

10,000 vehicles enter NOTL

In total, 19 automobiles towed, 113 parking tickets, eight emergency order fines



A bylaw officer tickets a vehicle parked in the tow-away zone on Queen Street. RICHARD HARLEY

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake bylaw and a small army of tow trucks had a busy weekend trying to deter visitors from Old Town, and as hard as they tried, the visitors kept coming.

The Town of NOTL said 10,452 vehicles entered Old Town Saturday and Sunday. Mechanized counters gathered the data at the intersection of Mississagua and William streets and on Queen's

Parade near Fort George. In total — even with parking banned in the downtown area — bylaw officers issued 113 parking tickets over Saturday and Sunday, said community engagement co-ordinator Lauren Kruitbosch, in response to questions from The Lake Report.

In comparison, bylaw officers issued 180 tickets over the same weekend in 2019, when there was no parking ban, she said.

That's on top of 19 vehicles being towed, eight

emergency order charges for groups of more than five and multiple complaints of people urinating and defecating in parks.

"The people from Toronto are still coming," said Bob Strickland, a NOTL resident who was biking around Queen Street Saturday.

"The people are still parking, but there's enough enforcement out to move them on," he said. "Well done by the town."

In a video address to residents on Wednesday, Lord Mayor Betty Disero

said Niagara-on-the-Lake's sole mandate during this crisis is "to keep the citizens of NOTL safe, healthy and protected."

But despite the town's efforts to ask people not to come, thousands still did.

"If we had not done what we all did collectively as a community this weekend, the results would have been exponentially worse," Disero said.

She said there are three issues making the chal-

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Elise Suhadolc is a nurse practitioner at the Virgil clinic. RICHARD HARLEY

On NOTL's front line: Elise Suhadolc

This story is the third in a series, profiling all three of Niagara-on-the-Lake's nurse practitioners. This week's profile, Elise Suhadolc, is one of two nurse practitioners at Niagara North Family Health Team's Virgil site.

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

It's a new, strange world for nurse practitioners like Elise Suhadolc.

Suhadolc, 34, has been at the Niagara North's Virgil site almost three years and in that time, there's been nothing quite like the changes caused by COVID-19.

She's seeing fewer people in the office and more patients online. And even stranger, it's now important to ensure people that do come in are "healthy," even though they are obviously coming to get checked for an illness.

But nurses like Suhadolc are doing what they can to reinvent patient care. They're using more hand sanitizer than ever before, cleaning down office rooms more regularly and finding ways to keep in touch with patients that might be more at risk.

"There's definitely a lot less patients walking around, a lot less bodies in the office, and then a lot of checking in on people that maybe aren't doing so well," Suhadolc says, during a phone interview with The Lake Report.

Those types of general wellness checks on patients weren't part of her normal day before COVID-19, but now the clinic is trying to reach out to "individuals who might be at higher risk."

In her day-to-day life, there's less mingling with co-workers, with some working from home and others trying to minimize contact.

"There's a lot less contact, a lot less socializing over lunch breaks. We're being very careful here, making sure everything's clean and sanitary, but we're trying to keep to ourselves as much as possible, just to protect ourselves and the patients that are coming in," she says.

All around the clinic, they're going through more hand sanitizer than ever before.

"I mean working in health-care we're used to using it pretty regularly, but definitely it's pretty much every room you go into. You can't walk too far without being able to access it," she says.

On top of that, there's more cleaning going on in the rooms.

But all of those things help remind people of how we should be acting, regardless of a pandemic, Suhadolc says.

"And I think that's a positive thing, for us to remember what is good practice — to disinfect and to just make sure everyone that's coming in is healthy," she says. "And, hopefully, people will be taking some of that and just carrying it forward after this

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No plans to close parking: Niagara Parks CEO

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

The Niagara Parks Commission is encouraging people to stay home but has no plans to close its parking lots, says CEO David Adames.

While the parks agency has closed public operations and recreational amenities, he said trails and open spaces will remain open for "walkthrough access only."

Sunday's warm weather and blue skies brought out

scores of people to walk the trails and parks along the Niagara Parkway, despite provincial orders to stay home other than for essential trips.

The parking lots along the Niagara River were packed so full that people started parking along the roads and in the grass, and groups of more than five people could be seen mingling.

Adames said the Niagara Parks board "extensively discussed" whether to close the parking lots, but

decided not to for logistical and safety reasons.

"We have a 56-kilometre parkway, a 53-kilometre Niagara recreation trail, over 13,000 hectares of open space, so to be able to physically lock that down is obviously a challenge — and that's a bit of an understatement," Adames said.

With such a high volume of people coming, blocking off parking lots would only cause more problems, he said,

"Let me use the example

of (Sunday) — so obviously a very beautiful spring day and people did come out. What we don't know is precisely where they came from, but based on numbers we can make an assumption that some would have been from outside Niagara, again given the volume. So, if we close the parking lots, there's a risk that people might park unsafely, or access trails unsafely. ie. a non-trailhead. And we've

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Parking ban **not enough** to deter visitors

Continued from Front Page

allenge harder: the Region of Niagara won't allow the town to close roads, the Niagara Parks Commission is continuing to keep its parking lots open, and many businesses that attract tourists have been declared essential by the provincial government.

Bylaw enforcement officers will be out again this weekend, with extra staff to help enforce the parking ban, Disero said.

"I'm hopeful that we will get much better," she said.

She thanked residents for co-operating with the province's emergency orders.

"I know you want to come out, but just — just have some patience" for a few more weeks, she said.

"We need you to continue to comply. We need you to stay home, we need you to walk from home, we need you to wash your hands and not touch your face. Together we can get through this."

Russ and Lisa Reynolds, who live a block off Queen Street, said they think it's a good thing the town is trying to deter visitors.

"If they left the streets open, we'd be inundated with people right now," Lisa said.

"I do think it has made a difference, it's helped for

sure. I just don't know if it's enough at this point."

Murray Weaver said he thinks the parking ban is working, but that it's "unfortunate" for the businesses in town.

"All these businesses along here, and a lot of people, they pay taxes. And I don't think that the town is giving them the support that they should be getting," he said.

"Why doesn't the town support a lot of these businesses? List the people that are open for takeout, give them some help ... some of these people are going to go out of business, and I think that's going to be too bad." Amit Kharia, from Toronto, was in town at Nina Gelateria & Pastry Shop on Saturday.

"I've been thinking about it, I was like, how do I justify if somebody approaches me and says, 'Well why are you here? Don't come,'" Kharia said.

"And I said, 'You know what, each of us have to make a decision, and if we can maintain social distancing, wash our hands, do all the things we're supposed to, then I think it's an individual choice. I mean if you really want to deter everyone, then you have to have police presence and just say don't come in.'"

NOTL copes with COVID-19



Top left: The Town of NOTL has banned parking in the urban area of Old Town to prevent visitors during the COVID-19 pandemic. SUPPLIED Top right: Despite town efforts to deter visitors, thousands still came. Bottom left: Town bylaw officers on patrol Saturday. RICHARD HARLEY Bottom right: Tow trucks lined Queen Street all weekend. ROSS ROBINSON

He said he saw the signs while driving in and considered them an "inconvenience."

"It did force me to drive a little bit more to find where there were other cars parked, and (I) took a risk."

"And I come often to Niagara-on-the-Lake. So, I know sort of the areas I can walk. I'm grateful that these guys are open," he said.

He said he thinks with vendors open in town, it

makes things more appealing for visitors.

"I mean, she's open. I think if she wasn't open, or if any other food vendor wasn't open, that would force us to limit our visit to go elsewhere."

NOTL is a "magnet," he said. "The whole town and the Shaw Festival and the whole industry."

He said people in town were very friendly. "We've said hello to many people

tending their gardens."

"I think that you do want to discourage people from congregating, but then how do you support business? You know, this town runs on visitors."

People whose vehicles were towed had to pay \$200 plus tax to retrieve their cars. All of the revenue went directly to the towing company.

The town did not pay to have trucks stationed

throughout Old Town, said Kruitbosch.

The town received complaints of people urinating and defecating in the parks, but no fines were issued, she said, as "persons fled (the) scene before fines could be given."

No fines were issued on Parks Canada property during the weekend, though the town can now enforce the lockdown rules there if necessary.

NOTL businesses struggle with **influx** of spring tourists

Jessica Maxwell
The Lake Report

Despite signs put up by the town warning there are no public washrooms and a state of emergency has been declared in NOTL, business owners in Old Town are still having trouble with out-of-town visitors.

"We're just following everything that the town has set out," Zoom store manager Ben Visser said, "in hopes that we can get fully functional sooner rather than later."

