



## Old Town gateway design moving to tender

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The new gateway entrance to Old Town has been shrunk to meet its budget and approved for tendering by Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors.

The wall has had about four metres shaved off its size from various directions, including reducing the highest point by almost half a metre, according to a presentation by Seferian

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## Residents want traffic routed around St. Davids

This is one in a series of stories on a regional proposal to build a roundabout at the main intersection in St. Davids.

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Some residents of St. Davids want traffic rerouted around the village centre instead of having a roundabout installed, but Regional Coun. Gary Zalepa says that is unlikely and "impractical."

"Routing traffic off Regional roads onto local ones

Continued on Page 5

# Maskless 'pod' school opens in Virgil

As many as 60 unmasked students and volunteers meet weekdays at the old Virgil school for unregulated classes. Ontario, regional and town officials are all investigating



Maskless, non-physically distanced students learn about gardening at the Niagara Alternative Learning Alliance in Virgil. EVAN SAUNDERS

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

More than 50 children and volunteers are gathering every weekday in Virgil in a maskless, non-distanced private learning pod known as the Niagara Alternative Learning Alliance.

"Everybody is against masking children. I don't think that I've actually met someone who is OK with it, ever, and I have a lot of friends," project co-founder Lori Davidson said in an interview on Monday.

Davidson started the learn-

ing pod with longtime friend Monica McCourt, both 38 and from St. Catharines, as a way to promote a more personal style of education for children and to bypass COVID-19 safety protocols in schools.

The pod opened at the beginning of January. Classes run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each weekday in the old Virgil public school on Four Mile Creek Road.

After questions from The Lake Report, the Ministry of Education said it is looking into the school's status.

As well, the Region of Niagara, Niagara public

health and Niagara-on-the-Lake's bylaw department on Tuesday initiated a joint investigation into the pod in

**"If they try to shut us down, everybody's just going to say, 'No. Not possible.'"**

LORI DAVIDSON  
POD SCHOOL CO-FOUNDER

order to address "concerns raised regarding (the) Old Virgil Public School," the town's communications man-

ager Lauren Kruitbosch said in an email.

"Our bylaw staff has been on site to investigate and are working co-operatively with the governing bodies. As this is an active investigation, the town is not able to provide any additional information at this time."

Davidson said the curriculum is mainly based on provincial government educational requirements. Learning pods have existed for a number of years and often are used to supplement students' regular schooling but during the pandemic they have proliferated as a

full-time alternative to traditional schools.

It is unclear whether the Virgil pod is violating Ontario masking and indoor gathering regulations.

The operators said they are not subject to some rules for various reasons, two of them being that they have created a "bubble community" and a "parallel society."

The school's operators also told a reporter on Monday that public health had been in to inspect and had OK'd the operation. However, a public health official said it had no

Continued on Page 2

## Indoor hockey rink keeps AAA skater on the ice

With arenas closed down, father and son AJ and Evan Harlund went to work constructing a home arena so Evan could keep up his skills.

Story on Page 8

## RiverBrink returns Feb. 2 with exhibition on lichen art

Niagara artist Melanie MacDonald captures the extraordinary diversity and magic of these composite organisms.

Story on Page 15

## Independent Grocers love being a part of NOTL

Independent Grocer owners Tony Hendriks and Phil Leboudec are excited for new changes coming to NOTL's grocers.

Story on Page 17

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# School says public health approved operation, but agency has **no record** of it

*Continued from Front Page*

record of visiting the school prior to that conversation.

"The kids don't go anywhere else but here and they're here Monday to Friday from 9 to 3," McCourt said.

"We're a bubble community and because we're a learning pod we have a bubble like family unit."

"We've kind of created a parallel society where (children) can exist and be children and if anybody feels vulnerable then they can go and take care of their own needs," Davidson said.

Regarding capacity restrictions specifically, Davidson said the pod doesn't have more people in a classroom than any other pod in Ontario. On Wednesday morning, she confirmed there were at least 20 kids in one classroom, not counting adult volunteers.

After renting space in the former Virgil school building last fall, McCourt and Davidson set about organizing their learning pod.

One reason was to "mitigate all the trauma (children have) been through for the last few years" during the pandemic, McCourt said.

"I am done messing around with not taking care of the children," Davidson said.

She said she was spurred to act after reading a news article that said suicide attempts among youth had increased during the pandemic.

"That's my line in the sand. We are taking care of the children now."

Davidson is a mother of four and two of her younger children are now getting their education at the Virgil pod.

Her four-year-old daughter "has never been to a real school," she said.

Once pandemic restrictions began affecting schools, "I pulled my kids out immediately. I didn't agree with the mask mandates."

One parent said masking was potentially more harmful to students than beneficial.

The region's chief medical officer disputed that.

"I have seen no science that would back up that. All the studies looking at wearing masks, including children, have generally found it to prevent infection of COVID-19 without really any kind of significant harms," Dr. Mustafa Hirji said.

McCourt said the final straw in her frustration with the environment created for children during the pandemic came when her daughter got sick.

**“There's absolutely zero policy on this and they're all over the country. There's absolutely nothing stopping anybody (from operating a pod).”**

LORI DAVIDSON  
POD SCHOOL CO-FOUNDER

"One day she caught a cold and she didn't want to come near me," McCourt said.

"I was like, 'What's wrong?' And she said, 'I'm afraid if I come near you I'm going to kill you.' And that's when I was like, 'Something needs to change.'"

"The traumas that these kids have been put through and their families have been put through during these last two years — we're trying to fix it."

"Society is creating a generation of victims, right?" Davidson said.

On Monday, the learning pod was full of adult volunteers who wanted to lend their time and skills. Davidson said at least one of every child's parents has volunteered and they regularly have about 15 volunteers in the building.

There could be as many as 60 people split between two classrooms in the school on a weekday. None of them wore masks or adhered to physical distancing guidelines when a reporter visited.

Davidson said there are no

policies to govern learning pods and the program did not need to apply for a licence or interact with the provincial or federal governments at all in order to operate.

"There's absolutely zero policy on this and they're all over the country," she said.

"There's absolutely nothing stopping anybody (from operating a pod). They'd have to create a policy."

"If they try to shut us down, everybody's just going to say, 'No. Not possible,'" she said.

Current provincial lockdown regulations state there can be no indoor social gatherings of more than five people. The pod has some 60 people, unmasked and undistanced, split between two rooms every day.

But McCourt said Niagara's public health department inspected the pod. "They were literally just like, 'OK, great,' and left."

On Tuesday, public health spokesperson Alexandra Rankin said the agency has no records of an inspection of the facility taking place.

She also said she knows of no reason why a learning pod would be exempt from public health orders regarding gathering limits.

Davidson said members of Ontario's trucking industry reached out to her and offered support if a governing body tries to close the pod.

"They said if anybody tries to shut us down they will be here," she said.

"They'll back us. If, for any reason, we need them, they're here," McCourt said.

"Nobody's going to mess with us," Davidson added, drawing a laugh from McCourt.

McCourt said the learning pod doesn't discriminate between families who do and don't wish to follow COVID-19 safety regulations. She said all are welcome, even kids who want to wear masks to class.

Despite the political undertones, McCourt stressed that the pod is "not a facility that is involved in politics. We are not anti-government, anti-mask,



Lori Davidson and Monica McCourt, founders of Niagara Alternative Learning Alliance, say they have created a "bubble community" and are not violating COVID rules. EVAN SAUNDERS

anti-mandates or anything like that. We are a group of families who are worried about the mental health of our children."

For some of the parents and the founders themselves, the pandemic was just another issue that created a wedge between them and a school system in which they say they had lost faith.

Several parents said they had issues with the institutionalized, non-personal style of traditional schooling.

"I found that the education system suppressed the ability for (my children) to truly express themselves," said parent and volunteer Lyndsey Bailey.

"Not everybody can be treated the same and I feel that education is exactly the same."

With a rough ratio of one volunteer instructor for every five students, Bailey said her children are getting a more hands-on education at the learning pod.

"Being able to be fully immersed and involved with their education and to take a bit of control into my own hands gives me a sense of comfort," she said.

McCourt said public frustration around pandemic regulations enabled the idea to grow.

"It gave us a voice. It strengthened us," she said.

"I think COVID really pushed a lot of people to dig down deep inside and find the true meaning of what it is (sic)."

McCourt and Davidson said starting their operation in Virgil is just the beginning for the Niagara Alternative Learning Alliance. They

hope to open learning pods across the region.

Davidson said the public has been trying to help make that happen.

"People have been offering us schools in Smithville, Ridgeway. We have parents who drive here from Tillsonburg," she said.

She said the learning pod has received some 200 emails from parents who want to enrol their students but no more can be taken on due to limited space.

