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From the Editors: August 2026

Group projects

Shortly after the publication of our glorious 40 Under 40 issue in July, our Managing Editor Erin Phillips (hi, that's me), was whisked away to attend the annual Association for Alternative Newsmedia (AAN) conference, happening this year in Palm Springs, California. Usually it is our small-but-mighty team of four in attendance, but this year (due to a number of compounding factors) I went all on my own. I was (graciously) afforded a fellowship from AAN to attend – I just had to get myself out there. That turned out to be a harrowing experience involving a hailstorm delaying a flight, “sleeping” on a love seat in the Denver airport, being rerouted through Las Vegas on one hour of “sleep,” and finally making it to Palm Springs the next day, but not, however, before they bestowed their annual awards, for which our modest Erie Reader was up for two – one for Best Cover Design and one for Best Political Column for “From the Editors” – how meta! I was deeply sad to have missed the awards ceremony, but more on that in a moment.

I quickly showered, grabbed (yet another) coffee, and headed down to the conference just in time to catch my favorite annual activity – 50 Ideas in 50 Minutes. During this presentation, the room (made up of editors, staff writers, and publishers from dozens of other alt-publications from

across the country) gets the mic, as it is passed around and we all share story ideas, themes, creative content, etc. Not only do I always come away with loads of great story ideas to make into our own, but I also get to share a lot of the awesome ideas our contributors come up with. I spoke about “Edwina Tries...” and how anyone could make this idea work in their individual cities – inspiring folks to try new things. I shared about “Take Your Beer For a Walk” and how it may not be feasible in most cities that don’t afford their residents the opportunity to walk around with an open container – but how taking a walk through a neighborhood and writing about it can be universally applied. I talked about individual features (like when we did a high school Black History Month art project that became our cover), theme issues (like our Food Issue and how we focused on Erie’s sourdough bread culture), and I talked about our yearly “Erie Reader Gives” feature for our annual community day of giving, Erie Gives Day.

Much like alt-papers, Erie Gives Day is a true group project. No one person makes a newspaper happen – it takes all of the ideas and work from all of us to get this thing to the presses every month (along with all the people who came before us who built it into what it is today). No one person, or people giving randomly, can sustain all



At this year’s alt-weekly conference, the Erie Reader took home the award for Best Cover Design – these three covers (left by Nicholas Cardell Gore, center and right by Nick Warren) beat out all of the others submitted by other papers like ours throughout the country. Making a paper is a group project in the truest sense, much like our community day of giving on Erie Gives Day.

of Erie’s vast network of nonprofits. It takes a community of generosity and that community is on full display for Erie Gives Day (happening this year on **Tuesday, Aug. 11**, mark your calendars). It’s astonishing to see those numbers grow every year and it is inspiring to know that, from the smallest to the largest amounts, giving is important to the people of Erie.

After feeling totally inspired by that 50 Ideas activity, I then popped into a presentation on making the most of our social media platforms, another on how to craft an AI policy (more on that next month), and then I boarded a bus (yes, still on an hour of “sleep”), along with all of my alt-brethren, to attend the AAN Honors, or Lifetime Achievement Awards, ceremony at a historic Palm Springs theater. Before they presented awards to three folks who have built legacy papers, estab-

lishing them in the 1970s and somehow keeping them going for all these years, they called me up on stage to give the Erie Reader the award for Best Cover Design, and my road-weary soul could not have felt fuller – to send that text back home to our team, and to be able to give congratulations to our winning designers (the award was for three of our covers, one from February by Nicholas Cardell Gore, and two from May and August, both designed by Nick Warren). This honor made me feel so swellingly proud of our small paper – and reminded me that this group project is so worth the effort, not just for this one prize but for the very real feeling of satisfaction that comes from making something that matters – and knowing that all of us are working together to help bolster our little community, one issue at a time.



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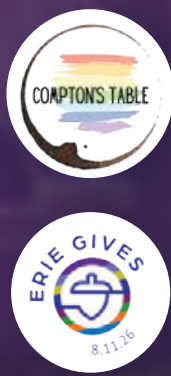
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NEWS & OPINION

The Reader Beat Recap: August 2026

A summary of July meetings

By: Alana Sabol

The Reader Beat aims to cover city and county council meetings as well as other important government and community-related meetings. The following is a summary of each meeting for the month of July.

City Council July 1: The first meeting of the month began with a presentation led by Executive Director of Bayfront East Side Taskforce (BEST) Marcia Farrell. Farrell proposed projects with Infinite Erie to both develop green space and the area along the lower blocks of Parade Street, building affordable housing and single-family homes for ownership.

Following the presentation and a private executive session, public comments addressed a variety of recent issues, including a comment Councilman Ed Brzezinski made toward a female reporter that constituents condemned as inappropriate after the previous city council meeting (with Corporate News Director for Lilly Broadcasting and Erie News Now Scott MacDowell speaking in her defense) and a video of the recent arrest of Keven Sparks, who was hit by a police car while riding an e-bike; the video appears to show an officer repeatedly punching Sparks as he was arrested on the ground.

Council discussed a resolution to execute an agreement between the City of Erie and Erie County Re-Entry Support Services Agency, whereby the City would make available \$65,000 of funding from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to carry out the designated activity outlined in the amended FY24 CDBG plan.

City Council July 15: City council presented honors to the Mercyhurst Prep Baseball Team as they were the state runner-up this season. Councilwoman Schaaf honored Erie native Cliff Crosby on behalf of city council for his NFL career and public service work.

Before public comments, President Titus addressed constituents, assuring the audience that city council has heard their concerns and frustrations. They announced that some ordinances were still under review by the city solicitor but will be addressed by council in the future, including the rules of council that set a clear code of conduct and decorum policy. Titus also addressed the

possibility of the citizen review board.

Constituents continued to speak out against police violence, referencing the arrest of Sparks. Rie Witherow (40 Under 40 Class of 2025) expressed frustration with a seeming lack of dialogue between city officials and their constituents, citing dozens of disregarded emails within the past two years.

Other constituents voiced concerns about defense manufacturing in Erie after Mayor Devlin and County Executive Vogel attended the Defense and Innovation Summit earlier in the week.

County Council July 21: During public comments, Cyndi Treiber condemned the excessive use of force against those arrested in Erie County and subpar medical care after arrests. Constituent Jen Paulson added to Treiber's statements, discussing a \$1.1 million settlement between Erie County and an inmate who was allegedly beaten by corrections officers.

"I'm willing to meet with anybody to create a policy to create change because we can't keep going through this same cycle of what we went through." —Malcolm Pullium

Malcolm Pullium tied this treatment back to Sparks, as well as the death of Marchello Woodard at the hands of his parole officer last year. "I'm willing to meet with anybody to create a policy to create change because we can't keep going through this same cycle of what we went through," Pullium said.

County Executive Vogel announced in her report that she, Mayor Devlin, Bishop John Crosby, and Warden Holman met to discuss Sparks and police conduct.

An ordinance approving the temporary unlocking of mobile devices for individuals attending public meetings of Erie County Council in order to facilitate public access and recording rights consistent with the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act had its first reading and was not voted on.

Coming up this month:

City Council: Aug. 5 at 9 a.m.

City Council: Aug. 19 at 6:30 p.m.

County Council: Aug. 25 at 6 p.m.





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Public Naloxone Trainings Aim to Save Lives, Change Minds About Addiction

Erie Regional Recovery Hub works to reverse stigmas

By: Chloe Forbes

Blue lips, leaning to one side, head and eyes beginning to roll back, aspirating – all are signs of an opioid overdose, and on a winter day in Erie several years ago, they triggered an immediate response in a bystander.

“I just remember running out to my car and getting this box of Narcan,” said Theresa Laird, who saw the individual sitting alone upon walking into a fast-food restaurant in Erie.

Having worked in the drug and alcohol addiction line of work, she knew the signs of an overdose and how to administer naloxone, also known as Narcan, a common brand of the medication that temporarily blocks the damaging effects of opioids, allowing time for emergency medical intervention to arrive.

Within a minute, the person still wasn’t responding, so she administered a second dose, and the person was revived in time for the ambulance to arrive. She said that it was a sobering experience and gave her a great moment of clarity and humanity.

“You don’t think about things like the taxpayer dollars that paid for the Narcan, or your political beliefs, or your personal bias towards drug and alcohol behavior,” she said. “Immediately, you just spring into action, thinking, ‘I have to save this person.’ This is a son. This is a daughter. This is a wife, a brother, a mother, whatever the case may be.”

Laird said that it’s her background in addiction treatment that enabled her to act in that moment because at the time, knowing how to use naloxone was not a common skill.

Now she works as an assistant project coordinator for the Erie County Regional Recovery Hub alongside Kaylee Stone, another assistant project coordinator who provides free community training for administering naloxone. Like CPR, administering naloxone is one of the closest things to an emergency medical procedure that the average person can provide.

Stone received her training through a nonprofit called Overdose Lifeline and since March 2025, she has trained about 400 people over nearly 30 sessions for organizations and in community spaces throughout the county.

In the training, Stone explains symptoms to look out for, how to administer naloxone, what to expect after, and what the overall overdose picture looks like in the area. Some of the symptoms of a person overdosing include being unresponsive or nodding off, having blue lips, making choking or gurgling noises, feeling cold or clammy, and losing a pulse. Having the average person trained to know when life-saving measures are needed helps cut back the number of fatal overdoses. Currently, three out of every four fatal overdoses occur when the person is alone.

While Stone said that newer medications like veterinary sedatives xylazine and medetomidine are mixed into the drug supply and cannot be reversed using naloxone, they are typically mixed with opioids like fentanyl, which is reversed by naloxone.

The Erie County Overdose Fatality Review for 2025 found fentanyl was ruled as a factor in the cause of death for 80 percent of the incidents studied. The good news, Stone said, is that interest in trainings shows that people want to reduce that number.

Since the Recovery Hub’s creation in 2023 – one of nine in the state – from a \$310,000 Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs grant, overdose deaths have decreased. This follows a national trend of declining overdose deaths within the same period (from a peak of 107,941 in 2022 to approximately 70,000 in 2025). In Erie County, drug-related deaths reported by the coroner have decreased from 122 in 2022 to 42 in 2025.

The recovery “hub” is meant to provide technical assistance and collaborate with a variety of community entities, sectors, and systems to enhance a recovery-supportive community and facilitate recovery support service delivery. In addition to layperson trainings, the hub hosts events like the recent Rock for Recovery event at the 1020 Collective and collaborates with local businesses and agencies to provide safe, substance-free events for people in the community.

The Erie County Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse also provides harm re-



Free community naloxone trainings are provided by Kaylee Stone through the Regional Recovery Hub. They include information about how to administer naloxone and use other harm-reduction supplies.

duction supplies and preventative education. When people ask, “What can I do?” Stone says that having supplies with you – and knowing how to use them – just as you would a first aid kit or EpiPen, can be the difference between life and death.

Harm reduction supplies like wound cleaning kits, medetomidine and xylazine test strips, and prevention care like safe disposal packets for medication, medication lockboxes, etc. are available to the community for free at the Erie County Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse.

Stone said that things like harm reduction supplies and using naloxone can still carry stigma, and she’s hoping that the trainings can help change that.

“At the beginning of my training, I always encourage people to just try to have an open mind,” she said. “It might challenge some beliefs that you didn’t realize before that you’ve thought about addiction.”

She’s found that people even have misconceptions about administering naloxone and that it could result in someone being charged in relation to the incident.

“There are Good Samaritan laws out there – they vary by state – but to encourage bystanders,” she said. “I always tell people in my training that you need to do what you’re comfortable with.”

Before and after each training, attendees complete assessments so

Stone can track how beneficial the training is to them. The feedback shows that people are learning more about naloxone and fentanyl and report building their confidence and knowledge regarding naloxone and drug overdoses.

By using education, harm reduction, and support at all levels of treatment, Stone said it increases the chances that people can recover and continue to lead productive and happy lives.

“At the end of the day, it’s about saving people’s lives,” she said. “Substance use disorder, addiction, these are complex issues, and I know we want people to stop using substances, but they really don’t get that chance if they’re not alive anymore. Narcan can really give them that chance at recovery.”

Find more information about the Regional Recovery Hub and request a naloxone public training by visiting recoveriepa.org or email Stone at kstone@eriecountypa.gov. To RSVP for this year’s International Overdose Awareness Day on Aug. 31 at Stairways Behavioral Health, visit overdoseday.com

Chloe Forbes is a local journalist. Reach her at chloeforbes14@gmail.com.

Stairways Behavioral Health is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate or search under Addiction Services to find other related organizations.



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NEWS & OPINION

Getting On Their Feet and Doing Something: Sunday Suppers at Covenant

Volunteers fill void, provide meals for those who need them

By: Alana Sabol

Every Sunday for the past 14 years, First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant has served a dinner for food-insecure and unhoused individuals in our community. But this isn't an ordinary soup kitchen. Sunday Suppers serves meals on real tableware with real silverware and has a warm and welcoming energy, with 15 round tables dispersed throughout the room. This past Sunday, on July 26, the church basement was filled with over 200 people needing a warm meal.

At the helm is Pat Tracy, who also runs the seasonal overnight shelter Our Neighbors Place. She had flowers tucked in her hair from a guest who came for a meal. Community members frequently approached Tracy while we chatted and she greeted them or gave them a hug. "One of my jobs is to be a hugger," she said. "I believe there's a great value in personal touch."

During Independence Day weekend in 2012, Tracy heard a guest at the shelter mention that they would be dumpster diving for food when the shelter was closed on Sunday night. "That was the first we knew that there was no free meal in downtown on Sunday, and that's how the idea was born," Tracy said.

Ever since that time, different churches, clubs, support teams, youth groups, and businesses have been bringing food and serving it to Erie's unhoused and impoverished community from 4 to 5:30 p.m. every Sunday. According to 2023 data from Feeding America, 15.1 percent of Erie County residents are food insecure. Tracy explained that more people come to Sunday Suppers during

the end of the month when they run out of their monthly SNAP allowance. This Sunday, there were so many people that the volunteers were unable to serve second helpings in order to make sure everyone was fed.

They served classic picnic fare like hot dogs, baked beans, potato salad, desserts, and lemonade.

Michelle, one of the volunteers serving food, told me she went to mass at St. Peter Cathedral and found out they were serving food at Sunday Suppers that evening. "It's kind of neat the idea of the real plates and actually dishwashing," she said. "They do things differently but accomplish the same thing which is feeding the hungry."

The suppers provide more than just a full belly. "That hunger maybe gets them in the door, but we have a relationship with people. We respect people. You can come in and be present no matter who you are," Tracy said. During the mealtime, the crew called emergency services for one individual and they regularly provide showers to a handful of people who are sleeping rough in the summertime.

When folks began to file out around 5 p.m., the volunteers cleaned up and shared a meal. "We can pray for the hungry all we want, but unless you get on your feet and do something, people are still hungry," Tracy said. "It's all well and good to say somebody should feed these people, but that somebody is us."

First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.



Sunday Suppers, served at the First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, were created to help to fill a gap in services, providing a community meal served on Sunday afternoons in a dignified, safe, cozy, and welcoming environment.

Have a Field Day: Celebrate Ainsworth's Birthday on Aug. 21

Historic ballpark was dedicated 79 years ago

By: Liz Allen

Maybe you remember the epic tales about Babe Ruth playing baseball in Erie. Or you want to learn more about the legacy of Negro League baseball in our town. Perhaps you are curious about the late Betty Peebles, a sports columnist when female sportswriters were rare, who led clinics to explain baseball to Erie women in the 1940s.

She later became the Erie Daily Times society editor.

Maybe you live in the area bounded by Cranberry Street and Washington Place, between West 22nd and West 24th streets, and wonder what improvements could be in store for your neighborhood.

Just as importantly and more urgently, you might be an Erie School District parent or coach advocating for upgraded facilities for students who play on the district's baseball and tennis teams.

Whatever your passion, from Erie's sports history to today's student athletes, you are invited to the inaugural **Ainsworth Community Day on Friday, Aug. 21**, starting at 4 p.m. The free event will feature food trucks, local vendors, raffle baskets, and activities. At dusk, *The Sandlot*, a 1993 comedy, will be shown. Mishaps involving a baseball autographed by Yankees legend Babe Ruth play a key role in this coming-of-age film, known for its oft-quoted line, "You're killin' me, Smalls!"

Coincidence or not, Ruth also played a big part in the legends about Ainsworth Field, even though when Ruth played here with his barnstorming team in 1923 and in an exhibition game for the New York Yankees in 1932, the ballpark was known as Athletic Field, before being renamed Ainsworth.

Ainsworth Community Day is a two-fer birthday party, celebrating the field's namesake, J.C. "Doc" Ainsworth, who was born on Aug. 19, 1878, and the 79th anniversary of the date that the Erie School Board formally dedicated Ainsworth Field, on Aug. 25, 1947. As with many attempts to make change in Erie, the path to changing Athletic Field to Ainsworth hit bumps.

In 1939, Erie City Council approved

a resolution urging the Erie School Board to rename Athletic Field for Ainsworth, longtime civic leader, champion of youth sports, and physical director for the YMCA. By a 7-2 vote, the school board promptly rejected the name.

Yet by the mid-'40s, Athletic Field was being called Ainsworth, even though the formal dedication wouldn't take place until 1947.

In their 2005 book *Baseball in Erie*, Mark K. Vatauvuk and Richard E. Marshall include a newspaper ad for a game on July 23, 1946, between the Newark Eagles, first-half champions from the Negro National League, versus the Cleveland Buckeyes, from the Negro American League, winner of the 1945 Negro League World Series. The game site is listed as Ainsworth.

The Buckeyes beat the Eagles 8-5 that night, powered by Sam "The Jet" Jethroe, who hit a double, triple, a home run, and stole a base, the book notes. After retiring, Jethroe moved to Erie, played with the Erie Pontiacs, and owned a steakhouse. Future Baseball Hall-of-Fame inductee Larry Doby, who would play for the 1948 World Series Champion Cleveland Indians, was on the Eagles' roster.

