



## Allied against racism



Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Yvonne Bredow speaks out against the racism she's felt in town. An anti-racism rally at Voices of Freedom Park and march through Old Town attracted about 400 people last Friday. RICHARD HARLEY

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Would a white person be willing to trade places with someone who is black?

That was a question posed to the crowd at an anti-racism rally in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Friday.

Not one white person raised their hand, making a clear point to the crowd: racism and prejudice is alive, everyone knows it and nobody else would want to experience it.

About 400 people, many from outside of NOTL,

showed up to support the rally, during which two black women living in town spoke out about their own experiences with racism.

Yvonne Bredow, a Queenston resident, asked the tough question, and said she'd like every white person to give it some thought.

"You know what's happening out there. You don't want it for you. Why are you so willing to accept it for others and let it happen? That is your food for thought," she said.

She said in her experience she feels racism regularly.

"My days consist of 'What are you? How do you get your perm so tight? Can I touch your hair? Are you wearing contacts? You know, if you grew your hair longer and straightened it, you could pass for white.' And the last one, 'Why in the world would you tell anybody that you're black? This is what I hear daily in different ways, forms and shapes,'" she told the crowd.

She said she's been called names and even fired from her place of work for speaking out against racism.

"These things leave scars

on my heart — scars that don't heal. Scars callous and they stay with you for a very long time," she said.

"You do not refer to me as buckwheat. I'm not a coon, and I'm not the N word either. I am a person, I am me."

She said she's tired of hearing people say they can't believe racism is happening.

"I'm really tired of hearing 'I'm shocked. I can't believe this. I had no idea,'" she said.

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Beamsville farmer Bill George is the chair of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. SOURCED

## Report accuses farmers of exploiting migrant workers

Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

A new report on conditions faced by seasonal workers alleges a shocking litany of problems on farms.

The report, "Unheeded Warnings: COVID-19 & Migrant Workers in Canada," was compiled by the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change and alleges violations occurred at farms across Ontario, including Niagara.

Among the complaints:

- \* Federally mandated quarantine wages were not paid or were clawed back.

- \* Overcrowding, making social distancing impossible.

- \* Inadequate access to food and health care.

- \* Lack of essential supplies, cleanliness, cramped quarters, and the presence of animals and pests.

- \* Increased racism from employers, local shops and some community members.

- \* Being forced to work long hours and for weeks

without a day off.

The workers overwhelmingly said lack of permanent resident status in Canada prohibited them from protecting themselves against COVID-19, because of fears of retaliation by employers if they complain about housing conditions, access to health care information, or assert their labour rights, the report by the alliance says.

The national report, released Monday, is based primarily on feedback from migrant workers in Ontario. None of the details have been independently verified and the information in the report is largely anonymous.

It was collected between March 15 and May 15, 2020, via calls to an all-Canada hotline. In all, 180 workers called on behalf of 1,162 workers.

"Because of the nature of surveillance on farms, and the fact that not all workers

*Continued on Page 2*

## NOTL real estate sales jump, strong recovery predicted

Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

After only eight residential homes were sold in April, the Niagara-on-the-Lake real estate market bounced back in a big way in May, with 25 properties changing hands, according to the Niagara Association of Realtors.

It is only a one-month

recovery, but veteran NOTL realtor Chris Bowron says he thinks the trend is going to continue.

As we climb out of the COVID-19 pandemic, there's a "much better vibe" now in the NOTL market, said Bowron, the broker of record and president of Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty.

"I predict that we'll probably see a very busy

sales period leading up to the fall," he said in an interview. His brokerage is already hopping. "I'm full-on right now."

The front window of his Queen Street office displays listings and "two months ago we were looking for pictures to put in the window. Now, we don't have enough space, so inventory is on the way up."

"I've had a lot of people saying, 'We're getting out of Toronto. We don't want to be here any more.' And places like Niagara-on-the-Lake are obvious choices for these people."

As prices firm up, Bowron expects to see more homes come on the market. In April there were only 55

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Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty president Chris Bowron. KEVIN MACLEAN



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# Report accuses farmers of **exploiting** migrant workers

## Workers alliance outlines long list of complaints including unpaid wages, overcrowding and inadequate food

*Continued from Front Page*

have access to local phones with credit or wifi connection, it can be difficult for workers to communicate with people off-farm," the report says. "As a result, individual workers calling on behalf of a group is common practice."

Two migrant farm workers have died from COVID-19 so far and hundreds have been infected at facilities in southern Ontario, including Pioneer Flower Farms in St. Catharines.

Bill George, chair of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, would not comment directly on the alliance's report, noting, "They have an agenda."

However, he emphasized that during the pandemic farms have undergone spot audits by the federal government and workers were interviewed as part of that procedure.

"If there's a case where workers weren't getting paid, then that's breaking employment law and that individual should be charged," said George, a grower in Beamsville.

As well, before any workers were permitted on farms during COVID-19, the facilities were inspected by local health officials, the provincial labour ministry and a federal agency, he said in an interview.

"Nobody wants to see an outbreak at a farm and



Erwin Wiens says "bad actors" in the agriculture industry should be reported. FILE

nobody wants to see any deaths from COVID as well, but obviously the virus isn't discriminating. It does affect everyone in the workplace, whether it be a farm worker or a domestic worker on the farm," so barriers and physical distancing are being maintained, he said.

Erwin Wiens, a farmer and town councillor in Niagara-on-the-Lake, said pandemic protocols remain unchanged, "We're making sure that they are being followed. Personally, I'm taking the time out to follow up with some growers just to make sure that everything's fine, they've got everything they need."

Speaking at a town council meeting Monday night, Wiens emphasized that migrant workers have the

same rights as anyone else living in Canada.

All workers receive information packages upon their arrival, outlining their rights and agencies to contact if there are problems.

"Every worker is being contacted on a daily basis to ensure that they are safe, they are healthy and if anything comes up there is a protocol in place for isolation and medical attention," he told councillors.

If there are some "bad actors" among farmers and they are violating workers rights, Wiens said they need to be reported.

"If anyone is ever aware of any situation, please come forward, so we can keep everybody safe. This is an important issue for the food chain, the workers, the

country and the employer.

The 28-page report by the alliance includes several accusations regarding unnamed farming operators in Niagara, including:

\* A peach and grape farm in Niagara asked over two dozen workers to sign an agreement saying that the pay during the quarantine period was a loan that they would have to pay back. In a separate incident report, 15 workers were only paid for 30 hours for the two-week isolation period (instead of 60 hours). They were given just one pay cheque of \$400 each for two weeks.

\* Sixteen workers at a peach and grape farm in Niagara reported receiving only one loaf of bread and a carton of eggs to feed them all for two days. Another

vineyard in Niagara provided only two small bags of tortillas and a carton of eggs to feed 20 workers.

\* At a flower greenhouse in Niagara, 50 workers who had been in Canada since January were forced to sign an agreement saying they would not leave the bunkhouse – not even for essential items like food and personal supplies. Although many workers did not understand what they were being asked to sign, they were all threatened with termination and deportation if they did not sign.

\* A Mexican worker in Niagara told his employer that he was exhausted from working too many hours at a flower greenhouse and was threatened with deportation under the guise that he was breaking COVID-19 protocols.

\* At a grape and peach farm in Niagara, 12 workers reported putting in 63 hours a week, working seven days straight, for four consecutive weeks while their co-workers were shut out of the country due to travel restrictions. Workers were not given overtime pay.

The report quotes a worker named Delroy saying, "These people are cruel and I'm tired of them. They have no heart for black people, they use us like slaves. I tried getting away from this farm for a very long time and I cannot."

Delroy, a seasonal worker for 23 years, asked for a

transfer to another farm and was refused.

Another seasonal worker, Joseph, is quoted saying, "Our boss will use this virus to enforce rules he wanted already. He's using the pandemic as an excuse to get control over us. He shouldn't be allowed to treat grown men this way."

The report contains 17 recommendations, the major one being that all migrant workers be given permanent resident status immediately upon arriving in Canada.

Other recommendations include:

\* Ensure social distancing and provision of personal protective equipment for all migrant workers, in housing and at work for the entire pandemic.

\* Conduct random, unannounced inspections of workplaces, including housing.

\* Provide immediate income support to all workers at workplaces impacted by COVID-19 outbreaks.

\* That a responsive monitoring and proactive enforcement system be set up, in consultation with migrant worker organizations. It would include swift, unannounced and in-person inspections of employers where complaints have been made, in co-ordination with local public health officials.

\* Create a national housing standard so that workers can live safely and with dignity.

# Niagara region stuck in **Phase 1** reopening

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

While much of the province is opening up to Phase 2 in the COVID-19 pandemic recovery, the Niagara region remains in Phase 1.

That means businesses such as restaurants, bars, most shopping malls and personal care services like hairdressers, spas and tanning salons remain closed under provincial orders.

"It's unfortunate in terms

of the economy, that we're not opening up. However, the premier's first and primary objective throughout this whole process was to keep people healthy and safe," said Lord Mayor Betty Disero.

"So he's got the medical people that he goes to for advice. I don't here in Niagara-on-the-Lake, so I accept the advice that he's getting from his medical officer of health. And when they see fit, we will move

on to Phase 2," she said.

"But until then, it allows us to monitor the impact of what's happening with the openings we have and we continue to prepare for when we do get into Phase 2."

She said when Niagara enters the next phase, NOTL businesses "may be able to open patio space."

"We have to try and figure out what that will look like," she said.

"We now think we have a process that might exist,

but now we have to figure out, OK, what is allowable and what isn't allowable?"

She said the town is continuing to prepare and monitor things for Phase 2.

"So, I'm not upset or jumping up and down. You know, we take it as it comes. Yeah, it's unfortunate that the restaurants can't open and some of the hairdressers for sure, but we just keep moving. We take one step at a time until we get through it."



Niagara-on-the-Lake is still in Phase 1 of reopening. RENE BERTSCHI/SKYVIEW ARTS INC.



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# Sentineal asks province to **protect** carriages

Brittany Carter  
 The Lake Report

After three years as the target of an animal rights group, and Niagara Regional Police responding "countless" times that nothing could be done to stop the protesters, Laura Sentineal of Sentineal Carriages says she sought to effect change at the provincial level.

She says she understood, if anything is to change, she would need to address her concerns through legislation about the safety of her horses and staff due to ongoing protests.

"Well, maybe we've got to do something and get (the police) some tools," she said.

When Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, 2020, was introduced in December, Sentineal said it included some language she thought could potentially protect farms and workers from protesters. The bill aims to increase the likelihood of trespassers on farms being prosecuted and convicted.

