

CITY & REGION

SECTION | B

Denise Jewell Gee • Deputy Managing Editor
849-4444 • djgee@buffnews.com

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Thursday, August 11, 2022



Rod Watson

COMMENTARY

Church aims workshops at heading off racism

Stacked against the racist massacre of 10 Black supermarket shoppers in an African American neighborhood in Buffalo, the vandalism of a Black Lives Matter sign at a church in overwhelmingly white East Aurora may not seem like much.

But though there is no comparison when it comes to the impact of the two acts, they both stem from the same demented mindset that categorizes certain people as "other."

Traditional education alone is no defense, as evidenced by the proliferation of racists - in government and elsewhere - with degrees.

But the right kind of education, particularly if started early enough, can be a prophylactic.

After battling both the village and bigots who twice vandalized its BLM sign, the Unitarian Universalist Church of East Aurora is stepping up its outreach campaign

with just that kind of education: concurrent two-day immersive workshops for children and adults to explore race and ethnic identity and how to build an anti-racist society. The workshops, in the works for well over a year, resulted from both the church's desire to start a children's

program as well as its 2020 dispute with the village - ostensibly over the size of its BLM sign, not the sign's message - and discussions with village leaders.

"Nobody wants to get close to the issue, the issue of racial justice, because our country is so polarized," said Rich Moglia-Cannon, UUEA board chairman.

So he said the church started pondering ways to prepare kids for a multicultural world amid book bans and school board fights among adults over teaching America's history, mindful that without such efforts, "you get distorted realities like the 18-year-old accused in the May 14 Buffalo supermarket murders."

"Widening the Circle: Journey to Togetherness" will take place from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Aug. 20-21 at the Buffalo Road church.

The workshop for kids in grades 3 to 7 will be based on the Jubilee Circle program developed by Sheila Schuh, religious education director at First Unitarian Church in Rochester, who will be the lead facilitator.

Using experiential learning techniques like body sculpting, puppet plays and painting to engage kids, the workshop will help them explore physical differences, family cultures, pop culture and concepts like power and equity.

"It's not a lot of talking, in terms of lectures. It's very interactive," said Schuh, who will conduct the children's

See **Banner** on Page B2

FALLING GAS PRICES HELP EASE INFLATION

The rate of inflation has slowed down considerably from its recent 40-year peak, thanks in part to falling prices for gasoline after spikes that hit consumers hard. *Story on Page B3.*

Judge won't drop charges against ex-agent

Rejects Bongiovanni's discrimination claims
BY DAN HERBECK
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

A federal judge has declined to dismiss criminal charges against former DEA Agent Joseph S. Bongiovanni, saying there is no evidence that the U.S. Justice Department targeted him because of his Italian-American heritage.

Bongiovanni and his attorneys have submitted "no evidence" to

prove that his 2019 arrest was "motivated by a discriminatory purpose," U.S. Magistrate Judge Michael J. Roemer wrote in a ruling obtained Wednesday by The Buffalo News. Roemer's ruling is only a recommendation that now must be reviewed by District Judge John L. Sinatra Jr., who will ultimately decide the issue.

Bongiovanni, 57, is a retired U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent who faces felony charges that he took \$250,000 in bribes to protect local drug dealers whom he believed to be involved with "Italian

Organized Crime" from prosecution. Bongiovanni denies taking any bribes or having Mafia connections. His lead defense attorney, James P. Harrington, has repeatedly accused prosecutors of targeting Bongiovanni for "selective prosecution" because he is Italian-American.

"The government has noticed that all of the participants have Italian last names, and as such, has imagined the existence of an Italian-American organized crime syndicate," Harrington said in papers filed last year.

Harrington and co-counsel Jesse

C. Pyle asked that the criminal case be dismissed because of selective prosecution based on ethnicity. They also alleged that agents who investigated Bongiovanni illegally seized and took information from his cellphone.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Buffalo has denied the discrimination claims, noting that lead prosecutor Joseph M. Tripi is himself Italian-American.

Roemer ruled against Bongiovanni on Aug. 4, saying "the standard" for selective prosecution is met. See **Charges** on Page B2



Working off his "bucket list," Lloyd the dog takes a walk in the Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, USA, mall in Niagara Falls on Wednesday. The Niagara County SPCA and the local community have stepped up to "give him the best" as Lloyd lives out his golden years.

It's anything but a dog's life for lovable Lloyd

Ailing stray becomes toast of Niagara County
BY LEAH CLARK
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

When you're a local celebrity, you greet your fans by making a grand entrance. And the case was no different for Lloyd the Pit Bull on Wednesday morning when he entered the Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, USA. Lloyd, who is embracing his moniker as "the most famous dog in Niagara County" is a 12-year-old pit bull who came to the Niagara County SPCA as a stray on July 5.

When he was given a medical exam-



Jillian MacDonell gets a kiss from Lloyd as he's greeted by people at the Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, USA.

ination, veterinarians diagnosed him with end-stage renal failure and a tumor on his back leg. Liz Marshall, the SPCA's director of marketing and events, said Lloyd was given only months to live.

