



## INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

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# Company culture feeds growth

FAST-GROWING COMPANIES FIND FORMULA FOR SUCCESS



JIM COURTNEY

Leaders of Buffalo's fast-growing companies met last month to discuss strategies they use to promote expansion. The event was part of an ongoing series of discussions with the region's business leaders.

BY DAVID BERTOLA  
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Those who run the region's fastest-growing companies say that building a good corporate culture is the secret to their success.

Peter Tunkey, president of Depew-based Buffalo Materials Handling, said forklift drivers are in demand and that employers can get caught up in raising their pay rate to compete for those with that skill set.

"But it is so much more," Tun-

key said.

He shared a story about how his predecessor didn't respect opinions of those on the shop floor. But when he turned to employees to learn about customer interactions, it was their ideas that fueled change.

Robert Rich III, president of Buffalo-based ROAR Logistics Inc., said he, too, values employee input.

"If you give people the opportunity to contribute, they feel as though the management and growth of building the company is participative for them. People want

to learn; people don't want to just collect a paycheck," he said.

"People who want to collect a paycheck usually weed themselves out. People who want to learn and grow with the company are the ones that you give them the opportunity to contribute, they give you feedback. They grow from the relationship just as much as you grow from having them there."

Tom McManus of KegWorks said his Town of Tonawanda business spends a lot of time and effort to make it a good place to work.

"Whether it's flextime to a keger-

ator in the break room. ... It comes down to communication, too," he said. "A dollar is a dollar but the environment that people work with is really what changes it."

"I have an office manager who says she has the greatest job. It allows her flexibility to take care of family issues," said Barrett Price, president of Bear Metal Works in Buffalo.

"I think even pets now are part of the equation. People have to maintain them. We all relate to them and we allow them to bring their dogs to work once a week."

### ► GROWING UP FAST

Business First's Fast Track awards recognize growing WNY companies

**\$2B**

Revenue for Business First Fast Track companies in 2013

**\$1.7B**

Revenue for Business First Fast Track companies in 2014

**312.1 %**

Revenue growth of No. 1 Fast Track company, Blue Ridge Financial

**189.4 %**

Revenue growth of No. 2 Fast Track company, ConEquip Parts & Equipment

**INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE**

**► To what do you attribute your ability to grow in Western New York and New York state?**



**MERLE WHITEHEAD**  
President/CEO,  
RealtyUSA

Most of our growth has been through mergers and acquisitions. I think business, in general, you're certainly seeing a consolidation. In '96 we merged Stovroff and

Potter and then we bought RealtyUSA in 2000 and we changed our name to RealtyUSA. Of course, newspapers wrote an article saying I was the village idiot to throw away a 46-year market leader, but the one thing they weren't thinking about was to say the name and spell the name. Couldn't get the URL so certainly RealtyUSA was a no-brainer.

**ROBERT RICH III**

President, ROAR Logistics Inc.

I think our ability to grow is based on our ability to hire good people.

**► CLOSER LOOK AT THE ROUNDTABLE**

The Fast-Growing Companies roundtable continues a series of discussions with Western New York business leaders.

Throughout the year, decision makers from diverse industries meet for discussions moderated by Business First journalists.

Excerpts from the conversation are published two weeks later. Upcoming topics include alternative energy, nonprofits, health care, agriculture and food manufacturing, education and economic development.

Discussions are sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP and are held at the law firm's Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

Western New York has been a tremendous ground for hiring good, young talent for our industry. We rely very heavily on the local universities, specifically Niagara University in the transportation program. We have recruited a lot of kids coming right out of college to work for ROAR. You know, to us, you have to have good talent in order to be able to grow your business because ultimately business is face-to-face. And if you're not dealing with people face-to-face in a positive relationship with good people who know what they're talking about, you might as well not be in business.

**PETER TUNKEY**

President, Buffalo Materials Handling

My company is interesting in that it's over a 60-year-old business, and when I bought the business five years ago, it was on the verge of bankruptcy. Your fundamental things really came into

fruition because I had the products and quality people who, when they had somebody who guided them and stood with them, we grew.

**KURT BINGEMAN**

President, Russell Bond & Co. Inc.

