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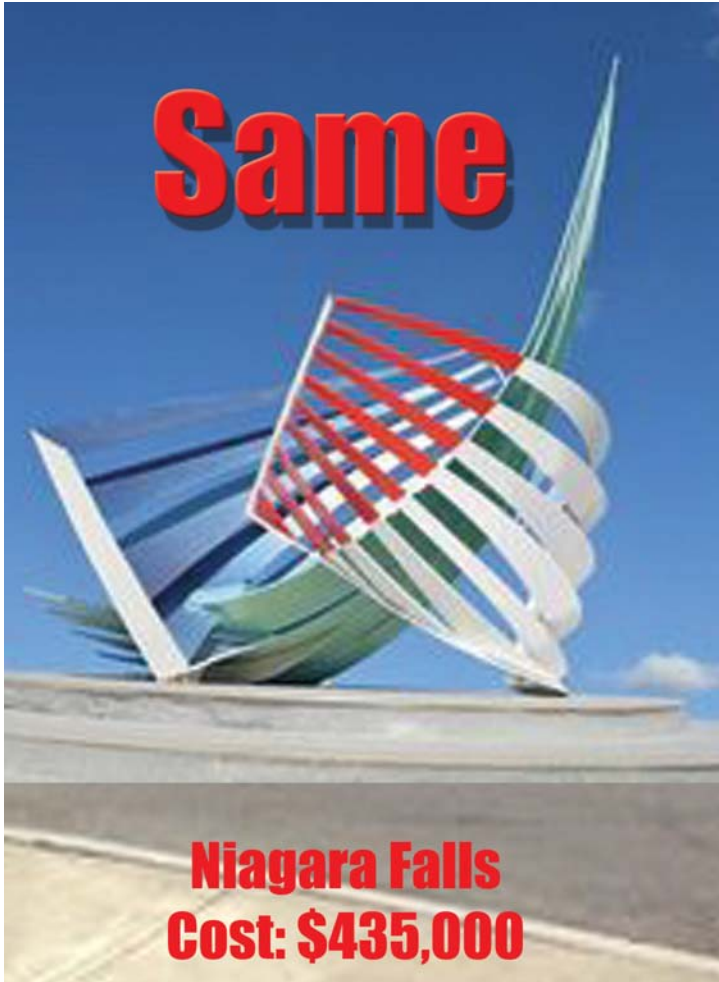
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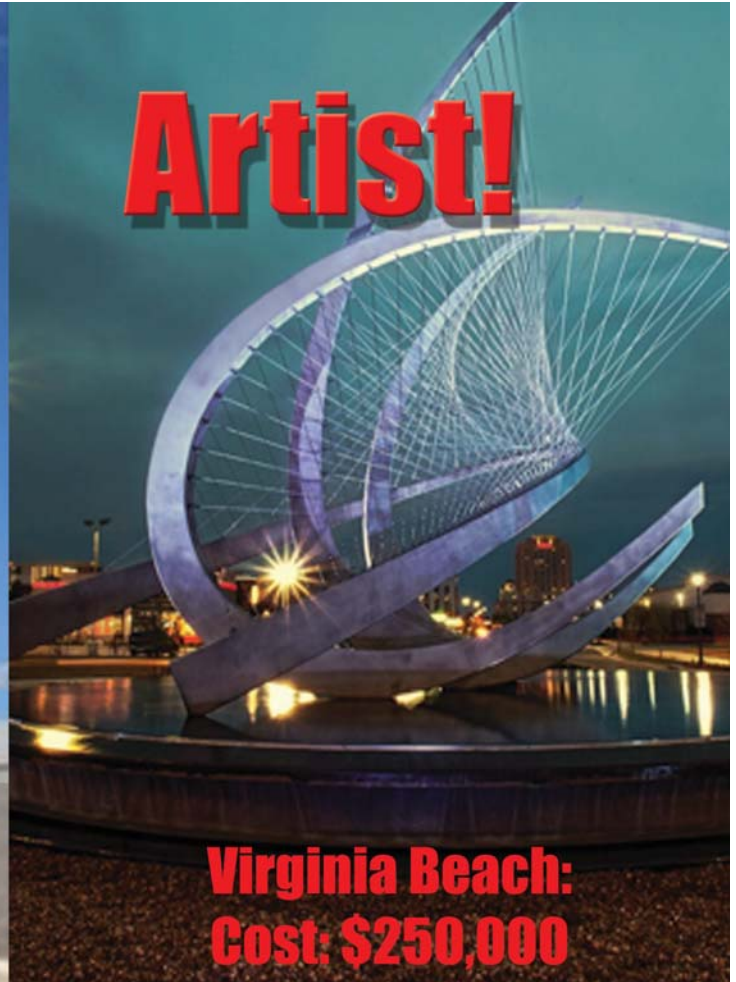
City's \$435,000 traffic island sculpture nearly identical to \$250,000 sculpture

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Cost: \$435,000**

Artist!



**Virginia Beach:
Cost: \$250,000**



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Niagara Falls Selects Artist for \$435,000 Public Outlay for 'Sculpture Art' at Traffic Circle

Rendering of Sculpture for Niagara Falls' Centennial Circle is unveiled



Photoshopped picture of how the sculpture will look at Centennial Circle.

Niagara Falls Mayor Paul A. Dyster has been working on getting a sculpture placed in what is called Centennial Circle since 2009, planning to spend some \$435,000 – plus annual maintenance – to do so.

This summer, it looks like the city will accomplish the task.

The \$435,000 plan, now on the high burner, following Dyster's reelection to a third term of office, will see a taxpayer funded sculpture erected at the "Centennial" traffic circle which is at the intersection of Third Street and Rainbow Boulevard in downtown Niagara Falls.

The city has selected what will be a 38-foot by 35-foot "sail-like" sculpture to be built by artist Jeff Laramore.

A rendering of the proposed work was shown to the City Council at their last meeting of 2015.

The "piece" is meant to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1909 Boundary Water's Treaty between the U.S. and Canada which was signed to govern the shared use of the Niagara River.

While Mayor Paul Dyster said the Boundary Waters Treaty was one of the first

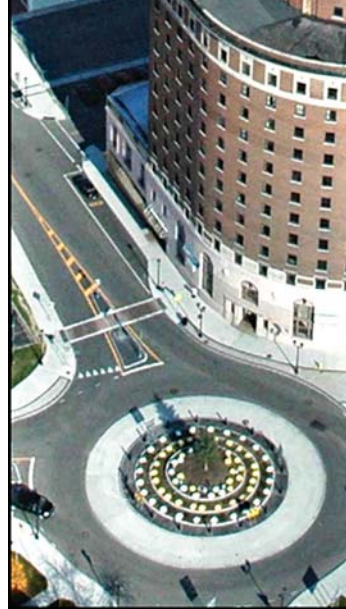


Artist rendering of Sculpture: He describes it: "A ribbon of water surrounded and protected by great nations. One may see the flags representing nations or as analogues to hands allowing a stream of water to flow freely between them, yet shielding it from harm."

environmental accords in history, the record shows that the environmental degradation of the Niagara River and the siphoning of the hydro power generated there away from local residents' use have not made this historic treaty one to emulate.

While some expressed surprise that Niagara Falls would spend \$435,000 on a sculpture on a small traffic circle – Centennial Circle, not counting sidewalks, measures 40 feet across – \$335,000 of the money is coming from Niagara Falls' share of the New York Power Authority's Niagara River Greenway money and \$50,000 is coming from state taxpayers via USA Niagara. \$50,000 is coming from city taxpayers.

According to a report in the Niagara Gazette, the search for the artist was headed by Public Art Curator Aaron Ott of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Ott compiled a list of 20 artists, then a selection committee, which included Councilwoman Kristen



The traffic circle which is about to get a sculpture is adjacent to the Hotel Niagara.

Grandinetti, settled on four artists. The four submitted responses to "requests for proposal," and Laramore, who has produced taxpayer funded pieces in Indianapolis, Dallas and Virginia Beach, was selected.

A look at the line budget for the Centennial Circle project shows that only a fraction of the money will go to the sculpture itself: \$120,000 is earmarked for "irrigation improvements" on the site; \$50,000 for announcing and managing the artist selection contest; \$125,000 for the "art" itself, \$75,000

for site work and \$15,000 for an interpretive sidewalk display that will explain why the artwork is there in the first place. Another \$50,000 is earmarked for "soft costs" and "oversight," which could include design work and consulting studies.

As quoted in the Niagara Gazette, the artist designed his proposed work, writing, "A ribbon of water surrounded and protected by great nations. One may see the flags representing nations or as analogues to hands allowing a stream of water to flow freely between them, yet shielding it from harm."

"Others may see the lags as protective screens, or some form of fortification guarding this valuable resource."

"All, a representation of the nations' understanding and respect for how vital, powerful and precious our waterways are," Laramore wrote.

The Reporter has previously criticized the expenditure of \$435,000 of public money to "spruce up" of a humble traffic island to honor the signing of a little known treaty back when William Howard Taft occupied the White House."



Aerial view of traffic circle



Centennial Traffic Circle as it appeared last summer.

NIAGARA FALLS REPORTER

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City's \$435,000 Traffic Island Sculpture Nearly Identical To \$250,000 Sculpture

Mike Hudson

Who is Jeff Laramore? The obscure Midwestern artist selected by the city to design and install a \$435,000 piece of sculpture on a deserted Rainbow Boulevard traffic island, directly in front of long shuttered Hotel Niagara, is hardly a household name.

According to his official biography, Laramore is the co-founder of the Indianapolis advertising firm Young & Laramore, an agency that has done business with Procter & Gamble, Goodwill Industries and other well-known companies. He also runs 2nd Globe Studios, a division of Young & Laramore, which he uses to produce and market his sculptures.

"This work is created to make public spaces communicate with people in ways that are relevant to the site, architecture, materials, purpose and subject of the assignment," his bio reads.

But running an ad agency and making public spaces communicate with people are just part of Laramore's mission. He also works in the commercial world creating site-specific design elements meant to engage the consumer and communicate the essence of a brand. Laramore refers to the commercial variety of design as "landmark media," which merges art and commerce.

An Indiana native, Laramore graduated with a B.F.A. in Design from Indianapolis' Herron School of Art in 1980. While at Herron he earned the President's Commission on the Handicapped for best poster design award. He began his career as an illustrator before getting into the advertising/sculpture/commercial art business.

"With his ability to see and render he can do all of that and he can do it in layers of color in art or in shapes," said his friend and business partner David Young.



This photo-shopped picture shows what the new \$435,000 art feature will look like on Rainbow Blvd.

Young stressed that their agency observes a holistic approach to business and aims for the synthesis of words and images in its designs. This synthesis is obtained by merging art direction, copywriting, account and creative, he said.

In addition to a number of pieces of public art in his native Indianapolis, Laramore has also done installations in Texas and Virginia Beach.

"The Wave" was installed in October 2013.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the Virginia Beach and Niagara Falls installations is price, and who will end up footing the bill. In Virginia, "The Wave" cost \$250,000 and was funded entirely with private contributions.

In Niagara Falls, the nearly identical knockoff will cost \$435,000, all of which will be public money. A total of \$335,000 will come from the Niagara River Greenway Commission, the other \$100,000 split evenly between city and state taxpayers.

Since the Greenway Commission, as it is commonly called, was funded in 2007 by the New York Power Authority, you'll be paying for the sculpture every time you turn on



Niagara Falls is ready to spend \$435,000 for a traffic circle art feature that looks a lot like one by the same artist in Virginia Beach (see photo right).

a light whether you also pay state and local taxes or not.

With top grade stainless steel going for \$1.20 a pound, the 15,000-pound sculpture will cost \$18,000 in materials. And, since most of the design work was already used on the Virginia Beach piece, it is difficult to see why its' Niagara Falls counterpart should be so much more expensive.

Laramore's Niagara Falls sculpture is meant to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the obscure 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty, an accord between the U.S. and Canada. Niagara Falls was chosen to co-host the centennial with Niagara Falls, Ont., in 2009. It was perhaps the biggest non-event in recent city history.

