The construction on Niagara Stone Road is an annoyance and an inconvenience for residents, and it is having a negative impact on businesses. (David Gilchrist)

Virgil construction impacting businesses

Penny Coles
The Local

With road construction through Virgil the talk of the town these days, many residents and businesses agree Niagara Stone Road needed to be fixed, but some are questioning the level of disruption and whether the construction is being handled as efficiently as it could be.

The most significant impact is to local businesses who depend on the traffic through Virgil during what should be their busiest time of year. Erin VanBussel is the general manager of Silversmith Brewing Company, right in the heart of the construction zone that began in the spring.

It is severely affecting the numbers of people who drop in for a pint, she says, especially tourists to town who are being led by their navigation systems through an alternate route, bypassing Virgil altogether.

“We’re seeing a huge decline in the number of guests,” she says. “Nobody knew what to expect when this started. Originally we were told it was going to pause in the summer, but a whole new proposal meant that it would continue.”

Silversmith’s patio was moved from the side of the building, where it would have been exposed to the dust and dirt of the construction, to the back. But business has still been impacted, says VanBussel. “Our guest count for June showed we were down 18 to 20 per cent. There was some rain on Saturdays, so that may be a factor. But typically at this time of year the patio fills up first and people would come inside if it was full. Now it’s the other way around — people come inside first.” She did ask if the sign at Four Mile Creek Road, which says local businesses are open, could include the names of the business-

Penny Coles
The Local

It’s been the support of the community that has kept Barbara Worthy going since Sunday, June 25, the day her 34-year-old son Liam Neumann went missing in Twelve Mile Creek. Nevertheless, she can’t imagine a future without her “super smart, big, beautiful, bad/good boy.”

“There was nobody I would ever want to spend time with, nobody I would ever want to travel with, or have more fun with,” Worthy told The Local sitting in the backyard patio, built by Liam, behind her Dock Area home. “We were super good pals, even though we were both dramatic and could argue a lot.”

Neumann, who had been living with his father Ron in St. Catharines most recently, went out with his beloved dog Brody on a dinghy in Twelve Mile Creek that day. The waterway runs between the city’s Western Hill and Glenridge neighbourhoods. It’s known for its strong current, which is regulated by Ontario Power Generation.

There were reports that Liam was seen at the shore of the creek below Rodman Hall where the currents pick up speed at the turn. Brody was still on the dinghy, which started to float out from the shore. Neumann apparently tried to rescue his pet, but fell into the water.

The dinghy floated toward Henley Island with Brody still safely on it.

Liam Neumann and Barbara Worthy (Photo supplied)
Parking meters ‘a huge problem’ in town

In January, most machines in the area stopped accepting credit cards and are now operating on coins or through use of the Honk Mobile app, which users can download and then pay through their credit card. A report to council on June 27 says the town’s current parking machines stopped accepting credit cards earlier this year due to aging infrastructure and new credit card payment protocols. The town’s machines, installed about 10 years ago, only have magnetic stripe readers, while newer payment protocols require chip readers and pin pads to authorize transactions.

“As a result, the town was forced to discontinue the use of credit card payments at its existing parking machines,” staff said in its report. According to staff, the parking machine vendor provided little notice to the town about a discontinuation of the necessary parking machine hardware.

The report says the municipality investigated updating the current system with its parking machine vendor, but the vendor was "unable to update the existing parking machine equipment" as they had exited this sector of the business. The lack of notice provided by the vendor gave the town "no time to replace the machines before the machines ceased to work for credit card payments," reads the report to council late last month.

In May, the town relocated four parking meters that still accept credit card payments to busier and more visible locations in the Old Town. They were moved from Wellington Street, by the former hospital. O’Connor argues that credit cards being a main option for guests to town should be a priority, and that using funds from the municipal accommodation tax to make improvements should have been considered. A motion she brought forward suggesting these steps was defeated at the June 27 council meeting.

"Knowing our demographics, I thought credit cards should also be a priority," she said, adding that having the Honk Mobile app as the focused option for now will continue to cause problems for people such as U.S. visitors who may not have data on their phones on this side of the border.

"I think it’s a really big problem for tourists," she said, also noting that many who make trips to town are in their senior years.

NOTL Chamber of Commerce president Minerva Ward told The Local that the local parking has become a huge problem for the town. Her office gets "quite a lot of complaints," she says, as do those who volunteer to greet visitors through the Ambassador program, with their kick set up by the Courthouse steps.

“We keep change in our office for those who can’t access parking meters any other way,” Ward says. She is discussing possible solutions with the town that can be implemented now, rather than wait until new meters are installed, she says. "It’s very concerning to see people aggravated when they come to town. Our Heritage District has been rated one of the top 50 attractions to visit. People plan to come to NOTL and have a lovely day, and the first thing they’re met with is difficulty parking. I’m concerned their aggravation is going to cost us our ranking.”

In 2022, the town collected about $2.3 million in parking revenues, said staff. More than $1.4 million of that amount was brought in through credit cards, while almost $600,000 was collected through Honk Mobile. Slightly more than $240,000 was collected in coins from machines that accept them.

This information demonstrates that credit card technology is still the dominant source of parking payment and a form of payment that users currently prefer," says the report. Toronto resident Ashley Rodriguez arrived at a municipal lot on Queen Street Monday ahead of spending a day in town.

He previously had the Honk Mobile app on his phone but had since deleted it. "You’ve got to have a simple way of paying," he says, attempting to redownload the app. "It’s not very user-friendly — and it’s a deterrent.

The town says long-term solutions will need to maintain credit cards, coins and other new payment technologies, such as Apple Pay and debit/credit tap, and look to take advantage of online payment technology.

Council has directed staff to include parking machine replacement as part of upcoming budgets, and to continue educating and guiding people toward the existing online platform, Honk Mobile.
Barrier needed to stop people getting into turbulent water

Continued from page 1

Barbara Worthy describes her son Liam as someone she loved to spend time with. (Photo supplied)

Meanwhile, Neumann was missing until he body turned up in the creek on July 1. It took another nine days for police to confirm that the body was indeed Liam.

Worthy has been living every parent’s worst nightmare since June 25. Even so, she is determined to make something good out of her beloved son’s death in the form of advocacy for water safety.

Worthy paints a picture of a brilliant, modest young man who could surprise gatherings with his favourite party trick.

“He would stand up at the keyboard and play it out while everything was going on around him,” Worthy adds, “smiling that he loved there about ‘him’.”

End, “Valencia adds, “smiling while everything was going on around him. He just took a white cloth off the end of the night, and they sat there and played it out.”

In those boxes sit note-book after notebook that Worthy says document so many moments in her son’s life since he was in a skiing accident at 13 years old.

“He had just started Grade 9 at NDSS,” Worthy says. “He suffered a brain injury and we almost lost him. They also found a benign tumour that had to be drained. His recovery lasted about 18 months. His memory was affected, so he began taking notebooks with him and writing everything down.”

Despite the brain injury, Worthy claims Liam, a global traveller through his work, was bright and vibrant. She calls him the best teacher she has ever had.

“I wouldn’t have ever known what was going on in the world if it wasn’t for him,” says the long-time CBC performer, writer, producer and director. “He brought the world to me in a way that made it so exciting. He could point to anywhere on the globe and tell you exactly what was going on there. He couldn’t be stumped.”

The mother and son often went camping in the Parry Sound area together, where she marvelled at Liam’s ability to start fires in the rain and cook fantastic meals over the hot coals.

“We cabin-camped every year of his life in the same place,” she says. “No water, no power. Just the two of us. It was some of our most precious times together. When he came back from Africa we went up there. We’d go kayaking, fishing. Next one of us is a strong swimmer but he always felt comfortable near water.”

Worthy said they both always got a little scared in deep water, and she made him put his life jacket on before they went out. He even had a life jacket for Brody. That’s part of what makes his loss so difficult for her.

“What was he thinking that day?” she wonders. “He loved Brody. I, and I know he was guilty of breaking the rules. But why isn’t there some kind of barrier to stop people getting past the buoys (past Rodman Hall)?”

Worthy has begun collaborating with Whirlpool Jet Boats founder John Kinney, who braved the Class V rapids of the creek in his kayak during the search for Liam’s body, on the plans for a water safety foundation. She has promised that funds raised via a GoFundMe campaign created on June 29 in memory of Liam will go toward those efforts. As of press time, almost $26,000 had been pledged.