His store is not making its washrooms available to the public, Visser said.

"For my own comfort level as the store manager



Scottish Loft owner Simon Bentall said it was a struggle to deal with tourists on the weekend. RICHARD HARLEY

and having to put staff in there to clean them and stuff, I wouldn't want," he said.

"I think it's just a safer thing that the town has said no, we're not going to do

that. We're going to leave them closed. I think that's a respectable thing to do for the safety of both our staff and the people who are visiting our business."

Visser said most peo-

ple are understanding of the closed facilities but he understands some people won't be happy.

"If you've got to go to the bathroom, you've got to go to the bathroom."

Zoom is only open for bike and product sales and services, not rentals, he said.

"It's actually been really nice to hear the response from locals who are coming to purchase bikes," he said.

"They're really excited to see that we're still trying to keep our business as functional as we can, while maintaining safe distances and following all the guidelines."

The large amount of out-of-town traffic has pushed some businesses to not just

change how they operate, but also stay closed on days where they are normally open.

Simon Bentall, owner of The Scottish Loft, said his doors were closed on Sunday, "partly because of the virus and I don't want to get tourists coming into the store too much."

"If I had opened Sunday it probably would have been a good day but we're still getting people coming in asking to use the washrooms," he said.

"I've heard about people peeing on the side of the shops and things like that because they can't get to any washrooms."

Bentall said some custom-

ers are frustrated about public facilities being closed and they have been vocal about it in his store.

"I've gotten some angry customers saying, 'What do you mean I can't use the washroom? If I buy things, I'm entitled to use a washroom!' And I tell them this is not a public washroom, we don't have public washrooms," said Bentall, whose store is offering free local delivery.

Even without the facility shutdowns due to COVID-19, Bentall said the store's washroom is for employees only.

Read the full story at: www.niagaranow.com/news.phtml/3859

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COVID-19 survey: NOTLers say they're following pandemic rules, but only 25% embrace masks

Steve Ferley
Special to The Lake Report

Almost three-quarters of NOTL residents gave themselves an A+ grade for adhering to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and guidelines, a survey by The Lake Report has found.

These days, with the streets and sidewalks of NOTL usually deserted (except on weekends when visitors descend), it might not be surprising that out of a sample of 260 of our readers, 72 per cent gave themselves a 9 or the maximum 10 for adhering to the pandemic restrictions and guidelines. The average score out of 10 across the entire sample was as high as 8.9.

Our survey addressed three of the individual guidelines – and we see that compliance is virtually total. Just under two-thirds of our readers say they've been "excellent" about staying at home other than for essential trips, with a further 33 per cent saying they "have been good about it."

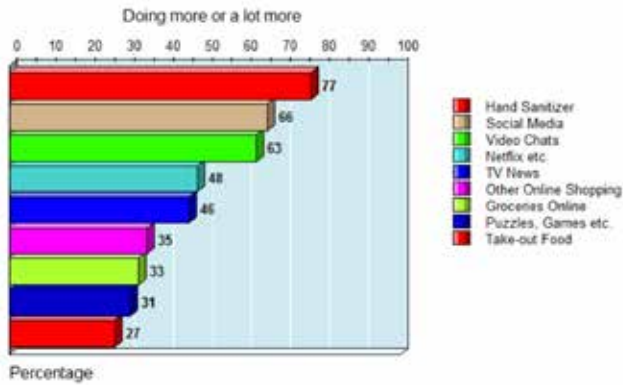
On social distancing, 70 per cent say they've been "excellent" at complying, with a further 28 per cent being "good about it." And the figures for frequent hand washing are similar (67 per cent and 30 per cent). For sure, the evidence about staying at home and social distancing is plain for all to see – and The Lake Report applauds NOTLers for the sacrifices they're making and their commitment to the cause.

The survey did identify a couple of worrisome issues: Among the 19 per cent of readers who told us they are self-employed, more than one in four expect to see a significant financial loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

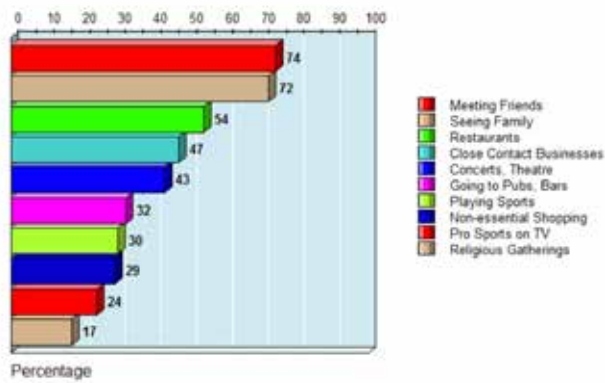
And just over one in five readers who would normally be in the categories of part-time or full-time employment told us they've been either temporarily or permanently laid-off. Worrying figures indeed.

We've seen and heard lots about the wearing of surgical masks. As of now, only one in four of our readers say they always wear a mask

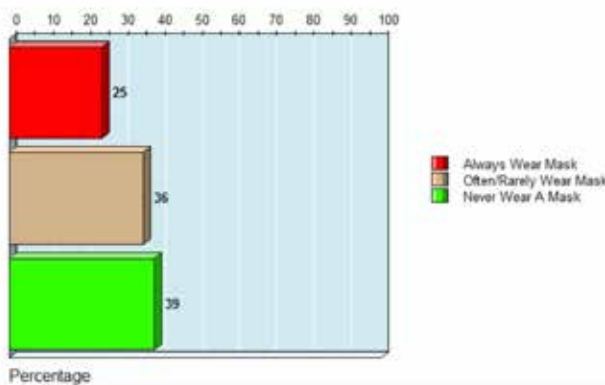
How we have changed in the era of COVID-19



Ordinary things we miss during the pandemic



Do you wear a mask when you leave home?



when they're shopping for groceries or other essentials.

And at the other end of the spectrum, the "never-maskers" (anti-maskers?) constitute 39 per cent of the NOTL population. That leaves a large middle cohort on masking: 36 per cent of residents claim they often or rarely wear a mask when shopping for groceries or other essentials.

Attitudes may change. People may become more comfortable seeing themselves and others wearing masks. And the rules may change.

So, how are NOTL people spending their stay-at-home time compared with their normal lives? The good news is that using hand sanitizer tops the table – and by a long way! In fact, 77 per cent of our readers are using more hand sanitizer these days

(and just under 50 per cent say they're using a lot more).

As we might expect, readers say they are far more into social media and video chats.

Even with what we know to be the age demographic of the NOTL population (about one-third of the respondents to our survey are over 65), we are seeing quite a rise in online shopping – for groceries, and also for non-grocery items. This may well lead to a long-term shift to online shopping, post-pandemic.

Yes, we're living in challenging times and NOTLers are making some real sacrifices in their day-to-day lives. But what are they missing from their normal lives?

Topping the list are the social aspects of life – meeting with friends or with family members who are not in the immediate home. Also

up there on the "missing list" are some business activities: just over half of our readers say they miss going to restaurants (going to pubs and bars constitutes a further 32 per cent).

What is known in the official COVID-19 vocabulary as "close contact businesses" (hair salons, physiotherapists, dentists, opticians etc.) also figure prominently – mentioned by just under one-half of our readers.

And if we include "missing a little" as well as "missing a lot," the count for close contact businesses climbs as high as 93 per cent. Let's hope those businesses do recover and become once again part of the NOTL scene when the pandemic finally passes.

We also asked our readers to tell us about some good experiences they may have had during the lockdown – and the comments show just how connected and caring the NOTL community is.

It almost goes without saying that the work of front-line services was frequently acknowledged (fire, ambulance, hospital workers and clinic staff). And our readers often mentioned how thankful they are for the help from neighbours with delivery of items such as groceries.

Residents were also quick to thank businesses such as the Valu-mart stores in Virgil and Old Town for their understanding and efficiency in ramping up home delivery and in-store pick-up. NOTL pharmacies were applauded for the changes they've made to help with deliveries.

Area wineries and distilleries were praised for their swift moves to produce hand sanitizers. And several residents were recognized for their work to produce face masks, both generally and specifically for health care workers.

The appreciation also extended to the lord mayor, councillors and town staff, particularly for their regular updates.

Prior to retirement, Steve Ferley was president of PMB Print Measurement Bureau, Canada's leading supplier of print readership information.

Town Enacts Parking Ban to Further Protect Against Community Spread

Effective May 1, 2020, all on-street parking within a designated area of Old Town is prohibited at all times. This prohibition will remain in effect during the Town's State of Emergency or until further notice.

