

Pigs and chickens and goats, oh my

NOTL urban barnyard hosts private tours to see farm's nearly 500 animals



Lizzie Salkauskis and Randy Lakeit with goats Tulip and Daisy at their farm on Niagara Street. RICHARD HARLEY

Jessica Maxwell
The Lake Report

Two people, nearly 500 barnyard animals and a whole lot of love.

Randy Lakeit and Lizzie Salkauskis are a Niagara-on-the-Lake couple who run tours of their barnyard, which is home to 14 different kinds of animals.

The farm sells fresh eggs as well as garlic, and other fruits and vegetables as they

come into season.

Last September, the couple purchased a 15-acre farm at 68 Niagara St. near Rye Street. It was previously known as the Garlic Glen.

Barnyard tours are operated by Lakeit and Salkauskis daily by appointment or for walk-up groups. Admission is \$5 per person.

With COVID-19 protocols, groups all receive private tours. "We don't mix any groups," Lakeit said.

"If you come as a group, your group of course came in a car together so as long as we keep our distance from them, it's OK."

"We have on our sign, private tours," he said, "meaning that only their group would be together."

Mask use during tours is optional. "They're welcome to wear their masks if they want. It's always appreciated," Lakeit said.

"We also have them put

their money in a bucket, and if they need change, we have clean money that has been out of circulation since before COVID, to give them for change."

"Most of it is in open air, only just the two rooms in the barn," Lakeit said.

"And it's always supervised," Salkauskis said.

The barnyard tours started in June and initially attracted about 20 to 30

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Ava Randall and Zoe Anger were tubing with Ava's family when they made an impromptu rescue. RICHARD HARLEY

Randall rescue: CAO and family help save couple in Niagara River

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

What started out as an evening of tubing and fun on the Niagara River ended with a scare for the Randall family.

Sheldon Randall, interim CAO of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and his wife Sandra, were taking their daughter Ava and her friend Zoe out for a boat ride to enjoy some summer fun Saturday, when they came across a woman in distress floating in the water.

The woman, a U.S. resident in her early 20s, had been out jet skiing with her boyfriend on July 4, when the watercraft barrel-rolled and they both fell off.

The boyfriend, who later

said it was his first time on a jet ski, couldn't get the emergency cord back in the craft, and had instructed her to swim to the shore.

But the woman, not a strong swimmer, was still more than a kilometre from shore and another half a kilometre from the jet ski, being pulled by the river current, when the Randalls spotting her waving.

"My dad started slowing down and I thought he was gonna show us a bird or something like that in the water," Ava said in an interview Monday.

"But then we saw arms and we're like, 'Oh, wow, that's not a bird.'"

"We heard my mom and

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Street closure has businesses divided

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Some hate it, some quite like it and some think it needs more time.

Business owners in downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake have mixed opinions about Queen Street being closed to traffic on weekends.

The trial run of the street

closure continued this past weekend, after being shut down on Canada Day last week.

Paul Dickson, owner of Irish Design, said the shop saw its worst Saturday sales in 33 years, even compared to the winter low season.

"I've never had a Saturday like that, ever. And that's raw data from yesterday,"

he said during an interview Sunday, noting he didn't compare the numbers, but knows what his typical business is like.

"I'm not in favour of closing the street. It's very clear why, you know, this affects my business, my customers. My customer base is based on the cars coming in. I think it's an experiment that was probably

worthwhile trying but you know, I would like to see it reopened."

He said he's also concerned about people who live on Queen Street, including five of his own tenants.

"I have an 85-year-old lady who lives upstairs who has been asked to walk four

Continued on Page 8



Paul Dickson, owner of Irish Design, says Saturday was one of the worst in 33 years. RICHARD HARLEY



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Deloitte service review outlines \$1M in savings, new revenue for town

Parking and user fees, improved procurement among suggestions by consulting firm

Kevin MacLean
Managing Editor

A 104-page report by consulting firm Deloitte shows that while there is “room for improvement,” the town is “doing a great job” in delivering services to residents, NOTL’s chief administrator says. The document outlines suggestions to boost municipal coffers by almost \$1 million a year, mainly through parking and user fees, streamlining purchasing practices and eliminating lost water revenue.

Interim CAO Sheldon Randall said the \$218,000 study confirmed the town needs “to make more investments regarding data acquisition, analysis, and reporting.” “We have to be able to gauge, with effective data, where we’ve been, where we are, and where we want to be,” Randall told The Lake Report.

The report was conducted under and paid for by the Ontario government’s Municipal Modernization program, which allocated \$125 million to help 405 small and rural municipalities conduct service delivery reviews and implement recommendations.

The town received \$725,000 under the modernization program, but has only spent \$218,000 of it so far.

Deloitte identified 53 “opportunities for improve-

ment” of which 42 can be implemented by the end of 2022, according to a report to council by Randall and project liaison official Bobbie-Joe Talarico.

The Deloitte report, presented at council’s June 22 meeting, acknowledges the COVID-19 pandemic likely will curb some of its revenue estimates.

However, it projects that implementing the top recommendations and some of the secondary suggestions could save Niagara-on-the-Lake taxpayers almost \$1 million a year by 2022 through increased revenue and reduced expenses.

“Deloitte recognized that an annual review of parking operations to consider surge pricing during seasonal times” could boost the town’s finances, Randall said.

As well, “There is an opportunity for the town to institute and periodically review a revenue policy for facilities, parks, special events and programs that generate user fees.”

At the outset, the town said it was looking for improvements that reflected its strategic priorities, were fiscally responsible and met “the expectations of residents,” Randall and Talarico said in their report to council.

Among the top areas identified by Deloitte with the most significant financial impact by 2022 are:

* Saving \$365,000 or

more by reviewing parking operations and inventory annually and to plan parking “supply” to accommodate tourists during high-demand seasons.

* Raising \$150,000 a year by instituting a revenue policy for user fees for town services.

* Saving \$275,000 annually by completing the final phases of a water audit.

* Saving about \$250,000 a year by improving the municipality’s purchasing practices.

* Hiring a full-time employee at a cost of about \$85,000 a year to manage procurement to “centralize purchases, eliminate redundancies in ordering and reduce challenges in capacity.”

As well, hiring a full-time chief administrator should be a priority, Deloitte concluded. Randall has filled the job on an interim basis since former CAO Holly Dowd retired in 2019.

None of the report’s recommendations have been approved by council, Randall said. Approval is “dependent on the new CAO and council. They will determine the best way to navigate the opportunities, which ones to implement and when.”

Randall noted the Deloitte review “identified a total of 53 opportunities for improvement. Each of the 53 opportunities will benefit the town in one or

more ways in that it will drive a quantified financial impact, improve services or operational efficiencies and lay a strong foundation for improvement.”

The report also will help the town focus on setting priorities and reduce costs “while maintaining or improving service levels. It’s all about making informed, strategic choices,” he said.

The consultants also said the town needs an enterprise risk management policy to guide its decision-making processes, should adopt integrated IT solutions to improve efficiencies and use key performance indicators (KPIs) for a data-driven approach to operations.

The report also recommends hiring a full-time employee to manage drainage and irrigation.

As well, establishing a full-time staff position for special events is suggested, to “increase efficiencies” and generate user fees.

Randall and Talarico said a business case for the special events job will be presented to council for 2021 budget approval.

None of the recommendations have been approved by council, Randall said in response to questions from The Lake Report.

“Staff will be looking into which recommendations don’t require approval from council that they can move forward on. Those that require approval from



Cover page of Deloitte’s service review report. SUPPLIED

council will be on hold until a full-time CAO is appointed.”

Some of the opportunities to be handled internally include:

* Improving the high staff turnover rate among customer service workers in the clerk’s department.

* Modernizing the planning and building application process by eliminating paper-based processes.

* Redefining communications and community engagement under a formal communications officer position.

* Revising job processes and job descriptions to reflect internal growth and changes.

* Improving internal training and cross-training staff to manage absences and provide backup support.

* Relying on volunteers or low-cost employees to supplement staffing at the community centre, which is constrained as it operates with only three full-time and two contract staff.

* Standardizing the water meter installation process to boost revenue.

Randall noted Deloitte

estimated the cash flow operating and capital implications of “five opportunities and the cost implications of another three opportunities. They expect other opportunities to generate financial benefits, but cannot estimate their impacts given the wide range of possible variables and outcomes.”

“The quantified opportunities could improve the financial position by just under \$1 million (4 per cent of 2018 operating budget) per annum (or \$1.9M between 2020 and 2022) with minimal capital investment required to implement them. Staff will need to take a second look at these numbers once the constraints surrounding COVID-19 are resolved to determine if this is achievable and realistic,” he said.