“The hardest thing I’ve ever had to do is write his obituary,” says Worthy. “Me, a writer, at a loss for words. He was my shining light. I can’t imagine managing so much fun, so many good times with anyone else in this world.”

A service of remembrance for Liam will be held at St Mark’s Anglican Church at 2 p.m. on Monday, July 31, followed by a reception at Addison Hall. Interment will take place at St. Mark’s Church Memorial Gardens.

Barbara Worthy describes her son Liam as someone she loved to spend time with. (Photo supplied)

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Urban design committee rejects King Street hotel

Carrie Gleason  The Local

The town’s Urban Design Committee is recommending that council reject the proposed Parliament Oak hotel development on King Street in the Old Town.

The applicant, Two Sisters Resorts, is asking for official Plan and zoning bylaw amendments to allow for general commercial use on the site of the former Parliament Oak hotel, currently earmarked for institutional use. At a recent urban design committee meeting, Peter Lesdow, the architect for the proposed hotel, provided the committee with an overview and his rationale for the development, saying that the “architectural philosophy” of the project is “to create a boutique hotel with Old World charm.”

“Integration of this development with the downtown heritage character area was very important to our team, and was the main criteria for the creation of the Parliament Oak hotel design,” he said.

Inspiration for the 129-room hotel was drawn from other “grand” buildings in the town, namely the Prince of Wales Hotel and the Court House. Lesdow explained that the hotel design drew from it the classical architectural detail, including smooth stone finishes along the base and a stone entrance portico.

Lesdow also noted that the stately Plum Residence, which featured a mansard roof, once existed on the property. That home was constructed by Senator Josiah Plumb in the mid-1800s and stood until it was destroyed by fire in 1913.

In terms of the hotel size, Lesdow compared it with other Niagara-on-the-Lake hotels. The four-storey hotel would be basically the same massing as Queen’s Landing, one storey taller and a little bit longer than the Prince of Wales, and roughly the same height as the Rand Estate. A stone wall would surround the property, creating a sense of enclosure.

Although the streets surrounding the property are made up of one- and two-storey homes, the property is set in the downtown heritage area of the Official Plan and is a short walk to the commercial districts on Queen and King Streets, Lesdow said. “Our proposal is consistent with existing hotels in the area, such as the Oban Inn, Queen’s Landing, and Pillar and Post. Both the Oban Inn and Pillar and Post are within residential areas of the town. One should note that Parliament Oak Hotel is 1.5 blocks from the Prince of Wales hotel and if the project were to move ahead, they would be visible to each other.”

Lesdow acknowledged that “it has been presented that this building’s architecture should reflect the buildings abutting the site to be in keeping with the area.” However, he continued, “It is our position that this is not the right approach. When one reviews the character of the area, one notes that the architecture of its buildings should reflect its individual use — a church, court house, hotel, commercial and residential buildings will each have an architectural aesthetic which clearly reflects the building’s prominence and use. It is a combination of different building’s architecture, massing, and materials which help make up the character of any town. For this reason, a prominent hotel development such as this need not mimic or reflect the architecture of the houses in the area, as this approach would not be consistent with the downtown heritage character of the area.”

However, the architect did say that he took the surrounding residential neighbourhood into consideration in his design by using various architectural devices. He also provided a “shadow study” showing that the shadow cast by the building at certain times and months of the year (but not the shortest or longest days of the year) would not exceed the limits of the property. He also noted that the buildings’ U-shape design “creates a compact square floor plan providing a minimum amount of building mass exposure to the surrounding four streets and allows for very large landscaped lawns and gardens around it.” Thirty percent of the hotel units would face inward toward a courtyard, rather than overlooking the residential neighbourhood, he added.

Committee member Allan Killin was just one member who didn’t agree that the hotel should stand out from the residential area and spoke of the “urban hierarchy” of the town’s buildings. “What is it about this ‘giant house’ that makes it deserve the architecture that you’re proposing?” he asked.

Other members also pointed out that hotels like the Oban Inn, which is set in a residential neighbourhood, has a design that fits with the neighbourhood and that the new Parliament Oak hotel cannot be compared to the historic Rand estate as it is a new development.

The hotel is too high, too large, and doesn’t fit the neighbourhood, committee members agreed. And although the committee was asked to provide input on specific urban design issues related to the development’s site, setback, building materials, landscape and parking plans, as well as in general appearance, members were vocal about whether or not commercial use is appropriate for this site at all, given its location.

In its recommendation to the council, the committee is asking that council and town staff carry out studies to determine the need and location of new commercial areas in Old Town before considering any new commercial developments requiring rezoning.

Although residents are anxious to hear the staff recommendations for the proposal, and how council will deal with it, town spokesperson Marah Minor was unable to say when the next steps in dealing with the project would take place.

There is no date set for those recommendations to go to the planning committee — first Two Sisters Resorts has an opportunity to respond to comments made to date.

Under the planning act, Two Sisters can appeal to the planning tribunal if a decision is not made within 120 days, which in this case was July 1, says Minor.

As for more public input, “a further public meeting is not required unless there are significant changes made to the application, and council requests further notice be given,” Minor says, although the planning committee could receive delegations from the public when the staff recommendations are brought forward.

Carrie Gleason
The Local
July 19, 2023
The SunOpta team of Parneet Kaur, Hardeep Kaur, Michelle Riley, Becky Goertz, Erin Hagar, Greg Dunk, Ray Sliter and Sean Brennan help the Friends of One Mile Creek with their cleanup.

The Friends of One Mile Creek hard at work cleaning up around the creek.

Michael Fox and Nigel Young-Chin dump a load of weeds.

Mike Balsom
The Local

A group of eight employees of SunOpta in St. Davids came out Friday afternoon to assist the Friends of One Mile Creek in their efforts to maintain the park at the corner of King and John streets in the Old Town.

Most of the members of the neighbourhood group, which formed in 2003, are owners of properties that abut the creek as it winds through Niagara. Klara Chin-Young, vice-chair and project coordinator, was pleased to have the extra help from the SunOpta team.

“We brought out the management team,” explained Erin Hagar, the human resources manager at the facility that manufactures healthy, non-GMO and organic fruit snacks for private label and co-pack applications. The former Niagara Natural Fruit Snack Company was acquired by SunOpta in 2015. The Four Mile Creek Road operation currently has 100 employees.

“I’m fairly new to the team,” said Hagar, “so I wanted us to get together for a team-building activity. Our company provides a day for us to volunteer out in the community, and we saw this a great opportunity to volunteer together.”

The eight managers from SunOpta worked alongside members of the environmentally-focused One Mile Creek group to pull out weeds and remove invasive species from the area that flows through the park before pooling in Lansdowne Pond at its outlet to Lake Ontario.

“Removing these invasive plants helps the monarch butterflies and the bees,” said Hagar. “There are a lot of issues with the population of honey bees, not enough of them to pollinate all the plants. We’re a company that produces food, we rely on bees and what they do. It makes perfect sense for us.”
How Bill C-18 could impact local news

That level of on-the-ground reporting is a rare resource,” says Friscolanti. While no doubt Bill C-18 will make it difficult for our readers to find the stories they are looking for online, we hope you will continue to visit our homepage, while Village Media continues to find ways to provide the same online coverage you’ve come to expect.

If you haven’t already, please subscribe to our free email newsletter. It will arrive in your inbox every afternoon at 5 p.m., full of headlines you won’t find anywhere else, from hyper-local news to stories from across the province and the country. The Local isn’t going anywhere. We have just hired Kris Dube, through the federal Lo cal Journalism Initiative program to help us report even more local news. He has been covering Niagara for many years, and will expand our news coverage and help us be an even better voice of your community.

Our printed edition will still be delivered to you every Wednesday, and thanks to Village Media, our website will continue to offer not only our local news, but so much more. And when and Google and Facebook follow through with their intentions—the timeline is still not clear, and the legislation could change—please keep looking for us in your mailbox and on our homepage. We’ll be there.

