



Photo by Natalie Cummings

“I’ve always loved horses,” Pat McCormick laughs as she pets Ziggy the horse. McCormick spends her days single-handedly taking care of horses on her small hobby farm, Double Luck Acres, in Brighton. McCormick, a rider and former teacher, knows that there is a special connection between horses and people, and loves being with the gentle giants.

Horses fulfill woman’s lifelong dream

By Natalie Cummings

Pat McCormick wakes up early every morning to feed the beasts living in her backyard.

McCormick can hear them coming with the steady beat of their hooves on the frozen ground and snorts creating little puffs of smoke trailing from their gaping nostrils.

The gentle giants meet McCormick at the gate like an old friend.

“You know how some people are born with brown hair? Well, I was born with a love of horses,” McCormick smiles.

An avid collector of all things horse related in childhood, despite never having

the opportunity to ride, McCormick held on to her passion for horses, even as she grew older.

After moving to where she now calls home on the outskirts of Brighton in the late 1980s, McCormick knew that with the barn and wide-open field at her back doorstep, it was finally her chance to get what she always dreamed of.

“I bought my first horse in 1992,” says McCormick’s with a gleam in her eye. “One person only needs one horse, right?”

However, with the new addition, McCormick at times was left scratching her head on how to look after the steed.

“I knew nothing about their care.” Fortunately, the next-door neighbours

with the same love for horses helped show McCormick the reigns.

After that, caring for one horse quickly became caring for two as the horse from next door moved into McCormick’s barn.

Over the years, McCormick has taken care of several horses from all walks off the beaten and broken trail, even taking in a seven-year-old rescue horse with special needs.

Now at 19 years of age, Mr. Christie, the rescue, can still be seen grazing the field at Double Luck Acres, which became the name of McCormick’s loving hobby farm.

It was upon retirement McCormick bought her first baby.

The foal, called Shaman, was delivered

to McCormick’s barn at four months old.

McCormick also received Apache, another foal, sometime after.

McCormick cannot deny that it is a lot of work to have so many horses. Hay needs to be drawn in, grain to purchase, stalls to be cleaned, all before taking time to groom and train the large animals.

However, for McCormick, it’s all worth it.

“When I walk to the barn, at feeding time, there is no better sound than that soft nicker,” McCormick grins. “No better sound than the horses rushing to meet me at the gate.”

Despite working her hobby farm alone, McCormick shares her love of horses

with several others in the community. She grins as she says there is always someone willing to lend a hand to help a fellow horse and rider.

“Horse people are special,” McCormick says, “always willing to help new riders and owners to stay safe and look after their horses well.”

Whether something has been lost or broken, there always seems to be a rider with an extra part, or another horse owner with a hand to lend.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, where many are forced to work alone, McCormick has all the company she needs in the barn.

“Horses are like family.”

Brewery shows Pride through donations

By Alex Bowman

With the provincial lockdown forcing a categorization of what we deem essential services, perhaps we have let one essential service slip through the cracks – supporting and giving back to our local community.

But for one local Bowmanville business, it has never forgotten its community and how important it is to support one another.

“Without our community, we would not be here,” says Matthew Allott, general manager and owner of Manantler Craft Brewing Co.

Opening its doors in 2015, the business is a small batch craft brewery making 500 litre batches of beer at a time, and working to create an inviting, local spot for everyone in the community to spend time in.

Not only does the brewery support local artists and musicians, but almost two years ago they decided to create a charity beer called Cause Worthy, which donates 50 cents from every bottle to PFLAG Durham Chapter.

PFLAG is a national organization created by parents wanting acceptance for their 2SLGBTQI children. With the Durham region chapter’s creation in 2003, their mission is to support any persons in their reach through their journeys of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

Although the creation of Cause Worthy was originally meant to begin an ever-changing charity beer, where the receiving charity would change throughout the year, the Manantler team decided that they could make more of a difference by continually supporting PFLAG.

“When we found out that 80 per cent of donations only came in June [pride month] and the other 11 months there were very little donations, we ended up deciding we could help this organization more by keeping donations going throughout the year.”

