



A chilly dip | Page 22

Divide grows over using heritage trail in Solmar subdivision work

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

After a long meeting held behind closed doors on Dec. 15, Niagara-on-the-Lake's

council emerged with a public stance on how development should take place on the historic Rand Estate in Old Town.

The town's position puts it on a slightly different path than that of the

residents' advocacy group Save Our Rand Estate.

Town clerk Grant Bivol announced the town is prepared to allow for the construction of a new road entrance into the historic lot from the Upper Canada

Heritage Trail to facilitate the building of new homes on the former estate.

"SORE doesn't support that access," said Catherine Lyons, a lawyer representing SORE. Solmar Development

Corp., which owns the property, has a subdivision plan on the books, which proposes to build 172 units on the historic property.

The proposal has been the subject of an ongoing

dispute between SORE, the town and Solmar owner Benny Marotta since it was first brought forward in July 2020.

Marotta's development

Continued on Page 3

YEAR IN REVIEW 2023

12 months of change in Niagara-on-the-Lake

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

With new development proposals from Old Town to Glendale sparking controversy, the resignation of the town's chief administrator, and the first year of the town's newly elected council, 2023 was a year of change in Niagara-on-the-Lake. And a \$10,000 cash donation from a developer to a town councillor made headlines, however police and integrity commissioner probes found no criminal intent. But plenty more happened in NOTL in 2023. Read on:

January

Jan. 5 edition: Niagara-on-the-Lake council creates a special committee to oversee how hundreds of thousands of dollars generated by the new municipal accommodation tax will be spent, mainly on tourism-related projects.

Former Shaw Festival artistic director Jackie Maxwell is

Continued on Page 14

Anything you can do ...

NOTL female farmers part of a rising tide of women in agriculture



Kim McQuhae of Gryphon Ridge Highlands and Breeze, one of her herd of 10 Highland cattle at the Larkin Road farm. RICHARD HUTTON

Richard Hutton | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

It's not just in offices where more and more women are breaking through the metaphorical glass ceiling – it's happening in agriculture, too.

Take Kim McQuhae, Linda

Grimo and Rose Bartel, for example.

They are three Niagara-on-the-Lake women – along with others such as Maureen MacSween (MacSween Farms) and Emma

Thwaites (Thwaites Farms) – who have taken charge of their own path in the agriculture industry.

McQuhae has her fingers in many pies, including cattle farm-

ing and an award-winning jam business. Grimo runs a successful nut farm (Grimo Nut Nursery) started by her father, Ernie.

Continued on Page 17



DR. BROWN

Long-term care residents can thrive on love and attention

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

My father-in-law was a good-natured, outgoing man with a sunny disposition and gifted with a lively sense of humour.

One of the many games he used to play with his daughter Jan and grandchildren was the four-liner, which began with holding Jan's hand and her father asking, "Do you love me?" Jan was expected to

respond, "Yes I do", after which Bob, would ask, How much? to which Jan would respond with a crushing grip, or for fun, a weak grip or none at all, at which point both would laugh – to be followed by another round,

this time with a more satisfying grip.

Last September marked four years for Jan in long-term care. Before that there were two years in day care and before that several years of cognitive decline marked

by progressive forgetfulness of the storylines of books she was reading, appointments and names, more errors creeping into her weaving, some of which she

Continued on Page 19



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Town ups prices on clunky parking services



The town is upping the cost of parking, despite complaints from residents, merchants and visitors that the current machines are insufficient. EVAN LOREE

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Hold onto your quarters, parking in Niagara-on-the-Lake just got a wee bit pricier.

NOTL's council voted to up the cost of parking in all lots by 25 cents per hour for 2024.

The proposed increase had councillors chatting for almost 20 minutes when it came up in a talk about increased fees for town services at a meeting Dec. 12.

"My only concern is we're upping parking rates in a system that doesn't currently work," said Coun. Tim Balasiuk.

Fire chief Jay Plato disagreed with Balasiuk's assessment of the town's parking system.

"I would not necessarily use those exact words," he said. "There are just pieces

of it that are not as user-friendly as they definitely could be."

Most town parking meters do not give people the option to pay with credit cards.

Instead, people can pay parking fees with coins or Honk Mobile, a parking payment mobile app.

This limitation generated significant criticism from residents and visitors last summer.

Despite people struggling to pay for parking, Plato said the town "still did fairly well from a financial standpoint" in 2023.

The town will soon take bids from private consultants for a contract to replace the town's parking meters.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor pitched the parking fee increases and also suggested the town undertake a full review of its service fees.

The town charges people for numerous services.

For example, it charges a fee for processing planning applications, hunting licences, sign permits and short-term rental licenses.

It also collects membership fees from people who exercise at the community centre.

The fitness memberships, specifically, are going up 10 per cent in 2024, while planning application fees are going up 4.6 per cent, according to a staff report.

The town currently charges adult residents \$22.75 a month to use the community fitness centre. It charges \$17.25 for students and \$15.25 a month for seniors.

Every planning application comes at a different price, but two of the more costly applications are for zoning and official plan amendments.

Applications for these are going from \$9,100 to \$9,520 for official plan amendments, and from \$8,570 to \$8,965 for zoning amendments.

"Rate adjustments are proposed to reflect the ongoing inflationary increase in the cost of service delivery," the report stated.

Though the town is paying for big studies, which may impact some service rates, councillors were not interested when O'Connor suggested they conduct a comprehensive review of the fee structures.

"I don't want to double our work for the exact same outcome at the end," said Coun. Adriana Vizzari.

She was one of three councillors to say the rates would be assessed as part of the several studies which O'Connor worried would impact service fees
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Upper Canada Lodge to close in June

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

It is often said that when one door closes, another opens.

And that is exactly the case for Upper Canada Lodge, a long-term care home in Niagara-on-the-Lake that will shut its doors for good this late spring.

The 80-bed facility on Wellington Street will be shuttered on June 19, the same day a new Gilmore Lodge is slated to open its doors in Fort Erie.

The new Gilmore Lodge will double its capacity from 80 to 160 beds and for all intents and purposes, replace the beds being lost in NOTL.

Construction on an expansion of Lindhaven Home in St. Catharines, increasing its capacity from 248 to 261 beds, is also happening now.

Henri Koning, director of senior services for Niagara Region, which operates Upper Canada Lodge, confirmed the closure date in an email to The Lake Report and said that the province's Home and Community



Niagara Region has confirmed Upper Canada Lodge will close on June 19. FILE

Care Support Services is coordinating new places for the residents to stay.

"Home and Community Care has been working closely with residents and families at Upper Canada Lodge since April to help each resident find an appropriate home to relocate to," Koning wrote.

She said that some of the residents have chosen to move to the new Gilmore Lodge, while others will be moving to other retirement homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake including Pleasant

Manor, which is in the midst of its own 160-bed expansion, or other homes in the region.

"Upper Canada Lodge is working with residents on a case-by-case basis to support the move and transition to an alternate home," Koning wrote.

Programming for seniors that is currently offered at Upper Canada Lodge will continue to be offered in town, she added, indicating community programs, including an adult day program, will be offered at

the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre.

Upper Canada Lodge is one of three senior homes offering long-term care services. The others are Pleasant Manor and Niagara Long-Term Care Residence.

The new Gilmore Lodge and expansion of Lindhaven are a part of the \$175 million being spent to improve long-term care facilities in the region. The provincial government has chipped in with \$66 million over 25 years.

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Still time to take part in survey on senior housing needs

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

There is still time to complete a survey intended to find out what Niagara-on-the-Lake residents' housing needs and desires are as they age.

So far, almost 400 people aged 55 and over have completed the online questionnaire.

But the two researchers overseeing the survey are encouraging more residents to have their say in order to build an extensive database of information that will help generate a solid recommendation about what the community wants.

The survey, which wraps up in mid-January, is a key research tool that an ad hoc committee of residents is using to determine what sort of housing options residents believe they will need as they age.

"We're aiming to make the sample as large and as unbiased as possible," said researcher Steve Ferley.

"The aim is to have an objective view of the landscape and be able to draw unbiased conclusions on the issues. The more responses

we get, the more we can drill down and look at subsets of the data," he said.

"It's totally anonymous, takes only about 12 minutes and flows very easily."

His fellow research expert, Michael Ennamorato, noted, "When we were designing the survey we knew that some people may not have given active thought to their future housing plans, their needs and desires."

They also knew it might be an issue many didn't particularly want to address.

"The good news is that people are telling us they're happy to be invited to think about issues that may have been only at the back of their mind. They're pleased to be addressing it," Ennamorato said.

Ferley said one aspect the survey might address is whether people in Old Town have different views than residents of NOTL's other communities.

"We've asked people to rank in order how important various factors are in their plans. Is it different according to their age or according to where they live?"

Some people already might have concrete plans



Scan this QR code to take the senior housing survey.

about their future.

"What are those plans? What are the timelines? The larger the sample, the more the data can be analyzed. And it'll all be done objectively," Ferley said.

After the survey closes in a couple of weeks, Niagara College School of Business Prof. Nick Farnell and his graduate students will work with Ennamorato and Ferley to analyze and interpret the data.

More than half of NOTL's population of 19,000 is over 55 and many residents have concerns about what housing options will be available as they get older.

The survey is available in a variety of forms, including a QR code that people can click on by using their smartphone camera or a

direct link to the survey via <https://forms.office.com/r/NGNVQ11SZd>.

As well, anyone without internet access or who has trouble accessing the survey can call 905-468-7498 for help.

The committee that inspired the survey includes Robert Bader, Al Bisback, Fran Boot, Cindy Grant, Bill Halpenny, Sandra Hardy, Terry Mactaggart, Sandra O'Connor, Tom Smith, Tim Taylor and Peggy Walker.

"First, we have to quantify the demand so that we can get the attention of the town, the region, developers and whoever else has a stake in this," Grant said previously. "Then we'll start talking about solutions."

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Besides heritage trail entrance, SORE group pleased with town's recommendations for Solmar subdivision

Continued from Front Page

group has planned to have one access point for vehicles to get into the site — through an opening in the wall at 200 John St. E.

The resident group has consistently argued the access point should be through an opening in the wall between 144 and 176 John St. E., lots which are owned by Marotta's other company, Two Sisters Resorts Corp.

Bivol said the town favoured the access point SORE proposed, but if Solmar remains unwilling to build it there, the town would allow a new access point to be built through the Upper Canada

Heritage Trail, which runs behind 588 Charlotte St.

"SORE is really uncomfortable with the idea that counsel has unilaterally made this decision without any consultation," Lyons said in an interview.

She said there should have been some consultation on whether or not part of the heritage trail should be given to a developer for private use.

"To take the trail and say, 'OK, now we're going to make it into a road' and do that with no public consultation is problematic," she added.

A town consultant's report discussed at council on Dec. 5 said an

entrance in the stone wall could be built along the heritage trail "to facilitate access for pedestrians and cyclists" if it met the structural requirements.

The report from Urban Strategies Inc. and GBCA Architects did not suggest granting road access from the heritage trail.

Despite differing on whether to let Solmar use the heritage trail as an entrance, Lyons said the resident group was "pleased with the town's position."

"Will we be able to co-ordinate our defences? Absolutely," she said. "We're on the same page, I believe, with everything except for the access."

According to Bivol's

announcement, the town wants to cap the number of residential units on the lot at 135, whereas Marotta's proposal is for 172 units.

In an article released Dec. 16, SORE shared a sketch of a subdivision with 126 units, well within the 135-unit cap suggested by the town.

The town also supported the development recommendations of Denise Horne, its former heritage planner.

Her recommendations are laid out in an 835-page report which was endorsed by council at a large public meeting on April 24 last year.

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Interim chief administrator wants to **avoid disruptions**

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

At least for a short while, Bruce Zvaniga is the man helming the seat of Niagara-on-the-Lake's chief administrative officer as the town begins its search for its official replacement.

"It might be a small town, but it's certainly a town with lots on the go," he said.

As the acting chief administrator, Zvaniga says his job is to keep the train on its tracks and help the town find a permanent staffer to assume the position.

Zvaniga fills the shoes of former chief administrator Marnie Cluckie, who left the town for the senior-most position in Hamilton before Christmas.

"Part of my job is to put myself out of work," Zvaniga said.

He estimated it would take between six and 12 months to find a replacement for Cluckie.

Zvaniga has worked for the last 40-plus years in administration.

The veteran of municipal affairs is looking to wind down his career, having spent thirty years with the city of Toronto and, more



Bruce Zvaniga is the interim chief administrative officer for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. EVAN LOREE

recently, three years as commissioner of public works for Niagara Region.

"I don't see myself as ... taking on the permanent role," he said, adding he was not planning to work full time for many years.

"I think I still have lots to contribute, and lots of energy over shorter bursts."

But part of the reason he was drawn to the job in NOTL was because it was a temporary position.

Since leaving the region last May, Zvaniga said he's focused mostly on taking care of his health and family while doing some professional consulting for a friend in Atlantic Canada on the side.

When the opportunity came up in NOTL, he said it was "just too good to say no to."

Rather than just being around to "keep the lights on," Zvaniga said he was

"anxious to keep the momentum going."

Though he acknowledged the change in leadership represented, in his own words, "a disruption" for the town, he said he wanted to make it a minimal one.

