talk almost daily, and so far haven't heard any news locally that would be concerning. "Our farming community, like our long-term care community, has really

stepped up. There have been no active cases (as of Tuesday), and I count my blessings."

The outbreak is the largest COVID-19 outbreak in Niagara, apart from long-term care homes, and was responsible for the majority of the 23 new cases reported in the region Monday.

Across Ontario, there was a jump of 404 new cases Monday, 81 of whom were migrant workers in southwestern Ontario.

At a news conference Monday afternoon, Premier Doug

Ford said he would be talking to public health officials, to ensure temporary farm workers get tested to keep them safe, and to keep the food supply chain safe.

CBC reported Monday a 31-year-old Mexican seasonal farm worker in the Windsor Essex area, who had been self-isolating in a hotel room, died Saturday due to COVID-19. The man had no underlying health issues, the medical officer of health for the area said.

Market selling flowers Saturday



Farmers' markets are now permitted to sell cut flowers, so Rose Bartel will be at the local Farmers' Market at The Village Saturday, with the beautiful flowers grown on the Bartels' Lakeshore Road farm. (File photo)

Celebrating in style



Local couple Marlene and Dick Heidebrecht celebrate their 46th wedding anniversary in style, by setting up a lovely picnic table at Newark Park complete with candles and flowers. Their dinner was delivered by Jovi Joki of The Irish Harp. The couple called it "coping with COVID," while supporting a local business at the same time. (Tony Chisholm)

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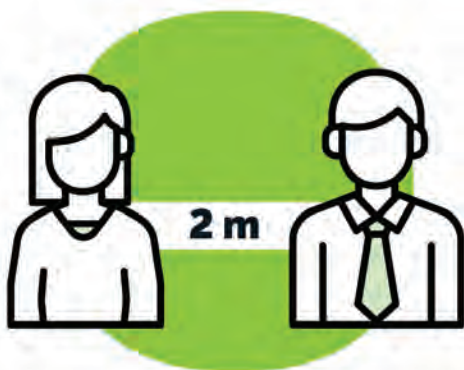
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EDITORIAL

The great, the not-so-great, and the truly ugly

This week Randy Klaassen, reader, contributor and supporter of The Local, sent us a link to an article about a community paper he remembers from his early days, living out west.

The paper has closed, and he was sad to see it go. He was pastor in Altona, the community the newspaper served, and also pastor to the founder of the paper, who he describes as “an amazing, quiet supporter of many people in the community.”

The article describes the role of the community newspaper, too often of days gone by, its columns filled “with the life and breath of the community; whether it broached topics on world or local news, community events, sports activities, marriages, deaths, employment opportunities, or advertisements – it was all there in black and white.”

Weeklies today still tend to stick to what they do best, telling local stories, leaving it to the dailies, and more and more online news sources, to deal with the rest.

While people may be turning to online sources for their news, and the large newspaper chains are struggling, community newspapers remain important locally. And never more so than during difficult times.

The article noted, “these changes in media consumption do not reflect the whole picture of the printing industry in general. Print is not dead . . . Even some community newspapers have thrived by not trying to be everything to everyone, but rather focusing on being really good storytellers of local stories. The future of print is bright!”

We hope so, and during this time, we love being able to share good news stories about our great locals. We have said before that we like to think of our local stories as “comfort food,” and we are proud to be able to deliver them to our readers, with support from the community and advertisers — we couldn’t do it without you. We feel fortunate, even through

this crazy time, that we have an opportunity to unite the community and help to communicate the messages our locals need to hear.

We can’t ignore the community concerns about this pandemic and its impact, which can be overwhelming. The not-so-great news helps us understand the reality of the world around us, but with so much negativity on social media and TV, it’s also a good time to try to focus on positive stories.

But first, we can’t ignore the ugly, heart-wrenching news that has come along at an already emotional time. It began south of the border, with the absolutely sickening and brutal actions of police officers. If we haven’t seen the video of what was done to George Floyd, we’ve certainly heard the details of his death, and all that has followed since, both in the U.S. and here, as citizens seek an outlet for the rage built up over lifetimes of injustice.

The Local heard Tuesday, and many of you will have heard by now, that here in Niagara-on-the-Lake, good citizens will also be protesting, peacefully.

As one organizer said, quoting Maya Angelou: “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

Those organizing the rally want to do better, and want us all to do better. They believe we must be awakened to the systemic racism around us, which many of us don’t see or recognize.

Here’s another quote, this one from George Bernard Shaw, shared by Julia Buxton-Cox on Facebook: “The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them.”

As awful as it is that some of us need to be hit over the head by recent actions to realize our indifference has been part of the problem, it’s a good news story in that we recognize we can do better.

The protest is being held at the Voices of Freedom Park, at noon this Friday, June 5. Like other protests held recently to demonstrate against racism, it will be a gathering of more than five people. Those attending are asked to wear masks, and respect physical distancing.

We have faith Niagara-on-the-Lake citizens will deal with hate by showing love; will demonstrate without violence, proving peace can be effective; and will work to conquer intolerance and indifference by spreading kindness. And because we need guidance, organizers are hoping local people of colour will be there to speak out.

Now, on to an example of love and kindness enriching us: the story of Doug Hunter, former organist for St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, playing hymns over the phone on Sundays for some of his friends, whom he knew were missing their contact with the outside world. It’s obvious he is enormously loved and widely respected in the community.

I was surprised when he called me Sunday afternoon, a busy time for him. But he didn’t call to chat. Instead, he played about 10 minutes’ worth of hymns for me. It was so moving — his thoughtfulness, the music, and the long-forgotten memories it awakened of the days I’d accompany my mother to church. Two of the hymns Doug played were among her favourites, and as I listened, it was as if my mother, gone for 35 years, was standing beside me in a church pew, our hymn books in hand, singing along with gusto, albeit both of us off-key. I teased Doug that I thought he must have thrown in a couple of Anglican hymns, and he admitted he had strayed a little from his usual Presbyterian repertoire.

His phone call was a reminder of the power of music to transport us to other times and places, and made me understand just how much Doug’s

acts of kindness must mean to his friends. I tried to thank him through tears that would not be stopped, but there were no words adequate to explain the comfort he gave me, along with the reminder that difficult times, and sad times, can also

be uplifting when we witness all the good that continues around us.

So please keep telling us your stories, the good ones and those that will help to make us better, and we’ll keep sharing them with our readers.

As the Town’s new message says, if you can’t stay home, stay safe, NOTL.

There are better days ahead, in so many ways.

Penny Coles
The Local

Wear a mask!



