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Erie City Council

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Brenna Thummler

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ERIE READER

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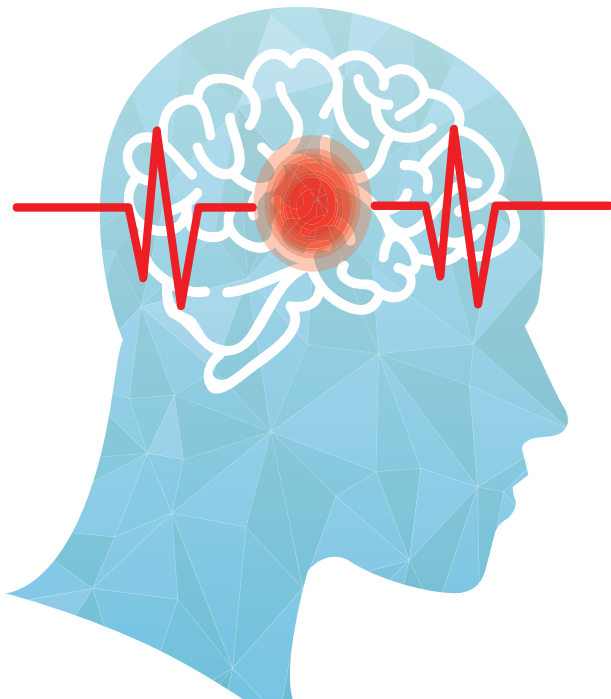


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From the Editors

May, the month of
many months

May has the distinction of being a month standing in observation of many “months.” May is Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage month. It is Historic Preservation Month. It is Mental Health Awareness Month. And, although not covered within these pages, May also happens to be International Masturbation Month AND Zombie Awareness Month, but we’ll just fall back on yet another designation of May: National Smile Month and give those last two our best awkward grins and move on.

April showers not only bring May’s long-awaited flowers with the true burgeoning of spring, they also bring May’s yard signs, as we’ll ALL be voting in the Primary elections on May 16 (ahem). Within this issue you’ll find May covered en masse (minus the self-gratification and undead, of course): Ben Speggen takes a lighthearted look at the candidates running for City Council, while Liz Allen reports on her attendance at the 77th annual Pennsylvania Youth and Government Model Convention in Harrisburg. Jonathan Burdick takes a look at the history of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month and how to support and celebrate Asian culture here in Erie. Both Charles Brown and Dan Schank take a look at mental health: the abatement of seasonal depression and addiction and harm reduction strategies, respectively.

May also marks the month in which we celebrate the art of the comic book, with Free Comic Book Day traditionally happening on the first Saturday of May for the past 23 years. And, related to that, our impressive cover art this month! It was created by graphic novelist Brenna Thummler, who is a recent transplant to Erie, and boy are we glad she’s here. Learn more about her, what she’s up to, her published books, and what’s to come (hint: it’s some very cool stuff) within.

And, as always, here at the Reader in May, we’re excited to bring you our Summer Events Preview. While spring may come as a relief to many after our long, gray winters, it really is summertime when our gem of a city shimmers. We’ve got live music galore, art festivals, nature and educational programs, physical challenges, food and drink festivals, heritage fests, and county fairs.

May may be many things, but it feels most like a brink, a shift, a precipice we’re all standing on waiting for the enveloping warmth of summer in Erie to truly begin. We’re definitely ready.

Erie at Large: Cultures of Abuse

How the judicial system favors abusers over the abused

By: Jim Wertz

What has played out in Erie County over the past few weeks has not been a good look for our community. It also wasn't a great outcome for the victims of domestic violence and the people who advocate for them.

That's because victims of domestic violence who choose to speak out have to balance the potential outcome of their situation against the many structural forces in place that repeatedly victimize them throughout the process of trying to defend and protect themselves and their loved ones.

While I understand that people who face cycles of domestic violence every day and the organizations who support them don't necessarily need or want the musings of another person dissecting their situation, after consulting with several women, and acknowledging that this is not an issue that's exclusive to male-female relationships, I decided to use this usually political column to weigh in on a highly personal crisis that requires us all to reserve some judgment. There is plenty to unpack as we reconcile the not-necessarily confluent forces of the truths we seek and the outcomes we face.

Of course, we're talking about the recent allegations against County Executive Brenton Davis by a woman with whom Davis had a relationship. She alleged on April 20 that Davis had violently dragged her around his home by her hair, as she explained in her victim's statement. The event on Easter morning, she alleged, was the most recent in a series of physically and sexually violent attacks. She also alleged that he had physically and emotionally abused her children, ages 10 and 11.

"He threatened me by saying I could go to jail for coming to his house to return his unloaded rifle," she wrote in her complaint. "He said I would lose my job and my children would be taken away from me." Later she added, "I felt intimidated to call law enforcement after the incident because of his past comments about being the most powerful man in Erie and that he could get away with anything."

Both a temporary protection from abuse (PFA) order for the victim and two temporary protection from intimi-

dation (PFI) orders for her children were granted by the judge on April 20.

In Pennsylvania, The Protection from Abuse Act of 1990 allows victims of domestic violence to report and receive protection from an abuser without a criminal complaint being filed against the abuser — at first blush, this may seem like a merciful legal step that favors the victim but often times it can be an additional layer of trauma that leaves the victim vulnerable and further exposed.

Because in this case the accused is the current county executive, all county judges recused themselves and a retired Venango County judge, Robert Boyer, presided over the hearing on April 20 and subsequent hearings, which were held the following Monday, April 24.

At Monday's hearings, the judge was to determine whether there was enough evidence to convert the temporary PFA and PFIs to a permanent status, known as a final protection from abuse order.

The standard of proof required to convince a judge that a permanent solution is needed rests solely with the victim. They must prove their case by a "preponderance of evidence," a legal standard similar to those used in criminal prosecutions. In these hearings, the judge is the only person to decide if the victim can meet the burden of proof, and defendants are not required to say anything in their defense — only the victim must defend themselves. Indeed, in most cases of domestic violence where the victim doesn't meet the preponderance of evidence required by the judge, the defendant doesn't have to say a word.

That's what happened on April 24.

Davis, the defendant, had two options. He could consent to the permanent orders without acknowledging or admitting to any wrongdoing or he could contest the allegations forcing the victim to plead her case, in pursuit of a more permanent protection from abuse order.

Davis did consent to six-month PFI orders without admitting to any of the allegations made against him regarding violence toward the children, but he contested the victim's allegations. This led to a five-and-a-half hour hearing in which a single witness, the victim, answered questions from Davis' attorney.

After Davis' attorney was done with



The bureaucracy of seeking protection from domestic violence puts a heavy weight upon the victim to prove the abuse of the defendant. The publicity and trauma of the process keeps many from coming forward to report their abusers.

her, he asked the judge to rule that the accused had not met the preponderant standard of evidence, and the judge agreed. Those are the realities of this case. The accused won; the victim lost.

The realities of far too many cases like this — when physical and sexual abuse is alleged during a relationship — often causes family, friends, and onlookers to opine on whether or not personal boundaries have been crossed. To explore those intimate and private rooms of experience, and level our own judgment. Far too often those dangerous rooms that we have never lived in become fodder for gossip and theorizing that can dissuade others from coming forward.

Too often in cases of domestic violence, and particularly in cases of sexual assault against a partner or spouse, the victims are forced to experience what is commonly referred to as "slut shaming" during their testimony because, at some point in the relationship they had consented to activity that might be considered taboo within the socio-cultural context in which the allegations were brought forward. This maneuver, leveled by the lawyers who lean into slut shaming, I've always found to be an ironically cruel — and widely accepted — injustice.

In these cases, text messages or previous statements inviting or accepting an intimate act are used against the victim in an attempt to diminish, defend, or erase the alleged violence. It's the challenge of self-determination, isn't it? People should be allowed to communicate

their desires and needs without being forced to perform those acts on demand — and shouldn't our free will allow us to change our minds? That's not always how it works when a relationship turns dangerous — in those cases choices are more difficult and can become a trigger for violence. It's often just another cruelty in a cycle of violence that includes emotional abuse, weaponizing children in a relationship, and asserting male privilege as part of the arsenal of violence in a culture of abuse.

As a community we must all consider how to talk about this case with consideration for the people involved. The Trump era that introduced our relatively civilized society to a shocking and vast array of now accepted derogatory language against women (and men) should not be the standard by which our Erie community explores it. I encourage us all to listen carefully and avoid the sharp elbows of politics during a particularly vulnerable moment in our public dialogue.

Locally, organizations like SafeNet attempt to serve as a landing pad for victims of domestic violence. Nearly 2,000 people seek their help each year. If you are the victim of domestic or sexual violence, you can contact them at safeneterie.org or by calling their 24/7 victim hotline at (814) 454-8161.

Jim Wertz is a contributing editor and the Chairman of the Erie County Democratic Party. Contact him at jWertz@ErieReader.com and you can follow him on Twitter @jim_wertz.



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Elective Action

Erie teens get intro to state government

By: Liz Allen

Brainstorming, briefings, and the buzz of political activity — those are a few things that Erie teens and more than 500 of their peers experienced at the 77th annual Pennsylvania Youth and Government Model Convention in Harrisburg April 13-16.

My friend Edison Nicholson, founder and CEO of the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) of Erie, invited me to cover the convention. The Youth Leadership Institute first participated in the convention in 2019 and sent six delegates this year. Erie's Booker T. Washington Center also sent seven teens. "Our young people need this type of exposure," said Nicholson. "They want to make change but they just don't know how," he said.

The last time I met up with Nicholson in the State Capitol Rotunda was in November 2019, when a large contingent of Erie residents, including young people, rallied with Empower Erie in support of a new community college. Years of well-documented research and advocacy finally paid off when the State Board of Education approved the new Erie County Community College the following July.

Still, as I hoofed it from the Harrisburg Hilton to the Pennsylvania Capitol with the Erie group, I wondered how to cover this jam-packed event in which up to 240 proposed pieces of legislation, summarized in an inch-thick spiral binder, might be introduced, debated, amended, and possibly approved by the full Blue or the Gold legislative chambers.

The actual Pennsylvania Legislature has 203 representatives and 50 senators — dividing the student lawmakers into two separate governing bodies (Blue and Gold) allows for wider participation. Students could opt to join either a liberal or conservative party, but the focus was on civility, parliamentary procedure, research, and public speaking, not partisanship. Committee chairs and presiding officers enforced the rules, including strict time limits for pro and con arguments.

Not all legislation made it to the floor for a vote, but even if legislation didn't advance, I was floored by the



[Top]: The Erie delegates at the Pennsylvania Youth and Government Model Convention include (left to right) (front row): Neveah Williams, Erica Gall and Gabby Rodney and (back row): Cassandra Gorton, LeJohna Lindsey and Solomon Ravnell. **[Bottom left]:** Katie Rodney (left) volunteered as a chaperone to Harrisburg so she could spend time with her daughter Gabby (right). **[Bottom right]:** Dravin Murti (left) of Middletown High School, talks to Solomon Ravnell of McDowell High School during a break.

wide range of issues that the teens tackled. In addition to trying save our planet, stop gun violence, and protect LGBTQIA+ rights, they also proposed reforming the criminal justice system, abolishing the death penalty, providing day-after contraceptives to female students, funding the arts, stepping up safety measures for first-time drivers, prohibiting discriminatory dress codes, and pushing back against book bans, among many other topics.

The "Tampons for All Bill" would allow those getting food stamps or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) coverage to pay for menstrual products with their benefits. Another bill would stock school restrooms with tampons and pads.

Those bills were just two examples of how vital it is to hear women's voices when it comes to making policy. This was clear from the first night of the conference, when the audience

cheered as the female governor, her two female lieutenant governors, and nine female Supreme Court justices, all elected at the 2022 conference, were sworn in.

The next day, Gov. Riley Stoddard, a senior from Garnet Valley High School in Delaware County, conducted a news conference inside the Capitol, aptly fielding questions from teen reporters about her platform and style of governing. When her male



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predecessor literally fell asleep on the job in 2022, everyone thought that was amusing, she said. In contrast, she has been viewed as “mean and aggressive” because “I’m a woman, I wear a suit, and I have a pretty interesting haircut,” she said, referring to her perfectly straight bangs and blunt mid-length bob.

“Women often feel like they have to limit themselves,” she added. “It is scary to put yourself out there.” Later that day, she led her administration’s mock crisis management response to a flood in Central Pennsylvania, which required her to make quick decisions about road closures, communications, evacuations, shelters, and emergency aid.

The young female leaders impressed Katie Rod-

Fleming also knows first-hand that the YMCA’s Youth and Government (YAG) convention helps to build leaders. He is the son of state Rep. Justin Fleming, D-105th Dist., the keynote speaker on opening night, who was sergeant-at-arms for YAG 25 years ago. “Be open to other ideas. Make new friends and challenge some of the ideas you come in with,” the elder Fleming advised. “I look forward to some of you joining me in the General Assembly someday.” The Erie teens don’t necessarily aspire to elected office but most are already mulling over career possibilities.

Neveah Williams, a ninth-grader at the Charter School of Excellence Skills Center, who worries about teens addicted to drugs and alcohol, wants to

New Orleans.

LeJohna, a Blue representative, got a taste of a healthcare concern that could become a political issue when she sponsored the “Marijuana Usage in School” Bill. Neveah, a Blue senator, was the secondary sponsor. The bill’s purpose was “to ensure that children and/or young adults with severe medical illnesses (who are) prescribed medical marijuana have access to marijuana-derived medication such as CBD during school hours.” She advocated for her bill along with two other delegates who have ADHD, but it failed by one vote in the Blue House.

The Youth Leadership Institute teens came up with legislative proposals “that they thought our government today, in the real world, could potentially look at,” said Hanna Oleski, 24, YLI’s youth engagement coordinator. Oleski knows first-hand that participating in training programs such as the Youth and Government Convention can build leadership skills. A major in international studies with a minor in law and business at St. Bonaventure University as an undergrad, she will receive her master’s in public administration from Gannon University this month.

At Bonaventure, she was named “all-region” lawyer for three straight years in the college Mock Trial competition in Buffalo. If YAG had been offered when she went to Collegiate Academy, “I would have done it in a heartbeat,” she said. Their confidence will grow if the teens return to YAG next year, Oleski predicted. She also hopes that more organizations in Erie will send teen delegations to YAG. “Kids know they want to be politicians or involved in government,” she said. “Little kids say they want to be president.” The Pennsylvania Youth and Government Model Convention could well start them on that path.

Liz Allen started covering politics at age 16, writing about teens volunteering for the 1968 presidential campaigns. You can reach her at lizerie@aol.com.

Brainstorming, briefings, and the buzz of political activity — those are a few things that 13 Erie teens and more than 500 of their peers experienced at the 77th annual Pennsylvania Youth and Government Model Convention in Harrisburg April 13-16.

ney, who accompanied her daughter Gabby, a Youth Leadership Institute member, on the drive from Erie. “We’re raising smart kids,” she said, referring to her own family and to the YLI participants. If she had been pushed to undertake this type of leadership training as a teen, “I would have had a better start at adulthood.” Instead, Rodney, 33, “did life backwards,” she said, dropping out of East High, getting her GED, marrying at 19, then returning to school recently to become a cosmetologist. She came to Harrisburg to spend time with Gabby but also “to learn from this experience, to learn what government can do and can’t do, to know what to look for when it comes time to vote.”

She has an advocacy issue of her own; she’d like Pennsylvania cosmetologists to be trained as mandated domestic abuse reporters, as they are in some other states. “Inside a salon we see it all, we hear it all,” she said.

Like Rodney, the teen delegates brought their passionate interests to the mock legislative sessions and also expanded their horizons, thanks to their committee assignments. Solomon Ravnell, a McDowell Intermediate High School ninth-grader, is interested in gun control and gun violence and would like to become a lawyer after attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

But as a Blue representative on the House Health and Welfare Committee, he found himself listening to Rep. Christopher Fleming, from the Friendship YMCA in Harrisburg, advocate for the “Prescription Affordability Act,” to pay for medicine for chronic illnesses, including diabetes, for those who don’t qualify for Medicaid or Medicare. The high cost of insulin hits home for Fleming; his younger sister has Type I diabetes.

go to the University of Pennsylvania to study marine biology or political science.

Gabby Rodney, also a ninth-grader at the Skills Center, is looking at going to art school or becoming a hair stylist like her mom. Erica Gall, an Erie High ninth-grader, is eyeing culinary school. A ninth-grader at Collegiate Academy, Cassandra Gorton would like to become a pharmacist. LeJohna Lindsey, also a ninth-grader at the Skills Center, plans to attend Harvard University and become a pediatrician, following in the footsteps of her sister, a med student at Dillard University, an HBCU in

Erie-Harrisburg Connections

One bill proposed in the mock legislation at the 2023 Pennsylvania Youth and Government Model Convention directly concerned Erie. Derick Sandstrom, 14, a freshman at Middletown High School, in Dauphin County, sponsored the “Lake Erie’s Beach Cleaning by Prisoners” bill, which would have required those guilty of littering, improper waste disposal, contributing to oil spills, or destroying wetlands to clean Lake Erie’s beaches for their community service sentences.

The Gold House Environmental Resources and Animal Welfare Committee approved Derick’s bill but it didn’t come up for a vote by the entire House. “Pollution is everywhere,” said Derick, the son of William and Miranda Sandstrom. Most of his extended family lives in Erie and they usually spend two weeks every summer here, he said. “Some of the beaches are just, like, super disgusting. You see broken glass and filth everywhere.”

Derick wasn’t the only Harrisburg-area resident with Erie connections at the convention. Anastasia Nebo-

ga Cerritelli, an English language teacher at Middletown Area Middle School, advised the 90-member teen press corps. As a child, she came to Erie with her family from Ukraine and attended Grover Cleveland and Bethel Christian schools before her parents relocated to Southeastern Pennsylvania for their jobs as hydrologists.

A YAG delegate as a teenager, she told the teen journalists that in covering the conference, they would have “an opportunity to truly make a difference and let other people know about what the program does.” The young journalists took photos, shot video, uploaded content to social media and to the website payag.wildapricot.org, and also produced a daily printed newspaper, The Capitol Chronicle.

Davasia Thomas, a delegate from the Booker T. Washington Center in Erie, was featured in an Instagram post by the teen journalists, explaining how she got by on “negative five hours of sleep” with sugary drinks and Doritos. Davasia is interviewed at the 37-second mark in the video: [instagram.com/reel/CrERw4ntGxs/](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CrERw4ntGxs/).

Change is coming to Erie City Council

How much is up to voters come May 16

By: Ben Speggen

To get to know the candidates, we provide a 42-ish-word autobiography on each — in their own words: who they are, why they're running, what sets them apart, and what they'd do to change Erie if they had a magic wand endowing them with unlimited resources.

The upcoming May 2023 Erie City Council primary election might be better understood by taking a look at some numbers: 7, 4, 3, 2, 10, 5/16, 6, and 42.

First, of the seven-member board, four seats are up for grabs. Of those four, three are four-year terms, and are held by incumbents. Because of term-limits, one candidate, Mel Witherspoon, who is currently serving his third four-year term, cannot seek reelection.

The other two candidates, Ed Brzezinski and Michael Keys, are both seeking a second consecutive four-year term. Brzezinski — who's served on council before from 1988 to 1992 and was recently re-elected to council, along with council first-timer Keys — is also on the ballot for a two-year term, which brings us to the fourth seat up for grabs: the one created by City Councilmember Liz Allen's resignation in January.