"I don't want to create any unnecessary disruption," he said. "Because to me, disruption is something that just reduces our capacity to get the important things done."

The key to success, he added, was not going to be in importing practices from other towns and regions but in "taking the time to listen, to understand why things are the way they are" in NOTL.

"It's not about no change." Change is inevitable in government but said he wanted to focus on change that was in "the best interest of the organization."

The challenge to running NOTL, he said, would be

in "finding the sweet spot" between town growth and protecting its natural and historical heritage.

This, he added, would affect the next chief administrator as well.

Zvaniga takes the helm just as a couple of other senior staffers are leaving.

Senior heritage planner Denise Horne left the town in November after eight years, and director of operations Rome D'Angelo is leaving his position on Friday.

The acting chief administrator said he was unaware of D'Angelo's intentions prior to taking the job and didn't consider staff turnover as a potential factor in the town when he took the position.

"It happens all the time," he said.

"You never want to lose somebody good," he added, but stated that it's "part of the natural ebb and flow" of running a town.

Though Zvaniga is a licensed engineer, he said he'd probably be too busy to do anything more than guide D'Angelo's replacement.

He has been a resident of NOTL for the last four years, having been drawn to it by its "historical connections" and "natural beauty."

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Peller promises to **keep pushing** to boost wine industry

Jill Troyer
The Lake Report

It's taken years to get the province and the wine industry on the same page, but several changes unveiled by the Ford government are "incredibly gratifying for all of us and we're all incredibly excited and grateful," says John Peller.

The changes announced just before Christmas are "a real shot of adrenalin," the CEO and president of Andrew Peller Ltd. said in an interview.

"This is just what the region needs, to know that when we work together our goals are very achievable."

The province unveiled a suite of changes to the landscape of liquor sales, several of which the Niagara wine industry had lobbied for intensely.



John Peller. FILE

Included in the announcement:

- Elimination of the 6.1 per cent tax charged on wine sales at wineries.
- In conjunction with the expansion of the number of convenience, grocery and big-box stores able to sell beer, wine, cider and coolers by up to 8,500 new stores starting in 2026, the government extended the current 40 per cent shelf

space requirements for Ontario wines and ciders to new retailers to help small producers compete.

- The Wine Marketing Fund will continue for up to five years.

- The VQA Support Program was extended and the cap on it will be removed. When VQA wines are sold at the LCBO, the program returns some of the taxes to Ontario wineries.

- Government direction to the LCBO to promote and prioritize Ontario-made products.

Peller has been a key leader in the push to get these changes in place and he intends to continue.

"He's a founder in the industry and John has had a very strong vision to move forward," according to Del Rollo, Arterra Wines' vice-president of corporate affairs.

"He has been a driving force, instrumental in our success," he added.

Peller noted his vision and ambition started with his grandfather some 70 years ago "and it was my father's as well."

"I've become attached to everything that our business stands for in terms of making an incredible agricultural product and bringing best-in-class wines and hospitality and culture to a region that has just absolutely unlimited potential," he said.

"It's heavy lifting. It's a lot of hard work using data and fact-based studies. It has taken a great deal of time and effort to get the entire Niagara region working together to share all the data and information that's in our Deloitte report," he said.

Deloitte's "Uncork Ontario" report says the Niagara wine industry could be the catalyst for adding billions of dollars to the province's GDP.

"In the end, there's a great consensus around the incredible economic opportunity that exists here," Peller said. "You can really see the power of collective ambition."

He calls the province's changes "foundational" for industry growth, but cautions there is still much work left to do, particularly around taxes and market share.

"Don't lose sight of the fact that even when this effectively reduces the taxation on VQA wine, we're still paying three or four times the amount of tax that most businesses pay," he said.

"Every wine region in the world has a dominant market position in its home market, greater than 90 per cent domestic share, including countries like France, Italy and Spain. Meanwhile, our market share in the LCBO is 25 per cent, the same as 30 years ago when I first started."

"There's a whole sense of energy and adrenalin in our industry right now. We're in the beginning phases in that there's a lot more work to be done, but I've never been more inspired," said Peller.

The industry adores Peller's passion on this, Rollo said, and "he'll be ever present and will continue to champion this industry."

"I'll be working on this for the rest of my life. I bought into this dream over 30 years ago," Peller said.

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Santa Clauses for NOTL causes

Christmas came a bit early in NOTL, when hundreds of Santa Clauses went running through town. The small army of red-clad Santas took to the streets of Niagara-on-the-Lake on Dec. 17 as part of the annual Santa 5K run. The run, organized by VR Pro Inc. and Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty Ltd., attracted about 400 runners, who started off at Simcoe Park. There was also an elf run for children before the Santas got moving. The run helped raise money for the NOTL Youth Collective, with donations, sponsorships and a portion of the money from each entry going to the youth group. Race director Kelly Arnott said the turnout was the highest yet, raising more than \$5,200 for the Youth Collective, plus 154 pounds of food for Newark Neighbours food bank. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Town operations leader heads Home-ilton

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

There's no place like Home-ilton for director of operations Rome D'Angelo.

After more than a year of running the operations department for Niagara-on-the-Lake, D'Angelo is returning to his home of Hamilton and taking a job with Hamilton Police Services.

D'Angelo told The Lake Report he'd be leveraging his background managing facilities at the city of Hamilton in his new role.

"I've always been eyeing police," D'Angelo said. "It was only over the last three months that there was a vacancy there. And I saw it, and I thought, 'Wow.'"

Had the opportunity been open to him a year ago, he said he would have gone there instead of to NOTL. He joined the town's staff last November.

The decision to leave has been "bittersweet," he said.

"Just driving in between the vineyards, like the fall



Head of operations Rome D'Angelo is saying goodbye to Niagara-on-the-Lake and going back to Hamilton so he can be closer to his family. EVAN LOREE

or the spring. It's just amazing. It's a touch of heaven."

Still, the regular commute to town from Hamilton is a challenge given the needs of his family.

D'Angelo said he has two adult children living in Hamilton and a mother struggling with early-stage dementia and Parkinson's disease.

D'Angelo said he needs to be "readily available" to his mom as her health declines.

Despite a short tenure, he has a few feathers to add to his cap after his year in NOTL.

"I feel that I brought value to the organization over the past year," he said.

D'Angelo said he was happy to help the town wrap up its fleet review and get it investing in environmentally friendly vehicles for the future.

He also brought up the new children's recreational activities at the community centre, another change implemented under his leadership.

For a small town, NOTL punches well above the belt and was "on the cusp of great things" in municipal

management, D'Angelo said.

The lean team delivers impressive services on things such as coastal protection, tree management and climate change preparedness, he said.

Though he would have liked to oversee a few upcoming projects at the town he looked forward to the work waiting for him back in Hamilton, D'Angelo said.

"They're (the Hamilton police) looking at a combined fire and police station in the Waterdown area.

That's a \$28 million project," D'Angelo said.

The police service is also planning to build a new marina in the Eastport area of Hamilton, he added.

"That's a whole new construction project as well that I could bring a lot of value based on my facility experience."

Looking back on his past year, he said he liked NOTL's big-city attitude and would miss the small, welcoming team at town hall.

"I think it's just a great community," he said.



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Connection to **area's history** important to NOTL Museum

This is the second of an ongoing series of stories about the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum as it embarks on a multi-million-dollar fundraising campaign for an expansion that will nearly double the size of the facility on Castlereagh Street.



Tom Knight, chair of the NOTL Museum's collection committee, documents an artifact. RICHARD HUTTON

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is always receiving offers of items to add to its collection.

However, as the museum's collection continues to grow, finding space to house those new additions is becoming an issue.

"(It's) a scary thought to think we would have to say no to someone who has something significant and it leaves the community or gets destroyed," said Sarah Kaufman, the museum's managing director and curator.

This is why the museum is embarking on a \$5-million fundraising campaign to add 8,000 square feet of space to its historic building.

Beyond trying to find space for new items, however, adding to the museum's collection is a multi-stage process in which the staff have to evaluate each item they receive and determine how strong its historical importance is.

"Staff will talk to the potential donor about it and its significance to Niagara-on-the-Lake's history," Kaufman said.

The museum takes items into "temporary custody," she said, "just to make sure that we know that it's not ours" and "that we have it on temporary loan."

Items are then turned over to the museum's collection management committee, a group of 10 volunteers responsible for assessing potential additions to the 53,000-item collection.

But not everything makes it before the committee, Kaufman said.

For example, she said, a family could bring something in such as an old wedding dress, which really doesn't have a tie-in to NOTL's history. Alternative new homes for the dress might be suggested, such as a textile or fashion museum.

Items that make it to the committee are then assessed

to determine the relevance they may have to the town's history, said Tom Knight, a decades-long museum volunteer and chair of the committee.

Approval of a donation is just the start, he said.

Lately, he and the museum's volunteers have been working on restoring and preserving a panoramic photograph donated to the museum.

The photo depicts the 146th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. While the photo caption says the picture was taken in Niagara Falls, the battalion received its training at Camp Niagara in NOTL.

"It was all taped at the back and there was wood to support it," Knight said, adding the photo first needed to be removed from the frame so it could more easily be stored.

"Sometimes it's not very good for the photograph itself, which is the case here. This one (is) just stuck to the glass."

Kaufman said there are some tricks that can be employed to help with such a sticky situation.

"We have to bring in something to heat up the glass to help remove the photo," she said. "So, we're bringing in a hairdryer. Nothing fancy, but that will unstick it from the glass."

Once the photo is removed, any tears will be repaired with tape and the photo will then go into storage. A digital copy will also be made.

"The panoramics are always trickier, but we do have a handheld scanner that will probably just kind of draw along the edge of it to scan the full thing," Kaufman said.

With the museum running out of space to house new items, there are negative implications for what happens if these historical pieces can't remain in the town they've always called home.

"There's a potential for things to leave the community, which is unfortunate because then access gets harder for community members to see their own family's collection, or for researchers to access it here and get the context behind why it's important," Kaufman said.

Knight agreed. "You can't collect everything," he said. "We are short of space. We're always short on space."

The museum's expansion fundraiser, called the Building History, Strengthening Community campaign, would almost double the museum's current 10,000 square feet of space, adding to the facility's storage and exhibition spaces as well as providing space to deliver programming.

The museum hopes to receive grants to match the \$5 million it raises for what really is a \$10-million project.

The expansion will include a two-storey addition to the rear of Memorial Hall and more basement space for storage.

Hopes are for the expansion project to be completed by 2026, which is the 100th anniversary of the death of museum founder Janet Carnochan.

Donations to the campaign can be made in person at the museum, at 43 Castlereagh St., during operating hours, 1 to 5 p.m. seven days a week, or online at canadahelps.org/en/charities/niagara-historical-society.

hutton@niagaranow.com

Have an opinion you want heard?

Send a letter to the editor to editor@niagaranow.com

Success was **ready-made** for Cacio Pepe

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Entrepreneurship runs in Justin Pepe's blood, and now, he's come into his calling, serving gourmet Italian meals patrons can enjoy at home.

Born and raised in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pepe moved back home from British Columbia in 2018, joined by his wife, Ashley Robertson-Pepe.

After settling in, their plan was simple – to start their own catering business.

That was when Cacio Pepe was born. The name is a play on Justin's family name and is derived from the Italian dish cacio e pepe, which translates to cheese and pepper.

Operating out of a brick-and-mortar establishment and kitchen in town, the couple sells prepared dishes such as ravioli, gnocchi, braised meats, soups, seafood and more. These come in frozen packets that can be cooked and plated at home.

"We like to do things that you might not necessarily have the time to do at home," Robertson-Pepe said.

Pepe's family has always been a part of NOTL commerce: his father, Gerald, ran a painting and decorating business while his grandparents, Tephi and Joseph, ran Pepe's Corner at the intersection of Mississauga and Mary streets (where Willow Cakes & Pastries is now located).

Now, it's Pepe's turn. "We planned on catering for the first couple years, just to get the name out there because nobody knew my food," he said.

After providing food for a couple of special events in Niagara, the demand for the NOTL native's culinary skills took off and the couple soon found themselves needing a place to hang out their shingle – or spatula, as it were.

That's when they set up their physical establishment in an industrial strip mall on Stewart Road in the shadow of the Garden City Skyway.

It was there that the pair began to prepare frozen



Top: Chef Justin Pepe and his wife and partner Ashley Robertson-Pepe are the faces behind the food being made at Cacio Pepe. Left: Veal meatballs with creamy parmesan polenta is a personal favourite of chef Pepe Right: The Cabernet braised beef is a popular item. RICHARD HUTTON

takeout meals for a growing customer base. Pepe, for one, was surprised at how receptive people were to the concept.

"We weren't sure that Niagara-on-the-Lake was going to take to this method of cooking but they took to us right away and we got extremely busy," he said. "Everything else is history."

The couple's initial concerns over whether their way of doing business would be accepted proved unfounded.

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020. Restaurants were forced to switch to takeout business only, severely hitting their bottom line.

That wasn't the case for Cacio Pepe: its way of doing business was tailor-made for this situation.

"Once COVID hit, we

were just through the roof (for demand). It helped us," Pepe said.

The business began drawing customers from beyond Niagara with orders coming in from the Greater Toronto Area.

"It helped us expand the market in Burlington and Oakville," Pepe said.

"Maybe they would have turned their nose up at a frozen product before, but they were kind of forced to try it and now we have customers for life out there."