Davidson is waiting to find out if she can rent more rooms at the Virgil school to expand the pod.

Davidson used to run a restaurant in St. Catharines, but said it closed recently for reasons other than the pandemic. McCourt owned a spa in St. Catharines but did not find the work fulfilling, she said.

The two said they had previously talked about opening a learning pod but laughed off the idea. When McCourt saw space for rent in the old Virgil school last fall after closing her spa, she knew immediately what she wanted to do, she said.

McCourt said she has never had a job as rewarding as running the learning pod and that she wakes up excited to get to work everyday.

The pod is also aimed to be affordable. Davidson says there is no strict cost and parents are asked to pay what they can.

The kids are split into two groups, ages four to six and seven to 13, Davidson said.

One of the volunteers is Audrey Bailey, Lyndsey's sister, who said she previously worked for an English

children's daycare in Chile.

She said children are evaluated in one-on-one meetings so the volunteers can understand their educational level and build a curriculum around each students' needs.

The school also plans to stress teaching "practical" skills, such as sewing and changing a tire, McCourt said.

"We're trying to bring that back to the education system for children and teach them basics," she said.

"We call it special skills development."

Davidson cited an example.

"Remember how everybody was freaking out about ivermectin (a drug approved in Canada to treat parasitic infections) Like, 'Oh my gosh, we've got to get this medication,'" Davidson said.

"Calm down. Calm down. It's just a parasite cleanse. You can do this at home."

Davidson said she recommends pumpkin seeds as an alternative to taking ivermectin.

Hirji said anyone concerned about a parasitic infection should consult their doctor.

One volunteer teacher, Mike, who did not want to give The Lake Report his last name because he works for the District School Board of Niagara, said he loved the energy of the learning pod.

"I am a teacher. I'm just volunteering here. It's a great spot," he said.

Mike said he is teaching the kids holistic character-building lessons and poetry.

McCourt said Mike reached out to her and asked to get involved.



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## Niagara's top doc says regulations are a must

Evan Saunders  
 Local Journalism Initiative  
 The Lake Report

Niagara's acting medical officer of health says a learning pod in Virgil needs to be classified to determine exactly what rules apply to it, noting some child care and schooling facilities have different COVID protocols to follow than others.

But Dr. Mustafa Hirji said there will be regulations.

"There's unfortunately no opportunity to be something that operates without any sort of rules right now. Whatever it is, there's going to be some sort of set of rules. It's just a matter of how do they classify themselves and how do we think they should be (classified),"



Students at the school learn about plants. EVAN SAUNDERS

Hirji said in an interview Wednesday.

"Whenever you have people who are coming together in an indoor space, that is a risk of COVID-19 spreading and we need to have protocols in place to limit that," he said.

Hirji said he is sympa-

thetic to claims the pod was set up to provide more reliable schooling amid COVID-19 closures.

"I think there is evidence to support that children really did suffer with the closure of schools and the disruption of their ability to get that education."

"We just need to make sure it's done in a way that is going to protect those children and in line with the current provincial law."

Hirji said the pod should have consulted with the Region of Niagara before opening its doors.

"Our advice is always, if you are starting any kind of operation in Niagara, it's good to speak with us in public health to get our advice and speak to your local bylaw office to make sure you have everything in place," he said.

### MORE COVERAGE

*A parent with a child at the Niagara Alternative Learning Alliance says she fears COVID protocols will cause 'lifelong trauma' for children. Page 4*

## Learning pod a 'unique situation,' ministry says

Evan Saunders  
 Local Journalism Initiative  
 The Lake Report

The status of the parent-led learning pod operating out of the old Virgil public school is unclear but the Ministry of Education suggests the pod should be considered a private school.

However, the ministry says the operators' claims of homeschooling complicate the issue.

"This one will end up being a very unique situation," Caitlin Clark, media relations manager for Education Minister Stephen Lecce, said in an interview.

Clark previously suggested the learning pod should be considered a private school due to the large number of students and location it operates out of.

But Monica McCourt, one of the pod's founders, claimed all of the children involved have handed in letters of homeschooling to the Ministry of Education.

"It seems, obviously, that they're trying to rig the system. This is very hairy, what they're trying to do here," Clark said.

If a student is registered for homeschooling they are "ultimately delivered entirely independent of the Ministry of Education," she said.

But Clark said the facility sounds more akin to a pri-

vate school than a home-schooling operation.

"Fifty kids congregating in a building — that's not homeschooling, that's private schooling," she said.

But Clark was not entirely sure about the status of the Niagara Alternative Learning Alliance and said an investigation will take place.

"The ministry is definitely going to look into this to determine if it constitutes a private school for the purposes of the Education Act," she said.

Clark noted that learning pods have been popping up and operating during the pandemic and been in violation of public health orders.

"Ultimately, it came down to public health enforcement to shut them down."

Clark said a private school is defined as an institution that provides instruction during school hours to more than five school-age children on any elementary or secondary school subject.

Private schools operating for the first time in Ontario must submit a notice of intention to operate and pass an inspection, she said.

Clark said the ministry has received no application for the learning pod.

Learning pods have been around for several years. Many of them appear to be used to supplement the instruction children receive

in regular or virtual publicly run schools.

Landlord Lloyd Redekopp said McCourt and co-founder Lori Davidson told him their learning pod is exempt from capacity restrictions put in place by the provincial government.

And when it comes to enforcement of capacity restrictions under provincial orders, that is up to local bylaw officials, said Niagara public health spokesperson Alexandra Rankin.

On Monday, Davidson said town bylaw officers had "come and gone" and done nothing.

But an investigation into the pod was confirmed by the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake on Tuesday.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero said she did not know what regulations learning pods were subject to. "I just hope no one gets sick," she said.

However, she said Niagara-on-the-Lake bylaw enforcement officers were investigating the learning pod and will "do what is required or necessary to bring people into compliance if they're not."

"I have confidence that our bylaw officers are doing whatever actions are necessary to keep people safe," she said.

"There's no way that the town would be condoning or accepting things that are

contrary to provincial regulation. We can't, we won't," Disero said.

"These regulations are put in place to protect the health of the public and as much as some people don't like what's going on, they should be complying."

Redekopp said his only rule for the tenants was that they abide by provincial and municipal regulations.

He said he has not received any complaints from other tenants in the building.

The Bikes for Farmworkers organization rents the basement of the old Virgil public school.

Member Terry Weiner said his group strictly adheres to masking and physical distancing, and no one from the learning pod would be allowed into the basement without wearing a mask.

But he said he was not overly concerned with the learning pod, since Bikes for Farmworkers is completely isolated from the rest of the school.

In an email to The Lake Report, a representative of the learning pod said the organization does not have a "vaccination policy in place and it is not something we discuss with people as we believe it is a personal choice and that people's medical information should remain private."

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# Parent says she fears COVID restrictions will cause ‘lifelong trauma’

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report



Sara Chojnicki, Niagara Alternative Learning Alliance volunteer and mother of a pod student. EVAN SAUNDERS

Sara Chojnicki, a parent volunteer with a child attending the Virgil “learning pod,” said she chose the alternative school because it relieves children from pandemic restrictions that could cause “lifelong trauma.”

Chojnicki said she tried to get her six-year-old daughter exempt from wearing a mask in school.

“I don’t really agree with the risks outweighing the benefits of what a mask would do for a child,” she said in an interview at the school.

Niagara’s top doctor said he has seen no scientific evidence that masks are more harmful than beneficial for children.

“Most children are able to tolerate masks. Obviously

it’s not the most fun thing to do but children have been able to continue wearing them and successfully been in school for the last 18 months,” Dr. Mustafa Hirji said in an interview.

He noted exemptions should be granted where warranted.

“It’s a core part of their development to be able to

see people’s faces, to socialize,” Chojnicki said.

She said the Niagara Catholic District School Board said her daughter would be isolated from the rest of the kids if she was approved for a mask exemption.

“Just the thought that they would segregate a six-year-old child, the trauma that would cause

her ... absolutely disgusting,” she said.

“These are the hands that my children are sitting in right now. These people are the ones saying, ‘This is OK behaviour, that we’re going to do this to your child.’ And that was it for me. She was never going to be in that school board again.”

In an email, Catholic school board spokesperson Jennifer Pellegrini said, “Determining the appropriate accommodation for a student who cannot wear a face mask due to a disability requires an assessment of the student’s needs, balanced with the need for school safety requirements.”

“Staff make every effort to work with students throughout this process and the decision to recommend remote learning for those students who are unable to

wear a mask is considered a last option.”

Chojnicki said education professionals are not putting children first.

“The social distancing thing was a really, really big issue for me as well. I feel that the educators are putting their fears ahead of the children’s needs.”

