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THE NIAGARA REPORTER

FREE

MAR 09, 2018 - MAR 22, 2018

VOL. 18, NO. 45

FREE

Vindication? George Maziarz Accepts Plea Deal as Prosecution Lacks Evidence for Trial

By: Tony Farina

It was just a year ago that Democratic State Atty. General Eric Schneiderman unloaded on two top Niagara County Republican figures in a headline-grabbing announcement that featured a total of eight felony counts.

Now, a year later, Schneiderman has egg on his face after the much-hyped cases against former State Sen. George Maziarz of Newfane and current State Sen. Robert Ort

misdeemeanor plea and a \$1,000 fine, both for Maziarz, and the dismissal of all counts against Ort.

Schneiderman, who once served in the State Senate with Maziarz on the other side of the political aisle during the "2009 coup" when Republicans and Maziarz briefly took control, must be licking his wounds over the beating he took in these two criminal cases.



In fact, we have learned just how little Albany County Judge Peter Lynch, who previously dismissed three felonies against Ort last June, apparently regarded the case against Maziarz, who was charged with secretly funneling campaign money to a former staffer who had left government service amid involvement

(Cont. on pg. 4)

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N.F. Mayor Dyster says Crime is Down in State of the City Address: Niagara Reporter Investigates

Nicholas D. D'Angelo

During his State of the City Address, delivered at Niagara Falls High School on February 27th, Mayor Paul Dyster painted a glowing picture of Niagara Falls before a crowd of City Hall employees, high school students and a few residents.

There were a number of topics discussed during his 49 minute speech. If you ask the mayor, Niagara Falls and its residents never had it so good.

The theme for his speech was Niagara Falls "on a roll."

Mayor Dyster's remarks on crime in Niagara Falls caught the attention of many residents – even those not in attendance - for it seemed to some that Mayor Dyster was suggesting crime was down and not in a small way.

"[B]ecause of many Niagara Falls Police Department initiatives," he said "... crime rate is down 5%. Robberies are down 10% over the past five years and use of force incidents have continued to decline since 2014, for a total decrease of 53% over the past four years... those are some encouraging numbers."

Lumping use of force incidents which are not crimes into a statement about crime being down is an odd way of expressing things and a little misleading.

Crime is down 5%
Robberies down 10%
Use of Force incidents down since 2014 for a total decrease of 53%

Adding a police "use of force" statistic in the same sentence as crime statistics was misleading. It needed some prefatory remark.

Some were misled into thinking the mayor said that crimes involving force were down 53 percent.

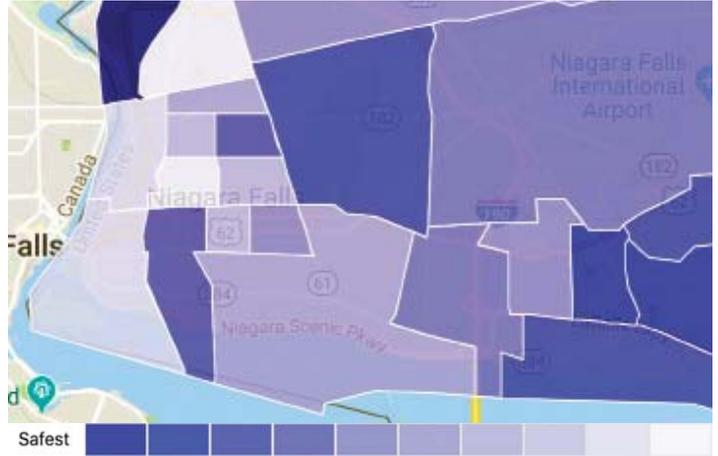
Use of force incidents are when police use force on a civilian and not an indicator of crime. It indicates that police used some kind of force – either justified or not – to subdue or intimidate an individual. [Putting handcuffs on a person is not considered use of force. Pulling a gun to prevent a suspect from fleeing is a use of force incident.]

As to crime overall, Dyster has little to crow about. Niagara Falls is not on a roll.

Crime is high and seems to be high on everyone's mind who lives here.

Had the mayor prefaced his remarks with such a sentiment, his speech might have been more palatable instead of being the object of derision to some who heard his remarks.

For instance, had Mayor Dyster said, "Crime is bad in our city. People are concerned. We still have a long way to go. Our crime rates are unac-



This graphic depicts both low (dark) and high (light) crime areas throughout Niagara Falls. Note that the heaviest crime areas are downtown where tourists spend the greatest amount of time.

ceptable – but the good news is they have dropped slightly," everyone would applaud him.

Instead the mayor – who in 10 years of serving the city has not succeeded in making it safe – talks as if the crime

problem that plagues this city is nearly resolved, and adds that police use of force incidents are down.

But let us examine whether the mayor was right about crime going down.

THE NIAGARA REPORTER

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Frank Parlato

MANAGING EDITOR
Nicholas D. D'Angelo

Phone: (716) 870-1175

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The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) compiled by the FBI are available up until 2016 [the UCR has not been compiled for 2017].

Perhaps, the most important crime statistic is violent crime.

It dropped a little:
Violent crimes have gone down slightly:
2013: 584
2014: 581
2015: 555
2016: 565

[Curiously, for the last four years – three murders were reported in each year.]

Rape [many of which are not reported] has gone up slightly.

2013: 12
2014: 26
2015: 32
2016: 14

Robberies are up – not down as Dyster said:

2013:166
2014: 161
2015: 156
2016:199

Aggravated assaults dropped.

