

The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



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Christmas comes to Queen Street

Gavin Laman, Barbara Boese, Brenda McArthur, Krista Janzen and Cameron Cropper make sure that though there couldn't be the decorating party that was held last year, the Court House is spruced up for Christmas. See story on page 4. (Penny Coles)

Family sees dog attacked, helpless to protect it

Penny Coles
The Local

Rachel Gossen spent last Saturday evening in the office of an emergency veterinarian clinic, waiting for Tyson, the family dog, to be stitched up.

Again.

She says Tyson has been attacked by a neighbour's dog several times. Saturday was the fourth trip to the vet's for stitches, but there have been three other attacks, with injuries they were able to handle themselves.

This is the second time in two months that he has had to be treated under anesthetic. Gossen feels she's tried every route she can to protect Tyson, but her options are limited.

She describes the terror of seeing him attacked, and being helpless to do anything other than make sure her kids are safe.

On Saturday, her daughter Gracynn, nine, was playing on her scooter in the driveway of their Line 4 home when the

neighbour's dog got out of his pen, crossed the street to the Gossen property and attacked Tyson. Gracynn was traumatized.

"We are asking for help," says Gossen on Facebook. "We are begging for help." But as she has discovered, it seems little anyone can do.

She has called the Town's canine control officer. She's called 911 and had the police arrive and stay in their car — they weren't getting out.

She's called the humane society, hoping they would take the aggressive dog.

So far, nobody has been able to do anything. They can't remove a dog from its owner, she's told.

Each time, her neighbour, Paul Ermanian, says he's doing his best to keep Diago contained, but the dog keeps getting out.

Diago has attacked Tyson in the Gossen's garage, and even once when Tyson was in his

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Shared, on-demand transit begins Monday

Penny Coles
The Local

Ellen Williams is looking forward to trying out the new on-demand public transit system, part of a Niagara Region Transit pilot program which will launch in Niagara-on-the-Lake Monday.

Williams says she often used the former fixed-route shuttle system, which was cancelled in April, and she misses it.

Her trips were mostly to Virgil for groceries or maybe a massage, but occasionally she would take it to Niagara College, where the schedule was conveniently timed to connect with the GO Bus, which she would take to Burlington. From there she would catch the GO Train to Toronto to visit with family, and she has missed doing that as well.

But when COVID-19 caused the cancellation of the shuttle bus, "I wasn't go-

ing out that often anyway," she adds.

Widowed eight years ago, Williams, 75, doesn't drive, and says having a public transit system gives her independence.

"It was a real deciding factor in whether I could stay here, whether I could do this without a car. I hear people say you can't live in NOTL without a car, but I'm invested in this community. I love it very much. I want to stay, and I want to feel like

I can do it on my own," she says.

The on-demand system "will be a replacement for the local bus system we've lost."

Having public transit could mean the difference between staying in the town she loves, or having to move, she says.

She occasionally gets rides with friends, "but I don't want people to go out of their way for me."

She's used a taxi service

or Uber in recent months, but they are costly, with trips from her Paffard Street home to Virgil costing from \$16 to \$20.

At \$3 for a one-way trip, the new service "would be much less prohibitive cost-wise."

Robert Salewysch, program manager for regional transit services, says there will be two vans coming to NOTL initially, to cover the Old Town, Virgil, Glendale, and what is considered the

Niagara Stone Road corridor.

The NRT OnDemand pilot project began operating in west Niagara in August, with Via Mobility, an international company, contracted to provide a ride-sharing service in Grimsby, Lincoln, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln, he says, but they also have a component that provides travel across mu-

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Regional restrictions hurting businesses

Penny Coles
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake restaurant owners are frustrated and discouraged by regional and provincial restrictions that make it tough for them to operate.

Of the provincial and regional measures now in place, the one that is causing the most difficulty is limiting those dining out to people of one household sitting together at a table.

Last Thursday, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Niagara Region's acting medical officer of health, announced more restrictions on restaurants and bars, hoping to avoid having the Province impose stronger measures on local businesses.

Friday, the Province did what Hirji wanted to prevent — Niagara went from yellow to orange, with further limitations for businesses and bars.

Hirji says he didn't know that was coming. If he had, he might have more closely aligned the restrictions and the timing of them, but he's not considering changing any of his Section 22 orders now, although they could be revisited if

the number of cases decreases. The decision to change the thresholds of the colour-coded system took Niagara from the cusp of being in the orange category to being on the border of red, says Hirji.

When the system was first announced, health officials across the province were surprised by how high the thresholds were, he says, expecting them to be more aligned with what they are now.

The announcement of the change in the metrics that determine restrictions came a day after new COVID-19 projections were released, indicating Ontario could see 6,500 new cases per day by mid-December.

Hirji says the regional restrictions, which limit those dining together in a restaurant to people of the same household, were not intended to punish business owners, who have done nothing wrong.

But it doesn't feel that way, says restaurant owner Maria Mavridis.

Of all the new measures that have been handed down from two levels of government over the past week, the one that is the hardest to accept is the regional regulation of people from only one household per table.

"We had couples who came to the restaurant together this weekend, and we had to turn them away," she says.

If the issue is young people hanging out with friends at restaurants, she added, this isn't going to stop them from being together — they will just socialize at home.

"Corks was dead this weekend, and it's dead today (Monday). We're going to start closing Tuesday to Thursday," Mavridis says.

"What really makes my heart ache is seeing what this is doing to our staff. They're totally devastated, and they're scared. They know their hours are being cut. This is just a horrible time to do it"

Restaurant owners and workers from across the region have come together in protest of the regional restrictions, says Mavridis, and will take their objections to the Region Thursday.

One of the reasons for such strong opposition, she explains, is that they feel targeted by these new regulations, while retailers large and small, which see crowds of people not respecting the two-metre distancing regulations, continue to be able to operate.

Meanwhile, restaurant staff

have done everything they can to follow all the other guidelines mandated by the Province. "It definitely does feel like we're being punished," says Mavridis.

Hirji says he knows restaurant owners are not happy with his decisions, and he's not surprised.

"I recognize the hardships this puts on the restaurant industry," he says, noting they were already struggling, but just starting to feel like they were getting back on their feet.

The restrictions are a result of "the sad reality of how COVID is spreading," with restaurants providing the venue for social interaction.

Niagara continued to see large numbers of new cases over the weekend: 29 on Saturday, 16 on Sunday and 21 on Monday. Niagara-on-the-Lake, as of Monday, remained at 59 cases, the same as last week.

Hirji describes his regulations as permitted under Section 22 of the Ontario's Health Protection and Promotion Act. He is also requiring restaurant owners to collect more information from their patrons, and

to ask them to attest to being free of COVID-19 symptoms.

COVID is spreading mostly among young people in their 20s who are seated at the same table in restaurants, and then are taking it home, to their workplace, gyms and other locations, and even to long-term care homes, Hirji says.

The act does not allow him to target individuals, or to fine them, so changing behaviour is his best option.

Although his order limits people per table to one household, he is allowing for someone who is an "essential contact," such as a caregiver, to share a table with that person for whom they are responsible, to prevent those living alone from being socially isolated. He is also extending that to couples who don't live together but are in a "romantic relationship," for the sake of their mental health.

Restaurant tables must continue to be two metres apart, or have plexiglass between them, and customers must be seated at all times, except when using the washroom, paying for their order or when

they leave.

Hirji says that while the Province continues to seek a balance between reducing the spread of the virus while limiting further hits to the local economy, so far, in Niagara, that balance hasn't been found.

He has asked health inspectors to go to bars and restaurants, paying evening visits as well, to ensure businesses are complying with the new regulations.

There are two options for dealing with violations, he says, one through the court system, that could order fines of up to \$25,000, or an immediate ticket issued by a bylaw officer with a fine of \$750. Both fines would be against the business, not the patrons.

He says he understands municipalities are strapped for funds to pay bylaw officers for more enforcement, and the Province should help fill that gap.

And "regardless of the current stage of shutdown, the Province should be stepping up with the resources to help restaurants and staff through this difficult time."

Sandtrap owner says household restriction 'really impactful'

Penny Coles
The Local

While the Sandtrap Pub and Grill gets some tourists from Toronto, most of the clientele is local, says Paul Dietsch, who, with his brother Matt, owns the Mary Street restaurant.

The recent regional restriction of one household per table "has really hit us hard," he says.

Although the provincial move of Niagara to orange from the yellow zone has imposed further restrictions, "we have to do what we can" with the rising number of cases.

The provincial limit of only four people to a table doesn't really change anything — it's what they've been doing at the Sandtrap anyway. They've also installed plexiglass, have been taking contact information, and are following all the rules to keep

their patrons safe.

But he has regular customers, groups of women who don't live together who come in regularly for lunch, and now he can't sit them together. "They come for some social interaction, but they're not allowed to have lunch together," he says.

He has customers who come as a group of two couples, and men he knows work together, but can't eat together.

"What's the point of them being out for a meal together if they can't sit at the same table?"

The restaurant has a local beer crowd, men who stop by for a couple of beers, but they don't stay long. "They can't sit at the bar together, so why would they come in?"

He has some visitors from out of town stop by for a meal, and he's sure, when he asks if they are from the same household, that they ar-

en't, but they say they are and he seats them.

Locals who come in regularly are honest, and he has to tell them he can't seat them together.

"The same thing is happening all over town," he says. "This regulation is the most impactful. It's really hard to turn people away when the restaurant is empty."

He doesn't get the young crowd the regional restrictions are aimed at, he says. "We maybe have some people, in the 30 to 50 age group, and lots of seniors. Turning them away because they come in with friends is really hurting us."

Just when they thought business was getting a little better, it got worse, he says.

"I have no problem following the provincial restrictions. I think they're necessary, and I'm happy to do everything they ask us to do. But this seems very unfair."

Penny Coles
The Local

While the Region and Province continue to deal with high numbers of COVID-19, Niagara-on-the-Lake has been fortunate throughout this second wave, staying consistently low, says Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

And she is proud of residents and businesses who have worked hard to reduce the spread locally and keep themselves and others safe.

"Today we are at two unresolved cases, with no increases," she said Monday.

