



Kekalainen's message carries into playoffs

'This is the time,' Sabres GM says with postseason starting this weekend | PAGE C1

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BUFFALO NEXT: BUSINESS OF SPORTS

Sabres fans will have to dig deep for playoff tickets

Low inventory means sky-high prices on secondary markets

It wasn't easy for fans to get their hands on Buffalo Sabres playoff tickets, and that has created an expensive secondary market for resale seats.

Most fans fortunate enough to get tickets don't want to give them up, so with inventory low, prices have skyrocketed for the four games that can potentially be played in Buffalo during the opening round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Prices on the resale market for the cheapest tickets to the playoff home opener climbed to \$650 Monday. They remained high Wednesday after the playoff picture was solidified and the Sabres learned they would face the Boston Bruins in a seven-game series starting this weekend.

Nick Giammusso, founder and CEO of Buffalo ticket reseller VIPTix, said the equation is simple: the first playoff appearance for the Sabres since 2011 compounded by excitement reaching a fever pitch.

"People are excited that the team is in the playoffs and a whole generation of fans haven't experienced playoff hockey, so that makes them even more excited for it," he added. "And season ticket holders just aren't selling their tickets, so there aren't many of them in the secondary market."

Giammusso has around 850 seats available for Game

1 on VIPTix, about 250 more than were available Monday, and said around 1,500 tickets are available in the general marketplace on sites such as StubHub. That is a lot fewer than a typical Sabres game in the regular season, he added.

More than 30,000 people joined the queue on Monday morning for a chance to buy an "extremely limited" number of tickets that were made available to the general public. The seats sold out within about 15 minutes.

Abigail Lee, a Buffalo clothing designer and content creator, went straight to the secondary market for Game 1 tickets Monday.

She couldn't snag any of the tickets the team put on sale at 10 a.m., but wound up scoring verified resale tickets through Ticketmaster. Lee paid way over face value, at \$485 each for a pair of 100 level tickets, but bought before prices went even higher later on Monday. "A couple of friends messaged me about how much I paid and when I told them, they said, 'No way, that's crazy. It's \$590 minimum for the 300s right now. You scored,'" said Lee, who will be going with a friend.

As of Wednesday, a Game 1 ticket in the upper level was listed for \$535, but prices do go down a little from there. They are \$425 for the Sabres' second home game, \$355 for the third game and \$437 for the fourth game at VIPTix.

Most of the playoff tickets were snapped up by the team's full- and half-season ticket members, who got the first shot at purchasing seats for the playoffs. That includes current season ticket holders and the approximately 2,500

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Ryan delivers his budget plan to a city 'hamstrung' by debt

BY JUSTIN SONDEL
News Staff Reporter

Standing in the Broadway Barns, the historic former armory and athletic facility where the city Department of Public Works stores heavy equipment, Mayor Sean Ryan peered up at gaping holes in the roof, netting strung underneath the rotting wood to protect workers from falling pieces of the structure, with chunks of debris caught 20 feet above a floor still wet from the overnight rains.

As metaphors go, this one was not exactly subtle.

Ryan said he chose the facility as the setting to present his first proposed budget because it symbolizes the chronic fiscal mismanagement and disinvestment from city leadership over the last 20 years,

causing his administration to propose a 25% tax hike in his first year in office, necessary to bring the city's books into balance and address the many capital needs throughout Buffalo's inventory of buildings and equipment.

"This building didn't look like this when the city got it," Ryan said. "The city made it look like this through disinvestment," he said.

Like the buildings, his administration will also need to invest in its workforce, which is underpaid, understaffed and under-resourced, Ryan said.

"Each and every department is shorthanded," Ryan said. "They're hamstrung in delivering for the people of the City of Buffalo because they don't have enough

resources."

And so, as Ryan said last month, the tax levy in his \$681 million spending plan will need to rise by 25%. It would mean a 22.9% jump for homestead, or residential, property owners and a 16% increase for non-homestead, or commercial, properties.

For property owners whose homes are assessed at \$75,000, their tax bill would go up \$9.31 a month. A house valued at \$208,000, the city assessment average, would see a bump of \$25.83 a month. On the higher end, owners of a house valued at \$347,000 would pay an additional \$43.09 a month.

