



‘Hotels-on-the-Lake’

An in-depth look at how **short-term rentals** have turned housing into a commodity and quickly taken over a large number of NOTL homes, how some residents feel they are being driven out by a lack of long-term rental housing, plus an industry representative’s take on the growing problem.

Series by Evan Saunders on **Pages 2-5**



Farmworker Hub is a **growing** community

Free tuck shop and health care centres are part of a chain of support for seasonal farmworkers

With parents **facing bombings** in Kyiv, daughter is trying to help

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

As bombs fell on Kyiv on Monday night, Daria Zakharchenko was on the phone with her mother who was trying to sleep in an apartment hallway for protection from the incoming Russian artillery.

“I was talking to my parents last night when all the explosions were happening and my mom was like, ‘OK, hold on, we are going to hear from truthful sources, from our government, where the missiles landed,’” Zakharchenko said in an interview on Tuesday.

When the invasion first began, missiles fell within a five-minute walk of her family’s home in Kyiv, the 27-year-old said.

It can be difficult to differentiate truth from fiction with the sheer volume of videos, pictures and reports coming from all over Ukraine and worldwide media, she said.

Zakharchenko’s mother,

Continued on Page 10



Orville Bronn, a seasonal farm worker from Jamaica, picks up a few essential items at The Farmworker Hub in Virgil on Sunday. RICHARD HARLEY

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Farmworker Hub is a place for people to come together.

For seasonal workers, it’s where they can get the things they need — clothes, warm gloves and boots, food, toiletries, kitchen basics like utensils and pots and pans. And through

a partnership with Quest Health, it’s also a lifeline that gives them access to free health care, without needing a Canadian health card.

But it’s also a connected community, one that allows people to stay in touch with each other and face issues together.

It’s a place where people who aren’t farmworkers

can volunteer their time for the good of the community, to help out the people who plant and tend and pick the food that ends up in our grocery stores.

A visibly proud Julia Buxton-Cox, the founder of the hub, was excited when it opened for the season Sunday, in a new location inside Cornerstone Community Church.

She was busy sorting through hundreds of boxes of boots donated to the shelter by Mister Safety Shoes, as farmworkers like Steve Wallace and Orville Bronn picked up some items. Buxton-Cox is preparing for a busy season, having welcomed more than 1,900 workers through the door last year during the pandemic.

She said the sentiments she’s hearing are that workers are happy and grateful to see the hub open again. And while the items the hub offers do mean a lot to them, it’s also about having a place to gather together.

“I think the hub serves as a hub not just for farmworkers to come and get goods,

Continued on Page 8



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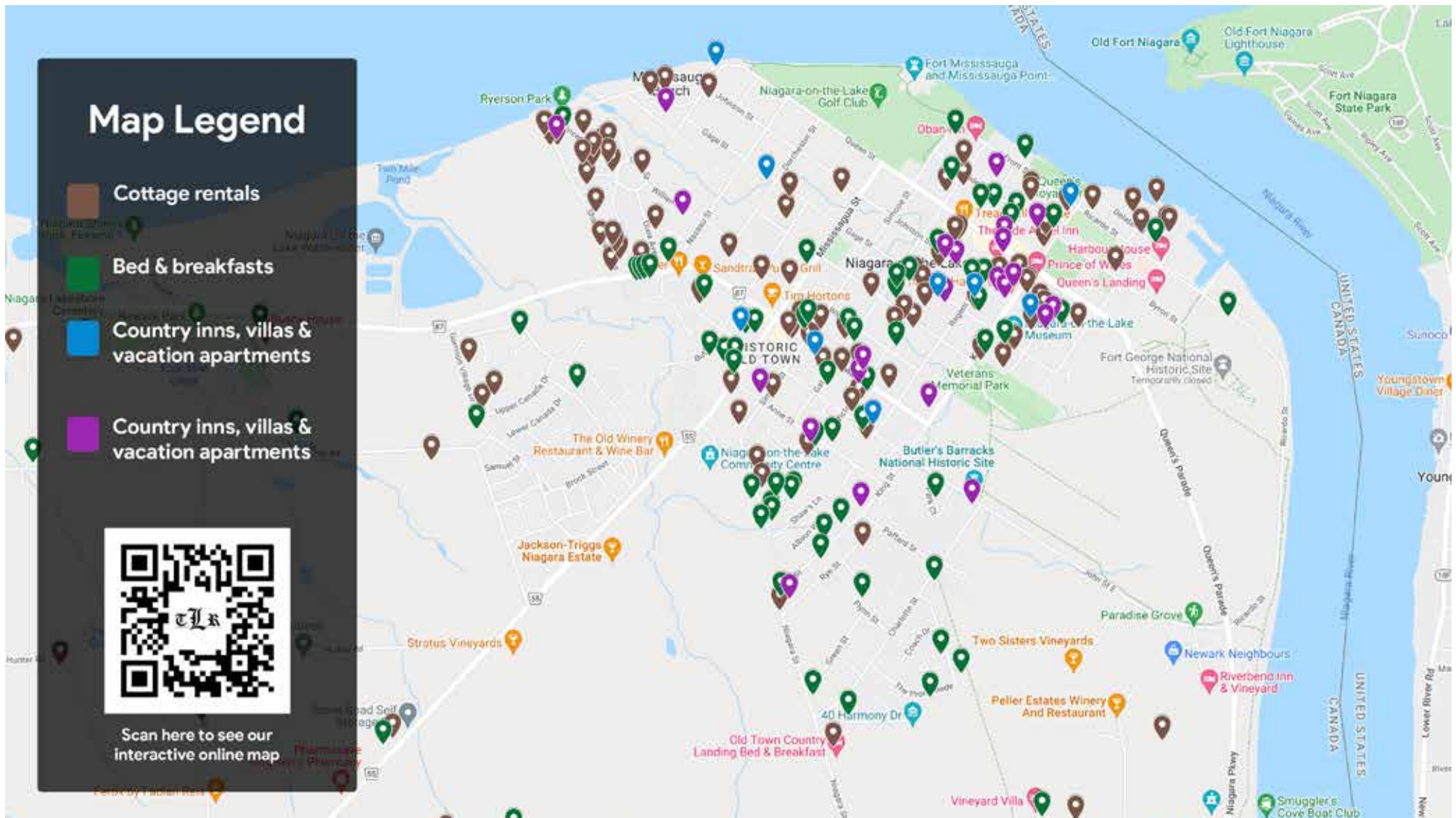
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This map shows the 190 legal short-term rentals that are licensed to operate in NOTL's Old Town. GRAPHIC BY EVAN SAUNDERS/RICHARD HARLEY

Short-term rentals consume 10% of Old Town homes

About 8.4 per cent of homes don't serve as a primary residence to anyone, as 'ghost hotels' continue operations

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

More than 10 per cent of all homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake's Old Town are used as some form of short-term rental, analysis of data by The Lake Report has determined.

And Victoria Street holds the distinction of being the street with the most rentals of all, with 19 registered.

There are 290 licensed short-term rentals in all of Niagara-on-the-Lake, according to data from the town, with the overwhelming majority of that total – 190 – concentrated in the Old Town's historic district.

Details from the 2021 census is not yet available for Old Town, but the Region of Niagara says there were 1,770 single detached dwellings in the historic district in 2016, meaning that rentals comprise 10.7 per cent of all homes in the area.

In July, a 2 per cent municipal accommodation tax

is due to begin, but it mainly will apply to visitors staying at hotels as the vast majority of short-term rentals are exempt from the levy.

Maps compiled by The Lake Report using data from the Town of NOTL show the locations of all 290 licensed short-term rentals in Niagara-on-the-Lake. They are among the 8,578 permanent dwellings in town, according to the 2021 census.

The 2021 census shows a 7.7 per cent increase in dwellings over the past five years, which means there could be about 1,906 single-detached homes in Old Town today.

Under the town's short-term rental bylaw, NOTL's 290 licensed bed and breakfasts, country inns, villas and cottage rentals can only be operated in single-detached dwellings.

Regional property maps show about 90 homes on Victoria Street and its 19 short-term rentals represents more than 20 per cent of all residentially zoned houses on the street.

This issue of short-term rentals is significant, not only in NOTL but in cities around the world, where concerns have been raised about communities being hollowed out by rentals, "ghost hotels" and unoccupied properties.

As well, some worry the commercialization of residential properties is helping to make home ownership even more difficult for younger generations.

In the maps compiled by The Lake Report, the types of rentals have been classified using the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's system. There are cottage rentals, bed and breakfasts, country inns, villas and vacation apartments.

Cottage rentals are shown in brown and bed and breakfasts in green.

Country Inns, vacation apartments and villas have been classified differently. They are shown as either purple, which means they will not be charging guests the municipal accommodation tax, or blue, which means they will.

All cottage rentals and bed and breakfasts are currently exempt from the tax, which is only being applied to businesses with five or more rooms.

The municipal accommodation tax is a revenue tool allotted to municipalities by the government of Ontario. Starting in July, NOTL will begin charging a 2 per cent tax on all room rentals in town but not on establishments with less than five rooms.

Under NOTL's short-term rental bylaw, a cottage rental and bed and breakfast legally only can have three rooms.

Room numbers advertised by owners show that of the 290 total rentals in Niagara-on-the-Lake, only 12, or 4 per cent, will have to collect the tax. However, all hotels in town must charge their guests the tax once it is implemented.

In a previous investigative series on short-term rentals published by The Lake Report, several municipal

leaders and a housing advocate said unhosted short-term rentals — those with no permanent residents, also known as "ghost hotels" — can be problematic for communities.

Bed and breakfasts and country inns are hosted rentals, which means someone lives in the home for the majority of the year. Those two categories together represent 131 of the town's 290 total rentals.

Cottage rentals and villas do not need to have a permanent resident to operate. That means 168, or about 1.9 per cent, of the residential properties in NOTL are home to no one except transient visitors, though the properties might occasionally be used by the owners.

Exacerbating this situation, as noted by several residents in an article in this week's Lake Report, is the number of homes owned as seasonal properties, which are often used by the owners for a few weeks, but sit empty the rest of the year.

According to the 2021 census, there are 721 properties in Niagara-on-the-Lake that have no permanent residents. At least 168 of these homes are registered rentals, leaving 553 as either vacation homes or possibly as illegal short-term rentals.

This means, in total, based on Canadian census information and the town's short-term rental list, about 8.4 per cent of all NOTL dwellings have no permanent residents.

Among Old Town rentals, 121 are either cottage rentals or villas, meaning they have no permanent residence requirement to operate. This accounts for roughly 6.4 per cent of all the detached homes in Old Town.

The municipality says it has been able to bring 99 per cent of illegal rentals into compliance through its use of Granicus, a third-party service hired by the town in 2021, partly to help with identifying rentals that were operating without a licence.



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Goodbye NOTL, hello ... Disneyland? Renter struggles to keep living in town

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Mike Barneveld is worried Niagara-on-the-Lake is turning into “Disneyland” as he and another longtime resident struggle to find a place to live in their hometown.

As the town increasingly becomes viewed as an investment opportunity for wealthy individuals, its working inhabitants are being driven out, resulting in the hollowing out of the community, Barneveld said in an interview.

“I think the town very much becomes Disneyland, where it’s great when the parks open but as soon as it’s closed there’s nothing there, there’s no community, there’s no life — there’s nothing,” he said.

That is the reality of NOTL becoming a hot spot for tourism, he said, but there needs to be room for local workers and families.

“Unfortunately for me, Niagara-on-the-Lake is Niagara-on-the-Lake and, of course, property values are high and people love it,” he said.

“But, you know, for nine years that was my home. So, all the people that were there, the local pub and whatever else, that became my home.”

Barneveld is living in Beamsville with his sister after the Chautauqua property he rented was targeted by a real estate investor.

His former landlord had a business in Toronto that was facing financial difficulties due to the pandemic. That prompted the landlord to sell the home Barneveld

and one other person had been renting for 10 years, he said.

His landlord had one stipulation: whoever bought it had to be moving into it as their permanent residence.

The new buyer said they were going to live there and Barneveld said he and the other resident agreed to leave their home on that condition, noting the landlord had always been very good to them.



Mike Barneveld agreed to vacate his home of almost 10 years when the new buyer said it was going to be their new permanent home. Two weeks later, the room Barneveld once rented was on the market again, only the price had increased by \$1,000 and Barneveld is now struggling to find a home in Niagara-on-the-Lake. SUPPLIED

“So, all of us acted in good faith and, unfortunately, that wasn’t the case,” he said.

