



Virgil mural
installation
completed
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Sitting at the head table are Maureen Dickson (front left) and clockwise Ben Taylor, Oresta Simpson, Ward Simpson, Lyle Hall, Pat Ridesic, Paul Dickson and Mayo Ridesic. (Penny Coles)

Councillors differ on loan request from Chamber

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

Niagara-on-the-Lake Coun. Gary Burroughs says the municipality should have acted more swiftly when making arrangements related to the Municipal Accommodation Tax, a fund generated by local hotels set to be split between the town and Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The revenue collected in 2022 was close to \$500,000 and Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake, the local Designated Marketing Organization, is entitled to half that amount — which adds up to \$226,000.

Minerva Ward, chief executive officer and president of the tourism organization, requested a loan of that amount last week, but was turned down by local officials through a tied 3-3 vote.

The town started collecting MAT revenue in July 2022, but a transfer agreement with the tourism body has yet to be finalized, and no money has changed hands yet.

Burroughs believes the local government is to blame.

“The town should’ve resolved this by now,” said Burroughs, adding that he believes the payment schedule will be part of the agreement when it’s sealed — and that revenue generated in 2023 will likely be twice the amount of what 2022 brought in.

While other councillors argued that an agreement needs to be rubber-stamped first, and that the local government shouldn’t be using tax dollars for a loan, Burroughs is on the

other side of the debate.

“It’s not taxpayer money,” said Burroughs, who also supported a motion brought forward last week by Coun. Wendy Cheropita to hand over the revenue to tourism representatives.

“The hotels raised it, charged it, and gave it to the town in good faith that it would become part of the MAT program,” said Burroughs. The money Tourism NOTL will receive is intended to develop and carry out tourism marketing programs.

In 2017, the Ontario government issued the Transient Accommodation Regulation, which provides provisions for municipalities across Ontario to implement an accommodation tax if they choose to do so.

Last June, town council approved a MAT bylaw, resulting in this new tax of two per cent applying only to accommodation establishments with five or more rooms and for bookings made on or after July 1, 2022.

Starting in January, short-term rentals with less than five rooms will also have to pay the tax.

Accommodation providers will see the tax rise to three per cent in 2024, and four per cent in 2025.

In August of 2021, council passed a motion to implement the tax within the 2022 budget for tourism projects and to place any revenue generated into a special reserve for tourism promotion, town capital infrastructure and tourism initiatives.

Marnie Cluckie, the town’s chief administrative officer, re-

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Ward Simpson honoured by Niagara Foundation

Penny Coles
The Local

The Niagara Foundation has recognized Ward Simpson as its 2023 Living Landmark, an award given annually to a person who demonstrates an outstanding contribution to the quality of life in Niagara.

The Court House venue was packed Saturday evening, wall-to-wall tables filled with Simpson’s many family members and friends there to recognize the man who has given so

much to the community.

As would be expected during an evening with Simpson, there were lots of laughs and lots of tears, the giant handkerchief he brought along put to good use.

He was introduced by his good friend and fellow golfer Paul Dickson, who began with a story about golfing in Ireland — although religion and politics don’t mix with golfing, Dickson said, his story managed to include both. With props including an Irish

flag and an Ulster flag, Dickson said that added to all the accolades about Simpson, among the many “beautiful things he has accomplished,” he can add Simpson’s role of “legitimate peacekeeper” in Ireland, bringing both sides together in golfing, and in song.

When it was Simpson’s turn to speak, he categorized important people in his life as his many families, beginning with his 10 parents — his mother Mary and father Sherman, who was a pharmacist, and his eight

older siblings, who were his co-parents. His five brothers “might have demonstrated what not to do,” he said, but his sisters were “absolute perfection.”

They are down to four now, he said, with his brother Jim at 96 still organizing euchre games from his retirement home in Ottawa, “where we can see and talk to each other,” and keeping score on Excel sheets he sends out to the remaining siblings.

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Permanent patios don't sit well with councillors

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors have a lot of questions about how the town's patio program will operate in the future.

A report before them Tuesday had staff recommending that council support outdoor patios, which were allowed beginning in 2020 to help restaurants cope during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the time, the town created general guidelines for design and requirements for a tempo-

rary patio program, intending to do a more detailed review later.

Council has extended the program three times since 2020, but a recommendation from staff to create a permanent policy was met with hesitation from elected officials during Tuesday's council meeting.

Kirsten McCauley, the town's director of community and development services, said a permanent seasonal program, running eight months a year, would continue annually and not have to be extended each year by a vote of council. Changes could be made along the way, she explained.

When council voted, it was decided that council will support the program in principle, and that staff return with a report based on feedback from Tuesday's discussion. Council did not support a motion that described the program as permanent.

Some of that input was related to the impact on parking. Coun. Maria Mavridis, also the owner of two restaurants on Queen Street, said a few parking spaces are lost with the operation of the current program.

She said she is unsure of how many spaces would be affected with a permanent allow-

ance for patios.

"Parking has been an issue since the '70s, and it remains an issue," she said.

Since 2020, the town has approved and issued temporary patio permits for 37 businesses. Permits have been issued for 22 businesses in Old Town, five in Virgil and three in St. Davids.

Seven permits have been issued for businesses outside the urban area boundary. Eight of those in Old Town are for businesses located along Queen Street, staff said.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita said businesses have expressed concerns about the application and paperwork required before each season, hoping they can get something that's "easy to digest," she said.

Coun. Nick Ruller said he couldn't support the motion because there are "a lot of specifics that need to be worked through."

The temporary program allows patios to occupy municipal parking stalls. Patios have previously occupied one to two parking spaces each, with to date a maximum of four parking spaces along Queen Street currently being occupied by temporary patios, staff said.

If applying hourly parking rates, for 10 hours per day along Queen Street, the town loses approximately \$12,250 in parking revenue per space per season, which is April 1 to October 31.

If applying hourly parking rates, for 10 hours per day, outside of Queen Street, the town loses approximately \$10,120 in parking revenue per space per season.

Should council wish to apply a cash-in-lieu of parking rate to temporary patios occupying municipal parking stalls, this would cost \$65,988 per space, said staff.

Issue won't be resolved until next council meeting

Continued from page 1

iterated on Monday to The Local comments she made during last week's meeting — that an agreement like this being completed takes time.

"However, the town and Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake are committed to the process and optimistic that a mutually satisfactory agreement that protects all parties and benefits the community will be reached very soon," she said.

She also stood up for her staff who have been working on this file.

"The town's dedicated staff

team has exhibited diligence throughout the negotiation process, and Tourism NOTL has equally demonstrated a co-operative spirit by actively engaging in the discussions about this matter," Cluckie told The Local.

"Recognizing the time-intensive nature of agreement negotiation, the town acknowledges that reaching a resolution has been an iterative and lengthy process," she said.

Last week, Ward told The Local that the chamber has had to underwrite the expenses of Tourism NOTL that should have been paid for by MAT revenue.

Ward also said funds have been spent on marketing, accounting, and professional fees related to promoting Niagara-on-the-Lake and all it has to offer.

But some councillors wanted more information about what specifically has been paid for.

Asked if the town has received that information, Cluckie said it hasn't — but it is anticipated shortly.

"Tourism NOTL is currently gathering the financial materials to provide to the town for review," she said.

An important step was possible Tuesday as negotiations were expected to continue, but even if an agreement is reached, it wouldn't be a done deal until after it comes to council Dec. 5, explained Cluckie.

Coun. Maria Mavridis was opposed to granting the request because she considers it an "unsecured loan," which lacks needed documentation about how it would be repaid.

"If we're going to loan out money, the paperwork needs to be in place, and it just wasn't there," she told The Local.

Mavridis also said Tourism NOTL needs to be a little more patient and wait for the agreement to be reached, which she said would likely take less time than accepting a loan from the municipality.

"The paperwork for the loan would've taken longer than getting the MAT funds," she said.

Mavridis also believes local hotel operators who have been charging the accommodation tax since summer 2022 wouldn't like hearing about a \$226,000 loan being given without an agreement in place.

"It's our responsibility to ensure those funds are spent on what they are collecting it for," she said.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor is chair of the town's MAT committee. She also voted against the loan and told The Local that her biggest concern was that



Minerva Ward at an event she organized and held at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery in August. (Penny Coles)

Tourism NOTL came forward in last week's presentation with a budget plan, but not financial statements on how they've been spending so far.

"There's a big difference between the two," she said.

O'Connor said the province wouldn't like hearing about MAT funds being the subject of a loan.

"The legislation does not allow us to do that," she said, adding it seems the town and Tourism NOTL are "almost there" with finalizing an agreement.

Coun. Erwin Wiens, who left last week's meeting early and did not vote on the loan request, told The Local he is opposed to the idea, and said he couldn't support it without an

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John Peller stepping down from family business

Mike Balsom
The Local

As far as retirement announcements go, John Peller's recent one was about as quiet as it gets.

On Nov. 9, Andrew Peller Ltd. released its second quarter financial results for the period ending Sept. 30, 2023 to its shareholders. Under the heading Leadership Continuity and Transition Plan, John Peller announced his intention to retire within the next year from his position as president and chief executive officer of the company begun by his grandfather in 1961.

As well, "independent directors Perry Miele, Shauneen Bruder, François Vimard and David Mongeau have all announced that they will be retiring effective immediately, to support a proactive refreshment of the board," said the company statement.

Andrew Peller immigrated to Canada from Hungary in 1927. He soon opened the first new brewery in Canada following Prohibition. Peller's Brewery in Hamilton, Ont. was later sold to E.P. Taylor and Andrew bought a farm in Port Moody, B.C. Andres Wines was born, its Baby Duck "champagne" was a huge success, and by 1964 wineries in Calgary, Alberta and Truro, Nova Scotia were added to the portfolio.

The company moved into Ontario with the 1970 pur-

chase of Beau Chatel Wines in nearby Winona. Their first Niagara-on-the-Lake winery was Hillebrand Estates, now Trius Winery, which they acquired in 1994.

John succeeded his father Joe, who previously worked as a medical doctor in Hamilton, at the helm of the company in 1995, a year after the passing of Andrew.

In 2001, the company opened the palatial Peller Estates Winery on John Street East in NOTL. John Peller said at the time that the new location was a tribute to his grandfather's vision. The company name change to Andrew Peller Ltd. was made in 2006.

In the past year, John Peller has been at the forefront of a movement to bring Niagara's entire wine industry to the next level. Along with his son Grady, he has gathered together with a number of owners of wineries both large and small, grape growers, hotel operators, restaurant owners and post secondary schools they have begun lobbying all levels of government for more effective support of the industry.

John, who was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2020, is the third generation of Pellers to serve as CEO. He will retire after holding the position for 30 years.

Financially, the release to shareholders announced that

sales for the first six months of 2023 remained relatively flat in comparison to the previous year, at \$200.7 million compared to \$199.5 million. At the same time the gross margin improved slightly from 38.9 percent in 2022 to 40 percent in the current year.

"We are encouraged by the increased profitability in fiscal 2024," John Peller said in the statement. "Looking ahead to the longer term, we are optimistic about our future as global markets stabilize and inflationary pressures ease. We expect growth will come from our strong focus on our established trade channels, market share improvements, optimizing our selling prices and trade spending, and increasing our initiatives to enhance sales of our higher margin premium products."

As the search for his replacement, and that of the other four members stepping down, begins, John Peller has promised to help choose the next company leader, and to add independent directors to the board within the next few weeks. The identity and details regarding the new board members will be announced at that time.

"I am committed to providing leadership and support, together with the other members of the board and the Peller family," John said in the release, as the company enters the next chapter of its evolution.



John Peller outlining his premium wine strategy to a group of movers and shakers at Peller Estates Winery earlier this year. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Shaw executive director and CEO Tim Jennings conducting a post-presentation Q&A with John Peller at an event to talk about growing the wine industry held earlier this year.



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Regional council says no to garbage collection increase

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

The way trash is collected in Niagara is set to change in the new year, and regional council has voted to give taxpayers a zero-per-cent increase on the 2024 waste management budget — going against a recommendation from staff.

The freeze is the result of regional councillors voting not to replenish capital and landfill liability reserves, which would have landed the region at an increase of about \$870,000.

The region’s budget committee has approved a gross garbage collection spending plan of \$51.5 million, about \$12 million less than what was budgeted last year.

More than \$45 million of the 2024 budget will be apportioned to Niagara’s 12 lower-tier municipalities.

This equates to as little as \$148 per household in Thorold, while Port Colborne property owners will be taxed \$200 per year for waste management.