Athletic/Ainsworth Field also served as home for Erie's minor league teams – mostly the Erie Sailors but also the Erie Tigers, the Erie Cardinals, and the Erie Orioles – for decades. But in 1990, Major League Baseball spelled out strict facility rules that minor-league ballparks had to meet by 1994. Ainsworth Field failed those standards, and Erie was in danger of losing professional baseball.

"Since 1981, when professional baseball returned to Erie, major league directors and players beefed, to varying degrees, about inadequate facilities at Ainsworth Field, which is owned by the Erie School District," Dave Richards wrote in the Erie Times-News SportsWeek on June 18, 1995.

Justifiable complaints about the condition of Ainsworth Field and its nearby tennis courts continue, as Al Swigonski and Jenn Yaeger can attest. Swigonski, a stalwart Erie baseball fan and historian, has long been

CONTRIBUTED



The Erie Royals baseball team plays at Ainsworth Field, where the exterior of the grandstand shows its age.

urging the Erie School District to pay attention to the conditions at Ainsworth Field.

After MLB said that Ainsworth couldn't be salvaged for professional baseball, Team Erie formed in 1990, with Swigonski as president. Team Erie pushed hard for a new baseball stadium and a new minor league team. That's how the Erie SeaWolves came to play in a new downtown ballpark in 1995.

At Community Day, Swigonski will display a timeline about the history of Athletic/Ainsworth Field, along with his baseball card and photo collection. According to his research, interest in a new, first-rate athletic facility for Erie students began in 1911, when faculty members, students and alumni championed the project.

In an Oct. 4, 2020, Erie Times-News op-ed column, "Roosevelt demo offers chance to realize dream," Ann Silverthorn elaborated on that long-ago, big-picture vision. "William E. Dimorier, head of the Erie High English Department, recruited a committee of prominent business leaders who were at first skeptical of the project, but became convinced when they learned that the senior class had donated their entire treasury to the project. The school board agreed to match

the students' contributions."

You can read more about her research and the resulting biography, *William E. Dimorier: Servant-Leader*, at annsilverthorn.com. But suffice it to say that from the beginning, the seed planted to create the sports complex that later became Ainsworth Field was nurtured by strong community involvement.

Sadly, community interest in great ideas often wanes or disappears over time. The Erie School Board has periodically launched plans to fix Ainsworth Field, including with the use of various grants and at a 1980 re-dedication ceremony. But today there is litter outside of Ainsworth and holes in the metal fencing. Sloping near first and third base has been fixed, but "the fence at the bottom in the outfield is still hazardous," said Swigonski. "It curls up at the bottom toward the playing field," he said. "There are also holes in the infield where it's hazardous."

The Glenwood League, an amateur wooden-bat league, moved its games to Girard in 2024 because of the field condition, but has since returned to Ainsworth.

It's also important to recognize what's part of the Ainsworth legacy – six tennis courts to the south of the

baseball field – and what no longer exists, Theodore Roosevelt School, opened to the east in 1922, closed in 2007 and demolished in 2020.

Ainsworth should be considered a historic landmark, Swigonski said. “Not just Babe Ruth but a series of other Hall-of-Famers visited Ainsworth. The Negro Leagues used it as a neutral site,” he said. “That’s a history that needs to be preserved.”

In fact, Patterson, New Jersey, recognized the significance of its Negro League ballpark, Hinchcliffe Stadium, and led a \$100 million project to restore the field “to its former glory,” according to a May 17, 2023, New York Times story.

Erie’s commitment to Ainsworth likely isn’t that ambitious, but attention must be paid to the current conditions of both the baseball field and the tennis courts. “The primary thing is making sure our student athletes have a decent place to play. It’s as simple as it gets,” said Swigonski.

Jenn Yaeger, president of the Erie Royals Baseball boosters, would agree. Her concerns about Ainsworth started around 2017, when her older son Tyler, now 23, played baseball there for Erie High. A few years later, her son Jacob, who will be a junior at Erie High, began to play there. “I was disappointed the condition of the field had not improved much,” she said.

She emailed the Erie School Board and started speaking up at meetings. Her efforts prompted other parents as well as students to start advocating for Ainsworth.

Community Day developed from that activism.

“Come and experience this place that is so special. It’s a celebration of Ainsworth history and also about its future,” said Yaeger. She hopes

people will turn out to help shape the future of Ainsworth – not just for baseball but for tennis. She wants people who attend Community Day to “leave feeling connected to Ainsworth, inspired to help preserve it and invest in what it could become.”

Erie School Board President Jay Breneman and tennis coaches Cole Held and Kim Nikolai also have high hopes that Community Day will convince people – regular folks and community leaders – that Erie athletes deserve better.

“The public is encouraged to come out, be a part of it and help determine what the future will be,” Breneman said. After hearing from the public and consulting with its architectural firm, the “best case” scenario is that the district will go out for bids for Ainsworth improvements in the spring, he said.

Community Day will also introduce people to the fact that Erie students have a strong and growing interest in playing tennis. “We have athletic programs that many don’t know exist,” Breneman said. “The tennis families need more support from the district.”

Nikolai has coached girls’ tennis in the Erie District for the last 20 years, yet for all that time, Erie High has not had home tennis courts. Instead, tennis players practice and play at the former Burton School or at Frontier Park. “Community Day provides a tremendous opportunity to shine a spotlight on our tennis programs and the need for quality tennis courts,” she said. “We can build awareness, generate excitement and encourage support for a program that will not only benefit our athletes but future generations of students.”

Held, who coaches boys’ tennis for high school and middle school play-

ers, is also pumped about this sport, teaching skills that last a lifetime. “It’s one of the few sports where you might see an 85-year-old playing,” he said.

Tennis also teaches “overall good character,” said Held, who first considered coaching tennis at the suggestion of his wife, Nisha Tamang, even though he hadn’t played tennis. He has since plunged into learning as much as he can about the sport and is so enthusiastic that he also coaches tennis at Penn State Behrend.

He’s thrilled that tennis is accessible to so many students in the Erie District. Team members speak 12 different languages and are enrolled in programs ranging from honors to life skills. Like Nikolai, Held is an Erie Public Schools math teacher.

Speaking of math brings us back to the story about Babe Ruth’s first visit to Erie, on Oct. 28, 1923, when his barnstorming team beat the Erie Moose Club 15-1. Legend has it that Ruth swatted a home run that sailed above the Roosevelt School chimney. In their book, Vatauvuk and Marshall wrote that “contrary to popular lore, [Ruth’s homer] did not clear the Roosevelt chimney.”

Yet Jack Kastner, sports editor of the Erie Dispatch-Herald, wrote the next day that Ruth’s feat did occur, but during pre-game practice. “With [Johnny] Scott on the mound, Ruth pasted several over the right field wall, one going over the brick smokestack on Roosevelt school and another going so far in the air that it was difficult to say whether it landed on top of the building or passed completely over.”

Baseball mom Jenn Yaeger can attest to the staying power of the old Ruth stories. Her son Tyler hit a grand slam out of Ainsworth and “put a few

balls on top of the school” during his playing days, putting Tyler in good company with Ruth.

For more information about Community Day, visit Erie’s Public Schools website or email erieroyalsbaseballboosters@gmail.com.

Liz Allen, who learned the ins and outs of baseball by attending Erie Sailors games at Ainsworth with her dad, can be reached at lizallenerie@gmail.com.

The Foundation for Erie’s Public Schools is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.

Keep Reading!

For a hilarious and heartwarming look at Ainsworth Field and Erie’s charms, check out *The Old Ball Game*, by humor writer Dave Barry, which appeared in the Miami Herald’s *Tropic Magazine* on Sept. 13, 1992.

Barry’s editors sent him to Erie to write about the 1992 Erie Sailors. Erie was a farm team that season for the Florida Marlins, an expansion team that would not begin Major League play until 1993.

In his story, Barry mentions that actor Bill Murray was part owner of the Sailors at the time. The mention of Murray is a good reminder that in 2008, a documentary about the history of hand signals in baseball, *Signs of the Times*, was partly filmed at Ainsworth. Richard Dreyfuss narrates it.

To read Barry’s column, visit dave-barry.com, click on vintage columns, then Erie Sailors.



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Bird of the Month: Spotted Sandpiper

Amazing shorebirds with an unconventional lifestyle (wink, wink)

By: Mary Birdsong

Spotted Sandpipers, or Spotties as they are affectionately called by birders, are the most widespread and abundant shorebird in North America. They winter in southern states and much of South America but fly north to a breeding range that spans across the entire continent, east to west, and from sites along the southern edge of the Arctic, south to states like North Carolina and Arizona. Luckily for us that includes our region.

According to Cornell’s Birds of the World, Spotted Sandpipers have “colonized this broad range by capitalizing on generalist habits; i.e., individuals feed on a great variety of animal matter and occupy almost all habitats near water, everything from the shorelines of wild rivers and lakes to urban and agricultural ponds and pools.”

Meaning you can find them just about anywhere. I have seen them in office parks that have a water feature, along creeks, and of course, they are a regular sight on the shores of Presque Isle.

They are a joy to watch as they skitter across the sand with tails that continuously bob up and down. That teetering tail is a great field mark to identify them. Adults in breeding plumage do indeed have spots on their white breasts and bellies along with brownish to olive gray mantles (tops). Both males

and females are similar in plumage, but females usually have larger spots extending farther down the lower belly and they are typically bigger and heavier than males.

Why? Because their mating system is called polyandry – wherein the females have territories and attempt to acquire multiple mates rather than males doing all the work to attract females. Females have been known to fight for hours in a dispute over a male. The differences don’t stop with mate selection either. Within polyandry, females mate and lay eggs with multiple males over the course of a breeding season, leaving males to incubate the eggs and raise the chicks.

Despite some human views that females are the natural caregivers, polyandry is a system that works very well for the Spotted Sandpiper – perhaps that’s why they are so widespread.

Besides, it’s always fun to share this bit of information with others. When learning about it, a fiendishly mischievous grin usually washes across many women’s faces.

One of the most adorable things you’ll ever see is a day-old Spottie chick bobbing its downy tail as it makes its way into the world on unsteady legs. There is little chance of catching that this year,



Spotted Sandpipers, herein referred to by their much more adorable birder pet name “Spotties,” are a ubiquitous, charming shorebird with a telltale skitter and tail bob. They are also polyandrous – meaning the females maintain territories and the males vie for their attention, incubate eggs, and raise the chicks. Let’s go, girls!

though, as most are grown now and some have already left for the south. But make a plan for next spring to seek out this common, but amazing – and unconventional – bird.

Mary Birdsong is the lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory. Learn more at eriebirdobservatory.org. Mary can be reached at mbirdsong@eriereader.com

Erie Bird Observatory is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate

Edwina Tries... An Improv Class

Rediscovering the value of play

By: Edwina Capozziello

Do you remember when you were a kid, and you ran everywhere you needed to go and didn’t bat an eye at another kid asking if you wanted to play? Remember pretending, making up songs, and when doing creative things was just a regular part of your existence? Well, I remember, and I miss it. This month, in addition to seeing *Toy Story 5*, which reinforces the value of play (recommend!!) I tried an Improv class at the

Erie Art Museum. Now I’m feeling more playful than I have in a long time.

Full disclosure, the Reader’s very own Nick Warren (who recently upgraded me to fiancée!) has long been involved in various iterations of improv and had already been attending this class. I was equal parts soothed by the knowledge that he would be there and scared that I may be bad at improvisation and perhaps embarrass him. He has not yet retracted his proposal, so I think I did alright. In all seriousness, I can tell you that the atmosphere at this class is nothing short of absolutely welcoming. If you’ve ever thought of dipping your toes into this kind of thing, go for it!

The class is taught by Sara Fisher, a graduate of The Second City Chicago’s Music Improv Conservatory and the iO Theater Chicago. She studied in New York City and has taught and performed in Boston and Chicago in addition to here in Erie. Fisher draws on her expertise in movement and storytelling as well as her work with adults with disabilities to create a warm, inclusive, welcoming environment. She is a kind and inviting person with a lovely smile and an infectious laugh. She set me at ease right away. Sara opened the class with a brief agenda and focused on the idea that we were there to play. That further

calmed my nerves, and I was ready to get into it.

I was one of three newbies to the class; the others included a middle school teacher and someone visiting from Baltimore who had stumbled across the class after a quick search of things to do around town. The games and exercises quickly broke down barriers and encouraged an easy intimacy amongst the group. The prompts given were so simple and easy to build on that everyone jumped right in. It was really, really fun. I laughed so much that my cheeks hurt when I left. Luckily for us all, the class has been extended for two playdates in August. Check it out – maybe I’ll see you there. – Edwina Capozziello

Improv at the Museum // Wednesdays continuing for Aug. 12 and 19 // 6 to 7:30 p.m., Erie Art Museum, 20 E. 5th St. // \$15 for members, \$20 for non-members // More info at erieartmuseum.org/improv

Edwina is Erie’s (self-proclaimed) biggest fan who loves being a tourist in our own town. If you have an idea of something new she should try you can email her at edwina.capozziello@gmail.com

The Erie Art Museum is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.



Yes and... this month, Edwina gets way outside of her comfort zone as she tries out a session of improv, offered regularly at the Erie Art Museum. The warmth of the instructor and the welcoming nature of the other students put Edwina’s anxiety at bay for a fun evening.



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Making a Small City Smaller: Giving in A Small City

How Erie's unique giving culture sustains a robust nonprofit sector

By: Dave Tamulonis

Erie has a unique giving culture. Despite having a median household income lower than the national average, Erie has maintained a much higher density of nonprofit organizations relative to our population. A report from the Chronicle of Philanthropy shared in the Erie Times-News attributed this sustained support to a grassroots system of backing for the area's many nonprofits that often transcends income level, with the lowest-earning demographic households giving more than 7 percent of their income to charity against a national average across all income levels at around 3 percent. Part of this can be explained by the fact that nonprofit organizations have cropped up to fill gaps in services due to a shrinking tax base. As industry left Erie, the population dwindled – nonprofits were created by necessity to supplement the things our municipality could no longer provide. Perhaps as the public received services from these charities and saw the impact of their work in the community, they saw it necessary to sustain them with yearly donations. Giving at an income level below \$30,000 a year is almost never done for a tax benefit, as someone making that little could never give the amount that would exceed the standard deduction. Instead, giving by lower income tax brackets should be seen as an indicator of the trust, dependence, and faith in the charitable ecosystem here in Erie.

I think at least part of our healthy giving culture in Erie is also due to some careful cultivation and facilitation. The Erie Community Foundation (ECF) and partner organization the Nonprofit Partnership have been guiding the community through the giving process for decades, creating a framework for participation that is easy to navigate in the form of Erie Gives. The ECF also continues to innovate with the establishment of their collective giving groups, also known as Affinity Funds. The Erie Women's Fund, the LGBT Fund, and the Emerging Erie Fund of the ECF offer a chance for interested philanthropists to pay nominal yearly membership dues and vote on a grant to a local nonprofit who will receive the group's pooled contributions, significantly increasing the impact of each individual donation. I have the pleasure of serving on the advisory board of the Emerging Erie Fund, a collection of young "emerging" professionals who award a \$100,000 grant yearly to a deserving nonprofit with yearly dues of only \$100. These funds take the process of giving major awards, traditionally seen as very opaque processes with decisions made by an exclusive group of old white men in smoke-filled rooms, into a vibrant and participatory discussion by those whose children will grow up in this community and be affected by the health of our services sector. It may be one of the closest things we have to true, direct democracy regarding the distribution of some of the wealth and resources in our community, and ECF works every year to make participa-

DAVE TAMULONIS



The Erie Philharmonic, a popular nonprofit and frequent success story during Erie Gives Day, gives back to the community with a free outdoor concert at Bayview Park on July 4, 2026. Dave Tamulonis counts the ways in which Erie sustains a robust community of giving ahead of the big day.

tion in these affinity funds more accessible.

We have established that it's relatively easy to give in Erie compared to other similarly sized communities, but that is not the whole picture. ECF may lead our proverbial horse to the water, but why that horse continues to drink is influenced by other fac-

Erie's lowest-earning households give more than 7 percent of their income to charity — against a national average across all income levels of around 3 percent.

tors, I believe. I think being a small city works to our advantage when it comes to ensuring the effectiveness of these organizations. It is very easy to directly encounter the impact an organization has in a smaller community and to know that the money we are giving is truly making a difference. We understand the scope of the work done by our charities because there are fewer barriers between the results of that work and our everyday lives. This could go both ways: the trust built between the community and the nonprofits in Erie can swiftly be broken if a nonprofit is mishandling money or engaging in corruption or embezzlement. While it doesn't happen often, it becomes widespread news very quickly when an organization is not being responsible or accountable to its funders, and the consequences of the court of public opinion are quick and harsh. This high standard of ethics and demand for transparency benefits both donors and the populations

served by nonprofits.

We also have a few very high-profile philanthropists that set a community-wide example for how to give generously. Our local billionaire Tom Hagen has made an entire brand out of giving to causes that preserve and restore Erie's historic building stock. We may take it for granted, but other cities with a billionaire (or multiple) are not always so lucky as to have the bulk of that individual's charitable giving remain in the city limits. Tom Hagen and Erie Insurance see a benefit in investing within the city where their headquarters still resides. When many Fortune 500 companies opted for tax breaks, cheap land, and outsourced labor, they have remained within the city limits and continue to be an active participant (and driver) in our giving ecosystem and community development. Their actions send a message to the rest of their wealthy peers that Erie is worth it. That is a powerful message to convey to a community that can, at times, feel defeated by our limited resources compared to larger cities in the region like Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and Cleveland. While a system this large is bound to be imperfect, we can zoom out and see the larger picture: that the giving culture we've fostered and sustained in Erie is comparatively equitable, accessible, and impactful. And that notion, that what we have all built here is still worth our collective time, effort, money, and trust to maintain it, is what keeps the spirit of generosity alive and thriving in Erie.