All 1-Hour Resident Parking Permits will be void during the parking ban. The expiry dates for 2020 1-Hour Parking Permits purchased prior to May 1, 2020, will be extended by the period of time equal to the parking ban.

Despite this parking ban, the following accommodations have been made:

While parking restrictions are being strictly enforced throughout the designated area, vulnerable resident's dependent on the care of family and/or support workers remain a high priority for Town Council and Staff. If a ticket is issued to a person providing an essential service, please contact the Town at covidcomplaints@notl.com immediately.

Residents holding a Dedicated Parking Permit are permitted to park within the banned area.

15-minute parking zones have been established to accommodate patrons of essential businesses remaining open in Old Town.

It is important to remember the significant risk the spread of COVID-19 poses for Niagara-on-the-Lake. With more than 50 per cent of our population over the age of 50, one of the demographics identified as most vulnerable, this human health emergency could be disastrous for our community.

The health and safety of residents, and the public, is the highest priority, and Town Council and Staff are doing all they can to protect against community spread. This health crisis is new territory for everyone, and situations are changing rapidly. As such, adjustments will continue to be made as circumstances evolve.

In addition to increased enforcement efforts within the Old Town, Enforcement Officers will continue to ensure that Emergency Orders are adhered to throughout Niagara-on-the-Lake. Those wishing to report a violation or issue a complaint are encouraged to email covidcomplaints@notl.com.

For more information, please visit notl.com/COVID-19, or call 905-468-3266. For immediate alerts, follow the Town on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



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Managing Editor: Kevin MacLean
Publisher: Niagara Now
Design & Layout: Richard Harley
Advertising: Rob Lamond, Lisa Jeffrey
Contributors: Brittany Carter, Dariya Baiguzhiyeva, Jessica Maxwell, Jill Troyer, Tim Taylor, Denise Ascenzo, Linda Fritz, Dr. William Brown, Brian Marshall, Jim Smith, Susan Des Islets, Jaclyn Wilms, Collin Goodine, Leslie Moulson, Steve Hardaker, Plunger Patrol, Ross Robinson, Tim Carroll, NOTL Writers' Circle, Lisa Tache, Megan Vanderlee, and many more members of the NOTL community

POSITIVE
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Contributed by Patty Garriock

"One of the most difficult things to give away is kindness, for it is usually returned."

- Mark Ortman.



Contributed by Norm Arsenault:

Make use of your green bin to compost. It's easy and the compost can be reused to improve soil. Paper towels, tea bags, coffee ground, pet waste in compostable bags, brown cardboard, paper bags, egg cartons (all customer small) food products including fish, meat, cake, vegetables, fruit peels...all are compostable

Editorial: Please close your lots, Niagara Parks

Richard Harley
Editor

The flocks keep coming and it looks like there's no way to stop them.

While the town continues its efforts to deter visitors to keep residents safe, it is important to remember there are many NOTL businesses – including garden centres, wineries, hardware suppliers, restaurants and others – offering curbside pickup or delivery services that are essential for visitors and residents alike.

Our wineries, restaurants, greenhouses, and more could use the support.

We encourage that. But to clarify for any visitors reading: For now, this means come in, pick up what you need and then return home.

It doesn't mean stay, take a stroll on the main street because "It's my choice" or

"It's just me, I'm not hurting anyone" or "I need this for my mental health."

What the 17,000-plus residents of NOTL need for their own mental health is to feel safe within their own communities.

Yes, "just you" is a problem if everyone thinks like "just you."

When we say you're welcome for essential trips, it doesn't mean coming here to urinate and defecate on our lawns, parks or in our forests.

People use those forests. Just this week, a NOTL resident who hunts for mushrooms posted a disturbing picture online of someone's defecation beside a tree, and said they'd seen many other instances of the same.

There's no excuse for it – for the time being, our town is not open for strolling.

To our Niagara Parks

Commission – please close your parking lots, which are overflowing every weekend.

The Town of NOTL has closed its lots, while leaving trails accessible. Why does the parks commission refuse to do likewise?

This week you have said it's a matter of public safety. That sounds like a public relations excuse to stay open. Many of your properties are in or close to Niagara-on-the-Lake – a town where 50 per cent of residents are over the age of 50. Is there no concern for the well-being of these people, who are already at higher risk from COVID-19?

If there is, certainly the public health risk of thousands of vehicles of people coming into town should cause you to reconsider keeping those parking lots open.

There's no excuse and

citing public safety is just a guise.

People are still parking on the roads, people are not social distancing on trails, the parks police aren't fining people for breaking emergency orders. And there will be fewer people placed in potentially dangerous situations if they have nowhere to park.

The parks commission is potentially hurting people in our community by continuing to allow the behaviour that's been witnessed.

To the Town of NOTL and Lord Mayor Betty Disero – keep it up. You're stepping above and beyond what the province has asked, in the name of keeping people safe. That's commendable and most residents appreciate your attempt to balance safety with accessibility to essential businesses.

editor@niagaranow.com

Show respect for our cenotaph

Dear editor:

One afternoon last week two male individuals were throwing a tennis ball on Queen Street.

One proceeded to throw it at the cenotaph, hitting it just below the clock face.

This dangerous, disrespectful and thoughtless behaviour is intolerable. These individuals should know better and be ashamed of themselves.

Their actions were also recorded on camera and the chair of the town's cenotaph committee was notified.

As we all know, cenotaphs are memorials to our fallen heroes and, in NOTL's case, it is located in a street where Canadians fought for our country.

Shame on you.

Stan Harrington
NOTL



Cars parked along a residential street in Old Town. SUPPLIED/PETER THOMAS

Always been tough finding help on the farm

Dear editor:

I am writing about why we don't have Canadian workers for Niagara's farms.

We bought our 30-acre farm in 1965 and mainly grew grapes and two acres of peaches. My husband and I tried to do as much as we could ourselves. I even pruned grapes.

We have two sons who helped us tie and thin and sucker the vineyard.

Then came harvest. The first few years we had family and friends helping us. Once the family and friends grew older, we needed help on the farm. That was hard to get.

We even went to the Salvation Army. That was hard on me because we have to give them lunch.

Then it rained, so we supplied rain suits for everyone. Otherwise help was hard to get.

We once had a young couple from Quebec who brought their baby with them. They stayed in the garage, with the baby in the playpen.

Then GM went on strike. I thought, "Now, we will have help." But naïve me! The auto workers were getting strike pay so they didn't want to go work on the farm.

We needed 12 to 15 people for picking grapes. They were hard to find.

In 1972, the grape picker was introduced and we had our grapes picked by machine for the first time.

We still had friends help tie and thin and sucker. Cutting grapes was not easy. Hauling boxes and loading the truck to take them to the winery was hard work.

Then came the immigrant workers from Cambodia. I only needed to say how many people I needed and they got them for us. They helped us for a few seasons, when we most needed it.

However, they needed a job

for the whole year, which was something we could not provide.

Canadian workers are hard to come by. That is why 30-plus years ago the offshore people came from Jamaica and Mexico.

When we were in the Dominican Republic on vacation we saw a lot of street construction. Our guide said the workers were all from Haiti because the local Dominican people didn't want to do that kind of job any more. Similarly, Canadians don't like to do the hard labour of farm work.

Helga Rahm
NOTL

Lakeside outlook closed but parking problems persist

Dear editor:

The following is an open letter to Lord Mayor Betty Disero:

The town does not want tourists at this time.

The outlook parking at Queen and Newark streets has been closed. As a result, across the street on Newark has now become "the favourite" parking location, and people walk from Newark to the waterside outlook.

This multitudinous parking now occurs around my house on the corner of Queen and Newark. The gravel sidewalk I installed is slowly being gouged and eroded and my water views occluded.

It is to be expected that this injustice be corrected by parking officials as soon as possible.

PS: As a follow up, this past Sunday afternoon there were 14 vehicles parked outside my house at Queen and Newark. They were bumper-to-bumper. There was little semblance of social distancing and all seemed to be mingling on the street, on the waterfront and on the golf course.

Surprised we should not be to see a spike in COVID-19.

Sincerely,
Dr. Peter Thomas
NOTL

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.

If you wish to speak with a person, we will be available Tuesdays between 11:00 a.m and 3:00 p.m. to take your calls.

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OPINION

Pandemic Gestapo tactics are unnecessary

Dear editor:

I see the lord mayor and the town council are ramping up the Gestapo tactics, in my opinion an over-reaction to visitors needing a break from lockdown for their sanity.

Bylaw enforcement officers will be ticketing people in town and now on Parks Canada property as well.

Even ridiculous councilors were talking about blocking Queen Street or putting in a gate meter?