Within two weeks of the tenants moving out, the new owner put the house on the market as a rental and raised room prices by \$1,000 without doing any renovations on the property or even repainting the bedrooms, Barneveld said.

“Without young families with kids that will grow up in the community, where’s the sense of vibrancy and life and sustainability?”

MIKE BARNEVELD

Now he can’t even afford to rent the same building he called home for nearly a decade after alleging he was duped out of his lease by a property investor.

“I am trying to find a rental that may somehow be affordable so I can keep my job. Otherwise, I’m looking at moving back to Sarnia where my parents now live,” he said.

And it means another home in NOTL’s Old Town is sitting vacant, Barneveld

said, noting no tenants are yet living in his former home.

The move to cash in is part of a housing stock shift toward the short-term rental and vacation home markets, he said.

“A lot of places that were (long-term) rentals and places that I know were rentals at one point in time have now become vacation rentals or some way to make more money than what you could get from a long-term rental,” he said.

“And that doesn’t build community or anything. That’s a money-making venture,” he said.

Barneveld was a student at Willowbank School of Restoration Arts. He is concerned that, as more money pours into NOTL, its historic buildings will be bought up and rebuilt and the character of the town irrevocably altered.

“New this, new that and all of it is meant to turn Niagara-on-the-Lake into this sort of gold, polished version of itself,” he said.

“Where you go in and there’s a valet and all those things, and that’s what I think a lot of this outside money is trying to do.”

“To the point where even the quaint older places that have character, if someone gets their hands on them

they’re over-renovated and they lose their charm.”

Renovations aren’t necessarily for new permanent residents, either.

“They’ll over-reno-vate it and then slap a for sale sign on it to flip the property. I’m sure a lot of them are done as short-term rentals,” he said.

He said one of the problems is developers and investors who want to get the most out of a parcel of land instead of working to improve the community around it with a new build.

“Look at Parliament Oak,” he said.

“The amount that they were trying to jam in that section completely is not in keeping with the character of the Old Town.”

Barneveld fears NOTL is losing its residential identity.

“If you look at even 10 years ago in Niagara-on-the-Lake, all the older people in the community had bought a house not as a money-making venture but because this is a nice town to live in and they wanted to be a part of a community,” he said.

But that community is at stake as many long-time residential homes are for sale and their future as a permanent residence is uncertain, he said.

“And that doesn’t benefit anyone if you’re not building up a livable community,” he said.

The difficulty to find housing isn’t just a personal frustration, but an emotional worry for those who wonder what NOTL will look like in the future as young families and workers get pushed out of the municipality, Barneveld suggested.

“Certainly, without young families with kids that will grow up in the community, where’s the sense of vibrancy and life and sustainability?”

He said if the town doesn’t work to make itself more affordable to younger families it will just be “a series of visitors coming in to use the place, get their enjoyment and leave.”

“Whose actually continuing to build? Whose sustaining?”

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Rental tax needs strong oversight, B&B president says

Unoccupied seasonal homes are hollowing out the community more than short-term rentals, he argues

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Bed and Breakfast Association fought for years against an accommodation tax in town, but now that it's about to become a reality the group wants a clear structure in place for collecting and using the money to support tourism.

"We're very concerned with having proper processes and governance in place around the municipal accommodation tax," association president John Foreman said in an interview on Friday.

"If we had our choice, we'd rather not see the (tax) introduced but we realize that it's moving forward," he said.

The town approved a municipal accommodation tax last September. In January, after having its initial start date voted down, council decided to implement the tax on July 1.

Lodging industry representatives lobbied against the tax for several years but it was seen as "the only way we have to get additional revenue," Lord Mayor Betty Disero said during a council meeting in January.

Foreman accepts that "we can't really change that. So, now it's about let's do it in a right way that serves the purpose for which it was intended and makes it as painless as possible for all our members who are going to have to deal with it."

He suggested three ways the tax could be effectively implemented.

The first is for the town to form a working group to come up with details for its implementation.

Foreman is worried that a firm start date has been set before the system of remitting the tax and the fine details about it have been communicated to the industry, he said.

"We're not happy at all about a July start because the legwork hasn't been done to put it in place."

He also suggested an ongoing governance body to determine where the



Above: John Foreman
Left: Foreman runs the Apple Tree Historic Bed and Breakfast in NOTL, an example of a short-term rental that is also the permanent residence of its operators. EVAN SAUNDERS

revenue is spent.

"This is the group that's going to look at how the money is proposed to be spent and to make sure that it's aligned with the town's tourism plan."

Foreman is hoping someone from the bed and breakfast association will be able to be on the governing body, saying insider knowledge is essential for implementing the tax.

"Because we're the ones that are affected. We're the ones that can say what it is that's going to be difficult to do or cause us the most pain."

But Foreman felt a further step was necessary, saying the town should keep a close eye on the return on investment for projects the tax revenue is spent on.

"I firmly believe in measuring the impact of expenditures. We don't want to just throw money at things and not have any idea of whether it's achieved its objective," he said.

"I'm a big believer in metrics, myself, and figuring out what's the benefit achieved for \$1 of investment."

Foreman also suggested the town collect a flat fee per room instead of a percentage. Niagara Falls, for example, collects \$2 per room, regardless of room price.

The tax so far is only being applied to businesses with five or more rooms, leaving out the vast majority of short-term rentals.

The association "fully expects" the tax to eventually be charged to all short-term rentals in town, Foreman said.

He has been reading up on tourism strategies in places such as Venice and Florence. Readers may remember The Lake Report spoke with Venice's minister of tourism for a series on short-term rentals.

Foreman found inspiration from Florence for how NOTL might spread its tourists out over the municipality instead of having them focused in the Old Town.

"The Uffizi Gallery in Florence is creating a distributed gallery. They're taking the things that used to be in one massive building and they are spreading them out over the countryside in a number of smaller facilities," he said.

"Strategies like that would help relieve the pressure on Old Town."

While Foreman didn't speak out against unhosted "ghost hotels" in town, which account for more than half of registered short-term rentals, he lamented the decrease in the hosted bed and breakfasts.

"I think there's a reality that, over the years, the number of hosted properties has decreased for various reasons," he said. "It makes me very sad."

"Let's say 15 years ago there were over 300 bed and breakfasts in Niagara-on-the-Lake and now we are down to less than 150," he said.

Foreman said one cause of the decrease in hosted rentals is the increase in property values in NOTL.

"Some people are saying, 'I can sell my house at a high price now and move to somewhere less expensive and that's going to be financially better for me than running a B&B,'" he said.

This has a further negative effect on NOTL, he said, as quaint old bed and breakfasts are bought and renovated to be more modern, reducing the town's charm and character – it's main selling points for tourists.

"When they get renovated, they lose a lot of quaintness," he said.

"Regardless of whether it's a bed and breakfast or just all the charming old houses in the town, I shed a tear every time I see one getting knocked down," he said.

He said some owners do a good job of building new homes that maintain the

character of the Old Town but "some of them are really out of character."

"It makes me sad to see that happen because an old historic home is irreplaceable."

Foreman said the character of NOTL is "absolutely" its biggest tourist draw and pointed to a controversial project as an example of the importance of character.

"The Parliament Oak development," he said.

"If we really care about the character of the town then we need to see the right decision made there" because it sets the tone for other developments, he said.

He cited the Prince of Wales as an example of a large commercial building that fits in perfectly with the town's character.

"We really need Parliament Oak to step up to that level of commitment to the Old Town's character."

He said he enjoys reading The Lake Report columnist Brian Marshall's pieces, which discuss planning and architecture in NOTL.

Foreman acknowledged the issue of communities being hollowed out by short-term rentals but he said in his experience the larger problem is seasonal homeowners.

"On the street that I live on, of the eight or nine houses on the street, there's

one B&B — that's us — and one holiday rental," he said.

"But there's three houses that are seasonal houses for out-of-towners that are hardly ever occupied at all."

"I think there's far more hollowing out that's happening there than through the holiday rental market."

Foreman also said the extravagant prices of homes in the Old Town are not an attractive draw for potential ghost hotel investors.

And he suggested it is in the interest of the town to let seasonal homeowners rent out their properties when they are not around.

"What right do we have to say, 'You can't rent out your seasonal home when you're not there.'"

He figures it is better to have a seasonal home rented out to family and friends, possibly strangers, than having the home empty for more than half of each year.

People who can rent out a holiday home are more likely to stay for a longer time than if they could only stay in a hotel, he said.

"They're going to do a lot more and different things than they would on a one or two day stay. That's going to spread money into the economy in places that otherwise wouldn't be getting the money."

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Grasping to find a way to stay in town

NOTL's affordable housing shortage erodes 'sense of community'

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

As housing costs rise and fewer long-term rentals are available, Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Lauren O'Malley has struggled to find affordable housing in town for herself and her 16-year-old daughter, Hazel Norris.

With the shift toward more short-term rentals, the town "loses integrity. It loses a true sense of community. It loses longevity," O'Malley said in an interview.

She has lived in Old Town for more than 20 years and while she feels lucky to still have a place to live, her situation is precarious and looking for a new home has been depressing.

"I'm up at night, I'm awake and sleepless over this," the single mother said.

"I have a 16-year-old daughter who has gone through two years of a pandemic and her high school just flooded. So, she's having a kind of biblical year."

"My main goal is to give her some level of stability and peace and happiness and that would be staying in Old Town."

O'Malley said rental prices in NOTL are already well beyond the pale for most families with kids.

"We saw a two-bedroom basement apartment for \$2,000. Two weeks later we saw another basement apartment for \$2,700 per month," she said.

She said it is sad to see children grow up in town, only to leave and never return.

"Anybody I know who has a teenage kid, they go away to university and then they stay away because they can't afford to come back and live here," she said.

"What I would hope (our politicians) would look at is — in terms of building a stronger community — you want young people to stay here."

She said she is disappointed in the lack of action from local governments to improve the prospect of living in NOTL for young families.



Lauren O'Malley, left, and her daughter Hazel Norris, 16, want to stay in NOTL as long as they can, but a lack of long-term rentals is a growing challenge. SUPPLIED



And the chances of those prospects improving are not high.

"There's not even a high school here any more to draw them in," she said.

O'Malley and Mike Barneveld, who lost his rental unit when a new owner said he was moving in and then put it back on the market with a much higher rent, both said the situation is exacerbated by vacation home owners and short-term rentals.

“There's a ghost town element to all of it.”

LAUREN O'MALLEY

According to the 2016 census and the town's list of licensed rentals, about 10 per cent of Old Town's 1,770 residential homes are comprised of short-term accommodation businesses, which effectively treat housing as a commodity.

O'Malley broached the issue of real estate investment trusts, commonly known as REITs.

"That's real estate strictly as a business investment," she said.

"And then there's also corporate and overseas investments. How many huge houses are owned by people who live in South Africa or China, houses that are used once a year, if even that?"

"I'm really struggling to understand why these things are not being addressed," O'Malley said. "All of those things are really potent in town

and I think diminish the affordable housing stock enormously."

Barneveld said there is an argument to be made for restricting the number of short-term rentals.

Compounding the issue of housing availability in NOTL is the fact many people here work in the hospitality industry, a key economic driver for the town, and they don't necessarily make big wages, Barneveld said.

"The workers have to be able to afford to live here and that's not happening at all," he said.

"We live in a town where service industry jobs are a vast majority of jobs here. So, here are all the staff of those places earning minimum wage and utterly unable to live here," O'Malley said.

Barneveld pointed to the skyrocketing price of gas as further evidence low-wage essential workers should be able to access affordable housing near their place of work.

He acknowledged housing crises are driven by many factors but feels a simple solution for helping provide people with homes in NOTL could be limiting the proliferation of short-term rentals so owners are encouraged to turn them into long-term rentals.

"There's a ghost town element to all of it, where (NOTL's) not a highly populated town in terms of permanent population and in terms of building community," O'Malley said.

She said the town should be working on minimizing opportunities for short-term

rentals and property investors to snatch up housing in town.

"Talk to the community, engage, maybe do some town halls creating opportunities for people to speak up with their ideas," O'Malley said.

She said there has been no action by town council on the problem thus far.

