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Point  
Closed?**

**Hamister  
Hotel?**

**EXPECT  
DELAYS**

# NIAGARA FALLS REPORTER

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# What Were They Thinking? Seneca Casino Sucks Life From City

## Mike Hudson

What were they thinking?

Back in 2002, when the state of New York, under the leadership of then Gov. George Pataki, handed 50 prime acres of downtown Niagara Falls real estate to the Seneca Nation of Indians to settle the Grand Island land claim and allow the Seneca to open a tax free casino and hotel resort here, what was the logic?

Today, as dwindling casino revenues bite into the measly 25 percent of the slot machine take that Albany graciously allows the city to keep in return for police and fire protection, infrastructure and other amenities, and the Seneca recently announcing the opening of a tax free gasoline station and smoke shop to be opened downtown, many here are wondering how the powers that were could have entered into such a bad deal.

It was easy.

"This has been a long and difficult haul but it's worth it," Gov. George Pataki said when the casino opened. "When you look at what has happened all around the borders of New York state, every time casinos have opened, they have attracted hundreds of millions of dollars ... and created tens of thousands of jobs."

On a local level, there was guarded optimism.

"It'll work, as long as they keep the politicians out of it," said the late Flo Acotto, whose Press Box restaurant across Niagara Street from the casino was eventually bankrupted by its' opening. "They'd mess up a one-car funeral."

Former mayor Irene Elia, along with the entire city Council, had been left out completely of the negotiations between the state and the Seneca. Still, she wanted to make it appear as though she had shown some initiative and chimed in.



Vacancy and blight and not spin off greet the visitors approaching the Seneca Niagara casino

"It's been a long time coming," Elia enthusiastically told reporters.

Former state Sen. George Maziarz said he was mostly concerned about how the city would use the multimillion dollar windfall it would receive as a result of the casino opening.

"Let's look at the revenue as a source for funding economic development programs," Maziarz said. "We've given the city lots of money in the past and it hasn't been used well."

In addition to the direct payments to the city, one of the major selling points of the Seneca casino was the "spinoff" that would occur throughout the distressed neighborhood where it is located. Thousands of casino employees would want to live close by work,

it was said, and new housing would be needed, along with stores, churches and possibly even a new elementary school.

Today, more than a decade after the casino opened, the neighborhoods surrounding it remain more blighted than ever. And the recent announcement by the Seneca that a new, tax free gas station and smoke shop on the former site of the Niagara Street Pizza Hut will endanger the already precarious existence of the gas station and convenience stores located near the casino.

What were they thinking?

When the Seneca Niagara Casino opened, tour buses arrived every 15 minutes or half hour to drop of gamblers from Ohio,

Pennsylvania and New York cities such as Rochester and Syracuse.

Today, those places have their own casinos or casinos easier to reach, and the tour buses have become a rarity. A quick visit to the city's former convention center, gifted to the Seneca by the state for use as the casino, will reveal that the vast majority of gamblers pressing the slot machine buttons are Niagara County residents.

The loss of the convention center itself has had an incalculable impact on the fiber of the city. Now the city makes do with a small, state operated "conference center," big enough to host large weddings or minor league boxing events.

Had the local share of the Seneca casino cash been spent on economic development, as was originally intended, perhaps its existence could be justified. Instead, for most of its run, Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster used the money to plug holes in his bloated annual budgets and stage ego tripping non-events such as the Hard Rock Café concert series and the disastrous Holiday Market.

The Hard Rock concerts are particularly informative, as more than \$700,000 in casino cash was directed toward them. In Los Angeles, California, the Hard Rock on Hollywood Boulevard features live entertainment seven nights a week and the residents of that fair city aren't forced to underwrite any of the cost.

When the Seneca Niagara Casino opened in 2003, it was hailed as the beginning of a revival that would see the city flourish in the new millennium. In the years since, countless businesses have folded and as many as 10,000 residents have fled, seeking greener pastures.

It stands as one of many thought provoking examples that have, in recent years, prompted many here to ask the question:

What were they thinking?

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# Urban Renewal, State Park, Power Project:, What Were They Thinking?

**Mike Hudson**

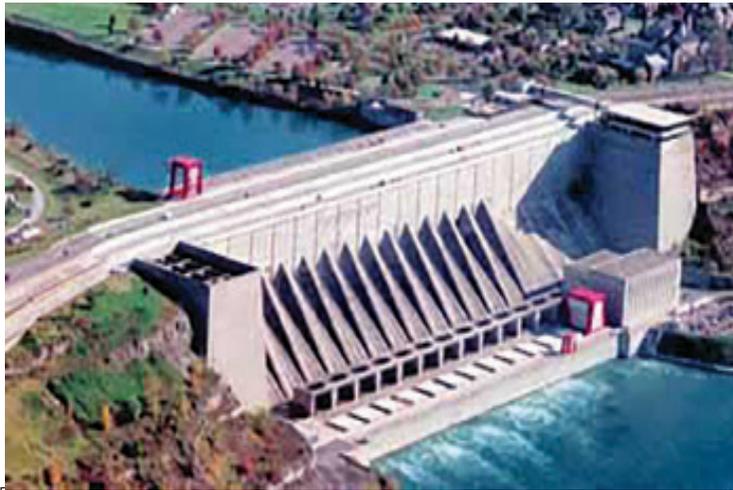
Stupidity and corruption of the part of city officials in Niagara Falls isn't a recent development. It is a tradition that goes back to even before the founding of this great metropolis, on March 17, 1897.

In fact, things started going downhill as early as 1885, with the creation of the Niagara Reservation, now known as Niagara Falls State Park, which is generally recognized as the oldest state park in the country.

The 435 acre park, which offers breathtaking views of the American Falls, the Bridal Veil Falls, and the Canadian Falls, as well as overlooking the Niagara River Gorge and allowing access to the Upper Rapids was once part of the city.

The park also offers a museum, food concession, a movie theater, a gift shop, fireworks, hiking and nature trails, picnic tables, recreation programs, and fishing. The Top of the Falls Restaurant, located on Goat Island overlooking the Horseshoe Falls, is also available within the park.

During the tourist season, the park itself generates revenue of more than \$10 million, not counting what Jimmy Glynn gets with his Maid of the Mist tour boat concession,



When the Robert Moses Power Plant opened in 1961, the generation of electricity by private industry in Niagara Falls became a thing of the past. What were they thinking?



Late in the 19th Center, city leaders thought it would be a great idea to give the falls themselves and the land surrounding them to the state. What were they thinking?

generating facility in the Western world when it opened.

More than 2,000 acres of private land, including 550 acres of the Tuscarora Indian Reservation, were seized under sovereign immunity provisions by the government for the project.

