



**Dyster low morale formula
puts department heads in fear
of losing their jobs**

NIAGARA FALLS REPORTER

THE TRUTH IS ALWAYS FAIR

FREE

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FREE

**Council member Kristen Grandinetti seeks ban on feeding
stray cats, possibly licensing cat owners**



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Council Tables Grandinetti's Anti-Cat Amendments to Animal Law

Mike Hudson

This week the Niagara Falls City Council tabled legislation introduced by Council member Kristen Grandinetti that would have tightened regulations for cat owners in the city, and made feeding a stray cat a criminal offense.

Grandinetti's bill seeks to amend Chapter 701 of the Codified City Ordinances, which governs ownership of dogs, cats and other animals.

Most of the changes she recommends have to do with cats.

"No cat shall be fed, sheltered, maintained or harbored that is not domesticated," Grandinetti's proposed new rules state. "No person shall harbor, maintain or feed any unlicensed or stray cat."

Under the new rules, cats would no longer be permitted to "interfere with garbage receptacles," or to "defecate, urinate or dig" on any property not belonging to the cat owner.

Exactly what constitutes a "domesticated" cat is not spelled out.

Additionally, there is currently no provision for licensing cats in Niagara County, and it is uncertain whether Grandinetti's legislation is designed to open the door for licensing in the city.

In any event, she's also provided a mechanism that would allow neighbors to inform on one another.

"Any person who observes or has knowledge of a cat violating any provision of this chapter may file a signed complaint under oath with the animal control officer or the city specifying the objectionable conduct of the cat and the name and address, if known, of the person harboring said cat."



In Niagara Falls, under Council woman Kristen Grandinetti's proposed legislation, someone who left an open can of Friskies on the back steps at night would be risking fines and jail time.

The new rules are replete with penalties for non compliance, with fines of up to \$250 and jail sentences of up to 15 days for repeat violations.

Last September, Amy Lewis, Niagara County Director of Niagara County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, made headlines when she took to the airwaves to make a startling claim. There are more feral cats, 60,000, in the city of Niagara Falls than there are people, [49,000] she stated. While many doubted her allegation, she never took it back.

In a national survey by the Humane Society of the United States, it is estimated there 60-100 million feral cats in the U.S., with approximately 17 million people feeding about half of them.

Grandinetti's proposed rule change flies



Many animal activists feed feral cats believing it is humane to do so. Are they enabling an exploding cat population?

in the face of much recent legislation designed to protect animals and enhance animal rights. In New York, a bill is currently making its way through the state Legislature that would make cat declawing illegal, for example.

Many animal activists feed stray and feral cats employing a method known as

TNVR [Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate and Release], a process which is meant to ultimately reduce feral cat populations. Many, if not most animal activists believe in feeding the released feral cats after they are neutered.

This would be illegal under Grandinetti's proposal.

NIAGARA FALLS REPORTER

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Mayor Dyster Talks for 90 Minutes Says Absolutely Nothing At All



Mayor Paul Dyster spent more than \$700,000 of public money on a series of Hard Rock concerts. Happily, he got to emcee many of those concerts.

Mike Hudson

Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster is a man of many unique abilities. Just this past Monday, for example, he spoke before the city Council for an hour and a half without saying anything at all.

“It really was astounding,” said one awestruck witness. “He just went on and on!”

Ostensibly, the mayor’s stem winding oratory was supposed to be a presentation of his 2016 casino spending plan, a strategy recommended by the city Council, city Comptroller Maria Brown and the Niagara Falls Financial Advisory Panel.

Last month, the Council formally asked Dyster to make the presentation in a measure that passed 5-0.

Dyster began with an interminable history of casino spending in the city. He failed to note that, after spending nearly \$200 million in casino cash on what were supposed to represent “economic development” projects, not one well paying private sector job has been created here, and apparently forgot to mention the insanely expensive Hard Rock Café concert series, the disastrous Holiday Market or the completely failed Isaiah 61 Project (See related story) as examples of his sound fiscal policies regarding the casino cash.

He did allude multiple times to the further need to approach New York’s executive branch to appeal for more local casino dollars, though when Republican state Sen. Rob Ort proposed exactly that a few months ago, the mayor was mute on the matter.

After delivering his sanitized history of casino cash spending, Dyster made sure that the Council members understood that anything he said was non-binding, legally and administratively. Dyster characterized it as an unapproved “draft executive item.”

Rather than a list of future projects and dollar figures, as the Council the Financial Advisory Panel and the city Comptroller’s office had asked for, Dyster offered a vague set of “decision criteria” that he claimed would be used to evaluate the potential future uses of casino funds.

Councilman Charles Walker, normally a staunch supporter of the mayor, questioned Dyster on the complete lack of specifics. Dyster hemmed and hawed. He couldn’t tell the Council what he was going to do with the money, he said, because he didn’t even know how much money there was going to be.

He stopped just short of saying the dog ate his homework.

“We still don’t have a plan.” Walker said. Without itemized figures, “like we do in our regular city budget,” the presentation was meaningless, he added.

Dyster will never tell the Council or anyone else what he is going with the casino money in advance. It would cramp his style. If he set out a budget for the spending at the beginning of the year as the city does with the

general budget, he couldn’t toss money at the Aquarium of Niagara for new penguin habitat or Community Missions because they got behind in their taxes.

He couldn’t play the big shot at the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center’s Art of Beer festival or at the Niagara Blues Fest.

Because for Dyster, spending the casino cash seems largely to be about ego gratification, a topic that – to him – is not open to discussion.

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Isaiah 61 Struggles Despite More Than \$1 Million In Public Funding

Mike Hudson

Although the city, state and various charitable organizations have thrown over \$1 million at the Isaiah 61 Project since its inception in 2012, little has been accomplished to date.

Isaiah 61 is a not for profit which receives local and state funding to rebuild rather than tear down vacant city houses that was launched with much fanfare four years ago. The one house rehabbed by organization workers, at 2215 Whitney Ave., is currently listed as “off the market.”

Niagara Falls Community Development received a \$132,000 Western New York Regional Economic Development Council grant at the end of 2013 for Isaiah 61 to rehab a city owned fire hall at 3721 Highland Avenue. Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster threw in another \$500,000 in casino money, and the project also received a federal Housing and Urban Development Block Grant of \$50,000.

The building is supposed to become the North End Trades Training Facility and the headquarters for Isaiah 61 and its building materials storage facility.

But except for the fact that the windows



A small mistake - not putting up support beams in the attic led to this Centre Ave. home's collapse. Thankfully the Isaiah 61 students had left the building before the home fell down.

are now covered with plywood, the old fire hall looks no different than it did when the city planned to develop it for Isaiah 61 nearly three years ago.