This is our 65th year in Buffalo. We have been in the Ellicott Square building for all those 65 years. I've been with the company since 1972. We've grown organically mostly but we recognize that with the consolidation going on in the insurance industry, we had to do



something significant to grow. So we had acquired a team of people that opened an office in New Jersey first and then our next venture, unfortunately, was in 2008. We opened an office from scratch in Massachusetts, which was a challenge because it took quite a while for it to get going. Then we acquired another Buffalo-based firm two years ago. All of which have kind of helped us. So even though we've been expanding around the country because we have individual employees in Chicago and some other cities, almost all the work gets done here and processed here. And the IT team and the accounting team and everything are here. It's getting a little more difficult, consolidation. We have competitors that do \$3 billion or \$4 billion in premiums. It's a challenging industry.

**KEVIN MCMULLEN**

Owner/CEO, Oogie Games LLC

I think a lot of it has to do with the people who work for my company. What sets us apart, or what we try to set ourselves apart, from major chains such as Walmart and Target and Game Stop and all these other big corporations is we're on the more personal level of customer service. And I think that we do some things to set ourselves apart being local,



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## INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

selling ourselves in the community. I think there's also a desire and a want to expand. There are similar local business owners – they're happy with what they do and they're happy with where they are. I'm a little more aggressive and want to grow and go from one store to six stores to 25 stores.

### ► Are Internet sales a big part of your growth?

#### KEVIN MCMULLEN

Ogie Games LLC

When I started it was, absolutely, and then I took a turn and made it more local.

#### CHUCK FRIED

President, TxMQ Inc.

For us, we're very, very niche and there are very, very few players that do what we do. So it's a constant focus on training and acquiring new talent. Our reach is national – Canada, as well.

So getting the word out is probably the biggest challenge to have people trained. We actually have built into our employment agreement that all of our folks have to maintain a certain number of industry certifications. So our biggest challenge and the reason we've been successful in growing is just getting the word out. If you need us, you're going to find us through Google search, through referral. So to the extent that we can get the word out to mostly national – not as much locally – if we're a good fit, then we're going to be able to close that deal. The other challenge is that our sales cycle is anywhere from nine to 18 months.

#### BARRETT PRICE

Owner/CEO, Bear Metal Works

Our growth has come through diversification and change. I was mainly robotic welding and job shop, and because it tied into the oil industry and because the price of oil has dropped, we had to change. Now we're mainly a stainless-steel fabricator, and that has allowed me to diversify into restaurants and food grade, food service type of equipment made out of stainless steel. My growth also comes from investment in equipment. I have major pieces costing me half a million, a million dollars that I put in to give us the capabilities to do the jobs faster. Yes, it does come down to being a service sector. I have a motto that it's customer focus, date

driven, and I just tell my people to make it happen and hopefully we can perform on time for the customer's requirements. We have done that very well for the last couple of years.

#### TOM MCMANUS

CEO, KegWorks

I think a lot of our growth has come from our planning process – having a long-term strategic plan, having annual plans and having quarterly plans and holding leadership to executing those plans. Having that discipline consistently over the years has allowed us to pursue new opportunities, to change our business. But we don't change it in broad, sweeping ways. It is the hundreds upon hundreds of small, incremental changes that we make every year that allows us to get some momentum and continue to grow.

### ► How has home brewing affected your business?

#### TOM MCMANUS

KegWorks

We love the craft brewing business. We're involved with every new brewery that opens up in Western New York and a majority that opened up across the country. When these guys are first getting started and they're going pro, they have to serve this stuff. So we sell the equipment that allows them to serve the beer. And then we're also involved in a lot of building of tasting rooms for the equipment that goes inside them. But we've had our hand in every brewery that's opened up in Western New York and we love it.



#### TOD MARTIN

Principal/Chief creative officer, The Martin Group LLC

Our growth has been really fueled by the people we're bringing in. You know, the better talent you have, the better talent you can attract and the better work you're going to do.

At the end of the day, the work that we do from a marketing/advertising standpoint is very visible, and if we're delivering for our clients, the referrals happen. So I would suggest that over the years it's primarily referrals. The other part of the growth for us has been acquisition. More recently, in the last year we acquired two other firms, neither one really big or anything but it certainly has fueled some growth

and acquired some additional clients. We also expanded into Rochester.



