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THE NIAGARA REPORTER

FREE

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NiagaraReporter.com

Vol. 19, No. 14

FREE

Grading the Niagara Falls Water Board

*Historic turnaround
from once bloated
bureaucracy to
growingly efficient
utility company.*

By: Frank Parlato

A – for effort – and for accomplishment. That's how we would rate it.

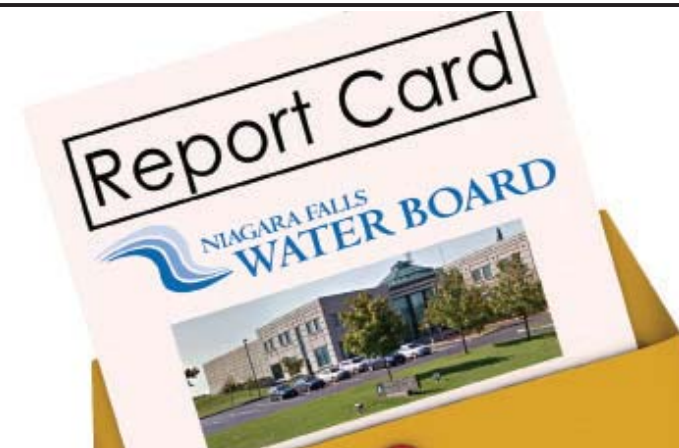
The Niagara Falls Water Board is run by a five-member board appointed by the Niagara Falls Mayor, the Niagara Falls Council, the NYS Assembly, the NYS State Senate and the NYS Governor.

The Water Board has 50,000 customers who are delivered drinking water through 17,000 service connections.

The Water Board was originally formed in 2002 and assumed control of the city's water and sewer treatment from the city under the administration of Mayor Irene Elia. During its 16 year history, it was run slipshod and by the full time management – without much oversight by the board.

It became a foul hotbed of waste, inefficiency and likely corruption. For years it was run as poorly as any bureaucratic nightmare anywhere. Then in 2017, perhaps by accident, the city council used their choice for an appointee to the board to appoint the hard headed, no nonsense businessman and Democratic Party leader, Nicholas Forster.

Then Mayor Dyster in a rare move that was both honest and efficient appointed a man who actually knew something about water treatment - Dan O'Callaghan. O'Callaghan had been the



superintendent when the original water plant was built.

He and Forster, joining the board, were quickly supported by the appointee of the New York State Assembly - Renae Kimble - and they now constituted a majority. Now things could get done.

And for whatever reason – it was good luck it seems - Forster and O'Callaghan decided to become hands on board members. This was the first time any board members appointed by the politicians ever were active in day-to-day management of the Water Board.

It resulted in a series of changes in both the culture and outcomes of an authority long known as a bureaucratic wasteland.

A Change in Culture

The first thing the new board did was to change an old rule of the ethics code that prohibited board members from speaking to union employees of the Water Board.

Forster found it stunning that the

board – which is charged with the management and control of the city's water - could speak only to management and not to union employees.

"How do you find problems out, if you can't talk to employees? How do you have your fingers on the pulse, if you can only talk to the bosses?" said Forster.

O'Callaghan said since the change, he and Forster spoke with almost every one of the 114 Water Board employees. He said employees often asked him questions.

"I have done almost everything they do," O'Callaghan said. "They come to me to ask for advice on how to manpower certain things."

So what have they accomplished? Stopped massive leaks throughout the city

The Niagara Falls Water Board's Annual Drinking Water Quality Report for 2017 disclosed that more than two

(Cont. on pg. 2)

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NIAGARA FALLS

Litany of Accomplishments Garner 'A' Rating for Majority Board Members on Water Board

(Contd from cover)

thirds of the water treated was not sold to customers.

According to the report, "[T]otal water produced was over 7.3 billion gallons.... The annual amount of water delivered to customers was about 2.3 billion gallons. This left 5.2 billion gallons unaccounted for."

That meant that prior to the Forster-O'Callaghan board, 66 percent of water treated by the Water Board was lost or wasted. Water Board customers bore the cost of converting 7.3 billion gallons of Niagara River water into clean drinking water, yet they consumed only 2.3 billion gallons – or about one third.