Since the creation of this beer,



Photo by Alex Bowman

Matthew Allott, owner and general manager of Manantler Craft Brewing Co., holds his Cause Worthy beer at the bar in their tap room at the brewery.

Manantler has been able to donate thousands of dollars to the organization and has been able to help shine a spotlight

on all the good work they do for the community – like help get Clarington’s first rainbow crosswalk, which has been

vandalized three times since its inception. “When the crosswalk got vandalized, it really showed us that there is a lot more

work to be done in this community,” says Allott.

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Photo by Bec Gauvin

Gordon Spearing stands in front of the People To Go company space in Whitby. Spearing is a partial owner of the company since March of 2020, and he now spends his days working in the smaller office with his dog, Cooper, at his side.

Staffing in the digital world

By Bec Gauvin

Gordon Spearing sits in the common area of his company office space taking a small respite from work to play with Cooper, his golden retriever puppy.

He works alone at the Whitby location, with the exception of his wife Tracy, who uses the room next door to conduct her own work. The space is bright and empty, with white walls stretching to meet three desks belonging to his financial team members who have since shifted to socially distanced working from their respective residences.

Spearing is a partial owner of PeopleToGo, an IT staffing services company that provides staff along with an array of technology services

for large corporations, which he operates with his colleagues and friends Dave Duncan and Chris Collins. Duncan is a founder of the 21-year-old company, whereas Collins and Spearing both became recent owners in March of 2020, having been employees of the company for 19 and 11 years respectively.

"We became owners on a Tuesday, and on the Friday, the world shut down, so it was an interesting experience," says Spearing of the national lockdown that occurred in March following the rise in COVID-19 cases across Canada.

"From an office perspective and a staffing perspective, the pandemic didn't do a lot of damage. We were very much a virtual office to start with. We had the software to do so, so we had the mentality to work from

home. We are pretty much 100 per cent virtual now, and we were set up that way before the pandemic even hit, so it was an easy transition for our teams. There was very little, 'Oh my goodness, what do I do,' because everybody was already mobile."

It is for that reason that the company downsized from the office they had held in Markham in January 2020, to the more compact space they now work from in Whitby. With an operations team, which is spread out across Canada, the company found they had a lot of space and nobody coming into the office.

"I basically only needed a place to store my financial system and sign cheques," says Spearing.

However, because the role of the company's primary focus is to place people in offices in person, the pan-

dem has done some notable damage.

"There's customers we have where would have had people on site, but they've shut down their offices and they've shut down their locations. If you're dealing with things like desk-side support, the jobs really aren't there right now."

However, it all depends on so many things. Don't be fooled into thinking that technological support is only for your laptop. Complex technology exists all around us in places we don't even realize, and IT people are essential to keep our world running as it is.

"So much of what we're touching now, so many systems are electronic. The difference between your photo copier, printer, and your coffee maker is what the circuit board inside of it tells it what to do. It all depends on what the customer needs fixed."

"Once the COVID-19 pandemic is over, close to one-quarter (22.5 per cent) of businesses expect that 10 per cent or more of their workforce will continue to telework or work remotely," states a study published by Statistics Canada in July 2020. With the increase in technological reliance, technology support jobs are becoming even more vital to a successful business, and PeopleToGo is looking at the growing opportunity to expand its business.

"We see an immense opportunity for growth," says Spearing. "We would hope to not only broaden our clientele, but the scope of what we do. There are all sorts of opportunities out there. The big challenge right now is getting through this pandemic. We've got to get the world to open back up."

Belleville city council seat finally gets filled

By Daniel Geleyn

After some controversy, the Belleville city council voted 7 to 1 on Jan. 21 to appoint Tyler Allsopp as the new councillor for the Belleville City council.

The position had been left vacant in November with the passing of Councillor Pat Culhane but the filling of this post became controversial after a committee was formed to put forward recommendations to fill this post.

City council had voted in December to create the ad hoc committee to advise on who should be chosen. This was proposed as an alternative to common practice in the past of appointing the individual who received the next highest number of votes in the last municipal election. The motivating factor for council's decision was a desire to increase diversity on the council by including more women and minorities.

