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The Real Wizard of Oz

Harry Kellar's legacy revived on State

A Tale of Three Phases

On reopenings and staying open

What We're Voting For

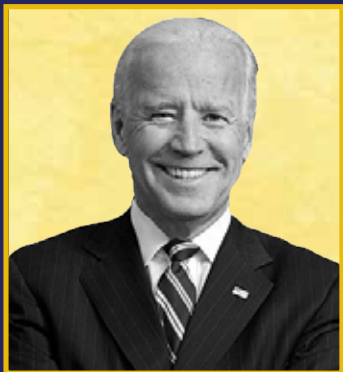
Erie County and the soul of America



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From the Editors

On keeping our heads on

By most accounts, Erie-born magician Harry Kellar had an exceptionally good head on his shoulders. Throughout his standard-setting career, he demonstrated savvy, dignity, and class, while never forgetting where he came from. But despite his family-friendly reputation, he wasn't above a little shock value. For instance, detaching that distinguished dome of his in front of a paying crowd of men, women, and children of all ages.

The Self-Decapitation illusion was one of several jaw-droppers Kellar, now fondly remembered as "The Dean of American Magicians," pioneered in his time. Audience members watched — some aghast — as Kellar casually popped off his head and allowed it to float serenely into the darkness with a smile and a nod. It was a refreshingly macabre reminder to never underestimate the power of nonverbal communication.

Today, nearly a century after Kellar's death, it seems we are *all* losing our heads a little — and not always wearing our best faces while doing so. Who could blame us? As a nation, we are like a box sawed in half, legs churning to free themselves from past sins as arms wriggle frantically in a haze of uncertainty. We are a set of disparate metal rings that no sleight of hand can seem to link back together. We are divided over how to balance our health and our economy; how, who, and what to vote for; and whether or not we can even coexist.

A return to mutual respect and tolerance may be this country's greatest trick yet, a bona fide Houdini act (who considered Kellar a mentor and one of his dearest friends, by the way) considering the mire we're in now. But if history has taught us anything, it's that in times of turmoil, cooler heads prevail. It's about tuning out the noise and distractions and focusing on what *really* matters. It's not having the biggest yard sign or the loudest voice; it's the right to *have* that yard sign and *have* a voice — whether you're woman or man, black or white, gay or straight, Christian or Wiccan, or anything in between. It's most important that our democracy — and the opportunity to live your best life, whatever that may mean to you — doesn't disappear.

Kellar once said of his masterful misdirection abilities that "a brass band playing at full blast can march openly across the stage behind me, followed by a herd of elephants, yet no one will realize that they went by." There's a lot of commotion out there right now, a lot of noise. Be not seduced by spectacle; do not fall prey to politicians' patter. Instead, take a good hard look at the mechanics of our institutions and operations and ask yourself if they're working for you, your neighbors, your loved ones, your children.

Vote your conscience. Vote your future. Cast your ballot. Abracadabra, alakazam.



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Wednesday, October 21st at 8:30 PM

Relaxation Practices for Life

Presented by Michael Plasha, E-RYT 500, RPYT

- Practice relaxation techniques
- Understand mindful breathing

Saturday, October 24th at 9:00 AM

How to Practice Self Care

Presented by Keith Walach, MS, CAC

- Discuss strategies for self-care awareness
- Develop self-care techniques that may be neglected during pandemic lockdowns

Wednesday, October 28th at 8:30 PM

Developing Hope: Finding the Light in the Pandemic

Presented by Gregory Krausz, MA, LPC, CAADC

- Discuss how hope can help during struggles
- Develop ways to find hope

Wednesday, November 4th at 8:30 PM

The Dynamics of Anger

Presented by Bernard Lucas, M.Ed, CAC

- Understand the essence of anger
- Develop skills to manage anger and empower oneself

Saturday, November 7th at 9:00 AM

How to Relax During Trying Times

Presented by Betsy Martellucci, MA, LPC, CAADC

- Identify sign and symptoms of stress
- Discuss strategies to increase relaxation & decrease stress

Wednesday, November 11th at 8:30 PM

Depression and Substance Abuse

Presented by Michael Palladini, RPh, MBA, CAC

- Identify the signs and symptoms of depression
- Discuss substance abuse as coping mechanisms

Wednesday, November 18th at 8:30 PM

Mindfulness for Life

Presented by Michael Plasha, E-RYT 500, RPYT

- Understand the components of a mindfulness check-in
- Practice learned strategies in mindfulness

Saturday, November 21st at 9:00 AM

Healthy Communication Skills

Presented by Vince Mercuri, M.Ed, LPC, CAC

- Discuss healthy communication skills for interpersonal relationships
- Understand expressions, feelings, and listening

Wednesday, December 2nd at 8:30 PM

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Presented by Vince Mercuri, M.Ed, LPC, CAC

- Understand the signs, symptoms, and types of depression
- Identify the onset of depressive symptoms & related behaviors

Wednesday, December 9th at 8:30 PM

I Can't Do This Again! Will 2021 be another year like 2020?

Presented by: Joe Haas, MS, LPC

- Discuss the pandemic response and how to prepare for 2021
- Differentiate political and social unrest
- Develop a plan for growth in 2021, and not regression

Saturday, December 12th at 9:00 AM

The Detrimental Effects of Isolation on the Minority Community

Presented by Marcus Atkinson, CEO

- Recognize how missing social connections impact the minority community
- Engage in community resources available to those struggling in the minority community

Saturday, December 19th at 9:00 AM

How to Identify and Avoid High Risk Situations

Presented by Keith Walach, MS, CAC

- Determine triggers for substance abuse in yourself and others
- Deal with thoughts or triggers in a healthier way
- Become familiar with community resources available



Funding provided by the 2020 Erie County CARES Act Grant for Behavioral Health and Substance Use Services

What We're Voting For

Erie County and the soul of America



JONATHAN CUTRER

By: Jim Wertz

Four years ago, Donald Trump won Erie County by 1,957 votes. On election night, none of that made sense. The national polls — all of them — were horribly incorrect, and for most of us watching at home, our expectations crumbled with the realization that the Trump campaign strategically orchestrated an electoral college victory despite being outperformed by nearly 3 million popular votes.

Once we reconciled the reality that a huckster from Manhattan sold Middle America his greatest forlorn “Deal,” all that was left was the contemplation of the next four years and the state of the world in its wake.

Several times following past elections, folks would remark that the winning candidate was “bad for the country” or was going to be the “worst president in history...” But with those administrations in the rear view mirror, the impositions of government and the people who led them look quite welcoming.

That’s because those men — Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush among them — believed in our institutions, the decorum of government, and the resilience of the American people. If their policies were

often perceived by Democrats to be overtly anti-worker or unabashedly militaristic, men like Reagan and Bush often invited Democrats that they knew, respected, and trusted to the table as a dissenting voice or to leave open the potential for reconciliation among partisan actors. For Reagan, it was Speaker of the House, Tip O’Neill. For Bush, Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts.

Those days are done. Led by an autocrat who traffics in white supremacy, conspiracy theories, and outright lies, the faith in our institutions and the decorum of government — and the people who comprise it — is long passed.

Today, most of us hang on to what we know to be true while attempting to ignore the noise, lies, and chorus of trolls that have hijacked social media.

Our president and his enablers can’t muster the strength to condemn violent, racist groups like the Proud Boys or the Ku Klux Klan and more recently have refused to denounce the conspiracy theorists that comprise QAnon, a once fringe organization which has been catapulted into the mainstream by a president who shares its egregious lies about COVID-19, active duty military and our veterans, and the sanctity of American elections.

Closer to home, the lies and threats expressed by QAnon have manifested themselves among the scores of Trump supporters who threaten and terrorize those who support Democratic candidates.

Trump has emboldened the worst in his supporters. I don’t hang this on Republicans generally, but I can’t see how anyone can stand with a party that has turned a blind eye to the way that this president has stoked his supporters to use hate and intimidation to advance his sole cause — getting re-elected.

When was the last time you were called a “ni-er lover?” It’s been routine for Democratic volunteers in the field. The racists simply feel empowered to shout it out their car or truck window as they pass by.

This year, the Erie County Democratic Party also opened satellite offices in some pretty Republican areas in an attempt to connect with Democrats there and form a base of operations in select parts of Erie County. Trump supporters were so incensed by our presence that they took over a legitimate business office (with the blessing of that business owner) to establish a Trump presence a few doors away.

One of our volunteers was

The leadup to the Nov. 3 general election has been fraught with anxiety — and levels of ugliness and intimidation that exceed anything the modern electorate has ever seen. According to columnist Jim Wertz, it starts with the man in the Oval Office.

threatened with a gun and called racist slurs, while being told that he was a “piece of shit” for supporting Joe Biden.

Another volunteer reported that his special needs son was beat up on the way home from school because his dad supports Joe Biden. Neither the school or the authorities we’re willing to intervene. “If it happens again...” they said.

More recently, an 80-year-old woman who stopped at one of our county offices for a Biden sign was screamed at from down the street called an “old bitch” and told to “take her old pussy back home.” All this, while children stand by being urged to participate in this vile behavior.

These people are there because Trump has given them a platform to feel safe advancing their hateful ideology. After white supremacists emerged from the fields with torches and drove over protesters, killing one woman and injuring others in Charlottesville in 2017, Trump pledged to “investigate” the incident. However, his first act of 2018 was defunding the civil rights division of the Justice Department, the agency that would have been tasked with such an investigation. Trump literally defunded the police.

Surely hate and racism are not new, but I can’t recall a time in my life when bad people have felt so empowered to publicly bully and intimidate people who are their neighbors.

Besides the fact that I think Joe Biden is a good man and someone who has more than enough experience to make

a good president, we (collectively) need the madness to be checked at the door in 2021. Another four years of this activity and hateful people will be doing hateful things with no repercussions. It’s already happening.

Stories like these are repeated in communities like ours all across the country. As a nation, we can’t afford for it to continue.

I’m happy to write essays about how the American economy has always fared better during Democratic administrations, or that the opportunities for your kids and their friends are going to be better served in a country with Democratic leadership, or that your parents will be put back to work when Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell help to destroy the pension and retirement systems for corporate greed.

But honestly, all of that pales in comparison to the need for people to have a better model for leadership. There are a lot of reasons why things aren’t right, but we need someone who will remind people that we have common interests and should be better to one another.

Right now that has been lost because we’re led by a liar and thief who has perpetrated the greatest con this country has ever seen. If you need a final anecdote, get a kid’s take on what they’ve seen. It’s so simple. “People should be better to one another,” my daughter told me.

Apparently, we still need a president who can show us how that’s done. Who knew?

Jim Wertz is a contributing editor and Chairman of the Erie County Democratic Party. You can email him at jWertz@ErieReader.com and you can follow him on Twitter @jim_wertz. He’s voting for Joe Biden. So should you.

Still Making an Impression

Dafmark Dance Theater celebrates 30 years in Erie



VINCE BROCKI

By: Liz Allen

When Jennifer Dennehy asked me if I'd be interested in writing about the 30-year anniversary of Dafmark Dance Theater, I was ready to leap right in, despite my two left feet.

But covering new territory, such as dance, is a challenge for me during COVID-19.

Fortunately, the creative forces behind Dafmark are adept at bounding over the hurdles that the pandemic presents to artists.

Dennehy, Dafmark's general manager, began by introducing me via email to Jean-Marc Baier, Dafmark's executive director, and his partner, Dafna Rat-house Baier, artistic director.

Next, I interviewed Jean-Marc and Dafna Baier on Zoom.

Then I watched "Will There be Singing?" This is the original dance Dafmark premiered on video for Erie's Blues & Jazz Festival. Immediately, I was plucked up and dropped into the contemporary, thought-provoking dance experience that Dafmark has been offering to Erie audiences since the Baiers arrived here in 1984.

Words on the screen at the start of the video explain why the pandemic cannot crush the imagination: "The nature of live performances has changed. But the creative voice remains essential and relevant to our time."

Choreographer Dafna Baier then deftly explains how the three dancers, the props, the drums, music and dramatic readings are used to honor police brutality victim George Floyd.

The stark, somber performance is gut-wrenching. It spurs the audience

to follow the example of Dafna Baier, who says she felt compelled "to respond to a moment in time that cannot be ignored."

Expect a similar chance to reflect on a range of contemporary issues if you attend a collaborative event featuring Dafmark Dance Theater, the Lake Erie Fiber Arts Guild, and 1020 Collective Erie Nov. 7-21. Dafmark will perform on Nov. 7, 14, and 21, for a limited audience, by reservation.

