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No one expected a global pandemic to shut the world down in 2020. A horrific virus infected millions – taking far too many lives – while causing businesses to shutter, a loss of income, and myriad canceled moments (proms, graduations, weddings, festivals, concerts, etc.).

But as the calendar turned to 2021, most people had a confident expectation that the new year would bring back the events – if not the personal freedoms – of the pre-COVID world.

While more gatherings and activities took place, thanks in part to a coronavirus vaccine, 2021 wasn't exactly as advertised. In fact, as the holiday season wrapped, variants led to a record number of positive coronavirus cases in Western New York.

So, what is the mindset for 2022?

Will it be hopeful – that even more can be recaptured; that people will be freer to move about and enjoy events; that infection and hospitalization rates will plummet? Or will it be pessimistic – that in-person will once again be replaced by virtual; that already hard-hit merchants will face more restrictions; that people will just stay home?

We asked local leaders to weigh in on this topic and share their expectations – and plans – for 2022. Their answers will be shared as they are received.

Of course, we'd love to know what you think, too. Feel free to send us your thoughts.

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Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysz



Becky Wydysz

In last month's column, I touched upon the fact that the end of the year seemed to lack the sense of optimism that usually is part of ringing in the New Year. Obviously, the continuing pandemic is the major reason for this. In that column, I mentioned that we need to begin policies that recognize COVID-19 is here to stay. I want to further expound upon that.

At the January meeting of the Niagara County Legislature, Dan Stapleton, director of the Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) gave us an update on the evolving approach to dealing with COVID-19. Dan talked about

how, at some point, we will move from viewing COVID-19 as a pandemic and instead it will be considered an endemic disease. So, what does that mean?

A pandemic is a global outbreak of illness in which a disease spreads quickly in unpredictable waves. The early stages of the pandemic, as we know too well, are spent trying to figure out the origin of the disease, the level of seriousness of the disease and how to treat/prevent it. As Director Stapleton has discussed, pandemics follow a pattern, and

there can be multiple surges and decreases. Endemic status is essentially recognition that a disease is going to be here for a while, like many other diseases, and that we understand the risk factors, have treatments in place and are able to mitigate its impacts. An endemic phase usually means that enough people have gained some measure of protection, through vaccine and natural immunity, that we will experience significantly fewer hospitalizations and deaths, even though the disease is still present.

Right now, many experts believe we are in a transition phase from pandemic to endemic, with public policy changing to face

SEE LOCAL, continued on Page 8

'In the Loop'

Lew-Port community comes together for 'One District, One Book'

River Region businesses
offering special incentives



Above: Lew-Port elementary students look for the magical creature. • Below, One student found a magical creature.

BY JULIE DONNELLEY

Vice President
Lewiston-Porter Board of Education
PHOTOS BY NICOLE STUART
Stu Stu Studio

The Lewiston Porter "One District, One Book" ("ODOB") literacy initiative continues to create community excitement!


Last Wednesday, Lewiston-Porter revealed the winner of its 6th annual "ODOB" vote during a live virtual event. "The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles," a novel written more than 40 years ago by the Oscar-

winning English actress Julie Andrews, has found its way into the homes of over 1,000 of our students. Each student received a personal copy, labeled with his or her name.

Go on the adventure with siblings Ben, Tom and Lindy Potter, who are taken on this fantastical adventure to Whangdoodleland. Meet Professor Savant, a lovable oddball; encounter magical creatures and navigate the obstacles the characters must overcome!

SEE ONE, continued on Page 6






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