

# The Niagara-on-the-Lake LOCAL



Drop off  
a tree, feed  
a goat  
page 13

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Rachel and Rebecca Saylor took the Penguin plunge on Boxing Day, taking part in the small, but official 45th annual tradition. (Kim Saylor)

## Small Penguin Dip makes an official 45th

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Although the Boxing Day Penguin Dip was cancelled to avoid crowds of people gathering at Ball's Beach, veteran Penguin Chris Bjorgan says there was an official 45th annual swim, albeit a small one, to ensure the annual tradition carried on uninterrupted.

"It would have been sad to see that come to an end," he says. "Now we can say it's been continuous. It was an official swim."

Bjorgan, 63, and two friends took their customary plunge, with no crowd to watch except for a few passersby. One of them stayed to watch, and took some photos for them, he says.

His two fellow swimmers were also long-standing veterans and official Penguins, having done their three swims "over and over again," a requirement to be a mem-

ber of the club. They asked not to be named, although, as Bjorgan points out, they weren't breaking any lockdown rules by being there.

"There was nothing we did that was even remotely against COVID restrictions," he says. "We were all just out getting a little exercise, which is what the government is encouraging us to do."

It was a good day for a swim, he adds. There was a little bit of snow on the ground, there were no waves or wind, and although it was a crisp winter day, "when you come out of the water, it feels quite comfortable." The water "does something to your skin" so that the air temperature feels warmer than it actually is, he says. "It felt really good."

There was no large, heated truck to warm up in, as there

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## Local health care workers adjust during pandemic

**Mike Balsom**  
Special to The Local

For Niagara Health employees Lisa Laughton and Maria Roberts Ramos, both Niagara-on-the-Lake residents, it was the uncertainty of the early days of the pandemic that caused them much stress back in March and April.

Now, approaching the 10-month mark, they've both settled into the routines that have become

a way of life in Niagara's health care system.

Laughton, a registered nurse, works in the recovery room at the St. Catharines site of the Niagara Health System. It's a position she took on about three years ago, after a number of years in the emergency room.

"It's really different working in a pandemic," reflects Laughton. "The biggest thing was the fear of the unknown. In the be-

ginning, we were seeing the media from other countries with mass casualties and strained health care systems. For a lot of us it was fear of the unknown, fear of not enough PPE (personal protective equipment), and fear of having to be separated from my family."

Though as a nurse, Laughton was already well-trained in infection control measures, she says she very quickly learned new methods that would keep

her two high-school aged daughters and her husband Rob, a retired teacher, safe.

"In the beginning, I was coming home, getting undressed outside and going straight into the shower before even talking to anyone in the family," she says. "At the hospital, we're all well-versed in infection control. When the hospital administration put policies and plans into place, it wasn't hard to execute them, and that gave us more confi-

dence and made us all feel a little better."

As the focus around the world turned to health care professionals and the fight against the novel coronavirus, Laughton and her colleagues circled the wagons in the effort to control the spread. "We're pretty tenacious," she tells The Local. "We look at this virus as our enemy, just like the rest of the world. I feel like

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Registered nurse Lisa Laughton works in the recovery room at the St. Catharines site of the Niagara Health System. (Photo supplied)



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# Heritage designation will help protect John Street properties

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Two John Street East properties, which include the historic Randwood Estate and other significant heritage attributes, have been designated by the Town under the Ontario Heritage Act.

A bylaw to designate the properties, which comes following the property owner's October withdrawal of an appeal to prevent the designation, was approved by council at their last December meeting.

The protection afforded by designation is important, says Lord Mayor Betty Disero, especially with the properties up for sale. Should anybody come forward with proposals to develop either of those properties, she says, "we know what needs to be protected, and we can talk about any changes to that property within the heritage context."

The designation of the properties should have been

undertaken by council when the former owners had a 2011 hotel proposal approved, she says.

"But they didn't, and we've done it now," says Disero, adding an earlier designation "could have saved a lot of tension."

The town-initiated process to designate the other two properties, and the owner's appeal, will continue, with the next step being a hearing before the Conservation Review Board, which "is taking a really long time," says Disero. There is only one member of the board to cover the entire province, and hearings were cancelled for a time early in the pandemic, she says.

Town staff have been inspecting the site and will know what has been damaged on the property during the designation process, if anything, says Disero. "They have a record of everything that's happened."

She says people peeking in windows thought things



The two John Street East properties, now designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, will be afforded some protection during future development proposals. (Penny Coles)

were being removed, such as the fireplaces, which are actually just boarded up but still there.

There was a report of things being thrown out of upstairs windows at one point, and staff investigated

and took photos, she says.

In addition to the appeal of designation on other properties, Disero says she believes charges against the property owner for damage to the historic Dunnington-Grubb landscape have yet to be settled.

The Town began the designation of all four properties with a notice of its intention in the summer of 2018, when council decided not to wait for the property owner, who said he supported designation, to proceed at his pace.

The Marotta group of Two Sisters Resort and Solmar Development Corp., owner of the four properties, filed an appeal of the Town process early in 2019.

The appeal withdrawal, which coincided with the owner's announcement he intends to sell 144 and 176 John Street East, does not include 200 John Street or 588 Charlotte Street lots, which remain the subject of a subdivision application. Town planning director Craig Lar-mour said in October that application was not complete.

The property owner's appeal to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal over the lack of a decision on the application to build a six-storey hotel and event centre was also dropped when the two John Street properties were put up for sale, listed at \$19 million.

Property owner Benny Marotta told The Local at the

time he was "tired of dealing with the politics" of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and "the group of people supported by the politicians."

He said his intention all along was "to preserve the integrity of this heritage property and enhance its already robust landscape for guests and the community to enjoy, while creating a beautiful establishment that would elevate hospitality in Niagara-on-the-Lake."

The 13-acre property at 144 John St. E., and the lot next to it at 176 John St. E., the two that are now designated of heritage significance, were purchased by Marotta in 2016 for \$8 million.

After a two-day hearing before the Ontario Superior Court last January on Marotta's attempt to put a stop to the town-initiated designation process on all four properties, Madame Justice Linda M. Walters ruled against the property owner, saying the matter should proceed to a hearing before the Conservation Review Board.

Included in the designation of the two John Street properties are the main residence (Randwood), a local landmark which was owned by the Rand family from 1919 until 1980, a wooden gazebo, and a modern brick pavilion. There are also other buildings and many landscaping features of note, including the wooden and stone foot bridges, stone pathways, and

water fountain, the report accompanying the designation bylaw says.

The heritage value includes the Rand summer house, as well as the concrete, brick and stone wall found along John Street East and Charlotte Street.

The report mentions the many historical associations of the properties, from the early owners, to the Rand family in more recent times, and ties to the Devonian Group (now part of the Devonian Group of Charitable Foundations,) and The Niagara Institute (now part of the Conference Board of Canada), which used the property for conferences, seminars and as a place of teaching. The Niagara Institute was established by Calvin Rand in 1971.

The designation report also references the Canadian landscape architect team of Howard Dunnington and Lorie Dunnington-Grubb. The couple designed and worked on various areas and landscapes on the property, and "were pioneers and well-respected in the Canadian landscape architect community. The property also has historical/associative value as it demonstrates or reflects their work and ideas."

The red brick pillars which mark the entrance to the property on John Street and the mature trees and plantings and boxwood hedge are also of historic significance, the report notes.

## Lord Mayor's robocall explains this lockdown

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Some Niagara-on-the-Lake residents will have received a robocall from Lord Mayor Betty Disero, who explains the shutdown that started Boxing Day, in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The calls were made over two days, Dec. 23 and 24, and went to those with landlines only.

The idea for the calls originated from the Region, with all municipalities taking part.

Other municipalities also sent out a robocall when the Region declared a state of emergency last spring, but Disero says at the time Niagara-on-the-Lake had already made that decision before the Region did, and chose not to use the automated calls, thinking they might just confuse some people.

It was the Town's emergency control group that made the decision to use

them this time.

Disero says she hasn't heard any response from anyone who received a call, and neither she nor her mother, both with landlines, had received one. The calls were organized by a vendor through the Region.

In a very unscientific survey on social media, The Local asked residents if they had received a call, and about 30 per cent of those who weighed in said yes.

The message Disero shared was that which residents have been receiving through the media from the Town and Region.

"The situation is serious, and this is a call to action for all of us to take the necessary steps to protect one another," she says.

"I want to thank everyone who has followed public health's directives over the last nine months. It continues to make a difference and save lives."

Disero also uses the robo-

call to remind residents what is expected during the shutdown.

She asks them not to gather with anyone outside their home; to only go shopping for necessities and consider curbside pickup and delivery to support local businesses; and to wear a mask, and wash and sanitize hands frequently.

"Lastly, if you have any symptoms, get tested, and stay home," she says.

"I know the holidays will make this difficult, and news of the province-wide shutdown may be a cause for concern. But we all must do our part to slow the spread of the virus."

Not following these directives may result in fines, while also putting lives at risk, she says.

For more information visit [NiagaraRegion.ca/COVID19](http://NiagaraRegion.ca/COVID19) and [notl.com/covid-19](http://notl.com/covid-19).

Disero can be reached by phone at 905-468-3266, or by email at [betty.disero@notl.com](mailto:betty.disero@notl.com).

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*We wish you a happy, safe and healthy 2021*



# Health care workers learn to feel comfortable in their roles

Continued from page 1

we're at battle, and we won't be beaten. We have a job to do, our patients are number one, and that's why we go to work every day."

During the earlier lockdown stages of the pandemic, Niagara Health postponed all elective and non-emergent health care procedures to protect patient safety and increase capacity for the response to COVID-19. That meant for the most part things were a bit slower in the recovery room where Laughton works. She credits Niagara Health for making wise decisions, which enabled local hospitals to reserve the capacity to take on coronavirus patients in the intensive care unit.

