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FREE

The Ultimate Western New York Summer Grilling Guide

*Navigating the fiery landscape
from basic charcoal grilling to
high-tech smokers*

By: Sumit Majumdar

Summer is here in Western New York. Well, almost. And as the days grow longer and the evenings warmer, we need every day we can get to be grill masters—or, in my case, grill disasters. As I sparked up the grill today for the first time this season, a wave of nostalgia washed over me. Yet, as I stood there, I made a very modern choice: I skipped the charcoal and went straight for the ease of gas.

It got me thinking about how much the backyard culinary landscape has transformed. Pretty much everyone knows how to grill and what to grill, and let's be honest, it was simple back in the day.

(Cont. on pg. 15)

Bullied at 11, Gone Far Too Soon: Family Remembers Nadiya Santiago After Tragic Death



By: John Watson

An 11-year-old Western New York girl remembered for her bright personality, love of sports, and deep devotion to family is being mourned this week after her tragic death. Her loss has sparked

heartbreak throughout the community and renewed painful conversations about bullying and the unseen struggles children can carry.

Nadiya “Nana” Marie Santiago died

(Cont. on pg. 8)

OPERATION POWERHOUSE

**The Bold Plan to Finally
Save Niagara Falls, NY**

By: John Karcz

The most baffling economic paradox in America sits on the border of New York and Canada, roaring 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It generates enough electricity to power a small nation. It draws more visitors than Yellowstone National Park. And it is dying. What follows is the plan that could change everything — and the proof that it will work.

THE CITY THAT FORGOT WHAT IT HAD
Twelve million visitors. A river of clean energy. And a poverty rate that would shame a developing nation.

There is a city in western New York that sits beside one of the most recognized natural wonders on the planet. Every year, somewhere between twelve and fourteen million people travel from every corner of the world to stand at its edge, feel the mist on their faces, and gape at the spectacle of six million cubic feet of water thundering over a limestone ledge every single minute. That is more visitors annually than Yellowstone National Park draws. More than the Grand Canyon. More than any national park in the American system. The falls are, by any measure of raw tourist magnetism, among the most powerful draws on the continent.

And the city that hosts them is dying. The numbers are not ambiguous. The population of Niagara Falls, New York has collapsed from a mid-century peak of more than 100,000 residents to 47,512 as of the 2024 Census estimates — a contraction of more than 52 percent in seventy years. The poverty rate stands at 23.7 percent, nearly double the national average of 12.5 percent. Per capita income is \$30,707 — roughly two-thirds of the national figure of \$44,673. More than a third of the city's children live below the poverty line. Niagara Falls has appeared on New York State's fiscal distress list for years running, a designation that places it in the company of cities whose finances have deteriorated to the point of near-incoherence.

Meanwhile, those twelve million visitors arrive, spend an average of four hours in the area, and flee. They flee across the Rainbow Bridge to Niagara Falls, Ontario, where the hotels are, where the restaurants are, where the entertainment is, where the casino glitters and a Ferris wheel turns against the skyline and the Canadian side of the falls is lit at night in a spectacle that makes the American side look, by comparison, like a municipal parking garage with a view. The economic energy generated by one of the world's greatest natural attractions drains, year after year, across an international border.

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The Rule of Law Versus the Modern Day Witch Hunt

By: Sumit Majumdar



True diversity and inclusion require more than corporate mission statements; they require the courage to uphold the rule of law in the face of public outrage. When companies commit to hiring marginalized individuals or those who have made past mistakes, they often find themselves in the crosshairs of a relentless court of public opinion.

A functioning society demands accountability, but it also demands that this accountability be administered impartially. Instead of respecting the lawful path to rehabilitation, segments of the media and the public frequently resort to mob tactics. They weaponize outrage and use guilt by association to isolate the very peop-

(Cont. on pg. 11)



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NIAGARA TOURISM

The Beauty and History of Niagara Falls State Park - America's Oldest State Park

Staff Reports

Welcome to Niagara Falls State Park - the oldest state park in America! Open 365 days a year, this magnificent park offers unprecedented views and proximity to the American, Bridal Veil and Horseshoe Falls. You will witness the convergence of the free-flowing waters from four of the Great Lakes into the Niagara River Gorge; a truly majestic sight.

However, the preservation of Niagara Falls was not always guaranteed. During the Industrial Revolution in the early 19th century, the natural beauty of the falls faced threats as mills and factories were constructed along the river to harness its power. Recognizing the importance of protecting this natural wonder, a group of early environmentalists, including renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, founded the Free Niagara movement. They believed that the land surrounding the falls should be safeguarded from commercial interests and remain accessible to the public.

After more than 15 years of relentless advocacy, the Free Niagara crusaders

emerged victorious. In 1885, the Niagara Appropriations Bill was signed into law, establishing the Niagara Reservation. This historic event marked a turning point in the history of Niagara Falls. Thomas Vincent Welch, a prominent figure in the movement, played a crucial role in getting the bill signed and later became the first superintendent of the newly created state park.

Frederick Law Olmsted, renowned for his design of New York City's Central Park, applied his philosophy of creating parks as places of natural beauty and renewal to Niagara Falls State Park. His vision is evident in the park's landscape design, featuring an extensive network of footpaths that wind through wooded areas and along the banks of the Niagara River.

Today, Niagara Falls State Park remains committed to preserving Olmsted's vision. The park diligently maintains its native vegetation ensuring that the unparalleled vistas remain unspoiled. Visitors from all corners of the globe are captivated by the thundering wonder of Niagara Falls - a testament to the dedication of those who fought to protect it for future generations.

Celestial Wonders: Stargazing and the Magic of Niagara Falls at Night

Staff Reports

At night, Niagara Falls transforms into a celestial wonderland, offering visitors the chance to embark on an enchanting stargazing journey like no other. Under the ink-black canvas of the night sky, billions of stars twinkle down, casting a mystical glow on the roaring waters. For astronomy lovers and casual star gazers alike, the magic of Niagara Falls at night is an experience not to be missed.

Bathed in colored lights and flanked by the constellations overhead, Niagara Falls takes on an ethereal quality, showcasing an alluring mix of human achievement and the natural world's majestic beauty. For the ultimate night time spectacle, time your visit for a fireworks display. Niagara's illuminations and fireworks have been a long-standing tradition, providing an exceptional addition to the panoramic nighttime vista.

While the falls themselves offer a fantastic stargazing location, there are also several prime viewing spots in the area. Queen Victoria Park is one such location that offers unrivaled views of both the starlit sky and the

illuminated falls. Alternatively, the observation deck at Skylon Tower gives you a breathtaking bird's eye view, elevating your stargazing experience to a whole new level. Another prime spot due to its lack of lights is Goat Island in Niagara Falls, USA.

In Niagara Falls, the splendor doesn't end when the sun sets. In fact, it's just the beginning. Stargazing amidst the glorious backdrop of one of the world's most impressive natural wonders adds a unique dimension to your visit. When bathed in starlight and silhouetted against the night sky, Niagara Falls exudes a mystical charm that truly needs to be experienced firsthand.

So next time you're planning a trip to this natural wonder, remember that the daytime is not the only time when the falls shine with incredible beauty. Don't forget to bring your binoculars or telescope, for Niagara at night is an astronomer's dream. Take in the sights, marvel at the universe's celestial wonders, and soak up the unparalleled beauty of Niagara Falls under the starlit sky. It's a view that promises to be every bit as breathtaking as the cascading waters themselves.

Niagara Falls to Become Global Soccer Destination as Niagara Parks Launches Massive Fan Zone by the Falls

Staff Reports

One of the world's most recognizable tourist destinations is about to become the backdrop for an international soccer celebration.

Niagara Parks announced plans for "Fan Zone by the Falls," a massive free public soccer experience that will transform the heart of Queen Victoria Park into a global gathering place throughout the summer of 2026.

Running from June 11th through July 19th, the event will coincide with the world's largest international soccer tournament being hosted across North America and is expected to draw visitors from around the globe to Niagara Falls.

Officials say the event will create an outdoor viewing-party atmosphere directly overlooking Niagara Falls, complete with giant match broadcasts, themed entertainment, family activities, illuminated Falls displays and specialty food experiences.

The centerpiece of the event will be located on the front lawn and green space surrounding Queen Victoria Place Restaurant where fans will be able to gather daily to watch live matches while surrounded by panoramic views of the Falls.

Large outdoor screens will broadcast games every day between 11am and 11pm. The site will also feature a licensed covered patio, a mobile kitchen and rotating themed programming throughout the tournament.

The celebration is expected to stretch

throughout Niagara Parks properties, turning much of the tourism corridor into a soccer-themed destination during the tournament.

That includes themed horticultural displays, nightly Falls illuminations tied to major tournament moments, specialty dining offerings and exclusive commemorative merchandise available at select gift shops throughout the park system.

Fans visiting the area will also see a gameday countdown clock displayed at Table Rock Centre as anticipation builds throughout the tournament.

Niagara Parks will also serve as one of the featured destinations for the nationwide "Canada Celebrates the FIFA World Cup 2026™" route during a special two-day activation scheduled for July 18th and 19th.

The national celebration tour spans 38 stops across 34 Canadian communities and is designed to bring tournament festivities to locations within driving distance of more than 75% of Canadians.

During the Niagara Falls stop, Queen Victoria Park is expected to host expanded programming intended to bring together both tourists and local residents for one of the final major celebrations connected to the tournament.

Officials say Niagara Falls offers a uniquely dramatic setting unlike almost anywhere else involved in the festivities.

"Niagara Parks is proud to bring the excitement and energy of the world's largest sporting event to Niagara Falls as we host the Fan Zone by the Falls this summer,"



said Graham Coveney.

"This free, family-friendly activation, along with the country-wide Canada Celebrates program, which will land in Queen Victoria Park on July 18-19, invites fans from around the globe to gather for an epic watch party at the edge of one of the world's most remarkable natural wonders."

The event comes as Niagara Falls continues expanding efforts to position itself as a year-round international tourism destination capable of hosting large-scale global events.

Millions of visitors already travel annually to the Canadian side of the Falls. Officials believe the worldwide soccer tournament could dramatically boost tourism traffic throughout the region during summer 2026.

Niagara Parks officials highlighted

special GO + WEGO travel packages designed to make it easier for fans to travel directly from Toronto-area tournament events to Niagara Falls attractions and the Fan Zone experience.

Families may also find the destination especially attractive because children 12 and under ride free on GO Trains traveling to Niagara.

According to Niagara Parks, vehicle parking at Buffalo Harbor State Park will remain free throughout the event period.

The splash pad will operate 11am to 7:30pm weather permitting while retail operations will run 11am to 7pm.

For Niagara Falls, the event represents another major international moment in the spotlight by combining one of the world's biggest sporting spectacles with one of the world's most famous natural landmarks.



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LOCAL NEWS

NIAGARA FALLS

Drake Spotted at Niagara Falls Restaurant During Surprise Western New York Visit

Staff Reports

Global music superstar Drake made an unexpected stop in Niagara Falls this week, drawing excitement from fans and staff after showing up at a popular local restaurant.

The Toronto-born artist visited Buzzy's on Niagara Falls Boulevard on Thursday, May 21st, as part of a broader trip through Western New York that quickly became one of the most talked-about celebrity appearances in the region this year.

Photos and videos circulating online showed Drake posing with employees and fans inside the longtime Niagara Falls eatery with stunned customers gathering around for pictures and reactions as word spread that one of the biggest artists in the world had casually stopped by.

For a city more accustomed to tourists flocking toward the falls themselves, seeing Drake suddenly appear in the LaSalle section of Niagara Falls was the kind of moment that instantly lit up social media.

And the visit did not stop there.

The Grammy-winning rapper's trip through the 716 also included an emotional meet-up with Buffalo-based content creator NYFlavaaa.

Randy built a major following on Instagram and

TikTok through viral "car karaoke" videos featuring him and his daughter singing together during rides home from school. Many of those clips included Drake songs, which helped their content explode online and gain millions of views across social media platforms.

This week, Drake apparently decided to meet the family personally.

And he did not arrive empty-handed.

According to posts shared online Thursday, Drake surprised the Buffalo-area influencer with a brand-new Cadillac Escalade during the visit.

In a message shared publicly on Facebook, Drake wrote that he had finally made it to Western New York to "see the family."

Video showing Randy's emotional reaction to the surprise gift rapidly spread online and has already amassed more than 3.2 million likes on Instagram alone. You can watch the video on our website.

The clip from Instagram (@NYFlavaaa) showed Randy visibly overwhelmed and tearful in addition to singing with his daughter and Drake.

For one afternoon, a neighborhood restaurant in Niagara Falls suddenly became one of the most unexpected celebrity hotspots in Western New York.

And for Buzzy's employees and customers, it quickly became the kind of story likely to be talked about for years.



OPERATION POWERHOUSE: The Bold Plan to Finally Save Niagara Falls, NY Cont. from Cover

The reasons for this are partly historical and deeply structural. In the 1960s, the Robert Moses Parkway was driven through 200 acres of downtown Niagara Falls, severing the city from its own waterfront in an act of mid-century urban vandalism that would be recognized as catastrophic almost immediately and yet has never been fully undone. The parkway has since been converted in part to a recreational trail, but the connective tissue of downtown — the streets, the blocks, the urban fabric that makes a city walkable and livable and economically self-reinforcing — was torn out and never replaced.

Then came the casino era. The Seneca Niagara Casino opened in 2002 with the fervent promise of transformation. What it delivered was a tightly controlled enclosure designed to keep visitors inside spending money, low-wage service jobs for local residents, profit extraction that flowed outward to institutional stakeholders, and no lasting equity for the city itself. It is not that the casino brought nothing. It is that what it brought followed a pattern so deeply embedded in Niagara Falls' economic history as to constitute the city's defining affliction: outside money in, profits out, residents left with parking attendant wages and a city budget that never recovers.

The core failure is not a failure of geography or of natural assets. It is a failure of economic imagination. Niagara Falls has been selling scenery — a product tourists consume in four hours and flee from — for the better part of a century. It has been sitting on an asset worth billions that nobody, in eighty years of revival schemes and redevelopment plans and urban renewal disasters, has ever thought to use in the way the twenty-first century now demands. That ends here.

"Niagara Falls has been selling the wrong thing for eighty years. It sells scenery. What it should be selling is power."

THREE ASSETS. ONE MOMENT IN HISTORY

To understand Cheap clean hydro. A cold that costs nothing. Hundreds of acres of near-worthless land. The perfect storm for the AI age.

To understand why Niagara Falls is uniquely positioned for what comes next, you have to understand three things simultaneously — three assets that no other city on the eastern seaboard possesses in this combination, and which, taken together, represent something close to a perfect alignment with the dominant infrastructure demand of the next decade.

The first asset is power. The NYPA Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant generates 2.6 million kilowatts of clean hydroelectric power from the same water that pours over the falls. The New York Power Authority allocates preferential low-cost electricity to industrial and institutional users located within 30 miles of the plant, on application, at rates that are among the cheapest and cleanest available anywhere in the eastern United States. This is not a subsidy in the pejorative sense. It is a structural advantage built into the geography of the place — the same advantage that powered the aluminum smelters and chemical plants that once made Niagara Falls an industrial giant. Those industries are gone. The power remains.

The second asset is cold. Niagara Falls, New York has an average year-round temperature of approximately 48 degrees Fahrenheit. The winters are deep, sustained, and reliably frigid in the way that only Great Lakes cities understand. This is, to most residents, an inconvenience. To a data center

operator, it is a fortune. Cooling represents 30 to 40 percent of a data center's total operating costs — the single largest variable expense in the budget. In Phoenix, in Atlanta, in Dallas, operators spend tens of millions of dollars per year per campus manufacturing cold air from scratch. At Niagara Falls, the cold arrives for free, every November, and stays until April. Nature provides, at zero marginal cost, what southern and southwestern competitors must purchase at enormous ongoing expense.

The third asset is land. Niagara Falls has hundreds of acres of brownfield, city-owned, and sub-\$15,000-per-lot parcels sitting in a geographically constrained border city, minutes from I-190 and less than 30 minutes from Buffalo Niagara International Airport. Land in Niagara Falls is not cheap because it is undesirable. It is cheap because the demand has not yet arrived. When it does, the price will change — and the question is whether that appreciation accrues to the city or to the investors who bought the land first.

Now add the demand side. AI data centers are the fastest-growing electricity consumers on the planet. The buildout of large language models, cloud inference platforms, and AI training infrastructure has created a demand for power-secured sites that has outpaced all previous projections. Global data center power demand is projected to reach 1,000 terawatt-hours by 2026. The hyperscalers — Microsoft, Google, Amazon Web Services, Meta, Oracle — are engaged in a publicly documented, fiercely competitive scramble for power-secured sites across the northeastern United States. They need, in every case, exactly three things: cheap clean power, cold climate, and affordable land. Niagara Falls has all three in abundance. Nobody has made the ask.

- Global data center power demand projected at 1,000 TWh by 2026
- Cooling = 30–40% of all data center operating costs
- Cold climate provides free cooling worth \$10–30M per campus per year
- NYPA allocates power to regional industry at 40–60% below market rates

"IT CAN'T BE DONE" — THEY SAID THAT ABOUT QUINCY, TOO

A potato farming town of 7,000 people with cheap Columbia River hydro and cold desert air. Sound familiar?

Case Study: Quincy, Washington

In 2006, Microsoft dispatched a site-selection team with exactly three criteria: cheap clean power, cold climate, cheap land. They found all three in Quincy, Washington — a tiny agricultural town most people couldn't find on a map, population 7,000, economy built on potatoes and apples. Within 18 months, Microsoft broke ground on what would become one of the largest data center campuses in the world. Then came Google. Then Amazon. Then 29 more operators.

The results were transformative:

- Poverty rate cut from 29.4% to 13.1% in under a decade
- Property tax revenues increased 1,277% — reaching \$54 million per year
- New school, hospital, soccer complex, and community center built entirely from data center tax revenue
- Microsoft President Brad Smith has publicly cited Quincy as the national model for respon-

sible data center community investment

Quincy's population is 7,000. Niagara Falls has 47,000. Quincy had the Columbia River. Niagara Falls has Niagara. Quincy had cold desert air. Niagara Falls has lake-effect winters. Quincy had cheap land. Niagara Falls has hundreds of brownfield acres at near-zero cost. And Niagara Falls has something Quincy never had: 12 million tourists already walking through the front door every single year.

The Quincy story is important not as inspiration — though it is that — but as proof. It demolishes, with data, every version of the argument that says this kind of economic reinvention is impossible for a small, struggling rust-belt city with no existing tech sector. Quincy had none either. What Quincy had was a set of physical attributes that matched the specific infrastructure needs of the AI era, a local government willing to engage seriously with the opportunity, and a regional economic development apparatus that knew how to make the ask.

