Council delays budget to search for savings

Penny Coles
The Local

Taking into consideration council budget requests and management adjustments, staff delivered an operating budget with a 9.48 per cent increase at a special meeting Monday, after considering assessment growth.

But despite the struggle to reduce the increase to that amount — it had started at about 22 per cent — at the end of the four-hour meeting, councillors agreed to "take a pause," as suggested by Lord Mayor Betty Disero, and wait until they reconvene in January to approve it. They committed to looking for any possible further savings to reduce that number, although they all agreed it was tough to get to that point, and they have been diligent in looking at every line that represented an increase.

Council did, however, approve a $10,393,750 capital budget, which allows staff to move forward in the new year on some of the projects that are included in the 2020 budget.

With the budget as it stands now, although not approved, the operating levy is proposed to be $12,786,151. The impact is around $100 for an average home of $530,900, says Freeborn.

For those within an urban area who receive a storm levy charge, an additional 2.48 per cent increase of about $4.03 comes to a total of $119 extra in 2020.

The total increase over last year is $1,267,601, subject to change after further deliberation.

The audit committee, which has met five times from October until last Wednesday to go over the budget line by line, was recommending council approve the 2020 capital budget and operating budget, as presented, but there were discussions about savings in some areas, and about additions to the budget in others.

Councillors applauded his diligence and long hours put in to arrive at a budget to meet the time table set out by council.

All discretionary grants were discussed at audit committee meetings, some approved and some rejected, with those recommendations still to be approved by council.

Similarly, every new project or addition to the budget...
Holiday camp for kids at community centre

Local Staff

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is offering a holiday camp for kids at the community centre. It will run Dec. 23, 27, 30, and Jan. 2 and 3, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the community centre on Anderson Lane.

It will be offered for kids ages six to 12, at a cost of $35 a day. Before and after care is also available from 7 to 9 a.m. and from 4 to 6 p.m., at an extra cost of $5 per day.

The camp promises an opportunity for kids to meet new friends, and have lots of fun with activities that include games, sports, arts and crafts, science experiments, theme days and more, including time playing outside.

Campers are asked to bring their own nut-free, healthy lunches and snacks. For information, call 905-468-4386, email camps@notl.com, or visit www.notl.com. Registrations can be made online.

Local author writes about historic home

The historic home on the corner of Centre Street and Mississauga is well-known to locals, for many chiefly as a source of ghost stories, and curiosity about its future. Author Lissa Paul was more interested in its past, and the life of Eliza Fenwick, a woman who lived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and turned the house into The Niagara Seminary for Young Ladies. Through a series of unpublished letters, Paul has written a biography, Eliza Fenwick: Early Modern Feminist, which was launched recently at the Niagara Historical Museum, and is for sale in the museum gift shop. Maureen Dickson was about one of 50 people to attend the launch and purchase a copy to be signed by Paul. (Penny Coles)
Budget increase of 9.48 per cent could change

Continued from page 1

requests, or more deferrals/ cancellations will be required. This may risk the quality of existing service levels,” the budget report says.

Some of the items discussed Monday was the cost of a new pool for St. Davids, which has risen to $75 million from the original projection of $3 million. Parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte told councillors Monday that the increase is due to some changes in design. The 2020 budget earmarks $100,000 for the pool, with a fund-raising committee charged with raising a portion of the cost. He will be looking for grants to offset the increase in cost, but failing that, the design can be scaled back, he told council.

Another discussion arose concerning the Simcoe Park wading pool, with a line in the budget to turn it into a splash pad.

Couns. Clare Cameron and Gary Burrows spoke passionately about the need for a splash pad, saying a wading pool is much more appropriate for the historic park. Burrows recalled his time on regional council when the issue of safety regulations for the wading pool first surfaced — the Province sets the regulations, and the Region enforces them.

Although there was a suggestion then to turn the wading pool into a splash pad, the public outcry convinced the Town to meet provincial regulations by providing life guards, at a cost of $25,000 a season, and emerging the water from the pool every night.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero, who was a councillor during the previous discussion, said at that time, people from the Old Town and other areas of NOTL were strongly opposed to removing it.

“To some people it became a symbol of our heritage, she said, and keeping it symbolized preserving the history of the town.”

Councillors voted Monday to leave the wading pool as it is, and continue funding the liftandpumps, with Disero expressing a desire to talk to the Region about allowing it to remain that way.

Another discussion relates around the need for an updated Town website. Cameron asked that some money from a $725,000 provincial grant earmarked for modernization initiatives, be set aside for staff to work on the website.

About one-third of that grant has already been allocated, and she was concerned by the time the Town begins work on the website, the money will be spent.

There is a Delotte service delivery review coming up, and some councillors felt it imperative to wait until that review is completed and recommendations made, in case the review suggests there are more important ways to spend the grant.

“I agree the website needs to be changed,” said McCormack. “I find searching on it a disaster against a nightmare. But I don’t want to commit money before Delotte tells us what we should spend the money on.”

Cameron asked that $100,000 be put aside as a ‘placeholder’, while waiting for the service delivery review to be completed, referring to the many residents and people who are interested in moving to town who have commented on the outdated website. “We’re starting to look like a bit of an embarrassment with our peers,” she said. “Not doing it is not an option.”

The majority of councillors agreed with her, noting the money is not coming from the taxpayers but the provincial grant.

The NOTL Chamber of Commerce came close to losing its funding of $18,000 for 2020, because councillors found a recent presentation by chamber president Eduardo Lafforgue lacking in the financial details they wanted to hear before approving the budget expenses. Although McCormack was set to withhold all funding, Bisback and others disagreed that this was the time to do that.

Admitting to being disappointed with the presentation, Bisback said, “maybe this is the year we do a reset, rather than withholding the money. I would like to understand better the services we’re funding.”

The hour-long workshop with Laforgue and chamber board members last week was more about the chamber’s strategic plan than the expected budget discussion, councillors said, and about talking about simply refusing the money until that information is presented, councillors voted to give the chamber the funding it needs to finance the upcoming Icewine Festival, and defer the remainder until that discussion has been held in January.

Disero was one who voted to withhold the funding. As she mentioned during the workshop, she thinks it important to distinguish between the work the chamber does to support local businesses, and its marketing arm, NOTL Tourism. Chambers of commerce, she said, “are supposed to be self-sufficient and service their members. They made it clear they (the chamber and its tourism subsidiary) are one, and I don’t think they should be. That’s just my two cents.”

Regarding more than $1 million set aside for legal fees, Disero explained it’s not just to defend against one development, and some of the legal actions were launched by the previous council and councils before that.

If council decides not to defend their positions against inappropriate development, “we will lose total control of what happens in the council chamber, and in town,” she said.

The meeting ended with Disero saying although the projected increase, as it stands, is high, and she’s not sure what can be done to reduce it, “maybe we can take a pause, look at it and come back with more ideas.”

Councillors agreed to a deferral until January.
Regional budget preparing for growth

Penny Coles
The Local

While town councillors continue to struggle to find more savings before finalizing the Town’s 2020 budget, Niagara regional council has approved a budget that sets up an overall property tax increase of 5.92 per cent.

Not unlike town councillors’ efforts, regional councillors’ efforts were aimed at balancing the need to catch up with infrastructure improvements, keep up with the level of service delivery and have a budget that is sustainable for the future, says Gary Zalepa, regional councillor for Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The regional operating budget for 2020 has been approved with a tax levy of $392.6 million.

The increase includes improvements to public transit and social services, and re-development for affordable housing and recreational facilities.