At the same time, the Robert Moses Parkway was built, essentially cutting off both the state park and the power plant from the city. Whether this was by happenstance or design is uncertain, but the push to tear the parkway out has been raging for the past 20 years.

The revenue generated by the Robert Moses Power Plant each year is uncertain. Electricity generated at the plant serves to power much of the Eastern United States, though Niagara Falls residents see very little benefit from the plant, and pay some of the highest electricity rates in

Hundreds of historic buildings were torn down, businesses were closed and thousands of residents were displaced in order to create a wasteland of empty plazas and huge but little used buildings.

Failed projects such as the Rainbow Center Factory Outlet, the Niagara Falls Convention and Civic Center, the Native American Cultural Center, the Hooker Chemical headquarters building, the Wintergarden, the Fallsville Splash Park, Aquafalls, a multi-story parking ramp, an enclosed pedestrian walkway bridge, the Falls Street Faire / Falls Street Station amusement complexes, parts of the Robert Moses State Parkway, and the Mayor E. Dent Lackey Plaza closed within twenty years of their construction.

Many demolished blocks were never

replaced. Ultimately, the former tourist district of the city along Falls Street was destroyed.

In Niagara Falls, the convention center blocked traffic into the city, located in the center of Falls Street, and the Wintergarden also blocked traffic from the convention center to the falls. The Rainbow Centre interrupted the street grid, taking up three blocks, and parking ramps isolated the city from the core, leading to the degradation of nearby neighborhoods. Tourists were forced to walk around the Rainbow Center, the Wintergarden, and the Quality Inn, in total five blocks, discouraging small business in the city.

Urban Renewal and the giving away of the tourism and power generating industries are but three historic examples that prompt the question.

What were they thinking?



Hundreds of buildings were demolished and thousands of residents were displaced for the city's Urban Renewal program of the 1970s. What were they thinking?

estimated at another \$8-to-10 million.

The people of Niagara Falls, who turned the land over to Albany for use as a park don't see a dime.

What were they thinking?

Most people today don't realize it, but until 1961, and the opening of the Robert Moses Power Plant, electricity here was generated by a private company, the Niagara Falls Power Company.

After a rockslide damaged one of the firm's several generating plants in 1957, the state stepped in and the U.S. Congress acted to build the Robert Moses, an \$800 million power plant that was the largest hydroelectric

the country.

Local politicians and the media were unanimous in their support for the plant when it was erected.

What were they thinking,

But if there is anything that points up the stupidity of local officials throughout the city's history more than giving away the tourism associated with the state park and the hydroelectric power provided by the mighty falls themselves, it was the wanton and wholesale destruction of the city's tourist district during the so called Urban Renewal program of E. Dent Lackey.



# What Were They Thinking? Hamister Hotel Shows They Weren't Thinking At All

## Mike Hudson

The Hamister Hotel deal is exactly the sort of fiasco that makes Niagara Falls such a special place. Choose a politically connected "developer" who apparently doesn't have any money, hand him a parcel of prime real estate for pennies on the dollar, along with tax breaks and other incentives, then sit back and watch the years roll by while absolutely nothing happens whatsoever.

What were they thinking?

Hamister got the nod nearly three years ago as the city's preferred developer for what is known as Parcel Four, a vacant piece of land on Rainbow Boulevard around 150 yards away from the entrance to the state park. The deal had to be done quickly, he said, so that construction could begin in the early spring of 2014.

Nobody really opposed the idea of a new hotel in the city's tourist district, but the fact that Hamister had never built a hotel before caused some question. Popular former city councilman Sam Fruscione was so bold as



Mark Hamister is an extremely well connected businessman who has donated to a plethora of local and state wide politicians.

to ask whether the developer actually had the money to do what he said he was going to do and an unprecedented wave of vitriol was unleashed against him.

He was an obstructionist, blocking development, was pro-organized crime and had committed numerous other unpardonable sins. He was running for reelection at the time and those spouting this nonsense included Mayor Paul Dyster, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, Sen. Charles Schumer and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand. Tens of thousands of dollars were spent on mailings, robocalls and radio and print ads, a media frenzy was worked up and Fruscione lost by a landslide in the primary.

Meanwhile Hamister downgraded the scope of the project - instead of a resort class Hilton the new hotel would be a boxy truck stop class Hyatt Place - even as the projected cost ballooned from \$22.4 million to \$35.7 million.

A nearly identical Hyatt Place was recently built in Amherst for around \$18



A plethora of state wide and local politicians fought for the right of Mark Hamister to get one of the most valuable properties in Niagara Falls for 1/15th of its appraised value.

million and successful hotelier Michael DiCienzo has said repeatedly he could do the same here if the project were turned over to his company.

But it won't be. A couple of weeks ago the county Industrial Development Agency extended tax breaks for the project that were to have expired today if construction hadn't begun for another six months. No other developer can take over the project so long as the IDA deal remains in place.

As many as five new hotels have opened in Niagara Falls since the Hamister deal was announced. They did so with little fanfare, and certainly without the involvement of the mayor, the governor and two United States



A plethora of politicians also worked to arrange for Mark Hamister to build a mediocre hotel for millions in tax subsidies - and turned a blind eye as he inflated the price to increase the tax subsidies. Hoist by his own petard, Hamister can't get the funding because he has doubled the true price of the mid scale Hyatt Place hotel and financiers know it.

senators.

Fruscione's 2013 question - Did Hamister actually have the money to do what he said he was going to do? - has long since been answered. He did not.

You don't have to look far in any direction here in Niagara Falls before the inevitable question pops into your head:

What were they thinking?

And, in most cases, the only conclusion you can reach is that they weren't thinking at all.



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# Terrapin Point...Off Limits

## Emma Gibbs

As another tourist season approaches, the New York State Parks Office is trying to fine tune a sale pitch explaining to some eight million annual visitors why the American side viewing area of the Horseshoe Falls is off limits.

Terrapin Point, located at the western end of Goat Island, has been cordoned off with chained link fence barricading visitors from the vista of the Falls and Lower Gorge.

The Parks is four years into a \$50 million rehab project which includes renovations on Goat Island. At first glance, the project shows progress through the past winter. While numerous construction efforts on the Niagara Frontier have moved forward during the off season, the LiRo Group, prime contractor of the project, has little to show.

Terrapin Point joins Prospect Point as the most frequented viewing areas on the American side of the Falls. The scope of Terrapin work involves railings, path work, landscaping, and pavers, nothing which justifies stealing a once—in-a-lifetime visit away from guests to Western New York.

Regardless of the construction, the Parks and local Tourist industry continue to highlight Terrapin Point in their promotional campaigns.

"People will not be happy" warned a veteran State Parks source, "these visitors are traveling here with little or no knowledge the Terrapin property is fenced off. Taking pictures through chained link fence is not what they are expecting."

