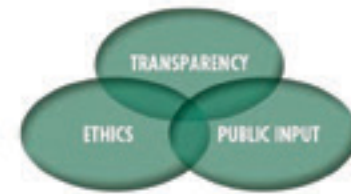




**Is it Dyster's
Train Station?**



**Where's
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Proposed City Wide Reassessment is Another Name for a Tax Increase

"If it cost \$10 million dollars more to run the city than it did eight years ago, then charge me."

With those words, retired school teacher, former city Council member and a member of the Niagara Falls Financial Advisory Panel, Frank Soda advocated for what would be in effect a 35.7 percent property tax increase for the City of Niagara Falls last week.

Do the math.

The entire amount currently collected by the city in property taxes annually is around \$28 million. City expenses have risen by about \$10 million a year while property tax revenues have remained the same since Dyster became mayor in 2008.

One of the main reasons property tax revenues are stagnant is not because Dyster has not raised taxes - he has - but because the tax base is shrinking requiring fewer taxpayers to pay the same amount of property taxes that were collected in 2007.

[The city's population in 2007 was estimated by the US Census Bureau to be about 52,000. Today it is estimated to be 49,000.]

In the past, Dyster has plugged the spending gap with casino cash, which represents 25 percent of the 25 percent of slot machine revenue generated at the Seneca Niagara Casino turned over to Albany each year.

With increased spending, combined with expensive-to-maintain projects such as the North Main Street courthouse and the new train station on Whirlpool Street, plus the fact that casino revenues are dwindling due to increased competition in the gaming industry, either expenses have to be cut, property taxes increased, or Dyster has to continue to use casino cash to plug the deficit.

Making the matter more complicated is that the decrease in casino revenue means plugging the gap, and spending the same amount of casino cash on Dyster-



Mayor Paul Dyster

proposed economic development projects, is impossible.

Dyster has suggested cutting casino funding of the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center and the Niagara Falls School District which amounts to about \$1.5 million per year.

Conversely, Dyster is not proposing cutting the \$1.5 million per year casino cash payment to support USA Niagara, a state agency whose general mission is to subsidize [politically connected] developers in downtown Niagara Falls. The \$1.5 million donated annually to USA Niagara from casino cash is used by USA Niagara to subsidize a private corporation to operate the conference center and stage events and parties on Old Falls St.

Dyster is also an advocate for funding the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation [he sits on the board of directors] with more than one million dollars per year in casino revenue [in addition to another \$1 million in bed tax money]. The NTCC has been criticized by this newspaper and others as being too



Council Chairman Andrew Touma

secretive for an intelligent evaluation of their success or lack thereof of their stated goal of "promoting, selling and marketing the county as a premier destination for meetings, conventions and leisure tourism."

According to figures provided by the state's Financial Restructuring Board for Local Governments, Niagara Falls is listed as the highest taxed municipality in New York State in proportion to the value of real estate being taxed.

New York State, according to various studies, is one of, if not the highest taxed state in the country. This supports an argument that Niagara Falls, NY is the highest taxed city in America - in proportion to the value of its real estate.

According to the City-data website, the median real estate property taxes paid for housing units with mortgages in 2013 was \$2,420. With a \$10 million annual increase in property tax revenues - the tax bill for the average property owner could jump to \$3,284.

To achieve the increase in revenue, Council Chairman Andrew Touma and his

advisory panel are not proposing an outright tax hike but to "reassess" all business and residential property citywide.

The tax rate would remain roughly the same, but since the property is assessed higher, the property owner pays higher taxes.

Reassessment entails the city assessor making an estimate on every property in accordance with his opinion of market value for that property and changing the assessment accordingly. Council Chairman Touma said he would like to see assessment values brought to 100 percent citywide.

"We're not where we need to be," he told the Niagara Gazette. "That's revenue that the city is losing out on."

Obviously, Touma's revenue lost by the city, is taxes not yet paid by property owners. There has been little discussion on cutting expenses.

Dyster has been using casino revenue for years to cover the deficit between tax revenues and expenses. He needed to use \$7.6 million in 2014, according to the results of an audit presented by the city's outside auditing firm. The latest budget required \$12.5 million of casino cash.

Yet casino cash has dipped from a high of \$21 million a year to about \$16 million anticipated this year.

Dyster wants to use what's left of the dwindling casino revenue for economic development projects [he selects] and wants to follow Touma's recommendation to raise taxes through a city wide reassessment.

This newspaper has been critical of most of Dyster's economic development projects as unneeded, as corporate handouts and wasteful. After eight years, little has been accomplished in terms of economic gain for the city.

In our opinion, giving casino money to developers and state agencies is not a better use of money than to keep that money in the hands of the people who live and operate businesses here.

The Men Behind The Proposed City Wide Tax Reassessment Can Afford Tax Increases, So What's The Problem?

NIAGARA FALLS REPORTER

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Council Chairman Andrew Touma, a teacher on a \$105,000 per year salary, plus health insurance and pension benefits, plus \$12,000 per year council salary, plus a \$10,000 per year health insurance opt out [\$127,000], Frank Soda, a retired teacher on a lifetime pension, plus social security, and stipends for service to the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, and Mayor Paul Dyster, with a \$78,000 mayoral salary, plus health insurance and pension benefits and a business in Tonawanda, can likely afford an increase in property taxes to cover the deficit spending of the Dyster administration.

By Niagara Falls standards these men are in the top 1 percent or income.

How about the other 99 percent - seniors on fixed incomes without pensions, workers in the private sector without deluxe government health insurance packages or six figure government salaries? How about landlords whose rents barely cover expenses?

What will they do if the city charges them a pro-rated share of what is needed to pay an additional \$10 million per year? Will these pay an extra \$50- \$100 month in taxes on their newly reassessed property for the cost of a city government that will neither cut expenses nor halt corporate subsidies?

Will rents be raised?; will people move?;



Frank Soda

will more houses be abandoned? Will some simply stay and suffer and do without something - cheaper food? One less night out per month? Will the end result be not an increase in revenue at all- just less people paying taxes with revenues remaining exactly the same and the deficit continuing?

Should the administration seek ways to cut the budget and halt corporate welfare before proposing a city wide reassessment that will hit beleaguered city taxpayers harder than they are already hit in the highest taxed city in America?

We Told You So! City's Been Abusing Taxpayer Casino Cash All Along!

Niagara Falls – My goodness, it's been a frustrating experience, preaching about the wasteful spending habits of the Dyster administration over the past five years while no one listens. But, better late than never.

People are finally noticing how Mayor Paul Dyster and the council have wasted casino revenue and delivered the city into deficit and debt.

On February 8 the city Financial Review Panel lectured the council and mayor as to the error of their casino revenue spending ways.

A February 11 Gazette guest view by Council Chairman Andrew Touma called for the city to adopt the recommendations of the finance panel.

A February 12 Niagara Gazette editorial took the mayor and council to task for plowing through the casino revenue like there's no tomorrow.

So here's the Dyster administration exactly where the Reporter said the Dyster administration was headed more than five years ago: Toward bankruptcy and higher taxes because mayor and council spent nearly \$100 million in casino cash.

The Reporter's been right all along but we don't want a pat on the back for our observational powers. What we'd like to see is a pledge from mayor and council that



the wasteful spending will end...an end to raises, consultant fees, stipends, lawyer fees, gifts to agencies, public artwork, business grants, Isaiah 61, penguins, overtime and so on. We want to see the \$100,000 salaries dialed back and an end to the "let the good times roll" attitude.

We have little faith of any of that happening because this is the administration that built a \$50 million courthouse featuring an annual debt payment of \$2.4 million and a \$44 million train station with no operating

budget. Nothing short of an intervention from Albany or from the NYS Comptroller could fix what ails the city finances.

The mayor and his compliant council are in way over their heads. There's but one meaningful question to be asked: How much of this wasteful spending was done deliberately and how much was done through incompetence? The answer to that question, dear readers, lies at the bottom of a \$100 million financial swamp.

