



NOTL to the rescue | Page 7

Missing cat Zeus found, police say **no crime committed**

Richard Wright
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A St. Catharines man who admitted to trapping a neighbour's cat in his backyard and dumping it

in a rural area of Niagara-on-the-Lake will face no criminal consequences.

"The matter has been investigated and concluded and no charges have been laid," Niagara Regional Police spokesperson Const.

Jesse Vujasic said in an April 23 statement.

The three-year-old black and white male named Zeus was found by owners, the Clout family, on the evening of Wednesday, April 17 near Church and

McNab roads in rural NOTL.

This was after extensive searches in that area and near the family home on Bowstead Drive in St. Catharines. He had been missing since March 4.

The Clouts first suspected the neighbour after overhearing a conversation between him and another neighbour April 10. They say they heard him



Zeus is back home.

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Niagara Foundation buys the Wilderness

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

After years of intense negotiations, the Niagara Foundation has obtained full ownership of the Wilderness property in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The organization announced Monday that it has acquired 100 per cent of the property, thanks to a \$1 million donation from the Goettler Family Foundation, as well as "several other significant donations from Niagara-on-the-Lake residents."

The forested property is located at 407 King St. in Old Town.

The Wilderness, "as it has been known for more than 100 years," is about five acres and "has significant historic, cultural, environmental and botanical importance within the Niagara region," said a news release from the Niagara Foundation.

The ownership of the property has been debated

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Room to grow

Niagara-on-the-Lake urged to do more for aging residents



Left: Amy Bolduc, NOTL's new nurse practitioner, began seeing patients on Monday. SUPPLIED Right: Dr. Anne Wilson joined the Niagara North Family Health Team in October. She says NOTL is in need of more family physicians. RICHARD HUTTON

CODE GREY

"Code Grey" is one in a series of stories in The Lake Report about health care in Niagara Region. In hospital parlance, "Code Grey" means loss of essential service.

Julia Sacco | The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake is home to one of the largest populations of seniors in the province, but it may not be the best place for those who want to age in place. At least, not yet.

Compared to the rest of the province, NOTL has almost double the percentage of people aged 65 and older — 36.2 per cent compared to 18.5 per cent provincewide.

People aged 85 and older make

up 4.3 per cent of Niagara-on-the-Lake's population, again nearly double the province's 2.2 per cent, according to Statistics Canada.

In St. Catharines, for example, StatCan says people aged 85 and

up make up 3.2 per cent of the population while in Niagara Falls it is 3 per cent.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa thinks one reason NOTL is so

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Rand heritage landscape elements **called into question** at tribunal

Richard Hutton
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Which parts of the Rand Estate include historic Dunington-Grubb landscape elements?

It depends on who you ask, said a landscape architect retained by Solmar, which wants to build a 191-unit subdivision on the site.

Tim McCormick, an associate principal senior landscape architect and

certified arborist with Arcadis (once IBI Group), gave his testimony on day 10 of an Ontario Land Tribunal hearing, held Monday, concerning Solmar's proposal for the estate lands.

The proposal has met stiff

opposition from the town and some residents since it was first floated in 2018.

The development wound up before the tribunal after the town refused to grant Solmar permission to demolish structures on

the site, including the pool garden, the Calvin Rand Summer House and the old stable house.

Under questioning from Solmar lawyer Mark Flowlers, McCormick said features such as the panhandle

and whistlestop could not be proven to be designed by Howard and Lorrie Dunington-Grubb.

Throughout the early to mid-1900s, the Dunington-

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NOTL has a **shortage** of physicians

Continued from Front Page

popular with seniors is because it has a lot to offer aging Canadians.

"I would say number one is climate," Zalepa told The Lake Report, citing the warm summers and idyllic autumn season.

"I'll say services as well," he added, such as the community centre, library, a strong sense of volunteerism and ample community events that take place in town.

Despite its many draws for seniors and retirees, Niagara-on-the-Lake might not be the perfect place to settle down in old age as there are numerous factors to consider.

Starting with housing: Zalepa says one of the town's greatest downfalls is addressing housing needs.

"We have a challenge there because we have a lot of older-style, single-family homes which are on what you might call larger lots. Those are not what seniors are looking for," he said.

Cindy Grant and a group of concerned community members in collaboration with Niagara College conducted an in-depth survey earlier this year to gather insights from residents aged 55 and up on the housing struggles they face.

