Residents anxious about drainage ditch spill

Families living near what they refer to as a creek, but seems to be a drainage ditch — not a ditch used for irrigation — say they were woken up early Thursday morning by bright lights flashing in their bedroom windows, around 1 a.m.

A work crew with heavy equipment was working in the nearby creek by 4:45 a.m., they said, and when they contacted the town later that morning to inquire what was being done at such a strange hour, they were told “it was a hazardous emergency situation” and the town needed to create a berm, “as someone noticed suspicious dark water flowing through the creek.”

Another neighbour talked to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP), and learned the town had been told to block the creek, which led to the development of a berm to stop the flow of water.

They were also told it was likely someone had dumped grape skins — the water, residents say, was black, and remained so early this week — but they were told lab results of the contents of the spill were pending.

Neighbours were uncomfortable that they didn’t know more, concerned about the lack of communication, and about their pets and wildlife in and around the creek, including frogs, birds and other animals. The extent of the clean-up, they said, “is concerning,” indicating the severity of the spill.

By Friday large dump trucks were brought in and lined up along Concession 5 between Line 6 and Line 7, neighbours said, and on Saturday, pumper trucks labelled were going up and down the undeveloped portion of the road, and “still no communication from the town with those living in the area. If there is a health risk, if there is any danger to the public, or even if there isn’t, that is information we need to know,” one resident told The Local.

Councillor running for the position of lord mayor for NOTL, Linda Chartrand, confirmed that on the evening of Wednesday, Aug. 17, town staff “identified what appeared to be a spill in the area near the Line 5 landfill.”

Early this week residents living nearby what the town is describing as a ‘spill’ were concerned about the lack of communication regarding the situation.

CAO Marnie Cluckie confirmed that on the evening of Wednesday, Aug. 17, town staff “identified what appeared to be a spill in the area near the Line 5 landfill.”

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Penny Coles
The Local

With the deadline for candidates’ registration for the Oct. 24 municipal election passed, there are three residents hoping to be chosen to head the next term of council.

In addition to incumbent Betty Disero, and Gary Zalepa, Niagara-on-the-Lake’s regional councillor running for the position of lord mayor, jumping into the race is retired entrepreneur Vaughn Goettler.

There are 13 candidates running for one of eight positions at the council table: Tim Balasiuk, Allan Bissack, Gary Burroughs, Adrian Crater (Vizart), Wendy Cheropita, Alistair Harlond, Maria Mavridis, John McCallum, Richard Mell, Sandra O’Connor, Katherine Reid, Nick Ruler and Erwin Wiens.

Pat Darte, Andrea Kaisser, Paolo Mele, William Roberts and Barbara Worley are each hoping to represent NOTL as regional councillor.

Those hoping for a position as a DSBN school board trustee are Jonathan Fast, Alex Bradnam, Lora Campbell, Kris Varcek, Don MacDougall, Kate Buggett and Rhona Lindo-Kelly.

Candiates for NCDSB trustees are Natalie Benoit, Larry Huibers, and Jolanta Pawlak.

Candidate for the Conseil Scolaire Catholique Mon Avenir trustee is Melissa Chartand.

To find out whether you are on the list of eligible voters for NOTL, visit https://www.voterlookup.ca/index.aspx
Pat Darte speaks of good relationship with region

Former Lord Mayor Pat Darte is throwing his hat in the ring for the position of regional councilor representing Niagara-on-the-Lake.

He is now one of five candidates to fill one position.

During his tenure as Lord Mayor (2014-2018), the town population grew by 14 percent, he says, continues to do, that would enable her to get back to her involvement in politics at a municipal, non-partisan level, and would fit into her current stage of life.

Her kids are adults, 24 and 26 now, her award-winning Drea’s Wine Company, in memory of her father Karl J. Kaiser, is established, as is the business she shares with her brother, Kaiser Design and Marketing. And she has cut back to a couple of days a week at Reid Estates Winery, where she has worked in marketing for many years. So she gladly raced around getting the signatures needed to register, and now she is ready to work with her sign committee — her son and daughter and their significant other, she says — and start knocking on doors. “I’ve come full circle,” she laughs, recalling that she and her daughter, then 11, were her 2003 award.

Continued on page 14
Former fire chief has municipal experience

Penny Coles
The Local

Former fire chief Nick Ruller may have left his position for one in a large urban setting, but he has not left the community he loves, and is hoping to have a meaningful role in its future. Ruller and his wife Lida are raising their four children in town, and have decided this is his time to run for a seat on council, hoping to represent other young families and ensure their needs are considered in council decisions. Ruller is a lifetime resident of Hagersville, in one of the first homes in the Virgil neighbourhood, went to Virgil Public School and then to Niagara District Secondary School. He remembers cycling around Virgil as a kid, riding his bike to the Memorial Park School, and has great memories of growing up in town.

It was during his high school years that he began a volunteer firefighting, before heading off to higher education. He graduated from Ryerson (now Toronto Metropolitan) University with a degree in politics and public administration, and attended the local council, she says, because the alderman, community engagement coordinator. He helped lead the town through the toughest years of the pandemic as part of the emergency control group, tasked with making critical decisions in response to the unfolding needs of the community during the time it was in a declared state of emergency. When Ruller left his job as fire chief in February, he had high praise from town leaders. Lord Mayor Betty Duvoisin spoke to his ingenuity and strategic leadership, while CAO Marie Chuckie said he was responsible for vast improvements in fire services, developing a “terrific team” to help him. Ruller himself is modest about his education and his accomplishments in town before leaving to take his job as platoon chief in an urban fire department.

He is focused on ensuring families and children are considered at the council table—not to the exclusion of other groups and other needs, he stresses, but that they are not overlooked in the decision-making process.

“I look at the situation we’re in, the challenges the municipal setting is facing that are so great and unrelated, and the importance of striking a balance of the diverse needs of the community, with young families, tourism, agriculture, development, employment and housing,” says Ruller.

Continued on page 15

Winemaker, Lions member wants to ‘help the little guy’

Penny Coles
The Local

What Barbara Worthy lacks in political experience, she makes up for in her ability to thoroughly research and understand complex issues, a skill that served her well when she was looking to enter the regional council table, as well as represented on the regional council.

Barbara Worthy is an independent, producer, well-known in the Niagara region for her stage and video multi-media productions. She produces short documentaries focusing on Niagara’s history and cultural heritage, and has taught in the town for 10 years at the NOTL Museum, where she is their community engagement coordinator. She has taught at both Niagara College and Brock University since 2006. As well as short historical documentaries, her media productions include Parks Canada films, such as the War of 1812 multi-media, Canada-wide touring productions, and current affairs for the NOTL museum.

