
https://buffalonews.com/business/local/buffalo-niagara-is-growing-again-how-do-we-capitalize-on-it/article_3ab0791c-6da1-11ec-9994-3b0c8fa9ec8d.html

The population of the Buffalo Niagara region is growing again – and it's flipping many of the basic underpinnings of the local economy.

Where for the past five decades, local businesses had to become masters of managing decline, as people steadily moved away, they now have the chance to tap into a growing customer base.

The implications of that change are far-reaching.

More people means more potential buyers for local homes and more renters for apartments. That likely will prompt an uptick in residential construction – both in single-family homes and apartments – in the coming years.

It means more customers for local stores, which for decades operated under the basic tenet that to win a new customer, you have to steal it from a competitor.

It means more spending trickling through the economy – money that will be spent on services, entertainment, travel and all kinds of other things.

All of it simply because there are more people.

It's an advantage that most of the rest of the country has enjoyed for a long time. And now it's the Buffalo Niagara region's chance to cash in.



We asked local business leaders what the region's modest population growth – it still is about half the nationwide increase – means to the region and how to capitalize on it.



Carolynn Welch, executive director of the Westminister Economic Development Initiative, or WEDI.

Derek Gee / Buffalo News

Carolynn Welch

Executive director, Westminister Economic Development Initiative

Carolynn Welch understands just how important immigrants are to the Buffalo Niagara region.

As executive director of the Westminister Economic Development Initiative, Welch has been working with the region's growing immigrant population to help them with the educational and financial resources they need to thrive here.

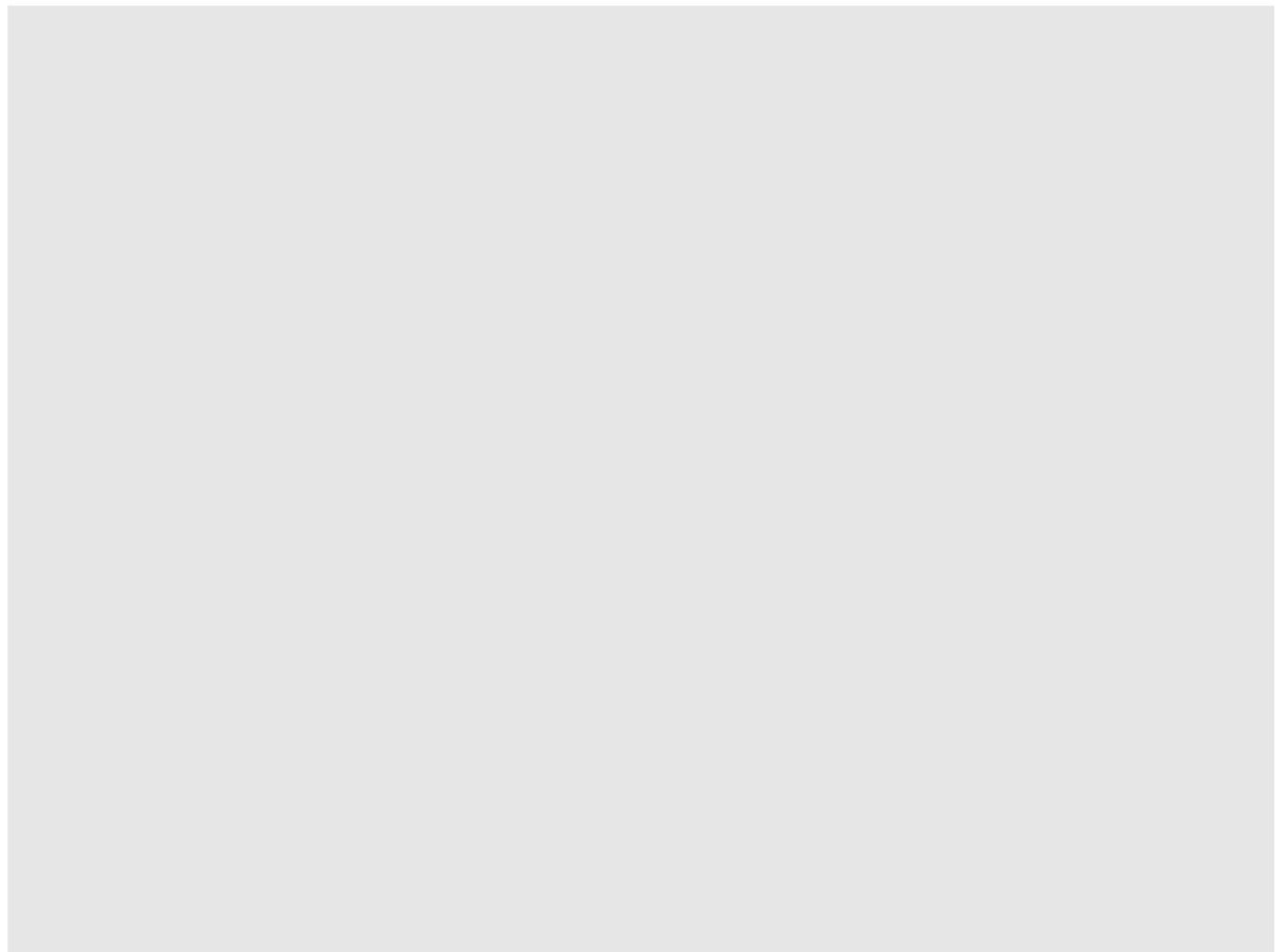
"We'd definitely not be experiencing the growth in our population. We wouldn't be experiencing the boom in our economy if it wasn't for immigrants and refugees," she   said.