Results of the survey haven't yet been released, but Grant said the need for improved seniors housing is obvious.

"It's clear from the conversations that myself and the committee have had over the last several months that there is a need for alternative supportive housing for seniors to either age in place or have an alternative to move to that would allow them to stay in the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake," Grant told The Lake Report.

She doesn't think there will be a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather a combination of different forms of alternative housing.

Addressing those concerns is something that town council is working on by boosting housing affordability and developing more homes to meet the needs of the town's older residents, the mayor says.



The walk-in clinic at the Village Medical Centre opened to patients on Monday. FILE

Transportation and walkability can also be improved, Zalepa said.

"We are very fortunate in Niagara-on-the-Lake to have good connectivity with paths and walkways. We're going to continue investing in that," he said. Council is dedicated to adding sidewalks and connecting different subdivisions and neighbourhoods in town, he noted.

Medical care is another factor seniors should take into consideration when moving anywhere and NOTL is struggling with a doctor shortage.

Dr. Anne Wilson, with the Niagara North Family Health Team, has been practising in Niagara-on-the-Lake since last October.

And objectively, the biggest problem she has noticed is the lack of family doctors in town.

"What I'm hearing from patients is that they've lived here a long time and haven't been able to get into a family practice," she said.

When Wilson and Dr. Michael Grasic started in NOTL last year, there were already many patients on their waiting lists.

"Because they hadn't had a doctor, some of them were travelling back and forth to where their previous doctors were or they were doing remote care."

This is especially problematic for older patients who tend to have more chronic conditions like diabetes or heart failure. Without access to a family doctor, those patients are more likely to end up in a hospital.

For specific checkups, NOTL falls a bit short.

"I've noticed a difficulty with accessing imaging and this affects older patients as well," Wilson said.

For smokers in particular, CT scans to check for lung cancer are beneficial.

"When I'm ordering these CT scans locally, it is over a year for the first scan to get booked," she said.

"And this is a population again who didn't have family doctors and maybe weren't getting their regular screenings done and now we're having difficulty accessing scans."

This affects overall care, Wilson said, especially since many of the older patients cannot drive to different cities for scans, or rely on family members for transportation.

But she says there are many positives and she doesn't discourage seniors from moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake for retirement.

"I think that people with complex problems can move here, but we need to be on top of what those problems are and we need to advocate to the government to help fund these family health teams."

With increased government funding, Wilson said the family health team will be able to create special programs catering to the needs of seniors.

"For example, when I worked more rural, I worked for a family health team as well and we were able to get funding for a heart failure program," she said.

A nurse practitioner who helped patients monitor their weights and adjust medications, ultimately reduced emergency room visits.

While health care is far from perfect in Niagara-on-the-Lake, improvements are being made with the introduction of Wilson and Grasic, as well as the newly opened walk-in clinic staffed by nurse practitioner Amy Bolduc.

It opened to patients this past Monday, April 22.

Karen Stearne, executive director of Heart Niagara, echoed the goals of Wilson and Zalepa, saying that heart health is something to be mindful of everywhere.

But for those aged 80 and over, a nice place to live drastically improves quality of life.

"Fundamentally what people need is somewhere to live. They need something to do and someone to love," Stearne told The Lake Report.

"Niagara-on-the-Lake has it in spades in that area," she added, noting the tight-knit community allows seniors to build plenty of meaningful connections.

Her suggestion is simply to make living in NOTL more accessible for people with different levels of income.

"It has to not just be a friendly neighbourhood, it has to be affordable," she said.

If you or someone you know lives in NOTL and does not have a family doctor, stop in to the Niagara North Family Health Clinic for an application (or download one from www.niagaranorthfht.ca).

Wilson's and Grasic's practices are filling up fast and the clinic wants to include as many NOTL residents as possible before opening up to patients outside the area.

juliasacco@niagaranow.com

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CODE GREY

“Code Grey” is one in a series of stories in The Lake Report about health care in Niagara Region. In hospital parlance, “Code Grey” means loss of essential service.

Lack of urgent care options in NOTL a big concern

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara Health is undoubtedly going through major changes with the introduction of a three-site hospital system across its St. Catharines, Welland and South Niagara locations.

But for Niagara-on-the-Lake, a community with 30.9 per cent of the population comprised of seniors and no urgent care centre, residents are worried these changes aren't enough.

