



Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

We're now on winter holidays for the rest of the month. We'll see you again Jan. 9! Keep up to date with stories at NiagaraNow.com

The Lake Report

Vol. 2, Issue 50

Niagara-on-the-Lake's most respected newspaper

December 19, 2019

Town legal fees skyrocket to \$1.15 million for 2020 budget

Residents could see a 9.48 per cent increase on property taxes in 2020

Richard Harley
Editor

If the town's \$37 million operating budget is approved as it stands, Niagara-on-the-Lake residents will see a 9.48 per cent increase on the municipal portion of their property tax bills in 2020.

Town council debated the hike Monday night during four hours of final budget deliberations. All around the table, councillors agreed it was necessary to raise taxes significantly this year

to cover needed expenses, though they deferred the final decision until January to try to find additional savings.

"It's part of our job to invest in our community, and I'm glad that we are doing that," said Coun. Clare Cameron, after praising the audit committee, which presented the budget suggestions.

She said it's important to consider the quality of life residents expect in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and

argued that it costs money to provide services.

"Expectations in our town are very, very, very high," said Cameron. "And there's only so much time that can go by with expectations being so high before the bill comes in."

Among major planned expenses for 2020 are almost \$12 million in salary costs (a \$473,980 increase), \$1.15 million for legal fees (a \$1 million increase, with

Continued on Page 2

Town has no whistleblower policy

Dariya Baiguzhiyeva
The Lake Report

Although the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake doesn't have an official whistleblower policy, Lord Mayor Betty Disero says there are mechanisms in place to protect town employees who have concerns of any wrongdoing conducted at the town.

"I'm all for protecting

whistleblowers," Disero told The Lake Report. "No one goes after whistleblowers in this administration."

Disero said town employees can take their reports to the town's human resources generalist Sarah Stevens who will then report to the chief administrative officer.

Whistleblower policies, used by various governments, agencies and companies, are aimed

at protecting individuals who report any illegal, unethical or fraudulent misconduct while acting in good faith.

Several Niagara municipalities have already adopted whistleblower policies or are contemplating doing so. Last week, in the aftermath of the Ontario ombudsman's report on the

Continued on Page 7



Eliot Stearns wears his feelings on his rain jacket during Saturday's rainy parade. BRITTANY CARTER

Spirits high for NOTL Christmas Parade despite rain

Brittany Carter
The Lake Report

Saturday's steady rainfall failed to dampen holiday spirits as the Niagara-on-the-Lake Christmas Parade marched on regardless of the lousy weather.

Though spectator attendance numbers were visibly lower than previous years, those who did brave the elements came equipped with umbrellas, raincoats, and big smiles.

Some spectators watched from the back of their open vehicles or even fastened tarps to trees and street signs for added protection against the downpour.

The Christmas Parade committee was prepared for 106 entries, only about 10 of which backed out due to weather, said Kevin Turcotte, a committee member and the town's parks and



People were in good spirits despite the downpour during the NOTL Christmas Parade last weekend. BRITTANY CARTER

recreation manager.

And parade day festivities didn't end as the last floats reached the end of their route. The NOTL

District 1 Fire Hall on Anderson Lane opened its doors for its annual turkey


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and
Happy New Year

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Tues, Dec 31st ... 9:30 am – 3 pm
Wed, January 1st ... CLOSED

Regular hours resume Thursday, January 2nd



Town council and staff talk budget deliberations at Monday's meeting. RICHARD HARLEY

Niagara-on-the-Lake still has one of **lowest tax rates** in region

Continued from Front Page

\$350,000 affecting the tax base), \$516,490 in new positions (\$78,000 affecting tax rates), \$473,610 in debt (a \$34,527 increase) and \$300,000 for dock area contingency funds.

The remaining \$650,000 for legal fees would come from the parking reserves, if required, Lord Mayor Betty Disero and director of corporate services Kyle Freeborn said in an interview Wednesday.

The average NOTL home is assessed at \$530,900, so the town's tax hike could translate into an increase of \$104 per year for houses in the urban area. On top of the municipal levy, the Region of Niagara is increasing taxes 5.9 per cent, which will add about another \$165 to the average tax bill.

Disero said the town's large increase is partly a result of taxes not being increased sufficiently over several years. The average rate of increase from 2010 to 2019 was 2.45 per cent per year, according to town budget documents.

Freeborn said that number reflects that the town has been "catching up" for the last four years. Between 2010 and 2014 the taxes actually fell on average by 0.33 per cent.

"I think people have talked about previous councils having tax freezes, or decreases to taxes. And it is the worst game to play, because it gets you political points for the short term, but it will end up coming back to those people who are paying taxes in the long term," Disero told councillors.

"When we were elected last year, the first thing that I talked about was we have to look at our budget and become self-sustainable. To think we only had two bylaw officers this summer. Why did that happen? It happened because previous councils did not have that forward thinking idea to accommodate what was happening in the town."

She said in light of it being "a rough year" for the town, she's proud of the committee for reaching the near 10 per cent increase. The original figure, she said, was around 24 per cent, and it took a lot of work to bring it down.

"They (members of the audit committee) were really to the point, going after every penny they possibly could," said Disero.

Coun. Norm Arsenault also echoed her comments, and pointed out NOTL is one of the least taxed municipalities in Niagara Region as far as local tax

rates go.

Based on the mill rate (the amount of tax per thousand dollars of a property's assessed value), St. Catharines residents paid 0.54 per cent in 2019, while NOTL residents paid 0.21 per cent. Niagara Falls residents also see higher tax rates, at 0.44 per cent, while Port Colborne residents pay the highest tax rates in the region, at 0.86 per cent.

Even with a 9.48 per cent budget increase, tax rates are still lower in NOTL, based on property assessments.

Disero said in terms of what's best for the town and residents, there's money that needs to be spent.

"We can say, 'No bylaw officers, we only want a one per cent tax increase or a two per cent tax increase,' but we will just get further and further behind, and our services to our residents will suffer."

Most of council agreed nine per cent is a large increase, but when factoring in all that needs to be done, agreed the audit committee (comprised of chair Coun. Stuart McCormack, and councillors John Wiens, Gary Burroughs, Allan Bisback and Arsenault) did a great job bringing costs down.

"Nine per cent I think is still a little bit high, and I don't know what we can do

to get it even further down than that," Disero said. "Maybe we need to take a pause and look at and come back now that we have this as a full council, and come back with more ideas."

Part of the town's annual budget increase is a result of increased litigation against the town, according to the audit committee report, but Disero said she's "not prepared" to back down from defending positions of council and residents.

"Legal fees are high this year, but they are again an accumulation of trying to defend the positions of council that were taken this year, in previous councils, and even previous to that," she said.

"In some of this, not all of it, we can turn around and say, 'No, we're not prepared to defend our position, let's just let it go.' But we will lose total control of what happens in this council chamber and around our town. And I'm not prepared to do that."

McCormack said he disagrees with Disero that council is defending the decisions of a previous council.

"We're defending a non-decision of a previous council," he said. "And that makes a huge difference, frankly. You defer, you don't make

a decision, it ends up being appealed, and we're forced to respond to that. There's no other way around it."

McCormack was referring to the previous council refusing to make a decision on developer Benny Marotta's controversial plans for the Randwood property.

Disero said lawsuits are just an ongoing part of operating a municipal government.

"We get lawsuits all the time, whether it's this council, the last council, and they all have to be dealt with. And we will leave lawsuits that future councils have to deal with."

Coun. Wendy Cheropita said she thinks council may be able to find some other reductions to the operating budget, and that it's prudent to do so to protect residents who are living on a fixed income, especially seniors.

"There's a lot of good that's going into the budget and there's a lot of great things that everybody is going to benefit from, but a very big majority of our community are senior citizens who live on a fixed income, who, if they have to absorb a nine per cent increase, that is a horrendous amount of money to absorb when they're not getting that kind of increase," said Cheropita.

"It's a really tough decision, in a very tough year. I think if we could just stop and take a pause and think about it until our next meeting, I think that would be a wise decision. There may be something that comes up that we may find that may help our situation."

Bisback said while it's a big increase, he thinks the town is doing the right thing.

"I don't like nine per cent either," he said. "But you know what, I can walk down main street and defend the nine per cent. Because when we sat through our various meetings in the audit committee, we sat and we tried to think, listen and make decisions that we thought were in the best interest of the residents and the town."

He echoed Disero's comments about supporting the legal costs.

"As it relates to legal costs, we did not take a cavalier approach to that. Because we have an obligation to be responsible to residents. And the approach we took is it would be irresponsible if we did not protect the residents and the town from what we think may take place in the next year."

Arsenault asked to defer the operating budget to next year and council agreed.



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An artist's rendering of what Glendale's Main Street could look like. SUPPLIED/NIAGARA REGION

Rename Glendale and honour its history, Friends of Laura Secord urge

Steve Hardaker
Community Correspondent

The leaders of the Friends of Laura Secord organization are urging that the Glendale area of NOTL be renamed in recognition of the community's rich local heritage and historical roots.

In a letter to Niagara regional councillors, town councillors and Glendale District stakeholders, Caroline McCormick and David Brown of the Friends of Laura Secord also propose that Glendale's planned Main Street include monuments in honour of some of the area's pioneering women.

As well, they suggest that names in public spaces and streets within the district reflect the landscapes, history, heritage and significant people in the area.

The letter includes a three-point proposal for the district to encourage town and regional elected officials to "join with other stakeholders in a public consultation process that reflects the unique history, heritage and sense of place of this important new community."

In proposing the name change, McCormick and Brown point out the name Glendale has no real affiliation with the neighbourhood and the street is just an extension of a St. Catharines roadway that extends into Niagara-on-the-Lake for a relatively short distance.

They also point out that other arterial roads in the area, notably York Road

and Queenston Road were "contiguous with the so-called 'Iroquois Trail,' a First Nations footpath of great historical importance" along the elevated ancient shoreline of Lake Iroquois on the northern border of the district.

McCormick and Brown suggest the name of the community should recognize and honour the surrounding landscape, rich natural and cultural heritage, and historical human settlement patterns of this area.

In their proposal, they list a number of historical and current attributes of the area that could be recognized in naming streets and public places.

Included are: the Lampman family estate high on the Escarpment at Woodend Conservation Area; the old Garden City Racetrack where the Outlet Collection mall is now; the Niagara Regional Native Centre, which is not far from the original Iroquois Trail; the area's rich agricultural history; and Ten Mile Creek, later incorporated in the Welland Canal, which was an important historical feature being a boundary, a barrier, a conduit and a resource.

Highlighting this particular feature, McCormick and Brown note the theme of "crossings" is significant to the district.

"First Nations people crossed Ten Mile Creek on the Iroquois Trail, as did early colonists. Laura Secord crossed the creek near Homer on her famous 1813

trek and the present-day Laura Secord Legacy Trail crosses through the district, as does the Bruce Trail," their letter says.

"From the earliest days of the Underground Railroad to later interactions between the well-established black communities in Niagara-on-the-Lake and St. Catharines, Niagara's black community would have used the crossing at Homer."

