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## A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

### It's still all hands on deck at WDGPH 12 months into pandemic

By Joanne Shuttleworth

GUELPH – There's been no time at Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) to reflect on the year that was.

With COVID-19 still spreading in the community and variants of the virus beginning to circulate, the focus for the agency has been on getting protective measures in place, communicating information with the public and planning for roll-out of the vaccine. And that, of course, is ongoing.

But Dr. Nicola Mercer, medical officer of health for WDGPH, took some time on March 12 to talk to the *Advertiser* about this extraordinary year and what has been happening at the agency since emergency measures were instituted province-wide on March 17 last year.

"We knew this virus was coming," she said, thinking back to January and February of 2020.

"But it was the bigger, broader implications we could never know: how long would it last, what would be the death rate, the need for a vaccine, the impact on the economy and on people's lives?"

"And we didn't know how governments would respond and if they would accept public health advice. And we've seen different governments take different approaches."

Locally there was support from Wellington County, Dufferin County, the City of Guelph, and all lower tier municipalities in the region for the mask mandate that Mercer put into effect on June 12, when the province began to reopen after the initial lockdown.

SEE PUBLIC HEALTH » 21



Mask mandate - On June 12 Warden Kelly Linton signed an order requiring anyone entering a business in Wellington County to wear a mask, in support of a similar order issued by Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health two days earlier.

Submitted photo

### Warden says pandemic end in sight after tumultuous year

By Patrick Raftis

WELLINGTON COUNTY – Once the novel coronavirus arrived in Canada "COVID hit us very hard and fast," said Warden Kelly Linton, one year after the pandemic's effects were first felt in the county.

However, Linton recalls, initial reports of a deadly disease making its mark overseas didn't hit home right away.

"In late January and into February, we were hearing warnings about an extremely contagious illness spreading across Asia and into Europe, but it still seemed far away," said Linton.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic and reactions began to flow faster.

"For me, it became real when hockey came to a sudden stop," said Linton, noting local deliberations on a response began right away.

"I remember our first county Emergency Management Team meeting in mid-March.

"We were sitting around the boardroom table (15 people in a small boardroom) talking about a virus we knew little about and trying to figure out if/how we should modify our operations without over-reacting.

"We had no idea that COVID

would turn our world upside down and last longer than a year."

In the early days, Linton said, governments worldwide were taking varied actions to address a completely new virus and healthcare specialists were not always on the same page.

"In many ways, it felt like we were building a plane while we were flying it," he recalled.

"The health and safety of our residents was always our number one priority."

Linton explained that early in the process, "we established formal lines of communication between the county and our local health

SEE WARDEN » 19

### Calls to support lines surge as pandemic takes toll on mental health

By Lori-Anne Little

WELLINGTON COUNTY – Experts say Canadians' mental health has been put to the test, with stress, anxiety and depression at all-time highs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Helen Fishburn, CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington (CMHA WW), said "the very things that people rely on to stay healthy, to stay connected, to stay supported, and to stay grounded are a lot of the things we have not been able to do."

Joanne Young Evans, executive director of Family Counselling and Support Services for Guelph Wellington (FCSSGW), added the pandemic "has brought to light these things that we previously took for granted, like how important the human connection and seeing people face to face are."

Not having access to these external comforts has increased stress, anxiety, irritability and depression levels in just about everyone, said Young Evans.

"The research has shown that only 35 per cent of people felt excellent or very good about their mental health – I'm surprised it's that high" she said.

Last May that number was recorded around 52%, according to CHMA polls.

With the added stressors and inability to access the things that bring comfort, the resilience of Ontarians has been depleted, said Fishburn.

"If you think about the pandemic as waves in a tsunami, which is really what it has felt like, there

SEE MENTAL HEALTH » 37

### 'It's ruining all of our lives': COVID-19 long haulers still dealing with impacts of virus

By Chris Daponte

WELLINGTON COUNTY – Jackie Loree wakes up every day wondering when her COVID-19 symptoms will subside.

She's been dealing with chest pain, shortness of breath and fatigue for a year now.

"I still have symptoms every day," she told the *Advertiser*.

The 60-year-old Guelph resident is one of thousands of Canadians suffering from what's known as long COVID, the less technical name for post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection, or PASC.

These patients, now known as

"long haulers," experience symptoms lasting for weeks or months - and now up to a year - following the initial acute illness.

Loree's journey began sometime between March 28 and 30, 2020, when she was exposed to COVID-positive patients while working as a respiratory nurse at a Kitchener hospital.

On April 3 she started to experience hip pain and the next day she had a fever, shakes, nausea, body pain, loss of appetite, and gastrointestinal issues.

"It was unlike anything I had ever experienced," she said.

Loree, who is originally from

Arthur, was tested for COVID-19 right away but the results came back negative. Her symptoms persisted and a second test a few days later confirmed she had the virus.

She spent over three weeks in quarantine and tested negative before returning to work, but her symptoms persisted, notably the chest pain and fatigue.

Loree took four months off work and when she returned it was part time and with light duties. Six months later, not much has changed and she's yet to return to work full time.

"I can function with it, but it's still there," she said.

Dr. Daniel Altmann, a professor of immunology at Imperial College London, has stated the evidence suggests 10 to 20% of people with COVID-19 experience long-term symptoms.

That means about 32,000 to 64,000 Ontarians and 90,000 to 180,000 Canadians could be long haulers.

But those figures may be low, as other studies have stated 50 to 80% of people will continue to have symptoms three months after the onset of COVID.

The U.S.-based Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that one third of

COVID-19 patients not hospitalized with the virus do not return to their usual state of health three weeks after contracting the virus. In contrast, the CDC states that almost all outpatients with influenza - over 90% - "recover within two weeks" after a positive flu test.

A recent study from China indicates about three quarters (76%) of hospitalized COVID-19 patients experienced at least one symptom six months after first falling ill.

**Support group**

Loree said she has completed numerous medical tests and consulted doctors, but there isn't much

SEE LONG HAULERS » 15