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**ERIE READER**

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# PRIDE & JOY

## Queer Art Rising

Erie's LGBTQIA+ Artists on Building Community and Taking Up Space

## Aging With Pride

Erie's Queer Senior Social Club Aims to be Welcoming and Inclusive

## What Sanctuary Really Means

A Story About Belonging, and the Barriers That Keep Us From It



Susannah Faulkner | Henry Alden Clark | Erie SeaWolves 30<sup>th</sup> Season | Beyond Bunder Miffin: The Electric City  
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From the Editor

Pride and joy

By: Erin Phillips

Our cover this Pride month is particularly wonderful because it combines three stories that appear within this issue. A one-on-one interview with the new director of Erie Arts and Culture, Susannah Faulkner (who was also an honoree in our 2023 40 Under 40 Class), a feature on Aging with Pride and the work that group has done throughout generations and what they are currently doing to give older LGBTQIA+ folks a place to belong, and a look at four local queer artists finding expression through their individual media.

And they're all standing strong and proud together on a hand-painted mural with all of Erie behind them. That feels like a metaphor.

Also within this issue, local advocate and City Councilperson Tyler Titus takes a look at the current presidential administration's stance on queer folks (particularly the trans community), how Erie can better serve the safety of our trans population, how the cruelty exacted towards trans people nationally can be mitigated locally, and how we can use our city's sanctuary status to truly save lives. We can work towards an Erie that truly stands behind them.

Within the Aging With Pride feature, one member

of the group, Laurie Finch stated, "Our whole lives we fought for rights, for marriage equality, and we thought we had it taken care of for the younger generation but it looks like the fight needs to continue." And while there will always be some measure of work that needs to be done, it feels now that the mountain of hate that has been directed towards LGBTQIA+ folks looms large. Those members of Aging With Pride will continue to do the work to uplift and support the lives of younger generations. They are there, standing behind them.

And then there is art – the creative support that stands underfoot. This month, Julia Carden interviewed four local LGBTQIA+ artists (Gaby Apollo Reyes and Austin Kulyk aka Pissi Gabune as featured on our cover, as well as Marcy Hall and Eric Anthony Berdis, also a 40 Under 40 alum) and how they found community and belonging through their art. What art is, ultimately, is self-expression – whether that is discovering one's self within art or proclaiming it – to the world, and arguably most importantly, to other queer folks, showing them that their voice matters and deserves to be heard. Those artists are here, standing behind them and creating the art beneath their feet.

Ultimately, what our cover this month celebrates is



On a breezy spring day, a group representing different stories within this very Pride issue gathered at Dobbins Landing to stand together in pride, representing Erie's LGBTQIA+ community.

queer joy. And whether that joy is found through expression, through art, through advocacy, or through companionship, where it is ultimately found is here – in our city – standing behind them and under their feet, in full colorful support.



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# What Sanctuary Really Means

A story about belonging, and the barriers that keep us from it

By: Dr. Tyler Titus (they/them)

They stopped going to the grocery store. That was one of the first things they told me. A simple act that once felt normal – picking up eggs, bread, a favorite snack – had started to feel like walking through fire. The stares. The second glances. The “sir” or “ma’am” said with uncertainty or, worse, disdain. They never knew which it would be – only that by the end, they would feel small.

Coming out as transgender wasn’t a bold announcement for them – it was a quiet truth, finally spoken after years of carrying it alone. But even whispered truths can make you a target.

At one job, coworkers would smirk when they walked in, misgender them in front of customers, and act like it was harmless – just teasing. At another, the manager never said their identity was the problem, only that they “didn’t seem focused” or “weren’t a good fit.” No one ever said the word “trans,” but the message was clear.

They can’t prove they were fired because of who they are. What they *can* say is this: the cruelty broke them down. They stopped sleeping. Their chest tightened at every shift. The anxiety made it impossible to concentrate, and the isolation crept in like fog until even showing up felt unbearable.

They began to unravel – not because they were weak, but because they were being quietly crushed.

Each job loss wasn’t just a financial blow – it was a gut-punch to their sense of worth. A reminder that being themselves came with a cost they never agreed to pay.

Misgendering, isolation, the constant edge of being seen as a problem for simply existing. It wears a person down.

They told me, “I thought once I knew who I was, it would get easier. But now I just feel like I have to explain myself to everyone, all the time.”

They’re not alone.

Across the United States, transgender and nonbinary people – especially youth and young adults – are under siege. From bathroom bans to book bans, from healthcare restrictions to the criminalization of affirming care, lawmakers are building walls around us while pretending it’s for our protection.

It’s not.

According to *The Trevor Project’s 2023 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQIA+ Young People*, 41 percent of LGBTQIA+ young people (aged 13 to 24) seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. For transgender and nonbinary youth, that number rose to nearly 50 percent. These aren’t just statistics – they’re lives. Stories. Futures that hang in the balance.

More than half of trans and nonbinary youth who wanted mental health care couldn’t access it. Barriers include fear of rejection, lack of affirming providers, high costs, and – more recently – state laws

CONTRIBUTED



For Pride month, city councilperson, advocate, and nonprofit leader Tyler Titus has taken the opportunity to address Erie’s LGBTQIA+ Sanctuary City status and what that really means for queer folks in our city.

banning access altogether.

These young people are told they’re too young to know who they are, even as they are being cut off from trained professionals who *could* help them safely explore their identities with care and support.

Let me be clear: the cruelty is the point. These laws are designed not to protect – but to punish. To silence. To erase.

And yet, even in places like Erie, where we pride ourselves on being open-hearted, these barriers persist.

Last year, Erie City Council passed a resolution declaring Erie a sanctuary for people fleeing persecution due to their gender identity or expression. The resolution asked local law enforcement not to cooperate in transporting individuals back to states where being trans or seeking gender-affirming care

could be criminalized.

It was an important symbolic step. It said, “You are welcome here.”

But what does “welcome” mean if the housing system isn’t safe for trans people? If therapists in town don’t understand gender identity? If being visibly trans or nonbinary still means walking a tightrope of silence and scrutiny?

Sanctuary isn’t just about what we *don’t* do. It’s about what we *build*.

We need affirming providers. We need gender-inclusive policies in schools, clinics, shelters, and workplaces. We need spaces where queer and trans people can gather, share meals, swap clothes, and remember they are not alone.

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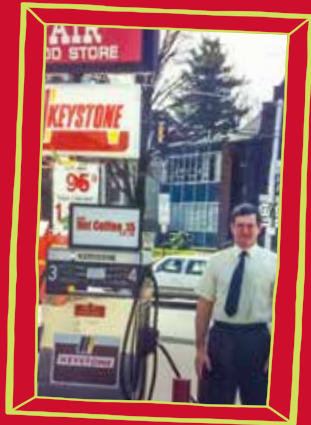
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ing and hygiene products, a quiet place to breathe, and peer-led programs that help queer youth and young adults build life skills (Chat n Chill, True North, or Open Mic). TransFamily of NWPA offers support groups, community events, and safe spaces for trans people and their loved ones to ask hard questions without fear.

But these organizations are small, grassroots, and overworked. They are doing the work that systems should be doing. They are holding space in a country where space is being rapidly stripped away.

And here's the truth: it shouldn't have to be this hard.

When a young person tells you who they are, believe them. When they say they need help, listen. They are not too young. They are not confused. They are surviving in a world that keeps telling them not to try.

Trans youth don't need saving from themselves. They need saving from a world that keeps shutting the door on their futures.

We can do better. We *must* do better. And we begin by asking ourselves: What does it actually mean to create sanctuary?

It means funding queer-led organizations. It means protecting access to mental health care. It means ending policies that punish doctors, teachers, practitioners, and parents for offering support and affirmation. It means passing inclusive local policies that recognize all genders and orientations. And it means showing up – with your time, your money, and your voice.

Here's how you can take action:

- Donate to local organizations like Compton's Table or TransFamily of NWPA.
- Educate yourself and others about gender-affirming care, which is supported by every major medical and psychological association in the U.S.
- Call your state and federal legislators and demand they stop the attacks on trans healthcare, education, and safety.
- Create affirming spaces – at work, in school, at home – where gender-diverse people are welcomed without question.

The young adult I met? They're still here. Still navigating. Still trying. They found a small supportive group of friends where they feel less alone. They started drawing again. They found laughter, even after loss.

They haven't gone back to the grocery store yet. But they're thinking about it.

And maybe – if we do this right – if we build a world where sanctuary is more than a promise – they'll feel safe enough to walk through those doors again, head held high.

Because everyone deserves a place where they don't have to explain their existence. Everyone deserves to feel like they belong.

Especially our young people. Especially now.

*Dr. Tyler Titus (they/them) is the board chair of Compton's Table and can be reached at [ttitus@comptonstable.org](mailto:ttitus@comptonstable.org)*

## Erie SeaWolves Celebrate 30th Season

### But what about Oliver's twist?

By: Liz Allen

**T**hirty years ago, a future Major League All Star playing for the Erie SeaWolves smashed a home run atop the roof of Tullio Arena.

But long before Jose Guillen's walk-off homer on June 20, 1995, when the SeaWolves played their first-ever game in Erie, Mayor Joyce Savocchio, local and state elected officials, business leaders, and Team Erie volunteers stepped up to the plate to make sure that minor league baseball would remain in Erie and that the team's sparkling new ballpark would revitalize downtown.

When the SeaWolves celebrate their 30th anniversary on June 20 through 22, the homestand against the Chesapeake Baysox will feature fireworks, 1995 replica blue-and-white pinstripe uniforms, giveaways, nostalgic trivia, and guest appearances by former Erie players.

Just as tantalizing, though, is the teaser about how comedian John Oliver, host of *Last Week Tonight* on HBO Max, might rebrand the Erie SeaWolves. Will our team really switch to a new name? Change mascots? Pick different colors?

Greg Coleman, Erie SeaWolves president, expects that Oliver's marketing plan will be revealed by the end of June. But surprise is part of this caper. After all, Coleman was unpacking in Toronto for a Blue Jays game against the Detroit Tigers when he learned by text that on Oliver's May 18 show, he had selected the SeaWolves out of 47 applicants for rebranding.

"The rest of the world found out before the Erie SeaWolves did. It's fun, it's entertaining, I got a kick out of it," Coleman said.

Coleman invited Oliver to rebrand the Erie team because Oliver had overlooked the SeaWolves on an earlier show highlighting minor league teams with unique names and offbeat promotions.

Coleman sent Oliver an 11-item list touting memorable accomplishments by the SeaWolves, including "Alternative Facts Night" in 2017, when fans got faux championship rings even though Akron had won the Eastern League Championship the previous season; cotton-candy hot dogs on "Sugar Rush Night" in 2018; and in 2021, the reunion of the Wonders band from *That Thing You Do!*, for the 25th anniversary of Tom Hanks' Erie-centric film.

"I didn't want Erie to be left out of the story," Coleman said. It's also real news that Erie, a small-market team, did, indeed, win Eastern League championships in 2023 and 2024 and hopes to three-peat this season.

Oliver's rebrand could play out in the same way that the SeaWolves have become the SnowWolves, the Piñatas, and the Pepperoni Balls on theme nights during the regular season.

But if Oliver pitches "the best thing that ever existed in this world," there will be serious consideration for his ideas long-term, Coleman said. "We have to go



During his weekly HBO Max program *Last Week Tonight*, host John Oliver announced that, after considering applications from 47 minor league baseball games, he would be taking the Erie SeaWolves under his wing and "rebranding" our 30-year-old team. SeaWolves President Greg Coleman thinks, "It's fun, it's entertaining, I got a kick out of it."

into it open-minded."

As Oliver researches Erie's long and storied baseball history, he will learn that change has been a constant for baseball in Erie and also that Erie fans are fully vested in the fate of the SeaWolves. "This is our team," said Dr. Brad Fox, who has provided physician services to Erie's baseball teams since 1992. "Fans actually feel that they are part of the team."

Season ticket holders and staffers make that clear.

Kirk Kinnear, an Army veteran who spent 20 years stationed in Hawaii, is always the first one in line for SeaWolves games, no matter the weather. He also goes on road trips to see "our boys," he said. The next one will be to Akron on July 5.

LuAn Sheptow, who holds season tickets for both Erie and the Detroit Tigers, said that at Comerica Park, former Erie players always make it a point to ask how "our Erie boys are doing," she said.

Kinnear describes those associated with the SeaWolves as "one big happy family" and that extends to employees including Beryl Fleming, who began ushering in 1996 during summers off from his job as a history teacher, and Mike Balko, 27, who rose from spinning the prize wheel as a seasonal worker to becoming director of operations.

"I love to see the smiles on the faces of fans," Balko said. That joy of taking in a ballgame never changes, even though Erie's team names have changed many times in the past. The current ballpark didn't even have a name when it opened in June 1995. It became Jerry Uht Park in August that year and then UPMC Park in 2017.

The SeaWolves started as a single-A team and advanced to AA in 2003. The ballpark has been renovated multiple times, and the Stadium Club, which opened in 2021, is a year-round venue.

We teetered on the brink of losing pro ball when team owners bolted and because of Major League Baseball requirements for facility upgrades, which were completed. We were on the chopping block when MLB shrunk the number of minor-league teams in 2019 but then spared Erie.

