

# The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



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Street artists  
identified  
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## Outpouring of love

Joan King, at the community centre Friday, was overwhelmed with the support for what began as a simple project to fill about 80 stockings for Upper Canada Lodge, and expanded to more than 200 stockings overflowing with gifts for seniors at all three long-term care homes in NOTL. (Penny Coles)



## Upper Canada Lodge staff appreciate community support

Penny Coles  
The Local

While we hear about some of the local initiatives to support staff and residents in long-term care during the pandemic, there is also much that goes on behind the scenes, all of it welcome by staff and residents.

Marg Lambert, administrator of Upper Canada Lodge, says the regional home has received “tremendous support” from residents’ families, and the Niagara community, “that has been greatly appreciated by all the staff and residents at the home.”

“We have received financial donations that we use for ongoing staff appreciation

events as a way to say thank you to our staff from the families for their hard work throughout the pandemic,” she says.

The beautiful outdoor holiday displays were made possible because of donations of lights and decorations from the local community, families and staff of the lodge.

“Members of the NOTL Garden Club decorated our gazebo this year with garlands and boughs, which was greatly appreciated, and we also received many Christmas cards for our residents from students and staff of UCL. The stockings that the community put together for our residents this year is amazing. We are so incredibly appreciative

of the amazing support at Christmas, and all throughout the year.”

Some of that support comes as COVID-19 has highlighted how challenging the job of protecting seniors has become. But that’s not just a local issue, says Lambert. “I think it is accurate to say that the whole world now understands how difficult the job is for every staff member working in long-term care.”

If there is any benefit to come of the pandemic, she says, it’s that long-term care may finally receive funding support to increase staffing levels, which has been needed for many years.

Across the region, and the province, staffing is now

becoming a problem in hospitals and long-term care homes, as more staff become infected in the community, or are having to isolate because someone in the family has tested positive.

“I think the most difficult part of our job right now is every week, when we test all of our staff for COVID-19, we wait to see if we are going to make it through another week with all negative results, and stay outbreak-free. It is a bit nerve-racking,” says Lambert.

“I think we all feel that we have a responsibility to ensure we are providing the best care possible to keep our residents



Upper Canada Lodge administrator Marg Lambert, and Michael Donaghue, resident council president, admire the stockings stuffed to the brim and delivered by volunteers. (Photo supplied)

Continued on page 3



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# Message couldn't be more clear: stay home

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

The provincial announcement of a lockdown starting Boxing Day is welcome news, says Dr. Mustafa Hirji, but he would have liked to see it happen sooner.

"I think the timing is a little bit too late. I think it is perhaps a missed opportunity that they didn't announce it Friday, and that they're going to wait four and a half days before it actually happens," the Niagara acting medical officer of health said earlier this week.

Instead, Friday's announcement included the news that Niagara would move into the red zone Monday, increasing limits on businesses this week, until Boxing Day restrictions, similar to the lockdown we experienced in March, come into effect.

Hirji references statistics indicating that with the current growth rate of COVID-19 cases in Ontario, the delay of the lockdown by seven days adds up to 45,000-plus new cases. "Once they'd made the decision, they shouldn't have delayed putting it in place. That delay means literally tens of thousands of additional cases, and probably hundreds of people being hospitalized."

With the lockdown in place, the most important step for Public Health is getting across the message that people really should stay home, the way we did in the spring, says Hirji.

"We all need to stay home, and limit contact with other people, so we get the full benefit of this lockdown, so we don't come to the end of January and have it extended longer, or get to February or March where we need to go back into lockdown because this one wasn't effective."

He's concerned that during the week of delay between the announcement and when the lockdown be-

gins on Boxing Day, "some people might rush out and do what we asked them not to do. It really doesn't make a lot of sense to me. The decision was that we need to go into lockdown, and we should have done it right away."

What will ultimately bring the number of cases down is not so much restriction on businesses, which will be closed with the exception of those which are essential services, but having people follow through with the advice "to stay home and not be out interacting with other people. That's what's really going to matter," says Hirji.

Niagara hospitals and long-term care homes "are stretched," losing staff not necessarily because they have COVID-19, but likely because someone in their household is infected and they need to isolate so they're not taking it to work with them, he says.

Resources for contact tracing have also been stretched, and staff are not managing to follow up on 100 per cent of the cases, he says. "This is the first time that's happened."

They're not doing as thorough a job as they were, concentrating on trying to contact everyone rather than getting information about patterns and trends and how people are being infected. "That's information we no longer have time to collect," says Hirji.

Last weekend and early this week saw record numbers of cases in Niagara Region, beginning with 126 recorded last Saturday, more than double any other day since the pandemic started. Sunday saw another 92 new cases, Monday 82 more. There were just 35 new cases on Tuesday.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, Tuesday's number of cases to date reached 82, up from 71 the week before. It was another leap after months of slowly increasing numbers,

typically one or two a week, and many weeks with no new reports. One resident was part of a hospital outbreak, and others were within households, with a little bit of spread from friends or co-workers, very much the same kind of pattern as everywhere else, says Hirji.

Across the region, more than 50 per cent of the cases of the last two weeks are linked to outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes, and to a lesser extent, hospitals, says Hirji. Infection rates rise in those settings because there are more cases in the community, he says.

Typically, a staff person, or a family member who's visiting a loved one, has been infected in the community and brings it in. "When cases go up in the community, I think it's unavoidable, and then it becomes a matter of how we control those outbreaks when they happen."

While visiting is restricted in long-term care homes, it's not entirely prohibited, he says, "and rightly so. I would be very reluctant to say people who are at the end of their life are not allowed to spend time with their loved ones, so there is some limited visiting still happening." Visitors and staff are being tested regularly, he says, but it's not a foolproof method, with a lapse in time before results are known. "You just can't catch 100 per cent of the cases. And when there are more cases in the community, there is going to be greater risk that some infections are going to get into the homes."

Other than those specific outbreaks, which earlier this week included 11 hospital units, long-term care and retirement homes across the region, the spread in the community has been similar to what we've seen in the past few weeks, says Hirji, involving households, people socializing with friends, co-workers and extended family.

As we head into the holidays, Hirji says his overwhelming reaction to what is happening is sadness. "It's really unfortunate we're in a situation where something really dramatic like this is needed to bring COVID-19 under control. I think it's unfortunate that there are lots of people who are going to really struggle through the next four weeks with this lockdown. There are going to be people who are for sure going to be out of work and no longer have an income. Lots of people are going to be struggling with social isolation, and heading into the holiday season is the worst time for this to be happening. Lots of businesses are going to have to shutter temporarily, and many of them are already struggling."

The lockdown needs to happen to bring COVID under control, he says, but stresses it's only going to have the intended benefit "if it's also coupled with all of us taking the advice to stay home, limiting our time outside of the home, limiting our interactions with other people. If we continue to still interact with other people, still find ways to visit other people, we're not going to get the benefit of the lockdown. And if we don't

bring cases down we'll be in the same situation as the U.K., where they just headed into their third lockdown, or France, which had to extend their lockdown."

Hirji says front-line workers, in public health, in long-term care homes, and in hospitals won't be getting much of a break over the holiday. "Staff in health care

are not going to have a very happy Christmas," he says. But those he worries most about are those who are going to be out of work, or are struggling with isolation and mental health issues.

"I think we really need to take the advice to heart, and just stay home. We should be doing it for everybody who is impacted by COVID."



Dr. Mustafa Hirji

## Town gives COVID update, explains restrictions

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

With Niagara now in the red zone, even if only for a week, there are some changes that have been made to public facilities.

And more are expected next week, Lord Mayor Betty Disero reported during her council update on COVID, encouraging residents to continue to be vigilant over the holidays.

CAO Marnie Cluckie explained the provincial lockdown that begins Saturday means restrictions are similar to the early days of the pandemic, with nonessential businesses closed, including bars, restaurants and retail locations, which may move to takeout or curbside pickups.

Recreation facilities also must close, although the

good news, she said, is that outdoor recreation amenities such as parks, tobogganing, outdoor skating and playgrounds can remain open.

Grocery stores, pharmacies and other essential businesses will remain open, but at 50 per cent capacity.

Indoor organized public events and social gatherings are prohibited, except for members of the same household, Cluckie said.

Residents are being reminded "to stay home to the fullest extent possible." Trips outside the home are limited to essential purposes, such as going out for food and medication, and work should be remote, also "to the greatest extent possible."

"We've been in a state of emergency for nine months now, which is bound to take a toll on mental health," she

said. Look online for mental health resources, "check in on neighbours, on your loved ones, and check in on yourselves as well."

Fire Chief Nick Ruller asked residents to refrain from driving unless it's necessary.

"One of our biggest concerns that we've had throughout this evolving pandemic has been the unintended consequences that can occur from simple things like nonessential travel."

That means "don't leave your home unless you're leaving for groceries, access to health care and things along those lines," said Ruller.

"A simple motor vehicle collision can involve several police officers, paramedics, and eight to 10 firefighters. We are putting our essential workers at risk if we don't abide by the recommendations of public health."

Ruller acknowledged "the steadfast service of our volunteer firefighters throughout the pandemic," and added, "we simply ask that you assist us in keeping them safe, and their families safe, throughout this, by adhering to public health recommendations."