Of the proposed Niagara Falls sculpture, the artist said it represented "A ribbon of water sur-rounded and protected by great nations. One may see the flags representing nations or as analogues to hands allowing a stream of water to flow freely between them, yet shielding it from harm."

Of the nearly identical piece he did in Virginia Beach, he wrote this: "Virginia Beach is a place where people intersect with the sea, and have for centuries. WAVE is an accessibly abstract sculpture representing those nautical elements, both natural and manmade."

Councilwoman Kristen Grandinetti, who doesn't know much about art but knows what she likes, said that spending \$435,000 of other people's money to decorate a traffic island was a thrill she won't soon forget.

"Being a part of the process was an honor," Grandinetti said. "This is extremely exciting, this is our first piece of public art but hopefully not our last."

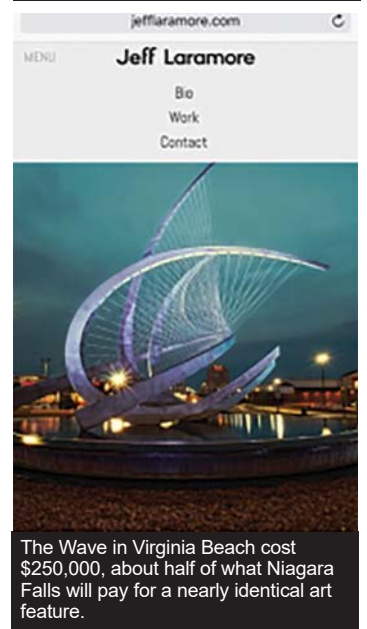
Grandinetti's remarks might have surprised James Earle Fraser, the world famous sculptor who was paid \$22,500 in 1927 to execute the bronze and marble stele that sit in front of City Hall, a building the councilwoman visits with some regularity.

Unlike Laramore, Fraser was one of the most renowned artists in the country at the time. In 1913, he designed the Buffalo Nickel for the U.S. Mint, and his bronze "End of the Trail" remains one of the best known and beloved pieces of American sculpture even today, a century after its' creation.

In April 2009, Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster his ventriloquist Tom DeSantis announced a contest. They would commission a monument celebrating the 100th anniversary



The Wave in Virginia Beach looks a lot like the art feature Niagara Falls is set to purchase. The Virginia Beach piece, called "The Wave," is remarkably similar to the untitled piece he's proposed for Niagara Falls. Both are 38 feet tall and measure about 35 feet across, both are installed on traffic islands and both are constructed of prefabricated stainless steel. The design of each is virtually identical.



The Wave in Virginia Beach cost \$250,000, about half of what Niagara Falls will pay for a nearly identical art feature.

of the Boundary Waters Treaty, an obscure document ultimately signed by President Theodore Roosevelt that provided protocols meant to resolve disputes between the United States and Canada having to do with the Great Lakes and associated waterways like the Niagara River.

Last week was a loss to explain why the project he first announced more than six years ago has taken so long to come to fruition.

"In 2009, we were never successful in completing the project, and now we're trying to get back on track," Dyster said.

In addition to the \$435,000 sticker price, Laramore's traffic island sculpture will have to be main-tained at an annual cost not yet determined.

Ironically, the lack of routine maintenance at the nearby landmark Hotel Niagara over the past 15 years has been responsible for making the hotel's reopening cost prohibitive for the various own-ers it has had in recent years.

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Setting the Record Straight On Parlato Indictment

Tony Farina

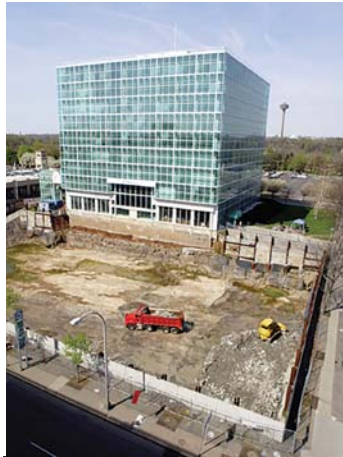
Recently, a local newspaper in Niagara Falls published a year-end story that highlighted the federal indictment of businessman and newspaper publisher Frank Parlato, Jr., basically rewriting the indictment without any response from Mr. Parlato. I feel it is necessary to respond to that story and to the public in general to give the other side of the story, not just the allegations. So, in the interest of fairness, here is the other side.

Let me start by reminding readers of the famous phrase of former New York State Chief Judge Sol Wachtler immortalized in Tom Wolf's novel *Bonfire of the Vanities* where Wolf quotes Wachtler saying that "a grand jury would 'indict a ham sandwich,' if that's what you wanted."

Wachtler coined the phrase in a 1985 interview with the *New York Daily News* and a month later it was noted in the *New York Times* that Wachtler believed that grand juries "operate more often as the prosecutor's pawn than a citizen's shield." Could that be true? In the race to build up their resumes, would prosecutors actually trample the rights of citizens to get a conviction in a case that lacks sufficient evidence? We may have the best legal system in the world but it is far from perfect. Mistakes are made and innocent people are convicted every day, some even sent to death row.

I'm not going to suggest a political motive in the case of Frank Parlato, but it is fair to comment on his indictment in a case where there is a great deal of exculpatory evidence suggesting he's not guilty of any crimes. Former New York State Attorney General Dennis Vacco and former U. S. Magistrate Carol Heckman, working as lawyers for Parlato, met with federal prosecutors controlling the grand jury presentment numerous times and basically urged them to consider voluminous evidence they said pointed to Parlato's innocence. In an almost unprecedented way, Parlato's attorneys opened the books for the government to see, exposing their entire defense in an effort to discourage prosecution on the merits.

Heckman, the highly regarded former magistrate, said her legal team "uncovered new evidence that exonerated Parlato," and asked the prosecutors not to return an indictment in the four-year-old case. Another Parlato lawyer, Ralph Lorigo, said "we presented information to the United States attorney to show that no crime has been done." Lorigo said later that he was "very taken aback" by what he read in the 19-count corruption indictment "after we had provided so much in-



When Frank Parlato bought the vacant One Niagara building it had a one acre, 40-foot-deep hole, the site of a failed underground aquarium project. Parlato turned it into a successful tourism center.



formation on so many topics."

However, as events unfolded we now know that the legal arguments and full disclosure of exculpatory evidence fell on deaf ears and the grand jury returned the indictment on Nov. 20 that prosecutors had been seeking—and had invested considerable time and money on—in a case where Parlato had refused to accept any plea agreement because it was his contention all his actions were legal and that he was innocent of any criminal wrongdoing.

Parlato's lawyers have consistently maintained that prosecutors kept shifting their theories in the case over the years to support their goal of an indictment, and there's a basis for that contention in the true context of the "whack a mole" quote used in the *Gazette* story—attributed to an unnamed lawyer—to describe the probe into Parlato's business dealings, suggesting, out of context, something sneaky and sinister.

Let me explain the true origin of the

whack a mole quote. Parlato attorneys Heckman and Brian Feldman wrote a letter to prosecutors, citing the lack of action by prosecutors on new exculpatory evidence and their focus instead on whether Parlato was willing to accept a plea deal. Here is an excerpt from that Nov. 10 letter:

"In response to defense counsel establishing that previously identified allegations lacked merit, the Government has repeatedly changed the investigation's focus and theories. The whack-a-mole approach of changing its prosecution theories has left us entirely uncertain of what mistaken assumptions [of the Government's] require our further attention. The government has not welcomed counsel's corrections of its various errors but, instead, has responded with actions that chill defense counsel's work in presenting additional exculpatory evidence to the prosecution." The indictment was returned 10 days after that letter, a clear confirmation that defense counsel's assertion that its work in presenting evidence that supported Parlato's innocence had been in vain.

All of Parlato's bank accounts referred to in the indictment had his Social Security number and address, and were set up according to Parlato to protect assets against a litigious minority partner in the One Niagara welcome center project. The minority partner, Sam Shmueli, has filed more than a dozen civil lawsuits against Parlato and the enterprise seeking judgments and lost every one of them.


In brief, in his defense, Parlato never spent the \$1 million payment he received from the NXIVM cult for recovering property for them worth more than \$26 million in Los Angeles eight years ago, and the cult's claim for repayment has been treated as a civil matter. It was reported on his tax returns as a loan pending civil resolution. Parlato's business partner at One Niagara, Larry Reger, has died but his attorney has filed a letter with prosecutors insisting that Reger had no complaints against his partner and was not owed any money. The lawyer that purchased the now thriving welcome center known as One Niagara that Parlato brought to life from the hole-in-the-ground, vacant Occidental Building firmly supports Parlato's contention that he's guilty of nothing except trying to protect his property from Shmueli's legal actions.

Readers should be reminded that one of the most sacred principles in the American legal system holds that a defendant is innocent until proven guilty. The government has filed a charge against him and Parlato and his associate stand ready to fight that accusation and prove that the government's shifting theories will not survive that justice system.



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If the whole world stands
against you sword in hand,
would you still dare to do what
you think is right?

Why was there no public hearing on 2016 budget?

Anna Howard



The Niagara Falls Reporter recently featured a cover story detailing how the city council approved the 2016 budget in a 4-0 council vote on November 17 at the close of a budget work session.

That budget, along with seven as yet to be disclosed council budget amendments, moved to the Mayor Paul A. Dyster who signed and authorized it.

We contacted former councilman Sam Fruscione, who served as council chairman several times in his eight years on the council. Fruscione told us that he'd never seen the

city budget proceed to passage like this during his two council terms.

"There should have been a formal public hearing where the proposed budget was presented before it was passed by the council," Fruscione told us.

Was the city charter violated by the passage of the 2016 budget?

If so it wouldn't be the first time.

Every day Mayor Dyster does not hire a city engineer he's in violation of the charter. He fired City Engineer Robert Curtis back in 2008 then let the court house run up in cost.

Since then he has not been able to find and/or keep an engineer on staff. Every day the mayor declines – for whatever reason – to hire an engineer he is in violation of the city charter.

Last year when Mayor Dyster delivered the budget 37 days late he was in violation of the charter for each of those 37 days.

The council has hired outside legal counsel, Robert Restaino for the past two years, to study and consolidate conflicting provisions in the city charter.

Meanwhile the council has stood by as it is repeatedly violated.

The council owes residents an explanation as to why the budget was passed without a public hearing.

As for the council's seven budget amendments, the council should reveal those seven resolutions immediately.

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PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT SHRINE'S RENOVATION PROJECT

Many New York Cities Pay \$95,000 – or Less – For Competent City Engineer

Mike Hudson

Last week, our colleagues at the Niagara Gazette ran a thought provoking and largely sensible editorial calling for the hiring of a city engineer.

That is a sensible position. Paying vast sums of money to outside engineering consultants from Buffalo – as Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster has been doing for most of his two terms in office – makes no sense whatsoever.

The editorial was thought provoking because it reiterated a position Dyster has long maintained: That the \$96,000-plus benefits that the city is offering to fill the position just isn't enough to attract a qualified candidate.

"It has often been said that the post here is hard to fill because the salary is not competitive with other cities, even smaller than Niagara Falls," the editorialist wrote. "That's a challenge which both the mayor and the City Council should address in the new year."

Despite the fact that the mayor has been telling people this ever since he fired the highly competent city engineer Bob Curtis on Jan. 1, 2008, many simply don't believe it.

According to the website Salary.com, a state licensed civil engineer in the private sector might expect to earn between \$56,179 and \$68,980 in Western New York, depending on experience and qualifications.

But as we've seen elsewhere, municipal employees on the Niagara Frontier often make far more than their counterparts in the private sector. After a bit of digging, we discovered that the proposed \$95,000 salary is not at all out of line with what other New York municipalities are paying their city engineers.

The City of Utica has within its boundaries, 205 miles of roadway, 188 miles of sanitary sewer, 107 miles of storm sewer, 102 miles of combined sewers, parks and playgrounds encompassing approximately 720 acres, a zoo, a golf course, a marina, a recreation center, as well as other city owned buildings. Its population is 61,000, more than 10,000 above that of Niagara Falls.

