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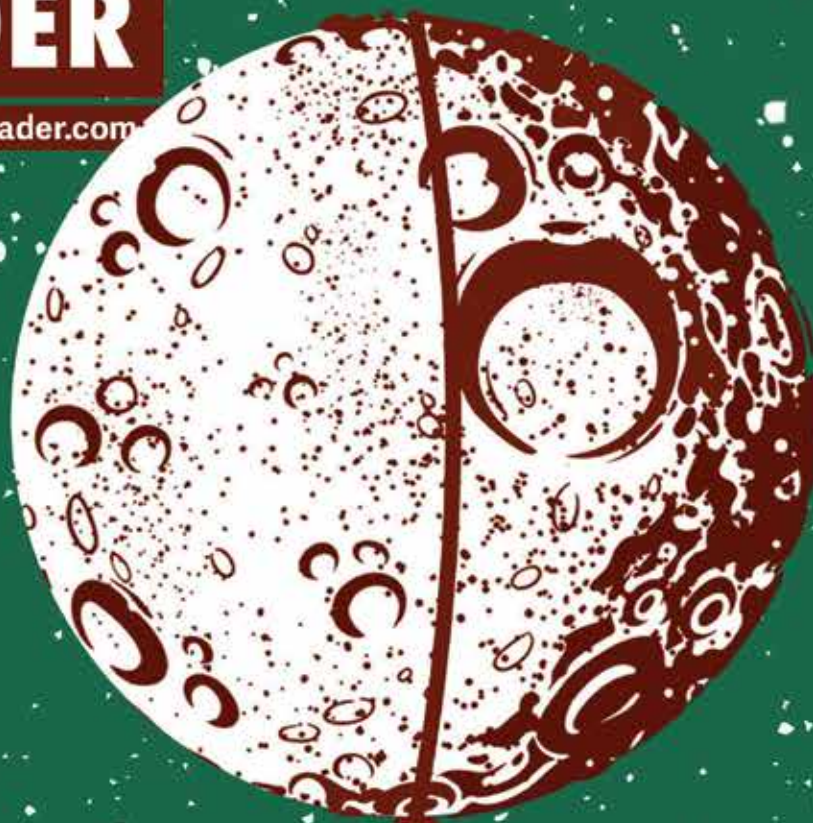
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**ERIE READER**

Dec. 2022 // Vol. 12 No. 12 // [ErieReader.com](http://ErieReader.com)

# The 2022 Year In Review

Does patience pay off?



## A Press for Local

The loss of the  
Titusville Herald

## An Abode of Hospitality

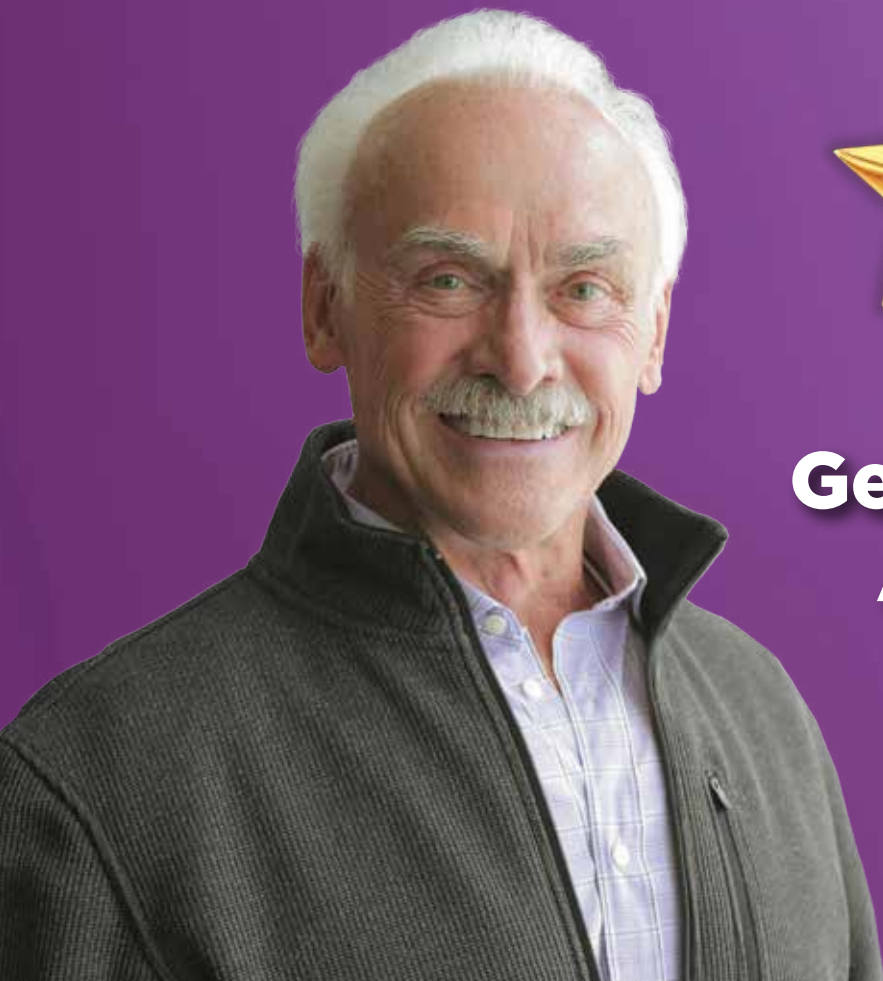
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# From the Editors

## Roping in Erie's image problem

For a short period of time, between 1830-1831, Horace Greeley, printer, editor, and founder of The New York Tribune lived in Erie in the building known as the Sterrett House (named for Joseph Sterrett, founder of The Erie Gazette) on the west side of State Street between Fourth and Fifth. Greeley was famously quoted as saying: "Erie is the shabbiest and most broken-down looking large town I, an individual not wholly untraveled, ever saw in a free state." Greeley is certainly not the only one who has held this belief, as those in the comment sections can attest: the self-esteem problem in Erie shows up loud (and often in all caps).

Up until recently, the home in which Greeley resided during his short stint in our town actually was one of the shabbiest, most broken-down buildings on State Street. But that building (along with a shockingly large number of other historic buildings in the greater downtown area) has undergone a transformation. And as the oldest building on State Street, has been restored into something worth celebrating. How do you like us now, Greeley?

It is obvious to anyone spending time in Downtown Erie, that our city is in a period of major transition. This past year brought a ton of structural changes to our downtown landscape with some massive projects (restorations and new construction alike), new restaurants and businesses, and a bump in commu-

nity activities to get us out and appreciating it all. When you live in the same town all your life, it's hard to imagine drastic changes, or really anything coming as a surprise. Which is why it's always exciting to learn something you've never known about a town when you thought you knew it all.

This "Year in Review" issue brought to light a few things this writer never knew existed in Erie before reading about them here. Surfing on Presque Isle. Who knew? There is a pretty decently sized subculture of freshwater surfers who take to the waves of Lake Erie at a time when most people stay far, far away from the beach. There's a park on East 22nd Street featuring inspiring poetry emblazoned on metal sculptures. Who knew? And while there are some changes that are not positive (the attempted dismantling of Erie's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission, the continued closures or corporate takeovers of local newspapers, and the ever-increasing threat of fentanyl-related fatalities) there are always those people, local and beyond, fighting the good fight, and working to make the situation better.


And while Horace Greeley (that old grump) had some not-so-nice things to say about our city, we can keep on proving him wrong time and time again; whether that's by fixing up our old buildings, breathing new life and businesses into them, finding something new to love about our old town, or coming up



Horace Greeley (1811-1872) was a classic Erie hater. The newspaper man, who is famous for saying "Go West, young man!" was also famous for saying some not-so-nice things about our city. We like to think that we've proved him wrong.

with solutions to very complex problems, Erie is continually up to the task. Great year, Erie. Keep up the good work.

#DefendThePress: Erie Reader Legal Defense Fund




Help defend the First Amendment and Freedom of the Press! The Erie Reader, Erie's only independent, locally-owned alternative newspaper, and its contributing editor, Jim Wertz, were sued for defamation by PA State Senator Dan Laughlin, who filed a multi-million dollar lawsuit against the Reader and Wertz.

The lawsuit alleges that Wertz defamed Laughlin in an opinion piece outlining actions connected to attempts to overturn the results of the 2020 Election and the events of January 6. This lawsuit is an attempt to silence the media from publishing critical political commentary and analysis.

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## Erie at Large: Bah Humbug Brenton Davis

First-year county executive not on County Council's nice list

By: Jim Wertz

Erie County Executive Brenton Davis is getting coal for Christmas.

That's because the man, to whom much was given, has taken his biggest step toward disinvestment in the City of Erie, and the community at large, when he systematically dismissed all but one member of the County's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Commission, also known as Diverse Erie. Erie County Council established the DEI Commission in 2021 with \$3.5 million of American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds designated for "populations disproportionately impacted by the pandemic," as defined in the council ordinance that established the commission. It was a natural extension of a previous ordinance that declared racism a public health emergency in Erie County in September 2020.

"Having a DEI commission puts Erie in line with similar initiatives in other cities like Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia, which have been doing this work for years," Trent Hargrove, the chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer for the Pennsylvania Bar Association, concluded in an opinion piece for the Erie Times-News. "Erie is now catching up and to keep up and not fall behind again, Diverse Erie cannot be lost. Erie cannot abandon this critical effort."

Unfortunately, the actions taken by Davis over the past two months lay the foundation to do just that: abandon this critical effort. Not only does his ill-advised revocation of appointed commission members delay the work of the commission, it threatens the fragile progress in the area of race relations that this commission represents.

The composition of the DEI Commission was detailed in its establishing ordinance. Each of the seven members of County Council have one appointment. The county executive gets two appointments to the commission, and if the City of Erie contributed a share of its ARP funds to the County DEI effort, Erie's mayor would also have two appointments to the commission. Seventy-five percent of the commission members must be from "diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds."

The problem for Davis is that the commissioners he inherited were appointed by his predecessor, Kathy Dahlkemper, who chose not to run for a third term in 2021, and the previous County Council, which voted to declare racism a public health crisis, to create the DEI Commission, and to fund it with ARP funds — none of which fit Davis' political ethos. From the outset of his administration, Davis called into question the viability of the commission, threatening to defund the commission on multiple occasions just three months into his first term in office.

When those efforts failed, Davis began dismantling the DEI commission by charging that three commission members, including its chairman, Gerald Blanks, had conflicts of interest related to the commission's first effort to distribute grant funds from its \$3.5



Current County Executive Brenton Davis has been behaving a lot like Ebenezer Scrooge — disinvesting from and dismantling the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission which was created to help fight racism in Erie.

million seed. Blanks is the executive director of the Greater Erie Economic Development Corporation (GEEDC). The other two members initially removed for conflicts of interest are GEEDC board member Adrienne Dixon, and Matt Harris, a retired Pennsylvania State Police Trooper who holds a leadership role with East Side Renaissance, Inc., which is developing a plan for Parade Street revitalization.

Both organizations received \$250,000 grants from the DEI Commission.

The county ordinance that established the DEI Commission addresses conflicts of interest by requiring members of the commission to "immediately disclose the conflict of interest to the members of the commission, who shall...promptly notify County Council and the County Executive."

All three commissioners with conflicts of interest — Blanks, Dixon, and Harris — disclosed their conflicts, and abstained from discussions and votes related to their organizations' grant applications.

The commission's solicitor, Tim Wachter, told the Erie Times-News that the commissioners acted in accordance with the commission's by-laws and the Pennsylvania Ethics Act. In other words, there was no wrongdoing, perceived or otherwise, as Davis alleged. Blanks and Dixon were appointees of former County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper and Harris was appointed by former Councilman Scott Rastetter, who lost his re-election bid in the 2021 Republican primary to Councilman Charlie Bayle.

These weren't Davis's people and he hoped to change that. We'll come back to this thread in a moment. It's

becoming a trend.

The county executive has the power to remove appointees from boards and commissions, according to the county's Home Rule Charter. Following the dismissal of Blanks, Dixon, and Harris, Davis declared that the remaining DEI Commissioners should cease doing business until the three vacancies were filled, despite Davis' previous criticism that the commission hadn't done enough in its inaugural year.

When the remaining board members took action on grant funding, contract approvals, and other commission business in October 2022, Davis followed up by issuing letters requesting the resignation of three more commissioners — Tiffany LaVette, Gwendolyn White, and Sarah Carter. Though challenged, LaVette, White, and Carter maintain that the commission seats remain theirs.

Councilman Andre Horton, a Democrat, appointed LaVette; Councilwoman Mary Rennie, also a Democrat, appointed White; and Republican Councilwoman Ellen Schauerma appointed Sarah Carter.

Brandy Cortes remains the lone commissioner following the purge. She just happens to be an appointee of Councilman Brian Shank, a devotee of the county executive.

This is the second time since taking office in January 2022 that Davis attempted to usurp the independent authority of an entity related to county government. Davis tried to replace the leadership of the Erie County Redevelopment Authority in May 2022.

He issued letters requesting the resignation of Chairwoman Kate Phillips, Secretary William DeLuca, and





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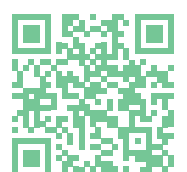
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Treasurer Laith Wardi in an attempt to oust Redevelopment Authority CEO Tina Mengine by replacing the authority board members with his own appointees. Mengine ran former County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper's successful congressional campaign in 2008 and later served as her chief of staff in Washington, D.C.

"This is 100 percent a vendetta against Tina Mengine," Wardi told the Erie Times-News in May. While the county executive does have the power to remove political appointees without the consent of County Council in many cases, the office does not enjoy the same authority when it comes to the Redevelopment Authority because it was formed under the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law, which states that authority members serve five-year terms and continue to serve after the five-year appointment until successors are named.

And in situations where the office does have such power, it doesn't mean that power should be executed with impunity. But that's exactly what seems to be happening.

This county executive spent his first year in office attempting to undermine the authority of other elected offices. Because at the end of the day — and at the end of his term — the ability to appoint and remove board and commission members continues to reside with the office — the seat — that makes the appointments, not the person who holds it.

When a county executive chooses to override the power of the other appointing agents, be they Republican or Democrat, that office is cheapened, not emboldened. The system of checks and balances designed in documents from the United States Constitution to the Erie County Home Rule Charter delimit authority for this reason.

The dismissed and challenged members of the DEI Commission may take legal action to retain their seats, and they should. They were appointed because of their professional experiences and the value they provide to a nascent organization with a heavy charge, not because of their political affiliation.

The attempted overreach of this administration into the actions of Erie County Council and the independent authorities that guide county resources is disruptive, at best, and immoral at its most extreme. It's not an effort to become more transparent, as the county executive would protest in the media. Instead, it is an attempt to shrink the sphere of transparency within the county executive's office.

Let's face it, transparency is simply a matter of size. This one was short to begin with and it's getting shorter by the day.

In the end we'll understand whether this was simply another attempt to disenfranchise communities of color from making decisions for themselves or if it was an attempt to consolidate power in an office that is limited, appropriately, by its governing document.

Sadly, the two offenses go hand in coal-counting hand.

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

## Fighting Fentanyl in Erie

Harm reduction strategies come into focus



ADOBE STOCK RICK

By: Dan Schank

**“W**ithout doing the math, fentanyl is our number one killer. About 75 to 80 percent of our deaths involve fentanyl.”

So says Lyell Cook, our county's coroner, when I asked him about opioid deaths in Erie County this year. As of mid-November, the precise number of drug deaths in Erie County was 92 — though Cook anticipates that about 10 more may soon emerge when toxicology reports are finished.

In the wake of the opioid epidemic, high overdose rates are unfortunately nothing new. But the degree to which they are increasingly driven by fentanyl is unprecedented. According to the Pennsylvania Office of Drug Surveillance and Misuse Prevention, 78 percent of the 5,343 drug overdose deaths that occurred in our state in 2021 involved fentanyl. In the first three months of 2022, our state's Bureau of Narcotics Investigation seized roughly 40 times more fentanyl than heroin — a haul that amounted to more fentanyl than was seized during the entire previous year.