In February, council appointed Susannah Faulkner to fill the seat Allen vacated until Jan. 1, 2024. Faulkner is also running for this seat. So are Kathy Schaaf, who like Brzezinski has served on council before, and newcomer Cory DiLoreto. Both DiLoreto and Schaaf are on the ballot for a four-year seat as well.

Also in the running for a four-year seat — for which voters can cast votes for no more than three candidates — in addition to incumbents Brzezinski, Keys, and Schaaf, who's making a return bid — are Elspeth Kate Koehle, Rock Copeland, Rob Mahrt, Tyler Titus, and Armand Rocco Jr.

That's 10 total candidates — nine in one race, and four in another with overlap between the two.

To help clarify a bit, here's how the ballots look:

**CITY COUNCIL FOUR YEAR TERM
VOTE FOR NOT MORE THAN THREE**

Elspeth Kate Koehle
Kathleen Kathy Schaaf
Rock Copeland
Ed Brzezinski
Cory DiLoreto
Robert Mahrt
Tyler Titus
Armand Rocco Jr.
Michael Keys

**CITY COUNCIL
TWO YEAR TERM VOTE FOR ONE**

Ed Brzezinski
Kathleen Kathy Schaaf
Susannah Faulkner
Cory DiLoreto



Vying for a spot on City Council are the following candidates who will appear on the ballot on May 16. [Top row from left] Ed Brzezinski, Rock Copeland, Cory DiLoreto, Susannah Faulkner, and Michael Keys. [Bottom row from left] Elspeth Kate Koehle, Robert Mahrt, Armand Rocco Jr., Kathleen Kathy Schaaf, and Tyler Titus.

Another number to keep in mind is the one we'll find out after the May 16 election: voter turnout.

Reader readers familiar with my past local elections coverage know what I'm about to carp about: elections absent a "marquee" race — president or Senate at the national level; governor at the state; even county executive or mayor at the local level, and so on — see far fewer voters casting their ballots.

Looking back to 2019 (2022 featured both gubernatorial and senate races; 2021 featured both City of Erie mayor and Erie County Executive races; and 2020 was, well, a year that'll be hard to forget any time soon), we see just shy of 22 percent of Erie County voters turning out.

How many voters will cast ballots in 2023, we don't yet know. Will it be more than one out of five? With Witherspoon unable to seek another term, there'll be at least one new face on the council if Brzezinski, Faulkner, and Keys retain their respective seats. But there could be a shift across all four seats. That amounts to a range of just over 14 percent change to 57 percent, and that, of course, depends on the voters.

And what happens in the primary will set the general, as all candidates running are Democrats, with no Republicans seeking seats in what continues to be a Democratic stronghold in the city of Erie.

If numbers help us better understand the race, what about the candidates?

First, for more extended coverage, check out Kevin Flowers' April 21 article "The race for Erie City Council: 10 Democrats vying for nominations in May 16 primary" for Erie Times-News, which is an excellent primer.

Second, let's return to a number: 42.

Via email, I asked all those seeking a city council seat to tell me. It came with a caveat, however: they had to answer in six words.

Seasoned Reader readers will remember that I referenced a famous urban legend that involves Ernest Hemingway, a short story, a bar, and a bet in my cov-

erage of 2017's mayoral election. I like this rhetorical approach for various reasons: it forces the subject to carefully turn over, or not, every word ever available to them to distill what can be a long-winded, autobiographical answer to what they see as its essence in their own self-awareness. Or, it can sound stumpy — just mirroring their bulleted talking points.

I asked each candidate for six more words on six more topics — their platform, why they're running for this office, why voters should vote for them, what sets them apart, and if they had a magic wand with

Another number to keep in mind is the one we'll find out after the May 16 election: voter turnout. Elections absent a "marquee" race — President or Senate at the national level; governor at the state; even county executive or mayor at the local level, and so on — see far fewer voters casting their ballots.

unlimited resources to do just one thing to improve Erie, what would it be. I also told them that, if they so choose, they have six additional words to do with whatever they wish.

With six words per response over seven prompts, that takes us to 42 — which literary buffs might recognize as the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything in *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

If it's good enough to be the answer to that lofty of a question, it should be enough to help you get a better sense of who these candidates are through the words they've chosen and how they've arranged them.

How do they sound? What do they tell you? That, readers and voters, is up to your interpretation, just as it is up to you to cast a ballot.

Like what you hear? Reach out to the candidate(s) to hear more. Don't like it? Reach out then, too. Confused? Perplexed? Intrigued? You know what you can do.

So, here are the 10 candidates' stories, in their own words, listed alphabetically by last name as not to conflate the ordering of the two ballots Erie city citizens will be presented with, telling you what they want you to know about them.

Remember, the prompts were:

- Who you are in six words (which follows their names, with the rest bulleted).
- Your platform in six words.
- The reason why you're running for this seat in six words.
- The reason why voters should vote for you in six words.
- Six words to describe what sets you apart from other candidates.
- If you had a magic wand that gave you unlimited resources to do just one thing but could only command it in six words, what would you do to improve Erie?
- Bonus: Six additional words to do whatever you wish with to tell Reader readers more.

Ed Brzezinski: A man who loves his city.

- Our citizens must have a voice.
- We have much more to accomplish.
- I continue to be their voice.
- Long-time experience in government budgets.
- Revenue and expenditures should be equal.
- Your vote will make a difference.

Rock Copeland: Empathetic, pragmatic, reflective, energetic, resourceful, passionate.

- Inclusive, sustainable growth. Invest in people.
- I love Erie; improvement is necessary.
- Values that inform decisions matter most.
- Not endorsed by litigious Dan Laughlin.
- Funding to end poverty and violence.
- Ready to work; let's Rock Erie.

Cory DiLoreto: Son. Brother. Friend. Neighbor. Educator.

- I'm running for all of us.
- Help Erie realize its full potential.
- Dedication. I'll always work for you.
- Previous government experience. Work ethic. Empathy.
- Decrease taxes. Improve roads. Include everyone.
- Be persistent. Never quit. Love all.

Susannah Faulkner: Sensible, compassionate leader, artist, and advocate.

- Our kids deserve a bright future.
- I'm tired of watching bad policymaking.
- Public servant committed to community.
- Global perspective with deep Erie roots.
- Build safety net to end poverty.
- We need you; please get involved!

Michael Keys: Husband, (Step)Father, Son, Veteran, Union-Member, Servant.

- Equitable inclusive policies that uplift everyone.
- Complete initiatives started during current term.
- I'm the most well-rounded candidate.
- Passion to represent the underserved communities.
- Ensure that everyone has safe housing.
- Vote Michael Keys 9th on ballot.

Elsbeth Kate Koehle: Mother, activist, wife, cook, comedian, greenthumb.

- Anti-racism, anti-poverty, pro-youth, pro-renter, and pro-senior.
- Adding another progressive voice to council.
- Unique perspective of a women's advocate.
- Humble, agile, wise, fierce, philosophical, empathetic.
- Eliminate all boundaries to citizen success.
- Mighty Fine donuts are the finest!

Rob Mahrt: Tech entrepreneur, finance expert, reasonable, measured.

- A rising tide lifts all ships!
- Bring unique business background to council.
- Sole contender with vast financial experience.
- 3x Business Founder, \$200M budget manager.
- 1,000 new businesses with sustaining wages.
- www.mahrt4erie.com

Armand Rocco Jr.: Lifelong educator, open-minded, independent thinker.

- Listen well, plan better, invest best.
- Give back all Erie's given me.
- Centered, grounded, committed, accessible, focused, organized.
- Insightful leadership, integrity-focused, independent thinking.
- Reclaim, rebuild what makes Erie great.
- Restore Our City, Choose Common Sense.

Kathy Schaaf: Educator, Compassionate, Inclusive, Spirit filled, Optimistic.

- Public safety, community together, building family.
- Living purposely as Erie public servant.
- Honest, compassionate listener, energetic, volunteer, inquisitive.
- Experience, time investment, team, bridge builder.
- Free education from birth 'til death.
- Endorsement from FOP and firefighters.

Tyler Titus: Therapist, small business owner, advocate, parent.

- Affordable housing, modernized infrastructure, safe communities.
- To build the Erie we deserve.
- I will fight for our families.
- Brought people together to deliver results.
- Expand access to quality, affordable housing.
- A better Erie is within reach!

Ben Speggen can be reached at bSpeggen@ErieReader.com and you can follow him on Twitter @BenSpeggen.



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Standing Up for Erie's Youth

Our youth are screaming out — are you listening?

By: Susannah Faulkner

The City of Erie has one of the poorest zip codes and one of the highest child poverty rates in the nation. Forty-four percent of youth under 18 grow up in poverty, with rates higher for Black and Hispanic youth. A crisis like this does not simply evolve overnight — it is built on decades of bad policymaking that leaves too many behind. Blaming those impacted is shameful; holding those accountable for these decisions is essential. It is time for our community to collectively work together to address this crisis. Our kids are our future.

All parties agree that the pandemic has made a huge impact on our youth from the lack of mental health services to disruptions in school and enrichment programs. Financial stress in the home creates ripple effects of trauma in young people's lives. The median wage in our city is currently around \$11/hour, landing 46 percent of our workers below the poverty line.

How can our kids succeed when their parents are working multiple jobs, can't afford childcare, don't have transportation, and need to leave the kids home alone? What choices are we giving families?

Lack of intentional decisions to reduce child poverty, such as investing in affordable housing, food access, childcare vouchers, public transportation, and social services, have slipped Erie into a new territory of youth violence. In my less than three months as Erie City Council's Public Safety Committee Chair, it has been gut-wrenching to review the weekly crime data from

the Erie Police Department. Our youth need a village to keep them safe. Instead, we live in a reality of teenagers shooting one another out of desperation.

Erie isn't alone in this struggle. Gun deaths among U.S. children and teens rose 50 percent between 2019 and 2021.

These issues are interconnected at the core. A 2021 study from JAMA Pediatrics found that gun-related deaths were over four times higher among young people living in counties with the highest concentrated poverty than with youth living in counties with the lowest concentration of poverty. The City of Erie holds the highest concentration of poverty in the region.

We cannot wait.

Every week when I walk into the studio at Erie Dance Theater to teach ballet classes, I am energized by our city's youth. They are witty, clever, caring, and confident. They are eager to learn, grow, and express themselves. Ninety percent of the youth I teach are growing up in low-income families. Teaching class last year, hours after the shooting at Erie High School was my wake up call. Children can't learn when they are scared. And they can't dance when they have lost hope.

It is imperative that we invest in a public health approach that not only prevents violence before it happens, but also addresses underlying causes. Poverty is a root cause of violence as well as a traumatic experience for our youth. Volumes of research demonstrate the negative impacts of poverty on childhood development. Poverty destroys opportunity: only 62 percent of



Advocates gather at the Erie County Courthouse during the local event for the International Basic Income Day-of-Action March in September of 2022. A universal basic income would help families get out from under the weight of poverty while curbing violence that stems from living under that burden.

children who spent at least half their childhoods in poverty go on to graduate high school compared to 90 percent for those who never experienced poverty (Urban Institute, 2017). The experience affects health with one out of every five kids in our community growing up hungry (Feeding America, 2022).

While we need this approach locally, we aren't seeing it in action. Current policy efforts to address this spike in youth violence from our city government include a \$4 million investment to reinstate a Juvenile Crime Unit in the Erie Police Department. Supported by the mayor's administration, this unit is

funded by American Rescue Plan dollars aimed to offset the impacts of the pandemic and subsequent economic downturn.

We can't police poverty; we can only incarcerate kids trapped in poverty by no fault of their own. Our extreme and unprecedented child poverty rate alone has increased since the last time the city had a Juvenile Crime Unit in 2005. If we want to curb violence, we must address poverty first.

Investing in evidence-based poverty reduction policies and programs is our best shot at reducing crime and creating a future for our youth to thrive in

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Susannah Faulkner spoke at the event Erie Celebrates Black Resistance: Yesterday and Today event at ECAT in February 2023, reading an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.'s book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*

Erie. A universal basic income pilot addresses exactly that by providing direct cash assistance to families in need.

The concept of universal basic income (UBI) is not new or radical. Cash transfers work — pandemic stimulus checks, increased unemployment benefits, and the child tax credit temporarily reduced child poverty nationally by almost 50 percent in 2021 (Census Bureau, 2022). UBI nearly became a national policy in the late 1960s with strong support from both Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and then President Richard Nixon.

Evidence shows that such a UBI program can decrease homicide, property crime, overdose deaths, and domestic violence in a community. Over 100 cities across the country have launched pilots for families in poverty including fellow recovering cities like Rochester, Detroit, Harrisburg, and Gary, Indiana to receive monthly cash stipends for a limited time. Cities partner with local universities and researchers to better understand the impact of the assistance and where greater local investments must be made to create systemic change.

Imagine if, throughout our city, families struggling to make ends meet received \$400 a month for a year to uplift themselves out of chronic poverty. Initial findings out

of various UBI pilots have found positive impacts. One-third of recipients secured permanent housing, showed decreases in anxiety and depression rates, and improvements moving from part to full time employment.

The good news is that we in Erie have the money to support a pilot program from a \$2.1 million Youth Investment Fund that is just sitting there, while our youth cry for help. A standard UBI pilot for 300 families for one year costs just shy of \$2 million. Additional grant funds can be accessed by the city to continue these efforts at no cost to taxpayers.

UBI is a preventative public safety policy which will improve mental health, reduce crime, and increase housing stability for our neighbors in need.

Our youth deserve to dream, and it is our responsibility as adults to create that future for them. Will you stand up for them with me?

Learn more at economicsecurityproject.org and mayorsforagi.org

Susannah Faulkner is an Erie City Council Member, Development Director at Sisters of St Joseph Neighborhood Network, and a Raimy Fellow at the Jefferson Educational Society. She can be reached at sfaulkner@erie.pa.us



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Erie City Council



Susannah Faulkner
#3 on ballot



Elsbeth Koehle
#1 on ballot

Erie School Board



Angie Amatangelo
#5 on ballot



Zakaria Sharif
#7 on ballot

Gavin Griffin for Titusville City Council

College freshman believes ‘there is no minimum age to do what is right’

By: Julia Carden

Eighteen-year-old Gavin Griffin has entered the race for a seat on the Titusville City Council following his official candidacy announcement on March 7. If elected, Griffin will be the youngest city councilman in Titusville and greater Crawford County history.

Located in Southern Crawford County, the city has a population of about 5,200. There are five seats on the council, and four seats are up for re-election in May.

As an advocate for rural communities and public service, the Democratic candidate hopes to improve local infrastructure and to support and aid small businesses, organized labor, and social services.

“There’s this old saying: ‘What people want most is for their water to turn on and their garbage to be picked up.’ Most of the time, people get caught up in big debates,” Griffin explained in regard to civic engagement in local government. “We need to get back to understanding that if we want to make meaningful changes it has to start at the local level.”

If elected, he plans to work on forming a committee with representatives from city social services, including the police department, and the Titusville Area

School District “to divvy up what needs to be done and get to work collectively.”

When asked if voters have expressed concerns regarding his age, he explained that “there is no minimum age to do what is right. I think if the person has the determination, ability, and wants to see a positive change in the community, that’s all that matters.”

According to Griffin, some constituents have questioned his availability as a full-time college student. Griffin is a freshman at Mercyhurst University studying political science and criminal justice. Despite these concerns from the public, Griffin is confident in his ability to balance his responsibilities as a student and a public servant. He has experience balancing a full slate: while in high school, he worked for the Butcher & Winkler Law Firm and volunteered in the community for organizations such as United Way and the Titusville Historical Society.

While he is only a year into his collegiate studies, Griffin has already gathered substantial experience in the political sphere. Currently, Griffin is an administrative intern for Senator Bob Casey.

“I have loved my internship. It has been a great opportunity to see what goes on at the federal level.” Griffin works within the campaign’s telecommunica-



He may be the youngest person to ever run for office in Crawford County history, but what Gavin Griffin lacks in years he makes up for in drive. The name of this 18-year-old Mercyhurst University political science student will appear on the Titusville ballot for City Council on May 16.

tions department answering phone calls and letters. “It tells me what real people in our region are worried about,” he said.

Further, the 2022 graduate of Titusville High School spearheaded efforts to increase involvement in lo-

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cal government throughout his school. Griffin was the leader of the Junior City Council, established during his senior year of high school. Leading up to the bimonthly city council meetings, Griffin met with students to discuss the agenda and gather public comments.

"Getting to do that really put a spark in me ... I got to sit up at the table alongside the official council members who were elected by our residents. It gave me a lot of insight," he shared. During his six-month period on the council, he worked on several projects including a sidewalk repair program to aid homeowners.

Griffin expressed the campaign has been "a lot of work." With a heavy focus on meeting with locals, he dedicates his weekends to knocking on doors with volunteer campaign staff. Additionally, he frequently attends local labor union meetings, including the Erie-Crawford Central Labor Council (AFL-CIO).

"There's this old saying: 'What people want most is for their water to turn on and their garbage to be picked up.' Most of the time, people get caught up in big debates. We need to get back to understanding that if we want to make meaningful changes it has to start at the local level." — Titusville City Council candidate Gavin Griffin on civic engagement

In March, Griffin participated in a ride-along with officers and K-9 officer "Griff" from the Titusville Police Department K-9 Unit. "It was a great experience to get to know the guys. I found out I was the only former or aspiring council person to ever ride along or stop into the station," he said. "I think it's important to keep fire and police in mind because what people need most out of city government is public safety."

Griffin further encouraged young people to get involved "in some way, to make an impact for someone, and for something bigger than themselves."

"Ultimately, we are going to be the leaders of the next generation. We are going to shape what path we go down. Getting a start locally, and helping out your neighbors, is one of the best things you can do," he said.

Learn more about Gavin Griffin's campaign at griffinfortitusville.com. Primary election day is Tuesday, May 16. You can find your polling place at pavoterservices.pa.gov

Julia Carden is a student at Pennsylvania Western University at Edinboro. In her free time, she enjoys spending time outdoors, muckraking, and perusing comics in the New Yorker. She can be reached at juliacarden91@gmail.com.



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Pain, Panic, and Progress

Responding to the overdose crisis in Erie

By: Dan Schank

When assessing the addiction and overdose crisis in our community, it's tough not to begin with alarming statistics.

A recent report from our mayor's office and the Erie Police Department indicates that, in 2022, there were 286 opioid overdoses in our city. These led to 54 deaths, which was 19 more than the previous year. And that number might have been higher had our police not administered 226 doses of naloxone, better known by the brand name Narcan, to people in overdose situations.

Statewide, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) listed Pennsylvania as the ninth highest state in the country for overdose deaths in 2021. The Pennsylvania Attorney General's office reports that overdoses took the lives of 5,343 Pennsylvanians that year — a 6 percent increase from 2020's tally. Perhaps surprisingly, heroin overdoses declined as fentanyl found its way into our drug supply — especially in the form of counterfeit pills.