The Region has made health and social services a priority, despite the fact that the Province is no longer funding many of those programs, he says.

“We’re protecting the most vulnerable in society, spending on programs for the homeless, and projects affecting families with low incomes,” including a program through the YMCA that helps kids participate in activities that include sports, theatre and the arts.

“The Region is ‘definitely doing some catch-up’ when it comes to capital projects, says Zalepa, with different priorities than councils of past years. “There isn’t enough funding in reserve funds to meet capital needs in the 2020 budget,” he explains, pushing the Region to work at finding the right balance between funding capital projects and building reserves for a sustainable future.

“This council was struggling with tax rates, and keeping things affordable, and catching up with reserves for the long term,” he says.

“Increases vary, according to ‘many moving parts,’ including the regional tax rate, and assessment.

The main point he makes about the 2020 regional budget is that “it sets the stage for growth.”

Investments in infrastructure for GO Transit and other projects that will attract employers and jobs are critical, he says, and public transit is a big part of the puzzle needed to accomplish that.

Regional councillors had several workshops and sessions to discuss each portion of the budget before making their final decisions, he adds.

Regional Councillor Gary Zalepa (File photo)

“We had a really fulsome discussion. We were not taking this lightly. It’s been a huge amount of work and input to get to where we were at the stage to finally approve it.”

But in the end, he believes it’s a good budget for 2020 and the future.

“This budget is positioning the region for growth. We need to compete with other regions for jobs, and we need the infrastructure to attract employers and jobs. Without them we’d end up playing second fiddle to other regions in the province. The Niagara Region is putting the infrastructure in place for the future, to be ready to get through the next period of growth.”

Can you make this holiday season a little more special for a Niagara Region charity? Yes, you can!

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Our campaign goal will help us provide another year of respite and recreation programs for children and young adults with special needs in the Niagara Region. With 19 years of history behind us, we know that support from our communities help us to continue to provide our services, that are so valued by those we serve.

To donate go online www.redroofretreat.com/giftsfromtheheart.
Niagara River designation another step closer

NOTL endorsement one of two remaining next steps

Penny Coles
The Local

Jocelyn Baker grew up in NOTL, just steps from the Niagara River. She swam in it, spent hours tubing along its inner tube between Navy Hall and the sand docks as a teen, and feels deeply the need to recognize and preserve the significant body of water that has played a huge role, not only in her formative years, but also in her career in conservation.

“The work I do today is not just related to my profession. It’s related to growing up in the river. It’s something I’ve experienced for 50 years,” says Baker. She recently spoke to The Friends of One Mile Creek in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and following that, to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, about her efforts to have the river designated as a wetland of international significance. Her next stop, likely in January, will be in NOTL, as she looks for council endorsement under the Ramsar Convention, which protects wetlands and their biodiversity in 170 countries.

A Ramsar designation is based on a convention that was held in 1971 in the city of the same name, in Iran, Baker explained. Since it was first signed — Canada entered into the agreement in 1981 — more than 2,000 sites around the world have been declared wetlands of international significance, with 37 in Canada and 39 in the U.S., which signed on in 1986.

The U.S. has already signed off on its side of the Niagara River as a significant wetland, and agreement on this side would make it the first trans-boundary designation, she says. She never envisioned “Canada would not be first” in its support of designation, she says, and considers that recent step from the U.S. as being helpful in her efforts.

Baker is co-chair of the Niagara River Ramsar Designation Steering Committee, which has been working on this initiative since 2013. She is also a former NPCA project manager in the area of water restoration, but lost her job in a major shake-up before the 2018 municipal election, a subject she is unable to broach publicly.

The former NPCA staff and board members did not endorse this significant designation, so the recent support is very much appreciated, says Baker, now a Niagara College instructor who is also pursuing a master’s degree at Brock University.

“The support of the NPCA was a pretty pivotal endorsement. We feel we can move forward now,” she says.

Baker was joined for the November presentation to the NPCA by Jean Rose-Burney, the U.S. co-chair of the steering committee. He told board members those on his side of the river are looking forward to Canadian designation.

In 2016, when the issue of the Niagara River as a wetland of international significance was discussed by NOTL town council, a decision was deferred due to “the unknown and unintended consequences” of designation, specifically from the agricultural community, which draws water from the river, a staff report to council said.

More than three years later, Baker continues to stress that while Ramsar designation would signify the importance of the Niagara River, it carries no regulations or restrictions with it — any protections are up to “the unknown and unintended consequences” of designation, specifically from the agricultural community, which draws water from the river, a staff report to council said.

For a site to qualify for Ramsar designation, it must meet one of nine criteria, which includes being rare or unique; supports vulnerable, endangered or threatened species; supports keystone or endemic species; supports species at a critical stage in their life cycles, such as migration or breeding; supports 20,000 or more water birds; supports one per cent of the individuals in a population of one species of water bird; supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish species, is an important food source, spawning area, nursery or migration path for fish; and supports one per cent of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent species that are not birds.

The Niagara River falls within less than one per cent of the global Ramsar sites that meet all nine criteria, says Baker.

NOTL is not the only support still required. While the Niagara Parks Commission agreed to be the nominating agency on the Canadian side as far back as 2015, as an owner and manager of a significant portion of the Niagara River on this side, the commission is still under-going a legal review of its support, the completion of which has been delayed with a new CAO and board members, Baker says.

“That report keeps getting pushed back. We’re now looking at March. They seem to have other priorities.”

Ontario Power Generation, Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, the Region and the NPCA have now given their endorsement, she added.

In addition to the pride and community support which would evolve with an international recognition of the Niagara River, there would be benefits for tourism, the wine industry, education, economic development and resource management, says Baker.

When her committee makes its presentation to NOTL council, she is hoping, with an increased understanding of the voluntary nature of designation, the Town will be supportive.

“It isn’t interfering with anyone’s rights,” she says.
**Local Finds**

**Peter John Stokes 1926 – 2013**

Consulting Restoration Architect known for his work at Upper Canada Village, many public buildings in Ontario, New Brunswick and the restoration to St. Mark's Church. Author and President of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.

ANN TOMPKINS 1926 – 2018

Wife of Peter Stokes

JACOBINE JONES 1897-1976

Architectural Sculptor & Guardian Mentor to Peter Stokes

Marker ERECTED BY THE NIAGARA FOUNDATION

**Heritage architect buried here**

by Donald Combe

Special to The Local

Peter and Ann lived for many years in the gracious 1828 house at the corner of King and Platoff Streets. They were active in raising awareness of the historic and architectural importance of this town.

The concept of a local radio station is brilliant and long overdue. We have such a diverse wealth of talented characters in our midst with stories, skills, ideas and advice waiting to be shared. Lord Mayor, let’s make this happen.

Peter Warrack

**Merry Christmas, happy holidays to all**

With just days until Christmas, we have so many reasons to be proud to live and work in this great town with its very generous people.

We’ve seen over and over that while it may be a small community, Niagara-on-the-Lake has a huge heart. We’ve seen the kindness, the spirit, and we’ve witnessed the many reasons to feel so grateful for all that surrounds us.

For many, Christmas is the day that’s at the core of Christmasy. It’s a day to celebrate for a specific reason.

But whatever our religious beliefs, whether we celebrate the birth of a child born centuries ago as the Son of God, or whether we just celebrate the season that seems to foster a feeling of peace and goodwill, of kindness and compassion, it is a time to contemplate what is important to us, our priorities not just for the holiday, but for the year ahead.

For many, it’s all about family, those who are closest to us, those whom we love.