Continued on page 15

Worthy would bring ‘investigative lens’ to regional council

Penny Coles
The Local

Katherine Reid, a Niagara resident and community engagement coordinator at the NOTL Museum, where she is their community engagement coordinator. She has taught at both Niagara College and Brock University since 2006. As well as short historical documentaries, her media productions include Parks Canada films, such as the War of 1812 multi-media, Canada-wide touring productions, and current affairs for the NOTL museum.

Continued on page 15

Retired minister also offers provincial political experience

Penny Coles
The Local

The town knows William Roberts best as the former minister of St. Mark’s Church, who came to Niagara-on-the-Lake, settled here, and remained after retirement. While at the church, he helped support migrant workers, raised money for palliative care, and hosted Shaw actors and young musicians for dinners and special events, he says.

More recently he has served on the town’s environmental committee. Roberts has decided he would like to devote his energies full-time to regional council, and has thrown his hat in the ring hoping for that opportunity.

What many might not know about Roberts is that he was twice elected to the Alberta legislature, where he focused on funding for hospitals and medical care, and improving universal access to quality health services. “I ran against a popular incumbent, and won twice,” he says.

“This led to a MBA in Health Services, and then consulting work with the Health Management Resource Group in BC,” he says. “For 10 years I directed Leadership Sea to Sky, a sister program to Niagara Leadership and graduated more than 100 young adults from this community-based leadership experience.” Roberts grew up in a large working-class family in Airdrie, and graduated from Trent University with a scholarship to attend divinity schools in Cambridge, Mass. and New York City.

“Returning to Canada, I served full- and part-time in churches and faith communities in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, with interim appointments in Jerusalem and the Chautauqua Institution in up-state New York,” he says.

While politics and church might seem an unlikely career combination, they actually have worked together, he says.

Continued on page 15

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A VOTED ‘BEST REALTOR’ IN NIAGRA
Niagara community mourning musician Peter Shea

Mike Balsom
The Local

Niagara’s music community is mourning the loss of drummer, pianist and singer Peter Shea this week.

The co-founder of the TD Niagara Jazz Festival lost his battle against pancreatic cancer Sunday morning with his wife Juliet Dunn at his side at their north St. Catharines home. Tributes began to pour in online almost immediately. Toronto singer Heather Bambrick, who played a Music Niagara Festival show at St. Mark’s Church last Friday night, spoke of losing her friend and former University of Toronto classmate during her daily shift on radio station Jazz-FM Monday.

“Everyone is devastated,” she tells The Local. “Everybody loved him. He was just that guy. I don’t know anyone who ever met Pete Shea and didn’t just completely fall in love with him. He was warm, kind, funny and engaging. He could put a smile on your face no matter what kind of hell you were going through.”

Described by Bambrick as open-hearted and lovely, she recalled first meeting him in the jazz program at U of T. “Singers and drummers always got the bad rap” laughs the frequent performer at the Niagara Jazz Festival. “But he was always so fun and hilarious. He could have been a stand-up comic. He was one of the first to ask me to sing at his graduation recital. That was such an honour, and I’ll never forget it.”

Dunn says she and her husband first saw signs that something was wrong back in 2018, but doctors found nothing. As Shea’s health declined and he began to lose weight, the couple continued to search for answers.

In March, 2020, pain in his spine prompted a trip to the emergency department in St. Catharines. A CT scan was called for, but the screwdriver meant that the appointment couldn’t happen. He finally had the scan when things opened up a bit that summer. Then, on June 22, 2020, his urologist called to tell him he had stage four cancer that had spread to his lungs and his liver.

Shea went through radiation and chemotherapy treatments, and had a hip operation to relieve the pain. He continued to stay positive and made many Jazz Festival appearances at the piano, including on Canada Day this year in Simcoe Park. He was even at the Meridian Centre in St. Catharines Aug. 6 to cheer on Juliet as she sang the Franco-Ontario anthem at the opening ceremony of the Canada Summer Games.

Niagara-on-the-Lake saxophonist Jim Gay has been a friend of Shea’s since meeting him at a gig in St. Catharines put on by La La La. “We had a great time,” Gay says. “He was always very, very kind individual, always upbeat, positive and encouraging.”

Lalama remembered playing some gigs with Shea at both of them played keys, trading tunes back and forth. “It was another set of friends who spoke of his energy and sense of humour.”

Toronto-based drummer Davide Di Renzo first met Peter Shea when they were in high school, Shea in St. Catharines, Di Renzo in Guelph. They connected at music competitions called Musicfests. “We immediately became very good friends,” says Di Renzo. “I fell in love with him the first day I met him. We laughed more than we spoke, we just became brothers right then and there. He just cracked me up, and man, was I ever a big fan of his drumming. He had beautiful technique at such a young age.”

Di Renzo moved to Los Angeles after high school to further his career in music, but when his visa ran out and he was pondering his next move, he chance met his old Musician friend at a gig in St. Catharines put Di Renzo on a course that he continues to pursue today.

“I had just finished his first year in the brand new jazz studies program in Toronto,” Di Renzo says. “He encouraged me to apply, asked me to fire him a demo tape, and he gave it to the director of the program. Sure enough, I auditioned and I got in.”

Di Renzo says all roads in his life lead to Pete, adding that they had a deep, deep connection. “I think I would have stayed in Canada had it not been for him,” he says. “Within that first year I started working with so many people and I got really lucky. I always thanked him for that.”

An emotional Di Renzo says he saw Shea about a month before his death, and cried about 80 per cent of the time because he could see how much his friend, whom he calls a deep, deep soul, was suffering.

Shea’s 50th birthday was held on March 3rd. Di Renzo tried to make it down from Toronto to Spirit in Niagara Distillery for the party, but a flurry of hospital visits that many who had planned to at tend could not.

Mavridis first met Shea and Dunn when her family was operating Marzi’s Seafood Restaurant in Port Dalhousie. They hit it off immediately, impressed as she was with what she calls Peter’s cheeriness and sarcasm. She attended their wedding in Mexico and was there to help the couple build their jazz festival.

“She was such a pure soul,” she says. “Anyone that knows Peter knows what I am talking about. And he and Juliet balanced each other so well.”

Dunn had been working with Mavridis to organize a Sept. 12 party at White Oaks dubbed “RE: Pete,” a second chance to hold Shea’s 50th birthday party. Mavridis started a GoFundMe page to raise funds to offset the cost for Dunn, and at press time it had raised $35,390 toward a goal of $10,000.

“The party is definitely still on,” Mavridis tells The Local. “It was Peter’s idea, that was where he wanted it. The food I ordered is all of them had planned to at tend all night long on that piano.”