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Senecas Move Toward New Convention Center 14 Years After State Gave Away City Convention Center For Casino

Mike Hudson

It's almost too funny. Back in 2002, the city handed its convention center over to the Seneca Nation of Indians, along with 52 acres of prime real estate in downtown Niagara Falls for one dollar.

Now, 14 years later, the Seneca's development agency is proposing to build a new convention center and entertainment venue in downtown Niagara Falls, and outlined its master plan to more than a dozen state, county, city and town leaders.

All of their earnings from the venue will likely be tax free as are their current hotels, restaurants and gift shops in the casino compound.

The Senecas only pay a percentage of the net profit on slot machines to Albany. All other enterprises – gaming included – are tax free.

Meanwhile, a planned citywide reassessment is expected to increase property taxes for residents of Niagara Falls. Since 2009, the city has raised its annual expenditures by roughly \$10 million a year while increasing its local tax levy by just a fraction of the amount.

Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster has plugged the gap by injecting revenue from the local share of the casino's slot machine take into the general fund, a fiscal practice endangered now by the dwindling amount of casino cash the city receives each year.

In addition to the convention center, the Senecas plan to put a 24-pump gas station on Seneca Niagara Casino property that will most likely bankrupt existing, American owned gas stations downtown. Because the Seneca do not have to pay taxes – property, sales or gasoline taxes — they can sell gasoline



The Senecas were supposed to build a casino and use the old convention center temporarily. Instead they found it advantageous to remodel the convention center into the casino.

cheaper than their taxpaying competitors.

Native American cigarettes, also untaxed, will be available at the gas station, which will put the hurt on existing convenience store operators as well.

These bombshells and more were contained in a master plan that Sean Caffery, chief executive officer of Seneca Development, with local officials at the county Industrial Development Agency headquarters.

"It's a place that can be completely transformed," he said of downtown Niagara

Falls, the deteriorating ghetto that surrounds the casino. "There's enormous interest."

For the record, Mayor Paul Dyster said he didn't think the Senecas were allowed to open a gas station. The state had made it clear in 2012 that a gas station was not in keeping with the Gaming Compact between the state and the Seneca Nation, Mayor Paul Dyster told The Buffalo News. That station would place local businesses at a "competitive disadvantage," he said.

Caffery countered by saying that gasoline would be offered at "market rate," whatever that is.

"There's a tremendous need for gas," said Caffery. "There was major demand by our clientele as well as the people coming into the area."

Niagara Falls Redevelopment (NFR) owns 142 acres of undeveloped land adjacent to the Seneca Niagara property. The footprint downtown is nearly three times the 52 acres that the Senecas own. The company has done nothing with the property since it began acquiring it in the late 1990s.

But Caffery said that the proposed new convention center would likely have to be located on property currently owned by NFR. Assemblyman John Ceretto said the company's cooperation would be central to the plan moving forward.

"If we don't try with the person who owns the property, then there's no discussion," Ceretto said.

Discussion or no, the state has previously invoked eminent domain on behalf of the Senecas in Niagara Falls, seizing private property, paying the rightful owners what it determines to be "fair market value" and turning the land over to the Indians, based on some pressing need.

"Our gaming corporation has identified this as a major need for the city," Caffery said of a new convention center. With potential costs running as high as \$250 million, an



Niagara Falls once had a convention center which helped support tourism in the shoulder season [fall and spring]. It was given away to the Senecas for \$1.

outside developer would be brought in to bankroll the project, he added.

Ceretto said a letter was being sent to NFR owner Howard Milstein and New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo encouraging the developer to work on behalf of what Ceretto characterized as the best interest of the city. Milstein served under Cuomo as Thruway Authority and Canal Corp. Chairman from 2011 to 2014 before resigning due to "business interests."

"As far as moving forward," Ceretto said, "(the Seneca Nation is) exploring the development of the area around the casino and also developing on Howard Milstein's property," he said.

The delicious irony in the Seneca proposal to build a convention center when it is their very presence in Niagara Falls that deprived the city of a convention center in the first place was not lost on commentators to the various Niagara Falls forums on Facebook.

"We need a convention center because we gave ours away? Makes sense. They didn't build any housing for employees downtown, which if I remember correctly was part of the casino deal in the first place," wrote Davin Strong. "I don't think that when we were told that the casino would revitalize downtown, what they meant was the surrounding area would continue to crumble until it was cheap enough for the Seneca Nation to buy it all."

Alisa J. Pucci concurred.

"I know we keep getting money but we should have had them build our convention center FIRST, before we gave away ours?" Pucci asked rhetorically. "I wonder why no one is saying anything from the city on this. Why do we always get suckered into BAD deals. What is in it for the POLITICANS? I would like to find out?"

Michael Murphy Pitarresi pointed out that, back in 2001, it was promised that no Seneca gas stations or smoke shops would be a part of the casino package.

"I remember clearly that Native gas stations and smoke shops were not to be allowed downtown," Pitarresi wrote. "Now it is becoming a great thing and a done deal? The State of New York, Cuomo, Milstein and the Senecas all screwed the citizens of Niagara Falls and this area so badly in the 'legalized casino gambling' deal. This is just insult to injury!"

Ceretto remained upbeat.

"I hear partnerships. I hear economic development. I hear things like that," Ceretto said. "It's all positive stuff. We're discussing the future of Niagara Falls."

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Ceretto Believes Seneca's Verbal Promise Of Market Rate Gas Prices

There is so much wrong with the Seneca proposal to open up tax free gas station [s] in Niagara Falls, it is hard to know where to start.

The Seneca Gaming Corporation, confronted with declining casino revenue, plan to expand their tax free operations exactly as this publication predicted for years by opening up other tax free retail operations.

The Seneca Nation has plans for a gas station/convenience store with 20 to 24 pumps at 621 Niagara St.

Sean Caffery, chief executive officer of the development agency for the Seneca Nation said gas would be tax-free, but they would offer gas at 'market rate' to keep the price fair with existing gas stations.

Boy, Assemblyman John Ceretto is a trusting soul. He told the Buffalo, "The Senecas have been good neighbors and want to be a stronger part of the community," Ceretto said. "If there are negatives [with the gas station] and it is found to be a detriment to the community, I'm sure the Senecas would work with us."

In other words Ceretto says we need no contract to ensure the Seneca's keep gas prices competitive because he is sure of the Senecas' good intentions. If there are problems we need merely tell the Senecas and they will change and work it out with us.



Assemblyman John Ceretto has faith that the Senecas will be good neighbors.

They will look out for our best interests in the spirit of neighborliness.

Who does business that way?

As one recent post said of Ceretto, "What has this fool been smokin'?"

Another said, "Senecas speak with forked tongue. When station open gas prices drop faster than canoe over falls."

So Caffery said gas would be tax-free, ... but Senecas would offer gas at "market rate" to keep the price fair with existing gas stations.

Even if they keep their word and charge



as much as the other gas stations in the area, it is grossly unfair to the other businesses. Why?

Because they will be making so much more money because they won't be paying taxes.

There will be no monitoring authority in place, however, to prevent gas prices to slide in the competition for business. And they can afford to drop prices since they pay no sales, or excise tax, and no property tax, something that every other gas station in the area pays.

Besides it will not be competitive – even if the prices were the same for gasoline sold at the pumps – since the Senecas, by not paying taxes on gasoline, will make far more profit which will allow them to improve their businesses and offer more options than

struggling taxpaying American gas station owners.

New York State charges 42.64 cents per gallon in taxes. That means for every gallon of tax free gas the Senecas sell at the same price as an American owned gas station the Senecas make 42 cents more profit.

According to industry reports the average annual sales for an average gas station is 1.58 million gallons, or 132,000 gallons per month.

At 42 cents per gallon savings, 1.58 million gallons will be \$633,600 in additional profit for the Seneca. That's a lot of money to use to reinvest and beat out the competition.

Only in Niagara Falls could such inequities pass for good business.

By the way, people who today are getting their gas at Niagara Falls' gas stations and paying market prices are patronizing stations whose owners are remitting 42 cents for every gallon sold. Every customer the Senecas get with their glitzy new pumps means a loss of money to the state.