#### JIM SPROULL

Principal, Genesis Payment Procession Group LLC

When we look at our growth, a lot of it has come from partnerships and in finding complementary businesses within. With us, it's usually a small margin sale. So if we

can make one large sale that turns into hundreds and hundreds, it's more efficient use of our time. We have really grown through some of the local partnerships and financial institutions, with some associations where we become the preferred vendor. We become the outsourced provider for some of these other groups. And it's been great to do those partnerships because what you're doing is you're selling on someone else's trust.

#### KENNETH FRANASIAK

Chairman/CEO, Calamar

We operate a very finite strategic plan that is projected out 15 years. We do not in any way, shape or form get away from it, no matter how the market might be or an asset or product sector. We stay very, very focused. An example would be that in 2007 we repositioned our organization, went to all cash because we knew 2008 was coming. Just a part of our plan – that's what we did, and that provided us with a great opportunity and we entered the great recession extremely well. So again, that's really part of that 15-year plan.

### ► What is your company doing from a cultural standpoint to make it a destination for a worker?

#### PETER TUNKEY

Buffalo Materials Handling

In my business, a large part of it is technicians who work on forklift trucks and so forth. It's a very competitive business and a very competitive skill, so you can get caught up in trying to keep raising the pay rate but it's so much more. And what made it easy for me is, surprisingly, my predecessor treated the technicians like second-class citizens and didn't listen to them. Not having any experience in the material handling business, it was critical that

I did listen to them – they're the ones who are in front of the customer all the time. So it was a real paradigm shift for them to have the owner listening to their ideas and changing the business around. That actually attracted a lot of employees to come over because they're actually listened to, and the word of mouth is really the biggest marketing campaign for employees.

#### ROBERT RICH III

ROAR Logistics Inc

I think if you give people the opportunity to contribute, they feel as though the management and growth of building the company is participative for them. People want to learn; people don't want to just collect a paycheck. People who want to collect a paycheck usually weed themselves out. People who want to learn and grow with the company are the ones who you give them the opportunity to contribute, they give you feedback. They grow from the relationship just as much as you grow from having them there.



#### TOM MCMANUS

KegWorks

Corporate culture happens, and whether you decide to build that corporate culture or let it happen on its own, corporate culture exists. We spend a lot of time and a lot of effort making our place a cool place

to work. Whether it's flex time to a kegerator in the break room, which I highly recommend to grow your culture. And if anyone needs help with that, I'd be happy to show you how that works. But it also comes down to communication, too. People want to know what's going on; they want to know not just cursory but the nuts and bolts of how the business is operating, how their efforts can impact the business. And by allowing people to participate in that process, that really changes your culture and you become a destination. And when you're competing for talent in this market, you want to be a good place to work. A dollar is a dollar, but the environment that the people work with and the people they work with is really what changes it.

#### BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

I have an office manager who says she has the greatest job. It allows her flexibility to take care of family issues.

**INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE**

You know, when a crisis arises you have to bend the rules; you can't be so rigid. And that makes for a nice work environment for anybody. I think even pets now are part of the equation. People have to maintain them. We all relate to them and we allow them to bring their dogs to work once a week.

**TOD MARTIN**

The Martin Group LLC

I'm in a deadline-driven business, and the associates, when they come in every morning and fire up their computers, they're firing on all cylinders and billing hours the minute they walk in the door. At least, that's the idea, that's what we want them doing. So we do a pretty good job of keeping the pipeline full so their plate is full and to capacity. They certainly need some break points during the course of their week, so we try to find some fun things to do. The management team works hard to make sure that once every couple weeks we're doing something, whether it's bringing in lunch, pizza. Yesterday we had a chicken wing challenge, so someone ran out and we picked up wings from four different places around town and just had a competition. I think the communication piece is crucial. We have a lot of moving parts in our organization from the client standpoint; we're in a lot of different sectors. There are various teams working on various accounts and they can be in their own little vacuum, so you don't know what the guy in the cubicle next to you is actually working on.

**MERLE WHITEHEAD**

RealtyUSA

Last Friday we had 350 people at a clam bake in Syracuse. Tonight we have a dinner at the Buffalo Club – the best of the best. Next week we have a party at Orchard Park Country Club with 120 salespeople. We do a lot of recognition and a lot of socializing, so they really buy into our culture.