2013: 403
2014: 391
2015: 364
2016: 349

Property crimes down more than 10 percent.

2013: 2,807
2014: 2,641
2015: 2,526
2016: 2,402

Burglaries down:

2013: 746
2014: 650
2015: 615
2016: 551

Theft down significantly:

2013: 1,949
2014: 1,858
2015: 1,781
2016: 1,665

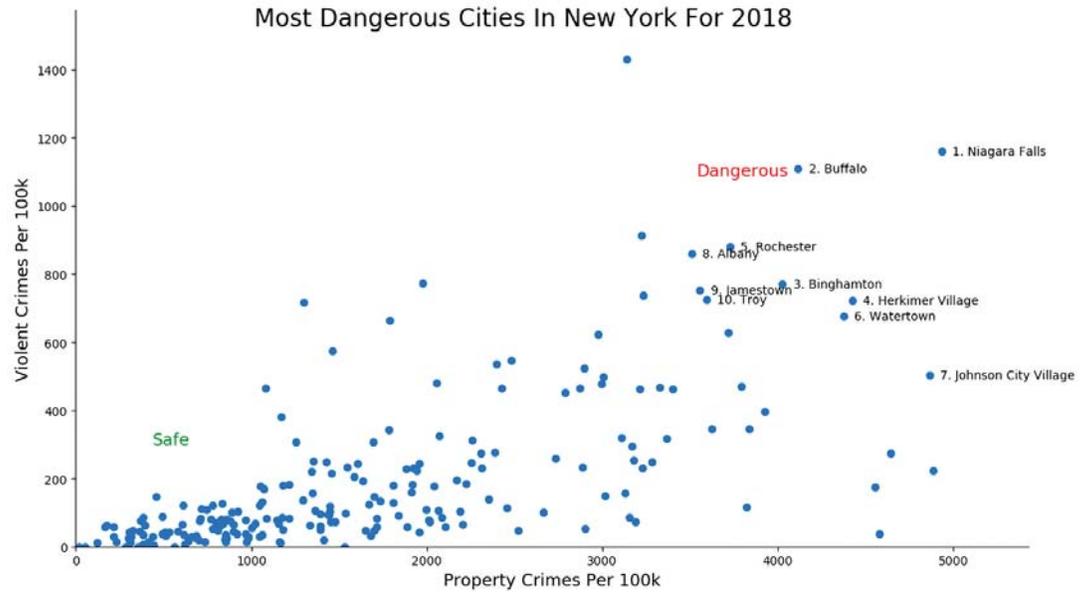
Motor vehicle theft increased.

2013: 112
2014: 113
2015: 130
2016: 186

Total crimes reported dropped more than 10 percent:

2013: 6,782
2014: 6,444

Most Dangerous Cities In New York For 2018



A cross-section of data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports comparing violent crimes per 100K and property crimes per 100K to determine which cities are the most dangerous.

2015: 6,162
2016: 5,934

Of course, there is some improvement. But crime is still high in Niagara Falls.

Based on the data, in 2016, a resident of Niagara Falls had more than a 12% chance of becoming a victim of a crime. This is more than five times the national average.

Roadsnacks.com, a data analyzing website, ranked Niagara Falls as the most dangerous place to live in New York State based on 2016 UCR data.

Neighborhood Scout, another website dedicated to compiling data, described Niagara Falls as "one of the highest crime rates in America compared to all communities of all sizes - from the smallest towns to the very largest cities."

Neighborhood Scout concluded that "one's chance of becoming a victim of either violent or property crime here is one in 16.

Within New York, more than 100% of the communities have a lower crime rate than Niagara Falls. In fact, after

researching dangerous places to live, NeighborhoodScout found Niagara Falls to be one of the top 100 most dangerous cities in the U.S.A."

While Mayor Dyster says crime has gone down – and technically he is right - hardly a day goes by in Niagara Falls when residents don't hear of a shooting, stabbing, robbery, assault, or theft.

If Mayor Dyster had addressed this instead of representing that Niagara Falls is on a roll, it would have inspired confidence, and that in itself gives people hope and gets them on a roll.

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Dining at The Royal Café – who could ask for anything better?

Frank Parlato

The Royal Café is perhaps the best kept secret in Niagara Falls. Located at 311 Hyde Park Blvd, near the center of the city – it is not in the tourist district. This is the real Niagara Falls.

The Royal is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It has a full bar. Not large - it seats about 60 people – the Royal is a friendly place where everyone feels at home.

It's a place frequented by locals. But it's the kind of place tourists like to go when they like to eat like the locals do.

I had been there a few times myself with Niagara Falls best known lawyer, Jim Roscetti, and Lewiston's Republican leader, Gerry Wolfgang, for lunch.

I did not pay much attention to the food because the company was scintillating. But the soup was good. There is no one who doesn't feel better by a little soup. And the burgers were extraordinarily tasty.

Then one night I came in for dinner and sat down for an hour with the owners, Kenny and Tracy.

I asked them about their restaurant and tried a sampling of food.

Homemade Soups

Tonight, they had chicken noodle soup with egg noodles.

"Pennsylvania Dutch, extra wide egg noodles," Kenny said.

The soothing sustenance of good chicken soup. I sipped and felt warm comfort from it. "We make all our soups, homemade," Tracy said.

Also, on the menu, was hamburger soup with fresh vegetables.

"No canned or frozen vegetables," Kenny said.

