



Tractor parade a roaring success

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Adults and some youngsters leave Simcoe Park for the 5K Santa Run, the second annual event organized by VR Pro. Families and younger children had the choice of a 1K run. The event was a fundraiser for the NOTL Youth Campus which will open in January. (Mike Balsom)

Suited-up Santas run through NOTL

Mike Balsom
The Local

Simcoe Park was awash in a sea of red and white Sunday morning as hundreds of running enthusiasts gathered for the second annual Niagara-on-the-Lake Santa 5K. There were tall Santas, short Santas, young Santas, old Santas, even a few canine Santas participating in the pre-Christmas race.

“We’re up about 25 per cent from last year’s race,” said Jessica Brake, organizer of the event for VR Pro. “We have just over 300 registered for our three events. This is one of our most popular events of the year. Our Hamilton-Burlington one had almost 800 Santas last week.”

Most of the people in Simcoe Park were there to run, but many others came just to experience the spectacle of so many Santas all in one place. There was no denying

Christmas was almost here after a visit to the popular tourist respite.

This year’s run was sponsored by Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty. Sales representative and local resident Caroline Polgrabia and her 12-year-old son Jayden ran in the event last year. When she discovered there wasn’t a charity linked to this year’s run, she jumped at the chance to suggest the NOTL Youth Campus as this year’s beneficiary.

“Last year it was the Niagara Furniture Bank, and they’re no longer operating,” Polgrabia explained. “I went to our brokerage and mentioned the youth campus. They immediately said yes, they’d love to be the title sponsor. So I got to bring my personal love of the youth campus to the event.”

Ten dollars from each registration was directed to the youth campus, which guaran-

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Ukrainian families flee homeland to Niagara

Penny Coles
The Local

“Can you imagine?” asks a young Ukrainian mother who is now living in Niagara with her husband and two young children, as she describes the horror of their final days in their homeland before fleeing to Canada.

They had a good life before the Russian attacks began, one they thought could only get better, she says.

“We were well-educated, respected, with good jobs and a beautiful home. But here we

are now, starting again from scratch.”

She left behind her own business as a travel agent with six employees, and her husband was a well-respected lawyer. The apartment she had so lovingly and carefully outfitted at home was destroyed by a bomb, and she and her family, as well as neighbours who survived the building’s destruction, hid in the basement. They were there for 22 days, she says, no lights or electricity, no toilets, and scrounging for food.

“For 22 days. Can you

imagine?”

But what may be hardest for Canadians to imagine is the fear that has followed them, even in this far-away country and small community — fear for those they have left behind.

That includes her husband’s mother. He is nervous about talking to the press, concerned the Russians will learn what they’ve said and his mother will be the victim of retaliation.

They asked for no names to be printed, no photos and no mention of where in

Ukraine they come from. It’s clear he was uncomfortable just talking to The Local.

But she wants Canadians to understand what they have left behind, how difficult it was for them to leave, and, even given recent events, how much they dream of one day returning to Ukraine when it is safe for their family to rebuild their future there.

Now she has two jobs, at a coffee shop in St. Catharines, and at a Niagara-on-the-Lake hotel, while he is helping to put finishing touches on a house under construction, in

return for living in the house rent-free.

She has become the bread-winner, “the matriarch of the family,” simply because she speaks English — her husband does not.

“We are in our 40s, and we have worked hard to have a good life. Never could we have imagined this. Our lives were so wonderful. But we had to leave, for our kids.”

She would never have left without her husband, she says.

But in the area where they lived, the Russians were forcing them to go to Russia, and

they were able to leave from there to come to Canada.

Maybe hardest of all for her is listening to Canadians complain about things that are inconsequential, when others have endured so much tragedy, she says, and how mean they can be at times.

“One woman comes in (to the coffee shop) and complains, all the time. She complains about her coffee being cold. I want to say, can you imagine . . .” and again she speaks of the hardships her

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Voices raised in song at Wayside Chapel



Dianne Ticknor led the carol sing at the Wayside Chapel Saturday, with Carl Finkle and Rick Meloen (Photos by Penny Coles)

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Penny Coles
The Local

It was a cold afternoon for an outdoor event, but hearts were warm as voices were raised in song to celebrate the holiday season.

The crowd of all ages that gathered around the tiny Wayside Chapel on the Niagara River Park-

way Saturday afternoon for a holiday sing-along filled the air with the sounds of joy, moving from traditional carols such as *Silent Night* that reflected reverence on the faces of singers, to rousing Christmas tunes, including *Jingle Bells* and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, sung with cheerful enthusiasm.

Song sheets were distributed, but were in short supply, however people were happy to share and many knew the words without needing one.

Rick Meloen, organizer of the sing-along, said beforehand he had no idea how many people to expect. It was the first time for a Christmas event at the chapel, and



Pia, Albrecht, Freya and Anja Seeger with Gisela Bertelmann made the sing-along a family event.

‘Would like to see it happen again’ Penguin dip moved to Queen’s Royal

Continued from page 2

he said he’d be happy if 10 people showed up.

He was ecstatic with the turnout.

“I really had no idea what to expect,” he said. “It was really good to see all these people come out.”

The count varied upwards from 60, as people came and went, including a group of people on a tour shuttle bus, and a smaller van of visitors who came near the end and were interested in the singing and the chapel.

It was Albrecht Seeger, a local grape-grower, who thought of the idea of a Christmas celebration.

He has been a regular at the chapel’s Easter Sunrise Service for about 15 years, he said, and encouraged Meloen, who helps maintain the tiny building and organize events there, to consider doing something at Christmas — and he’s glad he did.

“I think it was fantastic,” said Seeger.

“The turnout was great. I was so moved to see so many people.”

He wasn’t concerned the weather would be a deterrent — there is always a good crowd at Easter. “Sometimes it can be a beautiful morning sunrise, and sometimes it can snow. Saturday wasn’t

a bad day at all.”

“I’ve never been much of a singer,” he added, “but my two daughters Pia and Freya have great voices and love to sing, and it was great to be there with the family.”

Meloen was concerned about musical accompaniment for the outdoor event, but local singer Dianne Ticknor offered to lead the sing-along, and did a great job, said Seeger.

“I would definitely like to see it happen again. This was a great event for the first time, and it’s something to build on for next year.”



Crowd members were definitely in the holiday spirit. (Penny Coles)

Local Staff

The location has changed for the 47th annual Penguin Dip — those brave souls planning to take part will be going into the lake on Boxing Day from Queen’s Royal Park.

Organizer Chris Bjorgan thought he would be able to use the customary Balls Beach for the dip, but after checking it out this week and seeing the town still has it fenced off for some restoration work, he realized it would have to be moved.

The time hasn’t changed — it’s still 1 p.m. Dec. 26.

Bjorgan says he won’t be able to have the heated truck parked nearby. It will be a quick in-and-out for those who do the traditional three dips — it has to be three to make it count. “I guess we’ll see how tough people are,” he jokes.

In recent years the event has become a fundraiser for Red Roof Retreat, says Chris, reminding spectators to bring some cash for when the hat is passed.

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Santa Run provides funding for NOTL Youth Campus

Continued from page 1

teed at least \$3,000 according to the pre-race registration numbers. But others stepped up with larger donations once they heard about the race.

"We passed the \$5,000 mark last night," said an excited Polgrabia. "We received tons of exceptional donations across the board, some \$250 donations, even one for \$500. We're launching our programs on Jan. 16 and this will allow us to pay for courses for the kids. We're going to be running a babysitting course, first aid, and the (St. John Ambulance) Home Alone course as well."

Caroline and Jayden ran again this year, with Jayden finishing third in the 10 to 14 age group, and 34th out of all of the Santas who ran the 5K live (there was also a virtual option). Jayden's 10-year-old sister Kaitlyn also ran this year, taking part in the inaugural 1K Elf Race.

Sixteen-year-old Governor Simcoe Secondary School student Fenway Breckels was first across the 5K finish line. He completed the race with a top time of 16:43, 22 seconds faster than Eric Labelle of Oakville, who came in second.

Breckels shaved more than a minute off his 2021 time in the same race.

"The course last year was a

little slippery," he told The Local, "so that slowed me down a little bit. But I've been training a lot, and I'm older and stronger. I'm really happy with all the improvements I made."

Breckels competes in cross country and track and field events for Governor Simcoe, and runs with the Thorold Elite Track Club. The avid runner laces his shoes up at least six days a week. And after the race, he was still running. The NOTL Local spotted Breckels hoofing it through Simcoe Park on his way to the Irish Harp for the medal celebrations.

Richard Butlin was the first NOTL resident to finish the race. The 66-year-old completed the run in 20:22. He was followed closely by his good friend and running partner, 61-year-old Karen Gardiner of St. Catharines, who was the first female to cross the 5K finish line. She also held that distinction in 2021.

Butlin says he and his wife, Carol, who also ran Sunday, run together a lot. "We are members of the St. Catharines triathlon club Edge. We're actually both training for the world duathlon championships in Spain in April. My time today is great for me at this time in the season."

"I had a race plan for today," said Gardiner, a triathlete like the Butlins "I wanted



First place finisher Fenway Breckels was also the winner of last year's Santa Run in NOTL. (Mike Balsom)



Benjamin Gaudreau was the winner of the 1K Elf Race. (Mike Balsom)



Santas have breakfast at the Irish Harp after running. (David Gilchrist)



Even four-legged Santas need a break, finding a spot to rest outside the Irish Harp. (David Gilchrist)

to be close to 20 minutes, but that fell apart pretty quickly. I didn't do my typical race prep, as this is more of a fun event."

But not all the runners

were there to compete. For many it was a family affair.

Andrew Barton of St. Catharines took up running during the pandemic. On Sunday, he was joined by his wife Elysha and their young daughter Ella.

"This is a great community event to re-engage with after COVID," said Barton. "We tried to get Ella here for the Elf Run, and we were also trying to get family here to watch her while we run, but neither happened, so I'm running very slowly with her today at the back of the pack. We're looking forward to it."

Benjamin Gaudreau of Port Robinson led all competitors in the 1K Elf Race.

"I'm not a runner," the Lionel Messi fan told The Local. "I play soccer. I just ran as hard as I could so I could get home to watch the World Cup game."

That World Cup game was on the televisions at the Irish Harp, where the Santas gath-

ered post-race for hot chocolate and breakfast sandwiches served by host Jovie Joki. It was quite a spectacle seeing so many red and white suits making their way up King Street.

Originally scheduled for late November, Brake explained the event was moved to this past weekend by popular demand.

"We heard from some runners that they preferred a date closer to Christmas," Brake

said. "It was a great way to get their families out. It's something they hope to do year after year. We like it earlier to avoid the snow and ice, but we heard from the runners that it was better closer to Christmas."

Creating a new tradition in NOTL, VR Pro promises to run the race again next December. Whether a runner or not, it's not a bad way to get into the holiday spirit.



Santas run through the streets of the Old Town in the 5K race. (Mike Balsom)



Santa's elves head out on their race. (Mike Balsom)

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COVID cases rising in long-term care, retirement homes

Penny Coles
The Local

There has been an increase in the number of COVID-19 outbreaks across the region recently, including long-term care homes, retirement homes, hospitals and other congregate care settings, such as shelters, says Niagara's acting chief medical officer of health. Dr. Mustafa Hirji says

he doesn't know the significance of the recent increase. "It could just be random chance that we are seeing more outbreaks; it could be a signal that COVID-19 is increasing again. At this point it is too early to say." He noted that "a majority of the new outbreaks are small in size: all the new long-term care home outbreaks, for

example, involve fewer than five people. So the number of people sick is not very large yet. That can change over time though and we will be monitoring closely." In Niagara-on-the-Lake, the regional website was showing only Niagara Long Term Care with an outbreak, one that was first reported on Dec. 12, but at press time included 30 residents of the

Wellington Street home. Regardless of whether the outbreak "is a random variation or a sign of true increase, there is reason to worry that COVID-19, as well as influenza and other infections, might start to spread more in the coming weeks, given people will be indoors with the colder weather, and holiday gatherings will lead to plenty of social interaction, allowing

infection to spread." We were warned that an increase of COVID-19 was likely by January, he added. To minimize infections, and ensure people don't end up very sick and hospitalized while hospitals remain stressed, Hirji continues to "strongly recommend everyone six months of age or older get their flu shot ASAP. We are currently in the

middle of flu season." He also recommends everyone age 12 and up get a fall booster dose of COVID-19 vaccination, if they haven't already done so. Children ages five to 11 should get their first two doses of COVID-19 vaccine and a booster dose six months later, he said.