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“The party is definitely still on,” Mavridis tells The Local. “It was Peter’s idea, that was where he wanted it. The food I ordered is all of his favourites, including the mash-tini buffet. Peter was going to play for four hours straight, but this will become the celebration of his life.”
Shaw Festival receives $6 million investment

Mike Balsom
The Local

The outdoor stage on the grounds provided the perfect backdrop for an announcement about federal funding for the Shaw Festival.

Speaking on behalf of Helena Jaczek, Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario), St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle announced a non-repayable investment of more than $6 million to support the Shaw Festival’s recovery from the impacts of the past two years.

“We all know the last few years have been a challenge, to put it mildly,” Bittle said to the gathered crowd Tuesday morning. “Here in Niagara, after the Festival’s cancellation in 2020 and the shortened season in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s vital that we ensure these economic and cultural drivers continue to thrive and grow.”

Standing beside Bittle on stage, Shaw artistic director Tim Carroll and executive director Tim Jennings both seemed to be holding back tears of joy as the $6 million figure was announced Tuesday morning. “It is our intent to support a new concert series, Bittle explained, “and with the optimism to take good of the Festival.”

Carroll thanked Bittle and the minister for the grant. “It is astonishing and marvellous news,” the man known as ‘TC’ said. “It’s going to have an incredible impact both on our theatre and the community that we are in. I know personally that I have had a lot of people coming to me to tell me (a Shaw performance) was the first thing they’ve ventured out to do in the past two years.”

Jennings talked of the infusion of the federal funding’s potential to provide much needed support as Shaw moves through its 60th season, the longest and largest in its history. “On behalf of the 600-plus artists, artisans and arts workers here at the Shaw” said Jennings, “and the thousands of local jobs that are reliant on our stability for survival, I thank you.”

He went on to point out that Shaw is responsible for almost $220 million a year in local economic impact. “We know that our work generates work for others,” he added. “Shaw’s patrons anchor long stays in Niagara and Ontario with trips to the Shaw. They often use Niagara as a launching pad for seeing other parts of the province. And arts and culture tourists, according to Destination Canada, spend more than $0.3 million there. Arts and culture tourists, according to Destination Canada, spend more than $5,000 per cent of Shaw attendees normally come from the U.S., that percentage is down significantly due to some reluctance to cross the border.

“We hired six extra full time understudies this year to try to help beyond our normal understudy complement,” explained Jennings. “We’ve been using them every week due to illness. As well, we’ve lost about 5,500 tickets worth of cancellation in the course of the season related to that.”

Attendance is not yet back to pre-pandemic levels, but Jennings and Carroll both look to this funding announcement as a major step toward getting there. “When the government announced the major festival program (Major Festivals and Events Support Initiative, or MFESI),” said Jennings, “we put in an application last summer. We’ve been talking with them constantly. They’re a partner, and they’ve been really helpful. In planning for this season, there was a lot of conversation about what we could do together and how it could happen.”

Though Shaw is running a full slate of performances this year, the effects of COVID have certainly continued to be felt in the form of staffing short-ages and smaller crowds. As well, whereas about 40 per cent of Shaw attendees normally come from the U.S., that percentage is down significantly due to some reluctance to cross the border.

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Attendance is not yet back to pre-pandemic levels, but Jennings and Carroll both look to this funding announcement as a major step toward getting there. “It is our intent to get back to our pre-COVID attendance and economic impact as quickly and safely as possible,” Jennings said. “This significant investment will help us do that. It gives us the optimism to take good risks which will benefit all of Niagara.”
The Shaw Festival has had its ups and downs during COVID, as have most businesses. It’s been a rollercoaster ride for sure, as the festival shuttered at first, eventually to open with very limited capacity. CEO Tim Jennings and artistic director Tim Carroll trying desperately to perform some magic and keep employees working and ready when it was time to resume performances.

As cautious as they were, when the theatre reopened, COVID didn’t go away, the nature of the disease and its transmission meant actors succumbed, and various performances were cancelled. Each time the stage went dark, each time they were ready to plan for a reopening, performances were cancelled. The insurance allowed the Shaw to keep paying some of its actors and other employees through 2020, when other theatre companies could not, and along with some government measures, made reopening gradual by restrictions a little easier to manage.

In a good year the Shaw generates more than $200 million in economic activity, bringing people from the U.S. and other parts of Canada to Niagara. Jennings has always been acutely aware that the Shaw suffers, so does the economy in an area that depends on tourism.

The festival has recovered, but not completely, so it is welcome news indeed that the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario is making a $6 million investment in the Shaw Festival to move it forward during its recovery from the pandemic impact, and help it thrive.

Jennings and Carroll were of course both very appreciative of the substantial gift when it was announced Tuesday, but so too should we be grateful. Good news for the Shaw is good news for all of us, from the restaurants, hoteliers and owners of rental accommodations to the owners of the gas stations where visitors need to fill up before returning home.

We’re so fortunate to have the Shaw in our backyard, good neighbours that help to look after our community.

Thank you to FedDev Ontario for a very wise decision to invest in this much-loved and respected festivity, to Tim Jennings, Tim Carroll and all at the Shaw who used their creativity to weather the worst of this COVID storm, and congratulations on doing a spectacular job through challenging times. Your reputation is well-deserved.

Penny Coles
The Local

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Penny Coles
The Local
Could regulating nature lead to more human accidents?

Owen Bjorgan and his friend Chapin, holding up a massivemusky Bjorgan caught in the gorge, prior to fishing access regulations. The river legend was released unharmed back into the ecosystem. (Photo supplied)

THE NOTL

THE NOTL Local
August 12, 2022

®

Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

Hang on, hold up — I’ve got a weird theory.

The more governing bodies restrict how we access natural areas, including right here in Niagara Region and Niagara-on-the-Lake, the more disconnected we become from healthy but possibly risky play.

This societal change with how we are allowed to engage with the outdoors will ultimately lead to more individuals not knowing how to handle themselves outdoors, creating more safety-related issues than ever before.

Here is where my theory comes into play. As a child, and up until a few years ago, I swam down in the gorge with my parents and visitors from out of town in calculated, safe enough locations. Diversions upon dozens of times. I shuffled down to the river’s edge before high school days on early mornings, and watched world-class rapids cruise down the most biodiverse waters in the nation. It is on this now legally inhabitable riverbank that I caught the largest fish of my life, an enormous muskie — an inspiring and influential nature appreciation moment.

“Owen, you’re an outdoorsy guy from an outdoorsy upbringing, so you’re different from others,” might be the response. Not exactly. The key word here is upbringing. I was allowed to have that解釋

about the treacherous, violent waters of the Virgil dams. With an admitted sense of sarcasm, over these shallow, steep, derelict stagnant waters, I must professionally ask, why are we further discouraging healthy activities like paddling and nature exposure in an environment that is safer than the Niagara River or Lake Ontario? I also can’t wait for the next alarming news segment on how much of our young population isn’t active enough and doesn’t spend adequate time outside these days. Welcome to the future.

