

Pass the ‘melk’ — Buffalo accent is music to our ears

Take a moment to clear your throat and inhale a nice, deep breath. Then, read the next paragraph aloud:

“Ma’am? Can I get a half-pound of Krakus ham? It’s for my aunt in Tonawanda, after Mass at St. Stanislaus.”

Look around. Did any nearby crystal goblets shatter? Did the cat hiss at you? Did Siri wake up on your Apple Watch and try to order you an emergency kielbasa?

If any of those things happened, it probably means you hit those “o’s” and “a’s” in the familiar flat, high nasal tone that we sometimes think of as the Buffalo accent. To the uninited, it can come at you harder than the “goal” horn at a Sabres game.

Maybe like me, you no longer have a strong Buffalo accent. This might be because, like me, you were also a youthful ingrate who did not yet appreciate the sharp vowel sounds of your homeland. So when you went away to college, you tried to bleach Buffalo out of your larynx, because every time you spoke up in class, somebody from Ohio with an irritating grin said, “Wait. Say that AGAIN!”

I can’t believe I used to care what anyone from Ohio thought of me.

But it’s true. I was embarrassed by the linguistic tics that marked me as a son of the 716. It made me stand out. It was not the kind of attention I wanted when away from home for the first time at the age of 18.

A few months after I

started college, I came home for a visit and scandalized my grandmother.

“Do you want me to get a fire going in the fireplace?” I asked her.

She looked at me like I was a clone grown in a lab.

“What?” she said. I had drawn out the “EYE” in “fire,” when she was used to something closer to “fyre.”

“You’ve changed,” she said.

Gram didn’t really care how I talked. She just wanted to bust my chops a little. Lord knows I deserved it. I had come home from northeast Ohio — just three hours away — like a guy who spent a semester at Oxford and returned sounding like he’d spent his whole life choking on an ascot.

But self-consciously changing the way I spoke was more than just a youthful affectation. I didn’t know it at the time, but I was enacting one of the most basic human instincts: adapting how we speak to fit in.

Jennifer Schechter, a sociolinguist and doctoral candidate at the University at Buffalo, teaches undergrads about exactly this. She told me her students often have “a-ha” moments when they realize they do speak with an accent, even if they’ve always thought of themselves as sounding “normal.”

“I have students from Rochester insisting that the way they talk is drastically different from how their classmates from Buffalo talk,” she said.

Schechter, who hails from Michigan, finds that amusing but understandable.

John Beard knows this feeling. The retired TV

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Family-run marina slams utility’s bid for eminent domain

STEPHEN T. WATSON
News Staff Reporter

The adult children who took over a small Town of Tonawanda marina after their father was electrocuted there three years ago say National Grid’s new legal effort to grab control of a portion of their property threatens the future of their business.

The utility says it needs to use the power of eminent domain to improve access to its electrical equipment near the Mid River Marina property and ensure the marina’s continued safe operation.

To win its case, the utility must prove this application of the law serves a public good.

“National Grid is advocating for a minimally disruptive reconfiguration of our current right of way that would benefit both the marina and our customers,” David Bertola, a spokesperson for the utility, said in a statement.

James M. Bognar Sr. was killed in an industrial accident in 2022 and the Bognar family and National Grid have each said the other bears responsibility for his death.

The marina’s operators paint the long-running dispute as a costly legal fight between a small, family-owned business and a multibillion-dollar, international corporation. They say they fear a successful eminent domain filing could force them to shut down.

“This is our world. This is our livelihood,” Suzanne Bognar-Langefeld, one of Bognar’s daughters, said at a recent public hearing that drew several dozen supporters of the family. “We’ve been fighting for our lives against a Goliath.”

Trading blame for death

The fatal accident happened on Aug. 3, 2022, at the marina at 3670 River Road near the former Huntley generating station.

Bognar, 73, a Grand Island resident known as Mike, was operating a mobile crane, used to lift boats in and out of

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Cheektowaga school district faulted over water lead testing

MACKENZIE SHUMAN
News Staff Reporter

A Cheektowaga school district allegedly did not properly test and remediate drinking water sources for lead pollution, according to an audit by the Office of the State Comptroller.