But the proposed regulations weren't "solid" enough for Sentineal to feel her farm would be protected, she said.



Laura and Fred Sentineal. FILE/DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

That sent her down the "very long path" of consulting with lawyers, peers and trusted contacts in the community to make a decision about how to move forward.

It was suggested she begin the process by speaking with the provincial committee reviewing the legislation to make her concerns about the bill heard and to address how her business had been targeted by Niagara animal rights activists.

On Monday morning, Sentineal met with the committee via Zoom. She said her objective was to

tell committee members that while she respects the right to protest, her family's experience with the At War for Animals Niagara group went further than peaceful protesting.

"We're looking for a bit of a buffer zone. We just want a little bit of justice."

Her initial address was a "very honest, personal" account of what the last few years have been like from her perspective.

"We have lots of support and people have been wonderful. But as of right now, there's nothing anybody can

do. So, the direction I went with was basically asking (the committee) to consider our situation as the bill moves forward."

She wants to be able to send her horses and carriages, staff and guests for rides and for them to "feel a sense of safety and security that they haven't felt for three years."

And while she said she doesn't know what will happen next, she was "cautiously optimistic" that the bill may be updated to include protection for farms in similar situations to hers.

# Animal rights group says formal protests are **over**

Brittany Carter  
 The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's resident horse-drawn carriage activists announced the end of any "official involvement" in the NOTL campaign via social media Tuesday.

That means while action may continue in the fight against the carriages, any protests or planned events will be done without the leadership of At War for Animals Niagara, spokesperson Adam Stirr said during a phone interview.

He said he was feeling a lot of pressure from the community to "push harder" with his protesting tactics, but that wasn't something he was prepared to do. It was time for him to take a step back from leading the charge, he said, which

will allow room for protests to possibly move in a new direction.

"There isn't going to be any kind of leaders or central organization. There won't be really any one group that can be singled out as running the protest. It's kind of going to be a decentralized collective of individuals," he said.

Jennifer Jones-Butski, a spokesperson for the Locals for Carriages opposition group, said, while the reason for the announcement could be interpreted in many different ways, she thinks it might have to do with Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act.

She said she believes the group posted its withdrawal in NOTL because "they know Bill 156 is inevitable."

"They know Laura (Sentineal) spoke to the bill, and they know that means the carriages very likely could get legislative protection," she said.

If the carriages do not get more protection through the bill, she said it could also mean the carriages could become a larger target, she said.

"I honestly don't blame him for wanting to take a step back and advising everyone that they're liable for themselves at this stage in the game. There are a lot of very angry, radical people out there," Jones-Butski said.

Stirr said At War for Animals Niagara will remain intact, but its role will shift toward documenting and recording protests and events as they're happening.

"We're going to transition into more of a media outlet for animal rights stuff in the region. So, we're going to be covering different events from an animal rights perspective," he said.

But he said he wasn't sure the carriage supporters could count this as a win yet.

"I think it might be a little premature to start calling this a win. They might want to see what moves in after us. They might find themselves begging for us to come back," he said, adding he doesn't know what that new direction could look like.

"Every single individual that will be present is there representing themselves and they will each govern themselves accordingly as to what they feel that they want to be doing," Stirr said.

## Niagara-on-the-Lake

### Join the Conversation!

Following amendments to Provincial Emergency Orders, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has cautiously transitioned into its recovery phase in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As such, the Join the Conversation platform has been repurposed to provide information, resources, and engagement opportunities specific to Niagara-on-the-Lake residents, business owners, and visitors during this recovery process.

This site provides information regarding the Town's response to Provincial recovery measures, recovery support for local businesses, details about the gradual reopening of Parks and Recreation facilities, financial relief, a spotlight on community heroes, and a photo contest.

Visit [jointheconversationnotl.org](http://jointheconversationnotl.org) for more information and to engage in the Town's recovery measures.

For immediate alerts, follow the Town on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



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**Contributed by Patty Garriock**

"I don't think of myself as a poor deprived ghetto girl who made good. I think of myself as somebody who from an early age knew I was responsible for myself, and I had to make good." - Oprah Winfrey.



**Contributed by Norm Arsenaault:**

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## Editorial: Let's educate, not divide

Richard Harley  
 Editor

The anti-racism rally in Niagara-on-the-Lake last week brought out about 400 people to stand in solidarity with black members of our community and around the world.

It was sobering to here stories of racism right here in our town, yet inspiring to see how many people, black and white, stood up as allies with love in their hearts, even if many of us will never truly understand what it's like to feel discriminated against.

Kudos to the speakers, organizers and those in attendance. When our voices are heard, we can make a change.

What, sadly, isn't inspiring is some of the criti-

cism directed toward the organizers and participants, or the comments on an online video Niagara Now shared of people marching along Queen Street, or the ignorance displayed in using terms and phrases that are outdated and hurtful to the cause of equality.

The people who organized the rally, white and otherwise, had great intentions and should be congratulated for stepping up to make it happen. They made it clear from the start that they wanted no credit or kudos for doing so and refused to have their names published as a result.

We heard from multiple members of the black community, including those who spoke at the rally, that they appreciated it and were honoured to be part of the event.

That's a good deed, with good intentions.

It was disconcerting to read many of the online comments, mainly by people who didn't attend the rally and march.

Making statements like "All lives matter" misses the point of the lived experience of black people and what they continue to endure. And referring to black people as "coloured" is not acceptable in 2020. Being ignorant to how and why something is hurtful, wrong and offensive isn't an excuse to continue doing it.

Instead, let's educate ourselves. Let's listen and be accepting.

Whether intended to be hurtful or not, there are terms and actions that make people uncomfortable, and as with any minority group,

it is up to them to decide what offends.

They've lived it. We haven't.

It's up to the rest of us to implore kindness, compassion, to educate ourselves and be open to change — and we shouldn't be scared of change, not if the result is taking a step toward all humans being treated as equals.

There is simply no room for prejudice and hate in this day and age.

To the people who consider themselves "not racist" but find themselves unhappy to change something as simple as the words they utter, consider how that might make you seem racist.

The world is moving past you and one day the things you've said might come back to haunt you.

editor@niagaranow.com



## You know racism exists, don't let it happen to others

The following is a partial text of Queenston resident Yvonne Bredow's speech to the crowd at last week's anti-racism rally at Voices of Freedom Park in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Yvonne Bredow  
 Special to The Lake Report

I have never experienced the violence or death that our friends south of the border face on a daily basis.

But what I have experienced are racial remarks and have seen racial profiling at work and in other businesses.

Hearing the "N-word" being used as if it is funny — guess what? It's NOT.

These things leave scars on my heart.

Some well-meaning folks think if we stop talking about racism it will magically disappear — like the



Yvonne Bredow. RICHARD HARLEY

smell of a fart.

People might try to be polite and ignore it, but everyone knows it's there.

So, my day often consists of hearing:

"What are you?"

"How do you get your perm so tight?"

"Can I touch your hair?"

"Ya know, if you grew out your hair and straightened it, you could pass for white."

"Why in the world would you tell anybody that you

are black?"

"High yellow!"

"Hey Buckwheat!"

"Coon" and, of course, the N-word.

I am really tired of hearing people react by saying: "I'm shocked."

"I can't believe this."

"I had no idea."

"This can't be real."

Our pain is so off your radar that it shocks you.

The news that keeps me up at night on any given day

hasn't really been a topic of conversation in your world.

So, I bet you are tired of hearing about racism.

Just imagine how tired we are of experiencing it!

I'd like every white person in this park who would be happy to be treated as this society treats black people to raise your hand ...

(Silence and no one raises a hand)

OK, let's try this again, I don't think you understood:

If any white people want to be treated as black people are treated, please ... raise your hand.

(Again, silence and no hands raised)

No one is raising their hand.

That says plainly that you know what's happening.

You know you don't want this for you!

Why are you so willing to accept it or allow it to happen to others?



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# OPINION

## Town of NOTL condemns racism

All councillors except Stuart McCormack sign letter urging community to unite in understanding, acceptance

*The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake released a statement Monday condemning racism.*

*The lord mayor, seven councillors and five senior staff members all signed the letter. The only member of council who did not sign it was Coun. Stuart McCormack, who declined to answer why he did not sign it. He said he would address the matter at Monday's council meeting.*

*The town letter reads as follows:*

The recent death of George Floyd at the hands of members of the Minneapolis Police Department is reigniting a deeply-rooted anger and unrest that is completely justified.

We see this in the many protests rising up across the United States and Canada. This is provoking an important discussion that must not be overshadowed by



Stuart McCormack is the only NOTL councillor not to sign a letter condemning racism. He says he will explain why at the next council meeting. FILE/DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

violence.

We are taking this opportunity to condemn racism. If we are to find a place of peace and equality, there is no room for such hatred, not even in a subtle way.

We are calling upon the Niagara-on-the-Lake community to unite in understanding. We consider ourselves a kind and

welcoming town, but we are not immune to racism and discrimination. We must take time to listen to and understand the experiences of those who have been impacted by racism.

To our racialized community, we grieve with you, we sympathize with you, and we stand with you. We recognize that we may not fully

comprehend the turmoil you feel, but we align with you in your fight against systemic racism and oppression.

As people in positions of authority, we recognize that it is more important than ever to use our platforms to elevate those without the same privileges and to call-out racism as it happens.

Perhaps more importantly, we must step away from our privilege and listen, exercise silence to make space for the voices of black people and people of colour.

This is a practice we aim to continue every day: listening earnestly to the stories of people who have experienced unimaginable hatred. It is only when we step back and listen that we can learn and grow our capacity for love and compassion. Please join us in helping to create an environment upon which we can all exist in peace, as equals.

## A long overdue conversation about racism

Dear editor:

We are angered and saddened by the senseless murder and violence suffered by members of the black and Indigenous communities, not only in the United States but throughout the world.

We acknowledge that racism exists in our country, in our province, and in our town. Yvonne Bredow's column about her experiences, the Lake Report's recent coverage of discrimination, and the peaceful anti-racism rally last week have brought to light the issues of racism and discrimination in Niagara-on-the-Lake. They've

started a conversation that is overdue in our town.

We strive toward a community that is equitable, diverse and inclusive. In light of this, the Inclusivity Committee and the Community Wellness Committee will work to address the issues of racism and discrimination in our society and be an ally in the fight against systemic oppression.

