

# The Lake Report

Lakereport.ca / Niagaranow.com  
Hyper-local news for Niagara-on-the-Lake



Vol. 3, Issue 20

SPECIAL EDITION: NOTL copes with COVID-19

May 21, 2020

## COVID could cost \$650K

But thanks to cost-cutting, NOTL actually has **surplus** right now, treasurer says

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Though the full financial impact of COVID-19 isn't yet known, the Town of

Niagara-on-the-Lake has estimated the cost to the municipality to be about \$657,375.

That number will keep changing as the province

eases emergency restrictions, town treasurer Kyle Freeborn said in an interview Tuesday.

Last week, the cost was estimated to be \$1,049,738,

but has been revised since parking fees and other services have resumed.

The numbers come from

*Continued on Page 2*

## Town to bring in portable toilets



Droves of tourists lined up to use the washrooms in Old Town on Saturday, despite the pandemic. RICHARD HARLEY

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

The long weekend drew the large crowds to Niagara-on-the-Lake, despite continued advocacy from the province to stay home except for essential trips.

Behind the courthouse on Market Street, people lined up around the corner on King Street to use the town's newly reopened bathrooms. At Queen's Royal Park, the line in the parking

lot reached the road.

The town is adding several portable washrooms starting this weekend.

"We opened washrooms on Friday to little attendance, but as we all know Saturday was a beautiful day and the washrooms started to get really busy," the town's director of operations Kevin Turcotte said in an interview.

The washrooms were cleaned every hour, in ac-

cordance with recommendations from Niagara public health, and lines showed people where to stand to social distance, he said.

"Overall, I think we did OK. There was a lot of people, but I think we handled it the best we can in the current situation."

He said the biggest challenge was "definitely the number of people" — especially on Market Street.

"Some were wrapped around the building, almost

around to Balzac's, so that caused a little bit of problems with general traffic on the sidewalks."

He said the town will work to improve management of the washrooms and anticipates even more visitors this weekend.

Lord Mayor Betty Disero said the town is going to "step things up" to shorten the lines and will install portable washrooms at both

*Continued on Page 2*

## Fire rips through Read Road greenhouse

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

A fire broke out at a greenhouse on the border of Niagara-on-the-Lake early Wednesday morning.

The greenhouse, located at 376 Read Road, went up in flames around 1 a.m., neighbours said.

"Just before one (a.m.) I was in my living room,"

said Tika Kovinic, who lives next door.

"Then I noticed this orange light because there is a big window in the living room."

She said at first she assumed the neighbours were burning some branches but wondered why the flames were so close to her house.

Upon closer inspection, Kovinic could see the

flames were spreading rapidly. She called the neighbours to notify them of the fire and then called 911.

"We were scared that something was going to blow over and catch onto our house," Kovinic said.

Multiple neighbours watching the blaze said the greenhouse was a cannabis grow operation and frequently caused an odour.



St. Catharines firefighters respond to the scene of a fire on Read Road early Wednesday morning.

JESSICA MAXWELL

Cheese Secrets co-owner Xavier Allard prepares a cheese platter. RICHARD HARLEY

## They're back

Tourists flock to Old Town on holiday weekend

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

operative" in following the shop's emergency procedures.

"Interesting having to manage people a bit more," he said. The store has a limit of three people at a time.

"Today's probably going to be one of the busiest days we've had in the past two months. So it's needed. It's definitely needed."

He said the business had been struggling somewhat since COVID restrictions were put in place.

"One thing that was a bit of a saving grace is we started doing preordered platters. So order your platter between Monday and Thursday and then Friday, Saturday I put out all the platters."

The store now has three sizes of cheese and meat platters.

*Continued on Page 7*



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# Crowds will keep coming, lord mayor says

**Continued from Front Page**

locations, as well as hire additional staff to manage them.

"We're looking at getting a couple of portapotties at each location. I think four down at Queen's Royal, along with the washrooms, and two at the courthouse."

She said the town is not going to open the washrooms at Simcoe Park, because they require more staff to manage them properly.

"And we don't want to do that if we don't have to," she said.

Bylaw enforcement officers also had a busy weekend managing the crowds.

Acting senior enforcement officer Henry Boese said people for the most part were being respectful to bylaw officers and mindful of social distancing measures.

"We saw a lot of compliance, which was good, and that's what we're striving for every time," Boese said.

However, a quick walk down Queen Street makes it obvious that the sheer number of visitors versus the size of the sidewalks is not conducive to social distancing. While others waited in line, people passed by

within a foot from each other.

Boese said the focus of bylaw enforcement is on education, not fining. He said "maybe" two tickets were handed out during the long weekend, for trespassing, not breaching emergency orders.

The biggest challenge with that has been the sheer number of people coming from the GTA and other places outside NOTL, he said.

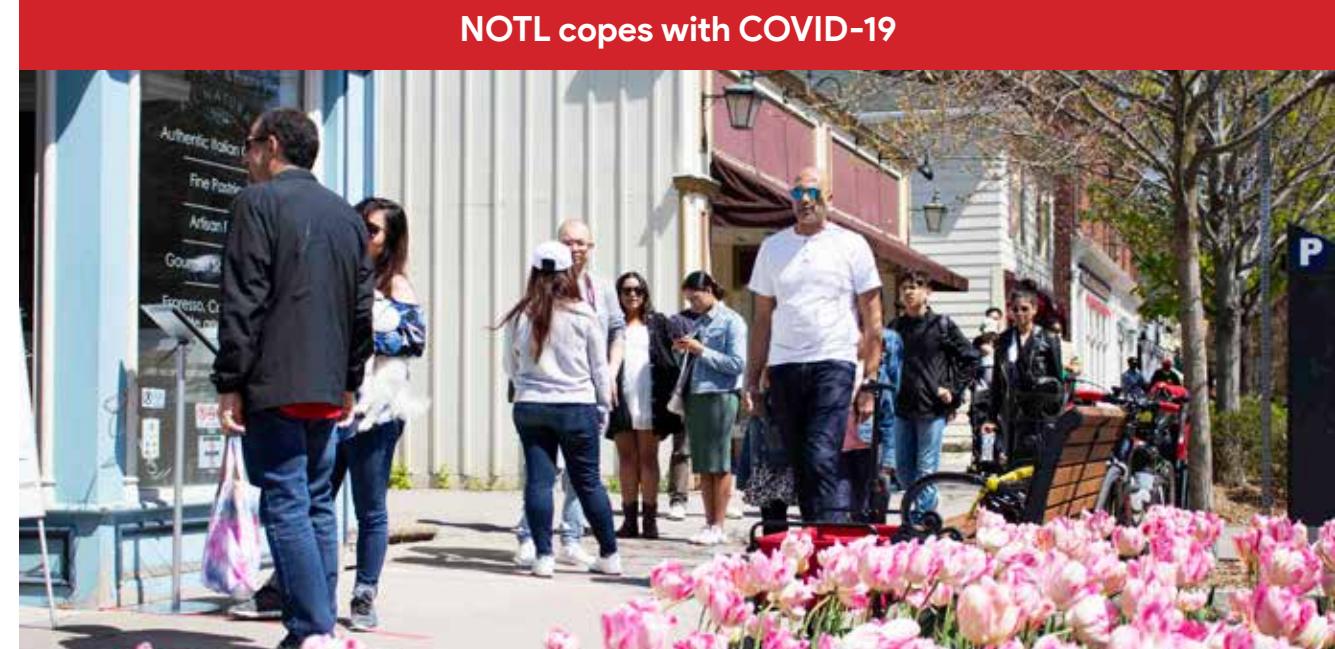
Disero said the town can't stop visitors. "They're going to come."

She urged residents, for their own safety, to take "special precaution" not to go into crowded areas during busy days in town.

"On the weekends, when there's a lot of people here, it's even more important now to try and protect yourself. Stay at home when you can on the weekends when we've got a lot of crowds. And if you have to go for a walk, walk in areas that are not high-traffic areas."