The event is called 2020@1020, "A collaborative look at earth-shattering events in 2020." The exhibit, with artwork from the community, will touch on world issues, including the coronavirus pandemic, Black Lives Matter, climate change and weather disasters, the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote, and the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Japan.

Exploring the wide world is not foreign to the Baiers. Jean-Marc, a native of Paris, received his bachelor of fine arts from the North Carolina School of the Arts and his master of fine arts from Southern Methodist University. From 1984 through 1990, he directed the Mercyhurst College (now University) Dance Department. Born in Israel, Dafna worked as rehearsal director and ballet mistress for Bat-Dor Dance Company and the Kibbutz Dance Company in Israel, the Repertory Dance Company of the Southwest, and the Dallas Opera in Texas. She also taught and choreographed at Mercyhurst.

"It was an exciting time for us, teaching, creating and sharing our vision of the world with young minds," they said in an email in response to my questions. "In 1990, we had a major decision to

Dafmark Dance Theater, established in 1990 by Dafna and Jean-Marc Baier, is celebrating its 30th anniversary this season. It is known for its timely and provocative performances, such as "Will There Be Singing?" based on the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd.

make. We could return to Europe or create our own company in Erie. We chose the latter, in part because we had quite a few dancers who had graduated from Mercyhurst interested in working with us and because we had built an audience during those college years. So we created Dafmark ('Daf' for Dafna and 'Mark' for Jean-Marc)," they wrote.

Erie is a good place to nurture dance talent. When I asked about Erie native Stephen Galloway, who became the principal ballet dancer at the Frankfurt Ballet and creative consultant and choreographer for the Rolling Stones, the Baiers got excited. "Funny that you would mention Stephen Galloway! He got his early training at the Martin Luther King dance program (the Erie Bayfront Ballet, now the Erie Dance Theater). Stephen studied with us and performed our choreography when we first came to Erie," they wrote. "His talent was blinding. We suggested that he go to Europe when he got a job with the Frankfurt Ballet. His success as a dancer and creative mind has been a beautiful thing to witness."

I asked how and why they used their art to encourage audiences to think about important issues.

Dafna said that she has always linked dance to her love for music, literature, theater, and the visual arts. "Hearing voices that were so powerful, politically and socially, it was a natural progression to use the language of dance to express dissent, amazement, and emotions. I have always felt that dance was my mother tongue," she said.

Jean-Marc became interested in dance while studying at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, although he didn't meet his future wife until they were both in Dallas. "If early on our perspective was linked to our cultural background, with time, it evolved with the culture of this country," he said.

The pandemic has impacted their art in a number of ways. "Dance is an exposed art form," Dafna said. "Physicality and contact are at its core. Physical distancing forced an introspective journey

that was a new experience. Working alone in the studio for months, with the amplification of world events, (there was) the awareness that everyone was going through something similar and yet, feeling a sense of luck that we could keep on creating and learning," she said. "A sense of responsibility was essential in response to the brutality of our times within our society — discrimination, injustice, and racism. What is strange is that all that was happening around us had been part of our creative journey for 30 years."

Liz Allen still laughs about the time her son asked why an Erie football field was named after a Russian ballet dancer. Liz's family had seen Mikhail Baryshnikov dance with Twyla Tharp when they lived in St. Louis and her son had mixed him up with NFL great Fred Biletnikoff. You can reach her at lizallenerie@gmail.com.

If you go

The exhibit 2020@1020, "A collaborative look at earth-shattering events in 2020," takes place at 1020 Collective Erie, 1020 Holland St., second floor, Nov. 7-Nov. 21. The exhibit is a collaboration among Dafmark Dance Theater, Lake Erie Fiber Arts Guild, and 1020 Collective Erie. Wine and water will be offered on opening night.

Gallery hours are Tuesday by appointment, by calling 814-983-8655; and Wednesday through Saturday from noon to 5 p.m.

Dafmark will offer a performance linked to the exhibit on three Saturdays: Nov. 7, Nov. 14 and Nov. 21. Doors open at 6 p.m., with the dance presentation at 6:30 p.m. There is a limit of 22 guests per night and reservations are required by emailing dafmark@gmail.com and indicating the number of attendees. Donations are appreciated. Masks are required.

Watch it

Dafmark Dance Theater officially observed its 30th anniversary on Sept. 1. But rather than celebrating that landmark with large gatherings, Dafmark has been documenting its past and current work on video. To view that video and to learn more, visit dafmarkdance.org.

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A Tale of Three Phases

On reopenings and staying open



[left]: Like other local businesses, Panache Salon and Studio has had to trim down capacity in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite that, owner Jim Farrell was happy to report no thinning out of his dedicated staff. [bottom right] Like salons, it's been difficult for fitness centers like iRock Fitness and Level Red Boxing to pick themselves up off the mat. Company vice president Matt Pribonic says they've been punching back with innovative new procedures and programs.

JESSICA HUNTER

By: Matt Swanseger

By now, we're all painfully aware that COVID-19 has been more than "just a phase." That's because in Pennsylvania, we're on at least our third.

Untold ages ago, on April 27, Governor Tom Wolf announced a three-phase plan for reopening Pennsylvania. During the Red Phase, which began with the statewide shutdown in March, a mandatory stay-at-home order was in place and only "life-sustaining businesses" could continue in-person operations. During the Yellow Phase (May 8 through June 25 in Erie County), labeled "aggressive mitigation," more "non-essential" businesses were allowed to reopen with precautions — although others remained sidelined until the Green Phase initiated on June 26. Gyms and health and wellness centers, personal care services (barbershops, salons, spas, etc.), and indoor entertainment and recreation facilities were among those left waiting the longest, with miles of ground to make up.

Regardless of who you are and when you received the go-ahead, one thing was clear — it would not be "business as usual," at least not for a while. With the novel coronavirus an invasive presence amongst our species, it has become necessary to

coevolve. In evolutionary theory, coevolution is the result of a series of adaptations and counteradaptations, the cause-and-effect and push-pull of survival. Although some have bristled at being told *how* to evolve, few have debated the *why* — because coming through for their clientele, their communities, their employees, and their livelihoods matters.

The scenarios that follow vary, but the resolve shown by the people involved rarely wavered.

In It For the Long Haul: Long-Term Care Facilities

As home to some of our most vulnerable populations, long-term care facilities (LTCFs) have withstood the biggest threat from the coronavirus thus far — not only from an operations standpoint, but a health outlook as well. Elderly residents are more likely to harbor comorbidities such as diabetes and carry generally weaker immune systems. Living in close quarters with limited mobility creates conditions for viruses to spread quickly, leading to outbreaks.

Statewide, COVID-19 has found its way into 1,025 LTCFs, infecting 24,663 residents and 5,389 employees and accounting for 5,609 deaths (as of Oct. 19). Those numbers translate to about 17 percent of total Penn-

sylvanian coronavirus cases (176,054 confirmed as of Oct. 19) and a staggering two-thirds of total Pennsylvanian coronavirus deaths (8,500 as of Oct. 19). In Erie County, COVID-19 has breached 21 LTCFs, with 182 infected residents, 129 infected employees, and 41 deaths. Mirroring the statewide trend, approximately 17 percent of local coronavirus cases (311 out of 1,879) can be traced to LTCFs, albeit with a larger percentage of deaths (41 out of 53, or 77 percent).

Brevillier Village, a nonprofit specializing in senior housing and health care with historical roots in the community dating back to the early 1900s, provides multi-level care to their residents with intentions of helping them age in place. Headquartered at 5416 E. Lake Road, the Brevillier campus encompasses four buildings, each with a different specialization depending on the resident's level of independence and needs. Their person-centered care mission involves many facets — a healthcare team, social workers, dining services, rehabilitative services, recreation, nondenominational spiritual services, and assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs).

Balancing their residents' physical well-being with their mental and spiritual welfare has been tougher than usual, says Maureen Rizzo, Brevillier's director of development: "COVID-19 has certainly chal-

lenged our ability to continually provide exceptional care; however the entire team, including residents, their family members, staff, and resident volunteers have taken the preventative measures very seriously. Social engagement has been limited to adhere to social distance restrictions requiring residents to remain in specific areas. Additionally, our Recreation Department has redesigned activities to be smaller, building-related programs to eliminate large group gatherings."

Residents have access to two on-site doctors, a psychologist and neuropsychologist, as well as a village chaplain. Mental wellness is observed daily by staff and when deemed necessary, a resident Care Plan may recommend the intervention of their expertise. The biggest missing piece has been face-to-face contact with family members, volunteers, and community. "We consider all these contributing people an essential part of our core values. Many of the ever-changing state and federal guidelines have made normal seem nearly impossible to achieve, but there is a sense of undeniable resiliency here," explains Rizzo.

"We truly have learned that we are a family and we are essential to the operations at Brevillier Village. I do not see that bond or pride going away soon. We celebrate together,

we cry together, and we have grown in many ways during these times. Staff is recognized for their tireless work and compassionate care. This will continue indefinitely."

Staying in Shape: Gyms and Fitness Centers

Any power lifter could tell you how important grip strength is to maintaining proper form — lose your grip and the whole thing comes crashing down, potentially taking you with it. When COVID-19 first hit, Matthew and Anthony Pribonic, proprietors of Level Red Boxing (LRB) and iRock Fitness, weren't so sure they could hold on.

"In the beginning, it was very scary because we were like 'Well, we're gonna close.' We're out of business if somebody tells us to close our doors for months," Matt admits. "It was kind of amazing that the government was able to put together a program that gave so many people subsidy and support — I really didn't see that coming."

Nonetheless, the sibling duo weren't depending solely on the state to spot them during their three-plus month shutdown — instead, they seriously flexed their ingenuity muscles. In March, they debuted Level Red Virtual to *everyone* in all four LRB market areas — Erie, Pittsburgh, Buffalo (N.Y.), and Cary (N.C.) — not just mem-



JESSICA HUNTER



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Due to more vulnerable populations, long-term care facilities like Brevillier Village have had more risk to manage than most. Maureen Rizzo, Brevillier's director of development, gives credit to her team for upholding a high standard of care and quality of life for residents while taking every precaution to avoid a major outbreak.

bers. On the iRock side, they introduced a timer app with an assortment of minimal equipment exercises that could also be performed entirely at home — thereby circumventing the ongoing shortage of workout equipment worldwide.

Even with those interim measures in place, increased advertising and community outreach, and the implementation of enhanced cleaning protocols (which Pribonic says should have been the norm all along), membership atrophied by nearly 50 percent during the shutdown. Pribonic isn't blaming anyone for canceling, especially those with vulnerable relatives. "You have to think about everyone you know and say to yourself, 'Well I could go to the gym, but then I can't see my parents.' You know what you are going to choose — you're going to choose your parents."

Now that we've officially hit bulking season, LRB and iRock are gradually building membership back up, with hopes of reaching pre-COVID registrations by the new year. But should anything like this happen again (and Pribonic highly suspects it might) and the company be forced to power down, the duo is ready with their proverbial "backup generator."

"We never want to be in the situation again where we're subject to the environment around us. We want to be in control," Pribonic asserts. "We want to be able to serve people no matter where they want to work out, whether it's at home, at a park, or at their office or business. We want to be able to be there."

To that end, they've been sculpting an all-outdoor workout system called Outfit. Using a combination of supersized Ford Transit vans and modi-

fied cargo containers (running on solar power), Outfit will operate a number of pop-up gym locations in outdoor parking areas, "fully decked out" with workout equipment, timers, technology, and lights capable of serving 20 to 30 workout warriors at a time. Membership will be on a per-month basis (up to 12 workouts per month), with the ability to opt in or out at any time without penalty via an app. "We're really excited about it because it's going to change the way people exercise and the way they pay for it."

Historic challenges facing your industry? No sweat.

Grooming a Comeback: Personal Care Services

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and things are appearing much prettier to Jim Farrell now than they did a few months ago. He says his business, Panache Salon and Studio, has lost much of its visual appeal since its resurrection

on June 26, but it has lost none of its essence.

"It's not been difficult to stay within the culture that we've built here at Panache," says Farrell. "The only thing is the facility we spent a ton of money on making beautiful is now no longer beautiful. We have plastic shower curtains everywhere, removed probably half of our furniture and had to buy a storage room to store it all. But as far as our values towards our clients and our staff, those have not been affected."