After a presentation at the NOTL Community Centre on Monday night, Niagara Health CEO Lynn Guerriero and executive vice-president of clinical operations Heather Paterson took questions from the audience.

An overarching concern for residents was the distance between NOTL and the nearest hospital that would be able to provide certain types of specialized care.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa wanted to know just how long it would take for an ambulance to transport someone from NOTL to the nearest site.

“The drive time from Niagara-on-the-Lake to St. Catharines takes 29 minutes,” Guerriero responded.

“It'll be about 28 minutes to the new site because it's all highway and to the current Niagara



Larry Yap was concerned about ambulance travel time from NOTL to the new hospital site. JULIA SACCO

Falls site, it's 26.7,” she said, adding that these times were calculated with regular drivers in mind, not an ambulance.

Paterson noted that all emergency calls would be triaged to assess the priority of each situation.

Aside from emergencies, NOTLers have a hard time arranging certain screenings for non-emergency ailments.

Resident Heidi Brown shared her concerns about accessibility to these services in town during the Q & A session.

“Right now, if I need a mammogram, I have to go to the hospital to get one. Any other imaging as well. It's not done in the community of Niagara-on-the-Lake,” she said.

Guerriero pointed out that there are a number of community-based diagnostic facilities across Ontario, as a result of physicians pushing for them.

“We have been pushing, you do not believe how hard, that one of these comes to Niagara,” she said.

Until then, there aren't many options for seniors in

NOTL who don't have a car or someone to drive them to appointments.

The Lake Report asked if any patient transport was available in these situations and the answer was no.

Paterson said that there is no current service and patients must rely on family, friends or Uber.

“I think that is something we've talked to the region about around transportation and helping communities come together,” she said.

“It's a concern for us as well. We want people to have access to care.”

Coun. Sandra O'Connor was concerned about how aging NOTLers with complex health issues will be taken care of.

Guerriero said the South Niagara site, under construction now at Montrose and Biggar roads in Niagara Falls, is specifically designed for geriatric populations.

She called it “a centre of excellence for wellness and aging.”

Following that response and words from Paterson, O'Connor urged Niagara Health to recognize NOTL's

need for more immediate care in town.

“Niagara-on-the-Lake in the next 25 years is almost going to double in population,” she said.

“We're looking at possibly trying to advocate for an urgent care centre to meet this almost doubling of the population.”

Guerriero agreed with O'Connor, adding, “We need to really make sure we're advocating for expansion of those types of services in high-growth areas.”

After the Q & A session, O'Connor told The Lake Report she felt the presenters were putting a positive spin on everything.

“We're left with gaps,” she said.

In the U.K., smaller cottage hospitals have been shutting down and health care has been centralized, she noted.

“They found out it doesn't work and they are now going back,” she said.

O'Connor said she wonders if Niagara Health has studied what other countries have done.

Ultimately, she said she wished more information had been addressed during the presentation, including how many beds are needed for a population of mostly seniors and how that changes the standard metric.

Queenston Pottery shows off renovations during studio tour



Eva Mlcak showed guests just how sturdy her pottery is during last weekend's studio tour. JULIA SACCO

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

For the first time ever, residents and visitors could take an inside look at Niagara-on-the-Lake's artist studios and take in the creativity.

Last Saturday and Sunday, the NOTL Studio Tour exhibited 28 artists over 16 locations, highlighting some of the creatives in town who fly under the radar.

Queenston Pottery is a perfect example of a hidden gem in town — and owners are hoping to change that.

During the studio tour, the property in Queenston debuted its updated and renovated studio space and sales floor.

Lisa Dahl, daughter-in-law

of owner Eva Mlcak, said that her hope with the studio tour is to “demystify the driveway” into the studio, which sometimes intimidates a customer from stopping by.

And a stop-by is well worth it.

In 1978, after immigrating from the Czech Republic, Mlcak and her husband Frank built their entire home, studio and gallery from scratch.

“We bought this land because somebody had let it go. We always liked this street because the country where we are from and the region where we lived was always very hilly,” Mlcak told The Lake Report.

She said that the York Road property made her feel at home.

Mlcak and her husband were engineers before shifting to focus on their artistic endeavours.

They were both good with design and Frank Mlcak was very handy with tools, something that his son Rick has carried on with.

Almost 50 years later, Mlcak still adds the final brushwork to the pieces herself, putting care and attention into every piece at Queenston Pottery.

After the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of her husband, Mlcak had begun plans to slow down business a bit.