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# Staff request: follow rules to reduce community cases

Continued from page 1

safe and well-cared for, but in some ways, we have also been more fortunate than most in that we are still able to work and get paid. We don't need to worry about paying the bills or buying groceries, which is a concern for so many others in the Niagara area right now. It's not all bad."

Staff morale has been up and down over the past 10 months, she says. "It was scary when it started, and we literally shut down, but we were fortunate. We had the ability to increase staffing and use redeployed staff from other Niagara Region divisions."

Over the summer, she says, "we settled into a routine, with the additional staffing that allowed us to really focus on our residents' needs, but then the direction changed and families were able to visit again." Although outdoor visits were a little nerve-racking at first, she says, "overall things went

well." But as restrictions were lifted, "it made the staff scared of relaxing the visiting rules."

They were nervous about the increased risk of visitors or family bringing COVID-19 into the home, which had remained free of outbreaks.

"Our staff had worked so hard to keep the virus out of the home, and had implemented so many safety precautions that we hoped would continue to work."

They have appreciated the diligence of families in following the rules, of which there were many when visiting the home, "but I believe they understood that we were doing everything we could to keep our residents and staff safe."

The support from residents' families, she says, "has been amazing. It has been very hard on the families as well when they were not able to see their loved ones, but we continue to receive emails and cards of support from our current families, and in some cases, families who no longer

have anyone living in the home."

Kristin Mechelse, program manager at Upper Canada Lodge, says although the pandemic has created challenges and the need for changes to their day, it has also provided opportunities for staff to do things differently, "and demonstrate what truly compassionate caregivers they are."

Recreation staff, for example, she says, "have had to completely change the way they provide programming opportunities for our residents. Since the pandemic caused visitor restrictions in our homes, our staff found a variety of different ways to keep our residents and family members connected through phone calls, Skype and FaceTime calls, window visits, emails and even pen pal letters."

The recreation staff at UCL stepped up "by working additional hours, learning new skills, providing not



Upper Canada Lodge is beautifully decorated for Christmas, thanks to donations of lights and decorations from the local community, families and staff of the lodge. Members of the NOTL Garden Club decorated the gazebo. (Photos supplied)

only meaningful and safe programming opportunities, but also emotional support, and even hair cuts for our residents."

Staff have gone "above and beyond," says Mechelse, "and we are very lucky to have such a dedicated group of staff in all departments of our home. I think our staff prove daily that this is not just a job. It is truly a passion for providing the best care possible for our seniors."

Asked how the public can show their support for front-line workers and residents in long-term care, Lambert answers, "I believe that the best way that everyone can help is by following the public health guidelines of wearing a mask, social distancing, washing your hands frequently, and finally staying home and only visiting with people in your household. I understand that it is Christmas, but we need to do these things to ensure that the pandemic does not get worse than it already is. The more community cases grow, the more it increases the risk of an outbreak in our home."

In addition, she says, when a vaccine is available to the public, "it would be a very good idea to get it."

Lambert says she's very excited the vaccines are available, and that access to long-term care staff and residents is a priority. She'll be the first in line to get it when it's time, she adds — staff will have to be vaccinated at the hospital where the vaccine will initially be stored. "We are currently working on the process for staff to get their vaccines."

Long-term care residents will be vaccinated in the home, once shipments of the vaccines that don't have to be kept frozen are available, she adds.



Amika Verwegen and her young son Kazuhiro Versteegen were at the community centre Friday to drop off more than 200 cards made by her three oldest children, Kazuhiro, 3, Yuna, 8, and Nova Versteegen, 9, along with neighbourhood kids Taleah Bucciachio, 10, Ella Wiens, 10, Naomi Wiens, 10, and Owen Nzouankeu, 11. Verwegen heard about King's stocking project and wanted to help by having hand-made cards for each stocking. When she heard how many, she says, she enlisted the help of other kids, and they got it done.



Marg Plato, Joan King, and NOTL Community Palliative Care Service executive director Bonnie Bagnulo help fill the stockings. Plato was adding cards made by local kids in a Town-organized contest, with five winners' cards printed and included in each stocking. Bagnulo was contributing beautiful red hearts knitted by palliative care volunteers. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Bev Wiebe and Marg Plato headed to the Niagara Long Term Care Residence on Wellington Street to deliver stockings for every resident.



Joan King shows off local author Bobbie Kalman's book, *Refugee Child*, a story of her experiences as a young girl during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. It includes three chapters about a very beautiful Christmas, when the very generous and kind people her family stayed with in Austria ensured she and her family had everything they could have asked for, and more. Kalman donated several books for the stockings.

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# Old Town entrance improvement project moving forward

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Gerry Kowalchuk wants the quaint, historic Old Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to leave a lasting impression on visitors, and after doing some research on similar towns around the world, decided the best way to accomplish that is to create an impressive focal point for people to see as they arrive.

He wants that to be his gift to the town he and his wife have come to love.

His goal became to create a “striking” entrance on Queen Street, a rejuvenation of the gateway to the Old Town, he says. He envisions a “symbolic representation” that will complement and enhance the town’s image with “landscaping excellence which reflects innovation and creativity.”

Other than that, he says he has no idea of what it should or will look like — that is a job for experts. He is also clear “there is nothing wrong with what is there,” but believes the important site could be improved with the help of a landscape architect firm.

Kowalchuk, who moved to NOTL a little more than a decade ago, says he is grateful for how his life has unfolded. As a way of paying forward to help others, in 2014, he set up a family fund with the Niagara Community Foundation. In



This 2019 photo shows the area to be rejuvenated, including the landscaping and the directional sign. (Photos supplied)

explaining his philanthropic endeavours through the foundation, he says he learned a strong work ethic and frugality from his parents, and through his early experiences, the value of “connecting with people,” all of which led to a variety of opportunities that culminated in a career as an investment advisor, from which he is now retired.

The fund, which he manages with one of his daughters, was created to help people in need achieve their goals, but Kowalchuk says he began some time ago to think long and hard about a donation he could bequeath to the town in his will. He initially envisioned it being spent on a community project after he was gone, but then decided he’d like to see it happen

while he’s still alive, and can be involved in the project.

His first step, in the fall of 2019, was to ask Lord Mayor Betty Disero to stop by for a chat at his Rye Street home, where he briefly outlined his idea for a rejuvenation of the existing entrance to the Old Town, making it clear he was offering \$250,000 to fund the project.

Disero set up a meeting with some town staff, and the project moved forward, following a suggestion that Kowalchuk make a presentation to the town’s Communities in Bloom committee, which he did, in December.

In January, 2020, councillors agreed with a CIB committee recommendation in favour of the project, to be financed by the Gerald Kowalchuk Family

Fund. They also approved the formation of the Queen/Mississauga Project, a CIB subcommittee, to create terms of reference and a work plan for the site.

That committee, which is now close to recommending the hiring of a landscape architect firm, includes two councillors, John Wiens and Wendy Cheropita; CIB representatives Janet Trogden and Janice Johnston; and residents Alex Topps and Bill Clark.

Kevin Turcotte, the town director of operations, and J.B. Hopkins, parks supervisor, have been included in committee discussions and have been very helpful, says Kowalchuk.

After several meetings between last January and March, it became clear the most important task was identifying qualified landscape architect firms and determine how to move forward with gathering expressions of interest in the project, says Kowalchuk. Having Topps, a retired member of a landscape architect firm, on the committee, proved to be helpful.

When COVID struck in March, committee meetings were cancelled, and only resumed in October by video conference calls. Since then, significant progress has been made despite the pandemic, he says.

After narrowing their search down to three firms, and interviewing them, they expect to make a choice at their Jan. 5 committee meeting, based in



Gerry Kowalchuk

part on the work samples each has submitted.

“Seeing their work product has given me a handle on their capabilities,” he says.

He hopes they will have approval from council soon after, and after awarding the contract, could see work begin on a design in February.

Each firm that has submitted a bid has committed to doing a number of conceptual drawings, three at minimum, should they be hired. From there, says Kowalchuk, he has confirmed the committee can look at all the elements in the drawings and if necessary, can choose which elements they would like to see incorporated in a final design.

“I think we will have a lot of

possibilities, and with the help of Kevin and J.B., we, as a committee, will make a decision.”

A second bid will go out, likely next spring, for a construction company to carry out the work, which will be overseen by the landscape architect firm as contract administrator, says Kowalchuk.

The tentative timeline he has set out has construction beginning next September, after the end of the 2021 tourist season, with planting to follow in the spring of 2022, and completion by June, in time for the next influx of tourists.

Although it’s a long way off from completion, he says, it’s best to take the time to get it right, and he’s “proud to be the donor of this project.”



The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, through its contractor CRL Campbell Construction Ltd., will be commencing with the removal and replacement of a road crossing culvert on Mississauga Street between Johnson Street and Gage Street. The work is scheduled from January 4 through April 30, 2021.

The section of road over the structure will be closed to all through traffic for the duration of construction.

A detour route will be provided around the site for traffic. This closure is necessary to facilitate a shorter construction schedule for the construction of the structure.

**Emergency Services will have limited access during this closure.**

Any inquiries concerning this project may be directed to Mike Komljenovic, Engineering Supervisor for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Your co-operation is appreciated.