"We are now facing, for the past five years or so, a poisoned drug supply," says Dr. Amy G. Miles, an Addiction Medicine Physician with UPMC Western Behavioral Health at Safe Harbor. "We're looking at something that is actively being contaminated." The impact of synthetic opioids — fentanyl especially — can hardly be overstated in our community. According to the CDC, it is up to 50 times stronger than heroin. It's also cheaper to manufacture and easier to transport without notice — a decisive supply-chain advantage for dealers during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Nationally, the National Safety Council reports that "overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids — including fentanyl — increased 2,524 percent between 2013 and 2021." In Pennsylvania, fentanyl was involved in 78 percent of our opioid deaths in 2021.

What's Being Done

The catastrophic impact of synthetic opioids can often overshadow the important work being done to address the crisis in our community. For example, a 2022 study in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* found that 80 percent of Pennsylvanians who have experienced an overdose since 2018 have survived. The study's authors attribute this success in part to the increased availability of Narcan, which they estimate makes people 11 times more likely to survive an overdose situation. A standing order passed in our state in January expanded its access to virtually anyone at risk of an overdose, or capable of assisting someone at risk. Many lives are being saved because of these changes, but because synthetic opioids often go undetected and can do unprecedented damage, the overdose numbers remain alarming.

Last December, I wrote about the legalization of fentanyl testing strips (FTS) in Pennsylvania. These strips, which allow drug users to identify the pres-

DIEGO CERVO



Overdose deaths in Erie can be curbed by implementing harm reduction strategies including widespread availability of naloxone, fentanyl testing strips, needle exchange programs, and mental health treatment which have all been shown to significantly reduce deaths and help drug users get on the path to recovery.

ence of the substance in a manner similar to a pregnancy test, are now available through the Erie County Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse (ECDA). The office is also "actively pursuing a vendor to support a model similar to Narcan distribution which will provide free FTS products to the public," according to director Scott Coughenour.

Since 2016, our region's Warm Handoff Program has connected people in overdose situations with mental health professionals at the moment of crisis. Case managers from Safe Harbor and Gaudenzia Erie report to our hospitals whenever drug emergency treatment is administered to offer free, voluntary counseling to people who decide to seek additional help. UPMC Western Behavioral Health at Safe Harbor made 1,272 treatment referrals in 2022. According to executive director Mandy Fauble, "of the people who accept the Warm Handoff help, the vast, vast majority connect to treatment afterward." In January of this year, the program contacted 144 people and made 33 referrals throughout Northwestern Pennsylvania, according to the Erie County Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse.

Moving Forward

Surprisingly, Pennsylvania is one of only 10 U.S. states where Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) are currently illegal. This is slightly misleading, because about 20 of them are currently in operation in our state in accordance with local municipal ordinances. Still, the potential effectiveness of SSPs, which

are sometimes known as needle exchanges, appears encouraging. According to the CDC, they are associated with an estimated 50 percent reduction in HIV and Hepatitis-C incidence. And users of SSPs are five times more likely to enter drug treatment — and three times more likely to stop using drugs entirely than those who do not use the programs.

Presently, there is a bipartisan movement to legalize them at the state level. On a Zoom call in late April, I spoke to State Representative Jim Struzzi of Indiana County about his advocacy for syringe service programs. Struzzi, a Republican in a conservative rural district, recently co-sponsored a bill with State Representative Sara Innamorato that would amend the definition of "drug paraphernalia" so that it doesn't include syringes, needles, and other objects used to "reduce the risk of disease transmission."

Struzzi was persuaded by the effectiveness of SSPs after a visit to Prevention Point Pittsburgh, where he found that syringe services were being provided with minimal burden on law enforcement or emergency medical technicians. He was impressed by the organization's focus on recovery in addition to drug safety. In the vehicles operated by Prevention Point, drug users were provided with information about counseling and treatment options — often by specialists who are in recovery themselves — in addition to clean needles.

"When conservatives in my district ask me about these programs, I always tell them that Trump supports them," says Struzzi. This claim is broadly cor-

rect. In 2019, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar publicly advocated for syringe service programs, noting that “we’re in a battle between sickness and health, between life and death.” Perhaps more surprisingly, Mike Pence legalized them in 2015 while governor of Indiana, in response to a shocking uptick of HIV cases in certain rural communities.

Struzzi admits that advocating for harm reduction measures like SSPs and fentanyl testing strips can be “a heavy lift” in places where people are understandably alarmed about drug use. But he defends his position with concise urgency: “You can’t help people if they aren’t here to help.”

Diversifying Recovery Options

In her 2018 book *Dopesick*, which recently became a TV miniseries, author Beth Macy asserts that “among health professionals, buprenorphine is considered the gold standard for opioid use disorder because it reduces the risk of overdose death by half compared with behavioral therapy alone.” Buprenorphine, which can be prescribed by a physician for up to 30 days at a time, is emerging as a useful option for people who haven’t had success with other approaches to drug abuse treatment.

“You don’t necessarily have to do an abstinence-based treatment first,” says Dr. Amy G. Miles of UPMC Western Behavioral Health at Safe Harbor. “Instead, you can work with medication fairly near the beginning of a diagnosis, to help lower people’s

urges and cravings. And to help them be engaged in the other aspects of their recovery.”

True to Macy’s book title, medications for opioid use disorder (OUD) like buprenorphine (as well as methadone) can alleviate some of the worst symptoms of so-called “dope sickness.” This can make the withdrawal period more manageable as users try to report to work or to reconnect with friends and family. In a recent article about the history of its usage, New York Times reporter German Lopez notes that when buprenorphine was deregulated in France in 1995, overdose deaths decreased by 79 percent over the next four years. In a somewhat similar spirit, the Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment Act passed nationally earlier this year, eliminating “the so-called X-waiver that physicians had long needed to prescribe buprenorphine.”

To be clear, medications like buprenorphine and methadone are opioids themselves. Accordingly, organizations offering medication-based treatment for OUD must monitor their distribution closely. “Because we are a licensed facility, we have to — at minimum — have a person drug-screened once per month,” says Safe Harbor’s Fauble. “There are also strategies where the person is engaged in therapy. And it’s not to be punitive. It’s to ensure that everyone is safe.”

In addition, the treatment process is a long-term one — with medication being only one part of a continuum of care. “The American Society for Addiction

Medicine recommends at least one year because it takes quite a bit of time to restructure your thinking, to become engaged in other aspects of recovery, and to make long standing behavior changes,” says Dr. Miles. “And that’s a minimum guideline. There are people who are on it for five or 10 years without any problem. When we interact with clients, we assess their readiness for change.”

I don’t want to imply that medical alternatives to abstinence-based drug treatment are any sort of miracle cure — or that this approach is categorically any better than, say, working with a 12-step program. Different approaches will make sense based on the needs of different individuals. The point is that more care options are slowly becoming accessible to people who haven’t found a recovery framework that works for them.

The more I learn about the overdose crisis, the more I alternate between abject despair and hope for the future. The problems we face often seem insurmountable, but there is growing agreement that we are faced with a public health crisis that can’t be eliminated by force alone. When I speak to the people working hardest on this problem in our community, they strike me as compassionate and realistic. Good ideas seem to move forward at pace with the epidemic itself. Hopefully soon, they will begin to outrun it.

Dan Schank can be contacted at danschank@gmail.com



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FEATURE

Goodbye Seasonal Depression

Return of warm-weather activities melts away the blues

By: Charles Brown

Seasonal depression hits pretty heavy in the City of Erie with our area having such long and harsh winters. Blistering, subzero cold and snow up to the torso is enough to drive anyone into a melancholy state of mind. Let's also not forget about the early nightfall, plunging our bright days into gloom. Although there are some individuals who enjoy the streets of Erie turning into a live-action snow-globe, it's safe to say that most of us could do with less. But let's be thankful that this past winter was surprisingly mild, even though the seasonal depression was still in full effect for many.

With spring finally emerging, the mood is starting to change with folks latching on to every warm day that calls for a ride around town. Though the 814 is known for throwing events all year round, from the Erie Winter Carnival curated by Erie Downtown Partnership to the high-profile gatherings held at the Bayfront Convention Center, it is the availability of warmth that has everyone asking "What's the move today?" Lucky for us, we have a multitude of options to choose from.

The most exciting part about the weather warming up is more and more Erieites finding a salve to their seasonal depression. Families and friends will be able to enjoy a good old-fashioned baseball game with our Erie Seawolves starting up at UPMC Park. And those classic rides around Presque Isle

JESSICA HUNTER



A drive around the peninsula is not complete without a stop for an iconic orange vanilla twist cone at Sara's. Their annual opening signals the official end of winter in Erie. Though our winters can be rough, our glorious summers make up for those long, dark days.

meal.

It is true that as soon as spring arrives, the City of Erie still can get hit with some wild weather that'll make you second-guess the season. But on those

It is true that as soon as spring arrives, the City of Erie still can get hit with some wild weather that'll make you second-guess the season. But on those days when we aren't experiencing all four seasons, it is important that we take advantage of the warmth that we do have in order to rise out of that sluggish mood and take on the day.

wouldn't be the same without Sara's opening up to satisfy all of your tasty cravings. Or, if you stay a little outside of town going south, you can hit up Sunset Grill in Edinboro this May and possibly catch one of your favorite local acts while enjoying a delicious

those days when we aren't experiencing all four seasons, it is important that we take advantage of the warmth that we do have in order to rise out of that sluggish mood and take on the day. And with knowing how fast our summers can go, why not tackle Erie

for all of the things that open up when the sun is our friend? Don't allow your seasonal depression to linger on once the snow has officially stopped!

Erie is known to make good use of spring and summer — giving you plenty of opportunities to shake those negative vibes off and jump right into fun. Whether it's chilling out at Rum Runners gazing at the lake or going on a pirate quest upon The Scallywag shooting water at spectators, the sunshine in weeks to come will brighten your mood as if winter was just your imagination. In the meantime while the heat is gradually setting in, rock your Iron Empire hoodies and your Dotigan jackets proudly! Erie fun in the sun is not far away at all, and your sickness is on its way out. I'll meet you at Frontier Park with my Popluck for whoever wants to brave the slides!

Charles Brown can be found on Facebook and Twitter @CEEBrown814, and online at ceebrown.com



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Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Establishing respect and representation for Asian and Pacific Americans

By: Jonathan Burdick

May marks the observation of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month in the United States. Its story, at least on Capitol Hill, began in 1976 during the Bicentennial celebrations. A Chinese American congressional staffer named Jeanie Jew noted during these events the lack of recognition for Asian and Pacific American contributions. Her great-grandfather, after all, had immigrated from China and along with thousands of other Chinese immigrants helped build the transcontinental railroad, an essential and complex part of the American story.

By 1977, her connections had led to Congress introducing multiple resolutions for an observation during the first week of May. The bill passed in 1978 and the following year, President Jimmy Carter issued a proclamation officially designating the week as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week.

“Unfortunately, we have not always fully appreciated the talents and the contributions which Asian-Americans have brought to the United States,” President Carter stated. “Until recently, our immigration and naturalization laws discriminated against them.”

Indeed, there was a long history of discrimination against people of Asian and Pacific ancestry in the United States. In 1873, a San Francisco newspaper printed a bolded headline: “THEY ARE COMING.” The editors declared that there was an impending “Chinese invasion” of “900,000 strong” coming to America. This sort of fear-mongering was common.

These fears would climax with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Numerous riots and even massacres against Chinese communities occurred throughout the following decades. The creation of the Asiatic Exclusion League in 1905 was further meant to keep other Asian immigrants, primarily of Japanese and Korean descent, out of the United States. In the following decades, similar groups would work to ban immigrants from all Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries. Perhaps even more well-known, especially in recent years, were the creation of Japanese Internment camps during

World War II, as well as the discriminatory treatment of Vietnamese refugees who came to the United States following the Vietnam War. These events represent only a very small fraction of a much larger story.

“America’s greatness ... derives from the contribution of peoples of many origins who come to our land seeking human liberties or economic opportunity,” Carter had said during his proclamation, adding how those of Asian ancestry had “played a significant role in the creation of a dynamic and pluralistic America, with their enormous contributions to our science, arts, industry, government, and commerce.”

The week was expanded in 1990 into a month-long celebration by President George H.W. Bush. “The history of Asian and Pacific Americans in the United States is a long and honorable one,” he noted. “[Their] customs and traditions have deeply enriched the wonderful heritage we share as a nation.” In 2009, the name was further altered to Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month under President Barack Obama and then “Native Hawaiian” was added in a proclamation by President Joe Biden. Each year, a theme is also selected for the month by the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC). This theme for 2023 is “Advancing Leaders Through Opportunity.”

In Northwestern Pennsylvania, the volunteer-based Erie Asian Pacific American Association (ErieAPAA), formed in 2005 as a collaboration between local businesses and the Erie Regional Chamber, contributes significantly to promoting awareness of the many Asian Pacific cultures throughout the Erie region. It has a board of officers as well as representatives from countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Japan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Turkey, and Vietnam.

ErieAPAA organizes and hosts popular events such as the Asian Festival, Taste of Asia, and Multicultural Asian Day. They have hosted a screening of “Minari” at Waterford’s Sunset Drive-in, visited schools with educational programs, sponsored writing contests, helped people network within the area, and, to the delight of many appetites, held numerous food tasting events



Last May, the ExpERIENCE Children’s Museum welcomed members of the Erie Asian Pacific American Association to host Multicultural Asia day at the facility. Children use their “passport” and visit a number of booths representing different Asian countries to receive stamps and learn about the different cultures.

over the years.

Amanpreet Oberoi, president of ErieAPAA, notes that the organization is still reeling from the effects of COVID-19. Many in leadership roles have also moved elsewhere in recent years. As a result, there are no major public events planned for this year while the organization is rebuilding.

“As a commissioner [to the Governor’s Advisory Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs] and the president of this organization, my role this year shall focus on rebuilding and expanding our team and along the way collaborate, network, and also work for the other social causes,” explains Oberoi. Plans for May still include a collaboration with Gannon University for its students that will include food, music, and displays. She also adds that the organization will be participating in events for CelebrateErie and AmeriMasala and they are always open to working with schools and organizations.

This past year has also been a time in which Asian representation in entertainment has increased. Just this year, Michelle Yeoh became the first Asian woman to win an Academy Award for Best Actress while Ke Huy Quan became only the second Asian actor to win the award for Best Supporting Actor, both for their performances in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. As has been widely reported in recent months, Quan, who found success as a child actor with mov-

ies such as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *The Goonies*, had given up acting for decades after realizing in the 1990s that Hollywood simply didn’t have non-stereotypical roles for Asian actors such as himself.

Streaming has been credited with much of this increase in representation. According to a 2022 study of 1,500 television shows across broadcast, cable, and streaming — streaming led the way with 11 percent of screen time including Asian representation (up from 6 percent two years prior), followed by broadcast television having 3.2 percent and cable lagging behind with 2.7 percent. As the Asian American Policy Review notes, such representation matters as media “creates the narrative foundation for how people of color are perceived and treated in the real world.”

“Negative portrayals have profound and insidious consequences,” they add. “Stereotypical portrayals of Asian American characters flood our screen again and again. ... What we watch on our screens impacts the way we think, feel, and act.”

One can support these traditionally underrepresented communities by embracing this media. This could include shows such as Netflix’s *Beef* or the upcoming *American Born Chinese* (also starring Ke Huy Quan) on Disney+, movies like 2022’s *RRR* and *Leonor Will Never Die*, or, yes, finally deciding to check out the K-pop that Gen Z keeps



The City of Erie honored the Erie Asian Pacific American Association (APAA), recognizing the organization's efforts to bring together all members of the community. Erie APAA president Aman Oberoi received a copy of the proclamation from Mayor Schember.

discussing. It can be reading books from authors such as Nguyen Phan Que Mai, who recently published her second novel *Dust Child*, or Soon Wiley's *When We Fell Apart*.

In Erie, one can support these communities by showing up to community events and visiting the many Asian-owned markets and businesses throughout the city. Restaurants are abundant in the area with well-known favorites such as Samurai Kitchen + Sushi, Royal Chopstix, Golden Wok,

Tasty Bowl, Thai Eatery, Saigon Nights, Tandoori Hut, Erie Curry House, Fine Restaurant & Bar, and many, many more.

You can also support the month online by using the promoted hashtags of #AANHPIHM and #AsianPacificAmericanHeritageMonth.

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

The Erie Cancer Wellness Center seeks to support and comfort individuals and families who are facing the impact of cancer.



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Brenna Thummler’s Own Kind of Ghost Stories

How the talented local cartoonist became a nationally recognized author

By: Nick Warren

Truly outstanding comics are a rare and precious thing. It’s a beautiful medium capable of telling stories in a uniquely personal way, holding onto the creator’s vision succinctly and directly. Great writing married with captivating art is a lofty aspiration, and when those two things are done by the same person, that can make the author’s vision more fully realized.

Making graphic novels is a difficult thing to do, and Brenna Thummler is doing it very well.

The author of *Sheets* and its 2021 sequel *Delicates*, she released her first major work in 2017 with her illustrated edition of *Anne of Green Gables*, working with Mariah Marsden’s adaptation of the Lucy Maud Montgomery classic.

Canadian Pastoral

Beautifully accessible with a heart that can’t be denied, *Anne of Green Gables* has been met with consistently glowing reviews. Thummler brings the fictional Prince Edward Island town of Avonlea to life, with all of its bucolic idealism bursting with the gifted imagination of its own title character from season to season. Illustrator Brian Selznick (author of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* and *Wonderstruck*) said that “it’s a thrill to watch as the beloved orphan rushes headlong through Brenna Thummler’s heavenly landscapes. Together Marsden and Thummler conjure all the magic and beauty of Green Gables. Like Anne herself, you won’t want to leave.”

Just as the original Montgomery novel does, *Anne of Green Gables* traces the story of a precocious young orphan as she comes of age to be an intelligent young woman with an open, if not stubborn, heart. Marsden leaves plenty of wide open space for Thummler to ruminate, as the illustrator is able to cover years and still linger on the contemplative moments in life like a stroll through nature that’s somehow fast-paced.

Produced by Andrews McMeel Publishing, *Anne of Green Gables* finds itself in the same realm as Gary Larson’s *The Far Side*, Dana Simpson’s *Phoebe and Her Unicorn* (Simpson said of *Anne*, “the illustrations are incredible”), and what is arguably the greatest comic strip of all-time aside from *Peanuts*, Bill Watterson’s *Calvin and Hobbes*. There’s both a literal and spiritual connection to *Calvin and Hobbes* that Thummler owns. A delight in the beauty of childlike imagination resides at the heart of her works.

Serving as an intern and later as their in-house illustrator, Thummler worked at Andrews McMeel right out of college.

Right away on her first major graphic novel outing, Thummler’s color palette was something that stood out. Her gift of storytelling and pacing from panel to panel seems virtuosically innate.

Perchance One Summer

Like me, you may have assumed that making comics was a lifelong dream for Thummler.

Well, it wasn’t.

CONTRIBUTED



While spending most of her life in Meadville, graphic novelist Brenna Thummler is now living and working in Erie. She recently saw her original play *Single Book Store* come to life on stage at Dramashop for their One Act Festival and is also co-producing a podcast focusing on local theater, *Spotlight 814*.

Though born in New Hampshire, Thummler has spent the majority of 30 years in Meadville, having moved there when she was nine months old. After graduating from Meadville Area High School, she pursued her talents at Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida as an illustration major.

