



PORT COLBORNE

Mayor's report to city council

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Top Hat ceremony

I could not be more proud of our staff, who pulled together as a team, to make our Top Hat event so successful last Friday morning.

The crew from the parks department was out there in the dark, before 6am, to set up chairs, tables, flags, lights and to start the bonfire. We sure needed that fire, as it was one cold morning. Quite a difference from the week before when we had sunny 15-degree weather. We had below zero temperatures on the second day of Spring, and the cold tested us all standing on frozen grass and pavement to celebrate the first downbound ship of 2024.

So, the first downbound ship, the Algoma Conveyor, actually went downbound the night before, and was upbound when we honoured Captain Ed Kemp and his crew. Bit of a glitch, but we worked with it.

The Fair Trade committee was there brewing coffee by 6:30 and setting tables for pancakes, sausage and real Niagara maple syrup.

Our comms team set up our podium and audio-video for all the lights, camera, action of the event. Our Town Crier Tom Pekar did an excellent job rousing the crowd with history and Huzzahs.

Our museum was there to explain the significance of the 100-year-old Top Hat, kept safely in the museum vault. We presented Capt. Kemp with a brand new top hat to keep. It fit him perfectly. Captain Kemp signed the museum log book, as first captains of the season have done since our Top Hat event started more than 50 years ago.

Our library was there with souvenir buttons, attached to cards outlining the history of the event, and the canal. My office is still getting requests for those.

Many thanks to ADM, Go Buddha, Villages Port Colborne, and Amherst Crane for your support and contributions to our breakfast.

We welcomed representatives from all levels of government and the Seaway to speak to the importance of the canal for the past 195 years, and the 65th anniversary of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Gregg Ruhl was here, president and CEO of Algoma Central Corporation. Gregg gave a great speech about the 125th anniversary of Algoma, and the Algoma Bear, and its possible DNA connection to the Blue Bear of Port High.

We had guests from Washington DC, from the American counterpart of the St. Lawrence Seaway. It was an honour to welcome, for the first time to Port Colborne: Rebecca Yackley, the director of Trade and Economic Development and International Trade Specialist Jazmine Jurkiewicz.

We had a group of Ship Junkies, who came from as far as Cambridge, Kitchener, and Burlington. And we had dozens of Port Colborne people and business partners who braved the cold to join us for breakfast and the celebrate the day. The blizzard didn't start until the event was over, just as the crews came to tear down.

I'll say this, as we have two Top Hat ceremonies in Niagara, one in St. Catharines at Lock 3 and ours in Lock 8 Gateway Park. We include all the formalities, all the traditions, all the pomp and circumstance befitting an historical occasion. But what we have, at our celebration, is fun. Our event is really a lot of fun.

There are also Top Hat ceremonies in Montreal, up in Thunder Bay, and ship watchers celebrate the first ship under the 1000 Islands Bridge.

As I said, I am so proud of our staff, and all the attendees, for making it such a great event. Another one for the books, team. Thank you all for your efforts to make the day so great.

Tugboat Bunny

It's Easter weekend! Already!

We wish everyone a healthy, blessed weekend with family and friends.

Port Colborne's own Tugboat Bunny arrives on the bow of the JW Cooper about 9 Saturday morning. We hope all the children will bring their parents and friends to the canal along West Street to welcome the friendly fellow with the big ears.

From the Promenade on West Street, take your children and their Easter baskets to the Vale Health and Wellness Centre on Elizabeth Street for face painting and crafts and an Easter egg hunt, starting at 10am. There is free skating all afternoon, sponsored by Rankin Construction, and free swimming sponsored by the YMCA.

Happy Easter, everyone.

Meeting with Health Minister

Yesterday morning I drove to Toronto with our CAO Scott Luey and Dr. Matthew Vandenburg to meet with Ontario Health Minister Sylvia Jones.

We wanted to make sure she was aware of the work we're doing to improve primary care in Port Colborne when the changes come in 2028. We wanted the Minister and her senior staff to support us as we work towards solutions to our health care challenges. We impressed upon her the collaborative efforts we're making, and that we need her and her team to help our team maintain and enhance access to primary care in Port Colborne.

Countdown to the eclipse

Councillors, if you'll all don the special protective eyewear left at your desks for my next announcement.

It's less than two weeks away from the celestial event of a lifetime. You may have heard there is a total eclipse of the sun starting at 2pm Monday, April 8.

Totality occurs at 3:18pm. We expect a few people to show up in Port Colborne – (maybe a few thousand!) – as we're on the direct path of the total eclipse, and we won't have any pesky mist from the Falls to impede our view. Ha Ha.

We have a full day of events planned – please refer to the city website portcolborne.ca for all the times and venues.

There will be some road closures, some detours, and parking restrictions at HH Knoll Park and along Sugarloaf Street as we anticipate an increased volume of traffic. The boat ramp will be closed that day – signs are already posted down at the marina. Emergency response teams from across the region, including ours, have been planning for this day for the past year.

It will be all-hands-on-deck for all city staff. City hall will be open, but we will have limited services that day, as staff may be deployed away from their regular posts.

Our customer service staff at reception have been inundated with requests for the special eclipse glasses – if you don't have yours, please get them soon. Our glasses are for Port Colborne residents, but we're getting requests from people from neighbouring towns and cities. All you have to do is show your PORTicipate pass or your library card, and you'll get glasses. Until they run out. I think we're down to the last few hundred pairs.

Our museum blacksmith, Dr. Brian Pihack, also happens to be an astronomer. He is a former president of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. Dr. Pihack will speak about the eclipse at a special lecture in the LR Wilson Archives April 3. You must register, as space is limited.

I'm a grandfather

As my last item this evening, I will share some personal, happy news.

Deb and I are grandparents. My son and daughter-in-law are first-time parents of Oliver William Scott Steele, born yesterday at 1:28pm, weighing in at seven pounds 10 ounces. Mom and baby are doing great. Named for his Great Aunt Olive, he looks just like his great grandfather Chuck.