In Utica, J. Michael Mahoney earns \$63,546 a year. His official title is Deputy City Engineer, but he has held the top spot in that city's engineering department for a number of years, and functions as a city engineer would in any municipality.

With 47,000 people and an economy based largely on tourism in the Finger Lakes region, Binghamton is very comparable to Niagara Falls.

The city engineer there, Ray L. Standish, makes \$88,831 a year.

In Schenectady, with a significantly larger population of 65,902, the city engineer, Christopher Wallin, makes \$95,371, about what Dyster has proposed for the position here.

And in nearby Buffalo, a city five times as large as Niagara Falls, City Engineer Peter Merlo earned just \$84,305 in 2013, the last year for which figures are available.

Why is it that Buffalo, Schenectady, Binghamton and Utica can manage to fill the position of city engineer for as much or less than what Niagara Falls is offering?



Robert Curtis was the city engineer until the day Mayor Paul Dyster took office.

Looking at recent history, one could easily get the impression that the Dyster administration likes things just the way they are, and isn't interested in having a city engineer at all.

After firing Curtis just minutes after being sworn in as mayor and beginning his first term, Dyster oversaw the courthouse construction project on North Main Street with the city engineer's office vacant. Cost overruns plagued the project, which was handed over to a \$14,500-per-month outside consulting engineer who also happened to be a Dyster campaign contributor.

It wasn't until the courthouse was substantially finished when, on March, 30, 2009, Dyster hired Ali Marzban, an Iranian immigrant from Los Angeles.

Five months later, Dyster fired Marzban following a Niagara Falls Reporter expose that revealed Marzban did not have a license to practice engineering in New York State or anywhere else in the United States.

During Marzban's time in office, however, he was permitted to sign off on the disastrous Lewiston Road project, which was the subject of a lawsuit.

Reconstruction went millions over budget and years behind schedule before it was completed by a second contractor in the summer of 2013.

Dyster again had no engineer until January, 2010, when he hired Tom Radomski. Seventeen months later, he fired Radomski for being in violation of the city's residency ordinance.

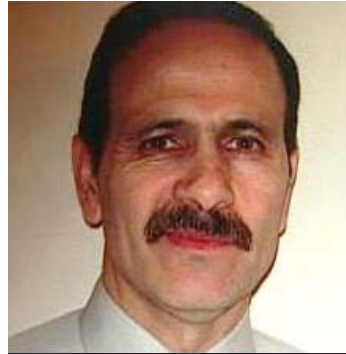
He hired Jeffrey Skurka in July 2011 and fired him in April 2013. Skurka had been so vocal in his criticism of safety practices on the Lewiston Road project that Dyster barred him from visiting the work site he was supposed to be watching over.

The former engineer filed a lawsuit against the city for wrongful termination.

In addition to the courthouse and Lewiston Road projects, other engineering disasters that have occurred have included the repaving of 72nd Street, LaSalle Park and the new train station and underground railroad exhibit on Whirlpool Street.

Dyster has now been in office for 96 months. The city has been without an engineer for 53 of those months.

The total cost to city taxpayers resulting from this absence has been astronomical. Mil-



Ali Marzban

lions of dollars has been siphoned off to Buffalo engineering consultants such as Clark Patterson Lee, which collects a \$95,000 a year retainer for its part time services to the city. During the courthouse construction, LiRo Engineers of Buffalo pulled down \$14,500 a month. Wendell Engineers have raked in millions as they have been retained to oversee Lewiston Rd. and the train station.

Overtime costs in the city's 10-member engineering department have also skyrocketed.

There are some who believe that Dyster's problem in attracting an engineer to Niagara Falls, despite the competitive wage and benefit package, is Dyster himself.



Jeffrey Skurka was fired after he tried to impose OSHA safety regulations at the work site.

Certainly, his dealings with Curtis, Marzban, Radomski and Skurka were not happy ones, and it is doubtful that any of them would think that having worked for the Dyster administration would be considered an asset on their resumes.

Regardless, the accepted Dyster wisdom – that a \$96,000 annual salary just isn't enough to attract a qualified engineer – is just not true. He can say it over and over again and it won't make it any more so.



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Is David Jaros Actually Dyster's 'De-Facto' City Engineer?

Mike Hudson

Is the real reason why Niagara Falls has gone without a city engineer for 53 of the 96 months that Paul Dyster has served as mayor because he already has one?

David Jaros, formerly of Li-Ro Engineers and now of Clark Patterson Lee has managed to get most of the work that would normally be performed by a city engineer, but at a much inflated price.

And when Jaros moved from Li-Ro to Clark Patterson Lee following the completion of the North Main Street city courthouse project, Dyster – without explanation – switched his allegiance from the former company to the latter.

Jaros has served as the ersatz “city engineer” on projects ranging from the courthouse to the Lewiston Road to 72nd Street.

He has contributed to Dyster's campaign war chest and attended fundraisers given for his friend and benefactor.

During the months of the courthouse construction, and subsequently, afterward, when so much was found wrong with the building that much reconstruction had to be performed, the administration paid Jaros – through LiRo – \$14,500 a month to oversee



the work.

The courthouse – which the state originally said could be built for \$14 million – ended up costing a staggering \$46.5 million.

And now that he's at Clark Patterson Lee, Jaros benefits from a \$95,000 a year re-

tainer paid to the firm for part time consulting. Much more than this amount is paid on an hourly basis when the firm actually undertakes a project.

Jaros himself bills the city at the rate of \$92 an hour, meaning that if he actually

worked 40-hour weeks like a real city engineer, he would be pulling down \$191,360 a year.

While it is uncertain how much Jaros actually makes from his relationship with Dyster and his contract with the city, at least he doesn't have to worry about being unceremoniously fired by the mayor, as were city engineers Bob Curtis, Ali Marzban, Tom Radomski and Jeffrey Skurka.

Ironically, the \$95,000 a year now being paid to Clark Patterson Lee for basically being on call is the same amount Dyster has proposed to pay a full time city engineer, should he find one willing to work for him.

The Clark Patterson Lee contract was automatically renewable for a second year when its first year ended, which was pretty convenient because two years of Jaros on the city payroll perfectly fit the train station's two-year construction timetable.

Both the courthouse and the train station are overpriced white elephants city taxpayers will be stuck paying for decades into the future. The 72nd Street debacle, where a simple street repaving job turned into a two-year nightmare for hundreds of city residents left without running water in the winter, is only now being corrected.

Matchup Between Ceretto, Morinello Could Be the Marquee Race

When state lawmakers convened in Albany on Wednesday to kick off the new legislative session, watchdog groups were holding a press conference calling on the governor and legislators to sign a “Clean Conscience Pledge” in the wake of the corruption convictions of the former Assembly speaker and the Senate majority leader.

The scandal-stained legislature knows it must do something to regain the public's trust, but what form that will take is still to be decided and ethics reform is expected to be a major part of the governor's State of the State message next Wednesday (Jan. 13) to lawmakers anxious to put the latest scandal behind them.

Restoring trust in government is also expected to be among the many issues up for debate—along with the budget and minimum wage increases—in what could be the marquee election matchup of the year locally between incumbent John Ceretto and his challenger Angelo Morinello in the 145th Assembly District which includes Niagara Falls, Lewiston, Grand Island, several towns and parts of North Tonawanda.

Ceretto, a former Republican who switched parties last summer and who is now a part of the Democratic majority in the Assembly, says ethics reform is at the top of his agenda and that restoring the public's trust in government must be a major focus of lawmakers in the wake of the corruption convictions of two of the most powerful lawmakers in Albany.

Morinello, who recently retired as a City Court judge, is also preaching about the need to clean up Albany's image, saying he has the experience to lead that effort having lived “under the strictest judicial ethics in the state” as a judge.



Here Comes the Judge: Former City Court Judge Angelo Morinello will run for New York State Assembly

Morinello is a bit of a surprise candidate who was forced to step down from the City Court bench after reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70 but who says he has plenty left in the tank to continue working as a civil servant “and try to bring change and focus in Albany” as a member of the legislature.

The former judge says he feels the area has been shortchanged in Albany and that Ceretto “has not served the district to the fullest extent,” and that if elected he is prepared to fight to make sure “we get our fair share.”

Ceretto says his focus is not on the upcoming challenge from Morinello but rather on his work in Albany in his new role as a member of the majority party which he says will enable him to deliver even more for his district that in his previous role as a minority assemblyman.

“I took a \$9,000 pay cut to make this



John Ceretto was unopposed when he ran in 2014. This year he faces a popular opponent. Ceretto narrowly defeated another former city court judge, Robert Restaino, in 2012.

switch,” says Ceretto, “and my focus now is to address the needs that we have, especially in the area of economic development, and that's what I'm going to be doing in addition to pushing for ethics reform to restore the public's confidence in our government.”

Morinello says he expects to have the backing of the GOP leadership in his challenge to Ceretto who was elected three times as a Republican before switching parties last August. It is fair to assume that the party once ruled by George Mazarz would probably like nothing better than to turn out Ceretto after he left their ranks to join the Democratic Party although rumors of bad blood between Ceretto and the GOP leadership had been swirling for some time before he jumped ship.

Morinello served 14 years on the City Court bench, six years shy of the magic 20-



year pension milestone. But while Morinello was forced to retire before hitting the 20-year mark, he sounds like he is anxious to continue working despite his advanced age, saying his many years of experience on the bench has prepared him well for the next stage of his life, dealing with the problems of people as an assemblyman.

For his part, Ceretto says he is anxious to work for the people of the 145th District in his new role as a member of the majority in the Assembly, and he thinks it will help him deliver a greater return for his constituents going forward, especially in the important area of economic development.

This could be a heavyweight contest between two prominent and respected public servants, and the race is only in the beginning stages with many more issues to be addressed before November's election. And it will be taking place at a time when one of Albany's biggest concerns is convincing the public that corruption is out and transparency is in. Let's see who signs the “Clean Conscience Pledge” that was on display on opening day at the 2016 session. And let's see what the governor has to say next week about cleaning up Albany.

Meanwhile, Ceretto and Morinello will be digging in for what will likely be a hard fought and expensive campaign for a two-year term in the Assembly that continues to be under the strong control of Democrats.

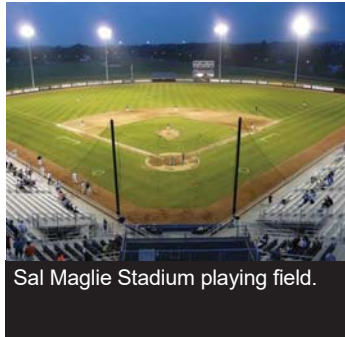
Non-transparency of Ice Pavilion Raises Questions About Sal Maglie RFP

Anna Howard

The Dyster administration is back at it again, trying to find an operator for Sal Maglie Stadium. The mayor's first pass at landing a manager and promoter for the historic, but dilapidated, sports facility didn't go so well and the Reporter wrote at length about it last year. At that time Dyster's non-transparent designs for Sal Maglie sank like a stone as the mayor's preferred stadium pro-moter withdrew his proposal.

Two weeks ago we wrote a column regarding the mayor's newly announced Request for Proposals for the stadium. That column noted that while the stadium was currently on the RFP table, we believed it was time for the council and mayor to immediately reveal and report on all of the costs and contractual ins and outs of the ice pavilion. We think the residents who are footing the bill for a \$14 million ice pavilion renovation that was supposed to cost \$4 million deserve a full accounting of what's on ice over there on Robbins Drive. So far the silence on a full reveal of the ice pavilion unending renovation has been deafening. Neither mayor nor council nor the law department are saying a word.

And it's the handling and non-transparency of the ice pavilion that has us doubting



Sal Maglie Stadium playing field.

the administration's plans for Sal Maglie Stadium. Forgive us for being skeptical when it comes to Mayor Dyster's true motives but this isn't our first rodeo.

We've watched the ice pavilion cost climb out of sight. We're watching the train station go forward with not one dollar budgeted for daily operation. The \$50 million court house and its annual \$2.3 million finance charge was a taxpayer boondoggle of Pentagon proportions. Because of this we see another curiously costly city hall enterprise up ahead.

