

By BRIAN ACKLEY
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Jayson Blair, that flowery purveyor of newspaper fiction, has apparently been rehired by the *New York Times*. How else to explain the paper's snapshot on Buffalo that began with an assessment few of us here would choose to believe.

Scout's honor, the first paragraph of the *Times*' capsule look at the city read, "With it's thriving medical-technology, aerospace and automotive-parts industries, sprawling State University of New York campus and burgeoning trade with Canada, Buffalo has cast off its old rust-belt image."

Of course, the story glossed over our recently seated financial control board. While most predict carnage, mayhem and figurative bloodletting, Blair, er, *The Times* simply offered that "a period of austerity in municipal services looms." And although we didn't bother to dig through the archives, *The Times* undoubtedly duly recorded for all of history our little bout with Mother Nature back in 1977 as a dusting of snow.

Strange, huh? Not if you're Bernard Simon, or Mary Ellen Slayter, to name two. Simon was the author of the July 22 *Times* piece, which appeared less than two weeks after Slayter's glowing account of Buffalo appeared in another bastion of respected journalism, *The Washington Post*.

"Full of good food and probably a little too much beer, I was smitten with Buffalo," Slayter wrote.

Why is it, along with ability to find a great chicken wing, cheer on the Bills and find the best Saturday morning bargains at Kaufman's, that one of our greatest skills is self-immolation?

We're so good at beating ourselves up, even Joe Mesi wouldn't consider us for his next opponent.

It's a fact not lost on Slayter. "I didn't bother asking any of the dozens of people I know who grew up in Upstate New York where I should go," she noted. "They all claim to hate Buffalo. Asking that bunch of Buffalo bashers for guidance would be like asking your new boyfriend's ex-wife how he likes to spend Sunday afternoon."

The writing pair used such adjectives as inspiring, gorgeous, lively, eclectic, breathtaking, funky, vibrant to describe much of what they saw.

OK, it may not be time to roll out the circa 1980 "We're Talking Proud" campaign – the reality check still has to be paid at the end of what is sure to be many difficult meals to come. And true, it's easier to focus on all the good an area has to offer when you're not drenched in the daily drip of dreck and dispiriting data that simply serves to reinforce what we've been brainwashed to believe.

But despite what we've come to expect, it doesn't have to be all about control boards, revenue redistribution, state grants or federal programs which often serve to do nothing more than perpetuate the aura of doom so understandably pervasive.

Never has the notion of helping those who help themselves been more real. It's not about what outsiders think, or what well-connected Western New York insiders constantly try to protect. It's about each of us choosing to believe the pendulum of potential can swing back in our direction. From something as simple as an improved attitude, to something as extraordinary as electing an electable non-incumbent now and again, the strength to revive a region is ours, not theirs.

The power to truly change has always been about us. It's no fiction: the decline is real. The dig out is difficult, deep, and yes doable, but only if we chose to believe it. And when we do, that will be news truly fit to print.

(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. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)