The Town is releasing a series of videos of locals in masks, encouraging the wearing of one in public, especially when physical distancing could be a problem. MPP Wayne Gates dons his, with the familiar Gates mustache. (Photo supplied)



Views from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

Gilmore Girls has engaged my interest with Netflix for quite a time. The series focuses on four generations of Gilmore Girls who struggle with large amounts of emotional baggage as they attempt to find the happiness that remains somewhat elusive. The characters in the several subplots, though often two dimensional, are all sympathetic. It is a potboiler, but I love it!

Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to go to the movies. He shares his opinions on what he is watching on TV, through “short and sweet” exclusive reviews written for The Local.



Kelly Bishop, Alexis Bledel and Lauren Graham are the Gilmore Girls.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake

LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community

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Our seniors in long-term care deserve respect and dignity



Wayne Gates, MPP
Special to The Local

One of the lessons I try to impart on my grandchildren is to always respect and value their elders. It's a simple lesson, and one that my parents instilled in me.

The report on the state of our long-term care homes from the Canadian Armed

Forces shocked and enraged anyone with a heart – our parents and grandparents living among cockroach infestations, alongside rotten food, not bathed for weeks, left in soiled diapers and crying out for help. For-profit care homes saw our loved ones as dollar signs and these inhumane 'homes' were the result.

These images shatter the idea that this province is properly respecting the seniors who built our province. Premier Doug Ford, for his posturing on this, cannot pretend not to have known there was a crisis.

Once again his actions do not match his words. We should all remember that Ford's first budget cut \$34 million from long-term care.

Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals under her should be ashamed to throw stones. They were the ones who tried to cancel annual inspections of homes in 2016 before public pressure forced them to reverse course.

What our province needs now is immediate action to fix the system so that more of our loved ones can live in dignity and be treated with the respect

they deserve.

Firstly, Ontario must dramatically increase inspections. Every care home that does not meet humane and comfortable living standards should be immediately taken under the control of the Province. For too long private for-profit homes have slashed our seniors' care in the pursuit of profits. These companies have lost their right to care for our parents and a full, independent judicial inquiry must allow their victims the space to speak and have their voice heard.

Second, the Province must immediately move to protect our seniors inside these homes and across Ontario. COVID-19 didn't cause the problem in these homes, but it has moved with devastating speed to take our loved ones from us. We could and should have protected our seniors, and the workers who care for them, but only if we moved faster and more strategically to get ahead of this virus. Ford's minister of long-term care, Merrilee Fullerton, who has been an advocate for private healthcare providers, should

immediately resign. The fact that it took the military to break this open just shows that the Ford government does not have the care or leadership needed to help our seniors get through this crisis.

Finally, we must put in place a community-based seniors care system that prioritizes care over profits. Seniors have spent a lifetime helping to build our province, and a better world. Now, it's our turn to take care of them with high-quality, dignified care based on the needs of each resident.

How did nature become owned by humans?



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

How has an ecosystem, something that has been around for 12,000 years or 180 million years, become deemed as ours?

And when we arguably need nature the most, how can all of that soil, rock, and bark, formed by nothing but natural processes and time, suddenly become off-limits?

It got me thinking, as Ontario is poised to reopen even more business and natural areas as a function of time this week.

COVID-19 has briefly bottlenecked us into a situation where we were forced to re-evaluate our relationship with the outdoors. When the various conservation areas, provincial parks, and other natural spaces in the region were systematically shut down, some people certainly felt a sense that something was taken away, as they may have felt about a gym, a favourite pub, or a service they valued. But it didn't make much sense when compared to a store. You own a business, you sell human manufactured goods, and you're often in an enclosed space without adequate spacing from people during the pandemic. The law has more obvious tan-

gibility over this human landscape, compared to the flowing creeks and fungi in the forests.

However, I was wrong. The higher tiers and organizations of our economy ultimately cover the whole spectrum of human operations. I'm not suggesting we're being controlled by some regime, or discrediting the very real seriousness of the virus, but hear me out.

Ownership ultimately means control.

In this context, control doesn't have to come weighted with a negative connotation. We absolutely need control in some of our natural areas in order to protect them. It looks more awkward now than ever before, though.

Silly humans. Let's remove 90 per cent of Niagara's original forest coverage, let's have a few governing bodies own the remaining parts, which will remain protected under their watch, but barricaded at their order.

I've watched the transition unfold. More parking meters, more permits and fees required for activities that were once seen as ordinary, and now, the reminder that these places forged by glaciers, erosion, and photosynthesis belong to someone, at least on paper.

With all due respect to the various authorities and governing bodies, one thing that became blaringly apparent to me is that nature is owned.

Even Crown land in Ontario got "shut down." That, to me, says a lot.

I am not oblivious as to why many natural areas are regulated and controlled. Let's suppose our protected areas are like people, for a moment. Some are so unbelievably attractive, that others just can't help but feel magnetized in masses. Hey, does that sound like a waterfall in our area?

Others are so sensitive, that it would be not only unruly, but damaging, to have sever-

al people swarm the spot at once. These are your spongy wetlands and the walls of the Niagara Escarpment.

Others are respectable and keep a low-key profile, these areas where people go for lunch breaks and have been defecating on in NOTL when washrooms were closed.

Some of the most biodiverse and beautiful areas around here contain an asterisk; violent rapids, crumbly cliffs, and potentially dangerous wildlife. Those who have

chosen to buddy up with or purchase these lands have also signed up for the traits that come with them.

There are a few that don't fit the mould. These are the natural spaces that are often larger, seen as unattractive or too risky for people to properly experience. Even on a non-lock-down day, they are rarely visited and are often silent treasure troves for biodiversity.

I missed filming some critical spring transitions along Lake Erie for another Hidden

Corners film, because even the most remote areas I planned on exploring were legally closed to the public.

As I sit at my desk, an ant on a giant ball spinning around the sun, I know my place in the world and in nature. During these challenging times, have you thought to yourself during all of this, "what's my place out there, and how am I reminded of that?"

Stay safe, stay healthy, and enjoy the newly-opened trails and parks where you can.



This view in Four Mile Creek Conservation Area, tucked in behind Virgil, offers a peaceful short hike anytime. (Owen Bjorgan)

PEACEFUL ANTI-RACISM RALLY NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

DATE & TIME:
Friday, June 5, 2020
12 p.m.

LOCATION:
Voices of Freedom Park
244 Regent St., NOTL



How local senior copes through pandemic

His wife is nearby, at Upper Canada Lodge

Penny Coles
The Local

Andrew Henwood is feeling pretty optimistic. Grateful, even.

Most mornings he wakes up feeling happy, he says.

He is concerned for his wife's health, and knows she isn't happy — that weighs heavily on him, but he feels fortunate she's safely tucked away at Upper Canada Lodge, receiving good care.