They point out today all that is left of this crossing is the current Homer Bridge and the Garden City Skyway.

In the letter's most significant proposal, the authors want councillors and planners to consider using the proposed Main Street between Niagara on the Green and the Outlet Collection to commemorate pioneering women of the area through the establishment of public monuments along the street.

It suggests the first monument could be in the centre of the existing roundabout and consist of a statue of women from three of the area's pioneering communities, in consultation with their representative communities.

In requesting that adjacent streets and public spaces be named after women of significance, names like Laura Secord, Harriet Tubman, Eliza Fenwick, Janet Carnaghan, Emma Currie and Chloe Cooley are suggested.

"The project would stand as a testament to the abiding strength and enduring

values of women whose efforts helped establish an enabling context for women of today, and who continue to inspire current generations to rise to the challenge," McCormick and Brown write.

Kirsten McCauley, a senior planner with the Region of Niagara, said there are several ways the letter's suggestions could be incorporated into the Glendale District plan.

"A convergence for the area's trails and active transportation facilities could enhance and improve the trail network with markers or wayfinding that provides information on the history of the area," McCauley said in an email.

"The main street could incorporate public realm improvements, urban design elements and public art that celebrate the history and heritage of the area and the creation of a public/civic space for Glendale could also incorporate placemaking elements related to the suggestions within the letter."

In an emailed response, Lord Mayor Betty Disero called the Friends of Laura Secord proposal "a good one."

"There is no easier way to recognize our heritage than to incorporate our heroines into the area by way of naming streets, parks and trails. It also starts to create a vision and set a theme going forward."

Steve Hardaker has lived in Glendale for nine years and is active in many community organizations.

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Contributed by Norm Arsenault:

Use hard plastic containers for your garbage instead of plastic bags. Dark plastics bags are not recyclable and always end up in the landfill. Do the same in your kitchen for food storage instead of plastic bags.



Contributed by Patty Garriock

"With enigmatic clarity, Life gives us different answers each time we ask her the same question."

- Poet Yahia Lababidi.

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Editorial

Town needs to **protect** whistleblowers

Kevin MacLean
 Managing Editor

In the digital information age, there are few secrets that don't eventually find their way into the public realm.

That's usually because someone, somewhere knows the truth or knows when some sort of illicit shenanigans have gone on.

That applies to everything from Watergate to the ethical mess that transpired in recent years at the Region of Niagara.

In the old days, that could mean compiling pages and pages of documents as evidence of perceived malfeasance or bad behaviour. Now those same mountains of documents literally can be moved at the click of a mouse.

Times have changed and now, in an era in which "transparency" is not just a buzzword but a mantra in public life, we need to revisit how some of the affairs of public governance are overseen.

When it comes to whistleblower policies – protecting people who come forward, sometimes anonymously, with tips, evidence or allegations about problems in government, commerce or other organizations – some institutions are leading the way.

As it stands now, at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, there are no independent mechanisms in place that

mirror the accepted best practices of whistleblower policies. We hope that will change.

Requiring an employee to go to the human resources department or a senior executive is not the way to encourage openness and transparency on matters of internal problems. Sometimes, unfortunately, the very people in an organization to whom an unprotected whistleblower might have to spill the beans are the "bad guys."

We're not suggesting for a moment that is the case at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, but there certainly are relevant instances in which this has occurred elsewhere.

Just this week, the Toronto Star reported that after information technology staff found sexually explicit pictures on the work computer of the CEO of the Canadian Internet Registration Authority, the IT workers ended up losing their jobs. Not the CEO.

The workers reported what happened and they became the victims. On the face of it, that seems ludicrous.

Fortunately, now, that obscure Ottawa agency (which oversees the ".ca" internet domain) has adopted a proper whistleblower policy that utilizes an independent third party to investigate such complaints.

As The Lake Report's story on page 1 this week shows, in Niagara,

several municipal governments and the once-ethically challenged regional municipality, have enacted proper whistleblower policies, or are in the process of adopting them.

Proper policies ensure that vindictive, malicious allegations are avoided and that thorough, independent investigations are carried out.

With luck, the whistleblower policy will seldom, if ever, be invoked. But knowing it is readily available to employees of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, is an important step toward transparency and full accountability.

When problems deserve to have a light shone on them, it is essential that employees be confident that their voice will be heard by an independent arbiter and that those in power will not be able to quash investigations just because they might hit too close to home.

With so many other things on their plate at the moment – including wrestling with a mammoth budget increase and actively overseeing several court cases – perhaps it is not top of mind for NOTL councillors.

However, we hope that come the new year, our elected officials will recognize our town needs to get with the times and move forward in adopting its own, comprehensive, effective whistleblower policy.

editor@niagaranow.com

Dog poisoned twice by discarded cannabis

Dear editor:

I'm writing to you on behalf of my wife, Bette Ann, myself, and for the many pet owners residing in NOTL, as your paper is a regular source of information for local residents. I have also cc'd MPP Wayne Gates and Lord Mayor Betty Disero, as our local legislators, to make them aware of our concerns.

On Dec. 13, for the second time this year, our one-and-a-half-year-old cockapoo, Bella, ingested cannabis while walking in the John-Charlotte-Niagara Street area where we live.

As a result, she suffered incontinence, vomiting and an inability to stay upright, with the symptoms fortunately dissipating after a day's rest.

In both cases, she required examination by a local veterinarian – first on Sept. 8 (Labour Day weekend) at the Niagara Emergency Veterinary Clinic in Thorold and on Dec. 13 by our regular veterinarian.

In both instances, anecdotal comments were shared by each clinic, about the increased frequency of this occurring since the legalization of cannabis in 2018.

For a dog owner, this is a very emotional, costly, and unnecessary experience, which can be fatal, depending on the age/health of the dog and the amount ingested.

I understand and accept the legal use of cannabis, but



Bella the cockapoo. SUPPLIED/MIKE JAMES

wonder if we need to make the recreational and/or medical users more aware of the risk they pose to our pets, when they discard this product carelessly?

I would suggest this disregard for the consequences of their actions are akin to discarding open containers of alcohol or medical prescriptions on the street, which no one would contemplate doing. In each case, the person responsible is putting both pets' and children's health at risk.

This is an issue that has already had an impact on the greater community, as evidenced by this article previously published online by the CBC on Aug. 14, 2019. Your comments and response to my concerns would be appreciated.

Mike James
 NOTL



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Happy Holidays from our family to yours!

We will be CLOSED on December 25th & 26th and January 1st.

NEWS

Let's encourage youth voices on climate change

Reid MacWilliam
Special to The Lake Report

We're in a climate crisis. Truth is, we've been in a climate crisis for years; unfortunately, we're only now admitting it. It's become the latest cause de rigueur among political candidates, many of whom spoke little about it until the past year or two.

A year ago, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned in a report that by 2030 carbon emissions must be reduced 45 per cent from 2010 levels, with further reductions beyond that to hold the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Any greater rise would be disastrous for the world's coral reefs and huge areas of animal habitat with resulting extinction risks. It would also put millions of people worldwide at greater health and serious economic risk due to climate-related threats. The actual severity of these impacts increases with every small, incremental increase above 1.5 degrees.

The Paris accord goal is no more than 1.5 degrees, or at least well below 2 degrees. The current emissions trajectory will likely produce 2.7 to 3.4 degrees of warming.

Since the time of this report, the public climate change conversation has greatly increased in volume. We've seen engagement by activists and participants in climate action demonstrations, around the world and right here in Niagara-on-the-Lake just recently, in particular with the Global Climate Strike. Maybe you're one of them. Over 7 million people worldwide were part of this movement.

I'd like to congratulate two young activists in particular, Molly Shara and Hazel Norris, who have vowed to continue monthly "climate strikes" at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Town

Hall until our council declares a climate emergency.

They have endured some criticism from adults, who should instead consider offering support and maybe advice. Yes, the climate change crisis is complex and demands systemic change that won't happen easily or quickly. And although a declaration recognizing a climate emergency would be largely symbolic, these young activists are helping to expand the dialogue and discussion, which is beneficial.

They are in good company. 11,258 scientists from 153 countries signed a letter published Nov. 4, 2019, in the journal Bioscience, stating "... clearly and unequivocally that planet Earth is facing a climate emergency."

The effects of the climate crisis are already evident. The Niagara Region should expect more extreme weather, such as flooding in the spring, heat waves and drought in summer, more numerous and more dangerous algae blooms that may affect swimming and availability of safe drinking water in places.

Climate patterns will also affect agriculture significantly. There will be more extreme storms like the "Halloween Storm" this fall that brought hurricane-force wind gusts in places and an evacuation in Port Colborne due to storm surge flooding. Even our recent cold winter weather is a product of altered atmospheric circulation patterns that are likely connected to climate change.

My personal engagement on the front lines has been most memorable in Northern California. I witnessed the extreme drought from 2012 and have "been up close and personal" with several catastrophic wildfires in 2017, 2018 and most recently the Kincade Fire. On Saturday, Oct. 26, as 5,000 firefighters massed to attempt to contain the fire perimeter, especially to



The sun rises through heavy smoke blown by 80 kmh winds on Sunday, Oct. 27, as Reid MacWilliam evacuated under orders of the Sonoma County Sheriff's Dept. The location is near the village of Bloomfield, 20 kilometres west of Rohnert Park, Calif. REID MACWILLIAM.

protect the cities of Windsor and Healdsburg, gale force winds threatened to push the Kincade Fire all the way to the Pacific, through tinder-dry forests and vegetation.

I stayed awake on the night of Oct. 26-27, tracking emergency advisory notifications on my cellphone. Alone in the house in a densely forested area, I involuntarily fell asleep, exhausted from my emergency preparations of the previous 36 hours.

Pacific Gas & Electric had turned off power to my area the day before, so I relied solely on my cellphone for notifications. Nearly a million homes were without power that night, affecting about 2.7 million people.

I awoke to the sound of large tree branches crashing onto the roof. It was 6:50 a.m. I checked my phone. Why had notifications stopped? "No service."

I later discovered that cell towers in my area had depleted their emergency power sources and gone dead. I had no communication. Thick smoke swirled around the house as I gathered some key items and got out within five minutes. Through the kitchen window, I saw only a long, low orange glow through the smoke. There was no way of telling whether this was the fire advancing, or the sunrise, or both.

I did make it out safely, although this was truly a frightening experience.

And I was definitely one of the very lucky ones. Of the 185,000 evacuated, a good number lost their homes, businesses or vineyards. I have friends and acquaintances that have suffered both personal and property loss in the fires since 2015.

In the Tubbs Fire that ravaged parts of Santa Rosa in 2017, 22 people died; as the Camp Fire swept through Paradise in 2018, 86 per-

ished and nearly 15,000 homes were reduced to ash.

If there's a positive side to this story, it's how California firefighters have used past shortcomings to improve their performance and were able to hold back the Kincade Fire against those fierce winds on Oct. 26-27. They and all other first responders deserve praise for their effectiveness, perseverance and courage.