Niagara-on-the-Lake residents are charged based on their fixed household

amount. Town spokesperson Marah Minor said records indicate this practice goes back as far as 1981.

The NOTL process involves taking the total cost of waste management as charged by the region and dividing it by the overall number of dwellings receiving the service. This calculation yields a per-household cost to be assigned to each property tax account.

Unlike some municipalities that base the charge on assessment values, where higher assessments result in higher fees for the same service, Niagara-on-the-Lake opts for a more “equitable approach,” she said.

The region’s recent report indicated the town would pay \$2 million to the region for garbage, Minor said, that amount determined by property assessment, divided by household.

In mid-July, the region’s public works committee chose to opt out of continuing to provide curbside collection of recycling from residences, facilities and public spaces when a new Producer Responsibility Blue Box Program is enacted on Jan. 1.



The way we put out recyclables will likely change in the new year, but details haven’t been released yet. (File photo)

This means the responsibility of residential recycling collection is set to be removed from the region and placed solely in the hands of Circular Materials Ontario, an organization responsible for setting up contracts to collect and receive recycling materials across the province, on behalf of producers.

Despite there being savings and the upcoming

changes playing a major role in that, regional finance director Helen Furtado said there are other costs that need to be addressed — which is why a 1.9-per-cent increase was initially recommended.

“In spite of the fact we have a reduction due to the collection contract, we do have some pressures in the budget,” she said.

The biggest of these

pressures is an increase of more than \$2 million to cover organics processing, drop-off depots, household hazardous waste, collection, landfill operations and grounds and security services, said Furtado.

The motion to freeze the budget with no increase was made by Fort Erie Regional Coun. Tom Insinna, who said council should take the opportu-

nity to give some relief to taxpayers by turning down an increase of nearly two per cent.

Catherine Habermehl, the region’s director of waste management, said details about which local contractors will be responsible for blue box collection are being worked out.

“I anticipate the transition to be smooth,” she said.

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Ceto Reid finally able to go home to Jamaica

Jane Andres
The Local

It's been almost 14 months since Ceto Reid, a 20-year veteran of the farm-work program, experienced a life-altering accident.

On Oct. 6, 2022, he was stuck by a vehicle while he was riding his bicycle back to his bunkhouse in Virgil, carrying a large load of laundry from the nearest laundromat almost eight kilometres away in St. Catharines. He was preparing to return to Jamaica the next day after the completion of his eight-month contract at P.G. Enns farm. He never made it back.

A car plowed into his bicycle at a Carlton Street intersection that afternoon. His injuries required extensive surgery in Hamilton, where he spent the next few weeks. Pain, isolation and anxiety about the future were constantly on his mind during the hospitalization that followed.

It's a familiar story. In addition to the physical and emotional stress, injured or ill farmworkers still have immediate expenses for food and necessities. There is a typical eight-week wait before receiving sick benefits, with the result that they are unable to provide for their families back home.

What Ceto did not expect was the wave of generosity from members of the community in Niagara-on-the-Lake who rallied to support him after his release from the hospital.

Volunteers at the Farmworkers Hub saw to it that meals and groceries were delivered to the bunkhouse on a regular basis.

Kathy Brown, then manager of the Virgil Avondale, raised funds and community awareness through the store. Members of the Buy Nothing Facebook group provided a recliner, a television and mobility devices

necessary for his recovery.

A few weeks later Ceto was informed that he would be receiving a portion of the funds raised at the Candlelight Stroll in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He had no idea what the Candlelight Stroll was and doubted he would be able to participate due to the fragility of his injuries. With a great deal of encouragement and a wheelchair, the impossible became reality as he met with organizers and local politicians in the Court House prior to the start of the stroll.

Nothing could have prepared him for the sight of the expectant crowd that greeted him as he was wheeled around the corner of the Court House at the start of the festivities.

After lighting the first candle, he watched in amazement as the flickering of the candles spread exponentially through the crowd. He was carefully assisted into the horse-drawn carriage and led the crowd through the beautifully decorated streets on what was for him a surreal experience of a lifetime.

In the long winter months that followed, Julia Buxton Cox organized a WhatsApp group to coordinate assistance as well as arranging rides to Hamilton for follow-up appointments. Regular phone calls and visits helped to alleviate the isolation while he was living alone in the bunkhouse.

Despite the hope that he could return home in the spring, the doctors felt it was in his best interest to stay where his progress and physiotherapy could be monitored.

With the return of his coworkers in March, he needed to find accessible accommodations, again made possible by a caring community.

It has been a long haul, with recovery taking longer



Ceto Reid, leading the Candlelight Stroll last year, lights a candle for Athena Snyder. (Penny Coles)

than he had hoped. He is no longer using a walker but relies on a cane for stability.

Recently Ceto was overjoyed to hear that he had been cleared to return home.

Last Thursday we met the night before his return for some reminiscing.

He has no idea what the future holds but for now he is anxious to be reunited with family, friends and his faith community back home.

Reid hopes that someday the good friends he has made in Niagara will be able to visit him at his home in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. He reminded me of the time we watched a video on YouTube that took us on a virtual trip, travelling the country roads leading to his hometown. He could scarcely believe Thursday that he would be driving along those same roads within 24 hours, on his way home.

"I have so much to be

thankful for. I am so grateful for all the support from the people in Niagara-on-the-Lake — drivers, people bringing me groceries, helping me in so many ways."

He paused to reflect for a moment, then added that he never could have thought

it possible. "Please tell them all thank you for me. May God bless them and may He help them continue to do their good work."

His suitcase was packed and ready to go. He pointed out his blue laundry bag sporting a long gash in the fabric that he is taking

home, a reminder of a tragedy that was redeemed by the love of a caring community,

"And I hope that when the guys are doing their laundry on the new (washing) machines they will remember me," he grinned with a twinkle in his eye.



Kathy Brown, then manager of the Virgil Avondale, raised money to help Ceto Reid, who had hoped to be home last Christmas, but he will be this Christmas. (Jane Andres)

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EDITORIAL

An explanation about the Queen Street post office

As Ward Simpson wrapped up his speech at the Niagara Foundation dinner held in his honour Saturday, he ended with what he called a rant, talking about the mess at the post office caused by people leaving their copies of papers and flyers which are now delivered through Canada Post. He asked residents to take the mail they don't want home with them and put it in their own recycling boxes.

This is a little bit of an explanation behind the mess.

Former town councillor Allan Bisback, a high-ranking employee for Canada Post when he retired, told The Local that the policy at post offices was not to provide a recycling box. After all, he explained, businesses pay to deliver mail through the post office, whether it's coupons, flyers or community newspapers, and leaving a recycling bin out would encourage people to leave those behind, not a good advertisement for delivering through the post office.

Bisback also explained to The Local that while the amount of mail left behind can look substantial, it is not — Canada Post research has shown it's in the neighbourhood of two to three per cent.

So newspapers have two choices. We can pay for drivers to drop them off in driveways, which is very inefficient because it's hard to find drivers, or we can pay for papers to be delivered through the mail, which is not only efficient, but guarantees it will get to every

household with a postal address in NOTL. While nobody likes the thought of trees being cut down, many people of all ages tell us they still like to hold our printed edition in their hands.

We had ample opportunity to see the issues with dropping bagged papers in driveways at the old Niagara Advance, the newspaper that served NOTL for almost 100 years before it was shut down in 2017.

At the Advance, people would come into the office

complaining about not getting their paper, or receiving it soaking wet because it was thrown in a puddle. One irate reader wanted his newspaper but threatened to break the legs of a carrier who had crossed his lawn one time too many. It wasn't fun.

The only downside with the post office is those who prefer to read their paper online, and those who call us to ask for delivery to be stopped because they will be away.

Canada Post doesn't allow

us to pick and choose addresses. So to all you snowbirds, the best advice we can offer is that when it becomes obvious you're away, post office employees will hopefully make the logical decision to stop filling up your box.

In Simpson's words Saturday about his post office beef, if that is our biggest cause of concern in life, we have much for which to be grateful.

Penny Coles
The Local

Roundabout a done deal, but design elements are not

St. Davids resident and business owner Paul Harber pretty well sums it up when he asks 'why'.

Why does the intersection at York Road and Four Mile Creek need a roundabout?

There have been no serious or fatal collisions at that intersection that residents can remember, and while the traffic might briefly become backed up, the wait time isn't long enough to be an issue — he knows that through personal experience.

The region has an answer to the 'why,' but many residents just aren't buying it.

Frank Tassone, associate

director of transportation engineering at the region, told The Local the environmental assessment study led to the recommendation of a roundabout because it best meets all the criteria for the intersection.

Included in the EA process, an evaluation was undertaken of alternatives to the existing all-way stop signs. Reasons for replacing them, the regional report says, include lessening peak hour delays (that will otherwise increase in the future), improving conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, better accommodating large trucks, and "strengthening the area's

relationship with its past."

The residents of St. Davids, many of whom have lived there for decades, beg to differ, but nobody is listening to them.

There was public consultation, Tassone points out to The Local, and most often, when it seems like the majority of residents are opposed to anything, it's because theirs are the loudest voices.

The Local agrees with that assessment, but also points out that this particular discussion has been louder than any other in recent years, from residents who have all kinds of logical reasons for opposing the roundabout, also in saying

if it's a future increase in traffic that's a concern, look to the intersection at Concession 6 and York Road as a better choice for a roundabout.

The four-way stop there considerably reduced the number of collisions at that intersection, but the value of a roundabout is that any collisions that do occur are less serious — they will be a fender-bender, not a T-bone. There have been collisions at the York and Creek Road intersections, with injuries, but although he said last week he would provide the numbers, he hasn't got back to The Local with that information.

Tassone won't rule out that

the region might one day looking at Concession 6 for another roundabout, but says the traffic solution for the centre of the village isn't up for debate — it's been decided, and a roundabout it is.

No matter that residents fear it will spoil the village atmosphere, likely cause serious harm to the small but popular business section that has developed recently, as well as existing businesses, and cause issues for pedestrians, both seniors and youngsters headed to the nearby school — he trusts the studies that show it's the best option.

The letters from St. Davids residents to The Local have

been strong in their opposition, as have lengthy social media threads, but the roundabout has been a done deal for a long time, some say even before the public consultations.

The important point that Tassone mentioned is that residents will have input on its design. No word yet how, when or where, but stay tuned. If there is any way to mitigate villagers' concerns, that seems the only option left, so best not to let it pass by without as much public input as residents can muster.

Penny Coles
The Local

Do we want black bears in Niagara, or more rattlesnakes?



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

What if black bears were brought back to Niagara? The timber rattlesnake hasn't been seen here since the 1940s, and the eastern massasauga rattlesnake hides its shrivelling population in the depths of Wainfleet Bog. Would we celebrate having more of them around?

What about the gray fox, whose Ontario population has been reduced to a single island

in Lake Erie? How would you feel knowing this cute canid could, and once did, survive in Niagara?

All of the above scenarios are to be answered differently by you as the reader. Your answer might be driven by emotional response or scientific speculation. Some are completely unre-

alistic, but what if I told you that others are totally plausible. I'm here to dissect the conversation of reintroducing wildlife that once roamed Niagara back into the ecological fold.

Although I love to tout how Niagara lies within the most biodiverse region of the country, we have lost an alarming

number of the original species that once thrived here prior to European settlement. Many of these organisms have not become extinct, but extirpated. This means that they no longer live in this area of the world, but still continue to live in other ranges.

This raises the question: if they once lived here, can't we just bring them back to Niagara?

It's not that simple.

When we stop to think about it, most of the better known species that we have pushed out or exterminated in Niagara fall into the "large

and dangerous" category. Black bears. Wolves. The eastern cougar. Timber rattlesnakes.

Unfortunately, these species were met with a two-pronged attack on their populations. Firstly, many were eliminated

Continued on page 7

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View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

In *Muriel's Wedding* (Prime, 1994) the eldest daughter of probably the most dysfunctional family in Australia strug-

gles to find acceptance through marriage. In the end she finds herself, her dignity and happiness and it has nothing to do with marriage. Perhaps an inconsequential film, but I found it worth watching.

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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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. Last week, it was no surprise that Arnie Lepp thanked The Local for printing a photo of Ben in front of the Spirit of Niagara distillery on Lakeshore Road, which Lepp owns.

COMMENT

Local LETTERS Royal Canadian Legion says thanks

On behalf of the General Nelles Branch #124 of the Royal Canadian Legion, I would like to thank all of those who supported the Remembrance Day services on Nov. 11 at the Queen Street Cenotaph and in Queenston.

