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Buffalo News

Sean Kirst: Close calls, a full eclipse and hurricanes: A year of Buffalo columns, in your words

- [Sean Kirst](#)

- **Dec 28, 2024**

In a year's end tradition I've followed for decades – one offered with gratitude for so many resonant voices and soulful readers, in Western New York – here's my annual sampling of some quotes I won't forget, from 12 months of columns.

Jan. 4: "My gosh. Right out the door in 2024, and everything I want gets checked right off." Marioly Corchado Ambrose, a clinical research nurse who joined two fellow runners during a New Year's race at Old Fort Niagara in [using CPR to help save John Leszak](#) – a runner who went into full cardiac arrest.

Jan. 6: "For me, the rivalry IS the Dolphins." Buffalo native and South Florida Bills fan Bobby Deese, [still aching from the Dolphins-over-Bills dominance of the 1970s](#), just before the resurgent Bills beat Miami to claim another division crown.

Jan. 19: "It is the way we ought to live." Monsignor Fran Weldgen, 87, retired Bills chaplain, after dozens of spectators [essentially lifted him beyond impassable snow-and-ice-covered stairs](#) at a Bills-Steelers playoff game at Highmark Stadium.

Feb. 3: "Who would believe that such heritage still stands?" Beatrice Davis-Canty, longtime congregant of the DeLaine-Waring AME Church on Swan Street. The Buffalo church was founded by a pastor fleeing racist violence in the South, [with direct ties to landmark Brown v. Board Supreme Court case](#).

Feb. 10: “We loved each other, and we made it work.” Dee Messer Alejandro on her 1965 marriage to Victor Alejandro when they both were teens at the Perry housing project. Almost everyone except their mothers said they were too young. At Valentine’s Day, [they looked toward their 60th anniversary](#) in 2025.

March 9: “Now Jon lives on in Cael.” Lockport High wrestling coach emeritus Joe Scapelliti on Cael Vesper, Clarence student-athlete who has embraced girls wrestling – [and the daughter of Western New York wrestling legend Jon Vesper](#), who died of sudden cardiac arrest while Cael was still in the womb of her mom, Jan.

March 16: “Its time is forever.” Dennis Sun Rhodes, renowned Indigenous architect on [efforts to save The Turtle](#), the memorable building he designed on request of Haudenosaunee artists more than 40 years ago, in Niagara Falls.

March 23: “Look. When she gets old enough, have her stop by and I’ll give her a job.” The late Max Pohl, a poultry and meat vendor, in 1983 to the mother and sister of a teenage Elaine Matuszak Pasternak – now a legend often called [“Queen of the Broadway Market.”](#)

March 30: “My dream is being an astronomer.” Tamere Johnson, 8-year-old pupil at the Stanley M. Makowski Early Childhood Center, [after a lesson about the impending full solar eclipse](#) by Michael Humphrey, the first African American president of the Buffalo Astronomical Association.

Michael Humphrey, president of the Buffalo Astronomical Association, speaks to students last spring at the Stanley M. Makowski Early Childhood Center about the impending total solar eclipse.

April 8: “For my mother, I use an old-fashioned word: She is stalwart.” Mary Tiedemann on her 105-year-old mom, Elk Street native Eileen Carroll Selig, who witnessed the full eclipse over greater Buffalo in 2024 and [remembers the one in 1925.](#)

April 13: “I’ve said it before but seeing totality is like having a million-dollar lottery ticket, and totality with clouds is like having a million-dollar ticket with one number off.” Dan Marcus, passionate eclipse chaser from Grand Island, [on why he drove hundreds of miles from cloudy Buffalo to see the full solar eclipse](#) in clear skies, in Vermont.

April 17: “She was always on the cutting edge of what is possible.” Former Erie County legislator Mary Lou Rath on [the Erie Community College atrium, in the old downtown post office, being named for the late Joan Bozer](#). Bozer teamed with the late Minnie Gillette, a fellow legislator, to save that endangered landmark, where an auditorium is named for Gillette.

"Here's a sampling from the last 12 months, with gratitude toward everyone who trusted me with their words and thoughts, whether they appear here or not – and with appreciation for so many loyal, insightful readers," Kirst writes.