It was a shameful statistic. At the time, then Niagara Falls Water Board Executive Director Paul Drof admitted there are "hundreds" of water line breaks across the city. He did not know how much water was lost, adding that the Water Board responds to breaks throughout the city, two to three times a day.

"Yes, people are calling. Yes, we are embarrassed and yes, this is irritating. We are trying our best to get to them, but we have to reassess daily," Drof said at the time.

Forster and O'Callaghan chose to stop being embarrassed and fix the leaks.

In less than a year's time, the Water Board was able to fix most leaks, and reduced the amount of wasted/lost water from 66% down to 18%.

Billions of gallons were saved in less than a year. Those savings have been used to upgrade systems and improve and clean the plants.

Removing the Smell

Every year in the summer, there was a terrible smell near the Michael C. O'Laughlin Water Treatment Plant on Buffalo Avenue. The smell was a combination of human excrement, dirty basins, and sludge.

The Forster-O'Callaghan board brought in AECOM, an engineering firm and Dr. John Goeddert, an expert in wastewater treatment - on the recommendation of new Water Board Executive Director Ralph Porter.

Dr. Goeddert told them to clean the basins. It was so simple it was brilliant. There are five basins. Clean them. That had not been done in years. They cleaned the wastewater basins and the smell went away.

For the first summer in years, there is

no smell. All those years of thousands of people in nearby neighborhoods having to endure the horrific odor was all unnecessary. All it took was common sense: Clean the basins.

"We are continuing to remove more sludge on a daily basis. You wouldn't believe the amount we already removed. We are not letting anything backlog," O'Callaghan said, "It's an incredible thing considering where we were a year ago. Yes, the smell went away because of the maintenance work done on extensive cleaning the basins."

Ending the Overtime Scandal

When Forster and O'Callaghan came to the water board in 2017 they found something shocking: A few workers were getting excessive amounts of overtime.

There are 114 employees at the water board. But some got a disproportionate, if not hard to believe, amount of overtime. For two years prior to their coming to the board, there was almost \$1.9 million in overtime paid.

What troubled Forster and O'Callaghan the most was that there was no monitoring overtime. There were no time clocks. An employee would simply turn his own time in. Everyone was on the honor system. No questions asked.

This struck these two businessmen as an invitation to cheat. Forster and O'Callaghan started monitoring overtime, and suddenly, leaks started occurring during the week, instead of only on weekends. Suddenly employees were not getting 40-100 hours of overtime any more. A guy could not simply say he worked 10 hours of overtime. He had to prove it.

Overtime diminished drastically. And, about a dozen people – the biggest collectors of overtime – all suddenly decided to retire.

"We cut overtime in the first year to \$500,000 by monitoring it," Forster said

Security and management upgrades

The new Water Board majority put in security cameras and operationalized the gates.

Said O'Callaghan, "We are implementing a time management system that went into effect August 1st. Our guys are using a time clock for the first time ever. No more honor system of people saying, 'I worked fifty, sixty, or seventy hours.' Every minute is accounted for. The guys used to tell the foreman how long they

worked and then they would send the time sheets down to payroll who would put in whatever they told her. It's unheard of, and it's finished."

Fixed Every broken Fire Hydrant

Another thing Forster and O'Callaghan insisted on doing – ensure that every single fire hydrant in the city worked.

When they first came on board – Forster and O'Callaghan learned to their surprise that, out of the city's 2600 fire hydrants, 152 did not work.

A well-run city does not allow any fire hydrant to be broken. It could be catastrophic if you happen to live near the one that is broken.

Forster and O'Callaghan found out that the last time every fire hydrant worked in the city was in 1980 – almost 40 years ago.

Today, every broken fire hydrant was replaced. For the first time in years, the Water Board tests hydrants by flushing the system and afterwards putting a system in place to do it regularly. Every fire hydrant in the city works.

Earning Interest on \$30 million

By law, the Niagara Falls Water Board [NFWB] is required to keep around \$30 million on deposit in the bank for emergency or extraordinary needs. As it turned out, \$25 million was on deposit for 15 years in interest free bank accounts.

Forster and O'Callaghan led the board to switch to a bank that paid interest.

