

pontnews&views

FREE monthly community magazine for Ponteland and district



New restaurant plan
for former bank

.....
Growing objections to Darras
Hall affordable housing scheme

.....
Young golfers raise £1,400
in 72-hole charity challenge

**Students celebrate
amazing achievements
after disrupted year**

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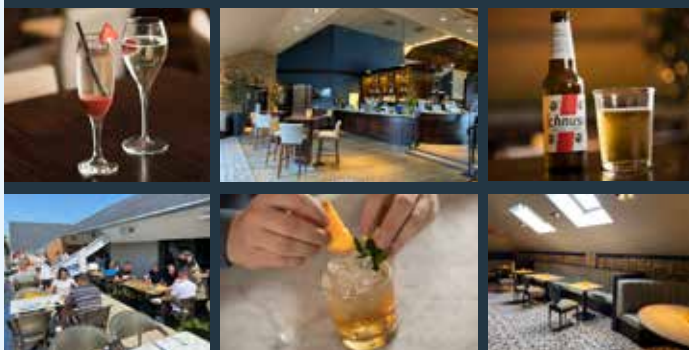
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Lewis and Matthew raise £1,400 in 72-hole charity challenge

Two teenage golfers have raised more than £1,400 for cancer care after a day-long four-round marathon.

Inspired by the death of both his grandparents to cancer, Ponteland High School student Lewis Scholes, 15, and friend Matthew Grant, 18, who has just completed his A levels there, wanted to raise funds for Macmillan Cancer Care.

Ponteland Golf Club was only too happy to help the pair, booking the four tee times for the day, ensuring they had time in between for breaks and informing other members about the charity challenge.

Lewis, who has been playing golf since the age of three, has a handicap of 4.3 and Matthew, who took up the sport aged seven, has a handicap of 5.3. They both play at Ponteland.

They have smashed their initial fundraising target of £200, but if you want to boost this further, donations can be made at gofundme.com/f/matty-lewis-72-hole-cancer-research-challenge.



Lewis Scholes (front) and Matthew Grant. Pic by Barry Pells.



The class of '21 – top GCSE and A Level performers

Amazing student success stories after disrupted year

After a year unlike any other for A-level, GCSE and vocational students across the country, there have been some amazing success stories to celebrate at Ponteland High School.

With regular disruption, classroom bubbles, frequent self isolation and remote home learning being the norm for the class of 2021, the achievements by so many pupils are all the more remarkable.

Nearly a quarter of the school's Year 13 cohort – 28 students – achieved a clean sweep of all grades awarded at A and/or A*. They included Euan Legg and Andrew Miller, who both received four A* grades, and Sophie Benfield, Sam Burrin, Lucy Cardno, Sam Edmondson and Hannah Tumia, who all scored three A* grades.

It was a similar story in GCSEs, with 30% of all students achieving five or more of the highest grades 7-9. Notable individual performances included Connor Petts and Ojas Rajkumar, who received a full house of Grade 9s.

Jasmin Broadey, Joseph Clark, Nox Conroy, Neave Dodds, Molly Dufton, Josie Legg, Jasmine Lever, Bethan Miller, Grace Owen, Emma Robinson, Omar Tumia and Marion Vollmer had all subjects awarded at Grade 8 and 9.

Meanwhile Beni Ayuk, Melody Brooks, Olivia Going, Milan Beau-Jensen, Maelona Redhead-Watson, Suzannah Shanks, Amy Sparshott, Gabriella Turnbull and Eloise Woods scored Grades 7, 8 and 9 (equivalent to A*-A under the old grading system) in all subjects.

Ponteland High School Headteacher Kieran McGrane said: "This has been a very trying two-year period for our students as they have endured a great deal of disruption to their studies.