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# Local artist contributes paintings for Christmas

**Penny Coles**  
**The Local**

Local artist Kevin Conway doesn't sell his work, he gives it away.  
Or if he does sell it, the money is donated to causes that are important to him.

This Christmas, he has chosen to donate paintings to Newark Neighbours.  
Conway says, "for years, I volunteered at the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, and know first hand what life is like for people needing assistance."

The cheerful, brightly-coloured paintings will be a surprise, and a welcome gift for those in NOTL who will receive them with their Christmas food and gifts, says Newark Neighbours chair Laura Gibson.  
In the past, he has given

paintings to the Romero House in Toronto for refugees, and more recently to support programs for students with autism.  
After not painting for 35 years, Conway picked up a brush again in 2017, after cancer forced him to slow

down. His first exhibit was at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library in 2018, where he sold paintings to raise money for York University's autism students support program, which he founded in 2014.  
A percentage of his sales

was also donated to the library.  
Most of his acrylic paintings are done in a studio at the back of his NOTL home.  
For more information about Conway visit <https://www.kconwayart.com/>



Pat Hicks, Pat Fryer, Laura Gibson, Susan Sparrow-Mace, Suzanne Vaillant, and Elaine Baitinger, Newark Neighbours volunteers, display some of the paintings donated by artist Kevin Conway, to go with the Christmas gifts and food boxes that were delivered Tuesday. (Penny Coles)

# BUNDLE UP NIAGARA

2020 IS ALMOST OVER, BUT COVID-19 IS STILL HERE, AND WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO STOP THE SPREAD THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.

<p>LIMIT CLOSE CONTACT TO YOUR HOUSEHOLD</p>	<p>STAY HOME AND GET TESTED IF YOU'RE FEELING UNWELL</p>
<p>WEAR A MASK</p>	<p>WASH YOUR HANDS</p>
<p>PRACTICE PHYSICAL DISTANCING</p>	<p>ONLY GO OUT FOR ESSENTIAL TRIPS</p>

DOING JUST ONE OF THESE THINGS ISN'T ENOUGH - WE NEED TO PRACTICE THEM ALL. SO BUNDLE UP NIAGARA, AND LET'S GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER.

FOR MORE INFO GO TO [NIAGARAREGION.CA/COVID19](https://niagararegion.ca/covid19)

Niagara Region



EDITORIAL

Look for joy, and find it all around you

Here we are in the midst of what for many is usually the happiest time of year, yet we're surrounded by bad news that seems to get worse by the day.

It's difficult to watch TV news, and not be depressed and overwhelmed by all we see and hear. The numbers of COVID cases are climbing all around us, and we're hearing a sense of urgency in the warnings we're receiving from all levels of government.

The pleas to stay home and interact only with our own household are hard for all of us to hear.

The requests come this last week before the holidays, the busiest time of year, and may be challenging. This is likely especially true for those with young families, who feel a responsibility to make every Christmas the best ever, who are accustomed to a Christmas that includes extended family, tables overflowing with food, gifts brightly wrapped, all of which is problematic when we're asked not to shop, not to gather, not to go out at all.

And even worse, those who may be facing lay-offs and losing their income.

It's heart-breaking for all who were looking forward to the traditional family gatherings over the holidays, who know that others will be hurting, and that those who live alone and are already feeling isolated will find this next month even more distressing.

Ontario, we're told, has the lowest number of cases per 100,000 in North America. That should be good news, but all it really does is highlight how much worse it is in other areas of the country, and that we're not alone.

The provincial decision to announce a lockdown Monday to be implemented Saturday has received criticism from all sides. Some believe the lockdown is too restrictive. Others believe it should have come sooner, and many question the call for action, but only after a warning period to give businesses time to adjust, and during that time, allow for COVID to continue to spread at alarming rates. Intended or not, it also gives shoppers time to finish their shopping, a contradiction to the message to stay home.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's to focus on all that is positive, and cherish what is important in life. Family and friends. Love and compassion. Tolerance. If we look for it, it's all around us, but easier for some to recognize than others.

That provides us with the opportunity to help others who are struggling to feel loved, to find joy, to experience the goodwill the season typically delivers. It doesn't take much. Maybe a phone call, a surprise gift left by their door, letting them know we are thinking about them and we care.

Our wish for everyone at this time of year: health, happiness, joy, kindness, love . . . all we would wish for you every year, all year.

But of course this isn't like any other year, and we also wish for that light at the end of the tunnel to draw near, for all of us to remember we will get there sooner if we restrain ourselves now, and to keep focusing on the time when we can be together again, safely, with the worst of this pandemic in our rear-view mirror.

Our thanks to all of our readers and advertisers who have supported us, as we come close to wrapping up just our second year in sharing your stories and helping your businesses get your messages out to the community. There is no doubt it has been a tough year, nothing any of us would have ever dreamed of a short year ago, when we first started hearing about this novel coronavirus that was emerging so far away.

We wouldn't be here without the overwhelming support we have felt from a community we love and respect.

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, and in the face of adversity, we feel privileged to have been able to do that. It's never been difficult to find examples of goodness and love, especially approaching the holidays, despite celebrating them in the midst of a pandemic.

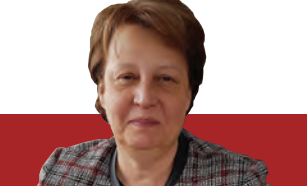
Please, make the most of the days ahead, and if there

is anything any one of us can do to help make them easier, reach out. Friends, neighbours, we're all here for each other, and together we can be strong and get through this, as we did last spring, and so we won't have to do it again.

We all look forward to a better year, a different year, in 2021, likely to have its own share of unknowns for us to navigate. At the same time, we can be grateful for the lessons we will carry with us from 2020; that times of need open opportunities for the community to come together to help one another; that we need little of material things; and that our greatest pleasures come from family, friends, and the simple things life presents when we look for them.

**Penny Coles**  
**The Local**

Feeling of unity and caring continues through COVID



Lord Mayor Betty Disero  
Special to The Local

The Dictionary.com says the people's choice for word of the year is "unprecedented."

Every day, every week, the way we live changed. As the waves of COVID-19 swept through the community, a whole range of emotions was felt by everyone daily: happiness, anger, frustration, worry, concern, caring. Yes, it was unprecedented, but in my mind the word rollercoaster suits. It certainly took a toll on our emotional health.

There was one thing that has stayed consistent throughout 2020: the feeling of unity and caring for each other. Together we have worked to protect each other, set up safe scenarios for our family, friends and neighbours to shop, walk, visit and meet virtually, make generous donations and wear masks. For this, I am truly happy.

Through this whirlwind of emotional stress, the work of council and staff continued, including planning for the future, completing outstanding issues and keeping the budget implications to a minimum.

While the restrictions with COVID made a lot of community consultation challenging, council actively listened when concerns were brought forward by members of the community. While some of the council conversations may have seemed a little divisive or conflicting, when you take a deep breath and remember that everyone wants what is best for the town, you begin to overlook any discord.

Council worked with both urban areas and the farming community to bring forward an Official Plan that protected both the heritage of our villages and the workable acreage of our farms.

Council heard the public when putting the economic framework and strategic plan in place, prioritizing existing businesses, trying to encourage new families to our town and supporting initiatives for seniors.

Council approved parks improvements in many areas of town after staff held public consultations.

Our staff have worked hard to mitigate the financial implications of COVID-19 for 2020 and the finance and audit committee have worked with staff to minimize the impact to the 2021 budget.

It looks like 2021 may bring with it the beginning of the end of the pandemic. A vaccine is on the way, and hopefully the restrictions that are in place today will help bring the numbers down, so we can get some relief. Retired General Rick Hillier says it will take a year and then some to complete all the vaccines, but as more and more people get vaccinated there will be some respite.

At council and Town Hall, our work will continue. We will finish the last of the master plans such as the tourism, transportation and irrigation plans. We will then have an idea of where we are going as a town long-term, how we want to get there and what the costs will be. We must put in place the budget principles and actions to create that sustainable budget we all want. With the help of our staff, we will do just that.

As we get ready to celebrate the holidays, there is one more emotion I want to talk about and that is gratitude.

I am thankful every day for support of so many community members. I am thankful my mother and the rest of my family is healthy. I am thankful we have not had any outbreaks in our long-term care facilities. I am thankful our farming community watched out for their workers and all of us the thoughtful way they did.

I am thankful to the many organizations that care so much about everyone and everything in our community. I am thankful for a hard-working council and a dedicated, devoted town staff.

But mostly I am thankful to be living in this wonderful town with all of you. Being grateful releases my stress and gets me through the day.

I wish you all good health and great joy this holiday season and for 2021! Merry Christmas everyone.

View from the couch

**Donald Combe**  
**Special to The Local**

*The Dressmaker* (2015 Netflix) is a stunning film focusing on revenge, and that has everything in abundance. It is probably way too much, but I was transfixed with disbelief and mesmerized at the twists and turns the plot was taking me. Kate Winslet is astonishing; it was all astonishing. See it. You'll never forget the adventure.