"I want to thank all the citizens of NOTL for their continued vigilance in the actions they are taking to control the spread, and encourage everyone to continue to wear a mask if you go out, keep a good distance from others, and practise good hand hygiene."

NOTL has done "an outstanding job of working together to control the spread," she says.

But earlier this week, Niaga-

ra entered the orange zone, says Disero, who explains the change in the colour-coding system that moved NOTL from yellow to orange, saying "the first one medical experts found was too lenient, so this new chart is more cautious and restrictive."

The provincial changes that impact NOTL include requiring screening for symptoms; gyms and fitness facilities can permit someone to be in the premises for a maximum of 90 minutes; restaurants, bars, and food services may seat no more than four people at a table; alcohol service stops at 9 p.m. and restaurants and bars must close completely by 10 p.m.

Local bylaw officers and the police are expected to lead enforcement of both provincial and municipal restrictions, Disero says, "but we don't have the resources for enforcement."

Some other updates include closing the washrooms at Queen's Royal Park and Simcoe Park, but that's not to do with COVID,

Disero says. They have always closed for the winter months.

The community centre will be closed on the weekends, due to lack of attendance. In the fitness centre, the change rooms will be open, but the showers will be closed, and the walking track has been moved from the gym to the auditorium to allow for more participants to take part.

The arena will be closed for spectators, with one exception of allowing one parent or guardian per participant to stay and watch, if the participant is under the age of 18. Parks and recreation staff are working to allow for online viewing for parents.

And an announcement about the Christmas Parade: It will not be the traditional parade on Queen Street, but Santa will parade through all five villages, "so our citizens who are young at heart can watch from the comfort of their home or street. We are working on the route and safety measures. More information will come next week"



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- **Buy their merchandise.**



delicious DINING



OLiV introduces their new fall and winter menu

Submitted by
OLiV

Hi, this is Executive Chef Alex here at OLiV along with my partner Chef Chris. We are excited to introduce you to our fall and winter menu. As always we used our amazing extra virgin olive oil and balsamic palette to inspire dishes to tantalize your palate. Fall and winter is the best time to come in and enjoy our comfort food created with local ingredients by local distributors, and of course LOVE. This year has been a trying time for OLiV us and this winter OLiV will donate 5% of all takeout sales to Bethlehem Housing and Support Services, a local charity that last year held a fundraiser soup competition that OLiV took first place with 2 Platinum Laddles. Thanks Friends, stay safe and at OLiV you will see that we do our part to keep our restaurant a safe environment for OLiV us.



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Christmas season arrives on Queen Street

Penny Coles
The Local

Brenda McArthur was back up a ladder Friday, helping to bring the Christmas season to Queen Street.

There was a chill in the air, but it was a bright, sunny day, with good cheer and the holiday spirit evident as volunteers helped decorate the Court House.

It wasn't the decorating party that was held last year, but Christmas hasn't been cancelled, just scaled back a little, says NOTL Chamber of Commerce president Eduardo Lafforgue.

McArthur says she has always loved Christmas, has always gone over the top with decorations, and is happy to have the opportunity to put her enthusiasm to work on Queen Street.

"I really enjoy doing this," she says. "Especially with all that's going on this year, it's good to bring out the smiles."

McArthur and her husband Blair used to come to Niagara-on-the-Lake to visit, and he proposed to her over dinner at the Oban Inn 38 years ago, "just before it burned down," she says. "It was very, very romantic."

They kept coming back,

and talked about one day living here.

"We fell in love with NOTL, and we thought when we slowed down, we would move here, and that's what we did."

McArthur says they would always drive by the Romance Estate on John Street, and admire its beauty. "It was such an amazing house. I dreamed of living there, but I never thought it would happen."

The McArthurs purchased the beautiful estate and moved to NOTL five years ago. "I feel I have to maintain it and keep it as beautiful as Trisha did, for her and for the community. We make it our duty to preserve it."

She has also opened the house to the community, adding it as a special event of the Rotary Holiday House Tour, which has helped raise a substantial amount of money for the service club.

This year, with the tour cancelled, McArthur approached the club and offered to open the grounds of the estate, which are extensively decorated for the holiday, as a fundraising Enchanting Wonderland Stroll.

"I really wanted to do it for Rotary, for the community, and especially for the children."

That will happen on two evenings in December, with the event quickly sold out.

McArthur is happy to help in the community in whatever way she can, and says she can't imagine living anywhere else. "It's such a feel-good place," she says.

With McArthur and "her team" in charge of the Court House, Lafforgue says there will be decorations along the street as well, in collaboration with the Town and business owners.

The Town will install snowflakes throughout all of NOTL, as well as the traditional decorations in the Heritage District, including planters along Queen Street and King Street, and natural garland and lights on the heritage poles.

A Christmas tree will be placed at the Cenotaph, along with 18 trees lining both sides of Queen Street.

Last year, he says, a volunteer built a beautiful arbor for the entrance to Simcoe Park, and it will be installed and lit again this year.

Queen Street businesses are being encouraged to place natural garland, wreaths or swags with ribbons on their storefronts, says Lafforgue.

And although the Candlelight Stroll will be much quieter than other years, with a small ceremony at the Court House and residents asked to take part

at home, "we are keeping the tradition alive."

Candles are now for sale at local businesses, and residents are being asked to purchase them, with the money going to the Temporary Seasonal Agri-

cultural Worker Health Program at Quest CHC, and The Migrant Workers Welcome Packages.

On Dec. 4, at 7 p.m. watch the ceremony live-streamed by Cogeco, and share in the

moment "by lighting candles out front of your home," says Lafforgue, and singing along to a few carols. The chamber is asking residents to post photos and videos on social media, #strollNOTL.



Brenda McArthur, with a team of helpers, brings Christmas cheer to the town she calls home. (Penny Coles)

Town launches 'Give Back' Christmas initiative

Local Staff

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is giving back to families and individuals in need this holiday season, with a one-day, three-in-one donation drive benefitting a variety of vital support programs within our local municipality and beyond.

Town staff will be at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 5, collecting food, warm clothing and gift donations. Curb-side dropoff will be observed.

"More individuals and families than ever need help making ends meet this year," says Lord Mayor Betty Dese-ro. "We want to help ensure that everyone is warm and fed, and that every child has a gift to unwrap this Christmas. Despite this year's unique struggles, we want to help make this a magical holiday

season for all."

Donations of food and Christmas gifts will be collected for Newark Neighbours' Christmas Food Hamper and Gift programs, new or gently used warm winter clothing will be collected for Newark Neighbours, Community Care, Hope Centre, and Open Arms Mission, and Christmas gifts will be collected for children and families admitted to the Hospital for Sick Children, in Toronto, during the holiday season.

The Town is calling on Niagara-on-the-Lake community members to join in giving back.

"If you're able, let's join together to give graciously and generously to our fellow community members who may be struggling, especially during this special time of year. Let's fill their homes, hearts, and tree skirts with gifts of love," says a recent Town news release.

The town is also holding a decorating contest, issuing a challenge to all NOTL residents and business owners to help make this the most magical holiday yet.

"So dust off your garland, re-tie your bows, untangle your lights and deck out your home in holiday sparkle. Once your masterpiece is complete, snap a photo, (day or night - you choose) and submit it for your chance to be one of our winners," says a holiday news release.

The top three submissions per village will be selected by public vote. All first-place winners will receive a holiday prize valued at \$150, second place winners will receive a holiday prize valued at \$75, and third place winners will receive a holiday prize valued at \$50.

For more information and contest details, visit <https://notl.com/Christmas>.

Christmas trees arrive at Cornerstone



The NOTL Lions Christmas tree sale begins Friday, in the parking lot of Cornerstone Church on Niagara Stone Road in Virgil. Lion Terry Flynn is organizing this year's sale, and says he will miss long-time Lion member John Skubel looking over his shoulder. Flynn has himself purchased a large, new sign for the lot, which says the sale is in memory of Skubel. He will also have a framed picture of his friend with him, and Skubel's wife and son will take over John's customary shift on the weekend. A lack of supply means fewer trees this year, says Flynn, and a higher price, but he will have a good selection of four-foot to 12-foot trees, Balsom, Fraser, and a variety called Siberian spruce. Unloading the trees at the lot are Tristen Castro, and Lions Flynn and Erwin Wiens. (Photo supplied)



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Becoming a Mo Bro to raise funds for men's health

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

My brother Joe, a car salesperson for more than 45 years, wore a moustache through most of the '70s and '80s. Back then, almost every car salesperson sported a moustache, and yes, almost all car salespeople were men.

Being more than 11 years younger than my brother, I tried to grow my own moustache in high school. In fact, there is a photo in my senior yearbook of me standing in the hallway, proud of my attempt to be as cool as Joe. The photo is in black and white. But that is not the

reason why you can't see my facial hair. I just couldn't grow a moustache back then.

I don't recollect exactly when Joe shaved off the 'stache for good, but I do remember thinking it had to be the end of an era. And it certainly was. Even Magnum P.I., featuring Tom Selleck's glorious moustache as the main character, didn't make it into the '90s.

Sure, some continued to cultivate the hairy upper lip after the '80s, but for the most part they were accused of being anachronistic, or just blissfully unaware. Then came 2003, when, during a drinking session, Australians

Travis Garone and Luke Slattery dreamed up the idea to grow moustaches, to raise funds for men's health issues. The idea caught on, they added the 'Mo' to the beginning of the month, and Movember was born.

According to Sam Wilson, Movember Canada Development Coordinator, men's health is in crisis across the globe. The charity's efforts are directed to four main areas: mental health, suicide prevention, prostate cancer and testicular cancer. Wilson points out that men die on average six years younger

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Ontario's Bill 229 will have ripple effects on Niagara's water



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

A friend of mine sends me a text message with an attachment to a link. I could have face-palmed myself. It was sad, backwards news for Niagara's biodiversity and quality of environment.

In total, half of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority's (NPCA) board members could be removed from their positions. These are citizen-held seats which bring invaluable local knowledge and perspectives to the table. Their presence speaks to a hard-fought switch made a couple years ago, where each municipality could appoint a citizen to sit on the NPCA's board.

