



Tractor parade will be back next year

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Niagara-on-the-Lake's downtown was flooded by all all shapes and sizes in red suits and white beards Sunday morning, as a Santa 5K run came to town. It was such a success, organizers are already planning on returning next year. (Mike Balsom)

Santa 5K Run makes quite a sight in Old Town

Mike Balsom
 Special to The Local

Santas from all over descended on Niagara-on-the-Lake Sunday, with runners representing Aurora, Caledon, Mississauga, Oshtawa, and Toronto among other places.

Alas, not one of the 209 participants in the first NOTL Santa five-kilometre race claimed to have come all the way from the North Pole.

Of course, there were many competitors whose trip to the starting line at Simcoe Park was much shorter. Karan Gardiner of St. Catharines joined Richard and Carol Butlin in a warm-up run down King Street from the Butlins' Old Town home to the park.

It was a chance for the trio to prepare for the icy conditions of the 5-km route that took competitors down Byron Street to the path along Fort George, then onto the Niagara River Parkway, past Riverbend Inn to the turnaround just short of East and West Line, then back to the park.

"It was hard work," Carol told The Local after crossing the finish line. "It was more like cross-country than a road race, but I thoroughly enjoyed it."

Gardiner concurred. "The route was challenging because of the snow and ice. We ran on the side of the trail to try and get a little traction in the grass. I certainly didn't run a PB (personal best) but it was really fun to be out there. It's nice to be in a live race again. A little bit of normalcy."

The sold-out run organized by Kelly Arnott of VP Pro Inc. almost didn't happen because of new COVID restrictions that capped outdoor gatherings at 25 people beginning midnight Sunday morning. Arnott was on the phone Friday with Lord Mayor Betty Disero, who told her she had already begun a meeting to figure out how the changes would affect the run.

Deeming the race an outdoor sporting event, not a gathering, the go-ahead was given for the 9:45 a.m. start time, while an announcer reminded runners to keep their masks on or maintain a safe distance of two metres from other participants. Arnott said all runners had to be double vaccinated as well.

The fight for bragging rights as the top finisher came down to a neck-and-neck finish between 27-year-old Waterdown native Jesse The Elf (yes, that is his legal name, and he has the pointy ears to prove it) and 15-year-old Governor Simcoe student Fenway Breckels. Jesse edged the youngster by a 10th of a second, coming in at 15:54.9.

"It was a really good race," said Jesse, who is a mainstay at Santa races, having won six or seven prior to Sunday's. "He ran with me the whole way. He's got a big future ahead of him. It was a beautiful course along the Niagara River, too. Niagara-on-the-Lake was a perfect host. And a lot of locals were out on the route cheering us on."

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Kids get early visit from Santa at community centre

Penny Coles
 The Local

Santa arrived at the community centre in a horse-drawn carriage Saturday morning, to a small crowd happy to see the jolly old fellow at a local event.

He was there to chat with children, see that every child received a gift, and to read from his favourite book, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

With his appearance arranged by the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Palliative Care Service, the

crowd included all ages, from youngsters hoping to convince Santa they've been nice instead of naughty, to grandparents accompanying their grandchildren and those volunteering for palliative care.

Partnering with the town to organize an event for families, palliative care executive director Bonnie Bagnulo said her intention was to let the town know "we're also about living life well," and helping to raise awareness

Continued on page 10




Rock and Taylor Ashley visit Santa at the community centre. (Penny Coles)



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Christopher Newton: formative for Shaw Festival and NOTL

**Mike Balsom
Special to The Local**

The Shaw Festival and the entire Canadian theatre world was devastated by the news of the passing of former artistic director Christopher Newton Monday. He was 85 years old.

Shaw executive director and CEO Tim Jennings announced Newton's passing to the staff and the board of directors Monday, before posting a statement on Facebook. Messages began pouring in immediately.

"So many people have written in to talk about his impact," Jennings told *The Local*. "Their memories of him, what he meant to them, it's just constant. He was a tremendous artist across the board, and an incredible businessman, too. He was one of the great Canadian impresarios."

At the helm of the Shaw Festival from 1979 to 2002, his was the longest term of any Shaw artistic director. He directed many of the festival's most well-known works during that time and also walked the boards as a cast member. The period encompassed some of the most important years for the theatre group, as well as some of its most successful.

"He's very much the reason I'm in professional theatre," said Jennings. "I started coming to the Shaw with my parents in his first season, specifically *Cyrano*. The 1982 production was brilliant. It had gorgeous fighting and poetry and sequences that made you think 'how do they do that? It got me interested in all the different aspects of theatre. It was formative for my love of the art form.'"

Current artistic director Tim Carroll said the Shaw community, knowing that Newton had been unwell for a number of years, had been bracing themselves.

One of Carroll's first orders of business before he began his role in 2017 was to visit Newton at the Old Town home he shared with his husband Nicholas, whom he leaves behind.

"It was immediate and clear to me that his presence was still very strongly felt at the festival," explained Carroll. "I had a bit of trepidation in going to meet him. But Christopher was nothing but generous and kind. We had a lovely afternoon drinking tea and talking about art and classical music. His advice to me was 'do what you

want, get on with it, and I'll be cheering you on."

Newton was born in Deal, England in 1936. He earned a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Leeds, and went on to study at Purdue and the University of Illinois, where he earned a Master's degree. He came to Canada in 1961 to audition for the Stratford Festival, then signed on with the Canadian Players for a cross-country tour of *Julius Caesar* and *Saint Joan*. He followed that up with acting roles at the Vancouver Playhouse before spending three seasons in Stratford.

In 1968, he became artistic director for Theatre Calgary, and then in 1973 he returned to the Vancouver Playhouse in the same role. As a playwright, his own works include *Slow Train to St. Ives* and *The Sound of Distant Thunder*. As an actor, he also had many television, film and radio credits to his name.

"He started Theatre Calgary, and he founded the very famous theatre school at the Vancouver Playhouse," Carroll said. "It was the alma mater of Martha Burns and lots and lots of other wonderful actors. There is a whole generation of the best actors in Canada who not only owe their careers to him, but also owe their standard of excellence to him."

Newton invited his successor, Jackie Maxwell, to join him for his final season as artistic director in 2002 in an effort to ensure a smooth transition. After Shaw, he was a freelance director and actor for the Canadian Opera Company, the Vancouver Playhouse, Theatre Calgary, and the Stratford Festival, among others. During Maxwell's tenure, he returned to the Shaw Festival in 2004 to direct Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and again the following season to direct R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*.

Carroll had hoped to bring Newton back for a production as recently as two years ago.

"I asked him if he would be up for directing or to act in something, because I thought it would be a wonderful thing," Carroll said. "With his usual grace and care, he said 'I don't think that would be fair to the Shaw, because I might not be well enough, and I don't want to commit to it.' That was unselfish, and so unfortunate, because I know that he would have liked to."

The list of honours for Newton's work in theatre is extensive. In 1991, he received the Toronto Drama Bench Award for Distinguished Contribution to Canadian Theatre. Five years later he was awarded the prestigious M. Joan Chalmers Award for Artistic Direction. And in 2000 he received the Governor General's Award for lifetime artistic achievement.

He held honorary degrees from the University of Toronto, Brock University, Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Guelph, Buffalo State University, the former Ryerson University, and the Royal Conservatory of Music in recognition of his contribution to Canadian theatre. He also earned the prestigious Molson Prize in 2002, and the Thomas DeGaetani Award from the United States Institute for Theatre Technology.

As well, Newton was named a Member of the Order of Canada in 1995 and subsequently appointed as an Officer in 2018.

St. Catharines native Franklin Brasz, Stratford Festival's music director, says, like Jennings, his interest in theatre came about largely due to seeing Shaw productions during Newton's reign.

"He is a towering figure in Canadian theatre," Brasz said in a message to *The Local* Tuesday. "My early interest and developing passion for theatre was strongly influenced by Christopher's memorably rich and poignant productions. Canadian theatre is indebted to Christopher's legacy."

Well-known actor Tom McCamus, who appeared in this year's *Desire Under the Elms* and *The Devil's Disciple* at Shaw, said Newton had a profound influence on him, especially in his early years as an actor.

"He taught me what it meant to be a member of a company, how to rehearse," McCamus said. "He taught me so much about the theatre. He was a very generous man. You felt like you were a part of his company. There was no hierarchy. Everybody was in the ensemble. You would always come out of meetings thinking you would do anything for the guy."

McCamus was directed by Newton on numerous occasions, but also enjoyed the opportunity to act beside him, including when Newton played Captain Hook to McCamus'



Christopher Newton (David Cooper)

Peter Pan in 1987.

"He would even play small parts in some productions," McCamus said. "To speak to him, you always felt you were working with a peer. He never made you feel like he was the artistic director and you had to watch what you said or did. He and I would try to figure out stuff together. That quality he created, I try to find that everywhere else I go."

Guy Bannerman, a veteran of 29 seasons at Shaw, visited with Newton not long ago, the two talking a bit about end-of-life things.

"It's hard to overstate his contribution," Bannerman, who first met Newton in 1968 when both were at Stratford, said. "He came from Britain and put down roots here and stayed. He devoted his career to furthering our Canadian vision. Theatre Calgary, still surviving and still strong today, is a big success story."

Bannerman lauded Newton for a humanistic approach, hiring actors of colour long before there was a drive for inclusivity.

"And he was incredibly loyal," Bannerman adds. "He made it possible for actors like me to have a life. You could talk to Christopher and ask what the next season was looking like, and he would tell you. You would know how to make some life decisions. The idea that you could make a home in the same place you were working and not have to spend time on the road

as your children were growing up, was an amazing gift."

Another veteran Shaw actor, Neil Barkley, said Newton basically created his career, providing him with challenges and routinely confounding his expectations of what he could do.

"He opened my eyes to a world of music and literature and culture that I never would have discovered on my own," Barkley explained. "And his goal of an ensemble where each person in every department was made to feel like they had an equal share in the success of the work resulted in it being a very invigorating and hugely fun company to be a part of."

Barkley recognized Newton for his curatorial genius in choosing both plays and people. Like Bannerman, he relished the opportunities he had to share the stage with the artistic director as an equal member of the ensemble.

"Seeing him be as uncertain and vulnerable as an actor just out of theatre school made my natural fears and self-doubt much more manageable," remembers Barkley. "And his insistence on being in the 'chorus' dressing room with the most junior and inexperienced actors drove home the egalitarian nature of the Shaw company."

Newton's enormous influence has been felt across Canada, as has his passing Monday. Besides the extensive credits he amassed over 23 years with the Shaw Festival, he also mentored

many actors, playwrights and directors over the years and lent his support to numerous arts organizations.