Business is booming and Cacio Pepe has won several Readers' Choice Awards, including one for Pepe as "Best Chef."

While he crafts all sorts of different meals typically found in fine dining establishments, he's learned that classic dishes are the most popular and keep people

coming back for more.

One of them is the Cabernet braised beef, which Pepe described as "a beautiful piece of beef brisket" that's braised in Cabernet and beef stock then served with garlic mashed potatoes and glazed baby carrots.

"It's kind of a crowd-pleaser," Pepe said.

Meals featuring beef are most people's go-to, he added.

"It's not out of their comfort zone, whereas maybe a piece of salmon or something like that is," Pepe said.

All dishes are made from scratch, using fresh ingredients. Meals are vacuum-packed before they are frozen to preserve flavours and freshness, Pepe said.

Word-of-mouth has proven to be a friend of the business, with existing cus-

tomers introducing others to Cacio Pepe's fare.

"People like to bring people in that haven't been here before," Pepe said.

For example, one customer who first came to the business a few weeks ago has already been back several times and has brought new customers into the shop with him.

It's the food, however, that keeps people coming back, Pepe added. And offerings go beyond just beef. There's a host of chicken, fish and pasta items that customers can choose from.

Meals are not simply tossed in your average freezer or even flash-frozen. Instead, Pepe uses a ULT freezer, which will freeze items in five minutes.

"It's only used in bio-chemistry to freeze cellular structures and stuff that

needs to maintain pristine condition," Pepe said.

That method, he said, preserves the freshness of the food.

In a region chock full of wineries, it makes sense to offer up advice on what vino to pair with Cacio Pepe's meals, said Pepe, who worked as a sommelier before he was a chef.

"I'm always thinking of wine first and food second," Pepe said. "So, whenever I'm creating a dish, it's always to pair with the wine."

Cacio Pepe is located at 65 Stewart Rd. in Niagara-on-the-Lake and is open Tuesday to Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

A complete menu can be found online at caciopepe-meals.com. Meals can be ordered online, in person or by phone at 905-358-4275.

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Canada The Local Journalism Initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

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Contributed by Patty Garriock
 "Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished."
 - Lao Tzu

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A frigid swim



A group of thrill-seekers and Penguins took a frigid plunge into the Niagara River on Boxing Day. It's an annual Niagara-on-the-Lake tradition, after which the swimmers warm up and head to a local pub for some drinks. Pictured here are Andrew Ball, Tim Balasiuk and Edward Fox. Read more on Page 22. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Editorial

Tractors and new traditions

Richard Harley
 Editor-in-Chief

Welcome back to reality. We hope you had a refreshing vacation and are headed into the new year with a renewed sense of enthusiasm and optimism.

As we begin 2024, we like to take a look back at some of the important moments of the past year. This week you can read some of those items in our Year in Review.

We won't rehash those happenings here, but we will take a quick look at what happened in town while we were on break.

In the spirit of the holiday season, the now-traditional tractor parade was bigger

and brighter than ever this year, with dozens of tractors taking part.

What started in 2020, largely in response to the cancellation of NOTL's historic Christmas Parade due to COVID-19, has blossomed from a small, almost rebellious stunt, into a glowing tradition that perfectly suits rural NOTL.

Staged at night, the lights are able to shine bright, creating a Christmas allure that you just don't get at 11 a.m.

Not to say our Christmas Parade isn't fantastic, too. It is. But this is a different experience. And judging by the crowd that gathered near Stone Road Dental, it's clear that this parade resonates with

NOTLers — and beyond.

But for 2023, it became more than emerging tradition in town. In addition to entertaining residents, the parade has now also become a big contributor to the fight against cancer.

With the help of NOTL residents and businesses, and a little healthy competition between parade organizers Erwin and Dorothy Weins and local comedy celebrity and entrepreneur Joe Pilliteri, more than \$108,000 was raised for the Terry Fox Foundation.

That was thanks largely to a matching contribution from an anonymous donor that doubled the \$54,000 in total pledges from the

community. The money is all going to Pilliteri's Team Pillsy initiative, which has raised \$242,000 for cancer research this year alone.

In total, Team Pillsy has raised more than \$700,000 to help fight cancer.

Kudos to the anonymous donor who matched the astonishingly high total of donations.

And congratulations to everyone involved, especially to the Weins. It's people like them that make our town special.

Everyone loves parades, especially during the holiday season. And when it's all done for a good cause, it's even brighter.

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

It's **ridiculous** to give developer access to heritage trail

Dear editor:

Now that the holidays are over it is time to carefully consider the actions of our town staff and council in the past month.

At the conclusion of an in camera council meeting on Friday, Dec. 15 a statement was issued concerning the town's position before the Ontario Land Tribunal on Solmar's Planning Act and Ontario Heritage Act appeals – which delineated site constraints including access.

Council clearly stated proper road access is feasible through 144 and 176 John St. and would yield an optimal level of intensification, but Solmar is unwilling to secure the historical John Street access from its related corporation.

The town then dropped the bombshell that council



Writer Bob Bader doesn't think the town should allow Solmar to create access to its planned subdivision through the heritage trail. EVAN LOREE

is willing to grant an easement over a portion of its lands at Charlotte Street to allow an appropriate road access, if Solmar requests it.

Frankly, standing on Charlotte looking at the Upper Canada Heritage Trail and 588 Charlotte St. lane-way with the intervening heritage-designated wall,

it is difficult to envision an acceptable road without knocking down at least 200 feet or more of the wall and turning a section of the calming walk along the old railway right-of-way into a sidewalk beside a subdivision access road.

What our councillors were thinking is simply beyond me.

To go on and suggest "public consultation" (on design only) after already making the offer to cede public heritage lands to a private developer smacks of our provincial government's Greenbelt giveaway and its issues with transparency and listening to its own advisory committees.

What kind of consulta-

tion can we expect when at the Dec. 20 meeting of the heritage trail, committee vice-chair Tony Chisholm complained that "We have no information on this whatsoever" when raising the question and was shut down immediately by NOTL parks manager Kevin Turcotte, who cited ongoing litigation?

I would like to understand exactly what "litigation" he is referring to with respect to the heritage trail committee and why that should be used as a shield to prevent the public from weighing in on council's ridiculous idea.

One would think the heritage trail committee, which has for years been the driving force behind protecting and enhancing this important feature of Niagara-on-the-Lake's cultural and historic heritage

would be the first group to be consulted by staff and council when making such a momentous decision affecting the trail.

And to learn the committee has been kept in the dark while actively raising funds for the improvement of the trail is simply reprehensible. There is a better alternative access, as council's own resolution clearly states.

I remember the hue and cry when developer Benny Marotta's original drawings for the aborted Rand Hotel project showed a crossing of the trail from the Promenade to the Rand Estate, which was much less egregious than the present proposition.

I'm sure the Lake Report will do a fair and thorough investigation.

Bob Bader
NOTL

Why can't Zalepa and council **act** on speeding concerns?

Dear editor:

As a longtime resident of Niagara Blvd., it was very disappointing to see town council once again delay listening to the concerns of the residents of the Chautauqua area in regards to vehicles speeding along Shakespeare Avenue and Niagara Blvd., ("Community group demands action on excessive speeding," The Lake Report, Dec. 14).

This has been an ongoing issue for a number of years now, through two different councils and it seems likely that no action will be taken to mitigate the problem before the 2024 tourist season.

I am sure council has a full agenda. But I would also like to think that coun-

cillors can make time for residents' concerns about public safety in regard to speeding issues in every area of town.

Operations director Rome D'Angelo's comment about doing a study and delivering it in a "timely fashion" was patronizing, considering that the mayor asked the town staff to come up with some numbers back in April of 2023.

While other municipalities deal with similar issues, seemingly with ease and in a "timely fashion," in reality this Niagara-on-the-Lake council cannot even put it on the agenda.

The work of Friends of Ryerson Park in studying solutions from other municipi-

palities is very well done, detailed and extensive, and I cannot see how another study would be practical.

When I drive through Niagara Falls, St. Catharines or Welland, and I see lower speed limits and other traffic calming methods in their residential areas, I do wonder why NOTL council procrastinates on this issue.

Perhaps councillors don't drive in the neighbouring communities at all?

With that said, I have faith that NOTL council will ultimately make the right decision and take action on these concerns in the interest of public safety for my neighbourhood.

Mike Grecco
NOTL

Public input needed on developer's access to heritage trail

Dear editor:

Our town council was elected by the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake to represent them and their interests to their benefit in all municipal affairs.

However, in certain cases involving the use of public property, it is my opinion and one that is probably held by many others that public input should be required.

This appears not to be the case when council last month decided in private to offer a private developer access to a unique piece of public property (the Upper Canada Heritage Trail).

Now the developer can decide if it is to his advantage to make use of this access to what is a highly controversial residential development.

He would be doing so at current and future taxpayers' expense.

This is the sole decision of council, which undoubtedly results in a very concerned and negative public opinion.

Without any public input, this decision carries very little authority and needs to be reconsidered.

Derek Collins
NOTL

Virgil **speed camera** starts next week

Dear editor:

If you see a flash while driving through Virgil near Crossroads Public School, it means your licence plate has just been photographed and you soon could get a speeding ticket in the mail.

The new speed It will take your plates' picture whether coming or going.

In Barrhaven, an Ottawa community similar in size to Virgil, close to 10,000 tickets were issued in its camera's first three months

of operation.

Would not a police presence help protect this community? It has been found that radar speed signs are most effective in the first month or so of being in a neighbourhood. After that, people get used to them.

Alternatively in Windsor, efforts have been made to expand its speed sign program, a non-intrusive method of reminding drivers of their speed as they approach a community,

as an expedited, temporary traffic-calming procedure.

We have all seen one and responded accordingly when approaching the heritage district on Mississauga near at the community centre.

While police enforcement isn't directly tied to the signs, data collected from them is shared with authorities. Information is passed on to the police and the best enforcement is then determined.

Derek Inslley
NOTL

Dear editor:

Well, 2023 has come and gone. I hope it was a good year for everyone.

I am writing to thank those who played a large role in some of the work completed in town this year.

The floral and lighting enhancements to the Glendale bridge and roundabout, the new look of the Virgil commercial centre, the new heritage district entrance, the Pride crosswalk and the new crosswalk at the community centre to name a few.

A big thank you goes to former council members Norm Arsenault, Allan Bisback, Clare Cameron, Stuart McCormack, John Wiens as well as current councillors



Gary Burroughs, Wendy Cheropita, Sandra O'Connor and Erwin Wiens for their collective leadership.

Thank you for your time and in-depth discussion, spending hours in the planning and the financial processes during some very difficult times.

Thank you to residents Margaret Louter, Richard Wall, Justin Williams and architect Gordon Stafford. Gerry Kowalchuk (for his time and generosity), the town's inclusivity committee, the St. Andrews/

Aberdeen residents who all worked with council providing support and expertise on these projects.

Ongoing gratitude goes to town staff. Chief administrator Marnie Cluckie and director of operations Rome D'Angelo will be missed.

Thanks also to the newest council members – Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, Tim Balasiuk, Maria Mavridis, Nick Ruller and Adriana Vizzari – for allowing this work to be completed. I wish them much success in 2024.

So, Happy New Year everyone. All my best wishes and I hope 2024 will be another great year.

Betty Disero
NOTL



A Christmas tale with a **distinct NOTL twist**

'Twas ten days before Christmas when in the Virgil Government House,
Council met in secret, quiet as a sneaky little mouse.
While good town residents celebrated the festive season,
And the tourists licked and littered with neither rhyme nor reason,
The elves of council held a "special meeting" to cook up a scheme,
Which alas, had a woefully familiar theme.
The Garys, Erwin, Wendy, Maria and all the rest were there,
Cozy, clubby, hidden in their chambers lair.
And, of course, the public was excluded so no one could listen or judge what was fair!
It's Christmas, the town councillors all said, so what do we need?
A gift they all cried; a gift shall be decreed!
But to whom, for what, doesn't there need to be a reason?
Why not to a developer more than one declared fore it 'tis the season!
But what more, they all asked can we give to owner of most of the towne?
Why not public land said all? Public land he can pave over to feather his crown!
But the town has owned the heritage trail for 50 years, someone should have noted.
And a dedicated group is determined to fix it, use it, ensure it is promoted.
Who cares about the voters, the taxpayers, the residents, the heritage devoted?
For the developers always prevail with this council since the public last voted!

Rick Monette
NOTL

Town needs to stop **exploiting** taxpayers

Dear editor:
As we enter 2024 in Niagara-on-the-Lake, add Upper Canada Lodge to our growing list of lost infrastructure: the high school, the hospital, Parliament Oak, our X-ray facility and so on.

Yet in spite of all this, we are once again facing close to another tax increase.

What are we paying for? Certainly not improved roads and side streets, where one almost requires a back and neck brace driving into town and perhaps a wheel alignment to boot.

Some might blame the bloated, inefficient, non-decision making town staff. Others, and the most probable scenario, might cite the desire to support our top priority, "overtourism."

Synonymous with this priority is the sheer number

of entities, year-over-year, pandering for handouts from the overburdened, taxpayers' purse.

Most egregious of these, and usually first in line, is our Chamber of Commerce.

It is not the general practice elsewhere to fund a Chamber of Commerce with municipal tax dollars. This annual practice in NOTL should stop immediately.

