

Walden Galleria "must succeed" says Cheektowaga Police Chief

By **Jim Herr** - December 29, 2018



Walden Galleria file photo. (Cathy Smith, Creative Commons)

CHEEKTOWAGA – Social media users across Western New York took to their platforms of choice to demonized the Walden Galleria in the days following the mayhem and chaos caused by [several hundred unsupervised adolescents at the mall Wednesday night](#).

Some commentators on Cheektowaga Chronicle's Facebook page say they'll never shop at the mall again, others are calling for its complete shutdown, most just wanted to know if the destination is a safe place.

"It's safer," Cheektowaga Police Chief David Zack says. "There's certainly going to be a large police presence. There's certainly going to be people working extremely hard to maintain safety. Our officers are doing it every day. Our community leaders are doing it every day – the partners that we work with – and certainly, Galleria wants that mall to be safe."

The Cheektowaga Police Department and Walden Galleria met Thursday morning to discuss and implement a plan of action to get everyone through the busy days following Christmas and New Year's Day. A record number of 25 officers will be deployed as part of a special mall detail, and Walden Galleria was said to increase their private security guards as well. Any costs incurred to the town will be picked up by the Walden Galleria.

Notable incidents have peppered the mall's nearly 30-year history. The [1995 death of Cynthia Wiggins](#), to brawls in 2014, 2015. Recently in 2017, a May fight left a [Cheektowaga cop with a concussion](#) and in December the [Sephora store was damaged after a brawl was filmed inside their store](#). This past May, the police department investigated a [shots fired incident in the mall's parking lot](#).

"Incidents will happen, they will, and it's how you deal with them and the aftermath," added Mr. Zack.

The police chief says the Walden Galleria is a regional economic driver that must succeed. The Walden Galleria has over 1.6 million square feet of retail space, supports over 3,000 jobs, and welcomes 23 million visitors every year.

Tax revenue from the shopping complex has a significant impact on the budgets of Erie County, the Town of Cheektowaga, and Cheektowaga Central School District.

Not accounting for sales tax revenue generated at the complex, the mall paid \$6,919,082.90 in tax revenue in 2018 according to figures provided to Cheektowaga Chronicle by the town. Their county and town tax bill

came to \$3,670,024.05, while the school district received \$3,249,058.85 in revenue towards its \$45,156,821 budget.

"That mall must succeed, and our community depends on the dollars and tax revenue that is generated there, so we all have a vested interest in that," said Mr. Zack. "We've seen problems in parks, problems at events. Whether they're in the city, the Town of Cheektowaga, or wherever. There is the initial concern of 'is this a safe venue for me to go to' and it's our responsibility as law enforcement, but also these private corporations to make people feel that way and our hope would be that we restore confidence. That's our goal and certainly [Walden Galleria's] goal."

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