Ceretto, while discussing the convention center, entertainment venue and Seneca-owned service stations, said, "I hear partnerships. I hear economic development. I hear things like that. It's all positive stuff. We're discussing the future of Niagara Falls."

Yes indeed we are.

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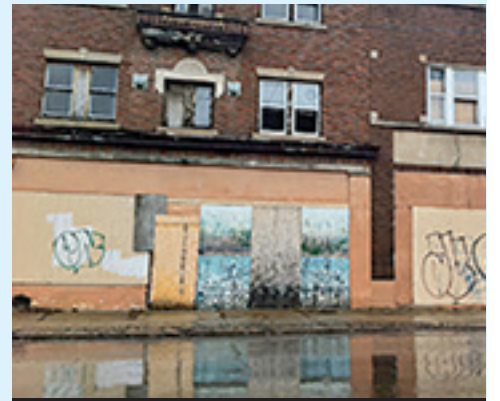
This commercial building at 1389 Niagara St. once housed shops on the first floor and nice little apartments upstairs. It has been derelict for years and is representative of the spinoff resulting from the opening of the Seneca Niagara Casino, almost directly across the street.



While there are no “nice” blacks on Niagara Street across the street from the Seneca Niagara Casino property, the 1300 block looks particularly bleak. Plywood covered storefronts and broken upper windows are par for the course and, in many of these shells, the last of the copper plumbing was stolen years ago.



Spinoff? We don't need no stinking spinoff! When the Seneca Niagara Casino opened in 2001, Niagara Falls residents were promised a rebirth of the South End neighborhood surrounding it. Fifteen years later, what people have witnessed was a stillbirth instead.



In addition to the unprecedented revival of business along Niagara Street, Seneca Niagara Casino employees were to have moved into the adjoining residential areas in droves, transforming the neighborhood.



This once stately Victorian residence at 462 Fourth Street — walking distance from the casino in even the worst weather — stands as an example of how well that idea panned out.



Had rosy predictions proven correct, structures like this apartment building at 511 Fourth Street would have been rehabbed and provided a home for employees of the Seneca Niagara Casino. The predictions weren't even close.



Some structures are just too far gone, and those — like this old Fourth Street house, might have been torn down to make room for a cozy bungalow. It stands today, abandoned and derelict, just waiting for someone to hide a dead body in it.



“Zombie” houses like this one at 529 Fourth Street pride ample proof of the failure of vision that surrounded the city's embrace of the Seneca Niagara Casino.

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DiCienzo Suit Alleges Be Tax Money Squandered By NTCC

Mike Hudson

The city bed tax is being collected “erroneously, illegally and/or unconstitutionally” according to the Article 78 action brought against the city by the DiCienzo family and their company, NFNy Hotel Management.

The suit, filed on the DiCienzo’s behalf by local attorney John Bartolomei in Niagara County Supreme Court, seeks the return of \$285,808 collected by the city between June 30 and Sept. 30, 2015 from the Sheraton at the Falls and the Days Inn at the Falls.

On Dec. 15, 2015, the company formally asked city Controller Maria Brown for a refund of the tax money, which is charged to guests at the hotels. Brown refused the request on January 5, the suit states.

While the DiCienzo’s acknowledge the right of the city to collect the tax, the questionable performance of the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corp., which receives nearly \$1 million a year in bed tax money, is brought sharply into focus in the suit.

“The contract under which the not-for-profit (NTCC) receives and expends the funds received from the collected taxes does not provide for sufficient oversight and control to assure that the funds received by



Michael DiCienzo wants to ensure that he and other hoteliers in this city are getting their money’s worth from the NTCC.

it are expended for the statutory purpose of promoting tourism in Niagara County,” the suit states.

The suit alleges the NTCC engages in “ill conceived and extravagant travel,” that it carries “excess payrolls and benefits to untrained and unqualified staff,” that it makes “contributions to other not-for-profit entities,” undermines the marketing efforts of local tourism businesses, illegally maintains a “huge” reserve and, in general, fails to apply “the funds to the designated statutory purpose of marketing Niagara County tourism business.”

Because the statute states that a portion

of the bed tax money can be used for “any city purpose,” it is, in fact, and hidden income tax, the suit alleges. Further, because the funds are being spent for things other than marketing tourism here, collecting the tax is illegal and unconstitutional.

“(U)nlawful and unconstitutional expenditures have been made both by the city and the NTCC in violation of the statutory authority and in derogation of the constitution,” the suit declares. “

In her denial of the DiCienzo’s request for a refund, Brown wrote that “the expenditures made by the NTCC are not subject to the review or approval of the city as

the language to fund the NTCC from portions of the occupancy tax is directory and not discretionary.”

“The Respondent Brown’s argument that they cannot review or approve the NTCC expenditures is laughable,” the suit states. “The City is collecting this tax and distributing it to a not-for-profit, yet they cannot review what it is spent on. The City still has a duty to use the funds for the promotion of tourism in accordance with the authorizing statute no matter whom they give the money to.”

The suit asks that the city bed tax be declared unconstitutional, that all funds collected pending a judgement in the case be frozen in a separate account and not disbursed and that the judge in the case rule that the city has an obligation to scrutinize NTCC expenditures down to the smallest detail.

Finally, it also seeks the return of the \$285,808 collected at the two DiCienzo hotels last season, whether the tax is found to be unconstitutional or not.

The DiCienzo action levels many of the same charges made by city Council members when they managed to temporarily defund the agency in 2013, and by the Niagara Falls Reporter almost since the NTCC was created in 2002.

Finally, the important questions raised then and now will be answered, under oath, in court.

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DiCienzo Suit Rekindles Reporter Fueled Criticism Of Percy, NTCC

Mike Hudson

The Article 78 claim against the city filed on behalf of Michael DiCienzo -- whose family owns and operates the Sheraton at the Falls, Days Inn at the Falls, T.G.I. Friday's, the Rainforest Cafe, Starbucks and the Sweet Treats Ice Cream Shop here -- and seeking the return of nearly \$300,000 the hotels have paid the city in bed tax money brings up an argument that the Niagara Falls Reporter has been making for years.

That money given the NTCC is essentially wasted. In 2013, a majority of the city Council thought this as well, and funding for the company was temporarily suspended. Intervention by Mayor Paul Dyster got it restored.

Nearly \$1 million a year is collected in bed taxes here, and the bulk of it is turned over to the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corp., a private entity that critics have charged lacks accountability insofar as to how the money is spent. By contract, the NTCC has to generate \$15 in business for every dollar given it by the city.

In addition to the bed tax money, the NTCC collects another \$1 million a year from the city's share of slot machine revenue at the Seneca Niagara Casino.

While the company and its CEO, John Percy, have steadfastly refused to disclose how they spend taxpayers' money, they do provide a quarterly report which attempts to demonstrate how they help the city.

Over the course of the year, various people make some sort of contact with NTCC -- by email, visiting their website or Facebook page, or by phone. If an NTCC representative answers the phone, if someone is sent an email or if someone visits their website, the person is counted as "serviced."

The NTCC claims it "serviced" 1,004,295 people in one recent year. About 90 percent were visitors to their website with whom they had no actual contact. Percy then claims that 46 percent of these "serviced" people actually come to Niagara Falls on the basis of their visit to the website, the phone call or the email, bringing their families along with them as a result.

Based on that formula, Percy then reported that a total of 461,976 people came to Niagara Falls because of the NTCC, and claimed that each person spent \$445 here, a total of \$205 million. According to Percy, none of the 461,976 would have come to Niagara Falls had they not called the NTCC, received an e-mail or surfed onto their website.

"These findings are not just pulled out of the sky," Percy told the council when



In the past this publication has made gentle sport of John Percy's constant traveling as these images show.

questioned about the veracity of these figures. "They are factual and solid numbers."

But there is no actual proof that any of these almost half-million people even came to Niagara Falls, because the NTCC does not track the names of people who visit their website. They simply presume that if someone visits their website, 46 percent of the time that person will be "converted" and decide to come to the falls, and that he or she otherwise would not have come.

