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**ERIE READER**  
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# I2E: THE INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP ISSUE

THE CORRY AREA TECHNOLOGY CENTER AND HUB

THE PRESQUE ISLE GATEWAY PROJECT

THE 2022 STATE OF ERIE INDUSTRY

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In physics, there are two forms of mechanical energy — potential and kinetic. As its label suggests, potential energy is defined as the stored energy in an object due to its position or configuration, whether that's because it's at a height (gravitational) or its shape is distorted through stretching or compression (elastic). Kinetic energy, on the other hand, is the energy produced by objects in motion. It is transferable from one object to another, and is lesser or greater depending on the moving object's velocity and mass.

Potential energy is converted to kinetic energy the instant we stop holding on — when we let the hammer drop or release the drawstring to let loose an arrow. When the hammer strikes the nail or the arrow hits the target, work is said to have been done. A force has been transferred, and the impacted object displaced from its equilibrium position. When we harness the transfer of these energies with intention and purpose, we have the basis of machinery — of getting more done more efficiently and effectively.

Innovation works like that, too. If ideas are the potential energy stored within our minds, entrepreneurship is the act of setting those ideas into motion, with hopefully enough velocity (which we'll remind you is speed *plus* direction) and mass to cause a displacement of the status quo. The more buy-in an idea has, the more the effects of innovation are amplified — the bigger the crowd, the stronger the push, so long as the push is in the same direction. This is how innovation works to reshape industries, and how civic activism can work to reshape cities.

Our annual Industry, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship (I2E) issue centers on the catalysts of this change right here in Erie, and how we might best align and synchronize at-times disparate moving parts to power our region forward. It's hard work, whether we're talking about planning or execution. Nonetheless, each year we are encouraged to see local entrepreneurs and enterprises alike dropping fresh ideas, pushing and pulling to innovate.

You'll see individual effort exemplified in the Erie-Made Business Academy at the Erie Center for Arts and Technology, the small business owners along Girard's Main Street and in Downtown Erie's PACA Building, and former "Erie's 40 Under 40" honorees Corey Cook, Amanda Duncan, and Padma Rai. Meanwhile, entities like the Corry Area Technology Center and Hub (CATCH), Presque Isle Gateway Project (in Millcreek), and the Erie Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC) are controlling the machinery of even larger transformations on a neighborhood- or city-wide scale.

After all is said and done, when all that potential energy is converted, will we settle into a new equilibrium? Or will we find a way to conserve and sustain the optimism and excitement that permeates these pages? That remains to be seen, but activating and harnessing 100 percent organic, home-grown ideas is a good place to start.

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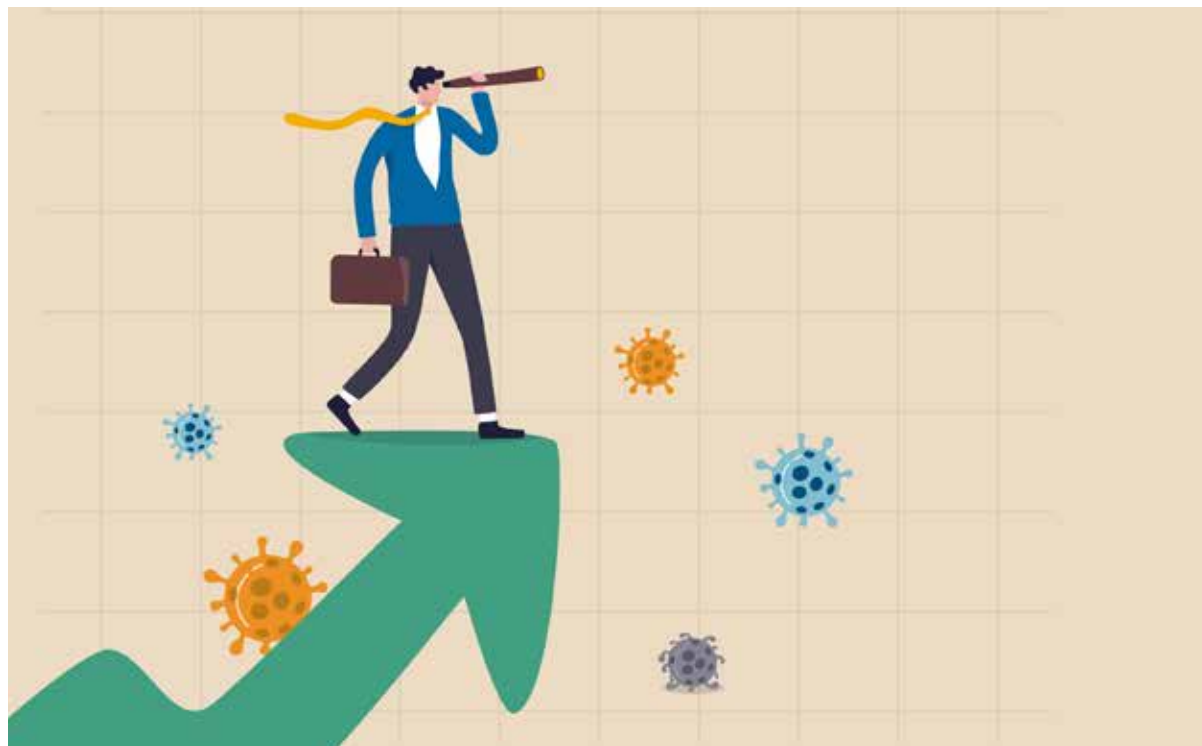
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# The 2022 State of Erie Industry

Business throughout the region recovers steadily post-pandemic



By: Jim Wertz

Before the pandemic hit Northwestern Pennsylvania, the Erie economy was plodding along. It lagged behind national and statewide economic indicators, such as the strength and scale of our industrial exports and the size of our overall job market — how many jobs we have versus how many people we have looking for work. Despite the lags, however, the local economy routinely grew at an annual rate of approximately one to two percent year over year.

When COVID-19 arrived, that momentum stopped and Erie County lost 26,000 jobs during the first four months of 2020.

Since April of 2020, the Erie economy has been recovering steadily, says Dr. Ken Louie, director of the Economic Research Institute of Erie at Penn State Behrend.

“Employment numbers are our most readily available statistic at the local level,” Louie says. “If you look at employment, the job recovery rate is going well.”

Erie County has recovered approximately 75 percent of the jobs lost to the pandemic since early 2020, up an additional 10 percent since the fourth quarter of last year and just slightly behind the national job recovery rate of approximately 82 percent.

This recovery is strongest in the transportation and warehousing sector, and within the financial industries sector, which have both fully recovered and added additional jobs across those sectors. Almost every sector of the Erie economy has experienced some level of recovery during 2021.

Louie says he's generally optimistic about the job recovery trend in Erie because it is likely an indication that our gross domestic product (GDP) — a measure

of the region's economic output — will increase as well.

“It may take a while for real GDP to recover fully back to a pre-pandemic level, simply because it has been on such a steep decline — almost 6 percent because of the pandemic,” Louie says. “It was pretty stable prior to that, but what's pushing it in a positive direction now are the good things going on at Wabtec,

---

**Erie County has recovered approximately 75 percent of the jobs lost to the pandemic since early 2020, up an additional 10 percent since the fourth quarter of last year and just slightly behind the national job recovery rate of approximately 82 percent.**

---

developing next generation locomotives, and the continued investments and activity in the central city.”

Ongoing development by the Erie Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC), which has bolstered retail and hospitality sectors downtown, and the technology-centered investments of Erie Insurance, Gannon University, the McGee Women's Hospital, and others, Louie believes, “will prove to be important contributors to our real GDP in the long run.”

Both retail trade and hospitality related jobs have outpaced the regional economic recovery overall.

Wages are increasing marginally as well, but those

**Since suffering a sharp decline at the beginning of the pandemic, the economy of Erie County has made a significant (although not complete) comeback, with every sector experiencing some level of recovery.**

increases are being offset by inflation caused by supply and demand tensions that have resulted in what economists call “pent-up demand.” Essentially, we went without certain products during the pandemic as a result of supply chain issues. Now that the supply chains are normalizing, everybody wants those products and that's creating greater demand and keeping prices higher than normal.

This too shall pass. How quickly it passes remains the question on everyone's mind. And because Erie tends to lag behind national economic trends — both positive and negative trends — the impacts of government-driven corrections to the market felt by consumers may also remain on the horizon for the short term.

What's more pressing for the long term is the waning number of people looking for work in Erie County. That's because the size of the labor force is an important variable in the equation for future progress and, as Louie says, “the most important resource we have for the creation of value” — goods, services, and income.

But Erie County is facing an aging population that is retiring or opting out of the workforce more quickly than it can be replaced. At the same time we have younger members of the workforce who are reevaluating the nature of work itself, looking for jobs rather than careers and embracing roles that afford them the flexibility to have a more appropriate work-life balance. When they don't find those opportunities here, they're leaving Erie County for places that do.

It's a complicated matrix in a moment of unprecedented change.

But between the continued investments in our neighborhoods and in Downtown Erie, coupled with rural mainstreet initiatives fueled by ECGRA and ARP funds, and the reinstatement of federal programs to resettle New Americans in Erie County, there is reason to remain optimistic.

All we need is leadership that is willing to commit to a solution rather than waiting for an opportunity. It's a bet we have to make.

The words written by urban planner Charles Buki about the City of Erie in 2016, now, in a post-pandemic era, seem ever more true for the county as a whole.

“The time has long passed when Erie had the luxury of assuming future prosperity,” he wrote. “Placing bets is part of leveraging the good cards in [Erie's] hand.”

*Jim Wertz is a contributing editor and chairman of the Erie County Democratic Party. He can be reached at [jWertz@ErieReader.com](mailto:jWertz@ErieReader.com) and you can follow him on Twitter @jim\_wertz.*

A photograph of a Country Fair store at night. The building has a red gabled roof with a white sign that says "Country Fair FRESH & LOCAL". The store is lit up, and the sky is dark with some stars visible.

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# Reimagining Entrepreneurship

New ErieMade Business Academy exemplifies creative alignment



**Kristen Santiago, owner of the Gone Local Erie retail shop and Ivy + Atlas business consultancy (and 2021 honoree of Erie's 40 Under 40), has embraced her role as project consultant and business assistance specialist at the ErieMade Business Academy, a cohort of 21 creative entrepreneurs conducted through the Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT).**

By: Matt Swanseger

Few would argue that Erie is undergoing a rebrand. What remains to be seen, however, is its ultimate direction — and just as important — who has a say.

If entrepreneur mentorship programs like the ErieMade Business Academy have anything to do with it, the answer will be *anybody* who has the drive and desire to, regardless of who they are or where they come from. Combining the resources of Bridgeway Capital's Creative Business Accelerator (CBA), the Western Pennsylvania Entrepreneur Diversification Fund, Erie Arts and Culture, and the Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT), the ErieMade Business Academy is aimed at transforming the "American dream" from theory into practice for historically disenfranchised populations.

For many would-be entrepreneurs, the gap between aspiration and attainment is not a matter of ability; it's a matter of accessibility. Because they cannot or do not know how to access the necessary financial, educational, and motivational resources, their ideas often fall by the wayside. This represents a huge loss to communities socially, economically, and culturally as huge stores of creative potential go essentially untapped.

Jude Shingle, arts program director at ECAT and a 2016 alumnus of Erie's 40 Under 40, doesn't believe there is a resource problem. "It's getting people to see that the resources are for them,

or to understand the resources exist, or talk about them in a different way. That's the work."

Building awareness is a lot easier, though, when you're building it right in front of them. Location is one reason why ECAT, housed in the extensively remodeled former Wayne School in the heart of Erie's lower east side, was such a perfect match for ErieMade. Generously equipped and beautifully appointed with 80,180 square feet of studio, conference, and activity spaces, ECAT has already been helping area middle and high school students reframe their expectations of what's possible with its clean, open, naturally lit atmosphere.

"Environment shapes attitude," affirms Shingle. Now it's doing the same for entrepreneurs-in-training. In turn, the ErieMade stakeholders hope that the new businesses can go on to reshape *their* environment by creating quality jobs, reactivating post-industrial spaces, reviving Main Street corridors, and elevating underserved populations. There are many inner-city neighborhoods — especially as one radiates further out from State Street — that could reap huge rewards from that investment, the area around East Avenue being one of them.

The other reason ECAT allied itself with ErieMade (through the Bridgeway CBA) is its philosophy. Explains Shingle: "We have an approach to career development that's very holistic. So it's not just about giving education-

al resources, it's also thinking about the whole person, and what barriers do you have to getting an education? Then we wrap support services around that."

Confirming that alignment is Katie Johnson, associate director of the CBA at Bridgeway Capital, who at times sounds like she's paraphrasing Shingle. She refers to Bridgeway as a "social impact investor" driven to "invest in small businesses that are women-owned, BI-POC-owned, veteran-owned, and those located in low to moderate income areas." In short, she says, the "overall reason for Bridgeway is to provide capital options for people who have barriers to capital." She calls ErieMade "one of the programmatic expressions of what we do."

Johnson explains that in order to "access capital as a tool to create resilient businesses," prospective entrepreneurs must demonstrate "capital readiness" by preparing or repairing credit, creating a business plan, filing paperwork, obtaining licenses and clearances, etc. Grooming participants for capital readiness is one goal of the ErieMade Business Academy (in particular to apply for \$2,000 grants through the PA Council on the Arts). The other is instilling a genuine belief and confidence that their business plans can succeed far beyond the scope of the six-month program, which officially wraps up late summer.

"It's about empowering the members of the community who are living in this part of town, to invest in and see themselves as business owners — to find a truly viable career in it," Shingle says.

Heading these efforts at the ground level is project consultant and business assistance specialist (and a 2021 honoree of Erie's 40 Under 40) Kristen Santiago. Despite being just 28 years old, she coaches from a wealth of experience as the owner of two successful area businesses, the locally-themed retail shop

Gone Local Erie and the small business and entrepreneurial consulting firm Ivy + Atlas. Under her tutelage is a cohort of 21 designers, artists, designers, craftspeople, micro-manufacturers, and makers from the greater Erie region, painstakingly selected from a pool of 40 applicants.

"It was a really competitive process. And it was really exciting," Santiago recalls.

At the start of the program in early February, Santiago met one-on-one with each member of the cohort to get a grasp of their individual goals, visions, and circumstances and design a personalized curriculum around their needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Group presentations are given once a month at ECAT to break down high level topics that are applicable to any business, while Santiago continues to hold individual coaching sessions bi-monthly by video conference.