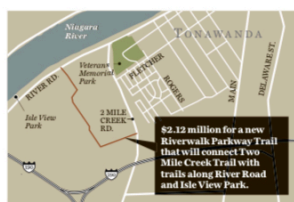
Determined to give Lloyd a great time during his last days, the SPCA has taken him throughout Niagara County on a series of "bucket list" adventures and documented it on social media.

"All we knew is he had life to live, and we wanted to give him the best," Marshall said.

Lloyd soon went viral, and found a lot of fans across the region. As the Niagara County SPCA began posting daily updates about Lloyd, officials received numerous calls from people wanting

See **Lloyd** on Page B2

Tonawanda trail aims for safety and wellness



\$2.12 million project to tie into other town trails
BY HAROLD MCNEIL
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Over the past 15 years, federal, state and local governments have increased their investment in new pedestrian walkways and bike lanes, with the burgeoning network of interconnected trails leading to a path not only for safer travel but also for community wellness.

The latest effort is a \$2.12 million project aimed at connecting Two Mile Creek Trail with others along River Road in

the Town of Tonawanda, announced Wednesday during a news conference at the entrance to the Riverwalk Solar Technology Park, off River Road. Rep. Brian Higgins said the new Riverwalk Parkway multi-use trail will connect people to jobs, recreation, parks and views of the Niagara River waterfront.

"The 1.5-mile path will provide a new connection between Two Mile Creek Greenway Trail and the Niagara River Greenway Trail, which runs along Leveeview Park," said Higgins. "This stretch of roadway, which is home to companies that employ over 500 workers, currently has

See **Trail** on Page B2

CITY & REGION

In 'close call,' judge allows use of evidence from seized device

CHARGES - from B1
...dard to prove selective prosecution is a demanding one...

ington told The News on Wednesday. "I still believe it was highly prejudicial and inappropriate for the government to make unfounded claims about Italian Organized Crime in this case in open court, in court papers and in press releases. We'll continue to make our case with District Judge Stuart...

of being the leader of Buffalo's Mafia family, but that has never been proven in court. Gerac's law denied the bribery charges, as well as charges of drug trafficking and sex trafficking in his strip club. Bongiovanni was arrested by federal agents in November 2019, five months after investigators used a no-knock search warrant and "flash-bang" devices during an early-morning raid at his Town of Tonawanda home.

Bongiovanni came from his cellphone, which was temporarily seized from him at a Baltimore airport in April 2019 as he and his family returned from a Dominican Republic vacation and passed through customs. Harrington argues that the seizure of the phone was illegal, and says any evidence taken from the phone should be thrown out of the prosecution's case.

was "lawful." Roemer concluded in a "close call" that prosecutors should be allowed to continue using evidence from the seized phone. Roemer also ruled against Gerace, who sought to suppress all evidence taken from his Clarence home. Pharoach's and Gerace's seized cellphone during the investigation that led to his arrest. Steven M. Cohen, Gerace's attorney, also contends that prosecutors acted improperly by bringing mob allegations into their case.

Town already has over 15 miles of trails

TRAIL - from B1
...no sidewalks or bike lanes, making pedestrian and bicycle travel difficult, at best. Each end of the trail will be equipped with HAWK signals to make crossing easier and safer. The trail will also complement the more than 15 miles of trails that already exist in the Town of Tonawanda.

we don't look at them as just for cars. We look at a multi-modal concept," Ryan said. The goal of the region's network of recreational trails is to enhance the quality of life for those who use them, said Assemblyman William Conrad. "You look around here and nature's beauty is all around us, especially in this community. This is giving people opportunity to explore that beauty on foot and by bike. It's ultimately good for our health, wellness and the vibrancy of our community and businesses," Conrad said. For years, many residents have been denied access to the waterfront because of the region's industrial past, he added. "This is really opening up a big footprint for the Town of Tonawanda and our neighbors in the City of Tonawanda and Cheektowaga. Pedestrians, bicyclists and those who use public transportation have to be part of the equation, too. As part of that effort, the aim of the new trail will be to create a new route to safely connect bicyclists and pedestrians to Isleview Park, the Niagara River and New York's Empire State Trail, he said. "We've seen since the pandemic, more and more people are out and using the outdoors. The policy we've had in New York State for over a decade is when we look at roads,

Lloyd is 'going nowhere' as his health improves

LYLOYD - from B1
...to spend the day with him and help the shelter. "We were actually blown away. Within a day, our email had over 100 inquiries about Lloyd," Marshall said. "We were amazed with how many people would show up to take a selfie with him at public events." Through proper care and a new diet, Lloyd has made a health transformation. According to Marshall, his veterinarians have noted that although he still suffers chronic symptoms, Lloyd is "going nowhere."



