

# The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



Virgil man  
home and  
feeling strong

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It was a busy day at the Fort George skating rink Sunday, with Zuma, from the popular Paw Patrol kids' show, on the ice to entertain kids. (Fred Mercnik)

## First-timers looking forward to Boxing Day Penguin Dip

Penny Coles  
The Local

The annual Penguin Club dip will continue this Boxing Day, as it has for more than 40 years, with at least two new participants hoping to become penguins.

Coun. Clare Cameron and her husband Mackenzie have decided to take the plunge into the frigid waters

off Ball's Beach. That decision was made before she realized there will be three dips on Boxing Day, to be repeated for three years, to become an official member of the Penguin Club.

"We've never done it before," says Clare. "I've always admired the people who have the courage to do it. We talked about it and decided this is something we want to

do. And it's a fundraiser for a good cause."

Even after hearing the details about what the dip entails, she says, "for some crazy reason, I'm looking forward to it."

She hopes, after all the eating and celebrating on Christmas Day, it will be an invigorating way to recover from the holiday.

She was planning on

talking to organizer Chris Bjorgan for some tips on what to expect, joking about hoping to avoid a "massive coronary or going into shock."

Bjorgan is hoping for a good turnout, after last year's showing of about a dozen people, when numbers traditionally are around 50 or 60.

He's started to hear from

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## Skating and music at Fort George

Kim Wade  
The Local

Niagara's own Madhatters band played an outdoor concert for skaters in the Agora at Fort George on Sunday afternoon. The stage was set up rink-side to provide entertainment for families taking time out from holiday preparations to enjoy an afternoon of skating.

Frank Pietrangelo, lead singer and guitarist of the band was happy to have his children skating while the Madhatters performed. "What a gorgeous day," he said after the band finished their first set. Pietrangelo was clearly enjoying watching his sons on the rink, wearing their Toronto Maple Leaf jerseys. "It's great

when the kids can be here and watch dad play," he said, especially when most of The Madhatters' shows take place long after his sons are already in bed.

And it was a gorgeous day. It was unusually warm for the day after the winter solstice, with temperatures in Niagara-on-the-Lake hitting a high of seven degrees Celsius under clear, sunny skies.

Seven degrees is nothing compared to the heat Virginia Lucente is used to back in Australia. Lucente has come back to Canada with her husband and their two children to visit with her extended family for the holidays. They live on the

Continued on page 2



Samson Pietrangelo, Desi Pietrangelo, and Joseph Marone skate while The Madhatters entertain from an outdoor stage. (Kim Wade)

  
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# Virgil family celebrates their 'Christmas miracle'

After two open-heart surgeries in less than 24 hours, Zachary Spione is home with his family

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Zachary Spione has touched the hearts of this community since he was a youngster.

Locals watched him grow and flourish, and couldn't help but love his open friendliness, his enthusiasm for life and the warm-hearted smile he shares easily.

A graduate of St. Michael Catholic Elementary School and Holy Cross Secondary School, he has been working in local stores, coffee shops and businesses since he was 14 — Phil's valu-mart, McDonald's, Tim Hortons, Silk's Country Kitchen, Subway, Dominos, PetroCan, Stratus Winery, even the Whirlpool Jet Boats, where he was a guest service agent — those were the names he could remember.

More recently, he became known as the greeter when the new Bricks & Barley Restaurant opened, with his parents as co-owners.

So it was with a huge feeling of dread that many learned less than three weeks ago he had been rushed into an operating room for emergency open heart surgery.

And then, just hours into his recovery, was rushed back in again, having his chest opened up for a second time in less than 24 hours to correct bleeding that was filling his heart cavity and making it increasingly difficult for him to breathe.

The irony of Spione's very frightening experience was that it had nothing to do with his genetic condition, known as Noonan syndrome, which can include congenital heart disease. His parents were warned when he was a baby that he would likely require heart surgery, but not for the reasons that sent him to the hospital as a 27-year-old man, and scared the daylights out of him, his family, and the many members of the community who have been touched by him and care about his welfare.

The path that led to the emergency room began last June, when he went to his doctor with breathing difficulties and was sent from his doctor's office by ambulance to the Niagara Falls hospital site.

There, he was sent to the cardiac care unit, where it was discovered he had fluid in his lungs.

He had been sick for awhile before that, but he's not a complainer, says Maria, his mother.

"He's so strong. We didn't realize how sick he was."

He had an infection that had been untreated, and was given antibiotics and released.

Since then, he has continued to be treated with medication for an infection and to drain fluid around his heart, in an effort to prevent surgery, but it didn't work, Maria says.

A trip to the St. Catharines hospital in November when his

breathing worsened, led to every test imaginable, he says, and after two days in emergency, admittance to the cardiac care unit, where he stayed for a week while doctors tried to get inflammation around his heart under control.

"They were keeping him stable, but they weren't solving the problem," says Maria, who has nothing but praise for the care Zac received. "Everyone in emergency, nurses and doctors, was fantastic. We don't hear that often enough."

When he learned he was being transferred to Hamilton General Hospital by ambulance, Zac says he was actually feeling a little better, as another round of testing began.

An angiogram showed scar tissue in his pericardial sac, which surrounds the heart. The thickening of the sac was what was impacting his breathing, and a decision was made to perform emergency open heart surgery for a pericardiectomy, which removes the sac. Without the surgery, even if they had solved the immediate problem, it would likely have returned, says Maria.

The angiogram, says Zac, might have been the most frightening part of the whole terrifying experience. At one point during the procedure, he saw angels — including four people, family and friends, who had passed away.

He also saw golden gates, but they were closed. "I thought it was because God was showing me it wasn't my time, that I still had work to do."

So when he was told he required surgery, he was calm, he says.

