

The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



Fire department
gets rave review
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The trusted voice of our community.

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Have a Meowly Christmas!

Cinder, the resident cat at Creek Road Paints, doesn't quite know what to make of Elf on the Shelf. Drop in to the Virgil paint store and say hello to Cinder. For every gallon of paint sold, \$1 will be donated to Red Roof Retreat, to support kids and young adults with special needs. (Karla Asadoorian)



Santa Claus to visit each community

Penny Coles
The Local

Not even a pandemic can stop Santa Claus from coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Jolly Old Saint Nicholas will ride through the streets of each of the five NOTL communities, providing an experience people can enjoy safely, maintaining physical distance, and enjoying the holiday spirit, says Kevin Turcotte, acting director of operations, and Christmas Parade committee member.

Santa will begin his journey at 9:30 a.m., Saturday, Dec. 12, the date of the traditional parade, with a rain date of Sunday, Dec. 13. For notification of when Santa is entering each community, follow his progression on the Town's Facebook Page.

Santa will be riding in a sleigh borrowed especially

for his visit from Sentineal Carriages.

While Santa will visit every community, he will not be able to hit every street. To see a map of Santa's route, visit notl.com/Christmas.

"We encourage all Niagara-on-the-Lake residents to step outside for some Christmas cheer," says Turcotte.

The Town is asking residents to please stay within their community. Those who drive to the nearest route are asked to avoid gathering, by staying inside their vehicle and waving to Santa from there.

"It's not going to be a traditional parade," says Lord Mayor Betty Disero, "but the main attraction is always Santa, and he will definitely be visiting Niagara-on-the-Lake."

Visit notl.com/Christmas for more information.

Newark Neighbours sees increased need this season

Penny Coles
The Local

It's looking a lot like a very different Christmas for Newark Neighbours, with the largest outpouring of generosity they have seen yet.

When it comes to helping others, COVID is truly bringing out the Christmas spirit in a community that has always been generous. "This is going to be the best Christmas ever for our cli-

ents," says Newark president Laura Gibson.

It's also going to be the busiest for the group of volunteers, who ensure those who are struggling to make ends meet in town are well-cared for at this time of year.

Gibson is estimating by the time registrations are finished, they will have about 50 families, couples and individuals needing help at Christmas.

That's more than oth-

er years, when volunteers typically organized gifts and food for a list of 35 to 40 people who have asked for help, but Gibson says they will have more than enough food and gifts for all those in need.

This year, "we have had a huge outpouring of support. It's unbelievable, the donations that are coming in."

By early this week, Newark had 20 different groups and organizations

helping out.

"That is unheard of for us," says Gibson.

Many of them have reached out for the first time with "new support," she says, including offers to help deliver the Christmas food boxes and gifts.

It couldn't have come at a better time, when the number of families and individuals reaching out for help is going up every day, she adds.

"Right now, we're up to

45, and we're getting more calls, all from people in Niagara-on-the-Lake. We don't get involved with other communities."

The increased need is likely a combination of factors, with COVID causing layoffs, and benefits running out, she says.

There are at least six major food drives planned, and other, smaller collections, she says.

Volunteers are contacting families on the list to

ask what their children are hoping to find under the tree at Christmas, and they will make sure the kids get some of the items on their list, as they have for the past several years.

A huge blessing for Newark Neighbours has come from Cornerstone Church, which has offered its Virgil space on Niagara Stone Road to store the

Continued on page 3



Fire department master plan recommends new headquarters

Consolidation of Queenston, St. Davids stations also suggested

Penny Coles
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake's volunteer fire department is in good shape, and the fire chief is doing a great job, but recommendations for improvement of service delivery include two expensive capital projects.

Rick Monkman, a consultant with Emergency Management and Training, offered a brief summary of the Town's 300-page, 10-year Fire Master Plan to council last week.

He said the Town is meeting all minimum federal and provincial standards, which is important, because if they can't meet those standards, the municipality is at risk for exposure to liability should there be any problems.

He had praise for both the fire department and its fire chief.

"The NOTL service is made up of dedicated, professional personnel, that meet their level of service," and are meeting the needs of their growing community, he said.

"We've been involved with the number of master plans, and to see what is going on in your municipality is very impressive."

The volunteer model is working well in town, should be maintained through investments by councils, both financial, and also through "fruitful dialogue" with fire staff, and understanding the challenges they are facing.

"The work of your fire chief is well-organized," said Monkman, praising Chief Nick Ruller for the data he gathered to aid in the consultant's review, and for the way he is "moving his fire service forward, and being very proactive." Ruller, he said, "has made great strides in the short length of time he's been involved with the fire department."

The chief, he added, "is dedicated to making decisions that will maintain a very effective volunteer service."

Monkman also had some good news to share about response times.

While the recommendation for volunteer departments is a response time of between 10 and 14 minutes, NOTL has "a very great response time of six minutes," for 80 per cent of the calls, he said.

He also offered 29 recommendations, some strategic, at a cost to the municipality, and some operational, at little or no cost, for improving the service.

One of the expensive recommendations is to build a new headquarters for the fire department on the town-owned property beside the Anderson Lane fire hall.

He suggested full-time fire department staff could be located there, with a purpose-built Emergency Operations Centre and a training room. Since the staff are also firefighters, it could improve the response time from the Old Town station, he said.

He also recommended a "duty crew" at the Old Town station, on weekend days in the summer, and on days of Town events that attract a lot of tourists.

It could help provide a good, consistent level of service, reducing responses to three minutes, at a time when traffic volume is high, and a lot of volunteers could be out of town, said Monkman.

The other costly recommendation comes after decades of debate about consolidating the St. Davids and Queenston fire stations.

The consultant suggested both a new fire hall and a new location, combining the two stations.

Monkman said he reviewed putting an addition on one station, but found some problems with that. Both are aging, deteriorating buildings, and will need major structural work in the future, he said. That would be difficult to do to a station that is still operating.



Fire Chief Nick Ruller and the volunteer fire department were praised by the consultant hired to review the 10-year master plan. (File photo)

Also, it would be better for staff morale to consolidate the two groups of firefighters in one new location, and very different from moving one group to another, existing station.

Morale is very important to firefighter retention, he said.

There are other recommendations in the master plan that apply to all stations. None of them have automatic standby generators. If power goes off someone has to go to the fire station to hook it up, and "during the time of emergency is not the time to be going to the station and manually getting the generator going to open the doors," he said.

The town hall is the same, he says, and continuity of services could be compromised due to a long-term outage from an ice storm or blizzard.

Monkman also recommended a new diesel exhaust extraction system for all fire stations, which none of them currently have. Carbon monoxide cancers are being found in a number of firefighters, he said, and a new system would reduce exposure of firefighters to diesel fumes.

Another recommendation in the review concerns personnel. Monkman suggested the Town could use additional fire prevention and education resources, including a full-time fire prevention officer and a part-time education officer.

But there is already a staff member in the fire department who has fire inspector certification, and the positions could be filled without having to hire more staff, he said.

Any decisions about recommendations in the master plan moving forward, including priorities and timelines, should be made through discussions with the fire chief, he said.

Councillors thanked Monkman for his report, and agreed with his praise of the fire chief.

"We are very proud of Nick, and we know he and his team are doing a great job," said Coun. Allan Bisback.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita agreed. "He has been spectacular, a gold standard in his role."

Ruller told The Local moving forward to act on the report starts with a look at which recommendations will most improve the service the fire department provides, and also on a cost/benefit analysis.

The recommendations are just that, he said, and his job will be to gather the data that will support them, or may suggest other options.

For example, he said, the "duty crew" that was suggested might be required at different times, or at a different station than was recommended, depending on the number of calls and where they originate.

Having full-time staff lo-

cated at a fire station was first suggested about two decades ago, Ruller said, and might be best tied to the Old Town station, in a new building or an addition to the existing one, but again, any decision will be based on further data analysis.

Bringing in a consultant to have a "critical look" at the way the department operates has been helpful, he said. "If there is something you're missing, it's good to catch it," but there was nothing in the report that came as a surprise.

About three years ago, when there was staff turnover and some changes made to the way the department was organized, there was a pretty thorough look at how it was operating, leaving him well-positioned to provide the data the consultant was looking for.

"We really looked at everything we were doing, and why we were doing it."

They also looked at whether they were meeting regulations and standards, Ruller said, so there were no surprises there.

Any decisions to implement the changes laid out in the report are up to council, he said, based on a report that will come from staff with its own recommendations, and those that are warranted will likely be tweaked to meet the needs of the community, while preserving the value the volunteer model provides.

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NOTICE

Newark Neighbours Thrift Store is temporarily closed as of Monday, November 30th 2020.

The Food Bank will remain open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 am until 12 noon.

Donations of food and gifts for our Christmas Hamper Program can be dropped off during those times.

**DONATIONS OF CLOTHING
AND HOUSEHOLD ITEMS CAN
NO LONGER BE ACCEPTED
UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.**



Men's gifts for Newark Neighbours



James Symons is at Essential Cremations and Burial Services in Niagara Falls with Tara Livingston, Elaine Biggar, Sherri Branscombe and Krystal Riddell, who collect items for the Toolbox Project. (Photo supplied)



Volunteers Pat Hicks, Pat Fryer, Cindy Grant and Laura Gibson are at the Newark Neighbours John Street barn preparing to help locals in need at Christmas. (Penny Coles)

Thrift store closed, food bank remains open

Continued from page 1

ing, just amazing to see how many new people are offering to help. Newark Neighbours celebrates 50 years next year, and it's great to see the response we're getting from the community. Our wonderful volunteers are going to have a very busy December."

This year, Newark Neighbours also has support from a different quarter.

James Symons will be donating "care packages" just for the men who are Newark clients, having expanded a program he began four years ago, called the Toolbox Project.

From Thorold, Symons began filling boxes with items for men, such as toiletries, toothpaste, deodorant and soap, some word search or other puzzle books, snacks and candy, and winter accessories such as gloves, tuques, and always, says Symons, two pairs of socks.

Instead of boxes, he mostly fills reusable nylon carry bags. Many of his gifts go to men who are homeless or in shelters, and he finds the bags much more convenient for

them.

Last year, he helped more than 700 men make it through the cold winter. This year he is adding a few more to his list, and with COVID and an increased need that all agencies across the region are seeing, he is expecting the number to top 1,000.

This is the first year he is including the Niagara-on-the-Lake charity, he says, because if there is a need, he wants to fill it.