It did not take a genius to think of this, but nobody did before Forster and O'Callaghan insisted.

Forster said, it was "shameful and borderline criminal to think that [NFWB had] \$25 million in non-interest bearing bank accounts."

Calculating interest rates paid by banks for big depositors for the last 15 years, the board lost about \$5 million.

Forster and O'Callaghan also learned the person who should have been in charge of banking at the NFWB - the Director of Financial Services - was unfilled. That position was vacant when O'Callaghan and Forster joined the board.

"When I joined the board in March of 2017," said Forster, "the financial services director position had been vacant ... and, instead of finding someone new, the board at that time, led by Gretchen

Leffler, hired an accounting agency for \$50,000 per month. Instead of hiring another financial services director, with a salary of \$88,000 per year, their answer was to spend \$600,000 a year."

The accounting firm, Pronexus, LLC, based in Rochester, NY, never advised the NFWB to put money in a bank account where they might get interest.

Forster and O'Callaghan decided to stop paying \$600,000 per year to an outside accounting firm to do the work an \$88,000 employee could do. And they decided to find a bank that would pay interest.

After interviewing several banks, the NFWB chose Bank On Buffalo. According to Bank on Buffalo president, Martin Griffith, if the Water Board's money had been in one of their interest-bearing accounts during the last 12 months, ratepayers would have earned \$427,000 in interest.

Among other accomplishments:

Corrected the drainage problems on Cayuga Island – by cleaning every one of the sewers.

Establishing a maintenance program to exercise the giant valves [turning them back and forth, open and close] that shut off water lines [so you can fix broken lines] so they won't break when you really need to turn them.

Buying a vacuum truck which works when the weather is below 32 degrees.

Updating the fleet, which was 12 years old, and saving ratepayers money by so doing.

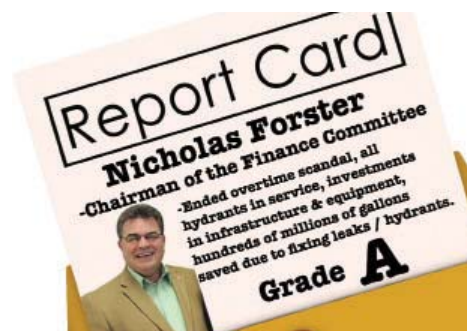
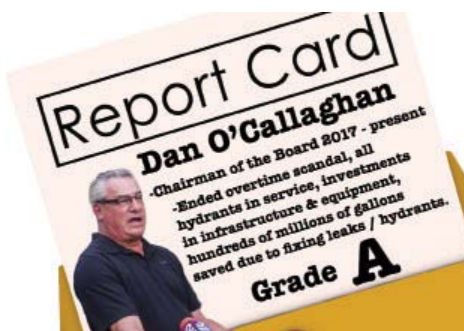
Settling the union contract. For 7 years, union members worked without a contract.

Bought a camera truck to accurately determine where leaks are – instead of just telling ratepayers that the leak is on their property – the hallmark of the old water board management.

Two recently appointed board members changed the way the Water Board was run, largely by taking a hands-on approach to its management.

Thanks to them – in our opinion - the Water Board overall is entitled to an A rating – and the approbation of the public.

We expect by next report that rating will be A++.



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Amber Skivington Shares Her Story of Saving Dog from Overheating Vehicle

Amber Skivington

On Friday July 13th, 2018, around 1:30pm I was leaving Walmart. I don't typically go to Walmart, but I am grateful that I was there on this day.

As I was leaving the store, by my car in the parking lot I noticed a cop parked and out of his vehicle with another gentleman. I started to walk closer in their direction and began to hear whining, howling and crying of a puppy.

I have a puppy of my own at home and I am all too familiar with that sound. Although this didn't sound like a puppy crying to eat or go outside, the puppy sounded like it was unbelievably distressed and I was immediately concerned.

I walked right up to the car that the officer, whose name was Officer Montanaro, and another gentleman were standing at. I saw yet another puppy in this car and immediately knew this was another situation of someone leaving a dog in a hot car.

The car was not running and only had the windows slightly cracked. The puppy was very small and was using all of her energy to stretch to the windows to let us know that she was hot and wanted out.