The notoriety of Terrapin grew to new lengths in 1983 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers blasted 25,000 tons of unstable rock off the nose of Terrapin Point. The



Will tourists be prohibited from experiencing Terrapin Point this summer?

demolition was telecast worldwide and brought awareness to this unique overlook on some of the world's most recognizable International waters. Despite the scope of the Corps demolition, Terrapin was able to re-open to the public before the end of that same season.

As the Parks approach the beginning of this year's tourist schedule, with Canada's Victoria Day and our Memorial Day in the last two weeks of May, the State Parks properties leave much to be desired. More than Terrapin Point, the thought of the Plaza around the Cave of the Winds being torn up is enough to put knots in the stomach of the most veteran tour guide. Lines at the Cave of the Winds on busy summer days have been as long as three hours.

Now, with plans in place to operate the Cave concession for sandals and raincoats out of temporary trailers, timed tours are facing a logistical nightmare. It is difficult

to understand why this work could not have been done in the "shoulder season", outside the critical 15 week window welcoming eight million tourists annually.

Somewhere down the road Albany should be able to derive a timetable which respects the interests of visitors to America's oldest State Park. Anyone who travelled Goat Island during the past three tourist seasons has to be turned off by the construction which has decimated the lands Olmsted cherished dearly. Chicken wire on Three Sisters Islands, construction debris everywhere, caution tape strewn about like unchartered wildflowers, tourists forced to walk on unfinished walkways, newly laid pavers lifting, creating tripping hazards. It is unfortunate that the victims of these butchered parklands remain the visitors who arrived at this "special place" looking for memories which they hoped would last their lifetime.



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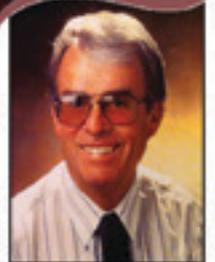
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# Great Lakes Water Withdrawal Scheme on Cuomo's Desk

## James Hufnagel

Later this month, and for the second time during his five years in office, Gov. Andrew Cuomo will make a decision that has enormous implications for the future of Western New York's water resources. The Governor will either deny or support the application of the small city of Waukesha, Wisconsin, which lies outside the natural basin of the Great Lakes, to access water from Lake Michigan in order to replenish its rapidly depleting municipal water supply. While the city's request has been winding its way through the regulatory pipeline for a number of years, the governor's office has given no indication regarding his intentions in terms of whether or not, as one of eight Great Lake states governors with veto power over the proposal, he will vote to approve the unprecedented water diversion.

The first crucial and pivotal challenge confronting the governor with respect to water, of course, culminated in his administration's 2014 prohibition of the practice of high-volume hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking", in New York State. In that case, most who were active in the movement against fracking, while appreciative of the final result, privately agree that Cuomo was dragged kicking and screaming to the decision.

At various times in the years leading up to the final and comprehensive frack ban, state agencies had floated various trial balloons involving "pilot programs" and "test wells", at first with the potential to be widespread but later restricted to four economically-depressed Southern Tier counties. Draft State Energy Master plans made oblique references to the implementation of hydrofracking here, and prominently factored fracked gas in the state's future energy portfolio as a "bridge fuel". Finally, the DEC's and Commissioner Joe Martens' assertion that fracking could be safely regulated here in New York, similar to the pap we're hearing from the Clinton campaign lately, was rightfully discredited by the time Cuomo's thumbs down on fracking became a fait accompli.

Confronted by an avalanche of scientific evidence documenting dangers to the public health from fracking, and encouraged by thousands of loud and raucous protesters who crammed into the Empire State Plaza during his State of the State speeches, Gov. Cuomo reluctantly banned fracking.

Cue up the next battle of the water wars. Waukesha, WI, with a population of approximately 70,000, has a problem. The deep wells that have supplied the city's water for over a century are drying up. Worse, since they are diminishing, the concentration of a certain contaminant brought up from deep within the earth, the carcinogenic element radium, is increasing. The city has been under orders from the EPA to find another source of water.

A November 19, 2002 article in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel made clear that



The Great Lakes have the greatest concentration of fresh water in the world. How much should the cities in the Great Lakes region share with the rest of the world?

the EPA had warned Waukesha as early as 2000 that remedial action was required to bring the radium levels down to acceptable standards, and the city's reaction? Sue the EPA.

"Waukesha... would have to spend an estimated \$67 million to rid its water of radium," it is reported, and "has spent nearly \$500,000 in legal fees and research in an effort to disprove that radium poses a danger at levels... found in Waukesha water."

"(T)he city will need to find another source of water in the future to serve the demands of a growing population and industrial base... (and) is also looking toward Lake Michigan as a potential water source." Sixteen years later, a decade and a half during which the city could have implemented any number of conservation and water savings strategies to cope with its predicament, as so many other communities across the country have, Waukesha's solution is to tap into one of the sole remaining bodies of freshwater extant on the planet.

"What's the problem with that?" the reader may well ask, "Aren't there billions of gallons of water in the Great Lakes, and wouldn't a city a mere 17 miles from Lake Michigan have a right to some of it?"

Enacted by Congress and signed into law in 2008, The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact established a council comprising the eight states bordering the lakes, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. A key provision of the compact is that no municipality located geographically outside of the Great Lakes watershed is allowed to draw on its water.

However, even though the city limits of Waukesha lie 1.5 miles outside the watershed boundary, a technicality in the statute enables towns, villages and cities of counties that straddle the boundary to be eligible to apply for a special exemption to help themselves to the abundant and seemingly boundless natural resource, and that's precisely what Waukesha has done. All eight governors must

approve the application for the withdrawals to move forward.

A letter sent to the Council by 41 conservation groups outlined reasons why the application should be denied. "The City of Waukesha: 1) does not justify why it needs so much more water than it is currently using; 2) does not consider all reasonable alternatives to provide potable water for its residents; and 3) proposes to divert Great Lakes water to communities who do not need it."

It's perhaps 3) that is the most alarming. In fact, Waukesha administers a water service supply area that forwards water to

three neighboring towns and the nearby city of Pewaukee, all outside of the Great Lakes watershed. If the water diversion is approved, could the lawns and golf courses of Arizona, and the fountains of Las Vegas, be added to this network?

There's a history here to be told as well. It's the story of the American experience of environmental exploitation, belatedly coming to the realization that, as singer Joni Mitchell put it, "You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone."

Back in the late 1800's Waukesha had scores of natural mineral springs. One entrepreneur began bottling the water, and shipping it out by the barrel as a cure for diabetes. The town garnered a national reputation for its healing waters and, at one point, planned to pipeline the water to Chicago's 1893 World's Fair.