"Despite this, they have remained positive and worked closely



A level success: Isabel Jennings (two A* and one Grade A - heading to Oxford to study law), Bailey Dawson (three Grade As - joining the police), Abigail Langstaff (three As - law apprenticeship at Wombles Bond Dickinson) and Sabrina Jackland (two A* grades and one grade A - law apprentice at Sintons).

with their teachers to ensure they made excellent progress and are well prepared for their next steps, whether that be higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

"We are incredibly proud of our students and all they have achieved; they have shown determination and resilience in abundance. I would also like to pay tribute to our superb teachers who have worked tirelessly to minimise the impact on students by providing them with first class support throughout lockdown and upon their return to school.

"We are now looking forward to welcoming the vast majority of our Year 11 cohort to our 6th form and working with them over the next two years, hopefully minus lockdowns and interruptions.

"I would also like to thank the young people in Year 13 for all they have contributed to our school over the last five years and hope that they will look back on their time with us fondly. I know they will do well whatever direction they take and we look forward to hearing about their future successes in time."

Cover shot: Top GCSE performers Grace Owen (all Grade 8 and 9), Ojas Rajkumar and Connor Petts (all Grade 9). Photos by Barry Pells.

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100% affordable housing scheme gets 100% thumbs down

Plans for a 65-home development on green belt land at the southern tip of Darras Hall appear to be getting the thumbs down by local residents.

The planning application by Esh Living for the 2.3-hectare site near the junction of Western Way and Stamfordham Road, which was validated by Northumberland County Council on August 10th, had received 32 comments within two weeks. All were objections.

The builder is partnering housing association Karbon Homes and architect IDPartnership in the scheme, which they say would provide a wide range of housing including affordable family homes, starter homes and bungalows.

The proposed development, described as a '100% affordable housing scheme', includes ten two bedroom bungalows, 24 three bedroom homes, seven two bedroom homes and 24 two bedroom apartments suitable for retirement living.

An initial public consultation generated representations from 78 members of the

public, which Esh Living said included both objectors and supporters. But comments from local residents on the council's planning portal as we went to print were all classified as objections.

Describing the proposals as "ridiculous", Paul Ross of Greenacres, Darras Hall, wrote: "Why do we need another 65 houses? Just go two miles down the road to Westerhope and you will see over 1,000 houses being built. Green belt land is there for a reason; let's not spoil our diminishing countryside anymore by bowing down to these developers."

Margaret Davison, of Western Way, Darras Hall, said: "The extra burden on schools, health services, roads, sewerage and water supplies is totally unacceptable. There is virtually no public transport in that area. The enormous growth of Medburn has already stretched local services to breaking point and a

further 65 properties will only exacerbate the problem."

Philip Gibson, of Woodend, Darras Hall, added: "I'm also aware of what the term affordable housing in an area with high house prices actually means - slightly-less-high prices that maximise profit for the developers. No-one should be under the impression that this development is in any way charitable."

While Darren Hilling, of Birney Edge, Darras Hall, simply said: "We have not the local services or infrastructure to cope with this development."

Comments were being accepted on the county council portal at publicaccess.northumberland.gov.uk/online-applications until Wednesday September 1st. The reference to input into the planning portal search box is 21/02437/OUT.



Reality TV star's brother lodges restaurant bid for former bank

The brother of a North East reality TV star has launched plans to transform the former Barclays Bank in Ponteland into a two-floor restaurant.

Leon Kasaei, whose older sister Sophie is a former Geordie Shore cast member and has 2m Instagram followers, has lodged a planning application with Northumberland County Council for change of use from bank to restaurant.

Mr Kasaei, 27, of South Shields, wants to construct a 42sq m single storey flat-roofed extension to the rear of the building to create a new kitchen.

The plans also include the creation of an outside terrace with a dwarf wall, replacement of the front windows, a new fire escape to the left of the building and three mobility car parking bays with electric charging ports.

Barclays' decision to close its Ponteland branch in January 2019 proved controversial, with local MP Guy Opperman describing the bank as "out of touch".

The MP said at the time he was "disappointed" that Barclays had chosen to close a much-loved local branch, adding: "No-one from the bank has come to local councillors or myself as the local MP with any alternative plans aside from saying customers can bank in Westerhope or go online."