As part of its review, Deloitte examined past economic, strategic plan, community wellness and budget surveys, and a customer experience survey that attracted 34 respondents, Randall said. Two open houses were also held: one for residents had only six participants and one for business and developers drew four participants.

Runner-up O’Connor says she’s interested in filling vacant council seat if asked to do so

Richard Harley
The Lake Report



Sandra O’Connor. FILE

After the sudden resignation of Niagara-on-the-Lake Coun. Stuart McCormack last week, town council must now find someone to fill his seat.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero has said she’s in favour of appointing the runner-up from the 2018 municipal election. However, it’s still

uncertain what council will do.

Council must first declare the seat vacant at its July 20 meeting.

Runner-up Sandra O’Connor said the news of McCormack’s resignation came as a surprise, but she is interested in joining council.

“It would be definitely something I would consider,” she said Monday.

She hasn’t made a firm decision because she hasn’t been presented with any options yet, she said.

“I think council has a

number of options in front of them. And I think I need to wait a little to see what council is going to do,” she told The Lake Report.

“I’ve always been interested in serving the local community in one capacity or another and I think I would continue to do so, but I haven’t made any decision yet, because I haven’t been presented really with a decision to be made.”



NOTL bans open air burns

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has banned open air burns until further notice due to dry conditions.

The ban includes cooking fires (except barbecues and other gas appliances), fireworks and all other types of outdoor burning.

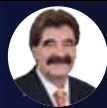
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Mask discussion to continue at later date

Kevin MacLean
Managing Editor

After more than four hours of sometimes contentious debate Wednesday, Niagara regional councillors had not come to an agreement about whether to make masks mandatory indoors.

The decision was deferred to regional council on July 21.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, wearing masks has become a major concern among many people and the province has left it up to municipalities to decide whether to impose the restriction.

Niagara public health officials have said making masks mandatory is not necessary.

Prior to regional council's debate, Niagara-on-the-

Lake Lord Mayor Betty Diseros said she would support a move to mandatory masks.

"This is a difficult one. I believe in masks indoors, I will vote for it at the region, however, will I be voting for something that is likely totally unenforceable unless we hire a significant number of bylaw officers?" she told The Lake Report.

"I just don't get why people don't care enough to wear a mask or a face shield for others. It would be great if the upper levels of government would assist in some way."

Regional Coun. Gary Zalepa said ahead of the debate that he would follow the advice of the medical officer of health, who previously refused to support mandatory masks.

Responsible tourism group wants to protect way of life for residents

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

A new resident group has formed in Niagara-on-the-Lake, advocating for sustainable and responsible tourism.

The group, called Voters for Sustainable Tourism emerged June 26, and has set up a website and mailing list for residents who want to speak up against "overtourism" that affects the way of life for residents of NOTL, said founder and spokesperson Bruce Gitelman.

"I felt there was a need to have a voice that represents the residents that elect the elected officials on this issue of overtourism," Gitelman said.

He emphasizes the group supports the tourism industry, but wants to see it done in a way that doesn't degrade the quality of life for residents.

"It's important to let all of the merchants in the hospitality industry know that all of us, our heart goes out to them," he said, noting the impact COVID-19 has had on the industry.

"We're concerned for their survival. We know that having a healthy Queen Street and a healthy hotel industry and healthy tourism is vital for the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to be a good place for all of us to live. But tourism should be contributing to the culture and economy of the town. It should not be harming the way of life of the residents," Gitelman said.

"Now is the time to put



A road closure sign on Queen Street. JESSICA MAXWELL

in place a way for tourism to grow in Niagara-on-the-Lake in a positive way and to discourage things which might have a negative impact, because overtourism hurts us all. It hurts all the stakeholders. If Niagara-on-the-Lake becomes a place where nobody wants to visit for multi-night stays or going to theatre or dining because it's so over-touristed, nobody wins."

He said the group, which so far has between 10 and 20 people on its mailing list, is meant to be a voice for residents whose way of life is affected by overtourism.

"It's a fine complex balance," he said. "And so our organization is dedicated, during the road of recovery from COVID, to helping elected officials understand the type of tourism that would be great to have going forward."

One example of overtourism affecting residents, he said, is the town's trial closure of Queen Street.

"We live on a street that comes off Queen Street.

My wife was looking at the kitchen window and there was a traffic jam on that small residential street. And people were honking their horns because they were mad at another car. That means that if the child is trying to cross the street to go to their friend's house, they've got to go in between cars and if a (visitor) is trying to social distance and they want to walk on the road, they can't," he said.

"This weekend there was gridlock all the way from Queen's Royal Park along Front Street. There were times when cars were bumper to bumper. And I don't think anybody in Niagara-on-the-Lake who moved here or has grown up here wants to have a traffic jam getting to their home or getting out of their driveway."

He said there are examples of tourist events that benefit residents and visitors alike.

"Like the Peach Festival, the Cherry Festival. There's wonderful tourist events that we all enjoy,

residents and visitors, and we're willing to put up with it for short periods of time. But overtourism is when it reaches a point of scale and frequency that it harms our way of life," he said.

Another example of overtourism is the number of people visiting Ryerson Park in Chautauqua, which has a small beach, no bathrooms and no water testing. In recent weeks, the beach has been overcrowded by visitors, with little room for residents of the neighbourhood to enjoy their own space.

"It's a shame that excess use is harming the residents, who are the people that vote. I mean, who are the town council members supposed to represent? Who are they making decisions in the interest of?"

He said the group hopes to hold meetings with residents in the coming months and that residents can also leave anonymous comments on the group's website, votersbeforetourists.com.

The group will be a voice for residents, to make it clear to the people running the town that there needs to be a happy medium between tourism and the happiness of NOTL residents, Gitelman said.

"We should let our elected officials know that our quality of life is important to us. And we should let them know when excess tourism has harmed it."

The main goal, he said, is to make sure Niagara-on-the-Lake is a great place to live.

Niagara-on-the-Lake



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Contributed by Patty Garriock
 "There are no shortcuts to any place worth going." – Beverly Sills.



Contributed by Norm Arsenault:
 Save on electricity!! Use a pressure cooker, microwave or toaster oven when possible. Buy energy efficient appliances. Reduce your heat. Put your air conditioner up a couple of degrees. Hang up clothes instead of your clothes dryer where possible. When using your clothes dryer do it during low peak hours usually 7pm to 7am daily and all weekend!! It all adds up.

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Editorial: Fill council vacancy by **appointment**

Kevin MacLean
 Managing Editor

Stuart McCormack caught his colleagues and Niagara-on-the-Lake residents off-guard last week when he announced he was quitting his job as a town councillor.

We respect McCormack's decision, thank him for his 19 months of service and, as a councillor who shunned the media, for uncharacteristically sharing his resignation letter with The Lake Report so we could share that news with our readers.

But it is now time to move on. The question is: how do we best do so?

In our democratic system,

the ideal, fairest and most representative way in which to fulfill the electorate's wishes is to hold a by-election. However, that is a time-consuming and costly option at a time when your municipality – and taxpayers – can ill afford it. Democracy has a price, certainly.

Perhaps if municipal elections, arguably the level of government that is closest to "the people" due to its grassroots nature, were more widely embraced by voters, we would feel differently. But municipal elections traditionally attract the lowest voter turnout levels and municipal by-elections

attract even fewer people.

And matters are complicated more so as we find ourselves in the midst of a global pandemic with little assurance what the next weeks or months hold.

The first step is for NOTL council to officially declare the seat vacant. Then councillors must decide how to fill it.

Our suggestion is to offer the appointment to the person who garnered the next highest vote total among the more than two dozen (!) people who ran for council in 2018. That person is Sandra O'Connor, who finished only 37 votes behind and has expressed interest in the

job, but wants to hear what council has to say.

If, for some reason, O'Connor does not accept an appointment, then we respectfully suggest council offer it to the next-highest finisher. And so on. With 25 candidates last election, there is no shortage of people who were interested in the job.

With a little over two years left in this council's mandate, offering the seat to the person who finished next in line is indeed expeditious, but on balance it seems a fair way to ensure NOTLers have full representation.

editor@niagaranow.com

Emergency group decision was **undemocratic**

Dear editor:

The recent move by the mayor and senior staff person of Niagara-on-the-Lake, apparently urged on by the president of the Chamber of Commerce, to overturn a decision reached by our legally elected town council, is troubling and I believe undemocratic.

In October 2018, when residents voted in a new mayor and town council, we elected nine individuals (one mayor and eight councillors) to represent us and make decisions on our behalf.

