Pleasant Manor residents delighted by Tractor Parade

Penny Coles  
The Local

For the third year in a row, Tim Siemens witnessed first-hand the delight of seniors who were able to watch Thursday’s tractor parade, brought right to their doors by Erwin Wiens and Dorothy Soo-Wiens, and members of the local farming community.

“For four-storey apartment balconies were just packed,” says the CEO of Radiant Care, which includes Pleasant Manor. “I’ve never seen as much activity outside the home, with cars and people lining the streets all around it.”

Long-term care residents were bundled up and portered outside, he says, and others could watch from their windows. “We had hot chocolate, portable propane heaters so people could enjoy the warmth — it was just delightful all around.”

Cotton Construction trucks and staff were there to ensure the new gravel surface that had been laid just that morning on the construction site stood up to the weight of the tractors, and some of their pickups were filled with their wives and children, Siemens says.

He and his wife went for dinner at Bricks & Barley before the parade started, “and the conversation was the tractor parade, people asking each other if they had a spot on the route.”

What he saw when he watched the parade, he says, “was a local group of people wanting to make a difference in the lives of others, and from the Pleasant Manor perspective, we’re just tickled pink that we’re a prime part of the route.”

It’s been a difficult few years for residents throughout COVID, he says, and Radiant Care’s strategic plan is now to “recover, restore and rebuild. This event helps restore a sense of community that was lost. It feels like it’s wrapping its loving arms around the people who live in town.”

“Just a delight to see,” he adds, “our board, our residents, our tenants, our staff are all ecstatic to be included.” Some staff intend to make it an annual team-building event, he says, turning it into a potluck dinner leading up to the parade.

“It’s had such an impact on the way of life in this community. Can you ask for anything more? It’s absolutely amazing what Erwin and Dorothy Soo-Wiens have done in bringing another event to the residents of Pleasant Manor.”

Continued on page 17

Sea of red at Simcoe Park

The Santa Run drew 400 runners and raised $5,260 for the NOTL Youth Collective Sunday. For more photos and story please see page 23. (Mike Balsom)

Trisha Romance
Star of Wonder in Simcoe Park

Penny Coles  
The Local

Those who have visited Simcoe Park recently will have seen a reproduction of Star of Wonder, one of Trisha Romance’s famous Christmas paintings, at its entrance.

She was delighted to see it there, she says, but also surprised — she wasn’t sure how it got there.

For several years it was the centerpiece of the Christmas scene at the end of Mississauga Street by the golf course, but with the construction of the new gateway feature, town staff and the Chamber of Commerce and Communities in Bloom committee members decided the best spot for the painting was at the entrance to Simcoe Park. Staff installed the support structure and lights on Thursday, Dec. 7, for the holiday season, where it will remain until the end of January, says town spokesperson Marah Minor.

Because of the severe angle it was on by the golf course, Romance recalls, “it was often covered by snow, like a blanket. Imagine my unbelievable delight to see it in Simcoe Park, in a place of honour as we continue to celebrate our 40th anniversary as a gallery in NOTL.”

Every painting has a story, she adds, “and Star of Wonder is no exception.” She shared that story with The Local, and her words are reprinted in full for our readers on page 2.

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Continued on page 2

Thank you Niagara-on-the-Lake

Whether you’ve visited us at the winery, attended our events, or simply enjoyed a bottle of wine at home; we want to express our deepest appreciation for your continued loyalty and support. From all of us at Konzelmann, we wish you a holiday season filled with love, laughter... and of course great wines.

konzelmann estate winery
Artist dreams of more paintings in Simcoe Park

Continued from page 1

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Noble

New Year’s Eve

DINNER | 5:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Tiara

New Year’s Eve

DINNER | Settngs start at 5:00 PM & 8:00 PM
New Year’s Day

BRUNCH | 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Cannery

New Year’s Eve

DINNER | Settngs start at 5:00 PM & 8:00 PM
New Year’s Day

BRUNCH | 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

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A self-portrait of Trisha Romance as she works outside in her garden on a beautiful fall day, something she loves to do, and is one of many creative outlets for the renowned artist.

Romance, now 72, says she struggles with her health, but quickly adds, “I’m the type of person who rises above challenges, in every way.” Her father, she says, would tell her in stressful times that “you’re in God’s hands. You have nothing to worry about.” And that was so comforting to me, that he lifted me up that way. I can still hear him say that. I don’t worry about the past, and I don’t think about tomorrow. I live in the present, like my grandchildren do. They are a true blessing to me.”

They are also an incentive to stay positive, she says. “I have five wonderful grandchildren. They don’t come to visit that often, but when they do, they love NOTL.”

“And my friends continue to sustain me,” she adds, “my collectors, and the many people who wish me well. I’m very grateful for them.”

She’s not actively painting the way she was, “not as quickly or as abundantly,” but has a studio almost completed. “It’s coming along, slowly but surely. What the next steps are for us, I don’t know.

Although her daughter Tanya Peterson has taken over the day-to-day running of the gallery in Virgil, she is still a regular there, and very active, going in to signs cards and prints, and chat with people. “But I’m very fortunate to know my work is in good hands. Tanya knows the stories behind the paintings as well as I do. She is the right person to tell them — she lived through them.”

Romance still lives in town, loves work in her garden, and has a greenhouse where she can take her plants inside to look after over the winter.

“Once an artist, always an artist,” she says, and that is in everything she does, whether it’s gardening in the summer or decorating for Christmas at this time of year.

“All those things I do fill me with hope, with faith and continued energy. That’s what keeps me going.”

Continued from page 1

her painting in Simcoe Park made her dream about a possibility for the future, an inspiration that came to her, and that she has already passed on to town staff.

She has eight Christmas paintings, “eight very distinct pieces,” and her vision is to see all of them mounted in a manner similar to Star of Wonder, although it is two pieces of wood with a seam down the middle — technology today could do a better job, she says. She pictures them placed at intervals along the pathway through Simcoe Park during the winter months.

“I always felt the park was under-used,” she says, “and to me it still is. I can remember when we first moved here, living across the street at the gallery, we were able to skate in the park — that’s going back 40 years. What a great thing it would be to see those pieces along the path in this town that is so magical at Christmas.”

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“All those things I do fill me with hope, with faith and continued energy. That’s what keeps me going.”
Fort Mississauga shoreline restoration underway

Crews and machinery from Rankin Construction were on site on Parks Canada property Friday to begin work on the final phase of construction to protect Fort Mississauga National Historic Site.

The walking trail near the fort was being temporarily reinforced and widened and removable fencing was being installed last week to facilitate the movement of vehicles, materials and supplies to the eastern side to begin the building of a new breakwall and removal of non-native trees and shrubs. The work is being done to protect the cultural heritage of the property.

The pathway is being reinforced for the use of vehicles during the building of a new breakwall by the fort. (Photos by Mike Balsom)

Parks Canada public relations and communications officer Julia Gevic said there will be some periodic closures of the trail to the public for safety reasons while the $6 million project is underway this winter and next, but for the most part it will be open.

The new 500-metre section of breakwall starting behind Fort Mississauga is necessary to combat shoreline erosion near the mouth of the Niagara River. Frequent and more severe storm events and high water levels, possibly due to climate change, have wreaked havoc on the current breakwall protection near the fort farther east toward the Parks Canada property leased by the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club.

The work will take place this winter and next, with an expected completion date of spring 2025.

The highest volume in Niagara-on-the-Lake from 01/01/2011 to 09/21/2021. Source MLS.