Using 2020 numbers, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concluded that Pennsylvania's drug overdose death rate was 42.4 per 100,000 — more than twice the rate they determined for firearm deaths, and nearly five times the rate for homicides. Pennsylvania's numbers were also the eighth highest in the nation. So what is being done about it?

### Reducing harm

One promising policy change involves the legalization of fentanyl testing strips, following legislation passed *unanimously* by our House and Senate. Quite

**The majority of drug-related deaths in Erie County are due to the increased presence of fentanyl, and Pennsylvania ranks the eighth highest in the nation for drug overdoses deaths. Harm reduction strategies and legislation may help curb the grim statistics moving forward.**

literally, these strips can allow drug users to test for the presence of fentanyl in the narcotics they acquire. Operating somewhat like a COVID-19 or pregnancy test, users simply dilute a very small amount of their drugs in water, and within about two minutes they can assess whether or not fentanyl is present in the supply.

Fentanyl testing strips are also useful for outreach and education. Workers in emergency departments, clinical settings, and addiction services can use them to notify their clients and patients about safer drug practices. The strips obviously won't guarantee that overdose situations will be avoided — and questions remain about how seriously they'll be taken by people with addictions — but they can provide a crucial lifeline to folks who aren't ready to enter recovery.

To get a better sense of the impact of the legislation, I reached out to Scott Coughenour, director of the Erie County Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse (ECDA). “If funding is secured for the utilization of fentanyl testing strips,” says Coughenour, “the ECDA can then move forward rapidly by soliciting providers to assist us in generating public awareness of the availability of the testing strips, and in providing the strips at key locations within our community.”

Coughenour sees fentanyl testing strips as part of a larger harm reduction strategy in Erie, which includes “drug and alcohol screenings, assessments, treatment referral and monitoring, along with case



management support” within his organization alone. Harm reduction tactics have gained momentum in Pennsylvania over the past decade, especially following the 2014 passage of “Good Samaritan” laws that provide legal immunity to people experiencing overdoses — and to anyone who intervenes to save their lives. That same year, a Senate bill (Act 139) was implemented to provide intranasal naloxone (informally known by its typical brand name, Narcan) to first responders free of charge. In 2022, Narcan can now be made available by prescription through a family doctor to “anyone at risk of experiencing an opioid-related overdose, or who are family members, friends, or other persons who are in a position to assist a person at risk of experiencing an opioid-related overdose,” according to a standing order from our state’s physician general.

Harm reduction strategies are informing law enforcement tactics as well. For example, our police department is presently establishing a Diversion and Identification Unit to connect low-level and non-violent criminals to recovery resources. They are also initiating a Survivor Follow-up Team to provide service referrals and additional support for recovery.

Bipartisan momentum has also been growing for the decriminalization of Syringe Service Programs (SSPs), which provide access to clean syringes and medical supplies in settings where drug users can access a variety of other services. Four SSPs are currently operational in Pennsylvania, despite being technically illegal. However, if legislation introduced by state Rep. Sara Innamorato (D-Allegheny) and Rep. Jim Struzzi (R-Indiana) passes, SSPs could be decriminalized, expanded, and supported with federal funding.

**Paying the price**

The story of the overdose and opioid epidemic would not be complete without mention of the egregious actions of the pharmaceutical industry over the past two decades. The dishonest marketing, pseudoscience, and outright criminal behavior that have mobilized

the sale of opioid pain relievers since the 1990s is too massive to fully outline here. Instead, let’s focus on one of its few silver linings — the \$26 billion payment that four of our nation’s largest corporations recently agreed to in response to a lawsuit concerning their role in the opioid crisis.

Three drug wholesale companies, Amerisource-Bergen, Cardinal Health, and McKesson, will pay a combined \$21 billion, while manufacturer Johnson & Johnson will add an additional \$5 billion. And those payments have just begun across the nation — as well as in Erie.

“Erie County received its first allocation of opioid litigation settlement funds in September of this year,” according to Coughenour. “Very recently, we finalized the formation of the local oversight committee that will be tasked with managing those funds in order to best enhance the services available to combat the opioid crisis within our community.” This committee will manage the distribution of settlement funds of approximately \$16.4 million dollars over an 18-year period, ending in 2039.

According to Coughenour, the funds “will be used solely to enhance our strategic local approach to combating opioid abuse and opioid abuse-related issues within our community. The inaugural meeting for the Erie County Opioid Settlement Fund Oversight Committee, which consists of a seven-member panel of local professionals who were chosen on the basis of their expertise and knowledge of the effects the opioid crisis has had in our local community, is set to occur on Dec. 6, 2022. Once the committee has met, the expectation is that the funds will be allocated in accordance with the needs of our community, beginning in early 2023.”

**Treading carefully**

As someone who has written about opioid abuse periodically over the past decade, the fight for effective action can seem both exhausting and futile.

The rise of fentanyl and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis have undermined a lot of the progress being made to help people with addictions. “I think for quite some time the system as a whole was operating in somewhat of a ‘crisis’ mode, just trying to deliver the best service we possibly could in light of the extreme (global, national, and local) challenges that COVID-19 presented,” says Coughenour. With these challenges being (slowly!) overcome, he is focused on “strategizing for new intervention and treatment modalities, and planning more education and outreach initiatives.”

Regarding fentanyl, perhaps a balance between alarm and caution is appropriate. When you read that fentanyl is “up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine,” you can trust that those figures come from the CDC and act accordingly. However, recent reports about how deadly it is to touch are mostly overblown. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, Halloween came and went this year without any real danger of fentanyl in the candy supply — contrary to plenty of cable news fear-mongering.

Ultimately, the harm reduction approach — which looks at addiction as a public health problem rather than a purely punitive one — seems well-suited to the terrifying task at hand. A community that seeks to rehabilitate people living with addictions strikes me as far preferable to one that wants only to ostracize, criminalize, and quarantine them.

*For more information regarding drug abuse and addiction services, please call the Erie County Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse at 814-451-6877 or drop by to schedule a meeting with a case management staff member at 240 W. 11th St., Suite B-050 in Downtown Erie.*

*Dan Schank can be contacted at [danschank@gmail.com](mailto:danschank@gmail.com)*



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# An Abode of Hospitality

The Elsie Greer House hosts festive tour, history lesson included

By: Erin Phillips

There are a number of historic Erie figures whose names most locals know: Oliver Hazard Perry, Col. Strong Vincent, Harry T. Burleigh, maybe even Laura Sterrett or Emma Lawrence (if you've been reading *The Reader* for a while). There are many more people in our city's history who simply lived their lives, and often in doing so, had a profound impact on the way the community developed, without even knowing it. Most of their names are not commonly known. Mrs. Elsie Custard Greer is one of those people. Her kindness, generosity, and family strength helped shape the borough of North East into what it is today, but until very recently, no one had likely spoken her name aloud in a century.

That is until Nanci Haibach, a former nurse who has always had a dream of owning a bed and breakfast, purchased the home of and embraced the story of Elsie Greer, and made her dream a reality. The Elsie Greer House, the home that the Greer family built and that Haibach now calls her own, has been standing proudly at the intersection of Park and Division streets in North East since 1865.

Elsie Custard Greer was born in North East in 1827 on her family's farm. Abraham Custard (sometimes recorded as Castor or Custer), Elsie's grandfather, moved to North East in 1797 from Orange County, N.Y. The Custard family were among the first white settlers in this area of Erie County and helped build and populate the town of North East. And Elsie's ancestors were some of Pennsylvania's earliest non-indigenous settlers. Her great-grandfather, William Custard, was born in Philadelphia in 1729 and fought in the American Revolutionary War. Her great-great grandfather, Conrad Custer, was born in Philadelphia in 1693, his father coming to Pennsylvania from Germany around 1684.

Not only was Elsie Greer well-known by her own merit and family history in North East, but her husband, John Greer, (whose father came to settle in North East around the same time as Elsie's grandfather in 1797) was a reputable judge who came to be elected during a time of great political upheaval, on the cusp of the Civil War. Upon

Elsie's death in 1888, the *Erie Morning Dispatch* printed a large article extolling her praises and sharing much of her and her husband's biographies. They noted: "Her life was pleasant, her home circle charming, with an influence permeated with kindness and benevolence. Of this, those among whom her whole life was spent are witnesses. They have known her as maiden, wife, and matron. With these the fragrance of her memory will linger long after the flowers upon her casket have faded." Their home was described as "an abode of hospitality."

"From the second that I got here, even just standing outside of the house, I felt this comfort. And then I came inside and it was ten times that. It wasn't just the look of the house, it was just a feeling," Haibach relates. She purchased the house in May of 2021 and after making the house her own (mostly with a rich palette of paint colors) and doing a mountain of research on the home's history, she opened up the bed and breakfast for guests this past summer.

But before the first guests stayed in the home, Haibach welcomed the residents of North East (and beyond) for a home tour and Winter Wonderland of Trees open house last December, and she is now making that a tradition and hosting the event for the second year in a row. "Christmas is always a huge thing for me and I always put up a bunch of trees, so I thought, everyone should come and see them all," Haibach continues. "The event is \$5, there will be music playing, they can come into the kitchen for cookies and cocoa, then they can go through the house at their leisure and enjoy the trees and the history. There will be 13 trees in total, all decorated with different themes, and almost all of the ornaments are vintage."

This year's Winter Wonderland of Trees will take place **Dec. 10-23 and resume after Christmas from Dec. 27-31 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.** Whether uniquely, elaborately decorated vintage Christmas trees are your thing or not, the promise of touring the home should be enough to bring you through the door. It is a stunning masterpiece of perfectly preserved Civil War era Italian Villa style architecture, with a massive tower, beautiful woodwork, inlaid



The Elsie Greer house, built in 1865 and named for its original owner, is a stunner during the holidays and all year round. The architecture is highlighted by a new color palette.

hardwood floors, fireplaces, plasterwork, and more. And since Haibach has treated the home with such respect, it likely looks much like it did back when it was built.

Haibach's love of all things vintage doesn't stop with her home or the ornaments: she has curated the house with antiques: light fixtures, a marble-topped coffee station, the ceiling-height mantelpiece, a Murphy bed disguised as a dresser; Haibach doesn't bat an eye at traveling hours away to hunt down the perfect pieces. Every bit of the Elsie Greer House has meaning, a history, a story. Haibach recalls, "Over the summer they took down a huge oak tree in front of the church down the street. It had to be four feet across and I was so sad. All the sawdust was

laying there by the stump, so I went back and filled bags full of the sawdust. I'll mix it with stain and fill in the gaps in the floorboards of the house. Elsie probably walked past that tree a thousand times when she walked to church, and I need that part of her history in my house." Out of a respect for history (as well as a personal family history of antiquing), the Elsie Greer House is like a museum in the making, as Haibach continues to collect pieces of local North East history to display around the house. Anyone who comes through the door learns something they didn't know about the town that Haibach has come to love and call home.

While Haibach isn't a native to North East, she has fully embraced the community and is excited to bring trav-



ERIN PHILLIPS



Nanci Haibach sits in the parlor of the Elsie Greer House next to an elaborately sculpted Christmas tree laden with a hundred vintage ornaments and tinsel.

elers to town and to highlight those things about North East that make it unique. She loves to walk around the neighborhood, for fitness and curiosity alike, in particular up and down Division Street, which borders her property to the south, and to the north, borders the land that used to belong to Elsie Greer before she donated it to the Lake Shore Seminary (pre-St. Mary's, pre-Mercyhurst North East). This action shaped the way North East looked and felt then, as well as today. Haibach reflects, "A lot of people just go about their lives and live in a town and just come and go, don't care about

what it was. It's important to know the history of a place. I walk around here all summer in the evenings, and people will be on their porch saying hello. It's like living the play *Our Town* here. It's such a nice town. I love living here; besides the house and whatever it means to me personally, and whatever I feel when I'm in this house, I love the town, too."

*Erin Phillips nearly vaulted over a staircase blockaded by Nutcrackers to get a peek at Elsie's tower room, but in the end exercised restraint. She can be reached at [erin@eriereader.com](mailto:erin@eriereader.com)*

NANCI HAIBACH



The Elsie Greer House at 45 Park St. in North East will host their now-annual Winter Wonderland of Trees throughout the month of December. Tour the historic house and enjoy 13 elaborately decorated vintage Christmas trees.



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# Itching to Ditch Twitter?

Read, write, listen instead

By: Liz Allen

“Hello Mary Lou, goodbye Musk.” I’ve been humming my spoof lyric, based on a 1961 Ricky Nelson hit, ever since I decided to combine a tribute to Benedictine Sister Mary Lou Kownacki and a farewell to Elon Musk’s Twitter in the same space. In late October, about six weeks after I learned that Mary Lou was in hospice care, I deactivated my Twitter account. Mary Lou’s terminal cancer didn’t prompt me to avoid Twitter, but I am certain that the closing line from Mary Oliver’s poem, “The Summer Day,” had some influence. Oliver, one of Mary Lou’s favorite poets, writes: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do/ With your one wild and precious life?”

After Musk bought Twitter, one thing I didn’t want to do with my wild and precious life was to doom-scroll toxic tweets day and night. Under Mary Lou’s mentorship, I had learned to keep a journal (even if sporadically), dashed off some clumsy poetry, experimented with using my grandmother’s typewriter instead of a computer to write, taught a memoir class to women veterans, and composed an invitation to an imaginary dinner party with my late mom and my maternal grandmother Rosa (whom I never knew because she died when my mother was an infant).

Venturing into territory far removed from my writing life, I ran for Erie City Council only after Mary Lou assured me that I could make a difference. In fact, Mary Lou and Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus Ministries, came to a City Council meeting many months ago to deliver the shocking news that Mary Lou had cancer of the eye. For cancer to rob Mary Lou of her sight struck me as particularly cruel, because her writing and social justice activism have opened so many eyes.

Now, by ignoring Twitter, I’ve scrounged up time to emulate Mary Lou — to do more reading, writing and listening. Here are three ideas to carve out more time for those things for yourself.

## Join a book club

Check out resources from the Erie County Library to find groups to talk about books. Visit [erielibrary.org](http://erielibrary.org) for more details, but start with this list:

- **Book Club in a Bag.** Each kit, which can be borrowed for up to 60 days, provides 10 copies of one title, along with discussion questions, the author’s bio and a sign-up sheet. Some kits now include graphic novels or movie/TV versions of books, according to Sheryl Thomas, assistant library director.
- **Lincoln Community Center Library, 1255 Manchester Road** in Fairview, has one book club that meets on the third Monday of the month at 1 p.m. and another on the third Saturday at 9:30 a.m. The group picks the book from the Book Club in a Bag list, the bestseller list, or any title members like.
- **Millcreek Branch Library, 2088 Interchange Road** meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. to discuss a Book Club in a Bag selection. The Dec. 13 meeting will discuss David Grann’s *Killers of the*



NUTHAWAT

According to Urban Dictionary, the definition of doomscrolling is “when you keep scrolling through all of your social media feeds, looking for the most recent upsetting news about the latest catastrophe. The amount of time spent doing this is directly proportional to how much worse you’re going to feel after you’re done.” Liz Allen suggests maybe it’s time to unplug.