Perhaps more of our local merchants, who benefit from the tourist industry, should be members and support the chamber.

Every year, taxpayers continue to get exploited. I would suggest that if NOTL took a one-year hiatus and not spent a dime on marketing, the tourists still would come.

Samuel Young
NOTL

Friends' dog **poisoned** by cannabis castoffs

Dear editor:
Niagara-on-the-Lake lends itself to Christmas and generally I hope that we have all enjoyed the time with each other to celebrate, catch up and reflect.

It is a joyous time. What was a joyous occa-

sion in my family turned to anger and sadness.

Firstly, we heard of the heartless abandonment of young puppies at the water's edge of the Parkway in Niagara Falls and then we learned of dear friends who live in Old Town having to

deal with their beloved dog (well-known to those in the area), being poisoned by eating marijuana castoffs consumed on her daily walk.

This is not a minor thing and has entailed three emergency veterinary visits with symptoms still persisting.

Marijuana is legal, but if you smoke or consume edibles, please dispose of the remains in a responsible way.

Christmas has not been so joyous for this family.

Bonita Cawker
NOTL

More on **resident rights** when a neighbour builds

Dear editor:
I felt the frustration rolling off the words of Kip Voegel in his Dec. 7 letter, "Do residents have rights when neighbours build next door?"

It seems the process has been long and arduous, as his neighbours build their dream house.

Do residents have rights? In my opinion the answer is both yes and no.

Yes, we are allowed freedom of information, but it's regarding the overall

build and a list of boxes to check off.

Does the proposed new house sit within the front, rear and side setbacks? Will the new house be built within the maximum height allowed? If there are no variances requested then no, there will be no notice given to town residences.

I'm sorry the new house restricts your view of the Niagara River and interferes with your digital reception. There isn't much

that can be done now about the view.

However, I would hope you can find a compromise about the reception. As for the addition of outdoor potlights, again I share your frustration.

So many new houses are lit up like an airport runway. Why do new homes need so many lights all along the front, side, rear and the driveway?

In other letters and articles, The Lake Report has written about light pol-

lution. I hesitate to use that term, but in some cases it does apply.

I used to think the town was so dark at night. If we keep building these runway-worthy houses, I'm rethinking my stance.

The night sky is lovely and I enjoy seeing all the stars, all from the comfort of my own property. That could change if builders keep adding more and more outdoor lights.

Lara Davidson
NOTL

Virgil traffic lights are **out of sync** with traffic flow

Dear editor:
I'm not alone in noting that the recent recalibration of the traffic light at Field Road and Niagara Stone Road in Virgil as made it both too frequent (often-times with few or no left-turning or through vehicles into or out of the LCBO plaza) and too long (with

nary a pedestrian in sight).

Consequently, northbound traffic is repeatedly bunched up so as to block the very busy grocery store lot immediately to its south, backing up vehicles attempting to enter or exit it.

In peak visitor periods, increased volumes will only make matters much worse.

Since right-turning vehicles coming off Field or exiting that plaza don't really need a traffic light to do their thing, a reduction in the frequency and/or duration of those lights will impact only a small number of drivers compared to those forced to stop and idle on Niagara Stone Road.

This being a self-inflicted problem, why don't we prevail upon Niagara Region to remedy it by finding a less-obstructive compromise, something easily accomplished with the new timers that are now in place?

Bruce Dickson
NOTL

Did you know?

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Old Town cigar shop closes doors after nearly three decades

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report

Cigars have been a part of Ian Wilson's life for almost 50 years now. He first started smoking them during his last year of high school in 1975 and in 1996, he opened Customs House Cigars on King Street.

Today, however, that chapter of his life — the commerce side of it, anyway — is coming to an end.

After more than three decades in business, Wilson is closing the doors to his shop on King Street after maintaining its status as a town staple for decades.

"It's 26 and a half years later and I'm ready to retire," he told The Lake Report.

In the '90s, the cigar experienced a surge in popularity, which many credit to the foundation of American lifestyle magazine Cigar Aficionado, which launched in late 1992. This period is often referred to as "the cigar boom."



Ian Wilson has closed the doors to Customs House Cigars after 26 years. JULIA SACCO

Around this time, Wilson was working as a journalist with a passion for tobacco.

"When the boom hit, I had the idea of pitching a story to the Star about

what was happening and the boom and all of that," Wilson said.

While reporting on his story, which included visiting a cigar lounge in Toronto, Wilson had the

idea to open up a shop of his own.

"When I was up there, I thought, 'If there was something like this in the Niagara area, I would really like that,'" he said.

In its nearly three decades of business, Customs House Cigars has undergone quite a few changes but never wavered in its goal to provide great service to NOTLers and tourists alike.

When the store first opened it was on Queen Street, next to where 124 on Queen now resides, before moving to its current spot in 2017.

"It's been a struggle at times and I'm lucky that I have a very understanding spouse," Wilson said. "She has retired now but she had a good full-time job and was able to pick up some of the bills because you weren't going to do that all with this business."

During his time running the shop, Wilson said he most enjoyed meeting the interesting people who passed through.

"I sold a pair of sunglasses to Gordon Pin-sent," he said.

Other famous passersby included numerous hockey

players and other Canadian stars including Ed Broadbent, Dale Hunter, Eddie Shack and more.

"Interaction with people is the most rewarding part. Probably to my detriment, my focus has always been to give people what they want and to make people happy rather than making the most money out of it," Wilson said.

His dedication to customers will be something missed by die-hard clientele.

"You always think any businesses in town need a tourist element to make it work, but I've been lucky in that I've made a product that you can sell to (NOTLers)," Wilson said.

For those who will be missing out on their cigars in town, Wilson suggests checking out Cigar Experience in Niagara Falls or Havana Castle and Smoke Masters in St. Catharines.

The last day of business at Customs House Cigars was Dec. 29.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com

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Thank you to the participants who made the Niagara-on-the-Lake Christmas Tractor Parade a success. Wishing you a year ahead that is bright and hopeful.

- Dorothy & Erwin Wiens

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A special thank you to all who donated to the Terry Fox Foundation. Total donations reached \$50,445, which was matched by an anonymous donor.



YEAR IN REVIEW 2023

Continued from Front Page

named to the Order of Canada.

Pink eye? Cold sores? Hay fever? NOTL pharmacists gear up to prescribe medication for 13 common ailments after the province changes the rules.

A team of line workers from Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro spent the holidays helping other communities – like Fort Erie – clean up after a massive blizzard swept through Niagara just before Christmas.

Jan. 12: After 30 years on John Street East, the Newark Neighbours food bank and thrift store announces plans to move to the former Lincoln Interiors building in Virgil.

The board of the Niagara Regional Native Centre is looking for community members to fill several vacant seats, after the resignations of its executive director and three board members just before Christmas.

After the previous council delayed it, the newly elected NOTL council is moving forward with developing a tourism plan and will hire a private consultant to help formulate it.

Following months of preparation, the NOTL Youth Collective launches an eight-week winter program for kids in grades 7 to 12.

Coyote sightings are on the rise in Niagara-on-the-Lake and, once again, experts are advising people not to feed them.

Jan. 19: An early-morning explosion and massive fire at Ssonix Products in Port Weller claims the life of worker Ryan Konkin, who had just gotten engaged. The company was later charged with 21 offences under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act.

Spirit in Niagara distillery, the NOTL Museum and the Pillar & Post take home top honours at the Niagara Biennial Design Awards. The museum was singled out for its Poppy Project and the hotel for its lavish Monet-inspired gardens.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro is preparing for big changes in the near future, when electric vehicles dominate and gas-powered cars are a thing of the past, CEO Tim Curtis says in an exclusive story for The Lake Report. He promises the utility will be ready when e-vehicles start plugging in.

The Lake Report reveals that the Niagara-on-the-Lake Pickleball Club will play host to a major international pickleball tournament in June that's expected to attract players from across the country and the United States.

Jan. 26: A 41-unit apartment proposal near Mary and Mississauga streets draws the ire of neighbours, who worry about its height, design and the traffic it could generate.

Residents get a peek at long-term plans for the Glendale neighbourhood when consultants unveil a draft of the area's proposed district plan.

About 3,000 seasonal workers from Mexico and the Caribbean begin arriving at greenhouses in Niagara, Leamington and other parts of Ontario, preparing for another year of field



In January 2023, an early-morning explosion and massive fire at Ssonix Products in Port Weller claims the life of worker Ryan Konkin, who had just gotten engaged. The company was later charged with 21 offences under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act. RICHARD HARLEY

work.

Fireworks, wine and food celebrate the return of the annual Icewine Festival after two years of pandemic restrictions.

February

Feb. 2: St. Davids boxer Mckenzie Wright begins in earnest her quest to compete for Canada in the 2024 Paris Olympics as she fights in the Elite National Championships in Brampton. It's just the first of many steps she'll take along the Olympic road this year.

NOTL council again extends its popular temporary patio program for restaurants still reeling from the pandemic.

The annual Icewine Festival bounces back in the wake of the pandemic as large crowds return.

Police detain a man after reports of a gun inside an Anne Street home. But the man is released after investigators said they found no evidence a crime was committed.

Safe Haven, a new youth group, launches at St. Davids-Queenston United Church on York Road.

Feb. 9: Farmworker advocate Jane Andres and her team of volunteers say there is a shortage of donations for the annual welcome kits they prepare. Among other things they need 300 more toothbrushes.

The long-awaited new state-of-the-art Village Medical Centre opens on Niagara Stone Road.

The NOTL Rotary Club contributes \$25,000 from its community fundraising projects to groups that are providing direct aid to Ukraine.

St. Davids boxer Mckenzie Wright is crowned national champion in the 48-kg. weight class.

Feb. 16: Developer Benny Marotta's Two Sisters Resorts Corp. unveils plans

to build a 129-suite luxury hotel on the old Parliament Oak school property. Resident reaction is swift and overwhelmingly negative.

Members of the Niagara Regional Native Centre elect a new board amid allegations from senior staff that former board members had abused their powers.

The Lake Report is nominated for 17 provincial awards for journalism and advertising excellence.

One week before a court is to hear the town's appeal of stay of charges against developer Benny Marotta for clear-cutting a portion of the Rand Estate, town council, "mindful of the high legal costs," abandons the appeal.

Feb. 23: The Lake Report's "Code Grey" health care series documents health care workers' concerns about a crisis in the health system.

NOTL elementary schools tackle Black History Month head-on with discussions about slavery and also about the significant contributions Black Canadians have made.

An in-depth feature story looks at the Ford government's Bill 23 and how it takes much of the control over development out of the hands of municipalities.

March

March 2: A hovercraft service that was hoping to take riders across Lake Ontario in 30 minutes has been delayed a year due to "delays on both sides" of the lake, its proponents say.

The town's historic military property markers – called ordnance stones – need to be preserved, NOTL Museum board member Ted Rumble says.

Spring is around the corner and Bikes for Farmworkers needs more helping hands in its repair shop. Meanwhile, snow and freezing rain hit NOTL hard,

turning driveways into skating rinks.

March 9: Members of the Niagara Creative Cultural Community Hub, a collaborative group of non-profit organizations, pitches council on using the space as a shared facility for community groups. The hub says it has \$2 million to help fund the project.

The Lake Report closes down Queen Street for mass photo in celebration of International Women's Day and produces a 12-page special section that commemorates the work of the town's women.

Residents of St. Davids are alarmed that continued development of residences on Tanbark and Warner roads could overwhelm the infrastructure of their small village.

March 16: Ontario high school wrestling champ Zubin Gatta was hurt in the national championships in Waterloo. Thirty seconds into his first match he heard four loud snaps" – his elbow was dislocated.

There is no end to phone, text and door-to-door scams targeting and experts warn seniors to be careful.

The Shaw Festival had a small \$7,000 surplus in 2022, as donations and federal funding helped boost the non-profit theatre organization.

Major road construction begins backing up traffic in Virgil – and will continue to do so until the fall as a long-awaited revitalization project finally begins.

March 23: In a potential political bombshell, The Lake Report reveals that the OPP has been asked to investigate after developer Benny Marotta gave Coun. Gary Burroughs an envelope containing \$10,000 in cash.

NOTL swimmer Peyton Leigh qualifies to compete at the Canadian Olym-

pic trials in the 200-metre butterfly and the 400-metre freestyle.

The first part of a Lake Report investigative series looks at how difficult for people to find an affordable rental in NOTL.

The town finalizes its 2023 budget and spending will increase by \$4 million – and taxes on a home assessed at \$541,000 will rise \$105.

March 30: Niagara Region announces plans to expand the use of speed cameras to catch people who exceed the posted limit. One of the cameras is on Niagara Stone Road near Cross Public School.

"A single step is a closed door," Pamela TurnerSmith, who uses a city scooter. She estimates she can get into about 60 per cent of stops on Queen Street as a result.

Niagara Regional Police are now investigating a cash exchange by developer Benny Marotta and Coun. Gary Burroughs. The town had asked the OPP to probe the matter but the provincial force said it is a regional police matter.

The community group Friends of Forgotten gets the green light from council to care for NOTL's Black burial ground.

April

April 6: Queenston resident Leyland is tragically struck and killed by a cyclist while out walking on a Saturday afternoon.

