

COVID-19 cases close classrooms at Crossroads and St. Davids schools

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Three people at Crossroads Public School and one at St. Davids Public School have been infected with COVID-19, a school board official says.

As a result, two classrooms are closed at Crossroads and one is shut down at St. Davids, said Kim Sweeney, a spokesperson for the District School Board of Niagara.

She would not say whether the infected individuals were students or staff, cit-

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The Lake Report takes a Christmas holiday, too

Staff
The Lake Report

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Season's Greetings to all!

This is the final edition of The Lake Report for 2021 as, like many of our readers, we take our annual break over the holidays to relax, recharge and get ready for the new year ahead.

We will be on a two-week hiatus over Christmas and New Year's.

While our print edition won't return until Thursday, Jan. 6, the news doesn't

Continued on Page 23

NOTL homes dec' out for holidays



All around Niagara-on-the-Lake dazzling light are displays set up for the holiday season, like this one at 78 Prideaux St. **SEE PAGE 24.**

Residents unite to fight for respectful Parliament Oak plan

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

A small group of Niagara-on-the-Lake residents is hoping to have a big impact in preserving the character of Old Town.

Neighbours Alan Gordon, Connie Tintinalli and Marilyn Bartlett have formed an advocacy group called Preserve Our Special Town (POST) because they want to ensure the character of Niagara-on-the-Lake is maintained and the town doesn't lose its historic charm.

The group's first mission, and inspiration for forming, is to stop what the trio views as an out-of-character development planned for the former Parliament Oak school property on King Street.

The property owner, development company Liberty Sites (3) Ltd., plans to build 71 apartments on the four-acre property in the historic Old Town, an unprecedented development for the neighbourhood, which is composed mainly of detached homes.

Together group members have set out numerous issues they've found with the developer's plans for the site, including that the proposed density, style and height of the proposal do not match the character of the town.

Tintinalli, who lives at the corner of Gage and Regent streets, said the group isn't against residential development of the property.

"I don't have a problem

Continued on Page 4



From left: Marilyn Bartlett, Alan Gordon and Connie Tintinalli. Together they have formed a group called Preserve Our Special Town. **RICHARD HARLEY**



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GROWING PAINS: PART 3

Benefits of short-term rentals amid worries about impact

This is the third in a series of in-depth stories about how tourism is changing worldwide and how some destinations are dealing with concerns about overtourism, unprecedented growth in short-term rentals, skyrocketing housing prices and, ultimately, how these factors can affect communities.

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report



Top: The old school house on Platoff Street is a popular short-term rental.
EVAN SAUNDERS
Bottom left: Josh Bivens, director of research at the Economic Policy Institute.
Bottom right: Thorben Wieditz, of Fairbnb Co-op.



Every municipality needs to adopt policies based on its own character, but some economists and short-term rental advocates agree the industry needs to be built around owner-occupied rentals and discourage non-primary residence rentals – which effectively function as commercial businesses in residential neighbourhoods.

There is a distinction between hosted and unhosted rentals, or a bed and breakfast where someone lives year-round compared to a home that functions only as a short-term rental and has no permanent occupant.

But before looking at this solution, it is essential to highlight some of the important benefits of the rental industry.

The number one benefit of home-sharing short-term rentals is the ability for hosts to diversify their income stream, writes Josh Bivens, director of research at the Economic Policy Institute.

“Property owners do benefit from Airbnb’s capacity to lower the transaction costs of operating short-term rentals,” making it easier to earn revenue off their home, Bivens writes in his 2019 study “The Economic Costs and Benefits of Airbnb.”

Nathan Rotman, a public policy representative for Airbnb, agrees.

“Our hosts are regular people living in communities across the country and around the world,” Rotman said in an interview.

During the pandemic, when people have been losing their jobs and earning reduced incomes, the value

of services like Airbnb cannot be overlooked, Rotman said, adding that 14 per cent of the platform’s new hosts reported losing their job because of COVID-19.

And the average new host in Quebec since the beginning of the pandemic has earned an additional \$8,000 in income, he said.

Bivens notes that short-term rental operators tend to be better off financially, particularly those who own two properties, a primary residence and a non-primary residence.

An analysis of the U.S. Federal Reserve in 2016 presented in Bivens’ study showed that more than 90 per cent of non-primary residence wealth was owned by the top 20 per cent of earners in the United States.

“To put it simply, any economic occurrence that provides benefits proportional to owning property is one that will grant these benefits disproportionately to the wealthy,” Bivens writes.

He notes the transformation short-term rentals and Airbnb have gone through since the boom of the home-sharing market in the late 2000s.

“At its inception, Airbnb advertised itself as a way for homeowners (or long-term renters) to rent out a room in their primary residence, or as a way for people to rent out their dwellings for short periods while they themselves are traveling,” he writes.

“However, in recent years Airbnb listings and revenues have become dominated by “multi-unit” renters — absentee property owners with multiple dwellings who are essentially running small-scale lodging companies on an ongoing basis.”

Bivens writes that this development raises several key questions, such as why can companies like Airbnb operate mini-hotels in residentially zoned neighbourhoods?

Platforms like Airbnb allow people to ignore zoning bylaws, which leads to multiple property owners renting out their non-primary residence as “ghost hotels,” one of the main issues policymakers and housing advocates have raised when discussing this issue, Bivens notes.

As for regulating owners of multiple properties, Rot-

man said that decision is up to municipalities and he did not offer a specific stance on the issue on behalf of Airbnb.

The amount of money tourists who stay with companies like Airbnb spend in the communities they visit is another benefit that short-term rentals bring, Rotman said.

“In Toronto, for example, 45 per cent of total guest spending occurred in restaurants,” he said.

Rotman argued Airbnb also enables tourists to reach more untapped communities and areas off the beaten path of the typical tourist, such as Oro-Medonte or Haliburton.

However, Bivens argues such claims should “be ignored by policymakers seeking an accurate sense of the scale of Airbnb expansion costs and benefits.”

He cites two studies (one by Daniel Guttentag and another by Morgan Stanley Research) which showed fewer than four per cent of Airbnb users would not have stayed in their intended location if Airbnb were unavailable.

Another benefit of Airbnb and short-term rentals is

they reduce costs for short-term accommodations for travellers, Bivens writes.

A study by economists Georgios Zervas, Davide Prosperio and John Byers claims a 10 per cent increase in Airbnb rentals results in a 0.4 per cent decrease in hotel revenue.

Another study by economists Tarik Dogru, Makarand Mody and Courtney Seuss found a direct, negative correlation between hotel room prices and Airbnb expansion.

The study found that increasing Airbnb supply affects all hotel metrics, including room revenue, average daily rates and occupancy rates.

But Bivens once again is cautious about what the statistics mean.

“This potential benefit of Airbnb introduction and expansion is overwhelmingly a redistribution of welfare, not an increase in economy-wide welfare,” he writes.

An analysis by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, a U.S. government agency, shows that short-term rental prices have actually increased more than the cost of general goods since 2014, Bivens writes.

In Toronto, an advocacy group called Fairbnb, is hoping to provide an alternative to the burgeoning short-term rental model by offering rentals that strictly adhere to municipal rules and regulations.

“Airbnb has contributed to the housing crises (in various cities) by removing housing stock that was built, zoned, and approved as residential housing stock and converting this into what we call ghost hotels,” says Thorben Wieditz, of Fairbnb Co-op.

Fairbnb is a coalition of housing advocates, academics from institutions such as York University, community groups like the Friends of Kensington Market and many others.

The best solution to the problems caused by the explosive growth of short-term rentals and Airbnb is ensuring that homeowners actually rent out their primary residence and try

to curb the proliferation of ghost hotels into residential neighbourhoods, Wieditz said in an interview.

“We are not against short-term rentals or Airbnb. We are a pro-home-sharing coalition, meaning that if you or I wanted to rent out our home while we are on vacation or gone away for a weekend, we should be able to do so,” he said.

“But we should not be able to buy up or lease up residential housing stock and turn this into commercial ghost hotels. That is where we draw the line.”

Fairbnb’s tactic would seem to address several of the problems explored throughout this series by The Lake Report.

One of those issues, espoused by Seguin Township Mayor Ann MacDiarmid and Bivens, is that tourists staying at ghost hotels in residential neighbourhoods do not care about the area and are prone to being disrespectful of the community while adding undue stress on neighbourhood infrastructure.

Since ghost hotels do not pay commercial tax and are cheaper than regular hotels, the municipality loses out on potential revenue while still having to maintain its infrastructure.

“Transactions in the home-sharing market, therefore, involve a reallocation of resources from locals to non-locals,” Kyle Bar-

ron, Davide Prosperio and Edward Kung write in their 2017 study “The Effect of Home Sharing on Housing Prices and Rent: Evidence from Airbnb.”

“A shift in welfare from locals to non-locals is important for public policy because policy is set locally.”

In his own research, Bivens writes that this was a reason why hotels are specifically zoned and built away from residential neighbourhoods. It prevents the overflow of external costs onto long-term residents in what is supposed to be a residential neighbourhood.

NEXT: To rent or not to rent: The role of owner-occupied rentals.



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Speed limit to be cut at Con. 6 intersection

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake council wants to reduce the speed limit on Concession 6 Road between York and Queenston roads to 60 km/h from 80 km/h following a string of scary collisions this year.

And a roundabout or traffic signal could be in the intersection's future.

The speed limit change is expected to be approved at a council meeting on Dec. 20.

"With the opening of the Mewburn Bridge, it's fair to say that we've got a lot more traffic that's happening in that area," regional director of transportation Carolyn Ryall said during a council meeting on Nov. 22.

"We've been working and monitoring very closely the improvements we've been putting out there to deal with some of the driver behaviour and a number of



Concession 6 Road between Queenston and York Roads could soon be a 60 km/h zone. SOURCED

the angle collisions."

So far at the intersection the region has installed oversized stop-signs, "stop ahead" warning signs, pavement markings and reduced speed along sections of York Road, Ryall said.

She said the region is planning on installing "Cross traffic does not stop" warning signs on Mewburn

and Concession 6 roads.

"Eventually we'll be targeting this intersection for a future review on whether a traffic signal and or roundabout will be the best use," she said.

Associate transportation director Frank Trassone said the intersection was reviewed around 2015.

"That report recom-

mended the roundabout at Concession 6," he told councillors.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero says the York and Concession 6 intersection would be a better place for the region to build the roundabout it is planning at Four Mile Creek and York Roads in St. Davids.

"I'm not an engineer, but I would think with all the accidents happening at Concession 6 and York Road that's the place for the roundabout," Disero said in an interview.

She pointed out regional council approved a motion asking for an exit from Highway 405 to the Mewburn Bridge on Concession 6 Road.