Before the stadium was sent out to RFP the administration should have made public



One of two rinks at the Ice Pavilion in Hyde Park

a full report as to the conditions of the property: integrity of the structure...concrete, electric, current compliance with all building and health codes, condition of locker rooms, condition of vendor facilities, condition and suitability of the grounds for modern sports play, parking lot conditions and operating costs of the past ten years for both city and school district. In addition to this the administration should have conducted an internal study regarding the potential entertainment market for the stadium.

This is after all a sport facility for baseball, football and perhaps soccer and lacrosse. It's not a modern domed stadium and it's not a

conference center...it will host sports played on grass and so a quick and dirty review of the possible market doesn't require a \$50,000 consultant report. Which is exactly what we suspect Mayor Dyster is going to do.

In fact, we have a suspicious feeling that first comes the preferred operator and then comes the consultant and then comes the ice-pavilion-like boondoggle of ongoing consultant engineering reports and endless renovations. The taxpayers can hardly afford another multimillion dollar wasteful and totally non transparent sports facility "renovation." We believe that this is likely what's going to happen. Mayor Dyster and the council have yet to detail where the ice pavilion \$14 million went and how the building earns a bottom line profit for the city. Would the mayor and his friendly council let another boondoggle monster loose in the city, this time in the form of a stadium project? Of course they would.

At the end of the day what we find hard to accept is the fact that as the city struggles under the yoke of \$65 million in debt, \$7.4 million in deficit, and has blown through \$90 million in casino cash, Mayor Dyster continues to plow ahead, unchallenged and unquestioned, with a secretive agenda.

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Goat Island Becoming One Big Parking Lot

Local politicians fiddle as City further deteriorates

James Hufnagel

While 2015 was a tough year for the newspaper business, the Niagara Falls Reporter came through with flying colors.

Bucking the trend, it was a banner year for the Niagara Falls Reporter. A merger with Buf-falo's ArtVoice weekly was a perfect fit, wedding the two newspapers' missions, continuing traditions of hard-hitting investigative journalism and insightful commentary, and realizing economies of scale. An attractive new web site for the Reporter was recently rolled out, providing readers with more frequent updates.

Whether or not due to the enhanced web presence, we're noticed an upswing in readership just over the past two months, so we'd like to take this opportunity to extend a heartfelt welcome to our new readers, and also get them "up to speed" in terms of what's going on here in Niagara Falls.

In case you didn't know, back in the 1950's and early '60's, the city of Niagara Falls was a powerhouse of industry, its numerous factories driven by cheap, locally-produced hydro-power. Twice the number of people lived within the city limits than live here today. Main Street, Pine Avenue, Old Falls Street and Niagara Street's bustling businesses catered to a prosperous middle class.

Sure, there were negatives back in those halcyon days, one being the influence of the Mafia. Magaddino ran the rackets for all of Western New York from his Niagara Falls lair. Labor unions and the Democratic party completed the triumvirate of local power brokers. From an early age in this city, it was drilled into you to keep your mouth shut and your head down, if you didn't want bad things to happen to you and your family.

The industry left, and with it the educat-



Another parking lot on Goat Island under construction last week. Eight million tourists visit this park every year, while the city of Niagara Falls suffers from some of the highest rates of per capita crime and poverty in the state.

ed and motivated. Many moved out to suburbs like Wheatfield and Lewiston and took their money with them. After a brief stay downtown, the local community college relocated to a sprawling campus on former farmland out in Sanborn. The state, through the New York Power Authority, constructed a massive hydro-power generating facility here to replace one lost to a landslide in the Niagara Gorge, and began exporting electricity out of the region with little compensation for the local community.

And a curious relic of the past started to take on more and more significance: Founded in 1885, Niagara Falls State Park and over 80% of the waterfront of the city, stretching from the Grand Island bridge to Buffalo, wrapping around the Niagara River past the

falls and north to the city limits, were deeded to the state of New York or, more precisely, Albany. The state's development of the attraction, including construction of a dedicated roadway into the park that cuts the city off from the river, large parking lots on the former nature pre-serve and a steadily increasing retail presence consisting of gift and souvenir shops and food concessions, served to sequester the average eight million tourists in the park, giving them little reason to venture into the city.

It took decades, but the city gradually withered and decayed and descended into poverty, and it's not over yet.

The past couple of weeks State Parks has been paving yet another parking lot on Goat Island near the falls, as if the hundreds

of new spaces they added over the past year in pur-suit of their so-called "Landscape Improvements" weren't enough. The parking lot is being constructed by Scott Lawn Yard, the same outfit that butchered Three Sisters Islands.

Will the two new city council members, and three-term mayor Paul Dyster speak out against this injustice? Doubtful. In fact, as Vice-Chair of the Niagara Greenway Commission, Mayor Dyster approved the state's "Landscape Improvements" plan, and thus the continuing monopoly State Parks has on the local tourism industry, to the great disadvantage of the city.

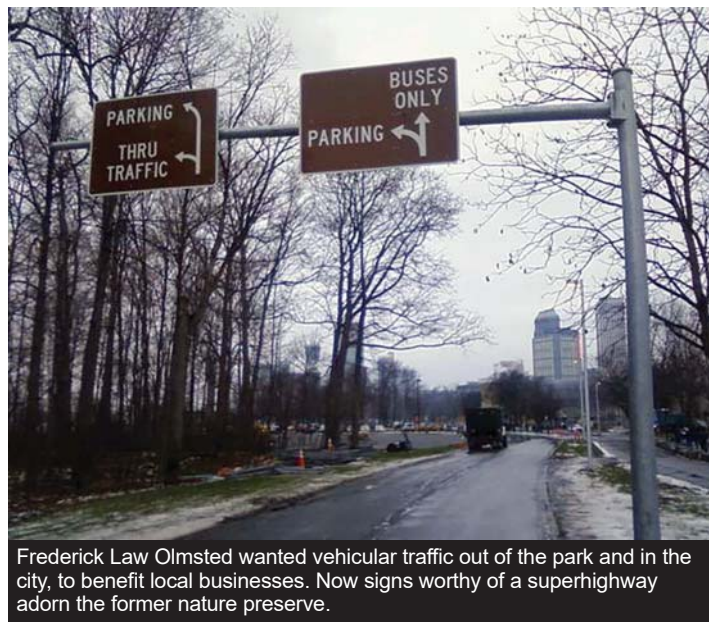
Bringing these important issues to the public week after week, for over fifteen years, is why the Niagara Falls Reporter under publisher Frank Parlato's stewardship is thriving.

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King Con: Shmueli Doesn't Live Here Anymore

Frank Parlato

Last week the notorious conman Shmuel Shmueli was evicted from a Niagara Falls luxury condo at the Parkway Condominiums on Buffalo Ave.—but not until after he stayed in the condo for free for a year. Artvoice previously identified 25 lawyers that Shmueli conned out of legal services. We've now discovered a new class of Shmueli dupes: landlords.

The latest landlord – who is a well-known contractor in Niagara Falls – had to do what all who enter into contracts with Shmueli must do: Abandon all hope for getting paid. Shmueli ran up a bill of \$24,000.

The Parkway Condominiums house many of Niagara Falls' elite – so the elegant Shmueli was right at home with lawyers and other professional people who live there. With panoramic views of the Niagara River, it is pleasant to think of Shmueli sitting on the balcony on a bright summer morning, having his favorite breakfast of lox and bagels, reading newspapers, and planning how to stiff his next lawyer.

Last week, his Parkway Condo landlord not only had to evict Shmueli – but clean up the condo as well.

Shmueli left behind palettes of papers. Just like he did when he was evicted twice in Brooklyn, and twice in Ghanzou, China, and in Jerusalem—he left papers and stacks of newspapers.

Not just a couple of piles. But palettes of newspapers piled high in apartments where he did not pay rent.

This is not indicative of any mental disease, by the way, not some pack rat hoarding of old newspapers – which he may never read. It was a strategic ploy to combat eviction.

When the landlord threatened to evict – which Shmueli knew he would since he didn't pay rent, Shmueli, who would be conveniently "out of town," would argue that he had many important "papers" in the apartment.

It will cost a million dollars in damages if those papers were lost.

The record shows this generally worked to forestall landlords for months; the law reads you cannot simply evict a tenant and throw his stuff out to the curb. You have to store it.

One landlord, Lewiston lawyer Paul Grenga, who was unfortunate enough to have Shmueli occupy an office in his building, tried to get him out for years. In the end, Grenga won a court order.

But Shmueli haggled about "papers" he left behind.

Grenga placed boxes of them in storage and when he returned these to Shmueli, sure enough, Shmueli said some of the "papers" were missing. He accused Grenga of reading them and tried to sue. State Supreme Court Justice Timothy Walker – having had Shmueli before him on numerous lawsuits – threw the case out.

But it cost Grenga about \$10,000 in legal fees.

As a cautionary word to landlords—when you rent to Mr. Shmuel Shmueli, please have a plan to store outdated, yellowing, seemingly useless palettes of newspapers. Shmueli may sue you, claiming he saved these for important financial reasons. And they are irreplaceable. And of course, some of them are missing.



Shmuel Shmueli does not just fleece lawyers; he enjoys fleecing landlords too.

Of course, Shmueli is not a one trick tenant.

In Ghanzou, Shmueli was evicted from both apartment and office and never once used the newspaper ploy. According to his Chinese law firm of Anderson and Anderson, Shmueli's secretary was called into service and taken advantage of.

In an email to Shmueli, dated Dec 23, 2010, Ms. Wu Xiaoping in the Finance Department of the law firm Anderson and Anderson, whose purpose in writing, by the way, was the attempt to collect some \$57,000 in unpaid legal bills, reveals Shmueli's financial genius.

She wrote:

Dear Mr. Shmueli,

You sat in our office in Guangzhou for many hours. You reviewed our bills with Mr. Buxbaum, myself and our general manager; we brought you documents for each item you requested.

You agreed to all the bills; you then left and only paid one bill.

You failed to respond to numerous e-mails requests for payment. We provided you with food and drink at our expense. We did not charge you yet for all the work we spent reviewing the bills with you, nor for the food and drink.

Your staff whom you hired in Guangzhou has not been paid since September. The landlord of your office and residence in Guangzhou was not paid and terminated your lease. Your poor secretary had to use her own money to move things out of your Guangzhou office. You apparently failed to pay other lawyers such as Hogan & Willig who are also suing you. You appear to try to deceive all your service providers, accepting services and not paying for them. You do not appear to be acting properly.

It is time for you to straighten yourself out and pay your bills. We hope you are not only earning your revenue from wasteful litigation, so you need to use other people's money to litigate to eat. Pay your bills now or we will be forced to sue you...

Yours very truly,

Ms. Wu Xiaoping

Finance Department

ANDERSON & ANDERSON LLP -

Macau

20th Floor, AIA Tower

Nº 251A-301, Avenida Comercial De Macau

The reference to Shmueli using litigation



Shmuel Shmueli doesn't live at the Parkway Condominiums any more.

money to eat may seem curious but it is the most telling sentence in the correspondence. In a nutshell, Shmueli gets investors to give him money to retain lawyers for a lawsuit and in return, if he wins the case, he would give a share of the winnings to the investor. Instead of paying lawyers, however, he only gives them a retainer fee, pockets the rest of the money and stiffes the lawyers.

Since he never won a lawsuit, he never had to pay back investors. This is very similar to the scheme used in the famous movie and Broadway play The Producers.

But today we are talking about landlords.

We will skip over Golderg Companies who, court records show, were forced to evict him in Brooklyn recently.

But speaking of Brooklyn, as previously reported, Shmueli bought a home there and placed three mortgages on the property then transferred the home to his wife, who got a mortgage for \$110,000. She transferred the house back to Shmueli, who got another mortgage for \$75,000. Then Shmueli transferred the home back to his wife who transferred it to their daughter, who got a \$328,000 mortgage then sold the house for \$480,000 to Jacob and Eva Fuhrman who planned to live in the home.