Saturday along Queen Street, people were elbow to elbow, and it didn't look like we are in the midst of a pandemic.

Geoffrey Thomas, a NOTL resident who was



## NOTL copes with COVID-19

Tourists were observed not social distancing at all, as they passed each other within close range. RICHARD HARLEY

taking a physiotherapy walk after a March hip replacement, said the number of tourists concerns him.

"Look at this, it's August crazy down here," Thomas said. "It's ridiculous right now."

He said he thinks people are being selfish.

"People only care about themselves, honestly," he said. "This line, 'We're all in the same boat' — we're not all in the same boat. We're all in different boats in a very nasty storm right now, is what we are. So your

storm is going to ride out differently than mine."

He said he'd like to see people taking prevention of a second wave of the virus more seriously.

"Everybody's gotta kinda get on board in the sense of 'OK, we need to do this to quell this stuff so we don't get a second outbreak,'" Thomas said.

"I mean, Spanish Flu taught us nothing? Has history taught us nothing at all? No, it hasn't because we keep repeating everything we've done before."

What did Einstein say? The definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting different results. And people are doing the same thing and we're going to get the same results."

While some people are respecting distancing, he said it's not a good idea to be out in a crowded town.

"It is insane to subject yourself purposely when it's still a good possibility that it could be another outbreak," he said.

"Some people are respect-

ing other people, but then again people are people. They're like 'oh, shiny' — like goldfish, they get distracted and they forget."

As positive as it is to see life on the street, it's worrying that people don't seem to be taking emergency orders seriously.

"It is nice to see people again, but so much at one time is just, I don't know, it worries me. But then again natural selection comes in a lot of different ways, so maybe this is part of thinning the herd."

# Financial impact estimates will continue to change

**Continued from Front Page**

reports prepared by Freeborn, which aim to provide an estimated financial impact and a summary of various cost savings directly associated with the pandemic. An initial report was based on projected costs and savings until June 30, though those projections have changed.

"It's changing all the time, mostly with just the restrictions of the provincial orders," Freeborn said.

He emphasized the costs associated with COVID-19 do not mean the town is facing a deficit — on the contrary, the town is currently seeing a surplus.

The \$657,000 figure is a measure of the cost of the pandemic, which is made

up of wages that would have been paid in the regular course of town business but are now being diverted to the pandemic, additional purchases to address public safety, lost revenues due to facility closures or other measures such as temporary parking bans, and savings from deferring or canceling town programs.

"Currently the financial impact of COVID-19 appears manageable and will not put the town into a deficit," Freeborn said.

The emergency control group, which is overseeing town operations, "will be monitoring the situation and looking for the right balance of responding to the emergency appropriately and mitigating costs where possible. If costs start to

creep up, town programs will be rolled back. If things start looking better, some town programs can resume. There are still costs associated with recovery and modifying or servicing public spaces for safe use to be considered."

It's currently estimated the town will lose about \$1.3 million in revenues, but that is mitigated by about \$1.3 million in cost savings.

The \$657,000 figure comes mainly from costs supported by normal budget expenses, and incremental expenditures such as \$7,928 in overtime, \$11,249 for additional enforcement staff (estimated to June 30), \$67,317 in department purchases (estimated to May 5).

Department purchases include \$2,036 for advertising and supplies, \$39,009 for laptops and VPN licences to enable remote work, \$7,988 for personal protective equipment, \$16,029 for electronic signage and \$2,253 for supplies for parks and recreation.

Costs associated with the already approved base budget include \$313,024.49 toward the emergency control group meeting daily for discussing and responding to town issues, \$349,132.63 for redeployment of staff to other functions to maintain core services, and \$390,528.97 for "staff time responding or implementing the direction of the emergency control group."

Lost revenues include \$13,650 in Provincial Of-

fences Act court revenues; \$65,000 in penalty and interest on taxes, which were waived to June 30; \$195,000 in short-term rental licensing, as the town reverted the increased 2020 fee to 2019 levels; \$1,500 in licensing and inspections for fire services; \$50,000 in building permits; \$79,500 in transit fares and Fort George revenues; \$614,200 in metered parking; \$48,616 in community centre bookings; \$3,340 from March Break camp; \$75,567 in arena bookings and \$4,896 in other bookings, as well as \$19,000 due to the St. Davids Pool closing and \$135,000 in water and waste water grant reduction.

"The pandemic is easily one of the most difficult situations that residents, businesses and municipalities have faced," Freeborn's report to councillors last week said. "Changes with social distancing and a new working environment have impacted all areas of the town's operations, requiring additional resources to enable remote work and protect the public while enforcing provincial orders."

The \$1.3 million in cost savings comes from an estimated \$200,102 in "incidental savings due to compliance with provincial restrictions," plus \$1,094,611 in "savings related to mitigation measures adopted by the municipality," the report says.

**Read the full story at [www.niagaranow.com/news.phtml/3915](http://www.niagaranow.com/news.phtml/3915)**

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May 21, 2020

NEWS

## Business fined \$880 for emergency order breach

Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

A store in Old Town has been fined \$880 for violating a provincial order after patrons on the sidewalk outside were found to be ignoring pandemic social distancing rules.

The owners of Nina Gelateria and Pastry Shop were ticketed by a Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake bylaw officer for a violation on Sunday, May 3.

Downtown NOTL was packed with visitors that weekend, despite a state of emergency and few services being available. More than 10,000 vehicles entered Old Town that Saturday and Sunday, according to town traffic count data.

The town refused to release any details on the ticket, citing privacy statutes and the fact the matter was before the courts.

NOTL's acting senior enforcement officer Henry Boese said he can't talk about it. "That incident is currently with the Ontario Court of Justice and I can't speak about it," he said.

In response to a question asking to clarify the town's position on what businesses should be doing on sidewalks to enforce distancing, spokesperson Lauren Kruitbosch said, "Busi-



A sign outside of Nina Gelateria asks people to practice physical distancing. RICHARD HARLEY

nesses should be taking reasonable steps to enforce physical distancing within the business. Sidewalks can be used by pedestrians waiting in line to enter a store (while maintaining physical distance). They can't however, be used for business purposes."

Mark Martinovic, who co-owns Nina Gelateria with his wife Klaudia, confirmed receiving the ticket, a \$750 set fine plus costs totalling \$880. The fine has been paid, he said.

Until that first weekend in May, the shop, at 37 Queen St., was "closed on the weekends as we were just catering to our locals, Monday to Friday," Martinovic

said in a statement to The Lake Report.

The store owners heard there would be a parking ban and many bylaw officers in town for added support, "so we decided that it would be OK to open up. We have always followed the provincial guidelines in the store with signs and floor markings," he said.

"As a take-out/curbside pickup establishment, we never had any issues with serving our sweets, pizzas, crepes or panini sandwiches safely."

On Sunday, May 3, Queen Street was very busy. "We wish we received a warning or some communication first, but we ended

up receiving a fine for not enforcing physical distancing in front of our store."

"A big problem is that the sidewalk is shared by people waiting to get inside the store (while waiting in line) and with pedestrian traffic and it clearly presents a challenge for businesses and the town, moving forward."

Some of the customers outside were families, who, when standing together in line, can appear to not be complying with physical distancing requirements, Martinovic said.

"But as they are a family unit, they stay in close proximity together and this is allowed under present regulations."

"The good news since then is that we have maintained positive communication with the town and are working together to make sure we are on the same page," he said.

Kruitbosch said the town has laid 42 charges during the state of emergency, which was declared on March 23.

"Some were laid as trespass, the majority for violation of the (province's) emergency order. The identities of persons or businesses charged are protected by the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act."