CONTRIBUTED/FRANK MEDIA



(Clockwise from top left): Second baseman Trei Cruz makes an exciting out as the SeaWolves work their way towards the Eastern League Championship; The yearbook from the inaugural season of the Erie SeaWolves was published for their first game in 1995 – the club celebrates their 30th anniversary this year; UPMC Field was originally christened Jerry Uht Park; The SeaWolves celebrated back-to-back Eastern League championships in 2023 and 2024..

The baseball business is stable right now. SeaWolves' owner Fernando Aguirre signed a 10-year lease for UPMC Park with Erie Events in 2021 and a similar agreement was reached to keep Erie's affiliation with the Detroit Tigers for the same length of time.

But it's also important to recall that Erie has pluck, as demonstrated by the Erie SeaWolves' fight song. Two seasons ago, Coleman, who plays guitar, came up with the melody on a drive home from a game, then added lyrics. Professionals polished up the ditty and Jason Dougherty, entertainment director, created the video that plays on the scoreboard during crucial game moments.

"We are home of the fierce and the fun," the song intones in a catchy rhythm ideal for clapping along. "We dream and we build and we just go out and get another win." It's the kind of bold attitude that Erie demonstrates time and again.

"It's catching steam, especially with the kids," Coleman said. Listen for yourself on YouTube.

The first-ever SeaWolves game that featured a dramatic come-from-behind win could have used a fight song. It happened at the SeaWolves' home opener on June 20, 1995. With Erie tied 2-2 against the Jamestown Jammers in the bottom of the ninth, Guillen, a hot Pittsburgh Pirates prospect, came up to bat and blasted the first pitch to the top of Tullio Arena for a 3-2 win for Erie.

The capacity crowd of 6,300 went wild.

But those who had worked for years to secure a new stadium and minor league team for Erie already knew that they had a winner three days earlier, on Saturday, June 17, when hundreds of people braved

high humidity and hot temperatures in the Ballpark-to-Ballpark Home Run (and Walk).

The route took them from beloved Ainsworth Field on West 24th and Cranberry streets, home to Erie's minor league and amateur teams for decades, to the new ballpark at East 10th and French.

Craig Latimer directed the walk/run race, part of the City of Erie's 1995 Bicentennial celebration.

"I had a lot of experience putting on races but usually in low-traffic areas in the country or the easier-to-control Presque Isle," Latimer recalled. "A daytime race from Ainsworth to the new downtown park with a flood of runners, walkers, strollers, and skateboards about to stream through a gaggle of hopefully secured intersections was giving me race-director hives."

Would there be a train running along the 19th Street tracks through Little Italy? Would the 16th and Liberty intersection be safe for pedestrians? Nevertheless, Latimer called about 800 participants to the starting line and as "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" played, he yelled "Go!" and watched as "the ambulatory dam burst with a tide of folks keen on getting to the new era of Erie baseball."

Fans eager to check out Erie's new downtown ball team wanted to pay tribute to Ainsworth Field, which has its own history that should be preserved. This field, owned by the Erie School District, has hosted exhibition games featuring Honus Wagner from the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1906 and then Babe Ruth twice – in 1923, when Ruth's barnstorming All-Stars beat the Erie Moose Club 15-1, and again in 1932, when Ruth and fellow Yankee Lou Gehrig lost to the Erie Sailors 7-4, as documented in the Mark Vat-

avuk-Richard Marshall book, *Baseball in Erie*.

Eric Brookhouser, 56, an Erie SeaWolves season ticket holder, nurtured his love of baseball at Ainsworth. "I was going to Roosevelt Middle School when the Erie Cardinals came, back in 1981. I lived around 36th and Greengarden and could walk from my house and then walk home at night. I probably saw that last game at Ainsworth (when the Sailors were in the independent Frontier League) and I was at the first SeaWolves' game and saw the famous Jose Guillen game-winning home run."

Brookhouser is the great-nephew of the late Betty Peebles, who broke ground as a female baseball columnist before becoming society editor of the Erie Times-News. She was part of Team Erie, the volunteer organization that Savocchio credits with being key to Erie landing the SeaWolves franchise.

"So many projects depend on partnerships, not just political partnerships. Team Erie was part of a very significant partnership," she said. "One thing I've learned in being mayor is that if you don't dream big, you don't get big."

Al Swigonski had that can-do attitude as president of Team Erie and facing a daunting task. How do you find millions to construct a new ballpark when you start with only a \$30,000 shoestring budget from local fundraisers? "We were pulling teeth. Frankly, it was a painful process. It was five years of purgatory."

Swigonski became determined to save Erie baseball in 1990, after Erie Daily Times Sports Editor Kevin Cuneo wrote about the poor maintenance of Ainsworth Field. Swigonski had seen his first ballgames there as a kid, with his parents and two brothers. He wrote to Cuneo: "Let's do something."

A 1992 feasibility study determined that Ainsworth would not be a good site for a new ballpark and recommended that the stadium be built on the west bayfront, where the Erie Bayfront Convention Center now sits, although the study pointed out that the "smell" from the nearby asphalt plant might offend fans. Erie City Council members also complained that gulls would foul up the field.

But there are no complaints now when gulls occasionally glide over UPMC Park during a game. The birds won't distract you from a conversation with new usher Orzeko Seneta, 28, a Navy veteran who will go to college in the fall to become a math teacher. He is a "sports nut" who knows more trivia about the team and the ballpark than anyone I've ever met.

Also count yourself lucky if you run into Michael and Shannon Barry, military veterans who chose to retire to Erie six years ago from San Diego, because he loves hockey and can root for the Erie Otters and she can cheer for the SeaWolves in her favorite sport, baseball. They had no ties to Erie when they relocated here but are now season ticket holders.

And before John Oliver unveils his rebrand of the Erie SeaWolves, have some fun dreaming up your own new team names. Doc Fox likes the Olivers or the Hazards. I'm partial to the Erie Dinor-saurs.

*Liz Allen became an Erie SeaWolves usher in 2016 after retiring from the Erie Times-News. She can be reached at lizerie@aol.com*

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Journey: Healing Together is a safe space to be yourself

By: Edwina Capozziello

Journey: Healing Together is the community outreach arm of Journey to a Trauma Informed Life, a counseling and therapy group founded by Will Koehler, Tyler Titus, and Rachel Lohr in 2019. Since 2023 it has been co-owned by Koehler and Angelica Spraggins, LPC and has a staff of more than 15 counselors



This month, Edwina attended an LGBTQIA+ Friendly Game Night hosted by Journey to a Trauma Informed Life's community outreach department, Journey: Healing Together, and learned more about their approach and services.

focused on helping diverse groups of people "including LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, people living with disabilities, and New Americans, to heal from the deep-seated traumas of discrimination, systematic oppression, and marginalization..." according to their website.

Journey: Healing Together, in its goal to "provide opportunities for diverse groups to gather, heal, restore, discover, and rebuild" is offering Wellness Weekend events. I joined May's Friday Game Night and had a wonderful time. Game nights are an 18+, LGBTQIA+ friendly, sober space, with snacks provided, that runs on a "pay as you can" donation model. We played a couple of easy but intense board games that encouraged friendly discourse and conversation. I learned more about the counseling practice and the community organization from host Eric Reiche, LPC, ATR and they made me feel very welcomed and included in the fun.

In my follow up contact with Eric, they wanted to make sure it is known that Journey "strives to create welcoming, affirming spaces for healing, connection, and joy... with monthly themes that highlight intersectional wellness." The last dates for the Spring 2025 session are June 21 and 22 and will focus on Pride and

Black Celebration. Friday Game night will be trivia focused, Saturday's family-friendly "Crafternoon" will be making rainbow pocket shrines, Saturday evening's Dissociation Support Group welcomes all systems and loved ones, and Sunday's Recovery Meeting is open to anyone in recovery or seeking supportive community dialogue.

For everyone's safety and comfort the group has a rules page posted when you sign in – this is a space to feel completely welcomed to be yourself. In the current political climate, creating that kind of atmosphere can feel like a revolutionary act. Journey continues to fight the good fight to promote inclusion and healing for underserved groups through their community outreach.

For more information and a complete list of events visit: [atraumainformedlife.com](http://atraumainformedlife.com)

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

Take Your Beer For a Walk: Erie's East Side

Cheers to Denny's empire, ErieBank, Kraus, and a stellar crenelated parapet

By: Jeff McCullor

We're headed to Erie's east side this month folks – lace up those sneaks, grab your beer, and let's take a walk together. Snag a can or growler-fill from a local brewery and we'll all meander along the mega-wide sidewalks of Erie's first main thoroughfare, Parade Street.

Let's begin at the north east corner of East 10th and Parade streets, home to all things Denny: Denny's Ice Cream Stand, Denny's Coin Laundry, and Denny's Touchless Auto Wash. Ice cream has been a fixture in this spot for the last 43 seasons, imagine how many cones have graced those serving windows. We'll raise a pint to you!

This exact spot once housed the Parade Street Market House, a large building where local vendors could sell their produce, meats, and other provisions. Similar to Cleveland's wonderful West Side Market, its interior was lined with stalls for rent from 1895 through the 1960s when it closed. At one point in time, Erie had no fewer than four market houses. Shopping local was the norm and chain stores didn't exist.

Just turn around for our next stop and look across Parade Street, you'll see a new ErieBank branch, the first new bank to open in this neighborhood in decades, marking one of the most visible projects of the Erie's East Side Renaissance (ESR) efforts in revitalizing the Parade Street corridor from East Sixth to East 12th. Cheers to you, ESR and ErieBank!

Next, let's stroll north a bit to 810 Parade, home to Kraus Department Store, Erie's oldest and arguably



This month, Jeff McCullor takes us on a stroll (with beer in hand, of course) to Erie's east side, experiencing the Denny's empire as well as imagining what the corner would have looked like many (blue) moons ago.

most beloved hardware store. Their tagline is, "If we don't have it, you don't need it." As a frequent flyer here myself, I can attest this is 100 percent true. The family-run business has been cranking out excellent service since 1886, which is nothing short of incredible. Cheers, Kraus Family!

We'll continue our travels northbound on Parade eventually landing at the northwestern corner of East Sixth, home to the fortress-like Erie Armory. If you can't spot it just look for the crenelated parapet (a tower with gaps at regular intervals, as in a castle battlement) – when was the last time you spotted a

sweet parapet, am I right? Purchased and modernized by Erie Insurance in 2013, this spot was once home to the Pennsylvania National Guard's 112th Infantry Regiment, a unit with formation roots dating back to the Civil War.

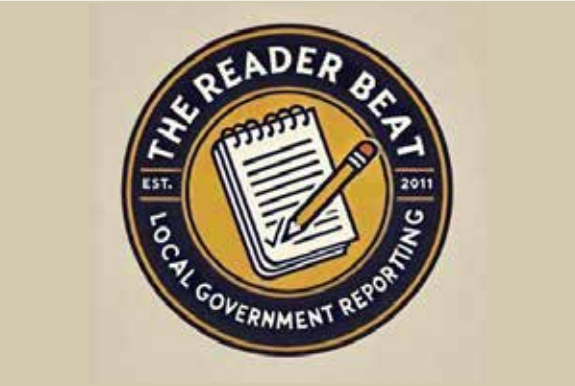
I hope you'll agree this has been a delightful stroll along through an often overlooked piece of Erie. Thanks for coming along with me. Drink local, and keep on walking.

Jeff McCullor is the co-owner of Erie Ale Works. He can be reached at [jeff@eriealeworks.com](mailto:jeff@eriealeworks.com)

The Reader Beat Monthly Recap

Summary of May council meetings

By: Alana Sabol



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

County Council May 6:

During this meeting, public comments primarily discussed concerns around an ordinance for \$433,620 in additional federal revenue for housing immigration detainees. Vice Chairman Rock Copeland addressed these concerns during and after the meeting, citing instances where both criminals and law-abiding people with legal status were detained. “There’s the opportunity that we could have actual citizens in lockup before they get to see the judge to say, ‘no, I am actually a legal citizen.’”

City Council May 7:

Many constituents came to witness and speak on the ordinance amending and supplementing Article 354, which addresses rental housing. This amendment would shorten the length of the Tenant Bill of Rights document required to be given during lease signings. Representatives of rental agencies and landlords expressed their concerns and requested more amendments, such as amendments concerning the legal process required to withhold rent and return of the application fee. The ordinance was passed unanimously by council. Councilmember Tyler Titus explained in their committee report that, “There’s going to be another amendment that’s coming forward with a lot of the suggestions that were made.”

City Council May 21:

Another rental housing amendment ordinance was adopted during its first reading, to be voted on for final passage in June. During public comments, CEO of the Erie Zoo Roo Kojancie asked city council to meet with Erie Events to continue the discussion of the zoo’s ownership. “It is vital that the council and the administration keep the zoo’s needs at the top of your minds during this time of city change,” Kojancie said.

Coming up this month:

- County Council Meeting, June 3 at 6 p.m.
- City Council Meeting, June 4 at 9 a.m.
- County Council Meeting, June 17 at 6 p.m.
- City Council Meeting, June 18 at 6:30 p.m.

Bird of the Month: Bank Swallows

Excavators with wings

By: Mary Birdsong

On any summer day at Presque Isle, if you are on the right beach, you have the opportunity to enjoy the aerial acrobatics of Bank Swallows, a bird that flies with fast, fluttery wing beats and brief glides. They change course frequently in the air, and swoop low over the water in pursuit of flying insects.