In the end, Santiago says the program "is going to be different for everybody. Everybody works at their own pace. You'll have somebody who will attack and do their entire business plan, and then you'll have others who do it section by section, working more slowly and methodically. We need to acquaint ourselves with their working style and how they can be best held accountable."

Echoes Shingle: "The way we've really marketed this program is 'We're going to meet you where you are.' You're part of a cohort. Everyone's figuring this out together. And that's extremely valuable because being an entrepreneur is terrifying ... we're super excited because we just saw a diverse pool of applicants who typically don't see themselves as, and may not even use the word 'entrepreneur' to describe themselves."

So even if homework and tutoring sessions are the bulk of the ErieMade Business Academy, there is still tremendous benefit in attending monthly class. "Not only do you get training on a topic that can be applicable to most or all of the people in the room, but you also get to hear from other people, hear their stories and struggles," says Santiago. "It's really easy to sit there and think, 'Oh my gosh, this person's at this level there, and they've accomplished this and did that and where am I at and

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



The new Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT) resides within the radically renovated Wayne School on East Avenue, the culmination of a \$12 million investment. Mirroring the belief that “environment shapes attitude,” the space is bright, open, and inspiring — the perfect venue for community education initiatives such as the ErieMade Business Academy.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

what have I done?!” But the second that the walls come down and people start being transparent and vulnerable, everybody else in the room understands it’s not a new thing — it’s a universal issue.”

Although the anxieties and doubts

surrounding entrepreneurship are universal, the language around it is often not. Therefore, Shingle says, it’s been important to adapt that lexicon in a manner that suits anyone — whether or not they’re not from a business background or even speak

English as their first language. Santiago feels honored to work with the three New Americans in the program, who were variously recruited through Erie Arts and Culture and their CHROMA Guild (Santiago thanks Kelly Armor, folk art director) and the City of Erie’s New American Council (kudos to Niken Astari Carpenter, New American liaison).

Technology can also be a hurdle for some, especially to those who didn’t grow up with it. Santiago says Patrick Moran, emerging technologies librarian at the Erie County Public Library, has been instrumental in getting them up to speed through Blasco’s Idea Lab, an adult maker space that offers free access to equipment and classes. “It’s a lot of connecting the dots.”

Whether there are future iterations

of ErieMade remains to be seen, but everyone sounds optimistic. “A lot of businesses are already working on their business plans and making leaps. Some people have already gotten grants and have just done great things. So we know that this is working really well,” enthuses Johnson, who has seen similar programs flourish in Pittsburgh and elsewhere throughout Bridgeway’s 15-county footprint in Western Pennsylvania.

“I’m floored to be part of this program and having an impact on so many businesses. Because I know how hard and how lonely it can be,” admits Santiago. “And also to have the support of organizations like ECAT and Bridgeway and Erie Arts and Culture — all of the pieces are working together in such a cool way. If the same marrying of all the resources could happen in other sectors of this city, amazing things would happen.”

“I digress. That’s another article for another day.”

One we certainly hope to write.

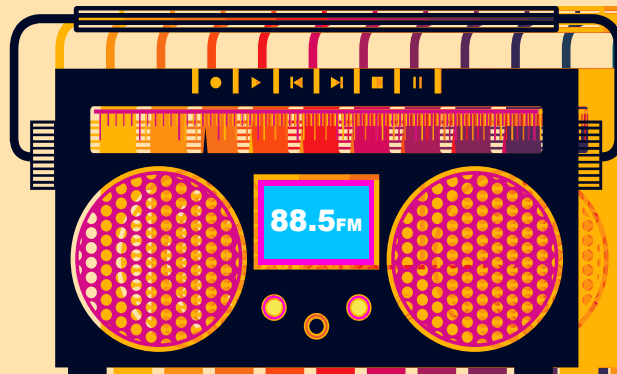
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# Howard Industries Shows the Way to Go

Family-owned sign business still thrives



[left] This sign has a slide component to show whether the conference room is open or closed, according to Jeffrey Stewart, vice president of sales at Howard Industries. In addition, the guitar image in the background can easily be swapped out and replaced. [bottom right] Howard Industries salespeople can use this handy panel to display their products at trade shows.

ly pleasing signs at Erie hospitals, universities, banks, businesses, nonprofits, and arts and culture venues. Many of them, including Marquette Savings Bank, Erie International Airport-Tom Ridge Field, the Barber National Institute and Glowacki Management, have a graceful arched top.

Some signs simply state the name of the business, while wayfaring signs guide visitors to their next stop — the emergency room, the delivery entrance, the parking ramp — with text and/or maps.

From the signs at the Erie Zoo, you can learn the scientific classification of an animal, where its native land is and whether it's endangered.

At Experience Children's Museum, the sign for the Discovery Corner Outdoor Classroom has at least 10 distinct colors, with the words "children's museum" in a font that resembles a kid's first attempt at printing. But sign fonts also have to be readable; fancy scripts won't make the cut.

By: Liz Allen

When Jeffrey Stewart talks about signs, his face lights up.

That's not surprising. After all, Stewart is vice president of sales for Howard Industries Architectural Signage Systems, located at Sterrettania Business Park in Fairview.

But when he shares his enthusiasm for signs, Stewart offers more than just professional expertise. The narrative about Howard Industries is a story of successful entrepreneurship, with all the factors that entails — being a creator, risk-taker, and innovator. At Howard Industries, there's the bonus that the business has been passed from one generation to the next.

In 1928, Howard Schneider, who died in 1984, started hand-painting signs in the basement of his Rochester, N.Y. home. His late wife, Mary Moulton Schneider, was also a co-founder of the family business.

The Schneider family moved to Erie in 1941, locating the business in downtown Erie on Turnpike Street, the narrow block that juts toward West 14th Street between State and Peach. The company's website explains that with the Erie move, Schneider was "taking his chances with the relatively new technology of neon signage."

By the 1950s, Howard Signs began to

specialize in "open" and "closed" signs for drive-through banks.

Howard Schneider's sons, Gary and Larry Schneider, worked together at Howard Industries until 1999, when Gary became sole owner and CEO. Larry Schneider owns Signal-Tech in Erie, which manufactures high-quality LED signs and signals in Erie.

Gary Schneider's daughter, Tonya Pace, joined the company as operations manager 12 years ago, after owning a pet-grooming business. "I fell into it and it felt right," said Pace, who oversees the fast-growing side of the business that makes interior signs.

Gary Schneider is currently a snowbird in Florida, but Stewart, with 22 years at the company, is well-versed in his boss's business philosophy. Stewart said that Schneider likes to tell the story about his father taking him to lunch on State Street during their workday, when there were restaurants on opposite sides of the street. "His dad would tell him to look at the signs," Stewart said. Where would his son rather eat? At the restaurant with the attractive, inviting sign or at the one where the sign was "coming apart," Stewart said.

That's one way that Schneider absorbed his dad's lesson about "integrating an architectural element" into their work.

Look around Erie and you can spot Howard's functional and architectural-

And those aren't just any old primary colors on Howard signs. Colors can be custom-mixed to match a company's particular shade of blue, for example. "That's where the fun comes in — with the materials and the colors (and) the layouts to the design," Stewart said.

That's also where new skill sets and advanced technology come in. Draftsmen are now called technical illustrators. They must be "well-educated, highly technical people because of the graphics programs that are out there," he said. These workers must be able to make their programs "talk to the machines" that will make the end products.

Mechanical equipment is more advanced, with 3D printers performing functions that once might have required separate machines.

Erie employers have banded together for years to persuade people that manufacturing jobs don't require labor in a gritty environment. The airy factory floor I toured is the same one that workers and visitors see every day, Stewart said. "You can come in any day of the week and find the floors just as clean," he said.

Howard Industries also fosters a culture to think ahead to what comes next. When Stewart, 63, began working there 22 years ago, the company catalog





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Being nimble enough to make those shields helped the business, which has 53 employees, to stay open and keep busy during the pandemic, he said.

The company also has seen a big uptick in orders for interior signs; in fact, the ratio is now 5-to-1 for interior signage versus exterior.

The Americans With Disabilities Act requirements are helping to drive much of that business. Signs for exits, stairways, wheelchair access, exam rooms, restrooms and hotel pools, to name a few examples, are made with raised letters to serve those who are visually impaired, with words in Braille underneath. This is another area where attention to detail matters, because the ADA requires complying with strict rules on font size, spacing, layout, color and contrast. "That fire marshal is going to come in and say, 'Let me see your ADA-compliant-code signage,'" he said.

One of the newest products, "patient focused signage," also found more markets during COVID. Signs outside patient rooms at UPMC Hamot, for instance, have pull tabs to show at a glance if the patient has allergies, if there are visitor restrictions, or if the doctor is inside for consultation. "Tabs

**The Erie Zoo is one of many local institutions that uses signs from Howard Industries. This sample is on display in the lobby of Howard Industries at Sterrettania Business Park in Fairview. The company's clients also include many financial institutions, including Widget Financial, a credit union.**

for patient conditions allow poor, busy nurses to do their jobs more effectively," said Stewart. "The nurses love them."

As we ease back into a normal life, Howard's patented "Perma-Banner" system may be guiding you to a festival, concert, an ethnic neighborhood, or another unique venue or event. These signs, mounted on street poles, can be permanent or seasonal. Either way, Stewart said, they won't fray and tatter the way cloth banners do. "There's no tearing, no grommets," he said.

This sign company has come a long way — from hand-painted products, to neon signs, to energy-efficient LED signs. It now makes desktop or doorway signs where the wording can be changed by using a suction cup to open up the clear cover and insert a new piece of paper. It's as simple as changing out a photo in a picture frame.

"Howard Industries is always thinking about the next step," said Stewart, and his boss, Gary Schneider, is always thinking about the big picture and the next "longer-lasting, higher-quality product that can go out the door."

*Liz Allen's youngest grandchild is blind, so ADA signage has special meaning for her. You can reach her at [lizallenerie@gmail.com](mailto:lizallenerie@gmail.com).*



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# 40 Under 40 Catch-up: A Little Distance, A Lot of Perspective

Talking to Corey Cook, Amanda Duncan, and Padma Rai



JESSICA HUNTER

By: Cara Suppa

**T**he old adage says that time can heal all wounds, but how do you heal in the midst of a worldwide public health crisis?

While we're two wearying years into the COVID-19 pandemic now, time has indeed played an important part, giving many young professionals the opportunity and space to regroup and reexamine what they want from life and their careers.

They have learned to adapt to extraordinary circumstances, with many of them nowhere close to where they started in 2020.

And Erie is all the better for it.

The Reader caught up with three previous honorees of Erie's 40 Under 40 to check in, see what they're up to, and see what time has wrought.

We reached out Corey Cook, from the Class of 2014, the current director of operations and logistics for the Erie Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC), CEO of CookMediaLLC, and program director of Life-thrumusic; Amanda Duncan, the current community leader of Radius CoWork and president and chairwoman of Young Erie Professionals; and Padma Rai, the owner of Annapurna Kitchen.

### Corey Cook, Class of 2014

**ER:** It has been eight years since your inclusion in the 40 Under 40 list, and a lot has changed since then.

Can you speak a little to the evolution of your career these past eight years?

**Corey Cook:** The location of my career has changed, but at the core of what I have been doing for the last 16 years is operations and community development work.

At UPS it was all about hitting production goals, timing, safety, and efficiency, working in a very rigid corporate environment. Working in the nonprofit sector was all about community-focused development with limited funding and resources, but the impact on lives was the ultimate goal.

These two very different experiences have been great learning experiences for me.

**ER:** What was it about EDDC that made you want to be a part of the organization? What differences in the

lives of people in Erie do you see the organization making now and in the future?

**CC:** I was a part of the EDDC's Community Engagement Council and knew about the work being done. For me, having the opportunity to have an impact on the development downtown was an opportunity that I could not pass on.

There are core elements of community and entrepreneurship in both the [Flagship City] Food Hall and Public Market. I call the food hall "the community's dining room." It's located in the heart of downtown and so many people from different walks of life come to enjoy a meal, have a drink, and meet up. Having spaces like the food hall and market will have a lasting impact from an economic, health, and community perspective downtown for years to come.

**ER:** Finally, we're into the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Has there been an instance where you found yourself pivoting/growing/evolving because of it, and what did you learn from that experience?

**CC:** During the pandemic, I was able to start CookMediaLLC, a media services company specializing in photography, video, and live sound. It's something I have been doing for years as a hobby and decided to make it an official business.

Since starting CookMediaLLC we have been blessed with opportunities to do corporate work, weddings, family shoots, events, and have our work published in major trades work magazines.

It has also been a blessing to have my wife LaTasha Cook as my partner in this venture.

### Amanda Duncan, Class of 2020

**ER:** It has only been two years since your inclusion on the 40 Under 40 list, but even still, much has changed for you!

Can you speak a little to the evolution of your career these past two years?

**Amanda Duncan:** Shortly after the 2020 40 under 40 edition came out, I had the opportunity to lead Radius CoWork and accepted without hesitation.

Building intentional communities is what drives and inspires me and the community at Radius has been a core part of my life since I moved back to Erie in 2017. This was a big pivot for me.

**Past 40 Under 40 honorees [left to right] Corey Cook (2014), Amanda Duncan (2020), and Padma Rai (2020) have not sat idly by during the pandemic, and have continued to make strides in the community and their respective professions. Duncan is helping to cultivate new waves of entrepreneurs through Radius CoWork, Cook is one of the most visible faces of Downtown Erie's transformation as director of operations and logistics for the Erie Downtown Development Corporation, and Rai is serving up flavorful food and fashion as proprietor of Annapurna Kitchen and Gurung Fashion & Design.**

My entire career [up until then] had been managing nonprofit organizations. I've learned a lot about small businesses over the past 18 months. I've really enjoyed exploring and being part of Erie's entrepreneurial ecosystem. There is a strong, collaborative effort in Erie to support innovation and entrepreneurship in our region. I feel honored to be part of that and learn from my peers.

**ER:** What was it about Radius CoWork that made you want to be a part of the organization? What differences in the lives of people in Erie do you see the organization making now and in the future?

**AD:** While Radius has a very cool space, great views, and my favorite cup of coffee in town, the physical aspects are secondary to the incredible community of people we have.

Everyone genuinely wants each other to succeed and are willing to help each other out in any way they can. It's beautiful what passionate people can create when they're put in a room together. My position as community leader has made me appreciate how critical these communities are to entrepreneurial growth at a macro level.