*Flower Moon.*

- **Edinboro Branch Library, 413 Plum St.** The First Tuesday Club meets monthly at 1 p.m. in-person or by Zoom, for which you must register. The “War and the Humanities” reading group meets on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at 6:30 p.m. to discuss fiction, poetry, memoirs, and more. Teen Reading Fiends, for ages 12-18, meets monthly, usually on the last Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. Because teens are the audience, “There is a little more to it than just discussion: themed snacks, games, and other forms of social fun help keep the atmosphere compelling and light,” said Matthew Yaw, branch manager. “By including more elements than just a book discussion, the door is open for teens who may not have read the book but have seen the movie, or just want to socialize with peers to come and not feel out of place,” he said.
- Blasco Library offers “**Spinechillers: A Book Club for Young Horror Fans**,” for children ages 9-11. Registration, which is required, opens two weeks in advance of an event. Check the library calendar for future events.
- “**Read to a Therapy Dog**” activities are offered at all locations. Check the library calendar for upcoming dates. This county-wide program “is one way that we reduce the anxiety that can be felt by struggling readers,” said Jessica Stefano, manager of the Iroquois Branch Library. “Children who experience fear, anxiety or discouragement from reading aloud have an opportunity to practice their reading with a calm, kind, non-judgmental four-legged listener,” she said.
- **Werner Books** has three book clubs. The Wednes-

day Morning Book Club meets on the fourth Wednesday at 11 a.m. at the store in the Liberty Center, 3514 Liberty St.

- **Canalside** meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:30 p.m. at the Hagen History Center.
- **Books & Beers** meets on the third Sunday of the month at noon at Erie Ale Works.

## Get into poetry

One source to learn about the local poetry scene is Mable Howard’s website, [poeticmessage.com](http://poeticmessage.com). Howard, also known as Miss Mabeline, will present an open mic night, **Poetry X-Change**, on Dec. 11 at 7 p.m. at Werner Books. The event includes desserts, which is fitting, because Howard and her mother, Thelma Blanks, are the



LIZ ALLEN

This poetry sculpture, found in the Hold Fast to Dreams Poetry Park on East 22nd Street, features the words of Langston Hughes (from which the park got its name). It reads: “Hold fast to dreams / For if dreams die / Life is a broken-winged bird / That cannot fly.”





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proprietors of Café 7-10, 7 W.10th St. Or check out a poetry book from Blasco and enjoy a sweet treat from Mabel and Thelma's new food concession in the library lobby.

Another place to get a taste of poetry is at the **Hold Fast to Dreams Poetry Park**, in the 600 block of East 22nd Street. Sister Mary Lou was the driving force behind the park, a serene retreat in Erie's inner city. As I walked the brick path there recently, I brushed snow from Langston Hughes' poem, "Dreams," on a metal flower sculpture. He writes: "Hold fast to dreams /For if dreams die/ Life is a broken-winged bird/ That cannot fly."

Write some letters

Hughes' observation that without dreams "life is a broken-winged bird," made me ponder how Twitter and other social media sites have become such fractured messes. But when you write a letter, you must pause before you create words and send them winging away.

During the height of COVID, I got a letter from my friend Elizabeth Way, who decided to write letters to keep in touch with people. Elizabeth, a former neighbor, lives in North East but we rarely see each other. I called her recently to learn more about how and why she writes to family and friends. "So much of the thrust of our culture is to do all this stuff," she said. A letter, on the other hand, requires the writer to think about what you want to share. It can also be a way to preserve family memories, as she has been doing in letters to a cousin in Montana.

Making the effort to write personal words at this time



This excerpt of a poem by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers can be found at Poetry Park in the 600 block of East 22nd Street.

of year can also become a Christmas gift to the letter recipient, she said. She tackles her letter-writing "in spurts and spells," but by Mondays, she usually has seven to 10 letters ready to go out in the mail.

To become a good writer, you don't have to be wordy, as Mary Lou has shown in her poetry collections and her reflections on spirituality. So I must confess that I reactivated my Twitter account shortly before the 30-day expiration deadline, simply to preserve my pithy @lizereriepa Twitter profile: "Freelance editor/writer. Erie Reader columnist. Proud grandma. Bereaved mom. Twice widowed. Happy wife again. SeaWolves usher. Erie City Council button-pusher." I thank Mary Lou for pushing me to embrace that last bit of bio.

Liz Allen can be reached at [lizallenerie@gmail.com](mailto:lizallenerie@gmail.com)

Did you know?

"The War and the Humanities" reading group at the Edinboro Branch Library began in April. "The focus is thematic: we read humanities sources pertaining to the topic of war. The selection of books has been varied. We have read Western canonical fiction (*The Things They Carried* and *Slaughterhouse Five*), World War I poetry (Wilfred Owen), philosophical memoir (*Jarhead*), psychiatry mixed with classical Greek literature (*Achilles in Vietnam*), and others. The only fields we don't delve into are biographies and strict history," said Matthew Yaw, branch manager. "The idea behind this book club was to offer people an opportunity to explore an extreme human event like warfare while simultaneously becoming exposed to lesser-known yet extraordinary works of literature."

This group is only for adults, as both the subject matter and oftentimes language of the books can be harsh, but the reward is worth it. "This group would be good for anyone who is interested in the theme of warfare, or to read award-winning authors that they may have never heard about," Yaw said. Future works include a novel by a former member of the North Vietnamese military, poetry from both Iraqi and American military sources about the Iraq War, and a novel about child soldiers in West Africa. Copies of the books are provided in advance, and refreshments are served at the meetings.

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# The Press for Local

## Loss of Titusville Herald further underscores critical endangerment of independent journalism

By: Jonathan Burdick

On Nov. 2, 2022 the Titusville Herald published an article introducing their newest reporter. In it, she spoke of her eagerness to hear and report on the stories of those in and around Titusville, Pa. for the historic newspaper that had served the community since 1865.

Her chance to do so would be short-lived. Three days later, the paper stunned its readers with its front page headline: “The Titusville Herald says goodbye, and thank you.”

The neighboring Oil City News-Herald soon reported on how the closing jolted the Titusville community. As the news spread across social media, comments online from Titusville residents overwhelmingly suggested that they were blindsided by the news. While Mike Sample, the longtime owner and publisher who referred to Titusville as “the center of the universe,” had died in early 2022, the newspaper — at least from the community’s perspective — was still publishing as usual. While the announcement was vague, it only stated that the family had “desperately” desired to continue publishing, but it was “evident” that they no longer could.

Publishing a newspaper is not an easy task. It never has been, but this is particularly true considering the unique challenges of the digital age, which has upended the traditional business models. The Titusville Herald is not the first historic newspaper to close up shop in recent years. According to a recent New York Times report, over 2,500 newspapers have folded in the U.S. since 2005 with more closures on the horizon — leaving one-fifth of Americans already living in

news deserts, where residents have little to no access to essential local news and information.

The University of North Carolina’s Hussman School of Journalism and Media has been tracking the growth of these news deserts, sounding the alarm on the dangers of communities losing local coverage. “Local newspapers have historically been a ‘tie that binds’ people in a community,” they explain. “Our sense of community and our trust in democracy at all levels suffer when journalism is lost or diminished.”

Smaller market newspapers are the hardest hit. Many are also being bought out by corporate giants. In 2015, for instance, the family-owned Erie Times-News was purchased by GateHouse Media, which then merged with Gannett Co, Inc. in 2019, making it the largest newspaper publisher in the country. At the time, journalist Clara Hendrickson reported that this merger — granting Gannett control over one out of every six newspapers throughout the nation — would likely “deepen America’s local news crisis.”

CEO Mike Reed celebrated the merger by stating that these changes would bring \$300 million in “annual cost saving synergy.” What became clear very quickly was that this “synergy” was corporate-speak for gutting newsrooms. Layoffs and furloughs were immediate. The pandemic didn’t help. More layoffs, furloughs, and buyouts emptied newsrooms further — although unionized Gannett journalists were quick to point out that while newsrooms suffered, the CFO was awarded a \$1.2 million bonus and the CEO was bringing home an \$8 million salary (on top of receiving \$16.4 million from the Paycheck Protection Program).

These cuts, which have continued into 2022, are described by the unions as a result of “financial mismanagement,” unable to be solved by more staff reductions. However, as reported by Poynter on Nov. 17, Gannett is again laying off more from their news division in order to cut costs, this time a reduction of 6 percent — or roughly 200 more of their remaining 3,440 journalists. This is *after* laying off 400 last August and deciding to not fill 400 open positions, as well as requiring mandatory unpaid five-day furloughs and halting contributions to employee 401(k) plans. The newsrooms most affected are those lacking unions with contracts protecting its membership. Erie Times-News journalists are unionized with the Erie News Guild Local 38187, but as some journalists have already pointed out, contracts won’t protect even unionized newsrooms from long-term mismanagement and lack of local investments at the corporate level.

The reaction from journalists online was swift and highly critical of Gannett.

“Journalists already have to convince so many people that the work we do matters,” journalist Kati Kokal tweeted in response to the news. “[Gannett] shouldn’t be on that list.”

“Slashing newsrooms is not what our communities



This is a facsimile of the first issue of the Titusville Herald, published June 14, 1865.

deserve,” tweeted Detroit Free Press reporter Andrea May Sahouri.

Others feared how the industry’s increasing instability would crush the morale of young reporters while also scaring away those who might be interested in studying journalism. Reporter Andrea Ball stressed the importance of “smart, analytical, passionate, [and] curious” journalists, who, she argued, expose corruption and mismanagement at the local level, but also inspire communities. “They tell stories that make you laugh, make you cry, and make us better people,” she wrote. “They demand accountability.”

These latest cuts at Gannett began on Dec. 1, a day described by journalist Tom Jones of Poynter as “brutal” and a “grim day in journalism.” Dallas Morning News reporter Meghan Mangrum noted that thinning out newsrooms “while asking readers to pay more and more for the product still being produced is lunacy.”

There is no doubt that the industry has changed significantly in the digital age and the economics of publishing isn’t for the squeamish, but for many who entered journalism believing they were providing a public good, corporate leadership’s lack of imagination and lack of desire to support the work of its journalists is the most frustrating. Furthermore, some allege, it’s also clearly resulting in *less desirable* products. Stretching newsrooms too thin and filling space with aggregated content not specific to the community is leading people to cancel subscriptions, attracting fewer new subscribers, and in turn leading to fewer local advertisements, which reduces revenues. Gan-



From 1865 onward, the Titusville Herald was largely run by two families: the Bloss and Stevenson families. Joseph M. Bloss (right) is shown with his successor, Edgar T. Stevenson at the newspaper’s former South Franklin Street office. This photo was taken in 1955. On Saturday, Nov. 5, 2022 the newspaper closed its doors after 157 years of publication.

AROUND TITUSVILLE / DAVID L. WEBER

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**December 24** **CHRISTMAS EVE SHOPPING**, 9am-4pm



## Looking for More Events?

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## NEWS & VIEWS

nett leadership offering that journalists work shorter weeks or take unpaid six-month sabbaticals is only a band-aid that doesn't solve these long-term revenue problems. It also does nothing to improve the product itself, which is what makes it worth subscribing to.

Gannett's corporate approach also seems to be to sell off as much real estate as possible (as seen in Erie in 2020 when they sold the longtime Times-News building at West 12th and Sassafras to Logistics Plus for \$2 million), followed by investor-friendly cost cutting.

As former USA Today journalist Brian Munoz wrote, "Journalism is supposed to serve our communities, not shareholders." Yet, serving shareholders is exactly what Gannett is doing, according to the Arizona Republic Guild. In a statement, they stressed that Gannett is choosing profits for its shareholders and executives over investments in its newsrooms, adding that while underpaying journalists and overpaying corporate leaders, its executives were "earning millions and spending ridiculous amounts of money on anti-union attorneys to negotiate their contracts."

The SJ-R Newspaper Guild out of Illinois added that Gannett gave over \$9 million to its top two executives just last year while concurrently reducing its staff by 24 percent. "You couldn't have a more out of touch CEO [than Mike Reed]," the guild alleged.

Indeed, just this year, Gannett published a press release for investors announcing its authorization of a "share repurchase program for the repurchase of up to \$100 million of the Company's common stock." Otherwise known as stock buybacks, the purpose of this is to artificially create demand for one's own stock, which will increase the prices of its shares to reward investors (as well as providing corporate compensation for those whose salaries are tied to stock prices). It's complicated, but in simple terms: money invested in buybacks is money *not* invested elsewhere in the company.

In Sept. 2022, financial advisor Roger Wohlner wrote that stock buybacks may seem good for investors at first, but that effects are temporary because the market will eventually self-correct when the company hasn't actually done anything to increase its value. "Some economists and investors argue that using excess cash to buy up stocks in the open market is the opposite of what companies should be doing, which is reinvesting to facilitate growth (as well as job creation and capacity)," he explained.

Of course, in terms of newspapers, *especially* smaller regional papers, in order to sustain long-term and increase in value, one needs to adapt to the changing economies of the digital world, but even *more* importantly, continue putting out a product that consumers are willing and eager to spend money on. Potential subscribers and advertisers likely are not too focused on Gannett stock prices while weighing their decisions to subscribe or advertise.

Alternative newspapers, such as the Erie Reader, Pittsburgh City Paper, Cleveland Scene, and Buffalo Rising help fill in the gaps, although they are not immune from financial struggles as well. As Poynter points out, there were 135 alternative papers in the



**The final issue of the Titusville Herald, a newspaper in business since the Civil War, was published on Nov. 5, 2022. The closing of small market newspapers (or their purchase by larger corporate outfits) is a growing trend throughout the United States, and the future of the way we receive our news is in peril.**

Association of Alternative Newsmedia in 2009, but the number has dwindled to 88 as of this year.

There are solutions. The easiest is simply supporting local journalism. Whatever the problems with corporate ownership, Erie is fortunate to have the Erie Times-News and the excellent, dedicated, and fair-minded journalists employed there. That shouldn't be taken for granted. Nor should the Erie Reader, which also provides a valuable service to the community.

There are other regional newspapers worth supporting as well, whether it's the Corry Journal, Meadville Tribune, Erie Gay News, West County News-Journal, North East News-Journal, Union City Today, and even local university and high school newspapers. Support their journalists. Share their work. Click on an advertisement every so often.

Despite the loss of the historic Titusville Herald, there is still a positive development. Days after its closure, the Corry Journal announced that they, along with owners Sample News Group, would be starting a free, advertisement-driven weekly newspaper called the Titusville News-Journal. Corry Journal publisher Bob Williams promised to save as many Herald jobs as possible, which included the reporter who had only been on the job a few days before the closure announcement. The first weekly was published on Nov. 18 (which included reporting on the local school board and city council meetings), a Facebook page is already set up, and a website is in the works.

While the realities of the industry should be discussed candidly, there *are* ideas on how to move away from a model of self-destruction. UNC's Hussman School of Journalism and Media has offered their solutions: invest in *human* capital, tie newspaper business strategies to the particular communities, create meaningful partnerships, and, perhaps most importantly, remember that "advertisers follow audiences," *not* the other way around. Invest in a product that is worth the subscription and the subscribers and advertisers will follow.

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





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# Surfing the Lake Erie Waves

Winter winds bring in a swell of surfers

By: Amy VanScoter

While most locals stop or scale back their visits to Presque Isle State Park during the winter months, there are some who can't wait for the bitter temperatures and high waves the winter season brings. You've likely heard of the popularity of ice fishing, but there's another winter sport that is bringing in those who dare to brave the icy waters and frigid wind chills.

Surfing the Lake Erie waves is definitely a thing, and finding out how to get involved is as easy as making a stop at Erie's local surf, skate, and snowboard shop, The Isle Surf and Skate (3628 W. 12th St.). Owner Dan Parra, who was born and raised in Erie, opened the shop in April 2022 and has been surfing for about 17 years.

"We in Erie are blessed for surfing because we have Presque Isle which catches wind from all directions," Parra said. "We need cool air and warm water, when the winds are blowing it will blow bigger waves. Usually we surf right up until the ice dunes form and then transition into snowboard season."

Although Presque Isle is a popular spot for surfing, it is only officially authorized by the park on Beach 1 and the far east end of Beach 10 due to concerns about surfing into the breakwaters. "There is a push to get those rules changed," Parra said. "It was made about 20-25 years ago and the Presque Isle shoreline moves around constantly so the rule is outdated. We want to bring people here to surf and for the community to also experience that. We have a pretty healthy surf scene here. People are always shocked to find that out, but nobody goes down there this time of year to check out the lake. You have to think outside the box," Parra said.