"Men seem to be forgotten. If they're in need they're told to pick up their socks. I'm trying to stand up for them," says Symons.

"Most people don't think about there being need in NOTL, but we know there is. The work Newark Neighbours does is amazing."

He says he'll deliver the gift bags to Newark on Dec. 9, in time for them to be distributed with Christmas hampers and gifts.

Although Newark has been overwhelmed with generosity this year, Gibson says, this is a welcome addition, with one of Symons' kits going to each of the local male clients.

Newark volunteers have made the decision to close the thrift store for now. They see a large number of shoppers who come to visit NOTL and stop in at Newark Neighbours — they hear about it at the B&Bs where they stay, and from other locals, and some make a yearly visit to the shop, says Gibson. But this season, with the large numbers of COVID cases in other regions, and the very close quarters at the thrift shop, they decided not to take any chances, she explains.

The food bank will be open until Dec. 15, and volunteers will begin preparing the hampers Dec. 16, to be distributed Dec. 22, says Gibson.

Donations of food and gifts will be accepted at the John Street location Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m. until noon, until Dec. 15.

Deliveries will include not only a complete Christmas dinner and gifts, but two weeks' worth of food.

With so many food drives, Gibson says, "we'll have lots of food, and enough to restore shelves after Christmas. This is a very busy, wonderful time."



delicious DINING

Hassle-free family Christmas dinner

Submitted by
PigOut Catering

Local catering company PigOut, who traditionally caters to corporate events, parties and weddings, was forced to change their business model after most of their 2020 events either cancelled or postponed. To keep busy this summer they partnered with many local charities to help raise funds with drive-through BBQ's.

Corporate buffets were replaced with Individual Lunch Boxes, business and private events changed to ordering from their new Catering To Go Menu with contactless pickup or delivery.

The New Holiday Menu is designed for families and includes hand carved turkey with all the trimmings and serves 8-10 guests. Owner Anne Dickson explained that it's an opportunity to enjoy a great family meal without the shopping, prep, stress and clean-up, and most small family groups will have enough leftovers for a second meal.

Christmas Dinners are freshly prepared and ready to pop in the oven to heat and serve. The secret to the fabulous tender fresh turkey is PigOut's proprietary rotisserie system that bastes the turkey, keeping it juicy and succulent. Once cooked, it is hand carved off the bone providing both breast and dark meat. The dinner incorporates fresh locally sourced ingredients with homemade turkey stuffing and GF gravy. Appetizers and handmade desserts can be added to customize your dinner menu.

Imagine a Holiday dinner without a kitchen full of pots and pans. Just book



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Check out our website and our ready to heat and serve offerings at pigout.ca. Questions? Call us at 905-650-0781 or email catering@pigout.ca



PigOut offers a variety of appetizer platters.



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A Brunch to Remember!

Submitted by
OLiV

Executive Chef Alex here to let you know Boxing Day, Saturday Dec 26th OLiV will kick off its annual Jazz Brunch. It will continue Sunday January 3rd, and every Sunday until Easter.

It has been almost a year since Our Brunch was cut short and the long and different year 2020, has almost been endured.

On Boxing Day join us for a toast with Strewns Delicious Wine or Our Balsamic Blasted Drinks too

a year of trials and tribulations and an upcoming year of rejuvenation and human triumph.

We enhanced our New Brunch dishes as always with OLiV's exceptional Extra Virgin Olive Oils and Balsamic Vinegars.

We used inspiration from around the world to bring you a variety of Delicious International dishes.

Try the Pot Roast Benedict, which features Filet Mignon slow Braised in its own juices with red wine, Poached Eggs and Hollandaise on Our House Made

Herbed Biscuit.

For the sweeter tooth Banana Bread French Toast with Caramelized Banana and Berry Compote.

Or Scandinavian with Our Smoked Salmon and Cheesy Scrabbled Eggs or Spicy and Flavorful with the Lamb Curry with Basmati and Naan.

No matter what you have your palate will be excited.

The Jazz Music won't be live just yet, but the spirit will be Alive.

See you All December 26th.



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delicious DINING



Robin Howe Catering launches a new takeaway and delivery menu

**Submitted by
Robin Howe Catering**

Robin Howe, chef and owner of Robin Howe Wine Country Catering, is looking forward to making this holiday season as simple and stress-free as possible, with delicious, prepared gourmet meat pies and casseroles ready for delivery or pickup.

Robin has been specializing in frozen holiday entrees for several years. He saw this as an opportunity to expand his successful catering business that has been much in demand for fulfilling full-service catering needs at local events for the last 25 years.

This year, with COVID limiting large gatherings of all kinds, Robin is focusing on helping locals with their family celebrations, offering frozen meals that are perfect for every day, or special occasions like Christmas and New Year's.

Before launching his catering business, the Niagara-on-the Lake native trained with some of the best chefs in top restaurants across the country. When he moved

back to town, around the same time the local wine industry was starting to grow by leaps and bounds, he began catering small gatherings, which grew into larger events such as weddings. He has never looked back, priding himself on providing seasonally-inspired local cuisine.

The wide selection of entrees he offers, along with gourmet meat pies and casseroles, and trays of cold hors d'oeuvres to complement your own holiday meals, is available on his website.

Entrees include several delicious quiche and casserole options including an el-

egant seafood combination, a shepherd's pie with beef or lamb, a deep dish pork tourtiere, or chicken, steak and Guinness, and Ontario farmed venison pie.

In the new year, when events can hopefully resume, Robin is looking forward to returning to his role as primary caterer and booking agent for Willowbank Estate, which in addition to being a School for Restoration Arts, is also available for hosting workshops, conferences, and social events, including weddings. It's a charming, historic location, perfect for small gatherings, says Robin, and he is hoping to be able to resume organizing and catering events at this beautiful venue.

For more information visit the pop up menu on the home page of robinhowecatering.com for our current prepared items for takeaway or pickup.



Call us today to order for the holiday season, or email us at robinstakeaway@robinhowecatering.com

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EDITORIAL

Helping each other, because that's what we do

Dr. Mustafa Hirji, a doctor and scientist, is standing firm with the restrictions he has imposed on restaurants and bars. That's bad news for business owners, but good news for chances of staying COVID-free for the rest of the year.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero and MPP Wayne Gates are pushing for rent relief and wage subsidies from

the Province for businesses which are being treated like they are in red or lockdown zones, because of the extra layer of regional restrictions. We have to hope the pressure on the Province is successful, because at this time, for at least a few more weeks, there doesn't seem to be any other solution. Kudos to Gates for trying, and let's hope he has some good news soon.

As difficult as this pandemic is on businesses, and on many individuals, there is something very cheering about all the great stories of generosity, and the many residents and organizations helping those in need.

Newark Neighbours is going to provide the best Christmas ever to some locals requiring assistance at this time of year, and more

than 20 groups and organizations are making it possible. Joan King is helping seniors; we have someone coming to town to raise money for Alzheimers; the Town has a plan to collect food, warm clothing and gifts at the community centre this Saturday; St. Davids Lioness members are collecting food at the York Road clubhouse, also Saturday; the Rotary Club has its fundraising silent auction; and there are many others going on around us, all backed by kind, community-minded individuals giving generously of their time to make them happen, and all doing their best during a very difficult time.

Each one of us can make an effort to help by supporting our local businesses when we're doing our Christmas shopping. We may be planning on doing it online, but we can do that with many local stores, either picking up curbside or having items delivered. We can order gift

cards from our small, independent retailers and restaurants, instead of from big-box stores, or we can shop safely during the week when the streets aren't busy.

These businesses support us, our service organizations and our many fundraisers all year long, and have continued to, even during a pandemic. Let's each of us make the decision to buy as many gifts as we can from our local businesses, and help to ensure they're still around for us next year.

Bah COVID!



St Andrews Presbyterian Church is unable to hold its annual Festive Fair this year, but continues its tradition of selling Christmas cookies by the pound, as shown by Suzanne, with a cruise-by cookie sale Saturday, Dec. 12. The sale is at 323 Simcoe St., \$20 per box, with elves ready to deliver cookies to your car for the exact change. This year, a portion of the proceeds will be donated to Newark Neighbours. (Photo supplied)

Auchterlonie on Astrology

Bill Auchterlonie
Special to The Local

The full week of Auchterlonie on Astrology can be found on the Facebook page for The NOTL Local, and on the website <https://www.auchterlonieonastrology.ca>. In part II of my podcast, thanks to Astro-Butterfly, we get the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn at 0 degrees of Aquarius, a new world order.

Monday, Dec. 7: The third

quarter Moon in Virgo occurs at 7:36 p.m. on a day where heart and mind are in two very different places. Paradoxically (perhaps), emotions are focused on practical matters, while thoughts are about love and loved ones. Here in Niagara we talk and think a lot about The Bench. In Cincinnati, they fondly remember the catcher widely hailed as the greatest of all time - Johnny Bench. Twice an MVP, and with two World

Series rings, Johnny Bench turns 73 today.

Tuesday, Dec. 8: Whether it's relationships or work and financial security, there's not much standing in the way of what you want today. So, make a list and look for green lights! Famous Hong Kong businessman, Jimmy Lai, celebrates birthday number 72 today. No doubt a telephone call from his sister in Niagara-on-the Lake will be part of the festivities.

Penny Coles
The Local

Correction

Last week's article about the St. Davids Lioness had an incorrect date for its food drive. It's this Saturday, Dec. 5, in the parking lot of the Lions Hall on York Road, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The Local apologizes for the error and any inconvenience it may have caused.

LETTERS

Support for Niagara Restaurants and Bars

Letter to Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria, Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction,

I am writing to you to express my support of Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates' request for the Province to look at a regional approach with relief measures.

New restrictions for food and drink premises, enacted by the Acting Medical Officer of Health for the Niagara Region under Section 22 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act to limit the spread of COVID-19, came into effect on Nov. 14, limiting dining to only those within your household or an individual essential to maintaining physical

or mental health. I support taking action to limit the spread of COVID-19, but restrictions are beginning to take a serious toll on the economic viability of our local businesses.

I understand that new relief measures announced for businesses within the budget are intended for those facing closure due to heightened provincial restrictions (Red and Lockdown).

However, if Niagara had waited to be moved into the Red - Control (Stringent Measures) Level under the Provincial COVID-19 Response Framework before establishing stricter restrictions, it would have been

risking a higher number of infections. A pre-emptive strike by our Acting Medical Officer of Health should not penalize our restaurants and tourism operators. Niagara should be eligible for funding as well.