Coworking spaces like Radius break down so many barriers for people looking to start their own business or become freelancers. Colocation provides opportunities for collaboration that would otherwise not exist.

After almost seven years, we can see the positive impact Radius has made on Erie's economy through the success of multiple businesses that grew out of the coworking space like MenajErie Studio, Whitethorn Digital, and ApexDrop (to name just a few).

**ER:** Finally, we're into the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Has there been an instance where you

found yourself pivoting/growing/evolving because of it, and what did you learn from that experience?

**AD:** The pandemic was a hard time for us as it was for all small businesses, but our members rallied around us to make sure Radius survived. The pandemic showed us that Radius truly is more than just the physical space. It was the ultimate test of our community and we nailed it.

Even when we couldn't come together in person, we found ways to continue connecting with and supporting each other. We have slowly begun to grow membership and are looking forward to adding back our in-person programming. We're carefully watching how the pandemic has shifted the workforce and examining ways to support that change by providing a space and community for new remote workers, start-up businesses, and freelancers. We want to make sure they're equipped with the tools and support system they need to be successful.

A big project we've been working on that we are super excited for is Freelance Week Erie. It's a weeklong conference of workshops, panel discussions, and networking opportunities tailored for freelancers of all kinds happening April 18-22, 2022. You can find the full schedule and tickets at [freelanceweekerie.com](http://freelanceweekerie.com).

**Padma Rai, Class of 2020**

**ER:** It has only been two years since your inclusion on the 40 Under 40 list, but even still, much has

changed for you!

You've gone from social worker to restaurateur — can you speak a little to the evolution of your career these past two years?

**PR:** I have become more thoughtful and productive. I'm able to share an authentic taste of Nepal with my new American friends through my restaurant Annapurna Kitchen ("Annapurna" meaning both full and sufficient of grains and also the name of the 10th tallest mountain in the world). Even though I have changed from a caseworker to a business personality, I still haven't changed my desire to help those who are in need of my help. Now I'm physically working as a server; it's a beautiful experience for me while explaining each dish to customers who are trying new food. Overall, the bigger you grow, the bigger the responsibilities are on your shoulders. It's the circle of life. I'm happy with what I used to do and what I'm doing now.

**ER:** In addition to Annapurna Kitchen, your Facebook indicates that you have opened or are in the process of opening a clothier shop. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**PR:** Yes! Gurung Fashion & Design clothing line is soon to be open for the public. I learned tailoring back in Nepal. I'm thankful to my school systems where students get to work on drawing. I used to be happy drawing flowers more than drawing a body diagram in science class. My personal understanding is that a person who is good at art could survive anywhere.

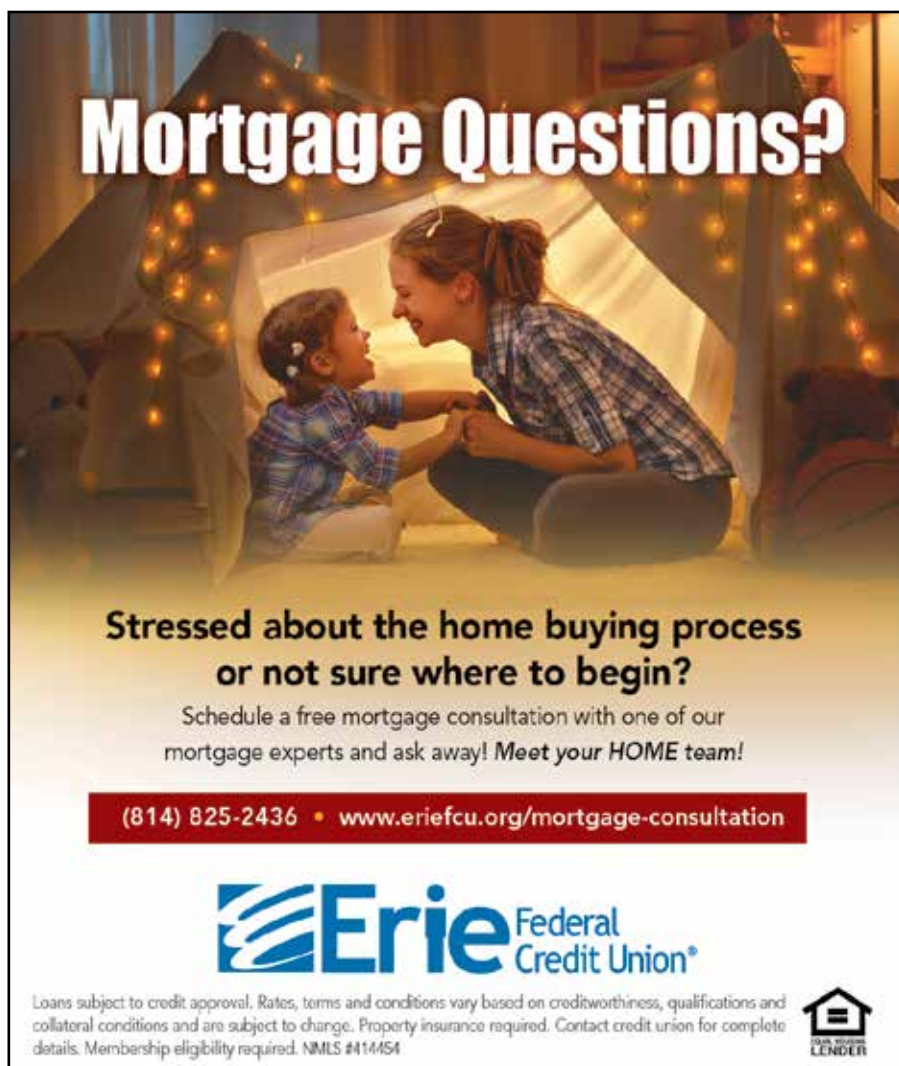
I wanted to motivate and see more women in business, that's why I'm focused on woman-based handmade ethnic and party wear. A friend of mine had to quit her job because of a language barrier. I decided why not involve her in this business where she doesn't have to communicate in English with customers; she's good at cutting and getting ten different designs from [a piece of] fabric. If you need jean fittings, me or my friend could easily work on it.

**ER:** Finally, we're into the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Has there been an instance where you found yourself pivoting/growing/evolving because of it, and what did you learn from that experience?

**PR:** The impact in sales. It was super slow in winter, and now the increase in gas prices has slowed some of the online platforms. You could get our food delivery through GrubHub.

I'm promoting our food by engaging in cultural events, like the Sakela event happening on June 11, 2022. It's organized by the Bhutanese Kirat Rai organization of America, where I worked as an international and national outreach coordinator. So I'm going to be a little busy these couple months, helping to promote my cultural events. It's going to be downtown in Perry Square.

*Cara Suppa can be reached at [csuppa@eriereader.com](mailto:csuppa@eriereader.com). For more information, go to [erieddc.org](http://erieddc.org), [radiusco.work](http://radiusco.work), or [annapurnakitchenerie.com](http://annapurnakitchenerie.com).*



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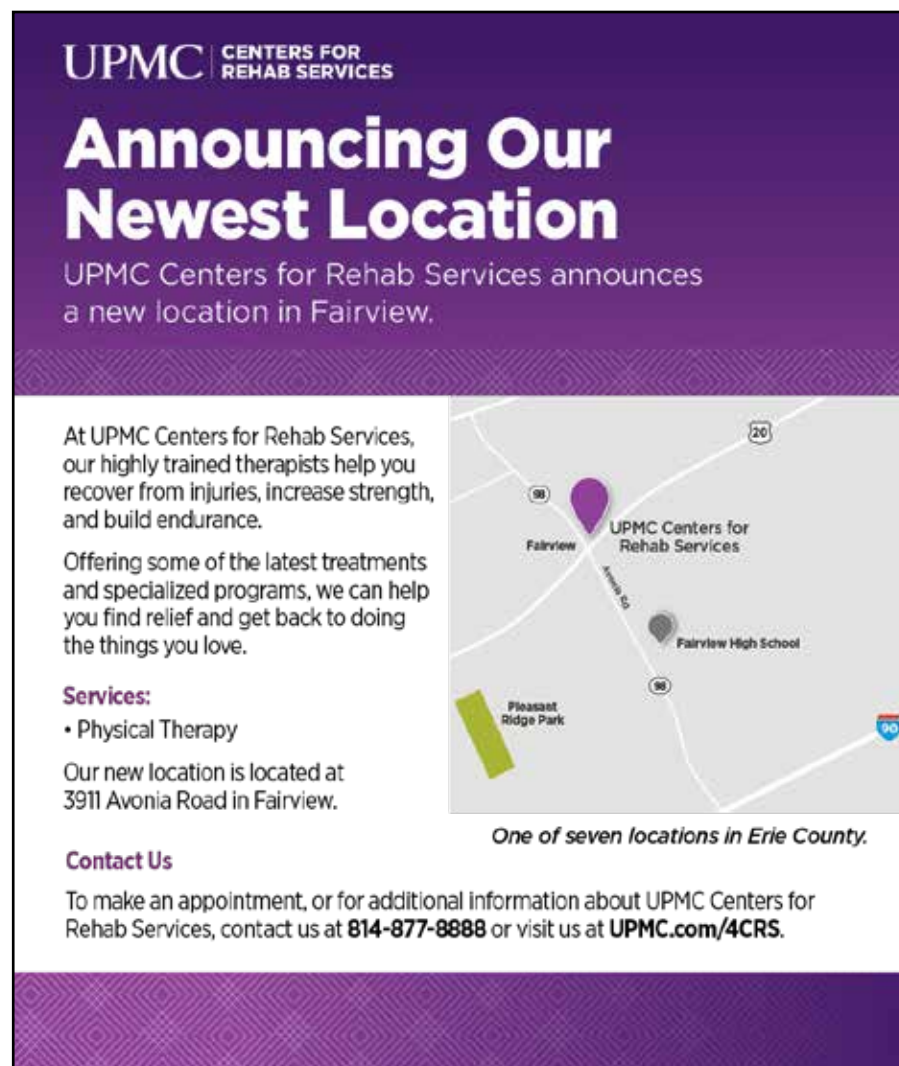
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# How the Presque Isle Gateway Project Could Redefine the Region

The proposed multi-million dollar vision would focus on walkability



[left] Making retail attractions such as the locally owned Shops at the Colony more accessible to cyclists and pedestrians is one of the goals of Millcreek Township's Presque Isle Gateway Project. [bottom] Conceptual drawings demonstrate the aesthetic vision and geographical footprint of the Presque Isle Gateway Project.

By: Nick Warren

Have you ever visited another city and spent a day browsing amongst different storefronts? Maybe the area had a nickname, or perhaps branded signs boasting about its cultural identity.

Well, Millcreek wants to do that in a big way.

From Pittsburgh Avenue westward past Peninsula Drive, and from West 12th Street north to the peninsula itself is the target area that we will come to know as the Presque Isle Gateway District.

This long term project focuses on making the area more walkable and with its own recognizable identity. The pathway along Eighth Street in particular will be given an updated Main Street-style facelift.

One of the aims of the Presque Isle Gateway project is to tie together some of our important assets like Waldameer Park, Scott Park, the Colony Plaza, the West Erie Plaza, and of course, Presque Isle State Park.

For years, this has been the dream for many people in the area, chief among them being Robyn Crago, a local business owner in charge of Les Crago Jewelers

and Salon Verde. Crago recalls visiting her daughter while she attended Denison University and being charmed by some of the local districts. "We visited the Short North, which is a very cool area that goes from downtown to the campus of OSU," she described, soon lamenting the fact that while Erie had eye-catching shops like the Colony Plaza, they weren't nearly as utilized or pedestrian-friendly.

The idea isn't to make Presque Isle State Park sprawl out into Millcreek, but to give the "Gateway" region its own identity unto itself.

Crago went on to present the seeds of this idea to the Millcreek Board of Supervisors. Over the course of pitching what would become the Presque Isle Gateway Project, she met several people with like minded goals. She teamed up with Ralph "Chip" Riehl III, owner of the Colony Plaza, as well as Chris Greene and CA Conrad of VCG Properties and the West Erie Plaza. VCG got the project connected with Ingalls Planning & Design, a firm outside of Rochester, N.Y. — itself located in a charming commercial strip known as the Box Factory.

They say it takes a village, right? That's especially

true when you're trying to build one.

Piqued public interest and a growing list of powerful supporters saw to it the Gateway Project would be one of the tentpoles of the comprehensive plan Embrace Millcreek, adopted in 2018.

Having previously championed the project while on Erie County Council, Kim Clear was elected Millcreek township supervisor in the fall of 2021. Clear cemented her role as one of the central people steering the district to where it wants to be, joined by Matthew Waldinger, director of planning and development for Millcreek Township.

Clear elucidated that the project would give the district "a Main Street feel. If you travel, you see a lot of these places that are redefining an area."

"We're trying to get the traffic off the road. You stop and you spend four hours shopping, going to eating and drinking establishments, breweries, distilleries, and things like that."

Crago noted that "it also would give people a nice, comfortable place that's aesthetically pleasing. There would be walkability. You could park your car and walk a few blocks between Pittsburgh and Peninsula Avenue and feel safe. It's a beautification, certainly. All the power lines would be underground, with sidewalks and green space."

And that's the essential part of the project, specifically the West Eighth Street corridor. The project has plans for West Sixth and 12th streets as well. One of the goals is to make 12th Street the place to drive, and Eighth and Sixth streets the places to walk or bike.

The project plans to establish pedestrian sidewalks flanked by green space, with a tree-lined buffer between road and walkway. There are also plans to have angled parking along the central section (Sommerheim Drive to Lowell Avenue) of Eighth Street.

If the project goes according to plan, the most immediately noticeable addition will be the full gateway



MATT WALDINGER

INGALLS PLANNING AND DESIGN

## Blender Boyz Stay In The Mix

The new local clothing line from Kyle Harris and Tae Hayes

By: Charles Brown

Fashion entrepreneurs Kyle Harris and Tae Hayes joined forces in October of last year to emerge with a clothing line that will send a message to every street and avenue in Erie.

With the city in the midst of finding its own distinct look, giving “the 814” a sense of pride and meaning, the two thread merchants had a desire to leave their mark as well and rank themselves among the apparel-creators shaping the local fashion scene.

Harris is a huge advocate of the value of teamwork and conversing with like-minded individuals, which all plays a part in the Blender Boyz theme.