Penny Coles
The Local

Plane lands on water, leaving men stranded in far north

Owen Bjorgan with a northern pike. (Owen Bjorgan)
**Comment Local Letters**

**Vegetarian option at Cherry Festival barbecue**

Your correspondent is disappointed to learn that a vegetarian option was available at St. Mark’s Church’s 2023 Cherry Festival. In fact, a vegetarian burger was available on request. However, if this was clearly advertised, we apologize. Be assured that St. Mark’s will ensure that vegetarian alternatives will be communicated to our visitors in future.

Greg Walker, Kathy Taylor
2023 Cherry Festival Co-Chairs

**Vegetarian Options Wanted**

Sustainable transportation infrastructure necessary to support tourism

I have been proud to serve as the Member of Provincial Parliament for Niagara-on-the-Lake since 2014, and I have been working closely with local business owners, industry representatives and important stakeholders who have noted the toll that commutes to and from those of us who work in the tourism industry and the environment — which we need to invest in order to create new opportunities for transportation infrastructure. We are working hard to reduce traffic congestion and emissions, and to provide better options for visitors to our region. The ministry of transportation currently has a project underway to upgrade the Niagara Parkway and make it more accessible for all travelers. The project includes the addition of a new bus stop and the construction of a new pedestrian bridge, which will allow people to cross the Parkway safely.

As an elected official, I am committed to ensuring that our local tourism industry and the environment — which we need to invest in order to create new opportunities for transportation infrastructure. We are working hard to reduce traffic congestion and emissions, and to provide better options for visitors to our region. The ministry of transportation currently has a project underway to upgrade the Niagara Parkway and make it more accessible for all travelers. The project includes the addition of a new bus stop and the construction of a new pedestrian bridge, which will allow people to cross the Parkway safely.

In addition, the ministry of transportation is working to improve the Niagara Parkway, which serves as a key transportation route for tourists visiting the region. The ministry has already completed a number of upgrades, including the addition of a new bus stop and the construction of a new pedestrian bridge, which will allow people to cross the Parkway safely. The ministry is also working to improve the Niagara Parkway’s infrastructure, which will make it easier for people to access the region’s attractions. The ministry is also working to improve the Niagara Parkway’s infrastructure, which will make it easier for people to access the region’s attractions. The ministry is also working to improve the Niagara Parkway’s infrastructure, which will make it easier for people to access the region’s attractions. The ministry is also working to improve the Niagara Parkway’s infrastructure, which will make it easier for people to access the region’s attractions. The ministry is also working to improve the Niagara Parkway’s infrastructure, which will make it easier for people to access the region’s attractions. The ministry is also working to improve the Niagara Parkway’s infrastructure, which will make it easier for people to access the region’s attractions.

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Dry stone wall expert explains his work at gateway project

Mike Balsom
The Local

Sharp shards of limestone fly from the edge of Menno Braam’s chisel behind the black-screened fence at the Mississauga Road and Queen Street intersection. He has just shaped the next stone to be placed onto the new gateway project welcoming visitors to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

About three weeks of solitary work under the hot summer sun, the new structure is beginning to take shape. Though much work has been completed, Braam maintains there is still much left to go.

The Toronto-area resident and proprietor of Whistling Dwarf Stonework has been chipping away at stone through a 40-tonne shipment of limestone sourced from a Buckhorn-area quarry by Upper Canada Stone, a business owned by NOTL resident Perry Hartwick. Each piece is carefully chosen for its size, shape and colour quality.

“As soon as the stone was dropped on site I was scanning for the largest stones, which go on the bottom of the wall,” Braam explains. “I also look for stones with solid 90-degree shapes. I hold them for the corners. It helps me to establish each corner, to make it strong and sturdy.”

The founding member of the not-for-profit organization Dry Stone Canada has been practicing the trade for 20 years, and working on his own for the last 15. His expertise as a certified professional member and instructor with the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain has seen him involved in projects such as the Legacy dry stone bridge in Perth, Ontario, and the Dry Stone Amphitheatre at the University of Toronto.

Locally, Braam also worked with Dean McLellan on a dry stone wall blacksmith building at the Willowbank School of Restoration Arts.

It was his reputation that led to Braam’s selection to complete the NOTL project, funded by the Gerald Kowalchuk Family Foundation. The town decided last summer to pre-qualify three general contractors who were capable of doing this,” Kowalchuk says. “All three contractors who went to tender chose Menno to build it. From our point of view, that was a feeling of great comfort.”

Working with Smith’s design has gone quite smoothly for Braam. “I had to make sure that they understood the dimensions of the thickness of the wall,” he explains. “The thickness changes the taller the wall gets. That wasn’t accounted for in the original drawing. The ‘batter’ of the wall, how it leans into itself on both sides, requires it to be thicker at the bottom than it is at the top for structural reasons.”

That design creates a centre of gravity, so the wall doesn’t lean one way or the other. That’s important, of course, as there is no mortar holding the stones together. “It just wants to settle and strengthen over time,” continues Braam. “That wasn’t accounted for in the design. Only a dry stone waller would account for that. Overall, it’s been great working with their design, to see it come to life.”

Braam may be a whistler, but he’s hardly a dwarf. On the contrary, about 6’2” tall and 260 pounds, he is about the size one would expect from someone who will be moving tonnes of stone over about an eight-week period. When requested, he holds up his large hands. Not surprisingly, they are covered in limestone dust and calloused from chiseling away at his trade.

Besides the stone on site, there’s not much else there, not a tool or carbide in the vicinity. Braam shows the Local his brick hammer, fitted with carbide on its impact zone. He also has a hammer and a chisel, and a wheelbarrow that he uses to ease the pressure on his back while he moves the larger stones. And he has a marquee tent that he can move over the wall to block the sun.

“I don’t wear a hat,” he says, “I find I sweat a lot more when I do.”

When he arrived on location, the first step for Braam was to paint lines to mark the footprint of the structure. Then, he erected wooden frames at each end and corner, attached to each other via string to help him to keep each row level from end to end.

In his initial scanning of the 40-tonne delivery Braam also searched for larger stones to use as “through stones.”

“If you think of this as two walls leaning against each other,” he says, “the through stones go from front to back, acting like a stitch. I have two rows of those laid down already.”

From there, he adds, it’s working from biggest to smallest as he builds his way up. There’s about a tonne of stone in every linear foot.

“There’s structural reasoning for a lot of the stylistic choices,” says Braam. “I don’t like to use anything smaller than two inches (high), because anything less than that won’t be strong enough to last. For this project, the bottom layer is three inches, and I’ll go to about two-and-a-half at the top.”

Looking from above at the most recently completed row, there are smaller bits of stone sitting between the larger pieces. Braam explains that those pieces are not just rubble that he picked up but actually pieces that he cut to fit into those crevices.

“It’s all fitted, and wedged in,” he explains. “They help to lock it all together, but not as rigidly as mortar would do. Think of all of these joints as expansion joints, which allow these walls to breathe and move with our frost. It’s referred to as ‘harding.’”

Menno picks up a stone and demonstrates how he trims a piece to fit correctly on the wall. “It really comes down to practice,” he says of getting the clean cut on each piece. “It’s all about the angle that you use to cut. You can anticipate where the stone will break and control it.”

As he gets closer to the top of the wall, where he will begin to create the gateway arch and the circular section that will hold the town crest, he expects the job to get more intricate and time-consuming. There may be the need for another delivery from Upper Canada Stone.

“I work with Perry’s stone, more than anyone else’s,” says Braam. “I don’t like to use anything smaller than two inches (high), because anything less than that won’t be strong enough to last. For there. But the 46-year-old craftsman is there every day for about seven hours, adament as he is that he takes on only one job at a time, working it from start to finish before moving on to his next project. After NOTL, he’s off to Halifax. I’ll be working with the association to help restore a dry stone wall at a little church in Halifax,” he says. “The wall was built first in the 1850s. Last year we rebuilt half of it, and this year we’re going back to finish it in two stages.”