She was panting, crying, and scratching desperately at the door to be let out. I asked the officer how long that she had been in there for and the gentleman with us told me that he was watching the car for about 45 minutes waiting for the owner to return. When the owner did not return that's when he called the police.

Officer Montanaro responded to the call and said he had only been on scene a few minutes before I arrived. The Officer said that he had attempted multiple times to get the door unlocked to let her out. He wanted to exhaust all of his options before having to break the window.

This entire time the puppy is still crying desperately to be let out. I could tell that it was getting hard for her to deal with the heat because her entire body was moving. It looked like she was having a seizure.

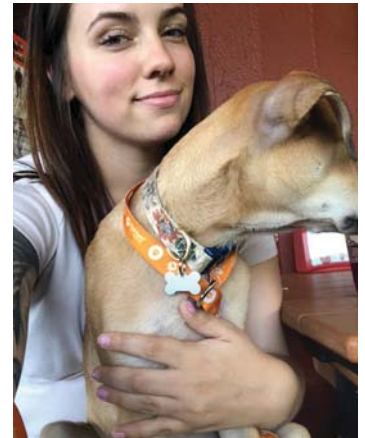
It had been an hour already and, with no owner in sight, I realized that the windows were cracked enough that I could possibly get my arm down into the car through the crack to unlock the doors; so that's just what I did.

I reached my hand through the crack attempting to get the lock. Officer Montanaro assisted and told me how close I was to it. Despite my arm being squeezed, I kept reaching.

To my relief, I was able to get the door unlocked.

Officer Montanaro immediately picked her up and put her into his air conditioned patrol vehicle. We knew the first thing she needed now that she was in a cooler environment was water. Luckily, I had just bought water so I ran to my car quickly and got some for her.

Officer Montanaro gave her some water



Amber Skivington

and she immediately began guzzling it down. We were beyond relieved to see her panting start to subside.

From there the officer got in contact with animal control to let them know that I was able to get into the vehicle to unlock the door and the puppy was out. As the Officer and I were exchanging thanks to each other, a woman and her family began to approach the car. Officer Montanaro asked her if she was the owner of the vehicle and when she confirmed she was. He let her know that the puppy was in his vehicle and that animal control was on the way to assess the situation and the amount of danger she put the puppy in.

The owner was angry that animal control was called, that we had got into her vehicle, and blamed Walmart's long lines for the reason why the puppy was in the hot car for an hour.

I was unable to stay to see whether or not she was charged, but Officer Montanaro handled the situation perfectly and I am so grateful that a cop who was so caring and eager to help was on the scene.

Our main concern was to help this puppy who was trapped inside a hot car who appeared to be very close to suffering heat stroke.

I have two dogs of my own and could never imagine putting them in harms way. It is disappointing to know that there are people in the world who leave their animals in the car on hot summer days when they are fully aware of the dangers of over heating. I posted on Facebook shortly after this situation occurred to bring awareness to what happened and to thank Officer Montanaro.

To much surprise my post blew up and our story was shared and seen by so many people. All that I can hope is that from sharing that post and this article people understand how important it is not to leave their pets in hot cars during the summer.

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WEEKLY HEADLINES

-A two-car motor vehicle accident on Buffalo Avenue on August 6th resulted in one driver being arrested and charged with DWI.

-It was a busy night for the Niagara Falls Police Department:

- 10:30pm: police respond to Niagara St. for a stabbing.
- 2:00am: police respond to Memorial Hospital for victim who was shot near Walnut Ave.
- 3:00am: police investigating death on Portage Rd.

-For the second night in a row, the Niagara Falls Police Department responded to a call of shots fired. The call stated that multiple shots were fired on 98th Street between 12am and 1am. No injuries were reported, but at least one car was hit.

-The DEC & Niagara County DA's Office announced this A.M. the arrest of two individuals involved in an Environmental Conservation Officer being dragged by an ATV in Wheatfield. James Olscamp, 30, of Sanborn, & Dean Banks, 52, of NF, turned themselves in Wednesday night.

-The Niagara Falls Police Department responded to the 2900 block of Niagara Avenue for shots fired through a window on August 9th.