But, at the same time, her son and daughter-in-law were able to make the move to Niagara and lend a hand. “We thought the business

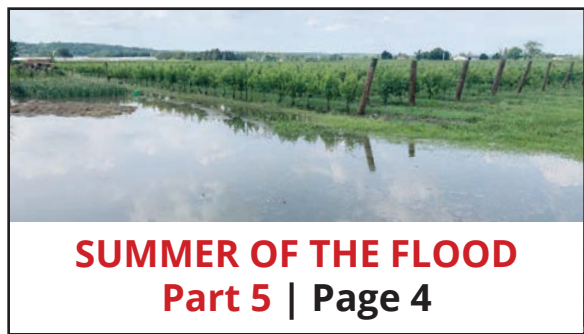
was so beautiful and too important to let it go,” Dahl said.

“We are now taking on and growing off of the strong foundation that has already been built.”

Along with renovations, Queenston Pottery is now offering Studio Tours and hoping to add some pottery classes in the fall.

“We're really looking to turn this place into a destination and experience for people who are here touring, something in addition to a wine tour,” Dahl said.

Queenston Pottery is located at 1648 York Rd. and more information on their hours and offerings can be found at queenstonpottery.com. juliasacco@niagaranow.com



Neighbour sues Konzelmann, town over special event permits

Richard Wright
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A lawyer representing a NOTL resident involved in a lawsuit against the municipality is accusing

the town of not enforcing its own bylaws by allowing what he calls illegal gatherings on estate wineries.

Standing before council Sept. 24, St. Catharines-based lawyer Tom

Richardson, who is a municipal law specialist, took councillors to task about special events, such as weddings, being held on estate wineries.

A practice he contends is in contradiction to current

agricultural zoning bylaws. He was representing NOTL resident Ed Werner, who launched the suit. He lives on Lakeshore Road next to Konzelmann Estate Winery.

Richardson recapped

that Werner has for several years complained to the town that events are occurring next to his home at Konzelmann, resulting in considerable disturbance.

"The Konzelmann property is zoned for the

estate winery and has no provision to allow special events," said Richardson.

"My thesis is this," he added, speaking not specifically to the

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New transit service falls short for specialized needs

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Alexis Dowsett hasn't been able to get a ride with Niagara Transit since July 2.

Alexis, 43, is quadriplegic and uses a power chair, relying heavily on transit to go about her day-to-day life.

As of July 2, Niagara Transit, which adopted Niagara Specialized Transit and NRT OnDemand, now functions under a new service provider, Voyago.

Since the transition, Alexis and her mother, Ruth Dowsett, have encountered several problems that inhibit her ability to complete daily activities.

"My daughter has not been able to get one ride. One ride," Ruth Dowsett told The Lake Report.

As per a board report from August, the Niagara Transit Commission is

Continued on Page 7

HEARTBEAT of the HARVEST

A Rubik's Cube of planning and problem solving at Trius



Emma Garner, director of winemaking for Andrew Peller Ltd., with a batch of incoming Sauvignon Blanc grapes. DON REYNOLDS

Jill Troyer | The Lake Report

There's a whole lot going on at the production facility at Trius during harvest season, and Emma Garner is in the thick of it. Her day starts early and finishes late. She's up at 5:30 in the morning and on

site at Trius until 6 p.m. — and that's on days when everything goes smoothly. The ripening grapes in the vineyard dictate the schedule and the pace.

"Once the fruit's ready, we've got to go. That's the biggest thing."

Garner orchestrates the complex processes at the Trius production site in her role as director of winemaking for Andrew Peller Ltd., working very closely with the winemaking teams from both Peller and

Trius. Their premium wines are made here. She is also the winemaker for Thirty Bench.

In a masterful understatement, Garner allows that "my day is

Continued on Page 3

Maxwell charged with second count of assault, remains in custody

Staff
The Lake Report

A former Niagara-on-the-Lake child care worker was charged with a second count of aggravated assault on Tuesday.

Matthew Maxwell, 26, was charged with one count of aggravated assault last

week for allegedly choking a child under the age of five while he was working at Way to Grow Daycare in Niagara Falls.

He has remained in police custody since he was initially charged.

The details of the second charge are protected by a publication ban, said

Niagara Regional Police Cost. Jesse Vujasic, in response to questions from The Lake Report.

Maxwell was previously employed at Niagara Nursery School, located beside the community centre in Old Town.

