

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## COMMENTARY

### Charity Vogel: A vision for Buffalo to focus on

**Charity Vogel**

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We can choose to be small. Or we can decide to dream big. The choice before us was made clear last week, when two strongly opposing views of Buffalo's future collided in the city's consciousness like so many warring meteors.

You could almost see the sparks fly. The first vision of Buffalo's future calls for burying our glory days as a major American metropolis and shrinking into a small city. Edward Glaeser, a Harvard economist, came to town Friday to urge us in that direction.

"It's hard," he said. "We all root for our cities. But getting confused by the myth that bigger is always better — it's counterproductive."

We could do that. No doubt about it. It's the easier way, frankly.

There's a problem, though, and it has to do with Buffalonians themselves.

Often, people who leave Western New York don't want to go. Many of them are young, less rooted, more mobile, but they like it here and could see themselves sticking around. Still, they feel they need to think hard about moving because 1.) their friends seem to be doing it, and 2.) you only get one life, and they don't want to mess up if they could be twice as successful somewhere else. This job-blighted region makes it tough on them.

Colleen Tomlinson knows the feeling. On a recent morning she was perched behind the counter at Pavlov's Togs on Elmwood Avenue, which is one of her two jobs, along with making jewelry out of beads and stones.

Tomlinson, 27, is right at the age when she's deciding whether to stay in Buffalo or move somewhere else to find a better life.

"I know a lot of people who've left and never come back," she said. "Most of the time it's jobs, but a lot of the time it's nothing major. They just go."

Which brings us to the second view of the city. This one is about looking up, not scaling down.

Richard Florida, the guy who coined the term “creative class” as a way to describe the hip cities that will thrive in the 21st century, is pushing a new theory of “megaregions” that he believes will shape the future of the global economy.

Here’s the good news: We’re sitting in one.

Buffalo’s proximity to Toronto and Rochester means that, with some effort, the city could turn itself into part of one of the most powerful “megas” in the world, alongside the “Bos-Wash” corridor of Boston and Washington and “Charlanta,” which incorporates Charlotte and Atlanta, argues Florida in a new book, “Who’s Your City?”

“Tor-buff-chester” is the name Florida gives us.

Which we’ll forgive him, because he points out that we’re part of a “bi-national mega” that includes “a population of 22 million people and an economy of more than \$530 billion . . . the fifth largest megaregion in North America and the 12th largest in the world.”

We just need to start acting like it, Florida says.

A positive view of our future? That’s about as welcome now as a 70-degree day.

And while some in Buffalo buy Glaeser’s shrinkage theory, others believe Florida’s vision is the one we should focus on.

“Let’s presume he’s right,” said Eva Hassett, at Savarino Companies. “Now what do we do?”

We might start by taking advantage of the fact that Florida, a professor who’s lived in Pittsburgh and Washington, recently relocated to Toronto. So, if you buy his “mega” arguments, he’s a local boy now.

Let’s press that advantage and ask for his help finding ways to make “mega-Buffalo” happen.

Call us stubborn. But we just can’t buy a Buffalo with the best far behind it.

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