In 2002, the Shaw Board of Governors conferred on him the lifetime title of Artistic Director Emeritus for his tireless work in cultivating and developing the organization. His contributions to both Shaw and Canadian theatre in general were further recognized with the establishment of the Christopher Newton Interns Program launched in 2018.

"He was formative to so many organizations," said Jennings, "but Shaw was lucky that for the majority of his peak career, he was here. The largest number of attendees were coming here during his time."

And Jennings is quick to point out that his importance stretches outside of the walls of the local theatre company.

"Beyond that, he was formative for the Shaw Festival and for this community. What he did for the Shaw Festival changed the nature of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Niagara in general. Had there not been a Christopher Newton, I'm not sure there would still be a Shaw Festival."

Jennings says the Shaw Festival will work with Newton's husband, Nicholas MacMartin, on a celebration of his life at an appropriate time. They will also ask for MacMartin's advice on the proper way to recognize Newton's legacy during the 2022 season.



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Santas head back to Irish Harp for breakfast, awards

Continued from page 1

Arnott was also quick to credit the support of local businesses for opening their doors, as well as for their contributions to the race kits handed out to the participants. "Everybody was so lovely to deal with," Arnott said Monday. "The Irish Harp just took this event on, too. It's actually the best town I've ever worked with. It was just

such a great place to be, and we're planning to come back next year." Following the race, participants gathered at the Irish Harp, where Jessey and Fenway received their awards, as did other winners in various age groups. The sight of dozens of Santas walking through the town was the latest attraction in the Queen and King Street area. The Irish Harp Pub was the official host restaurant, serving

coffee and breakfast sandwiches to all race participants after the event. At 62, Jim McCord of NOTL was second in his age category, coming in at 30:20.6, despite the encumbrance of the loose-fitting Santa suit. "It was warm, but you know something, it puts you in the spirit," he told The Local. He ran with his wife Susan, and though they both blamed the icy conditions for slowing them down quite

a bit, they were quite happy to be out running with other like-minded trotters. At the finish line, runners were greeted by a red, crushed velvet-clad Santa Claus, otherwise known as Matt Cuthbert, executive director of the Niagara Furniture Bank. The St. Catharines-based charity that collects furniture donations for the needy was the recipient of more than \$400 raised by participants. "There's nothing like 250

Santas running in Niagara-on-the-Lake," Cuthbert said. "We are happy to be a part of it as the selected charity. Over the last two years we've really seen an increase in the number of people living in poverty. Every little bit helps." Cuthbert, a powerlifter who says his body is just not built for running, also arranged for food donations to another charity, Community Crew, via a collection barrel

in the park. Arnott has already chosen a date for the 2022 return of the Santa 5K Race to NOTL. "Nov. 25," Arnott confirmed. "We'd like to come at a time when the businesses really want more people around. That's what we can do, we can bring people from all over to come and stay for the weekend. We're hoping we can get even more people next year, maybe 2,000 runners. That would be great."



Santas visit the Irish Harp on King Street, for breakfast and coffee. (Photos by Mike Balsom)



Santas Carol Butlin, Richard Butlin, and Karan Gardiner warming up on King Street.



Santas line up to start the five-km race through the Old Town.



Fenway Breckels and Jessey the Elf



Susan and Jim McCord take part in the Santa 5K.



A sea of red leaves Simcoe Park.

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Budget discussion gets heated over accommodation tax

Penny Coles
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake town councillors approved a \$10.38 million capital budget for 2022, a little lower than the \$10.5 million proposed in the report before them.

That's because the municipal accommodation tax, much discussed in previous years and on the budget committee's agenda for 2022, was defeated in a tie vote.

The budget committee, which includes five councillors, considered and recommended a two per cent tax on accommodations of five rooms or more, as was suggested at a meeting earlier this year.

But also discussed in September was that an accommodation tax should be part of an

overall tourism strategy, with more data than was currently available, and some councillors said last night they were dissatisfied that didn't happen. The fact that the hospitality industry was not consulted in the recent committee recommendation also was a concern to some councillors.

Coun. Erwin Wiens, who is not part of the budget committee, said he was surprised by how quickly the accommodation tax has moved forward since the September meeting. If it had been approved, about \$310,000 would have been collected from June 2022 to the end of the year, a lot of money to collect and spend without a full discussion, further analysis and a business model, he said. "I'm quite alarmed that this is going off the rails," he added, objecting not to the tax itself but

to instituting it in June.

Coun. Gary Bourroughs said the timing is poor, with the hospitality industry still on shaky grounds, and Coun. Clare Cameron went even further. "The timing is awful, doubly awful" with recent news of the increasing number of COVID cases, she said.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita agreed, while Lord Mayor Betty Disero, Coun. Sandra O'Connor and Coun. Norm Arsenault were just as emphatically in favour of the tax.

Disero called "shame" on councillors talking about saving money, not willing to spend money, and concerned about not meeting infrastructure needs, but also not willing to look for other sources of revenue.

Without the accommoda-

tion tax, she said, "we're going to have a 20 per cent increase for taxpayers."

"At some point you have to stop talking about things, and just move ahead with it," said Arsenault.

Coun. John Wiens also voted in support of it, creating a tie that meant the motion in favour of the tax was defeated.

Coun. Allan Bisback, the chair of the budget committee who has spoken in support of the tax in the past, was absent.

Corporate services director Kyle Freeborn said other sources of funding for three items discussed last night will have to be found, with their costs subtracted from the capital budget that was approved, which was what brought it down to \$1.38 million. Funding for NOTL Tourism, a Victoria Street landscaping project, and \$100,000 for the NOTL Museum was removed from the budget — they were to

be paid for out of the municipal accommodation tax.

The museum was recommended to receive a total of \$500,000 over five years.

Arsenault made a notice of motion to reconsider the accommodation tax at the next council meeting, which will be in January unless a special meeting is called.

To bring the matter back to the table he needs two-thirds support, or six votes. Over the next little while, when emotions have subsided, he will discuss the tax with councillors, and hope to get enough support to revisit the issue.

"MAT is not dead," he said. "It's never dead. It's just on life support at the moment."

The report presented to council Monday said assessment growth will have a positive impact on the town's 2022 operating budget, calculated to be a 1.15 per cent increase, equating

to an additional \$151,187 in new property assessment that will mitigate the existing increase.

With the capital budget approved before the year's end, town staff can hope for more favourable results as they begin tendering projects in the new year, said CAO Marnie Cluckie.

The operational budget is expected to be discussed in January, with staff aiming for an increase over last year in the two to five per cent range, or between \$262,540 to \$656,350, an increase of \$23.50 to \$58.75 on the tax bill for the average residential assessment.

The capital projects approved for 2022 include work on the Irvine Road drain at \$430,000; Canada Summer Games costs for the Memorial Park tennis courts, one replacement pumper at \$855,000; a rainbow sidewalk at about \$15,000; and work on Niagara Stone Road to cost \$595,000.

Council meeting remains virtual for now

Penny Coles
The Local

Council's decision to move to a hybrid model of meetings this week, allowing for those who want to meet in the council chamber to do so and others to attend virtually, has been put on hold with the arrival of omicron and rising COVID case numbers.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero has made no secret of the fact

that she was anxious to get back to meeting in person, but because of announcements from the province on Friday, and trying to take precautionary measures "with this very contagious omicron variant, we decided we would stay virtual for this meeting before Christmas."

She said the town would be watching the numbers carefully to see if council can begin meeting in person in January.

"It was a tough decision, because everybody is anxious to get back to the council chamber," she said, "but we thought it was best, as the message we send to people is that it's best to try to stay home as much as possible."

The hybrid model would see staff members in town hall offices during council meetings, and would not allow for the public to attend meetings.

Consolidated transit system wins council approval

Penny Coles
The Local

After years in the making, the proposal for a consolidated regional transit system received unanimous support from Niagara-on-the-Lake town council Monday night.

Mat Siscoe, a St. Catharines city councillor and chair of the region's Linking Niagara transit committee, presented the regional plan to council, outlining the work that has gone into getting it to this point, including extensive public consultation, and the benefits and governance model if it's

approved to move forward.

He explained the NOTL vote, "a significant decision for this council," is part of a triple majority process, which means that the plan must first be supported by the majority of regional councillors, which was received Nov. 25. Next comes majority support from the 12 municipal councils, which must represent the majority of Niagara voters to allow consolidated transit to move forward. The vote must go to all municipal councils before Jan. 31, Siscoe explained.

"Regional council has passed this proposal. It's now up to Niag-

ara municipalities to determine if Niagara takes this next step in moving transit forward."

Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Grimsby and Port Colborne have already given the plan a green light. Welland has not, with some outstanding issues, such as budget and capital assets. Thorold was expected to vote on Tuesday night, but has been supportive of the integrated system in past discussions. Votes in the municipalities of Pelham, Lincoln, West Lincoln, Wainfleet are expected to be scheduled in January.

The proposal before council Monday night, Siscoe said, was seeking to create a single system governed by a commission that would deliver transit "with a region-wide lens for all of Niagara," one that would seamlessly connect to the GO network of buses and trains, "and ensure sustainable connectivity for all corners of Niagara and beyond."

The vision for a reliable, sustainable and fully-integrated

Continued on page 8



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Local BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: Nine Lives Custom Refinishing

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Expansion of refinishing services allows for more renewal and less replacement

To think that only five short years ago, Nine Lives Custom Refinishing started out of a garage in St. Catharines with owner, Kevin Coyle, refurbishing and breathing new life into outdated and damaged furniture. With his wife Carolyn, working full time alongside him, applying custom finishes to client projects and their own to sell, it wasn't long before they needed more than a garage to continue their story.

Their next move was collaborating with a cabinet maker to offer refinished kitchens alongside furniture and in 2019, after seeing the demand and realizing the importance of a space that could handle both services, they made the call to move into a facility in Fonthill. Within 6 months, the demand for their respraying services increased exponentially and along with the purchase of a new spray booth and equipment and addition of staff, an even larger facility was required. Luckily, Kevin found a 2000 sq. ft. location just two doors down that could serve as both the shop and showroom. As

the growth continued on a steady trajectory over 2020, they quickly outgrew this location and had to add an office space down the road to house sales and management, and then in October, finally consolidated all staff under one roof at their

newest location across the bridge in Allanburg.

