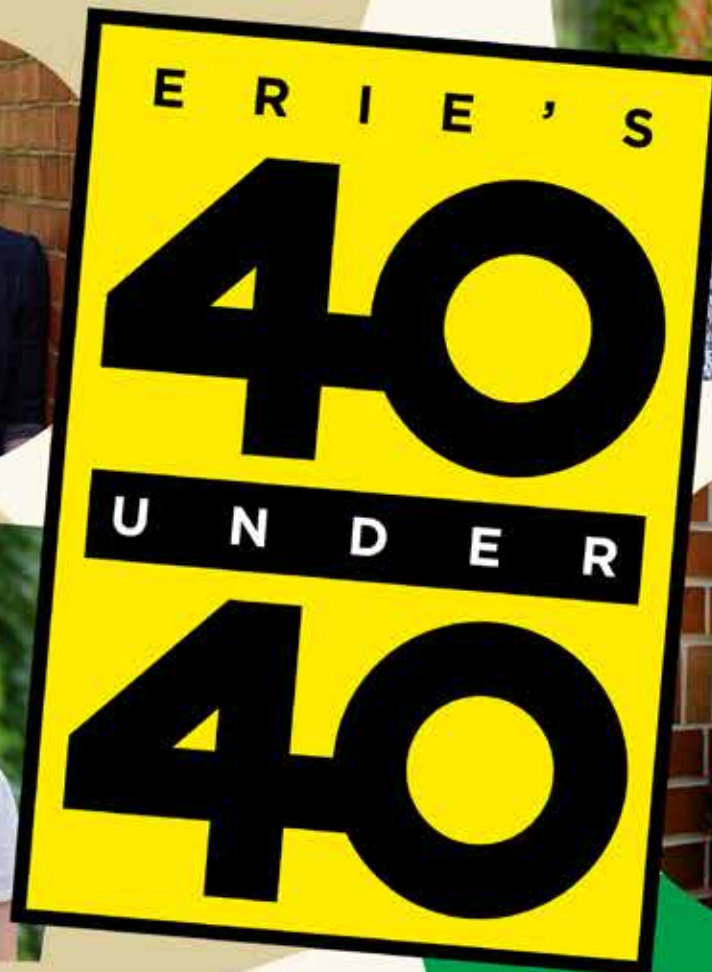


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40 Young Innovators, Entrepreneurs,
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CONTENTS
JULY 12, 2023

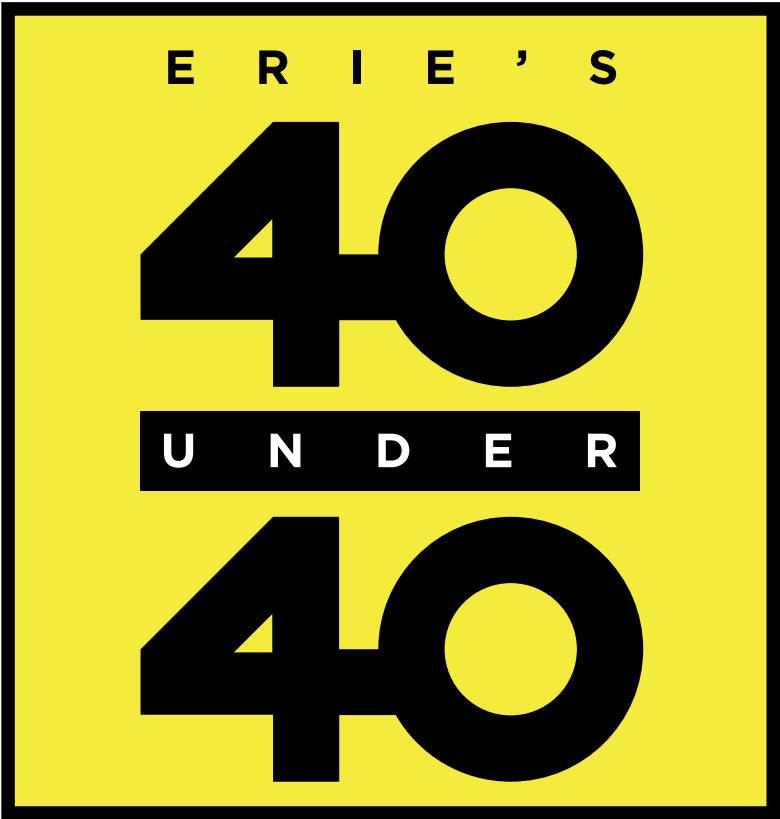
Erie At Large: Laughlin vs. The Reader - 4

How do you measure a year?

The Historical Institute of Culture and the African American Experience - 7

Erie’s new art and cultural center: where creation meets curation

Erie’s 40 Under 40: Class of 2023 - 10



40 young entrepreneurs, creative thinkers, and leaders shaping the future of Erie

Spotlight on Erie - 34

Find glory beyond the cheap colored lights, one song before the sun sets

Gem City Style - 43

40 Under 40 Catch-up: Emily George, David Hunter, and DaVona Pacley

Movie Reviews - 46

Asteroid City and Spiderman: Across the Spider-Verse

Local, Original Comics - 47

From Brad Pattullo, John Bavaro, Melissa Sullivan-Shimek, Bryan Toy, and Tommy Link

Album Reviews - 48

New cuts from Foo Fighters, Youth Lagoon, Sigur Ros, and Skating Polly

Book Review - 49

The Wishing Game by Meg Shaffer

Crossword Puzzle - 50

The latest stumper from David Levinson Wilk

From the Editors:
Seasons of love

How do you measure a year? 525,600 minutes? In daylights, in sunsets, in midnights, in cups of coffee? In the 365 (ish) days since the publication of our 10th annual 40 Under 40 issue, we find ourselves asking: how would we measure such a year?

Last July’s issue, of course, featured 40 of the best and brightest young minds in Erie at the time, but it was also the issue in which the now prominent “A Congressman and a State Senator Walk Into a Bar” op-ed was published, and for which the author (Jim Wertz) and the Erie Reader were sued by State Senator Dan Laughlin for defamation.

So, how would Jim measure this year? In weird press conferences, in depositions, in discovery, in previously confidential emails? With this month’s Erie At Large, our contributing editor takes a look back at some of the decisions made that led up to this point and how we are holding up against the costly court proceedings and all the time and effort it takes to make those sway in our favor (and we’d be remiss if we didn’t mention that you can help defend our inalienable First Amendment rights and keep our doors open by contributing to our Defend the Press GoFundMe to help offset this year’s measure of legal fees).

How do we, the writers and editors at the Erie Reader, measure a year? In issues, in meetings, in pictures, in moments of inspiration? We often find ourselves measuring a year as the time it takes to cycle through to the same issue once again. And here we find ourselves a year later with a brand new class of 40 Under 40 honorees. The 40 we’ve selected might measure their years in acts of service, in grants written, in elections, in published words. In performances, in kitchens, in bookstores, in classrooms.

It just so happens that in this issue we’ve covered the upcoming production of Rent happening at the Academy Theatre in Meadville this month, which is what obviously inspired this month’s edition of From the Editors. While the cast of that original musical found a place in many an elder millennial’s heart, almost everyone can recognize one of the most iconic songs from the score: “Seasons of Love” in which they famously measure a year in minutes, in inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife. How do you measure a year in the life? How about love?

This year and in all the years to come, we’ll be here (despite the best efforts of some) doing what we love: giving you stories of local successes (often in groups of 40) and stumbles (and telling the truth while doing so) all through the papers that we use to measure our years.

Erie at Large: Laughlin vs. The Reader

How do you measure a year?

By: Jim Wertz

It was one year ago this month that this opinion column — Erie at Large — featured the exploits of a congressman and a state senator who, I joked, “walked into a bar” in search of a pardon. Of course, there was no bar — hence, the joke — and neither the congressman, Mike Kelly, nor the state senator, Dan Laughlin, sought a pardon, as I made abundantly clear throughout the piece.

Nevertheless, the actions each had taken — Kelly’s vote against certifying results of the 2020 election and Laughlin’s signing on to an amicus brief in *Texas v. Pennsylvania*, a case which asked the U.S. Supreme Court to throw out the mail-in ballots in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Georgia, and Wisconsin — placed them squarely within the category of actors for whom pardons were sought by Alabama Congressman Mo Brooks, I contended.

Congressman Kelly responded to the article by holding a combative press conference in which he scoffed at the press, and performed the Republican party’s greatest hits of the past few years, from one gold-plated conspiracy to the next.

“The chairman of the Democrat party in Erie is the author of a blatant lie. And you want me to reply to it? Shame on it. Shame on it,” Kelly told the press.

“Didn’t you call the press conference?” the Erie Times-News asked.

Kelly called for us to retract my opinion piece. We declined.

Laughlin took a different, more litigious, path. In October he sued me and the Erie Reader for defamation, claiming a million dollars each in damages because — wait for it — he “likely faces an increase in re-election costs” in 2024 and, he claims, he’s experienced “mental and emotional harm and has been the subject of humiliation.”

Democracy, how dare thee...

Subsequently, the Erie Reader and I have spent the past year navigating the halls of constitutional justice. The case has exposed infighting between Laughlin and other members of the Republican party in Pennsylvania that has resulted in significant news coverage from local and national outlets.

The Philadelphia Inquirer published an article on June 16 in which its reporters wrote that “previously unreported communications obtained by The Inquirer show that, two days after (Christina) Bobb’s email, Trump himself called [former gubernatorial candidate and State Senator Doug] Mastriano — this time peddling lies about Dominion voting machines.”

The communications to and from Mastriano regarding strategy to stop Pennsylvania’s slate of electors making its way to Washington on January 6 emerged from the Reader’s discovery requests in the lawsuit filed by Laughlin.

“The new emails reveal additional details about Trump’s pressure campaign in Pennsylvania and provide a behind-the-scenes glimpse into how it was re-



It has been a year since The Erie Reader and our contributing editor Jim Wertz were sued by State Senator Dan Laughlin. The First Amendment protects freedom of speech and freedom of the press – both of which are currently being contested by Laughlin with this lawsuit.

ceived in Harrisburg. Election-related conspiracy theories and bad legal advice percolated quickly through the legislature,” wrote the Inquirer’s William Bender and Gillian McGoldrick.

The Philadelphia Inquirer article prompted a host of podcasts, social media, and other national media interest to Laughlin’s lawsuit against us, reframing Laughlin’s attack into further reporting on the very issues I spotlighted in my op-ed.

“On the surface, this might not seem especially notable,” wrote *Rachel Maddow Show* producer Steve Benen on the MaddowBlog. “What makes this story interesting,” he concluded, “is some of what we’ve learned as a result of the case.”

And that commentary underscores some of the reasons why our defense — and the defense of the First Amendment, generally — remains so important. Without an independent free press to chronicle and make transparent the actions of our elected officials and their enablers, their voice becomes the single chord to lead the choir. It’s not only disinteresting. It’s dangerous for democracy.

It is burdensome and costly to defend against lawsuits like this one in part because, unlike many other states, Pennsylvania does not have robust protections against SLAPPs — strategic lawsuits against public participation — which are meritless lawsuits filed to suppress constitutionally protected speech. That could change soon. Erie’s own Representative Ryan Bizzarro (D-Erie) recently introduced a bill that would allow defendants in meritless defamation suits like this one to file special motions for dismissal and force plaintiffs to pay the other side’s attorney fees if a court determines that the action lacks merit.

If this bill were law, we may not be where we are today. For now, our fight continues, but we can’t do it without you, Reader readers. We’re grateful to those of you who have answered the call to invest in our legal defense fund. Your support got us this far.

Unfortunately, the wheels of justice turn slowly and our defense goes on. For how long we fight is not in our control. Stay with us. Visit our Erie Reader Legal Defense Fund GoFundMe (gofund.me/797307ec) and contribute as you can.

With your support the Erie Reader and the words we write will continue to come without a cost.

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

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The Historical Institute of Culture and the African American Experience

Erie's new art and cultural center: where creation meets curation

By: Liz Allen

Appreciation for and involvement in Erie's rich art scene should not depend on the size of your wallet. That's one takeaway Mabel Howard has after the successful opening of *Break Free*, the inaugural art exhibit at the new Historical Institute of Culture and the African American Experience (HICAAE). An opening-night reception for the art show was held on June 15 as part of Erie's multifaceted Juneteenth celebration.

Many in Erie, including people of color, assume that you need a wealthy pedigree to become an artist or even just to pop into an art gallery, Howard said. "I want to take that stigma away," she said. "Art is created for all to enjoy and should be part of everyone's life. Just as important as going out to dinner, art should be part of the African American experience."

Howard, 45, owns the 7-10 Café with her mother, Thelma Blanks. She also works as a health and wellness educator at Bethany Outreach Center, and she shares her poetry as "Mabeline the Artist" at the 1020 Collective and other outlets.

Adding one more activity to her busy schedule — curating the art that graces the first-floor walls at the cultural institute — doesn't slow her down, because creativity has been part of her DNA since her mother taught her the "art form" of martial arts at age nine, she said. When her mother became ill in 1992, Howard, a teenager, took over running the martial arts studio. "I had to learn the importance of guerrilla marketing at a very young age. I understood how to make things happen with little, so therefore when I was given more, that just flowed over into this new sector," she said. "Even at 14, I knew I wanted to bring people together and give them something positive and fun to look forward to."

The HICAAE has already brought people together, starting with Howard, Bishop Curtis Jones Sr. and Pastor Vickie Jones, the bishop's wife of 48 years. The institute is housed at the New Life and Spirit Revival Center, 315 E. Ninth St., formerly St. Mary's Catholic Church, where the Jones family holds their worship services.

In 2017 when they bought the historic church building, which dates to 1854, and the adjoining priests' residence, built in 1922, they started to imagine how to repurpose the 33-room rectory, with its finely crafted woodwork, tiled fireplaces, beamed ceilings, leaded-glass bookcases and cabinets, into a community hub.

"The artists were a great place to start," said Bishop Jones, as he led a tour through the former rectory after the artists introduced themselves at the opening reception. The idea is to hang art on the walls of three floors of the building, which boasts 9,700 square feet, and to use the rooms themselves to display local, national, and international African American museum artifacts. There will be both permanent and mobile museum exhibits, he said.



[Top] Artist Antonio Howard is leading the work on a new mural on the west side of the Historical Institute of Culture and the African American Experience at 315 E. Ninth Street. Volunteers are welcome to help complete the mural, which is now in outline form. **[Bottom]** Mabel Howard (left), Bishop Curtis Jones Sr., and Pastor Vickie Jones welcome guests to the opening reception for *Break Free*, the first art exhibit at the Historical Institute of Culture and the African American Experience, on June 15.

"Erie is sort of late coming" to the concept of developing an African American history museum, Jones said. "We want to take it to a whole other level that Erie has not seen."

One inspiration for him is the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. Vickie, his wife, fondly recalls visiting the Erie Public Museum every Saturday when she was growing up on West Second Street. Her widowed mother, Mattie Riley, welcomed the opportunities the museum presented for her 11 children to explore and learn from the exhibits.

That museum, now the Hagen History Center, left a huge, positive impact on her, she said. But no one at that museum "looked like me." When today's youngsters and future generations visit the new cultural institute, they will see artists who resemble them and

learn history through the lens of the African American experience. "It's hard to know where you are going, if you don't know where you're coming from," she said.

In addition to the art gallery space and the museum exhibits, Bishop Jones revealed other plans for the institute building — using the library for a collection of African American literature, adding retail space in the dining room to support the museum, opening a café in the basement, hosting lectures and creating the Frederick Douglass Think Tank. The worship space in the old church will continue to be used for services, because "the church has always been the heart of the African American community," he said.

Bishop Jones has also been conversing with Bishop Dwane Brock of Victory Christian Center, whose

own revitalization project, the East Side Renaissance, is centered on Parade Street, around the corner from New Life and Spirit. "I think we're going to enhance one another," Bishop Jones said.

Indeed, "unity in the community" was one of the themes sounded at the artists' reception. "This is a movement of God that has been a long time coming," Vickie Jones said. "I've been in Erie my whole life. I love Erie but unity is one of the things that has been missing. There is a message in each one of these art pieces."

The art exhibit, which will be expanded and updated quarterly, mostly focuses on visual arts but poets and essayists also have their work displayed. Roland Slade also has a multimedia piece with a video component.

The exhibit's featured artist is Antonio Howard, known for his Erie murals and for his candor about his 26 years in prison, starting at age 15, until he was paroled in 2018. His work at *Break Free* includes the stunning piece in which two skeletons embrace, *Prison Is Where Relationships Go To Die*, in the front hallway. He is currently working on a mural on the west side of the rectory, depicting four adults lifting up a child.

Mabel Howard is quick to acknowledge the positive influence of Antonio Howard, her "older, famous cousin," on her work. "We have a very special bond. We always encourage each other and continue to help each other open doors," she said.

Like the artists whose work is exhibited, Mabel Howard cherishes several "wow" moments and the mentors who led her to become an art curator. Her idea to create art space for people of color in Erie dates to her 2018 visit to the Savannah College of Art and Design. "I took a vacation there and fell in love with the active curation, tens of thousands of square feet of art. It meshed together so well it seemed like it was the body of work of one artist, this seamless movement throughout a building," she said. "That visit was like a 'wow' for me."

"Wow" is also the way she describes the influence of Patrick Fisher, the former director of Erie Arts and Culture, who left at the end of April to become CEO of the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council. "He believed in every person that came into his presence. It wasn't what you showed him, it was what you told him you wanted to do. He always had encouraging words. That gave me a 'wow' factor," she said. In 2021, Erie Arts and Culture honored Howard with its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Award.

When today's youngsters and future generations visit the new Historical Institute of Culture and the African American Experience at 315 E. Ninth St., they will see artists who resemble them and learn history through the lens of the African American experience.

The beauty of the new Historical Institute of Culture and the African American Experience is that the "wow factor" leaps out from so many participating artists and those who influenced them. Jazzpoetictruth, a painter and freestyling poet whose real name is Jasmine Lamison, credits her mother for introducing her to poet Maya Angelou's book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Trapped herself during the isolation of COVID, Jazzpoetictruth began to paint with acrylics. One piece she painted is a portrait of Ola, the dog abandoned by a roommate. "I got to watch Ola grow. She was my best friend. All I had was a dog," she said.

