

Growing Business & Community

We have a podcast!

We have a podcast! One you can actually subscribe to and download on Spotify or Apple, or watch on YouTube! The weekly articles here in Niagara Frontier Publications are a great way for us to stay connected to our community. The weekly podcasts give us a chance to discuss business issues and more with business and community leaders in a casual format. We have had a lot of so far with the podcast, and cannot thank Rich Meranto (Meranto Media / Emerge Creators) enough from for his expertise and help in get-

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Jennifer Pauly
President

and the board of directors. We also started back up our "Roam the

ting this off the ground!

When businesses were forced to shut down in 2020, the Chamber was looking for additional ways to connect with our membership. We quickly navigated Zoom to set up meetings for committees and the board of directors. We also

Region" programming, but in the form of webisodes, not thinking people were actually watching. To our surprise, we had a following! As business opened, we fell back into our program of work and put the "Roam the Region" episodes on the back burner. The rebranding of the Chamber gave us the opportunity to also rebrand the program and explore what it takes to pull off a podcast!

Our first podcast was a solo one, which is harder to do than it looks! We gave an overview of all of the new programs and the

Chamber rebrand. Episode 2 featured The John Fiore Foundation. Ron Aughtmon, the director of the foundation, spoke about the legacy John Fiore left, and how the foundation is used to spread good around the region. Episode 3 was on location at Chairman Matt Villnave's Center Street business, Trait-Carré. We spoke about chamber initiatives and also having a business on Center Street. Rich brought his camera and we were able to showcase the store. Our guest for the fourth episode was Michael Ragusa, managing

partner at Vision Financial Group. Michael has joined the Chamber at our leader membership tier level.

We are looking forward to programming the remainder of the year, and have a goal of staying consistent with weekly content. Podcast information is shared on our social media pages, and in the member newsletter. We encourage members to contact us to be a guest and talk about their business goals, challenges and growth. Find out more about the podcast at www.UpwardNiagara.com.

New Clean Slate bill impacts business owners

BY BRIAN D. SEAMAN

Niagara County District Attorney

The Legislature in Albany has passed another new "criminal

justice reform" bill. They call this one Clean Slate.

Once signed by Gov. Hochul, this bill will seal almost all

criminal convictions from public view after a minimal period of time if the person is not re-arrested; three years for misdemeanors; and eight (years) for felonies. Sex offenses and murders will not be sealed, but most other violent crimes would – including burglary, robbery, assault and manslaughter.

The stated reason for this bill is to lessen the burden of a criminal conviction on those convicted. The idea is that, because a criminal record can make it harder to get a job, the fact of the criminal conviction should be sealed from the public eye.

Police agencies working within their scope of duties are still supposed to have access to these sealed records, and so are courts, as well as certain types of employers who are required by law to do criminal background checks, like schools or police departments. So then, from whom are the criminal convictions sealed? The answer is ordinary business owners. While a school will be able to obtain a complete criminal history for a potential employee, an ordinary small business will not.

Would you want to know if someone has been previously convicted of burglary, robbery, and assault with a weapon, or

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Niagara County District Attorney

even manslaughter before you welcome him or her into your family business? What about hiring someone to be the bookkeeper at your business? In my experience, embezzlement is a crime with a very high likelihood of recidivism. I have seen it time and again: The same person steals from one employer, is convicted, then gets a new job with a different employer and steals again, often over and over again. Do you think you should be able to find out if the person you are considering hiring to keep your books stole tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars from a previous employer?

New York already has a law that allows people with one or two older, non-violent convictions to seek to have those

convictions sealed. It is a simple process. The individual has to fill out a simple application created by the court system for the purpose and obtain a copy of the certificates of conviction from the court. They then file the application with the court and serve my office with a copy. The court decides whether or not to seal the record, and in a vast majority of cases the record is sealed.

The irony is that this new law was passed, in part, because, in the eyes of some, too few people have applied to have their records sealed. Too few people with criminal convictions are concerned enough about this issue to make a simple application. Nevertheless, downstate legislators have stepped in and decided to seal not only those older non-violent records, but many, many more criminal records, even violent felony convictions, and even for criminals with many, even dozens of convictions.

Many businesses don't currently obtain criminal histories before hiring someone. They are not particularly concerned about prior convictions. Many other businesses believe in offering second chances, and are more than willing to hire someone with a criminal record. But it seems to me that, whether or not to do so, and for what positions, should be a decision a business owner gets to make.

This new law takes that decision out of the hands of business owners.

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