The facility at 2136 Allanport Road is roughly 5000 sq. ft., features a full showroom, offices and a large shop to meet the demand for this ever-expanding business. With

the larger showroom and shop, they now offer refinishing, refacing, hardware, quartz countertops and appliances, all from their one-stop shop. On top of that, this past Spring, Nine Lives launched the first of its kind, Mobile

Spray Truck, where garage and man doors, shutters and patio furniture could be done on site and then in the Summer, announced their trailer/RV refinishing service!

Presently, to keep up with the demand, they house a staff

of twelve talented specialists including spray finishers, installers, preppers, administrators, and consultants and operate a fleet of six vehicles to complete multiple kitchens and numerous pieces of furniture each week.

Kevin believes the key to the company's success is the dedication of the team to keep customers happy with the end result, "The business of refinishing kitchens is not an easy job nor is it a glamorous one," says Coyle, "We are constantly striving to improve and to make the customers experience a pleasurable one, and the option of refinishing not only saves the client thousands of dollars, but also keeps old kitchens out of landfills."

As far as the future, Nine Lives has secured another location that will open in early 2022 that will allow them to refinish products with high end Automotive grade paints as they move into the realm of becoming Niagara's leading refinisher of everything! Be sure to keep an eye out for Nine Lives as they give new life to kitchens, furniture, golf carts and so much more in 2022.









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EDITORIAL

Make the most of another pandemic holiday - we have no choice

If we have learned anything during almost two years of a pandemic, it's to focus on what is positive, and what is important in our lives.

The people we love. Our friends and family. What we can do, not what we can't do. COVID-19 is helping us appreciate the smallest things that give the most meaning to our lives.

We may be facing reduced gatherings, cutting back on the socializing we were excited about. Family plans are being turned up-

side down. But remember last Christmas, we were being told to do even less. Many of us cooked a turkey for two, if we were lucky. This year, we may at least share our meal with close family.

Worrying, being angry about what we can't do, doesn't help anyone — although as we look and listen to what is happening in the world, and our own little corner of it, we see so much to worry about, to lash out at. The omicron news is not good. And

we're being told it will get worse before it gets better.

This time last year, we were using phrases like the light at the end of the tunnel, or seeing the pandemic in our rear view mirrors. Now it seems slightly foolish to have thought it could be over so quickly. But we have endured, and will continue to, making the most of all that is good about life.

We may not celebrate the way we had hoped, but we can still celebrate the spirit of the holiday, and of course, the spirit of this

community, as we love and support each other, and as we should continue to 365 days of the year.

Our thanks to all of our readers and advertisers who have supported us, as we come close to wrapping up our third year in sharing your stories and helping businesses get your messages out to the community. It's been a tough couple of years for businesses, and nothing any of us would have ever dreamed of when we first started hearing about this new virus that

was emerging so far away, and that is instead of going away, is now doubling every few days. But we can only do what we are asked, what is in our control, and with the support from a community doing the same, a community we all love and respect, we will get through it.

At The Local, our goal has always been to bring you the good news of all the great people and events in our community, to unite our community. We are surrounded by goodness,

by love and generosity, and we offer huge thanks to our readers and advertisers for support through this challenging time. Our mission is to continue to bring stories of all the good people around us — they help us to see the good in each other.

Here's hoping everyone keeps safe, finds joy over the holidays, and takes pleasure from the simple things life presents when we look for them.

Penny Coles
The Local

Difficulty with appointments, rapid tests frustrating for residents



Wayne Gates, MPP
Niagara Falls Riding
Special to The Local

The last 10 days have undoubtedly been some of the most frustrating in recent memory for residents across Ontario, and especially in our riding. While we are still learning about this new variant, it is becoming clearer every day that the omicron is significantly more infectious than the delta variant, itself more infectious than earlier variants of this infuriating

virus we have been battling for two years. While we still have much to learn about omicron, one thing is clear: getting your booster shot provides you the most protection against this new variant, which is spreading exponentially.

As many of you know, I pride myself on being able to work with anyone. I do not care what political party any of us belong to so long as the policies benefit our community. It's just that simple, you have to be able to get things done and you can't do it unless you're willing to reach across the aisle. I believe during COVID we've been able to do this. However, it also means you need to be willing to raise your voice when you see a

policy failure. I have been clear with our Premier — the rollout of vaccine boosters and rapid tests across Niagara over the last 10 days has been a catastrophic failure.

To begin with, we've been facing the COVID crisis for almost two years now. It is shocking that after this time the Province of Ontario still does not have a plan to ensure staffing supports and a supply chain that can rapidly move into action to get dosages into arms. For months now experts have been telling us of the ever-changing nature of this virus, and it is shocking to know that Premier Doug Ford did not prioritize the provincial booster vaccination pro-

gram before this moment. To make matters worse, I do not believe that Ford actually consulted provincial health teams before making these announcements. When Ford announced boosters for those in the 50-plus age group, Niagara Region Public Health was still focused on vaccinating the five to 11 age cohort, where only 30 per cent of residents have a first dosage, and where community spread was higher. What this meant was that seniors were forced to rely on pharmacies, which quickly became overwhelmed by the demand. By the time we were able to secure vaccine appointments for seniors, the Premier had already announced that those 18 years and older could book their vaccines just days later, creating unneeded stress for seniors. At this stage in the pandemic, there is no reason the Premier should be making any decisions without knowing what's occurring on the ground. Unfortunately, this wasn't just a Niagara issue, these were issues across all of Ontario.

Another major way we can stop the spread of

omicron is through testing. We've been asking the Ford government to release the rapid tests the province has had in storage for weeks. Last Thursday we saw the province's plan to do so. Instead of offering mailings or local pick-up points, they simply sent them to 100 LCBOs. Forget the fact that liquor stores are jam-packed before Christmas, the entire Niagara Region was serviced by just two locations — both in St. Catharines. Residents from all across Niagara, from cities like Grimsby, Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake, traveled to St. Catharines and lined up only to find out the shipment was gone in less than an hour. How, after two years of this, and after granting himself extraordinary emergency powers, did the Premier unveil a system that looks more like the Hunger Games than a real response to a public health emergency?

These are not critiques I am confining to this newspaper. Last week I spoke with the Minister of Health's office, the Premier's office and the LCBO. In the

first wave of this pandemic, Niagara was shortchanged as its vaccines were diverted elsewhere. We raised our voice collectively and got Niagara its fair share of vaccines. Despite these frustrations, I've been clear with the Premier's office — we're willing to work alongside them, but we will not accept anything less than our fair share of vaccines and rapid tests, including free access to both.

In the coming days, we expect to have good news about more vaccine dates and more sites to retrieve free rapid tests. Our team will not allow Niagara to go without its fair share. As we do this, I am asking for patience.

On this botched roll-out I will hold the Premier accountable, while meanwhile our public health teams and front-line staff are working so hard under the circumstances and I am thankful they are doing it, especially during this holiday season. If you interact with them, please remember, we're all in this together. In the next few days we hope to have some good news, and we will make sure it's released publicly as soon as we do.



View from the couch

Donald Combe
Special to The Local

In *Selected Exits* (Prime, 1993), Sir Anthony Hopkins is Gwyn Thomas, the noted Welsh writer, in this autobiographical film which follows Thomas' life from childhood

in a Welsh mining village to his success as a playwright in London's West End. The film is a basically a monologue and is revealing of the character and soul of Thomas. Not for everyone, but I found it a joy just to be caught up by the sound and spirit of Welsh people.

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.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake
Local
The Trusted Voice of Our Community

P.O. Box 430, 1596 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, LOS 1T0

Editor:
Penny Coles
penny@notllocal.com
905-246-5878

Publisher:
The Niagara-on-the-Lake Local

Graphic Designer:
Rosie Gowsell
composing@notllocal.com

Advertising Sales:
Karen Skeoch
karen@notllocal.com • 905-641-5335

Julia Coles
julia@notllocal.com • 905-934-1040

Helen Arsenault
Local Business Directory,
Local Happenings, Classified Sales
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Local LETTERS

Not rights for one, but for all must be defended

Does anyone else see the massive irony in staunchly defending the individual rights of every person (LGBTQ and abortion for example) and celebrating them (rainbow sidewalk) while simultaneously denouncing the individual rights of every person (those against forced experimental medical procedures for example) and publicly humiliating them, insulting them, vilifying them and denying them movement or entry in our society even if they have legitimate health concerns or religious beliefs that are supposed to be protected?

Because I see it being done every single day by our

politicians, media, public health officials and everyday citizens. And it needs to stop. It is absolutely beyond shameful and is utterly and undeniably hypocritical.

Either individual rights matter for everyone or they don't matter for anyone. You can't just pick and choose based on emotion or ideology. That's supposed to be the beauty of living in a free country where free speech is encouraged and supposed to thrive. It's how we make progress against old systems, oppression, or ways of thought that no longer serve us good. As soon as it only matters for one side everything will inevitably

fall apart.

We all should have undeniable, inalienable, equal human rights under all circumstances. Not special rights. Not just sometimes. Equal rights all the time. As soon as everyone accepts this and we treat every individual with the love and respect they deserve, regardless of sexual orientation, skin tone, background, ideology or emotion, the world will be a much better place.

I truly miss what this beautiful town & country used to be. We are so much better than this.

#BeKindToEachOther

Tyler Weichel

Local LETTERS

Is gay population afraid to come to NOTL?

I would like to respond to the letter by Peter Millard (Another way of looking at Rainbow crosswalk, The Local, Dec. 15).

He first off suggests that the number of letters to the editor against the rainbow crossing means the majority is being heard. Other writers seem to suggest that it is the majority of the public support the crosswalk. Which is it? He then suggests that Mr. Williams (So many reasons for paying attention to LGBTQ community, The Local, Nov. 17) has resorted to using "mercenary" facts and figures" is because he is exhausted from trying to appeal to "the humanity that he desperately hopes resides somewhere inside the hearts of the majority."

Maybe the majority just does not feel there is a need for this crosswalk.

He then quotes Booker T. Washington and says

parliamentary procedure allows the majority to operate as long as it protects the rights of the minority. If he is saying that this sidewalk is a right for the LGBTQ population then he must also support the Black community to have a right to have something, the Indigenous population to have something and every other group to have something. Perhaps he believes the anti-vaxxers have a right.

He then falls on the safety of the gay community and reflects on a couple of sad examples of people being killed just because of their sexual identity. Are you serious? When was the last time such an atrocity occurred here in NOTL? Does he really think the gay population is afraid to come to NOTL?