On Dec. 5, he was rushed into surgery about 10:30 p.m., and in the wee hours of Dec. 6, his family, waiting anxiously in a waiting room, were reaching out to friends and family and asking for prayers for Zac. Four hours later, they learned their prayers had been answered and the surgery had been successful.

Maria says for a few hours Zac seemed to be doing well. He was still in critical care, heavily monitored, but as the morning progressed, it was getting harder and harder for him to breathe. They were beside themselves, not knowing what was happening to him. "At one point, he looked at me and said, 'I don't know how much longer I can do this,'" says Maria.

In an update to friends and family, she says, "please continue to pray for him. I don't know how much more he can take."

Finally, after a surge of doctors and nurses surrounded him in a flurry of activity, they were told there was some bleeding in his chest cavity, and Zac was headed back to the operating room to have his chest opened up for the second time.

With his mother in tears, telling him he couldn't leave them, Zac promised he wouldn't. "A promise is a promise," he says

now.

"That was another three-hour wait," says his dad, Marco. "They had to remove five litres of blood."

"That was the worst three hours of our lives," adds Alexa, Zac's younger sister.

Sitting with his family in their Virgil living room shortly after being discharged from the hospital, Zac listens to the words of his parents and sister, and is still having difficulty talking, having to stop to rest, catch his breath, and wipe his eyes — he becomes emotional recalling what happened to him and how he felt. He says he's been told to expect that emotional reaction to continue, maybe for as long as a year, as he recovers from an experience that nearly took his life.

"They told me when you come that close to dying, you get very emotional thinking about it, and feeling so grateful that you're still alive," he says. "Even though the fear is gone, it takes awhile to accept the reality of what has happened, and realize how lucky you are to be alive."

As hard as that experience was for all of them, Zac says now he believes he will feel stronger than he ever has. His circulation, always poor due to Noonan syndrome, is already much improved — for the first time he can remember, his hands and feet are warm, he says.

"And if I listen, I can hear my heart. It sounds so much stronger."

A deformity in the bone structure of his chest, which he has had since birth, has also been corrected, he says.

"There is more room for me to breathe now, better lung capacity, and more room for my heart to pump. I'm already feeling more energy."

Zac says in the days and weeks leading up to his surgery, "I prayed to be healthy again," and the 17-day journey he has travelled, from the trip to St. Catharines to coming home, has definitely made him stronger.

He was discharged six days after surgery, and although he wants to get back to the restaurant to see his friends, and return to a job he loves — he's now working in the kitchen prepping food — he has to rest at home. Maria is also concerned about exposing him to germs, worrying about what a cold would do to him at this point.

Maria, meanwhile, calling her son "our Christmas miracle," says the family has been overwhelmed by the response from the community, and Alexa was looking forward to what she knew would be the family's "best Christmas ever."

The family, and especially Zac, have been astonished by the number of people, new and old friends, and even those who never prayed, who reached out with love, support and prayers during a very challenging time, says Maria.



Zachary Spione, with his mother Maria, sister Alexa and father Marco, is recovering at home, and feeling stronger than ever. (Penny Coles)

"I knew I was loved," says Zac. "I had no idea I had touched so many people."

Maria recalls the day she and Marco decided to buy a lot and build a house in NOTL — the best decision they ever made.

"There is so much love in this community," she says.

When Zac was in the hospital, Michael McGarr, the man he

calls his BFF and brother, started a Go Fund Me page, asking people to show Zac "some love."

They did, also showering him with cash.

Everyone who knows Zac, says McGarr, "knows he's an amazingly kind-hearted dude who would do anything for his friends and family."

He has been through a lot in

his life, "and always comes out on top," says McGarr. He says he started the fund so that when Zac has recovered, he and his family can take a trip to Harry Potter World in Disneyland. "Let's show our buddy some love," he says.

The fund had reached \$12,000 by last weekend — evidence of a loving community showing it cares.



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# Families celebrate with Santa



The NOTL Mamas and Babies group, which meets weekly at the library, held its last gathering of the year Saturday. Thirteen families, including dads, grandparents, and nannies, came out with their children to meet Santa Claus. New books were given to the kids, donated by a Scholastic employee and family member of Natalie Cooper, who founded the group. Jason Chow, husband of member Fiona, and father of Declan and Paige, took photos and agreed to share them with The Local. His website is <http://jasonchow.com>.



Santa has a chat with Declan Chow.



Wells Frederiksen (left) has a story for Claire Staz.

Jennifer Moledina (right) and son Kiaan enjoy the holiday get-together of Mamas and Babies.

Clare Cameron (below), with Adelaide, visits with Santa.



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Claire Staz isn't sure about the man with the white beard.

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**Santa visits NOTL**

Santa Claus makes an appearance at an evening skating party at Fort George. The rink will be open over the holidays, but check the Fort George website for times. (Fred Mercnik)



# Wide range of services available close to home

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Do you have some new electronics, possibly Christmas gifts, you're having trouble setting up?

A new laptop or other device that's stumping you?

You can ask an expert for help, nearby, and at a really good price — the advice is free.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library has a host of programs you can access at no charge. One of them is Ask a Tech.

There are specific dates when an IT staff member will be available to answer your questions, says Matt Furlong, IT coordinator at the library.

Just bring the device for which you need help, and if they can't fix your problem, they can help by suggesting where you can go to get it fixed.

The next date for Ask a Tech is Jan. 17, at 11 a.m., but you don't have to wait for one of the scheduled sessions — although it's a regular program, you can call and make an appointment, says Furlong.

As an example, he says, a common question he is asked is how to transfer photos from a phone to a laptop or computer. While it may seem daunting to some, it should be fairly simple, and will free up space on your phone.

That's just one of all the services and bits of advice you can find at the library.

Want to learn about genealogy, ancestry and DNA testing? That's available from expert David Hemmings — at the library.

How about local health care, and services you might need as you age? Learn from Dr. Bill Brown, along with doctors and medical students associated with McMaster

University. They are at monthly InfoHealth sessions — also at the library.