Now, with the volume closer to normal on the elective surgery front, the hospital is working through the list as quickly as they can. "We've learned since the spring, we've tweaked things, and at the same time we're ready for the second wave," Laughton explains.

She feels the decision by Premier Doug Ford to move Ontario into the grey zone on Dec. 26 was the correct one, in light of the high COVID-19 numbers recently. "We needed to do that," Laughton confirms. "I think we all let our guard down in the summer, but it's winter time, and we've moved inside. I'm confident that we'll keep plugging away, a vaccine will soon be distributed, and that things will improve if we keep doing what we're doing."

She credits the teams at Niagara Health who put policies in place for alleviating those early fears of the unknown that she and her colleagues had. "I'm positive about the organization, and how we've all pulled together. We feel confident in what we're doing, and we're all supportive of each other, whether I work with you in my inner circle, or in the hospital as a whole. You can just tell that we're there for each

other. We feel like this virus is the enemy, and we're at battle. It's not going to stop us from doing what we do."

Though Laughton says the praise that has been heaped onto health care workers since March makes her proud of her role as a nurse, she deflects some of that praise onto others in the community. "We're all in this together. I feel like we're all in the front lines. If we don't all do what we need to do, then we're not going to have the best outcome. We all have to work together to do this, not just the health care professionals."

Similarly for Maria Roberts Ramos, a speech language pathologist, the stress of the unknown at the onset of the pandemic has been replaced by a confidence that upgraded infection control methods and procedures are effectively allowing her to continue in her role in the health care system.

Though Roberts Ramos is employed by Niagara Health, her position is overseen by the Niagara Preschool Speech and Language Program through the Niagara Children's Centre. Her office is attached to the Greater Niagara General site in Niagara Falls, though she doesn't actually have to enter the hospital building itself.

Like Laughton, her job was never interrupted during the first wave of the outbreak, though there were some changes to how she delivered service to families.

Before COVID-19, Roberts Ramos would arrive at her office at 8:30 a.m. Throughout each day she would work with between four and five families, helping children, with an average age of two years old, with early speech development. This involves face-to-face meetings with the children and their families, working on communication strategies for those who have been assessed as experiencing difficulties in language and communication development.

Like many in the health care system, she was ready for any changes to her role, including being shifted to other duties to support the overall goals of Niagara Health if necessary. "We were told we might be moved, but because we were always able to maintain contact with our families and continue offering service, we weren't."

For the first two to three months of the pandemic, Roberts Ramos shifted to telephone consultations with her client families. "I've been going into the office all through this," she says. "I would call families, ask how things were going, the parents and I would talk. We would problem-solve, I would give them suggestions through these phone conversations."

She admits she worried somewhat that some of her client families would not be able to receive the guided help with communication strategies that they would have via her usual routine. "When you think health care, you think of hospitals and surgeries," she says. "But parents who had had an assessment would have to wait a much longer time to get the help they needed. That's the impact of COVID that a lot of people don't think about. Kids need rehab. We did the best that we could, but there was some impact on the ability of some children to move forward with their development and connections to other resources."

Over that early stage of the pandemic, Roberts Ramos and her colleagues were able to learn new techniques to move into a virtual method of delivering services to families via Zoom Health, a more secure form of the Zoom platform used by health care professionals.

"It's new to us, but it's not new to the profession," explains Roberts Ramos. "Up north, where people can't travel, this is how they provide therapy. Our focus shifted early on to developing materials and learning ourselves how to do virtual

therapy online with preschoolers."

She has clearly enjoyed learning the new techniques, and felt very supported by both Niagara Health and the Children's Centre in developing new methods. She even sees some advantages to the virtual platform for continued future use.

"You get to see the children in their home environment," she enthuses. "You can talk to the parents and say 'show me what that looks like in your kitchen,' you can coach them right online on how to get through to the child. Or they have siblings, who want to be in on it, so you can include them right there."

Now, more than nine months in, Roberts Ramos is back in her office and has been seeing clients for face-to-face sessions since early fall, while still offering virtual options as well. Though a COVID-19 outbreak was declared at the Niagara Falls site on Dec. 24, she is not worried about working out of her office.

"I'm not right in the hospital," she says, "and when we started seeing families in person again, NHS was really good with providing screens, masks, goggles, face shields, gloves, everything we needed to feel protected. There's a screener downstairs as well, and we disinfect toys, tables, chairs, doorknobs and all touch points. And I'm not dealing with sick people in my role."

As Roberts Ramos heads back to work Jan. 4, she has yet to hear if the province's month-long lockdown will allow her to continue with those face-to-face sessions. But she is optimistic.

"The hospital is trying very hard to maintain their outpatient services," says Roberts Ramos. "We do have protocols now, we know how to keep people safe. They understand how important services are. I think everybody recognizes the importance of keeping these services available."



Lisa Laughton has settled in to her role, feeling safe with the protocols provided by Niagara Health. (Photos supplied)



Maria Roberts Ramos, a speech language pathologist with Niagara Health, has seen clients online and in person at different stages of the pandemic.



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# Niagara Foundation recognizes citizens of NOTL

## Annual Living Landmark Award goes to all residents who help preserve town's heritage

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

The Niagara Foundation, which annually recognizes individuals who have contributed to the reservation of heritage and cultural landscape, has taken a different approach with its 2020 award.

"In this unusual year, the board of The Niagara Foundation, led by president Michael Howe, decided it would be most appropriate to recognize the resilient and co-operative spirit of all citizens of Niagara-on-the-Lake who strive to live in unity as one unique community," says a recent announcement from the foundation.

The decision of the foundation "is consistent with" this year's National Trust Prince of Wales award to the town, which also recognizes the work that's been done in the past, and gives credit to all efforts of all the townspeople who have put their efforts into preservation, says Brad Nixon, vice-president

of the foundation.

It too celebrates the town's sustained commitment to heritage conservation over time.

Like the National Trust prize, the foundation's Living Landmark Award recognizes the many preservation projects and all those who put their efforts into preservation, past and present, says Nixon.

"In both cases they're recognizing the work people have done in the past, and the way the town and the people have come together to support so many projects."

The foundation, like other organizations, has been unable to hold its traditional events, such as its customary three summer parties, but the lack of fundraising won't hamper any of their ongoing initiatives, he says.

Chief amongst those at the moment is the effort to purchase what is known locally as the Wilderness, five and a half acres of heavily wooded property that stretches between King

Street and Regent Street in the heart of the Old Town.

The purchase, which has been in the works for more than two years, remains in litigation, says Nixon, partly due to a slowdown in court proceedings during the COVID pandemic, but mainly because of the number of parties involved, and an inability to come to an agreement over the value of the property.

"We've asked and tried to get before the court to resolve this," says Nixon, adding it's impossible to estimate a timeline for accomplishing that goal.

The property is now in the hands of two estates, with the holdup caused by parties who "can't agree on how the property is to be dealt with," says Nixon.

The foundation has a signed offer with the estate of Ruth Parker, one of the two deceased sisters who owned the property. The hold-up is on the portion owned by Parker's sister Fran McKay, and passed down to become the estate of McKay's daughter Kea



The Niagara Foundation's goal for this year is to complete the purchase of the Wilderness on King Street. (Penny Coles)

Reid, who died in 2016.

"The Parker estate sale could go ahead," says Nixon, but the McKay estate is being delayed because the price tag that has been put on it represents a value of the property if it could be developed. Foundation members maintain development on that property is not realistic.

"We're looking at the existence of a conservation easement to protect One Mile Creek, that covers about 40 per cent of the property," he says, "and we're also mindful of a municipal heritage bylaw designation of the property."

The Town designated the Wilderness a heritage property in 1994, including the land and the exterior and interior of the house on the site, as well as the carriage house and the archaeological remains.

No one can "change the use or character of the property" without permission from the Ontario Heritage Trust, says Nixon.

The foundation wants to purchase the property, rich in historical significance, to protect and pre-

serve it from development.

"We see the significance of the property and want it protected," says Nixon.

The buildings on the property are 200 years old, and also worthy of saving, he says. "They have a lot of heritage value, and some of the huge, mature trees on the property have cultural value."

The property was once the home of William Claus, deputy superintendent of the Indian Department and one of the three trustees of the Six Nations. The Wilderness was originally given by the Six Nations Indians to Mr. Claus' wife Nancy Johnson "in token of her many deeds of kindness."

Her father Sir William Johnson negotiated the Treaty of Niagara with 24 Indigenous nations in 1764. The treaty formed the basis for the original treaty relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers in Eastern North America, says a Niagara Foundation description of the property they hope to preserve.

Sir William Johnson met with more than 2,000 chiefs from all of eastern North America in Niagara in 1764 to negotiate the treaty. It was considered the high point of colonial relations with Indigenous peoples. It was specifically conceived as a treaty of sharing of the land, not conquest.

The question to be settled by the court remains

the value of the property today.

The foundation is not going to pay for development potential they believe does not exist, with the levels of protection on the property, says Nixon.

"We believe we have the law on our side, but the court rules."

In the meantime, although fundraising opportunities have been limited, the goal of the foundation members has not changed. "It's full steam ahead."