Shmueli refused to move out and produced a lease signed by his daughter that leased the home back to him at a low rent.

The Fuhrmans filed suit to evict Shmueli; Shmueli countersued and asked the court to honor the lease and postpone the court dates, keeping the Fuhrmans out of the house since he had urgent business in Israel. Months went by. Finally, US District Court Judge Carol B. Amon ordered Shmueli to vacate. When, months later, he still failed to move, the judge directed the U.S. Marshall to eject him.

Shmueli never paid the \$56,668 judgment the Fuhrmans won. He discharged it, along with \$24.5 million in other debts, in bankruptcy. On his bankruptcy petition, when asked if any "books of account or records" were missing, Shmueli wrote, "records were lost during eviction action without my presence court ordered."

Which brings us back to the present.

Shmueli has been evicted from his condo he enjoyed so much at the Parkway.

And while he will likely very soon be

looking to be compensated for the million dollars' worth of "papers" he left behind, he still needs a new place in Niagara Falls.

If there are any landlords looking for a quiet man who loves to read newspapers, please contact this newspaper and we will refer you to that splendid conman and celebrated rascal, Mr. Shmueli Shmueli late of Jerusalem, Ghanzou, Victoria, Australia, Brooklyn, and coming back soon to Niagara Falls.



"Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received—only what you have given." — Francis of Assisi

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Cult of NXIVM Series Part 7: “Don’t Call me ‘Papa’”

Frank Parlato

Every December more than a billion people celebrate the birth of Christ, a child born of immaculate conception who would change the world – whose true father was said to be God, and whose earthly father was an Israeli carpenter named Joseph.

Cult of NXIVM leader Keith Raniere’s former partner Toni Natalie is quoted in MacLean’s Magazine saying: “I was the chosen one. I was brought in to bear the child that would change the world.”

Another former Keith Raniere partner Barbara Bouchee stated “Keith himself told me that he had dreams and visions that I actually would be in a relationship with him and have a child with him.”

This of course is weird since both women were told by doctors that they were unable to bear a child. Perhaps that inspired the clever and controlling Raniere to appeal to their primal desire for motherhood.

His fervent female acolytes no doubt believed that he could make a barren woman fertile and miraculously give birth to a child of destiny—a twisted version of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary minus the immaculate and minus the virgin.

But Raniere did indeed father a child, a boy named Gaelen, born nine years ago. But unlike Joseph who raised Jesus as his son, Raniere denied he was the father of Gaelen and although Gaelen lived in the NXIVM community, Raniere never spent time with the boy as father and son.

Some of Raniere’s female followers believe he is Christ-like – come to atone the sins of struggling humankind through his teachings and pure life of truthfulness, sacrifice and celibacy.

So what story did the celibate spiritual leader give to explain how his son Gaelen came to live among them? It’s very complicated.

Raniere told people that Barbara Jeske, (an inner circle NXIVM member) had an old boyfriend living in Michigan who was now a widower and a bereaved father. His daughter had died giving birth to a male child – and the father was unknown.

Remembering Jeske as a kind and compassionate woman and having no wife or female relative who could care for the newborn, the widower grandfather called his old flame to give the child to her.

As the fiction went– Jeske and another NXIVM inner circle member, Kristin Keffe, traveled to Ann Arbor to get the boy just days after his birth and brought him back to live with Jeske in Albany.

Soon Jeske found she could not care for the infant and Keffe took over as surrogate mother; moving into a new townhouse with the ‘adopted’ infant Gaelen and out of a townhouse on the same street that she’d shared with Raniere (and two other women).

The infinitely compassionate Raniere then decided to personally supervise the child’s education. He would be a teacher, almost “like a father” to this child – the first to be raised utilizing Raniere’s unique methodology. The child would be exposed to certain kinds of music, certain kinds of physical exercises and languages, a certain diet and his interaction with other children would be limited. He was to have no common, ordinary friends.

This was the story told to all in NXIVM village and beyond. And the story is a lie.

I was there and I witnessed it.



Cult leader and deadbeat dad, Keith Raniere told his followers that his son was an orphan whose father was unknown and whose mother died while giving birth.

Gaelen is the child of Keith Raniere and Kristin Keffe.

The elaborate lie about his adoption was told because Raniere did not want NXIVM students to know he fathered a child. Students, from Mexico to Tacoma and all points in between believed he was a “celibate monk”.

Some of his inner circle knew he wasn’t celibate because they’d had sexual relations with him. They knew he wasn’t celibate and they believed he would, when the time was ripe, have a special child with a chosen woman who he had preordained would be mother of a child who would carry on Raniere’s work to save the world.

Keffe, on the other hand, was his legal liaison – a smart, tough-talking, but eager follower of Raniere. Raniere never showered on Keffe the special attention that he did with others like Barbara Bouchee, Toni Natalie, or, more recently, Mariana Fernandez; not for Keffe was such an honor of bearing the golden divine child.

But it was Keffe who got pregnant.

Raniere immediately required Keffe to lie about her maternity. He helped her hide her pregnancy, and being thin she hardly showed for months. When her pregnancy became visible he told people she was severely ill and could not be seen.

Over time, some in the NXIVM inner circle came to know Gaelen was Keffe’s child. A smaller few came to learn Raniere was the father.

Keffe told them. Nancy Salzman knew, as did Jeske, of course. But these women could be trusted to lie for Raniere.

The rest of the community, NXIVM students far and wide, and the press – were led to believe the boy was adopted. He would have the privilege of being raised according to Raniere’s revolutionary theories.

What kind of a man denies his own son,



Keith Raniere, who has followers refer to him as “Vanguard”, lies in bed reading a book on gambling. He “gambled” more than \$70 million of his followers’ money in the commodities market. Some say he did not actually lose it, but hedged investments so he took the profits while his followers lost their money.



Keith Raniere with Toni Natalie. He told Natalie that she would have a child with him who would “change the world.” Natalie never had a child with Raniere and fled the cult in 1999. She says Raniere has relentlessly attacked her in court for 16 years and tried to lure her to Mexico on false pretenses.

tells the spiritual community he leads a lie about his child’s parentage, and forces the mother to publicly state her child is not hers, but adopted?

What is the psychological impact to the boy growing up – with all the people around him – and himself – believing he is adopted and that his mother died while giving him birth? It is well known that children whose mothers die at childbirth often feel heavy guilt.

Meanwhile his mother is not dead but is raising him, and his father lives nearby acting the part of some kindhearted man who decided to become his teacher.

I saw the child many times. He looks like his parents. I spoke with his father and mother many times. I heard this lie told many times.

Although I initially believed the lie, irrefutable evidence came into my possession that demonstrated the adoption story was fabricated and that Raniere and Keffe are the parents.

In time, Keffe told the boy the truth about his parentage. Despite Raniere’s plan, she would not let the boy grow up with a lie. Apparently motherhood is stronger than cult-hood.

Raniere never allowed the child to call him “dad” and the boy never received a father’s tender love. Gaelen never had the pride a boy has in saying to all, “see – there - this is my father.”

In February 2014, Keffe fled the cult. She had to enlist the help of Rodger Kirsopp, a New York State Police investigator. Kirsopp confirmed in an interview that he helped Keffe escape from Raniere with her son, and helped arrange for her to live in safe houses for battered women for a time. She is now in hiding.

Defenders of Raniere contradict me if



Kristin Keffe is the mother of Raniere’s son. Raniere made her lie, she says, to the NXIVM community and say her son was an orphan. Keffe fled the Cult in 2014 with her son with the help of state police and is now in hiding.



Court records show that the gullible Bronfman sisters, Clare and Sara Bronfman, gave Raniere \$65.6 million which he said was lost in the commodities market. They have bankrolled many of Raniere’s allegedly illegal schemes. At first Raniere kept the secret of his paternity from the Bronfman sisters.

you’re able. Show me this isn’t true and I will cease writing about Raniere and the cult of NXIVM.

To the followers of Raniere I ask, how long you will defend or be blind to Raniere’s grotesque life and heinous actions?

Clare Bronfman, Sara Bronfman, ask yourself what your life would be like if your own father had told you that when you were born your mother died giving you birth and that he was not your father.

Sara, you have a child now. Would you or your husband lie to your child the way your spiritual leader Raniere did?

There are not many things lower than a man who denies his child. But lower still are the women who know this and continue to fund him and follow him.

Yes, the enablers are worse.

For without the Bronfman money, the Cult of NXIVM would cease.

The suicides, the twisted sex, the frightened former members running and hiding, the relentless lawsuits, the lurid tabloid stories, the house of lies, could all disappear with the simple closing of your checkbook.



Barbara Bouchee is another woman who Raniere promised would bear his “divine child.” Bouchee never had a child with Raniere and left the Cult in 2009. Raniere has paid lawyers several hundred thousand dollars to get her indicted for computer trespassing. Her crime - she once went on the Cult’s private social media website for 15 minutes using the password of another cult member. Before she left Raniere took her life savings of more than \$1.6 million. She has filed for bankruptcy.

Touma Gets the Chair, Grandinetti Gets the Bum's Rush...Again

(The Reporter's resident feminist, Anna Howard, says the 'woman was denied')

Anna Howard



Kristen Grandinetti



Andrew Touma is reelected as council chairman by his colleagues on the council

The city council held their 2016 reorganization meeting today, January 1, 2016. And, as we feared, the male dominated council decided to let current chairman, Andrew Touma, remain in the big seat for 2016. As the saying goes, we're shocked, but not surprised.

Grandinetti is in the third year of her second four-year term and has never been allowed to serve as chairman. While time in office has no direct bearing on being chosen for the position it con-founds both logic and common sense that the men on the council can't see the errors in the way they continue to block the councilwoman from the leadership position.

The Reporter has written several columns in recent weeks in which we went to bat for Kristen Grandinetti being elected chairwoman. What happened today is just plain wrong and we'll be writing more about it in the coming days.

World's Best Pizza Place Now Called Ricky's Pub & Pizzeria



Hello Everyone,
Welcome to this week's edition of Ricky's Corner. Hope you're all staying warm in what is shaping up to be one of our shorter winters.

I am pleased to announce that we have decided to change our establishments name to Ricky's Pub & Pizzeria.

The story of how I arrived at this name is a very special one.

My wife Kristy and I lost our eight-year-old little girl, Ana, this past fall to an inoperable tumor on her brainstem. Ana was a very wise, insightful & beautiful little girl. We have three other daughters, Emily, 20, Caitlin, 17, and Katie, 14. Ana's attitude throughout her illness was inspiring to us all. She was always cracking jokes, right to the end, often at my expense. I was her go to target; she never let me off the hook with my bad jokes.

I wouldn't have it any other way.

She will always be my baby. After Ana passed I came across a drawing she did before she was sick on a dry erase board that reminded me of a conversation we had. The drawing was that of a Bar & Restaurant called "Rick's Place For Adults".

Ana also drew in the picture" And Playroom For Kids."

I remember Ana showing this to me when she made it and her telling me I should open my own bar & restaurant. When Ana showed me, I was running my souvenir stores and we both had absolutely zero inkling that I would be getting into the restaurant business.

My involvement with The Nifty Fifty started in October as just a favor for a good friend. I was just helping out with managing the place during the off season of my summer-time business. A lot of things happened quickly that gave me the opportunity to take ownership. When I was working on coming up with a new name for The Nifty, I came across her picture and instantly got goose bumps as I remembered right and then there the conversation we had, I knew this was a true sign.


As much as I would love to keep the name Rick's Place For Adults, I think Ana would understand upon me explaining to her that particular name might confuse people as to what kind of establishment we are. Ricky's Pub & Pizzeria gets it done. A play room for kids is in the works and we hope to have it ready in early spring. The playroom will have something to do for kids as their parents eat, just as Ana wished. The room will also feature a blown up framed picture of the drawing she made for me and the room will be called "Ana's Playroom"



Ana had an idea this place was going to happen!

My wife & I have discovered the path to the healing of our loss starts with us honoring and following through with the many fascinating things our Ana wanted and wished for.

Ricky's will be a place for everyone. Kids & adults, Ladies & germs (I can so see Ana rolling her eyes at that) Hope to see you soon !!!