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Niagara Long Term Care has 30 COVID cases

Penny Coles
The Local

Niagara Long Term Care has been in a COVID-19 outbreak since Dec. 12, with 30 residents having positive PCR test results as of Monday. The affected residents are isolating in their rooms, says Chris Poos, executive director of the Wellington Street home, and are receiving in-room meal service. Only essential caregivers may visit the home, and along with team members, must wear N-95 respirator masks and appropriate personal protective equipment, says Poos in an email to

The Local. Infection prevention and control measures continue to be followed, including masking, active screening and daily rapid testing for team members and visitors. Residents and team members are being closely monitored for any symptoms of the virus. "We remain in regular contact with residents, families, our team members," he says. COVID-19, and other respiratory viruses, including influenza and RSV, continue to cause outbreaks in many long-term care and retirement homes, says Poos. "However, vaccinations play a big role in

keeping residents and team members less sick. Most who are fully vaccinated come down with mild cold-like symptoms, or remain asymptomatic." "We are quick to act when anyone presents with symptoms, including rapid testing and isolating the affected resident," he adds. "If a rapid test comes back positive, then a PCR test is conducted to confirm the results." The support from community partners and families is appreciated, he adds, "and we are so proud and thankful for our dedicated, hard-working team here at Niagara Long Term Care."



Niagara Long Term Care had a COVID outbreak in January 2021, when this photo was taken, again in January 2022, and a third outbreak that was declared Dec. 12. At press time 30 residents were being segregated on one floor. (File photo)



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EDITORIAL

Wishing you all the best over the holidays

As we look forward to a COVID-free holiday — at least one with no restrictions — there is much for which to be grateful. We can surround ourselves with those we love. We can share a meal with family, or if we don't have anyone close by, we can seek out someone else who may be alone to share a holiday meal with.

And we can celebrate the spirit in this community, the generosity, the assistance offered to those less fortunate, and we can be kind to others, over the holidays and hopefully all year long. At The Local, our goal has always been to bring you the good stories of all the great people in our community,

those with interesting stories and skills, those who give of their time to help others. This year, we have learned about the increasing need for food banks, but thankfully, through the generosity of local individuals, businesses and organizations that have donated all manner of food and gifts to Newark Neighbours, those in

need will have a good holiday. We also have Shirley Madson making sure Ukrainian families, recently having fled their war-torn country, have lots of food and gifts for their youngsters, making us realize how fortunate we are to live in a country where we can't imagine what those who have escaped to Canada have suffered,

and what those left behind must continue to endure. There is love, generosity and goodness all around us, enough for all. If you are in need and looking for help, reach out to someone — ask a friend or neighbour, if you don't know where else to turn. And if you know someone who is suffering, reach out

to them. We thank each and every one of you who has done something to put a smile on the face of someone who needs some holiday cheer. And we wish you all, each and every one of you, a safe, healthy and happy holiday. **Penny Coles**
The Local

Many different holidays celebrated around the world

Christmas is nearly here! This is a holiday that is probably known all over the world, but not celebrated by all. For those who believe in the birth of Christ, this is a celebration of faith. This holiday is also celebrated by non-Christians, with Christ-

mas trees, decorations, families and friends getting together, especially on Christmas Day — after all, it's a statutory holiday. Gifts are given and exchanged and somehow things seem to be more friendly, a little kinder and more forgiving

at this time of year. There are many holidays and celebrations the world over, and I had a look at a few in December. Hanukkah is a Jewish celebration for eight days, this year from Dec. 18 to Dec. 26. This religious festival includes the nightly lighting of the me-

norah, a candelabrum that has nine branches, with special prayers each evening. This celebration includes special dishes, traditional Jewish songs, and dreidel, a traditional Jewish game, is usually played.

Kwanzaa is an African holiday that celebrates culture, tradition and family. Unlike most of the December holidays around the world, Kwanzaa is not a religious celebration. It is a time when people of African heritage, regardless of religion, celebrate their history and culture for seven days, from Dec. 26 until Jan. 1. It includes families coming together; decorating homes in green, red and black; and wearing traditional African clothing. It also centres around a candle holder known as the Kinara, which holds three green candles, three red and one black. One candle is lit each evening. There are also gifts, which are usually handmade, given on the seventh day to encourage achievement, self-determination and success.

Every Dec. 13, various Nordic nations, including Sweden, Norway and parts of Finland, celebrate Santa Lucia, often referred to as Lucia's Day or, more popularly, St. Lucia, held in Saint Lucia's honour. A Christian martyr, Saint Lucia was put to death by the Romans in 304 CE because of her religious convictions.

Yule is frequently celebrated in Germany and other German-speaking nations. It lasts for 12 days and is commemorated in the middle of winter. The longest night of the year, also known as the Winter Solstice, and the New Year, are celebrated this way.

I also came across Festivus, a holiday celebrated every Dec. 23 as an alternative to Christmas. No decorations, no gifts . . . well nothing like Christmas at all! Festivus was created by television writer Daniel O'Keefe in the mid-1960s and was shown on a *Seinfeld* episode. No matter how we choose to celebrate, the season can be

a time when we enjoy being with family and friends, and we should all practice carrying the holiday spirit onward.

For some, however, the holidays can be a sad and difficult time. If you are able to share some of what you have, give to your local food bank, thrift stores and charities, not just in December but all year round — the need continues long after the holidays end.

Free and confidential mental health and substance use support is available 24/7 from Wellness Together Canada. Check this page in the Local for distress numbers.

I would like to wish you all a happy holiday, whatever your celebration is, and a wish for a kinder and more peaceful world in 2023. I hope you all have something nice to remember from the holiday this year. **Ben Foster**
Special to The Local
Ben Foster is an Eden High School co-op student at The Local.

Where's Ben?



The Local co-op student, Ben Foster, is discovering new locations in NOTL and wondering how familiar others may be with them. If you know where this photo was taken, email penny@notllocal.com.



View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

Gianna, the heroine of *I Hate Christmas* (Netflix 2022, six episodes,) is convinced she is a loser because she has no 'significant other,' so in exasperation, she lies, telling her fami-

ly she will bring her boyfriend to Christmas Eve dinner. Her search for a boyfriend begins and the episodes are filled with intriguing characters and romantic locations. In her pursuit of a boyfriend she makes errors, but in the end learns a lot about relationships and what love

really is. *Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to go to movies. Until he resumes going to theatres, he has graciously agreed to share his opinions, through "short and sweet" exclusives, of Netflix series and movies for The Local.*

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COMMENT

Owen promises to imitate animal sounds, if you see him



Owen Bjorgan
Special to The Local

Winter is a time of travelling acoustics. The crisp air pairs quietly but surely with the bare trees, devoid of their leafy dresses. Insects tuck their tunes away under the cork-like bark of an eastern cottonwood, and some of our favourite feathered singers take their live performances to some beach in Central America.

I find that this is the time of year when the natural world can become unbelievably silent, but such conditions allow any remaining noises to become amplified. This has inspired me to discuss the most bizarre, unexpected, and sometimes horrifying sounds that animals around here can present.

If you see me in public, I promise I will mimic these noises for you the best I can.

Trouble is, I'm perhaps as stealthy as a great blue heron.

This elegant wading bird comes off as sophisticated and calculated, especially as it traverses the shorelines in ponderously slow fashion on the hunt for fish, snakes and frogs. If I were to personify this animal, it would be wearing a blue-grey business suit, tall and lanky with impressionable poise. This person would be remarkably professional — until they opened their mouth.

Before paddling the Virgil dams was recently disallowed, I had countless encounters with this beautiful animal there making such an ugly, startling noise. Suddenly, from the shade of the shoreline where they frequently feast, a loud and deep gurgles begins. The gurgles can transition into something like a dog bark, or even a voracious low growl. The closest sound we can get to dinosaurs, which rings true, as birds are the only living direct descendants from dinosaurs.

Another bird that caught me off guard in recent times was a double-crested cormorant.

My friend Brandon and I were filming *Hidden Corners*:

Canadian Erie this summer past. We had a turbulent and memorably sketchy boat ride to Canada's southernmost piece of land, the tiny Middle Island, sitting out in the abyss of Lake Erie. No cell phone reception, no people, no buildings and tons of rare species.

While traversing toward the island interior in search of biodiversity and all things interesting, we were met with a terrifying sound. Are there any fellow metal-head musicians out there? Bellowing, powerful growls were coming from the forest interior like a lead singer roars during the heaviest of metal rock. We couldn't yet tell what the sound was, nor whether it was being generated from the treetops or the forest floor on this remote island. Being so far from anywhere, I momentarily questioned if there was a population of wild boars present, as this heavy grunting got louder.

Our answer was delivered by a chopped-up fish falling from the treetops, right at our feet. Above, dozens of dark-looking, and dark-sounding, double-crested cormorants were happily eating and nesting away. The noise was like something of a monster from your imagination, and it comes from a bird the size of a large duck. If anyone has heard howler monkeys on a nature documentary, this is the best sound I can possibly relate it to.

Back in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and very much off documentary duties, I was once standing around a giant bonfire enjoying some beverages with

my pals. It was a weekend, and it was turning into a big night.

In a small patch of forest a hundred metres away or so, I heard someone make the silliest and most outrageously loud noise. Someone must have snuck off into the bush and thought it would be hilarious to yell out some dilapidated version of the word 'help!', followed by some 'ouch'es. They were really belting it out, and I was dumbfounded as to which of my buddies was pulling this prank off.

Although these particular guys are indeed pranksters, they were all present by the fireside. What we were hearing was a red fox.

The cute and fluffy canine known by all has a distinctly strange set of calls that don't match its sweet image. It sounds so human-like, it is kind of eerie and unsettling.

It is believed that female red foxes, known as vixens, make this sound during breeding season to bait males closer to them. However, male foxes, known as dogs or tods, can make this desperate and painful sounding yelp as well, especially when guarding territory or during stand-offs.

I literally got home the next morning and Google-searched something to the effect of "painful scream or yelp in southern Ontario animal." Eventually, I discovered who the culprit of this brutal and emotionally-perplexing sound was.

I felt humbled, as I do to this day, about how nature always keeps us guessing. "Yeeeeeooooowch!"



Although the red fox appears cute and cuddly, it can make a noise that makes your hair stand on end. (Owen Bjorgan)

Local LETTERS

To Karen Skeoch, on her retirement

Dear Karen,

I am certain that as you reflect on your career in advertising sales, you will celebrate with pride the huge difference you have made in the lives of so many: your clients, your colleagues, and the Niagara-on-the-Lake community at large.

You always went the extra mile and you never lost sight of the importance of good working relationships.

I so respect your tenacity and your ability to be so relaxed in the face of requested changes, additions, and those going-to-press deadlines.

The dictionary defines professionalism as the practice of doing one's job with skill, competence, ethics, and courtesy; I simply define it as Karen.

But more than these attributes, I want to celebrate you, your sense of humour,

your passion for life, your selfless caring for others, and to say thank you for the privilege and pleasure it has been for me to share a few moments in your life's journey.

My very best wishes to you today and for all your tomorrows; may they be filled with all those good things you so richly deserve.

Doug Rempel
Bosley Real Estate

Thanks for stocking initiative

To Joan King:

I write this brief letter to thank you and the NOTL 4 U group for organizing the wonderful gift of Christmas stockings for the residents living in our long-term care home.

We are so very grateful and thankful for this kind gesture and the positive im-

pact it has on the lives of our residents. The smiles on their faces are priceless.

Tim Siemens
Radiant Care

Joan King says thanks for the support

The joy of giving was overwhelming as the community so generously put together more than 200 stockings for the seniors at Niagara Long Term Care, Pleasant Manor and Upper Canada Lodge.

It takes many kind-hearted people who believe that this simple request will bring pleasure to our seniors living in these residences.

Much thought and care was taken in selecting appropriate items for the Christmas stockings. The three senior Kindergarten classes from Crossroads School filled over 30 stockings. They are learning about giving back to the community and can be very proud

of their efforts. Dorothy So-Wiens and the NOTL Lions were able to put together 30. JoAnn Cudmore and Wendy Midgley of Royal LePage so kindly donated 20 stockings. The community really comes together to be a part of this heartwarming initiative.

Amika Verwegen and her young children continue the tradition of creating hand crafted Christmas cards with Christmas riddles to bring a smile. Other holiday gift tags created by Sheri Ruby were attached to each and every stocking that was donated.

A big thank you goes to Penny Coles and her husband Wayne for delivering the Christmas stockings to all

three homes. The reception is such a positive experience and Penny was able to capture these happy moments.


To all the people who supported this initiative please know the impact you have had on making Christmas a joy for the seniors who may be alone or lonely.