Self-isolating isn't a problem, he says. At 81, he has enough to do around the house to keep him busy, including a significant project to improve his work shop, and a massive amount of outdoor work. "Gayle used to do the gardening, and I'd do the house maintenance. Now I'm trying to do it without her."

He gets up at 6:15 a.m. and is totally exhausted when he quits at the end of the day, although always with a sense of accomplishment, he says.

He also has several hobbies he enjoys, including painting and wood-working, and family phone conversations with two daughters and grandchildren, living on different continents — one in Britain and the other in Switzerland.

"I'm pretty good at isolating," he says. "I'm not a gregarious person. I'm not always good with people — I have a habit of saying the wrong thing."

His one worry is Gayle, who has Alzheimer's, and since October, has been in Upper Canada Lodge. She is unable to look after herself, requiring 24-hour care, and Andrew could no longer look after her. He brought a health-care worker into their Johnson Street home, but that didn't work well for either of them, and he was happy when he was offered a spot for Gayle close to home.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic meant visitors were prohibited from long-term care homes, he had a daily routine that included visiting Gayle from about 9:30 a.m. until noon.

"I hadn't been doing much painting, but I've taken up the brush again recently, doing little postcard-sized paintings to take to Gayle," he says.

He's reduced his grocery

shopping to once a week, and is enjoying cooking and walks on the Commons.

When self-isolating and physical distancing began, he felt, "life is in hand. We are indeed fortunate."

Once visiting at Upper Canada was no longer allowed, his routine included taking his regular long walks past the lodge, and stopping to wave at Gayle through a window. That is no longer allowed either — completely understandable, he says — and he is left with talking to her on FaceTime, although he has planted some flowers she can see from her room, and when he goes over to water them every couple of days, he can still wave.

She has been handling the lack of visits well, understanding the need for the lockdown, but she's not happy where she is.

Gayle knows him, still remembers friends and family, and enjoys hearing about them, he says.

"Alzheimer's is not a cookie-cutter thing," he says. "Every patient is different."

Gayle has difficulty conversing, yet she is fully aware, takes in everything, has her opinions and still has her memory, which some people find bewildering, says Henwood.

He is accustomed to her not saying much when they're on the phone, and having to hold up the conversation from his end. He walks around the house showing her paintings, talking about them, showing her what he's doing, and she reacts with smiles. Or he'll show her photographs that one of their daughters has taken, and read her messages from the family.

He cannot help but worry. He sees signs she's going downhill, "but there is absolutely nothing I can do about it."

Gayle, he says, "is stoic, strong and courageous, but she's very much alone, during much of the day and through the night. There is nothing I can do. And nothing they can do either," he says.

Worse, he has no idea when it's going to change, and when he'll be able to visit — there is no end in sight regarding the opening of long-term care homes to visitors, no way



Andrew Henwood and his wife Gayle, in better times. (Photos supplied)

of knowing when the light at the end of the tunnel will be reached.

Andrew said when he first heard he would no longer be able to see Gayle, he understood it to be an obvious, necessary measure to keep residents safe. "I absolutely agree with all the measures they're taking. I applaud them in every way — they're doing everything right."

But that doesn't make it easy.

He recently put one of his postcard paintings in the mail for her. It's of a clock that sits on the buffet in their dining room, with a loving note attached.

He knows she's in the best place possible, he says, getting good care, and is "profoundly grateful she's so close to home."

He says he's trying to take a lesson from Gayle, to be stoic and courageous as she is. "I'm determined to be strong for her."

However, he feels they are both in need of a visit, of the personal, quiet companionship they've enjoyed in the past, and hope that isn't in the too distant future.

"I'm confident I'll one day be able to go out the door, visit her again from 9:30 to noon, and possibly go back to tuck her into bed at night. I know we'll be fine."

In the meantime, he says, "I'm surprised sometimes by how happy I am, under circumstances that are not ideal. It's a good life."



A Johnson Street resident, Andrew Henwood has painted several of his neighbours' homes.



Andrew Henwood has taken up painting again, and made this postcard-sized painting of a clock in their home for Gayle.

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Sunshine, beautiful view draw people to waterfront



Local photographer Fred Mercnik snapped this photo of a couple walking their dog by Queen's Royal Park and enjoying the warm weather Sunday, while others took advantage of the park and the view, appearing to be following rules about physical distancing and restricted gatherings.

Thanks, valu-mart



Phil's and Hendriks' valu-marts are now allowing cloth bags in order to reduce the plastic impact on the environment. There are a few guidelines — shoppers may not use the bags to gather groceries, they must use a cart, and they must pack their own groceries. Staff will not pack personal bags or containers. They also ask that shoppers please wash their bags and containers after every use to ensure the safety of everyone. (Karen Skeoch)



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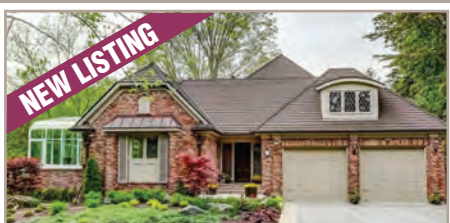
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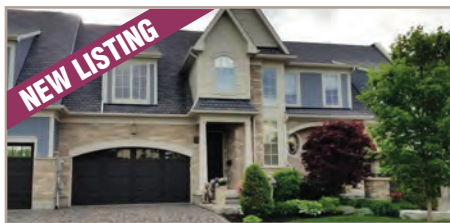
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Work on Heritage Trail to begin this week

Penny Coles
The Local

Work will begin this week on the first stage of revitalizing the Upper Canada Heritage Trail between John and Charlotte Streets.

The project is being funded through donations collected by a Town committee formed last year, with a goal of preserving and rehabilitating the trail along the old rail line, from John Street to York Road, following the historic Erie and Ontario Railroad along Concession 1. This was one of the first railroads in the province, and was used for over 100 years.

Many of the donations have come from supporters in town and from people whose homes back onto the trail.

Heritage trail committee vice-chair Tony Chisholm says there has been some confusion amongst residents in the area who were concerned, once they saw some workers on the trail cleaning up trees, that it was going to be paved.

The three-metre-wide trail will have a fine crushed stone surface. The project is expected to take about four weeks to complete, weather dependant.

Committee members researched trail surfaces, and

had “a strong negative reaction” to the idea of paving, he says.

The crushed stone has a more natural look, and is fine for wheelchairs and cyclists, as well as pedestrians, he says.

The committee has had a large quantity of stone donated by Walker Industries. Whether it’s enough to complete the first stage, or even a portion of the rest of the trail, they’ll find out as the work proceeds, says Chisholm.