"I have this image of them waving their hands like, 'Oh my God! Oh my God!' but at the same time they are covering their eyes. There's barely even lip service."

O'Malley suggested council go the way of municipalities such as Toronto and bar short-term rentals from operating on residential properties unless they have a permanent resident.

She said the solution may need to come from the ingenious and creative residents of NOTL.

So far, NOTL has failed to live up to its mighty potential, she said.

"The scale of the community and the wealth and power within this community together allow for a lot of opportunities that I'm not seeing," she said.

"I think locals feel pretty disenfranchised."

She said the enthusiasm of some residents to get involved with the town has been dwindling.

"I don't really want to use a negative analogy here, but the flow is going down."

O'Malley stressed that more permanent residents in town means a healthier community in the present and future.

"The deeper the root, the stronger the connection and the stronger the tree."

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COVID Tracker

NOTL active cases (last 28 days): 140

Region active cases: 1,128

Region deaths: 522

Region total cases: 35,072

**March 16 data per Niagara Region Public Health. Public health warns that "Due to the surge in COVID-19 cases, limited availability of testing, and changes to case and contact management practices, case counts shown (above) are an underestimate of the true number of individuals in Niagara with COVID-19. Data should be interpreted with caution." Case data for municipalities is also now being interpreted in 28-day cycles.*



Contributed by Patty Garriock

"Being negative only makes a difficult journey more difficult. You may be given a cactus, but you don't have to sit on it!" - Joyce Meyer

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Fort George

NOTL photographer and Lake Report contributor Dave Van de Laar captured this snowy image of Fort George over the weekend.

Calling all NOTL photographers: send us some of your interesting, evocative, quirky images of life around town and we'll consider them for this space on our editorial page. Email images (1 MB or more) to editor@niagaranow.com.



Editorial

With election on the horizon, now is time for council to act on short-term rentals

Kevin MacLean
Managing Editor

Niagara-on-the-Lake has an awful lot of short-term rentals.

And the fact that 10 per cent of all residential homes in Old Town are some form of short-term rental should be a wake-up call to NOTL town council.

While many of those rentals are legitimate, hosted bed and breakfast operations where an owner lives and welcomes visitors into their home, the proliferation of cottage rentals and vacation rentals should be a big concern for our town's leaders.

The growth in this sector has been tremendous – and unchecked. We understand why Old Town is home to many rentals, as the historic district is a big draw for visitors.

But as with any growth, it needs to be managed so it doesn't overwhelm the town.

We can debate whether rentals are a major factor in NOTL's well-documented housing affordability problems, but the fact remains that the growth of rentals here – and in many other places worldwide – needs some controls.

Limiting licensed rentals to owner-occupied homes would be a start. As our extensive reporting on the short-term rental industry in NOTL and around the world has shown, there are options available to governments for dealing with the situation.

But using available tools to crack down on the number of rentals is just one aspect of the issue that council needs to tackle.

There are far fewer B&Bs than there once were in town but these operations are still accommodation businesses.

Council missed the boat when it instituted a 2 per cent municipal accommodation tax that is due to

start in July. (The revenue from the tax is to be used for tourism-related purposes only.)

While the levy will be charged by all hotel operators in town, it applies to a fraction of the nearly 300 short-term rentals because council opted to exclude operations with fewer than five rooms.

That's really unfortunate and unfair, but as both the hoteliers and the B&B association have acknowledged, they expect that eventually all short-term rentals, including small B&Bs, will have to collect the tax. It's just a question of when town council will have the political will to do so.

The B&B association is right to want to make sure the town has a proper structure in place for collecting and spending the revenue from the accommodation levy.

But figuring out the logistics of how to do it efficiently and effectively

should not be difficult.

We're not reinventing the wheel here and many municipalities around the world – and even right here in Niagara – already have an accommodation tax and systems in place to collect and account for it.

We respect the argument that the past two years have been tough for businesses in NOTL.

But it appears we are coming out of the COVID coma and life will soon be more "normal." (One sure sign of that is the impending return of the annual Strawberry Festival.)

Given all that and with a municipal election on the horizon, town council needs to act quickly to deal with the short-term rental situation and to ensure the accommodation tax is collected by all licensed rental operators. This is bound to be an election issue. Let's see our council act sooner rather than later.

editor@niagaranow.com



Allow Red Cross and UN to fly in supplies for Ukraine

Dear editor:
Surely the Red Cross and UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) must demand that Russia allow allied bombers to

bomb food and water for the besieged people of Mariupol and other areas of Ukraine.

This is what happened in 1945 when the Dutch were starving under Nazi occupa-

tion. It was part of the terms of capitulation.

In this case it could be as part of the conditions of Russia's participation in world trade etc.

My late brother-in-law (an RAF pilot) said that it was the best bombing run he ever made.

Elizabeth Oliver-Malone
NOTL

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Let's welcome Ukrainian refugees to NOTL

Dear editor:

In the same way in which our local churches sponsored Syrian refugees a few years ago, our town needs to think about how we in Niagara-on-the-Lake can help some of the millions of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Our churches are themselves recovering from the disruptions of COVID, so may not be able to help the influx this time.

The refugee women and children would no doubt welcome a large building with many sleeping rooms and perhaps even a spacious common area for socializing or watching television.

And maybe even a kitchen and a dining facility, no matter how rudimentary. Not necessarily five-star, but a haven from the horrors of Putin's rockets and bombs.

But do we have anything like that in our town? Let me see ... let me see ... let me see. Yes!

It's called the Old NOTL Hospital and in only a few months all the tenants of the lower level will have moved out to a more modern medi-



Caldwell Securities is one NOTL business that's flying a Ukrainian flag in solidarity with the country. SUPPLIED

cal facility.

There are rooms that could accommodate beds. There is a room in which to congregate called the Wooler Room, the hospital's original venue for meetings and lectures.

Plus there is the cafeteria area where staff used to dine. And even better, there is a kitchen (which needs refurbishment) but is still wired and plumbed to be a kitchen.

It appears that the town's well-intentioned purchase by a former council, which was put out to pasture by our voters in the last election, is not going to be an easy sell.

Creating this haven for

desperate human beings would defer having to deal with a property while we await creative and practical uses by the town and its local groups and institutions. I think that it has a future for our town, but like many of us, I can't yet visualize what that future looks like.

There will be the usual negative comments. First, it will cost money. Well, if we could raise the funds for a heritage trail on the old rail line, we can create a temporary home for people who have fled for their lives.

Secondly, language barriers? Well, in the First World War we coped with 20,000 Polish soldiers training here to defend their country and

the town survived. If you check out the 2021 Census, you'll find that there are 85 people in Niagara-on-the-Lake who claim Ukrainian origin.

Some NIMBY opponents may claim that these are (by circumstance at least) poor people and they might not "fit in" to our town. Don't forget that the United Empire Loyalists who had fought for their beliefs over 200 years ago fled here and played a significant role in the foundation of the town that we love so well today.

And the "refugee effect" on property values? Only the Shaw is really close and the impact would be much less than if one of the aggressive local developers tries to put a luxury highrise condo on the site.

Hey, town council. There's an election looming. Let's do something positive, creative and exciting that reflects what I hope are the values of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Ukrainian refugees need us. Please let's try to help them.

John Sayers
NOTL

Looking forward to visiting new Stone Eagle Winery

Dear editor:

I want to congratulate Two Sisters Winery and wish them well on their new venture – Stone Eagle Winery ("Two Sisters opening new winery near Garrison Village," The Lake Report, March 10).

If this new winery is anything like its sibling winery, Two Sisters, then we are in for a real treat.

After many visits to Two Sisters Winery, whether it

be for a tasting, a meal on the patio or a restaurant meal, I still get the feeling that I'm going somewhere special.

From the beautiful driveway, to the impressive architecture and imposing entry hall, to helpful, friendly, knowledgeable staff and good quality food, there is nothing but professionalism every which way you look. And their patio is probably the

most stunning in the area.

If they can achieve this (and I'm sure they can) with Stone Eagle Winery, then it will be another popular attraction for the region.

It will be a beautiful landmark for Niagara-on-the-Lake, perfectly located with Jackson-Triggs and Stratus close by.

The three wineries will be totally different in what they offer the public, in

wine styles, wine pricing, winery design and architecture. There is no need for them to be compatible with each other – the three wineries will be unique.

All the best to you, Two Sisters Winery. I hope you receive the same respect in building your new venue as was given to all the other wineries in the NOTL area.

Debbie Kassebaum
NOTL

An innovative idea to fill some of those unfilled jobs

The following letter was sent to Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland.

Firstly, I must congratulate you on providing such strong leadership with reference to the Ukrainian war. Wonderful. But my email is not about that.

In Canada (and many other countries) we find ourselves living amongst a sea of "We are Hiring" signs,

everywhere. The obvious comment on this is we must stop the COVID giveaway programs that still disincentivize people to return to work or get a first-time job.

However, my key suggestion was formulated by my partner (Sylvie) and is such:

For a period of, say, two to three years the government of Canada should allow seniors to earn up to may-

be \$10,000 per year without affecting other government programs, such as OAS clawbacks, the guaranteed income supplement, etc.

This would cost the exchequer nothing because they pay these allowances now.

It would create consumption (the seniors will spend the money) and produce tax incomes (employment and HST, etc.) while assisting

employers with the labour shortage.

For seniors it could help fill their lives productively and provide a sense of worth.

Please take the suggestion seriously. Sylvie and I believe this could boost our economy in a big way while enhancing the lifestyles and sense of value for seniors.

Richard West
NOTL

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HALL RENTAL AVAILABLE

Quest health centre and tuck shop give farm workers **much needed care**

Continued from Front Page

it serves as a hub for a community. To bring all of us together, because this whole community, we're dealing with issues of racism and poverty and movements like Black Lives Matter. People are becoming aware of more than what's outside their little circle. And so this brings everybody together to help and just be a community," she said.

And the hub isn't alone: it has partners all across the community, people such as Jane Andres, whom Buxton-Cox said distributed 600 welcome kits to farmers so when they arrive the workers have a meal and some of the basics right off the bat. "When they get up here after a couple of days of travelling, they've got warm socks, some hot soup, something on their bunk waiting for them when they get here. So, it's just all a community being a community."

Other partners include Bikes for Farmworkers, Newark Neighbours, Gateway Community Church and the Niagara Falls soup kitchen.

Quest Health is also a big partner, operating a clinic for workers starting on Sundays in April.

"So if workers can't get access to a doctor during the week, when they're working, if they need prescription refills, they need any sort of confidential health care, they can come to Quest and they take care of them," Buxton-Cox said.

Moises Vasquez, of Quest, was at the hub Sunday.

Quest has been operating in NOTL for "a long time," he said and this will be the third year at Cornerstone Church.

There's a wide variety of needs for farmworkers, everything from check-ups, muscle pain and seasonal allergies to primary care for chronic diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure.

"We try to make sure they receive the care they need while they are here. And once they're back, we tend to help them with that transition, like providing a letter for them to follow up with a doctor back home. And vice versa. When they come in, they provide some papers for us to follow up here."



Steve Wallace and Orville Bronn peruse the wares at the hub. RICHARD HARLEY

Workers don't need a health card to access the care, which is free and confidential. However, right now it's only offered on weekends, Vasquez said.

The program is run by volunteer physicians from Brock and McMaster universities. Services are in Spanish and English with the help of volunteers from various churches.

"Our program relies a lot on the great support that we receive from our volunteers and we're really grateful and blessed to have those volunteers," Vasquez said.

Buxton-Cox said the most popular items with

the workers now are winter supplies.

"Number one, winter coats, boots, pots and pans, and hoodies — the guys and girls like to have that warm hoodie when they're out in the field."

Steve Wallace, a Jamaican farmworker with Meyers Fruit Farms, said being able to pick up some essentials is really helpful.

"This means big, big big," he says. "These people do lots of things for us. And it's well appreciated."

He said having the essential items helps things "make sense," but the health care has been especially

important for him.

Wallace has been coming to NOTL for 19 years to work at Meyers and helps harvest peaches, grapes and flowers.

Over the day, about 30 workers stopped in to pick up items. There's a limit of three each, but it's not too strict. And it doesn't include small basics like toilet paper or towels.

The place is well-stocked, but is always looking for items to help keep it that way.

Buxton-Cox said most of the items are donated to the hub through her Buy Nothing NOTL Facebook group,

where people give away gently used items.

