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# THE NIAGARA REPORTER

FREE

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## IS IT CORRUPTION?

*Block Club Wants Piccirillo Investigated Over Memorial Parkway Property Giveaway*



By: **Frank Parlato**  
*Analysis*

Mayor Paul Dyster has operated this way for nearly 12 years and his handpicked succes-

(Cont. on pg. 2)

or, Seth Piccirillo isn't going to change a thing. Leaders of the Memorial Parkway Block Club sent complaints to state and federal officials about how Piccirillo, in his capacity as Niagara Falls Community Development Director, seems to be giving a sweetheart deal to a

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PAGE 4

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## GOP Chairman Says Niagara Falls Needs New Leadership

By: **Tony Farina**  
*Analysis*

John Spanbauer, a lifelong resident of Niagara Falls and former administrator at Niagara University, has announced his intention to seek a seat on the Niagara Falls City Council. He will run on the Republican line in the upcoming prima-

(Cont. on pg. 3)

## Police on the Railroad Tracks

By: **Brendan McDonough**

More Police will soon be patrolling the railroad tracks in North Tonawanda as part of a \$24,000 grant the city received.

The grant, which was applied for in September by the North Tonawanda Police Department, was part of \$50,000 total being handed out. The NTPD applied for half of the \$50,000

(Cont. on pg. 6)

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# NIAGARA FALLS

## Corruption Cont.



Karen Mock, a Real Estate Agent at Keller Williams Realty.

supporter on their street.

Piccirillo, who is appointed by Dyster, and is running for mayor with a promise to continue the policies of his leader, policies that led Niagara Falls to be the poorest city, with the highest crime rate, the highest taxes and the fastest-shrinking population in New York State.

Piccirillo said he did nothing wrong, of course. It was all in a day's work to give 424 Memorial Parkway away to someone who would develop it. The only problem is the house was never developed.

And, on May 1, if Piccirillo has his way, the City Council will vote to pay the current owner, Karen Mock of Memorial Parkway, \$10,000 to buy back the house so the city can give it away all over again.

This is extremely generous of Seth since they legally they don't have to pay her a dime.

But Mock was a campaign supporter of Mayor Dyster, a member of his Healthy Community Committee and reportedly supports Piccirillo for mayor.

Under Piccirillo, the Community Development Department, offered 424 Memorial for sale through a special "home ownership auction," in which the city required the buyer to renovate and live in the home.

In 2017, the city put the vacant 424 Memorial Parkway, a 3,100-square-foot, five-bedroom house, assessed for \$48,000 up for sale. The property was in disrepair with broken and boarded-up windows.

The City received two bids: \$7,000 from three brothers from Buffalo who wanted to spend their own money, fix it up and rent the property.

And a bid of \$1,000 from a couple, Ryan Cali and Mathew Melcher.

In April 2017, at Seth's urging, the city sold 424 Memorial Parkway to Ryan Cali and Mathew Melcher.

It was typical of Niagara Falls' policies that the city rejected the higher bid of \$7,000 and sold it for \$1,000.

The couple claimed they would live in the house and Cali and Melcher got the house for \$1,000.

As a condition of the low price, the city put in writing that the couple had one year to renovate the house or else the property would "revert" back to the city.

The couple did not fix the house. In fact, they broke up. And Melcher sold the house he got from the city for \$1,000 to Karen Mock – the Dyster supporter – allegedly for \$10,000.

Somehow, instead of enforcing the terms of the original contract – which prohibited the sale of the property - the city stood by as Melcher sold the property to Mock for 10 times what he paid for – at least that is what is shows on paper.

It is unknown if money actually changed hands.

This happened in December.

Seth not only allowed the illegal sale, he argued it was fine because Mock's son was going to live in the house.

As a strict point of law, Piccirillo

wasn't authorized to allow a private sale instead of having the city take back the property as required in the contract.

Now, after being exposed by the block club, Seth wants city taxpayers to pay Mock the \$10,000 she allegedly paid for the house in the illegal sale.

Remember, the city sold the house for \$1,000 and the seller illegally sold it – with Seth's consent – and now Seth wants the city to pay the new owner – a Piccirillo supporter - \$10,000.

The council will vote on it on May 1.

Ah, if only no one had been looking. But the Memorial Parkway Block Club sent complaints to the State Comptroller's Office and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, demanding an investigation into Piccirillo's alleged "inconsistencies."

In reality, the city likely doesn't have to pay Mock anything. She does not have a clean title.

The city has the right, as per the contract, to take back the property and pay nothing. The house was never repaired.

