





{ Story: Audrey R. Browka }

{ Photos: Shaun Maciejewski and Linda Prinzi }

There's no place like home

Canisius College alumni return to their roots

Matthew E. '91 and Susan (Tychinski) Raiff '91 will never forget their daughter's first birthday party. The family lived in northern Virginia at the time. Since none of their relatives lived nearby, the Raiff's invited six of their closest friends to the party.

No one came.

"Susan and I just looked at each other and said 'something is seriously wrong with this picture,'" recalls Matthew Raiff. "We realized then that our priorities were backwards. We needed to move home so our daughter could be close to family."

Four months later, the Raiff's moved into their new home in Orchard Park, NY. What Matthew and Susan did not know was that they became part of a growing number of Canisius 'repats.'



Buffalonians take advantage of winter, during an evening ice skate at Rotary Rink, on Main Street in downtown Buffalo.



“A repat or repatriate is someone who moved away from Buffalo but returned because they realized there’s no place like home,” explains Marti Gorman, a volunteer with Revitalize Buffalo who helped coin the repat term. Interestingly, after 32 years, Gorman became a repat, herself, when her daughter was recruited by the Canisius College synchronized swim team. “Starin turned down Cornell to come to Canisius because she fell in love with the campus and the city. We both did.”

Many Canisius alumni tell a similar love story about Buffalo.

“I moved home because I believe Buffalo is on the cusp of a turnaround and I wanted to be part of it,” says **Michael J. Pietkiewicz '92**.

For five years, Pietkiewicz worked as a Washington, D.C.-based staff member to then Congressman Jack Quinn (R-Hamburg). Throughout his tenure, Pietkiewicz endured

jokes and jabs about the causes that contributed to Buffalo’s population plummet: its Rust Belt reputation, its unpredictable winters and its ailing economy.

Although Buffalo is the state’s second largest city, U.S. Census figures indicate the population peaked in 1950 with 580,000 people. By the mid-1990s, a steady exodus of people began. Today, the result is a population cut in half: 290,000.

But as **Matthew K. Enstice MBA '04** learned, big things can and do happen in a city this size. A Canisius repat, Enstice worked in Los Angeles and New York City for Lorne Michaels, an entertainment executive perhaps best known for NBC’s “Saturday Night Live.” Enstice moved home in 1999 and now serves as executive director of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC). It is a

position which puts him at the forefront of the plan to develop the BNMC into a world-class center for clinical research, and academic and entrepreneurial excellence.

“Sure, I was doing very fun, exciting things in New York and L.A. but it meant nothing to the communities there,” Enstice says. “What we’re doing with the medical campus in Buffalo is having a huge impact on the community. Buffalo just has so much more to offer in terms of making a difference.”

Enstice works with the leadership of the BNMC partners, which include Buffalo Medical Group, Hauptman-Woodward, Kaleida Health, Roswell Park Cancer Institute and Buffalo Hearing & Speech Center, among others, to create new jobs in the life sciences industry. His efforts have been an enormous contributor to the revitalization of Buffalo’s economy, which is emerging from the industrial age and into the information and life-sciences age.

Since its establishment five years ago, the BNMC has secured \$14 million in federal funding and \$20 million in state support. It’s grown to become a four million square foot life sciences complex that employs more than 8,000 people, has more than one million patient visits annually and reports \$1.2 billion in economic output and impact to the community. Most recently, the BNMC completed the \$200 million development of a trio of new medical buildings: the Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute, Roswell Park’s Center for Genetics and Pharmacology and the University at

Buffalo’s Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Life Sciences.

“When you talk about the future of Buffalo and its workforce, you need to talk about the life sciences industry,” says Pietkiewicz, assistant vice president for government relations at the University at Buffalo. Pietkiewicz passed up an opportunity to work for then New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani to come back home.

“Working for the university is a form of public service because you

A Revitalized Buffalo

After decades of dormancy, the city of Buffalo shows signs of life

- New upscale loft apartments
- Inner harbor canal reconstruction
- Naval & Serviceman’s Museum
- Vehicular traffic to return to Main Street
- Development of downtown buildings into mixed-use projects



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• Matt Enstice MBA '04



As executive director of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Canisius repat **Matt Enstice MBA '04** is at the forefront of developing the BNMC into a world-class center for clinical research, and academic and entrepreneurial excellence.