Until then, though, he’ll continue to work in solitude, practising a craft that he refers to as somewhat romantic, while he creates a lasting impression for local residents and future visitors to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Braam expects the gateway to be ready for its unveiling in about four or five weeks’ time.
Library Pop-ups fun for kids

The NOTL Public Library is offering a Pop-up program for kids, which included (below) Milania, Gianna, Naome and Vivian enjoying a fun storyline at the Outlet Collection at Niagara with Tess from the library. Button-making at the Pop-up Library was also fun (right), with Tess helping Summer Reading Club participants Vivian and Naome make buttons at the Outlet Collection mall. (Supplied)
Chamber, businesses struggle with accessibility

Penny Coles
The Local

It’s been many years since David Onley, who served seven years as Ontario’s Lieutenant Governor and visited Niagara-on-the-Lake at least twice, began his advocacy for accessibility. It was his priority during his two terms, but as a solo supporter left with his own mobility problems, it had been a battle back in the 1990s. Onley, who died earlier this year, spoke of his frustration over the lack of progress being made to improve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities, outlined in a review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which he wrote for the government. The legislation had been passed in 2005.

Another review in 2022, the fourth to examine the implementation of the legislation — or lack of it — said little progress had been made since the law was passed. And as Dave Antaya, NOTL’s representative on the region’s Joint Committee on Accessibility, told The Local, very little has changed to prepare local businesses for the deadline of compliance by 2025, as set in the 2005 legislation.

Last month, the town raised a flag for the regional committee, which has a goal of making Niagara municipalities more accessible.

Antaya says despite the work of the committee, at least 50 per cent of NOTL businesses have accessibility issues — “and some have said the number is well north of 60 per cent.”

With that legislative deadline looming, it’s going to be a big challenge for businesses that haven’t started to budget or prepare for accessibility improvements.

What the implications of that deadline might be aren’t known, he said. “Will businesses be fined? And if so, by how much?” he asks.

Considering the “fundamental lack of change,” or even awareness of what needs to be changed, the deadline is not realistic, he says. “In reality, I don’t think that is going to happen. This isn’t going to be resolved in two years.”

There seem to be more questions than answers, and more problems than solutions. It’s a complicated issue that begins with how businesses become compliant, given the problems presented by heritage buildings, crowd-ed sidewalks and streets, and the costs associated with any work that needs to be done, says Antaya.

During his two terms with the accessibility committee, he has come to realize that public buildings across all Niagara municipalities, in fact all levels of government buildings, have for the most part become compliant with the legislation, “and in instances where problems are discovered, they are quickly addressed,” he says.

But it’s a different story with privately owned businesses that are required to be accessible to the public.

About 20 per cent of visitors who come to NOTL have some form of disability, says Antaya.

Businesses face a struggle of how to become compliant with the cost of improvements, with some tax credits available but no grants to help.

However, there is an added economic benefit to being accessible, he adds. “Why would you ignore 20 per cent of the people who might want to come into your business?”

Minerva Ward, NOTL Chamber of Commerce president and CEO, is working on accessibility in the Old Town, and has come across one solution available that would help businesses with a step to get through their door.

In a recent letter to business owners, she encourages them to look at installing single-step ramps. By doing so, says business will become more inclusive and welcoming to a larger customer base. “Accessible businesses are more attractive to customers with mobility challenges, such as wheelchair users, parents with strollers, and the elderly.”

Access to businesses, creating a positive and inclusive experience for visitors and also demonstrating “a commitment to diversity and equal access for everyone in our community,” she says.

Moreover, installing accessible ramps aligns with the principles of social responsibility and customer service excellence.

Ensuring accessibility, she tells business owners, “sends a powerful message about your values and your dedication to providing exceptional customer experience.”

Antaya says the province has become a priority for many customers, and they are more likely to support businesses that share their values and demonstrate a commitment to accessibility.”

Integrating wheelchair accessible ramps “also presents a compelling business case,” she adds, by attracting and retaining customers who rely on mobility aids.

Ward mentions a non-profit organization called STOPGAP, which makes affordable, portable ramps for single-step entrances that can be easily installed and removed as needed.

However, she told The Local, there doesn’t seem to be interest on the part of the merchants — there was not much of a response to her letter.

Antaya says while the ramps might provide some accessibility, there are many more issues — a single step that makes their space inaccessible. He also envisions problems with using them on a busy sidewalk at the height of the tourist season.

Whatever the biggest issue for NOTL, says Antaya — possible solutions are made more difficult by the lack of space at the front of buildings. “And possible long-term solution would be removing parking from Queen Street to allow more room in front of doorways to make them accessible, he suggests. That would require parking nearby, possibly underground, with lots of room, such as the former hospital site. “Whether the solution, it’s not going to be quick or easy, he says.

Ward agrees that the portable ramp would not help all merchants, but it would help some, and the town has applied for a grant to help offset costs, she said, although CAO Marnie Chuckie confirmed there has been no response to that request yet.

The provincial act to provide accessibility for all has limited exceptions where compliance might affect the natural, cultural or heritage value of a protected facility or environment, Chuckie says. While it aims for a barrier-free province by setting accessibility standards, “the act also allows exemptions to the challenges that accessibility features may pose to preserving the heritage value,” she says.

“Moreover, there may be limited exceptions for heritage buildings regarding certain accessibility requirements, depending on the circumstances.”

It’s important to consult with experts about specific circumstances, she says.

The town needs someone to take on a management project and work with businesses on accessibility issues, also possibly coordinating with the NOTL Rotary Club, which has also offered to partner on the project at some level, Ward says.

In addition to helping other businesses, Ward is also working toward an accessible, street level location for the Chamber offices.

Their space is currently on the lower levels of the historic Court House building, now a National Historic Site — a building which was constructed in 1847. For many years in recent history the downstairs space was the location of the town’s public library, but was vacated when the new building on Anderson Lane was ready to open in 2000, and at that time, the Court House space was taken over by the Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber needs a new location, both for accessibility, says Ward, and because the basement is too small to accommodate the Chamber of Commerce and NOTL Tourism.

Visitors have to make their way downstairs to find a wall of brochures regarding accommodations and attractions in Niagara-on-the-Lake, or to talk to a staff member for recommendations.

The space is not accessible to visitors with mobility issues — an elevator in the building intended for accessibility is not open to the public, unless the stairs is being used, says Ward.

“We need to find street level space,” she says. “It’s our business centre, and it’s not accessible. It’s really far below what we should be doing as a chamber of commerce. We should be accessible for all. We’re just making do until we can move. However, finding space can be an issue, especially with the high cost of rents in the area. Since the town has the chamber on the cost of information services, a decision to move, and who would be responsible for the rent, would have to be made in partnership with the town, Ward says.

But those decisions have to be made, both for the chamber office and local businesses, she adds.

“We should be doing better as a town,” says Ward, especially as a world-class destination. “We need to think ahead about how we can serve our visitors. We’re not doing a good job of serving all of them.”

niagara-on-the-lake raised a flag for the Joint Accessibility Committee on June 5. Dave Antaya, NOTL’s representative on the committee was on hand for the event, with Deputy Lord Mayor Erwin Wiens, committee member Joey Hewitt from Thorold, and Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa. Antaya says despite the town needs someone to take on a management project and work with businesses on accessibility issues, also possibly coordinating with the NOTL Rotary Club, which has also offered to partner on the project at some level, Ward says. In addition to helping other businesses, Ward is also working toward an accessible, street level location for the Chamber offices. Their space is currently on the lower levels of the historic Court House building, now a National Historic Site — a building which was completed in 1847. For many years in recent history the downstairs space was the location of the town’s public library, but was vacated when the new building on Anderson Lane was ready to open in 2000, and at that time, the Court House space was taken over by the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber needs a new location, both for accessibility, says Ward, and because the basement is too small to accommodate the Chamber of Commerce and NOTL Tourism. Visitors have to make their way downstairs to find a wall of brochures regarding accommodations and attractions in Niagara-on-the-Lake, or to talk to a staff member for recommendations. The space is not accessible to visitors with mobility issues — an elevator in the building intended for accessibility is not open to the public, unless the stairs is being used, says Ward. “We need to find street level space,” she says. “It’s our business centre, and it’s not accessible. It’s really far below what we should be doing as a chamber of commerce. We should be accessible for all. We’re just making do until we can move. However, finding space can be an issue, especially with the high cost of rents in the area. Since the town partners with the chamber on the cost of information services, a decision to move, and who would be responsible for the rent, would have to be made in partnership with the town, Ward says. But those decisions have to be made, both for the chamber office and local businesses, she adds. “We should be doing better as a town,” says Ward, especially as a world-class destination. “We need to think ahead about how we can serve our visitors. We’re not doing a good job of serving all of them.”
Battle of Fort George event attracts hundreds of re-enactors

David Gilchrist
The Local

This past weekend a major event took place at Fort George in Niagara-on-the-Lake: a re-enactment of the Battle of Fort George during the War of 1812. The original battle, when American forces in a combined naval and land assault captured the fort, took place in May of 1813. This yearly event at the fort brings hundreds of re-enactors from across Canada and the U.S. to take part. The event featured a number of period displays both inside and outside the fort throughout the weekend. During the two-day event, a series of mock battles took place, with the fort being captured and then re-captured. This offered several opportunities to view the manoeuvres of the various British and American regiments. The battles were held outside the fort, allowing visitors to view them well. An excellent narration during the battles offered many historical details of great interest. It is amazing to see the rows of white tents, the soldiers, the ladies and children in their period costumes, the preparations of gun crews, and the inspection of troops, and also to hear the music of the Fife and Drum Corps. This annual event certainly helps to bring history to life.