*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, L0S 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**  
classified@notllocal.com

notllocal.com facebook.com/notllocal instagram.com/thenotllocal @thenotllocal

**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. The deadline is Monday at noon.

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

# COMMENT

## What's happening to world's ecosystems during COVID-19?



Owen Bjorgan  
Special to The Local

Every day, we are barraged with new information regarding the pandemic, politics, and other developments from around the world.

But wait. Around the world? What about ecosystem degradation on the other side of the world?

It's all Ontario and Canada, and rightfully so, as we need to focus on what we can do to maximize safety in our regions. The pandemic and its unending statistics are one thing, but what about globally important ecosystems being removed behind the scenes while we're on our screens — in other countries?

While the media has us hyper-focused on the home front, I can't help but wonder what might be happening with the rest of the world. What's happening in Egypt? Malaysia? Nigeria? Chile?

It appears that the pandemic has been used as an opportune moment to pass bills which don't relate to the virus. Case in point, we have Ontario's most recent move, disguised in a COVID recovery budget (Bill 229), which aims to remove powers from conservation authorities across the province. We will see less protection to our fragile remaining ecosystems, while conservation authority boards become populated by local

politicians, and developers can get an easier second look at sensitive developments.

But that's just Ontario. As glad as I was to see that this issue caught some traction in recent weeks, it is already fading away. As we talk about case counts, legislation is moving forward to further wreck the very natural heritage that keeps us healthy, and on a global level, protects us from viruses.

So, if that's what is happening in the environmental sector in Ontario alone, what are we not aware of around the world? And why does it matter to us, here in Ontario?

I picture developing nations strung across the tropics. Imagine governments which are financially hungry with little regard for biodiversity, let alone humane working conditions. A rainforest is standing timber. A mountainside is a mine. A river is to be dammed. Many governments of developing nations have complete oversight and regulation on how they treat their natural resources, sometimes, at a costly and unsustainable rate.

From what I've seen here in NOTL and Niagara alike, we're no better on a smaller scale. We've lost 90 per cent of our original forest cover and wetlands.

I predict we'll see profit overshadowing biodiversity at a global scale over the next few years, in an effort to offset economic losses caused by the pandemic.

Protecting the diversity of species present in our communities only strengthens the

ecosystem services which nature provides for residents of NOTL, such as flood control, carbon sequestration, and contributions to fertile soils.

I painfully envision families around the world, desperate to make a living. We're talking real poverty and a need for food to sustain the family. The amount of unchecked rainforest clearing and burning in the next couple years is likely to be enormous. A headline of such losses isn't likely to make it to the forefront during the coming couple of years.

Instead, we will likely live with the effects of such decisions in these regions, where a few are reaping massive benefits from natural resource exploitation, no matter how irresponsibly executed.

Is it on the minds of workers? To care for a rainforest, a gecko, or an orangutan, when you have a family to feed and a government who feels the need to recover quickly? From a nation's perspective, if you've been economically rocked by COVID, why not just tap into your natural resources? Can you blame them? It's a profound situation.

To remove your nation's natural resources aggressively in the name of economic rebuild and financial desperation is simply pouring gasoline on an even bigger fire that is yet to be lit.

And so, we will continue to pick away at the global body of biodiversity as a unit of one. We just won't see it happening amidst the currently closed world.

Rainforests and tropical

humidity in Africa dictates how hurricanes form and hit the Americas. The Arctic's rising temperatures influence Western Europe's climate patterns. The increasing temperature of the Coral Sea can ramp up Australia's cyclone season.

As we continue to focus with the best intentions on what's happening in our backyard during a legitimate health crisis, we should also be mindful of what forces are at play overseas to our ultimate protector.

It has been postulated that

this time is the final wake-up call to address climate change with the same intense response we've done with the pandemic. However, because the effects of climate change are slow-motion and hard to distinguish, it doesn't seem to be as urgent an issue.

The U.S. election this year briefly brought up the idea of transitioning to green energy at a national scale, and away from fossil fuels. It's becoming a conversation here in Canada, too, considering we could see an election pop up in the next

year. Funny how we wait until election time to discuss such prevalent issues.

The transition to green, renewable energy had its platform laid out for us decades ago. Amidst the need for sharp economic rebound, I hope we can collectively stay focused on our environment as well.

I love talking about cars in terms of biodiversity. You may not know, or be able to see, how I'm removing air from your back right tire, but you're sure to find out soon enough. You just didn't see me there.



Rare ecosystems around the world, including southern Ontario's Carolinian Forest wetlands, are now at greater risk during the pandemic. (Owen Bjorgan)

## LETTERS

### Thanks to a generous community

Reflecting back on a simple request to have interested people fill a stocking for the seniors in long-term care made me realize what a truly caring and very kind community I live in. The generosity, thoughtfulness, and outpouring of help was overwhelming. All the

thought that was put into giving those 'special' items was heartwarming. Each and everyone who contributed can be happy to know you have brought pleasure to one of the NOTL seniors in long-term care at this magical time of the year. The spirit of giving was

certainly alive in our community.

Thank you for being a part of this simple yet meaningful request.

Happy Christmas and a healthy 2021.

Stay safe,  
Joan King  
Queenston



### Tell us what you've learned in 2020

As we enter 2021, we'd love to hear from our readers about anything positive you're taking away from 2020. It has been a challenging holiday season for many, but are there benefits you've discovered about the changes in your lifestyles? Perhaps a different way of prioritizing what's important to you?

Please share your insights by emailing penny@notllocal.

### Correction

The name underneath the letter 'Waste of time and money' on page 7 of last week's edition of The Local was incorrect. We sincerely apologize to both Lezlie Wade, who did not write the letter and does not agree with the content, and to Jim Howard, who did write the letter.

# HAPPY

# Holidays

All the best for 2021  
from all of us at

# LOCAL

The Niagara-on-the-Lake







# Making noise!

Residents on Shaw's Lane appreciate all the time and dedication of all the front-line workers around the world during the pandemic, says photographer Rene Bertschi, and showed their gratitude with this little serenade with different instruments Saturday evening. The Town asked residents to 'Make Some Noise,' and Shaw's Lane residents, including Jean-Guy DesRochers, Sheila Ashton, Monika Baldwin, Ann Holcomb, Allan Magnacca, Patti Knipe, and Raymonde DesRochers obliged. (Rene Bertschi)



Volunteer firefighters made some noise Saturday evening, using their sirens to show gratitude to front-line workers. Trucks and firefighters at the Queenston fire-hall joined the Town-organized event, as did Pat Conlon across the street from the firehall. (Fred Mercnik)



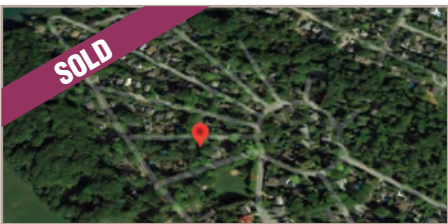
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# 45th annual Penguin Dip cancelled due to COVID

**Penny Coles**  
**The Local**

Chris Bjorgan, organizer of the annual Penguin Dip on Boxing Day in Niagara-on-the-Lake, likes a crisp, cold day for the fundraising swim.

This year, he would have been happy whatever the weather, instead of cancelling what would have been the 45th annual dip into the frigid water of Ball's Beach.

It's especially disappointing to have to cancel a milestone year, and will be the first time since the first dip that the annual tradition hasn't occurred, says Bjorgan.

In the years since the

swim became a fundraiser for Red Roof Retreat, founded by his sister-in-law Steffanie Bjorgan, the milestone anniversaries have been the best, bringing out a bigger crowd of swimmers and spectators, and raising much-needed funds for the organization which provides overnight care and day programs for children and young adults with special needs.

"Most years we pass a hat, and maybe raise about \$1,000," he says. "This was going to be a big one."

Coun. Clare Cameron and her husband Mackenzie decided to experience the Penguin Dip for the first time last year, and took their



Organizer Chris Bjorgan (red shirt, centre), with a group of about 20 swimmers on Boxing Day, 2019, says this will be the first year the traditional event has not occurred since the original dip. (File photo)

three dips with the veterans.

To become a member of the NOTL Penguin Club, they'll have to repeat that two more years, although

fortunately it doesn't have to be consecutive years.

Both said they were up for the challenge, determined to become official

Penguins, and Bjorgan says this year the Camerons said they would help out with the fundraising for Red Roof.

"I thought this year we'd have in the range of 60 people," says Bjorgan.

His brother Lorne was one of the originals, and there are swimmers, including Lorne, who will take part in the anniversary dips, although they are no longer regulars. Chris was hoping this would be such a year.

Chris, 63 years old and retired since last February, is a regular participant in the dip. He said a few years ago, a lack of publicity meant a particularly small crowd came out on Boxing Day, but the numbers have been slowly increasing, and this could have been a banner

year.

Last year saw 20 swimmers and a large crowd to watch.

But COVID, especially with the recent increase in cases, makes it impossible to hold a safe event, he says.

Although swimmers could have spread out and kept their distance, moving into lockdown Boxing Day morning would have meant breaking the rules. And physical distancing in a trailer between three dips to make it an official event would have been impossible.

"It would have also been difficult with the number of spectators who would have shown up," he says. "I would feel so bad if someone becomes ill from something I had a hand in arranging."