We might be hitting reverse on that celebrated progress, though.

The sweeping change coming down from the Province is the introduction of Bill 229- Protect, Support, and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020.

Thirty-six agencies will feel the sharp new rules on the Conservation Authorities Act, which mandates that all board members are to be municipal councillors only.

This means that the current 12 citizen-appointed members of the NPCA's 21 seats are in uncharted waters. In addition, conservation authorities will have less control over development.

Developers can more readily appeal decisions based on scientific surveys to the higher orders of government, such as the Ministry of Environment or the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal for a second look, if they aren't satisfied with the response from the conservation authority.

After a slow and painful transition to bring transparency and citizen presence to the NPCA's board, the public generally embraced the concept of having an informed citizen representative taking part in board deci-

sions. It was a necessary move to bring accountability, diversity, and a more inclusive discussion around the conservation authority's table, which, from 2014 to 2018, was hurled into a slough of lawsuits and other issues.

I feel like I'm echoing. An echo comes back, as a second wave. We hear it again.

This has happened before. When the previous NPCA board was composed almost entirely of regional and municipal politicians, we saw what could unfold. Plenty of room for unwritten conflicts-of-interest scenarios, such as mayors advocating for environmentally sensitive developments while sitting on the board. I didn't think it could get that severe and askew again.

This time, it's a situation beyond the NPCA's immediate control. It's a shame, considering successful stepping stones in recent years to restore public trust and environmental advocacy in the organization.

I would dare say it's a short-sighted move by the Province which shows embarrassingly little recognition for a green and sustainable future. It's a lot of overdue and logical progress becoming undone in one bill.

The 2018 Auditor General's report recognized that weighted environmental decisions needed to be met with expertise and experience in order to keep to the NPCA's mandate. Let's not forget the word "Conservation" is right in the name.

I believe municipal councillors can sit on the board of a conservation authority, absolutely. But never as the only sitting members. We also need representatives from agriculture, lots of environmental science and biology positions, and citizens. There needs to be a balance.

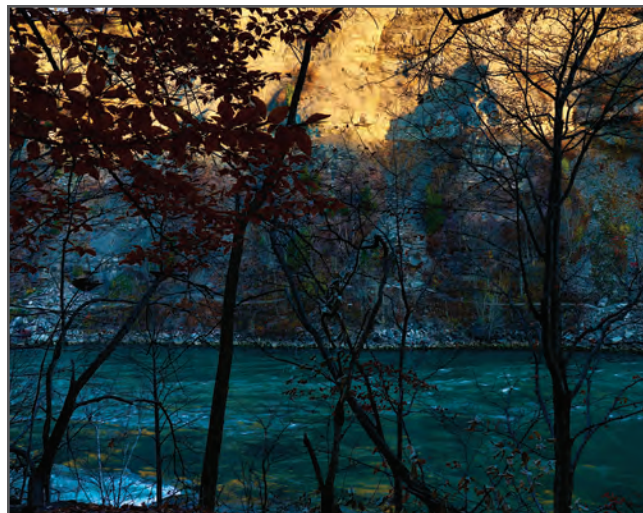
The scariest thing about all of this is that a sizeable and hopefully noteworthy piece of legislature is coming through the system, and a lot of people are going to miss it. Pre-pandemic, this event would cause some packed gatherings and more headlines.

While COVID-19 is in our face on every screen and sign, we must also continue to be alert and vigilant to now seemingly quiet events, as they are portrayed as blips on the radar compared to all things pandemic and election-related. I saw this sort of environmental decision coming along since March, something so big, but that can still slip under our noses in strange times.

So, I encourage community conversation about this topic. It's a big one.

This move will erode protections to our nationally-rare ecosystems, and water quality here in Niagara. It is also a dangerously biased way to run a Conservation board.

Is everything going backward? Nature moves on. But not at our mercy. If Bill 229 passes, I have great concern for the fate of Niagara's biodiversity and our relationship with nature.



Changing seasons and tides within Ontario's new Bill 229 could have major implications for our freshwater quality here in Niagara Region, among other issues. (Owen Bjorgan)

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EDITORIAL

Newest restrictions hard on restaurants

Is it too little, too late? Or too much too soon?

Depends on who you ask. Niagara is dealing with two levels of new restrictions this week, and our restaurant sector is the hardest hit, in a way that is specific to our region.

Ontario has lowered the thresholds that determine restrictions according to colour-coded zones, bringing new measures down on Niagara businesses and individuals.

That news came a day after the regional medical officer of health imposed his own, Niagara-specific restrictions, and they are not sitting well with local businesses.

The number of cases in Ontario is growing at an alarming rate. Niagara's situation is not as bad as Toronto and some other regions, but it is still steadily climbing.

The Province has instituted restrictions such as moving up hours of closing and serving alcohol, and other measures aimed at reducing spread by limiting social interactions. But

only in Niagara, at this point, are restaurants, which are still allowed in-house dining, being asked to restrict patrons to one household per table. That means questioning everyone who walks in the door, and refusing to seat those from different households, with the exception of those in specific circumstances, such as for caregivers or those in "romantic relationships," when socializing is important for mental health.

The reasoning is that it would prevent the young people who are choosing to hang out with friends in restaurants, and then are causing outbreaks that spread to family, workplaces, gyms, stores and even long-term care homes.

It's difficult to imagine that is happening in NOTL restaurants — we haven't had a new case in more than two weeks, and no outbreaks that we know of have been traced to NOTL.

There is a feeling, even among some restaurant owners, that it would be easier to just shut them down, and

ensure they get the financial help they need so their staff is looked after and they will be able to reopen eventually. The Province has the money, and has actually spent little on COVID costs, mostly relying on money that has come from the federal government.

It may be the only way to bring numbers down, or end up in a province-wide lockdown of everything except essential services. If that's in our future, maybe better to do it now and save some lives.

The one thing most of us can do to help is continue to shop local and enjoy a break from cooking with takeout meals, supporting our businesses through this next stage of restrictions.

The other big news, and in this case good news, is the launch of an on-demand transit system in NOTL. It will help those who don't drive, seniors, youth and everyone in between, at least those from the Old Town, Virgil and Glendale. Hopefully, if it's considered use-

ful and people take advantage of it, we might see it expand to include St. Davids and Queenston. For those who need to travel outside the municipality, there are places where it can connect with regional fixed-route buses, to allow travel to other municipalities. And at a really, really reasonable price.

Use it or lose it is the message we're hearing. It's a difficult time to judge the need, with people not moving around as much during the pandemic, but hopefully that will change before the year-long pilot project is over.

And in the meantime, use the on-demand transit vans to

shop local, and eat local (with your household). Could there be a better place to live during a pandemic? It's one of the safest communities in the region, with lots to offer. Make the most of it — safely.

Penny Coles
The Local

Province has money to spend on COVID aid



Wayne Gates, MPP
MPP for Niagara Falls Riding
Special to The Local

In early October, the Province released projections indicating it was possible that by December we could be seeing 1,200 new coronavirus cases a day in Ontario.

By Nov. 11, we were hitting that number. The projections have been revised and are now upwards of 6,500 cases a day by December. It is abundantly clear that we are in the middle of a second wave which healthcare professionals tell us threatens to overwhelm our healthcare system, especially in hot spots. If this trajectory were to be followed, it stands to reason that we could also see case growth in Niagara-on-the-Lake, which is home to many seniors, a particularly susceptible group to this virus.

Presumably seeing this data, last week our (acting) chief medical health officer, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, used his powers under section 22 of the Ontario Health

Act to enact new regulations for initiating a new dining policy for restaurants and bars in Niagara. The new policy stipulates that patrons may only dine with members of their household or persons essential to maintaining physical and mental health. While Dr. Hirji does have jurisdiction over health matters, he does not have the power to provide the vital second component of this strategy — financial support.

Premier Doug Ford does have that ability, and he cannot delay using it. During this period, I believe it's important to show a united front when possible, but also to point out policy failures when necessary. Now is one of those times. According to the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario, 97 per cent of money spent on Ontario's COVID-19 recovery program has come from the federal government. Perhaps even worse, that same report showed the Premier has been sitting on billions of unused funding earmarked to help struggling residents through COVID-19.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, and across Niagara, that money

must be deployed immediately in the form of financial support for businesses who will feel the effects of these health policies. Having spoken with many restaurant and bar owners (in fact, many more business owners as well) the original COVID-19 restrictions have left them on the brink of bankruptcy and layoffs. Given that this industry accounts for more than 13 per cent of the direct jobs in Niagara, this would result in a devastating unemployment spike that would take years for our local economy to recover from. In this instance, the funds are already available, and earmarked for just such an occasion, and there is simply no reason why they should not be used directly for small businesses, and especially our local restaurants and bars.

We are facing unprecedented, tough times, there is no doubt about that. However, we cannot come through this having said we didn't use all of the tools at our disposal to save the economy and jobs. The money is there and it is earmarked. That means there should be no reason why we have to choose between people's lives or their livelihoods.

MPP donates masks to medical clinic



MPP Wayne Gates delivers boxes of KN-95 masks to Dr. Steve Durocher of the Niagara North Family Health Team at the Niagara Medical Clinic Friday. Gates was given the masks from an anonymous donor, who asked him to pass them on. The masks will be used by anybody in need at the clinic, whether it's a physician, staff member, volunteer, patient, or a LifeLabs representative, says Durocher. Staff at the clinic keep track of the use and inventory of masks, to ensure those who require them in an emergency would get it, such as a hospital, says Durocher. Currently, supply is meeting demand in Ontario, he adds, but there's no way of knowing what will happen in the future. (Penny Coles)

View from the couch



Donald Combe
Special to The Local

I was hesitant to watch the mini series, *The Queen's Gambit* (2020, Netflix), as I thought hours of involvement with chess matches was not for me; however,

my error, as I was soon deeply involved with this orphaned girl and her struggles with life and addictions, and her passion for solving the riddles posed by the game of chess and by the game of life. Passion, after all, is everything. I was caught and you will

be as well. *Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to go to 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.*

The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community

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The opinions expressed in submitted commentary, and letters to the editor, are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of The NOTL Local.