He doesn't see the danger of a rainbow crosswalk being damaged by vandals. In September of this year

one was damaged in Port Colborne. In June of this year one was damaged in Swift Current. Fairly easy to find other examples. He also seems to indicate that it creates no harm and that it is inevitable. As I have said in a previous letter to the editor, signalling out any specific community is not the way to promote inclusivity. We are all Canadian and if we just concern ourselves with being that instead of trying to have ourselves considered a subset makes more sense to me. If any discrimination happens we deal with that on an individual basis.

NOTL plays an important part in the history of Canada and there is plenty of signage and examples around to demonstrate that and that should be the focus of the town.

Doug Johnson
NOTL

Can we please have sidewalks cleaned?

Having lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake for seven winters, I can no longer stay silent. I think it is shameful that in winter, in a town of mostly seniors, our residential sidewalks are not sanded or salted and often, not even plowed.

In several other small Ontario towns where we lived, the sidewalks were plowed and sanded/salted by the time the sun came up.

I don't know if it is a question of money or negligence, but it is time our Lord Mayor addressed this

issue. It is disrespectful and dangerous to not address such an obvious safety concern on behalf of all residents of NOTL.

Laura H.
(resident and senior)
NOTL

Many questions to answer with regard to Rainbow crosswalk

This letter (Another way of looking at Rainbow crosswalk, The Local, Dec. 15) has been written by a self-acknowledged privileged white man. I, however, make no such claim since I have never seen myself as in any way privileged. This issue seems unrelated to the debate since arguably white male privilege is probably of similar proportion in both the LGBTQ and majority communities.

However, having said this some comment in response to the content of the letter is appropriate.

a) The number of letters to the editor that point out the absence of public input and which is most important in this debate (but so far is otherwise largely ignored) when compared to a proper

assessment of public attitudes, is hardly of the magnitude that would take the wind out of any sails.


b) To me it could be seen as somewhat naive to suspect that Mr. Williams (So many reasons for paying attention to LGBTQ community, The Local, Nov. 17) is utterly exhausted from his appeal to humanity that he hopes resides in the heart of the majority. His main argument for a permanent rainbow crosswalk seems to be focused on the alleged economic benefits that he claims would come from increased tourism.

c) It is difficult to see how LGBTQ safety can be enhanced or even achieved through the mere presence of a permanent rainbow crosswalk.

It is even more difficult to see how any community can feel safe and welcome unless the crosswalk also reflects the genuine good will and support of the majority through the expression of public opinion which is unknown at the present time, and is not simply part of an agenda of one small community. (It has already been mentioned by Mr. Williams that a request for rainbow benches and a pride parade is to follow.)

There is a lot more to this issue than whether or not actual harm can occur as a result of the crosswalk, or what the ultimate cost of this might be. Many questions are raised that will require answers.

Derek Collins
NOTL



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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Omicron could mean 'explosion' of COVID cases

Penny Coles
The Local

COVID cases are going to "explode to a point that we have not seen before," warns Dr. Mustafa Hirji, who is expecting another wave to hit Niagara harder than any of the previous ones.

"I am worried that in the next few weeks, we will be seeing astronomically high case numbers."

The highly contagious omicron variant, with a much higher reproductive rate than delta, will spread so quickly it will be impossible to keep cases low, said the region's acting chief medical officer of health. Instead, the goal will be to keep hospital and intensive care admissions manageable.

While there are some regions in the province that haven't been hit quite so hard, what's happening in Niagara is reflect-

ed across the province, he said. Although there is "weak evidence" omicron cases are less severe than what we've seen from other variants, he said, there is also lots of evidence that says otherwise.

There hasn't been an identified case of omicron in Niagara, but cases have taken a "sharp trajectory" upwards. Hospitalizations, active cases and new cases have been rising steeply.

He spoke of the need for booster shots, especially for the elderly and the most vulnerable, and first doses for children ages five to 11, who are still at the greatest risk of becoming infected.

And although the demand is high, as is the frustration level of those looking for appointments, there are more opening up, he said, suggesting checking out pharmacies and primary

care physicians as well as public health clinics.

Contact tracing and the restrictions we're facing aren't going to be enough to stop case numbers from climbing, he said. And with capacity an issue for testing, Hirji is asking anyone with cold-like symptoms to voluntarily isolate instead of looking for a test.

"I don't think there will be enough testing capacity," he said,

although Niagara Health has opened up access to testing with more hours of availability.

"We're going to see a very different way of managing it for the next few months."

Hirji is also calling for a change in social behaviour, including continuing to wear well-fitting masks, distancing, strategically using rapid antigen tests, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated areas.

Transit sytem to expand hours of service in NOTL

Continued from page 4

system will "transform mobility independence and growth in Niagara for generations to come," Siscoe said.

The benefits are many, he told council, including pooling resources and optimizing them to maximize service for residents.

"It will create equity for all communities, and enable access by residents where mobility may be limited or unavailable due to municipal or jurisdiction boundaries."

It will provide better access to transit for those employees "living in other municipalities, but working in yours."

A consolidated system will also help the "enormous student population, significant and valued users of transit," he said, and not only post secondary but also younger students "who will gain more freedom and independence. Getting our next generation comfortable and reliant on transit as

their primary mode of transportation is a key driver in youth retention and system growth."

Enhanced and expanded services will create what riders want, he told councillors: reliability, consistency and frequency. The expansion of services and enhanced access will drive economic development and job retention and attraction, said Siscoe.

It will cost the town more, but will deliver more service, he explained. NOTL taxpayers will pay for the service they receive, on the regional tax levy, rather than paying it to the municipality, as they do now.

A town report to council explains transit services are currently paid through a combination of parking revenues, provincial gas tax, and bus parking fees. "Town staff has confirmed with regional staff that this form of payment can continue, and a gradual transition will occur to shift the cost to the tax bill. The cost will ulti-

mately show on the tax bill as a separate levy."

Currently, the town pays \$1.8 million in transit costs, or about \$225 per household, councillors were told.

With recent enhancements to the town's on-demand service, the cost to the town will be increasing in 2022.

After a year-long pilot project, the region and the town moved forward in November with on-demand transit to serve the entire town of NOTL, giving more riders access to public transportation when travelling in the area. Two additional vehicles were added to the fleet, bringing the total vehicle count to four.

The service originally included just two vehicles providing trips along Niagara Stone Road, including only the Old Town, Virgil and Glendale.

NRT OnDemand ridership had been steadily increasing, particularly as Ontario moved

through the various COVID-19 reopening stages, the region reported in November.

Other enhancements were added to the local system, with an option to pre-book trips up to 10 p.m. the night before the desired ride by using the NRT OnDemand Mobile app. Those without access to a smartphone can pre-book by phone.

The adult fare for trips within NOTL is currently \$3, with connection to Niagara Region Transit conventional service at the transit hub at the Outlet Collection at Niagara, or the Glendale Campus of Niagara College, for a \$6 fare.

Siscoe told councillors that as well as extra operating hours to be standardized across the region, which will mean 5,500 more hours a year in NOTL, the fare will be \$3 to travel anywhere in the region.

"Residents going to the St. Catharines hospital or to a doctor

in Niagara Falls will pay half the \$6 it costs now," he said.

The extra hours of operation will occur in 2024, when the cost to NOTL taxpayers will jump to \$2.7 million, covering the increase in service and inflation, he said.

If the system turns out to be underused, either the commission set up to govern regional transit or the town will be able to reduce the service and associated costs, Siscoe explained.

He told councillors the new consolidated transit system will be governed by a commission of 15 elected officials, and supporting the commission will be a public advisory board of 20 representatives of diverse sectors. NOTL and the other smaller municipalities will have one representative appointed to the commission, either a town or regional councillor, as well as one citizen appointee to represent the town on the advisory panel.

With the triple majority

achieved, the commission's assumption of full operational control will occur on Jan. 1, 2023, Siscoe said.

Questions about the new system included Coun. Norm Arsenault asking whether it will be "nimble enough" to add ad hoc services when needed, potentially during the tourist season, from GO trains into NOTL to encourage visitors to use public transit rather than clogging Niagara Stone Road as they come into town.

Operating under a single commission, Siscoe said, will provide the ability to look at "a different approach to seasonal increases in transit" in both NOTL and Niagara Falls, and allow for an enhanced level of service "in tourist hotspots."

That could also hold true for a next step beyond on-demand service, with a community bus that would serve specific locations or corridors that might warrant a higher level of service, he said.

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Congratulations to our winners

Thanks to all the boys and girls who entered The Local's Christmas colouring contest. We were very pleased to receive many wonderful entries, and would like to congratulate Emmitt Nickason (right), who won a beautiful prize presented by Julie Biczel of Maple Leaf Fudge for the five and under age category, and Eva-Odile Beausoleil (above) who won the generous prize donated by Phil Leboudec of Phil's Independent in the age six to 10 category. And thank you to our two local businesses for contributing the prizes. (Karen Skeoch)



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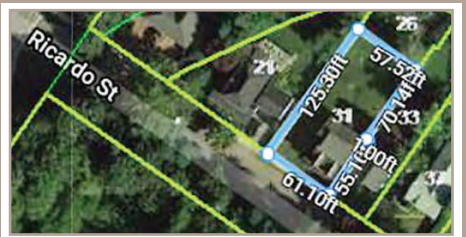
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Santa wraps up reading his favourite book to kids

Continued from page 1

of palliative care's many services, which include volunteers providing one-on-one visits, for now mostly virtual, offering respite care, bereavement programs and all kinds of resources, including free loan of equipment for those suffering from a life-limiting illness.

Saturday was also about making a "heartwarming day in palliative care history," she said.

With bad weather and the rising number of COVID cases impacting the size of the crowd, "we may not have had the turnout we hoped for, but that room was filled with the spirit of Christmas and a true display of giving,"

Bagnulo said.

Her Christmas wish, she noted, is for the palliative care service to be known to any person and their family experiencing a life-limiting illness in NOTL.

"We are grateful for the chance we had to raise awareness, we are grateful for the opportunity to bring the community together, we

are grateful for the publicity we received, and grateful for you all," she said after the event.

And she promised to do it again next year.

To watch Bagnulo's interview with Cogeco, visit <https://yourtv.tv/node/327591>

To watch Bagnulo's interview with Cogeco, visit <https://yourtv.tv/node/327591>



Town CAO Marnie Cluckie with her daughter Lexi, Lord Mayor Betty Disero, palliative care executive director Bonnie Bagnulo and town community engagement coordinator Marah Minor were at the community centre Saturday to help Santa during his visit. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Peter Pietruniak and his daughter Edith visit with Santa.



Evie Haslam and her dad Kyle listen to Santa read 'Twas the Night Before Christmas.



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**Submitted by
Ara Shoes &
Accessories**

Ara Shoes opened its doors in 2015, and has been thriving ever since.