Happy Erie Gives!

Dave Tamulonis is an educator and musician living in Erie. He is the director of grants at the City of Erie and lives in the West Bayfront with his wife Marissa, dog Esthera Minerva, and cat Cherry Blossom.

Gem City Style: Shateria A. Franklin

Speaking with the founder of Destiny of Our Daughters before Erie Gives Day 2026

By: Jessica Hunter

Every year, at the end of the Destiny of Our Daughters conference, about a hundred Erie girls get dressed in whatever makes them feel most like themselves, walk a red carpet, and hear their own names read out to a room full of people clapping for them.

Shateria Franklin (40 Under 40 Class of 2023) has spent 11 years building toward that, and she'll tell you it was never really about the clothes. It's about a girl finding out what it feels like to be looked at on purpose – and deciding she can hold up under it.

Since 2014, Destiny of Our Daughters has worked with Erie girls ages 8 to 18 – Black and brown girls in particular – through mentorship, conflict resolution, college prep, and a youth council that runs much of the organization itself. All of it points toward a two-day empowerment conference each year, which ends with the gala.

She arrived at my studio in a black-and-white polka dot top and pink glasses, and I loved it immediately – polka dots are kind of my thing. I'd already kicked my shoes off, and told her to do the same, because that's the kind of afternoon it was going to be. What I got over the next hour wasn't a mission statement. It was a life, laid out in order, with the organization sitting in the middle of it.

"I love this organization with every fiber of my being," she told me early on, then spent the next hour proving it.

Franklin is 34, and her resume is Erie all the way down: East High, Class of 2010. Gannon undergrad in 2014, master's in 2018, and a seat now on the university's academic advisory board. A published author. An Erie Reader 40 Under 40 honoree in 2023. Today she's a community school director for United Way of Erie County – so the girls she serves through her nonprofit are, often enough, the same ones she's alongside during the school day.

But when she describes herself, none of that comes first.

"I'm just a person who has gone through extreme adversity," she said. Her father died when she was 14, and this year brought another significant loss. "I talk about loss a lot, because I realize how much of that has been an important piece of who I was able to become."

The losses, though, are only half of it. The other half is women.

"I always had people and women who believed in me," she said – a wonderful mom, wonderful grandparents, and a middle school assistant principal who watched a straight-A student slide to Cs after her father's funeral and pushed her over the finish line anyway. "She believed in me," Franklin said. "And I never forgot that."

"Destiny of Our Daughters is a bright spot in all of the loss that I've taken," she said, "because it is truly a direct reflection of what it means for people, and for women, to believe in you."

JESSICA HUNTER



Shateria Franklin (40 Under 40 Class of 2023) met up with Jessica Hunter at her downtown studio to discuss Franklin's motivations behind creating the nonprofit Destiny of Our Daughters and how she sees that organization creating a future legacy in Erie.

The idea found her unexpectedly, in college, when girls she barely knew started telling her they admired how she dressed, how she carried herself, how she talked. "Then I thought, wait a minute – this is the same thing someone said they saw in me when I was a little girl," she said. "Now other people are starting to see it, and I want other girls to know that I see them."

What she wanted was specific. "I really want Black and brown girls in particular to be seen, to be heard, to be felt," she said. "To know that they can do whatever, no matter where they come from, that you can literally be whoever it is that you know you were created to be."

The first gathering came in 2014, in a borrowed room at Strong Vincent High School, set up like a workshop for lack of a better term. "It was very small but powerful," she said. "I was scared, because I just didn't know what it would be."

The girls who showed up were age 10 to 13 – timid, unwilling to ask a question. By the end of the afternoon they were talking to each other, making friends, being themselves.

"And I was like, this is it."

After extensive research, the 501(c)(3) came through in 2018, and a formal board followed in 2020. Ask what she wishes she'd known and there's no pause at all. "That it's okay to ask for help," she said. But she wouldn't trade the route. "I appreciate every single moment of growth we've had. I don't

think I'd change anything about how I got here." She is also nowhere near finished. "We haven't reached where I believe that we will go yet," she said.

The Youth Ambassador Council is a group of high schoolers who serve as a working board of directors. They pick the conference theme. They pick the speaker. They lead. It exists because the girls asked for it. "It's a thing to say something," Franklin said. "We tell kids all the time to speak up for themselves. But if we don't put any action behind speaking up for themselves, then their voice is a little bit diminished. So I let them lead. Tell me what you need."

College Knowledge, a 12-week intensive workshop, exists because Black girls in Erie are not only underrepresented in college numbers but underprepared for the application itself. The program walks them through essays, applications, and scholarships, and every woman facilitating – professors, people in higher ed – looks like the girls across the table.

The six-week conflict resolution curriculum came out of her days inside Erie's schools, and out of years watching friends cycle in and out of trouble over conversations that could have gone another way. The work is showing them a disagreement isn't a fight waiting: "I can disagree with you, you can disagree with me – you might actually be right, I may actually be wrong. And both of us may be right, and we can coexist. Two things can be true at the exact same time."



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SEPTEMBER		
1	Sept. 2	Glenwood YMCA 8:00 AM-12:00 PM
2	Sept. 3	Edinboro YMCA 8:00 AM-11:00 AM
3	Sept. 4	GECAC (Fairview) 12:30 PM-2:00 PM
4	Sept. 8	Our Lady of Mt. Carmel • 8:30 AM-10:30 AM • 2:00 PM-4:00 PM
5	Sept. 11	LCHA Flu Kickoff Event 9:00 AM-4:00 PM
6	Sept. 14	Eastside YMCA 8:00 AM-2:00 PM
7	Sept. 15	Millcreek Township Building 8:00 AM-4:00 PM
8	Sept. 17	Rep. Merski's Office 9:00 AM-12:00 PM
9	Sept. 17	Cambridge Active Aging 12:30 PM-2:30 PM
10	Sept. 18	Rep. Blizano's Office 9:00 AM-12:00 PM
11	Sept. 18	Corry Community Center 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
12	Sept. 18	Corry Moose Lodge (Part 1) 4:00 PM-6:00 PM
13	Sept. 20	St. Francis Xavier Church 11:30 AM-1:30 PM
14	Sept. 22	Union City Senior Care 9:00 AM-11:30 AM
15	Sept. 22	St. Lawrence Parish (Albion) 9:30 AM-11:00 AM
16	Sept. 22	Meadville Active Aging 12:45 PM-2:45 PM
17	Sept. 24	St. James Social Center 9:00 AM-12:00 PM
18	Sept. 24	St. James Social Center 3:00 PM-6:00 PM
19	Sept. 25	Erie City Hall 12:00 PM-4:00 PM
20	Sept. 27	Holy Cross Church 9:00 AM-12:00 PM

OCTOBER		
21	Oct. 4	St. Jude's Parish 8:00 AM-12:00 PM
22	Oct. 6	Millcreek Township Building 8:00 AM-10:00 AM
23	Oct. 6	Meadville Rural Health Clinic 10:00 AM-4:00 PM
24	Oct. 7	Erie County Dept. of Health 3:00 PM-5:00 PM
25	Oct. 11	Wayside Presbyterian Church 10:00 AM-1:00 PM
26	Oct. 17	St. George Church 4:00 PM-6:00 PM
27	Oct. 18	St. George Church 7:00 AM-1:00 PM
28	Oct. 20	Wattsburg Rural Health Clinic 10:00 AM-4:00 PM
29	Oct. 23	Rep. Merski's Office 9:00 AM-12:00 PM
30	Oct. 29	Corry Moose Lodge (Part 2) 4:00 PM-6:00 PM

NOVEMBER		
31	Nov. 6	Eastside YMCA Health Fair 9:00 AM-11:30 AM
32	Nov. 13	Fairview Elementary School 10:00 AM-1:00 PM



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By week six, she said, you can watch a girl decide not to roll her eyes. Teachers notice before the girls do.

Of the four words at the center of the mission – hope, wisdom, courage, power – I asked which is hardest to teach. “Hope,” she said. “If you come from a community where all you see is chaos and brokenness, you tend to think that you are a product of all the things around you. If no one around you graduated from high school, you tend to believe that it’s not made for you.”

So she is deliberate about who the girls see – who speaks at her events, who volunteers, who leads. Hope isn’t something you can talk a girl into. She has to watch it walk into the room. “When you start to see women who look like you – wait a minute, she’s an executive. She owns a business. She’s an author. And she grew up right where I grew up, in the projects,” she said. “And she didn’t leave Erie and come back. She did it right here.”

And then she says something I’ve been thinking about since: “I want them to see a version of themselves that they often know is there, but they don’t know how to get there. It’s in their heart. They have the desire. I see girls every day. I see versions of myself in the girls every day.”

Some of those girls are seniors now, filling out the applications her program walks them through. “They came in five years ago,” she said, “and they wouldn’t even hold the mic to their voice and say their name.”

Which brings us, eventually, to the clothes – because in Franklin’s case the two things were never separate. She was the girl at Wilson Middle School who wore heels to class, and her high school friends still resurface it online, tagging her under old photos: *this was you, Shateria*. Behind it is a great-grandmother and a sentence.

“If you look good, you feel good,” Franklin said. “She was always on us about the way we presented ourselves. I don’t think that we correlate the way that we feel with the way that we look.” So the conference’s second day is a gala: a red carpet, a photographer, a photo booth, and awards handed out by name to young women who are doing well.

Franklin didn’t learn to dress for such events until she was an adult, often as the only woman who looked like her. “So I get them in a room where everybody looks like them,” she said. “Different shades, different hair – and their personality gets to shine through the formal wear.”

Franklin runs all of this alongside a full-time job and three children, and describes it as alignment rather than strain. Her daughter is always around. Her sons come help her set up. They’re watching what it looks like to lead, to juggle, and to rest when you need to.

“It’s all my purpose,” she said. “That’s how I know it’s meant for me.”

The organization has also done something she didn’t plan for – reached past the girls entirely. The women who volunteer, facilitate, and lead tend to leave with something of their own. “I’ve literally seen my organization assure other women that they are who they believe that they are,” she said.

Near the end of the afternoon I asked what she wants the organization to look like in 10 years, when the girls from that first cohort are old enough to run it. She pulled out something she’d written down – every year she picks five keywords for the year ahead, and one of last year’s was *legacy*. Partway through reading it aloud, she stopped to acknowledge she was tearing up. By then, so was I.

“It’s not about my name being remembered. It’s about the work continuing well after I’m around,” she said. “It’s seeing young girls that I once poured into become women who pour into someone else. And it’s women who understand the responsibility and the power that you have in reaching back to pull up the next generation.”

She has thought further ahead than most founders permit themselves.

“I don’t plan to live and die here,” she said. “I want to build a foundation where someone can come and take it well beyond what I could have ever even imagined. And that’s leadership. I don’t think that we always have to hold on.”

What she pictures is a girl who came through the program at eight growing up, gaining confidence and experience in the real world, and applying for

the executive director job.

“And when they think about their story, they’ll say: I was connected to an organization called Destiny of Our Daughters when I was 10, 11, 12 years old, and because of that I learned how to speak,” she said. “I learned that I could go to college as a first-generation student. I learned that leaders do look like me.”

One last question, because I couldn’t help myself: if Destiny of Our Daughters were an outfit, head to toe, what is it, and who’s wearing it?

She didn’t need long. Michelle Obama is wearing it. It’s bold and loud and almost certainly pink, because there is a great deal of pink in this organization. Patterns, obviously. Pink glasses. A two-piece pantsuit, a statement flower – the whole thing built to stop a room.

It took me a beat to catch what she’d done. Sitting across from me in polka dots and pink frames, she had described the organization and described herself, and hadn’t noticed the difference.

But it isn’t about taking the room.

“Not stealing the room,” she said. “Shifting the energy. And allowing other people to be like, oh my gosh, where’d you get that.” Starting a conversation, she said. Being inviting. Sharing.

Which is, more or less, the whole method: walk into a room, make it bigger, hold the door. Eleven years of it, and she’s not planning to do the next ten alone – she’s actively looking for women with expertise in fundraising and leadership to join the board, and she’d like Erie to know it.

To learn more about Destiny of Our Daughters, to volunteer or mentor, or to inquire about board service, visit destined2be814.org or find them on Facebook and Instagram.

Destiny of Our Daughters is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.

Gem City Style is a monthly column featuring an intimate profile of someone making a creative impact in Erie. If you or someone you know would make a good fit for a future Gem City Style, email jessica@eriereader.com



Take Your Beer For a Walk: August 2026

A refreshing summer stroll on Erie’s east side shows nonprofits and urban gardens

By: Jeff McCullor

Ah, August. A time for harvesting the literal fruits of your garden that’s in full bloom, to reap the benefits of your hard work and countless gallons of water. It’s also a great time of year to think about giving back as Erie Gives advances closer and closer on the calendar. With these themes in mind, I hit the streets to show off some of Parade Street, some nonprofits, and a bit of the lower east side of Erie. So let’s roll, shall we?

First, grab your favorite local beverage and navigate yourself to our starting point, the intersection of East 17th and Parade streets. Pop open your container and situate yourself on the northwest corner of the intersection, but look east. You’ll find the St. Martin Center’s green buildings flanking East 17th, once home to the Wayne Brewing Company. Officially in operation between 1907 and 1951, it was one of only two breweries in Erie to survive Prohibition. At its height, the brewery plant occupied the entire block heading east. Today, the St. Martin Center provides assistance to families through housing counseling, emergency assistance, food pantry services, financial education, and more. Cheers to you for all you do, St. Martin Center!

Next let’s head south for a bit, ultimately landing at the corner of East 22nd and Parade, where there’s a lovely urban garden owned and maintained by the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) on the northwest corner. There you’ll find some reclaimed bicycle parts adorning the front gate where a fleet of raised beds can be seen growing all sorts of goodies. I’ve definitely experienced some garden envy solely based on the sheer square footage of this spot when compared to my own home garden. The SSJNN’s urban assistance can be felt in many different areas: housing and home ownership, Little Italy Farmers Market, the Erie Bike Co-op, community gardens, and much



Take a walk with Jeff McCullor (and his beer) as he connects the summer bounty of local urban farms with the bounty of community giving that goes along with Erie Gives Day.

more. Cheers to you Sisters of St. Joseph!

From this spot let’s cross Parade Street and do a 180-degree turn, we’re headed back down the other side of Parade Street, take a swig or two, we have some steps to accumulate! Next stop is all the way past the CVS Pharmacy at the corner of East 12th and Parade streets. Notice that mural painted on the building behind the pharmacy? Right in the alley there? This mural is officially dubbed *Untitled by Ms. Yellow*, by Gabi Keebler, Sage Hulingues, and Leecia Moffatt, and is available on the in-depth Erie Arts and Culture (yet another Erie nonprofit!) Mural Tour found on their website. My favorite portion has to be the cat wearing a fishbowl-space helmet, naturally. Cheers to you Erie Arts and Culture and to these great muralists!

Now, do an about-face and peer across the street, you’ll see the East Side Renaissance (ESR) office. This nonprofit’s goal is to energize and revitalize the portion of Parade Street between East Sixth and 12th streets, including 18 properties on their active target list for improvement. One accomplishment that’s clearly visible is the new-ish ERIEBANK location at 926 Parade. Cheers to you East Side Renaissance! Keep up the good work!

Next, on to our final stop. We’ll roll down to the intersection of East Seventh and Parade, and hang a right. We’ll end today’s walk at 633 E. Seventh, home to Wild Field Urban Farm. A triple lot farm owned by my bud Stephanie Ciner, this quarter-acre chunk of Erie exists with the goal of cultivation of plants for

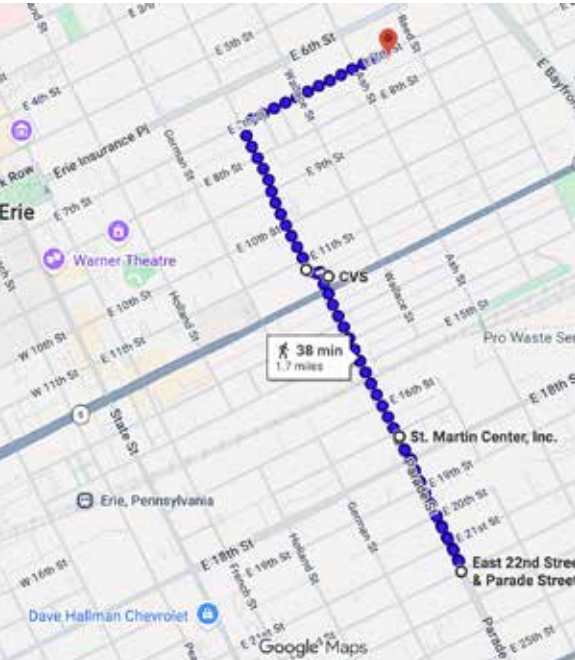
food and beauty. Stephanie works with community partners to enhance our local food system (I get my veggie starts here every year) and educate young people on where food actually comes from. Cheers

I've definitely experienced some garden envy solely based on the sheer square footage of this spot when compared to my own home garden. The SSJNN's urban assistance can be felt in many different areas: housing and home ownership, Little Italy Farmers Market, the Erie Bike Co-op, community gardens, and much more. Cheers to you Sisters of St. Joseph!

to you, Wild Field Urban Farm!

Hey, thanks for coming along this month – and thanks for drinking a local beer along the way. August is a solid month of outdoor enjoyment in town and I appreciate your company as we get some steps in together with beer in-hand!

Jeff McCullor is the co-owner of Erie Ale Works. He can be reached at jeff@eriealeworks.com



Tree Talk: August 2026

The bat and the sycamore tree

By: Hannah Rhodes

A pleasant summer day has been seemingly difficult to come by this season. Hazardous air, heat domes, and unrelenting winds have made my usual work in the world of arboriculture just a tad less endearing. However, one July morning last month was an outlier, and this particularly perfect summer morning had more in store for me than just optimal weather.