"I don't do that. Not even at home," Tracy said. "I use fresh vegetables with everything. It takes a little more time, but it tastes better."

French Onion

The Royal has French onion soup every day and is rather famous for it.

"What is the secret of good French onion soup?" I asked.

"The cheese and the wine," Tracy said. "Fresh cut Vidalia onions. Everything we do is fresh, even our burgers are 100 beef. Nothing is frozen. Our chicken wings, our chicken breasts, are always fresh."

Getting back to soup, I noticed there was a soup I never heard of.

"I just love to cook, and I like to try new things," Tracy said. "I like to be creative with what I cook. Tonight, we have a stuffed hot banana pepper soup which is to die for."

"It's the same green banana peppers we serve as appetizers," Kenny added. "We buy the banana peppers fresh. We make our own ricotta cheese stuffing."

"Use good ingredients. Don't take any shortcuts," Tracy said.

Kenny's Special

The Royal makes their own homemade pea meal bacon. They cure the pork themselves.

"There are Canadians who come in for it," Kenny said, then explained the process of curing the ham in brine and rolling it in corn

meal in the traditional way.

The Royal is the only restaurant in Niagara Falls that takes the time to cure their own bacon, as far as I know.

How's this for breakfast: A large slice of pea meal bacon, two poached eggs, over an English muffin. And freshly made hollandaise sauce – with just the right amount of lemon – poured on top. It makes an exquisite and satisfying breakfast for \$9.95 and served with fresh-cut home fries.

Baby Back Ribs.

Every Thursday, the Royal has baby back ribs. Slow cooked.

"I only serve baby back ribs. I don't serve the bigger ones," Kenny said. "Baby backs are more expensive and they're smaller, but much more tender."

I tried them and they were exquisite, with just the right amount of barbecue sauce, which is to say, because the meat was so flavorful, I did not need much sauce.

Best of all, these ribs I could eat with a fork. You don't have to make a mess picking up ribs and chewing them off the bone. The meat fell right off the bone with a little prodding from my fork.

Seafood

The Royal serves an array of seafood. Fresh haddock on Fridays. Eight-ounce lobster tails every day for \$13.95.

They serve their haddock in a variety of ways: Deep fried, beer battered, breaded haddock, or baked haddock, Greek or Italian style, or Cajun. The Italian has tomatoes and onions. The Greek has feta cheese.

On Fridays, they serve a seafood platter: crab cakes, scallops, shrimp and 10-12 ounce fresh haddock.

Kenny buys the fish personally at the market. The Royal makes their own batter, of course.



A 1/2 rack of the Royal's famous ribs along with their delicious macaroni and cheese on the left. A hearty meatloaf dinner with homemade mashed potatoes, gravy, vegetables, and piping hot stuffed banana pepper soup on the right. dinner and the Royal's famous.

There is shrimp cocktail and shrimp baskets. The shrimp were fresh and perfectly cooked.

Fresh steamed clams with butter. On Fridays, homemade New England clam chowder with fresh clams and real cream.

Meatloaf and turkey on Sundays

Meatloaf with mashed potatoes and gravy is served on Sundays. And Monday, meatloaf sandwiches with mashed potatoes and gravy.

As for the mashed potatoes, you can get them every day, made fresh. Mashed potatoes with real potatoes, butter, milk. No sour cream. No cheeses. The people of Niagara Falls like their mashed potatoes the old-fashioned way.

There is no great secret to it. Tracy thinly slices potatoes, setting them to boil. When

they're soft, she mashes and seasons them, adding warmed milk and butter. The result is a deep dish of creamy, smooth mashed potatoes.

Turkey

On Sundays they also serve fresh turkey with gravy, stuffing, mashed potatoes, fresh vegetables and cranberries.

Curiously enough in their club sandwiches and julienne salads they use the same fresh turkey. They do not use processed turkey.

"I wouldn't serve anything I don't like," Tracy said.

Like fresh carrots and Brussels sprouts tossed in a pan of butter and garlic and squeezed the juice of a lemon over them. Everything is simple but satisfying.



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Royal Cont.



The owners of the Royal Cafe, Kevin and Tracie Zortman, have transformed a once-dilapidated building into what is now an absolute treasure!

Boiled Dinner

Tracy likes to make a “boiled dinner.” Corned beef and cabbage.

“So many people do not know how to prepare it properly. It’s often too dry or too salty,” Tracy said. “I slow cook it in a roaster oven. After the meat gets down to a certain point, I put in the potatoes and carrots and it soaks right into the brine and makes it so flavorful.”

On Tuesday, the Royal also has a Polish platter. Perogies, Kielbasa, fresh cabbage rolls, sauerkraut, fresh rye bread for \$16.95. Sometimes she also does a polish boiled dinner.

Pasta

At the Royal, they make their own sauces. Red sauce and Alfredo.

They don’t put meat in the sauce, which is nice for vegetarians. For non-vegetarians, they serve spaghetti with fresh homemade meatballs, which you can get every day.

What goes into the best red sauce?

Roma and sun-dried tomatoes, good olive oil, fresh basil. Thick, rich tomato paste; fresh-packed crushed tomatoes and a cup of red wine. Rosemary, thyme, oregano.

In skilled hands, meals become greater than the sum of their ingredients. It makes a wonderful meal: Rich tomato sauce with a sprinkling of shredded parmigiana over pasta. Crushed red pepper, and freshly ground black pepper. Fresh-baked bread. Crisp green salad.

Grated Cheese

One thing I found interesting is, at the Royal, they shred their own parmesan cheese.