Fashion entrepreneur Kyle Harris shows off one of his Blender Boyz hoodie designs.

With the help of some of the biggest names in town, BB was able to take off. “Sean Madigan allowed us to sell with his brand Dotigan in the lobby of DuceTwo, which was a big help in Blender Boyz recognition,” says Harris.

“Then Garrett (owner of Ink Xspression Tattoo and Piercing Shop) gave us the green light to sell our hoodies in his store at the mall.” Two of the largest local co-signs took Blender Boyz from an idea to a growing local phenomenon.

Within the first month of its release, Harris and Hayes sold over 300 hoodies between DuceTwo and Ink Xspression. “The city really supports us. People have shown Blender Boyz love from day one,” Harris states.

While utilizing two of the hottest spots around to get their brand to the people, Harris mentioned that a website is coming soon for online shoppers.

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



INGALLS PLANNING AND DESIGN

arches (no, not you, St. Louis) crossing Eighth Street. Three are planned for now. For a “close-enough” preview, check out the arch at the entrance to the West Erie Plaza.

There are also plenty of half arches designed to line the way, as well as poles and lamp posts, often decorated with matching medallions.

Conversely, perhaps the portion of the plan that requires the most work (and money) is a more subtle change: moving the power lines underground, and keeping the corridor well lit by lamp posts in their place.

In May of 2021, Erie County Council approved the application for a Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) Grant. According to the commonwealth’s budget website this program is designed “for the acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational, and historical improvement projects.”

The RACP Grant, if accepted, would provide \$6.3 million in funding for the project. In addition, Millcreek Township would provide \$1 million, with \$5.5 million in private investments set to be a matching fund to the grant.

The Presque Isle Gateway Project is not, however, responsible for the purchase of the former Shicklay’s location. That would be the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The organization bought the 18 acres of land for \$4.6 million in late 2020, and governs the entirety of Presque Isle State Park.

The Gateway Project is also not interfering with Sara’s Campground, a privately owned community

**This map shows planned arches and roundabouts to be distributed throughout the Presque Isle Gateway’s targeted improvement area, which will span from Pittsburgh Avenue westward past Peninsula Drive, and from West 12th Street north to the peninsula itself.**

treasure. “There’s no infringement onto Sara’s Campground,” Clear clarified, smiling and declaring “that will not be touched or changed.”

Why is that necessary to point out? Clear knows very well why. Up until the end of February, Millcreek was soliciting online suggestions from the community via the Ingalls Planning site. With just a quick scan through the comments, you’ll find responses from Sara’s supporters so numerous, they deserved addressing.

Clear was quick to note that sustainability was a key issue to her, as well as making the district welcoming even in the winter months, an ambitious task indeed. Pushing winter sports like cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing would be paramount.

Once the project is implemented though — and it will take time — it will be here to stay. After mentioning that this would be around for decades at least, she wagered that “we have to be thinking 100 years into the future.”

*Nick Warren will probably be found wandering around the Presque Isle Gateway in a few years, especially if they launch a new music venue (Grog Shop at Coventry Village in Cleveland, he’s looking at you). For now, he can be reached at nick@eriereader.com*

## What's Happening in Corry Should CATCH on Elsewhere

New technology center seeks to bring fiber internet, training, jobs, and business to the region



The hulking 88,000-square-foot Corry Area Memorial Hospital is slated to become the site of the Corry Area Technology Center and Hub (CATCH), a home for high-speed fiber internet, a cloud storage system, a tech incubator, a tech job and remote career training center, a co-working space, and a daycare center focused on early technology education.

the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt sought to address the divide of his era: Access to electricity. On May 20, 1936, congress passed the Rural Electrification Act, providing loans for rural electrification projects. Just 17 years later, more than 90 percent of farms had access to electric service. Something once seen as a luxury became a necessity.

When it comes to access to broadband, it goes beyond connecting a community to the internet. It's about connecting a community to opportunities today and anticipating them tomorrow. That's the plan in Corry thanks to the guidance coming out of the community's recently completed strategic plan, produced by czb, LLC earlier last year.

"Our hope with CATCH is to not only support current industries but make the pivot to Industry 4.0," says Brody Howard, executive director of the Corry Higher-Education Council. Industry 4.0 — also referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution — began to be popularized around 2015 in efforts to make sense of and anticipate rapid changes in technology and industry and the implications they'd bear on society and culture.

While the strategic plan addresses a range of issues, connectivity, tech, and industry are areas Howard is working to address as a "local champion," a term given to volunteers in the community stepping up to turn the plan from words on a page to accomplishments in the community.

"This is the most important time for rural communities to find their place in the innovation economy," says Chuck Gray, executive director of Impact Corry, the organization behind getting a strategic plan produced that is now guiding implementation. "If they don't find footing now, I don't know how they find footing ahead."

Finding footing and moving forward in the innovation economy in Corry

By: Ben Speggen

On Feb. 22, from the comfort of my couch, I learned about news coming out of Corry, Pennsylvania. As reported in the Erie Times-News by Valerie Myers, community leaders in the most southeastern city in the most northwestern county of Pennsylvania are making moves to launch the Corry Area Technology Center and Hub (CATCH) in the former Corry Memorial Hospital.

Myers' lengthy and thorough feature details the ambitious aspirations to convert the hulking 88,000-square-foot building that's sat vacant for a decade into CATCH — a home for high-speed fiber internet, a cloud storage system, a tech incubator, a tech job and remote career training center, a co-working space, and a daycare center focused on early technology education.

I read about the big news in Corry not in the pages of the paper (although I still love the smell of newsprint in the morning), but on my laptop's screen (which, between that and my iPhone, is where I consume mostly all the content I read or watch or listen to). It was easy to do — from the couch to the screen to my eyeballs — thanks to a reliable, stable internet connection that I worry

little about when I'm home.

As it stands today, 19 million Americans can't say the same. That's the number, according to the Federal Communications Commission, of folks nationwide without access to broadband internet.

As defined by the FCC, broadband is internet with download speeds of *at least* 25 megabits per second (Mbps) coupled with upload speeds of *at least* 3 Mbps. It can be delivered via fiber, wireless, satellite, digital subscriber line (DSL), or cable.

"Gig fiber" has become shorthand for capturing equitable internet speed over fiber optic cables measured in *at least* 1 gig both *down* and *up*. There are 1,000 megabits in 1 gigabit. So, at 25-3, some users are experiencing a fraction of the speed of the internet than others.

According to the most recent FCC data on broadband deployment, just 17 percent of Erie County, Pennsylvania residents have access to fiber broadband. The majority who access broadband do so over cable or DSL. The same data reveals that nearly 10,000 Erie County residents are without access at all.

Plenty has been — and continues to be — written and said about the digital

divide. Strides to narrow that gap have been made over the years. According to PEW, just 1 percent of U.S. adults living in urban and suburban areas had household access to broadband in 2000 — an era when dial-up internet was still king. Zero percent in rural communities reported having access that year. A decade later, the percentages jumped to 64, 63, and 52, respectively. By 2021, it was 77, 79, and 72.

It's important to note that these numbers are for those who *have* access — not those that *do* access. As the FCC reported in its "Eighth Broadband Progress Report," "even in areas where broadband is available, approximately 100 million Americans don't subscribe."

While rural areas in America constitute 97 percent of the nation's land area today, 20 percent of the population (about 60 million) lives there, according to the Census Bureau. Of those living in rural areas, one out of four lack access to high-speed internet. It jumps to a third on tribal lands. Additionally, nationwide, according to PEW, as of 2019, 40 percent of the nation's schools and 60 percent of healthcare facilities outside metropolitan areas lack access.

But it's not as if a 1930s analog doesn't exist to which we can look for inspiration and guidance. With the creation of

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



has begun with the Greg Pike family donating the Corry Memorial Hospital so that the space for CATCH can be created. Next up is, well, a lot, but folks in Corry aren't ones to sit on their hands.

In the traditional sense of a tech center, CATCH will house a data center and offer training. In a less traditional sense, training is being approached from a "whole life cycle based around technology," Gray says.

Howard is working on developing a curriculum for training through the Hi-Ed. Training will range from skills-retraining for today's workers looking for tomorrow's jobs, as well as focusing on beginning tech-focused education at the pre-K level.

counties — Erie (where Corry is located), Crawford, and Warren — with a population of 14,819. In Corry, the population is just over 6,300.

Also in the works: the Union City School District.

"This is our duty to be a part of a regional community," Gray says. "We want to be sure we're playing a part in a bigger system."

There's plenty of work ahead yet — from creating a request for proposal for providers, to curriculum development, to hiring for jobs now that'll help build out the jobs of tomorrow, and plenty more. But what's clear so far is that the community of Corry has come together to create a strategic plan and

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**"CATCH is one of the most important things we're doing at the present moment to contribute to our region, to our nation, to make ourselves a prosperous place to be. CATCH is important not just because we're bringing technology, but because of the opportunities that will be present." — Chuck Gray, executive director of Impact Corry**

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"Rather than having to take a generation to make generational change, we have the potential to make a change on the generation today," Howard says.

He says he sees what's happening in Corry as a "once in a lifetime opportunity."

"Being able to have this growth opportunity, not to have to be a scrappy small town just trying to survive — we're not talking about survival, we're talking about being able to thrive," Howard says. "There's this drive for education, for innovation — to tap into that potential we've never had before."

That potential isn't limited to Corry. And the folks there recognize that.

"We do not rise or fall alone," Gray says. "We have a commitment to take what we've learned to other communities to help them get the connectivity they want."

In the short-term, that means not just deploying fiber through the city of Corry but including the entire Corry School District. The school district spans over 210 square miles over three

is now working to carry it out at a pace that matches the speed of the internet they hope to deploy. And they're carrying it out with the goal to have the impact felt beyond the city of Corry.

"CATCH is one of the most important things we're doing at the present moment to contribute to our region, to our nation, to make ourselves a prosperous place to be," Gray says. "CATCH is important not just because we're bringing technology, but because of the opportunities that will be present."

How long will this all take? We'll need to refresh our browsers. But if innovation in Corry is to be measured today, it's safer to see it not in megabits but gigabits and as a replicable model for community development to be copied and pasted throughout Erie County and beyond.

*Ben Speggen can be reached at [bSpeggen@ErieReader.com](mailto:bSpeggen@ErieReader.com) and you can follow him on Twitter @BenSpeggen.*



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# Girard's Mission Main Street

How the town's citizen-led revitalization is bringing Main Street back



[top left] Girard's first public mural was funded in part by the organization "Downtown Girard." Main Street business owner, Eliza Wolfe, was one of the artists who volunteered their time to create this mural dedicated to celebrating the history of Girard. [bottom right] The Crick Coffeehouse and Eatery at 236 Main Street West in Girard was Val and Dan Mininger's message of hope to the town of Girard and has served as a revitalization inspiration for other businesses in the area.

By: Erin Phillips

In Sinclair Lewis' 1920 opus, *Main Street*, he writes: "I think perhaps we want a more conscious life. We're tired of drudging and sleeping and dying. We're tired of seeing just a few people able to be individualists. We're tired of always deferring hope till the next generation. We're tired of hearing the politicians and priests and cautious reformers (and the husbands!) coax us, 'Be calm! Be patient! Wait! We have the plans for a Utopia already made; just give us a bit more time and we'll produce it; trust us; we're wiser than you.' For ten thousand years they've said that. We want our Utopia now—and we're going to try our hands at it."

While these words were written 100 years ago, they still feel inherently relatable. In recent years, it has become a priority for small cities and towns to reclaim and restore their historic Main Streets from economic abandonment and structural neglect. And while in the City of Erie this reclamation is largely happening at the overarching hands of local corporations and large private donors, in the smaller boroughs throughout Erie County, in particular in Girard, it is happening because of the people who live and work there, who are trying their hands at creating their own Utopia on Main Street.

I've recently become very familiar with Main Street Girard as I have partnered with the borough to learn, write about, and share some of the success stories of Main Street building restorations (in particular, those using Girard's Facade Grant Program, which is a 1:1 matching grant program using funding provided by Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority's Mission Main Street program for property owners on and around Main Street to use for exterior improvements). In learning the stories of the people who own property on Main Street, I have come to find a passionate group who all truly care about making their

town as beautiful, successful, and idyllic as possible. Among this group is Val Mininger, co-owner of the Crick Coffee House and Eatery at 236 Main St. W, who has made it her personal mission to revitalize Main Street, and to give the people of Girard something to be proud of.

"We travel a lot and go to a lot of small towns with Main Streets and every shop is always full and busy. We need to have that here and there's no reason why we shouldn't. So we tried to do something different that could also then act as a starting point, and that would bring people not just from Girard, but from other places. People won't come to Girard for one consignment store, or one little gift shop, but they will come to walk the whole street and stop in each place," Mininger explained.

While Mininger's business (established in 2017) is somewhat new to Main Street, there are some who have been there for years and watched the gradual revitalization with appreciation. Eliza Wolfe has owned Eliza's Pottery and Main Street Art at 138 Main St W since 2005 and has been a great advocate for Girard's rebirth for years: "I was one of the businesses that was here before the revitalization started and it was really depressing. I tried to be there as a shining light and a lot of people did start coming in."

"A lot of building owners have taken advantage of the grant program and it's really wonderful to see the place come alive," Wolfe continues. "I believe that it's very uplifting for people to drive through and see that there is a business here, it's not just an empty space going to waste. It's a vibrant, alive town and seeing work done gives me hope."

Wolfe's building is one of many that has a rich history, tied to the early success of Girard. Built in 1861, it was once a saddlery, harness, and leather goods shop, and now, being renovated, restored, and freshened up, it provides a great example of how to be the steward of a building, and how building owners can, in turn,

be stewards of the town.

Melinda Meyer, president of local nonprofit Preservation Erie touches on the importance of preserving the history of small town Main Streets like Girard: "Not that we need the experts to tell us; we seem to know it instinctively. Research shows that people love to live near and visit well-cared-for and interesting historic places, especially downtowns. And downtown Girard has such a cool history with ties to the Erie Extension Canal, the railroad, and, of course, showman Dan Rice. Its history and historic buildings with their unique and beautiful architectural details are part of what makes Girard special." And Girard's special and unique history largely still remains in its historic buildings which can tell that history by simply existing.