But on Jan. 20, at a special council

meeting, they voted 5-3 to refuse formal acceptance of the report that was recommending the appointment of a new councillor to fill the vacant seat.

It became clear at the Jan. 25 council meeting that most councillors had received a lot of feedback from residents of Belleville on this issue, with most of them supporting the common practice of appointing the individual who received the next highest number of votes in the last municipal election, in this case 2018.

Councillor Garnet Thompson introduced the motion by stating that "this is very important to the public that they have a say on who is going to take the position. That may not always be the next in line, it certainly could be a by-election."

All the councillors had the chance to speak to express the reasons for the way they were voting on this issue.

Councillor Bill Sandison talked about the "overwhelming public support to

'It was not an easy decision. We would have got an outcry no matter what we decided. We will hear from members of the community in the future about issues of sexism or racism in the city and they will point to the lack of diversity on city council.'

Mayor Mitch Panciuk

appoint the next in-line to a seat on the council."

Councillor Ryan Williams quoted Winston Churchill and then said that "Democracy can be messy, it can be long as we have heard in the last five weeks but it should never be optional."

The only dissident councillor, Kelly McCaw stated "I feel better standing alone for what I believe in then standing together with others for what I don't."

As the chair of the ad hoc committee, she said that "Filling the council seat was always about finding a qualified municipally engaged person first with diversity a distant second," McCaw concluded by saying "I would argue that change is tomorrow, not now in the city of Belleville and we know that tomorrow never comes."

Mayor Mitch Panciuk also voted in favour of the motion but stated, "I have heard from a lot of people saying that they believe in equality, in equity, in diversity but that they also believe in the tradition

of appointing the runner-up. In this case, it's a contradiction which leads to further under representation of important segments of our community. This will result in an eight male, one female city council, the first time since 1977 that we only have one woman on city council. This can't be the end of it until the next election."

After the council meeting, Mayor Panciuk reflected that "It was not an easy decision. We would have got an outcry no matter what we decided. We will hear from members of the community in the future about issues of sexism or racism in the city and they will point to the lack of diversity on city council."

"We've appointed Tyler Allsopp to the position on council but at the same time we have identified the real shortcomings we have with our system. I hope that as a result you'll see not just more people running in the next election, but a more reflective council elected."



Photo by Sabah Rahman

Back in action

The City of Quinte West reopened the Batawa outdoor skating rinks on Jan. 22 under increased safety measures for COVID-19. New measures include the requirement for visitors to always wear masks and respect physical distancing.

Brewery...

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This recognition of the work that needs to be done is so important to organizations like PFLAG.

"Having community businesses who not only support us but are active allies for the community, is how we start to normalize the 2SLGBTQI community members. This is how we move into a place within our community of Durham where we are no longer afraid of being who we are in public," explains Jake Farr, President of PFLAG Durham Region.

The organization really feels the support in the area, with other breweries like The Second Wedge Brewing Co., Little Beasts Brewing Co., and Old Flame Brewing Co., also showing their support.

"We can go for a beer at Manantler and feel safe to do so, as Matt and his staff would never put up with any homophobia or transphobia in their establishment," says Farr.

Proudly supporting an organization like PFLAG is a no brainer for Allott

and Manantler brewing, saying that "as long as we're in business, we won't stop supporting our community and amazing organizations like PFLAG and what they stand for."

Even though sales have dropped for the brewery by more than 40 per cent in the past year due to COVID-19, the donations will keep rolling with every purchase of Cause Worthy, and the brewery will continue to stay optimistic, and try and weather the storm.

"We also grew up and live in this community ourselves, so making it better only benefits us. Supporting small local businesses and organizations is truly one of the best things we can do to help our community thrive," says Allott.

Setting an unprecedented example for all local businesses, Manantler will continue to support its community, recently partnering up with two other local businesses, the Newcastle Snug and Bowmanville's Three Six Kitchen and Lounge.

With the taproom fridge always fully stocked, Cause Worthy will continue to support PFLAG Durham, even through this pandemic.