Then more people moved in. The springs got contaminated from outhouses and storm drain outflow. A nearby quarry drew water away. The city dug deeper and deeper wells, but couldn't keep up with the burgeoning demands from a growing population, unregulated water usage and lack of intelligent planning. Now it's thirsty.

And all they want is a sip, just a little sip, mind you, of the Great Lakes. Pending Gov. Cuomo's approval, that is. Given that the public hasn't paid as much attention to this issue as they did fracking, and Wisconsin is a swing state important to the governor's future presidential aspirations, they'll probably get it.

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# Tompkins, Scott Seek To Wrest Water Board Control From Albany

## Mike Hudson

In addition to calling for the termination of Niagara Falls Water Board Executive Director Paul Drof, city Councilman Ken Tompkins has introduced a resolution with Councilman Ezra Scott asking that all five members of the Water Board be approved by the mayor and the Council, so as to regain city control of the municipal water supply and wastewater treatment facilities.

Currently, the governor, state Senate and Assembly name three of the board's five members, with the Council and the mayor appointing the other two.

Tompkins' ire was raised last week when



Ezra Scott

state Comptroller Tom DiNapoli revealed the results of an audit that showed the board to have \$6.3 million squirreled away in a bank account.

In the resulting controversy, it became apparent that not all the board members were aware of the surplus.

"It is time for Niagara Falls to return the Water Board to people who can efficiently and effectively manage it for the good of this city's people," Tompkins said.

In his resolution, Tompkins and Scott call upon state Sen. Robert Ort and Assemblyman John Ceretto to introduce legislation that would amend the state Public Authorities Law in such a way that would allow the mayor and the Council to appoint all five members to the board.

"How do you not know that you have over \$6 million dollars? This is simply gross incompetence," said Tompkins. "To think that our residents on 72nd Street went without water for two winters and were forced to pay exuberant amounts of money to repair their homes' connections to the water main, when the money for infra-structure repairs could have been available, is simply beyond inexcusable."

The Water Board was created in 2002 during the administration of Mayor Irene Elia. On the Council, the most enthusiastic supporter of the board idea was Paul Dyster, who now serves as mayor.

## Ortt: No State Funding for Sanctuary Cities

Please see the following statement from State Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I - North Tonawanda) regarding the State Senate's Budget that seeks to prohibit local governments from adopting laws or policies that impede the enforcement of federal homeland security laws.

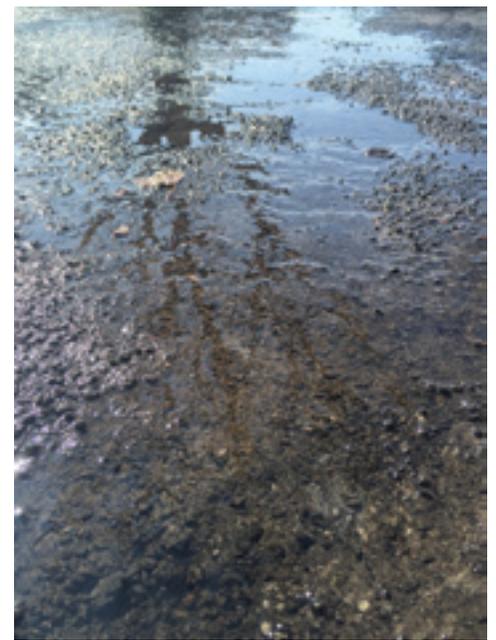
"New Yorkers are sick and tired of working hard, playing by the rules, and paying taxes only to see local, state, and federal politicians cower to reward illegal immigrants and those breaking our laws. Big cities across this nation are thumbing their noses at our rules, our laws, and our Constitution. It's time that we take a stand, here in New York, and say 'no more.' I understand that liberal special interest groups and the illegals' community in New York City have a problem with this, but I don't care. If you're a city in our state and if you refuse to follow our laws, then you shouldn't receive funding from state taxpayers. It's that simple."

## Going on Two Years with the Water Board

### Guest View by Leo Zientara II

I do not know if this is something your paper is interested in covering, but no one at the water board cares so I thought maybe this would help

There is a broken water main under Pierce Ave right near Whirlpool. The leak has been there for about two years. The neighbors have called multiple times and the water board and city hall are well aware of the issue. There are holes on both sides of the street where the water comes up. There is only so much water coming up, however I am sure it is soaking into the dirt under the road. We are talking about thousands of dollars' worth of water. At this point the end of the concrete slab at the end of 721 pierce is starting to sink into the ground. The holes where the water comes up are about 6 inches deep and into loose gravel. The asphalt around them is caving in. The city cannot even fill the holes because it is constantly under water.



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# Will Taxpayers To Foot The Bill For Dyster's Personnel "Surprise"?

## Dyster Secret Plan To Give Raises To Appointees Requires Council Support

### Emma Gibbs

Nowhere in either his proposed or adopted 2016 Budgets did Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster have the courage to introduce the plan he now wants to ask the City Council to approve sometime in April.

You read it here first.

Niagara Falls' Chief Executive has plans to present an agenda item asking the Council to sanction additional spending not authorized in any municipal spending plan.

According to city hall sources, Dyster plans to create a new job title for his current secretary, Nick Melson, purportedly relieving Melson of the traditional duties assigned to a Mayor's confidential secretary. The third term Mayor wants to name Melson as "Special Assistant to the Mayor" and give him a substantial raise.

Melson, currently earning about \$42,000, boasts a resume long on political campaigning and highlighted by a stint as an assistant to former New York State Assemblywoman Francine DelMonte.

The plan is expected to face little



Nick Melson and Brigette Myles to get a raise?

opposition to this "out of the blue" appointment.

It is safe to assume that Dyster owns the votes to have the Council fund this plan.

With Nelson's salary moving above \$50,000 annually, one is left to ask, what about the daily clerical, communication and reception duties handled in the past by the Mayor's right hand?

Dyster, in his own version of 'financial

musical chairs', plans to assign Melson's old duties to , Cindy Ransom, the secretary of City Administrator Donna Owens.

Accepting the fact that many in this community have questions as to what Owens actually does, it seems to follow that her subordinate, Ransom, might have a free moment or two.

Don't fret, the Administrator's girl

Friday will be justly rewarded with a raise in excess of \$6,000 bringing her salary close to \$50,000.

. Then keeping up the plan to raise salaries of secretaries higher than managerial positions in the private sector, Dyster also plans to raise the Council secretary, Brigette Myles pay so that there is no inequality among the \$50,000 secretaries at city hall.

Think about it. The mayor plans to have three city employees, each an appointee, being awarded unauthorized pay raises.

City union employees must be having a kitten.

There remains little question that the Dyster regime will conveniently identify a budget line from which to draw down gratuities to these three of the Mayor's 'friends'.