But the 40-year-old said she is not a COVID denier. She said her whole family had COVID-19 and the experience helped her decide the virus isn’t entirely the health threat it is made out to be.

She said she weighed “the benefits with the risks and I just don’t feel like it’s a safe place anymore in the schools (because of pandemic restrictions).”

Chojnicki is a dental hygienist in Welland but volunteers at the Niagara Alternative Learning Alli-

ance pod almost every day. “I really want to be here, my kids want to be here. It’s not work, it’s a labour of love,” she said.

Another mother and volunteer, Sandy Craig, said her son’s loss of education due to school closings motivated her to find a reliable alternative.

“It turns out that (my son’s) entire Grade 5 class is two years behind (on their education),” Craig said in an interview at the Virgil school.

The “online learning thing they’ve been doing for the last two years has been a complete waste of time. He wasn’t adjusting well,” she said.

Craig said she is very happy with the learning pod and volunteers because “I want to be a part of it and I might not be a teacher but I can teach things.”



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## Pink Pearl fundraiser will support young women coping with cancer

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake resident and ovarian cancer survivor Elise Gasbarrino is inviting people to attend a virtual online fundraiser for Pink Pearl — an organization she started to help young women who have cancer cope with their diagnoses.

Services range from scholarships, to overnight retreats, to one-on-one counselling with a social worker, Gasbarrino said.

While the event is normally held in person, she said pandemic limitations are a bit of a blessing, in that now anyone, anywhere can attend the fundraising event.

The event is Thursday, Feb. 3, at 7 p.m. and will feature stories from Pink Pearl participants as well as a silent auction with prizes like Muskoka getaways, home decor items and wine experiences.

Anyone who wishes to join in can register for the event at: [trellis.org/blackwhite2022](http://trellis.org/blackwhite2022)

### YOU ASK, WE ANSWER

## Who’s responsible for clearing snow around fire hydrants?

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Lake Report reader Susan Pohorly inquired this week about snow removal around parking meters.

“We took a slow drive around our Niagara today and noticed many fire hydrants were barely visible or long stretches of nothing. There were however many that residents had dug out. Who’s responsible?” she wrote.

“It would be a shame if a fire happened in an area where the hydrant could not be located. I know where ours is and that it is fully visible and accessible.”

Adam Allcock, manager of public works for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, said the town is responsible for clearing hydrants.

“As a function and responsibility of the town’s winter control measures, operations staff clear around

parking meters when performing cleanup after a snowfall,” he said.

However, the town’s website does remind residents to keep hydrants clear, too.

“Keep fire hydrants clear and accessible as in the event of a fire, gaining access could be critical,” the town’s website snow removal page reads.

So, while not a legal responsibility, it doesn’t hurt to lend a hand — it might help save a life.

# SIMPLY WHITE INTERIORS

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Greg Walker is a vocal supporter of the roundabout in St. Davids, saying it might even improve the intersection's character from an aesthetic point of view. His wife Dorothy has a different opinion. EVAN SAUNDERS

## Residents want traffic routed around St. Davids

*Continued from Front Page*

makes no sense and does not confirm with any best practices" Zalepa told The Lake Report in an email.

The Region of Niagara's plan to build a roundabout at the intersection of Four Mile Creek and York Roads doesn't sit well with Dorothy Walker, a local historian and founder of the Friends of St. Davids.

"We come from England and usually they'll put a roundabout in an area that bypasses a village so it keeps the village unique," she said in an interview.

Walker, who wrote "A Village in the Shadows (a history of St. Davids)," worries the character of the historical village will be irrevocably altered by turning its most famous intersection and centre of town, known as the "Four Corners," into a roundabout.

She said it isn't just colonial history that is preserved in the intersection. The intersection was where two Indigenous trails met before Europeans even arrived.

Paul Harber, proprietor of Ravine Estate Winery, agrees.

"It's the heart of (St. Davids). What's incredible is York Road and Four Mile Creek Road were already in existence before the settlers came here. Those are two major First Nation trading routes. And we're just throwing that out," Harber said.

"When it's gone it can't ever come back," he said.

Harber and Walker said the best solution would be for the region to focus on routing traffic around the village centre.

But Zalepa said there is a possible alternate path somewhere down the line. Harber and Walker both suggested traffic be rerouted to Concession 6 Road, a municipal road.

Zalepa said he has been advocating for Concession 6 to be uploaded as a regional road and it was a great example of a long-term strategy for dealing with traffic in the area.

But the road is not up to regional standards and such a move is not happening anytime soon, he said.

"There would be some steps necessary. Including The Town would have to begin the process if council was willing to bring the road up to adequate standard," he said.

He also said he would only support the change if the Mewburn Rd. connection into Niagara Falls was included.

Zalepa said such considerations would be part of discussions for a transportation master plan between the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the region.

"I think an alternative road in and around the town would be important for the future," Zalepa said during an interview at the end of October.

Concession 6 Road, an alternate route from NOTL to Niagara Falls, was only reopened to traffic about

two years ago after being closed for about a decade until repairs were made to the Mewburn Bridge.

"The key to transportation changes and road changes is to make sure you're not making a bad decision or a knee-jerk decision. It requires the staff to compile a list of all the accidents and what the reasons were," Zalepa said.

Zalepa said all transportation decisions come from recommendations by outside consultants who are experts in the field and it is important for councillors to wait for their reports before making any major changes to an area.

He said the region favours the roundabout solution in St. Davids because it comes from the recommendation of experts.

But residents like Harber and Walker want a more balanced solution that maintains the character of the village.

"I don't see how a roundabout negatively impacts that village atmosphere," Zalepa said.

Dorothy Walker's husband, Greg, a former aeronautical engineer with the Royal Air Force and founding member of the Friends of St. Davids, is strongly in favour of the roundabout.

He listed a myriad of reasons, such as costing less to maintain over time, being more aesthetically pleasing than a traffic light, proven as a safer traffic solution and reducing congestion and noise pollution in the area.

But Greg Walker said his support hangs on two stipulations.

The first is that businesses be considered in the design and do not have customer access impeded by the roundabout.

The second is the roundabout be designed with the safety of pedestrians as one of its main objectives.

Walker, who has a visual impairment, said he is concerned for his own and other people's safety crossing the roundabout. He wants the region to consider the installation of flashing lights for a pedestrian crosswalk.

"Please, please, please put those in because we've got children here and we've got people like me trying to cross that intersection," he said in an interview.

"If it's properly designed with safety in mind for pedestrians, I think it is perfectly, perfectly safe."

He disagreed with the argument that the character of the intersection would be irreparably changed, saying that fundamentally, it will still be an intersection of the two historic roads.

"I think it will enhance the intersection," he said.

But one thing stands, some people are worried St. Davids will not be St. Davids if the change happens.

"It's gonna be sad. I mean, who's going to remember St. Davids?" Dorothy Walker asked.

**NEXT: Another small Niagara town's experience with roundabouts.**

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

## COVID Tracker

**NOTL active cases: 146**

**Region active cases: 3,585**

**Region deaths: 470**

**Region total cases: 30,594**

**Region resolved cases: 26,539**

*\*Jan. 26 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 below are an underestimate of the true number of individuals in Niagara with COVID-19. Data should be interpreted with caution."*



**Contributed by Patty Garriock**

"Define success on your own terms, achieve it by your own rules, and build a life you're proud to live." - Anne Sweeney

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## Sly as a fox

NOTL photographer Janice White captured this photo of a fox romping around near the Commons during a snowy walk.

**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

# Close maskless school now

Richard Harley  
Editor-In-Chief

It is shocking to learn of an unregulated, private "alternative learning" pod school operating in our community, flying in the face of COVID protocols.

As we reported in great detail this week, the school, called the Niagara Alternative Learning Alliance, located in the old Virgil public school, is hosting as many as 50 unmasked students who are not physically distanced.

Add to that as many as 15 unmasked volunteers and parents, most of whom don't seem to have any formal teaching credentials.

And the school says it has no vaccination policy in effect and, under the guise of privacy, won't comment on it.

It's frightening, and one is left to assume the majority of students and parent volunteers are likely not vaccinated, given the focus of the school's owners, which seems to mainly be a protest against safety, rationality and public health measures.

We question how this unregulated group could be legally allowed to operate given the provincial rules and pandemic protocols in effect. Both Niagara's public health department and the Ministry of Educa-

tion could not provide firm answers to numerous questions from The Lake Report on whether the school is contravening COVID laws — pending further investigation.

The co-owner, Lori Davidson, proudly states there is no regulation required to start a learning pod — not something you typically hear legitimate educators boasting about. Pods are not illegal, but society has special rules during a pandemic.

Davidson also made some unscientific statements such as touting pumpkin seeds as an alternative to ivermectin (a controversial remedy) and claiming masks do more harm than good to children.