-A 25-year-old was shot during a burglary on 20th Street in Niagara Falls. According to reports, after the man was shot the perpetrators took everything that was on the victim including a debit card and personal I.D.

-A large fight broke out on the 1900 block of Niagara Street Friday afternoon. No serious injuries were reported.

-Niagara Falls Police thwarted a robbery that occurred between 9pm and 9:30pm downtown on Friday evening. Police engaged in a foot chase with the suspect and ultimately detained him on 20th and Ferry.

-According to police, a 20th Street woman watched as a man reached over her fence to steal a wallet off of a table. The suspect must not have seen the woman, who was sitting on her second-floor balcony at the time. Wesley Wynn, 40, was charged with petit larceny.

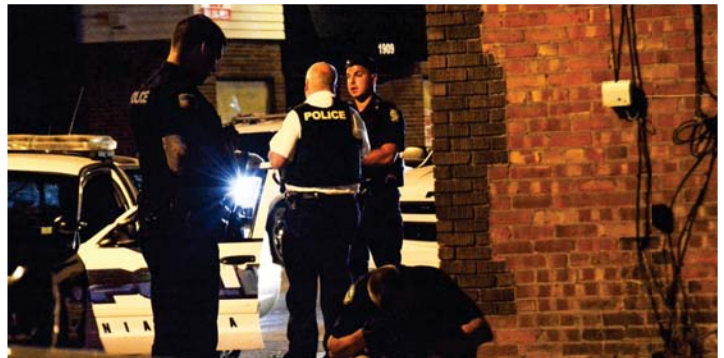
-According to police, a man walked throughout the Anchor Bar on Friday afternoon for 10 minutes before sneaking behind the counter to steal a woman's purse. The man was captured on surveillance footage but has not yet been apprehended.

-A Willow Avenue resident is looking for an individual who stole a green huffy bicycle.

-A city motorist faces a pair of felony charges, including one for a repeat drunken driving offense, after he abruptly stopped in the middle of the road causing a police officer who was following behind him to almost hit his vehicle.

-Niagara Falls Police and fire responding to the 600 block of 7th Street for a pedestrian struck by a vehicle on Sunday August 12th.

Police Catch Wallet Thief



Photos courtesy of Samar Hamilton, The Action Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls Police arrested a suspect on the above date after they were dispatched to the 400 block 20th Street for a "larceny in progress."

The caller stated that a man walking with two females snatched a wallet off of a table and walked away with it.

The victim followed the suspect

until police arrived on scene.

When police caught up with the suspect on 20th and Pine he attempted to run but didn't get very far.

The victim's wallet was recovered near 20th and Walnut.

The suspect also had a warrant for failure to appear on a petit larceny charge with a \$3000 bail.

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Driver of ATV Who Dragged DEC Officer Turns Himself In



Photos courtesy of Rob Bennett, RobShots

We all remember the story from July 22nd of the New York State DEC Officer suffering minor injuries after her was reportedly hit and dragged by an ATV in the Town of Wheatfield.

Although police were not able to find the suspect(s), James J. Olscamp, 30, of Sanborn, and Dean R. Banks, 52, of Niagara Falls, voluntarily turned themselves in to the New York State Police Lockport barracks late Wednesday August 8th.

Olscamp is being charged with first-degree reckless endangerment, tampering with evidence, Obstruction of governmental administration and trespassing, according to police.

Fight breaks out on Niagara Street in front of the Zodiac on Fri. August 10th.



'Summerfest at the Sal'



Photo courtesy of Rob Bennett, RobShots

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Restaurant Review: Steak Stone & Sushi

Tony Farina

I've been an investigative reporter most of my adult life, but sometimes it is nice to try something different.

William Cowper perhaps put it best in his 1785 poem "The Task" when he wrote, "Variety is the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavor."

And in this case, flavor is indeed the right word as I posed as a restaurant reviewer for a night to sample the food offerings at the new Niagara Falls eatery, Steak Stone & Sushi at 1340 Military Road. And I must say, I came away very impressed.

Johnny Chi and his brother Eric decided to open their new restaurant, complete with outdoor patio, and welcome a broader audience beyond their very popular Lockport restaurant that has been satisfying the appetites of diners for the last five years.

