

Expats to Repats: Young lawyer makes Buffalo permanent home

By [Jeff Schober](#)

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Building a career in Buffalo had always been the plan for Orchard Park native Jon Pierowicz — but first he wanted to travel the world.

Pierowicz, 32, returned to the Queen City in April when he was hired as a real estate attorney for Phillips Lytle LLP. The prior 13 years were a whirlwind that included living in Boston, Connecticut, Prague, Missouri, Arizona, Santa Monica and New York City — along with a four-year stint in the Marines, including eight months of deployment to Afghanistan.

Travel the world? Mission accomplished.

“All those decisions I made were to get back here in the right place and the right situation,” Pierowicz said. “I appreciate Buffalo more having lived in other places and done other things.”

Ironically, it was the monster storm that struck the Southtowns in November 2014 that triggered Pierowicz’s return. He was living in Southern California at the time, just a few blocks from the Pacific Ocean.

“I was watching news reports of the storm while it was sunny and 75 degrees outside,” he said. “You would think this was the time you don’t want to be in Buffalo. But I was missing an event that people were going to remember for the rest of their lives.”

He recognizes the resurgence in his hometown, mentioning great restaurants, downtown development and fun activities like kayaking up the Buffalo River.

Growing up in Orchard Park, Pierowicz attended Nativity of Our Lord School through eighth grade, then graduated from St. Francis High School in 2003. He studied history for a year at Northeastern University before transferring to Wesleyan University in Connecticut. After finishing college, he wasn’t sure what to do with his life.

So he spent a summer landscaping, then moved to Prague for three months. He chose an Eastern European location, reasoning that it was exotic and he could travel to Germany and Poland easily.

“Until that point, I’d always been selfish,” he said. “I thought about what’s best for me. I remember being on a train, looking out the window and feeling lucky. I realized I should do something meaningful.”

Name: Jon Pierowicz, 32

Hometown: Orchard Park; now lives downtown

Family: Single; one sister; parents Jim and Cindy Pierowicz of Orchard Park; grandfather Leonard Zotara lives in West Seneca

Miss most about Southern California: Easy to make friends; access to outdoor activities; living six blocks from the Pacific Ocean

Love about Buffalo: "If you're a younger person who wants to make a mark, I think there is great opportunity here. You can become a pillar of the community easier than in other cities."

Pierowicz always had an interest in military history. Inspired by his grandfather, Leonard Zotara, now 93, who participated in D-Day and served in General Patton's army, Pierowicz joined the Marine Corps. Between 2008 and 2012, he served as an officer, coordinating security. This allowed him to work in many different parts of the United States. He is proud that he went into Afghanistan with 50 Marines and left with the same 50 Marines. Everyone stayed alive.

After attending University at Buffalo Law School for a year, he transferred to UCLA, where he earned a degree in 2015.

"There is an adjustment to the civilian world," he said. "It's an entirely different culture. Some things are funny. I got out of the Marines in summer 2012, and began law school that fall. On my first day, students gathered in a big auditorium and an administrator told us this was going to be the most difficult thing we'd ever do. I had just gotten back. They had us practice breathing exercises and gave us stress balls to squeeze. I thought, okay, there are going to be times when I'll have to bite my tongue."

Pierowicz utilized the GI bill to fund law school and pay off undergraduate loans. He appreciates the support he's received from family, friends and strangers.

"When people say, 'thank you for your service,' I say, 'thank you for paying your taxes,' " he said. "All my tuition was taken care of."

Buffalo is now his permanent home — just the way he intended.

If you or anyone you know has a story to tell about moving back or to Buffalo, or about moving away, email JeffSchober@hotmail.com

Jeff Schober is the author of [Bike Path Rapist](#), [Growing Up Gronk](#) and several works of crime fiction set in Buffalo in the 1980s. His newest novel, [Faces and Fingertips](#), is available now. Visit his website at www.jeffschober.com.