The ranger station at Presque Isle State Park confirmed these rules and that there is the potential to have them either reexamined or more clearly defined by the state in the future.

"For recreational purposes it's really doing a disservice to people who want to be out in the water. You can surf on a paddle board or a kayak but board surfing is specifically outlawed," said surfer Ryan Burke, owner of PI Surfboards.

In Lake Erie, surfers also paddle out



DAN GRAZIANO

Surfing on Lake Erie is no small feat, and beginners should never head out on the icy waves alone. The Isle Surf and Skate shop offers rentals and lessons to get you started. Pictured is seasoned shredder Ryan Burke.

at Edgewater/Pinched Loaf on the far west side of Cleveland, at the east end of the Cleveland Harbor break-wall, Hamburg Beach, Luna Pier, Point Abino, Port Maitland, Reeb's Bay, and Sterling State Park. With the windchill sometimes reaching -10 °F (-23 °C) on the lake, surfers battle the cold temperatures for a limited time until the lake freezes over. Peak season for surfing is usually October through January, but Burke says you can surf most of the year. "Presque Isle is the best surfing on Lake Erie; we have the better waves. I've been surfing it for about six years, and especially in the warmer months, late summer, you can still have a beach day and surf," Burke said.

The Great Lakes' coastline measures approximately 10,500 miles, so it is commonly called the United States' "Third Coast," and the waters are well known for being inland seas due to their ocean-like characteristics. Ac-

cording to *SurferToday*, the very first surfers hit Lake Erie in Buffalo, N.Y., in the 1960s, although there are reports of wave riding activities in the region as early as the late 1940s.

The popularity of surfing the Great Lakes has been growing throughout the years, with a current Great Lakes Surfing Association Facebook group at 5.4K members and the Presque Isle Surf Club Facebook group at more than 900 members. In the 2005 documentary *Unsalted: A Great Lakes Experience* produced by Vince Deur, you can see surfers walking over the snow and falling through sheets of ice to reach the surf in thick wetsuits to handle the cold waters. Photographers often capture Great Lakes surfers coming out of the swells with beards full of ice formations. The strong winds off Lake Erie are bitterly cold and provide an extra layer of danger to the sport that is not to be taken lightly.

Surfers agree the wetsuit is the most important piece of equipment for a lake surfer. Generally speaking, November through April requires a thick suit and gloves. For someone interested in learning about Lake Erie surfing, The Isle Surf and Skate Shop offers a package deal for \$99 for a four-hour rental. For that price you get the board, the suit, the gloves, and a one-hour lesson included. The goal is to cultivate the surf community and make sure people are learning how to surf safely.

"My best advice is not doing it alone, and knowing your limits; don't go out there when the waves are too big," Parra said. "If you're going out for the first time, come by the shop, talk to us and let us steer you in the right direction. You'll need to know how to swim and know about rip currents. It's a growing community but it's small, so we really watch out for each other."

Although the Great Lakes do not





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Local surfers Ryan Cedzo and Jim Samuels set out on Presque Isle in their wetsuits, ready to face the frigid waters for their chance to ride a freshwater wave.

have enough area to generate groundswells, they do have enough space for wind swells to create highly surfable waves. Erie can generally produce waves up to 12 feet high when the wind hits 30 knots. The lakes provide their own challenges to surfers including paddling out in choppy waters, strong onshore winders, and short wave periods of four to five seconds. As a result, local surfers will duck and dive several times in freezing waters, resulting sometimes in headaches and brain freezes, but Burke says this shouldn't be a deterrent if you're interested in trying the sport.

"If you're surfing you're always going to have to dive under waves and if the water is really cold it can give you a headache, but it's just part of it and it doesn't stay cold," Burke said. "If you have the proper equipment, it's not so bad. The wetsuit insulates you and if you are working hard, it's aerobic exercise so you are warming yourself as you're working out there and then you get your time to rest too. It is cold at first but it's exciting to test yourself," Burke said.

Surfing in freshwater also means less buoyancy and more drag which presents another challenge. Freshwater surfers usually use larger, wider, and thicker surfboards to compensate for the loss of flotation com-

pared to the ocean waves. Burke conceives and produces his own specially designed lake boards, PI Surfboards, which are locally sourced and manufactured in a 650-square-foot warehouse. His boards have a few more liters of volume (foam) and an extra half-inch of width compared to ocean boards which he says are also better for paddling and catching waves for beginners. The boards are also a bit longer.

"The learning curve is really steep and it helps to have a mentor," Burke said. "Lake surfing is different from ocean surfing. Every day the conditions are a little different, it engages people a lot and it's difficult. It looks easy but you have to start learning and reading the language of the water. It's a challenge so that's what brings me back. There really is surfing on Lake Erie and it's really fun and anyone can get into it," Burke said.

You can find more information about PI Surfboards at @pisurfboards on Instagram.

Amy VanScoter is a marketing communications professional and certified yoga teacher with a passion for health and wellness. She can be reached at [avanscoter@gmail.com](mailto:avanscoter@gmail.com)

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intern for the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership,  
The Erie Community Foundation, and Knox Law.

She earned her J.D. from Case Western Reserve University  
School of Law, where she was the managing editor of the  
*Journal of Law, Technology, & the Internet*, and participated in the  
Women's Law Association. She earned a B.A. from Gettysburg  
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# The 2022 Year in Review

Does patience pay off?

By: Matt Swanseger

Good things take time — and a bit of effort. Want to bake a life-sized replica of Han Solo frozen in carbonite? This year, California's One House Bakery *proofed* it could be done, but not everyone is *bread* for such a challenge. The mother-daughter duo labored after hours for weeks on end to complete "Pan Solo."

Thinking about compressing Hidden Valley ranch seasoning into a diamond? Dress lightly, because the months-long process requires an oppressive 2500 degrees Fahrenheit and 400 tons of pressure, all for just two measly carats (the cost of crudités these days!)

You could become the *fifth* person to push a peanut up Pikes Peak with your nose (following 53-year-old Bob Salem this past July), but be prepared to army crawl through approximately 13 miles of red dirt on your way to the summit, with squirrels and birds conspiring to leave you naught but an empty shell.

Whether conceiving a masterpiece or testing the limits of the human spirit, patience is unequivocally a virtue. In 2022, Erie began to see its patience pay off in many areas, with gratification eluding us in others like 22,000 minks passing in the night (referring to an as-of-yet unsolved mystery in neighboring Ohio). Should we talk about it? Because we teased it on our cover, we probably must(elid).

## Well Worth the Wait

Let's begin our annual **ReCap** on a positive note — seeing Erie's arts and culture scene bounce back this year was more refreshing than the entire line of **Blind Tiger Spirit-Free Cocktails** and **Zenedge Energy Drinks** put together (by the way, all three locally-invented products referenced in this sentence reached multi-state distribution deals this year — we're always thirsty for success stories!)

The much-anticipated grand reopening of the newly renovated **Warner Theatre** in January opened the curtain on public recreation's complete resurgence, with the **Erie Philharmonic** hosting two concerts and one sell-out crowd in the same week. The momentum carried through the cold months (e.g. the **Erie Winter**



2022 saw the return of a number of community events that were put on hold during the pandemic. This year's Celebrate Erie was a rousing success — bringing vendors, artists, musicians, local food and drink, and a ton of visitors to Erie's Downtown.

**Carnival**) into a picture-perfect summer, with festival season back in full force, culminating in an incredibly eventful August featuring a trifecta of Gem City specialties — **Erie's Blues and Jazz Festival** (back in its familiar time slot), **Celebrate Erie** (headlined by X Ambassadors, Mya, Ja Rule, and Jimmie Allen), and **Tall Ships**. The latter two events attracted more out-of-town attendees than ever before in their first installments since 2019, an encouraging sign for our tourism industry.

If you'd woken up before September ended, you'd be pleased to know that the **Erie SeaWolves** enjoyed their best season on record. Led by first-time manager Gabe Alvarez, the 'Wolves made their first Eastern League playoff appearance since 2013, dispensing with the Richmond Flying Squirrels in the divisional series before falling to the Somerset Patriots in the championship round. Despite the disappointing finish to an otherwise magical year, fans were overjoyed to behold a pair of playoff victories at UPMC Park.

Across town, **Waldameer Park and Water World** was Sky-Riding high after a Ravine Flyer of a 2020 and 2021 plagued by attendance dips and staffing shortages, respectively. By implementing improved wages and bonuses for workers, the park maintained a robust staff and avoided the weekday Wipeouts of yesteryear. With an additional lift from the weather, Walda observed its best season to date, and will apply those profits toward a "water coaster" set to debut in 2023.

For those of a certain age, going back to school is not exactly a walk in the amusement park, but thanks to **Erie Arts and Culture's Purposeful Placemaking project**, it is no longer without its share of attractions. The organization commissioned muralists from near and far to beautify inner-city neighborhoods with vibrant, expansive, and eye-catching works of public art — all strategically placed along Erie School District walking and bus routes.

The very first Purposeful Placemaking

mural to be completed (of a planned 50 total) adorns the exterior of the former Wayne School, now home to the **Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT)**, along with the **United Way of Erie County** and other service-based institutions. The vitality of creators, entrepreneurs, and visionaries to Erie's future is not lost on organizations such as ECAT, which hosted the very first **ErieMade Business Academy** in 2022. The mentorship program, helmed by 40 Under 40 alumna Kristen Santiago, aimed to empower designers, artists, craftspeople, micro-manufacturers, and makers of all backgrounds from the greater Erie region with access to financial, educational, and motivational resources.

Along with ECAT, newcomers such as Alison Stinely's **Foundation Art Academy** (inside the **Performing Arts Collective Alliance** building, itself a bulwark for Erie's creative scene), Rick Bowser and Sarah MK Moody's **10/20 Collective**, and Benton Bainbridge's **FEED Media Arts** joined fixtures such as the **Inner-City Neighborhood Art House**, **Erie Art Mu-**





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## FEATURE



Construction season was in full swing in 2022, with work being done on a record number of properties through the city, most notably in the downtown core. The EDDC and others took advantage LERTA programs and Historic Preservation tax credits, bringing major structural changes to State Street.

seum, and Erie County Public Library to help cultivate new generations of artists and makers — just the sort of humans that lend depth and meaning to our humanity.

That's not to neglect the old standards of reading, writing, and arithmetic — or increasingly science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Behind a multimillion dollar influx of new state funding, a number of public schools across Erie County are in the midst of receiving welcome (and in many cases desperately needed) upgrades, including **Erie High School** (\$65 million worth), **Fairview High School** (\$45.1 million), and **McDowell Intermediate High School** (\$22.3 million). Beyond improved utilities and reinforced structures, lab facilities and technologies are a common point of emphasis. The same goes for the now combined **Prep-Villa Maria**, where the three-story **Salata Technology and Innovation Center** is being built onto the private school complex.

Hopefully these trends signal the long overdue reprioritization of education.

### Let's See How It Shakes Out

The recently vacated Villa Maria Academy property was not left vacant for long. The rapidly expanding **Erie County Community College of Pennsylvania** (EC3) quickly identified it as the ideal site for its west side campus. Now in

its second year, Pennsylvania's 15th and newest community college has doubled its enrollment and nearly quintupled its programming, with many of the certificates and associate's degrees focused on technologies and hands-on trades, as Erie employers seek reinforcements in a labor market that is still attempting to figure itself out in the wake of record inflation and the changing needs of the American workforce.

Erie County's four-year universities are also still very much figuring themselves out. As the collective mentality around labor has shifted, so has the perception of the bachelor's degree, and whether its value justifies the high tuition costs. Coupled with declining U.S. birth rates and a consequent decrease in the college-aged population, many institutions of higher education find themselves either at the edge of — or tumbling over — the "enrollment cliff."

The most visibly affected by this phenomenon has been the former Edinboro University, now known as the **Pennsylvania Western University at Edinboro** (or PennWest Edinboro) following a merger with two other Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education schools (Clarion and California universities) earlier this year. The restructure was intended to maximize faculty and administrative resources between the schools, without sacrificing the individual traditions and cultures of each campus.



Enrollment at **Mercyhurst University** and **Penn State Behrend** have held steadier, with **Gannon University** actually reporting record-high enrollment for a second straight year, thanks in large part to its incredibly diverse international student community (1,074 students from 68 countries), which makes up over 20 percent of its student population and has even spurred the adoption of multi-lingual signage across campus.

Global-mindedness (via worldwide recruitment, remote learning) is one way to survive the inevitable enrollment cliff; local-mindedness is the other. Through initiatives such as the **NWPA Innovation Beehive Network** (which added **Allegheny University** in neighboring Crawford County this year), direct pipelines between local universities and local businesses are created, and young entrepreneurs are given the tools and the audience to test and refine their ideas — thereby incubating more local businesses (and jobs), especially those on the cutting edge.

Fresh ideas are instrumental to any region's prospects — but even more trans-

formative is the wherewithal to convert ideas into action. According to **Bruce Katz** and **Florian Schalliol** of the consulting firm **New Localism Associates**, Greater Erie is uniquely positioned to do just that. But in order to secure the best outcomes, it will have to act quickly and synergistically. A "historic sequence of federal investments" in the form of the American Rescue Plan (\$1.9 trillion), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (\$1.2 trillion plus \$549 billion in new spending), and the COMPETES Act (\$250 billion).

The investment playbook "**Infinite Erie**" (initially known as "**Erie's Inclusive Growth: A Framework for Action**") identifies where and how to direct this "fire hose" of funding, while also laying a framework for public, private, and civic stakeholders to coordinate the investments, starting with the "Greater Core" (Downtown Erie, the East and West Bayfront, and the West 12th Street Corridor) and radiating out into the city, county, and surrounding region. The investments stand to address longstanding inequities, transition to a new economy with one or more defining "business

clusters" (e.g., plastics recycling, advanced manufacturing, and tech), and maximize underutilized assets (both natural and human).

Three "anchor institutions" — **Gannon University**, **UPMC Hamot**, and **Erie Insurance** — operate within that Greater Core, with a combined \$2.97 billion in annual spending power (enough to purchase 247,500 Hidden Valley Ranch diamond rings!) Erie Insurance and UPMC also happen to represent Erie County's top two employers, amplifying their economic influence within the Greater Core all the more. This is especially true now that Erie Insurance's employees have been filtering back into the office, with most working hybrid schedules.

It's tough to mention Erie Insurance's investments in the community without mentioning company chairman **Thomas B. Hagen**, the 586th wealthiest person in the world according to *Forbes*. The 87-year-old has not shied from investing his own fortunes around town, most prominently in the recently renovated and expanded **Penn State Behrend Federal House** and several historic proper-

ties in the vicinity of **West Sixth Street**: the Carter-Shannon House (203 W. Sixth St.), the Frederick Jarecki House (221 W. Sixth St.), and the Olds-Norman House (216 W. Seventh St.), all of which are being restored and donated to Gannon University.

Hagen's Erie Insurance, of course, is also the preeminent private funder of the **Erie Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC)**, which has already dramatically shaken up Erie's Greater Core in the area surrounding Perry Square. Following the debuts of **The Flagship City Food Hall** and **The Shops at Fifth and State** in 2021, **The Flagship City Public Market** premiered in 2022 (featuring **Luminary Distilling**, **Gordon's Butcher and Market**, and the **Erie Food Co-Op**), standing as an oasis in Downtown Erie's food desert. The nearby **Cashier's House** continues to add studio tenants and will further beef up its occupancy in the coming months with **Bricks**, a USDA prime dining destination. You'll just have to make sure to let your meal settle before attempting **Ascend Climbing Gym's** four-story climbing wall across the street (or, alternatively, simulate shortness of

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## FEATURE



The Purposeful Placemaking mural project, spearheaded by Erie Arts and Culture and the United Way of Erie County, has made the walk to school for many inner city students a bit more colorful and creative in 2022.

breath at the also forthcoming **Brig Cigar Lounge**).