"In the time of your life, live - so that in that good time there shall be no ugliness or death for yourself or for any life your life touches. Seek goodness everywhere, and when it is found, bring it out of its hiding-place and let it be free and unashamed...In the time of your life, live - so that in that wondrous time you shall not add to the misery and sorrow of the world, but shall smile to the infinite delight and mystery of it."

- WILLIAM SAROYAN

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Midtown Inn, Mecca for Prostitutes, Sex Offenders, Torched by Arsonist

Mike Hudson

The Midtown Inn.

For many residents on the city's South-east side, the ramshackle rooming house held a terror that would rival that of the Bates Motel, featured in Alfred Hitchcock's classic 1963 tale of terror, "Psycho."

The inn was a target of controversy in 2009 when the New York State Division of Parole began placing level 2 and level 3 sex offenders there after their release from prison. At one point, sexual predators were housed in the joint, which is located in an otherwise quiet residential neighborhood, 1,500 feet of the city's Niagara Street Elementary School and less than 200 feet from a church operated day care center.

Citizen complaints led to the involvement of the Niagara Falls Reporter.

The place was the former site of the Zodiac Lounge, the premier blue collar Polish saloon in a neighborhood filled with blue collar Polish saloons. They'd cash your paycheck, serve up a scrumptious fish fry on Friday nights, and everybody had a good time.

As recently as 2002, the Reporter covered a party there at which more than 200 people made it to the Zodiac Lounge on Niagara Street for a community tribute to community activists and tavern owners Bob and Mary Kay Wilson.

But then something happened at the Zodiac. An ownership change, combined with a desire by the state Parole Board to house registered sex offenders in the low rent city, turned what had previously been a bar downstairs, apartments upstairs arrangement into a subdivision of sorts, where sexual predators could have their way for whatever the state gave them for rent money.

The apartments were parsed, to supply sleeping quarters of a condition it would be difficult to find outside of a Third World country.

And the state contributed, sending in the most vile and heinous predators it could muster to fill those beds. At one point in 2010, more than two dozen sick and depraved convicted sexual offenders were living at the Midtown.

Neighborhood residents knew them by

name, and they could be seen lurking in the candy section at the old Wilson Farms store across the road from Niagara Street Elementary School when classes let out.

It turned out that legislation sponsored by former state Assemblywoman Francine Del Monte had turned Niagara Falls into a mecca for paroled sex offenders. Under the Del Monte sponsored "civil confinement law," the state's most dangerous predators were released back into society, where they collected welfare and Medicaid benefits, largely free to come and go as they pleased.

Following a highly publicized series of pickets that took place following the Reporter expose, Del Monte and Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster agreed to appear at a public meeting on the topic held at the Niagara Street School.

The protests began after James A. McKinney, 51, a North Tonawanda native rated as having a "mental abnormality" that makes him likely to re-offend, ended up in the Midtown Inn after a trial under Del Monte's civil confinement law.

State Supreme Court Justice Richard Klock found McKinney, who was convicted of having sex with four girls under age 14, to have the required mental abnormality, based on courtroom testimony from psychologists.

But he didn't want to commit McKinney to an institution, so he asked the Division for Parole and the state attorney general's office to find a place to put him while on Strict and Intensive Supervision and Treatment, a harsher-than-normal parole program.

McKinney was sent to his mother's house in North Tonawanda, but a community protest led by former North Tonawanda mayor Lawrence V. Soos and residents of Pioneer Drive, where McKinney's mother lived, caught the judge's ear.

Klock, who also lived in North Tonawanda, listened and decided to assign McKinney to a halfway house in Buffalo often used by parolees. But the office of former attorney general Andrew Cuomo protested that all the arrangements for monitoring McKinney had been made with Niagara County agencies.

So McKinney ended up at the Midtown.

Dyster, Del Monte and others charged with propping up the moribund city's sagging population numbers were happy to have him.



The Midtown Inn on Niagara St. is a rooming house where arsonists allegedly started a fire.

To them, McKinney represented the future of Niagara Falls – a ward of the state with no visible means of support who could be trotted out without regard for his heinous criminal history.

"[The Midtown Inn] houses the largest concentration of sexual predators in Niagara County, and is the chief reason that Niagara Falls has the highest concentration of sexual offenders in New York State," Sharon Szewdo, a Niagara Street Business Association board member and one of the picket leaders, said at the time. "Niagara Street is our poorest district. 'With 75 percent of our children walking to and from school at hours when these offenders are allowed to be on the streets.'"

As is so often the case in Niagara Falls, pleas by Szewdo and other longtime neighborhood residents were ignored by officials hell bent on advancing the cause of bureaucracy.

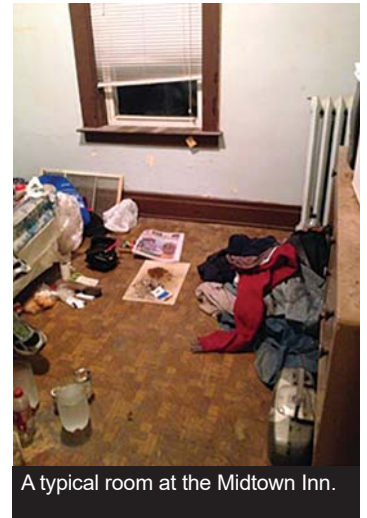
"They've got to live somewhere," Dyster said of McKinney and the other convicted deviants.

The controversy continued until the Midtown was condemned after December 2012 fire. According to police, the fire was started after a "resident set his bed sheets on fire."

Although the building's owners refurbished the flea bag, most of the registered sex offenders were disbursed. The Midtown served as the headquarters for the FBI, who were then engaged in the surveillance of John



Narrow halls connect the small rooms at the Midtown Inn.



A typical room at the Midtown Inn.

Gross, whose plumbing shop was located across Niagara Street. Agents could often be seen on the roof, snapping pictures.

Last week, Niagara Falls Police Detectives arrested a local man and charged him with starting the fire at the Midtown on January 1 at 7:15 pm

Police arrested Jerome Wingfield, a 32-year-old man who lives in the 1400 block of Main Street in Niagara Falls, and Wilber T. Haynes, 70, who lived at the Midtown.

Both men were charged with arson, burglary and reckless endangerment. They were arraigned Monday in city court, where Haynes was given a \$100,000 bond and Wingfield was ordered held without bail.

The fire caused extensive damage to the building and forced some 20 residents to flee the building for their safety, leaving several people injured.

Only one registered sexual offender was left homeless.

Will the building that's become a neighborhood nuisance finally be torn down? Or will government officials again allow for its refurbishment and grand reopening as a spot where lowlife scum can meet and greet?

More will be revealed, as they say.

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Midtown Arson Recalls Horrific Moonglow Hotel Fire of 1957

For some, last weekend's torching of the Midtown Inn on Niagara Street brought to mind the Moonglow Hotel fire of November 1957. But while the destruction of the troubled Midtown may even be seen as something of a public service, the catastrophic Moonglow fire – which left 18 people dead including 15 children, was an epic tragedy that will never be forgotten.

The Moonglow was a decrepit rooming house that had recently been reopened by its' owner, William Dietz, who was said to have bought the building in order to tear it down, as he was in the demolition business.

Dietz rented rooms to members of the city's rapidly expanding African American community, mostly recent arrivals from the South who sought employment in the hospitality industry here.

Frances Haynes, who lives across Allen Avenue from the Moonglow, said the sound of an explosion awoke her around 4:30 a.m. on November 16.

She looked out and "saw flames pouring out of a window on the second floor of the house across the street." By the time she had awakened others in her own house, "we looked again and the entire building was in flames."

Ironically, it was Dietz's father, Niagara Falls Police Traffic Division Capt. Jack Dietz who was on routine patrol in the neighbor-



hood when he saw flames bursting out of his son's building at 2449 Allen Ave.

He quickly called for an alarm, bringing a brigade of firefighters to the three-story tenement structure. Despite their efforts, the Moonglow Hotel fire remains the deadliest in the city's history.

The case attracted statewide attention

being it was the first time a homeowner was charged under the multiple residence law, in violation of provisions requiring fireproof doors and partitions.

Investigators discovered the building had no central heating system and tenants were using electric heaters and kerosene stoves to keep warm. Mention also was made about

nailed down win-dows and lack of proper lighting in the building, police said.

According to articles published in the Niagara Gazette after the fire, William Dietz was indicted by a 24-member grand jury Dec. 11, 1957, on charges of first- and second-degree manslaughter. He was released on a \$10,000 property bail bond.

The indictment came after the jury heard testimony from 42 people in a probe into the fatal fire conducted by District Attorney William H. Earl. Dietz's indictment charge claimed he violated multiple residence laws, and charged criminal negligence for allowing overcrowded conditions to exist inside the property.

Dietz claimed he didn't collect rent from the families and only agreed to let them stay there temporarily as an alternative to being homeless during the winter months after Hyde Park Village closed down.

In March 1958, a jury of 10 men and two women convicted Dietz on the first-degree manslaughter charge for "culpable negligence in maintaining the building in violation of multiple housing law," according to reports.

Genesee County Judge Philip J. Weiss sentenced Dietz to two to five years at Attica State Prison. He finished his sentence at Auburn State Prison.

Dietz, passed away in 1989.

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PHILLIP JAMES - THE CANDLE MAN

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Escape From New York: High Taxes, Regulation Result in Mass Exodus

Mike Hudson

Is Albany fiddling while Rome, Utica, Buffalo and Niagara Falls burn?

A report last week by the Empire Center for Public Policy noted that 153,921 more residents moved out of New York than moved in from other states over the 12 months through July 1, new US Census data show. That brings New York's total "net domestic migration" loss since 2010 to 653,071.

That shocking loss is bigger than in any other state for those years — in both absolute terms and per capita.

Simply put, the great migration means that fewer and fewer people want to live in New York. The state is now on the fast track to lose yet another congressional seat after the next 10-year census.

And it turns out that those fleeing the scene have some pretty good reasons.

Analysts say the state's crushing tax burden — New York is the highest taxed state in the nation — combined with a lack of jobs, particularly in the moribund Upstate economy, are the two factors most likely to blame for what can only be seen as the mass exodus of residents.

The average burden for state and local taxes in New York is \$9,718 a year, which is 39 percent higher than the national average. In many cases, a simple move across state lines can result in a nearly 40 percent reduction in the taxes that a cash strapped a business or individual has to pay.

Businesses large and small have been fleeing New York — and taking their jobs with them — for years, thanks to the state's reputation for stratospheric taxes and oppressive regulations.

And what is the Albany brain trust's response to this dire situation?



A raft of new regulations, hefty increases in the minimum wage and other measures that will make it even more difficult to do business and provide employment in New York State, of course.

An increase in the minimum wage for most workers went into effect on Dec. 31, when the hourly rate jumped to \$9 from \$8.75 as part of a gradual increase passed by the Legislature in 2013.

Base wage that employers must pay to workers who also earn tips also shot up on Dec. 31, and different classes of tipped workers are being consolidated so the hourly rate will increase to \$7.50 from between \$4.90 and \$5.65.

That's the first increase for those workers since 2011 and restaurant groups are concerned it will increase labor costs and will cause businesses to raise prices to compensate for the jump. The change was approved by Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration last February.

Franchise owners affiliated with fast food chains that have more than 30 locations will face an even bigger hike in the minimum wage they must pay employees, although there is a legal challenge pending.

The minimum wage for fast food employees in New York City went to \$10.50, and in the rest of the state, to \$9.75 on Dec. 31. The phase-in schedule calls for the minimum wage for these workers to hit \$15 an

hour in 2018 for New York City and by 2021 statewide.

Of course, sexual politics also plays a great role in Albany's thinking, and enhanced workplace gender equality protections are slated to go into effect Jan. 19.

These include a prohibition against discriminating in employment based on family status and requirements for workplace accommodations for medical conditions related to pregnancy.

As part of the same package, small businesses with fewer than four workers will be subject to the same state rules on sexual harassment as larger businesses. Employees at these businesses were previously unable to file sexual harassment complaints with the state.