A thank you to the veterans, branch associate members, RCMP, town fire department and cadets for marching with us, and also to those who presented wreaths on behalf of their family or organization. Our chaplain put together

a concise service with participation from townsmen. The Old Town service was well-attended, although being a Saturday, schools did not participate. We acknowledge that there was a problem with the amplified sound, and a remedy has

already been found for next year with the branch taking that burden off of the town. The first two weeks in November is when we hold our poppy campaign to distribute poppies, reminding everyone of the sacrifice of previous generations, and

the ongoing work of the Canadian military. Nearly all of the local businesses supported us by allowing counter boxes in their stores, and to those brave members that stood in the cold to meet people on the street with a poppy, we say

thank you and well done. We had a successful poppy campaign, meeting last year's collection for veterans in need.

Al Howse
President, Branch 124,
Royal Canadian Legion

Local LETTERS Willowbank is asking for support with school, building

As you know, Willowbank is a unique private career college and has been on the vanguard of heritage conservation and the adaptive reuse of existing buildings since 2006. And, as you have been hearing, we are on an upward trajectory to even greater significance. Yet we're wrestling with the rapidly growing financial

reality of operating our storied School of Restoration Arts. Your support is crucial to its success. Tuition covers just over a third of the annual cost of providing each student with the best education in heritage conservation. As Willowbank is not eligible for provincial funding, we must make up the difference through the generosity of our community.

To bridge our current operating gap, we seek to raise \$30,000 this season. In early 2024, we will also need to invest \$125,000 to construct a third-floor external exit stair. The generosity of our community members not only helps provide students with a great education but also assists in producing passionate heritage professionals

who champion the role of cultural heritage preservation in our communities here in Niagara and around the world. Your support makes a difference! Consider Willowbank as you think about your annual charitable contributions during this season of giving. Contribute to Willowbank either through Canada Helps (www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/Willowbank/) or directly to Willowbank at 14487 Niagara River Pkwy, Box 212, Queenston, ON L0S 1L0. Willowbank is a registered charity so you will receive a tax receipt. We thank you for including our valued school in your plans. Your generosity today will make a difference to the

financial sustainability of Willowbank as an innovative institution shaping new approaches to the stewardship of historic places and sustainable communities, now and for generations to come. Thank you.

John F.T. Scott
Chair, Willowbank Board
of Directors

Some missing animals would be welcome in Niagara

Continued from page 6

due to fear of them. Added to their targeted existence, southern Ontario's historic deforestation during settlement left them very little space to live. These species require larger habitats so they can establish territory and live their lives successfully. In short, they ran out of space, and ran into humans. Ironically, these particular species are recognized as paramount in their ability to regulate ecosystem balance. Being toward the top of the food chain, they control populations of other small predators, herbivores and pests. Let's focus on the black bear, which still happily plods along in large wilderness areas north and south of Niagara. As cool as it would seem to see a black bear walking the edge of the Niagara Escarpment or patrolling its historic grounds in the Gorge, it just wouldn't work. With 90 per cent of Niagara Region's original habitat coverage gone, and only a matter of time before a negative human encounter, it is just not realistic anymore. However, I believe that other

extirpated species could be reintroduced into Niagara with successful and positive results. In doing so, we would restore parts of our inherent alpha diversity (the actual number of species present) and beta diversity (the variety of population types in an area). This would be a boon for the genetic health of these species, as they wouldn't be trapped in one area as a singular population. We all know the beloved red fox, but have you ever seen the gray fox? This close relative of our more familiar fox species used to inhabit the woodlands and marshes of Niagara Peninsula. Although more elusive and less densely populated than the red fox, the gray fox could actually find peaceful refuge if it were to be brought back into Wainfleet Bog or Short Hills Provincial Park, for example. We used to have American badgers in Niagara. Nowadays, they have broken-up populations out toward Long Point. Sadly, the majority of the sandy forested hills of Lake Erie have been developed in Niagara. If left undisturbed, however, parts of southern Niagara could potentially host a small

but viable population of this expert digger. Many fascinating reptile species took serious dents to their populations through habitat loss and illegal pet trade extraction, such as the spotted turtle. Once common across southern Niagara's wetlands, they are now likely gone altogether from the area. However, there is still enough space to reintroduce them. With stiffer penalties for removing wildlife from its native habitat, people would be more likely to listen and let the turtle with orange spots be in peace. The list continues, with the six-foot long black rat snake, the five-lined skink (Ontario's only lizard), and expanding the population of the eastern massasauga rattlesnakes of Wainfleet. There is enough habitat in suitable quality left for some of these animals to be welcomed back home. With proper public education and the appropriate funding, this could be a fairly easy and benevolent move for the right species.



Southern Niagara's larger wetland areas, like the Wainfleet Bog, could not support black bears, but perhaps other extirpated species. (Owen Bjorgan)



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Pandemic has impacted students’ mental health

Sharon Burns
The Local

Short term impacts of lockdowns and school closures during three years of the pandemic show that youth, in particular, have been and may still be suffering from mental health issues, said Dr. Amanda Sherman, clinical psychologist and mental health lead with the District School Board of Niagara.

Social isolation, being disconnected from peers and disconnection from extended family during a time when young people, “particularly in the adolescent period when, developmentally, teenagers want to spend more time with their peers than with their parents,” was difficult, said Sherman.

She was speaking at a Zoom presentation last week to members of the Niagara Council of Women, politicians, school administrative staff and members of the public.

Increased screen time seemed to be a natural, however unintended, consequence of lockdowns and school closures. Sherman referenced a study which showed, pre-COVID, children spent an average of 162 minutes per day on screens. “During the pandemic, there was an increase in screen time of about 84 minutes daily,” she said. “This was during the weekday, and this really hasn’t changed too much, post-pandemic.”

Youth decreased their physical activity by 20 per cent, said

Sherman, in large part due to cancelled extracurriculars and sports clubs.

A disruption to routines, to sleep and to nutrition, and the idea of coping with uncertainty “was really hard for everyone, and caused anxiety and increased parental stress,” said Sherman. “Intimate partner violence went up, which of course impacts children and youth,” during a time when decreased access to support was available.

All of this has impacted the mental health of children and young people. Sherman explained that good research takes time, and that Canadian research on this topic is just starting to be published.

In the first year of the pandemic, a meta-analysis that included 29 studies involving 80,000 children showed that nearly 25 per cent of children and adolescents reported clinically elevated depression symptoms. Sherman explained that these symptoms are defined as “sadness, hopelessness and low mood. Twenty-one per cent reported clinically significant symptoms of anxiety, so excessive worry and fear,” she said.

Sherman acknowledged that child and youth mental health had been a challenge pre-COVID, but said that there is still strong evidence for a slight increase in depressive and anxiety symptoms from what children and youth were experiencing.

“Youth who were already experiencing depression before



Dr. Amanda Sherman, mental health lead with the District School Board of Niagara. (Supplied)

the pandemic likely would have had much difficulty coping with the additional stressor of the pandemic. That would explain why their depression symptoms increased. But then youth who didn’t experience depression before the pandemic would have had less experience with stress, and they might have had more difficulty coping with these new and unfamiliar stressors, which would also cause increases in depression symptoms.”

“Higher rates of depressive and anxiety symptoms were particularly true for girls, and girls from moderate to high income families,” said Sherman.

Another impact of COVID on youth resulted in increased rates of hospital emergency department visits and hospitalizations for self-harm. “When we

talk about self-harm, there are many definitions that are used, but really, we tend to think of self-harm as self-injury that is not intended to be suicidal.”

Sherman noted that hospital visits from female youth were higher than visits from male youth. “Not to say that males weren’t also impacted, but the effects were stronger in females and older adolescents.”

In the first eight months of the pandemic there were increased incidents of eating disorders, specifically anorexia. In a study of six children’s hospitals in Canada, research showed from pre-pandemic to during the pandemic, the number of new diagnoses that the children’s hospitals were making increased from 25 to 41 cases per month. And among those

children and youth newly diagnosed with anorexia, the number that had to be hospitalized because their symptoms were so severe, increased from about 7.5 youth per month to 20 youth per month.

They also found that among these youths who were newly diagnosed, the severity of their disease was significantly greater than what they were seeing in newly diagnosed youth before the pandemic. “So for anorexia, that means a faster progression of the illness, more weight loss and a more profound bradycardia, which is a dangerously low heart rate.”

While it is too early to determine long-term impacts of COVID on the mental health of young people, Sherman offered some insights as to what she is seeing in the schools.

“One challenge that we are still having is getting kids back to school, particularly students who struggle with anxiety. Many students have real challenges coming to school or staying at school the whole day, and that really does have to do with the fact that we got used to only online learning and for some students who struggle very much with anxiety having that online learning option that they never had before, it’s been quite a challenge for them to shift.”

Sherman hears from educators that many students are having a hard time self regulating their behaviour. “Self-regulation is generally the ability to manage

our emotions and behaviour.”

“Coping is a skill that young children learn as they develop, but many students, for whatever reason, are not coming to school with this skill, and as a result they spend more of their day in a state of hyper-arousal, which is a state of very high energy, anxiety and anger,” she explained — a ‘fight or flight’ mode.

Other students are in a state of hypo-arousal, “where they seem like they’re shut down. They might seem like their mood is low. They might seem passive or withdrawn, even frozen in extreme circumstances.”

Despite the higher numbers of students experiencing issues Sherman described, she said there has not been a significant increase in the number of students referred to school social workers compared to last year, “but what they are reporting is an increase in the complexity and acuity of the issues that students and families are dealing with.”

Sherman noted that schools provide social workers and youth counsellors, and that, in the elementary grades, part of the physical education curriculum is devoted to mental health literacy.

For support outside of school, families can access Pathstone Mental Health, which provides walk-in clinics, and a crisis and support line. Pathstone is now the centralized intake for child and youth mental health care, and families no longer have to call Contact Niagara first.

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Niagara Lion Terry Flynn (left) with Victoria and Luke Skubel, and Leos (right) gather with Lion Bradd Anderson after unloading trees at the St. Davids Lions York Road hall. (Supplied)



Local Staff

The Niagara Lions and the St. Davids Lions Clubs are back in the seasonal business of selling Christmas trees as fundraisers to allow them give back to the community.

The Niagara Lions sale is at the Niagara Stone Road Campus of Cornerstone Community Church and is open Monday to Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday 9

a.m. to 7 p.m.

Niagara Lions are dedicating their sale to the memory of John Skubel, who looked after the event for decades.

At the St. Davids Lions York Road hall, Lions, Leos and their parents helped to unload more than 500 trees.

Their sale is open weekdays from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. and weekends from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m. Candy canes are free.

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Write 4 Rights with local Amnesty group

Penny Coles
The Local

Amnesty Niagara is holding a Write 4 Rights letter-writing campaign again this year, hoping for a good turnout of supporters who will help put pressure on foreign governments to release prisoners of conscience.

JL Groux says Amnesty International Group 137 was formed more than 30 years ago, the length of time he's been a member. He thinks it could have been closer to 50 years, and now is the only group left between NOTL and Hamilton. The 12 members are also planning a letter-writing event in St. Catharines, to get a bigger response from across Niagara.

International Human Rights Day is Dec. 10, and Amnesty groups will be holding letter-writing campaigns across Canada and around the world, says Groux. Write 4 Rights is considered the largest human rights event in the world.

The local group will hold their event Dec. 8, the first since before COVID, and will meet at the community centre cafe to send letters focusing on five cases worldwide of peaceful people who have been im-

prisoned, as well as for one particular prisoner of conscience, a Canadian imprisoned in China.

Huseyin Celil, a human rights activist, is a Canadian citizen from Ontario who has been in a Chinese prison for 17 years. His case will be taken up in Amnesty letters world-wide.

Celil was also the subject of letter-writing in 2019, and although he has still not been released, people began to hear his treatment in prison had improved, with the government and the prison guards realizing "the eyes of the world are on them," says Amnesty member Pam Wilson. "We do know of successes when people are released, and even if they are not right away, their treatment improves because of the letters."

Celil's is a tragic story.

Groux explains there are about one million Muslim Uyghurs in China's western province of Xinjiang. Celil fled China in 2001 after being in jail for supporting the religious and political rights of the Uyghur people. The United Nations recognized him as a refugee, and he arrived in Canada that year with his wife Kamila, from Uzbekistan, with their first

child. After they settled, two more boys were born, and he became a Canadian citizen in 2005.

In 2006, when Kamila was pregnant with their fourth child, the family travelled to Uzbekistan to visit her family. The police in China found out he was there, and asked the police to arrest and deport him, which they did.