Kathy Woodard, too, started painting during COVID. When she was a child, no one celebrated the features of Black women in art, she said, so she "felt a sense of duty to focus on Black women" when she paints.

Born in Nigeria, Deb Adebayo has lived in America for most of her young life, leading to her struggles with identity. Her art celebrates the texture and designs of Black women's hair. "It is my hair — whether I bought it or grew it," she intoned.

Cathy G.g. Mitchell's poem, *Taking Turns to Learn*, was inspired by the true story of pioneering Black teacher Ada Lawrence, while Will Smith's film *Emanicipation* led her to write the poem *Scars*.

For Nicholas Constantino, composer and music arranger, Harry T. Burleigh provided the spark for his poem, *His Rhythm Remains*.

Lourdes Jasso said her three paintings of women who are muzzled, blindfolded, and deafened "are very, very personal," depicting her life as someone born in Mexico, raised in Chicago and living in Erie. "Our youth need to see themselves in places they normally aren't in," she said.

It is fitting, then, that among the two dozen artists whose work is on display, Mabel Howard has a special place in her heart for a painting by Abigail Allen, who also started painting during COVID, at age 12. "We were able to watch her blossom before our eyes," Howard said. "If this young artist is this gifted at age 12, I know she is going to be famous someday." Anticipating that future, she bought Abigail's first piece of art.

Liz Allen dabbled in acrylic painting during COVID, with encouragement from her daughter-in-law and granddaughter, but nothing worthy of exhibiting. You can reach her at lizerie@aol.com.

If You Go

The Historical Institute of Culture and the African American Experience, 315 E. Ninth St., is open on Wednesdays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free but donations are welcomed.



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Erie’s 40 Under 40: Class of 2023

40 young entrepreneurs, creative thinkers, and leaders shaping the future of Erie

From a literary standpoint, numbers in writing are almost always significant. No writer worth their salt picks a number at random without it being a metaphor for something meaningful to the rest of the story.

And so it goes with 40. Throughout history, in religion, science, literature, and pop culture, 40 keeps coming back around. Rain fell for “40 days and 40 nights” during that one big flood (there are scads of biblical and religious references to the number), there were 40 thieves in *Arabian Nights*, there are 40 weeks of pregnancy, popular songs are ranked by their standings on a scale of 40, and a standard

workweek is 40 hours (to name a few).

The number 40 for the Erie Reader is *always* significant as summer rolls around, when we take the time to sift through hundreds of nominations to make the tough decisions on who to include in the newest class of Erie’s 40 Under 40. This year, we read the incredible biographies of more than 300 nominees and somehow whittled that list down to 40. We’ve got farmers and entrepreneurs, professors and scientists, historians and activists, artists and musicians. Essentially, 40 people who have had a hand in helping to make Erie a more knowledgeable, fair, and beautiful place by being themselves

and doing what they believe in.

So please join us in welcoming the 11th class of 40 Under 40 inductees. The honor is greatly deserved.

Written by: Jonathan Burdick (JB), Ally Kutz (AK), Erin Phillips (EP), Matt Swanseger (MS), Cara Suppa (CS), Amy VanScoter (AVS), and Nick Warren (NW)

All photographs by Jessica Hunter

Do you know someone you would like to see in the 2024 class? Our online nominations are now open! Just visit eriereader.com/40under40nomination

Courtney Baran, 29
Digital Archives Technician, Hagen History Center

Those who enjoy local history are likely already familiar with Courtney Baran, a Seneca Valley High School graduate who studied at Clarion University before earning her master’s degree in public history at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Since moving to Erie nearly seven years ago, Baran’s mark on the regional history scene has been substantial. In 2022, while working for the Erie County Public Library as the digital collections librarian, she created and planned the very well-received histERIE Week. In her current role as the digital archives technician for the Hagen History Center, she scans archival material and prepares the images and metadata for the online collection catalog. She also runs a historical consulting business and has helped create historical displays, collected oral histories, completed archival research, and presented history lectures (such as her “A Taste

of Beer History” event with Erie’s Lavery Brewing Company). She also hosts a podcast titled *Food Wine & Good Ol’ Times* where she discusses history ranging from chicken wings to the Erie Pontiacs baseball team. On top of all of this, she also is part of a committee assisting the city on its historical preservation plan.

“I would love to help Erie’s community better understand its history,” explains Baran. “Having an appreciation for local history helps build a sense of pride and togetherness that I think Erie needs.”

Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her husband of four years, their two young sons, and their dog Lobster. They especially love camping and hiking together. She is also a foodie and loves a great drink (she’s even part of an online wine club).

As for Erie, she’s fallen in love with the city. “I can’t wait to watch my boys grow up here,” she adds. “This city and area has so much to offer that you can’t find

most other places.”

Fortunately for Erie, it has Baran to thank too for providing even *more* to offer in the city. - JB

Lynne Beatty, 35**Assistant Professor of Biology, Penn State Behrend**

Sometimes the best teachers are those who inspire by taking lessons out of the classroom and into the world. Beatty's classes have been described as four-month-long field trips. Using trail cameras and track plates, her students create population estimates for wildlife at Behrend and Wintergreen Gorge. Beatty was the first Pennsylvania researcher to create a team for SNAPS, the Student Network for Amphibian Pathogen Surveillance. Her students test Jefferson salamanders and other species for Bsal, a fungal pathogen that has decimated salamander populations in Europe. She also studies the mystery snail, an invasive species that has been found in Lake Erie.

Beatty is from Geneseo, New York. She obtained a bachelor's degree in wildlife science at SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry, a master's degree in biology from Texas Tech University, her doctorate in zoology from Oklahoma State University, and completed postdoc work in wildlife conservation at Trent University (Peterborough, Ontario). She was a Department of Defense National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellow during her Ph.D. studies, and the 2022 Recipient of Behrend's Council of Fellows Teaching Award.

She serves as an associate editor for the "Population, Community, and Ecosystem Dynamics" section of the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* and is involved in various scientific/professional organizations. Beatty has an impressive resume with 16 peer-reviewed publications. She is co-author of a book chapter, and has three other science-related publications. She has also collaborated with PA Sea Grant to start a series of beers at Erie Brewing Company highlighting aquatic invasive species and was instrumental in getting amphibian crossing signs established at Behrend.

"I want to get the people of Erie in touch with their wild side! Erie has so many unique, rich, and beautiful natural features that I want to share with my students and the community. Ultimately, I want to work with students and the community to recognize, respect, and protect our ecological wonders to craft a sustainable future for Erie," said Beatty.

Beatty considers herself a lucky person and says she enjoys hanging out with her fur, scale, and slime babies, fishing, hiking, generally being outside, and going to Erie SeaWolves games. —AVS

Brian T. Bonner, 35**Entrepreneur, Artistic Souls Clothing; Artist, Designer, Teacher**

An entrepreneur and teaching artist through Erie Arts & Culture, Bonner can always be found celebrating and contributing to the local arts scene in Erie while also motivating other entrepreneurs to live their dreams.

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Bonner graduated from Euclid High School and went on to study art and business. Founder of the clothing line Artistic Souls, which he launched in 2021, Bonner enjoys expressing himself creatively and inspiring others through several different mediums. Recently, his contributions to Erie's murals through the Purposeful Placemaking project with Erie Arts & Culture have been taking center stage. His first mural as an artist assistant featured well-known and beloved dance teacher Carla Hughes, and is located outside of the former Wayne School, now the Erie Center for Arts and Technology. It was created with some of the center's students from whom Bonner says he learns a lot.



"I want to help Erie become a better place by welcoming young, thriving, hungry entrepreneurs and creators to Erie to really help their careers take off. I want Erie to be a melting pot of young artists and entrepreneurs, and for this to be a place of creativity, understanding, and success to help people launch their creative careers," Bonner said.

Bonner says he is proud to have been featured in 708 magazine, the Erie Reader, and Erie Times News and to have held art festivals in the City of Cleveland. His paintings and artwork have sold all over the world and he's had multiple art shows.

Outside of his work, Bonner says he likes to create and design. "I love to help individuals with their goals in life, and I love giving business advice and really helping people find their success," he said. He also enjoys skateboarding and music. "I love the creativity of music; seeing how music is made and put on records. I love watching and learning the whole process." —AVS

Jasse Camacho Vera, 33**Community Organizer and Human Rights Activist**

Jasse Camacho Vera wears a lot of hats. A LOT. He is the board secretary for the Erie Latino Leadership Association as well as the Pennsylvania Youth Congress. He serves on the Dramashop Board of Governors and in their marketing and development department. He is a resident artist with Erie Arts & Culture,



a member of Mayor Joe Schember's inaugural Better Together Council, AND a member of the Community Liaison Roundtable with Senator Bob Casey.

You may have caught Jasse in his most recent role at Dramashop in their One Act Festival playing the show-stealing role of Al in *Long Lost*. His work in local theater is prolific, as he directs, produces, and performs in productions at Dramashop, Erie Playhouse, and Shakespeare Summer Nights.

But this activist's most important role is one of representation, "I'm a self-proclaimed triple threat, but not in the typical sense. I'm gay, disabled, and Puerto Rican. Growing up in a sea of white I was the only brown person ... I hid my gayness in shame, and while my friends ran around the yard looking for Easter eggs, climbed the stairs to shoot down the slides at Water World, or even just dug their toes in the sand at Presque Isle — there I was off to the side or down below. My memories were of other people making memories. No one could ever speak on my behalf because I was the only one like me. I had to speak for myself. As I matured, I vowed to change this — to become the advocate I never had. My hope is that my actions ignite a ripple effect that will make Erie a more livable, accessible, and accepting place for all."

But among all of his accomplishments, his largest source of pride comes from his family: "I love spoiling all my beautiful nephews and niece. According to them, I'm the coolest 'guncle' in the world. So far, that's the best award I've ever received." — EP

Kyle Churman, 35**Co-owner, Werner Books**

In taking a stand for local literacy, Kyle Churman has shown a lot of spine. "The signs of a thriving community are libraries, bookstores, and access to information."

If that's the case, his love of Erie is truly binding, as he is doing everything he can to publish a new chap-

ter in its “literary and intellectual development.” Of course, part of that is Werner Books, the used bookstore he and his wife Lauren (Shoemaker, a fellow 2023 40 Under 40) purchased from original owner Gayle Werner last year. Through consistent, enthusiastic community engagement and marketing, the couple has been able to expand on an already strong entry in Erie’s small business canon, with a forthcoming expansion that will double its shelf space and add a coffee shop to its Liberty Plaza storefront.

But that is hardly the whole story. Kyle also helped establish nearby Grover Cleveland Elementary School’s Little Free Library, hosts several local book clubs (the Hagen History Center’s Canalside Readers, Books + Beers in collaboration with Erie Ale Works) and school book fairs, and surfaces regularly at pop-up bookstores around the community. Often curling up beside him during his own reading leisure time are his cats Duke Silver, Betty, and Sara or any of the foster felines he and his wife shelter on behalf of the Erie Humane Society until they find forever homes.

As for finding his forever home, the former college hockey coach says he’s done skating around. “I plan to spend the rest of my life in Erie because I cannot imagine my home being away from the lake.” We’re glad the Latrobe native bookmarked us. — MS

Stephanie Ciner, 34
Grower and Educator, Wild Field Urban Farm



You may be surprised to know that Stephanie Ciner hasn’t owned a car since 2007, with her bicycle being her main form of transportation. This is just one of the many ways in which she represents sustainability and environmental consciousness within our community.

Originally from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Stephanie found herself in Erie as an AmeriCorps VISTA service member in 2016. Immediately involving herself in the community, she purchased a plot of land on the east side of Erie that would soon become known as Wild Field Urban Farm. In 2020, what began as a large backyard garden expanded onto two vacant lots next door to become the burgeoning urban farm it is today.

Stephanie’s vision for the farm is to work in conjunction with nature, not against it. She uses sustainable agricultural practices like composting and cover cropping while never using herbicides or fungicides. The farm is also pollinator-friendly, with no pesticides used and flowers left unpicked for bees to both enjoy the garden and do their natural job.

Stephanie’s farm doesn’t end at her backyard,

though — she shares seeds, produce, and recipes with the community, and shares the farmland with neighbors in need of gardening space. Produce and plants from the farm can be found at the Little Italy Farmers Market and the Edinboro Market.

Another place you can find Stephanie and her products are at the Parade Street Fresh Food Farmstand, an initiative she co-founded with another local farmer that offers a “pay what you can” system as a way to make fresh produce and other products more widely available to those who may not be able to otherwise afford them.

Stephanie is also an educator in Erie Public Schools, bringing food and gardening programs to the classroom to teach youth sustainable ways to garden and grow food, and about environmental issues and their impact on the community. “I want to be part of the collective work of growing new foodways in Erie,” she said. “And I want to become a good friend and neighbor.”

When not farming or educating, Stephanie enjoys reading, doing projects around the house, spending time with her very active dog, and practicing the daily ritual of drinking coffee and thinking her thoughts. — AK

Casey Corritore, 24
Program Officer of Capacity Building, Erie Arts & Culture

In 1889, Oscar Wilde penned, “Life imitates art far more than art imitates life,” and in the case of Casey Corritore, her life is art. Within her role at Erie Arts & Culture (EAC), Casey is responsible for fostering relationships with local artists and helping them reach their fullest potential, all while staying true to their creative vision. “My primary responsibility is to work closely with artists and arts organizations within EAC’s six-county service region to identify their professional and creative needs and provide relevant connections to resources, whether financial or otherwise.”



She does this through a variety of means, but among this Baldwin Wallace University graduate’s proudest accomplishments has been increasing the availability of grants to artists, as well as updating EAC’s Erie Arts Endowment grant making programs to align with national emerging trends and best practices. According to one of her nominators, “Thanks to Casey’s approach, she empowered me to apply for a grant that I ended up receiving and now my business has the capacity to grow. She is a beacon in the arts

community and has helped so many working artists by guiding them to the right resources.”

Casey herself is an artist, playing improvisational cello with a number of local musicians as well as participating in conventional ensembles like the Mercyhurst Civic Orchestra, the Warren Philharmonic, and musical theater pit orchestras. She also makes a conscious effort to face her fears, most recently through rock climbing and paragliding to help assuage her phobia of heights.

Casey plans to make Erie her home for the foreseeable future and looks forward to aiding in making the future of Erie a bright and colorful one, “By observing and listening to the needs of Erie’s creative community, my mission is to provide creatives with greater and more equitable access to resources, to grow their capacity and increase the strength of the creative sector.” — EP

Dina Csir, 32
Restaurant Owner, Dina’s Authentic Dominican Kitchen



It comes as somewhat of a surprise that Dominican-born Dina Csir is afraid to swim — because she’s proven plenty capable of keeping herself afloat. Buoyed by a passion for cooking instilled by her *mamá* and *abuelita* in her hometown of Hato Mayor del Rey (near the resort destination of Punta Cana), the young restaurateur has found her water wings in the Flagship City Food Hall.

Small but mighty, Dina’s Authentic Dominican Kitchen has swiftly turned Downtown Erie on to the delights of Dominican cuisine since its 2021 debut — most notably its signature dish, *La Bandera Dominicana* (“The Dominican Flag”). If you’re looking for an introduction to Dominican food, it doesn’t get any more authentic than this — the trio of white rice, stewed beans, and braised meat (representing the colors of their flag) is central to both the island nation’s diet and their day, when towns shut down and families gather at lunchtime.

Since moving to Erie in 2015 with her husband John and establishing her restaurant, it’s fair to say the people of Erie have become like kin, with whom Dina is eager to share the warmth and tradition of her culture through *la comida* (the food), six days a week, nine hours a day. Whether it’s her customers or her three kids at home, Dina is insistent on taking care of family. “I think we need to be kind and respectful. Show more love and try to help each other.” — MS

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John DiMario, 36
President, Allegheny Beverage Company



What sets John DiMario apart from most being honored in this year's 40 Under 40 class is the fact that he chose Erie. Moving here five years ago and relocating his entire family from Ohio (shout-out to wife Rhea, and kiddos Rhys, Rosie, Liliana, and Charlie for coming along for the ride), John felt like the opportunity to make an impact was too good to pass up.

Acquiring the former wholesaler Glenwood Beer in 2018, John remarks, "We loved Erie from the start and it immediately felt like home. My goal was to make an immediate and sustained impact on the company and our community." After rebranding the business to become Allegheny Beverage, the company has since earned the coveted Molson Coors President's Award, invested in a new 110,000-square-foot facility

(which was designed and constructed exclusively by local companies), invested in an all-new delivery fleet, added employees, and experienced significant sales growth.

"I moved here because I believe in Erie and its future," the Ohio University graduate remarked. "My intention from the onset was to grow Allegheny Beverage Company so it will always be a great place for people here to work. An organization is really all about the people — they're the most significant asset we have. Commitment to growth, ongoing upgrades, and investing in people can have an immense impact on our community."

John also makes a point to donate regularly to Presque Isle Partnership. Preserving and protecting our state park is personally very important to him: "This little strip of land that makes up Presque Isle is the reason this city became what it is and what continues to keep us thriving."

When he's not working on building his business or spending time with his family and two Great Pyrenees pups, he enjoys playing music on any of the six instruments at which he is skilled, following Cleveland sports, or reading about Civil War history. — EP

Alexandria Ellis, 34
Owner, SHE Vintage

To succeed in business, it's necessary to be able to pivot and innovate, something at which Alexandria Ellis excels. As the owner, operator, buyer, stylist, and



content curator of SHE Vintage, Ellis has become a contributor to the revitalization of Downtown Erie while also building her brand by participating in the Amazon Black Business Accelerator, and recently returned to her roots in the beauty industry.

Graduating from East High School in Erie, Ellis went on to obtain her Toni & Guy Hairdressing Academy cosmetology license, Parsons New School of Design certification in Fashion Industry Essentials and The Business of Fashion, and graduated from the Thrive in Erie cohort program. Ellis is a member of Erie's Black Wall Street, The Well Network (a networking group for Black women entrepreneurs), and the Coffee Club Divas networking group.

