

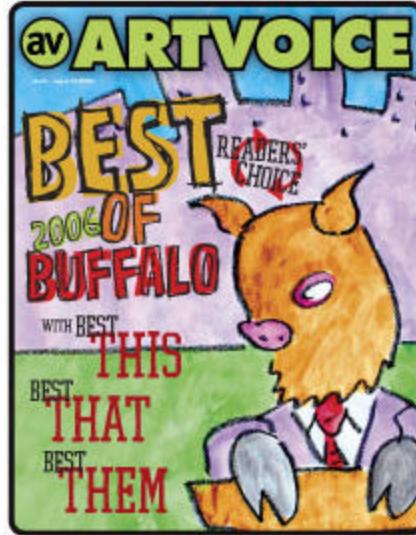
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Best of Buffalo 2006

This appears to be a remarkable year for Buffalo. We elected Byron Brown mayor; hockey is back and the Sabres are having a thrilling season; waterfront development is finally getting traction; Marv Levy returned to the Bills; Studio Arena sent a play to Broadway and appointed a promising new artistic director; Congressman Brian Higgins won his mega-million-dollar fight for us against the New York Power Authority; City Honors High School was ranked fourth in the country among public schools by Newsweek; and, probably most important, a majority of people are beginning to realize that a casino in downtown Buffalo would be about as smart as eating rat poison for dinner.



This is also a remarkable year for the Artvoice Best of Buffalo survey. Between our mail-in paper ballots and the spiffy online ballot (designed by our clever IT guru Dave Kleinschmidt), we found ourselves tallying more than 28,000 entries. In fact, the response was so overwhelming that we had to move the issue back a week so that we could continue tabulating all the votes. We've finished the counting and the top nominations are printed here for all to read. While most categories have five nominees, you will notice that some have more. In those categories that have more than five nominees, there were just such an incredible number of votes cast, and the races were so tight, that we felt the nomination list had to be expanded to recognize the strength of those named.

I would like to commend the *Artvoice* staff and interns for making sense of some of the ballots. We always have voters who misunderstand the concept of Best of Buffalo, voters who tell us Green Day or U2 are their favorite band and Angelina Jolie is their favorite actress. Forget those. Understanding what a voter has written on a legitimate entry can be more challenging than one might think, too. For example, someone, perhaps fond of bellybuttons, chose the Navel Park as the Best Tourist Attraction.

Names are often butchered almost beyond recognition. Channel 7 newscaster Keith Radford showed up as Keith Bredford, Keith Radcliff, Keith Rathman, Kieth Radston and "Keith the-guy-with-the-tan on 7." Talking Leaves Books received a great number of votes. However, many of those votes appeared as Falling Leaves, Turning Leaves, Counting Leaves, Reading Leafs and so on. Similarly, Rust Belt Books appeared as Rusted Root Books or Rusty Belt Leaves.

Perhaps, since I'm talking about book stores, this would be a good time to make it clear that while Barnes & Noble and Borders both received a great number of votes, the *Artvoice* survey is not intended to highlight national chains. Rather, it is to bring attention to places, people and businesses that are unique to Buffalo. While Barnes & Noble is an excellent store, and Starbucks has decent coffee, and many people like McDonald's fries, these chain stores offer the exact same product whether you're in Albuquerque, Seattle or Rochester. Apparently some people missed the notice printed on the ballot in all caps: "NO CHAIN STORES—VOTE LOCAL."

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—jamie moses

Drink



Fine & Performance Art



During the Blizzard of '77, then-mayor Jimmy Griffin advised Buffalonians to stay inside and drink a six-pack of Genny. While few agreed with his choice of beers, everyone agreed that drinking was a good idea.

Claiming four of the top five spots for **Best Exhibit**, the **Albright-Knox Art Gallery** nearly swept the entire category. Under the leadership of AKAG director Louis Grachos and curators Doug Dreishpoon and Claire Schneider, the gallery has completely reinvented itself in the past two years. The fall 2005 show "Extreme Abstraction" was the first time in the gallery's history that a single exhibit occupied every inch of the building: walls, staircases, floors, hallways, windows, upstairs, downstairs, main building, Clifton Hall and the sculpture garden. More importantly, "Extreme Abstraction" was a powerful confirmation of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery's strength and its most defining character: exemplary abstract and

contemporary art.

