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# Erie's Can't Miss Dishes 2026

*Local menu items we can't stop thinking about*

## Erie's Sourdough Culture

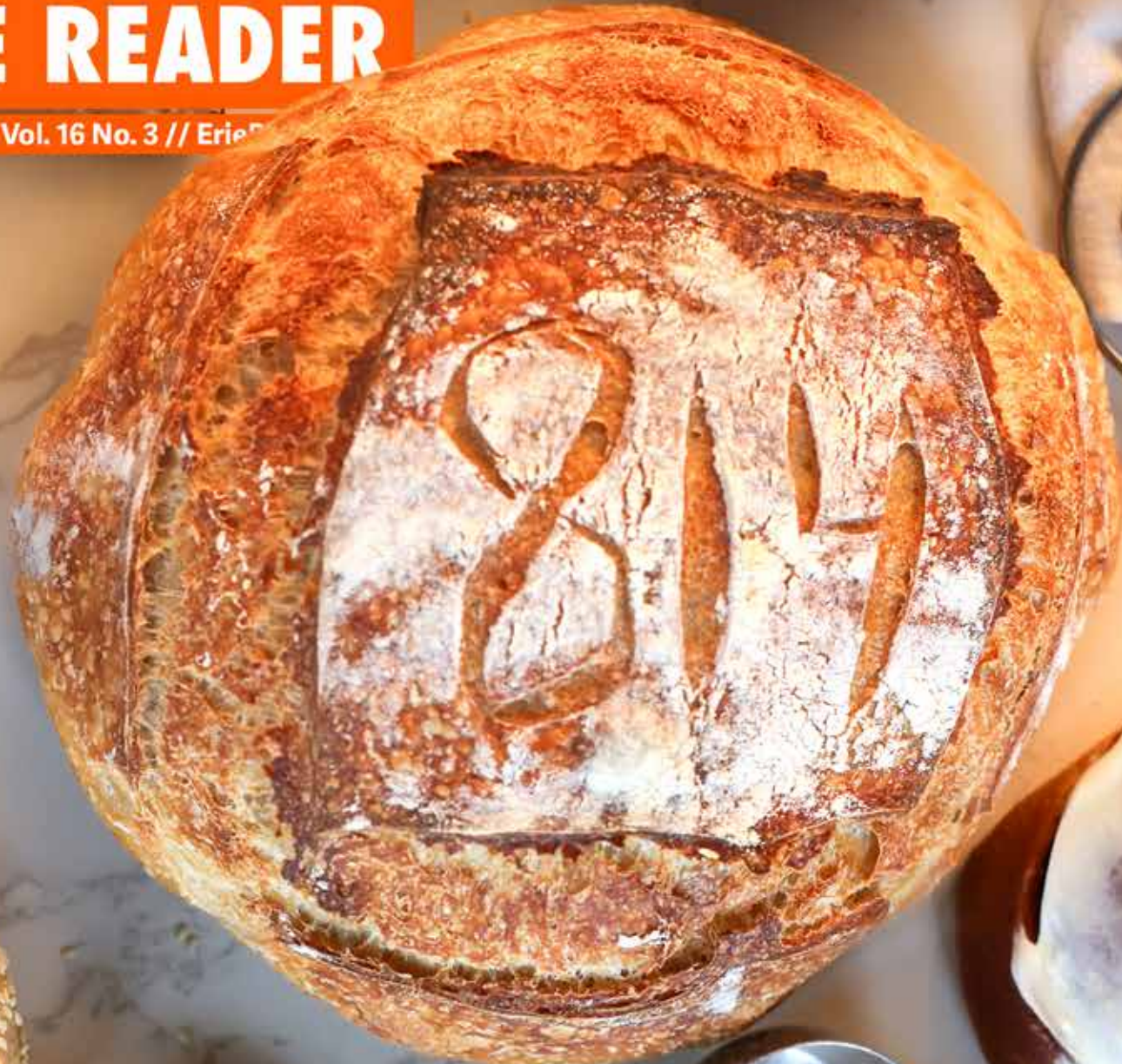
*The stories behind the starters from local bakers*

## Rural Food Access Solutions

*Combating food deserts throughout the county*

**ERIE READER**

March 2026 // Vol. 16 No. 3 // Erie



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- Women's History Month
- Wilds Sonshine Factory
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## From the Editors: March 2026

Are we healthy again yet?

There's been a lot of talk about our food systems in America lately. We've recently drawn up a new food (upside down) pyramid (because we paid such close attention to the old one, right?) that directly benefits the beef and dairy industries – you know, the top agricultural greenhouse gas contributors? So healthy!

And I know when I want nutritional advice, the first people who come to my mind are Mike Tyson and Kid Rock, of course. Fat shaming, flipping America off, drinking whole milk in jeans in a hot tub? These are all the most effective routes toward overall public health and wellness, and definitely the best use of our tax dollars, right?

A quote I think of a lot these days, which is most often attributed to Mark Twain, but is likely paraphrased: "It is easier to fool a man than to convince him he has been fooled."

My apologies to the MAHA crowd – but you've been had.

You were promised deep corporate regulation by an administration that is so transparently anti-regulation, it's surprising you didn't see that disappointment coming.

America is, at this moment, on track to become the *least* healthy we've ever been. Not only has the administration backed off its industry-wide ban on artificial dyes in our food supply, they've also doubled down on the use of probable carcinogens, poisoning our farmland and waterways. They've gutted programs that put fresh, unprocessed foods into the mouths of hungry children. They've canceled millions of dollars of cancer research program funding. Political appointees have taken the place of federal research staff at the National Institutes of Health. We have a wellness influencer who sells unregulated, costly supplements up for the job of surgeon general. We have a television doctor, telling us to pay no attention to the man behind the curtain – you misinterpreted his mixed messages on vaccines. He didn't actually mean that. He's sorry for all the measles.

Look. There is no denying that our food and healthcare systems in America are, in fact, broken. We rely on cheap, convenient, processed food – the priority in this country is and always has been fueling the corporate

DAVID



What will it take to make America healthy? Removing artificial dyes from food? Making less processed food easier to get and cheaper to purchase? Removing carcinogens from our farmlands? What it will actually take is deep governmental regulation of corporations – something this administration is transparently against.

capitalist machine over our public health. We are not doing what's best for our bodies. On this we can nearly all agree. But thinking, for even one second, that what is happening in Washington is, in any way, going to make us healthier, is a delusion.

Admitting you were wrong is the first step.

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There is no denying that our food and healthcare systems in America are, in fact, broken. ... But thinking, for even one second, that what is happening in Washington is, in any way, going to make us healthier, is a delusion.

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The second step is voting in ways that *actually* help our planet, our food systems, and our public health. Public health goes WAY beyond removing the food dye from some Skittles. Public health means clean air and water (while the Trump administration guts the EPA), public health means affordable healthcare coverage for everyone (while Congress strips it away or makes it completely unaffordable for millions of Americans), public health means providing all chil-

dren with healthy, fresh foods (as the Trump administration cuts supplemental nutrition assistance funding).

This issue of the Erie Reader is all about food, as you may have noticed. Part of it is encouraging people to take some amount of their food consumption into their own hands (in the case of sourdough and its myriad of applications in the kitchen), part of it is about supporting local restaurants and the folks working hard to make delicious, nutritious meals for us.

But being healthy isn't just about food. That is one piece of a complex puzzle. The other major players include widespread environmental health, well-functioning health care systems, supporting local farmers and the land in which they grow our food, providing housing security (how does one cook healthy food for themselves and their families without a safe, consistent place in which to do so?), dependable substance abuse and mental health services, research funding, participating in global health initiatives (we're all in this together) – so many parts of a public health ecosystem that are all being undermined by the administration that RFK Jr. supporters pulled the trigger for.

You were given a high-priced placebo instead of that snake oil supplement and your decision absolutely helped to get us to where we are now.

Own it, speak out, and vote against it.

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# Say What? Women's Voices Have Power to Wow

Two inspiring stories for Women's History Month

By: Liz Allen

“Wow!” That was my response after I happened upon two inspiring stories featuring strong women on the same day, just in time for Women's History Month.

On the morning of Feb. 24, I interviewed Jayne Simon about her success as a novelist, in retirement. The author of three books, she has a fourth that will be published in May. That evening, I attended WOW – “Women of Word” – at Gannon University's Schuster Theatre. Thasia Anne Lunger has created and hosted WOW for 14 seasons, collaborating in writing the narrative with Cathi GG Mitchell who, like Thasia, is both a poet and a social worker.

Interviewing Jayne and attending WOW reinforced my belief that now, more than ever, we need to hear and heed women's voices.

But sadly, the day before I sat down with Jayne and later joined a standing ovation at WOW, Erie lost a cherished storyteller, Bettye Walker Chapman, who died on Feb. 23 at age 81.

I am heartbroken that Bettye died before we had another chance to hear her again embody abolitionist and activist Sojourner Truth delivering her famous speech, “Ain't I A Woman,” which she gave at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio.

Yet it's a fitting tribute that Bettye's obituary and her funeral service focused on the joy that she spread throughout Erie and highlighted her boundless capacity to love, despite growing up in the Jim Crow era in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and discovering racist graffiti scrawled at her former Erie business, So'Journey's Truth.

Bettye and I shared good times and great conversations for many years. We talked about the grief of being widowed and we mourned the loss of adult children – my son, two of her daughters. We figured out how to go on living after loss and how to love again in new marriages.

In a February 2009 column for the Erie Times-News, I wrote that Bettye “showed me a multihued quilt, ‘Healing Hurts,’ with 12 squares that trace her journey of sorrow, hope, faith, love, peace and joy. The quilt has an ea-

gle, dancing women, African queens, butterflies and a high-heeled, checkered shoe.”

Bettye rocked those heels. At 6'1", she had the regal stature to carry off her living history portrayal of Sojourner Truth, a performance she presented to school children, social service agencies, church congregations – and in the finished basement of the home she shared with her second husband, Bert, where we celebrated Black History Month with soul food and a congenial collection of her family and friends.

Shortly after I wrote that column in 2009, Bettye persuaded me to join 11 other women to portray historical figures in a program called “Strong Women and Sweet Tea,” at the Watson-Curtze Mansion (now the Hagen History Center). Bettye, of course, played Sojourner; other women portrayed Harriet Tubman, Lena Horne, Lorraine Hansberry, Rosa Parks, and Maya Angelou, among other notables.

I timidly decided to give a voice to my maternal grandmother, Rosa Capoduri Tremori, an Italian immigrant living in a coal-mining town in Clearfield County. After Rosa died at age 25, my mother, an infant, was moved to St. Joseph's Home in Erie with her two older sisters.

I hinted at the end of my script that someday, I would research and write the whole story about Rosa and my Italian heritage. Other than some rough drafts of the first few chapters, I haven't made much progress.

That's probably one reason why I was delighted to meet Jayne, who has incorporated stories about Irish immigrants and the real-life experience of her mother and four aunts, raised in an orphanage in upstate New York, in her books.

Jayne, 77, has enjoyed many titles. She married her high school sweetheart, a lawyer who switched careers to become a Russian Orthodox priest. They've raised two daughters and one son and enjoy being grandparents. She worked as an administrator at various businesses and non-profits before retiring to become a writer. She's also a breast cancer survivor.

CONTRIBUTED



Thasia Anne Lunger, far right, joins other cast members from *Women of Word* for the finale of their program at Gannon University's Schuster Theatre on Feb. 24.

So far, I've only read her second novel, *The Music of My Heart*. Published in 2021, it made me cry happy tears thanks to a surprise ending. I also plan to read *Being Strong*, published in 2020, and *Dare to Dream*, which came out in 2023, and look forward to *Teddy's Gifts*, due out in May.

Jayne overcame what some might consider daunting odds to become a writer. Her father abandoned her family but Jayne's mother instilled a love of reading in all six of her children. “I stuttered terribly as a child,” she said, but her mother helped her to overcome that by having all the kids read aloud. She reassured Jayne that the reason she stuttered was “because your brain works faster than your mouth,” Jayne recalled.

Jayne somewhat regrets that there wasn't money for her to go to college but nevertheless, she got an education, courtesy of her boyfriend Steve, who shared his syllabus from Colgate University so that Jayne could read all of the English and Russian literature he was assigned in class.

She describes her writing process this way: “I get an idea about something and go with it. I don't really follow the ‘rules’ when it comes to writing. I don't make story outlines or character sketches. The story somehow develops and plays out in my head. It really is like watching a movie in my mind.”

She continued: “I chew on ideas for as long as it takes, and then I write

what I see. Although I don't have an ending in mind when I write, I know that the story will be resolved in an uplifting way. My protagonists are always strong women, who are supported by good men.”

Bettye might have said the same, because her obituary noted that “she believed deeply in building connections and creating spaces where everyone felt welcome.” Those spaces were always open to strong women and supportive men, no matter your race, your age or your upbringing.

In addition to being a grandmother and great-grandmother, Bettye was also a foster grandparent in the school district. Thasia would identify with that role. She's working on a writing program for this summer for youth aging out of the foster care system. To learn more about Thasia's workshops or WOW 2027, you can email her at [tannetaf@gmail.com](mailto:tannetaf@gmail.com).

As for additional writing advice, Jayne said it's important to “be authentic” and to compose something every day. She takes her cue from writer Jane McCarthy, who made it a habit to carry a notebook at all times.

Which reminded me that it was time to consult my own notebook and add one more tidbit about Jayne, whose nickname is MOM – that stands for Mother of Mayor, as in Daria Devlin.

*Liz Allen found inspiration for this story by rereading Sojourner Truth's “Ain't I A Woman.”*

## Food Access Solutions Taking Shape in Rural Pennsylvania

Smoothing out the uneven geography of hunger

By: Julia Carden

As his shift winds down, store manager John Belfiore pushes a wide broom across the tile floor of Cambridge Grocery. He can still name the grocers that once anchored the rural town of Cambridge Springs, including Vogel's Food Mart and Peterson's Golden Dawn.

Cambridge Grocery opened in September 2025 in the building that once housed Hendrickson's True Value Hardware. Its dark wood façade and outdoor display area still whisper hardware, while inside, bright white aisles cut through the open floor, stocked with canned goods, milk and eggs, and bins of fresh produce.

In Cambridge Springs, residents still remember Vogel's Food Mart – its child-sized grocery carts and hot coffee that made the store feel like part of the neighborhood. The store closed not long after a Dollar General opened down the street, a shift that reshaped how the town buys its groceries.

This shift in local food options is a trend beyond Cambridge Springs. There are 977 Dollar Generals across Pennsylvania, with 30 in Erie County alone. A study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found the likelihood that a rural grocery store will close after a dollar store opens nearby is three times higher than in urban communities.

For many rural communities in Northwestern Pennsylvania, access to fresh, affordable food is a daily challenge. Residents often travel miles to reach a retail grocery store, and the arrival of big-box and dollar stores has reshaped local food landscapes – sometimes closing the doors on long-standing neighborhood staples. While rural areas may have smaller populations, a larger share of residents face food insecurity. According to Feeding America, the 20 counties in Pennsylvania with the highest rates of food insecurity are predominantly rural.

Cambridge Grocery is the only locally owned food store in Cambridge Springs, a town of about 2,200 people. The nearest full-scale supermarket is Walmart Supercenter, located roughly 10 miles away. A Giant Eagle in Edinboro, which previously offered

free grocery delivery to Cambridge Springs, closed in 2022.

Residents with reliable transportation can access both big-box stores and locally owned options that offer nutritious, locally sourced products. According to Gregory Hall, Chief Executive Officer at the Second Harvest Food Bank of NWPA, distance remains the biggest barrier to food access in rural communities.

"Food deserts exist in both urban and rural communities, but they look different in rural areas. Food insecurity is often less visible there," Hall said. "One of the biggest problems is that families live miles from the nearest grocery store or food pantry. Transportation is a significant barrier – distance is the main issue."

Second Harvest serves 11 counties in northwest Pennsylvania, including Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, McKean, Venango, and Warren. These Rust Belt communities, Hall says, "have been hit hard," noting that 10 of the 11 counties are above the national poverty rate.

Hall says hunger affects far more than physical health. Food insecurity can also take a toll on mental health, increasing stress for families already facing financial challenges. Children are especially vulnerable. In Crawford County, for example, about 15 percent of the adult population experience food insecurity, compared to 20 percent of children.

"When a child goes to school not knowing where their next meal will come from, it's hard for them to focus," Hall said. "Hunger affects their ability to learn, grow, and succeed."

Hall says Second Harvest has seen rising food costs place additional strain on families and their ability to put food on the table. In rural areas, those increases can be especially challenging, as residents must also factor in the cost of fuel and transportation to reach grocery stores or food pantries.

To help bridge these gaps, Second Harvest offers several programs that bring food directly to residents. Their mobile markets and Produce Express program deliver truckloads of food to areas where traditional pantries are



The Second Harvest Marketplace located within the UPMC Health Plan Neighborhood Center on Parade Street had its grand opening in January – the market accepts SNAP and EBT and allows customers to schedule appointments to shop in a clean, modern space.

unavailable. Each Produce Express truck carries 25 to 50 pounds of nutritious food, enough to serve up to 200 families, completely free of charge. These initiatives provide vital access for residents who might not otherwise be able to reach a grocery store or pantry.

When Cambridge Grocery first opened, some residents raised concerns about prices compared to retailers like Dollar General or Walmart. But in the months since the store opened in September, customers say prices have fluctuated and become more affordable. The store manager noted that produce moves quickly, and the owners welcome customer suggestions for products they'd like to see on the shelves.

Residents have shared their thoughts on social media, praising the store's expanding selection and accessibility. One wrote, "The selection continues to expand and the prices are comparable to other grocery stores. It's so nice to have a local grocery option besides Dollar General." Another added, "Stopped by the new grocery store today. I was pleasantly surprised. Yes, some items were a little more expensive than Giant Eagle or Tops, but I didn't have to drive to Erie or Meadville."

Experts say addressing food access requires more than a single solution

– it takes a patchwork of strategies, from supporting independent farmers and grocers, to improving public transportation, to connecting residents to community resources and sustaining federal nutrition programs.

Another approach gaining traction in Northwestern Pennsylvania is Pay-What-You-Can Markets. Stephanie Thauer, who runs a small farm outside Cambridge Springs, helped launch a Pay-What-You-Can Market program in Erie County six years ago with a friend. These markets provide locally grown, affordable produce while directly supporting local farmers and agriculture. The first pilot market opened at 15th and Parade, an area long considered a food desert in Erie's east side.

Since then, the project has expanded to seven markets, with plans to expand into surrounding counties. Open weekly from July through October, the markets offer fresh, locally grown produce that Thauer says customers can trust. The food is grown within the community and without the chemicals or heavy processing often found in convenience store items. Thauer provides a variety of produce from her own farm, including fresh greens and seasonal vegetables.

Thauer runs a small market in Edinboro on Meadville Street, in partnership with Unity in Edinboro, a lo-

cal church. She opened it in response to the closure of the Giant Eagle, the borough's only large grocery store.

"Every town should have a resource like this," Thauer said.

The markets accept SNAP, EBT, and Farmers Market Nutrition Vouchers – an option Thauer says residents "really appreciate." During the 15-week market season in 2025, the market at 15th and Parade distributed roughly 8,651 pounds of food. The Edinboro market alone distributed about 2,100 pounds, serving 464 people, while the 15th and Parade location reached 1,171 residents.