"If that's the case, people that are just driving through to get to the highway can take that area instead of going through the village (of St. Davids)," eliminating the need for the roundabout in St. Davids, she said.

Public schools close classes for COVID cases

Continued from Front Page

ing privacy concerns.

There are no active cases at St. Michael Catholic Elementary School, the only Niagara Catholic District School Board school in Niagara-on-the-Lake, board spokesperson Jennifer Pellegrini confirmed Wednesday.

One of the people infected at Crossroads will be finished 10 days of self-isolation on Dec. 17 and will be able to return to the school on Dec. 20.

The other two people who tested positive can return to the classroom on Dec. 21,

Sweeney said. The infected person from St. Davids school can return Dec. 17.

As COVID cases in schools across Ontario surge, there are 19 active cases listed by the Niagara school board in its schools. Eden High School in St. Catharines is closed until Jan. 10 with four active cases.

Garrison Road Public School in Fort Erie is reporting six cases but the school remains open.

Sweeney said the decision about which schools close is up to Niagara Public Health.

"They felt there was a risk of transmission (at

Eden High School). So, to be really, really careful and to ensure student, staff and community member safety they thought the best course of action would be to close the school," she said.

Sweeney said at this point there is no indication that the school board may be moving to online learning in the new year as the Omicron variant spreads.

As of Wednesday, there were 513 active cases in the Niagara region, the highest number of active cases since May 23. Of the 513 cases, 94 are classified as being in the under-20 age group.

As of Sunday, Dec. 12, the

region had vaccinated 8,383 or 26 per cent of eligible children in the five to 11 age group, Niagara Public Health spokesperson Courtney Westerhof said in an email.

There are roughly 24,000 more Niagara children who are eligible to be vaccinated, Westerhof said.

As of Wednesday, Niagara-on-the-Lake had 21 active cases, one of the lowest counts in the region. But due to NOTL's small population, the municipality has one of the highest case counts per 10,000 people, at 11.1

Only Fort Erie, Grimsby and West Lincoln were performing worse in that metric.

Online exclusives: More stories about our NOTL

Pillitteri worker retires after 35 years



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POST: Parliament Oak plan **must fit character** of NOTL

Current plan is too big, contains 20+ homes per acre, group says. Surrounding area averages six per acre

Continued from Front Page

with there being apartments in town and I know people are anxious for that. It's just the mass and the scale and the architectural language is just totally wrong," she said.

The proposed building runs the entire span of the community block (about 350 feet), and is four storeys high at the back, she said.

"So, looking from Regent (Street), you're going to see a four-storey building, which just is totally inappropriate for this area. And I think once something like this happens, what prevents it from happening all over town?"

She said the group would like to stop the development from happening as it is currently planned.

"Obviously something is going to happen here. But, I think, little by little this town's being eroded — there's huge monster homes going up beside little tiny cottages. It's starting to look like downtown Toronto," Tintinalli said.

"It's a bit frightening because I think everybody, people that live here, think this is a special town and all the people that visit think it's a special town, and sooner or later it's gonna be like, 'What's so special about it?'"

Gordon, who previously encouraged residents to attend public meetings about the proposed apartment complex, echoed the same concerns about density, height and scale.

Once the land is divided, he said the proposal would mean about 28 units per acre — a giant leap from the current average of six homes per acre in the surrounding area.

Further frustrating the situation, Gordon said the virtual public meetings due to COVID-19 have essentially muted resident input on the project.

"I've spoken to numerous people who say, 'Boy, I wish there was a live public meeting because I would show up at it but I'm just not comfortable doing the online, speaking out online. I don't know who I'm speaking to, I don't



The plan for Parliament Oak looks more like something out of a Toronto commercial area, say residents, and nothing like the character of NOTL has and should be. SUPPLIED

quite understand it.' So, there are a lot of people who are against this, but they don't have a voice. That's why we've established the website and the organization POST," he said.

The organization is not incorporated yet and is a "grassroots" movement, he said, but he's hoping to make the resident-input process simpler for people who might have a hard time navigating the town's website for information.

"And hopefully that will galvanize the neighbourhood that they've got one place to come and it'll give them a lot of information and a lot of links," he said.

The group has also put together some pictures of what the proposed development will actually look like, "apart from the developer's pretty watercolour pictures," he said.

Bartlett, who lives on Centre Street across from the Parliament Oak site, expressed the same concerns about the potential damage to the town's character from the sheer size and density of the Liberty Sites plan. The development company could not be reached for comment on the resident group's concerns.

The group hopes to gain support to fight not only this development, but to set a precedent for other at-risk areas to say no to projects that don't fit in with the character of other neigh-

bourhoods, she said.

"We're also trying to galvanize support from the whole of the town, not just the neighbourhood, because there are other areas in the town that are vulnerable to this type of development. And if it happens here, it can happen anywhere."

She noted her house and all of the surrounding area, including Parliament Oak, are part of a heritage preservation area of town, which is meant to ensure protection for the streetscapes and neighbourhoods, "and keeping the town as special as it is now."

From her home, which looks toward the old gymnasium portion of the school building, the former school is not much higher than the other homes — about 17 feet, she notes, according to the developer's report.

If the proposed project goes ahead, she'll be looking at a 54-foot wall.

"That's no streetscape for this town. It's ridiculous," she said.

Gordon said even the nine planned single homes don't actually fit in with the surrounding architecture. "Part of what's mentioned in one of the (town's) official plans is to have a variety, even within the architecture, because if we look at these houses, they're all very different. They're not exactly the same. Whereas (the developer's plans) are all variations on a theme."

The developer's plan includes preserving a small portion of the school's entranceway and incorporating it into the design of the building. But Bartlett notes the school really doesn't have heritage value, it's more the property, which is said to have been the site of the first Parliament of Upper Canada.

The group agreed that preserving some aspects of the building could easily be done by moving some of the iconic plaques to a greenspace area for people to view, and don't necessarily see the value in preserving the front of the building.

Tintinalli noted the part Liberty Sites seeks to preserve is also planned to be an area for garbage. "(The developer) wasn't exactly honouring them by enclosing the garbage structure with those."

Gordon said the group will be advocating for the development to meet the standards of the surrounding properties, by limiting the build to six homes per acre as opposed to more than 20.

"That would give you 24 houses on the site, and that would be in keeping with the four streets that surround the site. And it would also reflect both the existing official plan and what they call the new official plan that has not yet passed the region. And 24 houses on this site is what would be consistent with the surrounding neighbourhood,"

Gordon said.

Bartlett agreed. "It definitely should be low-density residential, and done in a way that fits in with the local neighbourhood and local streetscapes and respects what this town is about."

Gordon said with 24 homes on the site, versus the selling price of \$4.925 million, the developer could still stand to make about \$20 million on the property.

"If you had 24 lots, you sold them for an excess of \$1 million each, then you wouldn't have to do a thing other than the paperwork and you're going to walk away with \$20 million in your pocket, or more."

Other concerns the group has are the planned access roads for the apartment complex.

"They've introduced this whole road system for the apartment, another road system for the singles in the semis," Tintinalli said.

"They say that the semis and the singles are reflective of the houses in the neighbourhood" but the planned houses "are surrounded by pavement. They have tiny postage stamp patios that are accessed from the master bedroom," she said.

"The access road to the apartment building runs right through the middle of the lot and exits and enters on Gage Street and Centre Street. That is contrary

to the official plan. Even for medium density, it's contrary to the official plan. And it's just ruining those streets to have all those cars, garbage trucks, delivery trucks, whatever going in and out of what is a local street," Bartlett said.

"I worry about what the intentions of those are. Are they going to be short-term rent? Who's going to want to buy them when they can buy (a house with a garden)."

Another issue they fear will be overlooked is the potential for the 71 apartments to be used as illegal short-term rentals.

"One other small thing — and this about the reality of life, not what the law is — with 71 apartments in this building ... this is just going to be a magnet for investors to buy those units and albeit rent them out illegally," Gordon said.

He noted the town already has a problem with illegal short-term rentals in town and fears there would be no hope of them managing an apartment building.

"And I can see this isn't gonna be certainly a building of families and homes and residents who will contribute to the community. This can be a lot of investors," he said.


"It becomes a community issue for the entire town."

Adding to the frustration, the group said while the town's planner has been "responsive" to their emails, they've "heard nothing from the politicians."

"I have heard, though, the politicians are not supposed to publicly comment on an application before it goes to council or before they get the recommendation of the planning department, which seems totally bizarre to me. But that's what I have heard. They have a policy — which is absurd, because why do we have these people (elected to represent us)," Tintinalli said.

The group is asking all concerned residents to sign up to be a member at postofnotl.com and to attend the next public meeting about the development on Jan. 10.





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Liberals, Tories, NDP all **ready** for election

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

They're off and ready to run.

With a provincial election on the horizon, the three major political parties all have picked candidates for Niagara-on-the-Lake's riding.

By law, Ontario's provincial election must be held on or before June 2, 2022.

The Liberals in Niagara Falls riding (which includes NOTL and Fort Erie) acclaimed Ashley Waters as their candidate last week.

Incumbent New Democrat MPP Wayne Gates was selected last month to defend



From left: New Democrat candidate Wayne Gates (incumbent), Progressive Conservative candidate Bob Gale and Liberal candidate Ashley Waters. FILE/SOURCED/SUPPLIED



his seat and Niagara Falls Regional Coun. Bob Gale was chosen as the Progressive Conservative party's candidate last March.

Waters, a mother of two, lives in Niagara Falls with her husband Jeremy.

A Brock University political science graduate,

she has worked for Scouts Canada as a non-profit manager the past 11 years and prior to that worked at the Scotia Bank Convention Centre and Fallsview Casino Resort.

She was a finalist for the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce's Women in

Business Awards this fall, was a founding member of NEXTNiagara and served on the Niagara Connects Council, a network for building a stronger future for the region.

Gale, a prominent business owner, is in his second term on regional council.

Pharmacy can't meet COVID **vaccine** demand

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

Sean Simpson needs help.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake pharmacist has plenty of COVID vaccine available for boosters, kids jabs and people needing first and second doses.

What he doesn't have is enough hours in the day or qualified staff to meet the demand for shots.

And besides vaccinations, there's flu shots to be given out, testing for symptomatic and asymptomatic people, plus non-stop inquiries from patients about when they can get whatever shot they're desperately waiting for.

He's not complaining, just being realistic.

"The reality is there's a massive bottleneck right now and we're going as fast as we can," he said in an interview Tuesday.

That bottleneck is caused by many factors, including the government making more and more people eligible for vaccinations without ensuring there are enough health care workers in the field to deliver the jabs.

