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notllocal.com AUGUST 30, 2023 Volume 5 • Issue 35



Maarten and Susan Muste in Maarten's garden, with grandkids Addy and Ezra Reeve, who live next door. (Penny Coles)

## Vegetable garden brings pleasure to family, friends and the community

Penny Coles  
The Local

Susan and Maarten Muste say they are living a good life, although it's not how they envisioned this stage of their lives, which changed one summer evening in 2010, when a collision left Maarten in a wheelchair.

But they have a large, loving family, great support from their church community and a large garden behind the house where Maarten loves to work, doing more than they ever thought he would be able to. And the abundance of produce he grows is shared with family, friends and the community, bringing pleasure to many.

The couple still live in the house built by Maarten and his father, into which they moved shortly after their marriage.

Now, with four adult children and six grandchildren

— three girls and three boys, ranging in age from eight to three and a half — they are now alone in their beautiful home on Concession 2, but have family close by — their daughter Nicole and her husband Martin Reeve live right next door with their two children. Derek, the youngest, lives around the corner on Larkin Road with his wife, Chelsea, and Heather, the oldest, lives in St. Catharines. Jessica has moved to Jacksonville with her husband, but there are regular visits back and forth.

Behind their home, in addition to about 60 acres of grapes, they have a very large vegetable garden, which has become Maarten's pride and joy — and an accomplishment that would have seemed impossible 13 years ago.

When Susan says their life is

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## Canopy Growth greenhouses believed to be sold

Kris Dube  
The Local  
Local Journalism  
Initiative Reporter

Niagara-on-the-Lake was once home to what was touted as the largest medicinal marijuana-growing operation in the world.

Canopy Growth closed its Tweed location on Concession 5 in 2021, a property with one million square feet of indoor greenhouse space that opened in 2014.

And finally, after sitting empty for several years, the website of real estate firm Avison Young says the property, with a listing price of more than \$32 million, has been sold.

An online website that lists property transfers indicates it sold for \$21,800,000 in May, to a company that grows mushrooms — neither the realty company or Canopy Growth responded to calls or emails to confirm that information.

Angus Foreman, the man

who originally purchased the Concession 5 greenhouses and received Health Canada's permit to grow medical marijuana, told The Local that with the exception of the more recently built greenhouse added to the range, the range was not best-suited for growing cannabis.

He later sold the operation to Canopy Growth, and said he would expect it to be purchased by a produce or flower operation,

He thought it unlikely, he

said, that another cannabis producer would purchase it, because growing the crop has turned out to be not very economical.

Coun. Erwin Wiens, who has been a local grape grower for 26 years, said he has heard the former Canopy Growth site had been purchased, but not who bought it.

It appears interest in growing cannabis, medicinal or recreational, has dried up in Niagara-on-the-Lake, as the Canopy Growth facility is the

only legal one to have ever set up shop within the municipal boundary, said Marah Minor, spokesperson for the town.

Minor said the municipality is unaware of what might be moving into the greenhouses.

"The town is not aware of any current operations at this site," she said. "There are no formal applications for this property at the current time."

When the operation, originally known as Park Lane Farm when Foreman started it, and then Tweed Farms un-

der Canopy Growth took over, opened in NOTL, there were only a couple of other legal medicinal cannabis operations in Canada, tightly controlled by Health Canada, and since it closed nobody else has come forward looking to grow cannabis in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"The town has not received any inquiries for potential growers in Niagara-on-the-Lake," Minor said.

Once Canopy was already

Continued on page 8

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# Discussions about unexploded ordnance on Lakeshore continue

**Kris Dube**  
The Local  
Local Journalism  
Initiative Reporter

New information from the federal government has come forward about the history of a property in Niagara-on-the-Lake where there is a potential risk for unexploded ordnance. And it appears that risk is here to stay.

The Department of National Defence told The Local that it will be impossible to determine if there are unexploded military devices within two sewage lagoons that are part of a former water treatment plant that sits in the vicinity of a field formerly used as a military training ground.

The properties were part of a recent report considered by Niagara Region's public works committee, asking that the federal government assist financially with the clean-up of the property, but locals who remember the history of the site said they thought it had already been cleaned up, and one group is trying to get it open to the public as greenspace.

The region has been leasing the property from Parks Canada since it built the first Lakeshore Road sewage treatment plant, decommissioned when the new one was built on property beside it, also belonging to Parks Canada.

Regional staff are dealing with what was news to them — that they are now responsible for cleaning up unexploded ordnance.

The DND told The Local that the lagoons on that property are the only piece of the area that needs attention — and that they can't be remediated of any

possible explosives.

A survey was conducted in 2008 that sought out any ordnance, explosives that did not explode or function as intended, including the former water treatment plant property before a new one eventually replaced it when it opened in 2020. No ordnance was found during that investigation, said DND spokesperson Andree-Anne Poulin.

But that survey, along with another in 2011, did not include the sewage lagoons.

"Due to the water depth and small magnetic signature" of potential unexploded devices, it is "not possible to investigate" for ordnance in the sewage lagoons, said Poulin.

But the lagoons can't be remediated and the federal government, through DND, believes the region needs to take measures while taking the old treatment plant out of service.

Poulin said there is no requirement for any special ordnance-related precautions at the site except for the sewage lagoons, and that "nothing has changed" since previous probes in the area of the new water treatment plant.

"The probability of coming across a UXO (unexploded explosive ordnance) and causing it to unintentionally function while decommissioning the sewage lagoons is remote, but not zero. The decommissioning plan for the lagoons will need to take that into account," added Poulin.

How should the region handle the possibility of potentially dangerous ordnance when shutting down the lagoons for good?

"With regards to recom-

mended precautions, our advice to the regional municipality is to investigate options for decommissioning the lagoons that do not involve disturbing the sludge where UXO may be present," said Poulin.

An area of about 23.1 hectares was transferred from Parks Canada and the Department of National Defence to build the two existing lagoons in 1965. This piece of land is currently in the hands of the region, said the recent public works report, and needs to be restored and turned back to Parks Canada.

An additional 3.7 hectares of land west of that property was leased from Parks Canada to facilitate construction of the existing mechanical and chemical facilities, including aeration lagoons.

Together, two parcels — the old treatment plant and the DND property, formerly a rifle range, on its eastern border, represent the area to be decommissioned. West of the new treatment plant is Niagara Shores Park, officially off-limits to the public, but used regularly.

Asked why a need to rid the property of any potential ordnance wasn't top of mind when the new water treatment plant was built, Niagara Region communications consultant Janet Rose said that given the significant amount of time that has passed since the lagoons and associated buildings were commissioned, staff today cannot be certain of the assessed condition of the site at that time, "nor what was considered in the decision to proceed with the project."

She said it was known that the DND had conducted training activities in the area and that ord-

nance could be present, but there was no documented risk that prevented proceeding at the time.

It was not until the results of the most recent assessment that the "medium" level of risk was revealed to the region, along with the remote possibility of ordnance being present, which if not handled correctly, "would have the potential to cause a catastrophic event."

The region's request to the federal government is to provide financial aid and assistance in managing potential ordnance on the property, or that the government accepts return of the land in an "as is" condition for Parks Canada to remediate.

Or if the DND determines remediation is not feasible for Parks Canada to undertake, the region is requesting that an agreement be made with the federal government to accept the return of the land in "as is" condition, said Rose.

The region currently has an available budget of \$2 million for the project. This funding is "considered sufficient" to undertake the revised Phase 1 decommissioning works, which now incorporates the removal of all equipment, fixtures and appurtenances from buildings and process tanks within the existing site and leaving the emptied and decommissioned facility on site, said Rose.

The region had a previous approved budgeted of \$10 million for decommissioning and restoration construction for the entire project site.

"Due to the more recent changes in the situation, the project was not proceeding within the original planned schedule of the region's funds being held for the project," said Rose, adding it was decided in 2022 that a portion of that budget would fund another capital project.

If future changes to the scope of the decommissioning works are required, the region will "reconsider the budget allocation as needed in future capital budgets,"

said Rose.

The property is located on the shore of Lake Ontario near the mouth of the Niagara River, and covers an area of more than 121 hectares.

Originally acquired in 1908 by DND, the lands were transferred in 1947 to what is now Parks Canada.

In 1982, 23 hectares were transferred to Niagara Region for use as a sewage lagoon, and an additional 3.6 hectares was leased to the region for the operation of a wastewater treatment plant located at 1699 Lakeshore Rd.

Until 2000, the balance of the property was used by DND under lease agreement for summer militia training which included two rifle ranges, a pistol range, a rocket range, a grenade range and a tank training and maneuvering area. There is also a small area to the west known as Niagara Shores, administered by Parks Canada.

There has been a push from people in the community, mostly from a group called Harmony Residents, to preserve the land in its natural state and to see it used by the public.

"Parks Canada remains committed to discussing the future of the property," said Parks Canada spokesperson Julia Grcevic. She also notes "there are still many steps that need to be undertaken before transfer of the land can take place."

Ron Dale is a local historian and author who was superintendent of Niagara national historic sites for Parks Canada from 1992 to 2013.

Other than Niagara Shores park, he said, the former DND property is fenced with locked gates so any public use of the property requires the scaling of the fence.

Very few locals use the land to walk their dogs or simply hike. Niagara Shores is accessible to the public with the entrance-way near the new sewage treatment plant.

He said the military had rifle, pistol, and grenade ranges at the eastern side. Mortars and rockets were fired there, and explosive items like artillery simulators and thunder flashes were also used at times during infantry training.

"However, the primary use was for rifle, submachine gun and pistol training," he explained in an email to The Local. He believes there is a "high" potential for live blank ammunition dropped during training exercises and a "much lesser chance of dropped live rounds with bullets."

Unexploded grenades from the First World War era and unexploded mortar bombs are possible, he added.

He claims suspected unexploded devices have been found on site near the lagoon and exploded by military or police bomb disposal teams.

The devices were blown up with another explosive charge, which made it "impossible to determine if the suspected ordnance was live or inert," he told The Local.

Niagara Shores Park, he added, is already open to the public and has been for several decades. "At one time you could drive right into a parking area by the lake," said Dale.

However, vandalism, cutting down trees, dumping refuse and other abuse led to the locking of the gate, allowing pedestrian but not vehicle access, he said.

"The area of the new sewage treatment plant is not an area where it would be likely to find UXOs but that remains a possibility for the rest of the land east of the new treatment plant," he said.

Also, about 100 bodies from the War of 1812 are most likely buried somewhere on the property and extensive archaeology would be required if any infrastructure, such as parking lots or trails, were developed, said Dale.

Finn Madsen, a longtime member of Harmony Residents, questions why the possibility of unexploded ordnance has resurfaced, especially when there was ample opportunity to comb for it when the treatment plants were built.

But he is also hopeful Parks Canada and the region can collaborate to come up with a plan to keep public access at Niagara Shores Park, as well as other areas of open space in the vicinity.

They could "construct a park with proper commemoration for those who fought the war on the property," he said, referring to it being a battleground in the War of 1812.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said he believes the issue of potential unexploded military devices on the property might be getting revisited because there is a "different standard" today related to public safety than when the last studies were conducted years ago. "In the modern times we're in, there's more of a cautious approach to things," he said.

It's important to "take every precaution necessary to determine what the next steps are," said Zalepa.

He hopes a reasonable path forward can be found, perhaps creating a "very passive eco-park that the public can use comfortably. I know many people in the community want to see that."

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# Developer proceeding with plans for hotel, conference centre

**Penny Coles**  
**The Local**

The town has received an application from developer Rainer Hummel to convert the Phillips Estate, once an elegant summer home for wealthy Americans, to a hotel development with 81 rooms.

The proposal is to use adjoining lots bordering Simcoe Street to add two new three-storey and four-storey hotel sections that will connect to the historic home at the corner of Queen and Mississagua Streets.