We did this in the knowledge that each of the individuals we elected would have a single vote at the council table and in

the belief that our elected municipal government would operate in a democratic manner.

We did not elect the town's chief administrative officer (CAO) nor the president of the NOTL chamber of commerce, nor did we bestow unilateral decision-making authority on the mayor.

Despite this, within days of council making the decision in late June to close a portion of Queen Street to vehicle traffic during weekends and statutory holidays on a trial basis, beginning July 1, the mayor and CAO acted to make significant changes to the closure provisions agreed to by council.

Although the COVID-19

pandemic led to a state of emergency being declared in NOTL and the establishment of an emergency response group, which includes the mayor and CAO, no clear health- or safety-related rationale was identified to justify the emergency group overriding the direction set by council in regard to Queen Street. Nor was a valid reason given, if indeed the mayor had concerns, why the matter could not have been brought back before our duly-elected council for further consideration.

If the president of the Chamber of Commerce was unhappy with aspects of council's decision to close Queen Street, as reported

by the media, surely the issues he raised could have waited until it was possible to reconvene council to consider them.

We elected a council to represent our interests, make decisions on our behalf and provide good government to our town.

That's democracy.

It isn't unilateral decision-making that overrides a decision of council, nor the mayor acting alone or as part of the emergency group, nor town staff doing anything more, with respect to governance, than providing informed advice to our elected officials.

Terry Davis
 NOTL

Council should think of **residents** first

Dear editor:

Our heart goes out to the wonderful businesses that serve Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Hopefully the federal and provincial governments can help those affected.

In the meantime NOTL town council has to recognize that the quality of life for residents should be the guiding priority in deciding to close Queen Street.

Queen Street is the ONLY commercial street that

crosses Old Town. The narrow residential streets, some without sidewalks, cannot handle 14,000 cars on their own without diminishing the safety and quality of life for residents and visitors.

Council must be reminded they were elected to serve the best interest of residents.

Bruce Gitelman
 Spokesperson
 Voters for
 Sustainable Tourism
 NOTL

Hold **by-election** to fill empty council seat

Dear editor:

I read the article about Stuart McCormack resigning from Niagara-on-the-Lake council (The Lake Report, July 3).

I thought it was great of him to send his resignation letter to your newspaper.

In light of the reasons he cited for his resignation (being unhappy with the direction in which council is moving), I believe council should not be

appointing anyone as his replacement.

I would like to know what other people in the community think about how McCormack's successor should be chosen: whether a new person should be selected by council or elected by the residents of NOTL.

I believe the person should be elected.

Cheers,
 Frank Wynia
 NOTL



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OPINION



Op-ed: Time to **redesign** how Niagara delivers services



Gary Zalepa
Special to The Lake Report

The service delivery review by Deloitte LLP, requested by the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, must be a catalyst for improvements in how all levels of municipal government can better service residents and answer the need for greater efficiency.

The report identifies many opportunities for the town, including improvements to procurement expertise, staff training for their fields of responsibility, enterprise risk management, alternative delivery of local public transit, IT support, drainage/irrigation support, improved hiring processes and other HR support items, just to highlight several from a three-page list.

All 12 Niagara municipalities have similar realities. This was true pre-COVID-19 and is more

evident today. The funding pressures on municipal governments have reached a critical point and it is time to act.

A change in service delivery models that removes redundancies and service overlap between local municipalities and the Region of Niagara can provide that path to sustainability.

The path forward for local government, is a restructuring of its cost model. Through redesigning how services are delivered across Niagara, a new cost structure can be achieved.

The goal is to make government more effective, reduce pressure on taxpayers and improve business competitiveness.

As an example, one of the services mentioned in the Deloitte report was procurement. It identified procurement improvements as an opportunity to make the town more efficient.

Through improvements to the town's expertise with procurement, NOTL could save an estimated \$250,000.

Deloitte recommended hiring that expertise and improving the municipality's procurement process.

But what if, instead of

hiring and creating a permanent budget increase in staffing, the town entered into a service delivery agreement with the Region of Niagara to provide procurement services when required.

Using this new service delivery model the town achieves the savings from enhanced procurement expertise but does not commit to expanding the staff budget. A larger win for the taxpayer.

Now consider service delivery reviews across all 12 of Niagara's governments. Procurement is just one example. This service delivery strategy can be implemented across many items on the list created by Deloitte, plus there are opportunities in many other areas of municipal service.

There are significant efficiencies to be achieved and sustainability is achievable, in many corporate service activities like human resource support, budget and finance, clerk's office, and legal support.

In planning services, you could have expertise hubs that deliver specialized support for local planning departments, provid-

ing planning expertise to local municipalities when required.

For example, when the town requires planning advice on a matter on which the local staff need outside expertise, the town would use the services of the region's planning department rather than going to a consultant. These are just a couple of the opportunities.

Niagara Region needs to unite behind the strategy of service delivery review and needs to break with the status quo. Many alternatives previously considered are not attractive and further tax increases are not possible. Niagara needs a redesign.

Region-wide service delivery reviews must be embraced. Ask your local representatives to support a region-wide service delivery review.

Niagara municipalities can maintain their uniqueness and autonomy but by creating a sustainable delivery model, all can benefit to gain from the strength of working together.

Gary Zalepa is regional councillor for Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Why joining the NOTL Museum was a **great** decision

Dear editor:

When I moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake almost five years ago, I knew six people who lived in the area.

Having lived in the GTA for most of my adult life, I had to build new connections and increase my social network. I also planned on having a lot of guests from Ontario, from other parts of Canada, and from the United States. For that, I was going to have to be the tour guide for my new town.

So I joined the Niagara Historical Society, now known as the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum. I figured I would learn a bit about history and at least sound knowledgeable to my friends and family. What I got was so much more!

I found out the best deal in town costs a few dollars! For \$10, every Saturday and



Sunday in the summer at 11 a.m., I could book a walking tour that started at the popular gazebo and ended up at the museum and learn about local history.

As a Niagara Historical Society member, I would have free access to visit the museum and attend, free of charge, several lecture series that made me learn even more local history. It was during one of those visits that I discovered the gift

shop, where I found unique useful items (for myself and as gifts).

I was approached to become a board member and, once elected, I was asked to serve as the treasurer, which I accepted. I have realized since then that this organization is a model in many ways. It is fiscally responsible, is guided by and operates with clear guidelines, and is supported by many residents of the area.

I definitely get more than I have given. I have had the opportunity to lead an amazing team of volunteers to host the Canadian Forces Snowbirds in September 2019, participated in the set-up of the Niagara Polo event, and learned a ton about what it means to sit on a board of directors.

Recently, with COVID-19, the NOTL Museum staff was looking for ways to continue to connect with the community while doing a bit of fundraising.

So now I know that in addition to all that, the NOTL Museum takes care of my tummy! This summer, in partnership with PigOut Catering we've had two fundraising events. I will continue to support the NOTL Museum. I hope you will too.

*Mona Babin
NOTL*

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OPINION

Please **fix** parking – and shuttle visitors to Old Town

Dear editor:

First, I disagree with the Queen Street shutdown date change, from October to July 19.

Clearly the former date would generate more meaningful data, however I assume the July date is not written in stone. With respect to the parking concerns, continuing to migrate into our residential areas is not the solution.

Has the town considered, for example, using the following short-term options: The acreage within the closed Parliament School grounds, the NOTL Community Centre, an area close to the Shaw in the Commons, similar to the temporary parking cleared



NOTL Transit bus on Tanbark Road in St. Davids. SOURCED

along Hwy. 55 for the Lavender Festival?

The town has neither the appetite nor the resolve to seriously address the parking issue or the permanent closure of Queen Street (overcrowding/over-

tourism) for the long term.

We have been repeatedly told that closing Queen Street has been discussed for decades.

The operative word here is discussed. Never, it appears, has a consen-

sus been reached to undertake a professional study, with a date certain to complete same and collectively make a final determination of the long-term benefit to all parties concerned.

Perhaps small town politics, as is often the case, impeded such a study. Clearly street closures, parking, services to stores etc. is not a new phenomenon. We are not reinventing the wheel here. There are hundreds of thousands of examples worldwide to draw solutions from.

Our town's CAO said closing Queen Street is not so easy. Bold decisions are usually never easy, however where there's a will, there's a way.

Quoting from an article

in the July 3 Lake Report, headlined "Pillar and Post turns 50," the parking issue was also raised decades ago.

To quote the hotel's founder, John Drope, a true visionary who was one of the first to warn of parking problems on Queen Street becoming a major issue, he urged the town, "To follow the Williamsburg, Virginia example and create parking outside the historic area, with shuttles carrying visitors to town." And everybody thought he was crazy. Not so.