507 MISSISSAUGA STREET
$2,179,000
MLS 40469293 – Christopher Bowron and Nicole Vanderperk

1611 OLD LAKESHORE ROAD
$998,000
MLS 40489897 – Thomas Elltoft and Jane Elltoft

36 THE PROMENADE
$2,150,000
MLS 40491396 – Patricia Atherton and Caroline Polgrabia

45 STONERIDGE CRESCENT
$1,685,000
MLS 4048088 – Randall Armstrong

507 MISSISSAUGA STREET
$2,179,000
MLS 40469293 – Christopher Bowron and Nicole Vanderperk

The Highest Total Volume of Local Sales for the Past Decade

Highest volume in Niagara-on-the-Lake from 01/01/2011 to 09/21/2021. Source MLS.

**Broker of Record  **Broker  *Sales Representative

Weston Miller*..............................289-213-8681
Ricky Watson**...........................905-246-3387

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Region provides update on Upper Canada Lodge

Niagara Region staff have confirmed with The Local that Upper Canada Lodge in Niagara-on-the-Lake will close June 19, 2024, which is the same date the new Gilmore Lodge site in Fort Erie is slated to open.

Upper Canada Lodge was once said to be closing in 2022 after it was determined it was not feasible to redevelop the property to align it with provincial standards.

It was also announced more than six years ago that the current Gilmore Lodge on Gilmore Road in Fort Erie would be re-built on Garrison Road due out-of-date according to 2024 provincial standards. The $85 million long-term care hub in Fort Erie is one of two redevelopments of Niagara Region facilities in progress, along with a new $105 million project at Linhaven in St. Catharines, which will take in 256 residents.

In a statement provided to The Local, Henri Koning, the region’s director of seniors services, said the redevelopment project in Fort Erie is “progressing well.”

A date for the opening of Linhaven will be announced when the project is closer to completion, she said.

Now it’s up to families to decide where residents of UCL will call home next.

Koning said Home and Community Care has been working closely with residents and families at Upper Canada Lodge since April to help find appropriate homes.

“Some residents are choosing to move to Gilmore Lodge, some have selected alternate homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake and some have selected other locations across Niagara,” said Koning.

“Upper Canada Lodge is working with residents on a case-by-case basis to support the move and transition to an alternate home.”

Radiant Care Pleasant Manor only has long-term care spaces for 41 residents, until the expansion now underway, which will accommodate 160 residents, is completed. That is expected to be late 2025. Although Pleasant Manor was once thought to be an option when UCL was slated to close, it soon became evident that several delays in funding and licensing to get to the building stage meant the timing wouldn’t work out.

A number of specific questions, such as whether families of Upper Canada Lodge residents are responsible for coordinating relocation on move-in day, and what residents are to do if they don’t have family and friends to help, were not addressed in Koning’s statement.

As for the existing Upper Canada Lodge site, the region is in the midst of a formal process to determine who will take it over when the home is no longer in operation, said Koning.

This process is ongoing, and there is no information to report at this time, she said.

Joan King’s stocking project delivery was moved ahead a little for Upper Canada Lodge, where 80 stockings were dropped off for residents Monday. It was a bittersweet occasion, all recognizing it as the last Christmas there for the lodge, staff and residents. The other long-term care homes in NOTL receive their stockings on Wednesday.

Once again people have been incredibly generous, with stockings bulging with gifts, and program manager Kristin Mechelse was very appreciative of King and NOTL residents who helped with the project. “It makes Christmas a little brighter for residents to know people are thinking of them, and to be able to receive something Christmas morning is lovely,” she said. Posing with the stockings are Bryan Neumann, Joan King, Kristin Mechelse and Jesse Pruniak, all wearing masks because there was an outbreak of COVID in one section of the home.
Family member receives news from Upper Canada Lodge

Penny Coles
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake families with loved ones living at Upper Canada Lodge were told Friday the closure date for the long-term care home: this June 19.

On Tuesday, Andrew Henwood, whose wife Gayle is a resident of the lodge, told The Local he had been told mid-February, but that staff had said that could change, as it has before.

The longer Gayle can stay there, the better, and he was happy to hear the targeted closure has been delayed.

The email he received was from Upper Canada Lodge management and was directed to families with relatives who will be moved to other homes, to keep them up to date on what is happening. It also thanks them for their patience, says Henwood.

Just days before that email, The Local asked the region for any news about the closure of the lodge, but was told there were no updates.

Friday’s email to Henwood says the date has changed because the completion of the expansion of Gilmore Lodge, a regional long-term care home in Fort Erie, is delayed — that news has been expected for some time — and is now planned to be finished by that date.

Accordingly, the licences for the 80 beds in Upper Canada Lodge will be transferred to Gilmore Lodge, the email explains.

“That June date is the latest Gayle will be moved, the way I see it — unless it changes again,” he says.

And the longer she stays at UCL, he says, the better he believes it will be for her.

He reiterates his choice would be a bed for her down Wellington Street at Niagara Long Term Care, but he has to wait until a bed is offered to her, and will accept it when it comes.

After receiving the email from UCL, Henwood wrote a letter to The Local explaining his feelings, which has been published on this week’s letters page.

Andrew Henwood has received an official date of closure for Upper Canada Lodge, although the date has changed several times. (Arun Kapur)
Healthcare, affordability top 2024 agenda

Wayne Gates, MPP
Niagara Falls Riding

As we approach the end of 2023 and head into the new year, I wanted to take some time to reflect on what we have accomplished for Niagara-on-the-Lake, and the challenges we continue to work together to address as we enter 2024.

Just earlier this month, we secured region-wide funding for Niagara Nutrition Partners, to make sure no child in our community is going to school on an empty stomach. While we have a lot of work to do on eliminating food insecurity, this is a major step forward that will allow Niagara Nutrition Partners to continue the great work they have done. No child should need help to get through the holidays, with a good meal, gifts for their little ones, or even just an opportunity to share a meal with others.

We thank all those who reached out with assistance to others — we see it all around us, in the great stories we share about those who respond to whatever need they see in their community, the many individuals, organizations and businesses, who reach out to others with love, kindness and generosity.

We at The Local wish our readers and our advertisers a healthy and happy holiday, and we look forward to continuing to do what we love for this community through 2024.

Penny Coles
The Local

MPP Wayne Gates was proud to hand out his Christmas card this year with the picture on the front drawn by his grandson, Tanner Bidul. (Supplied)

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Where's Ben?
Eden student Ben Foster continues to discover new locations in NOTL, wondering how familiar others may be with them. If you know where this photo was taken, email penny@notllocal.com.

Last week, Doug Hernder was the first to tell us Ben was at the Virgil Post Office.
My heartfelt gratitude goes out to all at the Chamber of Commerce and the Town of NOTL staff who were instrumental in the recent installation of my Star of Wonder painting at the entrance to Simcoe Park. It brought tears to my eyes and joy to my soul! How providential that it should find the place of honour as we continue to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our gallery in Niagara-on-the-Lake! Star of Wonder will always hold a special place in my NOTL life. It was a magical moment with my daughter Whitney while Christmas shopping in Old Town.

She was a wee little girl who loved taking time to observe the details of life and had a baby brother who was falling in giant flakes and darkness had already set in when I told her we must hurry home to get dinner ready for guests who were coming. It was only then that I realized that she wasn’t by my side! She had stopped to look at the brilliant Nativity Star in the Just Christmas Store window. I stood motionless as the star filled her face with light. This was more than an inspiration. This moment was a gift from God. It had to be perfect.

In the days and weeks that followed it went from sketch to final finished painting. I counted every minute I spent with it as a blessing.

I hated to say goodbye to it for a short time, and eventually the time came for it to go to the printing press and then to galleries across the country.