In the history of the Artvoice Best of Buffalo poll—now nearly a decade old—there are certain winners that have held steady throughout. While our readers have been fairly changeable in their top restaurant picks, when asked about the **Best Reason to Live in Buffalo** a top answer has invariably been “the food.” Year after year the Food & Drink section has been the one that gets the biggest response out of all the categories. It is also the largest in number, and counting the ballots is no small task. It is particularly daunting due to the sheer amount of different places that are offered as potential “bests.” With a few notable exceptions—the bus station for Best Breakfast?—all the candidates are worthy.

Food



Local Media



Our readers tell us that among the region's **Most Under-reported Stories** is the danger posed to the city by the **Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino**. We think so, too—though we note that, to its credit, the

Buffalo News is devoting more energy to exploring the issue in recent weeks.

Music



People & Politics



Whether your interest is blues, folk, rock, hip-hop, jazz or whatever, Buffalo has something for you. Buffalo has it all—not Lancaster, not Depew, not East Aurora, not Williamsville, not Cheektowaga. Buffalo. Got it?

Well, well—people and politics. If it weren't for the Sabres, what else would there be to talk about? There is hardly a politician in Western New York who did not receive at least one vote for **Best Politician**, which proves that every public servant has a mother collecting press clips somewhere. On the other hand—or maybe this is the same hand—there is hardly a politician in Western New York who did not receive a vote for **Worst Politician**, which proves that after every election there is a sore loser. The city's new mayor, after just 100 days in office as of the closing of the *Artvoice* polls, had managed to land on both lists—which

proves that everyone is watching **Byron Brown** closely. It's worth noting that, excepting perennial finalist **Sam Hoyt**, the finalists for Best Politician are all new to their offices. Optimism?

Queen City



Talk about a changing landscape; it seems only a few years ago that **Best Festival** comprised the Allentown Art Festival, which is almost a half-century old, and the Italian Festival, and that was about it. Today, *Artvoice* readers vote for literally dozens of other festivals that are relatively new: **Elmwood Festival of the Arts; Music Is Art; Pride Festival; Artvoice Street Festival; Wingfest; Wingstock; Irish Festival; Guitar Festival; Rock the Harbor; Canal Fest; etc.**

Shopping & Services



We begin with a hat tip to some our **Best Ballot Stuffers**, who congregate perenially in this section of the Best of Buffalo polling.

When It's Cold Out

Our winter category



When It's Warm Out



revealed a few indelible truths about Buffalonians. Namely that we like winter sports, we are all sex fiends, we really don't need any excuse to miss work, we spend way too much time in Florida and several of us don't quite get it... any of it.

Reading the results for our summer category almost always elicits the same set of reactions from AV staff: First there's cabin fever, then stunned silence and finally heavy drinking. While the folks who answer earnestly come back with many of the same answers year after year—**Sunset Bay** and **Evangola** in beaches, **Allegany** and **Letchworth** in camping, **Zoar Valley** in hiking, the **UB/Amherst bike path** for bicycling, **Delaware Park** and **Chestnut Ridge** in parks—occasionally a notable upstart makes the list, like **Jones Pond**, a gay campground in Angelica. They remind us of why everyone loves summers in Buffalo: long, sunny days and plenty of recreational opportunities. But there are others, the

ones who cause stunned silence and drinking, who remind of us of why democracy is bound to crumble. In the beaches category, many people decided on far-off locations, like Laguna Beach, South Beach and Topsail Island, North Carolina. We can only assume that these are not the same people who directed their vitriol toward golfing. One told us to ask the rich white people, and a second simply declared, "Go golf in hell, yuppie scum." Another morbid person likes the "beach" at Mirror Lake in Forest Lawn Cemetery. Two responses that raised eyebrows under the camping category favored Girl Scout camp. We can only hope that there are Girl Scouts filling out our survey. Needless to say, none of these answers made the top five lists.