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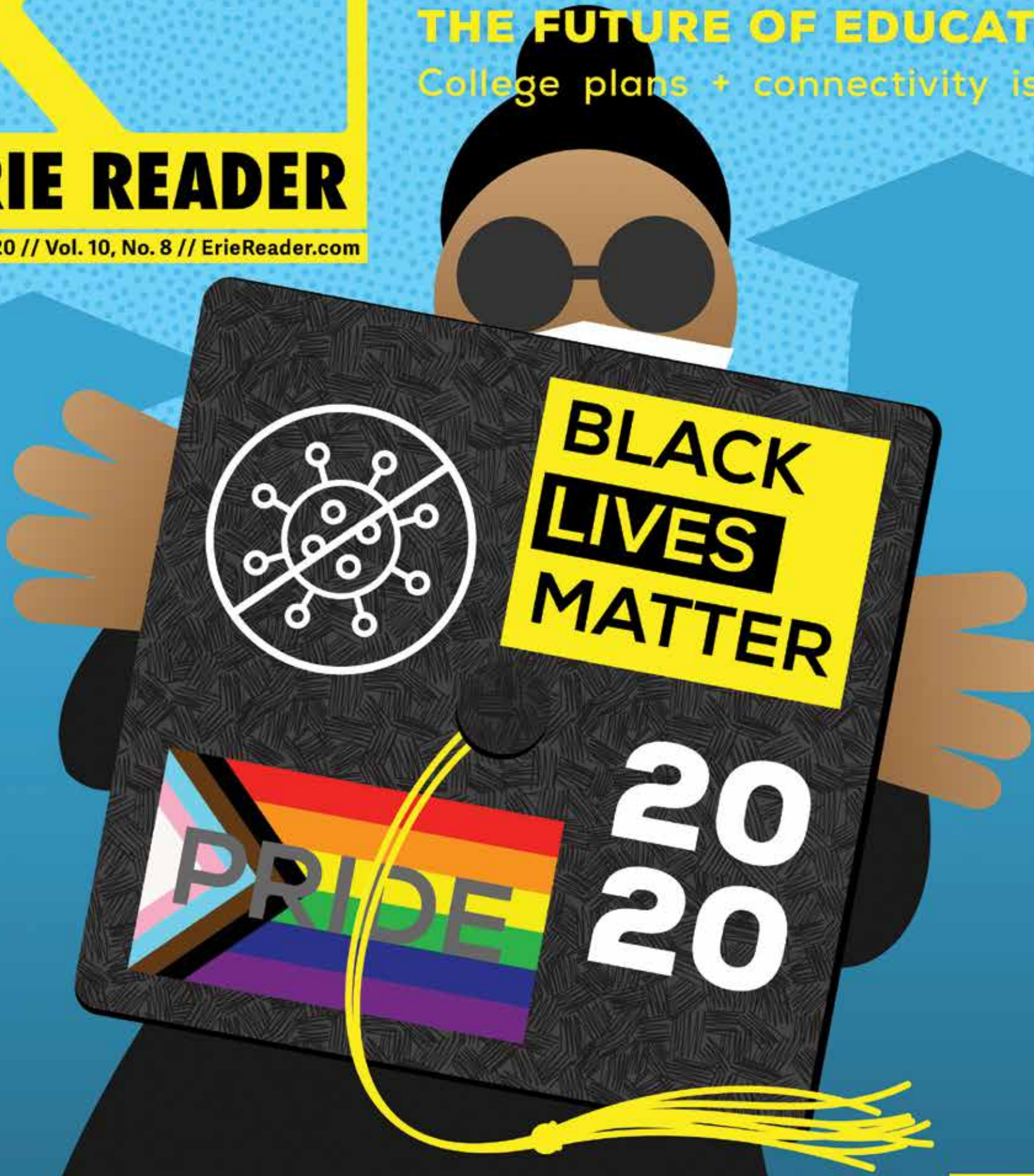
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THE NEW CLASS

Student speeches and stories from Erie's 2020 graduates

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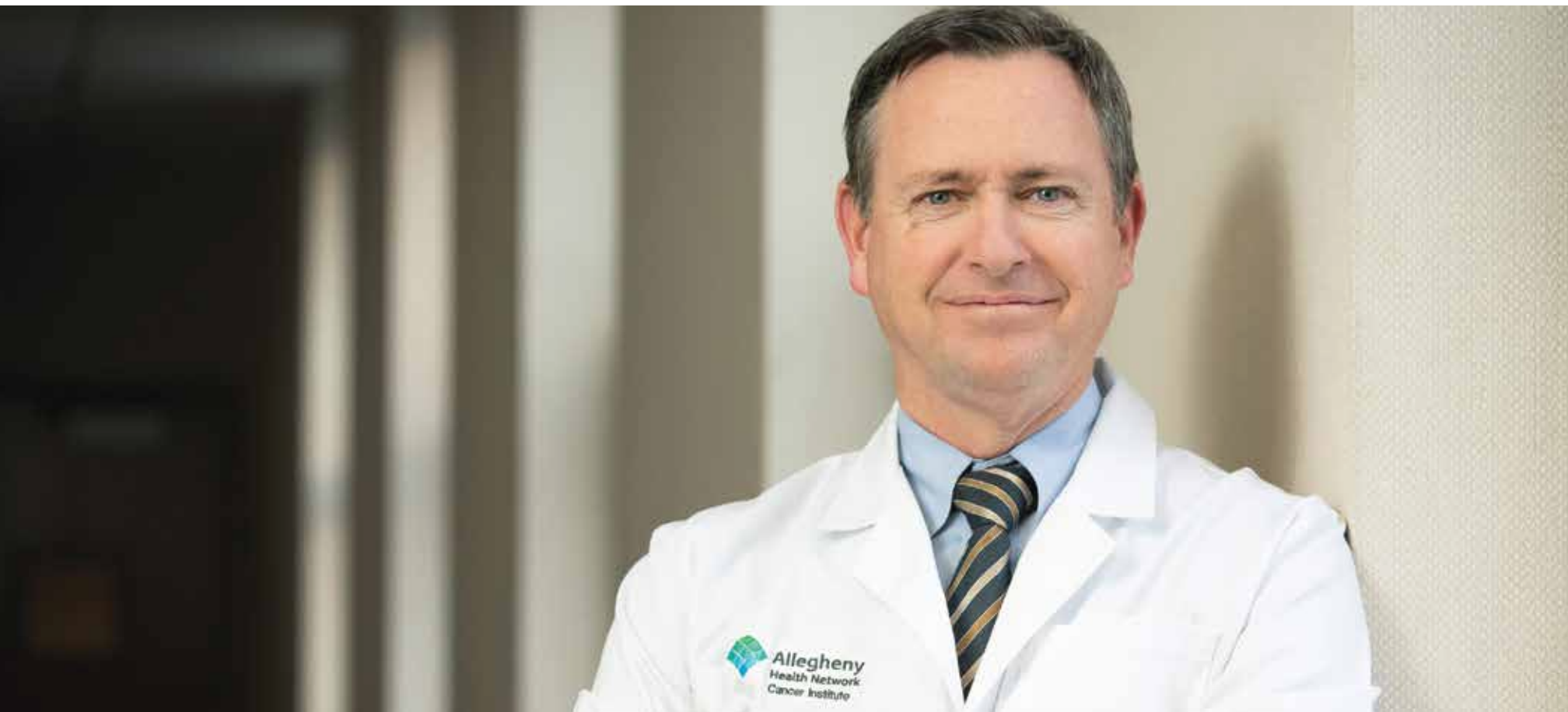
College plans + connectivity issues



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Pomp and consequence

If you've ever attended a commencement ceremony, you're certainly familiar with Sir Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance," the official theme song of graduations everywhere [with apologies to Vitamin C, composer of "Graduation (Friends Forever)"].

However, you may not be aware that *Pomp and Circumstance* is not the title of a single march, but rather a *series* of marches — and the one that gets all the spotlight is actually entitled "Land of Hope and Glory" (*Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1 in D). Furthermore, you're unlikely to ever hear the piece in its entirety during a procession, just a continuous loop of its two-minute "B" section. Despite its regal elegance (it was initially played during the coronation of Britain's King Edward VII), it's curious that the anthem for "moving forward" and "going places" should repeat in such a circular fashion.

Inevitably, though, diplomas and degrees will be awarded and the orchestra will fade out, punctuating years of hard work and expectation, and off they'll go to traverse the "Land of Hope and Glory" — or at least that's the idea. As we've seen in 2020, the landscape is riddled with obstacles and questions, and for many feelings of hopelessness and inglorious ends. Those born into privilege often march toward their destinations relatively unobstructed, in measured and confident strides. Meanwhile, those born into struggle often feel as if they're marching in place. Sometimes, the struggle originates in poverty. Others, it originates in the color of one's skin. Often, unfortunately, they are far from mutually exclusive.

As America has witnessed in the death of George Floyd and the subsequent protests across the country — including the riots in Erie on the evening of May 30 — systemic racism and subjugation are alive and festering. It's been playing on a continuous loop for *centuries*, tirelessly, as those in power constantly feed into its tip jar. Whether the band wears matching costumes (the Ku Klux Klan) to stand out or civilian attire to blend in, they're playing the same hate-filled song that should've faded out ages ago. Although it's been percolating through the airwaves for months, COVID-19 is a radio jingle in comparison.

When do we graduate from this? How many times do we as a species need remediation in kindness, respect, and empathy? This year's graduates — millions of talented young men and women — have the chance to change our collective tune, just as the classes that came before and those that will come after. In Erie, the recent approval of a community college at least extends a hand to economically disadvantaged individuals and minorities to band together as a larger and more diverse skilled workforce on the stage.

In the Oval Office and other positions of power, the instruments of hate have arena-sized amplifiers. Everyday civilians young and old must play their part — even if they stumble to articulate the right notes at first — and play them loudly. We should demand more from our leaders than deflective pomp in every circumstance; it's far past time we commence accountability and advance the universal best interest.

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COVID-19 and Colleges: Learning in the Time of a Pandemic

Local universities celebrate recent graduates, plan for future



The novel coronavirus outbreak brought an abrupt end to in-person instruction during the 2019-20 academic year, with institutions scrambling to pivot to a virtual model. Erie's local universities plan to return to modified in-person instruction during a condensed fall semester, with numerous safety precautions and a heavy reliance on virtual classrooms in effect.

microbiology, molecular biology, anatomy, and stem cell biology working to create that safe environment.

"We've got pretty strong leadership when it comes to managing something like this," he says. "It doesn't mean we're perfect, doesn't mean we've got all the answers, but what we do have are brains smart enough to listen to the CDC and listen to the Department of Health and listen to the people out there that really are living this every day."

Hallmarks of the new plans appear as many might expect: social distancing in classrooms, a relaxed attendance policy to accommodate for students needing to isolate or quarantine, and students, faculty, and staff donning masks in public spaces. There'll be increased cleaning and sanitizing of spaces, thermal scanners and thermometers to measure individual temperatures, dining services emphasizing takeaway options, and more.

"Based on the approval date of Erie County's transition to Green status, we intend to cycle some employees back to our Erie campus beginning July 1 so that the university is fully operational by the time students start arriving in July."

Like Gannon, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania has circled a date on the calendar and announced its plans to the public. Edinboro President Dr. Guiyou Huang outlined the details of the university's plan via email on the afternoon of Friday, June 12.

EUP will begin classes Monday, Aug. 17, and conclude before Thanksgiving on Friday, Nov. 20. Final exams will be conducted remotely the following week, and since finals week will be online, both housing and dining services billing will be prorated to reflect that adjustment.

According to Huang, when it comes to courses, "classes will be offered

By: Ben Speggen

By mid-March 2020, many college students throughout the country had already packed up. They departed their dorm rooms and apartments not in anticipation of summer break, but in the wake of the first outbreaks of the novel coronavirus. Whether social distancing practices to flatten the curve of increasing positive COVID-19 cases and deaths would last a few weeks or a month then remained unknown.

But as March gave way to April and May, Zoom classes were followed by Zoom commencements, with the class of 2020 closing out their college years in front of computer screens rather than learning in lecture halls and celebrating in gymnasiums packed for graduation. The world that awaits them is unlike one we've seen before.

For 2019-20's freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, summer break hangs heavy, not like a comma dividing two clauses but a bolded ellipsis ... *will the fall feel at all familiar?*

As the long tail of the pandemic wags

on, its blows to both public safety and the economy continue to land hard. But there are still credits to earn, degrees to complete. And for many, the college experience is just about to begin.

"With infectious-disease experts forecasting recurring waves of COVID-19 contagion, a number of colleges are coalescing around a plan to send students home by Thanksgiving this fall," wrote Bennett Leckrone for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on May 20.

In Erie, on June 10, Gannon University became the first to announce a plan to that effect.

"We're trying to ensure that our employees and our students and their families have as much time as they possibly can to plan and to know what it is they need to be planning for," says Gannon President Dr. Keith Taylor.

Taylor credits the Gannon community and his leadership team of roughly 100 people working on the university's adaptive plans for the fall to "meet our mission and our purpose of transforming lives."

On the heels of granting 841 degrees

— from doctorates to associates, a 102 increase from last year — the Gannon plan is to resume classes on campus Aug. 10 and conclude Nov. 16 with finals week to follow and students to head homeward before Thanksgiving. The modified schedule omits a fall break.

The full plan, which is available on the university's website, remains flexible, Taylor acknowledges.

"I have been talking about creating the safest environment we can and having a healthy place for all. Safe does not mean disease-free. Safe does not mean that there won't be challenges or that things won't happen. But they were going to happen on our campus, whether there was COVID or not; they're going to happen all over Erie and across the country. So there is a need for us to have faith that we are putting the best plans in place," Taylor says. "And those plans are going to change as the environment changes and as new data comes across."

