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IN THEATERS
AUGUST 4th

The News Briefly

Casino Chronicles

Of course they can stop the casino

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown tells everybody that a tax-exempt gambling joint in downtown Buffalo is inevitable, so the only thing people around here can do is work really hard to make it as pretty as possible so it will make as much money as possible so Buffalo's cut of the slot machine drop will be as large as possible.

That is to say, Byron Brown says we are going to get fucked so at least let's try to get paid for it so we can claim we're professionals rather than victims.

There are, however, other alternatives.

Where the Common Council stands, or sits, or hides

In the Common Council, Brown's position is endorsed without question or apparent thought by Bryan Davis (Ellicott). Dominic Bonifacio, Jr. (Niagara), seems to have doubts about the end result, but he also seems convinced of the casino's inevitability. Council President David A. Franczyk (Fillmore, where the casino would go up) says he has an open mind, but he is generally regarded as businessman Carl Paladino's man on this issue, hence a casino supporter. Richard Fontana (Lovejoy) seems to be solidly pro-casino too, either because he buys the done deal line or because of his close ties with Franczyk.

Michael Kearns (South) and Michael Lo-Curto (Delaware) are both strongly opposed to the casino plan. They see it as poison for Buffalo's economy, even if the city's share of the slot drop is sweetened, as was recently proposed by Congressman Brian Higgins. Neither do they think it inevitable: They point to the lawsuits against various city, state and federal agencies and officials pending in state and federal court, and the city's own very real power.

The other councilmembers might finally go either way. Antoine Thompson (Masten), for example, is heavily indebted to Byron Brown, for whom he used to work and whose former seat on the council he now occupies, but Thompson is running in the Democratic primary for a state senate seat in a district that is largely anti-casino. Will he pay his debts to Brown and perhaps ensure a loss in November or will he strike out on his own? He has missed the last two council meetings at which important casino issues

came up, perhaps deliberately. He can't keep that up much longer. When the vote comes in September on the proposed sale of Fulton Street, we'll learn where Joseph Golombek Jr. (North), Bonnie Russell (University), and all of them really stand.

Carl Paladino

Buffalo developer Carl Paladino remains a busy player in all of this. Paladino sold the Seneca Gaming Corporation most of the property it hopes to use for the Buffalo Creek Casino. Presumably he's been paid, but he continues to attack people who oppose the casino. Why? What dog does he still have in that fight? Is he hoping to sell them more land once construction begins? Does he have to give the money back if the project falls through? I haven't found anyone who thinks his continued advocacy rests in mere belief that a casino would do wonders for the city.

He has been involved in this project since before it officially began and he remains the only Buffalo businessman of any substance to advocate it. He largely underwrote the campaign that drove former Council President James Pitts from office and also abolished two at-large council seats. Pitts was independent in a way Franczyk will never be, which was the reason for the campaign. If Pitts were still council president, the council would now be asking questions rather than mostly rolling over or ducking for cover.

How the City of Buffalo can block the casino

The City of Buffalo doesn't have to wait for the lawsuits to be resolved to stop this idiocy. It can just say no. Here's how:

1. Don't sell the Seneca Gaming Corporation the two blocks of Fulton Street it is trying to buy. (SGC owns two square blocks between the Perry Street projects and the Cobblestone district. The two blocks of Fulton Street bisects their property. SGC says ownership of that city property will let them build a bigger and better casino/bar/restaurant/shopping/hotel facility; opponents say a bigger facility would merely let them do greater damage to the city. The City of Buffalo is under no obligation to sell Fulton Street and it shouldn't do it.)
2. Don't let any city streets or other property be converted to access roads making it easier to get to and away from the casino.
3. Don't put up any traffic lights helping the casino manage traffic.
4. Don't permit the casino operators to put



The belltower at St. Ann's Church on Emslie Street was visited by intrepid urban explorers recently. This week Bishop Edward Kmiec will visit the East Side landmark to celebrate a Sacred Tridium, held each year on or around July 26. Photo by Eddy Dobosiewicz.

any bridges over any city streets.

5. Don't relocate anyone living in public housing for the convenience of the casino operators.

6. Don't expand any city-controlled utilities for the convenience of the casino operators.

7. Don't permit any cuts in any city curbstones or sidewalks bordering the casino property.

8. Put parking meters on all streets bordering the casino property and tell the police to enforce parking regulations on those streets with the same vigor and enthusiasm they've been enforcing parking regulations on the rest of Buffalo's streets.

9. Let SGC know that Buffalo police will set up and run 24/7 Breathalyzers on the casino's access points, should a casino ever be built.

I'm sure there are many more places the City of Buffalo can say no to the casino developers. The members of the Common Council and the mayor will know about them because for any change in anything the developers will have to come to the city for easements. The city is under no obligation to give those easements.

We've done it before

The very bad twin span plan for Peace Bridge expansion was stopped cold when Buffalo Mayor Anthony Masiello refused to issue the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority the easements it needed to begin construction. The authority sued to force Mayor Masiello to sign the easements, but the court sided with him, saying he didn't have to sign anything he didn't think it was right for him to sign. So he didn't sign, and they couldn't begin construction of a project that would have been ugly and unhealthy. Then Judge Eugene Fahey told them they couldn't do anything until they did a full environmental impact study and that was when sanity and responsibility reentered the conversation and that potential public works disaster was avoided.

The mayor and Common Council could do exactly the same thing, with exactly the same effect, this time. They can make everything hugely difficult and uncomfortable for the Seneca Gaming Corporation. Nothing in the compact signed by Governor Pataki and the Seneca Nation forces the City of Buffalo to commit suicide.