Learn to be creative with Knit-a-Bit, socialize and make friends while you're learning, all over a cup of tea. "It's something we offer, organized by what has become a tight group of people," says library tech Sarah Bowers.

For new moms who want to get out of the house and hang out with a laid-back, no-judgment group of women, there's a Mamas and Babies group — sometimes including fathers — organized by a local mom and offered through the library.

Wine and Words, a library program that invites authors to talk about their books at local wineries, is so popular it is usually sold out, and the Beer and Books club, held at The Old Winery, is well-attended, says Bowers.

There's also a drop-in coffee break for seniors, some of whom are suffering from memory issues and come with their caregivers. It provides a bit of respite for both, says Bowers, and a chance to enjoy free coffee and cookies while chatting.

"It's a place that is safe and welcoming, where people can meet each other and chat. We set up tables and chairs in the Rotary Room, and it's very informal.

Most of the people who come are alone, but it would also be a great opportunity for couples to get out and talk to other people. We feel there is a need for seniors who are looking for a place that is safe and warm, at no charge."

As an added bonus, if there is a senior who needs help, or a family member looking for assistance, library staff can direct them to the right source.

"We can provide a bridge to the resources that are out

there for people with health problems, such as dementia," says Bowers.

"Libraries of today are really about being a general hub for the community," says Furlong. "Books are secondary, a small part of what we do."

"If someone comes to us with a suggestion, we're open to ideas," Bowers adds. "Some programs are a result of a particular suggestion from the public, some are from staff who get an idea from dealing with the public."

A recently launched children's chess club was a combination of that — a volunteer who was interested in teaching chess, and a staff member who knew there were kids interested in learning, says Bowers.

"It makes it easier if people come to us with suggestions — then we know what is needed and that there will be some interest in it."

Other programs and workshops have been held to talk about zero household waste, beginners' gardening, and beeswax food wraps. One that turned out to be pretty popular was the Repair Cafe, which will be repeated Feb. 1, at 11 a.m.

That gives you time to pull out all your old electronics, such as toasters, toaster ovens, computers, weed-whackers — even lawn mowers — to bring to the library, says Bowers. Jewelry and sewing repairs will also be available.

When the first Repair Cafe was held in the fall, there was a shout-out for people with repair skills to help, not only to fix things but to teach how to do the repairs.

The response was overwhelming from people who wanted to help, says Bowers — they may have had more volunteers than items to repair.



Shree and Bharti Gandhi receive assistance from IT library staff member Justin Oksam. (Photo supplied)

But with a little more publicity, she expects it will be a program that will take off — those who did attend were impressed with the help they received, including Furlong, who is very knowledgeable about computers but needed help to fix a lamp.

Repairing, rather than throwing away, ties in with zero waste, recycling and the

interest in a greener future, says Bowers. If the item is something you don't need, you could bring it in for repair and then pass it on to someone who does, possibly through Newark Neighbours.

There is also a coordinator for children's programs at the library, with some aimed at the family, such as movie events, and The Makery,

which encourages parents and kids to put their heads together to create something.

"People are often surprised at the wide range of services available at the library," says Furlong.

For more information about programs, dates and times, check out the library website at [notlpubliclibrary.org](http://notlpubliclibrary.org).

## Lighting up the neighbourhood



This York Road home near Queenston is always a Christmas event to visit, with cars parking and people walking across the front and back yards in awe of the lights. (Penny Coles)

## Holiday events at OLIV

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# EDITORIAL

## Take the plunge, try volunteering

The evidence of the value of volunteers surrounds us in Niagara-on-the-Lake, never more so than during the holiday season.

The work of Newark Neighbours may be one of the greatest triumphs of this community, but it wouldn't happen without the volunteers who run it and the generous community members who support it.

The programs which help the migrant worker community — Caribbean Outreach, which has existed for decades, many others working away at making the town safe for them through efforts to supply bikes and safety vests; The Friends of Fort George who stage so many worthwhile

events that bring history to life; all those who help make it possible for the museums, art centre and even the Shaw Festival to exist; the gardening club, horticultural society and Communities in Bloom volunteers who all work to beautify our town; there are way too many to mention, but all help to make NOTL a great place to live, work and visit.

We're all so busy, it can be hard to even think about finding the time to offer our services, but the benefits can be enormous, and not only for the recipients.

Volunteers become connected to the community, meet new people and learn new skills. Helping others also broadens our perspective

about the need that exists in the community, focuses our priorities and gives us a sense of purpose.

For those who may be thinking about New Year's resolutions that include being more involved in the community, there is no shortage of need. The Town has a volunteer talent bank that could be helpful, but really, all we have to do is look around us at the possibilities, and the opportunities that might interest us. It can be simple, and doesn't have to take a lot of time.

Take the plunge, and by this time next year, you could feel like a new person.

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

## LETTERS

### It takes a village

As I write this, I'm sitting at McMaster 3F Child and Youth Clinic, Von Paton and myself have just driven through a fierce snowstorm to deliver your generous donations to the second annual toy drive for paediatrics cancer patients.

I can't say enough on how your donations made an overwhelming difference this year. I'm truly, wholeheartedly thankful to each of you.

I would like to say a special thank you to Pat Darte of Benchview Equestrian Centre, Kevin Lunn of Kevin Lunn Salon, Jason McKee, Von Paton and Martin Flynn of VonMar Floral Boutique for your continuous support throughout this journey.

I would also like to say thank you to the anonymous donors from NOTL, along with Kevin Ripski.

Phil Leboudec, Angie Car-

rillo-Burgos, Dr. Gary Friesen, Jenn Poynton and the ladies from Live Breathe Pilates of NOTL, and Penny Coles of The Local for the wonderful article, along with all of my friends who made contributions to the toy drive.

May you and your families have love, health and happiness... Merry Christmas.