Ellis has successfully grown her business from pop-up shops and collaborations with community organizations such as Erie's Black Wall Street and the Erie

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Downtown Development Corporation. Her store, in the historic Bonnell Building is the only Black-owned shop among the Shops at 5th and State, helping to bring Downtown Erie into a new era of activity. “I love that I am able to operate my business and call the shots while simultaneously bringing home steady income within an industry that allows me to use my artistic skills. I’m also proud of being in the Amazon Black Business Accelerator so now SHE Vintage can have its own Amazon storefront and private label merchandise. That’s a big deal to me,” said Ellis. She plans to start transitioning SHE Vintage into a more business-to-business model, taking winters off to travel in order to keep her spirits high and inspiration flowing.

“I want the people of Erie to see that personal style and fashion is acceptable. Dress up, wear the heels, put on that loud print, wear the lipstick. Look your best even if you don’t have anywhere to go! I want to change the narrative of being overdressed, because if you stay ready then you never have to get ready,”

A self-described movie nerd, Ellis enjoys plants and cooking in her spare time. She has two children, a 13-year-old daughter Lailah and 16-month-old son, Eliah. Outside of work she loves to spend her days shopping and exploring fun things to do with her kids or just spending time with her parents at their home. — AVS

Susannah Faulkner, 34

Councilor, Erie City Council; Development Director, SSJ Neighborhood Network; Ballet Instructor, Erie Dance Theater



An Erie native who moved back to the city from Oakland, California in 2020, Susannah Faulkner immediately got to work. The Collegiate Academy and Ithaca College grad, who also holds a Master of Public Administration from The London School of Economics and Political Science, took a position with the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network as their director of development, overseeing all grantmaking and fundraising for the organization.

And just two years after that she was officially in the running for an open Erie City Council seat — and was selected from a candidate pool of 20, making her just one of two women currently on the council.

One of her nominators effused, “I have known Susannah for 15 years and can speak to how knowledgeable, dedicated, diplomatic, and passionate she is about public policy, community advocacy, politics, and economic development.”

Child poverty is a huge issue that Faulkner seeks to tackle as a city councilwoman: “The state and national average child poverty rate is 17 percent, and Erie is at a staggering 44 percent. This is a crisis that requires our collective attention and action immediately.”

Faulkner not only played a key role reforming a British social service program in 2015, she was part of a team that helped “to reform major inequities in [California’s] child welfare system,” when Gov. Gavin Newsome approved Assembly Bill 260 into law.

Outside of work, this Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy graduate is active in organizations like Erie County United and enjoys gardening, traveling, and naps. But she also lives a double life — as a professional ballet dancer! Faulkner takes her dancing skills to the Erie Dance Theater, where she not only instructs children in ballet, but aids the organization with grant writing to help secure their future. — CS

Jasmine Flores, 30

Vice President, Erie City Council; Direct Support Professional, Bayada Habilitation



As millennials approach middle age, they are now showing up in political offices on the local, state and federal level. One such young person is Jasmine Flores, who is in her second year of a four-year term on Erie City Council, and is currently serving as vice president of said council.

In addition to being the only Latina elected official in Northwestern Pennsylvania, she is the first Latina ever elected to Erie City Council, as well as the youngest person ever elected. One nominator said, “She is representing the often underrepresented population of Erie: women of color.”

In her own words, Flores wants “to make Erie equitable for all. I want our city to thrive year-round and have family-sustainable wages available to our community members...I want city children to graduate in record-high numbers. I want people to stop treating young people like criminals and then acting surprised when they become criminals of circumstance. I want to provide opportunities to my community so they can thrive and survive in our city.”

Flores cites her election to city council as her proudest professional achievement thus far — “My community voted to put me in that seat,” she said.

In addition to her service on council, Flores — who is the eldest sister of 13 siblings — works as a habilitation technician for Bayada Habilitation, where she takes clients with intellectual disabilities and autism out of their homes to experience meaningful social

interactions. Outside of her professional life, Flores enjoys trying out new local food spots, reading, and sitting by the lake, listening to the water. She dreams one day of owning a dog — and a house in the City of Erie. — CS

Tom Fox-Davies, 38

Series Producer, WQLN PBS



“I want to create content that helps people better understand what Erie was, what it is, and what it can be,” says Tom Fox-Davies, producer of WQLN/PBS’s *Chronicles*, the immersive local history docu-series that was recently nominated for seven Emmy awards (the first ever in WQLN’s 56 years).

His path to producing and sharing directing responsibilities on *Chronicles* was a bit unconventional. For starters, Fox-Davies is a native of Somerset, United Kingdom. During his childhood years at the Sherborne School for Boys, he began acting. He joined and toured with the UK’s National Youth Music Theater. He learned numerous instruments and has worked as a professional singer-songwriter, playing at Dubai’s first-ever music festival and even once singing alongside Antonio Banderas for Andrew Lloyd Webber’s birthday.

Eventually, he moved to Los Angeles where he worked on films, winning the Dell Legacy of Good Film Competition for the short documentary *Circular Cellular* and winning several other film festival awards for his first feature film. He moved to Erie in 2017 after having visited here numerous times due to a film connection to the area. He soon joined the Erie Ambassador program, then in 2022 was hired by WQLN PBS to work with producing partner Mike Berlin on *Chronicles*, which has been commissioned for two more seasons through the summer of 2025.

“The *Chronicles* show is huge fun to make and also allows me to learn so much about the region, the accomplishments of those that used to live here, and potential in its future,” says Fox-Davies. “My commitment to Erie isn’t just through storytelling. I believe in Erie’s future.”

Those who know him also note how generous he is with his time, volunteering it to assist young filmmakers throughout the community as well as assisting the Northwestern Pennsylvania Film Office.

Outside of work, Fox-Davies enjoys spending time with his two children, four cats, and dog, as well as spending time improving his investment properties that he has been renovating around Erie’s West Bayfront area. - JB



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Shateria A. Franklin, 31

Assistant Grant Administrator, City of Erie; Owner, Materialistic Boutique; Founder, Destiny of Our Daughter's Inc.



Shateria Franklin thrives when she is helping others — whether she's working with the City of Erie on grants to sustain our community, helping young women find confidence through fashion, or working with the nonprofit she founded to help young women find their purpose.

An East High School Graduate and Gannon University alumna, Franklin is the founder of Destiny of Our Daughters Inc., a nonprofit organization providing young women ages eight to 18 with the hope, wisdom, courage, and power to find their own unique destiny and purpose by teaching life skills and character building. "Destiny of our Daughters aims to help young women with the challenges of defining themselves and making a positive mark throughout their lives," said Franklin. "We promote education, health, strength, and women's empowerment."

Franklin is also a member of the Strengthening Community and Police Partnerships (SPCP), an organization within the Mayor's Administration of the City of Erie intended to help build relationships between the community and police. "It's important to be an example of what it means to love your neighbor. I want to help restore hope for our youth in Erie and be evidence that you can achieve anything in this world if you have the courage to believe you can and work tremendously hard no matter what," said Franklin.

Franklin says she is most proud to be a self-published and award-winning author (*Love or Loyalty*). She says her biggest accomplishment to date is following her dream of owning a boutique. Franklin notes she is the first African American business owner to have a storefront in the Liberty Plaza.

In her free time, Franklin can be found with her three children: David, Major, and Madisyn, as well as with her partner in life and business, Marcus. She enjoys time with family and friends, entertaining at her home, cooking, reading, and writing. — AVS

Gabe Genua, 21

Vice Chair, Compton's Table Inc.

At age 16, Gabe Genua had six blood clots cleared from his lungs. Now, at just 21, he is opening up vital new channels between LGBTQIA+ youth and the larger Erie community as vice chair of Compton's Table Inc., a queer advocacy group founded by small business owner and mental health professional Tyler Titus (a 2017 40 Under 40 honoree). Gabe's job duties include

event planning and execution, counsel and mentorship to queer youth, outreach, and connecting community members to resources. That's not counting his additional responsibilities as outreach coordinator and case manager at Central Outreach, a full-time college student at PennWest Edinboro (majoring in social work), a part-time retail worker, an occasional public speaker (most recently at Erie Pride 2023), and a corporate sensitivity trainer.

The young viola player from Altoona has already proven himself a prodigious orchestrator. He's co-authored two important research presentations on the



challenges and exclusions the queer community faces in higher education, as well as helped facilitate the recent "As I Am" art exhibition at Penn State Behrend featuring young LGBTQIA+ artists. Gabe is passionate about the opportunities within art to allow for the creative exploration of identity — and the emotions and complexities that surround it. Really, though, he's adamant about exploring opportunities for everyone.

"I believe Erie is on track to be the wonderful place we all know it can be. We can reach our goal by supporting and funding politicians and projects that truly contribute to all communities. We need to be focused on the entire population of Erie, rather than select populations. We are strong because we are diverse." We just have to work out the clots. — MS

Erin Green, 36

Director of Operations and Marketing, Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier (LEAF)



Anyone who has ever coordinated a big event like a wedding or fundraiser knows how much work it is: the planning, scheduling, details, layout, promotion, safety, etc. Erin Green, a Penn State and Xavier University graduate, knows this level of organization well, as she is responsible for planning a large-scale event every two weeks all summer long with LEAF's Open Markets. In her own words, "I love being able to sup-

port local businesses and promote entrepreneurship through the LEAF Open Markets. I would love to see these events continue to grow and highlight local products and services, while also encouraging residents to shop locally and support the local economy."

So not only is Erin handling the layouts for the markets, coordinating all the staff management, market logistics, and internal and external communication with vendors, clients, city officials and staff, she also oversees other LEAF programs like their tree-planting initiative which has, to date, planted 40,000 trees throughout Erie. Add to that all the grant writing, sponsorship securing, print and digital marketing, and relationship-building involved. She's *also* a bookkeeper for several local businesses, keeping financial, credit, and payroll records.

Oh, and did we mention, she also has two babies (ages three years and seven months, respectively) and is a registered Montessori teacher? Apparently sleep isn't on this Erie native's list of accomplishments.

Erin is dedicated to helping make Erie a better place and does so through both her work at LEAF and through raising her family. One upcoming project she's particularly excited about is LEAF's new Tiny Forest initiative: "This project will raise awareness about the importance of urban forests, biodiversity, and the benefits they can bring to our Erie community. By planting these urban tiny forests, we can create havens of nature within the city, improve air quality, mitigate urban heat island effects, and provide habitat for wildlife. These spaces also offer opportunities for residents to connect with nature and experience the benefits of green spaces in an urban setting." — EP

Melinda Hall, 39

Dean, Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul



"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." Those are the words of 1 John 3:18, and Melinda Hall is living them. Through her work with the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul, Hall has worked tirelessly to give back to the community. In the words of one nominator, "she is constantly working for change, giving voice to the marginalized and tirelessly advocating for those who cannot advocate for themselves."

In her time as dean, she has helped St. Paul to team up with St. Mark's Episcopal Church to form Erie Episcopal. Together, they help share and distribute food, shelter, and supplies to those in need. Hall co-leads the Formation Project, a one-year online program in conjunction with Harvard Divinity School, has recently

40 UNDER 40

completed the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy, and serves on the board of Compton's Table. She also volunteers with Catholic Charities to help support their work with New Americans.

Having previously served as area school director in Brookville, Pennsylvania, she worked with the local food pantry and helped them relocate, as well as starting a backpack program (providing food, meals, and snacks for kids to take with them) at her schools. She described that "I want to be an advocate for the welfare of all Erie residents, to support the work of our many nonprofits in helping everyone thrive, whether that means advocacy for more mental health resources, more low-income housing, or difficult conversations about gun violence," and was quick to note that "I am proud of the work I do raising up the gifts of others around me, empowering people to do what they are called to do and building sustainable organizations." — NW

Laura D. Howard, 36
Project Architect, Kidder Architecture

Honoring the past is something very important to Laura Howard, an accomplished architect and Penn State graduate, and native of Girard who has recently come back to Erie after 13 years in New York City working to restore some of our most important historic buildings. In addition to honoring Erie's architectural past, Laura feels deeply about preserving her own family heritage and does so by living on and caring for land



in Girard that has been in her family for 180 years and seven generations.

These deep roots mean that Laura has always felt like Erie County has been her home. After rappelling down historic buildings in Manhattan (she is certified in SPRAT — the Society of Professional Rope Access Technicians) to aid in facade restoration and working to determine the source of water damage and course of restoration at Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater* (which was the building that made her want to become an architect at age eight), she is now back in Erie and ready to work toward making sure our architectural heritage remains strong.

"We must find a balance between preservation and new architectural developments that create a dynamic and vibrant city that respects its past while embracing the future. By encouraging architectural designs that

blend seamlessly with the existing historical fabric of Erie, we can create a harmonious balance between old and new, preserving the city's identity while embracing innovation," Laura reflects. "The hope is to create an Erie that future generations want to preserve." She is excited to get those future generations of Erieites interested in historic architecture by volunteering to run an architectural day camp at the Hagen History Center this summer.

In addition to her love of architecture (and traveling to check must-visit buildings off her bucket list), she also loves skiing and is a licensed private pilot. Her-alding back to honoring her past, Laura connects her current interests with her family heritage: "During the pandemic, I accomplished another dream of becoming a pilot like my grandfather, and am currently working my way through flying everything in his logbook." — EP

Charles Johnson, 30
Museum Educator II, Erie Maritime Museum

In 2022, the Erie Maritime Museum was among 20 nominees for USA Today's list of Best History Museums. Needless to say, to operate a museum as unique and special as the Erie Maritime Museum, it takes a significant crew with a very specific set of skills and knowledge. One of those crewmembers is Charles Johnson, an educator employed at the museum by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Raised a few short hours away in Elmira, New York,

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Erie's 40 Under 40 Class of 2023



Congratulations to **Logistics Plus COO Yuriy Ostapyak** for being named to **Erie's 40 Under 40** list. We appreciate your commitment to the success of Logistics Plus and the Erie community.



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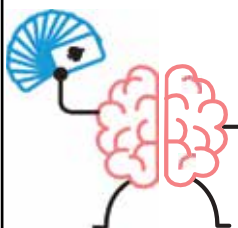
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Monday, July 24
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Friday, July 28
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Johnson studied history (with a focus on naval history) at SUNY Fredonia before moving on to earn his master's in public history at Southern New Hampshire University. Now at the museum, he is responsible for overseeing and managing museum education and visitor services operations. Clearly, communicating history to the public is not just a career, but a passion.

"Erie is historic," explains Johnson. "Reminding longtime residents, and newer transplants like myself, of the region's storied past should keep people focused on a brighter future."

Those who know him say he is innovative and well-organized, a natural leader who has raised the bar for the entire profession. He not only educates, but plans, develops, and implements all of the educational programming on top of recruiting, training, and scheduling over 100 local volunteers.

His experience is not limited to his studies either. He has also served in the U.S. Navy Reserve for 12 years. During his most recent deployment in 2022, he was recognized by Vice Admiral Brad Cooper as Navy Central Command's "Warrior of the Week."

Outside of work, he spends most of his time with his wife Alyssa and their two young children. He's an avid sports fan, particularly Boston-area sports teams and the Arsenal Football Club in England. He also owns a 1962 Ford Falcon that he enjoys driving in the summertime — which he plans to do in Erie for years to come. — JB

Maeve Kirby, 28
Mental Health Professional, Achievement Center of LECOM Health



Maeve Kirby believes in the future of Erie, and that our future is intrinsically connected to the well-being of the children in our community. "I hope to make Erie a better place by providing support to the children and adolescents in the area. Children deserve to know that

their voice is important and their feelings are valid," says the General McLane graduate, who then went on to earn her Bachelor of Science in Music Therapy and Psychology from Duquesne University as well as her Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Gannon University.

Maeve is working toward her goal of helping Erie's children succeed by combining her passions for therapeutic mental health with her passion for music. Through her position as a mental health professional for the Achievement Center of LECOM Health, she is able to offer school-based as well as traditional office-based therapies, in addition to music therapy groups.

A close friend of Maeve's commented on her journey, and her importance to the Erie community: "Her specialty is helping children work through grief, as she has volunteered and worked with the Caring Place. Her dad passed away when she was very young from cancer, and that has impacted her career journey for decades. Erie is better because of her, and the kids she serves are lucky to have someone who cares enough to know what they don't know." And Maeve is invested in staying in Erie for the long haul. She reflects, "Time away helped me to realize that Erie is where I want to be long term."

When Maeve isn't busy doing the hard work of helping children deal with difficult emotions, she enjoys leaving it all on the stage through her work with local theater groups at the Erie Playhouse and Dramashop. She also enjoys taking walks with her partner Michael and their dog Theo. — EP

Stephani Klassen, 39
Owner, Give A Crepe, La CrepErie LLC

When she first moved to Erie in 2006, Stephani Klassen wasn't so sure it was the right fit. Seventeen years later, she's showing others how to "give a crepe" about her now-beloved city. Said one nominator: "Stephani has become a pillar in the community and truly strives to make Erie a better place."

Spinning crepes came into Stephani's life by chance. After earning her Bachelor of Arts in Hospitality, she found herself testing out the crepe irons at the French bistro she managed at the time, falling in love with the craft. A few years and the creation of many recipes later, she found herself spinning crepes again at Virgil's Plate, spawning the first pop-up of Give a Crepe — La CrepErie in 2016, where they sold out before 3 p.m. In 2019, her brick and mortar location opened on Peach Street, where they're still located today.

Stephani's kids, Lexi and Eli, have been a huge part of the business from the beginning. They were the first to try many of the recipes during their creation, and have been consulted on major business decisions that have been critical to the restaurant's growth. From helping run the register and clearing tables at the first pop-up, their roles have grown over time. Eli now helps build things for the shop and works on Sundays alongside Stephani, while Lexi works behind the scenes helping with advertising and marketing ideas.

Stephani is also the vice president and artisan flea market organizer for the Erie Hill District Collaborative, which encompasses the area in which Give a Crepe



is located.

Stephani's work embodies her main mantra: to "give a crepe" about Erie and the Erie community. "(Caring) about Erie is a choice, and it's a choice I make daily via La CrepErie — through caring about the local gardens, entrepreneurs, and communication with multiple groups on how they can (care more) as well."

When not spinning crepes, Stephani enjoys gardening, cooking with her kids, and spending time with her dogs. — AK

Erin Layden, 36
Director of Development, Erie Cancer Wellness Center



Hailing from right here in Erie, Erin Layden — who holds a Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations and Journalism from Waynesburg University — serves currently as the recently-hired director of development at the Erie Cancer Wellness Center, where she oversees annual fund development, fundraising, donor cultivation, and coordinating volunteers.