EDDC CEO **John Persinger** announced he would be scaling down his involvement with the organization earlier this year in anticipation of a move down under (Australia, where he met his wife during his time as an attaché to the U.S. Ambassador to Australia). That followed the resignation of **Matthew Wachter**, the EDDC's former VP of finance and development. **Peter NeCastro**, Erie Insurance CEO and EDDC board chairman, told the Erie Times-News in August that he did not know what the organization's next phase looked like, but reasserted Erie Insurance's commitment to Downtown Erie.

In any case, Downtown Erie has largely acclimated to new buildings rising out of the ground ever since the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance program passed in 2019. There and elsewhere, construction worker couture is *in*, so strap on that bejeweled hard hat and let's run our way through these projects (and there sure are a LERTA them).

### Downtown Erie

- **expERIENCE Children's Museum (420 French St.)** — Three story-addition underway, highlighted by a

two-story ship climbing feature, renovation to existing building.

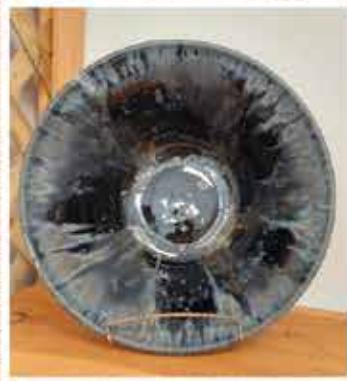
- **Richford Arms Building (515 State St.)** — Two-story addition underway, featuring communal kitchen space, TV lounge, laundry room, wellness center, support staff offices, storage areas, and apartments.
- **Great Lakes Insurance Building (1128 State St.)** — Former Citizens Bank undergoing glassy exterior makeover; renovated interior offices will host Great Lakes Insurance employees after already welcoming Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership.
- **F.W. Hirt Perry Square Building (100 Erie Insurance Pl.)** — Renovations to roof, skylight, windows, and entrance are underway.
- **Methodist Towers (160 W. Eighth St.)** — Apartment building slated for \$20 million worth in rehabilitation.
- **ValueMomentum Erie Development Center (1030 State St.)** — Former Northwest Bank building scheduled to house 80 of the New Jersey-based IT service provider's employees by next spring following a \$5 million renovation.

### Bayfront

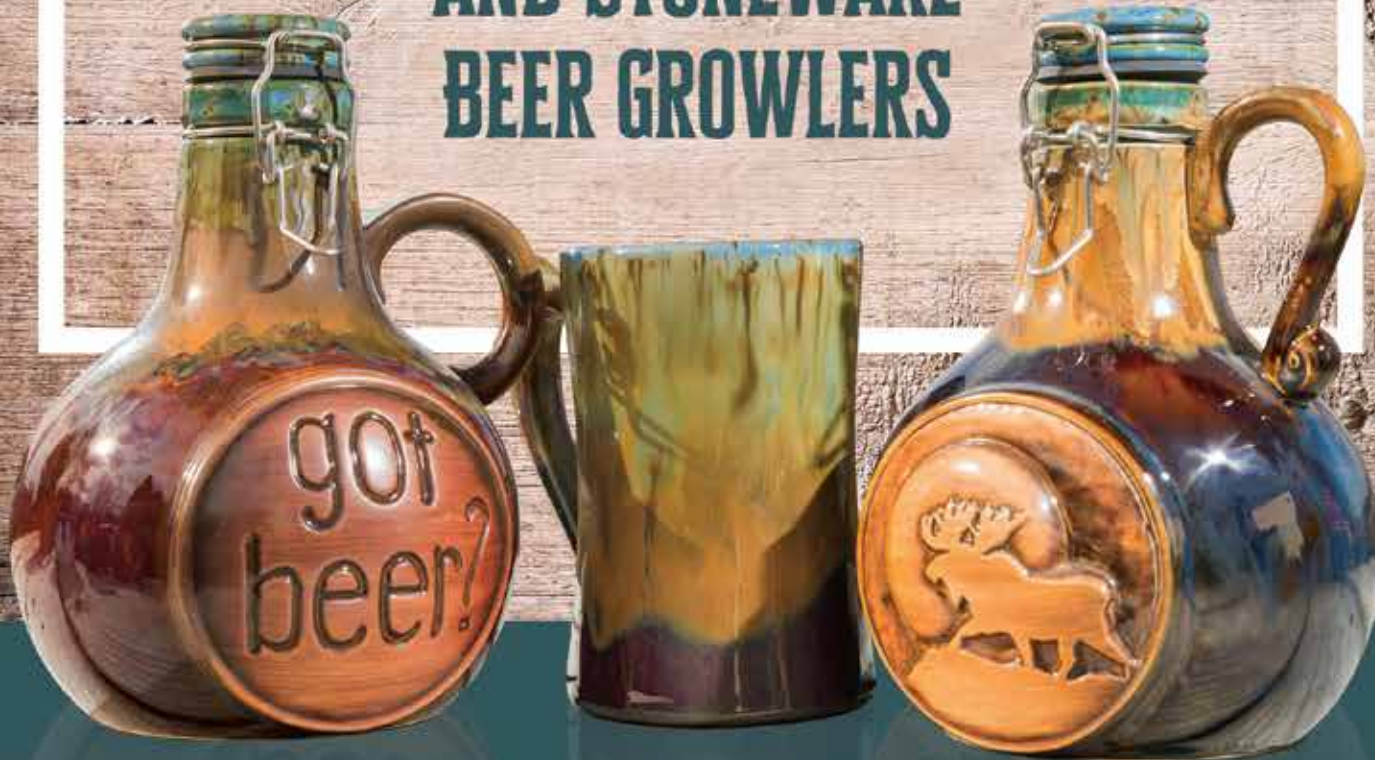
- **International Recycling Group Recycling Plant (1540 E. Lake Rd.)** — With business and environmental interests at loggerheads, construction has yet to officially begin on IRG's \$185 million facility on the former Hammermill site (although the idea sounds good *on paper*).
- **Bayfront Market House (West Bayfront Parkway)** — Renderings have been completed and funding has been pledged toward Erie Events' next crown jewel, although ground has yet to be broken on the former GAF Materials site.
- **Harbor Place Development (East Bayfront Parkway)** — Scott Enterprises complex hopes to add a 500-foot-long zip line, "nautical-themed" mini golf course next summer.
- **The Bayfront Parkway itself** — PennDOT's \$100 million plan includes roundabouts, vehicular underpasses, and pedestrian overpasses at key intersections — and continues to receive significant pushback from parties such as Connect Urban Erie, who contend it will effectively sever downtown from the bay-



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front (as a de facto highway) and are lobbying for a more pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly boulevard instead.

## Elsewhere

- **Millcreek Presque Isle Gateway** — Long-term project aims to redefine the area bound by Pittsburgh Avenue and Peninsula Drive (from east to west) and West 12th to Presque Isle (from south to north), for a more walkable “Main Street” feel.
- **EMI Business Park (West 12th and Cherry streets)** — The Erie County Redevelopment Authority has been pounding out plans for an expansive industrial park at the former site of Erie Malleable Iron, with multiple commissioned public art installations.
- **Quin-T Tech Paper and Boards property (140 E. 16th St.)** — Following demolition and site remediation work, plans for a public park and rec facility are pending.
- **Harbor Village (Buffalo Road)** — A forthcoming mixed residential and commercial complex in Harborcreek, much akin to Palermo Realty and Development’s existing Copperleaf in Summit Township.
- **LECOM (multiple sites)** — Ever-expanding just like our universe, LECOM got its foot in the door to a new podiatry school, and will also be footing the bill on a \$14.5 million ambulatory surgery center.
- **Splash Lagoon (8091 Peach St.)** — Completed its sixth renovation since 2003 opening, with a multi-level treehouse attraction further whetting aquaphiles’ appetites.
- **Erie Sports Center (8161 Oliver Rd.)** — Since a very deflating January that saw its golf dome collapse, the former Family First Sports Park has received a score of upgrades.
- **Granite Ridge (16 W. Division St., North East)** — The former Mercyrhurst North East campus will partner with the above Erie Sports Center for athletic programming, but other uses including residential rental units, film production facilities, and classrooms for faith-based and charter schools are all in play.

- **Corry CATCH (965 Shamrock Ln., Corry)** — Once known as the Corry Area Memorial Hospital, the Corry Area Technology Center and Hub (CATCH) aspires to be a home for high-speed fiber internet, a cloud storage system, a tech incubator, a tech job and remote career training center, a co-working space, and a daycare center focusing on early technology education. In other words, a technology CATCH-all.

## Totally Over It

The **Erie Wastewater Treatment Plant’s** recently rehabilitated sludge incinerators process up to 100 tons of sludge per day — 36,500 tons a year!

During any annual news cycle, we, too, go through some shit. But not quite like this.

The very essence of journalism is in our ability to question— to not accept reality as it *appears*, but to plumb the depths of our institutions. Traditionally, that doesn’t endear us to those in power. An editorial piece (and explicitly presented as such) written by our own Jim Wertz (“**Erie at Large: A Congressman and a State Senator Walk Into a Bar**”) didn’t go over so well with **U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly** (PA-16) and **Pa. State Sen. Dan Laughlin**, provoking legal threats and a good deal of ire. The article implicated the two Republicans in the signing of *amicus* briefs (“friend of the Court” filings) aimed at influencing court rulings regarding the who, when, where, and how of elections — a sore spot after Donald Trump’s loss in the 2020 presidential election.

With independent local news sources facing critical endangerment (see Jonathan Burdick’s excellent reflection on this topic elsewhere in this issue), it’s important that we collectively stand our ground. A free press, after all, helps maintain crucial checks and balances in any free society. Sometimes, truth hurts. But if we need to settle this with a pillow fight to soften the blow, so be it — as of 2022, it’s officially a sport (Just like how in 2021, the 2020 general election results were officially certified in favor of President Joe Biden.)

Feathers also flew in this year’s midterm elections, with combatants hellbent on securing the top bunk at the public office sleepover. In most local races, the incumbent prevailed — with Mike Kelly

defeating Democratic challenger **Dan Pastore** in the race for Pennsylvania’s 16th Congressional District and Democrats **Bob Merski**, **Ryan Bizzarro**, and **Pat Harkins** holding onto their respective seats in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The 4th Legislative District, which comprises a large swath of rural Erie County, was up for grabs with Corry Democrat **Chelsea Oliver** facing off against Waterford-area Republican **Jake Banta**, the conspiracy-slinging frontman of Jake’s Blues — but given the demographics of the recently redrawn district, the GOP guitarist was the people’s pick.

The perennially tenuous state of checks and balances was preserved in statewide races for governor and U.S. Senator, with former Pa. Attorney General **Josh Shapiro** defeating right-wing extremist **Doug Mastriano** in the gubernatorial race and former Pa. Lieutenant Governor **John Fetterman** winning the Senate seat over celebrity doctor **Mehmet Oz** in a tightly contested vote. Enormously consequential decisions regarding women’s reproductive rights (after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned **Roe v. Wade** on June 24, 2022), voting rights, and education are, and will continue to be, at stake.

Driving a stake into the also perennially tenuous state of race relations in Erie County was newly elected **County Executive Brenton Davis**, who has been systematically dismantling the **County’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Commission** aka **Diverse Erie** (after cutting funding to **Greater Erie Community Action Committee** programming aimed at assisting the economically disadvantaged, since restored in the county’s 2023 budget) and attempting to undermine Erie County Council members seemingly every step of the way (Jim Wertz goes into further detail in this month’s “Erie at Large.”)

A point of particular contention — a desire to use American Rescue Plan funds (which are intended for “populations disproportionately impacted by the pandemic”) to help fund Penn State Behrend’s **Project Resolve**, a 10-year plan to ignite Erie’s advanced manufacturing economy, beginning with the construction of 60,000-square-foot innovation and battery testing center in **Knowledge Park**. While the decision narrowly passed a Council vote, Erie’s Black community has had *its* resolve tested enough over the years, with many of its

leaders calling for Davis’ resignation.

Defunding and disempowering bodies such as Diverse Erie come as a blow to potentially transformational initiatives such as the **East Side Renaissance plan**, an effort being steered by **Bishop Dwane Brock**, **Matthew Harris**, and **Marcus Atkinson** to revitalize the Parade Street corridor through a combination of real estate and human development. A social club, bank, and grocery store top the list of targeted developments, with a tentative new ErieBank branch location satisfying one of those items. The environmental changes would be coupled with community outreach and training programs to affect a change in attitude and perception of the area (Parade Street between East Sixth and 12th streets), with a hopeful ripple effect throughout the 16503 and 16507 zip codes, in neighborhoods long scarred by blight and crime.

Bickering between bureaucracies and political parties only serves to distract from the more dire issues at hand. The opioid and mental health epidemics continue to impact record numbers within our community (see Dan Schank’s examination of these subjects in this issue and elsewhere), and gun violence continues at an alarming rate — particularly among youth. That troubling trend was made tragically clear this year with public incidents at Erie High School and the Millcreek Mall, and the shooting deaths of a seven-year-old and a 14-year-old.

We cannot just patiently stand by while these problems pile up and hope they go away. Earlier this year, absentee waste collection company **Raccoon Refuse** forced residents of several Erie County communities to pick up after themselves. When we remove burdens for those who have been historically piled *onto*, we pick up our prospects for a more promising future.

A quectogram of common sense can make a quettagram of difference (shout-out to the **International Bureau of Weights and Measurements** for redefining the world’s smallest and largest unit measurement prefixes for the first time since 1991 — turns out bureaucracies can get stuff done!)

*Matt Swanseger can be reached at mswanseger@eriereader.com. No Spam please, figgy pudding-flavored or otherwise.*



EVENTS

A Holiday Show With Wit

The Lion in Winter at PACA provides an epic family takedown

CONTINUING FRIDAY, DEC. 9

Just in time for the holiday season, *The Lion in Winter* is a show for the entire family to enjoy at PACA. Set during Christmas 1183, this witty period piece tells the wickedly amusing tale of King Henry II, his estranged and imprisoned queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (who is released only for the holiday), and their three entitled sons who are all vying for the throne in a double-dealing division of the kingdom. As the family gathers for the holidays, each member tries to make the indecisive king choose their option.

Directed by PACA Executive Director Mark Tannenbaum and Betsy Butoryak, the play features lead actor Rob Bush, who came out of acting retirement for his role as King Henry II. Bush is returning to the stage after a 15-year hiatus to play this bucket-list role alongside cast members Karen Schelinski, Matt Fuchs, Rob Karney, and Michael Haas. The cast also features two newcomers to the PACA stage: Olivia Lozano and Luke Scribner. PACA provides an intimate setting to see these actors at their best with each seat featuring a great view of the action, less than two feet from the stage.

*The Lion in Winter* was also a very famous 1968 movie starring Katharine Hepburn and Peter O'Toole. It won Hepburn an Academy Award for Best Actress, as well as Oscars for Best Writ-



The cast of *Lion in Winter*, from left: Olyvia Lozano (playing Alais Capet), Luke Scribner (John), Rob Karney (Geoffrey), Rob Bush (King Henry II), Karen Schelinski (Eleanor of Aquitaine), Matt Fuchs (Richard), and Michael Haas (Philip Capet)

ing and Best Score (John Barry). James Goldman, who wrote the play, also wrote *Follies*, and is considered Broadway royalty," said Tannenbaum. Told in "marvelously articulate language, with humor that bristles and burns" (per the Los Angeles Times), *The Lion in Winter* is a play that transcends the historical genre to become a biting hilariously family drama.