The estate has passed through many hands, from the early prominent citizens who originally owned portions of the property, to the Americans who first built the summer home, and then through generations who have renovated and added to it over the years.

It has been owned by Hummel since 2003, who has since

had portions of the estate designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The documents prepared for the designation process say the estate and property “represent a significant example of the type of elegant summer properties constructed by wealthy Americans who spent their summers in Niagara-on-the-Lake during the heyday of the grand summer estates that sprang up in the town in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.”

“The landscape setting, including the greenhouse and the specimen trees located throughout the property, is an integral defining element of the property, marking it as one of the few remaining significant summer estates in Niagara-on-the-Lake.”

The bylaw prepared to designate the property describes the building as “an amalgamation of a number of revival

styles, including neo-Classical Revival and neo-Greek Revival, with generous, light-filled reception rooms, spacious bedrooms, screened porches and a multiplicity of fireplaces.”

In a 2020 interview, Hummel told The Local that when he purchased the property he had planned to turn the estate into an upscale 24-room hotel, with a restaurant and spa. He expected to market it to the wealthy tourists he envisioned coming to town for what was then dubbed Project Niagara — a music festival to be held on the Lakeshore Road DND lands — until the principals behind the project put a halt to it in 2010.

His next plan was to renovate the estate as a home for himself, his then-wife and young children, but that was also abandoned as their marriage dissolved, he said.

By 2020, he had a plan for a 75-room hotel that included the main building and coach house, an outdoor-indoor spa, a pool, three dining areas, two outdoor eating spaces and a conference centre on the top floor of a three-and-a-half storey annex, which would have stretched from the original building to Simcoe Street — all upscale and impressive. He was clear that he would need town approval before proceeding.

Then, in December 2021, Hummel put the estate up for sale, telling The Local that after almost two decades of trying to be a good custodian of one of the most prestigious landmark intersections in town, he was



The Phillips Estate now has a sign giving notice of a proposal that involves Official Plan and zoning bylaw amendments to proceed with an 81-room hotel. (Mike Balsom)



Rainer Hummel inside the historic Phillips Estate, at the corner of Mississagua and Queen Streets, in March 2020. He was then restoring it as a 75-room hotel. (File photo)

ready to see it go to someone who would complete its restoration. He said he would like to see his vision of a boutique hotel eventually realized, but it wouldn't be by him.

Hummel was not ready to speak publicly this week about his change of heart, as the notice for potential Official Plan and zoning bylaw amendments was posted on the property for the public to see.

He told The Local he would comment after the staff report has been circulated, which won't be until after the upcoming public meeting and open house.

The notice says an 81-room hotel is proposed, with restau-

rants, a multi-use conference area, rooftop deck, spa facilities and underground parking. The requested amendments include the two new sections of four storeys and three storeys, to a maximum 16-metre height, connecting to the existing building.

The zoning bylaw amendment proposes to change the existing general commercial site specific zoning related to permitted uses, lot frontage, lot area, building setbacks, building height, parking requirements, loading spaces and buffer strip requirements abutting residential uses.

The notice explains that first a virtual open house will be held

on Sept. 11 at 5 p.m.

A public meeting, which can be attended either virtually or in person, will be held Oct. 3 at 6 p.m. to also gather information and provide input regarding zoning and Official Plan amendments.

To participate electronically at the open house or public meeting, register in advance with Denise Horne, heritage planner (denise.horne@notl.com or 905-468-6441), prior to noon on Monday, Sept. 11.

Register for the public meeting with the clerk's department (clerks@notl.com or 905-468-3266) prior to noon on Monday, Oct. 2.



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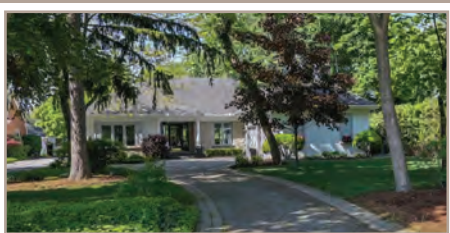
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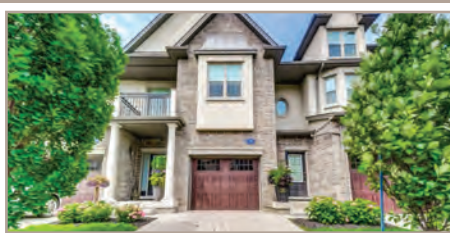
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# Zalepa says town can meet provincial housing targets

## ‘Strong mayor power’ not necessary in NOTL

**Kris Dube**  
The Local  
Local Journalism  
Initiative Reporter

Niagara-on-the-Lake Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa doesn’t anticipate Premier Doug Ford will be offering him strong-mayor status any time soon, nor does he think it is the solution to creating better access to housing for people in the province.

During the Association of Municipalities Ontario conference last week, Ford announced that he’d hand these powers to 21 smaller-town mayors by Oct. 15 if they agreed to meet housing targets set by the province and outline a strategy to hit their goal.

Cities with strong mayor powers will also be eligible for extra cash from a new \$1.2

billion “Building Faster Fund” if they’re on track to meet a specific number.

Through Niagara Region’s most recent official plan, Niagara-on-the-Lake has been tasked with creating 1,150 new units by 2051, with 25 per cent going in areas that are already built up and serviced, Zalepa explained in an interview with The Local.

“Niagara-on-the-Lake is not one of those communities that’s really needing to rev up its housing stock,” he said, adding that the new homes to be built could be placed in any of the five villages that make up the town.

The entire town sits within the Greenbelt, an area Ford recently said will be open for development, which has been faced with heavy criticism.

A lot of land in town is zoned agricultural and is considered specialty cropland, or is already built up, said Zalepa.

Ford first introduced strong mayor powers — only to Toronto and Ottawa — after the June 2022 election.

In June 2023, the provincial government gave the powers to nearly 30 other municipalities with projected populations of at least 100,000 by 2031, part of the province’s work to build 1.5 million homes by that time.

The latest expansion involves cities with a population of at least 50,000 by 2031.

Through its official plan adopted in 2022, Niagara Region is planning to accommodate a minimum population of 694,000 people and 272,000 jobs by 2051. This represents an increase of over 200,000 people and 85,000 jobs compared to 2021, reads the plan.

It also forecasts that Niagara-on-the-Lake will have a population of 28,900 and 17,610 jobs by 2051.

The town’s current population is about 20,000.

Zalepa said it’s not red tape or local governments getting in the way of expanding the housing supply.

“I believe there’s more of an impact in the supply of housing than simply the municipalities holding back,” he said, explaining the economy is in the driver’s seat, such as the rising cost of materials due to inflation.

One factor that seems to get less attention than it should when the lack of housing in Ontario is discussed is how much less upper levels of government invest in infrastructure compared to decades ago, he explained.

After the Second World War and into the 1960s, Zalepa said upper governments invested in about 60 per cent of infrastructure projects in communities. Today, it’s about 10 per cent, he told The Local.

“There’s no modern-day equivalent of that,” said Zalepa.

“We have not invested in our infrastructure like we have in the past.”

The lord mayor said he believes the target set for the town by 2051 is one that “can be met reasonably,” but that it will also involve “dialogue with the community” on how to achieve it properly.

The new mayoral powers include the ability to set budgets, veto bylaws and pass bylaws with just one-third of their council’s support — only if these bylaws deal with provincial priorities such as getting more housing built. Mayors will also have the power to appoint senior civil servants.

In July 2023, Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark sent a letter to the municipalities involved in the latest expansion asking them to set their own “locally appropriate” housing targets.

That was a big change from the bigger municipalities, which had targets imposed on them by the province.

*With files from The Trillium (Village Media)*



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa

# A Home Grown SUCCESS



# Support from church community 'mind-boggling'

Continued from page 1

not what she would have imagined, she is referring to life after the trip home from their Pembroke cottage in 2010. Maarten was driving, Susan reading a book, their dog asleep between them, when their truck was T-boned by a young man who, just for a moment, wasn't paying attention. Their truck rolled down an embankment into a field of grain, and then burst into flames.

Susan recounts the details of that collision very matter-of-factly, as if she has done it many times before — and she has.

When the truck came to a stop, she and Maarten told each other they were fine, although he said he couldn't move his legs. The truck was still running, the doors locked, says Susan. "I somehow got out of the pick-up — I really didn't remember how."

Their two friends who had been at the cottage with them were driving behind with Derek, and they pulled over and came running down the hill to help.

Although they knew Maarten shouldn't be moved, the truck had burst into flames, and leaving him in it wasn't an option — they pulled him out.

They were on Hwy 28 outside of Peterborough, says Susan, and once emergency vehicles arrived, Maarten was air-lifted in a helicopter and taken to St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, Derek with him, then transferred to Toronto Western.

Susan was taken to Peterborough to be stitched up — her arm was badly cut — and their friends, Wilf and Judy Giesbrecht, stayed with her, driving her to be with Maarten in Toronto as soon as she was able to leave the hospital.

That was a Sunday evening, and Monday morning, Susan was asked to sign to permit surgery for Maarten — the three options, she was told, "were that he would make it through surgery, be completely paralyzed, or not make it. Of course I had to sign," she says. She remains grateful to this day to Dr. Stephen Lewis, a spinal

cord specialist, for what he was able to do for Maarten.

Her next step that morning was to call Cornerstone Community Church to say "we need people praying for us."

Friends and family came, she says, "and we had such a huge outpouring of support it was amazing."

There was even a banner at the church asking the community to "pray for Susan and Maarten."

And they would need it during the following six months — Maarten didn't come home for good until December 2010.

The surgery had been a huge success — although a setback just days after meant a second surgery was necessary, Susan says. It too was successful.

After four or five weeks of Maarten's passive therapy, Susan at his side, helping him — she stayed in a hotel room within walking distance of the hospital — a nurse noticed his right big toe move slightly.

His doctor was called, and Maarten was able to move his toe again — that was a huge accomplishment after so long with no movement in his legs — and after six weeks of slowly gaining more movement, he was moved to Lyndhurst Centre, also in Toronto, for rehabilitation. Susan was able to rent a room nearby.

At that time, their kids were driving back and forth for visits, and Derek had quit his job to look after the farm — Maarten had been a part-time truck driver for Mori Nurseries while operating the grape farm he had taken over from his father.

But as Maarten was in rehab, their lives took another unexpected turn due to Susan's health problems.

Before the collision, she had been to her doctor because she was having problems with her arm falling asleep. She had an MRI, but the results of that completely fell off her radar while she was tending to Maarten in the hospital.

She eventually got a call from her doctor in Niagara, telling her she needed a second MRI.

"My first reaction was to put it off," she says, "but then I had second thoughts, and I went home to Niagara and had it done."

Nicole had at that time taken a semester off from a nursing program to help look after her father, and their oldest, Heather, also took time off work to help out — it would turn out Susan and Maarten would need all the help that was offered for what was ahead.

Susan was diagnosed with a meningioma — a non-cancerous tumour that was growing into her spinal cord in her neck. She was told she needed surgery, but was tempted to put it off. "I made light of it with the kids," she says. "Maarten's issues were so much bigger, and I was very involved in his therapy. My thing at that time was to be there with him."

But she was told her surgery should be done "sooner rather than later," and that she needed a neurosurgeon who could do the operation.

Maarten at that time had made his first trip home in August to attend a family wedding. "It was petrifying," says Susan, who worried about all that could go wrong.

A friend quickly built a ramp for the house, and one of Maarten's nurses offered to stay for the weekend to look after him.

They arranged for a hospital bed, and in the five-level house, none of it accessible, they could get it in the door, turning the entrance into his bedroom, and he made it to the wedding.