## New Year's Levee cancelled

The Jan. 1 New Year's Levee at Navy Hall, a 30 year tradition hosted by Parks Canada and the Friends of Fort George, has been cancelled. The annual event draws large crowds of people who come out to meet with friends, neighbours and dignitaries who offer official New Year greetings. The firing of a cannon across the Niagara River toward Fort Niagara, last year with honorary cannoneer Bill Ashburn, is the crowd-pleasing finale of the event. "2021 would have been our 31st annual New Year's Day Levee, and we are extremely disappointed to have to cancel this event," says Friends of Fort George executive director. "The Friends of Fort George and Parks Canada staff would like to wish everyone a safe and happy holiday, and we hope to be able to celebrate the new year with everyone in 2022."



*Wishing you a  
pleasant holiday  
and Godspeed 2021!*

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## Colouring with love



Maanak Malhotra, winner of The Local colouring contest for children five and under, receives a beautiful gift from Megan McLean of Maple Leaf Fudge, and Sirena Gill, winner for six-to-10 year-old category, receives hers from Phil Leboudec of Phil's valu-mart. The Local thanks the two businesses who contributed prizes, and the many children who submitted their artwork. (Karen Skeoch)

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Merry Christmas

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The Christmas Angel

Sharon Frayne  
Special to The Local

There was a snowstorm on Christmas Eve, and an argument in our house. By the time we finished dinner and Mom settled the younger kids with Grandma, everyone was upset. When she drove me into the crowded church parking lot, we were late. It was almost time for the pageant, and my special role as the Little Christmas Angel.

The teacher had shown everyone beautiful pictures of the Nativity by famous artists, so we understood exactly how the scene should look. Mary would wear a blue hooded cape, and Joseph would be in red. They would wrap the naked Baby Jesus in a white cloth. A bright white spotlight would shine on them. Everyone else stayed in the background. We'd rehearsed for weeks after Sunday School so it would be perfect.

My grandmother had made me a beautiful angel costume, with a long white gown, gauzy wings and a gold tinsel halo. I could hardly wait to stand on the raised platform in the background, behind

the Holy Family at centre stage. Our choir would sing *Angels We Have Heard on High*. I practised spreading my wings and gently flapping them to cool the baby's face.

I thought God would probably watch from high above the overhead lights and smile. God would know I was serious about my responsibilities. In my six years on Earth, this would be the most thrilling thing that ever happened.

When I arrived in the church basement where everyone assembled to go onstage, chaos reigned. My gown and wings were gone! Frantically, I tugged on the choir director's robe and fearfully asked where they were.

Then I learned a sad truth. Because I was late, they'd assigned my costume and role to someone else. There was no place left for me.

"Go sit in the audience with your mother and watch," said the director.

I was stunned.

It was Mom's fault we were late, and she'd ruined my Christmas Eve. More than anything, I wanted to be a glorious angel! As I sat cross-legged on the cold,

tilled floor, tears spilled down my face and left salty tracks on my cheeks.

A kindly Sunday School teacher offered an old striped bathrobe, and the handle from a floor mop. She said I could be a shepherd standing in the background. I reluctantly accepted, and tied a rope around my waist to hitch up the oversized gown. It smelled like cigarettes. The gorgeous angels organized to go on stage while I stared, sick with envy. As the pageant began, everyone forgot about me.

From behind the red velvet curtains, I watched the entire cast assemble before a packed audience. Ooh! Ahh! A polite round of applause broke out as they took their places.

I had no lines or directions to follow, and wandered onto the stage in an improvised solo performance. Strolling about, I pretended to search for something — sheep, perhaps?

"Baaaaah, baaaaah . . . here, sheep, sheep, sheep." Feigning concern, I checked my Mickey-Mouse watch. Did the old-time

Continued on page 13

Season's Greetings

AND A SPECIAL MERRY Christmas

TO OUR NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE CLIENTS AND FAMILIES!

from Lord Mayor Betty Disero, Members of Council, and Staff of the Town of

Niagara Lake

Season's Greetings

AND A SPECIAL MERRY Christmas

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# Anger, disappointment turns to love

Continued from page 12

shepherds wear watches? When I heard a few giggles from the front row, it occurred to me I'd made a mistake.

It was crowded at the back of the stage, and impossible to find a place to stand. The Wise Men, in their fancy crowns and long capes, elbowed me out of the way. Two boys disguised as a brown cow tried to kick me. I tripped over my drooping robe, and had to roll up my floppy sleeves. The angel who'd replaced me sneered and said, "Get lost, kid."

There was a clearing in the middle of the stage. Heart pounding, I walked up to the Holy Family and knelt down beside the manger on a bundle of straw.

Our Mary was a young mother who'd brought her beautiful newborn child to church that Dec. 24, 1959. While her tiny baby wiggled on a soft white blanket in the little wooden manger, she beamed with joy. The baby gurgled and waved a chubby hand. I reached out and touched a wee warm finger. The babe



The Christmas Angel had a beautiful white gown and gauzy wings made by her grandmother. (Shutterstock)

smiled.

Attracted to a glowing light in the middle of the darkened auditorium, I looked up. It was my mother's shining face, attentive to every move on stage. Our eyes met, and I saw her smile.

Afterwards, on the slow, snowy car ride home, Mother tried to console me. "Those angels seemed awfully hot and cranky up there. I could see them scratching, and they sang out of tune. It's a good thing you weren't one of them."

After a moment, I said, "It turned out better."

As the wind blew drifts of snow across our path, the world outside the car disappeared. Face tight with worry, Mother hunched forward over the steering wheel, straining to see the

road.

Barely visible beneath their burden of snow, the twinkling red and green lights strung on our trees welcomed us as we pulled into the driveway. We were safe at home, and both of us took a deep breath. I

reached for her hand.

"I love you, Mommy." She gave me a hug. "Merry Christmas, Sweet-heart"

Sharon Frayne is the co-chair of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Writers' Circle.

**Bah HUMPUK**

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# Important Hamilton collection now at Brock University

**Mike Balsom**  
Special to The Local

Clues to the early history of Canada’s postal service, which was begun right here in Queenston, now sit safely and securely in the Brock University library.

The Alexander Hamilton collection was recently donated to Brock and, following a successful application to have it designated historically significant by the Government of Canada, many of the documents and artifacts can now be viewed via an online exhibit.

David Sharron, head of archives and special collections at Brock, says the collection has been valued at almost \$350,000. The documents and artifacts were all contained in a mailbag that was likely stored for years somewhere at the Willowbank Estate. Included in the collection are much of Alexander Hamilton’s correspondence and records during the time that he was Postmaster at Queenston, as well as some related to his role as Justice of the Peace, Collector of Customs, Surrogate Court Judge and Sheriff of the Niagara District.

“Anything that happened from 1800 to about

1839, when he passed away, couldn’t have happened without his influence,” says Sharron. “He had his finger in everything. The fact that these records survived almost 200 years and are now back in Niagara, it’s absolutely thrilling.”

The university acquired the Hamilton collection about a year ago through a private collector from the Toronto area. “Percy Band had a very good eye for postal history,” explains Sharron. “He did some work in the area, and in the 1940s he went to a garage sale and found an old sack of mail. He saw all the records inside, and he haggled the price down to 17 cents.”

Percy’s son Robert inherited his father’s collection. Sharron says Robert’s home was like a private museum of Canadiana. When Robert Band passed away in 2013, his nieces and nephews understood the importance of the documents and artifacts, and have been slowly finding suitable homes for its contents.

“We are very fortunate that this was associated with the Woodruff Family collection that we acquired about six years ago,” Sharron tells The Local. “When it came to

the Alexander Hamilton collection, the family felt Brock was the perfect place for it. The records all stem from the Niagara area, and Brock can take good care of it.”

Alexander Hamilton was the son of Robert Hamilton, one of the most successful early merchants in Upper Canada. When Robert died in 1809, Alexander, still in his late teens, and his brother George inherited their father’s business holdings. Much of that fortune, however, disappeared during the War of 1812.

After serving under William Hamilton Merritt in the war, Alexander got busy rebuilding the family’s finances. Much of Alexander’s success in that endeavour came from the different roles he took in public life.

Hamilton built Willowbank between 1834 and 1836. After he passed away in 1839 at 48 years old, his wife Hannah raised their 10 children at the estate. The Hamilton family continued to live in the mansion until 1934, when it was sold to the Bright family, of winery renown.

Included in the collection are 11 postal ink stampers, three wax seal stamps and a fabric ink blotter. But it is in

the documents that the true value of the collection is contained.

About 60 per cent of the documents relate to the early days of the postal system. “Everything spread from Niagara and went outwards,” says Sharron. “All international mail went to New York City, came up the Erie Canal to Lewiston, crossed over the river, and all the American mail was distributed through Queenston to the rest of Canada. That was the lifeline of communication with the United States, and even across the Atlantic.”

Sharron says Hamilton established a sorting “factory” here that would distribute the mail, and its location influenced the road system. “The faster they needed the mail to move, they built roads through Niagara so the mail could go quicker to where it needed to go.”

The rest of the collection includes business correspondence relating to some of the other roles Hamilton took on over his brief life. “There is a lot of correspondence with William Hamilton Merritt,” says Sharron. “There’s great detailed messages from Merritt, saying, ‘we are about to open up stocks in a new company, the Welland Canal Company, and we would like you to find good citizens who would support this.’ He was reaching out at the early stages of building the canal.