► **How necessary is growth to your companies?**

**BARRETT PRICE**

Bear Metal Works

This year on the Fast Track 50 I was ranked No. 4. There was tremendous growth for last year. But yes, I'm going to be flat for 2015. I think because of some lost work and being a little flatter I'm a little more profitable. So the growth isn't necessary in that sense but, for the long-term success, acquisition will help me grow and get bigger.

**TOD MARTIN**

The Martin Group LLC

I sort of feel like – I don't know, my philosophy has been in my business area that if you're not growing, you're shrinking, and it scares the daylights out of me. It's a grind every day and you have to go chase new stuff because there's attrition at some point and you just have to be prepared that if one (client) walks away or goes away for whatever reason, that there's enough in the pipeline to keep everybody going. So we're constantly trying to grow.

**PETER TUNKEY**

Buffalo Materials Handling

You have to be focused on growing, too, because if you just become complacent, so to speak, you're slowly going to diminish and find yourself on the wrong side.

**KEVIN MCMULLEN**

Oogie Games LLC

I agree with Tod in the sense that if you're not growing, there's a fear there. I have opened up six stores in seven years and this is the first year I didn't open a store. But we're growing in a different way, in the sense that we are focusing in on some things internally to become more profitable. We're just polishing everything. You grow so fast sometimes that some things kind of fall off the wagon because you're growing, growing, growing and focusing on growth. And then, like I said, we're polishing things right now to make sure that we're more profitable.

**TOM MCMANUS**

KegWorks

Fast growth hides a lot of problems. When revenue is growing as much as it is sometimes, you know you're not dialed into the details. You know, we actually had our first down year ever but we still made the Fast Track list. And what we found is that we hit that plateau and we had to make some pretty significant changes inside our organization – you know, from a system point of view. You have to prune the bush for it to grow sometimes, and that's exactly where we are. We are on track to have our best year ever this year, but you know it's not letting the fast growth blind you to the details inside your organization.



**KURT BINGEMAN**

Russell Bond & Co. Inc.

You always have the issue of expense creep up, so that's always going to happen slowly, whether it's salaries, other facilities and things like that. But when you're in a marketplace where you have very large competitors that have a lot of market clout and can create new products or build exclusive products, you have to be able to keep up with that or you're going to lose your market share. So growth is sort of required in order to maintain a presence in the marketplace – at least for us.

**ROBERT RICH III**

ROAR Logistics Inc.

I think you have to look at growth, as everyone said here. Growth is great, and there's a saying, "If you're green, you're growing. If you're ripe, you're rotting." I think the successful companies grow with people who are looking in the stars while there are other people in more concrete aspects of the business: controlling the cost, maintaining the standard of service provision that you provide. You have to be able to grow at a level to keep up with the competition, especially in the transportation industry. So for us to stay where we're at, we can dial it in and become that much more

efficient than you but we have to have two teams. One team is maintaining standards of service and another team is looking for acquisition and growth.

**JIM SPROULL**

Genesis Payment Procession Group LLC

Growth is a mindset, and it's not always physical numbers that are showing up. So if you had a year where your numbers aren't growing but your mindset is, well, what are we planning for? What are we looking to do in the future that is going to cause growth? You're a growing company and you also almost have to take that step back in time to move forward because you're going to get so busy. When we formalize a partnership, there's a lot of work that goes into it. It's all hands on deck, and everyone kind of looks inward for a while as you're doing that thing which ramps the numbers up. Then when the sales kind of plateau, it's time to go look again and plan for that next big sale.

► **A lot of you mentioned mergers or acquisitions. Take me back to the first time you did one.**



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## INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

**MERLE WHITEHEAD**

RealtyUSA

I find everything we talked about is quality people in open relationships. What I find when you open that discussion is the words are critical. If I called anybody and said, "I'm interested in buying your company," they would not talk to me. Basically what I want to find out is are we compatible? Do we share the same vision? Then it would be just open the dialogue. And the other thing we never talk about is that we're big so we have all the answers. We let them know that we're investing in people, and regardless of the size of the organization, they're going to bring tremendous value and insight and continue to contribute. So I think there's a huge difference between soliciting someone to participate with you than the concept of buying someone out. I see a lot of my competitors that do acquisitions are condescending – "If you don't join us, you're not going to stay in business" – where we try to tell people, "You have a brilliant future. You have lots of options, but we think joining us is a better option."