"People helped so much. It took a group effort to make our life sort of normal again, but it made me realize our life was anything but normal. It was a huge realization, that our life was not normal and it never would be again. Until then we had one goal — to work on Maarten. When we went home, we realized how different our life had become, and would continue to be, and that all the hopes and dreams we'd had were no more. But there



Maarten Muste, in his therapy room with all the milestones he's achieved written on the wall behind him by his personal trainer. (Photos by Penny Coles)

was such an outpouring of love to help us."

In mid-September Maarten came home again, and the two girls were there as well, the four of them watching a movie together, Maarten in his hospital bed and Susan sitting beside him. Family came by to help out, including Susan's sister Kathe and her niece Briar, both nurses.

That evening, when Susan tried to get up, she found she couldn't move. Kathe called an ambulance and Susan was taken to the hospital in Niagara Falls. "I looked perfectly healthy. I just couldn't walk."

Eventually the doctors realized the meningioma was

pushing against her spine. Her Niagara doctor called Maarten's doctor in Toronto, and together they decided Susan needed high doses of a drug that would reduce the swelling, which it did, and she became mobile again.

When Maarten returned to Lyndhurst, he had an appointment to see Dr. Lewis at Toronto Western. Susan had planned to go with him, and they were going to show the doctor her MRI results. When Dr. Lewis looked at them for Maarten, he said "something needed to be done quickly, and he would get in touch with a colleague," Susan recalls. The only problem was the colleague at that time

was teaching in Germany.

"Dr. Lewis got me into Toronto Western, on the same floor Maarten had been on — nurses would come in and see me and say, 'aren't you Maarten's wife?'"

Susan's MRI had been sent to Dr. Michael Fehling, the neurosurgeon in Germany — and he returned to Toronto to do the surgery, which would be difficult as the tumour was growing into her spinal cord. Susan had been told warned there was a possibility she could end up paralyzed, and in a wheelchair.

Continued on page 8



Maarten and Susan in what they call 'our happy place' — there is a sign above the kitchen proclaiming it that. The outdoor space is covered, and used to entertain family during warm weather, with a large barbecue, and a nine-foot pine table made from a single slab of a tree on their Pembroke cottage property.

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# EDITORIAL

## Housing fixes don't require attack on democracy

There has been much talk in recent weeks about Bill-39, which would give special powers to mayors. Those special powers are being bestowed on municipal leaders as part of Premier Doug Ford's plans to increase housing stock by incentivizing mayors to allow development they might otherwise not agree to. That could also mean removing property within the Greenbelt to allow for residential builds.

That was the subject of his key address at the recent annual Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference in London.

Municipalities which meet their housing target would be given a chunk of funding for infrastructure projects, Ford told the gathering of mayors and municipal staff at the AMO conference, attended by Coun. Erwin Wiens, CAO

Marnie Cluckie, planning director Kirsten McCauley, and strategy and government relations officer Victoria Steele.

Wiens says the NOTL contingent went with the intention of talking to three MPPs, about three topics — the ministers responsible for infrastructure, heritage and transportation.

The discussion with the infrastructure MPP was about funding for irrigation expansion and improvements, Wiens says, an issue that has been presented at AMO for the last six years.

The meeting with the heritage minister was to ask for an extension to a bill that addresses heritage property that is registered but not designated by a municipality. The bill says if those properties on the register — which carries some protection, although not as much as designation — will have to be

removed if they are not designated by 2025.

NOTL has several significant properties on the heritage register, and the planning staff won't have enough time to have them designated by the deadline, explained Wiens, so they were asking for more time.

The meeting with the Minister of Transportation was to talk about funding for NOTL's many bike lanes and trails, to help make them safer for migrant workers, locals and visitors, and to provide mapping for those who use them, which would include safety guidelines.

Wiens says he felt they had a positive response on all three issues, and also assurances from the three ministers that they would be visiting NOTL soon.

And whether there is good to come of any of those meet-

ings, the AMO conference is always seen as important to municipal representatives, who have the opportunity to talk to others in similar positions, and learn from those conversations.

NOTL is fortunately too small, at least under the current guidelines, to be given strong mayor powers, which many mayors of larger municipalities are saying aren't necessary, and wouldn't be used.

The town has been assured by the region and the province that housing targets can be achieved in the appropriate areas — councillors can say no to development in some parts of town, as long as housing builds are occurring in other neighbourhoods, such as Glendale or St. Davids.

But that doesn't seem to be the whole story — staff are recommending approving de-

velopment based on provincial legislation, and some councillors are turning it down based on their constituents' outspoken disapproval, and because to them, it seems the right decision. And the town ends up defending the decision, and usually losing, at a land tribunal hearing.

That could be one good reason for a mayor deciding to those special powers — with only one-third of the councillors onside, he or she can override council votes on zoning bylaws related to housing, and save municipalities — and taxpayers — the expense of going to court.

But the more important issue is the attack on democracy, which is based on the majority ruling. Residents will vote and elect a full council, each councillor, along with the mayor, having one vote — that is the

way we expect our democracy to work.

Wiens, although he supports new housing, says he doesn't agree with the extra powers for mayors, because it is not based on democracy. He points out that there are much better ways to build more housing, at more affordable prices, and investments by federal and provincial governments would be a good place to start.

The Local agrees, and suggests that those houses should be built in appropriate areas within urban boundaries.

There are solutions available in town for the housing shortage without breaking down our long-held tradition of democracy — what is needed is more resources to get them built.

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

## Trifecta — three nearby provincial parks worth visiting

**David Gilchrist**  
The Local

Most of us dread driving through Toronto these days, and that's one of the reasons why my wife and I haven't spent much time exploring some of the campsites out that way.

On our last leg home from our trip to the east coast, however, since we were passing, we decided to visit a few of Ontario's provincial parks in eastern Ontario. We were able to visit Murphys Point, Sharbot Lake and Silver Lake. All three are

in the Rideau Lakes area of the province and are part of 13 provincial parks within the 36,000 square kilometres of the Algonquin Settlement Area. They are relatively close to each other and we found out that if you have a pass to one of them you can visit the others during the same day.

Our first day in the area, we camped at Murphys Point Provincial Park. It is 1,239 hectares in area and is part of the Historic Rideau Waterway. This park is on Big Rideau Lake and is bordered by Hogg Bay, No-

ble Bay and Loon Lake. Two of the highlights of this particular park are the Silver Queen Mica Mine and McParlan House.

Unfortunately, for us, the mine was not open when we visited, but when it is, they have interpretive staff in costumes leading guided tours down the trail and into the mine that operated in the early 1900s. There are interesting exhibits related to the mine on the grounds.

The other trail loops around Loon Lake and leads to an early homestead, McParlan House, which is the site of an archaeological study.



An angler fishes on Silver Lake. (David Gilchrist)



### View from the couch

**Donald Combe**  
Special to The Local

*You've Got Mail* (Netflix, 1998) is a finely-crafted love story, where words speak clear-

ly of idealism, avarice, fairness, passion and love. This film is surely a classic and valuable to revisit.

Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to

go to the movies. Until he resumes going to theatres, he has graciously agreed to share his opinions, through "short and sweet" exclusives, of Netflix series and movies for The Local.

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The Niagara-on-the-Lake Local

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**Publisher:**  
The Niagara-on-the-Lake Local

**Village Media Regional Publisher (online sales)**  
John Hammill  
John@villagemedia.ca  
905-988-5599 ext 1157  
notllocal.com facebook.com/notllocal instagram.com/thenotllocal @thenotllocal

**Advertising Sales:**  
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### Where's Ben?

Eden student Ben Foster continues to discover new locations in NOTL, wondering how familiar others may be with them. If you know where this photo was taken, email penny@notllocal.com. Debra Jacobs was correct in saying that last week Ben was sitting at the Niagara College Benchmark Restaurant, on a beautiful day.



# COMMENT

## Local LETTERS Residents can help forestall oak wilt

Responding to the recent discovery of a case of oak wilt found at Niagara College, the Chautauqua Oaks Project, in consultation with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, has completed an inspection of the oak trees The Chautauqua Oaks Project has planted throughout Chautauqua over the last five years.

Thankfully, none were found to be displaying signs or symptoms characteristic of oak wilt. The Chautauqua Oaks Project will continue to be vigilant with their treasured young oaks.

The Chautauqua community is particularly blessed with an impressive heritage oak tree canopy. The Chau-

tauqua Oaks Project, with the assistance of the Chautauqua Residents Association, is encouraging neighbourhood-wide vigilance by providing the following guide.

Preventive action is key to managing the threat. We urge everyone that lives under The Great Chautauqua Tree Canopy, as well as the greater

Niagara-on-the-Lake urban forest, to be watchful for tell-tale signs of Oak Wilt and to follow a couple of important preventative measures.

Anyone interested in joining in on Oak Wilt Watch is welcome to make use of this guide.

**Leslie Frankish**  
Director, Chautauqua Oaks Project

### HELP PREVENT OAK WILT

#### HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- ✦ Do Not prune oak trees between April & November.
- ✦ Do Not bring firewood in from other areas.
- ✦ Do check oak trees for signs of Oak Wilt.
- ✦ Do report suspected signs to: [inspection.canada.ca/oak-wilt](https://inspection.canada.ca/oak-wilt)

#### SIGNS OF OAK WILT:

- ✦ Leaves prematurely turn brown / bronze, starting at the edges & moving inwards. (Note the sharp distinct border between healthy green & discolouration.)
- ✦ Discoloured leaves appear in clusters, starting at the tips of branches. (Note not as individual leaves throughout the tree.)
- ✦ Early & sudden leaf drop, starting at the top of the tree. (Note this can also include green leaves.)
- ✦ In declining trees raised cracks or holes will reveal mats of fungus. (Note the fungus has a distinct smell similar to juicy fruit gum.)



Photos: Canadian Forest Inspection Agency & Invasive Species Centre

## Local LETTERS Enough, says Local reader

It has been 10-plus years waiting for a speed reduction to 50 km at artery roads 1,000 feet prior to urban boundaries.

We have travelled most areas throughout the region and found this to be consistent, except on Line 1. It was

pointed out that Line 2 is 50 km prior to Concession 4, which has far less traffic.

The road condition does not warrant 80 km, let alone anything beyond the 1000 feet.

The distracted habits of motorists is alarming! It has

reached the point where one does not want to jeopardize injury or life by simply walking or biking into the village.

How much of one's retirement will need to be wasted due to negligence after many promises, and still no action taken?

We have already had two recent fatalities. Had the speed changed years ago, the traffic route may not have ended up on Charlotte Street.

**Ted and Mary Ann Schellenberg**  
NOTL

## Local LETTERS Let's just leave the former DND property to Mother Nature

I read with great interest the article by Kris Dube on the old rifle range (Still a risk of unexploded ordnance on Lakeshore property, Aug. 16). It seems that the authorities haven't finalized their intentions concerning the land, but some in our community would like to open it to the public. I know this field well,

as my home office overlooks it. Here are some reasons why human presence there should be minimized:

1. Much of the field floods from late winter through spring, creating a haven for waterfowl, but dangerous footing for humans.

2. The shoreline cliff is unstable and prone to collapse

— another hazard.

3. The field is headquarters for coyotes, as anyone within earshot on a moonlit night can attest. They hunt in daytime, too.

4. When it fills with wildflowers, it's the largest pollinator garden in town, attracting clouds of monarch butterflies (an endangered species, ac-

cording to Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) — hence its local moniker "Monarch Meadow."

5. It's also a favoured habitat of deer (I've seen up to 13 at a time), foxes, and wild turkeys, and its little mammalian denizens make it prime hunting ground for raptors

and owls.

6. As noted in the article, there may be explosives there.

The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority reported that NOTL has the lowest amount of forest cover in the region, an unhealthy 8.5 per cent (recommended minimum is 30 per cent). Here we can help to rectify

that. Rather than "clean up" or otherwise disturb Monarch Meadow, let's leave it be. It could be flagged as an "ecological succession zone" — let nature gradually reclaim it, and let's celebrate the process in wonder.