Community Development Director Seth Piccirillo told the city Council that asbestos abatement had to be completed and a roof needed to be reconstructed, but that work should be completed in four to five months.



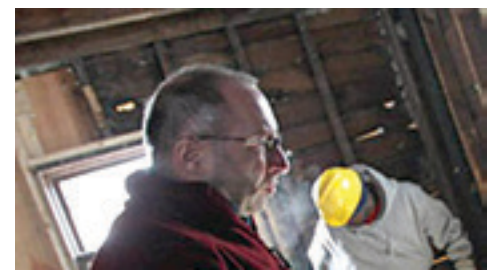
More than \$600,000 will be spent to fix up an old abandoned fire hall to teach the half dozen or so Isaiah 61 students who attend classes where they learn how to fix homes. Rev.

He said \$168,872 has been spent on the project so far.

The troubled history of the Isaiah 61 Project in Niagara Falls would be comical but for the fact that so much money has been wasted on it. Piccirillo attempted to deflect criticism by saying that it really was a job training program first, and a building rescue program second. As a training program, it has been a success, Piccirillo claimed.

Last year, a single family home at 1338 Centre Ave. in Niagara Falls collapsed after a crew from Isaiah 61 removed the bearing walls, sources say. The house was the third home Isaiah 61 has worked on in the three years they have been getting city, state, and federal subsidies to renovate homes in Niagara Falls.

In 2014 the Reporter learned that Isaiah 61's Hyde Park Blvd headquarters, store and school where they teach unemployed people building trades skills was condemned by the city because of code violations. City inspectors found that Isaiah 61 had electrical service for their store and school provided to them by using extension cords plugged into a building next door.



James Haid founded Isaiah 61 in Niagara Falls then suddenly left the organization just after Mayor Paul Dyster arranged to have a \$500,000 grant approved to develop a training center.

Also in 2014, Isaiah 61 founder and executive director James Haid quit the organization and moved to Utica for a position as director of the Utica Gospel Rescue Mission, a homeless shelter. Haid had either deliberately deceived Mayor Paul Dyster or that Dyster knew at the time he secured the \$500,000 in funding from the Council for the fire hall project that Haid had planned to leave town, but that Dyster withheld that information from the council since Haid was Isaiah 61's driving force and sole public face.

Despite Haid's departure, Dyster kept the \$500,000, along with another \$132,000 grant, and said the project would continue. During Haid's tenure the not for profit received grants from the New York State Power Authority (\$157,000), Community Development (\$70,000) and the John R. Oishei Foundation (\$200,000). The \$360,000 in federal, state, city and private grant money was used by Isaiah 61 to pay salaries and to rehab a single residential property.

Since Haid's departure, Piccirillo has assumed the role of spokesman for the organization.

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The remedy for weakness is

not brooding over weakness,

but thinking of strength...

~ Swami Vivekananda



Artist's conception: While Rev Haid is gone, and no longer operating Isaiah 61, many bright people - such as the one pictured above - would love to continue to operate the project.

See Yourself As Others See You? In Falls, Parking, Crime, Taxes, Health Problematic

Mike Hudson

Niagara Falls, already Number One in so many categories – is now poised to take the top spot in a competition to see which American city has squandered the most valuable real estate for use as surface parking lots, which often sit empty for large parts of the year.

Streetsblog is an online daily news source connecting people to information about sustainable transportation and livable communities. Since 2006, Streetsblog has held a competition – called “Parking Madness” – set up in a similar fashion as the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament.

Starting off with 16 cities and using aerial photographs and maps, readers vote to decide which municipality has wasted the most space of surface parking lots. The winner of the competition receives the coveted Golden Crater Award, which would look swell on Mayor Paul Dyster’s mantelpiece.

And that is well within the realm of possibility. Last Friday, Niagara Falls won a blowout 149-21 vote over Rutland, Vermont, after having achieved a similarly impressive win over Ann Arbor Michigan a week earlier.

Downtown Niagara Falls has advanced into the Final Four, competing now against Federal Way in Washington D.C., and Fair Park in Dallas. Ongoing voting will decide whether Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, or Louisville, Kentucky, deserves the remaining spot in the Final Four.

“Mere blocks away from the scenic grandeur of the falls is a stupendous array of surface parking lots, interspersed with hotels, convention buildings, and a casino,” Streetsblog wrote of the situation here. “In a hopeful sign for Niagara Falls, however, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that the state will remove a two-mile stretch of highway that impedes access between



As one can see from the aerial picture, much of downtown Niagara Falls is being utilized for parking. Parking is in demand for three months of the year, during the tourist season; the rest of the year, the lots are mostly empty.

downtown and the riverfront.”

Streetsblog has covered the movement to transform America’s cities by reducing dependence on private automobiles and improving conditions for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders. The website has broken important stories about transit funding, pedestrian safety, and bicycle policy for the past decade.

Arcane topics like parking, street resurfacing and zoning are Streetsblog’s bread and butter.

“This parking catastrophe can hardly be separated from Niagara Falls’ overall decline,” the blog explained. “In the early part of the 20th century, Niagara Falls was known as the ‘Honeymoon Capital. Many people would hop right off the train onto Falls Street.”

The majestic old train station, torn down during the infamous Urban Renewal program here in the 1970s, once stood where the Seneca Niagara Casino parking ramp is now located. Mayor Paul Dyster’s proposed new train station – which will be ready for use by June but still does not have a contract with Amtrak binding the railroad to service it – is

located about two miles away, in one of the most desolate and blighted neighborhoods in the city.

Should Niagara Falls be able to beat out Dallas and Washington D.C. in Streetsblog’s Parking Madness competition, it will not be the first time the city has finished first.

According to the state Financial Restructuring Board for Local Governments, Niagara Falls is the most highly taxed municipality in all of New York in comparison with actual property value.

The city’s fiscal situation is so out of hand that the mayor has asked the city Council to approve asking the Restructuring Board for a bailout that will effectively place finances under adult supervision.

And a 2014 study by the popular website MyLife found the city to be the “most dangerous” in the state, based on a detailed analysis of violent and property crime.

The MyLife study also pointed out that the ratio of registered sex offenders to upright citizens in Niagara Falls was the highest in New York.

The number of sexual predators, many of whom target children, has grown exponentially in Niagara Falls since Mayor Paul Dyster took office. In 2007, the year he was sworn in, there were just 82 registered sex offenders living in the city. As of last week, that number had jumped to 183, according to the real estate website homefacts.com .

The results of the MyLife study were confirmed by an independent analysis conducted last year by the website RoadSnacks. Despite the use of different methodology, Niagara Falls placed first as the “most dangerous place in New York.”