Taylor points out, too, that in addition to those with operational background and skill sets, there are faculty members with doctorates in epidemiology,

through a blend of in-person and online instruction to allow for social distancing by limiting the number of students in the classroom at a given class meeting; face coverings will be required in all campus buildings, shared public spaces and in areas where social distancing is not possible; those enrolled in face-to-face classes will be assigned a seat, and attendance will be taken regularly; all classes will be designed so that they can quickly pivot to fully online delivery if necessary; students with health issues should work with the Office for Accessibility Services to arrange for accommodations; faculty office and advising hours and other campus services will be provided in a way that allows for social distancing.”

The full plan, which reviews on-campus housing, dining, safety, and more, is available on the university’s website. Accompanying it is a video message from Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs Michael Hannan and Director of Safety and Risk Management Jim Dahle.

“Additional details will be forthcoming between now and the start of the semester, but we wanted to ensure you have essential information now,” writes Huang. “On behalf of the faculty and staff of Edinboro University, I want to tell you how excited we are about your return to campus.”

Like Gannon and Edinboro, Mercyhurst University also has a date on the calendar. However, the fleshed-out plan has not yet been released to the public at the time of this writing.

And like Gannon, courses will begin earlier, in Mercyhurst’s case on Aug. 19, and end Nov. 24, two days before Thanksgiving. At Mercyhurst, students will complete finals remotely between Dec. 1 and 4, with students not returning to campus until the spring term.

“As we prepare to address all of the potential issues with reopening this fall, both those anticipated and those unexpected, we are committed to establishing a level of readiness that will enable us to implement change, pivot, adapt, and meet the challenges head-on,” says Mercyhurst President Michael Victor.

“For our return to campus to be effective, we must reinforce a climate of shared responsibility. Together, we can create an environment that enables safe behaviors and reduces the spread of COVID-19, but a dynamic campus

environment will only be sustained if everyone — students, faculty, staff, and visitors — takes responsibility for their own health and safety and the health and safety of those around them.”

These measures include a reconfiguring of classrooms and laboratories to reduce density and maintain physical distancing; an amalgam learning experience of face-to-face, hybrid, and remote instruction; and modified housing and dining services.

The return to campus follows the largest graduating class in the university’s 94-year history. “All told, 893 students across all campuses and all programs were slated to graduate,” Victor reports, who says he’s working daily with his COVID-19 Task Force.

Penn State Behrend recently announced that “campus-based residential instruction” will begin on Monday, Aug. 24, ending Friday, Nov. 20.

“We are taking steps to prepare the physical campus,” says Dr. Ralph Ford, Penn State Behrend’s chancellor, “adding plexiglass barriers at high-traffic common areas, for example, and conducting a census of the instructional space in all classrooms and labs, as well as any available space in our properties in Knowledge Park, in the event we need to continue social distancing. We will also be making bulk purchases of health and safety equipment, including masks, thermometers, and additional hand-sanitizing stations.”

Like the other college leaders, Ford acknowledges that the shift to remote-learning in the spring on short notice was a “monumental task.” He credits the adaptability of the Behrend community to its long history with the Penn State World Campus, which “offers several degree programs taught entirely by Behrend faculty members, was a significant advantage when we switched to remote learning. With a heavy lift by the staff of our eLearning Center and the technology resources of the larger university, we moved nearly 1,200 classes and labs fully online without missing a single day of scheduled instruction.”

In spring, Behrend granted 674 degrees, down just 39 from 2019, which was the university’s record freshman class.

Ford notes that this semester’s emphasis is on safety. As for enrollment, Ford acknowledges the nationwide impact colleges and universities are anticipating experiencing.

“We expect to have fewer students from out-of-state, and from other countries. We are exploring ways that Penn State can offer our international students in-country courses paired with high-quality online classes that will allow them to continue their enrollment at Penn State Behrend,” he says. “We’ll know more about that in the weeks to come.”

But while applications outside of Erie County may be down, Ford says Behrend is experiencing an increase from local students throughout the surrounding areas.

“Penn State has introduced a Flex Plan program that enables students to begin their education at a Penn State campus close to home, and in the case of Penn State Behrend, many of those students are likely to remain with us through graduation, as more than three-quarters of our students do now.”

In an era of flexibility, Ford notes the university’s “rolling admission” approach, allowing the campus to “continue enrolling students as we approach the start of the academic year. The application deadlines are later, and in many cases are being waived altogether.”

“Students and their families have a lot to consider this year, and we aren’t rushing them,” Ford adds. “As the pandemic continues to evolve and the landscape for fall instruction becomes clearer, families will be in a much better position to make a decision. When they’re ready, we’ll be ready for them.”

Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine is also planning to have students, faculty, and staff return to campus, but official dates have not yet been announced.

Dr. Silvia Ferretti, provost, senior vice president, and dean of academic affairs at LECOM, credits the institution’s contingency plan with the smooth transition from in-person to online learning across its Erie and Seton Hill campuses and its Florida location in Bradenton.

“Throughout it all, we were mission-driven to ensure that all of our students, including our 539 fourth-year medical students, would graduate on time because we knew they were desperately needed on the front lines in combating the coronavirus,” she says. “At the graduate, professional education level, our students are determined to stay the course when it comes to reaching their professional goals of becoming physicians, pharma-

cists, dentists, or health care administrators. They never once missed a beat, and that’s evidenced by the 99 percent match rate of our osteopathic medical students who will enter residency programs this summer.”

Like others, the 2019-20 academic year was a banner one for LECOM. Across the three locations, the institution graduated 1,254 students, with 610 at Erie, 537 at Bradenton, and 107 from Seton Hill. While typically LECOM would host two in-person commencements, one for the students in both Erie and Seton Hill and one for the Floridian students, both were pivoted online.

“LECOM President and CEO Dr. John Ferretti delivered a special message to this year’s graduating class that paid tribute to their resilience and to the sacrifices they’ve had to make,” Silvia Ferretti reports. “His message also spoke to the noble profession our graduates will be entering at a time when they’re needed more than ever.”

When it comes to the fall term, Ferretti anticipates classes will be delivered in a hybrid format across the institution’s various locations. According to her, enrollment across the campuses are on track. “The virus hasn’t impacted our numbers,” she adds.

“LECOM has always been an innovative leader in the way we’ve taught our students,” Ferretti says. “Each student has the ability to choose a learning pathway that is the right fit for his or her specific learning style. That includes online distance education.”

No doubt, in March, universities nationwide found themselves in uncharted territory. In many ways, as the public health crisis and the economic crisis perpetuated by the pandemic plod on.

But many institutions, including Erie’s own, are navigating their way through. Some have more specific plans presented *today* than others, but all are remaining flexible and hopeful and are recognizing the inherent opportunity to innovate through times of crises.

This experience has been, and will continue to be, a learning experience for us all, including recent 2020 grads and the incoming class of 2024 nationwide and here in Erie. The times, indeed, they are a-changin’.

Ben Speggen can be contacted at Bspeggen@ErieReader.com, and you can follow him on Twitter @BenSpeggen.

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Digital Divides in Education

Unequal access to the 'new normal'



By: Jim Wertz

“New normal” seems to be the buzz phrase of 2020. It’s a loaded phrase, to be sure, and it leaves us much to unpack. That’s because normal — the old normal — wasn’t working.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vast insecurities in our daily lives, from the fragility of our economy and the antiquated operations of commercial and educational enterprises, to the gross divide between the working class and those who don’t worry much about hardship or hard knocks.

While the pandemic shed light on many fissures in our society, perhaps none was more equally distributed than the challenges facing education and the struggle to level the instructional playing field between students with access to the technological resources necessary to continue their coursework and those who lacked the tools, such as laptops or tablets, and access to broadband Internet connections.

The ParentsTogether Foundation, which publishes a website that provides research and a variety of support to parents and families on a range of topics including healthcare and education, published in May the results of a survey it conducted on access to online educational resources by household income. The results illustrate a vast divide in remote learning opportunities between households making less than \$25,000 and those with household incomes greater than \$100,000, and it

has little to do with the quality of their schools.

Kids from low income households were three times more likely not to have consistent access to an electronic device, the survey found. In some cases that was because the student had no device. But it was more likely that the student had to share a single device with other members of the household, including siblings who were also limited in their ability to access online educational resources or parents who needed the family’s device to work from home. In households with incomes over \$100,000, just eight percent reported needing to share a device. For families with household incomes less than \$50,000 nearly half of the survey respondents reported that students in their home shared a device.

Given the range of household incomes among the survey’s nearly 1,600 respondents, such results might be expected. However, many believe education to be the foundation to opportunity and expect that students within a single district or a single classroom share a common advantage. Unfortunately, the equity of school resources are limited to that which students have access to within the school itself. Once a student leaves the school, variables beyond the school’s control become mitigating factors in a student’s ability to academically achieve.

“That’s what we’re facing every day,” says Andrew Pushchak, school board president of the Wattsburg Area School

With virtual classroom models taking precedence during the COVID-19 pandemic, broadband Internet access defines the educational haves and have-nots. Author Jim Wertz argues that federal funding will be needed to bridge the gap.

MARINA ZLOCHIN/MICROONE

District and the head of the educational leadership program at Edinboro University. “Some districts are located in areas where 99 percent of the homes have broadband Internet access. Those schools pivoted on a Friday from face-to-face instruction to going online on Monday. We couldn’t do that,” says Pushchak.

Broadband Internet access is the modern equivalent to what rural electrification was in the New Deal era. Only 11 percent of American farms had electricity that came from a central service provider when the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 was signed into law. By 1960, 98 percent of rural America had a central electric service provider.

Today over 90 percent of Americans have access to some form of broadband Internet — cable, DSL, satellite, fiber optic, or something else — according to a 2019 study by the Congressional Research Service. That number doesn’t accurately describe the vast swaths of America with smaller populations that have no access to broadband Internet service providers or populations in both urban and rural communities with broadband Internet access but without the means to pay for service that is often overpriced as the result of industry monopolies nationwide.

“While the number of new broadband subscribers continues to grow, studies and data indicate that the rate of broadband deployment in urban/suburban and high-income areas is outpacing deployment in rural and low-income areas,” the study concludes.

The broadband divide is both economic and geographic in Erie County. A “Community Technology Action Plan” prepared in 2017 by the Northwest Pennsylvania Broadband Committee — composed of 29 organizations spanning business, education, and government throughout Northwest Pennsylvania — estimated that 99 percent of the geographic region north of I-90 had broadband access. South of I-90, just 25 percent of the region has broadband access. For those folks, mobile hotspots or

satellite Internet service — both inferior alternatives to broadband — are the only option.

Then-Vice President Joe Biden came to Seneca High School in the Wattsburg Area School District in 2009 promoting a \$7.2 billion funding package to expand rural broadband access that was part of the federal economic recovery act passed after the 2007-08 financial crisis. He was there because Wattsburg received broadband service in 2008 and was viewed as a model for rural access. To date, however, many of the boroughs and townships surrounding Wattsburg are still without broadband access because the expansion was left in the hands of private industry, for whom the return on investment was never large enough.

For school districts like Pushchak’s, that complicated the response to pandemic school closings.

“We had to take the time to verify which households have Internet access and which ones don’t, so that we could provide wireless hotspots to the families that needed access,” says Pushchak. “If the kids are in the school, we’ve got them covered. Go a half mile down the road and you’ve got nothing.”

Pushchak’s story is repeated in school districts throughout Erie County and across the country. And it’s only scratching the surface of the old normal.

School administrators are taking great strides to ensure that students have the tools they need to be successful as we venture into the new, whatever that may be. But students will need a leveling of the broadband field to put those tools to work.

It’s time for the federal government to do its part, just as it did in 1936. Because in a world of e-commerce and telehealth and every other promissory note written to those on the economic and geographic margins, the only thing that’s normal are the promises of private industry that go unfulfilled.

From education to broadband access, normal is no longer good enough. Let’s simply build it new.

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



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New Erie Grads Prove Resilient

Pandemic instills lasting lessons



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

By: Liz Allen

At a small family gathering on May 31, I watched my granddaughter Molly's livestreamed graduation. On June 11, I clicked on Vimeo for the previously recorded graduation ceremony for my grandson Cam.

Cam was supposed to graduate in Waldorf, Md., on May 28; Molly's graduation from Harbor Creek High School had been set for June 4.

COVID-19 not only changed graduation dates and formats, the virus also upended the last months of senior year for my grandkids and their peers.

We've all read the accounts of young people who were upset that they couldn't compete in their final sports seasons, attend prom, or celebrate with throngs of family and friends at post-graduation parties.

But when I interviewed 10 Erie area teens, I learned that these newly minted grads are readily adapting to what we call the "new normal" of life during a pandemic.

This doesn't mean that everything is rosy. Some teens have had to put college on hold. Those who are heading off to school are somewhat uneasy about whether enough is being done to protect them from the

Zoom classes and graduations were commonplace this spring, as local high schoolers experienced diluted versions of some of the hallmark moments of senior year — if they didn't miss out on them outright. However, students such as [top row] Lara Glendenning (Villa Maria), Chonje Hassan (Collegiate Academy), Elaina Lawson (Girard), [middle row] Regina Malango (Erie High), Chloe Robison (Villa Maria), Abdulah Sadeik (Erie High), [bottom row] Olivia Sanders (Villa Maria), Mike Wassolu (Erie High), and Ben Wyrosdick (Collegiate Academy) maintained positivity despite the circumstances, remaining rightfully proud of their accomplishments.

virus.