Niagara Falls has a superior physical profile to Quincy on every relevant metric. What it has lacked — until now — is the structural vehicle to make the ask and, critically, to capture the value for the city rather than for outside investors. That is precisely what this plan addresses. The question has never been whether Niagara Falls can attract this investment. The question is whether it can do so on terms that actually benefit the people who live there. Every previous attempt has failed that second test. This plan is built around it.

Why hasn't this happened already? The answer is structural, not geographical. No entity has existed whose explicit mandate was to approach the hyperscalers with a comprehensive, power-secured, equity-structured offer built on the city's actual assets. Developers have come and gone with proposals that required the city to give everything — land, tax abatements, infrastructure investment — and return nothing but low-wage jobs. No intermediary has ever stood between the asset and the investor and said: this time, the city takes a stake. The Niagara Municipal Power Cooperative is that intermediary. *"Quincy had cheap hydro, cold air, and cheap land. Niagara Falls has all three — and better. The only thing missing has been the ask."*

THE PLAN: THE NIAGARA MUNICIPAL POWER COOPERATIVE

A public benefit corporation. An equity stake. A check in every mailbox.

The City of Niagara Falls creates the Niagara Municipal Power Cooperative — the NMPC — a public benefit corporation that acts as the structured intermediary between the NYPA hydropower allocation and the global AI data center industry. This is not a new idea in the broadest sense. Municipal utilities and public benefit corporations have been used across the country to manage shared resources and deliver community value. What is new is the application: using the city's unique combination of power, climate, and land as negotiating leverage to secure equity participation in the infrastructure buildout of the AI age, rather than merely renting the city's attributes to whoever arrives with the largest check and the most aggressive tax abatement ask.

Unlike every previous development arrangement in Niagara Falls history, the NMPC structure does not merely attract tenants and hand out abatements. It takes equity stakes in exchange for land and power access, and it distributes a direct dividend to every

resident from the proceeds. The difference sounds simple. It is, in practice, the difference between Niagara Falls continuing to be a pass-through for other people's wealth and becoming an owner of its own economic future.

The pitch to hyperscale operators is straightforward, compelling, and grounded in the specific pressure these companies are currently under:

- Cheapest electricity in the eastern US — NYPA hydro rates, not market price
 - Free cooling for 6+ months per year, saving \$10–30M annually per campus
 - Shovel-ready brownfield land at near-zero cost via city partnership
 - 20 minutes from Buffalo Niagara International Airport
 - Direct fiber corridor access to eastern US backbone networks
 - 100% renewable energy satisfying ESG mandate requirements
 - A state government actively seeking transformative Western New York investment
- In exchange, the city receives real value, not promises:
- 5–15% revenue share — not just property tax, but a stake in operating revenue
 - Equity participation via NMPC partnership structure
 - Local hiring requirements for construction and ongoing operations
 - Infrastructure co-investment covering roads, utilities, and connectivity
 - A mandatory Citizens' Dividend contribution per megawatt consumed

The model closest in spirit to what the NMPC proposes is the Bilbao Ría 2000 example from Spain — a public regeneration company created by the city of Bilbao and regional authorities that used land value capture and equity participation to self-fund its entire urban transformation. The Guggenheim Bilbao, the rebuilt riverfront, the new transit systems: all of it was financed through a structure that captured the value the public investments created, rather than allowing it to drain away to private developers. The city invested in itself and owned the result. The NMPC is the same principle applied to a very different asset base — not a derelict industrial riverfront but a set of physical and energetic attributes that the AI economy desperately needs.

This is not a subsidy. It is not a tax abatement dressed up in new language. It is a deal — a structured commercial transaction in which the city brings genuine assets to the table and negotiates a return commensurate with their value. The leverage is real. The hyperscalers are not doing Niagara Falls a favor by coming here. Niagara Falls is doing them a favor by offering the cheapest, cleanest, most climatically advantaged power-secured site in the northeastern United States. It is time to price that favor accordingly.

THE CHECK IN EVERY MAILBOX

The most radical piece of the plan — and the one that changes everything. The most persistent and damaging feature of Niagara Falls' economic decline is not the poverty rate or the fiscal distress designation or even the hollowing out of the tax base, though all of those are real and serious. It is the population loss. And the population

(Cont. on pg. 4)

NIAGARA FALLS CONT.

OPERATION POWERHOUSE: The Bold Plan to Finally Save Niagara Falls, NY Cont.

loss has a single, overwhelming driver: there is no economic reason to stay. Decent jobs are in Buffalo. Good schools are in the suburbs. The housing stock is cheap, which sounds like an advantage but functions, for families with options, as a signal that the city itself has lost faith in its own future. There is no anchor — nothing that makes a rational calculation come out in favor of staying in Niagara Falls rather than leaving for somewhere that works better.

The NMPC Citizens’ Dividend changes that math permanently. It is modeled directly on the Alaska Permanent Fund — which has paid every Alaska resident a direct annual dividend from state oil royalty revenue since 1982, averaging around \$1,600 per year over its lifetime — and it dedicates 25 percent of the NMPC’s revenue share and land lease income to quarterly payments to every registered resident who has lived in Niagara Falls for at least 12 consecutive months.

Conservative Year 1 estimates, based on projections from a single anchor data center agreement, suggest the following:

- \$500–\$800 per resident per year in direct quarterly payments
- A household of three receives \$1,500–\$2,400 per year in new income — simply for staying
- Dividend grows as additional data center agreements are signed

This does several distinct and mutually reinforcing things simultaneously. It immediately arrests population loss — the financial calculus of leaving becomes measurably harder when departure means forfeiting a quarterly check that arrives regardless of employment status, age, or household composition. It attracts new residents, particularly remote workers and digital nomads who can live anywhere and who, offered a concrete financial reason to choose cheap-housing Niagara Falls over an expensive city, will do so in meaningful numbers. It generates local spending — every dividend dollar spent at a local restaurant, grocery store, hardware store, or service business multiplies through the local economy at a rate that economists call the multiplier effect, creating secondary employment and business revenue that compounds over time. And it creates political immunity: no mayor, no city council member, no political actor of any kind can kill a program that puts a check in every resident’s mailbox four times a year. The Alaska Permanent Fund has survived five decades and every political wind that has blown through Juneau because the voters will not permit a governor who touches it to survive politically. The Citizens’ Dividend works the same way.

The Alaska Model

In 1976, Alaska created a sovereign wealth fund from oil royalties and began paying every resident an annual dividend. The Alaska Permanent Fund has paid over \$25,000 per resident over its lifetime. Studies consistently show it has measurably reduced poverty, stopped outmigration, and become the most popular government program in state history. No governor has dared touch it in five decades.

The NMPC Citizens’ Dividend is the same model — built on AI infrastructure revenue instead of oil. Niagara Falls didn’t discover oil. It discovered something more valuable in 2025: it already owns the power source for the AI revolution. The Permanent Fund was capitalized by a resource extracted from the ground and eventually exhausted. The falls will never stop. The river will never run dry. And the demand for AI infrastructure power will not diminish in any timeframe relevant to public policy planning. *“The number one reason Niagara Falls keeps losing people is that there is no economic reason to stay. The Citizens’ Dividend changes that math — permanently.”*

GIGABIT CITY

How Chattanoogaog turned a rust belt city into a tech magnet — and how Niagara Falls can do it faster.

Case Study: Chattanooga, Tennessee

Population: 181,000. Former industrial city with a near-identical demographic profile to Niagara Falls as it stood in 2008. Poverty, vacancy, population loss, industrial collapse — the familiar litany of the American rust belt. What Chattanooga did was build a 9,000-mile city-owned gigabit fiber network through its public electric utility, EPB, for \$280 million.

- Results after 15 years:
- \$5.3 billion in net community benefit
 - 10,420 jobs created or supported — 31% of all new local jobs
 - 6.4x return on a \$396 million total investment
 - Surplus revenue that lowered electric rates for residents
 - Nationally recognized as a tech startup and remote-work destination

Chattanooga did not wait for a private telecom to decide its connectivity was worth upgrading. It built the infrastructure itself, owned it, collected the revenue, and reinvested it in the city. The network is now the economic backbone of a fundamentally transformed urban economy.

The NMPC uses its data center revenue stream as bond collateral to finance a municipal fiber network rollout across Niagara Falls. This is not a speculative move. The data centers themselves are the anchor customers for the network — they require massive, symmetrical, low-latency bandwidth that no existing commercial provider in the region can deliver at the

scale required. That anchor demand makes the network’s economics viable from day one, before a single residential or commercial customer is connected. The city builds the network. The data centers pay for it. Residents and businesses get gigabit internet at competitive rates. The city owns the infrastructure. Revenue flows back to the public treasury rather than to a private telecom whose shareholders live elsewhere.

The downstream effects compound rapidly. Niagara Falls, with gigabit municipal fiber, becomes one of the best-connected small cities in the United States. The remote worker calculation — which has already prompted tens of thousands of professionals to leave expensive coastal cities for smaller, cheaper places — now includes a concrete connectivity advantage, a quarterly dividend check, housing that costs a fraction of what it costs in Buffalo let alone New York, and one of the world’s great natural spectacles outside the window. That is a pitch. That is a real, differentiated pitch that Niagara Falls cannot currently make and, under this plan, would be able to make within three years.

The critical insight from Chattanooga is that the fiber network was not an amenity. It was infrastructure — the same category of investment as a road or a water main. Cities that own their infrastructure own their economic future. Cities that rent it from private providers are permanently dependent on decisions made by people who do not live there and are not accountable to the voters who do. The NMPC fiber network is an act of urban sovereignty as much as an economic development tool.

BORN HERE. REBORN HERE.

In 1895, the electricity that lit the world was first generated at Niagara Falls. In 2025, the same water powers the AI revolution.

There is a story that Niagara Falls has never told properly, and it is one of the most extraordinary technology narratives in American history. In 1895, Nikola Tesla and George Westinghouse commissioned the Edward Dean Adams Power Plant — the first facility anywhere in the world to successfully transmit alternating current electricity over long distances at commercial scale. The night it went online and sent AC power to the city of Buffalo, 26 miles away, it ended the War of Currents between Westinghouse and Thomas Edison and decided, once and for all, how the world would be electrified. Every light bulb that has ever illuminated a room, every motor that has ever turned a wheel, every computer that has ever processed a calculation, every data center that is now training an AI model — the entire electrical infrastructure of modern civilization traces its origin to a decision made at a waterfall in western New York.

That story is not adequately memorialized in Niagara Falls today. A historical marker here, a small exhibit there — nothing commensurate with the magnitude of what happened. The city that gave the world electricity has never capitalized on that identity in any serious way. This plan corrects that failure by proposing a physical district — the Powerhouse District — that turns Niagara Falls’ tech identity into a tourism and economic anchor in its own right.

The Powerhouse District is a proposed half-mile corridor adjacent to the data center campus that layers experience, education, and economic activity into a destination that fundamentally extends the average tourist visit:

- Glass-wall viewing bays into operational data center halls — the same concept as the Boeing factory tour in Everett, Washington, or the Ben & Jerry’s factory tour in Vermont, but for the physical infrastructure of the internet and the AI revolution
- The Tesla-to-AI Museum: an immersive, world-class science and technology museum tracing the arc from Tesla’s first AC generators at the falls to the ChatGPT era, designed as a landmark institution that draws visitors independently — in the tradition of the Bilbao Guggenheim as an anchor cultural destination
- The Innovation Quarter: mixed-use live/work space in renovated industrial buildings for the tech workers, engineers, and the entire support economy that follows data center operations wherever they locate
- The Thermal Reuse Network: waste heat from the data centers — an enormous and almost entirely wasted byproduct of high-density computing — piped to heat public buildings, a year-round enclosed winter market, greenhouses producing local food, and a public recreation facility open through the deepest months of winter. Iceland already does this at scale with geothermal heat; the engineering principle is identical, and the social benefit in a city where winter otherwise drives people indoors for five months is difficult to overstate

Consider what this does to the tourism equation. A family that arrives to see the falls now also has the option to tour the world’s most consequential AI infrastructure, visit a world-class science museum that tells the story of how the falls powered civilization, eat lunch at a heated winter market operating year-round on waste heat from the servers running the global internet, and leave with the genuine understanding that they stood at the place where electricity was born and where the AI age is running. That is not a four-hour drive-through. That is a two-

night trip. That is a hotel booking on the American side, a restaurant meal on the American side, retail spending on the American side. The revenue that has been draining to Canada for decades begins, for the first time, to have a compelling reason to stay.

“The falls didn’t just make history as a honeymoon destination. They powered the first industrial revolution. And now, one hundred and thirty years later, they are ready to power the next one.”

FROM FIRST CALL TO FIRST CHECK: THE 24-MONTH ROADMAP

Why this plan starts paying before a single shovel breaks ground.

The critical distinction between this plan and every failed Niagara Falls revival scheme that preceded it is timing. Previous plans required years of investment, permitting, construction, and community disruption before a single dollar of new revenue reached the city or its residents. Many collapsed before they ever produced anything. This plan is structured so that the first dollar comes in before the first shovel breaks ground. Option fees, exclusivity agreements, and RFP responses from hyperscalers generate immediate revenue the moment a serious process is underway. Here is the sequence:

MONTH 1–3 --> NMPC legal formation; NYPA strategic municipal power allocation application filed

MONTH 3–6 --> RFP issued to hyperscale operators; exclusivity and option fees collected immediately upon serious expressions of interest

MONTH 6–12 --> Anchor tenant agreement signed; upfront infrastructure fees paid; environmental and zoning reviews initiated in parallel

MONTH 12–18 --> Construction begins; property taxes start accruing; fiber network bond issuance collateralized against contracted data center revenue

MONTH 18–24 --> First data center goes live; full NMPC revenue share activates; fiber network construction underway

MONTH 24 --> FIRST CITIZENS’ DIVIDEND CHECK MAILED TO EVERY NIAGARA FALLS RESIDENT

YEAR 3–5 --> Fiber network operational city-wide; second and third data centers online; dividend grows proportionally with each new agreement

YEAR 5–7 --> Powerhouse District and Tesla-to-AI Museum open; average tourist visit length doubles; Innovation Quarter fills with tech employers and support businesses

- A single 100MW data center campus generates \$3–8M per year in property taxes alone
- That is comparable to what Quincy, WA received — which funded a new school and a new hospital from data center revenue
- NMPC equity and revenue share adds substantially to that base figure

IT HAS WORKED. EVERYWHERE THIS HAS BEEN TRIED.

Nobody has done all of this together. That is the point.

Each element of this plan has been demonstrated in isolation, in real cities, with real numbers, over real timescales. The novel act is combining them into a single integrated system. And Niagara Falls is the only city on Earth with the specific combination of assets required to do so. Let the record speak:

Quincy, Washington attracted data centers through the convergence of Columbia River hydropower, cold high-desert air, and cheap agricultural land. The poverty rate was cut from 29.4 percent to 13.1 percent in under a decade. Property tax revenues increased by 1,277 percent, reaching \$54 million per year. A new school and a new hospital were built entirely from data center tax revenue. Microsoft President Brad Smith has publicly described Quincy as the national model for responsible data center community investment. Quincy’s population at the time was 7,000 people. Niagara Falls has nearly seven times as many.

Chattanooga, Tennessee built a city-owned gigabit fiber utility as an economic anchor in a post-industrial rust-belt city of 181,000 people. The investment generated \$5.3 billion in net community benefit, 10,420 jobs, and a 6.4-times return on the total investment of \$396 million over 15 years. Surplus revenue from the network was used to lower electric rates for residents. Chattanooga is now nationally recognized as a tech startup hub and remote-work destination — a designation that would have seemed hallucinatory to anyone who lived there in 2007.

Iceland leveraged renewable geothermal energy and a subarctic climate to become the preferred global destination for hyperscale AI data center infrastructure. Microsoft, Google, and numerous European operators have located major facilities there specifically for the power and cooling economics. Waste heat from those data centers is piped directly into residential heating systems, eliminating home heating costs for large portions of the population. The thermal reuse component of this plan is derived directly from the Icelandic model, with data center waste heat substituted for geothermal output. The engineering is nearly identical.

Alaska created a Citizens’ Dividend from natural resource royalties in 1982 and has paid every resident a direct annual payment ever since, averaging \$1,600 per year over the fund’s lifetime. Studies have consistently demonstrated measurable reductions in poverty and outmigration attributable to the dividend. It remains the most popular government program in state history. Five decades have passed.

No governor has dared touch it. The political durability of a check in every mailbox is not a theory. It is an observed fact of American political life.

Bilbao, Spain created a public regeneration company — Bilbao Ría 2000 — that captured land value appreciation to self-fund an entire urban transformation, including the construction of the Guggenheim Museum, without relying on traditional public budget allocations or external subsidies. The company used the city’s own assets as collateral, captured the value those investments created, and recycled it back into further investment. The Bilbao effect is now a canonical case study in urban economics. The NMPC is that model, applied to AI infrastructure rather than post-industrial waterfront land.

No city on Earth has executed all five of these strategies simultaneously. Niagara Falls doesn’t need to invent anything. It doesn’t need a new theory, a new technology, or a new economic model. It needs to be the first city to combine five proven, documented, successful strategies into one integrated, resident-owned system — and it is the only city on Earth with the precise asset combination to do so credibly. That combination is what makes it novel. That resident-ownership structure is what makes it defensible. And together, they are what makes it impossible to simply replicate anywhere else.

THE FIRST PHONE CALL TO MAKE

It starts tomorrow morning.

The single fastest path to beginning is a direct conversation between Niagara Falls’ mayor and the New York Power Authority, requesting a formal municipal strategic power allocation reserved for the NMPC. NYPA has done this before — for EnerPlate, Plug Power, Saint-Gobain, and others that have applied under the Authority’s economic development power programs. The city has never made this ask as the centerpiece of a comprehensive, equity-structured economic cooperative vehicle. That one call, made tomorrow morning, starts the clock. The NYPA is not an adversary here. Its mission includes exactly this kind of transformative regional economic development. It needs to be treated as a partner.

The second call is to Invest Buffalo Niagara, the regional economic development organization that already maintains relationships with major institutional investors and site selectors across the country. They have the contacts. Microsoft, Google, and Amazon Web Services are all under enormous and growing public pressure to demonstrate responsible, community-beneficial data center investment. Quincy, Washington, is their current showcase. The opportunity to point to a second showcase — one with a world-famous natural attraction, a legendary technology origin story, and a state government eager to demonstrate that it can drive transformative investment in Western New York — is genuinely appealing to companies that are simultaneously building infrastructure at historic scale and defending that buildout to skeptical legislators and local communities. Niagara Falls doesn’t need to beg for this investment. It needs to make the case that this is the deal that makes the companies look good while generating extraordinary returns on their power and land costs.