Thauer says the model improves access to fresh, locally grown produce by allowing customers to pay what they can – through donations, bartering, or traditional payment. The markets are intentionally located in areas that are walkable and accessible by public transportation.

Thauer says the Pay-What-You-Can model not only provides food access, but also offers a dignified shopping experience and strengthens community ties.

"Back in the day, food markets were gathering places. People came not

just to shop, but to talk, socialize, and share recipes and experiences," Thauer said. "That's what our markets have grown into. It's about the experience – it's not just people standing in line and being handed food."

On the east side of Erie, another community-driven solution is the Second Harvest Marketplace located in the UPMC Health Plan Neighborhood Center on Parade Street. The center accepts SNAP and EBT and lets residents schedule appointments to shop in a clean, modern space. Staff also provide guidance on new recipes, nutrition tips, and ways to make the most of the food products.

New to the East Side, the Marketplace opened in January 2026, and Hall says feedback from the community has been overwhelmingly positive – especially around the dignity of being able to shop and choose your own food. Second Harvest hopes to expand this model to other communities in need.

In rural towns, these types of solutions often arrive slowly. For many families, the nearest source of fresh produce is far away, leaving them vulnerable to the uneven geography of

CONTRIBUTED



Cambridge Grocery opened in September, providing an oasis in what was otherwise considered a rural food desert following the closure of Vogel's Food Mart and Peterson's Golden Dawn – a proliferation of dollar stores has been driving out local grocers across rural America.

hunger. Community-driven initiatives – like Cambridge Grocery, Pay-What-You-Can Markets, and local food pantries – provide both dignity and access, showing how localized efforts can make a meaningful difference.

"History has shown us that we're more resilient and able to take care of ourselves and each other when we work together," Thauer said. "When we work within our community, we're not just thinking of ourselves – we're

thinking of our neighbors."

In rural communities like Cambridge Springs, independent grocers and community-based solutions are vital lifelines. Although progress is linear, these local efforts highlight the ongoing work needed to ensure that healthy, affordable food is available to residents, no matter where they live.

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# When Everybody is a Publisher

Decimated newsrooms, social media free-for-alls underscore need for editorial integrity

By: Jonathan Burdick

In Erie, Pennsylvania on the eve of the 1860 presidential election, Abraham Lincoln was the favored candidate locally. This was reflected in the coverage within the widely circulated Erie Gazette and Erie City Dispatch newspapers. There was a third well-circulated paper though, the Erie Observer, which represented local opposition, an opposition that was not merely wary of a Lincoln presidency, but outright hostile towards the idea.

Erie Observer editor Benjamin Franklin Sloan referred to Lincoln as “a respectable man of moderate abilities,” but he also alleged Lincoln was a “nothing and nobody” whose “importance comes from what he represents and not what he is.” Sloan had little patience for the abolitionist rhetoric he felt Lincoln represented. He believed it radical, instead of sympathetic to, as he put it, “the rights and property and safety of our Southern brethren.” Voting for Lincoln, he argued, was a vote for “the aggressive spirit of anti-slavery fanaticism” and against the Constitution and the Union. Voting against Lincoln then was the only “barrier to sectionalism and fanaticism.”

After Lincoln’s clear win a few days later – including by a significant margin in Erie County – Sloan was melancholy. The presidency, he editorialized, had been corrupted “for the purpose of pillage and plunder” in lieu of “a servant to look after the interests of the people.” Lincoln was destined to bring the United States “to the very brink of ruin.” Had the “wise and patriotic” founders of the United States foresaw this election, continued Sloan, they would have built “better safeguards.” Good men were disgusted by what politics had become.

“We warned the people previous to the election of the result which has followed, because we inform our readers now, as duty bound, of the exact state of the country, such mole-eyed papers as the [Erie] Gazette sneer at the dangers that surround us and stigmatize our articles,” Sloan added. He’d rather “bear the taunts and sneers of ... the ultra anti-slavery humanitarians” than “wither and die under the reproaches of a betrayed, divided, and infuriated people.”

While it is easy to pick apart Sloan’s points, he was correct in where this was headed: civil war. As fears of the Union dissolving escalated, Sloan appeared almost gleeful over his previous predictions of “secession and revolution” in the South. He commended South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama for their “honorable sincerity and conscientious resolve” since Lincoln’s election.

These sentiments were widespread throughout southern states, but Sloan’s frequently sensationalist editorials are a fascinating glimpse into anti-abolitionist perspectives in the North. The Observer, along with the Gazette and Dispatch, were unapologetically partisan in their stances extending far beyond the divisive national issues of the time into

IZZETUJMNEN



Over the past two decades, newspaper publications decreased from 7,325 to 4,490 across the country while circulation dropped from over 50 million to around 15 million. Additionally, the number of journalists and people working at newspapers has decreased from over 365,000 to about 90,000. Unvetted, subjective news reports presented in short-form fashion are increasingly, and alarmingly, becoming our main source of information.

politically mundane local issues like the mayoral race or proposed ordinances.

News being partisan and sensationalist are not new allegations. In fact, for most of the first century or so of the United States, such partisanship was the standard and expectation. The early decades following the American Revolution are even referred to as the party press era. People read newspapers owned and curated by those whose views most aligned with their own. This confirmation bias, as described by Northeastern University, is “the tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with one’s existing beliefs.” If one lived in Erie in 1860 and consumed their news only from the Erie Observer or the Erie Gazette, their understanding of national politics would be extremely different, not just from their editorials but from their story selection and framing of issues.

Both then and today, the media landscape can and often does frustrate people. The Observer and Gazette took swipes at each other weekly. One can imagine Erie neighbors siding with one paper over another, echoing the viewpoints of each, criticizing the other paper that they wouldn’t dare spend their hard-earned pennies on.

From the modern perspective, to leaf through old Observer or Gazette newspapers is to see first drafts of history (a phrase popularized by Washington Post publisher Philip L. Graham in the 1960s). Reading the direct words of those experiencing those years firsthand and analyzing their diverse and evolving perspectives provides indispensable historiographical insight.

As decades passed, the vigilance of muckraking journalists such as Ida B. Wells, Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, and Nellie Bly demonstrated the power and

influence of journalism. Words could change hearts and minds – and, in some cases, even laws. At the same time, they were competing with the powerful “yellow journalism” of the era: deliberately sensationalized, clearly unethical, often downright inaccurate (but probably more entertaining) stories that were the turn-of-the-century equivalent to internet grifter clickbait.

In the early 1900s, journalism changed and improved drastically with the professionalization of the field. In 1908, the University of Missouri established a school of journalism, followed by Columbia University in 1912. News, its purpose objective and verifiable and designed to inform, and opinion, subjective takes meant to persuade and inspire conversation, were separated and made independent of one another in the newsroom. Unlike previous eras, opinion pieces would follow strict ethical standards that included comprehensive fact-checking, avoiding misleading claims, and disclosing any conflicts of interest.

For news, standards of objectivity were developed. The Society of Professional Journalists (founded in 1909) and the American Society of Newspaper Editors (founded in 1922) established codes of ethics emphasizing accuracy and fairness. As described by the Society of Professional Journalists, for journalism to be ethical, it should be “accurate and fair” while journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.” Their code of ethics includes seeking truth, minimizing harm, acting independently, and being accountable and transparent. In Erie, Hazel Eberhart, better known by her pseudonym Barbara Hawley, was the city’s first professionally educated journalist. She graduated from Kansas State University in 1925 before writing for the Erie Daily Times and then



the Erie Dispatch-Herald.

To some extent, the shift towards objectivity was a business strategy. Appealing to broader audiences meant selling more papers which increased advertising revenue. The shift from smaller-scale partisan newspapers to a more standardized and professional model helped legitimize the field.

In the modern day, it can sometimes feel like objective and ethical journalism is an artifact of a bygone era. That, of course, is not accurate. There are tens of thousands of journalists, reporters, analysts, and editors out there putting in the work, doing what they were professionally trained to do, covering their beats with expertise and rigor and objectivity. They keep us informed on everything from national news to local council meetings to crimes, sports, education, finance, health, science, arts and culture, food, technology, the environment, and every topic in between.

These professionals now often get overshadowed by those who aren't worried about objectivity, fairness, and transparency – and perhaps the bigger problem is that people cannot always tell the difference. Besides apathy, one might say that the lack of media literacy is the most significant growing issue.

According to Pew Research Center, 62 percent of those age 65 or older “follow the news all or most of the time,” compared to 45 percent between 50 and 64, 26 percent between 30 and 49, and 15 percent between ages 18 and 29. As Tim Franklin, chairman of local news at Northwestern’s Medill School of

Journalism, worries, “[Most frightening] is the idea that generations are growing up without the habit of following news, particularly for their own communities.”

Even if they don't seek it out though, as research analyst Naomi Forman-Katz says, “[T]he news still finds them.” And, she adds, “Democracy depends on people being informed.” Newsrooms have spent decades now trying to adapt to the digital age and attract the younger demographics, including in recent years producing podcasts and vertical videos.

Examine their polling on how many get their news from social media and the results are almost the inverse of the Pew poll: 76 percent in the youngest age category compared to 28 percent in the oldest. It likely doesn't need to be explained, but there are numerous problems with relying on social media for news, foremost being algorithms deciding what you do and don't see. For instance, algorithms reduce the reach of any posts with external links. Notice how news organizations are now putting links down in the comments? In addition, many self-proclaimed news accounts lack standards and editorial oversight. Then there is the entire financial infrastructure of social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok which incentivizes clickbait, shock, and sensationalism.

It's also becoming increasingly difficult for many to know how to consume news responsibly. The lines between objective reporters and opinion-sharing talking-heads, particularly on television, have



The Erie Observer was one of three newspapers in circulation in Erie's early days – one that ran as an opposition paper relying on partisan and sensationalist views back in the 1860s, prior to the concept of unbiased journalism, which was established in the 1920s.

blurred. I still use an RSS feed (like Feedly) to ensure that I chronologically see all headlines from websites that I follow. From there, I can decide myself which articles to read or not read. Media bias charts by organizations like Ad Fontes Media and All Sides are flawed, but are helpful tools too. The News Literacy Project has created resources to help teach about different types of bias which includes the well-known partisan bias, but other types of bias including demographic, corporate, neutrality, and “big story” along with five forms that include framing, story selection, absence of fairness and balance, tone, and sourcing. Still, these require consumers of news to actively pay attention to what and how they are engaging with information.

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Perhaps the biggest problem though: there are fewer and fewer newsrooms to publish. Countless small town newspapers have shuttered all across the United States in recent decades. Many of those still in existence are barely holding on. Just recently in nearby Venango County, the Derrick Publishing Co. announced their closure, shutting down three papers: Oil City's The Derrick, Franklin's News-Herald, and The Clarion News. In Pittsburgh, the city faced the one-two gut punch of the city's alt-weekly Pittsburgh City Paper being shut down by Block Communications in January, followed by their announcement a few days later that they'd cease operations of the historic Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in May. This came following a Supreme Court ruling against ownership in favor of the Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh.

According to the Associated Press last year, over the past two decades, newspaper publications decreased from 7,325 to 4,490 across the country. Circulation has dropped from over 50 million to around 15 million. Another grim statistic: during this same time, people working at newspapers has decreased from over 365,000 to about 90,000. An eye-opening 2025 joint project from Muck Rack and Rebuild Local News found a 75 percent decrease in local journalists since 2002. Another way to put it: there used to be about 40 journalists per 100,000 people. Now, it's less than nine.

Examining the Staff Directory of GoErie.com from 2016, the same year the locally-owned Erie Times-News was sold to GateHouse Media (which later merged with Gannett, which recently rebranded as USA Today Co.), there were 18 full-time reporters, nine editors, five photojournalists, and 15 "special section" writers for Showcase, Her Times, Lake Erie Lifestyle, and Rock Erie. Needless to say, those numbers have dwindled since. Similarly, when one realizes how few left there are to cover beats for The Meadville Tribune, it's actually impressive how they accomplish so much with so few.

The fewer professionals there are to cover local issues, with their years of building trust and relationships and networks of information, the more that people will be in the dark about local issues – or they will simply turn elsewhere for their information, replacing fact-checked articles with posts on local Facebook groups where moderation of the comment sections range from the Wild West to authoritarian.

Generally speaking, there's value in community groups and the provided exposure to this diver-

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**As newsrooms close and news deserts grow, tsunamis of unvetted information from sources that don't necessarily value objectivity or even truth, threaten to be our only sources for understanding what is going on around us. Now, truly more than ever, we need quality, rigorous, ethical journalism to be the cornerstone of our information infrastructure.**

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sity of thought, but many devolve into unflinching tribalism, mindless memes, and short-form videos thrust into the world by financially-motivated grifters who've been chipping away at our attention spans for years. As longtime 60 Minutes reporter Scott Pelley said in a speech over a decade ago, we now live in "a world where everyone is a publisher [and] no one is an editor." For anybody who has an editor, you know they aren't just helpful, but indispensable.

We need these first drafts of history, news and opinions, in Erie, but also for Girard, for Edinboro, for Wesleyville and all of the other small boroughs and townships with their own meetings and happenings and scandals and, heck, even those feel-good stories. This isn't only for future historians, but for an informed citizenry presently. As explained by esteemed broadcast journalist Walter Cronkite in 2002, democracy requires a healthy free press, which he believed was threatened by a powerful oligarchy, and he believed shouldn't "be limited to only those who have the bank accounts to pay for the battle and win it."

This keeps the free exchange of ideas, free from government interference, alive and well. As newsrooms close and news deserts grow, tsunamis of unvetted information from sources that don't necessarily value objectivity or even truth, threaten to be our only sources for understanding what is going on around us. Now, truly more than ever, we need quality, rigorous, ethical journalism to be the cornerstone of our information infrastructure.

We need our editors and reporters at the Erie Times-News and the Meadville Tribune. We need our smaller market papers like Erie County's remaining Corry Journal, Erie Gay News, North East News-Journal, Titusville News-Journal, and Union City Today. We need all of our university and high school newspapers, providing experience and inspiration to the next generation. We need our alt-papers like, yes, the Erie Reader (which has our own Alana Sabol keeping us informed on our city and county council meetings) as well as nearby Cleveland Scene and Buffalo Rising. In fact, we could even use more. As the founders of the country understood, journalism on every level from national to local to hyper local is essential to a thriving, surviving United States of America.

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



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# Erie's Can't Miss Dishes 2026

Local menu items we can't stop thinking about

By: Erin Phillips

There really is nothing more human than sitting down with other humans and eating together. It takes an activity necessary for survival and imbues the moment with connection, meaning, tradition, and memories. It's something we've been doing for millennia and something we continue to do when we need to feel grounded – meeting up with friends for drinks and appetizers, catching up with family at a new place you've been wanting to try, or sorting through creative ideas with coworkers over a big plate of tacos. These examples literally all took place this past month, among the editorial staff of the Erie Reader, and helped us to inform this feature: our 2026 Can't Miss Dishes.

Below you will find a smattering of fare from throughout Erie highlighting our small restaurant businesses – those creating the flavors that keep us coming back for more. We've got everything from appetizers to desserts, quick grab-and-go affordability, or something more special, that takes time to savor and enjoy.

Wherever it is you choose to eat, whether it's a place from our list or from a Can't Miss Dish list of your own making, we hope you keep it local and share the love! Let's eat, Erie!

**What:** Soup Flight

**Where:** Westside Market on Powell, 1119 Powell Ave.

**Vibe:** Choose your own (soup) adventure

**On the menu as:** Soup Flights

**Price:** \$11.99

**Hot Tip:** Pair the soup flight with any of their toasty sandos and you've got a meal for two.

JESSICA HUNTER



You know when everything looks so good, that it feels impossible to just choose one thing? Enter: the Westside Market's Soup Flight. Three of the daily selections of freshly made soups with just enough of each to add up to a full belly. Complete with a trio of freshly made, locally sourced breads (everything at the market is locally sourced, which is pretty amazing) and you've got yourself a meal.

**What:** Mushroom Toast

**Where:** Born and Braised, 802 W. 18th St.

**Vibe:** The thing of beauty that is perfectly toast-

ed toast

**On the menu as:** Mushroom Toast

**Price:** \$14

**Hot Tip:** While not necessarily a recommended culinary pairing with the toast, I got a raspberry whiskey sour with my meal and it was one stellar cocktail. Chambord foam? Yes, please!

ERIN PHILLIPS



Move over avocado – there's a new toast in town. There is something truly unmissable about this dish – a base of grainy, sourdough toast perfection (not so crunchy it hurts to eat it, but with just enough stability to hold it all together), creamy, ethereal, lemony ricotta dolloped between deeply roasted mushrooms bursting with umami. I have no notes. It was perfect.

Doesn't everyone just love it when Edwina tries something? What has become one of our most beloved columns, Edwina Tries... has found her way into our Can't Miss Dishes! Edwina tries... a vegetarian gyro! Take it away, Edwina:

**What:** Vegetarian Gyro

**Where:** New York Lunch East Avenue, 922 East Ave.

**Vibe:** Meatless Mel's Diner

**On the menu as:** Mount Olympus Yeeros: Impossible

**Price:** \$11.99

**Hot Tip:** Fries or onion rings? Dealer's choice!

JESSICA HUNTER PHOTOS



Listen, New York Lunch East Avenue is not here to coddle you. They are here to feed you delicious food at a good price and get you on your way. This is a

lunch counter, not your mom's house. And while getting "greeks" in Erie typically means meat literally on top of meat, New York Lunch East Avenue also caters to vegetarians. Thanks to a Reader reader's tip, I was made aware of this little-known fact. The Impossible-meat gyro is absolutely delicious, loaded with fresh lettuce, tomato, red onion, and a thick, healthy dollop of cucumber sauce, served with onion rings on the side.

**What:** Chicken Gorditas

**Where:** Enrique's Southeast Mexico, Flagship City Foodhall, 22 N. Park Row

**Vibe:** Corn-forward, stick to your ribs nourishment

**On the menu as:** Gorditas

**Price:** \$4.90

**Hot Tip:** With constantly evolving specials and new, fresh offerings, trying something different or a smorgasbord of offerings is easy.

JESSICA HUNTER



Enrique's wants to make sure you leave their place wanting for nothing. If you order a taco, you better believe that taco is going to fully sustain you until your next meal (a single shrimp taco comes with six jumbos and three tortillas). That was doubly true for their gordita. The editorial staff of the Erie Reader made a special lunch trip to Enrique's and we ordered a lot of stuff. And among all of the super fresh offerings, the gordita was a standout. A hand-formed masa dough is fried, split, and stuffed with (in this case) chicken, seasoned mayo, homemade pico (with pineapple), cheese, fried plantains, and fresh avocado. The aroma of the masa dough hits you first and follows up that earthy sweetness with the fresh creaminess of the avocado. We're stuffed – much like this dish!

**What:** The Dirty Bird

**Where:** Lucero, 940 W. Erie Plaza Dr.

**Vibe:** Hungry and thirsty? No problem!

**On the menu as:** Dirty Bird Martini

**Price:** \$14

**Hot tip:** Save a little of this drink for when your appetizer of smoked beets arrives – they go great together

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FEATURE

ADAM WELSH



When you’re going out for drinks and you want something delicious to nibble on before your appetizers arrive – fear not, Lucero’s Dirty Bird is your perfect answer. A dirty vodka martini on steroids, the Dirty Bird is made with a perfectly chilled, almost unctuous fat-washed vodka and comes with a skewer of Manchego cheese and their special marinated olives – the perfect balance to the classic briny dirty martini. It’s a little snack and a classy bevvie, all in one.