It's a situation Simpson knows all too well.

"We're booking into the middle of January at the moment. That's the only availability we have."

Nearly two years into the pandemic having enough



Pharmacist Sean Simpson says demand for COVID shots far exceeds the ability of pharmacies like his to get needles into arms. FILE

trained and qualified health care staff available is a problem across the province.

"We can't increase capacity. We're having a hard time managing the capacity that we're already able to provide," he said.

Simpson's two NOTL pharmacies have job postings and are keen to hire, but that all takes time.

Julie Dyck at Stone Road Pharmacy in Virgil is also swamped.

"We are currently vaccinating over 100 adults weekly and have had a clinic for 20 children and have another clinic booked for before Christmas," she told The Lake Report.

"The demand is so high right now that we are booking eight weeks in advance," she said.

Demand is not letting up but most people are being understanding and patient, Simpson said.

However, some have un-

realistic expectations.

"Some people seem to think that the government announces eligibility so that means they should just be able to walk into a pharmacy that day" and get their shot, he said.

"So, compounded by those unrealistic expectations, compounded by panic around the new variant, compounded by people's travel schedules and holiday parties, people seem to think the vaccine is their passport to a normal holiday season," he said.

People need to temper their expectations, he said, and avoid scenarios like, "I've got a dinner party on Friday night. I want to get my booster before I go." But we all know it takes two weeks from a shot to build up immunity so getting a booster shot on a Thursday isn't going to do much for you on the Friday."

Because it is focusing on vaccinating children under

12, Niagara's public health department is doing few adult shots now, unlike last spring and summer when there were adult clinics at arenas and community centres across the region.

Now, much of the burden is falling to pharmacies, which are trying to juggle all their regular duties on top of a flood of vaccination requests.

Simpson's has 1,200 people on a wait list for boosters at its Virgil site and 600 at its Apothecary in Old Town. While there might be some duplication on the two lists, those people represent many days of vaccinations before they're reduced, he said.

"We're working absolutely as hard as we can but we also need to be able to take a day or two through the holidays to enjoy with our family and friends," he said.

Looking ahead to the holidays, Simpson strongly advises people to follow public health guidance about social gatherings and certainly to "avoid large parties."

The Omicron variant spreads quickly "and people need to be mindful of that."

In the meantime, he encourages people to "dial things back just a little bit" for Christmas and New Year's celebrations – and get their booster shots at the first opportunity, whether it's here in NOTL or elsewhere.

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EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

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

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

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

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

COVID Tracker

NOTL active cases: 21

Region active cases: 513

Region deaths: 444

Region total cases: 19,456

Region resolved cases: 18,499

**Dec. 15 data per Niagara Region Public Health*



Contributed by Patty Garriock

“Happiness is an accident of nature, a beautiful and flawless aberration.”

-Pat Conroy.

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

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Have a lead on a story?

Call 905.359.2270 or send an email to editor@niagaranow.com



Santa cruised around Niagara-on-the-Lake on Sunday, one day later than scheduled due to high winds preventing his sleigh from landing at the Niagara District Airport. The Big Man reminded children to leave him milk and cookies as he passed through Cannery Park subdivision waving and belting a big “Ho Ho Ho!” RICHARD HARLEY

Editorial

Giving back and paying it forward

Kevin MacLean
Managing Editor

‘Tis the season, the time of year when kindness, spreading festive cheer and good news all seem to be in abundance.

This is the final edition of The Lake Report for 2021, a year that began in the middle of a pandemic and ends – in the middle of the same pandemic – with a new viral threat thanks to Omicron, but plenty of hope thanks to vaccines, booster shots and the hard work of our front-line health care workers to get those needles into arms.

As our columnist Dr. William Brown warns this week, there is plenty to be worried about regarding Omicron, but we really won’t know how bad it may or may not be ... for a few weeks. So, let’s all be careful out there.

And as Niagara-on-the-Lake pharmacist Sean Simpson tells us, do whatever you can to get your COVID booster (or a first or second shot, if you are one of the few who has not). But recognize that our pharmacies are going full tilt trying to accommodate the demand. There just are not enough



hours in the day – or enough staff – to meet that demand.

A little understanding and empathy will go a long way on that front.

Two other stories in particular this week drove home for us how kindness and caring can make a difference in the community.

Again this year, via NOTL Gives Back, the staff of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake have

opted to think of others instead of themselves at Christmastime.

The success of the NOTL Gives Back project, inspiring town workers and many others in the community to donate goods, clothing, cash and more to help those in need, is remarkable. Kudos to our town staff and everyone else across the community who helped gather items to donate to Newark Neighbours.

By far the most heart-warming story is the tale of the inclusive playground at Crossroads Public School.

It was completed nearly two years ago, but its use was restricted by COVID protocols. It is wonderful to read the comments of kids and parents about how important something as simple as a playground can be.

How everyone came together to fundraise for the project. How the Virgil Business Association encouraged them all to aim high and think big. And, lastly, how private donors made sure the project met its goal.

That sort of pulling together is a common theme for this community.

But the outcome – a play area in which children can enjoy themselves regardless of their abilities – means that a generation of children growing up here will know and recognize that inclusion is far more than a modern buzz word.

This is the sort of investment and action that will pay dividends in the lives of our children – and their children – for many years to come.

What a Christmas gift it is.

editor@niagaranow.com

HEY NOTL! WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR DINNER?

← **Italian Pizza Pasta** or Spanish Tapas →

NAPLES-ON-THE-LAKE OR CATALONIA-ON-THE-LAKE



Town council **should not** be advocating for businesses to pay a 'living wage'

Bill Garriock
Special to The Lake Report

When did it become the role of town council to "provide leadership" to encourage businesses in the private sector to pay what anti-poverty groups advocate is a living wage for all workers?

And why would council, in an open session, discuss and vote on the possible adoption of "a living wage" for the town when it is clearly a compensation issue that should first be discussed under the practice of good corporate governance, particularly when the town has an employee bargaining group?

Because the living wage concept was discussed publicly, and not privately, before the implications of adopting it are clear, there is now likely an expectation that the town should be paying a minimum wage of \$18.91 for workers, the amount reported as the living wage for this area.

The reporting of the council meeting, ("Living wage proposal a divisive issue for council," The Lake Report, Dec. 2), suggests there is not

a clear understanding of the subject matter or the implications of adopting a living wage program.

"A living wage" and "minimum wage" are not the same.

The latter is set by the province and is the minimum that all employers must pay their workers, and it is scheduled to rise to \$15 per hour in January in Ontario.

A living wage, on the other hand, is different, and is a different amount for each town and city.

It is designed to let people know the relative cost of living in a particular area.

Living Wage Canada defines it as: "To pay wages to both direct and contract employees that are sufficient to provide the basics to families with children calculated as an hourly rate at which households can meet its basic needs, once government transfers have been added to the family income and deductions have been extracted."

It is based on two full-time income earners supporting a family of four, including two children, one of which is in full-time day-

care and the other in "before and after" child care.

As reported, the 15 to 20 Town of NOTL workers to whom the adoption of a living wage would apply would include camp counsellors, swim and aquatic staff, and library staff. These seem to be different than the criteria outlined above by Living Wage Canada.

We all want everyone to have the opportunity to earn as much as they can to support themselves and their families in their chosen lifestyle.

And if they genuinely need financial help, society should be there for them. Our society is out of balance with respect to the distribution of wealth and that issue needs to be addressed, but it is not the role of our town council to do that and in the process interfere with the rights of those in the private sector who have their own issues to deal with.

The cost to adopt a living wage compensation program will be much more than first evident.

The town has a pay system of grades for each

job category and pay bands. These are usually determined by compensation surveys and models that have as their purpose to ensure that employees across the organization are fairly paid both internally and in comparison with other organizations.

Any change has a ripple effect. Many factors are considered, including the value of benefits provided, usually 25 to 30 per cent above the basic hourly wage.

That is the role of council: to set and oversee compensation policy to ensure that employees are fairly and equitably paid.

But is not the role of council to ensure that all employees in our community are fairly paid, nor to promote "a provincewide push from anti-poverty advocates to secure a living wage for workers."

And it is not the role, as Coun. Norman Arsenault said, "to encourage businesses to adopt a living wage" or to suggest what they should pay their employees.

Bill Garriock lives in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Creative NIMBYism **reinforces need** for Pride crosswalk

Dear editor:

When information about a rainbow crosswalk for Old Town first surfaced, we were delighted to see that some of those who are leaders in the town, both elected and otherwise, were supportive of an initiative that demonstrated support for a group of people who have historically been

shunned, spat upon, physically abused and generally disparaged.

The rainbow crosswalk concept is a simple and yet very public statement that very clearly demonstrates acceptance.

As indicated by the creative variations of NIMBYism articulated in your letters section, not all

residents of Niagara concur with the growing levels of acceptance of this cohort in our society.

However, such a crosswalk is a visible indicator that leaders of our community see LGBTQ+ persons and their community finally considered as equal citizens not only within the principles of Canadian

governance but also within the hearts and attitudes of many within our community.

Those who persist in disparaging the plan only reinforce the necessity to finally act upon and complete the rainbow crosswalk project in a timely manner.

*Ray and Elsie Rempel
NOTL*

Show appreciation, inclusion to **everyone** in community

Dear editor:

In all my years this is the first time I have written a letter to the editor. I am writing about Derek Collins's Dec. 2 letter, "Argument for Old Town rainbow crosswalk is flawed."

I also am a taxpayer and resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake and have been for many years.

Today it is not always easy to keep up with what is politically correct and one can be afraid of voicing an opinion for fear of being called prejudiced.

I, for one, don't care if someone is LGBTQ, black, brown or has purple polka dots. We all bleed red.

Why does one group have to have a rainbow crosswalk painted to show

their Pride? I am proud of who I am, Caucasian, female and straight. Perhaps I should have a white crosswalk painted for my Pride. And why not a black one, etc.

Let's show appreciation and inclusion to all of our community, not just one segment of it.

Let's put our tax money where it will do the most

good and use it to send vaccines to poorer countries, to help move us out of this worldwide pandemic.

That way we all benefit, no matter what our race, creed or preference.

I salute the LGBTQ for their Pride, but that doesn't make them special. We are all proud of who we are.