Supporting our local restaurants, bars, breweries and wineries is crucial right now, and I hope you can look at all possibilities for support with the funds earmarked in the budget, and allow them to be eligible. Thank you for your consideration on this matter. Please feel free to reach out to me directly if you require any further information.

Betty Disero, Lord Mayor



View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

Hillbilly Elegy (Netflix 2020) is a true story set in Middletown, Ohio. The chief characters: Mamaw (Glenn Close), the matriarch, a harsh disciplinarian; Bev (Amy Adams), the daughter, big time user and drug addict; and J.D. (Gabriel Basso), the grand-

son, struggling to complete his law degree while being faithful to family. This is a family in crisis. I became so involved with this seemingly impossible family dynamic that I could not sleep that night. Now, I have calmed down and understand that no matter the mess, there is always hope. Valuable film, though not universally admired.



Glen Close / Shutterstock.com

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The trusted voice of our community

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

COMMENT

You may be tougher than you think outdoors



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

The onset of December was looking awfully messy, according to most weather standards. It's what is expected of the November to December transition, where relatively warmer moisture from the southern U.S. collides with our increasingly cool Canadian air mass. We are presented with the classic combination of cold and wet, for a couple days or more, at times.

One of the school groups I guided with the school board this week was faced with such conditions. As the gelatinous and unrelenting rain dripped down the bus window Monday, I imagined these kids felt pranked by the skies. November has been more than generous for its 30 days, but the 11th month was finally provoked by unstable atmospheric conditions. The rain fell without pause, and supersoaked every jacket and tree in sight.

I was astonished by the

resilience and toughness of this class. They grew into the trip like the puddles grew into the forest. They were indifferent to the grey rain, and they excitedly participated in all of the hikes and outdoor activities until bus time to head home. The type of weather upon them would give the majority of adults something to complain about. Fair enough.

In theory, they should remember the experience more than the weather. A few temporarily chilly hands along the way didn't stop the students from having a safe and positive experience with nature. Some kids only get one outdoor field trip in their lifetime, if that.

It had me recollecting my own childhood field trips, and other outdoor endeavours. There are now scores of times where disagreeable weather doesn't stand a chance against the memory of the event itself.

In Grade 9, we had to jump into a northern Ontario lake with pants and a sweater on, and it was toward the end of October. If you wanted to explore in the canoes during this team-building weekend, you were required to tread water for nearly two minutes

in your clothes.

I thrived for these occasions in high school, as I love my cold swims now, but it's easy to revisit the feeling of an icy wallowing. Cold water is much more efficient at draining the human body of its warmth than the air. Compounded by the saturated and increasingly heavy clothes, the sensation was unforgettably bad.

However, if this makes any sense, all I truly remember is a nostalgic feeling of the whole weekend, influenced by meeting new friends in an outdoors setting around campfires and on those canoes.

In those brief moments, the body is under some sort of stress. On a smaller but everyday comparison, it's the same as when your fingers get cold on a Bruce Trail hike, or your toes get cold while walking at Ryerson Park.

Providing you don't painfully overexpose yourself to such conditions, and you are dressed reasonably, the human body is a fantastic recovery machine. I'm not encouraging you to walk outside in a T-shirt tomorrow morning, but when we're caught in a pinch, just trust

in your body and its blue-printed relationship with the outdoors.

Nature exposure is element exposure, and it teaches us about our bodies. We shiver, we relocate blood to our vitals, and we keep that heart thumping. We are built to respond and ready to eat dinner later. It sounds dramatic, but our body changes to accommodate those uncomfortable moments without being permanently damaged.

In other words, it's really quite okay to get outside at this time of year, and get a little cold and wet.

I like to look at it this way. When you sit around a campfire and want to tell a good outdoor story, what would you say about your trip?

You remember what you did, and how you felt overall. You remember and can revisit the laughs, but you can't revisit the coldness of the field trip.

As we grow older, I think it's safe to say our brains begin to summarize complex sequences into one-unit memories, such as, "that field trip was the best." It's also likely that many who say this were also once subject to such harsh outdoor trips, but they carry away social memories and lessons learned about their environment. The weather didn't last forever, but the memories and lessons did.



Owen Bjorgan remembers cold toes and a cold nose, sleeping in his tent along the Niagara Escarpment, but says "the good memories trump that." (Owen Bjorgan)

LETTERS

Restrictions put human health first

I want to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Niagara's acting medical officer of health, for the actions he has taken recently to further restrict indoor dining.

Finally, here is someone who is putting human health above all other considerations in decision-making in these difficult times. He is obviously clear, and I believe correct, in his priorities as a physician and medical health officer.

I believe his provincial counterpart would do well

to follow this example and view his priorities in a similar light – human health first.

As well, it is clear to me that our Lord Mayor is having difficulty prioritizing between business health and human health. I was disappointed to read her comments criticizing Dr. Hirji's actions.

Also, the owners of Small Talk Winery and Fox Den Yoga are to be commended for their selfless actions in closing their businesses in the best interests of

the NOTL residents and of their own employees.

On the other hand, Vintage Hotels is widely promoting special room rates and its new Christmas Gardens and offering other incentives in order to fill as much of the Pillar & Post as possible. This, even though the owners must be aware that many of the people they are attracting have been requested to stay home for the holidays.

Sandra Davis
NOTL

Five successful flu clinics 'radiated warmth'

It was often a cold and windy day, but the sun was always shining if not externally then internally.

The Niagara North Health teams held five drive-through flu clinics in St. Catharines and Niagara-on-the-Lake during the last two weeks. These clinics served almost 2,500 individuals.

Setup took place early in the morning, and put in place the various outdoor stations needed to vaccinate people efficiently and safely, in the novel drive-through format. What impressed these observers is the cheerful and kind nature of all involved. From the doctors, the nurses, the nurse practitioners, para-

medics, the volunteers, and those getting vaccinated, everyone was unfailingly understanding and cooperative.

The patients expressed their thanks, and some went above and beyond and returned after being vaccinated with coffee and doughnuts for staff.

The sun may not have been shining every day, but certainly, each of the participants radiated warmth.

What a pleasure to be part of a community where people will willingly work together to problem-solve and support each other in difficult times.

Dee and Rob Fahlman
NOTL

House tour cancelled

Unfortunately, the Enchanted Wonderland Stroll of Dec. 4 and 5 has been cancelled due to COVID restrictions.

We thank the McArthur's for offering to share their beautiful property with us. Along with everyone else involved, we are deeply disappointed.

The Holiday House Silent Auction will proceed as planned Dec. 4 to 12 at Regal Florist & Garden Centre.

The Rotary Holiday House Tour Committee
Lorna Penman,
Rose Campbell,
and Fran Boot

Letters! We want letters!

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



Send your
Season's Greetings

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

Publication Date: December 17

Booking Deadline: Friday, December 11 at noon

Ask about our repeat special for December 24

The Niagara-on-the-Lake

LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community.

NOTL businesses contact

Karen at **905-641-5335**
or **karen@notllocal.com**

Businesses outside NOTL contact

Julia at **905-934-1040**
or **julia@notllocal.com**

SANTA

AROUND THE TOWN

Santa Claus is coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake!
Rather than the traditional parade, Santa will be driving through all five Villages on December 12, 2020, to wave to residents and wish everyone a Merry Christmas!

Visit notl.com/christmas for more information.

Free Parking

for the month of December

PUBLIC NOTICES

Resident parking permits and dog licenses are now available for purchase/pick up from the Town Municipal Offices at 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre at 14 Anderson Lane, Niagara-on-the-Lake. Please fill out the appropriate application form from our website www.notl.com and drop off the completed form with your payment at 1593 Four Mile Creek Road in one of our drop boxes. You will be called when your permit and/or license is ready for pickup.

Resident Parking Permits

Parking Permits are available exclusively to residents of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and entitles the holder to one hour of free parking at any parking machine in the Heritage District. Please note a valid piece of identification must be shown as proof of address in order to obtain a permit. Permits are valid for the vehicle identified, by licence plate number shown on the face of the permit only and are non-transferable.

Permits issued are valid from January 1 to December 31 of any given year. Residents must therefore renew the permit each year.

The current resident parking permit fee is \$20.00. This fee is subject to change effective January 1, 2021.

Dog Licenses

All dogs must be licensed by **January 1, 2021**. If you purchase a dog license before **December 24, 2020**, you will receive a \$10 discount off the annual licensing fee. Save an additional \$10 by providing proof that your dog has been spayed or neutered. **You must provide proof of current rabies vaccination at time of purchase to obtain a license.**

The current annual licensing fees are \$22.00 for an altered dog or \$32.00 for an unaltered dog. These fees are subject to change effective January 1, 2021.

Please note Town offices are currently closed to the public. Town staff are available by phone until Thursday, December 24, 2020, at 12:00 p.m. Staff will be available again by phone starting 8:30 a.m. on Monday, January 4, 2021.

Library contest a book give-away for all ages

Penny Coles
The Local

It's the time of the year for giving, and the NOTL Public Library is joining in the Christmas spirit.

Kasia Dupuis, the children's library service associate, says the library has several different ways to win books and prize packs, with something for all ages, from toddlers to adults.

There are more than 20 book bundles to win, each with three to six books. Each bundle has a theme, says Dupuis, such as black female authors, sci-fi, or educational non-fiction.

"We've tried to curate them, and if you win a bundle you like, that's great, and if you don't, it should make a great fit for someone."

As an alternative, a winner can pass on the bundle, and their name goes back in the draw for the next day.

"The premise is, you can read them, you can share them, or you can read them and then share with someone in your bubble."

The books are all new, from First Book Canada, "a wonderful organization that helps community organizations connect books with readers of all ages," says Dupuis.

The contest is for anyone who follows the library on social media, or on its website, where details and entries are available.

The books have to be picked up, either at the library or curbside, says Dupuis. Although the library is open to browsers now, she says, there are still some patrons who are more comfortable with picking their books up outside.

When the library was closed, pickup was popular, but it declined when the facility reopened. In the last couple of weeks, more people are staying home, and

if they venture out, are asking for pickup again. "It's about 50/50," says Dupuis. "People are minimizing their need to go out."

Winners will be notified privately, she says.

Also because of COVID, in recent months more members are accessing the library's website. "It pushed people who weren't using it to make a little bit of a jump, in some cases just to be connected to what they needed to know to keep safe."

Kids' books are being packaged with other items, she says.

"For the kids' giveaways, we have different themed prize packs that we will draw for during December," says Dupuis.