Why? I asked.

Kenny answered, “When you buy a bag of shredded cheese, in order for it not to clump together, they use a little sawdust. Parmesan cheese in shakers – like Kraft – they have sawdust in it. It’s legal. They use about 5 percent sawdust, so it won’t stick. When you buy it in a block, there are no fillers. That’s why we buy it in blocks and shred it ourselves.”

It’s a small thing?

“But it is so much better,” Kenny said. “Flavor. And it melts. You see how nice the grated cheese melts on the sauce.”

Steaks

Kenny prefers to serve New York strip steaks. Aged beef.

“I select the best cuts,” he said. “I won’t have it delivered. I personally inspect the beef I buy.”

How do you like to cook it?, I asked.

“Of course, we cook it to suit our patrons. I like my steak medium rare. Nice and pink throughout. I don’t mind if it’s really red too.”

A 16 ounce NY Strip at the Royal is only \$19.95.

Desserts

Tracy is a baker as well as a cook. She likes to make homemade cookies: Chocolate chip, oatmeal raisin, peanut butter, sugar cookies.

For dessert, there was peanut butter pie and dark, strong coffee. The layers were sealed together with chocolate, warmed up with a hint of ancho powder.

She also had banana cream pie, coconut cream pie, strawberry cheesecake, and homemade fried dough.

Every day, they have fried dough.

Daily Specials

There are so many items to try at the Royal. It’s a place where you can go and eat often.

Hot buttermilk biscuits with chicken and gravy. Fried chicken. Veal parmigiana. Lobster mac and cheese. Shepherd’s Pie. Sometimes it’s hard to choose.

They say there is a difference between dining and eating. Dining is an art. And when you eat to get the most out of your meal, that is dining.

You dine at the Royal Cafe.

But why take so much space to write about a local restaurant?

When things are great, they deserve mention. It is important for people to know.

Great food and a wonderful atmosphere are found at the Royal.

You can’t ask for anything better.

The Royal Café is located at 311 Hyde Park Blvd, Niagara falls, NY 14303.



How Long Does It Take to Get Out of Shape?

Colder temperatures and fewer daylight hours make it more difficult to stay active and motivated. But how long does it take to actually get out of shape? It varies from person to person, but most experts agree that it’s pretty simple: you either use it or you lose it.

After a few days

No change. A day off gives your body time to recover and grow stronger, so don’t worry about missing a day here or there. In addition to preventing overtraining, which can lead to injuries, rest days can also bring a much-needed mental break.

After one week

Cardio fitness starts to decline in the form of a slightly lower VO2 max – a measure of the lung’s ability to do work – meaning you might be a little more winded than usual doing a task you’re used to. During this time, blood sugar and blood pressure levels also begin to rise.

A week off won’t cause huge drops in muscle strength or cardio ability, but it could signal that you’re falling out of your regular routine.

After two to three weeks

This is when most people start to notice losses in strength and endurance. Cardio fitness levels decrease about 10-20 percent. Muscular strength tends to stick around a little longer, but a few weeks off can still lead to a 20-25 percent loss in strength. A layoff this long may also negatively affect your mood, stress level and even the quality of your sleep.

Consider some indoor and outdoor activities to maintain your fitness level during the winter months. If you’ve been inactive this winter, remember to start slow – trying to lift or run as much as you did before could lead to injury and even more time off.

- Get in a workout at home with simple bodyweight exercises that don’t require equipment.
- Workout programs on DVD and Blu-ray are available for all fitness levels.
- Go for a walk or jog around the neighborhood or explore some local hiking trails.
- Find an activity the whole family can enjoy, like sledding or ice skating.
- Participate in a winter sport like skiing, snowboarding or snowshoeing.

Maziarz Cont.

Tony Farina Investigative Reporter

Here is what we have learned about what led up to the surprising Maziarz plea last Friday (March 2), three days before the trial was to start, to a single misdemeanor count of offering a false instrument for filing.

According to legal sources, the judge suggested to the prosecution that they offer a misdemeanor plea, and told the defense they "ought" to take a misdemeanor if it is offered and they could walk away with a \$1,000 fine.

Clearly, Judge Lynch did not believe the stakes were big enough in the case to proceed with a trial and suggested to both sides get rid of it.

The plea was offered and accepted.

Case closed, a stinging blow to Schneiderman.

As one legal observer noted, Schneiderman is not getting much out of these high profile cases and has left himself open to the charges that started early on from Ortt that

they were politically-motivated and lacked any legal basis.

For Maziarz, the onetime king of Niagara County Republican politics, the result is a chance to move on, with one of his attorneys, E. Stewart Jones, saying the dismissal of all five felonies and the misdemeanor plea "was a win-win for George Maziarz."

Schneiderman countered that the guilty plea sends a message to public officials not to abuse the public trust because you will be caught and there will be a public accounting.

Maybe so, but if you are going to prosecute public officials, make sure you have a solid case and don't proceed to just to get a headline.

Certainly, the whole matter has been unpleasant for Maziarz and very expensive.

However, Maziarz was able to use his sizeable war chest to pay for his defense, so his only personal cost was the \$1,000 fine.

For Ortt, the matter is completely closed.



Former Senator George Maziarz pleads guilty to a misdemeanor in Albany on March 2, 2018.

He had been charged with padding his former North Tonawanda mayoral salary and using the Niagara County Republican Committee, which Maziarz once controlled, to provide an alleged no-show job for his wife.