Though she always loved to draw, Thummler never saw comics as something she wanted to do. “Even in my college experience, I was never really 100 percent sure what I wanted to do,” she reasoned, noting that “I thought maybe I would end up doing freelance work, like editorial work for newspapers and magazines, and maybe book covers and stuff like that. But the one thing I always said I would never do was graphic novels.”

Who helped turn that around? Mariko and Jillian Tama-ki. On a whim at a thrift store, Thummler picked up a copy of their 2014 graphic novel *This One Summer*. While she liked the cover art, Thummler was initially disappointed that it was, in fact, a comic. She bought it anyway. After reading it, Thummler was blown away by the book, which happens to be the first graphic novel to receive the prestigious Caldecott Medal, as well as Eisner and Ignatz Awards. [Author note: I have an autographed copy of *This One Summer* thanks to Small Press Expo (SPX) 2017, and coincidentally intended to reference it as a similar work, but Thummler happily beat me to it].

Comics for Everyone

It’s more than understandable why Thummler had all but written off comics as a medium. For over a century, they’d been geared exclusively and intentionally to white male adolescents. While there have been outliers like Los Bros. Hernandez’ *Love and Rockets*, Marjane Satra-

pi’s *Persepolis*, and the catalogs of Alison Bechdel and Lynda Barry, the superheroes of Marvel, DC, and Image Comics held the public’s perception of the Western industry at large. “Honestly, I think that’s kind of part of the reason why I had no interest in pursuing graphic novels, because I thought it was a man’s world,” Thummler explained.

In the last 10 to 15 years, however, there has been a remarkable amount of progress. One watershed moment was the unparalleled success of Raina Telgemeier’s graphic novel *Smile* (which came out when Thummler was a junior in high school — i.e. well past its target demographic) and its sequels *Sisters* and *Drama*. “I had no idea just how versatile the field had gotten,” she admitted.

Comics made for all ages and especially those geared toward young women have not only proven financially viable, but have opened the doors to an amazing generation of female cartoonists and creators. Now, Thummler cites cartoonists like Tilly Walden and Vera Brosgol as some of her favorites, along with the aforementioned Tamakis.

Cleaning Up

In August of 2018, Thummler’s debut graphic novel *Sheets* was released. It is the story of Marjorie Glatt, a young woman who helps in her father’s laundry business following the death of her mother. Marjorie soon meets Wendell, a ghost clad in the traditional white sheet with eye holes, and befriends him. As the plot unfurls, Marjorie and Wendell become close friends and the gentle world of the afterlife becomes commonplace for Marjorie.

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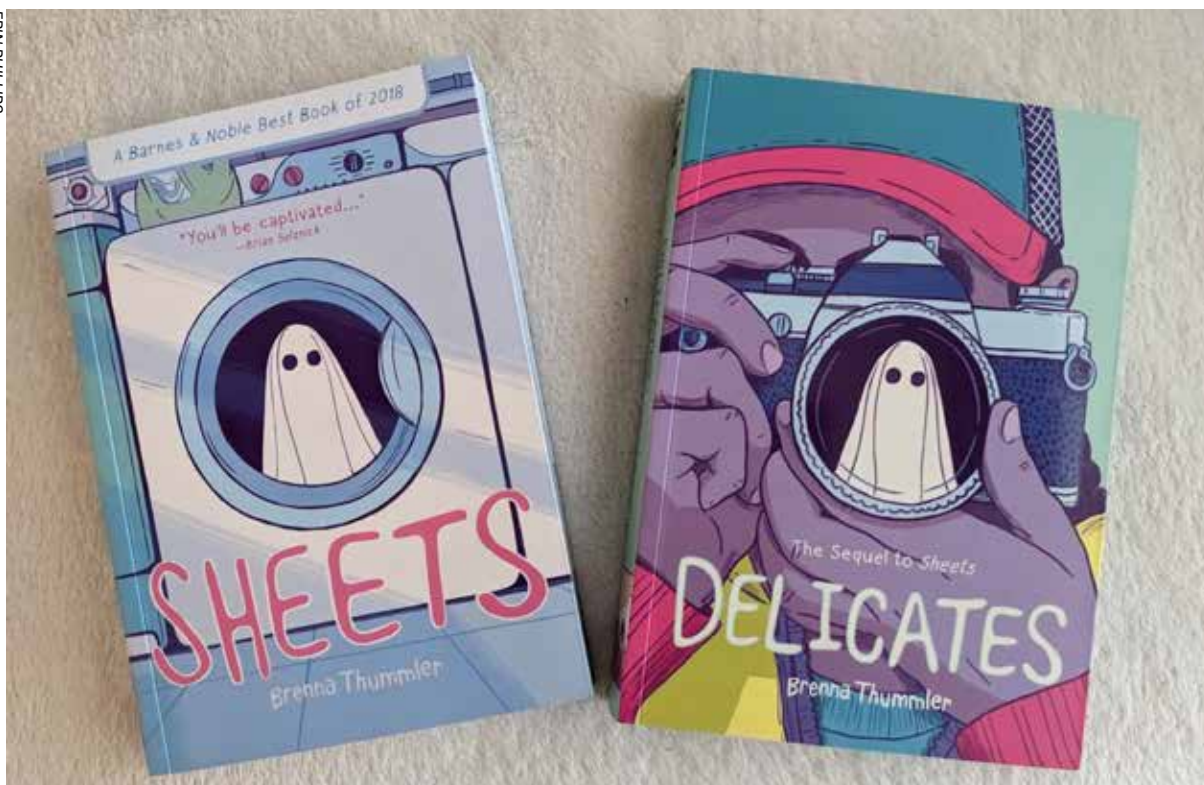
ECHRC's Ordinance makes it unlawful to discriminate against protected classes that include:

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ERIN PHILLIPS



Brenna Thummler's debut original graphic novel *Sheets*, which she wrote and illustrated, was named a Best Book of 2018 by Barnes and Noble. Her subsequent book in the series *Delicates*, was released in March of 2021, and there is a third book forthcoming entitled *Lights*.

With finer linework and an even more developed sense of pacing following *Anne of Green Gables*, *Sheets* is truly something special. With a pastel palette primarily of pink, blue, and teal, the 239-page book is something to behold.

In fact, author Lemony Snicket (aka Daniel Handler) said this of *Sheets*: “For days after reading Brenna Thummler’s *Sheets* I have been wandering my neighborhood, haunted, enchanted, and in need of freshly pressed clothing.”

The motif of laundry serves as an extended metaphor in the book, a trend that’s continued in its sequel *Delicates*, though the process of developing film is at the heart of that story.

Delicates comes in arguably even stronger than its predecessor. At 317 pages, it centers around the newly introduced character, Eliza. With Marjorie and Wendell settling into their friendship, and Marjorie’s adolescent life taking center stage for her, Eliza comes in as “sort of the very opposite of Marjorie, and she was obsessed with ghosts and believed so deeply in them. And she wanted to catch a ghost on camera.”

Both of these books were published by Oni Press, who are known for works by Kevin Smith, Mike Allred (*Madman*), Jhonen Vasquez (*Invader Zim*), and Brian Lee O’Malley (*Scott Pilgrim*).

On the Line

“These books are just everything to me. I pour my whole life into these,” Thummler emoted.

A self-confessed workaholic, she has not one, but two books coming out soon. The most recently announced is *Gumshoe*, which is set to be published by Harper Alley, a division of HarperCollins. Though it’s still in the writing stages now, Thummler stated that “I’m calling it a post office western.” The story centers

around her character Willa, and her struggles with social anxiety, paired with a case of mistaken identity involving a mysterious outlaw.

Coming soon, too, is the final chapter in the *Sheets* trilogy, entitled *Lights*. Just looking at the current cov-

BRENNATHUMMLER



Brenna Thummler never envisioned she’d write and illustrate graphic novels. But after illustrating an interpretation of the classic *Anne of Green Gables*, and feeling inspired by the work of Mariko and Jillian Tamaki, she’s successfully delved into the world of this often underestimated art form.

er image, it’s easy to picture the book’s key motif being something on a stage. “It’s performance, dance performance — ballet specifically,” Thummler explained. “So for *Lights*, it’s Wendell’s story, wrapping up the trilogy. The first one was Marjorie’s, and second one was Eliza’s. Now it’s Wendell’s turn.” She elaborated that she “started researching a lot about stage lighting and everything and that sort of plays a role as a motif in the book.”

It’s no surprise that Thummler is interested in the stage, as she herself is actively involved in local theater. In February, she appeared as Frenchie (and the Gorilla) in the Academy Theatre’s production of *Cabaret*. She also very recently saw her one-act play *Single Book Store* produced by Dramashop. A high-spirited, meta-textual look at gaslighting and relationships, co-directors Anna McJunkin and Alycia Olivar brought it to life with larger-than-life props and set accouterments that even looked like Thummler’s work. She has also recently started a podcast in partnership with (local podcasting savant) Ryan Louis (Idiotville Productions) called *Spotlight 814*, which focuses on local theater.

Mental Health at the Forefront

Thummler’s books are about being an outsider, being a weirdo who gets bullied, but still managing to find the necessary, important people. The books are emotionally moving and meaningful whether you’re a young adult or a middle-aged editor. In the characters of Marjorie and Eliza, you see characters living with PTSD and being on the autism spectrum as well as dealing with depression and thoughts of suicide. When asked, Thummler immediately said that “mental health is the number one reason I write, honestly. I make that at the forefront of all of my stories.”

She detailed that “when I went to write *Delicates*, I think maybe a month or two before that, I found an article online about a very young child, maybe eight years old, who had died by suicide. And I was thinking that this is not just something that older teens or adults deal with. This is definitely happening with young people and it’s not okay,” Thummler reasoned. “And it’s going to be difficult to talk about, but I feel like it has to be talked about and so that was sort of the driving force behind writing *Delicates*,” she said. “I myself have struggled in the past with a lot of mental health issues, so it’s something that I can speak to and I feel is necessary to speak to. So probably for most of the books that I write from here on out, there will be some element of mental health struggle in them because I find it’s really important.”

Not only is she doing great work, but it’s *meaningful*. “The thing that’s been the most incredible part of this whole experience is that I get messages from kids reaching out to me saying that I’ve saved their lives, which is unbelievable,” she shared.

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by texting “988” now or go to 988lifeline.org.

Brenna Thummler can be found at brennathummler.com

Nick Warren is a lifelong alternative comics fan and has gone to the Small Press Expo (SPX) alone three times. He can be reached at nick@eriereader.com

2023 Summer Events Preview

Mark your calendars for live music, cultural events in a packed summer schedule

By: Erin Phillips

Summertime in Erie is the absolute best, and part of what makes our summers so special is their fleeting nature. When we finally make it through our (usually) brutal winters, the warmth of summer has us all striving to make the most of it. The community shows up in droves to enjoy a packed schedule of live music, cultural events, and festivals. There's not a summer day in Erie without something to do.

Is camping out at a days-long music festival your thing? More into a BYOB, lawn chair vibe? Either way, we've got you covered. And it's not just live music that makes the Erie summers special: we've got art events, food and drink festivals, long-standing heritage fests, physical activities to get you out exploring, and history and educational series to expand your mind.

Whether you plan to pick a few activities from the following list, or pack in as many as possible, we hope that you can fully appreciate the beauty of Erie during these short-lived, glimmering, sun-soaked months.

(All events listed chronologically within each category)

Local and Local-ish Live Music Events

Edinboro Art and Music Festival

May 19 - 21 // Various locations in downtown Edinboro // edinboroartandmusic.com

Kicking off a summer filled with music is the Edinboro Art and Music Festival. With an ever-growing lineup, featured headliners are Donna the Buffalo joined by local favorites Tiger Maple String Band. As of this writing, 22 bands are slated to perform (including national and local favorites alike). For the art portion of the festival, be sure to stop by Goodell Gardens (221 Waterford St.) for a student art show and various art and craft vendors.

Monday Music in the Woods

Mondays, Jun. 5 - Jul. 31 at 6 p.m. // Celebration Garden, 4105 Asbury Rd. // asburywoods.com

Grab your lawn chair, bring a cooler, and enjoy the beautiful setting of the Celebration Garden at Asbury Woods (adjacent to the Andrew J. Conner Nature Center) while listening to local acts performing folk, bluegrass, classic rock, and other favorites. Guests can enjoy the music and explore the nature center, the animal exhibits, and browse the gift shop.

Goodell Gardens and Homestead Summer Music Series

Beginning Friday, Jun. 9 at 7 p.m. // 221 Waterford St., Edinboro // goodellgardens.org

Head out to Edinboro on Friday evenings throughout the summer to enjoy the lush botanical gardens, historic homestead, and barns of Goodell Gardens, along with a fully local live music lineup and local food vendors. Spread out your blanket and enjoy the glimmers of fireflies and the fragrant summer air, accompanied by the sound of beautiful music.

GARRETT SKINDELL, JESSICA HUNTER, ERIN PHILLIPS, AND RAN HOOVER



Live music events abound in Erie throughout the summer. Check out one or all of these [clockwise from top left]: The 38th Annual Gathering at Chaffee's, 8 Great Tuesdays at Liberty Park, Goodell Gardens and Homestead's summer music series, WQLN's Sounds Around Town (either live or on your television), and Celebrate Erie, of course.

Music in the Park 2023

Wednesdays, Jun. 14 - Aug. 23rd at 7 p.m. // Lake Erie Community Park, 10192 W. Lake Rd., Lake City

Enjoy the miles of trails winding through this 125-acre jewel of a community park while the sounds of local music fill the air every Wednesday evening.

Gazebo Concerts in the Park

Jun. 15, Jul. 20, and Aug. 17 at 7 p.m. // Beute Park, Lawrence Park // lawrenceparktwp.org

Every third Thursday this summer, Lawrence Park Township brings live music to their gazebo and its connected park on Iroquois Avenue. Bring a lawn chair to enjoy small-scale local music all summer long.

UPMC Sunset Music Series

Wednesdays, Jun. 21 - Jul. 26, from 5:30-8:30 p.m. // Beach 11, Presque Isle State Park // discoverpi.com

You likely already know that Erie boasts the second-best sunsets in the world, and UPMC along with



Discover Presque Isle and the Presque Isle Partnership gives us all a great reason to get out and appreciate them. With live music, food trucks, hula hooping, and ice cream, it's summertime in Erie defined.

12th Annual Riverside Music Festival

June 22-25 // 1 Fountain St., Cambridge Springs // riversidebrewing.co

In a tribute to the festival that took place for years at the historic Riverside Inn (which tragically burned down in 2017), this is a multi-day, jam-packed schedule of live music on the former site of the Cambridge Springs icon. Featuring three different stages, each with their own lineup, it brings true festival vibes. This is a family friendly event and will include a family "zone" with crafts and bounce houses.

Chautauqua Institute Summer Music Series

Beginning Jun. 24 // 1 Ames Ave., Chautauqua, NY // chq.org
The historic Western New York institute is dedicated



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Summer fun means getting outdoors as much as possible and Erie offers plenty of opportunities to do so – challenging your mind, body, and appetite. Some events from years past [clockwise from top left]: HistERIE Week Historic Architecture Bike Ride hosted by the Erie County Public Library, weekly West Bayfit events presented by Our West Bayfront, UPMC’s Sunset Music Series on Presque Isle, the Panegyri Greek Festival, and the Erie Bird Observatory’s bird banding station at Fry’s Landing.

to bringing the best creative and cultural events to our region all year long. Their Summer Music Series brings some serious musical heavyweights our way including Bonnie Raitt, Natalie Merchant, The Revivalists with Band of Horses, Patti LaBelle, and many more.

30th Annual Great Blue Heron

Jun. 30 - Jul. 2 // 2361 Wait Corners Rd., Sherman, NY // great-blueheron.com

A short drive east, The Great Blue Heron is a full-on experience. This year’s lineup features Donna the Buffalo, Keller and the Keels, Peter Rowan, Kaleta and Super Yamba Band, Kevin Kinsella OG JBB, and Couch along with 27 other acts (and counting). With on-site camping and the chilliest vibes, you’ll want to jam all weekend long.

WQLN Sounds Around Town

Fridays in July at 7:30 p.m. // WQLN Studios, 8425 Peach St. // wqln.org

Each year, music lovers of all ages enjoy Sounds Around Town’s free concerts in the idyllic wooded set-

ting adjacent to WQLN’s studios. This is a free, family-friendly event which features a different local music group every week. Each session is recorded and will be featured in subsequent WQLN television programming.

8 Great Tuesdays

Tuesdays, Jul. 11 - Aug. 29, 6:30 p.m. // 726 W. Bayfront Pkwy. // porterie.org/8greattuesdays

Enjoy some *great* live music, featuring national headliners and local openers, in one of the most picturesque spots in Erie at Liberty Park Amphitheater. Set up your blanket on the hill overlooking the bay, with sailboats gliding along the shimmering water, and the sun setting behind the performers. No wonder it’s one of the most popular Erie events each year.

The Gathering at Chaffee’s

July 21-22 // 8296 Mill St., Girard // thegatheringatchaffees.com

If you’re looking for a true festival experience, get hip with the crowd that’s been attending the Gathering religiously since its inception 38 years ago. With on-site camping and non-stop outdoor music: prepare to get

dirty, sweaty, and absolutely blissed-out on some great music — with local and national acts in turn.

31st Annual Blues and Jazz Festival

Aug. 4 - 6 // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St., Erie // eriebluesand-jazz.com

It just isn’t summer without the Erie Art Museum’s yearly Blues and Jazz Festival, which takes over Frontier Park at the height of summer and features outstanding national acts within the Blues or Jazz genres, with local acts interspersed. Set up your tent and get ready to dance.

Celebrate Erie

Aug. 18 - 20 // Downtown Erie, PA // celebrateerie.com

If you’ve lived in Erie for a while, you may recall a time when this festival was dubbed “We Love Erie Days.” And while the name has changed, the sentiment surely hasn’t. We do love Erie and Celebrate Erie is our yearly excuse to show it — with live local music and at least one major national act (TBD) each year, family-friendly arts and crafts stations set up on a closed-off State Street, and PLENTY of local food and drink. Erie sure does give us a lot to celebrate.

Our West Bayfront Porchfest

Saturday, Sept. 30 // Various locations in the West Bayfront // ourwestbayfront.org/events

Closing out the summer is the 4th Annual Our West Bayfront Porchfest. Multiple homes throughout the West Bayfront neighborhood (which includes everything west of Sassafra Street and north of 12th Street up to the Bayfront Connector) turn their porches into stages. Local bands are scheduled to play on various porches throughout the day, with transportation to and from each residence provided by Our West Bayfront and the EMTA Trolley. Enjoy a fun day of music while enjoying the historic homes of the West Bayfront.

Food and Drink

Botanical Beverages at Goodell Gardens and Homestead

Saturday, Jul. 22 // Goodell Gardens and Homestead, 221 Waterford St., Edinboro // goodellgardens.org

Featuring locally distilled spirits from Cart/Horse Distillery, locally made hors d’oeuvres from Cali’s West, and local music entertainment, you’ll sip creative cocktails featuring the flavors of trees, blooms, and herbs local to the homestead, all while supporting the work of Goodell Gardens.

Beer on the Bay

Saturday, Jul. 22 from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. // Liberty Park Amphitheater, 726 W. Bayfront Pkwy. // eriebrewingcompany.com

This annual event celebrates all the fermented hops, malts, and yeasts you can handle. Dozens of local and regional micro-brew specialists line up around Liberty Park for plenty of beer tasting. Maybe you’ll discover your new favorite.