The Chinese authorities falsely accused him of serious offences because of his activities in support of Uyghur rights, says Groux.

They threatened and tortured him and forced him to sign a confession, and the Chinese government refused to recognize him as a Canadian citizen. He was sentenced to life in prison in China, where he remains today, although his sentence has been reduced to 20 years.

Kamila has settled in Burlington with her children, says Groux. The Niagara group will be writing letters and sending them to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly, the Chinese ambassador, and others — in total, around the world, millions of letters will be sent.



Pam Wilson, Nora McLellan and JL Groux have letters to write. The Amnesty Niagara members will be at the community centre Dec. 8, hoping for a good turn-out of letter writers to join them. (Penny Coles)

The group rarely gets feedback from their letters, he adds, "but we know of people who have been released. You may hear nothing, but something is happening. When you receive millions of letters from around the world, you bet it has an impact."

The group also hoped to have a flag-raising at the town hall for Human Rights Day, as they have in the past, but when they approached the town recently they were told the policy has changed, and they had to register in September. "We missed that boat," says Groux,

"but we've already registered for next year."

Amnesty members will have all the information needed for the Write 4 Rights event Friday, Dec. 8 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the community centre cafe, and will also be collecting money to pay for postage.



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Buttons help fund Christmas Parade

Penny Coles
The Local

Thanks to a committee of local men who like to meet for morning coffee, an annual tradition providing financial support for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Christmas Parade began again last week.

Parade buttons designed by a local artist are being sold for \$3, although organizer John Strecker said people often throw much more in the button boxes that are at local stores in town, and often donate \$10 or \$20 on parade day.

The first year, he said, about 500 buttons were sold. Last year it was more than 2,000.

He recalls in the early years the design on the button was restricted to just two colours, “I haven’t any idea why,” but that has changed, and there is much more freedom for artists to produce colourful Christmas designs.

At first, well-known local artists, such as Trisha Romance and Angie Strauss, were asked to create a design. In recent years, however, it has been chosen through submissions from Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre artists.

This year Gail Kerr, an active Pumphouse volunteer and local artist, submitted a drawing of a Nutcracker, one she describes as fun and whimsical, which was chosen for the button.

Parade button sales generally cover a good portion



The coffee group that meets at the community centre for coffee, where often at this time of year the conversation turns to Christmas Parade buttons, includes (back) Gerry Brand, Robin Fraser, John Strecker and Merle Obee, with (front) Mike Carleton, Guy Hamilton, Bob McDonald, Roger Schmid, and Dan Djakalovic. Missing from the photo is Terry Choules. (Penny Coles)

tion of the marching bands and other costs incurred, said Strecker. Paying the bands, mostly their cost of transportation, costs about \$13,000 a year.

Bruce Pospiech had been co-chair of the Christmas Parade Committee for 30 years, until he passed away in 2019. At one point he convinced his friend Bob Cheriton to co-chair with him, which he

did for two decades, until the parade was cancelled during COVID.

In 2020, Cheriton decided to pull away from his role on the committee — in addition to Pospiech, he had lost two other friends who were committee members, John Fryer and Dennis Dick. Cheriton died in 2022, after a long and courageous battle with cancer.

This year, town parks and recreation director Kevin Turcotte has taken over, said Strecker, with Couns. Erwin Wiens and Tim Balasiuk also on the parade committee.

Strecker’s work on the subcommittee that looks after button sales began several years ago, when he moved to town and reconnected with Cheriton, a friend from the days of working together

in Toronto. Strecker wanted to get involved in the community, and with a background in marketing, decided developing button sales was a good way for him to do that.

Strecker was also meeting with a group of men for coffee at the community centre, and before long, he had several of them on the button committee.

The parade committee, he said, looks after everything else, from float entries to the Santa float to marshals along the route.

This year, several favourite bands are returning, including the Top Hat Band, the Burlington Teen Band, the Lincoln and Welland Regiment Band, and the York Steel Band.

The button boxes are traditionally placed in businesses after Remembrance Day, so as not to coincide with poppy distribution, and are throughout the Old Town, St. Davids and Virgil, at Sweets and Swirls in the Community Centre, at the Sandtrap Pub and Grill, the Avondales on Mary Street and

in St. Davids, Starbucks on Queen Street and in Virgil, Hendriks Your Independent Grocer, Tim Hortons in Virgil, The Junction in St. Davids and at the Royal Canadian Legion hall.

Buttons will also be sold by volunteers on Saturday, Nov. 25 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in front of Penners Home Building Centre and Phil’s Your Independent Grocer in Virgil — they always do a good volume when they are out selling in person, said Strecker.

And the big blitz occurs on the day of the parade, when any buttons remaining will be sold — they usually sell out, he added.

All together, the parade is expected to have more than 100 entries.

The Christmas Parade is Saturday, Dec. 9, beginning at 11 a.m. The parade will start at the intersection of King and Centre Street in Old Town and travel its traditional route down Castlereagh, Wellington, Byron/Prideaux, Simcoe and Queen Streets, ending on Queen near the cenotaph.

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REAL ESTATE WILLS BUSINESS

Artist Gail Kerr designs this year's parade button

Penny Coles
The Local

This year's Christmas Parade button, sold to provide financial support for the annual event, was designed by Gail Kerr, a local artist who is an active volunteer for the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre.

Pumphouse artists are traditionally asked to submit a design to the parade button committee, and this year hers was chosen.

The button is an adaptation of her fun, colourful and whimsical *Nutcracker* painting on display at the arts centre, in a style that is a departure for her.

She describes it as pop art from the '50s and '60s, a movement inspired by popular and commercial culture. Two of the most famous examples, she says, are artist Andy Warhol's

paintings of Marilyn Monroe and the Campbell's Soup can. Pop art, she explains, took everyday images and simplified them, often with bold splashes of colour.

Her typical style is impressionist or realist paintings, says Kerr, but for the button, which supports such a fun community event, she thought it would be fitting to create something in a style that would be both fun and representative of that venue.

She started by going on a shopping trip and purchasing two Nutcrackers 16 inches tall, she explained, and then painting the one she decided she liked best. That framed artwork is now on display and for sale at the Pumphouse until Dec. 10, as part of the members' winter exhibition.

The design then had to be

somewhat cropped for the button, to fit the shape and size of it, but she has also had the full watercolour image printed as greeting cards, which are for sale at the Pumphouse and at The Shawp, the Shaw Festival retail store.

A portion of the sales, she says, will be divided between the Shaw and the Pumphouse, "both causes that are dear to my heart."

She has been affiliated with the Pumphouse since she came to Niagara-on-the-Lake about eight years ago, including a stint as manager when director Rima Boles was on maternity leave, and helping with renovations to the building through her experience as an interior designer, which involved supervising contractors.

Pumphouse programs, she says, are intended to reach out

to the community, including children and seniors, "making art and learning about art available to everybody."

"There is a little bit of an

artist in everyone," she continues. "Everybody has art in them that they can express, through many different ways."

This is what the Pump-

house promotes, Kerr says, by providing "a platform for everyone to get involved with the visual arts, creating art, appreciating art and celebrating art."



The painting and Christmas cards with the painting's image are on sale at the Pumphouse, and the cards are also at the Shaw Festival Shawp. (Penny Coles)

Boaks wins second place in brush off competition



NOTL artist Ronald Boaks' mixed media collage piece, *Blue Venus*, won second prize recently in the International Brush Off Competition, beating artists from across Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Alberta, Manitoba and Arkansas. The competition raises funds to support art-based programs for those with Alzheimer's, enriching the quality of their lives. Boaks entered to honour his own family members who suffered with the disease. Voting is still open for the competition's People's Choice Award. You can support Boaks by visiting avenueart.ca/voting-page-peoples-choice-award-2023.html. The winner will be announced on Nov. 25.

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Rosalynn Carter's death leads to memories of visit

Mike Balsom
The Local

The passing of First Lady Rosalynn Carter at age 96 at her home in Atlanta, Georgia, last weekend gave Niagara-on-the-Lake's Debi Pratt a chance to reflect on a 1996 visit to the town by Rosalynn and her husband Jimmy, the 39th President of the United States.

Many of the national and international stories on Rosalynn's passing quoted Jimmy as claiming his wife was his political partner, equal to him in every way before, during and after his presidency, and the most important person in his life.

That was certainly in evidence during their 1996 visit to Niagara, says Pratt.

"Throughout the visit to Inniskillin they were there as a couple, celebrating their anniversary," Pratt tells The Local. "It wasn't him leading the way as a former president. You could see the magic between them. That has always stayed with me."

Back in July 1996, Pratt received a call from George Bailey, who was head of public relations with the Niagara Parks Commission at the time. He asked Pratt, who was the manager of hospitality at Inniskillin Winery, if she would be able to accommodate a VIP.

"He couldn't tell me who it was," she says. "I asked him to give me a date so I could ensure that Donald (Ziraldo) and Karl (Kaiser) would be here to greet whoever it was."

Just a few days before their arrival, Pratt was told it was to be the Carters, so she sat down and began planning the visit with Ziraldo and Kaiser.

The Carters were visiting Niagara on their 50th



Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter visited and toured Inniskillin Winery in 1996 with Debi Pratt, who organized the tour, and co-founder Donald Ziraldo with Karl Kaiser. (Brock University Archives)

anniversary. Photos on the Niagara Falls Public Library's website show them posing on the Niagara River Parkway in front of the falls and in front of the Floral Clock.

Their itinerary included a sojourn on the Maid of the Mist, the Journey Behind the Falls and a tour of the brand new Butterfly Conservatory. In addition, they enjoyed a leisurely stroll in Niagara-on-the-Lake and a stop for lunch at the Oban Inn.

But before lunch, Pratt, Ziraldo and Kaiser hosted them at Inniskillin.

"We had our self-guided tour at that time," Pratt recalls. "They arrived around 10:30 that morning. Donald took them on the tour, showing them the maps that explained why we could grow the grapes here. They were both really interested in the whole process."

The tour ended in the

loft, where they usually took important guests for a tasting.

"We did the chardonnay and then Donald did the icewine," says Pratt. "Just two wines, because past experience told us that former presidents don't drink much."

They also served the Carters, former peanut farmers from Georgia, a bowl of peanuts.

Before they arrived, says Pratt, Ziraldo visited Picard's Peanuts to buy two bags of their best product, grown in Ontario.

"When we were setting up, Donald told me to open one bag of peanuts and put it in a bowl," she says, "and to not open the other bag. He told me not to put the bowl out until he gave me a nod after the tasting."

Both Carters asked a number of questions during the tasting. When they were done, Ziraldo

nodded to Pratt and she went to get the bowl of peanuts.

"He told them that they were peanuts grown in Ontario," says Pratt. "The president didn't believe him. They tried the peanuts and agreed that they were delicious, but they still didn't think they were grown in Ontario."

So Pratt left and returned with the bag of Picard's Peanuts, clearly marked with "product of Ontario," and presented it to the Carters as a gift for them to take home.

"What I loved about what Donald did was how he made the parallel between all the people that told him and Karl they couldn't grow their grapes here to people thinking that good peanuts couldn't be grown here," Pratt marvels.

It's an example, she says, of how Ziraldo always had the fortunes of the region in mind, and not just the

success of his own winery at top of mind. It was just natural to him.

The Local reached out to Picard's head office in Windham Centre, Ontario, where Mackenzie Picard answered the phone. She said the peanuts would have been bought from the company's Fonthill store back then, which was managed by her late grandfather, Jim.

Her own father, also named Jim, had no recollection of the Carter incident. A story from the St. Catharines Standard confirmed that it happened but never named Picard's Peanuts. In fact, unless Ziraldo followed up with a call to Picard's, they may never have known about the president sampling their product.

Pratt also recalls the Carters being very interested in the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired design of

the Inniskillin barn. She credits that to the couple's support of Habitat for Humanity. When told that a Buffalo-based architect had refuted Ziraldo's original belief that Wright himself had designed the barn, Pratt said that Carter jokingly suggested that Ziraldo bribe him.

Another memory involves Kaiser, Inniskillin's winemaker, being a bit nervous about meeting the president and first lady. He wasn't sure what to wear, as his usual work attire involved jeans and T-shirt.

"He was wearing jeans and a nice shirt," Pratt says, "and I told him he looked fine. It was just a casual visit, not formal. He went home anyway and put on dress pants, a nicer shirt and a blazer. Then when Jimmy and Rosalynn got out of the car, Jimmy was wearing blue jeans."

When all of their touring was over, the Carters returned to their hotel, the Ramada Renaissance in Niagara Falls. Coincidentally, there they ran into former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who was visiting the area with his granddaughter.