It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.

This community certainly put a lot of love into this initiative.

Wishing everyone a wonderful Christmas and good health and much happiness in 2023!

Joan King
Queenston



Letters! We want letters!

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

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Check out where, when town streets are plowed

Local Staff

The weather outside may not be frightful — yet — but Niagara-on-the-Lake residents can prepare for dealing with it when it is.

The town is launching new interactive snowplow tracking software through Telus FOCUS Optimization.

FOCUS Optimization will help to ensure residents know about snow removal services through real-time updates. The system monitors where salt and sand have been distributed, what roads and sidewalks have been cleared, and where snow plows have been within the past 30 minutes.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says he's excited to see this interactive snowplow tracker used for the community's benefit. "Maintaining excellent customer service is what the town strives to achieve, and this is another great way we are enhancing service levels and ensuring effective information sharing is provided during a snowstorm. On behalf of town council, thank you to town staff for bringing this operational initiative to fruition."

The online map identifies streets that have been salted or sanded, and streets and sidewalks that have been cleared. It also shows how long ago streets and sidewalks have been attended to, and if a street is

primary, secondary, private or under another jurisdiction.

"With this GIS (geographic information system) software, the town can keep residents up-to-date as snow removal efforts are taking place," said CAO Marnie Cluckie in a news release. "This is another modernization project the town is proud to present to its residents."

The interactive tracking map is available on the town's website through the following link: notl.com/town-services/roads-infrastructure/snow-procedures. Residents are encouraged to use this new digital service to stay informed and up-to-date during future snow storms.

Region's holiday schedule for garbage pickup

Local Staff

Since Christmas Day and New Year's Day fall on a Sunday this year, there are no changes to the regular curbside collection schedule across Niagara Region.

Households may place out two extra bags or cans of garbage without a tag curbside on the first garbage collection week following Christmas Day. Residents in single-family homes and apartments with six units or less in Niagara-on-the-Lake will be able to put out four bags of garbage for collection from Dec. 26 to Dec. 30.

All materials must be at the curb by 7 a.m. on collection day.

Christmas trees will be collected for composting from Jan. 9 to 13 for residents in single-family homes and apartments with six units or less. Residents should be aware of the following:

- Place tree at the curb by 7 a.m. on your regular collection day
- Remove all ornaments and decorations
- Christmas trees wrapped in plastic, or buried in snow, or placed on top of snow banks will not be collected

- No artificial trees: these can be booked separately for large item collection

Unsure how to dispose of your holiday waste? Search the item disposal tool by visiting the Region's website or by downloading the Niagara Region Waste mobile app from the Apple or Google Play stores.

For more information, visit Niagara Region online or contact the Waste Info-Line at 905-356-4141 or call 1-800-594-5542, Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., excluding Christmas and New Year's Day.

Local homes worth a drive-by

Although there are many beautifully decorated homes in NOTL, photographer David Gilchrist captured these three — (left) on Niagara River Parkway, close to Reif Winery; (middle) on York Road, approaching Queenston from St. Davids, and (right) Prideaux Street.



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Doug Widdicombe
Sales Representative
Senior Vice President - Sales
289.686.8590
dwiddicombe@sothebysrealty.ca

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Could see increase in COVID cases in January

Continued from page 5

Public Health now has an Omicron-specific Bivalent booster dose for children five to 11, similar to what has already been available to everyone age 12 and older.

Children six months of age to four years of age should have their two doses of COVID-19 vaccination, Hirji says.

“Unfortunately, uptake of vaccinations in those under 12 years of age remains low. Only a third of Niagara residents age five to 11 have two doses of COVID-19 vaccine; only 3.5 per cent of these children have a booster dose; and only 1.9 per cent of children age six months to four years have two doses of COVID-19 vaccine.”

As we approach a likely increase in COVID-19 in the coming weeks, Hirji says, “I strongly encourage all parents to get their children protected from COVID-19. That will reduce their chances of getting sick, make it more likely they can be in school and learning, and protect their health overall.”

One of the theories be-

hind why RSV, influenza and Group A strep have been so severe in children this fall, he adds, is that recent COVID-19 infection in children may have temporarily weakened their immune systems.

“The research here is still emerging, and I don’t think we can say with confidence that this is occurring. However, the possibility it may be occurring is a reason I’d recommend children get vaccinated against COVID-19, so they can avoid any impacts on their immune system.”

He is also concerned that Christmas gatherings might bring more new cases of COVID.

“Holiday gatherings, especially if they are unmasked, will create prime opportunities for infection to spread. It is not a coincidence that the past two Januaries we have been in lockdown — holiday gatherings and people living indoors due to weather fuelled waves of COVID-19 that required lockdowns to manage,” said Hirji.

While he said he doesn’t think any wave will be bad enough to re-

quire a lockdown again, “the possibility of a surge with more hospitaliza-

tions and deaths is very likely.”

Vaccinating, masking

and staying home when sick can help mitigate the impact of holiday gather-

ings on COVID-19 in the Niagara community, he added.



Dr. Mustafa Hirji (File photo)

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Stockings stuffed, delivered to seniors in long-term care

Penny Coles
The Local

Joan King couldn't be more delighted with the generosity of Niagara-on-the-Lake residents and how well her annual stocking project came together again this year.

"It was heart-warming, overwhelming, really. The support in this community is unbelievable," says King.

It takes many hands to make it work, she says — more than 100 volunteers were involved in filling 220 stockings to deliver to the three long-term care homes in NOTL.

And those volunteers went well beyond what she was expecting. Every year she provides a list of appropriate items for the stockings, and every year volunteers do far more than is asked of them, she says.

"People tell me they have so much fun shopping and stuffing the stockings," she says. "I think many of them know what it's like to have an elderly parent in long-term care."

The idea of stuffing stockings for seniors was born of the pandemic, at the height of COVID-19 when so many other volunteer ini-



Joan King had 220 Christmas stockings at the Niagara-on-the-Lake community centre ready to be delivered Friday. (Penny Coles)

tiatives were cancelled. King recalls the time leading up to Christmas 2020, when everyone was dealing with restrictions that made traditional holi-

day celebrations impossible. She was concerned about the impact those restrictions would have on lonely seniors in long-term care when visitors were not permitted, and she decided there was a way to deliver some Christmas spirit to them from the outside world. Staff at all three homes were supportive, and helped make it happen.

That first year there were volunteers who made stockings. Now there is a variety, some handmade, some purchased.

Some volunteers fill one or two, others get together in groups, such as Dorothy Soo-Wiens and Niagara Lions Club members, and

Continued on page 11

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Staff grateful for work of King and volunteers

Continued from page 10

Marlene Sibbald who had a group of neighbours helping. Three Kindergarten classes at Crossroads Public School contributed 30 stockings, says King. Jo-Ann Cudmore and Wendy Midgley of Royal LePage Realty also made it a project and donated several stockings. Mary Taylor made stockings, and baked beautiful shortbread to put in them,

says King. Each year, Amika Verwegen has her children handcraft Christmas cards, and special gift tags are made by Sheri Ruby. Hand-knitted hearts were made by the ladies at Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Palliative Care Service and included in the stockings, as were cards sent by the town that were signed by Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa. Also, each year town manager of community

engagement Lauren Kruitbosch has provided big blue recycling bins to deliver the stockings, says King. Staff at Niagara Long Term Care, Pleasant Manor's Heritage Place and Upper Canada Lodge are all extra busy at this time of year but were delighted and grateful when the stockings were delivered by Local staff Friday, and said they look forward to distributing them to seniors, who are happy to receive them.



Sofia Catena, Cody Cowbrough and Laura O'Dell were very appreciative of the stockings delivered to Niagara Long Term Care. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Amika Verwegen with her children (clockwise) Nova, Yuna, Kaznhiro and Fern Versteegen, had handmade cards for each of the seniors in long-term care.



Liane Judge, Marg Lambert and Sydney Foster from Upper Canada Lodge, with residents Jim Blair and Helen Gonzo, were delighted with the delivery of Christmas stockings.



Bev Pepin, Jayma Monteith, Bronwen Herbert, Michael Dyck and Chelsea Bilton at Pleasant Manor's Heritage Place gratefully received Christmas stockings to distribute to their seniors.



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Angela Seeger, or Adele — the huge talent was real

Rosie Gowsell-Pattison
Special to The Local

Okay, full disclosure: I am not a huge Adele fan, but I am a massive Angela Seeger fan. Which is how I found myself at an Adele Tribute show hosted by Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery.

Let's talk venue first, because the setting seemed to play as vital a role in the entire experience. In fact, if this show had taken place in any other atmosphere, I'm not sure the vibe would have been the same. It was intimate, cozy, immersive and inviting — themes that came up over and over again last Friday evening. Maybe it was the candlelight, the fire pits burning outside the windows, the tasteful decorations, the

'Christmas cheer' flowing from the bar, or a combination of all of them, but something about the theatre-in-the-round made you feel like you were settling in to a private performance rather than a ticketed event.

I've seen Seeger sing before, but never as a persona. She is a musical chameleon. When she opens her mouth and lets loose Janis Joplin, you hear Janis Joplin. But when she took to the stage as Adele, she *was* Adele. I don't mean she put on an Adele-looking dress and did up her hair and make-up like Adele — she became Adele. Her voice, her accent, her mannerisms, her movements, her quips — and the audience was here for it. And I mean here, for it.

Okay, I have to pause here to apologize for not being able to tell you what her set list was. I know the titles to four Adele songs. So while I can't tell you what the first song was, I can tell you how the crowd reacted: like the queen herself had just stepped on stage and sang it to them personally. I remember thinking to myself (and not for the only time that evening), "they know this isn't Adele, right?"

Seeger commanded that room. She knows her fans and she knows what they like and what they want to hear. She interacts with them and frequently points out people she recognizes and jokes with them between songs. If she knew someone was desperate to hear a song she was about to sing,

she would look directly at them and sing to what I can only assume was directly into their souls. The number of audience members brought to literal tears by her voice was staggering. At one point an audience member shouted out, "I'm going to need a Kleenex before you sing this next song." And a gentleman from three rows over delivered one to her.

People in the audience were listening to Seeger sing with their eyes closed, or with their hands in the air like they were praying to the Church of Seeger. And the singing was... well, I simply don't have an adjective good enough. Angela — er — Adele — can belt out the most incredible, beautiful, floor-vibrating notes that

made me wish desperately I could sing along with her. I can't, and I also don't know the words. But that didn't stop me from trying.

Or anyone else in the event centre, including a woman sitting a few seats down from me who would yell out the name of the song she was desperate to hear after every tune. Seeger would very patiently (and humorously) say, "It's coming, darling!" When it was finally time for the long-awaited song, Seeger brought the eager fan up on stage for a special performance, which ultimately turned into a duet.

And the woman from the audience killed it. While she may not have had the same talent (ahem) as Angela, she certainly made up for it with

enthusiasm, and with the support of everyone in the room going wild for this woman and the experience she was having singing with 'Adele,' I'm thinking, again, "Do they know this isn't the real Adele?"

And that was just the first set. The second was even more intense and moving than the first. At no point did Seeger's persona falter. For two solid hours, she never lost her accent or her energy, and the crowd was reluctant to see the show end.

Several of Adele's most popular songs were included, and man, did they move people! Moved them to tears, moved them to leap out of their seats and dance, moved them to put their arms around the

Continued on page 13



Carol Johnson had an opportunity to dance with Angela Seeger, a moving moment for Johnson's family and the audience. (Rosie Gowsell-Pattison)

Wishing you and your family a very happy and safe holiday season!

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Popular songs moved audience to tears

Continued from page 12

loved ones they were with and snuggle. All around the room, there were audience members with their eyes closed, or unabashedly singing along, or dancing in their seats. Including the two hulking young men I was sitting behind. I could barely

see around their biceps to catch a glimpse of Seeger on stage. At first I had mistakenly assumed they had been coerced into coming by their family members. Surely these strapping young lads weren't there for the schmaltzy love songs Adele is known for? Isn't there a hockey game on?

I couldn't have been

more wrong. They were feeling it. Like head-bobbing, eyes-closed, knew every word, feeling it in their soul. And much like the Grinch (hey, it's Christmas) when his heart grew three sizes, I had the same sort of epiphany. I may not understand the power of Adele, but I do understand the power of Angela.

As did the family in the front row, with an elderly woman suffering from dementia. Her daughter explained after the show

that her mother, Carol Johnson, thought she was seeing the real Adele. She sang along to every song, wept repeatedly when the music moved her, and more than once was moved to her feet to dance, with some help. During the second-to-last song, which was also, I assume based on her reaction, this woman's favourite, Seeger left the stage to dance with her, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house, including mine.