Every previous Niagara Falls revival attempt shared a fatal flaw. They were extractive deals dressed as development. Outside money arrived, extracted value, and departed, leaving the city with parking attendant wages, incremental property tax, and a legacy of lost land at prices that now seem criminal in retrospect. This plan is structurally different in every way that matters. The NMPC is a public benefit corporation. Its revenue belongs to the city and its people, not to a developer who acquired land for nothing and sold it for a fortune. The Citizens’ Dividend ensures that the people who stayed through the hard decades — who chose Niagara Falls when choosing it required real sacrifice — are the first and most direct beneficiaries when the city finally captures the value it was always generating. The fiber network is city-owned infrastructure, not a private telecom franchise. The land value appreciation that data centers create accrues to the NMPC through equity stakes, not to investors who arrived with a term sheet and left with a windfall.

When the next economic disruption comes — and it will come, because it always does — the city will not be dependent on a single industry, a single employer, or a single political relationship. It will have a diversified base: technology infrastructure revenue growing year over year, a tourism sector extended by the Powerhouse District and the Tesla-to-AI Museum, a municipal fiber network generating recurring income, a growing remote-worker population attracted by the dividend and the connectivity, and an endowment-style fund that functions as a permanent buffer against the volatility that has always defined Niagara Falls’ economic life. That is not dependency on a casino. That is a city that has learned, finally, to own its own future.

“The falls have been roaring for ten thousand years. It’s time they finally paid the rent.”

The falls have been roaring for ten thousand years. The power has been there all along. What has been missing, for decades, is the structural vehicle to capture the value that Niagara Falls already generates — and return it, finally, to the people who stayed. That vehicle now has a name. The clock starts when someone picks up the phone.

AROUND NIAGARA COUNTY

Old Fort Niagara Marks 300 Years with Massive Three-day Celebration Honoring One of North America's Oldest Military Sites

Staff Reports

One of Western New York's most historic landmarks is preparing to celebrate a milestone three centuries in the making.

Old Fort Niagara will commemorate the 300th anniversary of the construction of the historic French Castle with an extensive three-day public celebration running June 5th through June 7th in Youngstown.

The anniversary marks exactly 300 years since French soldiers, engineers and tradesmen arrived at the mouth of the Niagara River in 1726 and began building what would eventually become one of the oldest surviving military structures in North America and the oldest building in the Great Lakes Basin.

Officials say the tricentennial celebration will feature historical reenactments, military engineering demonstrations, Indigenous cultural performances, musket firings, educational presentations, period craftsmen and international dignitaries gathering to recognize the importance of the site.

The centerpiece of the celebration remains the French Castle itself. The iconic stone structure was originally designed to secretly function as a military fortification while appearing outwardly as a simple residence.

French engineer Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry arrived at the Niagara River with roughly 100 soldiers and artisans on June 8th, 1726, immediately beginning work on the massive stone building.

The 96-by-48-foot structure included barracks for soldiers, officers' quarters, a chapel, gunpowder storage, bakery facilities and trade areas.

Construction was completed in October 1727.

Over the next three centuries, the building served numerous military and civilian purposes under changing governments and occupations before eventually being restored between 1927 and 1934 to reflect its original 1726 appearance.

Today, the French Castle remains the symbolic and historical centerpiece of Old Fort Niagara.

The tricentennial celebration officially begins Friday, June 5th, when regional students will travel to the fort to experience what life along the Niagara Frontier looked like 300

years ago.

School groups will participate in demonstrations showcasing many of the building trades used during construction of the French Castle, while also learning about the geopolitical tensions that existed around Lake Ontario during the early 18th century.

Saturday, June 6th will serve as the main rededication day and is expected to be the largest public event of the weekend.

Officials from the Seneca Nation, France, the United States and Canada are all expected to participate in ceremonies commemorating the tricentennial.

The day begins at 11am with a recreation of the arrival of Chaussegros de Léry and his military escort.

The reenactment party will arrive aboard the U.S.S. Trippe, an early 19th century sailing ship constructed by the Buffalo Maritime Center.

After landing at the fort, reenactors will march inside and begin laying out defensive fortifications during a live military engineering demonstration designed to showcase early French military construction techniques.

At noon, visitors will see a cultural presentation by Haudenosaunee Dancers who will present Indigenous dances and storytelling reflecting the traditions that existed in the region long before the arrival of European settlers.

At 1pm, the fort will host a reenactment of a diplomatic council between Seneca representatives and French commander Captain Charles LeMoyne de Longueuil.

Women's fashion from the 1720s through 1760s will also be highlighted at 1:30pm during a special presentation by the Dames of Vintage Experiences.

The formal tricentennial rededication ceremony begins at 2pm directly in front of the French Castle.

Representatives from France, Canada, the United States and the Seneca Nation are all expected to participate.

At 3pm, the ceremony will conclude with an artillery salute commemorating 300 years of history at the mouth of the Niagara River.

The day will end with a recital of early 18th century harpsichord music performed inside the Sir William Johnson Room of the French Castle.

Throughout Saturday, visitors will also be able to observe demonstrations involving



period masonry, blacksmithing, woodworking, swordsmanship, gunsmithing, tin smithing, leather working, surveying and weaving.

The final day of the celebration, Sunday, June 7th, will feature a more educational focus centered around the history of the French Castle itself.

At 1pm the fort will present a special PowerPoint lecture titled "It Will Serve the Purposes of a Fort, Just as Well: The Story Behind the Construction of the French Castle."

The presentation will take place inside the Old Fort Niagara Visitor Center.

Later in the afternoon at 2:30pm, guests can participate in specialty tours inspired by the popular children's book "The Gold Laced Coat."

Musket firing demonstrations will also take place hourly between 11am and 4pm.

As part of the tricentennial celebration, Old Fort Niagara is also reissuing one of the definitive historical works ever written about the French Castle.

"The Glorious Old Relic: The French Castle and Old Fort Niagara" by the late historian Brian Leigh Dunnigan is being republished after remaining out of print for decades.

The updated edition is being released through Western New York Heritage Press and will retail for \$25.

Copies will be sold through Old Fort Niagara's museum shop while supplies last.

The tricentennial celebration is even extending into the local craft beer scene.

Brickyard Brewing Company has partnered in the anniversary celebration by creating a commemorative lager marking 300 years of the French Castle.

According to organizers, the beer is brewed using French-grown barley and hops and features:

"Crisp and clean malt" balanced by "an herbal, slightly floral hop character."

The beer has been lagered locally near the historic fort and will be sold at Brickyard Brewing Company, DiMino's Lewiston Tops and additional locations throughout the region.

For Western New York history enthusiasts, the tricentennial celebration represents far more than a typical summer event.

It marks three centuries since the Niagara Frontier first became one of the most strategically important military and trade locations in North America and honors a structure that still stands today overlooking the same river where French soldiers first arrived in 1726.

Additional information about the anniversary celebration can be found at www.oldfortniagara.org.

Newly Built Town of Niagara Travel Center Sells for Almost \$17 Million

Staff Reports

A Porter Road travel plaza, built for \$7 million just two years ago, has sold for almost \$17 million.

It has also been renamed, a change that caught Niagara County economic development and town officials by surprise.

Town officials said Friday that they have still not seen the "closing documents" for the sale of what was the Quicklee's Travel Plaza at 6021 Porter Road. The sale was first reported by the Buffalo Business First newspaper.

"We have no information on what's happening there," Niagara Town Supervisor Sylvia Virtuoso said. "We didn't know anything about the sale."

Records filed with the Niagara County Clerk indicate that PEMM Niagara LLC sold the Porter Road property to Niagara Falls Holdings NY LLC for \$16.7 million. Niagara Falls Holdings is a limited liability corporation that appears to have been formed in Queens in 2019. No other information on the entity was immediately available.

PEMM LLC is an Avon-based corporation that is the parent company of Quicklee's, which operates gas stations and convenience stores. Its locations are largely concentrated in Monroe County and in and around Rochester.

"Usually we're introduced to a new busi-

ness in the town and we discuss what we can do for them," Virtuoso said. "But we haven't heard anything from them. I think (the new owners) may believe that they're operating in Niagara Falls."

Virtuoso said town building inspectors noticed a change in the signage at the travel plaza, from Quicklee's to TA Express.

TA Express is a truck stop-branded gas and convenience store operator owned by TravelCenters of America. TravelCenters of America is a subsidiary of BP, a oil and gas company formerly known as British Petroleum.

The only other TA location in Western New York is just off the New York State Thruway exit at Pembroke.

Town building inspectors advised the new owners that they would need to file for permits to change the signage on the property. Virtuoso said the paperwork for those permits has now been received by the town. The town supervisor said she was notified that a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreement between PEMM LLC and the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency has been "discontinued."

The travel plaza project received \$500,000 from Empire State Development (ESD) as part of its Regional Economic Development Council Initiative. It also received \$725,000 in tax incentives from the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency (NCIDA). Andrea Klyczek, executive director of the NCIDA, confirmed that the PILOT agree-



ment for the property is no longer in effect. PILOT agreements typically allow developers to pay less than the full amounts of taxes due on a property for a specified period of time.

"All of the incentives associated with the project have been returned," Klyczek said. "All the grant money has been returned. There are no further applications (for a PILOT on the property) at this time."

Klyczek said the sale of the property showed that the IDA incentives worked. "We got everything we wanted," she said. The original travel center project took four years to develop, at an estimated cost of \$7 million. It is in close proximity to Amazon's \$550 million fulfillment center on Lockport

Road.

The 3.1 million-square-foot five story facility, the size of six football fields and set to employ about 1,000 workers, is expected to be completed in time for Black Friday 2026. It will use robotic technology to receive, store, and ship items and has enough room for 414 tractor-trailer parking stalls, 55 loading docks, and 1,755 parking spaces. The Porter Road travel plaza is the largest in the Niagara Region, covering 12,000 square feet, with a convenience store, 12 gas pumps, 10 truck pumps, four EV charging stations, a Tim Horton's, a fireside lounge, CAT scales, showers for truckers, and a 3,000 square foot truck car wash. It employs 15 full-time workers.

BUFFALO

Buffalo School Board Approves Massive \$1.4 Billion Budget Amid Deep Cuts, Growing Deficits and Warnings of Future School Closures

Buffalo Public Schools says at least two schools will likely shutter in 2027-28 as the district struggles to address growing budget shortfalls.

Staff Reports

The Buffalo Board of Education unanimously approved a sweeping new budget on Wednesday, May 20th, that district leaders say is aimed at stabilizing Buffalo Public Schools financially. Massive cuts, rising class sizes and the elimination of several programs are fueling frustration among parents, teachers and community advocates who say the district's budget process lacked transparency.

The budget, totaling roughly \$1.4 billion, marks the first spending plan approved under Superintendent Dr. Pascal Mubenga since he took over leadership of the district.

District officials described the plan as an attempt to confront mounting structural deficits that they say could threaten the district's long-term financial future if major action is not taken now.

But while the board ultimately approved the budget unanimously, the meeting exposed growing anxiety surrounding the direction of the district, the elimination of staff positions, concerns over equity-related resources and the reality that school closures are now looming on the horizon.

Administrators say Buffalo Public Schools entered the budget process starting down an enormous financial problem.

District officials repeatedly referenced deficits ranging between \$66 and almost \$90 million if cost-cutting measures weren't implemented.

Mubenga acknowledged the severity of the situation during Wednesday's meeting, describing many of the cuts as painful but necessary.

"We cut about 51 positions at the Central Office," he said. "That's a lot. I'm not proud of that. Any time you are cutting positions, that's impacting someone's livelihood. It's concerning. But at the same time, when you are looking at a deficit

of \$66 million, if we continue with that trend, we are going to be broke. And it is my job to make sure that we are fiscally sound. But it's really tough to make those decisions."

Mubenga later reiterated the district's worsening financial trajectory.

"We really want to make sure that our students are educated . . . we had a deficit of about \$78 million last year. It's not pleasant for a superintendent to cut any positions. It's been a really tough decision to get to this point."

Officials noted that many of the 51 eliminated central office positions were already vacant.

Still, the cuts represent one of the clearest signs yet that Buffalo Public Schools is preparing for a prolonged financial tightening period.

To close budget gaps without immediately shutting down schools, the district approved multiple cost-saving measures throughout the system.

Among the most significant changes is the elimination of the district's Virtual Pathways Program.

Administrators also approved consolidation of 35 general education classrooms, increasing the average class sizes from approximately 19 to 21 students.

The district additionally reduced the number of active classrooms operating throughout the system.

Officials argue those moves were necessary to avoid even deeper financial damage.

But teachers and advocates warned the cuts could directly impact student engagement and support services.

"When we cut these positions, we aren't just losing staff. We are losing student engagement," teacher Lesha Rutledge told the board.

Other critics accused the district of shifting priorities away from students and toward testing systems and outside educational consulting.

"What's happening in BPS right now is clear," said Dr. William O'Neill White, "more focus on high-stakes testing, paying private equity firms, and educational tech software that makes students hate school, and defunding equity initiatives."

Community concerns also centered around reported reductions affecting counseling services, Native American programming and language-related resources.

Although district leaders avoided closing schools for the upcoming academic year, officials openly acknowledged that closures are likely coming in the near future.

James Barnes said two schools are expected to close during the 2027-28 school year, though no final decisions have yet been made regarding which buildings would be affected.

Barnes warned that avoiding closures entirely would create an even larger financial disaster for the district.

"You could expect an [approximately] \$90 million deficit if we didn't take cost-cutting actions, such as closing schools," said Barnes said. "We've seen the necessity to do that in order to maintain our fund balance."

Mubenga also acknowledged that delaying closures this year may have only postponed a more difficult conversation.

"If we continue with this trend, three, four years from now, it's going to be a different conversation that we will be having," he said.

"I can take some of the blame for not closing schools this year, but I felt it was a little bit premature. But we are going to have to make some tough decisions. It's going to be a brutal conversation."

The district's fiscal oversight authority has reportedly warned Buffalo Public Schools that long-term deficits likely cannot be corrected without eventually reducing the number of operating schools.

Enrollment declines, rising operational

costs and staffing expenses continue to place pressure on district finances.

Despite major cuts in other areas, district leaders emphasized that the budget also includes substantial investments in special education services.

Administrators said the spending plan funds:

- new special education classrooms
- 58 additional special education staff positions
- Creation of a new "agency model" at School 27

District officials said those additions are intended to improve services and expand educational support for students with disabilities throughout the system.

The budget vote also reignited long-standing criticism surrounding transparency and community involvement in Buffalo school budgeting decisions.

Numerous speakers raised objections ahead of the vote, arguing that families, teachers and community organizations should have been more involved before major staffing and programming changes were finalized.

Even some board members acknowledged frustrations with how the process unfolded.

Following the vote, district officials said they plan to alter the process moving forward by creating more opportunities for public discussion before future budgets are approved.

Board leaders said future budget conversations are expected to involve roundtable-style discussions and greater community participation earlier in the process.

Throughout Wednesday's meeting, district leaders repeatedly framed the cuts as a matter of survival rather than preference.

But judging from the warnings delivered Wednesday night, district leaders made clear the toughest decisions may still lie ahead.

Sully's Chowder House Officially Opens on Buffalo Waterfront Bringing Coastal New England Feel to Erie Basin Marina

Staff Reports

Buffalo's waterfront restaurant scene has a new addition, and this one is bringing serious New England fish shack energy to the edge of Erie Basin Marina.

Sully's Chowder House is now officially open inside the former William K's restaurant space at 329 Erie Street, introducing a seafood-focused concept inspired by the laid-back coastal eateries found throughout Maine, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

The restaurant is the latest waterfront project from Buffalo hospitality operator Jason Davidson whose growing collection of local venues has helped shape much of Buffalo's modern waterfront dining scene over the last decade and a half.

Davidson has previously been involved in opening or operating several well-known Western New York destinations including Liberty Hound, Fables Café, Waterline Café, The Terrace and Roux Café at both Canalside and the Burchfield Penney Art Center.

Many of Davidson's restaurant concepts have incorporated soups, chowders and comfort-style dishes over the years—something he connects directly to his family.

In a previous interview, Davidson explained that his son's middle name is "Roux," referencing the classic mixture of flour and fat commonly used as the base for soups, gumbo and traditional New England chowders.

Now, that longtime culinary influence

has evolved into an entire restaurant concept centered around waterfront seafood dining.

"I'm excited to open Sully's Chowder House during the 15th anniversary year of opening Liberty Hound down the road at Canalside," said Davidson. "I've always loved being part of Buffalo's waterfront, and this project brings together everything I love about coastal seafood spots: fresh food, live music, cold drinks, and a relaxed atmosphere right on the water."

Davidson said the restaurant was heavily inspired by family vacations throughout New England.

"Sully's was inspired by family trips to Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Some of the best seafood I've ever had was served at casual fish houses where you'd sit at a picnic table next to a lighthouse after a day on the water."

"That's the feeling we wanted to create. More Marblehead fish shack than formal Boston seafood restaurant. Come as you are and enjoy summer on Buffalo's waterfront."

The restaurant now occupies the former William K's space along Erie Street near Davidson's existing Sully's at Harbor Walk location.

The neighboring former The Hatch building, which remains city-owned, still sits vacant after years of uncertainty and deterioration at the site.

The opening of Sully's Chowder House adds another active destination to Buffalo's evolving waterfront corridor and further expands the growing concentration of food,

drinks and entertainment surrounding the marina.

But Davidson's new venture goes beyond simply opening another seafood restaurant.

The property is being positioned as a full summer entertainment destination featuring live music, frozen desserts, outdoor cocktails and sunset events throughout the season.

Among the major additions is the new Music Matters Summer Concert Series, which will take place Thursday nights beginning June 11th.

Live music performances are also planned Wednesday through Sunday on Sully's outdoor patio throughout the summer months.

The waterfront venue is additionally launching Scarlet's Ice Cream, described as a Grateful Dead-inspired ice cream and frozen custard shop.

The concept will feature specialty flavors including "Sunshine Daydream," "Franklin's Tower," "Fire on the Mountain" and "Dark Star," alongside Perry's Ice Cream offerings under the theme: "Peace, Love & Ice Cream."

Another major component of the property is Sully's Harbor Bar, which is an outdoor beer garden and patio area featuring Great Lakes Brewing Company products, cocktails and sunset views along the marina.

Meanwhile, Sully's Grill will serve traditional summer waterfront staples including Sahlen's hot dogs, burgers, curly fries and



onion rings.

The Harbor Walk Sunset Happy Hour is also returning to the waterfront property this season, featuring two-for-one drinks, discounted beers and food specials beginning 30 minutes before sunset and continuing until 30 minutes afterward.