**Niagara-on-the-Lake**  
EST. 1781

### Notice of Approval of Tax & Rate By-law 2020 Tax Rates for General Levy & Special Area Levies

**TAKE NOTICE** that the Council of The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake will consider a report for the 2020 Tax Rates for General Levy and Special Area Levies at the Council meeting on:

**Monday, May 25, 2020**

**6:00 p.m.**

**Electronic Participation Meeting Only**  
[livestream.com/notl](http://livestream.com/notl)

A copy of the report will be available on the Town website at [www.notl.com](http://www.notl.com) on **Thursday May 21, 2020**. Delegation requests to speak to the report must be arranged prior to the meeting date. Registrations to speak must be submitted to the Office of the Town Clerk in writing no later than **12:00 p.m. on May 22, 2020**.

Final approval of the By-law will be considered at the May 25, 2020 Council Meeting.

For further information, please contact the Corporate Services Department at **905-468-3266**.

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The ink is also vegetable-based.

## 'Incredible response' for NOTL flag project

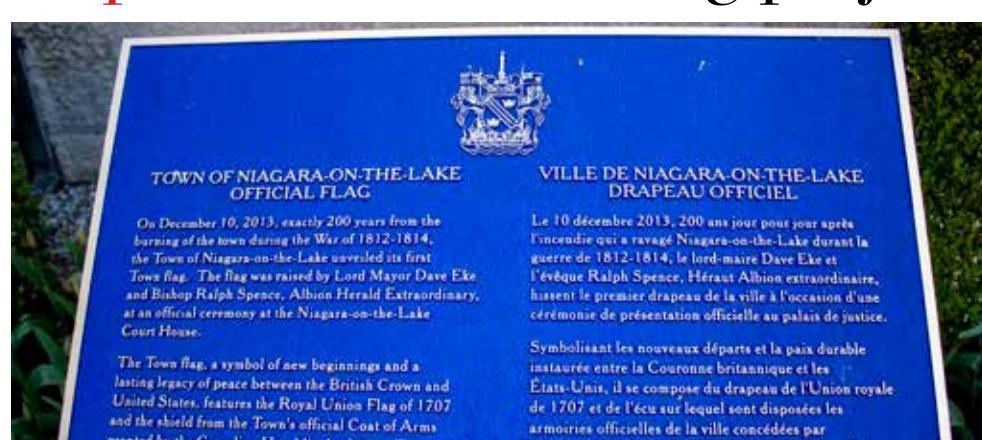
Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

Hundreds of Niagara-on-the-Lake flags will be flying around town in a few weeks thanks to a project by Coun. Norm Arsenault and the enthusiasm of NOTL residents.

Arsenault received orders for more than 400 flags by Tuesday's sales deadline. The flags should arrive in time for Father's Day.

The town councillor, who organized the flag initiative independent of his municipal duties, said his supplier needed at least 200 sales in order for the plan to go ahead.

"To say that this project is a success would be a serious understatement," Arsenault told The Lake Report.



A plaque outside of the courthouse tells the story of NOTL's flag. RICHARD HARLEY

"NOTL residents have stepped up with an incredible response. As of 4 p.m. (Tuesday), we have received orders for 401 flags and I expect the final tally at the end of day today to be around 425."

"Thank you to everyone for an outstanding response.

NOTL will be flying red, white and blue on Canada Day," he said.

The idea for producing the three- by five-foot ensigns at a cost of \$25 each grew out of some social media posts and comments in the past few weeks.

Arsenault latched on

to the idea and ran with it. Coun. Allan Bisback and Regional Coun. Gary Zalepa are also involved with the project.

All profits from sales of the flags will go to the NOTL 809 Newark Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron.



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### Contributed by Patty Garriock

"We have enough people who tell it like it is. Now we could use a few people who tell it like it can be." – Robert Orben.



### Contributed by Norm Arsenault:

Eliminate single use plastic water bottles from your lives. ONE MILLION plastic bottles are bought EVERY MINUTE around the world – and that number will top half a TRILLION by 2021. Less than half of those bottles end up getting recycled. In Ontario less than a third are recycled. 8 MILLION METRIC TONS of plastic winds up in our oceans each year. (Earth day.org)

## Editorial: Don't let down your guard

Kevin MacLean  
Managing Editor

After months of living through the threat and then the reality of a worldwide pandemic that has hit oh-so-close to home, restrictions on our activities are now being eased.

We are now able to move about more freely in the community, after two months of being at home and limits on where we can go, what businesses are

open and how we all should behave.

But let's not make the mistake of thinking things are back to normal. What was once normal for us all might never return, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With warmer spring temperatures on the horizon – finally – it will be easy to lose sight of the need to maintain some of the strictures we have had to embrace since life irrevocably changed in March.

We all need to be careful to not let down our collective guard. NOTL has been relatively lucky as there has not been a large COVID outbreak in the community nor in our long-term care homes. For that we can all be thankful.

However, many experts already have warned that, as with SARS in 2003, a second wave of COVID could easily erupt and spread widely if people are careless.

So, please, let's all mind our physical and social distancing, keep washing our hands, wear a mask (when distancing is a problem, as federal health officials now recommend), but above all, treat one another with respect and care.

It's been a stressful time for everyone. We don't want to have to turn back the clock and head for lock-down again.

*editor@niagaranow.com*



## Mayor, council doing nothing to help Old Town businesses

Dear editor:

The Old Town and Queen Street, in particular, are the centrepiece for tourism in Niagara-on-the-Lake and tourism is the mainstay of our economy.

The Shaw Festival, the bed and breakfast industry and the local wineries all benefit from the charm and attraction of this unique area with its outstanding collection of restaurants and shops.

The businesses in this area are, for the most part, locally owned and employ hundreds of our residents. Even our residential property values are enhanced by the charm and attraction of the Old Town and Queen Street.

The high property taxes

and parking revenues from this area contribute a sizeable portion of the town's revenues.

In view of this, one would think that the town council and our lord mayor would be working tirelessly to help and assist the businesses in this area during the state of emergency.

Sadly, this is not so.

There has been no communication or contact by councillors or the mayor with business owners to help these struggling merchants during our state of emergency.

There has been no co-ordinated plan during this crisis or for the reopening of our commercial area.

Flashing signs at the entrance to town to discour-

age visitors, eliminating all parking in the Old Town one week and then reopening the following week, towing cars off Queen Street, closing all public washrooms and fining merchants for shoppers congregating on the public sidewalk in front of stores are some of the tactics that have been used without any input or forewarning for the businesses.

Surely we have the right to expect better management from our local government.

Instead of developing tree bylaws or bylaws for locks on backyard hot tubs, focus on the development of a strategic plan for the health of our businesses in the Heritage District.

Start by forming a committee of council to work with Queen Street merchants and property owners to develop a plan to reopen.

Let's implement the Heritage Tax Credit designed by the Ontario government to help property owners in heritage areas. (Over 30 municipalities in Ontario offer this credit to property owners in heritage areas... but not Niagara-on-the-Lake).

Stop working on plans to allow temporary vendors to set up shop in Simcoe Park, which would add additional injury to the Queen Street businesses.

It's time for our town officials to provide leadership and direction.

*Tom Gauld  
NOTL*

## Fining store owners kicks them when they're down

Dear editor:

I just heard that one of the stores on Queen Street was fined by the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for having people standing too close in a lineup outside the store. Some social media posts said the fine was \$1,000.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but wouldn't the public area outside the store be under the jurisdiction of the town and not the retailer?

Wouldn't it be the town's responsibility to enforce these social distancing rules? How can it be the responsibility of the store owner to look after a lineup outside their store and which, indeed, may very well have people in it who are not even going to their particular establishment?

Just when the province allows these poor retailers to get back to work,

our bylaw officers go and kick them when they are at their most vulnerable for something that should not fall under their responsibility at all.

Should our retailers hire one or two more people just to police this? Have they not got enough on their plate trying to pay the rent that in a lot of cases has not been deferred due to greedy and short-sighted landlords?

Way to go, Town of NOTL. If I was this retailer you would have a tough time getting that \$1,000 out of me.