As a resounding testament to that, every one of Panache's 34 staff members returned as soon as they were allowed to reopen — much later than the three to five weeks than Farrell had initially projected. State legislators were lobbying for a waiver to the governor's mandatory closure of personal care services back in May (House Bill 2388), but it was vetoed — and barbershop, salon, and spa owners were left spinning in their chairs until the Green Phase commenced. In spite of that, salons have repeatedly proven to be a safe environment since reopening. Not a single employee has come to Farrell expressing discomfort, "which is saying something."

Some of that is attributable to their strict no mask, no service policy. "I've had to ask people

to leave if they wouldn't put a mask on. We're very stringent in our setup here. We're big believers in the actual virus." The other part of that is the sheer breadth of the facility, an expansive environment of about 7,000 square feet — very amenable to social distancing. Enhanced antiviral cleaning procedures between clients are likely to stay in place whenever the pandemic mercifully passes, especially during flu season.

So while Farrell is eager to resume skincare services (disallowed currently because they can only be administered to unmasked clients), take down the shower curtains, and restore Panache's atmosphere as a homey little oasis, he is grateful that his customers are still getting the "attention to detail, personalization, and experience" that they're accustomed to. "We try to instill that connection between people that's more than just receiving a service."

Little by little, we'll gradually phase out of this pandemic — and color-coded phases. But the people and local businesses that make our community tick, they're not going anywhere if they can help it.

Matt Swanseger can be reached at mmswanseger@eriereader.com

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The Real Wizard of Oz

Harry Kellar's legacy revived in Downtown Erie



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

By: Matt Swanseger

Off to see the Wizard? Hate to break it to you, but the Yellow Brick Road is kind of a dead end.

With all apologies to the Emerald City Department of Tourism, the legacy of the Real Wizard of Oz lives here in the Gem City. So adjust your coordinates to State Street and don't fret about flying monkeys — although I'd advise you to remain vigilant of whispering imps (don't worry, I'll explain later).

Now you see him, now you don't

Erie native Harry Kellar was not only an inspiration to L. Frank Baum, author of the 1900 children's fantasy novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* — he was, and continues to be, an inspiration to generations of magicians that have followed in his footsteps. An affable personality and consummate entertainer, Kellar is regarded as one of the foundational figures in performance magic — so much so that he became known as “The Dean of American Magicians.”

In reality, the honorable provost didn't even finish *high school*. It's not that he didn't have a brain — it's just that he had a little too much nerve. Born Heinrich Keller in 1849 to German immigrants, young Henry's pastimes included dashing in front of oncom-

ing trains and whipping up “potions” at the downtown pharmacy where he held his first apprenticeship. His employer was none too pleased when one of those whimsical concoctions blew a hole in his floor. Henry feared his father would have an equally explosive reaction when he heard of the incident, so he skipped town on the first freight train to Cleveland at the ripe old age of 10.

Northeast Ohio ultimately failed to captivate the boy, so he did what any enterprising 11-year-old would do — he packed it up for the Big Apple. While selling newspapers in Lower Manhattan, Keller met his eventual guardian, a minister from Upstate New York who would take him to his first magic show. Keller was spellbound as he watched “The Fakir of Ava” — aka American magician Isaiah Hughes — transform a scrap paper into coffee, milk, and sugar.

The spell never wore off. Keller left the minister and a temp job at a farm near Buffalo to become an assistant (now as *Harry Keller*) to none other than the man who cast it — Hughes, the Fakir himself.

Sleight of hand

Native Erieite Bobby Borgia vividly recalls his initial encounter with magic, too. His brother, Anthony Scott Borgia, had just passed away from complica-

For many patrons, walking into Kellar's, a Modern Magic and Comedy Club, is walking into a world they never knew existed. Erie-born Harry Kellar's fantastical persona and immeasurable contributions to the field of performance magic become quickly apparent after taking in the scene and decor.

tions of a liver transplant, in what had been the first successful procedure of its kind in the United States.

“I was five and I didn't know where he went,” Borgia explains. Around that same time, Borgia beheld famous Canadian magician, illusionist, and escape artist Doug Henning in all his logic-defying glory. He was hooked. “I knew one thing. I knew *exactly* what I wanted to be.”

Borgia filled the void left by his brother spending hours practicing finger exercises in the mirror to improve his dexterity. Sleight of hand (aka *prestidigitation* or *legerdemain*) is the bedrock of the close-up or table magic that provides many performers their “in.” Relatives and friends fed Borgia's passion, regularly buying him new tricks to add to his repertoire and inviting him to perform at birthday parties and gatherings. “They knew I was really into it,” Borgia says, and more importantly they never discouraged him.

By the time he was working his first job at the Station Restaurant and Oscar's Pub, he was already a seasoned veteran. Every Wednesday and Friday night, he went from table to table performing tricks, and soon enough other restaurants around town were hiring the precocious high schooler into cameo roles. After graduating from Academy High, Borgia moved to New York City and signed with a management company, landing a gig at Merv Griffin's Resorts International in Atlantic City for six months. “I was 19 years old. I was a *kid*.”

But unlike Keller, at least he was old enough to grow stubble before striking off on his own.

'Stache money millionaires

Entertainment in the late 19th century was dominated by larger-than-life personalities and larger-than-life facial hair. Circuses brought mutton chops and menageries, big tops and bearded ladies. Meanwhile, magnificently mus-

tachioed magicians mystified, citing pilgrimages to the mysterious Far East to learn their powers. Hughes — an Englishman — derived his stage name from a type of Sufi or Hindu holy man and doubled down on that persona by daubing his face with scads of dark makeup. In today's more culturally sensitive climate, he might've been asked what the *fakir* he was thinking.

In any case, crowds were drawn to the theatrics and spectacle, although they were duped by the occasional bad actor. Spiritualists — people who claimed an ability to communicate with the beyond — were notorious for that, conducting seances as a pretense for swindling audiences out of money and possessions (what a bunch of *deadbeats*!). Stage spiritualists, however, were entertainers first and foremost and had only the purest intentions — to awe and delight. Now *that* was something Keller could get behind.

In 1869, he signed on as an assistant with The Davenport Brothers and Fay, a troupe of stage spiritualists renowned for their Spirit Cabinet, an illusion in which musical instruments appeared to be played by ghosts within a hermetically sealed wooden box. In reality, shut-in siblings Erastus and William Henry Davenport quickly escaped tightly-knotted ropes, played a brief jam sesh, and wriggled their way back into their bonds before the cabinet reopened. Not a thing looked out of place; it seemed utterly inexplicable.

The then walrus-whiskered Keller sopped up every detail. After four years of playing second fiddle, Keller and his coworker William Fay ghosted the Davenports. The two men embarked on an 18-month tour of Central and South America from late 1873 through early 1875, with their own version of the Spirit Cabinet serving as the main attraction. By the end of their adventure, the duo had performed in front of Emperor Dom Pedro II of Rio de Janeiro and accrued over \$10,000 in revenue (about a quarter million in today's dollars) in Mexico *alone*. Despite assurances that nothing occult or sinister was amuck, Mexican newspapers were absolutely convinced that Keller was “in league with the devil.”

Ironically, that press did a *hell* of a lot for his popularity. In fact, the supernat-



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FEATURE



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ural became a staple of the Harry Kellar brand from the 1880s onward, after an 1876 name change to avoid confusion with contemporary Robert Heller.

Magic makes a comeback

Bobby Borgia has never been accused of demonic dealings during his globetrotting career. Nor has he ever contracted yellow fever or been shipwrecked with a cargo hold full of gold and jewels off the coast of France — all things Kellar experienced after his breakout tour. (It's safe to say that education and world travel have come a *long* way in the past 150 years). Nonetheless, Borgia's life has been *anything* but boring.

"I've had a very interesting career," Borgia admits. That feels like an understatement. His work as a performer, illusion designer, magic consultant, and technical advisor has taken him to 87 countries. His talents have been recruited by nearly every major network (or one of their subsidiaries), entertainment juggernauts such as Disney, casinos, cruise lines, and some of popular music's biggest names. They've surfaced on stage, screen, and in everything in between. He says it's unlocked a "whole different world" he never could have imagined.

He credits his success not to sorcery, but to "a lot of failing and learning, a lot of drive, focus, never giving up ... I don't care what happens, just don't give up."

Not when the market for magic is this rich. It's *everywhere*. Television shows

Erie native Bobby Borgia has taken an interest in magic since the age of five, since blossoming into one of the more respected names in the entertainment industry, regularly collaborating with major networks, movie studios, and musicians in the areas of illusion and effects design, technical advice, and creative consultation.

like *America's Got Talent*, *Masters of Illusion*, and *The Carbonaro Effect*. Movies like *The Prestige*, *The Illusionist*, and *Oz the Great and Powerful*. Magic-themed destinations like The Magic Castle (Los Angeles), Chicago Magic Lounge, Wizards at Universal (Orlando), and another we'd like to mention...

Kellar's, a Modern Magic and Comedy Club at 1402 State St. — just a block away from where the Real Wizard of Oz's childhood home once stood in Erie, Pa.

Imps 'n' shows

Still wondering about the whispering imps? Close the Kellar's door or you might let one out. These diminutive diabolos will be literally crawling out of the club's walls soon enough (with a bit of coaxing from 3D micro-projection technology).

For now, though, they're just part of the scenery — living within mural-sized reproductions of Kellar promotional posters painted on the wall. The original illustrations were the work of the Strobridge Lithographing Company in New York and Ohio, and depicted Kellar consorting with all manner of infernal associates. The

little devils seemed to be his favorite consultants, whispering the secrets to each new illusion — deceptions so incredible, so beyond earthly explanation, so dare I say *impossible* that they could have only come from the Great Deceiver himself.

Kellar's rivals might have contended the imps were whispering *their* secrets, as claims of plagiarism flew like pitchforks through sulfurous Hades air. Following the death of Heller in 1878, American critics wrote off Kellar as nothing but an *impostor*. The blow to his reputation was so severe that he was forced to cancel an entire U.S. tour.

In his absence, Alexander Herrmann (aka "Herrmann the Great") established himself as our country's most preeminent magician, which only further fueled Kellar's tireless pursuit of perfection. One assistant said Kellar wasn't projecting well enough on stage — so the Wizard put his 'stache to the blade. Another swore he knew how a magic box worked for a fact — so Kellar hacked it to bits with an axe. Every illusion was rehearsed and refined until it was indecipherable.

Such obsessive levels of quality control eventually *did* set Kellar apart. Truth is there are only so many types of effects — magicians disagree about the exact count, but the consensus is fewer than 10.

- You can make something appear (production) or disappear (vanish)
- You can turn one thing into something else (transformation)
- You can destroy something and put it back together (restoration)
- You can make one thing move to a different place (teleportation)
- You can make two or more things trade places (transposition)
- You can pass one solid object through another (penetration)
- You can make something defy gravity (levitation).

Some magicians group teleportation and transposition together (transposition = double transportation); others include mind-reading (prediction) and escape artistry on their lists.

There's no question Kellar "borrowed" from others — sometimes heavily. One of his favorite sources of inspiration was John Nevil Maskelyne and George Cooke's Egyptian Hall, located across the pond in London. Egyptian Hall was a magician's Mecca, attracting visitors from around the world. Not only did Kellar use some of Maskelyne's more ingenious inventions in his own act

(The Flying Cage, Psycho the Automaton), his performing troupe would also tour as The Royal Illusionists (the same name Maskelyne and Cooke used) *and* install their own Egyptian Hall in Philadelphia. If Kellar saw something he liked, he either bought the rights to it or devised a workaround.

Audiences were none the wiser. Of course they were curious about *what* Kellar did, but they were even more fascinated about *how* he did it. He had a doctorate-level understanding of the mechanics and optics that made each illusion work. He knew exactly when and how to misdirect the crowd's attention at the most critical moments. And above all else, he absolutely *nailed* the presentation, weaving elaborate backstories for spectacles such as "The Levitation of Princess Karnac," "The Shrine of Koomra-Sami," and "The Cassadaga Propaganda," each complete with on-theme props and costumes.

He believed that "you can never interest the modern public unless you are continually giving them something new."

All the way up until his retirement in 1908, Kellar's productions reflected a relentless drive to innovate. It's why in 1900 he was christened "The Peerless Magician." It's why his name became synonymous with sheer, unadulterated wonder.