LETTERS

Thanks for your support

Thank you to everyone who supported Watson's Pumpkin Patch this year. It was a great year!

The patch raised \$3500, all of which will be donated equally between McMaster Children's Hospital and Ronald McDonald House.

We hope everyone enjoyed

the Pumpkin Patch and had a great Thanksgiving and a fun Halloween!

Brook, Reid, Steve and Peg Watson

Public health should be NOTL's first priority

Two weeks ago Eduardo Lafforgue, the president and CEO of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce, was touting the "success" of the chamber's multimedia marketing campaign. That campaign was designed to attract visitors to NOTL from the Greater Toronto Area, including visitors from Toronto and Brampton, the cities with the highest rates of COVID-19 infection in Ontario. Much of it was digital, with Lafforgue noting that the chamber's Google AdWords campaign delivered 3.5-million impressions, 75.9 percent of which were delivered by mobile phones (suggesting that the majority of people reached by the campaign were likely in the 20s to 40s age demographic that currently has the highest infection rates of COVID-19 in the province, and are more likely to be asymptomatic spreaders of the virus).

Lafforgue expressed delight at the success of the campaign, noting that Bell Canada advised town council in early November that 90,000 "unique Bell devices" had entered NOTL in 30 days. During that same time period, the confirmed number of daily new COVID-19 cases began an upward trend in Niagara. The region has moved from the province's yellow zone into its orange one, bringing with it a new level of restrictions that will make it harder for local businesses to operate successfully.

Based on media reports, the influx of younger visitors attracted to NOTL through the summer and fall by the chamber's campaign did not spend much money in local shops while they were here, although our restaurants and pubs seem to have fared a bit better.

Still, the question remains: was the minimal gain in economic activity worth the significant increase in the risk of COVID-19 being brought into NOTL from the greater GTA and being spread within our community? I don't think so.

A campaign targeting an older demographic, marketing NOTL as a safe destination may have had some merit, particularly if the chamber measured the success of its efforts based not on the number of people who visit our town, but on the amount of economic activity they generate while they are here.

Instead, there are more restrictions, more COVID cases, and a message from our Lord Mayor asking residents not to visit the GTA's hot spots for the virus, at the same time as she notes that the Town cannot keep people in those zones from coming here.

What could be done is to stop mass-marketing Niagara-on-the-Lake as a go-to destination for all and sundry during the pandemic. If the chamber is unwilling to do so, then the Town should definitely reconsider the annual grant (\$118,000 in 2020) that it traditionally makes

to the organization. The Town could also reconsider its chaotic approach to Queen Street. If it won't close the street to vehicle traffic to create space for physical distancing, it should at least make outdoor mask-wearing mandatory on the section of Queen running between Simcoe and Wellington.

Ultimately, the Town's first priority during the pandemic should be public health. Working to keep residents safe from COVID-19, and Niagara region in the green or yellow zone, will do much more for our local economy in both the short and long term than having day-trippers from the GTA show up here in droves. Another lockdown, which is almost inevitable unless the incidence of infection levels off in the region soon, would likely force a number of local businesses to close their doors permanently.

As for the chamber's plea for residents to stay home and shop local, I no longer feel comfortable walking on Queen Street, even on weekdays, even with a mask. I might make a quick dash into the local valu-mart or on rare occasions Nina Gelateria during the week, but that's it. Even walking the Niagara Parks Commission trails loses its allure when you find yourself constantly looking over your shoulder for approaching bikes or runners.

Terry Davis
NOTL

LETTERS

Heritage Trail offers community and health benefits

My husband and I have noted the recent "controversy" over the next stage of the Heritage Trail.

We understand that people whose homes are immediately adjacent to this stage of the trail have expressed concerns about the width, format and catchment groups for the trail, amongst other things. From what we have read at least, it sounds as if their voices, however many of them there are, are opposed to just about every aspect of the next stage. It all sounds rather doom and gloom, whereas the focus really should be on the positive community and health benefits the trail project offers the town.

It is human nature to resist change. It is human nature to hold dear those things over which we have been accustomed to hold dominion. It is human nature to oppose encroachment on what we have come, rightly or wrongly, to see as our own. Seen through this lens, none of the opposition to the trail is at all surprising.

The fact that something is unsurprising, however, does not make it right. The Heritage Trail is no one person's, or neighbourhood's birthright; it is an asset for the benefit and betterment of the entire town and for some of our visitors who will discover its charms. Decisions about the trail's future really ought to be made through that lens.

We have a property on Paffard Street, very close to stage one of the trail. And we have a dog who has made sure that there are not many parts of the town with which we are unacquainted. The

conjunction of those two facts means that we are familiar with the John-Charlotte stretch of the trail as it was and as it is now. The latter is an enormous improvement on the former. The path, as you know, is broader, which allows both greater use and greater distancing, the latter being particularly important recently, but also important for reasons beyond COVID-19. It is not, however, a litter-strewn superhighway as some might pretend; it is not overrun with users; it is not Queen Street; its users are nowhere near the numbers that could compromise the quiet enjoyment of adjoining owners, or at least not their reasonable quiet enjoyment. Its breadth does not compromise the tree canopy or the feel of the space. It just works. It is lovely. It improves the fabric of the town and encourages physical engagement of its citizens and visitors alike. Those are both good outcomes.


We have read that adjoining owners near the next stage oppose the use of the same stone/gravel bed used in stage one. We are strongly of the view that the design used from John to Charlotte is perfect for such a trail and that wood chips, while somewhat more quaint, would be a poor substitute, of short life-span, and would incur ongoing maintenance costs, along with compromised surface quality and durability. On one of our first walks on the improved stage one trail, we met a woman using a walker whose delight was inescapable. She said that she had never been able to enjoy the trail in its original form

because of her mobility limitations. A wood chip trail would be off-limits to her, as had been the soil (and mud) trail that was the old stage one. Any decision about the format of the next stage should not turn its back on that woman and those like her.

We also note the calls for the trail to be dramatically narrower in the next stage. This too would, in our opinion, be a mistake. The trail should appeal to a wide variety of users: walkers (and people with walkers or other assistive devices), runners, kids and adults on bicycles, parents with strollers, even horse-riders. While it will never be a superhighway, it should envisage the need for the safe interaction of those various modes of transport, including the need for cyclists to pass pedestrians and the like. If the trail is too narrow, it will fall short of its potential.

The vision of the trail, a grand, public-spirited endeavour conceived in Canada's sesquicentennial, building on Niagara-on-the-Lake's history, spanning a huge swath of its territory from Old Town to the Bruce Trail and providing a legacy for current and future generations, is something of which the town should be both proud and supportive. The town should not allow this project to be effectively still-born or stunted. We trust that the town's decisions concerning the trail will be consistent with the breadth and length of its original vision, and not by any narrower perspective.

Amanda Thackray
NOTL



Letters! We want letters!

If you have a letter to the editor you'd like to see published, please send it to penny@notllocal.com. Please try to keep it to about 350 words. Sorry, but we won't publish anonymous letters. And please stick to the issue at hand, rather than attacking those involved. The deadline is Monday at noon.



Send your Season's Greetings

and best wishes for 2021 to the residents and businesses in NOTL by placing an ad in our Season's Greetings section.

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On-demand service provides flexibility for riders

Continued from page 1

nicipalities, which NOTL has chosen not to include.

Town council made the decision to come on-board in late August, asking the Region to amend its contract to include NOTL. Instead, Salewytch explains, there is a second contract for a year-long pilot project with just NOTL.

Although there was some discussion and an option offered to NOTL to pay for four vehicles to cover St. Davids and Queenston, council decided to revisit the scope of the project as part of the 2021 budget deliberations, says Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

The pilot program is a regional project, with little input from the municipality, she added.

“All we do is pay for it,” with a cost of \$200,000 for the service, which covers pretty much the same route as the shuttle service did, but without a fixed schedule.

The biggest advantage, Disero says, is that it will come close to the door, and users won’t have to walk far to get it or stand outside for a long time to wait for it.

She’s heard from other municipalities that it is being well-used, and there has been

good feedback from users.

If NOTL wants to keep a transit service, ridership will be important, she says — that’s what the Region will be looking at to make it a permanent part of a regional system.

When the service starts next week, one of the vans that will operate in NOTL will be wheelchair-accessible, and the other will have a bike rack, Salewytch says.

The goal of NRT OnDemand is to provide residents with an efficient system that is also affordable, and although NOTL did not choose the option to include transportation to locations in other municipalities, it does allow residents to connect with regional buses at the outlet mall, with a free transfer.

Niagara College is within the boundary for the service so residents will still have the same connectivity to GO Transit, says Salewytch.

The maps that are available are not detailed enough for riders to really see the boundaries, he says. “Once the NOTL section goes live in the app, it will allow riders to very specifically see the service area.”

There is a mobile app for the on-demand service, but it is also available by phone,

at 289-302-2172 for riders without access to a smartphone, says Salewytch. Passengers will be offered a pickup and drop-off location, within 100 metres of their door, he says, and within the hour. Once they have booked their ride, it is matched with other passengers going in the same direction who can share the van.

In winter months, and on rural roads without sidewalks, the service will ensure safe pickup, he says, likely going to the door or close to it.

The service will run from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday to Saturday. The goal is for a maximum one-hour wait time and a maximum 20-minute detour time to accommodate other passengers.

The contract with the Town includes a provision to extend the pilot for another 12 months, at which time, if the Region and Town are interested in continuing to provide an on-demand service, an RFP would be issued for a longer-term delivery partner.

Coun. Gary Zalepa says he’s pleased to have NOTL join the pilot project.

The Region is now considering a regional transit system, replacing the other

three services in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Welland, and integrating it as a single fare system to be managed and delivered by the Region.

The on-demand service, Zalepa says, “would be part and parcel of that system.”

It would have economic benefits and provide better service, he says.

The next step is to go to the municipalities and seek a triple majority to allow the region to move forward on a detailed business plan, sometime in the new year.