Cheektowaga-Maryvale Union Free School District failed to sample all possible drinking water sources in its buildings, did not have a plan detailing all actions taken to remediate lead pollution, did not properly inform the local public health department and the school community about drinking water test results, and did not retest some water outlets with high lead levels, the audit said.

Joseph D’Angelo, the district’s superintendent, refuted most of

the audit’s findings and told The Buffalo News that no students or staff were put at risk of consuming lead-polluted water despite shortcomings revealed by the report.

“We welcome audits because they’re valuable — we need to maintain our vigilance, keep our facilities secure,” D’Angelo said. “We need to continuously evaluate and improve our practices and audits help us do that.”

A spokesperson for the state Department of Health, which oversees lead testing in schools, said in an emailed statement to The News that the Maryvale school district “substantially complied with the lead testing regulations in place.”

“The New York State Department of Health is working with the school district and the Office

of the State Comptroller (OSC) to further evaluate the findings and assist the school district with compliance, if and where needed,” the statement said.

Maryvale is not alone in receiving criticism from state regulators. The comptroller found similar issues with the lead testing and remediation programs at 13 other school districts in New York.

Public schools are required to test any water outlet that may be used for drinking every three years for lead contamination, according to state public health law.

Lead is extremely toxic even at low doses and can cause health issues and development delays, particularly in young children. The

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Montessori site for preschoolers to open in Getzville



SOPHIA BUONPANE PHOTOS, BUFFALO NEWS

Jessie Styers, Peninsula Montessori Academy head of school, arranges animal figurines on a shelf in the new infant room. The Getzville school, which will serve children between 6 weeks and 5 years old, will launch in about a month.

Teaching method stresses importance of creativity and independence

BEN TSUJIMOTO
News Staff Reporter

Jessie Styers was eager to show off the brand-new Peninsula Montessori Academy, which will welcome kids 6 weeks to 5 years old to its Amherst location in September.

In the infants room, a handful of cribs line the wall, and interesting materials — such as a soothing rain stick, fidget-friendly wood blocks and soft, raised mats — dot the more active area for crawling explorers discovering their senses.

“They have the freedom to move,” Styers, the head of school, said. “They have the freedom to coo and learn the language, to talk with their caregivers.”

It was the first of three classrooms that will launch in about a month, she said, and all three hold hints of adventure. Styers emphasized, however, that the tools and setting come second to the Montessori mission: child-driven learning that develops interests, encourages independence and fuels creativity while ingraining respect for others.

Down the hall, the room slated for toddlers 18 months to 3 years old is geared more toward upright movement, aside from a small nap zone. Mini stations are spread across the room: a child-sized table with bowls and cups, a small drawing board and a door that gives easy access to a grassy area. A major goal of the toddler room is to transition them out of diapers, she

said, and acquire basic life skills.

“Kids love water play,” Styers said, pointing to a water station with steps leading up to it. “Water playing and food are the way to a toddler’s heart. You’ve got those two things, and you’ve got a best friend forever.”

The room earmarked for the oldest kids, ages 3 to 5, embraces math concepts and piques the senses. Orderly lines of small beads dangle on one wall, introducing decimals; wooden figurines split in half to convey fractions; and deep blue wooden objects shaped like bowling pins represent geometric solids.

Seeing the hands-on math tools took Styers back to her first exposure to Montessori two decades ago, when her then-3-year-old daughter entered a program in Seattle.

“If I had this, I would like math,” she said.

One of the main traits of Montessori is multiage classrooms, especially for preschool and early elementary. Activities vary in difficulty across the preschool room — a 3-year-old might have immensely different skills than a child about to turn 6 — but there’s social benefit to a shared environment.

“For the 5-year-olds, you’re instilling leadership qualities with them, so they’re like the leaders of the room, and they kind of take charge,” Styers said. “And with the materials in there, they’re showing the other kids how to use them.”

Peninsula Montessori, the parent organization, boasts three locations in Canada and three more in the United States, with three more on

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