

Melanie Reimondo  
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## 2013 Michael J. Krasner Memorial Scholarship

As a native Buffalonian, it is innate to me to love all the aspects of the City of Buffalo, the surrounding towns, and the overall Western New York region. With the present state of the area constantly being compared to the booming times of big industry and bustling population, planners can easily visualize the potential of the region. It takes the education and ability of these skilled professionals to transform Rust Belt cities like Buffalo into destinations full of prosperity and even further potential. I have grown up seeing buildings within the city limits fall into despair. I am currently working within the Perry Choice Neighborhood as part of the AmeriCorps program and am witnessing first-hand the effects poverty has on lifestyles and consequently devising ways to help transform this community into a self-sustainable facet located in between two extremely prosperous nodes: the Larkin District and Canalside. I see myself living and working as a professional within Western New York, joining in this transformation and working towards bring Buffalo to its peak.

During my current year of schooling at SUNY University at Buffalo in the Master's of Urban Planning department, the way I view neighborhoods has completely changed. Rather than seeing dilapidated housing or a vacant lot and thinking that area should be condemned, I now see that these areas are places for growth, change, and development. My work within the Perry Choice Neighborhood, in junction with SUNY UB's Center for Urban Studies, these last two months has inspired me to always look for new and alternative perspectives. In this short amount of time, I have developed programs to aid residents in their career search, an anti-bullying workshop for children, and am working on formulating a recycling initiative to help residents live more environmentally friendly lives. In addition to these programs, I sit on a committee that is working to reach out to businesses and ongoing community development in and around the neighborhood to solidify budding partnerships and provide residents with new employment opportunities. Our efforts are focused on developments within the immediate area to announce our presence, make them aware that residents are willing and able to work, and that the community center should be viewed as a motivating force striving to change the neighborhood. These partnerships will be founded on a mutual understanding that the success of the entire area is dependant on the success of each component. It is through these many commitments that I have realized being a successful planner can not necessarily be counted in dollars or structures, but rather in the lives touched and how the quality of life has improved. My

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goal for this year-long community center commitment is to give the Perry Choice Neighborhood a place of prominence within the South Park Avenue corridor and to connect the previously mentioned neighborhood developments with further improvement in living conditions within the neighborhood.

As I begin planning the final year of pursuing my Master's of Urban Planning degree, I plan on specializing in Community and Economic Development. These joint specializations will aid my work in the Western New York region to help transform the vacant structures within the city and surrounding areas into pinnacles that will improve the neighborhoods where they are located. I envision these buildings serving as mixed use developments which provide places for education, employment, recreation, commerce, and entertainment within walking distance to ensure that people living nearby will be able to utilize these newly developed areas. My hope is that transforming one building, or even one corner, will prompt further transformation of the block, the community, and consequently the lifestyles and perspectives of those utilizing these improvements. With the revitalization of just one area, these effects can snowball and renew an entire region, similar to the many pockets within and around the city of Buffalo that have undergone improvement.

Although physical change is a large component of this revitalization, social structure and community programs need to be put in place encouraging the exchange of ideas and incorporating neighborhood residents to strengthen their area. Rather than constantly hire planners to work within neighborhoods of any income status and those planners being the driving force behind change, I believe that planners should be there to help implement plans and teach the residents about certain activities or concepts, but to pass responsibility on so that the development is continually fostered through the neighborhood itself. I believe that progress can only fully and continually take place within an area if the people are dedicated to helping make that change and work collectively towards the betterment of society. My final year of education will include taking courses with components focusing on financing development projects, stimulating community growth, and how these topics blend together to further prepare me with achieving my career goals.

If there is one thing that I have come to love about Buffalo, it is the attitude of perseverance, even in the face of absolute despair. Whether it is through the disappointment of our sports teams not making it to the playoffs or the classification of the region as over taxed and underdeveloped, Buffalonians refuse to give up and work to find a way to make it through

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the tough times, salvaging the highlights of living in this region. It is this mentality that fuels my desire to help catapult Buffalo back to the national recognition it once had and that I believe it deserves.

Over the last few years, and especially over the course of this year, all of the transformations that have occurred in and around the Waterfront and Canalside are simply inspiring. To actually see an area that my family and I frequent changing right in front of our eyes is simply amazing and it shows that there is progress happening within this area, and more impressively, even when the economy is considered sluggish. This positive change, compounded with my recent awareness of the close proximity of low income housing to this area, can truly stimulate the lives of all Western New Yorkers as well as the economy. These improvements are just the beginning and with so many diverse ideas that can further change to the area, I want a part in showing others the side of Buffalo that residents know and love. With constant proposals and suggestions of different ways to renovate the city to stimulate the entire region, it seems obvious to me the historic opinion that nothing changes or develops in Western New York is in fact changing and, as developments stay on track, will be proved wrong.

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EDUCATION University at Buffalo Buffalo, New York  
*M.S., Urban Planning and Regional Development; May 2014*  
*Community and Economic Development specialization*

Canisius College Buffalo, New York  
*B.S., English, History, Criminal Justice; May 2012*

HONORS:

Dean's List, Alpha Phi Sigma, Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges 2011

EMPLOYMENT *Cook, Denny's, 03/2008-present*

EXPERIENCE (*Cheektowaga, New York*)

Corporate cook trainer, prepare food to instruction and preferences, inventory control, team leader

*Community Builder; Perry Choice Neighborhood, AmeriCorps, 01/2013-present*

(*Buffalo, New York*)

Community development to create a sustainable community within the Perry Choice Neighborhood in the City of Buffalo through employment and revitalization.

*Intern, American Red Cross, 06/2011-12/2011; 05/2012-12/2012*

(*Buffalo, New York*)

Development office: create flyers, data entry in Raiser's Edge, event planning  
Blood Services: create flyers, advertise blood drives, event planning

*Intern, Erie County District Attorney's Office, 05/2010-08/2010*

(*Buffalo, New York*)

Order criminal histories, prepare files, and organize fact patterns

EXTRA *YRoswell, Junior Captain Roswell Park Cancer Institute, 08/2008-12/2012;*

CURRICULAR *Captain 01/2013-present*

(*Buffalo, New York*)

Customer service, speak about RPCI, community outreach

*President, American Red Cross Club, 05/2010-05/2012*

(*Buffalo, New York*)

Organize semester events, outreach to Chapter and other college's clubs, network with college organizations

REFERENCES Furnished upon request