It takes a village.

**Jane Neaves**

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### The Niagara-on-the-Lake

# LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community

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## LOCAL FINDS



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### Oldest monument at St. Mark's

by **Donald Combe**  
Special to The Local

Elizabeth (Johnson) Kerr was the daughter of Sir William Johnson and Molly Brant, her uncle was Joseph Brant, leader of the Six Nations people, and her husband was Robert Kerr, physician with the Indian Department in Upper Canada. Elizabeth's funeral was the first conducted in Niagara by the Rev. Robert Addison. We believe Elizabeth's cemetery monument to be the oldest in Ontario.



## A Man Goes to the Movies

**Donald Combe**  
Special to The Local

### Knives Out

*Knives Out* is a wonderful, traditional "whodunnit." Everyone in the Thrombey family has reason to "do in" the family patriarch but... Daniel Craig leads an all-star cast in chomping through the scenery in this wonderful throwback to another cinematic time. Enjoy!

### A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood

Well-known, well-loved Mr. Rogers valued people just the way they were, accepting them without judgement. Mr. Rogers said, "if it is mentionable, it is manageable, and everything human is mentionable," thus giving hope to all.

He lived kindness, changing many lives, including mine as well as the lives of all others who see this film.

It is a must-see for ev-

everyone!  
*Donald Combe is a retired English teacher who loves to go to movies. His Facebook reviews have become popular with his friends and followers, and he has graciously agreed to share his opinions through "short and sweet" exclusives for The Local.*



Daniel Craig

The NOTL Local acknowledges the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples, many of whom continue to live and work here today. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum agreement. Today this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and acknowledging reminds us that our great standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous peoples.





Owen Bjorgan  
Special to The Local

As 2019 comes to a close, I've been reflecting on what opportunities to raise environmental awareness, what may lie ahead in the new year, and where they are picking up from this year. It's been a wild one!

Since April, I've been sitting in front of this 13-inch screen picking away at editing *Hidden Corners: Tropical North Queensland*, from last winter's filming excursion in Australia. Life hopped into the fast lane, and the documentary went on the back-burner for some time as environmental work unfolded on the forefront here in Niagara, which I am happy to call home for the holiday season.

With the majority of the film's creative work done, and some finishing touches to go, reviewing the footage has reminded me of what 2020 needs more of in an environmental context, and how I plan on using my time and resources to make it happen.

There are some upcoming potential filming expeditions I

plan to use as a conservation tool.

Jamaica has been on the list as an affordable and convenient candidate spot to film my series, *Hidden Corners*, over the past couple of years. Its geographical isolation means that Jamaica cooks up a lot of natural wonders typical of islands. Surrounded by water, but large enough to sustain a variety of ecosystems and its own microclimate, there is potential for unique life forms to thrive here.

Because those species have been physically limited to expand their genes to other areas of the planet, the endemism rates are exceptional. This just means that a relatively high percentage of the species here are found nowhere else in the world, which is extraordinary for biodiversity on the global scale. Plus, who isn't humanly fascinated by something rare, unique, or exclusive?

The following reminders are probably not the holiday Jamaica we think of. It has its own species of boa found on that island and nowhere else on the planet, just slinking its two-metre body silently through the lush vegetation. About a quarter of the country's plant species are found strictly on this landmass. Regarding my personal

favourite group of organisms, reptiles, the Jamaican iguana is not only restricted to the island, but specifically to one type of limestone forest ecosystem in a small pocket of protected land. It is therefore one of the rarest reptiles in the world.

There is the illusive American crocodile, which patrols the saline waters off the Jamaican coast. The creature remains instrumental in regulating the ecosystem, as it has done for millions of years. This is a saltwater machine, built much like its massive close cousin in Australia, the saltwater crocodile (which I was fortunate to film in close quarters for the upcoming documentary, where you can watch one effortlessly smash a coconut open with its jaws in the river).

The biggest high I can chase in life, is the chase of finding a particular species. I crave that meeting, face to face, with an animal that has existed on the third rock for far longer than we have. There is always a story in just trying to make this meeting happen, and it's super cool to show people why that matters.

This *Hidden Corners* formula is always productive. By searching for rare or unusual species, you're often forced to go

into their neighbourhood, areas where nature is still the boss and in charge. These are usually wilderness areas or locations that are daunting to access for the determined hominid. Thank goodness for rugged mountains, for if they were more complicit, we would have likely already gotten there and wreaked havoc on these biological refuges, our sincere natural heritage.

Mountains and valleys, as I experienced first hand in Ecuador and Peru, not only shelter populations of plants and animals removed elsewhere, but also independently continue to produce their own new species.

It's almost like evolution itself is sheltered in the hills and deep valleys of the world.

Let's fly to the other side of the world to another island, considerably bigger than Jamaica, where the wild spaces and animals are on a greater scale. It's not to say that Sri Lanka is automatically higher ranked as a candidate for a filming project, but it would certainly be different and require a different level or preparedness for safety reasons. I love the rush of that.

This also has my mind wandering and wondering about Borneo or Madagascar perhaps. Both are amidst a conservation

crisis, as their superbly high biodiversity is being eliminated or pushed deeper into the mountains of the island. There is an immense opportunity here to highlight this, the global implications, and why the heck our natural world should matter more at the turn of the decade than ever before.

Let's be resilient, like those island mountains, and not let the environment slip away on us in the new year.

I hope everyone has a safe and eco-friendly Christmas holiday. Thanks for your readership and being a thoughtful part of our community.



Mountains coated in clouds and forests are places to visit at the turn of the decade, for the sake of exposing their conservation value. This is a canyon entrance near Mossman, Australia. (Owen Bjorgan)



## Auchterlonie on Astrology

Bill Auchterlonie  
Special to The Local

This week in Auchterlonie on Astrology I'll look at Boxing Day and the Annular Solar Eclipse on Boxing Day. This is also the day of the New Moon in Capricorn.

