

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
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*(Editor's note: This is the third of a multi-part series regarding plans proposing a regional/metro government for Buffalo and Erie County).*

Being a past teacher himself, former University at Buffalo President William Greiner could fill up several of those black composition books in writing the perfunctory "What I Did On My Summer Vacation" essay now that school is back in session.

He'd surely start with a notation about the lousy weather, slide in maybe a grumble or two about his golf game, and add a paragraph or two about the inspiring sight of the largest football crowd in university history last weekend to cheer on his beloved Bulls.

But most pages would be scribbled full by the thoughts that now take up a good chunk of his "retirement" days – as chairman of the 11-person panel trying to craft and mold a plan that creates what one of the group's working documents calls the "Regional City of Buffalo."

Perhaps his perspective on the subject is succinctly packaged in this thought. "We need to think like Western New York, Inc.," Greiner said.

But what's interesting, that thought came from Greiner a decade ago, long before the regional conversations spearheaded by Kevin Gaughan, who himself is pushing a regional plan which will certainly differ from the one the so-called "Greater Buffalo Working Committee" is laying out.

And it came from what was actually the first of the televised discussions about regionalism in Buffalo and Erie County, a one-hour program that aired Friday, Nov. 11, 1994, on WNED.

"Our region has enormous potential for a strong economy and an exceptional quality of life, particularly if we begin to think and act regionally, but that effort requires a very deliberate collaboration on the part of every sector of the community, from education to government to business," he added. "The secret is to stop drawing lines, and arguing over where to draw the lines, and getting our lines crossed in the process."

A prescient thinker, he. In fact, taking a closer look at who's keeping watch from the crow's nest as regionalism plans navigate the dangerous and rocky shoals ahead might be as instructive as the plans themselves, at least in understanding their context.

It was under Greiner's watch that the school's Institute of Local Governance and Regional Growth was born, the seed of which was formally planted in UB's far-reaching 1996 "Governance Project" which, too, the former president initiated. In fact, when once asked to describe UB's efforts to focus on issues outside its Amherst boundaries, Greiner offered: "We take seriously the fact that we are of a larger society and we serve a larger society."

In other words, Greiner is no Billy-come-lately in thinking about how to make the region work a whole bunch better than it does today.

Greiner's group has done its work, deliberately so it would seem, behind closed doors. If that seems harsh, or wrong, maybe so. But in a region dotted with dreams that died of nothing more disarming than debate, perhaps the plan softly and carry a big stick approach might not be all that misguided.

Gaughan meanwhile seems best at getting his ideas across under the glare of white-hot television lights. While there surely have been dozens if not hundreds with whom Gaughan has

talked and consulted, he still remains the singular voice and very public face of the merged governments plan he introduced a month ago.

“We have a very long road, a very long process,” Greiner said recently, knowing full well it would be two summer vacations, maybe more, before his group’s work is done. Leave us at least one blank page Bill so someone, maybe even you, can author a happy ending.

*(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.)*