Proposed noise bylaw dropped in response to negative attention

Penny Coles
The Local

Thanks to local comic Joe Pillitteri, Niagara-on-the-Lake has attracted the attention of national media for its draft noise bylaw that bans hooting and singing after 9 p.m.

He has also drawn attention to the “ridiculous” 55-decibel level of noise as the limit proposed in the bylaw, which is below the sound of normal conversation.

The attention he attracted has convinced town councillors, who weren’t expected to discuss the proposed changes until their Aug. 24 meeting, to drop any thought of adopting the changes, and concentrate on enforcement instead.

The recommendations in the proposed bylaw included limiting the noise level at 50 decibels between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., and 55 decibels between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m.

The media attention has made NOTL a “laughing stock,” said Coun. Wendy Cheropita, agreeing that the proposed changes should be dropped.

Lord Mayor Betty Diessro suggested staff should not pursue the draft bylaw, and instead, councillors should hold a workshop to talk about the existing bylaw and deal with the challenges of enforcing it. Her motion was approved unanimously.

One of the most popular postings on social media in recent days was a satirical article from The Beaverton, a national publication, with a headline that shouted “Police in Niagara-on-the-Lake investigate drive-by hooting.”

But Pillitteri, who has been using humour to highlight the issue in several media interviews, including CTV, Global TV, and a local radio station, says the draft bylaw was not a laughing matter — it would have had serious repercussions during a time when local businesses are already suffering.

While revising the Town’s noise bylaw has been an ongoing council discussion, and on the radar of stakeholders such as the wineries, breweries and restaurants, “I don’t think anyone thought it would get to this stage,” he says. “It’s been a good wake-up call — if you don’t get involved, decisions will be made for you that will impact our businesses and our quality of life.”

“We enjoy family gatherings,” he adds. “When my dad tells his stories, he’s talking at 75 decibels. I want to be able to hear his stories.”

This bylaw, if approved, would have impacted every one, businesses and residents. “It’s important we don’t turn a blind eye to that,” he said.

Pillitteri was at Chateau des Charmes Winery last Friday afternoon, where he was partnering with the Canadian classical Quartetto Penny Coles
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Consider it a rally, a flash mob protest, a celebration, or all three — the crowd gathered on Queen Street Monday night planned to make a little noise and have fun.

Stacey Mulholland, one of the organizers, called it a “joyous occasion,” a time to celebrate a community coming together as #onenotl, which includes music, carriages, wineries, restaurants, and all that is best about the town.

It was also meant as a “soft message” to town councillors that Niagara-on-the-Lake needs to be a vibrant community for all ages, and the proposed noise bylaw expected to come before council wouldn’t support that.

Originally discussed as a protest, the conversation quickly turned to the need for something positive, says Mulholland.

There has been so much negativity, so much divisiveness in town, we decided to turn it into a celebration,” she says, referring to a discussion amongst a core group of people who speak regularly about their tourism-related businesses.

The timing was right to share some positivity, with restaurants now open, people coming back to town, and the pandemic seemingly under control.

“We have a lot to be thankful for,” Pillitteri says. “The people in this community have plenty of reasons to be happy.”

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Brent Carver, Tony award-winner and friend

Janice Thomson
Special to The Local

There has been a great deal of international press this past week, lauding Brent Carver’s outstanding achievements on the stage and screen over almost 50 years. His professional colleagues and those who followed his career are very familiar with his special, unique talents and abilities to interpret and deliver remarkable performances.

But there is another side to Brent Carver, a side that is equally remarkable. Like each of us, Brent was a complex individual, with traits that I will always treasure. He was kind, inquisitive, loving and generous to his family, friends and those he encountered in the community. I had the good fortune to count him as a dear friend, he was one in a million. Niagara-on-the-Lake residents became familiar with his presence as an upcoming part. Music residents became familiar with his special, unique, loving and gentle friend. He was, with the deepest love and treasured pets.

Like each of us, Brent was a part of the fabric of NOTL, and his presence will be missed. Brent lived in NOTL for the past 25 years, and had a history of deep friendships prior to that, so we are not the only community mourning his loss. Our thoughts are with all who knew and loved Brent.

Thank you to the Carver Family for sharing him with us. Here is the announcement of Brent’s passing sent by his sibings, Vicki, Frankie, Randy and Shawn: Our family is sharing news of Brent Carver’s passing on Aug. 4 at home in Cranbrook, BC, his birthplace and favourite place on Earth. Blessed with many talents and a natural love of theatre, Brent was always known as a first-class performer, unique in the presentation of his craft, delighting audiences through film, TV, stage and concert performances.

An impressive record, dating back to 1972, of awards, solo shows, collaborations with musicians, Broadway and West End shows and memorable performances at theatres across Canada and the United States culminated in a Governor General’s Performing Arts Award For Lifetime Artistic Achievement in 2014 – a proud moment for our entire family.

But Brent, in his humble fashion, will be remembered as the kind, gentle and gifted man he was, with the deepest love and respect for his true friend and family member.

His love of performing was matched only by his zest for life and lifetime devotion to family, friends and treasured pets.

Thank you to the performing arts community for embracing our Brent and helping him fulfill his dreams with joy in his heart. Brent will be missed.

All our love
The Carver Family

While actor Brent Carver was well-known as an award-winning performer, he was also a kind and loving friend. (Photo supplied)
Gelato for Music Niagara’s Music and Laughter series. The initiative was being filmed by Niagara College for the festival’s At Home virtual concert.

As he spoke to The Local from the York Road winery, the sound of musicians could be heard playing in the background.

“Of course it’s easy to download an app that measures sound levels, but it doesn’t tell you at the edge of the tent under which the musicians were playing, it was 68 decibels. “The music couldn’t be any more beautiful, flowing out through the vineyard of Chateau des Charmes on a summer night. But with all the live music our industry has worked hard to get back, it’s the work of a lifetime to ensure the music we create can be heard playing in the backyard.

“All of the town’s concerns were being raised,” said Pillitteri.

He compares the situation in town to the movie Footloose, an American musical drama that chronicles a battle in a small town between politicians who want to ban dancing, and locals who are fighting the prohibition.

“You watch it and think, who would do that in real life? I can’t think of a better comparison than what this bylaw would do to NOTL, the way it’s proposed.”

Proponents of the proposed “political process” is new for the owner of Lakewinds Estate Winery, who does stand up comic locally, primarily to help raise funds for causes he supports.

“Ultimately, and I guess personally, I had to get involved. I knew it would impact funding for things that are important,” he says.

Some of the businesses that would have been the most affected are also the most creative in terms of finding money for charitable organizations, including The Terry Fox Foundation, the Niagra Community Foundation, the Canadian Cancer Society, NOTL Minor Sports, Red Rock Resort, and Vineyard Sisters, Gara, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Niagara Rotary Club, and various other community initiatives, he says.

“How much money can we raise if we can’t have these events?”