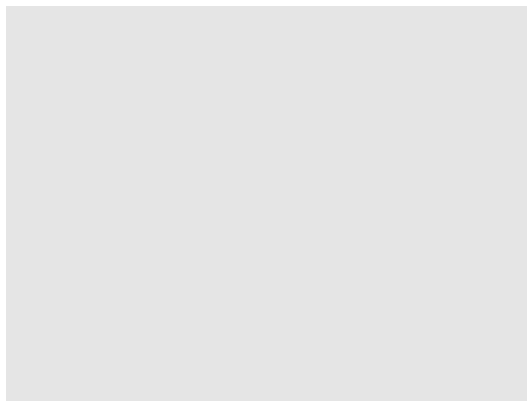
May 14: “They need you.” Paulette Gadley to her husband Craig, longtime Tops security guard, [in supporting his decision to return to the store](#) after 10 people he knew and loved were killed in the 2022 racist massacre on Jefferson Avenue.

May 18: “The whole goal is not to cry.” Law school-bound Jayseana Jackson, who remembered many childhood nights in shelters before her family moved to St. Luke’s Mission of Mercy, [on giving the Canisius College commencement address](#) – where she successfully held back tears. Jayseana Jackson, now in law school, delivered a commencement speech last May on the day she graduated from Canisius College.

May 27: “That it would mean so much to them? That’s what means so much to us.” Kevin Horrigan on Army Junior ROTC students from Hutch-Tech, many from refugee families, [who did a painstaking cleaning of military gravestones at Forest Lawn](#) including the marker of Daniel Horrigan, Kevin’s uncle, killed in World War II.

June 1: “Are you sitting down?” Michael Mee, a military identifications expert, in an April call to Don Loschiavo. [The remains of Bart Loschiavo](#) of Buffalo, Don’s great-uncle, had been positively identified almost 80 years after he died in World War II.

June 8: “She had her day, but her day never ended.” Buffalo lawyer Greg Brown on the lifetime work of an old friend, Gail Wells, [a passionate activist, skilled dancer, community gardener and a co-founder of Buffalo’s Juneteenth celebration](#) who died at 74, to a wave of civic sadness.

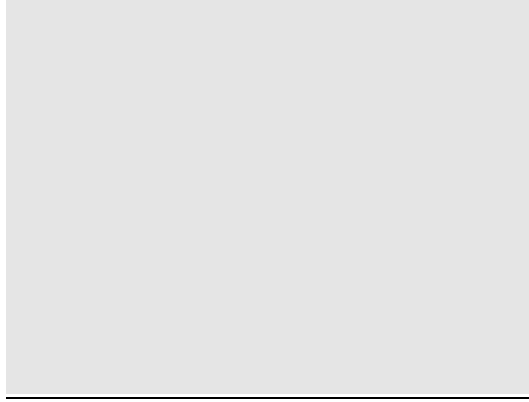


In 2018, Kris Scharoun-DeForge greeted her husband Paul as he arrived home from his time at a day program. The late couple's marriage of 25 years is believed to be the longest in national history for two people born with Down syndrome.

Derek Gee/News file photo

June 15: “It’s incredible that they found each other.” Kayla McKeon, grassroots advocacy manager for the National Down Syndrome Association, [on the death of Kris Scharoun-DeForge](#), whose long marriage to the late Paul Scharoun-DeForge shattered barriers. McKeon, like Kris and Paul, was born with Down syndrome.

June 29: “I think a lot of people are dealt a hand like his and fold.” Dr. Seth Glassman on the long, difficult and [ultimately successful battle by his patient – Buffalo’s Kevin Deese – to become a Navy Reserve officer](#), after tests showed he has HIV.



[Sean Kirst: From a year's worth of joy, tears and struggle, some quotes that resonate](#)

As 2017 nears its close, News columnist Sean Kirst shares some favorite quotes from a year's worth of columns, "part of the gift of hearing the great stories of Buffalo and Upstate New

July 3: "Gorgeous." Marcia Barnes, a pioneering 94-year-old Buffalo Veterans Affairs nurse [honored for her service by a nurse's honor guard](#), with awestruck remembrance of her grandparents' home on Humboldt Parkway – where different visions for change and restoration remain the subject of fierce community debate.