**What:** Honey Jerk Chicken, level five spice  
**Where:** Marley’s Island Caribbean Style Food, 3018 State St.  
**Vibe:** Tropical island, but make it in the snow  
**On the menu as:** Honey Jerk Chicken  
**Price:** \$13  
**Hot tip:** Order a pineapple fruit bowl on the side, you’ll need that sweet tang to cool you off

ERIN PHILLIPS



My mom has been itching to check out Marley’s Island since they were a meager food truck parked outside the Valu Home Center on East 38th Street. Now they’ve got themselves a brick and mortar and take it from Pam, you should give them a try! The Honey Jerk Chicken is so intensely flavorful, the sticky-sweet, spicy sauce (you pick the level from 1-10) is in perfect balance with the juicy grill-kissed chicken thighs, served atop a bed of coconut rice and red beans. Vaguely reminiscent of the long lost former Eli’s Jamaican jerk wings, this dish scratches that Caribbean itch and then some!

**What:** Cuban Pizza  
**Where:** Pizza Pete’s, 2823 W. 26th St.  
**Vibe:** Like a Cuban sandwich, but make it pizza  
**On the menu as:** The Cuban  
**Price:** \$12.99-\$18.99 (depending on size)  
**Hot tip:** Grab a Cerveceria brew from a local six pack shop to complete the vibe

JESSICA HUNTER



When your kids want pizza but you’re not in the mood for the same old same old, how’s about turning a Cuban sandwich (traditionally made with pork, ham, pickles, cheese, and mustard) into a pizza? Pizza Pete’s went there and it’s spectacular. With a honey mustard base (in lieu of a traditional pizza sauce), this chico malo is topped with mozzarella, tomatoes, onions, and pickles – and doubles down on the pork with both ham and salami. Salud!

**What:** Hummingbird Cake  
**Where:** Erie Food Co-Op  
**Vibe:** Tattooed Grandma  
**On the menu as:** (V) Hummingbird Cake  
**Price:** \$6.49  
**Hot Tip:** The refrigerated case at the Co-Op has your whole meal set, soup to dessert

ERIN PHILLIPS



This tastes just like your grandma’s hummingbird cake – pineapple, banana, pecans, and coconut make this cake a moist and tasty adventure in flavor and texture. The Erie Food Co-Op version just so happens to be vegan (but you really wouldn’t know it unless I told you). Super fresh, gently tropical, and nutty with a not too sweet, creamy, fancy swirl of cinnamony frosting in just the right amount – it’s a perfectly balanced treat that also happens to be better for the planet! We all win!

## One Tough Cookie

Edinboro baker tackles 279 recipes

By: Chloe Forbes

Most people flip through their grandmother's cookbooks and feel nostalgic. Katie Spangenberg (40 Under 40 Class of 2025) flipped through hers and saw a challenge: hundreds of cookies that she has yet to bake.

"This past Christmas, I was getting the dough ready, and I had my *Betty Crocker Cooky Book* sitting on the counter, and on the back, it says, 'over 450 recipes.' And I was like, dang, we use like 10 of those," she recalled.

She began flipping through all of the recipes and excitedly hurried out to her husband, Jason, in the living room and asked him, "What if I baked them all?" To which he replied, "You realize that's the plot of *Julie & Julia*, right? She turns 30 and cooks through the whole Julia Child cookbook."

Having just turned 30, Spangenberg decided it was fate. So, just before the new year, she sat down and planned out how she would accomplish the feat in one year.

"It says 450 recipes, but that's like variations on cookies, frostings, and fillings," she said. "But there are actually 279 cookies." As of this week, she baked No. 46, meaning she's got 233 cookies to go, which is roughly five cookies a week, give or take a snowstorm.

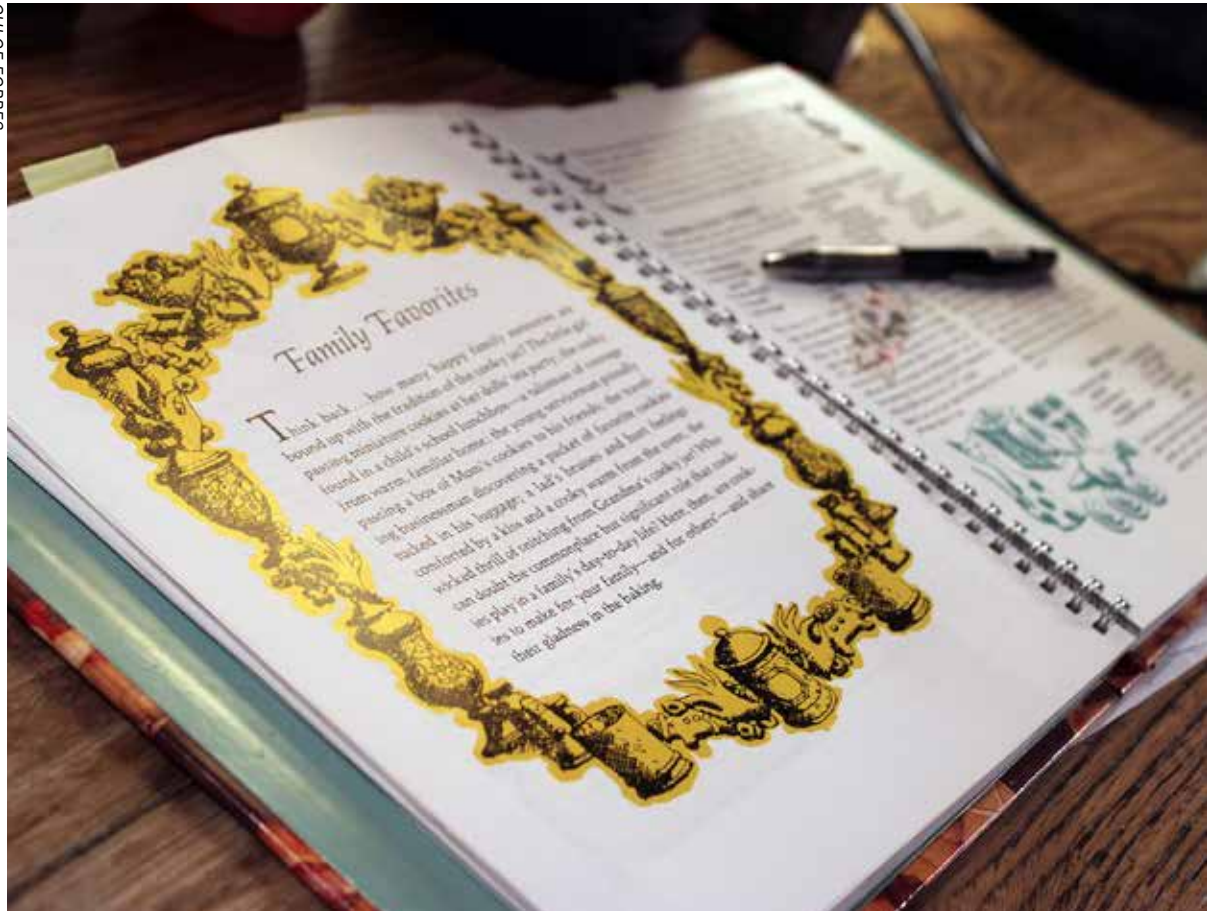
Spangenberg closed her blue kitchen cabinets as she moved about the room in a calculated flurry — much like Julie — dumping ingredients into a chrome KitchenAid mixer. Except this time, it's under the glow of a ring light.

**"Food really connects people. I have so many people who are following along or commenting with fun stories of certain recipes or how their mom used to use that cookbook when they were growing up. I have also received a lot of great tips from followers." - Katie Spangenberg, Bean & Bear owner, on her quest to bake all 279 cookies in the *Betty Crocker Cooky Book***

"Today we're making malted milk round cookies," she said into her phone camera, which recorded her atop a tripod on the countertop. Each time she bakes a cookie, she films the process and posts the recipe on TikTok.

"My first video was my intro video, and I thought I'd get some hits or whatever, and maybe if I lose motivation no one would notice," Spangenberg said. "But my first video got over 6,000 views, and I gained a

CHLOE FORBES



Follow along with local cafe owner and home baker Katie Spangenberg as she bakes through all of the cookie recipes in her grandmother's *Betty Crocker Cooky Book*.

bunch of followers, so I was like, 'Oh, now I actually have to be accountable.'"

In her videos, she gives the cookie a final rating at the end and has found that her favorites are the ones with strong flavor profiles. She said that a lot of the recipes don't include the strong flavor that people desire today, so she gives suggestions on how to improve the recipe.

"Food really connects people," Spangenberg said. "I have so many people who are following along or commenting with fun stories of certain recipes or how their mom used to use that cookbook when they were growing up. I have also received a lot of great tips from followers."

Every 50 cookies, she plans on doing a "*Cooky Book Wrapped*" with her top picks and fun statistics.

She's no stranger to the kitchen as owner of Bean & Bear Cafe in Edinboro, baking muffins, cinnamon rolls, cookies, and biscuits from scratch for her customers daily. But she's also learning how to set boundaries for herself and avoid burnout.

On days she works open to close at the coffee shop, she doesn't bake, but she might choose two easier recipes to bake the next day to catch up. If there's a really intense recipe, she saves it for a day when she can properly devote her attention to it.

Luckily, she had a small supply of baking supplies already, and said that since the book came out in the 1960s, it's pretty budget-friendly.

"For the most part, a lot of the cookies use the same ingredients," she said. "If it says add a nut, but it doesn't say what kind of nut, like, I use walnuts, because they're the cheapest ones."

Because she owns a coffee shop, she often puts the nut-free cookies out on a plate for customers to try for free. As the year goes on, she plans on donating her cookies to bake sales or places like assisted living homes. She said that if anyone is interested in trying the cookies they see her bake on TikTok, they can message Bean & Bear's social media to ask.

To watch the cookie connoisseur as she bakes through the *Cooky Book*, find Katie & Betty on TikTok (@muensterblackcat).

On the flour-covered counter, you might catch a glance of the book itself. From her grandmother's kitchen to her mother's kitchen to her kitchen, *The Betty Crocker Cooky Book* is a red-covered treasure chest that holds some of her family's heirlooms and newest baking gems.

*Chloe Forbes is a local journalist and cookie consumer. Reach her at [chloeforbes14@gmail.com](mailto:chloeforbes14@gmail.com).*

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# Erie's Sourdough Culture

The stories behind the starters from local bakers

By: Erin Phillips

I started my sourdough journey a little over two years ago. I've always been a fan of slow processes and generally enjoy challenging myself: I'm a knitter, a spinner, a gardener, a reader – it felt like a bread baker should also be included in that cozy list of hobbies.

Sourdough, or (very simply put) the process of leavening bread using gases produced from fermentation rather than from commercial yeast or baking powders, has been in my orbit for a while. One of the first stories I ever published in the Erie Reader back in 2020 was about the local resurrection of the Majestic Baking Company – feeling at once the soul of their old building, the awe at the giant, fire-breathing oven, and inspiration at the fact that they are able to make so much from simply flour, water, and salt. A number of my friends make sourdough (John, thank you for the many loaves over the years) and we can all hazily remember its viral explosion during the pandemic. I decided to make my own starter a couple of years ago and fully indoctrinate myself into the cult of sourdough.

I committed to a method (Maurizio Leo, you are my king), mixed together some rye and bread flours in a jar, added some water, and watched my budding starter burst its bounds as it collected the microbiome of my home, waiting for the good bacteria to triumph over the bad, and watch my very own starter come to life – ready to provide my family with homemade, nutritious, wholesome bread that I make with my own two hands.

The beauty of sourdough is that, even though the ingredients might be the same, the resultant loaves can differ wildly given the climate of your area, your home's ambient temperature, the wild yeasts you have swirling around you, the hydration level of your dough, the quality of your water, the weather or humidity, the length of time you allow your dough to rise, the duration the loaf chills in the fridge before it's baked (referred to herein as "cold ferment"). The science behind sourdough has been widely studied, and there are plenty of products one can purchase to "perfect" their own

loaves, but as the owner of The Park Coffee and Bread Company, Kristen Davis shared, "People have been making bread this way for thousands of years, well before anyone had all these rules and equipment." The only thing you truly need to make bread is a well-maintained starter ("fed" with fresh flour and water daily), a bowl, flour, water, salt, and an oven. Everything else is gilding the lily.

In reality, and antithetical to a lot of the noise and (let's be honest) snob-bishness in online sourdough groups, baking bread this way is not such a huge undertaking. Once you make it part of your routine, it becomes second nature. The dough is very forgiving – and there are methods available for any home baker's schedule. Start a levain (pronounced luh-VON, basically a second starter when you're ready to make a loaf) in the morning before work, then make your loaf when you get home. Pack all your baking into one weekend day and freeze loaves to have throughout the week. Mix your dough and let it sit on the dang counter all night long, bake a loaf in the morning and you've got yourself a gorgeous breakfast. The methods are endless.

In my quest to learn as much as possible about local sourdough and the people who love to make it, I spoke with a number of local bakers, all with their own, different stories about how they came to be a part of the cult of sourdough. Including the aforementioned Davis, I also spoke with Maximilian Wieczorek of Majestic Baking Company, Jessica Schultz and Vince Bartone of Herb and Honey Bakery, Amelia Madara of Madara Farms, and long-time home baker Michael Fuhrman. This is definitely not an exhaustive list of all of the folks making sourdough in Erie, and I encourage you to explore local farmers markets and grocers to find even more – taste them all, and then perhaps you'll feel inspired to start baking your own.

The first stop on my Erie sourdough walkabout was to The Park Coffee and Bread Company located at 4012 Main St. in Lawrence Park. I met up with owner Kristen Davis and her



ERIN PHILLIPS

The process of making a loaf of sourdough bread at home can seem intimidating at first, but once you make it a part of your routine (whatever that may look like), it's really very forgiving. The loaf on our cover was made over the course of three days in the home kitchen of our managing editor, Erin Phillips.

daughter in law as they closed up for the day. Davis has been making sourdough for over 20 years, when, as a young mother in Michigan wanting to feed her family more wholesome foods, she learned the art (and got her sourdough starter) from a friend's grandmother. It's that same sourdough starter that goes into every loaf made at The Park. Davis says that even on a larger scale (on a regular week, they bake and sell upwards of 100 loaves; on farmer's market weeks, that number is more like 300), "It's like therapy, I just love it."

"The beautiful thing is that you have all of these small microbakeries popping up, and it's all community-based. It's so much more than bread – it's a camaraderie between people."

Her bakery is also a cafe and serves prepared food, incorporating fresh baked sourdough items like bagels,

English muffins, pretzels, and cinnamon rolls, along with their bread, into the creations they serve. And all of their loaves are baked in small batches (she has a single Rofco B40 brick oven which only bakes eight loaves at a time) and all are baked after a cold ferment which helps deepen the sourdough flavor.

Davis hosts regular sourdough classes at her bakery and is proud to say she's taught over 1,000 people to make sourdough throughout her life – additionally she has online sourdough classes available through her website [theparkcoffeeandbreadco.com](http://theparkcoffeeandbreadco.com). Keep an eye on their socials for upcoming in-person classes.

Davis's main piece of advice for budding bakers is to maintain a good starter. "Having a starter that is taken care of is the most important thing. Also do not be intimidated – you might



(Left to right, top to bottom): Herb and Honey owner Jessica Schultz and bread baker Vince Bartone make nearly all of the bakery's leavened bread-based products from their Masa Madre sourdough starter. // Kristen Davis, owner of the Park Coffee and Bread Company in Lawrence Park, shows off her 20-year-old sourdough starter. // Amelia Madara runs the cottage bakery Madara Farms from her home. // Longtime home baker Michael Fuhrman found a passion for breadbaking during his time spent living in Germany and experiencing all of the beautiful breads that European bakeries had to offer.

not have the most gorgeous, artisan loaf, but you'll have good bread that you made with three ingredients that is healthy for you."

Mirroring that starter advice, I spoke with Maximilian Wieczorek from Majestic Baking Company to get an update on their operation since that 2020 article was published. Taking over the main baking responsibilities from owner Cam Spaeder, Wieczorek also feels that the best bread begins with a happy starter. "Make sure your starter is fed – as long as your starter is fed, you'll have a nice productive bread. If you leave it in your fridge for a while it won't have the oomph it needs to make your bread grow. Patience is also key."

Expanding their hours and their wholesale offerings recently, it's now easier to find Majestic Bread's products throughout Erie – they supply all of the hoagie rolls for the 6 Pack House of Beer (you might recall that I went off about how incredible their combo sub is in last year's Food issue), the Erie Food Co-Op, Duran's in Waterford, as well as pop-ups and at farmers markets throughout the year. The group has also expanded their regular menu, relying less on specials – you can pre-order from their website or walk in to enjoy their Erie sourdough, rye, hippie bread (seeded, whole grain), milk bread, jalape-

no cheddar, onion parm, and kalamata olive thyme, among others, all made with their sourdough starter.

If you're ready to get started on sourdough but don't want to go through the challenge of making your own starter, just show up to Majestic Baking Company (at 1501 Walnut St.) with an empty jar and Wieczorek will happily share some with you.

Also happy to part with some of their sourdough discard for the sake of recruiting home bakers, Herb and Honey Bakery doles out free jars to anyone willing to try, all offspring of their 12-year-old starter, which is lovingly referred to as Masa Madre (which literally translates to "mother dough," the Spanish word for sourdough). Owner Jessica Schultz mentions, "This is something we've cultivated here so it should be something that everybody has access to."

While the starter came with Schultz when she moved to Erie from West Virginia, the main bread guy at Herb and Honey Bakery (located at 516 Cherry St.) is Vince Bartone.

Bartone was a home baker well before he got started at Herb and Honey, getting his own starter going in 2019 and he brings that experience to nearly all of the leavened goods at the bakery, which include their caraway rye, multigrain and classic loaves, any brioche dough, cinnamon rolls,

egg bombs, bagels, and pretzels.

All of Herb and Honey's breads get a cold ferment overnight before being baked the next day. "This means we can bake the loaves fresh for people in the morning, but also it promotes that good lactobacilli growth, giving the bread more tang," Schultz explains. "If we did it all in one day, we might have a big buoyant, nice looking loaf, but the flavor wouldn't be there."

Schultz adds, "I love how place-based sourdough is, you catch different strains of yeast on the west coast versus the east coast." In every place she has lived, Schultz began a new starter and was interested to find how differently they behaved and tasted depending on the environment. "One of my most distinct was started in Rhode Island in peak summer – her smell was salty and had a different bouquet. She liked a really hot rise to have a nice crumb."

If you're interested in getting started but want someone to show you, Bartone teaches classes regularly throughout Erie – at the library, the Hagen History Center, as well as at the annual Fermentation Festival organized by Wild Field Farm proprietor Stephanie Ciner and held at Grounded Print Shop. Bartone's best advice to new sourdough adventurers, "Don't be disheartened if it doesn't happen the first few times. Keep at it, take your time."

And Schultz mirrors that advice, "Be patient for your loaf to rise. You're going to bake door stoppers, it's just going to happen. Most of the time it's because you haven't waited long enough." And be willing to adapt, "The microclimate of your kitchen is different. Here, we adjust recipes according to the season, things change and that's the beauty of it – being more in tune with the changes. In that way it's more difficult, but also more worthwhile."