Barclays' Westerhope branch closed in February.

Comments on the planning application are being accepted on the county council portal at publicaccess.northumberland.gov.uk/online-applications until Thursday September 9th. The reference to input into the planning portal search box is 21/02958/FUL.



Sophie Kasaei at the MTV Video Music Awards in Inglewood, California, in 2017.

ADVERTISING FEATURE

Why your biggest fear should be running out of time - not money

By David Lamb

In the last in our series of articles on the components that make up our lifestyle we look at abundance.

This is when you have more money than enough...enough to give you the lifestyle that you want without the fear of running out of money, whatever happens.

Many people do not realise they have abundance because they do not know how much is enough. This can result in them having more money than they need without realising it. And then it is wasted for years.

For many, the biggest fear is running out of money, but I believe your biggest fear should be wasting your life and the time, not running out of money. Don't waste the opportunity to use your wealth to enhance your lives and others you care about.

We only have two types of clients: accumulators and decumulators.

Accumulators are, generally, those still working and therefore increasing their wealth. Decumulation normally starts at retirement.

Unfortunately, many people spend all their working lives saving for retirement but when retirement comes, they feel uncomfortable about spending their hard-earned money.

Proper financial planning will help you rewire your brain by identifying how much is enough and then help you to structure your wealth to support an orderly decumulation of capital. So long as it is controlled, and logical, you will feel comfortable.

However, this does not mean you should waste your hard-earned wealth. When you are absolutely sure you have the lifestyle you want and are confident that there is nothing left on your bucket list, you can use your wealth to help other people.

But you need to do this at the right time. Don't wait until your children are

retired themselves to give them their inheritance, way after they struggled to buy their home and put their children through university.

If your wealth is sitting in investments the only beneficiary is the financial services industry. If you are never going to use that money, why not give it to your family now when they actually need it?

Other beneficiaries of your wealth can include charities, and more people are now investigating the establishment of charitable foundations.

Identifying abundance can avoid a lot of money worries, ensure that you get the most out of your life, and help other people. Don't let your money lie in investments to be passed to others when you die.

Dying with too much is a waste of opportunity. When you are aged 100, please don't look back and have regrets.



Patrols step up to tackle dog fouling

By David Foy, Environmental Enforcement Officer

Despite the vast majority of owners being responsible, dog fouling continues to be a concern for some local residents.

In response, I have teamed up with colleagues from Environmental Enforcement at Northumberland County Council to deliver enhanced patrols in Ponteland Park and other popular areas along the lanes and riverside.

This is particularly important during school holidays when children need to be protected from the potential hazards from dog waste such as toxocariasis.

All responsible dog owners will always ensure they carry sufficient waste bags for any walk and dispose of them at home or in an appropriate public waste bin.

The sometimes observed practice of placing full waste bags at the end of a lane or track only compounds the offence and is an insult to the wider community.

Thank you to those of you who have signed up to the Green Dog Walkers scheme and I continue to encourage all owners to sign up at northumberland.gov.uk/Protection/Animals.

The scheme is going from strength to strength since it started over four years ago and currently has nearly 4,000 members.



Environmental enforcement officer David Foy on patrol with colleagues in Ponteland Park.

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FREE flu vaccination drop-in at Taylors Pharmacy

Taylors Pharmacy is once again providing a **FREE** flu vaccination service for Ponteland from September.

We have been providing this service for many years now and feel it is more important than ever to be providing these vaccinations to our community.

Taylors Pharmacy has also been selected to administer the Covid booster vaccinations but we are awaiting the start date for these.

Seasonal influenza and Covid-19 viruses have the potential to add substantially to the winter pressures usually faced by the NHS, particularly if infection waves from both viruses coincide.

Influenza vaccination is therefore an important priority this coming autumn to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with influenza, and to reduce hospitalisations during a time when the NHS and social care may also be managing winter outbreaks of Covid-19.