Pratt says whenever she thinks of the Carters she remembers their visit to Inniskillin and all the funny stories that happened that July day. And with Rosalynn's passing last weekend it's all coming back to her.

At 99 years old, Jimmy Carter is the longest-living president in U.S. history. Back in February he opted to stop full-scale medical care and entered hospice care at the couple's Georgia home. He has hung on since, celebrating his latest birthday on Oct. 1.

Mrs. Carter is also survived by her four children, 11 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, and her sister, Lillian Allethea Smith Wall.





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World Toilet Day a perfect time to learn about sewage

Mike Balsom
The Local

Once it's flushed down the toilet, it has to go somewhere.

Last Friday about 20 people from St. Catharines and Niagara-on-the-Lake had a chance to take a deep look into exactly where it all goes.

The tour of the Port Weller Wastewater Treatment Plant was offered to coincide with World Toilet Day, which is recognized by the United Nations annually on Nov. 19. The purpose of the day is to draw attention to the importance of effective sanitation to health across the world.

Believe it or not, there are still 3.5 billion people living without safe toilets, according to the UN. Almost 420 million of them still practise open defecation. These situations are open incubators for disease, killing 1,000 children under five years old every single day. It's a global crisis that poses a threat to nature and to everyone's health, particularly to vulnerable groups.

In Niagara, 11 wastewater treatment facilities, including the one on Lakeshore Road in NOTL, process 187.5 million litres per day of sewage. The Port Weller facility treats about 3.5 million litres daily from much of St. Catharines and Thorold as well as the Port Weller East section of NOTL. The final product — cleaned, disinfected water — is released safely into the Great Lakes.

The tour, led by facility operations manager Mike Hall and Amanda Deschenes, the region's engagement and education coordinator for wastewater and public works, began at the headworks. It's where the wastewater flows into the facility via the trunk sewer, a pipe Hall estimates to be between 48 and 60 inches in diameter.

From there it is directed into a building where it first runs through a mechanical bar screen designed to automatically filter out all those items that people should not be flushing down their toilets.

"Sticks, wood, toys and things like that," Hall said. "We've seen rats, raccoons, bunnies, money, dentures, jewellery, phones, concrete, you name it. We don't want that kind of material going through our other equipment. It can damage significant portions of our treatment process."

This first step uses an automated rake system that picks up the debris, dumps it into a conveyor where the water content is removed, and deposits all of it into a dumpster. The water is re-

leased back into the treatment stream while the compacted solids get sent to a landfill.

From there, the wastewater flows into the second process for grit removal. Here, the water is funnelled through a conical screen designed to filter out the finer solid matter from the water, the materials the bar screening process didn't catch. Hall shows the group the results of the second step, a small pile of sand-like grains sitting at the bottom of a large bin, waiting to be disposed of.

Then the wastewater is sent off for primary clarification, the first step in the actual treatment process.

As Hall explained, these two large outdoor tanks primarily use a chemical added to the water to help bind coagulants, creating clumps that sink to the bottom. Those solids are removed while the cleaner, aerated water flows off the top to the next step.

A mechanical bridge-like structure slowly moves over both tanks. Far below is a rake that picks up all the heavier organic matter and sends it to a series of pits at the end of the tank. Those clumps are sent to the solids stream, where they will eventually be treated at an anaerobic digester.

The group moves on to view two other aeration tanks. Brownish-coloured water violently roils below a mixer that forces oxygen into the wastewater. In each of the eight cells propellers spin the water at a high velocity to speed up the aeration process, mixing ambient air into the liquid.

"The reason we do that is because the microorganisms need oxygen to be activated to be happy," said Hall. "When we make those microorganisms happy they do the job for us. A lot of this is a biological treatment. We just facilitate the microorganisms to clean the water."

It's much quieter at the secondary clarifier treatment area. Again, a rake drags along the bottom of these tanks collecting the finer sludge that were not picked up in the primary process. Clear, treated water flows along the perimeter of the tanks, in marked contrast to the dirtier-looking water the group saw in the previous step. It looks no different than tap water.

The water then runs underground into a building where it is disinfected by coming into contact with sodium hypochlorite, a type of bleach.

"It kills any excess microorganisms, viruses and bacteria," explained Hall, "so the water that we release into the lake doesn't contain

that, causing e-coli issues."

Hall and Deschenes both insist that any e-coli issues at nearby beaches have nothing to do with the water released by any of the region's treatment plants. In fact, Hall says they have extremely strict discharge limits, and is proud that the Port Weller plant consistently tests far below those standards.

Finally, before that water is released into Lake Ontario, it runs through a series of channels in an outdoor tank, where a mixture of salts called sodium bisulfite removes any traces of chlorine to ensure the final product is safe for marine life.

The chlorination process, by the way, is only used from April 1 to October 31.

"We don't chlorinate in the winter," said Hall. "Bacteria and viruses don't proliferate at low temperatures. There's no benefit or need to disinfect at those lower temperatures. That's typically the case across the province."

Virgil residents Clair Cronier and Jane Davies eagerly took part in the tour Friday.

"The treatment of sewage has always been a concern to me," Cronier told The Local. "I come from a background of biology. I just wanted to know how well we were doing here in dealing with our sewage. I wanted to see it with my own eyes."

"It was a great tour," Davies added. "It feels good to know what is happening. I think we're doing the best we can with the money that we have. I feel confident that at least from a biological point of view the water will be safe from bacteria."

Hall stresses that the Port Weller facility was originally opened in 1965. With upgrades just a few short years ago to the NOTL plant, operations there use some newer technologies to complete the same three-step process to treat wastewater.

Deschenes adds that with the Niagara Region's population expected to grow exponentially, eventually a new treatment plant may need to be built.

With the Region voting for a 7.95 per cent water and wastewater rate hike for 2024 just a few days ago, the issue of the cost to run such a massive facility came up at the end of the tour.

"When you look at it from a cost-benefit perspective," Hall said, "the access to clean water and waste services really does allow us all to live all aspects of our lives fully and in a healthy way."

"Not having clean water," added Deschenes, "is a huge risk to public health. It's costly, but it's crucial."



Tour participants take a look at the mechanical bar screen that picks out large solid items from the wastewater early in the process after it arrives at the Port Weller Wastewater Treatment Plant.



Mike Hall explains to the tour participants how the secondary clarification process works.



The final step in the clarification process as gravity feeds the clean water into Lake Ontario.

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Simpson says he's a man with many families

Continued from page 1

His sister Murial lives in Goderich in a retirement home, and was the first Simpson to be paraded down a main street as a young Blossom Queen. The youngest, Margaret, at 86, lives in Hamilton. "I ruined her teenage years," says Simpson. "She had to take me everywhere." And despite him being the younger brother who tagged along, "she says she still loves me. Thanks, Margie."

That was to be just one of many expressions of gratitude throughout the evening, beginning with his "wife and partner Oresta, my support not only in business but in all my volunteer activities."

While he went to work from their Welland home to a pharmacy in NOTL, she was bringing up two small children by day and helping him with business records and billing at night, he said.

When they moved to NOTL and he began volunteering in the community, "she was 100 per cent in favour. She should be the Living Landmark." He was also supported by his two children, Lisa and Sean. "While Dad was doing community service, they were very patient, and we enjoyed our special time together," including him coaching them "in their various sporting activities and life's activities. I am proud that they both are great human beings but they also became pharmacists, which told me I never complained about my profession. I am also very proud they are thoughtful, caring contributors to society."

Also family was the Virgil Business Association for more than 30 years. He helped with the stampede — first in charge

of the Mousy Mousy game, where people would bet on which hole a mouse would run into, until "the SPCA put a stop to that. Then Mary (Snider) put me in charge of the pig races, where pigs would run a steeplechase race on a very short track. The SPCA put a stop to that too."

Next came the Bingo tent, "finally a position that fit my Irish Catholic background, and did not involve the SPCA," he joked.

Next came his parish family of St. Vincent de Paul, the new arena fundraiser, with a group of people who "really became a family over the years," and then the new family to raise funds to build the community centre.

There was also the Rotary Club family working together on all kinds of projects, and of course "the family at Simpson's Pharmacy," that was very special. "I have never worked with more caring, reliable friends," he said. "They made it fun to come into work, they make it fun to be at work."

He made special mention of Elly Forbes, "who started with me one week after I opened the store, and is still putting in some hours at the pharmacy."

Next came Red Roof Retreat, "the small charity with a big heart," providing programs for children with special needs. "When these children arrive at Red Roof their eyes brighten up, smiles come to their faces," he said, "and to the faces of the staff there to look after them."

When he agreed to lead the fundraising to buy The Ranch property on Concession 6, he said, "I found out you can't say no to Steffanie (Bjorgan), founder and executive director of Red Roof, but more impor-

tantly its heart beat." And then, he said, "there is the community family. This is the best community to raise a family, have a business, and make friends."

Simpson touched on the politics of the town and how it has changed, and went on with what he admitted was "a bit of a rant" about losing schools, Upper Canada Lodge about to close, and his "biggest beef," the mess at the post office, asking people to take their papers and flyers home to their recycling boxes.

"So, if that is my biggest disappointment, then all is well in NOTL. I'm proud to tell people I'm from NOTL, and prouder when they say how luck we are to live here."

And lastly he said, he is thrilled to be joining the Niagara Foundation family of Living Landmarks, thanking foundation members for the honour.

Niagara Foundation president Lyle Hall spoke briefly of the work of the charitable organization established in 1962 to promote the history, traditions and culture of the Niagara area, initially focusing on identifying and preserving historic buildings.

"More recently though, we've concentrated on advocacy, addressing the rapid and significant changes brought about through growth and associated development, mostly residential."

He spoke of future growth, with a population that was 12,500 in 1971, a year after the town and township became NOTL, that with its rate of growth will be 29,000 by 2051, and the need for a plan to accommodate thousands of addition residents, "not only where they live, but where they shop, educate their children, recreate and otherwise enjoy their community."

While development is inevitable, "it doesn't have to involve destroying heritage streetscapes, the very thing that makes all our villages unique."

Town council "has a big job, and a big responsibility, to manage this growth through their current and subsequent terms," said Hall.

The Foundation also has

a job: "to maintain the history, traditions and culture of NOTL, something we hope to do in lockstep with council, and in a way that results in a community where we want to

live and invite others to visit. The bottom line is that change is inevitable, but so is the responsibility to ensure that the essence of our town isn't lost in the shuffle."



Ward and Oresta Simpson. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, Niagara Foundation president Lyle Hall, St. Mark's Rev. Leighton Lee, who said grace, and Coun. Burroughs, who offered a pre-dinner toast.



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Town needs to complete due diligence

Continued from page 2

agreement being settled first.

"As stewards of tax money, we're obligated to ensure that all processes are followed," Wiens said.

He also echoed O'Connor — that provincial legislation related to MAT would not allow it.

"It's really that simple," he said. "We can't transfer money absent of that agreement" and noted there have been "no delays at all" on the town's side of the process.

"As soon as the town has been approached for anything, there's back and forth between the lawyers to make sure this agreement is signed," said Wiens, who also expressed the importance of it being formalized correctly, considering MAT revenue will generate

"millions" of dollars in the coming years.

On Monday, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa provided a statement to The Local, saying the town is grateful to the chamber and tourism organization for the vital roles they both play.

He said the town has been working co-operatively with Tourism NOTL on the MAT transfer agreement, and that both sides are "dedicated to maintaining open lines of communication, continuing to foster collaboration, and adhering to the process established."

Before issuing MAT funds, the town needs to complete its due diligence to ensure financial accountability measures are in place in the form of an agreement, he said.

"By following the process established, I am optimistic that the town and Tourism

NOTL will ensure fiscal responsibility and achieve a mutually satisfactory agreement that is beneficial to both parties and the community," said the lord mayor.

Following last Tuesday's meeting, Ward said in a statement to The Local that the town's "delays" have put the chamber and Tourism NOTL in a "very difficult position, starving the DMO of much-needed funds while the MAT sits in an account."

She also agreed to a phone interview the next morning, but later said all questions would need to be handled by chamber board chair Andrew Niven.

He was given a number of specific questions about how the tourism group plans to continue marketing the town without having MAT funds in

its possession, whether a breakdown of what exactly the funds were being spent on was provided to the town, when a new tourism board will be formed, among other inquiries.

He said the chamber board is "committed to the process and is optimistic that a mutually satisfactory agreement will be reached and the MAT funds will be received in a timely manner."