And, in January of this year, the prestigious Insurance Journal reported that the city was the 38th most dangerous place in the entire United States.

Poor health is another area in

which Niagara Falls can proudly claim a commanding position.

A report published by Kaleida Health in 2013 states that while the benchmark for cardiovascular disease mortality rate in the entire state is 289.2 per every 100,000 people, Erie County’s is 350.7 per 100,000 and Niagara County is 421.1 per 100,000.

That’s right, Niagara Falls is at the top of the heap when it comes to heart attack deaths in New York State.

The city is number two in teen pregnancy in the state, and also ranks at or close to the top in rates of lung cancer, diabetes and numerous other serious diseases.

The picture painted by the hard data is diametrically opposed to the rose colored statements of leaders like Dyster, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Sen. Charles Schumer, who often paint Niagara Falls as a garden spot on the move toward a better tomorrow (see related story).

If you’re reading this, it is likely you’re living in a shrinking city that bears the burden of being the most dangerous, most taxed and least healthy municipality in all of New York.

Ironically, the Streetsblog Parking Madness competition comes at a time when Dyster and the city Council are getting ready to squander nearly \$1 million to further restrict on-street parking through the use of meters, a move that will undoubtedly drive even more cars into the waste of space surface lots.

Except between Labor Day and Memorial Day, the nine months of every year when tourist district parking is no problem whatsoever.

There is an old adage, that you should try to “See yourself as others see you.”

In Niagara Falls, doing so isn’t pretty or uplifting. It is grim and reflects the quality of leadership the city currently enjoys and has had for decades.



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Falls Hierarchy At Odds With Outside Assessments Of Falls Sorry Condition

Mike Hudson

There are two sides to every story, so they say, and if you want to hear the side that completely goes against the grim portrayals of Niagara Falls that regularly appear in the national media or the statistically based rankings that show the city to be at the top of the heap when it comes to crime, taxes, poverty, heart attack deaths and many other bad things, you need look no further than the pronouncements of our elected and appointed officials, who get paid hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, it seems, to say that everything's OK here.

Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster is a case in point.

"In the last few years, we have managed to push aside our doubts and fears long enough to lay the foundation for a brand new beginning in Niagara Falls and the surrounding region," Dyster said in 2015. "The change that we said we wanted so badly, the change that we feared would never happen in our lifetimes, well, guess what? That change is happening now in our community."

He never got around to saying exactly what that change was, whether it was for the better or for the worse, but he seemed to be absolutely convinced of it.

"Right here, right now," he said, "the dollars are flowing and the projects are

advancing that are going to transform this community."

And then there is Seth Piccirillo, the city's youthful Community Development Director.

In 2012, Piccirillo introduced his Downtown Housing Incentive Program, a city funded program meant to attract college educated people to live downtown by paying off up to \$7,000 in student loans. The program, which has been rebranded Live NF, has been an utter disaster despite initial hoopla.

According to Piccirillo, Live NF would transform the city's Third and Fourth Street district between Niagara Falls and Pine Avenue into a kind of "Elmwood North," referring to the Elmwood Avenue section of Buffalo, which is allegedly "cool" and "hip."

"We're following some of the things that [Elmwood Village Association] did, but also we have some other tools and a lot of that is marketing," Piccirillo said in an interview with "Good Morning America." "The graduating class of 2013 will be our first real swing at it."

Piccirillo said the program would start out small.

"We're not talking city-wide. We're taking acres," he said. "There's no doubt in my mind that getting even 100 to 150 people could revitalize the neighborhood."

It turned out that even his modest expectations were wildly optimistic. By 2014, the program had but five participants,

yet Piccirillo remained buoyant.

"I think for something that was just an idea on paper just a few short years ago," he said, "it's working and it's accomplishing the type of personality change for our city that we're hoping for."

Councilwoman Kristen Grandinetti was an enthusiastic proponent of the Piccirillo plan to pay recent grads to come and live in Niagara Falls. She imagined a burgeoning arts and entertainment district that would rival the Champs de Elysee in Paris, France.

"Because of their lifestyle, They'll create a demand for restaurants and coffee shops," Grandinetti said of the new arrivals.

And Grandinetti would brook no criticism of city government when things didn't work out as expected.

"If you don't like where you are, MOVE. You are not a tree," the crabby council woman posted on a public Facebook forum.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has twice endorsed Dyster for reelection as mayor, also thinks Niagara Falls is in the middle of a historic comeback. Recently, he waxed eloquent about the opening of a new hotel here, a hotel not that much different from 20 others already here.

"Niagara Falls is one of New York's greatest tourism destinations and with the construction of best-in-class accommodation amenities, we are making it easier for the region to showcase its beauty to visitors from all ends of the globe," Cuomo said. "This project is an important step forward in the city's ongoing revitalization and one more reason why Western New York is a region on the move."

In 2013, he launched an open ended competition to attract entrepreneurs to the city in an effort to find the "best idea" anyone has to turn Niagara Falls around. Dyster was so enthusiastic about his powerful political ally's promotion that he agreed to help fund the contest with \$4 million of your casino cash revenue annually.

"With the launch of this competition, we are challenging talented designers and developers to dream up and propose grand ideas to transform the Downtown Niagara Falls area into a premier destination that will attract tourists and fuel private investment," Cuomo said. "This competition is a real opportunity for champions in the development and investment industries to face off right here in the Falls with the best ideas to be turned into reality. We are looking for creative and innovative projects that will spur private development and at the end of day, entice visitors to the area so that they will stay longer and spend more in the community. So while this competition is just beginning, we already know who the winners are and that is the people of Western New York."



Gov. Andrew Cuomo [center] promised in 2013 a new Niagara. It was tied in part to the tipping point Hamister hotel which has not been built largely because Cuomo's campaign contributor and developer Mark Hamister [left] does not have the financing to build it. Hamister has inflated the price of the proposed hotel by 100 percent in order to falsely qualify for more taxpayer funding. The new Niagara is much like the old Niagara.

The competition was launched in 2013 and, thus far, there have been no results whatsoever.

But still, nobody does cheerleading like John Percy, head of the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corp. and a man who is clearly at home with pom poms and tumblers.

When asked about the proposed dewatering of the American Falls, which resulted in a tourism disaster the last time



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St Francis of Assisi

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International Journalists Help Us See Ourselves As Others See Us

Mike Hudson

In our effort to see Niagara Falls as others see it, we've examined both the statistical rankings that regularly appear on internet websites devoted to such things and the views of community leaders whose livelihoods largely depend on making people think things are good or at least getting better (See related stories).

