



## Event to focus on emergency readiness

by **KIMBERLY M. KARCHER**  
Clarence Editor

Eastern Hills Mall, First Niagara Bank and the American Red Cross, Greater Buffalo Chapter have come together to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the October storm with an event that will make you leave your home and "Storm the Mall."

(See editorial on page four)

The emergency preparedness event will be held from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 6 at the mall, 4545 Transit Road, near Main Street.

Judith A. Rucki, director of communications for the American Red Cross, Greater Buffalo Chapter said the Red Cross, the mall and First Niagara are reminding families of the importance of being prepared in case of an emergency.

Rucki said the event will have a special focus on children and educating them on what to do if a disastrous situation occurs.

"The point of the event is to teach children how to prepare for emergency situations," Rucki said. "They will learn things like how to recognize when a storm is coming, making sure their family has a safety plan if their house catches on fire and who to call in the event of emergencies."

The day include activities, entertainment and prizes for the entire family.

According to mall officials, participants of "Storm the Mall" will start at the American Red Cross booth in front of Bon-Ton. Each child will receive a "Preparedness Passport," along with a list of the daily events and mall merchant discounts.

Participants can visit each exhibit, take part in the activities, have their "passport" stamped and return to the First Niagara booth in front of Sears to receive a prize. The grand prize is a \$1,000 savings bond from First Niagara Bank.

"We are really looking forward to this event," said Megan Wagner, marketing manager of Eastern Hills Mall. "There are going to be so

many fun and educational things to do on Saturday, and the entire event is free for all community members. It will be a great day to come to the mall and learn about how to be ready in case of an emergency."

Wagner said the event has created excitement among mall vendors and merchants.

"Many of our mall merchants are going to be having special sales and discounts," Wagner said. "Even our vendors in the food court will have certain items for discounted prices."

According to both Rucki and Wagner, this event is the first of its kind in the area.

"We are really hoping we can make it an annual event," Rucki said. "It's a fun day at the mall, but it has a serious purpose."

Along with the preparedness passport village, there will also be informational safety demonstrations for both children and adults throughout the day. Several emergency response vehicles will be on display outside the mall as well.

"This is truly a family event," Wagner said. "There will be something going on for everyone to enjoy, but at the same time we will be helping our neighbors be ready and be aware of what to do should we have another storm like last year."

Rucki said its important to remind community members of the importance of preparedness — a lesson learned the hard way for many western New Yorkers last October.

"Many people bought generators after the storm, but they have never hooked them up," Rucki said. "We want to encourage people to update their safety plans. The whole idea is prevention. At least you can know what to do and how to stay safe."

For further information visit [www.shopeasternhills.com](http://www.shopeasternhills.com) or contact Eastern Hills Mall at 633-1600 or contact the American Red Cross, Greater Buffalo Chapter at 878-2230.

*Editor's note: Reporter Andrea Kimbriel contributed to this article.*

## Police get 'extra set of eyes' License plate reader installed

by **ELIZABETH TAUFA**  
Reporter

The Amherst Police Department now has a new weapon for keeping offenders off the roads.

In August, the police department obtained a mobile license plate reader camera, which has been attached to one patrol car. Since then, Capt. Patrick McKenna of the Traffic Bureau has been working with various officers to train them to use the new equipment.

"We hope to have many more individuals who are driving illegally removed from the road or apprehended," McKenna said.

McKenna applied for the \$17,100 grant through the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services in February of 2007. The grant was approved in May.

The plate reader can scan 1,500 license plates per minute, taking pictures of each plate. The plates are then compared to a database of wanted vehicles. If one of the scanned plates is in the system, the driver can be apprehended without having committed a traffic infraction or crime, as was the case previously.

The database contains plates of suspended or revoked drivers' licenses, McKenna said. Licenses can be suspended for an uninsured driver, failure to pay a fine, failure to answer a summons or failure to pay child support.

The database is updated everyday by the New York State Police Information Network.

The device is also helpful in finding stolen cars or license plates.

"We've found some suspended licenses," McKenna said. He noted that the device also helped



**Captain Patrick McKenna** adjusts the mobile plate reader that was recently installed on an Amherst Police patrol car. The device can read up to 1,500 license plates per minute.

police arrest a suspect in a strong-arm robbery case.

Since being installed, most of the work the police have done with the device has been for training purposes.

"Almost everyone on the afternoon shift has been trained on it, quite a few on the day shift and we're still working on the mid-night shift," McKenna said.

According to McKenna, the best way for the device to work is to have the patrol car it is attached to stationary, with other patrol cars around it. That way, when a plate from the database is found, the other patrol cars can apprehend the offender.

"It's too hard with the traffic to look for the car while in motion," McKenna said.

The device is also useful in crime situations where a license plate, or partial license plate, has

been reported by a witness.

In such cases, like Amber Alerts, the license plate can be put into the system by a laptop in the patrol car, which allows the officer to be alerted if the offender's car is found.

"It becomes an extra set of eyes for the officer," McKenna said.

While McKenna is hoping that the device will make a difference by making offenders more accountable, the Amherst Police Department is not looking to secure any more plate readers.

"We're only allowed one grant process in a year," McKenna said. "But other jurisdictions have them, too."

McKenna noted that joint operations with adjoining agencies, as well as the state police, are also being planned.

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## Suspect strikes man with gun, leaves with cash

At 8 p.m. Monday, Amherst police were called to DiBella's Old Fashioned Subs at Transit Road and Wehrle Drive for an armed robbery.

According to the report, a man dressed in black entered the restaurant from the rear, striking the manager in the head with a handgun before handcuffing him to a chair.

Other employees and patrons were in the front of the restaurant at the time.

The suspect then took money from the victim and a safe. He left with an amount estimated between \$2,000 and \$3,000.

The suspect is described as a 6-foot-3-inch black male weighing 270 pounds. He left in an unknown direction in an unknown type of vehicle.

Anyone with information is asked to call 689-1333.

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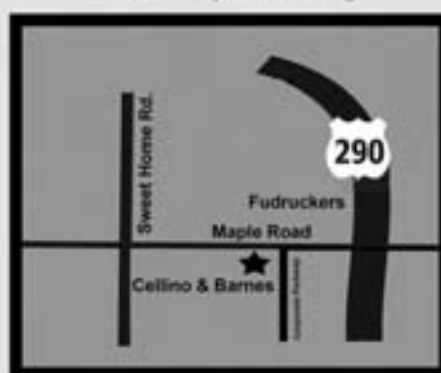
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