Pillitteri has been a regular at the Jackson-Triggs Amphitheatre, performing to raise money for The Terry Fox Foundation, but that would have to come to an end under the proposed bylaw, without a special exception.

“The same would hold true for other popular events, such as the Virgil Stampede. The Virgil Business Association, organizers of the event, has given more than $1.2 million to the community through its annual fundraiser.

“If you’re yelling happy birthday to your grandmother by your backyard at 9 p.m., you’ve broken the proposed bylaw and could draw a $500 fine,” says Pillitteri.

It would have restricted how residents celebrate special occasions with family and friends, and would limit recreational and cultural arts activities, eliminate outdoor concerts and live music on patios, and diminish the quality of community events, he says.

An online petition Pillitteri set up had drawn almost 9,000 signatures by Monday night’s discussion at council’s planning meeting, and the number was continuing to climb toward his goal of 10,000.

“The petition has been signed by Steven Page of Barenaked Ladies, who noted “as a musician, audience member and wine lover, I have seen numerous outdoor concerts in NOTL, specifically at Jackson-Triggs have been an important part of my life.” Killing performances such as these would be a huge and destructive blow to both the arts and wine communities in Canada,” Page says.

Also voicing his concern and signing the petition was singer Alan Doyle, who has performed at the Jack- son-Triggs Amphitheatre. “Let’s save this most amazing music venue,” he says. “The music industry is facing a crisis like never before. We need all the help and venues we can get.”

Pillitteri was hoping his online petition would con- vince councilors that the changes to the bylaw were a bad idea, and it worked.

Referring to the petition and the resulting attention from the public, Dinozo said the proposed changes to the bylaw were making a lot of people angry. “We need to stop, take a pause and start again with this particular draft bylaw, no matter what you do now to try and fix it, people will continue to be angry with it.”

The recent proposed revisions came about as a result of a community directive to town staff to review noise policies and gather input from the public to see where improvements could be made to the current bylaw. It had been approved in 2012, but not without lengthy debate amongst councilors and the public at that time. Ongoing concerns have been from residents living close to venues that held permitted special events, and from neighbours of short-term rentals, where loud parties can be an issue.

At the request of council, town staff reviewed noise as it relates to special events and outdoor locations, and how it could be better controlled.

They were also tasked with investigating the possibility of including a decibel level, which is missing in the current bylaw, leading to the recommen- dation of limits of 50 and 55 decibels.

At a virtual open house in September of 2019, a group of business people and community members make their way to the cenotaph in a horse-drawn carriage to celebrate NOTL as one community. (Fred Merkner)

Several councillors spoke of the good information that came out of the open house, which shouldn’t be lost just because the draft bylaw is abandoned. Coun. Clare Cameron elicited a guarantee from interim CAO Sheldon Randall that the comments from the open house will be preserved in a report for council, ready for the time when the current bylaw is discussed.

Another point they made, agreeing with several of the comments from the public, is the need for better enforcement of the current bylaw, including Pillitteri, is the need for better enforcement of the existing bylaw.

“We had meetings, we lis- tened, and right from the start everyone complained of lack of enforcement,” said Coun. Erwin Wiens, adding if enforcement isn’t part of future discussions, the problem will never be solved.

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Jimmy Lai becomes emotional when asked whether he is sad that his sister in NOTL must be worried about him. (Screenshot from CBC National)

Jimmy Lai is also a kind, loving, humble family man, says his niece

Penny Coles

The Local

When Jimmy Lai, on trial for organizing and participating in protests, was asked in a rare interview recently if he was worried he might one day “be spirited away in the middle of the night to prison in mainland China,” he said yes, but “what can I do? Just keep quiet?”

That was about a week ago, and the owner of Apple Daily, a media outlet openly critical of the Chinese Communist Party, hasn’t kept quiet. Instead he has continued his criticism and protests, and was arrested Tuesday morning. The media tycoon, with close family and business ties to Niagara-on-the-Lake, was taken from his home in Hong Kong, this time, according to international media, with his 39-year-old son, News agencies are reporting the arrest was over suspected collusion with foreign forces, under China’s new, restrictive national security law, which bans slogans and protests, and can mean life in prison for anyone suspected of subversion or collusion.

He had been arrested earlier this year, along with other prominent business people, on illegal assembly charges, for organizing and participating in protests last year.

A billionaire, he can be seen in photographs marching through the streets of Hong Kong in protest last summer, during adownpour, a plastic bag over his clothes keeping him dry.

He speaks out, as he does in the CBC interview, knowing the danger, because of the stakes involved.

While there are many in NOTL who know of his business interests in town, they may not know much about the man and his family, who have been coming for regular visits, or his decades-old quest for democracy.

Lai is the owner of Vintage Hotels, which includes the Pel- lar and Post, the first hotel to be taken over and run by his twin sister, Si Wai Lai.

She caused quite a stir when she arrived in NOTL in the 1990s, also buying, on behalf of her brother, Queens Land- ing, the Prince of Wales from the Wiens family, the Oban Inn from Gary Burroughs, and properties on Queen Street, where she built the Shaw Cafe. The chain of Vintage Hotels has grown since then to include other properties in Niagara and across the province, but Si Wai’s interest in recent years has been the Oban, while the Vintage leadership has taken over man- agement of the other properties.

Although there was some criticism from locals about her makeovers of familiar landmarks in the 90s, Lai had all the hotels updated and brought up to her high standards, says John Wiens.

The town had already gone through one major change in the 70s, with the Shaw Festival drawing tourists who filled NOTL hotels and restaurants, he says, but Lai investments catapulted the town into a second stage of develop- ment, one that was positive for the town, bringing increasing waves of tourists, as well as retir- ees drawn to the area.

Everything she touched had to be perfect, with no expense spared on fulfilling her vision, says Wiens, who was always to do the best she could for Ni- agara-on-the-Lake, the town she loves and continues to call home.

Her purchase of the Prince of Wales was not the easiest of times for him. He and his fa- ther were not at first interested in selling but when she made an offer “too good to refuse,” her father and another family part- ner decided it was time to sell.

He didn’t, and was disappointed that running the hotel was not to be in his future. However, in hindsight, he says the family wouldn’t have had the means to do what the Lais were able to do.

“She wanted to make it into a very special, first-class destina- tion, and she did,” he says.

Working with the Town, she also invested in Simcoe Park, which benefited from the upgrad- ing, and made large donations to NOTL first entry into the Cor- mons in Bloom competition, which led to the town being named the prettiest of its size in Canada, recalls Wiens.

“When I look back, I can see that a lot of good came from that,” he says.

In the early days, she loved to talk about her plans, she was industrious and enthusiastic about the future, and also open about her past and the struggles she and her brother had faced.

Although she now chooses a much quieter, private life, she remains positive about her busi- ness interests in NOTL.