The opening comes as Buffalo's waterfront continues undergoing significant transformation with restaurants, entertainment spaces and outdoor gathering areas increasingly turning Erie Basin Marina and Canalside into some of the city's busiest summertime destinations.

Instead of driving to Cape Cod or coastal Maine for lobster rolls, chowder and live music by the water, Buffalo residents or visitors can find that same vibe right along the waterfront.

BUFFALO CONT.

Buffalo's First State Park Unveils Splash Pad, Playground and Landmark Buffalo Sculpture

Staff Reports

Buffalo's waterfront just got a major new attraction.

State officials this week officially unveiled sweeping new improvements at Buffalo Harbor State Park – the first and only New York State Park located within the City of Buffalo – transforming the Outer Harbor destination with a giant new sprayground, expanded accessible playground, public gathering areas and a massive stainless-steel buffalo sculpture expected to become one of the city's newest landmarks.

The upgrades are part of a broader push to continue reshaping Buffalo's waterfront into a year-round destination for families, visitors and residents while creating more free and affordable recreational opportunities along Lake Erie.

Among the centerpiece additions is a sprawling 6,700-square-foot sprayground designed for children of all ages.

Officials say the splash area was specifically designed with multiple sections catering to different age groups while also incorporating environmentally friendly systems that recirculate approximately 11,000 gallons of water per minute.

The sprayground will operate daily from 11am until 7:30pm, weather permitting.

Governor Kathy Hochul described the upgraded park as a major addition to Western New York's outdoor recreation network.

"The new and improved Buffalo Harbor State Park boasts new features that will help every member of the family to 'Get Offline and Get Outside' in a fun, welcoming and accessible environment," said Hochul. "The only State Park in the City of Buffalo is a world-class destination to experience the beauty of our Lake Erie waterfront, and I encourage visitors

throughout Western New York and beyond to come out and enjoy it this summer."

The most visually striking addition may be the park's new signature Buffalo sculpture.

Created by artist Ai Qiu Hopen, the massive structure stands 18 feet wide and 13 feet tall and is composed of roughly 2,000 individual stainless-steel birds representing 15 bird species native to New York State.

In addition to the sprayground and sculpture, the project also includes a significantly expanded playground.

Other improvements include:

A fully electric café and retail space
Public restrooms and park office space
Pergola swings overlooking the harbor
Dedicated food truck areas
Native landscaping and plantings throughout the park

Additional gathering and multi-use spaces
New York State Parks Acting Commissioner Kathy Moser said the project fulfills a larger vision for the waterfront.

"Governor Hochul's vision for a state-of-the-art waterfront destination has come to life with new opportunities for the public to get outside, cool off, relax and connect with Buffalo's incredible shoreline," said Moser. "Investments like these strengthen Buffalo Harbor State Park as a vibrant gathering place for residents and visitors and expand access to affordable recreation for all."

Local officials also praised the project's impact on families and tourism.

State Senator April N.M. Baskin called the sprayground an affordable new summer option for children and families.

"This new sprayground is a fun, affordable way for Western New York children and families to beat the heat this summer and enjoy Buffalo's beautiful waterfront," said Baskin. "I thank Governor Hochul for her continued investments in Buffalo's Outer Harbor, making it a more accessi-



ble, family-friendly and welcoming destination for residents and visitors."

Assemblymember Jon D. Rivera said the project also highlights Buffalo's growing emphasis on public art and outdoor community spaces.

"Investing in our New York State Parks means investing in the health, culture, and quality of life of our communities," said Rivera. "These exciting improvements at Buffalo Harbor State Park not only create new opportunities for families to enjoy the outdoors, but also showcase the importance of supporting local artists and public art that reflects the spirit of Western New York."

Sean Ryan said the upgrades continue reshaping Buffalo's Outer Harbor.

"These improvements are making Buffalo's Outer Harbor even more vibrant and welcoming while preserving the character that makes it such a special part of our city," said Ryan. "As a city on the shores of Lake Erie, Buffalo should have waterfront spaces that are accessible, family-friendly and built for people to enjoy year-round."

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz

predicted the new features will quickly become major draws during the summer season.

"Just in time for summer, the new Buffalo Harbor State Park Sprayground has arrived and will be ready to cool off park visitors during the upcoming hot weather," said Poloncarz. "Along with the new must-see 'Buffalo' sculpture that is sure to become a waterfront favorite, this summer is shaping up to be an exciting one at Buffalo Harbor State Park."

The upgrades also continue Governor Hochul's broader efforts to expand Buffalo's Outer Harbor district following the successful opening of Terminal B and ongoing plans to attract Great Lakes cruise ships to the city.

For visitors planning trips to the park, vehicle parking remains free.

The Gallagher Beach area, greenspace, playgrounds and shelters operate from dawn to dusk. Retail operations will run from 11am to 7pm.

Pets are allowed with a maximum of two per group. Animals must remain supervised and either leashed or crated at all times.



Buffalo Common Council Narrowly Approves \$670 Million Budget After Intense Debate Over Massive Tax Increase

Staff Reports

After days of negotiations and mounting concerns over Buffalo's growing financial problems, the Buffalo Common Council narrowly approved a revised \$670 million city budget on Tuesday, May 26th, avoiding an even larger tax increase that would have automatically taken effect July 1st.

The amended budget passed in a tight 5-4 vote after Mayor Sean Ryan and several council members reached a last-minute agreement to reduce the originally proposed 25.8% property tax increase down to 19%.

Even with the reduction, Buffalo homeowners are still facing one of the steepest tax hikes in recent city history as officials attempt to close a projected deficit exceeding \$100 million.

"We had to make some very difficult decisions," said Ryan.

City leaders argued the increase was necessary to stabilize Buffalo's finances after years

of structural deficits, depleted reserve funds and spending that outpaced revenues.

"No one is doing a victory dance," said South District Councilman and former acting Mayor Chris Scanlon.

"This amended budget is the lesser of three evils," said Scanlon. "I am painfully aware that the city needs more revenues."

Ryan's administration says the city is attempting to reverse years of financial instability while also addressing aging infrastructure, deteriorating city equipment and shrinking reserves.

To reduce the tax increase from 25.8% to 19%, the city approved several spending cuts and revenue adjustments including increasing projected Erie County sales tax revenue by \$1.6 million, increasing projected parking-related revenues by millions more, reducing capital reserve funding and cutting spending on Department of Public Works equipment, LED lighting projects and building repairs.

The Council also eliminated a vacant director of special events position, saving

approximately \$81,861.

Several council members pushed for an even lower increase.

North District Councilman Joseph Golembek and Majority Leader Leah Halton-Pope introduced a separate amendment package aimed at reducing the tax levy closer to the 12% to 13% range, but the proposal failed after lacking enough support from fellow lawmakers.

"It was a frustrating process," said Golembek.

"For too many people that 19% hike is just insurmountable," said Halton-Pope.

The amended budget was ultimately supported by Council President Joel Feroletto, Scanlon, Niagara District Councilman David Rivera, University District Councilman Rashied NC Wyatt and Fillmore District Councilman Mitchell Nowakowski.

Voting against the measure were Zeneta Everhart, Bryan Bollman, Golembek and Halton-Pope.

Nowakowski defended the final agreement,

saying city services and operations had to continue despite the financial pain.

"Would I have loved to have gone down to less than the 19%? Absolutely," said Nowakowski, "but [the] city has to operate, has to provide services and programs at the same time."

Ryan called the final agreement an example of city leaders working together under difficult circumstances.

"This process showed that this administration and the Council can work together to deliver long-term results for our residents," said Ryan. However, officials warned Buffalo's financial challenges are far from over.

Ryan acknowledged future tax increases may still be necessary as the city works toward long-term fiscal stability after years of budget deficits and declining reserve funds.

"Bringing that additional revenue on board will set the city back on a trajectory to reach financial stability moving forward," said Scanlon.

AROUND ERIE COUNTY

The State of Erie County is Strong Because of Good Governance

Mark C. Poloncarz
Erie County Executive

I recently presented the 2026 State of the County address at Shea's Performing Arts Center. I was joined by elected officials, small business owners, representatives of not-for-profit organizations, religious leaders and various other community stakeholders, all of whom heard my review of the past year and what Erie County has planned as we continue along with my administration's ongoing commitment to good government.

I discussed many initiatives and programs during my speech, including our plans for Erie County to use surplus funding to assist first-time home buyers, the introduction of an energy efficiency program to replace older style light bulbs, and the continued growth of the Erie NET broadband internet project.

A recent editorial published in The Buffalo News supported my agenda and celebrat-

ed Erie County's many accomplishments. It applauded my efforts of good governance and how we remain focused on actions, policies and programs designed to address quality-of-life issues impacting county residents, including those living in poverty.

If you were not in attendance last month and haven't taken the time to watch my speech, I urge you to view the video of my presentation of the 2026 State of the County address.

Despite continued demands from a vocal online minority for me to ignore what's happening in our nation's capital, I remain steadfast in my criticism of President Trump, specifically his lack of clear strategy to end the war in Iran. His mixed messaging is causing significant geopolitical instability and is damaging the reputation of the United States of America.

The escalating price for gasoline has been one of the main talking points in almost every conversation I have had recently and the uncertainty surrounding the Strait of

Hormuz will likely result in more gas price increases in the days, weeks and months ahead, as well as an increased cost for materials used to repair roads.

The policies developed and major decisions made in our nation's capital impact us locally, so expect to hear more from me in the future about the direction our country is headed in and what you can do to attempt to influence your federal representatives on important votes they will be making about funding for another overseas war and some of the silly high-cost vanity projects being discussed in Washington D.C. I hope you will join me in speaking out and addressing national issues that affect you and your loved ones.

I also want to remind anyone who hasn't taken the "Envision Erie" online survey to visit www.erie.gov/envisionerie so we can collect your feedback to help guide future county policy, programs, and investments. Paper surveys are available at various senior centers and public libraries. If you have a



specific question about the survey or need help obtaining one, feel free to contact David Bojanowski in my office at 716-858-8466.

Bullied at 11, Gone Far Too Soon: Family Remembers Nadiya Santiago After Tragic Death Cont. from Cover

As Western New York mourns the loss of Nadiya Santiago, loved ones hope her story sparks urgent conversations about bullying and the struggles children may silently carry.

on May 19th, 2026.

Her death has left family members, friends, classmates, and those who are hearing her story for the first time grappling with grief over a life that ended far too soon.

According to information shared publicly by family and/or friends, bullying was one of the main factors that contributed to Nadiya ending her life. They are now pleading for greater awareness so other families do not experience similar heart-break.

For Nadiya's family, the issue is no longer a statistic or a headline.

It is deeply personal.

As loved ones continue grieving, they are also speaking publicly in hopes that conversations surrounding bullying become more urgent, more serious and more proactive.

But amid the heartbreak and difficult questions, family members say they want people to remember who Nadiya was beyond the tragedy.

According to loved ones, Nadiya was a bright and energetic child whose personality lit up those around her.

She loved spending time with friends and family, staying active and enjoying the outdoors with her siblings.

Soccer and boxing ranked among her favorite activities.

Her family described her as a child whose kindness and laughter naturally made people smile.

"Nadiya Santiago was a bright, energetic 11-year-old who brought joy to everyone around her. She loved spending time with her friends and family, playing soccer and boxing, and enjoying the outdoors with her siblings."

Family members said her warmth reached countless people.

"Her laughter and kindness touched so many lives, and her absence has left a deep void in the hearts of those who knew her."

Nadiya attended Frontier Middle School in the Frontier Central School District.

Born October 10th, 2014, she was affectionately called "Nana" by many people close to her, though according to her obituary she often preferred being called Nadiya, which is a detail family members say reflected her strong personality and sense of individuality.

Her obituary described her as a cherished daughter whose kindness and warmth were evident to everyone fortunate enough to know her.

Along with overwhelming grief, relatives are also navigating funeral expenses and other unexpected burdens that followed her death.

A public fundraiser established to support the family had raised more than \$25,000 after Niagara Action published this article online with more than 10,000 reading it.

The fundraiser states:

"On May 19th, 2026, Nadiya's life was tragically cut short. Her family is now facing unimaginable grief, along with the sudden burden of funeral arrangements, moving costs, and legal fees as they seek justice and healing. The pain of losing a child is something no family should ever have to endure, and the road ahead will be long and difficult."

The page also contained a message urging greater awareness surrounding bullying and support for families facing similar pain.

"Bullying is a terrible thing and takes the lives of thousands of children each year. We hope to raise awareness and support for families facing similar struggles."

Nadiya's parents later thanked the growing number of supporters contributing to the fundraiser.

"I'm so thankful for the people that are donating she now can have a burial and her lil body can rest in peace thank you guys for making



this for her. I love yall"

On Thursday, May 21st, Frontier Middle School Principal Daniel Charland sent a letter to parents and guardians acknowledging the student's death and the emotional impact it has had throughout the school community.

"It is with profound sorrow that I write to inform you of the passing of one of our students. This loss is heart-breaking and sudden. Our hearts are with the family as they navigate this incredibly difficult time," said Charland.

Charland described Nadiya as a beloved member of the school community whose presence touched both students and staff.

"Our student was a sweet member of our school community, known for their smile, gracious heart, and academic curiosity," he continued. "In their time at Frontier Middle School, our student touched the lives of many, both students and staff."

School officials said counselors and social workers remain available to assist students and staff members coping with grief and emotional distress in the wake of the tragedy.

"We will continue to work with our students in the coming days to ensure they have the support and resources they need. Please reassure your child that the mixed emotions they might be feeling are normal."

But today we remember the child herself.

The girl who loved soccer.
The girl who boxed.
The girl who loved the outdoors.
The sister.
The daughter.
The friend.

And the child whose family says brought joy everywhere she went.

Her obituary perhaps says it best:

"May Nadiya's boundless spirit guide us all as we navigate through these times of sorrow. Her legacy will live on in the hearts of those she loved and those who loved her."

If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally or talking about self-harm, support is available. Call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for free, confidential support at any time.

If you would like to donate to the GoFundMe, you can do so on our website.

ROCHESTER

Never Gonna Let Axel Go': Community Honors 4-Year-Old Killed in Greece Murder-Suicide as Mother Pushes for 'Axel's Law'

John Watson

Hundreds of balloons, butterflies, flowers and tears filled the grounds outside Greece Town Hall this week as family, friends and supporters gathered to honor a little boy whose life ended in unimaginable tragedy.

Tuesday night (May 26th) marked what would have been 5-year-old Axel Hernandez's birthday.

Instead of candles, cake and presents, loved ones gathered to release butterflies into the sky, dedicate a memorial plaque and plant a tree in memory of the young boy who police say was killed by his father during a murder-suicide earlier this year in Greece.

The emotional gathering became far more than a memorial service.

It became a public call for change.

For Axel's mother, Alexis Hernandez, the pain of losing her son remains impossible to fully process, but she says she is determined to turn heart-break into action.

"It means everything," Hernandez said during Tuesday's memorial event.

"Obviously it's been a really hard day, but anything to do with him I try to celebrate him and do something good with it. I can't celebrate him in the way I would if he was here, so I figured giving birthday joy to kids who need it is a nice way to honor my son and remember him."

According to police, Axel was killed January 26th during a murder-suicide inside a townhouse in Greece.

Authorities said the 4-year-old boy was shot and killed by his father before the man turned the weapon on himself.

The case stunned the Rochester-area community and quickly inspired conversations surrounding domestic violence, child safety, mental health intervention and whether more could have been done before the tragedy unfolded.

For Alexis Hernandez, those questions have become impossible to ignore.

Months later, she says she still relives the horrifying moments leading up to discovering what happened.

"I'm never gonna let it go. Never

gonna let Axel go," she Hernandez.

She says warning signs existed before Axel's death and believes more proactive intervention measures may have helped prevent the tragedy.

"We went to the house after getting concerning texts from Axel's father," said Hernandez. "The house was just locked up and we had to get management to unlock the door, and we had to go in there."

Hernandez says she had previously contacted police regarding concerns involving Axel's father but believes critical documentation and follow-up procedures were lacking.

"There was no police report, no documentation," she said. "Nothing that I could go refer back to or things that I could make a paper trail out of."

Now, Hernandez is working alongside Josh Jensen to advocate for legislation being referred to as "Axel's Law."

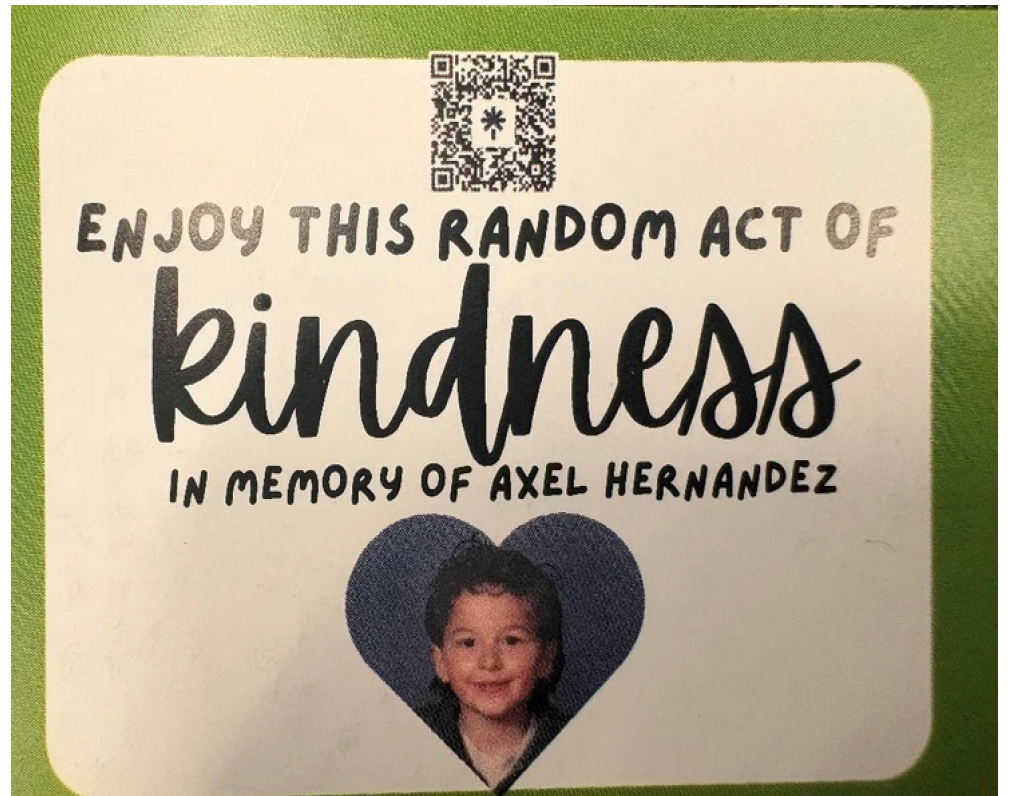
The proposed legislation aims to create stronger intervention mechanisms when authorities encounter warning signs involving a child's safety.