Erie’s Wild Rib Cook Off and Music Festival

Sept. 7 - 10 // Perry Square, 601 State St. // erieribfest.com

Otherwise known simply as Ribfest, during this long

weekend in September, Perry Square is transformed into one giant BBQ restaurant. Featuring local smokers, award-winning traveling national professionals, and mainstage musical acts all weekend — you'll be licking your fingers and tapping your toes.

North East Wine Fest

Sept. 22 - 24 // Gibson Park, 44 W. Main St., North East // nechamber.org

Enjoy the fruits of North East and beyond as you taste your way through the vintages of dozens of local and regional winemakers all gathered in Gibson Park for this annual early fall weekend. With local music, food vendors, and artisans, you can plan to stay all day.

Arts and Drafts at the Brewerie

September 2023 (exact dates tbd) // 123 W. 14th St. // facebook.com/artsanddraftsfestival

Established in 2008, this annual public art festival is an iconic event in the Erie area, as it features the work of over 70 local artists and includes a full lineup of local bands. Each year boasts a featured artist, whose lifetime of work in the Erie area is celebrated. Enjoy unique local art, music, and beer.

Expand Your Mind and Challenge Your Body

If you'd like to avoid summer brain drain while also working on your summer bod, check out the following educational and physical events happening throughout Erie this summer. Learn about local history, native species, and appreciate local art — or challenge your body with a grueling triathlon or the award-winning Barber Beast on the Bay.

Erie Bird Observatory Banding Station

Opens Apr. 21 (check back for rotating programs) 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. // Fry's Landing, Presque Isle State Park, 301 Peninsula Dr. // eriebirdobservatory.org

Learn more about our native bird species on Presque Isle with a visit to the Erie Bird Observatory's banding station at Fry's Landing. On Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays during specific periods throughout the summer and fall, observe the capturing, data-collection, and banding of wild birds in order to monitor their migration and ultimately aid in their conservation.

7th Annual Erie Ale Works 0.01K

Friday, May 12 // 6 p.m. // eriealeworks.com

Spoiler alert, 0.01K is about 38 feet. This annual spoof on a 5K fundraiser is geared toward the more sedentary among us. With proceeds benefiting the Erie Humane Society, and plenty of brews and local food truck fare available after teams complete the grueling track — the local beer gurus at Erie Ale Works encourage teams to be as silly as possible.

Erie County Public Library's HistERIE Week

Jun. 5 - 10 // Various locations around Erie // eriecounty-pa.libguides.com/histerie

The second annual HistERIE week hosted by the Erie County Public Library brings a full week of local history-related events. Learn more about where we live through guided walks, presentations and talks, historic tours, research tutorials, film screenings, and more.



It just wouldn't be summer in Erie without the annual Blues and Jazz Festival presented by the Erie Art Museum. For three days, Frontier Park is taken over by a packed schedule of performers, camping concert goers, food trucks, kids activities, art vendors, and more.

CruiseTown Erie Car Show

Jun. 9 and Aug. 11 // State Street, Downtown Erie // carmacruise-finder.com

Enjoy downtown Erie restaurants and bars while looking at classic and hot rod cars. Cars of all ages, makes, models, and customizations will be parked along State Street. Learn more about the history of the automotive industry through this family friendly event.

Presque Isle Poker Paddle

Saturday, Jun. 10, 9 a.m. // Presque Isle State Park Lagoons Boat Launch, 301 Peninsula Dr. // tickets.eriereader.com

Paddlers of all kinds are welcome for this fun fundraiser on Presque Isle. Take your kayak, canoe, or paddle board to five different marine stops around Presque Isle and pick up a card to add to your hand. The team with the best poker hand at the end of the course wins cash and prizes!

West Bayfit

Wednesdays, Jun. 14-Jul. 26 // Bayview Park, W. 2nd and Cherry St. // ourwestbayfront.org

If you've never been to the hidden gem of Bayview Park, local neighborhood organization Our West Bayfront's weekly summer event West Bayfit gives you the perfect excuse to check it out. These events combine fun, fitness, and family hosting a variety of activities, crafts, sports, local community organizations, farmers markets, and more.

Erie Art Museum Gallery Night

Jun. 23, Sept. 15, and Dec. 15 // Various locations // erieart-museum.org/gallery-night

Think of Gallery Night as a pub crawl but with art galleries instead of bars. Hosted at various creative venues across the county including (host) Erie Art Museum, City Gallery, Ember + Forge, Kada Gallery, Grounded Print Shop, and more — stop in to multiple locations to learn something new and see a variety of local talent on display.

Erie Pridefest

Jun. 24 // Begins at The Zone, 133 W. 18th St. // nwpapride.org

This yearly celebration and parade aims to enhance visibility of Erie's LGBTQIA+ community. This family-friendly event put on by NWPA Pride Alliance invites all to join in the colorful and celebratory march beginning at the Zone and culminating at Perry Square where features include a drag show and an ever-growing, eclectic vendor market.

Discover Presque Isle

Jul. 24 - 30 // Presque Isle State Park // discoverpi.com/events/dpi

Raise money for our defining state park while learning a new skill (like archery, fishing, kayaking, etc), taking a guided hike, touring the lighthouse, or supporting local artisans. There will be bonfires on the beach, plenty of live music, local food vendors, and more. Even if you've lived here forever, there's always something new to discover at Presque Isle.

Lake Erie Cyclefest

Jul. 28 - 31 // Various locations // eriesportscommission.com/lakeeriecyclefest

An all-cycling weekend for all cycling lovers, the Erie Sports Commission brings cycling events for all fitness levels to every corner of Erie County. With beginner-friendly routes like the Downtown Slow Roll or the Presque Isle Sunrise Ride, there are also more intense routes that allow you to see the beauty of Erie County as you could never experience it from a car.

21st Annual Presque Isle Triathlon

Aug. 5 // Presque Isle State Park // discoverpi.com/events/presque-isle-triathlon

An intense athletic competition set on the most beautiful track, the Presque Isle Triathlon will test your mettle while pleasing your eyes. Athletes will begin with a 0.35-mile open-water swim course in Lake Erie off Beach 10, loop counter-clockwise around the entirety of Presque Isle for the cycling portion, then close things out with a 5K leading back to Beach 10. Whew.

COMICON Erie

Sept. 8 - 10 // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // eriepromotions.com/comicon-erie

Get ready to geek out at the annual ComiCon Erie, presented by Erie Promotions. As in years past, there will be nationally recognized comic book authors and illustrators present to meet and greet visitors and sign comic books. Along with local artists and organizations, there will be cosplay contests, LEGO building competitions, Q & As, photo ops and more.

10th Annual Barber Beast on the Bay

Sept. 9 // Presque Isle State Park, 301 Peninsula Dr. // barberbeast.org

Winner of 2022's Best of Erie award for Best Athletic Competition, the Barber Beast on the Bay is an American Ninja Warrior-esque obstacle and physical endurance course set across 10 miles of Presque Isle. The challenging route takes participants grunting over sand, water, and trails to the ultimate benefit of the Barber National Institute. Adapted courses are available.

Heritage Festivals

When our city's neighborhoods were first established, residents who immigrated to Erie from elsewhere in the world tended to settle into certain parts of the city where they could be near one another. This helped them acclimate to America while providing them with a sense of home and belonging. To celebrate heritage in Erie is to honor these cultures and neighborhoods,

and we certainly have no shortage of heritage festivals to prove it. Here is a listing of all of the scheduled heritage events happening in Erie this summer. Stop by for cultural food, customs, art, and music and celebrate the international diversity of Erie.

Troika Festival 2023

May 26 - 28 // Church of the Nativity Community Center, 109 German St. // churchofthenativity.net/troika

North East Firemen's Cherry Festival

Jul. 5 - 8 // 40 N. Lake St., North East, PA // facebook.com/necherryfestival

Panegyri Greek Festival

Jul. 7 - 8 // Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, 4376 W. Lake Rd. // erieorthodox.org

Waterford Heritage Days - 50th Anniversary

Jul. 21 - 23 // Parks in downtown Waterford // waterforddays.com

The AmeriMasala

Jul. 22 // Perry Square

Dan Rice Days

Aug. 2 - 6 // 34 Main St. W., Girard, PA // danricedays.com/schedule

St. Paul's Annual Italian Festival

Aug. 11 - 13 // 1617 Walnut St. // erieitalianfest.com

German Heritage Festival

Sept. 2 - Sept. 3 // St. Nick's Grove, 5131 Old French Rd. // dank-erie.org

Erie Irish Festival

Sept. 15-17 // St. Patrick's Church, 130 E. 4th St. // erieirishfestival.com

County Fairs

If funnel cakes, thrill rides, games of skill, livestock, craft and farm competitions, Americana, and live music are your thing, you might want to check out one of these annual county fairs around the region. Dating back over 100 years in some cases, they're a celebration of the agricultural history of our area.

Cochranon Community Fair - 95th Annual

Aug. 7 - 12 // cochranonfair.org

Warren County Fair - 92nd Annual

Aug. 8 - 12 // warrencountyfair.net

Crawford County Fair - 76th Annual

Aug. 20 - 26 // crawfordcountyfairpa.com

Erie County Fair - 138th Annual

Aug. 28 - Sept. 2 // wattsburgfair.com

Spartansburg Community Fair - 101st Annual

Sept. 4 - 9 // spartansburgcommunityfair.com

Waterford Community Fair - 86th Annual

Sept. 4 // waterfordfair.org

Albion Area Fair - 78th Annual

Sept. 12 - 16 // albionfair.com

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Gem City Style: May 2023 Summer Preview

A Q&A with musician Tommy Link: six-stringer and song singer

By: Jessica Hunter

Jessica Hunter (JH): Tell us a little about Tommy Link as an indie folk singer-songwriter. What first got you into music? Did something or someone inspire you to make music? What three words describe you and your music best?

Tommy Link (TL): It can be tricky to label oneself. I spent years trying to emulate songwriters from before my time that I idolized, and more recently, I've been making the effort to find my own voice and style in songwriting as opposed to just wanting to sound like my heroes. "Indie folk singer-songwriter" seemed to capture the notion.

I can remember my parents playing cassette tapes on car rides at a very young age. They had a good collection of tapes and vinyl, and we listened to a lot of Froggy 94.7.

Creating music — even playing music — sort of snuck into my life. I always loved singing, but I was very introverted. My very generous mother bought me a guitar and lessons after I took an intro guitar class in high school, and becoming a performer very cautiously developed from there (thinking: well, I've learned these songs, so I guess I should play them in front of people). After performing for long enough, writing songs felt like the natural next step.

Three words to describe my music: Older, getting younger.

JH: I am interested in what your creative process is like. Can you share how you begin your songwriting process?

TL: I tend to start with words before music. The songwriters I've always been drawn to are those who tell stories or are really good at capturing very particular emotions into words. The songs I've been happiest with in the past tend to start with a single line that sets the tone for the whole song. From there, I might figure out how it should be sung before I write more, or sometimes I'll figure out all the words before starting the music. But either way, the good songs tend to grow from one solid line.

JH: I love your collaborations with local artists. I especially loved your video and cover of Jim Croce's "Operator" with Brooke Surgener. If you had a choice to collaborate with any artist in the present or past, who would that artist be?

TL: Thank you! Brooke's work is incredible. She's produced a few videos for me, and with both of us being big Jim Croce fans, we talked about working on a cover together for a long time before it finally happened.

That is such a hard question! I would have to go with someone from the present, as if I picked someone from the past I think I would be too awestruck to get any work done with them. I'll say Regina Spektor, as she has been releasing albums I have been consistently in love with for the past 15 years.

JH: Can you tell us about your latest songs? What are your upcoming shows for the summer?

TL: Back in March I released my latest single "So

© JESSICA HUNTER PHOTOS



Indie folk singer-songwriter Tommy Link has just released his latest original song called "So Many Mornings." You can listen to it on all streaming platforms and catch him performing this song at the Edinboro Arts and Music Festival the third week of May.

Many Mornings." I've been self-producing songs the past few years, but time got away from me in the second half of 2022, so this is my first original release in almost a year! It's about not having the words in confrontational moments, and dwelling on falling-outs, wondering why things play out the way they do. Beyond that, I have been back to writing more frequently, and have been very happy with the results. I plan to have more releases later this year (singles and hopefully either an EP or LP).

Lots of gigs for the summer months! Some of my favorite regular spots in the area (Room 33, Lavery Brewing, Edinboro Hotel Bar, Sunset Grill, etc.), Erie Art Museum, and a whole bunch of other bars, breweries and wineries in the tri-state area. I'm also on for a few festivals, like the Edinboro Arts and Music Festival at the end of May, and the Titusville Music Festival at the end of June. My upcoming gigs are listed at my website (tommylinkinc.com), and I post them on Instagram regularly as well.

JH: You also are a contributing cartoon artist for the Erie Reader as we know and love *Tommy in Toon*. Is there anything about being a working musician that you wouldn't want to put in *Tommy in Toon*?

TL: *Tommy in Toon* is a lot of fun because I get to create a version of myself that gives in to all these

petty behaviors I would never condone in real life! It's definitely an outlet for some exasperations that come with the gig lifestyle. I don't think there's anything I wouldn't want to share, but I always want to make sure the tone is coming across right. I'm very happy as a working musician (however grumpy my cartoon self might be), but it is work! And like any work, you'll have days when it feels tedious or frustrating.

JH: What is your absolute favorite song to perform? Do you sing this song in the shower?

TL: Oh wow, I feel like the answer to that question changes by the hour. There's a few songs that sit in a really powerful place in my singing register, and it's still an exciting feeling when I'm in a room that's big enough that I don't have to worry about being too loud. "Make Your Own Kind of Music" by Mama Cass has always been one of my favorite covers to sing for that reason. Similarly, "Grow" from my 2021 album of the same name gives me that kind of feeling. In my opinion, I think that's the best song I've written to date.

I rarely sing in the shower. But I credit developing my singing voice to singing in the car.

Tommy Link's music and performance schedule can be found at tommylinkinc.com, on Instagram @tommylinkinc, or via email at tommylinkmusic@gmail.com

Jessica Hunter can be found at jessicahunterphotos.com



EVENTS ON SALE NOW

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Magic Beans w/ Wood Belly

May 12 @ 8pm-1am • Live at King's Rook Club

Magic Beans returns to Erie, PA at the King's Rook Club. They're bringing along Wood Belly, also from Colorado!



Toxic Prom 2023

May 13 @ 5pm-Midnight • Basement Transmissions Theater

10th anniversary of the event! A celebration of local talent and chance to dress up in our best. This year the theme is Cowboys vs. Aliens, and we want EVERYONE to dress up. Lineup includes: GRIMACE, SPADES, NAUGHTY FROG, SHIVER, GRIM GRIN, DO NOT CALL LIST, MALLORY RUN, and 'Prom Til Dawn featuring Gelatin Skeleton!!!!!!



Trivia Night w/Erie Roller Derby

May 17 @ 6pm-9pm • The Brewerie at Union Station

Gather your smartest group of friends and brush up on your pop culture, music, history, and roller derby knowledge for a night of fun and a chance at fabulous prizes! Raffle baskets, 50/50s, drink specials, and general trivia questions! Doors open at 6PM and trivia starts at 7PM. All proceeds will go toward funding the 2023 season.

Open Comedy Mic Night

May 15

Outlaw Barbecue Revolution Westlake

Open Comedy Mic Night

June 5

Outlaw Barbecue Revolution Westlake

Open Comedy Mic Night

June 19

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Open Comedy Mic Night

May 29

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Erie Roller Derby vs. Ladies Death and Derby Society

June 19

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The 2023 Nicole and Harry Martin Spring Show

One Hundred Years of Looking

By: Justus Cotterill

The 100th Annual Spring Show is up and running at the Erie Art Museum. I've been meaning to take a look, and during a cold, gray April, spending time in galleries seemed like the perfect thing to do. The Spring Show is a juried exhibition and a yearly litmus test for artists within a 100-mile radius. Each year the show is judged by a new juror who has been invited by the museum along with a panel of professors from the Art Department of PennWest (which will always be Edinboro to me, despite its new title).

The national climate of visual art has seen a huge influx of work based on identity, sexuality, gender, and race. This trend, of course, seems a direct response to the insistently repressive, negative vision of a national conservative agenda that is responsible for the recent sharp rise in racism, homophobia, and book-banning. Prominent artists such as Simone Leigh, the late Keith Haring, and Dawoud Bey, paired with Carrie Mae Weems, all have major exhibitions coming this year that specifically deal with the topics of racial and sexual identity.

This year's juror Gaetane Verna has made these social issues and the subject of diversity a focus in her vision of what an art institution should engage in. Her time at the Power Plant in Toronto and at her current position at the Wexner Center at Ohio State University has allowed Verna to address these themes with shows whose artists represent many backgrounds and cultures. As a curator she strives to bring the world, with all its colors and variations, to our doorstep and introduce that complex world to her audience. Knowing her perspective on art, I was intrigued by what types of work would be chosen for the exhibit.

Artwork engaged in themes of race, sexuality, diversity, and current political issues populate the Spring Show. There are portraits that deal with queer identity, photographs that explore poverty, and found object constructions that reveal the artists' feelings about their own ethnic background and how it is viewed in contemporary society. There are also works about social issues such as pollution, job loss, and urban planning.

I noticed that, with each piece, the artist included a statement explaining where the impetus of the work originated or how it was conceived, evidently to avoid any confusion on the viewer's part. I wasn't

JUSTUS COTTERILL



Among the diverse selections for inclusion in the 100th Annual Nicole and Harry Martin Spring Show at the Erie Art Museum are the following works: [left] "model minority" by Gwen Waight, [top right] "01000111 01010011" by Gary Wolfe, and [bottom right] "Below The Light" by Angie Jennings.

sure if these statements were necessary or helpful. I don't always want to be led when viewing art, rather I tend to read artists' statements after viewing the work to see if I'm seeing what the artist sees. In this instance, the statements did not leave room for alternate visions. This show appears specifically built to increase awareness of today's social problems and give voice to artists who are trying to make positive changes in our world. What surprised me most while looking at many of these pieces was how unmoved I often felt. For all the controversy that these subjects are supposed to invoke, I saw the work as both collectively affable but tame.

There was an amazing level of craft in the work of artists Gwen Waight and Hayden Hanes, whose assemblages were delivered with both an impeccable eye for choosing the objects used and an artisan's attention to detail in their construction. Elizabeth Prindle inserted colored rolls of thread and antique photographs into her wood constructions that were made to look old, like visual memories of times past, birth to death, in the life of a wom-

an — the thread representing both time and motherhood. All three of these artists made entrancing work, but I was not left with much to ponder after being awed by the sheer aesthetics of the pieces.

I found the photographs of Fred Scruton an interesting comparison to the bricolages. Scruton has spent years meeting, photographing, and championing "outsider" or "naïve artists" — people without formal art training and not involved in mainstream art. In most cases, these artists — like the three mentioned above — also use found objects or recycled materials to create their work, usually out of financial necessity. Most of these artists make work based on life experiences or have received instructions from spiritual callings. Seeing Scruton's photos showing these artists' female dolls, painted collages of magic symbols, and brightly decorated scraps of wood made me think about these objects in comparison with Prindle's work. Here were people who used similar found objects but with no art school background, and they also made work with a message.