Canisius repat Lee Wortham '79 returned to Buffalo in September 2005 after the bulk of his banking career was spent in New York City and London.

really are working for the betterment of the community," says Pietkiewicz, who works to secure federal funds for such projects as U.B.'s Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Life Sciences. "If we create the number of jobs we anticipate will be required, we will also need a pipeline of students and graduates who can fill these positions." He adds, "I was thrilled, for example, to learn that Canisius has a Bioinformatics Program and that it is investing in the development of a new life sciences building at BlueCross BlueShield."

Such development spurs more of the same.

Many of downtown Buffalo's aging historic buildings, and long vacant loading docks and schools are now new, upscale loft apartments. The first phase of an inner harbor canal reconstruction project is near fruition and tangible movement is underway on a new naval and serviceman's museum. Downtown Main Street's pedestrian mall is expected to see the return of vehicular traffic as early as 2008. Two out-of-town developers have each purchased empty or underused city buildings with plans for major mixed-use projects. A \$15 million transformation of the former Federal Reserve Building, on Delaware Avenue, is now the new business headquarters for New Era cap company and its 285 employees. And renovation of the Dulski Building downtown by Uniland Development, with nearly a half-million square feet, will be the largest office building to rise in Buffalo in 20 years.

"The residential refurbishment of old downtown properties, a friendlier, more stabilized city government and business incentive programs arranged by the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise (BNE), the Buffalo Niagara Partnership and the Empire Zone are all making Buffalo a much more attractive place from a business perspective," says Carl J. Montante '64, president and managing director of Uniland Development Company.

Indeed. The BNE reports \$258.2 million in new capital investment in 2006. That's a 12.7 percent increase from 2005. The business development and regional marketing organization also says more than 11,000 jobs were retained or created between 2003-2005. That number includes 2,500 service jobs added by insurer GEICO Corp.

"I was taken aback and extremely impressed by the unified and professionally aggressive business voice coming from the Buffalo Niagara region," states Lee C. Wortham '79. Wortham was recruited back to Buffalo in September 2005 after the bulk of his banking career was spent in New York City and London. Since Wortham's time away, the Buffalo business community has changed, says local business owner and Canisius repat Ronald A. Raccuia '90.

"The business community is much more receptive today to progressive thinkers and companies that want to do things out-of-the-box," he says.

In 1993, Raccuia sidelined a successful sports marketing career in Miami to return home and establish Integrity Distribution. The office supply company, which provides everything from pens and paper to office furniture, was one of the first in the industry to become a stockless dealer. Raccuia's newest business venture, AdPro Team Sports, is a national distributor of sporting goods apparel and corporate promotional items. Both companies are housed in a city warehouse that has "unheard of rent rates" and "direct access to all major highways."

"The best part of doing business in Buffalo is that you can keep your expenses down," notes Raccuia. "The cost of living is lower. Salaries are lower. And the work pool is more talented."

In fact, labor market and industry assessments annually rank the region's highly educated, skilled and available workforce among the best in the nation.



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“When business decision-makers look to make a location decision, finding a highly skilled, trained and dependable workforce is first on their list,” explains **Therese J. (Angilella) Hickok '96**, director of marketing and communications for the BNE. “The fact that we have 30 colleges and universities in the Western New York region, which graduate some 20,000 students every year, is a huge selling point for this area.”

Education, skill set and reliability aren't just job descriptions in the region – they're part of the mindset, adds Wortham. “I don't care if you're a surgeon or a steel mill worker, there is a blue collar mentality in Buffalo and that is a huge asset to this city. We work like dogs here to get the job done and get it done right. People never really think about Buffalo in that way.”

The Buffalo Niagara Enterprise hopes to reverse that.

“Buffalo is prime territory to do business,” says Hickok. Those sectors of the local economy that hold the greatest potential for growth are the life sciences, advanced manufacturing, Canadian/international business expansion and customer service.

Then there is the virtual marketplace. “If someone has a job that doesn't require an office presence, only broadband, then why not live in Buffalo,” asks Marti Gorman, referring to the city's telecommunication infrastructure, which houses 11 major fiber-optic trunk lines.

And if they need to travel? The Buffalo Niagara International Airport offers professionals a very efficient and inexpensive way to conduct business. “Access to transportation is one of the first things clients ask about,” explains Hickok. “Knowing that our airport is easy to navigate through, that you can get a flight when you need one, and that there are a number of inexpensive, direct flights to larger, more expensive markets, is a great asset to the community.”

The airport provides Matthew Raiff with the ability to work in Washington, D.C. and live in Orchard Park, NY. The economic litigation support firm he co-founded (Bates White LLC) is headquartered in the nation's capital. For more than three years, he commuted to D.C. on Mondays and returned to Buffalo on Fridays. Now, thanks to a virtual office Raiff opened in Orchard Park, he spends just three days a week in D.C.