But here's the point for Niagara-on-the-Lake: California has learned from its climate-driven disasters, primarily droughts, fires and floods, and communities have adopted strategies that have enabled a much more effective response. In addition, private citizens have adopted emergency preparation and response practices that are saving lives and protecting property.

Niagara-on-the-Lake has wisely partnered with six other Niagara municipalities and Brock University's Environmental Sustainability Research Centre to establish Niagara Adapts, which will enable adaptation planning and the development of greater resilience to climate change impacts for the Niagara region.

While mitigation plans seem to be primarily a federal priority at this time (Ontario doesn't appear to have a credible plan, at least to date), Niagara Adapts will develop strategies that have significant mitigation impacts. Surely there are opportunities for local youth like Hazel and Molly to be engaged somehow in a meaningful and productive manner.

NOTL resident Reid MacWilliam is a retired business professor and marketing executive who has researched environmental issues for over a decade, attending numerous events and conferences as far away as Australia and New Zealand.

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The Lake Report welcomes your letters to the editor. Please, write early and often. Letters ideally should be under 400 words long. Occasionally, longer letters may be published. All letters may be edited for conciseness, accuracy, libel and defamation. Please include your full name, street address and a daytime telephone number so that authorship can be authenticated. Only names and general addresses (eg. Virgil, St. Davids, NOTL) will be published. Send your letters to editor@niagaranow.com or drop them by our office at 724 Mississauga St., NOTL.

The Lake Report

MPP reflects on milestones from the past year

Dear editor:

Firstly, let me say Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays! While the legislature only sat for six weeks this session I did my best to get as much work done for our community as possible.

In this session I introduced legislation to have OHIP join eight other provinces in finally covering the cost of PSA testing for men. When caught early, the survivability rate of prostate cancer is 100 per cent – when caught late it plummets to 28 per cent.

In Ontario, this life saving test should be covered by your

OHIP card and not your credit card.

I was proud to stand alongside Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Maya Webster, age 7, and Niagara Falls resident Ava Emerson, age 8. These kids are at the forefront of the movement to ensure that every man, woman and child has access to the same lifesaving devices that they have access to.

These devices have meant that they no longer spend countless nights in the hospital, reducing the pressure on our hospital system and improving their quality of life. Beyond that, we also worked to ensure the Thorold tunnel remained open to two-way traffic this winter and continued

our ongoing efforts to address serious health and safety concerns in workplaces across Ontario.

I would never have been able to accomplish so much this session without the hard work of residents just like you. I look forward to seeing everyone this Christmas break at our many community events, but in case I don't, I want to wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

*MPP Wayne Gates
Niagara Falls riding*

\$25 ticket after Old Town parking meters reject coins

The following is a letter to Lord Mayor Betty Disero and Coun. Wendy Cheropita. A copy was submitted to The Lake Report for publication.

This is to make you and council aware of a serious parking problem you may not know about.

Many of the Niagara-on-the-Lake parking meters do not accept newly minted loonie or toonie coins! This is similar to a problem Toronto has had with meters and newspaper boxes.

After getting another ticket we went to NOTL Town Hall to fill in a three-page questionnaire in order to get a face-to-face meeting.

I am sure very few people would bother going to this trouble for a \$25 fine. Many of our friends have experienced this problem, including one night when we tried two meters a block apart in front of Zee's on Queen Street.

We do not use our credit cards in these as we had one "eaten" by the machine.

After having a few delayed meetings with the town on this, we finally got a call back in which the officer did not acknowledge the problem, suggested buying a resident parking card (good for one hour!) or call the telephone number on the box!

And, after all our effort, the officer simply said pay the fine – in spite of all this being explained in the three-page request form.

We can only imagine the number of visitors, in particular, who encountered this problem and had neither time nor would go to the trouble of fighting it. Not what you'd expect in NOTL. Meter revenue is great, but only if it works.

As an aside, friends of ours who visited could not find parking anywhere near town after driving up and down streets. So, they left.

Visitors are overwhelming us and we suspect the limitless buses are a big factor.

*Lesley Golombek and John Duncan
NOTL*



Town needs to get short term rental bylaw right

Dear editor:

While tough words from town council and talk of significant penalties for people in Niagara-on-the-Lake operating short-term accommodation to visitors may be warranted, I recommend that councillors start at the beginning if they want to get this issue right the first time.

The first step should be to reconfirm that the town is comfortable permitting residents to offer short-term accommodation to visitors to our area.

There are economic and environmental reasons for accepting short-term rentals, so it should be OK.

There are two types of short-term rental: hosted accommodation in bed and breakfast homes (B&B) and country inns, where the host lives on-site, and non-hosted accommodation in what are known as cottages or short-term vacation rentals.

The town needs to have a vision for short-term accommodation over the next several years and determine whether it prefers one type of accommodation over the other.

If it does, it needs to ensure that its new town bylaw is designed to encourage that sector of the industry. That was the step previous councils never considered.

I was the president of the Bed & Breakfast Association back in 2006-08 when council was active in amending the bylaw and enforcing it.

During my time, we attempted to brief the lord mayor and chief administrative officer about the state and trends in the industry that we saw.

Coun. Gary Burroughs can attest that Lynne LeGallais and I briefed him and then CAO Lew Holloway that the most significant change we were seeing was the increase in number and size of cottages in the town.

We advised at the time that the emphasis on amendments to the bylaw had been aimed at the hosted accommodation sector and implicitly encouraged the conversion of hosted accommodation in larger houses to non-hosted.

The significant differences between the two sectors during my time were different off-street parking requirements, different hosting requirements and licence costs, but the big one was the requirement to go through a zoning change process to offer hosted accommodation in more than three bedrooms and to have a property of sufficient size to even qualify for the change in zoning.

A number of four-bedroom houses were quickly converted in the aftermath of the bylaw amendments. That trend plus out-of-town ownership and management continued, at least until I left the industry after the 2008 season.

And, for the record, the old bylaw had very sharp teeth.

That bylaw had in it the following offences that were considered to be "major:" renting rooms in a completely unlicensed residence, offering hosted accommodation in a room that was unlicensed and uninspected, and offering to host events or parties at any type of hosted accommodation.

There was no provision in the bylaw for a hearing for the charged operator to offer a defence. The penalty in those cases was usually a fine and licence suspension for up to a year.

In what those of us in the industry always thought was a "sting" operation, one weekend in 2005 or 2006, two hosted accommodation operators were charged, one with renting unlicensed rooms, one with hosting a wedding reception. Each of these operators paid a fine of \$25,000.

*Kenn Moody
St. Davids*

Water main replacement cost \$263 a foot

I am writing in regard to a Dec. 5 article in your newspaper, "No danger of lead in NOTL drinking water."

I found the entire article interesting.

However, did anyone else question or think about the fact that it cost the town \$1.65 million to replace 1,900 metres of our main water distribution system?

I am assuming this also included signs that needed to be posted, road crews to direct traffic as well as the rest of the costs.

So, 1,900 metres equals 6,233.6 feet. There are 5,280 feet in a mile. So the town replaced in total 1.1806 miles of pipe.

That amounts to costing about \$263 to replace every single foot of pipe in 2018.

The width of the Lake Report newspaper page is about one foot.

Does that seem extreme or am I missing something?

*Susan Pohorly
NOTL*



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Whistleblower policies **protect** rights

Continued from Front Page

Region of Niagara's major ethics scandal, regional council directed staff to draft a whistleblower policy.

"Politically, I guess it's a good thing to do but if the staff feel they're covered, in practice, we're doing it now," Disero said regarding the Town of NOTL.

"There are mechanisms in place that if somebody has some concerns about anything they think is illegal that's going on or offensive, they can go see Sarah Stevens. And Sarah has a process ... that they can talk about."

Stevens couldn't be reached for comment but Disero said she spoke to Stevens about how such complaints are handled. After their meeting, Disero advised she will discuss the whistleblower idea with other council members.

Town staff are covered by internal policies such as Workplace Harassment Policy which deals with staff wellness, complaints and issues related to Bill 168, said the town's community engagement co-ordinator Lauren Kruitbosch.

Bill 168, also known as the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act (Violence and Harassment in the Workplace), aims to protect workers from violence and harassment at the workplace.

The town also has a code of conduct which applies to lord mayor, councillors and to members of all town committees, agencies, boards and commissions.

The 18-page document states that if a member makes a complaint, other members, "shall not act in reprisal or threaten reprisal against a person who makes a complaint or provides information to the integrity commissioner during an investigation."

"Members shall interact courteously and respectfully with the Integrity Commissioner and with any person acting under the direction of the Integrity Commissioner," the bylaw states.

The current code of conduct was updated in 2018. The town's current integrity

commissioner, Edward McDermott of ADR Chambers Inc., was appointed by council in March 2018.

McDermott declined to comment on the matter.

"Such matter is not within his mandate or jurisdiction as Integrity Commissioner for Niagara-on-the-Lake and it would be inappropriate for him to comment on this issue," was the email response from the commissioner's office to The Lake Report.

The earlier four-page version of the code didn't have a comprehensive list of definitions, didn't mention conflicts of interest, improper use of influence nor penalties for not following the code.

The town's previous integrity commissioner Suzanne Craig recommended making amendments to the old code of conduct at the council meeting in July 2015.

The updated bylaw has also provided a more detailed guide for dealing with gifts and benefits as well as confidential information.

The bylaw states members of council shall treat all members of the public, one another and staff with respect and without abuse, bullying or intimidation. Councillors shall avoid both pecuniary and non-pecuniary conflicts of interests and shall not use the status of their position to influence of another person to the private advantage or non-pecuniary interest of themselves, their friends or family members.

If the commissioner decides there's been a violation of the code of conduct, council may reprimand a member or suspend remuneration for 90 days. Council can also require that a member provide a written or verbal apology, return property or make reimbursement of its value or of money spent, be removed from or not be appointed to the membership or as chair of a committee of council.

According to the town's website, members of the public, town council and other town employees can file a complaint by following the Complaint and

Investigation Protocol and including the Consent and Confidentiality Agreement Form with the affidavit.

The town's integrity commissioner doesn't have authority over town employees and anonymous complaints cannot be accepted by the commissioner.

"Should a member of staff wish to report a councillor violation of the code of conduct, that would be handled through the integrity commissioner," Kruitbosch said in an email response to The Lake Report. "Councillors wishing to report staff would speak to the Lord Mayor and CAO. The CAO would be responsible for employee relations."

"This is case-specific. Depending (on) the complaint, the individual may remain anonymous," Kruitbosch said.

Ontario ombudsman Paul Dubé, whose report on the serious ethical problems in Niagara's regional government, was released a few weeks ago, wasn't available for comment.

However, the office's director of communications, Linda Williams, issued a statement saying, "While the ombudsman has always encouraged municipalities to have robust internal mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability, I don't believe we have done an investigation where he commented specifically on whistleblower policies."

In the City of Toronto, employees may remain anonymous when reporting alleged misconduct, according to the city's Disclosure of Wrongdoing and Reprisal Protection provision.

According to Toronto's bylaw, wrongdoing may include fraud, theft of city assets, breach of public trust, mismanagement of city resources, and violations of the city's conflict of interest provision.