Dispute this fine all you can. I know a QC lawyer who says you have a very good case. Good luck and keep your chin up through these difficult times. We locals will look after you!

*Shaun McDonald  
NOTL*



The restaurant fined was Nina Gelateria & Pastry Shop.  
RICHARD HARLEY



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## OPINION

# NOTL needs to act fast to curb 'overtourism'

Dear editor:

When will Niagara-on-the-Lake, and in particular Old Town, reach a saturation point for tourism – or are we there now?

Are we, as we continue to promote more tourism by building more hotels (Randwood) and accommodation for tourists, attempting to pour 100 gallons into a 50-gallon container?

I lived in the United States for many years, nine of which were spent in East Amherst, a suburb of Buffalo.

Friends and associates visited NOTL regularly, enjoyed a leisurely stroll along Queen Street, had lunch or dinner, visited The Shaw, etc.

Today they have either stopped visiting or do so infrequently. Visits are too stressful.

Queen Street, they say, is

overcrowded and looks like an elbow-to-elbow contact sport, much like leaving a Buffalo Bills or Sabres game. Are we already driving visitors away?

Residents have already seen their quality of life affected – the town has changed and not always for the good.

NOTL is not the only town, city or country experiencing a backlash to tourism overcrowding.

The tourism industry coined the official phrase for this phenomenon: "overtourism."

It describes a situation in which a tourism destination exceeds its carrying capacity or saturation point, in both physical and psychological terms.

It results in a deterioration of the tourist experience for either the visitor or residents or both. For

example, my friends from the Greater Buffalo area.

Witness also the current protests against cruise ships in Venice after a crash in 2019. Certain areas of the city are off limits to visitors.

Bruges, Belgium, is limiting the number of cruise ships. The Taj Mahal has increased prices and set limits on how long people can stay. The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island are limiting tours. New Zealand has introduced new taxes targeting visitors (a note to our local council, chamber and tourism board).

In Thailand, Maya Beach on Koh Phi Phi Leh Island, made famous by the movie "The Beach," is closed altogether due to overcrowding.

These are the tip of the iceberg and residents worldwide are protesting at

popular tourist destinations, must-see bucket list hot spots.

We see it here in NOTL.

Tourism is the lifeblood of NOTL and we all must be cognizant of the fact that, left unattended and addressed, the history of tourism teaches us it has a natural regression to tourist overcrowding.

Solving overcrowding is a hugely complex issue and is all too often oversimplified. As they say, it is way beyond my pay grade, however, there are expert consultants in this field who model short- and long-term visions, plans and solutions in concert with community leaders.

We should seriously consider and take action on these matters. We need to act before it is too late.

*Samuel Young  
NOTL*

## 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 \$5,605 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.

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**The Lake Report**

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# Dr. Brown: Virus mutates slowly, as search for vaccine accelerates

Dr. William Brown  
Special to The Lake Report

The genome of the COVID-19 virus (SARS-CoV-2) is small – only 30,000 bases in its single strand of RNA compared to the 3.2 billion bases in a single strand of human DNA.

Yet in the five months since it was first discovered in China in late November last year, this virus wreaked havoc first in Wuhan, then much of the rest of China, later Iran, much of Europe, the United States and now over 100 countries – along the way infecting millions and killing many thousands. And there is worse to come in poor countries where there's little in the way of health care and social distancing is impossible.

This virus, like many others, gains access to the interior of cells, by latching on to specific receptors embedded in the membranes of cells – in this case ACE-2 receptors. Then the virus's genome sets about usurping the cell's own machinery for copying proteins and RNA, to make thousands of copies of itself, destroying the cell in the process and releasing the copies into the circulation to infect other cells.

Favoured targets of this virus include the lining cells of the respiratory tract, especially the epithelial cells, which line the hundreds of thousands of tiny alveolar sacs and their associated capillaries, where gas exchange normally takes place. Other sites rich in ACE-2 receptors, such as the vascular system, kidneys, epithelial cells in the bowel and cells in the brain, are also prime targets for this virus.

Given the target tissues of this virus, it's not hard to guess what the clinical manifestations might be. Sneezing, coughing and pneumonia for the respiratory system, heart attacks, arrhythmias, heart failure, hypotension, ischemic stroke and changes in the fingers



Image by Gerd Altman. PIXABAY

for the vascular system, diarrhea and vomiting for the gastrointestinal system, kidney failure for the urinary system and clotting for the hemopoietic system. The common denominator: they all have lots of ACE-2 receptors.

So far at least 30 pharmaceutical companies and government-supported ventures are working on vaccines using traditional methods employing killed or tamed COVID-19 viruses or higher-tech methods designed to use selected bits of the virus to provoke a more vigorous, targeted and effective immune response.

Just days ago, Moderna, a Massachusetts-based company, released encouraging results from the first phase of studies of its vaccine. Hopefully that vaccine and promising ones produced by other companies will be fast-tracked through the clinical testing process to shorten what would otherwise be a year-long or longer time required for approval.

Just as important will be to develop the requisite manufacturing processes for mass producing the most effective vaccines for what will be a worldwide market. Hopefully, the development of effective antiviral agents can be fast tracked, too.

But what if the current version of COVID-19 proves capable of reinventing itself to get around any of the vaccines in development? Prior experience with the coronavirus family isn't encouraging.

For example, colds are caused by coronaviruses and what immunity might develop following one cold doesn't seem to last very long or the virus mutates to get around the immune responses to previous infections. In the case of the closely related SARS-CoV-1 virus, naturally acquired immunity didn't appear to last much past two years. What about COVID-19? We don't have an answer to that yet.

We know that COVID-19 has mutated within and beyond China, but as far as we can tell, not in a fashion that would change the transmissibility of the virus or the clinical features of the disease. So far most of the mutations documented in this pandemic have taken place in non-critical regions of the virus's genome with no apparent effect on the virus's infectivity or behaviour.

There are other regions of the virus's genome where there have been few, if any, mutations, which suggests these regions may be highly

conserved and that any mutations in these regions, might be fatal for the virus. That would make these conserved regions of the virus's genome a natural target for the development of anti-viral drugs and possibly a vaccine.

Despite worldwide dissemination of the disease and plentiful opportunities to make copying errors, this virus appears to mutate slowly – half the rate at which seasonal flu mutates, even though its genome is twice the length of the flu genome. That's reassuring because it suggests this virus might not find a quick way around any effective vaccine or antiviral drug – once we have them.

We're still learning about this virus, but so far, its behaviour suggests that we might be dealing with it for a long time: hence an effective vaccine is essential if we're ever to get on top of this phase of the pandemic and possible recurring waves in the months and years to come.

*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.*

**During this time of uncertainty, please remember to support the local businesses that are keeping our community running.**

## RIDDLE ME THIS

I may have eyes but I don't use them to see. I live in the dark until you have need of me. What am I?

Last Week: After a fall, you'll always find me there. What once was alive, will now be bare.

What am I?

Answer: Winter

Also accepted: Time

Answered first by: Howard Jones

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Katie Reimer, Kathy Neufeld

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

with COVID-19

## NOTL Farmers' Market opens Saturday

Jessica Maxwell  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Farmers' Market is back in action this Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. with reinvented operations.

Limiting the number of shoppers and vendors, a hand-sanitizing station and a reimagined product set up are all a part of the adapted farmers' market.

Market co-ordinator Sharon Brinsmead-Taylor said she is feeling good about the layout for the first market.

"We have markings on the pavement so if people are waiting to go in, they can line up two metres apart. When they get to the front of the line, they'll have a tent set up with an ATM if they need cash and our hand-sanitizing station," she said.

They're only allowing one shopper per vendor booth at a time. "We have 10 vendors starting out this week so 10 shoppers will be allowed to go in to the shopping area at any given time."

Shoppers must use the



The NOTL Farmers' Market opens Saturday with new restrictions.  
FILE/DARIYA BAIGUZHIEVA

sanitizing station before entering the market and vendors are required to sanitize after each transaction. Hand sanitizer for the market was donated by Limited Distillery in Virgil.