City Hall 'watch dogs' know the decision to fund or not fund rests in the hands of our City Council. But with the "hush money" in place and both sides giddy from drinking the same Kool Aid, sadly, to the tune of \$30,000 annually, the taxpayers will once again take it on the chin.

### Despite "Geno".... Final Four Fever Spreads

#### Emma Gibbs

The drama surrounding the NCAA basketball Final Fours, both Men's and Women's, approach what promises to be a frenzied finish.

On the Men's side Oklahoma faces Villanova, while the surprising 'tainted' Orange of Syracuse University meets up with the number one-seeded Tarheels of North Carolina.

The Women's final quartet has Washington University battling the Lady Orange of Syracuse, while the ladies of Oregon State, the same group which eliminated local sweetheart St. Bonaventure in the second round, locks up with the undefeated, top-ranked ladies from the University of Connecticut.

Of course "big-time" college competition would never be complete without controversy once again rearing its ugly head. Connecticut Women's Coach Geno Auriemma made sure of that.

In the quarter-final round ( the so-called elite eight) Connecticut manhandled Mississippi State, crushing the Lady Bulldogs 98-38. A mismatch from the start, Connecticut lead 61 to 12 at halftime. Nonetheless, Auriemma unleashed a relentless, classless blood-letting allowing Connecticut to continue to embarrass an over-matched opponent.

Despite the lopsided halftime numbers, "Geno" saw fit to play his starters in the second half, not pulling the last of the first-five until 8:45 was left in the game. "Geno", the only one you were entertaining was yourself.

As network television cameras panned the UConn bench, one could spot six athletes still in their warm-ups, none of whom had yet to step on the hardwood. Auriemma, what in God's name were you thinking???

Instead of having his players run some

time off the clock, slowing down their offensive onslaught, "Geno" continued a break-neck attack combined with a pressing defense to further trash a demoralized group of Mississippi State 'kids'.

Auriemma's lame explanation to a sideline network analyst reeked of arrogance. "I can't make them just walk up and down the floor" Auriemma scoffed. Lame, lame less-than lame....

Small chance remains that Auriemma will get his "comeuppance", his UConn team is that good. But little Geno might accomplish will cover up the "Twitter uproar" created by a Coach whose sportsmanship and common courtesy fell victim to an arrogant need to humiliate an already beaten opponent.

Let's get back to basketball. The Lady Orange has a real chance to reach the NCAA title game. Unfortunately, Connecticut should be there waiting to finish off its undefeated season by pounding the darlings of Central New York.

On the Men's side Oklahoma is lead by Buddy Hield, justly touted as one of college basketball's best.

But Villanova brings to the table a position- by- position advantage which can return Nova to the NCAA title game for the first time since Rollie Massimino's Wildcats shocked Georgetown and the College Basketball World in 1985.

The other semi-final pits the 'Orange' of Syracuse against the number one seeded Tarheels of North Carolina. Syracuse has survived the nine game suspension of Head Coach Jim Boheim, a questioned advantageous seed off the "Bubble" and two improbable rallies against Gonzaga and Virginia to reach the Final Four.

The clock might well strike twelve for Cinderella, as even its stifling defense will not be enough to get the Orange past a very talented North Carolina.

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# Department Of Health Awards \$450,000 Grant To Memorial For Innovative Post-Hospital Care Program

## Total of grants to medical center in 2016 reaches \$6 million mark

The New York State Department of Health has awarded a \$450,000 grant to Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center to support the continuation of a successful program that ensures better post-hospital care while reducing hospital readmissions and nursing home stays.

Called Bridging the Inpatient Process (BIP): Building Bridges to Home and Community Care, the innovative program has restructured the hospital's discharge process to provide needed support to care-givers who will care for Medicaid beneficiaries at home and in the community and to ensure better transitions to outpatient care and services.

Those changes have generated more than \$2.39 million in Medicaid savings during the past year. In its first year of operation, the BIP program prevented 105 acute and behavioral health admissions and avoided 9,476 days of Medicaid-paid nursing home care.

"We are grateful to the Department of Health for their continued support, which is a testament to the documented success of this groundbreaking effort," said Memorial Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Sheila K. Kee.

"This latest award validates the millions of dollars we are saving federal, state and local government funders by preventing frequent and medically unnecessary hospitalizations and emergency room us-age," said President & CEO Joseph A. Ruffolo. "Providing patient care at home with the aid of caregivers who have received training, education and support on helping their loved ones recover from an illness is a proven strategy for improving outcomes and saving healthcare dollars."

The "bridges" to home and community care are built by specially trained professionals – including discharge planners, social workers and resource coordinators from Niagara Falls Memorial and several community-based organizations.

"This team of specialists has broken down the barriers between hospital and home by providing the education and support needed to effectively connect patients to medical, mental health and medication management assistance in the community," said Kee. "This additional support extends to family members caring for Medicaid beneficiaries at home."

The incorporation of support mechanisms such as a telephone hotline, resource guide

and safe housing registry also have helped ensure better health, especially for chronic, high risk patients, she added.

"Many of these people were previously in danger of falling through the cracks after being discharged from the hospital," Kee said. "Now they're being supported in some very meaningful ways."

Ruffolo noted the documented results of innovative Memorial Medical Center efforts such as Bridging the Inpatient Process: Building Bridges to Home and Community Care, Emergency Department Care Coordination and Short Stay Intensive Case Management have paved the way for some \$6 million in government and private foundation grants thus far this year.

Included in that total is a three-year,

\$339,154 grant from The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation to support "Close the Gaps," a project to provide service coordination and care management to youth with intellectual disabilities (ID), from newborns to young adults in Niagara Falls. It will also serve the families of those with intellectual disabilities.

"Our efforts are truly making a difference in the quality of life enjoyed by so many, especially vulnerable individuals who are at high risk," Ruffolo said. "It's gratifying to be recognized for providing quality care and promoting better health – and doing so in a cost effective manner."

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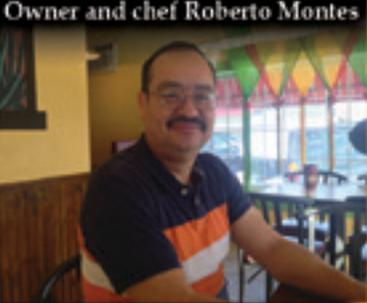
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# Tompkins Says Memorial Day Parade Will Go On

**Tony Farina**



In perhaps his finest hour in his first year as a Niagara

Falls city councilman, Kenneth Tompkins announced Wednesday night there will be a Memorial Day Parade this year only hours after the Veterans Memorial Commission had announced the parade had been suspended due to lack of funding. And the parade will be held without the need for any taxpayer money.

Tompkins, a Republican, stated in a press release "there has been a tremendous outpouring of support from local organizations and individuals," and he named former City Court Judge Angelo Morinello, a Vietnam combat veteran and the Republican candidate for the state assembly, as pledging a \$2,500 contribution to help make sure there is a parade this year.