Town roads department staff will do the work, which was scheduled to begin this week, paid for by the funds the committee has raised. The rest of the trail rehabilitation will be completed as staff is able to schedule the time to do it, he says.

Neighbourhood resident Heidi Stubbings, whose home does not border the trail, is concerned for those who do live adjoining it. Her issue is not with the surface, but “the entire undertaking. I’m very worried it will bring undue traffic to the area, and all that entails,” she says, wondering why it couldn’t have been cleaned up a little, with the removal of fallen trees, but virtually left as it is. “It’s a lovely plan, in theory only,” she says, worrying about the issues it might create from an influx of tourists.



Catherine Hunter, with Morgan, and Barb Gelb, with Lake, walk their Vizsla dogs on the Heritage Trail, popular with dog walkers. (Tony Chisholm)

One resident looking forward to seeing the work completed is JL Groux, who lives close by and uses it regularly.

“The trail definitely needs some rehabilitation and improvement for people to enjoy its usage,” he says.

It has been done very successfully elsewhere, such as the former railroad between Fort Erie and Port Colborne, says Groux, and will allow more residents to use it than if it were to continue in its

current rough stage, impassable in some areas. As a user of the trail on foot and on bike, Groux says he’s seen it deteriorate over the last 15 years, and has offered to help maintain it.

“I have some time to donate to clean up, trim, and help maintain the trail, or any other useful tasks,” he says.

The Heritage Trail is also used by a local equestrian club, as well as hikers and cyclists.

“Thank you to everyone who has generously donated towards this trail rehabilitation,” says Lord Mayor Betty Disero, in a recent announcement that the work would begin this week. “I’m so proud of our residents and community partners for valuing transportation connectivity, and taking pride in the heritage legacy of this Town. A big thank you to the Heritage Trail Committee members for their dedication to this project. A job

well done.”

Repairing it to make it once again attractive as a recreational trail was originally taken on as a legacy project during Canada 150 celebrations.

Trains brought prosperity to the town of Newark. Hotels were built, industry was growing and farmers used the railway to transport their products to distant markets.

The era of the trains ended in 1959, and the tracks removed a decade later.

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Churches caring for communities during closure

Penny Coles
The Local

This time last year, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church volunteers would be in the midst of preparing for their annual Strawberry Festival.

Festival chair Julie Hunter says by now, there would have been several meetings of the planning committee. Strawberries, barbecue favourites, beverages, yogurt, short cakes, ice cream, and crepes would have all been ordered, and books, collectables and antiques would have been gathered to sell.

The jam committee would have been busy producing jams, mustard and peach and pepper relish. The talented local entertainers would have been booked and confirmed for show time, and "the congregation would be praying for good weather, and a day filled with community fellowship."

The Strawberry Festival has been "a well-oiled machine" for more than 35 years, "and it feels very strange not to be planning or preparing this spring."

The event provided an opportunity for residents to "gather and enjoy the harvest, local talent and each other. It also attracts and welcomes many tourists as they join us in this celebration as well," says Hunter.

Its cancellation due to the pandemic will have a significant impact on church finances, she says.

The festival is a primary fundraiser for St. Andrew's, and generates about \$35,000 to \$38,000 in revenue each year, which helps fund the general maintenance and expensive upkeep of St. Andrew's three historic buildings — the church, church hall and manse.

"We like to make sure, since the community supports us, that we keep everything in shape for the community to enjoy."

Outreach and other church programs are funded from a separate budget, and so far, those are not endangered, says Hunter. "At least we're hoping not — at this point we don't know how long this will go on."

One benefit to come from the physical closure of the church, she says, is that when services became available online, rather than just an audio version for those shut-ins who were not able to attend, they were able to watch and feel a part of the service.

Also moving forward with technology, the Sunday offerings can be made by e-transfer, which will help with continuing to finance church programs.

Without the strawberry festival money, some improvements may have to wait, but several projects have been completed in recent years to keep the buildings in good repair, said Hunter.

"St. Andrew's appreciates all the past support we have received from our community and tourism for the Festival and look forward to next year, whatever that may look like. In the meantime, we ask that our gen-

erous NOTL community keeps supporting our local retailers, growers, and first responders," says Hunter.

From a revenue side, this is expected to be a "pretty dismal" year for most local churches.

Updating the situation of Niagara-on-the-Lake churches, Coun. Gary Burroughs says they have "a drastic year ahead as far as finances are concerned."

Churches are closed, and "unfortunate financial issues are coming up," he said.

The St. Andrew's Strawberry Festival in June, the July Cherry Festival at St. Mark's in July and St. Vincent De Paul's August Peach Festival have all been cancelled, as have some of the music events that use local churches for concert venues, such as Bravo Niagara! and Music Niagara. Also, weddings, which add to church revenues, have been postponed.

In the Anglican church, Burroughs said, "we're working with the diocese to see what kind of funding is possible."

As a long-time member of St. Mark's, although Burroughs can speak of the Anglican church's handling of the COVID-19 shutdown of services, and the cancellation of major fundraisers, he stresses the focus is on doing what churches do best — looking after the well-being of parishioners.

"I'm pretty sure all churches are doing pretty much the same thing," he said.

St. Mark's is sending a weekly email, News to the Pews, to all parishioners giving updates on where they can get help if they need it, and the same information is mailed every week to those who don't have email.

A group at St. Mark's, called the Calling and Caring team, continues to make calls to each parishioner every week to see how they're doing, and if they need anything, he added.

St. Mark's has a new interim minister, Peter Wall, for four months as the church transitions to a permanent replacement. It remains closed, with livestreamed services on Wednesday and Sunday.

"The church is looking beautiful, as volunteers, self-distancing, continue to clean up so that when we are able to open, we will be ready."

St. Mark's is asking its parishioners to donate to Newark Neighbours to help in their outreach, he said.

Terry Choules, co-chair of the mid-August St. Vincent de Paul Peach Festival for the last five years, says he and his wife were quarantined after a return home from Portugal when the festival committee members began discussing cancelling the 33rd annual event.

At that time, the Olympic Games, to be held late in July, had been cancelled, and it was becoming obvious that the pandemic would not be over any time soon. "Little by little, things were closing," he says, and it soon became obvious that even if events re-opened, there would

be a need for physical distancing, which would not have been possible for the organizing of the festival or the event itself.

"We have a lot of visitors, and it would be too close quarters. And most of the people working on it are seniors. We didn't want to take a chance on anyone getting sick."

Two of the staples, and money-makers for the fund-raising event, are the old books and white elephant sales. They especially posed a problem because this is the time when the items for those sales would be donated and sorted, and it was not a good idea to have people touching them.