These bundles of high-octane energy are small, a mere 5 inches in length, plain brown on top and white below with a distinctive breast band (birders say “banks have bands” as a way to remember this field mark). They have pointed wings and small notches in their long slender tails.

One feature that makes them captivating is their method of nesting. Rather than building a nest in a tree, they excavate cavities in the banks and bluffs of rivers, streams, and lakes. Many places on the shoreline of Lake Erie, including Presque Isle, offer appropriate substrate where the swallows can dig into the bank without the cavity collapsing. In these tunnels, which can be 2 feet deep or more, a mated pair of swallows use stems and leaves, and roots torn from the exposed banks to build a flat nest inside the cavity. During egg laying and incubation, feathers are added.

Because they nest colonially, sites become a whirl of activity as birds come and go quickly, especially if they are feeding chicks. At Presque Isle, colonies can contain up to several hundred pairs. It’s mesmerizing to watch birds fly directly to the bank at a high speed, know which cavity is theirs and fly right in without hesitation.

But these cozy cavities that protect eggs and young from predators are also vulnerable to collapse if the



Bank Swallows are unique birds, in their coloration and banding, as well as their nesting habits. This month, Mary Birdsong, lead shorebird monitor for the Erie Bird Observatory introduces us to these birds who are nesting now on Presque Isle.

site is disturbed by high winds, waves, or human interference (people sliding down banks, carving into them, or heavy equipment moving on the top).

Erie Bird Observatory and Presque Isle State Park staff do what they can to protect the colonies. Look for roped-off areas with informational signs about Bank Swallows and asking visitors to stay out. Sadly, these signs are sometimes ignored, so please do your part to help protect these birds – they flew all the way from South America to be here.

They are nesting now; go see them and their amazing colonies!

Mary Birdsong is the lead shorebird monitor for Erie Bird Observatory. Learn more at [eriebirdobservatory.org](http://eriebirdobservatory.org) or on their social media channels. She can be reached at [mbirdsong@eriereader.com](mailto:mbirdsong@eriereader.com)



Witness the entrancing dance of the Bank Swallows, nesting now on Presque Isle, but please do so from a safe distance so the unique birds’ nesting sites aren’t disturbed or destroyed.

Gem City Style: June 2025

An interview with Susannah Faulkner of Erie Arts and Culture

By: Jessica Hunter

Erie’s vibrant arts and culture scene is buzzing, and at its helm as the new executive director of Erie Arts & Culture (EAC) is Susannah Faulkner (40 Under 40 Class of 2023). Returning to her roots with a wealth of global experience, Faulkner is ready to infuse the region’s cultural landscape with fresh energy, inclusivity, and a collaborative spirit. In an interview from her offices at the historic Cashier’s House in Downtown Erie, she shares her journey, vision, and the personal philosophy that guides her leadership.

Faulkner’s artistic journey began at the tender age of four, dancing ballet at the MLK Center. This early exposure to arts education in a communal setting proved foundational. “Getting involved in dance, and specifically ballet ... really nurtured a collaborative spirit in me, and also made me quick on my toes,” she shares with a laugh. This collaborative essence has remained a consistent thread throughout her life, always providing a feeling like “home” even across continents and states.

Faulkner’s path has been anything but linear. After graduating high school, she was “truly dashing out of town,” seeking experiences in diverse locales like New York, Colorado, England, Ireland, and California. These years abroad, particularly her time in the Bay Area working in nonprofit administration and advocacy, instilled in her a tremendous appreciation for diversity and culture. Her return to Erie 15 years later has been a pleasant surprise. “There’s nowhere else I’d want to be,” she confesses.

Fostering inclusivity and representation is non-negotiable for Faulkner. As an openly queer leader, she aims to create visibility and ensure that LGBTQIA+ individuals and organizations feel a sense of belonging within Erie Arts & Culture.

Her unique perspective deeply influences her approach to community engagement. Faulkner is particularly inspired by fellow returnees and by those who choose Erie as their adult home, seeing opportunities, four seasons, or a great place to raise a family. This shift from a local culture of “trying to get out” to one of genuine pride energizes her. She spent her first year back keeping a low profile, working remotely, and



This month, Jessica Hunter sat down with the new executive director of Erie Arts and Culture, Susannah Faulkner (40 Under 40 Class of 2023) to discuss the nonprofit’s direction and goals, as well as Faulkner’s personal growth and style.

considering other major cities, but then, “I saw everything around me and all the seeds that were planted, specifically in the arts and culture sector.”

Central to her leadership at EAC is a powerful vision statement, which she plans to proudly display: “Erie Arts & Culture is creating a future where the arts remain the heartbeat of every community in northwest Pennsylvania.” Faulkner is passionate about bringing the “heart” to this mission.

Fostering inclusivity and representation is non-negotiable for Faulkner. As an openly queer leader, she aims to create visibility and ensure that LGBTQIA+ individuals and organizations feel a sense of belonging within EAC. This commitment extends to examining the organization’s funding and grants, striving for more flexibility to encompass cultural organizations that may not be exclusively arts-focused but primarily serve the LGBTQIA+ community. Her goal is to create more adaptable funds, especially in an era of federal arts funding cuts, to enable rapid response and support diverse cultural events.

When asked to describe her personal style in life and leadership, Faulkner states, “I am a colorful, open, and passionate human.” This ethos manifests in her

daily style and her conversations, where she actively seeks connection with everyone. Recalling her time on city council, she shares how she’d find common ground even with those holding opposing views, whether through a shared love of the Steelers or a favorite ice cream flavor. “I truly believe there is a point of connection with everyone. It can be found. And I want to find it,” she asserts. Her ultimate aim is to be a “walking rainbow,” embodying authenticity and inspiring others to do the same. As she aptly puts it, “if I’m too much, go find less.”

With her vibrant vision, inclusive approach, and unwavering passion for connection, Susannah Faulkner is undoubtedly poised to leave an indelible and colorful mark on Erie’s ever-evolving arts and culture scene.

Learn more about Erie Arts and Culture’s work at [erieartsandculture.org](http://erieartsandculture.org)

Gem City Style is a monthly column featuring an intimate Q&A with someone making a creative impact in Erie. If you or someone you know would make a good fit for a future Gem City Style, email [jessica@eriereader.com](mailto:jessica@eriereader.com)



# We're building Erie's civic future.

Thanks to the pledge of Bruce Raimy, one of the JES's co-founders and current Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees, all donations to the **Jefferson Educational Society Endowment Fund** at The Erie Community Foundation will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$250,000. Join Bruce in building Erie's civic future with us by donating today!

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# Aging With Pride: Erie's Queer Senior Social Club

Welcoming, inclusive group staves off elder loneliness

By: Erin Phillips

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy declared a loneliness epidemic in the United States. In part due to repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic, but noting that loneliness and isolation was a serious public health issue well before that, Murthy states that “loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling – it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death.” Combine the overarching issue of loneliness with individuals who are over the age of 55 and identify as LGBTQIA+, and that risk soars.

Clinical social worker Dale Allgeier knows this first-hand. Due to his continually running ad in Erie Gay News (a publication that has been serving the regional LGBTQIA+ community since 1992), he was often contacted by folks, particularly senior citizens, trying to find a social connection, a place for community, and to build friendships. “I started getting more and more calls specifically for resources for LGBTQIA+ seniors, people inquiring if there were groups or activities for them to join. And then I also began to hear, in my practice, people wanting to connect that hadn’t really been a part of a community, or who had lost a partner and needed to reconnect to the community.” These older folks, especially those who were new to the Erie area, didn’t have an outlet for meeting new people and didn’t feel comfortable going to bars, as they may have in the past, to connect. This was a light bulb moment for Allgeier.

In 2017, Aging With Pride (AWP) was born. “I asked a few key people to get together and it grew from there,” Allgeier states. AWP is “an organization of senior LGBTQIA+ members and allies that develops and sponsors social, recreational, and educational events to promote healthy leisure activities, community, and an active, enjoyable lifestyle.” And on a chilly spring afternoon, I met with four members of AWP (Dale Allgeier, Laurie Finch, Pete Genco and Stephen Si-



Some members of Aging with Pride met up with Erin Phillips at one of their favorite local spots, Werner Books and Coffee, to discuss the history and work of the group. Pictured from left to right are members Dale Allgeier, Stephen Siwiecki, Laurie Finch, and Pete Genco.

wiecki) at Werner Books and Coffee, a place which has become a gathering spot for many of their activities.

The bulk of what AWP does is to organize social events that range from cultural to culinary, including educational opportunities and advocacy outreach work. The group meets biweekly as a board to discuss and plan their upcoming activities. These have recently included day trips to art museums including the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Albright Knox in Buffalo, and the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. They also connect with similar groups in other cities and recently hosted a group from Pittsburgh called the OWLS (Older Wiser Leaders), guiding them to local restaurants, Presque Isle, and the Maritime Museum. AWP also recently hosted a movie night at the Erie Movie House, inviting members to a

screening of the film *Milk* (a biopic of activist Harvey Milk, who was the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California).

They organize monthly dinner outings to area restaurants, always keeping it local. Pete Genco notes, “Everyone just pays their own way, but it’s another way to get together. We’ve been to the Wooden Ladle, the Brew-Erie at Union Station, Oasis, Colony Pub – always a local place. And we’ve been very welcomed wherever we’ve gone. We’re really looking forward to visiting Give a Crepe this month – the owner (Stephanie Klassen, 40 Under 40 Class of 2023) is very supportive of our community.”

Additionally, AWP has a monthly book club at Werner Books and Coffee. Organizer Stephen Siwiecki notes, “Our book club was one of the first things we started. Most of our

selections have LGBTQIA+ themes, but it’s not a requirement. That group has grown – we’ve had three or four new members each month.” They also host a regular game night at the same venue.

But Aging With Pride isn’t just fun and games, as it were. They also work hard to have visibility in the community as advocates to help inform, educate, and work towards the betterment of the whole queer community in Erie. The group has representation within the Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council, the Independent Council on Aging, and has a regular informational booth at Ryan Bizarro’s Senior Fair and Older Living Expo, hoping to connect with seniors who may not be aware of the group. They’ve hosted educational speakers who talk on relevant subjects like Social Security and Medicare. They

have tables and information available at Pride on the Bay, the Pride Picnic, and Meadville Pride.

The group has organized to collect winter clothing and food for donation drives through Central Outreach and are currently organizing for a school supply drive which will happen in August. They also lend a hand when it comes to the distribution of the Erie Gay News. AWP holds monthly “folding parties” where members gather to collate and fold print copies of the publication. They also help with community distribution, stuffing envelopes or delivering copies to different locations, including to members of congress and local politicians. The May issue of Erie Gay News featured a voters guide as well as an article about “Honor Your LGBTQ Elder Day,” which was on May 16.

Additionally, the group is working on an archive of local LGBTQIA+ historical material. “Through the years, both Mike Mahler (publisher of Erie Gay News) and myself would experience people dropping off stuff that they didn’t know what to do with and it related to the queer community,” Allgeier states. Photographs, documents from early or now-defunct organizations, pamphlets, posters – a true archive of LGBTQIA+ information – is now being digitized and archived through the Lilley Library at Penn State Behrend.

“I think the oldest thing we have is from 1964 when drag shows were held at a now-razed facility, a banquet hall, in Harborcreek. It was once a year and was a big deal among drag



Recently, Aging with Pride hosted a similar group from Pittsburgh called the OWLS (Older Wiser Leaders) and started their day with lunch at the Wooden Ladle, a spot that has been extremely welcoming and accommodating.

circuits. I have some photos from that, some documents from different organizations from the past, some photos from house parties in the 1980s, different gatherings and pic-

nics,” Allgeier states.

Additionally, the group is starting an oral history project, akin to NPR’s StoryCorps, where older queer folks record their stories, what they went through, and the work they’ve done to help younger generations. AWP member Laurie Finch states, “We fought for rights, for marriage equality, and we thought we had it taken care of for the younger generation but it looks like the fight needs to continue. We’ll keep on helping them.” Eventually these recorded stories will also be stored at the Lilley Library and will serve as a gift to future generations of LGBTQIA+ identifying folks who hope to connect with their local, cultural past.

Aging With Pride events are open for anyone who wants to join. Allgeier states that the suggested starting age is 55, “but we don’t card.” The group is also open to supportive friends, family members, and allies. They have a public events calendar on their web-

site ([agingwithprideerie.org](http://agingwithprideerie.org)), which is also listed monthly in Erie Gay News and posted on the community board at Werner Books and Coffee – anyone is welcome to join in anything at any time. Finch notes, “Everyone brings their own interests to the group, so we all experience new things – learning new things keeps us young.” Genco concurs and adds, “Aging With Pride has a lot of positive energy. This group is very cohesive and all the people work well together. You know, a lot of seniors can feel lonely and isolated, I think this is a way of helping.”

*If you’d like to help support Aging With Pride, you can do so through their website where they sell merchandise and Pampered Chef products. Or to make a direct donation, email [info@agingwithpride.org](mailto:info@agingwithpride.org) or call (814) 455-4009.*

*Erin Phillips can be reached at [erin@eriereader.com](mailto:erin@eriereader.com)*



A major project Aging with Pride has undertaken in recent years is an archival one: compiling photographs, clippings, brochures, and memorabilia that capture queer history in Erie and working with the Penn State Behrend Lilley Library to create a historical archive.