On my podcast I've got some more news on the Saturnalia, the Astrology of Christmas and the real birthday of Christ. The website is <https://www.lookin-gupwithbill.com/podcasts.html>.

Now, the week ahead.

Thursday, Dec. 26: A New Moon is always about new beginnings, and this one is no exception. It is powerful and ripe with contradiction. To begin, it's about power, and especially the abuse of power. This is connoted by the perfect (eclipse) connection of the Sun and Moon at four degrees of Capricorn – opposite the North Node of the Moon at eight degrees of Cancer. All

of this happening at the highest and lowest points of the chart. This eclipse will be visible only in parts of the Middle East, in Asia and Northern Australia including also the Western Pacific Ocean. But its effect will be everywhere. Although it's softened here on the east coast of North America, courtesy of Libra on the eastern horizon at 12:59 a.m. It all adds up to a very tense battle, with abuse of power creating tremendous tension. But also with the opportunity to relieve that tension through adopting the balancing energy of peaceful Libra. It was Dec. 26, 1871 that the day after Christmas, commonly known as Boxing Day, becomes a holiday in Canada, England, Wales and Ireland.

There is more than one British tradition that could explain the name of the holiday. One possible explanation is that boxes with donations for the poor were opened the day

after Christmas. Another is that aristocratic families gave gifts in boxes to their servants and employees, and to tradespeople, on Dec. 26. Today in Canada, Boxing Day is known mainly as a day for bargain shopping; a day when we give boxes to ourselves.

Friday, Dec. 27: Both the Sun and the Moon in Capricorn make the strongest connections with Saturn today. It's a day for serious matters and for accomplishment. After playing only 38 games in the NHL, Edmonton Oiler Wayne Gretzky scored his 100th point, the fastest in NHL history.

Saturday, Dec. 28: While the Moon moves from serious Capricorn into healing Aquarius early in the morning, the big astrological news this week is Mercury moving from all-knowing Sagittarius into in-charge Capricorn late this evening. This sets up a month of practical, get 'er done thinking, and with ideas that are designed to get results.

On Dec. 28 in 1612, Galileo peered through his telescope and saw something new. He later named it Neptune, after realizing it was a planet.

Sunday, Dec. 29: Sunday is supposed to be a day of rest, but this one may be a day of tests. One thing after another. The good news is that there is opportunity for healing old wounds. The brilliant Mary Tyler Moore was born on Dec. 29, 1936. She died two years ago this January. And on this day in 1989, Wayne Gretzky and Martina Navratilova were named Athletes of the Decade by the Associated Press.

Monday, Dec. 30: The Moon moves from futuristic Aquarius into emotional Pisces this morning, setting the stage for a day of imaginative thinking and positive goings-on. Especially when Mercury in Capricorn makes a powerfully positive connection to Uranus in Taurus early this evening. Words of

love and surprising ideas about long term plans are in the air. He's been on top. He's been in the dumpster. Now he's making a comeback as a winner in sport and as a person. Tiger Woods turns 44 today.

Tuesday, Dec 31: The last day of 2019 ends with the Sun in serious Capricorn and the Moon in emotional Pisces. Party time? Yes, it can be a celebration, if friendliness is the objective and if part of the party is about planning for the future. It's time to make resolutions that look ahead and are believable. Today is the birthday of the French explorer who named a distant land 'the Canadas'. Jacques Cartier was born on this day in 1491. And it was Dec. 31, 1904 that the first New Year's Eve celebration was held in Times Square, New York.

Wednesday, Jan 1: Happy New Year! As the Moon continues transits of Pisces through

most of this first day of 2020, it may feel like a continuation of yesterday. Fortunately, there is lots of energy, willpower and common sense to make this a better than good start to a new year and a new decade. It was New Year's Day, 1902 that the first Rose Bowl football game was played in Pasadena, California. Michigan shut out Stanford 49 to 0.

The First Quarter Moon is Jan. 2, and I'll have that and a whole lot more here in The Local with another edition of Auchterlonie on Astrology.

And a reminder – please check out my podcast on my website at <https://www.lookin-gupwithbill.com/podcasts.html>

It has the astrology of Christmas and the real birthday of Jesus – and ideas for Christmas and birthday presents from me.

As Joni Mitchell said: "We are stardust. We are golden." So shine on!

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# Remember the good times



**Ted Mouradian**  
Special to The Local

Well, it is now the day after Christmas — possibly, depending on when you get your paper and how quickly you sit down to read it — and many of you are relaxing, enjoying leftovers and thinking about what the last week has brought you.

Many will have had wonderful family gatherings, but some will have had a bit of a sad time, remembering those lost during the year, or years past, both family and friends. You will be saddened by the loss. But hopefully you will also think with fond memories about the good times you had with those cherished souls.

So as the year 2019 comes to an end, and we ponder all of the good times, along with some of the bad. Let's keep in mind that no matter how challenging this year has been, there were plenty of wins as well.

Remember the smile you received from that nice woman when you held the door for her.

Remember the little baby

in the stroller who smiled up at you with those bright wondrous eyes.

Remember the little hug and kiss you got from your partner, for no other reason but that they cared.

Remember the wave from the person who stopped their car and let you turn left.

Remember looking up at the stars on a warm summer night, while looking at the mouth of the Niagara River with only a few other people there to enjoy it with you, and that knowing smile that passed between you all.

Remember finding the last parking spot at the valu-mart when you needed to rush in for a last minute item.

Remember when you dropped a package and the person behind you picked it up and handed it to you, with that bright smile and the kind words, "you dropped this."

Remember when you planned that family picnic along the Niagara River Parkway, and the weather was a little iffy, but when 3 p.m. came the clouds parted, and the sun came out.

Remember when you were walking down Queen Street and you saw tourists in complete awe of where you live. Tourists who came from all over the

world just to gaze at the wonders of this magnificent little town.