Ryan Gaio and his band rock a crowd of about 150 people at the NOTL on Saturday to celebrate the release of his album, "The Best Ain't Happen Yet."

After three years of discussion, construction of the town's new \$26-million gateway at Mississauga and Queen streets, funded by philanthropist Kowalchuk, is due to start this spring.

A massive, 835-page town plan report rejects most of Solmar's requests to demolish or make substantial changes to buildings and other heritage assets on the historic Rand property.

April 13: The town has received about \$200,000 from the municipal accommodation tax since last July. Staff estimates the levy could generate an additional \$600,000 if it is collected from all operators, including B&B cottage rentals.

After great fanfare and much publicity, activist James Russell abruptly ended his hunger strike at the New Baptist Church Burial Ground – a just a few hours.

NOTL hockey player Kaleb Diehl hopes to cap a stellar minor hockey career by getting drafted by an Ontario Hockey League major junior team.

The U11 Niagara-on-the-Lake rep team took the silver medal at the Ontario Minor Hockey Association annual championship tournament in Barrie.

April 20: Niagara Regional Police say they found no evidence of criminal wrongdoing and no charges will be laid after prominent NOTL developer Benny Marotta gave Coun. Gary Burroughs

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2023



In February 2023, St. Davids boxer Mckenzie Wright begins in earnest her quest to compete for Canada in the 2024 Paris Olympics.

envelope containing \$10,000 in cash. Several NOTL farmers have invested millions to build new, modern living quarters for their seasonal workers.

Hotel operators in Niagara-on-the-Lake say that if short-term rentals are going to exist, they ought to be charging people the town's 2 per cent room tax.

The Lake Report is again honoured with Ontario Community Newspapers Association awards, earning five first-place awards.

April 27: Almost 300 people turned out to the NOTL Community Centre for a special council meeting at which council voted 4-3 to refuse Solmar Development Inc.'s application for building permits on the historic Rand Estate property.

NOTL's Kaleb Dietsch realizes his dream as he is drafted by the Ottawa 67's of the Ontario Hockey League.

Simpson's Pharmacy, a venerable NOTL health care institution for more than 45 years, has been sold to SRx Health Solutions Inc., a major Canadian health and pharmaceutical company.

May

May 4: Housing advocate Scott Robinson urges town council to embrace secondary suites, separate living spaces that can be built on one property to accommodate additional residents.

King Charles III will be crowned on Saturday and the Scottish Loft and Prince of Wales hotel are among the NOTL businesses celebrating the royal occasion.

A short-term rental home with a history of bylaw violations wins its zoning appeal case at the Ontario Land Tribunal and NOTL must issue a rental licence, despite the town's previous refusal to do so.

May 11: Almost 50 people turn out at Niagara-on-the-Lake town hall to voice concerns about a developer's plan to replace the old Parliament Oak school with a hotel. The idea is "not compatible" with the area, they say.

A new condominium proposed for Mary Street should not exceed municipal height restrictions, says the town's urban design committee.

New town rules mean residents can't speak to council on regional issues – because they don't fall under the town's jurisdiction.

May 18: Financial statements from

last October's municipal election show that while Gary Zalepa beat Betty Disero in the mayoral race, Disero raised almost 20 per cent more in donations.

NOTL is recognized as one of the "50 Most Beautiful Small Towns in the World" by Condé Nast Traveler, with the Prince of Wales hotel receiving a special mention. Lunenburg, N.S., is the only other Canadian town on the list.

Glendale residents got together Saturday morning for their annual community cleanup.

After a three-year hiatus the Niagara Regional Police men's and women's tug of war teams faced off Saturday against their U.S. counterparts on the Rainbow Bridge. The Canadians won both battles.

May 25: The Virgil Stampede will look into increased safety and security measures after several fights occurred after the fair closed on Monday.

Effective Jan. 1, council votes to extend the town's hotel room tax to cottage rentals and bed and breakfasts, most of which do not currently collect the tax.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Ambassadors have hit the streets for the 2023 summer season, welcoming visitors and answering questions.

June

June 1: To kick off Pride month, the town finished painting a new rainbow crosswalk on Anderson Lane at Niagara Stone Road on Monday night and unveiled it Tuesday morning on social media.

With players from age 17 to 80 and with geographical backgrounds as varied as Sri Lanka, India, China and the U.K., the inaugural NOTL Classic pickleball tournament promises to be a diverse and inclusive showcase.

An investigation has been launched after a Jamaican farmworker at P.G. Enns Farms was found dead in his sleep.

June 8: NOTL's week-old rainbow crosswalk was vandalized twice in two days. The town considers adding a security camera to watch over the crossing.

Meanwhile, Crossroads Public School raises the rainbow flag in a ceremony aimed at making all students feel welcome.

Smog from wild fires forced cancellation of all NOTL soccer practices and games and keep District School Board of Niagara students indoors.

June 15: Niagara Regional Police release photos of a suspect riding an ATV to vandalize the town's new rainbow crosswalk.

Hundreds of players come to town to compete in the inaugural NOTL Classic pickleball tourney.

The Lake Report's award-winning magazine, "NOTL: A Guide for Distinguished Explorers," publishes its summer 2023 issue.

A 49-year-old St. Catharines woman dies Saturday after her small SUV strikes a tree on Lakeshore Road in NOTL.

June 22: The Town of NOTL and the resident group SORE have been denied repayment of legal costs totalling more than \$600,000 in a dispute over plans

from 2018 to implement a heritage designation for the Rand Estate. The Ontario Land Tribunal made the ruling.

A 15-year-old St. Catharines boy is the culprit who defaced NOTL's rainbow crosswalk. Rather than charging him, Niagara Regional Police opted for "extrajudicial measures," such as warnings or counselling.

Sixteen NOTL wineries took home a total of 46 honours from the Ontario Wine Awards.

June 29: Rural NOTL residents launch a petition seeking help to fix the "rotten egg" smell from their well water.

Police spend days scouring Twelve Mile Creek in St. Catharines after Liam Neumann disappeared while riding an inflatable raft.

With 19,000 people or more by 2043, a planning update shows the Glendale area also could have a transit hub, schools and retail stores.

July

July 6: Heavy rains have damaged this season's cherry crop, but there is a silver lining – all that precipitation means a bumper crop of peaches, plums and nectarines, NOTL farmer Scott MacSween says.

Virgil teen Steven Shelestowsky invents a cool way to beat the bridge and his innovative 99-cent Niagara Bridges app turns heads at Apple.

Niagara College unveils plans to triple its on-campus student housing over the next four years at its campuses in NOTL and Welland.

Virgil's Ray Rempel creates a rainbow garden to help bring Pride to the neighbourhood.

July 13: The long-awaited new gateway to Queen Street starts to take shape thanks to dry stone mason Menno Braam.

Oak wilt, an invasive tree fungus that infects and kills oak trees – and could devastate the area's trees – is found in NOTL, only the third infestation so far in Canada.

The annual Cherry Festival returns and its popular cherry pies are sold out by shortly after 10 a.m.

Officials confirm what mom Barbara Worthy knew all along: the body found in Twelve Mile Creek is her son Liam Neumann. He vanished June 25.

July 20: Butler's Development Garden Inc. is proposing to build a three-storey apartment/condo complex on the edge of Old Town, at the southwest end of King Street. Neighbours are not happy.

Police urge the motorist who left the scene after striking an 84-year-old Niagara-on-the-Lake cyclist Nestor Chemerika to turn himself in. The victim dies a few days later.

The shelves at the Newark Neighbours food bank are almost bare at its new, expanded location in Virgil and the agency is holding a food drive to help meet the need.

After the region said high E. coli levels made Queen's Royal Beach unsafe for swimming last week, the beach has been reopened.

Continued on Page 14



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style. Category: GEOGRAPHIC IDIOMS

Ooh, tough break, looks like "you're up a creek without" this item.

Last issue:

Category: REALITY TV

Clue: We kept up with this family for 14 years, but in 2021 Kim, Khloe & Kompany bid farewell as their show came to an end.

Answer: What is the Kardashians?

Answered first by: Bill Hamilton

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Margie Enns, Bob Stevens, Jane Morris, Bob Wheatley, Claudia Grimwood, Jim Dandy, Pam Dowling, Nancy Rocca, Sylvia Wiens, Howard Jones, Wade Durling, Maria Janeiro, Margaret Garaughty, Catherine Clarke, Trish Gander,

*REMEMBER TO PUT "WHAT IS" FOR JEOPARDY QUESTIONS!

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YEAR IN REVIEW 2023

Continued from Page 15

July 27: Reconstruction of Niagara Stone Road through Virgil is taking a toll on area businesses as slowdowns and traffic jams keep patrons away.

Speeding has become a major concern in several NOTL neighbourhoods. Our in-depth "Mind Your Meters" report looks at resident concerns and some possible solutions.

The wine industry is again urging the province to eliminate a 6.1 per cent tax that is only charged on wine sold at on-site stores – not the LCBO.

The most prestigious trophy in international men's team tennis – the Davis Cup, which Canada won last fall for the first time – is coming to NOTL, where the idea for the cup was first conceived.

August

Aug. 3: NOTL cleans up the third act of vandalism of the town's Pride crosswalk. The new security camera, installed to monitor the crossing, also was damaged.

Good Samaritans step up Saturday as parts of town become "Niagara-IN-the-Lake" when two inches of rain fell Saturday, flooding homes, roads and some low-lying properties.

But the weather didn't dampen spirits or participation at the annual St. Davids Lions Carnival.

Six months after Old Town's parking meters started using the Honk Mobile app instead of cash or credit cards, people continue to be frustrated by the service.

Aug. 10: When residents gathered Friday at the town's rainbow crosswalk to show their support after three incidents of vandalism, they were shocked to learn that it has been intentionally damaged for a fourth time.

NOTL's cenotaph is in desperate need of restoration and the committee overseeing repairs is \$28,000 short of the \$81,000 that is needed by Sept. 15 to complete the work.

As our "Mind Your Meters" series continues, residents say they want action, but the town says it needs data showing the extent of speeding problems.

Aug. 17: The Sharks are coming to NOTL, as the town's sailing club prepares to host the 2023 world championships.

Everything comes up rosé as the Chamber of Commerce paints Queen Street pink to wrap up the peach celebrations.

When a small airplane's landing gear fails, the pilot makes an emergency landing at NOTL airport. No one was hurt but the Cessna was banged up.

Aug. 24: Council has rebuffed the urban design committee for getting "off track" in a discussion about a development proposal from Two Sisters Resorts Corp. to replace the old Parliament Oak school with a hotel.



In August, more than 70 people showed up in support of the LGBTQ+ community — only to find the crosswalk had been vandalized a fourth time. SOMER SLOBODIAN

Councillors ignored the committee's suggestion the town reject the plan.

The first marathon swimmer to conquer Lake Ontario this year arrived ashore in Toronto from NOTL – and shattered a nearly 50-year-old record in the process. Maggie Regan broke Cindy Nicholas' mark by almost an hour.

Two more lacrosse legends – Paul French and Monty Slingerland – have been inducted to the NOTL Sports Wall of Fame.

Aug. 31: Swimmer Dylan Rumsey conquers the Niagara River again, this time with his hands tied. It was all in support of Pathstone Mental Health.

After nearly a week of racing, the Shark World Championship was decided by a single point. The winners were the hometown trio of Josh Wiwcharyk, Chris Clarke and Alex Letchford.

Virgil's Yellow Door Theatre Project is branching out and launching a new film academy after receiving a \$16,000 grant from the Goettler Family Foundation.

September

Sept. 7: NOTL's Greta Sobol, 11, is this year's youth ambassador for the annual Walk to Cure Diabetes in Virgil.

There were a few tears and lots of excitement as students flocked back to start a new school year.

Despite some bumps in the road, this year's tourist season has exceeded expectations in NiOTL, industry representatives say.

Terry Fox's brother Fred visits NOTL and helps raise the ceremonial flag to commemorate the Sept. 17 fundraising run.

Sept. 14: The fight to eradicate a 6.1 per cent tax on wine sold in wineries gets help from New Democrat MPP Wayne Gates, who reintroduces a bill to eliminate the levy.

Erwin Wiens, a farmer and grape grower who also happens to be the town's deputy lord mayor, is named Grape

King for the coming year.

The town receives more than 400 letters from residents opposed to an apartment/condo complex in their King Street neighbourhood.

Construction on the popular Concession 6-Mewburn Road shortcut to Niagara Falls is halted after "unforeseen" problems. It eventually reopens during the Christmas holidays.

Sept. 21: Former members ousted from the Niagara Regional Native Centre's board last February has asked a Superior Court judge to dismantle the current board.

NOTL's annual Terry Fox Run raises \$61,000 for cancer research, with Joe Pillitteri's Team Pillsy topping the donor board with more than \$32,000.

The town's integrity commissioner says there are "no grounds" for him to continue investigating a controversial \$10,000 cash exchange between developer Benny Marotta and Coun. Gary Burroughs.

The Lake Report is honoured with eight national awards for its journalism by the Canadian Community Newspaper Association.

Sept. 28: The NOTL Museum recruits prominent pharmacist Sean Simpson as the face of a major \$10-million project aimed at revitalizing and expanding the facility.

The owners of White Oaks resort unveil a plan to build four highrise towers of 17, 18, 21 and 25 storeys on land beside the Glendale facility.