Even after the increase, Ryan

Please see **BUDGET**, Page A4

Town on a roller coaster over Fantasy Island's fate



JOSHUA BESSEX, BUFFALO NEWS

Rumors are circulating on Grand Island about whether Niagara Amusement Park and Splash World at Fantasy Island will open this year for its 65th anniversary season.

Lack of activity, hiring at park on Grand Island spurs closure fears

BY STEPHEN T. WATSON
News Staff Reporter

The operators of the former Fantasy Island amusement park strike an optimistic tone on their website.

"The 2026 Season is Shaping Up to Be Our Best Yet!" they wrote in a pitch to season-pass buyers.

However, the park's website no longer allows customers to purchase those season passes, or daily tickets, and the link for job-seekers also is inactive.

And the park, now with the super-sized name Niagara Amusement Park & Splash World at Fantasy Island, hasn't said anything on its Facebook page since January.

For these and other reasons, worries are spreading on Grand Island that the park won't reopen for its 2026 season.

"They've been a really good partner. I mean, they really have. And I asked them - I take them at their word when they say they're going to open next month, said Eric Fiebelkorn, a long-time leader with the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce. "As a guy who runs a number of businesses, every day that goes by, I get a little more worried."

Executives with IB Parks and Entertainment, the park's owner, did not respond to messages seeking comment. But town officials say they have every expectation the park will open this year.

"I hope the rumor is not true. It's an important piece of our town," Town Board Member Jose Garcia said.

Fantasy Island, which opened 65 years ago, might be best remembered for its advertising campaign featuring parkgoers saying, "Fun? Wow!" It features family-oriented

entertainment, from the Silver Comet roller coaster to the long-running Western Town Shootout.

Fantasy Island closed in 2020 before the current ownership group one year later bought and revived the park, which is a major economic asset for the island.

"I do hope they reopen. And I hope, if they do not reopen, that somebody else reopens. It's kind of an important part of, I'll call it, our ecosystem for tourism and for economic development," Grand Island Supervisor Peter Marston Jr. said.

Ownership changed hands

Fantasy Island has drawn in generations of Western New Yorkers since opening in 1961. Its rides are among the most visible structures on Grand Island, seen by thousands of motorists daily as they pass the park on the Niagara Thruway.

But by 1982, Fantasy Island had fallen into bankruptcy, leading to the first of several ownership changes through the 1980s and '90s.

Martin DiPietro bought the park in 1994, changing the name to Martin's Fantasy Island.

In 2016, after more than two decades of park stewardship, DiPietro sold Fantasy Island to California-based Apex Parks Group.

The park at the time had more than 30 rides and water attractions on its 75 acres. DiPietro said then that the sale to Apex was the best way to ensure Fantasy Island's future success.

However, complaints about Apex's management of the park soon rolled in. The company had started charging for parking, for example, and patrons said lines grew longer and rides were frequently out of order.

In February 2020, Apex abruptly announced it was closing Fantasy Island and selling off the

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Prosecutors now part of Trump's battle with Powell and the Fed

BY MICHAEL KUNZELMAN AND
CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal prosecutors made an unannounced visit this week to a construction site at Federal Reserve headquarters that is the focus of an investigation into a \$2.5 billion renovation project, according to two people familiar with the visit.

Two prosecutors and an investigator from U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro's office were turned away on Tuesday by a building contractor and referred to Fed attorneys, one of the people said. The two people familiar with the visit spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to publicly discuss an ongoing investigation.

The visit underscores that the Trump administration is not backing down from its investigation of the Fed and its chair, Jerome Powell, even though the probe has delayed the confirmation of a new chair nominated by President Trump. The investigation is focused on cost

overruns and brief testimony about the project last summer by Powell. Trump confirmed in an interview that aired Wednesday on Fox Business that he wants to continue the probe.

Last month, during a closed-door hearing before a federal judge, a top deputy from Pirro's office conceded that they hadn't found any evidence of a crime in their investigation of the headquarters project.

Robert Hur, an attorney for the Federal Reserve board of governors, sent an email to Pirro's prosecutors about their visit and their request for a "tour" to "check on progress" at the construction site. Hur's email, which The Associated Press has viewed, noted that U.S. District Judge James Boasberg concluded that their interest in the Federal Reserve's renovation project was "pretextual."

"Should you wish to challenge that finding, the courts provide an avenue for you;

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