As I led a group of Groundwork Erie student workers into the Franklin Park Tiny Forest that balmy morning, ready to fix fences and pull weeds, I looked up into a 12-foot-tall sycamore sapling and saw the most beautiful thing.

There, blinking down at us from the underside of a huge sycamore leaf, was a young Eastern Red Bat pup.

Eastern Red Bats are not necessarily rare – in fact, they are just about the most common tree-dwelling bat species in eastern North America. But to see one nestled up in a tree in East Erie – a tree I had helped plant just three years ago – stopped me in my tracks. At that moment, I felt such ecological joy for both the tree in front of me and its small rust-colored inhabitant. How lucky I felt to witness this small creature rest in its found haven, and in the middle of a public park!

When the bat flew off (and up) to take refuge in a taller tree nearby, I was left gazing instead at the

HANNAH RHODES



Bats are integral to the functioning of an ecosystem – and they may be hiding in plain sight. This month, LEAF's Program Director Hannah Rhodes takes a deeper look at the American Sycamore, the tree in which an Eastern red bat recently took refuge within an urban forest.

American Sycamore trees can grow to be giants. The oldest and tallest sycamores documented have reached 175 feet tall and 16 feet in diameter. They grow fast, are a common tree species in our region, and are aesthetically unmistakable due to their peeling multicolored bark and large leaves.

young sycamore it had launched from.

American Sycamore trees can grow to be giants. The oldest and tallest sycamores documented have reached 175 feet tall and 16 feet in diameter. They grow fast, are a common tree species in our region, and are aesthetically unmistakable due to their peeling multicolored bark and large leaves. When I say they are common to the region, I mean it – American Sycamore trees have been recognized in the North American fossil record from over 100 million years ago. Throughout our own recorded histories, sycamores have been a cornerstone of human development. The trees were built into shelters across Appalachia at the hands of both colonists and nomadic tribes, carved into dugout canoes by multiple

indigenous peoples, are rumored to have sheltered American soldiers in the 1777 Pennsylvania Battle of Brandywine, and have even traveled as seeds to the moon and back on board the Apollo 14.

Given time and space to grow to an advanced age, these trees can develop cavernous hollows in the middle of their trunks that have historically provided both novelty and shelter.

Sometimes the trunks of large sycamores can develop burls, or bumps, due to environmental factors – this phenomenon can be witnessed in our very own city while traveling down the line of sycamores on Greengarden Ave. All this to say that the American Sycamores are huge, both figuratively and literally, in our local and regional landscapes.

Yet it was one of the smaller sycamores of Erie – standing just a little taller than a shed, no more than a half-inch thick, growing in a literal microforest – which gifted an Eastern Red Bat with a little bit of refuge this summer. It gifted me, too, with a little bit of child-like joy and ecological hope.

Both LEAF and Groundwork Erie are participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.

For more information on Erie's Arboretum at LEAF, visit: leaferie.org

Hannah Rhodes is the program director of Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF). She can be reached at hannah@leaferie.org

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SOS 4 KIDZ is a non-profit organization run totally by volunteers. It was created to level the playing field for the abused and neglected children of Erie County who frequently are unable to participate in school and community activities based on the costs associated with them. We have funded things such as music lessons, classes, gymnastics, dance, sports, homecoming, prom, YMCA memberships, class trips, camp, Waldameer passes, etc. We also have purchased things to enhance self-esteem such as haircuts, braiding, contacts, glasses, bikes, trendy clothes, yearbooks, etc.

Our mission is to help children/youth become involved in school and community activities and to purchase items to enhance self-esteem in an effort to create positive childhood memories. We hope that you will consider our organization worthy of your financial support.

sos4kidz.org

Erie Reader Gives 2026

Celebrating 16 sweet years of driving Erie’s giving on Aug. 11

By: Erie Reader Staff

Erie Gives Day is upon us again and the Erie Community Foundation (ECF) is poised to make this year’s event one of the biggest days of community giving yet. Now in its 16th year, most people living in the Erie area are familiar with the push from local nonprofits in the days leading up to Erie Gives Day, which this year falls on **Tuesday, Aug. 11**. If you’re new to Erie Gives Day, it “is a one-day celebration of generosity that brings our entire community together. For 24 powerful hours, thousands of donors from across the country, and even from around the world, rally behind local nonprofits that make Erie County stronger.”

Any donation of \$25 or more going through the ECF receives a matching donation from a fund that provides all of the Erie Gives nonprofits a boost to the totals they receive on the day. Dubbed “bonus bucks” by the ECF, these funds “are supported by our community partners, and help offset website and credit card fees, increasing the impact of donations. The remaining funds are distributed as a pro-rated match, meaning every donor gift receives a little extra support for the Erie Gives nonprofits.” In addition to this year’s \$673,424 in bonus bucks, the communities of North East, Corry, Union City, and Findley Lake have pledged additional Bonus Bucks contributions of \$30,000, \$25,000, \$15,000 and \$5,000 respectively, specifically to bolster the local nonprofits in their communities.

Of course, donating to your favorite nonprofit is welcome any time of the year, but your donation always goes a little further on Erie Gives Day, making the impact of that donation greater. And because these funds come from the public, they are not restricted in the same way grant funding is – the more a nonprofit receives in donations on Erie Gives Day, the greater spending flexibility that organization has.

This year, the ECF building itself is undergoing some upgrades, so celebrations will look a little

“Many essential nonprofits are right now responding to the growing needs of the people they serve while at the same time facing financial uncertainty within their organizations. Supporting them is not only about sustaining individual organizations, it is about protecting the civic and social infrastructure that helps Erie remain informed, healthy, welcoming, and connected.” – Patrick Herr, vice president of community impact at ECF

different than in years past. “Erie Gives has always been about bringing our community together through generosity,” said Karen Bilowith, president and CEO of the ECF. “Because The Erie Community Foundation’s campus is currently undergoing renovations, we didn’t want to miss the opportunity to celebrate this special day with our community. Our neighbors, Erie Insurance, have offered their courtyard for our celebration. We invite everyone to join us as we celebrate the collective generosity that

SYLVIA PHILLIPS



The Erie Community Foundation’s building is currently experiencing some renovations, but while the venue for the day has changed, their mission hasn’t – they’re gearing up to make Erie Gives Day 2026 the biggest yet. In our annual Erie Reader Gives feature, the staff of the Erie Reader helps provide some giving-inspo for the big day on Tuesday, Aug. 11.

makes Erie such a remarkable place.”

The celebration will be located at 100 Erie Insurance Place, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Erie Gives Day. Stop by throughout the day to meet local nonprofit leaders, grab lunch from local food truck

vendors, enjoy family-friendly activities, and listen to some live music.

At a time when communities tend to be relying more on nonprofits to fill gaps in federal grant support, those organizations rely upon individual donations more than ever. Vice President of Community Impact Patrick Herr notes, “Many essential nonprofits are right now responding to the growing needs of the people they serve while at the same time facing financial uncertainty within their organizations.

Supporting them is not only about sustaining individual organizations, it is about protecting the civic and social infrastructure that helps Erie remain informed, healthy, welcoming, and connected.”

Executive Director of the Nonprofit Partnership Adam Bratton concurs. “The entire nonprofit sector is facing considerable challenges while being expected to serve more and more people. Erie Gives is an important community giving vehicle that provides our nonprofits with the resources to do their great work.”

And while times are tight for many in Erie, helping out during Erie Gives doesn’t have to be just about giving cash. Vice President of External Relations Erin Fessler notes that helping can happen through hosting events to raise money for one’s favorite nonprofit, sharing donation links on social media, or championing your favorite nonprofit within the community. “Erie Gives is more than a fundraiser, but also a ‘friend-raiser.’ It connects nonprofits with new supporters, strengthens existing relationships, and helps our community better understand the incredible work happening throughout Erie County.” Additionally, look out for supporting events through-



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A photograph of a young woman with long blonde hair and red-rimmed glasses, smiling and looking upwards. She is wearing a black leather jacket and is sitting on a set of stairs with a metal railing. The background is a brick wall with an arched doorway.

The logo for Mercy Center for Women features a stylized purple house shape above the text 'MERCY CENTER' in purple, 'for' in a smaller, cursive font, and 'WOMEN' in purple. A blue butterfly is positioned to the left of the word 'for'.

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The Erie Gives logo consists of the words 'ERIE GIVES' in a blue, sans-serif font, with 'ERIE' on the left and 'GIVES' on the right, surrounding a central circular icon. The icon is a white outline of a house with a heart inside, set against a background of rainbow-colored segments.

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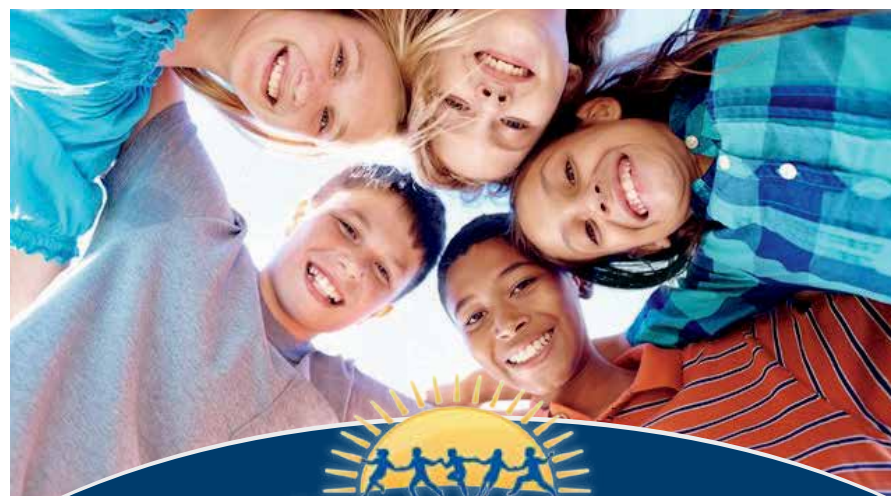
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out the region leading up to and on Erie Gives Day. Make sure you take some time leading up to the big day (during which donations will be open from midnight to midnight – a full 24 hours – just like last year) to familiarize yourself with some of the non-profits participating.

“I am most looking forward to seeing Erie come together again around the organizations that make our community stronger. Erie Gives raised more than \$11 million last year, but what stays with me is the inspirational number of people who chose to participate,” Herr shares. “Every gift represents someone identifying a cause they care about and deciding to be part of its success.”

Each year, our editors, writers, artists, and designers take a moment to share the nonprofit to which they’re planning to donate on Erie Gives Day. Their choices represent the diverse options available on Erie Gives Day and hopefully provide an inspiration to look a little deeper into the needs of the community. We hope you’ll feel compelled by this list of nonprofits that are so important to us – and give a little or a lot, as you are able.

(Listed alphabetically by donor’s last name)

Parkinson Partners of NW PA

Who’s giving: Liz Allen, contributing writer
Who they are: The mission of Parkinson Partners is “to encourage, educate and support people with Parkinson’s Disease (PD) and their families in the Erie region,” according to parkinsonpartners.org.

Why I’m giving: Carly Simon just announced that she has been diagnosed with Parkinson’s; Harrison Ford’s character copes with the disease on Apple TV’s *Shrinking*, with guest appearances by Michael J. Fox, who also has Parkinson’s. But Parkinson’s hits closer to home for me. My friend’s husband was diagnosed seven years ago. Another friend’s sister-in-law struggles with it. And a dear former work colleague cared for his wife, a Parkinson’s patient, for many years. She died two years ago and my friend died a year later. People with Parkinson’s and their families need support. I’m glad Parkinson Partners of NW PA provides that for our region.

Liz previously gave to: Eagle’s Nest Leadership Corporation (ENLC), Emmaus Ministries, The Harry T. Burleigh Legacy Alliance, Urban Erie Community Development Corp (UECDC), All Aboard Erie, and the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network

Bonus: Consider a donation to those organizations that offer support or aid in medical research for the disease that has impacted you or your loved ones like The Alzheimer’s Association or Cystic Fibrosis Association of Erie County.

The Friends of the Erie County Library

Who’s giving: Nathaniel Clark, contributing writer
Who they are: This group is an all-volunteer non-profit dedicated to the advancement of the Erie County Public Library. The Friends are proud to fi-

nancially support lifelong learning at every stage of life every year at the highest possible level. Libraries go way beyond traditional book lending to offer engaging educational programs and resources. The Friends continue to fund a diverse variety of classes, events and programs offered at all branches of the Erie County Public Library, the Bookmobile, and outreach activities.

Why I’m giving: As an educator by trade, I consistently advocate for the importance of community-driven and readily-accessible learning opportunities. The Erie County Public Library, with its multiple branches and expansive array of activities, is, and has always been, my first choice when recommending where people can become lifetime learners. As Arthur the Aardvark, created by Erie native Marc Brown, once said: “Having fun isn’t hard when you’ve got a library card!”



Nathaniel previously gave to: expERIENCE Children’s Museum

Bonus: For township-specific libraries, you may support Albion, Corry, Findley, Rice Avenue, Union City, or Waterford.

Erie Arts and Culture

Who’s giving: Chloe Forbes, contributing writer

Who they are: Erie Arts and Culture (EAC) is a regional arts agency dedicated to elevating, inspiring, and connecting communities through the arts.
Why I’m giving: EAC has made a name for itself doing one of the most commendable jobs Erie could ask for – cultivating community through art by limiting barriers to access. Whether through dance, music, fine art, theater, folk art, or written storytelling, I’ve watched the voices of *all* people be elevated and empowered thanks to EAC.

Chloe previously gave to: McKean Hose Co. and Goodell Gardens & Homestead

Bonus: Check the “Arts and Culture” category at eriegives.org to find the arts advocacy organization that aligns with you best.

Edinboro Market



Who’s giving: Gretchen Gallagher Durney, contributing writer

Who they are: Edinboro Market is a year-round, not-for-profit, 100 percent local grocery store and farm/food business incubator. They provide access to fresh, local food, and an entrepreneurial marketplace for local growers, artisans, and food producers, and they understand the importance of both.

Why I’m giving: I love how their mission is very literally rooted in our community and economy by supporting local growers. They offer retail space, a café/classroom offering cooking and gardening education as well as business classes for new and existing food businesses, and – drum roll – Erie County’s first certified shared-use commercial kitchen. The incubator space fans the flames for folks starting or continuing farm businesses and other creative ventures. Supporting them is helping to build a stronger regional food system and lends a hand to folks growing and making food intentionally to feed their neighbors. As someone who helped run a seasonal farmers market in Little Italy for more than a decade, I love their drive to fulfill these needs for all four seasons and foster opportunities that create so many positive ripples in our area and for our ag and food hub. This year, funds will go toward installing an access and security system so folks can use the commercial kitchen after hours. That may not sound very glamorous or be full of frills but is a great and responsible use of the gifts and that is a gleaming thing all on its own!

Gretchen previously gave to: Groundwork Erie

Erie Playhouse

Who’s giving: Brian Graham, editor/publisher

Who they are: Founded in 1916, Erie Playhouse is one of the oldest community theaters in the country. Throughout the year, the Playhouse runs youth education programs that have given young people in the region a creative outlet for decades.



Why I'm giving: Over the past few years, my daughter has been attending the Erie Playhouse's Youtheatre Summer Camps and Create-A-Play after school classes. Through these programs, she has gained confidence, cultivated her creativity, and made a few close friends who share her interests. The instructors are kind, patient, and encourage the kids to use their imaginations. A particular highlight has been this year's Lion King summer camp, where in one week's time the kids auditioned, learned their lines, songs, and dance routines, and even designed their own costumes. The week culminated, as most of their youth programs do, with a show put on for friends and family to enjoy. In this era of too much screen time and short attention spans, the Youtheatre programs give Erie-area kids a chance to unplug for a while and tap into their amazing creative potential.

Bonus: One side effect of the Youtheatre programs is that your child is likely to catch the theater bug. If that's the case, the Playhouse puts on full productions every year and encourages kids to audition.

Brian previously gave to: Because You Care / Purrista Cat Cafe, Erie Cancer Wellness Center, United Way Imagination Library, Friends of the Erie County Library, Meals on Wheels, Hooked on Books, and YMCA of Greater Erie

Erie's Blues and Jazz Festival



Who's giving: Jessica Hunter, media editor/photographer

Who they are: For more than three decades, the Erie Blues and Jazz Festival has turned Frontier Park into Erie's living room for one weekend every summer. Founded in 1992 by then-Erie Art Museum director John Vanco – what began as a grassroots gathering became one of the region's most beloved summer traditions – and it's now produced by an all-volunteer nonprofit board that keeps it free and open to everyone. That "free" part isn't magic. It's volunteers working countless hours, and donors stepping up in a big way.

Why I'm giving: The Blues and Jazz Fest is my favorite event in Erie, hands down. It's a summer staple in our house – the two days when everyone we love ends up on the same patch of grass in Frontier Park. Blankets overlap. Snacks get passed down the row. Everything gets shared: the food, the shade, the stories, the music. And the music is why we're there. Blues and jazz carry a lot of history, and none of it was ever meant to be kept to yourself. Look around the park and you'll see all of Erie out there – every age, every neighborhood – because nobody has to buy a ticket to be there. For one weekend, the whole city feels like one big backyard. That's the kind of thing worth protecting. I'm giving so the next 30 years look like the last 30.

Bonus: If you love the fest, consider the organizations around it too – Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF), who cares for the park itself, the Harry T. Burleigh Legacy Alliance, honoring the Erie composer at the roots of this music, or Erie Arts & Culture, which keeps artists working across our region.