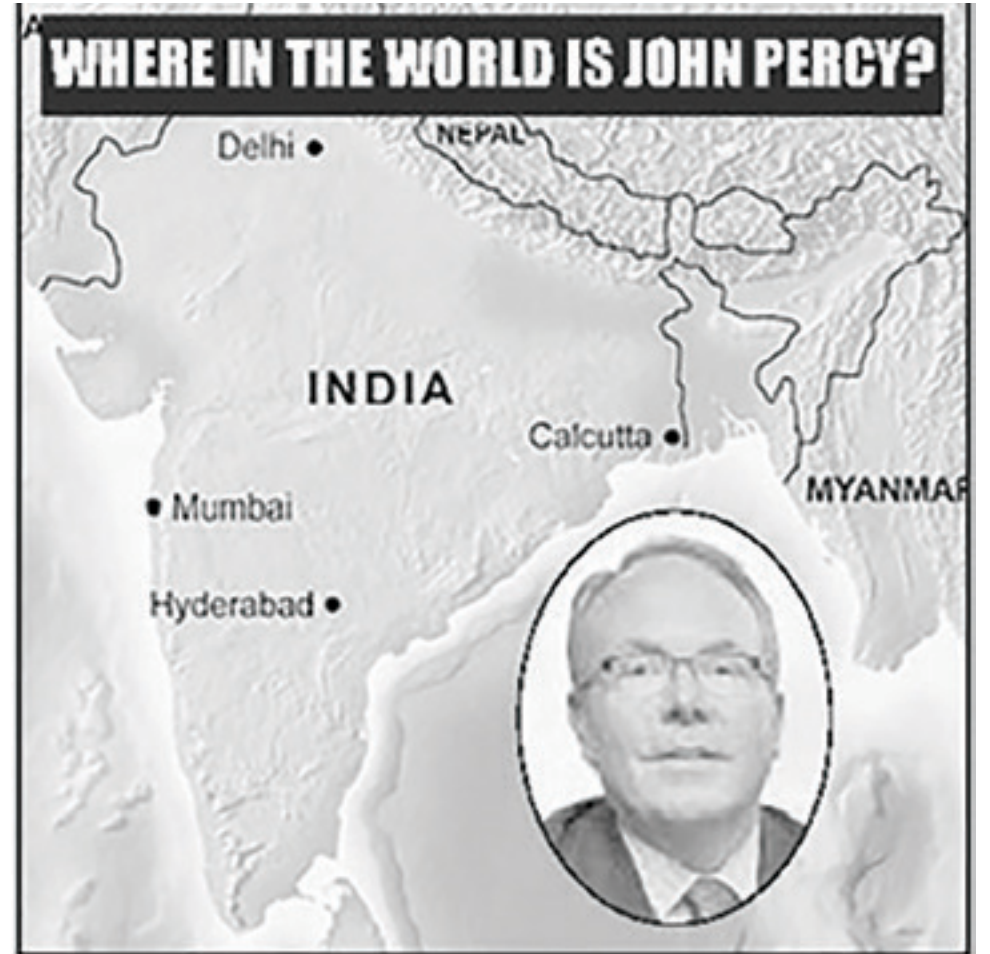
No analysis or conclusive data that shows whether any of these people who happened to visit this website came to Niagara Falls as a result of visiting that website, or if these people that came to Niagara Falls weren't already planning to come and only visited the website to find out more information. Likewise, no analysis or data exists that would suggest that 46 percent of the people who visited the website actually came to the Falls at all.

In sum, based on these assumptions, NTCC takes nearly \$2 million from the taxpayers every year for having a website and answering the phone.

And how does Percy spend the money?

To begin with, he pays himself \$133,000 a year plus another \$145,000 for travel expenses -- according to the IRS 990 filings for the organization.

The nature of much of this travel seems suspiciously like pleasure travel. Percy flies first class, has a yen for hotel rooms starting at \$500-a-night rooms and spends lavishly at



According to the NTCC's 990 [IRS filing] John Percy gets a salary of \$133,000 per year plus \$145,000 plus for travel and entertainment.

restaurants and other entertainment venues.

He has been to Delhi, Mumbai, London, Prague, Berlin, Geneva, Milan and other places that he chooses not to reveal, all on the taxpayer's dime. One four-day Indian jaunt cost hoteliers of Niagara Falls \$18,579.

But he has steadfastly refused to provide receipts or other documentation that would verify what the money is spent on.

"I've been hired to produce positive results for this destination and want to do that effectively," he told the Niagara Gazette in an interview. "I don't need to be criticized by every little receipt that is provided."

And, while Percy claims credit for increases in hotel occupancy here in recent years, an improving American economy and the plummeting cost of gasoline may have something to do with it as well.

"Explore Niagara Falls USA" is the official Facebook page of the NTCC. Of the nearly 155,000 worldwide who have visited the page, 63,036 have "liked" it and receive regular updates regarding tourist attractions and activities here. The preponderance of postings promote the Niagara Falls State Park and Glynn's Maid of the Mist boat ride, in

fact, fully 20 of the most recent 27 postings over the past two months in some way promote the park and boat ride, the other 7 touching on attractions elsewhere in the city and Niagara County.

All this and more has been grist for the Reporter's mill almost since the founding of the NTCC in 2002. DiCienzo's Article 78 suit, filed by prominent local attorney John Bartolomei, brings up many of the same points.

It questions the city's "specific performance" for the use of the tax money for the promotion of tourism, and asks for the court to order the city to review expenditures related to the NTCC. The petition argues that the contract under which NTCC receives and spends the bed tax money "does not provide for sufficient oversight and control to assure that the funds received by it under the contract are expended for the statutory purposes of promoting tourism in Niagara County."

It charges the NTCC has "mismanaged, misappropriated and expended the funds received" on a number of questionable items, including: "ill-conceived and extravagant travel expenses purportedly for marketing purposes; excess payrolls and benefits to untrained and unqualified staff; making contributions to other not-for-profit entities; paid staff undermining marketing efforts of local tourism businesses; illegally maintaining a huge reserve for the purpose of securing staff positions and severance funds and general failure to apply the funds received to the designated statutory purpose of marketing Niagara County tourism business."

Needless to say, Percy dismissed the charges.

"The accusations are absolutely ridiculous and quite frankly shocking," Percy said. "We're surprised."



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Cuomo Losing Interest In City Of Niagara Falls? Projects Stalled, Progress At A Standstill

James Hufnagel

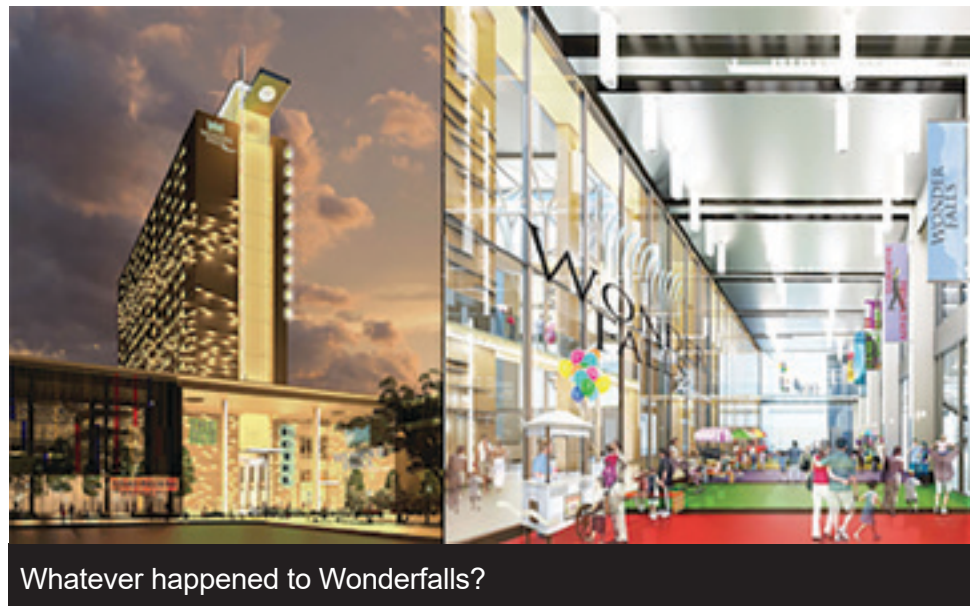
Over the past two years Governor Andrew Cuomo has promised tens of millions of dollars of economic aid for the city of Niagara Falls. So far, the city has received none of it. Not only that, but after having been a regular visitor here, it now appears the governor is distancing himself from involvement with the city and its political establishment.