A number of municipalities across the Niagara region have also moved forward with developing whistleblowing policies.

At its meeting on Dec. 12, Niagara regional council approved directing staff to prepare a report with rec-

ommendations and a draft whistleblower policy.

Fort Erie Mayor Wayne Redekop, who brought the motion forward, said he hopes all area municipalities will adopt this type of policy. In November, Fort Erie council approved a whistleblower policy.

"We owe an obligation to our employees to ensure they're protected in the event they see something that's not right," Redekop told regional councillors.

Welland Regional Council Pat Chiochio said he hoped the policy would have been brought forward a long time ago, but commended Redekop for doing so.

"I'm hoping this will stop the workplace harassment that's taken place in the past," he said at the meeting.

Lincoln Mayor Sandra Eastman told councillors the town is also working on developing a policy.

Welland passed a whistleblower policy in 2012.

Hamilton also has a whistleblower policy that protects city employees who report misconduct from job-related reprisals, such as dismissal, suspension, discipline, harassment, demotion, denial of a benefit of employment, and other disadvantaging.

In August, Grimsby's council passed a motion to direct staff to prepare a report on a whistleblowing policy.

"The municipal council of the Town of Grimsby fully supports whistleblowing and is committed to protecting whistleblowers, the important information they provide and more widely, the integrity of the whistleblowing processes," the motion said.

Niagara Falls' council has unanimously – with only Coun. Victor Pietrangelo absent for the vote – passed a motion directing staff to prepare a report on a whistleblowing policy during a council meeting in August.

In St. Catharines, city council voted in September to have staff review the city's current whistleblower policy and decide whether there is a need for a bylaw.

Best practices for **protecting** whistleblowers

Dariya Baiguzhiyeva
The Lake Report

Here are some guidelines for effective whistleblower policies.

Protection for public servants

In Canada, the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act provides protection to public sector employees making disclosures in good faith and prohibits reprisals against them.

The Criminal Code of Canada, section 425.1, states that employers should not take disciplinary measures, demote, terminate or adversely affect the employment of a worker to refrain or punish them for disclosing information to federal or provincial law enforcement about wrongdoing. This code section only protects people who report to law enforcement and not those who disclose information to media sources or any other outside agencies.

The public sector integrity commissioner is also empowered to investigate complaints of wrongdoing and reports of reprisals.

The Ontario Securities Commission launched a program in 2016 that allows people to report serious securities- or derivatives-related misconduct. Eligible whistleblowers may also receive up to \$5 million.

The OSC also encourages whistleblowers to report violations of Ontario securities law in the workplace through internal reporting mechanisms.

Transparency International

In its 2013 "International principles for whistleblower legislation," the Berlin-based, non-government organization Transparency International outlined three key principles of an effective whistleblowing mechanism: accessible and reliable reporting channels; robust protection from all forms of retaliation; and mechanisms for disclosures that promote reforms that correct legislative, policy or procedural inadequacies and prevent future wrongdoing.

Whistleblower regulations and procedures should be "highly visible and understandable," maintain anonymity, ensure timely and independent investigation, and have transparent mechanisms to follow up on complaints.

Acting in good faith

According to the G20 Anti-Corruption Action Plan Protection of Whistleblowers, the main requirement for whistleblowers is that they should act in good faith and on reasonable grounds.

Whistleblower laws should also protect against retaliation and provide anonymity and confidentiality, the G20 plan says.

To avoid loopholes, it should determine whom to cover and identify the scope and breadth of subject matter.

The policy may also impose criminal and civil liability if employees disclose official secrets or information regarding national security, the report says. The policy may also protect against libel and defamation suits, and use incentives to encourage reporting misconduct.

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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all of your friends at the newspaper!

The Lake Report



An illustration of a potential splash pad at Simcoe Park from 2017. The idea has met strong opposition from council and residents, both in and out of Old Town. SUPPLIED

Council **sinks** idea of splash pad at Simcoe Park

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

The idea of replacing the wading pool at Simcoe Park with a splash pad didn't go swimmingly during budget discussions Monday night.

Manager of parks and recreation Kevin Turcotte offered the idea of a splash pad for kids, in the wake of changing rules surrounding pools at the regional level, but council removed the proposal from the 2020 budget almost unanimously.

Coun. Clare Cameron voiced strong concerns and said she'd rather see the pool empty than convert the area into a splash pad, if the region insists.

"When this came up at audit committee I referred to the previous discussion it generated a few years back, which was quite passionate," said Cameron.

"It may surprise some of the newer members on council that people in the Simcoe Park area and visitors to Old Town as well have strong feelings about that wading pool. And this is a levy supported project as well, so this is one I wanted to get on the record that I'm not supporting."

Niagara Region Public Health says pools like the one at Simcoe will soon need fencing, and already need to be treated the same as other pools, with at least two lifeguards on duty at all

times it's open.

Interim CAO Sheldon Randall said the town previously labelled the wading pool as a fountain which people sometimes bathed in, but that definition won't work any longer.

"We've had a lot of challenges with the regional health department for years with this pool," said Randall. "We always try to classify it as a water feature or a fountain that people or kids bathe in. They have come down and said, 'no, it's a pool,' so we need to treat it as such."

He said two or three years ago the town had to start staffing the pool with lifeguards, "because the pool is open and the region classifies it as a pool ... so it's costing us about \$25,000 a year to have staff manage the pool when there's water in the basin."

He said council also asked parks and recreation to find ways of finding efficiencies.

"So we're estimating over four or five years there will be a savings without staffing it," he said.

"We go through the process every year that we're likely going to have to construct a fence around it, and that is coming. I'm not sure if it's going to be 2020 or 2021, but eventually that's going to happen and that will change the look and feel of the pool. And again it will add costs back

into that site."

The question came up about how the pool was being sanitized. Currently staff is sanitizing it by draining and filling it daily, as well as using chlorine.

"We do have challenges keeping up with the capacity of the wading pool, and some of the activities, as you can appreciate, young kids in the pool wearing diapers and things like that. And sometimes when we have staff on they're kicking patrons' dogs out of the pool," said Randall.

Turcotte said one advantage of a splash pad is that it extends the season, from as early as May to early October, depending on the weather.

Coun. Gary Burroughs said council just recently heard from members of the NOTL Museum that Simcoe Park has a strong historic value.

"I think it's a major mistake to talk about putting a splash pad in a historic park such as Simcoe Park. And I just think what we invest and the solution that staff came to was excellent," Burroughs said.

He said he never heard the message about fencing from the region, and understood regional officials were satisfied with the two lifeguards and some sort of phone system for emergencies.

"I'm totally against spending this money, not because

of the costs, but because a splash pad would be totally inappropriate in our historic Simcoe Park."

Coun. Wendy Cheropita said she agrees a splash pad should not be in a historic park, and that if a splash pad were to come to Old Town, it should be in another location.

Turcotte said the pool was renovated in the 1990s and doesn't have a heritage value. Council agreed the proposal should go to the Municipal Heritage Committee for recommendation.

"I do believe there is some kind of significance to that actual pool. It's not designated by a bylaw but it has been some form of wading pool or water feature with actual water in it for some time in that corner of the park," said Cameron.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero echoed comments about strong resident opposition to removing the pool.

"The last time this was in front of council a couple of years ago there was a major outcry from residents in the Old Town particular, although there was also people that weren't from Old Town that lived in other parts of NOTL that said don't do it."

She said to many the pool has become a "symbol of the protection and the preservation of our history in Niagara-on-the-Lake."

New legislation will have **little effect** on horse-drawn carriage operators: Sentineal

Brittany Carter
The Lake Report

Animal rights activists may soon face steeper penalties for trespassing on farms and agri-food premises, but will proposed legislation protect local horse-drawn carriage operators who have become frequent targets of the town's resident protesters?

It seems unlikely.

Ernie Hardeman, Ontario's minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs, introduced a new act Dec. 2 that aims to increase the chance of trespassers on farms being prosecuted and convicted.

The Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act could potentially deter animal rights activists from targeting farms and agricultural businesses.

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Sentineal Carriages will only benefit from the new legislation if protection extends off the farm, owner Laura Sentineal said.

Though she had not yet delved into the legislation documents, she does think "it's a step in the right direction all the way around."

A big concern for Sentineal is that her employees are protected.

"I don't want to prohibit anyone's right to protest, I just want it done in a respectful way so it's not inhibiting our right to have a legal business and, more importantly, my employees," Sentineal said.

"They should be able to go to work without fear of being harassed."

There already is legislation about safety and zero harassment in the workplace, but those rules don't seem to apply to her staff when protesters harass them, she said.

"Our poor staff seem to be the exception – it's wrong."

Hardeman's spokesperson Tanja Kiperovic said the application of the act

is specific to certain areas on agricultural premises only and to motor vehicles transporting farm animals.

"Trespassing that takes place on other properties continues to be covered through other legislation, including the Trespass to Property Act and the Criminal Code of Canada," she added.

In a response to a letter from Locals for Carriages advocate Jennifer Jones-Butski, which she provided to The Lake Report, Hardeman said he understands the concern for safety and well-being of farm employees.

"Our government believes that everyone has the right to feel safe at work; this is especially true for farmers and other businesses where home and work are often the same place," he wrote.

"The bill is intended to protect farm animals, the food supply, farmers and others from risks that are created when trespassers enter places where farm animals are kept or when persons engage in unauthorized interactions with farm animals," the introduction of the proposed legislation states.

Areas on farms, animal processing facilities and other premises farm animals may be kept or located are protected under the new act. People are prohibited from entering without prior consent of the owner or operator of the farm.

The maximum fine for a first offence under the bill is \$15,000, rising to \$25,000 for subsequent offences. The act also states that fine may be increased by the court depending on the gravity of the offence.

"We feel that this proposed bill is fair and balances the safety and security of farmers and their families and our food supply, while protecting the right of people to participate in legal protests," Hardeman told the Legislature.