*Cindy Carter
NOTL*

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Nurses **deserve better** from province

Dear editor:
Throughout my life I have always had a tremendous respect for front-line responders. I guess it's because my sister was a nurse (RN) and the police in our town were my buddies growing up. I played ball for their team and often made minor repairs on their personal vehicles.
Nurses seem to be able to put a smile on the face of a child, an elderly person and someone who may have very little time left on this Earth. The empathy so many of them show for their patients is apparent day in and day out. Can you imagine

how you would feel, after months and months and long hours every day with a threat of coming down with COVID or perhaps passing it on to a loved one and then being let down by our government?
They had insufficient PPE equipment, they were short-staffed and their hours on the job were insane. The hours they put in were dangerous as they tried to keep their patients alive while losing some of their colleagues to COVID.
Then came the news that for their dedication and service they were to be given a



Premier Doug Ford.

salary increase. An increase of 1%. Yes, 1%.
How would you feel if that was the reward you received for your dedication and commitment to patients, people you never knew and may not ever know?

How many professionals can put this sort of service record on their resumes?
I feel a debt of gratitude to all of our front-line workers. After many years in the nursing profession my own sister now has terminal cancer and has to rely on the help and commitment of others to keep her comfortable in her final days.
Let's not forget our front-line workers. We need them more than they will ever know. Let's show them our gratitude in whatever way possible.

Tom Thornton
NOTL

Goal is **public input** on any crosswalk decision

Dear editor:
I believe that one or two brief corrections and further comment are needed in reference to the letter, Objection to a simple crosswalk speaks volumes (Dec. 9).
Contrary to what the writer has said, my only objection has been in the lack of clarity with respect to public input (and of those who would rather ignore it) in any final decision on a crosswalk. Therefore the issue of true colours is quite irrelevant.
Regarding my reference to LGBTQ "lifestyle," as far as I can see, the definition of the word lifestyle does

not exclude involuntary behaviour, which makes his suggestion to me quite unnecessary and look really very silly.
The belief that nine elected members of council might be supportive of his position does not alter or eliminate the importance of the need for public input.
In just one sentence, the entire economic argument of Jordon Williams is dismissed – incredible.
As I think most people already know, there is a lot more to this issue than just slapping down some paint

Derek Collins
NOTL

Gateway bump out is **no cause for concern**

Dear editor:
Your very frequent correspondent, Samuel Young, has surpassed himself with his comments regarding the now three-way stop signs at the corner of Queen and Mississagua streets, ("Gateway bump out is going to cause accidents," Dec. 9).
He has clearly demonstrated that he is a few

bricks short of a load, once again.
For instance, he avows that his friends observed a "high-speed sports car" having to brake suddenly when a crossing motorist was making a perfectly legal right turn.
Mr. Young blames the town for the incident. No intelligent person would concur, Mr. Editor, for the

simple reason that the sports car driver clearly ignored the stop sign in front of him/her.
Presumably because a minor "bump" has been incorporated into this intersection, Mr. Young terms the intersection "now freakish."
I have driven through this intersection many times, as no doubt much of NOTL


has, since it was installed. It is now a clearly marked three-way intersection, very easy to navigate safely. Your correspondent's comment renders him not the sharpest tool in the shed.
I shall look forward to Mr. Young's future letters with even greater interest than in the past.

John Buchanan
NOTL

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Rental operators are now 99% compliant, CAO says

Evan Saunders
 Local Journalism Initiative
 The Lake Report

Chief administrator Mar-
 nie Cluckie says 99 per cent
 of short-term rental opera-
 tors in Niagara-on-the-Lake
 are now complying with the
 town's licensing and bylaw
 requirements.

"We're doing really well
 with the short-term rental
 program," Cluckie told
 councillors during Dec. 13's
 committee of the whole
 meeting.

On Sept. 7, the town
 rolled out a program with
 Granicus govService
 HostCompliance to monitor
 short-term rentals alongside
 the administrative monetary
 penalty (AMP) system to
 better fine individuals for
 breaking town bylaws.

As of Dec. 10, only one
 operator is non-compliant,



NOTL has achieved a 99 per cent compliance rate with short-term rentals. FILE

she said.

Cluckie said the town
 investigated six operators in
 the past week for violat-
 ing the short-term rental
 bylaw.

"I'm happy to say that all
 of those operators worked
 swiftly to resolve the issues
 and in most cases it was

simply an education piece,"
 she said.

Maintaining a 99 or 100
 per cent compliance rate
 will be nearly impossible,
 Cluckie said.

"As the non-compliance
 numbers can change daily,
 bylaw staff anticipate that
 the number of non-com-

pliant operators will be
 maintained in the range of
 0 to 10 at any given time,"
 according to an information
 report on bylaw enforce-
 ment.

Short-term rental compli-
 ance is a "high-priority"
 for the bylaw division, the
 report said.

Chautauqua group doesn't object to easing parking rules in off-season

Kevin MacLean
 The Lake Report

Leaders of a residents
 group that successfully lob-
 bied for strict new parking
 restrictions to reduce traffic
 problems in the Chautau-
 qua neighbourhood say
 they have no quarrel with
 a suggestion to limit the
 crackdown to Niagara-on-
 the-Lake's peak tourism
 season.

Coun. Clare Cameron
 presented a motion to coun-
 cil on Nov. 29 that aimed
 to remove parking bans on
 some streets in Chautauqua
 between October and April
 so residents could have an
 easier time parking during
 the quieter, snowy months
 and the holidays.

After debate on the idea,
 Cameron's initial plan was
 altered and councillors de-
 cided to ask staff to prepare

a report and get public com-
 ments on the proposal.

The Friends of Ryerson
 Park group, which worked
 with town officials to
 institute several restrictions,
 including fines of up to \$150
 in some areas of Chautau-
 qua, is fine with the idea of
 targeting only the busy sea-
 son, says John Scott, one of
 the people who spearheaded
 the changes.

Another group, the Chau-
 tauqua Residents Associa-
 tion, was cited by Cameron
 as having some concerns
 about the plan to only im-
 pose the restrictions during
 the summer season.

However, Brian Crow,
 president of the association
 and also one of the leaders of
 the Friends of Ryerson Park,
 said that's not the case.

"From the beginning, the
 Friends of Ryerson Park,
 with Chautauqua Residents



Parking in some areas of Chautauqua will land you a \$150 fine. That could change in the slow season. FILE

Association agreement, led
 Chautauqua residents (and
 also many supporters from
 outside Chautauqua) to have
 the town successfully ad-
 dress the issues of parking
 and traffic in our commu-
 nity," Crow told The Lake
 Report in an email.

He said the associa-
 tion endorsed and supported
 the Friends group's efforts
 then and the association's
 board recently reconfirmed
 its support of the Friends of
 Ryerson Park.

In a statement, Scott
 and Shaun Devlin said the
 Friends group sees "ad-
 vantages in the proposed
 adjustment and will commit

to working with the town
 to help determine the most
 appropriate dates."

Their group plans to
 ask supporters for their
 views "on the successful
 remedial measures imple-
 mented by the town as a
 pilot project in response
 to the issues and concerns
 raised last year. One of the
 recommendations for the
 consideration of the group
 is to support this parking
 adjustment."

They said the group will
 submit a report to town staff
 and council in the new year
 outlining the views of the
 members of the Friends of
 Ryerson Park.

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Wishing everyone
a safe and wonderful
holiday season!

Merry Christmas
and have a healthy
and happy New Year!
The Mastromatteo Family

A big thank you to everyone who donated \$20 for a Christmas tree! Half of the proceeds will go to Newark Neighbours to help ensure no families in Niagara-on-the-Lake go without a full belly this holiday season. Happy Holidays to all!

Use this page as wrapping paper for your last minute presents!



Reid unsure he'd stay with town after contract cut

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Canine control contractor Ken Reid may have the opportunity to stay on with the town in some capacity, but he's not entirely sure that's what he wants anymore.

"Do I want to continue working with the town after the way they dealt with this?" Reid said in an interview last week. "They just seem like they've gone absolute corporate."

Reid, who has handled animal control for the town for 22 years, said he didn't submit an application for the joint request for proposals for animal control services for the towns of Grimsby and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"There's no way I could respond to (the scope of work in) the RFP," he said.

The town is looking for comprehensive animal control that includes canines, livestock and wildlife.

Reid staying on as canine control officer "really depends on the proposals (the town receives) and if there's gaps in any of the proposals that Ken could be a good fit for," Lord Mayor Betty Disero said in an interview.

Reid did offer to stay on with the town if he is needed and is considering applying to work as a bylaw officer, he said.

"Basically, I just said if you don't get a response for the RFP or if the responses aren't satisfactory I would be available to continue covering Niagara-on-the-Lake as I have for the past 22 years."

He also requested a pay increase if the town needs him.

At the beginning of December, the town sent him a formal letter notifying him his contract would terminate in 30 days, he said.

During a joint interview with Craig Larmour at the end of November, chief administrative officer Marnie Cluckie said the town must follow a competitive and transparent process in tendering major contracts, like the one for animal control.

That procedure could mean that Reid's role as Niagara-on-the-Lake's canine control officer is ending, she said.

"We have an obligation to follow our purchasing policy and try to get the best value possible," Cluckie said.

Whoever wins the bid for the town's service could end up hiring Reid to do some of the work, she said.

Reid said he never seriously considered applying for a job with the Lincoln Humane Society or the Niagara Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. They are the only two organizations that applied for the RFP, according to Grimsby's website, where details of the RFP are posted.

Bids opened on Oct. 8 and closed on Nov. 23. Reid has said he first heard about the RFP on Oct. 21.

Larmour, director of community and development services, said the town is looking for a whole and comprehensive approach to all animal issues in Niagara-on-the-Lake, from canines to livestock and

wildlife.

"The current contract that we have is based on canines specifically," Larmour said.

"We have traditionally relied on the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) to augment the services that are provided under the canine control contract. So, we are intending to address the whole of the issue in a single process."

Larmour and Cluckie were quick to say that the change in contracting terms is not a referendum on Reid's performance as canine control officer.

"Ken's performance is not a part of this. We're looking for value for service," Larmour said.

"This is not based on a reflection of performance," Cluckie added. "We very much value the services that Ken has provided for us."

Reid told The Lake Report he does not issue tickets and focuses on compliance through discussion and educating people.

Larmour said the town supports Reid's approach to bylaw enforcement.

"When it comes to bylaw enforcement we would always prefer voluntary compliance over enforcement."

He noted approval of the contract will be up to town council.

"Our responsibility is to council and providing council with the opportunity to make a decision based on our procurement policy," he said.

Larmour said there's a possibility Reid could continue with the town if council directed it.



Ken Reid at his home on Regent Street. EVAN SAUNDERS

Reid said he asked the town about his contract on Oct. 21, before anyone had reached out to him. He was upset with how the town handled the situation.

Larmour said the town issued formal notice to Reid in October.

Cluckie said her team dealt appropriately with Reid but also said the town is working to improve its communication with contractors.

"I personally reached out to (Reid) to express that, and now we are working to ensure that we give ample notification," she said.