"There can be from such a horrible thing, something positive could come from it, if we're able to change state law," said Jensen.

Supporters behind the proposal argue that current laws often require explicit threats or violent actions before authorities can intervene in family situations involving potential danger.

Under the proposal being circulated online, Axel's Law would seek to establish several new safeguards and emergency response tools, including:

- Mandatory documentation of alarming behavior involving parents or guardians
- Rapid risk assessments by authorities
- Temporary precautionary removal of children when credible danger signs exist
- Immediate mental health evaluations before unsupervised custody resumes
- Consideration of temporary firearm risk mitigation in high-risk situations
- Expedited court review for emergency child safety cases



Jensen acknowledged no law can stop every tragedy, but says the goal is to give authorities more options before situations escalate into violence.

"You can't stop everything," said Jensen. "But if authorities are able to act more proactively when there are concerns, when there are allegations, that may be the thing that stops something from being a domestic incident."

According to Jensen, discussions have already begun with lawmakers in Albany, including conversations with leadership connected to the Children and Families Committee.

He says the process now involves reviewing existing state laws, identifying gaps and attempting to build broader legislative support.

Tuesday's memorial ceremony reflected just how deeply Axel's story has impacted the community.

Loved ones released butterflies into the air at Greece Town Hall before gathering for the dedication of a memorial plaque at the Town of Greece Spray Park. It was one of Axel's favorite places during the summer.

A tree was also planted in his honor.

The event additionally served as a fundraiser supporting Happy Birthday Cha Cha Cha, a nonprofit that provides birthday celebrations and gifts for children in need.

Family members said the decision reflected Axel's joyful personality and love for making others smile.

Even amid overwhelming grief, Hernandez says she wants her son remembered not for how he died, but for how he lived.

"He was so good and he was so kind," she said. "So it's just continuing to spread him and spread his kindness."

In the months since Axel's death, Hernandez has found unique ways to keep her son's memory alive throughout the community.

She has begun distributing random acts of kindness cards featuring Axel's portrait and information about Axel's

Law.

The cards are often attached to toys, gifts or small acts of generosity left for strangers.

Hernandez says Hot Wheels cars and monster trucks were among Axel's favorite things.

Now she uses them to spread his memory.

"It's a little sprinkle of Axel everywhere," she said.

Hernandez described leaving toy cars with the cards attached at parks, libraries and public places for random children to discover.

She has also attached the cards to gift cards and other small surprises for strangers.

Each card contains a QR code directing people to information about Axel's Law and a petition supporting the proposed legislation.

The cards also encourage others to continue the chain of kindness themselves.

According to Hernandez, the idea has already started spreading throughout the community.

"Other people in the community have caught on, and they want to do it too," she said.

For many attending Tuesday's memorial, the evening was heartbreaking.

But it was also filled with reminders of the little boy at the center of it all.

The child who loved toy cars. The child who loved monster trucks. The child who loved splash parks and birthdays and making people smile.

A life remembered not just through tragedy, but through the kindness his family now hopes will continue spreading long after his death.

And while Alexis Hernandez says the grief will never disappear, she hopes Axel's story eventually helps save another child somewhere else. One intervention.

One warning sign taken seriously. And if Axel's Law is passed, at least one life spared.





STATE NEWS

Albany Slaps Down Key Pieces of Hochul's Insurance Overhaul Plan

Staff Reports

After months of statewide speeches, pressure campaigns and promises to tackle soaring insurance costs, portions of Governor Kathy Hochul's aggressive push to overhaul New York's auto insurance system have officially made it into the state budget. However, several of her most controversial proposals were either weakened, removed entirely or remain stuck in Albany limbo.

The outcome leaves New Yorkers with a mixed picture. Some new protections aimed at insurance pricing discrimination are now law while several tougher anti-fraud measures championed by Hochul were significantly scaled back during negotiations with lawmakers.

The governor made auto insurance reform one of her signature issues throughout budget season, repeatedly arguing that New Yorkers are paying some of the highest vehicle insurance rates in the country and promising to crack down on fraud she blamed for helping drive costs higher.

Hochul spent months touring the state promoting the initiative and frequently tied rising insurance costs to industries such as trucking and farming, where commercial vehicle premiums have become a growing financial burden.

At the center of Hochul's argument was the idea that fraudulent insurance claims – including staged crashes – were inflating costs for everyone else.

Her administration pushed for tougher criminal penalties and broader enforcement powers in hopes of discouraging organized fraud rings and ultimately lowering premiums for consumers.

Some of those changes survived budget negotiations.

The newly passed Public Protection and General Government section of the state budget expands New York's legal definition of insurance fraud to include anyone who "hires, requests, encourages, orchestrates, or

invites another individual to stage a motor vehicle accident."

That language significantly broadens who prosecutors can target in staged crash investigations, potentially allowing authorities to pursue not just drivers involved in fraudulent accidents but also organizers and recruiters operating behind the scenes.

But several of Hochul's harsher proposed penalties did not make the final cut.

One of the governor's biggest pushes involved dramatically lowering the monetary thresholds required for serious felony insurance fraud charges.

Under Hochul's proposal, first-degree insurance fraud, which is currently triggered by fraudulent gains exceeding \$1 million, would have been lowered all the way down to \$50,000.

That would have transformed many more cases into Class B felonies carrying potential prison sentences of up to 25 years (i.e.: making it easier to prosecute these crimes).

The governor also sought to lower second-degree insurance fraud thresholds from \$50,000 to just \$3,000.

Neither proposal survived negotiations.

The final budget language leaves existing thresholds in place.

Lawmakers also declined to include another controversial Hochul proposal involving the Motor Vehicle Theft and Insurance Fraud Prevention Board.

The governor had proposed restructuring the board in a way that would have granted greater authority to Rossana Rosado, commissioner of the Division of Criminal Justice Services and chair of the board.

The proposal would have allowed Rosado to act independently if the board "fail[ed] to make any recommendations" related to reducing vehicle theft or insurance fraud.

That restructuring effort was also omitted from the final legislation.

While some of Hochul's tougher en-



forcement measures disappeared, lawmakers inserted several new insurance regulations into the final budget package. These changes are being praised by social justice advocates and trial attorneys who had strongly opposed portions of the governor's original plan.

Not that anything untoward ever happens in Albany, but it makes you wonder what lobbying went on behind the scenes.

Under the newly approved measures, insurers are now prohibited from using a driver's employment status, education level, home ownership status or ZIP code when determining auto insurance rates.

Advocacy organizations including The Black Institute had lobbied heavily for those changes, arguing such factors unfairly penalized lower-income and minority communities.

The final legislation also requires insurance companies to obtain approval from the New York State Department of Financial Services before implementing rate increases.

The New York State Trial Lawyers Association, which had fiercely criticized Hochul's original anti-fraud proposals,

praised the consumer-focused additions.

"Regulating insurance companies that delay, deny and defend as their business model is the future of affordability in New York," said Sabrina Rezzy, a spokesperson for the NYS Trial Lawyers Association.

Rezzy added that passage of the legislation "proved that the path to affordability starts with regulating insurers, not running over consumer rights."

Not all of Hochul's insurance proposals are dead though.

Additional pieces of her broader insurance reform package are reportedly included within the Transportation, Economic Development and Environmental Conservation budget bill, which lawmakers are expected to continue debating after returning to Albany.

The governor's office declined to comment on which specific provisions survived or were altered, saying they were waiting until the full package receives final approval.

For Hochul, the result appears to be a partial victory. Some of her crackdown on staged accidents survived, but most of her toughest enforcement measures did not.

New York's Highest Court Rules Children Can Appeal Custody Decisions Without their Parents

Staff Reports

In a landmark decision that reshapes custody disputes across New York State, the New York Court of Appeals ruled on Thursday, May 21st, that children involved in family court custody battles can appeal court decisions independently through their court-appointed attorneys, even if neither parent chooses to challenge the ruling themselves.

The unanimous decision from New York's highest court settles a long-running legal disagreement that has divided appellate courts throughout the state for years and significantly expands the authority of attorneys appointed to represent children in custody disputes.

Writing for the court in a five-page opinion, Judge Madeline Singas said state law already makes clear that attorneys representing children have the legal authority to pursue appeals on behalf of minors in family court cases.

"The Family Court Act plainly authorizes an [attorney for the child] to appeal on behalf of the subject child even though the child is not a full party to the custody proceedings," wrote Singas.

However, the court also emphasized that children – like any party filing an appeal – must still demonstrate legal standing by showing they were directly impacted by the ruling.

"Like any appealing party" the child must have standing by proving they were "aggrieved."

The ruling overturns legal precedent previously used by New York's Fourth Department Appellate Division, which covers much of Western and Central New York.

That court had repeatedly held that children involved in custody disputes lacked authority to independently appeal custody rulings if their parents themselves chose not to file appeals.

Thursday's decision formally rejects that interpretation.

The legal dispute that ultimately reached New York's highest court stemmed from a custody case involving four children whose parents had originally agreed the children would primarily live with their mother.

Later, however, the father petitioned family court to modify the custody arrangement.

When the court sided with the father and altered the custody terms, the attorney appointed to represent the children sought to appeal the ruling in an effort to keep the children living primarily with their mother.

The mother herself did not formally appeal the decision, though she did submit a letter supporting her children's position.

Despite that support, the Fourth De-

partment dismissed the children's appeal based on its longstanding precedent that minors in custody cases did not possess what the court called "full-party status."

Under that interpretation, children could not independently continue litigation that a parent had effectively abandoned.

The Fourth Department had previously argued that a child involved in a custody dispute "does not have 'full-party status'" and therefore could not compel a parent to "litigate a petition that [they] ha[ve] since abandoned."

But Judge Singas and the Court of Appeals rejected that reasoning entirely.

The court instead sided with legal interpretations already adopted by the state's First, Second and Third Appellate Departments.

According to Singas, interpreting the law any other way would effectively strip portions of the Family Court Act of meaningful purpose.

The court found a contrary ruling would render the statute's "relevant language without practical effect."

The decision now standardizes family court appeal procedures statewide, ending years of conflicting interpretations depending on where custody cases were heard.

The Second Department – which oversees areas including Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island and Westchester –

had already recognized the authority of attorneys for children to independently pursue appeals.

The First Department, covering Manhattan and The Bronx, and the Third Department, covering large portions of Central and Northern New York, had similarly followed that interpretation.

"The Second Department, which covers parts of southern New York including Long Island, Queens, Brooklyn and Westchester, 'has endorsed the [attorney for the child's] authority to appeal on behalf of their client,'" Singas wrote.

But she noted, "The Fourth Department has taken a different approach, dismissing appeals taken solely by an [attorney for the child] when neither parent party appeals or otherwise indicates their support for the child's appeal."

That divide has now officially been resolved once and for all.

Speaking after the ruling, family law attorney Alison Bates who represented the children in the underlying case said the decision ensures children across New York now receive equal treatment regardless of geography.

"I didn't feel like it was fair to kids to have different rights depending on where they lived in New York State," said Bates. "So it was just about making sure that there was equal protection across the state. Mission accomplished."

NATIONAL NEWS

The Rule of Law Versus the Modern Day Witch Hunt Cont. from Cover

Sumit Majumdar

President & CEO of Buffalo Biodiesel Inc. | Limited Partner & Director of Energy and Agriculture at Verite Capital Partners

le society should be integrating, threatening the core principles of justice and democratic fairness.

Accountability, Courts, and Separating the Mob from the Law

"There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law." — Abraham Lincoln

Actions have consequences. Crimes deserve punishment, and society has a right to demand accountability from those who cause harm. But this is precisely why the penal system exists: to enforce justice unbiasedly and proportionally.

The courts were designed to separate the mob from the law. A judge and jury operate on evidence, due process, and codified statutes, whereas a mob operates on emotion, rumor, and bloodlust. When an individual breaks the law, they face penalties, serve their time, and complete a process designed to allow them to re-enter society.

When the public or the media bypasses the judicial system to inflict their own extrajudicial punishment, they are rejecting the very foundation of a civilized society. There is a profound irony in vigilante justice: people who take the law into their own hands are demonstrating a belief that the law does not apply to them. In their self-righteous anger, they adopt the exact same mindset—disregard for the rules and boundaries of society—as the person they are so furious at for violating the law in the first place.

The Constitution and the Tyranny of the Majority

"Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect." — Mark Twain

This separation of law and mob was not an accident; it is the bedrock of the American democratic experiment. The Founding Fathers were acutely aware of the dangers of mob rule, often referring to it as the "tyranny of the majority." They understood that without strict legal frameworks, the loudest, angriest voices would dictate who gets to participate in society and who gets destroyed.

To prevent this, they enshrined Due Process in the Constitution. The 5th Amendment ensures that no one can be deprived of life, liberty, or property without the impartial application of the law. Later, recognizing that the mob was still successfully terrorizing marginalized groups, the nation passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. The 14th Amendment, in particular, guaranteed "equal protection under the laws."

These civil rights amendments were passed specifically to stop the mob from bypassing the law to punish, exclude, and terrorize minorities. They established that an individual's rights are absolute and cannot be voted away by an angry crowd or stripped away by public shaming.

The Digital Pitchfork vs. The Public Square

Human nature dictates that most people do not want to go against the grain. No one wants to be hated, and no one wants to be the target of a mob. The internet understands this fear and weaponizes it perfectly.

The digital age has made the mob exponentially stronger because participation requires zero physical effort. It is no longer about organizing a movement, printing flyers, and mobilizing a protest in the street. Today, joining a mob is a quick tap on a smartphone screen—an endless stream of equal opportunity chime-ins. It is infinitely easier, far more visible, and it brings the hate relentlessly right to your front door.

My main office is located on Court Street. On the weekends, I often see protesters gathering down at Niagara Square. I genuinely applaud them for putting in the physical

effort to come out on a Saturday to voice their beliefs. But I also sometimes chuckle, because the downtown buildings are empty—it is, in many ways, a self-performance where there is no one around to watch or hear them. Yet, as I watch, I often pause and wish that there was an audience. I wish another side was there listening, for no other reason than to hear them out and peacefully, civilly engage.

That kind of civil, face-to-face discourse is exactly what the digital mob has destroyed. The internet has replaced the physical public square with a hyper-reactive arena where engagement is measured only in vitriol and immediate destruction.

Free Speech vs. Free Hate

In this modern era, the mob's pitchforks have been replaced by keyboards. Journalists and commentators who feed this hatred often hide behind the shield of the First Amendment, but there is a distinct difference between free speech and free hate.

Free speech is the right to criticize the government, debate policy, and voice dissenting opinions. Free hate is the weaponization of a platform to stalk, harass, and systematically dismantle an individual's life after the legal system has already had its say. When journalists act as the leaders of a digital mob—digging up resolved legal matters, contacting employers, and inciting mass harassment—they cross the line from reporting to tortious interference.

If critics despise the legal framework of rehabilitation, the democratic solution is to campaign to change the legislation. If they prefer an autocratic system where individuals are forever banished based on the whims of a public tribunal rather than the rule of law, they are rejecting the Constitution itself.

The Irony of Guilt by Association

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." — Mahatma Gandhi

Perhaps the most ugly tool in this modern witch hunt is guilt by association. When a journalist or a public mob decides to target an individual, they rarely stop there. They attack the companies that hire them, the colleagues who work alongside them, and the partners who support them. The goal is to shame everyone in that person's orbit until the company caves and cuts ties.

This is bullying, plain and simple. By attacking a company for giving someone a second chance, the mob effectively bypasses the law, enforcing a lifetime sentence of unemployment and social exile.

The Chilling Effect on Protected Classes

This bullying extends far beyond those with criminal records; it is actively used to chill relationships with various marginalized groups. The weaponization of public shame is frequently aimed at companies that boldly support minorities, Muslims, and the LGBTQ+ community.

To understand the gravity of this, one must look at the modern civil rights frameworks designed to prevent exactly this kind of exclusion. In New York State, the Human Rights Law legally protects individuals from discrimination based on:

Race, Color, and National Origin

- Creed (protecting Muslim individuals and others from religious bigotry)
- Sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression (protecting LGBTQ+ individuals)
- Age, sex, and disability
- Military or veteran status
- Familial, marital, and domestic violence victim status

Crucially, New York State also explicitly protects the pathway to redemption. Under Article 23-A of the NYS Correction Law, it is illegal for employers to unfairly discriminate against a person based on a prior criminal conviction, provided the past offense is not directly related to the specific job and does not pose an unreasonable risk to safety.

The law is clear: discrimination is illegal, and redemption is protected. But the mob's attacks are meant to circumvent these pro-



tections. By generating negative press and leveraging guilt by association, bullies aim to make businesses too terrified of bad PR to hire former offenders, Muslims, transgender individuals, or racial minorities. The fear of being targeted is used to enforce a silent, systemic segregation.

The True Mechanics of Inclusion: Merit Over Checkboxes

"Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible." — Maya Angelou

Unfortunately, in the modern push for inclusion, many employers have gotten it entirely wrong. They have opted for an easy path, treating diversity as a superficial checkbox exercise rather than a commitment grounded in merit. While a Human Resources department might genuinely believe they are doing a good thing by hitting demographic targets, this approach is fundamentally flawed.

Many well-intentioned advocates argue that marginalized groups need to be placed in these positions specifically because of historical challenges in access to education and opportunities. While those systemic barriers are undeniably real, artificially placing individuals into roles to balance a spreadsheet treats the symptom rather than the disease. The actual cure for inequality of opportunity is to actively increase access to the education, training, and foundational resources that create those opportunities.

But at the hiring table, the focus for true equality must rely solely on merit. Merit acts as the ultimate blind test—the great equalizer that rises above prejudice. From an employer's standpoint, hiring and retention must be strictly merit-based. When diversity mandates outweigh this blind test—particularly to the extent that a company hires incompetent individuals or tolerates disruptive behavior in the name of representation—it spectacularly backfires. Rather than dismantling bigotry, it actively reinforces prejudice, giving critics ammunition to doubt the capabilities of all marginalized hires.

My partner and colleague, Don Jones—Founder and Chairman of Verite Capital Partners—embodies the true mechanics of how this work should be done. Don demands absolute excellence while relentlessly championing diversity and inclusion. Looking back at historical factors—both the broad struggles of the American civil rights movement and his own personal history of breaking through systemic barriers to rise from a janitor to a corporate executive—he knows that real integration requires grit, not just good intentions.

He recently told me, "It's hard, Sumit, to do right. And if it's not hard, it's not right, when it comes to tearing down prejudice."

