

# Local leaders provide insight on year ahead

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this reality. Director Stapleton said this transition can be a bumpy ride, as there are those who want to simply just flip a switch and go back to the way things were. Others believe tougher protocols must continue to remain in place. Like most things, the right approach is probably somewhere in between.

Perhaps the biggest change of late is in regard to contact tracing. For those who have had COVID, you most likely had interaction with a contact tracer who wanted to know when you first had symptoms and who you may have been around. They sent you a notification that you must isolate and then provided a release allowing you to return to work, school and so on.

Now, contact tracers will no longer conduct case investigations or identify close contacts for the general public. Anyone that tests positive for COVID-19, either from a lab, pharmacy, medical office, school testing site, or at-home test, should self-isolate and visit the Niagara County website for instructions. Individuals should submit positive results from at-home tests on the NCDOH "Positive COVID-19 Home Test Reporting Form."

Residents will no longer be contacted to be released from isolation. NCDOH has updated their website to include links to the New York State Department of Health documents required for return to work/school for individuals who have completed iso-

lation and quarantine. In addition, those who test positive should notify their household and other close contacts. Instructions for those close contacts to follow are on the website as well.

This is just one example of how we are shifting to people taking more individual responsibility for COVID protocols while local health departments focus on vaccines, boosters and testing. This is necessitated by the sheer volume of cases during omicron and the recognition that we collectively all have a better understanding of what needs to be done. It's also a step toward just "learning to live with it."

Clearly, all of this is much different than when we would hear talk of "defeating the virus" or "beating COVID." I don't envision any victory parades or declarations that the war with COVID-19 is over. At the same time, I believe we will move past any talks of closures, restrictions, etc. Instead, we will go back to living our lives without COVID being a consistent presence hanging over everything we do.

**Town of Niagara Supervisor  
Lee S. Wallace**

Based on the last two years, there is really no way to predict the road ahead as it is related to COVID-19. Our first priority has been and will continue to be the health and safety of our constituents and our employees. The issues and concerns related to COVID-19 are ever changing and thus our approach will be to continue to monitor things on a

daily basis and adjust as needed. We are hopeful that as we get into March-April that the infection rates will decrease significantly, and we approach the spring and summer of 2022 with cautious optimism.

**Sarah Nelson, Director  
of Marketing and Membership,  
Chamber of Commerce  
of the Tonawandas**

With 2022 just beginning, I am excited to work with our members to take what steps are needed to help their businesses succeed. I am also excited to work with my team to come up with new and creative ways to reinvent the wheel. We have many new events and programs in 2022, which I am excited to launch with the team at the Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas!

**Mark and Cheryl Butera,  
on behalf of the Youngstown  
Business & Professional Association**

YBPA has been incorporated since 1976. It has grown from a few members to approximately 80 members to date. With the many difficulties of these past years with the COVID-19 health

problems and even the past shutdowns, this month alone we are already receiving dues for 2022. Our members are committed to surviving.

We did reschedule our Jan. 11 membership meeting to April 12 for safety purposes. Safety is always priority. All Youngstown/Porter businesses follow the state guidelines for public safety, especially regarding indoor activities.

We are proud to report our association has the full backing of Town of Porter elected officials Duffy Johnston, Timothy Adamson (who is our direct liaison to T.O.P.), and even Irene Myers (Niagara County legislator). Stu Commerford is our liaison representing the Village of Youngstown as a village trustee. All of us are working together to promote all that our area has to offer both local residents as well as our visitors.

Speaking of visitors, the closing of the bridges and travel from our Canadian friends has been notable. Being a very active waterfront and sailing/boating/ tourist area during these difficult times,

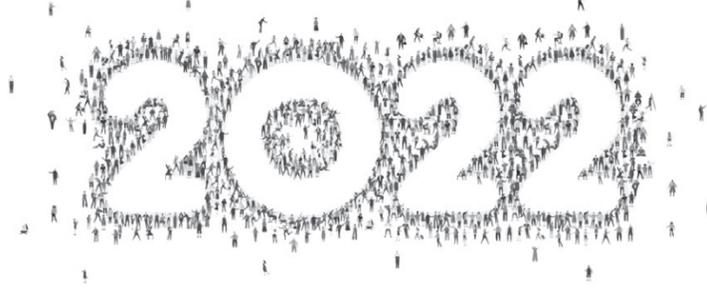
every business has noticed the loss of their friendly faces and dollars. We are hopeful this issue will turn itself turn around in 2022.

There is talk of the Niagara River Greenway Trail bicycle trail extending along the Niagara River to Lake Ontario and Porter on the Lake. How exciting is that? Also, NJA was sold to the Hornblower group from Canada awaiting "rebranding" in Youngstown also in 2022. Also, David Graf of Youngstown is actively working to reopen the old theater in Fort Niagara State Park for live theater productions and concerts. Let's not forget the Discover Niagara Shuttle, which offers free rides from Old Fort Niagara to Niagara Falls itself and more! There is so much excitement and positive energy coming to our area.

Regarding the business district in Youngstown proper and the Town of Porter more broadly, many of our businesses have struggled, but most have survived – and in some ways become even stronger.

The Ontario House (aka "The Jug") made some major renovations last year in order to accommodate more access to the outdoors for safety from closed-in spaces, and now has a major pavilion for live music and many other events. They met the need and then some.

Youngstown can now boast of three beautiful murals created by artist Alessandra Price. The first was created on Lockport Street next to The Dance Shop Studio  
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