"I understand and appreciate his feeling that this notification could have come earlier."

Larmour also said Reid was aware his contract was ending, as he signed a five-

year agreement in 2016.

Cluckie said the town does not have a responsibility to Reid outside of his contract terms.

"Reid is not an employee of the town so the contract terms apply only," Cluckie said.

But, "the human element of things is very important to us at the town," she said.

"We want all of our vendors to feel valued, to feel appreciated and to be given ample notification."

The change in service style was born out of discussions among the chief administrators of Niagara's municipalities looking to pursue joint services, Cluckie said during the interview.

One of the fruits of those discussions was the extension of services with a joint

hearing officer between Thorold and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The two municipalities have been using the same hearing officer to review parking infractions since 2015, Larmour said.

The town is now using the same officer as Thorold to handle any bylaw infractions covered under the administrative monetary penalty system as well. This was approved by council in June.

Neither Cluckie nor Larmour could comment on possible costs of the new animal control contract.

"We are very cautious when a procurement is underway to not to speak too much about it because we don't want to jeopardize the integrity of the procurement," Cluckie said.

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Town staff choose **charity** over Christmas dinner

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

What was supposed to be a gift for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's staff has turned into a new tradition of giving back to the community.

"The town puts away a certain amount of money every year for Christmas dinner for the staff. (Last year) we told them we weren't having a Christmas dinner," Lord Mayor Betty Disero said at Newark Neighbours on Saturday.

They could have taken some gift coupons for themselves but decided instead to give it all to Newark Neighbours, the mayor said.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Gives Back is a donation drive organized by town staff to benefit Newark Neighbours.

"This year they decided to do it again. So, we are very appreciative of the staff," Disero said.

And so in the midst of a global pandemic yet another new NOTL tradition of giving and helping others was born.

Disero said kind gestures like this help strengthen the sense of community in town and noted it is needed now more than ever.

"We're still in COVID, people are still unable to make ends meet and with this new variant I'm not sure that it is going to get better or what will happen after Christmas," she said.

"But, certainly town staff are behind the community and we love them for it. I'm sure our staff will want to help out Newark Neighbours every year."

More than 1,100 pounds of warm winter



Mariitta Maavara is one of the newest volunteers with Newark Neighbours. Her peers say she has a huge heart and Maavara shed some tears on Friday when considering the amount of items donated in the spirit of Christmas. EVAN SAUNDERS

clothes were donated along with cash, food, toys and hygiene products, town spokesperson Marah Minor said in an email to The Lake Report.

"It is always important to support one another, especially during the holiday season. Giving really is better than receiving," she said.

Cindy Grant, manager of Newark Neighbours, said Christmas is usually the best time of the year for receiving donations.

There was a steady stream of cars dropping off goods last Friday, she said.

Grant thanked Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery, Crossroads Public School and King's Point condominiums among some 20 other organizations that made bulk deliveries during the drive.

"People brought bins and cartons and SUV loads of stuff," she said.

"I think I'm up to around

40 different organizations that are either donating food or gifts or monetary donations at this point. It just never ends, it's beautiful. Just wonderful."

A flurry of people were organizing donations at Newark Neighbours, but all the volunteers agreed on one thing: Mariitta Maavara has the biggest heart.

Maavara has been volunteering with Newark Neighbours since 2019, just before the pandemic hit.

"I believe that you always have to give back," she said as she organized a trailer full of donations.

She felt drawn to Newark Neighbours as an organization that helps those in need in a place like NOTL.

"Let's face it, Niagara-on-the-Lake is a prosperous community on the whole but there are people who need help," she said.

She said Newark Neighbours enables the spirit of

giving in NOTL.

"It gives people a way to participate. People like to help but they may not know how or have the time to be able to do it," she said.

Maavara is proud that Newark Neighbours does not waste any donations.

"If we can't use it, we find a place to use it. You just can't waste — waste not want not."

"You know, the basic message of Christmas ..." Maavara trailed off as tears filled her eyes and she took a moment to collect herself.

"The basic message of Christmas is peace and sharing," she said tearfully.

When the other volunteers saw that Maavara was crying they all gathered around and gave her a big hug.

"They don't come any more hardworking than her," Grant said of Maavara.

"She's like an Energizer bunny."

RIDDLE ME THIS

What has roots as nobody sees,
Is taller than trees,
Up, up it goes,
And yet never grows?

Last issue: Alive without breath, As cold as death; Never thirsty, ever drinking, All in mail never clinking. What am I?

Answer: A fish

Answered first by: Maria Janeiro

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Pam Dowling, Eva Rasciauskas, Margie Enns, Sheila Meloche

Email answers, with your name, to editor@niagaranow.com for a chance to win a prize. (Subject line: Riddle me this)

Eva and Margie were correct that this riddle is from J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit."
Hint: This week's riddle is, too.

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SINKING OF THE FOAM: PART 4

Almost 150 years on, the Foam is still part of RCYC sailing lore

The last word in our four-part saga of the Foam goes to the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, one of North America's most respected sailing and yachting organizations. It was from the club's sheltered harbour on Toronto Island that the Foam sailed, south to Niagara, on that warm July day.

Tim Taylor
The Lake Report



Left: One of many, sometimes contradictory, accounts of the story of the Foam, from the Niagara Advance in 1936. Right: Karen McRae is chair of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club's heritage and archives committee. She has frequently sailed from Toronto to Niagara-on-the-Lake. SUPPLIED PHOTOS

perhaps the most straightforward explanation, in the magazine, The Sailor:

"While the details of this tragedy will never be known as a certainty, it was commonly supposed that the Foam was 'pooped,' filled up and foundered. She was a boat of very little freeboard and was probably carrying very little canvas, and what with the reduced speed owing to this, and the outgoing current, the following waves tumbled aboard and quickly filled her."

History records the time of the loss of the Foam on the Niagara Bar, just offshore at Niagara-on-the-Lake, as 10:30 p.m. on July 11, 1874. That was the time V.W. Vernon's watch stopped.

Vernon was one of seven young men, all from prominent Toronto families, who lost their lives that fateful summer evening.

The Foam left the Royal Canadian Yacht Club in Toronto mid-afternoon of that day, bound for Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The RCYC takes its history seriously. But the club's archival records shed little light on the circumstances of the Foam's sinking.

Karen McRae is an RCYC board member and chair of the club's heritage and archives committee. She's been sailing for over 50 years, more than 40 from the RCYC, and has completed the crossing to Niagara-on-the-Lake many times.

"Having come up to the Niagara Bar, I know how turbulent the water can be there when you get the current going against the wind coming across the lake," she says. "It is quite easy to understand how a boat could be swamped or capsized in those waves."

McRae believes the story of the Foam is quite well known by members of the club, particularly the older sailors. She remembers

visiting the Foam monument and burial plot behind St. Mark's church, many years ago.

"The Foam is such a fascinating story," she says. "And a cautionary tale," she adds thoughtfully.

"When you go out on the water, bad things can happen. And sometimes very bad things happen."

But she believes it is highly unlikely the circumstances around the Foam would repeat themselves today.

"Boats are so much better designed, we have wonderful things like lifejackets, and we have radios, distress signals — all of which would prevent an incident like this from happening today."

"One of things that immediately struck me was that they set off for Niagara at 3:30 p.m. So, they would be arriving in the dark. And didn't have the benefit of weather forecasts, radar and so on.

"It was an accident waiting to happen."

A story by honorary historian Albert Mallon in a 1996 edition of Kwasind, the club's periodical, relates the scant information about the tragedy:

It is "surmised that they swamped without warning crossing the bar. They had apparently reefed by then and possibly lacked the power to drive through the maelstrom of lake sea meeting river currents."

In a later letter to

Kwasind in 1997, Maurice Anderson, a family relative of the boat's owners recalls a different story:

"The two Andersons who owned the yacht were my great uncles, younger brothers to my grandfather, John Weir, who became Rear Commodore of the club in 1883.

"There are no survivors of my father's generation, who might well have been able to add to the story. The only recollection that was handed down to me was that it was thought that Foam sailed between two vessels, one a tug and the other the tow, and the top rope sank the yacht."

W.F.N. Windeyer, a prominent member of the RCYC in the 1930s, wrote

In the 1990s, the RCYC mounted a campaign to repair the weather-beaten monument in the NOTL cemetery and install a large bronze plaque describing the events of the tragic day.

McRae is determined to further commemorate the loss of the Foam for the 150th anniversary of the event, in the summer of 2024.

"I think the club should really be doing something to commemorate the events, in the next couple of years. I'm sure there would be great interest amongst members of the RCYC."

"We all love cruising to Niagara-on-the-Lake."

To our friends and family of Upper Canada Animal Hospital, and the Niagara on the Lake Community, to say what a year would be an understatement. We have continued to face the unknowns of a pandemic, we have rolled up our sleeves for vaccinations, we have endured a provincial lock down and re-opening, with ever changing rules. We have suffered loss, and we have welcomed new family members.

The emotional roller coaster of 2021 has been a whirlwind, and as the year comes to an end we reflect on the good times and the bad. And we discover that we are truly blessed that the good outweighs the bad. We are grateful to belong to such a strong community. You have continued to smile, yes even with a mask we can see it.

We hear it in your voice and see it in your eyes. You have been kind and you have been patient. And we thank you for this.

We are looking forward to 2022 and all the incredible things it will bring.

Happy Holidays to you all. Wishing you a safe, happy, and healthy holiday season.

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With inclusive playground, no child gets left out at Crossroads

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Crossroads Public School is entering a new phase, one where no child ever gets left out of the fun.

The Virgil school last Thursday opened its new inclusive playground, one designed so children with accessibility needs can play alongside their peers.

“It’s so nice and super inclusive so everyone can play together now, which we love,” said Crossroads student Felix Vollmer, 12.

“It’s so fun,” student Megan Dyck, 12, exclaimed.

The kids at Crossroads were excited to be able to include all their classmates in their play from now on.

“We used to hate seeing that we couldn’t play with Dylan sometimes or even Megan or anyone, and we would hate that,” Felix said.

Crossroads student Dylan Dietsch uses a wheelchair and one of the additions to the playground is a large boat-like structure with a ramp leading up to it. Dylan said it is his favourite.

Once inside the boat, there’s a special spot carved



Left: Dylan Dietsch (centre) and his buddies Megan Dyck, Brooke Whyte and Felix Vollmer at the inclusive playground. The kids said the best thing about the playground will be never having to see another student get left out again. Right: Principal Kate Fish was happy to see the playground open. EVAN SAUNDERS



out just for kids who use wheelchairs to sit so they can get in on the fun with everybody else. Kids rock the boat back and forth and make believe they are sailing on the high seas.