Taking this job meant leaving a 12-year beloved position as the director of development at the Erie City Mission, where, one nominator enthused, "She organized all the marketing and communications efforts for large campaigns such as Erie Gives Day, The Annual Turkey Drive, and Knock Out Homelessness." They continued, "She's an unsung hero in the nonprofit space here in Erie. The Erie City Mission is regularly a top recipient for Erie Gives Day, and Erin had a lot to do with this."

Layden said simply, "I love Erie and the people that call Erie home. I believe God has called me to serve my city and the people in it." Layden, who is a woman of faith — as well as an avid reader, a self-described "huge crime junkie," a gardener, a cook, a hiker and explorer (her favorite travel destination so far has been Malawi, Africa) — is also a self-professed stickler for grammar, and recently edited a published book. She has been

40 UNDER 40

married to her husband Gary for 11 years and they have a daughter, Annabelle, who is eight.

In addition to her professional endeavors, Layden also serves as vice president of Membership for the Northwestern PA Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and president-elect for the Northwestern PA Chapter for the Association of Fundraising Professionals. — CS

Marissa Litzenberg, 24 **Project Manager, Our West Bayfront**



Little else makes more of an impact on one's day-to-day life than the neighborhood in which one lives. The vibe, the people, the sense of safety, and community can all affect the way we feel about our home. It is the goal of Marissa Litzenberg, project manager and overall neighborhood organizer extraordinaire with the local neighborhood group Our West Bayfront, to make sure that the West Bayfront, and Erie at large, is the kind of place that residents can feel proud of.

"I want to create a sense of neighborhood pride that is inclusive, welcoming, supportive, and makes room for all. I think neighborhoods are what make a city great, and I love Erie neighborhoods! We should always be pushing for what residents say they need to succeed in life in Erie," Marissa reflects. She helps the neighborhood of the West Bayfront succeed through organizing a full slate of community events, and through facilitating wide-reaching surveys that get residents' input on potential neighborhood improvements, events, park upgrades, etc. Most importantly, Marissa has learned how to truly listen to the neighbors around her and take what they say into consideration when planning community events and workshops, public art installations, litter-cleaning initiatives, and more.

Prior to being hired in her current position, Marissa, a Penn State Behrend Schreyer Honors College history and political science graduate, served in a volunteer capacity at Our West Bayfront through Americorps VISTA, and her colleagues took notice of her great potential and work ethic. Anna Frantz, director of Our West Bayfront commented, "Marissa is a great example of how young adults can make a difference. Marissa is responsible for facilitating events and outreach activities that are strengthening the West Bayfront community."

When Marissa isn't dedicating herself to improving Erie's neighborhoods, she enjoys playing her saxophone in the long-standing local rock band This American Song. She also loves getting cozy with a good book or an embroidery project, and has recently started learning about the art of photography. — EP

Yuriy Ostapyak, 39 **COO, Logistics Plus, Inc.**



When your list of accomplishments includes starting out as a foreign exchange student college intern, working at a company in a small office of 30 employees, to then becoming COO and overseeing that same small office turn into a global company with over 1,000 employees, raking in half a billion dollars in revenue, AND climbing to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, it is safe to say that Yuriy Ostapyak is the stuff of 40 Under 40 legend.

Born in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, Yuriy came to Erie and attended Villa Maria Academy, followed by Edinboro University, before returning to Ukraine to complete his graduate studies in international economics at the Kyiv National Economic University. And he has put his degrees to good use in Erie as he has become the chief operating officer of Logistics Plus, an international company headquartered here in Erie (at Union Station) that specializes in freight transportation, warehousing, fulfillment, global logistics, business intelligence, technology, and supply chain management solutions. All this is to say, Yuriy is very good at moving things around the globe.

And he is excited to keep Erie as his home base, "We love Erie, love the Erie community. We are committed to investing in Union Station as the long-term global headquarters of Logistics Plus. We are committed to making this a great place to work and serving the community through creating opportunities for young talent to thrive. We have already invested millions of dollars into our opportunity zone, and will continue to invest in making this an area that is welcoming and prospering."

Yuriy's love for Erie is also paired with a love for his birthplace, Ukraine. When Russia attacked Ukraine, Logistics Plus rallied support locally and beyond to Ukrainians, raising over \$660,000 in relief and providing other aid. When he's not busy fundraising or traveling the globe on behalf of his business, Yuriy enjoys hiking, taking walks, and playing golf. — EP

Davina Pacley, 32 **Owner, DivinelyCROWN'D L.L.C.; Confidence Life Coach**

"Encouraging women to embrace the Queens within themselves," reads the mission statement of DivinelyCROWN'D L.L.C.

From the engaging mind and spirit of Davina Pacley comes a business that empowers self-love and confidence. Combining lifestyle tips, life coaching, words



of faith, and even fashion advice, Pacley is building — and is herself — a valuable resource in the community. Growing up in Erie and graduating from Strong Vincent High School, she went on to study at PennWest Edinboro and the Erie Business Center.

She's an executive assistant at Steel Toe Consulting, a member of Erie's Black Wall Street, Radius CoWork, the SafeNet Garden Party Planning Committee, and heads a Bible group known as the Glow Girls Club. Put that all together, and she's well plugged-in to the world of business professionals and local entrepreneurs, all the while carving out a personal space and identity of her own.

As an extension of her main company, Pacley hosts the *DivinelyCROWN'D* Podcast. Launching in September of 2022, it has since gone on to win a Greenlight Award for Best Podcast. She's hosted events like the Sip and Slay Soiree and the Lovers & Friends Soiree and plans on many future events as well. Pacley enjoys occasionally fashion modeling, and loves spending time with her children RaMiyah and Rodney III.

Overall, she wants to "continue to create safe spaces and fun experiences for people in our community. I also want to continue to be a positive influence in the people's lives of our community as the life coach that I am." — NW

Katie Peppers, 26 **Special Events and Volunteer Coordinator, Mercy Center For Women**



As a military kid, Katie Peppers has no real hometown. So far, Erie's been her longest place of residence since moving here in 2015, but in those years she's planted deep roots within the community.

Working as the special events and volunteer coordinator,

dinator at the Mercy Center for Women, Katie's day-to-day involves directing help for both the office and the Threads Thrift Store, as well as planning activities for large groups and fundraising events. She also finds time to engage with those in the Mercy Center's Transitional Housing Facility, where her office is located. Often, she has women and children stopping in to ask questions, grab a snack, or enjoy a quick chat with her.

Katie is involved with many local organizations, including being a member of the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy's 2023 cohort, but her work with Our Neighbors' Place (ONP) is a highlight of her commitment to the community. This past winter, she facilitated the organization's overflow shelter as the primary volunteer coordinator for a two-week period. This meant making sure staffing, volunteers, supplies, safety, and food were all taken care of for the shelter, in addition to her full-time position at the Mercy Center for Women.

This overflow took place during the huge winter storm of the past holiday season, which saw extreme low temperatures and put those without housing at great risk. Katie was not only able to open the doors early to 65 guests — almost double the capacity the shelter can usually take — but also kept it successfully running for two weeks, without having to turn away or ban a single guest.

This work is a testament to Katie's resilience and how she wants to make an impact: "My mission in life

is to challenge those that are content to instead live in the uncomfortable," she said. "I don't want people to be passive observers in a world so full of beauty and injustice. I hope that my work inspires communities to come together, regardless of gender, age, race, or socioeconomic status."

When not working or volunteering, Katie enjoys spending time with her two cats, Figaro and Oliver, as well as enjoying a sunrise or sunset at Presque Isle. She also thrifts and crafts DIY home décor to make her home a beautiful and welcoming space. — AK

Ralph Reitingger III, 38
Musician

It's easy to be impressed by Ralph Reitingger. For years, he's been an essential part of Erie's music scene, proving himself time and time again to be one of the hardest-working and talented bassists (and overall musicians) in Erie.

If you catch live local music, you've no doubt seen him onstage sporting a whaler beard, baseball cap, and fluorescent DR Bass Strings atop his Buddy Guy-autographed Modulus five-string. He's a member of (deep breath) Eric Brewer & Friends (four-time Best of Erie Winner for Best Local Band), Phunkademic, the CEE Brown Experience, the Jeff Fetterman Blues Band, Jake's Blues, SANIS, the Ron Yarosz Power Organ Trio, as well as Blue Sky, Dark Sider, and the Erie Allstars. And don't be fooled, though some guitarists or frontmen might have their names on the marquee,



it's Reitingger who serves as the backbone, providing the right groove every time.

Over the years, he's had the opportunity to open up for legendary acts like Van Morrison, the aforementioned Buddy Guy, Johnny Winter, Gary Moore, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, WAR, and Zappa Plays Zappa. An Erie native and Strong Vincent High School alum and RockErie Hall of Famer, Reitingger is a proud father of three.

When he's not playing music, he can be seen with another kind of bass, while fishing. He's also an avid comic book collector, and for the past three years, has been documenting his frequent, and often lucrative comic hauls via YouTube.

At his core, he's also a funny, genuine, and warming presence in the often all-too-chaotic music scene. In his words: "I want to inspire the next generation of



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Erie musicians to spread positivity and continue to build up a better community through the power of music.” — NW

Amanda Rumball, 31 **Makeup Artist and Beauty Educator, MUAH**



While many took time during the pandemic to take up a new hobby or learn a new skill, Amanda Rumball took it one step further and launched her own business. In 2020, Amanda took a leap of faith and began her bridal beauty business, which has since garnered more than 150 five-star reviews and cemented her as a successful entrepreneur in the Erie community.

Amanda's success isn't just local — her work has been featured in television advertisements, on streaming services Netflix and Hulu (9/11: *One Day in America*, *Unstuffed: A Build-A-Bear Story*), and on nationally published book covers (*Step into Your Spotlight: Inspiring Women to Play Bigger*). She's become something of a nano-influencer, creating an online community around her styles.

Amanda's journey hasn't always had Erie in the cards — she left the city to pursue her Bachelor of Arts in French Language from the University of Kentucky before returning to the area as an adult. “My goal when I returned home to Erie was to give back to the community I grew up in and heal my love-hate relationship with the city,” she said. “After I left, I realized it is a beautiful place to call home. I started my business to serve the community and honor my ancestors, who were also female entrepreneurs more than 100 years ago.”

Amanda not only runs her successful business, but works to bring together other makeup artists and those in the beauty sector in Erie: “I'm working on connecting local beauty entrepreneurs in the city to encourage the idea of community over competition.”

Amanda also volunteers her time at the Erie Cancer Wellness Center, providing those actively fighting cancer and recovering from it with the tools needed to feel beautiful again, in whatever way that means for each individual. With hair, eyebrow, and eyelash loss being a prevalent side effect of treatments, many women can feel they've lost a big part of who they are, and Amanda helps them focus on brow and lash enhancements that can make them feel like themselves again.

When not working, Amanda enjoys traveling, shopping, and trying new restaurants and foods. — AK

Jessica Schultz, 34 **Owner and Baker, Herb & Honey Bakery**

Take a glance at the social media accounts for Herb & Honey Bakery, operating out of Urbaniak Brothers on

East 24th Street, and it's safe to say that your stomach will *definitely* rumble.

It's quite clear that owner Jessica Schultz, a Northwest Pennsylvania Collegiate Academy graduate, is an artist when it comes to baking. She has dual degrees in human nutrition and agricultural sciences from Virginia Tech University (in 2012, she was awarded Outstanding Senior). After graduating, she stayed in Virginia and opened up a bakery. She also completed a county-wide food system assessment focusing on finding ways to increase access to locally grown and produced foods among low-income residents. The findings led to the development of a shared-use commercial kitchen (which she helped open as the kitchen manager) for farmers, small businesses, and hunger relief agencies.

After 13 years away though, Schultz missed home. So,



she moved back to Erie in April 2020 and, not long after, opened up Herb & Honey Bakery. She's deeply interested in nutrition, the connection between food and health, and community food systems, and considers all of this when sourcing ingredients. It's no surprise then that she frequents local farmers markets and is involved with the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network Garden Task Force. A friend calls her the hardest-working person he's ever met and extremely charitable.

“I want to contribute to Erie's local food system in a way that makes it more accessible, equitable, sustainable, and delicious,” explains Schultz. “I would love someday to open a shared-use commercial kitchen in Erie and see what others are dreaming, too.”

Outside of work, she loves gardening, native and medicinal plant identification, reading science fiction and fantasy, and hiking and traveling with her dog Max. The duo have driven through 40 states together. She also enjoys singing (and wishes she had more time for it) as well as playing the ukulele (which she jokes is to make the singing in public less awkward). - JB

Zakaria Sharif, 35 **Public Health Educator, Erie County Department of Health**

If there was just one word to describe Zakaria Sharif, it would be reciprocity. Refugees of the Somali Civil War (a conflict that still simmers to this day), his family arrived in Erie in 1996 with very little.

What they did have, however, was gratitude. They were grateful for the Housing Authority of the City of Erie that put a roof over their heads. They were grateful for Erie's Public Schools, which gave Zakaria an education and a springboard to pursue his dreams.



Most of all, they were grateful to have a community in which they could grow and flourish.

The one-time beneficiary of public services is now a full-time public servant, constantly giving back to the town that molded him. As a public health educator for the Erie County Department of Health, he helped steer citizens through the uncertainty of the pandemic. As an Erie School Board appointee and co-supervisor of the Elevate Success after-school program, he has continued to advocate for inner city students, with an emphasis on improving safety, addressing mental health, and increasing attendance and graduation rates. As vice president of the Islamic Association of Erie, he has worked to combat food insecurity and feed 180 local families.

The East High and Penn State graduate also holds board memberships with the John F. Kennedy Center, Multicultural Health Evaluation System, New American Council, and the Foundation for Public Schools. If that seems like a lot, he is quick to remind us that “representation matters,” pledging to be a “voice to those who don't have a platform to speak.”

Although a “very open, public person,” Zakaria says he cherishes his wife and five children the most. “My family is what keeps me going and grounded.” And with him as an example, surely continuing to give back for years to come. — MS

Lauren Shoemaker, 38 **Co-owner, Werner Books; Assistant Professor of English, Slippery Rock University**

To say that Lauren Shoemaker, Ph.D., wears many hats is a monumental understatement. As one friend notes, not only does she wear all of the hats, she does so very effectively and with creativity and fresh ideas.

After graduating from Northwestern Senior High School, Shoemaker completed her undergraduate studies at Slippery Rock University, then continued on to earn her Master of Arts in English Literature at Gannon University and her Ph.D. in Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

She then returned to Slippery Rock University in 2016 as an assistant professor of English. She teaches courses including composition, gender studies, and literary theory, but she's also a passionate advocate on campus for inclusive, student-centered pedagogy and integrating DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) principles in the classroom. She advises the campus Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance and was named the Woman/Ally of Distinction this year by the President's Commission on Women. She is also a proud member of the Association of Pennsylvania State College & University Faculties, the faculty and coaches union



at Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education schools.

Then there's Shoemaker's other job. As of 2022, she is co-owner of Erie's beloved Werner Books alongside husband (and fellow 2023 40 Under 40 honoree) Kyle Churman. Together with their team, they've continued the store's legacy of fostering a welcoming space while also building new community partnerships with WQLN PBS, LEAF, and Grover Cleveland Elementary School. Shoemaker also coordinates the Book + Beers monthly book club, assists Mabel Howard in the hosting of Poetry X-Change on the second Sunday of each month, and has worked with the team on doubling the store's size and opening a coffee shop.

"Erie is already a vibrant arts and culture community, so I want to strengthen our literary arts community," Shoemaker explains. "As we grow into the new space, our goal is to expand literacy partnerships and opportunities for Erieites of all ages."

Outside of work, she is, of course, an avid reader. She

also enjoys walking at Presque Isle and spending time with her husband and cats Duke Silver, Betty, and Sara (as well as fostering cats for the Erie Humane Society when needed). "Kyle and I are completely invested in Erie's future," says Shoemaker. - JB

Tyler Smilo, 35
Musician and Songwriter, *Smilo and the Ghost*

Smilo is inspiring countless members of the community through his personal recovery transformation which is shared through his music and stories performed with his band, Smilo and the Ghost.

Originally from Coshocton, Ohio, Smilo attended Coshocton High School and the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. In 2016, Smilo and the Ghost was formed and have been delivering hard-driving, old-time influenced folk-rock to crowds throughout the Northeast. Their debut album, *Ghost Writers*, was voted one of the "Top Three Albums From Erie Artists in 2018" by the Erie Reader (two solo releases, 2014's *Blood into Sound* and 2015's *Dust in a Grave* also received the honor in their respective years). Since then, Smilo and the Ghost have opened for national acts like Grammy Award Winning country duo Dan + Shay and alt-rock legends 10,000 Maniacs (in addition to earning more local top three recognition for 2021's *Fingers Crossed and Godspeed*).

Smilo has brought addiction awareness to the public eye by showing that recovery is possible for people who may feel hopeless. "I want to continue to talk about addiction and recovery through music. Letting

other people know it's okay to talk about their struggles and find solutions. People can and do change. Most people I've known who struggled with addiction have so much to offer the world and community once clean. We are a powerful bunch," said Smilo.



Tyler is currently working with the band on their third full-length studio album. "We are about to raise over \$14k through crowdfunding," he said. "We are hoping it is out by the fall. I want to continue to grow my *Songs & Stories: Tales of Addiction and Recovery* to spread the good news and continue to help other addicts in recovery."