**Leonard George Chautauqua**

## Parks include picturesque lakes, beautiful beaches

Continued from page 6

Since 2015, there have been 980 species of moth identified in the park. This includes several species that were previously unknown. So, I kept an

eye peeled for any, and what I spotted was a Little Wood Satyr (*megisto cymela*) which is actually a butterfly.

An initiative being started at this park and others is a Moth Wall. Rotated weekly

throughout the park, it is designed as a self-serve interactive display that is plugged in at night to attract moths. You may then use field guides to identify the moth species, and even photograph them.

After a pleasant overnight, we moved to Silver Lake Provincial Park and enjoyed a walk through a marsh area on a boardwalk and the views of the lake. It is a very picturesque lake and it had a lovely beach area. A boat-launching ramp was being used by fisherfolk and recreational boaters. The lake would also be ideal for kayaking and canoeing activities. It was a relaxing stay at our campsite that evening.

Not too much further down Highway 7, in Frontenac County, we stopped in at

Sharbot Lake Provincial Park. We decided to take one of the two hikes while we went into the park for the day. There was no cost as we had paid a fee at Silver Lake that was good until 2 p.m. This was a nice surprise.

Two hikes are noted at this park, the first being the Discovery Trail and the second the Ridgeview Trail. We decided to do the latter. There was a bit of a climb up the ridge on this trail that divides Black Lake from Sharbot Lake, but worth it to get a view of these two lakes.

All in all, it was nice to have been able to visit these three parks on our way home. With one more stop planned in Prince Edward County, we felt pleased with our ongoing adventure.



A trailhead at Murphys Point.



A view of Sharbot Lake.



The McParlan House and archaeological site is located at Murphys Point. (Photos by David Gilchrist)

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# No sign of interest in cannabis production in NOTL

Continued from page 1

in operation, selling its harvest through mail orders only, the town implemented an interim control bylaw to curb any further facilities from starting up, until its cannabis production and processing bylaw was implemented in 2020.

But Canopy was allowed to continue because the bylaw came after it was already growing, said Wiens, who noted the most important factor of the bylaw was the mandatory 600-metre setback put in place for future growers, which was largely intended to address odour concerns.

“Folks in St. Davids, their

concern was always the smell,” said Wiens, referring to when Canopy was in business.

It was often “overwhelming and overpowering” for them, he said.

It also seems that a forecast of large-scale, commercial grow operations as the next agricultural cash cow hasn’t budged the way some were predicting, although there were those who tried.

In 2017, police arrested two people for growing marijuana in a greenhouse on Larkin Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake. It was reported at the time it was believed they were operating under medical marijuana licences, but outside Health

Canada regulations.

At least two other greenhouses operations were suspected of growing cannabis illegally, and investigated by police, one on Lakeshore Road in 2014, at a time when the town said it had five applications for growing cannabis, and one in Virgil about five years later.

Wiens said it’s his understanding that cannabis didn’t become the booming business many expected it to be, which is likely the reason why sites such as Canopy Growth are closing, and new ones aren’t sprouting up.

“In agricultural products, it comes down to the econom-

ics of it, and so consequently, you’re not seeing a major uptick in growth,” said Wiens.

Asked if there were a lot of owners of agricultural lands who thought when legalization came into play, and was getting plenty of attention, that they might be able to sell their assets and retire, Wiens said that back then some did.

But as it turned out, growing cannabis “was not as economical and profitable as it was originally thought,” said Wiens.

Even though cannabis facilities, for both medicinal and recreational purposes, con-

tinue to be allowed in town under certain restrictions, he doesn’t see a resurgence coming.

“It’s hard to find a spot in Niagara-on-the-Lake where the setbacks work,” he said, adding the municipality “just doesn’t have the space” for them to exist.

He’s also said he would not expect another cannabis company would occupy the former Canopy Growth property.

Cannabis also can’t be purchased legally in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a result of council opting out in 2018 of allowing retail stores to open in the

community.

It was the “right idea at the time,” said Wiens, adding that residents “didn’t have an appetite for them.”

Municipalities, under regulations from the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, are unable to opt out after agreeing to allow stores on their streets or in local strip malls.

However, they can reconsider and welcome retail stores after initially saying no.

Wiens said there hasn’t been any discussion at council since making the first decision to opt out.



The large range of greenhouses owned by Canopy Growth, once used to grow cannabis, has been sold. (Kris Dube)

## Garden provides pleasure

Continued from page 5

“My mind couldn’t take it all in. There was so much going on that my brain could not deal with it all,” she says.

Her sister-in-law and sister were with her the day of the surgery. “It was a tough day for the family, just waiting to hear how it went. When I was coming to, my sister asked me to squeeze her hand and I did, and they both burst out crying. I knew there was a chance I’d be paralyzed, but I really didn’t take it in until I saw my sister’s reaction.”

Maarten, she says, studied the Toronto transit system, and on his scooter, with Jessica there to help, made it to Toronto Western to visit.

Five days later, Susan was home. “We had a hospital bed in the living room for me, and a hospital bed in the entrance for Maarten. He would come home for the weekend, and we could move my bed so we could see each other and talk to each other.”

While Susan was learning to walk again, church members and family would take turns visiting Maarten in Lyndhurst. “They would drive for three hours, for a visit of a half hour or hour, so he wouldn’t be alone.”

Once Maarten was able to come home for good that December, the house was renovated to include an elevator, part of the main floor was turned into his bedroom, and a pathway was made to the barn so he could get there in his wheelchair, where he parks his van. They also have a beautiful outdoor covered space to spend time with family — they call it “our happy place.”

All of this took time, says Susan — it was five years before reaching an agreement with insurance companies.

Meanwhile Maarten was learning to use a walker — he desperately wanted to walk down the aisle with Nicole at her outdoor wedding in September 2011.

He did, says Susan, after much practice on their front lawn, although he realized he couldn’t do it in his leather shoes.

“He was in dress pants, a

dress shirt and suspenders, and sneakers. Nikki held on to him while he was walking. It was a very special moment. There wasn’t a dry eye there, and when they reached the front, everyone clapped.”

Again thanks to insurance, they were able to attend a private clinic called Project Walk in California, where Maarten was pushed to do more, and the couple both learned a lot while there, Susan says.

He now has a therapy room in the cold storage area of the barn, and a personal trainer — Rae Ann Reimer, a local orthopaedic exercise specialist who has been coming to the house four days a week for more than 10 years to help Maarten stay in shape. On the wall, to motivate him and encourage him to stay positive, she has written all the milestones he has met since he began therapy, and she has become more than just an employee — she is very much a family friend.

Maarten says he knows he has started to regress somewhat — he doesn’t have the same strength he recovered after surgery — he turns 70 this year, and he is starting to feel his age.

But he and Susan get out every day, on a route through the Old Town where they get a coffee and chat with people.

Looking back, Susan says, “it’s mind-boggling what church members did for us — they came to clean our house, they’d invite my kids to meals, they would drive them to Toronto so they wouldn’t be alone. People cared so much. They brought us meals for months, until I said ‘I can do this.’ I love cooking, so once I was able I wanted to do it myself.”

Maarten says he is content with his life. He likes to keep busy, and he is doing what he enjoys. He is independent, can get into his van and go where he wants to go — as long as there is parking to accommodate it. He gets around in a wheelchair, or on a scooter — walking with the walker is just for therapy, to keep up the strength in his legs.

He has never gone through any major depression, and the work he does in the garden,

which he started in 2014, or getting onto the John Deere tractor to cut the grass, helps. He’s a farmer at heart — a stubborn one at that, Susan says — and this is the work he is able to do.

“It’s been hard,” she says. “But he has been amazing, so resilient, and never a lot of ‘poor me.’”

As she and Maarten show off the orderly garden that has been created with help from family, he says he can’t stand weeds.

Susan, however, refused to do the weeding — so he had to come up with a tool that would work for him. It’s more like an axe than a hoe, and he holds onto his scooter with one hand, manoeuvring through the wide rows between, weeding as he goes, although there is often a grandchild or two clambering on to the scooter to help Opa.

He plants a large selection of tomatoes — “a couple hundred plants,” Maarten estimates. And throughout the season he chooses a few plants he wants to take the seeds from for next year, based on how disease-resistant they are, how well they grow, and less so, how good they taste.

“Of six or seven varieties this year, I’ll repeat three of them, and then try some new ones as well next year,” he says. He is also growing peppers, potatoes, beets, carrots — their dog pulls one from the garden as he speaks — and zucchini. Recently he has planted a blackberry and a raspberry bush — he’s been known to pay the grandkids to pick the berries.

And all of it is brightened up by Susan’s sunflowers and zinnias.

“I can’t just sit around,” he says. “I love farming. I love growing stuff. It’s something I can do with a little bit of help, and it’s a way to find pleasure in life.”

The garden has been life-changing for the couple.

“It’s not what we planned,” he adds, echoing Susan’s words, “but we can’t complain. It’s a good life.”

And, says Susan, “we couldn’t have done it without our faith and our people supporting us.”

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# Exciting new season coming up at performing arts centre

**Mike Balsom**  
**The Local**

For director of programming and marketing Sara Palmieri, kicking off a new season at the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre is a bit like going back to school.

It's not just the fact that both of those events occur in the first week of September. It's also because there's a combination of both excitement and anxiety as a page is turned for the start of a new chapter.

"I can't believe it's already the beginning of September," Palmieri says. "It just sort of crept up on us. It's sad to see summer gone, but it's exciting to get going with this upcoming season."

It all begins Sept. 8 with the first of three days of programming for the seventh annual Celebration of Nations gathering of Indigenous arts, culture and tradition in downtown St. Catharines.

"I can't believe it's been seven years already," Palmieri marvels. "Michele-Elise Burnett and Tim Johnson have put together another amazing event, with some incredibly touring artists coming. The Kaha:wi Dance Theatre performs Friday night, they just won a couple of Dora (theatre, dance and opera) Awards. And Juno winners Digging Roots are here Saturday, with an American band called The Ripcords."

Palmieri is quick to point out that the Celebration of Nations weekend also includes an art installation curated by Burnett in the Robertson Theatre as well as a series of activities and learning opportunities both indoors and outdoors.

The Indigenous Songwriters' Circle returns as well this year, with two installments honouring sisters in spirit on Oct. 4 and April 25.

A number of true legends in Canadian music are making their way to the Niagara Region this summer. Partridge Hall at the PAC will host Kim Mitchell (Nov. 1), Downchild Blues Band (Nov. 23), Jim Witter (New Year's Eve) and Big Sugar (March 27).

Two more legends make their debut at the PAC this winter. Powerful singer Sass Jordan takes the Partridge Hall stage Dec. 20 while David Wilcox appears on Jan. 25.

"It's hard to believe, but David Wilcox has never played here before," Palmieri says.

The Classic Albums Live collective is back for three shows. Beatles fans

will love to hear *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* in its entirety, note for note, cut for cut, as their ads suggest, on Nov. 22. Led Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy* is featured on March 16, while the group jumps to 1983 for a take on *Synchronicity* by the Police on April 9.

"Tickets for all shows went on sale earlier to our members first," Palmieri says, "and some of these shows are starting to get pretty close to a sell-out already, including those Classic Albums Live performances. They are always really, really popular."

There's more than just music on slate, too. Palmieri points to a speaker series, created in conjunction with Brock University.

"*The Music of Listening* is happening this fall," she explains. "Dr. Susan Rogers was first known as one of the first accomplished female sound engineers. She worked with Prince and Barenaked Ladies. She's now at the Berklee College of Music. She'll talk about why we like the music we do and what it tells us about ourselves."