One of Scruton's photographs was of

Joe Minter's "Memorial Sculpture for Hilda Minter," part of his larger "African Village in America" installation, which is made up of discarded bricks, metal, stone, and objects found at flea markets or on the side of the road in his home state of Alabama. Here in this show, we had artists from different backgrounds addressing the same issues. As much as I like Scruton's images, I found myself wishing for the tangible objects he photographed to be in front of me in the gallery. They looked raw and more dangerous in comparison to the finely executed, well-crafted pieces that are on display.

As much as I understand political work to be important, especially over the last few years, I find myself often becoming numb in its presence. I'm not sure if its failure to move me stems from the increase in political work I've been seeing or because much of the imagery that represents these issues is used so frequently. This work will always be important, but part of me wants to see artwork where the work's edict is not so obvious. Sometimes you need to see an artist's intention right up front, but I still like to feel that an artwork gives me

ART REVIEW

room for contemplation; that there are depths to explore.

One of my favorite artists is Martin Puryear, who also deals with issues of history and race. What I love about his work is that its themes don't reveal themselves outright. For example, his red cedar sculpture "Big Phrygian" in the Glenstone Museum uses a slightly abstracted form of the Phrygian cap, the preferred headgear — originating in ancient Greece and Rome — for formerly enslaved people to represent liberty and the pursuit of freedom. His "Ladder for Booker T. Washington" consists of a 36-foot-long ladder that grows smaller as it ascends, representing the struggle and slow progress for racial equality. These themes connected with emancipation from slavery, however, are rendered with visual depth and historical perspective, and only through a bit of research or a prolonged contemplation does the issue's resonance become clear.

I did find this feeling of depth in the work of Angie Jennings. Her fascinating colored pencil drawings pulled me in, and I couldn't stop looking at them. I don't know what they were about and I don't care; they are so beautiful that the "about" doesn't matter. When I read the artist statement and learned the drawings were inspired by Victor Green's "Negro Motorist Green Book" and were imagined images of supernatural sites of escape, I was pleasantly surprised. Her drawings are so seductive that knowing their origins only strengthened my appreciation.

Other work that stood out to me were Sarah Jacobs' portraits. Her subjects were set on intensely decorative backgrounds that she constructed digitally, then applied in oil. If you know Kehinde Wiley's work, these paintings have a similar feel with the patterns filling the entire negative space. These portraits are well-executed, with amazing detail, and have an underlying aura of joyfulness that

makes you smile along with the subjects.

"Selections from the Industrial Valley," photographs by Samuel Huryn, are well composed documents of a dying part of our country's infrastructure. They were printed small and grouped together, and the sample made me want to see a longer series, perhaps in book form. Huryn has a good eye for composition but also brings an irony into the photographs that sets them apart from similar work I have seen.

There were other pieces I liked but was not as captivated by — which is perhaps an inevitable result of group shows. However, when a variety of artists are involved, one can see a collected group of ideas at once, which allows the viewer to connect with the work of different artists. What I may have missed, another viewer may have discovered. The downside of group shows is that one is only able to see a piece or two from each artist and not the whole vision of an artist's efforts.

This show, in its 100th year, has featured many different styles and art movements throughout its history. An exhibit of acquired pieces from previous Spring Shows is running in tandem with this one, and I encourage the visitor to see both, as a "compare and contrast" exercise. This annual show is good for our city because it introduces new art to Erie, and viewers can see what is being created visually in the region. At 100 years, the Spring Show has demonstrated not only its stamina but its importance. You only miss out if you don't take a look.

The 100th Annual Nicole and Harry Martin Spring Show runs until Aug. 11th at The Erie Art Museum, 20 E. 5th St. For hours and pricing visit: erieartmuseum.org

Justus Cotterill has an ongoing studio practice in Erie. He holds a BFA from the Cleveland Institute of Art and a MFA from Edinboro. He can be found at justuscotterill.com





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EVENTS

Staying Inn

All An Act stages *What Is Susan's Secret?*

FRIDAY, MAY 5

Imagine, if you will, you're a tradesperson — a plumber or an electrician or something of that nature. You see an ad for a rustic inn and they're offering a huge discount to people who do the type of work you do. So you arrive and you find yourself going through a confusing and rather elaborate check-in process, complete with multiple forms.

What you don't know is that you just signed yourself up to perform maintenance tasks around the inn — and the sweet, elderly couple, Michael and Susan Parker, who own the property are actually con artists.

This is the basic premise for *What Is Susan's Secret*, a farcical play that will begin its run on May 5 at All An Act Theatre in Erie's Little Italy neighborhood. Performances will occur on Fridays and Satur-

days at 7:30 p.m., with Sunday matinee showings at 3 p.m., until May 21.

Directed by Larry Lewis, the managing director of the theater, *What Is Susan's Secret* features an ensemble cast including: Lisa Simonian, David W. Mitchell, Natalie Waddell-Rutter, Michael Rutter, Andrew Heidt, Jessica LaFlamme, Michael Nasca, Greg Hill, Amanda Hill, Char Newport, Kerrylee Hinkson, Zach Mota, Dave Stazisar, and Marnie Floss.

So what is Susan's secret? The playwrights leave Susan's secret a mystery up to the last minute — and up to the audience's interpretation. But clearly all is not right between the host couple Michael and Susan, as the former believes he is taking part in major historical battles and the latter can't seem to remember her husband's name correctly.

Plan a night out to the gem of Little Italy,



What's Susan's secret? You'll just have to catch the mysterious romp *What Is Susan's Secret?* at All an Act Theatre in the heart of Little Italy to find out.

take a seat in the auditorium, and watch as the hilarity unfolds. — Cara Suppa

Weekends through May 21, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 3 p.m. // All An Act Theatre, 652 W. 17th St. // \$5-\$18 // For info and tickets: allanact.net/now-playing

The 22nd Annual Free Comic Book Day

Get in on the action at Books Galore

SATURDAY, MAY 6

Free Comic Book Day (FCBD) has been a tradition in the independent comic shop world for over 20 years and, as always, our local comic book shop Books Galore is joining in the fun. They are planning a full day of comic-related activities with vendors, costumes, and of course, a free comic book available to anyone who wants one.

Books Galore manager Cole Schenley comments, "Celebrating its 22nd anniversary, Free Comic Book Day has proven to be a smashing success, spreading the word that comics are terrific reading. Even if you have never picked up a comic book, stop into Books Galore, because you never know what you will end up finding." The idea behind FCBD, which is organized through Diamond Comics Distributors, is to draw in new readers and to get loyal comic book readers or collectors excited about reading something new.

Comic books and graphic novels are an art form that many in the comic industry feel is universally enjoyable and one that can also aid in improving childhood literacy. According to a statement from Scholastic Books, "Teachers and librarians agree that graphic novels are great for kids with learning disabilities. Children with autism can learn a lot about identifying emotions through the images in a graphic novel. Additionally,

for children with dyslexia, it might be very frustrating for them to finish a page of a traditional book, but they often feel a sense of accomplishment when they complete a page in a comic book. Accomplishment is important. It's a huge self-esteem booster and leads to kids naturally wanting to read more."

Reading comic books is also just really fun (for all ages). And Books Galore aims to highlight that fun at their store on FCBD. While everyone who attends is entitled to one free comic book (and there is always a hefty selection of titles available), there are a couple of ways to earn more than one. If you make (at least) a one dollar donation to Second Harvest Food Bank while at the store or if you come dressed in costume as your favorite superhero or comic book character, you will receive additional free comic books from the selection available.

Books Galore has partnered with local Federal Hill operated food truck Taco Distro to provide tasty snacks for all those patrons waiting in line to get their free comic, while folks in costumes and comic related displays will be available for photo ops along the way. Bringing the kids? See Taradoodles for a colorful coat of face paint (to help conceal their secret identities, of course!)

Bonus: Pre-signed copies of local graphic novelist Brenna Thummler's



Local comic and used book store Books Galore hosts their annual Free Comic Book Day event. Patrons can expect costumed characters, giveaways, and local food truck Taco Distro to keep them company in line while they wait for their free comic book.

Sheets and *Delicates* will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. In addition, up to ten attendees can claim a copy of Zachary Sterling's *Punch Up* (one of the FCBD selections), containing an autographed 10-page excerpt from Thummler's upcoming graphic novel *Lights*. — Erin Phillips

10 a.m. to 7 p.m. // Books Galore, 5546 Peach St. // All ages // Free // eriebooksgalore.com

Birdwatchers Flocking to Festival of the Birds

Presque Isle Audubon’s three-day event features David Lindo, The Urban Birder

BEGINNING FRIDAY, MAY 12

We’ve probably all taken notice of the return of birds singing their morning songs. Whether you are a welcomer or loathe the chirpy calls, it is an annual reminder that despite the chilly weather, it is indeed spring in Erie. Birds are on the move in our area — migrating and nesting during this time of the year, which makes this season the perfect opportunity for local birders to enjoy the Festival of the Birds at Presque Isle State Park. This event will welcome approximately 150 pre-registered participants to Presque Isle from May 12-14.

Presque Isle State Park has been rated by *BirdWatching Magazine* as one of the top birding spots in the country. Presque Isle’s location on the Atlantic Flyway makes it a favorite spot for birds to stop, feed, and rest on their migration across Lake Erie.

“Presque Isle is a natural stopping spot for birds migrating further north,” explained Mary Birdsong, event coordinator. “They stop before crossing the lake to rest and refuel. Some, of course, are arriving here to stay for the summer nesting season. Another reason Presque Isle is so valuable to birds — and the people who want to see them — is the huge variety the park attracts, because of the diverse habitats it provides. Forests, wetlands, beaches, and open water all attract different species of birds.”

More than 339 species of birds have been identified on the peninsula, according to Presque Isle State Park. A bird

checklist is available at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center in the Nature Shop. Some of the species recorded include warblers and other songbirds. It is also home to many owl, woodpecker, and heron species. Gull Point, a favorite birding spot, hosts migrant shorebirds and terns.

The 2023 festival features field trips to all of the birding hotspots and includes workshops for every experience level, from “Birding 101” to “Native Plants for Backyard Birds.” The keynote speaker is David Lindo, also known as The Urban Birder, who is a broadcaster, writer, speaker, educator, and bird tour leader. His mission is to engage those who live in cities around the world with their environment through the medium of birds. Every full-weekend registrant will receive a copy of his book, *How to Be an Urban Birder*. His presentation — “A World of Urban Birds” — will teach listeners about 30 birds found throughout urban environments. Lindo is also staying a day after the festival to visit two urban middle school classrooms to talk about city birds.

The event also features food, camaraderie, a welcome reception on Friday evening with music, friendly helpful people, and a small ticket auction. If this is piquing your interest, you can follow The Presque Isle Audubon Society on Facebook and/or Instagram to get involved next year. This event is expected to sell out for this season.

If you are interested in learning more



Presque Isle Audubon celebrates all of the migrating and native birds of Presque Isle in their three-day event Festival of the Birds. With field trips, classes, hikes, speeches, and workshops planned during the event, there will be plenty for local birding enthusiasts to squawk about.

about Presque Isle Audubon, you can also visit the website presqueisleaudubon.org to learn about upcoming field trips, educational programming and volunteer opportunities. You can also become a member to receive their e-newsletter. — Amy VanScoter

What to Bring when Birding in Spring

- Wear comfortable boots as the trails will most likely be wet and muddy.
- Bring any birding gear you desire.
- Dress warmly and be prepared for cold and rainy weather. 56 degrees is the

average high temp for Erie in May and temps on the peninsula are even lower.

- Deer ticks are common. Being able to tuck your pants into your socks is strongly advised.

Presque Isle Bird Migration

- Waterfowl migration occurs during March and late November through December.
- Shorebird migration peaks during April and September.
- Warbler migration is observed during mid-May and September.



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EVENTS

Erie Philharmonic Closes Season with Mozart's Requiem

Orchestra to perform poignant piece that transcends time

SATURDAY, MAY 13

The Erie Philharmonic is finishing its 2022-2023 season with a performance of Mozart's Requiem. The piece features the Erie Philharmonic Chorus and is dedicated to the people of Ukraine. Preceding the combined composition will be Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, performed by returning pianist Adam Golka.

"We conclude our season with a touching tribute to the people of the Ukraine, who have struggled now for over a year to maintain their freedom and regain the fragile peace they once knew," a Philharmonic representative describes. "There are few works as poignant as Mozart's Requiem in service to extraordinary times. Written near the end of his short life, the Requiem contains music that pleads for consolation in the face of sorrow. It is a work that is as grandiose and openly dramatic as it is touching and deeply personal."

Soprano Meghan Kassanders, mezzo-soprano Ashley Dixon, tenor Travon Walker, and bass Christopher Humbert will be featured as guest soloists performing alongside the Philharmonic Chorus under the direction of Thomas Brooks.

Requiem in D-Minor was commissioned in 1791 while Mozart worked on *The Magic Flute*. It is now known that Count Franz von Walsegg commissioned the piece for the anniversary of his first wife's passing, but the stranger who appeared on the composer's door-

step was sworn to secrecy. He worked tirelessly on the piece for much of the year and grew paranoid that the funeral march had been intended for him, as his health continued to deteriorate. Mozart died on Dec. 5, 1791 at the age of 35. Only the Introitus and Kyrie movements of Requiem had been completed, and Mozart's pupil Franz Xaver Sussmayr completed the piece on the orders of Mozart's widow Constanza.

Mozart's cause of death is unknown, but many theories have involved homicide or disease, including one in which rival composer Antonio Salieri poisoned him. This was most famously portrayed by the 1984 Oscar-winning film *Amadeus*, which starred Tom Hulse in the lead role.

Tchaikovsky started composing his first piano concerto in 1874, with the premiere taking place on Oct. 25, 1875 in Boston. German pianist Hans von Bulow performed the piece, taking over from Nikolai Rubenstein, a Russian pianist who had criticized Tchaikovsky over the style of the composition. Revisions were made for new printings of the concerto in 1888.

Adam Golka has performed with various orchestras and chamber groups around the globe, including the BBC Scottish Symphony, the Warsaw Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony, and the Shanghai Philharmonic. He made his professional debut at the China Shanghai International Piano Competition



Join the Erie Philharmonic for their final performance of the season and enjoy Mozart's Requiem as a dedication to the people of Ukraine. Beginning the evening will be a performance by pianist Adam Golka performing Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1.

in 2009 and was named the recipient of the Max I. Allen fellowship by the American Pianists Association the same year. Golka studied under Jose Feghali at Texas Christian University and Leon Fleisher at the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University. — Thomas Taylor

8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$12-\$56
// For tickets and info: eriephil.org





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The Tenth Anniversary of Toxic Prom

Freaks and geeks at Basement Transmissions

SATURDAY, MAY 13

As the school year comes to an end and summer is just around the corner, we find ourselves in prom season. One prom sets out to be a safe space for those who aren't into the traditional trappings of tuxedos and tiaras with a basic DJ playing today's top hits. Toxic Prom at Basement Transmissions is an event celebrating its 10th year with local music, costumes, and artistic decor. Each year's Toxic Prom has a theme, encouraging their guests to participate in the tradition. This year's theme is cowboys and aliens, so trade those bow ties for cowboy hats and the corsage for a lightsaber.

Toxic Prom is an all ages event that welcomes anyone who wants to celebrate local talent and have a good time, and even though there is a theme of Cowboys and Aliens, one is welcome to wear whatever clothes feel best. Expect live performances from local favorites Grimace, Spades, Naughty Frog, Shiver, Grim Grin, Do Not Call List, and Mallory Run. Basement Transmissions proprietor Bob Jensen says that he is excited to have Mallory Run back at Toxic Prom, since they were one of the bands that performed at the first Toxic Prom back in 2013. Along with all the local talent there will also be a photo booth, Toxic Treats (baked goods that are appropriately themed), and t-shirts available. Jensen says that the event is so popular that people start asking him about it six months

ELLE BROOKS



If you've always wanted an alternative to the basic, run-of-the-mill prom night, you might find your vibe at the 10th annual Toxic Prom hosted at Basement Transmissions, featuring a stacked lineup of local music.

before he even starts planning it.

The Toxic Prom is on Saturday, May 13 at Basement Transmissions. Tickets are \$12 in advance and \$15 at the door. The doors open at 5 p.m., with the event wrapping up at midnight. However, for adults who like to party a little later, there is a Prom Till Dawn party that is scheduled to "go until it goes" featuring the music of Gelatin Skeleton. So saddle up for a night that is sure to be out of this world. — Larry Wheaton

5 p.m. to midnight // Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. // \$12-\$15 // For tickets and info: tickets.erieareader.com

ENJOY NORTH EAST

June 9-10

COMMUNITY YARD SALE Shop sales at approximately 100 homes throughout the Borough and Township.

June 10-11

GIBSON DAYS In Gibson Park featuring live music, vendors, food and more.

Thursdays, June 15 - Aug. 17

PICNIC IN THE PARK 11:30 am - 1 pm (excluding July 6) in Gibson Park. Free entertainment and crafts for kids including:

- 6/15 - Juggler Howard
- 6/22 - Magic Man Industries
- 6/29 - Elvis impersonator
- 7/13 - Bubble Gum Machine
- 7/20 - Once Upon a Party
- 7/27 - Kenetic Creativity Hula Hoops
- 8/3 - Magician Bruce
- 8/10 - Krazy Kitchen Kemistry
- 8/17 - Jungle Terry

June 17

PETS IN THE PARK PET PARADE In Gibson Park - Disney theme. Parade at noon, pre-registration at 11 a.m. \$10 pre-register/\$15 day of. Proceeds benefit Erie Animal Network. Open Market featuring pet items & more. 10-2.

Saturdays, June 17-Sept. 2

OPEN MARKET 10-2 (excluding July 8) in Gibson Park. Homemade and homegrown goods, food, and live music, plus weekly themes:

- 6/17 - Pet Parade
- 6/24 - Gardening
- 7/1 - Yard Games
- 7/8 - No market. Cherry Fest Parade @ 2 pm
- 7/15 - Book Swap
- 7/22 - Cruise-In
- 7/29 - Flea Market/Antique Shop Hop
- 8/5 - Kids Brain & Brawn Contests
- 8/12 - Farm Heritage Days/STEM fair
- 8/19 - North East food, history & art tours
- 8/26 - Live butterfly release
- 9/2 - Salute to veterans

June 28, July 12 and Aug. 2

ERIE PHILHARMONIC FREE OUTDOOR CONCERTS At 7 pm in Gibson Park

July 4

ENJOY THE FOURTH 4 pm to dusk in Gravel Pit Park. Featuring family fun, music by Abbey Road, food trucks and fireworks at dusk.

July 5-8

FIREMEN'S CHERRY FESTIVAL In Heard Park. Carnival rides, games, food, 5K and parade to benefit Crescent and Fuller Hose Companies.

Aug. 12-13

FARM HERITAGE DAYS Noon to 7 pm in Gibson and Heard Parks. Celebrate North East's agricultural heritage and farmers. Featuring live music and daily performances by the Axe Women Loggers of Maine, a hands-on STEM fair for kids Saturday, tractor and farm equipment show on Sunday, along with specialty vendors, chainsaw artists and more.

For more information, visit

www.nechamber.org

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EVENTS

So You Think You’re Smarter Than A Derby Roller?