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<h2>The Lake Report</h2> <p>COMMUNITY FAVOURITES: Legion Fish Fry every Thursday 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. (CLOSED DEC. 19 - JAN. 9) Duplicate Bridge at the Community Centre Tuesdays and Fridays at 1 p.m.</p>			
22	23	24	
Art Exhibit and Sale - 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. - Gate Street Studio Sunday Brunch - 11:30 a.m. - Queen's Landing Hotel	The Grinch Movie - 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. - NOTL Public Library Free Youth Walk in Mental Health Clinic - 11:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. - Red Roof Retreat Fun Duplicate Bridge - 9 a.m. to noon - NOTL Community Centre Italian Conversation Group - 12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre French Conversation Group - 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre	Free Holiday Skate - 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. - Wayne Gretzky Estates Winery & Distillery Christmas Eve - Library closed today - Community Centre short hours - 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. -	Christmas Day Library and Community Centre closed
29	30	31	
Teen Literary Alliance - 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. - NOTL Public Library	Free Youth Walk in Mental Health Clinic - 11:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. - Red Roof Retreat Fun Duplicate Bridge - 9 a.m. to noon - NOTL Community Centre Italian Conversation Group - 12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre French Conversation Group - 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre Angry Birds 2 Movie - 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. - NOTL Public Library	New Year's Eve - Library closed today - Community Centre short hours - 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. -	New Year's Day - Library and Community Centre closed today - New Year's Day Levée - Navy Hall

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Report

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Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<p>19</p> <p>Seniors Drop in: Casual Bridge - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p>Niagara PF Support Group - 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p>Committee of Adjustment - 6:30 p.m. - Council Chambers</p> <p>Parents and Tots Play Group - 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. - GateWay Community Church</p>	<p>20</p> <p>Duplicate Bridge (ACBL Sanctioned) - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p>Heart of Christmas Past - 7:30 p.m. - Grace United Church</p> <p>Knit a Bit - 2 p.m. - NOTL Public Library</p> <p>The Wild: Firepits - 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. - NOTL Public Library</p>	<p>21</p> <p>Ryan Langdon live at Club 55 - 10 p.m. - Club 55</p> <p>Indoor Holiday Goat Yoga - 1 p.m. - Fox Den Yoga</p> <p>Art Exhibit and Sale - 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. - Gate Street Studio</p>
<p>25</p> <p>Community Centre</p>	<p>26</p> <p>Boxing Day Library and Community Centre closed</p>	<p>27</p> <p>Duplicate Bridge (ACBL Sanctioned) - 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre</p> <p>Knit a Bit - 2 p.m. - NOTL Public Library</p> <p>NOTL Newcomers Coffee and Conversation - 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. - NOTL Community Centre</p>	<p>28</p> <p>Indoor Goat Yoga - 1 p.m. - Fox Den Yoga</p> <p>Goodbye 2019: A Year of Beer - 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. - Exchange Brewery</p>
<p>1</p> <p>Community Centre</p> <p>ee - 3 p.m. -</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Minecraft Club - 4 p.m. - NOTL Public Library</p> <p>Celtic Cross Duo - 7 p.m. - Silversmith Brewing Company</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Knit a Bit - 2 p.m. - NOTL Public Library</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Shaw Festival Film Series - 3 p.m. - Shaw Festival Theatre</p> <p>Regency Skating Party - 1 p.m. - Vintage Parks Canada skating rink</p>

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Rain on my parade: NOTLers tough out the storm to see floats and Santa

Continued from Front Page

roll and open house after the parade.

NOTL fire association president Vic Martens said the rainy morning didn't seem to affect their fundraiser.

"The rain may have kept people away from the parade, but we didn't really see that here," he said.

The association has always held the open house following the parade, he said. About 10 to 15 turkeys are raffled off and firefighters served drinks and burgers.

"It's just something to add to the parade, I guess," said Martens. The party has become a long-standing tradition for families to bring their kids, he added.

"I think they just come for a few drinks after standing out in the cold for the parade. Kids like coming in here. They can just come in here and run, it's a big open space," Martens said.

Celebrations continue long after the open

house as many people in town also head over to the Legion following the turkey roll, Martens said.

"We finish the night off at the Legion," he said.

NOTL Legion Branch 124 kicked off the morning with peameal on a bun, which the Legion sold on King Street for the "early starters," said ladies auxiliary and committee member Megan Vanderlee.

"Every year before Christmas, on Saturday – Parade Day, we always have a great feast for everyone here. A turkey or ham roll – so you can come down and win your turkey or ham for Christmas. It's always well attended," she said.

The open house brought crowds in to warm up after the parade and it ran all evening.

"We have the ladies auxiliary raffle, which is a small 'Charlie Brown tree' with many gift cards," she said.

"And then we just spread a lot of Christmas cheer and hope everyone wins a turkey or ham."



Parade spectators hide from the rain under tarps waiting for the Christmas parade. PHOTOS BY BRITTANY CARTER



NOTL resident Steve Breeze snapped this picture while a woman's umbrella decided to give her trouble. SUPPLIED



The parade route is lined with people holding umbrellas Saturday.

Hydro box design winners unveiled

Jessica Maxwell
The Lake Report

Having artists design murals for vinyl wraps on hydro boxes in Old Town is a great "community builder" project, says Elaine Bryck, one of the artists whose work was chosen for the project.

Bryck and two other winners of the design contest gathered Thursday at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre for the unveiling and to collect their \$500 prizes donated by NOTL Hydro.

"We artists are always collaborating with each other and enjoy each others work," said Bryck.

"You want to see what other people are doing and work with them and hear how they interpret anything

that's out there. Especially a competition like this."

Artists' submissions for the Hydro Box Beautification competition were accepted between Aug. 21 and Sept. 18, with three winners chosen on Sept. 25.

At the end of the competition, "You want to see what's out there on the actual hydro boxes, whether it was mine or someone else's," Bryck said.

Bryck says Niagara-on-the-Lake is a very supportive and culture-minded community in that way.

The work of Jennifer Penner and Lindsey Kemp also will be displayed on the hydro boxes.

These art-wrapped boxes can be found at Front Street near Victoria Street, Memo-

rial Park off King Street, and King and Ricardo streets.

The contest was sponsored by the Pumphouse, Niagara-on-the-Lake's Communities in Bloom committee and NOTL Hydro.

Penner was born and raised in Niagara-on-the-Lake and her submission was a focus on ice wine grapes.

"It's called metamorphosis. As a butterfly, we kind of go through the series and we metamorphoses into something spectacular which is our icewine," said Penner.

Growing up and smelling the grapes in the air, "just kind of embedded in my soul," said Penner.

Kemp's background as a

photographer and herbalist inspired her submission, First Flora.

"It's a collection of plants that are native and indigenous to the Niagara Region. I wanted to pay homage to that," said Kemp.

"I hope there are more opportunities for local artists to show their work in town because there's so much talent here."

Being in Niagara-on-the-Lake allows Kemp more time to be connected with nature, which she says there is not the same opportunity living in a big city.

NOTL Hydro president Tim Curtis was inspired to start the project after seeing online posts of other communities painting fire hydrants.



Elayne Bryck accepts her award. SUPPLIED

He thought, "That's kind of cool, why don't we do the same thing for transformers," Curtis told the audience at the awards.

"Little did I know that hundreds of people have done it beforehand," added Curtis.

When Curtis suggested the idea to Lord Mayor Betty Disero she pulled out her phone and started showing him examples of decorated hydrants and transformers across the country.

"This is one of the beauties of having a local

electricity distributor. We can work with the town on things like this," said Curtis.

Although the lord mayor was unable to attend the award ceremony, Pumphouse volunteer Gail Kerr read a note on her behalf.

Disero said this project has been a dream of hers for many years and it "provides such a wonderful opportunity to showcase our artists in a public setting and it adds beauty to the town in places that are sometimes subjected to graffiti or ignored."



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The **curse** of cruising

By Ward Simpson | Special to The Lake Report

NOTL's Ward Simpson shared this poem with fellow Rotarians at their December meeting, just after he and his wife Oresta had returned from their European river cruise.

I wake up in the morning to a lovely cup of tea
 With my hubby standing next to me smiling down on me
 "Have a biscuit with it. Put shoes upon your feet.
 Let's hurry down to breakfast,
 It must be time to eat."

There's shuffleboard and other games and sitting in the sun
 Talks and quizzes, singing too and other lots of fun.
 I chat to people I don't know – so many still to meet
 But gosh! Where has the morning gone?
 It must be time to eat.

After lunch we sit around doing not a lot
 Then hubby says, "A cup of tea? Let's look at what they've got.
 Those sandwiches and cakes look nice. Just give yourself a treat.
 It's two whole hours since we had lunch.
 It must be time to eat."

Then I feel all guilty so I rush off to the gym
 and leap and prance and jump and dance and stretch out every limb.
 Then shower and change and preen and pat and check that all is neat
 A quick drink in the bar and then
 It must be time to eat.

Later there are shows and jokes and songs for her and him
 Then I stagger to my cabin 'cos I'm full up to the brim.
 But what's that on my pillow so tempting and so sweet?
 Ooooh! A little square of chocolate!
 It must be time to eat.

I know what's going to happen when I'm home and on the scales
 And the arrow whizzes upward and I'm thinking of beached whales
 And my clothes no longer fit me and the edges will not meet
 It's just the curse of cruising
 It must be time to eat.

NOTL's **town crier** will ring in the new year

Brittany Carter
 The Lake Report

Being a town crier means more than donning a period costume and loudly making a declaration.

Dr. Thomas Pekar, Niagara-on-the-Lake's unofficial town crier, says the role is about making connections and reaching the community.

This year, he was asked by NOTL Rotary Club member Jolanta Janny to help usher in the new year at the clock tower in Old Town.

She remembers when the bells at the Old Court House would chime on the hour. After the daily chimes stopped, she says she would look forward to the ringing of the bells on New Year's Eve.

"Now, there's no more chiming," Janny says.

She wanted to bring back the new year "magic" for NOTL residents, so she reached out to Pekar, who came "highly recommended," she says.

"My first thought was that

I want a celebration for us, the people of Niagara."

Pekar is no stranger to leading a celebration, having walked at the head of parades in Niagara Falls, Stevensville and Port Colborne. He is notorious for climbing out through the window to the balcony of the Old Court House to introduce the start of NOTL's annual Candlelight Stroll before leading the march.

He says he wants to help create authentic tourism in NOTL – his role as town crier is his way of transforming people's impression of the town.

"People come up to me and say, 'Can I take your picture?' and I say, 'No, but you can give her your camera and you and I can be in the picture together.'"

In doing that, he's helping to create an event – a memorable moment. Instead of, "There was this guy dressed up in funny clothes," he aims to create a "Kodak moment."

Pekar became enthralled with the idea of one day stepping into the role of

town crier after one officiated at his wedding 25 years ago at Brock's Monument.

"We had a period wedding. He was so superb as a master of ceremony, as a facilitator. He brought a flair and a pomp to that. How he managed the whole thing, it was spectacular. I thought, if I ever have a chance to be a town crier – I want to do what he does," Pekar says.

And when the town's bicentennial approached, he says he saw his chance.

"In 2010, I went to Gary Burroughs, who was mayor at the time. We had this bicentennial celebration coming up. We needed to have a town crier/ambassador," he says.

"As a town crier, that's the number one thing that we do in terms of our civic duties, we extend our hello to other people."

And though the decision to make the designation was deferred to the museum, which was then passed to the bicentennial committee, he says eventually he was named honorary Sheriff of Niagara.



Dr. Thomas Pekar, Niagara-on-the-Lake's unofficial town crier leads the Candlelight Stroll. RICHARD HARLEY/FILE PHOTO

"A member of the historical society said the sheriff did everything that a town crier did except ring the bell. So, in 2010 I was designated as Sheriff of Niagara," he says.

He assumed the "persona" of Thomas Merritt, who was sheriff of Niagara during the War of 1812.

"As a historical re-enactor that's the role I played, and I've been playing that role ever since."

He's since eased into the role, making appearances at Friends of Fort George events and doing weddings and private functions. He says the position requires someone who isn't afraid to speak in public.

"Not afraid to make a mistake and fool of myself.

Not afraid to poke fun at someone in an amicable way."