Smilo says he is proud to have written over ten full-length albums and well over 100 original songs. When not touring or working on music, you can find him cooking and hanging with his son. He also enjoys time in nature and collecting antiques. — AVS

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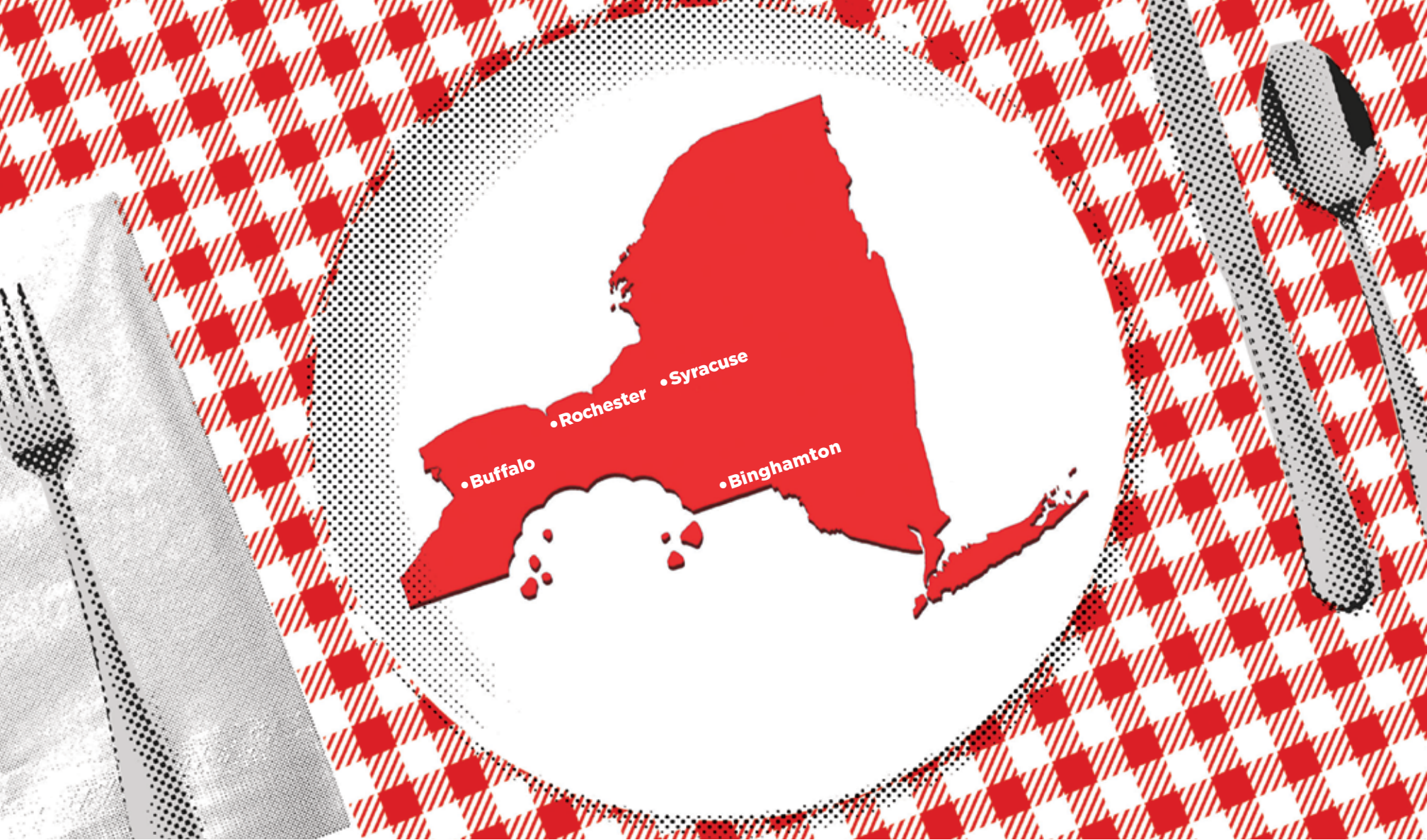
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Will Steadman, 32**Music Teacher, General McLane High School**

Pull back the mask on Will Steadman and you'll discover the authority on *All Things Spooky* (an adjective originating from a viral photo of a misspelled Halloween decoration, which has come to mean "silly-spooky") — and a fantastic mentor to more than a few *mettlesome* kids. Although he enjoys joining his sister in the podcast studio to discuss spookiness, his favorite haunt by far is a good auditorium or theater. Unlike the phantoms of R.L. Stein and Andrew Lloyd Weber, he's not there to scare anyone off. Instead, he welcomes them with open arms — he *does* have a master's degree in choral conducting, after all.

Steadman has never shied away from the stage, performing as a tenor soloist with the Western New York Chamber Orchestra, Erie Opera Theater, Erie Chamber Orchestra, and Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as a player in various community theaters (serving on the board of directors for both the Erie Playhouse and Dramashop) and Erie Philharmonic Chorus (where he is acting vice chair of the steering committee) productions.

He is not afraid to cede the spotlight to others either, whether he's teaching vocal jazz or choir at General McLane, coaching private voice students, chauffeuring standouts to any of the Pennsylvania Music Educator Association's major student showcases (he is currently the PMEA District 2 professional development chair), or directing rock musicals (like the Lizzie Borden-themed *Lizzie* at Dramashop).

His most superlative understudies have advanced to some of the most prestigious programs in the country, such as the Interlochen Center for the Arts (Michigan), the Paper Mill Playhouse (in the vicinity of Manhattan, and by extension Broadway), and several top college musical theater and voice programs.

He's more than ready for Erie's next act. "I want to provide opportunities for students to grow as empathetic artists and help them find passion for music, theater, and the arts." Perfectly pitched. — MS

Michelle (Elle) Taylor, 38**Local Musician; Case Manager, Sarah Reed Children's Center**

While you might see some people wearing her merch that says "Don't Ask Me About Elle Taylor," we definitely want you to ask us about this local

musician.

Many may recognize her from her involvement in the local Erie music scene, but by day, Elle Taylor works as a case manager with children in the acute program at Sarah Reed Children's Center. That's not to say she hasn't brought her talent and love of music to the youth she helps, though: over the past six years, she has been teaching the kids in the program to play the ukulele.

Voted the Erie Reader's Best New Artist in 2022, Elle is very involved in local music and art. She runs Open Mic Night at Philly on the Rocks each Sunday, giving other local musicians a space to express themselves and perform original music. She's had shows at the 1020 Collective, played Celebrate Erie multiple years running, and sells her art annually at the Arts & Drafts show.



Elle isn't trying to compete with other local artists, though. "We all have the same dream and passion, and music should never be a competition," she said. "I just want to listen to and root for others because I would not be doing anything with music if it was not for people believing in me."

While music is a big passion for her, Elle is also a single mom whose two children come before anything else. Her family includes the four-legged variety, too: she has cats, one of which is 17 years old and is her best friend. In her free time outside of work and music, she can be found riding her bike, kayaking, hiking, camping, and oftentimes creating collage art to sell or writing songs on her porch.

One of the most important things she wants young people to realize is that it's never too late to chase your dreams. "It's okay to not know what you're doing," she said. "I didn't play guitar until I was 31 and didn't have a band until I was 35. I'm more proud of myself now than I ever thought possible. Life doesn't end at 30 or 40 or 50. It's a journey, not a destination." — AK

Yvan Vladimir Tchounga, 28**Video Editor and Data Analyst, WQLN/PBS/NPR**

Though he hails from Yaounde, Cameroon, Yvan Vladimir Tchounga has called Erie home since he began his graduate work at Mercyhurst University, studying data science. That work led to his current position at WQLN, where he works as a video editor and data analyst, creating and editing promotional videos for the historical docuseries *Chronicles*, as



well as analyzing and interpreting different social media numbers, "which helps us better understand our demographic and target audience," Tchounga explained.

Chronicles, which features stories about the people and places that make the Lake Erie region extraordinary, was nominated for six 2023 Central Great Lakes Emmys, a fact Tchounga — who had a hand in every single episode — is extremely proud of.

When not working, Tchounga dedicates much of his time to his podcast, *International Student Experience*, where he talks "with different students, academics, and professionals about their home country's cuisine, culture, and tourism. We also talk about their experience in the U.S.," he mentioned. As one of his nominators said, "Through this podcast, he serves as an ambassador to the city and helps this community feel more at home."

Additionally, Tchounga runs an online group with friends from Cameroon called *Affaire Nkap*, and, while living in West Africa, he ran a nonprofit called *Helping Hands*, which organized different campaigns to help aid the orphanages of Cameroon.

Tchounga plans to stay in Erie — "There's a lot going on here," he said — and he enjoys taking advantage of Presque Isle, playing soccer, and pickleball.

Erie is a city with strong immigrant communities, as well as outstanding individuals representing their home countries, like Tchounga. As he said, "Let's embrace our diversity and keep learning from each other." — CS

Brenna Thummler, 30**Graphic Novelist, Illustrator**

Just one glance at Brenna Thummler's work and you know it's something special. With three major graphic novels — published by Andrews McNeel and Oni Press — and two on the way this year, her talent seems only to be matched by her incredible work ethic. "If you're not working, then you should be working," she mentioned as one of her frequently repeated mottos.

And working she is.

Growing up and attending high school nearby in Meadville, she ventured south to Sarasota, Florida's Ringling College of Art and Design. From there she served as an illustration intern with Andrews McNeel, which unexpectedly led to her debut work, a graphic novel retelling of *Anne of Green Gables*. She went on to write and illustrate *Sheets* in 2018



and its sequel *Delicates* in 2021. The former was named a Barnes & Noble Best Book of 2018, and was nominated for a Reuben Award from the National Cartoonists Society (NCS), and the latter named a Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Great Graphic Novel for Teens. This September will see the release of *Lights*, the final part of her original trilogy. Her self-described “post office western,” *Gumshoe* is set for a 2026 release with HarperAlley, the graphic novel branch of HarperCollins.

On top of that already impressive resume, she’s an actor, playwright, pianist, tapdancer, and podcaster. Recently appearing in productions of *Mamma Mia* and *Cabaret* with the Academy Theatre, she

had her one-act play *Single Book Store* produced by Dramashop, and started the podcast/website *Spotlight 814* with her co-host Ryan Dawley, focused on the area’s community theater scene. Thummler is also seeking her master’s degree at the Middlebury Bread Loaf School of English, which will find her studying at Oxford University this summer. — NW

Dr. Rochelle Von Hof, 39
Executive Director, L’Arche Erie; Senior Research Assistant, SUNY Fredonia

Dr. Rochelle Von Hof has a long history of helping those with developmental and intellectual disabilities — in fact, while working for the Chautauqua County Department of Mental Hygiene she wrote and won a \$4 million grant, and she is the co-founder of the White Pine Center for Healing, a nonprofit that works with individuals who struggle with eating disorders.

But it is her work through L’Arche Erie, as community leader and executive director, that Von Hof has made her greatest impact on the area to date — and she’s nowhere near done. “I want to continue to build programming for those who have mental/behavioral health and/or intellectual disabilities needs, because Erie is a place where everyone belongs,” Von Hof — who holds three degrees, including a doctorate in psychology — said.

One of her nominators remarked, “Rochelle goes above and beyond her long list of responsibilities...

first and foremost, she leads by example. She has built authentic relationships with many of the core members. For these individuals, who may feel like outcasts in society, she spends time supporting and



building friendships with them.”
In addition to her work with L’Arche, Von Hof is a passionate advocate for animals, as evidenced by her involvement with the Erie Kennel Club. And outside of work, Rochelle enjoys spending time with her husband and three French mastiffs, listening to podcasts, and educating herself “on how

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40 UNDER 40

the brain works and how the body responds to traumatic events.”

When asked if she plans on staying in Erie for the foreseeable future, Von Hof responded with a resounding “absolutely!” And Erie is all the better for it — as another nominator said, “Through events, outreach and volunteer opportunities, she has a positive impact at L’Arche and in Erie, building stronger relationships in the community.” — CS

Curtis Waidley, 26

Owner, Natural States Collective; Graphic Designer, American Stage Theater Company



Growing up in Erie, Curtis Waidley got to spend a good deal of time outdoors, doing the magical-seeming things that kids do. “However, I still always caught myself hypnotized by dramatic photographs of Western landscapes,” he describes at his website, naturalstatescollective.com. “I even remember changing the desktop wallpaper on my parents’ home computer once a week to photos of Yosemite and Canyonlands just so I could daydream about one day seeing these places for myself. At that age, the West seemed like another world.”

It’s that spirit of wanderlust that would shape both his life and his career.

In 2018, he embarked on a six-week journey to finally see 13 of our national parks, still visiting one per year.

A graduate of Northwest Pennsylvania Collegiate Academy and Mercyhurst University, Waidley studied design, and it was there when his project to illustrate America’s national parks first began to take shape, beginning with a series of eight posters for his senior thesis. Later, during the pandemic, he launched Natural States Collective, which is now a successful retail platform for his artwork and apparel. He’s since shipped orders to all 50 states, ethically sources his paper, and donates 10 percent of his total proceeds to National Park Foundation.

He’s a former professional photographer as well, having worked for American Eagle, Philmont Scout Ranch BSA, Lorei Portraits, and Level Red Boxing. His work has been exhibited in the Erie Art Museum Spring Show, and he has been a grant recipient from Erie Arts & Culture.

A member of Radius CoWork, Waidley works remotely full-time as the graphic designer for the American Stage Theater Company in St. Petersburg, Florida, which was named “Theatre Company of the Decade” by *Broadway World*. — NW

Mary Wassell, 26

Marketing and Communications Director, Parker Phillips

Good communication can be difficult — a source of woe and frustration in many relationships. But Mary Wassell has turned communication into an art through her day-to-day duties at Parker Phillips. “I work as part of a collaborative team on large-scale communications plans, projects, and initiatives. I help to strategize, craft, and execute marketing and communications plans for clients. I write copy for press releases, op-eds, newsletters, social media posts, and marketing collateral. I draft and distribute media materials, including press releases, media advisories, and pitch calls. I assist with project management and day-to-day communications with clients, while also supporting the social media and digital marketing manager with oversight of all social media accounts. I also plan and implement events, including press conferences, both in-person and virtual, and manage press inquiries and media relations.” Basically, Mary is the queen of effective communication.



This hometown hero, a graduate of both McDowell and Gannon University, is also a member of the Young Erie Philanthropists, the Northwestern Pennsylvania Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, and serves on her church’s parish council.

Among her many accomplishments, one of her proudest was being a part of Level Up PA, in which she played a role in successfully launching a campaign to persuade lawmakers to invest \$100 million in Pennsylvania’s 100 poorest school districts. “As a result,” Wassell reflects, “the first Level Up supplement in Pennsylvania was passed in 2021 — a big step in the right direction to close the inadequate and inequitable education funding gap.”

And we can look forward to many more years of Mary’s contributions continuing in Erie, as she loves being a resident of our city, “I couldn’t be prouder

to call Erie my home. Erie is in a period of constant growth — and it is very exciting to not only watch, but also have the opportunity to play a part in it.” — EP

Adam Williams, 34

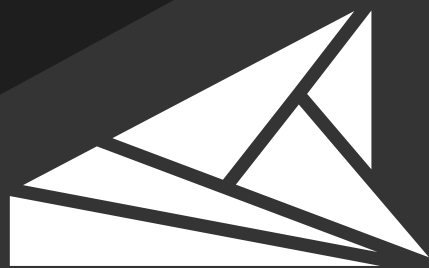
Chef and Partner, Bar Rōnin



Starting a restaurant is no easy task — from securing and designing a space, to building a brand, and creating a unique and craveable menu. Then comes the day-to-day of executing a successful dining experience for the hundreds of guests who come through the doors. All of this has been achieved and sustained by Adam Williams, who has not only helped make Bar Rōnin what it is (and it is something special: a fine dining experience unparalleled in culinary creativity in Erie), but is currently in the process of doing it all again, with a second (super secret) restaurant planned.

A Union City native, Adam earned his culinary arts degree from Le Cordon Bleu in Pittsburgh before coming back to Erie to build and plan two restaurants from the ground up. His business partner and friend Dan Kern comments, “Adam has had a huge influence on creating and bringing great food and spaces to our wonderful city. He is often underappreciated and doesn’t receive equal credit for the things we have built together.” Bringing great food to Erie is very important to Adam, who feels like providing a space where people can enjoy themselves and appreciate his creative dishes is his true goal: “I want to create multiple spots for dining and drinking where people can gather and just have a great time with some great company and do the absolute best job I can everyday to provide that for this community.”

Among his accomplishments, Adam is most proud of winning the Western PA Lamb Fest, a culinary competition in Pittsburgh that pitted his dishes against many of the best chefs in the region, which resulted in appearances in *Table* and *Pittsburgh Magazine*. When he’s not pouring over creative new menu items or cooking them up in the kitchen, he enjoys spending time with his dog Daisy and playing golf with his dad. And lucky for Erieites (and our taste buds) he has no plans to move away — instead, he plans to continue to build upon the momentum he’s created with Bar Rōnin. — EP



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EVENTS

Erie Philharmonic’s Summer Series Returns

Enjoy free orchestral productions in your neighborhood

CONTINUING WEDNESDAY, JUL. 12

The Erie Philharmonic is bringing back their popular Summer Series with a plethora of free outdoor concerts across Erie and Crawford counties. The Philharmonic has seven more performances scheduled throughout July and August, ranging from full orchestral performances of American composer Russell Peck’s *The Thrill of the Orchestra* in July, to a 16-person brass ensemble in August with arrangements of a variety of tunes from John Phillip Sousa, Scott Joplin, and Henry Mancini.

“From Corry to North East and everywhere in between, the Philharmonic is bringing the music to your hometown this summer,” the Philharmonic states. “This is our thank you for your continued heroic generosity and dedication to Erie’s orchestra.”

In July, the orchestra continues its tour: on July 12 through 14 at Gibson Park in North East, Corry City Park, and Diamond Park in Meadville. Preceding the concerts, there will be activities, including an “instrument petting zoo.” The

final leg of the tour, featuring the orchestra’s 16-person brass ensemble, will visit Pleasant Ridge Park in Girard (July 31), Gibson Park (Aug. 2), Gridley Park in Erie (Aug. 3), and Scheide Park in Titusville (Aug. 7). Rain dates for all locations will be available on the Erie Philharmonic website.

Following in the footsteps of English composer Benjamin Britten’s *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*, Russell Peck’s *The Thrill of the Orchestra* features narration introducing audiences to the instruments individually. When touring, Peck would often provide the narration. The piece first premiered in October 1985 by the Florida Symphony, where it was commissioned by and dedicated to conductor Alfred Savia. Peck received the Koussevitzky Prize for his work in composition, and his *Peace Overture* was one of the first series of contemporary American pieces to be played by the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra in China and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra in Egypt. The piece reflected his work with the Unit-



The Erie Philharmonic returns to a public park near you through July and August with their popular and free Summer Series. Plan to bring a chair and enjoy a selection from the orchestra and bring the kids along to experience the “instrument petting zoo.”

ed Nations on humanitarian efforts to combat world starvation and poverty.