"Some activities had already been arranged and had to be cancelled, but everyone was really understanding. Ours is the third church event of the season, and the others were already cancelled. So much of the planning and the preparation is done in the time building up to the festival, and we really didn't want to take any chances."

The funds raised, usually about \$15,000, have always gone to maintenance and repairs on the Davy Street church hall, says Choules. This year, there were going to be some improvements to the driveway, and there may be enough money left over from past years to go ahead with it, or it may have to wait. The committee hasn't had that discussion, and will when it's safe for them to meet again.

The bigger disappointment is having to cancel an event that was well-liked by the community, and also popular with visitors, who would plan their annual trip to Niagara-on-the-Lake to coincide with the Peach Festival.

"We have a lot of people who look forward to it. There are buses that come from the States, but we don't know about the border closures. And the Town has all its facilities closed until the end of June. We couldn't wait until July to make a decision."

Like all churches, St. Vincent is closed completely. Those who want to participate in mass doing it online from the Cathedral of St. Catherine of Alexandria in St. Catharines, says Choules. It livestreams masses on YouTube seven days a week at various times.

The Niagara United Mennonite Church hasn't had its spring fair for a few years, said youth Pastor Chris Hutton — instead, last year it decided to have a pot luck picnic in front of the church. It was intended as a gathering for families, friends, and passers-by — anyone who wanted to stop for a bite to eat was welcome, and they had a "really good turnout." There was no charge for food or kids' face painting — it was a "gift to the community," not a fundraiser, but some people left donations, he said.

Instead, this spring, says Hutton, "I took a page out of the playbook for the province of British Columbia, and we're organizing an event for our church called The Big At-Home Picnic. After our service online, we're inviting people to picnic inside or



Volunteers Trudi Watson and Earle Waugh keep to physical distancing rules while they do some cleanup in the cemetery at St. Mark's. The church is closed, of course, but the gardens, and the cemetery, still needs tending. (Donald Combe)

outside of their home, and then post those pics on Facebook or Instagram. We're also doing a live video on our Facebook page that people can watch during the picnic, that will have people from our church sharing and playing some songs for people to enjoy."

The church is also putting community recipes together for people to experiment with on the day of the picnic, he says. "We're pretty excited about it."

The church has been pushed by the pandemic to move forward with technology, and is able to offer services, meetings and activities for youth online that parishioners can participate in, using Zoom, "which way surpasses what can be done on YouTube," he says.

"People can gather, watch, pray, and chat together. It's a great way for people to gather."

It's something they had talked about doing for the future, but when COVID-19 closed the church, "we had to learn very quickly."

Hutton said the church is trying to find a balance between reaching seniors who are not ready to embrace technology, and the young people who see it as the way of the future.

"The reality is this is how people are going to engage in communicating," he says. If the church ignores it, he adds, "we face the prospect of being irrelevant."

They are being challenged, he says, to provide for the needs

of the seniors and the "delicate balance" of seeing the future and not ignoring the younger generation.

The church "is being proactive rather than reactive, saying 'here's what we need to do, now how can we do it?'"

And in the process, the youth pastor has discovered, young people who are helping to develop the technology "like the challenge of including the seniors."

When they're given the ability to express themselves, they gravitate toward inclusivity, he says.

And with the arrival of COVID-19, they are embracing technology that will "cast a wide net" with their parishioners.

"Life is still happening," he adds.

Canadian Infantry going ashore during the Normandy invasion.

JUNE 6, 1944

D-DAY

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TONY BALDINELLI
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
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Jim Gay leads the Eden High School band through a rehearsal. (Mike Balsom)

Virgil musician, teacher retires from Eden

Mike Balsom
The Local

Jim Gay had second thoughts about retirement on May 19. That was the day Premier Doug Ford announced that Ontario's schools would stay empty for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

As the veteran music teacher says, though, these were very fleeting second thoughts. Once he sets his mind to something, it's pretty final.

He admits, however, that he feels the need for closure. To that end, he plans to return to Eden High School in the fall, if it's open by then, to volunteer with the band and perhaps help out in some of the classes.

Gay's 28-plus years of teaching have taken him from Grimsby's Grand Avenue Public School, through 11 years at Beamsville District Secondary, to his longest stint in one building, the past 15 years at Lakeport, then Eden High.

It's been a rewarding career, and to observe him in class is to see someone who truly loves his students, and truly loves what he does. But a career in teaching is something Gay never imagined until an influential Mohawk College instructor suggested it.

The Niagara Falls native says his love of big band music was instilled in him by his parents. As early as Grade

4, he remembers picking up the recorder and being able to play simple songs almost immediately. As a high school student at Westlane Secondary School, he enrolled in music class and decided on the saxophone, mainly because of his parents' love of the instrument. Like he did with the recorder, he remembers playing songs on the saxophone on his first day in class.

At 17, his affinity for music and his experience as a member of the school's award-winning jazz band led to his first professional gig. He was hired as part of the horn section with a local group, the Rubber Band, for a New Year's Eve gig, earning \$140 for the night.

That began a string of 40-plus years as a professional musician, including about seven years with pianist Doug Mundy in the house band at the Prince of Wales. For much of that time, of course, he was also teaching full-time and raising his four children with his wife, Chris.

After Westlane, he enrolled in the Applied Music program at Mohawk College. It was an encounter with instructor Dave McMurdo, a member of Rob McConnell's Boss Brass and a fixture in the Canadian jazz scene, that served as his 'aha' moment.

"I was walking through the halls one day between classes," recalls Gay. "He

pulled me aside, and he said, 'you know, Jim, you could do the teaching gig if you really wanted to, you have the patience for it.' And then he walked away."

The seed was planted. A couple of years later, Gay enrolled at Brock University, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a major in music and a minor in history. Brock's Faculty of Education was his next stop, and he was hired to teach at Grand Avenue, before he had even finished teacher's college.

respected him. I can remember playing saxophone solos with the jazz band, and no matter how nervous or uncertain I was with how good it was, Mr. Gay just got right into it and grooved along and clapped and cheered."

In his last year at BDSS, he was assigned to teach Grade 9 applied English, she remembers. "Mr. Gay went through most of his life with an undiagnosed learning disability, and has great difficulty spelling, so teaching English seemed like quite a challenge. But with all

“ He had this amazing way of making everyone feel at ease and welcome. ”

Victoria Culp

Two years later he made the jump to high school, signing on to teach music in Beamsville. He remembers his 11 years there fondly. One of his BDSS students, Victoria Culp, is now a French teacher with the DSNB. She remembers Gay as an incredible human, both enthusiastic and motivating.

