



For Sabres' Krebs, it's plug and play
Forward's skills have come in handy in many roles and situations | PAGE C1

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BUFFALO NEXT: STARTUPS

43North features pizza, energy bars, celebs, much more

Semifinalists pitch their startups in bid to vie for \$1M prize

Jay Ruparel is banking on Buffalo's love for pizza to help move his startup VoicePlug on to Thursday's 43North finals.

He wants to bring his Palo Alto, Calif., company to Buffalo in its final startup competition at Shea's Performing Arts Center. VoicePlug uses artificial intelligence to run front-of-house systems for restaurants and take orders across phones, drive-thrus and kiosks.

Buffalo has the third most pizzerias per capita in the United States, and other areas in the state are not far behind, with both Rochester and Syracuse also ranking in the top 10 in the category. Six of the top 10 cities with the highest pizzerias per capita are in the Northeast.

In three years, VoicePlug has signed on more than 300 restaurants in the fast casual and quick-sell drive-thru categories. It has signed on with bigger chains such as

CiCis Pizza, as well as mom and pop shops, and experienced a 93% growth in business with the potential to double in size next year.

"We realized that this is really the home of a lot of local and independent pizzerias with a great reputation," said Ruparel, a three-time founder who has exited two previous tech startups. "There couldn't be a better place than Buffalo to sell our products and we want to see it be the base for not only pizza places, but also pizza AI technology."

VoicePlug was one of 15 semifinalists pitching Wednesday at Golisano Institute for Business & Entrepreneurship. They talked about their successes so far, goals for moving products forward and creating revenue, critical clients and test cases, their fit in Western New York and goals to hire locally in the future. Even dishing on celebrity co-founders was part of the day's pitches.

By the end of the day, eight of those companies will have earned a spot onstage at Shea's Performing Arts Center, with five \$1 million investments on the line for the final 43North Finals.

After 13 years of bringing

Please see **43NORTH**, Page A5

BUFFALO NEXT: DEVELOPMENT

City sues Senecas to stop construction of gas station

The City of Buffalo on Wednesday sued the Seneca Nation of Indians to stop construction of its proposed gas station and convenience store in the First Ward, following through on Buffalo Mayor Sean Ryan's threat last week.

The city says the planned project — which it repeatedly calls a "truck stop," despite repeated denials by the Senecas

— would harm the surrounding neighborhood and the nearby Buffalo River while damaging the public and private sector investments that have been made along Ohio Street.

It seeks a court order halting construction and forcing the Seneca Nation to comply with municipal requirements and go through the normal city review and approval process, including a building permit, traffic study, special-use permit, use variance and environmental review.

"We're asking the court to

maintain the status quo, which is no construction on the site, leaving it as it is," Ryan said. "Any developer, regardless of who they are, they have to go through a process."

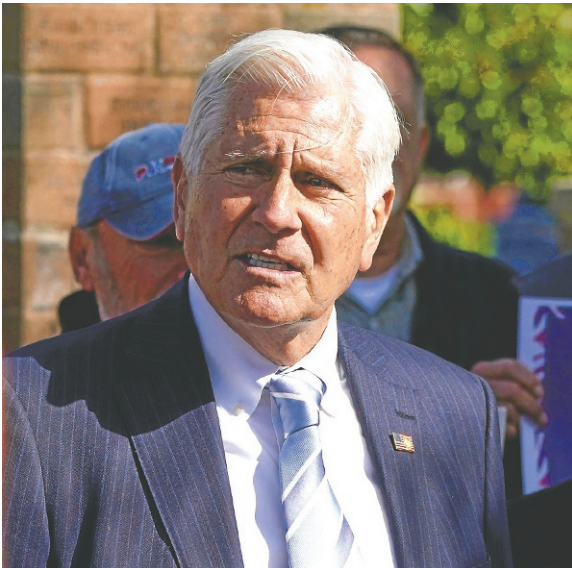
But nowhere does the city address whether it has any legal authority either to sue or to force the Nation to comply if — as the Nation asserts and various government documents appear to show — the land is already considered sovereign territory by the

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MIKE PETRO

ELECTION 2026



DEREK GEE PHOTOS, BUFFALO NEWS

When it comes to raising money in the governor's race, candidate Bruce Blakeman, the Nassau County executive, is trailing Gov. Kathy Hochul by a wide margin.

Major issue hangs over Trump's \$5K for midterm votes

JOHN T. BENNETT
CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — The White House has been unable to describe how it could ensure over \$1 trillion President Trump has promised American citizens in exchange for their midterm election votes would be spent in the United States.

During a GOP midterms convention in Dallas last month, Trump promised all U.S. adult citizens a \$5,000 payout if they keep the House and Senate under GOP control. During a rally Monday in Grand Island, Neb., the president attached some strings.

"The only caveat is the \$5,000 you have to spend the money in the United States of

America," he added. "That's the only thing."

Democratic lawmakers have accused Trump of offering voters a bribe. Those same Democrats, joined by some GOP lawmakers and conservative analysts, have predicted the White House would face a series of political hurdles — including push-back from deficit hawks in the House.

To track that consumer spending — and only if a lame-duck Trump somehow mustered the political capital on the back nine of his second term to convince a Republican-controlled House and Senate to allocate over \$1

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Hochul leads Blakeman in fundraising campaign

Governor's war chest has \$19M while challenger reports \$177K

ROBERT GAVIN
Albany Bureau Chief

ALBANY — The good news for Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman, the Republican candidate for governor, is that his fundraiser Monday night in Niagara Falls should have helped his campaign war chest grow larger.

The bad news is he has a lot of catching up to do.

Hochul's campaign is showing a balance of more than \$19 million, while Blakeman's campaign reported \$177,930, according to the state Board of Elections' most recent disclosures 32 days before Election Day.

"This just in: Bruce Blakeman is broke," Hochul's campaign said in a news release. "He has basically no cash on hand."

As of July 15, the previous reporting date for candidates, Friends of Kathy Hochul, the governor's campaign committee, had a

campaign balance of \$21,030,466, compared with \$4,591,461 for Blakeman for New York, the GOP candidate's campaign committee. Hochul has since accumulated almost \$12.9 million and spent close to \$14.9 million, while Blakeman has accumulated more than \$6.4 million and spent close to \$10.5 million, filings show.

Madison Spanodemos, a spokesperson for Blakeman's campaign, noted that based on just contributions, Blakeman has outraised Hochul since mid-July \$4.5 million to \$2.8 million. That does not account for Hochul's \$10 million in miscellaneous receipts compared with \$1.8 million in miscellaneous receipts for Blakeman. Hochul's largest source of funds was \$10 million transferred in from the New York State Democratic Committee.

"With just one month to go before Election Day, Bruce Blakeman outraised Hochul — proof New Yorkers are ready to fire the worst governor in America," Spanodemos said.

Blakeman has received \$3.5 million in public

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