

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
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That was quick.

And no, we don't mean Valentine's Day candy on store shelves, Gregg Williams getting fired as head coach of the Bills, or how fast a roll of quarters can disappear in a 25-cent slot machine.

It's the ever predictable grumblings that Seneca Niagara Casino might be money in the pocket for a few, but is virtually a non-starter for the masses.

It's painfully obvious that casinos, like the games they operate, are sucker bets. Gamblers gamble. Period. Few are interested in a spin on the Maid of the Mist, window shopping or bar hopping. It's hard to recoup your losses while standing in a rain coat looking up at the Falls. Thirsty? Here's a drink. Hungry? Step right up to our all-you-can-eat buffet. Sleepy? Here's a bed. Just don't step outside, please.

Dig deep into the numbers, and they are disturbing. Only a third or so of the casino workers actually live in Niagara Falls, for example. And, it's not like New York State simply turned over the four walls of the former Convention Center to create a gambling hall. In all, the Senecas have 52 acres of land there to develop as they see fit, none of which can be touched by the tax man.

And, how about that good neighbor policy Senecas like to toss out front and center? Said Mickey Brown, the man they hired to run the joint when asked about the bleak and barren landscape surrounding him, "That's not my watch. I build and operate hotel casinos."

He even went one better in talking with the New York Times last week. "We're not a social service agency. I think we've made our contribution. It's up to them to work on private sector development."

Incoming mayor Vince Anello – who despite the Casino's opening will inherit a more than three-quarters of a million dollar budget deficit -- spoke the truest words in summarizing the casino's first anniversary. "When this casino opened, it certainly provided immediate financial relief to the Seneca Nation, to the investors in the casino and the State of New York," he said in another published report. "The only ones who haven't gotten immediate relief were the people who have been told the casino was their hope, the people of Niagara Falls."

In Atlantic City, they've been waiting almost three decades for the economic bliss. So wrong is that thinking, a story last summer in Forbes Magazine described it as "a faded New Jersey seashore town in need of rejuvenation." Worse still, the Camden, New Jersey, newspaper last May wrote, "the city is littered with enough glass-strewn lots and vacant property that infrequent visitors .... perceive it as a crime-ridden slum."

Even the seemingly rational "it's better than nothing" argument rings hollow. With so much time, energy and false hope spent on chasing invisible dollars, the truly down-deep-in-the-trenches work of economic redevelopment – attracting the Geicos of the business world, for example -- gets shoved further back in the bottom drawer.

As David Schwartz, coordinator of the University of Nevada Las Vegas Gaming Studies Research Center once noted about the great Atlantic City experiment, "One of the tenets of the original pro-casino campaign was that the construction of casino resorts would in fact create an urban structure where restaurants, retail stores, and other

amenities would flourish amidst a garden of casino resorts. The middle class would return to the revitalized neighborhoods of Atlantic City and witness a millennium of civic tranquility. This didn't happen.”

Entertainment venues? Sure. Nirvana? Never. One half of Buffalo Niagara dreamed they'd be different. They're not. The other half could be, but it won't. We'll swallow the bait, again, and be left to wonder why another promise goes unfulfilled.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at [www.wnynewspapers.com](http://www.wnynewspapers.com). Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)*