Lord Mayor, council frustrated with lack of control over continuing protests

Penny Coles
The Local

The Town is doing what it can to help the horse and carriage business, and to mitigate the impact of protesters on businesses and residents, says Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

She says she understands the frustration of those who would like to see some controls in place regarding the protesters, and councillors are also frustrated that they haven’t been able to do more to help.

The Town has been looking at all of the possibilities, she adds, and is in the process of drafting an easement agreement that would provide a buffer zone around the horses and carriages when they’re parked on King Street, outside the Prince of Wales Hotel.

There is also some work being done to connect cameras at the intersection of King and Queen Streets, that will help the Niagara Regional Police monitor the activities at the corner where both the protesters and the supporters take up their positions.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor, sworn in Monday, has initiated attempts with the Crown Attorney’s office to discuss the possibilities of charges being laid, Disero says, but that has been difficult to arrange, with offices closed during the pandemic.

“We’re trying to get anyone we can to help,” says Disero.

She did not attend Sun- day’s protest, and she wrote to all members of council asking them not to, she says, on the advice of the NRP and the Town’s legal counsel.

She was told the rally was being organized in memory of Regan Russell, a 65-year-old animal rights activist, who was struck and killed by a tractor-trailer in June while protesting the treatment of pigs at a Burlington slaughterhouse.

“It is and it isn’t (a counter-protest),” said Jones-Butski. “A lot of people have always wanted to counter-protest them but we decided instead to protect the Town and the Niagara Regional Police. We want them to make what’s happening stop.”

“We’re okay if the protesters come down here and stand peacefully and pro-test,” she continued. “That’s their right. But it is not their right to harass, to intimidate or to bully.”

Jones-Butski was ad- mant that Sunday’s group was organized by the community itself in support of Sentinel Carriages, and was not officially a Locals for Carriages event.

Referring to Bill 156, passed in June by the Ontario government entrenching the rights of animal owners, Laura Sentinel expressed her ongoing frustration with the conflict.

“Our charter and our rights are all about striking a balance,” lamented Sentinel. “This is a very unbalanced situation and we need to re-store balance. I’m not saying they don’t have a right to their opinions or expressing their opinions. But it can’t continue in the same vein.

“This is about silently speaking for our town,” she continued. “We all live here, we want to enjoy our town, and to feel afraid of coming downtown, and not to be in-timidated.”

The ongoing battle has been taking a toll on Sen- tinel and her family. This past Wednesday she claims they received an anonymous phone call threatening to burn her barn down. “For the last year and a half, I’ve been thinking of these peo- ple not so much as activists, but terrorists,” she said. “This just brought it to that level.”

The carriage supporters peacefully marched down the streets Sunday afternoon to the corner of King and Queen Streets. Protesters, and councillors and businesses and residents, says Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

Although there was no permit issued by the Town to close Queen Street, supporters and protesters clashed near the intersection, closing the street and impacting businesses. (Mike Balsom)
Feeling sick about what is happening to our whole town.

Laura Sentineal

As 넗 C Zelda

It’s been a stressful few years for the Sentinel family and their business, but Laura Sentineal says they are remaining positive, going out with their head down and focusing on doing their job.

The ramped-up protest against the horse and carriage business, carried out Sunday, took over Simcoe Park and Queen Street for the afternoon, with supporters also taking to the streets.

Laura and Fred Sentineal, who operate Sentinel Carriages, were on-hand for the protest, with a plan to try to keep the demonstration peaceful, safe and respectful, she says.

Their T-shirts also helped to spread their message that the protesters are not the only ones with charter rights.

Their horses were kept at home, in the pasture, where they would be safe.

The safety of her family and the horses, whom the Sentineals consider part of the family, came under attack when Laura received a phone call last Wednesday from someone who wouldn’t identify themselves but wanted to warn her about an online threat.

As stressful as the aggressive protesters have become, her concern, Sentineal says, is on a broader scale. She knows the town for three years now, with no end in sight. They are fighting what they call speciesism, or objectifying animals by humans who use the animals for their own purposes, including pulling carriages. They don’t agree with the property status of animals owned by humans, for any reason. Their goal is to put an end to the use of horse-drawn carriages.

With discussions about the protests moving behind closed doors during council meetings, it’s difficult to know what councillors are thinking, although many have spoken out in support of the horse-drawn carriages, and have expressed their concerns over what they see as increasingly aggressive tactics of the protesters.

The protests are hurting downtown businesses, and creating a reputation that the town is a place to avoid. “We’re feeling sick about what is happening to our whole town. It’s not about us anymore. People are so fed up. People are afraid to go downtown. It’s crazy,” she says.

“Whether it’s spreading when dining, or wearing a mask during COVID, she says, laws are passed that curtail freedom, but in the case of protesters, the Town and Niagara Regional Police seem to be avoiding a court battle that would challenge those rights.

Responding to criticism from the local carriage support group, Sentineal says, has been helpful in many ways. They’ve done some fundraising to help with legal costs, they’ve raised awareness of the issues, and they’ve helped educate people.

“They’re not a protest group. They are supporters, and that comes in many forms.”

It has included offers from members to sleep in the Sentineal barn, or be there during protests and asking for protests moving behind closed doors during council meetings, as well as support in other ways. You see the investment, a lot of people are really thinking for the sake of the horses, and the group he calls countervailing rights.