The most unhealthy thing about the Virgil dams is how they consistently rank the lowest categories of water quality possible, according to the very agency that oversees and regulates them with a conservation authority report card.

My weird theory snowballs and gains momentum when I think about how nature exposure and opportunity lead to environmental respect and appreciation. When we are permitted to access their fresh waters, we foster a concerning culture of indifference towards our natural world while it continues to get paved over, as we ironically continue to have fruitless meetings about how to combat climate change. This may sound ruthless, but therein lies what I propose for a new era of perceived natural danger.

Put up a huge sign in the areas of perceived risk. Instead of telling people not to canoe, hike, fish, or simply venture past a certain point, let the sign show how much it will cost them to be rescued. Our eroded team be at risk of being unharmed back into the ecosystem. (Photo supplied)

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The most unhealthy thing about the Virgil dams is how they consistently rank the lowest categories of water quality possible, according to the very agency that oversees and regulates them with a conservation authority report card. (Photo supplied)
NPCA crew back rehabilitating Two Mile Creek

Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) crews were back working to rehabilitate the Two Mile Creek Conservation Area in Niagara-on-the-Lake this week.

The restoration efforts follow the 2021 clearing of infected ash trees on both sides of the Butler Street location and this past spring’s planting of 5,000 native deciduous and coniferous trees to regenerate the forest.

This week’s work involved the installation of cross vanes in the creek to improve the habitat for the numerous fish species that swim there. Cross vanes use natural materials (downed trees and stone) to focus the creek’s energy into existing pools within the creek that have started to fill up with sediment.

To prepare to work in the area, NPCA employees constructed a temporary barrier below one side of the footbridge that crosses the creek. Restoration specialist Stuart McPherson explained that the barrier was there to keep fish from swimming where the crew and contractors were working.

“We’re trying to do is to help the creek by concentrat-ing it,” said McPherson, “to help scour out some of the sediment that’s been building up in the creek. Erosion happens on the banks, depositing sediment into the creek. That moves down the creek and settles in the lower, cooler pools where fish tend to take refuge on these hotter days.”

The sediment typically comes from upstream sources of erosion. The cross vanes are laid in a way that focuses the creek’s energy, reducing soil erosion on the banks. The sediment reduction will help provide a better habitat for both fish and insects.

McPherson explained the logs being situated across the creek came from some of the ash trees cut down in the area last year. No new felling of trees occurred this week. At least 15 one-cubic-yard bags of stone sat creekside awaiting their destination in and alongside the water.

“We’re trying to direct the water into these pools to scour out the sediment,” said McPherson. “Often in creeks you have a ripple-pool sequence. You get a lot of cobbles in there, and right after there’s a pool. Some creeks meander and others go up and down, like this one. We’re expecting this will make deeper pools.”

While The Local was visiting the site, he directed a backhoe driver to adjust the position of the longest log to fine-tune the direction of the flow. The next step was to fasten the logs into place.

“There are three logs that are put together,” he explained. “We’re going to drill holes and tap through with rebar so it holds in place. This system will eventually rot. But it will help give a bit of a boost to the creek, creating a bit more pressure in that specific spot. It will generally help the overall creek health.”

The cross vanes were to be installed at two locations on the north side of the footbridge, one visible right next to the bridge, the other about 100 metres deeper into the forest. The NPCA says it will monitor those installations and consider more cross vanes in the area if necessary.

A press release from the organization said the timing of the latest work was chosen to take place outside of Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) restrictions to protect native fish populations.

NPCA employees were joined on the site by Ashcon Excavating and Sassafras Farms to complete the project.

This fall, restoration staff will return for additional plantings in the Two-Mile Creek riparian area. These plantings will work to hold the creek banks together, provide habitat and eventually cool the creek.

Mike Balsom
The Local

Nicholas J. Dibbell

Mike Balsom

Stuart McPherson, NPCA restoration specialist. lays some logs across the creek. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

With help of NPCA staff, a backhoe driver adjusts the position of a log to better direct water flow.
Hands-on makery project instruction available at library

Megan Honsberger
NOTL Public Library
Makery facilitator

Writer Jorge Luis Borges once wrote that he imagined "paradise will be a kind of library," and here in picturesque Niagara-on-the-Lake this is certainly the case.

From books, to programs, amazing facilities, online and community resources, free WiFi, a community garden and more — there remain few civic institutions quite like a public library.

Yet with our increasing connectivity society, there is now also a distinct need for more tech support, education on new technology, and help in creating amazing, one-of-a-kind projects. Indeed, all of these needs are met under the library’s roof at the veritable creative paradise of the Makery.

I’m Megan Honsberger, the Makery space facilitator at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library, and the Makery is our in-house makerspace. Makerspaces, an incredibly recent phenomenon of the mid-aughts, seek to provide community-centred workspaces and access to cutting-edge technological tools in a do-it-yourself, collaborative environment. Globally, many libraries and schools have adapted to this model to offer services beyond ‘just’ books, and we’re happy to be one of them.

Library patrons who would like to learn more about our machines can email me for more information and/or to book a 60 to 90-minute appointment. In these appointments, you can expect hands-on instruction through the process of making a project come to life. We have textile machines (sewing and rewiring, who are especially dear to me, as they echo findings and research I encountered during my Master’s degree, which looked at how technology has changed the ways in which we think, interact and behave. Registration is required for many of our programs, and spaces are limited, so make sure you register if you are planning on attending. More info about this and all of our fall programs can be found on our website.

Speaking of unexpected services, well, we’re launching our tool lending library in the fall, where library patrons are able to check out various tools to complete projects at home. More details will be available on our website. Some items available include hammers, saws, drills and sockets. More details are available at the library.

We’ll also have a set of Cricut Joys to lend out in the fall, so folks can tackle all sorts of vinyl, fabric, wood, and paper projects in the comfort of their own home. Further in the spirit of DIY, our popular Repair Cafe will be making its return on Saturday, Oct. 1, when customers can bring in broken electronics and items to be serviced by technicians volunteering from our community. We are always looking to recruit new volunteers that are skilled in electronics, soldering, sewing and rewiring, who can help other community members repair household items. Volunteers interested in participating in upcoming Repair Cafe events can forward their contact information to the library at notllibrary@gmail.com.

Outside of all that, this fall we see basic digital literacy group classes for adults and seniors that connect with others right in our community.