Hook, line, and synchronicity

It's hard to fathom now, but there was a time when Bobby Borgia had never even *heard of* Harry Kellar. He was a teenager performing table magic at Oscar's Pub and The Station Restaurant. As fate would have it, dining out that night was a Mrs. Katherine Keller Blakely. She asked him if he knew who her uncle was. Borgia drew a blank, so she filled him in. "He was the greatest magician in the history of magic."

It wasn't until Borgia began traveling the world and rising in his profession that he truly began to realize how impactful and wide-reaching Kellar's legacy was. But there were many secrets yet to be revealed. "I knew he was an icon, but I knew nothing about him." That has changed drastically within the past five years, in particular after *another* chance encounter with Keller descendants, this one even more uncanny than the last.

Flashback to 2018 in New York, aboard the Carnival *Horizon*, the cruise line's then latest ship. Borgia had been closing out his shows with a video tribute

to Kellar, with whom he had grown increasingly fascinated with as both a historical figure and a marketable concept. The cruise rep informed him there were some people in the front row who wanted to meet him. Who else but the Keller family?

"I was like, holy shit, are they gonna sue me?" Borgia recalls with a laugh.

They did no such thing. In fact, after sharing his vision of a more permanent Kellar homage in Erie, Rick (Katherine's grandson) and Jennifer Blakely were sold. They awarded Borgia unprecedented access to the Kellar estate, including photos, posters, memorabilia, and hundreds of personal letters between Kellar and his dear friend and renowned escape artist Harry Houdini. Dozens of these items now adorn the walls of Kellar's, a Modern Comedy and Magic Club. Dozens more will populate an upstairs museum in the future.

With these artifacts in hand, Borgia has become better acquainted with Kellar than just about anyone. "I feel like I even know who he was as a *person*. Forget what kind of a magician he was, I feel like I kind of *know him*."

Borgia has learned that Kellar was a very kindly and generous man, especially in regard to giving back to his hometown of Erie, where he would hold performances and donate to local charities almost every year. Borgia is inspired to do the same, professing a love for Erie greater than sponge candy.

"There's some kind of connection I can't describe," he says. "I've traveled the world two, three, four times, whatever ... [but] there is something special here. And I see a lot of people with oars in the water rowing in the right direction."

Where Kellar's is concerned, he has had two very important individuals in his boat. The first is Kristi Lewonas, his high school prom date turned business partner. Lewonas brings vast experience in personal services and hospitality, having owned a hair salon for 22 years and been involved in the restaurant industry for several more.

Asked why their working relationship clicks, Lewonas attributes it to familiarity. "Sometimes I ground him a little; sometimes he makes me reach for the stars a little higher. So with his magic and charming imagination, and my skills being able to bartend and mop up the bathroom on the hospital-ity end, it's a great match. The yin and the yang." Borgia gives her a little more

credit than that, saying "she's the reason this is here now."

But not the *only* reason. The other is Dave Litz Jr., owner of the former Jr's Last Laugh. Borgia was a seventh grader at St. Luke's when he caught wind of Litz's act at that year's Academy High School Talent Show. Borgia lost his mind when he saw Litz's guillotine illusion. "This giant blade came down, the head came off, went down to the feet, talked ... oh my gosh." He could not stop raving about it.

Two weeks later, the guillotine prop and others arrived in his parent's driveway. He wouldn't know this until years later, but his father had written Litz a check for \$150 to buy the entire setup. "I almost cried." After that, Borgia never saw Litz again. That is, until Borgia moved back to Erie and heard Litz (aka "Junior") was selling an even bigger setup — his highly successful comedy club at 1402 State St. Yet *another* Erie connection had come full circle.

Because of the wonderful things he does

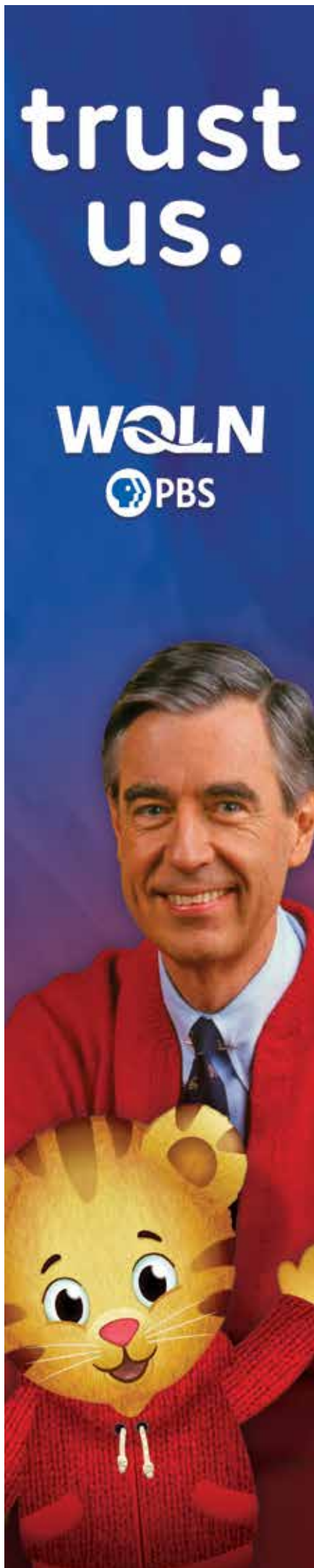
Like Litz, Borgia is a stand-up guy, counting comedians among his closest friends. He didn't want to completely sever himself from Junior's proven business model, but he didn't want to settle for old (top) hat either. So Kellar's rotates magic and comedy weekly, while seeking to provide an atmosphere and customer experience that "feels almost like a different world," according to Lewonas. And maybe more importantly, an escape from the current reality.

"We are really trying to show people that [our club] is clean and safe. And that they can come in and be reminded after about 10 minutes to unfold their arms and it's time to relax, time to laugh. That's what is going to bind us to this community," Lewonas says.

And in turn, hopefully bind the community with another thread of its oft-neglected heritage. "We are the home of the real Wizard of Oz. How cool is that?!" Borgia exclaims. "It's like discovering a magic trick."

As for what's next? "A magician never reveals his secrets."

Matt Swanseger has never pulled a rabbit from a hat, but he has pulled many a previously frozen meal from his microwave oven. Unlike most magicians, he'll happily let the imp out of the bag on this and other phenomenal feats at mwsanseger@eriereader.com



FEATURE

The Real Witches of Erie

Witchcraft and Paganism not as frightening as they're portrayed to be



By: Claudia Rose

As Halloween draws closer, the usual topics come up: the next pumpkin-flavored item, the latest film franchise to be made into a costume, and every so often, someone may mention that the holiday's roots in the Gaelic festival known as Samhain, which served both to mark the end of the harvest season and honor dead ancestors. The concept of Samhain was combined with Christian holy days, and over time, the traditions of wearing costumes and carving pumpkins (originally intended to ward off evil spirits), were incorporated into what we now know as Halloween.

This is nothing new, as the origins of the holiday have been explored through countless documentaries and films. What many may not realize is that Samhain, in addition to many other Pagan holidays that have been westernized, is still celebrated by large groups of people, some of whom are part of the Erie community. While not everyone uses the term "witches" to refer to themselves, it *does* suit the spirit of the season.

But what comes to mind when a witch is brought up? Bette Midler? The color green? In film and some literature, the witch is most commonly portrayed as a villain, or someone corrupted by a thirst for power. This likely stems from the common misconception that all

witches are in league with the Devil. This dates back centuries, long before the events of Salem occurred.

In 1486, Heinrich Kramer, an inquisitor for the Catholic Church wrote the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Also known as *The Hammer of Witches* or *The Witch Hunter's Bible*, this document was meant to instruct how to detect whether someone was a heretic participating in witchcraft, and suggests gruesome torture to elicit a confession. While not the only document of its kind, it is one of the better known, possibly due to Kramer's many unusual beliefs about what witches were like as well as what they did. Kramer himself links the practice of witchcraft with the Devil, stating witchcraft must be real because the Devil is real. Furthermore, it suggests that women are most likely to give in to temptation of the Devil, since they were believed to be the weaker gender. If that was not bad enough, women were believed to spread the word of evil to one another as easily as local gossip, so friends could not chat without being seen as suspicious. Healers and midwives were also brought under suspicion as witches were believed to use herbs and children to do the Devil's bidding. Kramer had been criticized prior to publishing the document for being uncomfortably preoccupied with the more intimate details of an accused heretic's personal life, and it is not hard to detect that through the text. Need-

Belief systems such as Wicca are rooted in Pagan traditions that sometimes predate Christianity by thousands of years. Contrary to popular perception, the overwhelming majority of these movements have no ill or malicious intent, serving instead as an alternative way to become attuned to natural forces and one's own spirituality.

less to say, if the clergyman lived in this era, he might have had a very angry blog, and perhaps a body pillow with a cartoon character on it.

Unfortunately, by the time the *Malleus Maleficarum* was banned by the church, the hysteria had already begun, and Kramer's word was seen as gospel by many. The most young people remember being taught in school is about the Salem Witch Trials, in which 19 people were hung, five died in jail, and one was crushed with stones. The reality is hysteria was running rampant for centuries throughout Europe, and at least 40,000 people were executed for witchcraft. A witch could have been anyone outspoken, independent or different.

While there are practitioners who do associate themselves with the Devil or Satan, that is a completely separate organization that has nothing to do with Paganism or witchcraft as a general practice. Much to the chagrin of the many members of the Erie Pagan/witch community, they cannot explain that witchcraft is a part of their spiritual practice without facing accusations.

Margo Wolfe is a local practitioner who has taken part in various conferences and events for people of diverse religious beliefs such as Paotheon and gatherings held by the Sisterhood of Avalon. That being said, she is all too familiar with the misunderstanding that any and all forms of witchcraft are linked to Satanism.

"Satan is a Christian concept, and Paganism is pre-Christian. There was no concept of Satan," she explains. The fact of the matter is witches, Pagans, Wiccans (three things that are not synonymous), are just expressing their spirituality, similar to any other belief system. A local couple who wishes to remain anonymous follows the traditions of Norse Paganism, and they get very disheartened when their practice is assumed to be barbaric or violent. "We worship our gods and we also worship the Earth, because the Earth is sacred. We aren't running around sacrificing people," they say. "We are a different form of a religion; we have people that we look to and pray to."

Another common misconception about witchcraft and Neo-Pagan practices that include it is that it's against

Christianity. Wolfe assures, "It's not anti-anything, anti-Christian or anti-God. I know people who are Pagan who also align themselves with Judaism. I know some people who find the teachings of Jesus in their path. It's difficult to nail down on purpose. It's taking hold of one's spirituality." Michelle Dolan has started exploring witchcraft for herself, and strongly encourages research of the topic before reaching any conclusions. "It's just like any other religious belief, it's an actual belief system and not a cult."

For many who found this path on their own, and were not raised that way, Paganism and witchcraft simply spoke to them in a way other religions didn't. Rachel Bernhardt has been a practicing witch for around five years, and follows the Greek pantheon of deities. "I consider myself religious again, which is really weird for me. Christianity had no pull for me my entire life and my whole family is Christian. I never had a true religious experience with Christianity which now I do with my deities." She also clarifies that the purpose of spellwork for her as a witch is not voodoo dolls or mind control

the way it has been portrayed in the media. "The intention is never force." Another point she stressed was that these different paths are just as valid as anyone else's. "Once you choose a path it doesn't limit you to believing in only what you do. It's as basic as diversity in people. Not living that person's life doesn't suddenly make it not a real life."

For practitioners who have chosen this path, witchcraft and Paganism has introduced a new form of self care. "I would never have started meditating before getting into witchcraft and that has done so much for me," says Bernhardt. "I'll meditate with the crystals, put on some different frequencies, and it's nice." Dolan adds, "It makes me feel a little safer, protected. When I am doing spells it makes me feel empowered." Wolfe shares this feeling of empowerment, asserting "I've been able to lead and have a voice in my own spiritual path."

That being said, for those who would be interested in looking into Paganism or witchcraft, it is a path anyone can follow. "I've seen people who dress like the soccer mom down the street who

are interested in it," says Dolan. "People of all genders, races, backgrounds, people who never fit into any box before." There isn't just one way of practicing either, one of the Norse Pagans who goes by the name Sam states. "I've seen so many people from different races with different pagan beliefs. Everyone has their own different pagan beliefs; unified they have one common goal."