We acknowledge that now, more than ever, is a time for allies to listen and to educate ourselves. We encourage you to speak up about experiences, concerns, questions or suggestions, if

you are comfortable doing so. You are always welcome to do so via email at [inclusivity.committee@notl.com](mailto:inclusivity.committee@notl.com). Any information shared will be held in confidence at the request of the individuals sharing it.

We urge everyone to learn more about what role you can play in addressing racism and what it means to be an ally. There is always more to know, and we all have a part to play. Together, we can ensure that everyone feels welcome, heard and valued in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

From members of

NOTL's **Inclusivity Committee:** Virginia Head, Jamie Knight (chair), Bex McKnight, Richard Mell, Niki Walker (vice-chair), George Webber, Coun. John Wiens and the **Community Wellness Committee:** Alan Brockway, Carol Clarke, Natalie Cooper, Lord Mayor Betty Disero (vice-chair), Cindy Grant (chair), Paul Jurbala, Terry MacTaggart, Catherine Novick, Sean Simpson.

**Inclusivity Committee  
Community Wellness  
Committee  
NOTL**



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## Let's **fix** derelict flag pole

Dear editor:

At the corner of Front and Simcoe streets near the entrance to the Fort Mississauga pathway stands a crooked, derelict flag pole, minus the flag.

I know for a fact that it has been this way for at least the past six-plus years I have lived on this corner and I often have wondered, "Why is the pole crooked and where is the flag?"

It is on the boulevard and appears to be on publicly owned land, a few feet from a Parks Canada display about the Fort Mississauga Trail. Maybe it is the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's flag pole or maybe it belongs to Parks Canada.

Over the past couple of years millions of dollars were spent to refurbish Fort Mississauga and with



Canada Day only a few weeks away it would seem a fitting time to straighten up the flag pole and fly both our NOTL and Canadian

flags in time for July 1. C'mon NOTL, let's fly our flags with great pride.

**Ken Porter**  
NOTL

## Seniors get forgotten, **again**

Dear editor:

A news report last week stated that more, and more less fortunate, seniors from NOTL are using the Newark Neighbours food bank to supplement their food needs.

This comes at a time when our federal government is once again treating seniors as second-class citizens by delaying their \$300 to \$500 COVID-19 aid payout by another month. Just another signal that "Senior Lives Don't Matter."

First announced on May 12, the latest payout date has been delayed another month to July 12, with no assurance that this date will not be delayed further.

No urgency here when you consider other aid was paid out in days.

An additional setback for seniors is the prime minister reneging on his re-election campaign promise, made in New Brunswick, to increase old age security by an extra 10 per cent once a senior reaches age 75, and boost the CPP survivor's benefit by 25 per cent, to take effect July 2020. So much political puffery.

Clearly seniors lack the megaphone afforded Black Lives Matter. We are under-represented in Queen's Park

and Ottawa by our elected members of parliament, MPP Wayne Gates and MP Tony Baldinelli. Their silence is deafening.

Perhaps we need a "Senior's Lives Matter" movement and plan a demonstration outside Queen's Park, on Parliament Hill, etc. This would be quite a spectacle: seniors in wheelchairs, walkers etc., quite an embarrassing picture on national TV and the world stage.

Seniors are shuffled to the back of the queue repeatedly. For example, wait times for hospital tests and procedures are longer for seniors.

My personal experience was as follows. In November 2017 I suffered an acute attack of sciatica. After months of physiotherapy, chiropractic, acupuncture, drugs and numerous tests here in Canada and California, I am left with permanent nerve damage in my leg and foot.

In December 2017, a month after my attack, I was referred for an epidural steroid injection. I received a call for the procedure in December 2018, (that's correct one year later). I cannot print my response to their phone call here.

Finally on a local matter and to give seniors a break. I broached the issue of senior residents parking stickers with Lord Mayor Betty Disero prior to reviewing and finalizing the 2020 budget.

My proposal was to issue seniors stickers free of charge, in addition to increasing all residents' parking time to two hours from the current one hour. This would afford our residents the opportunity to better support our local merchants.

One hour is insufficient time to say, visit the post office and grab a relaxing coffee or lunch, without being penalized with the cost of a parking ticket. To my knowledge this proposal was DOA – dead on arrival.

I would now add to this proposal: Assign a dedicated number of resident parking spots behind the Old Court House. Even with the paid stickers it is nigh impossible to find a spot. Paid parking for tourists is obviously the town's priority.

Ah, "Niagara-on-the-Take," as more and more residents and visitors refer to us.

**Samuel Young**  
NOTL

## B&B reopening must be **orderly**

*The following is a letter sent to The Lake Report and short-term rental operators in Niagara-on-the-Lake by NOTL Bed & Breakfast Association president David Levesque.*

As most of you probably already know, the government of Ontario has allowed the short-term rental industry to resume operations, effective as of Friday, June 5.

The province responded not only to our call for help but also to all business owners whose survival depends heavily on tourism gradually restarting. With this right to resume business comes the great responsibility for each and everyone of us to do everything we can to protect our guests, ourselves, our neighbours and our community from COVID-19.

Let me start by being the first to confirm that I have made the personal decision not to reopen my own business right away despite this news. I know a lot of us, especially B&B owners, are still being hesitant in opening our home to travellers and I do want to point out that resuming business is a personal decision.

I do know some of you have already gone as far as to make the decision not to reopen at all this year, some others feel more comfortable to wait a bit longer and

see, etc. However way you decide to reopen, make sure to manage your availability calendars accordingly.

Each of us is now suddenly faced with this important decision which was only a concept a few days ago. Please take the time you need to think this through for yourself. I am always available to discuss, as well as everyone on your BBA board of directors. Do not hesitate to reach out to us.

We already sent some suggested operational guidelines to all on May 19. I realize this is a lengthy document but the information it contains is crucial for your own safety and the well-being of our community. Both Vintage Hotels and the BBA have developed our respective operational guidelines starting from the same template we judged was offering the highest and most complete standards possible.

The president of the Stratford Bed and Breakfast Association has also asked to use our document as a reference in writing and publishing their own. For those of you who feel ready to reopen, please have very high standards in place regarding cleanliness, disinfection protocols, physical distancing measures, the use of personal protective equipment when needed, and the

maximum number of people allowed according to the provincial regulations.

I personally ask everyone to respect the recommended 24 to 72 hours between reservations in the same space. This is one of the most important protocols we presented in the guidelines. Vintage Hotels will only start running at a maximum of 33 per cent capacity, therefore leaving the full 72 hours at the moment.

We need to allow ourselves the necessary time to let the rooms sit empty before entering them and sufficiently clean and disinfect all surfaces in both private and public spaces. Time is truly our best ally. Remember that although infection through contact with surfaces is less likely than by close proximity with an infected individual, the virus can survive up to 72 hours on some surfaces.

Our town's accommodation industry reopening must be gradual, orderly and under control. Avoiding a possible outbreak in NOTL is everyone's responsibility and our number one priority.

Let's make sure to do everything we can to keep our community and the travellers who visit our beautiful town safe.

**David Levesque**  
NOTL B&B president

## Birthday party hostess ticketed by town

Dear editor:

Your June 4 edition's front page showed a charming photo and story of a group of neighbours who gather daily, maintaining the required physical distance, to celebrate front-line workers.

Presumably, the 13 people in the photo were "legal" as they were on a park area in front of their houses, and not on their own small lawns.

Contrast this to a carefully orchestrated 90th birthday on May 7, held in front of a friend's garage, to which the various guests were given different, specific times when to arrive and leave.

However, we slipped up – when the contract bylaw enforcement officer arrived there were six of us on the driveway, many feet apart.

He could have simply said one of us had to leave or stand on the sidewalk, but instead gave our hostess a ticket for over \$800.

When the officer arrived, he asked us to confirm if the six of us all lived at that address and when we said no, politely went over the rule about a maximum of five at gatherings. I don't remember the order of everything, just a few points:

\* When asked, he said he didn't have to wear a mask because he was outside. (This became a rules consistency issue later when he took the driver's licence directly from the hand of the shaken hostess. He was less than six feet away and not wearing a mask when the licence was passed hand-to-hand. I think this

contravenes the guidelines.)

\* He said he was there because there had been a complaint. Not a huge surprise, as cars had been arriving one or two at a time for two or three hours, for people to stay their allotted 15 minutes, and not many neighbours had been invited.

\* When asked, he said he had discretion as to whether to fine us all individually or not, but no discretion about giving the host a ticket. I haven't researched this, but it sounds unlikely.

Of course, these are tough and uncharted times. Even so, is it too much to ask for some logic and reasonableness, perhaps even compassion?

**Daryl Novak**  
NOTL

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# New hydro transformer **secures** NOTL's power capacity

Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

A \$3.5-million NOTL Hydro project to substantially increase the utility's electrical capacity is almost complete.

A powerful 83 MVA (megavolt amperes) transformer, designed and built in Canada, is now in operation at Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro's Bob Cheriton York Road transformer station.

The new transformer replaces an existing 41.7 MVA transformer that has been moved to the NOTL transformer station on Concession 5. That unit, replacing

an older, much lower capacity transformer, is expected to be operational early this fall.

With an existing 50 MVA unit, the Concession 5 station now has a capacity of 91.7 MVA.

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has a peak power usage of around 60 MVA, meaning each transformer station will be able to manage the full power needs of the town, providing additional power security, the utility said in a news release.

This also positions Niagara-on-the-Lake well for future growth, Hydro said.

With the town having a peak load of 60 MVA, "That was more than the transformer at our York station could handle," NOTL Hydro CEO Tim Curtis told The Lake Report.

"If we had an outage at a peak time at our NOTL station, which has happened in the past few years, then we would be in danger of not being able to serve all of NOTL," he added.

With the new transformer, that won't be a concern, Curtis said.

Kazi Marouf, project manager and vice-president of operations, said, "This project was a real demon-

stration of the importance of planning, with an emphasis on the safety of both personnel and equipment, and co-ordinating multiple third parties."

The project, funded entirely by the operations of Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro, "is part of our ongoing efforts to provide the residents and businesses of the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake with the best possible service at reasonable rates," the utility said.

NOTL Hydro, which is owned by the municipality, distributes power to 10,000 customers in Niagara-on-the-Lake.



A new 83 MVA transformer has been installed at NOTL Hydro's York Road station. SUPPLIED



Kate Birmingham, Stephanie Hall and Laura Thompson at St. David's Veterinary Clinic with some of the raffle prizes. JESSICA MAXWELL

## St. David's Vet Clinic supports NOTL businesses during **customer appreciation week**

Jessica Maxwell  
The Lake Report

Through all the changes businesses have made since the onset of COVID-19, the team at the St. David's Veterinary Clinic did not want to miss out on their annual customer appreciation festivities.