Dan Rice, a famously eccentric man who lived in Girard in the mid-1800s (when he wasn't traveling the country with his circus acts), succeeded in helping to put Girard on the map. He was nationally visible (he helped inspire the character of "Uncle Sam" and even ran for president at one point). He dedicated the nation's first Civil War Memorial in 1865 which still stands at the center of Main Street, separating East from West.

In addition to Dan Rice, another family that put Girard on the map was the Battles family, an influential group who settled in Girard around 1822. The Battles Museum, which lies south of Main Street on Walnut,



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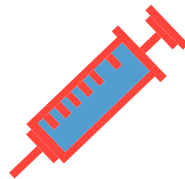


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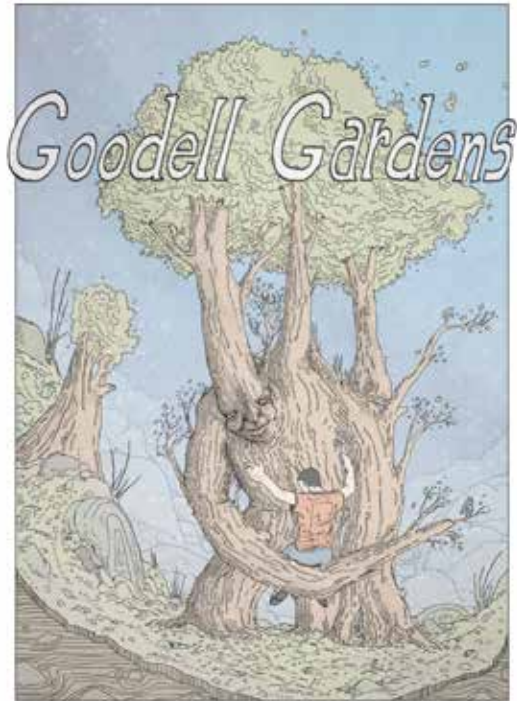
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## FEATURE



ERIN PHILLIPS

[top left] Jon and Gina Welch are pictured in front of the newly renovated and restored Battles Bank Building, constructed in the 1890s. The iconic Girard building now houses their business, Full Circle Winery. [bottom left, top] This photo from 1888 shows the property that is now Main Street Art. The dual storefront at 138 Main St W was built in the 1860s and once held a saddlery and harness shop, as well as a jewelry store. [bottom left, bottom] This historic view of Main Street is almost identical to the view today: featuring the 1865 Civil War monument installed by Dan Rice, which was the first Civil War memorial in the United States, as well as the Battles Bank building, and the Methodist church (it's steeple was blown down in a 1950s storm).

contains a mansion, a family farmhouse, and acres of preserved farmland, is currently owned, operated and maintained by the Hagen History Center. But the Battles family made their mark on Main Street as well, in the form of a bank: The Battles Bank. The bank was constructed around 1893 by farmer, lawyer, and businessman Rush Battles. Rush died in 1904, and his wife Charlotte and daughter Elizabeth kept the bank running for decades, and did so famously, even through the Great Depression.

The bank still stands as an architectural reminder of those times, although today owners Gina and Jon Welch have found a reuse for the building in the creation of Full Circle Winery. They have completed major restoration work on the building, while still making sure it remains recognizably a bank and the couple are proud to share their vision and dream with the people of Girard. Gina Welch reflects on the building's personal connection: "When we were engaged, this building was a jewelry store and we actually bought our rings here. So we've literally come full circle to have this place here in Girard. It's a great little town here and it's extremely important that we're here in the community of Girard."

The combination of restored historic architecture, a rich and interesting history, a cohort of business owners putting in hundreds of hours of work, as well as the support of local government means that Girard's revitalization is palpable, noticeable, and or-

ganic.

Girard Borough Manager Rob Stubenbort is excited about the changes he sees happening every day in his borough: "As the hub of the West County, Girard Borough is in a perfect position to offer shops and services for our borough and our unique, yet quintessential, small town vibe is an attraction for Erie County and beyond." Stubenbort mentions a council that was recently created called Downtown Girard, a group of elected officials and community members who have come together to help manage grants, offer support to business owners, and secure funding.

Melinda Meyer comments on the creation of this group: "The residents of Girard have such pride in the community and are incredibly engaged. This is how the borough was able to create Downtown Girard ... Since its formation in 2018, Downtown Girard has issued more than \$100,000 in grants for property improvements, supported creation of the first mural in the downtown, pursued National Register listing for a downtown historic district, and led work on a master plan, which is still in-process. The folks in Girard love their community and are willing to get involved, and it shows."

The Girard Borough Council has also made some improvements and changes that have helped draw attention to Main Street and make it more inviting, including ornamental lighting, landscaping, and event support. They have also eliminated paid parking on Main Street to encourage visitors to stay, shop, and support downtown. It is also worth mentioning that there are multiple historic commercial properties currently up for sale on Main Street, including the iconic Girard Dinor and neighboring Treehouse Tavern.

The people of Girard are no longer "deferring hope till the next generation," they recognized that a change needed to happen and are working to make that change for themselves. If you are not from Girard, or do not frequently pass through it, perhaps make it a point to stop and visit soon. Take a nice summer drive, get some lunch at The Crick, meander your way through vintage consignment shops and Eliza Wolfe's art gallery, pass by the 1865 Civil War Memorial, have a glass of wine at Full Circle while enjoying the historic architecture, and see for yourself all that Main Street has to offer these days.

Erin Phillips runs the Instagram @olderieonfoot, an in-depth look at local architecture "by foot, stroller, papoose, bike, and occasionally minivan."



CONTRIBUTED BY ELIZA WOLFE



FROM GIRARD BY LINDA LEE HESSONG EILER



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# Innovation From the Other Side of the Tracks

How Erie's PACA is making history and revitalizing downtown



The Performing Arts Collective Alliance (PACA) is making good use of the former Mayer Building just past the West 15th Street railroad tracks on State, playing host to not only thespians in its second floor theater, but also painters, sculptors, photographers, videographers, musicians, jewelry makers, dancers, fitness instructors, yogis, martial artists, and creative entrepreneurs of all sorts.

Mayer Building housed many food-related businesses due to its location across the street from the Central Market, a major food hall constructed in 1899, until its closing in 1958. City directories reveal that some businesses housed in the Mayer Building were the National Market Company (meats), Public Grocery Supply, Weaver Ice Cream Plant, C.A. Curtze Groceries (a successor to the Lake City Spice Mill), Grant Harnon, J.A. Schreiner Liquors, and Arcade Market, a grocery whose mosaic sign is partially preserved on the building's south storefront above FAT-Tees today.

Other retail uses of the past included furniture, wallpaper, tile, sporting supplies, plumbing and heating supplies, and paper goods. The large open spaces on the building's upper floors were used for a variety of light industrial purposes, such as a refrigerator company, knitting and woolen mills, printing and engraving, an electrotype maker, and a manufacturer of paper coin wrappers. The building has housed an undertaker, a business college, a roller rink, and the office of a drive-in theater company.

The current tenants of PACA are just as diverse with 50 percent being women and 25 percent BIPOC. They include the new Foundation Art Academy, Erie Clay Space, Paintology, photographers, musicians, videographers, and media production businesses such as Randy BillDuck, Sanz Studio Productions, Crew Life Productions, and numerous other artists, jewelry makers, sculptors, and movement artists who practice and teach fitness classes, dance, yoga, and martial arts in the newly renovated PACA Movement

By: Amy VanScoter

If you are starting to venture downtown again, you may be surprised by the surge of energy and excitement on upper State Street on a Friday or Saturday evening. Cars lined up and down the street, a diverse crowd, various forms of art and culture, and the community experiencing everything from live music, theater, fine art, poetry, pottery, photography, and yoga all in one place. Creatives of all kinds are coming to PACA (Performing Artists Collective Alliance) to unwind, experience, socialize, and practice their crafts.

Affectionately known to many as the PACA Building, the structure is officially named the Mayer Building. Recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the five-story, masonry, Classical Revival-style building located at 1501-1509 State Street is just south of the 15th Street railroad bridge in Downtown Erie. Outside business entrances include Cornerboy Collection Clothing, City Gallery, the main PACA entrance, and First Amendment (FAT) Tees. The building was constructed in 1899 but its windows, doors, and wood storefronts likely date to 1908, when the building underwent extensive reconstruction after a devastating fire. The elaborate history and industrial details of the Mayer Building are just a part of what attracts so many to venture inside.

"The first thing you see when you walk in is the original Lackawanna Steel Company staircase, topped with 100-year-old Pennsylvania slate," says Mark Tanenbaum, PACA's executive director. "You can ride in the oldest working elevator in Erie County." The elevator was installed in 1913 at the height of a typhoid epidemic, when the fourth floor was used to house the sick and the dying. "We've salvaged lighting and

fixtures from the Erie Coke plant and other local historic properties. Our new arts and entrepreneur center features a stone wall hewn by members of Henry Mayer's Army company, the Pennsylvania 102nd. In the back of the building is the only physical evidence remaining of the Great Mill Creek Flood of 1915 — a bent i-beam that was used to shuttle cargo off boats running the creek. There's history everywhere you look."

The Mayers owned 1501-1509 State Street until the Great Depression, running their paving and construction company from an office on the second floor and renting the remainder of the space to a variety of commercial and light manufacturing tenants. The





[top left] Bassist Tony Grey, drummer Michael Hibbler II, and pianist Nicholas Nasibyan perform during a recent installment of the PACA [LiVE!] concert series, which has been live-streaming nearly every Sunday since the summer of 2020. [bottom right] Anthony Morelli of Off Constantly Comedy performs during the opening weekend of RandyBillDuck's fourth floor music and entertainment studio.

The collective has continued thriving during these most unprecedented times.

PACA continues to move forward with plans for a green roof, new performance spaces, and room for more entrepreneurs. "PACA has always followed our motto — *Live Forward* — and we do that every day. We've set the stage to create a public green space and solar panels on our new roof. It will create a cool gathering space on top of our building, but it's environmentally friendly and will save us \$8,000 a year in energy costs. That's money we can put back into programs that turn artists into entrepreneurs," said Tanenbaum.

You can follow PACA on Facebook or [paca1505.com](http://paca1505.com) for the latest concerts, theater and news from the collective.

*Amy VanScoter is a PACA Board Member and the coordinator of the PACA Movement Center where she teaches Slow, Mindful Yoga classes. She can be reached at [avanscoter@gmail.com](mailto:avanscoter@gmail.com)*

Center on the fifth floor. The PACA Movement Center is also a collective space of its own, available for movement instructors and entrepreneurs to rent for classes and workshops.

"Artists get inspired by looking at art in other spaces," says Ken Falkenhagen, PACA administrator. "And it's not just inspiration. When artists open themselves up to other media and genres, the juxtaposition of the two styles can have a transformative effect." Falkenhagen notes that PACA's artists work together on the entrepreneurial side, too. "As a young artist or entrepreneur, it's nice to have mentors in the building who have done it all before. For example, if you're a new photographer trying to make a living at it, we can pair you with a professional in our building who's been doing it for 20 years."

The Mayer Building has seen steady improvement and economic growth since it was purchased by PACA in 2016. With Mark Tannenbaum as executive director, what was at first a theater on the second floor with 11 tenants will grow to more than 40 tenants following a fourth floor build-out in the spring of 2022. The property value has tripled since the purchase, increasing from \$265,000 to \$700,000 after a roof installation in 2020. The spirit of the collective is felt and seen throughout the building and to the betterment of the community as PACA continues to pay 100 percent of all Erie City, school, and county real estate taxes.

"PACA aims to be self-sustaining. It seems wrong to meet that goal by taking money from schoolkids and first responders. It's about more than art; it's about being stewards for the community at large. We're all in this together," said Tanenbaum.

While most organizations struggled during COVID, PACA saw their biggest growth with a 14,000-square-

foot new roof installation, two new ADA-compliant ground floor restrooms, a new custom LED marquee above the main entrance, an upgraded fire suppression system, and a new art gallery called the Skinny Gallery which connects the main inside entrance of PACA to City Gallery. PACA was also the only local theater to continue producing plays during the lockdown (in-house and live-streamed) according to an action plan developed with the PA Dept of Health.

Live-streamed Sunday music events — PACA [LiVE!] — continued to be offered free of charge for more than a year during the pandemic, and at the time of this publication have continued for nearly 80 weeks.

PACA also provided more than \$10,000 in COVID relief to the artist/entrepreneur community in the form of rent rebates/forgiveness. A new partnership with Eagle's Nest was created to provide summer Shakespeare camp to underserved middle schoolers.

**Awards and Accomplishments**

- 2015 Disrupt Erie Award winner, Innovation Collaborative
- 2020 Greater Erie Award for Preservation Excellence, Preservation Erie
- 2021 Leadership Award winner, David Schroeder, Erie Arts and Culture
- 2021 Listed on the National Register of Historic Places
- Grants awarded by ECGRA, Erie Community Foundation, Erie Arts and Culture, Erie Insurance Exchange, PA Council on the Arts, PA DCED
- 2021 Erie Gives Day raised more than \$17,000, top 25% of all organizations in dollars raised and top 8% in number of donors

*Executive Director, Mark Tannenbaum sits on the Erie City Historic Review Commission*





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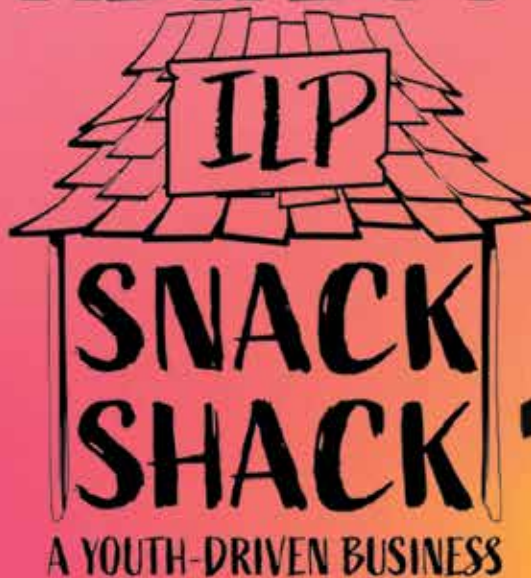
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## CALENDAR

### Mary Poppins Soars with Erie Philharmonic Concert

Disney classic screens at Warner in the most delightful way



WALT DISNEY PICTURES

you know what a wonderful way this is to rediscover a classic film or share with someone you love for the first time.”