What is maybe unexpected for a library that I’m stoked to be helping to bring is our program for teens, where we’ll offer several unique experiences alongside cool projects from our machines that are tailored especially to teens across the region. These events, called Teen Takeovers, will be offered monthly on Thursday evenings. We’ll kick things off on Oct. 20 with an outdoor screening of something spooky, and enjoy s’mores and ghost stories by candlelight (along with pizza and snacks).

In addition, I’ll be running a one-off presentation on Navigating Screentime for all members of the family on Sept. 20. These topics are especially dear to me, as they echo findings and research I encountered during my Master’s degree, which looked at how technology has changed the ways in which we think, interact and behave.

Finally, but perhaps most relevantly, I’m running our Makery Open House on Wednesday, Sept. 7 from 5 to 7 p.m. It’s a drop-in event, so no registration is required. We’ll be showcasing some of our machines, providing family-friendly things to tink and play with, as well as offering a take-home craft and light refreshments. I’m excited for this opportunity to meet and greet the community as we enter a vibrant, plugged-in, magical fall of things Made @ Makery.

Megan Honsberger is the Makerspace facilitator at the library. (Photo supplied)

Rare hole in one

It was an exciting day, and possibly the shot of a lifetime, when public player Derek McArthur notched a hole in one on the seventh hole of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club last week, a rare feat on a par 4 hole. (Mark Forbes)
Guiding fun for girls from five to 17-plus

As the summer winds down, Guiding in Niagara is getting ready for another year of fun, friendship, and new experiences – and we’re looking for female mentors for the next generation of Sparks, Brownies, and Girl Guides.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, we have about 75 youth members, spread across five branches of Guiding. While we have a fantastic core team of leaders, we are in need of new adult volunteers to help keep our units open and thriving. We provide training and skills development, and no experience is needed – just curiosity, an interest in our community, and a willingness to have fun.

Our youngest members, Sparks, are aged five and six, and meet in Old Town on Monday evenings for one hour. Sparks promise to “Share and Be a Friend,” which really sums up their program well — Sparks is all about making new friends and trying new things. If you love being silly and staying young at heart, Sparks may be the right fit for you.

Brownies meet on Tuesday evenings in Old Town, and could use a few more hands — the Brownie unit always fills to capacity. Brownies are seven and eight years old, and their motto is to “Lend a Hand.” Their program is all about getting out in the community, making new connections, and discovering ways to make a difference. If you enjoy stories of mythical creatures, are curious, and like a good knock-knock joke, the Brownies would love to welcome you (and they’ll even give you an honorary “Owl” name).

Our third branch, Guides, meets in Old Town on Monday evenings. Guides are aged nine to 11, and their program encourages exploration of both current interests and new skills. Guides do lots of outdoor activities like camping and hiking, but also start to explore their leadership capacity, plan service opportunities in the community, and a willingness to have fun.

In a recent survey, 85% of Niagara-on-the-Lake residents said they believe our town can attract a lot of visitors and be a great place to live. Scan the code below to view the complete survey results or visit www.chambernotl.com/researchandresources

Megan Gilchrist
Special to The Local

Brownies learn about the science of baking at their weekly meeting.
Volunteer leaders needed to help run programs

Continued from page 10

and share their knowledge (of everything from science to s’mores!) with younger branches. If your idea of a great weekend is singing around a fire and roasting marshmallows, Guides could be a great match.

Our oldest two branches, Pathfinders (aged 12 to 14) and Rangers (aged 15 to 17-plus) meet on Monday nights in a variety of locations, ranging from Virgil to Old Town to Stamford (and beyond). While we currently have a full complement of leaders for these two groups, we are always looking for guest speakers to share their talents, insights, and life experiences, so even if you can’t commit to regular meetings, but would be interested in sharing a skill or two, well love to have you visit.

Girl Guides of Canada recognizes and values the richness of human diversity in its many forms, and therefore strives to ensure environments where female-identifying youth and women from all walks of life, identities, and lived experiences feel a sense of belonging and can participate fully. We encourage self-awareness and awareness of others; room for difference; and environments where our members feel safe, respected, supported, and inspired to reach their potential. If you think we sound like the right volunteer fit for you, and you’re keen to share your unique talents with our youth, please visit us online at www.girlguides.ca, email 1notlpathfinders@gmail.com, or call Megan Gilchrist, NOTL Community Guide, at 905-329-4983 for more information.

We look forward to welcoming you to the Guiding family soon.

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Sparks, the youngest Guiding group, explore their community. (Photos supplied)

Rangers Tannin, Annika and Samantha, bronze Trailblazer Award recipients.

Guides attending a LEAP Interprovincial camp meet Olympian Sarah Wells.
The Icewine Cocktail Party, one of the signature fundraisers of the Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake, is returning after a two-year absence. “Grazius hosts Rick and Gianna Dritsacos will welcome guests to their garden on the Lake, after being greeted with campaign and cavalry.” Multiple food stations offer entries, including beef tenderloin, sushi and cheese, accompanied by donated trays of appetizers and sweets,” she adds, to be followed by an ice cream station. The entertainment will be provided by “the soft sounds of talented local musicians, the Athertones.”

This black and white, casual dress event would not be possible without the continued generous support of local winemakers, restaurants and sponsors, including lead sponsor Nancy Bailey of Engel & Volkers of Oakesville, says Spagnol. All proceeds will be equally divided between Rotary International’s ongoing projects worldwide, and Red Roof Retreat, the local organization that provides programming, including summer camps, for special needs children, young adults and their families. The Rotary Club of NOTL has been a sustainable donor since its founder, Stefanie Bjorgan, established this essential organization in 2006, says Spagnol. The funding raised from the Rotary event will allow for future expansion, including larger accommodations and hopefully offering weekend reprieve this fall.

Chris Hatch, a relative new-comer to town and to the Rotary Club, says he joined to meet people, and to find ways to give back to the community he now calls home, “and to have fun.” He’s finding his goals have been quickly met, as he helped out with the vaccine clinic held outdoors, planted tulips at Sir Simeon Park, and recently flipped pancakes on Canada Day.

He’s never been to a Rotary’s Icewine Cocktail Party, since they were cancelled during the first two years of COVID, but is looking forward to the September event. “The icewine project tends to work for us — the tickets are usually sold out,” he says. “The garden is beautiful, so the venue will be spectacular.” Hatch says he’s been pressed with the club since he joined, not just because of the events it hosts, but for the level of community engagement, and the breadth of the fundraising recipients, from international projects to community organizations such as Red Roof Retreat.