When he's not in character as the unofficial town crier for NOTL, Pekar runs a dental practice in St. Catharines and leads missions abroad to bring dental services to those in need. Any money he earns through his town crier gig goes toward his dental mission fund, he says.

"I'm not out to make a profit. I do it because I love it."

And the most surprising thing he's come to love about his role is the people he's been able to meet, he says.

"To be a town crier you first of all must love people – second of all you must

be passionate about your community. And to further the well-being of the community."

"The best part of the job I had no idea about when I signed up. I get to meet some of the seemingly ordinary, extraordinary people that I otherwise would have never ever crossed paths with. I get to meet the people who do Meals on Wheels, who do hospice, who do the water rescue," he says.

But more than that, he says he appreciates he is able to brag about those incredible people.

"You get to talk about unsung heroes. I get to meet all of these people, and I get to brag on them – that's probably the best part."



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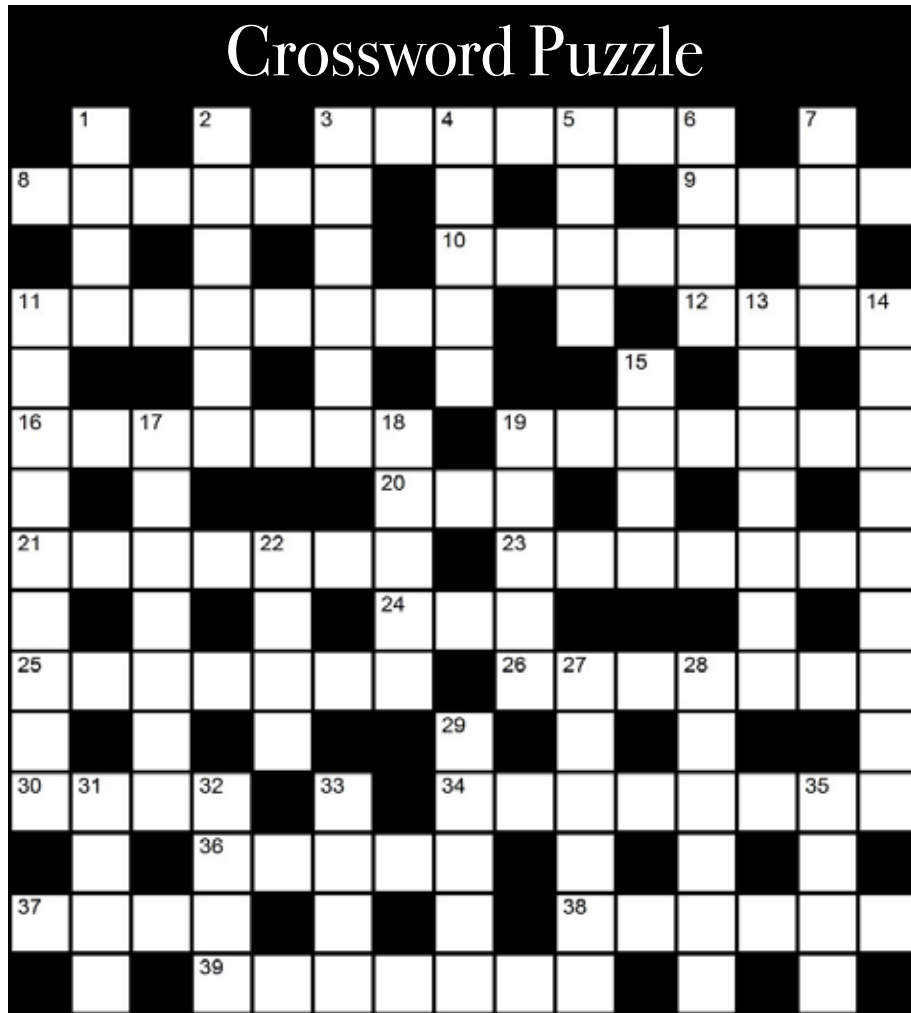
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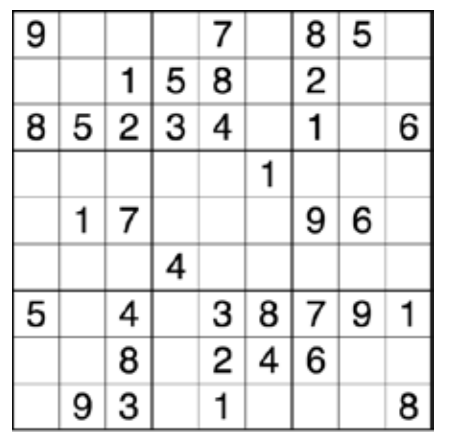
- Across**
3. Ringed (7)
 8. --- Goldberg, actress (6)
 9. Highway (4)
 10. Lax (5)
 11. Last (8)
 12. Heavy blow (4)
 16. Predicted (7)
 19. Spark off (7)
 20. Belonging to us (3)
 21. Old match (7)
 23. Its capital is Montevideo (7)
 24. Involuntary muscular contraction (3)
 25. Up-to-date (2,5)
 26. Covered (7)
 30. Young lady (4)
 34. Instruction to keep cool (4,4)
 36. Tyrone county town (5)
 37. Forbidden action (2-2)
 38. Vortices (6)
 39. Learned the ropes (7)
- Down**
1. North Wales seaside resort (4)
 2. Incentive (6)
 3. Shrill chirping insect (6)
 4. Canons (5)
 5. Landlocked SE Asian nation (4)
 6. Sketched (4)
 7. Father (4)
 11. Spreading out (9)
 13. Top brass (4-3)
 14. Death for a cause (9)
 15. Place (4)
 17. Earthquake scale (7)
 18. Value (5)
 19. Armistice (5)
 22. Smoke duct (4)
 27. Approached (6)
 28. Assent (6)
 29. Grey (5)
 31. "Prince ---", Borodin opera (4)
 32. Spoils (4)
 33. Individual facts (4)
 35. Sediment (4)

Have some fun

The Lake Report is looking for puzzle makers who would like to help develop this page. We are seeking both standard and cryptic crossword writers. editor@niagaranow.com



Last issue's answers



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During the holiday season, our thoughts turn gratefully to those who have made our partnership and progress possible. It is in this spirit that we say thank you. Wishing you all the joys of the Christmas season and a Happy New Year.
- Michelle & Stefan

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Review: ‘Enthralling’ performances at St. Mark’s Christmas concert

Jean Baker
Special to The Lake Report

A delightful musical journey through the Baroque period of the 18th century to carols interspersed with biblical readings foretelling the birth of Jesus Christ was featured at St. Mark’s Anglican Church on Saturday, Dec. 14.

Conductor Michael Tansley led both the orchestra and Newark Singers through two enthralling performances.

First was the Christmas Concerto by Italian composer Arcangelo Corelli in six movements in G Minor featuring harpsichord played by Catherine Willard, supported by fine string players from the Niagara Symphony, led by violinist Vera Alekseeva.

The concerto introduced the audience to a brilliant composer with a reputation as a master violinist whose music was studied by J.S. Bach. Corelli was a bridge



Michael Tansley conducted the St. Mark’s Christmas concert. JEAN BAKER

between music of the 17th and 18th centuries, a graduate of the Bolognese school trained in classical notation providing both grandeur and perfection.

Dr. Charles Burney, a renowned music historian, praised Corelli. “In their ensemble effect are majestic sounds, so solemn, so sublime, that they made

us forget everything else composed in their style.”

The second half of the St. Mark’s program was beautifully performed by the Newark Singers, again under the direction of Tansley. It was truly “sweet music” to the listeners’ ears.

Mention must be noted of soprano soloist Julia Hooker. Her powerful voice

singing in “What Sweeter Music” was very moving.

Some familiar carols were rearranged to give them a fresh voice, while others more traditional invited audience participation.

St. Mark’s Church, with its amazing acoustics and fine musicians, provided a wonderful musical prelude to the season of Christmas.

Vintage-Parks Canada rink at Fort George open after minor setbacks

Brittany Carter
The Lake Report

The Vintage-Parks Canada outdoor skating rink hit a few snafus before opening a day late on Sunday, but the rink is now open to the public with “perfect for skating” ice conditions, a Parks Canada spokesperson said.

Saturday’s rainfall caused the rink to delay its official launch party and opening date, and Parks Canada public relations and communications officer Brett Levitt said it’s not certain the party will be rescheduled at all.

Although the opening was initially planned for Saturday, the outdoor rink next to Fort George was ready Sunday morning without further problems.

“With the combination of warm weather and rainy conditions, the skating rink accumulated too much water and was not safe for the public to use,” said Levitt.

As well as poor weather conditions, the ice resurfacer required minor maintenance, but an alternative one was used to ensure the rink was fully operational and no more delays were experienced, Levitt added.

The 60-by-120-foot rink is free to use and is kept frozen by the five chillers installed below the ice surface.

Skate rentals are available for \$5 in the Agora building beside the rink, which features fireplaces, sitting areas and concession items for sale.

Though it’s uncertain the



Joe Murray, Vintage’s project manager and Jacob Hebbert, Vintage Hotels employee. BRITTANY CARTER

launch party will take place at all this year, Levitt said Parks Canada is discussing the possibility of an alternative date with Vintage Hotels, and there are several other events planned for the holiday season.

On Saturday Jan. 4, from 1 to 5 p.m., visitors can dress in their early 1800s “regency best,” including tailcoats, bonnets, collard shirts, waist coats and more, for an evening of elegance.

There will be special activities inside the fort and on the rink – and chances at winning prizes.

Family and evening skate:
Friday – 5 to 9 p.m.
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Sunday – 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 2 to 5 p.m.

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COOKING WITH COLLIN



A hearty Christmas squash and coconut soup to warm you up

Collin Goodine
Special to The Lake Report

This holiday season try a creamy, velvety smooth Squash and Coconut Soup. It is a perfect remedy for the frightful weather outside. Whether curled up in a warm blanket by the fire or in a Christmas fleece sweater around the dinner table, this soup will easily become a seasonal favourite. It has the traditional cozy texture and flavour you'll crave in a winter soup, with a nice twist of coconut. Make this hearty flavoured, rich tasting soup a new addition to the holiday table. Serves 12 to 15 people.

Squash and Coconut Soup

Ingredients:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2 butternut squash | 4 litres vegetable stock |
| 1 medium-sized carrot | 1/2 litre coconut milk |
| 2 medium-sized potatoes | 1/2 tsp cumin |
| 1 sweet potato | 1 tsp curry powder |
| 2 stalks of celery | 1/2 tsp cinnamon |
| 1/2 white onion | 1/4 tsp nutmeg |
| 3 Granny Smith apples | 1/4 tsp all spice |
| 1 tsp garlic (pureed) | Salt and pepper to taste |
| 1/2 cup maple syrup or honey | |

Directions:

Cut butternut squash in half. De-seed the squash and place skin side up on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Roast in the oven at 350F until fork tender (about 20-25 minutes). While the squash is in the oven, peel carrot, potatoes and sweet potato.

Chop carrots, celery, onion, sweet potato, potatoes and apples (skin on). Then, in a large pot, sweat these vegetables with garlic, until onions caramelize.