# Henry Alden Clark: Erie's Intellectual of the Highest Order

A local life lived in service from the Civil War to the Second World War

By: Jonathan Burdick

Henry Alden Clark was born in Harborcreek on Jan. 7, 1850 to Chauncey and Emeline Clark. He and his younger brother William received their early years of education from their mother. When Henry was 14 though, his mother died and the boys bounced around different schools. Henry spent a year at Erie Academy, a year at the Edinboro Normal School, and a year at Willsborough Collegiate Institute. He then returned to Erie and completed a year at Central High School before taking a job as a classroom teacher for a short stint.

He soon enrolled at Harvard. There, Clark co-edited *The Harvard Book*, which had a series of essays and biographies related to the university's history. He was also one of the co-founders and original editors of the campus newspaper *The Magenta* (now called the *Harvard Crimson*). Their first "office" was Clark's dorm room in Stoughton Hall. The success of this student newspaper was far from guaranteed. The previous five student publications had all failed due to "indifference of the study body." Yet, they pushed forward, filling the publication with student stories and essays and plenty of humor. It was an instant hit.

After earning his degree in 1874, he entered Harvard Law School. He graduated in 1877 and was admitted to the bar the following year. For the next few years, he practiced law in Fall River, Massachusetts, first in a partnership with Jonathan M. Wood and then with Hugo A. Dubuque.

In 1878, he married Sophy Gertrude McCreary of Erie, daughter of David Berkley and Annette Julia McCreary. Her father was a brigadier general during the Civil War, having first enlisted with the Wayne Guards under John W. McLane and working his way up the ranks. In 1880, Henry and Sophy had a daughter and named her Sophy Annette.

The Clarks moved back to Erie in 1882 and he became law partners with his father-in-law. Around this time, Clark also represented Edison Electric Light Company and was described as a "confidante" of Thomas Edison. In their personal correspondences, Clark and Edison personally discussed bringing Edison's "overhead conductors" for the "Edison light" to Erie's streets. The two men reportedly remained lifelong friends.

Clark was well-liked by his peers and colleagues. His friends described him as a "gentle, understanding, tolerant soul" who was known for his "cool and rational judgement" and "pristine eloquence." He was known as "the philosopher, the comforter, [and] the common sense advisor." Good friend and fellow lawyer Franklin B. Hosbach said of him, "Clark's charm for making and keeping great friendships lay in his sincerity and true basic greatness which radiated from his personality."

In February 1889, he and Sophy had their second child, a son named Henry. That December, Clark lost his brother William, only 37 years old, who was working as a pharmacist in Middletown, Michigan and was planning to relocate his business back home. After contracting malaria though, he returned to Erie to recuperate and while he initially seemed to be recovering, his health suddenly and rapidly deteriorated.

A few months after his brother's death, Clark purchased the *Erie Gazette* and worked as its editor. After a few years, he sold it, declaring that he was happy to get out of journalism forever, and instead turned his focus to politics. He had already dabbled in politics having been selected as chairman for the Republican City Committee and then to the county committee. He was first elected to the Common Council of Erie and then served a term as Erie City Solicitor beginning in 1896.

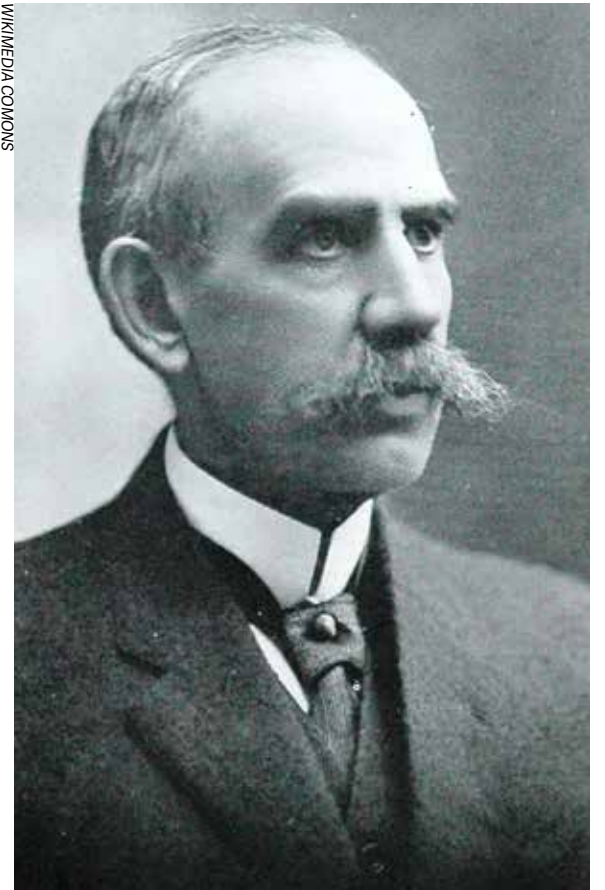
After taking a break from politics, he entered the race for the Pennsylvania State Senate in 1910. "The question of efficient government is squarely up to the people," he said after winning. "It is just as essential to have good men operating the municipal machinery as it is to have the men 'behind the guns.'"

Clark then ran for United States Congress in 1916. This was an extremely important election as war was already raging in Europe and many Americans were divided on whether the United States should get involved or not. Clark won the seat. On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson spoke to a joint session of Congress requesting a declaration of war against Germany. The Senate voted in favor two days later, followed by the House of Representatives two days after that. Clark voted yes.

Near the end of his term, as World War I was coming to an end, Clark chose not to run again. He returned to practicing law in Erie and remained active across the city. He was a trustee of Erie Academy. He was director of the Erie Art Club and president of the Erie County Historical Society. Clark was deeply interested in history and frequently read histories and biographies. To many locals, he was earning the reputation of "one of the city's most revered and prominent citizens."

In May 1921, Clark, now 71, was appointed by the governor to a 10-year term as judge of the newly-formed Erie County Orphan's Court. In this position, his role was to settle disputes related to estates, trusts, guardianships, and other family law issues. His term was met with approval, but for his second term, there would be no appointment. He'd have to win it in an election. Now though, he was 80 years old, his wife Sophy had recently died, and the opposition publicly and relentlessly highlighted his age in their campaigns against him, arguing that he wouldn't even survive another 10-year term.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Henry Alden Clark was born in 1850 and died in 1944, meaning he witnessed America's history from the Civil War through World War II. The nonagenarian Renaissance Man was a journalist, lawyer, intellectual, philosopher, father, state senator, congressman, historian, and judge.

While it is unclear what happened behind the scenes, Clark decided to run with the Liberal Party, making it a three-way race with the Republican and Democratic candidates. Many across the city came to his defense. He received numerous endorsements from area organizations, unions, and veterans groups, each highlighting his character, his experience, and his progressive record.

"When your personal affairs are at stake, would you dismiss a lawyer who had served you wisely and well to engage a newcomer merely for the sake of change?" one supporter published, comparing Clark to Babe Ruth and his two opponents to inexperienced ballplayers. "He has no 'machine' and no 'paid patriots' but trusts entirely the power of truth and the judgement of the voters." Despite these efforts, Clark came in third. He'd been deeply hurt by all of the personal attacks, but accepted the results and went back to practicing law.

Clark's mind remained sharp. He was still a great conversationalist and his impeccable memory remained, although he'd given up horseback riding and golf. His vision wasn't what it used to be, but he still could read and did so voraciously. He also still had his automobile and enjoyed leisure drives with



Even up until 94 years of age, Henry Alden Clark was sharp as a tack. The Erie Daily Times noted that he was “an intellectual of the highest order” who “spread his wisdom generously to all who knew him,” but always remained humble.

friends. When he could, he still traveled and visited Harvard for the first time in decades around this time. He marveled at the Crimson Building that housed the student newspaper that was once edited out of his dorm room.

Even after turning 90, while *officially* retired, he was known for helping out younger lawyers. “Judge Clark has never permitted himself to grow too old,” the Erie Daily Times noted on his 91st birthday. If a young lawyer asked for his assistance or advice, he was there. In fact, he was still seen in the courthouse nearly daily. He was also often seen taking walks, usually to the corner store nearby where he’d check out the baseball scores and pick up the newspaper.

He always kept a close eye on current events. He had strong opinions and he wasn’t shy about sharing them. “His rebuke could be sharp and his criticism searing,” stated the Erie Daily Times. “But he was just as quick to praise when it was merited.” As Europe erupted into another war, he studied the conflict daily from his East Sixth Street home.

“I look back over that long lane of years to 1850 [and] the world does not seem to have changed as much as we think it has, surely not as much as it should have done. Things aren’t a whole lot different now than they ever were,” he reflected in January 1941. He predicted that the United States would soon be at war with Nazi Germany. Just shy of a year later, the United States entered the war.

On Jan. 7, 1944, Clark celebrated his 94th birthday. In the past, his birthdays would be an open house of people coming and going, but his doctor had advised against it this year. He instead held only a small gathering with close friends and family where they discussed “pleasant memories” and Clark, always the storyteller, shared stories from the past and thoughts on the present war.

“He’s still the same keen student of current affairs he always was,” the newspaper noted in a report on his birthday, adding that his mind was still “sharp and clear.” Of the war, he said he hoped he would personally get to see the end of it. He recalled being a boy during the Civil War, living on the farm in Erie County, and hearing about the Battles of

Vicksburg and Gettysburg after they happened. And it seemed, Clark recalled, it had been war after war after war around the world ever since.

“There is battle, murder, and sudden death in the world today,” he said, “but there have been exactly those same things existing and operating for most part of my 94 years.”

Clark would not see the end of the war though. On Jan. 28, 1944, he came down with what seemed to be a simple cold. Within a few days, he had taken a turn for the worse and was bedridden at home. His doctors considered him to be in critical condition and predicted that he likely wouldn’t recover. A little over two weeks later, he died.

The editors of the Erie Daily Times noted their “genuine sadness” over the loss of this “gentlemen, scholar, citizen and jurist.” They added that Henry Alden Clark was “an intellectual of the highest order” who “spread his wisdom generously to all who knew him,” but always remained humble. “He was considerate and kind towards his fellow man,” they continued. “His heart couldn’t harbor any hard thoughts to any human.”

His son, Henry, died two months later at age 55. His daughter, Sophy, lived until 1961. She was 81. The Clark family are all buried at the Erie Cemetery.

*Jonathan Burdick runs the public history project Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at [jburdick@eriereader.com](mailto:jburdick@eriereader.com)*



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# Queer Art Rising

## Erie's LGBTQIA+ Artists on Building Community and Taking Up Space

By: Julia Carden

Art has long been a powerful force for visibility, resistance, and self-expression throughout queer history. In Erie – a cultural hub for the surrounding region – a number of organizations prioritize LGBTQIA+ inclusion year-round, not just during Pride Month. Through the arts, education, and grassroots efforts, they help foster visibility and belonging across northwestern Pennsylvania. Leading the way are the artists.

Among them is Gaby Apollo Reyes (they/them), founder of Apollo's Divine Odyssey and Melancholy Brand. For Reyes, art began as a form of survival, and has since become a powerful medium for self-discovery and transformation.

"I've been an artist my whole life," Reyes said, reflecting on a childhood steeped in creativity. "I'm fortunate to have a mother who's always supported me through every creative phase I've explored." That early encouragement was cultivated in community spaces like the Neighborhood Art House and the Boys and Girls Club, where Reyes found both belonging and a place to express themselves through art.

Artists often emphasize the importance of finding a network to support and inspire their creative process. Painter Marcy Hall (she/her) found just that when she moved to Oil City in 2020 through their Artist Relocation Program. She established her studio in the National Transit Art Studios, where she's become part of a thriving local arts scene.

"Everyone has the right to express themselves; that's what art is all about," Hall said. "It's also a powerful way to connect with others. For me, it's been really important to connect to other artists and feel the energy of people making things happen."

Hall's artistic journey began more than 25 years ago, painting regional landmarks like the Cashier's House, The Pufferbelly Restaurant, and Glass Growers Gallery. Today, she focuses primarily on commissioned work and contributes to public art.

Eric Anthony Berdis (they/them, 40 Under 40 Class of 2024) is a fiber artist and educator whose work is inspired



Julia Carden caught up with four LGBTQIA+ identifying artists from Erie and discussed their work and inspirations. These artists include (clockwise from top left): Austin Kulyk aka Pissi Gabune, Eric Anthony Berdis, Gaby "Apollo" Reyes, and Marcy Hall.

by queer joy and queer history – particularly the stories of lesbian and queer women who often served as caretakers during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States. Drawing influence from powerful memorials like *The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, Berdis sees art as a poetic way to express ideas "without directly saying it in words."

After leaving Erie for school, Berdis eventually returned and discovered a creative community waiting for them. Ashley Pastore (40 Under 40 Class of 2022), founder and owner of Grounded Print Shop, invited Berdis to use some studio space. Berdis credited Grounded as the place "where they fell back in love with Erie." There, Berdis made friends, collaborated with other artists, and made art.

"There's a big misconception that artists work alone," Berdis said. "But it really takes community. For me, that's an essential part of my practice."

With strong roots in Erie, their work has been exhibited at the Erie Art Museum, the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, and in galleries across the country, including Philadelphia, New York City, and Richmond.