His vision is still true today. He was certainly, in my opinion, not thinking about parking meters in residential areas.

Yes, shuttle people in from the community centre, etc. All temporary parking paid, of course, with an attendant. No parking meter installation costs. For example, Carmel, California, on the Monterey Peninsula, a tourist trap with a population similar to NOTL's Old Town, does not allow parking on residential streets.

It should also be noted that the street closing was not focused on increasing merchants' revenues – it was specifically to address overcrowding on the sidewalk and concerns about social distancing control.

Samuel Young
NOTL

Frankie Sez: Now is time to **redefine** NOTL's tourism experience

Dear editor:

The following letter was sent to members of Niagara-on-the-Lake town council.

COVID-19 has exposed weakness and provided opportunity for accelerated change with planning and creativity from representative leaders and visionaries. Which path will the town council of Niagara-on-the-Lake take?

I wish to express strong sentiment against the closure of Queen Street for both my boutiques, Frankie Sez at 79 Queen and Valverde at 55 Queen. I have been a merchant on Queen Street since 1994.

This closure was arranged in haste and now, on top of battling back to recover historical sales from COVID-19, we have been dealt another step backward with sales moving in the wrong direction, ie. negatively for the three days of street closure thus far.

1. Both of my boutiques sell apparel and a customer wants fast access in and out of the boutique, especially during this COVID-19 period. Our core customer can no longer park near either boutique and is faced with a considerable walk. By virtue of diminished store traffic on the three closure dates, they have obviously foregone the visit.

2. It was poorly executed, with virtually no advance planning: If a retail shopper needs to walk from a distance, a core shuttle should have been implemented, especially for the older demographic.

3. The closure is catering to establishments that sell food and beverages, as those customers are willing to walk from their vehicles as they know they will be seated for a period of time to consume food and beverage. These establishments have already been catered to with the temporary erection of patios directly on the street or on their property.

4. As a merchant, a qualitative assessment is constantly taking place as to the quality of the customers who visit Queen Street and the likelihood of garnering sales based on quality of customer. Without being scientific, the street closure favours a clientele that enjoys more of a carnival street atmosphere as opposed to a clientele that prefers a town that reflects a historical flare with modern amenities and forward merchants. The latter clientele arguably brings more potential disposable dollars to spend and is more discerning. The former is satisfied with a couple of drinks, some food and street entertainment. It's a slip-

pery slope to careen into a busker-style street.

5. Visitation in both shops has been lower on closure days as pedestrians gravitate toward the centre of the street. For those selling physical goods, temptation will be to join the centre and patios and place products where the people are, in the centre. Lower-calibre visitors necessitates lower-calibre products and the spiral whirls to lower revenue, unable to cover top-tier rents based on goods and services delivered to top-tier consumers. This ultimately leads to real estate devaluation and diminished tax revenue.

6. Two camps are emerging on Queen Street: Food and beverage and those selling physical goods. To join the food and beverage group, busking will be required.

7. We are at a crossroads that can change the tenor and core constituent of visitors who come to Niagara-on-the-Lake. Once this trend is established it is very difficult to reverse.

What kind of customer would you like to see visiting Niagara-on-the-Lake?

Which path do you choose? Just because any town, anywhere has closed its main street, Niagara-on-the-Lake does not need to

follow in lockstep with zero foresight and vision.

The other streets in any town, anywhere do not have the same physical attributes as Queen Street interwoven within a vibrant community, adjacent to waterfront, theatre and vineyards.

Why are we blindly following and risk altering our street negatively?

Niagara Falls is along the Parkway and in good times is vibrant with its constituent clientele. Does Niagara-on-the-Lake wish for the same type of visitor and busker streetscape? The residential areas directly adjacent to Niagara Falls are of a different quality than Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Maybe Prideaux/Johnson Street residents can apply for multi-unit short-term stay rentals like those along the Parkway approaching Niagara Falls as they are newly designated thoroughfares.

Have you looked through the newly-installed Queen Street cam to see what the street looks like to yourself? It looks like "trash," people eating ice cream curbside where cars should be parked.

If the Queen Street closure is contemplated for the future, it could benefit from looking at models in Paris and Sorrento.

It requires a great deal

of planning and infrastructure dollars to remodel the streetscape, physically enhancing it in a professional manner from the top down by town planners, urban designers, etc.

There is merit to the approach if the town is willing to undertake and utilize taxes collected to invest in the Old Town, not to steal from it and ultimately finish it.

Simply closing the street is a one-way road to ruin.

Niagara-on the Lake can and must do better: Will the future promotional tourism poster for NOTL depict 2-by-4 lumber blockading the street with a backdrop of individuals sitting curbside on the sidewalk enjoying their ice cream on makeshift street patios? Or will it become a global model of new town relevance, extolling unique cultural, historical virtues married to its agricultural pursuits and viticulture?

A street with cobblestone paths, a mini amphitheatre for the Shaw Festival to conduct public interactive sessions between performances and co-shared by curated artists, singers and performers? Perhaps new novel retail structures interspersed in a purposeful design, accented with landscaping, patios, open areas, even seasonal retail

in temporary venues/carts/winery/brewery tasting and sales (think Distillery District, Toronto) all supporting town revenue generation and a truly unique NOTL visitor experience?

With a true desire to close the street, the town-owned hospital can be redeveloped to house a majority of vehicle parking underground and above. Traffic would be routed away from residents, along 55, East West Line, to the Parkway and parkade, with a short exciting walk to a rebooted Queen Street.

The town desperately needs coherent vision and serious investment to maintain and foster discerning visitation to a special place. We are sitting at the precipice now.

COVID has exposed our shortcomings and now affords NOTL the opportunity to become a new model of global small town creativity, vibrancy and relevance.

Without special attention it will wither like the winter grapes on a vine. Our town leaders and representatives are more relevant today than at any time in our recent history. We look forward to your inspiration that surpasses our own!

Sincerely,
Frank Sisinni
NOTL



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NOTL Town council decided to experiment until the weekend of July 19 this summer closing Queen Street to traffic. It has resulted in NOTL's only Commercial street crossing Old Town being closed and as many as 22,000 cars per weekend having to use only narrow residential streets, some without sidewalks, endangering the quality of life and safety of residents and visitors.



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Queen closure: Some hate it, some love it and some m

Continued from Front Page

blocks to get her car on three days out of seven this week. I think that's not fair," he said.

He said he'd like to see the town try closing the street when there's not a pandemic going on.

"We've had enough trauma for one year at the moment."

He added he doesn't see any issue with social distancing on Queen Street, even without the closure.

Anne Kurtz, owners of Kurtz Culinary Creations, had a different Saturday, saying it was her busiest day since the pandemic began in March.

She said it's just too early to tell if the street closure had anything to do with it.

"I don't think it's necessarily attributable to Queen Street and its closure," she said Sunday during an interview.

"And scientifically, you can't make a judgment call. The fact is that you need more facts before you can make such a determination. It's called, in my old days of studying marketing research, statistical analysis — you need more data



Some business owners weren't happy about a sign letting visitors know Queen Street is closed to traffic, instead would prefer "open for walking" messaging. JESSICA MAXWELL

before you can come to any such conclusion. We're only in day two of our street closure, so it's way too early to determine that."

She noted that though it was the best day since the pandemic, sales are "drastically short of what is normal and what is able to pay the rent."

Despite it being too early to see the business

impact, she's in favour of the closure as far as social distancing goes.

"I'm certainly very, very grateful that the street is closed for safety purposes alone. Because as a business, you don't want to go backwards. You don't want what has happened in the States to happen to us," she said.

"I think we've done the

responsible thing, if but only for safety reasons. And that's why I think it should continue."

Peter Earle, owner of Halley's Fashion for Men, said he too thinks it's too early to make a judgment call, but noted several things that he thinks need to be ironed out to help people understand what the purpose of the closure is.

"It's not a road closure. It's a pedestrian opening, it's a walkabout, it's a street experience, it's an intimate shopping experience. That's what it is, so that's the way you put it. You say, 'Come on down to Niagara-on-the-Lake for an intimate shopping experience on old Queen Street.'"

Earle said he's not "for or against" the closure, but if the town does decide to continue with it, he thinks there should be elements added to support the overall experience.

"Whether you do some buskers or something like that, you have to kind of complete the package, whatever that is. That takes a plan," Earle said.

He noted the street being open to pedestrians does hurt some businesses.

"You've got lots of businesses that if the crowd goes to the centre, it hurts us. And that's really a conundrum."

Carlotta Cantini, owner of Il Gelato di Carlotta, said she thinks there needs to be more messaging to tell people the businesses are open and inform people that the closure is to promote a safe environment.