Some of the prize packs include Fill Your Home Library Prize Packs for toddlers, kids, tweens and teens; a Princess Prize Pack, including a copy of *Frozen 2*; an Artemis Fowl Book Set; and a Pokemon Prize Pack, with a Pokemon Trainer Box and stuffies. A few more will be added as the month progresses, she says,

The library also has two Dav Pilkey-inspired contests happening right now. "The first is to win one of two copies of Dav Pilkey's latest book, *Cat Kid Comic Club*, by sharing the names of your favourite Dav Pilkey characters with us on our website or on Facebook or Instagram. This contest closes Thursday, Dec. 3," says Dupuis.

"The second contest is our FLIP-O-RAMA contest to win a Dav Pilkey Book

Duo, including the new *Cat Kid Comic Club*, and the latest *Dog Man: Grime and Punishment* book."

To enter to win, participants will need to create their own Flip-O-Rama — a simple animation technique involving two pieces of paper, two similar drawings and your hands to flip the paper quickly — and share the video of it on the library website or on Facebook or Instagram. This contest closes Thursday, Dec 10.

The library is also doing giveaways for gift cards to local businesses. "We currently have a Holiday Lights contest on our social media channels, asking locals to share their favourite holiday light display out in the community, for a chance to win a gift card to Home Hardware," says Dupuis.

Next week, the library will have a photo/story contest. Share a picture and/or story of a favourite holiday ornament or decoration on social media for a chance to win a gift card to Just Christmas on Queen Street.

"Our last — and most exciting — photo contest is called Cozy Christmas Critters, where we ask participants to share a picture of their favourite critter/pet getting ready for the holidays, to win a gift card to Pet Valu."

"Overall, it is a month of giving and sharing at the library, and we're definitely excited to get it all started."

For more details, or enter to win the giveaways, visit notlpubliclibrary.org.



The library has book bundles and prize packages to be given away through the month of December. (Kasia Dupuis)

Coming weeks should tell the COVID tale

Penny Coles
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake is facing its biggest test yet, and Lord Mayor Betty Disero is counting on residents to help pass it with flying colours.

"Hopefully we can get over this one last hurdle," she says.

Disero is referring to the fact that the town's COVID numbers remain low, thanks to residents doing what they are supposed to do to reduce the spread.

"We're in this place where we have things under control, but we have to wait and see if anything happens from Black Friday."

That will take about 10 days, Disero says. She's also concerned about what happens from now until the end of the month.

"We're moving toward Christmas. The tell-tale sign will really be the first or second week in January, when we know whether we've been vigilant enough to stay the spread of COVID.

That's the big test, to make it through the holiday."

The crowds that were expected at the outlet mall on Black Friday and last weekend were not as bad as expected, and mall management had them under control, says Disero.

Saturday was the busiest day, but the parking lot was only about three-quarters full.

There were town bylaw officers patrolling the mall, paid police officers and mall security out in force. The mall has posted signs saying masks had to be worn everywhere on the property, including outside, and that was being enforced.

She was told people not wearing a mask were asked to leave the property.

With no sign of regional restrictions being lifted, Disero is hoping MPP Wayne Gates will be successful getting some financial relief through wage and rent subsidies for business owners that are currently only available to those in Ontario's red zone,

or in lockdown.

With Niagara in the orange-plus zone, with regional restrictions limiting business owners to the same degree as those with higher COVID numbers, Gates has been putting pressure on the Province to extend those subsidies to Niagara businesses. He was able to ask a question of the Minister of Finance in question period Monday, and to explain his concerns in more detail to the assistant finance minister after question period, he says.

"There is \$600 million for the Province to spend on businesses that are locked down or in the red zone. Our businesses have the same restrictions, and should be getting some of that," he says.

Gates says he will follow up with his request this week, and hopefully get a positive response.

"If I don't do this we're not getting it," he says. "I'll do everything I can to get it done."

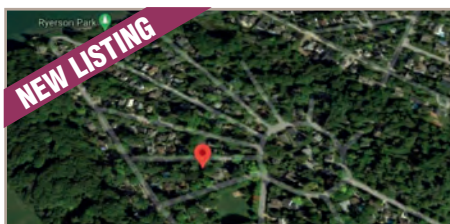


The Outlet Collection of Niagara wasn't as busy as expected on Friday, as shown in the photo taken around 6 p.m. The crowds came out to shop Saturday, but bylaw officers, police and security guards kept them under control. (Photo supplied)



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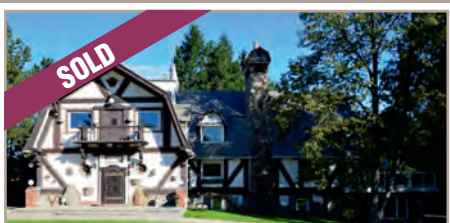
5 HAMPTON COURT
\$1,589,000

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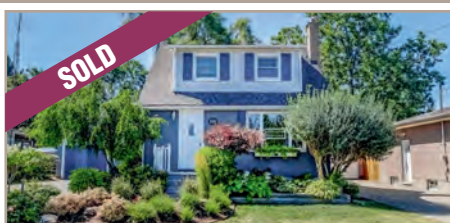
9315 WARNER ROAD
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NOTL Chamber planning January ‘icewine experience’

Penny Coles
The Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce is moving ahead with events it can do safely, says president Eduardo Lafforgue, focusing on “keeping our traditions alive,” which, during the pandemic, is more important than ever.

In a recent update to council, Lafforgue stressed the chamber is not advertising in Toronto, or trying to bring visitors from the GTA, Peel or other regions with high numbers of COVID cases to town.

He emphasized he has stopped all advertising outside the Niagara Region. In fact, he said, the tourism organization that provided the funds for the chamber’s marketing campaign during this time of recovery insisted that any advertising at this point be “hyper local,” and that’s what he’s doing.

He laid out what the chamber has accomplished so far, during difficult times, and what he plans to accomplish in the new year.

Celebrating the season began with safely decorating Queen Street, with volunteers “working in their own bubble,” he said.

A 12-foot Christmas tree, donated by the St. Davids Lions, was lit up at the Cenotaph Friday, in time for the holiday festivities. That includes a very scaled-back 31st annual Candlelight Stroll, which will be held with a limited ceremony Friday. Working in partnership with Cogeco and the Town, it will be broadcast from the Court House steps at 7 p.m., without members of the public in attendance. Residents are asked to participate by purchasing candles at local businesses, and lighting them outside their homes.

Some residents have purchased candles for their neighbourhoods, and will be outside singing carols, said Lafforgue, with the proceeds of candle sales funding two programs for offshore farmworkers.

The chamber is also accepting drop-offs of food for Newark Neighbours at its office, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., until Dec. 5.

But Lafforgue’s big news for councillors was that there will be an “icewine experience” in January.

The chamber will host an Icewine Village during two weekends, and an Icewine Trail will be held with activities planned at local wineries throughout the month.

These will provide “the only icewine experience in 2021,” he said.

If nothing changes, he said, there will be tents and ice sculptures on Queen Street, with all tastings by reservation and purchased online, for small groups of people in time blocks of 45 minutes. That will allow 15 minutes for cleaning between each group.

This “luxury experience” has been developed to offer an experience that follows all the safety protocols for guests, team members and the community, he said. The number of guests to the village is being limited to 2,800, nothing near the 12,000 of last year.

Without any revenue from events, such as the galas usually held, and with no sponsors, other than the Town, the chamber is operating with marketing funds and grants from tourism organizations and the Province.

“We won’t have the 12,000 people that went through the village last year, but we will have activities that are very important for economic recovery,” he said.

It was a challenge to put this event together, and to work out contingency plans to allow for any changes in restrictions, or that must be made to hold the event safely, he said.

“Everyone is fighting to survive. We’re keeping our traditions alive with the Icewine Village, and one way or another we’re going to have an Icewine Village, and safety and health will be paramount.”

When asked by council what could be done to help restaurants facing two levels of restrictions, from both the Region and the Province, Lafforgue said what would really help would be the lifting of restrictions, which he views as excessive for the industry.

But the chamber is doing everything it can to ensure restaurants are



Nicole Cripps, Eduardo Lafforgue and Kim Fletcher of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce show off the beautiful, 12-foot Christmas tree at the Cenotaph on Queen Street. Lafforgue helped string lights on the tree, donated by the St. Davids Lions. (Photos by Penny Coles)

doing what is expected of them, and following up on the few complaints they have received from patrons about businesses that are not complying.

To fund January’s events, he is hoping for the usual \$40,000 from the Town, and a \$20,000 loan repayable in February, which has traditionally helped the chamber cover costs ahead of time, such as

the expensive ice sculptures.

He also “respectfully asked” council to consider rent relief for 2021. He received notice of rent for the Court House office from the Town for \$36,500, and “due to COVID’s drastic reduction in revenue,” is hoping the Town will waive it for one year.

With all revenue-generating events cancelled, “this is very important,” he

said.

To help promote Shop Local for NOTL businesses, Lafforgue says he is partnering with the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce on its Shop Local website. It allows NOTL businesses to provide online information about their operations during the pandemic, aligned with current restrictions.

It’s a professional

website, very well-organized and much better than anything the NOTL chamber could afford to do itself. “It’s done, it’s working, and it would have cost us thousands of dollars to do our own. We’re just a small community, and there are benefits for us to partner with the larger community,” he said. “It gives us a wider audience, instead of just NOTL, but it’s still local.”



Eduardo Lafforgue, president of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, says they are collecting food at the office for Newark Neighbours.



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Reflections on Music Niagara's 2020 season

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Looking back at 2020, Music Niagara Festival chair Richard Baker is surprised at how successful the season actually ended up being.

"It was very hard to think of anything useful back in March when this thing hit us," he says, "knowing that the very stuff and substance of music is having people in an enclosed space listening to it."

Working with founder and artistic director Atis Bankas, the board members, volunteers and staff pulled together, and by summer had indeed found a useful way to go forward. Music Niagara's At Home Concert Series kicked off July 26 with Emma Meinrenken from Home, a performance by the young violinist and Music Niagara Performance Academy alumna recorded at her Toronto home.

That began a 2020 season that included a celebration of the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. Along the way it encompassed panel discussions, debates, dramatic performances, comedy, chamber music and jazz, along with the usual top-notch classical concerts for which Music Niagara has become known.

Though at first replacing live performances with computer-generated presentations seemed to Baker to be less than promising, he says the online platform and the revamped website have opened up a world of possibilities for the festival heading into 2021.