"It is radical to be authentically you in a room," Berdis said. "We need to have spaces for folks to experiment and try new things, and there are so many wonderful spaces in Erie that allow for art and expression. We need these spaces, and not just in June."

Arts and queer history have long been deeply connected, woven together through acts of resistance, celebration, and self-discovery. For many in

the LGBTQIA+ community, creative expression offers a powerful sense of liberation, providing space to explore and affirm identity in ways that words alone often cannot.

Edinboro native and musical theater performer Austin Kulyk (they/them) takes the stage as Pissi Gabune, captivating audiences at Erie Pridefest, Meadville Pride, The Zone, and The Boro Bar. After earning a degree in Theatre Arts from the State University of New York at Fredonia, Kulyk began performing drag in 2022. While their exploration of performance makeup and drag developed later, singing has always been a passion.

"Queer visibility is important in arts and culture because it's one of the few spaces where we can explore our-

FEATURE

selves without judgment,” Kulyk said. “There will always be judgment in some form, in any walk of life. But art allows for a full expression of who you are without having to explicitly say it.” Kulyk hopes to see the local drag scene continue to grow, with more venues embracing diverse styles and nontraditional forms of drag. What

others can feel that sense of safety.” For many artists, the growing momentum in Erie feels tangible. From the inclusive exhibitions at the Erie Art Museum to queer-led pop-ups on display in Ember + Forge, Erie’s creative scene continues to be fueled by the queer community. “Over time, I’ve seen more collab-

“It is radical to be authentically you in a room. We need to have spaces for folks to experiment and try new things ... and not just in June.” – fiber artist Eric Anthony Berdis

started as a creative outlet evolved into a powerful way to connect with others. “I love being involved, but that’s not why I do this. If I just wanted to sing, I could do that in the shower,” Kulyk said. “What matters is going out and creating a space where people feel accepted – that’s why I do this now. The most important thing to me is that

oration, more mutual support, and a growing commitment to claiming space,” Reyes says about Erie. “It feels like a real movement toward equity, one that is focused on making sure everyone, especially those on the margins, has a seat at the table.”  
  
*Julia Carden can be reached at juliacarden91@gmail.com*





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# The Local Impact of Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services Cuts

Cost-saving justification highlights community inequality

By: Chloe Forbes

With a click of a button online, access to information is a right most people have become accustomed to. Knowledge is power, and community hubs like libraries and museums facilitate that, especially for marginalized communities. However, a recent executive order aimed at cutting unnecessary federal funding may have adverse effects on those communities, according to local advocates.

In March, the federal administration signed an executive order proposing the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), citing efforts to streamline government spending and return more authority to states and local institutions.

Although it makes up less than 0.01 percent of the federal budget, the IMLS is the largest source of federal funding for libraries and provides crucial support to museums nationwide. In 2024, Pennsylvania received \$10.7 million from the IMLS – \$7.5 million for libraries and \$3.2 million for museums.

The order stated that the IMLS was deemed nonessential and directed the agency to cease components and functions not required by law. Because the IMLS operates under a budget approved by Congress, it remains uncertain which aspects of its work fall outside legal requirements.

Supporters of the cuts argue they could enable cost savings and empower states to manage cultural institutions more directly. Critics, however, warn that the shift may create funding gaps for communities that rely heavily on federal support.

## Impact on Erie County

A mix of rural, urban, and suburban municipalities, Erie County's landscape varies in its access to the internet, information, resources, and experiences depending on proximity to urban centers and income level. Advocates for the IMLS warn that cutting the institution could have the most noticeable effects in communities already facing resource shortages.

Kelly Armor, an Erie expert on the IMLS, has found through her time



With federal grant funding from IMLS secured by Kelly Armor, the folklorist-in-residence for Erie Arts and Culture was able to help facilitate programs like a West African clothing design workshop for local sewers and quilters.

executing IMLS grant programs and serving on the IMLS grant review board that the work makes meaningful change for those who are most marginalized.

"It doesn't mean the death of the museum – of course not," Armor said. "It just makes it harder for the museum to be able to serve the broadest swath of the community and to be able to reach out to those institutions and communities that don't think of the museum as for them, but it can be."

In Erie, IMLS funds have historically helped places like the Erie Art Museum, the Hagen History Center, and Erie Arts and Culture.

It also provides library resources – including the POWER online database for electronic books and databases and interlibrary loan software – along with professional development and training for library staff via the state. This is through the IMLS Grants to

States program.

According to Joseph Sinnott, director of administration at Erie County and former Erie mayor, these resources are a small enough portion of funding that daily operations likely won't be impacted.

For museums, the picture is a little different.

"IMLS' funding programs for libraries provide operating support for the state library system to distribute based on a population formula, but the museum grant funds are all project-based," said Rusty Baker, executive director of PA Museums. "General operating support, funding with no strings attached, is a real need in the museum field to support staff salaries, utilities, insurance, etc. While IMLS funding for museums does not provide general operating support, the ability to fund projects in museums frees up other resources to be devoted

to operations."

PA Museums, a statewide museum association, secured IMLS funding in 2019 for leadership programming that included the Erie Maritime Museum.

"PA Museums has been disappointed by the cancellation of grants that were already approved because of the planning and time spent by nonprofits that will no longer bear fruit," Baker said of the recent impact.

In 2022, the Hagen History Center received about \$22,400 to update its technology infrastructure. Its grant application states that the funding was to respond to the community's need for internet access, exacerbated by the pandemic.

"[The] IMLS is the nation's only federal funding source for museums," said Caleb Pifer, executive director at Hagen History Center. "Not only does the agency fund museums directly, but it funds every state archive. So there will


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Funding provided through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services helped make this cultural program hosted by Anjali Sahay at Blasco Memorial Library possible. Library resources, as well as funding for institutions like the Erie Art Museum, the Hagen History Center, and Erie Arts and Culture are at risk due to recent federal cuts.

be a trickle-down effect from federal to state, to local funding gaps. The loss of [the] IMLS makes it that much harder for already cash-strapped museums and historical societies to operate.”

Historically, the IMLS has also funded the art museum’s Kids as Curators program, along with leadership opportunities.

“When I was at the art museum, it was a really important part of the community outreach,” Armor said.

Armor worked at the Erie Art Museum and ran the Kids as Curators program for 12 years until 2018 when she went to Erie Arts and Culture, and 11 of those years, the program was funded by the IMLS.

Kids as Curators worked with three middle schools each year – a rural, suburban, and city school – and gave students the resources to create their own exhibits to be displayed in the museum. She said the public schools were wary to commit each year because of the high staff turnover, and rural schools were unsure of how appropriate the art would be for children because it wasn’t something they were familiar with.

But each year, the program was a success and Armor received positive feedback from the schools about how enriching the experience was.

“The schools that are harder to reach are the ones we really need to be working with,” Armor said.

Relationship-building has gone beyond schools, though, as most recently, the IMLS granted Erie Arts and Culture the funds to execute program-

ming with 14 different artists at libraries across Warren, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Erie counties.

#### Cultivating connection

At Erie Arts and Culture, Armor is known as the folklorist-in-residence. She said her favorite definition of folklore or traditional art is “art that has a job to do beyond simply being something of aesthetic enjoyment.”

“For example, a symphony or a Mona Lisa or a landscape painting, they’re really meant for our aesthetic contemplation. That’s their reason,” she said. “We go to a symphony to take it in. We go to an art museum to take the art in. With folk and traditional art, you cannot really separate them from the community and the role they play in the community. So a lullaby is a folk song because it has a job to do – it calms the baby down. It also calms the person who’s holding the baby.”

Other examples come from ethnic identities like African dances or Eastern European prayer circles, but they can also include Amish quilting, crafting fly fishing lures, or taxidermy.

“A taxidermist is a good example of folk and traditional art because they’re not creating a taxidermied buck head or a taxidermied fox to go in a museum,” Armor explained. “They’re doing it for that hunter.”

With her IMLS grant, Armor facilitated 49 folk art workshops throughout various libraries last summer. They included Ukrainian-style egg painting, a West African clothing design workshop for local sewers and quilters, and

more.

Armor said the IMLS proposals that were most successful and received funding were those that were collaborative and met the needs of the community.

“The IMLS has been very interested in working with diverse communities and making sure that the museum is indeed serving all kinds of people, particularly those people who wouldn’t see themselves as museum-goers,” she said.

For example, if an African group wanted to teach educators how to incorporate song and dance in the classroom, all those involved must be consulted to ensure it meets their needs.

The IMLS has become a conduit for a bigger cultural shift that began in the ‘70s when museums began welcoming educators into their space. It became centered around people rather than objects. “Objects are the means in which they do programming, but it’s really about the people,” Armor said.

The question became how the museum could further the community’s interests and challenge the community to better itself.

#### A broader picture

Although the proposed cuts would not prevent museums or libraries from operating, they would eliminate a key source of support, particularly for smaller institutions.

Over the years, the IMLS has sought to level the playing field by offering grants tailored to small-scale organizations with limited resources. If the

IMLS is eliminated or these funds are instead managed by state governments, competition may increase and opportunities could diminish for institutions without dedicated grant-writing staff.

Currently, Armor said, the IMLS has a rigorous grant process to ensure measurable success and that there is community buy-in. Most grants require matching funds, which Armor said can typically be secured with the help of the state. However, if the money is funneled through the state, that avenue will no longer be available.

Armor said the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Education Association are also pieces of the cultural sector puzzle that have been slashed and will hurt the most excluded communities.

“It will affect the poorest, the most marginalized, and the neediest,” she said. “The amount of money that the IMLS gets in federal and taxpayer dollars is so small yet the impact has been so great.” She said that every dollar is amplified through the IMLS and it was a marker of trust by the federal government in their work.

“By defunding the IMLS I feel like we’re cutting off our nose to spite our face. It hasn’t been partisan,” she said. “It has been about the community and widening the access to culture and learning for all kinds of people. And if that isn’t at the heart of democracy, I don’t know what is.”

*Chloe Forbes is a local journalist, reach her at [chloeforbes14@gmail.com](mailto:chloeforbes14@gmail.com)*

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12oz. BOTTLES | 6:30PM-8:00PM

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**GREENGARDEN LANES**  
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## MON-FRI

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Kings Rook Rocks Packed June Schedule

Pride events alongside national touring acts

BEGINNING SATURDAY, JUN. 14

The summer concert season is in full effect at the Kings Rook Club this June as a national touring act hits their stage, as well as a few events that celebrate Pride month. Early 2000s emo rock band The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus will be performing on Friday, June 27, while events on June 14, June 21, and June 28 feature a wide array of acts that will promote

inclusiveness and individuality. Kicking off The Rook's June events is The Enchanted Forest Party, inviting all fairies, nymphs, witches, and elves out for a night of music and performance on June 14. There will be acoustic performances from local artists Xandra and Joe Porter, followed by EDM music from DJ Drop Bear. Bookending the evening will be drag performer Shea D'Heaux who

will both open and (almost) close the night with a performance, followed by another EDM set from DJ Jay until close. The show will also serve as a birthday party for staff member Jonny Purvis, who famously makes patrons' late night grub from Purv's Burgs.

The Pride celebration continues on Saturday, June 21 with a Louder Together event that is celebrating the queer-straight alliance, with collaboration from Mayhem Music Productions. This show is meant to combine the LGBTQIA+ communities and their allies in one place, showing unity and peace. Featuring acoustic performance from Bummer Country's Jen Meyer, followed by a solo performance from Optimistic Apocalypse, the Nancy Boys will then take the stage, and according to their Instagram, it will be their last performance before an indefinite hiatus. Additional performances from indie band Deja Blue and the heavier Dysphoric Void (formally known as Mutants to Freaks) will continue until midnight. Wrapping up the evening will be DJ Drucifer. Also on hand will be Central Outreach, offering STI testing at their truck.

National touring rock/post-hard-core band The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus will land at the Rook on Friday, June 27, thanks to Idlestar Productions. The Middleburgh, Florida band

are known for their heavy emo style and the hit song "Face Down." The song was so huge that the album went 5x platinum and set the band on course to become a popular draw at both festivals and in the underground scene. Also on the bill will be Chicago's own Wolf Rd, Pittsburgh pop-punk band Crash Nebula, and local pop-punk favorites Do Not Call List.

Rounding out this stacked June lineup is local hip-hop artist Nequia5's Body Positive '90s Anime Rave. Those in attendance aren't required to dress up, however it is encouraged. Food for the evening will be made by Kansai Noodles. Also on hand will be Tarot by Phoenix Fern Promotions, for those brave enough to look into their future. —Larry Wheaton

Enchanted Forest Party: Saturday, June 14 // 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. // \$7-\$15

Louder Together: Saturday, June 21 // 7:30 p.m. to 3 a.m. // \$12-\$15

The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus: Friday, June 27 // 6 p.m. to 3 a.m. // \$30

Nequia5 Body Positive '90s Anime Rave: Saturday, June 28 // 9 p.m. to 3 a.m. // \$10-\$15

All events at King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. // Tickets and info: [tickets.eriereader.com](https://tickets.eriereader.com)



The Kings Rook Club has a stacked schedule for June including a nationally touring act in Red Jumpsuit Apparatus (pictured). Also on the slate are Pride month performances featuring an Enchanted Forest Party, Louder Together with the Nancy Boys, and a Body Positive '90s Anime Rave.