"It is another opportunity to find us easier," said Johnny as he prepared for last Thursday's grand opening which I attended with Mike

Gawel and his wife Michele. There was a good crowd on hand, some games and musical entertainment, and first class food.

Steak, sushi and fresh oysters were in high demand, and Mike and I tried strip steak served on an 800-degree hot rock that allows you to cook your entree to your liking right before your eyes with no oil or butter to intrude.

Michele went for the shrimp and we were all quite satisfied, thanks not only to the outstanding food but to the warm and gracious hospitality of our waitress, Joanna Angelo.

"We've got about 25 people on staff," says operations manager Tevye Maslowski. That's a nice number for a new place in hard-pressed Niagara Falls that not only features a unique eating style but also a bit of a sports bar flavor with plenty of big screen televisions for



Prime hit rock special at Steak Stone & Sushi on Military Rd.

easy viewing.

Johnny Chi has been a chef for 10 years and it is easy to see he takes his profession quite seriously, a magician with a knife and fork as he demonstrated how to make the most of the hot rock experience. Sort of like a heart surgeon at work, exercising great care.

It may be some time before I do another restaurant review, but I



Johnny Chi (above) and brother Eric own new Falls eatery

will certainly go back for seconds at Steak Stone & Sushi in the coming days.

If 10 stars is the best, I would give this new Niagara Falls eatery nine stars and invite readers to give it a taste. And the moderate prices are appetizing, too.

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ANALYSIS

The Truth Behind Niagara Falls Housing Court

Director of Community Development, Code Enforcement, and now City Attorney? Not so fast. The last one requires a law license.

Nicholas D. D'Angelo

Director of Community Development and Code Enforcement Seth Piccirillo was recently quoted in an editorial, written in the Niagara Gazette, where he criticized the Niagara Falls Housing Court. In particular, Piccirillo said the court lacks a sense of "urgency" and has been "too lenient" on offenders.

To support their claim, the anonymous author quotes the following statistics:

"In an analysis covering February to May of this year, Piccirillo's office found the city's department of code enforcement delivered 485 citations to Niagara Falls Housing Court, with 92% of those cases being adjourned by the court."

The author, however, is not being entirely honest with you.

First and foremost, it is important to understand how this process. A case originates when code enforcement sends a letter to the homeowner who is not in compliance with the code. The homeowner is then given at least thirty (30) days to remedy the problem.

If, after that period, the problem persists, then the City moves forward with filing papers with the court. The Defendant then receives a summons in the mail with a court date that was signed by a judge. Upon appearing in court, a Defendant then negotiates with the city prosecutor.

There is absolutely no involvement by the District Attorney's Office. It is purely the City of Niagara Falls.

Second, a Defendant has an abso-

lute right to request an adjournment. Once the request is made in court by the Defendant, the burden then shifts to the Complainant, which in this case would be the City of Niagara Falls, to object. If there is no objection from the City Prosecutor, who appears to represent the interests of code enforcement, then the judge is likely to grant the adjournment. However, if there is an objection the judge would hear argument for why and then make a decision.

In the statistics referenced above there seems to be one key number missing. That number is the percentage that the City Prosecutor, the "Complainant," objected to a Defendant's adjournment request.

That number, in fact, is zero. And in many ways this is the way it should be. The goal of housing court is not to fine offenders, but to have them remedy the problem. So if a Defendant talks with the City Prosecutor and says they are working on addressing the violation, it is absolutely the right move to agree with an adjournment.

Third, there are legitimate reasons to grant adjournments. Some examples include

- Personal reasons such as illness of a party, family member or witness
- A Defendant is working and cannot appear
- Unavailability of a key witness
- Disclosure issues
- Settlement discussions
- Need to obtain legal counsel
- Counsel not available
- Good faith efforts to obtain information necessary for a hearing
- That the Defendant is working on fixing their violation

I am in no way saying that all requests for adjournments are meritorious, but why would the City Prosecutor object to an adjournment while people are making efforts to remedy their violations? Why would the judge? The answer is they wouldn't.

The editorial concludes by stating, "for the sake of improving the overall condition and image of the city, the housing court should have a greater sense of urgency when it comes to punishing those who are contributing to the decay of the Falls and, in some cases, have been doing so now for many years."