**KENNETH FRANASIAK**

Calamar

As you're going through the negotiations, especially when you're much larger and those are difficult, I think most acquisitions take about a year to do, a lot of time and money. And you come to the end and you find out that the management team has incapability issues. Who's going to be CEO and they're going to be chairmen and it's not going to work. So I think your gut has to tell you right off the bat; you have to know.

**ROBERT RICH III**

ROAR Logistics Inc.

Culture is important and the whole thing – you can look at acquiring any business that you want but if it's an incapability culture, it's going to be a real

challenge. Culturally, are you going to be able to mesh those two cultures to make a successful entity?

**TOD MARTIN**

The Martin Group LLC

I've done a couple smaller things that have fueled the growth a bit, but what I found in the last year is that it sort of becomes addicting. It's like, "Hey, this worked." So it's a path – our growth strategy is moving forward. There are many facets of growth. There's

got to be obviously the strategic plan in why it's a fit but also the culture side, I think, is crucial. And I think as business folks, there's some innate sense when you sit down at the table with somebody that we have to make this work because this could be really powerful.

► **When you did an acquisition, did you seek them?**

**TOD MARTIN**

The Martin Group LLC

The first one was I had a long-standing relationship with my former firm, Travers Collins Partners, and Bill Collins; a great relationship. And Bill and Bob Travers decided it was time to do something else. So they were shopping their book of business. I was like, "Yeah, I'm flattered. I would love to talk."

**BARRETT PRICE**

Bear Metal Works

Mine had been on a much-smaller scale, and it's usually buying a sole proprietor mom-and-pop operation. Culture change is different for that type of person where the business is struggling along and we have computers and software and technology can do things quicker, faster. I think you have to focus on what the type of business is, that it blends with yours and similar commodities and, obviously, the sole proprietor will ease out of it and transition.

**KURT BINGEMAN**

Russell Bond &amp; Co. Inc.

In those three situations that I've talked about, all three parties came to us which was very interesting but I hadn't thought about it that much until I just listened to everybody talking about it. But the team that joined us, the individual that opened the office from scratch and the group that we inquired most recently all approached us about a relationship so it's fairly interesting.

► **Is it easier to acquire a business that's for sale or one that's not for sale?**

**MERLE WHITEHEAD**

RealtyUSA

I don't think we've ever bought anything that's for sale. I think one of the biggest challenges is that from our side of the table, you always say, "They're not as bright as we are, they're not as ethical as we are." So I think a common concern would be you tend to label your competitors. If you start labeling them, you won't proactively go after them.

**ROBERT RICH III**

ROAR Logistics Inc

I think when something is for sale, they have a preconceived notion of what the business is worth and put it on the table and say, "Here it is." Some of your best acquisitions have been competitors that we're familiar with – we understand their culture, they understand ours and the management team, getting them excited about becoming a part of what we're doing, giving them a picture of the bigger vision.

► **If you had a mentor that you really relied on as you entered the business world, do you still maintain a relationship with him or her?**

**TOM MCMANUS**

KegWorks

I'm very involved with the Entrepreneurs' Organization. It's a global organization – there's 10,000 members and 100 something companies. We have a chapter here in Western New York and it's been instrumental to the growth of our business. It's having people who are fighting the same fight that I fight who I can lean on their shared experiences to really help me make better decisions. We don't give advice, we share experiences. And by sharing experiences it allows everyone to put their own puzzle together.

**BARRETT PRICE**

Bear Metal Works

My mentor still works with me. He's vice president at M&T Bank and we continually stay in touch five, six years later. They take a vested interest in me and I try to do that to somebody else.