The students themselves work to accommodate their fellow classmates. At the opening of the playground “O Canada” was played and students performed the whole anthem in sign language.

And they do that every single morning for Dylan, principal Kate Fish said.

“For us it’s amazing that it’s not just an accessible piece, it’s also an inclusive

piece,” said Dylan’s father Matthew Dietsch.

“Everyone always thinks accessible and inclusive are the same thing but on a piece like this kids can play on either side of kids with disabilities so it really makes it special.”

Dietsch said seeing the inclusive playground unveiled at Crossroads assured him he made the right choice as a father enrolling his son at the school.

“The whole school has such a neat buzz about it as far as inclusivity goes,” he said.

“Looking back at it, we couldn’t have made a better

decision. It’s so cool being able to go around town and kids come up to us and say, ‘Hey Dyl, how’s your day going?’ ”

“You don’t always get that if you’re in a different city.”

Along with the playground designed to allow inclusive play for Crossroads students there is a “buddy bench.” If a student sits on the buddy bench, other students know they are looking for someone to hang out with.

The push to create the inclusive playground was started by Amber Dyck, whose daughter Megan is a Grade 7 student at Cross-

roads. She has a rare genetic disorder affecting her joints and spine as well as mild cognitive difficulties.

“How do you take these challenges and make school work for your child? How do we provide authentic integration in our schools and communities?” Dyck asked the crowd gathered around the playground.

“I think that the building of this accessible playground exemplifies the answer.”

The playground’s construction was a collaborative effort. Together with Dietsch, Dyck started fundraising to make it happen.

Originally, Dyck hoped to build a single inclusive structure on the playground, until she approached the Virgil Business Association.

“They encouraged with their words and finances to dream bigger and our original idea of a single piece of accessible equipment became a full, new accessible playground,” she said.

The facility cost about \$115,000 to build. It was completed in March 2020, but was unable to officially open until now because of the pandemic.

The fundraising team led by Dyck and Dietsch raised some \$40,000 for the project through the school’s Home, Garden and Craft Show. The Virgil Business Association contributed another \$40,000.

More than a dozen private donors helped raise a further \$40,000 for the playground. Fish thanked Niagara Inflatables & Games Inc., Peninsula Flooring and Emerald Retirement Residence, to name a few.

“I have so much hope for my daughter and her future when I look at this project and all of you amazing people who have made this happen. I wanted to remind her of how much goodness and generosity and love there is in this world,” Dyck said.

She said she had “tears in my eyes” the first time she saw Megan play with friends on the playground.

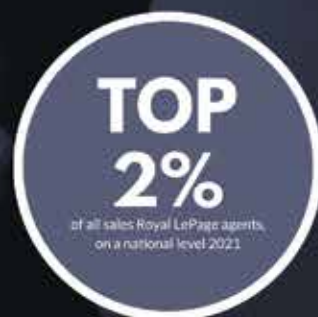
The playground “tells the story of what teamwork, creativity, compassion and perseverance can build,” she said.

“Through these things the barriers to inclusion will continue to fall.”

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Glass court featured as White Oaks hosts junior squash open

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's White Oaks Resort was home to Canada's Junior Open squash championships over the weekend.

The competition attracted about 250 players from across Canada and the world and they competed in about 500 matches over two days — something White Oaks is well equipped for.

New this year to the junior squash championships was the addition of the U23 category and players from that age group were on Squash Canada's glass court on Saturday.

One match between Heather McLachlan of St. Catharines and Catherine Giachino of Ottawa ended 3-0 for McLachlan.

McLachlan, 22, said she was excited to win at her home club.

"I've actually played this tournament specifically since I was like 11. So I've played every age group, and then they added the U23 this year, so I thought I should give it one last shot."

She said she started playing squash when she was just seven or eight.



Lucia Bicknell and Hannah Guthrie face off on Squash Canada's glass court. RICHARD HARLEY

Overall she said she was happy with how she played. "I felt really good today. I've never actually played a full match on an all glass court before so it took some adjustment, but I felt good. I like the court."

McLachlan plays for the Queen's University team

in Kingston where she is a biology major. She said her and a teammate had been practising four or five times a week leading up to the competition.

"I haven't been in this environment for a long time. I've just been playing university squash tournaments, which are a little

smaller. It's kind of nice to have a lot of people around to watch. I feel like it makes you play a little better when you have a bit of pressure on you."

On Saturday she said she was hoping to bring St. Catharines into the national spotlight with a win. After the tournament she'll continue with her university competitions and plans to enter the senior national championships, too.

Her opponent Giachino said she too decided to play this year because the U23 category debuted.

"It's my first match. So I lost my first round. So now I'll drop into the consolation and play it out for fifth place."

Giachino, 21, said she got into squash when she was about six. "I've played my whole life," she said.

Now she's studying nursing at Western University.

Despite her loss, she was still in good spirits.

"It's very cool with the setup with the glass court. It's the first time that they've done that," she said.

Squash Canada plans to use the portable glass court in competitions across Canada.

Tournament referee Les Homme, who manages the schedule for referees for the nearly 500 games, said the Junior Squash Open has been hosted in Niagara-on-the-Lake for about 15 years. "Because it's a great

facility, right? The hotel and everything right here, beautiful squash courts. The facilities are so good. It's a great venue for us."

The open tournament, as opposed to a national competition, attracts players from all over the world, Homme said, from places like England, Pakistan, Columbia and Egypt.

The U.S. Open is the following week, he said, so people come to the Canadian tourney as "sort of a warm-up."

While the tournament usually has about 300 to 400 competitors, this year it's a bit smaller because of COVID limiting travel.

He said it's a "very high profile tournament," being about the second most high-profile junior event in North America — second to the U.S. open.

With just four days to compete, Homme said the tournament runs a lot of matches on a tight schedule.

"There's nine matches an hour and we go from 8 o'clock in the morning till 9 o'clock at night on Saturday and Sunday and then Monday and Tuesday are a little bit smaller," he said, sitting in front of a computer with a huge spreadsheet of all the matches.

He said overall it's great to be back to doing tournaments.

"I think it's a great tournament. I mean, the kids have been very good. I've always been amazed by all these rules with the masks and everything — everybody wears their mask, nobody complains. You know, typical Canadians, right?"



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Amelia Knapp plays her way to a 3-2 victory against Sara Khan Saturday. RICHARD HARLEY



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Pauline Reimer Gibson
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Streaking Predators facing tougher test vs. North York

Kevan Dowd
Special to The Lake Report

It was another successful weekend for the Niagara Jr. A Predators with two victories pushing their winning streak to 10 games.

The team (18-4-0) remains in third place in their division of the Greater Metro Hockey League behind Durham and North York.

Their final game of 2021 this Sunday against North York will be a tough test as the Renegades handed the Predators a 5-2 loss in late October.

In back-to-back home games last week, Niagara beat the Windsor Aces 11-8 Friday night and the Streetsville Flyers 8-2 Sunday afternoon. Friday's game was in stark contrast to Niagara's game against Windsor just a week prior, when they skated to an easy 10-3 victory.

"They beat us to the puck, they beat us to the man and they beat us to the net," said head coach and team owner Robert Turnbull about the Aces. "They outplayed us."

Turnbull feels some of his players were expecting a repeat of the prior week's game, which may have caused them to be a little overconfident. He had also used the large lead as a means to give some players more ice time, something he did not repeat this week, which caught a few players by surprise, he said.

"Some of the players didn't get the ice time they thought they were going to get, because we beat them badly last time," he said.

"Beating them badly last time doesn't mean it's going to be the same this time.

So the kids got their heads down, a few boys lost their confidence. We talked about it and between the second a third period a few words were said and they did a better job at taking their man and we got a little bit of goaltending in the third period."

Windsor had to pick up two substitutes from the Plattsville Lakers for Friday's game ...

Read the full story online at niagaranow.com/news.phtml/6766.

Work begins on Virgil's community rink

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

The first posts went in the ground Sunday morning for the new community ice rink in Virgil.

Paolo Miele, a former town councillor and driving force behind the rink initiative, was at his diner serving hungry customers when the work began. He said while he's looking forward to it, the rink will have to wait until the weather is a bit cooler.

Back at the Virgil Sports Park, the walls of the rink were being set up and levelled out on the baseball diamond near the concession stands.

Ian Zancola, owner of Hosa Rink Solutions, was working with two crew members to get the walls up.

"We're building them a basic wood frame outdoor rink, 40 feet by 80 feet, so we'll lay out the dimensions, make sure everything is square. Then we'll place a wooden frame down, it's supported by L-frame brackets."

"We'll fabricate all that to the slope of the diamond as well because obviously



Ian Zancola and his crew put up the barriers for the new community rink. RICHARD HARLEY

it's not perfectly flat. That ensures that you'll get flat level ice," he said.

"Then in about a week or so, once the weather gets colder, we come back and put in a eight-millimetre poly white liner. That will hold the water, it'll freeze and then they'll have a great ice rink to skate all year."

He said the size of the rink would have a maximum capacity of about 50 to 75 people.

That "would be packed," he noted, adding he's not sure what the official

capacity of the rink will be set at.

There will be no automatic cooling, however. "We're relying on Mother Nature," Zancola said.

He said there are a couple of options to flood the rink, but imagines it'll be the simplest one — "Whoever their volunteers or workers are, they'll shovel all this snow off or when it gets to chopped up, shovel it off, and then they're hooking up to a hose in here and they just pull the hose out and just flood it with water so it's nice and shiny again."

Zancola, who also runs a hockey arena as his full-time job, started his rink-building company in September of this year and has already built about 20 rinks.

He said the idea came to him at the end of last season, after COVID closed many arenas and parents and kids were looking for outdoor places to skate.

Miele said next year he hopes to be able to install an automatic cooling system to keep the ice frozen all season.



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OPINION

Ross's Ramblings: Out for a **RIDE**, twice in one December night

Ross Robinson
Special to The Lake Report

Sometimes in life we are lucky to enjoy an excellent experience twice. Very rarely though, twice in one evening.

After a delightful Christmas Covelli pizza and chat with my son at Garage Pizza in St. Davids last Friday, I was returning to Old Town along Highway 55. It was peaceful, still and dark. Absolutely uneventful. Cold enough for early December.

I was admiring the festive and effulgent Christmas light displays in the Village to my left, when suddenly, as I crested the wee hill to take the dip prior to the Old Winery Restaurant, red and blue flashing lights appeared. Lots of reflective uniforms and pylons.

Uh-oh, the RIDE program. Nothing to worry about, though, as Diet Pepsi with a bit of ice had been my drink of choice earlier at Garage. I slowed to a halt, following the directions of the officer with the flashlight.