Her daughter, Erica Lepp, says her uncle Jimmy, her aunt and six children, now be- tween the ages of 19 and 42, have travelled often to Niag- ara-on-the-Lake, they love it there. He does not come as much as he used to, when her grandmother also lived in NOTL, but he still visits, and one of his adult children spent last year here, working at the Oban.

“She’s a great guy,” Lepp says, and although she’s hesitant to discuss his politics, she says he always had the same passion for democracy and freedom.

When she speaks to her uncle, as she does regularly, they don’t speak of politics, they speak of family, her cousins and their children, and she tells him she loves him.

“He’s a kind man, a calm person, and he’s always been passionate about what he be- lieves. What has happened is not surprising,” she says.

She spoke to her cousin in Hong Kong this week, but says conversations are far, out of necessity, guarded. She told them she was thinking about them and offered to do anything she could to help. She has no idea how long he will be detained or if he will be allowed out on bail under the new secu- rity law, she says.

She calls this a “cumulative moment” in his life, but nothing new for him. “He has always been so dedicated, not just in politics, but in all his beliefs,” she says.

“I remember him saying to me, when I was a young girl, ‘what good is having money if you don’t have freedom?’

She says he loves NOTL and although the creative vision of upgrading the hotels was her mother’s, he always supported it financially.

Si Wai is an outgoing, active person, still involved in the run- ning of the Oban and going out on her three-wheeled bicycle twice daily. “My mother loves this town, and always has.”

The cloak of privacy she wrapped around her and her family goes back to the early days in NOTL, when they were known by racists, and pub- licly criticized for Si Wai’s in- volvement in town.

“She said, ‘We have a lot of good friends here, and the many great people I’ve met here!”

To protect them, her mother sent her girls, Erica and Celia, to school in Niagara Falls and then St. Catharines. She wouldn’t let the comments bother her, but she determined she should defend her children. Her mother is a person, and having con- firmed so much worse in her life, she is not easily intimidated, says Lepp.

After high school, Celia went on to study in Europe, and came back to NOTL, taking over the running of the Oban Inn and becoming a beloved member of the community, until her death from cancer in 2014, leaving family and friends devastated by their loss.

Lepp says her uncle, like her mother, is strong, and the criti- cism they faced has not had an effect on either of them.

“They’re similar in that way, not easily swayed by what’s go- ing on around them. When you’ve grown up in communist China, when you have the be- liefs they have, you are not going to be intimidated.”

She calls her uncle a “hum- ble man,” wealthy, yes, and likes nice things, but not flashy. He’s also a loving family man, and devoted to God, she says.

He is generous, faithful, and has always been an incredible uncle, she adds, offering guid- ance and support to her and her sister Celia.

“We have always held him, my bed and my bedside prayers close to our hearts, and have endless gratitude for everything he has done for us.”

Lepp mentions her uncle being chosen one of Time Mag- azine’s top 100 influential people, and the comment written about him. “Though he went from a child labourer in a garment facto- ry to owning known clothing line and media company; he rejected contemptibility and the status quo when he chose to criticize a pow- erful government and support a primarily student-led democracy movement in his beloved Hong Kong. His courage in the face of the firing of his home, as well as his subsequent arrest for his role in challenging the rul- ing institution, spoke of his love for the world as an inspiration for those seeking self-determination. It was this kind of bravery that inspired me to mention the Hong Kong protests in my Oscar acceptance speech, and remind all of us to always strive to speak truth to power,” as the quote from Com- mons, a hip-hop artist and Acade- my Award winner asked by Time Magazine to comment on Lai’s inclusion in the prestigious list.

Lai knew he was risking his freedom by continuing his criti- cism, he told journalist Adri- enne Arsenault in his interview for the CBC National. He said he is not immersed, because if he was, he would be able to do or say anything, and would be letting the country’s rulers do whatever they want. His deep worry is for the young, he said, and he hopes Canada and other- wise countries will offer asylum to young activists, and also use their combined leverage for change. He said he had asked his staff not to put themselves at risk, and has told his family “to go if they need to.”

When asked by Arsenault at the end of the interview if he was concerned for his sister in Cana- da, who must be worried about him, he becomes emotional, and says, “well, it must go on.”

When Lepp is asked if she is worried about him, says she is not, but in his fulfilling, his role in God’s plan for her uncle, and he believes the same. “He too says this is all part of God’s plan. And when you have that belief, you don’t worry!”

Jimmy Lai can be seen taking part in a protest. (Screenshot from CBC National)
Three presentations to council Monday night from the tourism sector sent a clear message to local politicians to get to know the next stage of the pandemic recovery period, and to work with council on fulfilling the community’s needs to achieve success.

Edward Laforgue, president of the NOTL Tourism Advisory Working Group (VTWG) and Tourism Director for the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, was up first at the virtual council meeting, which included Janet Jones of the Bed and Breakfast Association of NOTL, and Karen Kaiser, marketing director for Real Estate Winery and chair of Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Jones brought up two new committees of the chamber, the NOTL Tourism Advisory Working Group (VTWG) and Tourism Director for the NOTL Chamber of Commerce’s marketing committee.

“Our wish is to have a productive and successful year in 2021 and to communicate with town council, so we hope this is a start,” said Laforgue before beginning his presentation, one he had prepared for the previous council meeting, but which was put off because of COVID.

He explained the two entities he represents, the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, the community’s leading business advocate, and Tourism NOTL, the tourism marketing organization and subsidiary of the chamber, which is committed to the promotion of responsible growth and sustainability of tourism in NOTL.

“The Chamber and Tourism NOTL are not the official eye on council or on town officialdom, or a dependency or agency of the town,” he said.

Despite the office closure and reduction in staff during the pandemic, the chamber has been busy with a recovery plan and guide that follows provincial guidelines, which offers information and resources are available free to all, members or not. “We are committed as a community to develop a tourism strategy,” says Clare Cameron, one of the chamber’s directors, who represents the town and all stakeholders through the process to be successful, “from the beginning. It’s not there at the moment, but it’s there. Depending on who is doing it and who is putting it together, you can just add it later.”

Addressing marketing NOTL, a destination, Kaiser told council the town is on the road to recovery, but “the path is slow.”

Tourism NOTL is launching a marketing campaign that speaks “to the invisibles that Canadians are feeling in travelling in these uncertain times,” she said, with a three-month campaign that was launched Aug. 1, and allows for any necessary adjustments to messaging during September and October.

The goals are to increase day trips for wine and culinary experiences, shopping and theatre (when it’s available), and increase overnight stays, she said.

Coun. Wendy Chaputula asked Kaiser what NOTL was like “before we had the value of tourism,” and having had the benefit of seeing the town evolve, Kaiser said, “I feel we’ve come full circle talking about a tourism strategy similar to a conversations years ago. What is exciting to her, she says, is the opportunity for young people to live, stay and work in the community.

She shows the main street regularly, and loves going downtown. Seeing local markets and visiting her favourite bakery “to me is what NOTL is.”