The film features music from Richard and Robert Sherman, who worked with the Walt Disney Company after being discovered by Disney himself and would go on to compose songs for *The Jungle Book*, *Winnie The Pooh*, *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, and *The Aristocats*, along with *Snoopy*, *Come Home*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, and the 1973 film adaptation of *Charlotte’s Web*. The brothers also composed music for the Disney theme parks, including “It’s A Small World,” “The Tiki, Tiki, Tiki Room,” and “There’s a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow.”

*Mary Poppins*, starring Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke, was released on Aug. 27, 1964 by Walt Disney Pictures. The critically acclaimed film won Oscars for Best Actress, Best Sound Editing, Best Score, and Best Song for the work of the Sherman Brothers and Irwin Kostal, and Best Special Visual Effects, along with a nomination for Best Picture. A sequel was released in 2018, with Emily Blunt taking on the titular role. — Thomas Taylor

*Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$25 - 60, \$12 for students // For tickets and more information, go to [eriephil.org/calendar/marypoppins](http://eriephil.org/calendar/marypoppins)*

#### SATURDAY, APR. 9 - 10

The Erie Philharmonic is returning to the world of film music with the classic 1964 Walt Disney film *Mary Poppins*. The film will be presented in high definition on a large screen at the Warner Theatre while the orchestra plays with the film.

“In April, the most supercalifragilistic-expialidocious Mary Poppins comes to Erie on a huge screen, high-definition projection of the original film,” teases the Phil in its promotional materials. “Don’t miss all of the original moments you love, with the Erie Philharmonic performing the score in real-time, live, synchronized with the film. If you’ve experienced our recent film productions like *The Wizard of Oz*, *Casablanca*, or *E.T.*,

### Enjoy the Eclectic Stage Presence of Melissa Errico at MIAC

Broadway star to fill D’Angelo Center with song



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

#### MONDAY, APR. 11

Following a wildly successful live stream during the fall of 2020, Broadway star and singer Melissa Errico will be “returning” to perform at Mercyhurst’s Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center before embarking on a tour that starts in San Francisco and ends in London. If her name sounds familiar, it might not only be because of her widely publicized dramatic talents; the Tony Award-nominated actress is also an author and a regular contributor to *The New York Times*.

Accompanied by jazz pianist Tedd Firth, Errico will be presenting a night filled with classics from both the stage and screen — and considering her love for the great American songbook, attendees can look forward to hearing the star

sing her way through a setlist filled with her “favorite things.” In addition to a preview of her new album, *Out of the Dark* (composed entirely of songs inspired by films), Errico will be performing tunes written by the likes of Stephen Sondheim, Lerner & Loewe, Harold Arlen, Michel Legrand, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and more. These names should come as no surprise to fans, considering the singer released a full album of Sondheim numbers in 2018 titled *Sondheim Sublime*. Tickets for this performance come with complimentary pre-show tapas and drinks. — Aaron Mook

*7:30 p.m. // Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 East 38th Street // \$50 // For tickets and information, go to [miac.mercyhurst.edu](http://miac.mercyhurst.edu)*

### David Sedaris Talks Pretty at MIAC

Bestselling author and humorist returns to Mercyhurst

#### TUESDAY, APR. 19

It’s no secret that we here at The Reader are fans of David Sedaris, as he’s continued to frequent our pages throughout the years and influence our writing staff (this author included). Now, in his fifth Erie appearance, we’re just as excited as ever for him to show off his mastery on the Mercyhurst stage.

A man of many talents, Sedaris is foremost a humorist and comedic author but has also found success in his radio contributions to NPR, PRI, and BBC Radio. If you ask anyone who has had the pleasure of meeting the author, they will likely describe him as brutally honest and fiendishly funny.

His big break came when radio host Ira Glass discovered him in Chicago, leading to Sedaris’ reading of his first major essay on NPR, titled “Santaland Diaries.” Detailing his experiences working as an elf at Macy’s during the Christmas season in New York City, the essay was a major success and opened the door to Sedaris’ further works that we know and love today.

Whether it’s in his debut collection *Barrel Fever*, the wildly popular *Calypso*, or any works in between, there’s something for every reader to enjoy in Sedaris’ blunt, sardonic, and hilarious delivery, both on the page and on the stage. Folks won’t want to miss Sedaris’ presence (and outfits) as he finds himself on the Mercyhurst stage once more.

Be sure to bring along a copy of your favorite Sedaris work or buy one at the venue, as his website advertises that he will be doing a Q&A and book signing following the main reading — the author known for his expectedly hilarious personal inscriptions.

His most recent published work, *A Carnival of Snackery: Diaries (2003-2020)*, was named one of The Reader’s Top 5 Books of 2021.

Sedaris’ next essay collection *Happy-Go-Lucky*, the newest collection since 2018’s *Calypso*, is set to hit shelves May 31. — Ally Kutz

*7:30 p.m. // Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center, 501 E. 38 St. // \$30 - \$55 // For tickets and more information, visit [miac.mercyhurst.edu](http://miac.mercyhurst.edu)*



HEIKE HUSIAGE-KOCH

**Widely acclaimed and widely adored humorist and essayist David Sedaris returns to the Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center at Mercyhurst once again on Tuesday, April 19.**



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## CALENDAR

### Revisit a Classic Greek Myth with Dramashop's 'Eurydice'

Sarah Ruhl's visionary take set for local production

PREMIERING FRIDAY, APR. 22



where she reunites with her father — a new twist on this classic tale. It is then that she must make the ultimate decision whether to stay with her father or return to her lover in the land of the living.

Written nearly 20 years ago, Ruhl's modern interpretation of this ancient story incorporates new character perspectives, fresh story elements, and visual effects intended to bring out the best in each production's set designer. Directed by Anna McJunkin, Dramashop's adaptation will feature Maeve Kirby in the titular role alongside Matthew Fuchs as her Father and Playhouse regular Aaron Holman as Orpheus in his Dramashop debut. — Aaron Mook

*Fridays and Saturdays, April 22 - May 7 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, May 8 at 2 p.m. // Dramashop, 1001 State St., Second Floor // For more information, visit [dramashop.org/eurydice](http://dramashop.org/eurydice)*

On Friday, April 22, Dramashop will be debuting *Eurydice*, their third adaptation of a Sarah Ruhl play following stage productions of *In the Next Room (The Vibrator Play)* and *The Clean House* in 2013 and 2018, respectively. In *Eurydice*, the Pulitzer Prize-nominated Ruhl retells the Greek myth of Orpheus from the perspective of its female lead. Following her untimely death on the day she is to be wed, *Eurydice* starts on a critical journey through the underworld

### 'Tick, Tick...BOOM!' Set to Go Off at Erie Playhouse

Before there was *Rent*, there was *Tick, Tick...BOOM!*

PREMIERING FRIDAY, APR. 22

If you're familiar with Jonathan Larson, it is likely due to his success as the creator of the massive Broadway hit *Rent*, a fan-favorite for many theater-goers both young and old. But before *Rent* could soar, *Tick, Tick...BOOM!* had to explode onto the stage.

An autobiographical musical, *Tick, Tick...BOOM!* is the story of Jonathan Larson's struggle as an aspiring composer. Still waiting tables and trying to write the "great American musical" in the ever-competitive New York City theater scene, Jon finds himself questioning all his life choices up to this point on the eve of his 30th birthday. His girlfriend wants to get married and move out of the city, while his best friend is making good money working on Madison Avenue. Should he give up his dreams, or courageously continue on?

Originally performed as a solo piece by Larson starting in 1990, the work was revised by playwright David Auburn following Larson's 1996 death and premiered off-Broadway in 2001. Since then, the show has seen major success across many platforms, including West End productions as well as a 2021 film adaptation directed by Lin-Manuel Mi-



*Tick, Tick...BOOM!* is an autobiographical musical about the late Jonathan Larson, creator of the Broadway smash hit *Rent*, as he struggled to find his way in the New York City theater scene.

randa and starring Andrew Garfield as Larson.

Moving, funny, and exciting, *Tick, Tick...BOOM!* will resonate with anyone who has struggled to find their way while following their dreams. — Ally Kutz

*Nine performances from April 22 - May 8 // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$12.00 - \$20.73 // For tickets and more information including full performance schedule, go to [erieplayhouse.org](http://erieplayhouse.org)*

**McKillin' It: Smilo & the Ghost with the Probables**

Basement Transmissions celebrates Earth Day

FRIDAY, APR. 22



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

(left to right) Adam McKillip, Ryan Ecklund, Steve Johnson, Nick Campbell, and Matt Gronquist form Jamestown's The Probables, performing with Erie's Smilo & the Ghost at Basement Transmissions on Friday, April 22.

It's quite probable that you know Tyler Smilo already, and his indie folk group the Ghost. Perhaps too, you've heard of — but not yet seen — the popular Jamestown bluegrass outfit The Probables.

There's a link between these two bands in the form of a tenor-voiced mandolin player (and one of the nicest guys you could meet), Adam McKillip.

In addition to McKillip, there's a shared feeling of rootsy American string music shared by both bands, happily fitting

with the timing of the show on Earth Day.

In what should be a lively show, Smilo and the Ghost (also featuring the wonderful Jassen Wilber on bass and Dominick DeCecco on banjo) released their latest album *Fingers Crossed and God-speed* in 2021, and have plans to release a live album later this year.

In 2021 the Probables (who got their name while indecisively booking a slot at Great Blue Heron) released the *Lost in Circles EP*, their third official release after forming in 2018.

Will it be a good time? Definitely. — Nick Warren

7 p.m. to midnight // Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11 St. // 21+ // \$20 // For tickets and more info [theprobables.com](http://theprobables.com) or [smiloandtheghostmusic.com](http://smiloandtheghostmusic.com)

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### CALENDAR

#### Spring Gallery Night Packed with Sights and Sounds

20 participating locations around the city take part in April event



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

#### FRIDAY, APR. 29

Gallery Night. Any self-respecting Erieite knows it and loves it. After last occurring in October 2021, the first official Gallery Night of the year will include at least 20 different participating locations.

Chief among them, of course, is the Erie Art Museum. With the 99th annual Spring Show opening on Friday, April 8 (thanks in part to guest juror Jessica Hong), this will be an opportune time for those who missed the opening to check out the venerable annual exhibit. On Gallery Night, EAM will feature music from DJ Amy Sas and McKenzie Sprague (aka Optimistic Apocalypse), and the debut of the interactive experience "Narcissus," courtesy of the Erie Art Company and Noodlefish.

Looking to make the crawl? Try to hit up as many of these locations as you can. — Nick Warren

#### **Andora's Bubble Tea Shop // 516 State St.**

"Invisible Worlds" by talented local illustrator Calie Mee

#### **Glass Growers Gallery // 10 E. 5th St.**

An exhibition featuring Tom Ferraro, one of Erie's best-loved artists and muralists

#### **419 on 10th // 419 W. 10th St.**

With contemporary and period art, mid-century barware, rococo, boudoir furnishings, and more

#### **Ember + Forge // 401 State St.**

Erie's downtown coffee stop with memorable chandlery and ongoing display of local artists

#### **Primo Tailoring // 421 State St.**

Recently opened storefront showcases high-end men's fashion as well as local art at the Cashier's House location

Gallery Night attendees are often granted the opportunity to enjoy complimentary hors d'oeuvres and meet-and-greets with participating artists.

#### **Robertson Kitchens // 2630 W. 12th St.**

Visit the hot chocolate bar in the cabinetry showroom and see the art on display, themed around seeking healing over the past two years

#### **32 West Eighth // 32 W. 8th St.**

Tour the historic Masonic Temple with its grand ballroom, lodge room, Arcadia banquet hall, and more

#### **Keller Williams Erie // 2564 Village Common Dr.**

Visit the realtor's office at the Village Common Plaza

#### **The Dollhouse at Pointe Fourre // 423 State St.**

Local artist Rachel Berlin transforms the new downtown boutique with a vibrant "Garden Party" display

#### **Purrista Cat Cafe // 30 W. 8th St.**

Erie's newest sensation lets guests mingle with adoptable feline friends (cat room upon reservation)

#### **Crime Victim Center of Erie County // 125 W. 18th St.**

The "What Were You Wearing" display gives sexual assault survivors a safe space to express themselves through art

#### **V Gallery // 3330 W. 26th St.**

With a combination of abstract paintings and photographic prints at the multi-use space

#### **The 10/20 Collective x Radius CoWork // 1020 Holland St., 1001 State St., Ninth Floor**

## CALENDAR

Radius CoWork will feature art by Jamie Keim, Theresa Musatto, and more, while the 10/20 Collective will feature Ana Balcázar, Erikka Spaid, Kat Charnley, and Chongyuan Du with music by Islers

### D'Hopkins Denniston Gallery Fine Art & Boutique // 5 W. 10th St.

Celebrating their 10th year, the gallery will feature new works from Olaf, Weber, Braul, Ellis, Gupta, Nemo, Steadman and others

### Molly Brannigan's // 506 State St.

Catch some special food and drink specials at the participating Irish bar and restaurant

### City Gallery // 1503 State St.

See Dan and Rachael Burke's first exhibi-

tion as a couple and compare and contrast their works, and enjoy live music while you're at it

### PACA // 1505 State St.

The Performing Arts Collective Alliance showcases local art, theater, music, and more

### Hagen History Center // 356 W. 6th St.

Opening of the "Indigenous People of the Plains Region: Domestic Life" exhibit curated by Edinboro student Nathan Maleski

### Gannon University Archeology Museum Gallery // 109 University Sq.

"Archaeological Exhibits of Indigenous Peoples of North, South, and Meso-America" in collaboration with the Hagen History Center

## Feel the Force of the Erie Philharmonic

John Williams iconic score presented live with screening of *Star Wars: A New Hope*



BRETT

### SATURDAY, APR. 30 - MAY 1

Coming soon to a theater, not so far, far away.... It's a story that has captivated generations of movie-goers, a soundtrack that has kept audiences on the edge of their seats, and a film that launched a franchise that took off faster than the Millennium Falcon. The music from *Star Wars: A New Hope* will be performed by the Erie Philharmonic on Saturday, April 30, with a matinee performance on Sunday, May 1 at 3 p.m. at the Warner Theatre.

The Erie Philharmonic will perform Oscar winning composer John Williams' legendary score to *Star Wars: A New Hope* with full accompaniment in tandem with the action on-screen. It all starts with the dramatic opening title sequence that every fan has come to know and love. The Philharmonic will continue its journey through the 1977

classic, starting in the seedy underbelly of the cantina and taking you to the edge of the galaxy. *Star Wars* fans won't want to miss the epic intergalactic shoot-outs and emotional realizations that the Erie Philharmonic will add a texture to as it fills the theater with these memorable compositions. All of this will lead to the climatic fight between Darth Vader and Obi Wan Kenobi, a scene in which viewers are enthralled and the music brings out the emotion of the film.