This quote represents a grave misunderstanding of the role a court plays in such proceedings. It is not the job of a judge to have an "urgency" for anything other than upholding the law, protecting the due process rights of defendants, and remaining impartial in all cases before them.

It would be wildly inappropriate



for a judge to preside over a criminal court with the goal of putting repeat offenders in jail before he even hears their case!

The same goes for a judge presiding over housing court. A judge cannot preside over a court with the goal of "improving the overall condition and image of the city" as the editorial suggests because that would mean he or she is implicitly biased against the Defendant.

Despite Piccirillo wanting a more streamline, assembly line type of housing court model where each Defendant goes to court, receives a fine, and leaves, that is not how due process works. Fortunately for the residents of Niagara Falls, all City Court Judges understand this as well.

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NORTH TONAWANDA

Planting the Seeds for a Healthier Lifestyle at the Imagine Community Gardens.

Brendan McDonough

Residents at the Imagine Community Gardens learned ways to cook and eat a bit healthier at "Meet the Chef Day," where people presented dishes they made using only ingredients from the garden.

The garden came about thanks to Lumber City Church as a way for residents to grow their own food and save money at the gro-



cery store.

Now they are taking things one step further and showing people how to make healthier dishes using those vegetables from the garden itself!

Residents got up before the crowd and presented their dishes. Each explained how it was made and what ingredients it encompassed. At the end of each presentation people got a chance to taste those same dishes.

"We also have recipe cards for people so after they are done tasting the dishes they can take these recipes and take them home to prepare fresh vegetables in a tasty way," said Bob Zima, President of Imagine Community Gardens.

From zucchini lasagna to dishes with fresh tomatoes and basil there was something to satisfy just about everyone's taste buds. The goal is to get people across the



area to lead a healthier lifestyle starting with a fresh vegetable from the garden.

"They American way," said Zima, "everything is processed. When a lot of people think about vegetables they do not think of something delicious and what we are trying to do is show people how to prepare them in a way that

is tasty, but also healthy. The nutritional value of the vegetables that you are eating from this garden is significantly higher than the vegetables you buy from the store; and we are beyond proud of that.

In addition to getting their hands dirty, many people have also formed lasting friendships with other garden growers.

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Kan Jam World Championships in North Tonawanda

Brendan McDonough

At Gratwick Fire Hall organizers held the Annual World Championship Jan Jam Festival where participants were running, throwing, catching and dunking in the hopes of bringing home some hardware.

People of all ages have been taking part in the event for the past twenty-eight years. The sport was invented in North Tonawanda and this year more than ninety-four teams took part in the event.

Players competed against one another in teams of two. The goal is for one teammate to throw a disk to the other and for them to jam it down into the can (hence the name "kan jam"). The team with the highest number of points wins.

Organizers say what makes the sport special is that anyone, regardless of age, sex, or physical condi-



tion, can participate.

"We have had people who are 6 years old come to the tournament and we have had people who are in their 70's," said Jayce Grefrath, Event Organizer. "I feel you can play it at any age. Basically, if you can throw a frisbee you can participate."

Trophies and awards were handed out to the top players and money raised from the event were donated to four local charities.

"This year the first-place team get a total of \$1,000.00 in cash and prizes," said Grefrath. "Things like gifts cards, kan jam swag, metals, and etc. The 2nd place teams gets gifts totaling \$500.00 and then the 3rd and 4th teams gets gifts for \$250.00."

Next year they are hoping even more people will participate in the event.

Matt's Music Expansion Hopes to Spark Growth on Oliver Street



Brendan McDonough

More music is set to fill the air in North Tonawanda as Matt's Music, located at 937 Oliver Street, is planning a major expansion.

The 2600-foot expansion project includes taking the empty lot next to the existing store and turning it into a music studio and much more.

"It is going to be a complete vocal performance complex with five vocal studios, a recording booth, a performance base with stage sound and lighting," said Zach Carr, Owner.

"We are also going to be blowing out the whole front part of our music store here and creating an

atrium."

The two buildings will be connected and the project is expected to take about 10 months to complete.