The clinic will celebrate this year's customer appreciation week by giving out raffles prizes from other businesses in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Five prizes will be raffled off Monday to Friday the week of June 15-19 online through the clinic's Facebook page.

"We've been here for nine going on 10 years. Every June we do a community appreciation barbecue," said Stephanie Hall, owner and veterinarian at St. David's Veterinary Clinic.

"A lot of our clients and even community members who (we) don't know come to it. We just have a nice afternoon out on the lawn and pets are welcome. But because we can't do that this year, obviously, we're switching it up a little bit."

Each year at the customer appreciation event there is a one big raffle prize, said Hall, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic things will be a bit different because there is no barbecue.

"This year we figured, well we're not putting the funds into the barbecue that we normally would," Hall said, "so why not put those funds back into the community and purchase different gift baskets or gift certificates."

The prizes for the raffles have been locally sourced from places like Grape Escapes, Tails

Niagara, Maria's Bed and Breakfast, Bistro Six-One, Clavaux designs and NOTL Jewellers and Precious Metals.

"We are so grateful that we have an awesome community that supports us. We're a small business, you know," Hall said.

"So talking with my staff, we just decided, let's support those local businesses around us."

She said along with her team it has been fun thinking of what they would put together for raffle prizes because of all the great artists, restaurants, businesses and more that Niagara-on-the-Lake has to offer.

"We love our clients and our pets and we've missed them these last few months," Hall said.

"Everybody is in the same boat and we have to make the best of the situation."

## Town's Golf Classic, Wall of Fame induction **cancelled** due to pandemic

Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has cancelled its 2020 Golf Classic Tournament and the annual Sports Wall of Fame Induction Ceremony due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The decision followed careful deliberation among committee members, who cited concerns for participants' health and safety, the town said in announcing the cancellations.

"The decision to cancel these events was not taken lightly, but given these unprecedented times, we believe it is the best course of action," said Kevin Turcotte, the town's acting director of operations.

"Thank you to all of our sponsors and participants for their ongoing support and involvement over the years. We look forward to working with you again in 2021."

The annual Golf Classic has raised thousands of dollars for various community projects over the years.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Sports Wall of Fame was established in 2003 to honour and recognize men and women who have made a significant contribution to sports in the community. Each year two names are added to the Wall of Fame.

The nomination period for Wall of Fame 2020 nominees has been extended indefinitely and a new dead-

line will be announced in the future.

Meanwhile, golf is now in full swing at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club, but with strict physical distancing and other restrictions in place.

The popular women's and men's leagues have started playing for the season and the club is now permitting the public to play the course.

Last week in men's league action, winners were: Tom Wiley (25 points), Noel Morris, Arthur Wosinski, Glenn Young (20), John Sobil (19). Michel Trudeau had the low gross score (38). Net skins (\$53): Tom Wiley, Sean Simpson, Paul Dickson. Gross skins (\$23): Larry Mantle, John Reynolds, Sean Simpson.



Men's and women's leagues, and public play has resumed at the NOTL Golf Club. Getting ready to tee off on Thursday afternoon are, front row, Jim McMacken and Warren Tutton, with Tim Taylor and Doug McCulloch. KEVIN MACLEAN



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Image Detail: Tom Thomson, Twilight, pre-1914 Collection of Samuel E. Weir ©RiverBrink Art Museum

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## The Checkout

### How grocers and consumers are changing



NOTL resident John Scott is chair of Niagara College, as well as a former CEO, current board member and retail adviser in the grocery industry. He offers his perspectives from the grocery aisles in the era of COVID-19.

John Scott  
Special to The Lake Report

If you're a baby boomer you no doubt remember the days when mom went to one grocery store to buy all of the family's consumable goods.

Over time that concept has changed as a plethora of food retail outlets have been developed to appeal to differing preferences.

For example, before the COVID-19 pandemic it was quite common for customers to purchase packaged goods at discount stores while picking up produce and meats at specialty outlets or perhaps securing organic and gluten-free products at still other unique stores.

The need for a store to have a consumer-valued point of differentiation became critical to success. The days of loyalty to an exclusive store shopping experience were replaced by the reality of sharing customers.

The result has been a dramatic change in the structure of the traditional supermarket. Given that since the great recession in 2008, packaged goods have been increasingly purchased at discount operations, most traditional grocery stores have reduced the amount of shelving in the centre of the store.

While you can still find most products, the number of brands in each category has been reduced. The new



PIXABAY IMAGE

supermarket design favoured increasing space for fresh, specialty departments and frozen offerings.

The goal is to delight consumers with superb produce, mouth-watering artisanal breads, a variety of fresh seafood, creative cheese from around the world, outstanding deli selections, unique cuts of some of the finest meats and delicious home-cooked meals prepared under the supervision of amazing chefs – all at reasonable prices (in fact, as a share of income, Canada's food cost is among the lowest in the world). As Canadians we have truly enjoyed an amazing feast of fabulous food.

COVID-19 almost immediately introduced a profound change in consumer habits and buying patterns. One of the chains I work with has researched its sales product and volume through the years and the data suggests we are behaving in a similar manner to the early 1980s.

There are many ways we measure success in a store – one is weekly customer count. After the initial surge of panic buying this chain's count is exactly half

of that of a year ago. That would imply a problem until you consider a second determining factor – basket or average transaction size.

Transaction size is the average of purchases by all customers regardless of size, which means it can range from a litre of milk to a full order of groceries. Our stores have become accustomed to an average transaction in the mid to low twenties.

The new reality is an average transaction of more than double that amount, which, combined with the customer count, has told us two things: our consumers are coming much less frequently but buying substantially more.

We're also seeing a return to customers sourcing food products from a single store. After all, who wants to repeat all of the necessary precautions in a multitude of stores? The reality of fewer customers per week has also eased the pressure on sanitation and staff safety issues as well as the logistics involved in facilitating social distance measures.

Consumer product purchasing has changed

dramatically. The decline in packaged good purchases has been more than reversed, which initially led to several "out of stock" sold out situations.

Our meat and produce sales continue to hold at levels prior to the pandemic but the in-store deli and prepared meals sales have declined to the point where they may be suspended until after the crisis.

Very popular in-store features such as salad or olive bars have been closed. Frozen exotic foods are becoming extinct but plant-based protein is surging.

Our online business rose a brisk 27 per cent but we "pick" in store and needed spaced so we have been creative in closing in-store eating areas to facilitate staging areas.

Frankly, I can't believe how quickly stores adjusted and how effective retailers are meeting the needs of consumers in this new reality. And we're all very proud that staff and customers are safe and that a superb, welcoming atmosphere has been maintained.

Soon it will be time to figure out where we go from here.

During this time of uncertainty, please remember to support the local



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If only half grows I shrink.  
What am I?

Last Week: It's the right thing to keep me, even though you've given me to someone else. What am I?

Answer: A screw

Answered first by: Janice Hall

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Lynda Collet, Quinn Tiller, Sadie Willms, Wade Durling, Britiney Turasz, Sylvia Wiens, Brenda Bartley, Katie Reimer, Margie Enns, Kieran Jones, Sheila Meloche

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## Royal Oak embraces online learning

Brittany Carter  
The Lake Report

As schools around the country have shifted to online learning, one mother of a Royal Oak Community School student initially balked at the thought of continuing to pay for her son's at-home learning.

But Victoria Gilbert says she quickly changed her tune a few weeks into the program.

Gilbert enrolled her seven-year-old son, Aspen Ziraldo, at Royal Oak this year because she says she preferred the smaller class sizes and focused attention that comes with an independent school.

When the pandemic caused schools to close and transition to online learning in March, she says she was "very frustrated" for the first week.

"I thought, I'm sitting next to my seven-year-old all day and I'm teaching him these programs, which are good, but I'm thinking that I'm paying quite a bit of money and I can't work. I have to sit home with my kid and teach him," Gilbert says.

When she reached out to the school to ask for a refund or credit, she says it was suggested she try to stick it out for a few weeks.

"And after a few weeks into it I realized, 'Wow, this is extremely worthwhile,'" she says. "I compared what we were doing at Royal Oak with what they're doing in the public school system and there was really no comparison."

Aside from missing social interaction with other students, Gilbert says she doesn't feel as though her son has missed out at all. She was "incredibly impressed" with the quality of programming and the availability of the faculty.

Royal Oak's head of school, Julia Murray, says as soon as she learned schools would need to remain closed for at least two weeks after March break due to COVID-19, the planning began to create a viable online learning program.

"I contacted my staff and



Royal Oak students learn via Zoom. See more photos at [www.NiagaraNow.com](http://www.NiagaraNow.com). SUPPLIED

we kicked into high gear to try and really plan a very expansive, robust and I guess, permanent program, because my deep instinct was that it was going to be a lot longer than two weeks."

Murray says it was important to create a program that was as close to an in-class experience as possible. Faculty discussed the needs of the 32 students enrolled at Royal Oak on a class-by-class basis, as they tried to home in on the core curriculum goals for each age group.

"One of the most important things as part of our philosophy is that we are meeting students where they are."

The number of tasks to be completed daily was cut while lessons were made "extremely clear and extremely focused" in terms of their importance for the curriculum, she says.

"There's no fluff or extras. It's about getting right to the learning goals."

Those exact goals have been carefully targeted for each age group.

"So, for example, in the early years, it's a play-based curriculum. The most important thing is that learning is joyful and hands-on and experimental, that students are being challenged but have a lot of choices," she says.

A mix of live-learning interactions with teachers through Google Meet and online learning materials were worked into the students' daily activities.

"Having that face-to-face connection would be important ... Students were basically following the same routine that they were when they were in class," she says.

Generally, teachers are available from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. They offer a break from screen time midweek, which she calls "Wellness Wednesday."

In that time, students are encouraged to get outside, sleep in, connect, "because it's hard working online with a large learning curve."

"We knew students would be tired from that," she says.

The five teachers on staff have been working from home to meet the needs of each student while also finding ways to communicate effectively with parents.

"Each week, parents receive an email with the weekly schedule and the learning goals for the week for each subject. We understood that parents were being put into the position of also kind of being a teacher, so they needed to understand, in appropriate language for parents, what the goal in each subject was," Murray says.

Gilbert says the experi-

ence helping her son learn from home made her appreciate teachers even more.

"Now I appreciate teachers even more than ever and I think all of us do. We're all playing this role of teacher right now and it's not easy. It's really challenging," she says.