Two more doctors are joining the Niagara Medical Centre in Virgil this fall. Dr. Anne Wilson starts Oct. 2 and Dr. Michael Grasic joins the practice Dec. 4.

After more than one year and 65 episodes, The Lake Report's series of profiles by historical expert Ron Dale about area men who gave their lives in our two world wars, is coming to an end.

October

Oct. 5: The town raises the Every Child Matters flag to

half-mast in honour of Truth and Reconciliation Day.

The highly invasive spotted lanternfly, which has the power to destroy entire vineyards, now has been reported in several parts of Niagara and is prompting a huge concern for the region's agricultural industry.

Despite objections from residents, a senior official says Niagara Region is moving forward with plans to build a roundabout in the heart of the St. Davids village.

Police charged Richard Moore, 37, of Niagara Falls, in connection with the fatal hit-and-run collision in July that killed cyclist Nestor Chemerika.

Oct. 12: St. Davids Public School teacher Bryce Honsinger is honoured with the prestigious Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence.

In a major victory for seasonal migrant workers, a provincial tribunal has ordered the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to pay compensation to four injured Ontario farmworkers who were denied long-term benefits.

NOTL plans to use Niagara Region planners to help the town handle some of its planning responsibilities, part of an effort to adapt to legislative changes introduced by the province last year.

Oct. 19: Glendale residents say four highrise towers are not appropriate for the White Oaks property and they're fighting back.

A St. Catharines woman is charged with impaired driving causing bodily harm after a migrant worker was hit by an SUV while cycling at Lakeshore and Townline roads.

The NOTL Museum's Poppy Project returns this year, bigger than ever, with thousands of hand-stitched poppies on display at three locations in town.

Oct. 26: In the latest volley in an ongoing battle, St. Davids residents have launched a petition against the region's

planned roundabout, worried that it will hurt several area businesses.

A new mobile clinic will help provide seasonal agricultural workers in NOTL with better access to health care, says the head of Quest Community Health Centre.

Doors Open literally opens the doors to a dozen of NOTL's historic buildings, offering some behind-the-scenes looks at several heritage sites.

The St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Women's League marks its 100th anniversary in NOTL.

November

Nov. 2: NOTL's Two Mile Creek has some of the brownest, foulest water in the region and the culprit appears to be leaky sewage lines. It also has the highest level of E. coli of any water system in the region.

Bob Mavridis, owner of Corks and Orzo restaurants, wants to build a mixed-use development on 4.8 hectares facing York Road near the existing Hilton Garden Inn in Glendale.

A group of concerned residents is launching a comprehensive survey to assess the housing challenges faced by NOTL seniors and explore a range of possible solutions.

In a bid to shorten meetings, residents will now only have five minutes to make verbal presentations to NOTL council.

Nov. 9: NOTL gets the royal treatment on Saturday as Princess Sophie, the Duchess of Edinburgh, spends a day in town, touring a winery and attending a gala dinner at the Queen's Landing Hotel.

Bob Mavridis' hotel and condo plan on York Road in Glendale draws the ire of some nearby residents who let council know they are "furious."

NOTL prepares for its two annual Remembrance Day ceremonies and a young veteran urges residents to wear a poppy and support those who serve their country.

Nov. 16: They came to remember on Saturday — hundreds of people, young, old, veterans and those compelled to pay their respects for sacrifices made so many decades ago. It was one of the largest crowds in recent memory.

The town has collected hundreds of thousands of dollars from its accommodation tax but Tourism NOTL hasn't seen a penny of it because no deal has yet been reached between the two parties.

The Shaw Festival remains strong even though attendance remains down about 20 to 25 per cent post-pandemic, CEO Tim Jennings says.

Nov. 23: NOTL's leaky sewers are a symptom of inadequate infrastructure spending, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says.

In the first instalment of an ongoing series, The Lake Report looks at how the NOTL Museum is bursting at the seams and needs to expand.

NOTL artist Gail Kerr's rendering of a nutcracker is chosen to grace the buttons that will be sold to help fund the 2023 Christmas Parade.

An explosion on the U.S. side of the Rainbow Bridge sparks fears of a terror attack and makes headlines around the world.

Nov. 30: The future of a contentious condominium proposed by Bice Builders at the end of King Street is now out of the hands of NOTL councillors as the developer asks the Ontario Land Tribunal to approve the project.

Team defence – and offence from their defence – helps the NOTL Wolves U18 rep team to win the regional Silver Stick tournament in Midland.

The Lake Report and Tourism NOTL join forces to produce a winter edition of the glossy magazine "NOTL: A Guide for Distinguished Explorers."

December

Dec. 7: After three years as NOTL's top civil servant, Marlene Cluckie resigns to become city manager in Hamilton.

Niagara wine industry pioneer and innovator, Paul Bosc Sr., of Chateau des Charmes, dies at age 88.

After a few weeks of negotiation, the town and Tourism NOTL strike a deal to share the \$1.1 million raised by NOTL's two per cent room tax. In January it rises to 3 per cent.

A speed camera is being tested in Virgil near Crossroads Public School. Tickets will start being issued Jan. 8.

Dec. 14 and onward: Mild weather helps make this year's Christmas Parade crowd one of the largest ever.

There's yet another development proposal for Glendale – 383 units on Concession 7 between Queenston and York roads.

A residents group that has been working for three years with NOTL officials to stop excessive speeding in Chautauqua voices frustration at the lack of action by the town.

Boxer McKenzie Wright beats a three-time national champion in an Olympic team qualifying tournament as she continues her quest to represent Canada at the 2024 Summer Olympics. Her next shot at competing at the Paris Games is a February tournament in Italy.

The NOTL Horticultural Society brings some Christmas joy to long-term care homes, delivering 224 potted poinsettias to residents.

The province promises to cut the 6.1 per cent winery tax that Niagara vintners and industry leaders have been railing against.

People line the streets of Virgil for the third annual Tractor Parade on Dec. 14.

Signs of the season: the Santa Claus 5K run attracts about 400 participants who dress as Santa and run through town. And with unseasonably warm temperatures, a big crowd turns out for the annual Boxing Day Penguin Dip.

TEAM OF THE WEEK

U9 Minor Development



Our first Team of the Week for 2024 are the members of the NOTL Minor Hockey Association's U9 Minor Development team. Front row: Logan Nichols and Daxton Thompson. Second row: Leon Wertsch, Bennett Hope, Sydney Herriman, Jona Wiens and Rily Chan-Hill. Third Row: Smith Kaposy, Henry Kedziora, Colton Dietsch, Christian Gossen, Weston Stewart and Landon Pagnotta. Back row: the coaches, Joe Pagnotta, James Wiens, Derek Nichols and Matt Dietsch. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



NOTL skaters compete in Stratford

Four skaters from the Niagara-on-the-Lake Skating Club competed at the Stratford December Classic competition held Dec. 15 to 17. Pictured are Samantha Frydryk (Star 5 – 3rd place), Alexx Hill (Star 8 – 7th; Star 9 – 12th), Liza Butko (Star 3 – silver assessment) and Kayla Thwaites (Star 3 – gold assessment). SUPPLIED

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Tractor parade helps raise \$108K for cancer research

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

When Dorothy Soo-Wiens and Erwin Wiens, organizers of Niagara-on-the-Lake's Christmas tractor parade, teamed up with Joe Pillitteri to cap off his annual fundraiser for cancer research, little did they know the depth of the generosity they would witness.

In total, they managed to collect more than \$100,000 from attendees and supporters of the tractor parade on Dec. 14 — surpassing their goal of \$15,000.

Pillitteri, co-owner of Lakeview Vineyard Equipment, heads up Team Pillsy, which participates annually in NOTL's Terry Fox Run, raising tens of thousands of dollars every year for cancer research via the Terry Fox Foundation. 2023's campaign started in late August.

He was overwhelmed by the support from the community during that December evening in Virgil, as the people who were gathered on the street to watch the parade chipped in what they had for the cause.



More than 60 tractors and pieces of farm equipment took part in the now-annual Tractor Parade. RICHARD HARLEY

"Just walking along the side of the road, I think we collected \$5,000," Pillitteri said. "People were chasing (the collectors) wanting to donate, which was incredible."

Before the parade in December, Soo-Wiens and Wiens approached Pillitteri with the idea of adding a fundraising component to their tractor parade.

A friendly competition was cooked up, pitting the Wienses against Team Pillsy to see who could raise the most money for cancer research in conjunc-

tion with the event.

The goal was modest — the Wienses and Pillitteri hoped to raise a total of \$15,000 during the parade — but as it turns out, donors had other ideas.

With contributions still coming in, the tractor parade's campaign has raised \$54,000 so far. And thanks to one anonymous backer who pledged to match donations dollar for dollar, the total stands at \$108,000.

This brings the total amount Team Pillsy raised in 2023 to almost \$250,000 — the money was raised in

the fall during the town's annual run and a comedy night hosted in early October by Pillitteri.

"We had a lot of people, friends who stepped up to help," Wiens said of the tractor parade team's campaign. "The \$15,000, we didn't even know if we'd get that."

One of those friends who came through in a big way was Dorothea Enns, a Wiens by birth, who stepped up to donate \$10,000 in honour of her cousin Herman Gau, who is living in a Niagara long-term care facility.

"He was in the farming community," Enns said. "He had a brother who sadly passed away," she added, referring to Reinhard Gau, who had cancer himself.

"We thought it would be nice to honour them," she said.

When it came to which team would get the money, Enns admitted to feeling a little conflicted.

"I was a Wiens before I was married," she said. "Dorothy (Soo-Wiens) and I used to joke about being the two Dorothys. But Joe is

also our customer."

In the end, her money went to the Pillitteri side, but regardless of which campaign came out on top, the money was all going toward a worthy cause, Enns said.

"It was a collaborative, friendly competition."

The funds collected will push Team Pillsy's fundraising total for 2023 to \$242,000, which Pillitteri said would make Niagara-on-the-Lake's Terry Fox Run team one of the top three in the country.

"It will be incredible," Pillitteri said. "I think only Toronto and Montreal are in front of us."

He also had high praise for the Wienses, citing the couple's dedication to helping the community. Soo-Wiens in particular, he said, is "an angel" in his eyes.

"She does so much for the community and expects nothing in return."

The Grape Growers of Ontario, meanwhile, stepped up with a donation of \$2,000 while several donors came through with donations of \$500 or \$1,000.

The parade itself was a

huge success, Soo-Wiens said. While she couldn't give an exact number for how many people turned out to watch the festivities, she said it surpassed last year, when about 4,000 people lined the streets in Virgil for the event.

And it wasn't just people from NOTL who came out for the event.

"We talked to people who came from Fort Erie, Grimsby, Fonthill, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines," Soo-Wiens said.

In total, 65 tractors and pieces of farm equipment were a part of the parade. And that is what brought out the crowds, she said.

"Who doesn't like tractors all decked out in lights?" she asked rhetorically. "It's always a fun time, especially for families."

While the popularity of the event has thrilled Soo-Wiens, she said that some changes may need to happen in the future as the parade grows: With the increased attendance came increased traffic, for example.

"We'll have to review how we do traffic," she said.

hutton@niagaranow.com

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THANK YOU ALL!!!

More and more **women** are taking up agriculture

Continued from Front Page

Bartel, meanwhile, leads Bartel Organics with the help of her husband, Ken, and has been diligently working three acres of land to grow organic fruits and vegetables as well as flowers.

“In my case, I just love animals,” McQuhae said. “I bought my first two cows in 1996 before I had a farm.”

She now owns the 10-acre farm, Gryphon Ridge Highlands, where she maintains a small herd of 10 Highland cattle. She spends her days tending to the herd and making jams, jellies and preserves.

Data from the 2021 Census of Agriculture showed that female farm operator numbers increased for the first time since 1991, when the Census of Agriculture started collecting data.

In 2021, there were 79,795 female farm operators in Canada out of a total of 262,455 farms, up from 77,970 in 2016, an increase of 1,825 or 2.3 per cent.

By comparison, male farm operator numbers dropped by 5.8 per cent over



Linda Grimo of Grimo Nut Nursery said that more women taking leadership roles in farming reflects what is happening in other business sectors. RICHARD HUTTON

the same period.

Grimo, meanwhile, thinks the fact more women are taking charge in farming shows how society has changed when it comes to accepting women in leadership roles.

“The old view was that women were taking care of the kids and the home front to support their husbands,” she said.

“The new view is that we are equal partners in the farm operation, or running them on our own, with our partners, if any, supporting us.”

Women are thriving in this environment, she said, and enjoying their work and agricultural leadership roles, both on and off the farm.

Bartel, meanwhile, said Bartel Organics is a small player in the agriculture business, with most of its products being sold directly from the farm, or at the NOTL Farmers’ Market on Saturdays at Garrison Village.

She and Ben have been fixtures there for 17 years.

“The first time we went, we made \$50,” she said,

adding that with the farm now more established, it’s more common for her and Ken to come away from the market day with 10 times that amount – \$500 – in their pocket.

In a news release, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture said that despite the increasing numbers, women still face several barriers in the industry.

“We often still have to fight to have agricultural service providers, from animal nutritionists and agricultural lenders to farm equipment service managers and agronomists, view us as equal farm partners and informed decision-makers,” Sara Wood, a director with the federation, said in an online statement.