Ellen Williams likes her independence, which she’s been missing since the transit shuttle was cancelled in April. She looks forward to using the new on-demand system. (Photo supplied)

Former shuttle service provider offers free deliveries to residents

Penny Coles
The Local

Casey McNab has come to accept he will no longer be providing a transit service to the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

As the provider of NOTL Transit’s fixed-route shuttle service, he would have liked an opportunity to bid on the on-demand system that begins next week, but as a regional pilot project, it wasn’t put out to tender.

The contract he had with the Town expired last December, and from then until April, he had a month-to-month contract. When the service was suspended in April due to COVID-19 and residents being asked to stay at home, “our staff was kept on, and our vehicles were kept in a ready state. We didn’t think the interruption of service would be very long. At that point, all municipalities were turning to smaller buses.”

He wanted to keep his staff so they would be available once the service resumed, he says.

He knew the Town was looking at an on-demand system, and understands why it seems like a good

option for NOTL — one he would have been happy to provide.

When the Regional pilot project was finalized for NOTL, his service was cancelled, and he doesn’t expect it will ever be renewed, although once students going back to school in the same numbers as before the start of the pandemic, two on-demand vans won’t be enough.

“The shuttles were sometimes full, and when they were, it was always with students, either from Vineridge Academy or Niagara College. But we don’t have those students now, so that won’t be a problem.”

His drivers have been kept busy on other smaller jobs, and he’s continued to pick up and deliver free groceries and other necessities, at no cost, for residents who don’t want to go out, or are in isolation, due to COVID. With the number of cases climbing in the Province, he expects to continue that as long as there is a need.

As far as providing a town shuttle, he says, “we’re not expecting to be back in that service, ever.”

Last year, he made a significant investment with the purchase of two new shuttles,

“which was terrible timing for us,” he says, but with all municipalities cutting back on transit, he doesn’t expect to be able to sell them.

His other business, which included wine tours, has been down to about five to 10 per cent of what he would normally be doing, he says, with tourism decimated and airport business non-existent.

“It hit us very hard to lose the contract with the Town.”

He is still providing some patient transfer service, he says. “There is always a demand for that.”

There are other services he could provide for the Town, such as the shuttle in the Old Town if the tour buses return, “but I can’t say with any certainty there will be that opportunity.”

In the meantime, he encourages residents to call if they want to take advantage of his free delivery service. “It doesn’t make financial sense, but I don’t want to lose my drivers,” he says, “and if we can help out, we will. I’m 100 per cent sure something else will come along. It always does. There is always a way to move forward.”

Call 905-468-4132 to take advantage of McNab’s delivery service.



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Niagara-on-the-Lake Launches Holiday Decorating Contest

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Get ready to Deck the Halls, windows, railings, walkways and trees in Jingle Bells and holiday sparkle. Once your masterpiece is complete, snap a photo and submit it at jointheconversationnotl.org/holiday-decorating-contest. The top three submissions per village will be selected by public vote and will receive a holiday prize pack.

Chautauqua residents asking for Town help

Penny Coles
The Local

It's been a difficult summer for residents of the Chautauqua area of Niagara-on-the-Lake, with a large influx of visitors impacting traffic, parking and their own enjoyment of Ryerson Park.

Residents have seen their neighbourhood changing over time, with the proliferation of short-term rentals and Airbnbs, but this summer has seen significant increases to the number of visitors, who on some days far outnumber and leave little room for residents at the park, says a member of a group advocating for solutions to local problems.

Shaun Devlin, one of the neighbours who formed the Ryerson Park Residents' Group, says their goal is to begin a dialogue with the Town to look at options, and hopefully find some solutions to the problems that reached a peak this summer.

The trend to an increased number of visitors to the small, charming and close-knit Chautauqua community has been building in recent years, says Devlin, but this summer was worse than ever.

"We've always had visitors, but it was balanced," he says. "The balance is now out of whack."

It's become a safety issue with the number of cars, some travelling at high speeds through narrow streets, and residents hope to get that balance back, says Devlin.

The pandemic hasn't helped, with borders closed and people looking for places to visit close to home, and a growing number of online sites, including those advertising Airbnbs and other rental accommodations, focusing on Mississauga Beach as an attraction. While historically, in decades long past, the beach offered recreational activities, it has eroded over time.

It is now a very narrow

strip of sand, and at times just rocks, says Devlin.

It is not considered a public beach in that water quality is not tested, and there are no washrooms or change rooms available, he explains.

The park, which is bordered by narrow streets with little room for parking, was not designed for the large number of visitors that now arrive, especially on weekends, or in the evenings, to enjoy the sunset, he says.

Some are not even seeking the park out intentionally — they have stumbled across it, having driven from Queen Street through to Niagara Boulevard, possibly looking for Lakeshore Road, says Devlin. They can be seen stopping, creating congestion while they look for directions to get to the highway.

The report the group sent to the Town was initiated in September, and endorsed by the previous board of the Chautauqua Residents Association, says



Visitors expecting a public beach find a tiny strip of sand at Ryerson Park. (Photo supplied)

Devlin.

Although the CRA, with a decades-old history of bringing residents together, is struggling with issues that have caused five directors to quit, the Ryerson Residents' Group was not formed to take its place, but rather to enable those most affected to advocate for solutions to the specific problems that are evolving from the online

promotion of the park and beach as a major tourist and swimming destination. It is also listed as one of the best places to view the sunset, the report to the Town says.

Without some solutions, the situation is expected to get worse, says Devlin, as interest in the area continues to build, and as COVID restrictions are lifted.

Access for emergency

vehicles is a concern with the increased traffic and vehicles parked, says the report, and there is also a significant concern with the safety of pedestrians, particularly children crossing Niagara Boulevard on bikes, skateboards or on foot to get to the park.

Sanitation is also a huge

Continued on page 14

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Bowron's fiction moves into realm of fantasy

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Daniel St. Croix, the protagonist of local author Christopher Bowron's next novel, *Almost Immortal*, dies in chapter two. Normally that would be the end of the story, but the book's title should tell you all you need to know about that particular plot twist coming so soon.

Bowron just signed a deal with his publisher, Kehler Books out of Virginia, to publish the book, his fourth, and his first to dive into historical fiction and fantasy. He hasn't totally abandoned the crime thriller genre of his previous novels, *Devil in the Grass*, *The Palm Reader*, and *The Body Thieves*, though.

Almost Immortal begins much like Bowron's earlier works, with St. Croix involved in some shady dealings before his untimely demise. Once back to life, Daniel discovers the journals of his father, Pierre, whom he previously thought was his grandfather. Through those journals, the reader is taken back to Versailles in the time of King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, just as the French Revolution is about to take place.

It turns out that Pierre was a thief, who stole some jewelry from the last King of France. A secret society that has been in existence for over a thousand years wants that jewelry, in particular a certain gold ring that provides immortality, and they

chase Pierre through the centuries to get their hands on it.

"There's lots of cool twists," explains Bowron. "Pierre ends up going to Egypt to find the source of where the gold came from. It was a gift to an Egyptian pharaoh from the gods who walked on the Earth, which you can surmise might have been aliens."

Where does Daniel fit in? When the story of his return from the dead hits the news in 2020, that same secret society begins trailing him, with the aim of ending his life once again so they can take the ring. Daniel, himself a modern-day thief in the tradition of his father/grandfather, leads them on a wild chase through Ontario and Quebec.

Local readers will recognize a number of the sites where the first part of Daniel's journey occurs. Drinks are shared at the Angel Inn, and a chase through the St. Mark's Church cemetery provides a bit of suspense. There are also stops at the gazebo at Queen's Royal Park, a mention of Fort Niagara across the river and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club, and a tense situation where Daniel, his mother and new friend Devi are almost taken down at a home on Wyckliffe Avenue in the Chautauqua neighbourhood, where Bowron bought his first house.

Fitting the old town into *Almost Immortal* came naturally to Bowron. His previous three novels were set in his oth-

er home of Southwest Florida, where he loves salt-water fishing. "Writing is a bit of an escape to me," he points out. "So when I was writing here, I was escaping to there."

This one was also mostly written here, but Bowron credits one of his local boosters for convincing him it was time to include the town in one of his books.

"Laura McFadden of the Old Niagara Bookshop, she told me, 'just write something with a little bit of Niagara-on-the-Lake in it,'" he laughs, "and I'll sell hundreds of them. And I thought, it's an interesting town, so why not? When you have a familiarity with something, it comes easy to you."

Bowron says he has always wanted to move into the realm of fantasy and adventure with his work. He cites J.R.R. Tolkien as one of his all-time favourite authors, and includes American author Steve Berry's historical fiction as a huge influence. Bowron holds a BA in history from Brock University, and knew he wanted to eventually draw more on that degree in his writing.

Almost Immortal was finished in 2019, and Bowron sent it to his agent about this time last year. His goal to find a place amongst one of the big publishing houses of New York City was almost realized.

"I've had a lot of people read it and they tell me this is my best book ever," Bowron says. "My agent sent it to the big publishers, and Harper Collins

held onto it for six months. I think if my name had been James Patterson, I would have been published instantly. But it's a pretty tough time in publishing right now, and no one's taking gambles."

When the pandemic began, Bowron was looking forward to using the downtime to continue writing his sequel to *The Body Thieves*, featuring disgraced military surgeon Major Domenic Travano, known as "Doc Dom". But he instead found it difficult to get his creative juices flowing, while some life issues also got in the way.

Once lockdown conditions were lifted, he was surprised to experience a boom in his real estate business (Bowron is the owner and broker of record for Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty), leaving him with little time for wordsmithing. "Coming out of the pandemic, real estate got really busy," he explains. "I've not been this busy before, in 32 years."



Chris Bowron (Photo supplied)

So the timing of the deal with independent publisher Kehler comes at exactly the right time. Over the years, he has racked up sales of about 20,000 copies of his three books via the independent publisher.

Bowron says the editing process for *Almost Immortal* still has some way to go, and a release date has not yet been announced. In the meantime, if

you haven't read his first three novels, maybe now's the time to catch up on Jackson Walker and Doc Dom.

And when his new release is available, visit the Old Niagara Bookshop, or the Steele Gallery on Mississauga Street, to follow the adventures of Daniel St. Croix and his father Pierre through their brushes with immortality.