She was particularly upset by signage saying the road was closed for an emergency.

"Are you kidding me? It's a joke," she said. "I had some friends of mine that said, 'We were thinking that everybody was closed, so we turned the car and we left.' So, it's very, very scary, a town message like this."

Dickson also said he thinks the signage was an "oversight" by the town.

"I'll give them the benefit of the doubt there," he said.

Earle said he thinks people have been enjoying the concept of the closure and the social-distancing aspect.

"Anytime you increase space in this environment, you're going to improve the distancing and that sort of thing. And that's a good thing. I mean, that's a health and safety issue right now. That's really appropriate. But any plan needs to be conceived and then detailed against all of its audiences, including, and most importantly, the customer."

He said details need more thought because people coming to NOTL have other options for day trips.

RIDDLE ME THIS

I'm precious. Furthermore, I'm half Fear and two thirds ironic. What am I?

I get sharper the more you use me. What am I?

Answer: Your brain/mind/wit

Answered first by: Kieran Jones

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Gary Davis, Margaret Garaughty, Howard Jones, Ross Robinson, Janice Hall, Susan Hamilton, Sylvia Wiens, Sheila Meloche, Christine Yakymishen, Margie Enns, Mark Turasz, Susan McKay

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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Image Detail: Lauren Stewart Harris, Study for "In the Ward 1, City Pairings", 1918. Collection of Samuel E. Weir ©RiverBrink Art Museum
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need more time

Anita Bates, manager of Tyme Candy Shoppe, said she's in favour of opening the street to pedestrians. "I love the road closure," she said. "Except the sign scared some people away." She said she isn't sure if the closure had an impact on her business, though. "It's hard to say, because since we reopened, every week it's a little bit busier, but I'm not sure if it's just the closure. But there seems to be a lot more people outside when I look out," she said. John Paraskevopoulos, owner of Gyros on the street, said he doesn't think there are enough people on the streets to justify a closure. "It defeats the purpose," he said, noting that he'd prefer to see parking spaces closed instead of street traffic. "He said he's seen less business during the closure hours, partly because people aren't on the sidewalks much and partly because cars seem to be avoiding the street. "They seem to avoid it because the parking is limited as well," he said. "When you have people

on the sidewalk, they see your business, they smell the food, they see the menu. Everybody has their menus outside. They're looking, they come in. When they walk in the middle of the road, they lose that effect." Kim Gauld, owner of Sunset Grill, was on the street passing out surveys to see how the closure has affected businesses. She said so far businesses are saying they haven't seen a bump in sales. "I feel like they struggled with the shutdown yesterday with the wrong signage up," she said. "The parking hasn't been advertised as well as it could, so it's made it a lot more confusing. And unfortunately, most of the retailers I'm talking to haven't found that it's increased their sales." She said she was hoping for more from the closure and suggested the town could do a marketing campaign to explain that the street is open to visitors. The closure has been effective in terms of social distancing, she said, but business-wise it hasn't had much of an effect on Sunset Grill either.

A few visitors like new-look Queen Street

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Not everyone is happy about Queen Street being converted to a pedestrian mall, but some residents and visitors are loving it.

NOTL resident Nancy Drope, who was out riding her bike down the closed street Saturday, said the closure reminds her of how Niagara-on-the-Lake was when she grew up.

"Considering I grew up here in the '60s, this is like going home," Drope said.

With no cars on the street, "This is what it was like when I grew up, so I'm loving it."

She said with the street closed to traffic and open for people to walk, it's easier to social distance.

"(People) can create their own space, and boundaries are important, especially with what's going on in the world."

Nikki and Jason Green, who were visiting from Port Credit with their two daughters for the first time down since the COVID shutdown, said they stayed longer on the street because it was closed off.

"I feel comfortable walk-



Nancy Drope cycles on Queen Street. JESSICA MAXWELL

ing up and down here," Nikki said.

"I didn't really anticipate that we'd spend much time here and maybe because it's quieter when the street's closed, then it's easier to do that — it's safer."

Jason, however, said the street "loses a bit of the vibe because it is quieter, but it is nice to be able to come and enjoy it safely, that's the priority."

NOTL resident Ashley Gordon said she's also enjoying the shutdown.

"I think it's a wonderful idea because it's Niagara-on-the-Lake and it's a tourist town, so I think the more tourist things the better," Gordon said.

Lorna Henderson, another NOTL resident, said she would be avoiding the street and that she generally tries to avoid downtown during busy times

regardless of the closure. "I avoid it when the town is full of tourists anyway. I try to usually come at off times," she said.

She said the closure is "kind of weird" and was more concerned about people not wearing masks.

"It pisses me off that people are not wearing masks. Period. I have to work really hard not to let people know that I think it's really inconsiderate," Henderson said.

"Especially when you find people standing around smoking and you're wearing a mask. It's just really, really unpleasant."

Darlene Shiels and Diane Pare were visiting from Toronto and have visited NOTL before.

Shiels said the street being shut down is "perfect. They should do that every weekend."

Pare said the street is less crowded with no traffic. "It just makes it more open and you can see more," she said.

"And people enjoy it. I think it's perfect," she added, noting that several areas in Toronto shut down streets on weekends.

"I think it's less stressful, it's more relaxing." Stephen from Toronto,

who wouldn't provide his last name, was out biking.

He said the closure is "fantastic."

"It's a great idea. It gives you tons of access, especially in this COVID world where you can distance," he said.

He added he likes not having to worry about cars.

"You can cross the street when you want to and the only downside is a little bit of parking is lost here during the closure."


He did say the street looked less busy than usual.

"There's actually less people here than I thought there'd be," he said, "But it probably just looks less because there's more space than usual. The sidewalks are usually pretty packed on a Saturday."

On the other end of the spectrum, some residents are unhappy with the closure.

One of those residents, Bruce Gitelman, who lives near Queen Street, has started a group to advocate for the street to be opened up again and a change to how NOTL approaches tourism.

Read more about Gitelman's efforts on Page 3.

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GAMES



Have some fun

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

Across

- 1. U.S. space group (1,1,1,1)
- 3. Court game (10)
- 10. Consequently (9)
- 11. Female sovereign (5)
- 12. Survive (7)
- 13. Bowling pin (7)
- 14. Skin eruption (4)
- 15. Pachyderms (9)
- 19. Sue (9)
- 21. German Mrs (4)
- 24. Passage (7)
- 27. Surrey commuter village (7)
- 28. Trembling poplar (5)
- 29. Mouth organ (9)
- 30. Science of numbers (10)
- 31. Undiluted (4)

Down

- 1. Belonging to a country (8)
- 2. Enticement (9)
- 4. Papal (9)
- 5. Leg joints (5)
- 6. Mexican liquor (7)
- 7. Proficient (5)
- 8. Beam over a door (6)
- 9. Started (5)
- 16. Medley (3-6)
- 17. Frighten, usually by violence (9)
- 18. Take away (8)
- 20. Squeeze together (7)
- 22. Las Vegas setting (6)
- 23. Racecourse (5)
- 25. Island in the Bay of Naples (5)
- 26. Resort lake in both California and 22 down (5)

Crossword Puzzle


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Last issue's answers

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10 +/- ACRES




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MLS ID #30818834

NEW




8 ACRES LAKESHORE ROAD, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE - \$2,150,000
MLS ID # 30811220

NEW




25 ANNMARIE DRIVE, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE - \$799,000
MLS ID #30817747

NEW




121 REGENT STREET, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE - \$2,150,000
MLS ID #30818056




765 LAKESHORE ROAD, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE - \$1,725,000
MLS ID #30754879


15 +/- ACRES




60 NIAGARA STREET, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE - \$1,689,000
MLS ID # 30801773



2215 FOUR MILE CREEK ROAD, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE - \$774,900
MLS ID # 30800891




8 BIANCA DRIVE, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE - \$885,000
MLS ID # 30811220



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Dr. Brown: Science and Noble series return to NOTL library – **virtually**



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

Dr. William Brown
Special to The Lake Report

Established programs at the Niagara-on-the-Lake library, such as Infohealth and the Nobel series, won't be the same this fall because of the need for social distancing.

That means no face-to-face meetings in the library or community centre until we have an effective, widely available vaccine to stop COVID-19 in its tracks.

However, in the face of this pandemic, it was amazing how quickly businesses, families

and teachers from primary schools to universities quickly pivoted to the internet to fill in the gaps.

Enter Zoom – the latest user-friendly program for bringing people together electronically. In this pandemic, Zoom soon transformed how we meet with colleagues, friends and families and in the process, many became familiar with how Zoom works.