But Judge Lynch dismissed the three felonies last June for lack of evidence.

Furthermore, any witnesses who had been likely to testify about GOP operations will not be heard in any public forum.

For Schneiderman, he comes up empty in his high-profile prosecution of two top Republican figures in Niagara County.

The Schneiderman camp is trying hard to spin it into a victory, but Maziarz is walking away with a misdemeanor and Senator Ortt is free and clear, so is it really a victory?



Former Senator George Maziarz and current Senator Rob Ortt are all smiles after AG Schneiderman comes up short of presenting enough evidence to proceed to trial for either of them.

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Niagara County Super Lawyers Series: Michael H. White to the Defense

When an individual is going through the criminal justice system, there is often nothing in their life more important to them than what the outcome will be.

It is for this reason that when selecting an attorney to represent you, that person should care as much about what you are going through as you do.

Based in Lockport, New York, criminal defense attorney Michael H. White, Jr., is just that person.

Born in Wilson, Mr. White was born and raised in Niagara County.

He attended Wilson High School, graduating in 1994, and then went on to attend law school at Syracuse University.

Mr. White has practiced law in Niagara County for nearly a decade and, throughout that time, has concentrated his time, effort, and

preparation on mastering the art of criminal defense.

"It has been a dream come true to practice law in the same place where I grew up," said White.

"I love this community and being able to help people has made being a lawyer worthwhile."

Through a complete understanding of the criminal law, Mr. White uses his knowledge to obtain the best possible outcome for his clients.

When asked why he chooses to practice primarily criminal law, Mr. White stated, "for me, it's never been about the money. I went to law school because I wanted to help people and I am thankful for the opportunity each and every day to do that; as both a public defender in the Niagara County Public Defender's Office and in my private practice."

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THE NIAGARA REPORTER

Mr. White continues to see his criminal law practice grow with clients from all over Niagara County.

"It is important to be someone that people can trust," said White, "and that is what I have always been for my clients."

Whether you are from Lockport, Niagara Falls, Lewiston, North Tonawanda, or somewhere else, each client deserves someone who will have their best interests at heart, fight for them tooth and nail, and

always be willing to go the extra mile. I oftentimes meet people at the most difficult time in their life and, despite how hard that is to go through, am grateful for the opportunity to face it alongside them."

Mr. White can be contacted at (716) 998-7499 or via email at mhwhitejr@gmail.com, and his office is located at 7 Main Street, Lockport, New York 14094.

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Chris's Corner: A Conservative-Libertarian Approach to Fighting Poverty



Niagara Falls City Councilman Chris Voccio

I attended a presentation recently of the Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI), a state-funded program announced last year with the noble intention of reducing poverty by helping people enter the workforce and gaining important life skills.

We've been waging a War on Poverty for half a century now, since LBJ declared war while at the same time waging another war in a far-off jungle.

The results of our War on Poverty are questionable, at best.

New York's former United States Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan warned us that we were contributing to the breakdown of the family and in a sense institutionalizing poverty, but 50 years

later the war rages on.

Here in Niagara Falls, poverty is a massive problem that is a drain on our city's and county's coffers, not to mention the large amounts of state and federal monies sent here to alleviate poverty. But look around.

During the ESPRI presentation, our mayor correctly stated that the best route out of poverty was a job. Precisely.

So let's follow that line of reasoning and look at another approach to fighting poverty.

What if the tremendous resources we pour into fighting poverty were instead deployed to enhance economic development.

What if the drain of tax dollars that transfer wealth from the most productive sectors of the economy and channel them to unproductive sectors were instead allowed to remain in the productive sectors, thereby creating more economic activity and more jobs?

Yes, a job is the best route out of poverty. But it's become too easy to live in this country without a job.

We've essentially taken away the all-important incentives to work and be productive and replaced them with a safety net that has become a hammock.

We've so institutionalized poverty that you can live at the federal poverty line and still have a smart phone, a flat screen TV, air condi-

tioning, health insurance via Medicaid and plenty of food, all without a job.

So where is the incentive to go through the process of learning new skills, seeking employment, and then showing up every day to a job?

Here's an idea:

What if the federal and state government officials who administer programs related to subsidized housing, food stamps, Medicaid and other public assistance programs carved out an exemption for Niagara Falls, we'll call it the Niagara Falls Poverty Reduction Enterprise Zone (PREZ.)

In this zone, federal and state handouts are available, but with strings attached, strings determined at the local level, not in Washington or Albany.

Things like work, living responsibly and drug-free, community involvement and other worthy attributes could be tied to the handouts.

At the same time, we vigorously push economic development and job creation, reducing tax and regulatory barriers to doing business in Niagara Falls.

Perhaps prohibitively high state business taxes are reduced in the PREZ, offset by reduced state handouts.

So at the very time investors and developers and entrepreneurs

are coming here and creating jobs, we have a bunch of people who are freed from the yoke of federal and state largesse and entering the workforce.

Many of these good folks may lack the skills needed to enter the workforce, but many employers are willing to train and develop people and give them the skills they need.

The good thing is that they would now legitimately need these skills. Let's face it, under the current system they really don't need the skills because they can live without working.

But this is all a pipe dream. There will be no federal or state carve-out for Niagara Falls or any other community to try a new approach to fighting poverty.

We'll continue to drain massive tax dollars from the productive sectors in our economy and pour them into programs that haven't worked for decades.

While I'm skeptical of this new ESPRI initiative, I applaud the well-intended people and groups trying their best to make a difference in their community, and I hope they can make a difference.