There will be a public backlash against this town because of tactics like this come the recovery.

If I was visiting and one of those “public servants” had given me a \$750 ticket, I would make sure I go somewhere else when it gets better.

Members of council should be careful what they wish for!

Regards,

Earle Vance
NOTL

Visitors ignored town’s pleas to stay home

Dear editor:

It’s 3:45 p.m. Sunday and I just got off the Niagara-on-the-Lake webcam, curious to see what Queen Street looked like.

To my surprise it resembled a day in mid-July.

There were as many cars as I could count driving the main drag and more parked along the street. I understood these spots were designated “no parking” during this crisis.

Apparently Lord Mayor Betty Disero’s plea fell on deaf ears despite the fact it has been stressed how serious the threat to our health is.

I noticed cars in a couple of our neighbourhood Airbnbs and traffic on

Niagara Stone Road was at mid-summer volume.

All our vendors are closed for a reason! Maybe they aren’t operating in order to keep people from coming to NOTL and to protect themselves from getting the virus.

It’s sad that people feel they are entitled despite repeated requests for compliance.

In the midst of a pandemic, so I’m led to believe, why would anyone not consider the need for everyone to stay at home?

If you don’t care about yourself think about others who do care.

No sense ... no feeling.

Bill Hamilton
Virgil

Letter from the U.K.: Wary of lockdown being lifted

Longtime NOTL resident Susan Hall, a warden at St. Mark’s Anglican Church, has been unexpectedly caught up in the COVID-19 pandemic while visiting family in Brighton, England. This is her fourth letter home to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Susan Hall
Special to The Lake Report

An overview of Britain today shows that the long-awaited opening up from lockdown is already underway, unofficially, in the minds of many, as we see more people and more cars around.

However, in view of the massive, horrifying death figures, 47,000 as I write this (from all sources, home, nursing homes and hospitals), taken together with the knowledge that a new wave of infection is starting up again in Germany, where opening had barely begun, the idea of opening up now was promptly quashed by the government.

Interestingly, a much quoted poll, showed today that over 60 per cent of people said they were too frightened of catching COVID-19 to leave their homes and 54 per cent would refuse to let their children return to school.

A day later and we are beginning “softening up” for life to start opening up again. Up until now, everywhere we turn, we have been indoctrinated constantly with the mantra, “Stay At Home, Protect the NHS” and “Save Lives.”

That unbelievably effective slogan has reduced the wave of COVID-19 cases that otherwise would have completely swamped the ability of the health service to cope, leading to the truly medieval horrific sight of bodies piling up in the street.

The very success of that message is difficult to undo with statements like “the public must realize, if things are to get going again they must be willing to take a certain amount of risk.”

Similarly, after years of bringing in measures to make it too difficult and unaffordable to drive cars into cities, the message is now to avoid public transport. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how the London Tube will be able to transport the usual number of two million commuters a day if, as planned, social distancing is to be implemented.

Read the full letter at www.niagaranow.com/news.phtml/3848

A sarcastic reply to author of mystery Queenston notices

Dear editor:

Someone has been posting notices on utility poles around Queenston.

It’s important to note that these are “guest courtesy rules,” not “resident courtesy rules.” I was relieved by the distinction, because I spend a big chunk of each day letting my dog poop all over the park whilst I urinate wildly on someone’s shrub and spit on the ground.

I certainly wouldn’t want any of these “dear visitors” to enjoy Queenston the way I, a resident, can – why should they be able to stroll through the village, look at the old houses, sit quietly in the park or by the river?

If one of them pees on



A sign posted around town with a message to visitors. SUPPLIED

a tree, where will I pee? Where will my dog defecate? That enjoyment I feel as I spit on my neighbour’s boulevard will be cut in half by the sight of a dear visitor doing a similar

boulevard spit.

It’s so lovely when someone speaks for the entire village without consulting the other villagers. It really engenders a feeling of community, of welcoming and friendliness.

I’ve never actually seen any outsiders – oops, I mean dear visitors – peeing on trees, spitting or leaving dog poop behind, but I’m sure it’s happening with alarming frequency.

I live on the main drag, across from the park, so it must be occurring on a side street, maybe during the night. Is Dumfries or Highlander a wild playground in the midnight hour?

Perhaps a minivan has been pulling up on Dee Road after sundown, releas-

ing a handful of outdoor urinators and their enormous, gassy dogs. Gosh! We’re just overrun.

I’m grateful to this brave resident who had the guts to anonymously put up notices on public utility poles, outside other people’s houses rather than their own.

When I started reading the notice, I had a hunch that it was related to COVID-19, and yep, it is! They mention that bit at the bottom, just in case anyone mistakenly thought this was about classism or xenophobia, or thought the individual had been itching to put up a sign like this long before the virus provided them with an excuse.

Caitlin Wooll
Queenston

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Seaway Farms employee Marisa Valla maintains a social distance while helping customers. JESSICA MAXWELL

NOTL copes w

Garden centres get g

Curbside pickup could be only option at some nurseries

Jessica Maxwell
The Lake Report

Niagara's garden centres and greenhouses can be fully open for business Friday, after the provincial government lifted COVID-19 restrictions.

While they have been only offering delivery and curbside pickup of late, some stores were also preparing for the anticipated reopening.

Premier Doug Ford announced Wednesday afternoon that nursery businesses can be fully operational as of Friday.

Exactly how the reopening will play out is still being decided by garden centre operators. Some plan to continue focusing on curbside pickups so customers are advised to check with the centres directly. Some may allow shoppers into their retail areas.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the shopping experience at Mori Gardens has changed from a retail store to almost like a warehouse. Online and phone orders have been available with curbside pickup or delivery, says owner Toni Mori.

"We have a really good online store so we're happy about that. That's really helping us a lot."

All seminars has been delivered online by video and landscape design via Zoom. For landscape design, customers did one-on-one with a designer working from home.

The designer created the design and would send it as a PDF to the customer for review and discussion.

"It's really good that all these technical things are available to us," Mori said.

"The one thing is keeping organized. We have to be really organized to keep going but it's working."

Mori Gardens has been offering free delivery to Niagara-on-the-Lake daily and to Niagara Falls and St. Catha-

rines twice a week. Customers can also order online or by phone for curbside pickup.

"We are on the road all the time delivering," Mori said.

At Sunshine Express, "this time of year is our Christmas," retail sales manager Phil Fluit said. "This is what everything is geared for, so this is our busiest time."

"May is the kick-off for planting season, so even in these troubled times people are needing something to keep their spirits high and keep on going."

Fluit said sales have been going well and the busiest days are always Friday, Saturday and Monday. The store is closed Sundays.

"Wednesday could be just as busy as a Monday or Friday if the weather is ideal," he said.

With the restrictions, many new customers are placing orders because of how quickly things have changed and how Sunshine Express has managed to keep up, he said.

"Not everybody can be adapting as quickly as the next person."

For Sunshine Express, the last four weeks have meant a lot of reinventing of the business, said Fluit. It had an existing website that needed to be adapted to process online orders.

"We didn't have pictures, pricing, descriptions, any of that. So, it's been a lot of adding more to it," he said.

"We are lucky enough that most stuff is in place, just makes it tricky going from a retail business with the customers coming in, to an online shopping

experience."

Fluit said Sunshine Express is working to make online shopping on its website as easy to navigate as possible.

Fort Erie resident Elaine Blecher had no problem. "It was really easy to go on to their website and to be able to pull up the hanging baskets and go through each individual basket, know the colours and all that to order," Blecher said as she picked up an order Monday afternoon.

Online ordering on www.sunshine-express.ca has been available from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and store hours are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. for curbside pickup.

After an online order is placed, customers receive a confirmation of purchase. They are then advised to wait for an email notifying them that the order is ready for them and given a two-hour time frame to go get their order through the curbside pickup.

Fluit said this system allows Sunshine Express to control the flow of customers and maintain social distancing by not having too many people picking up at once.

Upon arrival at the garden centre, customers are met by an employee who takes their confirmation number and gives them a numbered parking space.

"We left the parking lot space in between everybody. Their items get brought out to the driver side for them. We leave it there for them to load up. Once they're done they exit out the back side of our parking lot and head home for their planting," Fluit said.

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Also accepted: Fog horn, theramin, stethoscope

Answered first by: Kathy Neufeld

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Margie Enns, Karen Lesley Jones, Howard Jones, Sylvia Wiens, Kandie Martin, Pam Dowling, Sue Davies, Brenda Bartley, Susan Hamilton, Katie Reimer, Judy Stanley

Email answers, with your name, to editor@niagaranow.com for a chance to win a prize.

with COVID-19



Mori Gardens worker Mike King checks orders for curbside pickup. JESSICA MAXWELL

green light to reopen

as operators scramble prior to Mother's Day weekend

Curbside delivery to customers remain the best option for Sunshine Express right now, Fluit said after the government announcement that restrictions were lifted.