So as the full moon rises on Halloween, realize the concept of witchcraft is not as simple as the classic films make it out to be. Make no mistake, plenty of Pagans and witches enjoy watching *Hocus Pocus* and *Practical Magic*, just don't expect the witch next door to bring back the dead or shoot Force lightning from their fingers! That being said, it is comforting to know the world is magical.

Claudia has been fascinated by the concept of witches ever since she was a child, making a quest to consume as much media as possible about them. Of course, she does also come from a long line of Tarot readers...and has a crystal collection. She can be reached at claudia@eriereader.com

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Small Statures, Big Stories

Why little people like Erie's Alice Zenda are among history's greatest omissions



CHARLES EISENMAN

[left] Espiridiona Cenda, better known to the public by her stage name of Chiquita (meaning "little girl") and to those close to her as Alice Zenda, stood just over two feet tall. [bottom right] Zenda fell in love with and married Erie-born-and-raised Anthony "Little Tony" Woeckener in secret in 1901.

stories are usually centered around those committing the exploitation, rather than coming from the perspective of the person or people with dwarfism.

In the history of Erie, one such overlooked woman was Espiridiona Cenda, better known to the public by her stage name of Chiquita (meaning "little girl") and to those close to her as Alice Zenda.

Alice appeared in thousands of American newspapers throughout her lifetime. One of the earliest of these mentions was the July 24, 1896 issue of The New York Times when she was set to make her New York City debut at the Metropolitan Hotel. The story described her as a 26-year-old university graduate who recently arrived from Mantanzas, Cuba with her brother and cousin. The Times inferred that she was a proponent of the Victorian dress reform movement (a tenet of first wave feminism) and described her on stage as the "most graceful little lady imaginable" who could play instruments, sing, dance, and was fluent in numerous languages. She wore colorful, silky dresses as she sang, danced, and charmed her audiences. She was also 26-inches tall, having been born with a form of primordial dwarfism.

The Times article is not completely reliable. Alice was indeed 26-inches tall, but she was born in Mexico, not Cuba. That detail was a part of her Chiquita persona and was,

perhaps, chosen as public sympathy for the Cuban people was growing due to their oppression by the Spanish Empire. Much about her life before arriving in the United States remains uncertain.

Alice's newspaper appearances increased significantly after the Times story. That winter, she began performing in Boston at an attraction called The Zoo. The language used in advertising her shows was demeaning and stereotypical for the time, including the concept of marketing her alongside various exotic animals — but in a society that was still largely driven by agriculture and industrial labor, Alice was forging a path towards financial independence.

Her manager was a man named Frank C. Bostock. His family had been in the business of exhibitions for nearly a century at that point. His grandfather, George Wombwell, had first taken wild animals on the road in Britain in 1804. Wombwell's daughter Emma married James Bostock and the two eventually took over the family business.

Frank's two brothers worked for their parents, but he was interested in taking an act of his own across the Atlantic. He arrived in the United States in 1893. He organized his show in Brooklyn and began exhibiting exotic animals: monkeys, parrots, lions, and a boxing kangaroo. A few years later, he would meet Alice and she would quickly become a

By: Jonathan Burdick

In 2019, Pennsylvania officially designated October as Dwarfism Awareness Month, with Oct. 25 named Dwarfism Awareness Day. After seeing a concert skit by Zac Brown Band using a little person widely seen as degrading, Nick Sorensen, a local member of Little People of America, reached out to State Rep. Ryan Bizzarro and soon, they were working to create and pass the bill that made this a reality.

The resolution, which passed unanimously and was adopted a year ago on Oct. 29, 2019, states that it is "recognizing dwarfism with the hope of raising positive awareness about dwarfism and promoting the welfare of people having dwarfism in this Commonwealth."

"People with dwarfism have also faced a negative view in the media, one that has caused stereotypes or misinformation," Sorensen (who works as digital content manager for JET/FOX/YourErie as well being a stand-up comic

and the founder of his own popular podcast *Buddycast) recently wrote for *eriereader.com*. "Just like you, we are human beings, maybe just a foot or two smaller. We are not mythical creatures, stunt objects, jesters, or sporting equipment."

October was selected because Oct. 25 is the birthday of Billy Barty, the well-known actor who founded Little People of America in 1957. Barty was integral in bringing together people with dwarfism, who in turn would organize and fight for civil rights legislation over the following decades.

Despite this progress, in written histories, people with dwarfism are often marginalized or outright absent. When those with dwarfism are included in our histories and popular stories of the past, they are frequently portrayed as lacking historical agency — defined as individuals having the ability to act and make choices independently.

When such stories are told, they are often stories of exploitation. While exploitation was sometimes apparent, the



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cornerstone of his exhibition.

In 1901, Bostock took his show to the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, N.Y. — known infamously for being where President William McKinley was assassinated that September.

Alice held early morning receptions where guests could pay to meet and talk with her and listen to her sing. She would show off her gowns and jewelry. She was gifted an electric vehicle, which she would drive during the daily Midway parades. Some reports claimed she accumulated over \$100,000 in a personal fortune during these times.

“They made her the mascot of the fair, which is just telling in all sorts of different ways,” Margaret Creighton, author of 2016’s *The Electrifying Fall of Rainbow City*, wrote. “At two feet tall, she resisted being treated as a child. She fell in love and escaped from her manager [Bostock], and he kidnapped her again.”

She had fallen in love with the Erie born-and-raised Anthony “Little Tony” Woeckner. Although only a teenager, Tony was taking tickets and playing the cornet for Alice’s

show. They quickly bonded and, that November, they married in secret.

Alice snuck out one evening, scaling the fence of her exposition and met Tony for a “midnight marriage” at the home of Justice Thomas H. Rochford. When she returned that evening with her new husband, Bostock’s men were waiting for them. According to Tony’s account, this was at gunpoint. Tony rushed away to get assistance from the police, but before he was able to return, she was allegedly “whisked away [and] abducted to Canada.”

Tony soon found out that she had been taken to Boston. He immediately traveled there. By early January of 1902, they were in court in Boston. When Tony took the stand, it was the first time that he had seen Alice since their November marriage.

“[Tony is] small for his age,” the Pittsburgh Daily Post reported. “His manner on the witness stand showed that he was very much in earnest.”

“Chiquita was placed upon the stand and testified that she wanted to live with Tony, but also wanted to carry out

The multitallented Chiquita was described on stage as the “most graceful little lady imaginable,” with the ability to play instruments, sing, dance, and speak fluently in numerous languages.

her contract with Bostock,” the Buffalo Evening News reported.

The judge believed that there “was no evidence to show that Chiquita was restrained of her liberty,” but then he adjourned so that “the couple could determine whether they wanted to live together or not.”

“The statement that I am keeping Chiquita from her husband is not true,” Bostock claimed. “The fact is Chiquita is fickle-minded and she wants nothing more to do with Woeckner.”

On the following court date, Bostock’s counsel appeared. Chiquita was not present. The judge granted another hour, but she again failed to appear. Bostock’s counsel stated she could come the following day. On the following day, she was “questioned as to the state of her mind,” but the judge concluded that she was content to stay with Bostock.

Judge Morton argued that the marriage never should have happened. “I do not think the marriage was the offspring of love or affection,” he said in court. “There seems to be some ulterior motive behind this. I think it is our duty to look beyond the mere surface and ascertain the motive.”

That Judge Morton alleged there was an ulterior motive for Tony, but not Bostock is notable, as well as his adding that he did not believe that Alice was capable of making decisions for herself, stating the “wife is not an ordinary person [and] not of ordinary capacity and intelligence” and that he would “hesitate to give her wishes the same force and effect that I would give to those of ordinary persons of her years.”

Tony returned to Erie without Alice. His lawyer told re-

porters that Tony “would never give up the fight” and they were “prepared to go on with this case.” He fumed that Alice had consented to Bostock’s wishes in court only by persuasion, perhaps even threats. The Buffalo Evening News reported that Bostock offered to hire Tony permanently if she consented to remain with his show without further litigation.

“Tony Woeckner will never enter the employ of Mr. Bostock,” Tony’s lawyer countered. “That part of it is settled.”

In March, newspapers were again advertising Alice alongside Bostock’s other performers and exotic animals in Boston. Sometime that August, Alice escaped with Tony, saying that Bostock had taken her over his knee to “tame” her.

“The evidence in the case will unfold a most remarkable love story,” the Pittsburgh Press wrote of the couple in November. They recounted the story of their marriage and separation, then reported that they had been back living together again in Erie since their August escape.

The problem? Bostock had her under contract. He had an injunction served that forbade any performances by Alice for two more years under any other management but his own. Alice ignored the injunction and began to manage herself. Tony assisted.

In April 1903, The Evening Republic in Meadville described how Alice was set to perform “passionate love songs” all week at 178 Chestnut St. across from the Midland Hotel. The article noted her ability to speak multiple languages and waltz and stated she would “converse and shake hands with all who attend the show.” The article also described three diamond rings she wore, one from President Theodore Roosevelt and others from famous stage actresses Julia Marlowe and May Fisk.

Soon after, she became

pregnant. One of the leading surgeons in Erie, Dr. Frank A. Walsh, attempted a cesarean section at St. Vincent’s hospital in October. He was able to save Alice’s life, but the child did not survive.

She went back to performing by that spring after her recovery, but court battles with Bostock persisted. In June 1905, a U.S. Circuit Court settled Bostock’s case against Alice. He had argued that he “discovered” her and “enhanced her value as a star by clothing her in costly garments, decking her in miniature jewelry especially made for her, and having her educated.” She shot back, describing his “cruel treatment, which consisted of locking her in apartments and refusing her permission to see her husband.” With their settlement, he agreed to dissolve his injunction.

She and Tony continued putting on shows over the next few years from Pittsburgh to San Francisco. In 1908, the Pittsburgh Press wrote, “No artist, public performer, past or present, has ever received the same continuous proportionate stipend as this little lady.”

The two retired from the business the following year. Many reports claim they moved to Mexico, but not much is known about the rest of their years, although by most accounts, she lived until 1945. Still, one aspect is known: Alice was free from Bostock’s legal grasp. He died in 1912.

Stories like Alice Zenda’s are important always, but especially deserve attention during Dwarfism Awareness Month, when the complexity of lives such as Alice’s can be explored, the adversity which she overcame highlighted, and her determination to forge her own path as a performer and businesswoman admired.

Jonathan Burdick runs the historical blog Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at jburdick@eriereader.com

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Erie Gay News Celebrates 300 Issues

The long-running LGBT+ publication looks back



The Erie Gay News originated as a double-sided sheet of paper in the spring of 1992. Three hundred issues later, it is still going strong and providing Erie a needed voice. Pictured here are members and supporters of Erie's LGBT+ community on Oct. 28, 1995, along with EGN Editor Michael Mahler (front row to the very right).

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

By: Nick Warren

On Tuesday, Oct. 20, The Erie Gay News released its tri-centennial issue. That milestone was reached month by month in print, and in case you haven't already done the math in your head, that's 25 years. For the record, it's actually been around 28 years. With in-depth community news and an extensive community calendar, it's been a fixture of the Erie community since the early 1990s.

Back when it started though, things were very different.

EGN Editor Michael Mahler, 57, came out publicly in May of 1992 and was one of the first openly gay voices in Erie County. "It was a lot more common for people not to be out," Mahler recalled, able to count on one hand any local people he knew who were openly gay or lesbian. "It used to be the case that when we got started that folks weren't necessarily as comfortable listing contact information online," said

Mahler. "So there was a point where I [reasoned that] since I'm already out, I don't care. I will kind of be a buffer for you guys."

"So I mean that's changed."

For Mahler, EGN wasn't his first foray into the world of print publications. A software developer by trade, he created a regular newsletter for a comic book club he was part of in college — while the golden age of zine culture was in its heyday. A few years later, he helped do the same thing for the regional arm of The Society for Creative Anachronism, the world-famous medieval recreationists. The Erie Gay News evolved out of the Erie Gay Community Newsletter, which was produced by the organization Bridges, beginning as a double-sided sheet of paper in the spring of 1992. By January of 1993, it had moved to the 12-page format that they still use in 2020 (though over the years, they've regularly gone with 16 and 20-page runs as well). Even

in those early days, you could read Mahler's long-running column, "Michael Dithers."

In August 1997, the issue masthead debuted with the logo and title they still use today: Erie Gay News. In the early 2000s they ran several issues as P.R.I.D.E. — standing for "Positively Representing Identities of Diversity In Erie," with EGN returning in December of 2002 onward.