The final slide of the ESPRI Power Point presentation asked a number of questions. The first: Will this program work?

What do you think?

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Liberty Tax Ready to Help Get Tax Returns Filed Quickly

The folks at Liberty Tax Service wish to advise taxpayers that the due dates this year for corporate and personal tax filings are just around the corner.

For corporate tax filers, the deadline is March 15, or next Thursday. For personal returns, the date is April 17.

"It is that time of year again, says Liberty's owner, Edwin Garey, "the time to file your income tax return and maybe get a nice refund check to help make the coming year a little better for your family and get caught up on any outstanding bills still on your list."

If you are looking for a nearby location to get your tax return prepared and filed, you might want to check out Liberty Tax Service at 6509 South Transit Rd., Lockport, or call 650-4076 to set

up an appointment with the experts on hand to help you get that refund check as soon as possible.

"We are here to serve our clients," says Garey, "and we have a solid group of professionals here to help our clients get the best possible results. We have a centrally located office and we can schedule appointments to accommodate our clients. It is our mission to give our clients the best service possible and as quickly as possible."

Among the accounting professionals on hand at Liberty Tax Service are Michael Gawel, manager, and Gregory Gerstung, and there is also a person on staff for Spanish-speaking clients.

"We are proud of our record here at Liberty Tax Service in serving our cli-

ents," says Garey, "and that is the reason so many of our clients come back every year to get their tax returns filed. They know they will receive professional and courteous help in getting their taxes done."

Again, due dates this year are April 17 for individuals, estates, and trusts, and next Thursday (March 15) for corporate filers.

"It is indeed a busy time for us, but also very rewarding to be able to tell a client that he or she is going to get a nice check from the government," says Niagara Falls native Gawel, a CPA. "We take great care in serving each and every client and helping them get the maximum return on their refund. That's the best part of this job."

"New York Hits the Productive Sector with Twin Sledge Hammers: Property Taxes and Income Taxes." - report

Frank Parlato

Overall, New York imposes one of the nation's heaviest tax burdens on residents and businesses, adding to the cost of living, working and creating jobs in the State.

The Empire Center, an Albany think tank, thinks it might have some answers.

It released its 2018 edition of "Checklist for Change," a summary of reforms it says are "needed to promote renewed economic growth and competitiveness in New York State."

But here are some of the problems the state faces:

Only 15 states had top state income tax rates higher than New York's 6.85 percent.

New York's property taxes are even worse – especially for those living in western New York.

As of 2010, measuring property taxes as a percentage of home value, 15 of the 20 most heavily-taxed counties in the USA are in upstate New York, according to The Tax Foundation.

Property taxes in most New York counties were two to three times the national median.

This might be part of the reason why people are leaving New York.

New York led the nation in net domestic out-migration since 2010, losing more than 1 million people.

New York lost 190,508 residents to other states during the year ending July 1, 2017.

New York has been a net domestic migration loser for more than 50 years.

The Empire Center report focuses on reducing the state's heavy burden on taxpayers.

It focuses on six priorities:

- Cut taxes
- Curb health care costs
- Control public employee compensation
- Reduce the job creation toll
- Adopt pro-growth energy policies
- Streamline state development regulations

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Study Claims \$35 Million Impact from Discover Niagara Shuttle While Tourists Exit Downtown Niagara Falls on "Free" Buses

Jim Hufnagel Opinion

Recent glowing reports in the local media about the economic impact of the Discover Niagara shuttle, which conveys tourists out of downtown Niagara Falls to Lewiston and Youngstown, would be more plausible if, instead of discharging passengers at various attractions, the shuttle was dropping off sacks of money.

"Discover Niagara Shuttle drove \$35M into local economy," declared the Gazette on Dec. 4. "Discover Niagara Shuttle driving economic opportunity in Niagara Region" heralded the Lewiston Sentinel a few days later. "With continued growth and investment," the headline continued, "\$35 million impact projected to double over next 3 years."

Even Congressman Brian Higgins joined in the delirium over the Discover Niagara shuttle, stating on his official website that "... operation of the Discover Niagara Shuttle injected \$35 million into the Niagara County economy during the 2016 season."

The upbeat coverage was based on an economic impact study released by the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, which "sponsors" the Discover Niagara shuttle. The Heritage Area retained Pittsburgh-based consulting firm Tripp Umbach to survey some 310 shuttle passengers and 10 "stakeholders," plug shuttle ridership and other statistics into a computer model, and arrive at the nice, round \$35 million figure.

When it comes to the fare-free Discover Niagara shuttle, here at the Reporter we've always enjoyed having what we fondly refer to as, "Fun with Math."

For example, based on numbers released last year by the National Heritage Area, we calculated that, on average, fewer than 11 riders board the shuttle on its complete 15 stop, 28 mile round trip to Fort Niagara and back (see "'Discover Niagara' Shuttle Numbers Disappoint, Ridership, Tourism Impact Fail To Meet Expectations"

7/21/16 Reporter). And since most passengers board and disembark more than once during their trip, and are therefore counted two or three times, even the eleven passenger number is inflated.

"Riders may have been counted twice as they hop on and off again, (Heritage Director and shuttle supervisor Sara) Capen acknowledged," to the Buffalo News' Nancy Fischer in a September, 2016 profile of the heavily subsidized (\$1 million annually from NYPA, State Parks, Destination Niagara (formerly NTCC), the city of Niagara Falls and the Niagara Greenway) transportation initiative.