Zach Carr and his mother currently run the businesses, but it was originally started by Zach's grandfather Matt fifty-five years ago. It is a true family business.



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A photo of the land Matt's Music is utilizing for its expansion.

Matt's Music sells everything from guitars to drum sets and everything in between. They also offer music lessons and a host of other activities for people in North Tonawanda to take advantage of.

With the expansion they are hoping to not only bring more services to the area, but are also hoping to inspire other businesses to invest

in Oliver Street.

"There is a lot of growth on Webster Street and down on the other part of Oliver Street," said Carr, "but we are really hoping that this can be the beginning of an effort on this side of Oliver Street to spur growth with other businesses. We have a huge bookstore that will be opening soon, so we are very excited about the possibilities for this community."

The ground breaking for the expansion of Matt's Music took place on Monday August 13th.



The Union Advantage: Safety & Health

For years, unions have been working to prove with data what their members and contractors see every day in the field – that construction sites staffed by union workers tend to be safer working environments. So far, that's been a difficult task, in part because injury reporting doesn't collect certain key information and because of other factors such as concerns over workers' privacy.

In a recent article, we shared data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showing that fatality rates are 54 percent higher in states with right-to-work laws. Now, a new study is providing more evidence that right-to-work laws are detrimental to worker safety and health.

The study, found that U.S. right-to-work laws are tied to a 14 percent increase in worker fatalities due to decreased unionization. The study concludes by noting the "protective effect" that unions have on worker safety and health. This study may help explain why deaths in U.S. workplaces have been on the rise since 2013. Recently released 2016 data shows there were 5,190 fatal workplace injuries in the U.S., an increase of seven percent from 2015. That's the highest number of workers who have died on the job since 2008. States like Michigan and Indiana have both seen a noticeable spike in on-the-job fatalities since passing right-to-work laws in 2012. A recent OSHA press release notes increases in workplace deaths from falls, struck-by and machine hazards in Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri, all three of which have right-to-work laws. One likely explanation for these increases is that being part of a union gives workers the ability to speak up about hazards they see without worrying that they will face retaliation. As right-to-work laws weaken unions' ability to collectively bargain, these same workers are increasingly without anyone to speak up on their behalf.

The CPWR – the Center for Construction Research and Training – recently surveyed more than 3000 union and non-union construction firms about their safety management practices finding:

- Union contractors were 20 percent more likely to engage in prevention through design practices, which involve anticipating and designing hazards out of work methods, materials and tools before workers encounter them.
- Almost 80 percent of union contractors said they conduct hazard analysis before projects begin; only 56 percent of non-union contractors said the same.
- Union contractors designated competent persons more often (76 percent vs. 62 percent), investigated near misses and other incidents more often (67 percent vs. 50 percent) and implemented site-specific safety and health plans more often (87 percent vs. 69 percent).

Time and time again, research shows that engaging workers is one of the best indicators of a successful safety program. In the same CPWR survey, 83 percent of union contractors said they considered worker involvement to be the most essential aspect of a world-class safety program. Only 66 percent of non-union contractors said the same. At a time when unions are being weakened by Supreme Court rulings and more states are passing right-to-work laws, it's important to remember that unions offer a safety and health advantage in the construction industry. Cooperation between labor and management produces a safer, more healthful work environment that has a big impact on worker safety.

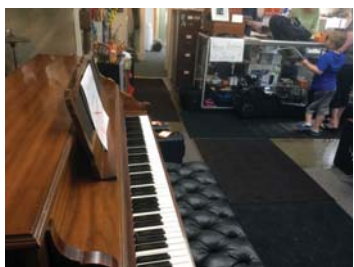
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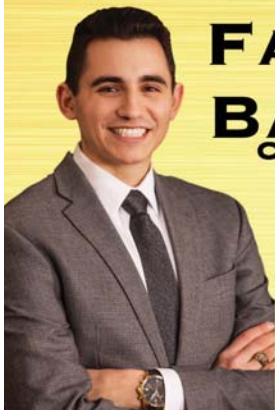
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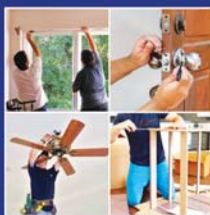


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