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## Making magic for the masses: A week behind the scenes at Artpark



**BY JOSHUA MALONI**  
GM/Managing Editor

Artpark & Company used extra-small font on its heavy-stock, 8-1/2-by-11 2023 season poster in order to cram in as many listings as possible. It doesn't escape me that this typographical method reflects the standard the performing, visual, educational and environmental arts venue has set by jam-packing summers with concerts, walks, tours and talks.

Year in and year out, this is the place to be when the warm weather returns.

Of course, most large-scale Artpark presentations were slated for Tuesdays in the early 2000s and into the 2010s, but that is no longer the case. Nowadays, workers are essentially on call, as happenings are spread throughout the week – sometimes on back-to-back days – subject to guest performer availability.

Over a nine-day period in mid-July, I observed the inner workings of the Artpark & Company approach, spent time with the team, and peaked behind the curtain (and behind the scenes) to get a better understanding of what it takes to entertain, enlighten and empower more than 100,000 people on a yearly basis.

This time period included four concerts (headlined by Tori Amos, Barenaked Ladies, Lauren Daigle and Rain: A Tribute to the Beatles), two "New Music in the Park" shows (Jeremy Dutcher, Third Coast Percussion), a "Free Family Saturday," the first week of Art Camp, a guided walking tour-modern music concert ("L'Oiseau"), a Sensing Resonance: Plein Air Poetry writers' workshop (and performance), and the Artpark Fairy House Festival.

An estimated 20,000 people participated in one or more of the activities.

But most of those patrons only saw the end result of the efforts required to present those performances. They may have admired an art installation, or let their children play with costumed characters, or watched their favorite musicians rock the Mainstage and Artpark Amphitheater concert stages – but little did they know how these massive, magical moments were managed.

*SEE DISCOVER, continued on Page 6*

## Loud and fast: 'Thunder on the Niagara' returns this weekend

**BY KAREN CARR KEEFE**  
Senior Contributing Writer

"Thunder on the Niagara" is back at Gratiwick Park in North Tonawanda this weekend, and hydroplane enthusiasts of all ages couldn't be more pleased.

The day-long, family-oriented event starts at 10 a.m. on both Saturday and Sunday. But spectators likely will have tents, lawn chairs and blankets all along the water well before the races start. About 30 food and craft vendors will be out in full force, as well.

Event organizer Gary Roesch of Grand Island said people can look forward to watching four different classes of hydroplanes and more than 60 boats. First up are the qualifying heats.

"The last of the heats is Sunday afternoon, and that's the final," Roesch said.

"There's been a considerable change from years previously. Now we're asking people to go into the Witmer Road entrance,



Gathered at Gratiwick Park in North Tonawanda for a news conference about the "Thunder on the Niagara" hydroplane races this Saturday and Sunday, are, from left, race organizers and participants Charlie Miller, event chairman Gary Roesch of the Niagara Frontier Boat Racing Association, Phyllis Gentner of the Erie Niagara Sunrise Exchange Club, North Tonawanda Mayor Austin Tylec, Bill DeGlopper, hydroplane racer Ken Brodie Jr. and Hydro-Fish crew member Mike Geblein. On the left, the red and white hydroplane is GP:50, and on the right is Hydro-Fish.

which is the central part of the park," he said. There will be people there to direct the spectators on where to park.

A car show had traditionally been held on the north side of the park.

"This year, we're not doing the

car show, but that's all going to be spectator parking," Roesch said. "It will be a lot more convenient for the spectators that go into the Wit-

mer Road entrance and then, that's basically right where the races are – it's right behind the vendors."

The admission to the park is a \$15 donation per car, not per person.

"I often relate that to, like going to the drive-in, and you used to hide people in the trunk so that they wouldn't have to pay. Well, with this, as many people as you can put in the car, it's still \$15 and you get a program," Roesch said.

A portion of the parking proceeds goes to the Erie Niagara Sunrise Exchange Club.

"It's kind of nice because the Sunrise Exchange Club does a lot of different fundraising activities with other organizations such as the Salvation Army, the Twin Cities Community Outreach and other organizations they actually work hand-in-hand with," Roesch said. "We're really happy that we're working with them because it's a great charitable organization."

*SEE THUNDER, continued on Page 11*

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