But to get the full picture, one must peruse the literature. That is, the depictions of our fair city that have appeared in the accredited, mainstream media, as reported by writers of solid credentials.

What we find is not pretty. Word pictures of a desolate and devastated landscape are common.

"Today, the city appears almost to be a shell," wrote Mark Hughes in the London Telegraph. "The streets are lined with boarded-up shops and derelict houses. Bars and restaurants are few and far between. Some neighborhoods are nearly empty."

Some have called the city a poster child for the decline of the Rust Belt in general.

"Once a hydropowered center of industry, Niagara Falls is now one of America's most infamous victims of urban decay, hollowed out by four decades of job loss, mafia infiltration, political corruption, and failed get-fixed-quick schemes," read an article in Bloomberg Businessweek.

Ginger Strand, author of *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power, and Lies*, called the place 'a history in miniature of wrongheaded ideas about urban renewal.'

"Niagara Falls, New York, is by general agreement a mess. The river above the Falls is lined with factories, many of them shuttered. Almost half the population and more than half the jobs have decamped since 1960, and it shows," Strand wrote. "Housing stock is crumbling, and the center city is a study in urban decay: empty lots, boarded-up businesses, foreclosure signs. The roads are potholed, the sidewalks cracked. Someone's usually pushing a shopping cart down the street. The area around the Falls is a jumble of failed attempts at urban renewal — a bankrupt mall, a foreclosed Native American museum, a shoddy row of cheap attractions, handmade signs and pushcarts selling samosas and souvenir sweatshirts."

"If you can figure out which way the



Writer Ginger Strand penned an entirely different view of Niagara Falls than elected officials describe.



riverfront is, you'll notice the view is blocked by a giant parking ramp and a smattering of hotels, not fancy ones, but the kind that try to temper their bland mediocrity with the word 'inn.' Days Inn. Comfort Inn. Quality Inn," she concludes.

The shocking reality of conditions here stuns vacationers, according to an article in the online magazine *Governing*.

"Whatever visitors imagine they'll find in Niagara Falls, New York, the reality is coarser. The Falls themselves remain a gem... but the rest of the city could be Detroit or Gary—an industrial town long past its

heyday and shackled by its economic and political history," the article states. "Beyond downtown stretch miles of chemical plants, some in use and others abandoned. Cracked and potholed streets lead to neighborhoods with houses that are shabby and overgrown or obviously deserted, blighted reminders that the city's population is half what it was a few decades ago."

Clearly, as seen through the eyes of trained journalists from around the world, Niagara Falls is not the city on the move so often depicted by leaders such as Mayor Paul Dyster, Councilwoman Kristen Grandinetti, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Sen. Charles Schumer.

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LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Filmmakers Celebrate 10 Years of The Buffalo Niagara Film Festival

> BY JORDAN CANAHAI

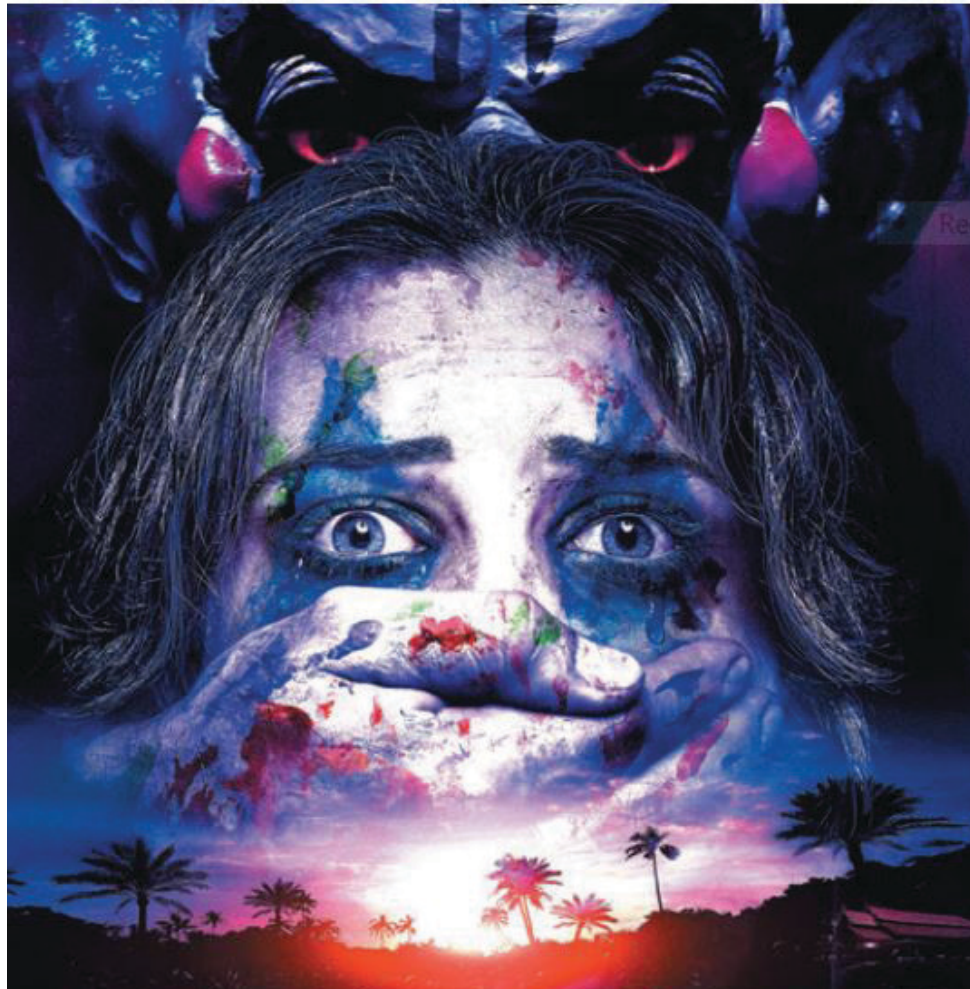
If you ask any dedicated filmmaker or professional in the movie industry to name the biggest film festivals in North America, you'd no doubt hear a lot of the same answers; Toronto, Sundance, New York, Telluride, etc. For the past 10 years it has been the dream of filmmaker and Western New York native Bill Cowell to make the Buffalo Niagara Film Festival a home-grown event worthy of being mentioned alongside those institutions. The upcoming 2016 festivities, which marks the events 10th anniversary, is set to take place next week from Wednesday, April 13th through Sunday, April 17th at the historic Tonawanda castle. Described as a "festival by filmmakers, for filmmakers," the BNFF has long been a great place for producers, directors, and screenwriters based on the East coast to network with industry professionals from around the world.