"He had this amazing way of making everyone feel at ease and welcome," says Culp. "Everyone liked and

the Mr. Gay enthusiasm we knew and loved, he dove right in, and learned right along with the kids as he taught them."

When he moved to Eden in 2006, it coincided with the start of high school for his oldest child, Stephen, now 28 years old. Jim has had the unique opportunity to teach all four of his own children (in addition to Stephen, there's Mitch, 25, Lauren, 21 and Matthew, 19). They all studied music

under their father, with the two youngest following in his footsteps with the saxophone.

At first, Gay's timetable was split between Lakeport and Eden. When the former school closed, he got to work building up the instrumental program at the latter. It flourished under his direction.

Eden also offered Gay the chance to combine his focus on spiritual matters with his love of teaching music.

Jordan Duerrstein, a 2009 Eden grad now a minister at The Meeting House Waterloo, remembers Gay as an honest, humble, open and approachable teacher. A very talented musician himself, Duerrstein is still influenced by his music teacher today.

"Outside of the classroom," says Duerrstein, "Jim was able to share his faith in really simple and clear ways. To be able to teach in a professional capacity, but to also be able to share who he was as a person of faith (during chapel) was something that was really cool to see."

As Jim moves into retirement, he'll be handing the reins of the music department off to Derek Stickney and Eric Mocchio. He is certain that they will work hard to continue to inspire students to excel through music education.

In the meantime, the

Virgil resident will take a few more months to decompress, to hopefully travel, and to excitedly await the birth of his second grandchild in July.

Once gatherings larger than five are allowed by the Province, his former students will have plenty of chances to catch up with him around the region. About six years ago, he enlisted his son Stephen to play the drums for a new band that debuted for his and Chris's 25th anniversary. Generation Train has given him a chance to work on his singing chops, while inspiring people to dance to songs from the 60s through the 90s.

And he'll continue to accompany the Niagara Rhythm Section when bandleader Steve Goldberger calls. He also hopes to return to his Friday night James Gay & Friends gig at the OLiV Tasting Room at Strewin Winery.

As he says, "most of my professional career has been as a 'gun for hire' for various bands, or as a solo saxophonist in a dinner music kind of setting."

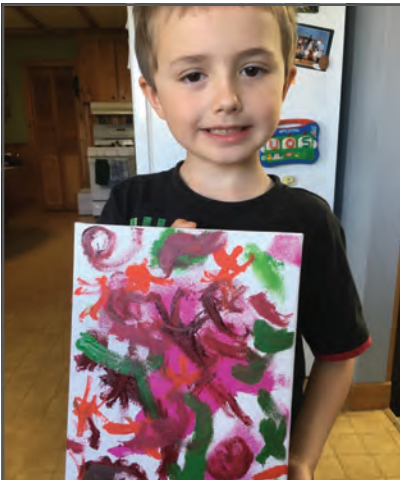
Which takes him to where he had to be later in the afternoon he spoke to The Local: standing outside of Morse and Son Funeral Home, playing *My Way* as a horse-drawn carriage took a friend's mother for her last ride through the streets of Niagara Falls.

SCHOOLS CROSSROADS PUBLIC SCHOOL

Crossroads students learning at home



Grade 4 student Marek Baranski takes the volume challenge in math, using Lego. (Photos supplied)



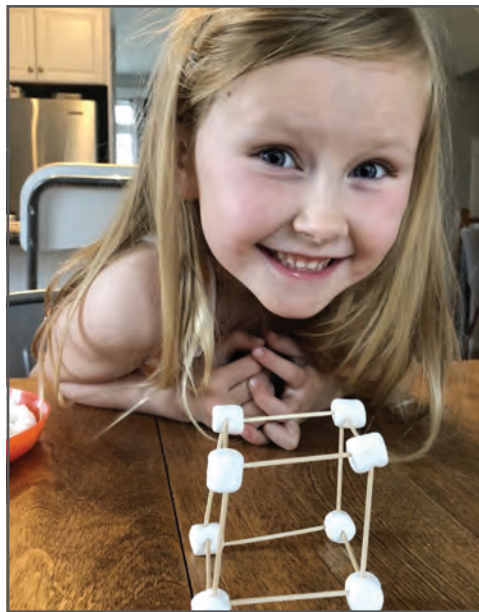
Noah Saxton displays the artwork he did for a class art gallery.



Mann Gill creates an 'emotions portrait,' with items collected from nature.



Grade 4 student Lauryn Friesen tests out her science project, a homemade periscope she made using materials found around the house.



Students Lyla-Grace Palmer, Kayla Thwaites and Alice Geachin make 3D shapes they're studying in math.



Alanna Kroecker learns about measurement and weight by packing for a trip to the Mayan Riviera, which she is studying in social studies.



Bryce Duncan is creating kindness, making rocks to leave in the community.



Grade 1 student Brody Baerg displays a device he made to show the use of wind energy.



Emma Stewart and her dad Adam Stewart build a 'Tower of Terror' for Emma's Lego challenge.



Grade 1 student Addien Corry-Danieluk wrote a letter of thanks to essential workers at this time.



Kindergarten student Zenen Boissonneault compares the capacity of water in different glasses.



Grade 2 student Jon Velsink takes his letter of thanks to essential workers to the post office.



Grade 6 student Alanna McEwen and her siblings Jackson and Callum Meyer make and test paper airplane models, measuring flight distances for a science exercise.

LOCAL SPORTS

Friesen back to racing, in truck and modified series

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Competing in his virtual race car over the first two months of the pandemic “just wasn’t cutting it” for Niagara-on-the-Lake native Stewart Friesen.

Luckily, he had a couple of real big-block modified race cars to tinker with at his New York State home base.

So, when word came that racing in both the Short Track Super Series and the NASCAR Gander RV and Outdoor Truck Series were resuming two weeks ago, he and his team were ready, and raring to go.

On May 18, his Halmar Friesen Racing team loaded up

and headed south for his first six races of the season, five with his #44 modified and one with his new #52 Toyota truck. Racing is a family affair, by the way, as his wife Jessica would also be driving her #1 Halmar modified on the dirt tracks during this southern swing.

Their first stop was in Brasstown, North Carolina, where they were to compete in the Short Track Super Series Return to Racing. Running in front of empty stands, Stewart spun in the third lap of the 40-lap race, causing a pile-up that he admits was his fault. But he recovered, took the lead with 10 to go, and held on for the win on his first night out. Jessica did not race in the feature.

Back on the same track the following evening, Stewart picked up where he left off, quickly driving to the front of the pack. On lap 24, however, he got caught up in a four-car tangle and was forced to hit the pits for repairs. He clawed back into the race for a third-place finish. Jessica, finished 18th.

