

# Niagara County Tribune/Sentinel

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Pictured, above, a look at building No. 1 inside the Ellicott Development plaza. Below, the Frontier House.

Center Street projects moving along

## Work continues on plaza, Fourth & Center, Frontier House

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

Center Street construction projects were delayed last spring by the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent "New York State on PAUSE" executive orders. As summer approached and some restrictions were lifted, people expected to see a rush of activity on the village's main thoroughfare.

However, domestic travel and border-crossing restrictions – not to mention people at home with more time on their hands, eager to renovate – made it more difficult to obtain building materials. There also was the issue of unemployment and how readily available laborers were to resume work.

As such, a lot of activity has taken place behind the scenes in recent weeks – not necessarily in big, showy places or ways for the public to take notice.

SEE MAYOR, continued on Page 2



## Local officials call on residents to demand state protect theater industry



The Historic Riviera Theatre in North Tonawanda.

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Interim Tribune Editor

Earlier this week, New York state's movie theater industry breathed a collective sigh of relief as Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced theaters across the state (except for NYC) could finally begin to re-open. Per state safety guidelines, theaters can only maintain a 25% capacity; with no more than 50 people in front of each movie screen.

However, the announcement made no mention of independent theaters that specialize in live entertainment. These industries have been among those hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and by some estimates, may never fully recover. The National Independent Venue Association estimates nearly 90% of live, independent music venues could close permanently because of the shutdown.

The uncertainty is being felt by many independent theaters throughout Niag-

ra County, including the historic Riviera Theatre in North Tonawanda. The venue, which opened in 1926 and is home to the world-renowned "Mighty Wurlitzer" pipe organ, has struggled to stay afloat since the shutdown began. As the months have dragged on, Executive Director Dave Fillenwarth says the theater's situation is dire.

"It's very serious. We are a not-for-profit and we've had to layoff staff and we had salary cuts and (the whole industry) is looking pretty grim right now; so we're not the only theater. It's been estimated 90% of independent theaters will never open again and we're fighting not to be one of those," he says.

Fillenwarth says the lack of communication from state officials has been the most frustrating part of the ordeal.

"The fact that it's not even being talked about is the frustrating part," he says.

SEE VENUES, continued on Page 7

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