"Karen (Lade, general manager) and Atis worked very closely with Niagara College (Broadcasting Faculty and students) and we're very happy that we were able to collaborate

with them in the filming," he explains. "All of a sudden we've become more confident in our ability to film and record what ends up becoming very satisfying and professional-looking musical concerts."

"We hardly did any of this in the past," continues Baker. "Now we've done a whole season of it, from solo piano, to duets to larger groups. The collaboration with them on producing content has provided insight into the techniques involved and will facilitate our own production and filming as an addition to live festival output when we resume."

Moving into 2021, Baker promises that even if there is a return to live performance, there will continue to be online content produced for the website. It is clear to all involved that it proved to be an effective year-round platform to expand the festival's presence within the musical world, and to connect with a wider audience.

"Our viewership was higher than the number of tickets we would sell traditionally," Baker enthuses, "suggesting that more people are seeing and hearing what we are doing. I don't think it's a dramatic increase yet, but it's so easy to click in."

In addition to the new partnership with Niagara College, a number of local venues opened their doors to Music Niagara free of charge when it became evident that its traditional venue, St. Mark's Anglican Church, would not be available this season.

"We're very pleased with the new partnerships that have developed through finding new venues for our concerts, and that's going to continue into the future," Baker promises. "We filmed at a couple of wineries



Violin virtuoso Emma Meinrenken performs at Pondview Estates Winery, with Music Niagara artistic director Atis Bankas (left). (Mike Balsom)

(Chateau des Charmes and Pondview Estates), which are wonderful places, and have been very helpful."

He continues, "St. Mark's remains the Carnegie Hall for us. It has such a lovely atmosphere, and tremendous acoustics. For most of our small-scale classical events it's the perfect venue, and we hope to get back there."

The wineries, though, offer an option to accommodate a larger number of guests in 2021.

The Performance Academy continued this summer and Baker, in his first year as chair, says new opportunities arose during the pandemic. "Though it was on a reduced scale, this new medium that we have allows us to continue the

instructional and education side of the music better than we could before. Atis and some other musicians have been giving master classes on YouTube and Zoom." He also notes that students from as far away as Mexico were able to participate.

According to the retired lawyer, Music Niagara is doing reasonably well financially, despite having no ticket sales this season. "The major sources of income for us have been government grants, provincial and federal," he tells The Local. "We've had donations from some foundations, and generous support from private donors. That's basically what's gotten us through, and provided us with enough money to afford to do these videos, and pay our musicians and our very

small staff."

However, he admits that finances can be a constant challenge. He adds that the generous government support provided during the pandemic may not be available in 2021.

As well, the 2020 Big Night fundraiser was cancelled last June due to the pandemic. As the board looks to next year, they are planning to replace that event with the return of another. "We're planning a COVID-safe golf tournament, which we have done once or twice. It was successful then, so we're hoping to do it again."

Planning has begun for the festival's 23rd season. This year marked Beethoven's anniversary, while 2021 will mark the 265th anniversary of Mozart's birth. "Another

king," says Baker. "To have Beethoven followed by Mozart, you've covered 80 per cent of the classical world in many ways. What could be better than emphasizing Mozart's music. We'll certainly be doing that."

With 2021 just around the corner, Baker, Bankas and all involved with Music Niagara will be waiting anxiously for a return to eased conditions, restoring the communal feeling of a concert hall, church or winery tent, with artists and instruments on stage, lights dimmed, light breezes blowing and audiences enraptured in close proximity. Baker promises the festival will continue developing new ways of looking at short-term survival until that day comes.

Niagara-on-the-Lake gives back

This Saturday, Dec. 5, town staff will be collecting donations of food, gifts and gently used warm clothing.

This 3-in-1 donation drive is part of the Town's Niagara-on-the-Lake Gives Back campaign.

Contact-free and curbside dropoff will be

available at the community centre, between 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday.

Donations can also be dropped off at the community centre until Dec. 4, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Donations from this collection will go to Newark

Neighbours for their Christmas food hampers and gifts, the Cold Weather Clothing Drive, and the Christmas Gift Drive.

Visit notl.com/christmas for more information, including what items are most needed.



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Regional restrictions to remain in place for now

Penny Coles
The Local

Niagara is sitting pretty much “settled” in the centre of the orange zone, which means it’s unlikely there will be any changes to the restrictions on local business or the public in the next two weeks, says Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Niagara’s acting medical officer of health.

He doesn’t expect the Province will move Niagara out of orange for at least that long.

“We’ve moved away from red, but we’re not edging toward yellow yet,” he said. To move to yellow would require time to show the region is consistently going downwards in its numbers.

He is not considering lifting or changing regional restrictions yet. The numbers are “pretty flat” right now, and it’s too soon to see any results that would tell him the restrictions are working. “We need more time to see the impact.”

Elsewhere in the



Dr. Mustafa Hirji (File photo)

province, regions are trending upward, so at least Niagara is not in that situation, he says, and if it continues to keep its numbers steady, or even better take a downward turn, it will be difficult to know whether it’s a result of the current restrictions.

“It will be hard to know what would lead to a downward change, with the provincial orange level and our restrictions.”

While there was an outpouring of anger from restaurant owners initially, when they were told there could only be one household per table, except under special circumstances, that seems to have died down, he said.

The new cases are stressing regional staff with the amount of contact tracing that’s required, said Hirji. They’re keeping up, but if the case numbers rise,

“we might have to cut back” and the emphasis on tracing where cases come from and where they spread to could be at risk.

However, he says, “we’re not seeing as many people going to restaurants and bars to socialize. It’s early days yet to know if it’s a trend. We’re still seeing people spreading infection to their friends

or co-workers, people they socialize with outside the house, but not in restaurants. We’ve seen less of that kind of spread for sure.”

The fact that regions around Niagara are in red or lockdown, could help Niagara, if residents from those areas stay home. Their numbers should go down, and when they do come

from those areas to Niagara, there should be less chance of them being infected and bringing COVID with them.

He says Niagara residents should feel safe and comfortable going out to restaurants with members of their household, and hopefully, we will see less-limiting yellow restrictions before too long.

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A wonderful time of year to give



Warm a heart for students in need

**Submitted by
Education Foundation
of Niagara**

The economic disruption to our society, and our school community, arising from COVID-19 has impacted the Education Foundation of Niagara, and its ability to help the families and children we serve on so many levels.

Led by a volunteer board of directors, and a small staff, the foundation's mandate is to support District School Board of Niagara students, and

reduce the barriers to their success.

We have seen an increased demand for services, with a significant decrease in donations, and the cancellation of all fundraising events. Without any government funding there is a gap between what we can afford to do and what we need to do.

In this new environment, our foundation has been doing everything we can to support Niagara students and families who need our help.

Over the past several months we have seen the

impact that both the stress of uncertainty and the loss of social connections can have on all of us, but we've also seen the power of community. We are all champions of the common purpose of providing assistance to children in need.

We understand the challenges, and the need that exists as we continue to support 38,051 elementary and secondary students across all of Niagara's twelve municipalities. Through our Emergency Relief Fund, we are providing quality nutritional support, personal hygiene items, and basic necessities, such as boots and coats, at this time of year.

We hear such heart-breaking stories. Kathy, a single mother of two daughters, who was laid off at the end of October, and is struggling to provide basic necessities for her family.

Andrew is a recent widower, after the death of his wife in September,

and is raising his four young children. Andrew is unable to make ends meet, with the cost of rent, utilities, and putting food on the table, we provided grocery gift cards and basic necessities.

These stories of loss

Kathy and Andrew, and we want to be able to help offer some relief from their struggles.

As we continue to navigate through these tumultuous times, we are asking for help to support those who, through no fault of



Laura Byers, Executive Director Education Foundation of Niagara

“ We have seen an increased demand for services, with a significant decrease in donations, and the cancellation of all fundraising events. ”

—Laura Byers

“ Without any government funding there is a gap between what we can afford to do and what we need to do. ”

—Laura Byers

equal access to all of the necessities and opportunities of school life.

We know that with the continued support of our Niagara community, we can be there when we are needed.

Please envision your support by donating and making a difference in the lives of those who need it the most.

Warm a heart this holiday season. Visit efnniagara.ca

and devastation are just some of the dozens of the difficult stories we have seen unfold since the mandatory school closures last spring. The reality is that many of our children and their families are living with uncertainty, just like

their own, need our assistance. By making a donation through our Warm the Heart campaign, you will aid in narrowing the gap and helping the foundation better achieve its vision of a community where every student has


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Submitted by
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Out with 2020 and in with 2021

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We look forward to serving you this Holiday Season!



Holiday Shopping at the Museum – Pandemic or No Pandemic

Submitted by
**Niagara-on-the-Lake
Museum**

We all know that the Grinch tried to stop Christmas in Whoville.

And in 1918 during the Spanish flu pandemic, Robert Borden's Unionist government postponed Thanksgiving and considered doing the unthinkable for Christmas.

Now, in 2020, pandemic or not, our community is determined to keep Christmas alive. And to encourage the holiday spirit, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum's gift shop is offering a unique array of gifts to purchase in person or online. Not only can you buy Christmas ornaments and timeless children's toys, but you can also find a classic assortment of collectibles for the home and garden, for the historian, and even the student. Plus, the Museum's retail book collection includes a comprehensive library of local and Canadian history,

fiction and non-fiction, as well as children's books.

But don't miss your chance, the Museum is closed December 18th to January 1st for the holidays.

The NOTL Museum is a small museum, with a massive heart. The collection numbers more than 50 thousand items, artefacts, documents, photographs and paintings. And as much as they welcome the

researchers, history scholars and heritage fans, the Museum also values casual visitors, strollers, and passersby.

So as you make your Christmas plans to stay, zoom, or share a heated patio, take a look at the Museum's gift shop, in person or virtually, and don't let anyone tell you that Christmas is being postponed, just because Santa has the flu.



Find some unique gifts at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum.

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The Exchange is your one-stop-shop to support small local businesses.

Submitted by
The Exchange Brewery

This year, perhaps more than ever, we've been reminded of the importance of supporting small local businesses. So, at The Exchange Brewery, we've decided to partner with local friends to bring you exclusive craft artisan packages for the Holidays. Not only do we love every single item curated for the packages, but it's a great way to support your local businesses and simplify gift giving.