“It can also be intimidating to step forward to take on a leadership position, particularly in organizations where women haven’t previously played very visible roles,” she wrote.

Additionally, she said the women in agriculture, just like women in other sectors of the workforce, face challenges like child care.

All three women said they

have been fortunate to have not experienced some of the issues described by Wood.

“I have a really strong personality,” McQuhae said. “I exude a lot of confidence, so people don’t boss me around.”

Bartel agreed and said her dealings with seed suppliers – Stoke’s Seeds in St. Catharines, William Dam Seeds in Dundas and American company Johnny’s Selected Seeds – have all been positive.

“We haven’t really had much that was negative,” she said, adding that being a small operator helps.

Grimo, meanwhile, said she hasn’t noticed much bias in her sector, as many nut farms are led by women.

“When I am working with suppliers I personally don’t find barriers, but maybe Niagara suppliers are ‘with the times’ more than perhaps other locations in Ontario,” she said.

There have been occasions, however, where she feels she may have been treated differently if she were male.

“But honestly, this is rare for me,” she said. “I had

an old farmer once tell me, ‘Listen sweetheart blah, blah, blah.’ He lost me at ‘listen, sweetheart,’ and I was angry. I knew far more about the industry than he did, but he was ignorant and misogynistic.”

She chose not to stew over it.

“I took it for what it was: an old man who couldn’t see a woman running a farm,” she said. “Fortunately, I didn’t have to work anywhere near him and eliminated contact with him.”

Wood said there is a new federal government initiative for female farmers called the Agri-Mentor program that offers six months of individual coaching for women in the agri-food sector, matching mentees and mentors.

She encouraged women in agriculture to take advantage of resources and to take more chances in their line of work in order to prosper.

“It won’t always be easy, but when it comes to farming, I believe we can do everything a man does – we just may do it a bit differently,” she wrote.

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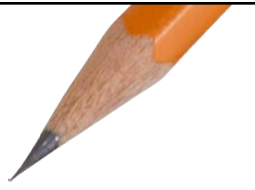
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Have some fun



Across

- 8. "You're fat", revised, is far more polite (5,3)
- 9. Being professionally looked after (2,4)
- 10. Blocked (10)
- 11. Islamic cleric (4)
- 12. Elegant and fashionable (6)
- 14. Cause of summer sneezes (3,5)
- 16. Well maintained (2,4,9)
- 18. Gain control of oneself (3,1,4)
- 19. Electrically-operated switches (6)
- 20. Egyptian played by Liz (4)
- 22. Anxiety (10)
- 24. Wide street (6)
- 25. Annoying (8)

Down

- 1. About to fall over (3,7)
- 2. Undiluted (4)
- 3. Sweet (6)
- 4. "You couldn't be more wrong!" (4,3,8)
- 5. Idealistic and unrealistic (4-4)
- 6. Fortuitous (10)
- 7. Operatic solo (4)
- 13. Hunt for bargains (4,6)
- 15. Coral reefs, for example (10)
- 17. Thrown off course (8)
- 19. Grand Prix participants (6)
- 21. Zero, on court (4)
- 23. Classic war game (4)

Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8				9		
10					11	
12		13		14		15
16			17			
18					19	
20	21		22			23
24				25		

Last issue's answers

1	S	R	A	S	P	B	E	R	R	Y	D
2	C	E	D	E	T	I	E	O	M	A	R
3	E	D	O	U	T	L	O	O	K	I	
4	D	Y	N	A	M	O	T	P	E	L	L
5	O	L	D	A	Y	B	E	D	E	M	
6	B	U	R	E	A	U	N	S	N	I	P
7	A	R	P	L	U	G	S	I	U		
8	T	U	F	T	S	A	E	I	F	N	O
9	H	L	E	D	I	T	S	E	L	E	
10	T	R	I	O	N	U	S	A	B	L	E
11	U	C	I	D	I	O	M	S	R	I	
12	B	A	K	U	E	P	A	S	T	E	S
13	M	S	U	M	A	T	R	A	O	S	
14	P	I	K	E	I	E	I	M	A	I	D
15	R	D	E	C	A	D	E	N	C	E	N

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



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‘Do you love me?’ How long-term care residents can thrive

Continued from Front Page

couldn't solve.

And for an outgoing, sunny person very much in her father's mould, there was a slow withdrawal from social events and longtime friends.

For the initial few months in long-term care, as I left following a visit, she would say she wanted to come home. That was tough for both of us, although she was usually distracted by a staff member and I was promptly forgotten until, eventually, with repeated periods of isolation in 2020, Jan no longer asked.

These days, Jan and most of the others suffering from dementia, spend much of their time watching old sitcoms on TV, church services or playing games, most of which the residents pay little attention to unless personally prompted by name by a staff member.

To me the most striking and telling feature is that residents fail to form meaningful social relationships with other residents, despite living and eating with them for months on end. With this

isolation comes a withering of language skills, mostly due to lack of practice, although some dementias are associated with specific language problems.

Some residents light up with visits from regular close family members. That's true of Jan, too.

If she spots me coming, her face lights up. She regularly enjoys marching page-by-page through pictures of wild animals by Robert Bateman or listening to long-ago family stories and viewing video clips of our daughter Martha's cats in Anchorage, Alaska.

That's where her father's, "Do you love me" ditty comes in.

Jan remembers the lines and if I start the game, she likes to tease with a no grip responses to "How much?" – all the while, grinning.

This game and others I make up or stories I tell, seldom fail to bring out her sense of humour and enjoyment. Those responses remind me that Jan's capacity to love and need for affection is very much alive and well, despite long hours when, like other long-term-



Dr. William Brown, pictured with his wife Jan, says love, attention and a bit of humour can go a long way in helping bring joy to people living in long-term care homes. SUPPLIED

ers, she watches sitcoms or simply nods off.

What Jan and other residents need is warmth and social connection for which they depend on the staff, some of whom make a point of connecting with them in personal ways, such as the odd hug, which can make a big difference.

Unfortunately, these days, those moments have become fewer because long-term care facilities are short-staffed much of the time and sometimes last-minute no-shows make

those shortages worse, leaving even less time for the staff to spend with the residents above and beyond meeting their physical needs.

There's another matter. Most residents in long-term care come from cultures and times when the social mores of greetings and small talk were well understood and practised within a community and continued when most of the staff shared similar cultural backgrounds, making communication between staff

and residents much easier.

With migration from so many diverse cultures to Canada has come an awkwardness and unease between cultures that is hard to bridge, especially for the elderly. I witnessed that when we lived in Boston in the 1990s when there was a large-scale immigration from the former Soviet Union.

The older generation stuck to the community and language with which they were familiar, while the children and young adults

soon fit in but retained their connections with their grandparents.

There's a similar cultural gap in many areas of Canadian life these days and it would be surprising if there were not similar challenges in long-term care.

The result can be unintended social and communication gaps between staff and residents, even though the treatment of the residents is exemplary in other ways.

However, the impact of cultural differences between staff and residents in long-term care facilities where so many suffer from cognitive isolation has the potential to worsen the isolation and boredom for the residents.

Finally, Jan illustrates what is probably true for most residents: they respond to affection and warmth more than might be apparent through much of their waking hours. It takes special people in long-term care to make that happen and thank goodness, many do.

Now back to Jan and "Do you love me? ..."



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Queen Street, 1873

This 1870 view of the south side of Queen Street shows, from right: John Lees Alma's upscale grocery and wine store, originally built in 1825 for dry goods merchant John Daly; an early narrow frame building, the business of John McMillan and his son Dave; the hotel of James Walsh and his son Frank, which was built c. 1840 as half shop, half house; the Sherlock block, built c. 1850 as two buildings and later joined with a "boomtown" front added to disguise the joining; the Court House, and the oldest building in the commercial area, William Duff Miller's 1817 stationery shop. The second storey was added in 1855, probably by grocer Henry Chrysler. Purchased by the LCBO in 1928, the building was restored in 1973.

Sandy Sugarswirl at North Pole **delights** Niagara children



Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson
Columnist

It's been a wonderful 33 years for one Canada Post employee, who was very busy over the holidays writing letters to Niagara area children before Christmas.

In a world — and a country — where it seems that every tradition is being challenged and every difference is cause for divisive discussions and acrimony, our friends at Canada Post were soldiering on by spreading the love.

Right across our nation, a tradition that started way back in 1990 gets more popular each year.

Right here at our downtown post office, where many NOTLers still go to fetch their mail and pick up their copy of The Lake Report every Thursday, a festively attired longtime

employee donated her time and enthusiasm answering letters to Santa Claus.

Yes, Sandy Sugarswirl is a Niagara-on-the-Lake gem. Known to some as Sandy Godard, she is one of many who takes pride in making our wee town a better place to grow up and live and grow old.

Someone somewhere had the idea, and like many ideas that just seem to hit all the right buttons, the postal code H0H 0H0 — "Hohoho" — contained the right number of digits to jive with the ingenious Canada postal code system.

The Letters to Santa program seems to transcend religious differences, to cross cultural lines, to simply do a wonderful thing.

I am so old that even during my six high school years in St. Catharines, there was no such thing as a postal code. Just the street address and the city and province, for postcards and letters and junk mail pieces to somehow find their way to the addressees.

And, believe it or not, our telephone numbers only had seven digits not that long ago. Remember the angst about 25 years ago when Big Brother dic-



For more than 30 years, local Canada Post employee "Sandy Sugarswirl" has ensured letters to Santa get sent to the North Pole in time for Christmas. ROSS ROBINSON

tated that we would have to dial area codes along with telephone numbers? Ten digits. Horrors. Not that long ago.

Right here in NOTL, our wonderful and personable Sandy Sugarswirl personally responded to some 300 letters to Santa.

During a recent interview amidst the frenetic activity at our

Queen Street post office in mid-December, she told me that she is taken through a complete range of emotions when reading the carefully printed letters children write to Old Saint Nick.

Each envelope includes a clearly-printed return address, to allow Santa and his helpers to find the right place to leave requested gifts on Christmas Eve.

There's the little girl in Welland whose daddy is serving overseas in a war zone with Canada's military and won't be home for Christmas — for the second straight year. She wants a gift to be waiting for him when he gets home in March.

Or, the five-year-old boy in Virgil whose mommy and daddy aren't together anymore, and he knows they can't afford to buy him any presents. He is OK with that and plans to somehow get them each a Christmas gift, plus one for his little sister. He knows that his parents both love him.

Plus, in Queenston, the little girl whose grandmother is battling cancer and may not make it to their house for Christmas dinner. She doesn't really care about getting a Christmas present from Santa but would love some chocolates to share with Granny and her family.

Let's all remember that Christmas can be the happy, happy, happiest time of the year, but for many people, it is the lonely, lonely, loneliest time of the year.

At post offices all across Canada, volunteers were being kind and spreading the love. Particularly difficult

letters from Niagara were forwarded quickly to the huge Stoney Creek distribution centre, where special requests are sent out to charitable groups who have the resources and personnel to somehow make the Christmas season a little less painful and lonely.

It is so easy, and it seems to be the way of our world, to be negative and grumpy, to take shots at other Canadians who live differently than us.

Yes, oversized bureaucracies are easy and easily identifiable targets for our critical and often snide comments. Do they really earn their money, and how about the benefits and pension packages they enjoy? Those darn unions are sticking it to the hard-working private sector.

Let's all take a step back and remember the thousands of good people like Sandy Sugarswirl who donate their time and enthusiastically spread their love.

Year after year, they do this just because they want to make the lives of their fellow Canadians a bit better. A bit happier. A bit more loving.

Merry Christmas, a bit belatedly, to y'all.

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Getting ahead of 2024 gardening trends



GROWING TOGETHER

Joanne Young
Columnist

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy New Year and all the best of things to come in 2024.

Looking forward to the coming year, I thought that I would take a look at four gardening trends for this year.

The trends below are not new ideas for most gardeners, but they are practices that have been “growing” in interest (pun intended).

In next week’s article, I will be sharing five more trends that are newer ideas in the field of horticulture that you may not be as familiar with.

Using pollinator-friendly plants

This is definitely not a new trend by any means, but gardeners are becoming more and more aware of the importance of planting

with pollinating insects in mind.

Many of the world’s pollinator insects are in decline. This includes bees, wasps, moths, butterflies, flies, beetles, and many other insects.

Their decline is due to several factors such as loss of habitat, use of pesticides and chemical-based fertilizers and climate changes such as warming temperatures.

It is estimated that 75 percent of the crops that we rely on depend on pollinators to some extent. A sobering thought indeed.

There are so many plants, not just annuals and perennials, but also shrubs and shade trees, that will attract these important pollinators to your garden.

Along with plants that attract pollinators, it is essential to include plants that will sustain the insects, meaning plants that the insect depends on to complete its lifecycle such as butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and its association with monarch butterflies.

Many of the plants that are pollinators are native species, which leads us to our next trend – planting native plants.

Using native species
Again, not a new trend in



A monarch caterpillar on butterfly weed. JOANNE YOUNG

the world of gardening, but it is one being embraced by more and more gardeners.

As I stated above, planting native plant species is one of the best ways to rejuvenate our pollinators.

Native plants have several other strengths and benefits, including:

- More drought resistance due to their deeper and more aggressive root systems;
- Lower maintenance requirements – less fertilizer, less pruning or deadheading;
- Providing shelter and food for wildlife;
- Promoting biodiversity and stewardship of our natural heritage;
- Adapting better to poor soil conditions, and;
- Providing beauty

through flowers, fruit, seeds, and foliage.