We understand everyone's frustration with two years of COVID and ongoing public health measures. But they work and save lives.

The situation with this learning pod raises serious questions about whether parents and volunteers who deny sound science should be allowed to teach children in a learning setting.

In our view, they absolutely should not. At home is one thing, but being an educator is a sacred responsibility and should be reserved for those who can understand basic data.

This pod group is an

insult to the teachers who take years of schooling to be able to properly teach a sound curriculum.

And it's a public health hazard.

We wonder if landlord Lloyd Redekopp will take steps to remove this school from his building — a place that's familiar with anti-maskers and conspiracy theorists, as a former tenant operated maskless art classes in the school.

We also wonder where public health officials and the town's bylaw officers have been during all of this as it appears they only started to take the issue seriously after inquiries by The Lake Report.

Public health has passed the buck and said the town is responsible for enforcing mandated COVID restrictions. We hope to see swift and firm action against this school if it is found to be violating the law.

How is it safe, fair or legal, when legitimate schools have to abide by the province's rules?

Unmasked people, possibly unvaccinated, gathering in a building and potentially spreading COVID present a risk to everyone.

They increase their chances of becoming infected and passing it on through community spread outside the school.

Because the vaccine (like all vaccines) is

not 100 per cent effective, these actions put NOTL's largely senior population at risk (e.g. A "pod" school parent gets it, goes to the store, gives it to Mrs. Jones, who falls seriously ill and maybe even dies).

And not just that, but what if one of these parents or students unnecessarily develops severe symptoms and needs an ICU bed? Then that's a bed that's no longer available for another Niagara resident, who followed the rules, but might require it.

Viruses also mutate more easily in the unvaxxed, who remain contagious longer. More reasons why public health measures need to be followed.

The town has been touting COVID safety since March 2020 and it is time for Lord Mayor Betty Disero to make a strong statement in the interest of public health and in keeping with the town's position regarding COVID safety.

It's time for public health to shut this place down.

It's time for those students to be subject to a proper, safe learning environment with legitimate, trained educators.

And it's time to stop unscientific rhetoric from being spread in our community.

editor@niagaranow.com

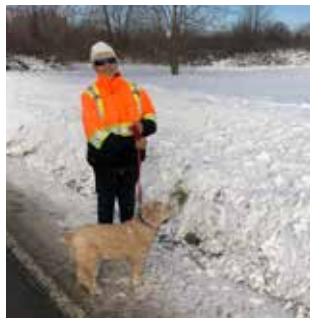
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# Walkers, please wear **visible** clothing

*Warning: The following contains graphic language and disturbing thoughts. Anyone who gets queasy at the thought of blood, shattered bones and even death, should not read further.*



Ross Robinson  
Special to The Lake Report

Full disclosure: I have no right to preach or pontificate. I have done lots of dumb things during my somewhat adventurous life, but I have never intentionally put my life in danger. Or anyone else's life.

Another pedestrian killed in our quiet village? It's not "if," it's when!"

I am done being subtle, beating around the bush. I witness totally preventable dangerous situations on our roadways, several times each week. Totally, 100 per cent preventable.

I am done cajoling, done being polite, done suggesting.

Let me be blunt and at the same time touchy feely. With very few exceptions, I love NOTLers, and always love living in our wee paradise. Even with a

The effervescent Helen got hit by a car in front of the Pillar and Post three years ago, and spent four months housebound with her left leg in a big cast. That Christmas, her bright children gave her what she calls "the perfect gift."

heavy dusting of snow, it's sure purdy and pleasant.

I do not want to kill anyone while driving around, so I almost always pay attention to the road in front of me.

Some months ago, The Lake Report published a totally black "picture" I submitted. The caption underneath read, approximately, "Two unidentified and almost invisible people walk their dog on a Chautauqua street, enjoying a dark and quiet evening with Fido."

Please, neighbours, wear light-coloured clothes and/

or reflective vests.

As a former long-distance runner, now a short-distance plodder (right, left, right, left), I almost always wear light-coloured running gear and run against traffic, careful to be well over on the shoulder.

At least this way, I can see possible danger and take evasive action. After this Christmas, I also have a toque with a battery-powered light to be even more visible to drivers. What a great gift, eh?

I have run thousands of miles, many marathons and along some of the most beautiful trails, beaches and byways in the world. Not one step with music or "the news" in my ears.

My failing sense of hearing is a good thing and the sounds of nature are God-given. Please, no earphones or earbuds, or whatever they are called.

Let's ramble back now to preventable deaths. Well over half of the people walking, with or without Fido, after dark, on a clear or dark night, wear dark outerwear. Either black or navy blue.

Very, very little reflectable

striping or lettering, if any at all. And many walk with the flow of traffic, trusting drivers to not kill or injure them.

I almost hit someone, just the other day. Invisible till the last second.

Please give yer heads a shake. Think about it. Life is too good to end up badly maimed or dead just because a driver didn't see you in time and couldn't swerve.

Thirty-seven years ago, I bought the 43 members of the St. Catharines Running Club a reflective Uniglobe Travel 10-inch circular logo, which they all put on the back of their windbreakers.

Even with that added safety precaution, several club members were injured by cars or trucks. One was killed.

Thank you for your patience, but this Ramble contains a very serious request. Be more visible. Wear light-coloured clothing, wear a reflective safety vest. How about a blinking light, front and back. Please, let's help each other.

P.S. After 22 months of COVID, I am still confused. Is a positive test negative news? Is a negative test good news? Just askin'.

# Old Town residents' opposition to development is sheer **NIMBYism**

Dear editor:

Like most citizens of Niagara-on-the-Lake, I tend to read the newspaper and chuckle at the ridiculous comments and opinions that abound in the Old Town.

Of late however, the hysterical and ludicrous comments around proposed developments have me wondering where the adults have gone.

The evil developers are now "aliens" and "malignant." Further stoking the idiotic level of discourse is Lord Mayor Betty Disero with her well-planted question about "opening the floodgates."

I get it: the mayor and councillors work for those who fund their elections. However, NOTL is not supposed to be a gated community for the wealthy, run by the wealthy.

In this case the gates are in fact a series of regulations designed to keep the grubby middle class away from our local elites.

Look at the various comments over the last few years: Developments like the one SORE opposes are better suited to Virgil or as one woman opined, she could not understand how people could live in the ugly Cannery development.

Even more outrageous, one writer suggested there need be no density in Old Town because we were going to shove that stuff out to Glendale.

A lot of talk is about

protecting the "character" of Old Town. What character is that if not an arrogant and entitled enclave of exclusivity for the wealthy?

Where is the mayor's plan for affordable housing or are all Old Town working-class folks expected to catch the bus out of the area after their shift?

The town brags of its inclusivity, however, that never extends to economic factors. Imagine a town that had affordable rental apartments, housing for middle-class families and was accepting of people of varying levels of income.

So to all those who proudly proclaim there is no NIMBYism, I say you are being delusional as well as excessively entitled.

NIMBY is exactly what this is. I also understand it will not change unless the province or federal government grow the spine to force an end to economic segregation.

As for changing the character in the Old Town, I can only hope one day the area will welcome back farm labourers, store clerks, town workers and their families.

It certainly won't happen with this council and these self-appointed protectors of the Old Town character.

So, lord mayor, where is the plan for affordable housing in the Old Town?

Respectfully,  
**Mike Macdonald**  
NOTL

# Snow plows don't need to **fill in** our driveways

Dear editor:

This issue has no doubt been raised before. We have an aging population, a lot of us in our 70s who find it increasingly difficult to shovel windrows (ridges of snow) thrown on the entrance of our driveways by regional and town snow removal equipment.

Some of us have health issues which prevent us from doing strenuous activities leading to back issues and more.

There have been suggestions from Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake officials that people can hire contractors to clear windrows, but that assumes everyone has the means to do so. We also have a lot of women living alone in this town.

There is equipment available that has gates/flippers to trap the snow, preventing it from being dumped on driveway entrances.

If the snow removal authorities don't have and can't afford this kind of equipment because of priorities perhaps they could send front-end loader operators to help residents living on regional roads and in town.

This is what was done in Winnipeg when I lived there and where it is still the practice. This could be an alternative to sending out employees with snow removal equipment that incessantly throws snow on the driveways where residents are trying to clear their entrances.

I saw a woman throwing her hands in the air when a plow shoved the snow back on her entrance. I also observed an octogenarian helping a septuagenarian friend living alone clearing the entrance of her driveway.

An alternative would be a user-pay windrow program offered by some municipali-

ties, such as Oakville. The fee there is about \$100 a year.

Parts of the GTA, including Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough and areas of Toronto and East York also have snow removal alternatives. They are the envy of other GTA where windrow services are not offered.

