

By BRIAN ACKLEY
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Opinionated lines, ominous signs and personal whines....

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Maybe the Seneca Nation of Indians owes Judge Makowski a quiet “thanks” for his recent decision regarding its Cheektowaga casino plans.

It might not be time quite yet to bring out the plywood and nails, but there might be at least a little empirical data on whether or not the Buffalo Niagara region is a little too awash in poker tables and slot machines. Officials at Fairgrounds Gaming and Racing, the recently opened “racino” in Hamburg, are now admitting that payment projections of \$35 million a year to New York State will be significantly lower than that, at least at the pace the gambling hall is currently on.

The state payout now looks like it might be closer to about \$20 million, meaning significantly less slot wheels are being spun there than the experts thought. This on the heels of Batavia Downs deciding it made more economic sense to simply stay dark than become the area’s third “racino”. The Hamburg facility will still make money, for sure, and they have already started to retool, realizing that it is a more local, niche facility than a big regional draw. Still, like a dealer getting twenty-one when you’re sitting with a pair of ten’s, it’s a little jolt of reality that maybe the road to economic revitalization is not paved with casino chips.

Nation President Rickey Armstrong’s threat of simply taking the tribe’s wampum and returning to the reservation may not be totally idle. Pouring money into their existing Niagara Falls and Salamanca facilities, insuring they become true “destination” casinos, instead of a third Erie County site, might indeed be a smarter play.

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No kidding, according to a local weekly publication devoted to the arts, Niagara University is looking to hire, are you ready for this, a mime instructor. The potential pool of applicants might be much deeper than they might think.

Afterall, whether it be at the town, city, county or state level, there is no shortage of officials and alleged leaders who are wonderful at saying nothing while going through a whole series of interesting contortions. Of course, if only voters would be willing to pay a little more attention, more of them should be looking for jobs than actually are.

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Hard to know what Joe Mesi got his dad for Father’s Day, but the best gift of all would have been a simple note that said, “no mas.” The Mesi camp has gone from potential to pathetic in the space of a few months. It might be under a tent off Niagara Falls Boulevard, but trust us, Mesi will box again. It’s a sport filled with more loopholes than Western New York has strawberries in June. He’ll find a place to ply his trade again because, well, it’s boxing. But precisely because we all care – apparently more than the Mesi’s themselves -- how many Western New York supporters, in good conscience, will still be around to watch?

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Most political quotes these days are the equivalent of Kleenex: use it once and throw it away. And, if you're really lucky, no one will notice. But the words of Erie County Legislator Timothy Wroblewski, a West Seneca Democrat, really struck to the very core of a myopic mindset that cripples even reasonable ideas.

"This is a huge leap of faith, and I am not prepared to take a huge leap of faith," he said in his initial opposition to a city-county parks consolidation plan." Huge leap? The 10-5 vote, finally in favor, hardly qualified as even a baby step. When even a modest, sensible proposal draws a reaction like this, we should all get ready to go down with the ship.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at www.wnynewspapers.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)