Laura and Fred Sentineal kept their horses at home, for safety reasons, but said they would attend the protest to try to keep it peaceful and respectful. (Mike Balsam)
Disero suggests working with carriage supporters

Continued from page 1

a tractor-trailer in June while protesting the treatment of pigs at a Burlington slaughterhouse.

"Yesterday's issue was far bigger than being against the carriages," she says of Sun-

day's protest.

"It was an escalated fight between two polarized

groups, using the tragic fa-
tality of a woman to try to

make a point. I don't believe it was appropriate for me or

any member of council to

be there. I don't believe we

should be taking this poor

woman's fatal accident on one

side or another. I don't believe it was appropriate for me or

any member of council to

be there. I don't believe we

should be taking this poor

woman's fatal accident on one

side or another. I don't believe

it's an issue NOTL councillors

were going to stand on the

sidewalk outside Simcoe Park, which they are allowed to do.

They did not have per-

mission to use the park or the

amphitheater, or to close off

the street, and if they do that

again, she says, they will need

a permit, and will have to pay for

police presence.

Jennifer Jones-Butski, or-

ganizer of the Locals for Car-

riages group, wrote to town
council last week saying she

was representing concerned

residents of NOTL Sunday's
group, also concerned resi-

dents, she says, were there to

protest the Town and the Ni-

agara Regional Police, not the

protesters.

"The lack of action on the part of the Town of Niaga-

ra-on-the-Lake and the Ni-

agara Regional Police has cre-

ated an unjust and dangerous

situation. If we are unable to

inspire the necessary conver-

sation and subsequent legisla-

tive changes, we are prepared to

exhaust all legal means re-

quired to end the injustice de-

scribed herein," the letter says,

detailing alleged incidents of

"harassment, terrified and traumatised workers, horri-

fied and intimidated patrons,

crashes with families and a

peaceful street corner that is

no longer safe.

The letter says the Town

and police "are both complicit

in this injustice and therefore

liable for the resulting damag-
es incurred by countless busi-

nesses and individuals."

Disero says there have

been ongoing discussions

"about our right as a munic-

ipality to protect our busi-

nesses, residents and public

safety," although some behind

closed doors, with details that
can't be reported to the public.

She spoke of frustration felt by members of council,

residents, Locals for Carrig-

es, the Sentinel family car-

riage owners, other business-

es, "by everybody. I wish I had

a magic wand. This isn't the

impression we want to give to

the outside world."

Disero says as much as she

supports the Locals for Carri-

ages group, she wishes they

would work with the Town, to

fight a fight they can win.

With two sides fighting

each other, as they did Sun-

day, she says, "nobody won anything. It just caused more pain

for the family of Regan Rus-

sell, and made more peo-

ple angry."

She believes there is "ab-

solutely" a way to win, and it

doesn't involve "unintention-

ally handing the protesters

a stage and a microphone.

That's not a fight you can win."

Willowbank asks for bylaw

exemption to allow meadow

Penny Coles

The Local

Willowbank has been

charged for violating a bylaw

for having a meadow of grass

or weeds over 20 centimetres,

and is asking council for an

exemption to the bylaw.

Caitlin Wooll, the educa-
tion coordinator of Willow-

bank's School of Restoration

Arts, told councillors the

Queenston estate meadow has

existed for a decade, and has

never received a notice of vi-

olation before. The meadow

shouldn't fall under that bylaw, she says — it's a grassland hab-

itat similar to other meadows,

such as outside Fort George on

the Commons.

There is a "clearly defined

path" from the gate on Quer-

ston Street, on the east side of

the estate, through the meadow

to the front door of the build-

ing, with clear signage explain-

ing about the meadow and ask-

ing people to stay on the path,

she said.

Wooll believes there was

one complaint about the length

of the grass, which prompted

the visit from a bylaw officer, she

told councillors.

"As soon as we got the vi-

olation, I contacted Niagara

Parks," she explained. An expert

surveyed the meadow, finding

30 different plants, including

mullein, which the butterflies

like, plants that attract birds,

and two baby deer who nest in

the meadow when their mother

is out getting food. The expert

was confident, she says, that the

meadow is significant.

Her stance, she says, is that

the meadow is long-standing,

beautiful, and "so necessary"

for all the insects, animals and

plants found there. It is very eco-

logically significant, and part of

the cultural landscape, she said.

Coun. Gary Burroughs

made a notice of motion that it

be allowed to remain, that is

expected to be discussed at next

months council meeting.

Mark Powell, husband of Regan Russell, speaks from the stage of the Simcoe Park amphitheatre, with his son Joshua behind him. (Mike Balcomb)
Horse-and-carriage supporters make their way from the former Parliament Oak School along King Street to Queen Street, where they took up positions on all four corners. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

Continued from page 1

‘Restoring justice to Regan’s name’ motivated protest

King Street and took up positions on the sidewalk on all four corners in front of the Prince of Wales Hotel. The area of the street usually occupied by the horses and carriages was instead populated by police cruisers, there to ensure the situation would stay under control. The Sentinel’s animals do not need protection, and if they stop working, they’ll be put down. “They’re ill-informed. “

The way I look at it, there were no arrests, nobody was injured and there were no damages,” McCaffery said. “To me, that’s successfully keeping the peace.”

Three years in and it seems the conflict between the two groups is not soon going to dissipate. “This was the largest (protest) and by far the most acrimonious,” added McCaffery. “This problem is not going to be solved by the Niagara Regional Police. That’s not our goal!”