"I was so glad to have

this night with my family, and so happy Angela was so interactive with us all night," her daughter, Claire Johnson, said after the concert.

"My mom was so alert and engaged that night, and she had no idea the next morning what we did."

Her mother's experience, she added, was an indication not only of Seeger's big heart, but of the power of music for a person living with dementia.

It was a beautiful mo-

ment, and you know what? It really didn't matter it wasn't the real Adele. It was the real Angela, and her incomparable talent and ability to transport us all for two hours to a private Adele show.

Seeger has another show at Ravine on April 21 called 007: 60 Years of Bond. I've seen this show before and it is amazing. Do yourself a favour and get tickets. And if you do, make sure you wear socks, because Seeger will knock them off.



Seeger belts out *Skyfall* as only she can do. (Tracey Storr)



While singing, Angela spots a fan she recognizes snapping a pic. (Tracey Storr)

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One family hopes to return to Ukraine when war ends

Continued from page 1

family has endured.

She talks of seeing the dead bodies of her neighbours and having to step over their charred bodies and body parts. One man from their apartment building lost his wife, son and daughter. Corpses were burned beyond recognition. "Nobody can imagine," she says. "But we're here. We are okay. We didn't lose anybody."

Compared to the stories about Ukrainians who have settled in large urban centres in Canada, such as Toronto, where living accommodations are difficult to find, and prices are very high, it would seem their lives in Niagara are a little easier. This couple arrived in September, and live in St. Catharines. Her parents had arrived in July, and are with another family member in NOTL. Her children go to school in town so their grandparents can get them off in the morning and look after them at the end of the day, while their parents are working.

They are grateful for the warm welcome they have received in Niagara, with so many people doing everything they can to help. Yet despite the horror they left behind, she and her husband have not yet accepted that this home is anything other than temporary, and they hope one day to return to the life they left behind.

"Our souls here are suffering," she says.

"Or maybe we'll just get used to living here," she adds quietly, knowing that at home "everyday there are new attacks, new bombs."

And every day, people losing their loved ones.

"I couldn't go on without my family," she says. "Without family, you wake up empty inside. That's the worst, to be empty inside. There are a lot of people who have become victims of this war, and they can feel nothing. That's not a life."

While what has happened to her family is a tragedy, "we

are all alive, we have family, we have support. Always there is someone worse."

Shirley Madsen, a NOTL woman who is spending almost every waking minute gathering assistance for Ukrainians, sometimes delivers it to them personally, or to the Help Boutique in St. Catharines. Her heritage is Ukrainian, so she is able to bridge any language gaps, and she visits with several families regularly, always asking, "what do you need? What can I bring you? Just call if you need anything."

She has put out calls for Christmas trees, and then picked them up and delivered them. One woman asked for a meat grinder for a woman who likes to make meals from scratch when she can get the ingredients — and a local with a Ukrainian background, who is also helping out, bought a meat grinder for Madsen to deliver.

Madsen discovered recently that her mother had been married previously when she lived in Ukraine. "She was just 19 or 20, and her husband was in the Polish Diplomatic Corps, which allowed her to travel on a diplomatic passport," says Madsen. In 1943, when the Russians were attacking Ukraine, her mother would travel to Vienna, Austria, to get fake passports made for Ukrainians who wanted to flee.

Until her aunt told her that story, Madsen had no idea she is now helping people in a very similar situation, only after they have escaped.

Many Ukrainian families in Niagara have received assistance with food, clothing, and at this time of year, gifts for their children, and they are very appreciative, but Madsen says it is hard for them to be on the receiving end of such generosity. They are proud people who are accustomed to looking after themselves and others, not being on the receiving end.

"If you are visiting them, they want to give you something to eat and drink, even



Luda, Vasili, Daniel and Valeria are settling in a St. Davids home. (Supplied)

if they don't have enough for themselves. And you can't say no," says Madsen.

"Are they getting help? Yes. Are they getting what they need? I'm not sure they are. I'm afraid they're too proud to tell us if they need something."

Another Ukrainian family Madsen has met and befriended, also a husband, wife and two children, have settled for now in St. Davids.

They too are careful about what information is printed about them, including where they lived in Ukraine — they left their parents there, and worry about them suffering consequences, but are okay with their first names being used: they are Luda and Vasili, and their children, Daniel, nine, and Valeria, seven.

The four of them arrived in Canada May 8, after a harrowing departure from Ukraine — an experience many of us witnessed on the news over and over again, from the safety of our homes. They fled in their car, and ended up in one of those

interminable lines of traffic miles long, some in their vehicles for days as they headed to the border. It was early enough in the war that her husband was able to leave with her — at that time men were not yet prohibited from leaving.

Luda says they had roused their children early that morning, and they were out the door at 5 a.m., without telling anyone they were going or saying goodbye. Her son had his knapsack by the door ready for school that day, and he grabbed it as he left, one of the four bags they took with them.

"All you need for a family of four, you can fit in four small suitcases. All you need is to have your family with you and feel safe," says Luda.

Luda says they had been encouraged by her parents to flee, for the safety of the children. It was extremely painful to leave them behind, but they were determined to remain in their home. "My mother was afraid of being homeless. She wanted us to



Shirley Madsen packs up her car for another trip to the St. Catharines Help Boutique. (Supplied)

leave, she wanted us to be safe, but she wouldn't come with us. I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye. I just hope some day we'll see them again," she says, suddenly unable to speak — one of the many times there were tears in her living room that afternoon as she shared her story with Madsen and The Local.

"When we left we didn't know where we were going. Nobody knew. We were hoping it would be over in a month or two and we would go home. We got to Romania, and we thought we would get settled there and wait a little bit. But then it didn't stop, and we realized we weren't going home."

From there it was a matter of getting the right documents, and they had been encouraged by her father to come to Canada if they had the chance — it is a country with a large population of Ukrainians.

"Canada is full of good people who help us," Luda soon realized. "They have such open hearts."

She remembers shortly after their arrival, going for a walk through St. Davids. "A woman ran out and hugged us. She said she was so glad we were here, and safe, and said 'this is your home now.'"

Their family was very fortunate that Vasili has a friend in St. Davids from Ukraine, Gregory Petrenko, who welcomed them into his home when they first arrived.

He also put a poster up at the St. Davids post office with a QR code for locals to donate to the family, and people were very generous, she says.

She says thankfully the internet allows her parents, still surrounded by rockets aimed at their city, to at least see their grandkids and know they are safe.

Her mother tells her, "we're glad we don't have to worry about you, and we know you're safe."

Even if she could convince her mother to come, "my father for sure won't leave his home."

Continued on page 15


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St. Davids family settling in, planning for the future

Continued from page 14

Luda and her family are now living in St. Davids in a house Petrenco found for them, through somebody he knows who knows somebody, she says. It is temporary — it's a small, older home on a large piece of property that is slated for development, but until the owner is ready to build, they are able to live rent-free. She has no idea how long that might be, but for the moment they have everything they need, including a really cozy living room with a large TV for the kids to watch YouTube, a used but comfortable couch that has been donated, a table for kids to do crafts or their homework, and three bedrooms.

Vasili is working with his friend stuccoing homes, and Luda, who stopped at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery one day when she was out for a walk and asked about a job, was given one first as a concierge, and is now working as a server at the event centre.

The people she works with are wonderful to her, she says, and some have Ukrainian backgrounds. When she asked owner Paul Harber where she would find uniforms for her kids to wear to school, he got on his phone and found uniforms

for them. "People there have really opened their hearts to us," says Luda.

She was a flight attendant in Ukraine, so speaks English, and Vasili was an auto mechanic — he hopes to one day get his papers so he will be able to find work as a mechanic here.

Their two kids are learning English, and love school — they can't wait to go in the morning, she says. And they have joined a church in Niagara Falls with an ethnic-based congregation, helping immigrant families as they arrive, that is now focusing on support for Ukrainians. Her children go to Sunday School and sing in a choir, and really enjoy meeting other kids with similar backgrounds.

Luda says from the beginning of their arrival in Canada, she and her husband "have felt like we're on the right path. And we feel now like this is home. We worked hard at home and we can work hard here."

She feels like they can build a life here, and has no interest in going back to Ukraine to live.

"Canada will never be at war. It's safe and stable. Canada is welcoming, and it offers us peace. We see people here enjoying their lives, with so many places to go and things to do."

"We knew when we were in Romania we couldn't go home," she adds. "We want our kids and their kids to have a future. It will be a good life here for them."

Luda tells the story of

spending some time in Toronto 10 years ago as a flight attendant, and remembers coming to Niagara Falls with some of the airline crew. They saw the falls, and did some travelling around the area,

including stopping at some wineries.

"Never could I ever have imagined then that one day I would live here, in this beautiful place. I have travelled and seen a lot of countries, and

Canada is the most beautiful," she says.

"It was a good decision to come here," she adds. "If you are willing to work hard you can build a new life. I just hope we can be helpful here."

Christmas cheer for local families



Newark Neighbours volunteers were preparing Christmas hampers for 62 families and individuals, as well as boxes with two weeks' food and Santa bags of gifts for the children in those families. Adults will also receive gifts. This year, Newark is helping five Ukrainian families now living in NOTL — one of which just arrived earlier this week. Preparing the boxes to go out to the families were Sharon Rogers, Genevieve Lawrence, Marilyn Rickard, Pauline Meyler, Cindy Grant, and (kneeling) Pat Hicks. (Penny Coles)

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Werner and friends stake their claim in NOTL wine country

Rick VanSickle
Special to The Local

He stormed onto the Niagara wine scene as the winemaker at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery, quickly rose to general manager status and then . . . poof, he disappeared.

But, boy, it needs to be said, Martin Werner is back and he's back in a very big way with tentacles in myriad wine projects far and wide, but firmly rooted in the rural vineyards of his beloved Niagara-on-the-Lake, where he was born and raised.

Werner never really disappeared, but he did bow out of the limelight in 2019 to quietly begin the journey of reshaping his place in the tapestry that is Niagara. And after getting schooled over a couple of hours at the Paris Crepes Cafe in Niagara Falls recently, we finally learned what a fascinating journey it has been for Werner and all the various projects he is involved in.

As the wines came at us swiftly and the relationships with friends, farmers, family and yes, even wine writers, were revealed in layers, it became perfectly clear that growing grapes and wine-making are central to what ties all those bonds together.

Werner is not only a Niagara native but also well-versed in nurturing vineyards and creating small-batch wines. He grew up on his family's 80-acre farm, working in the vineyard each summer. Before he ever made a bottle of wine, Werner already had a lifetime of experience with grapes.

Now, with many years of crafting wines in Ontario, New Zealand and California, he is not only embracing his roots in NOTL with various projects highlighting regional wines, but also his desire to showcase small-batch wines from multiple regions and appellations internationally through his Northern Wine Merchants agency. And this is where we will begin.



The League of Farmers: Trevor Falk, Shawn Spiewak, Martin Werner and Mark Lepp. (Supplied)

Northern Wine Merchants wines

The mission at this new wine agency is to create long term personal partnerships with producers looking to provide authentic wines and spirits to the province of Ontario through all available sales channels. The partners include Werner, his brother Michael, and three other associates who grew up in Niagara: John Keen, Kim Legros and Matthew Pauls.

The portfolio is growing quickly and includes interesting and eclectic wines from Argentina, France, Chile, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the U.S. and, of course, Canada, including his own wines, MW Cellars.

Our tasting began with two sparkling wines, a cava and a Champagne, both lovely examples of the two different styles.

Vita Vivet Brut — The Spanish cava Vita Vivet is made in a fresh style from Xarel-lo, Macabeo and Parelada grapes from Penedes.

Lovely lemon tart, green apple and citrus notes with a fairly robust bubble and vibrant finesse.

Jil Accaries Cuvee Racines Champagne — This is a 100% Pinot Meunier bubble from Vallee de la Marne region in Champagne. Interesting side note: Jil Accaries is a cousin of Chateau des Charmes winemaker Amelie Boury. Such a beautiful floral note on the nose with citrus, peaches and biscuit. It's creamy and vibrant on the palate with elegant bubbles.

Paramour Gamay 2021 — This is a structured Gamay sourced from Marty and his wife Rachael's family vineyard on the St. David's Bench and made in collaboration with Toronto wine writer Michael Godel. It's a bolder style Gamay with some oak aging and has an enticing nose of plums, crunchy red berries, cassis and spice. It has structure on the palate with ripe tannins, red/dark berries, plump plums, spice and plenty of zip on the finish.