"We're not going to be changing anything because there's no way that this is going to run efficiently," he said.

"We're going to be doing curbside because it's the only way to get everybody the product they want the quickest way. Until everything gets settled with getting through this busy time, there's no real other option," he said. "Unfortunately, people don't get to come in and browse and that's just what it's going to be."

Fluit said 460 orders were delivered curbside on Saturday, but if Sunshine Express were to start letting people inside they would be sacrificing the people that are waiting in line and people that are trying to continue with ordering online.

"It's just a different dynamic for us. Usually we're used to just pumping product in and the customers get to take what they want. Now, we're basically the personal shoppers," he said.

"People don't get to pick exactly the shape or size that they want but they have to trust that we're doing the growing we are picking the best and getting the right product and information to them."

The biggest challenge so far for Horbach's Greenhouses on Concession 2 Road has been people not understanding they can't come inside during the lockdown, said Jon Horbach, part-owner and operator at the greenhouse.

"We have people that come to the door that are actually mad at us that we can't open and we won't let them in," he said.

"It's definitely easier to let somebody to just go through and pick what they want," Horbach said.

Horbach's is still deciding what changes will be made to its services, but for the time being online orders will continue with curbside pick-up.

The company's retail store opened May 1 with curbside pick-up. Orders can be placed online at horbachsgreenhouse.com.

After hearing the government was lifting restrictions on greenhouses and garden centres, Seaway Farms owner Eileen Pillitteri said she is thrilled – but there is much to be done.

"Now I feel we're scrambling," Pillitteri said. "It's very exciting but we just have to get everything in place now and figure out how we are going to do both," referring to opening doors to shoppers and continuing curbside pick-up.

"My fear was that it was going to be next week or something, but Mother's Day is a huge weekend for us so this is really great news," she said.

"We're kind of ready. We're just working on signage and where we're going to accommodate lineups and that sort of thing."

Wednesday after closing Seaway planned to prepare the store for re-opening with proper signs and floor markings to maintain social distancing and devise a game plan to control the

flow of customers, said Pillitteri.

"I feel like I can breathe a little bit now," she said. "We're absolutely thrilled and, thank goodness, it's certainly one bit of good news."

Under the lockdown restrictions, Pillitteri said it has been hard for some customers to adjust.

"We just keep saying to people – be patient, we're learning too," she said. "Nobody's done this. We've never done this."

"I think with the announcements that Doug Ford made the other day, it was a bit confusing for people," Pillitteri said.

When the announcement was made last week that garden centres could reopen for curbside and delivery, she thinks people assumed they would be able to enter the garden centres and greenhouses.

"On Monday we had people show up, like lots of people, show up," she said. "The parking lot was full with people wanting to come in."

Seaway Farms has been offering curbside pickup of online and mobile orders. Customers can visit seawayfarms.ca to place an order. Customers arriving without orders still want to do their shopping and she hates turning them away.

"Turning it into a drive through overnight has been really challenging," she said. "But we're making it work."

Those without mobile or online orders are asked to wait until existing orders are filled before they are served. It is preferred that customers call or go online to place an order.

Pillitteri said traffic is "weather dependent. All of a sudden the sun comes out and we get a rush of cars."

"Easter was just a write-off and we've kind of looked past that," she said. "But spring seems to be a bit more promising because the phone is ringing off the hook."

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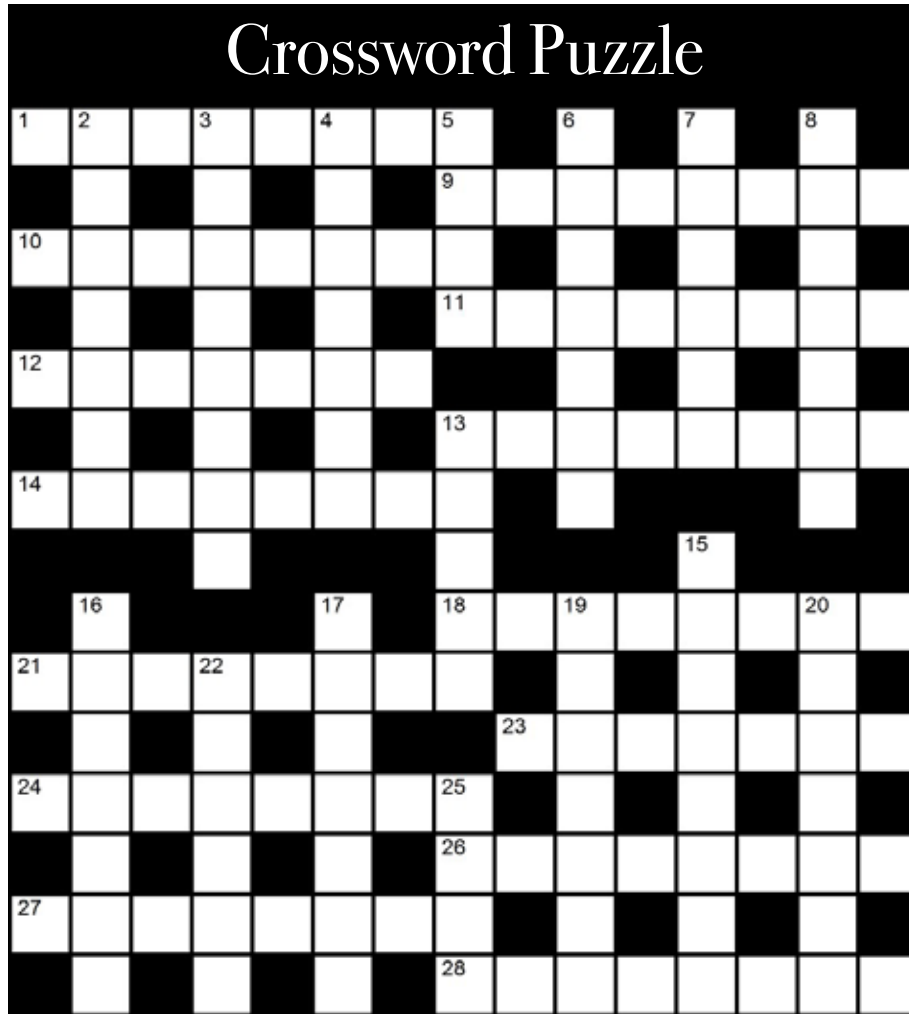
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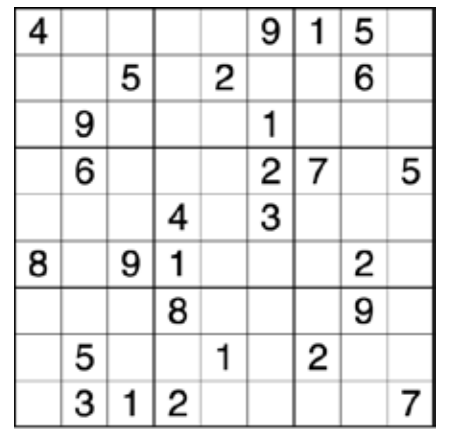
Have some fun

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**
- German liqueur (8)
 - Burden excessively (8)
 - Self-important (8)
 - Travelling case for clothes (8)
 - Refrain voluntarily (7)
 - Gambling game (4,4)
 - Private feud (8)
 - Acts (8)
 - Bald (8)
 - Black magic (7)
 - I o W town (8)
 - Staple of Mediterranean cooking (5,3)
 - Goodbye (8)
 - Charismatic (8)
- Down**
- Responsive to drugs (7)
 - Middy (8)
 - Musician who could play the Moonlight Sonata (7)
 - Drunkards (4)
 - Musical performance (7)
 - Tranquil (6)
 - Cushion for kneeling (7)
 - Poaches with a torch (5)
 - Substantial (8)
 - West Atlantic island country (7)
 - Decreased (7)
 - Covering for a building (7)
 - Cocktail (7)
 - Battered (6)
 - Small island (4)



Last issue's answers



United Way presents Showcase Niagara

Jessica Maxwell
The Lake Report

Niagara performers are set to play three live stream concerts to raise money for the United Way Niagara's emergency response efforts.

Showcase Niagara's Facebook page will have a live broadcast at 7 p.m. on May 6, 13, and 20 with a line-up of local musicians.

The team behind the online concert series has a fundraising goal of \$50,000.