He also said the board is "equally committed to strengthening our relationship with the town council and staff, while working collaboratively with their tourism strategy committee and marketing Niagara-on-the-Lake as a special and unique destination."

Referring to talks resuming Tuesday, he said he's "confident of a positive and collaborative path forward."

Stunning Virgil mural installation complete

Penny Coles
The Local

An idea put forth by the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre about 18 months ago came to fruition Thursday with the installation of a large mural on the front of the Niagara Orchard and Vineyard building.

It took some time to raise the money to pay for the street-facing art project, and to work out the details and logistics. But once started around 9 a.m., the installation was completed in a matter of about four hours, creating a stunning display of a painting by local artist Ron Clavier reproduced on aluminum panels, and timed to be part of a Virgil beautification plan to coincide with the reconstruction on Niagara Stone Road.

The original painting is an oil on canvas, 30" by 36", called *Day's End*, which Clavier describes as the work day of a

farmer ending "with exhaustion and the satisfaction of having made a valuable contribution."

It took a team of people and skills to complete the installation, starting with painting one section of the building — passersby couldn't help but notice the vivid blue, painted by The Scottish Painter, Tony McCafferty, on a yellow corrugated wall, which then needed time to cure, said Gail Kerr, an artist and volunteer with the Pumphouse.

Kerr, a retired interior designer with an extensive background working with contractors, was asked by the Pumphouse to take on the job of overseeing the art installation.

Also involved in the project were graphic designer Sonia Wilkinson, and The Printing House in St. Catharines. On-site Thursday were Terry Fleming, Frank Doolittle and Shane Fleming, experts in custom graphics installations. And it was all done

with support from Arnie Lepp, owner of the Niagara Orchard and Vineyard building.

That it all came together in time for Thursday, which turned out to be a perfect day for the job, said Kerr, was good luck. "We had no idea what to expect in the way of weather," she said. Because the panels are thin aluminum — actually two layers, with vinyl in the middle — the work would have been too dangerous to carry out on a windy day, although it would have gone ahead if it had rained. But the day was calm, the sun was shining, and the men doing the installation were happy to work in T-shirts, when, as they said, at this time of year it could just as easily have been jackets and gloves.

Clavier arrived partway through the process to admire the work they were doing, saying he was excited and pleased to see how well it was turning out.

"I'm totally thrilled with how it looks, and totally honoured that my work was chosen."

Clavier told The Local he spent summers at a cottage on a farm north of Montreal, with "a kindly farmer" who let him and other kids help out with simple chores.

"In addition to learning how to work hard and have fun while doing it, this gave me a first-hand and lasting appreciation for the farmer's dedication to the land," said Clavier. "I also learned never to take for granted the food that comes so plentifully to us, especially as I grew older and realized that so many people on our planet have nothing comparable to our food security."

A trip as an adult to Steinbeck country in California led to an art exhibit of his work at the Pumphouse, and then another focusing on local farming, involving Clavier and five other

local artists entitled *Celebrating Wine Country*. *Day's End* was included in the exhibition.

About a year ago, Clavier said, "Lise Andreana told me about NOTL's plan to beautify Virgil. It was her idea to propose a mural for Arnie Lepp's building, and she felt that *Day's End* would be the perfect piece for it. I gladly gave my permission to use the image, and Arnie gladly approved of using his building."

"I want to emphasize that *Day's End* is not meant to reflect the highly skilled and scientific technological nature of today's NOTL farming," he added, but "is a nostalgic look back at the farmer, with his straw hat and horse-powered plough that I and many of NOTL's residents and visitors remember from our youth and childhood."

His painting had to be adapted somewhat to fit the size and shape of the mural, explained Kerr. "We had to final-

ize the drawing so that it didn't change much from the original. And it was all done with Ron's approval. The whole process has been a collaboration."

It also highlights, she added, "the important role the Pumphouse plays in bringing art to the community."

For almost 30 years, the Pumphouse has fulfilled that role through exhibits, programs and successful projects to promote public art, such as the NOTL Hydro box beautification initiative, with its mandate to "engage, enrich and celebrate the diverse and growing population through visual arts," Andreana reminded council when the Virgil art project was first discussed. This installation is seen as a next step, not only enhancing Virgil's aesthetic appeal, she said, but also reminding "locals and visitors alike of the importance of agriculture and the visual arts in our community."



Gail Kerr, who organized the project and contractors, chats with Frank Doolittle, Shane Fleming and Terry Fleming before the Virgil mural installation work began Thursday morning. (Penny Coles)



The first of 12 panels goes up. (Gail Kerr)



The panels with the painting's name, *Day's End*, and artist Ron Clavier's signature are complete. (Penny Coles)



Artist Ron Clavier stops to see the work underway, and says he is thrilled with how it looks. (Penny Coles)



A lift truck is needed for the top panels. (Gail Kerr)



A separate piece of wall has a permanent panel giving recognition to the sponsors of the project. (Penny Coles)



The mural installation was completed less than four hours after the work started. (Mike Balsom)

Pumphouse Holiday Market a great place for unique gifts

Maria Klassen
The Local

As we hear more Christmas songs being played, and see Christmas decor wherever we go, we are reminded that the Christmas season is drawing near, and it is time to think of what we would like to gift our family and friends.

A great place to shop is the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre's Holiday Market. This indoor event will be open from Dec. 1 to 10, in the art centre's beautifully decorated lobby and galleries. A wide variety of one-of-a-kind handcrafted items by talented artisans

will be available. Festive Christmas trees will be hung with handmade ornaments and stocking stuffers, all available for purchase.

Joanne Morandin, Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre's events board member says, "The Holiday Market is a fantastic way to kick off the holiday season. It's a unique and festive atmosphere that truly captures the spirit of the holiday. The amazing array of creations by very talented artists will ensure everyone finds that special something for family and friends."

If you are looking for a wood-themed gift, there

are several vendors. JS Benchworks is an artisan duo that repurposes wood. They embrace materials that come their way into creative works of art, always prioritizing sustainability through material reuse.

Dezigned For U is a husband and wife team that together create birdhouses and other wood crafts, sourcing old barn tin and antique pieces to add character to their work.

Kreations by Kerri — Farmhouse Decor uses materials like old farmhouse windows and reclaimed wooden spools, repurposing local treasures into rustic farm-

house decor.

The Owl and Easel crafter transforms wood into personalized word art for special events, reclaiming and upcycling wood from various sources.

For gifts of jewellery there are several choices. Shimmer Jewellery Designs offers unique pieces of bead-weaving using needle, thread, glass beads and crystals. Coconut Quartz designs include artistic pieces that combine meaningful colour and stone combinations, using high-quality gemstone beads to craft wearable art. A new vendor this year is Effusive Arts, jewellery focusing mainly on copper. Other metals, such as brass, aluminum and silver, are incorporated into some of the work.

Vendors of self-care products include Body Soup for the Soul, the place to stop for natural products inspired by lavender fields in Provence. The line includes skin and body care, therapeutic products and candles created by a certified aromatherapist.

New to the market is Niagara Homespun Botanicals. Artisanal soap bars and skincare products are inspired by nature, free from synthetic ingredients and fragrances and packaged in eco-friendly materials.

Proceeds from the

event go toward programs for children and seniors, including art kits for seniors and free art camps for children and youth.

Entry is free, with those who attend encouraged to bring non-perishable food donations for the Newark Neighbours Food Bank. Shoppers are also asked to bring their own bag. Major credit cards are accepted.

Dec. 1 and 2, the doors are open from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. From Dec. 3 to 10 it is 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come to shop, support local programs at the arts centre and bring donations for Newark Neighbours. What a great way to celebrate the season!



Handcrafted products at the Pumphouse Holiday Market include Coconut Quartz, JS Benchworks, Niagara Homespun Botanicals and Body Soup for the Soul, natural lavender products. (Photos supplied)



Friends of Fort George say thanks for the cake

Local Staff

The Friends of Fort George stopped by to meet Sean O'Donnell at Willow Cakes and Pastries earlier

this week, to say thanks for once again donating their time, effort, supplies, space, and skills for the huge cake for Canada Day, but to also give a donation to help sup-

port their efforts. For more than 10 years, Willow Cakes and Pastries has donated a 4'x8' cake that is designed by Catherine O'Donnell and her

team, and that travels along Queen Street to Simcoe Park on July 1, where it is distributed to more than 2,000 residents and visitors each year.

Earlier this year, the Friends of Fort George were successful in their request to the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for financial support for Canada Day to cover the cost of the fireworks, as well as the Cake Parade.

The Friends of Fort

George received \$1,000 from the town, and of that \$600 was donated to Willow, with the remainder of the money used on purchasing all of the supplies for the parade, says Amanda Gamble, executive director of the Friends of Fort George.

"Canada Day Celebrations in Niagara-on-the-Lake are truly a community event, including many volunteers from the Friends of Fort George,

the Niagara-on-the-Lake Rotary Club, and many local businesses like Willow Cakes and Pastries that support the days' festivities — we are so glad we can support each other this way, and are looking forward to working together again in 2024."

For many locals, the Cake Parade is the highlight of the Canada Day celebrations "and we owe a huge Thank You to Willow Cakes and Pastries," says Gamble.



Sean O'Donnell of Willow Cakes and Pastries is given a cheque from Amanda Gamble of the Friends of Fort George to help pay for the Canada Day cake Willow bakes every year. (Supplied)

Women's Institute to host Elder Abuse discussion

Local Staff

The Virgil Women's Institute and the Women Empowered WI are hosting a not-for-profit community awareness program on elder abuse.

The Niagara Elder Abuse Prevention Network in partnership with Crime Stoppers of Niagara are presenting "Be Aware . . . Take Care", a safe guide for the community.

The Virgil Women's Institute and Women Empowered WI are members of the

Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, a charitable organization, says Margaret Byl, president.

The event is Wednesday, Nov. 29, in the Mary Snider Room of the Centennial Arena in Virgil, from 7 to 9 p.m.

Pleasant Manor will hold bazaar after four-year absence

Local Staff

Pleasant Manor is having its annual bazaar after a four-year halt.

"We are baking and decorating cookies this morning in the kitchen at Niagara Mennonite Church," says volunteer Anne Litke.

The bazaar will offer its famous fleisch perishky meat buns, she says, and many cookies and baked items.

"We will also be offering our wonderful Tea Room to gather and drink tea and coffee with fresh baked goods, for \$5."

There will be a craft table which will include several

handmade quilts, she says. "You don't want to miss seeing those."

There will be many other items for sale that people have made, and everyone is welcome.

The bazaar is this Saturday, Nov. 23 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Pleasant Manor in Virgil.

Santa Run is raising money for youth collective

Local Staff

The popular Santa Run will return to Simcoe Park this year as a fundraiser for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Youth Collective.

Organized by VR Pro and sponsored by Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty, funds raised will help the youth collective, a safe, accessible and welcoming space for NOTL youth from Grade 6 to 12, offset the costs of the programs they run.

Each entry fee will provide \$5 for the collective, plus participants have the option to run their own campaigns and raise more to support it.

Last year, race participants, both local and visitors, helped raise more than \$5,500, organizers say.

"We are so grateful to NOTL Realty Ltd. for their support," said volunteer Caroline Polgratia.

"We opened our programs on January 16, 2023, and during our winter and spring sessions this support helped certify over 30 new babysitters and provided more than 50 youth with the First Aid Certification."

NOTL Realty encourages their team to get involved in the community, and many of their offices are strong youth advocates, supporting Royal Oak Community School, numerous sport teams and programs, and various cultural and arts events. "We believe when you help someone buy a house, they are buying a home. We feel part of our role is to ensure the community

has the services and programs needed for our clients," says Tom Elltoft, one of the owners of NOTL Realty.

The one-kilometre Elf Run and the five-kilometre Santa Run give everyone an option to come out, have some fun and raise some dollars for a worthy local cause. Registration can include a Santa suit and elf hats, as well as chipped time results, a goodie bag, and a post race breakfast catered by the Irish Harp Pub.

This year's Santa Run begins from Simcoe Park Sunday, Dec. 17, with opening ceremonies at 9:15 a.m. and the main event starting at 10 a.m.

To get involved, please contact Kelly Arnott at kelly@vrpro.ca or Laura Stevenson at laura@vrpro.ca.



Last year's Santa Run raised more than \$5,500 for the youth collective. (Mike Balsom)

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St. Davids citizenship judge wins Community Impact Award

Mike Balsom
The Local

Rochelle Ivri stood on the stage last Thursday looking over the Niagara Women in Business Awards crowd of more than 250 people, mostly women, in attendance at the Marriott on the Falls.