Yet as they move to the next stage of their lives, they all have lessons to share about education, resilience, and innovation in the age of COVID.

Mike Wassolu, 17, didn't have difficulty switching to online learning for his auto mechanics classes at Erie High. Students already had been using the web at school to learn which tools are used for various types of auto

repairs; they got new passwords to continue those lessons online at home.

Wassolu was well-prepared to adapt to change. When he arrived here in fifth grade from Burundi, in East Africa, "I did not know any English except for greetings," he said. Now he speaks the language perfectly.

"The best part of coming here was the great opportunity for education. We (in the U.S.) have

a better education and everybody has a better future," said Wassolu, who plans to study engineering at Gannon University or Penn State Behrend.

Elaina Lawson, 19, is a graduate of both Girard High School, her home school, and Erie County Technical School, where she studied drafting and design. Most of her County Tech classes already required the use of computer software. When she had

to switch to classes at home, she and her classmates had to complete some assignments using Word instead of technical software. “It was a pretty easy process,” she said, because by that point in senior year, students had mastered most of the skills they needed to graduate.

Lawson, who plans to become an architect, had landed an internship with Erie architect Michael Grab but she only got to spend a week at the office before the shutdown. Now she’s doing projects for him online. She hopes she’ll be allowed to return to the office before she starts school at Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, where she will study architecture and sustainable design. The move-in date for freshmen has been extended to two days instead of one to allow for social distancing. Food will be served as takeout, rather than communal dining.

Villa Maria Academy graduate Lara Glendenning, 18, who will study electrical engineering at Georgia Tech, has some reservations about completely replacing classroom education with online learning. During her years of schooling, there has been wide recognition that kids have different learning styles, she said.

“I’ve been a relatively high-achieving student, but I couldn’t have done nearly as much without actually experiencing and seeing exactly how the teacher was delivering (the lessons),” she said. Doing that via Zoom is much harder, she said. “For my education, I learned a lot in the classroom but I really got close to my teachers, and that was so valuable. It gave me not only knowledge ... but gave me the basis for how to interact with people and how to talk to people besides your parents. That was very valuable growing up.”

Her college will open on its regular schedule, but students will be able to choose among in-person and online classes. She wonders, though, about other colleges that will start early, offer classes on week-

ends, eliminate breaks, and finish by Thanksgiving.

In addition to coping with the pandemic, college students “will have no breaks to just breathe,” she said. Such an accelerated schedule will be difficult in high-pressure environments, she said.

Abdulah Sadeik, 18, studied pre-engineering at Erie High and will major in electrical engineering at Gannon University. He, too, said there were disadvantages to taking his last high school courses online rather than in school. “It’s just harder,” he said. “In manufacturing and anything technical, it’s hands-on. You can’t learn it by just theory alone. Unless there’s an instructor and someone proficient (teaching), you won’t know what you are doing.”

Collegiate Academy graduate Chonje Hassan, 18, planned to study nursing in college immediately after high school but is “taking a little break” so she can get a job and save money for school.

But adjusting to new circumstances is nothing new for Hassan, whose family is originally from Somalia. Born in Kenya, she came here at age 3. “Seeing all the people of different colors surprised me, but I was taught that the place I was in was going to help me with my education,” she said. “Fast forward to now. I got my diploma, but not under the circumstances I expected. Our class was hit the hardest when it came to the pandemic, but our generation proves time and again that it can adjust and accept whatever comes at them. The protests proved how much we stick together for a cause or situation,” she said.

Regina Malango, 18, an Erie High graduate, did not know English when she started second grade in Erie after arriving here from Tanzania with her family, who had fled the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

She mentioned the benefit of educational opportunities available in this country. “The good experiences are the opportunities that we didn’t have back where we are from,” said Malan-

go, who will study criminal justice at Gannon University.

But adapting to a new country was difficult at times. “Some people ... might treat you differently,” she said. She had to learn to be “confident and proud of where I am from.” One of her disappointments is that she didn’t get to wear her long dress in an African print to what would have been her first prom.

Collegiate graduate Tatiana Lamberty, 17, had been accepted to Akron University for nursing and Edinboro University of Pennsylvania for criminal justice but will put off college for a year because she is pregnant with a son, due in September. As an expectant mother, “You’re more in jeopardy for easily catching something, like corona,” she said.

She plans to go to college next year for a career in health care. “Nursing is something I will still try to accomplish. Being in an environment of helping people and saving lives is something I look forward to. I believe this (the pandemic) has opened many eyes of people who take things like school and work for granted, because it did for me,” she said.

Ben Wyrosdick, 18, a Collegiate Academy graduate, will attend Penn State Behrend to major in economics and minor in political science or accounting. He plans to later transfer to Penn State’s main campus and then attend law school.

Wyrosdick wasn’t enamored with the coursework he had to complete online in the months before graduation. “It was like background work,” he said. “Learning was severely limited.”

But there was more to learn during the school shutdown than just academics. “Ironically, the quarantine has helped me to grow,” said Wyrosdick. “Staying at home when most people are working has allowed me to become much more of an independent person,” he said.

Wyrosdick has been working at Donatos Pizza since October and recently started a second job at Sheetz. He likes the “socialization” aspect of working at

Donatos, but said the pandemic hasn’t affected his other friendships. “It allowed us to kind of separate at an easy pace, rather than having that awkward slide (right before college),” he said. In addition, as an online gamer, a lot of his friendships are online, with people who live out of state.

Chloe Robison, 18, a Villa Maria Academy graduate, will major in exercise and sports science on a pre-med track at Nova Southeastern University in Florida. Her college classes are supposed to start on time, but she’s a little uneasy that she will be rooming with two other students. “I feel like that’s not super safe at the moment,” she said.

Like other teens, she missed not participating in the milestones of senior year. “It definitely stinks but I think it made every one of us in this generation stronger and shaped us into innovators,” she said. “We will be more flexible and adaptable to things that might happen in the future.”

Her Villa classmate, Olivia Sanders, 18, will major in pre-med at the University of Notre Dame, where classes begin Aug. 10, two weeks earlier than the original start date. She won’t find out about housing until July 2, which will definitely mean “a little more adjusting,” she said.

But those changes are minor to what she has learned because of the pandemic. She and the other class speakers at the Villa and Cathedral Prep graduations focused on the theme “Enduring Much, Achieving More.”

In her speech, Olivia opened by reminding her classmates that they had been born at the time of 9/11. “There was so much uncertainty during that time, so much fear, so much worry, yet so much strength,” she said in her speech.

She talked about those strengths in an interview. “Prom and graduation would have been nice, but I’m just happy everyone is safe. It’s woken us up to what’s really important in life,” she said.

Lawson, the graduate from

Erie County Tech and Girard, said she knows several people who were the first ones in their families to graduate from high school. It was disappointing that their families couldn’t celebrate that accomplishment in the traditional way, she said. But, she said, “In reality, the only other thing that really matters is that we graduated. Even if there isn’t a ceremony, we know that we did it. In the big scale of things, it’s better off having everyone safe.”

Sadeik, the Erie High graduate, knows firsthand about overcoming challenges. His family went from Iraq to Syria and then to Turkey after the Iraq War started. Nearly 12 when his family moved to Erie, he had taught himself the “basics” of English when they were living in Turkey. “Other than that, I did not know that much stuff,” he said.

He decided to become an engineer because he likes problem-solving. Dealing with the pandemic is one more challenge. “It’s another hardship that we have to overcome,” he said. “We’re strong and we can get through it. That’s my thought process.”

Hassan, the Collegiate Academy graduate who will work to save up for college so she can become a nurse, was crushed at first that the virus made it impossible for her to graduate in the traditional way.

“I came to this point for my parents and family. I accepted life in America, learned English, passed all my middle school classes, got into Collegiate Academy, and now could graduate,” she said. But there are lessons from this experience, she said. “What do I think this has taught me? A lot. Perseverance, dedication, hope. But at the very least, I was able to walk across the stage with my family. A girl who once had no dream finally accomplished it.”

Liz Allen expects to be in good hands in her old age because both of her graduating grandchildren want to become doctors. You can reach her at lizallenerie@gmail.com.

The Class of 2020 in Their Own Words

As commencement ceremonies are revised, student graduation speakers hone their voice



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Collected by Nick Warren

Graduation looks very different in 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, Pennsylvania moved to close schools for the remainder of the year, starting on April 9. In-person classes were halted, and students finished their academic year online. The graduating class of 2020 didn't get to have a traditional ceremony. Sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with your entire class, with hundreds of family members in attendance nearby was simply not an option.

Ceremonies have been changing over the years on their own, however. For example, only half of the schools that responded to our call chose the valedictorian or salutatorian as featured speaker. Many schools around the country have been either moving to a Latin honors system featuring Summa Cum Laude honorees, having students apply to be speakers themselves, showcasing student and faculty choices, or some combination of those tactics.

Many student commencement speeches feature a quote. Using words of wisdom from someone well-known and respected is a common tool to add a dose of credibility to prepared words. These quotes can help to frame a speaker's own thoughts and distill a complex message into memorable pieces. This year's students highlighted quotes from Maya Angelou, Thurgood Marshall, Derek Jeter, Winston Chur-

chill, Muhammed Ali, Charles Dickens, David Bowie, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Thornton Wilder, Lou Holtz, The Dalai Lama, Ferris Bueller, and Drake to name a few.

So we're doing the same. Here are small excerpts from dozens of the top local students across Erie County in their own words.

Unlike any other graduating year, it's not just our family and friends pouring out love and congratulations. The entire world is celebrating the class of 2020. The world needs our love, hope, and energy. While I am hopeful that graduates around the country will rise to the occasion, I know for a fact that my sisters will. — **Bella Agresti, Villa Maria Academy**

Never stop asking questions, never stop learning, and never stop trying to better yourself. Being motivated and having the focus to achieve your aspirations make success a much more realistic end product. Although at this moment in time, finding motivation may seem difficult. We feel lost, trapped, and filled with confusing emotions, not only because of the COVID-19 shutdown, but also because our routines — that we've all become so accustomed to — have ended because of graduation. — **Kenny Berlin, Harbor Creek High School, Summa Cum Laude**

Please learn from those around you, because just as I learned an immense amount from my teachers, I have also learned from my peers. They have

The prohibition of large gatherings due forced area high schools to be creative when it came to their intra-pandemic graduation ceremonies — North East High School's drive-in solution has also been applied to weddings and concerts throughout the spring.

taught me what is and what isn't friendship, how to work together, and what true compassion is. I would say that I and many of us have changed as academics, athletes, performers, friends, and people in general as a result of the company we have had during the last handful of years. — **Miranda Bly, Mercyhurst Preparatory School**

The last three months have been less than ideal for everyone. And this is certainly not how the seniors were expecting to end their high school experience. However, three months is such a small fraction of time if we choose to look at the bigger picture. We have our entire future ahead of us, which I hope is much more exciting than these last three months would have been. — **Lily Brak, Harbor Creek High School, Summa Cum Laude**

We have dealt with fires, three different principals, the Erie community talking negatively about us, and now COVID-19. We have come together, and we took on every obstacle that has come our way. Although it has been an eventful four years, it has also been great, and we are ready to take on what is next in our lives ... A lot of us thought we would never make it to where we are now, but we did! And now it is time for new and better things. — **Angela Breter, Erie High School Valedictorian**

I know that our impact on the world will be prominent. But in that vein, I think it is worth highlighting that this prominence can only be felt if we take the time to make our voices heard. I urge each of you to employ the full force of the tools you have been provided to amplify your voice and take a stand for what you believe in. In doing so, I feel confident that you will never fail to find new and positive ways of impacting your community. — **Cassie Carr, Girard High School, Summa Cum Laude**

To my classmates, our valiant efforts, impressive successes, and memorable friendships are not all for nothing. Everything we did over the past four years still has meaning, and the lessons we learned will carry on with us to

our future endeavors. Our graduation marks the end of our high school years, but more importantly, it marks the beginning of the rest of our lives. — **Abigail Caviglia, North East Valedictorian**

I speak for the vast majority of the class when I say that we would much rather be in a classroom right now — we'd never have thought we'd be saying that. The cancellation of many important moments in our high school career has left us feeling heartbroken and robbed. But I invite you all to look at this situation from a different perspective, where instead of dwelling on what we missed out on, we look back and celebrate what we did get to experience as students at Harbor Creek High School. These memories should be the basis of what we remember from our time spent here. — **Dan Dabrowski, Harbor Creek High School, Summa Cum Laude**

We love our families and have been blessed to grow closer with them during this time, but we have another home, one located at a place most of us have grown up in for the past 13 years. One where we used to see our friends each and every day. One with unforgettable memories we will never get back. One where we faced hard circumstances like the one we continue to face today and one that has built ourselves into the men and women here today. General McLane has become our home and this class has become our family. — **Timothy Fair, General McLane, Summa Cum Laude (Student Choice)**

During this entire process, we've not only focused on the task at hand, but have also been able to take the positives from every situation. It may be hard to understand right now, but I can assure you that we will grow stronger as people and as friends from what we are dealing with as of late. Like I said, We've learned that taking the positive from every situation is so important. That mentality has been necessary during these times, and is also a skill that we will take into the next chapter of our lives. — **Tyler Habursky, Harbor Creek High School, Summa Cum Laude**

Be persistent in achieving your goals. If you give up in the middle of trying, you would have nothing left. Even though by the end you still might not achieve your goal, the fact that you have tried hard can console you. "I have



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Mercyhurst Preparatory School celebrated a socially distant commencement outdoors.

we cared. Because we were taught that having an opinion is fine, but doing something constructive with it is what makes it valuable. We have learned that exhibiting pride, honor, and respect will encourage people to listen to you and that is the way we should treat people. — **Lacey Jo Hunter, Collegiate Academy speaker**