Those attending the market are asked to have one shopper per household go in to the market area at a time to maintain physical distancing.

There is no requirement to wear a mask for shoppers

or vendors, but it is recommended. Gloves are not recommended.

Shoppers can bring reusable bags, however they will be responsible for bagging their own produce and purchases.

"Our vendors are not to touch anything that the customers bring in," Brinsmead-Taylor said.

"Products will be set up behind vendors and then they will pass them off to

customers, rather than customers touching things."

She said she recognizes that the first few weeks may have a few hiccups, but the new system is pretty straightforward.

"I think we've got some really good protocols in place to ensure everybody's safety," she said, "and I think we've got a really good variety of foods that are going to be available on a regular basis."

## Businesses welcome tourism back

*Continued from Front Page*

"So that's been helpful. Mother's Day was a good weekend, I actually had over 50 platters on Mother's Day, so that kept me buzzing," Allard said.

Being able to open a little bit now is a relief. "It's definitely a little bit of weight off the shoulders. Because before was, 'Oh, how are we going to make rent? How are we going to get by?'"

He said the closing of the NOTL SupperMarket was a "big loss" for the business.

"To be quite honest, like thousands," he said.

He said other markets, like the St. Catharines market are going to be substantially changed.

"Online stuff for the St. Catharines market is going to be very distanced —



Businesses around town displayed open signs Saturday. RICHARD HARLEY

only the amount of customers as there are vendors in the market area at once, so it's going to be interesting, a lot slower paced," Allard said.

"That's the one thing I kind of appreciate, I guess, about all of this, is that everybody's taken a step back and easing back into

it. It's more of a slow-paced lifestyle, which is kind of nice."

He said given the long weekend traffic, he's "hopeful" about tourists returning, though he doesn't expect things to be back to normal.

"But we've got to get used to our new normal. It's going to be a new normal that we're gonna ease into and have to think a little outside the box — or even in the box, because people are now putting packages together, preordered boxes."

He said Cheese Secrets and some other stores in town are planning a box with various products. "It's about thinking outside of the box and trying new ways of getting customers, essentially."

He said social media has

become more important than ever.

"Social media is a big one that everybody kind of knows and knew, but now it's like you have to. If you're not online, if you don't have a presence on the internet or a way for people to communicate with you on the internet, it's hard to have business."

He said some store owners he knows have been struggling without an online presence.

"(They) really had nothing to do until just now where finally some of the people are coming around."

He remains hopeful and will keep up the extra precautions in the store.

"It feels good to be back in the groove of things and busy again. It's a little more in depth of being careful, but it's worth it."



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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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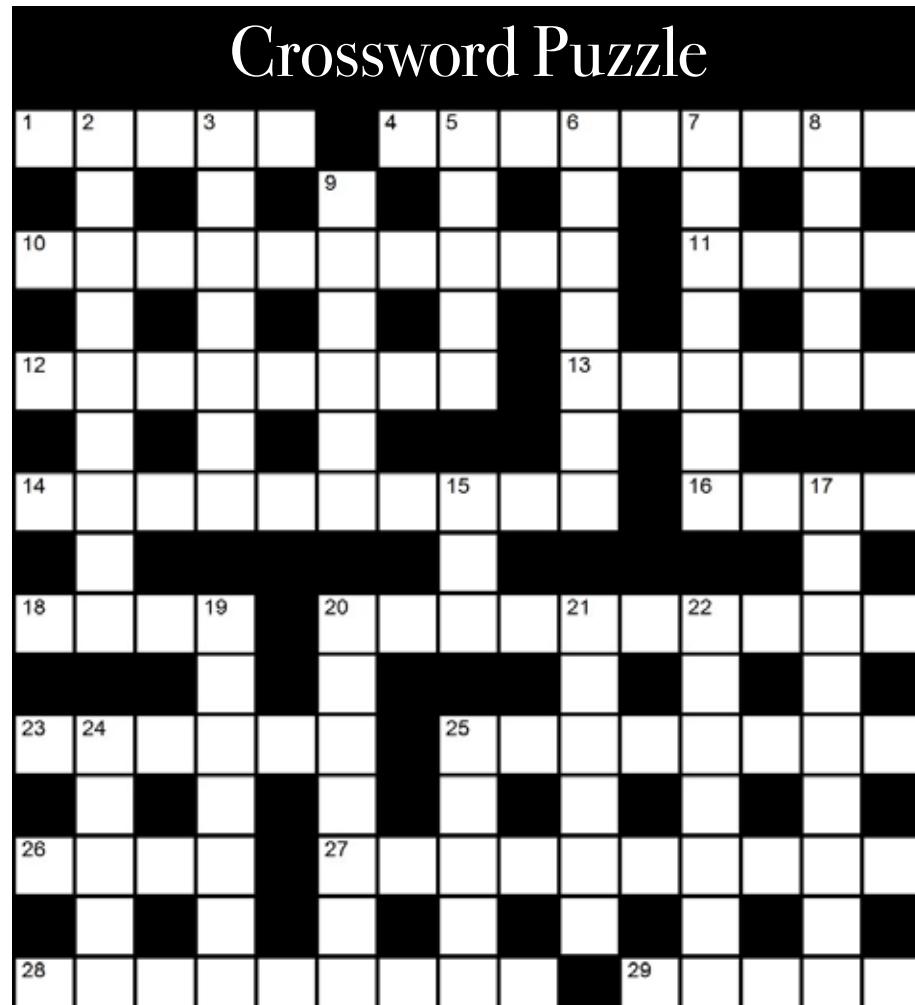
*Have some fun*

**Across**

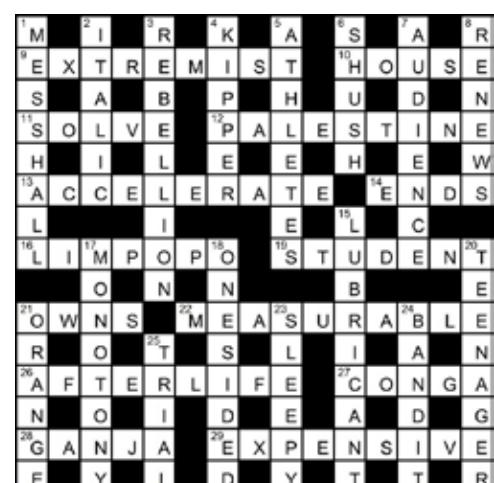
1. Scent (5)
4. Dutch canal city (9)
10. Lively interest (10)
11. Small margin (4)
12. Serious warning (3,5)
13. Animosity (6)
14. Tropical fruit (10)
16. Unspecified in number (4)
18. Singles (4)
20. Place to research (10)
23. Throughout (6)
25. E.g. Aldrin (8)
26. Knave (4)
27. Matrimonial lady-in-waiting (10)
28. Gun dog (9)
29. Customary (5)

**Down**

2. Weed (9)
3. Lift up (7)
5. Intended (5)
6. Hardens metal (7)
7. Christens again (7)
8. Item with exchange value (5)
9. Dozing (6)
15. Tennis high ball (3)
17. Salty cocktail (9)
19. Slacker (7)
20. Readable (7)
21. Subscriber (6)
22. Vacuum flask (7)
24. Long-continued practice (5)
25. Connected series of rooms (5)



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](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com)

**Last issue's answers**

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## INNOVATION IN WINE COUNTRY: Part 5

# Online sales, exports help Pillitteri Estates navigate pandemic

**Editor's note:**  
We launched our series on Innovation in Wine Country in the days before COVID-19 changed the landscape and life as we know it. Many of the stories focus on innovation and expansion in the industry, which come at a cost. Pillitteri Estates Winery awaits the opportunity to reopen and welcome guests to some of its new features.

Jill Troyer  
The Lake Report

On a typical May long weekend, the scene at Pillitteri Estates Winery on Niagara Stone Road is a bustling parking lot packed with tour buses and cars, and hundreds of tourists streaming into the winery for tastings and tours.