Much to her surprise, she was on stage to accept the Community Impact Award from the Women in Niagara Council, an offshoot of the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce.

“It was great to see all these amazing women doing great things for this region,” says Ivri. “I spent my entire afternoon reading over the brochure, making note of people I want to connect with, stories I want to tell my kids about, and some I can incorporate into my speaking engagements and ceremonies.”

The ceremonies to which she is referring are for Canadian citizenship. For just over five years Ivri has been a citizenship judge with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. In an average week in this role she swears in between 1,200 and 1,500 new Canadians every week.

In the relatively short time that she’s been one of nine judges in the Niagara and Hamilton offices of the department, she has welcomed more than 100,000 newcomers to Canada. Besides her family — husband Eldean and children Elijah, Zachariah, Ezekiel and Michaiiah — she says it’s the most rewarding thing she’s ever done.

Ivri herself comes from an immigrant family. Her mother Valerie came to Canada to visit an uncle in 1967, leaving behind her husband Roosevelt and their son back in Jamaica. On leave from her job as a customs officer there, Valerie went to a Canadian immigration office to extend her visa, where an officer suggested she instead apply for citizenship, so she did.

“It wasn’t her intention when she came to visit, but it’s what happened,” laughs Ivri. “She started working in Canada, then my dad and my brother came up and the rest is history.”

Rochelle was born in Canada, and remembers her mother telling her how much of a privilege it was to be born in this country, with all of the opportunities that status implied.

Prior to applying to become a citizenship judge, Ivri was teaching in Mohawk College’s paralegal program and running an immigration practice part time, helping clients with their entrepreneurship and business applications.

“I saw a posting and re-

alized that all my experiences to that point gave me the skill set to do this job,” she tells The Local. “I applied along with probably thousands of other people, and I was appointed as one of 10 new judges in June 2018.”

Since the pandemic the ceremonies have become a mixture of online and in-person events. The Hamilton and Niagara offices also serve the Kitchener, Windsor and London areas. Each online ceremony typically welcomes 180 to 200 new Canadians. In person, the number depends on the location, but usually it’s about 60 to 80 people.

She’s seen the volume increase exponentially over the past few years, partly because of the convenience of the online ceremonies. She’s also been involved in mega ceremonies in Scarborough and Montreal, which can handle 300 people in a single event, up to 600 in a day.

“It’s a beautiful privilege to be able to do this,” she says. “I am a part of, for most people, one of the most important days of their lives. Most people don’t have the ability to be even a fly on the wall for something like this, never mind an integral part of it.”

She’s a strong believer that every Canadian should attend a citizenship ceremony.

“It gives us a deeper appreciation of what it means to be Canadian,” says Ivri, “and what it means to become a part of the Canadian family.”

Ivri recounts the story of a recent ceremony she presided over in Kitchener. There was a gentleman there crying profusely. He told Ivri that for his entire life he had been stateless. His emotion was a reaction to finally having the feeling that he actually belonged somewhere.

She is currently on leave from Mohawk, but is teaching a course in citizenship in the Queen’s University graduate law program. This week Ivri is preparing for an annual guest speaker slot for Brock University’s Law Plus program.

In addition, she co-founded a mentorship program for Black youth, which earned her the Lincoln Alexander Award, given to an Ontario lawyer who has shown an enduring commitment to community service. She has served on the boards of the NOTL Public Library and Bravo Niagara!, and was the first Black woman appointed to the Niagara Region’s Women’s Advisory Committee.

At the Women in Business celebration, Ivri was handed her award by last year’s winner, NOTL resident Coun. Maria Mavridis. Ivri gave a heartfelt speech that outlined her surprise at even being nominated.

“I felt so special that any-



Maria Mavridis, last year’s winner, presents Rochelle Ivri with her Niagara Women in Business Award. (Mike Balsom)

one would think that I had had such an impact on the community,” says Ivri about her reaction to the nomination. “I have great respect for all of the women who were nominated. I honestly went in with no expectations, so I was pleasantly surprised when my name was called. It’s very affirming of the work I’ve been doing over the years.”

- Full List of 2023 Women in Business Award winners:**
- Business That Gives Back Award, sponsored by Niagara Community Foundation: TD
 - Community Impact Award, sponsored by Anchor Niagara: Rochelle Ivri
 - Corporate Leadership Award, sponsored by Hatch: Cassandra Ogunniyi, Niagara Region
 - Cultural Arts Award, sponsored by CAA Niagara: Jean Bridge, Rodman Art Institute of Niagara
 - Emerging Business Award, sponsored by Niagara Region Economic Development: Stacey Stemplowski, Grounding Balance Wellness & Psychotherapy
 - Entrepreneurship Award, sponsored by The Pen Centre: Lori McDonald, Provisions Food Company
 - Equity Entrepreneur Award, sponsored by Niagara College: Arielle Smith, Fix My Books Inc.
 - Excellence in Trades Award, sponsored by Kraun Electric: Shelley Parker, Alectra Utilities

- Excellence in Hospitality and Tourism Award, sponsored by DDL & Co.: Whitney Rorison, Dillon’s Small Batch Distillers
- Excellence in the Not-for-Profit Sector Award, sponsored by MNP: Nicole Regehr, Gillian’s Place
- Health Care Hero Award, sponsored by Alectra
- Utilities: Karen Lutz, Niagara Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Award, sponsored by Mountain-view Homes: Dr. Darby McGrath, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre
- Young Professional Award, sponsored by Ridley College: Krystal Riddell, Essentials Cremation and Burial Services Inc.
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Youth movement behind the Wolves' Under 18 bench

Mike Balsom
The Local

The next generation of young hockey coaches, average age only 25 years old, is leading the Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves Under 18 rep team this winter. The four young men behind the bench are all former Wolves themselves and thrilled to be giving back to an organization that has meant so much in their lives.

At 27 years old, less than a decade older than much of his squad, head coach Devon Neudorf is the senior statesperson of the staff. He's joined by trainer Kyle Juras, 26, and assistants Mackenzie Berg, 24, and Alex Read, 23.

From hockey school all the way to their own playing days at the U18 (formerly midget) level, all four played their entire minor hockey careers in NOTL.

"The reason I coach," Neudorf tells The Local, "is that I know through all the years that I played minor sports here, someone was always giving their time to me, for my team. To be at this point where I can do the same, I think that's great. I think these guys all feel the same way, too."

The other three nod in agreement to Neudorf's remark.

Even at their young ages none of them are strangers to coaching hockey.

In 2019-2020 Neudorf and Read both helped current club president Pete Flynn coach a U15 team that won the Niagara District League's C championship. Last year the four of them worked with the U15 Wolves rep team, which was a finalist in the Niagara loop and the only team to win a game all season against the champion Fort Erie Meteors.

"We had our sights on coaching this team right from the start," Neudorf explains. "But we wouldn't have been ready to coach this age group until after we had a chance to coach the younger kids last



Noah Whyte scored two goals in the U18 Wolves' win over Port Colborne last week. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

year."

"It was a really big year for us," adds Read. "We grew so much as coaches. It was our first time coaching on our own, without an older adult on the bench taking over. We learned from them and used that last year and now we're mentoring these guys."

All four are excited by the opportunity this year to take their coaching experience to the next level. With the U18 team, they are working with Wolves who have mostly been playing for years, and who have developed most of the skills and basic knowledge of how to play the game.

"It's a huge difference in the skill gap," says Read. "We've gone from boys to Grade 12 men. There's a lot more to do coaching-wise. There's a lot more thinking and analyzing that goes into coaching at this level."

Neudorf adds that they are able to talk about the game at a higher level with this team. They've introduced systems and designed plays that can build on the hockey sense

his players have developed at younger age groups.

Flynn has coached all four of them and shared the bench with Neudorf, Read and Juras.

"They are all such great guys," Flynn says. "They did a really good job with their own team last year. They are all about Niagara-on-the-Lake."

Flynn stresses the importance of young people to step up and volunteer for minor sports organizations. One of his goals since taking the helm as president a few years ago was to ensure that he increased the number of non-parent coaches with the local club.

Berg, Juras, Neudorf and Read feel they interact with their players almost as peers and friends, just old enough to command respect but not old enough to be seen as father figures. They insist that anyone on the team can speak to any of the coaches about anything, any time, and not feel they are being judged.

All four began to help out behind the bench almost im-

mediately after their own days as Wolves concluded. From the get-go Flynn says they've been generous with their time and committed to developing the younger players.

And Neudorf knocked it out of the park at his interview for his head coaching role this year.

"The parents are impressed with how professional they are and how prepared these guys are for every practice and game," Flynn adds.

Craig Roberts' son Lucas Roberts Ramos is a member of the team.

"It's a significant time commitment from these guys," says Craig. "We're on the ice three to four times a week and there is a lot going on behind the scenes including training and tournaments, etcetera. Their coaching philosophy outlined early in the year certainly checks all the boxes as a parent. And Lucas has shared that it is a fun and very comfortable atmosphere."

The coaches spend two hours at the arena for each practice and three hours there

on game day. Add in the travel time to locations such as Lowbanks, where the Haldimand River Kings play, Fort Erie and Port Colborne, and time dedicated to being there for their teams stretches beyond an average of 10 hours a week.

It's not like they're not busy away from the arena, either. Neudorf works in business development for Kruger Products, a paper mill company out of Toronto. Read just graduated from Brock University with a business degree and Juras is the operations manager at Niagara Flower Growers. Berg will be leaving for Liverpool for two years to become a physiotherapist.

This weekend they are off with the team to Midland for their first road trip, a Silver Sticks qualifying tournament. While the team will be staying with the parents at a hotel, the coaches have booked the same Airbnb that they rented last year when they travelled with the U15s. It's to ensure there is a bit of professional

distance between them and whatever is going on at the team's hotel.

Speaking of tournaments, at the recent Harvest Classic hosted by the Wolves, the U18 team went 1-2 in pool play and took the eventual champion Saugeen Shores to a seven-person shootout before losing 2-1.

The Local was struck by the fact that fathers Danny Neudorf, Rick Juras and John Read were all at the arena for parts of that weekend watching their sons coach, not play, hockey.

All three were involved to some degree with their kids' sports through the years, as was Berg's father, the late James Berg, who served with the club as its president years ago.

Last Wednesday the U18s knocked off the first place Port Colborne Sailors 5-0. Noah Whyte scored two goals in the game, while Dylan Price, Josh Dulas and Billy Pillitteri-Smith added singles. Braden Sawyer got the shut-out.

They followed that win with a 2-0 victory over the West Niagara Flying Aces Sunday afternoon.

Things are clearly starting to click on the ice for this team at the right time. The coaches are happy about that, of course, but to each of them it's more about helping to develop every one of the Wolves as both players and people.

"We have a three-pronged approach," says Neudorf. "We hold them accountable for everything they do. We require them to be disciplined both on and off the ice. And we expect them to put in a full effort every time they step on the ice."

Surely those are lessons the four coaches have learned from their own mentors through the years. Now they are imparting those to another generation.

For more photos see www.notlocal.com/local-news/youth-movement-behind-the-wolves-u18-bench-7860107




U18 Wolves coaches Kyle Juras, Devon Neudorf and Alex Read watch the action unfold.



Under 18 coaches Devon Neudorf, Kyle Juras, Mackenzie Berg and Alex Read.

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LocalSPORTS

Predators back in the win column

Mike Balsom
The Local

The Niagara Predators got just what the hockey doctor ordered last weekend, putting together convincing wins over Tottenham and Toronto to end their losing streak at six games.

Friday night saw them drop the visiting Tottenham Railers 4-1 at the Meridian Credit Union Arena. They followed that with a 7-4 victory Saturday over the Toronto Flyers at Thornhill's Paramount Ice Complex.

It didn't take long for new signing Declan Fogarty to make an impact on the scoreboard in his first game. Fogarty beat Railers' goaltender Thomas Rousseau just 13 seconds into the first period Friday to give the Preds their earliest lead in a game this season. They held onto that lead for the remaining 59:47 of the game.

"I have no words to describe how that felt," says Fogarty, a 21-year-old St. Catharines resident. "I know the first goal is always the hardest one to get, especially when you're new to a team mid-season. I was glad to get that one out of the way, and my teammates were amazing with how they welcomed me back after that goal. It felt great."

The St. Francis Catholic Secondary School graduate returns to the team following a 2022-2023 campaign during which he contributed 10 goals and 28 assists to the Predators. The second-year automotive engineering student at McMaster University originally felt he would be too busy academically to continue to play junior A hockey this year, but he kept the door open.