"We have not violated any of our procedures," Piccirillo told the Buffalo News. "Unfortunately, it looks like we're not going to be able to find a compromise and we're going to have to go the route of the clawback."

So why does Piccirillo want to give Mock \$10,000 of taxpayer money?

Mock declined to answer questions about the case. "It's being handled legally," she said.

But this isn't the first time that Piccirillo has given a sweetheart deal to Mock.

A few years ago, Seth arranged a city-owned Chilton Avenue apartment house be sold to Mock for \$500.

She was then a volunteer member of Dyster's Healthy Community Committee.

The Chilton Ave. property had an assessed value of \$37,260. And came with a \$40,000 reimbursable grant for

renovations.

Before that Mock was able to purchase 435 Memorial Parkway for \$500 from the city. The seven-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath brick structure had an assessed value of \$44,047.

When Mock bought the Chilton property for \$500, Ron Anderluh of the Niagara Street Area Business Association, characterized the price as "very, very low" while addressing members of the planning board.

"I have an interest in making the neighborhood better and making this city better because I live here," Mock said at the time.

The Chilton property Mock purchased for \$500 qualified for a \$40,000 grant because it is in a two-street Historic District created by Dyster in 2009, which also includes Dyster's own street, Orchard Parkway.

Mock was asked by Piccirillo to sit on the housing subcommittee of the Healthy Community Committee. Piccirillo said at the time that it was only natural that someone on Dyster's committee should get the house.

"It doesn't surprise me that someone involved in the group was interested in that vacant property," he said. "But I don't think there's a headline — member gets a sweetheart deal — that's really not the case."

Meantime the Memorial Parkway Block Club thinks an investigation is warranted in the latest deal involving Mock.

Their letter to the HUD Inspector General – who has the ability to make a criminal referral to the FBI - charges, "False Representation, Mismanagement, Abuse of Authority, Conflicts of Interests" against Piccirillo.

"We would appreciate your investigation into this matter," the Block Club wrote to authorities.

## NIAGARA



## REPORTER

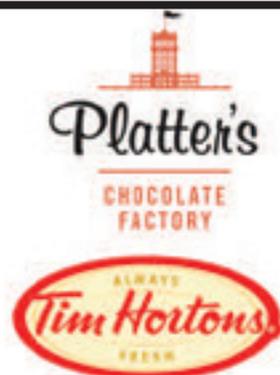
Frank Parlato, Jr.

Publisher & Editor in Chief

Nicholas D. D'Angelo

Managing Editor

P.O. Box 3083, Niagara Falls NY 14304  
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# New Leadership in Niagara Falls Cont.



ry election.

In making his first bid for a council seat, Spanbauer, 59, said he believes the city needs strong leaders who will come to the table with new ideas. "I look forward to being an independent voice on the council, representing our youth, seniors, veterans, and all the neighborhoods of the city," he said.

Spanbauer holds a Master's in Education from Niagara University, where he is currently an adjunct professor in the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management and a part-time supervisor with the school's recreation department. He started his career in 1983 at the Niagara Falls YMCA as Director of Youth and Director of Program Operations, before he began his distinguished tenure as a full-time administrator at Niagara University in 1988, overseeing the recreation facilities and club sports program. In addition to his responsibilities, Spanbauer was also a member of the University's Crisis Response Team, Title IX Investigator, Chair of the University Building Safety Team, and Chair for the Club Sports Advisory Committee. He also served on many Human Resource search committees and is a graduate of the Leadership Niagara program.

Actively involved in the community, Spanbauer, a LaSalle resident, volunteers at St. George's community outreach programs and for the WNY Special Olympics basketball program. He served as a trip leader for a

service mission to Panama with Niagara University's Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Spanbauer is a past member of the Niagara County Community College Health Advisory Board and the Niagara Falls Human Rights Commission. He is a current board member of the Hyde Park Golf Club.

Spanbauer is the recipient of numerous services awards, including Big Brother of the Year from Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, and the Vincentian Mission Award which is given annually to a Niagara University employee who demonstrates the values of St. Vincent DePaul in serving people's basic spiritual, material, and education needs.

"My goals as a city council member would be to focus on fiscal responsibility both in expenditures and revenues," Spanbauer said. "I will fight to restore and improve core city services such as street and park maintenance and address public safety issues, as well as expand recreation services for youth and adults. I also want to see a highly functional relationship between members of the city council and the city's administration, while giving residents a bigger voice in our government."