The reaction from my collectors was extraordinary. Star of Wonder had spoken to them just as it had spoken to me. As I went on tour with it if would show up every time, like Niagara-on-the-Lake and the magic they would discover there. But truly, Star Of Wonder had been the little ambassador of the door.

Soon it became the popular painting to leave my studio. Our Gallery Guest Book was filled with inscriptions from people far and wide. Many wanted to know where this painting came from... where was the exact spot in our town.

And so, to see Star of Wonder still gracing vistas later, now in Simcoe Park, brings me immeasurable joy. I truly am humbled. Every painting has a story. And now my daughter Tanya who is the owner/curateur of our Gallery continues to share those stories.

As many of you know, Star of Wonder has access to this test. I was told that this was a special painting. I was told when first seeing it.

I know that such things do not happen easily, so my gratitude is far from realizing that.

My wish is that all who pass Star at the entrance of Simcoe Park will be filled with the spirit of Christmas and a light-filled sense of hope and joy for 2024. Trisha Romance NOTL

Today I learned that UCL, Upper Canada Lodge, is to close on June 19. Why is that? Because their licence is being transferred to Gilmore Lodge at Fort Erie, where they are building an extension which will house 80 more patients.

Given the overwhelming need for long-term care, we don’t understand why licences are rare and new licences are not possible. On the day that the Gilmore extention opens, Upper Canada Lodge; they have already been disabused of that notion.

Andrew Henwood NOTL
**Penguin Dip tradition continues on Boxing Day**

Sharon Burns
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake’s winter traditions are strong; the Candlelight Stroll, the Sant’Claud Parade and now we can add into the mix Virgil’s Tractor Parade. But before the year ends, there is one more tradition to honour: The Penguin Dip. Dec. 26, Boxing Day, will be the 48th annual Penguin Dip from Balls Beach on River Beach Drive in the Old Town.

“This started with a group of guys that I grew up with in ‘Old Town,’ said original Penguin Dip member Chris Bjorgan of St. Davids. “It actually started on Easter Sunday. We were out playing football in the park and we decided to go for a swim because it was so hot.”

They had so much fun they decided to do it again on Boxing Day. “The original swim started out of the Ball family home right beside Balls Beach,” Bjorgan explained. “As it got more and more popular, it just moved next door because we couldn’t fit everyone on their dock.”

“Many years ago we just started passing the hat,” said Bjorgan, who said it’s obvious why they picked Red Roof Retreat as the charity to receive the funds. Bjorgan’s nephew, Garrett, has cerebral palsy and 23 years ago, his parents Stefanie and Moe, started Red Roof Retreat, a respite for families with youth and adults with special needs.

“Other years we’ve gotten pledges, but mostly we’ve just passed the hat for Red Roof because it’s a good cause,” Bjorgan said. “This year, a new face is around to help drum up funds for the SRRMRA. Lindqvist, director of hospitality at Chateau Des Charmes, and his wife, Krystle Bernier, participated in the dip last year.”

“It popped onto the radar just before Christmas time last year. We had some friends that showed an interest to contribute, and I didn’t feel right up front,” said Lindqvist. “We enjoy doing healthy things and have done some sort of cold treatments, so that was right up my alley.”

Lindqvist said that he was surprised at how challenging the dip was “because it was a very, very cold day last year.”

“To be an official Penguin,” explained Bjorgan, “you have to plunge for three years, three times each year.” For the first dip, participants walk into the water where Lake Ontario meets the Niagara River. The second plunge requires one to fully immerse themselves, and the third, said Bjorgan, is the hardest because they have to stand in the lake for a group photo.

“The last one we call slow and painful!”

That’s an experience Thanha Kurooparan is going to try for the first time. 

Kurooparan, friends with Lindqvist, was at the event last year. “I was just taking pictures and videos of them doing it because I’m not the biggest fan of cold water,” he said. Born in Sri Lanka, Kurooparan moved to Canada in 2004. Last year, “I just needed every single layer possible to keep myself warm.”

This year Kurooparan, general manager of the Cactus Club Cafés out of Toronto, has been preparing by plunging in ice baths at Orthespain in downtown Toronto. “I was able to get my body prepared for it because I’m from a very hot country and my body is not designed for cold water,” laughed Kurooparan.

Lindqvist has created a fundraising website to challenge other members in the community, including Penguin Dip. “We were sort of joking, and saying ‘how many of you I will have to pay to do it,’” he said, referring to Kurooparan. “At the end of the day, I’ll pay him 100 bucks to do so, but that money will go to charity!”

Coun. Tim Balasnik, who joked that you couldn’t keep him out of the river if you tried, has also accepted Lindqvist’s challenge. “First time I’ve stood to join the tradition,” he said. “I am really hap-
New Year’s Levee returns after three-year absence

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Niagara-on-the-Lake community will ring in the New Year with a tradition that hasn’t taken place since the COVID-19 pandemic. Put on hold by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, 2022, and 2023, the annual New Year’s Levee was revived and will be held on Friday, Jan. 13, at Navy Hall at 3 p.m.

The event is open to the public, with free admission. "We’re proud to be able to put this on as a charity organization, giving back to the community," Friends of Fort George president Tony Chisholm told The Local.

Friends of Fort George was founded 35 years ago, and the levee has been on the calendar for more than 25 years, Chisholm estimated. In pre-pandemic years, there would draw more than 100 people.

"It’s hard to say what it’s going to be now," said Chisholm.

The Friends are "very proud" to be the lead on the annual New Year tradition, and are also "providing a beautiful building for the event," referring to the Richmond Street building that is a Fort George National Historic Site.

The program includes music from local politicians, as well as toasts to King Charles III and the United States. There will also be a cannon firing to close out the function.

"That’s going to be a big part of the festivities," said Chisholm.

Finlay from Parks Canada will be the master of ceremonies, dressed in period costume, said Chisholm, and always adds a lot to the event.

"The Friends of Fort George board unanimously voted to revive the levee after a three-year hiatus," he added. "The thing is happening finally to a point where we can pull it off!"

Parking of interim CAO gives town six months

Kris Dube
The Local
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The town news release said Zvaniga has 40 years of experience leading municipal and regional transportation organizations for various municipalities.

"Until this candidate is interviewed, this position is filled with the best candidate for the role," said the news release.

Cluckie is not the only staffer to depart from the town recently. Rome D’Angelo, director of operations, has resigned and recruitment efforts will begin in the New Year, said Zalepa.

Senior heritage planner Denise Horne left her position Nov. 17.
Hong Kong trial of Jimmy Lai called ‘a sham’

Penny Coles
The Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake family of Jimmy Lai will be closely following the trial of the pro-democracy activist in Hong Kong, along with the rest of the world.

But as many international leaders have been reported as saying, and Lai’s niece in town Erica Lepp says her family agrees, there is little expectation it will result in anything but conviction.

“It’s a crazy trial, not a real trial the way we expect in Canada. It’s not a fair trial like we would expect. We don’t feel it will have a positive outcome.”

Lai’s son Sebastien has been “going around the world, advocating for my uncle,” and keeping the family up to date, she says.

He has been seen on international news broadcasts saying the trial has a predetermined outcome, and calling it “a sham.”

Although the family is relieved the trial has started, it is expected to continue for months, until next fall, “and it will be a long few months,” Lepp says.

At least, as the New York Times and other news sources are saying, “the eyes of the world are watching.”

Hong Kong has become “an amazing place, Lepp says, “but this trial represents what Hong Kong has become.”

Lai, who turned 76 in December, was arrested last month, was jailed on other charges. The sedition — he was initially too long to charge him with it — fence argument that it took judges to consider Lai’s defence argument that it took too long to charge him with sedition — he was initially jailed on other charges. The trial is expected to begin again next week. His case is being heard before three national security judges, with no jury.