Continued on page 15

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Sunday 27th	Closed	11 am – 3 pm
New Year's Eve: Thursday 31st	9 am – 3pm	9:30 am – 3 pm
New Year's Day: 1st	Closed	Closed
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Sunday, January 3rd	Closed	11 am – 3 pm





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# Important documents discovered at a garage sale

Continued from page 14

Other notable names mentioned in the correspondence include the first Anglican Bishop of Toronto, John Strachan, Samuel Street, a member of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada, and Justice of the Peace and Niagara businessman Thomas Clark.

On the subject of Hamilton's personal life, or what it was like to live at Willowbank at the time, the collection sheds little light. It does, however, demonstrate how

influential and significant the Niagara area was in the early days of the nation.

Sharron looks forward to a day when those interested in early Canadian history can get their hands on the documents. As well, with staff working from home during the pandemic, they have not been able to properly digitize the entirety of the collection. But he is hoping to celebrate the acquisition with the Willowbank School of the Restoration Arts as soon as possible.

When that time comes, all precautions are in place

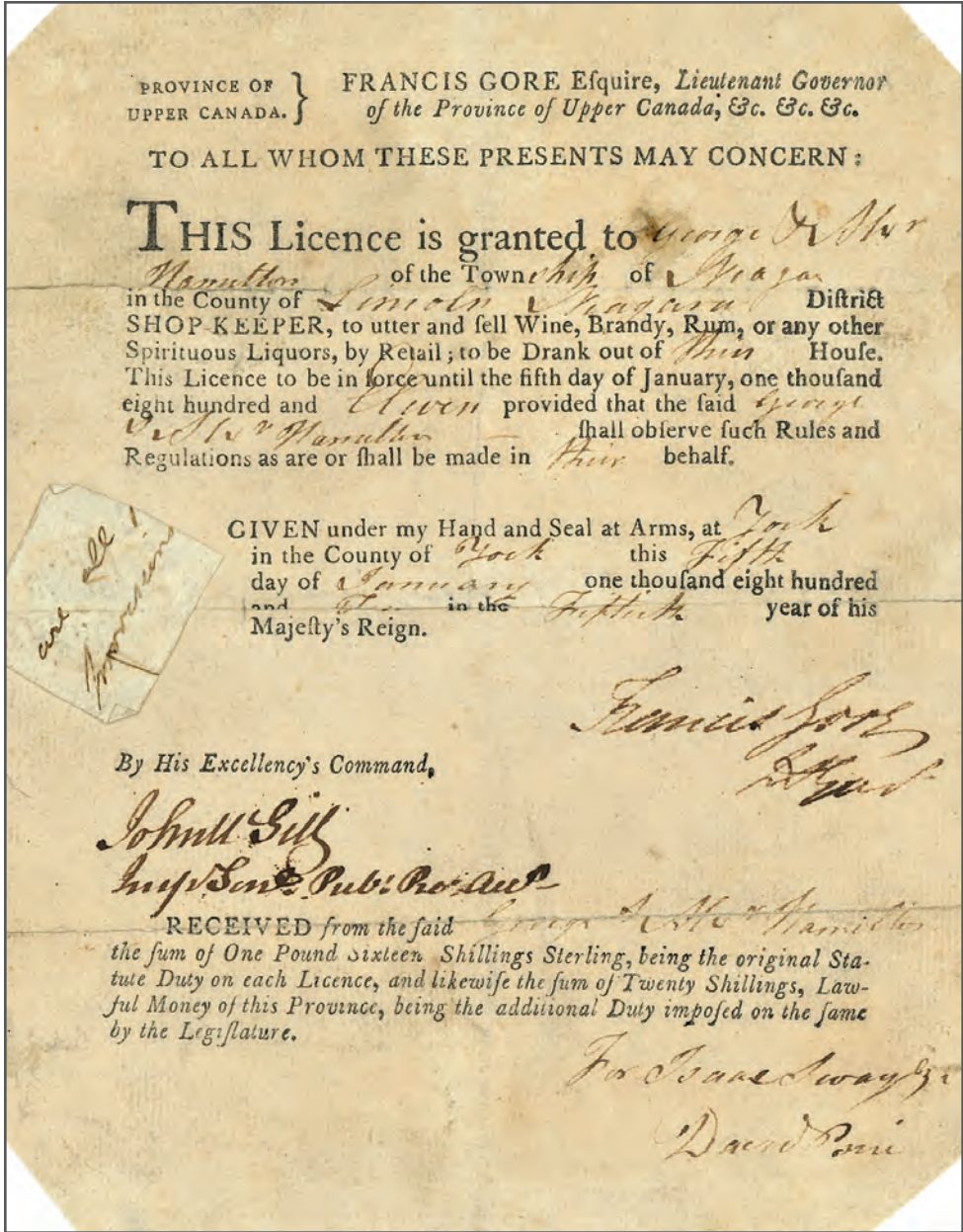
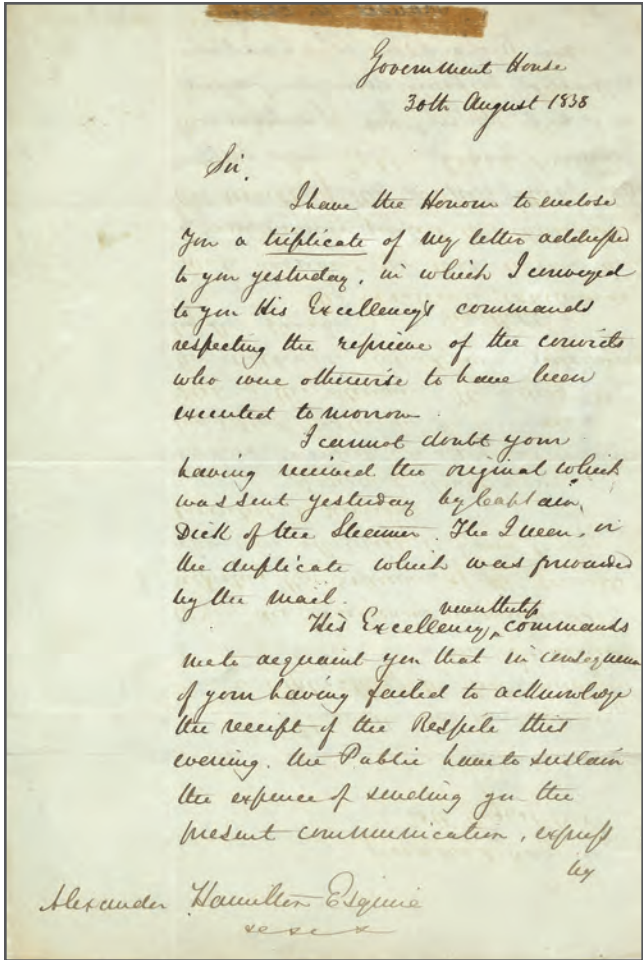
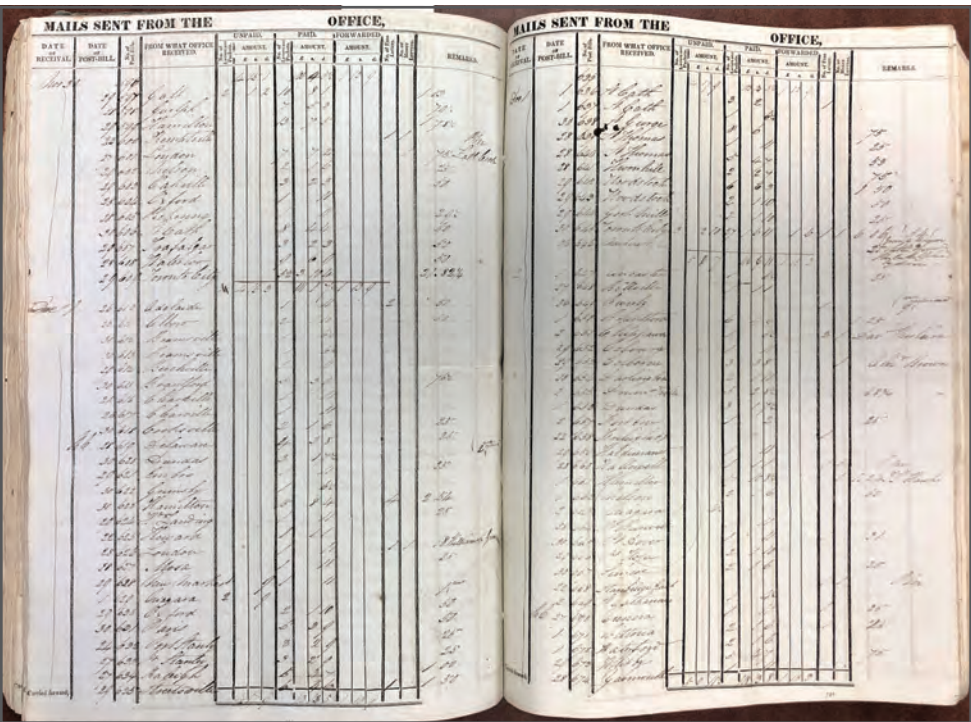
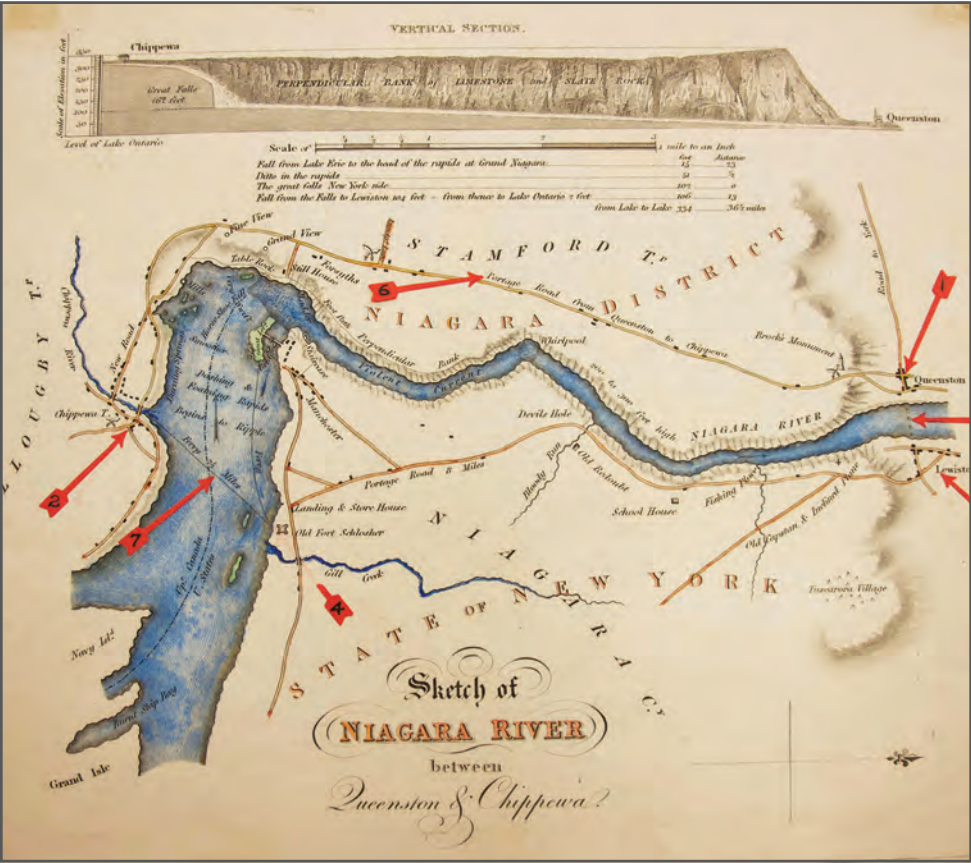
to maintain the condition of the documents. "Humidity and temperature controls are in place," assures Sharron. "Security is top notch at Brock. When people come in there is a sign-in procedure. Light is another issue. Everything is kept in a dark room, cooled until someone asks for it. Then it goes out to a nice reading room, where someone can enjoy it."