"I pledge to be the checks and balances for the tax payer and a change agent for the city of Niagara Falls," Spanbauer concluded. "I have always been an independent voice and will bring that independence to the city council."

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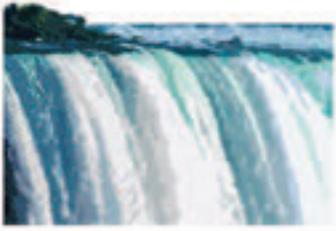
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# THE CRIME

## WEEKLY HEADLINES

-Niagara Falls Police responded to 18th and Niagara Street in the evening hours of Monday, April 8th, 2019, for a foot chase with a person of interest suspected of aggravated harassment and breaking windows. According to reports, the person of interest fled after striking a vehicle and utility pole. He was captured by police.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to multiple reports of shots fired in the North End - 18th and Michigan Avenue to Niagara Avenue - in the early morning hours of Tuesday, April 9th, 2019.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 500 block of Pierce Avenue, at Mike's Food Shop, in the evening hours of Tuesday, April 9th, 2019, after reports of an armed robbery. According to police reports, one black male and a Puerto Rican male entered the store and displayed handguns, threatening to shoot, if they did not receive money. No one was hurt and police are continuing to investigate the incident.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to reports of criminal mischief in the late evening hours of Tuesday, April 9th, 2019, and arrested four teenagers who were accused of breaking windows at the Niagara Falls Public Library on Main Street.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 1700 block of Ashland Avenue in the early morning hours of Wednesday, April 10th, 2019, for a stabbing.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 1800 block of South Avenue in the afternoon hours of Thursday, April 11th, 2019, for reports of an armed robbery / home invasion. According

to reports, police received a call stating that two males armed with guns forced their way into a home and held the occupants at gunpoint. When police arrived, the suspects fled and have not yet been captured.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to reports of a shooting in the evening hours of Thursday, April 11th, 2019. According to reports, police responded to the 1100 block of LaSalle Avenue after calls of shots fired. Witnesses stated that two males were shooting at each other. By the time police arrived, all suspects were gone. Police later discovered a victim of the shooting, who had been shot in the hip, walked to the ER at Memorial Hospital. At least two bullet casings were recovered from the scene and no arrests have been made.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to Niagara Apothecary, 8745 Niagara Falls Blvd., in the evening hours of Saturday, April 13th, 2019, after receiving reports of a burglary. Police responded to the scene and found the front door open. Officers later discovered the suspect climbed onto the roof and broke out a rear window before entering the building through the ceiling. Cash and pills were taken.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 1700 block of Whitney Avenue in the evening hours of Sunday, April 14th, 2019, after reports of shots fired. According to reports, a female victim stated that two men driving in a white 4-door sedan were shooting at her. Police recovered at least one shell casing in the middle of the street. A house with occupants inside, as well as a vehicle that had a 5-year-old child in the backseat, was also struck by bullets during the attempted assault. No injuries were reported and police are continuing to investigate the incident.

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# NORTH TONAWANDA

## Railroad Tracks Cont.

and ultimately were awarded almost all of the requested amount. Three cities total ended up sharing the full \$50,000.

"It pays for officers to patrol the tracks for trespassers on the CSX railroads," said Rob Frank, North Tonawanda Police Department.

People and cars being on the tracks when they shouldn't is a bigger problem than most people would realize.

"Another thing is GPS systems," said Frank. "People would turn using a GPS system and they were not watching the roads and they would be turning down the railroad tracks. It has actually happened like 10 times, in the past couple of months."

From trespassing to criminal mischief members of the North

Tonawanda Police Department say in the next few months they will be on the tracks looking for people who shouldn't be there. Officers will also be checking for gates that are not working properly.

"There is a lot of graffiti on the buildings back there," said Frank. "What we are going to do is, starting around May or June, we will be sending our patrols out there to monitor it and we will be issuing tickets for trespassing. We have an affidavit through CSX to do that."

Frank says in the meantime he will be handing out pedestrian safety brochures. Taking one more step to help make the tracks and the residents in North Tonawanda a little safer.



## Spreading Child Abuse Awareness in North Tonawanda

### Brendan McDonough

According to the most recent statistics, one in five children across the United States will be a victim of child abuse. To help lower those numbers and educate people about the dangers of child abuse members of the Erie/Niagara Sunrise Exchange Club were out in full force this weekend spreading awareness.

"Every April we have special promotions," said Susan Gilbert, Event Organizer. "Like on Monday we ask people to wear blue for child abuse, we lit up the Peace Bridge and we lit up the Electric Tower for awareness of child abuse."

