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RESTAINO TAKES REIGNS OF CITY GOVERNMENT



(Cont. on pg. 2)

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Morinello Opposes Raising Taxes to Close State Deficit

By: Tony Farina

The Citizens Budget Commission, a business-supported fiscal watchdog group, warned Gov. Andrew Cuomo last year that Medicaid costs could spike, and spike they did with the rising costs helping to create a \$6.1 billion budget hole in the coming year.

(Cont. on pg. 6)

HAMILTON: Richardson, for Whom the 'Belle' Tolls

By: Ken Hamilton

Steve Belle was still visibly shaken by the untimely death of his friend and mentor, restaurateur Jesse Richardson,

(Cont. on pgs. 3)

OFFICIAL HOME OF **THE CRIME** PAGE 4
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NIAGARA FALLS

Excitement in the Air at City Hall as Restaino Takes the Helm

Tony Farina

The new mayor of Niagara Falls appears to be acting like a football coach getting his team ready for the season, moving around City Hall looking to get employees involved in his efforts to return the Cataract City to its glory days of the past.

"There's definitely an air of excitement at City Hall," says new Council President Chris Voccio who took over on the same day, Jan. 1, that Robert Restaino was sworn in as mayor, and who has been meeting regularly with the city's new chief executive.



Niagara Falls City Councilman Chris Voccio was voted Council Chairman by a vote of 3-2.

"I believe he will be a very involved partner with the council," said Voccio, saying that would be a change of pace from the previous administration based on his experience.

Republicans now hold a 3 to 2 majority on the council, and with new GOP member John Spanbauer on board, there could be a consensus brewing to find ways to reduce costs as Voccio has long pressed for getting unions to the table and Spanbauer campaigned on the idea of running government like a business, not spending what's not there.

Restaino is known to be working feverishly pushing his collaborative approach to involve neighboring villages, towns, cities, and the school board in helping to create a strong hub for the region, namely Niagara Falls.

Most observers expect announcements in the very near future on the fruits of those efforts, something the new mayor has been talking about for years and has been working on since he won the office in November.

What would certainly help kick-start the regional approach would be some kind of service agreement with the city's major employer, the Seneca Nation, and the arrival of between \$35 and \$40 million in casino revenue sharing dollars to



Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino being sworn in on January 1st, 2020, by his daughter, Niagara Falls City Court Judge Daniello Restaino.

the city, some of which is already accounted for, but nonetheless badly needed.

Still no word from the Senecas but Restaino was known to be meeting regularly with Seneca Nation representatives from the moment he won the election and hopefully the money will begin flowing again soon.

For Niagara Falls, there is definitely a new feel around town, whether at local restaurants like the Como and Michael's or at local coffee shops like Frankie's Donuts.

The youthful Restaino excited everyone at City Hall during his swearing-in speech before a packed council chambers as he pledged to work hard to restore Niagara Falls to greatness and urging workers and citizens to join with him to get the job done.

It is definitely a new beginning for the world wonder city, home to the mighty waters of Niagara Falls. Maybe now is the beginning of a new era for the Cataract City and the citizens still around hoping it comes to pass.

NIAGARA



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Sanborn: Smokin Joes (gas station and store) & Tim Hortons

Wilson: Lakeside Market

Youngstown: Anchor Spirits & Wines, Bandanas Bar & Grill, Public Library, Rite Aid, Village Diner

HAMILTON: Richardson, for Whom the 'Belle' Tolls Cont. from Cover



Ken Hamilton

when I ran into both him and former inmate Rudolphus Boans at the Military Road Walmart. "I didn't see you at the funeral," Steve said to me. I responded, "I knew nothing about it until yesterday (after it happened)."

It was kind of flattering that from the thousand or so of people that Steve said he saw at the wake, he would even miss me; but it shouldn't have been surprising to him, in as much as doctors likewise don't know about every operation that takes place in local hospitals, and funeral directors don't know about every funeral in town; nor do newspaper writers know about everything written in the local newspapers either.

Belle did say that he had a hard time being around the big crowds that were at the Richardson wake at the Colucci Funeral Home on Military Road near the six-corners of Packard and Porter roads, near the Tim Horton's there, and not far from where Hutchins once had his automotive parts store, and the K-Mart store once lured shoppers from the small clothing store on streets like Highland in the northern parts of the city, and north Main Street in mid-town, and Niagara Street that ran parallel to its namesake river, just before the river took its magnificent plunge into the depths of the gorge, once being a bread basket of the city's economy. That was back when homicides did occur, but with a much larger city population, their impacts were less – much less than the impact of businesses moving out of the city and subsequently increasing the ratio of crime in its remnant wake. "I couldn't do big crowds like that," Belle said, "but Jesse gave me my first break in business."