This may be the case of comparing apples and oranges but different means should be investigated by snow removal planners in NOTL and Niagara Region.

This past week, in reply to an email Lord Mayor Betty Disero questioned whether the amount of snow that fell (about 50 centimetres in some areas between Jan. 16 and 17), would benefit from windrow elimination techniques. They worked on the street in Toronto where I lived from 2007 to 2011 before I became a "NOTLer."

The mayor followed up with an email from Bruce

Zvaniga, Niagara Region's commissioner of public works.

His response to "driveway plow gates" was that the emphasis after a storm is on clearing roads quickly (sometimes with multiple passes). By the time roads are done, "many people have cleared their own driveways before the crews can come back and use the gated plow approach."

He added that plow gates/flippers add to the mechanical complexity of the plow and therefore tend to increase maintenance requirements and damage susceptibility.

At this point, Zvaniga said he can't advocate for an additional tax increase for the few big winter storms we endure but he did say climate change and technological advances could change that.

**Gilbert Comeault**  
NOTL

**TONY BALDINELLI, M.P.**  
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# Indoor home **hockey rink** keeps AAA player on the ice

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Evan Harlund just didn't want to stop skating when arenas and hockey shut down during the pandemic.

For the 16-year-old AAA hockey player, losing a year of time on the ice would have been crushing to his progress. He needed a place to practise his skills and be able to keep up with his hobby.

So, he and his father AJ set out to build an indoor hockey rink in a garage unit at their Virgil home on Concession 7.

The result is a homemade hockey rink and chill pad that any Canadian kid would drool over. There's a large skating space, loud speakers, and an upstairs loft with couches, a fridge and a dart board. A teenager's dream.

The father and son built the rink together last year.

"He's been playing AAA hockey for the better part of seven years," AJ said. "It was his draft year last year and basically everything shut down."

"People were going and paying crazy amounts of money to go to these secret rinks in different parts of Ontario and stuff. And we're just like, 'We have a barn.'"

The barn had been filled with his father-in-law's old farming equipment from before they sold a chunk of their farm land, AJ said. So Evan and his friends ripped everything out to make way for the rink.

This year, Evan and his friends rebuilt it themselves, after learning the ropes in 2021.

A versatile skater who plays on the wing and on



Above: Father and son AJ and Evan Harlund on their homemade indoor rink. RICHARD HARLEY Bottom left: Evan uses a cooler to resurface the ice at the rink. SUPPLIED Bottom right: The rink is complete with an upstairs lounge.

defence, he is rostered with the Niagara North Stars under-18 AAA team and has been a regular call-up with the Welland Jr. B Canadians, with whom he has practised all season.

Evan said it's been nice to have a place to skate and he enjoys that it's his own space.

"It's pretty great because

I can just kind of come out here whenever I'm free, and just after school come out here and I don't have to wait for my parents to get driven somewhere and it's private. I can just do my thing," he said.

The whole setup was largely helped out by the popular Buy Nothing NOTL group on Facebook,

AJ and Evan said. Everything from the net, the carpets, speakers, couches and more were donated by members of the community through the giving group.

"We got this hockey net from there a couple weeks ago because my hockey net was toast from previous years," Evan said. "This carpet here we just picked

up a couple weeks ago as well."

"Everything's gifted," AJ said.

Having an indoor rink has some other perks compared to skating outdoors, they say.

"We're lucky, if there's inclement weather that comes in with heavy snow, we're not stuck in here wasting

hours shovelling," AJ said. "And there's no wind," Evan added.

To resurface the ice they had to get creative, as there isn't much room for a Zamboni.

"We just use a cooler and we put a little towel in the back and hot water and pull it up and down," Evan said.

The whole place has an "arena" feel to it, with metal walls.

The rink has even garnered some internet fame, with famous Canadian YouTube channel NELK featuring it in a video.

AJ said it's too bad there are ongoing restrictions on gathering, because he'd like to open the rink up for other people to use.

"I've thought about doing something for the community. You see some of these parents reaching out and you feel so empathetic because it's like year two now where little Johnny hasn't been able to celebrate his birthday and he's a hockey player and his team shut down," he said.

"I'd love to be able to just say, 'Come on in and have his birthday party in here.'"

When the climate is right again in the world, he might be offering up some skating sessions on the Buy Nothing page, to return the favour.

In the summer, Evan converts the rink into a mini-skatepark for himself and his friends. The walls of the barn are lined with skateboard decks.

"They built their own skateboard ramps and everything so they hangout here and sleep up in the barn in the top," AJ said, clearly proud to be able to have something unique for his son to use.

  
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# Upper Canada Food Guide

Vol. 1, Issue 3

Serving up delicious food to all of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Jan. 27, 2022

## Angel Inn is about **good times, good food**

Owner Kelly Turner says they put a fun spin on traditional English pub ... *'probably the best in the world.'*

The Food Guru  
Upper Canada Food Guide

For the Olde Angel Inn, it's all about consistency, comfort and people.

Owner Kelly Turner says the real goal of the pub is to provide a place where people can come to meet friends for a cold pint and a good quality meal for a reasonable price.

"It's all about people coming together for a good time," Turner says in an interview at the restaurant.

Manager Greg Farr says, "It's like Cheers, 'Everybody knows your name.'"

Just the other day, Farr says, he was telling a couple, "If you come back when we open up ... and you come in for a pint and sit over by the bar, within 15 minutes you'll have met four or five different people who'd be carrying on conversations, whether they're locals or from some other place. It just has that aura about it."

"And you're gonna leave with a full belly and warm comfort," Turner adds.

The British-style pub and inn was established in 1789 and has gone through various names and owners, remaining a staple in town for tourists, who often come back and comment that the place hasn't changed much from what they knew.

Turner took over the business in 2018 with her husband Keith and the business still specializes in English pubfare.

"We have a lot of people from the U.K. come in and they feel like they're at home when they come in here and eat the food and sit in the pub," Farr says.

The inn portion is still running, too, and Turner notes they have some "really good" specials on for any locals who want to do a



Angel Inn executive chef Tim MacDonald holds up some pub-style fish and chips, a recipe he says hasn't changed in 36 years. RICHARD HARLEY

stay-cation in town. They're fully licenced to serve the rooms alcohol, she adds.

the recipes for popular menu items haven't changed since he's been there.

responsible for. Some of their popular items are curries, stir-fries, creative soup and sandwich combos, and roast dinners.

His favourite thing on the menu after 36 years? The reuben sandwich, he says, without skipping a beat.

The restaurant has had to get creative during the pandemic, like so many others, and has switched things up to offer heat and serve meals and cocktails to-go.

"We kind of have a thing: we don't say no," Turner says. "If we can do it, we will do it."

Since Turner took over, the pub has increased its social media presence, with regular postings of daily specials on Facebook and

even some fun videos of Angel Inn ghost stories — the inn has long been said to be "haunted" by the ghost of Captain Swayze. Over the years, staff members have said they can feel his presence lingering in the basement.

Their slogan is a bit tongue-in-cheek: "Probably the greatest pub in the world."

Turner laughs that the motto came out of a conversation around the table, where they decided they couldn't just flat out claim to be the best, but there's nothing wrong with saying "probably."

"We like to have fun. It's old, traditional, but we want to put a fun spin on it. Our

staff are young, witty, they engage with customers and we just want to have fun," she says.

"We want everybody to come here have a good time, not be miserable. We spend more time with each other than we do our own families. So it's nice to have the camaraderie and the banter."

She says she's thankful for the ongoing support from residents as the pandemic continues and is looking forward to a return to in-person dining Jan. 31.

Meantime, the restaurant is open for takeout daily. Why not give them a call for that reuben?

Find more out about the Angel Inn at its website, [oldeangelinn.com](http://oldeangelinn.com).

**“ We like to have fun. It's old, traditional, but we want to put a fun spin on it. Our staff are young, witty, they engage with customers and we just want to have fun.”**

**KELLY TURNER  
OWNER, ANGEL INN**

She's also focused on customer service, noting during the pandemic the restaurant is offering free delivery to businesses in Old Town.

For executive chef Tim MacDonald, who has been with the restaurant on and off for 36 years, consistency is essential. He said some of

"That's my main thing. If you had steak and kidney 36 years ago, we have the same steak and kidney pie. Tastes the same as it did back then," MacDonald says.