She says teachers have been available at any time during school hours, and whether her son misses a teacher or just wants to reach out, he can send a message at any time and his teacher will be available.

"They really are working full-time. It's not that I got ripped off or any of the private school kids got ripped off, we just had to look at it differently."

The school year will finish June 12 for Royal Oak and though it's still not certain what regulations may be in place for September, Murray says she's confident she will be able to welcome students safely back into the classroom.

The school's class cap of 15 students will help when it comes time to reopen, she says.

"I feel pretty confident that we're going to be in a good position to be able to open up, of course following all the procedures and protocols necessary for social distancing and safety," she says.

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I also want to say a big thank you to everyone who is working during this time to keep our community safe - we will not forget what you've done for us.

**Wayne Gates** MPP Niagara Falls representing Niagara-on-the-Lake & Fort Erie  
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# Have some fun

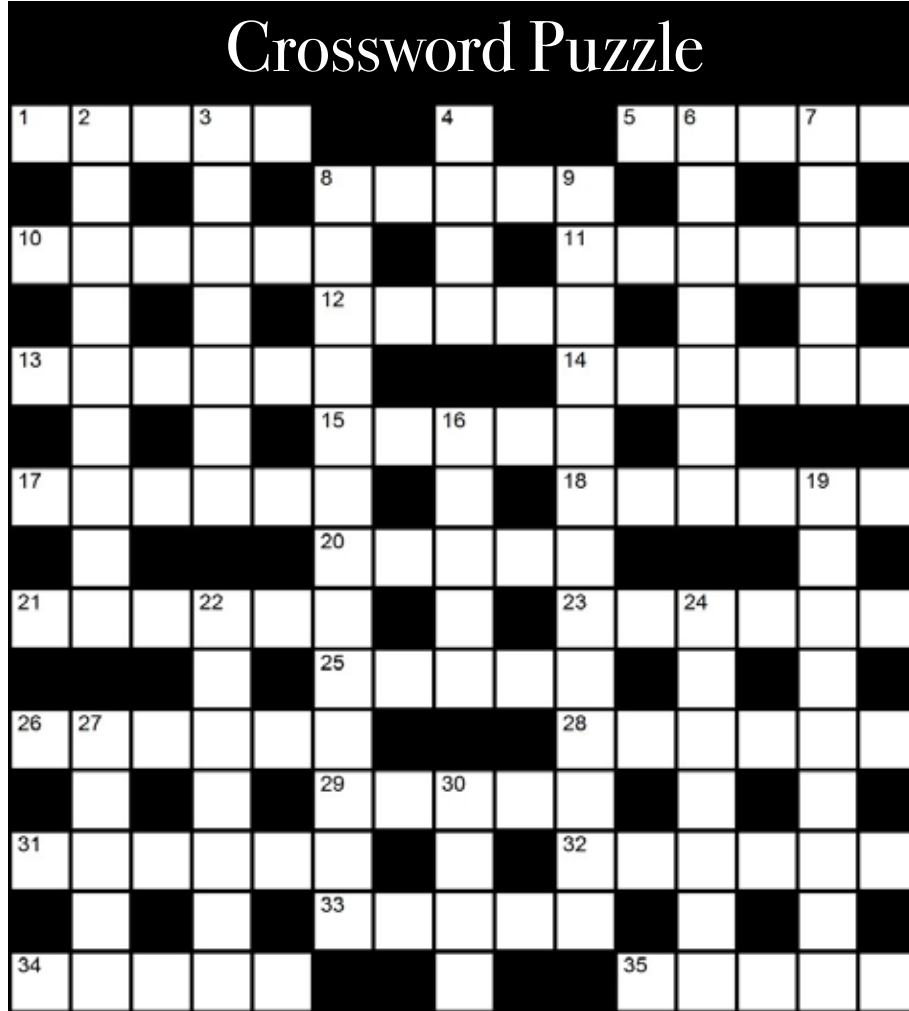
The Lake Report is looking for puzzle makers who would like to help develop this page. We are seeking both standard and cryptic crossword writers.  
editor@niagaranow.com

**Across**

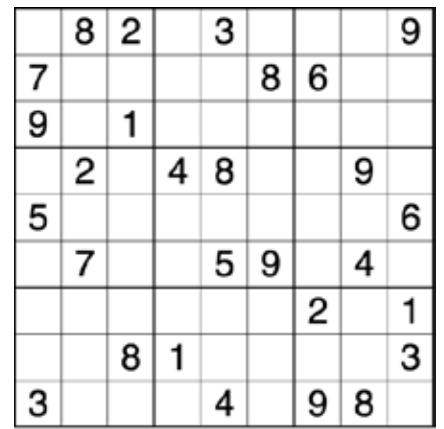
- 1. Frequently (5)
- 5. Divest (5)
- 8. Sag (5)
- 10. Spanish fleet (6)
- 11. Israeli currency (6)
- 12. Bring together (5)
- 13. Dwelling (6)
- 14. Kine (Arch.) (6)
- 15. Moor (5)
- 17. Contaminate (6)
- 18. Resist (6)
- 20. Minor actor in crowd scenes (5)
- 21. Sliding compartment of furniture (6)
- 23. Capital of the Bahamas (6)
- 25. World's largest democracy (5)
- 26. Regular customer (6)
- 28. Departs (6)
- 29. Rotten (5)
- 31. Capital of the Philippines (6)
- 32. Scandinavian kingdom (6)
- 33. In what place (5)
- 34. Tale (5)
- 35. Small salamanders (5)

**Down**

- 2. Alien (9)
- 3. Scrutinise (7)
- 4. Central Chinese desert (4)
- 6. Crown (7)
- 7. Standard of perfection (5)
- 8. Wife of your son (8-2-3)
- 9. What shrinks do (13)
- 16. Behaved (5)
- 19. Declaration (9)
- 22. Soldier (7)
- 24. Type of twin (7)
- 27. Behind (5)
- 30. Junkie (4)



## Last issue's answers



# Happy 80th Birthday, Joe!

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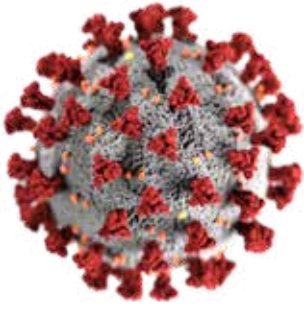
**Joe is Mr. Hospitality!**

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Shaw Guild members, the Village,  
and all the neighbourhood dogs  
you have befriended throughout the years!



## Dr. Brown: **Anti-viral drugs** could be the answer

Dr. William Brown  
Special to The Lake Report



PIXABAY

My article on COVID-19 last week was about the importance of achieving herd immunity in the majority of the population as a means of reducing the risk for the most vulnerable in this pandemic, short of an effective vaccine being widely available.

The article was based on evidence in late May that before the late fall or even early 2021 no country would achieve a level of immunity in the population sufficient to prevent a major wave of new infections and deaths associated with reopening.

That meant that the growing pressure to reopen businesses and avoid lasting permanent damage to the world's economies and jobs is, and will be, at odds with the very measures such as isolation and social distancing that have been so effective in flattening the curve and saving the lives of those most at risk for serious infections and death from COVID-19.

Of course, those gloomy projections about herd immunity could be wrong. Perhaps the percentage of the population who have acquired natural immunity to COVID-19 is much higher than the 20 per cent or less reported for most countries and much closer to the 80 or 90 per cent the

"experts" suggest might be necessary to achieve herd immunity.

And maybe the latter figures for effective herd immunity are set too high for COVID-19. Maybe.

And goodness knows, if we've learned anything so far in this pandemic, it's that the experts, the disease modellers and the tests for immunity currently available can all be off-base. But, as matters stand, they're the best evidence we have and based on that evidence, we badly need effective vaccines in the next few months.

Fortunately, there's another option for attacking COVID-19 beyond vaccination – what about antiviral drugs? For some viral diseases, antiviral drugs can be lifesaving, such as Ebola – a far more lethal viral disease than COVID-19. Just as there are now over 100 companies developing vaccines, many companies are rushing to develop an effective antiviral drug – effective enough to prevent

the serious complications of COVID-19.

There are two options: repurpose antiviral drugs used for other viral diseases such as the AIDS virus or Ebola, to name two considered for treatment of COVID-19. Or, what about developing novel new antiviral drugs tailor-made to target specific COVID-19 proteins?

The latter include proteins in the virus's spike that target the ACE-2 receptors imbedded in a cell's membrane, the viral proteins responsible for replicating the virus's genome, others that cut the virus's proteins at just the right place and yet others that co-opt the cell's own protein-making machinery. All would make excellent targets for prospective antiviral drugs.

Not so long ago, any of those jobs would have been a major undertaking lasting many months – certainly well beyond the time frame of this pandemic. Not so this time around.

These days it's possible, with the aid of high-tech methods coupled with powerful computers, to create 3-D images of key COVID-19 proteins in the virus's spikes or once inside the cell, created by the virus's RNA.

Knowing the precise molecular structure and shape of those proteins makes it possible to design drugs that can latch on to targeted proteins by precisely match-

ing the latter's shape and blocking their function or destroying the viral protein.

But there's more – virtual simulations make it possible to see whether the fit between candidate drugs and the targeted viral protein is precise enough to warrant clinical trials.

It's a whole new way of designing and selecting drugs based on matching candidate drugs to detailed molecular models of the targeted protein – and a whole lot quicker than previous methods. There's even hope that drugs could be designed to target key protein components of all coronaviruses, which could be used to treat variants that might arise in the future through mutations to the virus's genome. That would be a huge bonus.

So, it wouldn't surprise me to learn that we might have several effective new antiviral drugs and, with luck, several effective vaccines before the year is out. And, hopefully, we will also have much more reliable blood tests to identify the immune status of everyone who works in high-risk care facilities such as long-term care and hospitals.

*Dr. William Brown is a professor of neurology at McMaster University and co-founder of the Info-health series held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library.*

## NOTL photo contest invites **amateur shooters**

Jessica Maxwell  
The Lake Report



A photo of the popular Ryerson Park sunset.  
FILE/KEVIN MACLEAN

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is inviting hobby photographers to contribute submissions for a photo contest.

Pictures will be accepted until July 31 when town staff will choose the top photos in each category and allow the public to vote for the winners.

"It's a nice way to acknowledge the photographs that we know people are taking of our town," said spokesperson Lauren Kruitbosch.

"And it's great for us on

our end as well to just get some additional photos for us to use for publication in our online use as well and it's nice to have local or visiting photographers share their work."