For some, that’s a struggle. We’ve lost loved ones, we may be feeling alone, but we are in the midst of a caring community, we can reach out to those in need.

It’s a time to feel blessed for all that is good in our lives, especially here, in this beautiful town that millions of people love to visit, and be mindful that not everyone is as fortunate as we are.

Although this time of year is usually a rush for many of us, with the days leading up to Christmas going by in a bit of a blur, there are reminders all around us to be calm, to be loving and caring, to be kind and gentle.

We at The Local wish for all of you, a happy, safe holiday, and a time of joy however you choose to spend it.

We thank you for being so supportive over the past year, with the stories you have shared, the love we have felt, and your support with your businesses, which allows us to help bring the news to this amazing town we all treasure.

We will be starting a new year soon, another year of challenges and triumphs — mostly triumphs, of course — and we will be here to share the news with you.

We have been so proud to be part of this town, to have watched it grow over the decades, to meet and learn about so many of you, and to continue to be, in some small way, a part of your lives.

Penny Coles

The Local

**Budget deferral a gift to all**

The big story this week is the much-awaited budget, already the subject of much criticism on social media.

We have a suggestion for those of you quick to slam the deferral.

The deferral of this budget is one we’ve heard, as councillors did by taking money they can afford. The senior citizen on a fixed income, the taxpayer, even after so much has already been done.

There is now a period of repairs, when councillors will try to find more savings. Do you have a solution? Making tourism pay for infrastructure projects is one we’ve heard, as councillors did by taking money from parking reserves, that’s not enough. There are smart people in this town.

This council was democratically elected to look after the issues NOTL residents have determined to be priorities, and to preserve the quality of life this town offers.

There is a time to protest, when councillors cavalierly.

These councillors struggled. There was no decision made lightly, no money spent cavalierly.

This was a huge undertaking, to provide the services residents expect, at a cost that’s not enough. There are smart people in this town.

The Local

**LETTERS**

Make this happen

The Niagara-on-the-Lake

The trusted voice of our community

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The Local

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NotLocal

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41 Byron St., NOTL

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then your tip
Plants and animals create their own balance in nature

One of my favourite components of the spring hiking tour I run is explaining to people that nature has a pre-planned rulebook to follow every season.

The head of each species pushes through the newly thawed ground in a text-book, predictable order every year. We know that trout lines and wild leek will be first to burst on through to the other side. These two species are so determined to get that first taste of photosynthesis, that I have even seen them stick up through remaining snow patches.

After these early bloomers, the wild ginger, Solomon’s seal, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and other herbaceous plants pop up in the same scene they did last year and the thousands of years before that.

Why wouldn’t every plant have evolved to pop up early and “beat” the competition? Wouldn’t it make sense to take full advantage of the first warm days, the first buzz pollinating through the door. A little moosey and uncoordinated. Instead, if the kids got into line and were told they would all eventually be getting to the same place, it would be a smooth and more graceful transition.

Everyone wants to be in the foreground, yet it’s the kids all got where they wanted to be, and is it not just about every plant species has made its success of the springtime. The plants couldn’t be able to successfully function. This applies to all over the world also have a funny triangular relationship with humans. Sometimes you can find a plant that can harm you, and other species against which you could get where you wanted to go, and 40 shows up? Imagine a nation or planet whose natural resources are being irresponsibly disused. They may be in the pot at once! This is a picture a bunch of enthusiastic school kids trying to rush out the classroom door to their goal: recess or gym rush. If every plant wanted to be first to the scene or live in photosynthesis heaven, it would be so competitive and chaotic that none of them would succeed. There would be too much stress on the ecosystem’s resources. Imagine planning a party for four, and 40 shows up? Imagine a nation or planet whose natural resources are being irresponsibly disused. They might ask? A forest ecosystem wants to keep itself healthy, so neighbouring habitats can also stay healthy. The benefit is that kids get to ‘be in charge’ Capricorn. Clever thinking and a surprise or two (or three) make this a Christmas to be remembered and enjoyed. It was on Dec. 25, in the year 5 BC, that the day was adopted as the traditional birthday of Jesus. And on Dec. 12, 1233, St. Francis of Assisi built the world’s first church featuring Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the Three Wise Men, and the shepherds and animals in a manger setting.

Next week is Boxing Day, New Year’s Day and an Annular Solar Eclipse which is courtesy of the New Moon in Capricorn, also on Boxing Day. So please return!

Bill Auchterlonie
Special to The Local

This week on Auchterlonie on Astrology I’ll look at the Winter Solstice on December 21, Christmas on Wednesday, and also a Solar Eclipse on Boxing Day.

On my podcast I’ve got some more news on the Saturnalia, the Astrology of Christmas and the real birth of Christ.

Now let’s get back to the Solstice. Thursday, Dec. 19: The Moon moves from discriminat-ing Virgo into peace-loving Libra early in the morning. But the big news is courtesy of Mars in Scorpio making a friendly con-nection to Saturn in Capricorn, bringing a serious and sexy ener-gy to bear, especially for Scorpio.

Then, late Thursday night, Mercury in all-knowing Sagittarius, challenges by a keenly intuitive Neptune in Pisces, leaving many scratching our heads, wondering what to believe. In 1818 James Cameron, one of Niagara Falls, released his epic film, Titanic, which held the box office record for 12 years, until beaten by Av-atar (also by James Cameron) in 2009.

Friday, Dec. 20: The last full day of fall for 2019 was Mercury move from ‘Im in charge’ Capricorn, into forward-looking Aquarius. Despite the "aquarius" in its name, Aquarius is actually the last air sign of the zodiac. Aquar-is is represented by the water bearer, the mystical healer who bestows water, or life, upon the land. Accordingly, many see Aquarius as the most humani-tarian sign of the zodiac. We are entering the Age of Aquarius, which I explain (a bit) on my podcast. Today begins a month of forward-looking thoughts and conversations that look to help make life better for all.

Saturday, Dec. 21: It is the first day of the Winter Solstice as the Sun makes its furthest journey south and begins to move northward again. It’s the first day of winter and the shortest day of sunlight in the Northern Hemisphere as the days become longer. In ancient times, this was the day of the Saturnalia, an ancient Ro-man festival in honour of the god Saturn, held on Dec. 17 of the Julian calendar. That’s Dec. 21 in the Gregorian calendar we use today. I explain more about this in my podcast. This first day of winter begins at 11:11 p.m. Eastern time. The day is busy from an astrological perspective, with the Moon in Scorpio mak-ing connections all day long. Emotions are deep and friendly, and a surprise is in the offing for some.

Sunday, Dec. 22: A restless night of sleep may be due to worry about a relationship, or worries over money. Mars in Scorpio hooks up with Pluto in Capricorn, bringing willpower to physical efforts, making creative efforts better and providing subtle hand-eye coordination.

Monday, Dec. 23: The Moon spends the first half of the day in secretive Scorpio and then moves on to the constellation Sagittarius for the second part of it. The best of it is a sweet connection to Venus in Aquarius early in the evening. It is time for a party! Even if it’s a party for two! On this day in 1972, the fa-mous football play, the Immacu-late Reception, takes place when Pittsburg Steelers Franco Harris scores a touchdown on a pass thrown by Terry Bradshaw.

Tuesday, Dec. 24: Christmas Eve is about as lazy a Christmas as you might ask for. The stockings are hung and all seems to be ready in preparation for a fairly laid back day of celebration of the birth of Jesus, which was really on March 23, 7 BC. Composer Franz Gruber wrote Silent Night on this day in 1818.