Amelia Madara started small, making loaves in her kitchen, like so many others, during the pandemic. "For me it was failed attempt after failed attempt and I was so disappointed. The bread was a hockey puck, but something about it wouldn't let me walk away. I would try again and again – finally something just clicked and my starter grew like crazy and I was finally able to make that one decent loaf." That win started a whole business Madara didn't see coming. "Through all of my failed attempts, I really got

to understand the process from a hands-on place. Over time I started giving loaves to a friend, then she would tell her friend. I'd give loaves as teachers' gifts, and people started asking if they could buy them," Madara explains.

She started small with a "bread club" as a way to share loaves and also improve her own skills, and it eventually blew up into Madara Farms. Known as a "cottage bakery," she operates out of her home but is licensed and inspected through the state. At one point, she had her oven running for 12 hours a day and could only make four loaves at a time, so she ended up building a bakery in her basement with a commercial oven and mixer.

In addition to ordering bread directly from her website at madara-farms.com, Madara also sells loaves at the Country Superette on Route 8, Jo's Brooklyn Bagels on West 38th Street, and the Breakfast Place on East 38th. She is also a regular at LEAF Open Markets throughout the summer, as well as at the seasonal Copper Carriage markets and Goodell Gardens events in Edinboro. She also holds regular workshops at a nearby church, demonstrating how to make sourdough through every step, with patrons walking away with their own starter and a freshly baked loaf. Visit the aforementioned website for information on upcoming classes.

"My biggest advice is not to compare anything you're doing to anyone else – everyone has their own technique. Comparison is the thief of joy," Madara shares.

The final stop on my local sourdough journey led me to the home of Michael Fuhrman, a hobby baker who has been baking bread for decades. Fuhrman's collegiate dance education took him to Germany, where he lived and worked for years. While there, he states, "I fell in love with European bakeries and the bread – it was amazing. When I came back I was inspired to make my own." It was in 1988 when Fuhrman began baking traditional yeasted breads, then in 2000 he was given a book by his sister, *Bread Alone* by Dan Leader, which introduced him to the concept of sourdough – and that was his spark. "When I first started making this kind of bread, it turned out terribly but the flavor was there. I must have spent hundreds of dollars on flour in those



early days as I was working it out.”

As he got used to the feel and techniques of sourdough, he began giving his practice loaves to friends and family and everyone really seemed to like it – that encouraged him to keep going.

For those of us who bake bread, including Fuhrman, it can often feel like an inherent, natural inclination. Fuhrman explains, “My mother’s grandfather was the main baker in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. In that family, they were all cooks and chefs. My mother owned a catering company, my brother owns a couple restaurants. My family on my dad’s side were called Pfister, from southern Germany, and the name Pfister means ‘bread baker’ so there’s got to be some kind of genetic driver in there.”

Fuhrman’s schedule allows for most of his baking to happen on Sundays, which was the day I visited – with jazz music playing in the background and homemade kombucha bubbling on the sideboard – he had three different doughs going when I stopped in. Post-it notes were stuck on the wall indicating the timing and progress of all of them

to stay organized. In various bowls and containers throughout the kitchen were a bubbly poolish, a white rye with dill and caraway seeds, as well as a medium rye with caramelized onions and a custom-made German spice blend.

it, it will pay off.”

In today’s world of constant rush, instant gratification, and disposable everything – the art of sourdough is a welcome opportunity to slow down, to relish in a process that doesn’t work

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In today’s world of constant rush, instant gratification, and disposable everything – the art of sourdough is a welcome opportunity to slow down, to relish in a process that doesn’t work unless you allow it time, patience, and space to grow. It is an activity that human beings have been engaged in for millennia and every time you make a sourdough loaf, you are tapping into that ancient human history.

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Fuhrman’s advice for fellow home-bakers? “Never give up. Stay with it – it’s a skill that requires time, just like the bread itself. If you stick with

unless you allow it time, patience, and space to grow. It is an activity that human beings have been engaged in for millennia and every time you make a

sourdough loaf, you are tapping into that ancient human history. Intentionally slowing down, especially when it comes to the food we’re eating, is a benefit – to both our bodies and our souls.

*If you’d like to get started on your own sourdough journey, the Erie County Public Library has dozens of books available to get you started. Visit [erielibrary.org](http://erielibrary.org) or visit any of the bakeries’ websites noted in this article for information on classes or bread for sale:*

*The Park Coffee and Bread Company at [theparkcoffeeandbreadco.com](http://theparkcoffeeandbreadco.com)*

*Majestic Baking Company at [majesticbaking.co](http://majesticbaking.co)*

*Herb and Honey Bakery at [herbandhoneybakery.com](http://herbandhoneybakery.com)*

*Madara Farms at [madarafarms.com](http://madarafarms.com)*

*When not feeding her starter (affectionately named Starty McFly, an homage to the greatest cinematic masterpiece of all time) or working on a loaf, she can be found at [erin@eriereader.com](mailto:erin@eriereader.com)*

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## The Sweet, Spicy Future of a Million Local Sunflowers

1898 Bayfront Reserve distilled by Wilds Sonshine Factory

By: Alana Sabol

On a cool evening last summer, my boyfriend and I drove out to Girard to admire the sunflowers at Battles Farm. What I didn't know at the time was that in the fall, their seeds would be harvested and distilled into a spiced rum that I would be sipping on in the spring. In a small gathering at the Hagen History Center, I witnessed the unveiling of a sunflower rum made by Wilds Sonshine Factory.

As a previous student of sustainable agriculture, I was excited by an agricultural process that stayed within two hours of Erie County. Dave Conklin, owner of Wilds Sonshine Factory in Kane, Pennsylvania, figured out how to grow sunflowers that produce starch which can later be distilled into alcohol. Hagen History Center and farmer Jim Neuburger planted and harvested over one million of Conklin's sunflowers to produce a yield that could make half a million bottles of liquor. The rum, tentatively dubbed 1898 Bayfront Reserve, will be exclusively sold in Erie County and is expected to be in nearly "every bar and establishment in Erie County, hopefully by early summer," Conklin said.

Dave passed around the rum for us to smell. "That's what you grew, my friend," he said, passing it to Neuburger. It was nutty and malty, with

notes of apple and cinnamon. I was curious to see how it translated in its flavor.

I didn't have to wait long. Soon we traveled down into the President's Room, where we were greeted with two mixed drinks, rum and coke and rum and pineapple juice. I chose pineapple juice – the sunflower rum added warmth and depth to the otherwise fruity drink. When I tried it straight, I could taste more of the fragrant notes I picked up during the smell test. It was strong and astringent at first, followed by slightly sweet and spicy flavors.

The combination of ecotourism at the Hagen History Center's Battles campus and the Erie-exclusive product of 1898 Bayfront Reserve is a truly local project that I was excited to witness, from flower to glass. "We're really proud of it," Conklin said. "It's true to Erie County, it's the real deal."

For more information on the Battles property visit: [hagen-history.org/visit/girard-campus](http://hagen-history.org/visit/girard-campus)

For more information on 1898 Bayfront Reserve, visit: [wildssonshinefactory.org](http://wildssonshinefactory.org)

Alana Sabol can be reached at [alana@eriereader.com](mailto:alana@eriereader.com)

CONTRIBUTED



If you happened to miss seeing the field of over a million sunflowers at the Hagen History Center's Girard campus this summer, you can still get a taste. A custom rum, distilled from the seeds of those very sunflowers, will be available for purchase in early summer.

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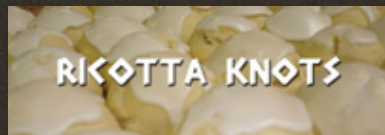
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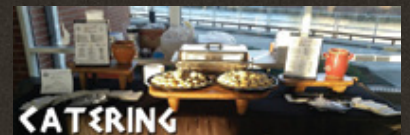
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## Bird of the Month: American Woodcock

It is time for timberdoodles!

By: Mary Birdsong

The American Woodcock is a bird with a ridiculously large number of colorful nicknames. They include bogsucker, mud snipe, night partridge, big-eye, Labrador twister, mudbat, and (most well-known) timberdoodle, which is a very amusing word to say. Especially out loud. Go ahead, we'll wait.

Woodcocks acquired those nicknames based on their looks and habits, both of which are fascinating, and it is often said that woodcocks were built by committee or are a compilation of God's leftover parts. I once heard someone refer to a woodcock as a meatloaf with wings.

Which is another way of saying: this is an awkward-looking bird. It has a rounded, pudgy body, short legs, an angular head, large eyes and a long bill. Its plumage – a mosaic of brown, gray, tan and buffy white – provides the best camouflage in the dense, moist, woodland habitat that it prefers. This preference is a surprise because it belongs to a family of shorebirds. Unlike all their closest relatives, woodcocks eschew the shore and use their long bills to probe the leafy woodland floor

for tasty worms.

Despite the aforementioned description of weirdness and leftover parts, it is a very charismatic bird that croons my personal song of spring. Their enchanting and buzzy "peent," made by males only, lifts my spirits like no other and definitely announces the beginning of the warmer months.

The "peenting" is done at dawn and dusk as the first course of a mesmerizing courtship display designed to persuade a female into mating.

The display starts on a singing ground or lek. The males gather to show off for the ladies and peent. When the time is right, males fly up in wide spirals, their rapid wingbeats producing a high twittering sound. When maximum height is reached, they circle for about 10 seconds, the twittering increasing with the undulation of wings. They then descend at high speed, swerving back and forth, and resume peenting once they reach the ground. Hopefully, a female was impressed and agrees to be his mate. If she does, and after successful mating, the male stays on the lek in hopes of finding another willing



Make way for the Timberdoodle! Otherwise known as the American Woodcock, this quirky, lovable bird will soon be entering their mating season – which means a showy flourish of "peenting" and impressive flight displays to attract a suitable partner.

mate, and the female incubates the eggs and rears the chicks alone.

Watching (or listening to) this courtship behavior is a treat for anyone. As March progresses into April, woodcocks will arrive and begin their displays. Since they are usually found in more remote settings (Presque Isle, wetland areas) and their displays occur in near darkness, Erie Bird Observatory will be organizing woodcock walks to known display sites; look for announcements later on in March

and early April on the EBO website and on socials.

They really are quite endearing, so don't miss this opportunity to experience these collections of random parts, these meatloaves, these Labrador twisters, these timberdoodles. Say it out loud!

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

## Edwina Tries... An International Grocery Store

Almadina Supermarket offers a centrally located, multicultural shopping experience.

By: Edwina Capozziello

You've probably driven by the Almadina Supermarket before – formerly at a smaller location down the street, they are now at 2325 Parade St. in a tidy white brick building with



Take a shopping trip with Edwina as she tries out a newly expanded New American grocery store. Almadina Supermarket's location may have changed and upgraded, but their friendly service, fresh offerings, and low prices are mainstays.

welcoming, impressive lighted signage. It's a convenient location, especially for the many New Americans who call East Erie home. That's doubly true for many people who are celebrating Ramadan through March 19. In the spirit of learning more about our neighbors, our city, and always looking for ways to shop locally, I made my way to 23rd and Parade.

When I walked into the store, I was greeted with a smile, and took a few minutes to wander around and take everything in. It's not a huge space, but very well stocked and very well organized with a bodega-type feel. I got the immediate feeling that I could get just about everything I'd need in this one place. To my right was a huge variety of bakery breads, to my left a case of fresh halal meats, and straight

ahead was gorgeous produce. I went down every aisle and took everything in from top to bottom. There is a huge variety: spices, tea, canned goods, a dairy case, frozen foods... I even saw Canadian favorites like Bounty bars and ketchup-flavored potato chips!

I'd gone in with a small shopping list in mind and left with some BOGO instant soup (lentil and cream of mushroom varieties), 2 lemons, and active dry yeast packets (my sourdough isn't getting a good oven-spring, so I'm trying a hybrid dough). I talked to the young man at the counter, and I left the store having spent only about \$8

On Almadina's website, they describe their business this way: "a family-owned and operated grocery store, we consider every customer as part of our family. Our multinational staff

and clientele create a vibrant melting pot of cultures and cuisines, forming a sense of camaraderie that transcends borders." I don't know about you, but especially in the current political climate, that's the kind of vibe I'm looking for. If you're looking for a little culinary adventure in a welcoming atmosphere, you should definitely check out Almadina Supermarket.

Ramadan Mubarak.

*Almadina Supermarket is located at 2325 Parade St. and open from 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. daily, 814-240-9002*

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

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## Gem City Style: March 2026

An interview with Amanda Hines, owner of Westside Market and Cafe on Powell

By: Jessica Hunter

Amanda Hines, the visionary behind Westside Market and Cafe and co-founder of No Dirt Farms, is redefining what it means to eat locally in Erie.

Walking into the Westside Market and Cafe feels like stepping into a bright, cozy space that immediately feels like home. While I was framing up a few shots of the cafe's interior, trying to capture the distinct green of the hydroponic towers in the front windows, I struck up a conversation with a regular. She was scanning the market, on the hunt for fresh local eggs among her usual haul of scratch-made breads, local canned goods, and the occasional artisanal gift. It's exactly this kind of dynamic, multi-purpose shopping experience that Hines envisioned.

The concept was born out of a desire for convenience that didn't compromise on community support. "I really saw the need to help people who wanted to support their local farmers," Hines explains. "It's very time-consuming to drive out here to get eggs, drive over there to get your milk, and get your meat somewhere else. I thought, why not bring everybody to one location? You're still fully supporting all of those individual local people, but without the runaround."

The space itself is a testament to Hines and her husband Dave's DIY work ethic. The building has lived many lives – formerly her husband's appliance business, sitting right next door to her former hair salon. When they decided to pivot, they moved the appliance business next door, completely gutted the interior, and transformed the building themselves. Hines even taught herself 3D modeling to draft the blueprints before taking her vision to an architect.

That same hands-on, problem-solving dedication is evident in her approach to sourcing products for the market. As the co-founder of No Dirt Farms, she is one of Erie's few year-round local lettuce growers, utilizing the cafe's front-window hydroponic towers to showcase how to defy the region's notoriously harsh winters. "When we had our zero-degree temperatures, we were still growing

JESSICA HUNTER



40 Under 40 Class of 2021 alum Amanda Hines gave Jessica Hunter a tour of her Westside Market on Powell – a beautiful store that highlights the hyper-local. From prepared foods to grocery staples, Hines keeps her product stock as locally produced and low-waste as possible.

lettuce," she says with pride. She acknowledges that it can be difficult for people to understand why the lettuce changes its look throughout the year, but her response is simple and effective: "I ask them, 'Tell me what other local person you can buy lettuce from this time of year?'"

Sourcing locally from other vendors is a constant balancing act, especially since many farmers in the area are stretched thin. To combat this, Hines offers a reliable wholesale spot for newer farmers trying to get their feet on the ground.

Inside the cafe, fresh produce fuels a strictly scratch-made kitchen – everything is designed to offer a practical, healthy alternative to the national processed food system.

It is also a kitchen fiercely dedicated to zero waste. Leftover vegetable scraps from prep days – like broccoli stems and carrot shreds – are taken straight home to feed her very happy chickens. Meanwhile, produce is creatively repurposed. "If something doesn't have a long shelf life, throw it in a salad. Make soup with it. Figure it

out. Be creative," she notes.

That boundless creativity birthed one of the cafe's most popular offerings: the signature soup flight. Unable to choose just one of Hines's inventive soups, diners can enjoy three distinct varieties served on custom hot plates, accompanied by a trio of house-made breads. Beyond the soups, the menu boasts vibrant Mediterranean salads topped with pickled onions, and hearty sandwiches like my husband's favorite, The Cuban, all elevated by ingredients like herb-roasted tomatoes and house-made mustard.

More than just a place to grab lunch, the Westside Market has become a genuine community hub. It's a place where locals bump into friends, pull up a chair to share some local ice cream, or set up their laptops to work for the afternoon. In an age leaning heavily into automation, Hines fiercely protects this personal connection.

"A lot of people want to turn to kiosks and get away from that personal touch, and I couldn't disagree more," she says firmly. "I want people talking. I don't want robots or AI making your

food. I want it all to remain personal."

Since being named a 2021 Erie's 40 Under 40 honoree, Hines has only continued to expand her vision. Looking ahead, she has her sights set on growing the market's catering services and developing an online platform to ship her products to a wider audience. But her primary goal remains rooted right here.

"I just want it to be a place people think of as a hub where you can connect with people and get great food," she says. "When people come here, they often tell me it feels like they're out of town. I want it to stay the gem that we are."

And with her continued dedication to local farmers and community building, Hines is ensuring that the Westside Market remains exactly that – a true gem right here in the Gem City.

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

## The Reader Beat Monthly Recap: February 2026

A summary of February meetings

By: Alana Sabol

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

### County Council, Feb. 10, 2026:

Many constituents came to support the ordinance that would terminate the contract between Erie County Prison and ICE to house federal immigrant detainees, which had its first reading at this meeting. But Executive Director of the Multicultural Community Resource Center (MCRC) Katie Kretz expressed concern for New Americans and refugees who could potentially be affected by Operation PARRIS (Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening), an initiative used by ICE to detain refugees in Minnesota, and suggested that council table the ordinance. "Operation PARRIS has changed the entire landscape. Lawfully admitted refugees, many of them still awaiting their green cards, are being detained, sometimes without judicial warrants, and are being moved far away from their families, their attorneys, and their communities," Kretz said. "Ending the contract does not stop detention, it's going to move it."

Constituent Heidi Shadeck mentioned that a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order on detaining refugees in Minnesota until the court rules on a preliminary injunction on Feb. 19. Shadeck continued, questioning whether the current contract Erie County Prison has with DHS kept any detainees' due process rights protected. "This is an impossible choice. I wonder if attempting to protect one exposed group – refugees, who have not been harmed yet by this contract, but may be under Operation PARRIS – justifies the existing, ongoing, and documented harms to other vulnerable groups," said Shadeck.

A resolution approving the financial statements and independent auditor's report of the Erie Area Council of Governments for 2024 and 2023 passed unanimously.

### City Council, Feb. 18, 2026:

During this meeting, constituent Tina Hiotis called for the creation of a community policing board, describing it as "a safety measure for the public and police." Constituent Deonte Cooley discussed investing in the east side of Erie and community centers. "Our cries for help have been for change. Not just to arrest an officer, not just to not have ICE here, but to give Black and Brown people opportunities on the side of town where we reside," Cooley said. Michael Woodard brought attention to "Enough Blood Official," a Facebook account started by Marchello Woodard's son Malakai to shed light on preventable deaths, including the death of Matthew Zaborowski, who was struck by a police car on Sept. 12, 2025. The officer received a \$525 fine. "Is Matthew's life worth a cita-

ing the city solicitor to prepare an ordinance amending the zoning map accordingly.