And employers sued for discrimination based on sex could be on the hook for attorney's fees if the employee successfully proves their case. Attorney's fees could also be awarded in housing and credit discrimination cases based on sex.

A study by the Tax Foundation's Center for State Tax Policy found that New York's ranked 49th out of the 50 states in terms of overall business quality, with only neighboring New Jersey faring worse.

But when it comes to easing taxes or rolling back out-of-control regulations, Albany has done little but make things worse.

NY to Raise Minimum Wage; When/if it Comes, \$15 min. Wage Will Destroy Jobs

New York is one of 16 states increasing minimum wages for 2016.

New York state's base minimum wage will rise from \$8.75 an hour to \$9. Fast-food workers mini-mum wage rises to \$10.50 in New York City and \$9.75 elsewhere in the state.

The base hourly rate for restaurant servers and other tipped workers will increase to \$7.50.

The increase in the minimum wage was passed by lawmakers in 2013. The raises for fast-food employees and tipped workers were approved this year by Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Cuomo wants to phase in a \$15 minimum for all workers, a proposal lawmakers will debate next year.

Generally minimum wage hikes give employers a combination of three choices: Take

less profits, raise prices for consumers or lay off some employees.

If it is fair that people should get \$15 an hour for working at, for example, a fast food restaurant, then people should be willing to pay more money for fast food products.

The increase in labor costs for example of a fast food restaurant which has 10 full time employees who will get a \$5 increase will cost the fast food restaurant \$100,000 per year.

Clearly the entire \$100,000 will not be offset by the owner taking less profits.

Some will likely go toward increased prices of hamburgers and some through not hiring new or laying off workers.

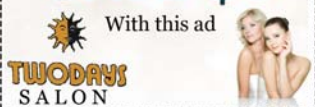
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"Such was the will of the Father that his Son, blessed and glorious, whom he gave to us, and who was born for us, should by his own blood, sacrifice, and oblation, offer himself on the altar of the cross, not for himself, by whom "all things were made," but for our sins, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps."

St Francis of Assisi

Hillary “Rotten” Clinton’s First Success; Congratulations Hillary!!!



**J. Gary
DiLaura**

The Right Side



when a politician like Hillary, is trying to sell you a bridge to nowhere and convince you that “chickens have lips”, you can tell they

are lying, in Hillary’s case, when HER lips are moving.

In her first real job as a lawyer, on a Democrat led Watergate Committee, that was trying to impeach Nixon, she hid a legal decision that would establish Nixon would be entitled to legal representation if he testified before Congress and THEN wrote a brief that there was no precedent! That lie got her called a liar, unethical and immoral attorney and FIRED by her well respected DEMOCRAT boss! You Hillary lovers should look up some of her past deeds instead of leaving you head stuck in that dark place you have them stuck and saying, “I love Hillary”.

Oh... I almost forgot, why is Hillary finally successful at something?

Well, apparently Al-Shabaad, a Somalia-based militant Islamist group aligned with Al-Qaeda, heard Hillary’s idea of putting Trumps’ statement in a video AND DID!!!

Way to go Hillary!!!!... you finally got an idea accepted by someone! Unfortunately it was accepted by an enemy of the United States and gave Aid to our enemy but...”what difference does it make” ...a little Treason among friends, hell if the President can get away with it, why shouldn’t Hillary? She thinks she’s President already!

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Only in North Tonawanda: Is NT Surreptitiously Violating Open Meetings Law?



Sweeney Payne

Reviewing 2012-2015 Common Council minutes posted on NT's website indicates most meetings lasted less than 30 minutes, some less than 10, only a few lasting 60.

In 12/1/15 minutes, Jean Kroetsch requested more information be included on agendas so she could understand budget transfers. Do Council members, Mayor, or City Clerk-Treasurer know Jean Kroetsch's her role in NT's past financial administrations? Officials provide information veil-ing details because most residents don't have the time or patience to drag the details out of them. When Kroetsch asks on our behalf, she should be treated with the respect she is due and answered properly.

Kroetsch said she was present when Mayor Pappas announced in October there would be no tax increase. She then read in newspapers taxes were going up 1.9%. She asked what caused the in-crease, noting NT has \$5 million

in the bank earning 0-2% interest and should use those funds to cover the increase. She suggested using Casino funds for street repairs, noting not enough money is spent on roads.

Comments from residents at Council meetings are recorded, but no responses from officials are given. Televised Council meetings of the City and Town of Lockport indicate that their officials re-pond immediately to speaker's concerns.

NT Council meetings aren't televised and are held when most residents, other than politicians, are having dinner after a long day. Lasting 30 minutes or less, public participation is difficult. It doesn't take a Masters Degree in Political Science to realize the party in control holds the meetings of the Council, School Board and County Legislature at the same time to minimize public scrutiny. Concerned residents cannot attend all three at the same time.

NT puts the "meat" on the agenda for workshops instead of for public meetings. Residents and media are allowed to attend workshops, but the title itself intimidates most from attending and asking questions.

Residents attending Council meetings hear "carried" for everything on the agenda. Aldermen already discussed it all out of sight of public meetings. Because of ironhanded one-party rule, there's never any actual debate at workshops or public meetings. Decisions appear to be handed down to them before the items hit

the agenda.

A (Buffalo News, 2/13/15) letter to the Editor from James Healy said Buffalo Board of Education member Larry Quinn needed a refresher on the First Amendment, including "The First Amendment guarantees citizens freedom of speech. This guarantee does not require the approval of elected officials or an agreement with its content. It is the responsibility of good citizens to question their elected officials in pursuit of a transparent and free society." Preventing citizens whose opinions or manner of speaking you don't respect is unconstitutional when you are an elected official.

Per the Open Meetings Law, "It is essential to the maintenance of a democratic society that the public business be performed in an open and public manner and that citizens be fully aware of and able to observe the performance of public officials and attend and listen to the deliberations and decisions that go into the making of public policy."

A (Buffalo News, 3/8/15) article about the County Legislature included "A Democratic resolution to change the public speaking format at meetings was sent to committee." Minority Leader Dennis Virtuoso predicted before the previous week's session that the Republican majority would proba-bly kill the proposal there. The resolution would have moved public speaking about issues not on the night's agenda back near the start of the meeting. In 2009, the

Republican majority passed a measure moving such comments to the end of the meeting, meaning that anyone who wanted to address the Legislature on a general topic had to sit through the Legislature's typical two-hour plus meeting to do so. "Public speaking in the final time slot has dwindled, and the former cadre of "gadflies" that used to attend Legislature meetings no longer does so," continued that article. A gadfly is someone who annoys people by being very critical or is a person who persistently annoys or provokes others with criticism, schemes, ideas, demands, requests, etc. Is that what those elected to represent us think of us?

NT's meeting time was changed at the same time as the County's from the longtime Wednesdays 7 p.m. start to Tuesdays at 6 or 6:30, (sometimes 6:15, occasionally other times) to also make it in-convenient for most residents to attend meetings. Meetings and locations of most boards and commissions are not announced routinely so citizens can attend them either.

How about fixing this in 2016?

Council plans to offer non-Council meeting opportunities for residents to share concerns, perhaps twice a month in four-hour periods outside City Hall might be a good start at listening to the resi-dents, if it isn't another attempt to keep residents away from the Council meetings where deci-sions are made!

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Niagara Catholic Chairwoman, Judith Nolan Powell, to Receive Bishop's Medal for the Diocese of Buffalo

Niagara Catholic Jr. / Sr. High School is proud to announce that Judith Nolan Powell has been chosen as a recipient to receive the Bishop's medal for the Diocese of Buffalo. Judi is a well-known and respected Niagara Falls native with a passion for the city and the county. She is a 1968 graduate of Madonna High School and is a current chair of the board of trustees of Niagara Catholic Jr. / Sr. High School. Judi has shown her commitment to her Catholic faith and especially Catholic Education throughout the years. It is a great honor for Niagara Catholic that Judi

will receive this Diocesan award.

She will receive the award at the 16th annual Catholic Education Dinner, which will be held Thursday January 28, 2016 at the Buffalo Convention Center. Niagara Catholic Jr. / Sr. High School will also hold its own reception for Judi on February 5, 2016 from 3pm-5pm at Antonio's Banquets on Niagara Falls Boulevard. The cost is \$5.00 per person. Beer, wine, snacks, and cash bar will be available. Come out and say Congratulations! For tickets, contact Tina at (716) 283-8771, Ext. 237.



James J. Maher, C.M., Bishop Richard Malone and Judith Nolan



Health and Wellness For the New Year

The start of the New Year also marks the start of a focus on being healthier. We hope to educate you about the eight dimensions of wellness and enhance your own personal wellness. We will provide tips and strategies you can apply to your own life and the different roles you may fill.

Health

Health and wellness are not the same although these terms are often used interchangeably. Health is typically thought of in terms of the absence or presence of disease. It is often defined by objective yes/no responses. Are you sick? Have you been diagnosed with a medical condition? Are you currently taking medication to manage a chronic condition? While the answers to these questions may provide a snapshot into your general physical health, they do little to determine how "well" of a life you are leading.

Wellness

Now consider the following questions. What is the quality of your sleep? How healthful and nutritious are your meals and snacks? How often do you exercise? The answers to these questions may not be as cut and dry as the previous health questions. They likely require an explanation or a scale to answer, but they may also lead to a panoramic view of your overall, holistic sense of health, better known as wellness. Wellness is a multidimensional, holistic, evolving state and process of achieving your full potential. It is subjective, personalized, individual, cultural and situational. One's own sense of wellness may change based on experiences, age, life stage and values. Wellness is about balance, moderation and avoiding social comparison. It is comprised of the following dimensions: physical, social, intellectual, emotional, mental, financial, vocational and spiritual.

There are many different paths to follow heading to better health and wellness and you should take the path that makes the most sense for you. The journey is comprised of eight wellness dimensions and people are at varying levels on each dimension. For example, while someone may have a very strong sense of spiritual wellness, they may be lacking in their emotional wellness. Another person may feel secure in their financial wellness, but their physical wellness could use some improvement.

All aboard! Join us as we embark on this journey to become healthier, happier and well-balanced Laborers leading successful lives and doing our best each and every day.

Letter/photo: Love the horoscopes....

As always, Paul and I share the Reporter amongst the Canadians. Thanks again for another evening of laughs, as we all read out

loud our horoscopes. Great way to start off the new year. So, here you go...a photo of all of us and the Reporter. -Michelle



The Good, The Bad, The Ugly –according to our horoscopes, that is!! And then there's the Canadian.



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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

Chuck Shephard

NEW WORLD ORDER

■ In December, Canada's supportive organization The Transgender Project released a biographical video of the former Paul Wolscht, 46 and the father of seven children with his ex-wife, Marie, describing his new life as not only a female but a 6-year-old female, Stephoknee Wolscht. She told the Daily Xtra (gay and lesbian news site) that not acting her real age (even while doing "adult" things like working a job and driving a car) enables her to escape "depression and suicidal thoughts." Among the trans-age's favorite activities are (coloring-book) coloring, creating a play-like "kingdom," and wearing "really pretty clothes." Stephoknee now lives with the couple who adopted her. [The Independent (London), 12-16-2015]

UNCLEAR ON THE CONCEPT

■ Thee, Not Me: American "millennials" (those aged 18 to 29) continue a "long-standing tradition." The Washington Post wrote in December, describing a Harvard Institute of Politics poll on their views on war. Following the recent Paris terrorist attacks, about 60 percent of U.S. millennials said additional American troops would be needed to fight the Islamic State, but 85 percent answered, in the next question, that no, they themselves were "probably" or "definitely" not joining the military. [Washington Post, 12-10-2015]

EXCEPTIONAL FLORIDIANS

■ (1) Police in St. Petersburg reported the December arrest of a 12-year-old boy whose rap sheet listed "more than 20" arrests since age 9. He, on a bicycle, had told an 89-year-old driver at a gas station that the man's tire was low, and when the man got out to check, the boy hopped in the car and took off. (2) A driver accidentally plowed through two small businesses in Pensacola in December, creating such destruction that the manager of one said it looked like a bomb had hit (forcing both—a tax service and a casket company—to relocate). The driver told police he was attempting to "travel through time." [WTSP-TV (St. Petersburg), 12-15-2015] [WEAR-TV



To work! In full speed, and with undaunted zeal....