Because of our hardships, it made this class stronger, more successful, and more passionate about our lives. The class of 2020 will not be defined by this virus that is going on, but by our unity. I am proud of every single one of my classmates, and I am proud of what we have become. — **Nathan Jones, Girard High School, Summa Cum Laude**

Between the stresses of classes and the impending SATs, we still found time to have fun and even got to attend our first and only prom. Whether it was in the classroom or on the field, we began to discover our true passions and build unbreakable bonds with our FHS classmates. Junior year was the beginning of the end of our FHS careers. But as Fairview Tigers, we'll make every single

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put all my effort, that's enough." This may sound ideal because it is hard to succeed. Only a few talented people can succeed easily. Most people have to exert a lot of effort to succeed. The reality is tough, though. Even though you try your best, you may still gain nothing. However, if you give up at first, you are definitely not getting anything. — **Anran (Lyle) Huang, Mercyhurst Preparatory School**

This fall, my perspective shifted. We, as a class, embodied the idea of translating our opinions into meaningful action as we shared our perspective on the changes that were being made to our environment, our school, our family. I remember opening Instagram one afternoon, astounded by the number of people who didn't think twice about putting their opinion into positive action ... We were doing it because

day count. — **Caroline Kraus, Fairview High School, Summa Cum Laude**

Despite all of the setbacks corona[vi-rus] gave us, we graduated. Now is not the time to be sad. Now is the time to rejoice. We were hit with a challenge and we faced it head-on making us stronger. Now the changes and challenges that we will be subject to in our next steps — whether that be in college or the military, or in a job — we all will be prepared and ready for whatever comes at us. — **Glory Linebach, General McLane, Summa Cum Laude (Faculty Choice)**

Please also keep in mind that the things we did in high school do not define us for the rest of our lives — and an international pandemic certainly doesn't either. Life will be what you make of it, so I challenge each one of you in the class of 2020 to leave no door unopened, no stone uncovered, and no opportunity unchecked. — **Lucas Mosher, Fort LeBoeuf Valedictorian**

This is our time to use what we have learned to bring light into the darkness. Now more than ever, we need to spread the idea of togetherness and family. We may be required to be physically apart but we can still connect through kind-



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[left] General McLane was another high school that utilized Waterford's Sunset Drive-In for their graduation ceremony, as cars made their procession under balloon archways of Lancer red and white. [bottom] Harbor Creek High School graduates proceed to the stage for their diplomas six feet apart as a sparse contingent of masked parents look on. Traditional indoor graduation ceremonies in auditoriums or gymnasiums were of increased rarity in 2020.

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ness. Whether we are placing motivational signs on display, making small donations to charity, or simply checking in on a friend or neighbor, we are impacting our community. — **Rachel Nesgoda, Iroquois Valedictorian**

I had to make the decision to put myself out there, follow up on that email, and ask for other work after finishing my tasks. I forced myself to get out of my comfort zone, try something new, and out of it came a stronger, wiser, and more unique me, although I still have my moments. Graduates, use your insight to put energy into something different, something challenging and meaningful to you as you enter your next chapter in life. Lead. Set examples in whichever path you choose. We learn from doing, not only listening. — **Alexa Pierce, Collegiate Academy speaker**

We, the class of 2020, are leaving here today with a sense of pride. Pride in knowing that we are about to enter the ring ready to fight our fight. We are leaving here today knowing that we are stronger than we ever could have imagined. We will not give up in the years to come, we will continue to show great resilience, and we will show everyone what fighters are made of. We have so many to thank for preparing us so excellently for this huge step we are about to take. — **Olivia Sanders, Villa Maria Academy**

School is a lot more fun when you take away all the learning and the work. I know, I know, learning is important. And that's the reason why we were here. But think of all the great

memories you have with your friends, and how none of them happened when you were focused in class. But let's not take away from all the wonderful teachers we had. I only went to one high school. So I don't know many other teachers from other schools. But I can confidently say that I wouldn't replace a single teacher at Fairview. — **DJ Smith, Fairview High School (student choice)**

Since elementary school, we have been asked the question, "Are you brave enough?" The context of this question has changed as the years have progressed, and went from "are you brave enough to make new friends" or "to stand up to the bully," to "are you brave enough to try out for the varsity sports team or to overcome senioritis?" And finally, today, we are faced with the question: "Are you brave enough to face a global pandemic?" I would like to answer it. Yes, we are brave enough. — **MacKenzie Smith, Iroquois speaker (faculty choice)**

Use your voice. The world needs leaders, people who aren't afraid to stand up for what they believe in. Speak your mind proudly and confidently, and others will follow. Don't jump on the bandwagon of groupthink and herd mentality. Have original thoughts and be proud of them. Go out into the world and lead with character and integrity. Show the world how strong we can be in the face of adversity. And most of all, never give up on who you are just because of who other people think you should be. — **Halle Swasing, Seneca Valedictorian**

Some of you may call this the worst times of your life but many people are dealing with similar concerns. Such as "will life ever be the same?" And "when will this all end?" But in light of those concerns, life still continues. At times, we may feel that all hope is lost, but there's always some gift of hope waiting around the corner. And it's just a matter of seeking it out for ourselves. Our attitude about these drastic life changes is what determines our outcome throughout it all. — **Joseph War-go, Iroquois Salutatorian**

We can compassionately use the knowledge we have gained to help others, whether by inventing a scientific device, educating people who would not have access to proper schooling otherwise, or bringing joy to people through works of art. With such a wide variety of talents, the possibilities are limitless. — **Tyler Warzynak, Mercyhurst Preparatory School**

Our class may be small, but we have sure made an impact at our school and in our town. We have accomplished many things throughout our time as YellowJackets, and although it is tragic that our time together had to end

so unexpectedly the way it did, I am so proud to be a part of the class of 2020. I am going to miss my time spent in those hallways, but I am confident in saying that I left a wiser, stronger, braver, and most importantly kinder person than when I entered those doors because of my fellow classmates. — **Sydney Wetzal, Girard High School Senior Class President**

High School is a time in our lives when we begin to experience and have the opportunity to explore the world we are so eager to enter. Each of these past four years has been a stepping stone, leading us and preparing us for our bright futures. Every year has brought us fond memories that we will reflect on throughout our lives. — **Lauren Weindorf, Fairview High School, Summa Cum Laude**

In the coming years, remember that you all hold the power to create change, regardless of what position you hold or how much power you possess. Especially in turbulent times like these, we need people who can leave behind a better world, people who can serve as models for posterity as they continue the advancement of human achievement. — **Kevin Xu, Collegiate Academy speaker**

Thank you to the many principals, teachers, counselors, and school administrators who assisted in compiling these excerpts, and a sincere thank you and congratulations to the class of 2020.

Nick Warren can be reached at nick@eriereader.com



KEVIN SOLES PHOTOGRAPHY

Erie Equal: A Conversation with Andrey Rosado

The founder of Erie's latest activist group explains how it began and how they're leading the discussion



NICK WARREN

Andrey Rosado (left) and Jenessa Williams head the racial equality activism group Erie Equal, kneeling nine minutes daily to honor the life of police brutality victim George Floyd.

Less than two weeks ago, there was no Erie Equal. A few days ago, it didn't even have a name. Even so, local political action has coalesced around a group of local residents committed to change. Building off the George Floyd protests and Black Lives Matter movement, Erie Equal has come to lead the daily demonstrations going on in downtown Erie. At 8:19 p.m. every day, a large group peacefully takes a knee for nine minutes, to honor the life of George Floyd. Out of these demonstrations, and a collection of nearly 1,900 people on Facebook, the group has become a progressive force in the Erie area. Founded by the 22-year-old Erie native Andrey Rosado, Erie Equal is seeking to find solutions to problems inherent to our community. Since gaining Jenessa Williams as a lead partner, Erie Equal has been building partnerships with like-minded groups such as Erie United, and recently starting a regular series of conversations with Mayor Joe Schember.

Nick Warren: So, what is your role in all of this? In the protests and in the organization of everything, how would you define that?

Andrey Rosado: So essentially, my role is to be the voice of so many people. Because obviously we can't bring 1,900 people into a meeting with city officials or anything like that, especially with COVID-19 going on. So when I first started this group, it was the Sunday after the riots that happened downtown. The very next day after

that happened — I was at home during it — I saw it on the news, saw Ember + Forge get their window kicked in, with a [Molotov cocktail] thrown on a table. That made me really emotional. I had a couple friends over, we were just talking, hanging out, and it really got me thinking, I've always thought about it, but I've never acted on the inequality that's in our city. And not only inequality — this isn't necessarily just exclusively a Black Lives Matter thing — but it's more or less about Erie itself, the community that we live in, we all want it to prosper again, especially my generation. So I set up the Facebook group on Sunday, like I just mentioned, and I initially just wanted to give everybody a platform to organize their protest. Everybody has the right to protest. It's in the Constitution. So I wanted to give everybody a platform where they can all come together and discuss ideas and promote it to be peaceful, because things get nasty when people start breaking and looting and setting fires, as you can see in other cities and states where that's happening.

NW: Can you tell me a little bit about your meeting with the mayor?

AR: It happened yesterday, which was Tuesday (June 9), at three o'clock. Yeah, we were comprised of myself, Jenessa Williams, then two men — the Horton

brothers, Aaron and Kennedy Horton. We all sat in on a meeting. We all had our different points that we wanted to talk about. Jenessa was in charge of demanding a civilian review board or community review board — it's been tossed around as a few different names.

NW: And are the Hortons related to [local politician] Andre?

AR: They are.

NW: I know that he's been a big part of the citizen's review board.

AR: Yeah, we were all in charge of our own thing. I was in charge of voter education. Jenessa was in charge of the community review board. And the Hortons were in charge of police brutality, and holding them accountable, and implementing [changes to funding]. I was trying to steer away from using the term 'defund the police.' But as more people talked about it, I understand what it means. It doesn't mean 'take away everything, all the money that they have and completely drain them and just abolish the department.'

NW: Reallocate, kind of?

AR: So myself and a random group member, she said 'refund society,' or 'refund our community' or social services. So, we're going to say 'defund the police, then refund ____' Fill in the blank for anything that matters. So we talked heavily with the mayor, we all hit him with our points. Jenessa's was very, very in-depth. So I can't really stream all that out off the top of my head ... So at the end of the meeting, we did a recap and we each hit upon every single point that we wanted to discuss. So I'll use myself as an example. I said, 'Mr. Mayor, given the voter education programs that I asked you to implement in our society, starting at the youth level at Youth Centers, the Martin Luther King Center, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Club, and then transitioning that into middle school, high school, as well as the general population voter's education course, just to get people more involved in voting, if that proves to be effective, would that be something you would support? So that's a question where he had to say yes or no, and he said yes to that. Same thing with the other two topics, so that was highly successful. He did ask to continue working closely with us, he asked to meet again next week. And following the meeting with the mayor, I went and had dinner

with a local councilman, Mr. [Michael] Keyes. We spoke heavily. So I had a lot more for him. He had some new ideas and values to learn from me. We hung out for about two hours, just talked and educated each other, and it really brought me to the realization that our group's goals really do have a huge impact and have the potential to seriously reform our entire society. The goals aren't just about Black Lives Matter. The goals aren't just about minorities. Although that's a large portion of it, the overall goal is to relocate money from the police department and put that back into social service programs such as housing, education, and things like the community college. So, essentially, the goal is to revitalize Erie, like I keep saying over and over again. I know the older generations have been in charge for a very, very long time, and we see that it is our time to kind of step up to the plate and establish the foundation for a better Erie. Establish the foundation so our kids' futures aren't at risk. And you know, you can walk around and not be scared.

NW: Obviously this has evolved extremely quickly. We talked about how this came together on Sunday on the 31st. So now, can you speak a little bit about how the group has evolved? How has the mission changed? It was posted on the group today about how the protests were kind of pigeon-holed as George Floyd protests, and how it's grown to be so much more than that.

AR: So things have definitely changed from the beginning. Initially, when it all came together or fell together, I should say, because it wasn't perfect. When it first started — we've got a lot of work to do — it was more about organizing demonstrations. We try to steer away from using the word 'protest' because there's a negative [connotation]. So that was kind of the main goal, was just organizing everybody at the protest, and setting that all up downtown. And then as we slowly moved, all the ideas came together and I slowly started realizing myself, 'hey, this has got to be bigger than just going downtown and protesting.'

So that really got us thinking seriously here, and you decided that the kneeling, and the main focus of that meeting is just to take that knee, give respect to George Floyd, who was murdered and

lost his life so early. So once that knee happens, you think about that. You have nine minutes to think about that personally in your head. And that knee hurts, man. I don't know if you got any time to get out there, but kneeling for nine minutes isn't fun.

NW: How long have the kneelings been going on consecutively?

AR: The Monday after I started the group, one day after, that's when the kneeling started. The group started evolving once we started hearing a lot of that, and we kind of decided that we need to divvy up what our focuses are and really hone into them. So that's why it became Erie Equal, and that portion of the name is just a shout out to all the minorities who are oppressed, or suppressed is the term I like to use. And it makes perfect sense. That term in the name is to support and show respect to all of us. You know, I myself am a minority, so the Erie part is to cover everything else that we stand for, which is better funding for Erie schools, better pay for the teachers, the forming of a community college, more after school programs or better funding for ones that are already in there. Voter education.

NW: Actually you beat me to that question. What is Erie Equal seeking out? What are you asking for?