Lai, the founder of Apple Daily, a Hong Kong media outlet openly critical of the Chinese Communist Party, has in the past taken to the streets in protest. He has been involved in the day-to-day running of the hotels.

“Everyone who has ever met my uncle says he is an amazing, kind man, and they feel honoured to have met him,” Lepp says.

The family is happy to see the recent announcements by Canada’s House of Commons, the UK’s Foreign Secretary David Cameron and the US State Department all calling for Lai’s release, she adds.

As for his letter, “he always gives me really good advice, sometimes about business, but also to think with my heart. He’s such a kind, loving man. My heart goes out to my cousins, his children.”

Despite everything he has been through, “the words I received from him were so loving and so positive. That was really amazing to me, considering how long he’s been confined.”

When Jimmy Lai was asked in 2020 about his twin sister, Si Wai, worrying about him, he became emotional. International journalists seeing him arrive at a Hong Kong court for his trial Monday reported him looking thin and frail. (Screenshot from CBC interview)

A devout Catholic, Lai said the quiet “makes him feel closer to God,” reports Lepp. Ten Catholic Cards from around the world have also called for his release, she adds.

“During the day running of the hotels. The family agrees, there is little expectation it will result in anything but conviction.”

“Although the family is resolved, it is expected to continue for months, until next fall, “and it will be a long few months,” Lepp says.

“Hong Kong has become “an amazing place, Lepp says, “but this trial represents what Hong Kong has become.”

Lai, who turned 76 in December, was arrested last month, was jailed on other charges. The sedition — he was initially too long to charge him with it — fence argument that it took judges to consider Lai’s defence argument that it took too long to charge him with sedition — he was initially jailed on other charges. The trial is expected to begin again next week. His case is being heard before three national security judges, with no jury.

Lai, the founder of Apple Daily, a Hong Kong media outlet openly critical of the Chinese Communist Party, has in the past taken to the streets in protest. He has been involved in the day-to-day running of the hotels.

“Everyone who has ever met my uncle says he is an amazing, kind man, and they feel honoured to have met him,” Lepp says.

The family is happy to see the recent announcements by Canada’s House of Commons, the UK’s Foreign Secretary David Cameron and the US State Department all calling for the release of Lai. “It makes a great statement. We’re all really encouraged by this,” she says. Although the family has been disappointed that the U.K. didn’t do more earlier to gain the release of her uncle, a British citizen, they are grateful to have Cameron publicly now on his side.

“All of those things happened in the last week, and it was great news.”

Personally, she says, she was buoyed by a letter she received from her uncle about a month and a half ago. “He sent some advice,” along the lines of what he has advised from the time she was a child, “and he sent his love. He said he’s doing as well as he can be doing, and he finds the interesting thing about being in jail is the quiet.”

When Jimmy Lai was asked in 2020 about his twin sister, Si Wai, worrying about him, he became emotional. International journalists seeing him arrive at a Hong Kong court for his trial Monday reported him looking thin and frail. (Screenshot from CBC interview)

A devout Catholic, Lai said the quiet “makes him feel closer to God,” reports Lepp. Ten Catholic Cards from around the world have also called for his release, she adds.

“As for his letter, “he always gives me really good advice, sometimes about business, but also to think with my heart. He’s such a kind, loving man. My heart goes out to my cousins, his children.”

Despite everything he has been through, “the words I received from him were so loving and so positive. That was really amazing to me, considering how long he’s been confined.”

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Church offering help with food, emergency bills

Since last spring, a newly-formed group of parishioners from St. Vincent de Paul Church has been quietly working on a way to help those in need in Niagara-on-the-Lake. They are calling it the Community Pantry, and while a food bank during winter months is part of their plans, there is so much more they are offering.

Matthew Mattingly, one of the organizers, explains the group has established a Niagara-on-the-Lake conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (by coincidence also the name of their church).

The society, he explains, is a worldwide Catholic lay organization founded in Paris in 1833, and is "committed to serving the needy, ministering to the poor and marginalized while addressing the root causes of poverty in our society."

The local group of parishioners started meeting last April, says Mattingly, and as a start, last summer held a dinner at the Davy Street Hall for migrant farmworkers.

The food bank, which will open in January, is "less formal" than what is now available — there is no need to register or meet low income levels to qualify. In addition, the group will respond to requests for help with emergency needs, "such as rent, utilities, or other pressing bills."

"We're ready to do that," he adds. "We have the funds. We have very generous parishioners."

"We were trying to find out how to reach people in need," Mattingly continues. "We've put posters up in town and we're doing what we can to make people aware there is another resource out there if they are in need. We don't often think of poverty being a part of beautiful NOTL, but there are many more people than we imagine struggling to get by. Other organizations such as Newark Neighbours are doing wonderful work, and our society is not meant to replace them but to complement them by providing one more resource for those in our community trying to make ends meet."

He says the local conference wants to be sure they are making personal contacts with those in need, and will make home visits if required to determine what the situation is and be able to respond quickly.

"Our goal is to really build personal relations with people living on the margins in our area, and to get our parish more engaged in aiding those living in poverty. We want to reach another segment of people who need help — the poor and the marginalized."

The food bank officially opens Monday, Jan. 8 at the Davy Street parish hall, and will be open Mondays from 2 to 4 p.m. during the winter months, he says. It will be on a drop-in basis and open to anyone.

It’s important to the conference that their church plays a role in helping those they see. "They may not know who that is. We see it at church among the elderly on fixed incomes that are not keeping up. They have a lot of pride, and they’re struggling," he says.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society isn’t new to Niagara Region, and although the conference is new to NOTL it has already been receiving requests and helping NOTL residents through a hotline for the society in Niagara Falls.

"We are now officially a part of the hotline," says Mattingly. "So anyone who needs help calls 905-374-7070 will be referred to our NOTL conference. Our conference is part of the Niagara Falls Particular Council, which handles the calls to that number."

The NOTL conference is already helping a refugee family from Afghanistan, he says. "They arrived last winter, and had been staying in a Niagara Falls hotel, as part of a refugee program arranged through the government. But the hotels weren't open, and they were the first to call the hotline."

They didn’t arrive in Canada with refugee status, and have applied for it, but that takes time, Mattingly explains. "They are a good family. They had good jobs, and paid to come to Canada. Now they have to pay off that debt. The father has been working, and we’ve been helping them with rent."

They arrived last winter and had been staying in a Niagara Falls hotel, as part of a refugee program arranged through the government, but the hotels wanted their rooms back for the tourism season, and this family ended up in NOTL. "I think because of his job," says Mattingly. "but it’s tough living in NOTL."

They had to leave their homeland to survive — the father’s life had been threatened — and they want to contribute now they have found a safe place to settle. “They want to work and do their part. It’s impossible not to want to help them.”

“We all work together to help those in need,” he adds. "But at this point in the early days of the conference, we have no idea of what those needs are going to be.”

They ask anyone in need of emergency help in Niagara-on-the-Lake to please call 905-374-7070.
Event brings Jewish community together at Chanukah

Penny Coles
The Local

When Virgil resident Alana Hurov watched the news last October of the atrocities Hamas terrorists committed against Israel, she was horrified, but that was quickly followed by shock and fear from the hateful anti-Semitic responses that came on the heels of the attacks.

Her feelings haven’t changed — if anything they have grown stronger. And as she said she would do then, her way of handling those emotions is by bringing the local Jewish community together.

Although she’s not religious — her husband is not Jewish, and they don’t celebrate the holidays — this year she decided to celebrate Chanukah surrounded by others who wanted to join her.