That truth is universal. Dismantling prejudice through excellence is difficult work. The true purpose of diversity and inclusion is to open the door so that, despite a person's status or background, they can showcase that their job performance is unquestionable. This is what actually destroys prejudice. When a coworker sees a marginalized individual

contributing at a high level and recognizes them as highly valuable to the company, it creates a blinding effect to their protected status. Excellence creates undeniable shared value, and that shared value is the most effective mechanism for a lasting reduction in prejudice.

The Courage to Integrate: A Historical Imperative

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." — Martin Luther King Jr.

When the mob directs its fury at a company for employing a marginalized individual or a former offender, the path of least resistance is dissociation. It is incredibly easy to issue a corporate apology, sever ties, and throw the targeted individual to the wolves to save a brand's image.

But progress has never been achieved by taking the easy way out. Throughout history, true societal advancement has relied entirely on the courage of those who stood their ground and demanded integration. The abolition of slavery required individuals to actively defy the law and society to harbor and defend those deemed property. The fight for women's rights was won because people refused to back down in the face of intense public mockery and institutional exclusion.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr. and his allies faced brutal violence, economic retaliation, and crushing societal pressure. Yet, they—alongside the brave business owners and community leaders who refused to enforce segregation—stood firm.

Today, that same courage is required in the boardroom. Employers who shatter glass ceilings and actively fight hate are the modern inheritors of this legacy. By refusing to capitulate to outrage, these companies choose genuine, merit-based inclusion over exclusion. They recognize that breaking down barriers for minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, religious groups, and those seeking redemption is a fight worth having, even when it draws the ire of the crowd.

Standing Up to the Bullies

Discrimination and bullying by association are alive and well, dressed up as righteous accountability. But there is nothing righteous about denying someone a chance to earn a living, and there is nothing heroic about destroying a company for practicing genuine, legally protected inclusion.

It is time for individuals and corporations to stand up to these bullies. True inclusion means holding the line when the public pitchforks come out. It means trusting the legal frameworks of our democracy, defending the marginalized, prioritizing unquestionable merit, and refusing to let sensationalist journalism dictate who deserves a place in society.

Democracy thrives on the rule of law, equal opportunity, and the belief that people can pay their debts and move forward. Mob rule thrives on permanent shame. We must choose which society we want to build.



CRIME BLOTTER

CRIME REPORTS PUBLISHED BY NIAGARA ACTION OVER THE LAST WEEK

-Screaming in Pain: Niagara Falls Woman Claims She Was Poisoned with Rat Poison. Law enforcement received a call around 9:35pm on May 19th after reports that a woman was possibly poisoned on 16th Street in Niagara Falls. The victim was lying on the ground and told her husband that she had ingested rat poison. She was screaming. AMR and Niagara Falls Fire responded to the scene. It was not clear from the audio who the woman believed poisoned her. Police also responded to the scene. No further information is available at this time.

-Woman Locks Herself in Room as Boyfriend Uses Sawzall to Cut Through Door in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 11:03pm on May 16th after reports of a violent domestic disturbance on Spruce Avenue in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that she is having a “dispute” with her boyfriend (name was given to police). She locked herself in a room to get away from him after he was trying to attack her. However, the boyfriend grabbed a Sawzall and was using it to “cut through the door.” This was happening while she was on the phone with law enforcement. Police also responded to the scene. It is unknown if the boyfriend was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Chaos at Niagara Falls Hotel as Naked Woman Screams and Bangs on Guest Doors. Law enforcement received a call around 5:34am on May 20th after reports of disorderly conduct and a possible domestic disturbance at the Comfort Inn & Suites on the 6100 block of Niagara Falls Boulevard in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller, who works for the hotel, told police that there was a white female who was “completely naked” screaming and banging on the doors. She woke up multiple guests and caused a scene, putting guests themselves in fear of what was going on. Police and responded to the scene. It is unknown if the woman was arrested or taken for mental health treatment. No further information is available at this time.

-I Murdered My Grandmother': Chilling Niagara Falls Phone Call Sparks Police Response. Law enforcement received a call around 2:22pm on May 21st after reports of a domestic disturbance and possible homicide on 98th Street in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller, who is believed to have been an employee of Fidelis, told police that they attempted to contact a woman by phone and a male answered instead. The male identified himself as the woman’s grandson, but when the employee of Fidelis asked to speak with his grandmother, he told the employee that he “murdered her” and ended the call. The grandson’s age is unknown. Police responded to the scene. The grandmother’s condition and whether the male was arrested or taken for mental health treatment is unknown. No further information is available at this time.

-Intruder Enters Apartment Through Window and Attacks Victim in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 7:53am on May 21st after reports of a home invasion with an assault in Packard Court on Pine Avenue in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller and victim told police that a male, identified during the call as James Leonard, entered her apartment through a window unit and attacked her. She attempted to fight him off but sustained injuries during the struggle. He fled the scene before law enforcement was called. Police and responded to the scene. It is unknown if the male was located and arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Street Horror: Niagara Falls Woman Dragged by Neck Into Home After Weapon Threat. Law enforcement received a call around 1:22pm on May 21st after reports of a violent domestic incident on 16th Street in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that his neighbor, whom he described as a black male, was fighting a female. He described that the male was holding a dark object to the woman’s stomach, believed to be a weapon, before he “dragged her into the house by the neck.” The woman appeared injured and was reportedly screaming. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the male was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Teen Caught on Camera Stealing Electric Scooter From North Tonawanda Tops. According to the North Tonawanda Police Department, the theft happened around 6pm on May 11th inside the Tops Markets location on Meadow Drive. Investigators say the juvenile walked into the store and left with a dark-colored Hiboy electric scooter before fleeing the area. Authorities later released an image of the juvenile as detectives worked to identify him. Police have not released any additional details regarding how the scooter was taken or whether it has since been recovered.

-Woman with Hatchet Threatens to 'Chop up New York State Troopers' in North Tonawanda. Law enforcement received a call around 4:13pm on May 22nd after reports of suspicious activity and menacing with a weapon at Pine Woods Park in

North Tonawanda. After a 911 call, dispatch advised responding officers that a female suspect known to police (as she has done this before and there is an officer safety in effect) is outside carrying a hatchet and making comments to “chop up New York State Troopers.” The caller was in Pine Woods Park with her child when she observed and heard the woman with the hatchet. The woman Police also responded to the scene. It is unknown if the female was arrested and/or taken for mental health treatment. No further information is available at this time.

-Possible Kidnapping Investigated After Woman Seen in Vehicle Trunk at Niagara County Walmart. Law enforcement received a call around 3:13pm on May 23rd after reports of a possible kidnapping at Walmart on South Transit Road in Lockport, Niagara County. The 911 caller told police that he observed a female being placed in a trunk at Walmart. He also described the vehicle as being grey. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the vehicle was at the location when they arrived or if a victim was located inside the trunk. No further information is available at this time.

-Mother and Group of Teens Roll Up to Fight Young Girl in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 11:09pm on May 22nd after reports of a domestic disturbance on 20th Street in Niagara Falls involving a group fight. The 911 caller told police that a mother and several juveniles arrived at her home to fight her 15-year-old daughter. Dispatch then noted to responding officers that “county noted they have a warning they have a warning of possible possession of a firearm for a 20-year-old black male named” Police responded to the scene. There were no details on the call if a fight actually occurred. It is unknown if the mother and juveniles were still on scene when law enforcement arrived. No further information is available at this time.

-Danger at North Tonawanda Park After Woman with Knife Leads Police on Chase. Law enforcement received a call around 4:07pm on May 22nd after reports of menacing with a weapon at Pine Woods Park in North Tonawanda. The 911 caller told police that a woman near an agitated female carrying a large knife was walking a small dog. The female suspect was complaining to the 911 caller about some federal money that she is owed and not getting. The female suspect then entered a silver vehicle – described as a sedan – that was parked by the pavilion. Police responded to the scene and observed a sedan near the pavilion driving away. The vehicle refused to pull for police. The woman drove down Twin City Highway and got on the I290 which is when local police terminated their pursuit. No further information is available at this time.

-Niagara Falls Hotel Employee Burned After Guest Throws Boiling Water. Law enforcement received a call around 2:07pm on May 24th after reports of an assault at the Holiday Inn on Buffalo Avenue in downtown Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that a disgruntled hotel guest threw boiling water on a hotel employee. The hotel employee sustained minor injuries as a result of the incident. Both parties remained at the location. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown of the hotel guest was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Niagara Falls Man Threatens to Kick In Door Over Dog He Abandoned. Law enforcement received a call around 5:44pm on May 24th after reports of a man threatening to force entry into a home on the 600 block of 33rd Street in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that the suspect “abandoned” his dog about “six months ago” and that he was currently on his way to retrieve the dog. The caller told the suspect that he could not have the dog after he abandoned him in the first place. When the suspect was told this, he told the caller that he would “kick the door in if he needs to.” Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the suspect arrived at the scene and, if he did, whether he was arrested or left without incident. No further information is available at this time.

-I Thought I Was Going to Die' Says DoorDash Driver After Window Shattered at North Tonawanda 7-Eleven. Law enforcement received a call around 10:02pm on May 20th after reports of an assault at 7-Eleven at the corner of Ward Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard in North Tonawanda. The 911 caller told police that she was in fear of her life after a male smashed the window of her car and then entered the store to buy some snacks. The caller described the suspect as a black male wearing a blue shirt. She told police that he remained on location. Police noted unknown weapons and unknown intoxication. Police responded to the scene. It is believed the suspect was still on scene when law enforcement arrived and that he was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

Buffalo Police Officer Shot Multiple Times; Commissioner Confirms Another Officer-involved Shooting

Staff Reports

A Buffalo police officer was shot multiple times on Tuesday, May 26th, during a violent encounter on the city’s East Side according to reports circulating from the scene and comments made by Erika Shields confirming that another officer-involved shooting had taken place in the city.

The shooting reportedly happened in the area of the 200 block of Sherman Avenue where police swarmed the neighborhood as streets were shut down to allow emergency crews to transport the wounded officer to Erie County Medical Center.

Initial reports shared by Buffalo Street News indicated the officer may have been struck multiple times including injuries to both arms and at least one leg. Those specific injury details have not yet been officially verified.

Reports also indicated the suspect involved in the confrontation was shot during the incident.

Authorities have not publicly released details regarding what led to the shooting, the condition of the suspect or whether additional individuals may have been involved.

Commissioner Shields briefly acknowl-

edged the incident Tuesday while speaking during a separate news conference connected to another violent confrontation involving Buffalo police over the weekend.

When asked by reporters about Tuesday’s shooting, Shields confirmed that another officer-involved shooting had occurred but declined to provide additional details.

The latest incident comes just days after another dangerous encounter involving Buffalo police officers Saturday night.

During that separate incident, a Buffalo police officer was stabbed by a suspect before officers opened fire on the attacker.

Police said the officer was stabbed in the torso beneath his left armpit.

The injured officer was transported to ECMC for treatment and later released.

The suspect who was shot during Saturday’s confrontation remains hospitalized, according to police.

Tuesday’s shooting now marks yet another violent attack involving Buffalo officers during an already tense period for the department.

Officials had not released the officer’s identity involved in Tuesday’s shooting.

No additional details are available at this time.

Undercover New York Troopers Dressed as Construction Workers Nail 94 Drivers on Thruway



Staff Reports

Drivers flying through a New York State Thruway work zone on Friday, May 22nd quickly discovered some of the “construction workers” standing near the I90 were actually undercover state troopers watching every move they made.

By the end of the eight-hour enforcement crackdown, New York State Police had issued 94 traffic tickets during a major “Operation Hard Hat” detail targeting dangerous driving behaviors inside an active highway construction zone.

The enforcement operation took place along I90 where undercover troopers blended into the work area dressed as roadside construction workers while monitoring drivers passing through the zone.

Whenever violations were spotted, the undercover officers radioed nearby marked patrol units who then conducted traffic stops further down the roadway.

The overwhelming majority of citations involved speeding.

Police said 69 of the 94 tickets issued – roughly 73% of all violations – were for drivers exceeding the posted speed limit through the construction area.

The fastest driver stopped during the operation was allegedly clocked traveling 79 miles per hour inside a 55-mph work zone.

State Police also cited multiple motorists for other violations including eight seatbelt tickets, six Move Over Law violations and two citations involving cell phone or electronic device use

while driving.

An additional nine tickets were issued for various other vehicle and traffic law infractions.

The enforcement effort is part of New York’s ongoing “Operation Hard Hat” campaign, a statewide initiative designed to crack down on reckless driving behaviors in highway work zones.

The program first launched years ago but ramps up heavily during construction season as road crews spread across highways throughout the state.

The latest operation also follows renewed awareness efforts tied to National Work Zone Awareness Week, which took place in April.

Unlike standard traffic enforcement details, Operation Hard Hat relies on undercover tactics that many drivers never see coming.

The strategy has repeatedly resulted in large numbers of citations across New York.

Transportation officials have increasingly warned about dangerous driving behaviors inside construction zones, especially speeding and failure to move over for roadside crews and emergency vehicles.

Even small mistakes at highway speeds can quickly become deadly.

Despite years of awareness campaigns, officials say dangerous driving through construction zones remains a persistent statewide issue.

Friday’s operation demonstrated just how common those violations continue to be.

Nearly 100 tickets in only eight hours means troopers were issuing citations about every five minutes.

CRACKING THE CARTON: The Truth Behind Egg Quality, Color, and Poultry Care in Erie & Niagara Counties



Sumit Majumdar
President & CEO of Buffalo Biodiesel Inc. | Limited Partner & Director of Energy and Agriculture at Verite Capital Partners

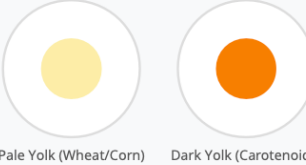
Walking down the dairy aisle of a modern grocery store in Western New York has become an exercise in deciphering agricultural jargon. What was once a simple choice between one or two brands has exploded into a complex matrix of labels, shell colors, and steep price gradients. Understanding the genuine differences behind these cartons requires peeling back the marketing to examine genetics, husbandry, and the strict local regulations governing how these birds are raised.



Red Earlobes White Earlobes

Illustration 1: Shell color is determined genetically by the earlobes of the hen, not by the quality of the egg.

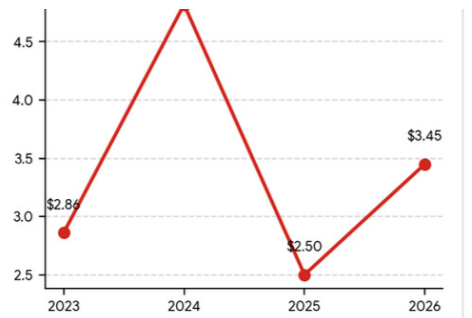
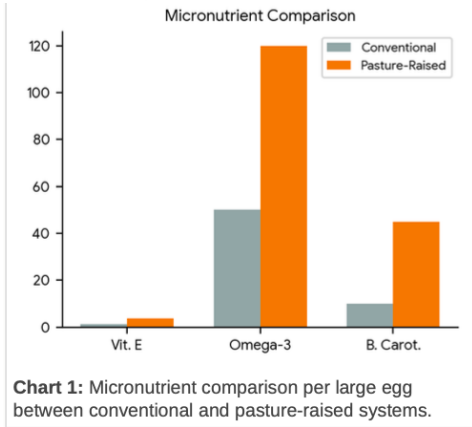
A GUIDE FOR THE CONSUMER
The Shell Game: White vs. Brown
The most visually striking difference among eggs is shell color. Despite enduring rural myths, a brown shell does not indicate a healthier, more “natural,” or higher-quality egg. Shell color is dictated entirely by genetics. Chickens with white earlobes lay white eggs, while chickens with red earlobes lay brown eggs. The nutritional baseline of a white egg and a brown egg produced under the exact same conditions is identical.



Pale Yolk (Wheat/Corn) Dark Yolk (Carotenoids)

Illustration 2: Yolk color is driven by diet. Pale yolks indicate a wheat/corn base, while dark yolks indicate carotenoid-rich foraging.

Yolk Color, Nutrition, and Health
While shell color is a genetic blueprint, the color of the yolk is a direct reflection of the hen’s diet. A darker, more vibrantly orange yolk indicates a diet rich in carotenoids and xanthophylls. Nutritionally, eggs provide high-quality protein and choline. Hens permitted to forage on pasture consume insects and plants, which can boost the egg’s micronutrient profile, often yielding higher levels of Omega-3 fatty acids and Vitamin E.



Decoding the Industry Labels
The terminology on egg cartons reflects distinct agricultural systems that impact welfare and cost:

- **Conventional (Caged):** Highly efficient,

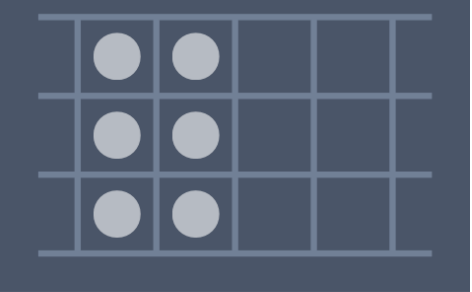
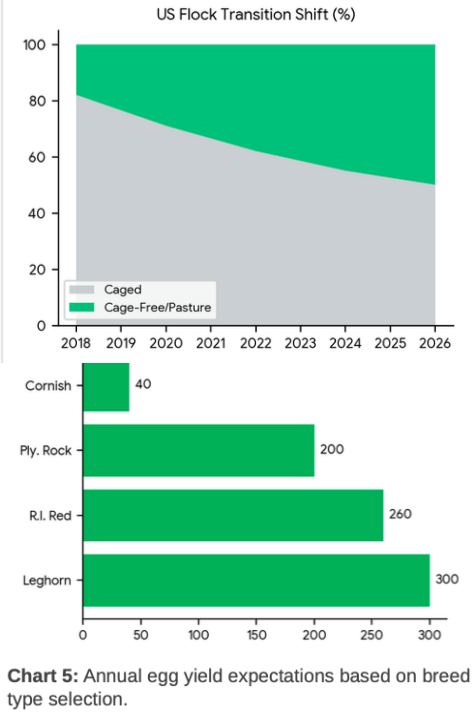


Illustration 3: Conventional battery cages maximize space efficiency but prevent natural foraging behaviors.



Illustration 4: Pasture-raised flocks actively forage on varied terrain, improving soil and diet.



restricting birds’ natural movements.

- **Cage-Free:** Hens are unconfined inside a barn, but outdoor access is not required.
- **Free-Range:** Uncaged with access to the outdoors, though yard quality varies.
- **Pasture-Raised:** The gold standard. Hens spend their lives outdoors on vegetated pasture.