AR: To sum it up? We are asking for

complete reform in our community. That's the long story short, so complete reform. Once you get all the points that I've been touching here. Our education system, I'm sure you know as an Erie resident, all these schools that have been shut down and all the kids crammed into one high school, with a heavy police force inside of that school. I understand just due to school shootings and stuff like that, they have to have somewhat of a police force in there, but we don't need city cops and sheriffs and this and that in the schools.

NW: Yeah, and then there's the argument that it probably causes more tension than it eases.

AR: Yeah, so that's one of our main focuses aside from supporting minorities and equal rights, which is a God-given right — that's not something we should even be having to ask for at this point, but, unfortunately, we are. It's literally 50/50, so 50 percent community reform. Everything from top to bottom, even in our local leaders, local leaders with quotations around it [laughs]. That's essentially what we're shooting for. We've been on the path to success so far. A lot of big names, a lot of big people are starting to throw our group's name around and reaching out to us in regard to that. Especially people who are up for reelection or want to get elected because they want us to support them.

NW: Which is part of the political machine, but it's also hopefully getting more voices heard. What has your reaction been? Do you think the conversation has moved quickly? Because last month, I didn't hear publicly people talking about defunding the police, and now it's something that's being heavily considered. How has that conversation moved in the past few weeks?

AR: I've heard rumblings about 'the police need less money.' I don't know if you know, but the police unions all across America, and even right here in Pennsylvania. I mean, they're backed by millions and hundreds of millions of dollars. They have access to people that have extreme power, they have access to the best attorneys and lawyers. So I've always heard rumblings about breaking that up a little bit. Just like how you see Facebook getting too big for people calling to break that up.

But as soon as all this happened, I saw the cities nearby us calling for it, I saw the states nearby calling for it. The conversation exploded like a nuclear bomb. And now we're in the middle of the radiation that's happening, the fallout from people calling for that. Because obviously there's going to be the people that call for it, and then the people that are completely radicalized and they're just like screaming, you know, pro-police. I'm not against the police. That's on

the record, I'm not against police officers. I know a handful of them, who are good guys. But it's literally just exploded, that's the best way to put it.

NW: Right. So, what are the next plans? Is it more of a day-to-day, or an evolution?

AR: We're definitely still working. There's a lot of things that are happening behind closed doors. We're moving forward with our agenda. We have our usual day-to-day activities, kneeling downtown to answer any general questions. Reach out to people in the group that want to meet up in person, or just have a Facebook Live, because that's kind of easier to get the message out to everybody in the group. But as far as long-term planning goes, there are long-term plans being set in motion. This isn't going to be a one and done. We're going to keep the fire lit. We're going to continue banging on the doors and making sure everybody's voice is heard. This won't stop until the community is where this generation thinks that it should be. Even once it is, we're gonna have to fight to keep it like that, because there's always gonna be people that come in and they have their own selfish reasons for wanting to do stuff.

NW: Thank you very much.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

George Floyd and Candidate Joe Biden

Erie will make the difference



By: Edward Gabriel

The demonstrations following the death of George Floyd remind

me of my days living in Erie between 1968 and 1974. During these years I attended Gannon University and worked at the Greater Erie Community Ac-

Erie County traditionally votes blue due to its heavily Democratic population base in the City of Erie — however, in recent years it's taken on a purplish tinge as Republican sympathies have grown. It will prove an important battleground county in the upcoming general election, for both incumbent Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden.

tion Agency (GECAC) under the highly respected community leader Ben Wiley. That experience inspired me to seek a career in Washington, DC, eventually becoming the U.S. Ambassador to Morocco and a foreign policy professional.

At the end of the 1960s and during 1970, racial tensions erupted in Erie, including se-

rious violence on our campus. Civil Rights activist Julian Bond — who later would become chairman of the NAACP — was invited to Gannon in the middle of our lowest moments to speak with students in an effort to mediate the growing anger and violence. In addition, a small group of black and white students were brought together in a retreat house south of Erie for several days in search of a better understanding of one another. We came back from that experience more hopeful and as friends.

Ben Wiley's period of leadership in the early '70s was among the most optimistic for

black-white cooperation and understanding. He and his social activist lieutenants, some who remain active today, grew GECAC from 50 to nearly 200 employees of various racial backgrounds. The city of Erie witnessed how black leadership could enrich the community for all citizens. Every Friday night we'd gather at the Pope Hotel for chitlins, chewing the fat, so to speak, feeling as though the world was changing for the better. Unfortunately, in hindsight, not much seems to have changed after all.

As a white person living through this Erie experience I learned from black friends

and colleagues that greater good comes from compassionate, empathetic, and caring individuals. The black community demonstrated at the time that although filled with hurt and pain and sometimes anger, they were the first to forgive, and maintained hope for an equal and just future.

Nearly 250 years ago, our founding fathers stated that all men were created equal but failed to actually include all people. It took Lincoln and Grant to make a remarkable and indelible mark with the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, granting Black Americans their freedom, citizen-

ship, and the right to vote, only to have those rights melt away after a dozen years of the Reconstruction.

Equal rights would lay dormant for more than 80 more years until Lyndon Johnson almost single-handedly pushed the Civil Rights Act through Congress in 1964, followed by his War on Poverty, which established community action agencies like GECAC, which raised the hope once again that blacks would be given equality.

Fifty years later and black folks are still waiting for full equal rights. How much forgiveness is there left in the black community?

At this time of needing a leader and a healer, we are strapped with a self-centered person who divides us, and who is among the most ineffectual U.S. presidents to hold office. Donald Trump has not only separated this country into factions, he's alienated our allies and set the world against us, with the exception of some authoritarian dictators with a similar mindset. During the nearly four decades of my professional career in foreign affairs, I have never seen four more disastrous years of international affairs than those under President Trump. Eight years could spell the end of

American influence in the world.

President Trump's response to the killing of George Floyd and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic further accentuates the need for the United States to have a president who can unite the country with genuine compassion and empathy. One may disagree with some of Joe Biden's policies, but no knowledgeable person can say Joe's not caring, empathetic, and compassionate. His lifetime of public service has demonstrated a strong moral compass, with a calm and balanced ability to bring people together in solving problems.

We have to be hopeful at this momentous era in our history that a person with Joe Biden's experience and moral fiber has risen to become the Democratic Party nominee for president. He is most needed in this turbulent time. We really don't have another 50 or 80 years to wait, or even one. We cannot let the death of George Floyd be overlooked, nor miss the opportunity that the November election offers, to finally put this dreadful history behind us and move forward together.

Edward Gabriel is the former U.S. Ambassador to Morocco, 1997-2001

Kristy Gnibus Prepares to Race Kelly for Congressional Seat

Local leader motions for 'getting up and doing something'



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Candidate for U.S. Congress Kristy Gnibus (PA-16), a mother of two and a culinary arts and nutrition teacher at McDowell Intermediate High School, will try to unseat five-term Republican incumbent Mike Kelly of Butler County in November's elections.

In mid-2019, Kelly announced he would be running for his sixth two-year term.

Over the last decade, Democratic challengers have repeatedly failed to unseat Kelly. He beat Erie County's Dahlkemper by just over 20,000 votes, according to the Pennsylvania Department of State. Again, in 2018, Kelly beat out another Erie native when he won over Democratic lawyer Ron DiNicola by just over 11,000 votes.

Coming off the June primaries however, it seems Gnibus may have a shot at taking the seat.

In the election earlier this month, Gnibus brought home 21,245 votes from Erie County compared to 16,472 votes for Kelly. Throughout the entire district, Gnibus received 47,387 votes in the primaries.

With the new systems in place for mail-in and absentee ballots in Pennsylvania — which were enacted by Act 12 in October of last year — results for the primary have been delayed, but it seems that Republican turnout outpaced Democratic turnout by over 10,000 votes.

"I think Erie has felt neglected for quite some time from our congressman," Gnibus told Erie Reader in early May. "I think that's across the district, but certainly in Erie, where [Kelly] promised lots of things," she continued. "We want to be heard as constituents, including myself, as a constituent, I want to be heard, and I want to know what his solutions are going to be, and see them brought up in Congress. What are we going to do to fix the issues? How are we going to keep Western PA and Erie's economy robust? Are you going to fight for infrastructure for this area?"

Gnibus, an Erie native, got her start in public policy at a young age. Today, her dreams of a Congressional term include using the position to fight for universal healthcare.

In regard to healthcare, Gnibus said: "Millions of Americans are now uninsured because they're unemployed and that has to stop. And so the first step is protecting what we have in place now ... our ACA [Affordable Care Act]. And we have to continue to work on a plan to make sure that every single American is insured." Gnibus continued, "We can't have a robust economy and we can't be a successful nation if we do not have our health."

As a mother, teacher, and community

By: Hannah McDonald

It seems change may soon be coming to Pennsylvania's 16th Congressional District as Democrat Kristy Gnibus is officially on the ballot to run against incumbent Congressman Mike Kelly (R) in November.

"Even though I didn't have any primary opponents ... being declared the official Democratic nominee for District 16 is huge," Gnibus explained. "And I feel like the results were very promis-

ing, even though we're dealing with a pandemic. I feel with everything going on, that it was a phenomenal turnout, especially from the Democrats. And I think a huge part of that lends to the fact that we were able to do mail-in ballots."

The district, which covers all of Erie, Crawford, and Mercer counties as well as parts of Lawrence and Butler counties, has been represented by Kelly of Butler since he took office following Democrat Kathy Dahlkemper in 2011.

member, education is another passion of Gnibus.

The education system in place is interesting, Gnibus said, as federal legislation strongly dictates action in schools, yet only four percent of the funding for education in the commonwealth comes from this level of government.

"I think that should be increased," Gnibus said. "And I would like to work to find out how we can equally represent districts and not tie them to their property. Because we know that where you live can determine the type of education you get. And that's segregation."

"These issues are something I've always been very passionate about," Kristy told Erie Reader prior to the June primary. "It's just more apparent how incredibly important our education system is, how incredibly important — and fragile — our economy is, and how incredibly important something such as healthcare is. I think the position that I'm in has just been highlighted even more through the pandemic because I'm going through a lot of the same issues that many people are right now."

Those people include many of the 195,451 registered voters in Erie County. Because it's a presidential election year, a greater percentage of them are likelier to turn out. In the last presidential election, 62.9 percent of Erie County voters cast ballots. Just four years prior, 64.6 percent of registered voters voted (compared to a rate of 31.9 percent during an odd year like 2013).

The most recent challenger to Kelly, DiNicola, won Erie County by 19,813 votes in 2018. That midterm election that saw only a 53 percent voter turnout, but Democrats came out to pledge support for their candidate. There will be naturally voters of both parties at the polls in 2020 — not only in Erie County, but in District 16's Republican-leaning rural territories. It's there where Gnibus will have to make up the most ground.

At home base, however, Gnibus has garnered favor — just last year, Gnibus was nominated and won a spot in the Erie Reader's 40 Under 40.

"Kristy is an influencer because her voice is real," one nominator explained. "Even more so she speaks as a strong woman who can be looked up to. She is an independent, honest voice that resonates."

Gnibus, a culinary arts and nutrition

teacher at McDowell Intermediate High School in Millcreek, found her love of public policy when she was a high school student herself.

"[It] started when I got really involved with the county fair," Gnibus said. After winning Erie County Fair Queen, she traveled to Harrisburg to present her winning essay.

She continued: "And I thought, 'Well, this is amazing what people are doing and what they're standing for.' And that was my first taste of politics. I thought people are doing something to make a change."

Her eyes were opened to the causes she felt adamant about "as my life started advancing, and having cancer, it opened my eyes to the healthcare system. [Between] raising my two girls and ... getting my Ph.D. in leadership, I just remember reading stories about incredible female leaders and what they were doing to impact the world around them," Gnibus said.

Around the same time she remembers thinking, "This might be my calling, this might be what I need to do."

"And so taking my passion for my community and my life experiences over the past few years, I took some different candidate trainings and talked to different leaders in the community and I just thought, now's the time," Gnibus admitted.

The greatest hurdle to Gnibus must overcome to have her voice heard in the capitol is name recognition, she said.

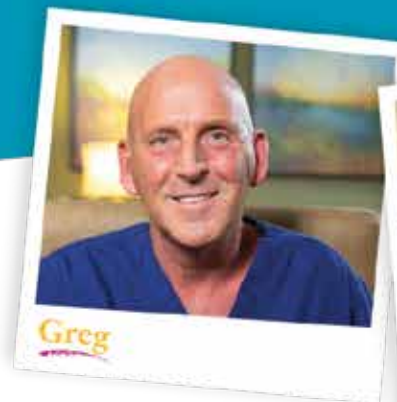
"A lot of people vote and don't have all the information, and (Kelly) has the advantage of having that name recognition from being in office for so long," Gnibus said, adding "I think raising money during an economically depressed time is going to be incredibly difficult. It's proven to be difficult. And I don't take any corporate PAC money like my opponent, so everything is truly grassroots. I'm really, really relying on people to help fund this race."

Despite these challenges, Gnibus and her campaign team "are doing everything we can to make sure that we are successful come November."

"We're done with the thoughts and prayers, and now it's time for policy change," Gnibus said. "And the only way that we're going to enact policy change is by getting up and doing something."

Hannah McDonald can be reached at hmcdonald@eriereader.com.

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Thinly Shrouded Racism

The Ku Klux Klan and white supremacy in Erie



The above picture shows the burning of the cross which brought to a close on Saturday evening the annual picnic and political outing of the Ku Klux Klan held on the Behr farm just west of Waldameer. Unknown to members of the Klan reporters for The Times were on the grounds, mingled with the Klansmen, secured the names of many persons, took the license numbers of most of the automobiles and found numerous cards on the machines urging support to William L. Morrison for Mayor and banners asking votes for Charles R. Davis for county commissioner.