Dance is on the slate Dec. 2 with Bboyizm's visit to Partridge Hall, the Dancers of Damelaha-mid on April 22 and Cote Danse scheduled for May 2.

And NOTL-based Bravo! Niagara Festival presents the world premiere of a new commissioned ballet entitled *Kimiko's Pearl*.

"We've been talking with them since the inception of this work," Palmieri says. "It's kind of a big thing for them (Christine Mori and Alexis Spielfender) to be producing their own show, based on their family's experience in Japanese internment camps. We're a commissioning partner on it, so it's going to be really nice to close out our season in June with it."

A major highlight for Palmieri is the April 10 performance by husband and wife banjo virtuosos Bela Fleck and Abigail Washburn. Fleck has been nominated for 33 Grammy Awards, and won 15 of them.

"There's just something about the banjo," she says. "And they are the king and queen of the instrument. They will be doing this beautiful double-bill. We've been trying to get him here for quite a while. I think this was our third attempt."

Palmieri says in all, there are close to 70 different artists involved in the 2023-2024 PAC season. And she's hoping the curatorial reputation that



Canadian legend David Wilcox will perform at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre this season. (Photos supplied)

the Performing Arts Centre has developed over the years encourages people to take some chances on a few things they might not be familiar with.

"It's really about discovering other things, about seeing things in a new or different way," she explains. "We always ensure there's a balance of the big names with lesser-known acts. It's important for us to show the diversity of work, viewpoints and artists coming through. The best thing is when you see people come in for one show and get excited about some other ones."

Looking back on the previous season as the PAC's first post-COVID, Palmieri says this new one feels a bit more like past seasons prior to that major interruption. And she's hoping that people will dig into the diverse lineup that begins Sept. 8.

"I know people have

lots of choices on where to spend their entertainment dollar," she says. "For us, the heart and soul of what we do is bringing the community together, and ensuring there's something to suit everybody's taste and that it's affordable."

Tickets to any of the upcoming performances, including movie screenings at their Film House, are available online at [firstontariopac.ca](http://firstontariopac.ca).

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Sass Jordan appears at the performing arts centre in December.

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# Rotary icewine party fundraiser coming up

**Sharon Burns**  
**The Local**

The much-anticipated annual Icewine Cocktail Party returns Friday, Sept. 15.

The Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake will host a fundraiser in the gardens of Hiscott House, the beautiful home of Rick and Gianna Dritsacos, said Chris Hatch, Rotarian and volunteer recruiter for the event.

“We hope to raise \$20,000,” he said. Half the funds will go to Red Roof Retreat, a local organization which provides weekend respite, adult day programs, summer day camps, recreational programs,

school trips and day visits for children, youth and young adults with special needs, and their families.

The other half of the funds will benefit Rotary Club projects around the globe, such as polio eradication. Incredibly, endemic wild poliovirus type 1 remains in two countries: Pakistan and Afghanistan, according to the World Health Organization.

This fundraising event showcases many Niagara restaurants, wineries and breweries, and of course, the couple who offer their home for the event. “The Dritsacos are good community citizens who are lending their beauti-

ful backyard again this year,” said Hatch.

He is appreciative of the support from the entire community. “The community is coming together for a good time, and a great cause,” he said.

Icewine cocktails, wine, sparkling wine and beer will be served to the classic rock sounds of the Athertones.

Food stations include beef tenderloin crostini, oysters, sushi, raclette, charcuterie, oven-fired pizza and more.

There is a cap of 200 guests and tickets, priced at \$150 all inclusive, are going fast. Contact [stewart.istvan@gmail.com](mailto:stewart.istvan@gmail.com) for more information.



The Icewine Cocktail Party is a popular and typically sold-out annual event for Rotary. (Supplied)

## More pie please!

With Joe Pillitteri trying to hit the \$1 million mark donated to Team Pillsy since he began fundraising for the Terry Fox Foundation, Dorothy Soo Wiens jumped in with the offer of a pie sale. With a great group of women to help, she expected to have made and sold more than 300 peach pies, some fresh, some frozen, to be sold and picked up Tuesday afternoon. The peaches and all the baking ingredients were donated so all the proceeds would go to the Terry Fox Run. She says the women all had fun chatting and getting know each other — some from Cornerstone Community Church and some community members who wanted to help out — while knowing they were helping out a good cause. (Photos supplied)



Connie Pillitteri, Joan King, Lynette McFarland, Karen Skeoch and Anna Kovacevic peeling and slicing peaches to fill 160 pies Tuesday.



Nancy Dempster, Eleanor Dick, Ian Neufeld, Isolde Kroeker, Mikaela Neufeld, Kathleen Eckhert and Deborah Partridge roll pastry.



Anna Kovacevic, Deanna Dyck, Shirley Klassen and Kathy Dyck filling pies and putting the tops on.



Dorothy Soo Wiens and Kathy Dyck preparing pie filling.



Susan Muste and Isolde Kroeker made the pastry for more than 300 pies.



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**Love Where You Live: SUPPORT *Local***



# Walk includes talk on historic home, birds, gardens, cemetery

Sharon Burns  
The Local

“Ordinary people are capable of wonderful things without even knowing they are doing wonderful things.” This Jane Jacobs’ quote handily describes the talents of two

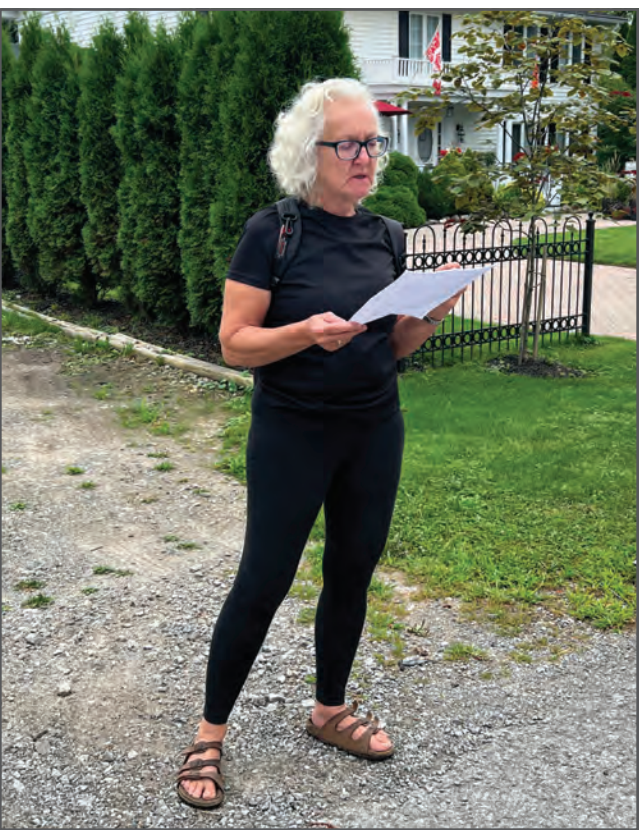
organizers and their four volunteers who created a wonderful and informative Jane’s Walk for more than 30 community members, named after activist Jane Jacobs. The event, organized by Kate Sullivan and Jo-Ann Fraser, began with Elizabeth Pil-

zecki sharing the history of the Steward House, on the corner of Butler and John Streets. Colonel John Butler’s son, Andrew, was given the property on which the house still stands. In 1834, it was sold to William and Susannah Steward. William Steward was an

African American teamster and carpenter, and the Steward home was part of what became known as Niagara’s “coloured village,” a community of former Canadian slaves, Black Loyalists and African American refugees, she said.

The entrance to the basement may have even been a part of the Underground Railroad, explained Pilzecki. In later years, it was the home of Peggy Anderson, one of the founders of Newark Neighbours, and after she died it was purchased by the Niagara Foundation, whose members had it restored before selling it to a private owner.

Master gardener Marylyn Hopper started her talk with the Jane Jacobs’ quote. “Traditionally,” she said, “lawns have been punctuated by plantings of ornamentals, which add aesthetic value, but often provide little for the wildlife. With the threat of climate change and the loss of natural areas and their inhabitants, we are realizing that if we are to do wonderful things, we must rethink our actions and see ourselves as stewards of diversity.” “Not only have we lost natural areas, but the make-up of those natural areas has changed dramatically,” she continued. “Those plants which grew there initially, in the time before colonization, grew within a balanced ecosystem. They provided the food, sheltering and nesting places for the insects, animals and birds within them.” Hopper suggested that invasive plants be removed. “It often takes immense effort to



Master gardener Marylyn Hopper talks about local gardens on Jane’s Walk and Talk.



Doug Gillard, his brother Dan and Dan’s son Joseph, in front of the Steward House, wanted to learn about the Butler family history — Col. John Butler is Dan and Doug’s fifth great-grandfather through their mother, Joyce Butler. (Photos by Sharon Burns)



Rick Meloen shares some history of Butler’s Burial Ground.

do that, and in order for them not to recolonize, it’s really important to reseed, depending on the area.”

Jean Hampson spoke on bird migration patterns.

“Migration has already started,” she said. “We’re seeing quite a few of the shore birds migrating back from James Bay, and if you’re out at the beach or go by a field that has a nice little wet puddle, you may be seeing some shore birds that are already heading back down to their southern climate for the winter.”

Various birds need various ecosystems and they have different needs at different times of the year, she explained, and many will migrate from northern habitats to the Niagara region in the winter because the Niagara River will stay open and provide water for them.

Nesting areas are very important, Hampson added. “An area like this,” she said, pointing to the wild space behind her as walkers descend into the dip on Butler Street, “can be a vital artery for migrating birds.”

She suggested helping the bird community by providing a bird feeder and native plants, and adding a water feature or bird bath to your garden. “It will help keep the birds sustained throughout the summer.”

Hampson advocated for greenspaces to be kept intact with native plants. “We don’t need every greenspace to be a park with a lawn and some planted trees. We need wild spaces like this to keep the birds happy.”

She also suggested turning lights off at night, keeping pets on a leash or inside, “especially during nesting season, when little baby birds are just coming out of the nest and can’t fly quite yet.”

With perfect timing, as dusk fell, history buff Rick Meloen led the group to the graveyard. “It’ll be nice and

creepy,” he said.

He shared that Colonel John Butler’s original home was on what is now Balmoral Drive, metres away from Butler’s Burial Ground.

At the cemetery, Meloen stood atop a long, low stone wall, which is actually the roof of a large vault, or crypt, he explained. When he was a young boy he could look into the vault, “even though there wasn’t much to see.” Since then, the vault has been filled in with earth to deter vandalism, and all that remains is the roofline. The vault belonged to the Claus family, who had also owned the land on King Street known as The Wilderness, across from the Royal Canadian Legion hall.

Meloen walked the gathering through the headstones, explaining each person’s role and relation to others. Many names are familiar to those who live here: Tenbroeks, Muirhead, Freil, Rist, Richardson, and of course, Butler.

Interestingly, a sixth generation Butler was a part of the tour. Eden student Joseph Gillard, his father Dan, and Uncle Doug were keen on learning more about the Butler family history.

Colonel John Butler is Dan and Doug’s fifth great-grandfather through their mother, Joyce Butler. Joseph is the next generation and Colonel John Butler is his sixth great-grandfather, they explained.

Shelley Burnett and Bryan Kenny walked over to the tour from their Victoria Street home. Having lived in Toronto, and before that, Montreal, the couple moved to town about four years ago, and had attended last year’s Jane’s Walk. “It was a nice way of getting to learn a little bit more about the neighbourhood,” said Burnett. “And this year we thought that we should just come visit and learn a little bit more about the history.”