### County Council Feb. 26, 2026:

County council voted whether or not to pass the ordinance that would terminate the contract between Erie County Prison and ICE to house federal immigrant detainees. Some constituents argued that ending the ICE contract would impact New Americans and move them to detention centers hours away from family or legal assistance. "When Erie County agrees to house ICE detainees, even briefly, it sends a clear message. It tells immigrant families that the place where they call police for help, or to report crimes for safety, where they pay taxes, send their children to school, work hard to pay bills and provide for their loved ones, that same county is also participating in their detention," Wuji Ahmad, a constituent and refu-

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**"When Erie County agrees to house ICE detainees, even briefly, it sends a clear message. It tells immigrant families that the place where they call police for help, or to report crimes for safety, where they pay taxes, send their children to school, work hard to pay bills and provide for their loved ones, that same county is also participating in their detention." Wuji Ahmad, Erie County constituent and Eritrean refugee**

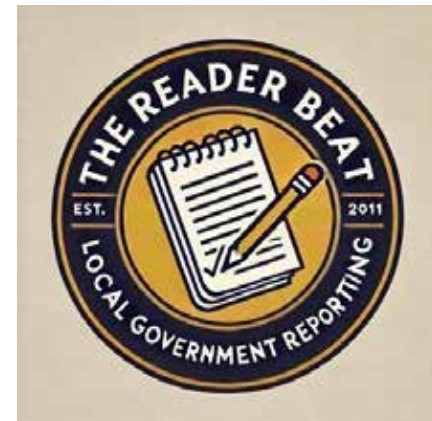
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tion?" asked Woodard.

Executive Director of Erie Arts & Culture Susannah Faulkner argued the importance of investing in Erie's New American population and codifying the "Welcoming City" ordinance. "When we invest in welcoming policies like this ordinance, we're investing in Erie's long-term future," Faulkner said.

Following public comments, A resolution was passed unanimously to designate Erie Cemetery, located at 2116 Chestnut St., as a Historic Site, direct-

ing the city solicitor to prepare an ordinance amending the zoning map accordingly. "We can do anything else instead of the hypocrisy of claiming we are an immigrant-inclusive community while detaining said immigrants. There are better options that represent our values." Councilman Winarski made a motion to table the ordinance since the U.S. Marshal is in communication with County Executive Christina Vogel and "for the good of our relationship with the federal government and the County of Erie." The mo-



tion to table failed 3-4 with Drexel, Wertz, Copeland, and Scutella voting no. Copeland spoke about his thoughts on the contract. "Our facility was never designed to have another 600 people staying nine and a half days on average. We never had the staff to handle the previous population in 2024 when the prison went over budget illegally by \$2 million in expenditures," he said. "I clearly object to this on moral grounds and did a year ago, February, and it is not predicated on recent events. This is something we've thought about and talked about as a body for over a year."

Councilman Jim Wertz also clarified what the contract does specifically in regards to federal law enforcement. "This ordinance does not end cooperation with federal criminal law enforcement. It does not prevent prosecution of crimes at any level and it will not, as the county executive renegotiates this contract, create a budget gap to be filled by the taxpayers of Erie County. It simply says that our local jail, funded by Erie taxpayers, will not be used as an extension of an unruly federal immigration detention system," Wertz said. Schauerman argued that the ordinance just "moves people away from their families and friends as soon as they are apprehended," and that "detainees do have access to interpreters, medical services, visitation by family, and legal services." The ordinance passed 4-3 with Bayle, Schauerman, and Winarski voting no.

### Coming up this month:

City Council: March 18 at 6:30 p.m.

County Council: March 24 at 6 p.m.



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where he handles their general and professional liability claims, commercial litigation matters, and various investigations. Before joining Knox Law, Ron worked at three national law firms in Pittsburgh, where he developed significant litigation and business insight that he now applies to help clients navigate complex disputes and protect their interests.

Ron sits on the Board of the Allegheny County Bar Association and is a former Senior Member of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Disciplinary Hearing Committee. He earned his JD and MBA from Howard University School of Law and School of Business, and his bachelor's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles.

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# Mural Guide Book



THIS MURAL GUIDE HIGHLIGHTS MURALS CREATED BY LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL ARTISTS, CELEBRATING THE DIVERSE STORIES, CULTURES, AND CREATIVITY THAT SHAPE NWPA. EACH MURAL IS A LANDMARK OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY, COLLABORATION, AND IMAGINATION. MURALS SPARK CONNECTION, CELEBRATE CULTURE, AND REMIND US THAT CREATIVITY STRENGTHENS OUR COMMUNITIES.

**ERIE**  
ARTS AND  
CULTURE

20  
26



## Making a Small City Smaller: The Art of Eating Out Alone

How to recharge your social battery and enjoy the anonymity of urban life in three memorable local meals

By: Dave Tamulonis

Most of my writing encourages readers to seek out connections. To use your city and built environment as a living, breathing switchboard, rocketing from one enriching experience to the next across a vast network of invisible cultural wires. However, I primarily identify as an introvert (a personality trait that exists more along spectrum in my opinion than a rigid dichotomy) in that I need occasional time away from connecting with others for my social battery to charge. Most of my job (then, as now) is talking to people. I can get stuck in “communicator mode,” as my wife and I refer to it, long after working hours before I realize just how exhausted I am in that state of mind. One of my 2026 goals was to build more intentional, contemplative alone time into my daily routine to avoid these inevitable moments of social burnout. A part of my day that I have been using to meet this need for a social reprieve is my lunch hour. And, though I usually go home for lunch, occasionally out of necessity or emotional need, I will go out to lunch and eat somewhere alone.

And I've come to love it.

The act of eating alone, especially downtown, reminds me of being in a much larger city: cities where faces blur past you, restaurant service

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The act of eating alone, especially downtown, reminds me of being in a much larger city: cities where faces blur past you, restaurant service is quick and impersonal, and you can shut out what's happening around you simply because there is so much happening. Being alone among others adds to your solitude the additional experience of observing. Not only are you alone with your thoughts, but scenes are playing out in front of you for you to contemplate, study, comprehend, and romanticize.

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is quick and impersonal, and you can shut out what's happening around you simply because there is so much happening. Being alone among others adds to your solitude the additional experience of observing. Not only are you alone with your thoughts, but scenes are playing out in front of you for you to contemplate, study, comprehend, and romanticize. One

of my best investments recently was a pair of over-the-ear, noise-canceling headphones for exactly this situation; a pair so dense they can turn the noisiest bus ride or the most bustling sidewalk into a quiet scene from your own personal biopic soundtracked by the music of your choosing. Eating alone may be an uncomfortable feeling for many (it was for me at first), but I've tried to shed the fear of being perceived by others and embrace the quiet anonymity of urban life and the peace it brings to an otherwise hectic, socially draining day.

In my opinion, a good solo weekday lunch out requires three things from the restaurant: 1. quick service to get a diner back to their job on time, 2. a variety of light, affordable options that neither break the bank nor have you napping on your desk in an hour, and 3. comfortable space available for single diners with room to do something besides eat. I've tried to avoid scrolling during lunch, but I do enjoy playing a game of chess on my phone while waiting for a meal. I've also started bringing something to read which could either be a book or your favorite free, monthly arts and culture periodical complete with local interest writing, music reviews, and more. The following meals and dining experiences are three that I think check all these boxes

and really hit the spot when the mental load of packing a lunch seems insurmountable.

### **Dave's Diner (431 Peach St.) Single Breakfast (\$10)**

Nothing beats breakfast food out. This is my favorite meal of the day to eat, cook, and enjoy in a restaurant and I am a strong believer that

DAVE TAMULONIS



Dave Tamulonis is one of the busiest folks in Erie – between his public facing work and his participation in a myriad of local bands – he takes time to recharge his social battery by eating in restaurants alone. This month, he visited three downtown spots: Dave's Diner (sic), Oba Sushi, and Franco's new location.

breakfast food can be enjoyed at any time of the day. With one egg, choice of bacon or sausage, choice of home fries or hash browns, and toast, this is hearty without being a massive carb load. Dave's has a breakfast bar seating option and the service is fast. Those who remember the original Dave's Diner will not be disappointed by the new location. The food is very reliable: classic diner breakfast and lunch food with an atmosphere and interior that matches perfectly. Dave's also has a liquor license so make sure to come back for a nice brunch when you can relax and take your time.

### **Oba Sushi (516 State St.) Spider Roll (\$11)**

Oba Sushi's authentic Japanese sushi joint interior (and authentic, high quality sushi menu) makes it even easier to imagine yourself dining in a much larger city. Tucked away, almost hidden and easy to miss in the former Andora's Bubble Tea micro storefront, Oba is just large enough to accommodate single and couple diners with small, simple tables and

amazingly quick service. While their entire menu is filled with fresh sushi options that are more traditional, my personal favorite menu item is the Spider Roll, a tempura soft-shell crab roll with asparagus, avocado, sesame seed, and eel sauce. I get spicy mayo for dipping, miso soup, and hot tea if I'm feeling indulgent. Runners-up are probably the Sugar Mama (tempura Krab with cream cheese roll) and the classic California Roll (Krab and avocado). I just really enjoy crab-centered rolls. Japan is known for its urban food culture that caters primarily to single working people and Oba has perfectly replicated that experience right in Downtown Erie.

### **Franco's (416 State St.) Salad Bar (\$12)**

Recently reopened as their new location at 416 State, Franco's had been serving downtown residents for several years in the Renaissance Centre. One of downtown's best-kept secrets, Larry Franco and team have held down a reliable, always fresh salad bar stop with tons of options for customization. Their new location, the

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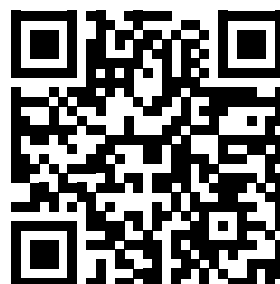


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former Fresh Healthy Café, is a perfect and beautifully restored historic space that reflects their new brand and menu perfectly. They also have soups, paninis, and now burgers and hoagies, but the salad bar will always be my go-to lunch. There is something satisfying about paying for your lunch and immediately being able to start building a plate. My indulgent add-on here would be to make your salad a Pittsburgh salad and add a side of French fries. Franco's also has breakfast now, but I have yet to try it. Though it's still cold outside, I imagine my favorite way to enjoy this salad will soon be in a to-go container while sitting in Perry Square.

Downtown is filled with other great options that are worth mentioning briefly here. I recommend also checking out the bar seating at Serafini's (for a bowl of lasagna soup), the kitchen-view seats at Like My Thai (for a Panang Tofu Curry, spice level 6 out of 5), and Shish Kabob (for a mixed grill platter) if you are considering something a little more filling and comforting.

Any episode of Anthony Bourdain's classic travel shows will expound on the ability of food to bring people together across cultural and social divides like little else. I highly encourage you to seek out culinary experiences with others, cook for friends, share meals with strangers, and use food to bring family and friends together. But most of all, I encourage you, whether you are at a table full of your extended family or sitting alone, to treat a meal as sacred. You don't have to say grace to respect your food and acknowledge the small miracle that every meal can be. If we start recognizing our meals as an opportunity for a tiny moment of reflection, maybe we will think more about what we choose to put into our bodies. That reflection will probably benefit you way more than whatever RFK Jr. thinks he is doing to make you a healthier person. Recognize the meal for what it can be: nourishment of body and soul. And sometimes your soul just needs to be alone for 45 damn minutes.

*Dave Tamulonis is an educator and musician living in Erie. He is the director of grants at the City of Erie and lives in the West Bayfront with his wife Marissa, dog Estherra Minerva, and cat Cherry Blossom.*

## Take Your Beer for a Walk: March 2026

Our West Bayfront: Dinner is Served and a Porky's pie

By: Jeff McCullor

Ah, March. It's like spring, but with wind and mud, and a little sun and warmth tossed in. We're on the verge of true blue beer walking weather my friend! And I'm here for it. In fact, I'll hook you up with a custom route through town for both you and a malt beverage of your choosing. Consider this a fun-sized walking tour complete with instructions. Put on your shoes, don your favorite hoodie (or "hooded sweatshirt" if you were born before 1993), and let's take a zip through a sweet neighborhood on Erie's west side.

Let's begin our march (see what I did there?) through the Our West Bayfront neighborhood by beginning at the corner of West 10th and Myrtle streets – position yourself on the northeast corner looking directly west. You'll find yourself staring at the stately Erhart House, 304 W. 10th. Just take a sip or two of your beverage and marvel at all the curves going on here. The front entrance, the multi-story turret, the circular windows! What a great spot. Cheers to you, Erhart House family!

From here we'll zip north on Myrtle exactly two blocks, ending up at the corner along West Eighth Street. You'll notice Porky's Pizza situated on the northwest portion of the corner. They make some pretty solid pizza and wings – delivering within a reasonable range in a short amount of time. One of my pizza shop gripes in this town is that not many are open past "usual" dinnertime, but Porky's bucks



JEFF MCCULLOR

Take a walk with Jeff McCullor as he celebrates the culinary offerings of the West Bayfront neighborhood. Porky's Pizza and Dinner is Served by Lisa help keep the neighborhood (supported by the nonprofit Our West Bayfront) fed and humming.

that trend staying open until midnight or 1 a.m. depending on the night. As someone that often lives within the rollercoaster timeframes of service industry schedules, the fine folks at Porky's have saved our butts more than once. Cheers to you, Porky's Pizza Pros!

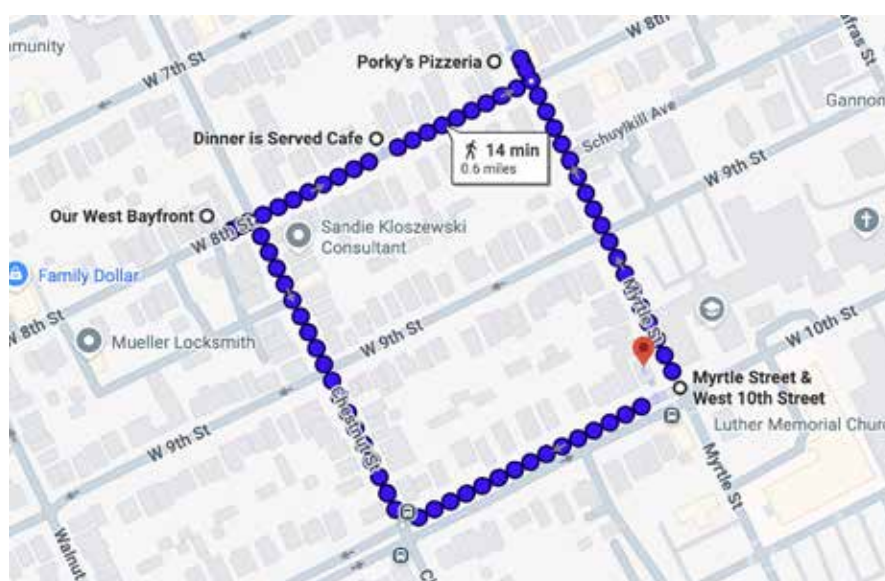
From this intersection, let's take a short walk west along Eighth Street to number 334, home of Dinner is Served By Lisa. Owner and Chef Lisa Heidelberg has been involved in Erie's food scene for quite some time and was one of the O.G. food truck operators at Erie Ale Works back in the day, serving as one half of the innovative food truck, One Farmer, One Chef. Since then, she's made a seri-

ous name for herself by cranking out quality meals for catering gigs and her signature "Big Bad Meals," available to order each week for pick up at the Erie Food Co-Op. If you haven't had her food, look her up, it's worth it. Cheers to you, Chef Lisa!

We'll make one last stop on our open container journey and that's a building located one block farther west. The address is 404 W. Eighth St., home of the Our West Bayfront headquarters. The group occupying this office is in charge of beautifying, unifying, and engaging the entire area between the Bayfront Connector and West 12th Street west of Sassafras Street. They organize events and activities like PorchFest, a unique afternoon-long music festival held on neighbors' porches. Or West BayFit, held at Bayview Park in warmer months providing yoga, recreational activities, a farmers market – all alongside beautiful bay views. Or, stop in and ask about the home they've been rebuilding with volunteer power from the neighborhood literally one brick at a time. Cheers to you, Our West Bayfront!

Thank you once again for taking an uninhibited walk with me and drinking a local beverage along the way. Enjoy the Our West Bayfront!

*Jeff McCullor is the co-owner of Erie Ale Works. He can be reached at jeff@eriealeworks.com*



## The Odd Couple Meets The Golden Girls?

PACA stages touching comedy *Ripcord*

BEGINNING THURSDAY, MAR. 12

When a cranky woman who enjoys her space is forced to share her room with a chipper new arrival to a senior living facility, you get *Ripcord*. The newest show at PACA is directed by Howard Lang, with Kenna Stevens as-

sisting and managing the stage. It's the perfect play to celebrate Women's History Month, featuring two female leads: Peggy Hauser as Abby and Betsy Butoryak as Marilyn. The women decide on a game to remedy their situation, and as they try to one-up each other, hilarity ensues.

"It's basically a character study between two women – as the play goes on, you understand why they behave as they do," explains Butoryak. She adds, "It's a mixture of comedy, self-awareness, and family." The cast is rounded out by Bryan Toy, Coreen Scott, Bryan Prior, and Zachery Hoffman as Scotty, "the beleaguered orderly that has to put up with the women," says Butoryak.

The show was written as a two-act comedy in 2015 by Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright David Lindsay-Abaire (*Rabbit Hole*, *Kimberly Akimbo*, *Good People*). But it is often described as more of a "dramedy," amusing and moving at once, with darkness and a focus on life and death. The original debut was off-Broadway, directed by David Hyde-Pierce, with Marylouise Burke and Holland Taylor in the lead roles.

This is a family-friendly show with a runtime of about an hour, with six evening shows and one Sunday matinee on opening weekend. It seems like the

perfect way to shake off spring fever. If you spend any time on social media or watch the local news, you may

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**When a cranky woman who enjoys her space is forced to share her room with a chipper new arrival to a senior living facility, you get *Ripcord*.**

---

know that there's been some recent turmoil at PACA. Butoryak wants you to know, "PACA is back. We are better than ever, and we need your support." – Edwina Capozziello

*Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays through Mar. 21 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 15 at 2 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St. // Tickets and info: [tickets.eriereader.com](http://tickets.eriereader.com)*



Celebrate Women's History month with the latest production at PACA – *Ripcord* tells the comedic story of two female leads living in a retirement community.

## The King's Rook Presents the Rock of the Irish

Shamrock 'n roll

SATURDAY, MAR. 14

The weekend before St. Patrick's Day will be filled with good luck, good music, and good beverages – with the parade in the afternoon and many downtown pubs planning special events. Once the sun goes down, revelers can follow the rainbow to the pot of gold located at The King's Rook Club for their second annual Rock of the Irish. This annual themed rock show features some of the area's most original and heaviest artists, with last year being so successful, Mayhem Productions secured some of Erie's elder statesmen to help create mischief in their second installment.

The green beer starts flowing with Maniacal Device kicking off the show. A band known for their horror-themed lyrics and rapid-fire playing, they are sure to drive all the snakes out of Erie. On the day where everyone is a little Irish, Erie's all Latino punk band Mala Sangre will bring the blarney with their breakneck-speed street punk. Mala

Sangre is one of Erie's longest-running bands who play all original music and have featured many local artists on each of their albums, from across various genres. Their first album was

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[Rock of the Irish] features some of the area's most original and heaviest artists, with last year being so successful, Mayhem Productions secured some of Erie's elder statesmen to help create mischief in their second installment.