A source told The Lake Report Maxwell was fired

for grabbing a child's arm while he worked there.

Police would not answer questions about that, stating the incident is part of an ongoing investigation.

It appears from a review of Ontario Ministry of Education records that Niagara Nursery School may not have reported that incident

when it occurred, which is it required to do by law.

Police said that matter would be "an investigation run by FACS and the Governing Bodies that manages daycares."

Reached last Tuesday, Niagara Nursery School executive director Candice Penny said, "We cannot

comment at this time."

Police are urging anyone with more information, or who suspects their child may have been a victim, to contact detectives at 905-688-4111, option 3, ext. 1009468. Anonymous tips can be provided to Crime Stoppers of Niagara online or by calling 1-800-222-8477.

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NOTL resident hasn't been able to get ride since July 1

Continued from Front Page

aware changes need to be made — and they are underway.

The BTS Network, the former service provider for Niagara Specialized Transit, was “absolutely wonderful,” said Dowsett.

Alexis could book a specialized bus trip as short notice as a day in advance to do things such as go to the mall, visit a friend or go to a doctor’s appointment, Dowsett said.

Now, the Dowsetts have trouble getting a ride at all, even weeks in advance.

The lack of access to transit has affected more than just Alexis’ social life, her mom said.

“She was involved in independent living and they had all sorts of activities she would go to — can’t get rides,” she said. “She volunteers at Niagara Longterm Care on Thursdays — can’t get rides.”

Neither Alexis nor her mother have been able to get through to Voyago or Niagara Transit for solutions.

“I just don’t know what to do anymore, because



Ruth Dowsett and her daughter Alexis have not been able to book a ride for Alexis to get to her volunteer job or see friends since transit changed on July 2. JULIA SACCO

nobody will speak to you,” Dowsett said.

Alexis said she is left feeling frustrated.

“With the old service, I was friends with some of the dispatchers. I could call them up and they’d try to get me a ride,” she said.

Missing out on volunteering is a huge source of

frustration, Alexis added.

“If we can’t get this resolved, I can’t get back to work.”

The unification of Niagara Specialized Transit and NRT OnDemand came after NOTL council, along with six other municipalities in Niagara, voted in favour of amalgamating all transit

services across the region in 2021.

With amalgamation approved by the required majority of municipalities, Niagara Transit took over multiple existing transit contracts, including NRT OnDemand and Niagara Specialized Transit.

MJ McGraw lives in Old Town and had also been using the service formerly run under BTS to get her to and from medical appointments for the last five years.

“They knew, just from their familiarity with the clients based on the number of times they had to pick them up, what they had to do to keep them safe,” McGraw told The Lake Report.

When the service initially transitioned to Voyago, McGraw said BTS employees weren’t allowed to share any information with clients about how to use the new services.

“It meant that everybody, including Alexis’ mom, were wandering around trying to figure out what the hell to do with this,” she said.

When using the app instead of the phone, McGraw

said she can book rides with a few days’ notice, rather than two weeks in advance.

She understands how Alexis may have a hard time getting a ride though, McGraw said, adding that she has only seen one wheelchair accessible van during recent rides.

Voyago seems to have realized they made a mistake in taking on these transit services, McGraw said.

Leah Tracey, Niagara Transit’s communications consultant, sent The Lake Report the commission board report from Aug. 27 outlining what changes will be implemented to fix ongoing issues — and how.

“Niagara Transit Commission staff have investigated the operational and logistical challenges that have impacted both the Niagara Transit Commission and its customers,” the report said. The report recognized that without proper service clients could become isolated and miss out on potential life-saving treatments.

The challenges outlined in the report include: Vehicle capacity, high-demand periods and extended hold

times, unconventional payment methods, abandoned and delayed rides, on-time performance confusion, new customer base and other issues.

More than 100 new clients applied for specialized services immediately following the launch, the report said.

To help mitigate the problems, Niagara Transit is promising an increased vehicle count, booking platform improvement, abandoned and delayed ride mitigation, multi-modal integration and increased staffing.

“Starting Oct. 1, we will have an additional seven wheelchair-accessible vehicles in service,” Tracey said in an email to The Lake Report.

This is in addition to those vehicles already in service. The full fleet will operate across the region, including in NOTL.

Tracey requested contact information for McGraw and the Dowsetts and said Niagara Transit would be in touch to ensure all improvements made had been relayed.

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