Corretta Chianti Clas-

sico Molino di Grace 2018 — The Corretta is a more fruit-forward Chianti that is a collaboration between the winery Il Molino di Grace and Godel. It oozes bright red berries, dried herbs and subtle spice notes on the notes. There is some structure here with smooth tannins, anise, red berries, spice and wonderful freshness on the finish.

MW Cellars wines

The M stands for both Martin and Michael, two brothers who grew up on the family vineyard in NOTL, and the W for their last name of Werner. They travelled the world pursuing their passion for wine, all-the-while dreaming of returning home to open a winery together.

The fruit for the MW Cellars comes principally from the NOTL Werner family farm (aside from the Gamay above, which comes from St. Davids) and Martin is helped in the winemaking process by assistant winemaker Carter Snow. The first wine from this project was the 2021 Rose

with a Cabernet Franc following closely behind. The label is being replaced with a new concept going forward. Most of the other new wines in the portfolio are unlabeled, some experimental, and others looking for a home on restaurant lists or by-the-glass programs.

There's a lot to unpack with Martin Werner and his new ventures.

Here's a brief rundown of the MW Cellars tasted at Paris Crepes:

MW Cellars Rose 2021 — This is a blend of Chardonnay and Gamay made in a bolder, more textured style. It shows a pale salmon colour in the glass with ripe red berries and citrus notes. There's a touch of sweetness on the palate from the ripe berries but all nicely balanced by the racy acidity.

MW Cellars Cabernet Franc 2019 — There's a funny story that goes along this wine and how Twenty Mile Bench fruit from the Wismer Vineyard made it into a primarily NOTL brand. It

involves the start of hunting season and harvest colliding at an inconvenient time, but that's all I am willing to reveal. Let's just say Cabernet Franc "is my favourite variety in Niagara. and has more a story to tell than Merlot," says Werner. The opportunity to work with Wismer fruit presented itself, so he jumped at the chance. This has a beautifully floral nose with plums, cassis, black raspberries, herbs, and spice. The herbaceous notes fold seamlessly into the red berries on the palate with bonus anise fruit, ripe tannic structure, spice and a long, lifted finish. Classic Bench CF.

The 'undefined' MW wines

And then came a series of unlabeled bottles, consisting of various grape varieties and styles, that have been course filtered but won't be bottled until February. All the fruit is from Werner's Lincoln Lakeshore vineyards.


The Pinot Gris is loaded with peachy stone fruits, mineral notes, apples, and melon. It's fairly fresh and dry on the palate with a lovely saline note to go with all those ripe orchard fruits along a zippy finish.

The Sauvignon Blanc is an elegant style with pear, grapefruit, starfruit, herbs and subtle spice notes from what I presume is some barrel aging. It has lovely texture on the palate with pear, citrus, herbs and a lively finish.

The Viognier is made in a fleshy style with pure apricot, jasmine, orange blossoms and peach. It has gorgeous mouthfeel and ripe exotic fruits on the palate.


The final two unnamed wines, just waiting for a restaurant to jump on them, are "my version of flaunting with natural wines," says Werner. Both wines are a blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, with the first one made as a white wine and the second one made as red wine with as little intervention as possible.

Continued on page 17



To all my past and current clients, and friends, I wish a very Merry Christmas. I thank you for putting your trust in me over the last 30+ years. I look forward to helping with your real estate needs.

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York Vineyards devoted to sparkling wine program

Continued from page 16

The wine (get this!) was made in foraged demijohn bottles discarded on the side of farm roads in NOTL. These are true garagiste wines and they have a story to tell. The white, especially, caught my full attention with peach, orange blossoms and wild red berries that was nicely textured. The red is made in a lighter style with the full range of red berries on a fresh finish.

League of Farmers Cabernet Franc

The League of Farmers is a collection of good friends and grape growers who decided to turn wine they made for themselves over the last decade into a business (to help pay for their homemade wine). The friends are Werner (who also makes the wine), Trevor Falk, Shawn Spiewak and Mark Lepp. Equal parts of Cabernet Franc are collected from each farm (two bins each), which are all within a stone's throw of each other in the Four Mile Creek Road/East-West Line area in the Lincoln-Lakeshore sub-appellation, and blended together for the single Cabernet Franc they are making for this project every year.

The beautiful artwork on the label is from Julie Amlin,



Martin Werner pouring a range of wines at Paris Crepes Cafe in Niagara Falls last week. (Rick VanSickle)

a Toronto-based artist and muralist. You will find her vibrant work scattered around the Toronto street art scene and in private collections.

League of Farmers Cabernet Franc 2020 (\$42, you can purchase here, 93 points, only 98 cases made) — This is a really nice Cabernet Franc, about as concentrated and juicy as they come from the warm 2020 vintage. It's tightly wound on the nose, but swirl for a few seconds and the gorgeous nose of dense black raspberries, kirsch, anise, mulled herbs and fine oak spices emerge in spades. It's

substantial on the palate with a rich and structured profile that highlights ripe wild raspberries, black cherries, cassis, licorice, sage notes, elegant oak spices and a long, lifted finish. Such a lovely Cabernet Franc. It needs a little time to integrate or decant if you can't wait. Cellar five-plus years.

BOTL from NOTL

The idea behind the new BOTL (Blends On The Lake) label from Werner and friends Lepp, Dustin Gill and Jordan Hernder is to produce a non-vintage red wine with "a bit more creativity," says

Werner. The goal is to use NOTL fruit and take it to the ultimate of ripeness and to ensure that ripeness, take the best fruit from the best vintages and blend it. The blend for this first effort is 60 per cent Merlot and 40 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon. Werner hopes to sell this in the \$23-\$24 range, incredible when you think about it, considering the low yields and work that's going into this wine. It's almost opaque in the glass with a dense nose of black cherries, cassis, ripe blackberry jam, kirsch, toasted vanilla, caramel and lavish spice

notes. It's incredibly rich and dense on the palate with ripe red and dark berries, dried tobacco, macerated cherries, smoke, licorice, grippy tannins with length and power driving through a finessed and long finish.

The MW Cellars, BOTL and League of Farmers wines are made at Palatine Hills Estate Winery.

Werner has a lot on his plate, but what just might be his biggest project is the first one he began before all the others above.

While the bulk of these Niagara wines were sourced

from the Werner family farm on Lakeshore Road in NOTL and neighbouring friends' farms, Werner's wife Rachael's family farm is on York Road, where they live with their children. They have planted the vineyard with grapes for the York Vineyards sparkling program, what would be Niagara's first winery devoted only to sparkling wines. The first grapes were planted in 2013 and Werner says consumers should start seeing the first sparkling wines from that vintage this coming summer. No bottles have yet to be disgorged and none of the base wine was available for this tasting, but I would venture to say the best is yet to come from Werner.

And just one more layer to this story: Rachael Werner's parents also have a vineyard near Chateau des Charmes on the St. Davids Bench, where they live. The family has planted a further two acres of Cabernet Franc, not for sparkling, but for a still wine that will be coming to the MW Cellars lineup soon.

And one final note: Kevin and Peter Buis manage the 80 acres of farms on Lakeshore Road and the Oppenlaender family takes care of both the St. Davids properties, totaling 15 acres.

— *Wines in Niagara*



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Budding young artists



The Local's Christmas Colouring Contest, sponsored by Maple Leaf Fudge and Phil's Independent, provided beautiful prizes to the winners in each of two age groups. Ben Bayne, 10, won a gift basket of fruit, candy and a gift certificate, presented to him by Mark Castelli of Phil's Independent. Julie Biczal of Maple Leaf Fudge gave a gift basket to Wendy Djakalovic for her granddaughter, Matilda Montgomery, four, who was sick. (Photos by Karen Skeoch)



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Belisle Pottery in Virgil to offer workshops in new year

Mike Balsom
The Local

After living a nomadic lifestyle since reaching adulthood, 35-year-old artist Valerie Belisle is laying down roots in Niagara-on-the-Lake clay. And she's hoping to soon be using some of that local clay in her original creations.

Belisle Pottery is her new studio space, or 'atelier,' in the former Kindergarten room at the old Virgil Public School. She moved in on Sept. 1 and is now ready to welcome aspiring potters for intimate and inter-active workshops.

It's a major leap of faith for the Ottawa native, who has spent her working life mostly as a sommelier in fine dining establishments. Her education took her to France, Spain and Italy, and she has worked on both coasts of Canada. Her most recent stint was on the Patio at Westcott Vineyards in nearby Jordan working with chefs Ricky and Olivia this summer.

While working at Restaurant Candide in Montreal in 2017, Belisle was looking for an outlet that would help her relax after putting in a hard day's work in the fast-paced, high-stress environment. Having consulted with ceramicists, who would design original pieces for use in restaurants where Belisle had plied her trade, she approached Basma Osama, of Ceramik B studio, for some lessons.

"From the moment I touched clay, I loved it right away," says Belisle. "Pottery became my healthy obsession. It made me so happy doing it. When I touch clay, I feel like there's something therapeutic. It brings a certain peace that I don't achieve any other way."

Osama, says the trilingual (English, French, Spanish) Belisle, was an amazing teacher and a phenomenal woman. She sparked Belisle's interest and desire in pottery, inspiring her to research the art through books and videos in an attempt to learn as much as she could.

Her next stop was in Newfoundland, where she landed a



An example of Belisle's pottery. (Supplied)

gig at Raymond's Restaurant, once named one of Canada's top dining establishments. Wanting, or more precisely, needing, to continue her new relationship with clay, she connected with Jason Holley and Maaikie Charron at CUP Studio, who became her next mentors.

"They had a different approach," says Belisle. "They taught me to love my pieces. They even gave me the key to their studio so I could show up any time after work. And they encouraged me to sell my work for the first time."

Those sales were all in support of a charitable drive to help a neonatal intensive care unit at a Newfoundland hospital. Belisle refers to those sales as her thank-you gift to her hosts in the province.

From there she was off to Toronto, where she eagerly set out to find artists to work with, and then spent a short time in Vancouver with artist Janaki Larsen. A contract offer from Pearl Morissette brought her to Niagara in 2019. She quickly made new friends and continued to pursue her pottery passion.

"With all the travelling I've done, I've always made whatever city I was working in my community, my home," says Belisle. "It's always so important. When you're far away from home, you need friends, a community, or else it's hard."

With her contract in Jordan reaching its conclusion in fall 2021, Belisle pondered her future.

"I was considering what to do, where to go next," she

laughs, "and Niagara kept pulling me back in. I'm a vagabond, I love to travel and connect with people in every community that I encounter. But Niagara began to hold my attention. There's something in the air that makes this feel like the right place to grow roots."

She started looking for a suitable pottery space, deciding not to run things out of her rented rural home in NOTL. She began to host private hospitality events, offering tastings and taking on catering and oyster shucking events in the meantime.

When she finally found the space in Virgil, she knew things were falling into place for a reason.

Stepping into Belisle Pottery, one is struck by its brightness and sense of order. It's easy to see how Belisle herself, as well as others, could find peace in the spacious surroundings.

On one side, next to a bank of large windows, sits a brand new custom kiln. A rack full of her work sits beside it, the pieces waiting to be fired. On the other side sit her pottery wheels (she has two) and a slab roller.

Visitors are encouraged to choose a record to spin on her vintage turntable, her selection heavy on traditional jazz and classical music. On most days, Belisle is accompanied by Sol, her German Shepherd-mix constant companion. Belisle pours a cup of herbal tea and serves it in one of her own creations, a handleless mug glazed in earthy tones.

"Through my travels I always take drone shots of dif-

ferent landscapes," she explains about her inspiration. "I then study the landscapes and try to figure out the exact colour that I find in the photos. To me, it's like an homage to the communities that have welcomed me. In Newfoundland, I was inspired by the colours of a beach in Salmon Cove."

She is still discovering the colours that inspire her in NOTL, but it's already clear that the local landscape is speaking to her.

"It's the clay," says Belisle. "I would love to work with Brock University, to collaborate on gathering soil samples. And I'd love to work with the area's farmers, too. I want to have Niagara in the clay. And the glazes are minerals, so I would love to have Niagara in the colours, too."

Her studio is just that, a studio, without any retail activity happening out of it. She does sell mugs, plates and dog bowls, as well as some smaller decorative pieces, through her website at valbelisle.com. And a friend from her hospitality days who is soon opening a butcher shop in St. Catharines has agreed to sell her designs.

But most importantly, she's begun to build a community, and in January will begin to offer classes to one or two people at a time. Workshops can be booked via her website, and a gift certificate might make a great last minute

addition to a stocking.

Belisle adds that it's a great activity for couples, and jokes that any attempts to imitate Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore's famous scene from the movie *Ghost* are seriously encouraged.