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released in 2010 and they are currently working on recording their sixth studio album, with a release date later this year. Headlining the Rock of the Irish will be long-time Celtic punk band The Tradesmen. This will be the triumphant return for The Tradesmen with a new lineup, featuring talents from bands



After the St. Patrick's Day parade, keep the party going into the wee hours at the King's Rook Club as they host Maniacal Device, Mala Sangre (pictured), and long-time Celtic punk band The Tradesmen.

like Human Animal, Ralphie's Gone Blind, and The Go Go Rays. The band is known for their working-class attitude blended like a Shamrock shake with traditional Celtic sounds, incorporating a bagpipe and tin whistle.

If after a day of drinking you are still feeling lucky, there will be a karaoke afterparty hosted by Terry Crebel. Providing food for the evening will

be Roc's Catering and attendees who dress up in their St. Patrick's Day gear will get a drink coupon at the door while supplies last – so arrive early. – Larry Wheaton

*Doors at 8 p.m., music at 9 p.m. // The King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach St. // \$10 at Door, discount price with pre-sale // For tickets: [tickets.eriereader.com](http://tickets.eriereader.com)*

**One Night Only: Cheyenne Jackson, Live at Mercyhurst**

MIAC welcomes musical talent to their concert stage

WEDNESDAY, MAR. 18

The Mercyhurst Institute for Arts and Culture (MIAC) is proud to welcome the Emmy and Grammy-nominated artist Cheyenne Jackson to their stage for an incredible concert as he continues his *Mid Life Torso* Tour.

Fresh off of his Carnegie Hall solo debut and known extensively across the theater scene, Jackson offers a unique range of musical mastery and comfort in the spotlight. He has an extensive resume, having performed in over 15 shows on and off Broadway. This includes work in familiar titles such as *Into the Woods*, *The Secret Garden*, and *All Shook Up* – this role in particular earned him the Theatre World Award for “Outstanding Broadway Debut.”

His television and film presence is no less spectacular, with roles in *30 Rock*, *Glee*, and several seasons of *American Horror Story*.

MIAC Artistic Director Dr. Brett Johnson commends Jackson’s performance versatility: “Anyone who appreciates great singing, compelling storytelling, and an evening of live music will find something to love. His program spans Sinatra and Elvis

to Sam Smith and Chappell Roan, so it truly crosses generations.”

Jackson is also set to perform an original song, titled “Ok,” described on MIAC’s website as “a moving tribute to his father’s unconditional love for his gay son.”

“Mercyhurst has built a reputation for bringing major artists to Erie, and we’re proud to continue that tradition.” Johnson stated. “Jackson’s performance promises warmth, humor, and exceptional musicianship – the kind of shared live experience that reminds us why the performing arts matter.”

MIAC plays an integral part in displaying Erie’s diverse community of talented artists, actors, and musicians. In addition to several annual live shows through MIAC Live, the School of Arts frequently opens its doors to showcase various galleries, recitals, ensembles, and more.

This one-night-only engagement promises an “electric evening,” and is intended for audiences of all ages. – Cassandra Gripp

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

CONTRIBUTED



Emmy and Grammy-nominated artist Cheyenne Jackson hits the Mary D’Angelo stage at Mercyhurst for his *Mid Life Torso* Tour.

a play by David Lindsay-Abaire

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## FILM 1020 Finishes Program Strong

Wednesdays, throughout March and early April

CONTINUING WEDNESDAY, MAR. 18

In the fall of 2025, FILM Erie and the 1020 Collective launched their joint program, the aptly named FILM 1020, to bring the Erie community together to watch movies. And they're finishing off the season throughout March and early April, with an exciting, thrilling, and moving lineup.

According to John C. Lyons, the award-winning Erie-based filmmaker

Erie-based director and FILM 1020 curator John C. Lyons describes film as an "empathy machine." In his opinion, "Today, perhaps more than ever, we all could benefit from putting ourselves in other people's shoes."

and creator of *Tethered Immersive*, who curated the film list and volunteers his time to introduce the movies, "For the most part, this Winter and Spring 2026 program was me trying to both read the tea leaves on the films that would be awards contenders, as well as those I felt were the best of last year." He explained that the 5 to 7 p.m. programming, which takes place before the feature screening, "is meant to build community, try new things, and highlight recent work from regional filmmakers." Altogether, for Lyons, film is his

church, and he described it as an "empathy machine." In his opinion, "Today, perhaps more than ever, we all could benefit from putting ourselves in other people's shoes."

There are two types of tickets available for purchase for FILM 1020, one without a meal and one with (vegan and gluten-free options are offered). Popcorn is free, and there are food and beverages available for purchase. —Cara Suppa

### Wednesday, Mar. 18: *Sound of Falling* and *The Underground Railroad*, Ep. 9

In *Sound of Falling*, a German drama, the same farmstead is the setting for four different generations of girls – the story is told non-linearly, shifting between each time period. Meanwhile, Dr. Rhonda Matthews joins the fun for a screening of Episode 9 of *The Underground Railroad*.

### Wednesday, Mar. 25: *Hamnet* and *The Underground Railroad*, Ep.10

The Oscar-nominated *Hamnet* is a stunning, soul-stirring depiction of the wife and family that has stood in William Shakespeare's shadow for centuries. When their young boy falls ill and dies, Agnes and William's grief spills out in different ways.

Beginning the evening, Dr. Rhonda Matthews will again be on-hand to lead the screening of the last episode of *The Underground Railroad* and the discussion afterward.

### Wednesday, Apr. 1: *Wicked: For Good* and a secret film

The blockbuster sequel to 2025's first installment of the book-turned-musi-



FilmErie and 1020 Collective present their latest slate of film screenings for their Film 1020 series, including fan favorites as well as titles that showed up in multiple Academy Awards categories including *Sound of Falling*, *Hamnet*, *Wicked for Good*, and *It Was Just an Accident*.

cal-turned-film series, *Wicked: For Good* closes the book on the story of Elphaba and Glinda. The feature film will be preceded by an as-yet secret film, which will be announced at the event.

### Wednesday, Apr. 8: *It Was Just An Accident*, *Lake Erie, Our Kin: Roadshow Version*, and *Watershed*

*It Was Just An Accident* is an Iranian-French-Luxembourgian thriller (reviewed by Forest Taylor within this issue) that follows a man whose life takes a drastic turn after he gets into a car accident.

The night begins with a screening of *Lake Erie, Our Kin: Roadshow Version*, the full-length edition of the documentary produced for WQLN's *Chronicles*, with a filmmaker Q&A afterward. It's followed by *Watershed*, which describes the Mill Creek Flood of 1915, also followed by a Q&A featuring the filmmaker.

Dinner and complementary programming at 5 p.m., feature at 7 p.m. // 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland St. // \$10 (no meal), \$30 (with meal) // For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit: [tickets.erieereader.com](https://tickets.erieereader.com)



## Idlestar Stacks Lavery Bunker with Metal, Comedy, Punk, and More

Jam-packed schedule precedes April 12 grand reopening of Centennial Hall

**Saturday, Mar. 21**

### Bore, Twist and Writhe, One If By Land, Loss Becomes, and Gatlin

The first Saturday in spring will be filled with sounds of punk, metal, and hardcore. Starting the night off will be the Youngstown quartet Gatlin, fresh off their latest full-length (released March 3), *Worst Case Scenario*, courtesy of This Is Just a Record Label. NYC heavy metalcore five-piece Loss Becomes will follow, formed by guitarist/YouTuber/Mission Sandwich Social Chef Brian Tsao, with members of Thracian, Tiger Flowers, as well as the Westfall Recording Company. Make sure to catch your local(ish) heroes, Meadville's very own One If By Land, the long-running punk outfit fronted by 40 Under 40 alum Fred Oakman. Continuing in that vein, Hanover, PA's Twist and Writhe will take the stage, with their gritty, lovable throwback punk sound. Headlining the show will be NYC hardcore chaos agents Bore, supporting their recent album *Feral* from Silent Pendulum Records.

6 p.m. to 11 p.m. // *The Bunker at Lavery's, 128 W. 12th St. // \$10 adv., \$15 day of show // 21+ // Tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com*

**Thursday, Mar. 26**

### Zeta, Hiroe, Amplifiers, Zakrahe

Prog, ambient alt, and post rock will be the order of the day in Erie on the last Thursday in March. Dextrous compositions and virtuoso musicianship will be on display from the very

beginning with Zakrahe, the talented team hailing from right here in Erie. Pittsburgh's Amplifiers will bring their trademark sound of lush and often ambient orchestrations swelling and churning away thunderously. For this show – including a trio of regional performances – they'll be joined by their siblings in sound, Hiroe. The Philadelphia instrumental rock quin-

It might seem to be a break from the norm (if you can remotely call it that) for an Idlestar night of comedy. But when you see the throughline of punk ethos and street cred, it's easy to get how the first Tuesday in April came together.

tet will be performing cuts from their 2025 album *Wield* and more, and first met Amplifiers sharing an Idlestar bill in 2025. Finishing out the evening will be Venezuelan post rockers Zeta. With their uptempo, punk rock-inspired sound, the group of hard-touring and harder-playing artists will win over fans with their high-energy stage presence and fervor.

6 p.m. to 11 p.m. // *The Bunker at Lavery's, 128 W. 12th St. // \$15 adv., \$20 day of show // 21+ // Tickets and info: tickets.eriereader.com*

CONTRIBUTED



Idlestar Productions brings three energetic shows to Lavery's Bunker in March, ahead of the anticipated reopening of Centennial Hall. Catch shows from Bore, Zeta, or a comedy set from Neil Rubenstein, along with their musical and comedic guests.

**Tuesday, Apr. 7**

### Neil Rubenstein, Bailey Pope, Jerry Morrison, and Alex Stypula

It might seem to be a break from the norm (if you can remotely call it that) for an Idlestar night of comedy. But when you see the throughline of punk ethos and street cred, it's easy to get how the first Tuesday in April came together. Pittsburgher (and former Los Angeleno) Alex Stypula will be hosting the night, having recently completed the second season of his rotoscoped animated short series *Night Drives*, and will be bringing his dark wit to the Bunker stage. Then, guests can catch comedian Jerry Morrison, the Nashvillian and former bassist of Tooth & Nail/Forefront

Records band Bleach. Bailey Pope will bring her own punk rock roots to the mic; the trans New Yorker (and former Angeleno) recently released her live special and album AKA. Headlining the night will be Neil Rubenstein, who released his 2024 comedy album *Have Some Dignity* on Equal Vision Records. Erie will be the first night in a six-show run for Rubenstein and Pope, christened the Pennsylvania Takeover. Yeah, the PA Takeover, as the duo makes their way all throughout this so-called nation. — Nick Warren

7 p.m. to 10 p.m. // *The Bunker at Lavery's, 128 W. 12th St. // \$20 adv., \$25 day of show // 21+ // tickets available at tickets.eriereader.com*

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## Erie Philharmonic Showcases Flagship City Legacy of Burleigh with Dvořák's *New World Symphony*

Additionally Erie to host Burleigh Spirituals Festival

SATURDAY, MAR. 21

The Erie Philharmonic's upcoming March Symphonic Series concert features artists who have revolutionized classical music by drawing on a wide range of musical influences. From Jessie Montgomery's *Strum*, which mixes the traditional orchestration of the string quartet with the technique of classical guitar, to the combination of jazz and Basque folk that Maurice Ravel explored in his Piano Concerto in G Major (performed by featured pianist Sean Chen), theirs are ideas that moved the classical world forward. The Philharmonic's concert selection echoes a partnership between an Erie music legend and one of the most influential composers of the late 19th century: Harry T. Burleigh and Antonín Dvořák through Symphony No. 9 *From A New World*.

"Our concern became really focused on promulgating the legacy of Harry Burleigh," Burleigh Legacy Alliance board member Cheryl Rush Dix explained. The Burleigh Legacy Alliance provides historical research, archival work, and education in music and the arts focused on Burleigh's impact. "The breadth of his significance from an Erie native standpoint, going on to impact the world of music and social justice. To the benefit of our community and the pleasure of all, we have made Erie a center and a reliable purveyor of Burleigh scholarship and performance."

Dvořák's tenure as director of the National Conservatory of Music was part of a movement to shift the sphere of influence of American music away from European education and German compositional structures. Jeannette Thurber, patron and founder of the conservatory, sought out Dvořák personally because he used Bohemian folk melodies in his music, rejecting the German influence widely considered the standard of the Romantic movement. Thurber believed American music should have its identity not come from Europe, but from the marginalized voices of African Americans and Native Americans.

Harry T. Burleigh first met Dvořák in his second year at the conservatory, where he would go on to become the orchestral librarian, copying manuscripts for Dvořák's compositions.

Although it is theorized that Dvořák had heard the style before with the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Burleigh was the musician who introduced him to African American musical tradition, including the spirituals "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Go Down, Moses."

"Burleigh had a great deal of personal contact with Dvořák and a warm relationship," Dr. Jean Snyder, author of the 2016 biography *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance*, described. Burleigh would sing and play the piano, with Dvořák asking detailed questions about the distinctive music elements and African American life. "He was regarded as one of the best students at the conservatory, and spent a lot of time with Dvořák personally, walking through the streets of New York and spending time at Dvořák's home with his family."

Dvořák began composing the *New World Symphony* in the late spring of 1893, encouraging Burleigh to "give these melodies to the world." Syncopation and the pentatonic scale, used within African American and Native American music, were both present throughout the composition. Elements of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" could be found in the second theme of the first movement, alongside a musical interpretation inspired

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**Because of the work of the Burleigh Legacy Alliance and generations of musicians and composers over the last century, Harry T. Burleigh's contributions to Dvořák's Ninth Symphony and American music will never be forgotten.**

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by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha." Within the second movement, the melody would later be adapted by fellow Dvořák student Williams Arms Fisher into "Goin' Home" in 1922. The use of the English

CONTRIBUTED



The Erie Philharmonic's symphonic concert in March features the work of Erie music legend Harry T. Burleigh and one of the most influential composers of the late 18th century Antonín Dvořák, as they present Symphony No. 9 *From A New World*, featuring pianist Sean Chen.

horn within the melody is speculated to be reminiscent of Burleigh's voice.

Leading up to the premiere, Dvořák would proclaim to the classical music world that America's contribution must be built on the foundation of African American and Native American music, writing, "These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American." His advocacy encouraged Americans to stop going to Europe for their music education and to pursue their dreams without the barriers of poverty or class. In addition, Dvořák and Thurber announced the National Conservatory would open a new department dedicated to the study and teaching of students of color, with Harry T. Burleigh and Paul Holin serving as teachers.

Almost 20 years later, Burleigh commented in the program notes for the Philadelphia Orchestra that many people ignored the influence of African American music on the composition of Dvořák's Ninth Symphony. At St. George's Episcopal Church in New York City, where he served as soloist until shortly before his death in 1949, many of Burleigh's arrangements were paired with Largo and

played at the Annual Vesper Service of Negro spirituals.

Because of the work of the Burleigh Legacy Alliance and generations of musicians and composers over the last century, Harry T. Burleigh's contributions to Dvořák's Ninth Symphony and American music will never be forgotten. At the upcoming Burleigh Spirituals Festival this March, Erie will host the Fisk Jubilee Singers alongside HBCU choirs from Morgan State University, Tennessee State University, Delaware State University, and Howard University.

Dix's words on the festival showcase Burleigh's impact on American music. "This is available to Erie. Erie is available to the music world that loves Burleigh. These voices are coming here. They want to be in his hometown." – Thomas Taylor

*The Erie Philharmonic's New World Symphony: Saturday, Mar. 21 // 7:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$27-\$68 // For tickets and info: eriephil.org*

*The Burleigh Spirituals Festival: Wednesday, Mar. 25 to Saturday, Mar. 28 // For info: burleighlegacyalliance.org*

## Multicultural Dance Night Celebrates Global Communities on Playhouse Stage

Gannon's annual tradition brings together performers from around the world

FRIDAY, MAR. 27

Bringing global rhythm to the local stage, Gannon University returns with its annual Multicultural Dance Night – an evening of movement, music and shared celebration that trans-

forms the Erie Playhouse into a world stage.

The event offers students and community members the opportunity to experience cultural dances from around the globe, with performances representing nearly every conti-

nent. This year's lineup includes two Chinese dance groups, a high-energy K-Pop performance, and a traditional Dabke presentation, alongside Rwandan, Hungarian, Italian, South Asian, Syrian and North American traditions.

From intricate footwork and flowing costumes to percussive rhythms and synchronized group choreography, each performance highlights the stories and heritage carried through dance. All participating groups are trained local performers, reflecting Erie's vibrant cultural fabric. Erie Arts and Culture's Folk and Traditional Arts Director Kelly Armor assisted in identifying community groups whose work honors and preserves these traditions.

"Erie's strength lies in our rich diversity of cultures," said organizer and Gannon English professor Shreelina Ghosh. "Dance is the universal language that [transcends] the barriers of language and politics. This event

creates a space for celebration of cultural heritages and unique identities."

The program is part of Gannon University's College of Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences Speaker Series, inspired by Immanuel Kant's call to Sapere Aude – "dare to know."

The series encourages critical reflection, courageous inquiry and civil discourse, and Multicultural Dance Night brings that philosophy to life through embodied storytelling and shared experience.

In that spirit, audience members will not just watch – they'll be invited to participate. Select performers will guide attendees in learning basic steps, turning the evening into an interactive celebration that bridges cultures through movement. – Chloe Forbes

7 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$10 for students, \$20 general admission // For tickets and info: [erieplayhouse.org](http://erieplayhouse.org)

CONTRIBUTED



Gannon University has sourced choreography from across the globe to present a Multicultural Dance Night taking place at the Erie Playhouse.

## Budding Birder? Take a Walk with Erie Bird Observatory

Free monthly guided bird walks at LEAF

CONTINUING SATURDAY, MAR. 28

March brings a shift in seasons, the ebb of late winter. One of the first tell-tale signs of warmer days ahead are the sugar maples, second only to the annual migration of waterfowl and birds of spring.

The Erie Bird Observatory (EBO) continues their series of public bird walks in partnership with LEAF to explore this shift. I spoke with Holley Short, executive director of EBO and their naturalist Katie Andersen to better understand this winter-to-spring transition.

The free monthly bird walks led by both Short and Andersen, meet on the fourth Saturday of every month. They begin at the LEAF building (1501 W. Sixth St.) near the tennis courts in Frontier Park and run for about an hour. Binoculars will conveniently be provided for attendees to borrow. And, according to Andersen, "This is a great month for waterfowl watching, especially the first two weeks. Check various ponds and lakes for ducks, geese, and swans."

Budding birders can then take their newly acquired bird-spotting skills home with them. "If you want to bring the birds to you, you can add native plants and feeders with an appropriate seed mix as well as a water source, like a simple bird bath," advises Short. And for those of us ready to venture out, a bird ID guide such as the EBO recommended *Sibley Guide to Birds* or the free Merlin Bird ID app are invaluable resources during these upcoming seasons.

"Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, Fox Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Eastern Phoebe, and Tree Swallows [all] begin migrating back into our area this month," says Andersen. And now, alongside the true experts, novice birders will have a chance to witness the wonder of this transition – the wintering songbirds that are once more joined by the migrating birds of spring. – Erica Stewart

9 a.m. // Frontier Park, 1501 W. 6th St. // Free // For info visit: [eriebirdobservatory.org](http://eriebirdobservatory.org)

ERIE BIRD OBSERVATORY



Whether you're a budding birder or seasoned bird professional, join the folks from Erie Bird Observatory at LEAF for a free monthly guided birdwatching walk – this month will highlight some exciting migratory visitors like the Tree Swallow (pictured).