But the rise in the immigrant and refugee population goes beyond sheer numbers. It also is transforming neighborhoods, she said.

"I think it also is changing the face of Buffalo," Welch said.

"The West Side of Buffalo is one of the most diverse places in the city. And I think, as a city, we need that," she said. "We need that cultural richness because we've struggled in terms of the diversity of our communities."

– *Samantha Christmann*



Stuart Green, the owner of Braymiller Market on Ellicott Street in downtown Buffalo, expects further growth downtown. (Derek Gee / Buffalo News)

Derek Gee / Buffalo News



Stuart Green

Stuart Green is making a big bet on downtown Buffalo's growth.

Green, the owner of the Braymiller Market that opened on Ellicott Street in September, needs a steady stream of customers to his grocery store for it to thrive in a part of the city that has long been without a major food store.

The key is getting people: Getting people from downtown's growing stable of new apartments to shop at his store. Getting people who are coming downtown for an event to stop by. Getting visitors from nearby hotels to shop there.

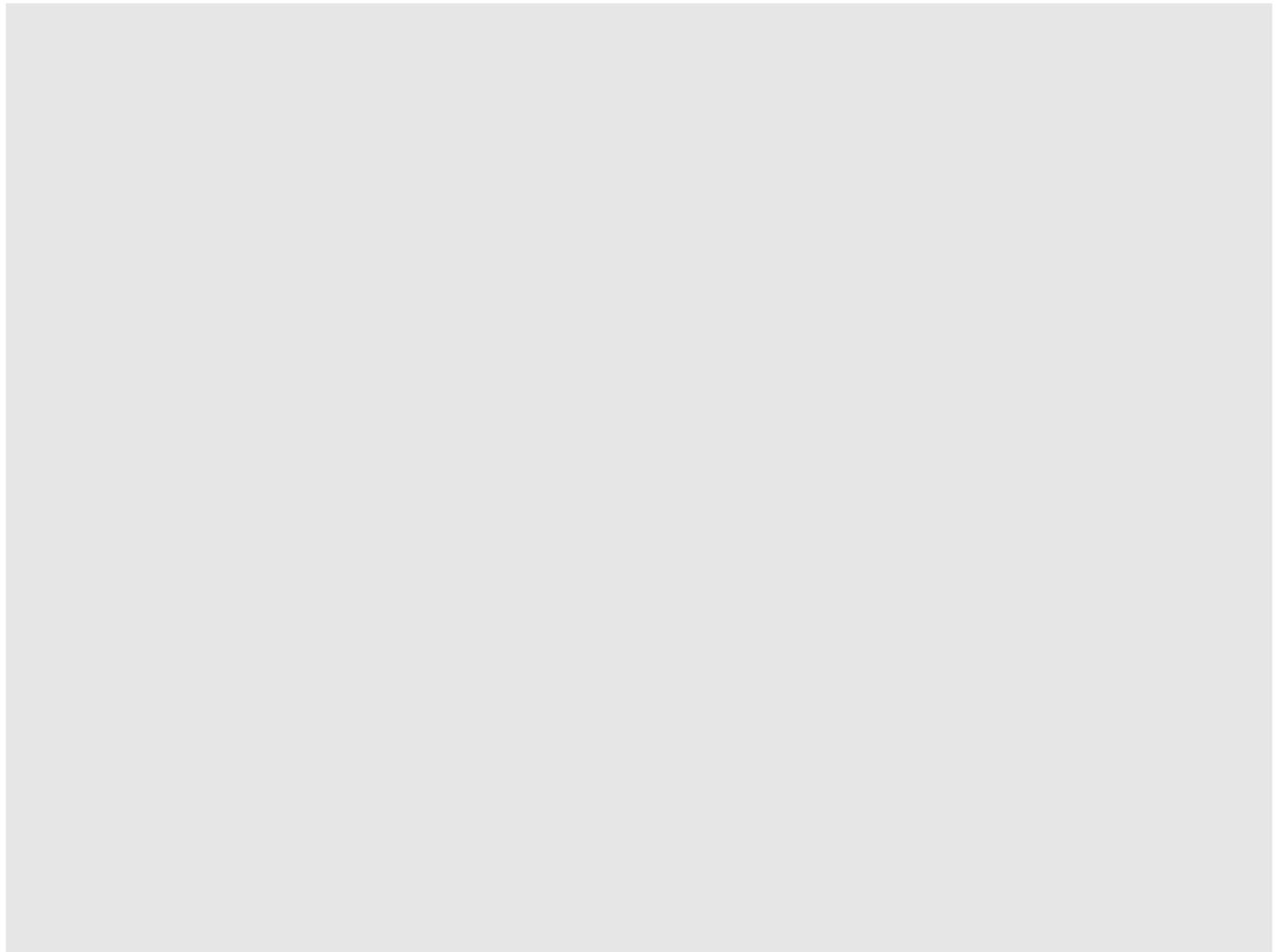
So far, Green says it's working, at least for the midsize downtown store.

"I'm sure at some point, downtown will need a 150,000-square-foot supermarket. By that point we'll be established and have our customer base and we'll be fine," Green said.

"At some point with all of the residential development happening within the city – and hopefully we get Covid behind us and the business environment gets to what it once was in offices and so on – ... the city will need more than just us downtown," Green said.

– *Samantha Christmann*





FOR PROSPECTUS - Mike Wisler, the chief information officer at M&T Bank and the incoming chairman of 43North, in the Clubhouse at Seneca One, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021. (Derek Gee / Buffalo News)

Derek Gee / Buffalo News

Mike Wisler

Chief information officer, M&T Bank

Mike Wisler is eager to persuade more workers to move to the Buffalo Niagara region, as M&T Bank hires more technology workers.

The Buffalo area's population increase is one factor that helps M&T – and other employers here – make their pitch to recruits, said Wisler, the bank's chief information officer.



"We're starting as a community being able to pull in folks who had choices just like I did," he said. "Their ledger is starting to look a little bit better because we're sending some of those signals."