"We see 200,000 people in a year," says Jamie Slingerland, director of viniculture at Pillitteri.

"We've enabled our facilities here to handle large numbers of people. We have a number of different areas, so we can handle bus traffic as well as car traffic."

But this past long weekend, the only cars in the Virgil winery's parking lot belonged to staff or customers doing curbside pickup. COVID-19 restrictions have grounded tourism-related businesses like Pillitteri and it's uncertain when "normal" times will return.

The pause in tourism comes on the heels of some recent enhancements to the tour experience at Pillitteri, as well as various innovations in the production area.

Brand new doors, recently installed to welcome visitors on tours, remain closed. Inside, other improvements now awaiting the return of visitors include a dramatic sculpture, a hand-built wall created from 100 barrel staves, and an impressive new space in the barrel cellar.

"Since we're not selling at the front door, or to restaurants, or farmers' markets, our wine sales are down 50 per cent, plus or minus,"



Above: New doors greet visitors to Pillitteri Estates Winery. Below: The winery's new barrel cellar is ready for visitors. JILL TROYER



says Slingerland.

"We have to innovate, and adapt to the changing environment, so we're focusing on curbside and online sales. Deliveries have increased by 500 per cent, but even that doesn't replace what we've lost at the front door," he explains.

As far as curbside sales, he's "seeing a few dozen cars per day, and (he expects) that to grow."

Exports are the other big part of Pillitteri's business, in fact, they account for half of the company's overall sales.

"If there is an economic decline, it will affect exports," Slingerland says. "We won't know the real decline until the fall, since it's our peak shipping time. We are holding our breath, to see how things unfold."

In the meantime, the vineyards still need tending and wine production continues,

with new measures in place to ensure staff are safe.

While the tour enhancements won't be appreciated until visitors come again, the production innovations are providing immediate benefits.

Among those innovations are new, ultraviolet lights in the barrel area that kill mould, bacteria and yeast; new chillers and heaters that maintain exact temperatures in the tanks during fermentation; and new tanks from Bulgaria that have automatic pumpover for red wines, a process that otherwise would have to be done manually.

In the lab, "we test for various compounds in the grapes. Using the test tube method, we can test a sample of grape juice in 45 minutes, with the new (FOSS) system, it takes just two minutes," says Slingerland. "The winemaker

needs this data to make important decisions."

Pillitteri is also going ahead with plans to renovate and expand an outdoor patio at the winery, where food and wine can be enjoyed.

"We have to be ready for when we open again. Eventually, there will be tourism, and we aim to constantly improve that experience."

Until that time comes, "we are very grateful for locals going online or ordering curbside. It's so critical right now. It will keep wineries alive," Slingerland emphasizes.

"If you want to help us, order some wine, and buy Ontario. You'll be helping your neighbours."

NEXT: A sight to see – 100 bottles per minute whirl through the new bottling line at Henry of Pelham.

Hey hot stuff! You've kept your humour and those legs — and now you've finally got a reason to keep the paper.

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## Please donate to support local news

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So far there has been \$5,605 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.

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The Lake Report



# Glendale District Plan moving ahead

Steve Hardaker  
Community Correspondent

Niagara Region planning staff have completed the final draft of the Glendale District Plan and presented it to the Niagara Region planning and economic development committee on May 13.

Kirsten McCauley, the region's senior planner for the Glendale District Plan, provided committee members with a recap of the two-phased approach that was taken to develop the plan.

She said the district plan was created in co-operation with Niagara-on-the-Lake and St. Catharines planners as well as through a number of public consultation methods among stakeholders that included residents, land

owners, municipal politicians, Niagara College and businesses.

The committee was told that process has now concluded with the final draft of the Glendale District Plan.

A timeline for endorsement was discussed with a request for the committee to provide support for moving into this phase.

The endorsement phase will include presentations to the NOTL planning committee of the whole in early June followed by a recommendation report to the region's planning and economic development committee in mid-June and, finally, to regional council for endorsement later in June.

When development is complete, the plan esti-



The plan estimates Glendale will have a population of 15,000 residents along with 7,500 jobs. SUPPLIED

mates Glendale will have a population of 15,000 residents along with 7,500 jobs.

In an email response concerning the aggressive endorsement timeline during the COVID-19 restrictions, McCauley said, "I am currently working with staff at the town to confirm the presentation to NOTL planning committee of the whole on June 8. I am still targeting to bring it back to regional planning commit-

tee and council on June 17/June 25."

Once endorsed, there will be a regional Official Plan amendment followed by the updating of the NOTL Glendale Secondary Plan.

*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.*



Neighbours Sharon Brinsmead-Taylor and Tony Taylor with Dawn Walker-Krahn and Bill Krahn enjoy their shared "Flip Bar." SUPPLIED

## 'Flip Bar' lets neighbours be social – from a distance

What do friends who happen to be neighbours do when a six-foot-high fence separates them? They turn it into a "Flip Bar," of course.

Neighbours Sharon Brinsmead-Taylor, Tony Taylor, Dawn Walker-Krahn and Bill Krahn are keeping two metres apart in their own yards as they enjoy a flip bar made from the fence between their properties.

After seeing a similar project posted online, Tony and Bill decided to flip the fence to create their own social distance watering hole at the beginning of May and have been enjoying it ever since.

# Sailing club in uncharted waters

Jessica Maxwell  
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Sailing club re-opened the gates at 8 a.m. on May 14 with a new COVID Code of Conduct in effect.

"There is a lot of different correspondence regarding how to open this past Saturday, which we adhered to," Ed McIlroy, NOTL Sailing Club's General Manager said.

"There is a code of conduct that has been issued to all of our members as to how to enter the yard and how to act upon entry," McIlroy said.

He says there is a lot of communication between the sailing club and Ontario Boating and Ontario Sailing Association that are monitoring the provincial mandate.

Physical distancing is required for people not of the same household and no gathered groups of more than five people are permitted. Clubhouses and decks are closed until further notice.

Masks and latex gloves are encouraged, especially in the washroom. It is encouraged that people bring their own hand sanitizer but there is some available. Only one washroom is open



NOTL Sailing Club general manager Ed McIlroy stands at the front gate of the NOTL Sailing Club. JESSICA MAXWELL

at this time and is cleaned and sanitized professionally twice daily.

"As with the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, restrooms were an issue," McIlroy said.

"We've found the best way to tackle that is to be able to provide a single bathroom, not one of our larger ones with showers and things. They remain closed."

The notice also reminds people that NOTL by-law officers will be monitoring the club and fines are still in effect for those who don't comply with safety regulations.

Memberships help the club in monitoring the amount of people present at one time.

"Saturday being a beautiful day was the first test, because of the anxiousness

of all," McIlroy said.

"It went very well. It wasn't too overrun here and everyone seemed to be adhering to the code of conduct put in place."

"The challenge has been to just keep everyone informed," McIlroy said. "People are very anxious in the spring to get their boats ready."

He says up until the recent mandates put in place by the federal government it was challenging to give people the information they were looking for.

"Our facility being in Niagara-on-the-Lake means there's also municipal guidelines that we adhere to," McIlroy said.

"We didn't waver from them and we were in con-

versation with the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake senior staff and council members and we all kind of worked along the same line in terms of opening this up properly."

"Hopefully we only open up once and we won't have any set-backs," he said.

"We're very cautious about it, as the town and I'm sure Ontario, Canada and the rest of the world is."

"Everything is early here and in the infancy stages in terms of opening up," he said.

Currently programs including the learn to sail and race program are postponed. McIlroy said if things start to go in the right direction, that could change.

"We haven't done the hard and cold, that's it, we're done, that's not happening under any circumstance," he said, "just postponement."

So far everyone is adhering to the new code of conduct put in place at the NOTL Sailing Club.

