Since the pandemic threatened the spread of COVID-19, farmers in Ontario have taken the lead on the issue of worker protocols. "Doubling down" in their diligence to protect their workers, farmers have been working tirelessly to ensure the safety of their employees. The local growers have reached out to all their workers, asking them to continue to be paid while staying isolated. Reports of COVID-19 outbreaks in migrant worker communities have been ongoing, and the local growers have been working to ensure that all workers are tested and isolated promptly. The migrant workers that 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, "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 disease, instead of coming forward for testing, he said.

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

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, "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 disease, instead of coming forward for testing, he said.

Pioneer Flower Farm owns a large chunk of property in the 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’s "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.

Continued on page 2

Continued on page 4
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

Continued from page 1

He has a goal to ensure his plantings continue to make it possible. “At this time of year, the heading blooms and making 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 re- cords are not always accurate. “It’s interesting work, as I get to 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 Pumphouse 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 Pumphouse. More recently, he’s been involved in a project to preserve the Tenne, a fishing boat built in 1939 and one of the oldest still in existence. This past winter, he says, he restored a 100-year-old Walter Dean-designed Sunnyside Tor- pedo can, doing one of the jobs he loves. He especially likes the atmos- phere 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.”

Long-time retailer might not weather this storm

Ruth Aspinall has also been a business owner during the many times they’ve battled with the Town over the heri- tage tax rebate, from the time property taxes increased fol- lowing 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.”
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 psyche, and to the patrons who are missing it.

It’s also quickly obvious, though, that the bigger picture also weighs heavily on the ex-ecutive director of the festival. He feels deeply the impact of the festival locally, and the rip-ple effect of the cancellation of the season so far, in town and across the region.

Unlike the Stratford Fes-tival and Toronto’s Mirvish Productions, Jennings still has hope there will be performanc-es on Shaw stages this season, but not before August.

“In keeping with the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake’s pro-mi-nor order limiting orga-nized mass gatherings,” says Jennings in an announcement Friday, days when public events are cancelled until the end of July.

Jennings has been working with Lord Mayor Betty Disero, putting a Department of Transportation pick-up 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 on-line, or by phone, she says. Books can also be dropped off, and will be quarantined for 72 hours be fore 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. Pick-ups are 10 minutes apart, with about 25 arranged for each day, although more can be added if there is sufficient 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 li-brary, have been called back to look after the pickup pro-gram.

There are also plans to deliver books to those who are self-isolating and can’t get out to pick them up, adds Simp-son.

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 print-books through its Home program, at nodigital library.org/copyprintscan.

Library preparing for pickups beginning Monday

Penny Coles  
The Local

Beginning, Monday, June 8, members of the Niaga-ra-on-the-Lake Public Li-brary 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 on-line, 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.

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The library is also offering curbside pickup of print-books through its Home program, at nodigitallibrary.org/copyprintscan. 
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 tourism activities.

Heritage tax rebate to be considered for 2021

Freeborn explained.

All four councillors on the audit committee, which includes Bobbuck, 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 support hiring a consultant for implementation of the program next year.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero was listening to the discussion, but was 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 implementing the heritage tax rebate program as part of the 2021 budget, the audit committee supported a motion to have Freeborn and Bobbuck 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 farm 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.

Celebrating in style

Local couple Marlene and Dick Heidebrecht celebrate their 40th 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)
We’re Making a Difference to Keep Each Other Safe from COVID-19

As businesses begin to reopen, we all need to continue our efforts to protect each other.

Practice physical distancing. Stay two metres away from others.

Wear a face covering when physical distancing is a challenge.

Wash hands thoroughly and often.

Inside or out, stay safe. Save lives.

Learn more at ontario.ca/coronavirus
Paid for by the Government of Ontario
The great, the not-so-great, and the truly ugly

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

EDITORIAL

This week, Randy Kraassen, reader, contributor and supporter of The Local, sent us a link to an article about a community paper he remembers from his early years in Altona.

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 awesome, quiet supporter of many people in the community.”

The article describes the role of the community newspaper, too often of days gone by, in its columns filled “with the life and breath of the community; whether it breached 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.

Not everyone 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 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 . . .”

Print is not dead. . . Even some community newspapers have thrived by not trying to be everything to everyone, 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 local towns. 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.