On August 8, 2014 at a press conference in the Niagara Falls State Park, Gov. Cuomo announced that Uniland Development Co. had been selected to construct “Wonder Falls” at the site of the long-defunct Rainbow Centre Mall.

According to an article in the Buffalo News, “The project is... expected to transform downtown Niagara Falls and be a catalyst for visitors to lengthen their stay by offering 300 hotel rooms, themed restaurants, a spa, an indoor water park and a “daredevil adventure center” that will bear the name of famed wire walker Nik Wallenda.”

The \$150 million Wonder Falls resort was to have been heavily subsidized by a portion of the “Buffalo Billion”, the centerpiece of Cuomo’s economic development strategy for Western New York. The design phase of Wonder Falls was estimated to be 18 months.

Cuomo’s Wonder Falls announcement was on August 8, 2014. That was 18 months and one week ago. And all a Google News search on “Wonder Falls” and “Uniland” turns up is mostly Reporter articles from a year ago revealing that Uniland and Delaware North, the multinational food concessionaire, were embroiled in conflict over unrelated



Whatever happened to Wonderfalls?

issues, making it appear somewhat less likely they would follow through with the Niagara Falls project.

It’s particularly telling that no progress report on Wonder Falls was forthcoming during Mayor Paul Dyster’s hard-fought re-election campaign late last year. In the run-up to last year’s primary and general elections, local media treated the mayor as their fair-haired boy, the headlines, news stories and commentary generally quite favorable to his political interests. However, other than prognostications from Dyster, nothing of substance was announced about Wonder Falls. Although he did end up winning, a well-timed, widely-publicized Wonder Falls update could have proven beneficial to Dyster’s prospects in the two closely-contested elections. But there was no update, press release or sidewalk press conference on Rainbow Blvd.

Was it because Uniland has bailed? We might not know the answer to that question for a time, just as we didn’t know Dupont Chemours was closing its Buffalo Avenue plant with the loss of 200 jobs, and the city was wasting \$50,000 on a ridiculous work of “public art”, until the 2015 election results were in and Dyster safely returned to office for a third term.

In addition to the tens of millions pledged to build the apparently moribund Wonder Falls, Cuomo promised another windfall for the city of Niagara Falls amid great fanfare.

“Governor Cuomo Launches Development Competition to Revitalize Downtown Niagara Falls” announced the October 3, 2013 Albany press release.

The five-year, \$40 million initiative was “to transform the downtown Niagara Falls area into a premier destination that will attract tourists and fuel private investment”,

providing “a real opportunity for champions in the development and investment industries to face off right here in the Falls” resulting in “creative and innovative projects that will spur private development.”

So far, it seems the “Downtown Niagara Falls Development Challenge” is just more hot air from Cuomo. No competition has been held, no winners announced, and no transformative downtown projects begun, and it’s been more than two years. And, given the city’s fiscal difficulties, it may renege on its \$20 million end of the deal.

The governor’s endorsement of Mayor Paul Dyster for a third term was decidedly low-key, meriting just a few brief lines in the local dailies. No mention on the Governor’s website. No quick jaunt to the Cataract City to shore up the flagging popularity of his political ally Dyster, who’s dutifully supported the governor’s agenda at every turn. A far cry from when a phone call from the mayor could precipitate the governor’s unprecedented endorsement of two city council candidates.

So why the backpeddling on economic development, the lack of visits from the governor (even though he’s been to Buffalo recently) and the lukewarm Dyster endorsement? Could it be Governor Cuomo is distancing himself from a world-famous city that’s teetering on the brink of insolvency? Would it look good on a future presidential candidate to be intimately involved with the financial demise of a city that draws eight million tourists a year? Or has he come to the conclusion that the political leadership the people of this city have chosen is so hopelessly incompetent that it’s no longer worth his time or effort here?

Possibly, it’s all of the above.

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Train Station, Train Station, Who’s Responsible For The Train Station?

Anna Howard

In spite of the fact that the ribbon cutting of the Dyster administration train station is but a few months away the transportation facility is still, incredibly, without an operation and maintenance budget. Due to that fact some diehard Dyster administration cheerleaders have taken to promoting a cover story to inoculate the mayor against blame. That cover story goes like this: The train station looks like a \$44 million mistake, but you can’t pin all the blame on Mayor Dyster.

Some take issue with those who claim that the train station is Mayor Dyster’s project. A recent editorial in another newspaper tied the

project to the tails of previous mayors along with Paul Dyster. The argument appears to be an attempt to slide the rail facility ever so gently off the mayor’s planning table. That, however, is not so easily done because the facts are inconveniently contrary.

While the train station was a pie in the sky project for many years it remained just that, pie in the sky. It was Mayor Dyster who teamed up with city planner Tom DeSantis to move quickly in getting the train station onto its feet. They transferred federal funds from Buffalo Avenue road building to the train station construction account. Casino revenue was then set aside to support the \$44,000,000 project price tag.

Make no mistake, this train station, for

good or ill, properly belongs at the mayor’s doorstep. No amount of tampering with the facts of the timeline will succeed in putting daylight between the mayor and his costly pet project. When you add in the fact that the mayor and his planner have failed to provide a train station operation and maintenance budget it’s easy to see there’s serious problems facing the Niagara Falls International Railway and Intermodal Transportation Center.

The Underground Railroad Interpretive Center – a key element of the train station project – was to have opened its doors five years ago but remains locked as tight as the mayor’s desk when he’s hiding a proposed budget. The building is mired in an inexplicable six-year lawsuit (at what

cost to the taxpayer no one knows) and the Underground Railroad Commission no longer meets. The organization quite possibly no longer exists. No matter since that commission has been given \$2.45 million in casino cash and how those funds have been used is anyone’s guess.

We won’t even mention the “re bid” of the train station that cost the taxpayers \$350,000 in casino revenue two years ago. \$350,000 for the project planners to prepare the rebid paperwork.

It’s not the Dyster administration train station?

The record proves quite the opposite.



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The Cult Of NXIVM Series Part 13:

Frank Parlato

Frequent readers of Artvoice have seen our long running series The Cult of NXIVM. The series exposes over and over again that behind NXIVM's so called executive coaching program is a world of lurid sex, powerful money, danger, vengeance and alleged criminality. At the center of it all, and the target of our articles, is Keith Raniere, the former TV infomercial conman turned self-proclaimed spiritual guru. Why would we repeatedly keep writing about the same subject? We keep writing about it because law enforcement still hasn't taken action, because the courts still haven't taken action, because no prosecuting attorney has taken action.

Sooner or later some ambitious District Attorney is going to realize that an investigation and indictment of Raniere and NXIVM will not only serve justice, it will also be a cornerstone to their career. The involvement of the Seagram's fortune heiresses Clare and Sara Bronfman and the sensational sexual depravity and alleged criminal activity at NXIVM, means the prosecution of Keith Raniere will gain national and international press attention. It will catapult that prosecutor from unknown attorney to legal stardom.