The rent was also "graciously" paid by Kairos Canada, a social agency and partner of the hub that received a federal grant to help support temporary foreign workers. That grant runs out at the end of March, but Buxton-Cox said there are some other community partners and organizations that are going to be helping to cover the rent, too.

"This whole thing is becoming a really big tipping point in the community. People are becoming more aware of the people who pick our food and provide the food on our plates. So it's up to us to be able to say thanks and give back."

Buxton-Cox said the hub is always looking for volunteers and anyone interested can visit thehubnotl.ca to find out how to sign up.

The hub is open Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to noon and Sundays from 2 to 5 p.m. during spring. Plans are to open Thursday nights in summer when it's daylight longer, so it's safe for the workers, who mostly ride their bikes to the hub.



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Niagara MP on Putin's list of **banned Canadians**

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report



MP Tony Baldinelli.

Niagara Falls MP Tony Baldinelli and all his parliamentary colleagues have been banned from visiting Russia under a decree by President Vladimir Putin.

The Russian leader's announcement banning a total of 313 prominent Canadians came as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was addressing Canada's Parliament on Tuesday.

The blanket ban has been

met with derision by many observers who see it as a distraction from the invasion of Ukraine.

"I never had any plans of going to Russia, so this ban is more symbolic than practical," Baldinelli said in a statement to The Lake Report.

"I continue to stand united with my fellow Canadian parliamentarians who have also been banned, and I stand united with the people of Ukraine," he said.

"What Ukrainians want most is to be able to live in their home nation, free, sovereign and peaceful. This ban will not impact our po-

sition or continued resolve to support the people of Ukraine."

The Conservative MP was in his seat in the House of Commons for Zelenskyy's emotional and moving speech.

"President Zelenskyy has shown incredible leadership during this time, standing up not only for the brave and determined people of Ukraine, but also for freedom, sovereignty, and democracy in the world," Baldinelli said.

16-year-old **seriously injured** after ATV rollover

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Police are seeking security videos that might help them learn what happened to a 16-year-old from St. Catharines who suffered life-threatening injuries after an ATV rollover in Niagara-on-the-Lake early Sunday morning.

Niagara Regional Police arrived on scene at about 12:35 a.m. near Garrison Village Drive and Village Road, where the teenaged

driver was found pinned under an ATV in critical condition.

"The male was wearing a helmet but was suffering from life threatening injuries," police said in a news release.

Niagara EMS spokesperson Bryce Brunarski said when paramedics arrived the teen was not showing any vital signs.

Niagara paramedics and NOTL firefighters treated the teen at the scene and transported him to a Ni-

agara hospital. He was later flown by Ornge air ambulance to an out-of-region hospital for further care.

Police said the ATV involved, a yellow Suzuki King Quad 700, "sustained considerable damage" from the incident.

Neighbours in the area told a reporter they saw the flashing lights from emergency vehicles, but did not go out to see what happened. Many of them had heard the news on social media by the afternoon on

Sunday and were upset to learn the young man was badly hurt.

One resident said she often sees ATVs going through the neighbourhood, taking some of the turns at high speeds.

Another neighbour said they've often heard and seen the same ATV riding late at night.

The ATV rolled over into a driveway at 27 Garrison Village Dr., near where the road intersects with Village Drive.



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'We believe in our victory'

Continued from Front Page

father and grandmother live in the besieged Ukrainian capital. Her father is unable to leave as all Ukrainian men between the ages of 18 and 60 are being called to the defence of their country.

Convincing her mother and grandmother to leave has been fruitless.

"My mom said, 'I'm not going to leave my husband,' and my grandmother said, 'I'm not going to leave my only son. I'm not going anywhere,'" Zakharchenko said.

But, "once we win, you guys come here and you can relax," she told her family.

Zakharchenko is working with the Niagara-on-the-Lake Rotary Club to gather physical supplies and cash donations to support people in Ukrainian. They are collecting items at Pig-Out Catering's warehouse in St. Catharines.

Zakharchenko is connected to the Rotary Club through her employer at PigOut, Anne Dickson, who is a NOTL Rotary member.

Dickson told the club about Zakharchenko's drive to collect donations.

Zakharchenko said collecting and organizing donations has made her feel less helpless, and encouraged all Canadians to donate and help in any way they can.

"A little bit is always better than zero," she said.

Rotary Club president Patricia Murenbeeld said she met Zakharchenko as she was collecting her first bunch of donations to send to Ukraine.

"And a light went on and I said, 'Hey, you don't have to do this alone,'" Murenbeeld said at the warehouse on Tuesday.

Murenbeeld noted there are many Rotary Clubs in Ukraine as well, meaning they literally are fighting for their lives and homes.

"That's the real piece of the puzzle that is unique, that we have to support our neighbours," Murenbeeld said.

Zakharchenko moved to Canada six years ago with her parents' encouragement.

"Basically, my parents



Daria Zakharchenko and Jolanta Janny of the NOTL Rotary Club. The club has been working with Zakharchenko to gather donations for Ukraine. EVAN SAUNDERS

pushed me. They were like, 'We want to send you to Canada,'" Zakharchenko said.

She and her brother Dimi tri settled in St. Catharines. "They wanted for us a better life," she said.

It is no coincidence that her parents pushed for their children to leave the country after the initial Russian invasion in 2014, which Zakharchenko recalls with intimate detail.

"I remember this day very well," she said.

"The day, when it started, all the shootings. I remember I was going from university and my dad was picking me up," she said.

"My friend was staying at the dormitory and she was from another city and she was like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm so scared.' So I said, 'Dad, we are picking up all my friends and we are going to our apartment,' because it was a really dangerous time."

"But we blocked the attack. Lots of people died but the Russians actually retreated," though now they occupy parts of Ukraine, she said.

With the current invasion, Zakharchenko's 23-year-old brother has been considering returning to help fight.

"He's like, 'Give me the tank I will just go there and get them,'" she said with a

laugh.

But avoiding war was precisely the reason her parents pushed for their children to move halfway around the world and they are happy their kids are safe, she said.

Talking about the atrocity that is the Russian invasion of Ukraine was difficult for Zakharchenko, who broke into tears several times as she recalled stories she has heard from first-hand witnesses and seen on social media – tales of Ukrainian bravery, resilience, determination and suffering in the face of unfounded aggression.

"I'm stressed for the past 20 days. Everything will be good. We are holding but it's difficult to talk about it," she said with tears in her eyes and a smile on her face.

Zakharchenko has been disgusted at the atrocities the Russian army is inflicting on Ukrainian civilians.

"When you're an adult, it's hard on you mentally. But when you're a mom and you're actually pregnant..." she trailed off.

"This is so hard to talk about, but a pregnant woman actually died with her unborn baby," she said regarding a Russian artillery strike that levelled a maternity hospital in Mariupol last week.

She said 4,000 children have been born in Ukraine

since the war began, many of them born in bomb shelters and subway stations.

"When the first kid was born on the subway, in the bomb shelter there, everyone was like, 'Oh my gosh, there is a light of hope,'" she said.

Russian rhetoric has been as aggravating as the attacks on civilians are disgusting.

"Russia said, 'Ya, we attacked (the maternity hospital) but there were no people in it.' They actually said that," Zakharchenko said, outraged.

"Russians are saying, 'Oh, no, these are all actors.' Like, seriously?"

"It's just barbaric how this is even possible in the 21st century. You can cross a border with guns and say, 'Hey, I'm going to save you,' by killing you," she said.

She noted Russian rhetoric and even some of what is seen on the media serves the Kremlin's propaganda machine.

"It's all propaganda. Unfortunately, 140 million Russians, not all of them, but most, believe it because they were brainwashed for the past 20 years."

Referencing a viral video of a Russian broadcast employee this week speaking out against the invasion on state-run television, she encouraged people to read between the lines.

She said Russian state television is not broadcast "live," even if it says it is and the video would most likely only have gotten released with approval from the Kremlin.

She referenced an equally famous video of Vladimir Putin giving a "live" address in which his hand casually moves through a microphone in the shot, demonstrating the video was faked to distill confidence in Russia's "lunatic" of a leader.

She also wanted people to be aware that Russia is spreading narratives meant to undermine the resilience and stability of Ukrainian citizens.

"Russia wants our people to panic because when you're panicked it's easy to get to you," she said.

And that is why the support of Canadians is essential to the war in Ukraine. Supplies and monetary donations are extremely important but by demonstrating support we can help the Ukrainian spirit stay strong, too, she said.

"You have to actually support them, motivate them so they are actually staying strong," she said.

"Because if you're going to panic or if you're feeling so depressed it's going to affect you — you can't. You have to stay until the end."

She said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been a source of stability and confidence for Ukrainian people, shaming anyone who ever doubted the former comedian would not be a good leader for the country.

"Where are all your presidents right now and where is our comedian?" she said.

Zelenskyy is, as the world knows, on the frontlines of the war asking for ammunition for his troops instead of evacuations for himself and working tirelessly to garner support for his country.

Support and encouragement for Ukraine were alive in every word Zakharchenko spoke.

"I always tell my parents, 'Guys, we're gonna win soon.' I believe that," she said.

"We believe in our vic-

tory. Every single person in Ukraine believes in our victory. Mom was like, 'Well, we're going to win. There's no other thought than that.'"

At a meeting on Tuesday, the NOTL Rotary Club made the "historic" decision to reallocate \$10,000 from its community service committee in order to help Ukraine.

The club will be donating \$25,000 to various relief efforts at home and on the ground in Ukraine, including Doctors Without Borders, an organization with members literally on the front lines of the invasion, helping care for wounded Ukrainians.

The \$25,000 is going to be matched by the federal government and an anonymous Ukrainian doctor.

Murenbeeld was adamant her club's support will not end once the war is over.

"The country will have to be rebuilt," she said.

"I see that as the really long-term, one-on-one personal impact the club can do. When (the conflict is over) it's not stopping, it's not stopping there," she said.

Zakharchenko agreed. "We need to restore the country. We have to provide houses for people who, right now, are in Poland or western Ukraine and their houses have been completely destroyed."

She said entire cities have been destroyed by Russian bombing.

"My hope is someday you and I are going to be in Ukraine and we are going to be together, boots on the ground," Murenbeeld said to Zakharchenko.

"Absolutely," Zakharchenko replied, saying she and her brother plan on going to help rebuild once the Russians have been kicked out of the country.

If you would like to support Zakharchenko and Rotary Club's work to support Ukraine, she can be reached at 905-650-0781.

The Rotary Club's next big fundraiser is its Gigantic Garage Sale on May 14 and 15. Funds raised will go toward Ukrainian relief efforts.



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Carrying on the **Bright family** legacy at Willowbank

Former Queenston family homestead continues to evolve as acclaimed School for Restoration Arts

Tim Taylor
The Lake Report

When Willowbank, the picturesque heritage estate on the hill overlooking the village of Queenston, was saved from a wrecking ball in 2003, it was largely thanks to a group of residents led by Laura Dodson.

And the descendants of the last family that once called Willowbank home.

Completed in 1834 for the family of Alexander Hamilton, then sheriff of the Niagara district, in the Greek Revival architectural style, the estate is named after the massive willow trees that once graced the property.

Dorothy and John Bright purchased the estate in 1934 as their family home. He came from the family of Niagara pioneers who for generations helped shape the local wine and fruit industries.

But from 1966, when the Brights sold the estate, until the beginning of its physical and occupational revival in 2003, Willowbank fell on desperately hard times. By 2003, it was scheduled for demolition.

Enter Dodson. She was a tireless crusader, working to protect the heritage assets of the community. Her 2007 obituary describes her crowning achievement as the Willowbank School of Restoration Arts: “Her visionary leadership brought about the founding of a school which will stand as a memorial to her life’s work.”

Bright descendant Mary Bright Urban and her husband Tom Urban, then living in Iowa, were captured by Dodson’s vision and energy. The couple has provided much of the funding for the purchase and ongoing support for the school’s evolution, totalling several million dollars.

In the fall of 2006, the Willowbank School of Restoration Arts accepted its first student class.

And today, the Urbans’ daughter, Victoria Broer, continues to carry the family torch, striving to ensure the international legacy of



Top: Willowbank. RICHARD HARLEY Bottom: A birthday celebration for the 79th birthday of Mary Bright Urban, second from left, was held in the Bright Parlour at Willowbank School of Restoration Arts. With her from left are her husband Thomas Urban, grandson William Broer, son-in-law Peter Broer and daughter Victoria Broer, a current director of Willowbank. The family has been a major benefactor in the purchase and restoration of the historic estate. SUPPLIED

Willowbank.