### Living Landmark Awards from previous years are:

- 2006  
Gerry Wooll and Norm Howe
- 2007  
Donald Combe
- 2008  
Calvin Rand
- 2009  
John Walker
- 2010  
Joy Ormsby
- 2011  
Christopher Newton
- 2012  
Peter Stokes
- 2013  
Jim Smith
- 2014  
Debi Pratt
- 2015  
Gary Burroughs
- 2016  
Norma Jean Lowrey and Blair Harber
- 2017  
Dr Richard Merritt
- 2018  
Judy MacLachlan
- 2019  
Gracia Janes



### IN THE MATTER OF THE ONTARIO HERITAGE ACT R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER 0.18

AND IN THE MATTER OF THE LAND AND PREMISES AT THE FOLLOWING MUNICIPAL ADDRESSES IN THE TOWN OF NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

### NOTICE OF PASSING OF BY-LAW

TAKE NOTICE that the Council of the Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has passed

By-law No. 5284-20

By-law No. 5285-20

designating the following properties as being of cultural heritage value or interest under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act R.S.O. 1990, Chapter 0.18

**176 John Street East**

**(Lot 144 RCP 692 Niagara; Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake)**

**144 John Street East**

**(Lot 144 RCP 692 Niagara; Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake)**

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake this 31st day of December, 2020

Peter Todd, Town Clerk

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# Changes to Conservation Authority legislation a concern

**Penny Coles**  
The Local

Although the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, and others across the province, asked for more time and discussion about recent changes to legislation that oversees their work, their requests went unheeded.

The bill passed in December, with significant changes to the provincial Conservation Authorities Act that are concerning, says Niagara-on-the-Lake's Regional Coun. Gary Zalepa.

One change that has garnered attention and opposition requires conservation authorities to issue a development permit

when the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing issues Ministers Zoning Orders (MZO), which can override conservation authority decisions that have been made based on science and environmental protection.

The legislation undermines the ability for the NPCA to make decisions on the protection of

ecosystems and floodplains, says Zalepa, with no avenue for appeal.

Conservation authorities across Ontario endorsed a resolution to ask the Province to address their concerns by repealing, amending or at least delaying changes to the act, but that didn't happen.

"Anytime government wants to make some broad changes, it really should gather input from as many people as possible, because that's how you make a better decision. In this case that didn't happen, and that concerns me," says Zalepa. "I don't know why it didn't happen. I can't read the government's intentions. It doesn't appear to be a fulsome process, and I think process is really important."

The other issue of concern is the new requirement for members of conservation authority boards to be elected officials, says Zalepa.

After the 2018 municipal election and the overthrow of the previous NPCA board members amid controversy, Niagara regional councillors were appointed to replace them as interim members. Zalepa was nominated as Niagara-on-the-Lake's representative. NPCA governance had become the subject of criticism locally and from the Province, and the board of regional councillors was put in place to elect a new CAO to the conservation authority, and straighten

out issues of governance, staffing and budget that had come to light during the previous term, with the intention of replacing those councillors when their work was done with citizen members with relevant skills and knowledge.

St. Davids resident Dr. William Rapley was recommended to replace Zalepa on the NPCA Board and became NOTL's representative once those issues were resolved.

The interim board of elected officials accomplished what it set out to do, says Zalepa, and the current board of mostly citizen representatives is also working well.

"In Niagara, we've struck a balance between elected and non-elected people, and that so far has worked well. Conservation authorities were designed to have broad representation on the board. I think it's a flawed rationale to have only elected representatives for accountability reasons. In Niagara we saw a complete failure of good governance through the conservation authority's composition of mostly elected people. At that point politics was driving the bus, rather than good policy."

The current provincial decisions appear to be politically motivated, says Zalepa. "I don't know why they would do something without a fulsome discussion."

Ambiguity and lack of clarity in provincial environmental policy has long been an issue, and

will continue to be, says Zalepa.

Decisions of development in provincially-significant areas have "sometimes been managed effectively, and sometimes not so effectively by conservation authorities and municipalities," says Zalepa.

"In Niagara, a lack of clarity in provincial policy allowed people to manage the authority as they wanted. That still happens across the province, those problems still exist, with a lack of policy from the top." That lack of clarity allows for political decisions to be made, he says.

"We really need to take a step back, and do what the people of Ontario really want and need. That's not happening. What we really need is clarity about the guidelines, and how to implement them. That's not going to happen, and that's problematic."

Lack of policy should have been dealt with, and hasn't been, by this provincial government or others before it, says Zalepa, allowing municipalities to make decisions that may or may not consider what is best for protecting ecosystems and managing flooding and drainage issues.

Those issues have a financial cost, he added, referring to the doubling of regional insurance liability cost due to flooding that has damaged infrastructure.

Regional council will discuss the impact of the provincial legislation Wednesday, Jan. 13, says Zalepa.



**Regional Coun.**  
**Gary Zalepa**  
Special to The Local

Reflecting on 2020 reminds us of thoughts and hopes considered last year at this same time, prior to COVID-19 lockdowns and public health emergencies.

Last year, issues reflected upon were housing affordability, mental health care, and sustainability of local government.

Well, clearly COVID-19 has exposed our lack of policy priority and funding towards these issues and many others, including, but not limited to, long-term care, homelessness, and protection of our environment.

Contemplating our history is as important as considering our future. Thanks to Tu Thank Ha and James Keller, who in their article in the Dec 28, Globe and Mail, *How Canada Weathered a Pandemic - 100 years ago*, drew parallels with events in 1918 to today. Then authorities banned public gatherings and shut businesses, there were complaints about mask-wearing. Stanley Cup playoffs were disrupted, and leading elected officials contracted the virus. It sounds familiar.

In 1918, the global pandemic landed on the doorstep of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Hundreds of Polish American volunteers at Camp Niagara were infected with Spanish Flu, with several fatalities. Their sacrifice was recognized by Canada officially designating land adjacent to St. Vincent de Paul cemetery, in which these Polish Americans are laid to rest, as national lands of Poland. Are we learning from our actions of the past?

In some cases, we have. Society invested in government and built capacity for supporting Canadians, evidenced in financial support programs, which helped us weather recent and previous periods of economic hardship. Society invested in private business, promoting employment growth, and sparking technological innovation and research, evidenced through expansion of the middle class and vaccine research and development.

In some cases, we have not learned. Society failed in managing housing affordability. Not since the successful housing pro-

grams in post-war 1950s, have we invested adequately, ensuring that housing supply meets our needs, evidenced by the struggle of many families to maintain their core housing needs and the soaring cost of middle housing, running unchecked despite a pandemic. All the while housing supply is choked by a legacy of a dysfunctional planning approval processes, nimbyism (not in my back yard exclusionary policies) and inadequate funding levels.

We failed to adequately invest in support for mental health care. Successive governments pulled back funding and programs, as public management of mental health care was pushed to the sidelines and handed off to non-government entities, all in the name of tax cuts and more efficient government, a not-so-common sense revolution. Yes, in the short-term, cuts were achieved but in reality, issues were just handed down to municipal governments, which were ill equipped and lacked adequate financial resources for the task. Mental health issues did not disappear, and today we have a broken model that does not serve us well, where front-line workers, including police and health-care workers, are tasked with managing society's mental health care, lacking adequate support.

We failed to support our most fragile citizens, seniors in long-term care homes. Successive governments and their policies shifted management to privately-managed, corporate operators with weak operating guidelines and inadequate policies for guaranteeing minimal care. Private operators alone are not the problem, as many are quick to cast blame. More deservedly, the lack of adequate public policy and funding are the main drivers for this failure. This falls on all governments.

These specific examples happen to exist where the responsibilities of our local, provincial and federal governments intersect, having a joint responsibility in federalism, in developing clear national policy goals, and provincial implementation policies and local systems for robust delivery. Currently we have mission failure in policy areas where we see this intersection, a cumulative result generated by our federation's structure and governments' rigidity and inability to adjust as societal needs change. Successive governments,

federal and provincial, said, "Not our fault, it's their fault." Canadian finger pointing.

How many times did local government wish to make investments in housing only to have successive federal and provincial governments decline their participation? How many times have advocates in long-term care requested increased hours of care for residents, only to have successive governments decline funding?

How do we address such complex issues?

Best to address what we can most influence. Let's start locally with municipal government. A re-design of government service delivery with focus on serving residents better. Establish the goal to improve services, clarify the outcomes desired and attach sustainable funding models for government, while respecting local autonomy. Elected leaders must establish the goals, set the path and task policy experts to develop a set of actions for each goal to travel along that path.

For example, the lack of housing affordability is driven by the absence of a cohesive national-provincial housing strategy and successive provincial and municipal policies which have negatively impacted housing supply. Elected representatives (federal, provincial and local), must commit to the goal of improving housing affordability, and ensure alignment of their policies. Start locally. Local government can re-shape their planning approval process and task experts with developing a modern, planning approval framework with the approved goal, housing affordability. Provincial and federal governments can commit funding and provinces can align planning policies which are consistent with the goal.

Beginning with a local change, one that achieves its policy goal, and is focused on service improvement, that change will act as an impetus for other changes across our federation of governments and re-align our governments on key policy areas: affordability in housing, long-term care, homelessness, environment, mental health care and sustainable government. Encouraging all governments, local, provincial and federal, their representatives and their constituents to consider yesterday, while re-shaping government to tackle the pressing issues of today and tomorrow.

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# EDITORIAL

## Embracing the new year with hope and optimism

It was exactly a year ago the World Health Organization received news of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City of the Hubei Province, thought to have been spread from an outdoor seafood market. Early in January, we started learning of more cases, with the cause still unconfirmed.

The first Canadian case of the novel coronavirus was reported by Health Canada on Jan. 25. A Toronto man had recently travelled home from Wuhan. The day of his Jan. 22 flight from Beijing, major Canadian airports had introduced new screening measures for passengers returning from China with flu-like symptoms, but he had no symptoms. When he became ill, he was taken by paramedics in protective gear to Sunnybrook Hospital where he was isolated. Many of us remember the news footage, and the following reports that it appeared the only person he passed the virus to was his wife,

who isolated at home. Both went on to make full recoveries.