It's difficult to believe that in spite of all that's been written by investigative journalists in Forbes, Vanity Fair, Albany Times Union, NY Post, New York Observer, Village Voice, The Artvoice, WorldCultWatch.org and many other outlets NXIVM has apparently never been investigated by the FBI or the NY Attorney General. Keith Raniere has never had to answer for allegations of statutory rapes, unlawful imprisonment, suicides, money laundering and more. No law enforcement



NXIVM [also known as Executive Success Programs] teach the concepts of Keith Raniere [above], a man who keeps a harem, punishes his ex-lovers through abusive litigation, allegedly pursued an illegal attempt to imprison women in Mexico, allegedly imprisoned some of his defiant harem members in Albany, had a business that was shut down as a pyramid scheme, has been accused by his former followers of statutory rape, computer hacking, tax evasion, lost or stole \$69 million in commodities of other people's money, recommended a \$26 million real estate scam using other people's money, falsified his bio, denied the paternity of his own son and claimed he was adopted and did not know who the father was, is accused of being able to brainwash people, is a master of hypnosis and a host of other bizarre and eccentric misdeeds. Followers say he is the most wonderful man in the universe.

agency or court has questioned Raniere's abusive manipulation of the court system in his relentless persecution of former NXIVM members. And the IRS has apparently never investigated Raniere or NXIVM in spite of all the shady money used, allegedly, for bribes, coercion, frivolous lawsuits, and the unaccounted millions of Bronfman dollars in Raniere's control that simply disappeared, and the reported hidden movement of millions of dollars across the Mexican border.

Even a short list of Raniere's alleged activities should pique a prosecutor's interest. Here are some examples of crimes and misdeeds his followers and other eyewitnesses firmly allege he has committed:

1. He and the Bronfman sisters hired various investigative firms, including Groupe Canaprobe of Montreal and directed them to illegally obtain personal and financial records of six federal judges; U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer; the publisher and editor of the Albany Times Union; an investigative reporter at the Times Union and the personal and financial records of Rick Ross, a professional cult expert and deprogrammer and other adversaries. All of the federal judges were overseeing cases where NXIVM was suing some enemy.

2. Raniere took \$1.6 million from former NXIVM financial advisor and board member Barbara Bouchev and when she asked for it back tried to have her indicted for extortion. He and the Bronfmans also allegedly illegally hacked into her computer and stole banking, emails and phone records. Ironically Raniere and the Bronfman sisters charged Bouchev with hacking into a NXIVM computer. Defending herself against those charges drove Bouchev to bankruptcy and a near breakdown. The charges were dismissed last week.

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Should There Be An Investigation By Law Enforcement?

but Bouchey will never re-cover her money or the years of stress the court case caused.

3. Raniere took \$65.6 million from the Bronfman sisters and “lost” it all in commodities trading. However, there are evidently no records of the trades and Clare Bronfman told me she has no receipts documenting where any of the money went.

4. Raniere took another \$26 million from the Bronfman sisters for a real estate development that turned out to be a scam. The developer, who was Raniere’s personal friend, was the same man who acted as the broker in the purported commodities trades. I uncovered that he stole \$10 million from the Bronfman sisters, which I caused to have recovered for them in court. Then Raniere fired me.

5. Seagram heiress Clare W. Bronfman illegally planted a “key logger” virus on the computer of her own father, the late, billionaire, Edgar M. Bronfman Sr., so NXIVM could secretly monitor his emails, including his exchanges with world leaders and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

6. Raniere/Bronfman/NXIVM Corp. have as many as 75 shell companies, including alleged fake charities, fictitious loans with phantom interest to disguise gifts [and

avoid millions in gift taxes] to Raniere and appear to be engaged in a classic Klein Conspiracy to defraud the government. Raniere urges his followers not to pay taxes, according to numerous sources.

7. Raniere tried to lure to Mexico four women who left NXIVM so he could punish them. According to a former NXIVM member now in hiding and the mother of Raniere’s child “Keith intended these women serious, serious, emotional and physical harm.” Raniere is a very vengeful man who calls himself Vanguard. His favorite video game is also called Vanguard. It’s a game in which destroying enemies increases the fuel in the player’s tank.

8. Raniere offered to tutor the daughter of a woman who worked for him. Instead of teaching her Latin as he promised, Raniere had sex with the 12-year-old approximately 60 times in his townhouse, empty offices, an elevator, a broom closet, anywhere. The girl – who spoke on the record - was so in fear of him she ran away from home so she wouldn’t have to see him again. She reported the statutory rapes to the state police two years later when she was 14 years old. The police did nothing.

9. Kristen Snyder committed suicide. She left a note saying she was brainwashed by NXIVM.

10. Raniere was accused of having numerous illegal Mexicans working for him and Clare Bronfman. One source claimed he had an underage Mexican boy videotape him having sex with the boy’s sisters and other women. The children were entrusted into Raniere’s care by their parents. One of these women was imprisoned by Raniere in a room for two years, the woman herself claimed. She escaped and fled to Mexico.

11. Heidi Hutchinson confronted Raniere for having sex with Gina Hutchinson her underage sister, a sexual relationship that started after he raped her. The confrontation occurred when Heidi caught him crawling through Gina’s bedroom window. Raniere told her girl’s soul was much older than her biological age and continued to have sex with her. Gina was 15. She later went to a monastery in Woodstock and shot herself in the head. The sister said on the record that Raniere caused her sister’s death. Raniere also said in a chilling video that he has “had people killed because of his beliefs.”

We’ve already devoted a great deal of writing to Raniere’s sordid sex life. It’s an endless story. His former long-time girlfriend Toni Natalie called Raniere “a sex addict with bizarre desires and needs.”

Raniere repeatedly gained the trust of minors and/or their parents and then would sexually molested them.

After Times Union investigative reporter James Odatto interviewed former lovers and sexual victims of Raniere he wrote, “They’ve said he is more than just a man with an endless sexual appetite. They’ve said he needs to be stopped.”

You can help stop Raniere and the cult by calling or writing to the FBI, the NY Attorney General or the IRS and tell them that based on all the articles you’ve read about Keith Raniere and NXIVM you believe these people need to be investigated. You don’t need to explain why they should be investigated, just refer them to the frankreport.com, a one-stop clearinghouse for all the alleged criminal and noncriminal atrocities committed by Keith Raniere.

Why would you do that? Because the next Raniere victim of rape or mental abuse may be your daughter, your niece or your sister. Keep in mind that Raniere / NXIVM recruits in Buffalo, has Buffalo lawyers and have had an office in Niagara Falls for years.

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The highest manifestation of strength is to keep ourselves calm and on our own feet.

None will reach truth until he is strong.

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Blocking Off Part Of The Falls Again? – Be Very, Very Careful!!!



**J. Gary
DiLaura**

**The Right
Side**

In January 1985 a massive Ice Jam was caused in the East Upper Niagara River by the Power Authority. A week after the Ice Jam, at a meeting of 500 people in Amherst, the then Army Colonel Hardiman “declared” that the Power Authority did “everything right”. I challenged the Colonel to produce the study he must have conducted to arrive at such a conclusion. When he said they hadn’t conducted any study and he just “assumed” they followed their protocol. I demanded that the Corps conduct a study comparing what they should have done to what they did. He said he would and did.

As a result of that study the Corps conducted, the Corps determined that PASNY (the Power Authority) FAILED to follow their Ice Control procedures that “they wrote” and should have followed during the Ice Run. The result was an Ice Jam! The power authority underestimated the Ice Flow along with record high Lake elevations and caused the East Niagara River to jam SOLID with ice from the upper portion of the intakes, along the entire East River, around Grand Island all the way past the Huntley Plant! The ENTIRE EAST River had ZERO flow from 1-21-85 until 2-21-85. Millions of dollars in damage to homeowners, shore line and businesses, along the East River was the result of the Ice Jam and flooding.

In layman terms, the ENTIRE East River STOPPED flowing and was in flood stage for 30 days! The Niagara River from the brink of the American Falls “upriver” to the intakes (a section of the river called the ice Flushing Channel) FLOWED BACKWARDS FOR THOSE 30 Days!! All because the Power Authority didn’t follow its own procedures! That’s a negligence attorney’s dream case. This was all supported by the Army Corp study, their retired Chief Engineer, a former PASNY Ice Control Engineer, depositions from George Berry, head Design Engineer, Chief Construction Engineer and First Operating Engineer, who wrote the FIRST Ice Control Manual. That manual states, “If you fail to reduce diversions during an Ice Run, you will cause an Ice Jam with resulting flooding”. This was ALSO supported by PASNY employees who actually made and recorded the damaging Ice Flow speed observations. These were employees who

were not afraid to tell the truth backed up by their written observations at the critical times.