For 15 years, the affable Belle owned and operated Flight Food Service at the Niagara Falls International Airport, servicing the airlines and passengers that made flights into and out of western New York's second-largest commercial airport. His comments were in reference to the guidance and education that

Richardson had given him in how to start and run a business.

And Belle, like Richardson, was about business, despite its size and scope. As a result, he sought advice from other pillars of the community in the art and science of his profession. In addition to the mentoring of Richardson, Belle said that he also sought and received knowledge and advice from accountant Arthur B. Ray, Sr. and funeral director Teddy Williamson. It is to these gentlemen and others, that Belle credits a great deal of his success in life, citing Richardson as a "pillar of the community."

Belle went on to say that he had spoken with Richardson a week after a serious incident happened to Richardson, whereas Belle was told that he has to be aware of all people all around you.

As a result of that incident, about which Belle didn't disclose much information, Belle was inclined to believe that Richardson's demise was indeed a homicide – as the police investigators were treating it, though they had no conclusive evidence of it being such without an autopsy report. Belle said that he was reluctant to say that those who may have been involved in the prior incident and Richardson's untimely death were related. He then hailed back to so many people, especially African-Americans who were, at best, prosecuted and jailed in the past without conclusive evidence of their participation in a crime; and more extremely, significant numbers were never tried and simply executed in the far-past by racist vigilante groups, and that he didn't want to repeat the thinking of the past by falsely indicting anyone without evidence of their involvement.

"I was sad, really sad," Belle said of Richardson's death. "He was sure one of God's soldiers. He would always touch me with a verse in the Bible. He was a mentor and reached me at different levels of my life."

"When they are gone," Belle continued, "you can feel their good for days and days. It just doesn't feel good without them being on the planet. I really looked up to him (Richardson)."

Gone, too, are the Art Rays, Teddy Richardsons and other 'pillars' that, despite their own faults, gave encouragement, guidance and hope to a growing community that is now too often displayed as the poster boy of crime in the city.

"He (Richardson) was so good to me and my dad," Belle said. "I just want people to know that here



Jesse Richardson, photographed above, made a mark in the Niagara Falls community.

was a good man. It is a brotherly love. You love the family."

But even in the cold shadows of the death of Richardson, how bad is crime in the city?

According to Belle, "We are not as bad as some other cities. We work together trying to make our children better. It is what other cities around us are trying to get. When someone who is a pillar to the community, then it affects everyone. You see that the mayor (Mayor Robert Restaino) came out."

What then, according to Belle, is the solution?

"We have to improve the education of the children," Belle said. "We have to tighten up and teach our children. About Niagara Falls, everybody knows somebody. It is hard for somebody's child to hurt somebody else's child. He has to be accounted for."

Belle believes that with the legalization of recreational marijuana that the drug problem – in the past a major precipitous to crime -- has calmed down. But if what led to the death of Richardson was a robbery attempt, as many community members believe, then the legalization of recreational marijuana may have been deemed the need for the robbery. The illicit trade in marijuana was itself a business – a double-edged sword that when tossed haplessly into the air could come down and cut in various ways.

In the capitalism of America – and capitalism isn't necessarily a

bad thing, much of crime is caused by the lack of business opportunities that exist within a community. Belle, as previously cited, is a businessman himself, and when asked what would become of Richardson's Highland Avenue restaurant, he said that, "When black business owners had the grocery stores, their children didn't want to take it over to make it grow. They don't have time. I am hoping that they (the family) take it over and keep the name. We need to keep that family unit."

Next week, we explore that 'crime-reducing family unit concept' through the words of Belle's friend and spiritual brother, Rudolphus Boans, who's checkered past led him to become the founder of such organizations as founder of Stop the Violence Coalition, which later gave birth to organizations of non-violence advocacy groups like the United Front, 100 Mighty Men, MADD DADS and others like the Buffalo Peacemakers, whose Niagara Falls' local similarly-named group was introduced to Niagara Falls by former Niagara Falls City Councilman Ezra Scott, whose mantra was "A connected community is a protected community," reflects 16th century poet Richard Donne's work, For Whom the Bell Tolls that cites that, "No man is an island." It indicates that the destiny of anyone is in part the death of everyone.

In Niagara Falls, death is a part of the death of a city.



THE CRIME

WEEKLY HEADLINES

-Niagara Falls Police responded to a report of a stolen vehicle, originally out of Buffalo, in the morning hours of Monday, December 23rd, 2019, after receiving a tip from Sirius XM Radio who had tracked the vehicle near Tops on Portage Road. When police attempted to pull the vehicle over, the driver immediately took off at a high rate of speed. Police followed the vehicle until it came to a stop at the 700 block of 13th Street at which time the driver jumped out of the car and fled. A New York State Trooper who was in the area with his K-9 assisted police. Two out of three passengers in the vehicle were detained.