Our Gift Packages vary from \$47.00 to \$149.95 and include different selections of our beers, glassware and merchandise, along with Provisions Food Company jams, preserves and short-breads, Kozlik's mustards, Pickles Eh! Pickle jars, 416 Coffee bags, Kvas Fine Beverage Co. simple syrups and Maison Apothecare body care and cleaning products. These packages all come prepared in a beautiful festive wrapping, ready to be gifted.

If you are looking for a



Custom label beer bottles made to order at The Exchange Brewery.

great gift for your co-workers or employees, we also have a Corporate Gift Package that'll be sure to show your appreciation during this difficult year.

All our gift packages are available in our bottle shop (7 Queen St., NOTL) and our online store (exchangebrewery.com), with free home delivery in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Lastly, this Holiday season, we're making custom labeled beer bottles, with the name of your loved one or a memorable "Happy New Year 2021" message, as examples. You will have no doubt that your gift will be one of a kind. To place your order, please contact info@exchangebrewery.com.

Happy Holidays, from our family to yours!

The gift of theatre

Submitted by
Shaw Festival

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Kyle Blair and Kristi Frank in *Holiday Inn* (2019). Photo by Emily Cooper.

the Royal George Theatre to the Festival Theatre. Give Shaw this holiday season.

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SHAW FESTIVAL 21

Have fun with live nativity scene, support local causes

Penny Coles
The Local

Benchview Equestrian Centre is looking for cast members to star in Away in a Manger, a live Christmas experience it is offering.

It is providing an opportunity to make Christmas memories with a drive-through nativity scene that is being organized to support for three local charities.

Organizing it are Pat Darte, Melina Morsch, whose goats and donkey board on the Benchview property, and Jane Neaves, who spearheaded the idea as a way to provide Christmas gifts for kids in the pediatric cancer ward at McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton.

Neaves began collecting gifts several years ago for kids who must remain in the hospital over Christmas, and saw that organizing an event was a way to grow the project that means so much to her.

Darte has the space on his Queenston Road property, and got onboard to raise funds for a cause

that's important to him: youth mental health, through the Niagara Community Foundation Darte Family Fund, which is part of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Fund he established during his term as lord mayor.

The third recipient is Newark Neighbours. Those who drive through to view the nativity scene are asked to bring non-perishable items for the local food bank.

The organizers are hoping to attract businesses who might sign up to be cast members, as a team-building exercise, or instead of the Christmas party they aren't able to have this year.

It could also be fun for families, church, kids or service groups — any organization that wants to have some fun with its members while doing some good in the community, says Morsch.

Each time slot for the nativity scene requires cast members to play Mary, Joseph, three wise men, two angels, and a drummer boy, and each team must supply their own costumes, for a cost

of \$200 to participate. There are time slots for 10 teams.

Coffee, tea and doughnuts will be provided.

It will be done safely, with physical distancing, and for those who drive through to see it, there will be music, lights, goats, Jenny the Donkey, and lots of Christmas spirit.

They won't need to get out of their cars, and there will be someone on hand to safely accept toys, food or cash for the three charities.

"We're going to have fun with it," says Morsch. "Everyone is welcome."

They are hoping for a donation per car of \$10 to \$20, and there are sponsorship rates for businesses who want to support the event.

The fundraising event runs Dec. 19 and 20, from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m.


For sponsorship opportunities, email mtmbabin@gmail.com.



To donate online to the Niagara Community Foundation Darte Family Fund, go to <https://niagara.communityfoundation.org/dartefamilyfund>



Pat Darte and Joe Pillitteri practise being part of a nativity scene, with Jenny the Donkey and one of Melina Morsch's yoga goats. Pillitteri says his son Johnny and nephew Vinny Pillitteri-Smith will play angels in one of the Saturday evening tableaux. (Photo supplied)

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Offers of help for stocking project keep pouring in

Penny Coles
The Local

When Joan King decided she wanted to help local seniors celebrate Christmas, her plan was simple and modest, she says.

However, with each passing day since she posted her request for help on Facebook, the project continues to grow, encompassing more people who want to help.

Her idea was to ask about 80 people to stuff a stocking with goodies she could deliver to the residents of Upper Canada Lodge.

She was afraid that Christmas, which can already be a difficult time for some seniors, would be even more so during a pandemic. "It's a lonely time for a lot of people, and it will be so challenging to even have visitors. Christmas is supposed to be such a joyful, magical time of year, but it isn't for everybody," says King.

She has helped out with a similar project in Niagara

Falls, and thought she could replicate it on a small scale in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

When King put out a request for help through social media, she was immediately overwhelmed by the generosity and enthusiasm of the community, and her plan quickly expanded to include all three long-term care homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"This community is so incredible," says King. "I thought I'd get a few people to go to the Dollar Store and get enough items to fill stockings."

But that wasn't where it ended.

Betty Houghton Knight quickly reached out to King with an offer to make the stockings. She had some bolts of suitable fabric left over from another project, and with the help of her mother, Marian Houghton, began cutting the fabric. She then had an offer from Dorothy Soo Wiens, who has enlisted some of her church friends to help, including

Luanne Kulchar, Eleanor Dick, Kathrin Wiens, Regine Boss, Pat Household and Julia Griffiths. They are all working to ensure 224 stockings are completed and ready to be filled with treats, enough for every senior in long-term care at Upper Canada Lodge, Radiant Care Pleasant Manor Long-Term Care, and Niagara Long Term Care (formerly Chartwell) on Wellington Street.

In addition to help with the stockings, King, in about 24 hours, had enough offers from more Christmas elves to fill them, based on a list of items she received from staff at the homes of what would be best to include.

King also has help lined up to pick up items, help fill the stockings and deliver them to the three homes, including the NOTL Kinsmen and Bethany Mennonite Church.

And if that isn't enough, Lord Mayor Betty Disero and town staff asked if they could add a Christmas card to every stocking. The Town



Dorothy Soo Wiens, Marian Houghton, and Betty Houghton Knight cut out material for 224 stockings, which Joan King will fill and deliver to the three long-term care homes in NOTL. (Photo supplied)

had held a card-making contest for local children, choosing winning cards to be printed and delivered to seniors in NOTL long-term care homes. When they heard of King's plan, they asked if their cards could also go in the stockings.

Volunteers with the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Palliative Care Service, who were planning on knitting red hearts to deliver to the homes, also reached out, asking

if their hearts, along with hand sanitizers, could be included.

Putting everything together in one stocking works for staff at the long-term care homes, who will only have one safe drop-off to handle, which will be done soon enough before Christmas that the stockings, and the items in them, can be considered germ-free.

"This has just snowballed so incredibly," says King,

who was overwhelmed, but not surprised, by the generosity of the community. The organizer of the annual Terry Fox Run has witnessed that before, and is delighted to have so many people get behind her Christmas project.

"It wasn't going to be a big ask, but all these creative people have stepped up and are doing all these amazing things," she says. "I'm so grateful so many people wanted to help out."



Joan King has stockings made by Betty Houghton Knight and her friends, and is stuffing them at home as she receives donations for seniors in long-term care. (Penny Coles)

FOOD & TOY DRIVE

Help those less-fortunate in Niagara. We are accepting food and new unwrapped toy donations at our office at 8 Henegan Road until Friday December 11, 2020. Food donations will support Newark Neighbours and are in great need. Toy donations will support other local charities where accepted.

We normally get the bulk of our donations at the NOTL Christmas Parade. If you are not able to drop off a donation, we will pick it up on December 9th. Call our office at 905-468-4235 or email us at fooddrive@notlhydro.com to arrange a pickup. Please leave your donation outside your front door as our staff will not enter households.

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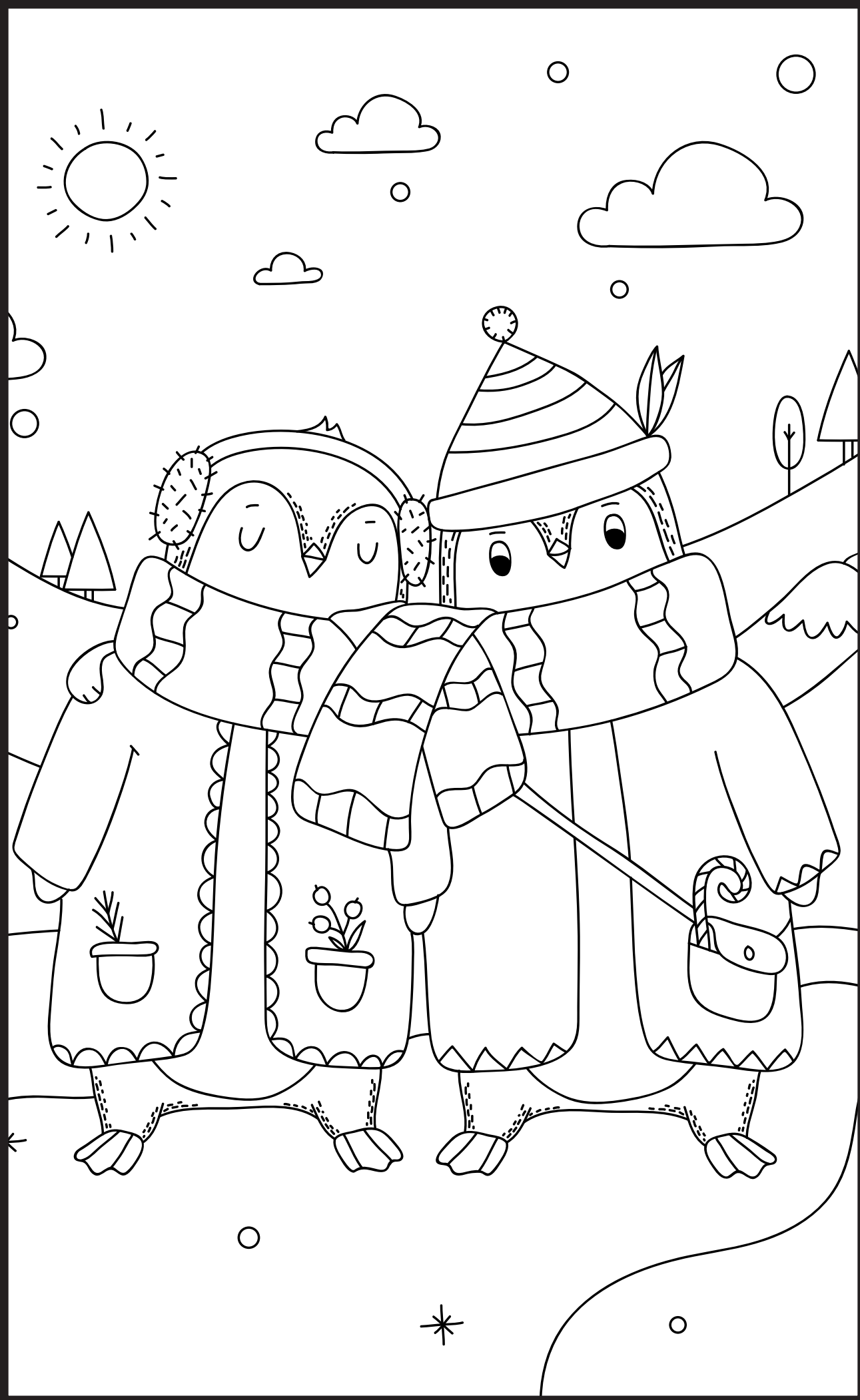


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Age categories are, 5 & under and 6-10 years old. Contest closes Thursday, December 17th at 5 p.m.