King made reference to the previous rally where Jones-Butski was seen holding a sign that suggested that Regan Russell’s death was actually a suicide. Much of this group’s focus seemed to be on retaliating against that claim.

“We found that very offensive,” said King. “And leading up to that display, Jennifer Jones-Butski had made several social media posts suggesting that Regan Russell was responsible for her own death, and therefore it’s a suicide. So we decided to bring people here today to restore justice to Regan Russells name.”

“We obviously have publicly apologized,” Jones-Butski told The Local. “We didn’t intend to cause any upset to the family. The signs were kind of a means of showing them what they do. We told them if they were going to call it a murder, we were going to call it suicide. We don’t think it was a suicide, we think it was a tragic accident. But we were trying to show them how equally stupid it looks.”

Russell’s widowed husband Mark Powell, and his stepson Joshua were among the speakers on stage. Though their presence in NOTL was prompted by the clash over the sign, and Powell has publicly denounced the statement of the Locals for Carriages about his wife’s death, on Sunday, he focused mostly on the horses.

“Just because you’ve done something one way for a hundred years, that doesn’t make it the right way,” Powell said. “How it affects the commerce of Niagara-on-the-Lake is not our concern. It affects the horses. Since they can’t speak for themselves, we will, and we will be loud.”

Following a series of songs, poems and practice chants, the opposing group wound its way up the path from the bandshell to the corner, where they were immediately met by the carriage supporters. Forced to funnel off to the side, the group wound its way to the intersection, stopping traffic in all directions, then taking stationary posts on all four crosswalks.

Niagara Regional Police (NRP) mobilized cruisers that had been stationed into position one block up in each direction to reroute autonomous traffic, while six other officers remained on site to maintain order.

NRP Insp. Jen McCaffery says the officers were there to keep the peace and ensure public safety. The officers were approached by many carriage supporters who expressed their frustration with the disruption to the town at the hands of the animal activists.

Shannon Wiebe, owner of Queen Street business Wow Me Gadgets, was one of the people who approached the police.

“I was asking him how we can get this away from here so that I can get customers into my store,” she told The Local. “You’ve got a group of people who aren’t from this community, protesting something in our community, who are not taxpayers in our community, hurting businesses. While I support the carriages, what they (the protesters) are doing is harming our local residents and businesses.”

Ginny Lovelace, a local resident who works in animal activism, was seen confronting animal rights activists in the intersection. She says she understands the need for organizations like AWFAN, but that the Sentinels’ animals do not need them.

“These animals are cared for,” said Lovelace. “They’re protected, and if they stop working, they’ll be put down. These horses are working animals. I don’t think these people understand that this is a breed and this is their job. I think their hearts are in the right place but I think they are ill-informed.”

At one point, the animal rights activists marched from the corner down to the end of the Queen Street business district and back to the intersection, where they sat on the road to chant their slogans, before getting up and dispersing back to Simcoe Park about 4 p.m.

McCaffery confirmed Monday that there had been one report of a possible assault taking place involving a carriage supporter who was in a wheelchair. The complaint is being investigated. Other than the disruption to traffic and businesses, and the noise level, overall it was a peaceful protest, he said.

“...
Local businesses, Shaw Festival receiving federal grants

Shaw to begin small, outdoor performances

Penny Coles
The Local

The federal government is investing almost $900,000 in Niagara-on-the-Lake’s tourism industry, including support for the Shaw Festival and about 50 small and medium-sized local businesses who are suffering during COVID.

The festival is receiving a grant of $400,000 to stage outdoor “shakespeare performances,” and an investment of $500,000 will allow for grants of up to $20,000 for businesses. The grants will be administered through a committee of two town councillors, Edouard Lutfiagge, president of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, and a representative from the wine industry, said Lori-Ann Durno.

The announcement was made during a virtual meeting Tuesday afternoon by Melanie Joly, the minister of economic development, official languages and responsible for FedDev Ontario.

“It won’t be onerous, it will be a fairly simple process to apply for it,” said Durno. Because not all businesses will apply for $20,000, which is to offset the costs of reopening and adapting to the pandemic,” Durno said. “I see this expanded beyond $20,000, which is in the realm of that $500,000.”

The project is expected to support 50 businesses and maintain about 100 jobs.

“Our tourism industry and the 1.8 million Canadians it employs have been hit hard by COVID-19, and we’re here for them,” said Joly. “This funding from FedDev Ontario will help Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Shaw Festival continue welcoming visitors, adapt to the new reality and keep supporting the region’s visitor economy. Our message to the Niagara tourism sector and those whose livelihoods depend on it is clear: we’ve been here for you with immediate measures, we’re here for you now as our economy reopens, and we’ll get through this, together. We’re working with you to support good, local jobs and help Niagara tourism come back strong.”

Joly said with borders closed to tourists, people are being enticed to visit locally, and to do things differently.

Tourism businesses in NOTL have been “hard hit,” she said, and “we wanted to make sure businesses and their employees knew we were there for them.”

Durno said the funding will also help to reduce the impacts of COVID-19, “in some cases, serve as a life preserver for many local businesses, especially heading into the shoulder season. Thanks to this opportunity, and continued support from the Province, working together, we are confident that Niagara-on-the-Lake will recover stronger than ever.”

Thanking the minister for the funding, Durno said she is looking forward to being able to see an outdoor Shaw performance with Joly, and sitting down with her afterward at one of the town’s patios.

“I’m looking forward to that, too,” Joly said.