From there, it was off to Cherokee Speedway in Gaffney, South Carolina, where Stewart picked up his second Short Track Super Series win in three days. His move down low in the bottom lane put him in the front on lap 28, where he remained for the next 12 laps to capture the checkered flag. Jessica was 15th across the finish line.

The next stop was at the



Stewart Friesen (centre), with his wife Jessica, their son Parker and the Halmar team in the champions’ circle after a successful race.



Stewart Friesen races the #44 modified in Louisiana, where he finished third in two events. His wife Jessica finished fourth and fifth. (Photos supplied)

Halmar truck shop in Statesville, North Carolina, where Stewart and his team were to hitch up his new Toyota for his first NASCAR Truck race of the season.

As in South Carolina, NASCAR’s NC Education Lottery 200 at Charlotte Motor Speedway, would be run to a mostly-empty venue.

“It’s definitely different,” he says. “The truck race was pretty odd, just the limited time at the track, and not having all the fanfare before the race, but once we got to the race, it felt like any other race.”

His #52 Tundra is emblazoned with “Thank You Health Care Workers” on the hood, a tribute to those on the front lines during the COVID-19 crisis. His team is owned by Halmar International, a construction company from New York City. During the downtime before the trip south, Stewart and his team used their truck hauler to deliver food to four different food banks in Long Island, Connecticut and Maryland.

“It was cool to use our race team to help give back a little bit,” he says. “We had a full-

blown 53-foot, NASCAR semi truck hauler right in the middle of the Bronx. It was a little stressful for the drivers, but the people absolutely loved it.”

The success of the previous weekend did not carry over to the truck race. “We had some brake problems that we fought with all race long,” Stewart explains. “And we struggled with some handling, obviously, without practice and qualifying (laps). We kind of went at it blind. We made some good adjustments, and were charging back through, then a lap truck (driven by Jesse Iwuji) broke up, and we got tangled up.”

Friesen settled for 30th in the field of 40 trucks.

Next stop for the Halmar Friesen team was at Chatham Speedway in Louisiana last weekend, where he would be back on the dirt track with the #44 modified for the Corona 32 Saturday, and the Corona 75 the following evening. He capped the southern swing finishing third in both events, his first in front of racing fans since February 21. Jessica followed closely, placing fifth on Saturday, and fourth on Sunday.


“Louisiana is open for business,” says Stewart. “The past two races have been packed houses. It’s been really refreshing to get to mingle with the fans and kind of get back to normal.”

After the weekend, Stewart, Jessica and their young son Parker inched their way back home to New York state to catch their breath after a taxing, but successful, whirlwind trip.

“It’s been fun. We’re wrapping up a two-week tour here, and we’re burned out, but it’s been great to get back to normal, get back to work, and to get back to our lives.”

He is back in the south by now, getting ready for NASCAR’s Vet Tix Camping World 200 at Atlanta Motor Speedway this Saturday, June 6, with the successes of the trip down south leaving him feeling confident.

“The last couple of weeks have been refreshing,” he reflects. “We’ve obviously done a lot of work at both shops, the modified shop in New York and the truck shop in Statesville, so it felt good to get some races under our belt, get a couple wins, and we’re looking forward to keeping it going now.”



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Warm weather brings out boaters



With the arrival of good weather, the NOTL Sailing Club has been busy getting boats in the water. Tony Chisholm was one of those anxious to get out on the water Monday, and snapped these photos for The Local.

LOCAL CLASSIFIEDS

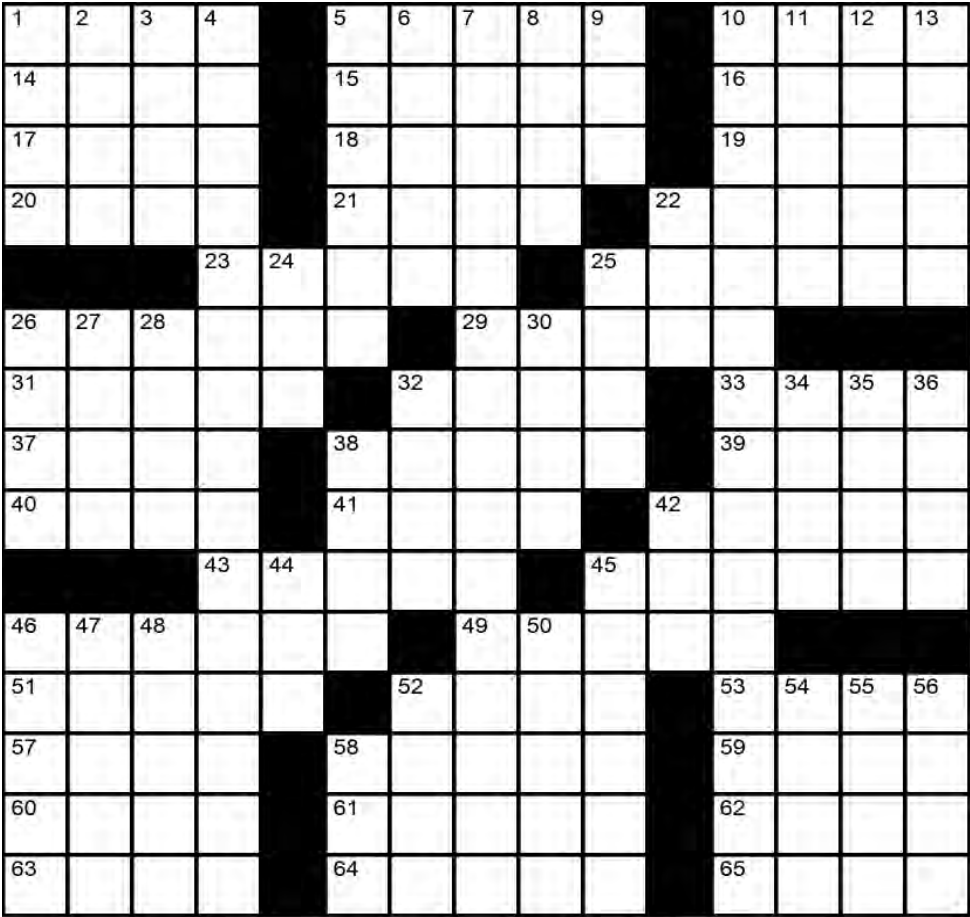
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- Across:**
- 1 Depositors' protective grp.
 - 5 Fruitcake
 - 10 Jane Austen matchmaker
 - 14 Bind
 - 15 Uma Thurman's ex --- Hawke
 - 16 Give temporarily
 - 17 Arabian chieftain
 - 18 Lightweight cord
 - 19 Breathtaking organ
 - 20 Against
 - 21 Large bundle
 - 22 Lamp scamp?
 - 23 Bit of broken pottery
 - 25 To do with mail
 - 26 Strainer
 - 29 Whisky distiller --- Walker
 - 31 Appears ominously
 - 32 --- Chanel
 - 33 Actor and rapper Mike ---
 - 37 Wheat flour in India
 - 38 For example, brogues
 - 39 Harvest
 - 40 Hits lightly
 - 41 High-efficiency lights, briefly
 - 42 Enigmatic quotemaker Yogi ---
 - 43 Corpse
- Down:**
- 1 Type of market
 - 2 What Rhett didn't give
 - 3 Brenda Lee's "--- True?"
 - 4 Yuletide
 - 5 Home beverage center
 - 6 Fighting an enemy
 - 7 Old acquaintance
 - 8 His last word was "Rosebud"
 - 9 Unity
 - 10 Large landmass north of the Canadian mainland
 - 11 Launch
- 45 Luxury accommodations
 - 46 Dozing
 - 49 Wet season
 - 51 Place
 - 52 Work the land
 - 53 Records
 - 57 Cookware
 - 58 Military blockade
 - 59 "... sting like ---" (Ali)
 - 60 Therefore
 - 61 Kofi ---
 - 62 Brief message
 - 63 Red light gas
 - 64 Office in training
 - 65 Writing table
- 12 Passion
 - 13 Theatrical backer
 - 22 Smallest Indian state
 - 24 "--- So Fine" (old Chiffons number)
 - 25 Advantages
 - 26 Fuss
 - 27 Scintilla
 - 28 Former Mississippi senator Trent ---
 - 30 Summer refreshments
 - 32 Top cook
 - 34 Cheeky
 - 35 Shave
 - 36 Health farms
 - 38 Thin potter's clay
 - 42 Top and bottom of a hamburger
 - 44 Senator --- Cruz
 - 45 Noiseless
 - 46 Colorado resort
 - 47 Stockpile
 - 48 Dismiss
 - 50 Pond problem
 - 52 S N L comic --- Fey
 - 54 Double-reed woodwind instrument
 - 55 Obtains
 - 56 Search
 - 58 Cold War U S A F arm