Jessica previously gave to: WQLN Public Media, Erie Yacht Club Foundation, Presque Isle Partnership, Lake Erie Region Conservancy, Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, NAMI of Erie County, and the Erie Humane Society

Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT)
Who's giving: Erin Phillips, managing editor

Who they are: ECAT is a nonprofit housed in the adaptively reused former Wayne School building on Erie's east side that offers adult career training programs and after-school arts programs for teens, which are all offered at no cost to residents of Erie County.

Why I'm giving: Over the past year I have seen the direct benefit of the programs provided by ECAT, as my daughter joined the Teen Arts after-school program. This completely free program, offered to kids in grades eight through 12, is not just a place for teens to go, but an opportunity for them to follow what drives them creatively and truly grow as artists. Employing teaching artists in multiple media (ceramics, drawing and painting, mixed media, and digital arts), kids can make whatever interests them on any given day, or hone in and focus on a particular inspiration. ECAT teaching artists provide



the kids with dinner, aid, expert instruction, and a safe space in which to be teenagers and embrace what makes them unique. Additionally, ECAT's adult programs in construction trades and medical assistantship are also offered at no cost and help folks advance a career without taking on a financial burden in order to do so.

Erin previously gave to: Emmaus Ministries, The Erie Bird Observatory, Friends of the Erie County Library, Erie Arts and Culture, Asbury Woods, and Our West Bayfront

Bonus: Consider other after-school, arts based programs like Dafmark Dance Theater, The Neighborhood Art House, or the Erie Junior Philharmonic.

Compton's Table
Who's giving: Dan Schank, contributing writer

Who they are: An organization devoted to celebrating, supporting, and protecting LGBTQIA+ youth in Erie. Lately, they've been collaborating with lots of other noteworthy businesses and organizations. Open mic nights for Pride Month at the 1020 Collective, an art show at Ember + Forge in partnership with Aging with Pride, Chat n' Chill events at the Erie Food Co-op, and an upcoming, gender-affirming shopping spree at Macy's to ring in the school year.

Why I'm giving: Compton's Table has seen some highs and lows this year. A grassroots campaign to find a permanent home has generated substantial success. Concurrently, homophobia (and transphobia in particular) is on the rise. We see it on the national level through Supreme Court rulings and the ugly rhetoric of the Trump administration. And it is trickling down locally as well – showing up in petty remarks at our city council meetings. Donating to Compton's is one way to remind ourselves that we're better than this.

Dan previously gave to: The Multicultural

Community Resource Center, NWPA Pride Alliance, Inc., and The Erie County Community College of PA

Northwest PA Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Who's giving: Bryan Toy, contributing artist/writer

Who they are: A group of passionate conservationists who dedicate themselves to clean water access, conservation, preservation of natural resources, and environmental education.

Why I'm giving: You want to save the planet for the next generation? You won't do it by fretting about climate change on social media. The way to do it is to get the next generation to love the Earth. This group is doing just that, with outreach that includes mentoring kids by actually taking them fishing. They teach biology by showing kids the practical art of fly-tying. They help our state conservationists by stocking fish so kids have a reason to go out and enjoy nature. They are conserving our wild places one person at a time, one stream at a time, and it's a beautiful thing.

Bryan previously gave to: McCord Memorial Library

Community Access Media (CAM)
Who's giving: Adam Welsh, editor/publisher

Who they are: You may know them best for their reliable coverage of Erie City Council meetings,



Jefferson Educational Society programs, or the live music of Celebrate Erie and Erie's Blues and Jazz Festival, but since 1997 Community Access Media (CAM) has been empowering the Erie community by providing the tools and training to produce and broadcast their own media. Authorized by the City of Erie to administer the public access channel on Spectrum Cable channel 1021 and VNET Fiber channel 2, CAM's mission is to facilitate community involvement in media that benefits our region. Beyond cable television, they've expanded to include podcasts, YouTube videos, and social media content, ensuring that local voices and visions have a platform to reach a wide audience.

Why I'm giving: Like the Erie Reader, CAM is a staple of our local media landscape and provides an important window into our community. At a time when crucial local media is increasingly being consolidated and defunded while a handful of large corporations dictate the conversation, CAM provides a vital counterbalance. They not only offer a platform for a diverse range of local voices from nonprofits to individual content creators, but they also provide the hands-on training and equipment needed to turn an idea into a reality. CAM fosters civic engagement and empowers citizens to tell their own stories. They don't just give people a microphone, they also teach them how to use it. In my view, that's an invaluable service for our community. As acting operations manager DeAngelo Dixon (Erie's 40 Under 40 Class of 2026) recently told us: "My goal is to help build a stronger creative community that inspires people to believe bigger about what's possible in Erie and remind others that your dreams never die."

Adam previously gave to: Career and Dreams, Erie Women's Fund, Film Society of Northwest Pennsylvania, Lake Erie Region Conservancy, LifeThruMusic, the Jefferson Educational Society, and the Presque Isle Partnership

Erie Gives Day is happening on Tuesday, Aug. 11 from midnight to midnight. Donate by going online to eriegives.org during that time period or give by phone by calling 814.454.0843, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Welcomes

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Ann Griesacker, FNP-C
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Shoreline Primary Care
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Norman Morrison: An Erie Quaker's Fatal War Protest

How a 1965 self-immolation left a family, hometown grappling with its meaning

By: Jonathan Burdick

The Erie Daily Times headline announced the “torch death” of a “former Erieite.” The day before, Nov. 2, 1965, a 31-year-old Quaker and pacifist named Norman Robert Morrison set himself on fire in front of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. as he stood beneath the office windows of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.

The United Press International reported that he self-immolated in the evening during the bustle of rush hour foot traffic. It appeared to be in protest of the escalating Vietnam War. Morrison, holding his infant daughter Emily, had approached the building, doused himself in kerosene, and lit himself on fire, the “sound of a small rocket” as flames engulfed his body.

No video or photographs exist, so reports drew from eyewitness accounts. They varied. Some witnesses said he set down his daughter. Others said he handed her off. Others yet said he tossed or dropped her after setting himself on fire. Onlookers watched “horrified” while others attempted to extinguish him. “He was a mass of flames, a human torch,” said one witness. He was dead by the time medics transported him to a nearby Army medical clinic only a few blocks away.

“Around supper time, I began getting phone calls telling me what happened,” his wife Anne later recalled. Shortly after, she released a statement from their Baltimore home. Norman, she understood, died “to express his concern over the great loss of life and human suffering” in Vietnam. Her husband “felt that all citizens must speak their true convictions about their government’s actions.”

Later, she reflected on how she and Norman often discussed the contrast between their own children’s health and prosperity and the suffering of children in Vietnam. It’s how she explained the death to her children: their father died trying to save children like them.

“Norman was the kind of person who was willing to make a sacrifice for others if it seemed necessary,” Anne said in an interview, holding Emily in her arms. “I had no trouble understanding it at all, because of the kind of person that Norman was.”

“I can’t understand how he could do such a thing,” said Florence Hirsch, a childhood neighbor in Erie. Allan Brick, a close friend and fellow Quaker, said it was “a sacrifice and a testimony,” but he was “deeply divided” on how he felt due to involving his daughter.

The Erie Daily Times editorialized that Morrison was a “young man no one ever expected to burn himself up.” Close Erie friend John Weaver described Morrison as “soft-spoken” and “a serious, idealistic young man.” He must have, Weaver assumed, had a mental breakdown that blocked his “reasonable thought.” Friends and acquaintances across Erie said it was impossible to imagine the

person they knew committing such an act.

It was clear though that the escalating war and deaths of innocents weighed heavily on Norman’s conscience. “We had to talk him out of burning himself up last year,” Baltimore friend John Paisley told UPI, saying he’d been inspired by the Vietnamese monks who self-immolated in Saigon. Other close friends pushed back against this claim though, stating he’d never given any such indication. He’d even discussed joining upcoming Thanksgiving Day anti-war demonstrations.

Norman Morrison was an international headline now, a topic of discussion in the growing schism between those desiring to help South Vietnam directly against communist aggression and those vehemently opposed to any military intervention. Public support was still on the side of intervention in 1965. Nearly 60 percent were in support and only a quarter of Americans said it was a mistake. Whatever the case, Norman’s family and friends were now left to grapple with the confusion and grief over what he had done, why he had done it, and if it would even make a difference.

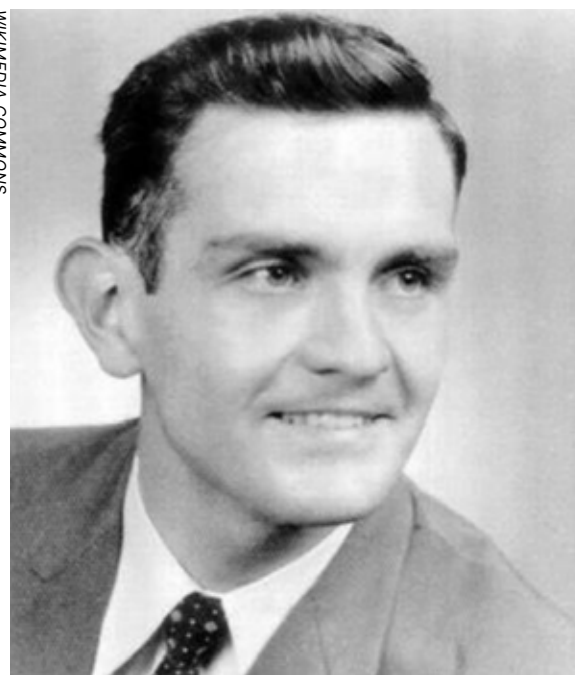
Morrison was born in Erie on Dec. 29, 1933. His father, Dr. Stanley F. Morrison, was a well-respected dentist and member of the Zem Zem Temple. He operated his dentistry practice out of their home at 2963 Peach St. His mother, Hazel (Fuller) Morrison was a “very gracious, well-educated person” who served as financial secretary at the Church of the Covenant. They were committed Presbyterians, community minded, and an “upstanding and very friendly” family. Stanley and Hazel were loving and attentive to Norman and his brother Ralph, known to “dote” on their children.

Norman was a “happy boy” in his years at Glenwood Elementary School. Those who knew him described him as nice, quiet, and serious. John Turner, a close childhood friend, said that from a young age, Morrison was always well-dressed and neat, “friendly, conscientious” and “something of an idealist.” He never caused trouble and his teachers all ranked his character as “superior.”

For the 1946-47 school year, he attended Academy High School. It was during this school year that tragedy struck. Stanley, who’d been dealing with a bleeding ulcer, died unexpectedly in their family home. After a few months of grieving, a teenage Norman convinced his mother to move to nearby Chautauqua, New York where they owned a summer home. There, he and Ralph completed high school. After graduating, both enrolled at the College of Wooster, a Presbyterian school in Ohio. Norman continued identifying as such, but began flirting with Quakerism for the first time.

Elsewhere, Anne Hodges Corpening finished up her psychology studies at Duke University. Born in Georgia in 1935, she was raised by her Methodist

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Norman Morrison was a father, husband, and Quaker pacifist who grew up in Erie and attended Glenwood Elementary and Academy High School. After having children, Morrison and his family moved to North Carolina where his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam war protests became an ethical priority in his life.

parents in western North Carolina. She was kind and open-minded and had an unforgettable and warm smile. It was while working a summer job at the Chautauqua Institution that she met Norman, who she found handsome, joyful, determined, as well as a bit intense and eccentric. In early 1957, they were engaged and wed that September.

The Erie Daily Times reported on their “Quaker wedding ceremony” which took place in North Carolina with Ralph as best man. The wedding was marked by “traditional simplicity.” Anne donned “a floor length gown of ivory lace over satin” and carried a “bouquet of off-white roses and gardenias.” The couple honeymooned on the North Carolina coast, traveled up north through New York, then sailed from Montreal to Scotland where they both spent a year studying at the University of Edinburgh. They then moved to Pittsburgh where he studied at the Western Theological Seminary. During these years, he’d occasionally drive to Erie, where he conducted worship services at the Church of the Covenant. As time passed though, he found himself committing more fully to Quakerism.

In the fall of 1959, with their first child, they moved to Charlotte, North Carolina where they helped establish a Quaker congregation. This was in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and Norman and Anne fully embraced “peace and social justice” and were involved in desegregation efforts. In 1962, they moved to Baltimore, Maryland. Here, his “radical Quaker posture” often clashed with the congrega-

tion's more conservative Quakers.

By 1964, Norman and Anne had three children: Ben, Christina, and a newborn Emily. That August was the Gulf of Tonkin incident which escalated growing tensions in the region. This led to the Operation Pierce Arrow bombing campaign, followed by the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which essentially authorized President Lyndon B. Johnson to wage war in Vietnam.

On March 2, 1965, Operation Rolling Thunder, an aerial bombardment campaign, commenced, followed by the deployment of 3,500 Marines to Da Nang, South Vietnam the following week. Two weeks later on March 16, Alice Herz, an 82-year-old German-Jewish refugee who'd escaped Nazi Germany, set herself on fire in Detroit, Michigan in protest. By the day in November that Norman Morrison decided to do the same, around 180,000 American military personnel were in Vietnam.

According to Anne's account, he asked her that morning, "What can we do that we haven't done?" For months now, they had peacefully protested. They had prayed and held vigils. They'd lobbied politicians and written letters to newspapers and even to President Johnson himself. Yet, nothing changed. Nothing they did seemed to matter. The bombs continued to drop. More soldiers continued to be deployed.

So, on the morning of his death, he scribbled a note, "The most important thing in the world is that our faith becomes living experience and deed of life." He put on a suit jacket, packed a diaper bag,

and put Emily in the car. That evening, he was dead.

The grief-stricken Anne called it his "supreme protest against war." As Anne later wrote, "[Norman was] excruciatingly aware of the suffering of innocent people in Viet Nam, and of our GIs returning wounded or in body bags." And, as she told Wooster Magazine in 2009, he was not a man of imagination, but a man of action.

Anne received a letter from her husband a few days after his death. In it, he told her he loved her and asked her not to condemn him. "For weeks, even months, I have been praying only that I be shown what I must do," he wrote. He had been shown the morning of his death.

Why he took his daughter remains a mystery. Anne speculated that it was perhaps, even if unintentionally, "a powerful symbol of the children we were killing with our bombs and napalm." Washington Post journalist Paul Hendrickson, who reported extensively on the self-immolation, ultimately concluded that Morrison's intentions are unknowable as are the facts of what exactly transpired.

Norman's friends continued to "express shock and disbelief" as the news went international. "Each member [of our congregation] is free to act to the measure of demand in his life which he understands," a friend and devout Quaker said of Morrison's choice. Another friend said solemnly, "If he would have just stood on the steps and expressed his views he would have at least cast his voice and opinion on the land." Others criticized him as insane and a hypocrite, saying he wasn't truly a pacifist or a Quaker with his act of "self destruction" that was "the ultimate form of violent action." In Wooster's alumni bulletin, many sent letters of anger and disgust. One called it a "sick and selfish act" while another said he "debased the very principles that made this country the greatest citadel of freedom."

Others yet tried to intellectualize his suicide, arguing that it fell within the Quaker belief of self-sacrifice. "Norman saw these policies as evil," his congregation said in a statement. "He found it necessary to protest them, but must have been discouraged that the protests seemed to fall on deaf ears."

Two weeks after his death, the first Erie County resident died in Vietnam, a 1958 graduate of Academy High School. The first major battle of the war, the Battle of Ia Drang, was in its fourth day when 25-year-old Sgt. Ronald R. Martin was killed. He was described as a "dedicated soldier" who was a good husband, father, son, and brother. He loved classic cars, music, and cooking and hoped to own a restaurant one day. He also believed deeply in helping South Vietnam defend itself. Only three weeks earlier, he'd written about the stateside protests, saying he wished they understood that they weren't there to kill but to help.

On this same day, the Erie Daily Times published a letter by Hugh P. Nesbitt. He called Morrison a "brave man" who proved that pacifists weren't "cowards" and criticized those who wrote him off as "the nut who immolated himself." Nesbitt didn't know if Morrison did the right thing. "But we can say," he



This photo shows the family of Erie native Norman Morrison, a man who, in protest over the escalating Vietnam War and out of an overwhelming empathy for the lives of innocents lost, self-immolated in front of the Pentagon building in Washington D.C., on Nov. 2, 1965.

continued, "he was able to get national publicity for his protest of our country's war." Below his was another letter: "Why can't we have peace? Why war with its death, destruction, disfigurement, sorrow, suffering, and ruin? War is a kind of fearful foretaste of hell."

A few days later, Erie Morning News columnist Hugh "Red" Barr wrote how Vietnam was a war "unlike any our troops have faced before." For soldiers, he wrote, it "must be agonizing to sweat and bleed in a remote jungle after reading accounts of protest marchers on the home front." Erie columnist Ed Mathews said it was clear this was a major war. "The death of the first local soldier ... brings the war even more to our attention," he wrote. "The unfortunate outlook is that it is going to get much worse before it ever gets better." The division was already clear.

Around this time, the Associated Press reported that Morrison's death was being used by the North Vietnamese government as propaganda. North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh directly commented on it in an interview, saying that America could "leave at any time" and mentioning Morrison by name for his "sacrificial act ... in protest against U.S. acts."

"We would not encourage these acts but for us they have a high symbolic significance," said Minh. "You have seen the suffering that the bombing is causing our people. They give us no alternative but to go on."

The Washington Post reported that Minh's government "issued a commemorative stamp" with his image and "an inscription loosely translated as 'Norman Morrison – the ultimate sacrifice as duty and purpose demand.'" NVA soldiers reportedly wore the stamp on their backpacks and civilians pasted them onto their bicycles. Schools and factories put up his photograph. When New York Times editor Harrison E. Salisbury traveled to North Vietnam the following year, he noted that people often specifically mentioned Morrison to him. Vietnamese poet Tố Hữu wrote a poem titled "Emily, My Child" about the act, while a prisoner of war was released as a "gesture honoring Norman Morrison."