That makes Zoom an attractive tool for continuing our signature programs in a virtual room rather than at the library. And if you're not yet familiar with Zoom, the library stands ready to help you get started.

Two programs are planned for the fall. The first is a six-week program focusing on the period in physics between 1900 and 1930 – the Camelot era in physics.

In no other time in human history have we learned so much about the universe writ large and the universe of the tiny – the nucleus, subatomic particles and forces. Before 1900, some senior scientists continued to question

whether atoms actually existed. The electron had been discovered but that was it.

However, over the next three decades the structure of the atom was worked out – the nucleus largely by Ernest Rutherford, a New Zealander working at McGill, Manchester and Cambridge universities, and James Chadwick, his Cambridge colleague.

And the riddle of the arrangement of the orbiting electrons was sorted out by Niels Bohr before and during his time with Rutherford, who befriended and encouraged him, after which time Bohr returned to Denmark to establish his justly famous Copenhagen Institute for Theoretical Physics.

To this new quantum world, Albert Einstein, working as a patent clerk in Switzerland, made two signature contributions in 1905, one to do with the photoelectric effect (which incidentally won him a Nobel prize) and the other on the quantum nature of light.

But it was his work on the relativistic nature of time in 1905 (special relativity) to which he added gravity in 1915 (general relativity), which upended Isaac Newton's view of the universe and gravity that made Einstein the most celebrated scientist of his day and ours.

Evidence based on his equations for general relativity and later observations by the Hubble space telescope revealed that the universe was expanding and therefore must have started with something incredibly small and dense – evidence for which led to the Big Bang hypothesis.

Black holes produced by the collapse of stars and gravitational waves created in space-time by the collision of massive objects such as two black holes or a pair of neutron stars were also products of Einstein's work on relativity.

In those heady days, with a few exceptions, physics was a largely European affair – a close-knit group who knew one another well and as

much as they argued and debated matters related to physics, especially the new field of quantum physics, they respected each other and often became very close friends.

That was especially true of Bohr and Einstein, whose disparate views on the quantum world were never reconciled in their lifetimes. Through the lives of these men and women we learned that differing world views, even strongly held, are not reasons for enmity but respect and that's a theme worth remembering in these fact-free, spun days.

The second six-week program highlights the 2020 Nobel prizes, beginning with physics, then chemistry, medicine (physiology), economics, the peace prize and finally the literature award.

This program has been a winner with the public in NOTL in the last two years and is an opportunity to learn about some of the best in science and the arts.

This year we welcome back David Elkins to cover the economics and

peace prizes, and Valmai Elkins for once more taking on the challenge of the literature prize.

Contact the library for times and help with Zoom.

* I don't usually include references but here are a few gems, especially Rovelli's and Lightman's short books, written by excellent writers and physicists: Carlo Rovelli (2014), "Seven Brief Lessons on Physics," Penguin Random House; Carlo Rovelli (2018), "The Order of Time," Riverhead Books; Allan Lightman (2018), "Searching for Stars on an Island in Maine," Pantheon Books; Allan Lightman (2012), "The Accidental Universe," Vintage Books; Manjit Kumar (2008), "Quantum: Einstein, Bohr and the Great Debate About the Nature of Reality," W. W. Norton & Company; C.P. Snow (1981), "The Physicists: A Generation that Changed the World," Little, Brown and Company; Brian Greene (2020), "Until the End of Time," Alfred A. Knopf.

Ghost Walks start again for season with **social distancing**

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's famous Ghost Walks are up and running again, offering a spooky time in "Canada's most haunted town."

Daniel Cumerlato, owner of Ghost Walks, said it's nice to be back in business.

"I'm definitely relieved that the shop is back open and the tours are going. However, it's, of course, still a struggle to get people to come out and take the tour," he said Tuesday.

It's understandable that people are worried to go out, but that the tours are taking every precaution to keep guests safe, he said.

"We keep the tours very

small within the gathering limits and we're doing correct social distancing and offering masks for sale, hand sanitizer and all that stuff," he said.

"But I think people are still a little hesitant to do touristy things."

He said masks are not mandatory, since it's outside and distancing is easy, but he does "highly recommend" wearing one.

The groups are currently limited to 10 people.

He said so far people have been abiding by the rules.

David Green, a local comedian and one of the tour's hosts, took his first group out for the season on Sunday.

"'Twas fun getting back in the saddle," said Green, who plays a character called Sir Bob during the tours.

"It was a private walk with a group who have been on my walk, no joke, over 12 times over the years – ghost groupies – so it was fun to hang with them."

He said the route has changed a bit to help with social distancing.

"We had a blast together and they all live together so (they) didn't need to distance but standard procedure for the tours for now is social distancing."

He said one thing that wasn't so nice was the number of discarded masks

"littering the streets."

Green provides some background information on Sir Bob.

"When I first started 10 years ago my first few groups chose it as a joke and it just stuck. Guests from my first year gifted me my walking stick that I still use to this day," he said.

"Each guide has a unique style and personality but Sir Bob is definitely the joker of the group – although I try to maintain the spooky vibe and just use jokes at the beginning and end of each stop."

Cumerlato said the tours will be resuming every night in July with at least one group going out.



Tour guide David Green as Sir Bob. SUPPLIED

He said the tours are operating with a limited crew.

A few of his tour guides who are "highly susceptible" to COVID haven't returned yet, "but most of the team has come back."

Business has been slower than usual, but he's confident things will pick up.

"It's just a matter of the town itself being so quiet right now and not a lot of bookings coming in."



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Woman power: New NOTL firefighter tells interested women to just 'go for it'

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

For Rebecca van der Zalm, being a firefighter was not something that was on her radar for most of her life.

She didn't dream of fighting fires as a kid and it wasn't her life ambition.

But last week van der Zalm, 26, was given her black helmet, along with 14 other new Niagara-on-the-Lake volunteer firefighters, making her a full-fledged member of the team.

It's a big change of pace from her regular job as a pharmacy assistant at Simpson's Pharmacy, she says.

"It's exciting. It's definitely something new. It's not something that I, when I was growing up, I thought to myself that I would want to get into. But over the past few years, I really thought about it. And I just kind of bit the bullet ... and filled out the application and here we are."

She says she decided to try out after being encouraged by friends and family involved with the fire department.

"My cousin Matthew is in the fire department, I have a few friends, close friends, in the fire department and they kind of said, like, just go for it cuz I was hemming and hawing the past few years."

She was supposed to have graduated sooner, but as with most of the world, COVID put a wrench in those plans.

"The training was definitely long — COVID took its toll on us, especially in the end there. We would have been done a little bit sooner if COVID didn't happen, but we had to, obviously, we had to go with the flow of things."

She says part of the reason she became a firefighter is because she felt she was fit enough for the job, as well as having a passion for being involved in the community.

"I'm really athletic, I play a lot of sports, I'm really involved in the community," she said.

She's volunteered as a coach for the NOTL Skat-



Rebecca van der Zalm is one of 15 new NOTL firefighters. RICHARD HARLEY

ing Club, helped at Red Roof Retreat, played soccer, baseball and rugby locally, and continued rugby in Stoney Creek.

But what really pushed her was hearing about being a firefighter from her friends, especially Dylan Skubel, who is also a NOTL firefighter.

"I knew that it was more of a team atmosphere. It's not like every man by themselves type of thing."

She's one of five women among the new graduates. It was "really exciting" to see four other women in the group with her, she says.

"It was nice to look around and see that there were four other women there with me and I'm sure they felt the same way."

"There were five of us in our recruit class this year. When I walked in the door and saw that there were so many women, because it's kind of intimidating — you don't like to admit it, but it's definitely kind of intimidating to walk through a room full of men and try and do what they're doing."

She said the women didn't group together most times, but she was proud to be a part.

"I liked it. It really showed that we're capable of a lot."

She said while it didn't feel like an "obstacle" to overcome, strength is a big factor in being a firefighter, and as a woman it is a challenge to prove yourself.

"Obviously strength is a big one because men are naturally stronger than women," she says.

"Just being a female ...

you really have to show that you are capable of doing stuff that men, I'd say, would typically say you can't do or think that you wouldn't be able to do as well. And it's not even doing it like the same way as them. Sometimes you just have to find a way that works for you, that still gets the job done."

She said during training the recruits were split into platoons and the men on the platoons encouraged her.

"It was really nice that like the guys didn't just push us aside and say they were gonna do it," she said.

"They were like cheering us on and they were willing to help us. If we couldn't lift a tool as high as them, there was no doubt they would help us."

"And from my personal experience, they were really willing to help me and eager to cheer me on. And if I was nervous about something, they would help talk me through it."