Erie Roller Derby invites you to a Trivia Night to raise funds for 2023 season
WEDNESDAY, MAY 17

The thrill of a roller derby bout has been an American tradition dating back further than one may think. Roller derby as we know it today began in 1937 by a walk-a-thon promoter who needed something a little more exciting to draw in Depression-era crowds.

Here’s a basic rundown of what today’s roller derby looks like: there are five players from each team—one jammer (whose job is to lap the other team resulting in points) and four blockers (whose job is to try to stop the other team’s jammer from passing and to clear a path for their own). Each round is known as a jam, and at the beginning of each jam, the two jammers race out to be the first to get away from the pack. Whoever prevails becomes the lead jammer. In the two minute time jam, the teams earn points every time their jammer laps a member of the opposing team.

Roller derby has phased in and out of the mainstream for decades, but in 2001 in Austin, Texas, the traditionally structured sport came back with a blend of

feminism in the form of the Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (W.F.T.D.A.). This governing body happens to be the association of which our own Erie Roller Derby (ERD) is currently a part.

If you’ve never been to an ERD bout, you are missing out. The group is a beacon of inclusivity.

Oriana Mattis, a blocker/jammer and team captain, who also holds a seat on the board of directors, speaks on her favorite things about the team and league, “I just love the built-in family and instant support you receive. People from all walks of life come in and are accepted, and they all have the same goal... to hit each other! Respectfully.” She also notes that the league is a completely volunteer run organization. “We’ve been around since 2010, and have been self funded since then.”

So, what to do when faced with a self-funding obstacle? You raise funds! And this month you can enjoy a night out and some competitive trivia at “Trivia Night With Erie Roller Derby,” all while raising funds for Erie’s only derby team and testing your wits against them. Triv-



Join the Erie Roller Derby for a fun night of trivia and fundraising at the Brewerrie at Union Station. The money raised from the event will help support the all-volunteer, self-funded organization that aims to bring inclusivity and fun with their regular bouts at the Bayfront Convention Center.

ia night will be held at The Brewerrie At Union Station, and there will be first, second, and third place prizes awarded. Along with the prizes, attendees will have other chances to win with 50/50s, raffle baskets, and delicious drink specials. This trivia tradition is the fifth annual (not counting the pandemic era), so guests can expect a fun time. Will you accept the challenge to prove that you are smarter than a derby roller? — Jordan Coon

7 p.m. // The Brewerrie At Union Station, 123 W. 14th St. // \$40 per team with four people to a team // Tickets available at: tickets.eriereader.com

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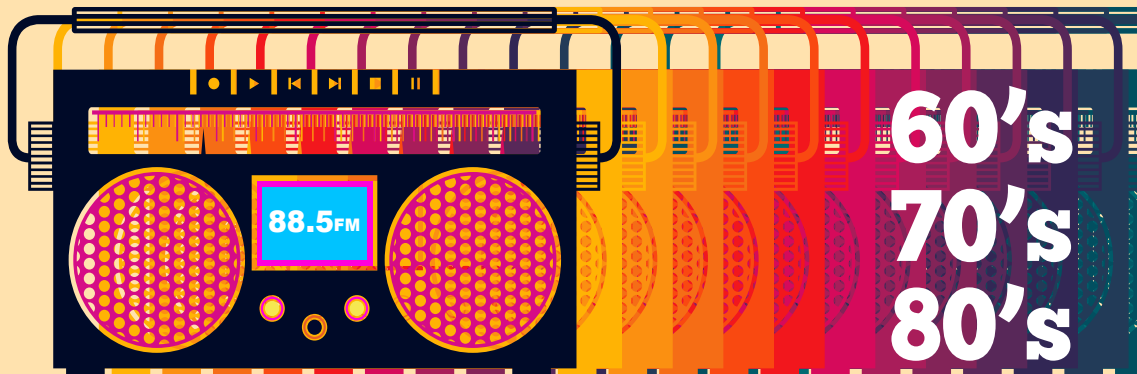


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EVENTS

Party for the Planet at the Erie Zoo

All-in-one extravaganza honors the Earth

SATURDAY, MAY 20

Join the Erie Zoo this month to celebrate Earth and all those who inhabit it with their annual event, Party for the Planet. Started by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Party for the Planet is a nationally celebrated event that brings together three internationally celebrated days: Earth Day, World Oceans Day, and Endangered Species Day.

The focus of Party for the Planet is to celebrate not only the planet that we inhabit, but also all the species that we share the space with, learning how to better provide for both these species and the Earth.

The Erie Zoo will be celebrating on zoo grounds alongside other conservation and green-minded organizations from around the Erie area including: Asbury Woods, Presque Isle State Park, newBin, TREX Recycling, Lake Erie Arboretum (LEAF), and the Purple Martin Conservation Association. Each organization is ready to party alongside event-goers and will have stations located throughout the grounds to educate visitors about their green-minded and conservational efforts within the Erie community and beyond.

The zoo will have their own stations as well, with employees and volunteers offering interactive opportunities for guests to learn about endangered species, composting, the importance of recycling, and the horticultural team's role at the Erie Zoo. There will also be an opportunity for visitors to purchase their very own zoo-grown tomato or pepper plants to start their own gardens at home.



Help raise awareness about endangered species, raise funding for the conservation work of the Erie Zoo, and explore the newly constructed butterfly garden all at the upcoming Party for the Planet event.

Debuting at the event will be the zoo's newest interactive exhibit, the Amazing Butterfly Experience. Visitors will be able to enter a tent full of plants and different species of butterflies, including painted ladies, monarchs, red admirals, and black swallowtails. For a small fee, guests will also be able to purchase special food to feed the butterflies.

Donations to conservation efforts can be made on the day of the party by participating in the Party for the Planet raffle or by purchasing an Erie Zoo button in the orangutan building. — Ally Kutz

10 a.m. to 2 p.m. // Event included in price of admission or with Erie Zoo Membership // Rain or shine // For more information: eriezoo.org

"Shakespeare in the Garden" Brings Classic Comedy to Unique Venue

Goodell Gardens & Homestead presents *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

FRIDAY, JUN. 2

The partnership between Goodell Gardens & Homestead and Meadville Community Theatre enters its third year with their most ambitious project yet. William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be set in the beautiful botanical gardens at Goodell for three performances.

This is a passion project for Goodell Gardens & Homestead Executive Director Amber Wellington, who fell in love with the Bard's work when she played a fairy in the very same play in high school. She was so inspired by the experience, she went on to study English literature at Edinboro University. In 2020, Goodell Gardens implemented a new artistic vision, which included partnering with other local non-profit organizations. Meadville Community Theatre (MCT) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were on Wellington's mind when Sylvia Cagle, Marketing Chair at MCT, reached out to see if there was a possibility of performing at Goodell Gardens.

Cagle, who is the director of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was looking for a way to hold performances in the 2021 world, when the only safe option was to be outside. We have come a long way since then, but the outdoors has proven to be a delightful venue. Shakespeare's playful comedy, set during an evening in the woods, is perfectly suited to the magical gardens.

Amber Wellington said, "When Sylvia reached out to us in 2021 looking for an outdoor space for a play, my mind began



How could the lush gardens at Goodell be any more magical? Add in the timeless Shakespearian comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* performed outdoors within the botanical gardens by the players of the Meadville Community Theater under twinkling lights.

to run wild with possibilities. It's long been my dream to bring *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alive in the Gardens, and I am so honored to see that dream come true. We sincerely hope folks turn out for this massive undertaking, as proceeds will be split between Meadville Community Theatre and Goodell Gardens, two nonprofit organizations doing great work in Northwestern Pennsylvania."

Be prepared for more than just a play. Come early to stroll the Gardens and enjoy a glass of wine, then settle in for a night of merriment and mirth. Goodell Gardens and MCT have pulled out all the stops to make *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a special event. — Michael Hull

Friday, Jun. 2 at 6 p.m., Saturday, Jun. 3 at 6 p.m. and Sunday, Jun. 4 at 2 p.m. // Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford St., Edinboro // \$20-\$30 // Tickets and information: goodellgardens.org/theatre



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October 7-20

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DEATH VALLEY

October 24-November 7

Travel to Denver, CO for a two-night stay at the Brown Palace & guided sightseeing in Rocky Mountain National Park, Utah for a two-night stay at the Capitol Reef Resort inside one of the Mighty Five Parks. Then...Vegas Baby! An overnight near the Las Vegas Strip at an all-suite resort, time to take in a show and see some of the excitement of the Las Vegas Strip. Two nights at Death Valley Ranch inside the park where a desert oasis awaits. Wild Horse Canyon in Wyoming as we return East. Stops along the way each night in Nebraska, Wyoming, Iowa and Indiana.

PODCASTS

Podcast Picks: Old Gods of Appalachia

“From ghoulies and ghosties, long-leggedy beasties, and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord deliver us.”

Diving into cracked, dusty diaries of pioneers in Northwestern Pennsylvania, growing herbs used in folk medicine called “Granny Magic,” listening to old mystery and horror radio show archives, and hiking cathedrals of trees and decaying cemeteries is my gig. While braiding all of these interests into an obsession, I stumbled upon the horror-fiction podcast *Old Gods of Appalachia* (OGOA) by co-creators Steve Shell and Cam Collins. The 480-million-



Despite *Old Gods of Appalachia*’s wildly varying stories, the bones remain connected and strong. The writing and acting are earnest without being belittling, like some more recent Appalachian memoirs.

these engrossing tales. It has Celtic, Native American, African, and Germanic threads throughout, mirroring traditional folklore of the region. Most episodes flow like chapters with something special occasionally woven in as a treat.

Since 2019, over 20 artists have given voice to many characters like lost innocents in the shadows of watching woods, hard-working folks clinging desperately to their faith with calloused hands, angered ancient spirits lurking in caves, and crooked mine owners treating lost lives as numbers in a ledger. Despite its wildly varying stories, the bones remain connected and strong. The writing and acting are earnest without being belittling, like some more recent Appalachian memoirs. You can catch the OGOA cast and crew in person at the Roxian Theater in McKees Rocks on May 19 with their performance of “The Price of Progress.” — Melissa Sullivan Shimek

year-old Appalachian Mountains and their plateaus run up to Newfoundland, Canada and down to Alabama, from the Atlantic coast and west to Ohio. That’s tons of geography for material.

The stories of OGOA take place between the late 1700s and the late 1900s, set in hills, caves, forests, and hollers of an alternate Appalachia (pronounced: apple-atchya) mostly before advancements in modern medicine and science. Dark themes of the supernatural, the occult, madness, and generational trauma pulse through the veins of

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The Daughter of Doctor Moreau

Silvia Moreno-García's latest horror recalls Victorian-era classics

In 2020, we named Silvia Moreno-García's *Mexican Gothic* as one of our favorites of the year. In her latest, *The Daughter of Doctor Moreau*, Moreno-García continues to impress with her signature style and ode to classics.

Growing up on a secluded estate on the Yucatán peninsula in 19th century Mexico, Carlota is the only daughter of Doctor Moreau, a man whose research is being funded by the wealthy Lizalde family. Along with the doctor and his daughter lives Montgomery Laughton, overseer of the estate and assistant to the doctor with his scientific experiments — most notably the hybrids, creatures the Lizaldes see as viable replacements for plantation labor.

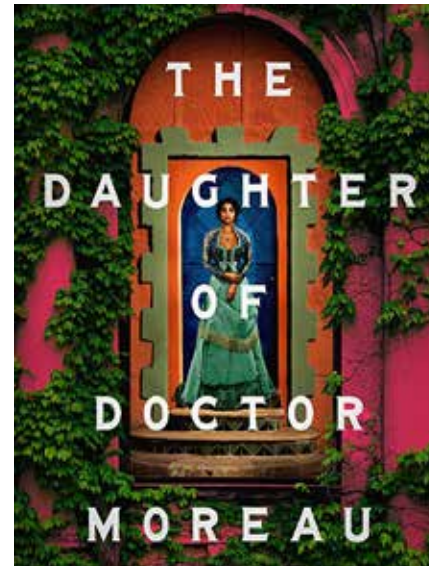
The hybrids are part-human, part-animal monstrosities, confined to the estate and designed to blindly obey their creator, but each holds their own personality traits and characteristics, some of whom Carlota has grown fond of and befriended.

For years the estate has lived in a bal-

anced harmony, with each inhabitant performing their duties to keep things running smoothly. It seems that the group would continue in this stasis until Eduardo Lizalde, the son of the doctor's benefactor, disturbs the delicate peace. What follows is a dangerous chain reaction that sends their idyllic world into complete chaos, bringing to light secrets and passions that were previously hidden.

Moreno-García's beautiful prose is reminiscent of 19th century classics by the likes of Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, easily and seamlessly blending science fiction with the classical style, a difficult feat to say the least.

Dazzling characters and backdrops throughout help to bring this story to life. Carlota's beauty and personality shine through, while the doctor's genius or madness — depending on who is consulted — both bring forth a mysterious element that propels the narrative. The hybrids and their traits, both human and animalistic, are the finishing touches



necessary to solidify the intrigue in the novel's mystery.

Somehow, Moreno-García's writing transcends the era in which it was written to transport readers to a forgotten time, providing an escape into the past for those stuck in the present. — Ally Kutz

Del Rey // 306 pages // Historical Fiction, Horror, Science Fiction

In the Lives of Puppets

TJ Klune's latest finds the heartbeat beneath the machinery

In the age of technology and with the rise of artificial intelligence, sometimes it feels like the science fiction genre hits a bit too close to home. But in TJ Klune's latest novel, *In the Lives of Puppets*, there may be some hope yet.

In the middle of a secluded forest in a home built among the trees lives Victor Lawson, a human, alongside three robots — Gio, his adoptive father; Nurse Ratched, a sadistic yet caring nurse machine; and Rambo, a small vacuum who is naïve but adorably lovable. Together, they have built a family home that, while small, has been enough for them and has kept them safe.

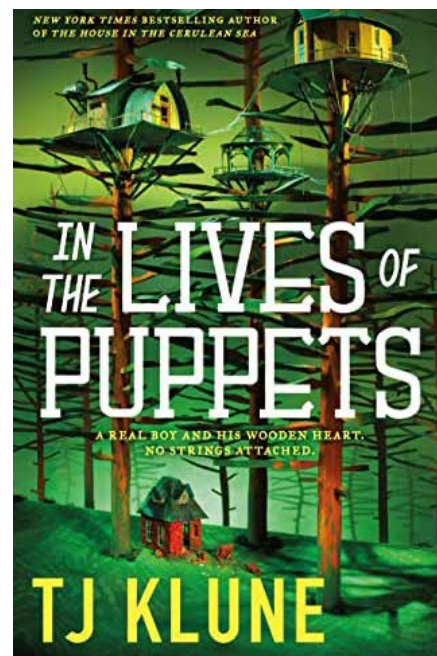
As he grows, Victor becomes more adventurous, often visiting the scrap yards where machines are discarded after decommissioning, hoping to find something to salvage for parts. Along with Nurse Ratched and Rambo, this is where Victor discovers an android labeled "HAP," whose battery is weak but still holding a small charge.

Victor rescues HAP from the pile of other androids — all of whom are lifeless — and repairs him in his workshop, bringing him back to life, but with very little memory of a past spent hunting

humans — a past shared with Gio. When HAP unknowingly alerts robots from the City of Electric Dreams of Gio's whereabouts, the family finds themselves in danger. Gio is captured and taken back to his old laboratory in the City, leaving the remaining family members to journey to save him. In his quest to save Gio, Victor learns a lot about the relationship between robots and humans along the way.

One of the most fantastic aspects of TJ Klune's novels is how each character is so unapologetically true to themselves throughout their character arc. Whether it is Victor who experiences a range of emotions he is not used to, or Rambo who learns to be brave even when he is scared — you can't help but feel invested in their development.

Klune's writing is also irrefutably his own, allowing readers a view into worlds he has built alongside emotions, problems, and solutions that each of his characters face and overcome. The strength of each character and their likability is evidence of Klune's dedication to his writing and his creations — even Nurse Ratched, with her deadpan delivery and brutal nature, becomes one of the more



lovable characters by the end solely because of these characteristics.

In the Lives of Puppets is a testament to the future, to knowing that it is not too late for us to put more kindness into the world, and that even the hardest of hearts can learn to embrace emotion. — Ally Kutz

Tor Books // 432 pages // Fantasy, Science Fiction



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MOVIE REVIEWS

Cinematic Panic Attack

Beau is Afraid is shocking, uncomfortable, and brilliant

★★★★★

It is an observable fact that we are living in the safest era of human history and yet we are all more afraid than ever. Every aspect of modern living seems designed to give us a deep sense of dread and helplessness where our every action and inaction will eventually come back to haunt us. Naturally, horror auteur Ari Aster (*Hereditary*, *Midsommar*) sadistically pokes that raw nerve with *Beau is Afraid*, the cinematic equivalent of a three-hour panic attack. This intentionally polarizing film is disturbing, funny, and disturbingly funny — and also one of the best films of the year.

Beau Wasserman (Joaquin Phoenix giving one of his best performances yet) is a lonely, paranoid man living in a city where everything seems to be specifically targeting him. His life is made worse when he is told that his mother (Pattie LuPone) has died and she will not be buried until he attends her funeral. Now Beau embarks on a surreal odyssey involving an eclectic group of characters who seem determined to stop him



from reaching his destination.

The film could be seen as nothing more than a three-hour joke about overbearing Jewish mothers, but to me, it is a perfectly realized monster movie where the monster is unrelenting anxiety. Beau is a man trapped inside his own head where every fear and doubt he's ever had is blasted back at him. Shot in beautiful IMAX and with incredible sound design, Aster's vision would be too much to bear if it wasn't also so funny. He gives us a

fully realized fantasy world that perfectly mirrors our confusing, uncertain, anxiety-inducing times. — Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Ari Aster // Starring Joaquin Phoenix, Nathan Lane, Amy Ryan, Armen Nahapetian, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Richard Kind, Kylie Rogers, Dennis Menochet, Zoe Lister-Jones, Julia Antonelli, Hayley Squires, Julian Richings, Bill Hader, Alicia Rosario, Parker Posey, and Pattie LuPone // 179 minutes // A24 // Rated R

Are You Smokin' Yet?

Smoking Causes Coughing is a Demented Good Time

★★★★★

Quentin Dupieux first reached international cult status with the surreal 2010 horror/comedy *Rubber*. Since then, he hasn't seen much recognition in America but his unique brand of absurdism has garnered much praise among like-minded fans. His latest, the anthology/superhero spoof *Smoking Causes Coughing* proves that he has only gotten stranger. The film is bloody, ridiculous, funny, depressing, and profound in ways that haven't been seen since the best of Takashi Miike.

The story follows the exploits of the "Tobacco Force," a *Super Sentai*-inspired team of superheroes who use the ailments linked to smoking as their weapons. The team has just won a battle against an evil turtle and are ordered by their leader (a lustful, bile-dripping rat) to take a team-building retreat while awaiting their next mission. The force and others (including a barracuda in the process of being cooked) proceed to tell increasingly horrific stories until the Emperor of Evil plans to destroy the earth.