In addition, Tompkins says "the Niagara LaSalle #132 Masons, the Kiwanis Club of Niagara Falls, and the Niagara Falls Tim Hortons' franchise owner Robert Burns have all come forward to help sponsor the event and do so much more. There are so many other organizations listing their support it's impossible to list them all right now."

The release states that Tompkins and Councilman Ezra Scott, Jr., would assume responsibility for securing participants and support for the parade which traditionally runs from 19th Street to the Niagara Falls Veterans Memorial in Hyde Park.

Tompkins said he was unsure of what happened regarding the original announcement hours earlier by David Fabrizio, chairman of the veterans commission, that the parade was being suspended due to a lack of funds.

"To the best of my knowledge," Tompkins said, "no request for funds or even a permit had been submitted to city hall. Nevertheless, the support is strongly there and as soon as my wife, Terry, posted on Facebook that we would be coordinating the effort, my phone rang off the hook."

Tompkins, who along with Scott is a first-year lawmaker, said "let me reiterate, we are doing this without cost to the city taxpayers. This is a community-driven effort," stressing it is not about politics but "about our community."

Tompkins stressed that Mayor Paul Dyster and the other members of the city council support the effort to keep the Memorial Day Parade tradition going in the cataract city.

Tompkins said the effort is being made to pay tribute to the men and women who have served to preserve freedom, and "this parade is a small token of the gratitude we have for what they've sacrificed, especially those who gave their lives in battle."

Groups that want to participate are asked to contact Tompkins at [kennytompkins@yahoo.com](mailto:kennytompkins@yahoo.com) for more information.

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# Stewards Of Children® Training To Be Offered In Niagara During Child Abuse Awareness Month

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One in 10 children will be sexually abused by the time they turn 18 with 90 percent of them abused by someone they know. You can make a difference in protecting children by registering for one of the six Stewards of Children® trainings being held in Niagara during the month of April.

The programs will be offered free charge by the Child Advocacy Center of Niagara, a service of Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, with the support of the Niagara Area Foundation.

Stewards of Children is an evidence-informed child sexual abuse prevention, recognition, and intervention training. More than one million people around the world

have taken this training. Sessions are open to anyone interested in protecting children from sexual abuse and may be of particular interest to youth serving organizations, parents, educators, childcare providers and faith centers.

The training will be led by Education and Outreach Coordinator Jacqueline Pritchard of the Child Advocacy Center of Niagara, an authorized Darkness to Light-Stewards of Children facilitator.

Scheduled training dates are

- April 5, 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Lockport Public Library
- April 5, 2-4:30 p.m., Lockport Public Library
- April 12, 2:30-5 p.m., Niagara Falls Public Library
- April 12, 5:30-8 p.m., Niagara Falls Public Library

• April 20, 2:30-5 p.m., DeGraff Community Room, 139 Division St., North Tonawanda

• April 20, 5:30-8 p.m., DeGraff Community Room, 139 Division St., North Tonawanda

Registration is required. Register online using the Classes & Events page at nfmcc.org or call the Child Advocacy Center of Niagara at (716) 285-0045.

About the Child Advocacy Center of Niagara: The Child Advocacy Center, a service of Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, is a child-friendly facility designed to coordinate a multidisciplinary response to reports of physical and sexual child abuse of children as well as cases where a child has witnessed domestic violence. The Center is a Darkness to Light affiliate, authorized to facilitate Stewards of Children training within

the Niagara County community.

Website: [www.CACofNiagara.org](http://www.CACofNiagara.org)  
Facebook: CACofNiagara

About Darkness to Light: Founded in 2000, Darkness to Light (D2L) is a nonprofit organization committed to empowering people to prevent child sexual abuse. We are guided by our vision to create a world where child sexual abuse does not exist. We believe protecting children is an adult responsibility and that education is critical for prevention efforts, as well as a catalyst for larger cultural change. Our immediate focus is to make child sexual abuse prevention national priority.

Website: [www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org)  
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John Hoppenthaler, *Domestic Garden*, (poetry)  
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# The Legal Corner: Advice on Automobile Accidents



**Nicholas A. Pelosino, Jr., Esq.**

remember the following:

1. Only give general information: driver's license information, insurance agent contact, and anything required by law enforcement or medical professionals to ensure the situation is safe. Do NOT admit fault.

2. Do not confront the other party of the accident in an emotional or hostile fashion. Even if you're not at fault, you can still prejudice any auto accident claim by your actions AFTER the accident.

In today's world of ever changing laws especially with respect to laws concerning auto accidents, an innocent driver or passenger must know their rights if they are injured because the time begins to tick as soon as that auto accident occurs.

First, you should always file a No-Fault claim following the accident. You have thirty (30) days from the date of the crash to file a No-Fault application. No-Fault is a separate and distinct claim from a bodily injury claim. Many people get this confused. If injured in a crash, a cyclist, pedestrian, driver or passenger may have the right to sue for their injury as well as their pain and suffering. This is what we call a bodily or personal injury claim. When you are a cyclist, pedestrian or passenger, it will be this same insurance company that provides and pays your No-Fault claim that will also be defending and paying a judgment or settlement for your personal injury claim. Although payment is made by the same insurance company, these

The fraction of a second in which an accident occurs has the power to change your life forever. It can be exceptionally challenging – physically, emotionally and financially – to move forward after a serious personal injury.

Today, I am focusing on auto accidents. I have handled hundreds of automobile accident cases throughout the last 26 years and if you're involved in a car accident,

are completely separate claims. Each has their own laws and rules and is usually handled by different adjusters and departments at the insurance company. The two claims also have different standards of proof, available compensation, and coverage.

No-Fault in New York was designed to ensure that regardless of fault, an insurance company will pay cyclists, pedestrians, drivers, and passengers up to \$50,000.00 for the legitimate economic losses. This includes ambulance and hospital expenses, doctor bills, prescription drugs and diagnostic tests, such as x-rays and MRI's as well as therapeutic services such as physical therapy. It also includes your lost wages. It does not include compensation for pain and suffering. Any additional claims can be pursued (if you qualify) by a separate lawsuit against the driver(s) and vehicle owner, or any other party who is responsible for causing the crash and your injury.

Do not put off filing your No-Fault claim thinking that your injuries may get better or that your health insurance will cover injuries you suffered in the crash. Simply filing the application does not obligate you to commence a "personal injury claim". Secondly, most health insurance does not cover a personal injury resulting from a car crash. Filing the No-Fault form simply protects your rights.

It is always recommended that you call the police if you are involved in an

auto accident because they will ensure that necessary insurance information is obtained from each party in order to protect everyone's rights and responsibilities.