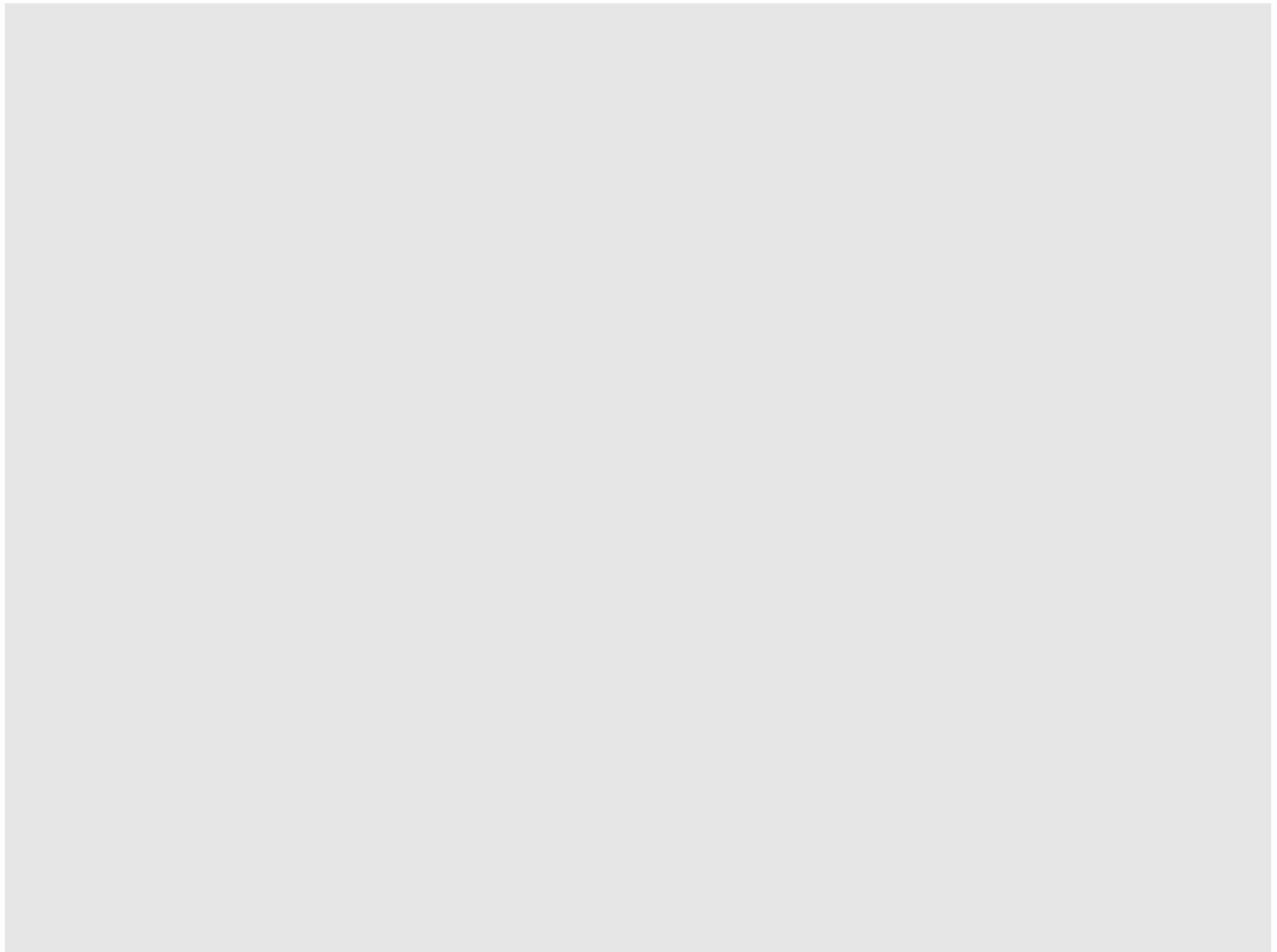
A few years ago, Wisler needed convincing to move to Buffalo from Northern Virginia to take a job with M&T. Now he is the one promoting the region's quality-of-life benefits and the opportunity to make an impact in a smaller metro area.

M&T's tech hub inside the Seneca One tower is emblematic of the region's push to build up its tech sector and startup ecosystem. Along with recruiting new talent, the region needs to capitalize on talent already living here, and training those workers for careers of the future, Wisler said.