Though she's no longer working full-time in the restaurant industry, Belisle continues to pursue that passion on a part-time basis. And she plans on combining her two passions. The experienced shucker would like to be able to offer beverage and oyster tasting sessions along with pottery classes some time in the future.

Having been mentored so readily by artists during her many travels, Belisle is ready to pay that gesture back to others here in Niagara. And she hopes she can inspire others to discover what she did about the benefits of working with pottery.

For Belisle, pottery is about being present with herself and her clients, slowing down and going back to simple craft with care.

"People forget the importance of going back to basics," she says. "You can't rush clay. You have to wait until it's dry, until the kiln is ready. There's just a tempo that does not allow you to go faster than that."



Valerie Belisle at her kiln. (Mike Balsom)



Valerie Belisle at one of her pottery wheels, where clay is shaped — perfect for a reenactment from *Ghost*, she says. (Mike Balsom)

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Abe Wiens' tractor (Supplied)



Fruit Haven Farms (Penny Coles)



The Thwaites Family Farms tractor with the Grinch. (Sarah Rowe)



Glenlake Farms (Penny Coles)



Rainer Hummel's tractor. (Penny Coles)



Colin McCarthy was proud to drive his vintage tractor. (Supplied)



Joe Pillitteri driving his Lakeview Vineyard Equipment grape harvester (Sarah Rowe)



Charlotte Tutu with her son E.J. as the Grinch as they ride out of Whoville. (Sarah Rowe)



Lakeview Vineyard Equipment tractor and sprayer. (Sarah Rowe)



Van de Laar Orchards (Sarah Rowe)



Wiens' tractor pulling Santa and Mrs. Claus (Penny Coles)



Santa and Mrs. Claus wrap up the 2022 Christmas Tractor Processional through the streets of Virgil. (Sarah Rowe)

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Ceto Reid's birthday turns into a special day

Penny Coles
The Local

Monday was Ceto Reid's birthday, and his gift was very much appreciated.

At a small gathering at The Farmworker Hub Monday, Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce board chair Andrew Niven handed Reid a cheque for \$3,992, half of the funds raised at this year's Candlelight Stroll.

Reid, who was chosen to lead the stroll, is a farmworker who was injured while riding his bike in St. Catharines on Oct. 6, the day before he was to complete his eight months of work on a NOTL farm before flying home to his family and his own

farm in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica.

Reid has been coming to Canada as a seasonal agricultural worker for almost two decades, and like his co-workers, is accustomed to riding his bike to a laundromat in St. Catharines.

He was returning to NOTL with a load of clean laundry when he was hit by a car on Carlton Street. His hip was badly injured, requiring surgery in Hamilton, and he is staying at the farm where he worked until it has healed enough to travel.

Reid saw his doctor last week, and the news was mixed. He is now able to move around a little easier on his crutches, after being told he can put a bit of weight on his leg, although he is still in pain

from his hip and knee.

When he was first injured and learned he had to remain in NOTL at P.G. Enns Farms, where he worked, he was hoping to get home for Christmas. He soon realized he wouldn't be able to travel that soon, but didn't know how long it would be before he would see his family.

"My doctor just told me at least six more weeks before I can go home," Reid told The Local Monday.

And while he misses his family, staying in NOTL means he is sure to get the medical treatment he needs, including physiotherapy — his therapist comes to the farm twice a week, at least until his next doctor's appointment in Hamilton on Jan. 25.

At home in Jamaica, it would be a three-hour trip for physical therapy, he said.

He has had lots of birthday messages from home though, and for now those messages will have to be enough.

"It's so hard not to be with my family, but what can I do? I need the physio. I'm improving every day — the physiotherapist does a great job with me. It's important. And at least I can start putting a little pressure on my leg now."

Reid thanked all those gathered at the hub for the help he has received — the money from the chamber, and all the assistance from Jane Andres,

Julia Buxton-Cox, and other volunteers who make sure he is looked after. He spoke from his heart, saying how blessed he feels, and also asking that "God give them the strength so they can help others. They are supporting me so much. I'm very thankful to everyone who is helping me. Such good people are hard to come by."

There is a core group of volunteers who help Reid — one of them, Tracey Dau, was headed to St. Catharines to pick up a Caribbean version of fish and chips for Reid's birthday dinner, a meal she knows to be his favourite, and Ken and Shirley Eden of Gateway Community Church were asking for a list so they could go shopping for groceries for Reid.

Julia Buxton-Cox was also presented with a cheque for \$1996, which was 25 per cent of the funds raised by the stroll, to support The Farmworker Hub.

"This is awesome," said Buxton-Cox. "This is two month's rent. We got to stay!"

The founder of the hub says worrying about paying the rent is one of the things that keeps

her up at night.

"I'm so blessed. My life is changed by what we do here, and by the whole community. This will help me sleep night."

"It's you who have made others' lives change," Niven said. "You have lit the fire."

Crediting volunteer and workers' advocate Jane Andres with lighting the fire under her, Buxton-Cox said, "Once you know, you can't turn your head. There are 2,000 workers here, 10 per cent of the town's population, some of them in town longer than our snowbirds."



Andrew Niven, board chair of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, hands Ceto Reid a cheque for almost \$4,000, raised through the sale of candles for this year's Candlelight Stroll, organized by the chamber. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Ceto Reid became a little emotional when he thanked Jane Andres and Julia Buxton-Cox and all the volunteers who continue to help him through a difficult time.

Adore!

Niagara United Mennonite Church
welcomes you to a
Candlelight Service
at 5:30 p.m., Christmas Eve

1775 Niagara Stone Road, NOTL
www.redbrickchurch.ca 905.468.3313



The gathering at The Farmworker Hub Monday for two cheque presentations, one to the hub and one to Ceto Reid, also included a cake presented by Julia Buxton-Cox to Ceto Reid on his birthday.



The hub has received some winter clothes to be handed out to farmworkers who begin arriving in January. Most needed are winter jackets, hoodies, work pants, and long-sleeved, buttoned shirts. A bin for donations is outside Cornerstone Community Church by the side door — look for the heart on the window.

Actual Kid-Friendly News

Kids

GAZETTE



JOKE

Why did Santa get a parking ticket on Christmas Eve?

Answer: He left his sleigh in a snow parking zone.

December 2022 Volume 2 • Issue 13

FIND THE SMILEY FACE HIDDEN ON THIS PAGE!

Local News

This will be the last Gazette issue of 2022. We hope you all enjoy your school break and have a wonderful New Year. We look forward to seeing what you submit in 2023!

Interview with Marlia

This issue has a very special interviewee. Marlia “Masha” recently moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake from Ukraine. We are very lucky to have such an amazing young lady join our town.

Artist's Corner

by Akira Anne Rijo, Age 6



Q. What is your favourite thing about Niagara-on-the-Lake?

A. My favourite thing about NOTL is people, because they are so nice, good and sweet.

Q. What do you want to be when you grow up?

A. When I grow up I want to be a designer or something like this.

Q. How would you change the world if you could?

A. If I could change the world I would delete Putin first and help people that are in a really bad situation or they can't feed themselves (like not having work), and I would clean the oceans from garbage.

Q. What is your ideal day in

Niagara-on-the-Lake?

A. Wake up, go to school, learn some stuff and play with friends during recess. After school go home and play with friends in video games for the rest of the day. It's mostly my ideal day because of friends and

school. I had really mean classmates in Ukraine so I'm really happy to spend time on learning or playing with friends.

Q. What is your favourite book?

A. *Twilight* and only *Twilight*.



Marlia “Masha” Yevtushenko, 11

Short Story: Our Dear Deer Friends

by Taleah Bucci, 12

My dad and I were returning from our evening walk, when I noticed something brown standing in the glow of a streetlamp directly in front of our home.

At first glance I thought it was maybe a dog or a coyote, but as we came closer, I realized it was a doe. And it wasn't alone. A group of about five more does were standing on our driveway. They moved under the crabapple trees as we drew near, watching us with wide, curious eyes. As quietly as possible, my dad and I walked up our driveway to our house, trying not to frighten the deer.

We turned off our outside light, then stood on our now dark porch

to watch what the elegant creatures would do next. One of the does was peeking at us over the hood of our truck. We immediately became as still and silent as statues. The group seemed convinced it was safe. They made their way across the driveway, the gravel crunching under their hooves. Now they stood on our front yard, posing like Christmas lawn ornaments.

One of the deer cautiously made its way onto the road. Suddenly, a car came down the street. The doe froze like a deer in the headlights, literally. Fortunately, the driver noticed the animal and slowed the vehicle down. The doe jumped the ditch in front of our yard, landing safely among the

plants. Once the astounded driver had continued down the road, the deer stepped timidly back on to the asphalt. Then, one by one, the group strolled down the street.

Now only one doe remained on the lawn. It sniffed the bushes for a moment longer, then looked in our direction as if to say a final goodbye before it pranced down the road to catch up with its friends.

As my dad and I turned to go back inside, I could feel the joy of a smile welling up inside me for the rest of the evening, inspiring me to write this story. The experience was a magical way to begin the Christmas season.

WORD SEARCH: DECEMBER SIGHTS

S J L R N M G R M C P K V E R S N O W R
C X K R P T B B V Z A I S H G N M F N U
T O Y W E U W T J Y R O A C M A Y V D Y
X F W H Z R N Q D W T P W B F P E R C J
L W N S E T R E E S Y C A N D L E S R J
N L S M Q B N B E U C P C G Q F I L N Q
I C V K Y U X X U G A T H E R E K N G H
D N O T F R I E N D S M C H X S F N T A
E V A C K A M U M J C H Q N T T H F K V
C E N A T C A Z E V L F Y F M I T E G K
O H R R G S Y V F A J I Z S S V U A C C
R S F O O S C U A Z L N G B D A I S D R
A L E L H M Q Z M H V O Y H C L W T E V
T V T E Q L G C I A T J U Q T V L W F S
I H Q R V W E I L S W T S V U S R H Z B
O U K S P Y Y A Y E H G J V X H W L A R
N E B B H U Y N B B Q F K V R F W O T H
S E I H V A X V U F E A S O K U I X X Y
D Y Z C G E Q A Z A X M C A N D Y R C V
T W L N O H E O E K F P T Z X K K X Q U

| | | |
|-------------|----------|----------|
| DECORATIONS | SNOW | PARTY |
| CANDLES | CAROLERS | FESTIVAL |
| FAMILY | FRIENDS | TREES |
| CANDY | GATHER | FEAST |

Family-Friendly December project courtesy of The Niagara Pumphouse
Use your cellphone camera to scan the code to get started!

FAMILY-FRIENDLY ONLINE ART STUDIO

Paper Winter Bear

View the video starting Dec. 1st
pumhouseart.online/bear



PRESENTED BY



ONTARIO POWER GENERATION



SUBMISSION INFO

The hope for this page is to get kids involved and interacting with the community in a positive way. We welcome submissions for all categories from kids of any age. Please keep the reviews positive and all submitted content appropriate for kids of all ages. Please send submissions to joyousnotlkids@gmail.com and in the subject line please put the category for which you are submitting. Thank you.

CHARITY

We are looking for charities in which kids can participate. If you would like your organization to be highlighted here, please send your information to joyousnotlkids@gmail.com.

Stronger together: Silversmith purchases Black Oak

Mike Balsom
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Silversmith Brewing Company announced Friday that it has purchased one of the province's first craft breweries. The move will see Silversmith joining forces with Etobicoke-based Black Oak Brewing Company to bring brews made by both facilities to more craft beer lovers across Ontario.

Silversmith began exploring a variety of options in 2021 when it became apparent that operations at the company's brewery and retail operation located in an old Virgil church needed to be suspended. Extensive structural repairs were needed at the historic location.

Then, early this year, Silversmith purchased a new canning line that was installed at Black Oak Brewing, providing mutual benefit for the two seasoned Ontario craft brewers.

Silversmith president and CEO Josh Graham, who came on board about four months ago, told The Local that brewing operations are still halted at their Niagara Stone Road location. Having the Black Oak assets allows them to continue their production until they can resume brewing in Virgil.

"This move just makes sense as both Silversmith and Black Oak are stronger togeth-

Josh Graham, president and CEO of Silversmith Brewing Co. with Ken Woods, president of Black Oak Brewing.