Tim Jennings, executive director of the Shaw Festival, was also delighted with the announcement of funding.

“On behalf of the Shaw Festival, our artists, craftspeople, technicians, volunteers, board and admin workers, we are thrilled to be able to partner with our partners to help support good, local businesses who are suffering during the pandemic, official languages and the tourism sector in Niagara,” Jennings said.

Pillitteri thrilled to be able to partner with the sector

He sees his role in the show as a bit like Doc Sev- erinson talking to Johnny Carson on the Tonight Show. “Between songs we would kind of banter back and forth,” says Pillitteri. “The end result was to try to get the audience to understand a bit about the music they were performing, but it was fun, too.”

Both Pillitteri and Mai-
er appreciated the ability to finally perform in front of a live audience, albeit a very small one, after all this time under pandemic restrictions.

“I was a bit worried about the small audience,” explains Pillitteri. “If you tell a joke that falls flat to 200 people, someone will still laugh, so there’s energy there you can still feed off of. When you tell a joke that falls flat to 16 people, that’s a tough crowd for comics. If it’s not funny, then it really sounds off.”

Melanie Joly, the minister of economic development, official languages and responsible for FedDev Ontario, made the grant announcement at a virtual meeting Tuesday afternoon.

(Screenshot)
What can be done to stop the craziness? And who will do it?

To all those who love the Sentinel family, and their horses, you will understand the feeling of just wanting to wrap them in a cocoon that will protect them and their business from anyone meaning them harm. Because really, as much as we want to help them and keep them safe, it doesn’t seem as if those who might have it in their power to do so, are going to do it.

We all understand about rights, including the right to have strong opinions and voice them publicly. That’s what our country is all about, it’s one of the reasons we’re so grateful to be Canadians.

However, when we witness what occurred this weekend in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and what has been occurring to a somewhat lesser degree for the last three years, it feels like this craziness has to stop, that there has to be something that can be done to at least bring it down to a tolerable level.

We look to those in charge, in this case, the police and the municipality, to do that, and instead, they’re letting us down. They’ve really done nothing, not even managed to keep order.

They throw up their hands and cite charter rights. We understand protesters are permitted to stand on a street corner to protest. They can choose to be vegan, they can believe their horses of course have every right to be on the same street corner and say they don’t agree, that the protesters are wrong, that they have no right to try to close down one business, never mind many businesses, or even a whole town.

So where does it end? When views clash, when people get angry, nobody’s minds are changed. People just get more deeply entrenched in their beliefs, more convinced that they’re right. They’re not going to just give up and quietly go away. So do the same people just take to their horses at the busiest intersection in NOTL week after week until there is nobody left on Queen Street to notice the signs, or hear the words of protests? If these angry echoes can’t be stopped, surely they can be controlled. The police say their duty is to be fair and keep the peace. They were present at Sunday’s protest, but they need to do more than show up on one day. We don’t have the answers. We do know both the police and the municipal leaders talk about solutions. What are they? When are we going to see them? Or is the solution to do nothing, to see how long it takes to accomplish the destruction of a town?

Penny Coles
The Local

Enjoying Queen Street

Cyclists make the most of the good weather and enjoy the scenery along Queen Street. (Fred Mercnik)

Auchterlonie on Astrology

Bill Auchterlonie Special to The Local

Again, a teaser for this week, with the full version on Facebook at The NOTL Local and at notlocal.com. Wednesday, Sept. 2. By far and away, this is the busiest day of the week with the Full Moon in Pisces part of it at 12:11 a.m. This Full Moon sees the Sun in discriminating Virgo and the Moon in imaginative Pisces. Uranus, Mars, Mercury and Venus all have important roles to play. Your best advice comes through both your intense feelings, and your clever ideas. Get them working on the same page. And it was on Sept. 2, 1902 that Georgie Melies’ film A Trip to the Moon was first seen in Paris. Martin Scorsese has an historic film, based on Melies’ 1902 work, playing now on Netflix. It is called Hugo, and is a treat to watch.

Donald Auchterlonie on Astrology for this week. Check out the full version on The Local’s Facebook page or on my website www.auchterlonie onastrology.ca.
COVID and climate change: some similarities and differences

Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

The most obvious and pressing phenomenon in the world today is climate change. The media and world leaders, climate change’s most ardent advocates and those most exposed to volatile environments, often in poverty. They are both such massive and compelling problems that we are left with the grace of time to prepare for the bursting point. Where conflicts can grow to a sizable scale, we often find some species of animals who live in a bubble may not fully realize that rats are not disabled because of their size. Our maintenance crew will need to sympathize with them, as the virus is the reason they are admitted. However, with climate change, a much bigger and fully encompassing health crisis is happening. Air, water, and soil quality all around the world are generally trending downwards. This sets the universal stage for a higher level of weaker immune systems or greater proneness to pollutants. We can simply say we are all sick as our surrounding environments and our quality of life deteriorate.

These two big topics also create human migration and displacement events. We’ve seen it in the news, those heart- breaking images of people who responded to the issue of a sea level, or a social political conflict. The remarkable thing is that this situation could come to fruition as a consequence of a serious storm, a predicted 50-year rise in sea level, or a sociopolitical conflict. It creates human migration and displacement events, which can all cause the same result.