What would the Seneca Gaming Corporation do?

An SGC spokesman said a while back that if the city were uncooperative, they'd just build something ugly and would put a few slot machines in it and run them. It would be, basically, a continuing "Screw you, Buffalo," for all to see.

So what? Let them. Who's going to look like a sulky sore loser if they do that? Who would be laughed at by everybody in the casino industry? Who would be calling attention to a debacle they'd rather forget? Whose customers would be getting Breathalyzer tests from Buffalo's finest?

No, that's not going to happen. If the City of Buffalo stands up and protects itself, the SGC will leave Buffalo alone and count the profits from the two casinos it did get to build. They'll be better off and so will we.

—Bruce Jackson

Bruce Jackson is vice president of Citizens for a Better Buffalo (<http://betterbuffalo.com>) and editor of the Web journal BuffaloReport.com. He is also SUNY Distinguished Professor and Samuel P. Capen Professor of American Culture at UB. **av**

BREAKING OUT

Syphilis outbreak should be a red flag for Buffalo's gay community

Erie County health officials are raising concerns about what they're calling a syphilis outbreak in Buffalo. In only the first seven months of 2006, the number of confirmed cases of syphilis—22—has nearly doubled the 13 cases discovered in all of 2005. "We're expecting to at least be in the mid 30s by the end of the year," says Michael Chase, a public health educator with the Erie County Department of Health. What makes the outbreak truly remarkable is that 21 of the 22 cases have occurred in the gay community.

There are several factors that have contributed to this outbreak, the most prominent of which is the rise in popularity of the club drug crystal meth. "The syphilis spike has come in the last six months or so," says Bryan James Whitley, program coordinator at the Pride Center of Western New York, "just as meth use has become quite prevalent in the Western New York gay community." Crystal meth heightens sexual arousal and dramatically lowers inhibitions, and is often linked with unprotected sex in multiple partner situations. Crystal meth isn't the sole cause of the syphilis outbreak, though.

Syphilis can be very difficult to detect. In fact, it's often called "the great imitator," because so many of its signs and symptoms are similar to those of other diseases. Primary syphilis generally manifests itself as painless chancres. According to Chase, this can be a problem in some cases. "People who receive it in the anus or the mouth often don't see it, and it's painless so they don't even know it's there. The philosophy of most men is to wait and see what happens, and if it goes away, then it must be nothing." And indeed if one waits a week or two, the chancres disappear.

A month or so later, the secondary stage sets in, which is usually marked by a rash on the palms of the hands or the bottom of the feet. This is a tricky symptom, too, and it's often misdiagnosed by both doctors and dermatologists. One case that Chase received this year was a man being treated for ringworm because of the rash on the bottom of his feet. Like the primary stage, the secondary stage only lasts a week or two before disappearing completely.

If it isn't treated in the secondary stage, the consequences can be dire. The tertiary, or late, stage of syphilis attacks your brain or internal organs, and in Chase's words, "You're done." It commonly results in paralysis, numbness, gradual blindness and dementia. In other cases, it causes death. There's no treatment for syphilis once it has reached the tertiary stage. "That's why we need to get people screened, tested and treated if they're positive," says Chase.

Chase also attributes several other factors to the recent rise in syphilis cases across Western New York. "It's obvious that people are having unprotected sex again," he says. "The message has been out there since the AIDS crisis in the '80s, and people are now becoming complacent about it." He says that the

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older generation may be getting tired of the same old safe sex message, and the younger generation wasn't around to recall the devastation during the AIDS crisis, "when people were dying and every weekend you were going to a funeral."

The Internet is another problem. "The Internet introduced anonymous sex. So they may think, 'It's going to be anonymous, we don't have to talk about STDs, we just hook up and that's the end of it.'"

Bathhouses are an age-old problem, he says. Toronto, only an hour and a half away, has several such city licensed and regulated bathhouses, and mostly gay men and women can go there to meet people and have anonymous sex.

"People think it's just about syphilis, but it really isn't," says Chase. "It's about a whole risky way of life, kind of the tip of the iceberg. So, yes, let's talk about syphilis, but then let's talk about gonorrhea and chlamydia."

Meanwhile, the Pride Center is already gearing up to combat the current syphilis outbreak. Working with Erie County health officials, the Pride Center now provides free STD testing every Thursday evening from 4 to 8pm, along with its existing HIV testing service. On that night, Erie County sends one of its staff to test for STDs, particularly syphilis. In its third week of testing, the Pride Center is already noticing a positive trend. "Within the first week, over 50 percent of the people who came in wanted STD testing, not just HIV testing," says Whitley.

Despite the small successes, there are still many hurdles, including the explosion of crystal meth usage in the region. "If you're using crystal meth, you've got to get checked out for STDs," Whitley

Check out In Albany's Closet,

this week's **Artvoice** story on **Channel 7's PM Buffalo** (Friday, July 28, 4pm).

The short documentary by **AV's Matthew Holota** looks at the fight to recognize same-sex marriage in New York State.

You can also view the documentary at www.artvoice.com.

says. He thinks the safe sex message has slipped from education curricula and mainstream press in recent years. "There's a new generation that's coming out without the message in their heads of being so careful. They're going out to clubs, they're going into bars, they're trying out new experiences, they're trying out drugs, and they don't have the proper training and the message isn't there in front of them."

SOME STD TESTING RESOURCES:

Erie County Department of Health, 858-7687

Pride Center of WNY, 852-7743

Project REACH, 845-0172

Planned Parenthood, 1-800-230-7526

—peter koch

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