During pandemic it was said to see the street empty, and it made her think “this is what it used to be like. We have to be careful with what we wish for.” She also cautioned that “the history of the word ‘tourism’, which can mean different things to different people, and instead encouraged thinking about sustainable tourism, which includes the three pillars of environment, community and economy, which she hopes to be in balance, and need to be addressed during tourism strategy discussions.

Although demographics are changing and the town is seeing younger visitors, she says she doesn’t believe that’s long-term, that young people are more comfortable travelling now, and are experiencing. They provide an opportunity for marketing, but the older, Shaw Festival patrons, who also spend more while they’re in town, will return, she believes.

Jones explained she was representing the new NOTL Tourism Advisory Working Group, an independent group falling under the umbrella of the Chamber that represents all segments of tourism and all segments of the community affected by tourism. Members of the group have the expertise to find solutions to the challenges NOTL is facing, she said.

Jones is running her B&B at less than 20 per cent last year, and “if it’s lucky I will have 50 per cent at the end of the year.”

Although we don’t have a clue what will happen in the next two or three months, the strategies and planning need to take place now for short-term recovery, she said.

“One of things that has been deeply disturbing to me, is the sense of die off I feel in the community. There seems a fairly significant amount of interest between interest groups, everyone is out to win, and there are unacceptable references to racism and prejudices,” references suggest there are only “certain kinds of visitor” needed in NOTL, and are “deeply disturbing.”

Success for all segments of the community won’t come from fighting each other, she said, suggesting a professional, independent facilitator would help “keep our options on the table in a co-operative, collaborative way,” so that the end of it “everybody buys into it and we all win. We have to commit to bringing everybody to the table.”

### Discussions could halt Virgil skateboard park

#### Penny Coles The Local

Coun. Clare Cameron says she loves the sound of kids having fun, but which was put off because of COVID, had intended to make in March, “I’m trying to ensure all residents are heard. “ She is making concerns at an appropriate time for discussion.

Although demographics are changing and the town is seeing younger visitors, she says she doesn’t believe that’s long-term, that young people are more comfortable travelling now, and are experiencing.

She also explained the importance of collaboration with the Town and all stakeholders during the process to be successful, “from the beginning. It’s not there at the moment, but it’s there. Depending on who is doing it and who is putting it together, you can just add it later.”

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They provide an opportunity for marketing, but the older, Shaw Festival patrons, who also spend more while they’re in town, will return, she believes.

Jones explained she was representing the new NOTL Tourism Advisory Working Group, an independent group falling under the umbrella of the Chamber that represents all segments of tourism and all segments of the community affected by tourism. Members of the group have the expertise to find solutions to the challenges NOTL is facing, she said.

Jones is running her B&B at less than 20 per cent last year, and “if it’s lucky I will have 50 per cent at the end of the year.”

Although we don’t have a clue what will happen in the next two or three months, the strategies and planning need to take place now for short-term recovery, she said.

“One of things that has been deeply disturbing to me, is the sense of die off I feel in the community. There seems a fairly significant amount of interest between interest groups, everyone is out to win, and there are unacceptable references to racism and prejudices,” references suggest there are only “certain kinds of visitor” needed in NOTL, and are “deeply disturbing.”

Success for all segments of the community won’t come from fighting each other, she said, suggesting a professional, independent facilitator would help “keep our options on the table in a co-operative, collaborative way,” so that the end of it “everybody buys into it and we all win. We have to commit to bringing everybody to the table.”

### In an effort to protect against the spread of COVID-19, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Administrative Buildings remain closed to the public until further notice.

The Town is committed to protecting the health and well-being of our community.

Staff continue to provide service online and over the phone from 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM, Monday to Friday.

905-468-3266

info@notl.com

Online Service Request at www.notl.ca
Let’s get serious about bylaw enforcement

The Town received a lot of attention this week from traditional media, social media and even a well-known satirical media publication, for the much-ridiculed noise bylaw being proposed. Kudos to Joe Pillitteri and all those who got on board, ensuring that the issue would never again see the light of day. Humour is contagious, and who could resist the howling and hollering jokes, when they were actually written into this bylaw, the same one that limited outdoor speech to almost a whisper.

Positivity is also contagious, so thank you to those who gathered on Queen Street with your #onenotl message. Great reminder of all that should be important to us, all we should be grateful for, especially now. But really, credit where credit is due, the 25 people who spoke out about the bylaw at an open session earlier this week should be recognized. There was no humour in their comments, although they must have thought that they would even be talking about the recommendations ludicrous. The inconsistencies alone as pointed out by those who spoke should have been enough to sink the bylaw as proposed, but there was much else wrong with it. The decibel level was ridiculous, and would have meant events you enjoy and help businesses survive, and even backyard family celebrations, would be in contravention of the bylaw.

But here’s a little more information worth remembering for those who jump to judge without understanding the bylaw.

First, the bylaw was drafted by staff, and when our local media carried the council’s media attention for it, town councilors had not yet addressed it. There was zero likelihood, after the July open house comments, that they would be supporting it. The fact that it would have hardened politicians pulling the plug on it, but it was headed down the drain anyway.

The other titbit worth noting, is that while Courtenay Clare Cameron and Erwin Wiens were asked early in the term of this council to meet with business community members and the public, to hear concerns and comments about the existing noise bylaw, they did not write the new one. They reported what they heard, which was likely more to do with lack of enforcement than a need for tougher restrictions. Cameron commented Monday she had no idea where the 55 decibel level in the proposed bylaw came from — it certainly wasn’t in their notes to staff. So let’s not blame council, or any individual councillor, for this debacle.

Another little note. Going back to the original, existing bylaw, which has no decibel level limits in it, two issues have been mentioned repeatedly. The first is that the Town doesn’t have enough bylaw officers, they don’t work evenings, when infractions usually occur, and the police have better things to do. So enforcement is the real issue, and the Town is going to have to find a way to fund more bylaw officers, or schedule evening or on-call shifts.

The second, mentioned as recently as Monday’s meeting, was that neither the police or bylaw officers have the equipment needed to measure decibels. Yet for the last week, residents and the public have been going around town measuring noise levels on their phones. That’s how we know just about everything we see here is more than 55 decibels.

Hopefully this absurd conversation is behind us, and if this Town is going to have bylaws, to control noise or anything else, let’s see it get serious about enforcement.

COVID risk requires responsible decisions

An interesting observation came from a reader last week regarding a photo of some people having fun at a local winery. They were standing shoulder to shoulder, and of course, while enjoying some wine and nibbles, were not wearing masks. And yet, we know the number of COVID cases are on the rise in Niagara-on-the-Lake. At press time Tuesday, we were up to 59, most from close contact, some community contact.