Broer doesn’t really remember visiting Willowbank as a youngster. “There are pictures of me as a very small child at Willowbank,” she says. “But I don’t really remember it.”

Now 61, Broer lives with her husband just outside Cleveland, Ohio. Their three grown-up children live in California. Recently retired, she continues to be active as a community volunteer and philanthropist.

Broer and her aunt, Emily Bright, from Virgil, are both members of the board of directors of Willowbank.

“The most important thing for my parents was

to save the house from the possibility of becoming condos,” says Broer.

“It was also very important for my mom, that we were able to ensure that even if someone wanted to sell the property 100 years from now, you still can’t tear it down.”

Although Broer’s mother Mary is no longer active in Willowbank affairs, she remains interested in what’s happening at the school. “She will tell you long stories about going to Laura Secord school.”

Broer is proud of her family’s commitment to Willowbank.

“There is a real com-

“It’s the right time to sell. The financial benefits of the sale will not be dissipated. It will be focused and help us move forward.”

VICTORIA BROER
DIRECTOR, WILLOWBANK

mitment on the part of the Bright and Urban clan to make sure that Willowbank is the best that it can be. It’s not just financial. Time. Talent. Treasure. We really have committed all three.”

Broer even did a stint as temporary CEO of the organization.

She admits that in the early days of the school, Willowbank meant a lot of different things to a lot of different people. “It was always tempting to run after the shiny new objects.”

“We have a very effective board, right now. We have some new members with a lot of energy, focus and talent.”

She believes the school has a better understanding of where it fits in the array of historical renovation options. “I think we now have a true discipline and focus around achieving our

goals,” she says.

“We have been impactful for what we’ve been able to bring to the sector and our graduates.”

Broer describes the school’s prospects as “exciting and comforting.”

“Like any startup, you find that the evolution is also a learning in itself. Those 15 years taught the school, the sector, and historic restoration, in general, a lot of lessons.”

These learnings have led to the decision to sell the remaining building of the lower campus — the historic Laura Secord Memorial School.

Broer is thankful the opportunity to acquire the lower campus came along when it did in 2012.

“It was fortuitous that we had the lower campus while we were able to work on the house,” says Broer. “(The lower campus) was also a little bit of a grand experiment. It opened options for the school.”

“We spent some time living in it, working in it.

“Now, the upper campus is in really good shape. We know how to use it. We’re focused on serving our students very effectively,” she says.

“It’s the right time to sell,” adds Broer. “The financial benefits of the sale will not be dissipated. It will be focused and help us move forward.”

Broer believes Willowbank has an opportunity to become the premier institution for historical preservation in Canada.

“We won’t necessarily be training hundreds of people. We will be focusing on developing curriculum and leveraging the cutting-edge direction we are so good at.”

The Bright-Urban-Broer clan “started out wanting to preserve the house. But we’ve all become enamored and excited about what’s happening at the school.”

In an online profile, Broer describes her passion: “The integration of heads and hands at all levels.”

It goes a long way to explaining what keeps her engaged at Willowbank.



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HUMOUR

'Detective Kids' find lost keys in hard-to-find NOTL park



Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson
The Lake Report

I lost my ring of keys in Rye Heritage Park last Thursday. Car keys, door keys, post box key, other keys. What a pain.

My tennis pal Manny and I looked everywhere for about 30 minutes and then gave up. The problem is that you always find a lost item in the last place you look.

About 30 minutes after we had departed in despair, a March Miracle!

A large group of children were enjoying the fresh and cold air at the playground. Six-year-old Jesse had found a ring of keys in the park and handed them to his parents.

Enter the NOTL Detective Kids, and who says there are no young people in our town? (That's why Parliament Oak Public School closed, right? Wrong.)

When these nine amateur sleuths swung into action, they created a plan and were determined, with lots of confidence. Everything but pipes, deerstalker hats and a pink panther. Inspector Clouseau and Sherlock Holmes, move aside.

The nine children were all members of the Wiens, Vanderlee and Bucci families.

Chief Inspector Ella Wiens, 11, sketched a



Jesse Vanderlee, 5, found Ross Robinson's keys in Rye Park. Robinson rewarded him and his family and friends with cupcakes on Monday. Behind are Hannah Vanderlee, Caleb Wiens, Jeremy Vanderlee, Joshua Vanderlee, Taleah Bucci, Ella Wiens, Grace Vanderlee and Naomi Wiens. RICHARD HARLEY

detailed map of the scene. A list of clues was created. They had noticed two somewhat athletic looking gents, one with gray or white hair, who was wearing a white sweater and blue tights, with slimming red stripes down the legs.

The other man seemed to be a tennis coach and looked Hawaiian. He was called Manny and was eating peanuts and laughing a lot.

The key loser had been greatly enjoying a small Jos Louis chocolate cakette as

they searched. By a stroke of observant luck, Frank Bucci or one of his children had noticed a white Kia car parked in the wee lot and the licence plate ended in "239." Amazing, eh?

Frank and two kids drove around the neighbourhood, looking for the white Kia. Found it. They knocked on my door, but no answer.

That evening, a 8" x 8" bristol board sign was drawn up. "YOUR LOST KEYS ARE FOUND. CALL THE WIENS (and the telephone number.)"

The next day, I decided to drop by the tennis courts once more, just for a last look. Imagine my joy when I saw the laminated sign on a post.

I called, we knew each other from our running days, and we arranged to meet in Rye Heritage Park and have a celebration the next day. Don't we just love living in a small town like NOTL?

Young Jesse returned my keys on a big silver platter and the nine kids enjoyed big carrot cupcakes

with sour cream icing, absolutely fresh from Sweets & Swirls Cafe in the NOTL Community Centre.

I, the grateful key owner, made a very brief speech about "doing the right thing" and "having great friends." If you have great friends, all else follows, eh? Joyful feelings all around and a wonderful story.

Let me ramble now to a respectful conclusion. We love living in a tourist town. Shouldn't we have an organized, easy-to-locate lost

and found system? When people are not in their hometown, they are, by definition, out of their routines. They lose things. Heck, even locals lose things, as I have proven.

A trusted source tells me that during the tourist season, at least once a week someone manages to find our local Chamber of Commerce office, with a lost or found situation. A cell-phone, keys, a credit card, a camera, sunglasses.

Until now, a rather haphazard system has sometimes managed to pair lost articles with anxious and stressed lookers. "I'll write down your name and telephone number, and call you if it's turned in."

Let's organize a more formal lost and found place, perhaps at the Chamber office, with an official log book to increase the chances of more miracles.

Get the word out to merchants, restaurants, the police, the NOTL Ambassadors. It's just a small thing, but it will make us seem even more organized and classy as a tourism destination.

Another wee observation: I defy anyone to provide explicit directions to Rye Heritage Park. King Street, Cottage Street, Rye Street, a quick left, a driveway. But no sign. No sign for Rye Park!

Such a wonderful, big and well-kept park. And so many informative and interesting plaques to read.

Learn about Court House and Gaol, 1817-1866, British Home Children, Our Western Home. There is more plaque than you would ever see at the local dental office. Smile.

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Politicians and NOTL Airport chair Robin Garrett gathered last week to announce a \$1.6 million investment from the federal government into new safety equipment for the airport. EVAN SAUNDERS

Federal money for equipment will allow NOTL airport to **focus on growth**, chair says

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

After closing for one of the first times in its history due to repeated heavy snowfalls this winter, the Niagara-on-the-Lake District Airport is getting \$1.6 million from the federal government to help purchase a snowplow, blower, loader and a runway sweeper.

“Having this equipment is absolutely critical,” airport chair Robin Garrett said at an airport gathering last week for the funding announcement.

She noted the heavy snowfalls this winter presented obstacles for the airport.

“It was 55 centimetres of snow we had to clear one day and I believe staff were up all night. It was one of

the first times we had to close the airport,” she said.

But the money does more than help the airport purchase up-to-date equipment. It also enables its resources to be allocated toward other projects.

“It allows us to spend the time we need and the resources on growing the airport,” Garrett said.

“Staff have been spending a lot of time and effort and resources maintaining old equipment. It’s time-consuming and it’s expensive. This equipment will free up the time to spend attracting new business.”

Federal Transportation Minister Omar Alghabra, St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle and Niagara Centre MP Vance Badawey were at the airport to discuss the investment on Thursday.

“Every sector of our economy has suffered during

COVID-19,” Alghabra said in response to a question from The Lake Report.

“The aviation sector has suffered significantly. Our government understood that and also understood the importance the aviation sector plays in all of its components: airports, airlines, workers and all the businesses that supply those entities,” he said.

“We stepped up and provided support.”

Alghabra said the federal government has provided \$11 billion of financial relief for the industry throughout the pandemic in the form of loans and grants.

“The funding I’ve just announced will help ensure that this airport can continue to provide safe, reliable and efficient travel options” and “help Canada work toward economic recovery and travel restart

as the pandemic eases.”

“I feel very optimistic now, as we are turning the corner from COVID-19, to see a greater sense of enthusiasm and energy in the sector,” he said.

Garrett said the choice of equipment was limited due to the grant the airport applied for, which was for safety investment only. The investment is great news for the airport, she said.

“It’s one of our most important needs at this time, so that works very well and we’ve received everything we needed,” Garret said.

But she was sure to let the politicians present know aid is always welcome.

“More is good,” Garret said, eliciting laughs from the political assembly. “We have other needs.”

Garrett said the airport is already tendering for the purchase of the equipment.



RIDDLE ME THIS

What word of five letters has one left when two are removed?

Last issue: I’m so fragile that saying my name breaks me. What am I?

Answer: Silence

Answered first by: Margie Enns

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Susan Hamilton, Bill Hamilton, Terry Nord, Bob Campbell, Mary Ann Enns, Pam Dowling, Wade Durling, Tammy Florio, Howard Jones, Maria Janeiro, Rob Hutchison, Rosemarie Huber, Kim McQuhae, Sheila Meloche, Dennis Blake, Doug Bruce, Bruce Robb, KC King

Email answers to editor@niagaranow.com, with your name, for a chance to win a \$20 Irish Harp Pub gift card every week. (Subject line: Riddle me this)

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Jr. A Predators lose first game of second-round playoff series

Kevin Dowd
Special to The Lake Report

Two wins over the Plattsville Lakers was all the Niagara Jr. A Predators needed to take things to round two of the playoffs but they couldn't keep the streak alive against tougher competition.

Niagara made short work of Plattsville in the first round of the Greater Metro Hockey League's playoffs, winning two straight games of the best-of-three series. But in Tuesday's first game of the semi-finals the Predators lost 8-5 to the North York Renegades.

"We were up 4-2 then we took some, I guess you could say bad penalties I didn't necessarily agree with but it is what it is and they scored a couple power play goals when we were two men short and one man short," said Predators' head coach and owner Robert Turnbull.

"We definitely played well enough to win."

North York started with an early two-goal lead but Niagara's Pontus Madsen narrowed the gap nine

minutes into the first. Jason Humphries responded to a third tally by North York at a little past the 17-minute mark, ending the period with Niagara trailing 3-2.

An explosive start to the second period for Niagara saw Alexander Page and Alexander Insulander each scoring in the first four minutes and a 4-3 lead Niagara held for the rest of the period.

Niagara's Dante Massi brought things to a promising 5-3 early in the third but five unanswered goals over 15 minutes for North York – two on power plays and their eighth in an empty net – iced the Predators 8-5.

"Being down 2-0, to come back and score three times, and then another one to make it 4-3, momentum was on our side. We were playing great and then we get a couple bad penalties. Today we should have won," said Turnbull.

He is proud of his team and attributes the loss in part to two top scorers who moved to European pro leagues, former captain Mario Zitella out for the remainder of the season with



The Jr. A Niagara Predators ousted Plattsville in two straight games but lost Game 1 of the second round to North York. RICHARD HARLEY/FILE

a shoulder injury and newcomer Mackenzie Okumura in isolation after COVID-19 contact.

"We got to the puck better than we normally do against this team and we made some unbelievable passes."

A 2-1 finish last Wednesday and 4-2 win on Friday against Plattsville earned Niagara their spot in the league's south division semi-finals against North York.