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Located across from the Royal George Theatre, Ara is in the heart of the Niagara-on-the-Lake main street, and in addition to comfort, promises fashionable footwear in a colourful assortment, wide to narrow fitting, in unique and fun styles that cater to all age groups. Their loyal clientele come from Toronto, Buffalo and Rochester to buy their footwear at Ara, knowing they will find an eclectic array of styles they can't resist, and won't see closer to home.

Perfect for this time of year, their winter selection of boots include water-resistant and fleece-lined options that have excellent grip for walks in the snow, as well as a new line of ice-grip boots with spikes on the bottom. With people enjoying more activities outdoors due to the pandemic, Ara fills the need for more durable winter boots, so if you're in the market for a new pair of boots for a trek outdoors, it is the store to visit first.

As well as footwear, this year Ara has introduced a new line of outerwear from Claire Desjardins, a Quebec designer whose abstract artwork inspires her unique clothing, which includes reversible jackets. Come spring, you will find her new line of colourful prints.

Volks Walkers is a unique, popular footwear line, made in Turkey and Portugal. Their wide-fitting styles and colourful assortments attract a lot of attention. With leather uppers and cushiony insoles that are removable, when customers try them on they say they feel like they're walking on air. In the spring, Ara will carry their cork line of shoes



made in Portugal. Cork is a vegan alternative, and environmentally-friendly. You

will also find cork bags and accessories at Ara, all made in Portugal.

The Queen Street store has two annual clearance sales, one coming up after

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Devon's family overwhelmed with generosity

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

The atmosphere inside the offices of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce was trans-

formed Thursday afternoon, when Devon Botbyl and his family exited the elevator, the 18-year-old announcing their arrival with loud cheers, glowing eyes, and a broad smile

hidden by his mask. Already celebratory, the mood elevated to downright joyous as Devon worked the room, excited to see the group gathered together for a cheque pre-

sentation to him. According to Chamber president and CEO Eduardo Lafforgue, the \$6,500 raised through candle sales at the 2021 Candlelight Stroll set a new 32-year re-

cord. But the cheque that was presented to Devon was for twice that amount, as an anonymous donor followed through on a promise to match the donations from the Dec. 3 event.

Lafforgue hinted that there is even more to come. Though he couldn't provide details, there is word that either a second donor or a local foundation is planning to chip in the same amount, which would bring the total donated to Devon very close to \$20,000.

Devon's mother Dani said the Botbys are still searching for the best way to say how they felt that night of the stroll.

"You're taking it all in, and you think you're going to walk into the Court House in control of everything, but there was this incredible wave of emotion that took hold," she told The Local. "Words can't describe it."

At one point before the ceremony began, Devon and his sister Elise peeked out the front door of the Court House.

"It was like a whoosh of magic that came up the Court House stairs and not only hit Elise and Devon, but everyone who was behind watching. It was a really, really neat moment."

It was clear Thursday that the memory of Devon's role in leading this year's stroll will hold a special place in the hearts of the family for the rest of their lives. Dani told the gathered group that since that night, when the family drives along Queen Street, Devon asks them to slow down to about the pace of the stroll so he can relive the moment.

The Virgil teen was born with a rare chromosome condition, leaving him with global delays and autistic tendencies. He also has mobility challenges, is immunocompromised, and was diagnosed with lymphoma in June, after which he underwent immunotherapy and chemotherapy treatments.

The money raised through the Candlelight Stroll will go toward the installation of an elevator in their home that will allow Devon easier access to his second floor bedroom, as well as the basement, where he loves to watch television and play hockey.

NOTL Chamber mem-



From the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, Nicole Cripps, president Eduardo Lafforgue, Petrice Custance, and Ryan Gosnell were onhand to present a cheque to Devon Botbyl and his father Scott, sister Elise and mother Dani. (Mike Balsom)

Thank you to all who helped make the Christmas Tractor Processional such a huge success.

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Continued on page 13

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Family has elevator designed to ensure Devon's independence

Continued from page 12

ber Edwards Designs has created the plans for the installation.

"Wendy and Mark Edwards are local," Dani says. "Wendy has been great guiding us through this process. She's done some elevators for other clients in Niagara-on-the-Lake. You can't just pick up a catalogue and buy an elevator."

The family has met with a number of contractors to collect estimates. They expect to choose one soon and aim to begin construction some time in early spring. The entire job, which involves creating a shaft through the three floors, could take anywhere from four to six months.

"We're losing a front closet, which isn't terrible," explains Dani. "The whole roof has to be extended, they have to pull off the front of the house, and a side of the house. They're putting the elevator next to our cold cellar, so the concrete has to be jackhammered out."

The design of the elevator is such that Devon will

be able to move between each floor independently. In addition, their upstairs bathroom is to be renovated to be more accessible for the Eden High School student, who, until three years ago, was walking independently.

That will involve combining two bathrooms into one and widening the doorway so Devon's walker and wheelchair can fit inside and have enough room to turn around. It will also be fitted with a shower and tub that will be accessible.

"I can't begin to tell you what it's like as a parent to have a house where one of your children has barriers. We're going to plow through all of the construction with our eyes on the prize. It's going to be worth the inconvenience. We want to open the whole house so that Devon, just like myself, Scott and Elise can access it."

The Bobyls continue to be blown away by the support of the entire community, and have plans to recognize that support when the construction is complete.

"It's the elevator that

love and kindness built," Dani says. "We're thinking of dedicating and naming

the elevator to reflect our gratitude."

Then she adds, with

a chuckle, "Hopefully the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, when they get

the permit application early next year, will push the approval through quickly."



Nicole Cripps from the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, with Julia Buxton-Cox and Jane Andres from the Migrant Workers Hub, and Eduardo Lafforgue from the chamber with Petrice Custance and Ryan Gosnell, were at the Court House last week as a cheque for \$1,000 from the Candlelight Stroll proceeds was donated to the Farmworkers Hub, which will pay for the rent for one month, where 1,961 farmworkers were served this summer. The first order of business for 2022 is to assemble the welcome kits for the return of the off-shore workers. (Mike Balsom)

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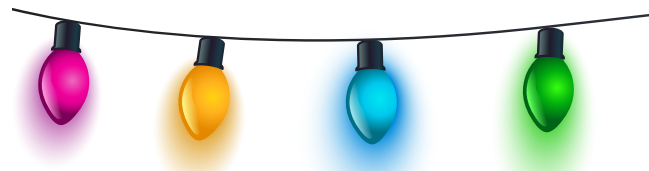


Ontario



The hit of the parade was Rainer Hummel's Rudolph. (Karen Skeoch)

Tractor parade hit of the season



Penny Coles
The Local

Last week's tractor procession, put together in a matter of two weeks, might just have been the hit of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Christmas season.

Dorothy Soo Wiens says once she and her husband Erwin decided to quickly organize the event, they reached out to their farming friends and received immediate support.

However, they were amazed at the vehicles that pulled into the Virgil arena parking lot, all decked out in their Christmas glitz.

There were 19 tractors of various shapes and sizes, says Dorothy, and Kevin Buis, one of the farmers in the parade, said he felt there had to be more than 1,000 people lining both sides of the streets of the route through Virgil to watch.

Balconies at Pleasant Manor were full of people, residents and families, who had some of the best views of the parade.

Dorothy and Erwin stayed at the arena to marshal the vehicles, and were receiving calls all evening congratulating them on organizing such a successful event.

"I was really emotional all evening," she says. "After the vehicles left the

parking lot we walked to the entrance to see them all on their way back. It was really something."

They jumped on Buis' tractor so he could take them to see the crowds still gathered at Concession 4, she says, giving them a sense of how many people had come out to watch.

"We had so much fun that night. I would love to do it again."

They likely will, and it will probably be bigger and better.

"I had one person telling me he wants to buy a tractor so he can be in the parade next year," she laughs, "and a few people ask if they can come out in decorated riding lawn mowers."

A Niagara Regional Police officer was on-hand to help, leading the way and stopping traffic at each street as the tractors moved along the route.

A NOTL fire department ladder truck brought up the rear of the parade.

Virgil, she says, was the perfect place for a tractor parade.

"It's the heart of the farming community, the hub, where farmers come to buy all their supplies. There's Vineland Growers, Louth Niagara, it's where farmers meet and shop. There couldn't be a better place for it."



Dave Froese and Pat Household were on Ladder 1, bringing up the rear of the parade. (Dorothy Soo Wiens)

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Everyone loved the cute little vehicle brightly decorated for the parade. (Helen Arsenault)



The bright blue Braud German harvester, owned by Huebel Grapes Estates, has a New Holland tractor behind it. (Dorothy Soo Wiens)



Jesse Willms of Lakeview Vineyard Equipment is in the Gregoire grape harvester. (Karen Skeoch)

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Stocking project will deliver cheer to NOTL long-term care residents

Penny Coles
 The Local

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

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

Many hands helping out have brought joy to the residents at Pleasant Manor, Upper Canada Lodge, and Niagara Long Term Care, with each person receiving a stocking filled to the brim with all kinds of goodies.

More than 200 people were part of this initiative, some filling stockings, others contributing items to fill them with. Cards were created by Amika Verwegen's young children, and special gift tags made by Sheri Ruby. Hand-knitted hearts were made by the ladies at Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Palliative Care Service and included in cards designed by students, and printed by the town.

Staff at Heritage Place in Virgil were excited to see the stockings arrive Friday.

"Christmas is a busy and festive time at Heritage Place," says program director Chelsea Bilton. "The week leading up to Christmas there is a virtual visit by Santa Claus, a Christmas banquet with a traditional Christmas meal, sing-alongs and more. The stockings that are donated will be handed out to all residents on Christmas

morning. These stockings are very appreciated, and are sure to bring a smile to all the residents' faces. It's so special that every resident will get to open these stockings on Christmas Day," she said, thanking King and all who contributed to the initiative.

Continued on page 17



Joan King had enough Christmas cards, created by local children and printed by the town, to go into each stocking. (Penny Coles)

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Many hands contributed to project to help seniors

Continued from page 16

King started her project last year, at the height of COVID, when there was no visiting in long-term care, and she thinks the desire to help residents is what has made people so generous. Some of those who contributed to her project have parents in a care home, and others have lost a parent during the last year.

"I think it means a lot to them to be able to help people here in NOTL living in homes," King says.

And it means a lot to those in homes, says Cody Cowbrough, program manager at

Niagara Long Term Care.