He and sous chef Jennifer Madden are tasked with coming up with the daily lunch and dinner specials, which he said she's mostly



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### Secondas includes 2 contorni\*

**BONE-IN PORK SCALLOPINI** | lemon | caper | butter 29\*  
**GRILLED VEAL CHOP** | marsala & mushroom cream sauce 39\*  
**"EGGPLANT PARMESAN"** | marinara sauce | mozzarella | sourdough 29  
**WOOD-OVEN 1/2 CHICKEN "SALTIMBOCCA"** | sage | lemon | prosciutto 29\*

### Contorni

**WOOD-FIRED ROOT VEGETABLES** | balsamic reduction 11  
**BROCCOLI SPRIGARELLO** | lemon | garlic | anchovie 11  
**POLENTA** | grass-fed butter | parmigiano 10  
**WOOD-OVEN ROASTED POTATOES** | rosemary | preserved lemon 10

### Dolci

**CHOCOLATE PANNA COTTA** | pawpaw dulce de leche 9  
**TIRAMISU** | coffee | cocoa | mascarpone 9

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+ change to gluten-free bun | 2 / + add extra cheese | 1

### FRIED CHICKEN SANDWICH | 20

crispy fried organic chicken thigh, Dre's bun, Alabama white sauce, bread and butter pickles, iceberg lettuce, house cut fries  
+ change to gluten-free bun | 2

### BEEF SHORT RIB | 36 | GF

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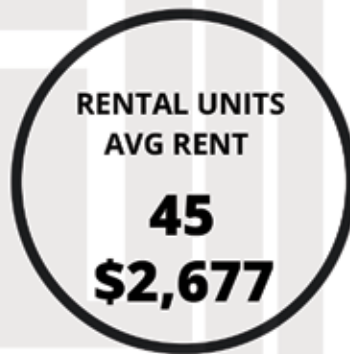


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Ashleen Hale practises her figure skating moves on a home rink made by her father. She and a group of girls from the NOTL Skating Club met Monday night to skate together. RICHARD HARLEY

# Figure skater feels 'like myself again' thanks to backyard rink

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake figure skating star Ashleen Hale says she has regained a part of herself after her parents built a backyard rink for her to practise on.

"When COVID first hit, I just felt super lost because I didn't have school and I didn't really have a social life," Ashleen said in an interview.

Pandemic restrictions have led to extended closures of public ice rinks over the past two years.

Ashleen, 16, who was one of the top three figure skaters in Ontario in her division before the pandemic, often has had nowhere to practise.

"You just feel like you lose a part of you," she said.



NOTL Skating Club members meet Monday for an evening skate on Ashleen's home rink. RICHARD HARLEY

But mother and father Lolita and Jim Hale decided enough was enough and set about building a backyard rink for their daughter. "It's been a labour of love

that took about five days of flooding," Lolita said.

"But, you know, she's been using it every day."

Ashleen said the rink has helped her reclaim her iden-

tity as a figure skater.

"I felt like myself again. So, that was nice," she said.

"It feels so nice to have a place again because we've all missed out on so much. Just skating feels super nice."

"I'm so thankful that my dad did that because going three, four weeks without skating — you lose a lot of stuff."

Ashleen said she is ready to work her way back to the top now that she has a reliable place to work on her skills. Her mom has no doubt the teenager can do it.

"She'll get back to where she was before. She has the opportunity to skate seven days a week again," Lolita said.

But it's not all about gold medals for the Hale family.

"We enjoy watching her," Lolita said.

## RIDDLE ME THIS

Mississippi has four S's and four I's.  
How do you spell that  
without using S or I?

Last issue: If there are three apples and you take away two, how many apples do you have?

Answer: Two

Answered first by: Eva Rasciauskas

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Howard Jones, Gail Benjafield, Mary Drost, Bob Stevens, Sylvia Wiens, Wade Durling, Pam Dowling, Gary Davis, Maria Janeiro, Margie Enns, Rob Hutchison, Mike Berlis, Sheila Meloche, Wesley Turner, Kevin Etherington, Lillian Farinavci, Tammy Florio

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



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## Museum lecture series opens with peek behind the scenes

Staff  
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is giving the public a virtual peek behind the scenes of its operations.

Have you ever wondered how a museum actually works?

How do curators decide what makes up their collection? What's inside those hundreds of drawers and cases in the museum's storage areas?

Will the museum want your great-great grandma's favourite tea set? Or her ancient bloomers? And what about those framed Beatle concert tickets?

Well, maybe.

To learn the answers to

these questions and more, join the first of the museum's 2022 virtual lecture series on Feb. 2 at 11 a.m.

Barbara Worthy, a NOTL writer, producer and museum staffer will chat with museum curator and managing director Sarah Kaufman and assistant curator Shawna Butts.

If there are questions you'd like answered, send them to Worthy at [bworthy@nhsn.ca](mailto:bworthy@nhsn.ca).

Whether it's regarding collections, programming, the ghost of Janet Carnochan, or even the evolving role of museums in a local and global sense, the museum's curators say they will do their best to answer.

The virtual lecture series



Assistant curator Shawna Butts with a classic tea set. The museum kicks off its lecture series Feb. 16. SUPPLIED

continues through March and includes:

**\*Feb. 16:** "Re-imagining Niagara: Using GIS (geographic information system) to Study Local Economic Development 1783-1812," presented by Jessica Linzel.

**\*March 2:** "Apothecaries to Pharmacies – Prescriptions, Potents and Healthy Herbs," presented by Katelynn Best.

**\*March 16:** The Shaw at 60! – featuring Leonard Connolly in conversation with Barbara Worthy as they reflect on 60 years of the Shaw Festival.

**\*March 30:** David Hemmings explores "Heritage Homes of Niagara."

All the Zoom presentations begin at 11 a.m. and registration is required via [notlmuseum.ca](http://notlmuseum.ca)

## Gateway moving forward

*Continued from Front Page*

Design Group.

"I think it's made a big difference in terms of our budget as well as our design," Brad Smith of Seferian told councillors.

The most costly aspect of the wall is the dry stone being used to construct it.

With materials and construction all in, the wall itself is expected to cost \$130,000.

Plantings for the project will cost around \$20,000, the NOTL crest and signage will be \$20,000, and electrical features and service are estimated at \$10,000, among other costs.

The project's total price tag is now \$249,102.50, just under the \$250,000 donated by Gerald Kowalchuk for the gateway.

A previously planned revamping of the pedes-

trian corners on the south side of the intersection into plazas has been made provisional, meaning it will only be done if money is available.

Parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte told council the town needs to have a cohesive design finished to apply for grants, and hoped to be able to include the plazas if grants come through.

The layout of plantings in the garden has not been finalized yet, Smith said, but the types of foliage have generally been decided on.

"It's a combination of perennials, deciduous, evergreen and broadleaf evergreen so that, every three months, every season, there is a change visually that will take place in the garden," he said.

*Read the full story online at [www.niagaranow.com/news.phtml/6918](http://www.niagaranow.com/news.phtml/6918)*



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# RiverBrink returns Feb. 2 with exhibition on **lichen art**

Debra Antoncic  
Special to The Lake Report

A new exhibition at RiverBrink Art Museum transports the viewer into the mysterious and seemingly alien world of lichens.

In this series of paintings on display in the main floor galleries, Niagara artist Melanie MacDonald captures the extraordinary diversity and magic of these composite organisms.

The experience is similar to stepping into a tropical garden, the warm colours and intricate patterns of nature a welcome respite, particularly during a Canadian winter.

Lichens are highly complex organisms comprised of fungi and microscopic algae living in symbiosis. They are ubiquitous, found on bark, rocks, on walls, in woodlands, deserts, or tundra.

In this series of paintings, they appear in fairy-like clusters of coralline branches, tiny cups or leaf-like fronds. They resemble plants or fungi, are both tenacious yet fragile, and represent the co-dependence



Untitled (Chanterelles Mushrooms and Beard Lichen) 2021, 1. BY MELANIE MACDONALD

and interconnectedness of the natural world.

These natural visual qualities have drawn many artists to focus on lichens, particularly those artists interested in the close study of nature.

Victorian-era art critic and writer John Ruskin (1819-1900) wrote extensively on lichens, and captured their beauty and variety in numerous watercolours, his interest closely

tied to botany and nature studies of the smallest, most insignificant organisms.

Others, such as Saskatchewan artist Ernest Lindner (1897-1988), came to the subject of lichens and forest vegetation from a tradition of landscape painting. More recently, artists have taken lichens as the starting point for immersive installations and large-scale photographic work.

MacDonald's paintings

of lichens, in contrast, are more closely aligned with her previous explorations in the genre of still life.

The delicate fronds and branches of these living organisms, rendered in closeup, recall series such as *In the Kitchen* (2008-18) and *Board Games* (2009-20), in which MacDonald captures everyday objects with exacting detail.

Just as vintage flea-market treasures and mass-pro-

duced kitsch are rendered in a photo-realist style, individual lichens have been isolated and magnified.

Working with photography, using a macro lens and additional exploration and framing on a computer, MacDonald is able to pull details into focus. Highly intricate and complex in the foreground, the lichens are set against a background of blurred shapes awash in colour.