Add honey or maple syrup, veg stock and coconut milk and stir. Add all the spices, salt and pepper.

When the roasted squash is ready, scoop the meat of the vegetable into the pot with all the other ingredients, discarding the peel.

Cook on medium until all vegetables are soft enough to puree.

Puree in high-speed blender or with a large hand blender until very smooth. If you need to you can put the soup through a china cap to strain out any lumps left behind.

Put back onto the stove on low and adjust the seasonings until you are happy with the flavour of the soup.



The Heritage Trail Committee has raised more than \$52,000 for restoration, which will begin in the spring. BRITTANY CARTER

With \$52,000 raised, Heritage Trail restoration slated to start in spring

Brittany Carter
The Lake Report

More than \$52,000 has been raised for the restoration of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail and that means work on it will begin this spring.

Rick Meloen, chair of the Heritage Trail Committee, said construction of the first portion of phase one, which runs from John Street to Paffard Street, will start in early spring, with completion expected in June. Work will be done by town staff and involves levelling some of the path and laying a granular surface.

Kevin Turcotte, the town's manager of parks and recreation, said the section from John to Paffard is now being designed by the engineering department.

Meloen said the commit-

tee received the go-ahead after an archeological study was conducted. Now, the committee is awaiting the results of a forthcoming study on the second portion of phase one, which continues from Paffard Street to East and West Line Road.

"We have considerable funds for that. We're hoping to raise sufficient funds to complete it to East and West Line Road, which is our target for 2020," he said.

Meloen said he doesn't anticipate any issues arising after archeological studies for the rest of trail.

"The railbed and the construction of the railroad itself disturbed anything that would have been in there. It's very old. So, I don't see anything aside from railroad stuff," he said.

Waiting for the study isn't something he said he's

bothered about.

"Because it is town property, the town has a process for this. We want to follow the process. We are concerned about heritage and archeological stuff is part of the heritage - we can't deny that."

Meloen said he's "very thankful" for the support received up until now, adding that donations from individuals and companies brought the committee this far. Now, more fundraising for the trail is in the works.

Plans are moving forward for a five-kilometre fun run, which Meloen said he hopes will become an annual event.

"We're very excited about this," he said. The run, which is still in the very early planning stages, will likely take place along a part of the trail.



Jacyln Willms, Sarah Barber and Danielle Lepp write down their goals for the new year. STAY FIT NOTL

The ultimate December workout: Mindset and goals

Jacyln Willms
Special to The Lake Report

Enter 2020 with energy, vitality and wellness.

The hustle and bustle of the holiday season can sometimes feel overwhelming so make sure to take time to break away and find a calm place to take some

time for yourself.

If you have never exercised a day in your life or you're a conditioned athlete, taking time for yourself is important at all stages.

December is the month of closure but is also here to help us welcome new beginnings, as we get ready to enter into a new year of

endless possibilities.

Relaxation and wellness are the two most important things to embrace, especially as we close out 2019 and say hello to a new decade.

Take a moment to thank your mind, body and soul for what it has done for you this past year, as it was your stepping stone for 2020.

I want to leave you with the exercise of writing down three goals you want to achieve in 2020 and post it somewhere you will see it everyday.

The team at Niagara Fit wishes you an amazing holiday season and to enter 2020 with abundant energy!



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EXPLORING PHOTOS

WITH JIM SMITH



Sleeping in the attic

My dad built our house at 178 Regent St. and it had only two bedrooms. I slept with my older brother Terry in a double bed and my oldest brother, Don, had a single bed. In the winter, our bedroom was almost as cold inside as it was out. There were no storm windows so Jack Frost painted our single-pane windows generously with crystal patterns that looked like ferns. Our house was heated with a Quebec coal stove in the dining room. The only place in the house that was warm was right beside the stove. When I was too old to sleep with my brother, I wanted my own bedroom. The only place I could have was the attic, as seen in the picture. It was ice cold in the winter and boiling hot in the summer, but I loved it.

SUPPLIED PHOTO/JIM SMITH

ARCHITEXT

A Christmas Candle

Brian Marshall
Featured

Christmas in the Town of Niagara during the late 18th and early 19th century was absent many of the practices we follow today.

One attended church in the morning, possibly place holly or evergreen sprigs in the windows, sat down to a fine meal, and then would visit or be visited by neighbours.

It was the first of the 12 days of Christmas, which ended on Jan. 6 and, if any gifts were given, it would have been simple sweets or the like, which could just as easily be passed out on New Year's Day as Christmas.

Parishioners may have



A candle in the window. SUPPLIED PHOTO

hung simple evergreen garlands in the church, and possibly extended that practice into their homes, but decorations were nowhere to be found.

Christmas trees were strictly a German tradition until an 1848 image of Queen Victoria and her German husband Prince Albert's tree was widely published, giving royal respectability to this curious "foreign" practice.

But in some windows, a candle glowed during the Christmas season, its

flickering light seeming to beckon welcome as it danced through the waves and occlusions of the glass panes.

The candle in the window had its origins during the period of the Penal Laws in 17th-century Ireland. These laws, passed by Protestant England to suppress the practice of the Catholic religion, effectively made priests into hunted outlaws.

A candle in the window of a home was a signal to these fugitives that the door was unlocked and an invita-

tion to join the family in secret Christmas prayer.

Of course, as candle-lit windows proliferated, it inevitably drew questions from the English soldiers. When asked, the Irish householder would reply that it was a welcome for Mary and Joseph to shelter on a night the Bible said there was no room in the inn.

Not only did the candle in the window become a tradition carried outward by Irish immigrants, but the story was passed on by the English soldiers and candles began to appear in the windows of homes both in Europe and North America.

So, while this is a distinct departure from the normal content of this column, I wanted to put my "candle in the window" this year. I wish that you may enjoy peace, happiness and love as you, and those around you, celebrate the holiday season!

CELEBRATE the SEASON at St. Mark's

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JIM BOURNE & MEMBERS OF THE NEWARK SINGERS
AND AN APPEARANCE BY SANTA CLAUS!

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CHRISTMAS EVE
7:00 PM: 'SING CHOIRS OF ANGELS' WITH COMMUNION TO CELEBRATE THE SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT BY CANDLELIGHT
10:00 PM: HOLY COMMUNION CHRISTMAS CAROLS AND HYMNS BY CANDLELIGHT

CHRISTMAS MORNING
10:00 AM: COMMUNION WITH CAROLS FOLLOWED BY SHERRY AND SHORTBREAD

St. Mark's Anglican Church
41 Byron St., NOTL www.stmarksnotl.org

From our family to yours,


*Merry Christmas
& Happy New Year!*


WWW.JS-CONSTRUCTION.CA

Did you know?

The Lake Report's printer sources 100 per cent of its paper fibre from industry leading paper mills, which use quick-growth, sustainable, renewable plots of land, rather than clear-cutting forests.

The ink is also vegetable-based.



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The **ruthless** burning of Niagara

Part 2: Frustrated and defeated, the retreating Americans set fire to what is now NOTL



Denise Ascenzo
Exclusive/The Lake Report

In November 1813, winter was fast approaching and the commander of Fort Niagara, Gen. George McClure, was very concerned about a series of American defeats and the depletion of his troops who were sent to serve in the Battle of Chrysler Farm.

His militia men would soon be finished their term of service and, upon their leaving, Fort Niagara would be defenceless.

With the American loss at the Battle of Stony Creek in June 1813, the British and their Indigenous allies carried out a loose siege on Fort George during the summer and into the fall.

With continuous attacks on outlying sentry posts disrupting American scouting parties and supply lines, Fort George was no longer the "springboard" for the American conquest originally planned. McClure recalled all his troops from the town of Niagara (now NOTL).

The American Secretary of War had instructed McClure to burn the town if it would secure the mouth of the Niagara River for the Americans.

It is interesting to note that after the war, McClure was dismissed from service because he gave the orders to burn the town.

On a cold, wintry Dec. 10, 1813, American soldiers pillaged the town, torching every building regardless of who lived there.

Women and children were ordered out into the



When the Americans burned Niagara in 1813, some of the women rushed to remove items from their homes. FROM 2013 VIDEO, "BURNING OF NIAGARA," COURTESY TONY CHISHOLM

streets, many with just the clothes they were wearing, and forced to watch their homes burn.

Some of the women, upon hearing what was happening, rushed to remove items from their homes, but many others were not as lucky.

Catharine Heron, who had recently given birth to her daughter, was carried out onto the street in her bed, with her newborn, to watch her house burn to the ground.

Mrs. McKie stood in a snowbank with her three daughters, one of whom didn't even have time to put on her shoes. They watched in horror as their home was burned.

Charlotte Dickson, who had hosted McClure and some of his officers in her home, was forced out and allowed just a few minutes to retrieve some of her possessions.

With three young chil-

dren, Mrs. Campbell, a widow, was driven from her home. They spent several nights out in the open before she found shelter for all of them.

The lighthouse, though, was spared from the fires. Maybe it was too far out for the arsonists to be bothered with or maybe the Americans spared it as it was essential to both American and British shipping.

But the lighthouse was where several families went for refuge. They took their meagre possessions with them and lived there for most of the winter.

Another home that was overlooked, spared from the fire was the Clench house, and many took refuge there. (Unfortunately the home burned down in March of 1814; a spark from a fire that was used to heat water was considered the cause.)

Some of those left home-

less by the burning of the town found refuge in old root cellars or from debris that they leaned against chimneys for makeshift shelters. Many others walked to outlying farms, some as far as St. Davids or to the Servos farm on Lakeshore Road, past Four Mile Creek.

The next day, Dec. 11, 1813, the British forces arrived in Niagara.

One account was from William Hamilton Merritt, who recorded the devastation he saw: "Nothing but heaps of coal and streets full of furniture."

This ruthless, unwarranted burning of the town ended the type of warfare that was known at that time. No longer was it a gentleman's war and the British were out for revenge.

Fort Niagara, near what is now Youngstown, N.Y., was captured by the

British on Dec. 19, 1813. The British then headed south, burning villages and towns all along the American side of the Niagara River, including Buffalo.

As for the residents of Niagara (NOTL), in December 1813, the war had left their town. The Americans made another attempt to take the town, landing from Lake Ontario at Four Mile Creek, but were not successful.

It was time to rebuild.

Fort George was considered within cannon range of Fort Niagara, so work was started on Fort Missisauga, where the lighthouse had been. Butler's Barracks was also constructed, but farther inland, around John and King streets.

By 1816, rebuilding of the town had begun. The second courthouse and jail were built farther out of town, at what is now Cottage and Rye streets. Busi-

nesses were encouraged as well to move farther away from Fort Niagara, out of cannon ball range, however, many business owners did not want to be far from the Niagara River and decided to build on Queen Street.

In 1817, the first store was opened – William Duff Miller's Stationery Shop. It is the home of the Queen Street LCBO now.

Several decades after the burning, residents of the town still feared the Americans would attack again, but warfare never returned to Niagara (NOTL).

I would like to thank Ron Dale and the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum for their continued support when researching my articles.