Taylors Pharmacy is starting appointments and walk-ins from Monday to Saturday, starting on Wednesday September 15th. Pop along for a walk-in vaccine or ring to make an appointment on (01661) 822055.

Your letters

The Editor
Pont News & Views



Another demand for Ministerial intervention over a green belt homes plan and an appeal for new trustees for Merton Hall in this month's postbag...

Minister urged to instruct county council green belt development is not permitted

For those who read the copy of my unanswered letter sent on July 12th to Housing Minister Robert Jenrick in the August edition of Pont News, please note that I sent this further letter to him on August 16th with a copy to Guy Opperman MP.

Dear Mr Jenrick,

Whilst you have not yet replied to my letter on July 12th, may I please update you. Local residents have recently received from Northumberland County Council a letter stating that Esh Living have applied for outline planning permission to build 65 new homes on the land on Western Way, which as I mentioned in my letter is in fact green belt land.

This letter from NCC gives the impression that NCC is not aware of the Government commitment not to build on green belt land, because the letter goes on to ask for the usual public comments etc on building applications to be submitted by September 1st.

May I please request before a lot of time and indeed Council Tax payers money is wasted, that you inform NCC that building on green belt land is not permitted and therefore the application be rejected.

A copy of my letter which I sent to you on July 12th was printed in our local monthly community magazine Pont News & Views.

A number of local residents have since mentioned to me that they are encouraged by your commitment on Sky TV not to develop on green belt land and therefore, like me, they are also delighted to know that our precious green belt land is at last protected after so much destruction in recent years.

Malcolm Thompson
Western Way, Darras Hall.

Appeal for new trustees for Merton Hall

This is a plea to readers to ensure that Merton Hall, Ponteland has a future. Can you help please?

We are desperate for trustees and a secretary and vice chair to comply with Charity Commission rules. You do not need any qualifications except a willingness to help.

We are a small group of volunteers running Merton Hall but more are needed to ensure Merton Hall continues to stay open.

If you are interested in a trustee role please contact the Chair Carl Rawlings on 01661 871727 or Treasurer Christine Greenwell at mertonhall123@gmail.com or on 01661 821488.

Carl Rawlings and Christine Greenwell
Chair and Treasurer, Merton Hall

Thanks for finding my car key!

Thank you very much to the person who found my car key fob near Woodhill Farm and placed it near the lower field style.

I found it while retracing my walk and am delighted to say it is still functioning!

Clare Jones
Runnymede Road, Darras Hall

October issue deadlines: The deadline for all copy and adverts for the October issue is Friday September 17th. Door to door distribution will be from Friday October 1st to Thursday October 7th. Businesses should be aware that all bookings for advertisements must be paid in full by the deadline to ensure placement in the October issue. Please visit ponteland-tc.gov.uk/pont-news-and-views for online issues and all updates.

Letters on all issues are welcomed by Pont News & Views but the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher. The Editor reserves the right to amend any submitted letters for legal or other reasons. All letters submitted should include the writer's name and address.



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What's on...

Ponteland u3a

Meetings and talks at St Mary's Parish Centre are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 2pm. Our next two talks will be: Sept 1st – The History of Jesmond Old Cemetery by Ray Hayes; October 6th – Bobby Thompson – The Little Waster by Ben Haddon. We welcome enquiries from anyone wishing to join Ponteland u3a. Please call the membership secretary on 01661 824953.

Duck Races

After being forced to go virtual in 2020 the Rotary Ponteland ducks will once again be set free on the River Pont in Ponteland Park on the afternoon of Sunday September 5th. See article on page 16.

Wilde Farm Market

Wilde Farm Market will be held at Dobbies Ponteland from 10am to 2pm on Sunday September 5th and Sunday September 19th. Go through the main building entrance and turn left into outdoor plant area for all the usual gazebos packed with local produce, gifts and crafts. Visit: wildefarm.co.uk.