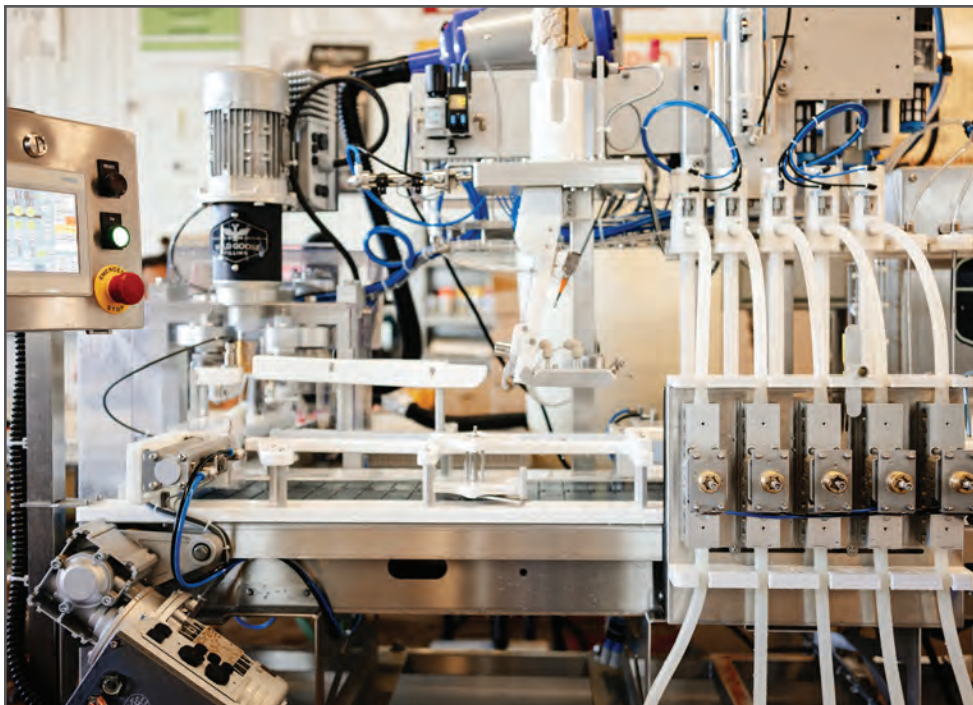
er,” said Graham in a press release. “Black Oak has a long-respected history that aligns with our mission to brew authentic, quality, great tasting craft beer. The benefits of combining our strengths became apparent. We are at a place that feels right and this is the start of an exciting future for both Silversmith and Black Oak”

“Black Oak Brewing has been my mission for the past 23 years,” said Ken Woods, president of Black Oak Brewing Company, which began in 1999 in Oakville. “We’ve persevered through many challeng-

es, and I am looking forward to what the future holds and the new opportunities that this purchase will bring.”

Woods is a certified management accountant, and serves as secretary on the board of the Ontario Craft Brewers, a trade association of more than 80 small, independent brewers across the province. He is also a certified beer judge.

Black Oak's website lists an array of thirteen different beers, including eight seasonal brews, such as its Oaktobfest, Triple Chocolate Cherry Stout and a Nutcracker Porter avail-



Silversmith has a new canning line at Black Oak Brewing. *(Photos supplied)*

[illegible]

Happy Holidays

All the best
for 2023 from
all of us at

The Niagara-on-the-Lake

Local

The Trusted Voice of Our Community

Preds may be clicking at just the right time

Mike Balsom
The Local

If the play of Anthony Tropea, Declan Fogarty and Cameron Savoie this past weekend is any indication, the Niagara Predators are gelling at the perfect time.

The trio combined for 21 points Friday and Saturday as Niagara swept their weekend home-and-home series against the fourth place Tottenham Thunder.

Tropea exploded for four goals, all in the second period, and an assist in Friday night's 8-1 drubbing of the Thunder. He added a hat trick and another assist to complete his nine-point weekend in Saturday night's 7-1 victory in Tottenham.

Fogarty had two goals and three assists and Savoie added seven assists over the two games.

"My line was just connecting," a humble Tropea tells The Local. "Everything was going right with passing, the plays we were making, the connection was really working. My past experience playing with them at the Ferroni Hockey Academy (out of Hamilton) has brought a good chemistry for our line."

Saturday's game on the road was pretty special, too, for many of the Predators. For the first time since the team moved to Virgil last year, the players' fathers were invited onto the bus for the trip to Tottenham. That gave Tropea's father, also named Anthony, a chance to see his son's big weekend continue.

"It was a great experience," says Tropea Sr. "It was an opportunity to see the players from a different perspective, to get to know them a little more. Getting to meet the dads was great, too. We all shared stories. And in the arena we celebrated goals together, and had a lot of fun."

The proud father, a teacher at Saint Paul Catholic High School in Niagara Falls, was overjoyed with Anthony's performance in both games. He sees the weekend as a culmination of his son's hard work this year.

"His mind set is just 'what can I do better?'" Tropea Sr. says. "He's a thinker. At home he watches film, he trains. And then when he goes to the rink, he connects with the guys and applies it. I see it all coming together. He's much more relaxed now, and he's using all the tools in game situations."

The weekend series concluded a busy six days for the Predators, who played four games in six days.

Earlier in the week the team competed in the GMHL (Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League) College Showcase, held at the Gale Centre in Niagara Falls. The seven teams from the league's North Division and the nine in the South gathered at the multi-rink complex to play two games each over Tuesday and Wednesday.

The Predators were shut out 3-0 by the South Muskoka Shield on day one and pushed the West Nipissing Lynx to the limit for 60 minutes in a 4-3 loss on day two. Michael Santini, Max Bredin and Reese Bisci contributed goals in the game against a much larger West Nipissing squad.

"We just couldn't put the puck in the net," a perplexed head coach Kevin Taylor told The Local about Tuesday's game. "We had opportunities, we outplayed them, we played our system, we played smart, we just didn't score."

Of the two showcase games, which count toward the season standings, Taylor says, "I was disappointed with the results, but I was really happy with the performance. We were in both games against much bigger, physical teams and our boys played some great physical hockey."

It was a rare opportunity for the Preds to take on two North Division opponents they don't usually meet during the season. To reduce the amount of travel, the nine teams in the GMHL's South Division play a 42-game schedule largely amongst themselves, while the seven teams in the North do the same within their own division. Teams from the separate divisions usually only meet in the Russell Cup Finals.

This was the first time the league brought the two divisions together in a tournament-like format. Judging by the atmosphere in the Gale Centre it was a major success for all involved.

"I wish they (the GMHL) could somehow do this more often," Taylor says. "It's nice seeing the other teams. It gives our players a chance to sit and watch the other teams play. I can pretty much guarantee that none of our guys have gone to a rink to watch another (GMHL) game before today."

The Predators' record of 10-12-3 puts them in sixth place in the South Division, a point up on Northumberland with two games in hand. They are four points back of St. George, whom they host this Friday night in an important game at the Meridian Credit Union Arena.

"I was hoping to be above .500 before the break," laments Taylor, "but we're pretty close. I think we're putting it all together at the right time. The guys are getting along really, really well. This game will be a good indication, though, of where we are."

Team owner and president Robert Turnbull is also happy about what he sees from the Predators 25 games into the season.

"I couldn't be more pleased with the way Kevin and the coaching staff are getting these guys to play," says Turnbull. "The boys we've just brought on (Fogarty, Cameron Savoie) have taken some of the younger players under their wings. The room is solid. I do believe we are going to have a real good run come playoff time."

Turnbull is adamant that this is the right time for the team to start firing on all cylinders.

"I said from day one that the middle to the end of December is when the cream really rises to the top," he explains. "It takes that long. Once we figure out a couple of things we'll do even better. You'll see some of the guys rise to another level."

"We still need to focus on a couple of things that we knew



Anthony Tropea scored four goals during the second period win Friday — this is one of them. (Ben Foster)



Another goal scored in the second period, in the Preds' 8-1 win Friday. (Ben Foster)



Declan Fogarty earned an assist in the College Showcase at the Gale Centre last week. (Mike Balsom)

needed work," Turnbull adds. "The power play and the penalty kill. And our guys continue to want to beat guys one-on-one. We need to force the (opponent's) defence to make

a move. When our games get tight, there's still too much individual play."

Niagara will be without Leo Savin, Jaroslav Dohnal, Josh Gros and Ryan Santini

Friday, as all four have headed home for the holidays. The 7:30 p.m. game will be the last one for the Predators until their Jan. 6 home game against the Bradford Bulls.



HOLIDAY EARLY DEADLINES DECEMBER 28TH ISSUE

Classified and display deadline: Booking Friday, December 23rd @ noon

Editorial and letters deadline: Friday, December 23rd @ noon

JANUARY 4TH ISSUE

Classified and display deadline: Booking Friday, December 30th @ noon

Editorial and letters deadline: Friday, December 30th @ noon

Advertising

julia@notllocal.com | 905-934-1040

Editorial

penny@notllocal.com | 905-246-5878

Club coaches, skaters love the family feeling on ice

Mike Balsom
The Local

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Skating Club is back at almost full-force after navigating pandemic rules for the past two seasons. For many of the coaches and the skaters, it's like a family reunion of sorts.

Treasurer and past president Yvonne Haines says the club is thriving. "Those two years were hard," says the 2022 inductee into the NOTL Sports Wall of Fame for her 31 years volunteering with the club. "We were mandated by not only the town but also by Skate Canada.

When we could start back we were limited to 10 kids on the ice. And then it shut down again after we had kids signed up last January."

Haines adds that the club has taken a cautious approach in its return to full strength, keeping the safety of their instructors and their participants top of mind. At first, all groups were limited to 20 skaters at a time, but recently they upped that number by 10.

"The coaches really enjoyed the smaller groups," Haines says. "They could give much more attention to the kids. But we will stay now at 30, and we do have

wait lists to get into our programs."

Between their CanSkate, STARSkate and CompetitiveSkate programs, the NOTL Skating Club has at least 275 skaters registered, with their winter sessions starting in January. Unlike many sports, the divisions don't necessarily follow age groupings but instead are formed based on skill levels.

Skating competitions have fallen by the wayside since 2020, but about nine intermediate and senior skaters have already been competing the past two weekends. Many of them will be doing so for the first time, having missed their first opportunities due to the pandemic.

Of course, it's not all about competition.

"We have a mission," Haines says, "to provide quality programs to anyone who wants to skate. We provide skating from babies to adults. It's skating for life, that's what we go by."

The club is a gem in town, giving many children their first instruction on the right way to skate safely. A visit to their website, at notlclub.com, reveals a schedule covering seven days a week and a list of coaches with a combined 127 years of coaching experience.

Judi Boyle-Krzczkowski, for instance, has been coaching for 36 years. She is a multiple Skate Canada gold medalist and has won numerous national coaching awards. The St. Catharines-born Boyle-Krzczkowski has been with the NOTL club since 1992.

"We are really family-oriented," says Boyle-Krzczkowski. "We try to make a sport that is very singular, very individualistic, into a team sport. There's no place for jealousy, for putting others down. It's a supportive team effort to support everybody, regardless of what level we skate at."

That focus was evident during a recent visit to the Centennial Arena in Virgil. During two very different sessions, girls of every age group were working together, providing advice and offering help to each other as they attempted to master difficult maneuvers.

"We try to do team-building events that bring everybody together," adds Boyle-Krzczkowski. "It's total inclusivity, where we try not to make anyone feel like they are lesser. We had a Halloween event, where we dressed up and picked up candy on the ice. We've done an advent calendar that challenged them to master new skills. And we used to go bowling a lot prior to COVID."

Boyle-Krzczkowski says she found the COVID cancellation of programs really difficult. The self-professed people-person missed her skating family dearly.

"I personally love being

around kids," she says. "We don't give them enough credit for what they are and what they give. And we don't give them enough credit for how smart they are. They work pretty hard, they smile, they're happy, they say funny things and they make us laugh."

On the evening The Local visited the arena, the girls in the intermediate/senior group gathered around Boyle-Krzczkowski and another coach, Darlene Dortono. Boyle-Krzczkowski had recently lost her beloved dog and the girls had a sympathy card for her.

Boyle-Krzczkowski was moved to tears by the gesture, taking time to hug each of the skaters.

It's a demonstration of the family feel of the club. She goes on to say how great it makes her feel to coach the children of previous skaters that she worked with many years ago in the same environment. Haines adds how

happy she is to see her three grandchildren learning in the same arena she's been in for more than three decades.

And there's nothing like the feeling of the beginning of the skating season every September.

"When summer winds down, I hear them say they can't wait to 'go home,'" says Boyle-Krzczkowski. "It's so nice to hear that they think of this as their home. They love the smell of this rink, they love the environment of this rink, and they love how it's just us, and how we have developed something that passes on from year to year."