"Good evening sir. We are



conducting a RIDE stop in an effort to make our roads safer this holiday season," she said. "Have you had any alcohol or drugs this evening?" She aimed her flashlight beam into my eyes, as I responded in the negative.

She seemed to believe me and then her wingman arrived at my window and asked me if I had been fastening my seat belt as I approached their checkpoint. "No, I always wear my seatbelt. And, when I play old men's hockey, I always wear a full visor."

I'll bet he was just cleverly checking my eyes and visual sobriety. He chuckled and they waved me through. It was so nice to see a job done professionally and with courtesy.

The RIDE program started in 1977, as Reduce Impaired Driving in Eto-

bicoke. It saved lives and has been expanded across Canada. Eight years later it withstood a challenge as a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Now the Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere program is used during the festive season, and occasionally throughout the year. RIDE has greatly reduced the carnage caused by drunk and impaired drivers.

Thank goodness! Before RIDE made us smarter and more responsible, there were so many tragic Christmas seasons. Our roads were a bloodbath in December, and after 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, a shocking number of drivers were ...

Read the full story online at niagaranow.com/opinion.phtml/6764



Seasons Greetings

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



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Dr. Brown: Be safe during holidays with uncertainty of Omicron variant

Dr. William Brown
Special to The Lake Report

Where SARS-Cov-2 is concerned, surprise is the operative word. As recently as last summer some experts began to imagine a world beyond COVID or at least a world where COVID was corralled well enough to begin opening up.

Then three things went wrong.

First, the anti-vaxxers dug their heels in, so the pandemic simmered and flared up throughout much of the Western world and beyond.

Second, the Israelis and Qataris discovered that the effectiveness of mRNA vaccines began to wane four to five months following the second shot, with the result that some of the fully vaccinated developed breakthrough infections, which occasionally were severe enough to warrant hospitalization.

Third and most worrisome, what many virologists feared most might happen: A new, potentially dangerous mutant version of the virus emerged a few weeks ago. It turned out to be even more transmissible than



The Omicron variant of COVID-19 is on the rise. PIXABAY

Delta and perhaps capable of skirting the antibody responses provoked by vaccines or earlier natural infections. The Omicron variant had entered the fray.

More than any previous variant, Omicron is literally armed to the teeth with over 50 mutations, far more than earlier variants, 30 of which involve the spike protein.

Some latter mutations, because of their strategic location, might facilitate the virus's chances of locking onto ACE-2 receptors in the

host cell's membrane, and perhaps, cloaking the spike protein from the body's antibodies. On the positive side there's no evidence that T cell immunity is impaired.

It's too early to say whether the worst fears of virologists and infectious disease experts are justified. So far, the variant appears to be infectious enough to displace the Delta variant and, at least in laboratory tests, it appears to be less responsive to antibody-

ies created naturally or in response to vaccines. But at least among the young, the associated clinical illness appears to be mild.

It will take several weeks before we know for sure whether this highly transmissible variant causes more severe infections in the wider population. But even if the virus proves no more lethal than Delta, transmission to more people, means more cases and deaths.

Most experts expect

current vaccines to remain effective, but less so, with only two jabs – hence the added push for booster shots these days. Recently Pfizer announced that a version of its current vaccine, engineered to deal with the Omicron and other variants, could be available by the spring of 2022. That's one of the pluses of mRNA vaccines such as Pfizer's and Moderna's products – quick adaptations to changing viral antigenic targets.

Hopefully, Omicron will turn out to be relatively benign despite its many mutations, but it is worrisome, because each new variant appears to sport more mutations – somewhat like an arms race between the virus and our defences such as vaccines, monoclonal antibody treatments and most recently antiviral drugs.

So far, the virus is more than holding its own, especially against the unvaccinated and much less success against the fully vaccinated. The reason is an ancient one, evolution on the part of the pathogen (in this case by natural selection acting on random mutations in the virus) and naturally

acquired adaptations on the part of human and other animal hosts.

This is mightily aided in the case of humans by vaccines and soon antiviral drugs, both of which, like the annual flu vaccine, will have to be regularly updated. It's a long game and we're barely through the first innings.

With more indoor activities and a certain rebelliousness and resistance on the part of many to continue social distancing and masking, this winter, like last year's, could be one to remember. Let's hope not but be prepared to adjust.

Luckily, unlike last winter, most are now fully vaccinated, and many have received a booster. That's a big plus but remember the vaccinated may develop breakthrough infections and spread the virus to the vulnerable.

Be cautious and enjoy the holiday season.

Dr. William Brown is a professor of neurology at McMaster University and co-founder of the InfoHealth series at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library.

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Across

- 9. Capital (5,4)
- 10. Maxim (5)
- 11. Femoral region (5)
- 12. Comparison standard (9)
- 13. Unusual (8)
- 14. Botch (6)
- 15. Snug (4)
- 17. Prepares for publication (5)
- 19. Homework (4)
- 22. Order to come (6)
- 23. Comfortable piece of furniture (8)
- 25. Misunderstanding (9)
- 27. Paddled (5)
- 29. Burdened (5)
- 30. Form of hypnosis (9)

Down

- 1. Expel (4)
- 2. Choice (6)
- 3. Bow and arrow skill (7)
- 4. UK biscuit brand sold as cookies (8)
- 5. Tolerate (4)
- 6. Serious collision (5-2)
- 7. Longitudinal fuselage component (8)
- 8. One who maintains accounts (10)
- 13. Easy to reach (10)
- 16. An unspecified person (8)
- 18. Hare beater (8)
- 20. Perfumed toilet water (7)
- 21. Film: "The Hunt for Red ---" (7)
- 24. Apprehensive (6)
- 26. Gammy (4)
- 28. 10 U S cents (4)

Crossword Puzzle

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Last issue's answers

S	R	T	M	R	B	N	J						
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Temptations of the table

Penny-Lynn Cookson
Special to The Lake Report

In the 17th century, the Dutch Republic became a powerhouse of economic, industrial, military, scientific and cultural success.

It was the Dutch Golden Age, a time of unprecedented wealth and prosperity. The Eighty Years' War (1568-1648), the Dutch war of independence against the rule of Habsburg Spain, had been fought and won.

Independence led to greater urbanization and a global trading empire that stretched from the Dutch East Indies to the Caribbean West Indies, from South America to west Africa, and to the South Pacific islands the Dutch named New Zealand and Tasmania.

The large Dutch naval fleet dominated the seas, defeated the English Royal Navy at Medway, profitably captured Spanish and Portuguese ships and ambitiously traded grain, herring and textiles for luxury goods to satisfy

rich burghers and a rising affluent middle class of merchants, traders and brokers.

Fruits and vegetables were imported from the Mediterranean; tobacco, squash, corn, tomatoes and sugar from the Americas; tea, silk and porcelain from China and Japan; spices from Java; gold, silver and slaves from Guinea.

There was a desire to show off this new wealth by the luxuries that indicated status. How to show it? By art!

For artists, it was a bonanza as works of art, whether originals, copies or prints, were in demand and to be found in almost all Dutch homes. This desire for art in a time when religious art was suppressed by Dutch Calvinism, led to the evolution of an independent still life genre remarkable for detailed realistic naturalism and symbolic meaning.

How was it interpreted? As class status? As Protestant morality lessons? As "memento mori" (remember you will die) or "vanitas" (vanity) works? Actually, by all. They



Jan Davidsz de Heem, "Abundant Still Life with a Parrot," c.1655, Oil on canvas, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildende Künste, Vienna, Austria. SUPPLIED

are documents of how the Dutch saw themselves, their land and their possessions.

Initially, Dutch still life paintings were modest domestic "ontbijtjes" (breakfast) subjects in keeping with Calvinist religious humility: bread, butter, cheese, salt, perhaps some herring and beer. Then came the "banketjes," (banquets) with oysters, shrimp, olives, bread, game, grapes and lemons on silver or pewter trays and rummer wine cups arranged on silk over a wooden table.

As prosperity and materialism increased, the "pronk" (show off) paintings displayed tables laden with flowers and exotic fruits, Chi-

nese blue and white porcelain, ostrich egg "nautilus" cups, seashells, gold and silver trays, fragile Venetian glass goblets and Persian carpets.

By the end of the 1600s, even a Black slave might be included, on request, if the client didn't have a servant but thought it would indicate wealth. All items in the paintings held understood symbolic meanings. Bread, wine and grapes were Eucharist reminders of the body and blood of Christ.

Apples represented temptation, pomegranates fertility, figs prosperity, peaches good health, rotting medlars decay, fish and lamb Christ, lobster and shellfish

gluttony, oysters aphrodisiac lust. Most important of all were the costly bittersweet lemons, artfully peeled with skin in spiralling coils to signal life is fleeting.

Empty wine glasses also indicated life and pleasure as ephemeral. Broken, tipped and stacked vessels meant disorder and loss of innocence. The chalice represented the church. Seashells reminded one of pilgrimages, saints, birth and resurrection.

Books were pride in knowledge. Globes meant earth and sky. Musical instruments gave enjoyment but futility with a broken string. The draining

hourglass and the watch portrayed the passing of time. The candle was faith in God when burning, death when extinguished. Birds were resurrection. The skull was mortality and a contemplation of earthly life as short and death inevitable.

As we approach the festive season and plan what we will have on our tables, what symbolic meaning will it have for us? Will we think about the origin of our food, who picked it and under what circumstances?

Some of it will be local, much will be globally sourced with lemons from Argentina, oranges and grapes from South Africa, berries from Peru, coffee from Colombia, olives from Greece, kiwis from New Zealand and, yes, Gouda cheese from Holland. It will be a time of feasts, of giving, gratitude and the celebration of life, for however long it may be.

Penny-Lynn Cookson is an art historian who taught at the University of Toronto for 10 years. She was also head of extension services at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Her next lecture series, "Concepts of Beauty: Artists, Models & Muses," is on Zoom for the Niagara Pump-house Arts Centre, 11 a.m. on Thursdays, Jan. 6 to 27.



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FEATURED



Chris Allen's mask

Many of us enjoy the Christmas shows that the Shaw Festival is back presenting this year. The Courthouse Players, the forerunner to our beloved Shaw Festival, started in 1962 and featured a Christmas show at the Court House on Queen Street. The museum has a program from the "Christmas in the Market Place" show that featured a nativity play by Henri Gheon. It was directed and produced by Brian Doherty and the actors and other supporting staff featured several local names such as Calvin Rand and Roger Picken. John Ruta, an actor and radio broadcaster from Toronto, and Juliana Saxton, also a budding actress, were two known actors who also formed part of the cast. Tickets were sold through local shops in town as well as some in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines. The photo featured here is one of five masks that we have in the collection that were created by local resident Chris Allen. On behalf of the board of directors and staff of the NOTL Museum, we wish you a happy holidays.



