

Portraits of Western New York

Photography by James P. McCoy/Buffalo News

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To those who have never been here, Buffalo is our sports teams, or our weather, or maybe even our food. Those of us who call Buffalo home know it's something else: our people. But it's much more than the famous people whose names and faces you recognize. That's what Portraits of Western New York will celebrate, as each week we introduce you to someone who calls this region home. You might not think you know any of them. But if you are from Buffalo, you will know all of them.

Fahim Mojawalla: Co-owner of Island Ship Center on Grand Island



Week 11: Fahim Mojawalla , Grand Island. (James P. McCoy/Buffalo News)

Fahim Mojawalla travels across the country for his work with Island Ship Center, and he'll tell you there's nowhere quite like Western New York. "The vibe in Western New York is just unique," he said. "The commutes are short and the people are friendly. There is still an emphasis on family values placed here. My wife and I love raising our kids here because of this ideal." "What's more, we have amazing summers, outstanding fall foliage and a spectacular spring season."

Mojawalla and his wife moved to Grand Island 15 years ago from Long Island — they wanted to be closer to family in Canada and western Pennsylvania — and appreciate the difference in cost of living and quality of life. As a businessman, he also appreciates the resurgence Buffalo has been experiencing and the overall business climate. "Business can still be done here through word of mouth, empathy and collaboration," he said, "and we love that!"

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How he got the shot: McCoy first envisioned this portrait with Mojawalla standing in box. Then he realized that Mojawalla was up for a more creative approach and asked him to lie in a box, covered with packing peanuts. "He laughed," McCoy said, "and instantly agreed."

They took a large box and cut a hole in one end. Mojawalla crawled in and laid on his back, face up. His wife then covered him with packing peanuts.

The lighting was simple. McCoy used one small light with a very small snoot, positioned close to Mojawalla's face at a 180-degree angle, to avoid glare on his glasses.

McCoy climbed a ladder to take the shot. Everything went smoothly — until a delivery driver opened the large bay doors nearby, sending packing peanuts flurrying throughout the stockroom.

Said McCoy: "It took longer to pick up the peanuts than the entire shoot took."