Registration for the NOTL Skating Club's January programs is quickly filling up, but Haines encourages anyone who is interested to visit the club's website and register. They will be keeping a wait list and contacting hopeful skaters when spots open up.



GATEWAY COMMUNITY CHURCH

**Christmas Eve
Candlelight Service
@ 4PM**

1615 Niagara Stone Rd., Virgil

**Visit:
gatewaynotl.com**

Legion *Royal Canadian Legion,*
General Nelles Branch 124

invites you to a
NEW YEAR'S DAY LEVEE
on January 1st, 2023.

Branch will be open at 1:00 pm
Loyal Toast at 3:00 pm

Uniform or business attire is preferred

410 King St., | 905.468.2353 | legion124@gmail.com

PLACE YOUR COMING EVENT COMMUNITY SOCIAL HERE
With or without a border, colour graphics optional.
Prices starting at \$20. Deadline: Monday 3 p.m.
Call Karen 905-641-5335 or email: karen@notllocal.com



CORNERSTONE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Sunday, December 25th

9:45 a.m.
No childcare available.
There will be a clipboard station

10:00 a.m.
Worship Gathering
Online & In-Person

Message:
Kevin Bayne
Lessons and Carols
www.ccchurch.ca

**To advertise your
Worship Services
in this section, please contact:**

karen@notllocal.com



Ashleen Hale and Mary Lamky competed at the recent Provincial Series #1 held in Keswick recently. The Provincial Series tallies skaters' highest scores throughout the competition season, with a set number of skaters per group qualifying for the Provincial Championships in March, 2023. Hale won the Gold Women event and placed 5th in her STAR 9 Women event. Lamky placed 10th in the STAR 8 Women (Group 1) event. (Supplied)

Local

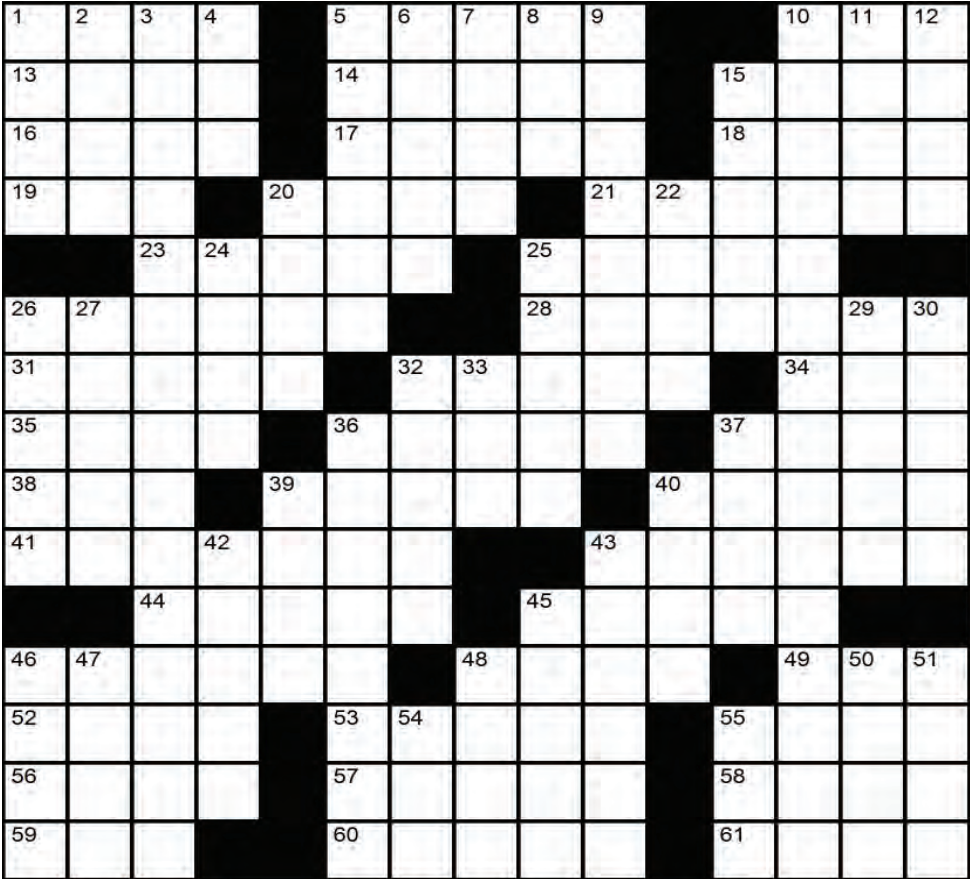
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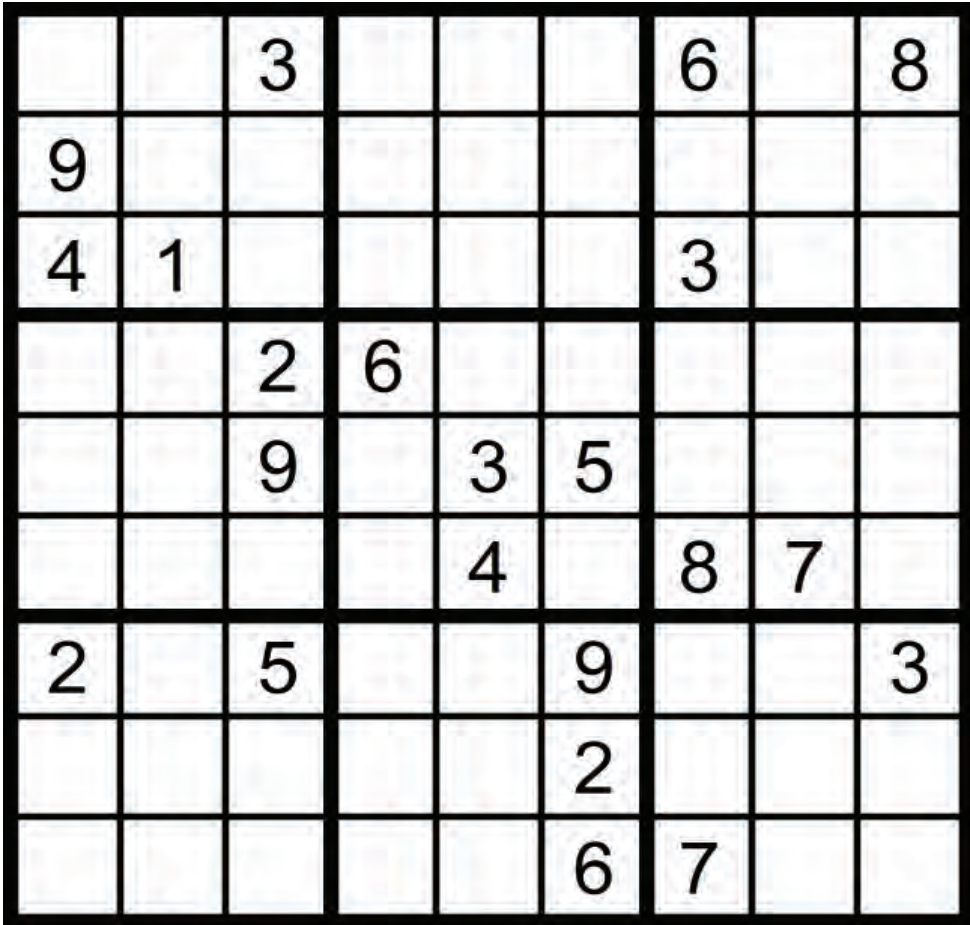
CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU



- Across:**

1 Able was I ere I saw ---
5 The Paris subway
10 4 qts.
13 Underhand political revelation
14 Relating to birds
15 Set of three
16 Isinglass
17 Hunters' cabin
18 Radicals
19 Hard durable wood
20 Birthday party essential
21 Said to photographers
23 Inclination
25 G M builder Alfred P ---
26 Scarcely
28 First Gospel
31 Usual type of switch
32 "I miss my ---, my --- miss misses me"
34 "Halt! --- fire!"
35 Burden
36 Some embers
37 Former Georgia senator Sam ---
38 Great weight
39 Legion
40 Oater baddie chasers
41 Firefighter's water source
- 43 Captivates
44 Paws
45 Russian prison camp
46 South American cowboy
48 Little Dickens heroine
49 Plugs
52 Twice-baked bread
53 Come together
55 Chop-chop
56 Tennessee state flower
57 Happen again
58 Greek goat's cheese
59 Lobbying gp.
60 Measures
61 Old Russian ruler
- Down:**

1 Tickle Me toy
2 Star Wars princess
3 Aural atmosphere creator in films
4 Alias
5 Affliction
6 Summon
7 "There is a --- in the affairs of men ..." (Shakespeare: "Julius Caesar")
8 Syncopated piano piece
9 With uniform service throughout
10 E.g. methane and water vapor
11 Supports
12 Fail to win
15 Hallowe'en option
20 Bovine baby
22 Strong attraction
24 Sports officials (Abbr.)
25 Look happy
26 Kiosk
27 Bug
29 Physicist --- Mach
30 Fermented grape juices
32 Varieties
33 Bundle
36 Topographical outlines
37 Cosmic bang
39 Hell --- no fury like a woman scorned
40 Tab
42 Haystacks
43 Top dogs
45 Arrangement
46 Suitcase
47 Migraine feature
48 Pleasant
50 Collection of facts
51 Pole at sea
54 Butterfly catcher
55 Astern



OBITUARY



BERGEN, ARTHUR ‘ART’ — It is with great sadness the family of Arthur ‘Art’ Bergen announces his passing on Sunday December 18, 2022. Mourning the loss is daughter Jennifer Anne (Frank) Bergen-Tiffney, son Robert Bergen and step-son Charlie Linnenbank (Amanda). Beloved Papa of Amelia Tiffney, and Lucas, Brook, Breanna Linnenbank. Appreciated and loved by mother Anna Bergen (nee Regier) and siblings Ken (Dianna), Irene (Walter), and Wayne (Annette). Reunited in heaven with his love Patricia (2017), his father Peter (2012), brother Tim (1978) and step-daughter Jennifer Lynn Sisson (1995). He will be missed by close friends and family members.

Dad was always puttering around, creating little projects to keep him busy after ‘retiring’ from being an electrician for over 45 years.

In keeping with his wishes, cremation has taken place. Friends are invited to gather at the PATTERSON FUNERAL HOME, 6062 Main St. Niagara Falls on Friday January 6, 2023 from 2 to 4 and 6 to 8 pm. A Celebration of his life will take place at Bethany Mennonite Church (572 East and West Line, Niagara-on-the-Lake) on Saturday January 7, 2023 at 11 am, with time for friends to visit from 10 to 11 am. Memorial donations can be made to Diabetes Canada or The Mennonite Central Committee, and would be appreciated by his family. Online condolences can be made at pattersonfuneralhome.com



NOTICES

To place an Obituary or
In Memoriam in our Classifieds,
please contact Julia at:
julia@notllocal.com or
905.934.1040
Deadline is Tuesdays at 1 p.m.

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from
December 7, 2022

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

Across: 1 Elba, 5 Metro, 10 Gal, 13 Leak, 14 Avian, 15 Tro, 16 Mica, 17 Lodge, 18 Red, 19 Oak, 20 Cake, 21 Cheese, 23 Grade, 25 Sloan, 26 Barely, 28 Matthew, 31 On-off, 32 Swiss, 34 Or I, 35 Onus, 36 Coals, 37 Nunn, 38 Ton, 39 Horde, 40 Posse, 41 Hydrant, 43 Rivets, 44 Mitts, 45 Gulag, 46 Gaucha, 48 Neil, 49 Ads, 52 Rusk, 53 Unite, 55 A s a p, 56 lns, 57 Recur, 58 Feta, 59 P A C, 60 Steps, 61 Tsar.

Down: 1 Elmo, 2 Leia, 3 Background music, 4 A k a, 5 Malady, 6 Evoke, 7 Tide, 8 Rag, 9 One-class, 10 Greenhouse gases, 11 Aids, 12 Lose, 15 Treat, 20 Calif, 22 Hots, 24 Refs, 25 Smile, 26 Booth, 27 Annoy, 29 Ernst, 30 Wines, 32 Sorts, 33 Wad, 36 Contours, 37 Nova, 39 Halt, 40 Pill, 42 Ricks, 43 Rulers, 45 Getup, 46 Grip, 47 Aura, 48 Nice, 50 Data, 51 Spar, 54 Net, 55 Alt.



NOTL Skating Club in pictures



The intermediate/senior skaters were on the ice Monday, skating individually and in groups, helping and cheering each other on. (Mike Balsom)

Make Child Care Your Business

Flexible hours.
Work from home.
Provide a vital service for Niagara families.

Become a Home Child Care Provider