Period displays, both inside and outside the fort, and mock battles brought the Battle of Fort George to life this weekend. (Photos by Dave Gilchrist)
Neighbours marshalling opposition to apartment proposal

Penny Coles
The Local

A group of neighbours living in single or two-storey homes are concerned about a development proposal for an area that is mostly green space at the end of King Street.

The parcel proposed for development by Josh Bice of Butler’s Garden Development is officially between 727 and 733 King Street, on the northwest side of King and southwest of Cottage Street.

Bice is asking for Official Plan and zoning amendments to increase the permitted density for a three-storey apartment building of 17 units, as well as 18 parking spaces and landscaping, on less than an acre of property.

Neighbours hope to stop it.

That includes Jim and Erika Alexander, who have lived in the neighbourhood for almost 50 years.

Jim says they were opposed to a proposal put forward a couple of years ago for three houses on that property — and now they’re faced with an apartment building. A group of neighbours from King, Niagara, Rye and Cottage streets, Shaws Lane, Albion Way and Meritage Lane got together for almost 50 years.

Erika Alexander, who have lived in the neighbourhood for almost 50 years.

Jim says they were opposed to a proposal put forward a couple of years ago for three houses on that property — and now they’re faced with an apartment building. A group of neighbours from King, Niagara, Rye and Cottage streets, Shaws Lane, Albion Way and Meritage Lane got together for almost 50 years.

In a 100-page “planning justification report” prepared by NPG Planning Solutions, signed by two former NOTL town planners for a company founded by a former NOTL planning director, the consultants say the proposed Official Plan and zoning amendments “represent good land use planning, and are in the public interest and should be approved,” continuing to list the many ways in which the proposal meets provincial and local planning policies.

One side of the property which was originally two lots, with one severed to make three lots to accommodate three houses, is not a suitable location for an apartment building, says Jim.

“The report says the proposed development will have a density of 52.3 units per hectare, higher than the maximum of 14 units per hectare for low-density zoning, and a maximum of 30 units per hectare for a medium density development. The amendment application is asking for low-density, site-specific zoning. “This area has always been low-density family homes, and a lot of time and effort has been invested to keep it that way,” Jim says. “Those lots are all big enough for a two-storey house, but instead it’s going to be a three-storey apartment building.”

Another of Jim’s concerns is road access to the 17 units, which at the moment is just a narrow unfinished lane. He’s concerned the plan will be to continue King Street, now a dead-end, and make it a through street to East and West Line, which would also mean widening it and increasing traffic.

“It will become a back way into town,” Jim says, “and our little oasis will have a widened road, with curbs and gutters.”

The Alexanders are part of a group of residents already trying to marshal their neighbours to speak out about the development, and estimate they have about 30 people onboard so far, “but we only found out about this last week,” says Erika.

“Making presentations against this project is critical,” adds Jim.

There is a virtual open house planned for Tuesday, July 25, at 5 p.m., and an in-person or virtual public meeting Tuesday, Sept. 12, at 6 p.m.

Andrea and Kevin van Niekerk live on King Street, and are gathering neighbours to join in opposition to a proposal for an apartment building. A group of neighbours from King, Niagara, Rye and Cottage streets, Shaws Lane, Albion Way and Meritage Lane got together for a photo in front of a few houses at the end of King Street, the area planned for the apartment. (Andrea van Niekerk)
Mike Balsom
The Local

Niagara Falls-based band A Sea of Gold and Burgundy have found a kindred spirit in Niagara-on-the-Lake musician and producer Steve Goldberger.

Never mind the obvious similarities between the producer’s name and the trio, which was derived by the way, from the members’ names C.D. Onofrio (the ‘Sea’) Nathaniel Goold (the ‘Gold’) and Aaron Berger (the ‘Burgundy’). ‘It’s pretty crazy,’ Onofrio tells The Local during a private listening session at Goldberger’s NOTL studio. ‘It’s the perfect name for our producer. I think it was Nathaniel who put it all together.’

‘Steve tried to steal our copyright,’ laughs Berger. The good-natured, joking atmosphere during the listening session reflects the working relationship that developed between Goldberger and the band during the six months of jamming, rehearsing, recording and mixing that began in December 2022.

Though the group had met Goldberger a number of times at various gigs on the Niagara music scene, they had never had a chance to collaborate. Goldberger took the initiative to invite them to work with him. ‘We had 10 songs when we got here,’ Berger says. ‘It was a magical, memorable and fitting way to kick off the festival’s summer run of outdoor shows. It was a magical, memorable and fitting way to kick off the festival’s summer run of outdoor shows.

When we got into the mixing room, we got used to the fact that these guys didn’t even need lyric sheets. They just had to shut up. This is their creative philosophy, ‘Onofrio

Goold sings about taking the bad and making something good out of it. The three singers push the limits with their vocal interplay on this one. ‘It took me a little while to get used to the fact that these guys don’t sing traditional harmonies,’ Goldberger says. ‘Sometimes they’re doing alternate notes, they don’t do the obvious. I came to realize that I just had to shut up. This is their sound, I just had to let go and let them be themselves.’

Goold’s production works perfectly on each of the group’s four songs. He provides the aural punch where necessary. ‘It’s obvious he stepped back and let the band take things where they wanted it to go, while adding the bells and whistles exactly where they were needed.’

“We really appreciate Steve’s creative philosophy,” Onofrio confirms. “The whole process was very enjoyable. There was a spirit of being in the laboratory at times, seeing what kind of chemistry comes about.”

A Sea of Gold and Burgundy plans to release each of the four tracks to all streaming services once a month, starting with ‘I Will Abide’ on July 29. An EP release party is being planned for October.

Nathaniel Goold, Aaron Berger, C.D. Onofrio, and producer Steve Goldberger in NOTL. (Mike Balsom)

A Sea of Gold and Burgundy recorded at Shed Studio

Saturday night’s downpour didn’t dampen the spirits at TD Niagara Jazz Festival’s Jazz Under the Stars event at the Jackson-Triggs Estate’s amphitheatre. As the skies opened up, headliner Laila Biali invited audience members who were sitting exposed to the elements up to the relatively dry stage, where she could perform with her band. It was a magical, memorable and fitting way to kick off the festival’s summer concert series in celebration of its 10th anniversary. Next up for the festival is Soul Jazz in the Vineyard with Cinnamon Jones and the Quinsey Bullen Quartet at The Hare Wine Co. on Thursday, July 20. (Jeff Friesen for the TD Niagara Jazz Festival)
Canada’s first classical music ensemble dedicated to diversity, discovery and dissemination is coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake for a Music Niagara Festival performance at Ironwood Cider House.

Executive director Alison Migeon and her partner, artistic director Brandyn Lewis, founded Ensemble Obiora in Montreal in 2021. It was born out of the experience they both had been one of very few, if any, people of colour during their careers in the arts.

‘Brandyn as a performer, and me as an administrator,’ Migeon tells The Local, ‘we always felt that it was hard to find people of diverse backgrounds in the classical music industry. We started to think about how we could change things, and after a while we just decided to found our own ensemble.’

The pair chose the name Obiora, meaning ‘heart of the people’ in Igbo, a language spoken in Nigeria. Migeon and Lewis then began recruiting musicians based on what she calls the group’s 3D principles of diversity, discovery and dissemination.