A year later, we are living through our second lockdown, as we hear of record numbers of new cases in Ontario and other provinces across the country, months after we thought we had “flattened the curve,” one of the new phrases we learned this year. Every day we hear of more people dying of the disease, and grieve for their families and our society.

Here in Niagara, a disturbing number of new cases are being recorded, with a jump of 138 in the region Tuesday. The number of total cases in Niagara-on-the-Lake since last March reached 96 Tuesday, up from 82 the Tuesday before, and 71 two weeks ago.

The good news is the “mission,” as described by retired Gen. Rick Hillier, has begun, as he promised to deliver the vaccine as rapidly as possible. Earlier this week there was some criticism the vaccine roll-out wasn’t happening as quickly as it

should have in Ontario, but his mission seemed to be ramped up as the week progressed.

This is where we are now, a place we would never have been able to imagine this time last year.

Our lives have been turned upside down. Many of us stayed home and restrained from seeing our family this Christmas. Most had holiday activities greatly curtailed.

We typically consider the new year a festive occasion. This year will be very different, not only because there is little we can do to celebrate, but because we’re so unsure of what the year will bring.

At The Local, just as every story of the last 10 months was inevitably impacted in some way by COVID, so much of the news we expect to hear and write about in 2021, the conversations we will have, will be against the backdrop of working our way out of this pandemic. It won’t all be good news, but given this very special commu-

nity and the people who make it what it is, there will certainly be stories we can celebrate.

Making New Year’s resolutions is an annual tradition, despite how quickly we break them.

This might actually be the year to keep them. Resolutions for 2021 may be the usual eating less, drinking less, and exercising more, which many of us need more than ever.

But our lives have changed dramatically in the last year, and we may be looking at the new year with a different view. We may have learned what is important to us, been given a new perspective on priorities. We may take less for granted and appreciate more each opportunity to be around those we love, simple dinners with friends will take on a new meaning, as will being able to move around freely, and for some, most important, we will experience new joy

when embracing one another without fear of doing harm.

Every new year, we look forward to what we hope it will bring. In 2021, it may be the simplest of things. There may continue to be aspects of our lives out of our control, but there is much we can resolve to do that is within our control.

We can reach out to others in need, to see what we can do to help.

We can try to be kinder and more understanding with those who think differently than us.

We can share compassion with those who are crying out for it and condolences with those who’ve suffered losses in very challenging situations.

We can show empathy and gratitude every chance we get, to health care workers, to essential workers, to business owners and employees who are struggling to find new ways to carry out their

jobs safely, fearing loss of the income they need to feed their families.

We can try to ease the worries of our children and grandchildren through a positive attitude that will tell them we’re going to get through this together.

We can make the most of each and every contact with our loved ones, whatever form that must take, cherish them, send our hugs virtually if needed, but be sure they know how much they are loved.

We can be hopeful, embrace the future and carry our optimism into the new year.

We look forward to a year of sharing all your ups and downs, your great stories, new adventures and continued successes, and we wish a happy and healthy new year for all.

Penny Coles  
The Local

## Please support businesses by following all lockdown rules



Eduardo Lafforgue  
Special to The Local

When I joined the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce team, no one could have anticipated what 2020 would be like. It has been quite a journey, but together we will emerge stronger from the pandemic.

Last week the Retail Council of Canada heard the government’s message loud and clear, “people should stay home to stop the spread.” On behalf of its members, many of whom are struggling to remain viable, the RCC implores the public to obey the rules so businesses don’t have to suffer again and again.

Health and safety are paramount. It will always be the right

decision to prioritize life, but the lockdowns have created an economic disaster, businesses and jobs have been lost. Research conducted for the Retail Council of Canada shows that most stores are low-risk environments, with approximately one in 400 COVID-19 cases resulting from a retail environment. Most of our companies strictly follow all health and safety protocols.

Last week’s announcement of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant will help, but “non-essential” small and medium businesses, including restaurants and most of our tourism industry, desperately need help from all levels of government.

We all know someone who works as an essential retail worker in a pharmacy or grocery store. Many of us know a business, restaurant or hotel owner who is in the heart of our community. Retail employees and essential

business owners have worked tirelessly to address the new realities of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. All of our businesses have gone above and beyond and will reopen safely when allowed to do so, but the other component of the equation, the public, is beyond their control.

Please follow the rules, think of these people throughout the confinement. We have to support them by buying locally. Without this support many will collapse. But we must also support them by following the rules, so that they are not forced to close again and can continue to fight for the survival of their businesses. We will prosper when all prosper.

From the Chamber of Commerce and Tourism NOTL we wish you a happy, safe and healthy 2021.

*Eduardo Lafforgue is the president of the NOTL Chamber of Commerce and Tourism NOTL.*

## Noise and ‘hollowing out’ two main issues

I am no longer a vacation rental owner so I have no stake in the bylaw changes. I am concerned however about the issue of fairness.

There appears to be two major reasons why the Town wants to amend bylaws for vacation rentals: the fact that some (and by far the minority) of vacation rentals allow rowdy parties; and secondly that they are perceived to cause a “hollowing out” of the community. I would like to address both concerns.

The first problem should have been addressed originally under the noise bylaw but the enforcement mechanism appears to be little to non-existent. As a result, instead of addressing the real problem, a number of years ago, the Town just upped the licensing fees for all short-term rentals so they could hire additional staff to monitor the noise issue caused by a few properties (which obviously didn’t solve it) and so the Town was inadvertently responsible for increasing the number of unlicensed short

term rentals. Why? Because if your laws aren’t perceived to be fair, people get angry and decide to bypass them. Vacation rentals are rented as one unit to one family or group of friends. Suddenly they all had to pay an additional license fee for every bedroom no matter how large or small. (As a result, the cost of our license tripled in one year and we were tiny with only 2 1/2 bedrooms.) That’s why the Town started having a licensing problem. When you think you have solved a problem you have to be very careful not to have created a new one which is exactly what the Town will do again if they insist vacation rentals be owner occupied and if they continue to increase the licensing fees. Soon it won’t be worth operating a short-term rental at all whether you are an absentee owner or not. The costs are skyrocketing, especially insurance if you can get it, so this is just another reason to get out of the business. The impact on tourism and possibly property values too will be significant. Having con-

tributed to a tourist accommodation problem, the Town will be forced to approve more hotels thus further diluting the historical nature of the town and realizing the second problem.

The second issue is the perceived “hollowing out” of the town. Let’s think about that for a minute. What is the alternative? Fewer vacation rentals may result in more long-term rentals (long-term rental income is fairly low compared to short-term rental income) or it may mean more second homes sitting empty when not in use. More and more people are retiring here. With the closing of local schools, the town becomes less hospitable for families. In normal circumstances, many houses are empty anyway because they are either second homes or retirees are travelling elsewhere. By catering to tourists, NOTL changed its destiny from small town to tourist destination. You can’t change it back now.

Jackie Bonic  
NOTL

### The Niagara-on-the-Lake

# LOCAL

The trusted voice of our community

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### 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

## Seeing the light at end of dark tunnel



**Wayne Gates, MPP  
Niagara Falls riding  
Special to The Local**

Writing a year in review column this year is impossible without returning to the very subject which has dominated so much of our lives over the past 10 months.

This has been a trying time for so many in our community, and the damage of this virus is unquantifiable. So many times over the last 10 months I have been heartbroken by the stories of suffering and loss this virus has caused, and yet so many times I have been lifted up by

the care and compassion of this community.

Throughout it all, My team and I have done the best we can to be attentive and responsive. Where it has been needed, I have stood with Premier Doug Ford to offer a united fight against this invisible enemy. When necessary, I have raised my voice in opposition to some of his plans which I believed were lacking, misguided, or in some cases, unnecessarily cruel.

In the earliest parts of this pandemic, we focused on ensuring no person who lost income due to COVID would have to withstand hardship or debt to stay afloat. I introduced legislation aimed to ensure the WSIB stopped fighting employees about coverage when they contracted COVID in the workplace.

As the summer months came and it seemed in Niagara that we were on top of this virus, I returned to some of the immediate healthcare legislation we had been pushing for. This included funding to reduce MRI wait times, so residents no longer have to wait 12 months for a life saving MRI. It included universal coverage for PSA testing for prostate cancer, which we knew if caught early enough is nearly 100 per cent treatable, and yet takes thousands of our loved ones each year because they forgo the test based on the cost. These initiatives would have saved our healthcare system millions of dollars and kept people out of hospitals needing the most complex of care – space we desperately need now.

One of the places I clashed hardest with Ford was on his desire to tear up our Greenbelt for development. Three times he tried to pass regulations that would see our environmentally sensitive areas get sold to the highest bidder, and three times we pushed back and won. Unfortunately, in his latest attempt, he marshalled his PC caucus to ram through an amendment hidden in their pandemic budget bill that removes citizen appointees to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, puts development on sensitive areas under the discretion of political appointees and severely endangers our environment. Despite his drive to see this legislation passed, I remain committed to fighting these attempts to hurt our environment

and will continue to push for efforts to protect our natural heritage and give our kids and grandkids the same wonderful Niagara given to us.

We see the light at the end of this dark tunnel. A vaccine is on the horizon, and over the course of 2021, I will work every day to get it to you and your families as fast as humanly possible. But we all must pitch in together. Our Premier can no longer play favourites with big-box stores over small businesses, and he must immediately release the almost \$12 billion he has in emergency COVID funding to help our small businesses, especially restaurants, bars and wineries. We have a role to play too – I am hoping you will also realize how particularly dangerous this period is

and continue to distance, wash your hands and wear a mask.