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Sunday, June 21 @ 4 p.m.
Celebration of Nations

Thursday, June 25 @ 7 p.m.
Yellow Door Theatre

Sunday, June 28 @ 4 p.m.
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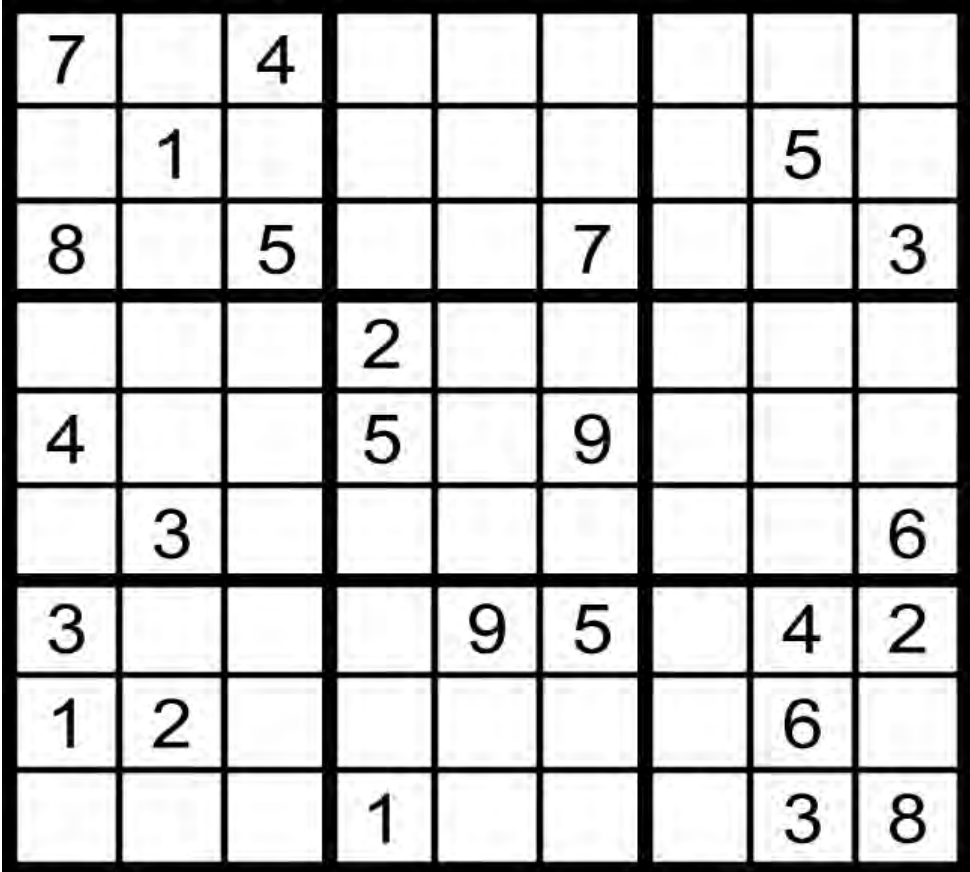
PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from
May 28, 2020

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 F D I C, 5 Wacko, 10 Emma, 14 Lash, 15 Ethan, 16 Loan, 17 Emir, 18 Twine, 19 Lung, 20 Anti, 21 Bale, 22 Genie, 23 Sherd, 25 Postal, 26 Filter, 29 Hiram, 31 Looms, 32 Coco, 33 Epps, 37 Atta, 38 Shoes, 39 Reed, 40 Pats, 41 L-E Ds, 42 Berra, 43 Stiff, 45 Suits, 46 Asleep, 49 Rains, 51 Stead, 52 Till, 53 Logs, 57 Pots, 58 Siege, 59 A bee, 60 Ergo, 61 Annan, 62 Note, 63 Neon, 64 Cadet, 65 Desk.

Down: 1 Flea, 2 Damm, 3 Is it, 4 Christmas season, 5 Wet bar, 6 At war, 7 Childhood friend, 8 Kane, 9 One, 10 Ellesmere Island, 11 Mount, 12 Mania, 13 Angel, 22 Goa, 24 He's, 25 Pros, 26 Flap, 27 Iota, 28 Lot, 30 Ices, 32 Chef, 34 Pert, 35 Pare, 36 Spas, 38 Slip, 42 Bun, 44 Ted, 45 Silent, 46 Aspen, 47 Store, 48 Let go, 50 Algae, 52 Tina, 54 Oboe, 55 Gets, 56 Seek, 58 S A C.





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