



## The View from Right Field *by Rick Ohler*

a bi-weekly column in the  
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“Everyone’s Talking About The  
Weather....”

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**M**ark Twain, the famous humorist and smart aleck, is credited with saying, “Everyone’s talking about the weather, but no one is doing anything about it.” He should know better. After all, he edited the *Courier Express* for a couple of years and lived in Buffalo, a place that does something about its weather: we make the most of it, at least in the 14052.

When word of the approaching storm came early last week, I was skeptical, and hardly alone in my skepticism. We have girded our loins to do battle with a snowy Goliath many times before, closing schools and highways, scurrying to grocery and liquor stores until the shelves were bare skeletons, only to find at daybreak a world pretty much the way we left it. So our attitude might justifiably be one of “Show us the snow.” My Thursday writers, a group of sexa-, septua-, and octogenarians scoffed at the warning and opted to have our regular, late afternoon story-swapping session in person at the senior center rather than Zoom, even as Jim Cantore and his Weather Channel crew began arriving in town, smelling a TV-worthy storm.

Well, they came to the right place. The snow began on schedule and continued just as members of the meteorological fraternity and sorority said it would. Luckily it fell straight down with little or no wind, unlike the Blizzard of '77 when it came sideways, upwards, downwards and in all directions at once.

This storm, in contrast, became a work of art on Mother Nature's part: incessant and exhausting, but beautiful, prompting expatriates on social media, who often gloat over their southern weather, to pine for their hometown. Our storm—maybe we'll call it 22 Skidoo—created graceful sculptures, like the one that formed so entirely over my GMC Yukon that you'd have no idea a vehicle was under there, and may not until April Fools' Day or later. My appointment with Dave Allen Service to get my snow tires on and heater fixed, which I scheduled weeks ago for November 22 thinking I'd be in plenty of time, may have to wait. Wasn't it just a week or so ago when shorts and t-shirts were still in the dress code? We might have guessed that we'd pay for it.

As my efforts with the snowblower yielded less and less progress, and as it became a more obviously Sisyphean (RIP Snake) task, I began to wonder if I had yet reached a sufficient elder status (age 72) where young lads from the neighborhood would appear, armed with shovels and offer to clear my driveway for 50 cents and a mug of cocoa, a scenario that was commonplace on Oakwood Avenue when I was that lad, 60-some (yikes!) years ago. Probably not, I guessed.

So, I did the next logical thing. "Hey Ben," I texted to the owner of the Right Field Satellite Office, southeast corner of Oakwood and Elm, "will you be able to open?"

"I've been shoveling since eight this morning," replied. "I found a couple employees willing to come in. I'll be here."

Ever the civic-minded citizen, I put out a social media offer: "I will buy a first drink at Wally's for anyone who arrives on skis or snowshoes from 3-5 p.m. today." I figured I would support a local business, encourage physical activity and forget about the sculpture of the frozen GMC Yukon for a while.

Skiing through the village with a several feet of the fluff on the ground (and on houses, cars, shrubs and trees) had a serene quality to it. Quietly I slid from Right Field World Headquarters on the western fringe of the village toward Oakwood and Elm encountering a few plows, a police car and just a private vehicle or two for whom the travel ban did not, apparently, apply. Many, like me, had given up snowplowing and yielded this round to Mother Nature, the only noise being shovels against snow and kids shrieking with delight as they (sort of) helped Mom and Dad shovel.

A rosy-cheeked, but small crowd awaited at Wally's, none of whom had skied or snowshoed, making it a cheap afternoon for me. Ben allowed as how he wasn't making any money that day, but he hoped the good will generated would be some compensation. The following day, Saturday, with snow persisting, he opened once again, one of the few in town do manage it. A family scheduled to hold a memorial at a local funeral parlor, discovered that the parlor was still snowed in, so the gathering moved to Wally's at Ben's invitation. Not a formal memorial, but a place the family could welcome friends with warmth and wings.

It didn't take much past noon for the word to get out; soon the place, which technically doesn't open its kitchen until two on Saturdays, was teeming and Ben opened for food orders. One of the first groups through the door was the five-man video team from the Weather Channel. Pulling from my training as a journalist—wait a minute; I have no training, I'm just winging it—I invited myself to their table. Astute server/bartender Jerrica Hinman brought me a fresh beer and voilà, I was turning the tables on national television personalities by asking the questions.

On-air reporter Chris Bruin, a Florida native now in Atlanta, said all the right things about being in East Aurora. Almost all. "Such friendly people," he said, "a small town full of trusting people. They opened the Speakeasy (Elm Street Bakery's subterranean tavern) and told us to help ourselves and use it as a place to get warm. Everyone at the Roycroft has been so accommodating. What a place. We've enjoyed how East Aurorans have welcomed us and how much they've love the representation. It feels like we're back in the good old days."

But then, but then... he said it, with a straight face. "Being in East Aurora feels like being in a Hallmark Christmas movie." In the immortal words of Moon Unit Zappa in her short-lived almost-a-hit song, "Valley Girl," "Gag me with a spoon. Like, totally."

Eventually, Chris Bruin and his colleagues, Randy Flinders and Charles Peek from headquarters in Atlanta, and local freelancers Mark Zoni and Daniel Sack, turned the tables on me and we talked about East Aurora and Buffalo history, local beers, and their cash crop, storms. Everybody's talking about the weather, and some people are doing something about it.