A cross burns at Behr Farm just west of Waldameer Park in August 1923, closing out a "joint political-social outing" of the Ku Klux Klan, who endorsed then-mayoral candidate William L. Morrison over Republican favorite Joe Williams.

ERIE DAILY TIMES/NEWSBANK

By: Jonathan Burdick

The Ku Klux Klan is the most infamous of the many white supremacist groups that have existed throughout the United States. This is in part due to their portrayal in Hollywood movies, from *Mississippi Burning* to the more recent *BlacKkKlansman*, but also due to their secrecy, their regalia, and their campaigns of terror.

In the 1920s, a second wave of the Ku Klux Klan was growing in numbers and power throughout the country. This was partially due to the popularity of D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, which glorified and romanticized the Klan, but also their new and more modern system of recruitment. At their peak, this second Klan claimed to have somewhere between 4 to 5 million members at a time when the U.S. population was around 100 million.

Despite the common perception that the Klan was a problem historically plaguing only southern states, this second Klan tightened its grip in northern states as well, expanding deeply throughout Pennsylvania. By 1923, the Klan was making news daily in the state, such as in Wilkesburg, when thousands of Klansmen descended on the town, conducting a parade

that blocked traffic for at least an hour while they also set off "red lights, fireworks and bombs," before inducting 500 new members and setting fire to a 50-foot-tall cross.

During this time, the Erie branch of the Ku Klux Klan had entrenched itself in the community, involving itself in local politics, co-opting local churches into their cause, and making it known that vigilantism was a tactic they weren't afraid to employ.

In February of 1923, Dr. Rev. Homer B. Potter, who pastored the Simpson Methodist Episcopal Church in Erie, gave a sermon to 300 members of the local Klan. He preached that he did not agree with all the Klan's platform, but that Erie's Klansmen were "law-abiding citizens who will not act as bigots or law-breakers." He declared that the Klan was necessary for Erie.

"[T]his Erie Klan has done some things for which the church and law-abiding citizens may well be thankful," Potter said. He pointed out the speakeasies around Erie. If the city wouldn't shut them down, then the Klan would. "And so long as they continue to do it, they are what Erie needs."

During another evening service, Potter preached on "Americanizing Americans." A newspaper advertisement not-

ed the Ku Klux Klan as "guests of the evening." In April, the Lawrence Park Methodist Episcopal Church held a service where Rev. Harvey H. Bair gave a sermon titled "The Patriotism of Jesus." The local Klan, again, were advertised as "guests of the church." The Central Presbyterian Church, recognizing the increasing grip of the Klan in Erie, advertised a "present day and popular theme" to be discussed the following Sunday: "Shall I join the Ku Klux Klan?"

Meanwhile, Rev. W. D. Dempster, a Presbyterian minister from Crafton, Pa., met with the Erie Ministerial Association to discuss if they should accept Klan contributions. Dempster spoke admirably of the KKK, noting that they were an "American Protestant organization" who did "missions of charity." They would only "maintain law and order and act if city and county officials are negligent," Dempster reasoned.

Erie was about to witness this maintenance of "law and order."

In the early months of Prohibition, a 25-year-old black Erie woman named Ruby Scott had been arrested for selling whiskey to undercover federal agents at her German Street home, which also served as a boarding house. She was fined \$500. In February of 1923, she was arrested again, this time on charges of "being the proprietress of a disorderly house." On the night of April 20, she had returned to her home just before midnight when hooded Klansmen appeared.

They doused a cross in petroleum and ignited it in her

front yard. Scott, not initially realizing it was the Klan, went for her revolver but decided against confronting them. They graffitied her front door with "KKK" and left her a warning letter, but fled before the police arrived.

"The Kluxers have just paid your disorderly house its first visit, to warn you and the rest of your kind to close up and get out," the letter read. "You have defied the laws of God, country and city long enough. Now listen, you black violators, close your places and go. Erie does not want you."

If they returned, they warned, it would be their "second and last visit" and would "be one of greater force."

By morning, the newspaper reported she appeared frightened, but she stood her ground and refused to leave, while publicly pointing out all of the letter's spelling errors. The district attorney promised charges if he could "secure sufficient evidence." He did not.

As the Klan's numbers grew in Erie, so did their confidence. That August, the Erie Daily Times ran a story titled "Koo Koo Klansmen Parade in Fords." After a late-night meeting at their headquarters at 818 State St., plainclothes Klansmen went "parading up and down State Street in their automobiles (mostly Fords)."

"Talk about noise. These night owls who paid ten dollars [in dues] to learn some secret stuff, blew their horns for twenty minutes," the Times reported sarcastically. "They disturbed the peace."

Later that month, the Erie Klan held their first of what was to be an annual picnic and "joint political-social outing" on Behr Farm across the road from Calvary Cemetery on West Lake Road. It was an election year and the local Klan was working out a list of endorsements. This included

the Erie mayoral primary, in which they were planning to endorse William L. Morrison over the Republican favorite, Joe Williams.

What the organizers did not realize was that, despite having guards around the perimeter, Times reporters had infiltrated the event undercover. They estimated a total of 2,000 men, women, and children attended. The reporters "mingled with the Klansmen, secured the names of many present, [and] took the license numbers of most of the automobiles..."

Throughout the day, Klan leadership debated endorsements. Some conversations were heated. To close the evening, the Klan then had their "customary display of 'the fiery cross.'" It stood 30 feet and "lighted up the sky ... easily discernible for a mile or more."

By this point in 1923, Klan activities were dominating news coverage in the Times.

"We suspect that a good many fellows join the Ku Klux Klan simply to have a new excuse to hand the wife anytime they happen to be out all night," one resident joked in a letter to the editor. "Too many wives were getting wise to the 'sick friend' alibi."

"We shall not join the Klan while they continue to charge ten dollars for ordinary cotton nighties," quipped a columnist.

Meanwhile just south of downtown Pittsburgh, approximately 25,000 Klansmen congregated. During one march, a group of Klan resisters (referred to in the paper as "antis") blocked them. Violence ensued and a robed Klansman was killed and "scores of others" were injured. The Klan offered up a reward of \$2,500 for the killer and they condemned "the action of the mob" which had a "sense of anarchy."

On Sept. 4, the Times reported the Klan's official endorse-



THE REV. HOMER B. POTTER has been in the Methodist Episcopal ministry in Erie Conference since his graduation from Boston University School of Theology in 1907. He is a native of Corry, Pa., and was graduated from Allegheny College twenty-one years ago. He is now pastor of Simpson Church, Erie, Pa. In the World War he served as chaplain on the U. S. S. DeKalb. The following sermon was delivered in Ford Memorial Chapel, Allegheny College.

THE CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE/NEWSBANK

If Christ Were On Earth Today Would He Join the Ku Klux Klan?

The Ku Klux Klan of 2,000 years ago—Ku Klux in everything except that its members had the courage to come out in daylight and wore no masks or sheets to hide their shame—attempted to stone and drive a fallen woman from its midst.

Christ raised a protecting hand over her and stayed the mob with these words:

“Let him among you who is without sin cast the first stone.”

ERIE DAILY TIMES/NEWSBANK

[top] During a 1923 sermon, Homer B. Potter, a pastor at Simpson Methodist Episcopal Church, declared that the Ku Klux Klan was necessary for Erie. [bottom] During the 1920s, the merits of Ku Klux Klan membership was legitimately debated in some white churches — this church bulletin condemns the group’s overly glorified self-righteousness.

to the Woolworth’s below and apartments above them. They believed the blaze was started by a Klansman’s discarded cigarette, as the Klan held a meeting throughout the night after an evening of burning crosses outside of city limits.

Discovered during the morning fire was a business directory. Times reporters on the scene wrote down the more the 100 local businesses that appeared to have dealt in some way with the Erie Klan. Some businesses, it appeared, offered perks to Klan members. The Times published a list of these businesses which included grocers, jewelers, builders, dentists, chiropractors, plumbers, barbers, insurance agencies, banks, and more.

In the following days, many of these business owners denied being in the KKK or having any connection to or business dealings with them. “[I] am not in sympathy with the organization and did not know that our business card was in the rooms of the Klan,” George Epp of Epp Furniture Company released in a statement.

“We are not knights of the Ku Klux Klan,” another grocer advertised. “We offer \$50.00 to anyone if this is not true.”

Dozens of other public denials were made over the following days.

Perhaps emboldened by the newspaper’s escalation, the downfall of Morrison’s campaign, and heightened emotions over the fire, Rev. Ethelbert D. Hulse escalated the Klan’s feud with the Times on Sept. 10. Hulse, who was a preacher at the Tenth Street Methodist Church and the Erie County Jail, was also a prominent member of the Klan. With 60 robed Klansmen hooded

and in the front rows of his service, he attacked the publisher and editor of the Times as “waging a battle against the Ku Klux Klan” and claimed that they were not “one hundred percent American” like the Klan.

“He was greatly perturbed and told his audience they should not become discouraged,” the Time reported. Hulse seethed that Erie politics were “of the skunk variety,” then revealed to the congregation that the Klansmen in attendance were concealing guns and that an unnamed state official had approved this violation of the law, which was greeted with thundering applause.

In response to this escalation, the Erie Daily Times published 21 license plate numbers of vehicles outside of the church. This included a handful of prominent members of the Erie community.

After Morrison lost the primary to Williams, coverage of the local Klan dwindled. The momentum that the Klan had built over the previous year seemed to stall as well. On Dec. 31, a Ku Klux Klan leader, who was a volunteer state policeman and attempting to obtain a federal Prohibition job, had his home on Stafford Avenue vandalized while he and his wife were at a dance: furniture was smashed, lights were torn from the walls, fixtures were shattered, and water was left running in a bathtub, filling the entire home with ankle-deep water.

“Police declared it was one of the most complete jobs they had ever seen,” the Erie Daily Times reported.

By 1925, total membership in the local Klan had declined to around 700. Even if membership had declined though, the ideologies that permitted its rise in the first place would continue to persist. White supremacy ideologies, in fact, persisted in Erie in many forms throughout the following century — although most white supremacists traded in their robes for suits, a deliber-

ate tactic meant to legitimize themselves as well as distance themselves from the Klan.

On Nov. 28, 1998, the Klan visited Erie once again, a rally planned for outside the Erie County Courthouse, organized by a woman out of Allegheny County.

“We are there to stand up for white rights,” Kathryn Negley Hedrick, who went by the pseudonym Kay Ryan as the branch’s leader, said two days prior. This time though, 75 years after the Klan was increasing its grip on the city of Erie, only 25 Klansmen were present — and they were met with fierce resistance.

“The Klan were met by 400 furious spectators, who simply couldn’t resist unloading their verbal outrage at these hooded fools,” the Erie Times-News editors wrote. “Thirty-two blocks to the south [at Mercyhurst], 500 people gathered for a ‘Unity in Our Community’ rally, set up to offer the community a celebration to the power of diversity.”

“The people here, assembling like this, to stand together to oppose hatred, it tells me that Erie is moving forward in teaching its young people,” an 80-year-old Cornelius J. Smith told journalist Ed Palattella at the time, after recalling to him a time in Erie when he and friends who had purchased tickets to a skating party were not permitted in because they were black.

“There has been a great change in Erie,” Smith added.

Erie, like the rest of the United States, has a long way to go in confronting and accepting its past. White supremacist ideologies that once made the Ku Klux Klan both popular and powerful still permeate every part of our society. If we recognize this and recognize the flaws within our society, we can continue to effectively rework it in a meaningful way.

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

ment of William Morrison for mayor. The meeting had taken place at their State Street headquarters and of the 318 Klan members present to vote, 315 chose Morrison.

The Erie Daily Times was not attempting to hide their bias. They were clearly aiming to take on the Klan, as well as keep the Klan’s endorsement of Morrison fresh on everybody’s minds. The Erie Dispatch Herald, Erie’s other prominent paper which preferred Morrison, condemned the Times for continuously linking his campaign to the Klan.

“The next mayor of Erie will have a lot of big problems to meet, problems that must be met wisely if the best interests of the city are to be served,” Times editors wrote. “And they are not the sort of problems the additional state police or the Ku Klux Klan can help him solve.”

In another editorial, they implied that the Ku Klux Klan was “a menace to the pursuit of liberty guaranteed by the constitution” and that the “organization is declared to encourage race prejudice and religious bigotry instead of promoting fellowship and good will.” One published letter referred to the KKK as “illiterates” and “night shirted cobras.”

Each time the Times published a story about the upcoming mayoral election, they reminded readers of Morrison’s Klan endorsement. By Sept. 6, Joe Williams had 5 to 1 odds over Morrison. This agitated local Klan leaders.

Early in the morning on Sept. 8, a fire was reported at the Klan’s State Street headquarters. Fire department officials were able to keep it from burning to the ground, but it caused thousands of dollars of damages, including

2020 Virtual Pridefest Goes Digital at an Uncertain Moment

Northwestern PA Pride Alliance and Erie Playhouse get creative



NEGRO ELKHA

By: Dan Schank

Let's get the bad news out of the way. COVID-19 is going to eliminate an in-person parade from the Northwestern PA Pride Alliance this summer, just as it has eliminated many other fun things in our lives.

Thankfully, through a partnership with the Erie Playhouse, the show will go on digitally. And organizers are doing their best to adapt the spirit of the celebration to an online setting, while taking advantage of the opportunities that pre-taped performances provide.