When asked how she feels, now being an inspiration to other women who want to become firefighters, she said she'd never really thought about it that way.

"I guess, in a way, yeah, I think I would be," she says.

"Maddie Skubel was kind of an inspiration to me to come into the fire department. I've known her, grown up with her. She's a few years younger than me, but last year I noticed that she was part of the fire department. And I was like, 'Oh, well, like, I can do that.' I guess people might be able to look at me and be like, 'Oh, if she can do it, then maybe I can do it too'

type of thing."

Her advice to other women considering becoming a firefighter is, "Go for it."

"And if you're scared, don't even hesitate, cause you learn, right? I knew nothing coming into the fire department, like absolutely nothing — I couldn't even build a fire in my fireplace. It was so bad, but I've learned so much," she said.

"You learn. That's the whole point of the recruit class, right? So if you think that you want to do it and you want to do it to help people and maybe grow as a person or be part of a family, everyone is so welcoming. And you will learn a lot about yourself."

As of July 1, van der Zalm can go to all fire calls and can now fight fires inside of buildings. During training, she was able to help fight fires from outside.

"We have our black helmets now, which means we are interior firefighters, which means that we can do everything. It's pretty exciting," she says.

She missed the helmet ceremony last week because she was away at her family cottage, so she was presented with her helmet Monday.

"A bunch of my recruit classmates have already been going on calls this week."

She's now working out of Station 5 in the Glendale area and she's proud of herself for following through.

"Even if you think you can't do something, you can always surprise yourself. Follow your dreams."

Golf: Townley, Derbyshire sizzle with superb 34s

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Brodie Townley and Mark Derbyshire lit up the course and each shot 2-under par 34 to win low gross in the NOTL Golf Club men's night competition last Thursday.

Townley and Derbyshire also shared first place with John Read in the modified Stableford scoring format,

accumulating 22 points each.

Mike Eagen, Ross Smith and John Sobil were runners-up with 21 points.

Gross skins for birdies went to Townley (#1), Derbyshire (#6) and Paul Dickson (#8). They won \$27 each.

No one took home the \$540 net skins pot, so that prize will be worth \$720 this week.

Barrie man, 23, arrested for NOTL break and enter

The Lake Report

A man from Barrie has been charged in relation to a Niagara-on-the-Lake break and enter.

The break-in took place in the area of Stewart Road and Niagara Stone Road on Canada Day, between 4 and 9 p.m., police said in a media release.

Once inside, the man stole more than \$5,000 in jewelry, art and electronics.

Police arrested Ari

Hawla, 23, in Barrie on July 5 and were able to locate items in the residence linked to the home that had been broken into.

Hawla is charged with breaking and entering and committing theft over \$5,000 and possession of property obtained by theft.

Anyone with information is asked contact police by calling 905-688-4111, ext. 2200.

Full moon fever



Top: A shot of the full moon through the trees. ROB LAMOND
Bottom: Another full moon shot. RICHARD HARLEY




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Diana Donnelly as Margy LaMont in past Shaw production of Sex. DAVID COOPER

Shaw cancels August shows, but hopes to salvage some performances in fall

Any resumption of live theatre will mean audience members must wear masks, CEO says

Kevin MacLean
Managing Editor

Niagara's live theatre season, which has been plagued by upheaval due to COVID-19, received yet more bad news this week when the Shaw Festival pulled the plug on all of its planned August performances.

The decision, which follows the extension of the province's emergency orders and continuation of states of emergency in Niagara-on-the-Lake and across Ontario, puts the festival one step closer to losing the entire season, an unprecedented situation.

Despite that, Shaw chief executive Tim Jennings remains optimistic that something can be salvaged, with performances of some kind in September and October, leading up to the popular pre-Christmas season.

He just doesn't know exactly what any of those performances might look like. It could mean some outdoor shows, pop-up performances around town or small-scale concerts. Or even partly-filled theatres.

Everything depends on COVID-19 cases continuing to drop and the province giving the entertainment industry the go-ahead.

Whatever happens, if it happens, live theatre will look much different than in the past. And audience members will all be wearing masks, he said.

"We're in conversations with the government and our insurers about what would be allowed," Jen-

nings said in an interview Tuesday.

"We just have to get the numbers down to the point where it makes sense to be able to try things and I can't imagine any version of intentional gatherings that doesn't require face coverings for the audience," he said.

Working 12 hours a day and six to seven days a week, Jennings has been in regular contact with senior provincial officials and cabinet ministers to push the case for reopening live theatre in some form.

"Some of them are convinced we'll be able to try some things in the fall, which is why we're still trying to figure out what to do. There are certainly folks who feel strongly that outdoor things might be easily allowed and that would probably be the early fall at this point," Jennings said.

He is a bit confused about why churches are allowed to open at 30 per cent capacity and airlines are permitted to fly with some separation between passengers, but live theatre has not yet been given the green light.

"If you can have 300 people in a plane for four hours, why can't you have 100 people in a 300-seat theatre, for instance," Jennings said. "Why are those different" than live theatre, he asked.

He's tried without success to get an answer to that, he said.

"Right now I think the biggest answer to that question is that the feel-

ing is that air travel needs this kind of support more than theatre does, but I think that's about lobbying and I think it's about showing safety protocols in ways that they're seeing as 'OK, this is necessary to every person who needs to travel,'" he said.

But live theatre needs support, too, and is prepared to ensure everyone is safe, he said.

"I get that they're focused on the parts of the economy that are in some ways, easiest to reopen right now because that makes sense for a larger group," he said.

"But at some point, they're going to have to think about the entertainment economy, which has tens of billions of dollars of money coming into the province that isn't going to be happening until something's allowed to restart."

Jennings noted contact tracing is not a problem at the Shaw. Patrons will be asked screening questions, but once they're inside the Shaw's buildings, "We know not only exactly who's sitting there, but we have cameras in the lobbies and things that would allow us to track movement."

However, the festival doesn't even have clearance to try that outside yet, he noted.

NOTL Lord Mayor Betty Disero said she has been "lobbying with everyone who will listen in upper levels of government that the Shaw is better equipped, given that the right protocols are put in place (masks,

sanitizer and shields), to help with contact tracing."

"They know exactly where each ticket holder is coming from, what their address and phone number is, who sat six feet away from them, when they attended the performance, more readily than any other community space," Disero told The Lake Report.

Her only concern is if the Shaw is allowed to open, "Will the people come? The messaging and the advertising must be very clear, concise and direct about how safe it really is. And, with the Shaw, I have every confidence."

Jennings, too, is confident that, with all the proper precautions in place, people will be "excited" to come back, whether it's to sit on a lawn for an outdoor performance, or in a sparsely-filled theatre.

He understands how important the Shaw is to NOTL's economy and how the festival's patrons could help boost area businesses.

So, among many scenarios, the festival is "trying to figure out if we could do some kind of much reduced fall-winter season to help the town out and to try to figure out how to move forward from here."

However, no matter what happens, he also doesn't foresee things returning to normal – whatever that will be – any time soon.

"I don't think we're going to get back up to normal until at least next summer and probably later than that, depending on what happens with next summer."

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Top left: Cameron, Jordan, Gabe and Emma Laidlaw spend the afternoon at the farm. Top right: Lizzie holds a baby quail. Right middle: The goats on the farm are particularly energetic. This one posed for a photo. Bottom row: The farm llama, one of the goats stands on Randy's back, chickens roam freely. PHOTOS BY RICHARD HARLEY AND JESSICA MAXWELL

Falling in love with farm life

For Lakeit, farm is extension of lifelong love of animals

Continued from Front Page

tours per week, according to Lakeit.

"On Canada Day, we had some posters printed up now with all the list of animals and picture of animals on it," he said. "She went and put a few around town and then right away that day we had four tours."

The couple said the barnyard tours have seen a lot of local support.

"It's actually been more locals driving by," he said. "We've got signs out around town."

"When they see '400 animals' (they think) I've never seen animals there, other than chickens."

"And the neighbours have been really supportive,

like they buy the eggs and they're always saying how appreciative they are that we're doing this," Salkauskis said.

"Usually people are amazed and as soon as we go out in the back by the fancy chickens, then show them the pigs, roosters, alpacas and the goats, they say, 'Oh, well it's really nice you've got a lot of animals here' and we say well there's still two more rooms to show," Lakeit said.

Although the farm has grown to have nearly 500 animals, things started small.

"I had my horse, a few chickens and some guinea hens that I already bought off Kijiji to make sure we had them," Lakeit said.

"Almost all the baby animals we have here have been hatched from our duck eggs, our goose eggs, our guinea hen eggs, our chicken eggs," he said.