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

The protest is being held at the Voices of Freedom Park, at noon on this Friday, June 5. Like other protests held recently to demonstrate against racism, it is likely to 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, and 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 Sunday during the COVID-19 pandemic 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 thought of us during the pandemic as 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 to be happening around us.

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

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 emotion-al 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 pothol-er, but I love it!

The Niagara-on-the-Lake

The trusted voice of our community

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Mental Health and Addictions Access ( Toll Free) 1-866-550-5205

KIDS HELP PHONE
Service for youth 1-800-668-6686 (Crisis Line) kidshelpphone.ca

Alcoholics Anonymous
Meetings every Wednesday evening 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. 1-651-734-1677

Gamblers Anonymous
905-351-1616

Assaulted Women’s Help Line
Mobile calls to: #SAFE (#7233) 1-866-863-0511 (Toll Free)

Crime Stoppers
1-800-222-8477 (TIPS) niagaratips.com

Text 274637 (CRIMES), keyw0rd: Niagara, then your tip

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

DonDonald Combe is a to share his opinions on retired English teacher who loves to go to the movies. through “short and sweet” for movies unavailable- exclusive reviews written for The Local.
Wayne Gates, MPP
Special to The Local

One of the lessons I try to impart on my grandchildren is 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 cockroaches, infestations, rotten food, dirty diapers and coronavirus risks for weeks, left to soil themselves and cry 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 Bjorgman
Special to The Local

How has an ecosystem, something that has been around for 12,000 years or 180 million years, become deemed 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 tangibility 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. Some are so unhesitantly 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 several 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. Your local wetlands or the local marshes. Heck, does that sound like a waterfall in our area?

In this context, control seems like the only way that our protected areas can be protected. It’s the only way that we can protect our natural areas in order to protect them. It looks more awkward now than ever before, through.

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 baricaded 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 glaringly apparent to me is that nature is owned PEACEFUL ANTI-RACISM RALLY
NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

DATE & TIME: Friday, June 5, 2020
LOCATION: Voices of Freedom Park
244 Regent St., NOTL

Staying 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 Bjorgman)
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’ll 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 grandchil- dren, living on different con- tinents — one in Britain and the other in Switzerland.

“I’m pretty good at isolat- ing,” he says. “I’m not a gre- garious 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 work- er 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.

In the meantime, he says, getting pretty optimistic. Grateful, even.

But that doesn’t make it easy.

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 cook- ie 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 re-
acts 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 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, nec- essary measure to keep resi- dents safe. “I absolutely agree with all the measures they’re taking. I applaud them in every way — they’re doing every- thing right.”

But that doesn’t make it easy.

He recently put one of his postcard paintings in the mail for her. “It’s 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 circum- stances that are not ideal. It’s a good life.”
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)
Catherine Hunter, with Morgan, and Barb Gelb, with Lake, walk their Vizsla dogs on the Heritage Trail, popular with dog walkers.

Work on Heritage Trail to begin this week

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.

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.

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.

He 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 dedicate 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.
The Niagara United Mennonite Church is also planning to hold a picnic ahead of the annual Strawberry Festival in June, the July Cherry Festival and the mid-August St. Vincent de Paul Peach Festival. To be held late in July, games, to be held for a few years, said youth director Paul Peach Festival for the last time last year it decided to have a potluck picnic in front of the church. It was intended as a gathering for parishioners to connect with the Peach Festival. 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.

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. 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.

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Jim Gay leads the Eden High School band through a rehearsal. (Mike Balsom)
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 Kroeker 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.

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

Grade 4 student Addien Corry-Danieluk wrote a letter of thanks to essential workers at this time.

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

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 Bratscott, 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 checked flag. Jessica was 15th across the finish line.

The next stop was at the 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, NASCA’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 Jessey hewitt) 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 Chauffeur Speedway in Louisiana last weekend, where he would be back on the dirt track with the #44 modified for 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 on now, getting ready for NASCA’S VP the Camping World 200 at Atlanta Motor Speedway this Saturday, June 6, with the success 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.”

Warm weather brings out boaters

With the arrival of good weather, the NOTL Sailing Club has been buzzing with activity, with the NOTL Sailing Club has been buzzing with activity, with 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.
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