"Before we started people had always talked about doing a film festival in Buffalo but nobody had really gone through with it," said Cowell, "so I reached out to my contacts and said let's do this. It's been an awesome experience. Working with both long-time friends and new friends who are a part of it, everyone involved is really excited and dedicated to growing the festival."

Cowell and fellow organizers have worked hard this past year to ensure this year's festival is even more special than previous events, and they're proud to showcase a line-up that includes over 50 full length features as well as 40 shorts across a wide variety of genres from both local filmmakers and those throughout the country. Some titles, such as Rob Imbs' Game Changers and Emil Novak's Frankenstein's Patchwork Monster, may be familiar to Artvoice readers who have followed my coverage of our local independent film scene in the past year.

The launching of the BNFF's Main Events and Opening Ceremonies will take place Wednesday April 13th at the Tonawanda castle, a 38,000 square foot one-of-a-kind-beauty built in 1896, whose interior has been outfitted and set up to host three separate theaters for screenings.

Friday, April 15th will see producer and director Stanley Isaacs present the world premiere of his film It's Always About the Story: Conversations With Alan Ladd Jr. Using the man's own words to tell his story, the film offers a rare glimpse into the life of the renowned Academy award winning producer who gave the green light to films as beloved as Young Frankenstein, Star Wars, Alien, Chariots of Fire,



Still from The Incredible Adventures of Jojo

Blade Runner, The Right Stuff, Thelma and Louis, and Braveheart. Along with writing, directing, and producing, Isaacs is a friend of the BNFF and husband of Cheryl Boone Isaacs, current President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.

This day will also see the 20 year reunion premiere of Larry Bishop's 1996 independent cult film Mad Dog Time, whose all-star cast includes Diane Lane, Burt Reynolds, Richard Dreyfuss, Ellen Barkin, Jeff Goldblum, Gabriel Byrne, Billy Idol, and Rob Reiner. Bishop, who wrote, directed, and produced the film, will be present to debut behind the scenes footage, share memorabilia, meet with fans, and

discuss his experiences making the film. Bishop is an actor, the recipient of a BNFF Walk of Fame and the son of comedic movie and TV star Joey Bishop. Some of Larry Bishop's other film credits include Underworld, Kill Bill Vol. 2, and Hell Ride. Last year, Cowell drove 3,000 miles across the country to L.A. to attend a tribute party Quentin Tarantino hosted for Bishop at his New Beverly Cinema, where Cowell personally presented to Bishop a large-size painting of the actor by Buffalo artist Phillip Burke.


In keeping with the diverse festivities, Saturday, April 16th is Comic-Con Theme Day, offering

guests a chance to indulge their inner-superhero. It will include a full day of comic-con market space, special celebrity guest appearances, panel discussions, autograph signings, photo opportunities, world premieres, horror film screenings, and a fun-filled masquerade party involving entertainment, spirits, and themed costumes. Along with film screenings, BNFF has also offered various high-profile panels, seminars, and workshops to aspiring filmmakers seeking new insights for honing their craft. These workshops cover a wide spectrum of subjects, including screenwriting, production and distribution, women in film, and more. This year includes a special focus on animation, offering an animation panel Thursday and an in-depth two day animation workshop Friday and Saturday and given by professionals from some of the country's top animation schools. By the end of both 12-hour workshops, participants will have completed their own 30-second animation.


The final day of the festival, Sunday, April 17th will see the premiere of two very special films paying tribute to the troops and is set to coincide with the BNFF Fallen Soldier Event. The first film, Kaziah the Goat Woman, concerns beloved American artist and goat rancher Kaziah Hancock, who has used her extraordinary talents to paint over 1,530 portraits of fallen soldiers and over 3200 paintings total with a couple of mother artists within her organization. These paintings are gifts to their families. The second film, Beyond Glory, follows acclaimed actor Stephen Lang (Avatar, Conan, Tombstone) as he recounts the ten year odyssey behind his one-man show about eight Medal of Honor recipients, and will feature Lang and director Larry Brand in attendance for a post-screening Q & A.

The Fallen Soldiers ceremony is a special part of the BNFF honoring families of fallen soldiers from the Iraq War with Hero portraits painted by Hancock and presented to their loved ones. In attendance will be Staff Sgt. Timothy Payne, a wounded local Army Airborne soldier and recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from President Obama. Other special celebrity guests and presenters who will be honoring the heroes before announcing the 2016 BNFF award winners include Lang, Bishop, Isaacs, Frank Dux, Jon Van Ness, and others. A former armed forces member himself, Cowell has long been passionate about the cause.

"Four years ago I hosted an event at the Rapids Theater about Hancock, a woman who has dedicated herself to painting every fallen soldier of the Iraq



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Still from Sound of Tears

War, and we commemorated her 1,000th painting. At the same time I had just seen a documentary film called If I Should Fall made by a Canadian soldier and filmmaker about his wartime experiences and who tragically died while serving in Afghanistan. I reached out to Hancock and asked her if she would paint a portrait of him along with other local fallen soldiers, and it's been an honor to work with her. Brethren are brethren, and the men who serve our country make it possible for us to be free to pursue our careers in the arts" says Cowell.

A special highlight of the BNFF has always been its Walk of Fame, which honors the most celebrated of filmmakers for their contributions to the festival and the arts as a whole. Past recipients of the award include William Fichtner, Tom Sizemore, Evander Holyfield, Michael Madsen, Larry Bishop and Barry Kivel. Those being honored this year include Lang, alongside grandmaster martial artist Frank Dux (the true-life inspiration for Jean-Claude Van Damme's hugely successful Bloodsport) and actor Jon Van Ness (The Natural, Brubaker, The Postman Always Rings Twice, The Hitcher). The BNFF's 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient will be industry legend and Cowell's close friend Dick Delson- the writer, publicist, and strategist for numerous Golden Globe, Oscar, and Presidential campaigns. Delson has been credited with over 300 Academy Award Nominations and over 100 wins between all his clients over the years, having campaigned for American Graffiti, Jaws, Rocky, Lord of the Rings, Air Force One, Chicago, Gangs of New York, and hundreds more.

The BNFF is also going to include some major announcements on several new films in development that will be shot locally with some major stars and talent, and produced by Cowell and others. While not much can be divulged at the moment, Cowell could confirm some of his upcoming projects include a

film about Native American history, a feature-length animation, and a prequel to Bloodsport, which is to be written and directed by Larry Bishop, with Cowell and Frank Dux Producing and assisting with the story.

Cowell also has plans to reveal a new concept feature in tribute to Quentin Tarantino, as well as future inclusions into the BNFF Walk of Fame and commemorative BNFF Monument.