There is no doubt that COVID has exposed conflicts all over the world. This world has done so indirectly, but we are aware of historical patterns where conflicts can grow into a burst point, and then human displacement can occur. We feel like the bursting point of climate change is uncontrollable effects are getting ready to do just that — burst. The science is in, and it tells us that really some natural disasters tip over a certain threshold of stress, they can exponentially disappear and harm other areas around them on the way out. The physical removal and manipulation of our natural landscapes are easier than nature can see it in the news, those heart-breaking images of people who responded to the issue of a sea level, or a sociopolitical conflict. The remarkable thing is that this situation could come to fruition as a consequence of a serious storm, a predicted 50-year rise in sea level, or a sociopolitical conflict.

Both climate change and COVID are vectors of time and place. Both are growing with every sunset and sunrise, and we are left with the challenge to respond. Because they are both such massive and forward moving items, they don’t discriminate. Climate change’s most recent regrettable effects are already hitting areas of the world with a more sensitive impact profile. These are regions where people live in high population densities and are exposed to volatile environments, often in poverty. Having said that, the same way COVID infected some of our world leaders, climate change’s impact is in face of the facts — we are facing a species of animals who live in a bubble may not fully realize that rats are not disabled because of their size. Our maintenance crew will need to sympathize with them, as the virus is the reason they are admitted. However, with climate change, a much bigger and fully encompassing health crisis is happening. Air, water, and soil quality all around the world are generally trending downwards. This sets the universal stage for a higher level of weaker immune systems or greater proneness to pollutants. We can simply say we are all sick as our surrounding environments and our quality of life deteriorate.

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This past Saturday I took my dog for a walk at the Commons as we often do. We decided to have a walk around the former Officers’ Quarters building on Niagara Parkway, an exclusive enclave in the Commons. As we walked around the building and came to the porch on the side of the building, I noticed a wire contraption on the porch. Curiously I looked at it and to my horror discovered a dead two-legged animal. I immediately reported to the maintenance crew. I was interested in the steps we had taken to remove this trap and safely dispose of it. It appears it was dumped here. Our maintenance crew will need to sympathize with them, as the virus is the reason they are admitted. However, with climate change, a much bigger and fully encompassing health crisis is happening. Air, water, and soil quality all around the world are generally trending downwards. This sets the universal stage for a higher level of weaker immune systems or greater proneness to pollutants. We can simply say we are all sick as our surrounding environments and our quality of life deteriorate.

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This past Saturday I took my dog for a walk at the Commons as we often do. We decided to have a walk around the former Officers’ Quarters building on Niagara Parkway, an exclusive enclave in the Commons. As we walked around the building and came to the porch on the side of the building, I noticed a wire contraption on the porch. Curiously I looked at it and to my horror discovered a dead two-legged animal. I immediately reported to the maintenance crew. I was interested in the steps we had taken to remove this trap and safely dispose of it. It appears it was dumped here. Our maintenance crew will need to sympathize with them, as the virus is the reason they are admitted. However, with climate change, a much bigger and fully encompassing health crisis is happening. Air, water, and soil quality all around the world are generally trending downwards. This sets the universal stage for a higher level of weaker immune systems or greater proneness to pollutants. We can simply say we are all sick as our surrounding environments and our quality of life deteriorate.

These two big topics also create human migration and displacement events. We’ve seen it in the news, those heart-breaking images of people who responded to the issue of a sea level, or a sociopolitical conflict. The remarkable thing is that this situation could come to fruition as a consequence of a serious storm, a predicted 50-year rise in sea level, or a sociopolitical conflict. It creates human migration and displacement events, which can all cause the same result.

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Both climate change and COVID are vectors of time and place. Both are growing with every sunset and sunrise, and we are left with the challenge to respond. Because they are both such massive and forward moving items, they don’t discriminate.
Community mourns passing of Dennis Dick

He tried not to let his illness slow him down. He was always pushing ahead.
Sandra O’Connor says she found her first council meeting challenging, and exhilarating.

Monday’s meeting.

Sandra O’Connor was sworn in at the beginning of council this week, after being sworn in virtually, with no fanfare.

There was little fanfare, and some confusion about the virtual meeting, asking Todd at one point, “are we going to be able to see you?”

The ceremony was quick, with few words. Councillors were not sure if it had been completed, having been unable to see or hear it, when O’Connor left the chamber to join the virtual meeting from the adjoining committee room.

“Welcome, Sandra, to council,” said Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

“I think what surprised me most is how many important issues council has to deal with,” she said after the meeting.

Sandra O’Connor is sworn in as the eighth councillor, replacing Stuart McCormack, who resigned from the position. O’Connor came ninth in the 2018 municipal election. (Town photo)

“Council is working very hard on behalf of residents. What I found is that with a number of issues there is so much to balance, between the Town and the residents, but also sometimes between two different citizens’ rights,” said O’Connor.

“I’ve always wanted to serve the community. Trying to make the best decision is challenging, but I also find it exhilarating.”

She planned to make a motion to “break” the tree by-law Monday night, which is a good by-law but not perfect, she said. However the meeting was called at 11 p.m., so she was hoping to make her motion when council reconvened Tuesday, too late for The Local to update before press time.

The Local
August 27, 2020
Town hopes for on-demand transit system by November

Service to replace existing fixed-route system

Penny Coles  
The Local

With recent funding from upper levels of government to spend on transit, the Town is hoping to hop on board a regional, on-demand, shared-ridership pilot project launched earlier this month.

The Region decided to move forward on the project by providing service to west Niagara municipalities only, but the Town plans to ask the Region to amend its agreement with a private company to include NOTL in its “turnkey” service, to replace the current fixed-route model.