With their mission to promote musicians from diverse cultural backgrounds, increase their representation on the classical music scene, and program unfamiliar works by composers of colour whose contributions have gone unnoticed, word quickly began to spread. Musicians of colour started to reach out to Migeon and Lewis with the hopes of finding a seat in the ensemble.

“We are unique in Canada,” says Migeon. “There are many in the U.S. of course. But our inspiration was the Chineke! Orchestra in England. We met the founder, Chi-chi Nwanoku, and she was very happy that we had the idea to do this in Canada. She had such great advice for us on how to start it.”

Obiora is now the ensemble in residence at the Université du Québec à Montréal, and boasts a roster of more than 45 professional musicians, most from diverse backgrounds. Their performances promote often little-known composers whose music is traditionally overlooked by other orchestras.

“Obviously, we know all the traditional composers,” says Migeon. “We found so many other composers that do not often get programmed. Because of racism they were pushed out and nobody talked about them. We try to help people rediscover these composers.”

That is certainly the case with Ensemble Obiora’s program for this Sunday’s performance at Ironwood, where composers Jeff Scott, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Joseph Bologne take the spotlight.

“Coleridge-Taylor had English and Sierra Leone roots,” Migeon explains of the composer whose Nover in F minor the ensemble will be playing Sunday. “He was famous in England in the 19th century. Joseph Bologne was a contemporary of Mozart from Guadeloupe, whose mother was a slave. His father sent him to France to study music. But when Napoleon re-established slavery in France his music was forbidden.”

Bologne, a skilled violinist and fencer named by King Louis XV as Chevalier de Saint-Georges, is today often referred to cruelly as “the Black Mozart.” The 2022 film Chevalier, starring Kelvin Harrison Jr. as the composer, dramatized Bologne’s life as an undeclared swordsman and colonel of his own regiment that fought in the French Revolution. Ensemble Obiora will be playing Bologne’s Symphony in G major, Op. 11, No. 1, a work in three movements, an excellent example of the cosmopolitan French symphonic style.

Finally, contemporary composer Jeff Scott’s Sum- tim Mountains will give the ensemble’s woodwinds an opportunity to showcase their talents.

In addition to including musicians of colour and presenting the works of long-ignored composers, Migeon stresses that community work is an important part of Obiora’s mission.

“We are trying to reach new audiences,” she says. “Some people love classical music but find it hard to go to a concert hall because they feel they don’t belong. We do a lot of workshops for students in school and remain very active in the community. It’s important for young musicians to see people who look like them playing this music.”

Migeon says in the short two years of Obiora’s existence they’ve experienced great support wherever they have played in Quebec and Ontario. But they continue to break down barriers as they spread their wings.

In Montreal, we are accepted so well because people are very aware of diversity and inclusion,” Migeon explains. “But it’s more difficult when we try to go to some other areas of Quebec, where they are not so open about it. Some are afraid to program us because they are worried their audiences won’t like it.”

Migeon holds out hope that Ensemble Obiora’s 3D message can be spread further afield across the country. And bringing 11 of the group’s musicians to the Music Niagara Festival this weekend is a big step.

“This will be the first time for most of the musicians and the team,” she enthuses. “We’re very excited to come and to enjoy Niagara.

At least one of those musicians, Tanya Charles Iwiah, will be familiar with the area. Charles Iwiah, a former student of Music Niagara’s founder and artistic director Atis Bankas, will be in NOTL this Thursday with the Odin String Quartet as they perform only the final movements of classical and contemporary composers at Chateau des Charmes Winery, another unique Music Niagara Festival presentation.

Tickets for that show, and for Ensemble Obio- ra this Sunday, July 23, at Ironwood Cider House on Lakeshore Road in NOTL, are $40 each plus HST and can be purchased at music-niagara.org.
Traffic is stop-and-go along Niagara Stone Road, some days there are large potholes, and tourists are avoiding Virgil as a route into the Old Town. (David Gilchrist)

Frendo says it’s not that money is going to solve the problem, it’s the logistics. "It’s a problem for many, but business has been contracting for years, and what they are seeing is a decline over previous years of about 10 to 30 per cent, "but in the restaurant business, 10 to 30 per cent can kill you."

It’s especially difficult giving the risen cost of supplies, some increased by 300 per cent, while retaining the quality they’re known for, and just coming out of a pandemic, he adds.

Frendo said when he was first told about the project, it was expected to be done by May, but the timing changed.

"And the majority of days, it seems there’s noth-
ging happening. There’s just this rough road, with lit-
tle going on. I’m not say-
ing it doesn’t need to be done, but I’m an engineer. I think good planning and engineering could have moved this project on a lit-
tle faster." While it is a signifi-
cant amount of work to be done, he recognizes, "it shouldn’t be taking so long."

The potholes that are also slowing traffic are not necessarily, he adds. "You have to take a grader across them, but that costs money. It’s not magic, it’s just work."

Jamie Slingerland of Pillitteri Estates Winery is being philosophical about the inconvenience of the construction. He tells the sto-
y of construction on the road in front of the winery about 15 years ago, when his father-in-law, Gary Pilittinn, stood at the edge of the road and watched the dig-
ging, fearing that a force main carrying wastewater would be hit, and it would be an expensive problem with a lot of disruption to the operation of the win-
ery. "He would stand out there for hours at a time. And then one day just as he was coming in for lunch, they severed it. We had to have trucks come in to take away our sewage."

This time, Slingerland says, the winery put a sign out by the road reminding the workers of the force main.

They still managed to cut it, but because of the timing, it was repaired be-
fore there was any disrup-
tion to the winery opera-
tion, he says.

There is no doubt the stop-and-go traffic due to the construction is hurt-
ing the winery business — tourists especially are taking different routes through town, he says.

"It’s a double hit for the winery, which is still suf-
fering from the lack of tourism caused by the pan-
demic, especially Asian tourists who came by the busload pre-pandemic — that has not rebounded."

But Slingerland is con-
centrating on “the bigger picture,” he explains. “This road really needed to be rebuilt — no question about it.”

Traffic gets backed up as vehicles try to turn into their driveways, peo-
ple have difficulty exiting, and heavy traffic volumes have made left-hand turns impossible sometimes, as locals will attest. “There have been many colli-
sions," he says. "It’s really been a safety issue." And it’s not a small project, he continues. “The amount of infrastructure below the ground is off the wall — there’s a giant web of infrastructure down there. It’s a very difficult task. And we know this project has to go ahead. It has to get done. I’m look-
ing at it as the glass half full. They’re finally going ahead with it. Yes, it’s a great inconvenience, but what are you going to do? Do I want to suffer the in-
convenience? No. It is in-
vitiable? Yes, it is. And it will be beautiful, there will be bike lanes, and it will be great. But we had one sum-
mer after COVID that we were fully open, and now we’re dealing with this.”

Traffic gets backed
up as vehicles try to turn into their driveways, people have difficulty exiting, and heavy traffic volumes have made left-hand turns impossible sometimes, as locals will attest. “There have been many collisions," he says. "It’s really been a safety issue." And it’s not a small project, he continues. “The amount of infrastructure being added. "When would this go ahead if it didn’t hap-
pen now? The pain has to be felt.”

Lord Mayor Gary Za-
lepaa, asked about the proj-
ey by residents through an email thread about the project, says in his re-
sponse: “The major con-
struction project that has been in the works for Ni-
agara Stone Road for over a decade is no doubt incon-
venient. Complaints are fair and can be dealt with, but misinformation is not ap-
propriate. This project is a major rework of the road and utility services that do not currently serve the needs of our community.”

Both timelines and budget are on track, he added.

Traffic is stop-and-go along Niagara Stone Road, some days there are large potholes, and tourists are avoiding Virgil as a route into the Old Town. (David Gilchrist)
Mike Balsom
The Local

A chance to prove himself to the Stanley Cup finalist Florida Panthers last week was everything 19-year-old Matteo Giampa thought it would be.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake native spent July 8 through 15 at the Panthers’ IceDen facility in Coral Gables, Florida, as one of 37 participants in the NHL teams 2023 prospect camp.