More Niagara's History Unveiled articles about the past of Niagara-on-the-Lake are available at: www.niagaranow.com



COMMUNITY



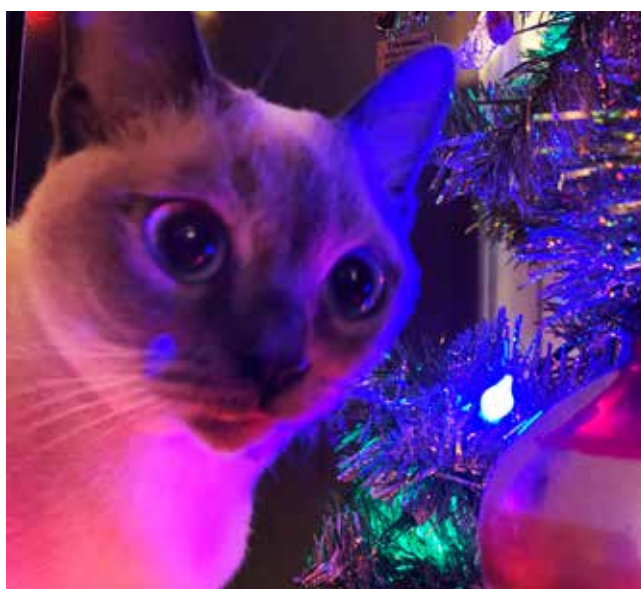
We invite you to submit photos and stories for consideration in this section.
Send your submissions to editor@niagaranow.com for a chance to be featured.



Community photos



Top left: Neighbourhood kids get a ride with Santa at the annual Chautauqua Carol Stroll. JESSICA MAXWELL
Top right: Purr the Wonder Cat waiting for Christmas. MATTHEW J. WRIGHT
Bottom left: Friends gather at Hear Better Niagara for a small holiday gathering. RICHARD HARLEY
Bottom right: Callie and Ryder Robertson smile for pictures with Santa on Sunday. BRITTANY CARTER



Silversmith Brewing Company



Jessie Bridge accepts the award for Silversmith Brewery. THE GOLDEN PLUNGER

The travelling gals almost missed the next destination at Silversmith Brewing Co. as it is located in an 1890s church in Virgil. This brewery "oozes" with charm as you admire the exposed beams and brick walls, which are architecturally reclaimed. Even the tables are made from wooden church pews. Silversmith offers its award-winning Black Lager and the "Altar kitchen" offerings will excite your palate. Our visit to the "water closet" downstairs found a facility for single users, with ample supplies and one could say that, "Cleanliness is next to godliness" in this "hallowed space. We wish the Silversmith brewery "cheers and packed pews" in this festive season as it earned 3/5 Golden Plungers.

3/5 Golden Plungers



NOTL DART LEAGUE

Each week, dart teams face off at local restaurants and pubs. Find scores here weekly, exclusive to The Lake Report.

The NOTL Dart League had its Christmas Team Tournament Tuesday night. Members raised more than \$500 of cash and donations for the food bank. Close Shavians won the tourney. There are no darts again until Jan. 7.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Tarot of the week

Lisa Tache/Special

DATE: Dec. 19, 2019

It's a time to put action into place. A new way of thinking will allow you to view the world with clear eyes. It says your mind is opening up. Be eager to

learn something new. The Ace of Swords tells you that now is an excellent time to start a new project – one that requires your intellect, communication skills and intuition. See this card as a sign of encouragement. You may feel inspired to practice your public speaking skills, take a writing class or get involved in activities that require more brainpower than usual.

ASK YOURSELF THIS.
How can I turn my ideas into action?

RIDDLE ME THIS

I have keys, but no locks and space, and no rooms. What am I?

Last Week: I'm an English word that has three consecutive double letters. What am I?

Answer: bookkeeper

Answered first by: Quinn Tiller

Also answered correctly by: Ross Robinson, Lynne Stewart, Margie Enns, Pam Dowling, Katie Reimer, Sheila Meloche

Email answers to editor@niagaranow.com for a chance to win a prize.



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Wishing you a Merry Christmas
and a safe and Happy New Year!

FROM - SHARON, CAROLE, LANA, LILIANA, HOLLY, BETH, AMY, LAURA AND WERNER

December 25th - December 29th : Closed
December 30th: 9-5 December 31st: 9-12 January 1st: Closed

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FEATURED LOCAL STORY

Read Ward Simpson's poem about the trip on Page 13



Left: Crowds at the Christmas market in Prague. Right: Oresta and Ward Simpson at the Nuremberg market. SUPPLIED

People from Niagara-on-the-Lake travel to some of the most interesting places on Earth and we'd like to hear about your vacations.

So, if you have ever wanted to be a travel writer, here is your chance. Send us a travelogue story about your vacation, along with some photos.

It's impossible to include everything, but stories ideally should be 250 to 600 words and focus on a unique, quirky or particularly interesting aspect of your trip. It can be about a vacation you have just taken, one you're on now (lucky you!), or a holiday you took a few years ago.

Sometimes, just a picture is worth a thousand words. So, if you aren't able to write a story about your trip, send us two or three snapshots from your holiday and we will try to publish some of them.

In all cases, smartphone photos are perfectly acceptable. Just make sure each digital image you send us is around 1 to 2 MB in size. Include destination information and the names (from left) of everyone in each photo. And tell us who took the photo, if possible.

As a bonus, bring along a copy of *The Lake Report* and include it in your photo!

Send your stories and photos to editor@niagararow.com and be sure to write TRAVEL in the subject line.

Happy trails.

Hometown Travellers: Christmas tour of a lifetime

Ward and Oresta Simpson
Special to The Lake Report

Well, calling our European Christmas Market Cruise a Prague-to-Budapest journey is not exactly correct – as the cruise was from Nuremberg to Budapest. But we did spend three days in Prague prior to boarding the ship.

Our first taste of a European Christmas market was in Prague's main square, a short walk from our hotel. The first thing that caught our eye was the famous Astronomical Clock, which dates to 1410 and is the oldest clock still operating.

The market was spectacular, dominated by a huge decorated tree and nativity scene in the centre with hundreds of stalls surrounding it. These stalls offered traditional Czech food and drink, handmade souvenirs and gifts – and, of course, mulled wine. (Although the Czech Republic is part of the EU, it has its own currency, the Czech Coruna (or Crown). And 100 Coruna is about \$6 Canadian, it is relatively easy to convert.)

As we were wandering around this and many other Christmas markets on our trip, we thought what a

lovely idea this would be for Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Simcoe Park would be a great location, where the market would be somewhat protected from the elements. Queen's Royal Park would be ideal, too, but the weather, especially the wind, might be a deterrent. It could be held on weekends in December in conjunction with the Candlelight Stroll, the Rotary House Tour, the Santa Claus parade, etc.

We also did a walking tour of Prague, exploring the beautiful architecture and restaurants. It was a lovely start to the trip.

After a bus ride to Nuremberg, Germany, where we boarded the Scenic Ship Amber, we settled in to our room for a brief nap and set off to see the sights.

The "Nurnberger Christkindlesmarkt," also in the central square, is one of the largest Christmas markets in Germany and one of the most famous in the world.

It also had the traditional foods and drinks, souvenirs and gifts, and a special mulled wine called "Feuerzangen-bowle," a strong red wine punch. It has a sugar cone soaked with a robust rum (54 per cent alcohol) which is placed over the red wine. The rum-soaked sugar-cone is lit, allowing

hot rum and melted sugar to drip into the pot, where it infuses with the red wine and spices. Delicious.

When you buy a drink you are also required to buy a mug with it. The drinks are usually 3 or 4 euro and the cups can be another 3 or 4 euro. Each market has its own distinctive cup and if you don't want to keep the mug you can return it to any of the mulled wine stalls and get your money back. Neat idea.

Back on the boat, we set sail for Regensburg and a tour of the Thurn and Taxis Christmas Market. This is a smaller market but located in a castle courtyard. The Thurn and Taxis families still live in the castle and it was incredible to see all their wealth as we toured it. We were then set free to enjoy the market, which is much smaller than Nuremberg's but still romantic and unique in its own way.

Next we sailed to Passau, arriving in the morning. We chose to do a bus tour to the picturesque town of Cesky Krumlov in the Czech Republic. The bus took us slowly up through the mountains and hillsides to arrive at a beautiful little town surrounded by the Vitava River.

Cesky Krumlov is

dominated by its 13th-century Rosenberg castle. It was a nice break from the Christmas market tours as the quaint village offered us a tranquil setting where we could relax and watch the locals. We headed back on the bus to meet the ship in Linz, Austria, ending a unique day in which we set foot in three countries in one day: Germany, the Czech Republic and Austria.

The next day we arrived in Melk, Austria, where the highlight was a tour of the Abbey of Melk, a Benedictine monastery overlooking the Danube River. This abbey is not only majestic when viewed from the river but inside you are surrounded by famous frescos and countless medieval manuscripts and an overwhelming amount of gold leaf.

In the afternoon we boarded the ship and set sail for Durnstein. This small village of about 250 reminded me of the villages in Greece. It is located on the steep slopes of the Danube with tiny, narrow streets that are decorated with Christmas lights and bulbs.

There is no real market here because there are few shops, so the whole village becomes the market. One shop had its products on display right out on the

street with a bell and a sign simply saying, "For service please ring."

Durnstein is a well-known wine-growing area but I was intrigued by the blue and white tower of the abbey of Augustinian Canons founded in 1410. After a quick visit to the abbey, I found a cute little bar and enjoyed some of the local wine.

Vienna was our final stop in Austria. In the morning we had choices of various tours but decided a relaxing morning on board would help us rest up for the Vienna markets.

This was a good idea. There are over 20 markets in Vienna alone, but we chose the most famous outside St. Stephen's Cathedral. It's called the Stephansplatz Christmas market.

There were over 40 stalls completely surrounding the church, with many restaurants nearby. Here I picked up my favourite mug. It is a Christmas boot, festively decorated and filled with Jameson Whisky Hot Apple Punch. Needless to say, I paid this stall a couple of visits.

Oresta enjoyed the shopping here particularly because there were the regular retail shops in the same area and the prices were quite reasonable. The evening in

Vienna ended with a classical music concert at Palais Lichtenstein.

On our last day Sunday we arrived in the beautiful city of Budapest (pronounced Buda Pesht). We did a guided bus tour of the city, which took most of the day, ending with a beautiful piano recital in a concert hall at the School for the Blind, where each child has the opportunity to learn using instruments, join a choir etc. On the ship for our final night, we were treated to a traditional Hungarian folk show with lively dancing and music.

This trip was very special as we not only toured several Christmas markets but also visited many historical areas and sights along the way. The meals, service and entertainment on board were 10.5 on a scale of 10, so we have to congratulate Scenic Cruises for their hospitality.

This cruise was recommended by the staff at Upper Canada Travel here in Niagara-on-the-Lake and I extend to them a sincere thank you for what was the trip of a lifetime – and one that certainly got us in the Christmas spirit.

Merry Christmas to all and a happy, healthy New Year.



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