It's unknown what the National Heritage Area paid for the 34-page economic impact study, and they wouldn't tell the Reporter. Tripp Umbach charges up to \$150,000 "for an assignment that requires conducting interviews, analyzing different scenarios or strategic planning," its CEO told a Pittsburgh newspaper back in 2011. "Critics of economic impact studies say the organizations who commission the studies have a vested interest in using aggressive multipliers in order to inflate their economic impact," the article went on to say.

It's in that spirit that we divided the \$35 million in purported economic impact for the year 2016, as determined by Tripp Umbach, by the 33,530 shuttle riders, also according to their report, who got on and off during that year, and it works out to an astonishing \$1,043.84 of additional tourist spending for each woman, man and child who rides the Discover Niagara shuttle.

If you believe that the Discover Niagara shuttle adds over a thousand dollars to the western Niagara County economy for every tourist who rides it, we have a waterfalls we'd like to sell you.

The study went on to predict that, given projected 20% annual increases in ridership, economic impact is slated to double by the year 2020, to \$70 million.

However, it was reported by several of the previously mentioned local media outlets in December that "Almost 70,000" had ridden the shuttle by the end of 2017, presumably based on information supplied by



A slew of local politicians gathered around National Heritage director Sara Capen late last year at the NU campus to promote the government-subsidized "free" Niagara shuttle

National Heritage.

Stealthily, National Heritage hasn't released ridership figures for 2017, but since 2016 ridership was 33,530, 2017 couldn't have been more than 36,470, consistent with the "Almost 70,000" claimed over both years. That's an 8% increase, not 20% as asserted by crack consulting team Tripp Umbach.

Tripp Umbach spent a great deal of time visiting Niagara County doing research on the Discover Niagara shuttle, as evidenced by its statement that the shuttle is "having a significant impact on local sites and communities, such as Lewistown (sic)."

Let's just think that was a typo: "Many stakeholders think that the Town of Lewistown is the biggest benefactor of the Discover Niagara Shuttle, as Shuttle riders are making the stop at Lewistown and patronizing local shops and businesses."

It's indeed fortunate that last month the Niagara Falls City Council, acting on behalf of a city in deep fiscal distress, voted \$100,000 to the shuttle so that tourists can patronize "Lewistown" shops and businesses, the shuttle's "biggest benefactor."

In fact, according to the Tripp Umbach study, of the "top ten destinations" identified by 310 surveyed riders of the Discover

Niagara shuttle, the only downtown Niagara Falls tourist attraction was the Aquarium, if you could call it that. The remainder were the Maid of the Mist, Cave of the Winds, Gorge Discovery Center and Niagara Falls State Park, the Power Vista, Fort Niagara and its State Park, Whirlpool State Park and, last but not least, the "Village of Lewistown."

We happened upon the shuttle parked at Whirlpool State Park at noon on Wednesday, February 28, months before the start of the tourist season. The driver volunteered the information that the shuttle was transporting Niagara University students from a location on Hyde Park Boulevard to various locations on campus, and he was on lunch break.

In fact, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area maintains offices on the NU campus. Dr. Thomas A. Chambers, Professor of history at NU, is chairman of the National Heritage board. The majority of the interns at National Heritage are Niagara University students.

We think it's a great idea that the city of Niagara Falls contributed \$100,000 to the Discover Niagara shuttle so that NU students can get a free ride to campus during these chilly winter months.



Why was the shuttle parked at Whirlpool State Park last week, on Feb. 28th, months before the tourist season begins?



The shuttle moonlights as a free Niagara University school bus, as evidenced by the sign in the window and the admission of the driver.

Lead or declassify! Declassify what Obama sealed, hid, over-classified to protect himself, Hillary, Holder, Lynch etc.!



J. Gary DiLaura
The Right Side

Opinion

Mr. President; if you will not take charge of matters demanding your attention, then, at least, declassify those matters that Obama sealed, hid, over-classified to protect himself, Hillary Clinton, Eric Holder, Loretta Lynch and others!

Former President Obama lived a life of lies and deceit before becoming president and expanded his deceitful ways into very serious crimes, during his eight years of his "mission," in my

opinion.

Obama "sealed," classified, and otherwise hid Fast and Furious papers from purview, like he did his passport, his college FAF forms, his Social Security numbers, and many other records, including those overflowing into the deceit used in the FISA courts!

I am certain there is no other reason for Obama to either classify or use Executive Privilege to hide the facts from the Congress Intelligence Committee and the family of our Border Patrol agent Brian Terry, other than to protect Eric Holder and/or himself from possible criminal charges for blatant criminal negligence or some other crimes.

The use by Obama of our FISA court for what I believe was his "personal Black Ops" agency to monitor his political foes, news reporters, those who were critical of him, and other personal reasons, seems to be overwhelming.

Who else would... who else could have ordered Samantha Power to

unmask the identity of over 300 US citizens in Obama's last year, 2016?

Clapper, Brennan and Rice all say, under oath, that they know nothing about it. So who ordered the unmasking?

Unmasking is not a minor deal, it is a major deal! The names of citizens discovered during a FISA over hear of foreigners, according to FISA Law, are to be deleted.

Who ordered the unmasking and why? Congress and We, the People, demand an answer!

Only the president can review the FISA court evidence and make the determination, if a crime probably was committed, who should investigate and then order the investigation.

Only the president can declassify documents that agencies refuse to declassify!