With a job in marketing and a varied background that includes event producer and co-ordinator, she rented out Navy Hall and through social media invited the public.

She also arranged for prominent Toronto lawyer Brian Greenspan to speak at the event, which was organized to support the Jewish community at a time when it really needs support, she says.

“Having him be a part of the evening was such a blessing. It was really fascinating to hear him speak.”

He mentioned some universities, particularly in the U.S., that have spoken out against Israel, and he also singled out the University of Ottawa for standing up against anti-Semitism.

“He told us it’s important to stay strong and united, to support each other, and to love being Jewish,” says Hurov.

The day of the event at Navy Hall was the anniversary of his brother’s death, he said. Eddie Greenspan was also a well-known Toronto lawyer, and the two of them worked together. Brian told the crowd that being in Niagara and speaking of his brother, their work and their family history “was a perfect way to show respect for him.”

“It was the first time the synagogues came together, the first time the Jewish community in Niagara came together in that way,” says Hurov.

In addition to representatives from three synagogues, MPP Wayne Gates attended, as did Rob Nicholson, on behalf of MP Tony Baldinelli.

Based on the success of the event, Hurov plans to develop it into a series of speakers for the Jewish community, “to bring more people of that stature to Niagara. Over the past several months, since Oct. 7, I have felt I had to do something. I can’t stand on the sidelines,” she says, referencing anti-Semitic words and actions that have escalated since then, putting fear into the lives of Jewish people everywhere.

“I feel like it’s my duty to do something positive, to bring us together. And for all walks of life, not just the Jewish community. I want for us all to stand together. That is my small attempt at making this world a better place. And the response I’ve received has been overwhelming — positive. This is a time when it is so important to feel supported, and I’m really proud to be a part of it.”

Buck Royston
45 years ago in the "dish pit" in a pub in Markham. He attended Catering and Culinary College in England and appren-
ticed at the Ritz Hotel in London. A private chef to
the late King Hussein of Jordan, Watt was also the
executive chef on a cruise
ship. Watt cooked the
recipes both at home on
his electric stove, and
at The Garrison House,
purchased for $45 plus tax
for this book, Watt stated
that the criteria "was es-
sentially that it was not to
be a chef's cookbook, but
one mainly for the home,
with a simple list of ingre-
dients. Nothing so out-
rageous that you have to
scour the universe to find." Watt has included an-
exodites about his par-
ents and grandparents,
as well as some of their
recipes, including one for
his mother's Christmas
cake recipe, "a heavenly
dark saviour of an English
classic dish served with a
piece of really old cheddar and a cup of tea."
Each chef is introduced
by Watt with affection and
reverence, humour
and storytelling. A colour
photograph of each dish accompaniles its recipe.
"I'm very proud of my
friend Mike and all these
beautiful photographs
that he's taken," said Watt.
"Not just of the food and
the chefs, but also of the
surrounding area. Any-
body who lives in the re-
gion, if you look at some
of the shots, you know the
blossoms or the vines or
things of that nature, and
you'll go, 'Ohh I know
where that is!'"
Feast of Friends can be
purchased for $45 plus tax
at The Garrison House, Oast
House, The Pie Plate, Barbea,
Jackson Triggs, Tide and Vine,
Megalomaniac Wines, Ravine,
Cheese Secrets, Bella Ter-
a and the Sandtrap Pub and
Grill.
"I hope people look at
the pretty pictures and get
it nice and stained," said Watt. "Cookbooks don't
belong in the library, they
belong in the kitchen."
Volunteers preparing food boxes for delivery

Francyne Chenier, Angelika Gibney, Angela Lindfield, Mandy Shanks, Pauline Meyler, Barbara Webber, Cindy Grant, Katherine Babela and Joy Leonard take a break from packing food boxes to pose for a photo. (Sharon Burns)

Bags of carrots, onions and potatoes, fresh baked pies and all of the contents of everything one needs for a holiday dinner has been carefully packed into boxes for 113 families registered at Newark Neighbours. Each family can choose between a turkey and a ham from Kent Farms.

Newark Neighbours has about 40 families registered who have children under the age of 17. Last week, board chair Cindy Grant invited parents to choose gifts from several bookshelves filled with stuffed animals, toys and Barbies. “We had so many donations we were able to give each family five or six toys,” said Grant. “Money and food and toys continue to come in every day,” said Grant. “Yesterday they were coming in the front door and the back door simultaneously.”

A team of volunteers is putting together hampers for delivery, and the food bank closes Wednesday, Dec. 20 after the hamper distribution. It reopens Jan. 2.

The thrift store closes at the end of day Saturday, Dec. 23 and also reopens Jan. 2.

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Smiles on residents’ faces were priceless

Continued from page 1

Manor, an activity for people who would otherwise miss out.”

Under its plan to recover, restore and rebuild, the Pleasant Manor calendar is jam-packed with activities, with the Radiant Care Foundation sponsoring many events at Pleasant Manor, rising to the challenge of giving residents what they want — music, dinner out, among other activities, he says.

“And for people to bring an event to others who are not able to participate because of frailty, wow! We are so thankful for a community that remembers its seniors, its builders, and can serve them in such a practical and meaningful way.”

He mentions “the smile on Mrs. Klassen’s face, the smile on Billy Dick’s face — it was priceless. And they’re just two representatives of a good group of people watching from inside and outside, people who have chosen to live in our home, and now we’re being blessed and honoured by a group of people who remember them, and are impacting their lives through an event like this.”

“Everyone is saying the same thing — it’s amazing to see. The tractors are tangibles,” Siemens says, as each one of them moved slowly through the grounds of Pleasant Manor, at a perfect pace for the seniors, who had a great view — especially of the 18-wheeler “that lit up like the North Pole. I said to Dorothy, 60 registered tractors this year — is it going to go to 120 next?”

But what people also saw, even more importantly, he added, “was a vibrant community looking after its people.”

Some Pleasant Manor residents gathered inside to watch the parade, while others lined the route outdoors. (Supplied)
Third annual Tractor Parade triples in size

Penny Coles
The Local

The day after Erwin Wiens and his wife Dorothy Soo-Wiens put the third annual, and increasingly successful, tractor parade behind them, they were already looking at how to improve the event, which is growing in popularity with the farming community who participate, and with the spectators who come out to watch it.

In the days and even hours leading up to last Thursday’s parade, Dorothy says their list of tractor entries was growing, and ended up being more than 60, tripling from the first parade three years ago.

“It was so great. Erwin and I went a little crazy marshalling them,” she says. “We’re realizing we’re quickly outgrowing where we’re setting up. And next year we’re going to have to go with road closures.”

Town staff do a great job of rolling closures as the parade moves through the village, but with the number of vehicles parked, and people lining the roads, that doesn’t seem to be enough. “People want to get into their cars and drive away as soon as it’s gone by, and they’re blocking streets.”

But that’s for next year. Dorothy becomes emotional when she talks of the residents of Pleasant Manor in Virgil, which offers a range of housing options for seniors, from apartments and townhouses to long-term care, who can watch the parade from their windows, balconies, porches and patios as it travels by them — that is her greatest joy, and reason enough to organize the Christmas event.

With the Pleasant Manor expansion underway, she says, Cotton Construction laid some gravel to create a road for the parade that would avoid it, and even had trucks of gravel on hand if needed.

Staff of Pleasant Manor do everything they can to make sure residents can watch the parade, as do family members who join them. “Even long-term care residents can see it from their windows,” she says. Erwin’s father is a Pleasant Manor resident and can see it from his window on the first floor, she adds.

“It’s very meaningful for us to be able to do this, and for the residents to see it,” she explains, knowing so many of them were members of the farming community — this is a way for that community to give back.