"This play is as close to Shakespeare as you can get," said Tannenbaum. "It's about love, succession, it's incredibly funny, and just a great family-friendly holiday show." — Amy VanScoter

Fridays and Saturdays, Dec. 2 to 17 // Doors: 7 p.m., Curtain 7:30 p.m. // PACA, 1505 State St., 2nd Floor // Tickets \$15 at [paca1505.ticketspice.com/the-lion-in-winter](http://paca1505.ticketspice.com/the-lion-in-winter)

Christmas With Class at Lavery Brewing Company

Third annual holiday rock and roll show benefits local nonprofit

FRIDAY, DEC. 9

Lavery Brewing Company is hosting the 3rd annual "Half Glass Christmas with Class" concert in their Bunker with some of Erie's finest indie bands joining together to raise money for a good cause. Half Glass, Mallory Run, Penny Racer, and Brooke Surgener are set to play, with the proceeds from the cost of admission being donated to Erie DAWN. The holiday season is one of giving and Erie DAWN is an organization that has been helping those in need for decades. This event's proceeds will help the nonprofit achieve their mission of continuing to provide services and housing for low-income women and children, one it has been working toward since it was first organized in 1995. Since that time, Erie DAWN has helped over 1,000 local women and children secure these services.

Bringing holiday cheer to the stage will be Brooke Surgener, who recently released her full-length album *Moon Waves*; she performs indie-pop songs for the whole family. Joining in the reindeer games will be Penny Racer with their tongue-in-cheek pop punk songs, followed by the eggnog-swilling elves in Half Glass who lean into their garage punk sound. Mallory Run will wrap up the festivities with their heavy riffs and brash vocals. This emo rock band from Edinboro has been on the road more than Santa, touring extensively since



Join Half Glass, along with a number of favorite local rockers, for their second annual "Half Glass Christmas with Class" show in the Bunker at Lavery Brewing Company to benefit Erie Dawn.

forming in 2015.

The first 20 people through the doors will receive their first drink free, courtesy of Half Glass, so plan to get there early. And with all the magic in the air, the not-so-secret Santas at AMAT-ECH Inc. have agreed to match up to \$250 from the money raised for Erie DAWN. Enjoy an evening with good music to hear, while drinking some local beer, and spreading holiday cheer. — Larry Wheaton

Doors 6 p.m. // The Bunker at Lavery Brewing Company, 128 W. 12th St. // \$5 donation // [facebook.com/halfglassrockmusic](http://facebook.com/halfglassrockmusic)

'Buddy The Elf, What's Your Favorite Color?'

Elf The Musical to hit Erie Playhouse for holiday good times

CONTINUING FRIDAY, DEC. 9

Holiday movies have always been a staple in every child's (inner or otherwise) life. Whether it's a classic like *Miracle on 34th Street* or *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*, everyone has a favorite. A modern classic that seems to be the qualm-less favorite of a major portion of America is, of course, *Elf*, starring Will Ferrell and Zooey Deschanel. This movie seems a good fit for the stage, and now is your chance to see it live, in musical form, at Erie Playhouse.

Isaiah Aldridge landed the key role of Buddy the Elf and has been preparing his holiday joy by living by "rule number three of all elves: the best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear." Aldridge is well seasoned and ready to wow, "Windows down, walking down the street, or vacuuming at work, I've been getting ready by singing these songs any chance I get," he

says. "I think there's a little bit of Buddy the Elf in all of us and the impact of this movie is the main focus of this performance. I hope to do it justice for all the excited families by bringing out all of our inner elves," Aldridge continues. "Our cast has such a close bond, and it will show in the final product. The beast of a script, and the music added to an already amazing story, has forged the closeness amongst our members that will make these performances even more special."

A classic all on its own, the current local cast will leave you laughing, loving, and wishing you had these characters in your life — and if you have any remaining doubt of Aldridge's ability to perform as America's most beloved *Elf*, know this: he likes to put melted M&Ms on his cheese pizza. — Jordan Coon

Dec. 9-11 and 15-18, 2 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. // Erie Playhouse, 13 W. 10th St. // \$17 to \$30 // [erieplayhouse.org](http://erieplayhouse.org)



*Elf the Musical* turns a modern holiday movie classic into a musical stage production that brings your favorite characters to life. Directed by Ryan Ingram and starring Isaiah Aldridge (center), Buddy the Elf has never been more lovable.



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An advertisement for the Erie Humane Society. The background is dark green with white snowflake graphics in the corners. At the top left is the Erie Humane Society logo, which includes a stylized cat and dog face. To the right of the logo, the text "ERIE HUMANE SOCIETY" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with "RESCUE • REHABILITATE • REHOME" in a smaller font below it. The main text, "Every Pet Deserves a Home for the Holidays & You Can Help Them Get There", is centered in a white, cursive font. Below the text is a large, square gift box with a green and white patterned paper and a red ribbon bow. A black and white dog with its mouth open is peeking out from the bottom of the gift box. At the bottom of the advertisement, the website "eriehumanesociety.org/donate" is written in a red, sans-serif font.

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**Apply online:** [www.SarahReed.org](http://www.SarahReed.org)

EOE. Must be 21+ to apply.





## A Queer Comedy Comes To The Dramashop

*The Crumple Zone* to pass crash test and show Erie what drama really is  
CONTINUING FRIDAY, DEC. 9

Queer theater is taking the mainstage at the Dramashop this December. *The Crumple Zone* is described by Zachery Hoffman, who is playing Terry in this five-man show, as “gay, heartfelt, thought provoking, and HILARIOUS.”

Hoffman continues, “This is a show about life among people. As the characters laugh and feel together, you also get to see male characters actually feeling all of their feelings, and that’s incredible to be a part of because it’s not the norm for men to get to show all ranges of their emotions.”

Preparations for this role have taught Hoffman a lot about personal growth. He states, “Preparing for the role of Terry has helped me to reflect on myself and where I’ve come in life as a gay man.” As for finally being able to portray that gay man on stage he says, “I have been waiting to portray an openly gay man. I’m so thankful for this opportunity. Terry is a man, who, like myself, is not afraid to feel. This play is so important for the public to be able to see gay men living life, just like anyone else.”

According to Concord Theatricals: “This hilarious off-Broadway hit, set in a run-down apartment on Staten Island, concerns three gay roommates coming to a crisis during one frantic Christmas weekend. Terry, an out-of-work actor who can’t keep a job or get a date, spends his days swilling cheap vodka



The cast of *Crumple Zone* get in touch with all of their emotions on stage at Dramashop this month. This is a welcome change in scripting for lead actor – Zach Hoffman (left), who is excited to see this range of emotions in a male character.

and playing referee to a messy love triangle. Extremely funny and deeply moving, *The Crumple Zone* by Buddy Thomas is about staying together, breaking apart, and the things we lose along the way.”

For such a cozy production, this showing of *The Crumple Zone* is jam-packed with emotions that will make you feel sad, joyous, and make your belly hurt from laughter. Have your tissues ready for this one, because it will tug at your heartstrings.

This production is sponsored by NWPA Pride Alliance, Inc. and Glass Growers Gallery. — Jordan Coon

Dec. 9, 10, and 16 at 8 p.m., Dec. 17 Drag Pre-Show Christmas Party Performance 6:30 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 18 at 2 p.m. // \$7.50 to \$15 // 1001 State St., Suite 210 // For tickets and information: [dramashop.org/crumple-zone](http://dramashop.org/crumple-zone)

## Barber Christmas Ball Benefits National Institute

‘Christmas in the City’ at the Bayfront Convention Center  
SATURDAY, DEC. 10

This year, the Barber National Institute is celebrating their 70th year in style. A holiday tradition for more than 50 years, the Barber Christmas Ball is a one night festive gala that supports the mission of the Barber National Institute, founded by Dr. Gertrude A. Barber in 1952.

Many Erie natives are likely familiar with the Barber National Institute and their mission to provide resources, education, and support to those with autism, intellectual disabilities, and behavioral health challenges along with their families, working to help these children and adults to be self-reliant, independent members of their communities.

From humble beginnings in a borrowed YMCA classroom in 1952, the Barber National Institute has since expanded to six major locations across Pennsylvania, including offices in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, assisting children and adults in need thanks to the support of many generous donors. The Christmas Ball helps to raise funds to continue their work with the individuals who benefit from their services.

This year’s Chair Couple are Tim and Lisa NeCastro, Erie natives dedicated to supporting their hometown. President and CEO of Erie Insurance since 2016, Tim has led his company’s commitment to the city by directing more than \$64 million to the downtown revitalization project. Lisa, since retiring from Erie



Celebrating the 70th year of their organization, The Barber National Institute hosts their annual Barber Christmas Ball at the Bayfront Convention Center, a formal gala with dancing, food, and over the top decorations for their yearly fundraiser.

Insurance after a 36-year career, volunteers with many various community causes, and is a founding member of United Way of Erie’s Women United for Community Schools. The couple is currently chairing the campaign to fund the expansion and renovations planned for the expERIENCE Children’s Museum.

Live music, delicious food, and breathtaking decorations all make up a fantastic evening for a fantastic cause. Barber National Institute invites everyone to come celebrate with friends, family, and neighbors this holiday season, in support of their mission. — Ally Kutz

Doors at 7 p.m., dancing from 8 p.m. to midnight // Bayfront Convention Center, 1 Sassafras Pier // \$95 donation // [barberinstitute.org/events](http://barberinstitute.org/events)

## The Benefits of Being a Last Second Shopper

Holiday shopping and live music at Basement Transmissions

FRIDAY, DEC. 16

The holidays are right around the corner and we all know how stressful and mundane shopping can be. This year, Basement Transmissions takes all of the pressure off by hosting a special event providing both live entertainment and vendors, a perfect curation of locally made gifts for your hardest-to-shop-for friends and family, all the while keeping you entertained by several of Gem City’s most beloved musical performers.

The event, “Last Second Shopper,” will showcase some of Erie’s favorite crafters, occultists, and boutiques. There will be art, locally made clothing, and trinkets you won’t find in your average department store — you are sure to find something for everyone on your list. The vendors include unique work from local artists Jim Hogan, Joshua Mitulski, Tiffany Sheffield, Jamie Manarino, Clara Ferris, Georgia Buchner, Amy Gone, Hope & Liana Durnell, Tia Keith, Sejla Ibrahimovic, Rock n’ Roll Medium Ruth, and Naomi Mecci & The Tarot Tower.

Unlike most holiday shopping experiences, you won’t be hearing Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas” over a Muzak speaker. The live music lineup is a perfect mixture of genres that everyone can enjoy while perusing the goods in Basement Transmissions’ eclectic, massive, and newly renovated space. Performances are anticipated from local legend Fresco, intense electronic duo Grimace, pop-punk quartet Do Not Call List, punk-rock four-piece Grim Grin, and rapper Andre Concepción, all with soundscapes between sets by NASTY TAXI.

Erie’s best local craft brews can be enjoyed from Erie Ale Works while you check items off your wish lists, and you may even have the opportunity to meet the greasy, bad banana Mr. Grinch himself while you’re there. — Cypher Eihwaz

6 p.m. // Basement Transmissions, 145 W. 11th St. // \$15 // All Ages // For more information: [facebook.com/basement.transmissions](https://facebook.com/basement.transmissions)



Finish up your last minute shopping at Basement Transmissions during their Last Second Shopper show and sale, featuring a local lineup of original music and local artisans selling their wares.



EVENTS

The Nutcracker Returns to the Warner Theater

Traditional holiday ballet receives local reimagining

SATURDAY, DEC. 17 - 18

The Lake Erie Ballet Company's production of *The Nutcracker* is returning to the Warner Theatre after a two-year hiatus. *Erie's Nutcracker Reimagined* will feature city history and landmarks as the backdrop of the famous production, bringing a local touch to this classic ballet.

"I'm excited to, once again, direct the reorganized Lake Erie Ballet Company to continue over 60 years of tradition at the Warner Theatre," said Christina Maria, artistic director of the Lake Erie Ballet Company. "This 'reimagined Nutcracker' will not only include the magnificent score in its entirety, but we have used modern ingenuity to include the glorious history and beautiful landmarks of our amazing city on a digital backdrop, enhanced with a script without missing a step of dancing from excellently trained dancers from around the Erie community."

The show features collaboration from a variety of dance schools and companies from around the region, including Corella Productions, Sovereign Ballet, Cadence Dance Ensemble from Collegiate Academy, Marguerite School of Dance, Patterson School of Dance, and features the local talent of Christina Maria, Shawn Clerkin, and Robert Martin. The orchestral score will be performed by the Lake Erie Ballet Company Orchestra under the direction of Jonathan Moser.

Maria began her career training under the famed Rus-



CHRISTINE SHEWELT

The snowflake dancers traditionally represent the scene transition from Clara's home to the Land of Sweets. *The Nutcracker Reimagined* works local Erie landmarks into these traditional scenes.

sian prima ballerina Natalia Krassovska and learning from the American School of Ballet and the San Francisco Ballet. Her career would lead her to the Boston Ballet, where she would dance and tour across the country before becoming a dancer of the Lake Erie Ballet Company for 14 years. Maria teaches and advises at dancing schools around the region, including as an adjunct faculty member at Gannon University and the Mercyhurst University Dance Department.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's famous ballet, based on the short story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* by E.T.A.

Hoffman, premiered on Dec. 17, 1892 in Saint Petersburg, Russia with the original choreography by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov. Although the ballet itself was not well-received, critics praised Tchaikovsky's suite. The ballet's first complete performance in the United States was by the San Francisco Ballet in 1944, a decade before the New York City Ballet would have its first annual premiere in 1954 with choreography by George Balanchine.

— Thomas Taylor  
Saturday at 7 p.m., Sunday at 2:30 p.m. // Warner Theatre, 811 State St. // \$30 to \$50 // lakeerieballetcompany.org



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## Walking In A Winter Wonderland

Asbury Woods offers free festive light displays and more

**CONTINUING THROUGH DEC. 31**

There is something magical about the quiet of the forest in winter, from the snow underfoot, softening your footfall, to the white-covered trees' branches contrasting starkly against the darkness — all under the twinkling stars of a frosty night sky.

Asbury Woods has been bringing people in to appreciate the magic of a winter's night for over 20 years, and they are continuing the tradition with this year's Winter Wonderland series.

Jennifer Farrar, executive director at Asbury Woods, said, "[We are] pleased to once again offer the community a delightful holiday experience at our Winter Wonderland program during the entire month of December." Every evening in December, save Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, Asbury Woods invites guests to promenade along the boardwalk adjacent to the Andrew J. Connor Nature Center and take in the sights, sounds, and that special wintry smell.

The boardwalk and surrounding

trees and displays will be lit up with lights and the trail is an enjoyable — and wheelchair accessible — 1/3 of a mile long. The Nature Center will also be open during this time, and after a two-year absence, the model train display is back to captivate and enchant young and old alike. Plus, the Squeaky Frog Gift Shop will be expanded to include local, artisanal products.

Thanks to the generosity of Asbury Woods' sponsors, the event is again free of charge, though donations are accepted. Said Farrar, "I hope that visiting Winter Wonderland adds to people's enjoyment of the holiday season and that they delight in soaking in the beauty of the woods during the winter season." —Cara Suppa

5:30 to 8:30 p.m., every day in December except Christmas Eve and Christmas Day // 4105 Asbury Rd. // Free (Donations accepted) // [asburywoods.org/events/winter-wonderland](http://asburywoods.org/events/winter-wonderland)



Asbury Woods lights up their boardwalk around the Andrew J. Conner Nature Center for their Winter Wonderland celebration that continues throughout the month of December. Decorations, lights, and displays make for a magical winter woods walk for all.

