

The saga of little sloop

Mysterious sailboat found on beach at Fort Niagara



The sailboat found beached at Fort Niagara State Park. (Photo by Terry Duffy)

BY TERRY DUFFY

Editor-in-Chief

Those hiking the meadow beach area at Fort Niagara State Park last week saw something strange on the shore. Amidst the ice floes, a small, abandoned sailboat was seen bobbling on the eastern end with the waves.

This little sloop had managed to

break free from its mooring across the river earlier at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, and drifted across into U.S. waters. Law enforcement on both sides of the border said they are fully aware of it.

So what's the story with this sailboat?

According to a recent online post on Facebook by Youngstown sailing enthusiast Aaron Dey, the unfortunate-looking vessel belongs to a Niagara-on-the-Lake man who apparently encountered some difficulties in his own personal life.

"This little Grampian 26 sailboat was the home to a man who created quite a buzz on social media after anchoring in the lower Niagara River in Canadian waters starting prior to the American Thanksgiving in November. The gentleman identified as 'John' suffered from some issues and remained there through freezing conditions before having the boat secured on shore in Canada, by rescue crews and good Samaritans," Dey wrote.

The man was apparently attempting to live on the boat that anchored at various locations on the Canadian side of the lower Niagara River mouth into Lake Ontario. Over past months, the man and the sailboat became a curiosity piece among locals on both sides of the border. While the man managed to survive on the vessel through late fall, as winter conditions began to develop, life became far worse.

According to an article in the Jan. 20 edition of the NOTL Local, a community newspaper that serves the Niagara Region in southern Ontario, the saga of the little, solitary sailboat began to take on a life of its own.

"A local humanitarian who has been helping the lone man living on the boat spoke to The Local on a couple of conditions. ... He couldn't stress enough how important it is that the man on the boat — he called him John — be left alone," the NOTL Local story began.

"The story ... is of a man who prizes his solitude above all else. If he is approached, he may feel threatened and decide to head back out into the river, and the good Samaritan who has taken him under his wing says that's the last thing he wants to happen, after all the efforts to get John safely to shore.

"At this point he's safe where he is, and should be able to stay there all winter."

But things began to take a turn for the worse. According to the Local, John's helper, "first went out to check on the boat and its inhabitant on Dec. 23, when it had been

anchored in the river for about four weeks. He learned that John, who has an apartment in London, Ont., bought a Grampian 26, without a motor, from the St. Catharines Marina earlier this year, and that it's his third such boat since 2018 — the other two were both run aground on the bottom of Lake Erie, in a shallow area in the same location near Long Point, where they remain.

"As John's local shoreline supporter says, 'he's a horrible sailor, very inexperienced.'"

The NOTL article continued, "He spent about four weeks at the Dalhousie Yacht Club, where some people who came across him referred to John as a savant. He quickly wore out his welcome, though, and after continuing efforts to get him to move on that involved the Niagara Regional Police, the Department of Transportation and the RCMP, he finally left. His plan was to sail to Pickering, to anchor by the nuclear generating station where the water wouldn't freeze, but he didn't get as far as Niagara-on-the-Lake without hitting the shore and damaging his boat. The day he had chosen to leave Port Dalhousie wasn't a favourable day for sailing, so he decided to take refuge anchored in the Niagara River, where he stayed until late last week."

Dey, in his online post last week, wrote, "After (the Lake) article appeared ... 'John' found his way out to what is referred to as the Green Can, a mile out into Lake Ontario at the mouth of the Niagara River ... in winter conditions probably the worst place to be. He was then directed back into shore and was secured to two docks at the Niagara on the Lake Sailing Club by club members."

John was admitted to an Ontario hospital where he remains with undisclosed health issues. Later, the boat managed to break free and flow down river.

"The boat was somehow mysteriously released from its moorings and drifted into U.S. waters, where she found her way ashore this past weekend," Dey wrote. "The boat is tied down to rocks lakeside at the base of the Fort Niagara Beach meadow area, where she is not considered a navigational hazard."

According to U.S. Coast Guard Station Niagara, the owner has been contacted and USCG is awaiting its removal from the shoreline.

"We have been in touch with them; they will be removing it. There is nothing hazardous there," a Coast Guard staffer said this week.



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A Message from the Wheatfield Supervisor

The past year has been challenging for everyone. We are all hoping and praying for a much better 2021.

The Town of Wheatfield as a whole, has endured well. Although the Town of Wheatfield has faced a major crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as the entire country has, the Town does have some positive comments regarding its financial status.

Because of the low interest rates, the Town refinanced a serial bond in October 2020 which will save the Town slightly over \$194,000 over the next 6 years that is left on the outstanding bond. The average of this savings is over \$32,000 per year. We were also able to maintain our AA3 bond rating from Moody's. This rating indicates that our bonds are judged to be of high quality and are subject to very low credit risk. We held the line on spending and negotiated with outside contracts to hold the line on budget increases.

Significant progress has been made on our veteran's memorial behind Town Hall and we hope to complete it in 2021. The Wheatfield Town Hall has public WiFi installed by RTO Wireless available in the parking lot at no cost to the town.

We completed the LED streetlight conversion in the Town to decrease cost and reduce environmental impacts.

We have a focus group working with the New York State DOT to better identify Wheatfield in the next phase of construction on Niagara Falls Boulevard. This will include turning lanes at Ward Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard, and Witmer Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard. The Oppenheim Park entrance will be relocated to align with Witmer Road for a much safer and efficient intersection. Construction is scheduled to begin next year.

We are still working on the next phase of the Greenway Trail which will interconnect North Tonawanda and Niagara Falls with Wheatfield and then on to Buffalo.

The Recreation Department has begun baseball, softball and T-ball registrations as of Feb. 1. In addition, we are adding a fall T-ball and coach pitch season. Grading and paving of the walking path at Fairmount Park has been completed for our residents to use all year round.

The Community Center will be opening again on March 1, 2021 but with limited capacity based on CDC guidelines. The Youth Center is still

closed. It will open when it has been determined to be safe for all by our Town Board and Niagara County Health Department.

The Town Clerk's office has remained open for business but has added alternate ways to do business. Options include by mail, on-line or by calling for an appointment.

In addition, there is a drop box next to our entrance which is checked several times a day. We also accept check and credit card payments (vendor convenience fee will apply). You can visit our website at www.wheatfield.ny.us. On the left side of the homepage, click on the "bill payment" box on the left. Soon you will also have the option of paying water bills online.

The Town Highway Department has paved almost 4.5 miles of town roads in 2020 even with budget cuts. The men also chipped 1,500 tons of wood chips and picked up 200 tons of leaves. Ten ditches were cleaned for approximately 2.5 miles in length. This is in conjunction with the many other jobs that also include snow plowing, catch basins, and pipe installations.

Town Court has been closed during the pandemic however Town Prosecutors have developed a procedure to handle most traffic violations via the mail.

I would like to thank our Niagara County Legislators for their involvement during the pandemic. Legislator Dave Godfrey and Becky Wydish, county chair, kept me up to date on a daily basis with the ever-changing rules and guidelines during the crisis from the Health Department and New York State. Legislator Jesse Gooch provided meals on a weekly basis to our senior residents from the Town Hall parking lot.

In closing, I want to thank all of our essential employees for their efforts working long hours during the pandemic. I would also like to thank all of our residents who have been patient and endured through this difficult and ever-changing time. Thanks to all for their efforts. Stay safe, stay healthy, and God Bless.

Don MacSwan
Wheatfield Supervisor



Don MacSwan
Wheatfield Supervisor



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