



TLR

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Canada The Local Journalism Initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

COVID Tracker

NOTL active cases (last 28 days): 43
Region active cases: 542
Region deaths: 661
Region total cases: 48,948

**Dec. 7 data per Niagara Region Public Health. Public health warns that "Due to the surge in COVID-19 cases, limited availability of testing, and changes to case and contact management practices, case counts shown (above) are an underestimate of the true number of individuals in Niagara with COVID-19. Data should be interpreted with caution." Case data for municipalities is also now being interpreted in 28-day cycles.*



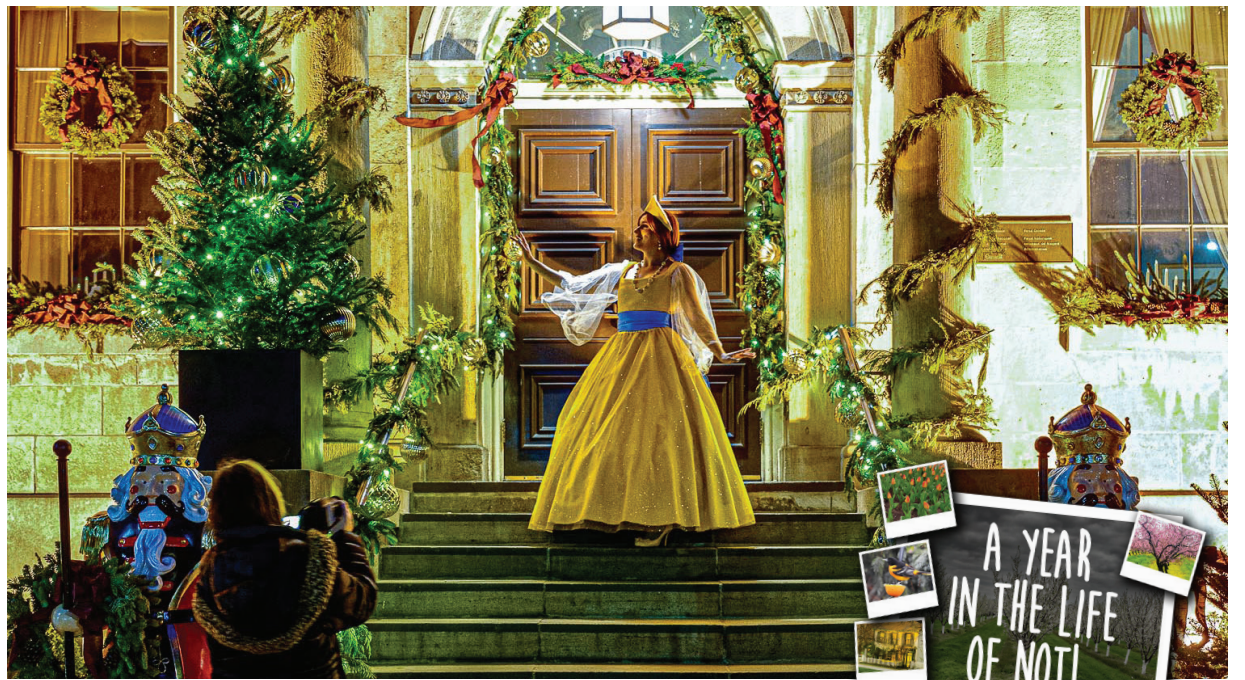
Contributed by Patty Garriock

"Optimism is a happiness magnet. If you stay positive, good things and good people will be drawn to you." - Mary Lou Retton

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Anastasia on the steps



Lake Report photographer Dave Van de Laar snapped this shot of a fellow photographer named Beth taking a picture of Molly Flora as Anastasia on the steps of the Court House.



Editorial

Do the right thing for seasonal workers

Kevin MacLean
 Managing Editor

It is never easy for an employee to speak up when they feel their boss is not treating them fairly.

In most cases, there's a huge power imbalance. Even if there's a confidential phone line, a union or other mechanism for workers to rely on, lodging complaints about the boss can be a tricky business.

When you are a foreign national – a seasonal farmworker – toiling in the fields, doing the type of work that Canadians shun, you have little or no protection if you encounter a bad boss or a workplace situation that is intolerable or unfair.

Do not misread our sentiments: We love and respect farmers, and the essential work they do.

Farmers feed cities, farmers literally put food on our tables, farmers are integral to our economy, especially in places like Niagara-on-the-Lake.

But are there bad farm bosses? Just like in every business or industry, no doubt there are. We have long heard rumblings about

some farmers who routinely mistreat their workers – and, of course, that is not right or just. Finding evidence of it is difficult.

But those who violate the rules or trample the rights of employees need to be identified and dealt with.

However, as migrant worker advocates will tell you, it's not wholly about the farmers. Rather it is about the system that we – Canadians – and our elected governments allow to flourish: seasonal workers returning to the fields of NOTL and other agricultural areas year after year after year, hired (or not) at the discretion of farm bosses and having no concrete alternatives.

Because they don't have permanent status here in Canada, they don't have the same rights as the rest of us. Even if they've been doing the job here for decades.

That is something we – the people – need to call on our government to fix. The federal and provincial bureaucracies grind slowly and take an eternity to change.

And the only way change will come is with serious

pressure from communities like ours to stop turning a blind eye to the second-class treatment we visit upon those seasonal workers who are crucial to the success of our agricultural sector.

It is shameful that Canadians allow these workers – overwhelmingly men and overwhelmingly visible minorities, from Jamaica and Mexico mainly – to be effectively indentured so that we can enjoy NOTL wines and peaches and other fruits.

But that is "the system."

On our front page this week, injured farmworker Ceto Reid is rightly celebrated as one of the recipients of the money raised by the annual Candlelight Stroll. That is an excellent and happy outcome.

On the same page also is a story about complaints by seasonal farmworkers from Mexico, including at least one from NOTL, accusing their Canadian employers of mistreatment, modern-day slavery and poor working conditions.

Ceto Reid is from Jamaica and works at P.G. Enns Farms in NOTL. He has not complained about the conditions he faced, but

his situation tells us all we need to know.

In October, riding his bike in St. Catharines, his clean laundry in a large bag, he was headed to his bunkhouse, preparing to return home to Jamaica, when he was struck by a car and badly injured.

He's recovering and receiving lots of help from the community, and for that he is forever thankful.

But the fact he had to ride his bike some eight kilometres, each way, to find adequate laundry facilities in a very simple way illustrates how the plight of seasonal workers face is an afterthought.

Bed bugs, bad bosses and crowded bunkhouses aside, we can't even make it mandatory that people who work in the dirt must have proper laundry facilities.

Yes, congratulations to our generous community for helping Ceto Reid and the Farmworkers Hub with donations raised by the Candlelight Stroll. But shame on us if we continue to support a system that lets such major and minor inequities persist.

That system has to change.

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