It's been a tough year, but as dark as it's gone and as hard as these days have been, I have been lifted up every day by our community. By the residents who emphasize shopping local to support our neighbours. By the healthcare workers still working long and difficult hours to keep us safe. By our children who may be scared of this crisis but wear their masks and wash their hands to save their grandparents. We are facing tough times, but this holiday season it's worth remembering that these times brought out the very best in our neighbours – a lesson in community I hope we never forget.

Have a safe holiday, and I'll see you in 2021.

## Finally seeing pandemic progress being made

### Canada still lagging behind other countries



**MP Tony Baldinelli  
Niagara Falls riding  
Special to The Local**

Just weeks after being sworn in as the new Member of Parliament for our riding, I had the pleasure to attend the annual New Year's Levee at Navy Hall in Niagara-on-the-Lake. It was a spectacular sunny day, allowing us to look forward confidently, to the promise and future ahead.

No one could have imagined at that time that a deadly virus was encircling the globe and would have an unprecedented impact on our communities and country.

COVID-19 has significantly changed our world, our lives, and has greatly impacted our livelihoods, for the time being.

After living through this pandemic for more than 10 months, we are finally seeing some progress being made by the federal government on the fronts of vaccine approval, deployment and rapid testing. Unfortunately, poor federal

leadership has caused Canada to lag far behind our allies and other countries in responding quickly and effectively to this deadly virus.

In March, when COVID-19 was starting to take hold, it was the federal Conservatives who held the Trudeau government to account to ensure that Parliament — the voice of Canadians — was considered an essential service, and needed to meet, in order to develop and provide the emergency programs and supports that Canadians require.

Throughout this pandemic, my Conservative colleagues and I have worked to raise the concerns of our residents to improve the needed federal emergency response programs that will help get us through COVID-19. By directly collaborating with Canadians, businesses, and not-for-profits, programs such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS), the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), and the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA), are all better off today compared to when they were originally introduced by the federal Liberal government.

Despite all political parties coming together to work on the needed emergency response programs, Canadians still witnessed the serious ethical lapses and poor judgement from our prime minister. Justin Trudeau is now under his third ethics investigation, and the WE Charity scandal forced the Liberal government to prorogue Parliament for six weeks, in the middle of a global pandemic crisis. This precious lost time could have been better spent responding to the challenges faced by struggling Canadians, but instead, the prime minister used this as an opportunity to deflect attention away from his errors and poor judgement.

In August, Conservatives elected a new leader in Erin O'Toole, and on Sept. 9, I was pleased to be appointed special advisor to our Conservative leader on the matter of tourism recovery. Since my appointment, I have been extremely busy meeting virtually with stakeholders in our Canadian travel and tourism industry.

COVID-19 has hit this industry particularly hard. As travel and tourism were hit first, they were hit hardest, and will take the longest time to recover from this pandemic.

Businesses and organizations in this industry desperately need sector-specific support, and a formal federal tourism recovery plan. While we are seeing a strong tourism recovery response in Ontario through the provincial government, needed federal initiatives continue to lag far behind on this important file. I will continue to pressure the Trudeau government to deliver these critical support measures, when Parliament resumes in the new year.

Our vitally important wine industry has also suffered greatly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the failures of the Liberal government to protect this growing and internationally recognized Canadian industry. It was this Trudeau government that triggered a World Trade Organization (WTO) challenge from Australia against our wine industry,

when they imposed the escalator tax in Budget 2017. Conservatives opposed this Liberal decision, and we warned this government it would result in a trade challenge, but they refused to listen. As a result, it is incumbent upon this government to provide certainty and fair compensation to vintners to offset the tax increase they are now facing, in order to protect the thousands of jobs in this important industry.

Until vaccines and rapid testing are deployed widely around our country, we must continue our individual responsibility to keep ourselves, and each other, healthy and safe. So many of us have made great sacrifices in 2020 to protect our health and loved ones. We need to continue these habits as we enter 2021.

While many businesses and our border remain closed, we

must also remember to support and shop local. For years, local businesses have strengthened our communities by giving. Now is the time for us to support them, as well.

2021 is a new year, and a new year offers refreshed hope: Hope for vaccines. Hope for rapid testing. Hope to visit our loved ones again. Hope for travel. Hope for good health. And hope for life to return to normal again soon.

I hope for all these things, as do so many of you. As your MP, who proudly serves the communities of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls and Fort Erie, I will continue to represent our interests in Ottawa, and ensure your views and concerns are heard by this federal government.

No matter our challenges ahead, we shall carry on and carry forward, together.



## View from the couch

**Donald Combe  
Special to The Local**

Colin Firth is a fine actor. In *A Single Man* (Prime, 2009), he convincingly portrays a depressed, homosexual professor

living in California in 1962. Following the death of his long-time partner, he struggles to find peace and a way of belonging. It is a tortured struggle, but in the end he is able to "feel" rather than "think."

*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 series and movies for The Local.*



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# In fall, Niagara trails were discovered by visitors

Continued from page 8

sters, as much as they are for adults who simply go there for the first time. Nature is a classroom, while our current classrooms have arrows and rules and boundaries.

Noting the volume of people on the trails, I can confidently say there are now that many more people in our communities who appreciate and respect nature that much more.

The people of southern Ontario moved like sand in a changing river. For summer and fall, restrictions in Toronto helped shine a light on the liberties in Niagara. Niagara's trail networks and incredible natural experiences were being discovered by droves of people from the Golden Horseshoe.

Then there's Bill 229, the Province's new COVID Recovery bill which sneakily included drastic changes to our Conservation Authorities. The governing boards, which normally contain a diversity of experts and local elected representatives, are set to become entirely

composed with municipal councillors. By the same token, developers and other applicants can get an easier reconsideration from The Ministry of the Environment or the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, should they not like the scientific evaluations given by the local conservation authority.

You do the math as to what this could mean for our remaining natural spaces, which are already heavily encroached upon, right here in the most biodiverse region of Canada.

I sit at the desk and ponder what this all means for 2021 and beyond. Socially and spiritually, I'd say that our modern Ontario world has reconnected to nature in a big way. How effective will a more environmentally-educated population be against the impairing Bill 229 and ongoing pandemic, though?

Ontario has officially entered its four week lockdown. I haven't read any updated restrictions on tobogganing, so I took to the Niagara Escarpment's forested slopes and moulded a sled track from top to bottom. I slid like an otter down the escarpment

slant, weaving through the old growth oaks and maples. A bleak, sleepy winter landscape blankets NOTL down below. We have entered some sort of double hibernation, I thought, as I dodged the trees at high velocity. It's the first of its kind in a century. In contrast, the trees and rocks of this slope, coated in

have passed over me unknowingly while I sled through the forest. And, if you're looking for something healthy and fun to do during lockdown, never forget the Bruce Trail and various sledding hills across NOTL.

And now, for the year-end adventure that sums it all up. I've really wracked

reminder of 2020's madness stands more than seven feet tall at the top of Decew Falls. The fence is enormous, and stretched across the entirety of the parking lot and surrounding bushes. Pylons of the past still remain in the present, discouraging those summer crowds in the dead of winter from congregating at the iconic Decew Falls.

Blankets. Tim Hortons cups. McDonald's containers. Beer bottles, and masks. Decew is no stranger to pockets of litter, but this was an unending eyesore. It was the desperate, last-minute forest party that nobody wanted to clean up. This happened in many of Niagara's popular nature spots this year. Rescues, paid parking, and presence of trash are all variables in which we saw a sharp increase during the pandemic.

With litter everywhere, and the defiantly beautiful canyon to myself, there was something eerie going on. The misty fog rolling in only made the feeling more magical.

It wasn't just the litter, but the residual human energy that clung to the walls in here.

It was 2020's chaos,

unruliness, and summer of uncertainty still buzzing in this rocky, muddy landscape. You could just picture all the friends and families scampering down the steep banks to get to the beautiful water on a hot day. I saw it before the fence days, and it was incredibly busy. In contrast, here I was standing in the Decew Falls gorge, with the whole place to myself.

This hike was an ode to a powerful and transitional year, regarding all things in nature.

It seems like those early summer days are well over a year behind us, considering the changes which took place since the pandemic began.

Having said that, we need to hike positively into the future as a new year approaches. We need to remain vigilant for what's coming to our natural areas, and we need to act as locally as possible to make those little differences add up to a big one.

We all know 2021 is going to be a big one. So, let's make the most of it. Thank you all for your readership, thoughtful comments, and feedback this year.

Cheers, and Happy New Year!

“...we need to hike positively into the future as a new year approaches.”  
Owen Bjorgan

snow, were comfortably the same as they've always felt.

This wild winter activity served as an opportunity to write about how nature is always there to provide for us. The same escarpment slope filters water for our smaller NOTL communities, while providing irreplaceable habitat for owls, which may

up my 2020 escarpment hours as the year comes to a close. I find myself standing in the depths of the Decew Falls' gorge, icy cathedrals hanging like wizard beards off of their rocky chins. A haunting wintry chasm. What I discovered down there was a perfectly symbolic way to wrap up the year in natural Niagara.

A stark and profound

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# Sisters take plunge to keep tradition alive

Continued from page 1

usually is, so he left his truck running in a private driveway near the beach — parking at Ball's Beach is nonexistent, “although that's another story.”

The improvements at the beach made for a good dip, he says. “It's nice and sandy down there now.”

In recent years the swim has been a fundraiser for Red Roof Retreat, which was 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.

Bjorgan was disappointed that this couldn't happen this year, at a time when all fundraising events have been cancelled, but those who would like to help out can still donate at <https://www.redroof-retreat.com/donate>.