The force is strong as the Erie Philharmonic brings *Star Wars: A New Hope* to life in a way that you've never seen before. Trust me, Yoda not want to miss this. — Larry Wheaton

*Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$25 - 60, \$12 for students // Tickets can be purchased at [eriephil.org](http://eriephil.org), by phone at 814-455-1375, or in person at 23 W. 10th St., Suite 3*



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## BOOKS

### **The Unsinkable Greta James**

Jennifer E. Smith's latest novel spins tale of embattled songwriter

When Greta James was young, she could only dream of becoming a successful musician. When her father bought her a guitar and she began practicing in the family's garage, those dreams started to take a more meaningful shape.

But it wasn't an easy path. From dive bars and small venues, Greta grew her fan base and eventually achieved indie stardom, featuring on magazine covers and playing sold-out venues. Her mother Helen was there every step of the way, supporting her daughter as her first and biggest fan. However, her father Conrad was not so supportive, only seeing an unpredictable career path for his daughter, worrying about her financial and professional stability.

Greta spends most of her career trying to prove him wrong, creating a rift between them that only grows larger over the years. But following Helen's sudden death and only weeks before her sopho-

more album is set to release, Greta finds herself spiraling and has an epic meltdown onstage, leading to an embarrassing video that goes viral.

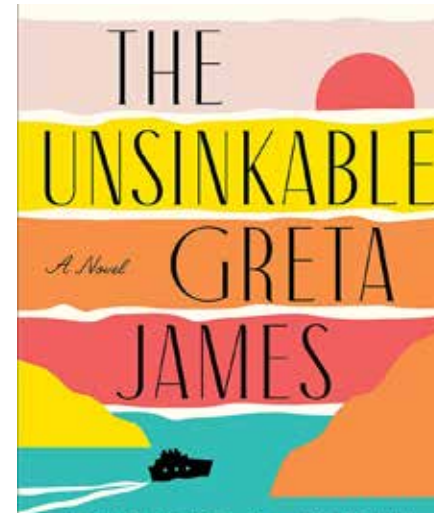
Humiliated and still reeling, she finds herself grudgingly agreeing to accompany her father on a week-long Alaskan cruise that her parents had booked for their 40th anniversary. With tensions mounting between Greta and her father since her mother's death, this cruise could be the last chance they have to make amends and heal their now smaller family.

Alongside historian Ben Wilder, an author aboard the ship who catches her attention, Greta must figure out how to move forward and together try to make sense of the difficult choices in life.

The true spotlight in this book, though, shines on Jennifer E. Smith's writing: characters with larger-than-life personalities, heartbreaking and heartwarming moments, and breathtaking landscapes

painted so delicately yet vividly through prose are all the stars of this novel. For those looking for adventure and emotion, you'll find it in *The Unsinkable Greta James*. — Ally Kutz

Ballantine Books // 292 pages // Contemporary Fiction



### **Comedy Comedy Comedy Drama: A Memoir**

Bob Odenkirk autobiography traces his remarkable career trajectory

For those who were first introduced to Bob Odenkirk through AMC's *Breaking Bad* or its spin-off *Better Call Saul* — or, perhaps even for some, 2021's action-thriller *Nobody* — his origins may be a bit surprising. For longtime fans, if you had told them 20 years ago that the surrealist sketch comedy master behind *Mr. Show with Bob and David* (and *Saturday Night Live* writer best known for penning Chris Farley's iconic "Van Down by the River" motivational speech) would be collecting Golden Globe and Emmy nominations for his dramatic acting and winning over critics as a convincing action star, well... they'd likely think you were performing some absurdist sketch.

This, of course, is part of the point of Odenkirk's appropriately titled *Comedy Comedy Comedy Drama*, which serves as a reflection on the self-described "strange trajectory" of his career. With his book, he demonstrates the big breaks of his career, whether obvious at the time or their significance only understood with hindsight. He describes his early years and how his obsession with sketch comedy was influenced heavily by the timelessness of Monty Python ("Python was like my Bible ... [but] kinder and more truthful") and how a trip when

he was 14 to Chicago's Second City Theater, famous for its improv, gave him the first inkling that comedy could actually be a career.

One thing that Odenkirk makes clear though is that much of his career is the result of sheer luck: being at the right place at the right time or happening to know someone else catching a big break who brought him along with them. "There was no obvious route to fame, or even a 'career,'" Odenkirk explains. "Every day was just write something funny today, then see what happens."

What happened, of course, was SNL (where Odenkirk freely admits to having had a chip on his shoulder), followed by experimenting in the early alternative comedy scene, before getting brought aboard as a writer for the short-lived but influential *The Ben Stiller Show* where he became good pals with David Cross — his partner for the iconic cult-favorite sketch comedy series *Mr. Show*. For Odenkirk, it's clear that financial success and fame were *not* the goal. "I wanted lots of people and ideas and offbeat things to happen to me in my life, more than I wanted to play golf or drive a big car or tell people to take their shoes off when they came into my house," Odenkirk muses.

His memoir requires some base knowledge of comedy history to fully appreciate, but reading about his journey from writer to sketch comedy surrealist to *Very Serious Actor* provides worthwhile lessons for all readers: hold tight to your convictions, flirt with the road less traveled, never expect a big break (but try to recognize when they happen), and, maybe above all, surround yourself with good people. — Jonathan Burdick

Random House // 304 pages // Autobiography, Humor



**MOVIES**

**Adults Only: X Gives New Meaning to “Dirty Movie”**



★★★★

Over the last few decades, plenty of filmmakers have tried to emulate the ingenuity and low-budget creativity of horror films from the “Grindhouse” era of the 1970s, that wonderful time when weirdos, artists, and artistic weirdos put films that felt truly dangerous in theaters. Very few have really been able to capture that energy, but Ti West got close with his 2009 slow-burn horror flick *House of the Devil*. Now he’s taking an even more deliberate stab at it with the seductively-titled *X* and while it doesn’t quite reach the heights of a deranged masterpiece like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, it still provides plenty of sleazy fun.

Set in 1979, the film follows a DIY film crew who head to a cabin in middle-of-nowhere East Texas to shoot a pornographic movie. Things seem to be going according to plan until the elderly couple that owns the cabin begins to take an interest in their guests — an interest that soon turns deadly.

In the tradition of horror films of the era it’s representing, the film

takes its time establishing the characters and setting before the blood starts to fly, giving it a laid-back feeling held together with stylish direction, likable characters, and experimental editing choices reminiscent of *Easy Rider* of all things. West does such a good job with these moments that the horror scenes feel rushed by comparison. That said, his direction still shines giving us a creepy atmosphere charged with sex and violence and clever little visual references to exploitation films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Eaten Alive*, and even *The Toxic Avenger!* His story of free-spirited, sexually liberated youth clashing with repressed, moralistic elders is straight from the Grindhouse playbook, making it a welcome breath of grimy, gory air. — Forest Taylor

*Written and directed by: Ti West // Starring: Mia Goth, Jenna Ortega, Brittany Snow, Kid Cudi, Martin Henderson, Owen Campbell, Stephen Ure, James Gaylyn, Matthew Saville, and Simon Prast // 106 minutes // Rated R // A24*

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**On the Market: *Fresh* is a Grisly but Overlong Thriller**



We follow a woman out on a first date. We feel her awkwardness and discomfort as she and her date fail to connect, then her bewilderment as he becomes insulting after she declines a second date. This is the scene that opens Mimi Cave's horror/comedy *Fresh* and sadly for our heroine, it is the least horrifically uncomfortable experience she has throughout the film. Cave takes us on a tale of modern romance that is gross, darkly funny, and unfortunately, a little too convoluted for its own good.

The film follows Noa (Daisy Edgar-Jones), a lonely young woman unlucky in love. Her spirits are lifted after a chance encounter with Steve (Sebastian Stan), a plastic surgeon who is handsome, charming, and seemingly everything that she is looking for. However, the budding romance hits a bump when Noa is whisked away to a secluded cabin in the woods, where she learns about Steve's unusual ... appetites.

I'm trying to keep the plot synopsis as vague as possible as most of the fun is letting the plot unravel into weird and unexpected directions. As a simple horror tale, it works well enough, but sadly the film adds unnecessary subplots throughout, most of which get dropped and thus do nothing more than pad out the bloated runtime. The film feels like it's trying to make some kind of satirical statement about modern dating and/or objectification but there just isn't enough there for any kind of lasting message. Even though the satire doesn't quite work, there are still enough effective gross-out moments to make audiences squirm in their seats. *Fresh* is now playing exclusively on Hulu. — Forest Taylor

*Directed by: Mimi Cave // Written by: Lauryn Kahn // Starring: Daisy Edgar-Jones, Sebastian Stan, Jonica T. Gibbs, Dayo Okeniyi, Charlotte Le Bon, Brett Dier, and Andrea Bang // 114 minutes // Rated R // Searchlight Pictures*



**Our Monthly Podcast Picks**

Sonic showers to bring your mind to flower

**Dead Eyes**

Hosted by: Connor Ratliff // [headgum.com/dead-eyes](http://headgum.com/dead-eyes)

On paper, the pitch for the *Dead Eyes* podcast seems pretty niche and, to be honest, kind of absurd. Its origins begin in the year 2000 when a young twenty-something actor named Connor Ratliff was hired and then fired from the HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers*. The reason he was given? Tom Hanks, series producer and director of that particular episode, had allegedly said he had "dead eyes." Thus began a two decade journey as an understandably despondent Ratliff all but abandoned acting, worked at a bookstore for a decade, and then reinvented his career in the comedy world with New York City's improv group Upright Citizens Brigade.



In 2020, as a pandemic loomed, Ratliff decided to finally explore the question that had been haunting him for so long: why *did* Tom Hanks fire him? After three seasons and over 30 episodes unpacking this question on his podcast, Ratliff has created something both completely unique and universally relatable with *Dead Eyes*. What could easily have devolved into mean-spirited bitterness or self-indulgent self-deprecation instead contains profound conversations and thought-provoking meditations on rejection, disappointment, and adversity.

Conversations include people connected to *Band of Brothers*, but also others including Jon Hamm, Elijah Wood, Aparna Nancherla, Judd Apatow, Nikki Glaser, Tony Hale, and yes, for the final episode of Season 3, Tom Hanks himself in an unparalleled and quite moving conversation lasting nearly 90 minutes. — Jonathan Burdick

**Financial Feminist**

Hosted by: Tori Dunlap // [herfirst100k.com/financial-feministpodcast](http://herfirst100k.com/financial-feministpodcast)

In many circles, talking about money — what you earn, how you earn it, and what you do with it — can be a borderline taboo subject that makes a lot of people uncomfortable. But why? According to money expert Tori Dunlap, it's because the world is run by rich white men.



Dunlap's business — named Her First 100K — was founded on the idea that all women have the power to gain financial freedom and equality but are not provided the resources needed in a predatory financial industry that unfairly targets marginalized groups. But she's here to change that.

After finding huge success on social media — she has more than 2 million followers on TikTok alone — Dunlap took her mission to the world of podcasts. *Financial Feminist*, which returns for a new season this spring, teaches financial stability and provides the resources necessary to start on the path to financial equality.

Touching on subjects ranging from building your financial game plan to discussing in detail the racial wealth gap, Dunlap provides her own expertise as a finance expert alongside that of others in the financial field.

Discussed in an open, unabashedly feminist space with much candor and encouragement, Dunlap has created the start of a new wave of financial feminists across the U.S. — and the world. Achieving financial equality is possible for women, and as Dunlap states, "A financial education is a woman's best form of protest. Let's start the movement." — Ally Kutz

**Behind the Bastards**

Hosted by: Robert Evans // [iheart.com](http://iheart.com)

Bastards are fascinating. In the context of the show, they're the bad guys of the world. Almost overwhelmingly middle-aged white men (the quintessential bastard), these people have done more than their duty to make the world a worse place.



Combining history and humor, *Behind the Bastards* often turns tragedy into well-researched comedy. The show's host, journalist and author Robert Evans (formerly an editor at Cracked.com) takes the listener on a deep dive into the heels of humanity. Evans guides the production, sprinkled with clips and plenty of sources, his guests mostly there for some welcome color commentary.

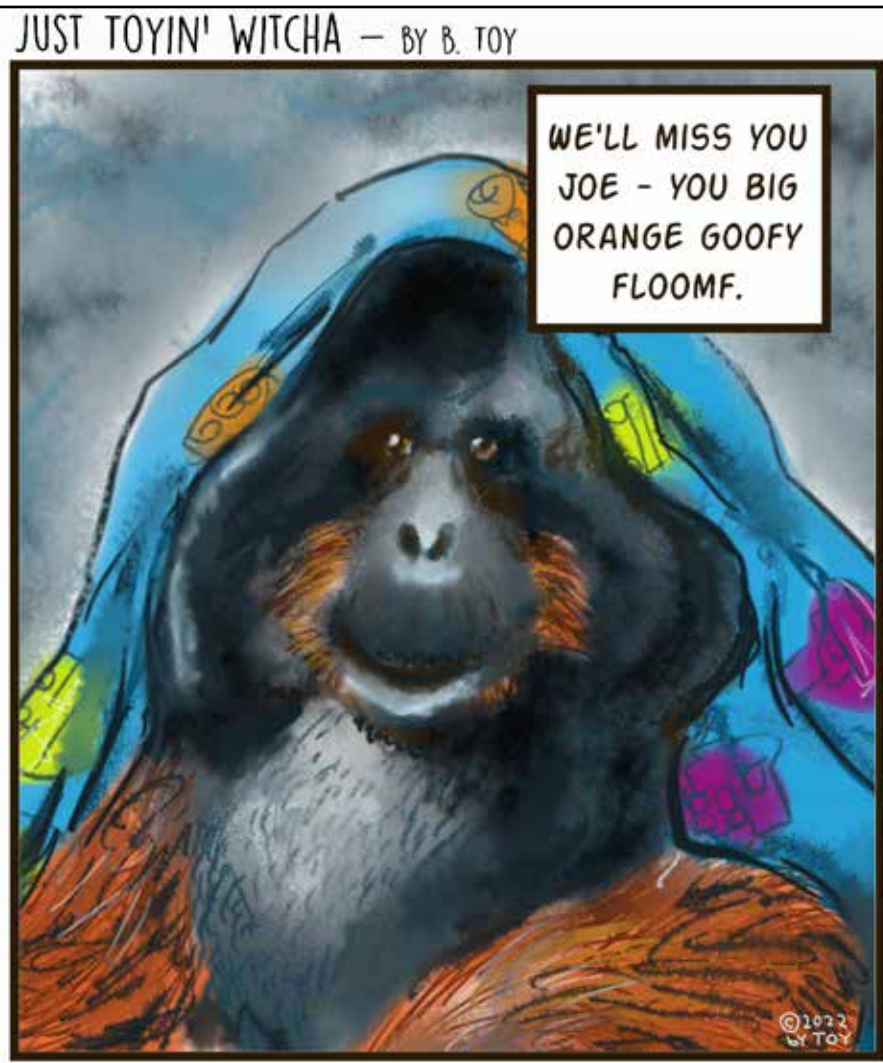
Most recently, the show concluded a six-part series on Henry Kissinger, with guests Gareth Reynolds and Dave Anthony of the like-minded podcast *The Dollop*. Former guests have included the likes of Andrew Ti, Jamie Loftus, and Paul F. Tompkins.