ERIN PHILLIPS



## THE JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY'S GLOBAL SUMMIT 2022

### WEEK FOUR

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2022 AT 7:30 P.M.**

**John Dickerson**

Chief political analyst for CBS News and senior national correspondent is also a writer and author. **Future of the American Presidency**

Location: Gannon University's Highmark Event Center  
620 Peach Street

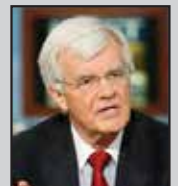


**MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2022 AT 7:30 P.M.**

**Al Hunt and Judy Woodruff**

National media personalities and spouses Al Hunt and Judy Woodruff comment on American politics **An Evening with Al Hunt and Judy Woodruff**

Location: Gannon University's Highmark Event Center  
620 Peach Street



**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022 AT 7:30 P.M.**

**Making Maps, Telling Stories, Opening Minds**

Respected geographer, cartographer & storyteller **Allen Carroll** is the featured speaker in the Summit finale.

Location: Jefferson Educational Society



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## The Artistic Soul of Brian T. Bonner

Local entrepreneur brings interests to life

By: Charles Brown

You may not have heard the name Brian T. Bonner, but you've likely come across some of his work around town — perhaps a jaw-dropping mural on the side of a building, or a painting in your favorite coffee shop. Founder of the clothing line Artistic Souls, which launched in November of 2021, Bonner wears several different hats in the creative world (muralist, painter, motivational speaker, executive producer, etc). Bonner began his work through pure interest, embarking on an artistic journey that he continues to travel.

"I always thought it was so cool creating something in your mind and to see it come to life on canvas or on walls or shirts," says Bonner. "Even if it's music, I have always been intrigued by the process of getting something out of your mind and having it come to life." While Bonner has been dabbling in various media for 15 years, it has only been since 2017 that he has truly taken his

art seriously. In doing so, he is now living life on his terms while empowering others to follow their dreams.

Bonner's drive to be independent was instilled by a significant source of inspiration: "My father was an entrepreneur, and I learned a lot from him business-wise," states Bonner. "Then what I did was surround myself with like-minded individuals and ask a lot of questions. From that step, I went and found me a couple of mentors and asked them a lot of questions as well." Bonner applied those insights to realize success in the entrepreneurial world. He also credits reading as something that helped him learn all that he could to benefit his endeavors.

"Now that I've had some success, I'm able to give knowledge to others who want to be an entrepreneur. It's all about the application and not the information." Bonner has not only built up an impressive portfolio of solo work, but also eagerly offers his talents toward shared artistic expressions. When asked about his collaborations, he was honored to not only shed light on what he has contributed, but what others have as well.

"The first mural I worked on is one of Carla Hughes on the side of the Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT) building through Erie Arts and Culture. I was invited to be an artist assistant, and played a huge role in creating that mural." The Carla Hughes Memorial Mural has garnered a lot of attention for honoring the late educator and teaching artist through a mural so vibrant that it's hard to miss on the lower east side of town.

Erie Arts & Culture has been paving the way for artists such as Bonner to be placemaking creators in an environment where they can express themselves. Patrick Fisher, the executive director of Erie Arts and Culture, relays that artists of all kinds have been granted opportunities as well as funding to be able to present their work to the city and beyond. To date, the organization has completed 12 murals as a part of their Purposeful Placemaking public art project, which Erie Arts and Culture is spearheading along with the United Way of Erie County. This project aims to target locations for these public murals along safer school walking routes.

"Myself and another artist, Steve Mik, were teachers at the ECAT building and we taught a class about murals and creating. That was a really dope experience," Bonner continues. "I learned a lot from the kids, so after the class was over, the kids and I ended up having a finished design that me, Steve, and the kids themselves put together. That one is right across the street from the ECAT building on the H.A.N.D.S. building (Rosewood Apartments, 1002 E. Lake Rd.)"

Brian has been more involved with the community over the years and has humbly cemented his place in the art scene in Erie. But national exposure has been a part of the muralist's success story as well. "I've sold paintings across the country, from here in Erie to Cleveland, all the way from California to North Carolina." Bonner is making strides toward becoming a prominent creative figure; with his Artistic Souls clothing line, he is looking to make his mark through his street-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Artist and entrepreneur Brian Bonner wears many hats in the artistic community: muralist, painter, clothing designer, blogger, and music producer to name a few.**

wear, while pushing the culture of the arts forward. According to Bonner, Artistic Souls is more than fashion or merch: "Not only is it a clothing company, it's an art company, a media company," claims the visionary. "We got some crazy stuff in the works."

Bonner is truly a multifaceted artist, as you can see through his mural projects. But his vision is broader than just what you drive or walk past. Bonner is soon planning to launch his Artistic Souls YouTube channel, which will feature blogs and interviews. He plans to serve as executive producer for a hip-hop album which is currently in the works, as well as to curate events where artists can network and help each other evolve, and give back to the arts community.

The 814 has always been a nexus for creators of all sorts. With Bonner now getting his hands in the mix, Erie is positively impacted by having another artistic member added to that hub.

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



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**This mural at the intersection of East Avenue and East Lake Road marks mural number six of the Purposeful Placemaking project spearheaded by Erie Arts & Culture. Completed as a collaboration between students and teachers at ECAT, this mural was an opportunity to comment on gun violence without glorifying it.**



# Top 10 Albums of 2022

Our favorites from a busy year in music

By: Aaron Mook and Nick Warren

Any list-loving media-lover relishes a good end-of-the-year countdown, and we are no exception. Since 2017, Aaron Mook and Nick Warren have been working together to build their combined roundup of favorites. There's a whole weighted scale filled with variables at work behind the scenes. It's all very scientific, we assure you. But, what you end up with is above all a top 10 list of albums that moved us, that we left on repeat, and that stayed in our head and heart.

## 1. *God Save the Animals* // Alex G

In 2019, experimental singer-songwriter Alex G released *House of Sugar*, his best record at the time (and one that topped our End of the Year list here at the Reader). Three years later, Alex Giannascoli surpassed himself again and topped our list with *God Save the Animals*, a collection split between down-to-earth Americana and otherworldly soundscapes. The record feels like a victory lap, but a weary one (Giannascoli spends part of "Miracles" asking how many more songs he has to write before he can "turn it off and say goodnight"), a culmination of everything he's created prior to this. It's no surprise, then, that the album contains an alarming number of his best songs to date, including the hyper-pop-tinged piano ballad "Immunity" and the irresistible acoustic-rock of lead single "Runner." In short, there's never been a better time to dive into this prolific songwriter's catalog. — AM

## 2. *Blue Rev* // Alvays

From "Archie, Marry Me" through their sophomore album, *Antisocialites*, Alvays has continued to capture the eyes, ears, and hearts of indie rock fans everywhere. But *Blue Rev* is different; it's the kind of once-in-a-lifetime record that could make a band's career and propel them beyond the success of a few popular singles. From the swirling guitars of opening track "The Pharmacist" to the Johnny Marr-esque jangle-pop of album highlight "After the Earthquake," *Blue Rev* is a carefully curated album designed to offer something for indie rock fans of all generations, presented with a unique Technicolor swirl. — AM



## 3. *The Unraveling of PUP THE BAND* // PUP

Likely the best working punk band active today, it's no coincidence that PUP are also one of the most ambitious. While that aim is shrouded in a slacker haze of young adult existentialism, it hits hard. From the first notes and sentiments of the piano-based "Four Chords," the listener realizes that this ain't no normal punk album. With the anxiety of Jeff Rosenstock and the grace of the Hotelier, the Toronto-based quartet's fourth full-length album is perhaps their best, and certainly their most varied. Highlights include "Totally Fine," and "Matilda" with their anthemic earworms that swirl in your heads for days. — NW

## 4. *Being Funny in a Foreign Language* // The 1975

If The 1975 haven't won you over yet, they might with this one — or their next. The band has offered increasingly ambitious projects since 2018's *A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships*, resulting in electronic experimentation and even dancier hooks. On *Being Funny in a Foreign Language*, the band has

never sounded poppier or more skilled at songwriting. From the Huey Lewis-inspired single "Happiness" to "All I Need to Hear," a slow-burning ballad destined for weddings, *The 1975* has pulled out all the stops and graduated from one of the most inescapable bands in the age of the internet to one of the finest. — AM

## 5. *Ants From Up Here* // Black Country, New Road

Just before their sophomore release, Cambridgeshire, England band Black Country, New Road saw themselves going from a septet to a sextet. With the departure of their frontman and guitarist Isaac Wood due to mental health issues, what would the group do moving on? While the post-punk chamber pop thankfully will continue on, fans at least have been left with two utterly brilliant works, filled with complex instrumentation and insightful lyrics fit for fans of Black Midi and Slint. Wood's unique vocal delivery combines with textured horn and klezmer-like passages, creating an almost surreal listening experience. — NW

## 6. *Sometimes, Forever* // Soccer Mommy

Just as Soccer Mommy's 2020 breakthrough, *color theory*, expanded upon the minimalist singer-songwriter palette of her debut, *Clean*, this year's *Sometimes, Forever* (produced by electronic musician Oneohtrix Point Never) represents a stylistic evolution for frontwoman Sophia Allison. While her songwriting remains as sturdy as ever, her reliable brand of '90s-influenced indie rock is now joined by cascading synthesizers and shoegaze-kissed hooks on songs like "With U" and "Shotgun," respectively. For Soccer Mommy fans, it's yet another step forward, and for newcomers, it offers the forward-thinking ideas and melodies Allison has always excelled at. — AM

## 7. *Wet Leg* // Wet Leg

Wet Leg burst onto the scene like a wildfire. Their self-titled debut album had all the earmarks of an indie favorite for fans of bands like The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, The Julie Ruin, and Beach Bunny. What was perhaps a bit surprising is just how commercially successful the album be-



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came. A veritable mainstream hit, with singles like “Wet Dream” and “Chaise Longue” charting in the US, UK, and Japan. Nominated for four U.S. Grammy awards including Best New Artist, Wet Leg’s eponymous first offering hit well immediately with critics and fans alike, landing spots on numerous festivals throughout 2022. — NW

### 8. *Can I Take My Hounds to Heaven* // Tyler Childers

The sheer ambition of *Can I Take My Hounds to Heaven* is impressive. For his fifth studio album, the Kentucky-based troubadour chose to release it as a triptych. The 24 tracks contain what is essentially three different versions of the same album, each with noticeable stylistic variations. The “Hallelujah Version” showcases Childers and his band, The Food Stamps, at their most recognizable, in all of their rollicking alt-country, bluesy glory. The “Jubilee Version” is also fantastic, with its mix of gospel and Dixieland arrangements. Finally, the “Joyful Noise Version” employs sampling and electronic elements, capping off what’s easily one of the most accessible country releases of the year. — NW

### 9. *The Family* // BROCKHAMPTON

The show is over; that’s what self-defined boy band and hip-hop collective BROCKHAMPTON announced abruptly around the time of their Coachella set earlier this year. Their “final album,” *The Family*, was teased all over social media before their actual final album, *TM*, was released as a surprise for fans just a day later. But *The Family* stands out as a fascinating document about the band as opposed to one created by them; group leader Kevin Abstract uses the 35 minutes of mu-

sic required by RCA to recount the band’s highs and lows against joyous chipmunk-soul samples and production. — AM

### 10. *Laminated Denim* // King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard

Australia’s King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard deserve a special prize for 2022. In this year alone, the already prolific band released not one, but five full-length studio albums. Who does that? Beginning in March with *Made in Timeland*, then the double-album *Omnium Gatherum*, October’s *Ice, Death, Planets, Lungs, Mushrooms and Lava*, *Laminated Denim* less than a week later, and finally *Changes* just two weeks after that. For my money, the two 15-minute tracks of *Laminated Denim*, with their psychedelic improvisational tone is hard to beat, with the retro grooves and conceptual conceit of *Changes* coming in at a very close second. — NW

#### Aaron Mook’s Additional Top 10:

*Green Hour of Evening* // GOON, *Household Name* // Momma, *Tana Talk 4* // Benny the Butcher, *honeybee table at the butterfly feast* // Teen Suicide, *We’re Not Here to Be Loved* // Freshwater, *God Don’t Make Mistakes* // Conway the Machine, *Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers* // Kendrick Lamar, *Anywhere But Here* // Sorry, *Cowboy Tears* // Oliver Tree, *SICK!* // Earl Sweatshirt

#### Nick Warren’s Additional Top 10:

*Laurel Hell* // Mitski, *Squeeze* // SA-SAMI, *All of Us Flames* // Ezra Furman, *Blending* // High Vis, *Endure* // Special Interest, *Hold On Baby* // King Princess, *Crash* // Charli XCX, *EBM* // Editors, *The Bad Plus* // The Bad Plus, *House of Confusion* // Trace Moun-

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## Top Five Local Albums of 2022

Our staff shares this year's favorites from right here in Erie

There were so many excellent local releases this year. It's pretty incredible, really. And, as the music scene grows, so does our list of music contributors here at the Erie Reader. Since this was a special year all around, we decided to do things a little differently. For seven years since 2015, our former managing editor and part-time music reviewer Nick Warren has drafted up his top three albums from the Erie area. This year, we had five of our writers pick their *number one* choice, for a deservedly bigger list and some top quality recommendations.

### ***Sincerely Yours* // Anthony Rogers**

The pace and timing of this album is perfect. It displays a great balance between fun raps, melodies, and meaningful lyrics. *Sincerely Yours* shares the story of an artist who wants success as much as he wants peace and happiness. Though that may seem profound, sonically, the album isn't a downer. You can definitely throw this on while riding around town or having a get-together at home. Self-produced and written by the man himself, Rogers has never failed in maintaining both rhymes and production. Every part of creating this opus feels natural and to have come from a genuine place. Released on his birthday back in April, a month that's usually dreary with the deep anticipation of summer, I can say that this is a project that will uplift your mood. — Charles Brown

### ***My Mom Thinks I'm Depressed* // BLUNT GUTS**

BLUNT GUTS, the musical side to artist and Basement Transitions owner Bob Jensen, released *My Mom Thinks I'm Depressed* at the end of 2022. It's the follow up to 2021's *Cranberry Blood*. With his newest release, Jensen continues to carve out his own unique place in electronic music, touching lyrically on the in-

securities that many people face and how they feel on the inside versus how they appear on the outside. The addition of trumpet to the mix gives the album a trip-hop feel, and it is, at times, reminiscent of recordings by William S. Burroughs from the '80s and '90s. — Larry Wheaton

### ***Tell the World Your Secrets* // Fastfall**

This EP is everything that post-hardcore fans could want. Fastfall is brand new to the local music scene, formed in 2020, but have still managed to leave a massive impression with this project. The sound and lyrics on these five songs are doused in angsty, relatable subjects ranging from mental health to political justice. This band clearly knows just where to lead their genre to keep it fresh, keeping listeners on their toes and leaving them wanting more of that mid-2000s rocker nostalgia with a new perspective. The high-energy momentum of this group gives us all the hopeful boost we need to keep post-hardcore alive and well. — Cypher Eihwaz

### ***Parry This* // Grim Grin**

For their debut album, Erie newcomers Grim Grin released a full-length record with 11 tracks of perfection, and thank goodness they did. *Parry This* boasts some of the catchiest songs imaginable, channeling the best parts of '90s punk — the gruffness and harmonics of Bad Religion and Good Riddance and balanced fun and gravitas of No Use For a Name and Millencolin. With expertly crafted singalongs and riffs, tracks like "Radio," "Remember You," and "Bad Habit" will stay in your head for days, making you track down their next show like a raving lunatic. With this release, it's easy for this reviewer to cite them as one of the most exciting local punk bands in over a decade. — Nick Warren



### ***Above the Land* // Optimistic Apocalypse**

Erie has waited five years for new music from beloved singer-songwriter McKenzie Sprague, also known as Optimistic Apocalypse, and her sophomore album, *Above the Land*, has made it beyond worthwhile. A favorite of numerous writers here, Sprague uses this project to expand upon the songwriting and ideas displayed on her debut album, 2017's *The Art of Love*. From the opening moments of "Cardinal" to the album's centerpiece, "Centipede," the ever-growing songwriter contributes gorgeous vocal work to songs often related to nature and our relationship with it; it's as unique as her own watercolor artwork adorning the album's cover. — Aaron Mook



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## Top 5 Best Films of 2022

Best cinematic offerings range from magically real to frighteningly surreal

By: Forest Taylor

### 1. *Petite Maman*

Céline Sciamma's follow-up to her masterful *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (which I foolishly neglected to include in my 2019 Top 5) is another emotional look into the past that hits with a different, but no less powerful resonance. The story of an 8-year-old girl exploring her late grandmother's house and developing a friendship with a mysterious girl her own age she meets in the woods seems like a simple, care-free children's tale. As Sciamma gradually reveals to us the truth about this girl and the nature of their relationship, the story takes on a new emotional weight. The result is a blissful, imaginative shot of magical realism that manages, in its short runtime, to say so much about grief and loss but also familial love and the joy of youth. Sciamma has crafted a beautiful little fairy tale that can appeal young and old in equal measure. Truly a film for the ages.