Wednesday, Dec. 25: Merry Christmas! And merry it promises to be, with the Moon in the upbeat constellation of Sagittarius until late in the af-fernoon, when she moves on to ‘in charge’ Capricorn. Clever thinking and a surprise or two (or three) make this a Christmas to be remembered and enjoyed. It was on Dec. 25, in the year 5 BC, that the day was adopted as the traditional birthday of Jesus. And on Dec. 12, 1233, St. Francis of Assisi built the world’s first church featuring Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the Three Wise Men, and the shepherds and animals in a manger setting.

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Auchterlonie on Astrology
Library activities for kids

Kasia Dupuis
Children's Library Service Associate
Special to The Local

When school’s out, the library is the place to be. While the library will be closed on Dec. 25, 26, 31 and Jan. 1, we still have a number of programs and activities planned to keep the family engaged and creative this holiday season.

Start off the week with a showing of The Grinch (2018, PG) at 1 p.m. Monday Dec. 23, complete with popcorn and hot chocolate in the Rotary Room. What is more cozy than a movie afternoon at the library?

Also on Dec. 23 at 4 p.m., join us in The Makers for the last of this season’s BYO Monday Makers series. Bring in two clean, 16-oz mason jars with lids, and we will provide the materials needed to build a mason jar winter diorama — a mini winter world in a jar. This workshop is perfect for kids ages six and up, costs $2 per participant and registration is required.

On Friday, Dec. 27, pop into the children’s corner at the library for a variety of drop-in crafts and activities, perfect for all ages. Kids can create, explore and browse our children’s collection while parents can get a nice change of pace and perhaps pick up a new read or two for themselves.

Sunday, Dec. 29 is the Teen Literary Alliance’s monthly meeting in the teen section of the library. The Teen Literary Alliance is a super fun way to spend an afternoon having casual discussions about the books we enjoy reading. Not at all like school, plus there will be snacks. At this month’s meeting, the group will be discussing the classic, Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott, which has just been released as a feature length movie this month. Interested in joining? Email Emma at eburkholder@notlpl.org to register.

On Monday, Dec. 30 at 1 p.m., we will be showing our second winter break movie, Angry Birds 2, in the Rotary Room with popcorn and hot chocolate. This is a free event and registration is encouraged to save your space. After the movie, at 4 p.m., the Monday Makers Club will be meeting to create the much-anticipated Everlasting Gingerbread House. Create a cute and colourful faux gingerbread house with unconventional materials — no food involved! This workshop is geared for ages 6-plus, costs $5 per participant and registration is required.

Is Minecraft a thing in your house? If yes, the ever popular Minecraft Club will be running at its usual 4 p.m. time on Thursday, Jan. 2. Registration is required for this weekly program, and it is a great way to get out and meet fellow Minecraft enthusiasts.

On Friday, Jan. 3, there will also be a new batch of drop-in activities in the children’s corner of the library, as well as a Technology Petting Zoo from 1 to 2 p.m. in the Rotary Room. Pop in and play with some of the library’s gizmos and gadgets, explore activities in the children’s corner and of course, grab a new book or two to take home for a cozy winter reading session.

Wishing everyone a safe and relaxing holiday. See you at the library.
Town discussing hosting teen co-op placements

Driving through Niagara-on-the-Lake on a week-day afternoon, one might notice the presence of a few teens around the area of Vineridge Academy. It harkens back to those days when hundreds of local teens attended Niagara District Secondary School in that same building. But as welcome as they are in town, the great majority of those Vineridge students are not local.

Since the 2010 closure of the high school by the District School Board of Niagara, there has been little teenage presence in town weekdays, from September to June. That's in town weekdays, from little teenage presence.

District School Board of the high school by the town hall last week be-
to that end, Randall reached out recently to the cooperative education de-
Fees, seniors homes and
to their various departments.

The potential oppor-
tunities the Town may be able to offer are seemingly endless.

Randall floated such town departments as plan-
ing, bylaws, fire services, finance, information tech-
ology, communications, and parks and recreation as among those possibly able to host students.

The benefits to youth are obvious. As Randall pointed out, it is always dif-
ficult for NOTL and other municipalities to fill va-
cancies for positions such as building inspectors, and
to retain good employees.
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It is a fantastic first step toward seeing more youth in all corners of the town, Monday to Friday, on a more regular basis.
Ted Mouradian was among friends, new and old, watching Saturday’s Christmas Parade from a Queen Street porch. (Photos by Penny Coles)

Last Saturday, like many of you, I braved the rain, the wind and the cold to watch the 2019 Santa Claus Parade. Luckily I was able to keep dry, because of the great hospitality of my friend Lynn Masaro, who runs the B&B at The Doctor’s House on Queen Street.

As I watched the parade and interacted with the other guests, something struck me. No one seemed to be upset with the fact that it was pouring rain and not snowing. We were simply enjoying the moment and the friendship. That got me to thinking about the abundance that many of us have who live in Niagara. Unfortunately, that is not what I see on a day-to-day basis, where people complain about the smallest of issues.

There is a story about a family who arrived from a third world country, where they literally had nothing. They were asked what struck them the most about their new home. They said that they couldn’t believe we actually use clean water to flush our toilets. Think about that comment. Water is gold in many places of the world (including Canada), and we in Niagara use clean drinkable water in our toilets, and simply flush it away without a thought.

Here’s the rub. Then we bitterly complain about not finding a parking spot on Queen Street because of those tourists who simply want to enjoy what some would call the prettiest little town in the world. Or someone who is driving too slow, or a friend or relative who didn’t treat us the way we thought we needed to be treated.

I believe it is time we all thought more about the abundance we have, and how blessed we are for the lives we live. This season, and hopefully into the next and beyond, it’s time we take a minute to be grateful for what we have, and stop focusing on what we don’t have. Of course it is important to give to others at this time of year, but I think it is more important to understand how blessed we are, and how fortunate to be living in this place at this time.

So, here is my hope for the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. Be more grateful and less wanting. Be kinder and less hurtful. Be more open and less closed. Be more patient and less impatient. Be more helpful and less selfish. Be more giving and less taking. Be more understanding and less narrow in your thinking.

And finally be happier, and less angry with your situation in life. Remember, you really do have a lot.

Don’t get me wrong – last Saturday at the parade it was wet, cold and nasty, but that was secondary to all of the wonderful volunteers and parade participants who took the time to march, in order to bring others so much joy that day. Not to mention the great laughs I had standing on the porch with old friends and some new ones.

Dante said we don’t see the world as it truly is, we see the world only from where we stand. Maybe it is time to look again, with a new vision, at the blessings of what we have.

Ted Mouradian is the President of the 2% Factor Inc. and creator of the Law of Cooperative Action. He is an author and professional speaker and can be reached at ted@the2percentfactor.com.
Cross-lake ferry has long journey ahead

Penny Coles
The Local

The president of Lake Ontario Express says he has been working on a water link between Niagara and Toronto since 2014, and tried to float the idea with stakeholders in 2018, but he has some obstacles to overcome before turning his idea into reality.

Bruno Caciagli hopes to use the Navy Hall dock as the Niagara-on-the-Lake connection, but has failed so far to receive permission from Parks Canada, or from the City of Toronto to use its harbour, without which, he told council, “there is no project. You will never see me again.”

The benefit to a successful water link is chiefly the time it saves for commuters and visitors to Niagara, he says.

The distance across the lake is 50 kilometres, versus 120 kilometres along the highway, and the time of a ferry crossing is about 40 to 45 minutes. Caciagli told NOTL councillors, with cars and buses taking from one to two hours.