Friday morning she ran into the sister of one of the residents, she says, “and she gave me a huge hug and said thank you. To me, that’s what Christmas is all about.”

And the couple has fun doing it. “Afterwards we had a little thank-you get-together, and the camaraderie, the laughter, the stories, that means a lot.”

Every year, she adds, “I say I want to see the people and hear them, but we can hear kids squealing. I would love to go to Pleasant Manor and see people looking out their windows and on their balconies.”

The farmworker everyone calls Obama was on one of the decorated tractors, and he says there were definitely more people out than last year. Dorothy has heard there were spectators from across the region, including Fort Erie and Grimsby.

“That is crazy beautiful,” she says. “And I can’t help but smile when I think of the people of Pleasant Manor.”
Christmas tractors plough through town

Thank you to the participants who made the Niagara-on-the-Lake Christmas Tractor Parade a success. We wish you joy and hope this Christmas season.

—Dorothy & Erwin Wiens

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- Seaway Farms
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- John Deere Retirees
- Vineland Growers Cooperative
- Rob Neufeld
- Jim Diodatti
- Every generous soul who donated as a spectator
To introduce myself, I am Dr. Jim Turpel, the founder, owner, and one of the four full-time veterinarians at Upper Canada Animal Hospital. I would like to start by thanking all of the families who have entrusted us with the care of their cherished pets over the last twenty seven years. It continues to be a pleasure and an honour to serve my community in this way.

My personal journey in veterinary medicine has covered some thirty five years, and naturally, many of my friends (and colleagues) ask when I will be winding down. My answer is always the same, "when you love what you do, why would you stop". I am blessed in that veterinary medicine continues to provide me with great joy and purpose. To that end, my plan is to continue to work as long as I'm able to provide the exceptional level of care to which I hold myself accountable.

As a veterinarian I see the best of humanity on a daily basis as people act selflessly to help their pets. I'm also privileged to bear witness to the unconditional love and joy that these relationships bring. This is the fuel that sustains my love for the profession and my optimistic outlook on life.

The recent years have been a trying time for everyone. The pandemic placed a massive strain on our society to a point which had not been seen for generations. The veterinary profession was hit especially hard as there was a remarkable surge in new pets, and with more time spent at home, clients became more attuned to the subtle signs of their ailing pets. These changes resulted in increased demand for appointments while the mandated COVID restrictions meant each appointment took far longer to perform. As months turned to years, burnout ensued, resulting in an exodus of professionals from veterinary medicine. These were incredibly stressful and challenging times.

Despite the difficulties we faced, I am proud to say we continued, without interruption to provide care for those in need. This even extended to ailing pets that could not be seen by their regular veterinary clinics, and patients of the Niagara Veterinary Emergency Clinic that struggled due to a serious lack of veterinary staff. I would like to thank my staff for the unwavering dedication that was exemplified to all of the families that depended on us during those uncertain times.

I have raised my children to understand that while it is easy to be gracious, sup-portive, and empathetic when times are easy, it truly shows one's character by how one acts in times of great difficulty and adversity. I am eternally grateful to my entire staff who stepped up to the plate and recognized that we must always support our community no matter how difficult the times may be.

While COVID has become a part of our new “normal”, I am happy to say we are back at full staff and are more resilient and committed than ever to provide the excellent care our patients deserve.

Through my years of veterinary service I’ve accumulated a substantial amount of knowledge and experience. With this in mind, I take great pride in being able to mentor the veterinarians that will be around for decades to come. I continue to be impressed by Drs. Harkness’, Rossi’s, Golding’s and Gokhale’s empathy, integrity, and knowledge. They inspire me to continue on the path to be the best veterinarian I can be.

As a veterinary hospital in the picturesque small town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, I believe many of our clients may be unaware of the degree to which we are respected in the veterinary community. We have developed a glowing reputation throughout Ontario and New York State, with over 120 animal hospitals entrusting us with the care of their patients through referrals. The excellent service that we provide to our referral clients is just a natural extension of the care we have provided to our local community for the last twenty seven years.

We have always organized our hospital such that we are able to see all sick and/or painful pets in a timely manner (frequently within minutes to hours), and routine examinations are typically available the same or following days. While an ear infection, sore leg, and itchy skin may not be life threatening conditions they are frequently very painful and in our minds warrant immediate care.

As a four-veterinarian hospital, with a combined experience of over fifty years, we are able to collaborate on difficult cases to ensure the best possible outcomes for our patients and clients. Included in this communal experience we are privileged to have younger veterinarians who provide a different perspective, and help ensure we are always up to date with new developments in veterinary medicine.

As a hospital we are accredited by the American Animal Hospital Association, a benchmark in top quality care of which only 10% of Canadian veterinary hospitals are distinguished. Every staff member is also Fear Free Certified, ensuring that we place a strong emphasis on preventing and treating fear and anxiety in our patients. When posed with difficult situations it is ingrained in all of our staff to ask a simple question, “how would I want this case handled if this was my own pet”.

I am tremendously grateful for the support that Niagara has given us over the last twenty seven years and look forward to the many years ahead. I am appreciative for my family, my staff, friends, for all of the people who make the world a better place through their acts of love, empathy, and kindness, and also for the opportunities I have been gifted through living in Canada.

Kindest Regards,
Dr. Jim Turpel.
Once again this year, words cannot express our deep gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the many donors and supporters that made our Newark Neighbours Christmas Food and Gift Program such a success.

Season's Greetings

To our Niagara-on-the-Lake Clients and Families!

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All the best in 2024!

Wayne Gates
MPP Niagara Falls riding, representing Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie
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wayne.gates.com

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Santa Run raises more than $5,000 for youth collective

Mike Balsom
The Local

At the end of his five-kilometre run Sunday, Jayden Polgrabia peeled off his Santa jacket and dropped to the Simcoe Park grass to catch his breath.

The 13-year-old Niagara-on-the-Lake boy was the 63rd runner to cross the finish line, completing the run in an impressive 25:39, not far behind his friends Henry (25th; 21:42) and Malcolm Buffington (30th; 22:42), and Holden Powell (33rd; 23:12).

But more importantly for Jayden, he topped the field in fundraising, smashing his personal goal of $250 for a total of $818.15 to go toward the NOTL Youth Collective.

“This year we funded (St. John Ambulance) babysitting and first aid programs,” Jayden’s mother Caroline, a volunteer with the Youth Collective, says. “This year we’re going to add the Bronze Cross Lifesaving course so we can certify kids to work at our local pools in the summertime.”

An attempt, she says, to connect NOTL kids with job opportunities in their own community.

“We’ve talked about things like Smart Serve and WHMIS, things they can put on their resumes,” says Caroline, who has participated in the run all three years — it was the second run for Jayden. “We are listening to kids to find out what they want, and we are looking to partner with appropriate community organizations to give our kids access to this stuff.”

She stresses that 100 per cent of the funds raised stay in the local community.

“It’s an important event for us,” she adds. “We’re fundraising all the time to build our program. We want to work more closely with the town in 2024, look at what the other community groups are doing, and look at ways to fill the gaps where they need to be filled.”

It was the third year for the Santa 5K and 1K Elf Run in NOTL. The event is organized each year by VR Pro, who also operate the Chilly Half Marathon (March 3 in Burlington) and the Fridgy 10K and Frosty 5K (March 17 in Hamilton). A Santa 5K in Burlington earlier this month attracted more than 600 runners.

The NOTL race has grown each year, almost doubling from the 209 participants registered in 2021 to the large field of red velvet seen running through town last weekend, all of whom seemed relieved that the early morning drizzle stopped in time for the run.