The reader pointed out publishing the photo is mod-

Need help? Make the call

Distress Centre
For depression, distress and crisis, 24 hour help line: 905-688-3711

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

Gambler’s Anonymous Phone line 905-351-1616

KIDS HELP PHONE
Service for youth 416-586-5437
1-800-668-6688

Crises Line kidsHelpline.ca

Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings every Wednesday evening 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.
St. Mark’s Parish Hall 41 Byron St., NOTL

General Help Line: 1-800-222-8477

Assaulted Women’s Helpline

Crisis Line niagaratips.com

Police Tip Line 905-351-1616

Tragedy and Survival Line 905-351-1616

FREE Call Centre

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

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Local

The trusted voice of our community

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Bill Auchterlonie on Astrology

Auchterlonie on Astrology

Donald Combe

Special to The Local

In The Farrell, a Chinese

family discovers that their

beloved grandmother is terminal

ill. She has not been told of her

impending death, so in order

that the family can gather from

far and wide to celebrate and
to say goodbye to the beloved

matruch a wedding is planned for

one of the grandsons. In-

teresting behaviour follows and

we see what makes the family

function and if lying to grand-

mother was a good course of

action. Each member of the

family plans for life without

Grandmother. The film ends.

View from the couch

Parks Canada interpreter Scott Finlay, as Major General Sir Isaac Brock, offers Brock Talks, Saturdays and Sundays at 12 p.m. at the Queenston Heights monument. (Fred Mercnik)

Dennis LaRochelle
Niagara’s Dr. Hirji recommends continued vigilance

Dr. Mustafa Hirji
Special to The Local

For five months, Niagara has lived with COVID-19. Fortunately, thanks to all of us working together, we have slowed the spread of infection, protecting lives and enabling a safe reopening of most of our economy. As we head into the next chapter of this pandemic, I want to share how all of us can help to keep our communities safe.

There are three ingredi- ents to an infection spread- ing through our commu- nity; the pathogen (e.g. virus) must be introduced; there must be close interac- tion amongst us so that the pathogen can move from person to person; and we must lack immunity.

Our response to this pandemic has addressed each of these in turn. From January until late-March, we focused on prevent- ing the COVID-19 virus from taking hold in Cana- da. Federal monitoring of international arrivals, and local Public Health efforts to find infected travelers kept COVID-19 at bay. This bought us time to prepare.

By mid-March, with COVID-19 now spreading in Canada, Public Health shifted to finding and iso- lating infected persons, and tracing contacts. By isolat- ing cases and contacts, we stopped interactions with others, thereby halting the spread of infection. Prov- inces instituted emergency measures preventing large gatherings and closing busi- nesses to further stop inter- actions.

Ultimately, we hope to shift to managing COVID-19 by that third element: addressing immu- nity. Unparalleled global ef- forts are underway to develop vaccines that can provide us that immunity.

While we await a vac- cine, all the ingredients that allow COVID-19 to spread are still here: the infection is in our communities; with businesses reopening, we are now interacting more than we have for several months; and almost none of us have immunity.

Recently, we have be- gun to see larger pockets of infection where people have had close interaction. This includes an increase of COVID-19 cases in Niaga- ra-on-the-Lake tied to the close interactions in house- holds and social events. Fortunately, this transmis- sion has thus far been con- tained, resulting in little ad- ditional risk to the public at large. However, it illustrates the potential for a new wave of infection to arise if we let our guard down.

Therefore, we must re- double efforts to keep two metres distance from each other. We should keep washing or sanitizing our hands often. We’re now re- quired to wear a face cov- ering when indoors, but we should wear it outdoors too if within two metres of people. And we should stay home and get tested if we have any symptoms of ill- ness. Keeping this up after five months is understand- able. But practising these measures will avoid the kinds of interactions that risk infection spreading to our friends, neighbours, and loved ones.

As we enter this chapter of the pandemic, Niagara has the distinct advantage of having been resilient enough to endure the dis- ruption of losing physi- cal interaction, and strong enough to pull together to support each other. It is therefore no surprise that we have managed COVID-19 better than other parts of the province, like the GTA. I be- lieve this will be our greatest strength as we head into the coming months: remaining united as a community to practice measures that pro- tect each other, and to exer- cise compassion in support- ing each other.

Dr. M. Mustafa Hirji is the acting medical officer of health for Niagara Region.
Horwath talks to Anett Kane, owner of Budapest Bakery, a new business badly hit by the pandemic.

NDP MPP Wayne Gates and NDP leader Andrea Horwath get down to brass tacks about what local businesses need, and aren’t receiving, in the way of financial aids. One of their stops was to talk to Paul Dickson, a Queen Street business owner for more than 30 years. (Photo by Mike Balsom)
‘Gentle giant’ will be missed by many

Penny Coles
The Local

John Skubel, the ‘gentle giant with a huge heart,’ will be most remembered by the public for his many years of presiding over the Christmas tree sales for the Niagara Lions Club.

To those who knew him best, he will be remembered as a good, loving, man who would do anything for his friends and family.

At the age of 67, John died suddenly Saturday, Aug. 8, leaving his wife Victoria, his 14-year-old son Luke, a large extended family, and a circle of dear friends to mourn a pillar of the community.

A life-long resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake, he began working at Niagara Fruit and Vegetable on Four Mile Creek Road when he was 14 years old, and after it was sold, moved to Niagara Orchards & Vineyard on Niagara Stone Road, which he loved, although he was only there for a short time.

During his career, John became well known to the agricultural community, and took his responsibilities toward his customers, the local farmers, very seriously, says his wife Victoria.

He loved to hunt, was active in sports earlier in life, and most enjoyed sitting on the porch of their Concession 6 home with a morning cup of coffee in the good weather, or relaxing around a bonfire with family and friends in the evening, she says.

And he was the go-to guy when anyone needed help with just about anything, she adds.

If his death was a shock to the community, it was as much so to his family.

Victoria says John had been battling cellulitis, a common but bacterial skin infection, for years, several times ending up in the Niagara Falls hospital, but he would be given antibiotics and recover.

Several of the symptoms, including a fever and chills, are similar to COVID-19, so although he was sure he was suffering a flare-up of the recurring infection, he had driven himself to an assessment centre, and they were all relieved when he received a negative response, says Victoria.

Then, last Wednesday, he became sick enough to be taken to the hospital, where he was tested again for COVID, again with a negative result.

“It was his big toe,” says Victoria. He believed a sliver was causing the infection, she says. “It was that simple, a routine thing.”

That was what she was told by his family doctor, who had seen him through these infections many times.

But in the hospital, he had been laid flat in his bed, leaving his body unable to drain the build-up of fluids, she says, and died of congestive heart failure.

During the few days he was there, she was unable to see him, and only spoke to him twice, once in a conversation with Luke as well, and then a second time when he called to say he wasn’t happy in the hospital.

“He asked me to come and get him and take him home,” she says.

The next phone call was from the hospital Saturday morning. Victoria says she had been out for a walk with their dog, returned home, sat down with a cup of coffee, realized she had missed the call, and dialled the hospital, expecting good news.

She thought they were going to tell her to come and pick him up. She and Luke had bought a 55-inch TV for John, so he could watch the Stanley Cup playoffs, and they were excited for him to get home to watch the game that evening.