Photo by Alex Bowman

A Barred owl rests on a low-lying branch at the Bowmanville Creek, in Bowmanville. In recent weeks, these Barred owls at the creek have garnered a lot of attention from the local townspeople. Starting with a post on a local Facebook group about a sighting of one of these owls near the main pathway, the recent owl craze that has the public flocking to the creek for photos has raised some concern amongst wildlife experts in the area.

Look who's watching...

Facebook group causes owl craze

By Alex Bowman

With the onset of COVID-19 came some unexpected changes in our society. One of these changes is that more and more people are becoming interested in the environment and its outdoor spaces.

One of these outdoor spaces that has seen a recent surge in visitors is Bowmanville Creek Valley. Not only does the creek house a butterfly garden, a commemorative forest, a fish passage and dam, and an old historic mill on its creekbank, but the creek also houses this winter's biggest town celebrity: The barred owl.

With the craze seeming to begin on a local Facebook page, hundreds of visitors from all over the area have flocked to the creek in search of these brazen barred owls.

According to Lloyd Rang, treasurer and board member of Valley 2000, he estimates an increase in visitors of 10-fold, even visiting from Toronto.

Valley 2000 is a citizen-based organization that represents the municipality and raises money for projects in the Bowmanville creek, working to maintain the fish ladder, provide informative signage and create wayfinding tools.

Rang admits that there are a lot of factors at play when determining why there are so many visitors this year, from people wanting to take care of themselves during COVID to the fact that we are having a mild winter and the paths are always cleared of snow, and maybe even because of an owl.

Although these popular owls are residents of the creek, staying year-round, it seems possible that the combination of COVID and a spiking rodent population is the cause for the sudden interest in these birds, Rang explained.

"The barred owls range expands quite a bit naturally, following the rodent popula-

tions closely," says Rang. Meaning that if the barred owl's primary diet of voles and mice fluctuate, then so too does the owl population – which may explain the more frequent sightings.

According to experts at the Durham Region Field Naturalists, a group of people dedicated to conserving local natural spaces and promoting conservation through education, barred owls are unique birds.

"They are excellent hunters at night because of their exceptional hearing and strong low-light vision. One of their easiest features for identification is their dark eyes. They are the only medium-sized owl in Ontario with dark eyes," says the group of naturalists.

This group would also have to agree with Rang, observing that "due to the pandemic, it appears that a lot more people have taken an interest in nature photography and birdwatching. Owls seem to hold a special fascination to a lot of people, and they are a favourite target of photographers."

However, one question that cannot be answered is why these owls are so comfortable with a large human presence, even allowing selfies.

When discussing why these owls have become so habituated to humans, Rang has no explanation, but urges the public to treat these beautiful birds with compassion.

"Treat these birds with sensitivity. No mobbing, use common sense, don't feed or threaten them, leave them be, take your picture and move on and encourage others to do the same," urges Rang, also explaining that some animals can't show stress like we are used to understanding.

"If an owl reacts to your presence, then you are too close," says Kristen Osborne, co-president of the Durham Region Field Naturalists.

Members of this naturalist group also want the public to know that an owl is trying to sleep during the day so that it has enough energy to hunt at night. When large groups of people disturb them throughout the day, it can actually leave

the owls vulnerable to other predators.

"So, if you find an owl, do not advertise it in a way that will give away its exact location, as this will lead to large groups visiting and disturbing the owl. If you want to find owls on your own, look and listen for birds such as blue jays and chickadees scolding and causing a ruckus in the coniferous trees. There is likely a raptor or owl in the tree that they want to leave," explains Otto Peter, board member of the Durham Region Field Naturalists.

With this sudden interest in owls, however, there is a silver lining for a lot of species in the creek valley, including the not so elusive barred owl.

"People are learning about them, folks have become interested in the owls, and it has created a learning opportunity for the species, as long as people are being respectful and responsible," explained Rang.

So, when going to visit your local wildlife, always remember to be light in your visit, keep the place clean and respect its inhabitants.

