

It is, as the crow flies, 3,298 miles between Buffalo and Glasgow, Scotland. But when Eddie Friel stood near the banks of Niagara River last week, he didn't have to squint very hard to see his Scottish city of the past.

Other than the 200 or so educators, businessmen and high schoolers who heard him speak last week, it's a shame more people around here don't know Friel, for he knows Buffalo. He knows its pain. Because for decades he lived it, in his case, halfway around the world.

Decades ago, Glasgow was home to 38,000 ship builders, roughly the equivalent of Buffalo Niagara's steel making workforce in its prime. But when competition and the global economy eroded and eventually collapsed the once bedrock-solid manufacturing base, Glasgow did what we did: ignore the realities, throw up our hands, and simply hope for a better day.

"Glasgow has reinvented itself more times than Madonna," said the winner of Canisius College's 2002 Lifetime Achievement Award in Tourism. His message, however, was just slightly more serious than the Material Girl herself.

"What we did is unforgivable. We took an entire community and condemned it to poverty. An entire community was told you do not have a future. For 30 years, the community was being reminded that they are no longer relevant to the society in which they live. It creates a sense of despair, that they are not connected to the world that once they were part of. If you have a community that does not believe in itself, you're in deep trouble."

Then they did something we're all still waiting for. They planned, and acted, and were reborn, copying in part a renaissance from this side of the pond. "We learned what to do as a consequence of what happened in Baltimore," he said. "Baltimore had to reinvent itself, and it looked to its waterfront, and tourism, as the means whereby they gave the city back to the community."

Tourism, he explained, is based on several fundamental criteria: have a reason to come, be easy to get to, have accommodations to house the visitors, and deliver on the promise. But most of all you need qualified people in the industry. It's a great place for a young workforce -- he told his largely school-based audience -- to find a way in, to become connected.

"The first sentence of *David Copperfield* is, 'Whether I shall be the hero of my own life, or whether that task will fall to someone else, these pages should show.' We have a responsibility to be sure that each and every child has the chance to be the hero of their own lives. We are the custodians of our cities for the next generation. We will return them in a worse condition than we received them, or we will return them better. We only have one choice. The issue for Buffalo, the issue for any other city is: what's your port of entry?"

Pick one, any one. Niagara Falls, one of the natural wonders of the worlds, is 20 minutes away. There is no Shea's there, no orchestra, no zoo, no presidential sites, no lauded-in-American-lore canals. Frank Lloyd Wright, as far as we know, definitely did not design the Minolta Tower.

In the last 20 years, Glasgow has added hotel rooms by a multiplier of 12. It is the number one shopping destination in the United Kingdom. It is the fastest growing convention destination on the planet. Some 55,000 people now work in hospitality there.

Making it happen here ... why is that so hard to see?

*(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.)*

Why here, not matter how hard we look, is that still so hard to see?