John Phillip Sousa, Scott Joplin, and Henry Mancini are well-known for their contributions to American music. Sousa is known for his works for band, including the well-known marches *The Stars and Stripes Forever* and *The Washington Post*. Joplin, known as the “King of Ragtime”, composed over 40 piano pieces in the style, which helped in-

spire and shape the genres of jazz and blues. Mancini is well-regarded for his stylistic flair in popular music, composing the scores for iconic films and television shows, including *The Pink Panther*, *Peter Gunn*, and *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*. — Thomas Taylor

July 12, 13, 14, and 31, Aug. 2, 3, and 7 // Various locations // Concerts start at 7 p.m., instrument petting zoo opens at 6 p.m. // Free // For more info: eriephil.org



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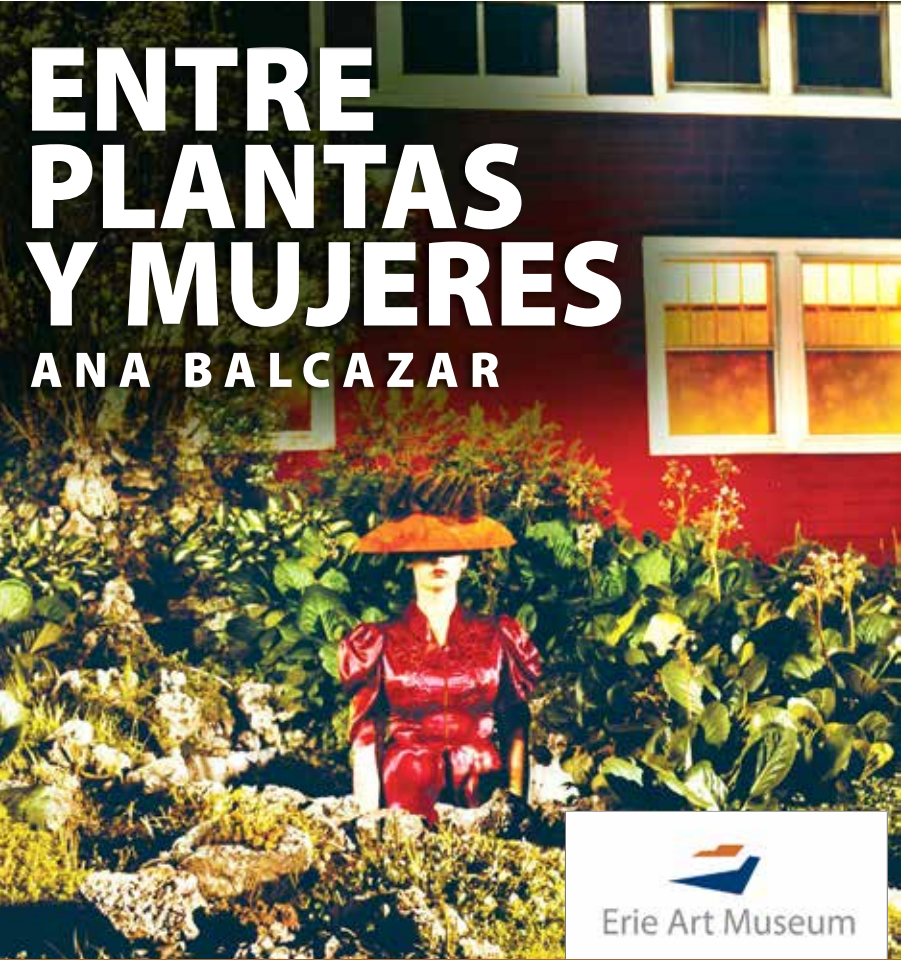
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Mystery and Mayhem Onboard Erie's Victorian Princess

Murder in a Bottle takes to the seas in July and August

BEGINNING THURSDAY, JUL. 13

Do murder, mystery, intrigue, buried treasure, and a cruise ship filled with suspicious characters pique your curiosity? Then join the cast and crew of the Victorian Princess for their performance of *Murder In A Bottle*, in an evening of fun-filled mystery-solving, all while enjoying the waters of Presque Isle Bay with dinner and drinks provided by Calamari's.

Local playwright and performer Adele Crotty is excited to bring this newly produced play to the community, set in one of the most unique venues in Erie, "For anyone who enjoys murder mystery, humor, intrigue, delicious food, and a beautiful cruise around our amazing lake, this unique event is for you." She continues, "Engage your inner Sherlock Holmes and see if you can solve the murder and win the Honorary Detective prize. *Murder in a Bottle* is an original play written specifically for the challenges and excitement that come with performing on a moving boat, so this is something you won't experience anywhere else."

This event will run Thursdays through July and August, and Crotty expects that the popular dinner theater events will sell out, so make sure you reserve your spot today. "After the incredible success of last year's show *Murder on Misery Bay*, we highly recommend ordering tickets well in advance as we

JULIE LOKAHI



Pictured is Mike DeCorte who plays Dr. Larry Wingrove in the upcoming, locally written and produced murder-mystery play *Murder In a Bottle*, staged onboard the Victorian Princess cruise ship.

sold out all performances and were left with a wait list of people who, unfortunately, were not able to attend the event. Our August 10th performance this year is already sold out, so get your tickets soon."

Murder in a Bottle is written and directed by Adele Crotty, with assistant director Julie Lokahi. The cast includes Tony Lewandowski, Katie States, Mike DeCorte, Colleen Munn, Lisa Simonian, and Justin Moyer. — Erin Phillips

Thursdays July 13, 20, and 27, and August 3, 10, and 17 // Board at 5:30 p.m., show starts at 6 p.m. (approx. runtime, 3 hours) // \$68 // For more info: victorianprincess.com

WQLN's Sounds Around Town: 2023 Season

Lights, camera, action!

CONTINUING FRIDAY, JUL. 14

One of Erie's most unique concert series is back for its 10th year in a row: Sounds Around Town. The one-of-a-kind setting of the WQLN campus allows local artists to perform in the woods that surround the studio, in front of a live audience, while being captured on camera to be aired on television at a future date. The Sounds Around Town music series has always provided a showcase for the artists of our region and a time capsule of the bands that were popular at the time of the recordings. The series originated in the late 1970s and had a brief revival in the 1990s, however the current series is the longest running yet.

Sounds Around Town traditionally starts the first Friday after the Fourth of July weekend and runs for a total of four Fridays in a row. This year, singer-songwriter (and 2023 40 Under 40 honoree) Elle Taylor kicked off the series with her band on July 7. On Friday, July 14, the Meadville-based rock cover band Touch of Grey will take the stage. Week three will feature the troubadour rock sounds of Sunday at the Station, and wrapping up the series on Friday, July 28 will be Erie area singer songwriter Josh Travis.

When asked why people should choose to spend their Friday evenings at Sounds Around Town, WQLN's marketing coordinator Chantel Rodriguez said, "It's an enriching and soul-stirring experience that celebrates the talent and spirit of

WQLN



our local musicians. It provides a sense of unity and community pride where friends meet new and old connections. It's also a chance to be part of something beautiful, where music weaves its magic and hearts are uplifted in a place we call home. We love our local bands, local beer, and local food. It's what loving Erie is all about."

These family friendly concerts are free and open to the public and start promptly at 7:30 p.m. It is recommended that you come early and bring your own chair or blanket. This year's sponsors are National Fuel, Smith's Provisions (who supplies hot dogs for the hungry visitors), and Five & 20 Spirits and Brewing, who will be providing beer samples throughout the evening. There will be plenty of parking as well as a golf cart available to transport individuals who are in wheelchairs or are unable to walk down the path to the concert. — Larry Wheaton

Fridays in July // 7:30 p.m. // WQLN Studios, 8425 Peach St. // Free // For more info: wqln.org

Forget Regret or Life is Yours to Miss

Meadville's Academy Theatre is living as well as it can with *Rent*

PREMIERES FRIDAY, JUL. 14

If you grew up in the '90s, there is a good chance that you have memorized how many minutes there are in a year, and for that you can thank the song "Seasons of Love" from the hit Broadway musical *Rent* for that. Written by Jonathan Larson, *Rent* is loosely based on an opera made famous in 1996 known as *La Boheme*, which follows the life of a poor seamstress and her artist friends living in Paris in 1830. Larson drew from this storyline to create a modern-day version set in New York City during the height of the AIDS/HIV epidemic in the 1990s, with relatable music and themes for the younger generation. *Rent* began bridging gaps between stuffy theater-goers and the new wave of musical theater enthusiasts.

Julia Kemp, artistic director for Mead-

ville's Academy Theatre, is responsible for all artistic endeavors for the theater and is very committed to bringing high quality entertainment to the community, so much so that she has also decided to grace the stage for this production as Joanne. She says, "Although relatability to the content may be low, having local theater is relatable on its own. Being in a room full of your peers and people from your community gathered for the same purpose, brings a sense of relatability to any showing." She continues, "You experience friendship, conflict, grief, and love all with those that you share a street with every day."

The narrator Mark poses the following question in every production: "Is anyone in the mainstream?" This question is geared toward the local audience and

is meant to make individuals contemplate the theme — youthful optimism, seizing the day, and how that is a universal concept. It's also about searching out a community that transcends the separateness of individuals and finding understanding in a world where it seems impossible to fit in. "You'll hear us mention Jason during act one, and that is in reference to a lost loved one of a cast member. For that cast member, the themes of *Rent* hit closer than the rest," Kemp says. "The average age of our cast is 23, so we all have our own experiences to draw from for these performances."

With these showings Kemp and the director, Ted Watts Jr., hope to inspire audiences to embrace the concept of "carpe diem" (seize the day), and to not let fear or uncertainty hold them back from pursuing their dreams. "We'd also like to highlight the power of love, acceptance, and promoting the idea that love knows

MARGARET WEST



Throughout July you can catch Mary Coulter playing Mimi (left) and Oliver Smith playing Roger in Meadville's Academy Theatre's production of *Rent*.

no boundaries and that everyone deserves respect and understanding. There is nothing more valuable and life-saving than authentic human connection and support." They also hope to inspire, uplift and provoke thought with this run. — Jordan Coon

Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m., July 14 - 30 // Meadville Academy Theatre, 275 Chestnut St., Meadville // \$17-\$25 // For tickets and info: theacademytheatre.org

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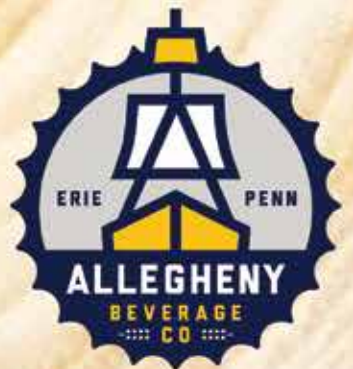
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Mother Earth News Fair Coming to Erie

Learn how to live sustainably from experts across the country

BEGINNING SATURDAY, JUL. 15

For those interested in building a more sustainable lifestyle, the Mother Earth News Fair is coming to the Bayfront Convention Center in July. The two-day event will feature interactive workshops, presentations, and vendors with topics ranging from raising animals and seed-saving, alternative energy, and herbal medicine.

Mother Earth News has provided information on do-it-yourself projects, gardening, and homesteading for over 50 years. "When it comes down to it, what we teach is resilience," states Josh Wilder, director of events and video at Mother Earth News. Wilder mentions increasing costs of necessities due to inflation and supply chain issues as rea-

"When it comes down to it, what we teach is resilience ... A lot of times we're sold things that aren't as necessary. You know, it's really about living simpler." ~ Josh Wilder, director of events and video at Mother Earth News

sons for people to learn these skills: "A lot of times we're sold things that aren't as necessary," Wilder adds, "You know, it's really about living simpler."

Throughout the weekend there will be over 75 workshops and eight event stages where experts will share their knowledge. For an additional registration fee, people can participate in the fair's hands-on learning workshops, like the Foraging Walk at Presque Isle State Park. On Saturday morning, participants will learn the basics of foraging at Presque Isle with Amyrose Foll and William Padilla-Brown, two specialists in



Learn the art of resilience at the two-day Mother Earth News Fair coming to the Bayfront Convention Center. There will be classes in a number of subjects including gardening, animal husbandry, and foraging.

the field. "It'll be a group of 10 or 20 people with a mushroom expert and a foraging expert, going through the state park and identifying the types of food or mushrooms that you could possibly consume or what to stay away from," Wilder explains. "[It will include] a lot of the ethos and the community around foraging and what's acceptable and what's not," Wilder adds. Though Mother Earth News has online resources like videos and podcasts, Wilder explains that the in-person fair is a unique experience with a chance to build community with like-minded people, "You can learn a lot from our speakers, but you're [also] gonna learn a lot from the people you're sitting next to." — Alana Sabol

Saturday July 15 from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday July 16 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // \$32-\$212 // For tickets and info: motherearthnews.com

Our West Bayfront's West Bayfit, Back Again

Wednesday nights are for wellness at Bayview Park

CONTINUING JUL. 19

Cultivating the Erie community, Our West Bayfront (OWB) offers West Bayfit events for all Erieites throughout the month of July. OWB has been a valued organization for their neighborhood area since 2014, helping to create a strengthened community that emphasizes the well-rounded health of each individual. This nonprofit organization revitalizes neighborhoods in the lower west side of Erie spanning from Sassafras Street to the Bayfront Connector, and West 12th Street to Presque Isle Bay. The weekly West Bayfit events held at Bayview Park are a part of OWB's outreach — the goal of this program being to enliven Bayview Park with action to inspire all people to be healthy and active in both mind and body.

West Bayfit has something for everyone, with S.T.E.M. related activities, crafts (like kite building or painting plant pots), athletics, music, food, and more. West Bayfit combines the efforts of many local partners from the Erie area to collaborate and offer resources to the people of the West Bayfront area. Gannon University and First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant lead the featured sport of the week. Gannon's student volunteers are available to help those interested in learning the sport (which can include volleyball, tennis, wiffleball, and soccer). Anyone is welcome to play; no prior knowledge is needed. A hockey game led by the McDowell Hockey Club and pickleball with the Erie Pickleball Association are planned for the summer.

Burch Farms provides a \$5 food voucher and brings fresh food to West Bayfit, farmers market style. Other consistent partners include Feeding Minds and the



Join the folks at Our West Bayfront along with the Erie County Department of Health for their weekly gathering at Bayview Park for West Bayfit. Enjoy farmer's markets, crafts, educational opportunities, and physical challenges.

Erie County Department of Health. The efforts of OWB and West Bayfit have been positive as Bayview Park continues to increase in popularity with folks using the space to connect with others, nature, and themselves. Project manager for OWB (and 2023 40 Under 40 honoree) Marissa Litzenberg mentioned the park quickly attracts people filled with anticipation for the night's events and activities. Litzenberg's favorite role at this experience is "meeting the inquisitive kids or seeing kids become inquisitive. They will start at a location, at one of the activities a little quiet and as they build their craft, there are people helping them and cheering them on and they really build confidence as the night goes on."

You don't have to live in the West Bayfront to enjoy West Bayfit gatherings — all are welcome to come and enjoy an evening of fun and fitness! — Sarah Beck
6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Wednesdays July 12, 19, and 26 // Bayview Park, W. 2nd and Cherry streets // Free



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Support *Tethered*: An Immersive Theatrical Experience in Erie

Kickstarter event to help bring unique fusion of performance arts to fruition

TUESDAY, JUL. 25

You can get in on the ground floor of a new immersive theater project in Erie — which will be the first of its kind in the area. Born from the minds behind Lyons Den Productions, and with an impressive cast of characters from Erie's theater, dance, film, and nonprofit scene at the helm (including John C. Lyons, Corinne Justine, Nikki Behr, Jennifer Dennehy, Adele Desmone, Niecey Nicole, Sakhari Thomas, Anna McJunkin, and Mark Tanenbaum) the immersive theater experience titled *Tethered* is already off to an impactful start.

The story behind the experience centers around the self: the masks we put

up and the often destructive behaviors we perpetuate because of those masks. According to the experience's creator John Lyons, "It's only when the mask falls that we are exposed and forced to see who we really are and the journey of healing and self-discovery may begin. Inspired by true events, *Tethered* will be an immersive theatrical experience, the first event of its kind in Erie, with your help."

On Tuesday, July 25, consider joining the committee of *Tethered* for a Kickstarter event to help get this unique performance art experience into production. Cost of admission to the event is a pledge of \$25 or more to the group's



Kickstarter, which will open the morning of the event at 8 a.m. This pledge will also include adult beverages, light appetizers, live music and performances, new film screenings by Lyons Den Productions, and an exclusive peek inside the minds of the *Tethered* creative team.

If the group reaches their funding goal, supporters will also be among the first attendees of the ultimate *Tethered* experience. — Erin Phillips

6 p.m. to 9 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // \$25+ // For more info: Search Facebook events for *TETHERED* Kickstarter Launch Event

Annual Lake Erie Cyclefest Returns

An inclusive celebration of all things cycling

BEGINNING THURSDAY, JUL. 27

The annual Lake Erie Cyclefest is set to run from Thursday, July 27 through Sunday, July 29. Cyclists can enjoy scenic views across the picturesque Erie County area. Presented by the Erie Sports Commission, the event consists of six self-guided bike rides for all ages and abilities. According to the executive director of the Erie Sports Commission Mark Jeanneret, more than 900 cyclists participated in the 2022 Lake Erie Cyclefest. "We hope to see that number continue to grow as we add more exciting elements to the rides and take participants' feedback as we try to improve the experience for everyone," he explained.

Accessibility is a priority for the Erie Sports Commission: "It is important that we make this celebration of cycling as inclusive as possible. We want to remove as many barriers as possible to getting people out on their bikes and taking part in a festival that is meant to celebrate them and their community," Jeanneret explained. Cyclefest includes a wide variety of locations, distances, and prices.

"We like to say that Lake Erie Cyclefest is an all-cycling weekend for all cycling lovers, and we mean it," Jeanneret commented.

The events happening throughout Lake Erie Cyclefest are as follows:

Downtown Slow Roll

Thursday, July 27 at 6 p.m.

Cyclefest will kick off with the Downtown Slow Roll beginning and ending

in Perry Square in Downtown Erie. The slow roll is an easy level ride that is family friendly and perfect for casual cyclists. Following the ride, musical entertainment will be provided by the rock band Phunkademic with special guests SAN-IS. The slow roll is free but registration is required.