Business blooming during pandemic

By Cassandra Williamson

Nestled in the Reid's Dairy Village in Belleville since 2010, a family business run by Lynn Ackerman called Live, Love & Laugh Flowers has been a part of the city since 1995. Using their own fleet of delivery vans, curbside pick-up and online ordering, the business is flourishing despite the pandemic.

"Interest in our indoor plants have increased during this pandemic. Plants help clean the air and provide a sense of satisfaction to help them thrive. Orchids, succulents and tropical floor plants are very popular and are easy to care for," Ackerman says.

Indoor plants can provide added benefits, including lowered stress levels and elevated moods, and can also improve concentration and productivity — all amazing for anyone currently working from home due to the pandemic.

While the business has been fairly busy, keeping their staff and customers safe is their top priority. Their designers, Michelle Cummings and Natalie Ackerman, add their designs to the new custom website, making it easier for them to showcase their work and customers to choose their favourites for delivery or curbside.

As well as flowers, the business also stocks a large selection of Roger's Chocolate, greeting cards, balloons and plush to add to orders.

"We provide the service of same-day delivery of these gifts to recipients in the region. Our customers appreci-

ate the opportunity of reaching out to friends and family, especially when they are unable to visit them. Our delivery staff are very conscientious about keeping the delivery process to "no contact" as much as possible while wearing a mask, of course," Ackerman says.

With Valentine's Day quickly approaching, they are now concentrating on ordering fresh flowers and plants, while updating their website to prepare and make it easier for their customers to order online.

"We buy as many locally grown flowers and plants as possible. Our winters with low light affect the supply of fresh flowers like chrysanthemums. I am being told there will be a shortage of chrysanthemums from local growers for Valentine's. However, supply for the various colours and varieties of tulips is good. We do bring our roses from Ecuador," Ackerman adds.

Interest in outdoor gardening has also increased. The business also specializes in small to extra-large hanging baskets and container gardening with instructions for longevity.

"Studies have proven that flowers not only brighten the room but they also improve a person's mood. Customers are sending flowers to friends and family to say happy birthday, happy anniversary, congratulations, thank you, sorry, thinking of you, and just because."

The business offers flower and gift delivery not only in Belleville but as far away to Picton, Tweed, Trenton, Stirling and most surrounding areas.



Two of the florists at Live, Love & Laugh, Michelle Cummings and Ellen Webb.

Photo by Cassandra Williamson



Photo by Cassandra Williamson

Debbie-Lee Pike, Emily Craig and Karma Aequitas (Not Alone Team Quinte) stand around Karma's trunk as she prepares to bring her own empties back for money to give to the homeless.

Pandemic doesn't stop work of Not Alone Team Quinte

By Cassandra Williamson

Debbie-Lee Pike started the Not Alone Team Quinte with a friend when she noticed more and more individuals panhandling and homeless camps.

She wanted to see a change in what she saw as a very flawed system and felt everyone deserved to have a voice.

The Not Alone Team Quinte (NAT) now consists of five members: Karma Aequitas, Emily Craig, Lisa Anne, Karen Clouter and Pike. They are a federal non-profit outreach team that works with homelessness and food insecurities (including those that do have some sort of housing).

"We work with each individual differently because we learned not everyone's the same and that each case is different.

We try to build trusting relationships with every single person we come in contact with because once we gain their friendship, we are able to make a strong bond and help them in the future," Pike says.

Pike oversees the business side of it, speaking to other agencies, and is also the first to notice when someone they typically see has gone missing. She also keeps informed on what may have occurred over the course of any given night on the streets.

Aequitas has her hand in many projects the team does and acts as a liaison whenever required. She also helps brainstorming fund-raising ideas.

Craig is who they call the "street mama" and has built an unfathomable trust from their market square friends. She typically deals with meal delivery and spends a

good majority of her time making sure everyone is okay. She also handles the packaging and delivery of meals, drinks and other supplies to those in need.

Anne has been a core member of the team and often surrenders her home as a supply closet. She's had her hand in almost every role possible and is the backbone of their administration.

Clouter has been one of their main cooks and has provided many of their meals single handedly.

"We know 85 per cent of the homeless by name. We have worked with them in different places in their lives and we have been successful in finding some of our friends housing," Pike adds.