He is predicting 2,100 travellers per day, with 80-passenger hovercrafts or catamarans making 14 trips per day, seven days a week, 12 months a year “weather permitting,” at a ticket cost of $25.

He would also like to see the service offer round trips between Toronto and Port Dalhousie, and the Beacon Harbour, as well as NOTL.

He wants to be operational for those coming to Niagara for the Canada Summer Games in 2021.

But Councillor Wendy Cheropita, while saying the idea is “exciting and timely,” asked the question on everybody’s minds: “What are you doing differently to make it a viable business that will be successful?”

She was referring to several efforts in recent decades, from hydrofoils to ocean-type ferries, at a similar price, and some with shuttle service, that failed.

The lake was often too rough, the weather made services unreliable, and the costs prohibitive, although the concept was always a welcome one.

Coun. Gary Burroughs also brought up some of the “serious” problems in the past. He referred to an incident in the late 1990s. A wave washed over a hydrofoil operating from Toronto to Niagara, with a provincial minister of tourism aboard.

The windows broke, soaking the passengers — the tourism promotion wasn’t a success.

Caciagli said he has several factors on his side, including a construction background that has taught him to pay attention to “lessons learned.”

Most important, he said, is that “any type of ferry service has to be coordinated with land transit. It cannot exist by itself.”

The biggest factor to ensure success, he said, is for public transit to connect with ferry dockings, to eliminate the need for parking for commuters and encourage tourists to choose the cross-lake option.

He also spoke of the timely need to reduce vehicles on the road to protect the environment and reduce climate change, “to do something for our children and grandchildren. We have to start some place and one place to start is in the use of our vehicles.”

He told councillors that with support in Niagara, he hopes to make inroads with Toronto and upper levels of government for funding.

“I appreciate the enthusiasm,” said Coun. Clare Cameron, saying she finds the possibility of success “dubious” and she couldn’t support it without Parks Canada included in the discussions.

Burroughs made a motion to support the proposal in principle, in order to help Caciagli move forward with the project, subject to Parks Canada approval.

It passed with only Cameron and Coun. Erwin Wiens opposed.
Youth council hosts holiday party with music, crafts

Sunday's dreary and cold afternoon was made merry and bright by the Lord Mayor's Youth Advisory Council's Christmas Party.

The party kicked off in the auditorium of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre, with plenty of hot chocolate and marshmallows on hand to please the younger crowd. And coffee to warm up their parents. Children and teens were invited to decorate gingerbread and sugar cookies and eat their creations. Christmas-themed craft projects were set up and staffed by youth council volunteers. Music and a flashy strobe light completed the party atmosphere.

"New fun to be had this year," enthused Bethany Poltl, chair of the LMYAC. She explained the youth council had changed the format of the celebration this year, the third annual Christmas event. In previous years, the celebration has centred on providing the audience with performances by local youth, but this year, they decided to engage younger members of the community by setting up the creative Christmas craft projects.

Poltl introduced herself, her co-chair Janvi Ganatra and youth council member Genny Moncion, who helped introduce the acts for the performance, including the Niagara Bethany Handbell Choir, always a joy to hear, and earning enthusiastic applause as the last chimes of the March of the Nutcracker fade.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero addressed the audience after their performance, saying she makes a point of attending concerts of the youth and adult handbell choirs when they perform. She also thanked the youth advisory council for representing the young people in town and bringing their voice to council.

Although Niagara-on-the-Lake has been called a town for retirees, this could not be further from the truth, she said. With the number of young people and young families moving to NOTL, the work the youth advisory council will do over the next three years "will be so important to the future of our town."

She concluded by thanking the volunteers of the Lord Mayor's Youth Advisory Council, Lauren Kruthbosch, Community Engagement Coordinator, who works directly with the LMYAC and Town Councillor Claire Cameron, who according to the Lord Mayor "has played an integral role in the leadership" in the LMYAC.

Following that, the performances began, including pianist Clara De Munnich, and the sibling duo of Seungbeom Kim and Dahyeon Kim. Seungbeom performed on the cello, while his sister accompanied him on the violin.

Poltl entertained the audience with her lovely soprano, followed by a dramatic reading of Twas the Night Before Christmas, read by Moncion.

Poltl concluded the afternoon's festivities by thanking the audience, the volunteers, the Lord Mayor and the Town Council for their continued support of the Lord Mayor's Youth Advisory Council.

The Lord Mayor's Youth Advisory Council was established in the fall of 2017 after Poltl approached the NOTL Town Council in an effort to increase the voice of youth in the community. Presently the LMYAC consists of nine members ranging in age from 13 to 18 whose mandate is to give a voice to the youth of NOTL, encourage youth involvement within the community, offer opportunities for youth to be a part of local activities and events, provide leadership opportunities and experience for youth; and, allow youth to help build the NOTL community.
Vineridge Academy planning an expansion

Local and international students benefit from small class sizes

Penny Coles  

The former public high school building on Niagara Stone Road is looking better than it has in decades, inside and out, and is due for an expansion that would attract about 300 more international students.

The Vineridge Academy, rebranded from the Royal Elite International Academy, as it was named when it opened four years ago, is still Chi- nese-owned, and has about 120 students, says Jade Winterbottom, who coordinates accommodations and activities for the students.

It’s a 24/7 job for her, with students arriving as young as 13 years old, some needing more care than others, she says. And she and other staff from Winterbottom’s understand that is the nature of their job, which often includes organizing outings for the students outside of school hours.

A small number of local students have registered, preferring the small class sizes that allow for one-on-one help when needed, the location in their own community, and the school’s 100 per cent acceptance of the students to preferred choice for post-secondary education, whether it be university or college.

One of the three Niagara-on-the-Lake students at Vineridge is Sebastian Reese, who began his education at Vineridge for high school.

He was also attracted by the high success level of students accepted to their choice of universities.

“It made me feel good, knowing that I’d get to go to the university of my choice,” he said.

His choice is Webb University, on Long Island’s north shore in New York. The university is a top-ranked undergraduate institution that provides a well-rounded program in naval architecture, which is Reese’s goal for the future.

His family moved to Niagara from Florida when his father accepted a job as the St. Lawrence Seaway as a pilot of boats through the locks, he said, so he has grown up with boats in his blood. He sees Vineridge as the school that can unlock the key to his future.

He is taking the subjects he needs — the curriculum is the same as any Ontario high school — and class size varies from five students to a maximum of 20.

The reason for the schools high post-secondary placement rate is the guidance department, said Winterbottom. Councillors work with students right from their first year, looking at their goals, making a study plan to ensure they take the courses they need to achieve them, and then helping them apply to the schools of their choice.

“We’re such a small school, the counsellors can sit down with students and talk about what they want to do, where they want to go, and make sure they get there,” she said. “We can make sure any course they need is available to them.”

Alexandra Odumosu is a 15-year-old student from Nigeria. She is in her third year at the international school in Grade 12, and arrived when she was just 13.

Her goal is to study media arts, and she is considering Brock University, the University of Windsor and Niagara College, she says.

She lives in Niagara-on-the-Green, with Ruby, a grandmother, and Ruby’s husband Ben.

She’s been great for Alex, teaching her how to look after a house for when I live on my own, and to remember things that are important, like being on time, and having manners. She is teaching me the skills of living independently, to be healthy and organized.”

Alex says she likes it when Ruby’s adult children and grandchildren come to visit.

“It’s a lot of fun, and a really good experience.”

Winterbottom says she believes it’s been good for Alex to live in a family home, rather than in residence at the school, having arrived in Canada at such a young age.