NOTL Transit shuts down

To replace the existing fixed-route system, the Region decided to launch a regional, on-demand, shared ridership pilot project.

It’s better for the residents who live off the fixed route, says Randall, who was part of the regional staff, saying there was no will at that time to bring the pilot project to the east side of the Region, but thanked the upper level of government for now considering the inclusion of NOTL.

“Is a great project,” says Zalepa, thanking the Region for entering into negotiation for a great project for NOTL.

“The one-year pilot project was going to enter into,” says Randall, thanking the Region for entering into negotiation for a great project for NOTL.

“Now we’ve got a chance to enter into an inter-municipal regional transit for $6, but the Town is not going to look at that option,” says Randall, who was part of the regional staff, saying there was no will at that time to bring the pilot project to the east side of the Region, but thanked the upper level of government for now considering the inclusion of NOTL.

All municipalities have faced challenges with transit during the pandemic, with ridership dropping off and revenue collapsing, and this is a great project, says Zalepa. "I'm hearing good things about it. It could fill gaps in town and get people linked with regional transit, and to appointments around town. I would encourage the Town to do what it can. On-demand is the future of transportation."
Outdoor theatre will bring visitors

Continued from page 5

with FedDev Ontario to be able to support the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Region of Niagara and Tourism NOTL in encouraging a resurgence of safe, outdoor gatherings through a series of musical performance opportunities and a few other surprises. The Shaw will use these funds to provide free and low-cost outdoor performance activities, and purchase equipment to ensure the safest possible experience for everyone. 

Before COVID hit, local businesses “were aligned for a record rise” said NOTL Chamber of Commerce president Eduardo Lafforgue. Once the crisis hit, “we were hoping for a quick return to the pre-season frenzy, but a few weeks later the picture changed drastically. The collective challenge COVID-19 has presented Niagara-on-the-Lake, are enormous and complex.”

“Tourism is a crucial part of our local economy,” he said, and by “being inclusive and working together, we can reimagine a brighter future under the new normalcy.” Lafforgue said “Visitors and residents will see smiling faces behind the ubiquitous masks, and feel the eagerness to serve with joy and resolve. Great hoteliers, restaurateurs, retailers, musicians and actors, women and men who possess the intrinsic quality to put their guests first, run our tourism industry making their experiences a priority.”

Lafforgue told The Local he is delighted to see grants for NOTL businesses, which will help maintain about 100 jobs. The support for the Shaw Festival is key to bringing visitors back to NOTL, he added. “It’s really really fantastic news. We are thrilled with this.”

Tim Jennings of the Shaw Festival is thrilled to be able to offer outdoor performances, thanks to a federal grant. (Screenshot)
Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Final touches are being put on the old Niagara-on-the-Lake hospital building, as tenant Royal Oak Community School prepares for its biggest September ever.

When classes begin Sept. 8, Head of School Julia Cain Murray will be standing in the doors to 52 students from Kindergarten to Grade 8. At twice the number of pupils enrolled last year, it is the largest student body ever for the local private, not-for-profit school.

And there will be multiple doors that are thrown open, as for the first time in their three years in the building, Royal Oak will be expanding physically to use the south and east wings. Along with the north wing they had already been using, that will enable them to create separate cohorts for their primary, junior and intermediate students, with separate classroom facilities as well.

Murray expresses gratitude toward their landlord, the town of NOTL, for making it possible to keep the grade levels separate. “With the cohorting of wings, our separate entrances that we can use, along with our very detailed policies and protocols, it seems we have the best possible plan in place to mitigate risks as well as we can.”

Murray is sure that the small class sizes, which have historically been capped at 15, along with extra safety measures taken to ensure there is no spread of the novel coronavirus within the school, are at least partially responsible for the boost in enrolment.

“We have always believed that our class cap of 15 is truly the optimum size for learning,” she says. “I’m grateful as well that it aligns with what has been deemed the most safe cohort size with regards to COVID”.

Royal Oak is also running a parallel virtual school this year where all the in-class lessons will be available in each class’s Google Classroom. That means that if or when any child is required to stay home (due to potential exposure to COVID, travel, or general family health risks), they can continue to learn through the virtual programming.

On the day of The Local’s visit to Royal Oak, dedicated parent Jason van Veghel-Wood was there to help sand, paint and generally get the building ready to welcome students. He was happy to demonstrate the layout of various rooms.

“The way that they set it up (the Grades 6-7-8 room) is in pods,” he explains. “Every student will be separated by six feet, and where they can’t be separated by six feet, they’ve got this Plexiglass, and they will be wearing visors for added protection.”

The parental involvement of van Veghel-Wood and others is key to the functioning of the school, says Murray. “It is such a close-knit community. Jason has built desks by hand since the beginning of June, when I started to come in and say I could envision this being really different. I’ve had a COVID task force of about eight parents, who have been on every email with me and are part of all the decision-making. Parents are the stakeholders of the school. I’ve had parents be part of our re-entry plan formation all along the way.”

At press time, Murray was still meeting with families interested in learning more about making the switch to the private school for their children.

Marylee Arnold and her family recently moved to NOTL. She toured the school this week to consider enrolling her girls Gemma and Fiona in Grade 1 and JK respectively.

“We were looking at private schools just for the level of education,” she says. “Throughout COVID, I just thought private schools have smaller classroom sizes. I just want my children to be safe, and I want them looked after, so at a private school, obviously they’re going to be looked after a little bit more.”