The president of the United States doesn't "ask" the Attorney General or FBI Director to open or close an

investigation; he tells them to do so! He may ask their opinion and then direct them to act but the president "is" the boss.

He doesn't ask. He directs. That is what President Trump, in my opinion, must start doing or, at the very least, he should start reviewing evidence and see what the hell is going on!

Declassify the records DOJ is withholding from Congress.

It is Obama holdovers who are refusing to release. I'll bet money on that!

He should, at the very least, examine all the FISA papers regarding the Carter Page case and then, if warranted, declassify all those documents, so Congress can do their job.

If the president doesn't want to take charge, for whatever reason, then allow Congress and We, the People to know if Obama abused the FISA court system and the rights of citizens, against illegal search and seizure!

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Restaurant Review: Colosso Taco



Jamie DePetris
Food Expert/Critic

Colosso Taco & Subs has been a staple in the City of Niagara Falls for decades. It recently moved locations from Pine Avenue to its current location at 7101 Packard Road in the Town of Niagara.

The new location is large, roomy, clean, comfortable, and very welcoming. The food is exactly the same, which means YUMMY!!

Upon entering I was greeted by the owner, Rami, who has never taken a day off since he opened the business years ago!

Although it was lunchtime and the

restaurant was packed, my order was taken immediately. Before I knew it, my food was ready!

I had been frequenting Colosso Taco on Pine Avenue since I was... well, since the 80's (a woman never reveals her age!).

I would drop in on my way home from work or after a long night out on the town.

The same anticipation I felt waiting for my food to be ready then is the same that I feel now!

My usual order is a cheese crisp and a small colosso taco and, although I didn't waiver from it, I also ordered a steak and cheese sub, a homemade pastelillo, and fried dough bites.

I know what you're thinking and, NO, I was not alone!

The "cheese crisp" has always been my favorite and still is. Melted cheese on a fried tortilla topped with medium sauce and banana peppers cooked to perfection. It definitely gets me every time.

The "colosso taco" is seasoned ground beef, cheese, lettuce and tomato in a soft tortilla shell. No disappointment there.

The "steak and cheese" submarine was prepared with real steak cut thin, topped with melted cheese, lettuce and tomato, served on a fresh roll.

Then we come to the "pastelillo."



The "steak & cheese submarine" (top) & the "pastelillo" (bottom)

This is the first time I had ever ordered it, but WOW, it was a homemade pocket full of heaven. It is filled with meat, cheese, potatoes & peppers, wrapped in an authentic empanada shell. The pastelillo is now tied for my favorite.

I finished with the "fried dough bites," which should be called fried dough fries if you ask me. These are insanely delicious. Crispy on the outside, delicious and soft on the inside, topped with powdered sugar. It is by far is my favorite fried dough ever.



The "fried dough bites"

Overall, Colosso Taco is an awesome restaurant for a quick and delicious meal or snack!!

A few things that are happening soon are:

A children's menu is coming along with specials for the kids.

"Taco Dogs" are also coming! I'll leave you in suspense of what that is exactly (but YUM).

There will also be an outdoor patio this summer!

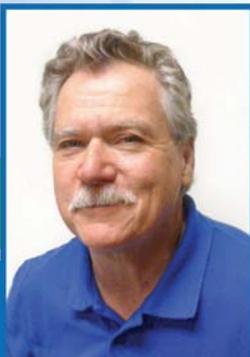
I suggest everyone go and experience why Colosso Taco has, and always will, steal my taste buds away!!

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Household Tips for Spring Flood Season

Brought to you by the Niagara Falls Water Board

Focus on prevention.

Long before you're in a flooding situation, look around your property for ways to divert rainwater away from your home. Important considerations include extending rain gutter downspouts away from your home and making sure the grade of your yard surfaces slope away from your home.

Clean the rain gutters in the spring and after all the leaves have come down in the fall.

Blocked gutters will cause all of the roof water to dump directly against your foundation, increasing the likelihood of basement flooding.

Extend the rain gutter downspouts well out and away from your home.

Do not connect the downspouts to your foundation footer drain tiles or to underground dry wells. This will only cause the roof water to further saturate the ground and cause flooding in your basement.

Install a sump pump.

An automatic sump pump should help keep normal amounts of water leakage/rainfall from building up in the basement. As long as the sump pump tank has an opening in the lid, the sump pump will act like a floor drain and keep the water from accumulating. Melting snow piled up around the perimeter of your house will run down basement walls, so remember to shovel and move such snow back 3-5 feet.

Consider purchasing a water alarm and flood sensor.

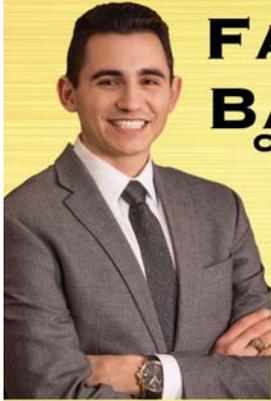
A water alarm and flood sensor will alert you of water in the basement before extensive damage is done. There are a range of affordable water alarm systems available that will alert you through an audible siren and/or a phone call to one or more pre-programmed telephone numbers.

Safety Reminder!

Never wade into a flooded basement to check the flood level or related damage. Flood water can contain bacteria and cause serious infections. In addition, electrical shorts can occur as a result of floods, potentially causing electrocution.

Please remember to keep emergency contact phone numbers handy, in case of an incident. These should include phone numbers for the Niagara Falls Water Board 716-283-9770, your local plumber, and electrician.

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