Sustainable gardening practices

Sustainable gardening practices are one that put the environment first and foremost.

You will find that all the trends in this article are linked together: focusing on what is best for the environment overall.

You might be thinking that all gardeners are focused on the environment, but this is not always the case.

One example of sustainable gardening is switching gas-powered tools, such as a lawn mower, to battery-run tools that reduce carbon emissions.

You may be surprised to know that a gas-powered

leaf blower or lawnmower produces a lot more pollution than a pick-up truck.

Another sustainable gardening practice is reducing the use of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and chemical-based fertilizers in your garden.

Planting more drought-tolerant plants to conserve water use is another great practice when thinking about the well-being of the environment.

These are just a few simple things that you can do in your garden to reduce your carbon footprint.

Use of rain gardens

First of all, I feel it necessary to say that rainwater is a resource, not a waste product.

We spend so much time, attention, and cost trying to figure out the best way to get rid of rainwater off our properties as quickly as possible.

Does this seem strange to anyone else? Why are we wanting to get water down the sewers as fast as possible?

Why are we not trying to capture this water and use it for our gardens instead of paying for it during the hot summer months?

Rain gardens have been growing in popularity and the concept is being highly promoted by some municipi-

palities.

A rain garden is a shallow, saucer-shaped garden featuring native perennial plants and grasses.

It is designed to absorb stormwater run-off from impervious surfaces such as rooftops, driveways and sidewalks.

Rain gardens slow down the rush of water from these hard surfaces, allowing it to naturally soak into the ground.

For every inch of rain that falls on a surface area of 1,000 square feet, approximately 600 gallons of rainwater is generated.

Homeowners can help reduce the amount of run-off water flowing from their property by planting a rain garden.

The garden should be positioned near a runoff source like a downspout, driveway or sump pump to capture rainwater runoff and stop the water from reaching the sewer system.

In next week’s article, I will have a few more of the trends for 2024.

Joanne Young is a Niagara-on-the-Lake garden expert and coach. See her website at joanneyoung.ca.

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Penguin Dip swimmers celebrate 40 years of embracing the chill



Penguins and friends take a frigid dip in the Niagara River on Boxing Day. It’s an annual tradition that raised \$10,000 for Red Roof Retreat this year. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report

It started as a way for a few friends to have something to do on Boxing Day, now more than 50 people dip their toes to their heads into cold Lake Ontario annually.

The annual Penguin Dip takes place every year on Dec. 26 and features three separate dips into the icy Lake Ontario, which includes dipping your head under.

This past December was no exception to the annual tradition: swimmers came out on Boxing Day to the shores of Balls Beach for the Penguin Dip, including NOTLer Pat Quinn.

“Originally it was a very small group down at a local house right on the water,” Quinn said. “I grew up with the family and it was something that they started on Easter and then moved to Boxing Day – I was just

trying to weasel my way into a part.”

He has participated in every Penguin Dip since 1980, that is until this year.

“I’ve done it for 42 years, I think I’ve served the Emperor Penguin enough years,” he said.

Quinn is turning 67 this year and decided that it was time to stop hopping in the freezing lake, but still came out to assist other swimmers in and out of the water.

“It was boring (not swimming),” Quinn joked. “But there were a good number of people coming out.”

He said because of the warmer holiday weather a total of 61 people joined in on the dip.

“People said ‘Oh you had an easy year for a swim,’ and to those people, I say ‘Talk to me when you come out of the water,’” Quinn said.

The Penguin Dip has a handful of veteran swim-

mers aside from Quinn, including founding member Chris Bjorgan, who has been dipping just as long.

“I’ve been saying I can’t quit until my grandkids start, so I’ve got at least another six years left,” Bjorgan said.

Bjorgan’s brother Lorne started up the dip all those years ago and now money raised goes toward Red Roof Retreat, founded by his sister-in-law, Steffanie

Bjorgan.

“It started out as fun and just kept going and growing,” Bjorgan said.

This year’s dip raised \$10,000 in support of Red Roof.

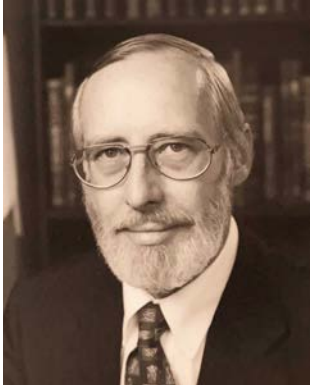
“It was a good year, I really enjoyed seeing that many people out,” Bjorgan said.

Those interested in taking the plunge can look forward to next year’s dip, when the group plans to meet again.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com

Obituaries

Peter Hancock



Peter Julian Arthur Hancock -
16/3/1938 - 18/12/2023
Peacefully on Monday, December 18th, 2023 at the Greater Niagara General Hospital. Peter arrived in Canada in 1940 at Pier 21 in Halifax, a two year-old war guest of the Dominion, evacuated from England along with his mother and sister. He left us in his eighty-sixth year with a distinguished record of serving the country that became his home. He found his métier in diplomacy and during his long career in Canada's foreign service

became one of its most skilled practitioners, with an abiding commitment to advancing Canada's interests on the world stage.

Welcomed by the generous Moyer family to the Niagara Peninsula, they lived during the war in Vineland Station, and later moved to St. Catharines. At Queen's University he studied political science, wrote poetry, produced theatre, and met Eleanor Toren, whom he married in 1960. In postgraduate study of the history of ideas at Brandeis University under Herbert Marcuse, he had hoped to savour the great works, but found that academics spend more time reading one another. Disappointed, he left.

As a young man of letters gifted in languages, he joined the Department of External Affairs as part of the celebrated class of '63. His inaugural posting was to Yugoslavia during Tito's presidency, where as a junior officer he got his first indelible taste of the Cold War up close. Next came Moscow under Brezhnev, where he assisted with Pierre Trudeau's landmark 1971 visit and experienced the thrill of being embroiled in the 1972 Hockey Summit Series. A posting to Barbados followed and was an opportunity to explore the culture and geopolitics of a different part of the world.

When he returned to Moscow in 1979 it was as deputy head of mission, an expert in East-West relations, and one of the most skilful interpreters of the Soviet Union — just in time for Canada's boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics. As head of policy planning in Ottawa in the early 1980s, he led development and elaboration of foreign policy, and accompanied Gorbachev on his influential 1983 visit to Canada. Later that year, he worked directly with PM Pierre Trudeau on his International "Peace Initiative", helping to pen the seminal Guelph speech. A stint as deputy head of mission in West Germany from 1985-1989 was followed by the role of Ambassador to both Poland and East Germany, where he witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall. His final posting was Ambassador to Turkey from 1993-1996.

After retiring from public service he was appointed Head of Regional Office in Banja Luka for Republika Srpska, implementing the Dayton Peace Accords in Bosnia and Herzegovina (an American initiative under President Clinton). Upon his return to Canada, he taught for several years at the Munk School for Global Affairs & Public Policy, and at Trinity College, University of Toronto.

Despite living much of his life abroad, home for Peter was always the Niagara Peninsula. His knowledge of the region was encyclopaedic and up-to-date, from natural history, local politics, the best plays at Shaw this season, the best restaurants and wineries, its demographics and cultural enclaves, to, always, always, the history of the place. It was his terroir, and the pond hockey rinks of his youth, the music and pizza in Buffalo, and the multicultural community he grew up with in St. Catharines shaped his character in enduring ways. It was no surprise that upon retiring he would move back to his roots and establish a home in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Peter was a consummate story-teller, and a brilliant conversationalist when it pleased him. He was possessed of a great roaring laugh and was a man of keen insight, rare wit and towering erudition. He was a constant and voracious reader. Peter will be sadly missed by his four children (Christopher (Pat), Max (Karen), Martha (Jeffrey), Claudia (David)) and six grand-children (Julia, Ben, Jasmine, Zoe, Aidan, Tara), and by friends and family at home and around the world.

The family thanks the many friends, neighbours and care staff who made his last years as comfortable as possible despite declining health, and allowed him to remain in his home where he was happiest.

As per his wishes, his ashes will be interred at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery, and a "congenial but not lugubrious" event will be held to mark his passing and celebrate his life at Morgan Funeral Home in Niagara-on-the-Lake in a few months. Please check the funeral home website for service details.

Donations if desired may be made to Gillian's Place in St. Catharines, or The Chautauqua Oaks Project or the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Tree Fund. Condolences at www.morganfuneral.com

*And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.*
— Tennyson



Ian "Scotty" Murray



Ian "Scotty" Gilmour
Bremner Murray
May 30, 1932 –
December 3, 2023
With profound sadness,
we announce Ian "Scotty"
Murray passed away
peacefully with family
by his side in London,
Ontario on Sunday,
December 3, 2023 at the
age of 91 years young.
Loving, loyal and proud

father to daughters Colleen and Heather. Adored by his cherished grandson Spencer Craddock. Devoted and caring husband to the late Emily Jane (died July 28, 1995). Predeceased by four brothers, one sister and parents. Brother-in-law and Uncle Ian to many relatives in Scotland and Ireland who remember his kindness and thoughtfulness. Scotty is missed by London friends and neighbours who fondly recall driveway chats and visits, as well as life time old town friends in Niagara-on-the-Lake who would meet to catch up at the local coffee shop.

Our dad was born at Rosehall Cottage, in Drumoak, Scotland. He grew up in the seaside town of Buckie. He often spoke of his adolescent life experiences growing up during the war years and recounted listening to Churchill over the radio. At the age of fourteen, he began a six year apprenticeship building wooden fishing boats at Jones Shipyard in Ianstown. His mother sent him to Canada when he was twenty years old with \$54 in his pocket. He stayed with a brother in Toronto for three months. One weekend they drove to Niagara Falls to take in the attractions and returned home along the Niagara Parkway. By chance, they stopped in at Shepherd Boats and my dad got hired that very day in 1953 and began work the following week. One afternoon, while driving down the dock hill, he met our mother outside her nursing residence and they were married in 1961. In 1966, he erected a small garage at Gillingham Yacht Basin where he established Murray's Boat Repair. Over the years, he moved to a larger shop at the marina, where he continued to work on wooden boats and became an expert craftsman in the repair, painting and maintenance of fibreglass boats. After running a successful company, where business was done by a handshake as a true gentleman, Scotty retired in 2009 at the age of 77. During retirement, our dad enjoyed memorable family summer vacations to his hometown in Scotland. When relatives visited him in Niagara, he delighted in touring them around sharing the local sights. While in London, Grandpa Scotty could be found cheering for Spencer at whatever sport he was playing each season. We often went out for a coffee and a drive to the park to see the geese. He enjoyed feeding and watching wildlife in the backyard garden.

Dad had a strong will, determination and resilience. Anytime he was challenged by medical issues, he always rallied back. We used to joke that our dad was like a cat with 15 lives! He

always had a smile on his face and a story to tell. Dad was a great teacher of life and a genuine friend. We miss him terribly but we carry loving memories that will remain forever in our hearts and minds. Thank you dad for those valuable life lessons and always being present for us. Cheers to you, dear dad, for a life well lived. Till we meet again. Love always.

We would like to extend our gratitude to friends, family and the endless list of exceptional health care providers who have loved, supported, cared and advocated for our dad and family throughout the years. Cremation has taken place and upon our father's wishes, there will be no funeral or Celebration of Life. A private family interment will take place at St. Mark's Church in Niagara-on-the-Lake in the spring. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions to the charity of your choice would be welcome expressions of sympathy. Arrangements entrusted with Cremation London & Middlesex, 519-858-2467. Online condolences shared at www.cremationlondon.com

Joan McNulty



McNULTY, Joan Christina (Irwin) –

It is with great sadness that we announce the peaceful passing of Joan Christina McNulty on Saturday December 23, 2023, at the Greater Niagara General Hospital. Beloved wife of the late George McNulty (1977). Loving mother of Sean McNulty, Stephen Irwin, and Angie Irwin. Dear sister of Steven Irwin (Jennie). Adored great aunt of Janae, Parker, and Hunter. Predeceased by her brother Jay Irwin and great nephew Justin Irwin Brown. Fondly remembered by many friends. Joan worked in Dr. Rigg's office in Niagara-on-the-Lake for over 30 years.

A private family service was at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake on Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023. A celebration of life for Joan McNulty, will be held at Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre – Mori Room on Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024, from 1 to 4 p.m. Those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com



Jeanne Wiens



Jeanne Patricia Wiens (Greengrass),
formerly Dolby

The family is saddened to announce her peaceful passing on December 22, 2023 at 5p.m. Born in Boston, England on June 1, 1935, she is survived by her five children Paul Dolby, Susan Dolby, Heather (Vic) Goertz, Rhona (Greg) Papai, Patti (Mike) Dolby, her six grandchildren and nine great grandchildren. Thank you to the staff at the Greater Niagara General Hospital in Niagara Falls for their kindness and care. All are invited to attend her service at Lakeshore Cemetery (NOTL) on Saturday, January 6 at 11 a.m., and her Celebration of Life to follow at 481 Bunting Rd. St. Catharines at 12:30 p.m. Parking available at Lockview School. Please contact her son Paul at 905-325-5767 for more information

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