"It was great, it was fabulous, the kids earned it. Some of the boys, in a posi-

tive way, are playing way above their level and it's fabulous to see and I'm so proud of the guys who leave it all out on the ice."

In their first game, scoring started early for Niagara, courtesy Georgy Kholmovsky 5:36 into the game. It would be almost 20 game minutes later before either team's goaltender slipped up, with Plattsville sneaking one past Morgan Penwell a second shy of 15 minutes into the second period. Four minutes later Alessandro Massi put Niagara back in

the lead with the final goal of the night.

Playing at "home" last Friday in Port Colborne because icetime was not available at the Meridian Credit Union Arena in Virgil, the Predators put down Plattsville a second and final time.

The game was scoreless for the first half until Niagara's Dante Massi netted one at the 11:46 mark in the second period.

It was in the last 20 minutes when things really picked up with a recently returned Noah Caperchione giving his team a two-goal lead nearly seven minutes in. Plattsville answered back 30 seconds later but not to be proude, Madsen managed Niagara's third goal just 20 seconds after that.

A power play goal by Plattsville tightened things up for the last 10 minutes but with less than two minutes left on the clock, Caperchione's second of the night sealed the deal for Niagara 4-2.

"They were very tight games, they were hard-fought games, they were

very physical games and we had the goaltending. We had good goaltending against Plattsville those games," said Turnbull.

Niagara faces tougher competition against the Renegades, who finished in second place – one spot above Niagara – and bested the Predators three out of four games in the regular season. But a comeback is not out of reach as the semi-finals are a best-of-five series.

Turnbull feels the wins will not be easy but has a game plan.

"Our plan's really simple, try to play like we did tonight and eliminate the bad penalties. That's all we can do."

"It's going to be very difficult against this team. The first two periods were some of the best periods we've played. We've always had close games against the Renegades and we always give them a good go."

Niagara was to play their second game of this series Wednesday night in North York and their third is this Friday night in Virgil at 7:30 p.m.

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The Virgil arenas were bustling with activity this weekend as 42 minor hockey teams faced off in a tournament. Top right: Gino Patterson runs the trophy room. RICHARD HARLEY

NOTL minor hockey tournament a **sign of life**

Arena was packed with families enjoying the weekend as tuck shops, friends, barbecues returned

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

A minor hockey tournament took over the Virgil arenas Friday to Monday, as 42 teams faced off for the title of champion in various age groups.

It was a sign of life coming back to the community, with the arena filled with parents and children.

Even some small-item shops were set up, and there was a barbecue.

For NOTL father Chris Doyle, it was essential to be back out on the ice with kids being able to have fun and look forward to something.

“It’s fantastic to be out with everybody and kids need it,” he said while his son Cian played on Saturday.

Chris also volunteered

with the tuck shop and barbecue set up for the weekend.

He said Cian was “completely excited, ready for a tournament and good to be out with all his friends and ready to go.”

His daughter also plays hockey but wasn’t in the weekend tournament.

NOTL parents Kim and Scott Gauld were also watching their 10-year-old son Eric play on Saturday, and echoed similar sentiments.

“It’s long overdue and we’re happy to be out,” Kim said.

She said her son was “pretty excited” to be in a tournament with people around and that it’s bringing the “energy” back to the kids and the game.

“He likes being out with

his friends and this has been good after a couple of years of not doing so much. It’s really nice for them to be able to come out and spend time with the kids from other schools and all that,” Kim said.

It’s her son’s first year in hockey and she said it’s nice to have fewer restrictions on parents entering the dressing rooms, etc.

“You can see all their friends are here cheering them on, which is nice,” she said.

“We’re pretty new to the sport, but we’re loving being out and we’re loving the energy in town.”

Scott also felt the same.

“It’s healthy for them, it’s good for them. They need socializing, they need to be out with their friends

— that’s what kids do. It’s essential.”

Behind the scenes, Gino Patterson, who helps keep the tournament together and has been volunteering with NOTL hockey for 11 years, was helping to keep track of scores, arrange trophies and answer questions from parents and coaches.

“It’s just so nice to be playing again. It’s incredible. Like it’s such a good feeling just for the kids,” he said.

He said when COVID first hit, it meant the March break tournament in 2020 had to be cancelled the night before it was to begin.

“I had the trophies set up, all the fridges full, the barbecue set up, everything was ready to go and I think I got the call probably at around seven o’clock at night that

the time the government was shutting everything down,” he said.

The March tournament is only the second to have taken place since March 2020. NOTL held another one in November, before things got locked down again.

“A lot of people don’t know how important it was for us like to have the November and March tournament this year.”

His son Jaden missed his last year of midget hockey due to the pandemic. So it hits close to home to see kids back on the ice.

For Patterson it’s no easy feat managing the logistics of 42 teams playing in a tournament, but once all the labour is done, it’s worth it.

“You’ve got to put in a lot of work to get to this point

and it’s a little stressful, but when you actually get to the day and you get to meet everybody and talk to everybody and have fun, then you sit back and you go, ‘This is why I do it.’ ”

He also sang the praises of the many other volunteers and coaches who help bring the tournament together.

“Niagara-on-the-Lake honestly, I can’t give enough thanks to the community around here. Like we got Jo Zambito out there — his kids aren’t even in this tournament and he’s up there doing seven hours of barbecue help. You know, he’s a fire chief (in Niagara Falls). He doesn’t need to be here. That’s the way our community is, everybody signs up and helps out. Like it’s a wicked community.”



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‘There’s a lot of uncertainty’ with mask mandates ending, medical officer says

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report



Dr. Azim Kasmani, associate medical officer of health for Niagara Region, says COVID is not going anywhere and people who still wish to wear masks should be supported. SUPPLIED

Mask mandates are set to be lifted on March 21 and vaccine requirements have nearly vanished across Niagara’s businesses, but the region’s associate medical officer of health says there is “a lot of uncertainty” about where COVID counts will go from here.

“Ontario’s one of the later regions to remove mask mandates. I’m glad we waited this long,” Dr. Azim Kasmani said in an interview Monday.

“I would have waited a little longer but the decision has been made,” he said.

Kasmani noted there are COVID surges in several countries around the world right now but said Ontario has more than 90 per cent of its residents aged 12 and up vaccinated, an essential bulwark against a potential rising tide of COVID.

“It’s our job now to respond and make sure that we do other things like make sure everyone is up

to date on their vaccines — has received their third dose,” he said.

“If they haven’t received their first or second they need to get those as well to protect themselves.”

He said Ontario is at

a point where it needs to balance the risk of COVID with the harms associated with continued safety measures in the form of social isolation and economic difficulty.

COVID has not gone anywhere and the threat is still very real, he said, pointing to surges across China and New Zealand, two countries famed for their zero COVID policies, as examples of how completely eliminating the virus is simply not possible.

Kasmani noted a stark difference between the nations’ outbreaks.

“There was a lot more trust in government (in New Zealand) and a lot more people in the elderly age groups got vaccinated. As a result, although cases in both countries are going up, their hospital and ICU admissions and deaths are orders of magnitude different,” he said.

He further stressed the importance for vulnerable populations to get vaccinated.

“Anyone over the age of 50 that hasn’t gotten their

first, second or third dose yet: go get that,” he said.

“We don’t want to see other measures being introduced at this point,” he said.

He said the under-vaccinated and unvaccinated are overrepresented in deaths and ICU admissions in Ontario.

Kasmani said it is essential we support people who wish to continue wearing masks after mandates are lifted.

“I absolutely support people who will continue to wear a mask because I think that can help across the population,” he said.

Kasmani said he will continue to wear a mask when out shopping or in crowded places, and not because he is overly concerned with his own safety.

“I’ll deal with the fogged glasses a little bit longer to keep the community safe,” he said.

“It’s not about me getting sick. If I get sick, I’m less worried than if I transmit (COVID) to somebody else who could become really sick.”

Mobile vaccinations in NOTL, restrictions eased at hospital

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report



The GO-VAXX bus.

The GO-VAXX mobile clinic will be in Niagara-on-the-Lake today, March 17, between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

The mobile clinic will be at the Daniel J. Patterson campus of Niagara College in parking lot A2.

As Dr. Azim Kasmani noted in this week’s Lake Report, vaccinations are now one of our best defences against COVID-19 and possible future restrictions.

With restrictions waning across the country and the removal of the mask mandate on March 21, Niagara Health has also loosened its restrictions for visitors in certain areas of regional hospitals.

As of March 14, rules for inpatient units, labour and delivery, and the newborn intensive care unit changed, Niagara Health said in a news release.

The changes include allowing two visitors at the bedside at a time with no

restriction on total number of visitors throughout the day.

Children and youth are able to visit as long as they can wear a mask at all times.

Patients may designate up to two essential care partners who can be present 24/7 but need to coordinate with other visitors to ensure only two people are at the bedside at a time.

Visiting hours continue to be 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Niagara Health said there may be times when patients are unable to see any visitors due to COVID-19.

“Check with the patient’s unit ahead of your visit to see if your loved one can have a visitor.”

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State of emergency **lifted** in NOTL

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

After two years of lowered flags and half-capacity stores, the Region of Niagara has lifted the state of emergency brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

“As the heads of council, we declared the state of emergency together in an effort to help save lives, protect our hospital system and to underscore the critical nature of the (pandemic),” regional chair Jim Bradley said in a statement.

“After two years, we are in a significantly different position and it appears that it is now the appropriate time to move forward as a community.”

The state of emergency was lifted across all Niagara municipalities simultaneously on Tuesday, March 15.

As of Wednesday, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake’s vaccination policy for employees is still in effect, town spokesperson Lauren Kruitbosch said in an email to The Lake Report.

“Senior staff and the

Emergency Control Group (ECG) continue to review the policy regularly. The next review is taking place on March 21 following March break, and staff will be advised of any changes to the policy shortly thereafter,” she said.

The Monday, March 21 committee of the whole meeting will be the first in-person meeting for councillors and the town clerk since the pandemic began, Kruitbosch said. The meeting is limited to council and the clerk. All delegations, staff, residents and media will attend virtually.

Kruitbosch said the town had yet to determine whether masks will still be required in its facilities after March 21.

“Senior staff is working with the region to support a consistent approach to changes throughout regional municipalities and will provide updates as soon as they become available via the town’s website and social media pages,” she said.

Bradley congratulated Niagara residents for their due diligence during the

state of emergency.

“Make no mistake: the sacrifices that you made saved lives and kept people out of the hospital,” Bradley said.

“These two years have been difficult and volatile for all of us,” Lord Mayor Betty Disero said.

Disero thanked staff, council, residents and generous organizations who did what was necessary during the pandemic and looked after their neighbours, family and friends who were struggling.

“Lastly, and probably most importantly, I want to thank our frontline workers and our emergency response teams for everything they did, working tirelessly, 24 hours a day to heal us and to make sure that we’re safe.”

But Disero and Bradley both made sure to highlight the continuing threat of COVID-19.

“The pandemic is not yet gone. We should continue to stay safe,” she said.

Disero encouraged NOTLers to continue wearing masks if they wish and maintain social distancing when out in public.



List of Food Requirements 2022 Easter Hampers

- Canned Green Beans
- Canned Peas • Canned Pineapple
- Stuffing Mix • Canned Gravy
- Cranberry Sauce
- Snack Crackers (any kind)
- Bottled Juice (Cranberry or Apple)
- Cookies (any kind or flavour)
- Chocolates (for Easter baskets)

General Food Bank Supplies

- Canned Salmon • Soda (Soup) Crackers
- Flakes of Ham, Chicken or Turkey
- Peanut Butter • Canned Chili or Spaghetti or Ravioli
- Oatmeal • Canned Beef Stew • Cereal (any kind)
- Habitant Soups • Granola Bars • Chunky Soups (beef or chicken)
- Canned Baked Beans • Canned Red Kidney Beans
- Jello – any flavour • Canned Ham, Corned Beef or Spam
- Jams (any flavour) • Canned Tomatoes / Tomato Sauce
- Ketchup/Mustard/Mayonnaise/Green Relish
- Canned mixed vegetables • Sugar / Flour / Baking Ingredients
- Rice • Coffee or Tea • Kraft Dinner Mac and Cheese
- Shampoo & Conditioner / Toothpaste
- Sidekicks & Mr. Noodle packets • Paper Towels / Toilet Paper



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The **early birds** are coming as spring migration begins



Keeping it Green 

Kyra Simone
Special to The Lake Report

After spending winters down south, many birds migrate north in the spring. From now until the end of May, Niagara is an important spot for many migratory birds to take cover from inclement weather and to feast on insects.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

"You can actually watch the radar! That's how big the flocks are," says Marcie Jacklin, Niagara regional co-ordinator for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas.