Great Escape

Friday, July 28

The ride will begin and end at Shades Beach Park on Lake Erie in Harborcreek. Participants can choose between a 25 or 50-mile ride. Participants are invited to enjoy post-ride wine samples from Lake Erie Wine Country. Registration is \$45 with a deadline of Monday, July 24.

Tour de West County

Saturday, July 29

The Tour de West County is hosted by Asbury Woods and will depart from the Andrew J. Connor Nature Center. There are three distance options to explore the rolling hills and meadows of West County including 12-mile, 25-mile, and 50-mile. Registered participants will receive a post-ride lunch. The cost to participate is \$45 with a registration deadline of Monday, July 24.

Six Mile Creek Classic

Saturday, July 29 at 2 p.m.

If you're interested in taking the road less traveled, this ride will travel the six-mile long mountain bike course at the Six Mile Creek Park in Harborcreek.



The Presque Isle Sunrise Ride is one of six planned group rides during 2023's Lake Erie Cyclefest. There is a ride for everyone, beginner to advanced, and many rides are customizable for different skill levels.

There will be six classes varying in speed and distance: beginner, youth, sport, Clydesdale, expert, and single speed. Registration for the ride is \$40 until Thursday, July 27.

Presque Isle Sunrise Ride

Sunday, July 30 at 6 a.m.

Cyclists can enjoy the sunrise over the tranquil shores of Lake Erie in one of the most well-loved state parks during the Presque Isle Sunrise Ride. The 13-mile loop will begin at the Beach 1 Pavilion. Registered participants are invited to the Discover PI Pancake Breakfast at the Rotary Pavilion. New to Cyclefest is the opportunity to tour the Presque Isle Lighthouse. Registration is \$30 with a deadline of Thursday, July 27 by 6:15 a.m.

See Spot Ride

Sunday, July 30

Hosted by Because You Care, the See Spot Ride for Animal Rescue will feature three distance rides throughout rural McKean in Southern Erie County including 10-mile, 25-mile, and challenging 40-mile route. All three rides will depart from the McKean Elementary School beginning at 9 a.m. The ride will commence with a "pawty" at the Because You Care adoption center with local food trucks, beer, and entertainment all for a great cause. Registration is \$45 until Friday, July 28. — Julia Carden

July 27 - 30 // Varying times and locations // Free-\$45 // For more info: lakeericyclefest.org

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EVENTS

The Inaugural Violet Gathering: Crime Victim Center Benefit

Locals rockers rally together to throw a fundraiser festival

BEGINNING SATURDAY, JUL. 29

A staggering one in four women and one in nine men experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. Locals are collaborating together to create a safe and healing space by creating a festival that raises awareness and offers resources for those who are or have experienced an unsafe relationship.

Hosted at a nearby outdoor venue, local bands Odd Atrocity, Dumpster Garden, and their dedicated friends created the inaugural Violet Gathering which will offer tent camping, workshops including self-defense demonstrations, support groups, trauma releasing activities, art therapy, "rage painting," and more.

A supervised kids tent full of fun and engaging activities will be run until sundown by local moms and daycare workers with government clearances for parents who want to enjoy some child-free social time. This event features over 25 local bands and independent musicians on two stages for non-stop jams. There will also be several options for food vendors, general goods vendors, and a "free market."

The idea for the Violet Gathering, reflective of the purple ribbon which is used as a symbol for domestic violence survivors, was started as a means to protest abuse in the music scene. The hosts wanted to do something more than just protest, and as more ideas blossomed, they set out to create a supportive environment focused on healing, unity, fun, and accessible help for those in domes-



Massive Denial will be on the bill for the first annual Violet Gathering – a grassroots, all volunteer-run, not-for-profit music festival whose proceeds will benefit The Crime Victim Center of Erie and whose organizers hope to raise awareness of the prevalence of domestic violence.

tic situations.

The Violet Gathering has plans to continue hosting this event every year, donating proceeds to The Crime Victims Center of Erie. If you are interested in making a donation to the festival itself, readers can do so on Cashapp with the tag \$TheVioletGathering. The musical lineup and more details can be found on The Violet Gathering event page on Facebook. — Cypher Eihwaz

July 29 through 30 // Beginning at 12 p.m.
// Venue TBD, check FB for updated info //
\$10-\$15 // More info: thevioletgathering@gmail.com



Music of the American Revolution

David & Ginger Hildebrand

July 27, 2023 • 7PM

Enjoy a spirited performance of music telling the story of America's War for Independence. Highlighting both military and civilian forms of music, the Hildebrands will discuss and perform pre-war songs against taxation, ballads about heroes and battles, and dance music enjoyed by soldiers and officers alike. David & Ginger work directly from primary source musical materials and perform upon appropriate period instruments – harpsichord, violin, Spanish guitar, English guitar, hammered dulcimer and flutes.



The Disappearance of the Marquette and Bessemer No. 2 Vessels

Carrie Sowden, M.A.

August 14, 2023 • 7PM • FREE ADMISSION

December 7, 1909 might be the eeriest day of history on Lake Erie. The Marquette & Bessemer No. 2, set sail from Conneaut, Ohio, for a five-hour steam across the lake to Port Stanley, Ontario - but was never seen again. Since that time, researchers and shipwreck hunters have been looking for this 338-foot steel vessel and its story as to what happened on that December day. Join us as we take a look at the story, contrasting eye witness accounts, and possibly mutiny!

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

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Gem City Style: July 40 Under 40 Issue

40 Under 40 Catch-up: Emily George, David Hunter, and DaVona Pacley

By: Jessica Hunter

The Reader caught up with three of Erie’s 40 Under 40 honorees of years past to check in and see what they’re up to these days!

EMILY GEORGE



Jessica Hunter (JH): You were part of the 2018 class. Catch us up! What’s new? Tell us about how things have been since you were featured in Erie Reader 40 Under 40.

Emily George (EG): Hey Jess! I can’t believe it’s already been five years! A lot has happened and is still in the works. We moved our boutique’s location during the pandemic — the Dollhouse at Pointe Four is now located at 423 State St. in the old Erie Art Museum frame shop which is connected to other local boutiques and the art museum. We are now part of the Flagship City District’s Shops at 5th & State redevelopment. And drum roll! This year is a big milestone for the business. It’s our 10th anniversary as a brick and mortar (we started up in 2013) and my son Cy is a tween going into middle school.

JH: What challenges have you faced since you were featured; and how did you overcome those obstacles?

EG: Some of the challenges my business has faced were COVID, moving locations, and dealing with the recession. During the pandemic, Pointe Four had to close its brick and mortar operation for six months and then only partially open for the remainder of the year. I overcame these challenges by offering local delivery on

“Adapt and overcome. Succeed despite the challenges — improvise, adapt, and overcome. Repeat this process and persevere until the goal is accomplished. Align your values with your goals and mission. Take risks and dare to own a life you love.” — Dollhouse at Pointe Four owner Emily George’s advice to young professionals

online sales and selling plenty of vintage scarves. When the guidelines eased up and we were allowed to start opening back up we offered private shopping and styling appointments — which we still do! At that time we also worked on our Local LookBook, so that once the world started to open back up, the public would have a pocket-size guide on where to support other local small businesses in our hometown.

Moving is always a challenge and a risk. However, I looked at it as an opportunity to rebrand, refocus, and change our business model. We have spiced our name up, sprinkled in new sustainable merchandise, now carry local plants and fresh flowers alongside our vast inventory of locally sourced vintage golden gems. All things sustainably pretty! We started hosting workshops, like “Build your own Bonsai” with Ashton Ferns and collaborating on photoshoot events with... Jessica Hunter Photography. We have overcome challenges by

offering the public more meaningful shopping experiences and events — like our upcoming Summer Citrus Sizzle photoshoot party on July 16 and spearheading Flagship City Boutique Nights which are held every second Friday of the month until September.

JH: What’s your advice for other young professionals in Erie?

EG: Adapt and overcome. To succeed despite the challenges — improvise, adapt, and overcome. Repeat this process and persevere until the goal is accomplished. Align your values with your goals and mission. Take risks and dare to own a life you love.

DAVID HUNTER



JH: You were part of the 2013 class — our inaugural class. Catch us up! What’s new? Tell us about how things have been since you were featured in Erie Reader’s 40 Under 40?

David Hunter (DH): I was just 29 years old at the time I was asked to be part of the inaugural 40 Under 40 class. So much has happened since then; it’s hard to even answer this question without writing a short novel. My children are now in their teenage years and

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my wife is making big things happen with her photography business (and here at the Erie Reader). The business I started with Shaun Rajewski (40 Under 40 Class of 2014), Epic Web Studios, has grown substantially as well. When we first opened our doors back in 2008 we were nervous about hiring even one employee and now there are 18 full-time employees at Epic Web. Plus we offer pretty great benefits like top-tier healthcare, competitive salaries, flexible schedules, and a matching retirement plan; I'm pretty proud of the workplace we've built.

"Keep the faith in Erie! Start a business here. Buy a house here. Start a family here. I promise you will be pleasantly surprised with the support systems that have been created for all of these things and more over the past decade. Erie is actually an amazing place to live, work, and play." ~ David Hunter, CEO of Epic Web Studios

One of the most exciting updates, though, is an entirely new business we acquired last year called LocalFalcon.com. It's a SaaS business (Software as a Service) that shows anyone how they're ranking on search engines within their own city, neighborhood, or region. Local Falcon was started by a colleague of ours who lives on the Canadian side of Lake Erie, Yan Gilbert, and Epic Web Studios acquired the business on July 1, 2022. Since that time we've optimized the platform substantially and we're looking forward to a very bright future.

All-in-all, it's been a pretty amazing 10 years. My family and I have built a really great home and life here in Erie. I'm very happy, healthy-ish (ha), and very optimistic about the future.

JH: What challenges have you faced since you were featured; and how did you overcome those obstacles?

DH: It would be hard to look back on the past decade without at least one mention of the pandemic because that was a trying time for any business. Even though I'm running a digital marketing agency specializing in website development and search engine optimization (SEO), we still like to do things face-to-face and in the office as often as possible. In my experience, it's much easier to celebrate the victories and lament the defeats together as a team than when you only see your coworkers in-person a handful of times each year. Plus, I find the final product is usually a bit more polished when you can communicate with your clients and coworkers in-person; everyone seems to go the extra mile. Even with the difficulties of the pandemic and the realities of remote work, we got through it and came out stronger than when it started.

JH: What's your advice for other young professionals in Erie?

DH: Document and communicate your true needs and wants clearly, or you're almost never going to end up finding success. In my experience, I find strong communication to be the single most important quality a professional can possess. There are so many ways to communicate today, too. If you are nervous about face-to-face communication, then write things out in

an email or on Slack. If you're not a strong writer, then try using the phone. Maybe you're better at explaining things visually; that's fine too! As long as you can express yourself in a way that others are able to understand, then your career (and probably your life) is going to be a lot less stressful.

Oh, and keep the faith in Erie! Start a business here. Buy a house here. Start a family here. I promise you will be pleasantly surprised with the support systems that have been created for all of these things and more over the past decade. Erie is actually an amazing place to live, work and play. There are not many places where you can take a 30 minute drive and go to the beach when it's warm and skiing when it's cold (sometimes that can practically happen on the same day in Erie). There aren't many places where you can buy a really nice single family home for under \$200,000. There aren't many places where a week-long sleepaway summer camp for the kids is less than \$1,000. Did you know your kids can join a sailing club here for just a few hundred dollars and they're out on the water multiple days every single week? The opportunities you'll find in Erie are boundless. Make the commitment to Erie — you'll end up with a pretty amazing life.

DAVONA PACLEY



JH: You were part of the 2019 class. Catch us up! What's new? Tell us about how things have been since you were featured in Erie Reader 40 Under 40?

DaVona Pacley (DP): Since being featured in the 2019 Erie Reader 40 Under 40, so much has happened. In full transparency, in 2020 I was laid off from my job (at Sarah Reed Children's Center) of five years due to COVID, which was a blessing for me and led me to become a trained birth and postpartum doula. My job has also changed and I now work part-time as the community engagement associate for Erie Arts and Culture and a full-time business owner of Flow Freely — working independently and within a local community doula group, BirthRoot.

From personal experience, as Black and Queer femme, I didn't see folks that looked like me conducting yoga, reiki, or meditation classes here in Erie. I wanted to create an inclusive, diverse environment that supports my fellow Black and Queer folk. In my intention, it was imperative that I provided an open, brave, and intentional healing space for people that also prioritizes our Black and Queer community. My passion is to guide those

who are seeking support to explore their own personal truths and be liberated. I offer support as one grows through the journey of transitions in life, whether that be birthing a child, new experiences, new perspectives, and so on. This inspired me to create my business, Flow Freely — a holistic wellness business based in Erie that offers birth companion (doula) support, Usui Reiki energy healing, and meditation services.

Recently, I have partnered with Journey to a Trauma Informed Life's Wellness Initiative, which offers services to their Journey-ers and the community. These services include Reiki energy work, trauma-sensitive yoga classes and meditation sessions in collaboration with local BIPOC and LGBTQ+ providers. For Journey's Summer Solstice celebration, I led a 10-minute guided meditation and loved it!

"My advice for the other young professionals in Erie is to stay true to yourself. It's easy to get caught up in the hype of what others are doing – you can lose yourself that way. Each of us have unique gifts and it's up to us to learn, grow, and develop those gifts so that they can be shared with Erie and beyond." ~ 2019 Erie's 40 Under 40 honoree DaVona Pacley

I also provide Reiki sessions on Mondays and Fridays in Journey's Reiki Room located at 201 W. 11th St. You can learn more about me and Flow Freely by visiting flowfreely.space. Come flow with me!

JH: What challenges have you faced since you were featured and how did you overcome those obstacles?

DP: I have faced and still face many challenges, so that would be a whole article in itself! I would say the top three challenges for me were learning to say "no" to things, opportunities, etc. that do not spark joy, implementing my personal and professional boundaries, and resting without feeling shame for doing so. Also, TIME is more valuable than any monetary or material things!

I overcame these obstacles by taking a step back and reevaluating myself and my environment. I've asked myself: what am I willing to give my time to? Who am I willing to give my time to? Does this add value to me? Does this align with my personal and professional vision or mission?

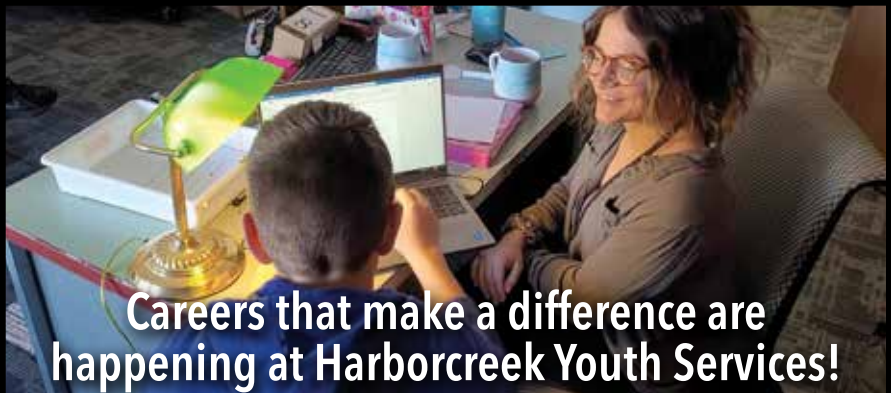
I'm also blessed to have a support system: my wife, close friends, family, and business mentors. I have folks that care for me and hold me accountable.

Lastly, I sought out a therapist again, I was growing through (still am) a transition in my life. So it was very important to me to take care of my mental health during these changes.

JH: What's your advice for other young professionals in Erie?

DP: My advice for the other young professionals in Erie is to stay true to yourself. It's easy to get caught up in the hype of what others are doing — you can lose yourself that way. Each of us have unique gifts and it's up to us to learn, grow, and develop those gifts so that they can be shared with Erie and beyond.

Jessica Hunter can be found at jessicahunterphotos.com




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MOVIE REVIEWS

The Truth is Out There

Asteroid City is a deliberately polarizing experience

★★★★

Wes Anderson's style, which he has been doing for nearly 30 years now, is superficially one of the easiest to replicate. The perfectly centered blocking and pastel color schemes can be found on parody videos all over the internet. However, the people spoofing those surface details never seem to get to the heart of Anderson's style. His storybook worlds reveal a deep melancholy and desire to connect on a truly human level, and no one (human or A.I.) can seem to match it. His newest, *Asteroid City* is strange even by Anderson's own standards but that desire for human connection amidst a chaotic, often unreal world is still laid bare.

Set in 1955 in a very small village built near the impact crater of a meteor strike, an eclectic group of people have come for the annual Junior Stargazers/Space Cadet Convention. But their lives are turned upside down when the government quarantines the town after an encounter with an extraterrestrial visitor.



Except the film's strange framing device reveals to us that this is all just a performance by a group of actors for a television broadcast. Anderson takes the inherent unreality of the situation and adds an extra layer of artificiality. The result could polarize viewers but he does an admirable job of breaking that barrier between performer and audience. The film itself is full of wonderfully deadpan performances and some of the funniest visual gags in Anderson's whole career. Audiences could find *Asteroid*

City either woefully self-indulgent or starkly emotionally honest, and I think they'd both be right. — Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Wes Anderson

// Starring Jason Schwartzman, Scarlett Johansson, Tom Hanks, Jake Ryan, Jeffrey Wright, Tilda Swinton, Bryan Cranston, Edward Norton, Adrien Brody, Liev Schreiber, Hope Davis, Stephen Park, Rupert Friend, Maya Hawke, Steve Carell, Matt Dillon, Hong Chau, Willem Dafoe, Margot Robbie, and Jeff Goldblum // Focus Features // 105 minutes // Rated 'PG-13'

Does Whatever a Spider Can

Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse is everything that makes comic books fun

★★★★

The superhero genre is one that has always appealed to the perpetual outsider. This has become harder to remember as the genre has become the most dominant force in mainstream entertainment, but the idea of a societal outcast who must keep their true identity secret to a world that would turn against them is something that attracts the marginalized from all walks of life. It's no surprise that comic books have always had a large LGBTQIA+ following.