Crossing the finish line first in the 5K was 17-year-old Governor Simcoe Secondary School student Fenway Breckels, who has led the field all three years. Breckels beat Graham Tomasini of St. Catharines by 17 seconds with his official time of 16:48, which was 35 seconds faster than his performance in 2022.

“I felt like I had a lot more left for the last 2K than I usually do,” said Breckels, who competes for his school’s track team and hopes to earn an athletic scholarship to Canisius University in Buffalo, New York next year. “So I started picking it up a bit. This might be one of my best races of the season so far. My training for my school races really paid off in this.”

With a time of 20:11, 19-year-old Fort Erie resident Mia Nanini was the 13th across the line and the first female to finish the race.

“I saw at the turnaround that there were no females ahead of me,” said Nanini. “I’m pretty happy I’m the first. I’ve been the first woman to finish at a number of events. I’m still training, though, because I really want to beat 20 minutes for a 5K.”

An avid runner, Nanini ran her first full marathon, Hamilton’s Road to Hope, two months ago. Her time there qualified her for the Chicago Marathon, scheduled for Oct. 13, 2024, and was just a minute short of qualifying her for the Boston Marathon next year.

In ninth place at 18:54, 17-year-old Mario Galbraith was the top NOTL runner in the 5K.

For the most part, though, the participants, like 12-year-old Wyatt Jackson of St. Catharines, were there to challenge themselves, have a bit of fun, contribute to a community cause and to be part of a great new Christmas tradition in NOTL.

“My mom told me about it and I got really excited,” said the Dalewood Public School student who eschewed the official VR Pro Santa suit in favour of his own onesie. “I started training for it in September, running on a treadmill. I was so ready to run.”

There is still time to contribute to the NOTL Youth Collective through the races’ fundraising portal. Visit raceroster.com/events/2023/71914/notl-santa-and-elf-run for the link.

To view more photos of the Santa Run visit notllocal.com.
Jazz pianist to present Christmas concert from NOTL studio

Since he and his wife Nancy Houle moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake about two years ago, jazz pianist Paul Tobey has been busy converting a room in their Old Town home into a music studio.

With that work now completed, Tobey is ready to perform live from the studio via YouTube this Wednesday, Dec. 20, for his fifth annual solo piano Christmas concert.

The Christmas concert actually started via Zoom in 2019 as a way to gather friends and family near and far to celebrate the season.

“It was the year before COVID,” says Houle, “and we were having a hard time getting the family together. So Paul invited people to Zoom. Everybody that was on was chatting away. When Paul was finished playing, we left the Zoom on and everybody was still chatting an hour later.”

The next year was the pandemic, when Zoom became the way that people across the world began to connect while in isolation. Family members enjoyed the 2019 concert so much that they urged Tobey and Houle to do it again. So it made sense that it would return as a way to once again celebrate the season together with music.

“They got the word out via email, and the link to the Zoom session began to be shared outside their immediate circle,” says Houle. “We found out after year two that the link had been sent out to a couple oficians’ homes,” says Tobey. “They would set up a television in a common room and get together to watch it.”

Last year was the couple’s first Christmas living in NOTL, and the first Zoom Christmas concert from their home here. The demand for the show continued to snowball and even though the new studio wasn’t ready yet. They held last December’s session with Tobey playing his beautiful German made 1888 grand piano set up in their living room.

Now the studio is completed, they both felt the time was right to make the move to expand the reach of the concert using a YouTube live broadcast.

“It allows for better sound, too,” Tobey says. “There will be no lag, no latency that you get with Zoom. The only drawback is that others won’t get to chat live, they won’t be able to see each other either.”

They will be able, however, to answer questions and send requests via the text chat. Houle will be monitoring the chat and feeding some of the requests to her husband.

The garrulous, charming and witty Tobey loves to take requests and interact with his audience. Anyone who saw him last year performing for the TD Niagara Jazz Festival at The Hare Wine Company or at Spirit in Niagara Distillers will know that.

Those shows were the beginning of Tobey’s return to performing after having spent 20 years off the circuit due to a chronic condition. In the new year to perform in the U.S. and Europe. As for his upcoming Christmas show, his repertoire includes the likes of Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas and Skating from A Charlie Brown Christmas.

But make no mistake, this will not be your run-of-the-mill mall music Christmas concert. Tobey looks for interesting chord progressions in the holiday standards, using them as jumping-off points into unique, creative new melodies. In the jazz world it’s called reharmonization, a way to make the song more jazzy, giving it a personal touch.

He plays his version of Santa Claus is Coming to Town. As recognizable as the number is, Tobey takes it into different, interesting directions, while still maintaining its spirit.

“It’s about finding the music within the music,” he says. “On Carol of the Bells his fingers move swiftly and expertly across the ivories. He uses that song’s well-known melody to segue into short snippets of other Christmas tunes, seamlessly coming back to the original song in between.”

You’ll hear Tobey’s original takes on those songs and more at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 20.

Tobey invites you to pour some hot chocolate, a cup of tea, a glass of Cabernet, or a tasty Scotch and join him as he jazzes up your favourite Christmas memories, movies, music and good times.

To ring in the season with the jazz musician, visit Jazzmentl.com/christmas-at-the-piano-concert-2023/.

The Paul Tobey Christmas concert will be recorded and posted to his Jazzmentl YouTube channel after Wednesday.
Mike Balsom
The Local

Organizers of the second annual James Berg Memorial Hockey Tournament, sched-
uled for Sunday, Dec. 23 at the arena in Virgil, wanted to do something to make this year’s event even more special.

So Matt Friesen suggest-
ed to his cousins Mackenzie, Madison and Mitchell Berg, the children of the late James Berg for whom the tournament is named, that it would be great to have Lord Mayor Gary Zale-
apa dust off his old referee jersey to officiate a game or two.

“We were reaching out to ref,” an ebullient Madison says, “and apparently he remem-
bered seeing the Lord Mayor ref
ing once in his past life. So he shot us an e-mail and he responded. We wanted him to ref the final but he has a Christmas gathering later that day, so he agreed to do the two semi-final games.”

Zalepa says he barely hes-
itated to accept the invitation.

“I let them know it’s been a really
close campaign since I’ve been
on the ice there,” laughs Za-
lep. “I think the last time was in
2012. They needed to know what they were getting into. That didn’t seem to scare them away though. I’m really looking forward to it.”

The fact that it is a com-
munity event, a gathering of mostly locals who played and coached in the Niagara-
on-the-Lake Wolves Minor Hockey Association, sealed the deal for the lord mayor. And he also remembers James Berg, the former president of the Wolves organization who died suddenly in December 2021 at 53 years old, as a big booster to the community.

“It’s a great community event, first of all,” Zalepa says, “and it recognizes someone who did a lot for minor hock-
ey and minor sports in general. I knew him through hockey, that’s why it’s so nice that they asked me to do this, I really appre-
ciate the request.”

Last year’s first James Berg
tournament was held on Fri-
day, December 23, the day a massive snowstorm shut down all of Niagara. Eight teams hit the ice that early morning while the snow accumulated outside.

“We actually had the police here at one point,” Madison recalls. “They showed up and said ‘why are you here, every-
thing is closed?’ We told them we had special permission to be here. Then they asked if they could come in and use the bathroom because everything was closed. They couldn’t even stop at a Tim Hortons.”

Last year’s tournament raised $5,500 through entry fees, concession sales and do-
nations.

In August, the Berg family presented a cheque for $4,500 to the Wolves and award-
ed 18-year-old Sam Walker, a member of last year’s U18 Wolves rep team who won silver in the Niagara District Hockey League, the very first James Berg Memorial Scholar-
ship.