The increased enrolment at Royal Oak has also brought back experienced teacher Lauren Dennis, who was on sabbatical the previous year. She is excited to meet her Grades 1-2 students in her bright new classroom.

“It used to be our assembly room, where the whole school would kind of meet every morning,” she explains. “They’ve just done a fantastic job making it such a beautiful space. I am excited, too, seeing all the things they’ve implemented, all the safety measures. I have no reservations. As long as we keep doing all the safety precautions that we’ve put in place, we’re going to have a great year.”

Of course, as Royal Oak is a private school, students do not attend for free. The cost for each student is $9,650 per year, but Murray is quick to point out that cost should never exclude a family from sending their children there.

“We’re a non-profit charitable organization,” Murray explains. “Over 50 per cent of our students are on a financial scholarship or bursary. That accessibility is extremely important, and it’s one of the reasons this school came into being. And diversity is important to us as well. We want Royal Oak to truly represent the community.”

To that end, Royal Oak is launching the Artists’ Family Scholarship to help support the local community of artists who live in NOTL. The scholarship will provide funding to cover application fees (to the school, as well as to Apple Financial, the third party company used to access bursary qualifications), as well as a commitment to ensure tuition costs are covered should an artist’s family financial situation change.

With just over a week until the first day of school, some of the grade levels still have room to grow toward that cap of 15 students. That record enrolment number may not yet have reached its peak.

The school has a new reception area as part of its expanded space.

All the student spaces at Royal Oak allow for physical distancing of up to 15 students per class.
Parks Canada celebrates Monarch Butterfly Day with tour

Mike Balsom Special to The Local

Armed with laminated information sheets and her uncle’s magnifying glass, Natalia Srigley turned over milkweed leaves in a field at the Commons until she discovered a Monarch butterfly egg. The St. Catharines girl jumped up and down in delight.

Natalia, her younger sister Emily and her father Nathan, along with another eight relatives and friends in their social bubble, participated in the first ever Parks Canada National Flight of the Monarch Day Tour Saturday. The walk through the historic Niagara-on-the-Lake Commons was part of a nation-wide drive to have Canada recognize the iconic Monarch butterfly.

“The enthusiasm of the children who were present was obvious. But the parents, and the one couple who participated without accompanying children, seemed just as enthralled.”

Also part of the discussion along the way, was the migration habits of the Monarch butterfly. Late August was chosen for the date to recognize the species as it is about now that the insects begin to make their way down to Mexico to sit out the winter.

Currently, Monarchs are classified as a Special Concern under the Ontario Endangered Species Act and the New Brunswick Species at Risk Act. In Mexico and the United States, they are also listed as “under special protection,” and are under review for listing under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Paraphrasing the movie Field of Dreams, Forget says “if you grow milkweed, they will come. In Canada, one of our main focuses is to ensure that we are protecting the ecosystems that allow the Monarch at all its stages of life to thrive.”

He encourages local residents to grow milkweed on their properties. “People did think it was a weed, and in the late ’80s there was some move to eradicate milkweed as it was on the noxious plants list. But that was just misinformation. It’s about changing the behaviours, and changing the narrative around the plant so that people reintroduce it into their gardens.”

The last stop on the tour was a field just across the Parkway behind the Memorial Park soccer nets, where milkweed was bountiful. This is where Srigley discovered the Monarch egg. Upon returning to the Agora building, the group was treated to a musket demonstration to see them off.

“People did promise there will be some kind of event in NOTL next Aug. 22 to continue to push for the national day of recognition for the insect. He also encourages local residents to get involved by visiting missionmonarch.ca for information and resources to participate in the collection of Monarch data.

Veronica McKelvey gives some of the children on the tour a closer look at young caterpillars on a milkweed leaf.

Using lifelike models, Veronica McKelvey explains to participants how to find caterpillars underneath milkweed leaves.

The enthusiastic tour guides.
Quartetto Gelato ‘plays it like it’s their last time’

Continued from page 5

unfunny. But they were awesome, totally gracious. They (the audience members) were ready to be out and enjoying themselves too.”

I’ve been making a living almost exclusively off of live performances, and that ended abruptly,” chimed in Maier. “We had to remember.

“T-minus five, you can’t be out and enjoying some, totally gracious. They unfunny. But they were awe-

Continued from page 5

Maier. “We had to remember

ended abruptly, “ chimes in live performances, and that

themselves too. “

Many who have seen the quartet in past Music Niagara engagements may not recognize the latest line-up of the

group. At 11 years, Maier is the longest-standing member of the current incarnation of Quartetto Gelato. He says

newer members Kirk Starkey, Charles Cozens and Konstan-
tin Popovic combine to bring a fresh, new musical element to the group’s repertoire.

“Our cello player (Star-

key) has arranged a beautiful classic for the quartet, our accordion player (Cozens) is a world-class composer and

arranger so he’s brought in some new stuff, our violin player (Popovic) was born in the former Yugoslavia, so we use a Serbian gypsy tune to end the show. It’s what Gela-
to has always done, what can you bring that no one else does, or what’s your secret talent or skill. More of the different flavours of Gelato that people will hear, but still

within the same vibe,” Pillitteri enjoyed the event so much he hopes he has another chance to work with the quartet some time in the future. It was the lo-

cal comic’s first engagement with Music Niagara, and he is also looking forward to the possibility of further involve-

ment with the organization.