They will, most likely, have to peruse the collection in Brock's facilities. "For another institution to borrow anything, we would first have to ask the federal gov-

ernment for permission," continues Sharron. "We would have to ask for data to prove they can provide the same protection that we can. We're very happy to work with anyone in the heritage community in Niagara. If we can't give them the original, we would certainly work with Willowbank to get them quality digital or printed reproductions."

The documents that have been digitized to this point can be seen in Brock's online exhibit at <https://exhibits.library.brocku.ca/s/alexander-hamilton/>.

Much of the Alexander Hamilton collection, valued at almost \$350,000, was found in a bag at a 1940s garage sale, and was purchased for 17 cents. The documents include a map, a letter agreeing to a stay of execution, a liquor licence and a mail ledger, from the mid 1800s. (Photos supplied)



We hope everyone has a Happy Holiday and a wonderful New Year



# Celebrate New Year's Eve with the Fitzgeralds

Mike Balsom  
Special to The Local

This has been a year like no other and, with Monday's announcement of a return to lockdown restrictions, most will be happy on New Year's Eve to celebrate its end.

Music Niagara offers a joyous celebration that afternoon, with the return of the singing, fiddling and step-dancing Fitzgerald siblings.

The family group, consisting of Tom, Kerry and Julie Fitzgerald, last performed for the festival in July, 2017. That summer, the siblings fit the NOTL show into the middle of a tour of Ohio, just before heading off to the U.K. and Ireland, where their Celtic music and dancing have their roots.

When it came time to book a New Year's show to conclude Music Niagara's 2020 At Home Series, general manager Karen Lade says the Ottawa Valley-area family act was an obvious choice.

"We were looking for something to end the year on a celebratory note," Lade tells The Local. "They were received so well last time, and their upbeat energy seemed perfect

to keep the momentum we built this year going. We were elated they were available."

Tom Fitzgerald remembers that 2017 outdoor show fondly. He says they jumped at the opportunity to return for this week's online event, especially in light of how many of their scheduled appearances were cancelled this year due to COVID.

"We had a big year booked, probably our busiest yet," says Tom. "We planned to play a lot of festivals in the U.S., and we had a tour booked in England." His sister Kerry estimates that since March, at least 100 appearances were cancelled or postponed. Luckily, they have had a few chances to participate in livestream and recorded online events such as the At Home Series.

With all of those cancellations, the three of them took some time to work independently. "We kind of focused on other projects," Tom explains. "Just solo things. I write a lot, and Kerry has her own electronic fiddle project. We all tried to keep busy with other things."

Indeed, all three of the Fitzgeralds maintain their own websites. A visit to [kerryfitzgerald.ca](http://kerryfitzgerald.ca) will lead to her 2018 album *Fiddle Beatz*, an experimental fusion of her original fiddle tunes with electronic music production. A three-song EP (extended play, or mini-album) of Tom's original fiddle compositions is available to listen to at [Tomfitzgeraldmusic.ca](http://Tomfitzgeraldmusic.ca), while Julie offers online music and step dancing lessons to dancers of all skill levels through [juliefitzgerald.ca](http://juliefitzgerald.ca).

Together, though, along with Alanna Jenish accompanying them on guitar, their act draws on a tradition with roots on the Emerald Isle, through the Maritimes, on to their Ottawa Valley home.

The Celtic connection came naturally to the Bancroft-raised siblings. "It's what we know," says Tom. "We grew up playing old-time music. Picture a square dance. We don't necessarily play that in our show as much, but it's our roots, what's common between all of us. From there, Celtic music, east coast Maritime music, as well as American folk music, it's kind of all translatable."

Continued on page 17



Julie, Kerry and Tom Fitzgerald, step-dancing, fiddle-playing siblings, joined by guitarist Alanna Jenish, were recorded at the Welland Campus of Niagara College by the students of the college's broadcasting program, to be viewed New Year's Eve. (Photos by Mike Balsom)





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**December 24: 9 - 5**  
**December 25: Closed**  
**December 26: 10 - 6**  
**December 30: 9 - 9**  
(also Senior's Day)  
**December 31: 9 - 5**  
(also Senior's Day)  
**January 1: Closed**  
**January 2: Back to**  
regular business hours





# Siblings all accomplished, awarded musicians

Continued from page 16

"The music we grew up playing," he continues, "Ottawa Valley fiddle and step, kind of originated in that small geographical area. Even outside of that, people ask 'what is that?' There's a certain style about it that is very Ontario, though we often do play with a lot of friends from the Maritimes."

All three Fitzgeralds, and Jenish as well, are accomplished and awarded musicians. Tom is a Canadian Grand Master Fiddle Champion and a Canadian Open Fiddle Champion, while Julie is a two-time Canadian Grand Master Fiddle Champion, as well as two-time Open Step Dance Champion. Kerry is an Ontario Open Step Dance Champion and Canadian Grand Master Fiddle Finalist, while Jenish has captured the Southwestern Ontario Open Fiddle Championship. All four play multiple instruments, as well.

Tom and Kerry both studied jazz at Humber College, while Julie holds a kinesiology degree from Western University. Jenish, meanwhile, graduated with a Bachelor of Music

degree from the University of Toronto. The Fitzgeralds have worked in the past with the likes of Natalie McMaster, the Leahys, Tommy Hunter and Wayne Rostad.

In their earlier days, the young Fitzgeralds were often accompanied by the other members of their family. "There used to be six of us," Tom says of their family band. "My dad learned to play bass and my mom learned to play piano, just so they could accompany us. We're obviously a fiddle-heavy group, so we needed some backup. And we have an older brother who used to play drums with us. So it was a full family thing at one time."

Their New Year's online show is a high energy, exuberant performance, combining some familiar seasonal tunes, traditional Celtic and Bluegrass songs and original compositions. For the Fitzgeralds, *Let it Snow* becomes *Let it Jig*, and they play a haunting, wonderful rendition of Gustav Holst's *In the Bleak Midwinter*. They take on the Bob Wills 1940s classic *It's All Your Fault* as well.