## Irish Butler descendants visit St. Mark’s



Descendants of Col. John Butler gathered in NOTL from all parts of the globe last week for a special Butler Society Gathering, an event usually held every three years in Ireland. It was scheduled to come to town earlier, but was put on hold until this year because of the pandemic. The Irish contingent, including Christy Upton from Dublin, Jackie Reade from Wicklow, Marie Butler Upton from Dublin, David J. Butler from Tipperary and Mark Reade from Wicklow, fit in a visit to St. Mark’s, learning of some Irish connections to the historic church, just before the end of their visit. (Penny Coles)



# Boaks exhibit, *Of Beauty and The Sublime*, opens Sunday

Maria H. Klassen  
Special to The Local

The opening reception for the exhibit of the exquisite artwork of Ronald Boaks, entitled *Of Beauty and The Sublime*, will be held at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre on Sept. 3 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the Joyner Gallery. The exhibit promises to be a journey into compelling imagery, duality and emotional resonance.

Boaks is no stranger to the art community of Niagara-on-the-Lake. On a beautiful summer weekend in June, he hosted a number of artists from the NOTL Arts Collective at his breathtaking grounds on Niagara Stone Road for a weekend of painting called *Artists in the Rose Garden*.

Boaks is known for his mastery in mixed media collage, painting and sculpture. His eclectic pieces highlight artistic media including drawings, monoprints, paintings and still-life photographs, which he has worked on during the last three decades. Along with his two-dimensional work, Boaks will be showcasing his thought-provoking sculptures. A strong coherence of form is created from very disparate elements and a diversity of materials, including wood, steel and stone. These diverse elements offer insight into his creative evolution.

His current work displayed in *Of Beauty and The Sublime* explores the delicate balance between his Romantic and Modernist inclinations. This juxtaposition becomes a profound theme, inviting viewers to bridge the dualities of realism and

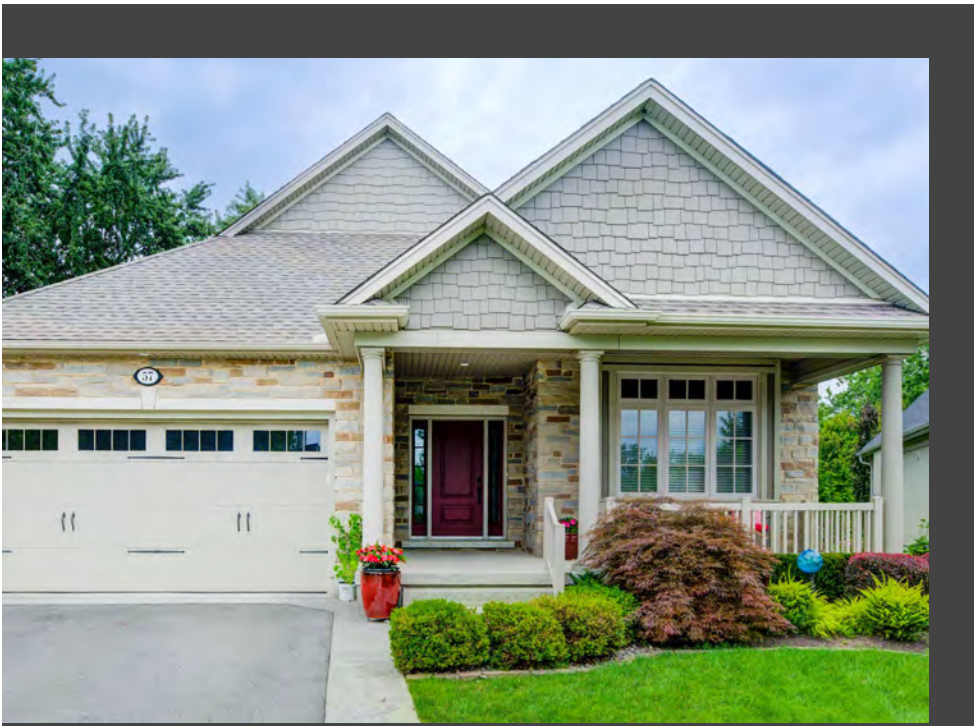
abstract, colour and monochrome, two dimensions and three. Commenting on the show, Boaks says, “I hope that the viewer responds to the complexities in the art, which in turn reflect the complexities in our lives.” The art exhibit runs for the month of September. Join Boaks at the opening reception Sept. 3 to engage directly with him, and gain insight into his creative process.



*Ascending*, a composition of wood, steel and stone, is part of the Boaks exhibit. (Photos supplied)



*DuoXX*, a Ronald Boaks painting included in his exhibit that runs for the month of September at the Pumphouse, is a captivating mixed media piece.



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## Local swimmer proving her prowess in the pool

### Peyton Leigh has one qualifying Olympic Trial time

**Sharon Burns**  
The Local

A Niagara-on-the-Lake teenager is Ontario's fastest 15-year-old swimmer.

Peyton Leigh is the provincial high point winner, having won four gold, a silver and a bronze medal in this past season's competitions. She is ranked first in the province for the 800-metre freestyle and the 200-metre butterfly.

When Peyton started her season last year, her only goal was to make the qualifying time to get into the Eastern Canadian Championships, held in Windsor last March. She ended up doing that, and much more.

In May 2024, Peyton will join other swimmers from across the country to swim at the Olympic Qualifying Trials in Montreal.

"It was a big shock. I was really happy about that," she said.

Peyton lives in Garrison Village, and has been swimming all of her life. She started with private backyard swimming lessons and joined the Garden City Aquatic Club at the age of five. She became competitive three years later. After bouncing around with membership in a few different clubs, last year Peyton joined Brock Niagara Aquatics, with a coach new to the club, and to Peyton, Dave Ling.

"When Dave came this

year it was really good for me. He taught me so many things, like how to perfect my stroke, how to gain speed, and he just motivates me," said Peyton, who is part of the elite Diamonds squad at Brock Niagara Aquatics, and swims with varsity athletes.

Ling, Brock University's head swim coach, participated in two Canadian Olympic Swimming Trials and represented Canada at the 2000 FINA World Open Water Swimming Championships in Hawaii.

At the winter provincials held in Toronto, Ling told her that attaining a time to allow her to compete at the Olympic Trials is possible if she went out and gave it her all. "I ended up making my first Olympic trial time that night. It was really exciting. I didn't go into that race in the morning expecting to even get close to that."

Peyton races everything from the 200 to 800 metre freestyle (front crawl), and the 200 metre butterfly.

"I prefer distance races over sprints," she said. What drives Peyton over the course of a race is "the feeling I get when I get going, getting into a rhythm."

In a long-course pool like Brock's, 800 metres is 16 laps.

Most of Peyton's swims have been at the Toronto Pan Am Center, which, according to Peyton, is known as the fastest pool in Canada because mul-

iple records have been broken in it. "I got to see Summer McIntosh break the world's record, which is really cool," said Peyton. McIntosh is the current world record holder in the women's 400 metre individual medley.

Peyton's mother, Christi Leigh, said that Peyton has "always been good. A little bit better than average. People were always like, 'wow,' when she was so little and had mastered the butterfly stroke."

Christi, a teacher at St. Michael Catholic School in Virgil, said "this year was the biggest jump, in terms of progress towards something more than we actually thought could ever be happening with the new coach."

Peyton's training schedule doesn't leave much time for the 15 year old to socialize with friends. She trains in the pool eight times a week, 20 hours in total. She trains twice on Monday, once each Tuesday through Thursday, twice Friday and once on Saturday. A pool session generally takes anywhere from two to two and a half hours.

"I also do dry land training three times a week out of the Brock Performance centre," she added.

Peyton's swim season was 11 months long. "It was the longest season I've had in my swimming career," she said. "I surprised myself."

Christi says that while her daughter "doesn't do a lot outside of swimming and school," she has really close friendships with people both inside and outside of the swim world.

"Sometimes at night, all my friends will go to football games and stuff, and I won't go because I have practice," said Peyton. But at school, I became friends with this group of girls who are also really athletic and we can relate to each other."

"The environment I swim in is very important to me. Being at practice with people who have fun and are passionate about the sport helps me be a better athlete, and I am so lucky to have teammates who allow me to push myself everyday," said Peyton.

Leigh acknowledges that swimming is a costly sport, as her mom and dad, retired police officer Jimmy Leigh, nod in the background.

It costs nearly \$5,000 to use the pool and training

room facilities at Brock. Training suits, of which Peyton currently has eight, are about \$90 each, and race suits cost anywhere from \$400 to \$600. The race suits are very thin, fit tightly to the skin, and rip easily. All suits last only one season, due to wear and tear, and swimmer growth.

Peyton's 13-year-old sister, Georgia, also swims for Brock Niagara Aquat-

ics, on the Gold team.

"But there are other expenses on top of that," said Christi. "You have to pay to race, you have to pay to get there. You need a hotel, and then there are coaching expenses."

"I'm applying for a \$500 scholarship right now from Swim Ontario," said Peyton, who works part-time at Seaway Farms while maintaining an honour's average at Holy Cross

Secondary School.

She has a few more weeks to relax before embarking on a new swim season and Grade 10. She will continue to work with Ling and her Diamonds team at the Brock pool.

"Right now the goal is to just keep getting better and faster and my coach, Dave Ling, and I will communicate along the way and try to achieve new best times."



Peyton Leigh with her coach Dave Ling. (Supplied)



Peyton Leigh with her gold medal for 400m freestyle at Ontario Junior Championships this past July. (Supplied)



Peyton Leigh at home. (Mike Balsom)



# Soccer season wraps up with year-end festival

Mike Balsom  
The Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Soccer Club concluded its season with its year-end festival Saturday, sponsored by Hummel Properties.

All of the fields at the Virgil Sports Complex were buzzing with activity as kids from age four to 14 gathered to wrap things up in celebratory fashion.

"It was a fantastic closing festival," Club president Carrie Plaskett tells The Local. "All the kids got so excited to get their medals. The smiles on their faces were amazing, you could really see how proud they were, and you could see how much they all improved throughout

the season."

With 380 children registered for soccer in town, Plaskett says the club is very close to being back to pre-COVID participation levels.

"We had 90 Timbits (ages four and five) this year," she adds. "Overall, we saw a lot more kids getting back on the field this summer. Keeping high numbers for our little ones, Timbits to U7, we had some great numbers there."

The enthusiasm of the coaches at those levels, Plaskett added, cannot be underestimated. Their efforts, she said, were instrumental in encouraging kids to hopefully come back for the 2024 season.

"And we had great sup-

port from the local business community," she added. "Our sponsors are so important in keeping soccer affordable for everyone each year."

For the first time this summer, a select team was run at the Under 9-10 level, organized by one of the volunteer coaches, Conor MacNeil. He pulled together a group of interested kids from that division's house league to participate in tournaments and exhibitions against other centres, and had some success.

"I'm really proud of the way Conor pulled that all together," says Plaskett. "It was something new and different for our club, and it was a huge success. I think we will be able to offer a travel team at the next level for

those kids going into next year."

Plaskett credits the club's head referee Lucas Michlik for helping to develop a young core of soccer officials.

"We had a good number of referees," said Plaskett, "a lot of young ones. There were a cou-

ple of difficult situations on our fields with some visiting teams' coaches. I'm really proud of how our refs handled it, and how Lucas followed up with them and gave them guidance on how to deal with those situations."

Registration will open in late January for the 2024 soccer season.

"We always encourage people to register as soon as possible, as some age groups fill up pretty quickly," warned Plaskett.