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Fundraising skate for Alzheimer's coming to Gretzky's

Penny Coles
The Local

When Steve McNeil steps on the ice at midnight, he is usually alone, often far from home, with exactly 19 hours and 26 minutes of skating stretching ahead of him.

In the last eight years, he's done that 22 times, to raise awareness for Alzheimer's Societies across Canada. He does it in memory of his mother, who battled dementia the last 20 years of her life. He does it to improve the lives of the many others like her, and to help their caregivers through a devastating time in their lives.

This year, with support from the Alzheimer's Society, Dec. 15 has been designated National 1926 Skate Day for Alzheimer's. His mother's birthday was Dec. 15, and she was born in 1926, hence the date and duration of McNeil's skate. She was diagnosed in her early 60s, when her family noticed her confusion, and lived with it for more than two decades, with McNeil as her primary caregiver, before she was eventually put into long-term care.

An Etobicoke resident, McNeil's fundraising skates have mostly been in

Toronto, at Nathan Phillips Square, but two years ago, he decided to travel across Canada, skating in all the large cities.

He finished his 11-city, 2020 tour in February, with plans to repeating his cross-country journey again this fall, but due to COVID, and difficulties travelling, that wasn't to be.

With just one skate planned for this year, he is coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake to take advantage of the ice rink at the Wayne Gretzky Estates Winery and Distillery. He'll stay in a hotel the night before, and head to the winery with his hockey bag over his shoulder, filled with two or sometimes three pairs of skates, several layers of clothing, and the music he listens to while he's skating, prepared to step on the ice at 12:01 a.m. Dec. 15, and skate until 7:26 p.m.

McNeil, 59, is a mailman by day, and a recreational hockey referee in the evenings and on weekends, although the pandemic has restricted that too. But being on the move, and on the ice, is second nature for him. Both skating and walking are activities he loves, allowing him to clear his head and plan for the future, chiefly finding ways



Steve McNeil has his routine, his clothing, his hockey pads and his stick when he steps on to the ice to raise money for Alzheimer's Societies across Canada. He uses his stick to help glide, like a hockey stick, but he admits to breaking into some air guitar moves as he listens to his favourite band, AC/DC, when he's alone in the early morning hours. This photo was taken in February, 2020, in Fredericton, N.B. (Photo supplied)

to increase awareness and raise money for Alzheimer's.

While he skates, he listens exclusively to the

"high-energy" music of AC/DC. It's been his favourite band for years, since a friend of his dragged him off to Massey Hall in Toronto for a concert. And in recent years it's become a tribute to Malcolm Young, the guitarist who left the band in 2014 to receive treatment for dementia, and who died in 2017.

McNeil says he feels blessed to be able to do something that comes so easily to him, and that can help him raise money for something so important to him.

The question he's asked most often when he comes off the ice after his marathon skate is "how do you feel," he says. "The answer is, 'I feel great.' If I could raise more money, I'd go back out and do it again, even though the weather is extreme, and sometimes I've been skating in a blizzard at -40 degrees."

His favourite four hours are from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m., when it's quiet, often without a soul around, and he gets lost in his music, coming up with ideas for the future — like a national skate day — and watches as the sun comes up, a new day begins, and in the big cities, people begin to move around.

He says he's not naturally good at being the centre of attention, but over the years, he's become more comfortable being in the limelight, and has been featured on both CTV and CBC news. His skates now regularly draw media, and he's always willing to

speak about what is most important to him: raising money to fight "this ugly disease."

He calls it that, he says, because it's so widespread, and so difficult not only for those who are diagnosed, but for their family members and caretakers, friends and even neighbours. Each case is completely different, but all are devastating, he adds.

"This year, with the focus during the pandemic on those in long-term care, the number of seniors who have become sick and died alone, and with families unable to say goodbye," he says, he's even more determined to improve their care and their quality of life, hopefully providing resources for more families to keep their loved ones at home. More and more families are going to need the assistance that their local Alzheimer Societies can provide, he adds.

"That's why this fundraising skate is so important."

His wife tried to care for her mother at home with them, giving up her career as her mother's dementia worsened, and her health suffered, until, eventually, they decided to put her mother in long-term care as well. She was not only in the same home as his mother, but on the same floor.

"We thought that might make it easier," he says, "but when you make a decision like that, even when you know it's for the best, it's still really tough."

When McNeil takes to

the ice at Gretzky's, he will be wearing his usual layer of clothing, all the hockey pads he is accustomed to wearing, which make him comfortable and add some warmth, he'll have his music and an oak stick he uses to help him glide, as a hockey stick would, his AC/DC pants and a new yellow hoodie — his mother's favourite colour.

He has a custom hoodie made for each skate, and when he's finished, has people sign it, and then takes it off, to be auctioned for the Alzheimer's Society.

He encourages people to stop by during the day to chat, and he loves a Tim Hortons double double, he says, usually going through several during his skate.

Most rinks, he says, accommodate him with a close-by washroom facility, but without that, he has options that involve an empty coffee cup, he jokes — that's the question he's asked the second most often.

But what he really hopes for Dec. 15, is that across the country, people will "do the Canadian thing" and skate for 19 minutes and 26 seconds, and then donate \$19.26 to their local Alzheimer's Society.

If skating is not their thing, he suggests taking the 1926 challenge by doing something enjoyable, he says. "Bike, cycle, cook, walk your dog," then tell your story and send a photo to social media listed on his website www.1926Skate.com, or #1926Challenge.

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Bike repair project looking ahead to the future

Penny Coles
The Local

Terry Weiner, one of the co-founders of Bikes for Farmworkers, spoke to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Rotary Club Tuesday about the future of the bike project.

They've been very fortunate to have everything they need in the space they use in the former Virgil school on Four Mile Creek Road, but they are looking ahead to ensure their needs continue to be met, so they can move forward with their

work without interruption.

Weiner and project co-founder Mark Gaudet understand there are plans to redevelop the school property within the next two to three years, and they will have to move.

They're looking for 1,000 square feet for their shop, and another 1,000 square feet for storage, Weiner told Rotary members during their weekly Zoom meeting.

They need a location with low or no rent, and in or near Virgil, to be convenient for the farmworkers who shop and bank in Virgil,

often coming to the bike shop Thursday evenings, when they've finished their errands.

Their shop operates two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, from February to November, and the farmworkers can drop in for bike repairs or to purchase a restored, safe bicycle, for \$20, which cover the cost of parts and supplies. Repairs and adjustments to bikes are done at no cost, although new tires and tubes are sold at cost. When a bike is going to take a little while to repair, loaners are offered, says Weiner.

Weiner says they keep a certain level of funds for necessities, and any money above that goes back to the community, including support for worker families in need, and the annual Peach Pickers Picnic organized by Jane Andres.

In the last few weeks, volunteers have been refurbishing bikes that have been left on the farms after the workers have gone home. Most of them have

been left outside, under a trailer or in the bushes, he says.

They've got farmers collecting the bikes, dropping them off, picking them up and where possible storing them indoors, so the bikes are rust-free and safe to ride when the workers return in the spring.

There are 10 volunteers involved in the project, all taking four weeks off, from mid-December to mid-January, before returning to their workstations, says Weiner.

They'll be back at it in January, with four fully equipped workstations and one quality control station, he says.

"We need to have all stations operating at least two days per week in order to reach our goal of providing 500-plus bicycles each year, as well as providing repair services for individual workers."

This year, although COVID restrictions reduced their number of workstations, they managed



Volunteer Ken Eden repairs a bike at one of the Bikes for Farmworkers workstations in the former Virgil School. (Photos supplied)

to repair and refurbish for sale more than 600 bikes, each of which goes through a 50-point checklist. The number has risen significantly since they fixed and sold their first 40 bikes in 2016, and brings the total of bikes repaired since then to 2,742 this year.

Their requirement for

operating are simple — space, volunteers and an inventory of bikes to repair, Weiner says, hoping that by getting the word out about their need for space in the future, they will be able to plan their move, and not find themselves even temporarily without a home for their project.



Four happy farmworkers leave the building with refurbished bikes that will give them safe transportation during their time in NOTL.

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St. Mike students celebrate first snow



St. Michael Catholic Elementary students Frankie Paugh, Andrew Kallio, Nicole Zdzieblo, and Emilia Bessey make the most of their outdoor time in the snow. (Photos supplied)



Emily Ferguson tries to get enough snow to complete her snowman.



Cian Doyle and Michael Collins have worked hard on their snowman, and take a break before heading back to class.



Szymon Rojda, Emily Gouck, and Gabryella Julien make the most of the first snowfall, outdoors at morning recess.