"Here at Niagara Long Term Care we are big on Christmas. We have been enjoying festivities throughout December, while continuing to follow all COVID-19 protocols to keep the residents safe. Residents have enjoyed tea parties with their families, Christmas entertainment, a Christmas Lights Tour, Christmas baking and many more activities. Christmas is a time of great joy for many of our residents, and brings back many memories for a majority of them," says Cowbrough.

The stockings help bring a smile to residents' faces when

they get to open a present, he says. "These donations of wonderful gifts are so appreciated by all of our staff and family members. Thank you to the wonderful NOTL community for helping with this project."

That includes Crossroads Kindergarten classes, where students have been learning about giving back to the community, and put together 54 stockings, says King, while the Niagara Lions Club, under the direction of Dorothy Soo Wiens put together 23 stockings.

The Wind group of restaurants had 40 to fill, and on Fri-

Continued on page 19



Caitlyn Darte drops off stockings filled to the brim for Joan King to distribute to NOTL long-term care homes. (Penny Coles)

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Chelsea Bilton, Megan Carr, Shaina Piquette, Drew Bellefeuille, and Michael Dyck, unloaded about 40 stockings for residents of Heritage Place. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Chelsy W., Cody C., Nicky L., Laura O., Emily V., and Shivam V. helped unload 110 stockings and stuffed animals for residents of Niagara Long-term care.

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St. Davids woman shopped to fill seniors' hearts with stuffed Teddy bears

Continued from page 17

day, just before the deliveries were to be made, Linda from St. Davids dropped off bags of large stuffed animals she had

collected by ordering online and driving around to various stores. All bins were donated by Lauren Kruitbosch, a town employee.

With help from such a car-

ing community supporting her initiative, King says, "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."



Denise Murphy, director of Care, Lauren Adamson, screener, Marg Lambert, administrator, and Blair Durward, screener at Upper Canada Lodge helped unload the stocking delivery and were looking forward to passing them around to about 80 residents. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Bonnie Bagnulo and Trish Anthony of NOTL Community Palliative Care Service put handmade hearts into Christmas cards, one for each of the stockings delivered to long-term care residents Friday.



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Renowned author visits NOTL, loves it

Penny Coles
The Local

British historian and biographer Matthew Sturgis paid a short visit to Niagara-on-the-Lake recently, with his wife Rebecca Hossack.

They were in town to visit with long-time friend Sis Weld, their first time experiencing all that NOTL has to offer.

It won't be their last, says Sturgis, who while here, had an opportunity to speak to a small gathering of about 50 people about his newest book, *Oscar: A Life*, at an event hosted by Weld.

"I gave a short talk about Oscar Wilde, and his relationship with Canada," recounts Sturgis. Wilde travelled across North America in 1882, and included several speaking engagements in Ontario, explains Sturgis.

Wilde was fond of Canada, and enjoyed the intelligence of his audiences.

His topics during that tour included aestheticism and home decor — "not that Sis has any need for lessons," Sturgis laughed, sharing his admiration of her lovely home, where she is surrounded by

beauty.

Sturgis quotes one of Wilde's earliest well-known sayings, from his days as a student: "I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china."

He explains that Wilde liked to surround himself with beauty, which he equated with his blue china.

Weld, he says, has taken Wilde to heart — in her beautiful home, and the objects she has chosen to decorate it.

Hossack, an artist and gallerist, and Weld met 40 years ago in London, England, when they were both attending a Christie's Fine Arts lecture series, and formed a friendship there.

They reconnected again by chance about 10 years ago, when Hossack was in Toronto to attend an International Art Fair.

She was sitting having her hair done, when the hairdresser learned about her love for art and turned to introduce her to the woman who was sitting next to her, who was Sis Weld.

Sturgis, who earned a degree in history at the University of Oxford and has written art criticism,

travel pieces and book reviews for several distinguished magazines and British newspapers, has received highly favourable reviews for his biography of Wilde. One British reviewer said in *Oscar: A Life*, Sturgis is "a tremendous orchestrator of material, fastidious, unhurried, indefatigable."

Another called it "sympathetic and insightful," and "much better" than the last major biography of Wilde published 30 years ago.

It has been described as 'the fullest, most textural, most accurate—most human—account of Oscar Wilde's unique and dazzling life, based on extensive new research and newly discovered materials.'

Perhaps one of the best parts of the visit to NOTL, says Sturgis, was discovering the town itself. "It's been exciting to be here, and we certainly will come back," suggesting maybe as soon as next year, when Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* is on the Shaw Festival playbill.

"We have fallen in love with this town. It's the most civilized place in the world," he says.



Author Matthew Sturgis, with his wife Rebecca Hossack (right), visited NOTL resident Sis Weld recently, where Sturgis was invited to talk to a gathering about his most recent book, a biography of Oscar Wilde. (Photo supplied)

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New Years Eve (December 31st):	9am - 3pm	New Years Eve (December 31st):	9:30am - 3pm
New Years Day (January 1st):	CLOSED	New Years Day (January 1st):	CLOSED
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Christmas comes to NOTL



Susan Sparrow Mace, Ellen Williams, Helene Felton, Cindy Grant, Roger Hicks, Pauline Meyler, Pat Hicks, Marilyn Richard and Dinie Muste were at Newark Neighbours Friday morning to oversee the distribution of gifts and food for those requiring help at Christmas. Two rows down the sides of the thrift shop were piled with boxes and gifts to be delivered. The community donations have been overwhelming, says food bank manager Cindy Grant, and with the help of volunteers, 48 homes were going to receive deliveries, with about 140 people to receive food. (Penny Coles)



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Ken Reid says goodbye and thank you to community

Penny Coles
The Local

With a contract that expires at the end of the month, Ken Reid wants to thank the community he has worked with for 22 years, and the many people he has come to know.

The canine control officer has been on a bit of a roller coaster of emotions the last two months or so, from the time he was surprised to learn the town was looking for proposals for a much larger package of services than he could provide.

When he read what the town was looking for, he realized it was way beyond the scope of anything he could provide, but hoped there might be some role he could continue to play.

However the time to submit proposals has passed, and his days of service to the town are running out.

"There's not much I can do about it," he says. "I've come to terms with it. I've been given my official 30 days notice, delivered to my home, so I guess that's it."

He believes he is at least owed two weeks' holidays, according to the terms of his contract, but there is some discussion about that at the town as well, over whether he is a contractor or a contract employee, that detail to be worked out.

However, at this point he's



Ken Reid, who has been assisted by his partner Lise Walton in recent years, says thank you to the community he loved to serve. (Penny Coles)

more concerned about the dogs and their owners who might need help in the coming weeks.

"I don't know what's going to happen, who is going to take over in January," he says.

He is sorry to see the town moving away from its small-town community spirit, when he would hear that a dog was running loose, or one was missing, and would know from experience where to find it, without issuing fines or costing the dog owner kennel charges for overnight stays at the Niagara Falls SPCA and Humane Society.

The town has said it was following its procurement policy for contracted services, and is planning to provide a "more comprehensive level of service for the growing needs and expectations of the community, covering all animal control-related functions," including domestic animals, livestock, and wild animals within the municipality, with a staffed, 24-hour service that includes kennel facilities.

There were two proposals in the procurement process made to the Town of Grimsby, the lead on the RFP, with NOTL considering sharing

services with Grimsby.

The Lincoln County Humane Society was the awarded vendor, the other the Niagara SPCA and Humane Society.

Town staff is compiling and reviewing the necessary contractor documentation from the successful proponent, with further details to be provided to council and the public once the award process is completed.

As disappointed as Reid remains that this job he has loved for more than two decades is coming to an end — and in the town for not informing him until weeks after the request for proposals for animal control

had been posted publicly — he is really trying to go out on a positive note.

"I've had years of support from the community, doing a job I've loved. I didn't hand out fines, I negotiated with people, and got compliance with the bylaws that way. I never handed out one fine. I just worked with people and solved problems through negotiation. I was always able to do that, even if it took me a few tries."

"I really want to thank the community for their support," he continues. "It was the support of the community that kept me going for 22 years."

Reid was known for often going beyond his job description and the hours he worked — sometimes just helping seniors who would call him when they had an animal control problem.

"I've developed a relationship with the community, and I do what I can to help."

He's someone who loves helping people, has a background working with them in challenging situations as an auxiliary police officer, and also has a love of animals. He raised dogs himself for a time, and was always the person to take in an orphaned or injured animal. His partner, Lise Walton, jokes about the way he talks to their dogs, and Reid is convinced there is a mutual understanding.

As his days as canine control officer wind down, Reid says he has no plans for the new year. He will take it easy for a bit, maybe for the month of January, before making any decisions.

A Facebook page Walton set up to help connect dogs to their owners will also be shut down at the end of the month, she says. "People message me, and Ken may not even have to go out. He'll recognize the dog and call the owner, and be able to connect them, sometimes within a couple of hours. That's been a big bonus to the community."

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(also Senior's Day)
December 31: 9 - 5
January 1: Closed
January 2: Back to regular business hours



Classics, Christmas music at Exchange Brewery

A small group of Music Niagara supporters enjoyed the music of a trio from the Toronto All-Star Big Band Sunday afternoon, upstairs at The Exchange Brewery. Alicia Oliver (vocals) Jesse Whitely (piano) and Riley Maguire on saxophone ran through a number of big band classics and Christmas songs for the annual Holiday Big Band Experience. *(Mike Balsom)*

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SCHOOLS ROYAL OAK COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Royal Oak suspends in-class learning this week

The Royal Oak Community School, operating out of the former hospital building on Wellington Street, has decided to finish the last four days of the term with virtual learning.

“We were seeing local outbreaks and cases in schools,

and realized we had a nice opportunity to keep our community online and safe before the holidays. Not an easy decision to make, but I believe it was the best one possible with the information and doubling cases every few days,” says head-of-school Julia Murray.



Pinecone, Royal Oak’s Elf, is a focus of student writing in December. Students have been writing letters to Pinecone, drawing maps of the school and her location each day, and asking Pinecone to deliver their letters to Santa. (Photos supplied)



Students at Royal Oak were happy to get vaccinated when they were eligible.



Some of the Early Years students show their holiday spirit.



Students in Grades 5 and 6 learned about different holiday celebrations and cultures, and then created holiday art representing these cultures, including decorations in their art class.



SCHOOLS ST. MICHAEL CATHOLIC SCHOOL

St. Mike students give back to community

Project: Give a Gift was initiated by the student leadership of St. Michael Catholic Elementary School, looking to give back to their local community.

Classes donated gifts throughout the month of December. Project Share collects unwrapped gifts and distributes them in the Niagara area and were recipients of the St. Mike’s students’ donations.