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EVENTS

The Great American Book Sale Returns to Erie

Get your read on at extremely affordable prices

BEGINNING SUNDAY, JUN. 15

The Friends of the Erie County Library are writing a new chapter with the return of The Great American Book Sale at the Flo Fabrizio Ice Center. With a collection of over 75,000 gently used books alongside a selection of audio-books, music, DVDs, and puzzles, this event serves as one of the Friends’ most significant fundraising events, with all proceeds going back to the library.

“Our goal as the Friends is to raise the funds that allow the library to succeed as a community center,” explained Benjamin “Henry” Barbour, Board President of the Friends of the Erie County Library. “We think the library should be a place where there is lifelong learning, access to services, community involvement, and civic engagement. The Friends pay for both the adult and children’s programming. I think the library should be a place for families, and we are really the main source of funding for these programs.”

This year marks the 47th year for the Great American Book Sale. Beginning in 1978, the event was first held from a tent in the parking lot of the Perry Square Library, moving to locations around the city, including West Erie Plaza, Villa Maria Academy, and McDowell Intermediate School. “We have a great history. And you know, a tent cannot fit 75,000 books, but that is how far we have come.”

Barbour detailed the preparation

for the event to ensure there is something for everyone, including the upcoming book drive two days before the sale opens on June 15. “All our books come from our book drives, so we try to respond to the needs and desires of the public. We recently had a mini book drive that turned out to be quite popular, so we are bringing that back because we have a lot of people in the community who want to donate books. I think our volunteers and staff really want to ensure that the public has access to the books they want.”

Children’s books are priced at \$1 for hardcover and \$0.50 for paperbacks, with Barbour estimating a very large selection of several thousand books. “Children’s books are among the most popular genres that are increasingly our best sellers. There’s a wonderful serendipity and thrill of going to a book sale with physical media. There’s a magic in discovering something new, coming across an old paperback that you might not have ever realized even existed that speaks to you. Everyone has had the feeling of coming upon a wonderful book that is the right book at the right time.”

For all other books, pricing will be \$2 for hardcover and \$1 for regular paperbacks. “With the space and the number of books, we can afford to have all kinds of different genres, including our collector’s corner for older, antiquarian books. It’s material that might please someone



The Friends of the Erie County Library are hosting their 47th annual Great American Book Sale at the Flo Fabrizio Ice Arena in June. Proceeds from the sale go directly towards funding adult and children’s programming at the library.

who is looking for something a little more obscure that might be worth a little more. The prices really can’t be beat, and that is something the whole community can respond to and support.”

Barbour reflected on his shared message with the community: “The library has such a powerful impact as a lifeline for the community with summer reading programs, literacy initiatives, technological resources, genealogical databases, and access to a wide array of media and information that people can research. From toddlers to seniors,

it enriches our lives and community. It’s essential for people in the community to realize that donations help fund one of the most important elements of any community for education and civic involvement. This is a wonderful and extremely fun way to support our library.” —Thomas Taylor

Sunday, June 15 through Thursday, June 19 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Friday, June 20 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. // Flo Fabrizio Ice Center, 527 W. 38th St. // For more info: [erielibraryfriends.org](http://erielibraryfriends.org)

World Refugee Day



Celebrate the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual World Refugee Day in Perry Square with music, dance, and vendors from Erie’s refugee communities

June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025 • 5:00-9:00

Gallery Night



Experience the work of photographer Garrett Hess and fiber artist Lynn Marie Fizel in our gallery space with live music by Jaden2WAAVY

June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025 • 5:00-8:00

Gannon’s Schuster Theatre brings back Shakespeare Summer Nights

Well met, by moonlight

BEGINNING SUNDAY, JUN. 15

If traveling to New York City to see Shakespeare in the Park is out of your budget, let us put you onto Erie’s own Gannon University Schuster Theatre, which is yet again producing its Shakespeare Summer Nights this June. This year’s performance is *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, one of the Bard’s most famous comedies, written in 1595 or 1596, and directed by Karalyn Headly.

While none of the performances will actually take place during summer, hopefully come mid-June it will feel start to like it, and there is no better place in the city to enjoy a magical bit of theater on a twilit warm night than at Frontier Park. Though the production does have a rain backup location (Schuster Theatre on the Gannon campus), as long as the weather permits, guests can take a seat – or bring a comfier one – in the open-air amphitheater that is formally known as the McCain Outdoor Classroom. And did we mention it’s totally free and open to the public?

All of the actors performing on the subsequent June evenings will actually be doing double duty, as is popular with Shakespearean plays, with leads like Katrina Buchanan, who takes the stage as Titania, Queen of the Fairies, also playing one of the Mechanicals, Francis Flute; and Chris Smith, who plays Oberon, King of the Fairies, will also



The players from Gannon’s Schuster Theatre are taking their act out of their building and into the green of Frontier Park. Join them as they stage a production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* which is free and open to the public.

take on the role of tailor Robin Starveling.

So, let Frontier Park and the Schuster Theatre players provide a little summer-adjacent entertainment, and while you thankfully won’t ill meet anyone by moonlight, the sylvan setting of the performance will nonetheless transport you to the fairy realm of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. —Cara Suppa

Sunday, June 15 through Tuesday, June 17, 7 p.m. // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St // Free // For more info: [facebook.com/gannonschustert theatre](https://facebook.com/gannonschustert theatre)

GALLERY NIGHT JUNE 27<sup>TH</sup>

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Erie Art Museum

[ERIEARTMUSEUM.ORG/GALLERYNIGHT](https://erieartmuseum.org/gallerynight)



EVENTS

Erie’s Juneteenth Celebration

America’s second Independence day honored through food and music

THURSDAY, JUN. 19

On June 19, there will be a Juneteenth celebration and community dinner from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. in Perry Square, hosted by Erie’s Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC) and Erie Downtown Partnership. Last year’s Juneteenth event had a similar theme, focusing on local urban farmers and Black-owned businesses. This year, a free community dinner will be made up of locally-grown winter greens, greenhouse produce, and ethically-sourced staples to celebrate the beginning of the farmer’s market season. According to FPAC, some of the collaborators include Urban Glow and Grow Farm, Black and Green, and Emmaus Soup Kitchen.

“This year we’re kind of doubling down and investing in the system,” said Dave Tamulonis (40 Under 40 Class of 2022), the events and marketing manager at Erie Downtown Partnership. “We’re helping them invest in their infrastructure and supporting the program from the supply side of things. Then also on the community side of things, with events like this, connecting people to those opportunities and making sure that they know what’s out there.”



Celebrating America’s second Independence Day, Juneteenth commemorates the ending of enslavement in the United States. And Perry Square will be buzzing with activity in celebration including music, cultural presentations, farmers markets, and a community meal.

Throughout the night there will be an interactive drum circle by AmeriMasa-la organizer Lynn Johnson and musical performances by DJ and rapper Jonny Evans (40 Under 40 Class of 2024) and friends. “Jonny Evans is an amazing

local hip hop producer and rapper and he books a lot of shows at the King’s Rook Club and is very, very helpful as a mentor to others in the scene,” Tamulonis said. “He’s bringing out a bunch of people that he’s helped get shows at

the Rook and giving them that platform to perform on a larger stage.” —Alana Sabol

6 p.m. // Perry Square, 601 State St. // Free // For more info: [eriedowntown.com](http://eriedowntown.com)

Erie Apparel’s Dog Days Help Kick Off Summer

A doggone good time benefiting The ANNA Shelter

SATURDAY, JUN. 20

Start your summer off the right way, by enjoying the bay while supporting shelter pups. Erie Apparel and Scott Enterprises have teamed up to present their first Dog Days, a fun-filled afternoon at Oliver’s Beer Garden that will benefit the ANNA Shelter.

The event will see the launch of Erie Apparel’s new Best Friends collection, which features clothing and accessories for pet-lovers as well as some matching items for their four-legged friends. “Our whole team are dog-lovers, and we’ve been wanting to make products for dog owners and dog lovers for a while,” said Greg Straub, owner at Erie Apparel. “A few of our team members have adopted in the past, and the ANNA Shelter’s mission is a great one that only succeeds with public support.”

Attendees will have first access to purchase the new collection, as well as enjoy live music, food and drink,

miniature golf, and other yard games available at Oliver’s Beer Garden. Some adoptable dogs from the ANNA Shelter will be on site to meet, and people are able to put in applications for adoption the following Monday at the shelter, if interested in a particular pup.

The event is free to attend, and well-behaved, leashed dogs are welcome. Monetary donations to the ANNA Shelter can also be made at the event, and all proceeds from merch and other sales will be directed to the shelter.

“This is our first effort for an event of this kind,” said Straub. “We’d be incredibly proud if we can make it a successful one, have some fun, and raise money for a great cause doing an important job here locally.” —Ally Kutz

1 p.m. to 4 p.m. // Oliver’s Beer Garden, 130 E. Front St. // Free // For more information: [facebook.com/ErieApparel](https://facebook.com/ErieApparel)



Help raise funding for the ANNA Shelter with a supporting event presented by Erie Apparel and Oliver’s. Adoptable dogs will be working the crowd while attendees enjoy live music, food, drinks, and mini-golf, all while helping a great community cause.



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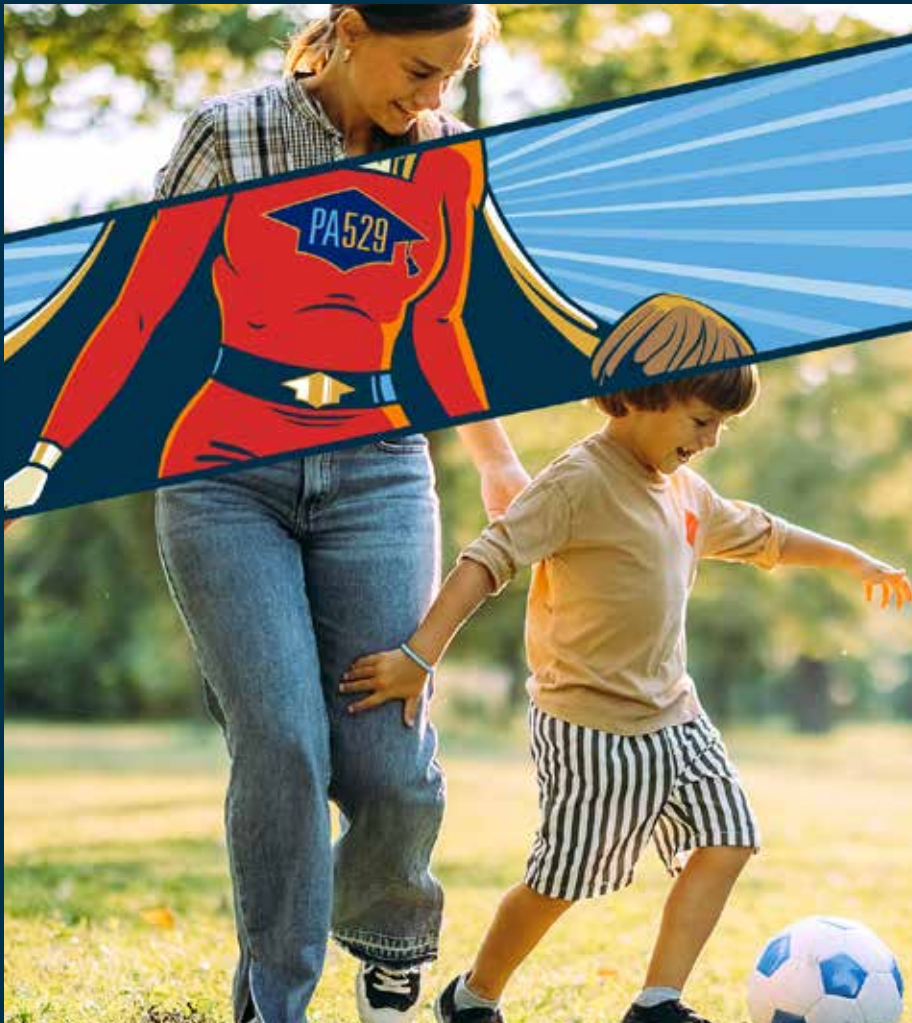
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# Boutique Nights



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## Original Works Weekend Debuts at PACA

Five works from local playwrights pack each performance

### BEGINNING FRIDAY, JUN. 20

There's something special about seeing an original play. As an audience member, you feel a kinship and connection with the work that goes beyond one's usual theatrical experience. Often, a piece is being performed for the very first time anywhere, and realistically may *only* ever see that theatrical run. That ephemeral wonder of a work's potential is also a glimpse into the author's writing process. You begin to notice familiar names and are able to chart their evolution as artists.

That being said, here are five names to watch: Daniel Collette, Mitchell King, James Hain, Howard Lang, and Brenna Thummler.

Each of these local writers has a piece in 2025's Original Works Weekend, presented by Spotlight814 and the Performing Arts Collective Alliance (PACA).

The Original Works Weekend will also provide a key time for PACA's landmark fundraising campaign: Rise with PACA. The effort eyes two key goals: a build-out of the building's fifth floor and a full elevator renovation. During this time, donations will receive matching funds of up to \$500,000, provided by a pledge from Erie Insurance Chairman Tom Hagen.

Starting off the show will be the short, *Denise, in Office 208* by Daniel Collette. The author hails from St. Paul, Minnesota and moved to Erie in 2024. The work finds the character Sam seeking out their coworker Denise, on a quest sparked by paperwork.