She hasn’t been able to return home since she arrived — apart from the expense, Alex says, “my mother is always worried about my safety at home.”

Instead, her family has moved to Canada to visit her, and she has travelled to Ottawa to visit her sister, who is at Carleton University. And she can call home whenever she wants.

Most of the students will be on their way home by Dec. 20, but Alex will be one of the staying in NOTL, and Winterbottom will ensure she and the others are kept busy.

“We make sure their calendar is jam-packed with things to do,” she said.

Last Christmas holiday, students went skating at Fort George, and at the arena.

“I fell down so many times,” says Alex. “It was really scary at first. There were kids five to seven years old skating, and they were doing really well!”

But she said falling didn’t hurt — much — and she was glad for the chance to try skating.

Winterbottom will arrange for a trip for those remaining in NOTL to see the Festival of Lights in Niagara Falls, for a Christmas Day dinner at the Mandarin in St. Catharines, and for New Year’s Eve, festivities in the Falls.

Staff work throughout the holidays to experience Christmas with the students, she said, and the kids are able to get a bus to the Outlet Collection or the Old Town if they choose to.

They know the bus routes and can also get themselves to the Pen Centre to shop or see a movie.

“These are kids who are really well-travelled. They can find their way anywhere.”

Local Vineridge students are encouraged to join in if they want to, she adds.

Reese says although he still hangs out with his NOTL friends, he enjoys the time he spends with the international students. “Everybody gets to know everybody else, it’s such a small school. We get to learn about each others’ culture, and to realize there is a whole big world out there. I’ve made a lot of new friends.”

The school also looks for opportunities to be students in the community — they bad a great experience volunteering at the Snowbirds air show, held a food drive for Newark Neighbours, and helped out collecting food at the Candlelight Stroll.

The lobby displays the many flags of countries represented at that school — students come mostly from Kazakhstan, Mexico, Nigeria, Vietnam and Turkey, said Winterbottom, although other countries have also been represented.

The halls are much improved from the former Niagara school board high school’s last years, refreshed and paint- ed in soothing colours. The library remains the library, but some of the study desks have been replaced with plush furniture to give the kids a comfortable, relaxing place to hang out. The cafeteria is still downstairs, where it serves three meals a day for students who live in dorm rooms converted from Vineridge wing classrooms.

In the first years of the international school, some students were housed in a residence in Niagara Falls and housed to school, others lodged with local families. But the preference for most parents, sending their young teens far away to receive a Canadian education, is to have them live in residence at the school, says Winterbottom.

In order to attract local students and find homes for international students to live ‘as home stays’ with families, the school started out offering free tuition in exchange for lodgings, says Winterbottom, but there isn’t a need for that anymore.

Although she’s unsure where the expansion stands in the planning process, the goal of the facility owner is to create enough rooms to house 400 students, with an addition from the end of the Virgil wing running parallel to East and West Line, into the back parking lot, she said.

The home-stay families have been really helpful, offering a safe environment for kids that allowed them to learn the language and culture, and develop friendships with local students, said Winterbottom, who likes to see her international students stay with families.

But the majority of the parents choose the residence for the kids, and only 10 per cent this year.

“There are so many great families, but we’re at the point where we have more families than we need for students,” she said.

“I think it’s a great experience for students to live with Canadian families, but the majority of the parents like their kids living at the school, not having to take the bus. We will always give them the choice, but very few are choosing home stays.”
Christmas glows with timeless handmade jewellery

Submitted by VandenDool Jewellers

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With her clear shapes and love of colour, founder and head designer Carola Eckrodt has succeeded in making COEUR DE LION one of the few brands which customers recognize instantly—in over 30 different countries. The GEOCUBE® collection dating from 1999 is now considered a German design classic and is admired around the world.

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Just in time for the 2019 Autumn/Winter season, Carola Eckrodt has combined exceptional design ideas with exquisite materials, perfectly showcasing the colours of the season such as fuchsia, peridot, violet, flame red, orange, petrol and sapphire blue in the multicoloured pieces within the EXPRESSIVE-CŒUR range or metallic silver, rose gold, yellow gold and black in the BRILLIANT-CŒUR collection.

The GEOCUBE® line features a number of real gems again: picture jasper, white howlite and black onyx are combined with fine synthetic tiger’s eye, sparkling Swarovski® crystals and 316L stainless steel.

When you’re doing your Christmas shopping, consider giving the gift of a Local discount card. It’s the perfect gift for anyone who loves to eat, drink, or shop in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and offers a great opportunity for recipients who would love to treat themselves, at a discounted price, to anything from a spa treatment to detailing for their vehicle.

If you have friends and family who are difficult to buy for, let them do their shopping themselves with a Local card that will offer them specials and discounts at many great businesses in town. If they live out of town, it will encourage them to visit, and enjoy all our beautiful town has to offer—a meal at a local restaurant, discounted tastings at several local wineries, and shopping at some of NOTLs most popular stores. It’s the gift that keeps on giving, for a full year—the card can be dated Dec. 25, and will not expire until Dec. 25, 2020. You can even make money with it — The Local is offering two free classified ads, a value of $40, which could be used to sell something you’d like to get rid of, and bring in some cash.

If you wish to order a Local card online as a gift, go to the section where you can comment, and use that space to tell us whose name you want on the card. We’ll then mail it out to you. You will be able to provide the recipient of the card with a link that will show all the Local business partners, and the monthly discounts they are offering.

You can also stop in on Monday or Tuesday at The Local office at 1596 Four Mile Creek Rd., across from the Town Hall, or call 905-641-5335 for an appointment. To purchase the card online, visit notllocal.com/membership, and we’ll mail it to you.

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The Fort George kitchen was a busy place this weekend at the Garrison Christmas event, as re-enactors prepare the dishes that would have been served in the fort during the 1800s. (Fred Mercnik)
Suzanne Kavanaugh displays the cookies she baked for the Fort George Garrison Christmas, made with the same recipe that would have been used 200 years ago. The cookies were served with hot chocolate. (Fred Mercnik)

The Grinch also could have used an umbrella Saturday, but even in the rain, he couldn’t steal the spirit of Christmas from the streets of NOTL during the town’s annual Santa Claus Parade. (Penny Coles)
The Oast House Brewers took part in this year’s Santa Claus Parade Saturday, handing out coasters and candy canes. (Penny Coles)

At the St. Davids Lioness Breakfast with Santa, Eleanor Colvin tells Santa what she wants for Christmas, with Leo Club member Ayla Jamal on hand to help out. (Fred Mercnik)
Aunt Agnes for Christmas is a magical, delightful holiday romp.

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Somewhere in the family, everyone seems to have “that aunt.” That one who shows up out of nowhere, that one of whom everyone has a vague recollection, but many are not exactly sure just how she fits into the family dynamic.

In the world premiere of a new Norm Foster play at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, that aunt is named Agnes. She surprises the small-town Trimble family with a visit just two days before Christmas. The problem is, though, that no one knows who she is.

Aunt Agnes for Christmas is a magical, delightful holiday romp that continues this weekend at the Reitval Hall in St. Catharines. It’s a new holiday show brought to Niagara as a special extension of the Foster Festival’s 2019 season.

Directed by the festival’s artistic director, Patricia Vanstone, the play is set largely in the home of Sally and George Trimble, where they live with their two children, Melissa and Brian. Sally is the town’s mayor, while the eternally optimistic George is a salesperson, selling RVs in town. Neither Sally nor George can remember ever having met an Aunt Agnes before. But with George always seeing the bright side, she is welcomed into the family home to celebrate the season.