As the semester progressed, Fogarty began to realize he would be able to fit in practices and games and still keep up his grades. He admits that his linemate from last year, Cameron Savoie, recently rejoining the team, may have had some influence on his decision.

Fogarty brings experience to a Preds team much younger than it was last year. That experience includes four years playing for various teams in the Greater Ontario Junior B Hockey League.

"There's a lot of guys who haven't had much experience in junior levels of hockey," he says of his new teammates. "I've been at this for six years now. I definitely love to try to help the younger guys, to help bring the team together. Whatever I get on the point sheet, that's just extra."

Preds' coach Kevin Taylor teamed Fogarty up on a line with Gehrig Lindberg and Luca Fernandez, who lead the team with 20 and

19 points respectively.

"They're both great players," says Fogarty of his linemates. "I've played against Gehrig on different teams pretty much my whole life. This is my first chance to be able to play with him on the same team. He's very skilled, a really good player."

The move paid dividends, as Lindberg added a goal and two assists and Fernandez picked up helpers on goals by Fogarty and defenceman Guy Manco. Fogarty also added an assist on Lindberg's goal, while Nicholas Nicoletti scored the Predators' fourth goal.

"It was great to see that he's back," Taylor says of Fogarty. "And the boys really enjoyed his goal. He's got some work to do to get back into game shape, which is our focus right now. We know what he can do, and I don't think he's anywhere near what his capability actually is. He will definitely get there. He's a huge addition to this team."

The three linemates were responsible for five of the Predators' seven goals Saturday in Toronto. Lindberg and Fernandez each scored twice while Fogarty added a single. Shane Kaplan and Georgy Kholmovsky also scored in a game that saw the Preds outshoot the Flyers 50-31.

"We had a full team, probably our best line-up to date for both games," Taylor tells The Local. "We dominated the game Saturday, but we made some mistakes that cost us some goals. You can make mistakes when you build up a lead, but we won't be able to do that this weekend."

That's because the Preds take on the league's South Division's top two teams, with Durham visiting Virgil Friday night and a trip to North York on the schedule Saturday. They'll finish their three-game weekend by hosting Toronto for a 3:30 p.m. game Sunday afternoon.

"We're hoping that we have Zane (Clausen) back for the weekend," Taylor says of the team's number one goalie, who was scheduled for an MRI last Tuesday afternoon. "We know we have to tighten up our defence. We just can't make mistakes against those teams. We have to be almost perfect."

Niagara's current record of 6-9-1 is marred by two losses to the Durham Roadrunners and three, including an overtime loss, to the North York Renegades. Their worst loss this season came just a week earlier, an 8-1 drubbing on the road by the Renegades.

"North York is the best team in the league," adds Taylor. "I think our guys can beat them, and beat Durham. We just have to play a full 60 minutes of hockey."

Game time Friday night is 7:30 p.m.

Check online at notllocal.com for more photos.



Luca Fernandez and Declan Fogarty watch the puck as the referee disallows a second period goal in their game against Tottenham. (Photos by David Gilchrist)



Luca Fernandez looks to pass to Gehrig Lindberg in front of the Railers' net.

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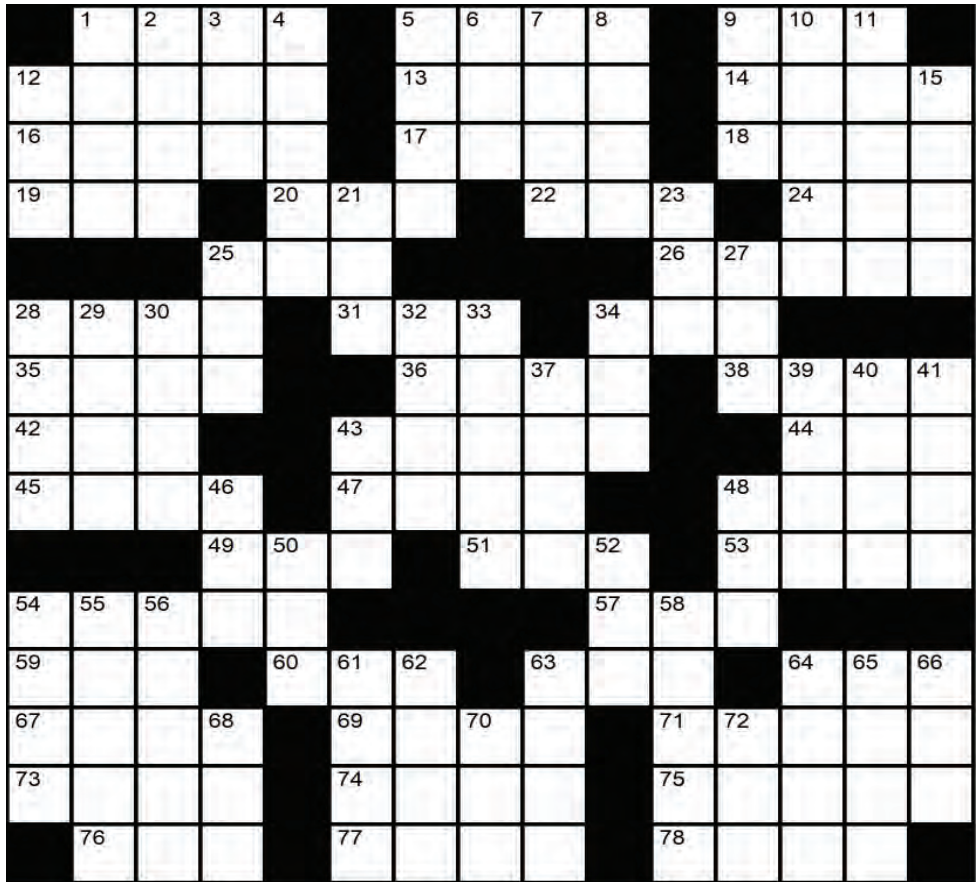
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5 Mining passage
9 Welding flash
12 Disgraced comic
13 U2 lead vocalist
14 Major health scare of 2002-03
16 Chip dip
17 1 for H, or 2 for He
18 "Yo!"
19 Anger
20 Teeny amount
22 Hearst kidnap org.
24 Observe
25 Dough dispenser
26 Fingerboard bars
28 Hobble
31 Not-for-profit TV spot
34 Angel dust
35 In which two dozen merles were found
36 Run at low speed
38 Kernel
42 CD- ---
43 Type of bottle with one surface
44 Owing
45 Afloat on the ocean
47 Touchdown forecasts
48 Big brute
49 Whey-faced
51 Type of joint
53 TV host --- Seacrest
54 49-er
57 "--- Love You" (Beatles hit)
59 100 square meters
60 Sir ---, Arthurian knight
- 63 Now let me think ...
64 Small snub-nosed dog
67 Smurf in red
69 Kvetch
71 --- ear and out ...
73 Visit
74 Doctor imprisoned on the Dry Tortugas
75 Stay still, at sea
76 Catastrophic occurrence
77 Approximately
78 Patron saint of sailors
- Down:
1 Laugh loudly
2 The Apple --- (Tasmanian nickname)
3 Parent company of Simon & Schuster
4 Big hotel name
5 --- hair day
6 --- Lemon, female barnstormer and navigator
7 Getaway places
8 Utensil
9 Bat wood
10 Hike
11 Undercroft
12 Forensic TV franchise
15 "Simon --- "
21 Signal booster
23 Home of one Super Bowl team, briefly
25 Emulate
27 Turntable speed measure
28 Yuri Zhivago's love
- 29 NASDAQ debuts
30 Silent actor
32 It's not quite as fine as clay
33 "A weasel hath not such --- of spleen ..." (Shakespeare, "Henry IV" Pt. I)
34 Author
37 Brightest Simpson
39 Nervously irritable
40 Ambience
41 Typical Hunger Games devotee
43 Range of knowledge
46 Wonderment
48 "Either you do it --- will!"
50 Presumably unicorns missed it
52 Air-pollution measure
54 Hikers' helpers
55 In a snit
56 Land between China and India
58 "... ---, though your heart is aching ..."
61 Magazine contents
62 It's --- move
63 Reverse
64 "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest ---" (Walt Whitman)
65 "... and --- dust shalt thou return." (Genesis)
66 Bygone GM brand
68 Bridge agreement
70 Lifeblood of TV and the web
72 "--- sine numine" (Colorado's motto)

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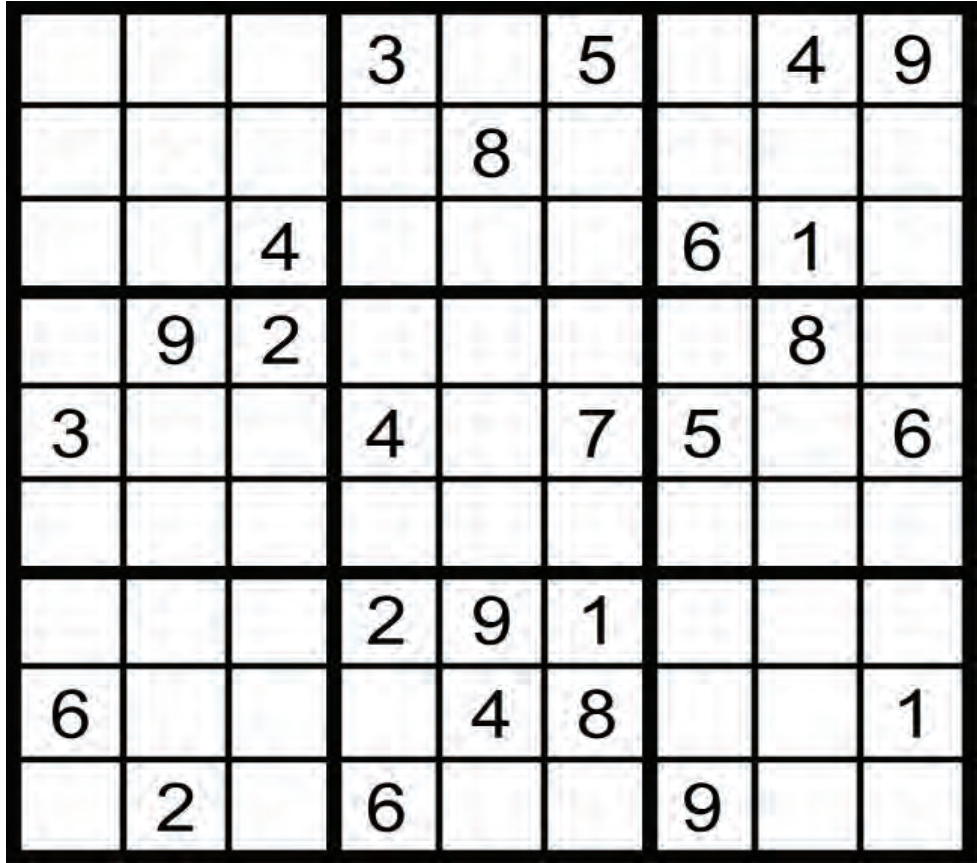
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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from November 15, 2023

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

Across: 1 Rich, 5 Adit, 9 Arc, 12 Cosby, 13 Bono, 14 S A R S, 16 Salsa, 17 At No, 18 Hiya, 19 Ire, 20 Tad, 22 S L A, 24 Spy, 25 A T M, 26 Frets, 28 Limp, 31 P S A, 34 PCP, 35 A pie, 36 Idle, 38 Meat, 42 R-O-M, 43 Klein, 44 Due, 45 Asea, 47 E T As, 48 Oyre, 49 Wan, 51 Lap, 53 Ryan, 54 Miner, 57 PS I, 59 Are, 60 Kay, 63 Umm, 64 Pug, 67 Papa, 69 Moan, 71 In one, 73 Stay, 74 Mudd, 75 Lie to, 76 E L E, 77 Or so, 78 Elmo.

Down: 1 Roar, 2 Isle, 3 C B S, 4 Hyatt, 5 A bad, 6 Dot, 7 lms, 8 Tool, 9 Ash, 10 Raise, 11 Cpyt, 12 C S I, 15 Says, 21 Amp, 23 A F C, 25 Ape, 27 R p m, 28 Lara, 29 I P Os, 30 Mime, 32 Slt, 33 A deal, 34 Pen, 37 Lisa, 39 Edgy, 40 Aura, 41 Teen, 43 Ken, 46 Ave, 48 Or I, 50 Ark, 52 P p m, 54 Maps, 55 lrate, 56 Nepal, 58 Smile, 61 Ammo, 62 Your, 63 Undo, 64 Poem, 65 Unto, 66 Geo, 68 Aye, 69 Ads, 72 Nil.

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