*Couched* by James Hain follows Sarah and Greg on a romantic evening. But there's just one problem: Sarah's sofa is possessed by the spirit of her late boyfriend, Scott. Hain is happy to return to his hometown of Erie after many years (and performances) in Youngstown, Ohio.

*Alone in the Dark at the End of the World* by Mitchell King tells the post-apocalyptic story of Heather and Will, who get to know each other despite having the world's dating pool catastrophically drained.

Following a brief intermission, the second half concludes with two one-act works, *Would You? Or How My Roommate Turned Into a Hotdog* by Howard Lang and *We Hate a Haunting* by Brenna Thummler. The former finds two roommates, Liffey and Myser on a wild, twisting journey to pair art and food, while reckoning with their own personal disappointments.

*Haunting* takes a next-door disagreement directly to the afterlife, as two



The folks from PACA are continuing to fundraise for improvements to their historic building as they present their Original Works weekend, featuring original plays from local playwrights Daniel Collette, Mitchell King, James Hain, Howard Lang, and Brenna Thummler.

ethereal couples face a clash of cultures. "I imagine it's quite draining to spend an afterlife being bothered by the dead couple next door," mused Thummler.

She explained that "it's been beautiful seeing what my framework can become when a group of creatives shapes it into their own finished piece. It's collaboration that fuels theatre, and the playwright is only a small part of that." —Nick Warren

Friday and Saturday at 7 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m. // 1505 State St., Second Floor // \$15 Suggested Donation // For more information, go to [PACA1505.org](http://PACA1505.org)

## Time for PRIDE!

NWPA Pride Alliance plans a weekend with Pride on the Bay and Erie Pride Parade

### BEGINNING SATURDAY, JUN. 28

Some years, winter in Erie can be more than even those of us with the sunniest of dispositions can handle. Our reward for toughing it out is some of the most beautiful summers imaginable and we Erieites know how to celebrate. We have three months full of festivals, parades, and various outdoor parties. That includes a weekend of Pride hosted by Northwest Pennsylvania Pride Alliance. It's arguably the biggest, most colorful, friendliest, and most fun weekend of the summer.

The weekend will kick off with Pride on the Bay (formerly Erie PrideFest) at Liberty Park on June 28 from noon to 5 p.m. There will be live music, food, and shopping vendors as well as tables and tents set up by local organizations for outreach opportunities. NWPA Pride Alliance says it will be "a day of celebration,

community, and LGBTQIA+ visibility."

The fun continues on June 29 for the NWPA Pride Parade that will begin at 11th and State streets at 1 p.m. In the spirit of true inclusion, anyone who wants to walk in the parade is welcome to join, simply line up at 11th and State beginning at noon. "This is more than just a celebration; it's an opportunity to advocate for equality, demand justice, and empower our community," says NWPA Pride Alliance. "Let's march together to show that we will not be silenced and that our pride is our strength." —Edwina Capozziello

Pride on the Bay, June 28 // Noon to 5 p.m. // Liberty Park, 828 W. Bayfront Pkwy.

Erie Pride Parade, June 29 // Line up begins at noon, Parade begins at 1 p.m. // 11th and State St. // More info: [nwpaipride.org](http://nwpaipride.org)



Organizers from NWPA Pride are hoping to make this Pride on the Bay the best yet featuring live music, performances, vendors, and informational booths from local outreach organizations. The annual Pride parade will take place the following day with a promenade down State Street.

## Erie Reader Book Club: June 2025

*Calypso* by David Sedaris

SUNDAY, JUN. 29

The Erie Reader Book Club will be reading and discussing *Calypso* by David Sedaris in correspondence with the Erie Reader's Pride issue. The book club is free to attend and anyone is welcome to join in at any time.

For those familiar with Sedaris, it should come as no surprise that this collection of semi-autobiographical essays takes heavy themes – such as aging, familial relationships, and death – and reframes them, making humorous the things we often find the most difficult to discuss, let alone laugh about.

When Sedaris buys a beach house out on the Carolina coast, he envisions an idyllic escape from reality, with days full of playing games, lounging on the beach, and enjoying time with his loved ones. Instead, he comes to the realization that you can never really take a vacation from yourself.

From approaching the age his mother was when she died of cancer to dealing with his nonagenarian father's failing mind and his sister's recent death, Sedaris ultimately takes in stride the events with which many struggle. A keen observer of the world around him, Sedaris looks upon these things and does with them what he knows best – transforming them into stories that stick with the reader long after turning the page.

1 p.m. // Werner Books and Coffee, 2608 Liberty St. // Free to join, cost of book not included // For more info: [wernerbooks.com](http://wernerbooks.com)



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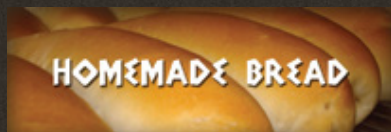
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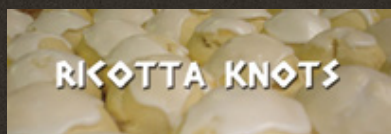
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Bring Her Back is Scary and Sad in Equal Measures

Philippou Brothers' latest lifted by stylish direction and inspired performances

★★★★★

The Philippou Brothers hit the horror scene hard with their debut *Talk to Me*. Now they return with a mournful new film *Bring Her Back*, and much like the former, this film takes what would be a simple story and nearly drowns it in the convoluted nature of its universe's rules. Fortunately, the film is successful thanks to some stylish direction and a stellar performance from its lead actress.

Andy (Billy Barratt) and his blind half-sister Piper (Sora Wong) have their lives turned upside down when they come home to find their father dead on the bathroom floor. Because Andy is under 18, he cannot yet claim guardianship of Piper so they are sent to live with a caretaker named Laura (Sally Hawkins) and her mute nephew Oliver (Jonah Wren Philips) until Andy turns 18. Laura seems to be a friendly and quirky woman but Andy senses something unusual about her. Little do they know, Laura has sinister plans for Piper and she tries to create a rift between her and her brother.



The film's story doesn't break any new ground and if one has seen enough A24-produced horror films, you can easily guess where this story is going. Thankfully, Sally Hawkins gives an inspired performance playing against her usual type. Her performance gives us a look into grief and desperation not seen since Toni Collette in *Hereditary*. The film is also well-shot and the direc-

tion is engaging enough that it works surprisingly well despite what is ultimately a very silly story.—Forest Taylor

Directed by Danny and Michael Philippou // Written by Danny Philippou and Bill Hinzman // Starring Sally Hawkins, Billy Barratt, Sora Wong, Jonah Wren Philips, Stephen Philips, Sally-Anne Upton, and Mischa Haywood // Stage 6 Films // 104 minutes // Rated R

Friendship is a Stressful New Comedy

Oh, you're my best friend

★★★★★

The term "cringe comedy" was popularized with shows like *The Office*, whose humor was based around how awkward and uncomfortable a clueless person can make a situation. But Tim Robinson of *I Think You Should Leave* fame proves that he is the master of comedic awkwardness in Andrew DeYoung's *Friendship*, a comedy that has more nerve-wracking tension than most horror movies and one that's written and performed strongly enough to excuse some of the more absurd flights of fancy.

Craig (Robinson) is a suburban dad living an unassuming, mundane life, but things turn after a chance encounter with his neighbor – a cool, charismatic TV weatherman named Austin (Paul Rudd). At the insistence of his wife (Kate Mara), Craig joins Austin and his friends for a casual get-together. The night ends badly for Craig but he finds himself obsessed with Austin's life and his attempts to insert himself into Austin's circle turn increasingly desperate.

The film, first and foremost, is a very



funny look at a control freak unable to maintain control, but in this case, the character is so ridiculously impotent that his attempts become funny rather than terrifying. Unfortunately, the story, which is mostly grounded in reality, takes occasional fantastical turns that strain credibility even for a film this outlandish. However, the smart writing and strong performances are more than enough to keep audiences engaged.

It's rare to see a comedy of this type on the big screen anymore, and *Friendship* looks to have the makings of a new classic in the genre.—Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Andrew DeYoung // Starring Tim Robinson, Paul Rudd, Kate Mara, Jack Dylan Glazer, Rick Worth, Whitmer Thomas, Daniel London, Eric Rahill, Jacob Ming-Trent, Billy Byrk, Meredith Garretson, Ari Dalbert, and Alex Webb // A24 // 100 minutes // Rated R

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- The Rule of Benedict

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**Tennis**  
*Face Down in the Garden*  
Mutually Detrimental

★★★★★

*Face Down in the Garden* is the melancholic final chapter for the indie pop duo Tennis. Since their formation in 2010, Tennis has been a passion project for married couple Alaina Moore and Patrick Riley. As the build-up began for their seventh studio album, the duo sounded stronger than ever on lead single “Weight of Desire” – infectious dream-like instrumentation and melodic vocals painting this transitory journey. All signs pointed to another solid addition to their discography; however, the language surrounding this project quickly changed as *Face Down in the Garden* became labeled as the band’s final album. The disillusionment of Tennis paints this project in a morose, reflective light. While the two sound as sharp as ever musically speaking, the same cannot be said lyric-wise. Throughout the album’s nine tracks, Alaina reflects on her time as a band and with Patrick. Akin to flipping through a photo album, thoughts and memories float to the surface between pages and key events. This form of lyric writing comes ahead with “12 Blown Tires” – starting as a simple tour story, the song quickly morphs into this rumination on the band’s intertwining professional and personal lives. *Face Down in the Garden* bookends Tennis with their most personal display yet. With the couple calling their project quits after the album and connected “Farewell” tour, little is known about what comes next for the two.—Nathaniel Clark



**Colette Bone and Seann Clark (Feat. Dom DeCecco and Frank Marzano)**  
*Forevermore*  
Self-released

★★★★★

A dark back-and-forth filled with evocative storytelling and musical explorations, *Forevermore* is an album to be reckoned with. Built upon a long-time collaboration between singer/keyboardist Colette Bone, singer/guitarist Seann Clark, and strings player Dom DeCecco, several tracks originally recorded in 2016 with Tavon Markov were revisited. Joined by guitarist Frank Marzano, violist Abby Barrett, vocalist Shelly Peeso, guitarist Jesse Tomczak, and multi-instrumentalist Josh Karickhoff, the band added new parts and even new songs to the original offering. The outcome is a bluesy, searing narrative that the listener can construct, the interplay between the two singers often having a theatrical effect (perhaps most evident on “Blood that Stains”). Clark explained that “Colette and I wanted to take the songs that we had written and put them in a ‘lower east-side bar at two in the morning’ kind of feel.” Even from just a few notes in, it’s absolutely clear that they achieved that with resounding success. At the album’s most tender moments like the album’s titular track, there’s a solemn wisdom, like the advice given by someone who’s gone through hell and back. Clark noted that they “wanted to dive into the low dark overtones of loss, love, hurt, and especially death.” Clark’s tone itself is lowered, using an acoustic baritone guitar tuned down a fourth to B. Coinciding with this release is the companion piece *Live at the Barn*, containing intimate performances of songs from *Forevermore*.—Nick Warren



**PinkPantheress**  
*Fancy That*  
Warner Records UK

★★★★★

PinkPantheress furthers her foothold in the modern dance-pop lane with *Fancy That*. In less than five years, PinkPantheress (aka Victoria Beverly Walker) has become a figure to watch in the popular music scene. Starting from humble beginnings on TikTok, the singer and producer has expanded her reach on a global scale. Said growth came ahead of her 2023 debut album *Heaven Knows* and its Billboard Top 10 single “Boy’s a Liar Pt. 2.” However, this project presents a more commercial version of Pink’s style: the sounds of Y2K DIY house and drum’n’bass switched out for a more contemporary R&B approach. With *Fancy That*, Pantheress returns to the tune that led to her stardom while showing immense musical growth. Take the lead single “Tonight” for example – with an anthemic chorus and pulse-pounding use of sampling and interpolations, the musician produces a track perfect for the clubs. Much of the project follows a similar prerogative: creating memorable gold with as little frills as necessary. Songs like “Illegal,” “Stars,” and album highlight “Stateside” are primed to be the soundtrack to your next night out. Speaking of no-frills, it is crucial to discuss *Fancy That*’s tracklist. Coming in at nine tracks (or 21 minutes), the project is concise to the point of perfection. While brief, it lacks any fat that may bog down the listening experience. Overall, *Fancy That* is a testament to PinkPantheress’ continuing artistic growth as an artist: a lean collection of absolute hits that are ready for any social venue.—Nathaniel Clark



**Mei Semones**  
*Animaru*  
Bayonet Records

★★★★★

Once in a while, an artist comes along so wholly unique, bringing seemingly disparate elements together in a way that feels almost effortless. Mei Semones is one of those artists. The 24-year-old Brooklyn-based singer and guitarist’s debut LP is a jaw-dropping blend of jazz (bossa nova in particular) and indie rock (’90s-influenced bedroom albums in particular), sung in both English and Japanese. It seamlessly code-switches between intimate acoustic recordings like the lullabies of “Donguri” and “Sasayuka Sakebu” and the orchestral layers of “Dangomushi” or the thematic banner anthem of “I can do what I want.” Semones fuses the relaxed vocal delivery of Soccer Mommy and Snail Mail with the chamber pop of Black Country, New Road and the Dirty Projectors and the warm virtuosity of bossa guitarists like Luiz Bonfá and Baden Powell. It’s a marriage that feels totally irreplaceable from anyone else but her – this is a sonic experience that only Semones is fully qualified to lead. Her five-piece band includes violist Noah Leong, violinist Claudius Agrippa, bassist Noam Tanzer, and drummer Ransom McCafferty, with the recurring string sections adding a tonal cohesion that makes the album even more singular. —Nick Warren