Inner Wheel Club of Ponteland

A small club founded on friendship which always welcomes new members and visitors. Meetings which are held monthly consist of members spending some social time together, talks, occasional meals in local restaurants and gentle fundraising events for charities are also held. The first two meetings of the Inner Wheel year will be held at 2pm on Monday September 6th and Monday October 4th in the Bishop Merton Room, St Mary's Parish Hall. For anyone who may like to join us and for further information please contact 07568 743653.

Callerton Garden and Flower Club

A club meeting will be held on Wednesday September 8th at 2pm in the Main Hall at Ponteland Memorial Hall, when Marion Hinchley will be our demonstrator.

Ponteland Senior Gentleman's Club

The guest speaker at our next Zoom meeting at 2.30pm on Monday September 13th is Geoff Hughes and his subject 'Strange tales of the River Coquet'. As with our normal meetings, we will welcome senior gentlemen as guests. We hope to be back to our normal venue in person – the Memorial Hall – for our October 11th

meeting when Kath and Harry Gilbert will entertain us with their talk entitled 'Foreign Devils on the Silk Road'. Enquiries to pontelandsgc@gmail.com.

Ponteland Ladies' Choir

Ponteland Ladies Choir is about to commence face to face rehearsals at our new venue Ponteland Community Primary School (next to the original high school) on a Monday evening from 7.30pm to 9.15pm (term time only) commencing on Monday September 13th. For further information please email pontelandladieschoir@gmail.com or contact Linda on 07771 536914 or Susan on 07710 418780.

Ponteland Local History Society

Michael Thompson will give his talk on 'Castle design and development' at 7.30pm on Thursday September 16th at St Mary's Parish Centre. Members and visitors are most welcome. More castles than you can shake a stick at! Not sure what that saying means but it certainly applies to Northumberland. In fact, it has more castles and historic sites than any other county in England. So Michael's talk is a most appropriate one for the society.

Stamfordham Village Hall coffee morning

A charity coffee morning is being held at Stamfordham Village Hall from 10am to 2pm on Saturday September 18th to raise funds for Macmillan Cancer Care. Cuppas and cakes, craft stalls and raffles...have your cash at the ready!

Ponteland Friendly Stitchers Group

The newly formed Ponteland Friendly Stitchers Group will start monthly meetings on Monday September 27th at Ponteland Leisure centre, from 2pm to 4pm. New members of any level of ability will be very welcome. Contact Penny Ford at penelopeford636@btinternet.com for further information or to register interest.

Ponteland Rotary jazz concert

Maureen Hall and Rendezvous Jazz Band are entertaining at Ponteland Memorial Hall from 7pm on Saturday October 16th. Tables will be set to make it comfortable and safe and you can enjoy your own snacks and nibbles. There will be a cash bar and raffle with valuable prizes. The car parking charge is £1 per vehicle. For tickets costing £16 contact Stewart Blair on 01661 822367. For more information visit rotaryponteland.org.uk

Ponteland Village WI

Ponteland Village WI is hoping to restart monthly meetings in the early autumn and members are asked to keep a look out for announcements on email and WhatsApp. The whole group hasn't met for 18 months, but there are lots of opportunities for members to see each other in small groups and via Zoom. The Walking Group, Cycling for Softies and Walking for Softies meet regularly. The monthly Coffee Club is being held in members' gardens, while the book club and crafts group remain on Zoom. Monthly Zoom speakers proved very popular. A monthly newsletter helps members to find out what's going on and to share ideas. To find out more, email pontelandvillagewi@hotmail.com or on Facebook, Ponteland Village WI.

Ponteland Methodist Church

Weekly 10am Sunday worship resumed in the church in July, with the provision of a bright new family area. Thursday Toddlers, Girls Brigade and Boys Brigade continue to meet, plus Pilates and Zumba classes. As numbers at some events have to be restricted please contact Ann if you would like to attend or would like further information at anncooperx@gmail.com or on 01661 824347.