New and old photos, from

any season that highlight NOTL are welcome in five categories: Amenities and Places; Arts, Culture and Events; Innovation and Economy; Nature and Parks; and Recreation and Sports.

Residents and visitors can enter up to 10 photos in the contest. Each entry must include a brief caption stating when and where the photo was taken in town.

Each of the five categories will have a winner who will see their photo professionally framed and displayed in town. The location is to be determined at a later date.

Photos can be submitted through [www.jointheconversationnotl.org/photo-contest](http://www.jointheconversationnotl.org/photo-contest). By contributing to the contest, the photographer is giving the Town of NOTL permission to use those photos for online and print publications.

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**Please donate to support local news**

We would like to thank everyone who has donated so far to the GoFundMe to help the paper, set up generously by Chef Ryan Crawford of Ruffino's and Backhouse. So far there has been \$5,920 raised towards the \$30,000 goal.

We encourage anyone who can to make a donation to help us to meet this goal. All money raised goes directly towards printing and distribution costs for the paper, so we can continue to ensure NOTL's #1 newspaper reaches all members of our community during this pandemic, especially our seniors who are most at risk. Local news is more important than ever.

Make a donation at:  
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**The Lake Report**

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# Bringing a smile to local seniors

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

A group of NOTLers have banded together to bring a bit of happiness to seniors in town.

Restaurateurs Ryan Crawford of Backhouse, Paul Harber of Ravine and David Watt of the Garrison House, have partnered with Erica Lepp to bring a special package to Meals on Wheels clients in town.

The package includes desserts like brownies and cookies, flowers, blankets, books, activity books, and a note that “just lets them know that their community is thinking about them,” said Lepp, who volunteers for Meals on Wheels and helped put everything together.

She said Watt came up with the idea and they all worked together to make it a reality.

The goal? Simply to brighten people’s day, Watt said.

For Watt, the worst thing about COVID-19 has been seniors dying and being iso-



David Watt, Erica Lepp and Ryan Crawford are helping to bring seniors something special with their Meals on Wheels deliveries. RICHARD HARLEY

lated from their families.

“So, you just want to do something for people who are isolated and, you know, live their life in our country and they deserve better,” he said.

Crawford echoed his comments.

“Just like Dave said, it’s like the elderly are just lonely, sitting by them-

selves. And sometimes their family can’t even visit them, so we just wanted to kind of cheer them up and give them something to enjoy. We want to make them smile. We’re chefs and we love making people smile through our food and through gifts through whatever we do,” he said.

“We just want to give

back to the community ... the community we live in and that supports us.”

Other members of the community who helped by donating are Del Rollo, Stacey Mulholland and Brand Boulevard.

Anyone who wishes to donate to the boxes can contact Lepp at ericalepp@yahoo.ca.

# Short-term rentals given green light to operate, with strict provincial guidelines

Julia Sacco  
Special to The Lake Report

Short-term rentals in Niagara-on-the-Lake have been given the go-ahead to reopen.

Following a change in provincial guidelines, the Town of NOTL this week confirmed short-term rentals can operate “in a similar manner as to hotels and motels, subject to compliance with all other regulations and/or industry guidelines.”

“All operators must ensure their services meet physical distancing requirements and all other provincial emergency orders and public health guidelines in effect,” the town said in a news release.

The town closed short-term rentals April 6, in response to the provincial emergency order to close non-essential businesses. Operators have until June 30 to pay their annual licence fees if they have not done so already.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Bed and Breakfast Association president David Levesque, who said he won’t be opening his B&B immediately, noted his organization has set up some extensive guidelines as well for members to follow.

Other short-term rental owners shared relief that they can finally operate again after months of inactivity.

Jason Clements, owner of Piper’s Getaway, described business the past two months as “non-existent.”

“All we’ve been getting is people calling us and canceling and a lot of people getting upset that they had to cancel,” said Clements.

He outlined some of the opening procedures put in place in preparation for the long-awaited renters.

\*Read David Levesque’s letter to B&B owners on page 6.

“We have to declutter the houses. A lot of times you have a lot of pillows on the



FILE PHOTO

couches and beds to make them look nice. You have to remove a lot of those soft surfaces and put hand sanitizer in the houses, a lot of sanitizing and disinfecting,” said Clements.

While new measures in place in short-term rental properties are comforting to guests, townspeople hope that tourists will follow similar measures when visiting town.

NOTL resident Nancy Buretic said she is glad short-term rental properties can reopen and bring visitors back to town, but hopes people continue to work hard to keep others safe.

“You have to see both sides, there’s pros and cons. You have to rely on people to make intelligent, smart, safe decisions,” said Buretic.

“I think what could work is walking down the street and wearing a mask and going into a store no different than we do. If you’re doing that I don’t see a problem. As far as groceries go, I think if there were numbers left for grocery pickup and takeout menus (in the rental) that could eliminate a lot of exposure,” she said.

Despite all the possible measures that could be put into place though, some short-term rental owners are still planning on their doors to remain closed.

Richard Patrick, a property owner from NOTL, said he won’t reopen yet, calling it still “very risky.”

Despite time dedicated to clean and sanitize, owners still face “risk if you miss something,” Patrick said.

# Environment needs to remain a priority: Arsenault

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Despite the pandemic, Niagara-on-the-Lake Coun. Norm Arsenault wants the environment to stay at the top of people’s minds.

He said right now the environment has been put on the “back burner” in town and he’s hoping to see things kick back into gear.

In late February, the town declared a climate emergency and decided it would form an environmental committee, after global protests shook the world, largely inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg.

Now Arsenault says it’s time to get back to work.

While the pandemic has dominated life for the past three months, there have been positives and negatives with regards to environmental impact in town and around the world.

Right away, Loblaw’s implemented a policy of no



Coun. Norm Arsenault volunteers with Bikes for Farmworkers. FILE PHOTO

personal reusable bags at grocery stores, reverting to plastic, which affected businesses in NOTL. Other stores followed.

Arsenault said he understands why they did it.

“When you’re lacking specific data, you pretty well have to go to the little bit more on the extreme side and take as many precautions as you can. And that’s basically what most companies did. So it has put the environment in the background. Now, it’s

not a total loss. There are some very positives coming out of this,” he said.

Other benefits have been reduced fuel consumption.

Arsenault said he “used to buy two or three tanks of gas every month” but has only filled up twice in the past three months.

He said all of these things contribute to a healthier global environment.

“There’s a blue sky over China, which is practically unheard of. NASA satellites have been noticing that

pollution has come down 20 to 30 per cent over the last three months, just because of the fewer factories that are spewing out carbon dioxide, and the number of vehicles that have come off the roads,” he said.


He said he’s going to be pushing for the town to “start coming up with a policy on (its) vehicles, for example, to start moving to zero emission vehicles over the next 10 years.”

He points out right now the town has no zero emission vehicles.

“We have no hybrids, we have nothing like that in town. So I’ve been pushing for that,” he said.

He also wants better options for recycling in public spaces, solar panels for town offices, permeable asphalt options for subdivisions being built.

And that’s just the tip of the iceberg, as he says there will be “many, many” other ideas coming up.




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Willow Cakes & Pastries chef Catherine O'Donnell.  
FILE/DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

## Friends of Fort George to sell **Canada Day kits** in lieu of festivities this year

Brittany Carter  
The Lake Report

Canada Day celebrations will look very different this year, but the Friends of Fort George have stepped up to prepare at-home Canada Day kits for purchase in lieu of the cancelled annual festivities.

Although the usual cake parade, fireworks and evening barbecue will not happen due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Friends have partnered with Parks Canada and Willow Cakes and Pastries to bring the Canada Day celebrations to Niagara residents in their own homes.

Each package will contain six Canada Day cupcakes created by Willow, as well as flags, pins, temporary tattoos, glow sticks

and Parks Canada swag. The kit costs \$35 with free delivery in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and \$40 for delivery outside of NOTL.

Supplies are limited and must be ordered by June 25. Orders can be made through the Friends of Fort George online gift shop at <https://friendsoffortgeorge.square.site>, or by phoning the store at 905-468-6621.

Further to the at-home Canada Day packages, the Friends have also created the hashtag #CanadaDayNOTL in hopes of connecting the community's celebrations via social media.

Follow along via the Friends' Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (@fofg) accounts for more content leading up to Canada Day.



NOTL resident Lynda Collet picks up her books on the first day of the Library's curbside service. JESSICA MAXWELL

## Library curbside drop-off **open**

The first day of library curbside pick-ups June 9 put reading materials back in the hands of Niagara-on-the-Lake residents.

NOTL library community engagement co-ordinator Debbie Krause said pick-ups scheduled 10 minutes apart

are fully booked until the end of next week.

Mobile book shelves allow the library to place reserved books outside for patrons to maintain physical distancing while getting reading materials back in residents' hands.



Nada Arnot and Adam Bach stand in front of The Blue Lady food truck at Palatine Hills Estate Winery. JESSICA MAXWELL

## From New York to NOTL: Blue Lady serves up Canadian-style poutine and beef dogs

Jessica Maxwell  
The Lake Report

A Niagara entrepreneur with a new business venture known as The Blue Lady food truck is proof that you can take a girl out of Canada, but you can't take Canada out of the girl.

Nada Arnot, owner of The Blue Lady, spent the past 15 years living and working in New York with a dream of opening her own poutine shop.

Since June 1, The Blue Lady is open to customers at Palatine Hills Winery between 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., and at 299 Lakeshore Rd. between 5 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. daily.

Customers can also order online through the website [blueladyfoodtruck.com](http://blueladyfoodtruck.com) or ordering app for a quick pick-up at either location.

"I've always wanted to open up a poutine shop, particularly living in New York where people didn't really know what poutine was," said Arnot.

"Every memory I have of poutine was either of being with friends or at a festival or summertime, but it was just really a good memory of both my childhood and young adult years," she said.

After moving to New York, she realized there

weren't many places to get a poutine and "went a decade and a half without really having experience with it, but everyone that's tried it that (she) introduced it to from New York loved it."

"I just wanted to be a part of other people's memories because I've always had a really fond connection to poutine and the association of being with friends and family," Arnot said.

"I came to Canada really wanting to do this. I ended up meeting my partner and I said to him, 'Hey I really want to open this poutine shop,' and he thought it was a pipe dream but we started looking at some leases on Queen Street."

"I said what I would love is to have a little shop with a food cart and he said, 'Well, why wouldn't you just do a food truck' and then that was the beginning of the new venture," Arnot said.