# CALENDAR

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**Thu 6/05**

Palace of Machinery / FEED Works  
@ 12pm / \$5  
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

**Sat 6/07**

**Featured**



**FEEDback 2025**  
@ 12pm / \$5-\$10  
FEED Media Art Center,  
1307 State Street



**TINYstage**

@ 5pm / Free  
cafeGIANT, 1311 State Street

**Featured**



**REWIND: A 90's  
Themed Immersive  
Pop-up**  
@ 6pm / \$15  
Room 33, 1033 State  
Street



**Murder Mystery Medvale Mayhem: "Class  
of '85 Reunion" Murder Mystery Dinner  
Theater at Madeline's**  
@ 6:30pm / \$45-\$55  
Madeline's Dining and Events, 8844 Pennsylvania 18,  
Cranesville

**Wed 6/11**

**Kids Yoga Series: Wednesdays**  
@ 11:15am / \$10-\$15  
Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford Street,  
Edinboro

**Thu 6/12**

**Garden Sprouts - Series**  
@ 11am / \$50-\$70  
Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford Street,  
Edinboro

**The Price**

@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Sat 6/14**

**The Price**  
@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Featured**



**Enchanted Forest  
Party ft. Shea  
D'Heaux, Xandra, Joe  
Porter, Dj Drop Bear  
and DJ Jay!**

@ 8pm / \$7  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



**STIM CITY: CLUB FEMME**

@ 10pm / \$10  
Jun 14th - Jun 15th  
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

**Tue 6/17**

**Sweet & Savory Strawberry**  
@ 6pm / \$50  
Yellow House, 436 Walnut Street, Girard PA, 436 Wal-  
nut Street, Girard

**Wed 6/18**

**Kids Yoga Series: Wednesdays**  
@ 11:15am / \$10-\$15  
Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford Street,  
Edinboro

**Thu 6/19**

**Mindful Garden Walk: Resting Tree  
Mindfulness/Richard Gosnell**  
@ 6pm / \$15-\$20  
Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford Street,  
Edinboro

**Erie Sea Wolves vs. Chesapeake Baysox**  
@ 6:05pm  
UPMC Park

**Golden Hour Photo Club**

@ 8pm / Free-\$20  
Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford Street,  
Edinboro

**Fri 6/20**

**Featured**



**Psychic Groovin' ~ 4  
Psychics 1 Price!**  
@ 4pm / \$25-\$25  
The Hippie Space, 211  
Main Street West, Girard



**The Price**

@ 7:30pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Featured**



**King's Rook Emo  
Night on the Outside  
Patio! ft. Fastfall,  
Heart of Atlantic,  
Mighty Vices + MORE**

@ 8pm / \$6  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



**Sat 6/21**

**Louder Together ft. Jen Meyer, Nancy  
boys, Drucifer and MORE!**  
@ 7:30pm / \$12  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street

**STIM CITY : CLUB TWERKNATION28**

@ 10pm / \$10  
Jun 21st - Jun 22nd  
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

**Sun 6/22**

**The Price**  
@ 2pm / \$20  
PACA, 1505 State Street

**Sunflower Bee Paint Class - Connie Bootz  
w/ Lucky Crane Studios**  
@ 3pm / \$10-\$45  
Goodell Gardens & Homestead, 221 Waterford Street,  
Edinboro

**Fri 6/27**

**Featured**



**The Red Jumpsuit  
Apparatus**  
@ 6pm / \$30-\$60  
King's Rook Club, 1921  
Peach Street



**Sat 6/28**

**Featured**



**Erie Roller Derby's  
June doubleheader**  
@ 4:30pm / \$10  
Bayfront Convention Cen-  
ter, 1 Sassafrafs Pier



**STIM CITY : CLUB KID**

@ 10pm / \$10  
Jun 28th - Jun 29th  
FEED Media Art Center, 1307 State Street

**Sun 6/29**

**Do Good Inc: Bolt Back to School 5k**  
@ 10am / \$35-\$40  
1 Peninsula Dr

Calendar information is provided by event organizers.  
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Beyond Dunder Mifflin: The Electric City Documentary

Erie film crew documents the city behind the scenes

By: Larry Wheaton

The Office was one of the biggest hit shows of the 21st century and arguably the most popular “water cooler” comedy since Seinfeld, popularizing the NSFW phrase, “That’s what she said” and a slew of ever-popular memes like the ones featuring character Pam Beesly that states, “They’re the same picture.” Now 20 years since its debut in 2005, The Office is still a highly-streamed show and has turned the coal-mining town of Scranton, Pennsylvania into a mecca for fans.

Local filmmaker Brandon Soto, along with his crew from Erie, decided to create a fan-made documentary titled Beyond Dunder Mifflin: The Electric City Documentary all about The Office and the impact that it’s had on Scranton, the city where the show is set. In the program, Scranton is mentioned frequently and the city is so interconnected to the storyline of the show that it’s almost a character itself. Soto got the idea while listening to a podcast hosted by the character of Kevin called Off the Beat with Brian Baumgartner, where he talked about the relationship between the city and the show. Soto said, “It took us a little over a year to put this all together, from shooting interviews and traveling, to editing everything. We wanted the documentary to come out in March 2025 because that marks the official 20-year anniversary of the pilot episode.”

During the documentary, viewers

will learn the role that the city played in developing the look of the show, and with the help of Scranton’s Chamber of Commerce, curated props were provided for each season. As the popularity of the show continued, the city rallied with the success and created an Office Convention that features cast members and guided tours of the many places mentioned within the show. Soto said that they didn’t receive payment to make the documentary and that it was more about the love of the show, stating, “In the beginning, we had to convince people that we weren’t just fans of the show, we were actually putting something real together. It wasn’t just about The Office, but about the city itself.” He continues, “The Everhart Museum in Scranton is currently putting together a 20th anniversary exhibit and are planning to use some of our film within the exhibit.” Along with the Mayor of Scranton and several key figures in their community, several Office cast members make an appearance in the doc, including Andy Buckley (David Wallace), Angela Kinsey (Angela), and Kate Flannery (Meredith).

With the boost in tourism and the national spotlight The Office has given Scranton, many hope that something like this could give Erie a similar boost, being there are similarities between the two cities (both in size, population, and their overall short distances from other major-metropolitan areas). “You never know, someone might want to create a show based in Erie some-



Local filmmaker Brandon Soto, along with a crew of Erieites, set out to be actual documentarians of the fictional documentary The Office, as they delve into the effect the show has had upon the Pennsylvania town of Scranton.

day. Small cities can boost tourism by embracing what makes them unique: local history, culture, events, and community pride. By highlighting their distinctive character through festivals, art, food, and storytelling, they create memorable experiences that draw visitors in,” says Soto.

Beyond Dunder Mifflin: The Electric City Documentary is streaming now on YouTube for free, with over 2,000 views and counting. However, the filmmaker and crew are hopeful that it will make its way to the streaming service Peacock, which is the home of The Of-

fice, so that more fans of the show get a chance to learn about Scranton and perhaps take a trip to the once “coal town, now cool town,” as it’s referred to in the documentary.

For more information on the documentary, visit [theelectriccitydoc.com](http://theelectriccitydoc.com)

“You miss 100 percent of the shots you don’t take.” – Wayne Gretzky – Michael Scott – Larry Wheaton

Larry Wheaton can be reached at [wheaton1138@gmail.com](mailto:wheaton1138@gmail.com)





CROSSWORD

1	2	3			4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11	12	
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			55							56	57				
58	59	60											61		
62						63							64		
65						66							67		

- Across
1. Pond fish

4. Baby cow

8. Went icy

13. Slot machine lever

14. Noisy fight

15. Moroccan capital

16. Tiny taste

17. Dejected area where the rugs go?

19. Animal's back crossing the line first in a race?

21. Healing plant

22. Subject of the outdated joke "Why do they call it a \_\_\_ when you only get one?"

23. Really quiet, in sheet music

26. Area 51 locale

29. Vicks cold/flu brand

31. Green Wave school

35. Involved in

36. Kinda boring one-vegetable salad?

40. Fab Four name

41. Acid in vinegar

42. Call the shots

45. City southeast of Istanbul

49. "Happy Days" eatery

50. Put a stopwatch back to 0

54. Yale grads
55. Magic words to make an RV disappear?

58. Just under a Louisiana subdivision?

61. Poivre tablemate

62. Be of help

63. King with a labyrinth

64. Part of the work wk.

65. New beginnings

66. Ooze

67. "\_\_\_ Kids 3-D: Game Over" (2003 film)
- Down
1. "The Big Chill" director Lawrence

2. Maryland major leaguer

3. "Yes and" performance

4. Mobile

5. Airborne

6. Pope ten behind the current one?

7. Household plants

8. Wendy's offering

9. Ninja Turtle in red, familiarly

10. Japanese kimono sash

11. Cheesy pies on a Scrabble board?

12. Suffix of most ordinal numbers

14. Advanced music or drama deg.
18. Demeanor

20. Kraken's home

23. Canine litter

24. Helmet type

25. Arafat's gp., once

27. "New Rules" singer \_\_\_ Lipa

28. One's partner?

30. Name in financial software

32. "Blue Rondo \_\_\_ Turk" (Brubeck song)

33. JFK's location

34. Before, to Byron

36. Manx's lack

37. Yours and mine

38. \_\_\_ brisk pace

39. Noise

40. BlackBerry, e.g.

43. Moves slowly

44. Short-timer

46. Elite guest rosters

47. Rebel

48. One of the Olsen twins

51. Bombards with junk

52. Like ghost stories

53. Threefold

55. Penny, e.g.

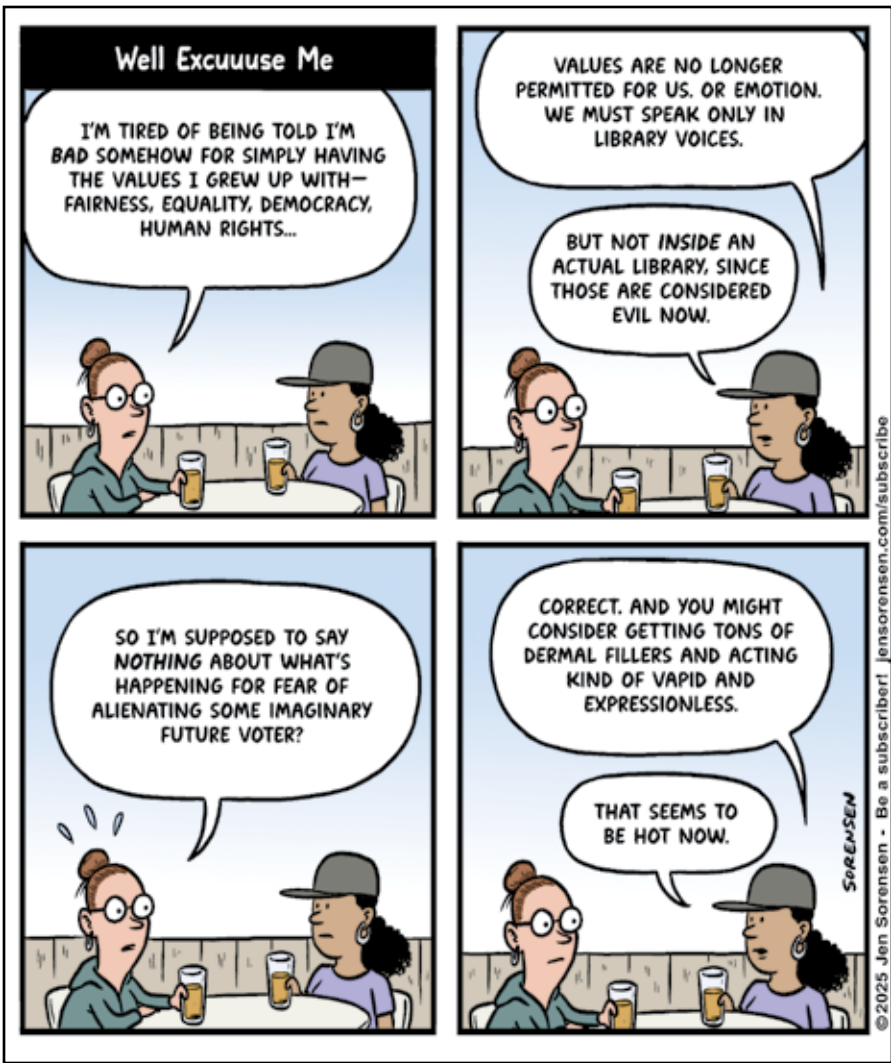
56. Brandy bottle initials

57. Sounds during medical checkups

58. Malicious

59. Actress Longoria

60. Trial concern



Answers to last puzzle

V	A	L	E		I	B	E	A	M			B	E	G
I	M	A	X		D	U	N	C	E	S		A	V	E
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R	A	T				L	U	M	B	A	R		U	S
C	B	S				D	I	A	N	E		V	E	R

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