## Benedictines for Peace

### 46th Annual GOOD FRIDAY Pilgrimage for Peace



*Racism is the focus of this year's contemporary Stations of the Cross. We will walk through the city of Erie, stopping to pray at places that connect us to or remind us of the reality of racism and the suffering it continues to cause in midst. Between stops, participants walk in silence on a route through the city.*

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## EVENTS

### Erie Reader Book Club: March 2026

*Salt: A World History* by Mark Kurlansky

SUNDAY, MAR. 29

The Erie Reader Book Club will be reading and discussing *Salt: A World History* by Mark Kurlansky in conjunction with the Erie Reader Food issue.

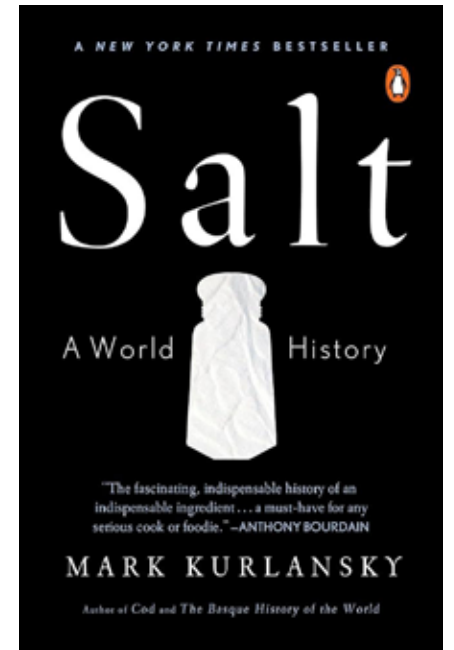
Each March, the Reader takes a deep dive into all things food in the Erie area, so it's only natural that a book about food would be selected. But Kurlansky's *Salt* is much more than the typical food read. His fifth work of nonfiction, *Salt* takes on the task of viewing the historical timeline through the shifting history of the rock – the only one that humans eat – and how it has shaped both human history and civilization.

The now common household item

holds a rich history: from its use as currency to its influence on wars and trade routes, salt has achieved many statuses over time that other food subgroups can only hope to achieve.

In this thought-provoking and well-researched telling, Kurlansky takes an item sitting unassumingly in many kitchens across the world and flips the story, shifting our perspective on the mineral and the lens through which we view it – after finishing *Salt*, you may have a newfound respect for what's in the shaker before you use it on your next meal. – Ally Kutz

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



### Mercy Center for Women Honors Women Leaders

Close out March with this inspiring event

MONDAY, MAR. 30

It's women's history month, and what better way to celebrate than chatting with the dynamic and driven Jennie Hagerty, executive director of Mercy Center for Women (MCW), about their 33rd Annual Women Making History Event.

Honoring inspiring women within the Erie community, the celebration will be held at the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center at Mercyhurst University. It is free and the public is encouraged to attend.

The event was started by the Sisters of Mercy because they wanted to recognize women who provide the heart, hands, and soul of the community. True to that, Hagerty explained, "this year I really appreciated the diversity of the nominations – there were more service leaders, wonderful boots-on-the-ground women who are in the community working with individuals so their lives are more fulfilled." MCW will honor 18 women but received 40 heartfelt nominations.

Through the years under Hagerty's leadership, MCW's services have expanded since starting out in a small home by the Sisters of Mercy, but their heart remains the same.

Success stories flow from the Holy Rosary grounds, where they have been since 1994, and soon the former Sacred Heart school.

"I am grateful we can repurpose those buildings and continue to help many."

Hagerty will be the emcee at the event this year. This role was a natural add-on, "because I'm just passionate about it and for me it's being able to connect with these honorees and introduce them, and even more importantly for me it's an opportunity for people to embrace the mission... the women and children – who face homelessness, abuse, and challenges with sobriety."

"When you're passionate, you live it morning, noon, and night," she adds.

Also speaking at the event this year will be Mishol Randolph, a graduate of the program who has taken her life in a new direction, becoming a certified peer specialist working for Gaudenzia.

Hagerty said she will be delighted to present Randolph, and also highlighted the fact that clients of MCW attend the event each year.

"The reason we do Women Making History is not only to honor these women, but also to show our clients – they see the videos and the inspir-

CONTRIBUTED



The Mercy Center for Women celebrates Women's History Month by recognizing 18 local female leaders who "provide the heart, hands, and soul of the community."

ing stories, they get dressed up via our Dress for Success program, get their hair and makeup done and enjoy the evening – and the next day will share their takeaways from it during morning reflection."

This one evening, she said, paints such a picture of hope. For the full-tilt takeaways that touch many lives, save the date for this inspiring event. – Gretchen Gallagher Durney

7 p.m. // Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, Mercyhurst University, 501 E. 38th St. // Free // For more info: [mcw-erie.org/events/women-making-history-2026](http://mcw-erie.org/events/women-making-history-2026)



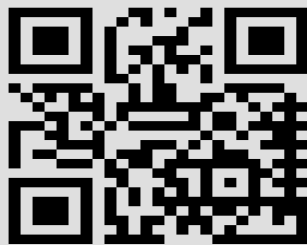
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**Charli xcx***Wuthering Heights*

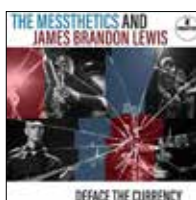
Atlantic Records



By the end of 2024, Charli xcx was ready to free herself from *BRAT* – her critical and commercial smash that came to define that year’s summer for many in popular culture. As end-of-year lists and awards nominations began rolling in, Charli was contacted by filmmaker Emerald Fennell in the mindset of formulating her forthcoming adaptation of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. While the director requested a singular track, the pop star relished the opportunity and offered a full tie-in project instead. Looking at this album outside of the context of Fennell’s controversial adaptation, Charli xcx’s *Wuthering Heights* is the welcome sonic departure that the artist needed post-*BRAT*. Opposed to *BRAT*’s focus on dance and club music, *Wuthering Heights* is a dizzying array of sprawling orchestral strings and heartfelt melodies, carrying with it a profound understanding of Brontë’s prose. The theme of finding oneself through romantic and platonic connections is channeled through Charli, as it was with Cathy in the 1847 literary classic. Much of this search for identity correlates with the pop star’s real-life experiences, marrying her longtime partner George Daniel (of *The 1975*) in July 2025. This milestone, in turn, is indicative of the project’s greater contemplative qualities. Where *BRAT* felt like escapism, *Wuthering Heights* feels like facing one’s emotions head-on. While a massive departure from her 2024 smash hit, *Wuthering Heights* is Charli at her most emotional and experimental – truly an engaging middle ground for the literary truthers and film defenders. – Nathaniel Clark

**The Messthetics and James Brandon Lewis***Deface The Currency*

Impulse! Records



An ultrasonic landscape with the unlikely pairing of punk and jazz creates the unique sound that is the Messthetics and James Brandon Lewis. On *Deface The Currency*, the four-piece combines these two outsider genres and proves that they belong together more than previously thought. The rhythm section was previously part of the D.C. area indie-punk band Fugazi, known for their DIY ethos and political stances. That Fugazi groove shines through on tracks like “Gestations” and “Clutch.” Guitarist Anthony Pirog is the perfect fit, acting as a conduit between punk and jazz – in this instrumental band, his playing is forward-facing when the saxophone isn’t taking the lead. The Messthetics started as a three-piece and released two albums that way, until they paired up with jazz saxophonist James Brandon Lewis for their first album together in 2024, after a successful tour (where they made a stop in Erie). The jazz is still present on tracks “30 Years of Knowing” and “Rules of The Game,” while they enter no wave territory, akin to the sound of Sonic Youth on the songs “Universal Security” and the blistering final track “Serpent Tongue (Slight Return).” The album is a great example of what The Messthetics sound like live, with the same raw intensity and technical prowess. Thankfully they are returning to Erie on Sunday, May 3 at Centennial Hall, where fans can pick up this fantastic album and experience the performance for themselves. – Larry Wheaton

**Mitski***Nothing’s About to Happen to Me*

Dead Oceans



This might be the single most quintessential Mitski album in her entire catalog. With that, there comes a bit of a double-edged sword. Make no mistake, this is a fantastic album filled with deep emotional resonance and lyrical metaphors all built around an ambitious, interwoven theme. Fans of hers – like myself – should not and will not be disappointed in the slightest. It’s worthy of analytical study and will be listened to and ruminated upon for years to come. *Nothing’s About to Happen to Me* is easily one of the best albums of 2026. Why then, do I sound so defensive and cold? It’s because she is – for better or worse – held to her own exceedingly lofty standards. The heights that Mitski has reached in the past are nearly unparalleled by other artists in her generation. While I would rank this album somewhere in the middle of her discography, calling this a “middling” Mitski album is wholly misleading. Glistening with fresh instrumentation (accordion, horn hits, etc.), it wavers between the delicate touch of *The Land Is Inhospitable and So Are We* and the aggressive tension of *Puberty 2*. It’s an exciting and dense album that will no doubt bring new listeners into the fold and give dedicated fans something to celebrate. It’s catchy, passionate, and brings a tear to my eye. What more could you want? – Nick Warren

**Joyce Manor***I Used to Go to This Bar*

Epitaph Records



I never felt my age until I turned 30, and suddenly, everything was measured in the age of the media I consumed growing up. It was a shock to look back on Joyce Manor’s classic self-titled debut being over 15 years old, and it feels almost just as shocking to hear that they haven’t changed a bit. Sure, vocalist Barry Johnson’s gritty yell is more restrained and less often deployed; his lyrics have sharpened, and there’s a little more acoustic guitar in the band than there used to be. But the California three-piece have simply graduated from being power-pop prodigies to power-pop veterans, making *I Used to Go to This Bar* a victory lap of sorts. Having most in common with their 2016 career highlight *Cody, IUTGTTB* has the kind of songwriting that feels accessible to new audiences while boiling down the band’s strengths into a 19-minute career retrospective. There are what feel like homages built into every nook and cranny of the album, from the Pinkerton-esque synth tones of “Falling Into It” to the Sum 41-aping opening lick of the album’s title track. But even beyond the bells and whistles, Joyce Manor is capable of writing songs like “The Opossum” and “Grey Guitar,” which feel destined to be setlist staples in another 15 years. – Aaron Mook

**Mabeline's Poetry Corner**

The Table

By: Mabel Howard, Mabeline "The Artist"

We gather at the table  
 For many different things  
 To play board games with family  
 To discuss plans and dreams

A table can be featured  
 In a variety of places  
 The kitchen, the patio,  
 And the dining space

What would a restaurant be  
 If no table were in sight?  
 No rounds, no squares,  
 It would certainly change the hype

Like, where would you tell  
 Your friends to meet you  
 And where would the waiters  
 Come to greet you?

Tables can be celebrated

While empty or full  
 Paired best with chairs  
 And favorite FOODS.

Mabeline hosts and promotes a variety of community building programs that focus on the Art of Healing through poetry and writing, including Live Poetry at Cafe 7-10 and The Poetry X-Change at Werner Books and Coffee. She can be reached at gamewithmabel@gmail.com



**FILM**  
**10 | 20**  
 WINTER SPRING 2026

**Downtown Movies are Back!**  
 Every Wednesday at The 1020 Collective  
 Doors open at 5pm, Feature film begins at 7pm

**FULL PROGRAM PREVIEW**



DINNER | COCKTAILS | FILMS

Open Thursday & Friday 10:20am - 10:20pm + During Events



1020 Collective is an art center with large scale exhibitions in visual, musical and performance art. We welcome our community to collaborate through events and rentals.

1020 Holland Street, Erie PA  
 1020collective.com



FRIDGE COMICS BY: Anthony @ants art house



**THIS IS FINE.**

**Time and Temperature**  
*at Your Fingertips*



**814 452-6311**

Featuring Erie's only team of meteorologists.

**YOUR WEATHER AUTHORITY**



CRAIG FLINT MORNING TALK TOM ATKINS EVENINGS JACOB MATTHEWS WEEKENDS

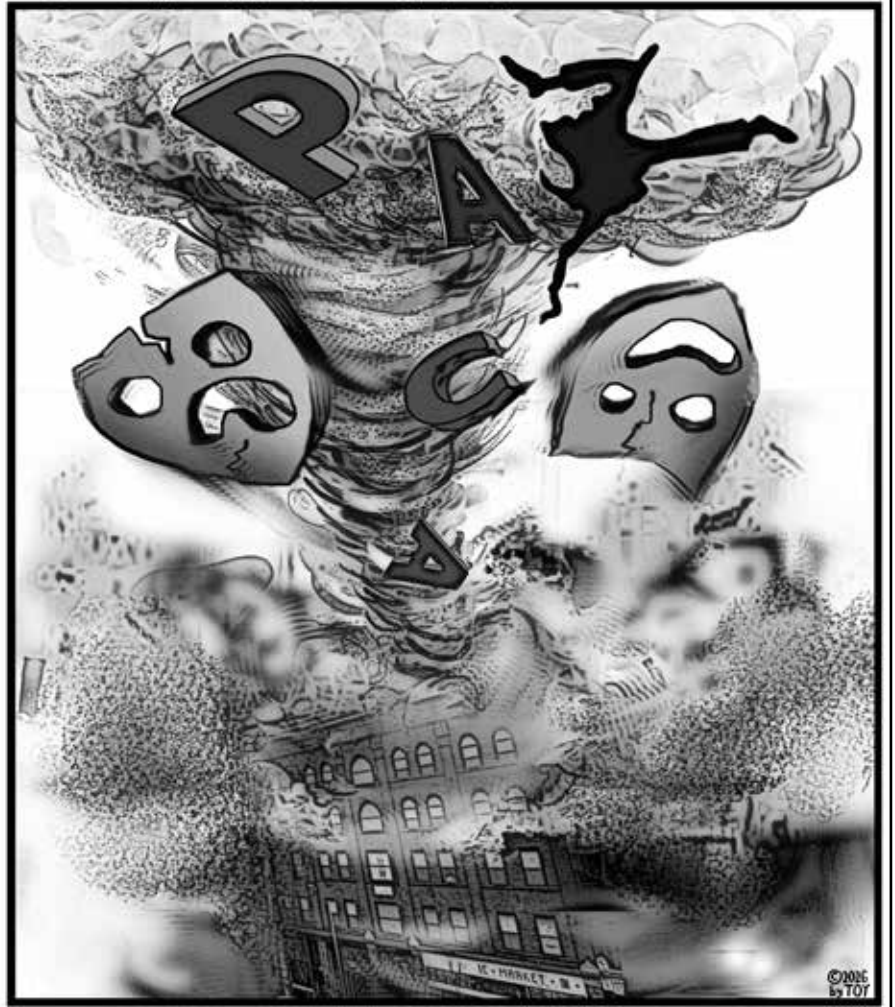
JET-24 FOX 66 YourErie

# NEGATIVE WORLDS

"WELCOME TO THE WORKING WEEK" BY NICK WARREN

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>DENIAL</b> 5AM-7AM	<b>ANGER</b> 6AM-7PM	<b>BARGAINING</b> 6AM-7:59AM	<b>DEPRESSION</b> ALL DAY	<b>ACCEPTANCE</b> 6AM-7AM ✓ ✗
<b>EMAILS</b> 8AM-9AM	<b>EXISTENTIAL DREAD (PERCEIVED)</b> 8AM-NOON	<b>SCRAMBLING</b> 8AM-9AM	<b>THE CRUSHING WEIGHT OF THE WORLD</b> CLICK FOR LATEST NEWS	<b>GETTING LITERALLY NOTHING DONE</b> CLICK TO RESUME
<b>A BRIEF GLIMMER OF PRODUCTIVITY</b> 10AM-NOON	<b>CATCH UP MEETING</b> 1PM-2PM	<b>COMPROMISED REALITIES</b> 10AM-11AM	<b>MUFFLED CRYING</b> NOON-1PM	<b>LONG LUNCH</b> CLICK TO HIDE FROM CALENDAR
<b>ONE THING THAT GOES WRONG AND RUINS YOUR ENTIRE WEEK</b> 1PM-5PM	<b>EXISTENTIAL DREAD (EXTERNAL)</b> 3PM-7PM	<b>DEADLINE</b> 11AM-1PM	<b>PRESENTATION</b> 1PM-2AM	<b>PLAN FOR NEXT WEEK</b> CLICK TO CANCEL
<b>DISSOCIATION</b> 6PM-TBD	<b>STARE BLANKLY</b> 8PM-TBD	<b>COMPROMISED DREAMS</b> 2PM-5PM	<b>YELL AT SELF IN MIRROR</b> CLICK TO COMPOSE INSULT	<b>MAYBE SOMETHING FUN?</b> CLICK TO RESCHEDULE
		<b>SELF CARE [CANCELED]</b> CLICK TO RESCHEDULE	<b>PITTERS</b> 6PM-8PM	
			<b>MURMURS</b> 8PM-TBD	