This chain of events caused me to form a Homeowners Association, conduct an extensive investigation (besides being an investigator I have a Bachelors in Mech Eng) into what happened. As a result, I filed a 50-million-dollar law suit against PASNY on behalf of the homeowners. We settled 15 years later, out of court. I wanted to go to court as we would have won a permanent injunction directing PASNY to follow their Ice Control Manual. I believed THAT to be more important than the money but most wanted to settle, so we did.

Why I say all this is because ALL the nonsense the power authority and to some extent, the Army Corp put out for years and years, that the ice jams and resulting floods, are caused by a “phenomenon in Nature” were pure crap!

I reviewed EVERY single Ice Jam flood from the beginning of record keeping to 1985 and found with substantiation from FERC, from the Corps, and numerous other sources that each and every flood and Ice Jam was as a result of MAN MADE OBSTRUCTIONS AND/OR ACTIONS IN THE GRASS ISLAND POOL (GIP). That was also what Mr. George Berry, the chief designer of the power project, told me, in a recorded interview with him in 1985, when he studied those same records!

If this work on the Falls and the redirection of the falls takes place during the winter months and IF there is a major Ice Run, the work in the GIP WILL cause an Ice jam, flooding and damage to the riparian’s! This is not a “MAYBE” but a “FOR SURE”!

I say this because with the new Canadian expansion and their increased diversions along with PASNY increasing their diversions, when nobody is looking and /or during the construction, there simply won’t be enough water going “past” the PASNY intakes to flush ice! PASNY MUST allow 20% of “actual” EAST RIVER WATER” flow to go past their intakes to prevent an Ice Jam and keep Ice Velocities high going past

the intakes during ice runs. That’s also stated in their Manual!

At a meeting a few years ago, attended by the Corp, FERC, the Public(me) and PASNY hosted by the International Joint Commission (IJC) I asked this question, “From which part of the Grass Island Pool is the power project designed to take water “? No one knew the answer! Unbelievable! The answer is the EAST river and the EAST river only.

Even if PASNY cuts diversions to zero it may not be enough, because during similar work in the GIP the exact same thing happened which caused Mother Nature to rip out a road that was built, under water, from the upstream end of Goat Island running towards the control structure on the Canadian side. Once the river ripped out the MAN MADE road, the Ice Jam, flooding and damage stopped. Interestingly the Army Corps said that this was a phenomenon of Nature, until we discovered that this road was there until it was ripped out by Mother Nature. I believe this was the March 1953 Ice Jam Flood. The Corps then changed their tune.

A statement George Berry made to me said it all. He said that “he” screwed up” when he and the other design engineers believed that no matter what “man” did in the GIP, all they had to do is to “turn the River back to Nature” (zero diversion) and it would take care of itself. When he realized they made a big miscalculation, as witnessed by the major Ice Jams that shut the power plant down during their first winter of operation, he took significant steps to PREVENT the reoccurrence. Incidentally, Mr. Berry told me the reason the Love Canal Project failed was because of the same problem, the Love Canal designers underestimated the impact of ICE and that bankrupted their project!

I also want to say that Mr. Berry, who passed away several years ago, was a brilliant, honest and very forthright man. It was an honor to speak with a man of his integrity and genius! Integrity that PASNY apparently lost when he left!

According to Mr. Berry, in PASNY’s 2nd year of operation and solely because of the Ice problem they doubled the width of

the Ice Flushing channel, began installing the Ice Boom, purchased Ice Breakers, and most important of all, he wrote the first Ice Control Manual. He wrote the manual as a result of real time studies, models and “reinventing the wheel”. He said that they simply MUST allow enough water to flow past the intakes and absolutely keep the ice flowing during Ice Runs. The magic number is 20%, that is 20% of East River Flow MUST flow past the intakes with the determining factor, over all others, being Ice speed past the intakes. It must not drop below a specific speed specified in their Ice Control Manual, or it will stop!

PASNY got so scared from our lawsuit and our knowledge of their operation that they now use the Patriot Act to hide River Flows, their diversions, lake levels and all other formerly public information. It is now, a “National Security secret”, what river flow is! Do you believe it? For well over a 100 years river flows were public info, now it’s a SECRET! For over 100 years river flow average was 204,000cfs with a 60/40 split between the East and West Rivers the East average is 80,000cfs. They can only take 80% of East River flow or 64,000cfs, during Ice runs, leaving 16,000cfs to flush Ice! There now I’m like Hillary and put Secret info on my insecure server!

If those planning on doing the work on the Falls plan on having the Falls blocked during the Winter, I have some good advice for them, DON’T do it! Get it done during open water flows, NO Ice!! If you don’t and we riparian’s are damaged again, we won’t settle again. Don’t rely on what the Power Authority tells you. Buy a very large insurance bond and have a hydraulic Engineer examine the Corp report raw data and chart from the January 21, 1985 event. It’s pretty straight forward if you understand that water can’t flow upstream, naturally. When the elevation at Material dock (near the brink of the Falls) is HIGHER than the elevation at PASNY intakes, water is flowing UPSTREAM, for over 1.5 miles, WHILE THE RIVER IS IN FLOOD STAGE!!! Even Mother Nature can’t do that, but PASNY did!

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Only In NT: Wasted Funds On Studies That Could Have Benefited Nt



Sweeney Payne

In 1958 and 1959, Mayor John Kopczynski opposed the Holiday Park development because he felt that the financial burdens placed on taxpayers for the Wurlitzer Park development for infrastructure and long-term maintenance which were then still an open liability were a serious concern. He also understood that such developments create additional long-term financial liabilities for the School District.

Our more recent City officials seem to think that bond issues are the solution to assuming, on behalf of the taxpayers, liabilities we cannot afford, especially when they can “bury” them in bond issues, thus increasing the overall cost with years, if not decades, of interest payments.

In 1971, when Paul Rumbold was Mayor, the NT Planning Commission hired an outside “professional consultant” to create “the “new” North Tonawanda Planners’ proposals” plan published in the Tonawanda News on February 20, 1971.

Most of it focused on the LaSalle Expressway and Lockport Expressway

connecting with the “arterial to nowhere” we ended up with. The only reason for today’s useless “expressway to nowhere” cutting NT in half is its serving as a road named in memory of Vietnam veterans.

Since the arterial never connected to anything but Nash Road, most of the grandiose “plans” at that time never materialized. Some of them, however, are worth remembering, if only because of the cost of the report!

The two-year project cost \$63,000, 85% of which was paid for by the State and Federal governments—also representing our tax money. That was 1971, not 2016, money, and would equate to spending \$374,398 today! And that doesn’t reflect years of interest payments on bond issues. One has to wonder if we’re still paying for it with some old bond issue!

They never did convert “downtown” to the recommended industrial warehouse corridor, with other non-retail uses like light industry and wholesale outlets, including replacement of older structures with new buildings.

With those plans in 1971 were plans for heavy traffic on Oliver Street. Imagine that!

Mayor Paul Rumbold was spot on when he described the expressway as a “Chinese Wall” and we appreciate the fact that he and some members of the Common Council opposed the arterial, with others favored it in return for state concessions to NT. We did in fact get the “Chinese Wall.” We have heard from quite a number of residents on the east side of the “Chinese Wall” that they



Officials watched from inside this edifice as the City of North Tonawanda waxed and waned... and perhaps will wax again....
Caption

lived there for years—and even for decades—before discovering that the “old” part of NT was in fact part of the North Tonawanda they lived in!

The consultants recommended a master plan for Holiday Park and developing the length of the Niagara River and State Barge Canal, acquiring land for parks in areas bounded by River Road, Nash Road, Meadow Drive, Payne Avenue, East Robinson, Sweeney and Zimmerman Streets, west of Ward Road and south of Warner Avenue.