Lloyd, a 12-year-old stray found in Niagara Falls, enjoys the sights and sounds of the mall, and fans' adoration, as he tours Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, USA, on Wednesday.

is a pet lover," said Susie Swiatkowski, a Fashion Outlets spokesperson. "He has a dog at home, and the story of Lloyd really just warmed his heart." Lloyd arrived at the mall to see a collection of natural peanut butter, spray cheese, food toys, blankets and other treats waiting for him. The items were donated by mall guests and employees. A group of fans gathered to watch as he rummaged through the gifts. Melissa Palesh, an employee at Arden, was part of the group and says she was excited to see Lloyd in person. "I've seen him on Facebook and Instagram. When I

first heard the story, it really touched my heart," Palesh said. "I mean we talk about all the time how we wish could rescue or have houses big enough to rescue every dog that we love and see." Jillian MacDonell, another Arden employee and Lloyd fan, says that his story makes her emotional and made this opportunity even more important. "I love dogs. Just to be able to give a dog, some love who may have not known it means a lot," MacDonell said. After greeting more fans, Lloyd seemed to become lethargic and made his goodbyes. While he left a lasting impression on his fans, it was just an average day for a local celebrity.

'This is how change starts,' facilitator says

BANNER - from B1
...workshop along with Saladin Allah, an author and elementary school educator at the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center, and Heather Schneider of Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES. The goal of the adult workshop is "deepening one's understanding of historical and contemporary racism and building one's skills to promote inclusion." A key component will be "The 1,000 Cut Journeys," an immersive virtual reality experience in which participants step into the shoes of a Black male elementary school educator as a child being disciplined in school, as a teen dealing with police and as a young adult in the workplace.

It was developed by Columbia University's Courtney Cogburn, who granted the church license to use it after Moglia-Cannon heard her speak at the Chautauqua Institution last year and approached her afterward. Fritz Galette, a New York City psychologist who does crisis intervention sessions for corporations and who has been holding monthly Zoom sessions with church members, will lead the adult workshops, which also will feature Henry J. Taylor Jr., founding director of the University at Buffalo's Center for Urban Studies. "That's how change starts," Schrub said, recalling another instance in which a workshop participant alerted the school principal about a transgender classmate who was being harassed. "It's teaching them a critical lens" through which to view behavior, she said. "That's what I think is transformative about it. If you're able to say, 'This isn't OK,' that's the thing."



After vandals twice damaged its Black Lives Matter sign, the Unitarian Universalist Church of East Aurora is stepping up its outreach efforts.

of the line because he had black hair; but after experiencing the workshop, he alerted his mother, who then complained to the school. Not only did the school change the practice, the principal came to the church's adult program. "That's how change starts," Schrub said, recalling another instance in which a workshop participant alerted the school principal about a transgender classmate who was being harassed. "It's teaching them a critical lens" through which to view behavior, she said. "That's what I think is transformative about it. If you're able to say, 'This isn't OK,' that's the thing."

The workshops, which include lunch, are free but registration is required at usua.org/widening-the-circle. Kids and adults will meet together at the beginning, for lunch and at the conclusion while breaking into their separate workshops in between. While the website lists a sign-up deadline of today, Moglia-Cannon said they will keep registration open a day or two longer, space permitting, but will have to close it shortly for planning purposes.

Lottery Numbers / Winning Numbers for Wednesday
N.Y. Evening Number: 304
N.Y. Midday Number: 531
Win Four Evening: 0775
Win Four Midday: 4861
Cash 4 Life: 15 26 45 49 53
Cash Ball: 1
Take Five: 2 15 20 27 30
Pick 10: 10 13 21 22 24 29 33 34 37 41 42 44 49 55 61 63 69 77 79
N.Y. Lotto: 3 13 16 25 32 42
Bonus Number: 46
Powerball: 29 44 59 61 68
Power Play: 18
Pick 3 Evening: 259
Pick 3 Day: 453
Pick 4 Evening: 5077
Pick 4 Day: 4534
Late numbers for Tuesday
Take Five: 6 24 27 33 36
Mega Millions: 1 8 10 25 32
Mega Ball: 13
Megaplier: X3

These numbers are unofficial. For official New York Lottery results go to buffalo.com/lottery or your

After vandals twice damaged its Black Lives Matter sign, the Unitarian Universalist Church of East Aurora is stepping up its outreach efforts. The church is stepping up its outreach efforts after vandals twice damaged its Black Lives Matter sign. The church is stepping up its outreach efforts after vandals twice damaged its Black Lives Matter sign.

Though the workshops were planned long before the Tops supermarket massacre and are "small potatoes" compared with that tragedy, he said the shooting just "increased our determination that this was important." He's excited about the potential "synergy" of kids and parents going through the program at the same time, noting that with the internet and social media, children are not "empty vessels." They're going to learn about race; the only question is: in what context? Still, given the backlash against teaching accurate history and dealing forthrightly with the nation's past and how it shapes the present, it's easy to imagine critics complaining that the workshops, especially those for kids, will be attempts at indoctrination. Schrub has a ready answer. "I would say we're trying to inoculate them," she counters. "It's our responsibility to help our kids to be inoculated against racism."

After May 14, Buffalo Niagara should not be a reminder of how fatal that disease can be.

WNY NEW BUSINESSES
751 Articles of Incorporation
751 Articles of Incorporation
751 Articles of Incorporation
WNY NEW BUSINESSES FORMATIONS
Appears every Tuesday and Thursday in the Business section of The Buffalo News.