**TOD MARTIN**

The Martin Group LLC

I had a mentor at the start of my career who just gave me some drive and motivation and simply said, "As an owner, you can do what I did." So I sort of took those words to heart and it took 15 years to make that move, but I did it. Ongoing management consultant has been instrumental. Sharon Randaccio from Performance

Management Partners has been sort of leading the trend. When I did the first acquisition, she called me immediately and said, "You need me." And I said, "I'm not sure that we need you because I can't afford you, one." She's like, "Oh, no, you need me. You need to be able to afford me." She was right – I needed her. I didn't know I needed her but I did, and she's been very helpful for my organization.

**JIM SPROULL**

Genesis Payment Procession Group LLC

In my business I've been fortunate enough. One of my partners was a very successful businessman, still is, but sold a large company. So we almost have that in-house, which has been nice to have the things that he did to grow a company to hundreds and hundreds of employees. It has been nice to have that in-house where you know someone working within the business has kind of that foresight of doing it before.

**MERLE WHITEHEAD**

RealtyUSA

I'm in two best-practice groups, peer groups around the country. Both of them have 15, 20 companies and we go tour their companies and critique them. They come in and tour your company and critique them. It's amazing when someone comes in one or two days, spends quality time with your leadership and how quickly they reinforce what you know, but they're so much more objective, causing you to take action. So I can't say enough about peer groups as much as objectively looking at an organization.

**KURT BINGEMAN**

Russell Bond &amp; Co. Inc.

I've always relied on a single consultant who has worked the bases in 1992, working all the way through, but in creating an ESOP I've had to create a board of directors for a small firm, which has been interesting. We were going to start as a board of advisors but in the time it took I needed to accelerate that to have a board of directors. So we now moved that way because as I stepped down, the current management of the firm reported to that board, as opposed to reporting to me. It's a bit of a challenge there.

► **We'll just make sure for the record that none of you mentioned your spouses or other family members.**

**ROBERT RICH III**

ROAR Logistics Inc

As far as that goes ... you mentioned a lot of us being born to CEOs and



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presidents, I have to say that my two greatest advisers were my grandfather and my father. So I come from a long line of guys who have been in business, and the greatest thing about growing ROAR is the challenges my grandfather and my father faced growing Rich Products. I've been very fortunate to have two men who have been very successful in what they've done and to have a part of that wisdom – sometimes more often than asked for. And especially after the financial going down in the year 2008, I got a lot of wisdom from my father and my grandfather.

**CHUCK FRIED**

TxMQ Inc.

It's funny you mentioned that because it doesn't really qualify as a mentor, but my wife and I have been married for 28 years and she runs a large, growing company, as do I, and there's rarely a situation that one of us hasn't run into. So we kind of become these casual mentors. Hers is a nonprofit; I sit on her board. We don't have a board, but it's really interesting that we actually moved to larger office space down the road. My kids think it's the biggest joke in the world that we went from being a mile and a half apart to maybe 400 meters apart, literally on the same road in Getzville.

► **Has the spotlight on Buffalo been beneficial to you when dealing with folks from outside Western New York?**

**TOM MCMANUS**

KegWorks

Was doing great until we had that snowstorm last November.

**KURT BINGEMAN**

Russell Bond &amp; Co. Inc.

It's been a challenge. I can't tell you with all my travels how discouraged I get at times listening to people say, "Oh, Buffalo – it's so cold there." But even Truckee, California, where they get, like, 500 inches of snow – I was in the store buying something and a woman goes, "Oh, Buffalo – cold, lots of snow." So it does, but I can tell you that the people who have come to Buffalo recently, the members of our board who come from other cities for our quarterly board meetings, they have been impressed with the restaurants and the hotel accommodations and everything that we've been able to introduce them to. We get them to see that there's a lot going on here.

**CHUCK FRIED**

TxMQ Inc.

We have a very tight relationship with IBM and obviously we've been trying somewhat desperately to turn the promise and the dream coming out of Albany to a reality here, and we haven't really seen it yet. We haven't really had that needle-mover. We've had the city say, "We'll invest here more, in Black Rock. We'll open some back office here." And M&T says, "We'll continue to invest here." So we've seen all of those things start to happen but nothing really has been needle-moving, and it's true that what you still hear is the weather. We'll drive people around through all the new neighborhoods that didn't exist five years ago and they'll say, "What was that storm like? We saw those pictures. That must have been amazing." So it's going to take a lot. I suspect we'll look back in five years and say that 2014, '15 it started to change, but I think right now in the midst of it we're not really seeing that change. Nobody is calling us up and saying, "I want to move to Buffalo. Help me with that."