"It's a lofty goal, but the need is great and we want to make a big impact," said David Rapelje, producer of Showcase Niagara.

"We all look forward to live music presentations with audiences coming back, but in the interim our presentation is one of the many in Niagara keeping people entertained and at the same time assisting those in need through the United Way of Niagara's



Canadian country star Tim Hicks is set to headline Showcase Niagara. SUPPLIED/DUSTIN RABIN

COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund."

While the idea is to entertain people during this time of isolation, the main goal is providing food and support for those in need.

The Brown Homestead in association with the Humeniuk Foundation is supporting the fundraiser, matching donations made to Showcase Niagara.

"It is heartwarming to see the community come together in new and creative ways to help their neighbours," said Frances Hall-

worth, executive director of United Way Niagara.

Concert performers include headliner country superstar Tim Hicks, Brooke George-neau, Tin Roof Duo, Mel Monaco, The Mandevilles and many more.

Another performer for Showcase Niagara, Elton Lammie, said, "When asked to be a part of this project it was easy to volunteer my time. It gives me reason to perform with a great cast of musicians and at the same time help the community."



Happy Mother's Day!

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On NOTL's front line: **Elise Sudaholc**

Continued from Front Page



Elise Sudaholc is one of NOTL's three nurse practitioners, based out of the Virgil clinic. SUPPLIED

all settles down.”

She says what is a good practice during COVID-19 is also a good practice anytime.

“So, using hand sanitizer, proper hand washing, using hand sanitizer when you're at the grocery store, staying home when you're sick, not trying to go to work or go out. You know, the world will still go on. Even if you're still sick you can stay home for a few days.”

One thing she's been hearing from patients is they're thankful they can still receive health care in some capacity, she says.

“Most people have been just positive and have expressed gratitude and thankfulness,” she says.

“I think there's, rightly so, a bit of cautiousness out there in the community. Everybody is looking out for each other and following recommended practices.”

For patient visits, nurses are using a video platform called OTN (the Ontario Telehealth Network).

“It's secure, it meets all the PHIPA (Personal Health Information Protection Act) recommendations for privacy issues. So you can speak with them over the camera or just over the telephone if you need to, depending on what they prefer.”

And while sometimes it's necessary to see people in person, as a phone call can only “take you so far,” she says things have been going smoothly.

“It's worked out really well so far. You just have to teach people how to use their computer sometimes, how to access their camera.”

The clinic had the capability to do video and phone assessments before COVID-19, though she hadn't used it before the pandemic.

“Previously it was preferable to see people in person to do a physical assessment,” she says. “It's new to us, but it's going well.”

She says the software is “pretty self explanatory” and wasn't difficult to learn and set up.

“We had a staff member here who was kind of a specialist in this and she taught us all how to use it properly, and then it's very easy to

walk patients through if they have a computer that is up-to-date enough that it has a microphone and a video camera. It's very easy to access.”

Her biggest concern during the pandemic is if there were to be an outbreak bigger than the Niagara area could handle, and having to make decisions about who can receive treatment.

“We follow the public health website quite carefully. Day to day they post statistics. And you know, definitely the people in Niagara are doing quite well. I don't think we're in a dire situation at this point. But I think about Italy and how they have huge numbers of cases and they were having to make life or death decisions about rationing health care, who should get this life-saving medical care and who shouldn't.”

“I think that's my biggest worry is if we were to get to a point like that. And we're definitely not there now, but you know, you're careful to watch and learn from other countries and other regions, and what's gone well and what has not,” she says.

She says people who don't use the clinic often, or don't have health concerns, might be surprised how easily accessible the clinic remains.

“Doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, our dietitian — everyone is still reachable by telephone, we can do phone consults. We still want people, if there's an issue, to call us. We still care about your health.”

She says one good thing to come out of this pandemic is a sense of community.

“Honestly, a lot of people that I've talked to specifically in this community, in Virgil, Niagara-on-the-Lake, if you're checking

in with them, it seems like there's a really good sense of community and people taking care of each other. If you talk to people that you might be worried about them going out to get groceries, it's, ‘Oh no, my neighbours are taking care of that,’ or ‘I have a friend that's bringing me things.’”

“It just seems like people are reaching out to their elderly neighbours, or their neighbours with new babies. It just seems like everyone's kind of taking care of each other, which is great.”

She says patients have been gracious in handling the changes in health care. “Everyone's been great.”

The most heartbreaking thing she's seen through COVID-19 is the health care providers who have had to make “horrible ethical decisions” about who should get treatment or not.

She also really feels for people who are going through major life events, like having a baby or losing a loved one, who can't celebrate as normal.

“All those celebrations of life, whether it be birth or death, they're kind of on hold right now, and that makes me sad for those people, who are wanting to celebrate people and have to find a different way to do it at this time,” she says.

Another heartwarming thing to come of the pandemic, she says, is seeing how children don't let things like pandemics get them down.

“When you look at little ones, like children, they are just so resilient,” she says. “There is so much chalk art drawn on the sidewalks and the streets in my neighbourhood, and people hanging paintings in their windows and decorating their yards, and I just think that, you know, there's still happiness, there's still joy. And sometimes you have to look at the children to remember that you can still be happy during th is time,” she says.

She's also seen more people out in their neighbourhoods, walking their dogs or getting exercise. She even saw someone walking their goats on a leash.

At home in Port Dalhousie, Sudaholc lives with her partner John. “We just moved in to our neighbourhood last summer,” she says.

Now, with COVID-19, her downtime is less busy than usual, which she isn't minding.

“Our evenings are really quiet. We're both working, I'm here full-time still and John works for Brock University, so he's working from home,” she says.

“But our evenings used to be full of sports or going to the gym or meeting up with friends or continuing education — we're quite busy, and now it's nice, it's a lot slower. We're definitely into cooking a lot more these days and being more experimental in the kitchen.”

“And then we're both close with our families, so we're not able to visit, so a lot more video chats, Zoom evenings with our families and telephone calls.”

She says she's also had more time to meet neighbours.

“We were so busy and you know, we met a few people, but it's nice now that — you can't really get too close, but if someone's gardening and you're out doing yard work and you get to talk to people that maybe you haven't got to talk to yet.”

Right now she's attempting to learn the guitar, “which is not going all that well,” she says.

“And a lot of finding new shows on Netflix and making sure we still stay active — doing yoga and going for walks,” she says.

Normally she likes to row in the summer, which she hasn't been able to do this year. “A lot of individual hobbies at this point.”

The thing she misses the most is seeing family.

“I'm OK not going out, you know shopping, going out to restaurants. I feel for our local businesses and we're trying to support people (by) ordering takeout and still keeping people in business, but I don't miss going out places. I do miss getting together with people. You can talk to people but it's different to see them in person and to give my nephew a big hug. That's what I miss the most.”



CALL FOR BOARD MEMBER – Community Representative

The Niagara North Family Health Team (NNFHT) seeks a **community member** for its **Board of Directors**. The NNFHT is a not for profit, charitable corporation providing multidisciplinary health care services to over 30,000 patients in the communities of Niagara-on-the-Lake and St. Catharines, Ontario.

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Further information on the NNFHT can be found at niagaranorthfht.ca. Please apply in writing by sending your resume no later than **May 25, 2020** to: Mary Keith, Executive Director, Niagara North Family Health Team at gcfht@niagaranorthfht.ca. Thank you for your interest in the NNFHT. Please note that we will not be contacting every applicant, only those who are selected for consideration will be invited to the second stage of the selection process. This will be done no later than June 5, 2020.

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Stay home – but we're open: Niagara Parks CEO

Continued from Front Page

had that experience in the past," he said.

He said in the last two weeks one person has fallen into the Niagara River and two people went off trail — all three needed to be rescued.

"What that does is puts our emergency personnel at risk," Adames said. "We had to have our high angle river team through our Niagara Parks Police go out for rescue in both cases, also Niagara Falls Fire Department in both cases."

Niagara Parks is trying to balance concerns by encouraging people to follow provincial orders to stay home, but keeping the park trails open and safe, he said.

"We know from experience that if you don't set up safe situations, you have more risk of those incidents, and that actually puts even more people at risk," he said.

However, even with parking lots open, people were



Niagara Parks parking lots, sidewalks and trails along the parkway were full of tourists Saturday and Sunday, despite town efforts to deter visitors. RICHARD HARLEY

NOTL copes with COVID-19

still parked illegally along the road and creating new parking spots in the parks.

"So, in those situations, our Niagara Parks Police are patrolling," Adames said.