The chemistry and comedic timing between Sally, played by Cosette Derome, and George, portrayed by Shaw Festival veteran Kelly Wong, is obvious from the start. Not surprising, when one discovers that Derome and Wong are a real-life couple.

Hayden Neufeld, a Grade 4 student at Crossroads Public School who appeared in Yellow Door Theatre’s Robin Hood last year, makes his Foster Festival debut as the youngest Trimble child, Brian. His character doesn’t say much, but is obsessed with imitating the style of his favourite singers. In Act 1, he poses as a young female-tinged Sinatra, walking on to the Peter Hartwell-designed set to maximum comic effect. In Act 2, he becomes a pre-teen Elvis Presley, shaking his hips to the beat of a song only he can hear.

Fifteen-year-old Kate Peters plays the Trimbles’ 14-year-old daughter Melissa, who seems mired in boredom. She obviously feels she is destined for bigger and better things than those on offer in such a quaint town. She can’t wait to grow up and get out of there.

In swoops another Shaw veteran, Nora McLellan, as Aunt Agnes, to shake things up.

Like a modern day Mary Poppins — without the umbrella — Aunt Agnes possesses special powers, which she uses to fix up elaborate meals out of thin air. Those powers also come in handy when Mayor Sally faces the prospect of the town skating rink being without ice for the first time ever.

But more importantly, it’s young Melissa who is the beneficiary of Agnes’ magic. She is the only member of the Trimble clan aware of her aunt’s abilities. Agnes takes Melissa aside and begins to act as the youngster’s tutor, showing Melissa how her special powers can be used for the “good of the many.”

It’s the relationship between Melissa and Agnes where the magic of the play shines. McLellan plays Agnes with a bit of grit and a special zeal that allows the sarcasm and humour of Foster’s script to connect with the audience. Think Bea Arthur as Maude, but with more heart and kindness.

Peters is a revelation as Melissa. She and McLellan take the spotlight together for much of the play, and the young Niagara Falls native holds her own with the veteran actor. She exudes a confidence she obviously has developed through appearing in a number of Linus Hand Productions in her hometown. That confidence also shows in her movements across the stage, most likely honed through seven years of competitive dance.

Agnes tasks herself with convincing Melissa of the value of her family and charm. Like a modern day Mary Poppins — without the umbrella — Aunt Agnes for Christmas is a magical, delightful holiday romp. — Tony Baldinelli, MP

From our family to yours...

we extend our heartfelt wishes for a safe and happy holiday season.

Tony Baldinelli, MP
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Happy New Year

FROM OUR FAMILY TO YOURS...

we extend our heartfelt wishes for a safe and happy holiday season.

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Music is alive and well at St. Michael Catholic Elementary School, and staff are excited to highlight the musical talent of our students and the many opportunities they have to share their gifts this holiday season. On Monday, Dec. 9, the Grade 6 students joined the Holy Cross Secondary School family for Christmas Together at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre. Under the musical direction of Mrs. Cumiskey and Mrs. Lingerfelt, the class sang two songs at a professional venue for the very first time, including Braden Byl, Aine O’Neill, Julia Rezza, Christine Dickens-Colling, Madison Morgan, Nieva Jacob, Gavin Corrins and Jasavion Jordan. (Photos supplied)

At St. Michael, the season of Advent is how students prepare for Christmas. The four weeks of Advent are represented by the four candles of Hope, Faith, Joy and Peace. “As the Grade 6/7 class led these liturgies, the school choir helped to focus our minds and prepare our hearts for the birth of our Lord,” says principal Janice Barretto-Mendonca. “This week we lit a pink candle, reminding us that the time of Christ’s arrival is coming soon. We are so very blessed to have terrific volunteers like Mr. Carty and Mrs. Cumiskey as part of our St. Michael family to lead our students in song each week.”

This past week, St. Michael school choir joined the Grade 6 class to sing at the Pillar & Post. Students enjoyed sharing their talents with the community, and the cookies and hot chocolate were awesome too.

The Holy Cross Concert Band and Choir performed at St. Michael School on Dec. 4. Many former Lightning continue to let their gifts shine in secondary school, says principal Janice Barretto-Mendonca. Pictured here are George Petrisis, J.P. Galbraith, Mary Clare Nolan, Sophie McClure, Amelie Merrill, and Hannah Kumarage.
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Hydro boxes decorated, artists celebrated

These are two of the four seasons painted by Jennifer Penner, decorating the hydro box at the corner of King and Ricardo Streets. (Kim Wade)

Kim Wade
Special to The Local

The winners of the Hydrobox Beautification Competition were celebrated during the exhibition opening and reception at Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre last Thursday evening.

About 75 people gathered for the celebration and the exhibit of all the entries on display.

“It was a great turn-out. We were very excited,” says Gail Kerr, office manager of the Pumphouse. They partnered with the Town to organize the competition for local artists.

According to Kerr, everyone involved felt this project and partnership was a success, and want to do it again. “Next year we will do a bigger call-out,” she says. All of the submissions including the winning works are part of their own exhibit at the Niagara Pumphouse and will be available for viewing until Jan. 7.

Located at the corner of Ricardo and King Streets.

In addition to having the satisfaction of seeing their art on display for the public around town, each winner also received $500 prize money.

Tim Curtis, president of NOTL Hydro, had an idea to beautify the hydro boxes and to use this initiative as a community-building activity with local partners. He approached the Communities in Bloom Committee and the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre. They partnered with the Town to organize the competition for local artists.

The winning works have been duplicated by using wrap. The wrap has been used to cover three hydro boxes in the Old Town. Bryck’s piece is in full bloom on the box at Front near Victoria Street. Jennifer Penner’s four panel pieces by Jennifer Kemp, and a set of four quadriptych represents each of the four seasons. Look for her pieces on the hydro box located at the corner of Ricardo and King Streets.

Out of the 16 art works submitted for consideration, three were chosen. The winning submissions are Remembrance by Elaine Bryck, First Flowers by Lindsey Kemp, and a set of four panel pieces by Jennifer Penner. The submissions to the contest covered a variety of media from watercolour, acrylic, oil, photography and textile art.

The winners of the Hydro boxes decorated, artists celebrated competition, three were chosen. The winning submissions are Remembrance by Elaine Bryck, First Flowers by Lindsey Kemp, and a set of four panel pieces by Jennifer Penner. The submissions to the contest covered a variety of media from watercolour, acrylic, oil, photography and textile art.

The winning works have been duplicated by using digital imaging onto vinyl wrap. The wrap has been used to cover three hydro boxes in the Old Town. Bryck’s piece is in full bloom on the hydro box at Memorial Park. Kemp’s work graces the box at Front near Victoria Street. Jennifer Penner’s quadriptych represents each of the four seasons. Look for her pieces on the hydro box located at the corner of Ricardo and King Streets.

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NIAGARA PLEIN AIR ART SHOW

December 1 - December 31
Niagara Plein Air Artists art show continues at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library for the month of December, during library hours: Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m. – 8 p.m., Friday to Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

UGLY SWEATER HOLIDAY FOOD TOUR

December 20 to December 22
1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Don your best ugly holiday sweater and join us on a special walking tour for a little foodie fun! This 2.5 hour tour differs from our usual Niagara-on-the-Lake culinary tour. It will include a mix of food tastings at culinary partners and a chance to pick up a last minute gift for that hard-to-buy-for person on your list. We promise a tasty bit of fun and frivolity and a takeaway gift. So grab a friend and dig out that ugly sweater and get in the holiday spirit! A prize will be awarded to the foodie with the ugliest sweater. It’s a great way to spend the afternoon with friends or a nice alternative to the holiday office party. Private booking dates are available. $60 per person. Meet at 1:00 p.m. at the Irish Harp, 245 King St., NOTL. For more info, contact: support@eztix.com or call 1 (289) 768-8717.