And for this particular event, there will be great food, lots of community support, and lots of fun, he says. The event is Sept. 17, 7 to 9:30 p.m., at the Hiscott House, 78 Pricedout St. Tickets, at $150 each including tax, gratuity and a tax receipt of $50, are limited. For more information or to purchase tickets visit https://niagaranotlrotary.ca/page/icewine-cocktail-party.
Town waiting for lab results to identify contaminant

Wednesday evening, “staff promptly investigated,” contacted Ontario’s Spills Action Centre (SAC), and took containment measures, “as is the protocol in these situations.” An officer for the Ministry of the Environment provided direction to town staff late Wednesday evening, requesting the SAC contact the Region of Niagara and direct the region and the town to begin an environmental clean-up.

“The environmental officer from the ministry provides guidance, documents conditions, assesses the environmental and health impacts, provides direction regarding the incident, and ensures the spill event is responded to appropriately,” Cluckie said.

“Town staff, the Region of Niagara and an environmental consultant responded to this direction as effectively and efficiently as possible, and began the necessary actions to clean up the site.” The ministry has been kept apprised of actions taken, she said.

“While the spill’s cause and source have not yet been definitively determined, lab analysis is currently being completed. Once the analysis is complete and the substance is known, additional steps will be determined, and more information will be provided to council and the public.”

The town “is doing everything practicable to address the concern and prevent and eliminate any negative effects from the spill,” Cluckie said.

“While I can certainly appreciate the many questions that result from a situation such as this one, unfortunately, there is not much more I am able to share at this time. Once the lab analysis is back, we will know more and can confirm some of the details.”

Cluckie explained the town is obligated to follow the direction of the ministry. “The town is responsible for ensuring adequate clean-up and restoration of the site. Staff is taking this matter very seriously and is providing great attention to this matter to ensure the town’s responsibility is fulfilled.”

The provincial officer did not express concern “for imminent human or wildlife safety,” otherwise residents would have been told, she said, “and staff will continue to do their due diligence to ensure the health and well-being of those in the vicinity. Maintaining health and safety is of utmost importance to staff.”

The town anticipates the lab analysis will be complete and provided later this week, said Cluckie.

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‘Cheerleader for NOTL’ ready to serve community

Continued from page 2

Andrea Kaiser says her 11 years of municipal experience will help her on regional council. (Photo supplied)

‘Feedback is residents are ready for change’

Continued from page 2

It feels like a door has opened. The path we take aren’t always what we planned. ‘Nobody likes to lose,’ she says, referring to her federal election campaigns. ‘Maybe this is where I’m supposed to be.’

Her experience at the municipal council table, she says, will allow her to contribute to a meaningful way at the region, while following her guiding principles, built on the pillars of sustainability, economic prosperity, and environmental protection and social inclusion.

Strategic planning is something she’s good at, and will help with her goal of building a sustainable economy for NOTL and the region.

Kaiser currently serves as chairperson of Ontario Craft Wineries Sustainable Winemaking Certification Program. Her daughter, Madison Lepp, whose thesis proposal for her Brock University Masters of Sustainability Leadership is on Building Climate Change Resilience and Climate Equity in Canadian Municipalities, has long been Kaiser’s inspiration for making environmental issues a priority.

She’s also had lots of experience working around the region, with wineries and agriculture, she says. And she’s always been a cheerleader for Niagara-on-the-Lake. ‘I love to contribute and be involved. It sounds so corny, but I want to be working for a better future.’

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Feedback is residents are ready for change'

Four years ago he was disturbed by the way things were going in town, and he hoped for change with the 2018 election. Now he’s hopeful the next election brings change, and an opportunity to get the finances of the town back under control.

Over the past year, he says, several people have encouraged him to run, and he has said “it’s not going to happen” but that has changed. “When I saw there were only two candidates for mayor, I decided if I didn’t stand up and be counted, I have no right to criticize.”

One of the solutions to the town’s financial problems, he says, is to increase revenue that stays in town, without a high percentage going to the region. That leads him to tourism, “taking it to the step” without adding to the traffic and parking issues.

One of his thoughts of increasing revenue is building agri-tourism on local farms, maybe by assisting the farming community over time to become a destination through offering Michelin-star farm-to-table meals, that would keep young people in town, giving them jobs and building a sustainable farming community.

A few large parking areas, with hop-on hop-off shuttles, is good in the U.S. somewhere, “and they’re beautiful.”

They could be offered free, or at a reasonable price that would increase parking revenue, he says, adding “it’s not going to happen overnight but it is something that could be built up over time.”

“Why wouldn’t we do that to help ourselves?”

His other issue is the other communities, having plans for Virgil, Queenston, St. Davids and Glendale. “We can’t just dump everything we don’t want in Glendale. And why can’t we have contextual zoning so houses have a commonality, to return to the quaintness of NOTL?”

He is also concerned about young people in town. Parents of the more established families are very concerned about losing their kids to Toronto or Hamilton, where they can find jobs, he says. “If they can’t find jobs, if they can’t live here affordably, we’re driving them out.”

Goettler says he fears the direction the town is going is not looking to the future. “It’s coinciding with the present, and it’s not working.”

“I don’t have all the solutions,” he adds, although building agri-tourism could be one, “but people are having families, and they want them to survive and thrive. It’s our job to make sure we’re providing for them.”

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Healthcare, long-term care priorities region can help fix

Continued from page 3

A lot in common, says Roberts. They both require a belief in the importance of public service, and a desire to help the community.

Reid would bring ‘different perspective’ to municipal finances

Continued from page 3

also worked at Sunnybrook Farms, Maryland Estates Winery, and in recent years has been the winemaker at Joseph Estate Wines. In 2015 Reid received the town’s volunteer award for working with youth. She has been a member of the Lions Club of Niagara for almost 20 years, and helps out regularly at the St. Davids Lions Club, she says.

She has received the Lions Melvin Jones Award and the Flavours of the Week Aug 29th - Sept 2nd (limit 2 per customer) Aug 29th - Aug 26th (limit 2 per customer)

Continued from page 3

Roberts is married to Eileen Turner, who has lived in Virgil for 12 years, and together, he says, “we have six adult children and seven grandchildren, whose future in a better world we work for, and plan for, and we are passionate about,” he says.

He says he chose regional council, having followed with interest the work and contributions of both Gary Burnough as regional chair and Gary Zalepa as regional councillor. “I learned how essential it is to have a strong voice at the regional council table and to advance the best interests of NOTL,” he says.

He believes in the adage all politics is local, he says, and also has experience in regional planning and provincial levels, so will draw on that to better serve residents in Old Town, Queenston, Virgil and Niagara-on-the-Green, and everyone in between.

He can be reached at 905-371-NOTL (6685), email vote@williamroberts.ca or visit

Continued from page 3

Who of Canadian Women, for being one of the few women winemakers in Canada in 1999.

Reid has served on the town’s agriculture committee and safety committee, enjoying both, and is now a member of the Queenston Residents Association — she says, she enjoys spending her time helping her community. “I like living in Queenston, helping the Lions of Niagara and St. Davids, serving as president of my own club and living in the most beautiful wine region of the world,” she says.

