

COLUMNS

Rebounding Buffalo deserving of the buzz

BUFFALO, NY – Classic rockers The Rig are belting out back-to-back tunes by Scarborough's Barenaked Ladies as disheartened Sabres' fans make their way into the century-old industrial building turned bar next door to their NHL rink.

Stouffville native and retired Sabre tough guy Brad May is wall-to-wall on the big flat screens, dissecting the loss to the Florida Panthers on the post-game show for anyone who can hear over that Brian Wilson song.

Above the nearby thruway hangs a billboard for a Sabres' credit card with the message: "Accepted in Toronto. Begrudgingly".

You can run away from the GTA for a few days, but you can never fully escape.

I owed Buffalo an apology. Thirty-three years ago, while driving home from our honeymoon, we stumbled into what had to be Buffalo's ugliest hood. Traffic was horrendous. Buildings appeared to be falling down in front of us. And when we asked for directions, the locals were not up for Miss Congenial.

I've made return trips in between. Caught a couple of Sabres' games over the years and a Broadway show at magnificent Shea's Performing Arts Center in the Theatre District – yes, Buffalo's got one. And it's getting plenty of buzz.

Canalside, on other side of the Sabres' arena (First Niagara Center), is a \$300-million playground added to the downtown waterfront. It hosts more than 1,000 events annually and, on the day we popped by, former Today Show co-host and CBS news anchor Katie Couric was there.

Now Yahoo News' global news anchor, Couric was at the spiffy lakeside skating, ice-biking and curling rink filming part of the series "Rebuilding America," on cities on the



Off The Top
with *Jim Mason*

rebound.

Buffalo fits the bill. Its skyline isn't filled with condos and cranes like Toronto. Folks seem to live in the burbs here.

Parking spots are \$2 an hour — and available.

But like Hogtown, it's a city of neighbourhoods and ethnic diversity.

And change. The Stouffville Spirit play the Jr. Sabres in the spiffy new \$200 million HarborCenter, next to where the big Sabres skate. Hotels have gone up in the area.

A vacant grain elevator is home to a stunning, nightly light show, visible for miles.

There are vacant buildings still, but there are also architectural gems, including city hall. Head to the top of the 32-storey Art Deco beauty for a free panoramic look at Western New York and the Niagara region of Ontario. This isn't the CN Tower. We were the only ones up here.

The clerk at our hotel sings the praises of the new Big Ditch Brewing Company.

Unemployment is the lowest it's been since 2007. Homes are selling at a record clip.

People who grew up here and moved away are coming back.

You can see why. Sorry, Buffalo.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune. Follow him on Twitter @stouffeditor

Resolving to take the pledge

Resolutions are theoretically codes of conduct meant to be enforced by the designer over a period of 365 days.

As conscientious as the planner may be, few pledges are sustained more than a month. Sometimes less.

Truth is, the whole procedure has developed into a bit of a joke.

"Why make them if you can't keep them?" most folks say. This being the modern-day rationale, few go through the imprudent process. And why blame them if the intent isn't there?

Being of the 'old school', I like objectives. For they provide one with goals to reach and commitments to keep. Here are a few of mine:

At home: With hydro rates on the increase, all areas where no one's sitting or standing, including the bathroom, will be subjected to a 'lights out' directive.

That I never again will make a pet of an orphaned house-mouse who's eventually destined for a trip to mouse-heaven.

That I'll be discouraged from covering our back yard with remnants of bread and buns that only serve as enticements from every raccoon and skunk in Stouffville.

That I'll place two hearing aids on my Santa Claus wish-list next December.

That I'll remember never to lock the car with the keys left in the ignition.

That I'll clear out shirts and sweaters I never wear from an overloaded clothes closet, including a 20-year-old Maple Leafs' jersey.

That I'll refrain from switching channels while my wife's watching The Bold and the Beautiful.

That I'll never again go to Tim Hortons for coffee and leave the hot water sink



Roaming Around
with *Jim Thomas*

tap running.

That I'll immediately turn off my computer when my wife honks the dinner horn.

Truth is, the whole procedure has developed into a bit of a joke.

At church: With my front wheel drive Chevy, I'll never again do a Sunday morning 'donut' in the church parking lot (unless it's empty). When agreeing to conduct a summer church service, I'll request two months advance notice to prepare a sermon.

I'll never again wear my Markham Fair fedora to church and neglect to take it off in the sanctuary.

When singing in a Father's Day choir, I'll remember not to sit down when others stand up or stand up when others sit down.

When the offering plate is passed, I'll be sure to hand the usher my donation envelope rather than my Visa card.

When placing a glass of water at the pulpit, I'll first check to see if there's a bug in the bottom.

At the crosswalk: I'll ask the Dept. of Public Works to install a mobile outhouse at the corner of Millard Street and Glad Park Avenue, so

I don't continually disrupt the work schedule of custodians at Glad Park School.

I'll personally thank all students and their parents for their incredible generosity at Christmas.

At the conclusion of the June school term, I'll present every boy and girl with a gold star honouring their acceptance of my 'Wait, Watch and Walk' decree.

At Parkview Home: As a bi-weekly volunteer, I'll attempt to learn and remember the first names of all residents on three floors.

While guiding wheelchairs between the elevators and Founders' Hall, I'll refrain from exceeding maximum speeds of four kilometres an hour.

With resident approval, I'll accept the approved policy of hugs and handshakes, but refrain from applying an occasional kiss.

I'll continue to compliment home staff and custodians as shining examples of care and cleanliness. I'll arrive on time and leave any time after a post-worship visitation time.

At O'Neill Funeral Home: As a part-time funeral assistant, I'll show greater appreciation of the family atmosphere displayed by the general manager; the director and other members of staff. I'll make sure the front doors are never pre-locked before I leave.

On paper routes: That, health permitting, I'll continue my carrier duties on four Sun-Tribune newspaper routes one more year. That, for the sake of my own safety, I'll bypass all homes accommodating hostile dogs.

These should be pledges enough for 2016. A year from now I'll report the results.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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