"We have police patrolling, and we have police visible. In fact, they were very visible (Sunday) in particular, because we knew that there was a risk with that good weather that

it would bring out more people."

He said parks police handed out more than 100 tickets over the weekend, most of which were for parking illegally, and that so far nobody has been fined for violating emergency orders.

If parks police see people who aren't social distancing, or groups larger than a family, they try to ask them to

physically distance, Adames said.

"Our number 1 approach is to engage and educate," he said.

The large number of people coming is something the Parks Commission is concerned about, which is why it is telling people to stay home.

"It's a shared concern, but we know that there are people coming out, includ-

ing many Niagara residents, coming out for their health and wellness as well," Adames said.

He also pointed out that if the trails were closed, it might have led for a "higher concentration of people in other areas."

Adames said there's also the argument that open walking spaces might actually be a good thing.

"It's interesting ... B.C.'s chief medical officer of health was saying last week that the risk of getting infected by COVID-19 outside in a park setting is very, very low risk and there might be a higher risk on mental health" by not allowing people to enjoy the outdoors, he said.

The Town of NOTL signed an agreement with Parks Canada last week to allow bylaw officers to enforce fines on the federal agency's property. Niagara Parks said it would not do the same, as it has its own police service.

"And they've been in place since 1887, so it's been

a longstanding history," he said.

He emphasized Niagara Parks has been consistent in its messaging to stay home.

"We will be welcoming visitors in the future when it is safe to do so, but right now it's to listen to the advice of the Ontario chief medical officer or health, and that message is to stay home, only undertake essential travel. And even when you do go out for essential travel, you should certainly not be going out if you're exhibiting any symptoms ... and again physically distancing when out."

He said the agency is meeting provincial guidelines, which say greenspaces and trails are allowed to remain open.

"However, for those that venture out again, our parks and trails are open for walk-through access only."

"We're very much relying on the individuals, both common sense and their adherence to these emergency orders."

Dr. Brown: Pulse oximeter can be key pandemic tool

Dr. William Brown
Special to The Lake Report

Without widespread COVID-19 testing designed to detect the virus in actively infected people and antibodies in those who have recovered, it's nigh impossible to get a handle on the prevalence of the active disease and the magnitude of any "herd" effect provided by the latter group.

The lack of those numbers has been the biggest failing for most countries except South Korea and Germany, compared to less well-prepared and resourced countries, such as Italy, Spain and now the United States, with probably far worse to come in the undeveloped countries which have few, if any resources.

But beyond the statistics and modelling of the disease, there is the challenge of managing COVID-19. Some infected patients, especially those with known risk factors, go on to de-



A pulse oximeter measures your blood oxygen level and pulse rate. SOURCED

velop symptoms sometime between three and 14 days after becoming infected.

Roughly 5 to 20 per cent of those with early symptoms go on to develop a more serious illness called ARDS (Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which in its clinical features is analogous to what was observed in earlier SARS and MERS outbreaks.

The chief manifestations are increasing shortness of breath and tightness in the chest. In COVID-19 there have been other serious complications, including

clotting disorders, kidney failure, liver failure, myocarditis, heart attacks or even ischemic strokes, some of which may be the presenting feature and even cause of death.

A common feature in the early stages of ARDS is that some patients develop hypoxemia (lower than normal oxygen content in the blood) without shortness of breath, despite X-ray and CT scan evidence of COVID-19 related pneumonia. Given that some of these patients go on to develop a much more serious, extensive pneumonia requiring supplemental oxygen and even assisted ventilation, surely it makes sense to track blood oxygen levels from the outset of symptoms in the disease to detect developing pneumonia as early as possible.

That's precisely what's been suggested using relatively cheap and widely available pulse oximeters. In their most simple form, the pulse oximeter is battery

operated, clips on the tip of the middle finger and provides a digital readout of the blood oxygen level as well as the pulse rate.

But why the paradox of significant hypoxemia yet no shortness of breath? It all has to do with the pathology of the disease and a little physiology. The primary target of COVID-19 in the lungs are the many thousands of tiny sacks at the end of the network of bronchial tubes, called alveoli.

Here the air is separated from nearby fine capillaries by a thin layer of lining cells, which proximity normally makes transfer of oxygen and carbon dioxide between the pulmonary tract and the blood possible. Oxygen is taken up by the capillaries and carbon dioxide passes in the opposite direction from the capillaries into the lungs to be expired.

The problem with ARDS is that those normally wide-open alveolar sacs

become plugged with cellular debris, inflammatory cells and fluid, which makes gas exchange impossible in the most severely affected alveoli.

However, blood continues to circulate through the affected alveoli, with the result that the overall blood oxygen level drops — hypoxemia. The lack of shortness of breath is probably related to the fact that the primary engine driving ventilation is not oxygen, but carbon dioxide, which diffuses better through inflamed alveoli than oxygen.


The body monitors blood oxygen and carbon dioxide levels closely and does so through an array of chemoreceptors in the carotid arteries in the neck, aorta in the chest and neurons in the brainstem, the last of which, control the rate and depth with which we breathe. Should the blood carbon dioxide level rise too much, the necessary cues trigger the brainstem network to in-

crease the rate and depth of respiration through a variety of muscles.

In ARDS, it's probably the case, at least early on in the pneumonia, that enough carbon dioxide gets through to keep the blood level relatively normal, even in the face of significant drops in the blood oxygen level. That's one explanation.

The takeaway point is that monitoring blood oxygen levels — three to four times a day — in patients with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, makes sense as an early warning sign to what might become a significant pneumonia at a stage when it can be best treated. Testing at home with a pulse oximeter makes sense to me.

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.



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Housing market **hit hard**, but prices rise and realtors confident of rebound

Kevin MacLean
Managing Editor

Not surprisingly, in the midst of a pandemic and social lockdown, the real estate markets in Niagara – and elsewhere – have slowed dramatically.

Year-over-year sales across Niagara Region dropped 62 per cent in April, according to the Niagara Association of Realtors.

However, despite that drop, which was anticipated, prices continue to rise and realtors are confident of a quick turnaround once the hangover of the COVID-19 pandemic recedes.

Niagara's Home Price Index, which tracks price trends, "is still rising and days on market is falling, indicating that when restrictions ease our market should be as robust as ever," says Terri McCallum, president of the Niagara Association of Realtors.

Although sales fell last month, "There is still pent up demand, which is having a stabilizing effect on the current sales prices," she said in a statement.

The index's composite benchmark price across the region was \$452,300 in April, up 11.7 per cent from a year ago, according to a report by the realtors association released this week.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, the top-priced community in the regional survey, the Home Price Index benchmark was \$752,100, an

NOTL copes with COVID-19



SOURCED PHOTO.

increase of about 7.5 per cent from April 2019.

New listings in NOTL last month totalled 45, compared to 84 a year earlier, and 53 this past March. Only eight real estate deals were signed in NOTL last month, down almost 70 per cent from the 26 sales recorded in March.

While Niagara has been hit hard, the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board reported 67 per cent fewer sales year-over-year in April and prices showed no increase, unlike here in Niagara.

Once people feel better about going out they're going to move ahead with "their plans and their dreams" and for many that means home ownership, McCallum said in an interview.

She is confident that sales and listings will rebound soon.

"None of us has a crystal ball," so there's no telling when the business will get back to some semblance of normalcy. Ultimately, it will depend on the government, she said.

Real estate is considered an essential business and has continued to operate during the provincial state of emergency, but with major restrictions regarding how properties are shown to prospective buyers. For example, no regular open houses are permitted.

As a result, many realtors have become "extremely innovative" and are using technology to live stream viewings for virtual open houses, McCallum said, noting properties are still selling across Niagara.

The instances of multiple offers and offers over list price that were occurring before the pandemic are continuing, mainly in entry-level properties in the \$350,000 to \$500,000 range, she said.

When restrictions are lifted, she anticipates a "very robust" return to sales and listings.

Royal LePage NRC Brokerage realtor Sally Miller agrees and says the future for the NOTL market looks "very bright."

"Niagara-on-the-Lake continues to be a desired

choice for homeowners wishing to leave high-density centres in pursuit of space and an outstanding lifestyle. Deals are being written and showings continue with health protocols in place," she said.

Spring traditionally is NOTL's strongest market, added Nancy Bailey, a broker with Engel & Voelkers.

However, despite the slowdown, "There is still more demand than supply. Supply is even less today as sellers have been reticent to go to the market due to coronavirus," she said.

And with mortgage rates forecast to remain at historic lows, she feels the climate for a market rebound is positive.

In the meantime, people have not stopped looking at properties, said NOTL realtor Stefan Regier.