A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESTEADER
Tired of grocery store price volatility, an increasing number of residents in our region are turning to backyard poultry rearing.

Selecting Your Breed and Team Building
Chickens have been selectively bred. Laying Breeds direct energy into eggs but are poor for meat. Meat Birds grow rapidly but are poor layers. For the standard backyard homesteader, Dual-Purpose Breeds (like Plymouth Rocks) offer an ideal middle ground. Establishing a backyard coop is an exceptional family project that builds teamwork and teaches children about food systems, operational maintenance, and accountability.

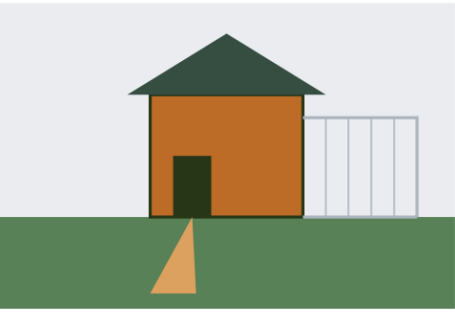
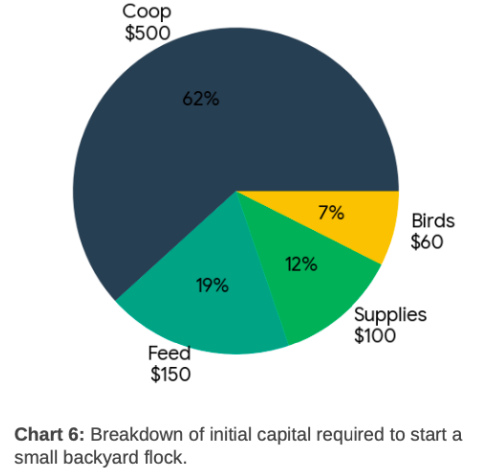
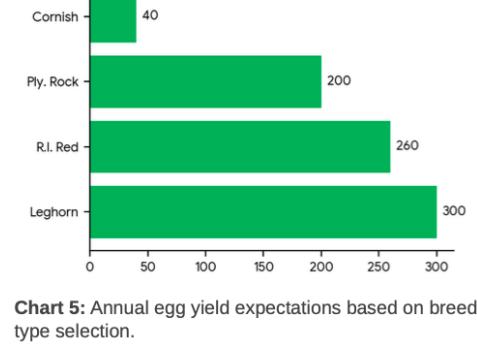


Illustration 5: A secure backyard coop setup with proper ventilation and predator-proof fencing.

Coexisting with Pets and the Rooster Myth
A primary concern is how chickens interact with dogs and cats. Dogs possess varying levels of predatory drive and require strict, supervised training alongside secure physical barriers to prevent flock injuries. Adult chickens are formidable enough to deter standard cats, but young chicks are highly vulnerable.

Additionally, we must dispel the most pervasive myth among urban beginners: You do not need a rooster to get eggs. A hen will ovulate independently. A rooster is only necessary if you wish to fertilize eggs to hatch chicks.

PROS AND CONS OF POULTRY
Advantages (Pros)

1. Nutritional Superiority
 2. Access to ultra-fresh eggs with rich, optimized micronutrients.
 3. Waste Circularity
 4. Chickens convert kitchen scraps into nitrogen-rich fertilizer.
 5. Educational Value
 6. Teaches families sustainable asset management and daily operational responsibility.
- Challenges (Cons)**
1. Upfront Capital
 2. High initial infrastructure costs, including predator-proof materials.
 3. Biosecurity
 4. Vulnerability to pathogens, parasites, and Avian Influenza.
 5. Predator Management
 6. Coops require heavy defenses against raccoons, foxes, and hawks.

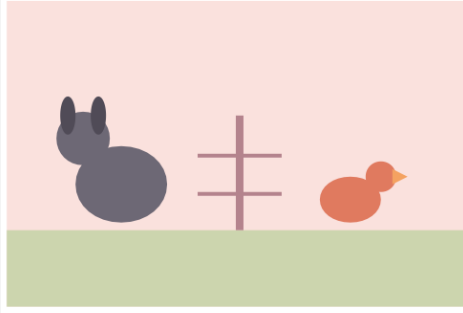


Illustration 6: Introducing household pets to flocks requires physical barriers and constant supervision.

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE
Before purchasing chicks, prospective keepers must navigate strict municipal zoning codes. In Erie County, the City of Buffalo permits up to five hens but strictly prohibits roosters due to noise ordinances, mandating specific coop setbacks from property lines. Conversely, rural towns like Evans or Eden feature agricultural zoning that permits commercial-scale operations and the keeping of roosters.

In Niagara County, densely populated municipal zones like Lockport restrict flock sizes to small, single-digit hen counts, while rural agricultural districts in towns like Somerset or Cambria allow for expansive, multi-purpose poultry farming without restrictive caps.



About the Author:
Sumit Majumdar is the President of Buffalo Biodiesel Inc. and a Limited Partner/Lead Advisor for Energy and Agriculture at Verite Capital Partners. For over 20 years, he has been a leading voice in the fight against climate change, specializing in practical solutions for reducing carbon and methane emissions through sustainable fuel technology and industrial oversight.

FINANCIAL MARKETS & COMMODITIES

STOCK MARKET INDEXES



DOW JONES

50,461.68



NASDAQ

26,65618



S&P 500

7,519.12



TSX (CANADA)

34,012.87



NIKKEI 225

65,158.19



SSE (CHINA)

4,112.90



FTSE 100 (UK)

10,491.39

METALS COMMODITIES



GOLD

\$4,603.70 per troy oz.



SILVER

\$77.42 per troy oz.



COPPER

13,184 per metric ton



PLATINUM

\$2,041 per troy oz.



PALLADIUM

\$1,418.55 per troy oz.



TIN

54,220 per metric ton



NICKEL

18,740 per metric ton



ZINC

\$3,512 per metric ton



ALUMINUM

\$3,676 per metric ton



LIVESTOCK



LIVE CATTLE

\$2.59 lb.



FEEDER CATTLE

\$3.73 lb.



LEAN HOGS

\$1.00 lb.



BEEF

\$372.84 cwt



POULTRY

\$1.42 lb.

AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES



COFFEE

\$2.71 lb.



SUGAR

\$.15 lb.



CORN

\$5.34
bushel



SOYBEANS

\$13.18
bushel



WHEAT

\$6.97
bushel



COTTON

\$.84 lb.



FCOJ

\$1.49 lb.

ENERGY COMMODITIES



GASOLINE

\$4.46 gallon avg.



DIESEL

\$5.61 gallon avg.



NATURAL GAS

\$2.94 MMBtu



HEATING OIL

\$3.79 gallon



WTI (West Texas int.)

\$193.89 barrel



BRENT CRUDE

\$99.58 barrel



USED COOKING OIL (UCO)

\$.73 per lb.

A SNAPSHOT IN TIME

AS OF 6AM WEDNESDAY, MAY 27TH, 2026

NA HOME & LEISURE

The Ultimate Western New York Summer Grilling Guide

Navigating the fiery landscape from basic charcoal grilling to high-tech smokers



Sumit Majumdar

The routine was foolproof, almost ceremonial: get some charcoal, get some lighter fluid, strike some matches, and open a cold beer. You waited for the flames to die down to a glowing, ash-covered red, threw on some heavily marinated meat, and hoped for the best. Sometimes it was perfection; other times it was a charred tribute to impatience.

Well, things have changed. Drastically.

I look around my patio and kitchen today, and my arsenal looks like a showroom. I've got traditional charcoal, an air fryer built right into my oven, an LPG (Liquid Petroleum Gas) grill, a tandoori clay oven setup, a wood-fired pizza oven, and propane-powered everything. Oh, wait, I almost forgot the electric grills and the massive smokers. The paradox of choice is alive and well in the world of outdoor cooking.

"The routine was foolproof: get some charcoal, get some lighter fluid, strike some matches, and open a cold beer. Well, things have changed."

So, let's talk about it. Let's break down all the different types of grills and smokers that are out there. What do they cost upfront? How much does it cost to run them? How long does it actually take to cook your dinner? And most importantly, what's the absolute best thing to cook on each of them? Whether you are a weekend warrior flipping burgers or a dedicated pitmaster waking up at 4:00 AM to tend a brisket, there is a perfect heat source out there for you.

THE GAS GRILL: LPG & PROPANE

Let's start with the workhorse of the modern American backyard: the gas grill. Powered by either refillable propane tanks or hooked directly into your home's natural gas line, this is the appliance I reached for today. Why? Convenience. Pure, unadulterated convenience. You turn a dial, push an igniter, and within ten minutes, you are ready to sear.

Gas grills offer precision. You can establish distinct heat zones with a flick of a wrist—high heat on the left for searing steaks, low heat on the right for gently finishing chicken breasts without turning them into leather. The flavor is clean. Some purists argue that you miss out on the smoky essence of charcoal, and they are right. Gas doesn't impart much flavor on its own; the flavor comes entirely from the vaporization of drippings hitting the metal flavorizer bars below the grates.

But for a Tuesday night when you get home from work at 6:00 PM and the kids are starving, the gas grill is the undisputed champion. It asks for nothing and delivers consistently. Plus, cleanup is generally a breeze compared to



The charcoal grill

dealing with pounds of ash.

Upfront Cost: \$150 (basic) to \$3,000+ (luxury built-in).

Cost to Run: Approx. \$1.00 to \$1.50 per cooking session (based on a \$20 propane refill lasting 15-20 cooks).

Time to Cook: Very fast. 10 minutes to pre-heat, 10-15 minutes to cook basic proteins.

Best Foods: Burgers, hot dogs, chicken breasts, delicate fish, vegetables, and anything requiring quick, weeknight execution.

THE CHARCOAL PURIST

Ah, charcoal. The scent of a charcoal fire is practically encoded into our DNA. It's the smell of summer, of tailgates, of neighborhood block parties. While I may have opted for gas today, I will never abandon my charcoal kettle.

Charcoal cooking is an active sport. You don't just turn a dial; you manage a living fire. You have to arrange the coals strategically. Want a hot zone? Pile them high. Need a cool zone? Leave a section empty. It requires patience. Using a chimney starter (please, put down the lighter fluid—your food shouldn't taste like a refinery) takes about 20 to 30 minutes just to get the coals ready.

But the reward is magnificent. Charcoal burns hotter than standard gas, allowing for a crust on a steak that gas struggles to match. Moreover, as the juices drip onto the white-hot coals, they vaporize and envelop the food in a rich, complex, smoky flavor that is impossible to replicate. It is weekend cooking. It is the ritual of the grill.

Upfront Cost: \$30 (portable) to \$400 (premium kettles/barrels).

Cost to Run: \$3.00 to \$5.00 per cook (premium lump charcoal or briquettes add up).

Time to Cook: Medium-Slow. 30 minutes to prep the fire, then 10-30 minutes of cooking depending on the meat.

Best Foods: Thick steaks, pork chops, whole chickens (spatchcocked), and anything that benefits from a hard sear and smoky finish.

"Charcoal cooking is an active sport. You don't just turn a dial; you manage a living fire."

KAMADO & TANDOORI: ANCIENT HEAT

Now we are getting into the specialized territory. The Kamado grill (think the Big Green Egg or Kamado Joe) is a modern evolution of ancient clay cooking vessels. These heavy, ceramic, egg-shaped behemoths are marvels of thermodynamics. They insulate incredibly well, meaning a single load of charcoal can burn steadily for 15 hours or more.

Similarly, the Tandoor—a cylindrical clay or metal oven used heavily in South Asian cuisine—operates on extreme heat. The fire is built at the bottom, and the heavy walls radiate heat up to 900°F (480°C). Cooking in these vessels is an experience. In a Kamado, you can smoke a brisket at 225°F overnight, or open the vents and sear a ribeye at 700°F.

In a Tandoor, meats are skewered and lowered vertically into the intense heat, while flatbreads like naan are slapped directly onto the scorching interior walls, cooking in mere minutes. The learning curve for these grills is steep. Temperature control relies entirely on airflow management, and once a ceramic grill gets too hot, it takes hours to cool down. But for the dedicated enthusiast, the results are unparalleled in moisture retention and flavor.

Upfront Cost: \$300 (small/basic) to \$2,500+ (large, premium ceramic).

Cost to Run: Low per hour of cooking. They are incredibly efficient with charcoal.

Time to Cook: Variable. Slow to heat up (45 mins+), but can cook a pizza in 3 minutes or a pork shoulder in 12 hours.

Best Foods: Tandoori chicken, naan bread, slow-smoked briskets, whole turkeys, and high-heat wood-fired pizzas.

PELLET SMOKERS: THE TECH REVOLUTION

If you want the flavor of wood smoke with the convenience of an indoor oven, welcome to the era of the pellet grill. Brands like Traeger have revolutionized backyard BBQ by marrying old-school wood fire with microprocessors.

Here is how they work: you compress hardwood pellets (available in flavors like hickory, apple, and mesquite) into a hop-



per. An auger feeds them into a firebox where a hot rod ignites them. A fan stokes the fire and circulates the heat and smoke, much like a convection oven. You set a digital dial to 225°F, and the computer does the rest, feeding pellets exactly as needed to maintain that temperature.

It feels almost like cheating. Purists of offset smokers will claim pellet grills don't produce a deep enough "smoke ring" or bark. However, for the average home cook who wants to make competition-quality pulled pork while sleeping through the night or watching a football game, the pellet grill is a revelation. It removes the babysitting from barbecue.

Upfront Cost: \$400 to \$3,000+.

Cost to Run: Approx. \$1.00 to \$1.50 per hour of cooking (pellets cost around \$15-\$20 for a 20lb bag).

Time to Cook: Slow. This is the definition of "low and slow." Expect 4 to 16 hours depending on the cut of meat.

Best Foods: Brisket, ribs, pulled pork, smoked salmon, and even baked goods like pies (it is an oven, after all!).



Wood-fired and offset smokers

WOOD-FIRED & OFFSET SMOKERS

If the pellet grill is an automatic transmission, the traditional offset stick-burner is a manual transmission with no power steering. This is the domain of the true pitmaster. These heavy steel rigs feature a main cooking chamber and a smaller firebox attached to the side. You build a fire using actual split logs of hardwood.

Cooking on a wood-fired offset requires constant vigilance. You must monitor the fire every 30 to 45 minutes, adding wood to maintain a clean, thin, blue smoke. Too much wood, and the fire burns too hot or billows thick, bitter white smoke. Too little, and you lose your heat. It is a labor of love, a test of endurance, and a true craft.

The same applies to standalone wood-fired pizza ovens. Managing a rolling flame across the dome of a brick oven to perfectly blister a Neapolitan pizza in 90 seconds is an art form. The upfront investment is high, not just in dollars, but in time and learning.

Upfront Cost: \$500 to \$5,000+ (for heavy-gauge steel or masonry ovens).

Cost to Run: Highly variable depending on local firewood prices. Can be \$10-\$20+ per long cook.

Time to Cook: Very Slow. 1-2 hours to establish the coal bed, then 6-16 hours of active fire management.

Best Foods: Texas-style brisket, massive racks of ribs, whole hogs, and artisanal pizzas.

"If the pellet grill is an automatic transmission, the traditional offset stick-burner is a manual transmission with no power steering."

THE ELECTRIC & INDOOR REVOLUTION

Not everyone has a sprawling backyard. For apartment dwellers, condo owners, or those facing severe winter weather, electric grills and indoor air fryers have become culinary lifesavers.

Let's talk about the oven air fryer. Many modern ovens now come with an "air fry" setting, which is essentially high-speed convection. It circulates super-heated air around the food, mimicking the crisping effect of deep frying or intense grilling without the mess. It's fantastic for wings, roasted vegetables, and reheating leftovers to crispy perfection.

Outdoor electric grills have also come a long way since the early days of the George Foreman. Modern electric patio grills plug into a standard 120V outlet and use high-wattage heating elements to generate temperatures upwards of 500°F. There is no fire, no carbon monoxide, and no heavy tanks to lug around.

While you completely lose the authentic smoke flavor, you gain the ability to "grill" on a high-rise balcony where open flames are strictly prohibited by fire codes.

Upfront Cost: \$50 (basic air fryer) to \$350 (premium electric patio grill).

Cost to Run: Pennies. Electricity is vastly cheaper than propane or charcoal per hour of use.

Time to Cook: Fast. Rapid preheating and consistent, weather-independent heat.

Best Foods: Chicken wings (air fryer), sausages, thin-cut steaks, skewers, and grilled vegetables.

A MASTER OR A DISASTER?

So, where does this leave us? The truth is, there is no single "best" grill. The right choice depends entirely on your lifestyle, your budget, and how much time you want to dedicate to the craft of cooking.

If your goal is to feed a family of four quickly on a Wednesday evening before soccer practice, firing up an offset smoker is a disaster waiting to happen. Conversely, if you are hosting a summer blowout and want to impress your neighbors with a smoky, bark-crusted brisket, a propane grill simply won't get you to the finish line.

As for me? I embrace the chaos. I will continue to spark the gas grill for its undeniable convenience. I will light the charcoal when the weekend calls for a traditional sear. I will use the air fryer when the weather turns foul, and I will occasionally brave the tandoor when I crave the blistering heat of the old world.

Grilling is no longer a monolith. It is a multi-faceted culinary discipline. The matches, lighter fluid, and cold beer are still welcome, but they have been joined by Wi-Fi thermometers, augers, and convection fans. The fire has evolved, and so must we. So no matter what you grill with enjoy the experience of it this summer and send some pictures of your grilling experience to the editor at contact@niagaraaction.com

About the Author:

Sumit Majumdar is the President and CEO of Buffalo Biodiesel Inc. For over 20 years, he has been a leading voice in the fight against climate change, specializing in practical, heavy-industrial solutions for reducing carbon and methane emissions, and establishing sustainable circular economies.

HOME & LEISURE CONT.

The Grill Master's Guide to Ditching Foil



Sumit Majumdar

“Hey. I love thick aluminum foil that’s non stick. It’s the go to grill treat. Grudgingly I used Pyrex to grill items like asparagus instead my favourite wrap ups. I must admit I cheated using foil for my spicy garlic parmasean and jalapeño siracha shrimp and I will admit it’s delicious. But I vow to keep the sin of foil out of my life. and honestly wax paper or shrink wrap does not do well on the grill. either. -although several folks would argue otherwise.”

THE ALLURE OF ALUMINUM FOIL

Aluminum foil has long been the reigning champion of backyard barbecues for a few undeniable reasons. It offers excellent heat conductivity, allowing food to cook efficiently. Heavy-duty, non-stick foil is particularly prized because it locks in moisture, making it perfect for steaming delicate items like fish, asparagus, or those irresistible spicy garlic parmesan shrimp. It acts as a convenient barrier, preventing smaller items from falling through the grates and ostensibly making cleanup a breeze—just ball it up and toss it away. But therein lies the major flaw.