To track some of these patterns in Ontario, check out sources like Weather Underground that use mostly unprocessed radar data.



A visiting migrant last spring, this tree swallow was spotted on the Niagara-on-the-Lake Niagara College campus. GREGARY FORD PHOTO

"Migration is often weather-related. You want these south winds," says Jacklin. We're most likely to see returning birds after a large increase in temperature.

Most of these species migrate at night when there's less risk of overheating or attack by predators, and they require clear, moon-lit nights to safely navigate.

"If it gets foggy or starts to rain, they need to get down right away," says Jacklin.

THE NIAGARA FLYWAY

The Niagara River Corridor is an extremely biodiverse area and is considered an Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (IBA) because it forms one of four major bird migration corridors in North America.

In addition to the flyway, Niagara is home to four other IBAs that support migrating raptors like turkey vultures and red-shouldered hawks, and species-at-risk, like the Acadian flycatcher.

Dr. Bill Rapley, a member of the Niagara River remedial action committee and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority board, says there is a "huge amount of birds coming."

"Killdeer came in Sunday," he said and the redwing blackbirds have also started to arrive.

UNDER YOUR WING

Because many birds use natural light cues to navigate at night, artificial exterior lighting can cause

confusion. "Lights do attract them. It's quite dangerous," says Jacklin.

If weather conditions aren't suitable for flying, birds may fly toward brightly lit areas and accidentally collide with windows and walls. Or, they may become disoriented and circle in confusion until they are exhausted.

Songbird populations are already dropping dramatically due to habitat loss and declining insect populations, and climate change may make migration more dangerous by increasing severe weather.

Turning off lights on the exterior of buildings or visible through window coverings between midnight and sunrise reduces the risk to birds. This is most helpful during peak migration "around the first of May," says Rapley. "It starts to slow down by the 15th of June."

"Use lights that only point down," adds Jacklin. "That definitely would save some birds." Highrise buildings pose the greatest risk of window collisions for these night migrants. "Above the canopy is the risk," he says.

Jacklin says the best way to help migrating birds is to plant native species in our gardens. "The other stuff is pretty, but has no nutrition."

"Not only native species, but biodiverse plantings," says Rapley. Plus, adds Jacklin, "A lot of these birds are insect eaters, so feeders don't really help." They need plants that will attract pollinating insects.

"You don't have to be an expert on any of this," says Jacklin. "If you want to know more, or if you're happy just feeding the birds or going for a stroll," there are many local interest groups and citizen science opportunities, such as the eBird app.

With spring around the corner, it's the perfect time to see if you can catch sight of these beautiful feathered visitors in flight.

Kyra Simone is a green-at-heart NOTL resident with master's degrees in biology and science communication. In her spare time, she advocates for sustainable change, picks up litter, makes recycled jewelry and transforms furniture bound for the landfill.

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Comedian Joe Pillitteri hosts new **Music Niagara** variety series

Staff
The Lake Report

Music Niagara is launching the first episode in a new contemporary variety show series this week.

The Not-So-Late Show will be anchored by comedian/host Joe Pillitteri and the house band Quartetto Gelato, led by acclaimed multi-instrumentalist Colin Maier.

The first show, on Thursday, March 17, is filmed at the Olde Library at the Pillar and Post. It features Shaw Festival artistic director Tim Carroll, Greg and Yannick Wertsch from Between the Lines Winery, Julie Nesrallah (soprano) with Guy Few (piano), and young virtuoso Sora Sato-Mound (violin and piano)

Upcoming episodes include:

* March 24, from Yuk Yuk's in Niagara Falls, featuring Marcel Morgenstern from Bella Terra Wines, Tanya Charles (violin) with Atis Bankas (violin), comedian Ben Bankas, and Kris Maddigan (Cuphead's



Joe Pillitteri is the host of a new show by Music Niagara, called the "Not-So-Late Show." RICHARD HARLEY/FILE

musical mastermind).

* March 31, from Hernder Estate Winery in St. Catharines, featuring Canada's Polka King Walter Ostanek (accordion) with Wayne Malton (keyboard), Daryl Novak, Doug Miller (flute) and Deborah Braun (harp) from the Niagara Sym-

phony Orchestra, Hernder Estate winemaker Angela Kasimos, and St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik.

More episodes are planned in the future.

All shows can be seen live at 7 p.m. on Music Niagara's website musicniagara.org or its YouTube channel.



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Across

- 1. German liqueur (8)
- 9. Burden excessively (8)
- 10. Self-important (8)
- 11. Travelling case for clothes (8)
- 12. Refrain voluntarily (7)
- 13. Gambling game (4,4)
- 14. Private feud (8)
- 18. Acts (8)
- 21. Bald (8)
- 23. Black magic (7)
- 24. I o W town (8)
- 26. Staple of Mediterranean cooking (5,3)
- 27. Goodbye (8)
- 28. Charismatic (8)

Down

- 2. Responsive to drugs (7)
- 3. Midday (8)
- 4. Musician who could play the Moonlight Sonata (7)
- 5. Drunkards (4)
- 6. Musical performance (7)
- 7. Tranquil (6)
- 8. Cushion for kneeling (7)
- 13. Poches with a torch (5)
- 15. Substantial (8)
- 16. West Atlantic island country (7)
- 17. Decreased (7)
- 19. Covering for a building (7)
- 20. Cocktail (7)
- 22. Battered (6)
- 25. Small island (4)

Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9						10	
			11				
12						13	
			14	15	16		
17						18	
			19				
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			25				
26	27	28			29		30
		31	32	33			
34				35			
		36					
37					38		
		39					

Last issue's answers

B	S	B	E	Q	U	I	P	S	C			
U	N	C	L	A	S	P	S	L	H	A	S	A
B	I	L	L	S	I	E	V	E	F	T		
B	A	M	B	I	N	O	R	A	W	A	S	H
L	I	N	M	I	S	T	S	R	O			
E	I	T	H	E	R	M	A	E	R	I	A	L
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P	A	R	T	E	D	I	C	O	S	M	I	C
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E	I											
C	O	C	O	A	Y	A	R	R	A	N	G	E
Y	S											

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



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Birdsong, human speech and how **practice** really can make perfect



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Special to The Lake Report

No less than Charles Darwin, the father of evolution by natural selection, speculated a century and a half ago that birdsong might be among the many evolutionary precursors to human language.

Turns out he may have been right as new evidence suggests the neural substrate for both share important features.

In the case of the zebra finch and probably most of the other songbirds that make up about half of the estimated 10,000 species of birds worldwide, birdsong is used as a personal calling card for courtship and other social interactions.

For mature birdsong, as David Clayton framed it recently in the Journal



A small house wren sings a song. RICHARD HARLEY/FILE

Science, “is a precisely structured performance, consisting of a few short sound elements (‘syllables’) repeated in an exact order, each burst lasting one to two seconds. The syllables can have differing complex structures, with stacks of harmonic frequencies and varied amplitude.”

And each bird’s song differs slightly from the songs of others, making for personalized versions of the

birdsong.

Songbirds begin learning birdsong with 20 to 30 days of hatching and continue to learn and perfect it over the next several weeks. Initially, they learn by listening, but it isn’t long before they begin to imitate the birdsong of their elder (usually the father) and by repeated practice, gradually, refine their song until it becomes a close facsimile of their elder’s song.

Here it gets interesting because all that listening and practice creates a remarkably exact physiological template for the song in a special region of the brain, which carries the fancy name of pallial sensorimotor nucleus interfacialis of the nido pallium or mercifully for short, NIf.

To create the song, the latter region projects to a premotor region in the bird’s brain which activates the requisite motor nerve cells and their related muscles in their proper order in the voice tract. To illustrate the importance of the NIf as the region that stores the all-important memory for the birdsong, investigators showed they could impose their own version of birdsong by repeated electrical stimulation of the same area.

Apparently, humans do much the same thing by listening, as early as within the womb, to the voices of their parents and others. Later, within a few months, they begin to copy their elders’ sounds, refining them by constant practice and in the process, like the songbirds, create auditory

templates in higher level association cortex surrounding the primary auditory cortex in the temporal lobes.

These templates for syllables and other oral speech constructions are connected to premotor cortex which, again as with the songbird, activate appropriate motor systems in the oropharyngeal and laryngeal regions to create oral speech.

So as simple as the system may be in songbirds, Darwin was right – the ancestors of songbirds and other species that communicate by vocalization, acted as evolutionary prototypes for the more complex vocalizations of highly intelligent species to follow, including humans.

Or perhaps birdsong and hominin speech are better thought of as examples of convergent evolution – two very different species arrive at similar solutions for similar challenges – communicating with others of their kind.

It’s worthwhile pointing out that learning other motor skills such as skiing or playing the piano are also acquired by imitation and relentless practice,

creating along the way, sensory memories for the tasks – which become more and more refined and fluid with practice and experience – to the point where most haven’t much, if any, conscious awareness of how they do familiar tasks.

At the other end of life, many of those same overlearned sensor-motor skills may be lost, at least partially so, as neurodegenerative and vascular diseases destroy the parts of the brain containing the sensor-motor memories on which those tasks depend.

There’s yet another point here. It turns out that songbirds have an extra disposable chromosome whose genes may play a pivotal role in learning birdsong.

But once mating is over, the chromosome disappears, possibly as a metabolic cost-saving measure, only to reappear again when the next mating season arrives! Nothing like that in humans. Extraordinary.

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

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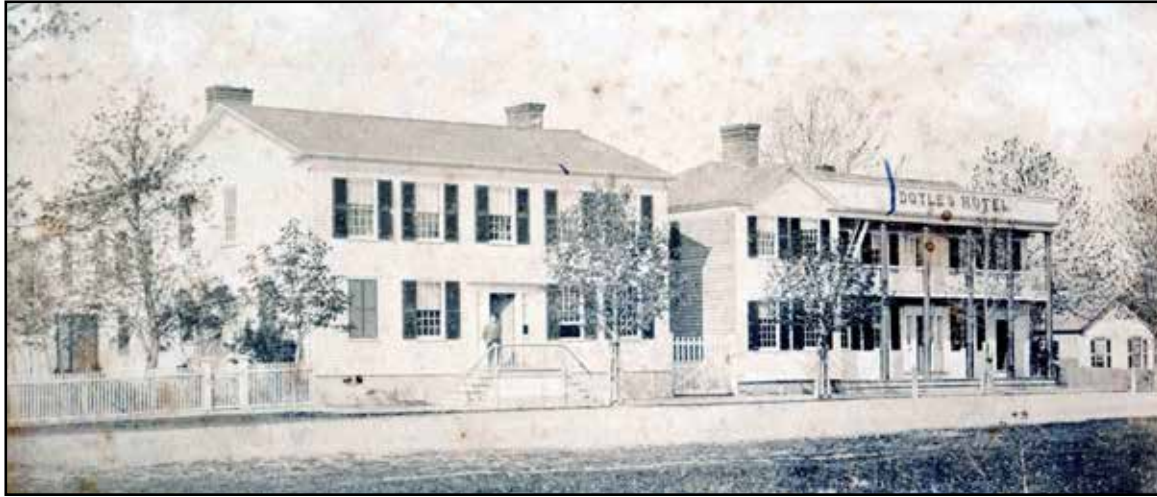
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EXPLORING PHOTOS WITH NOTL MUSEUM



Moffat Inn and Miller's Hotel

This c.1890 photograph shows the Moffat Inn, left, and the former Miller's Hotel. Richard Moffat Jr. purchased this land from James Crooks in 1834. The next year he built the inn, one of 28 taverns in town at the time. Carpentry and boatbuilding were the trades that ran in their family and this may be why they settled here in the first place – to assist with the Niagara Harbour and Dock Company. The Moffat Inn is an example of the simple, ordered vernacular of Upper Canada in this period, with a centre door. Clapboard was the original finish and stucco was added later. The stagecoaches for Hamilton, St. Catharines and Fort Erie stopped at this hotel daily. A livery stable was also attached. Immediately on the corner was Miller's Hotel, which was also built in 1835. By the end of the century, this building, along with the original Moffat Inn, were purchased by James Doyle and were renamed Doyle's Hotel. Doyle tore the Miller building down in the 1930s. The Moffat still operates as an inn today.