The U-14 soccer team had a great season, going undefeated, with (back) Taylor Nickerson, Jacob Froese, Patrick Elrod, Joshua Sasso, River Konik, Gracie Cherney, Keira Dexter, Ron Slootsky, and coach Jennifer La Valle, and (front) Vanessa Rezza, Angelina La Valle, Matthew Amodeo, Leonardo, Mark Baranski, and coach J.P. Konik. Absent were Alp Rahnamayan, Jack Dill, Ilias Dritsakos, Roc Mastromatteo and Declan. (Supplied)



Kids were having fun as they wrapped up their soccer season. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

Coach Mike Cwiertniewski with his U11-12 team. (Mike Balsom)



Showing off some hardware. (Mike Balsom)



Hungry soccer players are waiting for a snack. (Mike Balsom)



John Velsink, Jake Vanspronsen, Lucca Dellamarina and Ethan Tendean getting ready to play. (Mike Balsom)



Ena, Miriam and Cedric wait to be called onto the field. (Mike Balsom)

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# Preds ready to build on last season's success

**Mike Balsom**  
The Local

With their season just over two weeks away, the Niagara Predators are putting the finishing touches on their roster.

Monday night saw 23 skaters take to the Canada Games Park ice in Thorold for the first of four main camp sessions. Coaches Kevin Taylor and Greg Wilson, both returning from last year, had a chance to put those already signed and a few hopefuls through a series of skating, shooting and puck-handling drills.

"We are going to have a really good team," president and general manager Robert Turnbull said of his Greater Metro Toronto Hockey League team. "We're building on our success from last year and I'm excited about our new signings, too."

Turnbull retakes the helm as GM this year after stepping back a bit for 2022-2023. Over the winter months he sold his other league team, the St. George Ravens, to Russ Lockwood. That frees him up to take a more hands-on role for the team's third year playing out of Virgil's Meridian Credit Union Arena.

Back from last year are defenders Guy Manco, Nick Savoie and Logan Baillie. Forwards Reece Bisci, Thomas McGrath and Nolan Wyers are also returning, as is late-season pick-up, goaltender Zane Clausen.

Two names on last year's roster who were not able to get to Canada are both expected to arrive next month. The visa problems that held back



Preds' head coach Kevin Taylor explains a drill to his team gathered on the ice at Canada Games Park. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

goaltender Gorgii Kodzaev and forward Georgi Kholmovsky from Russia have been solved. Kodzaev should arrive Sept. 11, with Kholmovsky landing 16 days later.

Baillie, a third-year Predator from Niagara Falls, is ready to take more of a leadership role this season.

"After three years you get more comfortable, more confident," said the 18-year-old, who celebrates his birthday on Nov. 25. "I have to bring that leadership to the new guys coming in. With my experience I think I can give them a hand in building their own confidence in practices, so they can bring that into the game."

To Baillie, who started his own lawn maintenance business this summer with 13 clients in Niagara Falls, keeping his Preds teammates focused will be important this season.

"I'm hoping we can get everyone to stick with the program," said Baillie. "I want everyone to give 110 per cent at each practice. I think that was a lacking point last year. We have to have everyone on top of their game, everyone wanting the same outcome. That's the only way we can be successful."

Sidelined with a knee problem as a 16-year-old early in 2021-2022, Baillie worked on honing his blue line skills last year, but

knows exactly where he wants to improve this season.

"That first year, that injury, that was tough," Baillie recalled. "I definitely improved my defensive structure last season. This year I'm looking to build off of that, and also build onto my offensive game. I think that's something I've been lacking. If I build on that I'll be a solid defenceman."

He'll be joined on the blue line by newcomer Aidan Jones, who played his AAA hockey last year with the Blyth-Deerview Academy. Jones was taken by the Predators in the fifth round of the league draft this May. His younger brother Rhys will also be

ying for regular shifts with the Preds, but at centre.

From Hamilton, the 17-year-old Aidan says his two years at the Blyth-Deerview Academy helped him improve his skills.

"Every practice was about skills," he told The Local. "The focus wasn't on winning games, but improving as a player. Lots of stick-handling drills and things like that. It really helped me develop as a player."

The 6'1", 190-pound Jones says he's not a goal scorer, but excels at the penalty kill.

"I'm a stay-at-home defender, very much a defensive player," he said. "Hold-

ing on to a lead, keeping the puck away from the net, that's my role."

Jones had spoken to the Predators before the draft, but was surprised when he was chosen.

"They didn't mention the draft to me then," he said Monday night. "They just mentioned the camps coming up and invited me out to skate this summer. I was excited already, and even more excited when they drafted me."

The Grade 12 student at Westmount Secondary School in Hamilton is looking forward to the start of the season, and is hoping a stint with the Predators will turn into an opportunity to play hockey and study engineering at an American college.

"I've been talking with some Division III NCAA schools already," he says. "I'm looking forward to studying mechatronic engineering. It's a focus on mechanical and electrical, but it's more about building automated assemblies."

While both Jones and Baillie have the luxury of being able to live at home while playing out of NOTL, a few of their teammates from further afield will need local accommodations. Turnbull says the team is still in need of four or five billet families to host some of the young Predators. He can be contacted at 416-705-9948 or via email at turnbullr54@gmail.com.

The Predators open their season at home Sept. 15 against Tottenham, now known as the Railers under new owner Micheal Prock. Game time is 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$8 for seniors.



Aidan Jones was a fifth-round pick in this May's draft.



Returning defenceman Logan Baillie skates during a drill Monday night.



# Winning Shark crews keep trophies local

**Sharon Burns**  
The Local

The Shark was born in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and the top honours in Shark racing stays with Niagara-on-the-Lake crews.

The 56th Shark World Championship was held at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Sailing Club over the course of five days last week, with 48 boats entered and crews from as far away as Germany and Austria.

But it was the local crews who took home the trophies.

Josh Wiwcharyk, Alex Letchford and Chris Clarke sailed Crunch to a first place win.

"It was a great, crazy day," said Wiwcharyk. "We were up by a couple points, but it didn't really matter. We couldn't get off the line very well. We were well behind and we made some decisions that we wouldn't have made otherwise. It was a gruelling, stressful race."

Wiwcharyk explained that they didn't have fun "until we hit the dock. It wasn't until the dust settled and the scorers did their thing that we knew that we won by one point. We actually thought that we had lost on a tiebreaker."

Wiwcharyk and his crew sailed to a second place finish when the Worlds were at the NOTL sailing club in 2009.

The Harper brothers placed second. Jacob, Levi and Malcolm are the third generation to sail Rampant Lion. "As each boy turned three years old, they earned a spot to sail on this boat with their grandparents or aunt and uncle," explained their mom, Roberta Harper.

Roberta and her husband, Bruce, run the regular Wednesday night races with up to 15 boats, "which is kind of like a mini regatta for us," said Jacob.

Malcolm admitted that it was a tough week of sailing. "It took a lot of clear headspace to keep it together and focus," he said. "It's definitely tough to do a week-long race like this."

Levi said he was proud of the trio "for staying mentally tough, but it was hard sailing. We were probably the most consistent as far as being in the top 10 most of the week, and we were able to battle back."

As for three siblings working so closely in a stressful situation, confined to the small shell of a boat, Jacob said, "it's definitely a bonding experience where we just battle each other out on the race course, but we leave it out on the race course, right?" he asked as he looked at his brothers. "When we come in, we figure out what we need to do for tomorrow, and then we grow on that."

Richard Hinterhoeller, principal race officer, was responsible for running the races. "I surround myself with a bunch of very experienced and talented people," Hinterhoeller said. "I let them do their job, and we go out there and between the group of us, if we have some nice wind, we end up with some nice races."

Hinterhoeller's father, George, created the Shark in NOTL in 1959. Richard spoke to the lasting love of the Shark.

"It's the brilliance of the design," said Hinterhoeller. "What you've got is people like the Harpers and you've got the next group a half generation below them, and they're buying these Sharks and they're putting some time and effort into it, putting some new sails on it and then sailing faster than old guys like me."

Hinterhoeller, who races

on the regular Wednesday nights, has a son who lives in Campbell River who races, and a daughter who has been doing race committee work with him for 20 years.

As Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, a sailing club member and Shark racer, started up the barbecue to feed the racers last Friday evening, he told The Local that it is amazing that there is a picture of George mounted in the clubhouse. In it, he is sitting on a shark prototype with the lighthouse behind him in

1959, and this week 48 boats were sailing back and forth in front of it.

Another sailing club crew won the long-distance race and the Bill Metzger Trophy for top hours in the practice race, the long-distance race and the last race. Amicus was sailed by Mark Schantz, Dave Schantz and Ken Greer.

The George Hinterhoeller Award was presented to Jinnie Gordon, of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Sailing Club, for her commitment to promoting women's sailing and her

dedication to the Shark class.

Race organizers followed the Sailor for the Sea Clean Regatta protocols and achieved the Gold Standard. Only two bags of garbage were created over seven days, with four meals being served to 200 people. Everything was reusable, compostable or recyclable. Cutlery was made from recycled, fully compostable coffee grounds. The Niagara Region provided a water wagon, refillable water bottles and extra green bins for composting.



Alex Letchford, Josh Wiwcharyk and Chris Clarke sailed Crunch to a first place win. (Jim Schacht)



Brothers Levi, Malcolm and Jacob Harper on their last day of sailing. The siblings took second place in the Shark World Championship. (Sharon Burns)



Richard Hinterhoeller, son of George Hinterhoeller, who designed and built the first Shark in 1959, ran the races. (Sharon Burns)



Sharks out on the lake Thursday. (David Gilchrist)



# LocalSPORTS

## Berg family donates \$5,500 to support hockey, hockey player

**Mike Balsom**  
The Local

The late James Berg continues to have an impact in the Niagara-on-the-Lake community, almost two years after his sudden death at 53 years old.

The family of the long-time executive and volunteer with the NOTL Wolves Minor Hockey Club held a tournament in his name during a snowy December weekend in 2022. Last week, the proceeds from the James Berg Memorial Hockey Tournament were distributed back into the community in his name.

The Berg family gathered with current club executives outside the arena last Tuesday to present a cheque for \$4,500 to the Wolves. Also present was 18-year-old Sam Walker, who received the first James Berg Memorial Scholarship of \$1,000.

"We created an educational scholarship to go to somebody in their last year of hockey," said Madison Berg, James' daughter. "My dad was a very generous, caring guy who loved giving back to his community. We wanted this scholarship to go to someone who embodied that dedication to the community."

A NOTL native, James Berg joined the hockey club's executive in 2010, despite not having been a hockey player himself. He held the role of president early on, and took on a number of other roles through the years.

As his children Mackenzie, Madison and Mitchell began playing hockey in town, he also assumed roles with their teams. Current club president Pete Flynn credited Berg for being instrumental in "saving hockey" in NOTL.

Despite a snowstorm that made travel almost impossible last December 23, about 100 players and dozens of spectators and



Wolves vice-president Joe Pagnotta, scholarship winner Sam Walker, Carolyn Berg, Mackenzie Berg, Wolves president Peter Flynn, and Madison Berg gather for the handing over of cheques to minor hockey and a deserving player. (Mike Balsom)

supporters showed up for the first James Berg Memorial Hockey Tournament at the Meridian Credit Union and Centennial Arenas. The eight teams squared off to win bragging rights and a team set of T-shirts, at the same time raising \$5,500 through entry fees, concession sales and donations.

"The stands were packed," Berg's daughter Madison told The Local at the time. "The snow was crazy, but the whole community really came out. There were people all over the arena. It was so amazing to see how busy it was."

The donation to the hockey club will be used primarily to develop young goaltenders who play for the Wolves.

"We want to bring a little more on-ice goalie development to each team," Flynn said. "We want to bring someone in to work with each team at their own practices, an hour at a time, on edging and skat-

ing. It's for the development of both rep and local league goalies."

The family decided that some of the proceeds of the tournament would be awarded as a scholarship to a young Wolves player in their final year of high school. The recipient would have played for the Wolves for at least the past three years and be intending to pursue post-secondary studies.

Most importantly, the chosen player should have demonstrated qualities similar to James Berg's. In the application for the award, James is described as a selfless man who constantly put others before himself, giving back to the community in any way possible.