LOCAL WORSHIP



Sunday, December 6th

10 a.m. Worship Gathering
Speaker: Kevin Bayne
Message: Peace (Second Advent)
Pre-registration is required to
attend in-person worship

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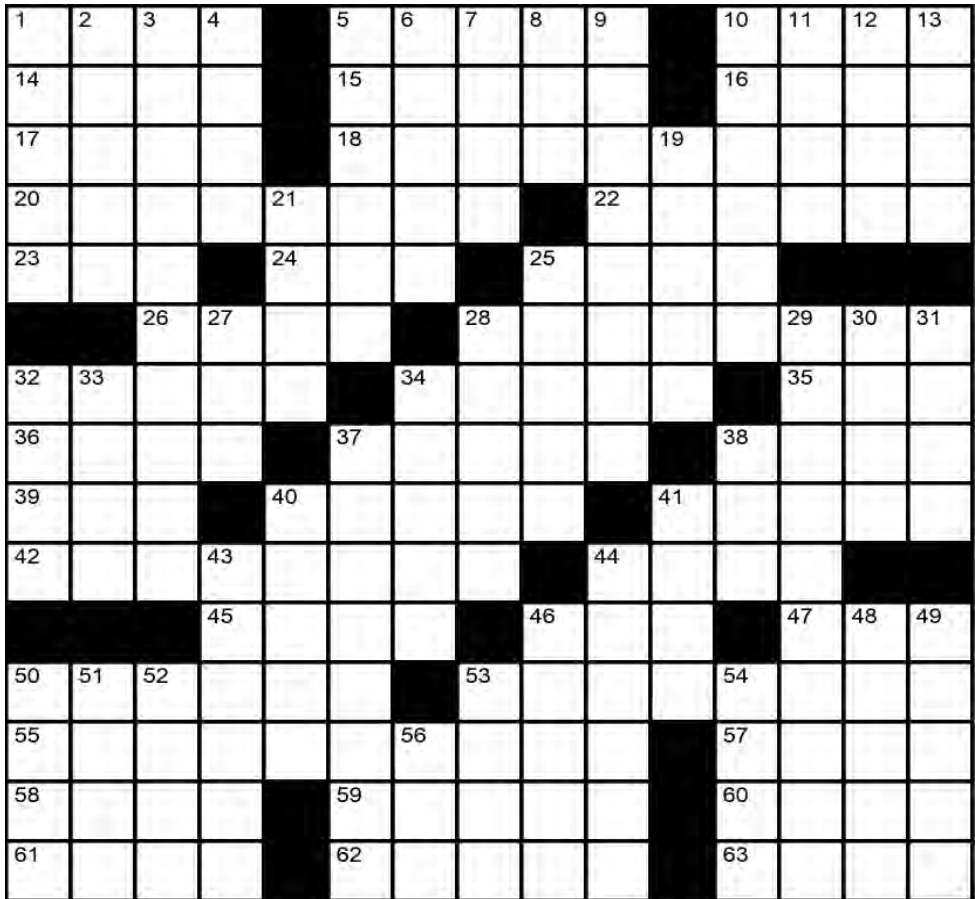
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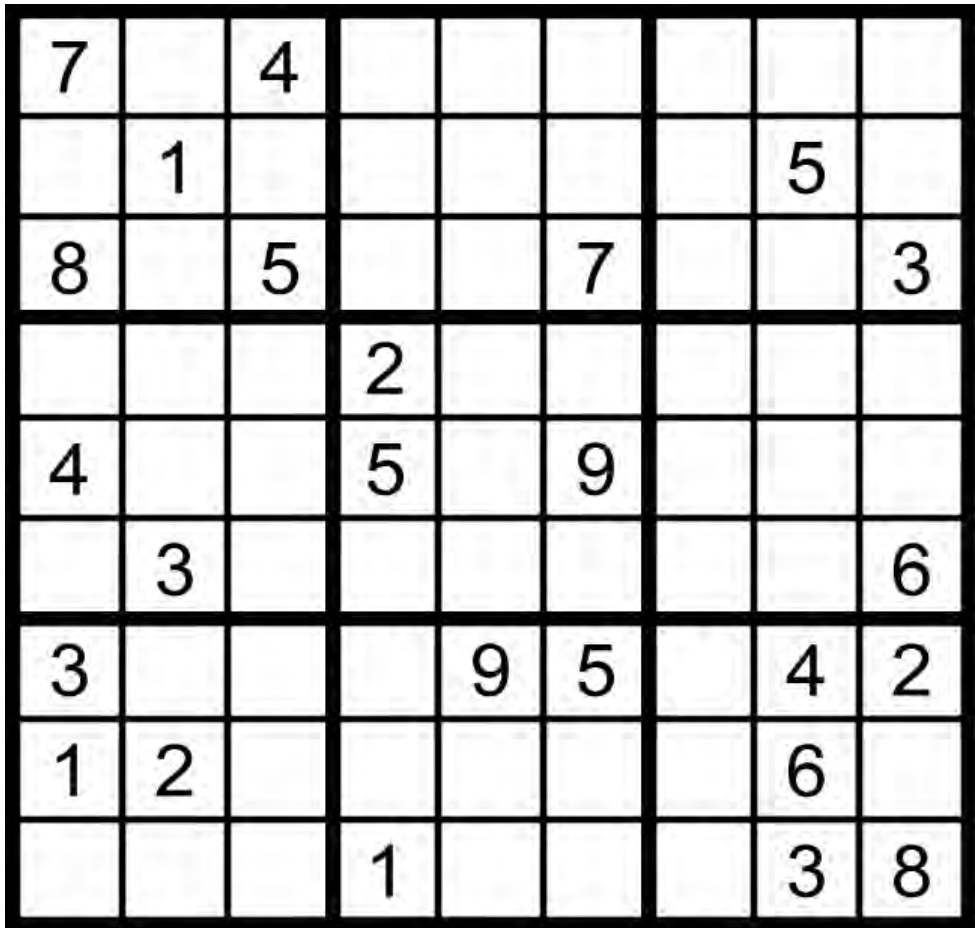
Across:

- 1 1/2 fl. oz.
5 Accumulate
10 Comic Chappelle
14 Dash
15 --- Hicks, who co-founded an eponymous online "List"
16 --- Jannings, first Oscar winner
17 "But, --- was ambitious, I slew him" (Shakespeare, "Julius Caesar")
18 Doubtful attitude
20 Pops the question
22 Fight sites
23 Brazilian saint
24 "--- cool!"
25 Chinese gooseberry
26 Coal Miner's Daughter
Loretta ---
28 Castigatory
32 Plaudits
34 "Peace on earth, good will ---"
35 "Air America" lead --- Gibson
36 "Death --- Expert Witness" (P D James)
37 "... my --- days, when I was green in judgment ..." (Shakespeare, "Antony and Cleopatra")
38 Australian national gemstone
39 "Holy cow!"
40 Of high grade

- 41 Former first lady of France --- Bruni
42 Attars
44 Democratic right
45 Sawbones, briefly
46 Salon goo
47 Sucker
50 Three miles
53 Disturb oilman, or sabotage form of transportation
55 Unlettered
57 "The Joy of Cooking" author Rombauer
58 "--- the torpedoes!" (David Farragut)
59 "Divine Comedy" writer --- Alighieri
60 Decree
61 Dead tree
62 Dirty political tactic
63 Dorothy's doggy

Down:

- 1 Golf hazards
2 Port on the Shatt al-Arab river
3 Choosy lads play havoc with study periods
4 Quick look
5 Long-time Moroccan king
6 Properly pitched
7 Matures
8 Final wish?
9 Kept in custody
10 Chicanery
11 Former Ugandan dictator
12 Passport endorsement
13 Boston's Liberty Tree, and others
19 Eighth moonwalker
21 Possesses
25 Stoner paired with Harold
27 " ... from --- far country blows" (Housman)
28 Gondoliers' propellers
29 Such as Flo Ziegfeld
30 Schnitzel meat
31 She, in Sonora
32 Japanese beef considered a delicacy
33 Mysteries on high
34 Watergate evidence
37 Turns out well
38 Bran source
40 End of a glacier
41 Centennial St.
43 Salvage
44 Pretense
46 We --- Get Out of This Place
48 Target
49 Pupil of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle
50 Eyeshades, maybe
51 Flair
52 Michigan college, and where it is
53 Leo's locks
54 Fissure
56 --- + clam = lamb



OBITUARY



HANS FUNK— September 19, 1925 – November 23, 2020

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Hans Funk on November 23, 2020 in his 96th year at Pleasant Manor Creekview Apartments in Virgil, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

Dear husband for 73 years to Eleonore Funk. Dad to Trudy and Gord Lockyer, Laura and Alan Brechin, Hans Peter and Ginette Funk. Opa to Rachel and Steven Vandermeer, James and Tanya Lockyer, Brandon Funk and Paige Coyne, Steven Funk. Opa to great-grandchildren Claire, Avery and Joshua Vandermeer, and Jacob and Sydney Lockyer.

Hans was a proud retired machinist of Girotti Machine Ltd. in St. Catharines and a lover of kayaking for hours on Leonard Lake in the Muskoka's even in his 90s.

The family was blessed with many people who cared for Hans and supported not only him but his family during a difficult time. Namely, The Paramedics, The Niagara Health System St. Catharines, LHIN, Pleasant Manor Supportive Housing and Chaplain, The Palliative Care Team and Paramed nurses and night nurse. A big Thank You to our heroes.

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to Tallman Funeral Homes.

Visitation took place at Niagara United Mennonite Church followed by a graveside service at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery.

Please consider donations to the Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Radiant Care Pleasant Manor or Niagara United Mennonite Church. Online condolences at www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca.

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Down: 1 Traps, 2 Basra, 3 School days, 4 Peep, 5 Hassan, 6 On-key, 7 Ages, 8 R I P, 9 Detained, 10 Decelt, 11 Amin, 12 Visa, 13 Elms, 19 Irwin, 21 Owns, 25 Kumar, 27 Von, 28 Poles, 29 Impresario, 30 Veal, 31 Ella, 32 Kobe, 33 U F Os, 34 Tapes, 37 Succceeds, 38 Oat, 40 Snout, 41 Colo, 43 Edging, 44 Veneer, 46 Gotta, 48 Aim at, 49 Plato, 50 Lids, 51 Elan, 52 Alma, 53 Mane, 54 Pitt, 56 Ram.

Across: 1 Tbsp, 5 Hoard, 10 Dave, 14 Race, 15 Angle, 16 Emil, 17 As he, 18 Skepticism, 20 Proposes, 22 Arenas, 23 Sao, 24 Way, 25 Kiwi, 26 Lym, 28 Punitive, 32 Kudos, 34 To men, 35 Mel, 36 Of an, 37 Salad, 38 Opal, 39 Boy, 40 Super, 41 Carla, 42 Essences, 44 Vote, 45 Docs, 46 Gel, 47 Sap, 50 League, 53 Monorail, 55 Illiterate, 57 Irma, 58 Damm, 59 Dante, 60 Flat, 61 Snag, 62 Smeat, 63 Toto.

Sudoku solution from November 19, 2020

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

Let it snow



A dusting of snow Tuesday turned St. Mark's Anglican Church on Byron Street and the Voices of Freedom Park on Regent Street into pretty winter scenes, as captured for The Local by Donald Combe.



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