**MERLE WHITEHEAD**

RealtyUSA

One thing that I see is weather is somewhat inconsequential. The key in Western New York now is jobs. You think how important your job is to your life and the opportunity. We're seeing a lot of people coming from other parts of the country and they're excited about the opportunity their new job has, and then the weather just becomes a side conversation. If you look, for years we didn't have the jobs, so all we had to focus on was the weather. But I think now there's so much new opportunity that will trump weather all day.

**TOD MARTIN**

The Martin Group LLC

There was just a social media article data along that line; it's a great story. The headline was millennials want to live, still want to live in New York except now it's Buffalo, New York, so they're coming in.

► **What's the outlook for your business?**

**MERLE WHITEHEAD**

RealtyUSA

Fortunately for our sector, the forecast is good for the next decade. The forecast is good for nice, steady growth for the next decade, and, you know, we've never been more optimistic about Buffalo.

**KENNETH FRANASIAK**

Calamar

Our biggest issue here is people. We are unable to find people, whether it's in our capital markets business, management business, truck drivers. Anybody from the construction carpenter, laborer. I know a number of people who will give their right arm for an electrician or a plumber. And this is not a shortage issue associated with just specifically Western New York – this is national in a lot of these trades, so it's not here.

**ROBERT RICH III**

ROAR Logistics Inc

We're very excited about Western New York, probably more so in the last 12 to 18 months than we've ever been before. We have offices throughout the United States. We have 70 different agents, 70 different countries. It used to be that we would tell people, "Well, we're based in Buffalo but we don't do a lot of business here." We've seen over the last 12, 18 months the excitement involved, new things going on at the waterfront, SolarCity looking to come to Buffalo. And we're putting more of an focus and more of a conscious effort to our marketing effort, especially manufacturing coming to Buffalo.

**PETER TUNKEY**

Buffalo Materials Handling

As long as we're in a position that has products and people, we're excited about Buffalo's growth and riding, to a certain extent, the coattails of that.

**KURT BINGEMAN**

Russell Bond &amp; Co. Inc.

My biggest challenge is that I've created the ESOP; I'm looking to retire. My focus is the cessation plan for the firm so it can continue – that's my biggest issue. Some of my No. 1 people who have run the firm for me for the last several years aren't a whole lot younger than I am. So we are already looking at retaining the people who will succeed them.

**KEVIN MCMULLEN**

Oogie Games LLC

Going into my eighth year with this company, I started in 2007 and going into 2008 – we all know how the economy has been over the last few years and being able to survive and grow within that. Now we're going to look to continue to benefit from the growth of Western New York.

**CHUCK FRIED**

TxMQ Inc.

The company has two divisions: one is staffing and for those who can't find people; the other is the IT side. They're both national; they both stretch into Canada. We have definitely seen, for whatever reason, far greater growth in Southern Ontario – specifically out of Hamilton and Toronto – than we have seen in the past year. But in the same time, we have definitely seen our local customer base grow over the past few years, which we did not expect to see. We do still find it to be a struggle to recruit people to come back to downtown.

**BARRETT PRICE**

Bear Metal Works

I'm excited about the future. Hopefully five years from now I can double in size my company. I want to thank Tom over there for promoting the craft beer industry because that also creates more people to not only drink but eat, and eating and promoting small-business entrepreneurs to startup restaurants and cater to the people because we all love our food.

**TOM MCMANUS**

KegWorks

I don't see Prohibition coming back anytime soon so my outlook is pretty solid right now. We continue to invest locally. Most of our business is outside of Buffalo but our store has been a phenomenal success.

**TOD MARTIN**

The Martin Group LLC

We're looking to expand. It's tricky. I think I'm going to have to reach out beyond to continue the growth, like we have in Rochester. There are other strategic target areas that I'm considering just based on the success we've had in Rochester.

**JIM SPROULL**

Genesis Payment Procession Group LLC

Our business is interesting in that we process payments. So as businesses, our clients, increase in revenue and take more payments, as restaurants expand and retailers expand and online stores – as we process those payments, our revenue increases. So it's been great to be a part of the Buffalo revival.