This year has been difficult for the team as they've had to greatly reduce their outreach programs. They are how-

ever still accepting non-perishable food items and Tim Hortons and McDonalds gift cards in \$5 increments. This way, they can provide their clients with something warm to drink during the cold weather months. For some, this can be the difference between life or death.

"Currently, the team's effort has been focused on frozen meal deliveries and trying to support those who are precariously housed in this area," Aequitas says.

They are also working with 116 Bistro with a "pay it forward" program, meaning if someone wants to purchase a meal or beverage for one of the homeless population they will gladly hand them out.

"We still do our outreach, meaning we go to the tents and hand out needed supplies and check on the wellbeing of each individual," Pike says.

The team looks forward to serving their community the same way they were able to in the past pre-pandemic, including hosting nightly meals on the Market Square. Which due to by-laws and COVID-19 restrictions they are no longer able to do so.

"What we do differently is we never refuse anyone our services regardless if they are having a bad day or upset, angry or wanting to fight. We always offer them a meal and a friendly smile and go on our way because we feel food should never be used as a punishment," Pike explains.

"We also understand many of our individuals face mental health issues, addictions and often some have cognitive disabilities so understanding each individual's needs helps to make a lasting impact on their lives," Pike said.

Poles apart at Sudbury stations

By Bec Gauvin

Greater Sudbury Fire Services has been facing ongoing logistical issues related to social distancing measures for the COVID-19 virus.

Several firefighters and paramedics have been forced to self-isolate after members of the community contracted the virus. The issue stems from the fact that firefighters are such a close-knit community, not only out of camaraderie, but out of necessity. Due to the crossover between fire stations, outbreaks of coronavirus have been difficult to contain and have forced many teams of firefighters into isolation.

"Even though we work very close together, we have to keep our separation. We work 24-hour shifts and can only take our masks off when we are eating or alone," says Hugh Duncan, a senior firefighter of 15 years.

The nature of the job requires a lot of teamwork, and so firefighters will naturally find themselves in very tight quarters with their teams, such as when they are in the cab of a fire truck, or when they are rehabilitating after the scene of a fire.

"One of the big problems is when we are actually coming off of a fire scene. We've just come off of doing 20 minutes of super-heated labour, you know? There's a rehab portion, and we can't wear the masks for that because you've just been working vigorously and so your breathing is heavy. We've had to create a rehab centre where we are keeping our distance from everybody, which is difficult when your scene is only so big," explains Duncan.

The biggest problem, however, arises when one of the firefighters does contract the virus.

"We don't run short staffed, we run overtime. You have to have four guys in the truck. And one person can infect a good number of people," says Duncan.

Because of the inability to operate while under-staffed when members are self-isolating, there is a fair amount of crossover between the staff of Greater Sudbury's 5 full-time stations and 20 career stations. "We tried to isolate



Photo by Bec Gauvin

Hugh Duncan (centre) stands with his "rookie" firefighters, Dave Prud'homme (left) and Cole Braney (right), in front of Sudbury's downtown station. Duncan, who has been a firefighter for 15 years, notes noticeable differences in training new hires during the COVID-19 pandemic.

each group and each station, and it just wasn't possible."

Naturally, the stations have enacted as many COVID-19 precautions as possible, such as a standard screening when workers come onto the premises to test for symptoms. Additionally, the training of new and incoming firefighters has changed its approach to

accommodate social distancing rules by becoming partially online.

"I think it's harder for the older guys to separate, because we're used to being so hands-on," says Duncan, explaining the learning style firefighters usually utilize in their training. The training process has now become a blend of theoretical and practical knowledge,

using in-field experience alongside online learning, PowerPoints, and instructional videos.

"Some of the most difficult things we face as a new recruit is just being thrown in. We've been trained, but now it's time for us to gain experience. It can be trying to remember everything you've been taught but the sup-

port here is great, you always have at least 3 guys that have your back," says Dave Prud'homme, one of the station's "rookie" firefighters.

Duncan has confidence in his rookies abilities, saying that "once we get back to full training, they'll be able to jump right in with the rest of us."