Buyers who had been looking at homes in Niagara-on-the-Lake prior to the pandemic "are still very much in contact and have perhaps a greater interest or stronger desire to start a life of walking into town, strolling by the water, visiting shops and restaurants," said Regier, an agent with Royal LePage NRC.

"While sales numbers certainly have come down, desire for the area remains quite strong and while it's foolish to make any predictions right now, I do expect an increase as people become familiar and comfortable making movements in this environment," Regier said.

Thieves **smash window**, grab golf clubs from pro shop

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

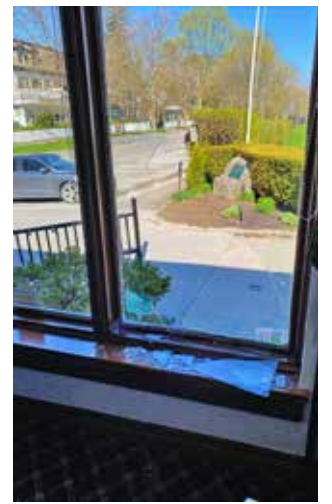
Niagara Regional Police are investigating a smash-and-grab break-in at the NOTL Golf Club on the weekend.

Sometime between Friday and Sunday morning, someone shattered a large window in the pro shop and then grabbed two golf bags and clubs, owner John Wiens said.

The sets, each valued at around \$1,000, were within arm's reach, Wiens said. The stolen clubs are:

new TaylorMade SIM left-handed men's irons (regular flex steel shafts) and a used TaylorMade M4 right-handed men's set.

If anyone sees someone trying to sell the clubs online or knows anything about the break-in, Wiens



The damage after a break-in at the golf club. SUPPLIED

urged them to contact police.

Investigators asked residents and businesses in the area to review their security cameras for any suspicious activity. The case is being handled by the 2 District street crime unit.



Re-enactors at Brock's Monument. FILE PHOTO

Battle of Queenston Heights program available for e-learning

Julia Sacco
The Lake Report

With all public activities cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Friends of Fort George has launched an online e-learning platform for the Battle of Queenston Heights.

To help limit the spread of COVID-19, instead of providing school tours, participants will be granted access to the educational program, including a PowerPoint presentation with images, videos, discussion questions, fun facts, activity sheets and more.

"This project has been a real collaboration with past staff (who are now teachers), community members who donated their pictures and video footage for the

program, and Parks Canada staff who provided their expertise," said Amanda Gamble, executive director of the Friends of Fort George.

"Part of our mandate is to raise awareness for the importance of our historic sites and we hope that this helps people connect with our local history while staying at home".

To access these materials the Friends of Fort George is asking for a nominal donation, with all proceeds going to support programming and employment at Brock's monument.

Contact the Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621 or by email at admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca for more information about the program.

Ruffino's opens Italian mercado

The Lake Report

Chef Ryan Crawford is kicking things up a notch, finding new, safe ways to bring Italian food to the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Crawford, owner of Ruffino's Pasta Bar & Grill, recently launched a new Italian "super mercado" where people can pick up food, fresh pasta, wines, pizza kits, herbs and more.



Chef Ryan Crawford at his newly opened mercado located at Ruffino's. RICHARD HARLEY

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The doctors Foster

Dynamic duo dedicated their careers to ensuring a healthier Niagara

Tim Taylor
The Lake Report

For almost four decades, Niagara medical couple Robin and Kevin Foster have been serving the health needs of the Niagara Region, each in their own way.

You could say they have covered the medical map: Kevin, with 37 years in general practice in Niagara Falls and Robin, known by the surname Williams during her professional career, was a pediatrician and later the regional medical officer of health for Niagara and associate medical officer of health for the province.

Today, newly retired, they stay quietly in their St. Davids home, self-isolating and walking their family pet, Marigold, a large, friendly Bouvier. Like everyone else, they are waiting to emerge into whatever the new world brings.

Both are tempted to don their white coats again. "We've put our names in to Public Health Ontario, signed up to volunteer as needed," says Robin.

It is unlikely they will get the call, at least to the front lines. In their mid-70s, they are in the high-risk category.

"I don't think it is a good idea. We can do intellectual stuff."

Robin has a lot to offer.

There is not much in public health she has not seen.

In her 25-year public health career she has been responsible for providing expertise, guidance and leadership on a long list of health matters, including: controlling communicable diseases, investigating environmental health hazards, maintaining safe drinking water, supervising food inspections, advancing no-smoking bylaws and regulating childhood immunization and health programs geared toward parents and their newborn children.

"It was a mishmash of



Kevin and Robin Foster, with Marigold. TIM TAYLOR

different ways to support health of the community."

In 2003, Robin participated in the provincial science committee, helping identify the SARS organism.

"It was a really scary time," she remembers, looking to Kevin, who nods in agreement. "Very different, but a forerunner of what we are dealing with now."

After SARS, Robin worked on a panel that recommended the establishment of what is now Public Health Ontario. Then she helped set it up.

It's apparent that Robin believes her concern about the well-being of her community was nurtured by her loving, attentive and supportive family upbringing in Niagara Falls.

She was one of four

children, born to a local surgeon and a stay-at-home mom. "I had a pretty easy, fun, lovely childhood," she says with a small, almost wistful smile.

After graduating from the University of Toronto medical school, Robin completed a degree in public health. After working locally as an assistant medical officer, she yearned to work with children. She returned to McMaster to focus on pediatrics, opening a practice in Niagara Falls in 1978.

Throughout her pediatric and public health careers, including stints as head of the Council for Early Child Development and the Canadian Paediatric Society, Robin put a special focus on advancing awareness of early childhood

development. It was for this career-long contribution that she was awarded the Order of Canada in 2013.

At the other end of the medical spectrum, at the grassroots so-to-speak, Kevin was quietly nurturing the lives of three generations of his Niagara Fall's patients.

"My story is pretty ordinary," he says.

Born in Toronto, the eldest of six children, he moved around Ontario and Quebec as a young boy. His father was a vice-president of Canadian Breweries. His mother raised her family and then went off to school at age 60. "She was really smart."

Kevin attended the U of T medical school and interned in Montreal.

His career has seen a lot of change in how the medical field is managed.

"In my early days we were very patriarchal," he says. "When I started, the doctor knew everything, and the patient knew nothing. Now, the new family docs have a very holistic view of their patients – looking more at the person with the disease than the disease in the person."

Kevin and Robin met during medical school while on a summer's medical internship in Jamaica. Married in 1972, they have three sons, including one who is the head of the intensive care unit at a hospital in Kelowna, B.C.

He is particularly proud of the leadership Robin has exerted on the health system in Niagara.

As an example, he makes a point of recounting the so-called Genoa salami story, a tale as much about dedication and determination as it is about medicine.

It was the Thursday before a long May weekend in 1998. Everyone was getting ready for the first weekend of the summer. Two kids showed up in the Niagara Falls emergency department with serious symptoms of E. coli. A smart emergency room doctor immediately blew the whistle.

Over a hectic, anxious long weekend, the entire Niagara health department team was able to identify the source of the E. coli outbreak — a specific brand of Genoa salami — and notify health authorities across Canada, potentially saving many lives.

"It was Robin who made that response happen."

Robin's last major brush with a pandemic was SARS, 17 years ago.

"There was a lot done constructively," she says. "But it fades from memory."

"I'm sure big gaps will be identified again, especially on Canadian supply chains for personal protec-

tive equipment (PPE) and ventilators."

And she has seen signals from the Canadian response that are very satisfying: "I think there are pockets of brilliance."

Robin applauds British Columbia's performance. "Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s chief medical officer, and I worked together in Toronto on SARS. They have created a fully integrated system. They have real synchronicity between the political and health leadership."

She also points to the way all levels of government have worked together across the country. "It's really been quite wonderful."

In recent weeks, Robin has been working with 16 medical students from McMaster to find new sources for PPE supplies. "The health department asked me to work with students to 'flush some out of the bushes.'"

Now that the supply of PPE seems more secure, these same students will be used in the critical contact-tracing role.

"They will be a little army, trying to build a fence around people who have the virus. It is critical. We're going to be in this for the long haul."

Somehow it is hard to see these two retiring.

Robin is just finishing eight years on the Brock board of trustees. "I've had a lot of fun. It is a pretty rosy time for Brock. It's growing, it's vibrant, we've got a wonderful president."

"We are certainly living our retirement with curiosity, family, friends, fun, and a bit of giving back. Our plates always seem full to overflowing."

Both former doctors believe COVID-19 will change almost everything we do, at least a little bit.

"Thank goodness we've got bright, young, smart folks coming along behind us to figure out what it ought to be."

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