Raising funds for a good cause

Continued from page 5

than women, and that three out of every four suicides are by males. In addition, one in nine men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer, which tends to hit older men, while those aged 15 to 34 are at the highest risk for testicular cancer.

"What Movember is all about," explains Wilson, "is we want men to be open about what is happening with their physical bodies, and mentally as well. There's no stigma around that. We know that just talking about the causes and what's going on in our daily lives can be lifesaving."

"We want men to be going to the doctor," he continues, "having that conversation about PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen) testing as early as possible. We want men to know that testicular cancer is one of the only cancers that you can check for yourself. And the same with mental health and suicide prevention. We know that social connectivity is a huge piece of that. It's all

about talking about what's going on, and checking in with friends and family."

Worldwide since 2003, the Movember Foundation boasts more than six million participants, called Mo Bros and Mo Sisters (yes, women participate too, without the moustache), from 20 countries.

Movember is in its 14th year in Canada. To date, funds raised in this country have assisted more than 300 programs geared toward men's health. In 2019, the Canadian arm raised more than \$20.8 million.

Those funds go to endeavours such as the GAP5 Testicular Cancer Translational Research Project, and clinical research studies that aim to improve treatment outcomes for men diagnosed with prostate cancer. They also help fund the Men's Depression & Suicide Network, as well as Kid's Help Phone.

These days, I am able to "Grow a Mo". However, like back in high school in 1981, you may have to squint a bit to see it. But that's because there's a bit more salt than there is pepper in my facial hair now. And rest assured, my brother Joe still laughs at my current attempt.

So I've spent the first three weeks of the month cultivating my own moustache, though I am a bit miffed that most don't see my efforts behind my mask. More importantly, I am raising funds for a cause I believe in. I know there are other charities



Mike Balsom with his "more salt than pepper" 'stache. (Jack Custers)

and causes that are also deserving of financial support. And I do continue to support them.

But I have watched helplessly as friends have battled prostate cancer, and my own father had prostate issues as well. In addition, as a high school teacher for more than 28 years, I have increasingly seen many young men suffering from mental health problems. We are breaking down the stigma that historically kept these young men from talking about their issues. But it takes time. And it's important that men like my own 20-year-old son face a world where they don't have to hide their feelings, or be ashamed to talk about their health issues.

If you can, please help me reach my goal of raising \$1,000 this month by visiting my "Mo Space" at <https://movember.com/m/14350681?mc=1>.

Any little bit helps.

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Avanti Singers rehearse in local parking garage

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Residents who live near the corner of Melville and Ricardo Streets have been treated to the sweet sounds of the Avanti Chamber Singers on Tuesday evenings this fall, free of charge.

The music has been emanating from, of all places, the parking garage at the Harbour House Hotel, where the award-winning ensemble has been rehearsing. It was a pair of local residents, Avanti members Jim Reynolds and his wife, Pat Hartman, who approached Harbour House manager Jamie Drummond with the idea of using the space.

"We live right next door," explains Reynolds. "We approached the Harbour House and asked them, we said their acoustics are lovely. We have a good relationship with them. He didn't hesitate. As long as we signed a waiver, they'd be delighted to have us use it."

On this warm November night, 20 of the 30 members are present, each safely spaced eight feet from one another. Their places are marked off ahead of time by Reynolds, using brightly coloured frisbees as place-holders. As the choristers arrive, they answer the COVID questionnaire, then check the map for their names, move to their marks, and set up their lawn chairs. Once conductor Dr. Rachel Rensink-Hoff begins to lead them through their vocal warm-ups, it's clear Reynolds and Hartman were on to something when the idea struck.

Even during the vocal exercises, the acoustics are, indeed, amazing. The garage is clad wall-to-wall and top-to-bottom in concrete, with large openings on three sides. The sound bounces and echoes perfectly, with the side openings allowing just enough sound to seep through. Sure, it's cold and grey, but close your eyes and

you would think you are in a meticulously-crafted concert hall.

Rensink-Hoff loves the space. "It's great," she says. "For an outdoor location it's ideal. If we were regularly outdoors, the acoustics would be difficult. The choir would have a hard time dealing with each other. Here, we get the ventilation, the feeling of being outdoors, and we can space out. And we have the reverberation of the cement all around us so we can get a pretty good sound."

Even with the eight-foot spacing between singers, each member wears a mask during the entire rehearsal. Believe it or not, it doesn't seem to take anything away from the power of the voices. "Visually it's difficult," admits Rensink-Hoff, who is an associate professor of music at Brock University. "You don't get the same visual feedback that we normally get. But surprisingly, sound-wise it's actually amazingly quite clear."

The Avanti Chamber Singers is a community-based chamber choir founded in September 2006. Avanti provides opportunities for local amateur singers, and the current membership includes chorists from across Niagara and Hamilton. In 2019, the choir was named Most Promising New Adult Ensemble in the Canada Choral National Competition for Canadian Amateur Choirs. Their public performances are often held at St. Thomas Anglican Church in St. Catharines.

When the pandemic hit in March, the group's final concert of the season, scheduled for May, had to be cancelled. Member Tim Stacey, who also serves as Avanti's marketing and media coordinator, says like everyone else, they played things week-to-week.

"We switched to Zoom rehearsals, to socially stay connected with one another," he explains. "We had au-

dio of a song (*North*, by the group Sleeping at Last) that we had done at our February concert. We set that audio to footage that everyone sent of what they were doing during quarantine. Things like that keep our presence and allow us to still engage an audience."

Looking ahead, they're not sure how much longer the weather will allow them to continue using the parking garage at the currently

closed hotel. And with public performances not likely to be permitted as the virus continues to spread, Rensink-Hoff says it's likely that Avanti will be working on producing another video for the public to see.

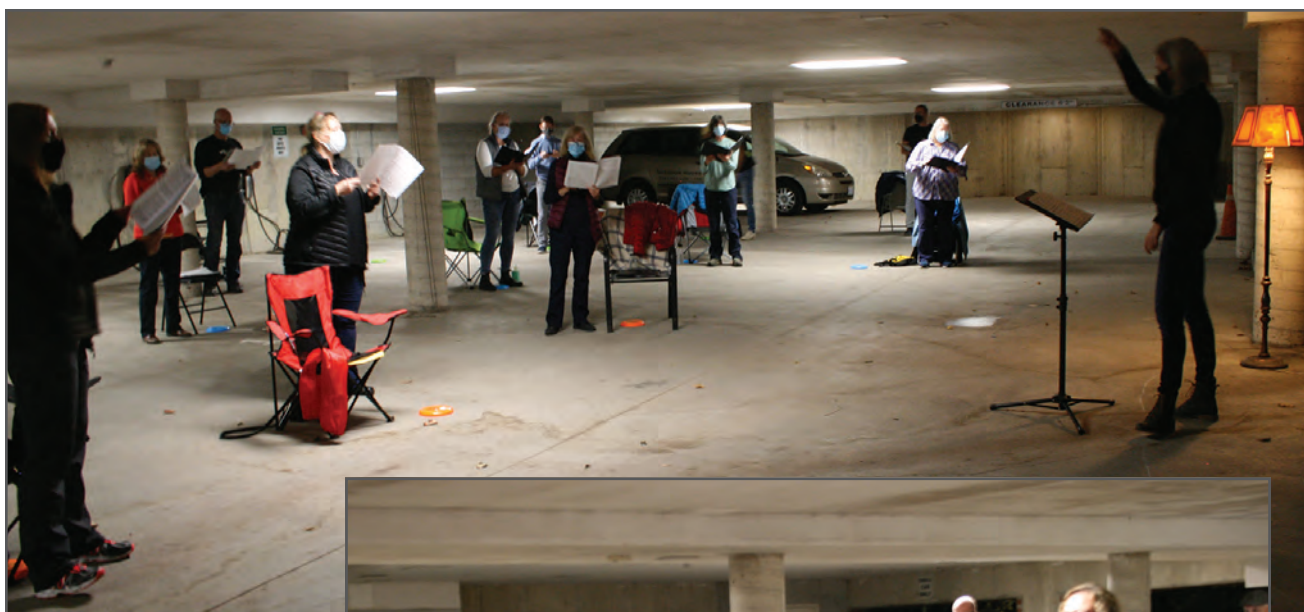
The numbers they rehearsed this past Tuesday are appropriate for the times, as well. *Unclouded Day*, *Sing My Child*, and Stephen Foster's *Hard Times Come Again No More*, all carry with them

a message of hope. Rensink-Hoff chose them because of that theme, and for their inspirational value.

"The pieces that we're working on now, we're hoping to record them before December," she explains. "We're looking at indoor spaces that the choir will feel comfortable with, that we can spread out in. But if that's not a possibility, we may end up recording here. Worst case scenario we'll

record ourselves at home and do the standard virtual choir."

For December, they are also offering to bring their music to the people. Via their website, you can make a small donation on behalf of a friend or family member, and a small group from the Avanti Chamber Singers will show up at the door on Dec. 15 to sing some cheerful carols. Visit avantisingers.com for more information.



Conductor Dr. Rachel Rensink-Hoff leads the Avanti Chamber Singers through their music in the Harbour House parking garage. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

The Avanti choir members wear masks and sing their hearts out in a parking garage.



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Submitted by
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Few options to help Tyson

Continued from page 1

own dog house. Ermanian had to come over and pull Diago out of the dog house, Gossen says, while the family watched in terror.

Saturday night, Ermanian says he was out when he got the phone call about Diago. He went right home, believing it had to be someone else’s dog, because he had left his two penned up. It wasn’t someone else’s dog, he says, and he’s sorry for the trouble Diago is causing the Gossen family.

Ermanian, who was happy to tell his side of the story to The Local, says he did consider “to some degree” giving up Diago, trying to find a new home for him, but decided he would keep him, and do his best, as he has been doing, to prevent any more incidents. He compares Diago to a wayward child — whatever they do, you love them anyway. “He’s part of my family,” he says.

He suggests the Gossens should build a fenced area for their dog.

But it’s not their dog leaving his property, Gossen says, calling Tyson a “porch dweller.” And as concerned as Gossen is for Tyson, an eight-year-old border collie/Australian shepherd cross, she is more worried about Diago attacking one of her kids.