THE DIRTY TRUTH: NOT RECYCLABLE

While clean aluminum cans are highly recyclable, used aluminum foil from the grill is a completely different story. The primary issue is contamination.

When you grill with foil, it becomes coated in baked-on grease, sticky marinades, and charred food debris. Recycling facilities cannot process contaminated metal; the oils and food particles disrupt the melting and purification processes.

Furthermore, aluminum foil is incredibly thin. Even if you were to meticulously wash your foil (which defeats the convenience factor entirely), many municipal recycling programs still reject it. Thin sheets of foil can easily get caught in the gears of sorting machinery or simply burn up into ash when exposed to the high temperatures of an aluminum recycling furnace, rendering it completely unrecoverable. Consequently, it ends up in the trash as “thrown-away aluminum.”

THE COST OF CONVENIENCE

Buying aluminum foil is a recurring expense. A standard roll of heavy-duty, non-stick foil can cost anywhere from \$5 to \$10. Over a single active grilling season, a family might go through several rolls, spending upwards of \$30 to \$50 just to throw the product into the trash. While seemingly cheap in the moment, it is essentially throwing money directly into a landfill year after year.

CHAMPIONING TRUE RECYCLING

By switching to items like cast iron

skillets and stainless steel baskets, you transition from a disposable mindset to a reusable one. These tools require a higher upfront investment (perhaps \$20-\$40), but they last a lifetime with proper care, completely eliminating the recurring cost of foil.

More importantly, these alternatives are genuine champions of recycling. If a stainless steel basket or cast iron pan ever breaks or reaches the end of its incredibly long life, it can be taken to a scrap metal facility. Because they are thick, solid pieces of metal without ingrained food contamination issues (unlike thin, crumpled foil), they are 100% recyclable and can be melted down to create new products indefinitely, closing the loop and keeping the “sin of foil” out of our lives and landfills forever.

THE LANDFILL BURDEN

Every balled-up piece of grilling foil tossed in the trash goes directly to a landfill. Once buried, aluminum does not easily decompose. It takes approximately 400 years for aluminum foil to break down in a landfill environment. While it sits there for centuries, it occupies valuable space and represents a massive waste of the immense energy and resources originally required to mine and refine bauxite ore into aluminum.

A SHIFT IN TECHNIQUE

Ditching foil requires a slight shift in technique, but the rewards in sustainability (and often, flavor) are well worth it. Note: As I said, wax paper and shrink wrap are absolutely not suitable for the grill due to severe fire and melting hazards. Below is a guide to the best robust alternatives for your next barbecue, whether you're at home or out at the park.

THE STAGGERING SCALE OF ALUMINUM FOIL WASTE

Based on national municipal solid waste averages, contaminated aluminum packaging is a growing crisis. Factoring in current U.S. population growth and a steady increase in single-use consumption, the 50-year projections for landfill accumulation are severe. U.S. Aluminum Foil & Packaging Waste | Current Estimates (2026) | Projected in 50 Years (2076) |

ENERGY CONSUMPTION & CARBON FOOTPRINT OF U.S. FOIL PRODUCTION

Refining bauxite ore into thin aluminum foil requires an immense amount of electrical power and fuels heavy industrial greenhouse gas emissions. Looking at historical utilization versus long-term growth, the industrial strain scales up drastically.

THE FINAL CUT

At the end of the day, walking away from our aluminum foil habit isn't a sacrifice; it's an awakening. When we look at the staggering energy drained, the mountains of everlasting waste, and the hard-earned money burned for a mere illusion of convenience, the choice becomes profoundly simple. Ditching the foil isn't just a win for the environment or the economy—it's a return to the authentic, time-honored roots of cooking over an open flame.

It is simple common sense. By investing in a sturdy cast iron pan or a reliable steel basket, we are choosing a legacy of rich flavors and genuine sustainability over a toxic cycle of endless trash. Let's fire up our grills, share the incredible food we love with our families, and proudly leave the disposable "sin of foil" in the past where it belongs.

THE STAGGERING SCALE OF ALUMINUM FOIL WASTE

Based on national municipal solid waste averages, contaminated aluminum packaging is a growing crisis. Factoring in current U.S. population growth and a steady increase in single-use consumption, the 50-year projections for landfill accumulation are severe.

U.S. Aluminum Foil & Packaging Waste	Current Estimates (2026)	Projected in 50 Years (2076)
Annual U.S. Usage / Generation	~500,000 Tons	~1,050,000 Tons

Added to U.S. Landfills Annually	~420,000 Tons	~880,000 Tons
Cumulative Amount Sitting in Landfills	~18,000,000 Tons	~52,000,000 Tons

ENERGY CONSUMPTION & CARBON FOOTPRINT OF U.S. FOIL PRODUCTION

Refining bauxite ore into thin aluminum foil requires an immense amount of electrical power and fuels heavy industrial greenhouse gas emissions. Looking at historical utilization versus long-term growth, the industrial strain scales up drastically.

Timeline Period	Total Foil Produced	Energy Required (Electricity)	Carbon Emissions (CO ₂ e)
Current Annual Baseline (2026)	500,000 Tons	7.2 Billion kWh	5.8 Million Metric Tons
Cumulative History (To This Date)	~12.5 Million Tons	180 Billion kWh	143 Million Metric Tons
Next 50 Years (2026–2076 Projection)	~37.8 Million Tons	544 Billion kWh	434 Million Metric Tons

LOCATION	RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE	WHY IT WORKS & HOW TO USE IT
At Home	Cast Iron Skillets & Stainless Steel Baskets	Instead of Pyrex (which can shatter under direct, intense grill heat), use a pre-heated cast iron skillet for shrimp or fajitas. For asparagus and veggies, a stainless steel grill basket is unparalleled. It allows the smokey grill flavor to reach the food without letting it fall through the grates.
At Home	Cedar Planks	Excellent for fish. Soak the wood in water beforehand. It provides a non-stick surface and infuses the food with incredible woody flavor. Planks can often be reused a few times before being composted.
At the Park	Portable Stainless Steel Trays	When grilling at a public park, you want something lightweight but durable. Stainless steel grill toppers are perfect. They prevent your food from touching the potentially dirty public grates and are easy to throw in a plastic bag to take home and wash.
At the Park	Metal Skewers	Instead of wrapping meats and veggies in foil packets, thread them onto reusable stainless steel skewers. They are highly portable, easy to turn, and guarantee zero waste.

About the Author:
Sumit Majumdar is the President and CEO of Buffalo Biodiesel Inc. For over 20 years, he has been a leading voice in the fight against climate change, specializing in practical, heavy-industrial solutions for reducing carbon and methane emissions, and establishing sustainable circular economies.

ARTS,EVENTS&ENTERTAINMENT

Old Falls Street USA Prepares for Busy Summer Packed with Concerts, Festivals, Movies and New Downtown Carnival

Staff Reports

Downtown Niagara Falls is preparing for another busy tourism season as Old Falls Street USA unveiled a packed summer schedule featuring concerts, movies, festivals, food vendors and a brand-new carnival attraction designed to bring thousands of visitors into the heart of the city.

Stretching between Niagara Falls State Park and the Niagara Falls Convention Center, the three-block cobblestone district has become one of the city’s central hubs for seasonal entertainment, tourism activity and community gatherings.

Officials say this year’s lineup expands on previous summers with additional attractions and weekly programming intended to appeal to both tourists visiting the Falls and local residents looking for outdoor entertainment throughout the warmer months.

One of the largest additions for 2026 will be a new summer carnival scheduled for June 19th through June 21st.

The carnival will feature rides, games, food trucks and other midway-style attractions throughout Old Falls Street.

Organizers say the new event is intended to create another family-friendly destination in downtown Niagara Falls during peak tourism season.

The district will also host several major celebrations and signature events throughout the summer and early fall, including:

- Fourth of July Celebration — July 3rd through July 5th
- Rainbow City Pride — June 27th
- FIFA World Cup Watch Party — July 19th
- Empire State Ride Welcome Celebration benefiting Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center — August 1st
- Labor Day Celebration — September 4th through September 7th
- 17th Annual Blues Festival — September

19th
• Oktoberfest Celebration — September 26th

Officials said this year’s Blues Festival will also feature a new bourbon-tasting component as organizers continue expanding festival offerings.

In addition to larger festivals, Old Falls Street USA will continue its weekly summer entertainment schedule.

The Friday Night Concert Series will run every Friday from June 19th through August 28th between 5pm and 10and with headlining performances beginning at 7pm.

This year, the concert series is being sponsored by Sheraton Niagara Falls and relocated to the Third Street block near the newly opened Steelbound Brewery & Distillery, closest to the hotel.

The district’s Saturday Night Movie Series will also return from July 11th through August 9th.

Tourism officials say the programming plays a major role in creating activity and foot traffic throughout downtown Niagara Falls during the busy summer season.

“Creating engaging programming and events on Old Falls Street USA is an important part of making downtown Niagara Falls a vibrant destination for both local residents and visitors,” said John Percy, President and CEO of Destination Niagara. “These events help bring energy and activity to the downtown area while showcasing everything that makes Niagara Falls USA such a special place to visit. Activities on Old Falls Street USA enhance both the local community and the tourism economy of Niagara County.”

Officials with New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation said the district helps showcase local entertainment and attractions for the millions of tourists who travel to Niagara Falls each year.

“Niagara Falls State Park is proud to support programming on Old Falls Street. We love



showing off all the great entertainment, tasty food and fun our community has to offer to the millions of visitors that come to town each summer! Kudos to the team for putting together another incredible summer of festivities!” said Angela Berti, Director of Public Affairs.

Leaders with USA Niagara Development Corporation described Old Falls Street as a key connection point between the state park and downtown businesses.

“Old Falls Street is the heartbeat of downtown Niagara Falls, serving as a vital link between our world-class state park and our local business community,” said Anthony Vilardo, USA Niagara Development Corp. President. “By offering a diverse summer lineup of free, family-friendly events and new attractions, we are creating a more walkable, vibrant and welcoming atmosphere for residents and visitors alike. Governor Hochul and USA Niagara are proud to support Old Falls Street and its programming, which continues to drive foot traffic to our downtown corridors and support

our regional economy.”

Mayor Robert Restaino said the entertainment lineup also provides a major boost for restaurants, bars and small businesses throughout downtown.

“The annual summer entertainment and festivities offered on Old Falls Street provides a central gathering place for area residents and visitors and, for many, a great way to cap off their day of visiting our various attractions and venues,” said Restaino. “Showcasing the liveliness of downtown through these celebrations drives more people to our small businesses, especially restaurants and bars, generating significant revenues that are critical to their long-term viability.”

Officials noted that all events on Old Falls Street USA are free and open to the public, although rides, games, food and beverages purchased onsite will carry separate costs.

Additional information and the complete summer events schedule can be found at Old Falls Street USA.

✦ BUFFALO-NIAGARA EVENTS ✦

JUNE 1 - 30

1	Triumph	– Darien Lake Amphitheater
2	Big Shrimp	– Buffalo Iron Works
3	Air Supply	– Riviera Theatre
3	Prince Daddy & the Hyena	– Rec Room
4	Caligula Blushed	– Buffalo Iron Works
4	Tapestry	– Riviera Theatre
5	John Papa Gros Band	– Town Ballroom
5	East Aurora Chamber Music Festival	– Corner of Main and Maple Streets
6	Buffalo Gore Fest 2026	– Buffalo Iron Works
6	Chris Smither	– Asbury Hall, The 9th Ward
6	AWAKEN	– Riviera Theatre
6	Devo	– Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Great Lawn
6	Trousdale	– Rec Room
7	Creed Fisher	– Buffalo Iron Works
7	Alison Krauss & Union Station	– Fallsview Casino Resort, OLG Stage
8	Robyn Hitchcock	– Sportsmen’s Tavern
8	Forrest Frank	– KeyBank Center
8	Classic Vinyl Live! With Jeff Miers: Miles Davis “On The Corner”	– Sportsmen’s Tavern
9	The Beths	– Asbury Hall, The 9th Ward
9	Shwayze	– Buffalo Iron Works

10	Journey	– KeyBank Center
10	Arts Fishing Club	– Buffalo Iron Works
10	Tyler Childers	– Darien Lake Amphitheater
11	The Vindys	– Buffalo Iron Works
12	Rug Burn, Boy Jr, Harepin Turn, Muddle, Blaised and Confused	– Buffalo Iron Works
12	Beach Party Boys	– Rec Room
12-13	Coco Montoya	– Seneca Niagara Casino
13	YYNOT	– Buffalo Iron Works
13	Linger	– Riviera Theatre
14	Black Uhuru	– Electric City
15	Yarn	– Sportsmen’s Tavern
15	Puscifer	– Fallsview Casino
16	Sawery	– Rec Room
16	Marcus King Band	– Fallsview Casino Resort, OLG Stage
16	The Toadlords	– Rec Room
17	Young the Giant	– Fallsview Casino Resort, OLG Stage
17	An Evening with Charlie Greer	– Rec Room
18	mck (formerly Machine Gun Kelly)	– Darien Lake Amphitheater
19	Eric Hutchinson	– Riviera Theatre
19	Honey Island Swamp Band	– Sportsmen’s Tavern

20	The Ten Band	– Electric City
20	Dark Star Orchestra	– fallsview Casino Resort, OLG Stage
20	Nearly Nicks	– Riviera Theatre
21	David Gilmour	– KeyBank Center
22	Ryan Davis and The Roadhouse Band	– Buffalo Iron Works
22	Leftöver Crack	– Rec Room
25	Judy Collins	– Asbury Hall
25	Flo Rida	– Fallsview Casino Resort, OLG Stage
25-26	Dreamer	– Riviera Theatre
26	Of Montreal	– Asbury Hall
26	James McMurtry & the Martial Law Review	– Sportsmen’s Tavern
28	Don McLean	– Riviera Theatre
29	Lespecial	– Buffalo Iron Works
30	More Than Me	– Buffalo Iron Works
30	Like Combs	– Riviera Theatre
30	Classic Albums Live performs The Wall	– Fallsview Casino Resort, OLG Stage
30	ABBA Revisited	– Fallsview Casino Resort, OLG Stage
31	Samantha Fish	– Asbury Hall

Things to plant in your garden

N B U R W W S O H K A E C A R R O T S Y
 G A L X S F V I O M M F S M N E Y B K P
 H S T R A W B E R R I E S Q C U S E F M
 C A S Y T J Z T E K C A N T A L O U P E
 U J I O H P L I G I D L H M Y V T I C G
 C A Y P B R W F A Y P E F X N C W D L G
 U G C G P R A X N K E P U M P K I N S P
 M A A P O V O D O W A T E R M E L O N L
 B R B A T X K C I E S B O Z C R P C F A
 E L B R A Q X B C S U A E U C S U O H N
 R I A S T Q K A V O H X Z C E A V R F T
 S C G L O B V S H Z L E F C T V Z N M F
 Z S E E E C E I R G D I S H Z B B X Z X
 F W Q Y S Y I L P C A U L I F L O W E R
 K Z R J Y N F L L E G F S N O M M K A K
 T O M A T O E S A B P A J I D N D K F C
 N P M S Q U A S H N E P Y C W P I A D H
 O S B Y W O U F P Y T A E T A J L O K B
 L H A Z F K Z Z W E N R N R H Y L O N M
 R F E Q V Y E S N R Z K O S S G R O A S

Strawberries	Cauliflower	Watermelon	Basil
Cucumbers	Tomatoes	Zucchini	Corn
Radishes	Potatoes	Broccoli	Peas
Cantaloupe	Pumpkins	Peppers	Dill
Cilantro	Parsley	Squash	
Eggplant	Onions	Oregano	

Sudoku

3	2		1
1	4		
	1	3	
		1	

1	2		
4		2	1
	4		2
2		3	

3		4	1
	4		2
		2	

			4
4	1		3
1	4	3	
	2	4	



ARIES (March 21 – April 19)

ARIES (March 21 – April 19)
This week rewards patience and persistence. You may feel eager to push ahead quickly, but careful planning leads to better outcomes. Financial matters or work-related responsibilities require extra attention. By the weekend, a conversation helps clear up lingering uncertainty.

TAURUS (April 20 – May 20)

A calmer, steadier rhythm settles in after a busy stretch. Focus on maintaining balance and following through on recent goals. Others may rely on your advice or support more than usual. Trust your instincts when making personal or financial decisions.

GEMINI (May 21 – June 20)

Your season continues to bring energy, confidence, and opportunity. Communication flows naturally, making this a strong week for networking, social events, or presenting ideas. Stay flexible when plans shift unexpectedly — spontaneity may lead to exciting outcomes.

CANCER (June 21 – July 22)

You may feel the need to slow down and recharge emotionally. Reflection and rest are just as important as productivity right now. Pay attention to your intuition, especially in personal relationships. A quieter approach helps you regain clarity.

LEO (July 23 – August 22)

Special connections and teamwork bring momentum this week. Collaboration may help solve a challenge that once felt overwhelming. Stay open to advice from others, even if you usually prefer leading on your own. A positive opportunity could arrive through an unexpected source.

VIRGO (August 23 – September 22)

Career and responsibilities remain front and center. Your hard work is beginning to attract attention, even if progress feels gradual. Stay organized and avoid overloading your schedule. Consistency now creates stronger results later.

LIBRA (September 23 – October 22)

A fresh perspective may inspire new goals or future plans. Travel, education, or learning opportunities could become more appealing. Keep an open mind when unexpected changes arise. Flexibility helps you discover possibilities you hadn't considered before.

SCORPIO (October 23 – November 21)

Financial or emotional matters may require honest reflection. Avoid avoiding important conversations — clarity brings relief. Trust your instincts, but verify details before making commitments. A sense of stability returns as the week progresses.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 – December

21) Relationships take priority this week. Cooperation and understanding help strengthen personal and professional connections. Someone close may offer valuable insight or encouragement. Avoid rushing to conclusions before hearing the full story.

CAPRICORN (December 22 – January 19)

DAILY routines and responsibilities demand discipline. Staying organized helps reduce stress and keeps you focused on long-term goals. Small improvements to your schedule or habits can make **a major difference by the end of the week.**

AQUARIUS (January 20 – February 18)

Creativity and enjoyment become important themes. Spend time on hobbies, social activities, or projects that genuinely excite you. Inspiration may arrive unexpectedly, especially through conversations or new experiences. Let yourself enjoy the moment without overthinking it.

PISCES (February 19 – March 20)

Home and family matters move into focus. You may feel motivated to create more comfort or stability in your personal life. Meaningful conversations strengthen important relationships. Trust that small efforts now will have lasting emotional benefits.