-Niagara Falls Police, Fire and Ambulance responded to 19th and Walnut Avenue in the early morning hours of Tuesday, December 24th, 2019, after reports of shots fired. According to police, at least one individual sustained serious injury and was transported to the hospital for treatment.

-Niagara Falls Police and Fire responded to the 600 block of 19th Street outside of the Coastal Gas Station around midnight on December 24th, 2019, after reports of a drive-by shooting that left one victim in serious condition.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the Valero gas station at 19th and Ferry Avenue in the afternoon hours of Tuesday, December, 24th, 2019, after reports of a stolen vehicle. According to witnesses, a man wearing a ski mask pushed the victim away from her vehicle and then drove off almost running her over.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to an Airbnb in Downtown Niagara Falls on Tuesday, December 24th, 2019, after a South African family told police that all of their belongings - and Christmas presents for their children -



were stolen from inside of their Airbnb. A TV was stolen from the home as well as one of the guest's insulin. Police are continuing to investigate the incident but do not have any leads at this time. The owner of the Airbnb promised a reimbursement to the family for their stay and belongings that were stolen.

-Niagara Falls Police and Fire responded to the 1000 block of Colvin Blvd. in the afternoon hours of Wednesday, December 25th, 2019, for reports of shots fired. Once arriving at the scene, police discovered that one individual sustained a gunshot wound to the hand.

-Niagara Falls Fire responded to the alley between the 1700 block of Whitney and Pierce for a detached garage fire.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the City Market in the early morning hours of Friday, December 27th, 2019, after reports that a female was robbed at knife-point. After receiving information regarding the suspect's appearance and the direction that he headed, Niagara Falls Police were able to locate an individual matching the description. After seeing police, the suspect took off running and officers began to pursue on foot. Police were able to catch him and take him into custody on the 600 block of 22nd Street. The suspect was then transported back to the City Market where a positive identification was made by the original suspect. However, the suspect said he was only one of four who robbed her.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 3100 block of Highland Avenue in the early morning hours of Saturday, December 28th, 2019, after reports of a double shooting. According to police, several hours after gatherers left the vigil event remembering Jessie Richardson, multiple gunshots were heard. Minutes later, police were informed that two gunshot victims arrived at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. Police later located the scene of the shooting on the 3100 block of Highland Avenue where at least thirty shell casings were found.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 8000 block of Rivershore Drive on Cayuga Island in the early morning hours of Tuesday, December 31st, 2019, after reports of a vehicle break-in. According to the 911 caller, he was inside his home when he heard a car door slam outside so he became suspicious and went to investigate. Upon going outside, he saw an unknown white male standing next to his truck. The caller then asked what he was doing at which point the male fled on foot towards the bridge. The caller, realizing his vehicle had been broken into, pursued him on foot to West Rivershore where the suspect jumped in the river attempting to swim to Buffalo Avenue. The caller told police that he saw the man struggling to swim against the current, and probably the cold temperature, and calling for help. The caller lost sight of the suspect while attempting to flag down police vehicles. The caller did not think the male made it out of the water and he was last seen in the water around the LaSalle Yacht Club. Niagara Falls Police, Niagara Falls Fire, Border Patrol and NYS Parks Police searched the area with the assistance of the Coast Guard who used a rescue boat. The male has not been found.

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Morinello Opposes Raising Taxes Cont. from Cover



NYS Assembly Member Angelo Morinello.

more taxes on the state's wealthiest taxpayers and instead favors making the state work better and more efficiently in serving the public.

Morinello, a member of the GOP minority in the Assembly, says raising taxes on the state's wealthiest taxpayers will continue to drive them out of the state, warning "pretty soon there won't be any of them left."

In fact, Morinello believes the state needs to take a different approach to deal with the budget crisis.

"We need to look at what we can cut back on," says the former Niagara Falls City Court judge, "and to find ways to economize. I'm not in favor of cutting health care but rather looking at ways to cut back on the abuse of the system."

Morinello represents the 145 District that includes Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda, Lewiston and parts of Erie County. In addition to the budget deficit, Morinello's minority GOP colleagues will be electing a new leader after the resignation of Canandaigua Republican Brian Kolb following his arrest on New Year's Eve on driving while intoxicated charges.

"It looks like Will Barclay will take over the Republican leadership role," said Morinello, referring to upstate lawmaker William Barclay, a nine-term Assembly member who has emerged as the frontrunner.

Of course, Republicans in Albany are scarce these days as Democrats control the Senate and the Assembly and the governor's office. Despite the lopsided political scorecard, expect moderates like Morinello to try and make their case to avoid a rush to raise and spend more money in the face of the budget deficit.