Creative writing classes

Suitable for both beginners and more experienced writers, these classes will inspire and encourage you to write poetry, short fiction and memoir and to share and develop your writing through stimulating workshop sessions in a friendly and supportive group. We meet on Wednesday mornings in members' homes/gardens in and around Ponteland (or on Zoom depending on current Covid regulations). Email claire@claire276.plus.com for more information or to arrange a free taster session.

Rotary Ponteland

Rotarians in Ponteland are holding their meetings via Zoom every two weeks on a Tuesday morning. The group organises many local events raising much needed funds for local charities. For more information visit rotaryponteland.org.uk or email info@rotaryponteland.org.uk

Ponteland Health Walks

Ponteland Health Walks meet every Tuesday at 10.30am outside Ponteland Leisure Centre. The free walks take 60 to 90 minutes on local footpaths. A good opportunity to walk safely, improve fitness and make new friends. Assistance dogs only please. Contact Gordon Allan on 07936 135469 for more information or just turn up, no notice required.

Growing tribute to victims of Covid

People from the Ponteland area are being invited to take part in a project to remember the huge effect Covid-19 has had on everyone's lives.

In the UK, more than 130,000 people have died as a result of the pandemic and millions have been affected. Ponteland councillors believe it is important that people do not forget the impact it has had on lives everywhere.

So Ponteland Town Council is planning to plant 1,000 crocus bulbs as a permanent reminder of the worldwide virus.

People of all ages are being asked to meet on Coates Green, outside St Mary's churchyard, at 10am on Saturday, October 9th to help with the planting. The Town Council hopes that the appearance of the bright spring flowers after the winter gloom will be a tribute to the many families who have suffered.

Ponteland Mayor Coun Christine Greenwell said: "Our aim is that the 'Crocuses for Covid' will over the years help residents and visitors to remember not only the sadness the virus caused to millions, but will also help us to remember the positivity and coming together of our community at that very difficult time and offer new hope and joy for the future."

She explained that the Town Council is buying early-flowering bulbs of one colour to have the maximum effect.

Council contractors will mark out areas on Town Council-owned land. People are being asked to gather on Coates

Green, where a short explanation will be given and people will be divided into groups to help to plant the bulbs. Dibbers, bulbs, compost and plastic gloves will be provided.

Coun Greenwell added: "It would be lovely to see children helping to plant the bulbs and we hope to encourage families and perhaps schools to plant their own Crocuses for Covid. They're easy to plant in gardens, tubs or even small pots and children learn a lot from watching things grow.

"We will be planting on land owned by Ponteland Town Council this autumn, but if the planting is successful and popular, we may consider extending the scheme next year."



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Exhibition of hope for the whole community

A display of creative arts inspired by experiences of the pandemic and hopes for the future is being held at Ponteland Methodist Church in November.

People of all ages and abilities are being invited to submit paintings, drawings, photos, poems, songs, stories, sculpture and crafts for the exhibition.

From the youngest and the oldest in our community, church leaders want everyone to share what was bad and what was good about lockdown, how you coped and your future hopes.

Whatever is produced will be put on display at the Ponteland Exhibition of Hope on Saturday November 6th from 10am to 4pm and from 12noon to 4pm on Sunday November 7th at the Methodist Church.

For more information contact mrpetecowey@btinternet.com or call 07771 857574.



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Estate Committee issues Airbnb warning

Homeowners in Darras Hall are being warned against using their properties as holiday lets.

The Darras Hall Estate Committee issued a statement on August 25th which said legal action could be taken against owners breaching the Trust Deed.

It said: "It has been brought to our attention that there are several Darras Hall properties listed on Airbnb.

"We remind Owners that Clauses 4 and 5 of the First Schedule to the Fourth Schedule of the Darras Hall Estate Trust Deed which, in brief, limits the use of a dwelling and land to private residential purposes or for agricultural or horticultural only. This precludes any properties being made available via Airbnb.

"Where the Committee are made aware of issues or complaints, the necessary steps will be taken to enforce the restrictions under the Trust Deed."