“As a school,” says principal Barretto Mendonca, “we wanted to make sure that children would have gifts to open

this Christmas. Each class selected gifts corresponding with their own age. Who better to know what peers would like?”

Cash donations were converted to gift cards. About 250 gifts were donated - it was a successful campaign, says Mendonca.

“As a Catholic school, we always focus on giving as the true reason for the season. Well done, student council for the wonderful initiative, and St. Michael families for responding so generously.”



Stevie Pillitteri-Smith, Asher Zimmerman, Charlotte Regier, and Grace Vani help with the Give a Gift project.



St. Mike students Madison Morgan, Anna Pillitteri-Smith and Sienna Lalonde show their Christmas Spirit day.



St. Mike’s Isaac Trapass has a gift to give. (Photos supplied)



Roc Mastromatteo, Enzo Cruz, Madeline Bruce, and Maria Francis with gifts for those in need.



Brett Hubbard, Lucas Pillitteri, Tyler LeBrosseur, Ella deSouza and Ella Cwierniewski participate in their Christmas project.

Project Imagine a labour of love to help others

Penny Coles
The Local

Imagine feeling alone in a room full of people, shivering with fright and cold while having chemotherapy treatment coursing through your body to fight a deadly disease... and then having a warm, brightly-coloured blanket, hand-made by someone who cares, wrapped around you.

Imagine being hospitalized for mental health problems, feeling scared, alone and unloved, until someone presents you with a gift made especially for you.

That is the goal of Project Imagine, as envisioned by Monica Oppenlaender when she found herself laid up for a few months with a foot so badly broken it had to be reconstructed, and turned to crocheting to keep herself busy.

It was a craft her mother had shown her decades earlier — one she had never taken to — but before long, with time on her hands, she had crocheted enough squares to make a blanket, and then several others, with plans to give them to family members.

Until a suggestion from her daughter to donate them to those in need made her take a “leap of faith,” and sent her on a journey to help others who would welcome the warmth, as well as the love that goes into each crocheted square.

At first, she looked online for a charity she could give them to, but finding only a model in the U.S. that wasn't available locally, she decided to create her own.

From there, she created Project Imagine to “bring hope, love, and comfort” to chemotherapy patients at the Walker Cancer Centre in the St. Catharines hospital. With her friend, Linda Gray, onboard, the project was expanded to include those in the mental health unit at the hospital, providing them too with blankets “made by many hands.”

They also receive requests from people who know someone going through a difficult time who would benefit from a blanket, and that aspect of their work adds the personal touch they were hoping to achieve when they began.

As more women came onboard, knitting or crocheting nine by nine-inch squares — it takes 20 to make a blanket — others began donating completed blankets.

Over the last four years, they've had about 200 women help out, with a group of 20 who consistently knit or crochet for them. Gray, the quilter, says she would love to have more volunteers offer to help make blankets for babies and children. A group of volunteers used to meet at a St. Catharines church to make quilts, but it's become a much smaller group due to COVID. Many of the volunteers, though, have formed their own teams with



Monica Oppenlaender has closets full of material and yarn, but her supplies go out to be made into blankets as quickly as they come in. The closet she is displaying could be empty in a week, she says. (Photos by Penny Coles)

family members or friends, and meet to work together.

And yet more supporters donate acrylic yarn to distribute to those who want to help, but can't afford to buy the supplies, says Oppenlaender, or can't get out to buy them. She also encourages her knitters and crocheters to ask family to purchase supplies for them, as a way of getting them involved.

At any one time, Oppenlaender has about 200 blankets ready to distribute, and many, many kits of yarn — a craft room in her home, an office and two bedrooms are all filled with closets of supplies, boxes of blankets, and containers with kits of yarn to be distributed for knitting or crocheting squares, and more kits of squares ready to be made into blankets.

“When someone calls to say they can use 40 blankets, I never have to tell them they'll have to wait. I always have some ready to go,” she says.

The kits are delivered to volunteers, locally and across the region, at the rate of about 20 per week.

As important as the warmth of the blanket itself, says Oppenlaender, is the message that comes with it, that others have cared enough to make it, with love, and that says, “you are not alone.”

Patients will also receive a card with all the contributors to the blanket, showing them the love and support they have through their journey.

The blankets, each one unique, let patients know that they are “special, unique and one of a kind,” she says.

COVID, of course, has affected their project. They haven't been able to go into the hospital to deliver blankets themselves. The gift store at the Walker Cancer Centre, which has many items for patients who can pick them out at no charge, used to also stock their blankets, but is closed. Howev-

er, they have been allowed into the mental health unit off and on throughout the pandemic, and just recently dropped off 110 blankets — one for every single patient in the unit.

“It's one of the most rewarding things we do, going into the mental health unit to deliver blankets personally, and seeing how much they mean to the patients. It calms their anxiety, just by showing them someone cares about them. And when you show people you value them, they value themselves.”

One young woman, Oppenlaender recalls, started to cry when they asked her to choose a blanket — she chose one with the word ‘love’ on it, and told them they were the only visitors she'd seen.

“All we could do was hug her, and she continued to run to greet us whenever we were there, running down the hall to us for a hug.”

They've also established a relationship with the staff on the unit, and this year were able to give out gift cards to patients and staff, provided by Huebel Grapes Estates.

There are several avenues open for someone who wants to be involved in the project — making squares is one way. As long as they're made from a washable, medium-sized yarn, they don't have to be any particular pattern, and they will be made into kits and given to women who will stitch them together.

“We always have squares

coming in,” says Oppenlaender, “We try to co-ordinate them into colours, mixing and matching, depending on what we have, and although I'm not always sure when I send them out, I'm totally in awe, surprised and amazed by how beautiful they are when they come back as blankets.”

They also have scarves, hats and mittens ready to donate to organizations that don't need blankets, and supplies for those who volunteer to knit them.

In turn, the volunteers feel they are doing something useful, especially during the pandemic, putting their time, efforts and creativity into something that not only keeps them busy but is very much appreciated by the recipients —

the pandemic hasn't lessened the need.

“All the credit goes to our volunteers,” says Oppenlaender. “They are the heart and soul of Project Imagine.”

Even children and grandchildren can be taught to knit or crochet squares — it's a great way to learn, says Oppenlaender.

For those who would like to help, donations of yarn would be appreciated, as would flannel and receiving blankets to be used as backing for the quilts.

For more information, to request a blanket, or offer to help in some way, email monicaoppie@icloud.com.

As Oppenlaender says, “imagine the possible, one square at a time.”



Linda Gray and Monica Oppenlaender display two blankets they've made, Gray's is a quilt for a child, and Oppenlaender's a crocheted blanket that will go to someone who needs it.

Local SPORTS

Predators close out 2021 with a loss

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

The Niagara Predators winning streak ended last Sunday at 11 games, after losing on the road to the North York Renegades, 5-3.

Their penultimate Greater Metro Junior A Hockey League (GMHL) game of the 2021 calendar year Friday saw Alexander Insulander catch fire for five goals and an assist against Windsor en route to a 12-4 shel-

lacking of the Aces in Virgil.

Insulander's linemates Jesper Eriksson, with two goals and four assists, and Georgy Kholmovsky, with four assists, combined for 16 points, while Noah Caperchione notched two goals and two assists to help out. Singles were added by Reese Bisci, Dante Massi and Alessandro Massi, while Kory Silverio scored all four Windsor goals on Niagara's Jacob Collaco.

It was a game that saw only one penalty assessed, to Wind-

sor's Jaxon Boucher, for a delay of game in the first period. The Aces once again played with a short bench, with two reserve goaltenders and two skaters, one of whom was injured and saw no ice time Friday. That left them with only three forwards and three defencemen to rotate in and out of the game.

Windsor head coach Joe Byrne admitted that he was frustrated with the situation the team commonly finds themselves in for road games.

"The guys we have here tonight, they're hard workers," Byrne pointed out. "They have great attitudes. We have trouble with a number of high-end players who don't take it seriously. This weekend there were some kids writing exams, and some were injured. But there are several we really believe should be here, and said they would be here, and they were no-shows."

Friday's game was much different than the Dec. 10 game between the two teams, when the Aces, with the aid of two pick-ups from the Plattsville Lakers, pushed the Predators to an 8-8 tie in the third period, before Niagara scored three times for an 11-8 win. Their stretch offence paid off in that game, and was responsible for all four of Friday's markers.

"People sometimes question



Georgy Kholmovsky drives toward the Windsor net with Jesper Eriksson following. (Mike Balsom)

Meet the Predators

Name:
Dawson Walker

Jersey number: 3

Age: 18

Birthdate:
Jan 16, 2003

Hometown:
Niagara Falls

Nickname:
Walks

Favourite hockey player:
Brad Marchand

Favourite 'hype' song:
One,
by Metallica

Other sports you play:
Soccer

Favourite "cheat" meal:
Pizza

Secret talent:
I can clap very, very fast



our run-and-gun style," said Byrne. "Sure, it spreads their guys too. We have some pretty high-end offensive players, and I don't like to shut them down. That's a good hockey team, the Predators, and we want to try and give them a good hockey game."

The Predators had a new skater wearing the captain's 'C' this weekend. Defenceman Pontus Madsen took over the role in place of Mario Zitella, who was asked to leave the team until he gets his COVID vaccinations in order.

"I'm pretty strict when it comes to health and safety," Turnbull said Friday. "I do my due diligence and I check everything. He needs to be vaccinated. He's a classy individual, and a tremendous player. Hopefully he decides to get his vaccinations sooner rather than later. I think the world of him, and I told him I would do anything to help him out."

Madsen was a natural choice to wear the 'C' in the meantime.

"It's the respect he gets, and the way he plays," Turnbull explained. "No defencemen had a letter, and when I coach, a defenceman always has a letter. He's been instrumental in our success. He controls the defensive side, he's the motor on the back end."

On Sunday, general manager Johan Eriksson said the Predators came out a bit flat, allowing North York to set the pace in the first period. The Renegades jumped out to a 4-0 lead by the first minute of the second

period, before Kholmovsky scored the first of his two goals. Defenceman Brett Lee added a third in the losing cause.

"It was frustrating," Eriksson lamented. "We weren't on our toes. They got a few easier goals in. The second period was a bit better, and we dominated in the third. We could have turned things around had that happened a bit earlier, but it was too late."

Eriksson said the team was feeling the loss of Zitella, a natural leader who has amassed 17 goals and 25 assists over 23 games. He's holding out hope that he will return to the ranks early in the new year.