"It's going as well as to be expected," McIlroy said. "People are happy and there's smiles out there again, some boats getting ready and they're going to go on the water and salvage some kind of season here."

## Niagara board supports keeping schools closed

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

The District School Board of Niagara says it supports the province's decision to keep elementary and secondary schools closed for the remainder of this school year.

"The decision to close schools until the end of June was important for maintaining student, staff, and community health and safety," the school board said in a media release.

"Our schools and teachers will continue to engage students with online education from their teacher(s), and through the DSBN Learn From Home website," the board said.

"Our students have been resilient in dealing with the

change from classroom to virtual learning, and our parent community have supported their children's efforts; we sincerely appreciate the work of our parent community."

The school board added that learning will continue for students via a summer learning program.

"This program will feature a broad range of subjects for all grades if they choose to enhance their learning during the summer. It will feature a much larger number and variety of credits than would typically be offered."

The school board said it will continue to work to "ensure that the 2019/2020 school year successfully concludes for all students and staff."

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## Obituary Dietlinde Witt



Dietlinde Barbara Erika Witt (nee Zollenkopf) met her Lord May 19, 2020 at age 89. She died peacefully at the Greater Niagara Falls Hospital with Pastor Larry Ritter at her side.

Dietlinde was born August 3, 1930 in Germany to Lothar and Erika Zollenkopf. She spoke fondly of her youth growing up in Prussia with her 3 siblings. Her father was a Lutheran minister so the parsonage was filled with music, sermons and many friends. She married Karl-Heinrich (Charlie) Witt and they immigrated to Canada in 1953 with their 2 year old daughter Ulrike. Life was not always easy but they worked hard scrimping and saving to build a new life in Canada. Seven years after arriving they built a beautiful new home in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Three more additions to the family, Christine (Beanie), Helga and Andreas (Andy) made the family complete. Dietlinde (Linda) and Karl (Charlie) had a multitude of friends and the home was filled with laughter and companionship. One always felt welcome at the Witt's! Dietlinde opened a successful Bed and Breakfast (Linda's Bread Basket) in the mid 1970's. It was to accommodate the Shaw Festival Theatre patrons. Her business ran for 40 years with many repeat customers.

Dietlinde was very musical playing a variety of instruments. She enjoyed singing in her church choir and the Niagara Area Lutheran Choir. Gardening was also a passion of hers, especially all her flowers. She also enjoyed her daily walks, in all seasons, to the Post Office. Along the way she always hoped to see her favourite dogs as she had a pocket full of treats for them.

In her later years she moved to a senior's complex, Pleasant Manor, in Virgil.

Dietlinde was predeceased by her husband Karl-Heinrich in 2005. She leaves to mourn her family:

Ulrike (aka Ricci) Matthews (Jim) of Hardisty, Alberta  
Christine Hameister (Todd) of Tonawanda, NY  
Helga Witt-Sullivan (Hugh) of Burlington Ont.  
Andrew Witt (Tracy Bilton) of Niagara-on-the-Lake Ont.

Her grandchildren include:

Amanda Voisinet (Jason), Scott Hameister (Jennifer),  
Mark Matthews (Sarah), Jeweleigh Bates (Noel), Kristy  
Meinen (David), Jordon Matthews (Sarah Wells), Harley  
Matthews (Fiance Justine Dammann), Craig Sullivan,  
Kenneth Sullivan (Ally Mackie), Erin Sullivan (Sebastian  
Katsman), Daniel Witt and Michael Witt.

### Rest in Peace "Liebe Mutti"

Due to Covid19 restrictions the funeral service is limited to 10 people. The family appreciates all the condolences and kind words.

In lieu of flowers Dietlinde had spoken about donations to: Trinity Lutheran Church, 2027 Niagara Stone Rd., NOTL LOS 1J0

## Golf auction raises \$6,000 for Newark Neighbours

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

What started out over lunch as an idea to raise a few dollars for Newark Neighbours has blossomed into a major fundraiser for the NOTL food bank.

Niagara-on-the-Lake head pro Billy Simkin and associate pro Ricky Watson were having a bite to eat last week when Watson suggested that, after a long-delayed start to the golf season, "Everyone will want the first tee time."

So Simkin decided, "Let's just auction it off and give the money to the Newark Neighbours Food Bank."

His goal: \$500.

The result: more than \$6,000 has been raised for the agency, led by a generous, anonymous donation of \$5,000 from one of the club's members.



NOTL Golf Club pro Billy Simkin and owner John Wiens (rear) keep a social distance as Harry Huizer and Martha Cruikshank are the first group to tee off for the season on Saturday. RICKY WATSON PHOTO

Several golfers who bid on the prized tee time opted to just donate their bids to the food bank, while others were inspired to give donations directly to Newark Neighbours.

"I was very taken aback when I received an email from a member offering \$5,000," Simkin said in a message to members.

"What was more impres-

sive was the request to remain anonymous and to give the tee time to some of the legends of our club and our greatest ambassadors."

He reached out to NOTL golf veterans Jim Brown and Doug Garrett, but both are still in "spring training" getting ready for the 2020 season.

Instead, Simkin nominated women's Solheim

Cup team captain Martha Cruikshank and men's Ryder Cup captain Harry Huizer, and "both were very delighted to get the call and graciously accepted."

"I could not imagine a better way to start what has been a difficult spring for all of us," said Simkin, in thanking club members for the outpouring of support for Newark Neighbours.

Newark Neighbours president Laura Gibson said the organization was "truly grateful" for the donation.

"What a wonderful surprise this was for Newark Neighbours! The funds will allow us to continue to stock our shelves at the food bank and serve those in need in our community," Gibson said.

"We are very fortunate to have such strong community support to see us through this pandemic."

## Soccer club cancels season due to pandemic

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

The NOTL Soccer Club has cancelled regular play for 2020, but is still hoping there can be some sort of "shortened" version of a soccer season.

The club will be issuing refunds to anyone who has already registered for summer 2020.

"The board of directors is heartbroken that for the first time in our history, we will have no organized soccer season," president Ted VanderKaay said in a statement to The Lake Report. "That is our only reason for



being, to serve kids in our community, but COVID-19 has stopped all of our best intentions."

And while the season is cancelled, "We have not yet given up on soccer in our community. Given the opportunity, we will offer families in the community

an alternate version of soccer this summer."

A "shortened" version of a soccer season is contingent on the provincial government allowing the sport to resume and it would focus on skills and culminate in some informal games between appropriate age groups, the club said in a news release.

With the town in a state of emergency and all town facilities, including soccer fields, closed until the end of June, it was difficult for the club to plan for the summer. The season usually starts around the May long weekend and ends the week

before Labour Day. As well, on May 11 the Ontario Soccer Association, an organization to which NOTL Soccer belongs, announced that all sanctioned in-person soccer events and activities for the month of June have been cancelled or postponed.

"We rely on many generous local businesses for sponsorship for both our house league and travel programs. With so many businesses feeling the financial pinch under the current situation, we felt the timing was wrong to approach them for donations," the club said.

## NOTL company takes over Canadian Woodworking magazine

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

Canada's top do-it-yourself magazine is now owned by a company headquartered in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Canadian Woodworking & Home Improvement has come under the wing of publisher Michael Fox's Inspiring Media, which also produces the online magazine Garden Making.



Canadian Woodworking magazine April/May 2020 cover. SUPPLIED

Fox, a resident of NOTL, purchased Canadian Woodworking in February.

The magazine was launched by Paul and Linda Fulcher's Sawdust Media Inc. from their home in Burford, Ont., in 1999 and grew into a major force among do-it-yourself enthusiasts. The Fulchers stayed on with the magazine in sales and advisory roles.

"Under their care, the brand has grown to become Canada's #1 DIY resource, with 20,000 print circulation and a website with more than 600,000 monthly

page views for homeowners actively involved in maintaining and improving their home and furnishings," says a statement from Inspiring Media.