More information on the Trust Deed can be found at darras-hall.net

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Flower Show going virtual again as Covid rates growing

Ponteland Parish Flower Show will once again be going virtual this month due to the one thing no one wants to grow – Covid infection rates.

But despite the setback organisers of the 44th event, traditionally held on the second Saturday of September at the Memorial Hall, are keeping upbeat.

Show Chairman David Goodchild said: "Ponteland Parish Flower Show refuses to lie down. Last year the pandemic made it impossible for a real live show to go ahead so technology was called in to help. A virtual show with entrants sending photos of their entries was very successful and the results can still be viewed at pontelandflowershow.co.uk.

"Everyone thought that it would be a one-off to go in the history book for the show but Covid says otherwise and so there will be a virtual show again this year.

"It will cover the whole range of classes – flowers, fruit and vegetables from the garden but also bakery (for good looks only), craft including woodcraft, painting and children's work. There's also a photography section so all skills are catered for.

"We're hearing that, in the very unusual circumstances, lots of people have taken the opportunity to get more involved in their garden or allotment or develop their craft skills or learn a new one. Now is the time to show off what you've done. When you're harvesting your fruit and veg, pick out the best and take a photo.

"Remember that anyone in Ponteland and the surrounding villages can enter but also any member of an organisation which meets there. So tell all of your members to get involved, even if they don't live locally."



Gladiolus spikes by Mike Sadler and the 3x1 Veg collection by Keith Bissett from last year's virtual show.



Entries are still open so get out the phone or camera and capture your produce or work at its very best. Send entries to entries@pontelandflowershow.co.uk.

The list of classes and the show rules are at pontelandflowershow.co.uk and the judges are all eager to see what you've achieved.



And they're off...ducks racing in the 2019 event.

Duck Races return this weekend

The long awaited Duck Races return to Ponteland Park on Sunday September 5th.

After a one year break due to Covid-19 the ducks will once again be set free to float down the river in a series of eight races starting at 1pm.

In addition to the races there is a "market area" with craft and food stalls and rides and attractions for children.

Organisers have reported a tremendous response from local businesses, with all eight races having been sponsored. Waitrose have also donated a hamper for the first prize in the duck race raffle – tickets can be purchased on the day.

Duck race tickets can still be purchased online via Virgin Money Giving>Rotary Ponteland>Campaign>Duck race. All of the money raised will go to Children North East.

There are also "Design a boat" and a "Spot the Duck" competitions for children to take part in, with details of both on the Rotary Ponteland website.

Archie McGlynn, President of Rotary Ponteland, said: "We have been really encouraged by the support we have received from many of our local businesses and hope that the weather will be kind to us so we can all enjoy a great day out in our wonderful park."

For more information on the event visit rotaryponteland.org.uk



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Living with Motor Neurone Disease

How a devastating personal experience led Dawn Nichol to help others

Seven years after losing her soulmate to the horrific Motor Neurone Disease, Dawn Nichol today supports others living with the cruel condition. Dawn, 57, of Darras Hall, told Pont News about her own loss and how the MND Association is desperate for more volunteers.

Seven years ago in April 2013, just weeks before going on a cruise for my husband Kevin's 50th birthday, little did we know our lives were about to be turned upside down overnight and change forever.

We had just left the consultant's office with the devastating diagnosis Kevin had Motor Neurone Disease.

From this day on we were on a rollercoaster ride we couldn't get off and faced the reality that the diagnosis meant our remaining time together was limited, though we never expected it to be less than 18 months.

Kevin lost his battle with MND in July 2014 aged 51, just 15 months after his diagnosis and a month after my 50th birthday when Kevin had organised a surprise get together with some of my family and arranged for my son Darren to go 'present' shopping for him despite being very poorly.

On that terrible day when Kevin was diagnosed we hadn't heard of MND, so we weren't initially prepared for what this horrendous disease was going to throw at us. But with hindsight the onset of his symptoms may have started a while before we began to realise there was something seriously wrong.