In order to sue the driver of the vehicle who was at fault in New York State, you must be able to prove that you have sustained what has been termed a "serious injury". That term is defined in New York State as either:

- A permanent loss of use of a body organ, member, function and symptom.
- A permanent consequential limitation of a use of a body organ or member.
- Significant limitation of a use of a body function or system.
- A medically determined injury or impairment of a non-permanent nature which has prevented the Plaintiff from performing substantially all the material acts which constitute the Plaintiff's usual and customary daily activities for not less than 90 days during the 180 days immediately following the accident.

What did you just read!!!!!! I know, it's confusing even for lawyers. That is why it is so important to contact an experienced personal injury attorney to protect your rights immediately following an accident.

Written by attorney, Nicholas A. Pelosino, Jr., Esq.

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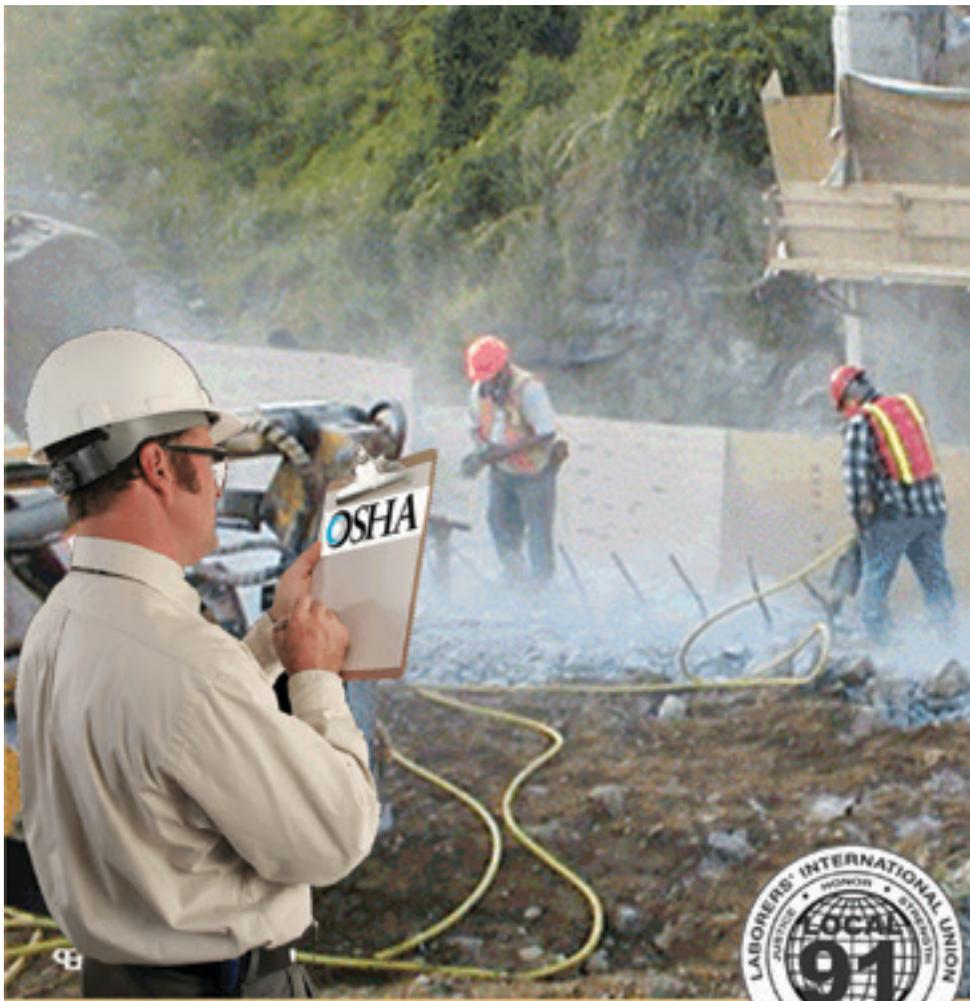


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## Construction Workers Safer with New OSHA Silica Standard

Construction sites are dusty places, but does that make them dangerous? If the dust contains pulverized rock or concrete there is more concern. One study showed silicosis deaths in the construction industry are higher than any other industry in the United States. Construction workers are clearly at risk of developing silicosis and other lung diseases if they breathe high levels of concrete and rock dust. However, levels fluctuate because of the nature of construction work which also makes air monitoring challenging on construction sites. To gather enough information about the wide range of construction activities, air monitoring information was pooled from regulators in Washington, Oregon, and the Chicago OSHA office; universities and other research groups; and several construction contractors. This information was collected and analyzed at the University of Washington.

With the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, Congress created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women by setting and enforcing standards and by providing training, outreach, education and assistance. The new OSHA standard for silica is a welcome and long overdue step towards safer job sites for the many millions of workers who suffer from its deadly impacts. LIUNA has advocated with our allies in the Building Trades for a stronger standard on silica exposure for many years. For too long, workers in the construction industry have been needlessly exposed to silica-related diseases. With implementation of this rule, millions of construction workers – including the hardworking men and women of LIUNA - will be safer on the job.

## Tax Filing Deadline is April 19 This Year



### by Tony Farina

Our friends at Liberty Tax Service have sent us a reminder that the deadline for filing a tax return to get a refund that might be due is April 19th this year as the IRS has extended the filing deadline from April 15 because of Emancipation Day.

According to Edwin Garey of Liberty Tax Service the IRS has estimated that almost \$1 billion in tax refunds from 2012 will disappear on the deadline date of April 19th.

“If you have not filed your 2012 federal or state tax return, you can come in from April 1 through April 10 and get 50 percent off tax preparation of your 2012 return,” says Garey.

Garey advises that anyone who needs to file can stop by Liberty Tax Service at 6509 South Transit Rd., Lockport, or call 650-4076 and speak to

Garey about filing an extension, Michael Gawel for business returns, or Gregory Gerstung for individual returns. There is also a person on staff for Spanish-speaking customers.

Individuals who meet income requirements must file an income tax return. You are also required to file if you had unearned income over \$1,050 including gambling winnings or earnings from self-employment of over \$400.

You may also be required to file if you received advance payments of the premium tax credit. Anyone seeking earned income credit, child tax credit, American opportunities credit or the new health care tax credits should also file.

Now through April 15, you can call Liberty Tax Service at 1-866-871-1040 for the nearest location or visit online at [www.libertytax.com](http://www.libertytax.com) for a free consultation or review of your prior returns.

### Republicans to Honor Tompkins

by Tony Farina

The Niagara Falls Republican Leadership is planning to honor their lone elected representative in city government, Councilman Kenny Tompkins, on Thursday, April 7, from 6 p.m. to 8 p. m. at Gagsters, 708 E. Market Street.