One piece of the puzzle

Brian Marshall
Columnist

My son is thrilled to pieces with his recently acquired property in an old turn-of-the 20th-century neighbourhood.

This is not because it is all he ever wanted in a house. On the contrary, he has made a number of concessions based on affordability.

Yes, it does have a yard big enough to allow him to express his love of gardening and a kitchen that supports his joy of cooking, but that's not the real reason he's so happy.

Nope, what has him completely chuffed is that for the first time in his life, he's living in a completely

walkable neighbourhood.

As he recently pointed out, except for the commute to work, on a day-to-day basis there is no need to start the car. Everything they would have historically driven to can be found within a 10-minute walk from their front door.

There are parks, schools, stores, restaurants, and even a Service Ontario office within that radius, all of which has made him and my daughter-in-law as happy as two clams.

I think his experience speaks to people's basic desire for human-scaled communities and precisely what this column has been visiting in the last several weeks.

We have considered the evolution and the failure of suburbia with its segmentation, separation and centralization of homes, retail, services (etc.) into separate "islands" dependent on vehicular transportation.

And, I hope there is a common understanding that our housing dilemma is such that we can no longer afford to go down the road well-travelled and continue to make the same mistakes over and over again – de-

spite the apparent desire of our governments and real estate industry. It is well past time for a new direction.

It is my belief that one small but absolutely vital component of this new direction is the resurrection of the small multi-use building.

I'm not sure exactly when the North American perspective shifted and it became slightly socially verboten to live above your or someone else's place of work, but there is no question that many of us have a vague notion that someone successful would not do so.

Of course, this flies in the face of most cities outside Canada and the United States, where it is common practice. But even here, it is a fallacy.

One of the best (in my opinion) restaurants in North America has been owned and operated by the same family for three generations, each of whom made their home in the three-storey townhouse above the business.

Interestingly, this same family holds an investment portfolio which in 2005 had a valuation in excess of

\$200 million.

As real estate, these multi-use (or live/work) buildings have a sound market. Witness the series built in Bronte during the early years of this century. Not only did they sell well initially, the properties have appreciated at or slightly above the market in the years since.

Why have more not been built?

That remains a question to which I can only speculate that they do not fit the common methodology of real estate developers.

The fact remains that this type of building within a neighbourhood not only delivers walkability benefits, it also provides dwellings in the same contained footprint.

And, adhering to good design principles, they can easily integrate into existing neighbourhoods while adding to the architectural attractiveness of the community.

Visit any old small town Main Street in this province and you'll see these buildings. And you don't have to go far: just take a walk down Queen Street in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Looking to the Stars



Spring equinox arrives Sunday and a new astrological year begins

This week, we see a full moon in Virgo and the vernal equinox as the start of spring, 2022.

Thursday, March 17: Top o' the mornin' to ya. Happy St. Patrick's Day! Good news today brings a long-cherished dream closer to fruition. It was March 17, 1908, that Canadian boxer, Tommy Burns, KO'd Ireland's Jem Roche in the first round.

Friday, March 18: It's the time of the full moon in Virgo. What happens when we swim into too much Pisces energy?

It's easy to get lost in Pisces' fertile field of endless possibilities. To balance things out, every Pisces season we have a full moon in the opposite sign of Virgo. Virgo is that part of us that is down to earth, remembers to set the alarm for the morning and makes sure we have enough food in the fridge. If we want to achieve those crazy Piscean dreams, we also need Virgo's practicality and attention to detail. On this day in 2009, we saw the tragic death of the brilliant actor, Natasha Richardson after a skiing accident in Quebec.

Saturday, March 19: Libra is where the moon is today. Mercury in Aquarius has the most prominent role to play right now, especially as surprising news of a cherished future arrives. Happy birthday to actor Glenn Close as she turns 75.

Sunday, March 20: At 11:33 this morning, spring will arrive. We have the spring equinox in the northern hemisphere and the autumn equinox in the southern hemisphere. No matter where you live on Earth, the day is equal to the night. Zero degrees Aries is the first degree of the zodiac, so the sun's ingress into Aries also marks the beginning of a new astrological year. This is a great time to press the reset button and start all over again. The upcoming month is also, of course, that time of the year when we

celebrate the Aries people in our lives. We all have something to learn from Aries' boldness and drive. This is a time to "just do it" – to follow our instincts and step outside our comfort zone. If something feels right, it's time to go for it. Number 4, Bobby Orr, celebrates birthday #74 today.

Monday, March 21: Today, Mercury is conjunct Jupiter. Mercury's yearly encounter with Jupiter is our opportunity to go BIG in everything that Mercury stands for. If you want to give a speech or a presentation, for example, then your message will be more inspirational and reach more people's hearts. With Jupiter, of course, there's also a tendency to exaggerate or over-idealize an idea. Controversial comedian Rosie O'Donnell turns 60 today.

Tuesday, March 22: This is a good day to 1) be on guard for potentially dangerous situations and 2) be ready for some very good news where health or work are concerned. Captain Kirk, aka William Shatner, celebrates birthday number 91.

Wednesday, March 23: Mercury is conjunct Neptune today. If you came up with a great idea when Mercury was conjunct Jupiter, Neptune will help you see even more opportunities. It will open up even more possibilities. Mercury conjunct Neptune is very beneficial for people who have mental blockages or a scarcity mindset because Jupiter's optimism and Neptune's idealism reframe thinking and take a more optimistic view of life. Of course, with this transit, we also want to pay attention to exaggerations, wishful thinking, or a tendency to see things for what we want them to be, rather than what they are. The Cars' Ric Ocasek would be 78 were he still here.

Bill Auchterlonie's podcast, "Looking up to the Stars," is at www.lutts.ca.

Astrology is a form of entertainment, not a science.



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Joanne Young says to remove one third of the oldest growth on the shrub. SUPPLIED

Pruning **deciduous shrubs** requires care and understanding



Joanne Young
Garden Columnist

Last week we looked at some of the science behind how a plant grows, which helps us understand pruning a bit better. This week, we have some tips on pruning deciduous shrubs.

In general, the best time to prune any deciduous woody plant is just before the new growth starts in spring (late dormant period – March to mid-April).

Pruning at other times can rob the plant of stored food and energy. It may also mean a loss of flowers or fruit. With that said all rules have some exceptions.

Here are those exceptions:

* Any early spring flowering plants (ones that bloom off old wood) should be pruned immediately after flowering and before leaves unfold. e.g. magnolia, forsythia, wisteria, serviceberry, lilac, quince,

bridal wreath spirea, most viburnums.

* Trees such as Maples (including Japanese maples), flowering dogwoods, birch and elm will bleed if pruned in late winter or early spring. A better time to prune these trees would be mid-summer.

Many people, when pruning deciduous trees and shrubs, will just shear back the top of the plant to reduce its overall height, but this is only one part of proper pruning techniques.

Here are some steps to follow.

Step 1. When pruning any shrub or tree, you always start out with the 3 Ds of pruning. This means you prune out any dead, diseased or damaged branches first.

Step 2. Next, remove any branches that closely cross with other branches or that cross through the middle of the plant. You want to have branches that come from the centre of the plant and head outward.

Step 3. When pruning any plant, it is always good to know what your goal is and that will help you determine how to best prune your shrub. There are four main goals of pruning that you should be considering before you begin.

GOAL 1 – Control the Size of Plant: The best way to control the size of a plant is by natural prun-

ing, which means you are making selective cuts to thin or reduce the overall size of the plant. You are not just shearing off the tips but removing branches with secateurs or loppers. When you only shear back the tips, your shrubs will become very wide at the top because of this increased branching, giving your shrub an ice cream cone-like appearance. When the top is so wide, it stops the sunlight from hitting the base of the plant and you are left with a plant that is bare at the base. When pruning is completed, it should still have its natural form.

GOAL 2 – Increase the Amount of Flowers and Fruit: Proper pruning will aid in the production of flowers. Most flowers are produced on the tips of the stems, so the more tips there are, the more flowers you have and the more fruit that will be produced. To accomplish this, you cut back the stem tips, stimulating the side branches and developing more tips for the flowers to form on. Just remember the more flowers a plant produces the smaller the flowers will be.

GOAL 3 – Maintain a Certain Shape: One of the goals of pruning might be to maintain a certain shape, such as a hedge, a globe form, or specimen plants like spirals and pompons. This is best achieved

by shearing. With shearing you are just removing new tip growth, creating a full dense look. Even though electric shears make the job easier, hand shears make a much nicer job of things. Electric shears just tear the plant tissue while hand shears make a cleaner cut. When the plant tissue is torn there is more die back at the tips, giving the sheared shrub a brownish tinge. To prevent this from happening, always make sure that any pruning tool is sharp and clean before using.

GOAL 4 – Rejuvenate an Older Shrub: We tend to let shrubs grow and grow and once they become too large, we hack (not a proper horticultural term) them back, hoping they will survive and become beautiful again. It is much easier to do a bit of pruning every year than to wait until the shrub is out of control. The best way to rejuvenate an old flowering shrub is to do so over a three-year period. This can be achieved by removing one-third of the oldest growth every year right back to the base, which will then stimulate growth to come from lower down. In three years, you will have completely rejuvenated the entire shrub.

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

NOTL bake sale for Ukraine raises **\$3,223** in two hours



Heather Hall and Sandra Hardy were some of the first ones at Tara Rosling's bake sale for Ukraine on Sunday. They picked up some fresh bread, helping bring the total funds raised at the sale to \$3,223. RICHARD HARLEY

Roofer **injured in fall** at NOTL home under construction



The house at 560 Missisagua St. where the fall occurred.

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

A roofing contractor suffered serious back injuries in a fall at a home under construction in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Friday morning.

The 34-year-old man fell about 12 feet to the ground on the site at 560 Missisagua St. at Anne Street, said Paul Fluri, the project manager for the new home.

"While on a ladder with all safety equipment in place, he slipped and fell," Fluri told The Lake Report.

While a co-worker on the ground was holding the ladder, the roofer apparently slipped as he was moving from the ladder onto the roof, Fluri said.

He called 911 immediately while other workers on the scene attended to the man until paramedics arrived.

A Ministry of Labour official was on the scene and confirmed all safety protocols were followed, Fluri said.

Police and fire department

officials also were called to the scene.

Bryce Brunarski, a supervisor with Niagara Emergency Medical Services, said the man sustained "mid-back pain with lower extremity issues" from the fall.

Brunarski noted, "Bystanders on the scene did their part and kept the patient calm and did not move him at all."

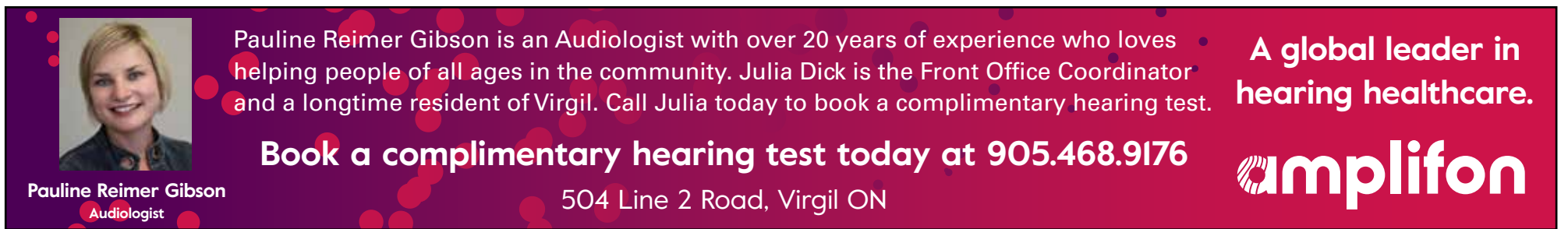
Paramedics immobilized the man and transported him to hospital in serious condition, he said.

An Ornge air ambulance was unable to respond due to inclement weather elsewhere.

The weather was clear in NOTL when the incident happened about 11:25 a.m., but rain and snow were falling elsewhere in the GTA.

The injured worker was taken first to hospital in St. Catharines and then to Hamilton, Fluri said.

He said he wasn't aware of the details of the man's injuries, but added, "We are hoping for his speedy recovery."




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