After looking for a food truck and finding The Blue Lady, Arnot said she just fell in love with it.

The previous owner purchased the truck when it was blue and operated under the name The Blue Lady. The food truck operated for two years in Oshawa before Arnot purchased it in March.

She said after bringing the truck to Niagara-on-the-Lake, the last couple months were spent with her partner Adam Bach re-vamping the brand, menu and experience.

"We took it and painted it bright yellow, so it's a big ball of sunshine," said Arnot.

"You're not expecting the yellow truck to say Blue Lady. It's a really cool looking food truck now. It's almost like a little cafe on wheels."

This is where her time spent in Brooklyn comes in, she said.

"I kind of wanted it to be a little bit hipster, a little bit premium."

"It felt a little elevated," she said. "There's certainly a love and fondness for food trucks but it tends to be kind of a greasy-spoon experience."

Arnot said the idea was to take poutine and hotdogs as a base and then add a different touch.

"Let's put some artisanal playful food twist on it such as putting mac and cheese on it or making it a tex-mex style or even just having a trashcan of everything on it," she said.

Arnot said more than just hotdogs and french fries are served from The Blue Lady. All the ingredi-

ents are sourced locally within Niagara Region and Ontario whenever possible.

"If we can't get it out of our own garden then we get it from local suppliers," Arnot said.

"If it's not local within the Niagara region, they're all Ontario-based and where we can't do Ontario based then it's definitely Canadian."

Some of the ingredients include potatoes from Brenn-B Farms in Waterdown, buns from La Farina Bakery in Niagara Falls, hotdogs from Springer's Meats in Hamilton and homemade sauces crafted with eggs and other ingredients from Arnot's hobby farm.

She said she loves the Niagara-on-the-Lake community and integrating her family and business has been a great experience.

"So far the reception has been so great," she said. "Small businesses are so supportive of each other." New York was far more cutthroat, she added.

Arnot moved back to Canada with her children and they now live in NOTL's Chautauqua neighbourhood. She is still working her day-job remotely for AMC as general manager for the Sundance streaming service.

**Although our Branch is closed during the Covid-19 situation we will continue to provide support to our Veterans and their Families.**

**If you require any support please contact us by e-mail or phone message.**

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# Racism protest draws hundreds to stand as allies

Continued from Front Page

“Our pain is so off your radar that it shocks you. The news that keeps me up at night on any given day, not just now, has never really been a topic in your household, because it doesn’t affect you directly. It does because we are all human beings. We are all affected by this.”

“Some of the things I’ve experienced just in this town since living here — when people ask me if I do gardening, are you a housekeeper? It’s unbelievable.” She said right now even she’s learning to put her foot down more.

“I’m going to start standing up when people are racist to me. I don’t say anything. I want the ground to swallow me up and make me disappear. You know why? Because if I say something, I’m going to hurt their feelings. That’s who I am. I’m worried about hurting someone else’s feelings when they are using racial remarks to me, saying something rude to me.”

People need to consider what they’re saying and how it might be offensive, she said.

“Think before you speak. A carpenter will measure twice and cut once. A good human being will think twice before they speak once,” she said.

“You turn us all inside out, we are all the same colour. We all bleed red.”

She said people need to use their voices to speak out against racism in their communities. “If you don’t say something you are condoning it.”

Jane Andres, founder of Niagara Workers Welcome, also spoke to the crowd. She said she spoke after a migrant worker declined to speak out of fear for his job.

Andres told the story of Solomon Moseby, a black slave who escaped to Canada from Kentucky.

Moseby was arrested and to be extradited back to the United States, “but the townspeople stood together and they decided it was morally wrong,” Andres said.

“For three days, they encircled the courthouse. For three days, white women



Left: Nadia McDonald, Eden Noble and Rebecca Saylor of Niagara Falls stand against racism at the rally Friday. Right: Protesters hold signs as they march down Queen Street. See more photos at [www.NiagaraNow.com](http://www.NiagaraNow.com). RICHARD HARLEY/JESSICA MAXWELL



joined their black sisters in the kitchen, cooking and caring for the people that formed the barricades in order to prevent Solomon from being taken away. The day that he was about to be extradited, everybody closed in and put a stop to the wagons. Two black men, one of them a school teacher, were killed by the local police,” she said. Moseby ended up escaping and living a free life. “These historic events which took place in Niagara-on-the-Lake paved the way for change. Niagara became a beacon of light for men and women trapped in the legal system of slavery,” Andres said.

Sue Batson Patterson, another black NOTLer, spoke about her experiences. She said she’s faced racism both in person and on NOTL’s community pages online.

“Nowhere is this cataloguing more evident than in the so-called local Niagara-on-the-Lake community groups that exist online. We all know what they are: ungoverned, useless repositories of exclusion, gaslighting, snobbery, rumour, tastelessness and hate. Not all of it. But enough,” she said.

She said soon after she moved to NOTL, she was the victim of a physical assault, about which police did nothing.

“The responding officer

said, ‘You look like the kind of person who can take care of herself,’” she told the crowd.

“They went to the home of my attacker, there was no answer. And there was no further action taken.”

She said that’s not the sole experience she’s had.

“I want to be very clear, I have also had very positive, uplifting and supportive experiences with the local police. They’re not all bad. I do not hate police. The problem is, is that all of my interactions with the police were the result of others weaponizing them against me,” she said.

“I don’t have answers for the unholy hot mess the world is in right now ... I had no intention of attending this rally. None — much less saying anything. But then I heard a rumour ... that a local and venerable entertainment organization allegedly instructed people of colour and anyone who would listen not to come to this rally.”

She said she decided she needed to speak.

“I am here for my son. I am here for my husband and I am here for Yvonne.”

She said she encourages people to educate themselves about how they can be allies.

“I implore of all of you, Google how to be an ally, and let your work begin. That’s it.”

Patterson also praised the late Wilma Morrison for her contributions to black rights.

“I want everybody to just take a quick moment to remember Wilma Morrison. She was a treasure. We were so honoured to have her in our community,” she said.

“I know that she would be here and she would be marching with us.”

Nadia McDonald, a black Niagara Falls resident who attended, said to her the movement is about “accountability.”

“If someone does a crime, they should be held accountable and there should be justice no matter what your race, religion, identification, sexuality — we just want accountability.”

Eden Noble, 10, held a sign that read, “Don’t I matter?”

“Everyone should be treated the same and this needs to stop,” she said.

Rebecca Saylor, a white woman who was there as an ally with Nadia and Eden, said she came to stand up for her friends.

“Nadia has been my best friend since we were nine and so, (I’m) really just here as an ally to stand up, and to say, like Eden’s sign — ‘Don’t I matter?’ — Yeah, you do matter. Your lives matter. We see you, you have value. And we need justice.”

Juliet Dunn of the TD Niagara Jazz Festival said it

was nice to see how many people showed up.

“It’s very powerful,” she said. “This is almost my community. I live in south St. Catharines, just across, but I do a lot in this community. And it really meant a lot to see so many people show up.”

She said while her experience in town has been different, she said it’s important for people to talk about racism.

“I think it’s great that this was organized, I think it’s very necessary. I haven’t had a lot of these experiences that people in the South have had and some of the people here that live in this town,” she said.

“I haven’t had to my face, anyway, which is one of the reasons I didn’t get up to speak today, because I didn’t feel I could speak to that. But I think it’s very important that people do know that these things do happen right here in our own backyard, and that people are aware. And so I was happy to hear the speakers talk about that.”

Jasmine, a black St. Catharines resident, who declined to give her last name, said it was nice to see white people being supportive.

“We had somebody chanting ‘all lives matter’ beside us, and to have a white woman step up and say something so that I didn’t have to mean a lot.

So, I think just to hear and see the support is important. I’m just hoping people actually go home and do their homework.”

Her friend Tyrell MacLennan echoed similar comments.

“It’s nice to see everyone out here standing in solidarity with all the victims of police brutality and to fight for such a social injustice,” he said.

“Growing up in Niagara, you don’t always experience racism as blatantly as you see in the States or in other areas. But it’s still here, it still exists. And it’s important that people are educated on the topic, and so that we can make a difference and make change.”

While he appreciated the rally, he said there’s still a lot of work to do.

“Coming out here and protesting is a good start, but there’s a long road ahead of us in terms of change and making a difference and for the future, for us, for the black community of our future kids.”

He said he thinks more black history should be taught in schools.

“I was never taught in school that Harriet Tubman lived in St. Catharines for over 10 years. It’s just misinformation, miseducation. And that’s where I think all of the racism, or subtle racism, stems from, is miseducation.”

  
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# NOTL real estate sales jump, strong recovery predicted

Continued from Front Page

new listings compared to 104 in the same month a year ago.

“We’ve seen some good sales in the past two or three weeks (in NOTL), including bidding wars, which we haven’t seen in sometime,” he said. “Even into the higher price ranges. We’re getting offers on properties over \$2 million and we had a bidding war on a property that was close to \$2 million.”

While he doesn’t have a crystal ball, he said activity is up. The sales stats for the last few weeks aren’t yet available, but “I think you’ll see that activity is up everywhere.”

The market remains “very price-conscious, but I think if you have the right price on something, there’s no reason for it not to sell now.”

The stronger market was reflected across the region, according to Terri McCallum, president of the Niagara Association of Realtors.

“After a significant decline in April, we have rebounded with a 30 per cent increase in new listings and 75 per cent increase in sales,” she said in a news release.

“Sellers and buyers are confident in the real estate industry safety protocols being used to keep Niagara families moving,” she said.

In NOTL, with the highest real estate prices in the re-



Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty president Chris Bowron. KEVIN MACLEAN

gion, the average sale price, known as the home price index, was \$779,400 in May, up more than \$40,000 from a year earlier.

Jerry Cino, president of Homelife Niagara Real Estate Inc. in Virgil, said, “It is a great time to sell. There is less inventory in the market right now as people are unsure what to do, sell or stay. But buyers are still out looking to buy.”

He cited the case of a young couple previously frustrated with properties attracting multiple offers or

selling for well over asking and said they recently were able to buy a house in their price range with the conditions they wanted.

Sought-after communities like NOTL are “somewhat recession-proof” as people are “always looking to buy in great areas,” he told The Lake Report.

James O’Connor, a sales representative for Royal LePage NRC Realty in NOTL, says with COVID-19 restrictions easing he expects to see sales activity more akin to a typical spring market.

“For about six weeks the NOTL market had the same feel we had during the financial crises of 2008-09 where real estate activity just came to an abrupt halt. This time around, however, as the slowdown wasn’t necessarily economically motivated, things should get back on track much sooner,” he said.