It's easy to see the history of EGN for one simple reason: They've kept their website meticulously updated. Not only is each issue viewable as a PDF, but there is an extensive local history regarding Erie's LGBT+ community reaching back to the 1960s. The EGN is also cataloged in the Toronto-based ArQuives and the IHLIA LGBT Heritage in Amsterdam (formerly Homodok), and digitally at EBSCO's LGBTQ+ Life and the Erie County Library, among others.

To have such a longstanding newsletter in Erie is rightfully — and no pun intended — a point of pride. In Pennsylvania, there are like-minded organizations like The Central Voice out

of Harrisburg and the Philadelphia Gay News. Sources such as Pittsburgh's OUT and Cleveland's Gay People's Chronicle and PRIZM ceased print publication in 2012, 2015, and March of 2020, respectively. "There aren't a whole bunch of us right now," Mahler mourned.

For Mahler and his decades-long collaborator Deb Spilko, EGN has been a labor of love. "This is a volunteer thing and has always been a volunteer thing," Mahler explained. "It was pretty much me and my friend Deb doing most of the work." Spilko had also been working on a similar predecessor to EGN, in the form of a newsletter for the group PALS (standing for Personal and Affirming Lifestyles), which met at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in the late 1980s and was active during the same time as the Erie Gay Task Force. "Things like that were very much 'hush-hush,' difficult-to-find stuff," Mahler explained. "And then the first local gay wedding I went to was also at St. Paul's Episcopal, and that was just about six years ago" he enthused.

"When I was first getting involved locally, I remember the term was 'LesBiGays.' So, we were doing sexual orientation, but that didn't include trans commonly. And it's now been the case, of course, that you'll see LGBT or LGBTQ, LGBTQAI," Mahler spelled out. "So when people complain about why

we're adding letters, I tell them, yeah, it's been in flux for a while, and that is totally cool."

Recalling Erie's acceptance of him in the early '90s, he said "I remember when I first came out, I was feeling really nervous. Because it was an unknown, not because I know something bad is gonna happen. I do remember obsessing about, 'Oh, my God, someone's gonna slash the tires on my car.' For some reason, I was really worried about that." Mahler quickly noted as well that "I know, again, I'm speaking as a white, cisgender non-disabled, born-in-the USA, English-speaking male. But the fact that I didn't run into anything, suggests that somebody probably could have [been publicly out] successfully earlier."

Thankfully, progress has been made over the past few decades. Even so, there is an extremely real possibility that ground will be lost, and the Supreme Court will overturn its 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling that legalized same-sex marriages. As the pandemic continues and many of us remain socially distanced, community may be more important now than ever. An inclusive, accepting community is one of the things EGN has helped to foster here in Erie. In its 300 issues, it's documented our past and present, shining a bright and hopeful light to the future.

Nick Warren can be reached at nwarren@eriereader.com

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Ratched's Rickety Start

Netflix series doesn't quite do iconic villain justice



NETFLIX

Infamous cinema villain Nurse Ratched gets her own backstory in the new Ryan Murphy series *Ratched*.

Ryan Murphy has added another project to his juggernaut list of shows, which include *American Horror Story*, *Glee*, *9-1-1*, and *The Politician*. His usual strengths and faults are on full display in *Ratched*. Sarah Paulson stars as Nurse Mildred Ratched, the unforgettably indomitable antagonist of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Like any Murphy affair, it starts off with a promising concept, strong aesthetics, and an excellent cast. Sharon Stone, Cynthia Nixon, and Judy Davis grace our laptops and Rokus, chewing up Murphy's hearty scripts like a mallrat chews up bubblegum. A beautiful shade of teal sweeps the entire main set of Lucia State Hospital, where Murphy holds no punches with the semi-accurate depictions of mental hospital procedures from the 1950s. It's close to *AHS: Asylum*, just with less darkness and Catholic guilt.

With that comes the show's faults, as Murphy has a knack to favor glamour over coherent storytelling. At times, plot narratives seem rushed and produce episode cliffhangers with little payoff. That's not to mention character arcs that seem directly recycled from *American Horror Story* (check the parallels of *Freakshow*'s Dandy Mott and Gloria Mott with *Ratched*'s Henry Osgood and Lenore Osgood, respectively).

I must confess something I never

Sarah Paulson stars as Nurse Mildred Ratched in the Netflix series based on the infamous antagonist of the novel and movie *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

thought I would admit. I was not sold by Sarah Paulson's performance. Paulson is arguably Ryan Murphy's greatest asset next to the likes of Jessica Lange, Kathy Bates, and Angela Bassett. However, her performance feels more like an audition tape without ever fully embodying Louise Fletcher's Oscar-winning iciness that built Nurse Ratched's legacy. While we must give the perception of a character backstory the benefit of the doubt, the frigidness of Paulson's characterization is more so reminiscent of her *American Horror Story: Apocalypse* character, Wilhelmina Venable.

There's plenty of good here — engaging and sweeping visuals, almost reverberating off of the television screen, along with crucial LGBT character representation — Cynthia Nixon portrays Paulson's love interest in the story, which reveals the tragic backstory of Ratched's character (a subplot that itself is a major stretch). But it's dragged down by Murphy's worst habits, including his ludicrous plot developments. His stylish setups may pull you in, but they're rarely worth the payoff. — Michael Mongera

Season One currently streaming on Netflix
// Created by: Evan Romansky // Starring:
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Emily In Paris Gets Lost In Translation

New Netflix show shakily walks the cobblestone streets of France



Set in the postcard-perfect Paris of a Francophile, Netflix's newest original show *Emily in Paris* feeds viewers cliché after cliché. Chocolate croissants? Check. Jaunty berets? Of course. Eiffel Tower money shot? Obviously. It's a story like many others. Enthusiastic Emily Cooper (Lily Collins) takes a job in France to act as the "American point of view" for a French luxury agency that has agreed to update marketing strategies. Through witty hashtags and cutesy social media campaigns, Cooper stumbles her way through trying to help her *Devil Wears Prada*-esque no-nonsense boss (Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu) and sassy coworkers (Samuel Arnold, Bruno Gouery).

Despite being a seemingly one-dimensional character, Cooper's supposed charisma and endearing foreignness

help her make friends through serendipitous meetings on park benches, at cafes, and while shopping for flowers. As new friends Mindy Chen (Ashley Park) and Camille (Camille Razat) along with flirty Frenchman Gabriel (Lucas Bravo) help Cooper navigate Paris, it seems that this 20-something chose to forgo any prior research about where she was living for the next year before jetting out of Chicago. In fact, one of Cooper's biggest character traits throughout the series is knowing zero française and often finding herself in awkward situations because of her cluelessness (which would be ignorance, if Cooper hadn't been painfully painted as adorable and earnest).

Often compared to *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl*, *Emily in Paris* lacks the depth and complex characters that

Lily Collins plays the role of adorably naïve transplant Emily Cooper in the lighthearted Netflix series *Emily in Paris*.

drive such long-lasting series. Yet, much like New York, Paris acts as a beautiful backdrop for Cooper to explore while fashionably overdressed, even for an American in Paris.

And while the social media angle is a relatable one, it only creates surface level commentary on new-age technology among young people. Outside of her job as a social media strategist, Cooper documents her life to her growing Instagram account, @EmilyinParis, which captures her whirlwind of a life in France, where even stepping in dog poop becomes a post-able moment.

Despite bringing complexity to characters in past projects (*To the Bone*, *Love Rosie*), Collins performance as a flitty, workaholic millennial is nothing impressive. The real stars of the show are Cooper's trusty 5-inch heels that have yet to fail her on cobblestone streets. Marketed as a "drama-comedy," *Emily in Paris* falls flat as jokes are elementary and drama is resolved within 30-40 minutes. The show is light and moves quickly, streaming at under five hours in total. True escapism for the Parisian lovers and dreamers. — Hannah Wyman

Season One currently streaming on Netflix
// Created by: Darren Star // Starring: Lily Collins, Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu, Ashley Park, Lucas Bravo, Samuel Arnold, Bruno Gouery, Camille Razat // 10 episodes

The Boys is the Best Rowdy Action On TV

Nazis, capitalism, and other mind-blowing villains fuel fandom in second season

Maybe you're experiencing superhero fatigue or maybe you aren't. We haven't had a Marvel movie in over a year, after all, so who knows? Virtually every streaming network has their own ensemble show, like *The Umbrella Academy*, *Watchmen*, or even *Doom Patrol*. While it's far from perfect, *The Boys* does its job better than the rest. A cynical take on what a superhero team — known as The Seven (a parallel to DC's The Justice League) — would be like in the real world, the series is based on the 72-issue comic book series by writer Garth Ennis and artist Darick Robertson. The source material often relied heavily on shock value and playing to the most extreme scenarios conceivable. While there are plenty of things shocking in this series, that's just one facet of why this show is so enjoyable. Sure, the characters have tongue-in-cheek/stupid names, like Homelander, Mother's Milk, and Black Noir, but some of these characters are truly captivating. [Spoiler Alerts ahead] This season grapples with The Seven's newest member, Stormfront (get it ... because of the racist message boards) as the team finds itself down a few members. Hughie (Jack Quaid) tries to make things up to Starlight (Erin Moriarty), Butcher (Karl Urban) comes to grips with season one's cliffhanger, and Vought (the all-powerful company funding the team) goes public about Compound V

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(the mysterious serum creating all these powers), and blurs the lines of public and private industry. Is Season Two better than Season One? No. It does build on everything you loved in that first adventure though, showing no signs of slowing down no matter how ludicrous the plot becomes. Comic readers will notice significant departures from Ennis' plotlines, thanks to showrunner Eric Kripke (*Supernatural*), and the changes seem all for the better. Overall, it's a fast-paced and exciting show that's easy to rewatch if you're so inclined. Though it's not for

The Boys thwarts superhero fatigue with its cheeky cynicism and more honest account of how superpowered humans would function in the real world, even as their circumstances grow increasingly ridiculous.

everyone, *The Boys* is some of the most fun TV out there today. — Nick Warren
Season Two currently streaming on Amazon Prime // Developed by: Eric Kripke // Starring: Karl Urban, Jack Quaid, Antony Starr, Erin Moriarty, Dominique McElligott, Jessie T. Usher, Laz Alonso, Chace Crawford, Tomer Kapon, Karen Fukuhara, Nathan Mitchell, Colby Minifie, Aya Cash // Eight episodes

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PODCASTS

Our Monthly Podcast Picks

Enthralling audio infotainment we can't stop listening to

Oh, Hello: the P'dcast

With: John Mulaney, Nick Kroll
Comedy, Satire, True Crime

Your favorite Tony-award watchers and boisterous New Yorkers return from their comedy show *Oh Hello, On Broadway* to bring you *Oh, Hello, the P'dcast*.

George St. Geegland and Gil Faizon, the geriatric-gone-wild alter-egos of John Mulaney and Nick Kroll, run what seems to be a celebrity-driven charity drive without the audience knowing. With guests Pete Davidson, John Oliver, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and others, the podcast asks listeners to donate to Off Their Plate, a very real organization that provides meals to emergency health care workers during the pandemic.

The pair start with their pitch of deep-diving into the death of Princess Diana, carried on through the show they refer to as "Die-Town," a play on Brian Reed's "S-Town."