It wasn't long before another self-immolation followed, this time in front of the United Nations building in New York City. A senator pointed out that "debate on our policy in Vietnam" was "a manifes-

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North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Mihn used Morrison's actions as propaganda against U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, while the Vietnamese government issued a commemorative stamp featuring Morrison's likeness and a slogan that loosely translates to "Norman Morrison – the ultimate sacrifice as duty and purpose demand."

tation of our strength, the democratic progress.” But, he countered while referencing the Morrison stamp, “Each time a protest occurs in this country, there is a concerted effort to convince the people of North Vietnam ... that the majority of Americans really support the aggressive and expansionist efforts of communism.” This, he argued, served to “prolong the conflict.”

Thirty years later, Erie reporter Bill Welch reflected how “the clues are hard to find” as to what effect Morrison thought his death would have. The reality, Welch continued, is that Americans were *still* divided on Vietnam all those years later. “When all is said and done,” Welch wrote, “there will still be more to say about it.” Despite that, Welch alleged, it was clear that within months of Morrison’s death, Secretary McNamara began to grasp what others in his administration couldn’t. “That America couldn’t win the war, not on the battlefield,” wrote Welch. “There had been a terrible, terrible miscalculation.”

McNamara spoke about Morrison on a few occasions. His death, he said, was “a tragedy not only for his family but also for me and the country.” It, like the war, haunted him. His act, McNamara said, “was an outcry against the killing that was destroying the lives of so many Vietnamese and American youth.”

Indeed, by the end of the war, nearly 60,000 Americans were dead – more than the total com-

bat deaths in the Iraq, Afghanistan, Korea, Spanish-American, and Philippine-American wars and the War of 1812 combined. More than 60 of those were from Erie County. *Millions* of Vietnamese perished, including as many as 2 million civilians.

Anne eventually remarried and moved back to North Carolina. In 1975, the family experienced another tragedy. Ben died of cancer at age 16. This was “the deepest sorrow of her life.” It also was the first time she felt anger towards Norman for having “to carry a parent’s grief alone.”

However, that anger played an important role in her healing journey. She told the faith-based *Sojourners* in 1995, “For so long after Norman died, I didn’t experience or express it. It’s very hard to be angry at someone who has just given his life for a cause, especially to try to stop a war. It seemed inappropriate to be angry.” Now, Anne said, she had “compassion and acceptance and understanding and forgiveness.”

Over those years, she remained active in the Quaker community. She continued grassroots work as a way to honor Norman. She completed a master’s degree and worked for the YWCA, American Friends Service Committee, and as the director of a group home. She wrote columns in local publications, as well as a pamphlet and a memoir about her experiences.

“Perhaps this is ultimately a story about healing – about how we get through our grief, doubts, and

pain,” she wrote in her memoir. “I learned the blessed necessity of accepting the irreversible past and forgiving both others and myself.”

In 1999, Anne, Christina, and Emily traveled to Vietnam. There, they met the poet who wrote about Norman and Emily. They were shocked by how many knew the story, even the younger generation. For all three, it was a profoundly moving experience. “I felt deeply honored and appreciated for our family’s sacrifice in a way that I never had been by our own culture,” Christina said, adding, “The farewell note I didn’t receive from [my father] is mine to write.”

Emily cannot know with certainty why her father took her that day. “By involving me the way he did, I feel Norman was intrinsically asking the question, *How would you feel if this child were burned too?*” she later reflected in her mother’s memoir. “I believe I was there with Norman ultimately to be a symbol of truth and hope, treasure and horror all together. And I am fine with my role in it.”

“I realize that out of the ashes of agony and loss rose something profound,” wrote Anne.

Anne died in 2024 at age 89. Her obituary read: “Despite her great losses, Anne had deep love and reverence for life and unshakable faith in God and the goodness of humanity.”

Jonathan Burdick runs the public history project Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at jburdick@eriereader.com

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Metal, Ska, Emo, and More at Centennial Hall This Month

Save Ferris, Autumn Lies Buried, Chironex, and Sam Gilman highlight upcoming calendar

By: Nick Warren

Sam Gilman

with *Sea of Ghosts*, and *Shell Shock*

Moving from behind the drums to the front of the stage, Sam Gilman will perform material from his solo project, backed by his band at Centennial Hall. Gilman is better known to Erie and YouTube audiences as the beat-keeper for First To Eleven. While the online sensations have made a career from their covers, Gilman’s own work will be on display here exclusively. The singer and guitarist’s emotional alt-rock promises to captivate audiences with its pathos and earnestness. The trio will be joined by Akron rockers Sea of Ghosts and Gilman’s frequent collaborators, Erie’s ShellShock.

Friday, Aug. 7 // 6 p.m. // \$25 pre-sale, \$30 at the door

Dweller and Moneyball

with *Perfect Blue*, *Nu Sance*, and *Stellar Motus*

Serving up a one-two punch of shoegaze and emo at the Bunker at Lavery’s, dweller and Moneyball will find themselves in Erie amidst a mini-tour running through the Midwest. The Brooklyn-based post-hardcore four-piece dweller are touring in advance of the release of their *Soft* EP, due this fall. The Cincinnati quintet Moneyball are rallying in support of their recently released EP *Dogcatcher*, a phenomenal work that fans should get familiar with immediately to help aid in gang-vocal style singalongs. The pair will be supported by Pittsburgh’s Perfect Blue (playing their very first show), Erie nu-metal youngsters Nu Sance, and Erie/Pittsburgh quintet Stellar Motus, hot off their recent debut EP *Northbound*.

Sunday, Aug. 9 // *The Bunker at Lavery’s* // 5:30 p.m. // \$10 at the door

Autumn Lies Buried

with *Gelatin Skeleton*, *Let It Rot*, and *Mantra of Morta*

With their unique mix of deathcore and nu-metal, the Clarksville, Tennessee quartet Autumn Lies Buried are bringing their aggressive sound to Erie. Packed

with a staunch anti-racist message, the band has been releasing material since 2017, with their *Mob Mentality* EP coming out in the summer of 2025. Expect blast beats, guttural vocals, and the occasional rap breakdown to keep you on your toes. Joining them on tour will be Lansing, Michigan deathcore quintet Let It Rot and Indiana female-fronted prog/alt-metal purveyors Mantra of Morta. Erie’s metal mainstays Gelatin Skeleton will offer up a little local chaos to the already exciting bill.

Thursday, Aug. 13 // 6 p.m. // \$15 advance, \$20 day of show

Save Ferris

with *Stacked Like Pancakes*, *Half Dizzy*, and *Oh No ... It’s Mustard Gas!*

One of the defining ska bands of the late ’90s, Save Ferris blends high-energy exuberance with danceable hooks. Playing their 1997 third-wave ska masterpiece *It Means Everything* from start to finish, the band crisscrosses genres and tones. From their hit cover of “Come On Eileen” to the swing-tinged “Superspy” and the theatricality of “Lies” to the ’90s novelty of “Spam,” the album covers a lot of ground. Helmed by the operatically-trained vocalist Monique Powell, the band returns to Erie County for the first time since touring in support of the album’s release at Edinboro’s “Skalloween.” Alongside them will be Minneapolis’ Stacked Like Pancakes, whose politically-tinged ska punk is sure to pump up the crowd (be sure to listen to their memorable 2024 EP *Everything Happens* to prep for the show). NYC punk rockers Half Dizzy will keep the energy flowing, with fans of their 2025 album *Yard Sale* fist-pumping along with every chorus. This show also features the triumphant return of Oh No ... It’s Mustard Gas! The local ska punk legends are more than happy to be such a perfect fit for this bucket-list show.

Friday, Aug. 14 // 6 p.m. // \$25 advance, \$30 day of show

Chironex

with *Cerebral Desecration* and *Baregrounds*
Houston metal storytellers Chironex offer a blend of hard-hitting riffs and my-



Centennial Hall’s August schedule is packed to the gills with something for everyone, from hardcore to emo and everything in between, including a stop from Save Ferris, who will be playing their 1997 third-wave ska masterpiece *It Means Everything* from start to finish.

thology-inspired lyrics to the Erie stage. With their 2025 full-length *The Crucible of Brutal Opposition*, the quartet proves itself through blistering musicianship and inviting grooves. With virtuosic licks and heavy breakdowns, they’re fit for fans of both technical death metal and progressive exploration. Joining them are San Marcos, Texas death/thrash veterans Cerebral Desecration, touring behind their excellent 2025 EP *Empty Black*, alongside Erie’s own Baregrounds, who will kick off the evening with a healthy dose of lake-effect death metal.

Wednesday, Aug. 19 // 6 p.m. // \$10 advance, \$15 day of show

Hand of the Tribe

with *Battle Chapel* and *Storms Within*

Another packed night of heavy music converges on Centennial Hall as Boston’s Hand of the Tribe brings their trademark sound of thunderous riffs and soaring melodies to Erie. Blending modern metal with hard rock influences, the band has built a reputation for commanding live performances. Supporting them are local heavyweights Battle Chapel, whose dance-ready metal is sure to get fists pumping. Rounding out the show will be Storms Within, whose melodic

metalcore perfectly preps the audience for what’s in store. Make sure to spin their 2025 album *Delusional Confidence* ahead of time.

Friday, Aug. 28 // 6 p.m. // \$10 advance, \$15 day of show

3 Years Hollow

with *Trackside* and *New Damage*

For nearly two decades, Illinois/Iowa hard rock veterans 3 Years Hollow have crafted hook-heavy anthems bridging the gap between post-grunge and modern rock. With emotionally charged songwriting and anthemic choruses, the band continues to build new audiences. Nashville quartet Trackside find themselves in the middle of a 21-date run with 3 Years Hollow (not to mention dates with Buckcherry and L.A. Guns), showcasing their own brand of modern rock to Erie. Chester County, Pennsylvania’s New Damage opens the evening fresh off the release of their *Voyage* EP.

Tuesday, Sept. 1 // 7 p.m. \$15 advance, \$20 day of show

All shows at Centennial Hall or The Bunker at Lavery’s, 145 W. 11th St. // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

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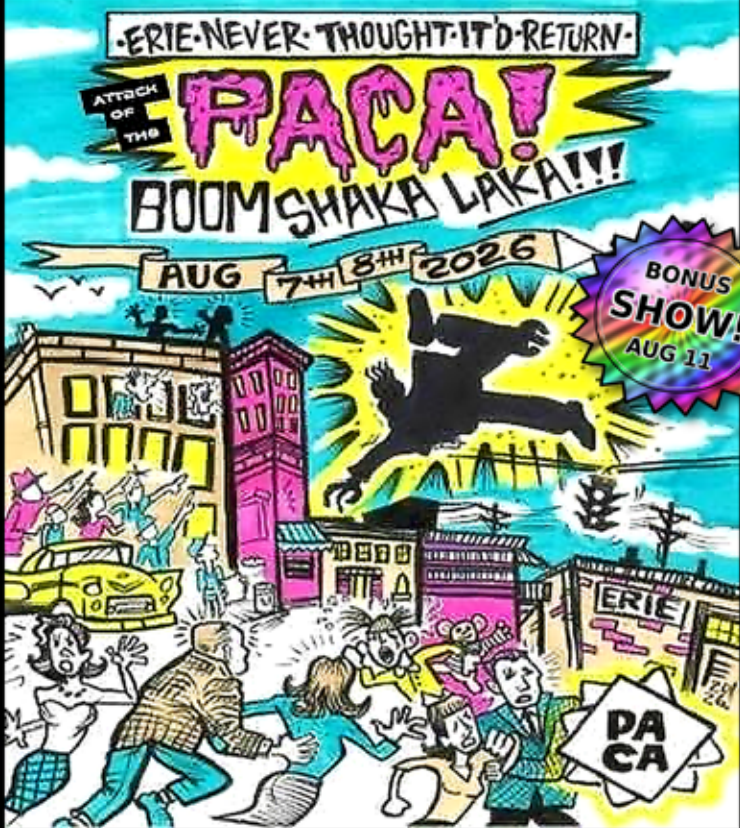
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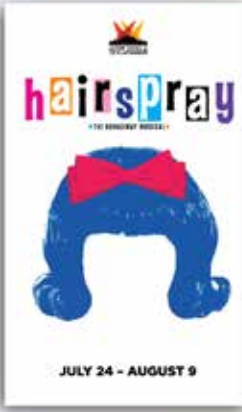
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\$25 per adult

Details, tickets, and registration: thecorgifest.com

Can you keep up? A Frenzy of Activity at PACA in August

Variety shows, comedy, and a poetic production on the slate

BEGINNING FRIDAY, AUG. 7

August is coming in hot, and it's more than just the reading on the thermom-



PACA is bringing an unconventional slate of events through August, including the return of *Attack of the PACA*, featuring an original play written by Jack O'Connell (right), presented by Seamus Clerkin (left), and starring them both. Additionally, catch a comedy event featuring Lisa The Glam Ham and a free homage to the poetry of Shel Silverstein.

eter. The Performing Arts Collective Alliance, familiarly known as PACA, is holding no fewer than three different events this August, kicking off with *Attack of the PACA* on Aug. 7 and 8 (with a special bonus date on Aug. 11). The creatively chaotic event will be a spirited celebration of all things art, including music, dramatic performances, and visuals.

Erie's own Seamus Clerkin will be staging and starring in an original play, *That Great Emu War*, written by his friend Jack O'Connell, who will be in Erie and co-starring for the Aug. 7 and 8 dates. If you're reading this, you're too late to get commemorative shirts, but tickets are still available – and they're free (but you have to reserve your spot).

Then, starting the following week-end, come on down to 1505 State to take in *The Glam Ham: Mild to Wild*, a comedy show featuring local artist Lisa Ann (voted Best Comedian in Best of Erie 2025). If you're in a

particular stage of life, her work will speak to you – and even if you're not, you'll still find lots to laugh about. Perimenopausal, plus-sized, and single, Lisa Ann encompasses multitudes – her comedy is good clean fun for the first engagement and then goes right off the rails Saturday, for a no-holds-barred night of spicy fun (and both shows are being filmed).

Finally, you can look forward to *The Whimsical World of Shel Silverstein* on Saturday, Aug. 22 and Sunday, Aug. 23 (the latter is a matinee). This funny and tender production, under the direction of Teresa Testrake, brings the wit and whimsy of the beloved author to life, through a variety of mediums like poetry and song. – Cara Suppa

Various dates throughout August // PACA, 1505 State St. // *Attack of PACA* and *The Whimsical World of Shel Silverstein* are free productions, *The Glam Ham*, \$18 // For tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com

Frontier Friday Concert Series Is Back

Crush those concert cravings at LEAF, this summer into fall

BEGINNING FRIDAY, AUG. 7

Looking for some live music to fill your Friday night? Look no further than the Frontier Friday Concert Series, back for its third year at LEAF.

From 6 to 8 p.m. each Friday in August (except the 14th, as LEAF will also be downtown enjoying Celebrate Erie, too), head down to the Patricia McCain Outdoor Amphitheater between the playground and LEAF Education Center to listen as local artists play the stage for everyone's enjoyment. Local food, drink, and dessert vendors will also be on site, so folks can grab a bite while enjoying the show.

"It's a great way to unwind after a long workweek," said Claire Ciezki, community outreach manager at LEAF. "Nothing is more Erie than spending an evening with great local music, great food and drink, and great people."

Guests are welcome to sit on the large stones surrounding the amphitheater stage, or they can bring their own blankets or camp chairs to set up on

the lawn. Be sure to bring the whole family along – with the park just up the hill, it's the perfect place for parents to watch their kids play and enjoy listening to the music simultaneously. The Shaggy Dogs kick things off on Aug. 7, with vendors of the week Erie

"[Frontier Fridays are] a great way to unwind after a long workweek. Nothing is more Erie than spending an evening with great local music, great food and drink, and great people." – Claire Ciezki, community outreach manager at LEAF.

Ale Works, C&G's (Chuck & Ginny's), and Kona Ice. Aug. 21 will feature McKenzie Sprague (40 Under 40 Class of 2025) with vendors Cellar '54, Dobbins Dogs, and Coldstone. And wrapping up August on the 28th will be Brooke Surgener (40 Under 40 Class of 2014) with vendors Erie Ale Works, Sundae, and E Dogs Hotdogs.

ERIN PHILLIPS



The amphitheater at Frontier Park lights up the night on Fridays throughout the remainder of the summer, featuring original local acts like McKenzie Sprague, Brooke Surgener, and Tommy Link.

But don't worry, the shows go on! The series runs five more Fridays after August, going until Oct. 2. –Ally Kutz

6 to 8 p.m. // LEAF, 1501 W. 6th St. // Free // For more info: leaferie.org

LEAF is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.