April is child abuse prevention month and on Saturday volunteers were handing out brochures and talking to people across North Tonawanda about ways to prevent this growing problem.

"Nationwide it is a big issue," said Gilbert, "and it can be either

mental, physical, it is a big problem here in our area."

She says Education is the key. "We try and make people aware of it and there are agencies that people can go to for help," said Gilbert. "Things like social services, we also have a web site, where people can go to and look for help."

If you would like more information on child abuse you can contact the Erie-Niagara Sunrise Exchange Club at 716-381-5087.



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# Pinewoods Park Easter Egg Hunt



**By: Brendan McDonough**

Kids were searching under rocks and leaves to find eggs this past weekend in North Tonawanda. It's all part of the annual Easter Egg Hunt at Pinewoods Park.

On Saturday hundreds of people from North Tonawanda and beyond gathered to take part in the event. This year there were more than four thousand eggs hidden for children to find. In addition to eggs there was also a petting zoo for the kids to enjoy.

"This year the Alpaca's are here and we have a photo booth for kids to take pictures with the Easter Bunny," said Pam Hogan, Event Organizer. "We have increased the amount of eggs by a thousand and it is a great family-friendly event."

In addition to regular eggs there was also golden eggs filled with a host of unique prizes. The event is sponsored by the Park Department and was free for kids twelve and under to participate in.

For more than thirty years organizers have been holding the event. This year a toddler area was added. The eggs were scattered everywhere for kids to try and find.

"Half of the eggs have little pieces of candy and the other half has toys in them," said Hogan. "Some of the eggs even have little signs that say come get a free chocolate sucker and come get a chocolate bunny. The chocolate bunnies were donated by Platter's Chocolates."

## EASTER EGG HUNT



# MOURN FOR THE DEAD FIGHT FOR THE LIVING

Organize and Mobilize for Safe Jobs  
Workers Memorial Day - April 28



## Fighting for All Workers on Workers' Memorial Day

Each year on April 28th, we observe Workers' Memorial Day in both the U.S. and Canada as a way to remember all the workers who have been killed or injured on the job. The day serves as a reminder of why the entire labor movement continues to fight for strong safety and health protections for workers.

At this moment in 2019, the safety and health of workers stands on uncertain ground. The number of OSHA inspectors is the lowest it's ever been, and the agency has recently made a habit of rolling back and weakening regulations that protect workers. The EPA finally banned methylene chloride, a deadly chemical found in paint strippers, but made exemptions for commercial operators, leaving workers at risk. And as safety-conscious companies look to leading indicators as a way to reduce injuries, safety and health professionals are still forced to rely on an annual report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics that lags a full year behind what's actually happening on jobsites across the country.

Yet despite all that, the number of workplace fatalities in the U.S., including those in the construction industry, decreased slightly from 2016 to 2017. That's the good news. However, hidden in that good news are many troubling statistics for construction workers. Fatal falls are the highest they've been in 26 years. Unintentional overdoses on the job went up by at least 25 percent for the fifth year in a row. All told, 5,147 workers were killed on the job in 2017. Nineteen percent of those workers (959) were in the construction industry, and 259 of those workers were construction laborers. Every year, the fatality numbers change only slightly – 2017's decrease was less than one percent. The bottom line remains the same: about 5,000 workers in the U.S. are killed on the job every year. It is human nature to get used to a situation the longer we see it, but this isn't a situation we should be accepting as normal. Going from 970 construction workers killed in 2016 to 959 killed in 2017 is not the kind of progress anyone should be satisfied with.

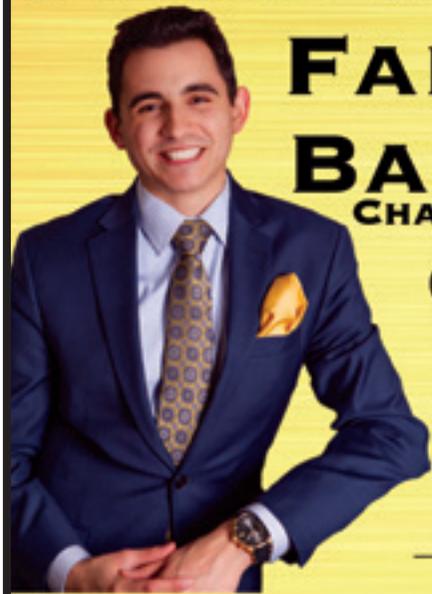
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