Giampa closed out the 2022-2023 hockey season on April 14 playing for the Bonnyville Pontiacs of the Alberta Junior Hockey League. The second-year right winger led the Pontiacs with 27 goals and 65 assists in the regular season and added another 23 points in the playoffs, leading the team to the league final, where they lost in five games to the Spruce Grove Saints.

Though the undrafted left winger was 180-pound forward watched this year’s NHL draft come and go without hearing his own name, he was overjoyed to get the invitation from the Panthers. “Right after the draft a couple of staff members called me and invited me down to the camp,” he tells The Local on a break from his summer job as a lifeguard at the Simcoe Park wading pool. “It happened really quickly after the draft, I was really excited to get that phone call.”

And the ball got rolling right away for Giampa. The very next day he received his itinerary, including his flight information for the trip to the Sunshine State. He was off to Coral Gables just another day later.

Giampa was joined by hockey players from across the U.S. and Canada, as well as others from Finland, Russia, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Austria. “I didn’t know anybody going into the camp,” Giampa says. “I ended up meeting a lot of really great people, and made some new friends. For the whole week, there wasn’t really even a second where we weren’t together doing something with the team, with the staff members.”

That included plenty of daily on-ice sessions and workouts, but the off-ice sessions were just as important for Giampa.

“We had some analytics people come to talk to us,” he explains, “some of their food and nutrition staff too. We learned a lot about what it takes to be an NHL player. And a couple of the NHL guys came and did a Q & A with us.”

That included former Niagara Ice Dog Carter Verhaeghe, 2014 number one draft pick Aaron Ekblad, Brandon Montour and Ryan Lomberg.

“They popped in for a couple of hours for a workout, and then they stuck around for the session with us,” he remembers. “They shared their experiences on how they got to the NHL.”

Richmond Hill native Lomberg’s story resonated greatly with Giampa. The undrafted left winger caught the eye of Calgary Flames scouts while he was playing for the Youngstown Phantoms of the United States Hockey League. The Flames invited him to their development camp in 2015 and assigned him to their East Coast Hockey League affiliate in Adirondack. He moved up to their American Hockey League farm team in Stockton, and in his second season with the Heat he was called up to the Flames.

“It was good to see different players and learn about their different paths to the NHL,” he says. “It showed me that I need to keep pushing every day, keep grinding, and that if I do, I can get to where I want to be.”

“Going to this development camp made me realize that I’m definitely not that far away from my dreams,” adds Giampa. “Overall, it was a really good experience. It was definitely a good thing for my career.”

Giampa will be taking that experience and that attitude with him across the border to Buffalo’s Canisius College this fall.

“I start there on Aug. 23,” Giampa says. “We’ll start skating then. I’m going to be there with two other guys from the Pontiacs, and I’ve talked to a couple of guys who played for the Golden Griffins last year. The coaching staff is really great, too. I think this year will be a really great year.”

From Summer Games to Winter Games for Carter Simpson

Mike Balsom
The Local

After carrying the torch through Niagara-on-the-Lake for the Niagara 2022 Canada Summer Games last year, local resident Carter Simpson will be on his way to Calgary to participate in Special Olympics winter version next year.

A Special Olympian, 29-year-old Simpson won a silver medal in alpine skiing at the 2011 Provincial Winter Games and captured multiple medals in track and field at the 2017 Provincial Summer Games.

Simpson was named to Team Ontario and will compete in alpine skiing in next year’s Special Olympics Canada Winter Games, to kick off in Calgary, Alberta, on Feb. 27. More than 1,250 athletes, coaches, friends and family members are expected to attend the five-week event.

Carter’s parents, Ann-Liz and Mike, were away attending the Tour de France when they got the email that Carter’s performance at a provincial competition had earned him a spot on the team. They planned to keep it a secret until they could tell Carter, who was staying with some family friends back in Sault Ste. Marie, where he grew up, while his parents were in Europe.

“But someone from the West Niagara team post- ed it on Facebook,” says Ann-Liz, “and of course he saw it. He started Facetiming everyone to tell them about it — he couldn’t contain his excitement.”

Carter, who also swims competitively, is a natural on the ski hill. Ann-Liz and Mike, as well as Carter’s brothers, are all skiers. While living in Sault Ste. Marie, Carter trained at Searchmont Ski Resort, where he was the only Special Olympian on the team.

When the family moved to NOTL, he was able to find a spot on Milton’s ski team, where Ann-Liz points out he has three dedicated coaches and skis with five and eight other Special Olympics athletes.

“He’s actually improved so much since we moved down here,” she tells The Local. “Even though the hills in Milton are smaller than Searchmont’s, he’s improved his time so much.”

Carter will be competing in both the giant slablon and slalom events in February.

Alpine skiing is one of eight sports at the 2024 Special Olympics, along with five-pin bowling, cross-country skiing, curling, figure skating, floor hockey, snowshoeing and speed skating.

Ann-Liz and Mike will make the trip out to Cal- gary with their son, along with his brothers.

And we have friends out there in Calgary, so there will be a larger cheering squad out there for him. He’s so excited about this.”

Matteo Giampa was invited to spend a week at the Florida Panthers prospect camp. (Supplied)
Select Under-10 soccer team plays in first tournament

Mike Balsom
The Local

Coach Conor MacNeil was on a bit of a high after his Niagara-on-the-Lake Soccer Club Under-10 team participated in Club Roma’s annual TiAmo Festival Cup this past weekend. They lost both games Sunday, 4-0 to a team from Paris, Ontario, and 6-2 to the Maple Leaf Cavan Football Club from the Peterborough area. But the improvement MacNeil and fellow coaches Mike Pilitteri and Will Reid saw was enough to assure them that they are on the right track.

“Our kids just kept getting better,” MacNeil told The Local. “Both teams we played were rep teams. They’ve been playing together for four or five years. I assume they are probably playing in the winter as well. Their chemistry is way better than ours, but technically, I thought our kids were right there.”

MacNeil’s U-10 team was paired together this spring from the NOTL Soccer Club U-9/10 house league program.

“This is totally new for NOTL Soccer,” says club president Carrie Plaskett. “Conor was calling it a select team, because it’s very similar to what is done with hockey — a team built out of the house league. He was so enthusiastic about it. He had a great time coaching these kids in house league last year. It’s a really great group of kids. They’re passionate about soccer. The goal is to get them the opportunity to play against other clubs, to hopefully turn them into life-long fans and players of the game.”

MacNeil is a life-long soccer player himself. The professor with Niagara College’s Game Development program group up playing soccer in NOTL and has fond memories of his father Patrick coaching him as a young player.

“He took us to tournaments in Erie, Pennsylvania,” he recalled, “Pittsburgh and Rochester too. I had a great time bonding with my fellow players on those trips. That really made me fall in love with the game.”

And he continues to play today. For the past 10 seasons MacNeil has been a member of the NOTL Gunners, a men’s over-35 team that plays in the Peninsula Veterans Soccer League. Their home games are Friday evenings at Memorial Park on King Street.

The U-9/10 house league plays its games Tuesday evenings. MacNeil coaches one of the five teams that evening, then the members of his select team, both boys and girls, stick around for a practice right after. It gives MacNeil and the other coaches a chance to work on skills and position play.

“The teams we played Sunday had better position- ing,” MacNeil admits. “But our team made some big jumps on positioning throughout the day. They were starting to realize that the stuff they get away with in house league was not working. They realized by the second game they had to get their passes together and work more as a team.”

From the clubs perspective, the new situation involved a bit of a learning curve.

“Some creative field scheduling was required to ensure the select team could practice, and the players needed a second uniform other than their house league kit.”

“There’s an extra cost for tournaments, and to pay for referees for exhibition games, too,” says Plaskett. “Conor found some sponsorship for the team, and the players did contribute some funds through an additional registration fee to help pay for it.”

Through his veterans soccer league contacts MacNeil lined up an exhibition game against a team from Fort Erie a few weeks ago. NOTL lost 6-3, but it was an impressive start for a team that had only been together for a short time. The two games in the TiAmo Festival, hosted by Club Roma, were the next big tests.

Goalkeeper Eli Pfeffer was the star in their first game against Paris. The nine-year-old’s fearless play earned him a chance to work on skills and position play. Some creative field scheduling was re-

Tied 3-3 after the first period, the Gunners used a big third period to win 6-3. MacNeil lined up an exhibition game against a team from Fort Erie, a blue chip team that has already gone further than we’ve ever gone before. Toronto’s largest tournaments.