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Low and Behold: Corgi Fest Returns for Seventh Year to Frontier Park

Celebrate, enjoy, and learn about the adored breed

SUNDAY, AUG. 9

You know them, you love them: corgis are one of the most instantly recognizable and universally adored dog breeds and now you have a reason to celebrate them at the seventh annual

Corgi Fest. For one day only, Frontier Park will be taken over by these beloved short kings (and queens) as the breed is celebrated by those who know and love them best. Erie's Corgi Fest was organized from grass roots seven years ago

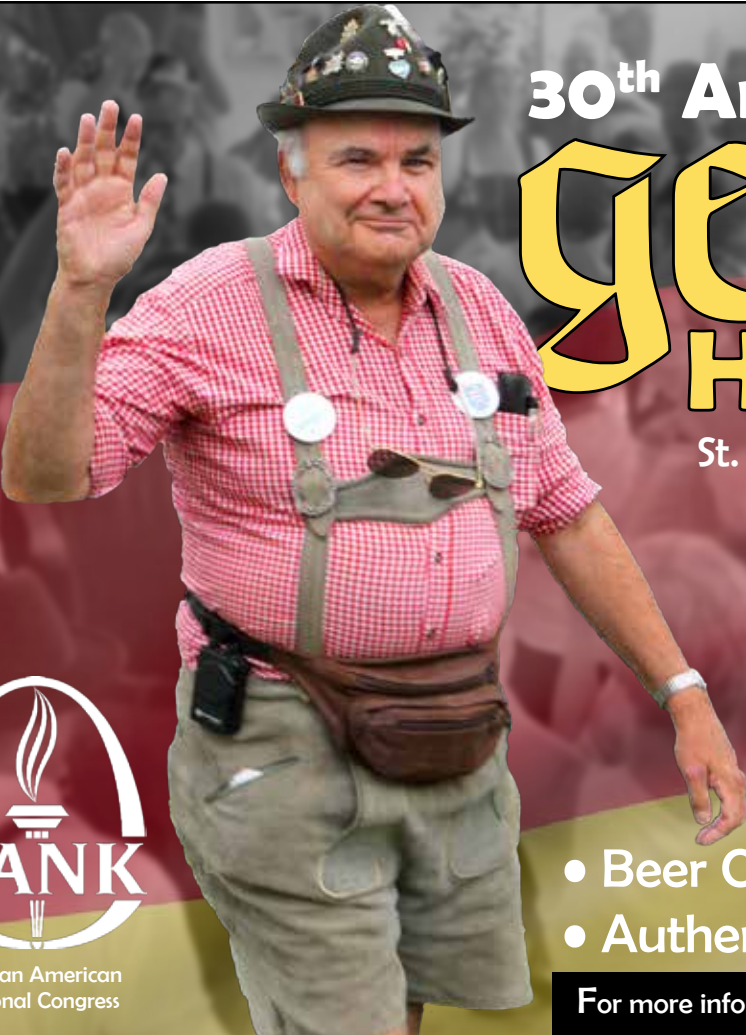
by Jade Mitchell (40 Under 40 Class of 2022), who shares her home with the two corgis (Fynn and Eevee) who helped inspire her to build a community around the breed. "Corgis are intelligent, stubborn, fearless working dogs," Mitchell says. "I often tell people that corgis are basically German Shepherds with short legs; they're capable of so much more than people realize." The festival serves to adore and celebrate the special dogs, but also to educate, entertain, and build community. This year, a feature of the festival will be a Rainbow Bridge mural, created to remember those companions who have passed since the event began. There will also be a veterinarian on site, Dr. Jenny Grimshawe, who works with Erie Puppy Mill Awareness, helping to educate the public about responsible breeding practices and animal welfare. Attendees can also expect relevant vendors, artists, makers, and small businesses, along with corgi races, costume contests, games, prizes, photo opportunities,

and a corgi ball pit (yes, you read that right). New for this year is a special senior corgi race – an inclusive, scaled-back physical challenge for the silver canine crowd. Erie Corgi Festival has welcomed hundreds of dogs and thousands of attendees over its lifetime, drawing visitors from across Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, and beyond – and this is all accomplished without access to grant funding. Mitchell credits the event's continued success to a dedicated group of volunteers. "The volunteers have been incredible," she shares. "Some have been with me since the beginning, and I couldn't do this without them." Overall though, "It's about more than corgis," Mitchell says. "It's about community, creativity, connection, and celebrating the dogs that make our lives better." – Erin Phillips

Noon to 4 p.m. // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. // \$25 (children under 12 and corgis are free) // For tickets and info: thecorgifest.com



Get ready to go gaga – as Frontier Park is filled with scads of short masterpieces, Corgis, for the return of Corgifest. This year, ironically, is bigger and better than before and with your support, the event will continue to grow each year.



30th Annual German Heritage Festival

St. Nick's Grove- 5131 Old French Road, Erie

Saturday, Sept. 5
11 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Sunday, Sept. 6
11 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.

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Time to CelebrateErie!

The annual event is back with music, food, and fun

BEGINNING FRIDAY, AUG. 14

August brings summer into full swing in Erie and nothing highlights the season more than the granddaddy of all of our outdoor festivals – CelebrateErie. This year brings back some familiar favorite activities, local vendors and bands, combined with some updates. Some signifi-

cant changes are a redesigned event footprint, increased security, an enhanced community resources zone, a dedicated beer garden featuring a special “Celebrate Beerie Lager” from Lavery Brewing Company, and a youth district sponsored by the expE-RIence Children’s Museum, featuring the Family Stage with various artistic and athletic demonstrations and fam-

ily-friendly musical acts.

CelebrateErie is hosted by the CAFE Board (which stands for Cultures, Arts, Festivals, and Events of Erie), a nonprofit formed by the city tasked with organizing this event and others. “This will be my third Celebrate on the CAFE Board,” says Sarah Morrison, director of marketing and public relations for EMTA, CAFE Board member, and 2025 40 Under 40 alum. “I can say with certainty that this new cohort of directors, with guidance from the Devlin administration, has taken the feedback from past CelebrateErie events and is taking a fresh approach to some of the event’s elements, without taking away from the main attractions,” Morrison adds.

The main stage will now be located at Ninth Street near the Warner Theatre, allowing local lower State Street businesses to stay open and welcome customers during the event weekend. There will, as always, be multiple stages throughout downtown featuring plenty of local bands and other entertainment, including favor-

ites like the Reader’s own Tommy Link and Anthony Carson, alongside others like Elle Taylor, Brooke Surgener, This American Song, Jonny Evans, Logan B. and Dirty Leaf, and many more. This year’s headlining acts include Arrested Development, Plain White T’s, and Al Jardine and the Pet Sounds Band closing out the weekend with an early-start 6 p.m. show on Sunday evening. The main stage will have increased security, especially around the area in front of the stage. “We feel this lineup hits a wide spread of interests and is as diverse as the folks that will be attending the event,” notes Morrison. – Edwina Capozziello

Aug. 14 through 16 // Downtown Erie // Music begins at noon each day // For a full map and schedule of events, visit celebrateerie.com

Cultures, Arts, Festivals and Events of Erie (CAFE) is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.



Get ready to celebrate Erie, Erie! This year, the CAFE board is implementing some changes to the anticipated community festival while doubling down on the creative family fun, live music, artists and vendors, food and drink, and stellar mainstage acts. Grab your schedule, mark your favorites, and head downtown!



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The Spoon River Project Haunts the Narrative

Mercyhurst Theatre relaunches summer program with a story of community

BEGINNING FRIDAY, AUG. 14

When we die, do we carry our regrets into the afterlife? What about our triumphs? Our dreams? Our stories as a whole? The Mercyhurst Theatre program answers these questions and more in their upcoming production of *The Spoon River Project*, a play inspired and adapted from Edgar Lee Masters’ 1915 collection of free verse poetry, *Spoon River Anthology*. Immerse yourself in the small town of Spoon River, where its residents reflect on their lives even after they’ve ended. “I’ve approached the play less as a ghost story than as an act of remembrance,” said Director Dr. Brett Johnson. “The company serves as the keepers of these stories, giving voice to lives that still have something to teach us about love, loss, regret, joy, and forgiveness.” These themes and many others will be brought to life over the course of more than 40 stories. It is portrayed by a cast of students, Lakers alumni, and guest artists alike, reflecting that

sense of community both off and on-stage. The message remains even more fitting as Mercyhurst University celebrates their centennial later this year. Told within a small, intimate setting, Johnson hopes to create “a space where memory, music, and storytelling can come together.” *The Spoon River Project* comes just in time to relaunch Mercyhurst’s summer theater program after a 13-year hiatus. The program encourages patrons of the arts to come to the Taylor Little Theatre and recognize the hard work these performers and the creative team have put into the show and create new memories and experiences along the way. “Our focus is on making these three performances as meaningful as possible while laying the foundation for what we hope becomes a lasting summer theatre tradition,” stated Johnson. – Cassandra Gripp

Friday and Saturday, Aug. 14 and 15 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, Aug. 16 at 2 p.m. //



Catch a reimaging of Edgar Lee Masters’s classic collection of free verse poetry in an upcoming Mercyhurst Theatre production of *The Spoon River Project*, part of their newly relaunched summer theater program and featuring a cast of students, alumni, and guest artists.

Taylor Little Theatre, 501 E. 38th St. // \$5-\$15 // For tickets and info: miac.mercyhurst.edu

Mercyhurst University is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.

Tune into Final Concert in the Music of Origin Series

Gather, learn, and celebrate at Goodell Gardens

FRIDAY, AUG. 21

Sweet summertime! June and July were just practice, but August is to be savored. If you can already faintly hear school bells and see Halloween items hitting the shelves, settle on down in your lawn chair to savor one last concert from the Music of Origin Series – the final event of the season will be Aug. 21 on the beautiful grounds of Goodell Gardens and Homestead. Inviting folks to experience “the sounds that shaped our region,” these free concerts celebrate the county’s cultural and musical heritage through live performances, storytelling, and community gatherings. Three Way Street will be the group playing for this month. Brittney Skrzypczak, events and outreach manager for Goodell Gardens and Homestead, said the event explores the connections between geography, migration, and music – from regional folk traditions and Appalachian influences to blues rhythms shaped by the Great Migration and global sounds that continue to influence our community today.

Inviting folks to experience “the sounds that shaped our region,” the Music of Origin Series celebrates the county’s cultural and musical heritage through live performances, storytelling, and community gatherings.

In addition to the music in the gardens, attendees can enjoy a “Night Market” with various local farmers market vendors and a children’s area with hands-on activities. Some of the lineup includes Steel Toe Farm, Hurry Hill Maple Farm, live demonstrations from Slow Formations, Weeping Willow Farmette, and Vanco Family Farm. Guests are encouraged to bring

A Sense of Place: NPAA Brings Landscapes to Local Show

1020 Collective hosts melange of work from regional artists

THURSDAY, AUG. 20

True art lovers appreciate landscapes. Close your eyes and picture in your mind Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” or the Giverny gardens of Monet – sweeping vistas by the painters of the Hudson River School put American painting on the map. Edward Hopper’s “Nighthawks” instantly transports viewers to a lonely street corner in what could be nearly any city in America. Winslow Homer somehow evoked the epic beauty and power of the ocean with a brush and a box of watercolors. Erie has its own talented landscape artists, some of whom are nearly as legendary. If you frequent galleries around the tri-state area, you will likely know the work of Brad Lethaby, Adele Larson, Daniel Austin, Mary Hamilton, and Geoffry Dunn – all of whom are well regarded for their work depicting the great outdoors, and not coincidentally, are all members of Erie’s profes-

sional artists’ group, the Northwest Pennsylvania Artists Association (NPAA). The NPAA is teaming up with 1020 Collective to fill their second floor gallery with marvelous paintings, photographs, sculptures, tapestries, and prints of scenes, both local and international. The “Landscapes, Cityscapes, and Seascapes” show opens on Aug. 20 in conjunction with 1020’s Collective Community social mixer. Mingling with the artists is encouraged. A light repast will be provided. This beautiful show will hang through most of September. – Bryan Toy

Exhibition is ongoing until Sept. 26, Opening Celebration on Thursday, Aug. 20 // 6 to 9 p.m. // 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland St. // Free // For more info: npaa-online.org

NPAA is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.



The Northwest Pennsylvania Artists Association presents their latest gallery show – a collection of locally produced landscapes (like this piece, *Liquid Light* by Anne Cameron Cutri) on view at the 1020 Collective through September, with an opening reception on Thursday, Aug. 20.



Catch the final performance in Goodell Gardens and Homestead's Music of Origins series, featuring Three Way Street. The goal of these live music events is to "celebrate the county's cultural and musical heritage through live performances, storytelling, and community gatherings."

picnic style food and beverages, as food trucks will not be on site for this year's concert.

Skrzypczak extended a special thank you to the Erie Community Foundation and the Erie County Gaming and Revenue Association, whose generosity makes the concert free and accessible to the community. She noted that this is the 20th year for the event. That's practically O.G. status, so park it and enjoy – and see you next month

for fall fests and events. – Gretchen Gallagher Durney

Gates open at 5 p.m., music from 6 to 8 p.m. // Goodell Gardens and Homestead, 221 Waterford St. (Route 6N), Edinboro // Free // For more information, visit: goodellgardens.org or call 814-734-6699

Goodell Gardens and Homestead is participating in Erie Gives Day on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Visit eriegives.org to donate.

Erie Reader Book Club: August 2026

Everything Is Tuberculosis by John Green

SUNDAY, AUG. 30

The Erie Reader Book Club will be reading and discussing *Everything Is Tuberculosis* by John Green in conjunction with the Erie Gives issue of the Reader.

The Erie Gives issue is a difficult one to pin down in terms of book club theme – there aren't too many fiction options relating to philanthropy, and many of the nonfiction options read more like textbooks rather than compelling stories (IYKYK). This year, we had to think outside the box in making our selection, but we feel it's a good one.

John Green's *Everything Is Tuberculosis* is, on the surface, a story about the disease and its continued prolific impact throughout the world, especially in impoverished areas. But a deeper dive reveals a narrative on not only tuberculosis as a disease, but also its cultural significance and the effects it has on a global level.

Despite being curable, tuberculosis remains the world's deadliest infectious disease, thanks to healthcare inequities internationally. Green's ex-

perience in driving narrative is evident as he shares these staggering facts alongside the story of Henry, a teenager in Sierra Leone who suffers from drug-resistant tuberculosis. Henry's story is one that, in a country like ours, is nearly incomprehensible, but is a reality for millions. Green's choice to draw attention to

Despite being curable, tuberculosis remains the world's deadliest infectious disease, thanks to healthcare inequities internationally.

these inequities and very real tragedies happening all over the world matches to the spirit of the Erie Gives issue – to support a community (whether local or global) by giving what we can: time, money, or even just word of mouth. Together, we can be a force for change. – Ally Kutz

1 p.m. // Werner Books and Coffee, 3608 Liberty St. // Free to join, cost of book not included // For more info: wernerbooks.com



Samara Joy

Kenny G

Indigo Girls

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Dance Theatre of Harlem
Aug. 24 • 7:30 p.m.

Get Happy with Lara Downes and Kurt Elling
Aug. 25 • 8 p.m.

Samara Joy
Aug. 26 • 8 p.m.

An Evening with Kenny G
Aug. 27 • 8 p.m.

The Australian Pink Floyd Show
Aug. 28 • 8 p.m.

Tower of Power
Aug. 29 • 8 p.m.

Indigo Girls
Sept. 10 • 7 p.m.

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More Than the Music: How Local Hip-Hop Artist TayJer is Building His Own Lane

Collaborations, visibility throughout the community fosters pride

By: Amy VanScoter

For years, hip-hop artist TayJer (Jeremy Ayala-Oquendo) has been putting in the work – writing songs, performing live, collaborating with other artists, and representing Erie’s music scene. If it feels like he’s been everywhere lately, that’s because he has.

From school campuses across the region to local business collaborations, live performances, and your social media feeds, TayJer has expanded beyond just releasing his music. He has built a recognizable presence that’s rooted in community pride, positivity, and making connections.

With millions of views (and growing) across all social media platforms, TayJer has a rapidly expanding fanbase and performs regularly in the area. Just after we spoke for this article, he headlined at Oliver’s Beer Garden on the Erie Bayfront to a packed and enthusiastic crowd.

“It truly means more than you know,” TayJer said while reflecting on all the support he’s received. “I think what really pushed me to become more intentional with social media is realizing that’s where people discover music today.”

If you haven’t yet discovered TayJer, he’s known for his unique, fast-paced flow. His music often draws from challenges he faced while growing up. It’s been a long road and TayJer will be the first to tell you his recognition didn’t happen overnight. Throughout his career, while working closely with local artists, producers, and engineers, he developed his craft within Erie’s independent music scene and was named an “Artist to Look For” by the Erie Reader in 2021. He believes a stronger, more collaborative local music scene benefits everyone.

“Most collaborations happen naturally,” he said. “Sometimes another artist reaches out about doing a feature. Other times we’ll meet at a show or through mutual friends and realize we’d make a great record together. Every collaboration gives us the opportunity to learn from each other, introduce fans to new music, and continue building a stronger music community here in Erie and throughout the world.”

TayJer has collaborated with Pittsburgh’s Walkman on the single “Different Breed,” and Cleveland’s Bizzy Bone of Bone Thugs-N-Harmony on the single “GitBy.” He’s released a number of EPs and singles through the years including fan favorites “Best Remember,” “Motivation” (featuring Ducky) with an introduction from Fat Joe, “Big Dawgs Only” (featuring K. Sanz), and “All Eyes on You” (featuring ItzToka), released this summer. The music video was filmed locally by Crew Life Productions with Wave Runner Graphics in Downtown Erie’s historic Union Station.

For TayJer, somewhere along the way social media started to become less about his song promotion and more about another way to collaborate, telling a bigger story. He said he feels it’s important that people connect with him through his music. His mindset, paired with a strong work ethic, professional demeanor, and approachable, humble personality, have led to his most recognizable social media videos, celebrating schools and students, connecting people across the region.

The idea began unexpectedly when TayJer and his girlfriend were driving past Collegiate Academy High School and noticed the gate was open. Seeing the football field as a potential backdrop, sparked the idea. What started as one video quickly became much larger, creating new connections and celebrating the schools, alumni, and traditions that make each community unique. TayJer even made sure to dress the part at each location he visited, often in school colors.

“Every school has incredible pride,” TayJer said. “Instead of visiting just one school, we decided to celebrate schools throughout the region and create content each community could genuinely be proud to share. If people smile, share the videos, and feel proud of where they’re from, then we’ve accomplished something bigger than simply promoting my music,” he said.

Creating something bigger has been happening on multiple fronts. While his music and live performances remain an important part of TayJer’s growing career, his vision has ex-



Local hip-hop phenom TayJer has been working hard to create a space for himself in Erie’s music scene and has made his mark – through collaboration, community pride, accessible live shows, and a commanding social media presence.

panded beyond the stage to developing a larger brand built not just around the music but with digital storytelling, partnerships, and community engagement.

“It’s definitely been a busy and exciting time, and honestly, I love it,” he said.