For Maier and Quartet-
to Gelato, it’s pretty much a given they will be back in NOTL. “I love that it is right here in our backyard,” he

says. “It feels like family ev-

every time. I’m honoured that out of all the people that have had gigs with (musical direc-
tor) Alis (Bankas) at the festi-

tival, they chose us to play this year. We’re very fortunate.”

You can watch the pre-

miere of Music and Laugh-
ter, filmed live at Chateau des Charmes, this Sunday, Aug.

30 at 4 p.m. on Music Niag-

ara’s Watch Livpage of their

website, musicniagara.org.

Quartetto Gelato and Joe Pillitteri were filmed at Chateau des Charmes Winery recently for a Music and Laughter performance, to be shown on music festival’s website Sunday. (Photo supplied)
DICK, DENNIS — It is with deepest sadness that we announce the passing of Dennis Dick on August 21, 2020, exactly one year to the day that he was diagnosed with mantle cell lymphoma. Dennis was the beloved husband of Shirley (Warkentin) Dick, and father of Jake and Angelica (Hill) Dick, and Denise and Colin Home, and grandfather of his precious little “Emmy May” Emberley Home. Dennis is also survived by his mother, Christina (Berg) Dick, and brothers and sister Bob (Annie), Anne (Brian) Liko, and Bill Dick, and sisters- and brother-in-law, Marlene (Doug) Caldwell, Janet Warkentin, and Henry (Rhonda) Warkentin, and many nieces and nephews. Predeceased by his father Jacob Dick and parents in law, Abe and Betty Warkentin. Dennis grew up on the family farm on Line 3 in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He was a graduate of NDSS and University of Guelph. As a young man, Dennis worked for many local businesses and farming operations including Bert Hopes, Hardy Homes, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Roads Department, as a Massey Ferguson sales representative for Creek Road Motors, and farm manager for Chateau des Charmes winery, before opening his own excavation company. D & B Construction. He was a partner in the family farm, Chestnut Tree Farms, for many years. In the past few years, he shifted his focus to septic inspections, and also worked seasonally for Millers, doing snow removal on the QEW, where he worked long night shifts and was always happy to train new drivers.

Dennis had a passion for giving back to his community. He was a volunteer firefighter for the Virgil Fire Department for 15 years, before tossing his hat into the political ring, and running for Town Council in 1991. He served as Alderman/Councilor for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for a total of 23 years. As part of these duties, he was pleased to serve on various Boards and Committees including the Library Board, Chamber of Commerce, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. He served several terms on the Town’s Committee of Adjustment and was still actively involved on the Agricultural Committee and the Harmony Residents Group and Niagara-on-the-Lake Santa Claus Parade Committee. Dennis was an active volunteer with the Chamber of Commerce for the Candelight Stroll and Icewine Festivals. Dennis was always a passionate advocate for the “beautiful Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake”. Dennis also served on the Board of the Vineyard UM Home for many years, and was currently on the Board of Radiant Care (Pleasant Manor and Tabor Manor). He had also served on the Board of OASIS (Ontario Association of Septic Services) for many years. Dennis was an active member of Bethany Mennonite church, currently serving on the Board there, as well as on the Property Committee. Dennis had a rich bass voice, and enjoyed singing in the church choir for many years, and most recently with the Niagara Community Male Chorus. A recent highlight for Dennis was participating in a mission trip with Wells of Hope to Guatemala with a team from Bethany Mennonite Church.

Dennis loved fishing and hunting, preparing family meals, spending time with his family at the cottage or at home, and was always up for a game of euchre on a Friday night. Dennis loved being with his friends and family, the more the merrier! He could light up a room with his smile and great sense of humour. Dennis was an active man all his life, always on the go, and although the cancer slowed him down physically, he never allowed it to defeat his spirit. Over the past year, he was very much encouraged by the expressions of support and prayer from so many in this wonderful community; a community for which he cared very deeply. He will be remembered for his steadfast faith, his courage, and his ability to push on through even the most difficult challenges with a positive attitude and unfailing sense of humour. Dennis was an active man all his life, always on the go, and although the cancer slowed him down physically, he never allowed it to defeat his spirit. 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August 27 @ 4 p.m. - 5 p.m.
Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum online lecture with Scott Finlay – Ten Things That Will Save Your Life in the 21st Century

For those of you who like to write and journal, the Niagara Historical Museum is looking for your insight. You can participate in the recording of our history today. In 50 or 100 years, we may just have an exhibition on the COVID-19 Pandemic and your journals will help us tell the stories of years, we may just have an exhibition on the COVID-19 Pandemic. Your audio diary.

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Deanna Calder and Shawna Mark’s Cemetery.

The tour route from the gazebo was altered due to COVID-19, and the need to physical distance and avoid larger crowds in the process. Each tour is different, including on the stage where you can really see how close we are and the effects of it.

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As the small group gazed over at Fort Niagara and the impressive French Castle, Butts recounted the history of the fort going back to when the French built it to use as a strategic out- post in order to control the mouth of the Niagara River. After the Seven Years’ War, the British took control of the fort. However, on this side of the riv- er, the territory was still under French control.

Butts explained that since the fort was captured by Col. John Butler and Butler’s Rangers, it remained under British control during the American Revolu- tion. At this time, the fort be- gan to be overcrowded with refugees. Eventually, the Butler’s Rangers came to this side of the river to start planting food to feed the people at the fort. This is where we get our first settlers, from 1779 to 1788. The Amer-

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