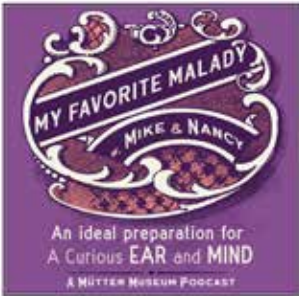
Running off-track, listeners get a glimpse into the moderately chaotic minds of St. Geegland and Faizon, who talk about their time in New York, from past lovers to the struggles of quarantine. The niche comedy brings irreverent humor to the forefront, examining pop-culture topics such as modern politics, musicals, Uber drivers, and the loss of diet root beer on draft. All in all, this podcast proves to be a much-needed and hilarious diversion from the stressful times of the pandemic and election cycle. —Chloe Forbes



My Favorite Malady: A Mütter Museum Podcast

Hosted by: Mike VanHelder & Nancy Hill
Medical History, Medical Mystery

If you've ever wondered about the weird and wonderful world of the evolution of medicine, look no further than the Mütter Museum at The College of Physicians of Philadelphia. In a "cabinet museum" setting, their collection boasts items such as Einstein's brain, Dr. Joseph Hyrtl's human skull collection, and a specimen from John Wilkes Booth's vertebra. The morbidly curious will be intrigued by the Mütter Museum's new podcast, *My Favorite Malady*, hosted by self-identified "science goths" Mike VanHelder and Nancy Hill, members of the Mütter Museum's staff. Although still in its infancy (at the time of this writing, it just released its third episode), this podcast holds great promise, as there is no shortage of medical maladies and mysteries peppering modern history. With subjects in the first episodes ranging from Blackwater Fever to the No-Nose Clubs of 18th century London to Trench Mouth, from Puerperal Fever and Giant Hogweed Phototoxicity, *My Favorite Malady* has a lot to offer those curious about the mysteries of medical history. VanHelder and Hill (with the occasional guest) take this morbidly interesting history of mysterious illnesses and medical events and create wonderfully told tales that leave listeners eager for more. —Ally Kutz




Secretly Incredibly Fascinating

Hosted by: Alex Schmidt
Science, History, Comedy

If you were a fan of *The Cracked Podcast*, put this in your feed immediately. Last year, *Cracked* was acquired by Literally Media. In June, they dismissed writer Alex Schmidt and with him, *The Cracked Podcast*, arguably the single most lovable offering the site ever produced. Beginning in 2013, it showcased little-known historical events, pop culture headcanon, and underreported news. They eventually adopted the repeated slogan "Why being alive is more interesting than people think it is." Alex Schmidt took over for the show's original host, Daniel O'Brien, in 2017 ... after the company was purchased by the E. W. Scripps Company. *Secretly Incredibly Fascinating* is, for all intents and purposes, the next evolution of *The Cracked Podcast*. Forgoing its precursor's penchant for the kinds of clickbaity titles that made the site such a commodity, SIF employs minimalist titling. Currently a dozen weeks in, Schmidt is joined by familiar voices, such as Jason Pargin, Soren Bowie, Adam Todd Brown, and even O'Brien. Also, they use the same tagline, and another theme courtesy of The Budos Band. Also, also if you're looking for more of an apéritif from Schmidt, check out his surprisingly beautiful miniseries *1 Way To Make An Emoji*. —Nick Warren







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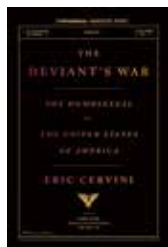
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The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States

Eric Cervini leads readers into trenches of ongoing fight for gay rights



The *Deviant's War* is a nonfiction book that takes an in-depth look at homosexual politics before the gay rights movement. Harvard grad and LGBT historian Eric

Cervini maps out the life story of Frank Kameny, a former WWII vet who fights against a discriminatory system that has stripped him of his government title as an astronomer. Now known as one of the leading figures of the gay rights movement, Kameny brought the first civil rights case based on sexual orientation before the Supreme Court, later fighting to have homosexuality removed from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Cervini's extensive research is supported by declassified government documents and thousands of personal documents and accounts.

Cervini educates the reader on key political figures that supported or hindered the gay rights movements, ranging from former President J. Edgar Hoover to Stonewall staple Marsha P. Johnson, while also sharing firsthand accounts of the closeted subculture of early LGBT organizations like the Mattachine Society. Kameny's life as a pillar for the gay rights movement ties all the information together.

Cervini has produced a jaw-dropping educational work that should be taught in any LGBT history course. The book portrays the life of gay Americans as a fight to survive, and eventually leads into the burgeoning gay rights movement of the '70s. Any curious queer person should look to this text for the true story of the gay individuals and historical events that led us to our modern visibility.

— Michael Mongera

Farrar, Straus and Giroux // 512 pages // Historical Nonfiction

The Sun Down Motel

When it comes to suspense, Simone St. James' new novel is booked solid



In 1982, Viv Delaney wants to be anywhere but home, so she hits the road with dreams of New York City. She falls short, ending up in Fell, a small town in Upstate New York. Viv

takes a job as a night clerk at The Sun Down Motel to pay for her move to NYC, but the town's past keeps her tethered to the motel, searching for answers. But then Viv disappears without a trace, leaving behind more questions.

In 2017, Carly Kirk, having always been obsessed with the mystery of her aunt Viv, who disappeared before Carly was born, moves to Fell to find out what really happened in 1982. Following in her aunt's footsteps and taking a job as the night clerk at The Sun Down Motel, Carly quickly realizes that not much has changed since that fateful night her aunt disappeared all those years ago. Caught up in the mystery of the town and its motel, Carly finds she is more like Viv than she may have known – and danger is lurking right around the corner.

With incredible attention to detail and

characters that come to life before your eyes, Simone St. James' writing evokes such strong emotions that it is difficult to put this book down. Much like a suspenseful horror movie, many moments are spent wanting to hide behind fingers, peeking out to see what happens next. *The Sun Down Motel's* mysterious details and creepy occurrences will send chills down any reader's spine, feeling like there is someone just over their shoulder, watching their every move. Each character holds so much personality that it is difficult not to begin rooting for them after getting to know them. Viv Delaney has the perfect Winona Ryder-esque 1980s vibes that make it all the better to envision her nights at the motel and her days spent looking for answers. Carly is what many bookworm, true-crime-obsessed 20-somethings want to be: someone using their knowledge and research skills to solve mysteries from the past. Reader be warned, though: once the sun goes down at The Sun Down Motel, there's no telling what you might encounter. — Ally Kutz

Penguin Random House // 336 pages // Mystery, Suspense, Thriller, Horror Fiction

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RSD Still Spinning Safely

Locations like Graham's Records find a new way to celebrate Record Store Day



Graham's Record Store, located at 613 W. 26th St. in Erie, originally got its start in Edinboro in 1985. It continues to aspire to be a "one-stop shop" for physical media in the form of vinyl, cassettes, and CDs.

along with the already planned Black Friday Record Store Day on November 27th.

Record Store Day is as important to the buyer as it is the store owner. These limited releases will draw some of the most die-hard vinyl lovers out of the woodwork, along with attracting those new to collecting. Traffic influxes at niche stores help keep these businesses running. The hope is that people come for the limited releases and end up spending more time and money on some of the store's other offerings. Michael Graham, from Graham's Records, said that his store wouldn't be doing as well as it is if it wasn't for Record Store Day. "The existence of RSD has raised the public perception to expand and grow with the ability to generate inter-

est in the media," said Graham. Graham's Records, at 613 W. 26th St., is Erie's only locally owned independent record store that hosts Record Store Day. Graham's was founded in 1985 by Michael's brother Steven and their mother, Margaret. Graham's Records was originally located in Edinboro before moving to its current location in the heart of Erie. Graham's is a one-stop shop for music in the form of physical media. They have a wide selection of records, CDs, cassettes, and even a few DVDs — however, vinyl records remain their specialty. If you can't find that rare album you are looking for, Michael will check his extensive warehouse; if you are looking to experience a newer release differently, he can special order it for you. The appeal of listening to records goes beyond your parents waxing nostalgic while listening to AM favorites from their youth — many modern artists are re-releasing their music on vinyl as well. One of the most anticipated releases this Re-

By: Larry Wheaton

Record Store Day is the most anticipated day for vinyl lovers and independent record stores across the country. It's a day when musicians distribute vinyl records in the form of collector's items, numbered pressings, and first releases which are sold at independent record stores throughout America and Europe. Traditionally RSD (as it's called

amongst vinyl enthusiasts) occurs on the third Saturday in April, however, much like everything else in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the 22nd Annual Record Store Day to be postponed. In the hope to limit the crowd sizes at independent record stores the organizers decided to split the release into three separate days, with one day in August (Aug. 29), a day in September (Sept. 26), and one in October (Oct. 24),

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NICK WARREN

Record Store Day was Billie Eilish's *Live at Third Man Records, featuring Eilish and her brother FINNEAS in a live acoustic performance. The performance was recorded direct-to-acetate at the Nashville studio owned by musician and vinyl preservationist Jack White last November. It was pressed on opaque blue vinyl and includes a limited edition poster. There were only 17,000 made worldwide and even though Graham's had several copies in store on Aug. 29, they quickly disappeared. Graham states that "thanks to Record Store Day and their online presence, the younger audience

other. Additionally, instead of opening the doors and letting shoppers loose in the store to grab the releases they want, which are usually placed around the shop like a vinyl Easter egg hunt, customers are required to wait in line while an employee asked them what they were looking for, making it a first-come, first-serve scenario.

In years past, you could grab as many releases as you could hold. However, with social distancing in place and in fairness to everyone waiting in line, there was a purchase limit on the special releases in 2020. If you wanted more of

The appeal of listening to records goes beyond your parents waxing nostalgic while listening to AM favorites from their youth — many modern artists are releasing their music on vinyl as well. Graham states that "thanks to Record Store Day and their online presence, the younger audience is getting into record collecting."

is getting into record collecting." Record Store Day offers other releases throughout the year, making many available exclusively at independent record stores. It's all part of the goal to draw people into the locally owned stores and help build the fanbase that will continue to visit these shops.

With the restrictions in place due to COVID-19, the setup and feel were different compared to previous years. Vinyl shoppers traditionally line up as early as six in the morning, talking about their collections and what they hope to grab on Record Store Day; now customers must remain six feet from each

the limited records, you had to go back to the end of the line and hope that the release you wanted was still there. Graham said "customers were overwhelmingly positive towards the restrictions and guidelines that were set in place" and added "most seemed relieved that there were precautions taken."

Graham's Records will open at 9 a.m. for its next Record Store Day event on Oct. 24. However, remember that the line starts early, usually around 6 a.m., and sleep-deprived vinyl enthusiasts geared up with excitement will be there waiting with coffee in hand. So show up early, build your collection, and most importantly stay safe.

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MOVIE REVIEWS

The One That Got Away: *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* is a Near Perfect Depiction of Regret

★★★★★

Charlie Kaufman has proved to be a master at depicting both the absurdity and the sheer existential horror of life. As a screenwriter, he had a true talent for taking outlandish ideas and making them achingly relatable, and as a director, he has taken all the longing, confusion, and fear of existence and turned them into complex yet entertaining stories. His newest film *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* may be his most impenetrable and unsettling yet. He has taken a story that is part family drama, part surrealist horror, and part Broadway musical and has made it all uniquely his own.

The plot follows a young man named Jake (Jesse Plemons) who is taking his girlfriend (Jessie Buckley) out to the country to meet his parents in the middle of a raging snowstorm. During the trip, the young woman begins to have doubts about continuing their relationship which becomes stronger as reality begins to slowly unravel around them.

It's difficult to describe the plot of this film without spoiling the entire thing, but I will say that nothing in the film should be taken completely literally. What starts as a simple story slowly falls deeper and deeper into abstraction to the point where the actual plot is swept away in favor of pure psychological and emotional exploration. In fact, with the possible exception of David Lynch, no filmmaker has used surrealism in mainstream cinema as effectively as Kaufman. In this film he uses it to explore the pain, regret, and disappointment of a life unlived until it all comes crashing down in a beautiful but devastating final sequence. It might just be the most horrifying movie-going experience of the year. — Forest Taylor

Written and directed by: Charlie Kaufman // Based on the book by Iain Reid // Starring: Jessie Buckley, Jesse Plemons, Toni Collette, David Thewlis, Guy Boyd, Colby Minifie, Hadley Robinson, Gus Birney, Abby Quinn, and the voice of Oliver Platt // 135 minutes // Rated R // Currently streaming on Netflix



MARY CYBULSKI / NETFLIX

An American Tale: *First Cow* is an Amazing Film that Flew Under the Radar

★★★★★

Film fans may come to remember 2020 as "the year without movies" as theaters locked their doors through most of the year and many films found their release date either moved back or cut short. Many of them found a home on VOD, but others were held in limbo for months on end. One of those films was Kelly Reichardt's *First Cow*, easily one of the best films of the year. Reichardt proves once again that she is the best chronicler of close, intimate friendships set against the wild, untamed beauty of the American Northwest.

The story centers around Cookie (John Magaro), a cook traveling with a group of fur trappers through Oregon Territory in the 1820s. On the trail, Cookie strikes up a friendship with King-Lu (Orion Lee), a Chinese immigrant searching for his fortune and the two go into business together, making and selling fried dough balls to fellow travelers. However, their business relies on the milk of a wealthy landowner's prized cow, a fact that could endanger their lives if the owner found out.