To work, with undaunted energy! What fear! Who is powerful enough to thwart you!...

All the powers of good against all the powers of evil—this is what we want....

Let people say whatever they like, stick to your own convictions, and rest assured, the world will be at your feet.

Swami Vivekananda

(Pensacola), 12-23-2015]

COMPELLING EXPLANATIONS

■ (1) Breen Peck, 52, an air traffic controller who has been having career troubles in recent years, was arrested during a traffic stop on New York's Long Island in December when officers found illegal drugs in his car. "That's meth," he said. "I'm an air traffic controller." "I smoke it to stay awake." (2) In a "she-said/he-said" case, wealthy Saudi businessman Ehsan Abdulaziz, 46, was acquitted of rape in December in England's Southwark Crown Court, apparently persuading jurors of "reasonable doubt" about his DNA found in the alleged victim's vagina. Perhaps, his lawyer said, Abdulaziz was still aroused after sex with the other woman in the apartment and accidentally fell directly upon the alleged victim lying on a sofa. [New York Post, 12-11-2015] [The Independent, 12-16-2015]

IRONIES

■ Christopher Manney was fired from the Milwaukee Police Department in 2014 after shooting a black suspect to death in a case bearing some similarity to 2015 shootings that produced "Black Lives Matter" protests—not fired for the shooting (adjudged "not excessive force") but for improper actions that preceded the shooting (not announcing a valid reason for a pat down and conducting a not-by-the-book pat down). Two days before the firing, he had filed a disability claim for post-traumatic stress disorder from the shooting and aftermath, and in November 2015 the city's Annuity and Pension Board, following city law, approved the claim. Thus, Manney, despite having been subsequently fired, retired with full disability, with basically the same take-home pay he was receiving when fired. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 11-5-2015; WITI-TV (Milwaukee), 10-16-2015]

■ In November, as anti-Muslim tensions arose in several U.S. cities following the Paris terrorist attack, two chapters of the Satanic Temple church (San Jose, California, and Minneapolis) offered to protect Muslims who feared a backlash. The Minneapolis group offered "just big dudes walking you to where you need to be," for example, grocery shopping—an offer "of genuine compassion for our fellow human beings." (The offer was subsequently rescinded by the Minneapolis church's executive ministry, reasoning that they are "not a personal security service.") [City Pages (Minneapolis), 12-22-2015]

WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME

■ In November, a 62-year-old customer at Ancient City Shooting Range in St. Augustine, Florida, was hit in the lower abdomen area by another shooter, 71, because the victim was standing behind the target ("for some reason," was all a fire-rescue spokesman would say). The shooter thought the man was elsewhere on the property. [Jacksonville.com, 11-27-2015]

LEAST COMPETENT CRIMINALS

■ Oops! (1) Jasper Harrison, 47, working inside the storage unit in Edgewater, Florida, where he grows his marijuana, heard a helicopter overhead on Dec. 9, panicked, and called 911 to turn himself in to pre-empt what he presumed was a SWAT raid. Actually, the helicopter belonged to a local news station headed elsewhere, but police later arrested Harrison based on the 911 call. (2) Lloyd Franklin, 34 and suspected in a North Carolina double murder, fatally shot himself in a Bensalem, Pennsylvania, motel room in November when police knocked on the door. However, cops actually had come to arrest another man in the room on a parole violation. [Orlando Sentinel, 12-10-2015] [KYW-TV (Philadelphia), 11-8-2015]

THE CONTINUING CRISIS

■ Elaine Williams, 47, was arrested in December in North Forsyth, Georgia, and

charged with trying to buy a baby for her daughter, 14, via an ad on Craigslist. Williams said her daughter said she "wanted a baby and would get one with or without (my) help." (Bonus: Williams lives near Jot Em Down Road.) [Forsyth County News, 12-7-2015]

■ Easily Disrespected: Two foreign students at the liberal arts Oberlin College complained in a recent school publication that the cafeteria selections—supposedly "inclusive" of world cultures—were actually denigrating other cultures by offering inferior versions of national dishes. Vietnamese student Diep Nguyen wrote that the correct "banh mi" sandwich should be a "crispy baguette with grilled pork, pate, pickled vegetables and fresh herbs" and not, he complained, "ciabatta bread, pulled pork and coleslaw." Said Japanese student Tomoyo Joshi, sushi with "undercooked rice and lack of fresh fish is disrespectful." (Cafeteria managers told The Washington Post they were proud of their commitments to other cultures, to local farming, sustainable foods and animal-treatment concerns.) [Oberlin Review, 11-6-2015] [Washington Post, 12-21-2015]

THE ARISTOCRATS!

■ (1) A customer had to be dragged from a burning sex shop by firefighters in the notorious Reeperbahn "sin" section of Hamburg, Germany, in November when he refused orders to evacuate. He had shut himself inside a private booth to watch a film ("Throbbin Hood") and was heard complaining (while coughing from smoke inhalation), "I haven't finished yet." (2) Police in Richmond, Virginia, announced in December that high school math teacher Kenneth Johnson III turned himself in for several recent residential shoe

thefts. Each time, the shoes taken from homes were returned to their owners but with "bodily fluids" added. [Daily Mail (London), 11-25-2015] [WTVR-TV (Richmond), 12-5-2015] UPDATE

■ Road to Nowhere: The "Bridge to Nowhere" played an outsize role in politics a decade ago as an example of uncontrolled government spending (before Congress killed it). (Ketchikan, Alaska, planned a sleek international airport on nearby, uninhabited Gravina Island, but needed a sleek \$450 million bridge to get there.) These days, reported Alaska Dispatch News in November, the original 3.2-mile, \$28 million access road on Gravina Island, built to access the bridge, now just ends in a "scrub forest." One optimistic state official said the road gets "more use all the time"—boaters come for "hunting and fishing, berry picking, things like that. It's actually a nice road." [Alaska Dispatch News, 11-16-2015]

A NEWS OF THE WEIRD CLASSIC (JUNE 2011)

■ A prison guard is "the greatest entry-level job in California," according to an April (2011) Wall Street Journal report highlighting its benefits over those of a typical job resulting from a Harvard University education. Starting pay is comparable; loans are not necessary (since the guard "academy" actually pays the student); and vacation time is more generous (seven weeks, five paid). One downside: The prison system is more selective: While Harvard accepts 6.2 percent of applicants, the guard service takes fewer than 1 percent of its 120,000 applicants. [Wall Street Journal, 4-30-2011]

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CITY HALL JOKES...



It's pretty small peanuts. Councilmen Charles Walker and Andrew Touma have pulled the chairmanship out from under Kristen Grandinetti more times than Lucy pulled the football out from under Charlie Brown.



In defense of his having prevented Kristen Grandinetti from being named council chairwoman, Andrew Touma, said, "Whether male or female all council members are equal. However, some council members are more equal than others."



Kristen just doesn't get any respect. The other day the homeless guy that hangs out in the city hall basement told her to move her car.



Ezra Scott, the rookie councilman, famously campaigned on his slogan, "A connected city is a protected city." He issued a statement regarding the council's refusal to name Councilwoman Grandinetti as chairwoman, saying, "An ignored Kristen Grandinetti is a bored Kristen Grandinetti."



Irony of ironies. After having railed against sexism for decades, and after six years of preaching gender equality as an elected official, Kristen Grandinetti has been repeatedly taught that politics actually is a man's world.



We aren't saying it's impossible for the councilwoman to become chairwoman. We're saying Totes McGoat has a better chance of landing the job.



The men on the council are knuckle dragging throwbacks to the school of, "Keep them barefoot and expecting"...expecting to be named council chairwoman.

2016 is being called "The year of the political woman." Councilman Charles Walker remarked, "Yeah, it's the year of the political woman, but Kristen isn't that woman."

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Your Weekly Horoscope

By Jean Topascani



Aries: (March 21 - April 19)

While it is a common adage that 'two heads are better than one.' In your case, one would have been better than none. You are barking up the wrong tree, but at least that is your natural voice. When people cut their fingers you cry over it just so that you can get salt in the wound.



Cancer: (June 21 - July 22)

You have no trouble making ends meet. Your foot is always in your mouth! Romance brings out the beast in you -- the jackass. People should judge someone by what that person really is instead of by appearances, but you are REALLY ugly.



Libra: (September 23 - October 22)

People used to think that you were a big pain in the neck. Now they have a much lower opinion of you. When you were a child your mother wanted to hire someone to take care of you, but the Mafia wanted too much.



Capricorn: (December 22 - January 19)

You have a terribly empty feeling -- in your skull. Some day you will find yourself -- and wish that you hadn't. If you don't want to give people a bad name, you will have your children illegitimately.



Taurus: (April 20 - May 20)

People often have cases of love that was just infatuation, but this hate they feel for you is the real thing. You are pretty as a picture and people would love to hang you. You are not the worst person in the world, but until one worse comes along, you'll do.



Leo: (July 23 - August 22)

You go to see the doctor and tell him that you wanted a little wart removed; he has you thrown out of his office. All of your dates kiss you with their eyes closed. Considering your face, that's the only way they could.



Scorpio: (October 23 - November 21)

You are down to earth, but not quite far down enough. You are someone who always sticks to your convictions. You will remain a fool no matter how much you get ridiculed for it! You have an inferiority complex -- and it's fully justified.



Aquarius: (January 20 - February 18)

At least you are not obnoxious like so many other people -- you are obnoxious in a different and worse way! People clap when they see you -- their hands over their eyes or ears. When you talk, other people get hoarse just listening.



Gemini: (May 21 - June 20)

You tell spouse, 'I know I could not live without you'. Spouse replies, 'I'll pay for the funeral. You spent so much time trying to get rid of that halitosis only to find out that you are not popular any-way. Go to the library and brush up on your ignorance.



Virgo: (August 23 - September 22)

You started at the bottom -- and it's been downhill ever since. When your mother first saw you, she decided to leave you on the front steps of a police station while she turned herself in. People can always tell when you are lying. Your lips move.



Sagittarius: (November 22 - December 21)

People would like the pleasure of your company, but it only gives them displeasure. You make people believe in reincarnation. Nobody can be as stupid as you in one lifetime. You have hair on your chest, and that's not your only resemblance to Rin Tin Tin.



Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You have a lot of well-wishers. They would all like to throw you down one. You don't believe in being artificial. You want people to hate you for yourself. You are not as bad as people say -- you are worse! Ordinarily people live and learn. You just live.

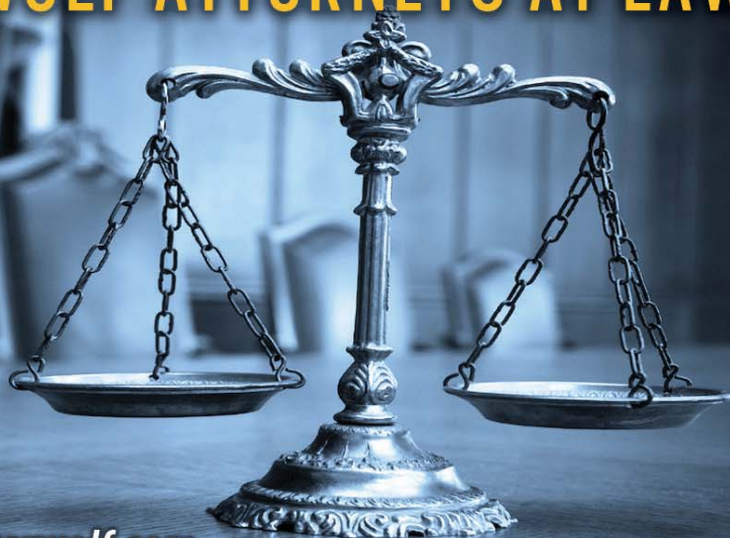
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