“Conor’s vision is that this will lead to a travel, or rep team for this group of kids next year,” says Plaskett. “It really looks like there will be enough interest at this age group so that this select team can turn into a true travel team next summer.”

Avery Warren moves the ball into the Paris end.

Wyatt Neufeld challenges a Paris attacker with Phillip Leanovitch behind him.

Wyatt Neufeld fights for the ball against a team from Maple Leaf Cavan.

Jack Friesen challenges a Paris defender while Edward Shepard provides support for the Fort Erie team, then an exhibition game against Club Roma. MacNeil is also trying to arrange a friendly match against Niagara Falls before they play in the A.C. Doug- las Memorial Festival Aug. 12 and 13. It’s one of Cana-

LocalSPORTS

No portable soccer nets in NOTL parks, club president says

Mike Balsom
The Local

A bill to improve the safety of portable soccer nets passed an important hurdle to become law last week at the Ontario Legislature.

“Similar to Garrett’s Legacy Act, Bill 99 passed through its committee study Thursday and will be turned to the House of Commons for its third reading as early as in the fall. The proposed law is named for Garrett Mills. The 15-year-old Napanee, Ontario, boy was killed in May, 2006, when a soccer goal post in a park tipped over and fell on his head while he was doing chin-ups on it. His father, Dave Mills, has become a vocal advocate for safer movable soccer goal posts since Garrett’s death.

“We don’t currently have any portable soccer nets in use in our parks,” says NOTL Soccer Club president Carrie Plaskett. “Other than the very small Pugg nets (pop-up all-mesh mini-nets) used by our Timbits division, all our nets are permanently anchored to the ground.”

Bill 99 is the fourth version of the proposed law that’s been introduced since Garrett Mills’ death. The current attempt to pass the law, spearhead- ed in April by Progressive Conservative MPP Ric Bresee, whose Hastings—Lennox and addington riding includes Napanee, has already gone fur- ther than the previous three tries.

If passed, the new law will require that movable soccer goals be securely anchored to the ground whenever they’re available to be used. Any ad-
tional requirements for portable goal posts will be up to the minister of tour-
manship, culture and sport to set after the law is passed.

According to the Con-
sumer Product Safety Commission, 42 people, mostly kids, were report-
ed killed in the U.S. and Canada between 1979 and 2017 by falling soccer goal posts that can weigh as much as 400 pounds. Another 263 died more are hurt each year.

“When I am on the soccer fields I constantly see kids climbing on our nets,” Plaskett says. “Even one situation, one death, or injury, one tragedy is too many. Definitely, the NOTL Soccer Club would support whatever changes that would make things safer for kids.”

The U-10 soccer select team: Coaches Will Reid, Conor MacNeil and Mike Pilitteri; middle: Matt Kieda, Declan MacNeil, Edwin Shepard, Eli Pfeffer, Martina Tempelsteers, Avery Warren, Wyatt Neufeld, Noah Viertich, Philip Leanovitch and Leo Pilitteri; bottom: Jack Friesen, Nathan Reid, and missing from the photo: Emmei Cheomy, Jordan Dulas, Charlie Hiebendaal and Evelyn Olsen. (Photos by Mike Balsom)
Swim team comes first at Memorial Pool meet

Penny Coles
The Local

The Electrifying Eels experienced the thrill of competition as a team Saturday against swimmers from Pelham and Dunnville.

About 30 youngsters, aged five to 16, took part in the meet at Memorial Park. The team has a full complement of 40 swimmers, but not all could attend, says Adriana Vizzari, mother of four kids who are part of the team.

The swimmers will compete against other municipalities in four different pools over four weeks, and then in a final regional meet mid-August, they explain. They were in Dunnville last week, and will swim in Grimsby and Lincoln over the next two weeks.

This year the regionals are at Brock University on Aug. 12, and next year will be hosted by the NOTL team. “We'll have to be ready for that,” says Vizzari.

“The Electrifying Eels had a great Saturday,” she adds. “The team won our meet and there were quite a few first-place ribbons taken home.”

It was a great experience for the kids, she says, “so positive.”

Practices, Vizzari explains, are held at both the St. Davids and Memorial pools on alternate days. Members of the swim team can attend all of the practices, or if transportation is a problem, they just go to the practices they can get to.

The coaches, Ella Carrique and Sierra Kelly, are former lifeguards at the town pools, and former swim team members, says Vizzari — to her, that’s one of the reasons local pools are so important.

“It’s awesome to see this go full circle for the swimmers,” she says. “These kids are our future lifeguards,” as well as instructors and coaches, and they are creating an important community that teaches kids to swim, passing on a love of swimming, and most importantly, contributing to water safety.

In addition to the swim team, swimming lessons are also full, she says, and the summer camp run by the town brings bus loads of kids to Memorial Pool as part of their program.

The team held a fundraiser Saturday with a concession stand at the meet. “Caps are the first order of business,” Vizzari says, as one of the basics — swim caps help the kids feel like a member of the team, and also help identify swimmers according to their team. Other teams, she adds, have caps — so far, the NOTL kids are the only ones without them.

In past years, “there were caps and T-shirts or sweaters for the swim team, but this year there just hasn’t been any money. I think it would cost about $200 for the caps,” she says. “We’re hoping to receive some donations.”

The swim team offers an accessible sport, with little cost, she adds. “It helps kids learn to swim, and to learn their strokes. They don’t have to be a racer — they just have to be able to swim 25 metres.”

Living in Niagara-on-the-Lake, swimming is a skill that’s essential, “and not all homes have swimming pools,” she says.

Memorial Pool is looking good, with a new high diving board — as a town councillor, Vizzari asked for it to be in the town budget, and other councillors agreed — and St. Davids has been painted and given a face-lift. It is being well-used, as are the tennis courts beside the pool, she says. And every day she sees kids using the path that connects the large Cannary Park subdivision to the park and pool.

As for the pool’s future, last year’s St. Davids Pool Fundraising committee, to which she belongs, ended with a mandate for the committee to look into either repairing or replacing the pool, but it hasn’t met since the October election. She hopes it will soon. “I would like to see a facility in St. Davids that supports the community. These pools are both essential. And this pool is so accessible, and really well-used, especially on the hot days we’ve had. Plus kids can meet their friends there, and kids from other schools. This pool is very community-driven, and it’s so important we continue to offer it.”

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa starts Saturday’s swim meet at Memorial Pool. (Photos by David Gilchrist)
OBITUARY

NEUMANN, LIAM—Died in a tragic accident on Sunday June 25th, in St. Catharines, Ontario, at the age of 34. Beloved son of Barbara Worthy and Ronald Neumann, brother to Jordin Neumann, uncle to Bowan and Sophia, and devoted dog parent to Brody. He is survived by members of the Worthy family; Uncle John, Ian, Jenn, Josh, Justin, Jarrod, Jake, Cami-Ann, Chelsea, Taylor, and Alex; and many members of the Neumann family including Uncle Vince, Aunt Pauline, Nancy, Christine, Jim, Peter, Denise, Karen, Lisa, Kim, Wayne, Bryan, David, Janet, and John, in Canada and abroad.

Liam was a graduate of Parliament Oak Elementary School and Niagara District Secondary School, (Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario); University of Guelph, (Bachelor of Arts, Honours, International Development); and University of Waterloo (Master of Development Practice).

Liam was a lover of all things active (hockey, basketball, lacrosse, snowboarding); a devotee of David Attenborough, poetry, classical music, and Queen; preferred all things pink; was a fearless adventurer, disobeyed countless rules, and above all was passionate, witty, and brilliant.

A citizen of the world, Liam travelled the globe his entire life. He had multi trips to Europe as a child, spent a gap year travelling Asia, travelling on a motorcycle, wagon, boat or tractor; and then as a young professional his career took him to four continents, working in project management and external relations, with a specialty in humanitarian affairs, gender equality, food security, and sustainable socioeconomic development.

He was also the recipient of numerous academic grants and awards, as well as published in the International Conference on Sustainable Development.

His travels with his beloved dog, Brody, were legendary. Brody became as well published in the International Conference on Sustainable Development.

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Sudoku solution from July 12, 2023

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

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