With the backdrop of Niagara Falls and the region's vast wine country, the BNFF has always offered guests the perfect setting for a weekend of food, fun, and films. There will be a full bar with sponsored beers, wines, and spirits, along with almost any kind of food and snacks available during all BNFF festival activities and events. All this ensures even non-professionals and casual movie-goers are guaranteed a great time during the whole event, while being able to support their community's art scene and our filmmakers.

For Cowell, the goals of the BNFF are an extension of his own as a Western New York producer and filmmaker, which is to provide opportunities to local filmmakers, expanding the region's growing film industry. "I've already helmed a few smaller productions here," said Cowell, "I can get things done in Niagara Falls and Buffalo way cheaper than anywhere in New York and L.A. I've been successful with negotiating... It's been really satisfying to hear such positive feedback from filmmakers, especially from some of the more famous individuals who have been a part of the event. This is just the start, we're gonna have a lot more film projects happening here going forward."

All show times and events including future updates within the next few days can be found on the website www.thebnff.com



Still from The Incredible Adventures of Jojo

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: BILL COWELL

An established writer, producer, and director as well as founder and President of the Buffalo Niagara Film Festival, few individuals have worked as hard to expand the film industry of Western New York as Bill Cowell. The Niagara Falls native's passion for the arts can be traced back to his childhood years spent being mentored by his Grandfather and Niagara Falls pioneer Charles Martino, for whom Cowell credits his creativity, artistic abilities, business mind, and sense of honor. Before pursuing a career in filmmaking, Cowell enlisted in the United States Navy when he was 18, where he traveled the world aboard the Aircraft Carrier USS Midway as a specialist. "I don't think I chose filmmaking, I think filmmaking chose me. I was always piss and vinegar when I was young, always doing something to not channel my energy properly. What I found was so cool about films, every project is so unique and challenging, I've finally found the perfect creative outlet to channel my energy towards" says Cowell.

Before founding the Buffalo-Niagara Film Festival Cowell worked as a screenwriter and producer and director on various independent productions. One of Cowell's earliest collaborators was a young sound mixer named Thomas Curley, whom Cowell gave his first professional gig to when he hired him on an independent film titled Raindrops from 2000. Last year, Cowell received a call from Curley; "Bill, thanks so much for giving me my first job!" said Curley. "I just won an academy award for best sound mixing on Whiplash!"

Cowell would go on to work on other projects like the documentary The Natural: The Best There Ever Was, about the making of the classic Buffalo-based sports drama, featuring interviews with director Barry Levinson, star Robert Redford, and others involved in the film's production, including BNFF Walk of Fame recipient actor/director Barry Kivel.

"He's totally into the craft of filmmaking," said Kivel talking about Bill Cowell, "he's a tremendously talented filmmaker and screenwriter, as well as such a stand-up guy. He doesn't waiver on his word. If he reaches out to me to work on a project I'll always be there. He is the most stand-up individual I think I've met in the 30-plus years I've been working in the industry. I think what he's doing with this festival and growing it is creating a space where likeminded filmmakers are

brought together; people are coming from all over the country to be there. It's a very positive space where everyone is exchanging ideas and working together to improve their craft. He's giving back to the city of Buffalo, and he's nurturing the film community. This is a tough business, and he's just a great human being who's doing a lot for the industry."

Others in the industry whom I spoke with echoed Kivel's sentiments regarding Cowell, including 2016 BNFF Walk of Fame recipient Larry Bishop. "I first met Bill Cowell in 2013 when he invited me and Michael Madsen to the festival to screen our film Hell Ride, which I wrote, directed, and starred in and which Quentin Tarantino produced. I had a great time. I thought Bill was a world class person and we kept in touch. About a year ago Quentin held a screening event featuring five of my films and I invited Cowell to be there. Not only did he show up, he also brought a huge Phillip Burke painting of myself with the Rat Pack as a gift. [Larry's father Joey Bishop was a member of the group of Las Vegas entertainers known as The Rat Pack, which included Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Steve Lawrence, and Sammy Davis, Jr.] This thing was the size of my living room! He's one of the all time stand up guys, and I'm looking forward to collaborating with him on future films" says Bishop.

Looking forward, Cowell plans to continue to nurture the relationships he's forged in the industry, while also realizing as many projects as possible. A dream project which he wrote and has hoped to direct for many years now is a film titled The Magic Shoe, a fantasy family film about a dancing, storytelling grandfather who discovers a magic shoe at the World's Fair in the 1940s The late James Garner was once attached to star alongside Diane Lane and Helen Hunt, though the lead actor's declining health problems lead to the production being halted indefinitely.

Whatever the future has in store for Cowell, there's no doubt that he'll continue to do everything he can to enrich the filmmaking scene in Western New York. Aspiring filmmakers of all backgrounds who are based in the region will not want to miss the opportunity to be a part of the Buffalo Niagara Film Festival's growing legacy, both at next week's event and for many more to follow in the coming years.



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City Hall Morale Plunges As Dyster Misses Own Deadline For Reevaluation

Mike Hudson

Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster suggested last week that employees might perform better with a veritable sword of Damocles hanging over their heads.

Despite running on a platform that touted his leadership skills in assembling a team of the “best and the brightest” during last year’s election, once he was safely returned to office Dyster turned around and told all exempt [non union] employees that he’d praised for over 8 years that they needed to resubmit their job applications and write a letter explaining why he should keep them on.

Dyster campaigned on his successes and his “moving forward”.

The reevaluation, he said, would be complete by the end of January, but here it is April and there’s still been no word.

“There’s some people who believe that that’s an incentive to throw at you the best they have because they’re being evaluated,” he told the Niagara Gazette last week when asked how long the process might ultimately take.

A few things are certain. The mayor’s secretary, Nick Melson, who worked on the Dyster campaign after performing in a similar capacity for former state Rep. Francine DelMonte and running a losing campaign himself for the county Legislature, will be elevated to some as yet undescribed “leadership position” within the administration and get a raise said to be in the \$20,000 a year range, which will bring his salary above \$60,000 a year.

It raises the question: will Melson’s new job description be the same as the City



How curious: When Mayor Paul Dyster campaigned for reelection his motto was “moving forward together” and he used a fast forward button symbol. Now that he has been reelected Dyster suggests that his department heads have been holding him back.

Administrator? If so, why does the city need both positions?

Also due for raises are two other Dyster loyalists, city Council Secretary Bridgette Myles and Cynthia Ransom, who serves as secretary to the nearly invisible City

Administrator Donna Owens.

When asked why the process is taking so long, Dyster hemmed, then he hawed.

There will be “one announcement that covers a variety of different topics, rather than information dribbling out,” Dyster said.