Bjorgan says he heard there might have been some swimmers at Ryerson Park, but he hasn't been able to confirm that.

There were, however, two official Penguins who took the plunge at Lion's Beach, as the locals call the strip of sand

by Queen's Royal Park.

Sisters Rebecca and Rachel Saylor first joined the event nine years ago, with their uncle Rick Mills and some of their cousins.

They have been back every year since, except for one, making the Ball's Beach event part of their Boxing Day tradition.

“Our first dip was in 2012,” says Rachel. “As a family, my sister and I, with Uncle Rick and his son Alexander, did three years in a row to become official penguins. Then my sister and I continued on. We did miss one year in 2017. Yesterday marked our eighth dip in nine years.”

This year, they wanted to see the tradition continue, but that was only part of their motivation.

“We had talked about it when we found out it was cancelled,” says Rachel.

“Part of what we like about it is doing something not everybody else is doing. We like the tradition, and we like that it's a community event. So much else during COVID has been taken away from us or changed, and we figured this was something we could still do. We didn't have the community present, but it was still fun.”

Their mother Kim was at the beach to take pictures, so the women would have proof



It was a long walk out in the shallow water off Queen's Royal Park, but Rachel and Rebecca Saylor took their three plunges in this year's Penguin Dip. (Kim Saylor)

they had done the dip. They saw only one other person, who was parked near the beach, and stayed to watch. “He gave us a little ‘good for you’ when we got out,” says Rachel.

They chose to go into the water by Queen's Royal Park because they found last year's event at Ball's Beach a little challenging. There are large boulders there now to climb over in order to get in and

out of the water, “and when you're coming out and your legs are numb, it's difficult. Rebecca had a little slip, and didn't realize she'd scraped her leg. You can't really feel anything,” says Rachel.

“Lion's Beach is easier to get in and out of, and it's sandy.”

The only problem is that the water is shallow, and the women had to go a long way out to take the plunge. They did that three times, although they didn't come all the way back to the beach between dips.

“It looked really cold, with the snow, and we were



Chris Bjorgan, organizer of the Penguin Swim for the last several years, made sure there was an official 45th annual event. He took the plunge with two other Penguin Club members off Ball's Beach Saturday. (Photo supplied)

psyching ourselves to get in. Once we were in, we thought, it's not that bad, but then the numbing starts and it's hard to catch your breath. But it's very refreshing, and I always come out feeling good.”

The Saylor sisters say they both missed their grandmother, Vi Mills, who passed away last February. Mills taught swimming, life-guarded and supervised the local public swimming program up until her retirement at 80 years of age, in 2014, teaching generations of children how to swim.

They followed in her footsteps, teaching swimming and

life-guarding for the Town, with Rebecca taking on the job of supervisor of the summer swim program in recent years.

Rachel was working at the YMCA pool at the McBain Centre until December, when staff was laid off due to COVID. With the exception of some Niagara Falls city staff who have offices in the building, the centre is closed, and Rachel is uncertain what the future holds for her. “I have to believe something better will come along,” she says.

Rebecca is working as a supervisor in child care for the YMCA.

Mills used to go to the beach to support her family members and cheer them on when they joined the Penguin Dip, says Rachel, and in the last few years, would be at home on Castlereigh Street waiting for them when they were finished. “We'd get out of our frozen bathing suits and she'd have hot chocolate waiting for us. We definitely missed her this year. She was on our minds.”

They were close to their grandmother, she says, and have missed her presence this year.

Their grandmother never participated in the dip, says Rachel, “but loved to bundle up and come watch her family.” Plus, she knew many more participants in the community, including the Bjorgan family, and having her there was part of the tradition.

COVID, which began shortly after their grandmother's death, “hit us hard. It numbed a lot of things for us. There was no candlelight stroll, no Christmas Parade, and we always did those things with her.”

Although they miss their grandmother, it feels good to think about her, says Rachel, and to know they were able to carry on one of the traditions that reminds them of her.

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# Couple cross Niagara to minister to local farmworkers

**Jane Andres**  
**Special to The Local**

It wasn't what they expected when they moved to Niagara.

It has only been a year and a half since Antonio Illas first set foot on the most fertile soil in Canada, but it feels like he has had a decade's worth of life-changing experience crammed into that short time.

Although Christ Church McNab began reaching out to the Spanish-speaking farmworkers in 1988, it began a more structured program in 2015, welcoming workers by providing church services and other support programs.

In response to growing awareness of the needs of these hard-working people, the Anglican diocese of Niagara hired Father Antonio Illas in the spring of 2019 to run the Migrant Farmworkers Project. It is hosted by three parishes: St. Alban's in Beamsville; St. John's in Jordan; and Christ Church McNab in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

He brought with him a wealth of cross-cultural experience that has spanned the globe. Spending his formative years in Puerto Rico, his family travelled widely, preparing him for a career of travel and adventures as a chaplain in the U.S. military.

Cela Tecamachaltzi de Illas, Antonio's wife of 31 years, is his partner in ministry. Her childhood years are full of special memories growing up in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. Her life was heavily influenced by her father, a pastor who served Mexico's most vulnerable people with a deeply committed love and compassion. She is also an ordained minister in the U.S. Presbyterian Church, and enjoyed preaching and assisting in the mass celebration in their first year here.

Together Antonio and Cela have crisscrossed the back roads of Niagara, reaching out to the hundreds of Spanish speaking men and women who work on Niagara's farms and greenhouses. Men and women from Mexico are here on eight-month contracts with SAWP (Seasonal Agricultural Work Program). However those from Guatemala and Honduras are here under the Temporary Foreign Worker program, with contracts ranging from one to four years.

Cela has been impacted by the stories of the women, mothers and grandmothers who are away from their children for as long as eight months.

As a mother of an adult daughter living in the U.S., she finds the stories of long separation from families and loved ones resonate deeply with her.

Family separation, especially when involving young children, and isolation due to language barriers, are the top two concerns that quickly became apparent during their first year of ministry.

The heart-wrenching hit-and-run accident in August

2019, that took the life of Zenaida, a mother of two young children, brought a painful awareness of these issues in a new way.

Another concern with more serious immediate consequences was the growing food insecurity. The weekly food budget for most farm workers is already stretched thin due to the many remittances deducted from their minimum wage, and the money sent home to support their families.

Many of the women in particular have large gaps in their employment. Some are stranded here for up to three months between greenhouse work in the winter and starting their work in the packing barns in late June or early July. Although they pay into employment insurance they are unable to collect. In recent years, women employed by some greenhouses have no longer received an advance when they arrive, waiting almost three weeks for a paycheque to buy groceries. For them, hunger is a stark reality.

What Antonio and Cela witnessed first-hand during their farm visits prompted them to step up efforts to try to provide adequate nutrition.

With the growing impact and uncertainty of the pandemic this past year, this issue has consumed most of their time and attention.

"Due to COVID-19, the farm worker project experienced a metamorphosis, as we could not continue to operate the clothing bank, medical clinic and religious services. A wholesaler from Burlington called us to offer food for the farmworkers so that it would not go to waste," says Antonio. "We started to pick up the food and the grocery bag drop-off program started. Then other generous donors started to donate food and the diocese gave us a grant to continue with the operation. Finally a grant from the federal government of Canada also provided funding."

Cela reinforced his comments. "We take groceries to the farms because we don't want food to be missing on their tables. It is necessary to be able to subsist. They have to be able to eat, and meet the economic needs of their families in Mexico."

Cela helps to organize the grocery bag drop-off program, focusing on the St. Catharines-area farms. The teams from the churches were careful to adhere to all safety protocols when preparing the deliveries and taking them to farms, where the men and women were eager to connect. Reusable, washable masks were greatly appreciated, she says.

"The biggest challenge has been COVID-19 restrictions, as it has prevented our meetings from taking place, and not being able to share the Sunday meal with the farmworkers," says Antonio. "The meal provided a vital social space to

connect, develop friendships and have a great time. We like to party, and COVID-19 has prevented us from those important celebrations."

"We are grateful to have survived the pandemic this season. Although several farmworkers have tested positive to COVID, they continue fighting, attempting to make it and survive," Cela says.

"The highlight for the past year and eight months has been to assist in time of needs, for example the fire at Pioneer Flower Farms, when the men lost all of their belongings just before they were to return home," continues Antonio. "This year, we have been able to find new ways to connect and develop relationships with the migrant farmworkers safely, in spite of the challenges of COVID."

Developing new ideas to provide a much needed clothing delivery and grocery bag drop-off program will continue well into the winter as they prepare for 2021.

It takes a lot of time and energy to meet the needs of a population that does not have the opportunities or the rights that most Canadians take for granted.

Based on conversations with their parishioners, what recommendations would they like to share?

They are both in agreement here.

If they had three wishes to make changes to the farmworkers program they would be:

1. Permanent resident status to prevent family separation and breakdown.
2. Decent living wages, and employment of 35 to 40 hours a week, with overtime benefits.
3. National standards that are consistent, and more accountability for decent housing.

"Any surprises?" I asked them.

"I've been surprised just how much and how quickly this ministry can grow! When I arrived I had no training manual, it was on the job training. A leap in faith and so much goodwill have supported this ministry," says Antonio.

They both say they did not expect that in little more than a year, they would develop such deeply-rooted relationships with the men and women who work so hard in our vineyards and greenhouses.

They did not expect their lives to be impacted in so many meaningful ways, or discover how God would provide, even during a pandemic.

They didn't expect their lives would be so quickly rooted in Niagara, but then again, this is not only the most fertile area in Canada for growing the best tender fruit, but a caring community as well.