Fans of drag shows have nothing to worry about. 2020 Virtual Pridefest will feature two winners of our annual Miss Erie contest (2011's champ Misty Michaels Kall and our current title-holder, Rebecca Mae), performers with amusing

names (Alysin Wonderland and Priscilla Godzilla), performers with conventional names (Debbie), and performers from out-of-town (L.A.'s Porshaa Lejay). There's a great range to the offerings scheduled — Senator Bob Casey is preparing a short video, Austin Kulyk of the Erie Playhouse will sing us some songs, and a daredevil named Joe Snarey (aka Snarenbear) will literally breathe fire. Something for everyone!

To hear how it's all coming together, I spoke to Pride Alliance president Alex Sphon (who will perform in drag as Lovin Heart during the event), who explained that a Zoom webinar will screen the day's events in a manner similar to a Facebook Live video. "Our feed won't have comments available," says Sphon, "but we're partnering with other organizations who

will be hosting Google Hangouts, Facebook chat rooms, and other options."

Sphon and his team are working hard to make the experience interactive. "We're trying to emulate as much as we can and keep as many of our original partners as we can," he says. "At Pride we have tables where you can go eat with different people, and then you watch the show. And because it's in person, it's interactive. So the tables are being replaced, so to speak, with chatrooms. You can go in and talk to people about things that interest you — and you'll be able to watch the performance also."

To pull this off, the Northwestern PA Pride Alliance turned to the Erie Playhouse for help with programming. According to executive director Kate Neubert-Lechner, "Our venue will be the location for live streamed performances and we will also have some pre-recorded performances from our volunteer performers throughout the event."

The event comes at a precarious time, both locally and nationally. In addition to the global epidemic keeping us all from leaving our homes, the enormous outpouring of activism in response to the killing of George Floyd is making a big impact. In fact, the local LGBT community already staged an action on June 13, declaring that there is "No Pride Without Black Lives."

In response to the recent momentum,

Neubert-Lechner notes that "there will be BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Color] speakers throughout the event and performances that will be related to and supporting Black Lives Matter." In particular, the Playhouse will be "presenting streamed performances of *The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall on July 16, 17, and 18 with all proceeds going to Black Lives Matter. We felt it was incredibly important to use the platform that we have to present a work by a black author, addressing the messages of injustice and the fight for equality." Sphon concurs: "Given the current political climate, we are stepping up to not only celebrate the LGBT community, but also to raise the voices of the black and brown community since there's such a great crossover between these communities."

Though it comes at a time of uncertainty, Sphon is quick to stress that the event will also provide a sense of relief. "Our goal is to create an escape and a sense of happiness. One of my favorite things about pride is the incredible emotional high and euphoria that you get from being in an area where you're totally accepted."

On June 27, that sense of acceptance will illuminate smart phones and laptops across Erie. We can't march this year, but we can certainly log on.

Saturday, June 27, 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. // Learn more at: facebook.com/NWPAPride

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Space Force Shoots for the Stars, Just the Stars

The well-cast comedy ultimately suffers from a failure to launch



Steve Carrell stars as General Mark Naird in the Netflix comedy series *Space Force*, lampooning the Space Operations department of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Armed Forces. While a good leader who values the needs of people, Naird knows little to nothing about the science behind the President's mission to have "boots on the moon by 2024." The many responsibilities of his job, on top of being a father to an angst-ridden daughter (Diana Silvers) without the help of his wife (Lisa Kudrow), who is incarcerated for reasons that are never explained, create a significant amount of stress that he can only relieve through singing to himself at least every episode.

While the concept is brilliant — and is arguably worth it just for the fact that it beat the Trump administration's military branch to the copyright punch — the first season seems to be in a hurry to get people excited for the next one, without dedicating time to building all of the characters. Viewers become pretty well

acquainted with Naird and scientist Dr. Adrian Mallorie (John Malkovich), as well as their fumbling attempts to understand each other as coworkers and possible friends. Ben Schwartz plays a fast-talking media manager known as F. Tony whose attempts to keep Naird up to date on current slang and trends is quite entertaining. Unfortunately, fleshing out the A plot leaves little room to properly build on additional characters to a point where the audience can't identify with them. Tawny Newsome and Jimmy O. Yang play coworkers that have their own side plot centered around a bond that developed in minutes and seemingly out of nowhere. Hopefully, if the show is renewed, more time will be dedicated to development of everyone's motivation and arc. — Claudia Rose

Season One currently streaming on Netflix
// Created by: Steve Carell, Greg Daniels //
Starring: Steve Carell, John Malkovich, Ben Schwartz, Diana Silvers, Tawny Newsome, Jimmy O. Yang // 10 episodes

If Michael Scott had a military career, married Phoebe Buffay, and was put in charge of astronauts, the results would look something like the new series

Space Force, now streaming on Netflix. The series follows General Mark Naird, played by Steve Carrell, who is put in charge of Space Operations for the U.S

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COUNTRY FAIR

Betty's Indie Style Shreds

The HBO female skateboarder series wobbles, but lands an impressive trick



Moonbear (Kabrina Adams, at left), Ajani Russell, Nina Moran, Dede Lovelace, and Rachel Vinberg aren't exactly skating through life as they reprise their roles in Crystal Moselle's six-episode series.

The Animated Series). It makes sense though, as the cast are real-life skateboarders essentially playing heightened versions of themselves.

If you never saw *Skate Kitchen*, fear not. In many ways, aside from its name, *Betty* (an iffy term in surf and skate culture referencing a young woman) actually exceeds its source material. And there's no Jaden Smith!

The show centers around five young female skateboarders in New York City, as they make their way through a male-dominated subculture. There's Janay (Dede Lovelace), the emotional anchor of the show, Camille (Rachel Vinberg), the group's new friend trying to balance out her male and female friendships, the taciturn documentarian Honeybear (Kabrina Adams), the charming rich-girl drug dealer Indigo (Ajani Russell), and

the heady and lovable wildcard Kirt (Nina Moran). While *Skate Kitchen* almost totally centers around Camille, *Betty* gives each character their time to shine, with Janay arguably taking center stage. Each character is unique and well fleshed-out, to one of the series strongest credits.

Capturing Moselle's ethereal, almost mumblecore sensibilities is done with a deft hand. It's relatively faster-paced with a denser narrative than the original film, and brings aboard behind the scenes talents like Leslie Arfin and Moshe Kasher (and the soundtrack doesn't hurt either). *Betty* is punchy and quick-witted while at the same time floating in an urban bokeh of navel-gazing indie style.

Though it starts off shaky, it quickly finds its footing. Having such richly identifiable characters cut from such a specific millennial cloth is the toughest trick the series lands, and we're glad the cameras were running. — Nick Warren

Now available on HBO // Created by: Crystal Moselle // Dede Lovelace, Moonbear, Nina Moran, Ajani Russell, and Rachele Vinberg // Six episodes

A television series based on a movie is no new thing. Shows like *Westworld* and *Fargo* have found success mining themes and playing in a world created previously. It's far less often that we see something helmed by the original creator, and even rarer when it's carried out by the same actors. *Betty*,

the new HBO series, is just that. Led by showrunner Crystal Moselle, it's based on her 2018 production *Skate Kitchen*, a well-received yet relatively unknown film. One of the most intriguing aspects of the show is that it sees the five principle characters reprise their roles (perhaps sharing the most DNA with *Clerks*:



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TELEVISION

Queer Eye In Philadelphia for Fab Fifth Season

Relocating the show continues to tune in with what made it click



NETFLIX

Just in time for Pride Month, Netflix released Season 5 of *Queer Eye* on June 5. This time their headquarters moved from Atlanta to the more familiar city of Philadelphia. In line with past seasons, the Fab 5 reminded viewers of the show that any transformation is possible, whether it be a dog groomer, DJ, pediatrician, or gym owner. Jonathan Van Ness brings his bubbly attitude, while Tan France remains the confident connoisseur of fashion, Antoni Porowski continues to master the kitchen, Bobby Berk provides his artistic eye with a side-smile, and Karamo Brown maintains his lovable personality (and most memorable T-shirts yet). The biggest difference this season is the increased focus on designer Bobby and his work, as he heads the best renovations of the entire series. In the first episode, he reconfigures the church of a gay pastor into a more inclusive parish center for the city.

There isn't one episode that stands out more than the others, and the revamped series (which now ties its Bravo predecessor by season count) stays true to its format each time. The shock factor is still there, but not quite like it was the first few seasons when it was new. Reminiscent

Bobby Berk (left), Tan France, Antoni Porowski, Jonathan Van Ness, and Karamo Brown drop in on the City of Brotherly Love for their fifth season.

of *What Not to Wear*, the show retains all the true emotions within the transformation without the over-dramatized reveals.

The focus has shifted a bit though. In a time when there is an ever-egregious news story always ready to break, the themes of love and redemption ring truer than the Liberty Bell. With episodes featuring a young man reconnecting with his mother, a family coming back together to continue their family business, and even a father handing his daughter off for marriage, the season is packed with stories of repairing relationships while continuing self-love. Many episodes also feature small businesses in different parts of Philadelphia, with discussions about gentrification and work-life balance. With all said and done, the show continues to be a go-to for an easy hour of feel-good entertainment. — Chloe Forbes

Seasons one through five currently streaming on Netflix // Created by: David Collins // Starring: Antoni Porowski, Tan France, Karamo Brown, Bobby Berk, Jonathan Van Ness // 10 episodes

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“Never Have I Ever” Takes Teen Comedy for a Spin

Inspired by Mindy Kaling’s own life comes a story for first-generation teenagers of color



Maitreyi Ramakrishnan (left) stars as Devi, alongside Ramona Young and Lee Rodriguez in the new coming-of-age comedy series from Lang Fisher and Mindy Kaling.

Never have I ever... seen Asian teenagers accurately portrayed on television. Okay, this isn't totally true, but it's no surprise that Asian representation in mainstream media is unnecessarily

lacking. Even less represented on the screen are the faces and stories of the South Asian community. Enter *Never Have I Ever*, one of Netflix's latest original series straight from the brains of Mindy

Kaling and Lang Fisher.

Together, Kaling and Fisher concocted a refreshingly earnest and diverse take on the classic high school coming-of-age story. *Never Have I Ever* follows Devi Vishwakumar (Maitreyi Ramakrishnan), or “your favorite Hindu girl in the San Fernando Valley” as she puts it, as she navigates sophomore year of high school as a child of immigrants while feeling “too Indian” at times, dealing with first loves and important friendships, and all the angst, heartbreak, and joy that comes with growing up in modern America.

From episode one, the writing and dialogue are as quirky as they are funny. Though some situations read a bit unbelievable, viewers can't help but empathize with Devi because despite the quotable one-liners, *Never Have I Ever* is sincere in highlighting very real problems young people face. In fact, I think

the most endearing quality of the show is in how complicated yet ultimately rewarding Devi's relationships are with those around her.

Throughout the season, Devi grapples with the death of her father while seeking acceptance from her strict mother (Poorna Jagannathan) by trying to meet lofty expectations set by her seemingly perfect cousin (Richa Moorjani). One of Devi's best friends (Lee Rodriguez) comes to terms with her sexuality while her other best friend (Ramona Young) comes to terms with her absent mother. To complicate things further, Devi feels compelled to compete with her nemesis (Jaren Lewison) of their class while pining over her secret crush (Darren Barnet). But hey, no one ever said high school was easy. — Hannah Wyman

Season One currently streaming on Netflix // Created by: Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher // Starring: Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, Poorna Jagannathan, Richa Moorjani, Jaren Lewison, Darren Barnet, Ramona Young, Lee Rodriguez, and John McEnroe // 10 episodes

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MOVIE REVIEWS

Watch the Skies: The Vast of Night Makes the Most of Its Small Budget



AMAZON STUDIOS

It is now easier to make a film than ever before, but that doesn't mean that directors aren't still restrained by their budgets. While Hollywood can spend hundreds of millions of dollars to fill every scene with the most advanced effects available, independent filmmakers still have to rely on style and technique to tell their stories. This is the case for Andrew Patterson's debut feature *The Vast of Night*, a clever little thriller that sadly doesn't quite stick the landing of its ingenious premise, although it certainly gets an "A" for effort.

Set in a very small New Mexico town in the late 1950s, the film follows high school student Fay Crocker (Sierra McCormick) to her job as a telephone operator. While listening to her friend Everett's (Jake Horowitz) radio program, she picks up a strange frequency over the airwaves. Fay and Everett soon team up to find the source of this signal and they learn that it may come from visitors from outer space!

As I said, the film doesn't have the budget to give us big effects set-pieces so it focuses on intimate moments of characters describing the events in long, tense detail. Often the visuals cut away entirely leaving us with only the dialogue. The result is a fascinating minimalist exercise similar to an episode of *The Outer Limits* or the *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast and the film is carried by the charisma of its two lead actors. Unfortunately, all this intriguing build-up doesn't really result in a climax that pays off. The film feels like it's ramping up to something great but doesn't quite get there. Still, *The Vast of Night* is a treat for anyone looking for subtle, character-driven sci-fi. — Forest Taylor

Currently available on Amazon Prime // Directed by: Andrew Patterson // Written by: James Montague and Craig Sanger // Starring: Sierra McCormick, Jake Horowitz, Gail Cronauer, Cheyenne Barton, Gregory Peyton, Mallorie Rodak, Mollie Milligan, Ingrid Fease, and the voice of Bruce Davis // 89 minutes // Rated 'PG-13'

"The Dead Walk!": One Cut of the Dead is the Best Film You May Not Have Heard Of



THIRD WINDOW FILMS

Zombies are quite possibly the most malleable movie monster in history. They've been slow, fast, stupid, smart, metaphors for just about every societal problem that has ever existed, and they have managed to permeate every aspect of pop culture — from film to television, comic books to video games, and everything in between. In Shin'ichiro Ueda's delightfully inventive *One Cut of the Dead*, zombies are now being used to tell a story about the impossible task of making a film itself. Horror fans who think they've seen everything under the sun now have the pleasure to witness this modern masterpiece themselves thanks to streaming site Shudder.