Talking openly about his plans now would “create more problems than advantages.”

But in the vault that is his mind, he knows what he is going to do, the mayor added.

“That doesn’t mean I haven’t long since made decisions about these things,” he said. “We’re working intensely on this and it’s not done.”

All of this mysterious intrigue strikes many as strange, given that the mayor has had two terms in which to assemble his administration and, during the November election campaign, told anyone who would listen what a great job his people were doing.

The sudden turnaround has some in City Hall concerned. What about those in the administration who have actually been candid about the dire conditions in the city? Whose job is safe and whose is not? Some are worried about being let go.

Dyster’s four month “reevaluation” does nothing to address the most glaring problem the administration faces, the lack of a city engineer. Sources say the paranoia at City Hall is palpable, and add that morale has never been lower.

It’s business as usual for Dyster, who has thus far been unable to reach an agreement with Amtrak to use the new \$44 million railroad station he built, or to convince campaign contributor Mark Hamister that his stalled hotel project downtown is making the administration look ridiculous. Or how will Dyster plug the \$12.5 million spending gap with dwindling casino cash?

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Artist's conception: A Washington DC Hamister Hotel. Just as the Hamister Hotel to be built just 300 feet from the entrance of the Niagara Falls State Park was said to be the tipping point for the redevelopment of all of Niagara Falls, a new proposed Hamister Hotel next to the Washington Monument might be the tipping point for the nation's capitol.

When the Niagara Hamister hotel was first announced it was supposed to be a luxury hotel. After Hamister got millions in promised subsidies, it was downgraded to a mid-scale roadside type hotel. Now it looks like it won't be built at all.

Maybe Hamister could get millions by promising a luxury hotel in DC, then downgrade it to something cheaper to build.

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Chiropractors like Mark Del Monte are Revolutionizing the Way We Think About Wellness

Lauren Ricchiazzi

Sometimes we want the quick fix – the feel better now but pay later approach that has characterized much of modern medicine and led to a culture of over-drugging patients that often exacerbates, prolongs, and compounds problems.

Those who insist that there is a better way are often seen as rebels, trouble makers, round pegs in square holes – who dare to question the most respected and moneyed profession of our day. They insist that the field of medicine is entirely wrong and that we should instead treat the underlying cause of problems rather than simply treating symptoms.

There is profound brilliance – even beauty – in that assertion: that wellness is a normative state and that the objective of treatment should correct the root of bodily dysfunction. Too much of medicine, they say, is about the momentary relief of pain and the ongoing sale of dangerously addictive drugs (often with harmful side effects that are damaging in the long term). More cynical critics would call it drug dealing.

Dr. Mark Del Monte, celebrating 30 years as the region's leading chiropractor, has changed many lives and has improved the quality of life of even the most challenged patients.

Born and raised in Niagara Falls, Dr. Del Monte moved back to his hometown after attending the prestigious Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, where the field was born in 1895. Back then, BJ Palmer hypothesized that manual manipulation of the spine could cure disease – a theory that Dr. Del Monte wholeheartedly embraces.

More than 10,000 patients have benefited from Dr. Del Monte's work since first opening his office doors in 1986. He's performed more spinal adjustments than most people can count – and has done so without the cost (or destructive impacts) of surgery or pills.

"It should be tried first ahead of drugs and surgery," Dr. Del Monte says, perhaps stating the obvious for many, but advice that sometimes falls on stubborn ears.

John Pallaci spent most of his career working at the Goodyear Tire factory, often performing repetitive and strenuous tasks that wore the body. Retired and feeling the effect of those many years on the production line, he searched for help. His intense lower back pain eventually brought him to Dr. Del Monte in 2000.

It's been nearly 16 years and Mr. Pallaci's only prescription for that once grueling back pain is a single chiropractic session every two weeks. He has never had surgery and doesn't need pills.

"I'd recommend that anyone see him," Pallaci says about Dr. Del Monte. "It may seem like a slow process at first but it works. I felt better with every visit. I couldn't even stand up straight [before seeing Del Monte]."

Anne Palmer also suffered from lower back pain. She discovered Dr. Del Monte through a flyer in the mail. After her consultation she began a rigorous treatment of three sessions a week. After a month the treatment was shortened to twice a week; and now her once a week visit has restored a normalcy to her health and wellness.

Katherine Ruggiero, age 81, had a consistent pain in her neck and tried many traditional treatments but nothing worked. She refused to accept the pain so she turned to Dr. Del Monte.

"At first, I thought I couldn't afford treatment, but then I thought I couldn't afford not to," she recalls. She began treatment in September of 2015.

"I feel 100% better," she rejoices only six months later. "Everyone deserves to enjoy the miracle of better health."

Suffering from sciatic nerve damage, Linda Warren turned to Dr. Del Monte in December of 2015. Her pain was so unbearable that she couldn't sit upright on



When you're tired of being sick, go see Dr. Mark Del Monte.

Christmas Day. She lost two weeks of work because of the immobility. For the first time in her life she felt debilitated.

"By the third week of treatment almost all of my pain was gone," she reports.

Winnie Titus had hip problems that caused a shooting pain in her upper arm. In December of last year she met Dr. Del Monte and has experienced relief ever since.

"I feel good and the problem seems to be getting better," Titus says.

The treatment length can be very widely from patient to patient, but for John, Anne, Katherine, Linda, and Winnie their experiences are success stories. That they are able to function properly day to day is, in many ways, a miracle unto itself. Their quality of life – they themselves argue – is far greater than it would be if they were forced into a life of dependence on prescription drugs.

The first patient of spinal manipulation was Harvey Lillard, a partially deaf janitor in an Iowa office building, who noticed remarkable improvements in his hearing after only a few days of chiropractic treatments.

Since then countless people suffering from ailments as ranged as irritable bowel syndrome, whiplash, migraines, osteoarthritis, tennis elbow, dizziness, adult scoliosis, attention deficit disorder, hypertension, baby colic, carpal tunnel syndrome, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorders, kinetic imbalance, epileptic seizures, menstrual cramps, pelvic and back pain during pregnancy, and asthma have been helped.

While no chiropractor can guarantee that your body will heal specific symptoms or diseases – or even how many visits would be required to achieve pain relief, he or she can guarantee that when your body is free of nerve interference it will work better. Over 90% of patients receive favorable results. Rarely does a chiropractic patient report that it didn't provide pain relief.

For merely \$35 an office visit, Dr. Del Monte's services are affordable to people of all walks of life. Dr. Del Monte takes pride in making Niagara Falls a healthier city and protecting people from the complicated alternatives of dangerous prescription drugs that too often impose uncertain burdens on unsuspecting people during their most vulnerable moments.