“This year will likely see an increase of city dwellers moving to smaller communities like ours,” he said. With the pandemic lockdown, people have now

realized that “working from home is far easier or has become a permanent new reality for them. I’ve already spoken to several clients from the GTA expressing that this will likely happen for them this year.”

Bowron is likewise bullish on the next six months.

“You can just feel the activity. I’ve been doing this for 32 years now and I didn’t feel enthusiastic coming out of the summer last year, but I feel very enthusiastic right now. I think if somebody wants to sell, they’re going to have a good little period right now.”

“A lot of people in Niagara-on-the-Lake are moving sideways, up and down. Usually the chain gets started by someone buying from the GTA,” he said.

And with people realizing “we’re not reaching Armageddon, buyer confidence seems to be returning.”

In the wake of the pandemic and the possibility of future viruses, rather than be cooped up in a condo in the city with little access to outdoor amenities, he thinks “people will gradually want to be in smaller centres where maybe you’re safer.”

Niagara-on-the-Lake has only had 21 COVID-19 cases thus far and no active cases for nearly two weeks.

“I think for the next six months (the market is) going to be really good, but you don’t know what’s going to happen in the fall. They say

that there might be another episode of COVID-19.”

People, on average, move once every five or six years, he said. “Some people will take 30 years and some people will take one year.”

“And when you stop people from moving for whatever reason they still want to do it. People want to be encouraged it’s the right time to do it and I think that up until maybe the new year people were a little bit gun shy. But when people see the market returning and prices probably going up, I think you’re going to see a lot of people putting their houses on the market.”

Interest rates remain at historic lows and will drive the market from the bottom up, he noted, and the economy is slowly restarting after the COVID-19 shutdown.

“I believe we are going to see an uptick in the real estate market in Niagara-on-the-Lake in general. I know that Toronto has seen an uptick and we generally follow along with what happens there.”

People who live in big city centres, like Toronto, “are not having too much fun when they’re being locked down.

There’s nowhere to walk, nowhere to go and they probably found that they could work remotely from home a lot better than they had envisioned,” Bowron said.

“We have a great town and people want to live here.”

## Region updates town on Glendale District Plan

Steve Hardaker  
Community Correspondent

Niagara Region planning staff provided NOTL’s committee of the whole planning meeting with a detailed briefing on the final draft of the Glendale District Plan at Monday’s virtual meeting.

Committee members were given an opportunity to ask questions most of which included definitions of medium- and high-density targets and building heights, where the higher density buildings would be located and consideration for compatible designs with the rest

of NOTL.

For the most part, Kirsten McCauley, Niagara Region’s senior planner for the Glendale District Plan, said answers to those questions will be considered during the future update to NOTL’s Glendale secondary plan, which will include a number of technical studies.

It was reiterated that the district plan provides guidance for updating the secondary plan, which will be done by the town in cooperation with the region, once a regional official plan amendment is completed.

In a response to a question

about heights of building, regional planning commissioner Rino Mostacci stated, “If I had a crystal ball, I would say it is unlikely you will see very high-density, very tall buildings because it is a large area and there is definitely opportunity to defuse density across the entire area.”

While the intent of the briefing was to obtain endorsement from Niagara-on-the-Lake council, the resulting motion that was passed by the committee was to receive the plan and then refer it to town staff for a full report back to town

council.

In an emailed response concerning the motion, McCauley said, “The Glendale District Plan endorsement process has shifted from what I initially anticipated. Next steps will be for NOTL staff to prepare a report regarding endorsement.”

“Following this, it will come back to regional planning and economical development committee and regional council for endorsement. This will delay the timeframe a bit.”

At full build-out of the district, post current 2041



An illustration of the Glendale area, presented to council on Monday. SUPPLIED

regional growth projections, it is estimated Glendale will have a population of 15,000 residents along with 7,500 jobs.

Steve Hardaker has lived

in Glendale for nine years and is active in many community organizations. He was a member of the Glendale District Plan, Phase 2 Community Focus Group.

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## FEATURED LOCAL STORY

# True Grist

## Entrepreneurial family builds a new business on an old foundation

Tim Taylor  
 The Lake Report

If Robert Begin had a personal mantra it would be: “Once an entrepreneur, always an entrepreneur.”

Part of Rob Begin’s story is that he and his wife of 25 years, Danielle, are in the midst of resurrecting an old fruit packing house on Four Mile Creek Road, just north of Highway 406 in St. Davids, and turning it into a state-of-the-art restaurant and brewery.

But perhaps the more interesting part of the story is how Begin is realizing his lifelong fascination with business creativity and entrepreneurship.

Now 49, he grew up on the Third Line in Virgil, just where it crosses Creek Road. He attended Denis Morris High School in St. Catharines. At the age of 18, he was on his way to the University of Toronto, when a friend said: “Hey, let’s open a pizza place on Martindale Road in St. Catharines.”

As young people are wont to do, Begin chose action over education.

The new business did well. “It was just a small take-out place on Martindale Road,” Begin says, proud of his success. “But we did phenomenally well, paying off our loans within a year.”

By his early 20s, Begin had sold the St. Catharines business, married Danielle, and opened a new restaurant in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Longtime locals will fondly remember Garciolli’s, on Mary Street, where the Sandtrap is now, for its gourmet pizzas. It was so popular, Begin won the Chamber of Commerce’s Young Entrepreneur of the Year after only a year of operation.

Begin attributes his love of “risk takers and dream makers” to his father, Reg, a General Motors executive,



Left: Robert Begin is sinking a lifetime of entrepreneurial experience into The Grist, craft restaurant and brewery, soon to open in St. Davids. His family team includes, from left, daughters Devin and Brooklynn and his wife, Danielle. Right: Siblings, Elizabeth and John Fedorkow, grandchildren of the farm’s founders who built the packing-house-brewery-to-be in the 1940s, reminisce about their summer childhoods spent working in the historic building. TIM TAYLOR



and two-term Niagara-on-the-Lake councillor. Now retired, living part of the year on the Parkway and part in Florida, Reg instilled a sense of business adventure in his son.

“I was always like my father. He has an entrepreneurial spirit,” says Begin. “Before General Motors, he and my mother opened a small retail store in St. Catharines, selling children’s clothes.”

After five successful years at Garciolli’s, the Begins sold the restaurant to a very satisfied former customer.

Some might say Begin’s next career choice — 25 years working for the Criveller Group, a Niagara Falls firm specializing in winery and brewery equipment — took him away from his entrepreneurial heart.

Not so, according to Begin.

He travelled all over the world, sometimes 20 weeks a year, giving breath to the fledgling craft beverage industry. He helped design, build and install many of the world’s small, brewing, winery and distilling systems — even olive oil presses.

“I was always around these entrepreneurs,” says Begin. “Around people who were building things. They had a dream and were pre-

pared to take a risk. I was part of their process.”

After 25 years with Criveller, Begin was tired of the constant travel and missed Danielle and their two daughters, Devin and Brooklynn.

The family decided to bring together his two long-time passions: restaurants and breweries.

*“We’ll be drawing on the St. Davids historic brewing tradition, recalling days of the town’s first brewery, Sleeman’s.”*

ROB BEGIN  
 FOUNDER OF THE GRIST  
 CRAFT KITCHEN AND BREWERY

As the new home for their business dreams, Rob and Danielle coveted the old Fedorkow packing house, the last small part of a once 60-acre tender fruit farm. They had always been intrigued by the building, now a bit of an anomaly, surrounded by new subdivision houses.

But it was not for sale.

So, they searched public records to find out the property was still owned by the Fedorkow family. A brief back and forth to explain

their hopes for the historic building and the Begins became the proud owners.

John Fedorkow, a grape grower and the current Niagara Grape King, and his sister, Elizabeth, who now lives right next door to the would-be restaurant/brewery, loved Rob and Danielle’s ideas.

Elizabeth couldn’t be happier. “We are just ecstatic they’re bringing the old building back to life,” she says. “They are such great neighbours.”

Begin admits it is a rocky time to start a new business, especially one in the hospitality sector.

“If I opened just a restaurant, in this day and age, I would fail. If I opened just a brewery, I would go out of business. What we’re trying to do is a little bit of both, not too big in either business. A balance.”

To make it happen, like most entrepreneurs, the Begins had to say, “in for a penny in for a pound.”

“We sold our house, really everything, to complete this project on our own, without financial or investor support.”

Danielle, 48, gulps a bit as she describes the family commitment. “I’m a bit of a Nervous Nellie,” she admits. “But it has always been in him to do it again and do it better.

“Back in the day, we worked together 24/7 and we did it really well. Now we’ll do it again. If it is going to succeed, it will take the whole family.”

Begin agrees that their success will depend, at least in part, on their personal attention to detail. “If we’re open 80 hours, we’ll be there every hour.”

“We also have a history in Niagara-on-the-Lake to begin with. That’s a platform for us to start from,” he counts their success factors on his fingers.

“We’re really investing in the community, not just opening a restaurant or brewery.” He expects to have around 20 employees.

Another finger: “We’ll be drawing on the St. Davids historic brewing tradition, recalling days of the town’s first brewery, Sleeman’s. It started here as the Stamford Springs Brewery in 1834.”

He counts their new brewer, a graduate of Niagara College, as a real strength, too. “He’s had a lot of experience, including brewing the first beers for the Wayne Gretzky craft brewery.

Begin shies away from talking too much about specifics. He’s really not being coy, but he doesn’t seem to want to give too much away until The Grist, craft kitchen and brewery, (see

www.thegrist.ca) opens later in the year.

He offers a few hints: “small, unique atmosphere, very intimate and cozy. With a wonderful story behind it.”

He thinks it is important to be right-sized. The brewing system will be small—he calls it a Tonka Toy, referring to the 70-year-old manufacturer of small toy trucks. “It will look great and give us lots of flexibility. And if we need to grow, we have a large old barn.”

From the sounds of it, they may just need the barn.

Remember that subdivision, surrounding The Grist? Every day Begin’s new neighbours stop by asking for news of the opening. They love the idea of walking to their friendly neighbourhood brewery ...

A real supporter of the new business, John Fedorkow has already booked his recreational hockey team for weekly post-game gatherings in the upstairs lounge.


Rob Begin has the charged demeanor of an entrepreneur on a mission. You can virtually see ideas churning in his mind. He infects those around him with his energy.

It’s a kind of damn-the-torpedoes approach to life. And a smile is never far away.

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