One area where Morinello is taking a public position is a proposal floating around to combine the state parks police with the state police, a move that he opposes, saying "they have two different mission statements. It would raise the question of whether the parks would have the protection they need."

On the homefront, Morinello likes the energy he sees from new Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino, saying he has put smiles on the faces of City Hall workers that haven't been there in years.

"I like what I see so far," says the longtime public servant, "and I

like the collaborative approach with the surrounding communities that he is pushing."

For now, Morinello will join the chorus of lawmakers in Albany looking for ways to cut into the enormous budget deficit without driving people out of the state or injuring the poor already here who depend on Medicaid for health care.

"We just need to do a better job than we're doing," he says, adding the state needs to look at efficiencies in delivering services, not in piling on with more taxes and fees.

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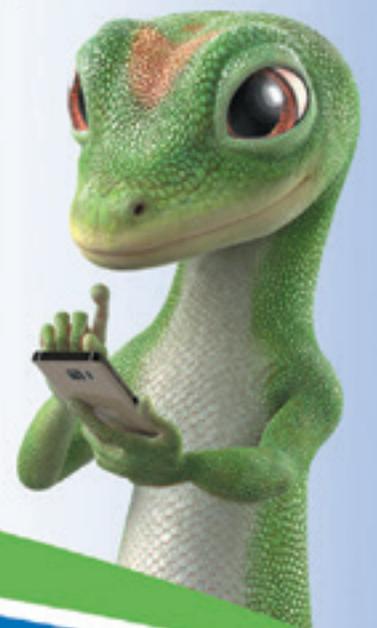
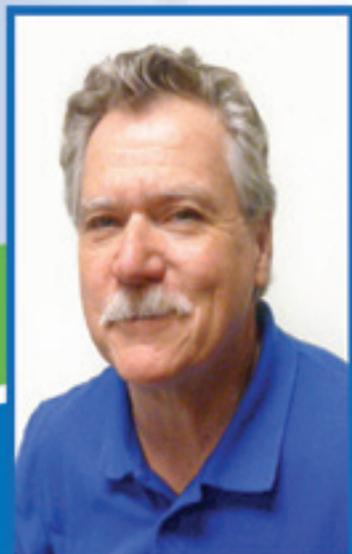
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sions and require people willing to put in the time and energy to help improve our city.”

City residents interested in being considered for current and future positions should send their resumes and letters of interest to Councilman Chris Voccio at 745 Main Street, Niagara Falls, NY, 14301 or christopher.voccio@niagarafallsny.gov.



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But lately, especially coming out of a busy few months of purchasing, it is refreshing to see a number of products proudly marked Made in America. From flatware to frying pans, boots and gloves to major automobile companies, everyday products we used to import from overseas, are all made right here in the United States employing Americans who in turn spend their income in our local communities. There are an increasing number of news stories about huge corporations bringing jobs and investments back to this country. It is always heartwarming to see a story that takes place in a small town in Ohio or Pennsylvania making quality goods with the Made in America label. Volvo, Toyota and Mazda are all building billion dollar factories in the United States to produce their cars – once made abroad – to employ thousands of Americans. We fortunately have a store focused on American made products in our own backyard. Now in multiple locations around Western New York, the Made in America store is packed with quality merchandise ALL made in America. From hats and shirts, to sandals and wind chimes, summer wear to winter protection, the Made in America store can outfit you from head to toe. From home goods to hardware, groceries to games, they make it easy to buy American. In addition to these convenient outlets, there are hundreds of American companies online to purchase thousands of products all Made in America by American hands. We and we alone have the power to change our economy. We need not wait on an incompetent Congress or count on our President to make the necessary changes to build this country to greatness once again. We need not look beyond a mirror to see who can choose to purchase goods made in this country by our neighbors and refuse to purchase an inferior good made overseas. We possess the power every time we decide whether or not to purchase that imported product. Take a close look. There are thousands and thousands of quality products made in the United States by US citizens. Buy American – the job you save may be your own.

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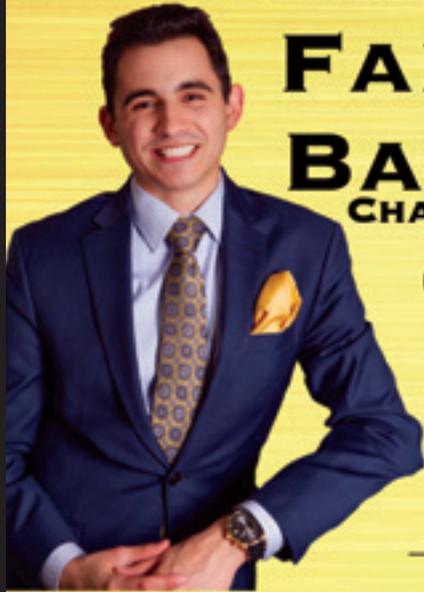
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