Instead, when she identified herself, “they said, ‘he’s not with us. He’s gone.’ I said, ‘Gone where?’ I had no idea he was that ill. He wasn’t that ill. It was such a shock, I still sometimes feel like it’s not real. Sometimes I just wait for him to call, or to show up late for dinner.”

They had been together 22 years, she says, having brought two families together when they married.

Her grandparents had arrived from Poland in the early 1900s, she relates. Her grandfather worked for the Niagara Lions Club member John Skubel received many awards during his decades with the club. This one was for his dedication to the club and his community. (Photo supplied)

I just wait for him to call, or to show up late for dinner.”

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Continued on page 11
1073 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil

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We are open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. - Monday to Friday, and closed on weekends until further notice.

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Continued from page 9

Thorold paper mill, and once he had saved enough money, they purchased the Concession 6 property, and it became a tradition that family members would come from Poland to stay with them while they established themselves in Canada and NOTL.

John's grandfather had also made his start in NOTL, staying with his grandparents, she says.

Decades later, Victoria and John married, purchased the property from family, and it became “John's little paradise. He loved it here.”

Although her siblings, the Bators, and his, knew each other when they were kids, John was at St. Michael Catholic School with kids, John was at St. Michel Catholic School with her older siblings. “He didn’t know I existed,” she says.

Once Flynn took it over, “there wasn’t a day gone by that John didn’t stop in, he cared so much about it.”

After going to Niagara District Secondary School, John went off to study marketing in Toronto, and when he returned, went right back to work for Niagara Fruit and Vegetable.

John Wiens was one of John's closest friends in those days, having played lacrosse and hockey with him. John was quite an athlete, he says. “We played minor hockey together, and we were also on the same team in Junior B lacrosse. We went to the Canada Games in Burnaby, BC,” together, says Wiens.

“John was the goalie, and he was amazing, in both hockey and lacrosse. He was an all-star, award-winning goalie,” he says, “a great athlete in his day, and an important member of the Junior B team.”

They roomed together in Toronto while they attended Ryerson, then known as a polytechnic institute, says Wiens, who was studying hospitality. They had NOTL friends stop by often, and although their good times were “low key,” they had a lot of fun together, having their “eyes opened wide” at life in the big city, while they lived the big city, while they lived the life of students, existing on Kraft Dinner and hot dogs.

“Because of John’s love of sport, he was committed to supporting minor sports through the Niagara Lions Club, says long-time club member Terry Flynn, who had taken over the organization of the Christmas tree sales, last year moving it, with John’s help, to the Cornerstone Church Virgil property. He considered John a friend and a mentor, and looked forward to the time they spent talking during the quiet evenings of the sale.

“Everyone would come in looking for John, says Flynn — he was so liked and respected by the regulars.

“John represented the Lions at many events over the years. He was a familiar figure when you entered the Virgil Volunteer Firefighters annual turkey roll. As well he was our guard-ian sitting at the door for the Niagara Lions monthly youth dances. While he was known as a gentle giant, he could also be fierce as a ‘Lion’ when required, and the kids jumped when he roared,” says Wickabrod.

“He provided me with great guidance in my years as a Lion. He was the true epitaph of what a Lion stands for: integrity and honour.”

Victoria says John was also a lot of fun to be around, and always willing to go along with her when she wanted to do something adventurous.

“When they began dating, she says, everyone says they would run into some of his large circle of friends, who would sit down to chat. “We would go out for dinner, and it could be in Fort Erie or Burlington. and there would still be friends who would show up.

The night we got engaged, the same thing happened. He was going to propose during dinner, and we ended up getting engaged in his truck later.”

Once married, they wanted a family. That didn’t happen until Victoria had to spend some time in a maternity ward with her ill sister — that was the only place there was a bed available. Listening to the babies crying, the sadness was overwhelming, and when she got home, she told John they had to give up.

“Shortly after, she says, “I got pregnant. Isn’t that always the way?”

Luke was the light of John's life, Victoria says, and she realizes life will have to change for her and her son. “There is going to be a huge void, but we have to carry on,” she says. “I think with our large families, and our friends, we’ll be okay for the future. I guess we take it one day at a time. I don’t really know what to expect.”

Because of all those who knew John and would want to honour him, Victoria is organizing a celebration of his life at the family home on Concession 6 Wednesday, Aug. 12, beginning at 10 a.m. Bring a lawn chair and a mask, she asks.

**He was the true epitaph of what a Lion stands for: integrity and honour**

Catharine Wickabrod

Once Flynn took it over, there wasn’t a day gone by that John didn’t stop in, he cared so much about it. He’d stop by every night, and sometimes two or three times a day.

“John knew what the locals wanted, and he would take orders from some and deliver trees in his truck. He also continued to take two weekend shifts, his days off to hear him laugh.”

Catharine Wickabrod, secretary of the Lions, also remember his work during the annual Christmas tree sale, and delivering the trees all over town. “John was a loyal Lion, and he had his priorities in order. Family first, work next and then volunteering, always helping those in need,” she says.

John represented the Lions at many events over the years. He was a familiar figure when you entered the Virgil Volunteer Firefighters annual turkey roll. As well he was our guardian sitting at the door for the Niagara Lions monthly youth dances. While he was known as a gentle giant, he could also be fierce as a ‘Lion’ when required, and the kids jumped when he roared,” says Wickabrod.

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Young violinist recorded at Pondview to be presented virtually

Mike Balsom Special to The Local

While most fans of Music Niagara will eagerly anticipate the return of 20-year-old violin virtuoso Emma Meinrenken to its At Home series Sept. 13, a dozen supporters had the chance to welcome her in person.

Emma Meinrenken debuted at the 2020 online concert series, a celebration of 250 years of Beeethoven in Port Colborne. He holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Ottawa, and spent many years playing trumpet in jazz combos while teaching in Niagara. Along the way, he got into jazz and classical music, and decided to focus on clarinet.

Currently based in Niagara-on-the-Lake, he is the only other musician on the program. For the Thursday night student performance, he found it’s almost better to pick up the instrument, and one more to get the floor.

The first movement was a rustic, simple tune, with slow, deliberate pacing. It was followed by the second movement, a spirited, lively dance.

The third movement was a complicated, fast-paced piece, with intricate melodies and rhythms.

As the final movement approached, the audience held their breath. Meinrenken’s performance was masterful, with a haunting beauty that left them spellbound. 

“His playing was absolutely amazing. He had such control and expression. I was completely entranced,” said one of the supporters.

Meinrenken, who is currently a student at the University of Toronto, said he was happy to perform for the live audience.

“I was so excited to be able to play live again. I’ve been practicing a lot in my room, but it’s different to play in front of a live audience,” he said.

The supporters were equally thrilled to witness Meinrenken’s talent in person. “It was a privilege to see such a talented musician perform,” said another supporter.