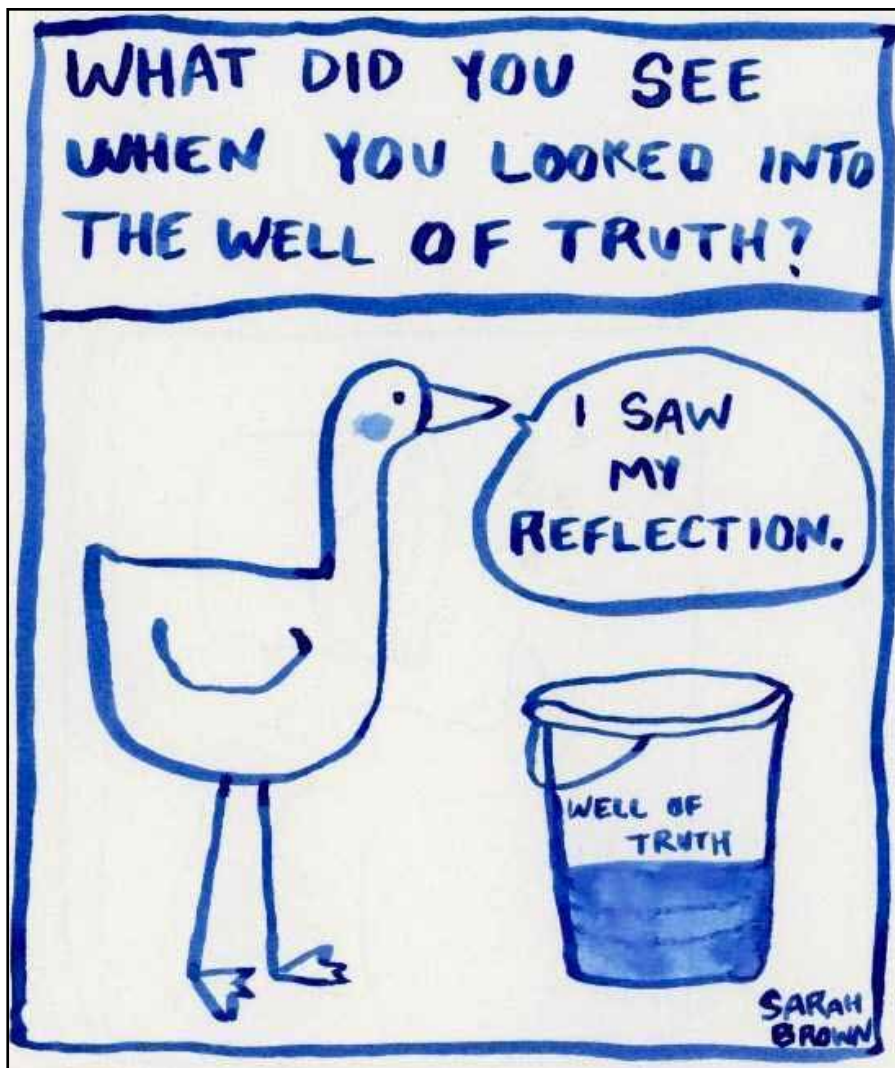
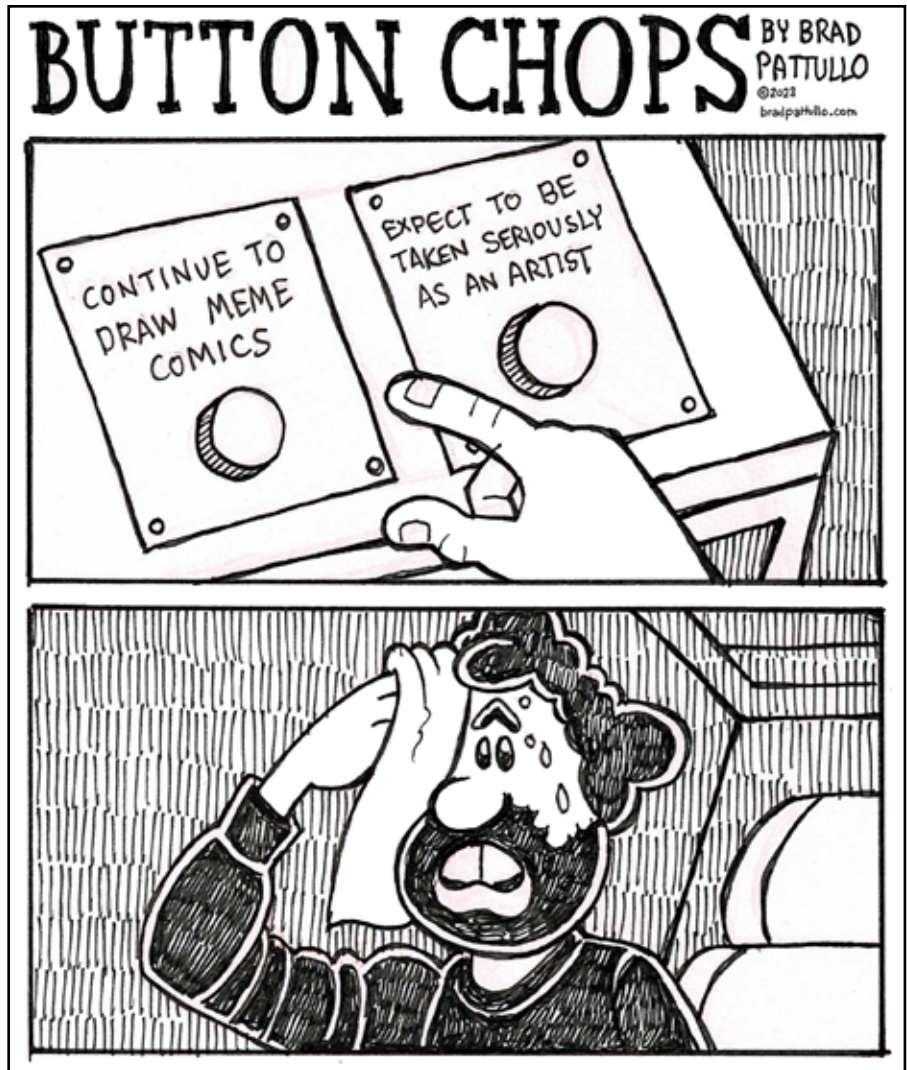
After a wild opening battle, the film



becomes an anthology of various tales relating to the existential dread of just trying to live in this crazy, absurd world. The result is a hangout film that crosses *Power Rangers* with *Creepshow*. Dupieux has said that his films have no grand meaning and are just intended as simple entertainment, but there is definitely a theme of the isolation and the helplessness that modern society feels in the face of widespread devastation. Maybe I'm overthinking it, but it just proves the film provides much for audiences will-

ing to get on its demented wavelength. *Smoking Causes Coughing* is currently available on Amazon Prime, Apple TV+, Google Play, Vudu, and YouTube. — Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Quentin Dupieux // Starring Gilles Lellouche, Vincent Lacoste, Anaïs Demoustier, Jean-Pascal Zadi, Oulaya Amamra, David Marsais, Adele Exarchopoulos, Gregorie Ludig, Doria Tillier, Jerome Niel, Blanche Gardin, and Alain Chabat // 77 minutes // Unrated ('R' equivalent)



ALBUM REVIEWS

Lana Del Rey
Did You Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd / Interscope/Polydor
★★★★★

Lana Del Rey released her ninth studio album *Did You Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd*. under Interscope and Polydor Records in March. Lana has a special way of connecting with her fans — especially hopeless romantics — and giving them exactly what they want every time. With hints of lo-fi, alternative, and psychedelic pop, the record solidifies her individuality and unique sound, making it difficult to pin under one genre. Fans and music critics have nicknamed the work *Ocean Blvd*. for convenience; the singer has a penchant for lengthy, intricate titles — for example, “Grandfather please stand on the shoulders of my father while he’s deep-sea fishing” (aka Track 11). In true Lana fashion, the 16-song tracklist is ethereal yet heartbreaking. The eponymous lead single of the album, for example, echoes the lonely refrain: “Don’t forget me / When’s it gonna be my turn?” The twelfth track and my personal favorite, “Let The Light In,” stands out for its optimistic, dreamy chord progression speaking on a secret love story. With poetic lyrics, meaningful storytelling, and gentle vocals, her latest album is yet another masterpiece in Lana Del Rey’s dense discography. — Julia Carden



Daughter
Stereo Mind Game
4AD
★★★★★

For years now, it seemed like Daughter was finished. Following the release of Elena Tonra’s fantastic, heartbreaking solo debut under the name Ex:Re, the frontwoman and singer seemed to go silent on social media, leaving fans to wonder if she would return with new music at all, let alone with the band she came up with. Fortunately for us, the band has not only returned, but they’ve matured since their 2016 opus, *Not to Disappear*; on *Stereo Mind Game*, Daughter creates a record that sonically splits the difference between their previous work while forging new lyrical paths. Around 2010, the delay pedal was having a real moment, both in indie-rock (see: The xx) and hip-hop (“Take Care”). At times, like on lead single “Be On Your Way,” *Stereo Mind Game* feels like a lost record from that era, familiar in all the right ways. But for once, Tonra sounds optimistic when addressing her long-distance lover: “I will meet you on another planet if the plans change/Be on your way.” And elsewhere, the band finds new sounds entirely; “Party” utilizes an organic mix of dry drumming and chunky bass work, while highlight “Dandelion” is set against frantic acoustic guitars. While *Stereo Mind Game* may be a little front-loaded, it’s also a nostalgic reminder of what one of the best acts in indie-rock is capable of. — Aaron Mook



Mudhoney
Plastic Eternity
Sub Pop
★★★★★

Mudhoney, Seattle’s legendary grunge forefathers, delve into trippy vibes on their 11th album *Plastic Eternity*. The band is celebrating 35 years of making music together with largely the same lineup (original bassist Matt Lukin left in 2001). Over the years they have become a staple in underground garage rock, and as they inspire younger generations, they continue to expand their own catalog along the way. On *Plastic Eternity*, Mudhoney explores their more psychedelic side, as heard in first single “Almost Everything” and its bongo-driven rhythm and a guitar hook that’s layered in fuzz tone effects. Along with the addition of more guitar effects and organ than previous albums, you get a groovier sound on songs like “Severed Dreams in the Sleeper Cell,” “Flush The Fascists,” and “One or Two.” While Mudhoney still remains true to their roots with the classic “Mud” sound on “Move Over,” “Here Comes The Flood,” and “Plasticity,” it’s their latest single “Little Dogs” that will get stuck in your head. This is like a love song and ode to their favorite four-legged friends. While there have been a lot of changes in their writing, this record should still be welcomed by their die-hard fans and embraced by new fans as well. *Plastic Eternity* brings Mudhoney out of the past and into their future. — Larry Wheaton



Blondshell
Blondshell
Partisan Records
★★★★★

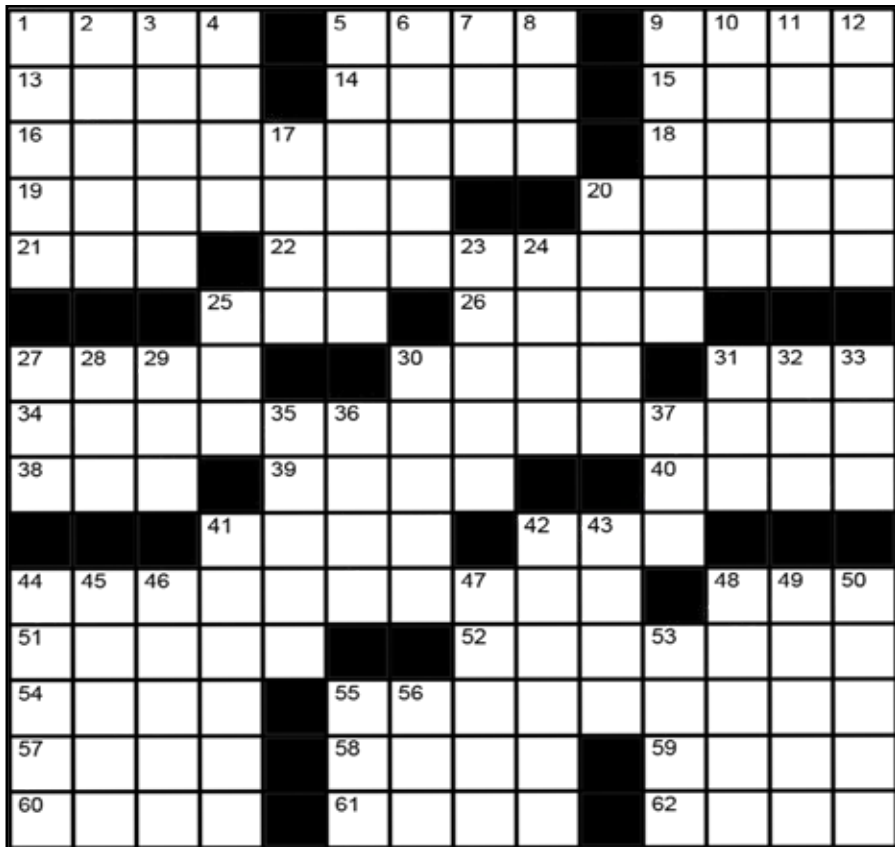
Sabrina Teitelbaum’s debut album is a subtly brilliant one, filled with personal songwriting touches. A bedroom record with fuzzy shoegaze sounds and ‘90s alt throwback shimmering choruses, it’s nearly perfect for what it is. Teitelbaum’s lyricism is distinctive, directly addressing the real-life issues at hand, such as drug use, failed relationships, and the litany of poor personal decisions one makes when they’re in their mid 20s. The Los Angeles-based 25-year-old previously put out music under the name BAUM, a much poppier outing compared to this grunge-affected eponymous release. Though the music uses a language established before Teitelbaum was even born, the words and delivery are purely honest, adeptly spun narratives you can blast in your car and sing along to. The nine tracks go by fast, without a weak song in the bunch. From the heavy opening distortion of “Veronica Mars” to the revenge fantasy of “Salad,” to the dark acceptance of “Sepsis,” Teitelbaum tells a damn good story. Though the pace of the album is a little front-loaded, it’s something that’s worth dozens of spins if not more. Perfect for fans of Soccer Mommy, Snail Mail, or Slow Pulp, Blondshell ranks right up there with any of her contemporaries. — Nick Warren



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



CROSSWORD



Across

- British financial giant founded in Hong Kong
- Centers
- Editor's "leave it in"
- Donald Duck, to his nephews
- One, on a one
- One of Pakistan's two official languages
- Winner of the first season of "Survivor"
- Author Gaiman
- Medical-scanning option for claustrophobes
- Minor hits?
- Rod and Todd's dad on "The Simpsons"
- Runner-up to Albert Einstein as Time's Person of the Century in 1999
- Delivery room possibility
- Fish whose preparation is strictly regulated in Japan
- ____ O's (breakfast cereal)
- Greiner of "Shark Tank"
- "Levitating" singer Lipa
- Group with the 1983 hit "Safety Dance" ... or a hint to solving 16-, 22-, 44- and 55-Across
- Jupiter or Mars
- ____ parm
- Iowa State's city
- Julia's "Ocean's Eleven" role
- Org. for D.C. United

and LA Galaxy

- He collaborated with Roberta Flack on the 1972 album "Where Is the Love"
- Lie a little
- "So long, amigo"
- "Let's do this thing"
- Be at an angle
- Lewis Carroll character who asks "Does your watch tell you what year it is?"
- Fashion magazine since 1945
- Tabula ____
- Part of a comparison
- Black and Red, for two
- Worldwide: Abbr.
- Bouquet holder

Down

- Second-largest Great Lake
- Take potshots
- Looped in secretly, in email
- "High Hopes" lyricist Sammy
- It can follow two hips
- Raise the lights back to regular level
- Tampa NFLer
- Texter's "I can't believe this"
- George H.W. Bush's chief of staff John
- Blow up on Twitter
- Wharton who was the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for fiction
- Gabbard who was the

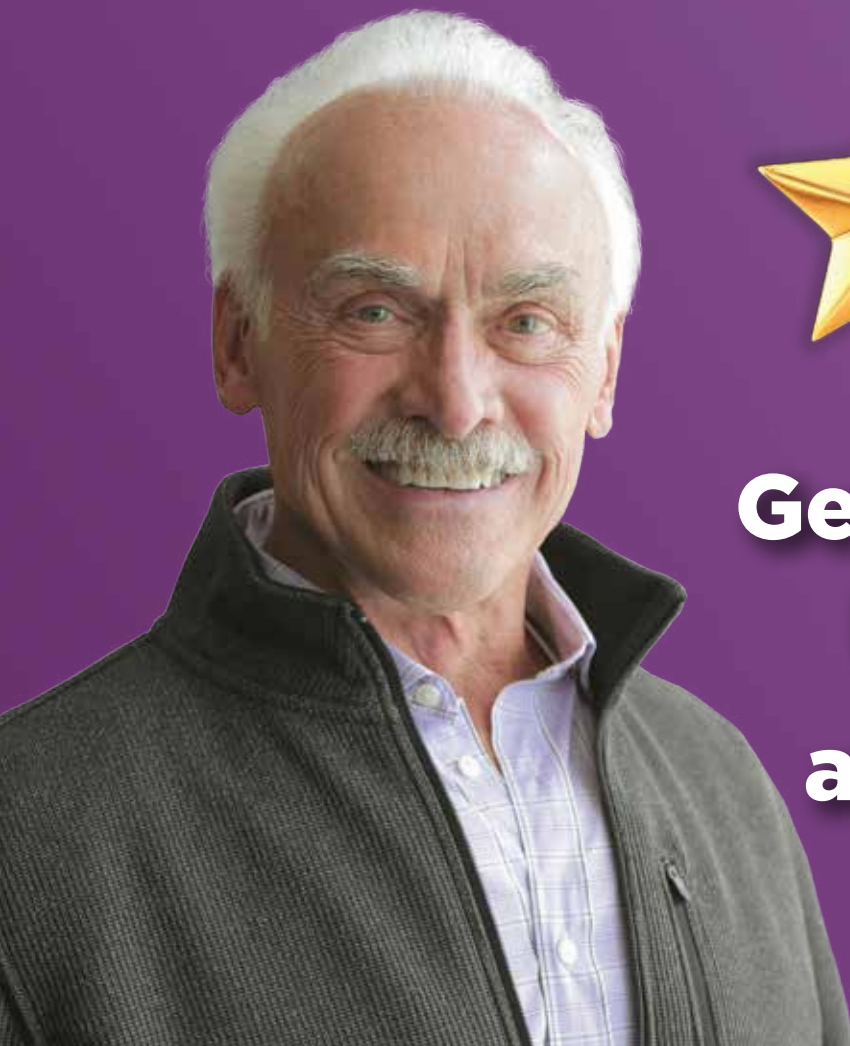
first Hindu elected to U.S. Congress

- Pies, in a slapstick fight
- Quit, slangily
- "Don't play me for ____!"
- Spiritual leader
- Pull (out)
- "!!!"
- Rock's ____ Speedwagon
- Terminate
- ____ Apso (Tibetan dog breed)
- Hydroelectric project
- Pac-12 athlete
- Stubborn animal
- Actresses Dana and Judith
- Former "Entertainment Tonight" host John
- Contains
- Low-risk govt. securities
- Fox or ox
- Harp-shaped constellation
- Fruits from palm trees
- "Swan Lake" maiden
- Nabisco wafer brand
- "Parenthood" Oscar nominee Dianne
- Nickname of jazz great Earl Hines
- Notions
- David of the Talking Heads
- 1999 Ron Howard film
- Start to cycle?
- China's largest ethnic group



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