A living landscape

Brian Marshall
Columnist



Under the trees in Simcoe Park. BRIAN MARSHALL

What makes a town like Niagara-on-the-Lake special for both those who live here and the visitors who flock here annually? Further, why has it been often described as the "prettiest town in Canada?"

In part, it is our built heritage, but I'd suggest that there is more to it.

It has always been my contention that architecture, no matter how good the design or finely wrought, does not by itself create a complete tapestry in which people can experience the full spectrum of beauty.

In fact, it is the gardens, the flowers, the shrubs and the trees that put flesh on the bones of a built landscape. It is the art of the landscape designer and those who nurture plants that give life and beauty to a town.

This observation was

brought to the front of my mind on a recent visit to the new gardens at the Pillar and Post.

As my wife (who possesses 10 "green" fingers and a profound talent for recreating Eden) verbally painted a picture of how the gardens would eventually mature, it struck me how diminished our town would be had Simcoe Park never existed or if the grove of trees surrounding the Wilderness had been cut down.

Adding to these larger islands of green is the warp and weave made by the mature landscaping surrounding a multitude of individual homes whose gracious lots support a sense of natural continuity throughout Old Town.

It is this living component that, when combined with our built architecture, makes Niagara-on-the-Lake distinct and deserving of the descriptor "prettiest."

It seems to me that in our headlong rush toward intensification it is this vital component that has been forgotten, resulting in the urban deserts of the GTA and other towns and cities.

We allow, dare I say, encourage, developers to buy their way out of creating parks. We allow subdivision builders to remove all the top soil off the land and leave behind ground that stunts the growth of trees because it is too poor in nutrients to support healthy plants.

Then, we support the

creation of building lots that are too small for any form of garden beyond potted plants or a token "feature" planting in soil that must first be remediated.

Look, I understand that there are lots of folks who are, for one reason or another, not inclined to garden and who prefer to have no property to take care of. However, I have rarely met an individual who does not appreciate the beauty of a living landscape or a simple walk in the park.

Although my small talents are much more aligned with designing buildings and hardscape, there is something about strolling under trees or simply sitting in a garden that revitalizes my spirit, to say nothing of the completion that these spaces provide to architecture.

I think it is past time that we stop ignoring encroaching urban desertification, develop creative solutions in accordance with a commonly held vision for a living town and impose legislation accordingly.

Perhaps we could start by increasing the representation of landscape architects on the town's urban design committee?

Looking to the Stars



Powerful energies, emotions and healing are in the offing

This week we see a full moon in Gemini, Venus turns retrograde, Chiron turns direct and the sun enters Capricorn.

Thursday, Dec. 16: For the first half of the day, the moon in value-conscious Taurus is in harmony and that brings good things. Later, in Gemini, watch out for issues with arms and hands. It was Dec. 19, 1899, that Noel Coward was born. He wrote plays and songs. His work is regularly seen at Shaw Festival with "Blythe Spirit," "Cavalcade" and more.

Friday, Dec. 17: Expect a lively end to the work week where healing an old wound is a bonus. The Wright Brothers launched their first successful airplane flight on Dec. 17, 1903, at Kittyhawk, N.C.

Saturday, Dec. 18: Today we see the full moon in Gemini. This lovely moon forms an auspicious trine with Jupiter, culminating with the Gemini/Sagittarius/Jupiter in Aquarius themes we had in 2021. On Dec. 18, 2009, Canadian-born director James Cameron had the number one box office hit for his futuristic fantasy, "Avatar."

Sunday, Dec. 19: Venus goes retrograde, while on the same day Chiron goes direct. There's a lot to talk about this powerful Venus retrograde but at this point let's just note that Venus goes retrograde on the same day Chiron goes direct. Venus is also conjunct Pluto, so we have some very powerful energies in the mix. And a powerful emotional revelation (Venus retrograde conjunct Pluto) will unveil a hidden wound, at the same time setting in motion the necessary healing process (Chiron direct). It's like we're ready for healing, ready for love, but not quite there yet.

We must go to the underworld first. The great news is that Venus retrograde comes with great clarity. We now know what we need to do: it's just a matter of embarking on the journey and staying true to ourselves no matter what Pluto has to reveal. It was 50 years ago today that Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange" premiered.

Monday, Dec. 20: The moon is in its home sign of Cancer, but Mercury is where the surprises come from. That's Mercury in Capricorn connecting to Uranus in Taurus. On Dec. 20, 1860, South Carolina voted unanimously to cede from the United States, setting the stage for the American Civil War.

Tuesday, Dec. 21: Today, the sun enters Capricorn and we have the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere and the summer solstice in the southern hemisphere. Zero degrees of Cardinal signs give us a tremendous energy and sense of direction. We now feel we can move mountains. This is a wonderful time to be clear about what it is that you want to achieve. Happy Birthday #84 to Jane Fonda, who keeps on working as Grace on "Grace and Frankie."

Wednesday, Dec. 22: Mercury gets a nudge from Jupiter and life starts to glow more positive. Canadian actor Sandra Oh divorced "Sideways" director Alexander Payne after five years on Dec. 22, 2006.

The Lake Report is on holiday for the next couple of weeks but you can still get a lot at www.lutts.ca as in Looking Up to the Stars. And you can get my \$29.95 horoscope with interpretation emailed to you. Either way, a unique Christmas gift.

Astrology is a form of entertainment, not a science.



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Card of Thanks

Sarah Drope

On behalf of all the Drope Family, we would like to thank everyone who attended Sarah's funeral, for all your kindnesses and condolence messages. In addition, thank you to all of you who have made a donation in Sarah's name to Community Living Welland (535 Sutherland Ave., Welland, ON., t. 905.735.0081 - directly). We would also like to thank Morgan's Funeral home for their care towards Sarah and to us through this time.

Kathy, Patsy, Nancy and Will.

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Kids' gift a truly **Canadien** moment

Ross Robinson
The Lake Report

It was a dark and stormy night back in early December, as I watched "Jeopardy!" on the television. I was doing OK, but what do I know about ancient Greek mythology or classical music?

A knock at the front door surprised me. I ran my fingers through my hair to seem presentable and looked out through the glass pane. Standing on the porch with shy smiles were two of my young neighbours from down the street, Marty and Ty Sherlock.

It wasn't Halloween, so what were they up to? I opened the door.

"Mr. Robinson, we were at a garage sale this morning and this great Canadiens sweater was for sale. It was jumping off the table and we had to buy it for you."

They handed it to me. It is a really nice red and blue wool sweater, not a hockey sweater. The CH logo on the front is big and brilliant.

"You have always had



Ty and Marty Sherlock with their special gift. ROSS ROBINSON

fun watching us play road hockey and skating on Lansdowne pond last winter. Playing hockey outside was so much fun."

"We know you love the

Canadiens, so we want you to have it."

I was, quite frankly, speechless.

I mumbled my appreciation, and within a few min-

utes, my eyes were damp as I reflected on the purity of thought, the generosity, yes, the neighbourhood love.

Truly a special moment in my life.



Lake Report takes **holiday break**, too

Continued from Front Page

stop – and neither do we.

We will update our digital platforms with important news as it happens.

So, please continue to follow us on Facebook and Instagram. And check our news website, NiagaraNow.com, regularly for all the news that NOTL needs.

Meanwhile, keep in touch with us and let us know whenever you see or hear about news happening.

Reach us by email at editor@niagarnow.com.

Happy New Year to all of our wonderful readers and supporters, and thank you for making 2021 such a memorable year.

See you in 2022!

How the **poinsettia** became official plant of the Christmas season



GROWING TOGETHER 

Joanne Young
Garden Columnist

When you think of Christmas, what is the first flower that comes to mind? Your answer is probably "poinsettias."

It has long been accepted as the official Christmas plant. But where did this history of poinsettias and Christmas begin?

A native of southern Mexico and Central America, the poinsettia is considered there to be a weedy plant.

When I travelled to Guatemala several years ago, I saw the tall gangly plants growing just about anywhere, sometimes reaching 15 to 20 feet tall – or more. Definitely not the compact bushy plants that we have come to know.

So how did this plant become associated with Christmas? As the old Mexican legend goes, a young girl named Pepita was sad that she didn't have a gift to leave for the baby Jesus at Christmas Eve services. Her cousin tried to comfort her and said Jesus would love anything that she brought for him even if she had no money to buy a real gift.

Pepita picked a bouquet of weeds that she was walking past on the way to church. When she got there, she set the weeds down at the bottom of the nativity scene. All of a sudden, the weeds transformed into beautiful red flowers. From that day on, they became known as



Poinsettia flowers. PIXABAY

"Flores de Noche Buena" or "Flowers of the Holy Night."

Poinsettias owe their common name to Joel R. Poinsett, who introduced them to the United States when he was the first American ambassador to Mexico, from 1825 to 1829. Poinsett, who was an amateur botanist, noticed the Euphorbias with red bracts growing wild in the hills of southern Mexico.

He sent a few home to South Carolina for his personal collection, where he began propagating them in his greenhouses and giving them to friends and botanical gardens. It still took about another 100 years before the poinsettia became a traditional holiday decoration, when the Ecke family started promoting them.

Paul Ecke Jr. sent free poinsettia plants to TV studios across the country,

including "The Tonight Show" and Bob Hope's holiday specials. Eventually, the trend caught on, making them the familiar live Christmas decoration that they are today. Over many years, breeders have developed the plants so that they are much fuller, shorter growing varieties that come in an array of different coloured bracts.

When choosing your poinsettia, look for a plant where the flowers are still tightly closed. Many consider the red colour to be the flowers but they are actually coloured bracts or modified leaves. The actual flowers are the tiny group of buds where the bracts come together.

If these buds are still closed at time of purchase, that means that it will last that much longer. Make sure you choose a sturdy-stemmed plant with no drooping or yellowing leaves. These are signs that

the plant may have been under-watered or in its plastic sleeve too long.

Poinsettias are easy to care for as long as you are aware that they are sensitive to cold temperatures. If transporting them on a cold day make sure you cover them completely with a loose-fitting bag, hurry them out to a warmed-up car and head right home to get them inside.

Once in your house, they do best with about six hours of sunlight a day. Ideal daytime temperatures are 15 to 20C. At night you can drop the temperatures down to 12 to 18C.

Make sure that the poinsettia is placed away from cold drafts from opening exterior doors and or from blasting heat ducts. Let the surface of the soil begin to dry before watering.

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



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Featured local story



Lights are up around The Village subdivision, creating a lovely light-lined path to walk along Niagara Stone Road. PHOTOS BY RICHARD HARLEY



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