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The Foster Festival presents Aunt Agnes for Christmas
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December 22
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NEW YEAR’S DAY LEVEE

January 1, 2020 @ 3:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Join the Friends of Fort George and Parks Canada as we ring in the New Year at Navy Hall! Levee celebrations start at 3:00 p.m., and include toasts, music by the 41st Regiment Fife and Drum Corps, and a cannon firing to welcome the New Year.

Call the Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621 or email: admin@fortgeorge.ca for more information.

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Call Karen 905-641-5335 or email: classified@notllocal.com
DIXON, Martina—On December 9, 2019 at the Greater Niagara General Hospital with family by her side at the age of 85 years. Beloved wife for 61 years of Frederick Dixon. Dear mother of Susan Gulley (Steve) and Debbie Hager (Butch).

Cherished “Nana” of Jamey Gulley (Beth), Tim Gulley (Aisha), Jeremy Hager (Anneisha) and Michael Hager. Great-grandmother of Makenna and Iris and Gordi. Martina had a beautiful smile and will be greatly missed by all that knew and loved her. Arrangements have been entrusted to Morgan Funeral Home. A memorial service will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, December 30th at St. Mark’s Anglican Church, 41 Byron Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake. As an expression of sympathy, donations may be made to the Alzheimer’s Society or to St. Mark’s Anglican Church.

Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com

FRIESEN, Ruben John—Passed away at the Greater Niagara General Hospital on Wednesday, December 11, 2019 in his 95th year. Ruben will always be remembered for his generosity, gentle humour, a tender heart that delighted in serving others and his ever present harmonica. Owner of Modern Dry Cleaners for 44 years, he was a founding member of Calvary Church, St. Catharines as well as a long time member of the St. Catharines Flying Club. He was passionate in serving on the board for International Child Care and fund raising for the Grace Children’s hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti for many years.

Ruben was the loving and dedicated husband of Velma Friesen for 68 years. He will be missed by his three daughters Jane (Brian) Andres, Marilyn (Michael) Trout of Colorado and Cathryn (Greg) Peck of Maryland. Predeceased by his daughter Debbie Wiecha in March 2019. Loving grandfather of Jamie Wiecha, Connie Wiecha Corbett, Scott Wiecha, Kit Andres and Marty Wells and great-grandfather of Naya Corbett. Survived by sisters Evelyn Epps (Selkirk), Josie Woods (St. Catharines) and Miriam Matthews (Indianapolis), Predeceased by twin sister Ruby Murdoch, Hilda Hubele of Calgary and Stan Friesen. Deeply loved by all of his nieces and nephews.

A private family interment will take place at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery, Niagara-on-the-Lake. A memorial service will take place at Pleasant Manor Chapel in Virgil on Monday, December 23, 2019, at 1:30 pm. Memorials donations may be made out to Mission Aviation Fellowship or the Niagara Chapel in Virgil on Monday, December 23, 2019, at 1:30 pm. Memorials donations may be made out to Mission Aviation Fellowship or the Niagara Workers Welcome (niagaraworkerswelcome@gmail.com).

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Big changes for Friesen next racing season

Mike Balsam Special to The Local

Big changes are coming for Niagara-on-the-Lake native Stewart Friesen when the 2020 racing season kicks off in February.

After a very successful year in both the NASCAR Gander RV & Outdoors Truck Series and the Super DIRTcar Series, Friesen has no plans to rest on his laurels while away from the track.

First up will be a rebuild and winter maintenance of his existing dirt car, which was put through the paces for 52 races this season. Friesen drove his Halmar-Friesen #44 car to the winners’ circle 14 times in 2019, driving in the Big Block Modified division. He describes his DIRTcar season, though, as a bit up-and-down this year.

“We switched to Bicknell at the end of August, so for our last bunch of big races, we made a pretty big switch, and had to scramble to put new cars together quickly,” he said, on the phone from his home near Albany, New York.

The adjustments must have worked, though, as his late season first-place finish at Syracuse in the Eastern States 200, a race in which he started last and won $40,000, would suggest.

Friesen and his team are also expecting the delivery of a new racing vehicle soon to his shop. That new car will also have a Bicknell chassis, made in St. Catharines.

Friesen was driving much of his time this winter between the Albany area, and Statevilles, North Carolina, where he will be preparing for his third full season on the NASCAR Truck circuit. And some very big changes are in store for Friesen there.

After being part of the GMS Racing team the past two years, Friesen is switching manufacturers, moving from GM to Toyota Racing Development (TRD).

Friesen says the move came as his team was “searching for a little bit more. Chris Larsen, the owner of our team, decided he wanted to have a little more stake to his claim, rather than lease off someone else’s program. It’s a little more of an initial investment but it will hopefully lay the future groundwork for us to be in the series for years to come.”

The move means Friesen will be building a new team, but has managed to retain his crew chief, Trapp Bruce, along with many of his crew members from his GMS days.

“On the performance side of things,” he adds, “Toyota has made us a really good offer to support us technically and with engineering and all the other stuff that goes along with it.”

After having a chance to tour the TRD facility in North Carolina, and seeing the resources they can offer, he feels it will be a very positive move for his team.

Friesen broke through into the Truck Series winner’s circle for the first time this season, taking the chequered flag at both Eldora and Phoenix.

“We were able to win two races, and to compete for the championship right down to the final race,” he enthused. “It was definitely good to finally get a couple of wins in the series, I think it was a pretty validating season for us.”

In addition to notchings his first two wins, Friesen added 12 top five and 16 top 10 finishes. Though he is disappointed in how the championship race turned out, he finished 11th in the race, behind winner Austin Hill, and fourth in the points championship, behind three-time champion Matt Crafton, he has to be a driver to watch for in 2020.

“I learned a lot this year,” says Friesen. “There’s momentum, and I’ve learned how to compete in the series. It’s a lot different than the racing I grew up with.

Though Friesen says his full-time job is working every day on the dirt cars in Albany, he’ll be making regular trips this winter to Stateville to work and train with the Toyota team.

“We need to be in North Carolina. All the resources are there, the wind tunnel, that’s where the technology is. If you’re going to race Indy Cars, you go to Indianapolis. If you’re going to race NASCAR, you go to North Carolina. That’s where you need to be.”

He’s looking forward to getting some time on the simulator rig that Toyota has down south. Friesen says now that his team will own the truck he’ll be driving, he will be entitled to more time on the simulator than he ever was with GMS.

He won’t be able to get behind the wheel of his actual new truck until Daytona Speed Week in February, due to a NASCAR rule that limits when a driver can take to the track.

Friesen and his team are aiming to test his dirt cars, though, this January in Delaware.

“As he looks forward to his upcoming season on both circuits, Friesen says “it’s always good to represent Niagara-on-the-Lake, and all the great Canadian race fans, it’s just great to have everybody’s support from back home.”

It’s a busy schedule, but Friesen plans to be back in NOTL later this month with his wife and young son to celebrate Christmas with his family. Then it will be back to Albany for Christmas Day, and on to his “full-time job” working in his shop.

Stewart Friesen completed his season in the NASCAR truck series in 11th place.

Stewart Friesen will be back in Niagara before Christmas, before heading back to Albany. (Photos supplied)
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