“We just don’t feel safe anymore. We’ve asked him (Ermanian) how he would feel if it happened to one of our kids. The threat is always there.”

Gossen says she doesn’t want to make this sound like a fight between neighbours. Other than the issue of the dog, they’ve always gotten along, and he’s been a great neighbour.

She knows he does try to keep his two dogs contained, but “that will work for a while, until Diago gets out the next time, and he’s over at our house, looking to kill Tyson.”

There was one day when the bus driver wouldn’t let Gracynn off the bus, because Diago was in their driveway, and she was terrified, says Gossen. “What if one day she gets off the bus, and he’s there? Our kids have watched over and over again, watched the dog they love being attacked. Does it need to be my daughter who’s attacked before anybody does anything? I guess that’s what it has to take.”

Gossen says she wants to be a good neighbour.

“We want to be peace-makers, to get along with everybody. But it’s frustrating to have to fight for our safety. We want to feel safe in our own home.”

Ermanian always apologizes, and always offers to pay the vet bills. The latest one, she expects, will come to about \$1,500.

He told The Local he’d be going over to the Gossens to pay this one, as he has the others, because he knows it’s his responsibility when Diago gets out. He describes in detail how fencing was put together to keep the dog from escaping, and his surprise when he discovered Diago had found a way out. There was a portion of the fencing, “that unbeknown to me, was not secured properly. Maybe it was the wind Saturday night. I’m not sure what happened, but he was able to crawl out,” he says.

There was a time when Diago and Tyson would play together, he says, and he believes this all started when his other dog, a female, was in heat, and Diago became jealous of Tyson. “My dog has a dislike for their dog.”

He says the thought of Diago hurting children “is my worst fear too.”

But he’s not aggressive with other dogs, and Ermanian doesn’t believe Diago would ever attack a child, or any human. He has no problem with Diago being around his own grandchildren — he has never displayed any aggressive behaviour around them.

“I’m still upset,” he says about the Saturday attack.

“I don’t want this to happen to anybody. But I feel strongly he would never harm a person.”

Diago is a mixed breed, a rescue dog, and “not as aggressive as he’s being portrayed. It would be really hard for me to get rid of him.”

Instead, he says, “I make every effort to contain my animals.”

Ken Reid, the Town canine control officer, was called out to the Saturday night attack, and is also frustrated with the situation.

There is very little he can do, and that is hard for him.

“I’ve been wracking my brain to figure out what I can do to help these people, but there just isn’t an answer.”

He has told Ermanian it’s his duty, his obligation under the law to keep his dog contained, and he knows the dog owner is

trying to do that. However, it’s not working.

“I’ve suggested he build a pen in the barn, so if he gets out of the pen he’s still locked up. But he has gotten out of the barn before, so I’ve suggested he has to be chained in the barn.”

On Saturday, he told Ermanian he should have Diago neutered, but isn’t sure whether he plans to follow through on that.

He’s “a lot of dog, a big strong dog. Neutering might make him less aggressive,” says Reid.

“I keep getting asked, ‘why can’t I do something.’ But other than telling him he has to contain his dog, there isn’t much I can do.”

If he were to find Diago off Ermanian’s property, he could pick him up and take him to the humane society, but Ermanian would just have to pay to get him back, “and we’d be back where we started.”

Even if Diago were to bite a child or a child were to get in the middle of a dog fight, which is a real possibility, “I can’t take that dog,” says Reid.

The humane society requires that a dog who bites a person be quarantined, and could take the dog for that time, but then he would be returned to his owner, Reid says.

The only way to take a dog from its owner is with a court order. That would require the Gossens to press charges, which they say they don’t want to do.

And even if they did, if it’s a fight between dogs, the judge could just tell Ermanian to keep his dog contained, says Reid.

Under the law, the dog owner is “doing his due diligence. He isn’t allowing his dog to run free. It escaped.”

Reid suggested another home should be found for Diago, “but Paul has had him since he was a puppy, and he doesn’t want to do that. It’s just one of those situations that is totally frustrating, and it keeps happening. I know both parties, and it’s difficult to come up with a solution. In the long run, it’s the dog owner who is responsible. I’ve told him ‘you have to do everything in your power to keep your dog contained. And if that’s not possible, you have to find the dog another home.’ I don’t want to see anybody going through this, on either side of the situation, but there’s nothing more I can do.”



Tyson, seen in better days at his Line 4 home, was attacked by a dog Saturday. (Photo supplied)



Calling seniors and busy families!

Submitted by
Time to Spare

Hello, let me introduce myself. I'm Deborah and several years ago I returned to my hometown of St. Catharines where I left some thirty years ago after graduating from university. Seeking new horizons, Miami, Florida, Victoria, BC and finally Toronto served as home bases over the years.

With my children grown and forging their own careers, I created "Time to Spare" shortly before relocating to Niagara. Gregarious, organized and a stickler for details, I enjoy helping seniors, busy professionals and families simplify their lives by taking on tasks that they could use a hand with or don't have time to do.

Some of the services I have provided to my older clients include computer help for letter writing, using spreadsheets or Internet research & bill payments. Scheduling household ser-



Deborah at home with her dog Lola.

vices after information inquiries, organizing kitchen cupboards & closets, grocery shopping & meal preparation were other tasks I assisted busy young families with and seniors alike. During the holiday season,

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Parking, partying and other issues at park

Continued from page 9

issue, with visitors using several locations in the absence of washrooms, including areas within the park, on private property, and even asking to use the bathrooms of residents.

"Many of the visitors change in and out of their swimsuits in the parkette or beside their parked cars, often in public view," the report says, and there is a safety concern with the number of barbecues being used, with visitors leaving behind hot coals.

Then there is the issue of garbage, which is not always placed in receptacles. "There is often loose and extremely offensive types of garbage on the beach, on the grass and at the side of streets, which residents have often cleaned up."

The volume of traffic creates not only safety issues, but is also increasing noise and exhaust pollution, and problems with headlights shining into homes, the report says. Parking often severely impairs even one-way traffic, with residents having trouble accessing their own driveways.

There are also issues with people partying into the early hours of the morning, and the report says there is concern about "suspected drug trading deals," and people in the park "signalling to boats in the water for suspected illicit purposes."

The number of visitors often means picnic tables



A bylaw officer tickets cars parked on the road by Ryerson Park. (Photo submitted)

and benches are in use, and there is little room for residents to enjoy their park.

Members of the residents' group are asking for signs that say no stopping, tow-away zone, and allowing only residents with permits to park on the street.

Welcome signs at the park should say no barbecues, fires or tents, that the nearest washrooms are at Simcoe Park, and that the park closes at 10 p.m. with strict enforcement, including fines of \$100.

Devlin says the group would also like better signage at Queen Street and Mississauga Street, to direct traffic to the highway and

Lakeshore Road, and indicate only local traffic ahead.

The report also asks that markings show the main lane at the intersection as the left turn lane, with the secondary lane going straight through.

Speed limits should be set at 35 kph for all streets in Chautauqua, the report suggests, also asking for a look at changing some streets to one way traffic.

The residents' group is hoping the Town will develop a communications strategy that, with the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, will get out the correct messaging about the neighbourhood, and "de-empha-

size" the name Mississauga Beach and its attraction as a swimming destination, says Devlin.

There may be other options Town staff may offer, he adds, but the hope is for a full discussion about the nature of the problems and the ideas the residents have put forward, with the goal of being prepared for the influx of visitors expected to begin again next spring.

A brief mention of the report at the town's last planning committee said it would be added to the Town's December transportation and parking committee meeting's agenda for discussion.



Auchterlonie on Astrology

Bill Auchterlonie
Special to The Local

The full week of Auchterlonie on Astrology can be found on the Facebook page for The NOTL Local, and on the website <https://www.auchterlonieonastrology.ca> in part II of my podcast. Thanks to AstroButterfly, we get the entire month of November.

Thursday, Nov. 19: Saturn is remarkably busy today, first with Venus and the

Moon, and that's not good, and then with the Sun, which is much better. Expect feeling like being torn between a rock and a hard place. Also expect a helping hand from a stern father figure, so long as you are honest with yourself. Today is the day in 1863 that Abraham Lincoln gave his famous Gettysburg Address. It begins: "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation,

conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure."

Saturday, Nov. 21: The Sun moves from watery Scorpio into fiery Sagittarius at 9:39 p.m. Twelve hours earlier, Venus moved from her home sign of Libra into sexy Scorpio. It's also

the day of the first quarter Moon in Pisces, making for challenges as the magical 'know it all Sun' in Sagittarius is square to the super-intuitive Moon in Pisces. It is a day of "Who do we trust?" When we first heard her on the radio with her innovative and catchy ditty, *Call Me Maybe*, we thought she would be a one-hit wonder. But nine years later she is still writing and selling hit songs. Canada's Carly Rae Jepsen turns 35 today.

