

letters



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Firefighters are unsung heroes

Our entire family would like to extend our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the volunteer firefighters of the Williamsville Fire Department for the fantastic job that they did in fighting a fire at our home on Jan. 2. The fire started in the exhaust fan in our upstairs bathroom and quickly spread to the attic. They responded to the fire within minutes and were able to save our older wood home from complete destruction. Our second floor is not livable at this time, but their actions to save as much of the

house that they did has given peace of mind to our family.

Not only did they do a fantastic job in fighting the actual fire and making sure that all of the hot spots were extinguished, but the care to try and mitigate the damage was unbelievable. From moving items downstairs out of the fire area to covering the first floor of the house with plastic to help with water damage, all of their actions are greatly appreciated. While we are all served by "volunteer" firefighters, all of those on the scene that night were nothing but professionals. We are writing this letter to let the rest of the residents of the

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Tailgating, traffic jams, potato soup and frozen Penguins

Some random thoughts and firsthand observations on the "Winter Classic" outdoor hockey extravaganza (aka the Ice Bowl) held on New Year's Day in Orchard Park between the Buffalo Sabres and Pittsburgh Penguins.

I was there, sitting (actually mostly standing) up in Section 314 in Row 21 in the general vicinity of Seat 13. Here's what I saw before, during and after the big game:

- Tailgating may not be defined as a "sport," but it definitely can be classified as Buffalo sports fans' favorite pastime. The thousands of rabid fans who jammed into the parking lots as early as 7 a.m. didn't seem to mind the snow, wind and other miserable weather conditions because they were solely focused on nibbling on nachos and sucking down suds. What an incredible atmosphere to experience if you're a fan of the Sabres, the game of hockey and Western New York.

- Just like at the pregame parking lot parties for Buffalo Bills games when people toss around the pigskin and run in between parked vehicles, there were more than a few folks playing street hockey prior to the Sabres-Pens game.

Everything from one-on-one action to a huge five-on-five affair that had a quintet of Pittsburgh fans wearing Penguins' jerseys taking on four Sabres-clad guys and one gal with a Jim Kelly football jersey (at least she had the right idea.)

- According to friends who are in the know, the new stadium food items were well received by those who tried them. While I personally passed on trying both the potato soup and the chili, one fan of all things deep fried and battered stated that the soup was a "refreshing alternative to the steamed hot dogs," while another friend described the chili as "tremendously tasty."

- One thing I could have done without was the postgame traffic jams. While I know from past experiences in leaving the parking lot from a Bills game that vehicles can get backed up a bit, both Abbott Road and Southwestern Boulevard appeared to be abnormally tied up with traffic for quite some time.

I'm not sure if it was a lack of folks monitoring the roadways or just a lot of cold and wet people very anxious to get home, but the backups bordered on ridiculous when you're still trying to

pull out of one of the secondary parking lots nearly two hours after Sidney Crosby won the game with his heart-breaking, jaw-dropping and game-winning goal on Ryan Miller in the shootout.

- Speaking of being cold, our contingent from Hamburg was not. In fact, we were quite comfortable because we actually overdressed for the occasion.

For the record, yours truly wore boots, long underwear, two pairs of socks, two pairs of sweatpants and snowmobile pants on the bottom, and then three shirts, a jacket and a hockey jersey up top, along with two pairs of gloves, a winter hat and a "neck gator." That kept me nice and toasty from the time I jumped in the car at around 9:45 a.m. until I arrived back home around 7 p.m.

- For those keeping score at home, the average beer went for \$8.50 while a cup of hot cocoa ran you \$3.50.

- My favorite "blasts from the past" hockey jerseys spotted in and around the stadium throughout the day that featured former Sabres players included Paul Cyr, John Tucker, Dave Andrychuk, Clint Malarchuk and a truly unique shirt that had the words "The French Connection" on the back along with the jersey number of Gil Perreault, while Rick Martin and Rene Robert's digits were located on the sleeves.

- There were also plenty of Penguins jerseys floating around Ralph Wilson Stadium, including numerous Mario Lemieux shirts as well as jerseys featuring the likes of Tom Barrasso, Jim Paek, Troy Loney, Bob Errey and Ron Francis.

- I still haven't seen a replay of the game, but a co-worker did tape NBC's coverage, so I'm looking forward to hearing the reference to the movie "Slap Shot" by Bob Costas.

- You really can't tailgate without the proper music. Still ranking high on my list of top tailgating tunes is Queen's "We Will Rock You," Guns N' Roses' "Welcome to the Jungle" and "Thunderstruck" by AC/DC.

(Daniel Meyer is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers of Western New York. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)



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Sweet Home makes good on a promise

A little more than three years ago, planning began for the Sweet Home Middle School renovation project with the convening of a parent task force that studied options and provided recommendations to the Board of Education.

The Board settled on a \$23.9 million project that would completely update the middle school as well as fixing some infrastructure issues at Heritage Heights and Glendale elementary schools.

On March 22, 2005 the Sweet Home community overwhelmingly approved the bond to fund the renovation project and work began in late May of that same year. Both the scope and the phasing of the renovation project were ambitious, renovating every space in the middle school and completing the job in 18 months.

I am proud to report that the project was substantially completed on time and on budget last month. We were able to deliver on everything we promised the community, and more.

Sweet Home Middle School has been transformed into a state-of-the-art facility for student learning. Every classroom space in the building was touched with a minimum of new floors, lights, ceilings, windows, and paint. New, energy-efficient boilers were added as was air-conditioning throughout the building. New student lockers and gym lockers were installed and all student and faculty restrooms were renovated.

The gymnasium was renovated and enlarged and the swimming pool was repaired. Nine new classroom spaces were added. The sixth, seventh and eighth grade science classrooms were expanded and renovated as true learning spaces for experimental inquiry. A high-tech fitness center with equipment geared toward middle level students was created. The library size was doubled and the cafeteria was expanded with a new serving area and kitchen.

The main office and student services offices were renovated. A new music wing was created with new rooms for chorus, band, orchestra, general music, and a showpiece 550-seat auditorium.

More than 300 new computers were purchased for the building. Hundreds of new chairs and desks were replaced and new student furniture in the library and academic spaces was purchased. Significant site work was done at the middle school, including a new, safer bus entry and exit area, new sidewalks around the building, and new blacktop on all parking lot areas. New telecommunications and data switches were added as well.

At our grand reopening ceremony we had the opportunity to thank all of the individuals who were instrumental in making this project such a success. I'd like to take this space to again thank the Sweet Home community for your tremendous support of our school district.



GEOFFREY M. HICKS

Superintendent Sweet Home Schools