Remember finding a perfect card or gift for a special person in your life, and how wonderful it felt when they opened it, gasped and gave you the biggest hug ever.

Remember running into an old school friend you haven't seen for years and how great it was to take the time to talk about all of the good days you spent together.

Remember the evenings, alone with a glass of local wine in front of a warm fire, thinking about how blessed you are.

Finally, remember you are the one with all of those wonderful moments in time that really made 2019 worth living.

My hope is that even though some of the memories might have not been so pleasant, the really special ones will be what you carry with you today, and in the future.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and Happy Holidays.

*Ted Mouradian is the President of the 2% Factor Inc. and creator of the Law of Cooperative Action. He is an author and professional speaker and can be reached at [ted@the2percentfactor.com](mailto:ted@the2percentfactor.com).*

## LETTERS

### Hope for the gentler, kinder NOTL community to prevail

Just over a year ago, it all came together. When we moved from Montreal to Toronto, we happened to be in need of a getaway place to escape work, celebrate a birthday or anniversary, and we became acquainted with Niagara-on-the-Lake.

That was many years ago. We especially loved coming in the off-season, late fall, when we would walk with the setting sun and the aroma of wood-burning fireplaces would tickle the nose, the quietness of the town would surround us, and a church bell would chime. It was bliss.

Or, in the early spring, before the enormous planters were erected in town, the grass was just beginning to sprout and one would witness the arrival of spring flowers showing off their glory. All troubles seemed to evaporate here. Whatever the season, smiles lingered longer, the heart was happier and all was well.

We continued to come, saw many a change in this town and in many ways grew with this town. Somewhere along the line, we started to think, what about when we can leave Toronto, what if we moved here? Well, there was many a conversation about this, and many a home

was looked at on Queen Street in the windows of real estate brokerages, and brochures brought home to be savoured later, before the internet. What if?

The elusive time, on fast-forward for us always, came to a standstill and we could leave Toronto. Beside the fact that it seemed to happen so quickly, we could look at making this town our home. We explored many a location in and around our favourite town, and many a home, but there was always something missing. Over a year of exploration, one afternoon in the summer we found a place we would call home. In historic Old Town, close enough to walk to the festivals, stores and restaurants and music events, but seemed like a world away, with the conservation area as our backyard.

Our move transpired and as real as it was, still it was sometimes hard to fathom that we were living in our adopted town. I know, there are many transplants like us, each with their own unique story, sharing this special town. It is a very special town indeed, even with its hiccups! We read the local news, so much better than any other city

news, and hope the heart and soul of this town will not change. Certainly, as time goes on, there will be modifications, but I sincerely hope the quaintness, the architectural gems, be it on Queen Street or in the community, do not change, and that the gentler, kinder feel, the less-hurried atmosphere, always prevails.

I believe we have attended almost all of the goings-on in this town we proudly call home, and we are beyond thrilled to be a resident. Naturally, everyone wants to visit, and we are happy for them to come and experience and share this special town of ours.

Many people speak of Napa, Sonoma and I always ask them, have you been to Niagara? If they haven't, I tell them you should really explore your backyard and see how vibrant the wine country is here. How far the wine industry has come from when we first visited, and there was maybe a handful of wineries. And the wine is oh so much better now!

We feel privileged to have Niagara-on-the-Lake as our address, and just wanted to share this story with our community.

**Joe-ann Barisa**



### Helping the needy at Christmas

Newark Neighbours had a space about 25 feet long with bags of food on the tables, and on the floor underneath, for about 30 families, singles and couples. Gifts and toys were piled high on the other side. Newark Neighbours has been helping residents of NOTL for almost 40 years, with no government support — just the work of dedicated volunteers such as Pat Hicks and Pat Fryer, and the generosity of individuals and businesses who help out all year round, and especially at Christmas. (Photo supplied)

### Higher taxes do not equal sustainability

Just as the Lord Mayor has said, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake needs to become self-sustainable. In effect, it needs to achieve a balance between the funds it spends on behalf of taxpayers and the revenues from all sources that it takes in during the fiscal year, without making municipal taxes so onerous that residents can no longer afford to pay them.

There are different ways that council could consider to achieve this goal, but in general, they all involve either raising revenues, cutting expenditures, finding ways to operate more cost-effectively, or a combination of these things.

Unfortunately, it does not appear likely that council will find the balance needed for the

town to be self-sustainable in the near future, if the proposed 2020 municipal budget is anything to go by.

The time has come for council to take a much harder look at discretionary grants, including those that have become line items in the budget such as the \$118,000 earmarked for the NOTL Chamber of Commerce.

It must also come to grips with the need for new sources of revenue, such as an accommodation tax, to ensure that visitors to NOTL contribute in a fair and reasonable way to maintaining the town's critical infrastructure, beautification program and by-law enforcement requirements.

And it should consider cost efficiencies, including looking at whether the Town has the

right staff doing the right jobs, and the right number of staff, to meet the needs of local residents and businesses.

Ultimately, council will have to take the demographics of residents into account as well. If, as the average age of NOTL residents suggests, many are living on fixed incomes, continued high annual increases to municipal taxes are clearly unsustainable. Instead, council should be looking at other options, such as deferred taxation (through which seniors can defer paying a portion of their annual municipal taxes until they sell their home, at which point the deferred taxes must be paid), to help residents stay in their own homes as the cost of living increases.

**Terry Davis**

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# SIMPSON'S

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**Christmas Day:**  
Wednesday, December 25th.... **CLOSED**  
**Boxing Day:**  
Thursday, December 26th ..... **CLOSED**  
**New Year's Eve:**  
Tuesday, December 31st..... 8:30 am – 3 pm  
**New Year's Day:**  
Wednesday, January 1st ..... **CLOSED**

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Wednesday, December 25th.... **CLOSED**  
**Boxing Day:**  
Thursday, December 26th ..... **CLOSED**  
**New Year's Eve:**  
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**New Year's Day:**  
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Regular hours resume Thursday, January 2nd

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# Levee will welcome in new year

## Local Staff

Ring in the New Year with friends and neighbours, music, refreshments, a roaring fire, and a cannon firing at Navy Hall has become a favourite tradition for many.