Meinrenken has been building a reputation as a rising star in the classical music world. He has already performed at many prestigious venues, and is poised to make a name for himself in the coming years.

His passion for music and his dedication to his craft inspire his supporters, who look forward to hearing more from him in the future.

Mike Balsom

Young violinist records ‘live off the floor’ From Steve’s Shed

Gravely James records ‘live off the floor’

Gravely James, a local blues artist, recorded his new album at Steve’s Shed in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The album, entitled “Gravely James,” features a mix of original songs and covers, with a strong emphasis on the blues genre.

James recorded the album at Steve’s Shed, a local recording studio. The studio’s sound engineer, Mike Balsom, worked closely with James to capture the raw energy of his performance.

“Mike Balsom is one of the best sound engineers in the area,” James said. “He really brought out the energy of the songs and captured the essence of my performance.”

The album was produced by Alex Goldberger, who also produced James’ previous album, “Grave-Lee.”

Goldberger praised James’ vocals on the album, saying they were “powerful and soulful.”

“He’s a natural performer,” Goldberger said. “I think this album really showcases his talent.”

The album’s title track, “Gravely James,” features a driving rhythm and James’ distinctive voice. The song is a tribute to the blues legend Lee Dorsey, who James is known for his bluesy love songs.

Goldberger described James as a “natural” blues singer, with a deep, gravelly voice.

“Gravely James is a unique talent,” he said. “I think this album will really take off.”

The album is available for purchase on most digital music platforms, and a physical copy will be released at a later date.

Gravely James’ next project is a collaboration with local writer Mike Balsom, who is currently working on a book about the blues genre.

“I’m excited to see where this collaboration takes us,” James said. “I think we have something special on our hands.”

Gravely James is looking forward to performing from the album on future music festivals and live shows.

“Performing live is where I really come alive,” he said. “I can’t wait to share this music with everyone.”

Gravely James’ new album, “Gravely James,” is available for purchase now on most digital music platforms.

Mike Balsom

Emma Meinrenken performs under the winery tent, with Music Niagara founder and artistic director, says, “It’s always a joy having Emma back. We’ve had many, many evenings of pleasure listening to Emma as she was growing up.”

Bankas is impressed with Meinrenken’s maturity and growth as a musician. “Of course, she’s well-equipped already technically but her musical maturity is definitely coming to fruition and is very noticeable. It’s a pleasure for me as a teacher to have my students perform,” he said. “And I’m happy to support her as an ensemble member.”


Mike Balsom

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Bankas is impressed with Meinrenken’s maturity and growth as a musician. “Of course, she’s well-equipped already technically but her musical maturity is definitely coming to fruition and is very noticeable. It’s a pleasure for me as a teacher to have my students perform,” he said. “And I’m happy to support her as an ensemble member.”


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Ravine patio a safe, welcoming experience

Kim Wade
Special to The Local

Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery opened during Phase 2 of the Province’s re-opening program, delayed to ensure the safest protocols were in place to ensure a comfort level for staff and customers, says owner Paul Harber.

Guests are welcomed under a large tent, and even once the Province entered Stage 3, the restaurant remained closed.

The tent was used last summer as a temporary set-up while the winery’s new event facility was being built. They were not planning to use the tent again and had even planned to dismantle the patio-stoned flooring in the spring. Due to the pandemic and the imposed restrictions, Harber said they had to “change gears quickly” to adapt to the changing circumstances. The patio stones were left intact. The tent went back up. The newly-built facility became the retail store to accommodate physical distancing and a flow of traffic. Tastings are being offered by reservation on the terrace outside the new event/retail building near the pizza oven area.

In light of the restrictions, the events, mainly weddings, planned this summer at the new facility have been cancelled and the normal traffic to the winery is down. Harber said the winery parking lot is empty of the usual New York and Ohio licence plates. They are seeing more people from the Toronto area, though, and he is pleased to see so many locals coming out.

He said that many locals are within walking distance of the winery and can stroll over with their dogs to the patio for dinner. “It is nice to have a bit of normalcy and have a safe setting to enjoy it in.” Harber explained that at this point their business is down more than 50 per cent in revenue, but they were able to welcome back around 50 per cent of their regular crew, mainly full-time staff, including retail employees, cooks, and servers, and the full management team. Harber is taking the safety issue very seriously. He explains they are safeguarding the staff and the public by following all the provincial guidelines, plus they are taking it a step further by adding their own precautions. For example, the menus are set on the tables and covered with Plexiglas to ensure it is visible, without the need to be handled. The tables are placed more than two metres apart, and a barrel is placed at the end of each table to act as a serving table, to minimize contact between the guests and the staff. The washroom trailer provided for guest convenience is cleaned and sanitized often, as are the washroom facilities inside the building. Staff is required to wear masks at all times and employees and guests are screened upon entering the winery.

Harber says he is comfortable with staying in Stage 2. “We don’t want to go inside.” He maintained that they will take it “one day at a time” and keep a close watch on the situation. Factors such as the weather and the number of cases of COVID-19 will determine plans for the fall. They are prepared, if needed, to go back to doing just takeaway, online and retail pickup orders if necessary. They are constantly reassessing the situation, watching numbers and listening to reports. He lamented that it is “exhausting, but these are the times we are in.”

Like many other restauranteurs and patios, Ravine is offering a truncated menu. Harber says the kitchen is focusing on a quality and flavour-focused menu, with daily features to give their chefs a challenge and allow them to use their creativity. They are “having some fun with the daily specials” which usually feature the fresh produce from their onsite organic vegetable garden. For example, Saturday’s daily special was a creamy polenta and sautéed wild mushrooms, with chillies drizzled, and a black garlic ice cream smothered with flower petals. Other offerings on the menu may sound like simple fare but they all have that Ravine flair, incorporating specific items from their garden, the relaunched Lowrey Bros. line of preserves and sauces, and even honey from their apiary. The St. David’s Sundae features vanilla ice cream smothered with Lowrey Bros. peaches, and topped with their own honey oat crumble.

Harber said he is “glad to see how receptive everyone has been in the offerings.” He refers to the positive Open Table reviews that have received, adding it is “nice to see our efforts are being noticed,” as they try to provide “the safest possible experience during COVID times.”

Guests will be delighted to discover the drink menu. With so many choices, it is sometimes good to leave the choosing to the experts, including Jayne Stewart, who has been working at Ravine for more than eight years. Her family and the Lowrey/Harber family have been friends for generations. In fact, it was at her great-grandparents’ picnic where Harber’s great-grandparents met and eventually started the Ravine legacy. Stewart is a wealth of information about the history of the farm and the winery itself. She highlighted the NV Charmat Rosé, which was produced during the pandemic. This rose has become very popular and is almost sold out. In addition, there is also the NV Ravine Charmat, a prosecco-style sparkling wine, nice on a hot summer day. If sparkling wine is not your style, Stewart suggests trying one of the Lowrey Bros. ciders in either the apple or pear flavours, from the relaunched Lowrey Bros. brand, and offering a light, refreshing summer drink.

