

# BUFFALO Law Journal

As Seen In the October 24, 2011 Issue

## Plenty of 'Success' to be found in Buffalo

**C**ontrary to popular belief among those who know me, I am not a very social person.

When my beloved Red Sox won their first World Series title in 86 years, I celebrated alone (OK, my dog was with me) and then went to bed. It wasn't for lack of social options, but rather a personal choice.



### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

MATT  
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I shun Super Bowl parties, cocktail parties, open houses and even our company "Meet the Staff" events. I enjoy eating out alone, taking in a matinee movie solo and road trips to my native New Hampshire with 1,000 miles of road and some good books on CD to keep me company. Given the choice, I prefer solitude over small

talk and privacy over parties.

Having said that, as a component of my job I attend several very public handshaking, business card-passing, "schmoozing" events every year. Though I've gotten better over the years, I still get a bit of a knot in my stomach the day of any such event. Please tell me I'm not alone. At least some of you out there can feel my pain, can't you?

Wednesday night I found myself in such a position as I prepared to attend the annual Success in the City Diversity Networking event at First Niagara Center. It is the brainchild of Minority Bar Association President Joseph Hanna. He wanted to find a way to bring a diverse group of business professionals together with local college students as a way to open doors, facilitate networking opportunities and bridge gaps in the business community.

I pulled into the arena parking lot fashionably late, a tactical maneuver designed to cut down my actual on-site time. For a two hour event – factoring in a stop at the rest room, lingering at the coat check and taking my time collecting my name tag at the door – I figured I could whittle my actual networking down to 90 minutes, a number I deemed manageable, if slightly unpleasant.

As I rounded the corner into the atrium, I saw more than 200 people milling about. They were eating, drinking and generally being merry. As always, I searched the room for a familiar face and soon located Emery Lewis, a young law student I interviewed this summer and later



**Terrence McKelvey, left, former president of the Minority Bar Association, visits with current President Joseph Hanna at the Success in the City networking event Oct. 19 in Buffalo.**

joined on the golf course a couple times. We chatted for a few moments and the ice was officially broken. Then a funny thing happened: I struck up a conversation with another person, then another. Before I knew what hit me, I had networked with more than a dozen professionals including bankers, attorneys, civil servants, folks from the nonprofit sector and, of course, students.

The obligatory stack of business cards I stuffed in my shirt pocket less than an hour earlier quickly dwindled, replaced by a collection of cards from people throughout Western New York. I had two strong story pitches (always a bonus for a writer) and several other possibilities to follow up on.

Before I knew it, my anxiety was gone, replaced by an unfamiliar feeling of actually enjoying myself. And I wasn't alone. The evening was awash with connections being made between students and businesspeople, companies from different industries comparing notes and alliances being formed. I watched as a foundation was laid for future opportunities, and that was what stuck with me the most.

Buffalo has a long-suffering reputation as not being business-friendly. Some of the disdain gets passed on to the county and plenty to the state but, overall, there is a perception of Buffalo as a rust-belt city whose best days are behind

it. For those who prescribe to that notion, they should have spent the evening with me at First Niagara Center. Every major sector was well-represented, from the legal community and the medical corridor to banking, accounting, manufacturing, tech firms, education and health care – the list was endless. Noticeably missing from the conversation were doom-and-gloom conversations. I didn't hear anything about taxes, blight or the red tape and regulations that seem to make success an elusive concept. Instead I heard conversation upon conversation peppered with optimism and enthusiasm. I stood among hundreds of Buffalo's strongest assets and for two hours on a blustery October evening, Buffalo seemed like anything but the third-poorest city in America.

As the event wound down and people said their goodbyes, I took to imagining the spider-web effect that likely would take place in the days and weeks to come. People would return to their offices and schools, sharing stories from the evening. Business cards would be dug out and phone calls made. Lunches would be scheduled, meetings held and networking in its truest form would take shape. And in the end, Buffalo will be just a bit better for it. Even if it did give me a knot in my stomach.

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