Buffalo will roll out the welcome mat for more repats like Raiff, Raccuia, Wortham,



Buffalo business owner and Canisius repat **Ron Raccuia '90** houses Integrity Distribution and AdPro Team Sports in a city warehouse, which has “unheard of rent rates” and “direct access to all major highways.”

Enstice and Pietkiewicz. Newcomers, notes Gorman, are less likely to be burdened by decades of unrealized projects and more apt to view the region with a fresh outlook. She maintains, “Repat bring the four Es back to Buffalo: experience, energy, excitement and expertise.”

Lorianne E. Pereira '97, DO, has all four. Pereira, who specializes in the treatment of stroke victims, spent 10 years at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, where she studied and worked with renowned physicians in her field. But when Kenmore Mercy Hospital needed a director for its new stroke center, Pereira knew it was time to come home. She was offered the position in June 2006.

“I knew my experience in Philadelphia could help make a difference in this community, particularly since this area actually has the highest incident rate of stroke in the country,” says Pereira.

In a few short months, Kenmore Mercy has created a viable stroke center. Under Pereira's leadership, the center treats an increasing number of stroke patients each month, continues to attract new, out-of-town specialists to Buffalo, and provides more out-reach stroke prevention programs. And while

Target Industries*

Six sectors of the Buffalo Niagara economy that hold the greatest potential for growth

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Canadian/International Business Expansion
- Customer Service Centers
- Hospitality/Tourism
- Life Sciences
- Logistics

*Information provided by Buffalo Niagara Enterprise

the Kenmore Mercy Stroke Center is much smaller than its Philadelphia counterpart, Pereira has no regrets.

“Many of my colleagues in Philadelphia couldn’t believe I was coming back here,” she says. “But I felt as though everything I learned in Philadelphia could be applied here and that it would only contribute to the growth of the hospital and the city. Besides, my family is all here and you can’t beat the cost of living in Buffalo!”

As **Deborah (Witkowski) Leaper '78** knows, family and quality of life are two powerful points that pull people back to Buffalo. Leaper lived in Los Angeles for two decades, where she climbed the corporate ladder and then opened her own image consulting business. She visited Buffalo once or twice a year but never imagined she would return for good.

“My father’s death really brought home to me what was important,” says Leaper. “I realized that no matter where we are in life, we all want to be loved and the only place you can truly feel that is at home, where your roots lie.”

After life in the big city, Leaper came to appreciate the best of Buffalo: the low cost of living, the change of seasons, the city’s many cultural and architectural treasures, and the ability to get almost anywhere in 20 minutes or less. But the biggest reward, says Leaper, is that Buffalo offers a sense of belonging not found in any other city.

“When I decided that I was going to move back to Buffalo, I started calling people I hadn’t talked with in 20 years, many of them Canisius graduates,” she recalls. “Right away they were there to offer help. It was as though our friendships never missed a beat.”

Certainly, the true character of the “City of Good Neighbors” rests with its residents. Canisius repats describe Buffalonians as



One of the natural wonders of the world, Niagara Falls is the region’s greatest attraction, with more than 12 million visitors annually.

friendly, personable, courteous and concerned. Lee Wortham’s word of choice is resilient.

“There’s a toughness about Buffalonians – a fight, an attitude that I just love,” he says. “Despite some of the setbacks this city has seen, people just refuse to give up on Buffalo. It’s almost a matter of personal, professional and civic pride.”

Matthew Raiff adds, “The people here are genuine.”

It’s a hometown quality that he and Susan celebrate along with the birthdays of their daughter, Elizabeth (7) and son, Matthew (5) in their house full of family and friends.

“What happened on my daughter’s first birthday in Virginia would never occur in Buffalo. We have family and friends here who we can call on any given day and trust they will be there if we need them. People here are driven by community, family and friendships and that’s why we came home.”



After 10 years at a large Philadelphia hospital, Lorianne E. Pereira '97, DO, brought her expertise back to Buffalo to become director of Kenmore Mercy Hospital’s new stroke center.



Selling Points*

Life in the Buffalo Niagara region offers many perks:

- Buffalo is one of the 25 most wired cities in the U.S.
- Employee absenteeism and turnover rates are lower than in most parts of the country.
- The region’s average daily commute time is 19 minutes; the lowest among 50 major urban areas .
- The median sale price for a single-family home in Buffalo Niagara is \$106,000 .