For more information visit their website at [www.migrant-farmworkers.ca](http://www.migrant-farmworkers.ca), [migrantfarmworkers@niagaraanglican.ca](mailto:migrantfarmworkers@niagaraanglican.ca)



Antonio and Cela Illas delivered masks to Amado DeAquino Fitta. (Photos by Jane Andres)



In 2019 Antonio Illas and Nate Dirks shared stories over a jerk chicken dinner at the Southridge Vineland Caribbean Welcome.



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# Museum joins prestigious arts and culture online platform

**Kim Wade  
Special to The Local**

“Inspiration is spread around the globe, across space and time, in the places we love and with the people of our past.”

This quote introduces the Google Arts & Culture website and application to the online world. This online platform seeks to engage art lovers and historians by providing easy access to images and videos of artworks and cultural artifacts from museums and cultural organizations throughout the world.

Our own Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum has joined the ranks of other art museums and cultural organizations in this online world, along with such esteemed museums as the Tate Museum in London, the Smithsonian in Washington, and the Musée de Louvre in Paris.

Sarah Kaufman, managing director and curator, explains the NOTL Museum was actually the first small community museum in Canada to create virtual exhibitions on Google Arts & Culture. On the museum’s Google Arts page, there are 22 online exhibits along with 330 items to view such as artifacts, sketches, photographs and paintings dating back over 200 years in NOTL history. These items have been collected and maintained by the Niagara Historical Society for 125 years.

The NOTL Museum’s newest online addition to the Google Arts platform celebrates this 125-year heritage. The milestone anniversary exhibit was created to promote the beginning of the Niagara Historical Soci-

ety and “honour 125 years of collecting and sharing our local history,” says Kaufman.

“We were looking at innovative ways to celebrate, and an online exhibition is one of the ways we can put the organizational history out there,” she continues.

Kaufman says Shawna Butts, assistant curator at the museum, has been responsible for the museum’s virtual exhibitions. Butts has been collecting, organizing and uploading these exhibitions on both the museum’s own website and on the Google platform.

She explains it takes several weeks to complete an online exhibit from “narrowing down the images, selecting which text to include, and trying to be concise.” She proudly states that even though the Google system of uploading exhibits to the application is complicated, Butts has “mastered the task.”

Kaufman believes the importance of this exhibition celebrates the fortitude and advanced thinking of the founders of the Niagara Historical Society.

“In the beginning, the society kept the history alive and present in our community through historical markers, commemorative events and publications about our history. Early members were constantly advocating for artifacts and archives related to our history to remain in our community, rather than sending them out of the area,” says Kaufman.

“Janet Carnochan, our first president and later a curator, fought to get significant pieces into the collection, such as Brock’s Hat, the Servos Indian Department uniform, the Laura Secord collection, and significant



This 1927 photo shows the interior of the museum's Memorial Hall. (Photo supplied)

war trophies of the World Wars,” she says.

“Throughout the 125 years, the organization has continued these traditions, but has also adapted to the times. Today we keep the history alive by continuing to work on public markers, hosting a permanent exhibition of our chronological history, two temporary exhibitions each year, and several engaging programs. We also maintain a collection which has started to become more accessible online through a collections database and virtual exhibitions,” such as the ones on Google Arts & Culture.

Over the past 125 years, the Niagara Historical Society has grown from a small community-minded group of volunteers who “mounted small displays in the Queen Street Courthouse,” to an

established museum with three full-time staff, one part-time, 100 active volunteers, and more than 600 individual members, who run at least 80 programs per year. The museum boasts over 53,000 archives and artifacts.

Kaufman sees that the future for museums will be interesting. In the recent past, before COVID, there was a movement toward more interactive activities to engage visitors with history. Unfortunately, she laments, these types of interactive exhibits and activities have been restricted or cancelled due to the pandemic. She explains that the online world has become much more important during this time, and will continue to be in the future. Even though the museum staff works with the past, it doesn’t mean they are not looking to the future.

“One thing is for sure, museums are realizing that our presence in the online world has become equally important,” she says. “At the NOTL Museum, we quickly pivoted to online in order to continue to reach our mandate by boosting our virtual exhibitions, social media engagement, online lectures and shows and more accessibility to online collections. This will continue to be a priority for us in the coming years, as we look at how we can expand our online engagement with our community.”

The 125th anniversary exhibit celebrates the contributions and the Niagara Historical Society’s efforts to maintain and promote the importance of preserving the history of the town. Kaufman and the staff of the NOTL Museum remain

dedicated to this task, and through the advancement in technology, they are going beyond Janet Carnochan’s expectations by being able to share everything that has been accomplished for the past 125 years with the world.

“In NOTL, the residents recognize how significant the local history is, and we’re doing our best to continue to promote it and maintain it on the community’s behalf,” says Kaufman.

“Further, in 2021, we’re looking at growing even more by expanding and renovating our facilities to better meet the needs of our community. We’re working on creating a world-class museum for a world-class community. We will continue to be the stewards of NOTL’s history, and their collection into the future.”



The museum will be expanded next year, to add more room for exhibits and programs. (Kim Wade)



General Isaac Brock’s hat is one of the most iconic artifacts in the NOTL Museum. (Kim Wade)







# Musical tells story of Niagara River and its local impact



Joe Lapinski, Laurel Minnes, Barbara Worthy, Juliet Dunn and Aaron Berger perform *Rollin' Down the River*, recorded at the NOTL Museum and available online. (Photo supplied)

## Kim Wade Special to The Local

*Rollin' Down the River* is a musical look at the Niagara River, its history, and influence on the region. Performed by the Great Canadian Songbook Band, the online musical event was scheduled to be part of a fundraising effort put on by Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery in support of The Friends of Fort George and The Niagara Historical Society earlier this month. Unfortunately, due to the increase in COVID-19 cases, the in-person dinner of the History in the Vineyard

fundraiser was required to become a take-away event. The musical portion that was to be presented at the fundraiser was recorded and eventually uploaded to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum's YouTube channel on Dec. 23. It was written and directed by Barbara Worthy, an experienced writer, director, producer and performer. She was a drama and documentary producer for CBC Radio for two decades, and enjoyed a 20-year association with the Shaw Festival. She teaches at both Brock University and Niagara College, and is a creative producer and con-

tent provider for many local arts organizations in Niagara. Over the years, she has worked with the museum on specific projects and contracts, but joined staff in the fall of 2019 as the visitor and members services assistant. Along with the musical and acting talents of Aaron Berger, Juliet Dunn, Laurel Minnes, and Joe Lapinski, Worthy takes the audience on a historical voyage down the Niagara River and its impact and influence on the Niagara area. Starting with the earliest records of original inhabitants, the group presents history through song, skits and stories. The

accounts chronicle the river's impact on trade, commerce, smuggling, and slavery. Highlights from the video include Juliet Dunn's solo performance of *Imma Gonna Take 'em Back*, which was both thought-provoking and touching. The song expresses the anguish of a black slave whose children have been taken from her, and her determination to get her children back. This song and the one that follows, *I Have Faith*, punctuate the role of the river in the Underground Railway for slaves escaping from the U.S. to freedom in Canada. Other performances

include an animated story by Aaron Berger, Laurel Minnes, and Joe Lapinski about prohibition and fishing rights in the river. Berger's rendition of a maritime diddy was an entertaining way to bring this period of history to life. The group also highlighted the impact of steam boats on the lake and the river, by concluding with a song about the most famous steam boat, The Cayuga, when it sailed Lake Ontario from 1906 to her last voyage in 1957, carrying more than 15 million passengers from Niagara-on-the-Lake to Toronto and other ports on the lake. Worthy explains that she originally formed the Great Canadian Historical Songbook Band to perform historical songs and stories. They have a history of telling local stories through song, with support from the NOTL and the Niagara Falls museums. To complement the live shows, they created a podcast series that is recorded at Joe Lapinski's WOW! Recording Studio & Creative Music Space in St. Catharines. This podcast is available through all podcast streaming platforms:

<https://anchor.fm/canadian-songbook>. "For me, it's an opportunity to work with superb talent, diverse, local and passionate musicians, and our local museum, because that's where I start with all the research," Worthy says. "That's what makes it so special. We can tell our local stories that include Black history, Native history, as well as stories that tell the settlement of Niagara and beyond," she continues. Worthy says she would like to thank the students and staff in the Niagara College Broadcasting department for making the filming of this part of their class project, and to the Niagara Region for funding through the Niagara Investment in Culture program. She says they were "thrilled to receive the Niagara Investment in Culture grant. The NIC program has been invaluable to local artists, and especially now, when everyone is scrambling to create digital content and be COVID-responsible."

The full event can be watched on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/JxaezsiID-AI>.



## 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. 31: The last day of 2020 is here! And it ends much as it has unraveled so far – with emotional tension making everything not so celebratory. It's a good idea to not push, but to wait and respond. He was born in Winnipeg in 1911, and was a professor

of communication theory at the University of Toronto when his small book, *The Medium is the Message*, changed the way we see the world. Marshall McLuhan remains a towering figure in Canadian history. He died in his sleep on New Year's Eve, 1980. Friday, Jan. 1: Mercury in Capricorn is pals with

Neptune in Pisces today, and that means a day of ideas that benefit both from imagination and a steady sense of practicality. It was 157 years ago today that Abraham Lincoln signed The Emancipation Proclamation, setting all former slaves free. This was Jan. 1, 1863, while the Civil War was still raging.