Fox's company provides communications and marketing support for businesses. Fox started out as a journalist and built a 30-year career in publishing, including a stint as senior vice-president for circulation and development of Rogers Publishing.



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## A big leap: From smalltown Niagara to smaller town Costa Rica

*While vacationing in early March prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, our intrepid reporter Tim Taylor met up with Simon, Joanne and Tristan. See the bottom of this story for Joanne's update on how the pandemic has affected their venture.*

Tim Taylor  
The Lake Report

COSTA RICA – When Simon Ibbotson and Joanne Lane decided to sell up everything in Niagara-on-the-Lake and buy a small hotel in Costa Rica, everyone around them said: “Are you out of your mind?”

After all, they had only made their first visit to Costa Rica just over one year ago. Their goal on that first trip was simply sun and fun.

“I’ve been a huge traveller my whole life — all over the world,” says Joanne Lane, a 54-year-old former pharmaceutical industry marketer, originally from Fonthill. “Costa Rica was the first place I’ve ever been that really felt like home.”

“I really like the cleanliness of the country. I liked the friendliness of the people. I felt quite safe here. A climate like summer back home. I just think it is beautiful.”

The couple enjoyed the experience so much, Lane returned in July, searching for a beachside condo to purchase.

“I wanted to look around to find a condo for Simon and me, that we could have as a vacation home and put it up on Airbnb. But I didn’t find any condos I liked.”

What she found was the exact opposite of a retirement investment home.

The small, roadside, four-bedroom inn and restaurant she found, quite by chance, had a checkered recent past, gradually slipping, in the previous decade, through a series of owners, into mild decay and a lacklustre following.

But for Lane, it was magical: “I walked through the



Simon Ibbotson (centre) and Joanne Lane, with Simon’s son Tristan show off the huge toucan bird in front of their newly refurbished Toucan Lane Inn, in rural northern Costa Rica. The Niagara natives sold all their assets and purchased the inn six months ago. Tristan, a well-known Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club server, is helping the couple get it all underway. TIM TAYLOR

main door, it was a beautiful sunny clear day, and I saw this spectacular view. I just fell in love.”

Toucan Lane Inn — the name is a combination of the ubiquitous, colourful local bird and Lane’s surname — is perched on a hillside overlooking Lake Arenal, a huge manmade lake in the shadow of Central America’s most active volcano, 90 kilometres northwest of San Jose, Costa Rica’s capital city.

“I called Simon and said: ‘How do you feel about buying a hotel, restaurant and bar in Costa Rica and moving?’” She didn’t tell him then that she had already put down a sizable deposit on the property.

“Joanne was saying to me: ‘Quit your job and move to Costa Rica,’” Ibbotson says. “It really didn’t take much convincing. But I also really didn’t think it would happen. It was kind of surreal.”

Neither of them had hotel and restaurant experience.

“I’ve had to learn a lot about hospitality,” admits Lane. “When I started in the pharmaceutical business almost 30 years ago, it was all about entertainment.

A couple of times a week we were hosting dinners

and meetings for doctors. But I’ve never been in the service industry.”

Likewise, Ibbotson. Born in England, the 57-year-old ended up in Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1982. He calls himself a jack-of-all-trades. Over his 30-year career, he’s worked in computers, high-tech emission systems and most recently, building yachts in Port Weller.

“I’m a very social person. I love people around,” he says. “But I’ve always really loved working with my hands. I built my first house on Lakeshore Road when I was 23. I can do it all. We work well together. We complement each other.”

After a quick late-summer visit to see just how crazy they really were, they gulped a bit and took possession in October.

Ibbotson remembers thinking: “Oh, my gosh. What have we got ourselves into? It’s so run down. My head was spinning.”

They describe the last few months as a whirlwind. “It truly was like fixing an airplane while it is flying.”

They spent their first two months painting every wall, inside and out, a warm tropical red, almost terra cotta.

They overcame dozens of plumbing, electrical and construction challenges. Then they began to build menus and payment and reservation systems and websites, and on and on.

And, believe it or not, amidst all the chaos, they got married. On New Year’s Eve, after 11 years of courting, six seriously, Ibbotson and Lane married, in front of a small group of friends and family, who had filled the hotel to capacity.

Tristan Ibbotson, Simon’s almost 30-year-old son, was his father’s groomsman.

Everyone who plays golf at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club and uses the 19th hole, knows the younger Ibbotson. He’s tall, lanky, exceptionally polite and a very professional server.

He’s spent much of this winter’s golf course downtime, helping his father and stepmother manage the hundreds of details of setting up and running a restaurant in an unknown environment, largely without the benefit of the language.

Tristan was born in NOTL, attended Colonel John Butler School and became a lifelong friend of The Lake Report editor-in-chief, Richard Harley, when they attended preschool together at Parliament Oak.

Tristan has worked in restaurants since the age of 14, first at Riverbend and for the last 10 years, the historic golf club, earning an arts degree at Brock along the way.

After high school, he learned the love of backpacking, travelling to Australia, Indonesia and New Zealand.

“I’m used to throwing a backpack on and hitching a ride in a bus or the back of a truck,” he says.

“This year, Dad and Joanne threw a wrench into that. They are counting on all the help they can get from anywhere and everywhere.”

It seems to be working.

Tristan is regularly interrupted by the new staff, quietly asking Tristan for

direction. His Spanish just gets him by but it’s growing stronger each day. The family has a Spanish-English dictionary on a table by the inn’s infinity pool. “I muddle through.”

Tristan, with his 15 years of hospitality experience, is helping the new innkeepers build their confidence for when he returns to NOTL. He’s building menus, advising on recipes, creating service approaches, table settings, and finding and training staff.

And he can’t call it work or get paid for his efforts. He doesn’t have a work visa.

In fact, Tristan’s cycle of work is perfect for Toucan Lane. When the golf club winds up, Toucan Lane’s tourist season winds down.

But Tristan doesn’t see Toucan Lane as a long-term opportunity for him. “I should go back to school. I’d also like to take a look at real estate.”

In the meantime, the innkeepers will take all of him they can get.

They both admit the honeymoon is over.

“Right now, is the most difficult time for us. The first three months we were focused on all the renovations, things we knew how to do. Now it’s down to the nitty gritty of running the day-to-day business,” says Lane. But she’s still smiling.

They are dealing with the language barrier, government red tape, finding staff, finding suppliers who will deliver to upstart new restaurants and on and on. “Tristan says these problems are just the same at home. But they seem huge to us.”

Ibbotson and Lane miss their Canadian family and friends, but are determined to return this small hillside property to its former vitality.

Maybe Simon and Joanne are out of their minds. But Tristan is more positive: “It’ll take blood, sweat and tears. It just needs time and effort to return Toucan Lane to its heyday.”

**Pandemic shuts Toucan Lane Inn until at least June**

Joanne Lane  
Special to The Lake Report

To say that these are challenging times is an understatement.

Simon and I knew that the first year would be difficult given that we had committed to renovating Toucan Lane but we felt that we would keep our heads above water with the business picking up more as the year went on. Today is such a different story.

We closed our doors here on March 17 and the country will be in complete lockdown until at least June 15. We have had to go through the process of letting our employees go, which is very difficult. Simon’s son Tristan Ibbotson, a longtime Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club employee, has stayed on with us because he knew that he had no job to come home to. And now Air Canada has told us there may not be any flights to Canada until December.

Costa Rica has declared a driving ban. We are under curfew from 7:30 p.m. to 5 a.m. and we are allowed to drive our car just four days a week. That presents the next issue – banking. Many days, the ATMs are out of service and we can only count on one day a week for one to work – Tuesdays.

Sometimes, the days feel long and lonely. Other times, we enjoy the beautiful weather, listen to music, sing, dance and have fun. Every day we eat incredible meals (thanks to Tristan) but, other than that, absolutely nothing is happening around here. No tourists, no locals, nothing ...

In summation, we are facing a difficult time. But we will prevail. We will continue working on the property for the day when we can once again open our doors.



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