"We've got to think about apprenticeships, going into communities who in the technical area, are just simply underrepresented for a million different reasons, and plant those trees that are going to take a long time, but they need to be a part of this," he said.

– *Matt Glynn*





Dr. Raul Vazquez, president and CEO of Urban Family Practice which he founded in 1996. (Derek Gee / Buffalo News)

Derek Gee / Buffalo News

Dr. Raul Vazquez

President and CEO, G-Health Enterprises, and president, CINQ Care-New York

Dr. Raul Vazquez has been providing care to Buffalo's underserved populations for more than 25 years, continuously innovating to develop new companies that meet needs he identifies by going into communities.

This past year may have been his busiest yet.

In 2021, Vazquez organized pop-up vaccination clinics to help fight Covid-19, he increased his fleet of mobile units to go directly into communities and negotiated a business transaction that folded his G-Health Enterprises into CINQ Care, a new



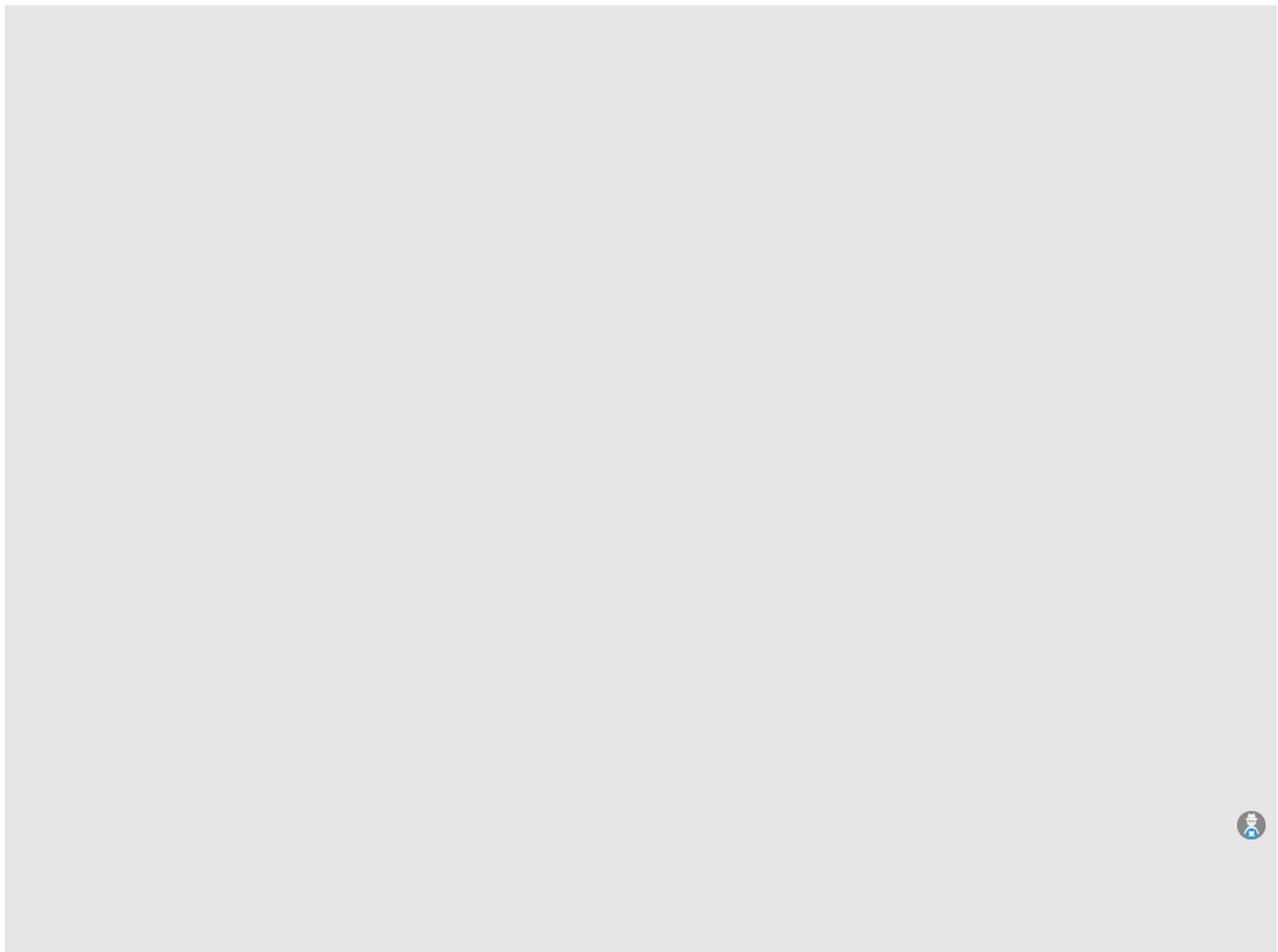
community-based ambulatory delivery system.