Turnbull admitted Friday that the Windsor game took the focus away from preparation to take on the first place Renegades Sunday. The road loss that day leaves them still looking for their first win against North York, and they will face second place St. George and third place Durham in four of their first five games once the GMHL schedule resumes in January.

With Niagara in fourth place with a 19-and-5 record, Eriksson relishes the upcoming opportunities for the Preds to play against the teams ahead of them in the South Division standings.

"At this point, it's not win or lose, it's win or learn," Eriksson told The Local. "The loss shows us exactly what we need to work on. We have a level we need to get up to. We need to step it up. Those four games will really show us exactly where we're at. We need to find a way to win all of them."

Eriksson is certain that new acquisitions, such as Jaleel Adams and the tough, physical forward Jason Humphries will allow them to do just that.

"Humphries is a point-a-game player, but it's his defensive side, and his physicality, that I really like. He plays the game the right way, he doesn't cheat. He goes first on the puck, he can take a hit, he can give one. We need that kind of guy for playoff-style hockey."

With nearly three weeks before their next game, some of the players will be heading back to Europe or the United States for the holidays. With the uncertain COVID landscape internationally, that creates concerns for both Turnbull and Eriksson about the availability of those players next month.

As well, the Bancroft Rockhounds, Durham Roadrunners, South Muskoka Shield and Tottenham Thunder have all had games postponed in recent weeks due to players testing positive for the virus. Though the GMHL has not yet demanded that all players be vaccinated, that may be coming soon. The spectre of the league shutting down temporarily is also a very real concern.

"There's a lot of uncertainty," Eriksson said. "We have to roll with the punches. With COVID, we can't plan much. Right now we're doing whatever we can to continue to play hockey. But that could change tomorrow."

The Predators' next game is scheduled for Friday, Jan. 7 at home against the St. George Ravens.



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's Community and Development department is currently recruiting for the following:

SCHOOL CROSSING GUARDS

The School Crossing Guard, under the direction of the Supervisor of Enforcement, will primarily be responsible for preserving the safety of school children.

School Crossing Guards must: be reliable and have good character disposition; possess good hearing and visual skills; have the ability to control students; assess traffic flow and react quickly; be physically fit and able to stand and walk continuously. This position is required to work outside in all weather conditions.

Candidates are to be available Monday to Friday to work on school days for 3.75 hours per day including before school, during lunch and after school. Must possess a Vulnerable Sector police clearance certificate and be available for mandatory training.

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is an equal opportunity employer. Accommodations for job applicants with disabilities are available on request. Please submit your resume to sarah.stevens@notl.com no later than **January 3, 2022**.

www.notl.com

We thank all applicants for their interest however only those selected for an interview will be contacted.

Local WORSHIP

CORNERSTONE
COMMUNITY CHURCH

Friday, December 24th

2:30, 4:30 & 6:30 p.m.

Christmas Eve Worship Gathering
Online & In-Person (Registration Required)
Child care for ages 5 & under

Sunday, December 26th

10:00am Worship Gathering
Online & In-Person (Registration Required)
No child care for this service
Message Kevin Bayne -
Hoping & Waiting

Our services are also streamed online Sunday's
at 10 AM. Visit our website for more information!
www.ccchurch.ca

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63						64				65				

- Across:**
- 1 Distant
 - 6 Apex
 - 9 Jobs
 - 14 "ER" actress --- Tierney
 - 15 "--- Believer", Monkees hit
 - 16 Start playing!
 - 17 Tap
 - 19 "Fear of Flying" author --- Jong
 - 20 Snow runner
 - 21 Less common
 - 22 Buoyant
 - 23 Old-fashioned cab
 - 25 Lightweight tropical hats
 - 27 Elite group
 - 28 Gene Pitney was only 24hrs from here
 - 29 Downloadable program
 - 32 Small lake
 - 34 Natter
 - 35 Tenor --- Bocelli
 - 37 Sidestepped
 - 39 Splendors
 - 40 Demeanor
 - 41 Total
 - 42 Capital of Norway
 - 43 Source of formic acid
 - 44 Jambalaya ingredient
 - 46 Little one
 - 47 "Band of Gold" singer
 - 18 Rotating engine part
 - 24 Welcome
 - 26 Old Testament song
 - 28 Silver
 - 29 Nobleman
 - 30 Rind
 - 31 --- doble (dance)
 - 32 One of the Three Bears
 - 33 "--- Almighty", in which Morgan Freeman played God
 - 34 Nixon's successor, informally
 - 36 Drivel
 - 38 At peace
 - 39 Rev up
 - 41 --- Todd, barber
 - 45 Chest pain
 - 46 Am disposed
 - 47 Serenity
 - 48 Pro
 - 49 Gun handle nick
 - 50 Notices
 - 51 Get outta here!
 - 52 "--- want is a room somewhere..." ("My Fair Lady")
 - 53 Bridal wear
 - 55 Start of a Hamlet soliloquy
 - 59 Geological time composed of periods
- Down:**
- 1 Pennsylvania Mennonites
 - 2 Sri ---, formerly Ceylon
 - 3 Ahead of the field
 - 4 Mineral source
 - 5 Litter of pigs
 - 6 Bracket
 - 7 Stimulus
 - 8 Security detachment
 - 9 Anna Paquin won an Oscar for this film, aged 11
 - 10 Spanish winds
 - 11 The pen
 - 12 Recoil
 - 13 Remain

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	5	8		2				

OBITUARY



BARNES, GIUSTINA—Peacefully, on December 16, 2021 at the Greater Niagara General Hospital at the age of 97.

Beloved wife of the late Maurice (1998). Loving mother of Viola Barnes (Andre Castel). Dear sister of Menica Colantoni.

Giustina was born in Italy and met her future husband while he was serving in the British Army during the Second World War. Shortly after the war, they moved to England where they lived for many years before immigrating to Canada in 1956.

Giustina was a member of the NOTL Lawn Bowling Club for many years, and she will be missed by many friends.

Special thanks to the doctors and nurses at GNGH for their excellent care.

Cremation has taken place. Due to current pandemic restrictions, a private family graveside will be held at a later date. For those who wish, memorial donations may be made to the Shriners Hospital for Children - Canada. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.



IN MEMORIAM

ANDRES, ART

JUNE 22, 1936 - DECEMBER 31, 2017



In loving memory of a wonderful husband, father, uncle and brother who passed away into God's Glory four years ago, Dec. 31, 2017.

So have a Merry Christmas,
And wipe away that tear,
Remember, I'm spending Christmas
With Jesus Christ this year.

Lovingly remembered by Helen and family and by Fred and Betty and family.

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 15, 2021**

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

Across: 1 Aloof, 6 Tip, 9 Tasks, 14 Maura, 15 I'm a, 16 Hit it, 17 Intercept, 19 Erica, 20 Ski, 21 Rare, 22 Perk, 23 Hansom, 25 Tops, 27 Few, 28 Tulsa, 29 App, 32 Mere, 34 Gas, 35 Andrea, 37 Avoided, 39 Glories, 40 Manner, 41 Sum, 42 Oslo, 43 Ant, 44 Prawn, 46 Tot, 47 Payne, 48 Felons, 51 Saver, 54 Get on, 56 Cop, 57 Cleat, 58 In order to, 60 Alice, 61 Neb, 62 Tract, 63 Tiled, 64 Aye, 65 Oaths.

Down: 1 Amish, 2 Lanika, 3 Out in front, 4 Ore, 5 Farrow, 6 Tier, 7 Impetus, 8 Patrol, 9 The piano, 10 Aires, 11 Stit, 12 Kick, 13 Stay, 18 Cam, 24 See in, 26 Psalm, 28 Tad, 29 Aristocrat, 30 Peel, 31 Paso, 32 Mama, 33 Evan, 34 Gery, 36 Droll, 38 Departed, 39 Gun, 41 Sweeney, 45 Angina, 46 Tend to, 47 Peace, 48 For, 49 Notch, 50 Spots, 51 Scat, 52 All, 53 Veil, 55 To be, 59 Era.

Local SPORTS

COVID shuts down minor hockey over holidays

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Both the Meridian Credit Union and Centennial Arenas went dark Saturday morning for Niagara-on-the-Lake Minor Hockey Association, with all games and practices can-

celled until Jan. 3.

A telephone vote was held Friday evening following a few positive test results from some local players. The timing of the virtual meeting also coincided with the province's announcement of new COVID-19 restrictions.

Club vice-president Peter Flynn says the vote was unanimous, 13-0, to stay off the ice until after New Year's Eve.

"Most teams only had one game left before Christmas," Flynn says. "COVID had hit the young teams, the unvaccinated kids. We had one kid test

positive from the U11 BB team. But the day he tested positive, there were four kids from the AE team playing with them, so that affected two teams."

As well, Flynn says the father of the child who tested positive is also the coach of the peewee BB team, while his oth-

er two sons play on two teams from the older age groups. Then, one of the U8 coaches tested positive as well.

"Niagara Health told the father that his family and everyone who was in the dressing room had to get tested and then quarantine for 10 days, and anyone with secondary contact had to watch for symptoms. Then another kid from the U8 Local League team tested positive, too."

With so many interactions spread amongst a number of age groups, the board met Friday and decided to shut things down over a time period that would accommodate the 10-day quarantine edict.

"We felt bad that people were going to miss their holidays," Flynn adds. "If they're locked up in quarantine, you can't even do whatever you were going to do with your family members. We figured, seven days before Christmas it's better to just pause it until Jan. 3."

By Sunday, Flynn had received communication from the Ontario Minor Hockey Association that the Port Colborne and Glanaster clubs, both of whom play against NOTL teams, had also paused their schedule for the holidays.

Flynn says two NOTL teams

are scheduled to play in tournaments out of town on Dec. 27 and 28. The atom BB team is entered in a St. Catharines tournament, while the midget Local League team is expected for a Niagara Falls event. The timing is such that the quarantine period would be over, allowing the teams to participate.

"The day they are done they would be able to go to the tournament," explains Flynn. "I talked to both hosts and they said they will still take the teams for the tournament. I suggested maybe that they do rapid tests. If the tournaments are still a go, both coaches will email the parents and see what they want to do. If they want to go, then we will allow them to go."

With vaccinations only recently available for children aged five to 11 years old, many of the children playing in the NOTL minor hockey system are still in the process of getting their first shots. That potentially leaves some of the unvaccinated players at risk in the close setting of a dressing room.

"We've been on top of things with minor hockey," Flynn says. "Basically, we just shut it down so people won't be missing the holidays. We don't want to be responsible for people missing Christmas."



All minor hockey team games and practices, including the U11 skaters who focus on skills rather than scores, will be cancelled over the holidays. (Mike Balsom)



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