

The View From Right Field by Rick Ohler May 18, 2017

Coming of Age—EA Style

It reminded us of a scene out of the classic Larry McMurtry book/Peter Bogdanovich film, “The Last Picture Show.” You’ll probably remember it if you’re of my vintage, give or take—it was a coming of age story that starred Cybill Shepard, Timothy Bottoms, Jeff Bridges, and Cloris Leachman and it was set in a Texas town that looked desolate, like a layer of dusty neglect had settled upon it and time had passed it by. That’s the way we felt when we took a very rare drive to the McKinley Mall the other evening.

Now, out here in Right Field, we eschew (RIP, Snake) the shopping mall experience. The way we look at it, any day that doesn’t require a trip to a mall or shopopolis-type retail center or chi-busting SprawlMart has been at least a partial success. So it had probably been quite a while since we had driven to the 100-storefront complex that was supposed to bring the Southtowns into the 20<sup>th</sup> century back when it debuted (not long after “The Last Picture Show opened).

What a shock. Macy’s, gone. Dick’s, gone. Sears and Penney’s, once the tibia and fibula of American commerce, on life-support and clinging to dwindling hopes. Small businesses, coming and going like a revolving door. So many of the stores had closed or moved on to the next big shopping experience down the road—you know: bigger, shinier, brasher, tackier, more crowded at first, yet, ultimately more transient, impersonal, lonely and devoid of soul. The McKinley Mall looked like the president for whom it was named: mortally wounded and soon to be forgotten, ready to take its place beside the other once sparkling jewel, now weed-strewn litter catcher of Western New York retail, the Seneca Mall.

I mention this because, as you might have guessed, I’m planning to relate my recent experience at McKinley to current goings on in the 14052.

A few weeks ago, the world’s best hometown newspaper asked to me to supply some text for the annual Greater EA Chamber of Commerce tourism magazine called *East Aurora and Beyond*, which extols the virtues of the 14052 and nearby 14059, 14102, 14139, 14169, 14170, and 14080. The advertising department at the *Advertiser*, Gail Ford and Leslie Wade, manager Sandy Cunningham, and graphics diva Stephanie Foersch, do the heavy lifting to put the magazine together, while I prose about things local. And together, we make the old hometown (and Chamber) look pretty darn good.

This year, I had an idea for a small piece that highlighted the new businesses on upper Main Street. I was sure there were half a dozen or so that might fit into a few hundred word, one-column article. Then I decided to take a hike and make a count. I was amazed. My five-minute walk turned into a whole afternoon.

Go ahead and guess. How many new businesses—say, under two years old—are there on Main Street from the Pine/Olean intersection to the Village Hall? I was surprised. I think you will be, too.

I counted fourteen. Fourteen local businesses where you'll probably be waited on by the owner and have a more pleasant experience than you might at the mall. And what a variety—not a national chain in the bunch.

Here's a very capsulized view of them: **Beulah's General Store** - 726 Main St., - a modern mercantile with gifts, accessories, apparel, housewares, local artisans, bath/body, and a warm place to gather; **Creative Wellness** - 726 Main St. 2<sup>nd</sup> floor - providing classes, counseling and workshops to help people establish patterns of living to enhance health to improve quality of life; **Mambrino King** - 720 Main St. - serving specialty wines, coffees, chocolates, charcuterie; **McDuffie's Bakery/Mr. Pot Pie** - 718 Main St. - where their famous pot pies—from their freezer to your oven—and shortbread cookies epitomize comfort food; **Cone Five Gallery** - 712 Main St. - where master craftsman Greg Link is opening a fine art gallery to showcase his pottery and the work of other masters in media like pottery, artisan jewelry, metal work, wood, candles, blown glass; **Rookie's Sports Bar and Grill** - 710 Main St.,- the newest tavern in town where you'll find a friendly pint, TVs tuned to sports and pub food; **Purrfect Tea Room** - 700 Main St., - recently moved to uptown, Purr-fect Tea has a large array of loose leaf teas to enjoy in their tea room or at home plus organic, loose-leaf teas and tisanes, and tea accessories; **Rowandale Farms Artisan Center** - 650 Main St.- where owners Rich and Alice Clarkson stock their shelves in their new store with beautiful, handmade works of art and functional furniture that they create out of reclaimed wood, whether it's barnwood, old windows or broken furniture; **Homegrown Kitchens** - 648 Main St. - serving grain bowls, soups, salads, smoothies, and featuring locally sourced and in-season fare to eat in, take out or order online; **Griffon Gastropub** - 634 Main St. - a true gastropub with a unique, adventurous menu and 72 beers on tap; **Beauty Organix** - 586 Main St., Suite No. 2 - an organic cosmetic and skin care; **East Aurora Cooperative Market** - 591 Main St. - a community-owned grocery store featuring local, organic, natural groceries—memberships available, open to the public; **Great Erie Federal Credit Union** - 576 Main St. - a not-for-profit, cooperative, community-based financial institution offering savings and checking accounts, loans of all kinds, ATM, IRAs; **Painted House featuring Kitch Studios** - 576 Main St. - a just-opened home & lifestyle shop with artfully restyled furniture, hip home decor, and unique gifts & accessories. Take a deep breath after that list.

Of course, I didn't include the kinda new businesses like **42 North Brewing**, **Daily's Catering** (recently moved into the **Aurora Outfitters** building), the soon to be metaphysical store in the Subway building. Or the suddenly vivacious Elm Street Corridor with **Yoshi** and **Kornerstone Café and Juice Bar**. Or **Bica e Vinho's** Portuguese cuisine on the Mill Road Creek. And what about all the businesses I've forgotten? I'm sure I'll hear from them. Oh, and you'll find another story in *East*

*Aurora and Beyond*—another lengthy story about all the businesses that have withstood the test of time for more than 50 years.

It's funny, isn't it, how places like malls and superstores and sprawlmarts have to keep reinventing themselves to keep up with the trends, while here in the old hometown, Right Field World Headquarters, we came of age a long time ago, and even with the constant updates, we seem to be aging just fine.