July 13: "There's been a shooting at Tops. Check your people." Photojournalist Brandon Watson, [recalling shock of 2022 text message that foreshadowed his involvement](#) in the CEPA Gallery-produced Blue Flag Memorial for those killed, wounded and traumatized in the racist assault.

July 27: "That's the South Buffalo way." A text from Dennis Crawley, wryly noting how a lifetime friendship began with a fistfight as a kid. The indomitable Crawley, a grandfather who coached a state championship baseball team at Depew High while in treatment for a genetic form of ALS, [died last summer](#). He was the 27th person in his family lost to the disease.

Last summer, Dennis Crawley watched his beloved New York Yankees with his grandson, KJ, and his dog Rocco at his West Seneca home. The legendary high school baseball coach died in August from a genetic form of ALS.

Aug. 10: "There is a sense of spirituality, of gratitude, and the only ones that can fully explain it are the originators." Claudia Jimerson, director of women's lacrosse operations for the Haudenosaunee Nationals, [on a Six Nations quest to compete at the 2028 Olympics](#).

Aug. 31: "This was Stu's?" Longtime Bisons fan Sean Simms, breaking into tears when presented with a jacket that [belonged to the late Stuart Boeckel](#), a fellow Sahlen Field legend who sat next to Simms for decades.

Sept. 21: "You can move past pain, you can move past self-doubt. You realize you're capable of hard things." Sue Walsh, a Hamburg native and a great international swimmer, on [how lessons from swimming provide strategies](#) for living with cancer.

Oct. 5: “You came for us!” Frewsburg native Chelsea Atkins, calling out to Falconer natives Steve Conti and Nathan Cobb, who [made a treacherous hike to reach Atkins and her husband](#) after Hurricane Helene flooding devastated their North Carolina community of Bat Cave. The friendship began in a North Carolina “Bills Backers” tavern.

Oct. 26: “It’s something that should be revered.” Retired Tonawanda police captain Joe Carosi, after realizing a hand-painted baseball “strikeout box” [still exists in his childhood neighborhood](#), maybe 60 years after some kids put it on a cinderblock wall. Carosi’s Facebook post touched off a deluge of wistful reaction.

Nov. 2: “It’s a sign that Jean’s still there.” Britnie Barmore, friend and aide to Willowbrook State School survivor Henry Wesley, [who voted as a statement on preserving hard-earned rights](#) about a year after the death of his wife Jean, also born with cerebral palsy.

Nov. 9: “Can I just call you ‘Doc’?” Gary Ulrich of California, [after traveling to Amherst to embrace Richard Feneran, 76](#), who saved Ulrich’s life more than a half-century ago as an Army medic in Vietnam.

Nov. 16: “I could not let that be the last impression of my brother.” Dan Lukasik, a lawyer and advocate for mental health, [on why he helped filmmaker Mark Anthony Dellas create a documentary](#) remembering Dan’s brother, Paul, who struggled with mental illness and died of an overdose.

Booker Edgersen, left, Ed Rutkowski and Wray Carlton talk to students from the Stanley M. Makowski Early Childhood Center during a presentation at the Johnnie B. Wiley Sports Pavilion, built atop the stadium where the Bills once played.

Derek Gee, Buffalo News

Nov. 23: “What I see is a man who’s been given a second chance, and who’s living it.” Eileen Gramlich, a retired nurse and fellow runner who helped save John Leszak, [on Leszak’s decision to run the Turkey Trot](#), his 109th race of the year, after surviving full cardiac arrest on New Year’s Day.

Dec. 7: “If everybody does a little bit, it can be a big thing.” Carlos Molina, a Marine Corps veteran working closely with Patrick Stokes of Fredonia, [who walked away from his everyday life to serve hot pizza to the suffering](#), in Ukraine.

Dec. 14: “You come in here and sit down and you feel like family, you feel the love.” Pam Backey, [enjoying a meal at St. Luke’s Mission of Mercy](#) after sit-down services resumed for the first time since the pandemic.

Dec. 22: “You’re not just you, you’re a team.” Wray Carlton, joined by 1964 Buffalo Bills teammates Booker Edgersen and Ed Rutkowski at the Johnnie B. Wiley Sports Pavilion, explaining to third and fourth graders how [those Bills found a way to win the American Football League championship](#). Carlton scored the go-ahead touchdown, 60 years ago, in the title game against San Diego.

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