The partnership with CINQ Care – Vazquez will serve as president of the New York division – should provide the financial resources to expand the model and add hundreds of employees this year.

And for Vazquez, a Bronx native who came to Western New York more than 35 years ago to attend University at Buffalo medical school, he's eyeing some of the city's new residents as a workforce that can be developed.

"It's a good thing for Buffalo because it allows new talent, new languages, new jobs," he said. "I mean, we're looking to employ 400 people in the next year. So that's a workforce that we can tap into."

– *Jon Harris*



Brandye Merriweather, president of the Buffalo Urban Development Corp., believes the recent gush of investment downtown, along with improved infrastructure, will spur more growth.

Robert Kirkham / Buffalo News

Brandye Merriweather

President, Buffalo Urban Development Corp.

Brandye Merriweather is thrilled to see the population growth in Buffalo. After all, it's what she's been working towards for her whole career.

The Buffalo native and president of the Buffalo Urban Development Corp. has seen the changes in the city firsthand, from her days growing up and attending Hutch Tech as a high school student, to her years in economic development.

She remembers when Buffalo had no real "downtown" to speak of, and when she didn't even realize that there was a waterfront because it was so underutilized.

Now, she sees young entrepreneurs, immigrants, refugees and workers coming here from other cities, attracted by new opportunities in technology, and eager to play a role in their new hometown.