The Friends of Fort George and Parks Canada are hosting the 30th annual New Year's Day Levee Jan.

1, from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. to greet the new year. The community celebration carries on an old tradition of citizens gathering together to pledge allegiance to our sovereign, to renew old acquaintances and raise a toast to the continued prosperity of our nation, says Amanda Gamble, executive director of The Friends of Fort George.

Light refreshments will be offered to all in attendance, with a music presentation by the Fort George 41st Regiment of Foot Fife and Drum Corps, and official toasts at 4 p.m. This will be followed by the firing of a cannon.

This year's honorary cannoneer is Bill Ashburn, who won the live auction at the fourth annual Beefsteak

Society dinner hosted by The Friends of Fort George in November. His donation will help to support student employment opportunities and ongoing projects at Niagara's National Historic Sites.

For more information on this great tradition, contact The Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621, or visit [www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca](http://www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca).

## The joy of giving



Andrew Niven, board member of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce, presented a check for \$5,000 from the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and \$1,000 from the Candlelight Stroll proceeds, to Jane Andres for the welcome safety kits that will await migrant workers when they arrive in the spring. The remainder of the stroll proceeds, \$7,500, was given to Delroy Castella, a farm worker from Jamaica who suffered a stroke in September, while working in NOTL. He has returned home, uncertain of whether, after decades of working for local farmers, he will be able to return. (Photo supplied)

## The Heart of Christmas Past



This annual event was held at Grace United Church Friday, with a concert of favourite holiday stories and songs from the Gallery Players. The Heart of Christmas Past is based on festive reminiscences shared by Gallery Players from audience members last year. With Shaw Festival veteran Guy Bannerman (right) narrating, and Glissandi performers David Braun on violin, Deborah Braun on harp and Douglas Miller on flute, the evening performance was a wonderful Christmas experience. (David Gilchrist)



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# SCHOOLS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS



Declan Chow looks in wonder at Santa Claus at the Niagara Nursery School Christmas party, with his classmates looking on. (Jason Chow)

Hope Herman and Maple Brown were emcees at Crossroads' Holiday Concert. (Photos supplied)



St. David's students perform in A Gingerbread Christmas: A Holiday Music for Young Singers, to the delight of their family members. (David Gilchrist)



Intermediate students from Crossroads enjoyed a local treasure at the Shaw Festival, A Christmas Carol.

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# SCHOOLS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS



Anessa Raso and Juliet Pillitteri were Santa's helpers at the family fun event at St. Michael. (Photos supplied)



The Three Wise Women in the NOTL Santa Claus Parade were St. Michael students Maria DelCampo, Mikailah Amio, and Simone Rezza.



Reindeer Noah Mendoza enjoyed St. Michael's Christmas Family Fun Night.



St. Michael students Vanessa Rezza, Natalie Simpson, Maria Francis, Clare Vanderlee, and Ashlyn Woods-Grin were angels in the NOTL Santa Claus Parade.



Before the start of the holiday, Royal Oak students proudly show off their new Indigenous-authored and focused book collection. Each class at Royal Oak has learned about Indigenous history, perspectives and contributions this year and this beautiful library will support their continued learning. (Photos supplied)



Even the wettest NOTL parade on record couldn't stop ROCS students from smiling and sharing their school spirit.

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# Willowbank looking to a bright future

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

A holiday open house held at Willowbank School of Restoration Arts recently was an opportunity to share news with the public about plans for the future.

About 100 people — Queenston residents, Willowbank board members and those interested in the estate and the school — crowded into the upstairs drawing room to celebrate the season, and learn a little more about the growth of the school and where it is going.

It was also an opportunity to publicly launch the school's new website, which was badly needed and has school staff and supporters excited, says Caitlin Wooll, education coordinator.

Although most of the students had left the area for the holiday, before returning in January for the next semester, on

hand was one of a group of five students who had recently returned from an exciting second-place finish at the Association of Preservation Technology and design competition in Miami. Meghan Lenz was happy to share some of the details of their ac-

complishment, against much larger institutions with engineering-based programs. The international competition included designing an arch, and building it to ensure it was weight-bearing. Lenz says as challenging as the hands-on portion of

the competition was, students were also required to talk about their model, and to make a presentation that represented a big portion of their scoring.

They felt like they had done "really, really well,"

Continued on page 15



Janice Holmes, Maggie Neuroth and Joan King are fans of Willowbank and the work it does. (Photos by Penny Coles)



Willowbank student Meghan Lenz was one of five who came second in an international design competition held in Miami. She attended a holiday open house to talk about her experience.

## LOCAL HAPPENINGS

**AA MEETING**  
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### UGLY SWEATER HOLIDAY FOOD TOUR

December 27 @ 1 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

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

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Jungle Book  
December 31  
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January 10  
54 . 40  
January 16  
Humans  
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### NEW YEAR'S DAY LEVEE

January 1, 2020 @ 3 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Join The Friends of Fort George and Parks Canada as we ring in the New Year at Navy Hall! Levee celebrations start at 3:00 p.m., and include toasts, music by the 41st Regiment Fife and Drum Corps, and a cannon firing to welcome the New Year. Call The Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621 or email admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca for more information.