Walker is one of four applicants for the scholarship.

As for Zalepa, he says he
would have liked to do the
final but he has a busy day.

“I hope they take it easy on
me though,” laughs the lord
mayor, who will officiate in
games scheduled for 1:40 and
2:40 p.m. “I’m going to rely on
the other official quite a bit.
And I haven’t skated since last Christmas. I hope they don’t regrett asking me to do this.”

Continued on page 26

Team captain Marco Grusso takes a shot. (Mike Balsom)

U18 Wolves in good shape heading to Silver Stick

Mike Balsom
The Local

With the International Silver Stick finals just around the corner, the Niagara-
on-the-Lake Wolves U18 rep
team’s recent play bodes well for them.

The Wolves picked up their 10th win of the season last week, a 5-1 victory over the West Niagara Flying Aces at Virgil’s Meridian Credit Union Arena. Their record of 10-3-3 puts them in first place in the Niagara District Hock-
ey League with eight games to
go in the regular season.

After giving up a goal to
the former president of the Wolves organization who died suddenly in December 2021 at 53 years old, as a big booster to the community.

The win over West Niaga-
ra was a good example of that.

“The boys have really shown up since our Silver Stick win,” he says, referring to their gold medal perfor-
mance in Midland in Novem-
ber. “They’re pushing, they’re giving 100 per cent for the full
three periods. Over the last 10 games we’ve had some 5-0, 5-1 wins. We’re not making
the mistakes that can keep the
games tighter.”

The win over West Niaga-
ra is a good example of that.

“We came out of the first
period with the lead,” Neu-
dorf points out. “They really
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games tighter.”

The win over West Niaga-
ra is a good example of that.
The Niagara Predators closed out the regular season with a home-and-home series this weekend against the Bradford Bulls. Picking up a few points against the South Division's second-place team would be a great way to end their current three-game skid.

"To pick up any point right now is important," says head coach Kevin Taylor. "This has been a really tough part of our schedule. We got some places where we weren’t expecting to Where we lost some points, we can’t dwell on that anymore. We have to look forward and try to pick up the points where we can."

Taylor is talking about the Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League’s last six games, during which they faced the first place North York Renegades and the third place Durham Roadrunners twice each, with two league show- cases against the North Division’s Timmins and West Nipissing in the middle. They went 2-3-1 in that stretch when many predicted they might have been completely blanked against some tough competition.

Unfortunately, last Wednesday’s 9 a.m. showcase against West Nipissing Lynx was the Preds’ fourth game in six days, including games three days in a row. It was the first of three losses in a row.

After some strong play by Niagara for the first 15 minutes of that day, they gave up two goals in 20 seconds to the Lynx and the wind seemed to have knocked out their sails. West Nipissing cruised to a 5-0 shutout of a tired and hapless Preds squad who looked lost on the Gale Centre Ice the rest of the way.

"It was just too much," Taylor said about Wednesday’s game. "Nine o’clock, I never see 9 a.m. And we had such a great game the afternoon before against Timmins (West Nipissing again won 5-3). It’s tough to do that again the next day."

After the Preds beat Durham 4-3 on the road last Monday the Roadrunners came to town Friday night for the first meeting of the re-venge. They got that in the form of a 3-2 win in front of one of the Predators’ largest crowds of the year.

After a scoreless first period Durham’s Zach Burns got the Roadrunners on the scoreboard 12:45 into the sec- ond and when he beat Preds goalie Zane Clausen on the short side.

The two teams exchanged goals back and forth in the third, with Durham’s Vener Bibb and Loemo Sullivan and Niagara Nolan Wyers scor- ing. Taylor pulled Clausen in favour of the extra attacker with more than 90 seconds remaining. Rhys Jones replied for the Preds to make it 3-2 with 30 seconds left, but the Roadrunners closed the door the rest of the way.

The Predators played a strong game defensively with two of the Durham goals coming on rebounds that Clausen couldn’t adjust. And they ousted the Roadrunners 35- 33.

But Taylor felt his team should have won the game, and that the loss came down to some basic fundamentals.

"We asked them to dump the puck in," explained Taylor Friday night. "Every time they did that we controlled the game. When we began trying to take the pack in our corner and we became isolated. We had no pack support. We were try- ing to beat three or four guys now and lost the pack in a row Sun- day, a 5-1 decision on the road in favour of the North York Renegades.

Taylor’s team found itself in a deep hole by the end of the first period, giving up goals to Reivy Wosik, Jeddy Somervall and Christopher Ramo, the latter of whom scored short handed. Though they had some power play opportunites in the final 30 minutes the Preds couldn’t come back from that deficit.

"We came out flat and they got three quick ones," Taylor lamented. "We played a lot better in the third period. We came out with a lot of jump. But we were missing some key players. I think we’ve had maybe one game with our full lineup this year."

Injuries and illnesses have slowed down some key Preda- tors as of late, including Declan Fagarty, Nolan Wyers, Reece Bisci, goalie Mike Mankowski and defenseman Nick Savone. That has forced the coaching staff to move some of the play- ers around to face the Bulls, who are 19-9-0 on the seasons.

"They have a good team," admits Taylor. "This is our first time playing them, so we don’t know what to expect. But we have to come out with a good effort and play a full 60 min- utes."

The Predators travel to the Bob Falla Arena in Bradford Wednesday night for the first game in the home-and-home se- ries, then host the Bulls in Virgil this Friday, Dec. 22 at 7:30pm.

After that it’s a much need- ed two-week break for all in- volved with the team.

“We’ve all been running down from this last stretch, coaches included,” says Taylor. “We’re worn out. The guys need a break, and I’m hoping they will come back with a renewed in- terest in the game, wanting to prove exactly what we can do.”

To view more photos visit notllocal.com
CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU

Across:
1. Distant
6. Apex
9. Jobs
14. "ER" actress — Tierney
15. "— Believer", Monkees hit
16. Start playing!
17. T
20. Snow runner
21. Taps
19. "Fear of Flying" author
22. Buoyant
23. Old-fashioned cab
25. Lightweight topical hats
27. Elite group
28. Gene Pitney was only 24hrs from here
29. Downloadable program
32. Small lake
34. Natter
35. Tenor --- Bocelli
37. Sidestepped
39. Splendors
40. Demeanor
41. Total
42. Capital of Norway
43. Sour source of formic acid
44. Jambalaya ingredient
46. Little one
47. "Band of Gold" singer
48. Miscellany
49. Gun handle nick
50. Notices
51. Get outta here!
52. All I, "want is a room somewhere..." ("My Fair Lady")
53. Bridal wear
54. Get on
56. Cop
57. Cleat
58. In order to
60. Alice
61. Neb
62. Tract
63. Tiled
64. Aye
65. Oaths.

Down:
1. Pennsylvania Mennonites
2. Sri ---, formerly Ceylon
3. Ahead of the field
4. Mineral source
5. Litter of pigs
6. Bracket
7. Stimulus
8. Security detachment
9. Anna Paquin won an Oscar for this film, aged 11
10. Spanish winds
11. The pen
12. Recoil
13. Remain
18. Rotating engine part
24. Welcome
26. Old Testament song
28. Sliver
29. Nobleman
30. Wind
31. — doble (dance)
32. One of the Three Bears
33. "— Almighty", in which Morgan Freeman played God
34. Nike's successor, informally
36. Drove
38. At peace
39. Rev up
41 — Todt, barber
42. Nixon's successor, informally
43. Andrea
44. Prawn
45. Chest pain
46. Tot
47. Payne
48. Felons
49. Gun handle nick
50. Notices
51. Get outta here!
52. — want is a room somewhere..." ("My Fair Lady")
53. Bridal wear
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