Dr. Del Monte is a primary healthcare provider – making him accessible without a referral, script, or the directive of your medical doctor. Appointments are often made directly through his office at 716-285-0391.

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Friedrichs Ruling Victory for Workers and the Nation

The recent ruling in the Friedrichs case by the US Supreme Court affirms 40 years of legal precedent and marks a significant defeat to the billionaires who backed the suit and whose aim was and is to weaken and destroy the collective bargaining rights that have enabled generations of public sector workers to organize for better wages, benefits, and working conditions.

The Friedrichs case was an assault on the fundamental rights of millions of Americans in the public sector; including tens of thousands of dedicated and hardworking LIUNA members. Unions are required by law to bargain on behalf of every worker in a unionized shop, even if those workers opt not to join the union. As such, non-members receive the same higher wages (one study found that workers in unionized shops enjoy a wage premium of nearly 12 percent) and benefits enjoyed by their coworkers who belong to the union. Absent something else, this arrangement would create a free-rider problem, because individual workers have little incentive to join the union if they know they will get all the benefits of unionizing regardless of whether they reimburse the union for its costs. Eventually, unions risk becoming starved for funds and collapsing, causing the workers once represented by a union to lose the benefits of collective bargaining.

The narrowly decided victory underscores the crucial role of the President and the 2016 Presidential election in determining the future of the Supreme Court. Supreme Court appointees are a President's longest lasting legacy, making critical decisions in cases that affect millions of people for decades after a President has left office. With several spots on the Supreme Court expected to open up in the next few years, working men and women need someone in the White House who will appoint Justices ready to defend the right to organize.

Sal The Surgical Robot Celebrates Another Milestone



Pictured, from left: Dr. Bala Thatigotla, Medical Assistant Noel Fotus, Director of Surgical Services Shelly Meigs, R.N., and Surgical Technician Robert Abrams gather around SAL, a da Vinci robotic surgery system, to celebrate the 750th robotic surgery performed at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center.

"SAL" the Surgical Robot recently completed its 750th surgical procedure at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center.

The procedure was performed by Bala Thatigotla, M.D., M.R.C.S., F.A.C.S., the medical center's head of Minimally Invasive Surgery.

Under the leadership of Chief of Surgery Venkat Kolli, M.D., F.A.C.S., and Chief of Robotic Surgery Donna Feldman, M.D., F.A.C.O.G., Memorial introduced robotic surgery to the Greater Niagara region in 2012 with the purchase and implementation of the \$1.7 million da Vinci surgical system.

Specially trained surgeons using the da Vinci system completed their 100th procedure in 2012, their 300th procedure in 2014 and the 650th robotic assisted surgery late last summer.

SAL, which stands for Save A Life, was named by then fifth-grader Gabriella Baratta in a countywide naming contest for schoolchildren. To learn more about Memorial's Minimally Invasive Robotic Surgery Program, call (716) 278-4492.



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The Future Looks Awesome

Strong Finish Bodes Well For Next Year's Sabres

**Andrew Kulyk
& Peter Farrell**

To get a glimpse of exactly what Buffalo fans have to look forward to, maybe for years to come, one only had to watch last week's Saturday matinee at home against the Winnipeg Jets, won by Buffalo 3-2.

Newcomer and highly touted prospect Hudson Fasching, brand new in town after inking a contract with the Sabres, puts on a rush to the net from the faceoff circle to earn his first career NHL goal.

Come the third period, Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel each get a goal, erasing a 2-1 Buffalo deficit and getting the team the win. Want more enthusiasm? The "other" newcomer, defenseman Casey Nelson, notches his first NHL assist on the Fasching goal, and in subsequent games has been adding the points.

Eichel and Reinhart, along with forwards Ryan O'Reilly and Evander Kane, make four players who are in the 20 goal club, and all are under 25 years of age. We all want to forget the

horrific season that the Sabres had to endure that ended just a year ago – a shameful 54 point finish and a -113 goal differential. This year's Sabres are close to the 500 mark, and have shrunk that negative goal differential to the low teens. Still not acceptable for a playoff contender, but the strides they have made are substantial.

Could the Sabres have made a legitimate playoff run this season, where they sit approximately 14 points out of that coveted eight seed? Here are the missing pieces of the 2015-2016 Sabres puzzle. Fix these in time for next season, and long suffering Buffalo fans could once again be enjoying home hockey games well into late April and perhaps beyond.

-Your injured goaltender. Robin Lehner was touted as a true #1 starter. This is a team whose success has always been built around an elite goalie who can win games and steal games. Think Roger Crozier, Tom Barrasso, Domink Hasek and Ryan Miller. Lehner's bad luck happened on opening night, succumbing to injury and forcing coach Dan Bylsma to lead with Chad Johnson and rotating his back up goalie from Rochester. Lehner's return to

the crease and unlocking his potential will go a long way to making the Sabres competitive.

-More missing pieces. Tyler Ennis has but 3 goals and has been off the ice in all of 2016 due to injury. Hot rookie Zemgus Girgensons has had a disappointing sophomore year after being named an All Star last season, wondering if former coach Ted Nolan's style was more conducive for the young Latvian. And Matt Moulson? This former high flyer drew comparisons to Ville Leino for his shocking drop in scoring. The Sabres are saddled with his contract beyond this season. Can he regain his scoring touch?

-Your elite defense. The Sabres have a good crop of capable young defensemen. What is missing is that 1-2 tandem that can qualify for that "elite" level, the guys who can shut down the opposition, kill penalties and gobble up minutes. Rasmus Ristolainen and Mark Pysyk might reach that stage. Can General Manager Tim Murray find that missing piece to headline the defensive roster?

-Win shootouts. Like it or not, there are overtimes and shootouts in the NHL. The Sabres seemed to struggle a bit with the

new 3 on 3 overtime format early on, before catching on to the strategically different style of play. But their record in shootouts has been abysmal, winning just two this season, both against the lowly Toronto Maple Leafs, while dropping 7. Add 4 overtime losses and that amounts to lost points and lost opportunities to improve their spot in the standings. Absent the next shootout specialist like former Sabre Ales Kotalik, the Sabres need to ramp up their analytics on opposing goaltenders and do better.

There are other pieces. Breaking down last year's trade with Winnipeg in raw form, Zach Bogosian was the guy who replaced Tyler Myers, and in recent weeks has been playing much better and showing his potential. Marcus Foligno has been quietly adding to the scoresheet. Johan Larsson has been scoring key goals in key moments and is final emerging as a potential offensive threat on a consistent basis.

Can the Sabres break a five year playoff drought next season? The pieces are in place. And the future looks awesome.

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