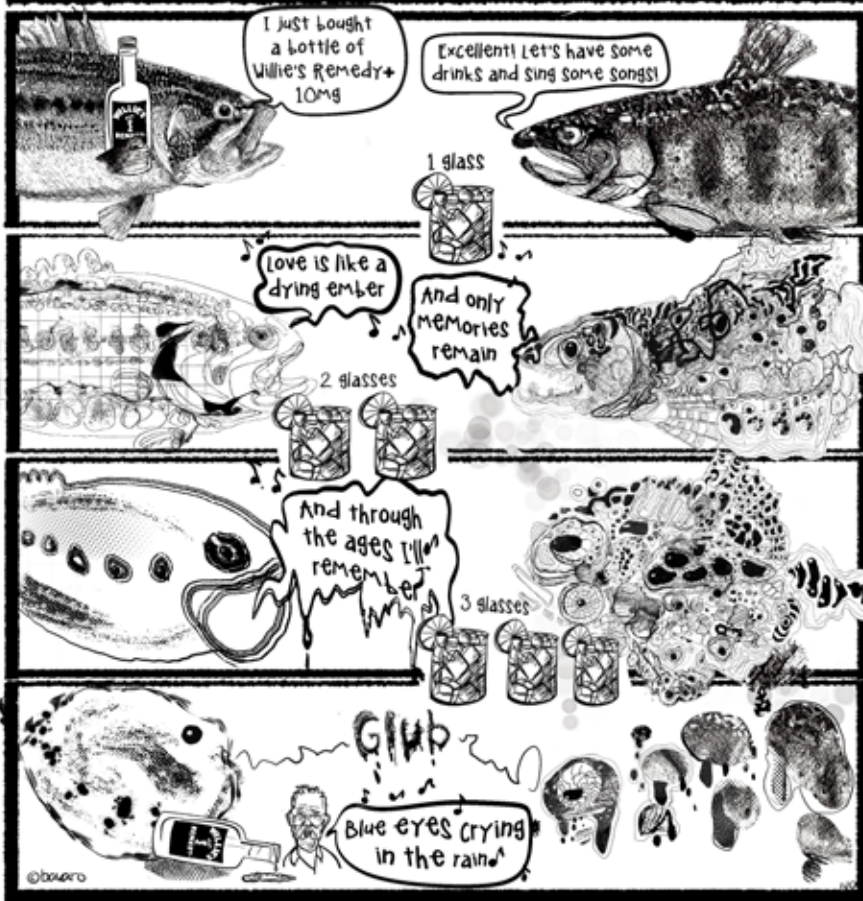
## JUST TOYIN' WITCHA — BY B. TOY



©2016 BY TOY

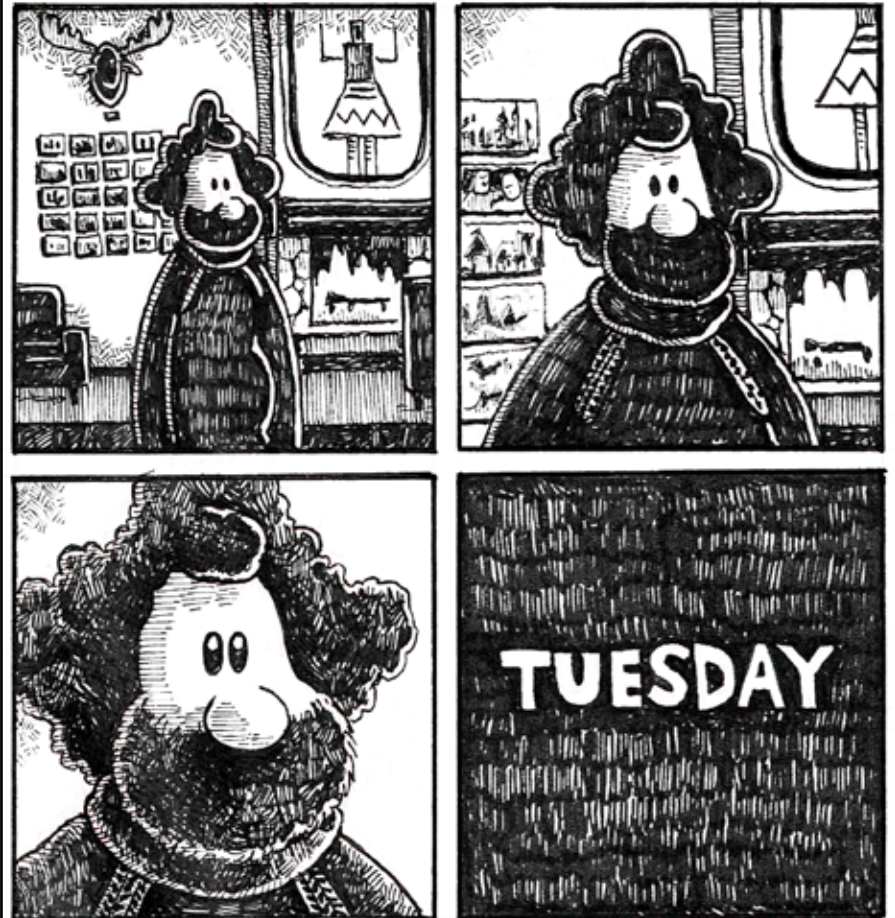
## Fish that Talk by JOHN BAWARO

in: pancho and lefty



## SABBATICAL DAY 15

BY BRAD PATTULLO  
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bradpattullo.com





ERIE OTTERS



# HOME SCHEDULE

MONTH OF MARCH



**MARCH 1**

**4PM**

FAITH AND FAMILY



**MARCH 7**

**7PM**

TIKI LUAU NIGHT

PRESENTED BY REBICH INVESTMENTS



**MARCH 8**

**4PM**

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT NIGHT



**MARCH 13**

**7PM**

ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION

PRESENTED BY REBICH INVESTMENTS



**MARCH 14**

**7PM**

MEMORABILIA MADNESS

PRESENTED BY TURN 2 SPORTS CARDS



**MARCH 21**

**7PM**

FAN APPRECIATION NIGHT

PRESENTED BY PLYLER ENTRY SYSTEMS

**DON'T MISS OUT ON OTTERS HOCKEY.**

**FOUR GIVEAWAYS IN THE MONTH OF MARCH**

**3.7**

**INSULATED COOLER BAG**

**3.13**

**ST. PATS REPLICA JERSEY**

**3.14**

**25-26 TEAM CARD SET**

**3.21**

**25-26 TEAM POSTER**

FOR TICKETS AND MORE INFORMATION    OTTERSHOCKEY.COM

**Wabtec US Rail, Inc.**  
dba **Wabtec Corporation** seeks  
**Advanced Lead MCA Platform  
Software Engineer** in **Erie, PA** to  
provide timely communications  
on significant issues, risks, or  
developments.

**Telecommuting Permitted.**  
**Domestic travel throughout the  
U.S. required 25% of the time.**

Apply at [www.jobpostingtoday.com](http://www.jobpostingtoday.com)  
Ref #64571

**Wabtec US Rail, Inc.**  
**DBA Wabtec Corporation** seeks  
**Advanced Lead Engineer – MCA  
Platform Software** in **Erie, PA**  
to design, develop, maintain,  
and test MCA Platform software.  
Telecommuting permitted.

Apply at [www.jobpostingtoday.com](http://www.jobpostingtoday.com)  
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## MOVIES

### *It Was Just an Accident* is Panahi's Crowning Achievement

This IS a film



Jafar Panahi may just be the bravest filmmaker working today. Although arrested multiple times by the Iranian government, including in 2010 when he was banned from making a film for the following 20 years, Panahi has remained one of the most exciting voices in world cinema.

With half of his filmography now being made illegally, he has challenged the authoritarianism of Iran's government in his own uniquely compassionate, humanistic way. His work culminates with *It Was Just an Accident*, easily his most outspokenly political film to date. The film manages to be a cry out against political injustice without ever losing that deep connection to humanity.

Auto mechanic Vahid (Vahid Mobasseri) is approached by a man with a prosthetic leg (Ebrahim Azizi)

to fix his car. Upon talking with the man, Vahid suspects that he may have been the government agent who tortured him in prison. Vahid kidnaps the man, intending to kill him and bury his body in the desert, but first, he needs to be sure it's him. He takes him to various other former prisoners (including a couple in the middle of their wedding rehearsal) to see if they think he is the right man, and a series of mishaps, both comedic and tragic, unfold over the course of the day. The story is clearly very personal to Panahi, along with anyone else who suffered under that authoritarianism. Where seeking justice against the state seems nearly impossible, the oppressed turn to individuals working under the state. That said, despite the serious story, it manages to be darkly funny through much of the runtime, proving that Panahi still maintains his deep empathy even in



the direst of circumstances. The story flawlessly builds to its heart-stopping finale, probably the best use of sound since *The Zone of Interest*. *It Was Just an Accident* will be playing at 1020 Collective on Wednesday, April 8 at 5 p.m. - Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Jafar Panahi //  
Starring Vahid Mobasseri, Ebrahim Azizi,  
Mariam Afshari, Hadis Pakbaten, Majid  
Panahi, Mohamad Ali Elyasmehr, George  
Hashemzadeh, Dalmaz Najafi, Afsaneh Najm  
Abadi, and Ali Rastegari // 104 minutes //  
Memento Distribution // Rated PG-13

### *Pillion* is a Unique Love Story

Power struggle



Queer cinema has always found much stimulation (both intellectual and physical) from the juxtaposition of the often surreal world of kink with the mundanity of straight society, and films like *Weekend* and *Taxi zum Klo* highlight the dichotomy between gay subcultures with ordinary life. Harry Lighton's new film *Pillion* revels in that dichotomy in powerful and often hilarious ways. The film asks a very important question: amongst all the dominance and submission of a 24/7 kink relationship, could or should there be room for a genuine connection?

Collin (Harry Melling) is a timid young man who is having some difficulty finding a partner. His every movement and word seem to be as awkward as humanly possible, but his mannerisms unexpectedly grab the attention of a ridiculously handsome biker named Ray (Alexander Skarsgård) and the two begin seeing each other. It isn't long before Collin becomes Ray's live-in submissive and is introduced to a BDSM subculture that seems to fit him perfectly. But things take a turn when



he starts falling in love with the emotionally distant Ray.

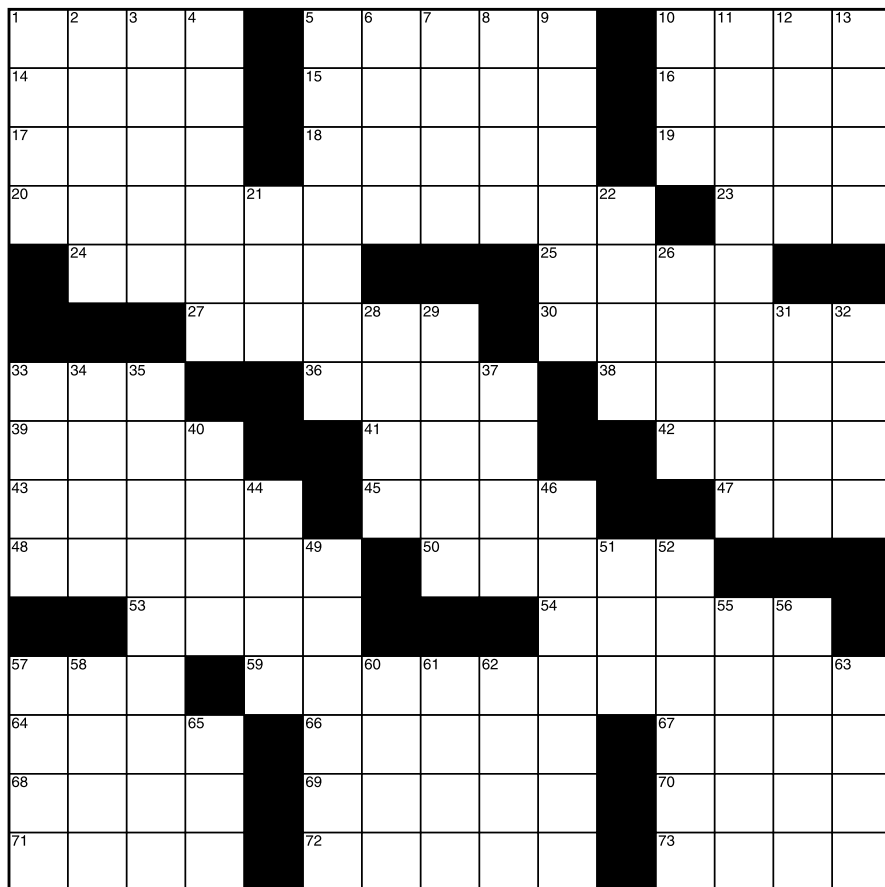
The film has a lot of fun with its subject matter, displaying the intricacies of a dom/sub relationship as well as highlighting the surreal, often silly-looking aspects of kink subcultures. This is an arrangement that many people would find appalling (including Collin's parents, who are shown as completely supportive of Collin, but weren't prepared for this), as from the outside, it seems to forego the concept of consent. But for Collin, it's exactly what he was looking for.

The film emphasizes the pain/plea-

sure of discovering one's sexual identity and the limits of certain kinds of relationships. It can often be a painful thing, but Collin is clearly no stranger to pain. *Pillion* is currently playing in select theaters. - Forest Taylor

Written and directed by Harry Lighton  
// Based on the novel *Box Hill: A Story of Low Self-Esteem* by Adam Mars-Jones // Starring Harry Melling, Alexander Skarsgård, Lesley Sharpe, Douglas Hodge, Jake Shears, Mat Hill, Nick Figgis, Zoe Engerer, Jake Sharp, and Jacob Carter // 107 minutes // Warner Bros. Pictures // Unrated (NC-17 equivalent)

CROSSWORD



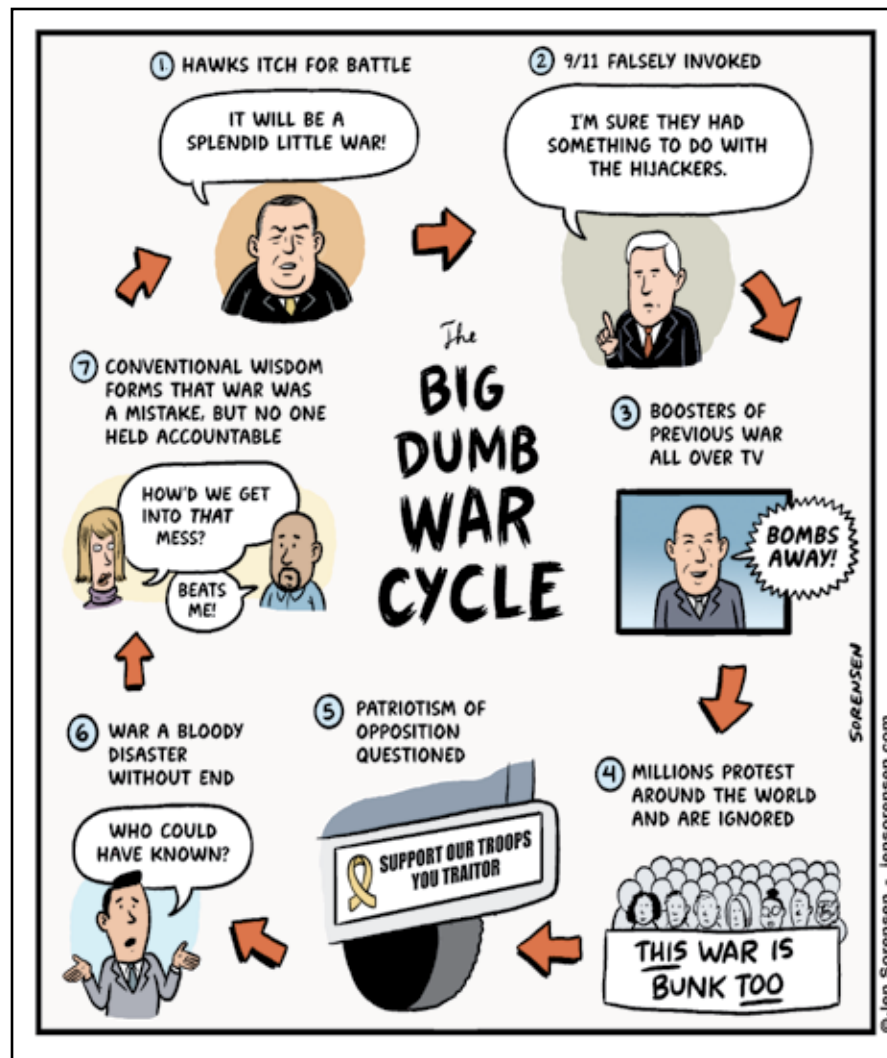
ACROSS

- 1. Little jerks
- 5. Head downtown?
- 10. Help in a holdup
- 14. Balming target
- 15. Beyond partner
- 16. Screenplay direction
- 17. T-bone region
- 18. Medical research goals
- 19. Every family has one
- 20. Illuminated
- 23. Holiday follower?
- 24. Skier's challenge
- 25. Unlike a litterbug
- 27. Palindromic windmill part
- 30. End of two state names
- 33. Scratch, say
- 36. Better copy?
- 38. Bahrain bread
- 39. Passed with ease
- 41. Genetic info carrier
- 42. Arboreal abode
- 43. Things to rattle
- 45. Fishtail, e.g.
- 47. Daydreamer's limit?
- 48. Fit to be fare
- 50. Killed, as a dragon
- 53. Tux accessory
- 54. Prepare for hanging

- 57. Wrestling area
- 59. Serving as a diplomat
- 64. Beer selections
- 66. Hindu grouping
- 67. Tat-tat intro
- 68. Folk facts
- 69. Pagoda roofing
- 70. Black cat, some think
- 71. It may come before "we forget"
- 72. Failed as a sentry
- 73. Bird's perch, perhaps

DOWN

- 1. Chaucer bit
- 2. They may be clicked on
- 3. Flu symptom
- 4. Grad-to-be
- 5. Bushwhacker's tool
- 6. Go to the edge of
- 7. The good olde days
- 8. Cooking place
- 9. Transmit anew
- 10. Back on a battleship
- 11. Crooners, often
- 12. Creation location
- 13. "High School Musical" extra
- 21. Main mail drop (abbr.)
- 22. Disconnected, as a phone line
- 26. Like siblings
- 28. Chances in Vegas
- 29. Roller Derby milieu
- 31. Checklist item
- 32. Pretentiously stylish
- 33. Attack deterrent
- 34. Military sch.
- 35. Enrolls
- 37. Barbary ape's lack
- 40. The red
- 44. Inner city concern
- 46. Most absurd
- 49. Official orders
- 51. Emotion of the miffed
- 52. Long and thin
- 55. Sight from Biscayne Bay
- 56. Gourmand
- 57. Shoppers' site
- 58. Ubiquitous lily relative
- 60. Place for some polish
- 61. "Cast Away" setting
- 62. Manual component
- 63. A driver may change one
- 65. Firm or fixed



Answers to last puzzle



# CALENDAR

The best place to promote your events online and in print.



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## Thu 3/12

### Featured



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



### Featured



Mayhem Music Promotions Presents: Rock of the Irish II  
@ 8pm / \$7  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



### Featured



Idlestar Productions Presents Bore, Twist and Writhe, One If By Land, Loss Becomes, Gatlin  
@ 6pm / \$10  
The Bunker at Lavery Brewing Company, 128 West 12th Street



Pirate Theme Night ft. The Stormalong Scoundrels, Anthony Carson and Brotherhood of the Jam  
@ 9pm / \$7  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street

## Wed 4/01

Wicked: For Good [FILM 10|20]  
@ 5pm / \$10-\$30  
The 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland Street

## Sun 4/05

Headliner Sam Miller at Werner Books and Coffee  
@ 7pm / \$20-\$25  
Werner Books and Coffee, 3608 Liberty Street

## Tue 4/07

Neil Rubenstein  
@ 7pm / \$20  
The Bunker at Lavery Brewing Company, 128 West 12th Street

## Wed 4/08

It Was Just An Accident | Watershed | Lake Erie, Our Kin [FILM 10|20]  
@ 5pm / \$10-\$30  
The 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland Street

## Fri 3/13

Erie Otters vs. Kingston Frontenacs  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

Lyndhurst  
@ 7pm / \$5  
The Bunker, 135 West 11th Street

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

## Sat 3/14

2026 St. Patrick's Day 5K Virtual Run - Erie  
@ 6am / \$19.72  
Mar 14th - Mar 17th  
Virtual

Create 2026  
@ 5pm / Free-Free  
10/20 Collective, 1020 Holland Street

Erie Otters vs. Niagara IceDogs  
@ 7pm  
Erie Insurance Arena

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

## Wed 3/18

### Featured



Sound of Falling | The Underground Railroad: Ep 09 [FILM 10|20]  
@ 5pm / \$10-\$30  
The 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland Street



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

## Wed 3/25

Hamnet | The Underground Railroad: Ep 10 [FILM 10|20]  
@ 5pm / \$10-\$30  
The 1020 Collective, 1020 Holland Street

## Thu 3/26

Idlestar Productions Presents Zeta with Hiroe, Amplifiers and Zakrahe  
@ 6pm / \$15  
The Bunker at Lavery Brewing Company, 128 West 12th Street

## Fri 3/27

Five Nights at Freddy's Theme Night!  
@ 8pm / \$7-\$9  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street

## Sat 3/28

Experience Curling!  
@ 6:30pm / \$30  
LECOM Sports Park, 8159 Oliver Road

## Sat 4/11

### Featured



Chestnut Grove w/ Steely Mac & Deja Blue  
@ 9pm / \$10  
King's Rook Club, 1921 Peach Street



Calendar information is provided by event organizers. All events are subject to change or cancellation. This publication is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained in this calendar.