Recent collaborations have connected TayJer with several local organizations and businesses including Gem City Skate, Falcone’s Kitchen, Serafini’s Trattoria, Denny’s Ice Cream, Lighthouse Law, Agresti Real Estate, and Scott Enterprises. His self-branded TayJer shake and TayJer ice cream cone at Denny’s will benefit Make-A-Wish with a portion of the proceeds going to the organization.

Whether it’s a music video, a business collaboration, or connecting with the community on social media, TayJer says authenticity remains the priority. He says he hopes his growing platform will allow him more opportunities for philanthropy, especial-

ly to support another cause close to his heart. “My son has autism, and I hope that as my platform continues to grow, I’ll be able to dedicate even more time and resources to supporting children and families affected by autism,” he said.

TayJer’s influence and influences are beginning to extend far beyond hip hop. “I think people sometimes forget that inspiration doesn’t have to come from rap,” he said. “One thing I always want is for people to never quite know what the next TayJer song is going to sound like,” he said. “I never want to get comfortable creatively.”

TayJer’s music is streaming on all platforms. Connect with him @tayjerofficial on social media and @tayjer840 on YouTube. His website TayJer.com is launching soon.

Amy VanScoter, a supporter of local music and the founder/owner of Infinite Love Yoga, LLC, can be found at infinitelove.yoga.

Brooke Surgener

ALL IN

Lucky Cat Chambers

★★★★★

If you're at all familiar with the music scene in Erie, there's a good chance you've seen or heard Brooke Surgener perform. (If you're familiar with this publication, there's a good chance you've read about her, too). The singer-songwriter and creative of many hats never seems to stop moving, and on her latest EP, she breaks new ground to stunning results. *ALL IN* takes the songwriter's acoustic pop foundation and applies just the right amount of sheen to transform it into something that feels completely new. "Burn Out" is a better pop song than anything you're liable to hear in the current Top 40, managing a delicate balance of twangy guitars with massive, '80s pop synth. That twang is a hallmark of the release – never enough to fully pin Surgener down as a country star, but enough to lend *ALL IN* a distinct texture and atmosphere (see: the pedal steel on "In the Room" and "Houston"). Her sultry voice has never sounded more at home than it does over these arrangements, and with any luck, the sounds that make up *ALL IN* will continue to pave her new path forward. – Aaron Mook



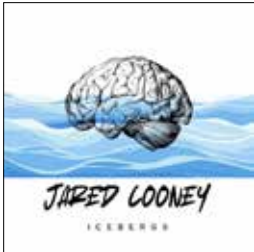
Jared Cooney

Icebergs

Self-released

★★★★★

It's not often that you find a musician so technically accomplished who also happens to be a fantastic songwriter and lyricist. There tends to be a trade-off in one direction or the other. Not so with Jared Cooney. The talented lead guitarist behind Mayflower Hill, Six Year Stretch, and Matthew Crays' band has released his third full-length album, and it's nothing short of astounding. Those familiar with Cooney's style will know what to expect, with lightning-fast guitar flourishes, finger tapping, and plenty of triumphantly soothing chord suspensions. To the uninitiated, it may be a little jaw-dropping. The magic trick that Cooney pulls off, though, is that he makes it sound like second nature, with catchy hooks and an emotional realness that shows. These are acoustic pop songs, brilliantly written and performed with gusto by Cooney and his bandmates Nick Bufalino on bass and Matt Froehlich on drums. From the dark theatrical opening march of "The Decline" to the uptempo mass appeal of "Good Intentions" to the stirring, hymn-like grandeur of "Generations," Cooney is painting a picture and telling a story. With an apt cover and title, the eight tracks of *Icebergs* have a depth worth investigating, including a nod to the popular neuroscientist (Jared Cooney Horvath) who shares two-thirds of Cooney's name. – Nick Warren



Matthew Crays

Crays & Co. Live at the Barn

Independent

★★★★★

With over a decade of artistry under his belt, Matthew Crays is a staple of Erie's arts scene. He's earned it, both personally and professionally. Crays' skillful storytelling (often revolving around recovery) feels universally relatable, while his interchangeable mix of folk, blues, and funk appeals to anyone with an appreciation for versatile singer-songwriter types. While the ideal means to experience Crays' music is still by catching a live performance somewhere in the city, *Crays & Co. Live at the Barn* is an impressive alternative that allows newcomers to become familiar and fans to relive their past experiences. As with any live recording, this bold collection of songs captures every high and subtle flaw of the performance (and I mean that in a complimentary sense). Crays & Co. sound absolutely electric on the lively closing track "Oh My, Mamma." After several raw, personal cuts ("Rough Rider," "Lover"), "Oh My Mama" feels like a technical marvel, boasting a clear, lively mix of organ, electric guitars, and vocals. It's the perfect note to go out on, leaving listeners eager to catch a show or explore the rest of Crays' discography. – Aaron Mook



We Out Here

Old Growth

Self-released

★★★★★

When aspects of modern culture become preoccupied with human-built liminal spaces, a retreat deep into a wooded sanctuary is refreshing. The natural world can seem primal, alien, and otherworldly if not frequented often. Like some Lynchian cosmic portal, it is everything We Out Here offers with *Old Growth*. To paraphrase Art Bell, these tracks were recorded at an undisclosed location in Allegheny State Forest. The pieces resonate with an Eno-like ambience and a J. Dilla sensibility. These recordings are not only inspired by their surroundings but also replicate a lovely moodiness, organic vibe, and sometimes chaotic dissonance. It doesn't leave you feeling as much Snow White as it does Cernunnos. The captivating tracks carry one from an NWPAsque Walt Wanderley exotica to an upbeat Raymond Scott orchestration to a smooth DJ Shadow production to hypnotic Moroccan beats to mellow Billy Frissell strings. Yet these musical wildings' unbridled approach can quickly morph from atmospheric to awkward overindulgence, if one is not careful. The title track hooks to exceptional others like "Skidoosh," "Goodlo," "Crazy Legs," and "Baba Kulee." It is exciting to hear artists like Ben Himan (natrlorder), Elias Kerr (Elias, if only), Jon Lightfoot (Baad entertainment), Joseph Newara (Frogs I Like), and Zach Hyman make committed, excellent contributions to the local music scene. – Melissa Sullivan





Mabeline’s Poetry Corner

Haiku Series

“Mighty Lion”

The mighty Lion
King, reigning over the land
Strategizing view.

“The Queens Calling”

Protecting the King
Her call of duty. Changing
the guards, when needed.

“Magnetic Mind”

You have the power
To draw in your desires
Peace follows purpose

Mabeline hosts and promotes a variety of community building programs that focus on the Art of Healing through poetry and writing, including Live Poetry at Cafe 7-10 and The Poetry X-Change at Werner Books and Coffee. She can be reached at gamewithmabel@gmail.com



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MOVIES

Maddie's Secret is a Camp Spectacle

Woman, interrupted



“Camp” is a term with a very nebulous meaning, but at its heart, it is a celebration of artificiality and theatricality. It’s often used for comedic effect, but it can also be a powerful way to point out the hypocrisies of soci-



ety. This is exactly what John Early does in his directorial debut *Maddie's Secret*. He uses camp aesthetics to make a statement about the increasing superficiality of our looks-based world and the horrible toll it can have on a person’s mental health. The result is a film that is funny and tragic in equal measure, held together by a truly one-of-a-kind performance.

Madelyn Ralph (played by director John Early in drag) works as a dishwasher behind the scenes of a famous cooking show, but she dreams of hosting a show of her own. After a cooking video she posts on the internet goes viral, Maddie is offered her own show and becomes an instant sensation. However, the pressure of performing on camera reawakens a long-buried eating disorder, and Maddie’s life begins to spiral out of control.

Early goes full camp with this story, filling it with garish colors and intentional-

ly over-the-top performances, making it feel like a parody of a made-for-TV movie. The aesthetics heighten the message of the film about the ridiculous pressures that beauty standards place on women. The fact that the main character is played by a man in drag only heightens the absurdity of it all. The film loses a bit of steam in the second half when it shifts from comedy into full-blown melodrama, but John Early’s performance and direction cement him as a unique new voice in indie cinema.

Maddie's Secret is currently playing in select theaters. – Forest Taylor

Written and directed by John Early // Starring Early, Kate Berlant, Eric Rahill, Claudia O'Doherty, Connor O'Malley, Vanessa Bayer, Chris Bauer, Nate Varrone, Ruby McCollister, Gordon Landenberger, and Kristen Johnston // 98 minutes // Magnolia Pictures // Unrated (R equivalent)

The Odyssey is Truly Epic Filmmaking

Defy the Gods



After conquering both the box office and the Academy Awards with *Oppenheimer*, Christopher Nolan was given carte blanche for his next project. He chose to adapt Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*, but in typical Nolan fashion, he was far more ambitious than expected. Filmed entirely in IMAX (the first narrative film to ever do so) and using as many real locations and practical effects as possible, the film is truly larger than life. The result is a visual and technical marvel that will keep audiences enraptured from beginning to end.

After a decade at war, Odysseus (Matt Damon) has concocted a plan to finally defeat the Kingdom of Troy and now sets sail for home, where his wife Penelope (Anne Hathaway) and son Telemachus (Tom Holland) are waiting for his return. However, after offending the gods, Odysseus and his men spend years lost at sea, fighting giants, monsters and witches, while back at home, a group of suitors led by the conniving Antinous (Robert Pattinson) plot to marry his wife, kill his son, and take over his kingdom.

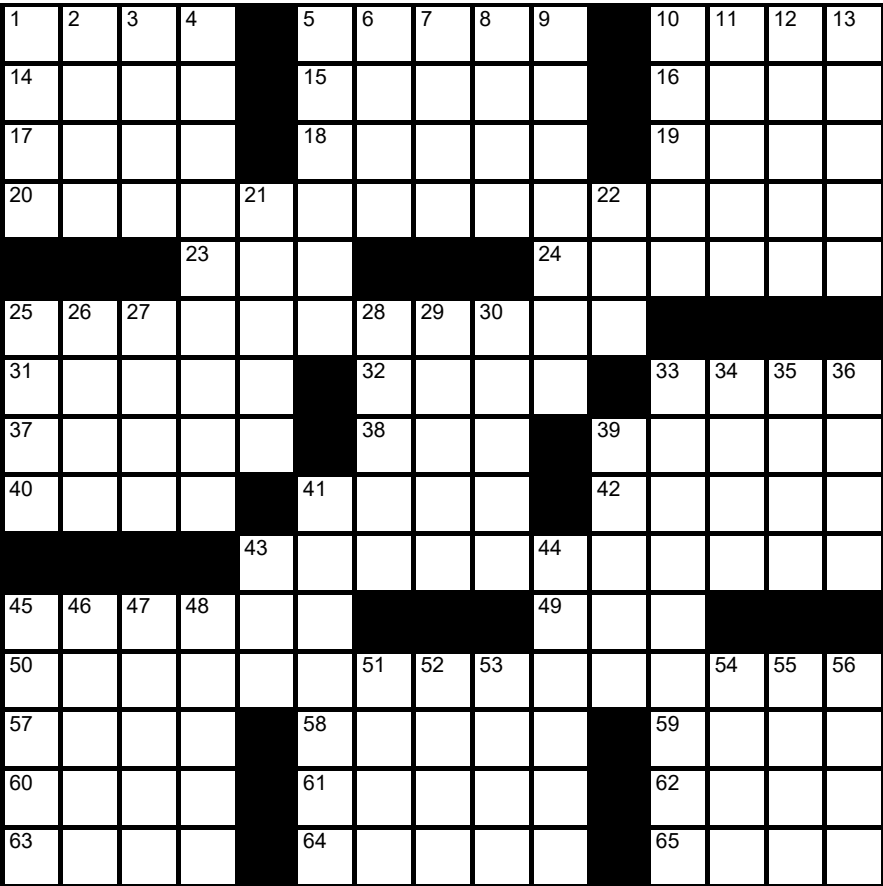
Nolan faithfully adapts Homer’s story while also adding modern sensibilities to



it that should feel out of place (Homer’s Odysseus is more braggadocious than remorseful), but instead successfully updates the tale. The film is full of compelling performances and flawlessly executed setpieces that make the nearly three-hour runtime fly by. While it is a little more chaste than a Greek epic should be, and I wish he could have found a way to incorporate the “Nobody” plan against the Cyclops into the story, *The Odyssey* proves to be one of the best

adaptations in years. – Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Christopher Nolan // Based on the epic poem by Homer // Starring Matt Damon, Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway, Robert Pattinson, John Leguizamo, Himesh Patel, Travis Scott, Corey Hawkins, Lupita Nyong'o, Jon Bernthal, Samantha Morton, Jarrett J. Merz, Niko Nicotera, Elliot Page, Mia Goth, Benny Safdie, Zendaya, and Charlize Theron // Universal Pictures // 173 minutes // Rated R

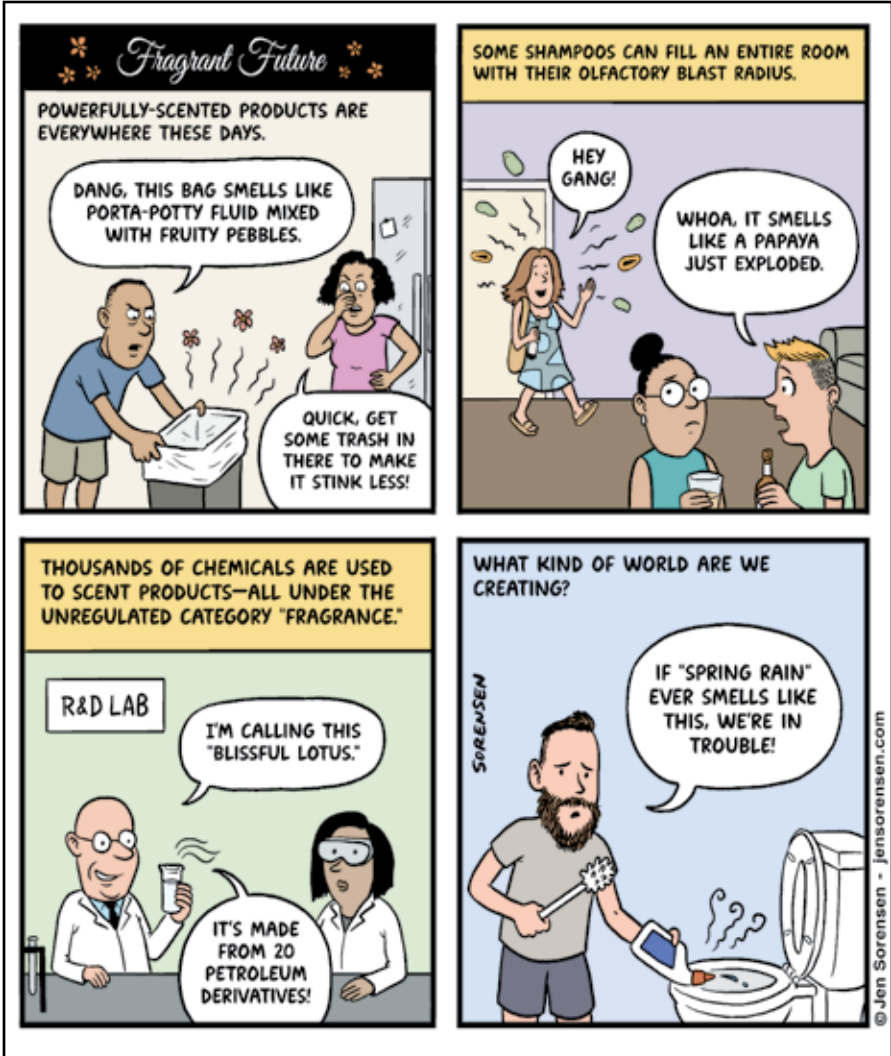


Across

1. Exasperated sound
5. Blundering
10. Spheres
14. Emmy winner Falco
15. In a regal manner
16. Brand of bubbly, familiarly
17. Like a moray
18. Begin to wither
19. Ready, willing, and ___
20. Well-hidden royal residence?
23. Singer Carly ___ Jepsen
24. How detectives might investigate
25. Report that a torso is lacking color?
31. Sister of Kim and Kourtney
32. Oboe piece
33. Pledging site
37. Blue-green shades
38. Judge who presided over the Simpson trial
39. Gut ___
40. Castle-building material
41. "Where have you ___?"
42. Feet in a meter?
43. Flower holder that hides easily in your hand?
45. Key of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1
49. "What have we

- here?"
50. Danish film director who's more minimalist?
57. "All right"
58. Checkout line
59. Acronymic exclusionary anxiety
60. English logician with a diagram named for him
61. Airport vehicles
62. Joule or ampere
63. Idle from Monty Python
64. "Cummo ___?" ("How are you?" in Spanish)
65. After the expected time
Down
1. Permeate gradually
2. Notion
3. Fish feature
4. Nickelodeon show whose title character has a football-shaped head
5. Heavily committed
6. Sushi seaweed
7. Dark, poetically
8. Story framework
9. Disease forever associated with Mary Mallon at the opening of the 20th century
10. Nebraska's biggest city
11. Follower of Asimov's laws
12. Casus ___ (war justi-

- fication)
13. Precipitous
21. They may be judged on "The Great Canadian Baking Show"
22. Come to a halt
25. B'way box office buys
26. Actress Seehorn of "Pluribus"
27. ___ Bator, Mongolia
28. Halle Bailey role
29. "Don't care if they do"
30. "Jurassic Park III" star Tea
33. Tasty
34. Italia's capital
35. Some Wall St. traders
36. Subdue with a zap
39. Quarrel
41. Style of J.S. Bach
43. First-person or third-person, briefly
44. At a minimum
45. Baseball catcher
46. Crafter
47. Resident of Tehran
48. Joey Fatone's boy band
51. Short pencils
52. Amanda ___ of "Brockmire"
53. Glow
54. Burial isle of many Scottish kings
55. Send out
56. Memory method



Answers to last puzzle



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