



## The View from Right Field

by Rick Ohler

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**T**he exasperating volume of traffic along our village streets in the last 10 days leads me to a disconcerting conclusion: some of you must have forgotten to go home after the recent raucous Reunion Weekend. I mean, it was fun having you back for a nostalgic look at the old place and perhaps some second guessing—why did we ever leave here?—but don’t you have jobs or families or something to get back to? I have this selfish notion that I’d like to drive from Right Field World Headquarters on the western fringe of the village to the *Advertiser* office in something under half an hour, quite a feat with the road overflowing with vehicles. I bicycle often, abiding by all rules and courtesies, thereby eliminating the parking dilemma, but with the traffic in a Mobius Strip-like perpetual motion, I feel like a minnow in shark water and it’s just a matter of time until someone texting while driving or pulling a u-turn (weren’t those illegal back in the day?) makes me wish I’d worn full body armor instead of a plastic helmet.

Oh, I can see why you made the pilgrimage to your old stomping grounds. For all the changes in the 14052, its quintessence (RIP Snake) has remained intact. And you saw that we still know how to have a good time here. Never a dull moment.

Look at the lineup for Reunion Weekend. On Wednesday, July 25, Peter Potter led a 12-kilometre bike trip to village and town parks. Sixty or 70 of us cycled around the village, offering anecdotes and information about our public green spaces, before we adjourned to 42 North Brewing. That same evening at the Community Pool the Aktion Club and Kiwanis were playing some spirited baseball as five or six-dozen developmentally challenged adults and a score of volunteers showed how much fun the National Pastime can be, at any level.

Thursday at 6:30, the Backyard Bash kicked off with East Aurora’s house band, Never Ben, rocking the parking lot behind Vidler’s to the delight of several hundred townies, expatriates, reuniting alumni, geographical transplants and music lovers in

attendance. The world's best hometown newspaper organizes and sponsors the event with wonderful help from the village and the local police and local merchants.

Friday of Reunion Weekend, for many, marks the high point of activities. During the day, classmates and compadres get together for some pre-game warm-ups. I was bold enough to climb a (very low) fence to crash the girls-only Class of '68 lawn party at classmate Judy Hamms's house without getting arrested. Then it's on to the East Aurora Rotary Club's RAAP party, short for Rotary's Annual Aurora Party, this year at the Healthy Zone Rink. It used to be called the Rotary Attitude Adjustment Party, but you can't be too careful how you word things these days, so they changed it. The RAAP drew 1500 people from East Aurora High School classes as far back as the 1950s as recent as the 2010s. Imagine that, people older than I am, out for an evening of beers, conversation with long lost friends and music. The RAAP is a tremendous undertaking that requires all the Rotary hands on deck, but the resulting proceeds help the club fund their good works throughout the area.

Saturday, the Greater East Aurora Chamber of Commerce organizes and runs the Annual Sidewalk Sale. From the (freshly painted) viaduct to the light at Olean/Pine Street, Main Street becomes a pedestrian walkway as 100 vendors and service groups line Main Street to hawk their wares and spread their word. It's not the Taste of East Aurora (coming up in September), but there's food, too, and music and demonstrations, performances by dance troupes, deals and steals as merchants clean out inventory and more.

Saturday night, the classes with significant milestones reunion—20 years, 30, 50 and so on—have individual reunion dinners around town. The Roycroft Power House, the Legion, Wallenwein's, 42 North, 189, Kodiak Jack's, Healthy Zone Rink, the new East Aurora Brewery and more are booked for the night. Those without a milestone party seem to find a way to gather with kindred spirits if the crowds spilling out from bistros onto the sidewalks are an indication.

By Sunday, people are weary—just kidding; many of them head to Right Field World Headquarters for the Lazy B Breakfast with signature poor man's omelets, tomato-y beverages, home cooked breakfast dishes provided by enterprising local cooks and Dunkin' Donuts from those holed up, pardon the pun, in the Hampton or the Croft or one of the many b&b's that have popped up. Of course, there are the horse and buggy events at the Chur Equestrian Center, too.

If the participants are finally tired out on Sunday night after that grueling forced march through frivolity, imagine all the volunteers who put these events together.

Which brings me, at long last, to the point of this week's offering from Right Field. Well, one of the points. The first point was about the traffic, and you can dismiss that as the grumbling of a curmudgeonly townie. Actually, y'all can stay if you want; we'll find room for you somewhere.

The real point I want to make comes from comments I heard a few weeks ago, when the Rotary Club decided to shift its RAAP party from Firemen's Field to the rink in the wake of declining attendance and proportionately declining revenues that compromised their fundraising ability. What a hue and cry arose from some complainants. The indignation! How dare they move my party! One fellow said that he came every ten years and demanded that the same party be in the same place because, darn it all, he liked it that way. Some accused the Rotary of being in cahoots with nether business forces in town out to stick it to the firemen. Oh my. You'd think the RAAP, and I suppose other annual events like the Kiwanis Chicken Barbecue, Memorial Day remembrances, the Independence Day parade and fireworks and carnival, the Carolcade, were birthrights, not generous gifts from civic-minded citizens.

I reminded the complainant that these are volunteers at the Rotary Club. So are the Aktion Club and Kiwanis Club members. And Peter Potter, bike trip leader. And everyone involved with the Backyard Bash. And all the folks who put together the Sidewalk Sale. And whoever organized your class dinner or cocktail party or brunch for Reunion Weekend. And, for that matter, the nice people in Right Field who hosted the 42<sup>nd</sup> Lazy B Breakfast. And that's just one weekend; this stuff goes on all year with dozens of organizations and hundreds of volunteers. No one *has* to do any of this. So when people come back and say, "God, we love East Aurora. What a wonderful place. What's the secret?" I tell 'em there are lots of reasons. Visionary businesspeople, for sure. Effective administrators, certainly. Engaged citizenry—we're trying. Schools—topnotch. Pleasant climate—occasionally. Greenspace, walkability, functioning Main Street—check, check and check. Jobs—getting better. Real estate—buy some yesterday before the price goes higher. But none of that means anything without the volunteers who, each in his or her own way, gives back and makes our town the place you want to come back to.

Elbert Hubbard said it best when he carved into a front door at the Roycroft Inn: "Produce great people; the rest follows."