She is also the current chair for Sight Preservation in Lions, with the main goal of recycling old eyeglasses.

Reid says she is concerned about local healthcare, and is anxious to see the town successful in the effort to have another nurse practitioner. “Healthcare is an issue, and it becomes even more important as people get older,” she says.

Living in Queenston, and as a member of the QRA, she is looking at the lack of secondary access to healthcare.

Just not physical and mental health, he adds, but economic, environmental, cultural and even spiritual health — how people deal with their lives in terms of meaning and values are all part of healthy communities, he says.

“Building on the many assets we have in NOTL and the Niagara region, and working with the wide-ranging diversity and knowledge of constituencies, I plan to work collaboratively to maximize the advantages we have in improving the health and well-being of all residents of NOTL,” he says.

From his extensive knowledge and experience of healthcare systems, he says, he also intends to devote special attention to improving access to the seniors in acute, long-term and home care. Roberts says he’s looking forward to knocking on doors — he calls his passion for meeting and listening to people insatiable, and it amazes him to hear what residents have to say.

Continued from page 3

The importance of public service, they both require a belief in the importance of public service, and a desire to help the community.

In the end, come election day, he hopes for a good voter turnout, showing that NOTL has some interest in the future of their community.

He can be reached at 905-371-NOTL (6685), email vote@williamroberts.ca or visit

William Roberts, shown with his grandson Atti, and his wife Eileen pray for a better future for all of their children and grandchildren. He believes he can help build a better future on regional council. (Photo supplied)
Local brothers ready to release new rap album

Mike Balsom

Hip hop artists 80 Empire, otherwise known as Niagara-on-the-Lake brothers Adrian and Lucas Rezza, release their new album Intermission to streaming platforms this Friday. It’s a follow-up to 2021’s Anthems & Icons release.

“We really went at it for that one,” Adrian says about last year’s collection. “But Intermission, this one’s a bit therapeutic. We did this one more quickly, we don’t have a lot of featured artists on it, no real huge, big names. It was nice to get some young up-and-coming artists like Nejna Neferitt.”

To date, four tracks from the album have found their way to Spotify and Apple Music, in an attempt to build a buzz for the full album, which the Rezzas say is a return to their roots as young rappers living north of Toronto. That’s clear from the image on the album cover, a vintage photo of the brothers as teens in their baggy jeans, Adrian scratch- ing a record on the family’s turntable.

First came Business in May, followed by Paintings, a song whose video was partially shot in local visual artist Filomena Psanou’s Virgil art studio. Piana makes a cameo in that video.

Next came GBS, featuring 17-year-old Coney Island, New York rapper Lil’ Dee. That single, with its turntable scratches and the 1980s-style rapping from their guest, is a true throwback to the legendary rap such as Kool Moe Dee.

Just two weeks ago 80 Empire dropped Sundays, with a guest rap from Buffalo female rapper 3weethegenius. The track has been featured on US Apple Music’s Best New Songs and BAR’S playlists, as well as Spotify’s Beats and Rhymes playlists.

The brothers are expecting more adds when the other four songs on the collection come out Friday. The Local had a sneak peek listen to the full album this week.

Dear Younger Me is a nostalgic reassurance to their past selves that everything in life is going to be okay.

“I actually rap on the second verse for about eight bars,” Lucas laughs. He’s usually the beatmaster and producer on their music, while Adrian handles the singing and rapping. “Adrian brought me out of rap retirement for the first time in 21 years.”

The high notes reached by Adrian on the opening part of the song are some of the best work he’s ever done. It’s probably the most soulful 80 Empire track ever, with a sound somewhat reminiscent of early 2000s Las Vegas rapper Ne-Yo.

A listening session with the brothers is always amazing. At times they talk over each other, at other times they finish each other’s sentences. Both bilingual (Italian and English), they also unravel mimic accents and famous actors in conversation with great precision. Over cappuccinos and scenes from Willow Cakes and Pastries, they unravel the rest of the new release.

The cinematic Rap Pistoletto could work on the soundtrack to a modern western or an episode of television show Breaking Bad. Adrian says the title refers to the pair being “lyrical gunslingers.”

“We took kind of a Latin folk song as our inspiration,” Adrian says. “It sounds very Buena Vista Social Club, but with rap over it. I even rap in Spanish over it.”

Cuban-born Toronto-based trumpeter Alexis Baro is featured on Rap Pistoleto, adding a mariachi feel to the song and taking an expert, atmospheric solo to close out the final two minutes.

“We mixed an instrumen- tal of that one,” adds Lucas. “I actually have an instrumental version of this whole project. We want to drop it as a full album just before our next one.”

Despite its ominous title, Prepare to Die is actually based on a line from the film The Princess Bride. jam laproducer Nadirah X lends her vocals for us that we never got to use.”

That song is called Take the Cannoli, a famous line from The Godfather. Another song, called Paul G, is a tribute to the recently departed New York actor Tony Sirico, who played Paulie Walnuts on The Sopranos.

Lucas says his daughter Vanessa loves the upbeat Take That, and requests it in the car as her hype song before soccer games.

Good Morning references Niagara Falls restaurant Casa Mia and the Niagara Escarp- ment and features a cameo from American actor Jenni- fer Esposito. The Don’s refers to the brothers’ first band name, the Rizzadons. Lucas rapping on the coda sounds like Wolfman Jack crossed with Prince, and makes Lucas shake his head in wonder and awe, even though he’s surely heard it numerous times.

The session wraps up short- ly after Adrian receives a call from his mother. Before hang- ing up the phone he makes sure to tell her he loves her.

After listening to the powerful blockbuster of both Intermi- nition and the future re- lease Welcome to the Falls, it’s a quick reminder that the hip hop veterans, as authentic and revered amongst some of the finest in that genre as they are, are also soccer coaches and family men at heart.

NOTaLians, indeed.

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Popular disc golf almost here

Disc golf should be opening soon at the community centre. NOTL Rotarians and some family members were on-site Tuesday helping to get it set up, with signage yet to arrive. They are suggesting it might be a couple of weeks before it’s ready for participants to discover how much fun this rapidly growing sport can be. (Photo supplied)
As with any sailing regatta, the weather was a factor last week during the Games. Competitors patiently awaited proper racing conditions on three of the five days of the regatta.

"It's a normal day at the office," Sprague told The Local. "The challenge that you get is you constantly deal with the heat, no wind on shore, the forecasts. When you look at the forecasts, you have to remember you're at a new venue you don't know. We had winds between four to six knots, and I don't think I have ever done a four- to five-day regatta without at least one 10 to 15 knot day."