"Everything else we just looked on Kijiji, and as things came up and I'd say, 'Hey Lizzie, this sounds neat, here's a four-horned ram, an endangered species.'"

"There's hundreds of animals for sale there," he said.

Lakeit said there are plans to continue expanding thanks to the size of the farm.

"We'll probably be building a new pole barn," Lakeit said. "Something long and narrow, so the people can stay in the

shade and see the animals, even on the hot days, and they won't have to rush."

"We do plan on getting more animals and different kinds of animals," Lakeit said.

"With the chickens and stuff it's good to keep them in individual pens. The purebred ones that are just for eggs, so you can keep them pure, otherwise they breed different varieties and stuff."

Lakeit wants people in the community to know, "They should all come out."

On visitor told them, "I just realized this is the first time I'm seeing an animal up close, like a cow or a chicken," Salkauskis said.

"Every group seems to be

fun and most of the people in general are coming because they are animal lovers," Lakeit said.

"They're looking to come and see animals and enjoy them, so it's nice to see other people enjoy them, too."

"I guess we've touched each other so deeply that it seems to have spilled over onto the farm with all the animals and it just spills onto the people that come here," Salkauskis said. "I don't know how to say it, it's just love."

On the farm the couple has something new happening every day.

"Something every day is either being born, or something starting to lay eggs that

wasn't," Lakeit said. "It's always changing every day."

"And we're both doing it together and everything, even though Randy does 99 per cent of the actual stuff," Salkauskis said.

"I couldn't do it all without Lizzie," Lakeit said.

"Plus, Lizzie hasn't been around animals as much as I have, being an animal guy all my life," Lakeit said. "I've been a dog breeder for 26 years."

"So, everything is so exciting to her and she gets so excited to help drive me."

The couple plans to get married at the end of the summer. They'll celebrate with a big party on the farm with friends and family once it is safe to do so.

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Gail Kerr, Niagara Pumphouse office manager, sits outside of the newly-renovated arts centre. JESSICA MAXWELL

Newly-renovated Pumphouse opens to summer visitors

Jessica Maxwell
The Lake Report

Doors at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre have been closed to visitors since the beginning of 2019, but they are almost ready to be reopened.

The Pumphouse is ready to welcome visitors back for a renovation reopening tour and first art exhibitions of the year on Aug. 2, as a fundraising effort for the arts centre.

Tours can be reserved by calling the centre or booking on the website.

"We're feeling excited, we're ready," said office manager Gail Kerr.

"We're doing many things different now."

"It is our major fundraiser this year and so we're hoping people are going to be generous. If they have a minimum donation of \$25, they will get a charitable tax receipt and their name will be entered into a door prize," she said.

The prize is 12 bottles of wine "generously supplied by our board members."

To ensure safety for guests and volunteers, time slots for tours are spaced 30 minutes apart. Separating tours and controlling the number of people in the building allows for proper physical distancing of guests.

The Pumphouse's waterfront space will also be available for guests to bring their own picnics to enjoy before or after their tour, with physically distanced tables provided.

"There will be a group

of volunteers at the entry door and at the exit door controlling the number of people in the building. That's why the assigned time slots are important," Kerr said.

"We'll be taking everybody's name at the door even if there are some drop-ins," she said.

"We want people to register. If you're a drop-in you might have to wait to get in because we are going to control the number of people in the building."

The renovation tour will include an exhibit that features Beverly Barber, a mixed media artist who won first place in the 2019 Walker Industries Art Competition. She will be in the gallery from 2 to 4 p.m. on Aug. 2.

As well, there will be an exhibit by Niki Kingsmill, an artist who led online painting classes for the Pumphouse during the COVID-19 shutdown.

After being closed for six months, Kerr said the arts centre is looking forward to being open and providing resources for the community again.

"It provides art classes and information and opportunity to create art, but it also provides a lot of opportunity for socialization."

"There's a lot of our members and patrons that really rely on that component as part of their socialization, so that component has been really missing for them. Now we're anxious to give it back to them."

Pickleball courts get new windscreens

Vince Serratore
Special to The Lake Report

Pickleball players at the Virgil Sports Park courts won't be blowin' in the wind as often now, thanks to \$5,000 windscreens that club members purchased and installed at the community facility.

The windscreens have a two-year history.

First came a request by the club to the town in 2018, with the insightful early support from then-Coun. Betty Disero, to convert the aging and little used tennis courts at the Virgil Sports Park into a state-of-the-art pickleball facility.

After the town agreed to convert the courts, they were rebuilt in 2019 and the NOTL Pickleball Club grew its membership from 60 members to 270 members last year.

The increase in membership gave the club more money from fees and other activities so the club decided



Vince Serratore on the ladder. SUPPLIED

to incorporate into a non-profit club and use some of its money to improve the playing conditions at the outdoor courts. In September 2019, at the club's first annual general meeting, members agreed to install windscreens to help with the Niagara winds we all have experienced and provide an opportunity for the club to give something back to the community.

In order to protect the club's asset (the windscreens) and the town's asset (the courts) we ap-

proached Council in early 2020 with the help of our ongoing strong partnership with parks and recreation personnel to request that the public courts be designated as community courts, which would allow the NOTL Pickleball Club to help the town manage and protect the courts.

The community designation allowed the town to install gates with a coded keypad for access and the NOTL Pickleball Club would contribute \$1,500 to the cost of the new gates

and manage the code on behalf of the town. The club would also purchase and install windscreens (at a cost of \$5,000) once the gates were installed.

The town agreed and now the gates and the windscreens have been erected.

It should be noted that the courts are always available to the public and the code to access the courts is published on our web page at www.notlpickleball.ca.

Due to COVID-19, club play has not yet resumed, however the courts are open for all to use as long as players are following all government guidelines. Club members also follow guidelines set by Pickleball Ontario.

We recommend that anyone using the courts follow the guidelines, play safe and, if you are uncomfortable with anything, just don't play.

Vince Serratore is vice-president of the NOTL Pickleball Club.

Family of CAO rescues couple from river

Continued from Front Page

my dad was asking someone all these questions like, 'Are you OK? Are you with someone? Are you injured? Is everything all right?' And the girl was crying and she was really scared."

The woman was trying to swim back to the Youngstown marina.

"But that would have taken her all night," Ava said. "So my dad put her into the boat. We're just telling her, 'It's OK. You're safe now,' 'cause she was bawling her eyes out. She was really scared."

It was about 6:30 p.m. when it happened, Sheldon said, and the woman said she had been swimming for 45 minutes to an hour.

"If someone didn't see her in the next hour or two, she would have been out there all night. She would have had hypothermia, for sure. It probably would have killed her. And the guy in the jet ski had no cellphone, no way of contacting the shore."

She was wearing a life-jacket, but it was black.

"She had a lifejacket on, which we're really thankful she did because she said she would have drowned if she didn't. She wasn't a very good swimmer. But we wanted to let everyone know that she was wearing a black life jacket. And that would be really hard to see if it were to get dark."

After making sure the woman was safe, they went to the jet ski, where her boyfriend was.

"We pulled up and we threw a rope to him and tied it up," Ava said. "And the boyfriend was explaining that was his first time on a jet ski and it was one of his buddies' and he didn't know how to use it. And so my dad hopped on the jet ski to try to get the safety cord back in."

She said on the boat they could smell alcohol on the couple's breath and suspect it could have played a part in the incident.

"And the boyfriend was

like holding her and I think that the boyfriend felt guilty that he let her swim that far herself," Zoe said.

"I don't think people appreciate the power of the water force coming out of the Niagara River, that you're not swimming against it at all because the current is so strong and it goes a long way and trying to swim across the river at the mouth, to get back to shore, you can't do it," Sheldon said.

Shortly after they rescued the couple, the friend who owned the jet ski showed up and towed it back.

The Randalls took the couple to the boat club in Youngstown, after the border patrol stopped them to ask a lot of questions and said they could bring her to the dock.

Sheldon said the experience helped to teach Ava and Zoe how important water safety is.

He said their first mistake was leaving the water-

craft, Sheldon said.

"Always make sure you have a lifejacket on because without the lifejacket she would probably not have made it," Ava said.

"And make sure you don't drive or use machinery while intoxicated," Zoe added.

"They both didn't know how to put a safety cord in, which is one of the most important parts. It's just something you should know and you should have these little kits called an orange bucket. It's got a flashlight, a rope, a whistle, all kinds of things that could have helped them in that situation. Or at least a paddle or something. There's one that folds up — especially on a jet ski."

And if possible, wear a bright-coloured lifejacket that can be seen with light at night.

Ava said she was proud of her dad and surprised at how fast he acted.

"It's just part of the boating procedure," Sheldon said.



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