"He was a very positive figure in all aspects of his life," says the scholarship description, "encouraging and uplifting others to constantly be their absolute best. James always had a

friendly, supportive spirit and was a leader in the community. He was never a superstar or looked to have the attention on himself, but rather he was a guy who genuinely enjoyed bringing everyone together."

Walker was chosen from a group of four applicants to receive the first James Berg Memorial Scholarship.

"His application was really well-written," said Madison, "and the qualities that he displayed really matched Dad the best. Like Dad, he dedicated his time

to the community and his willingness to help out any way possible was amazing."

Walker was a member of last year's Wolves Under-18 rep team that won a silver medal in the Niagara District Hockey League championships. Despite having to sit out the last month or so of the season with a broken wrist, Walker was there at every game and practice for his teammates.

His tenure with the Wolves goes far beyond the minimum three years required for the scholarship, having played in the NOTL

organization since he was five years old. Walker gave back to the club as a referee and helped current club vice-president Joe Pagnotta as an assistant coach with a team a few years ago.

"He was a huge help with our referee program," Flynn said Tuesday. "And he put in so many hours helping out in the box as a timekeeper, too."

"This scholarship means a lot to me," the honours graduate of Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School told The Local, "and not just for the money. I had (James Berg) coach me for one year. He was a great guy to have on the bench. Just to be recognized for some of the qualities he had, that's a pretty high accomplishment."

Walker leaves for the University of Guelph next week, where he will be studying marine and freshwater biology. He hopes to eventually work in research.

And despite having now aged out of the Wolves system, Walker says his hockey days are definitely not over. He's planning to play intramural hockey at university once that starts up.

Meanwhile, the Bergs are already busy planning the next James Berg Memorial Hockey Tournament. They are hoping to hold it the last Friday before Christmas Day, and are working with the town's parks and recreation department on nailing down ice time for the event.



The family of James Berg, shown here with his wife Carolyn, wanted to do something to give back to the community in his name. (Supplied)

## LocalWORSHIP

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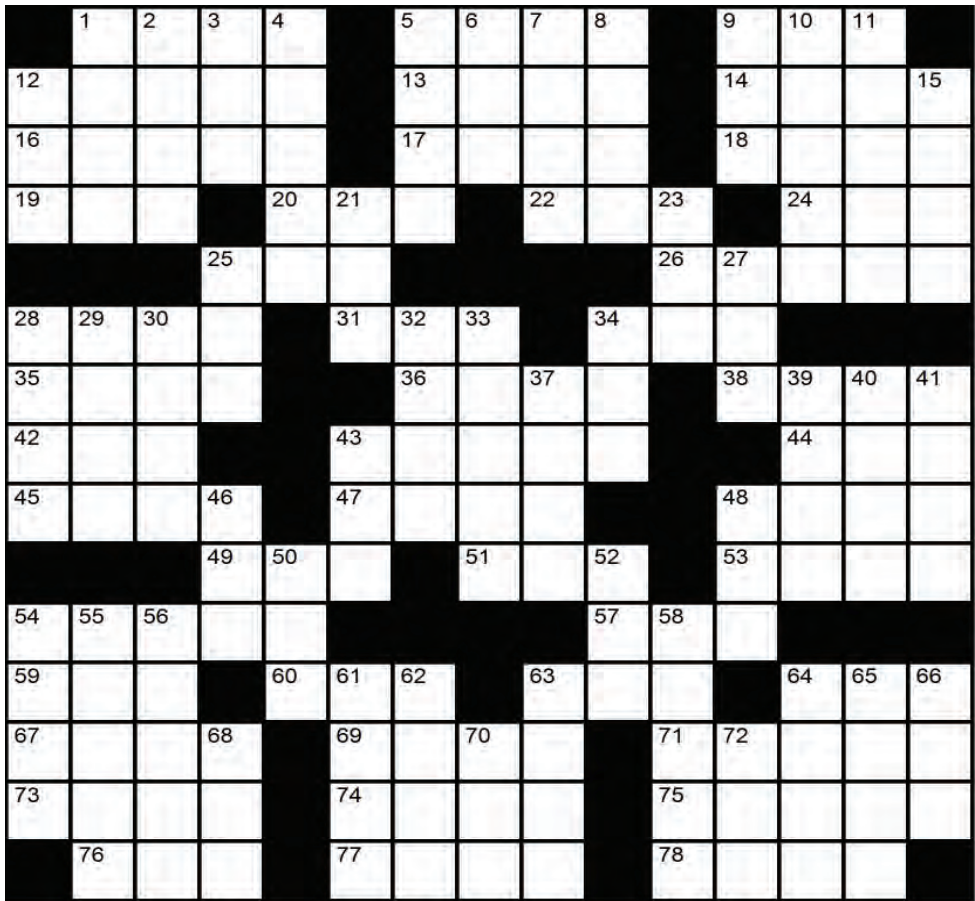
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- Across:**

1 #

5 Conversation

9 P C to web link company

12 Persian Gulf port

13 Gypsy people

14 Immediately, in hospital

16 Edgar --- Poe

17 Upon

18 Insect destructive of clothes

19 Negative

20 One coming out

22 Big beer can

24 --- Grande

25 Solar system center

26 Casing

28 Electrical connector

31 Passed away (Abbr.)

34 Old card game

35 "Would it be ---?" (Presley: "Can't help falling in love")

36 Father's sibling

38 Physicians

42 So far

43 Sour-smelling

44 Sticky stuff

45 Junction

47 Not us

48 Killer whale

49 Rotational speed measure

51 Bashful

53 Top
- 54 Harsh treatment

57 Applicable

59 Entertainment

60 Bench with a back

63 Letters on Royal Navy ships

64 E.g. a street kiss

67 Horse controller

69 Spanish fashion designer --- Rabanne

71 Long

73 Aware of

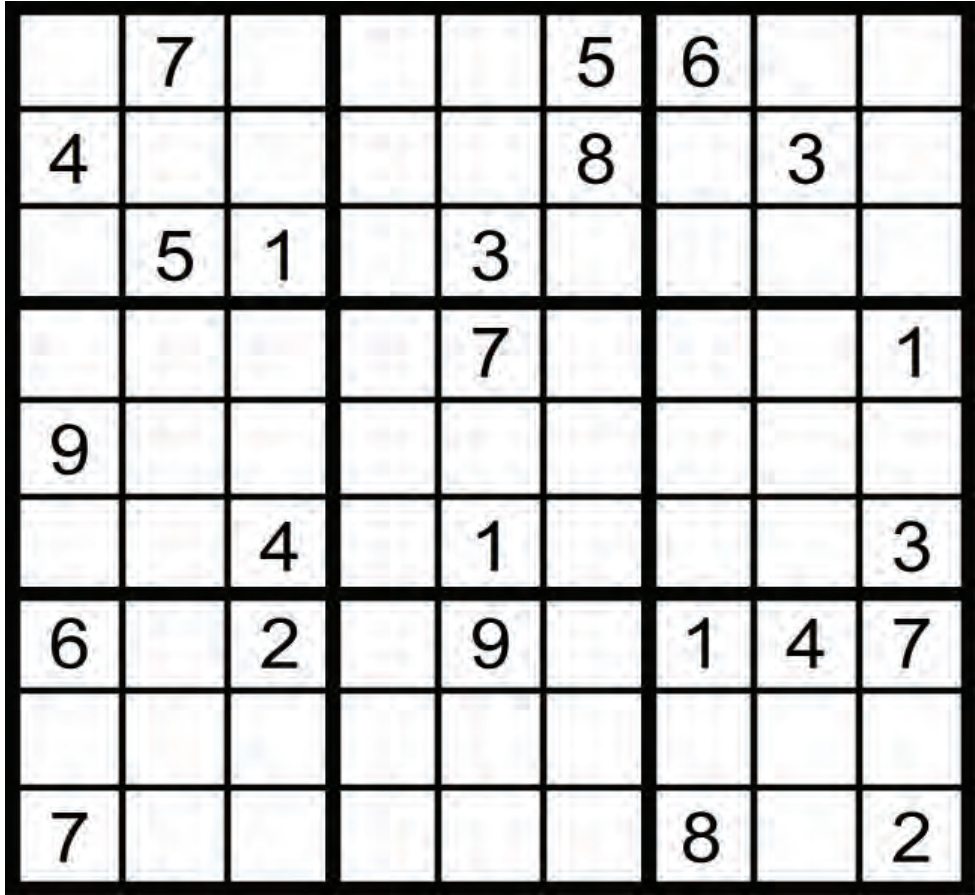
74 Overnight stops

75 Law

76 Fight against underwater threats

77 Penny

78 U R L starter
- Down:**
- 1 Kind of hoop
- 2 Competently
- 3 Cape Town carrier
- 4 One of the Indian majority
- 5 Quarrelsome grouch
- 6 Very fashionable
- 7 Hog-wild
- 8 Recording medium
- 9 Belief system
- 10 Bad weather
- 11 Paved outdoor area
- 12 Karate degree
- 15 Hammer god
- 21 Aim
- 23 Federal fiscal watchdog
- 25 One of a hundred in D C
- 27 Eye cell
- 28 Methods
- 29 Statement of understanding
- 30 The Beatles' lovely meter maid
- 32 Apiece
- 33 Antidotes
- 34 Classic Ford model
- 37 Type of rechargeable cell
- 39 Man-eating giant
- 40 Stimulating South American shrub
- 41 Sit in a tub
- 43 Bank machine
- 46 E.g. Robinson, Doubtfire
- 48 Plump
- 50 Vigor
- 52 Thanksgiving dish
- 54 Spherical hairdo
- 55 --- Vista, Disney brand
- 56 Military groups
- 58 Outguess
- 61 Heroic
- 62 Diminish slowly
- 63 Vast multitude
- 64 Gasp
- 65 Bead
- 66 Newswoman --- Curry
- 68 The present time
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Sudoku solution from  
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2	9	7	5	4	8	1	3	6
5	4	3	1	6	7	8	9	2
1	6	8	9	3	2	7	4	5
6	2	1	4	9	3	5	7	8
7	5	9	6	8	1	3	2	4
3	8	4	7	2	5	6	1	9
4	3	2	8	1	6	9	5	7
8	1	5	2	7	9	4	6	3
9	7	6	3	5	4	2	8	1

**Across:** 1 Hash, 5 Chat, 9 I S P, 12 Dubai, 13 Roma, 14 Stat, 16 Allan, 17 Atop, 18 Moth, 19 Nay, 20 Deb, 22 Keg, 24 Rio, 25 Sun, 26 Armor, 28 Wire, 31 Dec, 34 Loo, 35 A sin, 36 Aunt, 38 Docs, 42 Yet, 43 Acid, 44 Goo, 45 Seam, 47 Them, 48 Orca, 49 R p m, 51 Shy, 53 Peak, 54 Abuse, 57 Apt, 59 Fun, 60 Pew, 63 H M S, 64 P D A, 67 Rein, 69 Paco, 71 Yearm, 73 Onto, 74 Inns, 75 Canon, 76 A-S W, 77 Cent, 78 H t t p.

**Down:** 1 Hula, 2 Abby, 3 S A A, 4 Hindu, 5 Crab, 6 Hot, 7 Amok, 8 Tape, 9 Ism, 10 Storm, 11 Patio, 12 Dan, 15 Thor, 21 End, 23 G A O, 25 Sen, 27 Rod, 28 Ways, 29 I see, 30 Rila, 32 Each, 33 Cures, 34 LTD, 37 NI-M-H, 39 Ogre, 40 Coca, 41 Soak, 43 A T M, 46 Mrs, 48 Opt, 50 Pep, 52 Yam, 54 Afro, 55 Buena, 56 Units, 58 Psych, 61 Epic, 62 Ware, 63 Host, 64 Pant, 65 Drop, 66 Ann, 68 Now, 70 C N N, 72 Eat.



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