Those delays and general conditions forced organizers to make changes on the go. The usual course includes two upwind and two downwind legs followed by a short hitch to the finish. On some of last week's races sailors did not have the chance to complete a full course. It didn't change the end results significantly," Sprague explained, "but it makes for a tactical and strategically different race. Sailing is different from other sports, as it is designed to get 'x' number of faces over 'x' number of conditions to get the best overall individual. The skill sets have to be well-rounded."

On Friday, the 10 a.m. start time was repeatedly pushed back. Competitors, who were on site preparing their vessels at least an hour prior, were milling about, socializing, trading prowess, and signing banners that would be carried in Sunday's closing ceremony. Some were helping their teammates cool down with squirt guns. It didn't seem to bother the competitors. Haley Poirier of Team Quebec's sole sailing sailor, who stretched their legs for a walk through town on the hot morning. Joan and Morris Markentin, parents of Team Saskatchewan's Erik and Eliza, weren't too upset with the wait. The couple, who were staying in a bed and breakfast in town, were looking forward to sampling some ice cream on Queen Street.

Further delays ensued, and conditions were not favourable for racing until nearly 3:30 p.m. "We actually had the best sail of the regatta that afternoon," claimed Sprague. "We ended up getting a reasonable wind that day. We ended up shortening the last race for one of the fleets just two lengths before they would have normally finished."

With all those delays, Sprague had a chance to see how the athletes performed themselves on shore. "They were great kids," Sprague said. "The attitude, the fortitude, especially with the pain, I don't think I saw a single grumpy competitor for the whole week. It really was a great group to run races for."

With all was said and done, Ontario and Nova Scotia led the way with four medals each. Toronto's Siobhan MacDonnell followed up a bronze from a previous Canada Summer Games with a gold medal finish in the 2.4 metre parasailing event, while Ford Amery and Tom DeRoche paired up for silver in the male double-handed 29er race. Bronze medals were also earned for the team in both male and female single laser events.

British Columbia earned three gold medals at the regatta, taking both male and female double-handed 29ers, as well as the female single laser races.

Saskatchewan earned a silver and bronze, both in parasailing, while Alberta's James Fair, 18, took gold in the male single-handed laser competition, and Bunca MacLeod and Julia Capolichio captured Team Quebec's sole sailing bronze medal in the female double-handed 29er.
Mike Balsom
The Local

The Ontario Hockey League’s Erie Otters are having a busy summer, just as they were last year when they played a pre-season game at the Meridian Credit Union Arena in Niagara Falls, one year ago. This year, they hold the distinction of being the first OHL team to return to the city they left behind. A couple of years ago, they were really good organization from scratch, a model to show how it’s done. But things happen for a reason, I guess.”

After a year out of competition, the league, Sherry Bassin, who had major success in radio with CHUM and in television with CITY-TV. Brown says Waters is absolutely the best owner in all of sports. “It’s a bit of a tradition for most OHL teams to schedule a pre-season exhibition game in the pre-season to reach out to local minor hockey communities and charities. The Otters would usually partner with the London Knights, playing a game at that team’s home arena, Budweiser Gardens, and another in a smaller community near the city. But when the Burkes sold the Ice Dogs to a group led by a Brampton business owner Darren DeDobbelaer, Brown approached the new owner with a proposal to play a pair of exhibition games with his old team, including one in what he refers to as his “real hometown.”

“My one best move was deciding to live in Niagara-on-the-Lake,” says the 52-year-old. “My kids were young when we came here. They all played sports here, too. This has been a great place to raise them.”

When he approached current NOTL Minor Hockey president Pete Flynn and board member Trevor Falk with the idea, the entire organization was enthusiastic and Brown himself was giving back to the community he loves so much. “What better way to give back to minor hockey than to play a game here,” says Brown. “Minor hockey groups are always looking for ways to make money, and where would you rather play a September hockey game than in Niagara?”

Early in his time with the Otters, he tried renting an apartment in Erie and dividing his time between there and Mississauga. But things turned out to be something he didn’t want to continue. A lot of his work can be done remotely these days, and with the majority of OHL players continuing to come from Ontario, he needs to be in this province rather than Pennsylvania most of the time.

Brown and the Otters also give back to Niagara through a relationship the club has developed with Brock University’s sport management program. Since the Toronto Maple Leafs hired Brock grad Kyle Dubas as its general manager, the Brock program has become known as a gold standard in the hockey world.

The Otters’ first Brock intern was a Winnipeg-born student named Scott Grieve. “We got him a work visa so he could come and work with us on a full-time basis,” remembers Brown. "We financially treated him like a player. In his first year he learned a lot and was willing to do what we wanted. We kept him on, and took more Brock interns after that. Today, Grieve holds two titles: Scott Brown himself once held in his tenure with the Otters: assistant GM and director of hockey operations. And Brown’s fifth Brock intern was someone Brown knows even better — his son Mitchell.

Officially listed on the team’s website as the team’s South Central Triple-A Hockey League scout, Mitchell is now working full time with the Otters, taking on the role of video coach while also helping with sales and arranging team services such as travel.

“It’s important in this business to stay current,” he says. “You have to allow these young guys to make you smarter and wiser. You have to stay up to date with technologies, and that’s part of what these guys bring. I like to delegate, and I’m also going to be working with Hockey Canada’s Under-17 team moving forward, and you can’t do that unless you have a good team behind you.”

Working with some of the best players in the world is something I’m really proud of,” he says of the national team appointment. “I am really elated to be a part of the program, honoured that they thought I could help. I have high expectations for my team when we come to character and how they represent the Erie Otters. I’ll carry that theme with me to Hockey Canada.”

Brown’s exacting standards have been reflected upon the likes of Connor McDavid, Adam Pelech, Alex DeBrincat and other former Otters drafted to the NHL during his tenure in Erie. “We’ve had so many great players come through our program here,” he says.

Great players such as their number two and three scorers, Elias Cohen and Christian Kyrou, should be back with the team this year and may be making the trip for the game against the Ice Dogs. Local hockey fans have a chance to catch some of the NHL’s future stars on both teams right in their hometown.

Phil Leboudier, NOTL Minor Hockey’s local league convenor, says about 25 per cent of the 800 tickets available for the September 9 tilt versus the Niagara Ice Dogs than local residents are coming to town for the game. He adds that hockey fans will also reap the proceeds of the concessions stand sales during the game, and they are working on some additional fundraising options. They are hoping to have some mini games with local players between periods, as well.

Tickets for the Sept. 9 game are available for $10 each at Phil’s Independent Grocer during normal hours of operation.
Mike Balsom
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Kai Bartel is moving from Ontario to Victoria. “The Local.” We’re going through Chicago and Minnesota and Dako...