

COMMENTARY

From rat race to Buffalo and loving it

By DONN ESMONDE

12/15/2003

Set the following in stone for the Chamber of Commerce. Put it aside for every business trying to recruit out-of-town talent. Mark it as an antidote to our tattered national image.

For those reading this in other cities, the people quoted herein were not coerced or compromised. There was no cash payment.

Consider this a testimonial from the outback that much of America considers us to be.

Rick Paris, 52, and Laurel Di Brog, 43, are vice presidents at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. Paris moved to East Aurora last year from Washington, D.C., with his wife and teenage son.

Di Brog came to Amherst six years ago from Los Angeles, with her husband and daughter, now 9.

When the job called, each thought: Anywhere but Buffalo. It's old, cold, and the best restaurant probably has golden arches.

They came anyway.

What they found underlines the difference between perception and reality. It is an antidote to our image, verbal Viagra for our drooping psyche.

They rediscovered here their youth, their families, their energy. They found the time to be themselves, with jobs they enjoy but are not - because it's Buffalo - a slave to.

But I'll let them tell it:

Paris: "My life (in D.C.) was fighting the Beltway to get to work - I was spending three hours a day in my car - getting to work with my nerves shot, rarely getting home before 8:30, dinner from 9:30 to 11, to bed at 11, wake up at 6 a.m. and do it all over again. . . . My wife and kids had been telling me for years, "We don't know who you are. We never see you. On weekends all you want to do is sleep.' "

Di Brog: "I was exhausted (in L.A.), just with the competition on the job, taking two to three hours every day navigating the Freeway and always being on edge. . . . There was no time at the end of the day to pursue anything else."

Here, the Di Brogs have season tickets to Theater of Youth, and she's on the board. There's time for horseback riding, hobbies and occasional weekends in Toronto or Pittsburgh.

Di Brog: "When we moved here it was October. I remember driving by stores that had pumpkins out on the side of road. They didn't get stolen or smashed. My husband said, "My God, they leave the pumpkins out!' We were stunned that people still live like this, that you didn't have to chain everything down. . . . It was like going back to the '50s, the way the neighborhoods are here. We wanted that for (our daughter)."

Paris lived 11 years in a Washington, D.C., suburb without meeting his next-door neighbor.

Paris: "Here, the day we showed up with the moving van, six people on the street stopped by, to say hello or give us baked goods. The friendliness is unreal, and it's genuine. . . . I go to the airport, and the (security) screener says, "Hey, Mr. Paris, how are you?' "

Bigger cities may have a better Philharmonic or more sports teams. But it doesn't matter if it's too much of a struggle to go.

This material is copyrighted and is for your exclusive personal use only. Republication or other use of this material without the express written consent of The Buffalo News is prohibited. The Buffalo News can be contacted at 716-849-4444 or by e-mail at republish@buffnews.com.



COMMENTARY

From rat race to Buffalo and loving it

Di Brog: "We do more here than we ever did in L.A. There's good theater, good restaurants. In L.A., it takes a lot of energy just to walk out the door, knowing you've got to get on the Freeway, battle for parking, wait in line."

Paris: "It's 23 minutes for us, door to door, to the Philharmonic, and you can park right outside. . . . Old friends say to me, 'Rick, you look 10 years younger.' There's so much less stress here. There are great things in D.C., but it's an effort, every single day. After a while, you don't have the energy. You turn into a turnip."

Quality of life. We've got it.

Paris: "We have a house we could never dream of owning in the D.C. area - a lot of land, a hot tub. Friends come up from Washington, they can't believe it. I have one friend, in international trade development, he's begging me to find him a job in Buffalo."

Di Brog: "When I get those headhunter calls (about jobs in other cities), nothing wows me because I'm really happy here. There's something about this community that's hard to leave."

There it is. Post it, mark it, print it, save it.

Most of all, send it to anyone who doubts what we've got here. To anyone who thinks that image defines a place. To anyone who believes that reputation is reality.

e-mail: desmonde@buffnews.com

This material is copyrighted and is for your exclusive personal use only. Republication or other use of this material without the express written consent of The Buffalo News is prohibited. The Buffalo News can be contacted at 716-849-4444 or by e-mail at republish@buffnews.com.