In addition to food and drinks on the patio, Ravine has provided entertainment, with live music to add to the experience.

Summer patio hours are Sunday, Wednesday and Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Reservations are required and can be made through the Open Table platform at Ravinevineyard.com or by calling 905-262-8463.

Firetruck attracts attention

A Niagara Nursery School youngster got the first look at the town’s new fire truck when it arrived in town and firefighters tested it at the community centre, weeks before it was introduced into service Monday. The new 2019 truck has a 101-foot elevating platform, a 2,250 gallon-per-minute pump and a 300-gallon water tank. It took more than 500 days to build the new truck, which has been outfitted with features to help firefighters when responding to the changing needs of the community, including more than 200 feet of portable ground ladders, and an aerial platform at the end of the ladder that allows firefighters to perform rescues directly into the platform rather than having to remove a potential victim down a ladder to the ground, explains Fire Chief Nick Ruller. Typically, a truck such as this will remain in service for 20 years, he says. (Photo supplied)
**S.T.E.A.M. STORYTIME: SCIENCE – TECHNOLOGY – ENGINEERING – ART – MATH**

**Virtual – Jane Austen Tea Party**

**Weekend of golf sees championships decided**

**RiverBrink engaging public with online book discussions**
SKUBEL, JOHN (SKUBIE) — August 8, 2020 — It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of John Frank Skubel in his 67th year. Loving husband of Victoria and proud father of Luke. Predeceased by his parents Natly and John. Survived by siblings Helen (Tom), Dennis (Pat), Jane, Richard (Ann), Brother-in-law to Christine (Robert), Helen (Mark), Joe (MaryJane), Fran (Peter), Elizabeth (Steve), Robert (Doris), Donna (Bryan) and many loved nieces, nephews, great-nieces and nephews and a great-great-niece.

John enjoyed his work at Niagara Orchards & Vineyard Corp., where he was always available to advise and help all farmers in the Niagara region. John was a lifetime member of the Niagara Lions Club, and enjoyed the annual Christmas Tree Fundraiser. He loved his annual trip up north hunting with the boys. He was an avid hockey player, and played All Ontario Lacrosse.

There will be a celebration of John’s life held at the family home on Wednesday August 12, where a tree planting service will commence at 10 a.m. Please bring a lawn chair and a mask.

Those who wish, may make a memorial donation to the NOTL Minor Hockey Association and NOTL Minor Lacrosse. Cremation has taken place.

Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.

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As more businesses and services reopen, we must all continue our efforts to protect each other.

Continue to practice physical distancing. Stay two metres apart even in gatherings.

Wear a face covering where physical distancing is a challenge or where required.

Continue to wash hands frequently.

Get tested if you are worried you may have COVID-19, or have been exposed to the virus.

Inside or out, stay safe. Save lives.

Visit ontario.ca/coronavirus

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Run for Pink Pearl, to help young women with cancer

Penny Coles
The Local

Maria Mavridis continues to fulfill a promise she made to her mother to support organizations offering support to those going through cancer treatment, although the pandemic has cancelled most fundraising events making it a challenge.

The event coming up, a walk or run in support of Pink Pearl, is especially meaningful for her, as she will have her eight-year-old daughter Hope by her side.

Pink Pearl is an organization founded by cancer survivor Elise Gasbarrino, who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer at the age of 21.

While Gasbarrino was receiving treatment at a Hamilton Cancer Centre, she found there were few young women her age to talk to about her situation and decided to organize some programs for the younger age group, including wellness retreats, social events and family support.

Pink Pearl, which gives 100 per cent of the money it raises to fighting cancer, has become a thriving charitable organization focused on bringing together young women affected by cancer through a network of peer support and innovative programs.

Mavridis, who has organized several fundraisers for the organization, says before her mother Vera died of breast cancer at the age of 45, she asked her middle daughter Maria to continue on with the work she had started. Vera had lived with the cancer diagnosis and its progression for 13 years, and during that time, she volunteered for several organizations that raised money to fight cancer, promoted awareness of the disease or offered support to those who were going through cancer treatment.

Maria has had the BRCA blood test that uses DNA analysis to determine an increased risk of breast cancer. She has taken that as a lesson to make the most of her life every day, she says, including helping her community, accomplishing something positive, and setting a good example for Hope to follow.

Maria, a busy mom and business woman who helps her father Bob with their family-run restaurants in Niagara on-the-Lake, will continue to honour her mother’s request by participating in a run being held this month for Pink Pearl. She has organized other successful fundraising initiatives in the past, but at this time during the pandemic, supporters are taking part in individual runs.

She was eight years old when her mother was diagnosed with the disease she would go on to battle for 13 years.

When she and Hope go on daily walks through their Virgil neighbourhood, they chat, and she loves sharing her memories of her mother with Hope.

“It helps keep those memories alive,” says Maria. “She’s at an age that when I tell her how close I was to my mother, she’ll realize how much she can open up to me.”

Although she expects the five-kilometre walk for Pink Pearl to be more like “we’re on a mission” than a leisurely neighbourhood stroll, she expects her chatty daughter will be asking her questions that will give her the opportunity to share stories of her mother, and what they are walking for.

Together5k is Pink Pearl Canada’s 2020 summer event to raise funds and awareness. It’s a virtual ‘run’ designed to bring participants together from a distance in support of young women facing cancer.

“Typically, each year our supporters host their own fundraising initiatives, but we’ve found a fun and engaging way to pivot our efforts given the current COVID-19 situation,” says Melaina Gasbarrino, who has helped organize the run and will also be participating.

The programs and communications manager for Pink Pearl, Melaina is Elise’s sister, and a certified yoga teacher and reiki practitioner based in NOTL. She says the five or 10-kilometre run, which takes place from Aug. 12 to 19, is designed for participants to map out their routes to walk or run each day for five minutes, or complete their race in a day. Runners just need to finish their walk or run by Aug. 19 at 12 p.m.

Pink Pearl is “committed to raising funds to continue our programming in a safe and virtual capacity,” she says. “Our annual Niagara-on-the-Lake overnight wellness retreat hosts 40 young women facing any type of cancer, and provides our program participants with the opportunity to come together in a safe and supportive space to share, learn and build friendships. In lieu of an in-person retreat, this year we will be hosting a virtual retreat to ensure our vulnerable community is supported in a safe environment.”

To register and to start your fundraising page to support young women facing cancer, visit bit.ly/together5k.

Help Hope raise money for Pink Pearl by donating at: https://raceroster.com/events/2020/32571/together-5k/p/d/l/ participant/9597829?fbclid=IwAR2Z9Y9j6jFNC5xXmNRH4zA

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For more information, contact Penny Coles at thenotlocal.com, or visit notllocal.com.

Happy takes walks with her mother, Maria Mavridis, daily, and will also walk with her to raise money for Pink Pearl. (Photo supplied)