# LOCAL WORSHIP

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Message:  
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**Across:**

1 Turnpike exit  
5 Reverential  
9 Frown  
14 60% of us live here  
15 Of sound judgment  
16 Carried  
17 Former CIA director Porter ---  
18 Electrical devices  
20 Goals  
21 Central  
22 Reactor safety overseer: Abbr.  
23 Crimson  
25 Shuns  
29 Kvetch  
30 Hot air  
31 Street guide  
32 Severe  
34 Spark generator  
35 Scotch companion  
36 Perfectly  
37 Take pictures  
38 Egyptian solar deity  
39 Legs it  
40 Throw  
41 Corrosive chemicals  
42 Since  
43 Canter


44 Surrealist Jean ---  
45 Short musical passages  
47 Dearth  
50 Rider Haggard romance  
51 Clash  
52 Narrow road  
53 The Queen City  
57 Otherwise  
58 Oil well firefighter Red ---  
59 Terrible Russian leader  
60 Morose  
61 Specifically  
62 Fencing stake  
63 Storm centers

**Down:**

1 Fumed  
2 Together  
3 Minor crime  
4 Travel documents  
5 Get up  
6 Rubbed off  
7 Spot  
8 Destructive computer key  
9 Stiffer  
10 Shell which can be blown  
11 How some stocks are traded (Abbr.)  
12 The --- small hours  
13 S L C church

19 One way to preserve food  
24 Scurried  
25 Poet whose work led to "Cats"  
26 Passionately  
27 Walked knee-deep through water  
28 Crosses  
30 Fillip  
32 Bag supporter  
33 Knotty  
34 Total confusion  
35 Blasphemy  
37 Filter out  
41 Ambition  
43 Collarless short-sleeved top  
44 Devil dog  
46 Computer information exchange code  
47 Deadly  
48 Follow  
49 Appears  
51 Programming language  
53 Twin-hulled vessel (Abbr.)  
54 Statement of agreement at the altar  
55 Rural negative  
56 Small drink

IN MEMORIAM



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**JUNE 22, 1936 - DECEMBER 31, 2017**

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

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.

NOTICES

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**Deadline is Tuesdays at 10 a.m.**

**Across:**

1 Turnpike exit  
5 Reverential  
9 Frown  
14 60% of us live here  
15 Of sound judgment  
16 Carried  
17 Former CIA director Porter ---  
18 Electrical devices  
20 Goals  
21 Central  
22 Reactor safety overseer: Abbr.  
23 Crimson  
25 Shuns  
29 Kvetch  
30 Hot air  
31 Street guide  
32 Severe  
34 Spark generator  
35 Scotch companion  
36 Perfectly  
37 Take pictures  
38 Egyptian solar deity  
39 Legs it  
40 Throw  
41 Corrosive chemicals  
42 Since  
43 Canter

44 Surrealist Jean ---  
45 Short musical passages  
47 Dearth  
50 Rider Haggard romance  
51 Clash  
52 Narrow road  
53 The Queen City  
57 Otherwise  
58 Oil well firefighter Red ---  
59 Terrible Russian leader  
60 Morose  
61 Specifically  
62 Fencing stake  
63 Storm centers

**Down:**

1 Fumed  
2 Together  
3 Minor crime  
4 Travel documents  
5 Get up  
6 Rubbed off  
7 Spot  
8 Destructive computer key  
9 Stiffer  
10 Shell which can be blown  
11 How some stocks are traded (Abbr.)  
12 The --- small hours  
13 S L C church

19 One way to preserve food  
24 Scurried  
25 Poet whose work led to "Cats"  
26 Passionately  
27 Walked knee-deep through water  
28 Crosses  
30 Fillip  
32 Bag supporter  
33 Knotty  
34 Total confusion  
35 Blasphemy  
37 Filter out  
41 Ambition  
43 Collarless short-sleeved top  
44 Devil dog  
46 Computer information exchange code  
47 Deadly  
48 Follow  
49 Appears  
51 Programming language  
53 Twin-hulled vessel (Abbr.)  
54 Statement of agreement at the altar  
55 Rural negative  
56 Small drink

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

PUZZLE ANSWERS

**Sudoku solution from December 24, 2020**

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

**Across:**

1 Ramp, 5 Awed, 9 Scowl, 14 Asia, 15 Wise, 16 Toted, 17 Goss, 18 Appliances, 20 Ends, 21 Key, 22 N R C, 23 Deep red, 25 Eschews, 29 Moan, 30 Blah, 31 Map, 32 Stern, 34 Coil, 35 Soda, 36 To a, 37 Shoot, 38 Ate, 39 Runs, 40 Cast, 41 Acids, 42 Ago, 43 Trot, 44 Miro, 45 Phrases, 47 Famines, 50 She, 51 Jar, 52 Lane, 53 Cincinnati, 57 Else, 58 Adair, 59 Ivan, 60 Gium, 61 To wit, 62 Pale, 63 Eyes.

**Down:**

1 Raged, 2 As one, 3 Misdemeanor, 4 Passports, 5 Awaken, 6 Wiped, 7 Espy, 8 Del, 9 Starch, 10 Conch, 11 O T C, 12 Wee, 13 L-D S, 19 In salt, 24 Ran, 25 Eliot, 26 Emotionally, 27 Waded, 28 Spans, 30 Boost, 32 Strap, 33 Tough, 34 Chaos, 35 Sacrilige, 37 Screen, 41 Aim, 43 T-shirt, 44 Marine, 46 A S C I I, 47 Fatal, 48 Ensur, 49 Seems, 51 Java, 53 Cat, 54 I do, 55 Naw, 56 Nip.



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The Niagara-on-the-Lake

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Spread  
COVID-19  
can be deadly.  
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Stay strong.  
Save lives.**



# LOCAL SPORTS

## Queenston golf pro earns Master Kids Coach designation

**Mike Balsom**  
Special to The Local

For golf pro and instructor Brody Wetham, it's all about having fun, enjoying the game, and inspiring life-long golfers. A self-described big kid at heart, he brings that outlook to golfers of all ages across the Niagara region.

The Queenston resident's philosophy has once again paid dividends. For the third straight year Wetham has been named a U.S. Kids Golf Foundation Top 50 Worldwide kids coach, earning him the Master Kids Coach designation. It's the highest honour an instructor can receive from U.S. Kids Golf. And the title puts Wetham in rarefied company: since 2008 only 197 coaches in the world have received this honour, and only a handful in Canada can boast to be a master.

Wetham says he's had his sights set on being named a Master Kids Coach since his mentor, Doug Lawrie of Oakville's Focus Golf Group, earned the same designation in 2015. "A few years ago, when I first started teaching, he urged me to get certified with this, so I did. It became one of my big goals, and I'm pretty excited about it."

Wetham, like others in the golf world, are coming off one of the busiest seasons ever. With golf being one of the only recreational and athletic options available for all ages during the pandemic, courses were jammed with people either returning to the game or picking up clubs for the very first time. That includes Wetham's junior program run out of his Niagara Golf Academy at Sawmill Golf Course in Fenwick.

"I taught full-bore all summer," he raves. "I was crazy busy. People had time on their hands. Our junior program at Sawmill had over 330 kids and a waiting list. We also did our first full fall program, which took us into late September, and that filled up in three days."

Wetham continues, "we had more kids who had never touched a club before, because they had been playing baseball or soccer. They came out with their parents, and now they've got the bug. Many told me they can't wait to get back out next summer."

That meshes perfectly with Wetham's overall notion of the game. "U.S. Kids is all about making sure they're having fun. They could be sitting in their basements playing video games. I like to create an environment for them to get out and have fun. And this year it was more important than ever that they get outside and connect with other kids with some physical activity."



Brody Wetham's goal is to teach kids and adults to enjoy the game, hoping they will become life-long golfers. (Photo supplied)

For Wetham, when working with kids, it's all about skills, drills and games. With COVID protocols there were a few changes to the way he coached the youngsters this summer. Still, Wetham's program involves kids in games that are group-based and draw on items such as hula hoops, pool noodles, baseballs and frisbees to get them active and enjoying themselves.

"The main thing about golf is when kids want to come back, Mom and Dad begin to come out. Mom takes some lessons, they visit the club house, and golf becomes part of the family fabric. One of the best things is when I go to the range with a new group of kids and I see other kids I taught out there with Mom and Dad."

The lockdown stage of the pandemic forced Wetham to move to online private lessons last spring, something he plans to continue during the current provincial lockdown.

While a number of his regular students are now involved in competitive golf, he's clear that not everyone is going to be a Tiger Woods or a Rickie Fowler.

"I'm trying to create golfers," he asserts. "Hopefully some of these kids will play competitive golf, but it's more important to me that I create lifetime golfers. I want to teach the average Joe to get better. The adults I teach, if I can get that guy who's never had lessons before come back and say 'Brody, I just shot the best game of my life,' then I've

done my job."

During the winter months, Wetham usually continues teaching out of Sawmill, and also at Niagara Golf Warehouse in St. Catharines. He credits Jeremy Julie and his family, owners of Sawmill, and Niagara Golf Warehouse's Tony Haney and Brad Graham, for their support of his programs. "Right now we're shut down," he says. "We should be able to return to Sawmill once we move into the Red Zone, but at the Golf Warehouse, because it's primarily a retail operation, I can't teach there until we're in Orange."

In the meantime, he will continue developing his own skills as a golf instructor. "I'll be taking some courses, including a program through PGA Canada for coaching the competitive stream. And I just bought a new Flight Scope, a golf ball launch monitor, so I'll learn a bit more about how to use that to help enhance my teaching."

He'll also continue delivering lessons via FaceTime and Zoom to both kids and adults, and will use his website, [niagaragolfacademy.com](https://niagaragolfacademy.com), to post tips. Unfortunately, his annual trip to Florida for the PGA Show and Convention won't happen, but he will take part in the virtual version of that event.

Under normal conditions, Wetham would be receiving his Master Award at a ceremony during that convention, but he'll have to wait until January 2022 for that moment in the spotlight.