Tompkins, who campaigned on taking a business approach to running city government, has already made his mark by saving the Memorial Day Parade (see separate story) this year without using taxpayer money, a theme of his successful campaign last year.

The event at Gagsters will feature a light buffet and a cash bar with a \$25 ticket price according to Michael Gawel who will emcee the gathering to honor Tompkins.



“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



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# NEWS OF THE WEIRD

## Chuck Shephard

### HARDLY A "DO-NOTHING" CONGRESS

■ In March, U.S. Rep. Pete Sessions of Texas, chairman of the House Rules Committee, introduced a resolution to recognize "magic" as one of America's "national treasure(s)," backed by a 711-word paean urging all to "support and protect" the storied craft -- which needs to be "understood and promulgated," especially given that, according to Sessions, it "requires only the capacity to dream." Sessions made no link of magic to resolving other congressional business (such as, for instance, ending the string of 64 consecutive failed votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act).

### LEADING ECONOMIC INDICATORS

■ People With Too Much Money: Residents on London's swankiest street (Kensington Palace Gardens), stymied in efforts to build upward on their relatively small lots, instead plan elaborate "basements" -- extending as far as five stories down, with elevators, swimming pools, gyms, climbing walls, and one even with a "Ferris wheel" for dialing up the resident's daily choice among his several cars. However, embassies are located on the street and have challenged the construction chaos as offending their sovereignty under international law. Recent restrictions limit the basements to one story down, but billionaire entrepreneur Jon Hunt's five stories are grandfathered in (though his "Ferris wheel" appears to have been shelved).

### NEW WORLD ORDER

■ Mystery fiction has always been a popular genre, but now, readers who prefer that their crimes be solved by cats have several series of brilliant felines to choose from. As The Wall Street Journal reported in February, the major controversy swirling at "cat fiction" conventions is whether the clever kitties should advance the plot by speaking. "We all talk to our pets," noted one best-selling author, "and most of us imagine the other side of the dialogue." (Among the sets boasting more than a million copies are the "Joe Greys," the "Klepto Cats," the "Cat Shout for Joy" suite, and the recently concluded, 29-volume run of "Cat Who" books, e.g., "The Cat Who Could Read Backwards.")

■ The Glasgow, Scotland, company Osdin Shield announced recently that it had designed for potential sale (for those relaxing, yet secure evenings) a fashionable yet bullet-proof sofa and upholstered chairs sturdy enough to protect against 9mm handguns, shotguns and AK47s -- with special marketing to hotels, embassies and government buildings.

■ A Perfect Storm of Vacuumousness: In February, British marketing company Havas Helia tapped the "millennial" generation's obsessions with craft beer and data-driven knowledge, announcing the development of 0101 -- a brew created, it said, by social media messages. The company, "finding" that the generation appeared "optimistic," analyzed "thousands" of the generation's messages against 24 human emotions, which it translated to 38 particular emotional states, which were fed into the IBM Watson computer, which selected 10 existing beers, whose recipes were then cribbed to create 0101 (a "cream ale"

with honey and two specific kinds of hops, tasting of "optimism, love, imagination, and gentle overtones of excitement").

### LEAST COMPETENT GOVERNMENT

■ Following a simplistic hack at the Internal Revenue Service that permitted several thousand tax returns to be illegally accessed and refunds commandeered, the agency created an equally porous "fix" merely copied from failed security elsewhere on the IRS website. According to a March Washington Post report, the fix admirably added one level of security (a personal PIN), but nonetheless allowed anyone to change another's PIN using publicly available information. IRS Commissioner John Koskinen told the Post that "only a handful" of taxpayers were victimized by the faulty fix (but later defined "handful" as "fewer than 200").

### THINGS PEOPLE BELIEVE

■ Murders are being committed over hair weaves, reported WMC-TV (Memphis, Tennessee) in March, with one likely explanation being a belief that a person who acquires tufts of human hair surely acquires the fortunes -- good or bad -- of the person who grew the hair. That is especially true of "virgin" hair from India, shorn for religious sacrifices ("tonsuring") before falling into the hands of agents who sell to Western women. Said a Memphis pastor, "A generation back or so," people were being killed over tennis shoes. "Now (it's) hair."

### WAIT, WHAT?

■ Infrastructure Blues: (1) A 5-year-old, slow-moving underground fire (beneath a Superfund cleanup site) is within 1,200 feet of a waste site

for nuclear weapons near St. Louis, according to a December Associated Press report. The Environmental Protection Agency, of course, said not to worry, that the heat from the fire was not enough to ignite chemicals or trigger an explosion. (2) While America was outraged about the water in Flint, Michigan, the tap water in Crystal City, Texas (100 miles southwest of San Antonio) was suddenly as black and thick "as oil" and "stank," according to a resident. The city's water superintendent said the town had decided to clean residue from the system for the first time in "20 to 30 years."

### PEOPLE WITH ISSUES

■ (1) Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C., disclosed in March that in 2015 it received 8,670 noise complaints -- but that 6,500 came from the same person (thus averaging 18 per day, every day). (2) Buddhist monk Julian Glew, 45, was arrested in September in Humberside, England, and later sentenced to 11 weeks in prison after he slashed (by his count) 162 tires in his neighborhood because, he said, he was angry that he had stepped on an insect and needed to be jailed. <http://wtop.com/dc/2016/03/reagan-airport-says-1-person-filed-6500-noise-complaints/>

### LEAST COMPETENT CRIMINALS

■ Needed Training Wheels: Timothy Broad, 30, was convicted in February of a November Clacton, England, convenience store robbery and jailed for more than three years. The balaclava-wearing Broad had pedaled away from the store with the money but managed to fall off his bicycle three separate times, in short order, in the process losing both the balaclava (from which his DNA was recovered) and all the cash.

## Readers Follow Up With Ghost Stories And Pictures



by Frank Parlato

Following our publication of the picture of "Peg, the witch," last week, a purportedly ghostly presence which appeared against the backdrop of a black couch in a North Tonawanda home, we have been haunted by readers who claim they have seen ghostly visitors in their own homes.

A few claim they did not see a ghost until it appeared accidentally and surprisingly in a picture. Here are two such examples:

In the picture above, taken in a home in Niagara Falls, there appears to be a ghost floating in mid-air, who is said to be a child who died and continues to haunt his former house. The man who

sent us the picture swears the photo was not photo-shopped, or a double exposure.

In the photo below, an alleged "shadow person" appears in the background. The person who sent this could not say whether or not the shadow was caused by something more substantial than a ghostly presence - like the man who appears on the right.

At The Niagara Falls Reporter, we offer no comment on the validity of these or any ghostly presences in or outside of photographs. We published them here mainly because our readers have expressed a desire to either help debunk or affirm the existence of the dead coming back to resort to places where they once lived.



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