The green-browns and blacks of *Untitled (Chanterelles Mushrooms and Pelt Lichen)* 2021 are broken by a burst of yellow, the vibrant colour astonishing. In other paintings, such as *Untitled (Monk's Hood Lichen and Beard Lichen)* 2021, it is the details of the delicate tracery that capture attention.

The colours are lush, vibrant and unexpected, the shapes and textures otherworldly. Under this magnification, we might mistake these as abstract forms, rather than representations of living organisms.

Although lichens are the focus of intense scientific study, MacDonald, who is based in St. Catharines, has

approached the subject from the perspective of a non-scientist, a common practice in the field of lichens research and identification.

In this body of work, MacDonald draws attention to the aesthetics of surfaces and textures and colour, to details that cannot be seen with the naked eye. In so doing, she shares both her acquired knowledge and her appreciation of lichens.

In these highly detailed renderings is a world that is both strange and beautiful and, ultimately, very fragile. At least since the mid-19th century the sensitivity of lichens to air pollution has made them harbingers of environmental damage.

They also perform important ecological functions, such as soil stabilization. Yet they are often overlooked, fading into the background, or disappearing into the undergrowth of a forest.

With this series, MacDonald redirects our gaze, forcing us to pay attention, to take greater notice of the world around us.

*Debra Antoncic is RiverBrink's director and curator.*

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# GAMES



*Have some fun*

**Across**

- 1. Shrink (5)
- 5. Iberian monarchy (5)
- 8. Second planet (5)
- 10. Atoll used for nuclear tests (6)
- 11. Foolish (6)
- 12. Brittle (5)
- 13. Open up (6)
- 14. Mistakes (6)
- 15. Tender (5)
- 17. Penniless person (6)
- 19. Applauds (6)
- 20. U S state famous for potatoes (5)
- 21. Greek goddess of wisdom (6)
- 23. Brawn (6)
- 25. Crawl (5)
- 26. Short cannon (6)
- 27. False (6)
- 29. Beginning (5)
- 31. Spongelike (6)
- 32. Adequate (6)
- 33. Throwing weapon (5)
- 34. Appears (5)
- 35. Inheritors (5)

**Down**

- 2. Systematically arranged body of facts (7)
- 3. Capital of Egypt (5)
- 4. Against (4)
- 6. Incapable (9)
- 7. Underwriter (7)
- 8. Highest military decoration (8,5)
- 9. Powerful number cruncher (13)
- 16. Scale (5)
- 18. Sleeping accommodation which is only occasionally used (5,4)
- 22. Couple (7)
- 24. Recliner (7)
- 28. That group (5)
- 30. W W II sub-machine gun (4)

## Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
			8			9			
10							11		
			12						
13							14		
			15	16					
17		18					19		
			20						
21	22						23		24
			25						
26							27	28	
			29	30					
31							32		
			33						
34							35		

Last issue's answers

A	B	S	E	N	T	E	E	B	O	X	E	R	
C	E	O	X	B	B	X	D						
C	O	C	O	N	U	T	A	P	E	L	I	K	E
L	A	E	R	N	D	S	A						
A	C	T	S	R	E	S	T	R	I	C	T	E	D
I	E	M	A	E	L								
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S	T	I	N	K	R	E	V	E	I	L	L	E	

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



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# Independent Grocers love being part of NOTL

Evan Saunders  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report



Tony Hendriks owns Hendriks Independent Grocer on Queen Street.  
EVAN SAUNDERS

With his grocery store's renovations complete, Tony Hendriks says he is excited to offer an upgraded store for a community he loves being a part of.

"We simply have great, loyal local customers that have supported us for years," the owner of Hendriks Independent Grocer said in an interview.

"They become part of our daily journey and we become part of their lives."

Hendriks has been working at the grocery store on Queen Street for 32 years. He started in 1990 as store manager and purchased the Valu-mart franchise with his wife in 1999.

With a rebranding to the Independent and renovations completed, Hendriks is looking forward to offering a revamped store to those customers who have supported him all these years.

He said he's happy to "provide an upgraded warm and inviting local store for our community."

by many names, which is OK so long as people keep coming through the doors," he said.

Hendriks said the renovations were only difficult because he had to find a balance between operating as an essential business during the pandemic and getting the work done.

"It's been very challenging for all of our staff during these many months, working and running an essential business, trying to keep our shelves stocked and simply showing up day after day to serve our customers and our community as best we can," he said.

Hendriks celebrated his staff for their dedication to the business and community.

"We are especially proud of our loyal, dedicated staff who come from NOTL and the surrounding towns," he said.

"As a team they are great to work with side by side. We celebrate each other during the good times and support each other when times get tough. They are truly my work family."

Over at Phil's Independent Grocer in Virgil, renovations are still underway. The store is open and owner Phil Leboudec hopes to have everything finished in about seven weeks.

"I don't want to use the word upscale but it's going more that way," Leboudec said in an interview.

The store will have an expanded range of products for customers. "I think at the end of the day there's going to be more of a focus on fresh," he said.

"That will show when it's all said and done." "I can't even describe it as a change, it's going to be a translation."

Leboudec said nearly every aspect of the store will be revamped, from the produce fridges to the bakery. Rebranding as the Independent Grocer has big benefits.

"The Independent's a strong brand. It's a nationally recognized brand," he said.

He said he loves being part of the tight-knit community of Virgil.

"I think it's so much nicer when you're serving your neighbours," he said.

"You can hear the chatter, the laughter, you know?"



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# EXPLORING PHOTOS

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# Looking to the Stars



## Fog Hill Below Mississauga Point, 1886

This is an interesting landscape watercolour of the “Fog Bell,” below Mississauga Point, showing the wooden “groynes” (breakwater) on the right that was constructed to prevent erosion. The painting features a nice contrast of rocky cliffs and the soft shoreline of beautiful Lake Ontario lapping at the beach. The artist was Emma Currie (nee Harvey), who lived in St. Davids and even wrote about her reminiscences of growing up there. She is also known for being one of the first to write a publication on Laura Secord’s War of 1812 experiences. Read more about Emma in the book “Making her Mark: the Women of Niagara-on-the-Lake.”

## As January ends, there is light at the end of the tunnel

This week we see a new moon in Aquarius and Venus turning direct.

**Thursday, Jan. 27:** As the moon moves from secretive Scorpio into clairvoyant Sagittarius, retrograde Mercury gains a spiritual insight into your future. Note, this insight plays out in early February. On Jan. 27, 1880, Thomas Edison received a patent on the electric incandescent light bulb. According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, Edison purchased the patent rights from Toronto medical student Henry Woodward and hotel keeper Mathew Evans, and refined the technology to create a longer-lasting bulb.

**Friday, Jan. 28:** Mercury and Pluto are together in Capricorn today, giving ideas and intensity that opens new understanding and the drive to make magic come to life. Happy birthday #86 to Alan Alda. We first got to know him as Hawkeye Pierce, the wise-cracking surgeon for 10 years on “M\*A\*S\*H.” More recently, he appears in one of many Woody Allen films or on a PBS kids science show.

**Saturday, Jan. 29:** January ends on an intense note. Venus goes direct and on the same day, Mercury retrograde is conjunct Pluto. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, things will change for the better and we’re almost there. Just a little bit more of Pluto shedding and uncovering our truth. In February, March and especially in April we will see the fruits of our intense labour. Happy birthday to Oprah Winfrey. Born Jan. 29, 1954, she is now 68 and still commands must-see TV for a wide audience.

**Sunday, Jan. 30:** The sun is in Aquarius. Uranus, ruler of Aquarius, is in Taurus. Today they are exactly 90 degrees

from one another. An unexpected surprise opens a new way forward to a dream come true. The Beatles historic last concert, on the roof of their Apple Corp. headquarters on London’s famed Savile Row happened on Jan. 30, 1969.

**Monday, Jan. 31:** Tomorrow is the new moon in Aquarius, the start of a new lunar month. The set up for that is today with the moon moving from Capricorn to Aquarius. It’s a quiet and subtle change today for a lot more action tomorrow. It was Jan. 31, 2015, that 17-year-old Lydia Ko became the world’s youngest number one ranked golfer.

**Tuesday, Feb. 1:** Just past midnight we have a new moon in Aquarius. It marks the beginning of a 28-day period where new projects need to be identified and kindled into a flame. No matter how large or small, timing is important and today is the day. Make a list of things you need and want. He is not Canadian, but Rick James, aka Mr. Superfunk, was born on Feb. 1, 1948, in Buffalo, which means he performed a lot in Niagara.