Do you want to find out about how capitalism swallowed modern Christianity? Or know about the people who paved the way for FOX News? What about subjects like Amway, Ivermectin, or Thalidomide? It's all covered here in hated detail by Evans.

With more than 450 episodes — released every couple of days — the show has run since 2018, so there are plenty of bastards to dive into.

The podcast feed also features a weekly aggregation of *It Could Happen Here* episodes, a daily podcast that Evans also hosts. A prolific presence, Evans even has his debut novel due in May, titled *After the Revolution*. — Nick Warren





## ALBUM REVIEWS

### Optimistic Apocalypse

*Above The Land*  
Self-released



The long-awaited album from artist and musician Mckenzie Sprague has arrived under her moniker



Optimistic Apocalypse, her performing alias throughout the last decade. She is accompanied by her longtime rhythm section of Brent Knight on bass and Michael Hibbler II on drums. On *Above The Land*, you can hear fully fleshed-out compositions from a band that is well-versed in playing Sprague's songs. Her lyrics throughout the album are inspired by nature and self-reflection but delivered like a fortune-teller giving a reading. Standout tracks "The Moon," "10 X 10," "Centipede," and "Flies" weave in and out of psychedelia and folk, with a rhythm section that tidily brings the compositions together. *Above The Land* combines harmonious vocals (with help from Brooke Surgener and Flo) with nimble jazz drumming, fluid bass playing, ambient guitar sounds, and faint banjo tones, painting from a broader palette of Sprague's artistic imagination. She also designed the artwork for the release, which shares the spirit of her songs with its innocent expression of the mind and soul within nature.

— Larry Wheaton

### Sunday at the Station

*Revival*  
Self-released



An album bursting with rootsy folk energy, Sunday at the Station's *Revival* is an album you'll want



to seek out. The Meadville-based quartet began as a duo in 2009 with Donny Cosla and Matt Marr, both providing folk vocals and guitar, as well as mandolin and banjo, respectively. They were soon joined by Scott Stearns on upright bass and Josh Shaffer on drums and washboard. While the aptly named *Revival* is the band's third album, it's their first in over a decade. The gruff, punk-laced Americana style the band has handcrafted over the years is a truly timeless one, however. The sound is pristine, produced by Fred Oakman and mixed and mastered by Troy Messerall, with uptempo tracks like "Canyon Water String Music," the Lake Erie anthem "Don't Give Up the Ship," and my personal favorite "Clay Center Blues." The band pairs those with sincere ballads like "My Little Man" and "A Song for Katie." With an album release show set for April 30 at the Market House in Meadville (complete with a vinyl pre-order) and a slate of gigs lined up for the summer, it's high time for a revival.

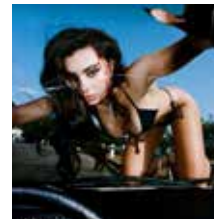
— Nick Warren

### Charli XCX

*Crash*  
Atlantic Records UK



Charli XCX is a gift to pop music. Charlotte Aitchison, better known to the world as Charli XCX is a gifted



songwriter and performer with a nearly untouchable catalog. It seems, then, that *Crash* might just be her gift back. With a much more traditional dance pop sound, Charli seems to be abandoning her more experimental side. While what we're left with is extremely listenable, it's almost underwhelming after being treated to the hyperpop genius of 2020's *How I'm Feeling Now* (in what was my personal pick for album of the year). The standout tracks are unsurprisingly the album's first three singles. "Good Ones" and "New Shapes" (featuring Christine and the Queens and Caroline Polachek) dropped in late 2021, with "Beg For You" (featuring Rina Sawayama) coming out this January. The fourth single, "Baby," plays as lackluster compared to the previous three. Maybe it's the added strength of Charli's cutting edge guests that put those songs over the edge? Whether or not *Crash* represents a permanent shift into a more accessible sound for an icon like Charli remains to be seen.

— Nick Warren

### Hot Water Music

*Feel the Void*  
Equal Vision Records



It's just so damned nice to have a brand new Hot Water Music album that's so thoroughly enjoyable. Able to



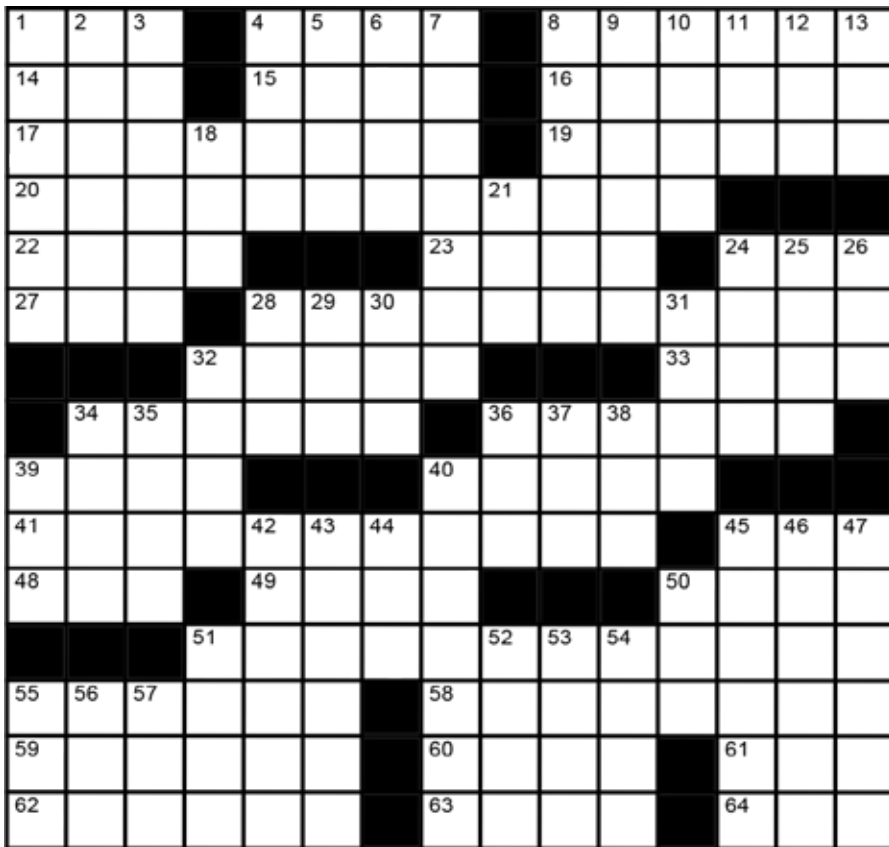
stand alongside some of their best work made in the band's nearly 30-year life, *Feel the Void* sounds relevant and fresh, while striking the same trusty chords fans have come to know and love. This is a remedy for the punk stagnation their now-middle-aged followers undoubtedly experience. The band's third record in a full decade, *Feel the Void* is the ninth overall studio album by the Gainesville legends, not to mention countless splits, compilations, and 7"s over the years. I think the surprising critical success of this album hinges on two main things. One, many published reviewers grew up idolizing Hot Water Music. Two, and most importantly, the bar for a punk band's new effort has been set so low that when a band simply comes up with something decently authentic to themselves, it's truly surprising. With the Flatliners' Chris Cresswell as the fantastic replacement for co-vocalist Chris Wollard, frontman Chuck Ragan, bassist Jason Black, and drummer George Rebelo haven't missed a beat.

— Nick Warren

## TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



# CROSSWORD



## Across

1. "Euphoria" channel
4. Weaving machine
8. Reroute
14. 100%
15. \_\_\_ mater
16. One with paper cuts?
17. "Now Is the Month of Maying," for one
19. Kind of pool or car
20. Mountain range where the Donner \_\_\_y was snowbound the winter of 1846-47
22. Cold War initials
23. Congers, e.g.
24. "!!!"
27. Stroke
28. Given its location, nickname lent to the De \_\_\_ment of State
32. Don Diego de la Vega's secret identity
33. Kunis of "Black Swan"
34. It's home to the \_\_\_henon
36. Napoleon Bona \_\_\_e's homeland
39. 401(k) alternatives
40. Milk-Bone biscuit, e.g.
41. Country that eliminated a \_\_\_heid in the early '90s
45. Law enforcement grps.
48. Nocturnal raptor
49. Berry in juice blends
50. The old you?
51. Anthony Bourdain

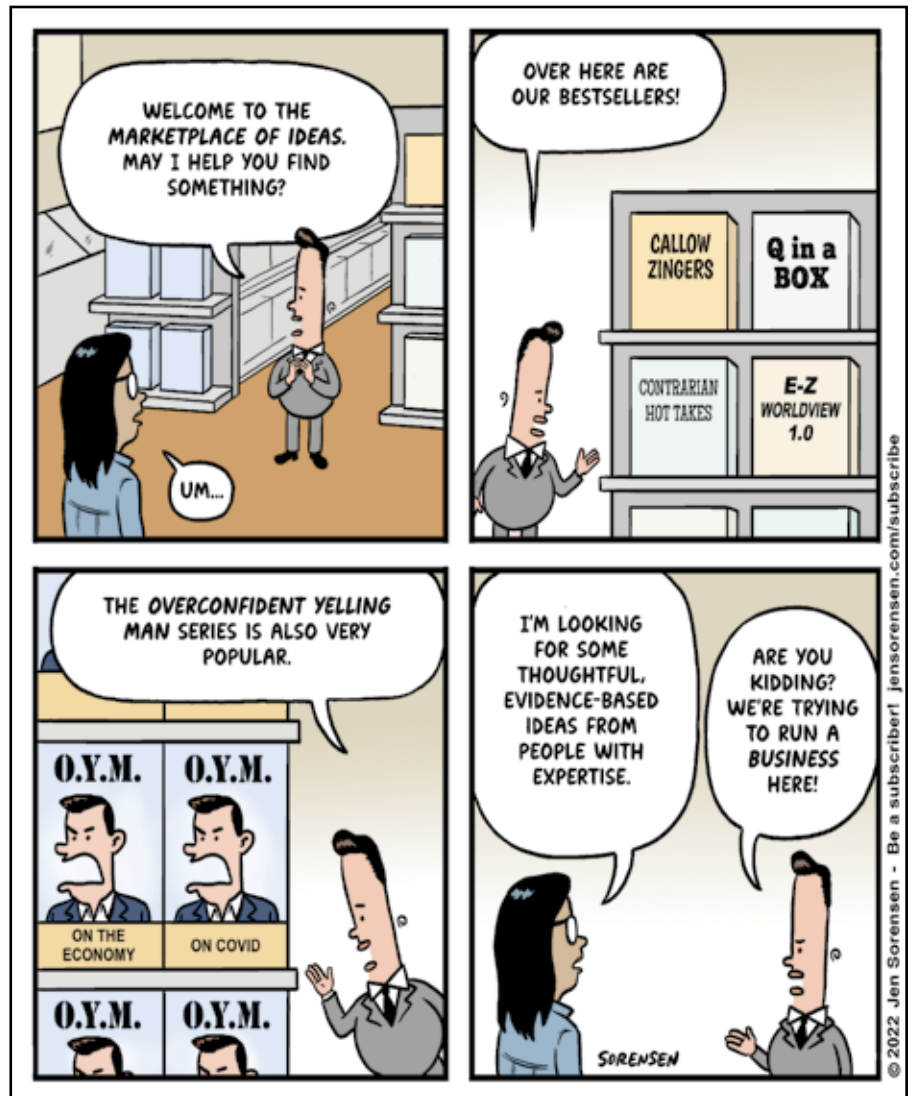
travel series ... and this puzzle's theme

55. "We've been approved!"
58. Airport monitor
59. Some doorstops
60. "The Kite Runner" boy
61. Arthur of "The Golden Girls"
62. Mary-Kate, Ashley and Elizabeth
63. Simple boat
64. Suffix for east, west, north or south

## Down

1. Exaggerates on stage
2. Mathematician Pascal
3. Firstborn
4. Hideaway
5. Gymnast Korbut
6. Only United Nations member whose name starts with "O"
7. Source of machismo, perhaps
8. Home of Northern Illinois University
9. Reply to "You couldn't have!"
10. "La \_\_\_ Más Fina" (Corona slogan)
11. Approx. takeoff hour
12. Chess piece between dame and fou
13. "Boyz N the Hood" protagonist
18. Trio in elem. school
21. "Oy \_\_\_!"
24. Suffix with psych
25. Burrowing mammal

26. "Today" rival, familiarly
28. The Red Baron, to Snoopy
29. "The Lord of the Rings" baddie
30. Univ. senior's test
31. Group led by Master Splinter, initially
32. Martini's lemon twist, e.g.
34. Bloom or balloon
35. Julia of "The Addams Family"
36. What many students look forward to: Abbr.
37. Camcorder button
38. Towing org.
39. Classified ad shorthand for "seeking"
40. "Sleepless in Seattle" studio
42. \_\_\_-Dazs
43. Unlike this answer, directionally
44. The 1% in 1% milk
45. "Friends" friend
46. Killjoy
47. Beachgoer's acquisition
50. "Star Trek" spinoff, to fans
51. Bookmarked item
52. Sch. with many cadets
53. Babe in the woods
54. Mario \_\_\_ (video game)
55. \_\_\_ Jima
56. No. on a business card
57. '60s antiwar grp.



## Answers to last puzzle



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