Following the cast and crew of a low-budget horror movie, things go from bad to worse when the director (Takayuki Hamatsu) decides to up the realism factor by turning various crew members into actual zombies! Now, this small band of actors has to fight to survive while their mad director desperately tries to get all the shots needed to complete his film.

Most talk of this film centers around the first act, which amazingly contains all the action in one unbroken, 37-minute shot. However, after that breath-taking opening, it gets even more interesting as the film goes back in time to show us how we got to this point. To describe what happens in the film would take away its impact, but suffice to say, very few films have captured the pain, stress, and euphoria of making a low-budget film like this. The best thing I could say of this film is to see it with as little knowledge as you can. It contains more thrills, twists, humor, and heart than we expect from zombie flicks. *One Cut of the Dead* is currently available on Shudder. — Forest Taylor

Written and directed by: Shin'ichiro Ueda // Starring: Takayuki Hamatsu, Yuzuki Akiyama, Harumi Shuhama, Kazuaki Nagaya, Hiroshi Ichihara, and Mao // 96 minutes // Unrated ('R' equivalent)



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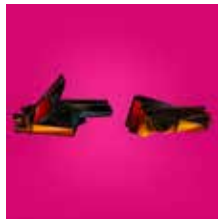
ALBUM REVIEWS

Run the Jewels

RTJ4
BMG Records



It's been three-and-a-half long years since *RTJ3* dropped on Christmas Eve of 2016, and a lot has changed in that



same span of time. The political climate many predicted became a reality, and the systems that allowed that to happen became more apparent. In a new age of a global health crisis, economic crisis, and civil unrest, there's never been more of a demand for Killer Mike and El-P's radicalized rap history lessons. *RTJ4* not only delivers exactly what we've come to expect from the two-man crew, but similar to 2014's *RTJ2*, it does so without wasting a single second. One of the most exciting things about this new album is the number of genres the group musically traverses. Miraculously, El-P continues to sound more confident than ever behind the boards, churning out old-school boom-bap ("yankee and the brave") and bass-heavy electronics ("goonies vs. E.T.") in equal measure. But vocally, *RTJ4* is Killer Mike's album; the veteran rapper delivers the anarchistic bravado we're used to on single "ooh la la," but in a verse that seems to transcend timeliness, he delivers a haunting verse reacting to police brutality in album highlight "walking in the snow."
— Aaron Mook

The 1975

Notes on a Conditional Form
Dirty Hit Records



Who is more polarizing than The 1975 right now? As the relevancy of megastar Kanye West — an artist they've referenced both on and off-record many times — continues to fade, it seems the eccentric and ambitious British pop-rockers have taken his place. It's enough to make most listeners roll their eyes between albums, but none of that seems to matter once a new album drops — provided it's strong enough to make up for abrasion, that is. *Notes on a Conditional Form* is a particularly odd release from the band as it seems to immediately be their least meticulous. Some songs carry on and on, others end before hitting the three-minute mark, and the transitions from orchestral interludes to scattered electronic pieces ("Frail State of Mind") and nostalgic Britpop ("Me & You Together Song") are almost always jarring. That being said, the album is reminiscent of Father John Misty's polarizing 2017 opus, *Pure Comedy*. *Notes* is the most self-aware the band has ever sounded; skeptics will find next to nothing to change their mind here, but believers will relish in the creative decisions and imperfections that are beginning to show in the band's stunning craftsmanship.
— Aaron Mook



Coriky

Coriky
Dischord



It's impossible to view some music in a vacuum, free of preconceptions. Searching for new albums, I saw one with a simple black and white cover from a band whose name I didn't recognize. I played it and immediately enjoyed the opening lo-fi vibrato of "Clean Kill" and the band's charmingly cacophonous instrumentation. I liked the singer's voice and it sounded warmly familiar, like a post-punk band that doesn't take itself too seriously. The singer said the line "But she's seen a lot of action" and then I looked them up. Coriky is the newest project from Ian MacKaye. His inflection was still the same from 1983's "Look Back and Laugh," as any self-respecting punk can recall lines from the Minor Threat discography like holy scripture. Though some may be scratching their heads, others are looking up this album before they even finish reading this. MacKaye was the singer for Minor Threat and Fugazi. This is his new project featuring longtime Fugazi bassist Joe Lally and drummer of The Evens, Amy Farina, expertly sharing vocal duties with MacKaye. The album stands on its own, with memorable tracks like "Bqm," "Last Thing," and "Shedlee-bop" having their standout moments.
— Nick Warren



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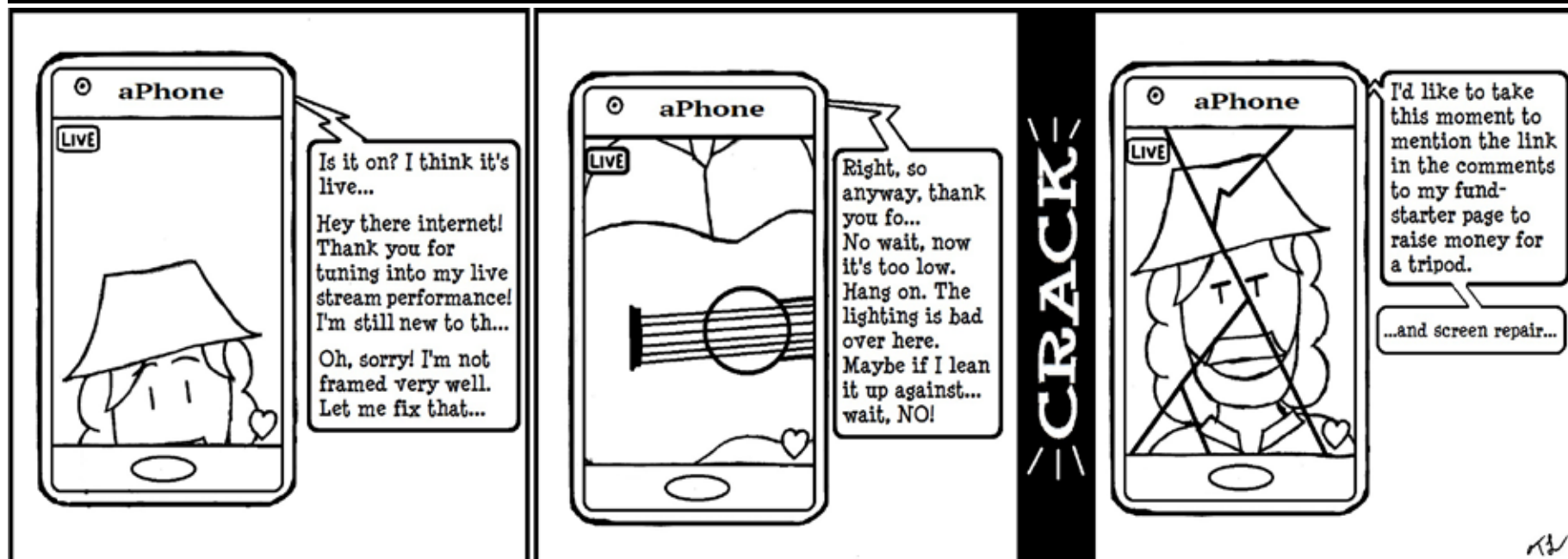
Sleep On The Wing
Warp



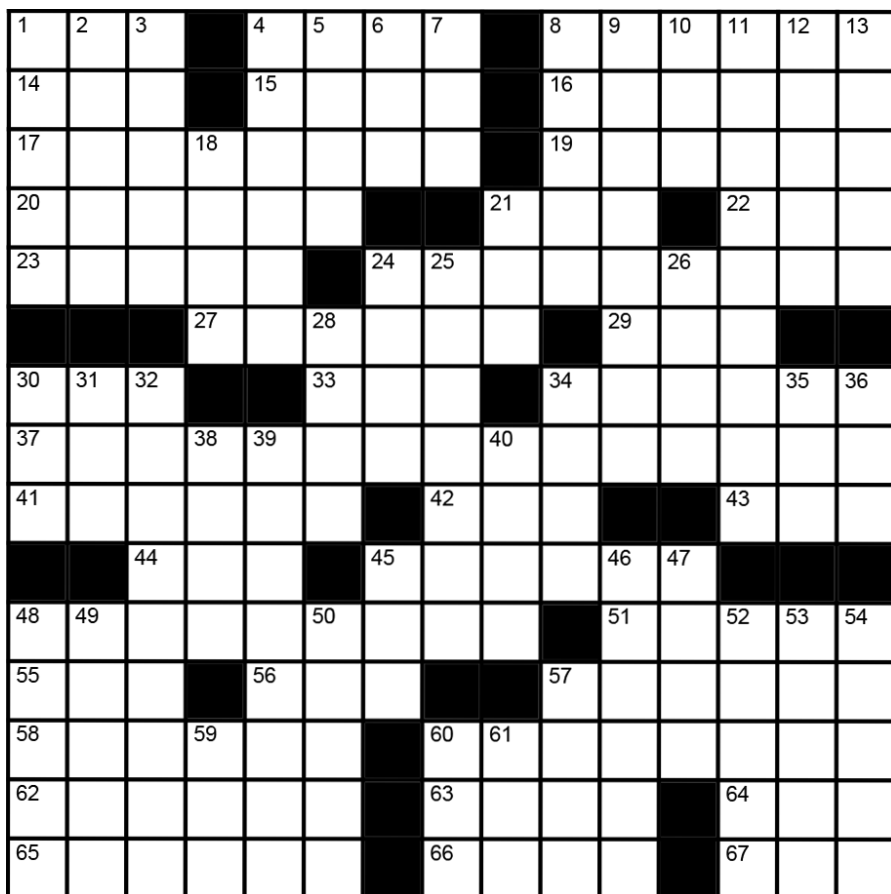
The year 2020 thus far can be best summarized as a months-long army crawl through a briar patch ... into a fetid drainage ditch ... onto hot asphalt. Within all that frustration and fatigue, it's never been more relieving to settle into a good pair of headphones and good music. Bibio's 11th studio album, *Sleep On The Wing*, reminds us that the grass is greener on the other side (of the play button). Serenely atmospheric and daydreamily beautiful, multi-instrumentalist and producer Stephen Wilkinson's predominantly instrumental follow-up to 2019's *Ribbons* is a welcome respite for wearied minds and ears. Close your eyes and you can envision yourself peering pensively through a forest canopy ("Oakmoss," one of the few songs to include Wilkinson's vocals), marveling at the magnitude of a starlit sky ("The Milky Way Over Ratlinghope"), or enjoying an afternoon wagon ride in grainy black and white (the lo-fi "Otter Shadows"). Muddling folk, classical, and ambient electronica (in the vein of Boards of Canada), *Sleep On The Wing* is soothing and meditative but hardly boring, the musical equivalent of reclining on a picnic blanket or in a hammock after a week's hardships and letting go.
— Matt Swanseger



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK



CROSSWORD



Across

1. Commercial ending with Water
4. 1974 Gould/Sutherland C.I.A. spoof
8. Nervous ____ on a hot tin roof
14. Have another birthday
15. Je ne sais ____
16. Jumping-in-a-puddle sound
17. "Leave the joke-telling to me"
19. "Wuthering Heights" author
20. Old-school "Fuhgeddaboutit!"
21. Astronaut Jemison
22. ____ Lanka
23. Ax and adz
24. "Yeah, that girl was definitely crying"
27. Bad place for a frog
29. Jackhammer product
30. Rock's ____ Fighters
33. Brief writer, briefly
34. Admits
37. "Together, you and I can physically prevent me from talking"
41. Archenemy of the Fantastic Four
42. "Letters From ____ Jima"
43. "Do the Right Thing" pizzeria owner
44. Toilet paper layer
45. Hits bottom?
48. "That woman is up for

using a rod and reel"

51. Otherworldly
55. Mars : Roman :: ____ : Norse
56. Without it, Earth is just "Eh"
57. It may have a hook
58. What a pop-up link might lead to
60. "That man is looking to put someone out of a job"
62. "ASAP!"
63. Archipelago part
64. Giorgio's god
65. 2017 Tony winner "Dear Evan ____"
66. Hit 100, say
67. Tax ID

Down

1. Coat that's hard to take off
2. "I" pad?
3. Ashton Kutcher TV role
4. Game played with a dotted ball
5. What you might do with gas or a fist
6. "____-hoo!"
7. What Marcie calls Peppermint Patty in "Peanuts"
8. "There's no such thing ____ publicity"
9. Terse cop order
10. Teléfono greeting
11. Meeting of the minds
12. "Ad ____" (2019 Brad Pitt

movie)

13. Hurston's " ____ Eyes Were Watching God"
18. "NBC Nightly News" anchor Lester
21. Convened
24. President's annual delivery to Cong.
25. Quaint gestures of gratitude
26. Jackson 5 brother
28. Barack's first chief of staff
30. DVD remote button
31. Opposite of 'neath
32. Nonagenarian, for one
34. Largest city on the Rhone
35. Suffix with señor
36. Org. with Sharks and Penguins
38. Laze
39. Starbucks offering
40. [Kiss!]
45. Plop down
46. Capsized, with "over"
47. Introvert's focus
48. Kind of infection
49. Monster slain by Hercules
50. A/C cooling agent
52. PEDs, in slang
53. Actor Elba
54. "Keep your ____ the ball"
57. French miss: Abbr.
59. ____ and outs
60. Casual greetings
61. Psychic gift

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Answers to last puzzle



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