They proposed a major industrial park between Erie Avenue and the Penn Central line and earmarked as locations for new industries areas east of Oliver, south of Wheatfield, east of Ironton, north of Wheatfield; and west of Ward.

In addition to major plazas including retail operations, personal-business services, office and finance, at intersections of the Division Arterial and Meadow; the Division Arterial and Erie Avenue; and Walck

Road and Toellner Avenue (now Wurlitzer Drive), they proposed neighborhood plazas-shopping centers located at least ¾ of a mile apart to provide for small supermarkets, drug stores, beauty parlors-barber shops, and laundromats.

Small plazas were recommended at Payne and Sweeney; Robinson and Oliver; Warner and Witmer; Sweeney and Meadow (which never did get completed through to Sweeney); East Robinson and the LaSalle Expressway; Meadow and Nash; Nash and Ruie; and Ward and Washington.

Fast forward to the 1980s and 1990s. We had an influx of “immigration” from the Town of Tonawanda and other areas of developers, former contractors, and real estate investors, none too concerned about the residents of North Tonawanda but very concerned with making money from property purchases, governmental assistance to renovating, and flipping them to others rather than making a long-term commitment to NT.

City officials watched downtown die a slow and agonizing death as the 1980s came along.

The current “revitalization” doesn’t include much that is useful to ordinary residents or the quality of life of those who live in NT. It doesn’t show much respect for the few remaining “historical” structures in the downtown area.

Why didn’t our 1971 “investment” in that study result in at least part of its recommendations becoming reality?



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\$6⁹⁹

Breakfast Buffet

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President's Transportation Budget Will Cost Drivers More without Improving Roads

Our lame duck President's final transportation budget is too little, too late, and wrongly focused. Throughout the Highway Bill debate, the Laborers' International Union of North America urged Congress and the President to pass an increase in the gas tax in order to ensure funding for the Highway Trust Fund. The White House refused to support this common-sense approach to our transportation financing needs. It appears that environmental extremists have convinced the President to tax our energy sector through a \$10 oil tax in order to pay for clean transportation investment. It is a poor policy proposal that will cost drivers more without actually doing anything to improve the roads they drive on. The proposal also sidesteps the urgent need to provide sustainable investment for all transportation infrastructure rather than stealing from roads and bridges to invest in transit.

For decades Congress has failed to act due to a partisan freeze on legislating. Many governmental officials agree that adjusting and indexing the gas tax will help rescue our nation's Transportation Trust Fund. It has been more than two decades since the addition of a 4.3 cent federal gas tax, which has been more than wiped out because Congress failed to index the rate to inflation. Every year we wait, New York area drivers are forced to pay a much higher price than any gas tax. The economic cost of our crumbling infrastructure is about \$3.1 trillion in GDP, \$1.1 trillion in trade and 3.5 million in jobs by 2020. On an individual basis, the average New York motorist wastes \$601 a year on fuel and repairs due to the deterioration of our roadways. Just a dime's worth of difference now could mean a total annual savings of more than \$250 million throughout the state not to mention the economic benefits of job creation to repair our crumbling infrastructure.

Our country needs a long-term strategy for investing in its backbone. Doing so will drive our economy, keep us globally competitive, create jobs and restore us to the ranks of nations with the most advanced infrastructure. Call or write your elected officials and encourage them to invest in our roads, bridges and transit systems.
 Congressman Brian Higgins - 716-852-3501;
 Congressman Chris Collins: 716-634-2324;
 Senator Charles Schumer - 716-846-4111;
 Senator Kirsten Gillibrand - 716 854-9725.

City Hall Jokes



Mayor Paul Dyster and Tom DeSantis walk into the new train station. The mayor turns to his planner and says, "This building will operate at a loss but it was built at a profit." Grin, snicker, laugh.



Question: Who won the Academy Award for best supporting actor in a financial comedy?
 Answer: Andrew Touma



The marketing geniuses that gave us Totes McGoat have announced the mayor's new downtown "Park'n Die" parking package. The mascot is Meter McMurder.



City hall survey:
 What's the best use for the new train station?
 A) a homeless shelter to handle Gospel Mission overflow
 B) pit bull dog shelter
 C) heroin addiction treatment facility
 D) any of the above



Overheard in Senator Schumer's Washington office: "We gave Dyster \$17 million for that dumb train station and you're telling me they have no operating budget!?"



Your Weekly Horoscope

By Jean Topascani



Aries: (March 21 - April 19)

Whatever kind of look you were going for, you missed. Muddlement is your word of the week. Obstacles will seem insurmountable to you this week, and they are. Life on the home front has never been more serene since you left. Your talents as a musician come to the fore when several recognize you as skilled at playing the liar.



Cancer: (June 21 - July 22)

Try to figure out why people often say, "If I throw a stick, will you leave?" Dynamite, mustache wax, rope, and train tracks figure in an encounter. P.M. Best time to sleep in order to get rest for the following day. Finances improve for coworker who takes your job. Everything has its place, and yours is on the floor scrubbing.



Libra: (September 23 - October 22)

Love responds to your pathetic pleas with: "If you can't live without me, why aren't you dead?" No pie, cake or donut ever crossed your path and survived. Hair extending out of your nose and ears presents some social handicaps in P.M. You probably have no social plans for the weekend, but if so, they will result in disaster.



Capricorn: (December 22 - January 19)

A promotion is just around the corner for someone more talented than you. You will get a job where you meet people, with plenty of air. It will involve standing on street corners and shaking a tin cup. Stars plays role in reigniting romance. Your partner is a little jumpy however and steals your life savings.



Taurus: (April 20 - May 20)

Don't go ice skating on the lake until it gets a lot warmer. You will come face to face with your worst fears this week after standing in front of a bathroom mirror. Your first instinct will be to run. Be enthusiastic about the success of others, since you will have none yourself.



Leo: (July 23 - August 22)

People would like to insult you, but don't think you're bright enough to notice. Persistence, if you had it, would be a great substitute for the talent you lack. Failure to make minimum credit card payment two weeks prior to receiving mortgage commitment leaves Uranus in empty house. Be ready for an unexpected trip when you fall screaming from an open window.



Scorpio: (October 23 - November 21)

Wear ugly sweaters to distract people from seeing your face. Avoid unnecessary death. You overhear the sound of your own snoring. Join an expensive health club and make a habit of never going there. Getting more money may improve your financial situation. Encouraging news on Tuesday will turn out to be inaccurate. Tues.: Don't hand marijuana to kids.



Aquarius: (January 20 - February 18)

Venus influences love life: Ugly neighbor, who is a depressed, lice-ridden, jealous, hemorrhoidal foreigner, who collects razors, has a crush on you. This week your desire for justice and truth is overshadowed by your desire for fast, illegal money. Future looks bleak. Wed p.m. You will consume a seven-course meal - a hot dog and a six pack.



Gemini: (May 21 - June 20)

Hoped-for date responds to proposed meeting time with "How about never? Is never good for you?" Change your sign to Pisces. Lover breaks up and writes sequel to Milton, called "Paradise Regained." Sunday PM: Test all food for poison. You will be torn away from friends and cast out of the only home you've ever known, now that your prison sentence is over.



Virgo: (August 23 - September 22)

Don't forget to purchase two tickets when you visit the zoo. You'll need one to get out. Stars point out that you were boring in your past and will be so in the future. When was the last time you said, "I couldn't be happier"? Whenever it was, don't expect it again anytime soon.



Sagittarius: (November 22 - December 21)

You become so famous in your area that every policeman knows you. You will have reason to exclaim this week, "Nobody makes a good deodorant." An attractive member of the opposite sex is secretly laughing at you. Travel, promotion, and romance indicated, if you live long enough. But not in the foreseeable future. PM: Keep away from sulfuric acid.



Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Thurs: Try to figure out why people visualize duct tape over your mouth. You say you are a little snowflake dancing in the universe. People say you are smelly and dirty and openly pick your toenails. Monday AM: A short trip is in the stars, possibly to the bathroom. Saturday PM: Becoming invisible could prove useful.

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