Kevin went from having a few falls and being unable to get himself up to eventually losing the ability to move his body, meaning he was unable to do anything himself. His independence had been completely taken away.

As the disease progressed I was to become Kevin's full time carer; eventually he required 24 hour round-the-clock care.

Fortunately his full speech didn't go until the last week of his life and his swallowing didn't start to deteriorate until weeks before his battle was lost. You may wonder why I say fortunately; this is because many people living with MND quickly lose their speech and the ability to swallow, meaning alternative feeding methods need to be introduced upon the onset of their MND.

Nothing can prepare you for the shock, anxiety and upset of having to watch

A romantic meal on holiday in Palma, Mallorca in 2012.



mnda
motor neurone disease
association



A special day: Kevin and Dawn Nichol on their wedding day in April 2000.



the person in your life who was not only a husband but soulmate both lose the ability to do anything for himself and be mentally tortured that the lifelong ambition of owning and running his own business in the area he had always lived was no longer possible. Kevin's ambition and dreams were lost to MND.

To be given a diagnosis of MND is heartbreaking and I feel for anyone else in the situation my husband and I found ourselves in and know only too well that every day can be different; each day can bring a new challenge.

My advice would be to try your hardest to maintain that strength and determination to deal with any changes MND throws at you and adapt to what you can do and not what you can no longer do. Also accept the support that may be offered by those around you; they are there for you so never feel you are facing MND on your own.

Today I still run the business (Triple Eight Motor Company on Broadway, Darras Hall) in Kevin's memory with the

continued support of the staff, though I would be wrong to say it's been an easy task as we all miss Kevin's presence so much. This is where we first met 30 years ago, when it was Priory Garage and Kevin was a salesman while I worked in admin.

Having seen first-hand the devastation MND can do to someone, I knew when the time was right I would like to try and support others going through what we did and two years ago I was accepted as a volunteer Association Visitor (AV) with the Motor Neurone Disease Association.

As an AV I visit/contact those living with MND and their carers/family to offer support and guidance as well as attend regular support groups for those newly diagnosed and also the monthly support group held by the MND clinic in Newcastle.

Unfortunately in the North East there are only a few AVs and more are needed so we can continue to be there for someone when they request an AV.

If you have some spare time please consider applying to be part of our team. Whilst many of us have personal experience this isn't a necessity as training is in place as well as a fantastic support network.

As AVs we meet regularly with our Area Support Co-ordinator David Whalley as well as some AVs meeting socially for coffee and lunch - we are all very proud to be part of the MNDA.

I would like to thank Pont News for giving me this opportunity to give a little insight into living with MND and would like to dedicate this article in memory of my late husband Kevin Nichol as well as all those I have supported as an Association Visitor who have also sadly lost their battle with MND.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer Association Visitor (AV) with the Motor Neurone Disease Association, contact Area Support Co-ordinator David Whalley at david.whalley@mndassociation.org or call 01604 800 613.

About Motor Neurone Disease

With MND, messages from the motor neurones gradually stop reaching the muscles. This leads the muscles to weaken, stiffen and waste. MND can affect how you walk, talk, eat, drink and breathe.

Some people also experience changes to their thinking and behaviour. However, MND affects everyone differently. Not all symptoms will affect everyone, or in the same order. Symptoms also progress at varying speeds, which makes the course of the disease difficult to predict.

MND is life-shortening and there is no cure. Although the disease will progress, symptoms can be managed to help achieve the best possible quality of life.

It can affect adults of any age, but is more likely to affect people over 50.

There is a one in 300 risk of being diagnosed with MND. In other words, if you have 10,000 people in a stadium, 33 of

them will get MND at some point across a normal lifespan.

However, the prevalence of a disease is the number of people currently living with that condition. As the progression of MND can be rapid, fewer people are living with this disease than you might expect with a 1 in 300 risk. This means the prevalence is low, with up to 5,000 people living with MND in the UK at any one time.

This is why MND is not seen as a common disease and general health and social care professionals may not see many cases of MND.

* Information from the MND Association

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