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Sunday, December 29th

Message by:  
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
17					18						19			
20					21						22			
			23	24					25					
26	27	28					29	30						
31						32					33	34	35	36
37					38						39			
40					41					42				
			43	44					45					
46	47	48					49	50						
51						52					53	54	55	56
57						58					59			
60						61					62			
63						64					65			

- Across:**

1 Depositors' protective grp.  
5 Fruitcake  
10 Jane Austen matchmaker  
14 Bind  
15 Uma Thurman's ex --- Hawke  
16 Give temporarily  
17 Arabian chieftain  
18 Lightweight cord  
19 Breathtaking organ  
20 Against  
21 Large bundle  
22 Lamp scamper?  
23 Bit of broken pottery  
25 To do with mail  
26 Strainer  
29 Whisky distiller --- Walker  
31 Appears ominously  
32 --- Chanel  
33 Actor and rapper Mike ---  
37 Wheat flour in India  
38 For example, brogues  
39 Harvest  
40 Hits lightly  
41 High-efficiency lights, briefly  
42 Enigmatic quotemaker Yogi ---  
43 Corpse
- 45 Luxury accommodations  
46 Dozing  
49 Wet season  
51 Place  
52 Work the land  
53 Records  
57 Cookware  
58 Military blockade  
59 "... sting like ---" (Ali)  
60 Therefore  
61 Kofi ---  
62 Brief message  
63 Red light gas  
64 Office in training  
65 Writing table
- Down:**

1 Type of market  
2 What Rhett didn't give  
3 Brenda Lee's "--- True?"  
4 Yuletide  
5 Home beverage center  
6 Fighting an enemy  
7 Old acquaintance  
8 His last word was "Rosebud"  
9 Unity  
10 Large landmass north of the Canadian mainland  
11 Launch
- 12 Passion  
13 Theatrical backer  
22 Smallest Indian state  
24 "--- So Fine" (old Chiffons number)  
25 Advantages  
26 Fuss  
27 Scintilla  
28 Former Mississippi senator Trent ---  
30 Summer refreshments  
32 Top cook  
34 Cheeky  
35 Shave  
36 Health farms  
38 Thin potter's clay  
42 Top and bottom of a hamburger  
44 Senator --- Cruz  
45 Noiseless  
46 Colorado resort  
47 Stockpile  
48 Dismiss  
50 Pond problem  
52 S N L comic --- Fey  
54 Double-reed woodwind instrument  
55 Obtains  
56 Search  
58 Cold War U S A F arm

OBITUARY



**FOWLER, WILLIAM "BILL"**—Peacefully, surrounded by family on December 21st, 2019 at the age of 88. Beloved husband of the late Pegi. Loving father of Claudia Jantz (Barry), Cynthia Leavitt (Steve), Colin (Cathy) and Craig (Dory). Proud grandfather of Adam, Luke, Josh, Jessica, Ryan, Michael, Aley, Corey, Chevelle and Cameron. Great grandfather of Halen, Cassidy, Mieka, Ryker and Cole.

Bill was a longtime resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake, volunteering as a firefighter and ambulance attendant for 35 years. He coached hockey and baseball, was an umpire and king scout. He was an avid golfer and enjoyed fishing. He worked for NOTL Hydro for 41 years, retiring in 1997.

Special thanks to Dr. Bastedo and the staff of Upper Canada Lodge.

At Bill's request, cremation has taken place. Private family interment. For those who wish, memorial donations may be made to the Alzheimer Society. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com).



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I have walked along with Jesus in a fellowship divine. Never more can earth allure me. I am His and He is mine.

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

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SUDOKU PUZZLE

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

PUZZLE ANSWERS

**Down:** 1 Flea, 2 Darn, 3 Is it, 4 Christmas season, 5 Wet bar, 6 At war, 7 Childhood friend, 8 Kane, 9 One, 10 Ellesmere Island, 11 Mount, 12 Maria, 13 Angel, 22 Goa, 24 He's, 25 Pros, 26 Chap, 27 Iota, 28 Lott, 30 Ices, 32 Chet, 34 Pert, 35 Pare, 36 Spas, 38 Slip, 42 Bun, 44 Ted, 45 Silent, 46 Aspen, 47 Store, 48 Let go, 50 Algae, 52 Tina, 54 Oboe, 55 Gets, 56 Seek, 58 S A C.

Sudoku solution from Dec. 19, 2019

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



# School is growing

Continued from page 13

since the Queenston program is so focused on questions and discussions, rather than engineering.

"It was a good lesson for us, that these people from other schools are not the enemy. We can get along and work together. For the most part, everyone was working to support each other, and it would seem that's the way it should be, all of us working together with our different skills," says Lenz.

Although a portion of

the trip was funded by the school, the students were on their own paying for the bulk of it, and continue to fundraise to offset the costs by selling items they've made, such as slate cheese boards, coasters and blackboards.

The school is also looking at ways to raise money to offset tuition costs for students, and to further connections with the community. There will be a music series beginning Jan. 26, with concerts on Feb. 23 and March 22, says Wooll.

The school is also ex-

amining new avenues to reach prospective students, and to develop funding partnerships, said Craig Crane, the managing director of Willowbank.

"The school is running pretty smoothly now, and my job is getting easier. We are also working on the process of re-imagining the lower campus (formerly Laura Second Memorial School), and talking about what that could look like. And we're active in Toronto. We're growing. The future is starting to appear."



Sydney Holmes, Caitlin Wooll (with Georgia), and Craig Crane address a group of supporters at a recent open house at the Willowbank School of Restoration Arts.



Carol Hutchison, Cosmo Condina, Judy MacLachlin, Charlotte Lewis and Jackie Kevill enjoy the Willowbank Holiday Open House.

## Wolves don't give up



The NOTL Minor Hockey peewee AE Wolves fought hard and came close to scoring several times, but lost to the Stoney Creek Warriors 5-0 Saturday. (Fred Mercnik)

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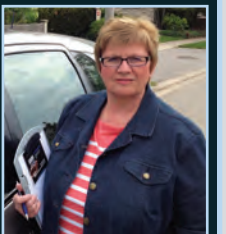
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