The long-anticipated sequel, *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* is the first film in a long time that recognizes that appeal to the outsider. It's what happens when all the weirdos from every dimension come together in one glorious, spectacularly animated visual spectacle. It's the rare instance of a sequel being better than the original.

Sixteen months after his universe-hopping adventure, Miles Morales (voiced by Shameik Moore) has been living a double life as a high school student and a superhero, but he longs to meet others like him. That desire is answered when



his friend Gwen Stacy (Hailee Steinfeld) returns to his dimension and shows him a world where all the Spider-People have come together to handle threats that could undo the fabric of reality.

Like the first, this film uses dazzling animation that seems to combine hundreds of styles into one, resulting in a visual feast for the senses. The action is fast-paced and for a film whose story is almost entirely exposition, never feels bogged down by the details. The characters, both old and new are likable (Spider-Punk voiced by Daniel Kaluuya

is destined to become a fan favorite) and the writing is witty, making this Spider-Verse one that we never want to leave. —Forest Taylor

Directed by Joaquim Dos Santos, Justin K. Thompson, and Kemp Power // Written by Dave Callahan, Phil Lord, and Christopher Miller // Starring Shameik Moore, Hailee Steinfeld, Brian Tyree Henry, Luna Lauren Valez, Jake Johnson, Jason Schwartzman, Issa Rae, Karan Soni, Shea Whigham, Greta Lee, Andy Samberg, Daniel Kaluuya, Mahershala Ali, and Oscar Isaac // Sony Pictures // 140 minutes // Rated 'PG'

COMIC STORY BY BRAD PATTULLO

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I AM A COMIC STRIP CHARACTER BASED ON THE ARTIST WHO DREW ME. VISUALLY, I AM A GROTESQUE CARICATURE.



AM I SENTIENT? DO I EXIST BEYOND THIS FORMAT, OR AM I JUST A VESSEL FOR MY CREATOR TO POUR HIS ANXIETIES INTO?



DOES MY UNIVERSE EXTEND BEYOND THE INKED BORDERS OF THESE PANELS?



I AM FILLED WITH EXISTENTIAL DREAD.



Fish that Talk



NO MATTER HOW GOOD OR BAD YOU BEEN IN LIFE, SOME THINGS REMAIN THE SAME.



LISTENING TO THE LIONS

CHINESE BUILD ALTARS OF VENERATION. PICNICS ARE PACKED TO EAT ON THE GRAVES OF LOVED ONES, CELEBRATING DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS IN MEXICO. CATHOLICS PRAY TO/FOR SOULS AND SAINTS. THE CELTS BUILT STONE MEGALITHS AND STILL TOSS CAKES INTO THEIR SAMHAIN FIRES. HINDUS PERFORM ŚRĀDDHA RITES. MORE & MORE, WE FIND OURSELVES REACHING OUT TO OUR ANCESTORS. ASKING QUESTIONS AND LOOKING FOR GUIDANCE. THERE IS ONE THING OUR ANCESTORS ASK US-- WHY WON'T YOU LISTEN?



JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY

THESEUS, WHEN YOU GO TO BATTLE THE MINOTAUR, USE THIS STRING TO GUIDE YOU OUT OF THE BAFFLING LABYRINTH!



ALSO, WHILE YOU ARE THERE CAN YOU PICK ME UP SOME DECKING SCREWS, A NEW RYOBI® 18-VOLT BATTERY, AND ANOTHER BALL OF STRING?



ALBUM REVIEWS

Foo Fighters
But Here We Are
RCA/ Roswell Records
★★★★★

The Foo Fighters return with one of their most emotional and hard-hitting records in years. This is their eleventh studio album and first since the death of drummer Taylor Hawkins, who passed away one year ago. The album kicks off with stadium anthem “Rescued” before moving into the track “Under You,” both songs dealing with loss. It’s a nostalgic record, sounding like a matured version of their critically acclaimed sleeper hit *The Colour and The Shape*. This is the first Foo Fighters record to feature Dave Grohl back behind the kit, which may explain why *But Here We Are* is reminiscent of the first two albums. Grohl has grown as a songwriter over the years; while here he deals with the deaths of both Hawkins and his mother Virginia Grohl with head-on lyrics, earlier material was more indirect.

The second half of the album delves into the more dynamic side of the Foos — with “Show Me How” you can hear Grohl harmonizing with his daughter Violet and on “The Teacher” the group abandons the standard song format for a ripping, 10-minute song obviously influenced by Sonic Youth, while shouts of “Wake Up” and “Goodbye” continue throughout the song. Overall this album explores how to carry on emotionally, and musically, after forced changes and still manage to come out on top. — Larry Wheaton



Youth Lagoon
Heaven is a Junkyard
Fat Possum Records
★★★★★

If you’re like me, you may not have known about Youth Lagoon before now. This may be because musician Trevor Powers retired the name in 2016, opting to move forward using his own. If you’re like me, you may also be unsure about Powers’ vocals upon hearing “Rabbit,” the first song on his new album; and if you are like me, you’ll be completely sold by the end of the track, gripping in both its vivid lyrical imagery and warm, piano-forward instrumentation.

Heaven is a Junkyard is a story record, the kind with a background that informs its songs rather than distracts from them. After a severe over-the-counter drug reaction, Powers was left essentially mute for the better half of a year, unsure of whether he could ever sing again. Because of this, *Junkyard* is filled with trauma (“Idaho Alien”), but it also highlights a genuine, irony-free hopefulness that seems to be missing from indie rock these days (just try getting the carefree chorus of “Prizefighter” out of your head). Powers evokes a lot of artists with his return to the Youth Lagoon moniker — his vocals are reminiscent of Big Thief, his piano front and center as Bon Iver-esque samples add texture to the stories he sings — but most importantly, he sounds more like himself than he has in nearly 10 years. — Aaron Mook



Sigur Rós
Átta
BMG Rights Management
★★★★★

It’s great to hear from Sigur Rós, even if it never quite felt like they went away. Since the atmospheric kings of Icelandic post-rock released their last album, *Kveikur*, in 2013, the band lost a multi-instrumentalist and a drummer while frontman Jónsi continued to release new music under a variety of names, including Dark Morph (with Carl Michael von Hausswolff) and Sounds of Fischer (with Sin Fang, Alex Somers, and Kjartan Holm). So the question remains: 10 years later, what does a new Sigur Rós album sound like? Compared to the industrial heaviness that inspired *Kveikur*, *Átta* instead embraces its lack of percussion, delivering the band’s most cinematic material in 20 years.

Promotional copies of the album were delivered as a single file as opposed to individual tracks, and listening to *Átta*, it certainly feels this is how the music was intended to be heard. Quiet pauses barely separate the songs as orchestral strings and airy synthesizers lay the backdrop for Jónsi’s unmistakable, otherworldly falsetto, allowing an introduction like “Glóð” to transition into the haunting and sparse “Blóðberg” effortlessly. Put simply, the lack of diversity here is a feature, not a bug; in a world reflected by the album’s violent album art, *Átta* offers gentle reprieve and beauty. It’s not only one of the finest albums of the year, but one of the band’s best, too. — Aaron Mook



Skating Polly
Chaos County Line
El Camino Media
★★★★★

Skating Polly’s latest album, *Chaos County Line* is wonderfully epic in scope, coming in at 67 minutes between its 18 tracks — Lookout Records-era bands would give a nod of approval. Perfect for fans of Charly Bliss, thanks in part to the breathy nasal affectation that both Skating Polly’s Kelli Mayo and Charly Bliss’s Eva Hendricks use. Along with Mayo, Peyton Bighorse trades off lead vocal duties, her voice more fit for fans of Screaming Females and Sleater-Kinney. The duo provides a nice balance, especially with an album as varied as this, the sixth full-length album (the first since 2018’s *The Make It All Show*) from the trio. The sonic diversity is evident in the first three singles, the grungy “Hickey King,” the retro vibes of “Tiger at the Drugstore,” and the power pop of “I’m Sorry for Always Apologizing.”

Beginning in Oklahoma City and now centered in Tacoma, Washington, the band was formed by stepsiblings Mayo and Bighorse, when they were just adolescents, releasing their debut album when Mayo was 10 years old, their follow-up being produced by X’s Exene Cervenka. They were later joined by their (step)brother Kurtis Mayo. Filled with frenetic and creative tracks that harness all the creative energy of the mid-’90s, this album sees the band at their most mature, moving far beyond any lingering novelty. — Nick Warren



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



BOOK REVIEW

The Wishing Game

Be careful what you wish for

Wishes can be a powerful thing — especially in Meg Shaffer's debut novel, *The Wishing Game*.

When Lucy was a young girl, she loved the *Clock Island* series written by extremely famous yet reclusive children's author, Jack Master-son. She loved them so much that she even ran away to the fantastical Clock Island in her early teens, showing up on the author's doorstep.

Now an adult employed as a teacher's aide, Lucy shares the love of the *Clock Island* series with her students, especially Christopher — a bright seven-year-old boy who was left orphaned following the tragic death of both his parents. Wanting nothing but happiness for him, Lucy's biggest wish is to be able to adopt the boy, but without proper funds and stability, it seems an impossible wish.

That is until Jack Masterson comes out of a long hiatus to announce he's written a new *Clock Island* book, of which there is only one copy in the entire world. He plans to hold a contest for the copy, inviting four lucky contestants — one of which is Lucy — to compete for the prize. All four contestants have one thing in common, and they travel to the real Clock Island for the second time in their lives to try and win.

Lucy can't believe her luck — in winning the newest book, she could be financially set for life, with enough money to afford the stability needed to adopt Christopher and create the perfect family together they have always wished for. But what must come first are challenges far more serious than a riddle or two from Jack Masterson — Lucy must come to terms with her past, and relive parts of her childhood she thought she left behind.

What follows is an absolute masterpiece — part whimsical fairytale come to life, part lessons in what it means to be an adult whose childhood may not have been ideal. Meg Shaffer paints a world in which both these things come together so magically that it is easy to believe that if you wish hard enough, all of your dreams just might come true. — Ally Kutz

Ballantine Books // 304 pages // Fiction, Fantasy

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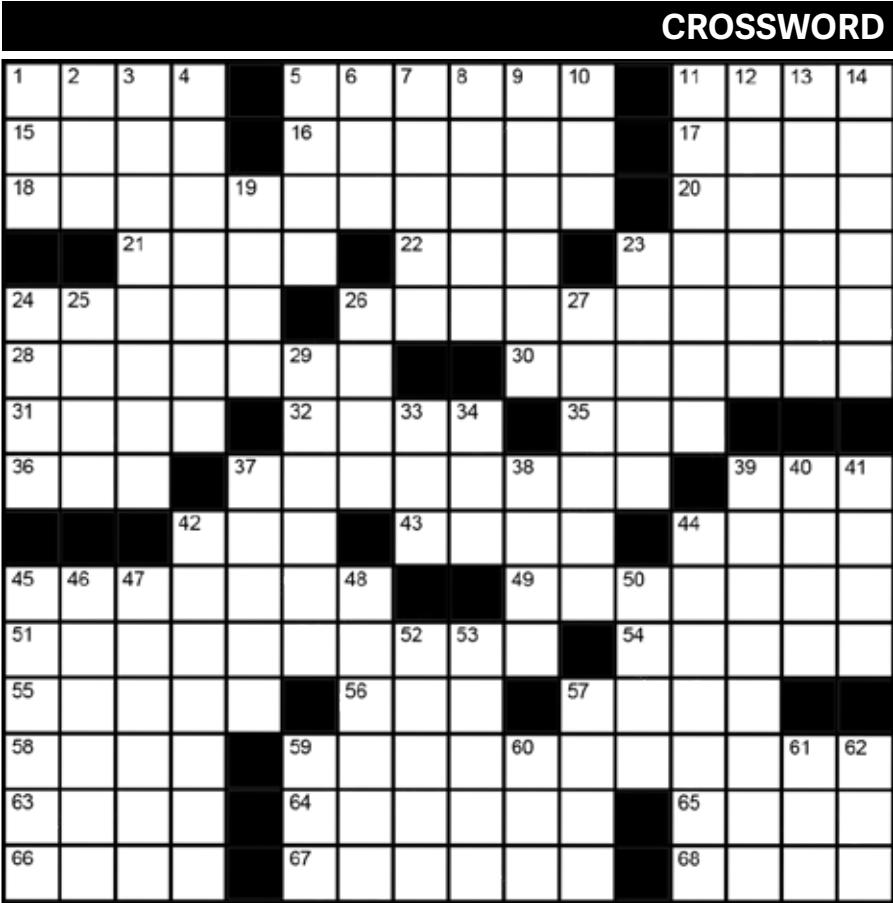
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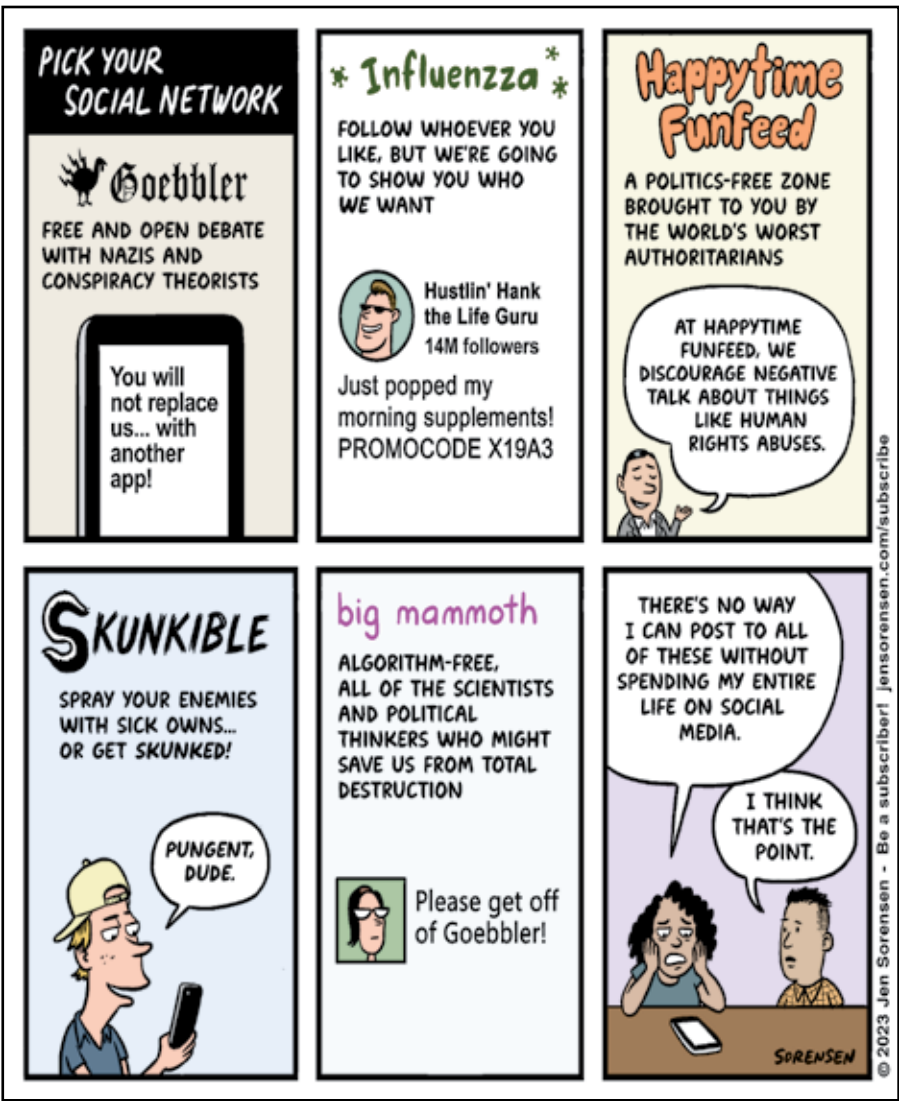
1. Latch (onto)
5. 1997 movie with the tagline "He Sits. He Stays. He Shoots. He Scores"
11. Roadie's vanload
15. Desierto's lack
16. Sleazeball
17. Uncommon
18. 1974 kidnap victim
20. "East of Eden" twin
21. "Have it your way"
22. Rapper Kool Moe ____
23. Seafood staple of New England
24. Michael of "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels"
26. Minor shoplifting crime, say
28. One who's blessed
30. Rascal
31. Just hanging around
32. Most important
35. G.I.'s field ration, for short
36. Airport code for Australia's largest city
37. Pulsating sound, informally
39. Down Under critter
42. "____ voyage!"
43. Clothing line?
44. Took one's turn
45. Sent with a click
49. It can spice things up
51. One using crude language
54. Wear away
55. Like some online purchases

56. Opposite of SSW
57. "Let me see ..."
58. Delevingne of "Carnival Row"
59. Tools for filling in holes in the wall
63. "The Kite Runner" protagonist
64. Rubbernecker
65. Maintained
66. What might collect a lot of checks
67. Fictional writer of "The World According to Bensenhaver"
68. Jacob's twin, in the Bible

Down

1. Thing to mind between the train and platform
2. JFK alternative
3. Where most hits wind up
4. Something never seen at night
5. Yearn (for)
6. Red state?
7. Aptly named novelist Charles
8. Floppy top
9. Some March Madness madness
10. Period
11. Athena turned her into a spider
12. Scratched, say
13. Checks for mistakes
14. Phrase on a mailing label
19. Santa ____ Valley

- (winegrowing region)
23. "Don't ____ with me!"
24. Forensic analysts, briefly
25. Name on Woody's shoe in "Toy Story"
26. Nitwit, to a Brit
27. Kind of joke
29. "The ____ Show" (best-selling album of 2002)
33. Part of FWIW
34. The Planetary Society CEO Bill
37. Sea anemone, e.g.
38. Hiking route
39. Settles conclusively
40. Bygone way to store data
41. Member of the Siouan family
42. Cameo role
44. Bellicose
45. Like DeMille films
46. Friendly French term of address
47. Classic consoles
48. Hole foods?
50. "How've you ____?"
52. Remove one's name from, as on Facebook
53. Four: Prefix
57. 1970s-'80s sitcom station
59. West Coast winter hrs.
60. "Quit ____ bellyachin'!"
61. Clean Water Act org.
62. Disco ____ ("The Simpsons" character)



Answers to last puzzle





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