Their set also includes a few songs written by the siblings. *Fin* honours their

Irish idol Brian Finnegan while *Ed in the Clouds* reminisces on their time spent on an Irish folk cruise with English Celtic guitarist Ed Boyd. As well, days spent laughing, conspiring, bickering and performing at a restaurant near their hometown at Potash Lake inspired the wistful original *The Lake-*

*house Jig*, which segues directly into their take on the upbeat reel *St. Andrews Flight*. They cap things off with a nod to the Maritime influence with the rollicking *PEI Set*.

Through the entire performance, it's a marvel to see three siblings playing, singing and dancing with so much joy and exuber-

ance. They seem to feed off of each other's energy, while Jenish anchors it all with her deft fretwork on acoustic guitar.

The show was filmed at the Welland Campus of Niagara College by the school's Broadcasting - Radio, Television and Film students under the direction of their professors,

continuing a relationship with Music Niagara that benefitted both parties throughout the pandemic.

A *Celtic New Years Celebration with The Fitzgeralds* hits the Music Niagara Festival website and YouTube channel at 4 p.m. on Dec. 31, and will continue to be available for viewing following its premiere.

## Music Niagara's Christmas Celebration



A Music Niagara Christmas Celebration, with Jesse Whiteley, Anthony Renaldi, Alisha Oliver, Ernesto Cervini, Dan Fortin and Donovan Locke from the Toronto All-Star Big Band, was filmed at Willowbank Estate recently, to be aired online as part of their At Home series on YouTube. (Mike Balsom)

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# Nativity event collects \$3,000, food and mountain of toys

**Mona Babin**  
Special to The Local

A very successful premier season for *Away in a Manger*, a living nativity scene, was hosted by Benchview Equestrian Centre this weekend.

The event was held for two days, and raised more than \$3,000 for The Darte Family Youth Mental Health Fund. Two other charities were supported, with a food drive for Newark Neighbours, and a mountain of toys collected for children in the 3F pediatric cancer unit in McMaster Childrens' Hospital his Christmas season.

Participants drove up to a manger, where they stopped to observe local people dressed as Mary, Joseph, wise men, shepherds, and angels.

Vineridge Academy took the Sunday afternoon sessions, while local families were featured on Saturday and Sunday evenings.

The event was organized by Pat Darte, Jane Neaves, Caroline Polgrabia, Mona Babin and Melina Morsch to raise awareness of the difficulty so many are having with the new norms the pandemic has introduced.

Steri Plus was on site with equipment that creates a virus-killing steam chamber that all volunteers walked through



Peter Raymond, Sebastian Reese, Luke Lu, Sophie Qu, Toyosi Agboola and Julian Xu, students from Vineridge Academy, created a nativity scene for those who drove by Benchview Equestrian Centre's fundraising event this weekend.

upon arrival and before departure.

Organizers said the Christmas spirit is something they wanted to share as a community, regardless of challenges due to COVID-19.

There were plenty of

happy visitors wishing all a Merry Christmas from the safety and comfort of their cars, as they enjoyed the lights and sounds and sites of this very special Christmas event. Organizers say they hope to make this an annual event.

Jennifer Visca and her son Lucas took part in Benchview's nativity scene. (Photos supplied)



*Congratulations!*



Joe and Janice Delaney are proud to announce the graduation of their oldest daughter

**RACHEL DELANEY**

Rachel graduated from Waterloo University with honours in Geological Engineering in June 2020. Rachel has taken a position with an Engineer firm in California. We are very proud of Rachel and we are happy to share the news with friends and family.

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## Auchterlonie on Astrology

**Bill Auchterlonie**  
Special to The Local

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

Thursday, Dec. 24: It's Christmas Eve, with the Moon in homey Taurus most of the day. Despite a bit of stress in the morning, the rest of the day is sweet, especially this evening. It was 202 years ago today that *Silent Night*, composed by Franz Gruber, was first heard in Oberndorf, Austria.

Friday, Dec. 25: Merry Christmas! A surprise just past midnight may have many of us wide awake and smiling. And thinking what to do next. It's a day where indulgence and imagination are hand-in-hand. In what would become the most horrific war ever, soldiers on both sides took the day off and exchanged gifts and played soccer.

Times have changed a lot since Dec. 25, 1914.

## LOCAL WORSHIP



**Sunday, December 27th**

10 a.m. Worship Gathering  
Speaker: Jeff Martens  
Message: Looking Forward, Looking Back  
Pre-registration is required to attend in-person worship

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58			59					60				61	62
63						64				65			
66					67					68			
69					70						71		

**Across:**

1 Maker whose cars go up and down  
5 Unfortunately  
9 Old Indian coin  
13 Individualist  
15 --- Marlene  
16 Turns  
17 Weighty  
18 Thought transference  
20 San ---, California  
22 Correction  
23 4th largest Great Lake  
24 With regard to  
25 Place  
26 Contains Jets and Texans  
28 Composure  
30 Small cell  
32 Paces  
35 Common subjects in life classes  
39 Zits  
40 Delhi wraps?  
42 S M S  
43 Additional clause  
45 Financial holdings  
47 Doze  
49 Calf meat  
50 Tennis player's org.  
51 Drop in value  
54 Small pool lining slab

56 Burrow  
58 Unworldliness  
60 Storm  
63 Truce  
65 Ace golfer --- Els  
66 Amount  
67 "Born Free" lioness  
68 Lucifer  
69 Was completely certain  
70 Raised platform  
71 Thanksgiving dish

**Down:**

1 "Quantum of Solace" actress --- Kurylenko  
2 Ripped  
3 Very soon  
4 Cut  
5 Either a male or a female voice  
6 Recline  
7 Filmmaker Woody ---  
8 Jagged mountain range  
9 Turkish rulers  
10 Asleep  
11 Long narrow jacket with a high collar  
12 So far  
14 Ancient artifacts  
19 Song of praise

21 E.g. venison, beef, pork etc.  
24 Better  
26 A long way off  
27 An ellipse has two  
29 Spring  
31 Not manual (Abbr.)  
33 Person between 12 and 20  
34 Father  
36 Dominican-American fashion designer Oscar ---  
37 Way out  
38 Cease  
41 Not fresh  
44 Assesses  
46 Online attacks  
48 Pockmarked  
51 Nibble  
52 Moses' brother  
53 Easy putt  
55 Bizet's priestess in "The Pearl Fishers"  
57 Start of a divine appeal  
59 Perspective  
60 E.g. Oolong, Darjeeling  
61 Now Thailand  
62 Sawbucks  
64 Long-running Ted Danson show

OBITUARY



**SMITH, GLENDA BLANCHE (NEE TONKS)**—Sadly, on Thursday December 17, 2020, Glenda Blanche Smith (nee Tonks) passed away at Joseph Brant Hospital, Burlington, ON at the age of 85, after a brief illness. Heartfelt thanks to palliative care nurse Diana. Glenda's pride and joy were her two daughters Laurie Simpson and Karen Lombardi and much-loved son-in-law Bert Lombardi. She had great love and pride for her three grandsons and their partners McKenzie Simpson (wife Amanda), Philip Lombardi (fiancé Tonii) and Christopher (wife Natasha). Glenda lived a long and abundant life with her predeceased husband George W. Smith of 42 years. Whether sailing, travelling the world or enjoying wintering in Florida, they enjoyed the time they spent in their custom-built home in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Glenda much enjoyed her garden and had a lifelong love of books. In Glenda's later years, she was influenced by her son-in-law Bert. He introduced her to the game of golf and also the love and appreciation of wine. Over her life, Glenda was blessed to have three wonderful dogs; Skipper, Peanut and Sheldon. A private family service was held on December 22nd at St. Mark's Anglican Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON. When safe to do so, a celebration of life will be announced in The NOTL Local. In lieu of flowers, a donation may be made to Red Roof Retreat, Niagara-on-the-Lake, and can be done through Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., P.O. Box 453, Niagara-on-the-Lake or at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com)



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

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Sudoku solution from December 17, 2020

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

**Across:** 1 Amir, 5 After, 10 Elms, 14 Pave, 15 Slade, 16 Guam, 17 Prop, 18 Poker, 19 Once, 20 Scrub, 22 Renew, 24 C A A, 25 Dalai, 27 Arthur, 29 Umpire, 32 Nadi, 34 Cataracts, 36 Tones, 40 List, 41 Nooks, 43 Memo, 44 Addis, 46 Last April, 48 Optic, 50 Used to, 51 Hannah, 54 Cabal, 56 Ado, 57 Major, 59 Noses, 63 Dubs, 65 Waugh, 67 Euro, 68 Ella, 69 Ennu, 70 Iman, 71 Step, 72 Dates, 73 Loss.

**Down:** 1 Apps, 2 Marc, 3 Ivor, 4 Repudiation, 5 Asp, 6 Flora, 7 Take into account, 8 Eden, 9 Reread, 10 Ego, 11 Lunch, 12 Macau, 13 Smeat, 21 Barr, 23 Writ, 26 Lean, 28 Trompe l'œil, 29 U C L A, 30 Maid, 31 PT S D, 33 Asks, 35 Coll, 37 Nerd, 38 Emit, 39 Solo, 42 Stub, 45 Spam, 47 As an, 49 Thawed, 51 Hades, 52 Adult, 53 Noble, 55 Argue, 58 Jana, 60 Sumo, 61 Eras, 62 Sons, 64 Sap, 66 His.

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