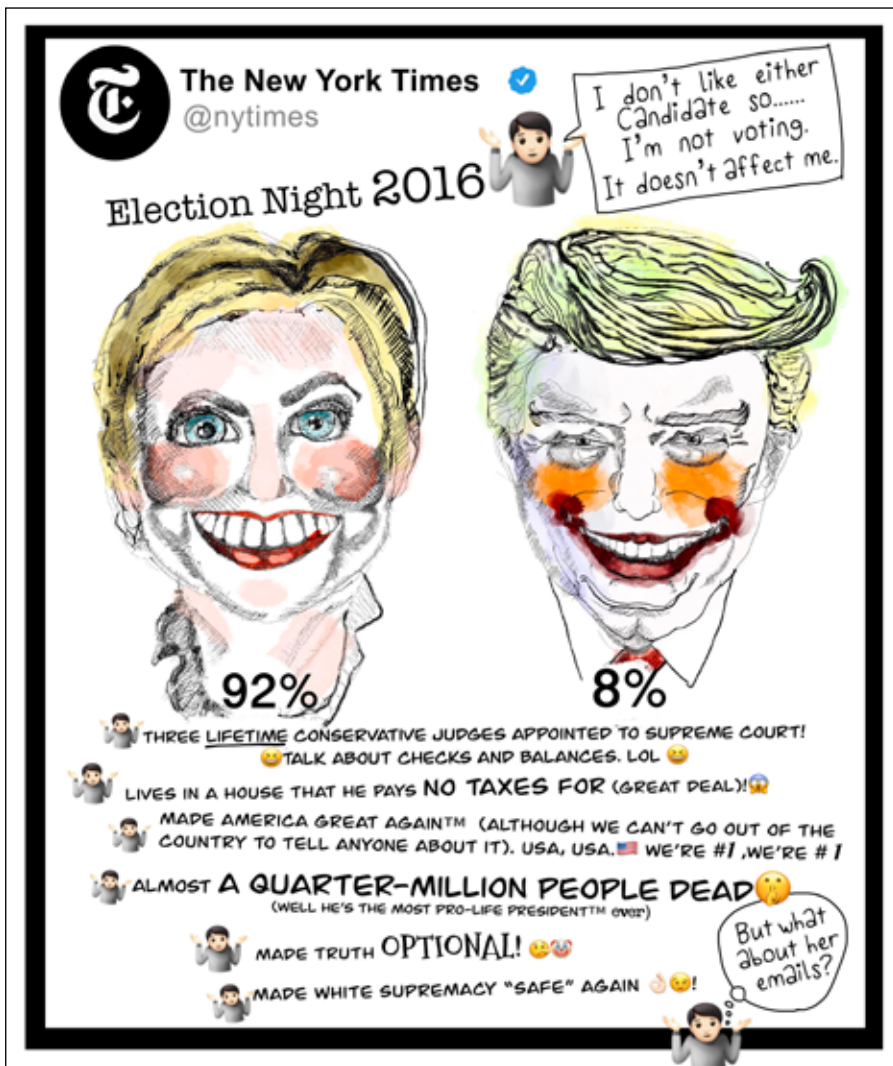
Ostensibly a Western, the film goes beyond the tired clichés of the genre and instead, much like Robert Altman's *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, presents the untamed West as a place ripe for capitalistic exploitation. However, it is also a place of untapped opportunity as these two men find a path to success that a more "civilized" world might have denied them.

Like her earlier films like *Old Joy* and *Certain Women*, this is also a tale of a close, platonic friendship. Magaro and Lee give us two people who need each other to survive in the harsh world. And that is a tale that is worthy of an American myth. — Forest Taylor

Directed by: Kelly Reichardt // Written by: Kelly Reichardt and Jonathan Raymond // Based on the novel "The Half-Life" by Jonathon Raymond // Starring: John Magaro, Orion Lee, Rene Auberjonois, Toby Jones, Ewen Bremner, Scott Shepherd, Gary Farmer, Lily Gladstone, Alia Shawkat, Dylan Smith, Stephen Malkmus, and Eve the Cow // 122 minutes // Rated PG-13 // Available to rent on VOD



A24



ALBUM REVIEWS

This American Song
People of the Stars
Self-released
★★★★★

Quite simply, this is one of the best albums to come out of the Erie area in the last five years. This American



Song has long subsisted as an underrated spoke of the local music scene — always deserving more recognition than they get, while never outwardly desiring to do anything besides make their own brand of wonderful music. The perfect sonic stew for aging Gen Y hipsters, they're an alt-rock band with a horn section. Diving in deeper, they're somewhere along the continuum between The Hold Steady and Jeff Rosenstock, filled with throwback full-band bombasts and enough personality quirks to keep a therapist's head spinning. In particular, *People of the Stars* is an achievement as an album. It starts off with the one-two punch of "Young Don't Die" and "Golden Circles," two tracks brimming with hooks. Most of these tracks will be familiar to TAS fans, with some like "Harvest Moon" re-recorded, and live staples like "Easy Way Out" and "Find Your Own Way" getting their time in the sun. Like any good album, it ends in a Pink Floyd-esque spacewalk, with its titular track sandwiched between the radio static of the penultimate Orson Welles sound clip and the opening track. — Nick Warren

Dorian Electra
My Agenda
Self-released
★★★★★

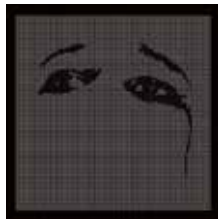
A caustic flurry of non-stop excitement, Dorian Electra's sophomore album is a captivating rollercoaster.



Saddled with nearly useless genre markers like "Bubblegum Bass," "Hyperpop," and "Deconstructed Club," the quest to categorize Electra is a fool's errand, and that's part of the point. While their debut album *Flamboyant* was more rooted in the electro attitudes of the magnificent Charli XCX, *My Agenda* quickly moves towards the more chaotic successes of 100 Geecs. The results are exuberant and entrancing, if not polarizing. This type of album creeping into the mainstream will likely cause confusion to some. It's a lowbrow tour de force, filled with weird humor and moments both tongue-in-cheek and weirdly forthright, often at the same time, like "Sorry Bro (I Love You)" and "Give Great Thanks." For another example, one of the album's singles is titled "Edgelord" and features Rebecca Black (of "Friday" fame). It's meta, winking, and a highly repeatable 25 minutes of life. *My Agenda* is frenetic at times, with its synth-heavy distortions also blotted with intense moments of repose. The 28-year-old trans and gender-fluid artist has risen beyond their station to make something that's undeniably whatever it needs to be. — Nick Warren

Deftones
Ohms
Reprise Records
★★★★★

Deftones operate in their own time and space, and by all means, they've earned that right.



Throughout a career that's lasted over 25 years, the band survived nu-metal, revolutionized alternative metal by incorporating trip-hop and goth-rock influences, and nine albums later, they have yet to release a dud. The confidence they have in their identity combined with their willingness to experiment has led them to be called "the Radiohead of metal," and considering their latest album manages to be their best in a decade, it's not hard to understand why While 2016's *Gore* polarized listeners with a complex assortment of influences and a muddy mix, *Ohms* plays like a greatest hits release composed of entirely new songs; it's a victory lap. Toss in the fact that legendary producer Terry Date reunited with the band for the first time since 2003, and it's easy to hear why some songs ("Urantia," "Error") hearken back to the band's *Around the Fur* days as others do their most experimental phases ("Genesis," "The Spell of Mathematics"). It may be years from now, but the album's triumphant title track points to the band returning yet again someday with another genre-defying masterpiece. — Aaron Mook

Sufjan Stevens
The Ascension
Asthmatic Kitten Records
★★★★★

The career path of Sufjan Stevens often feels reactionary; after releasing three consecutive albums as an indie



darling in the early 2000s, his orchestral arrangements gave way to a polarizing electronic opus in 2010, *The Age of Adz* (preceding Bon Iver's spiritual successor, 2016's *A Million*, by six years). Then, in 2015, came *Carrie & Lowell*, a stripped-down collection of his most personal songwriting yet. And now, yet another five years later, he's returned with *The Ascension*, a project that attempts to marry the hushed musings of its predecessor with the chaotic arrangements of *Adz*. Surprisingly, if *The Ascension* is anything, it's cohesive, almost to a fault. Newcomers may struggle to separate the monotonous tone of this 80-minute collection, but the dedicated will be rewarded upon repeat listens. Among the occasionally chaotic background noise is some of Steven's most interesting songwriting yet, from his attempts at The Postal Service-esque pop ("Video Game," "Sugar"), to haunting mantras ("Die Happy"), and the angriest, most compelling closing track he's ever written ("America"). *The Ascension* is unlikely to convert new fans, but for indie-heads up to the challenge, it may reveal itself to be one of the year's best. — Aaron Mook

TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



CROSSWORD

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53					54	55					56	57	58	59
60					61						62			
63					64						65			

- Across**
1. Loopy little films?
5. "I'm ready to be dazzled by your presentation"
10. Sammy with 609 homers
14. Big part of a Risk board
15. Like wealthy landowners
16. Universal donor's type, briefly
17. Go a few rounds with a co-creator of "The View"?
19. Great ____
20. Blonde or brown brews
21. Swing by unannounced
22. Figurine of comedian Patton made out of pasta?
28. Half of a 1960s folk-rock group
29. Areas of expertise
30. Cy Young Award winner Hershiser
31. C.S. Lewis' fantasy world
34. Group that came of age ballroom dancing?
40. Brainstorm
41. "Me neither"
42. Country south of Martinique
46. Invites to one's home
47. Statement revealing unwanted pressure stems from NBA legend Bill?

51. Nestlé bars filled with tiny bubbles
52. Canal to the Red Sea
53. Blockhead
54. Streaming service that launched in 2019 ... and this puzzle's theme
60. On the briny
61. Stonehenge figure
62. Move like molasses
63. SpongeBob's pet snail
64. Prom attendees
65. Exec, slangily

- Down**
1. Chatterbox's "gift"
2. Prefix with metric
3. Repair
4. Glimpsed
5. 2008 Pixar film that takes place in 2805
6. Largish jazz combo
7. Take forcibly (from)
8. Large body of eau
9. Some mag. workers
10. "Us, too!"
11. Commensurate (with)
12. Suffering from Alzheimer's
13. Customer service workers
18. They follow oohs
21. "Oh, hogwash!"
22. Air Quality Index factor
23. Whittle (down)
24. "Truer words were never spoken!"

25. Powerful wind
26. "Failure ____ an option"
27. Express viewpoints
31. First name in 1970s gymnastics
32. Tormented
33. Narrow coastal inlet
35. Anne and Condoleezza
36. Extremely uptight
37. 2000s TV show that begins with the crash of Oceanic Flight 815
38. Smallish jazz combo
39. "A People's History of the United States" writer Howard
42. "____ 17" (1953 film)
43. Where Springsteen was born, in song
44. "My Fair Lady" lyricist
45. "If you say so"
46. Vague, as a memory
48. Just one Time?
49. Longtime hair lighter brand
50. They get more annoying as they grow up
54. Toxin mentioned in Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi"
55. Livid state
56. Not neg.
57. Teammate of Babe
58. Rapper Lil ____ Vert
59. Complete collection



Answers to last puzzle

M	A	Z	D	A		R	E	A	D		S	A	J	A	K
A	S	I	A	N		I	N	G	E		P	I	A	N	O
T	H	A	N	K		G	O	D	I	T	S	F	R	I	D
			K	A	I		O	R	E	O		E	L	A	L
S	U	P	E	R	B	O	W	L	S	U	N		S	L	A
O	N	E		A	B	M			T	R	I	S	T	E	
W	I	N	E		O	N	A	T			T	A	R		
	T	U	R	D	N	I	G	H	T	F	E	V	E	R	
		L	A	R			E	C	U	A		E	T	A	S
	O	T	T	A	W	A			B	L	T		C	G	I
A	M	I		T	H	R	O	W	B	A	C	K	H	U	R
D	A	M	E		E	E	R	O		L	E	A			
I	H	A	V	E	N	T	G	O	T	A	L	L	D	A	Y
E	A	T	E	N		H	A	D	I		L	E	I	C	A
U	S	E	R	S		A	N	Y	A		S	L	E	E	P



SPEAKING GRIEF



VIRTUAL SCREENING & DISCUSSION
Wednesday, November 11 from 11am to 1pm

- Zoom training by The Caring Place staff
- Will offer CEUs via Mercyhurst University

Register at WQLN.org/SpeakingGrief

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