**Wednesday, Feb. 2:** It’s Groundhog Day. Or, as it was once called “Candlemas.” It’s the day Jesus was presented at the temple. It’s also the day when one of a number of groundhogs either see or do not see their shadow, forecasting either an early or late spring. The moon begins the day in Aquarius and moves to Pisces at sunrise. Maybe an astrological groundhog can be of some help. She had been a star since the late 1950s but it wasn’t until Feb. 2, 1974, that Barbra Streisand enjoyed a number one hit with “The Way We Were.”

**Bill Auchterlonie has a podcast and more at [www.lutts.ca](http://www.lutts.ca).**

*Astrology is a form of entertainment, not a science.*



## Let’s get creative

Brian Marshall  
Columnist

Spurred by the housing crisis that has fully blossomed over the past few years, during the last couple of weeks I have attempted to present an argument for a co-ordinated address based on public/private co-operation.

In Jan. 13th’s Arch-i-text, Wartime Housing Limited was cited as an example of what Canadians were able to accomplish under much more challenging conditions to create affordable housing.

Last week’s column visited Martha’s Vineyard, a jurisdiction that parallels Niagara-on-the-Lake in size, population, demo-

graphics, economy, and is facing the same housing issues. I focused on the Island Housing Trust as an example of what is being done.

I cannot stress strongly enough that this country faces a true crisis in affordable housing.

Today I listened to a radio interview with a GTA real estate broker who stated that, in the last two years, they have not had a single property listing that was not sold in multiple offers. In some cases there were up to 100 offers.

A second pundit suggested that in this market, if you wanted to successfully purchase a home, it was necessary to throw any buyer caution to the wind because the supply was so far under demand.

And, for those NOTLers who have not had to be the “Bank of Mom & Dad” and think this is not our problem, I beg to differ.

Our restaurants (think up to an executive chef), our wineries, our orchards, our town infrastructure, and every other service we call upon is completely dependent on employees who simply cannot afford (or

find) housing in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Have you tried to engage the services of an in-home personal support worker or para-medical service recently?

From personal experience (both before and during COVID), I can simply say, “Good Luck” – because it just isn’t there.

So, if you want to enjoy your “golden years,” I’d suggest this issue is very definitely your concern.

All that said, just what could be done?

Recently, I learned that the federal government is looking to divest itself of three pieces of “surplus” land in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Combined, the land totals 25.5 acres.

Perhaps with proper negotiation at the federal level, this land could serve as the basis for a land trust upon which to build affordable housing?

Incorporating a non-profit in Ontario costs peanuts, less than \$400.

This town has a wealth of retired, semi-retired and active resident expertise.

There are architects, urban planners, builders, and business people of every

stripe, who may, if properly approached, be willing to contribute their time, talents and experience to an undertaking that will ensure their community continues to be able to provide the services necessary to maintain a viable town.

Canadian businesses could be solicited for contributions in the form of cash or materials as tax-deductible donations or, failing that, for provision of materials at cost in return for marketing opportunities.

A partnership might be developed with a finance institution (Niagara-based Meridian Credit Union comes to mind) as a platform for buyer mortgaging.

And, of course, both town and regional governments would need to be on board to oversee permits, inspections and transit planning/execution.

To be clear, I am not proposing publicly funded housing but rather affordable housing. In other words, housing that can be offered for sale at a price that young families can actually afford AND service the debt on.

In return, all of us get to enjoy the benefits.



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# Bring a sense of enclosure to the garden



**GROWING TOGETHER**

Joanne Young  
Garden Columnist



Over my years of designing, I often come across a familiar scenario. I notice the clients have done nothing with their backyard yet, even after living there for several years or longer.

When I ask what they use their backyards for, they say they really do not use them at all. The reason? They just feel too exposed – to the sun and other elements, and too exposed to the neighbours.

It doesn't matter if you have a large country estate or a small postage stamp-sized garden, we all have the need to feel enclosed.

I think it is the same feeling we get when we wrap ourselves in a blanket – a feeling of instant comfort and knowing that everything is right in the world.

Until you create that sense of enclosure into your garden, you will find that your garden does not feel complete. For it to feel like your own little sanctuary you need to achieve that sense of enclosure.

There are several ways to go about accomplishing this.

### DEFINING THE PERIMETER

To feel at home and at peace in the garden, you need something that defines the garden space. When sitting out in the middle of your backyard leaves you feeling totally exposed to neighbouring houses, you are unlikely to spend time there enjoying your garden.

This enclosure can be made from plants, fences, walls, screens, trellises with vines, even berms. They each have their own characteristics, but the key thing they all do is separate the space inside the enclosure

from the space outside of it.

The most common way we enclose our properties is with a fence. Always check with your local municipality to see what the bylaws are for your area.

In many municipalities, there is about a six-foot limit to structures such as fences. (NOTL's 2014 fence bylaw allows side and backyard fences up to two metres high.)

Wooden fences provide a more solid barrier to close off your garden area and give you an instant result. Consider the style of garden that you are wanting to create before deciding on what type of fence you build.

Another way of enclosing the perimeter of your garden is using plants. Fences and walls create an instant barrier while enclosures made of plants will take some time to grow and fill out.

There is a rule of thumb to follow when looking at defining the perimeter of your garden and it is known as the "law of significant enclosure."

This means that we feel enclosed when the vertical edge of a space is at least one-third the length of the horizontal space we're inhabiting – i.e., if your

property is 60 feet wide, you will feel enclosed when your perimeter plantings are a minimum of 20 feet high.

The plantings can be a more formal type of hedge (such as cedars) or more natural groupings of mixed plant material. By defining the perimeter of your garden, you have set the bones of your garden in place.

### CREATING A CANOPY

Another way of creating that sense of enclosure is with a canopy layer, enclosing the overhead space. The most common way of doing this is with a tree canopy.

Sitting under the canopy of a tree will give you a peaceful feeling. I love just looking up through the branches and catching glimpses of a blue sky. No matter what size your garden area is you can find an appropriately sized tree for your garden.

Another way of creating a canopy layer is using structures. Pergolas, gazebos and awnings have become more popular in the garden. Not only do they help cut down on the amount of sunlight, but they also provide that enclosure you need.

It doesn't matter if you have a large country estate or a small postage stamp-sized garden, we all have the need to feel enclosed. Joanne Young offers some tips on bringing a sense of enclosure to your garden. JOANNE YOUNG PHOTOS

### UNWANTED VIEWS

To help create that feeling of enclosure, you also need to disguise any unwanted views. This includes items such as an ugly neighbouring shed, utility boxes and poles, and poor storage practices. By blocking these unsightly items, you feel less exposed and more at home in your own garden.

### CREATE GARDEN ROOMS

Rooms, whether in homes or in gardens, are spaces separated by some type of wall. In the garden, this can be accomplished with hedges, trees and shrubs, vines, or fences and other structures.

They don't have to be eight feet tall, they just need to give a sense of separation, to give you a defined space to design and use. By creating garden rooms in your landscape, you are providing yourself different areas where you will feel enclosed and safe.

When you incorporate a few of these practices into your own garden, you will come closer to creating the space that you always wanted.

Joanne Young is a Niagara-on-the-Lake garden expert and coach. See her website at [joanneyoung.ca](http://joanneyoung.ca).

## Obituary

# Alipio Seco

SECO Alipio - It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Alipio Seco, better known as just 'Seco' on January 23, 2022 at the age of 87. Seco was born in Cascais Portugal on April 1, 1934 to Antonio Seco and Maria da Conceicao Martins. In 1955 he joined the Portuguese military where he served for 22 months. On December 1, 1957, he and Luisa were married in Portugal and subsequently moved to the island of Jersey in England where they both worked for several years. The two of them immigrated to Canada on March 15, 1967 where Seco started working at The Oban Inn in Niagara-on-the-Lake as a bartender and then becoming the dining room and bar manager where he remained until his retirement at 65 in 1999. After that, Seco worked at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club as part of the course maintenance crew until about 6 years ago. Seco will be missed by many, including former staff at the Oban, co-workers at the Golf Club, as well as fellow golfers, and friends. He was an avid and excellent golfer, being a member of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club for many years, where many members knew him as the 'Great White Sardine'. Seco and Luisa enjoyed many vacations together over the years, many of them involving golf, and also visiting family in Portugal. Seco is pre-deceased by his wife Luisa (Oct. 2020), his brother Joao, and his parents. He is survived by his sister-in-law, Rosa Cristovao, his niece Isabel Cristovao, both of Toronto, his brother Jorge Seco of Portugal, many nieces and nephews in Portugal, and their dear friends Linda and Michael Freel. Many thanks to Dr. A. Suk and all of the staff at Garden City Manor in St. Catharines for their care over the last 4 and a half years. A ceremony was held at the Morgan Funeral Home on Wednesday January 26, 2022 followed by interment in Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery. Those who wish may make a donation in Seco's memory to the Canadian Mental Health Association.

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