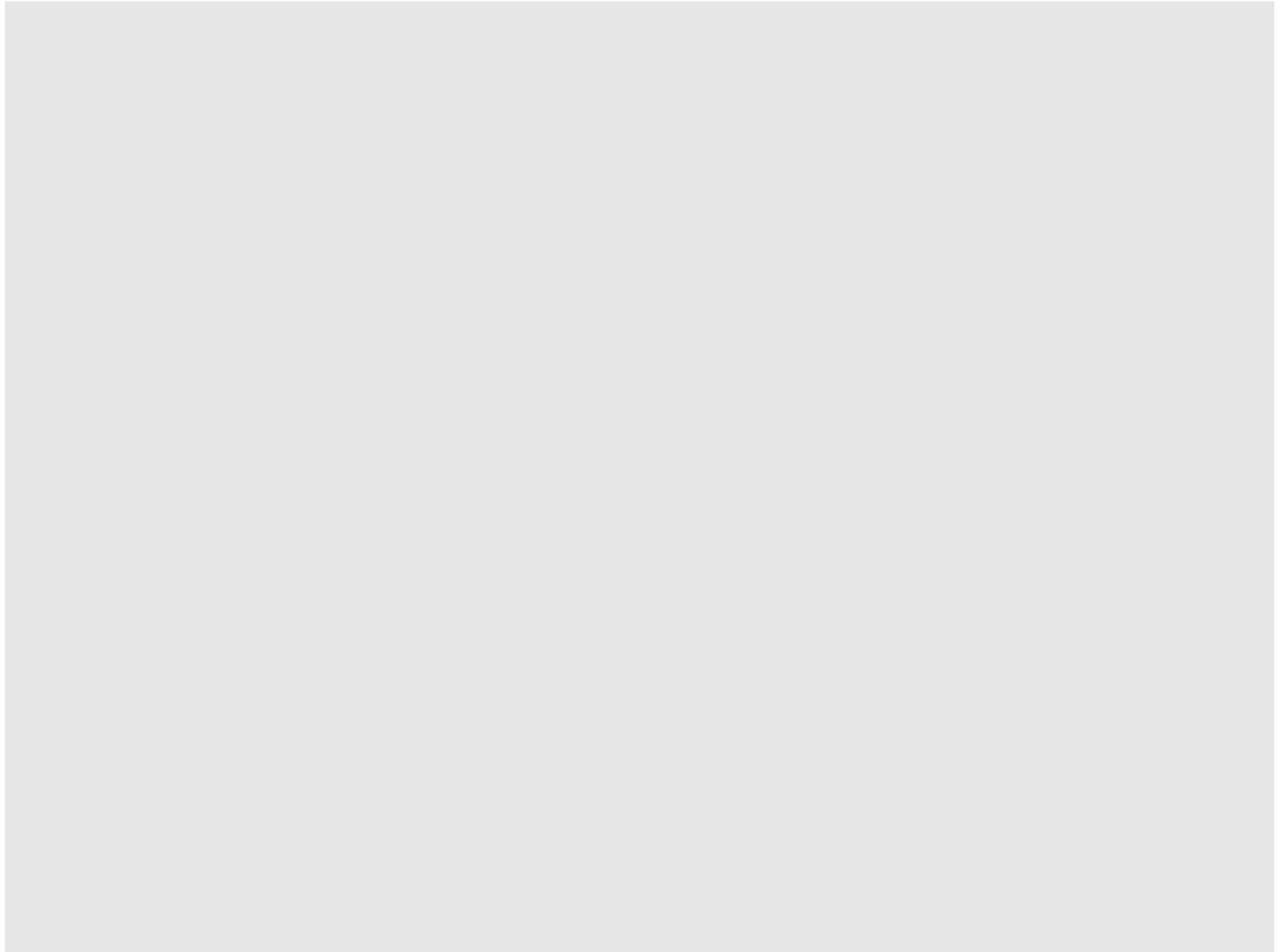
"There's an energy that's in Buffalo that I don't know that we had before," she said. "That's been really incredible, and it definitely helps with our initiatives."

She's excited to support them by encouraging new business, real estate investments and infrastructure that will make Buffalo even more appealing as a place to live and work.

"A lot of us for a long time have been really pushing for this collective vision to grow the city, to grow development, and to grow so many things," she said. "To be part of it, to be part of the planning process, working with small businesses, with stakeholders on development projects, it's unbelievable."



– *Jonathan D. Epstein*



Ernst Valery near one of his properties at the intersection of Carolina Street and Whitney Place on Buffalo's West Side.

Robert Kirkham

Ernst Valery

To Ernst Valery, Buffalo's growth is extra special, because it represents an accomplishment that a lot of larger cities haven't been able to replicate.

That says not only that those who already live here appreciate what they have, but also that they and the city's leaders have been able to better market the region to others, attracting new businesses, developers and now residents. that's likely to continue or even accelerate, and he believes Buffalo's prepared for that, he said.



"Businesses aren't going to come to a place that doesn't have the infrastructure, and this place has it," said Valery, one of the two principals of affordable housing developer SAA-EVI, and founder of the new Aequo Fund, which helps to cultivate and support new minority developers in Buffalo, and several other cities.

In turn, he says, that will build upon itself, encouraging innovations in architecture and expansion of the city's civic and cultural institutions.

"This is this global city waiting to happen, where people will want to live here," he said.

"And it's going to be sooner rather than later."

– *Jonathan D. Epstein*

David Robinson

Deputy Business Editor

I'm the News' deputy business editor. I grew up in New Hampshire, went to Syracuse University and started working at The News in 1985.

