

Buffalo has a chance to gain what it fought for

By Llona Leroy

After determining the Buffalo political climate was too obstructive and not conducive to economic development, the Seneca Nation identified land in the Cheektowaga as our preferred site for an Erie County casino. Instead, a lawsuit was filed which demanded we build in the City of Buffalo.

Now, business people and certain elected officials are working to thwart a Buffalo casino. They fail to acknowledge that Western New Yorkers spend millions of dollars every year at gaming and entertainment establishments in Canada and other areas outside of Western New York.

Dollars that are spent elsewhere support jobs and economic development elsewhere. Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino gives Buffalo the opportunity to bring those dollars into the City, thus supporting local jobs and helping create opportunities for local businesses.

There have been myriad other development projects that have been talked about in Buffalo over the past few decades. Some, like Dunn Tire Park, the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and the HSBC Arena, have been built. Others, such as the proposed Adelpia complex, Peace Bridge and countless waterfront plans, never got off the drawing board. The final result of discussions with Bass Pro remains to be seen.

All of these projects received or were promised public funding. Bass Pro has \$67 million worth of public backing to accompany its \$66 million in private investment – a better than dollar-for-dollar match.

Where will the Bass Pro customers come from? With three other Bass Pro stores within a three-hour drive from Buffalo (Toronto, Pittsburgh and Auburn), it's reasonable to expect that local customers will factor largely into the Buffalo project's plans. That's not a bad thing, because it will at least get more people coming into downtown once the store opens, optimistically in 2008.

Just a few blocks away, Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino represents \$125 million in private investment, 1,000 new jobs and millions in new revenue for the local economy. This project will not only help create a critical mass of people in downtown, it will give visitors to downtown, whether local or tourist, another reason to stay downtown after a Sabres game, event in the Theater District, or concert.

When the casino opens in 2007, we will also be creating a stream of visitor traffic that Bass Pro – and other businesses - can readily tap into.

By bringing in 1,000 jobs and millions of dollars in new revenue, the Seneca Nation is ready to work with Buffalo's leaders to make a positive impact in the City. We believe that Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino will complement HSBC Arena and the proposed Bass Pro store, creating progress and development that has eluded Buffalo for far too long.

*Llona Leroy is a member of the Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Council and
Chair of its Economic Development Committee.*