LOCAL WORSHIP

CORNERSTONE
 COMMUNITY CHURCH

Sunday, November 22nd

10 a.m. Worship Gathering

Speaker: Kevin Bayne

Message: United to Christ

Pre-registration is required to attend in-person worship

Please be advised that with the current state of COVID-19, your safety is of utmost importance to us. We will now be live streaming our service at 10:00 a.m. on Sundays.

www.ccchurch.ca

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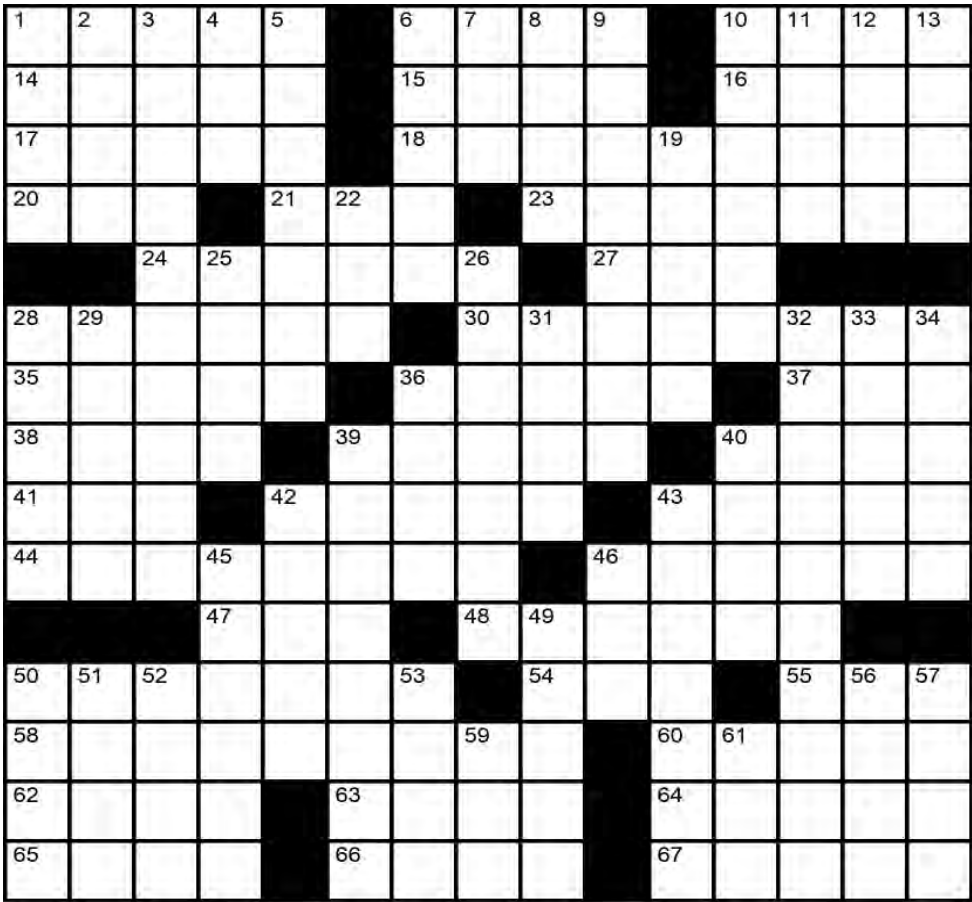
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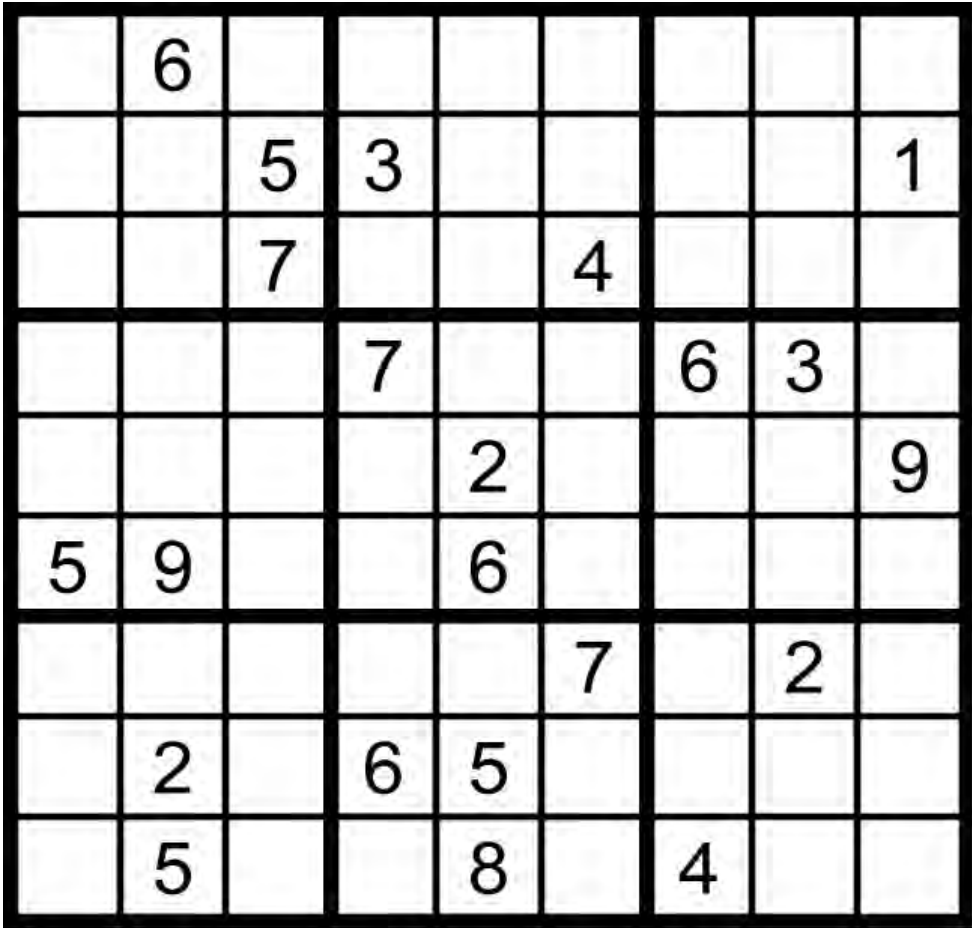
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CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU



- Across:**
1 Palpitate
6 Commanded
10 Exultation
14 Laughing scavenger
15 50-50
16 "Arrivederci" --- "
17 Stimulant
18 Gives added assurance
20 Episcopate
21 Crackpot
23 "... Sleepin' in the --- sun!"
(Mercer/Carmichael)
24 Powerful chopper
27 Bad toupée
28 Apparel
30 Field or box sport
35 Hot iron
36 "Good Time Charlie's got
the ---" (Danny O'Keefe)
37 "Iron Man" Ripken
38 Bunyan's ox
39 Change
40 Defeat decisively
41 Be unwell
42 Slumbered
43 As before
44 Asks Rene about footwear
46 Tune in
47 Sugar spirit
48 Wipes clean
50 "--- of the Cave Bear" (Auel)
- 54 Chicken precursor, or not
55 "Runaway" singer ---
Shannon
58 Retail soy all over the place
for ongoing income
60 Long-continued practice
62 Kind of tournament
63 Concerning, in legalese
64 Literary miser --- Marnier
65 "There is a --- in the affairs
of men ..." (Shakespeare,
"Julius Caesar")
66 Category
67 Former Senate majority
leader --- Lott
- Down:**
1 In this way
2 Promote to excess
3 Not just one-shot
4 Unity
5 Seven Sisters NYC college
6 Shelf-like sleeping space
7 "---, Caesar!"
8 Faculty head
9 Implements
10 "Old ---" (1989 Gregory
Peck/Jane Fonda movie)
11 Conrad's "--- Jim"
12 "Nanny McPhee" star
Thompson
13 Piece of cake
19 Bridge teams
22 Spam
25 Loblolly, for example
26 Orbital path
28 PLO Chairman
Mahmoud ---
29 Bridal follower
31 Bertie Wooster's Agatha,
for example
32 Taliesin West locale
33 Fry briefly over high heat
34 John with an Oscar and
a Tony
36 Transvaal trekker
39 Virgin's bower
40 All do this in court
42 Brain box?
43 Revulsion
45 Known to just a few
46 Barrel stave
49 Bowling alley button
50 Hurray
51 Kachina maker
52 Inspected
53 Barcelona boy
56 Alaska's first governor
57 "--- we forget" (Kipling)
59 Sin
61 Respectful form of address



OBITUARY



HOWARD, RICHARD NORMAN, 1948 - 2020—After being diagnosed with an untreatable brain cancer, Richard passed away peacefully at Hamilton General Hospital on October 26, 2020. His spouse David Johnson and two close friends held him as he ended his short but brave battle with Glioblastoma.

In addition, Richard is survived by three nieces - Heather, Kathleen and Jessica - and his beloved beagle Bogart.

Richard enjoyed a long career in the Canadian Diplomatic Service and Ontario's Economic Development department, finally settling in Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2011. He and David operated a B&B for a number of years during the summer months. Everywhere he went, Richard made many friends across Canada and around the world. It would be a fitting tribute if anyone reading this obituary, would be kind enough to pass it on to others who had the privilege of working with him or knowing him. Richard was also a passionate believer in the work that SORE did in its quest to save the heritage of the Rand Estate for the community.

In lieu of flowers, donations to the Sunnybrook Odette Cancer Centre would be appreciated.

**To place your obituary
in our Classifieds,
please contact Julia at:
julia@notllocal.com or
905.934.1040
Deadline is Mondays at noon.**

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

**Sudoku solution
from
November 12, 2020**

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

Across: 1 Throb, 6 Bode, 10 Glee, 14 Hyena, 15 Even, 16 Roma, 17 Upper, 18 Reaffirms, 20 See, 21 Nut, 23 Noonday, 24 Apache, 27 Rug, 28 Attire, 30 Lacrosse, 35 Brand, 36 Blues, 37 Cal, 38 Babe, 39 Coins, 40 Rout, 41 All, 42 Slept, 43 Dillo, 44 Sneakers, 46 Listen, 47 Rum, 48 Erases, 50 The Clan, 54 Egg, 55 Del, 58 Royalties, 60 Usage, 62 Open, 63 In re, 64 Sillas, 65 Tide, 66 Sort, 67 Trent.
Down: 1 Thus, 2 Hype, 3 Repeatable, 4 One, 5 Barnard, 6 Barth, 7 Ave, 8 Dean, 9 Enforces, 10 Gingo, 11 Lord, 12 Emma, 13 Easy, 19 Fours, 22 U C E, 25 Pine, 26 Ellipse, 28 Abbas, 29 Train, 31 Aunt, 32 Scottsdale, 33 Sauté, 34 Elton, 36 Boer, 39 Clematis, 40 Rise, 42 Skull, 43 Disjust, 45 Arcane, 46 Lag, 49 Reset, 50 Trot, 51 Hopi, 52 Eyed, 53 Nino, 56 Egan, 57 Lest, 59 Err, 61 Sir.

A close-up photograph of a rustic Christmas wreath. The wreath is constructed from a dense arrangement of dried, light-colored branches and twigs. It is decorated with several vibrant red poinsettia flowers, two dried gourds, and sprigs of greenery, including eucalyptus. The wreath is hanging in front of a large window with a dark frame, which allows natural light to illuminate the scene. The overall aesthetic is warm and traditional.