Written and directed by: Celine Sciamma // Starring: Joséphine Sanz, Gabrielle Sanz, Stéphane Varupenne, Nina Meurisse, Margo Abascal // 72 minutes // Rated PG // Pyramide

### 2. *Happening*

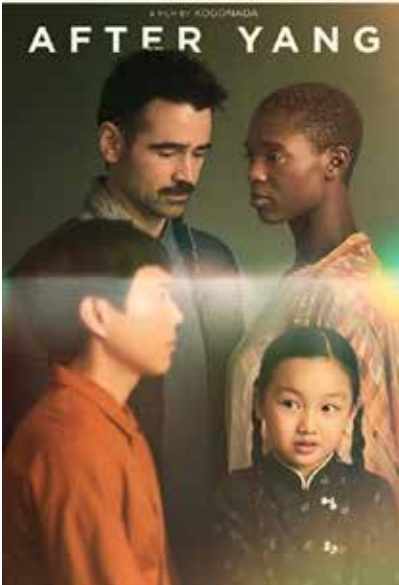
Terrible changes in the U.S. courts have made this film, sadly, the most relevant film of the year, but Audrey Diwan's drama should be rightfully celebrated as a work of art beyond its timely political message. The story of a college student wishing to terminate an unwanted pregnancy in a time and place (early '60s, France) when abortion was illegal is a deeply personal but also tragically universal one. Diwan presents us with a protagonist just trying to live her life as she chooses, and what she must go through when that choice is taken away from her. The lengths she must go to are humiliating, infuriating, and scarier than any horror film. The film is a shout for millions of people who (as current events have shown us) still need to be heard.

Directed by: Audrey Diwan // Starring: Anamaria Vartolomei, Kacey Mottet Klein, and Sandrine Bonnaire // 100 minutes // Rated R // Wild Bunch

### 3. *After Yang*

Some of the best science fiction is about machines that live richer, fuller lives than humans and Kogonada's little family drama fits nicely with the best of the genre. When a little girl's companion (an android named Yang) breaks down, her father searches for ways to repair him and, in the process, discovers memories, experiences, and a life that Yang lived that his family never knew about. Kogonada's story is a classic rumination about the blurry divide between humanity and artificial intelligence and what it truly means to be human, but one that puts the connections amongst family and human emotions front and center. The unique mixture is like *Blade Runner* as directed by Hirokazu Koreeda. Great sci-fi manages to appeal to the mind and the heart in equal measure and *After Yang* does both masterfully.

Directed by: Kogonada // Starring: Colin Farrell, Jodie Turner-Smith, Justin H. Min, Malea Emma Tjandrawidjaja, and Haley Lu Richardson // 96 minutes // Rated PG // A24, Showtime



### 4. *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

"The Daniels" (Daniel Kwan & Daniel Scheinert) managed to make a conversation between two googly-eyed rocks one of the most thought-provoking and powerful conversations in any film this year. And that's just one great aspect of this wonderful burst of creativity that truly delivers on its title. The story of a laundromat owner who must travel between dimensions to save the universe from a giant bagel is entertaining enough, but to have that story also say so much about family, love, regret, existence, death, and taxes makes the whole thing an absolute joy. Somewhere between *The Matrix* and *Rick & Morty*, Stephen Chow and Charlie Kaufman, this still manages to feel unique to The Daniels' own demented sensibilities. A challenge to the rest of the risk-averse film industry: let's see you be this smart about going this far over the top!

Written and directed by: Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert // Starring: Michelle Yeoh, Stephanie Hsu, Ke Huy Quan, Jenny Slate, Harry Shum Jr., James Hong, and Jamie Lee Curtis // 140 minutes // Rated R // A24

### 5. *Neptune Frost*

Saul Williams and Anisia Uzeyman have managed to create a post-colonial, Afro-Futurist, anti-capitalist, sci-fi musical and make all of those ideas come together in one coherent whole. That deserves respect on its own, but this story about an escaped coltan miner and an intersex runaway who connect through cosmic forces and form a hacker collective in the hills of Burundi to bring down the authoritarian government is an incredible rallying cry for the voiceless of the world. A film that attempts to transcend the limiting roles that money, society and even gender and sexuality have placed upon us, it is easily one of the most unique works in world cinema and it needs to be seen to fully grasp the ideas presented within. Also, it needs to be said that the music truly slaps.

Directed by: Saul Williams and Anisia Uzeyman // Written by: Saul Williams // Starring: Elvis Ngabo, Cheryl Isheja, and Kaya Free // 110 minutes // Kino Lorber

### Honorable Mentions:

Murina, Decision to Leave, Hit the Road, Pleasure, We're All Going to the World's Fair



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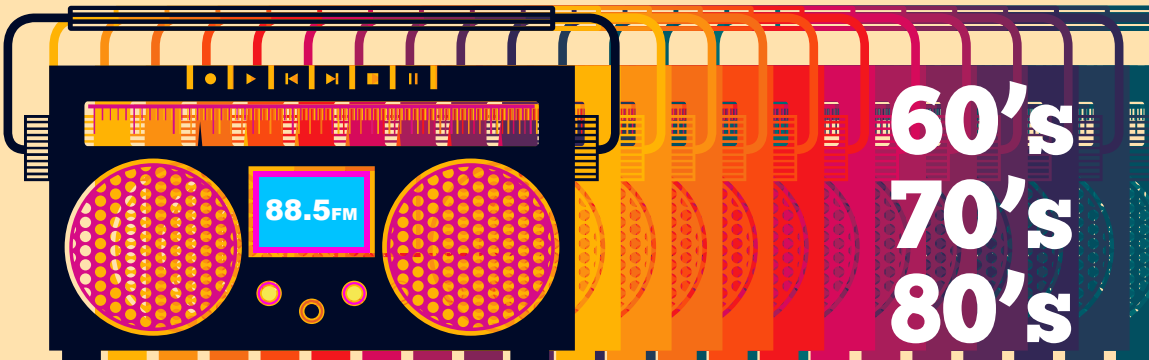


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## Top 5 Books of 2022

Reflections on the year, both near and far

It is a strange feeling to be rounding out yet another year still in the midst of a pandemic, but here we find ourselves again. With another revolution around the sun under our belts, it seems that this was a good year for reflection: on relationships past, on decades past, on what makes our differences important, on ancient times, and even on the pandemic itself. Here's a look at the best books of the year.

### *I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Jennette McCurdy

Actor and author Jennette McCurdy's heartbreaking yet hilarious memoir should be at the top of your reading list. Talking openly about her experience with the abusive parental relationship she had with her mom, McCurdy lays bare the trauma and eventual healing she experienced throughout her lifetime. Following her complicated, tragic, and traumatic childhood in which she was swept up not only in her rise to fame, but also in the demanding lifestyle her mother imposed on her, McCurdy's emotion shines through, thanks to her strong voice and even stronger personality. Written in a way that captivates readers from the start, this is a memoir to remember. — Ally Kutz

*Simon & Schuster // 319 pages // Memoir*

### *Happy-Go-Lucky* by David Sedaris

If there's anyone to trust with truthful, hilarious commentary on current events, it's David Sedaris. In this year's *Happy-Go-Lucky*, Sedaris reflects on the experience of the pandemic and associated lockdowns, as well as the "new normal" to which we have all had to adjust. Unable to tour and read for audiences — the part of his work he loves most — Sedaris finds himself walking for miles in a nearly deserted city, vacuuming his apartment twice a day, ruminating on what it means to be recently orphaned, and no longer being someone's son (Sedaris' father passed in 2021). As the world slowly settles into this new normal, Sedaris finds himself back in it with a new confidence. As always, Sedaris perfectly portrays the unique perspective about the recent mayhem, expressing best the drive for the connection that we all desire. — Ally Kutz

*Little, Brown and Company // 272 pages // Humor, Nonfiction*

### *The Nineties* by Chuck Klosterman

*The Nineties* is remarkable in what it is not: this book, which exhaustively covers the decade in which its author

came of age, is nearly completely devoid of nostalgia. Instead, Klosterman makes miraculous connections between seemingly disconnected subjects and, while doing so, gives a critical view of the decade that built our world into what it is today. His subject matter varies wildly: third party political candidates and their effect on our current political landscape, the birth of the internet and its effect on literally everything (music, news, television, the way we interact with each other, etc.), grunge music, O.J. Simpson, conspiracy theories, cloning, and yes, even Crystal Pepsi. Whether you're a fan of Klosterman already or have never heard of him, whether you lived through the '90s or not, it's likely that you'd find this book a fascinating historical document that is actually fun to read. — Erin Phillips

*Penguin Press // 370 pages // Nonfiction, Pop Culture*

### *The Maid* by Nita Prose

In this wonderful debut, Nita Prose paints the picture of Molly Gray, one of our favorite lead characters of the year. Molly isn't your typical 25-year-old; she struggles with social skills and situations, often misreading the intentions of others and making already bad situations worse. Before she died, her Gran was able to help her navigate some situations, but now Molly must go it alone. Her neat and orderly life as a maid at the Regency Grand Hotel is turned upside down when she enters the room of Charles Black, an infamous and wealthy tycoon, to find him dead in his bed. Due to her unusual demeanor and lack of social understanding, she soon finds herself the prime suspect in his death. Nita Prose hits the nail on the head with *The Maid*, showing readers that being different isn't necessarily bad — in fact, it can be one of our greatest assets. Filled to the brim with mystery, suspense, and a few laughable encounters, this is the perfect mystery thriller to round out your year. — Ally Kutz

*Ballantine Books // 280 pages // Mystery, Thriller*

### *Elektra* by Jennifer Saint

With the major success of her first novel *Ariadne* (one of the Erie Reader's top books of 2021), it is no surprise that Saint's 2022 novel *Elektra* made our list this year. Following one of Greek mythology's most infamous heroines, Elektra's journey seems doomed from the start thanks to an ancient curse. Intertwined with the stories of two oth-



er women — Clytemnestra and Cassandra — Saint's epic retelling of these women's paths is captivating from the start. One woman betrayed, one never believed, and one cursed from birth, Saint weaves together these women's tales in such vivid imagery and beauty to ultimately create a world into which the reader can dive deep, immersing themselves in both the lyrical style of her writing and the richness of the mythology. — Ally Kutz

*Flatiron Books // 304 pages // Mythology, Fantasy*

### Honorable Mentions:

*Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* by Gabrielle Zevin, *Kaikeyi* by Vaishnavi Patel, *Thistlefoot* by GennaRose Nethercott, *The Paris Apartment* by Lucy Foley, *Young Mungo* by Douglas Stuart

**Be sure to check out some of our other favorites reviewed throughout the year:**

*The Unsinkable Greta James* by Jennifer E. Smith, *The Secret Life of Albert Entwistle* by Matt Cain, *Rogues* by Patrick Radden Keefe, *Small Angels* by Lauren Owen, *Bomb Shelter* by Mary Laura Philpott

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# Fish that Talk 20.3

in: For Whom the Bell Tolls



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--DR. ZAIUS



DON'T BE SO DAMNED UGLY.  
-- DR. ZIRA



DON'T FLY. WHERE WOULD IT GET YOU?  
-- DR. CORNELIUS



DON'T BE A DIRTY ANIMAL.  
-- DR. GALEN



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Gem City Style

A Q&A with Louis A. Geramita of Primo Tailoring

By: Jessica Hunter

I recently caught up with Louis Geramita, owner of Primo Tailoring in The Shops at Fifth and State. An honoree of our most recent class of Erie's 40 Under 40, he is without question one of the preeminent ambassadors of Gem City Style.

**Jessica Hunter (JH):** For those who don't know, please tell us about Primo Tailoring.

**Louis Geramita (LG):** At face value, Primo is a proper men's clothing store covering just about anything a guy might need, from custom-made pieces to simple alteration. It's been long overdue for Erie to have a place that sells top-notch clothing and Primo is here to fill that need. On a deeper level Primo is an understanding that the details matter, breaking rules is necessary, and things done well last longer and only need to be done once. These are beliefs that should be applied as a way of life in all areas.

**JH:** Can you share the experience behind your mission and why you started your tailoring business?

**LG:** We started for two main reasons: First, there was a need and we wanted to fill it. Even now to get the services and products we offer, it's a minimum two-hour drive and that's simply not acceptable. Second, helping be a part of making Erie a place that is recognized for its fashion community seemed like a worthwhile mission. Erie is an interesting place in general but when it comes



JESSICA HUNTER

Owner, tailor, and clothing designer Louis Geramita of Primo Tailoring has his sights set on becoming a household name. His shop on State Street offers a one-of-a-kind fashion experience.

to fashion it's like another animal. The strategy in executing our mission has been education and community based. Without those two things, you can't make it while keeping your style integrity in this town.

**JH:** Your shop has such a vibe! Explain your style and how it sets you apart from other businesses. Do you offer any special or unique services?

**LG:** A good outfit isn't so much about the physical items you wear and pick

out, it's what your look conveys to others about yourself, your day, and how you view the world. It's truly a second language. So to us the "vibe" is everything, and that translates to our store image as well. We live in a time when we have







JESSICA HUNTER

A fully functioning tailoring shop, Primo Tailoring fills a niche void in Erie for clothing customization and alterations.

access to everything at our fingertips, so as a business, the key difference between you and everyone else is your vibe/brand. So making that vibe something people personally connect with is a must. Our services are extensive and one-of-a-kind for Erie, offering top-notch men and women's alterations, custom made clothing, retail items from socks, and shoes to winter jackets, and shoe shining services. We've truly become a one-stop shop!

**JH:** On Small Business Saturday your shop on State Street celebrated its first anniversary. What were some of the challenges and pitfalls you faced? What were your best achievements and successes?

**LG:** Since starting the business back in 2020 we were constantly faced with challenges, but the beautiful thing about starting when we did is that we had to take an alternative approach, not just copy and paste. I believe that really helped develop our business strategy. We are very proud of getting a retail space opened only a year after starting the business from nothing, and still being here and going strong! We have an incredible team at the shop. Honestly, without the amazing skills Olivia, Jul-

marie, Barbie, and Dill bring to the table, we couldn't have this amount of growth. Seeing our business up in excess of 300 percent is just mind blowing; we're so proud that we have been able to be a part of styling so many people in the community.

**JH:** What do you see for the future of your business and fashion in Erie?

**LG:** Our ultimate goal for the brand is to take it to a national scale, and become known as a household fashion brand. We are progressing this vision on multiple fronts, most notably by building an online presence that is focused on brand awareness. We're also bringing on sales staff that reach to different states, as well as developing a U.S.-based textile manufacturing plant for our products. With these steps we're confident that we will see this goal as a reality in a relatively short amount of time. As for the Erie fashion scene, we have a long way to go, but we have some really cool people advancing it.

*Primo Tailoring is located at 421 State St. and open from Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. // For more info: primotailoring.com*

*Jessica Hunter can be found at jessicahunterphotos.com*

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CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13
14						15						16		
17						18						19		
20				21							22			
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49							50							
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58				59							60			
61				62						63				
64				65						66				

Across

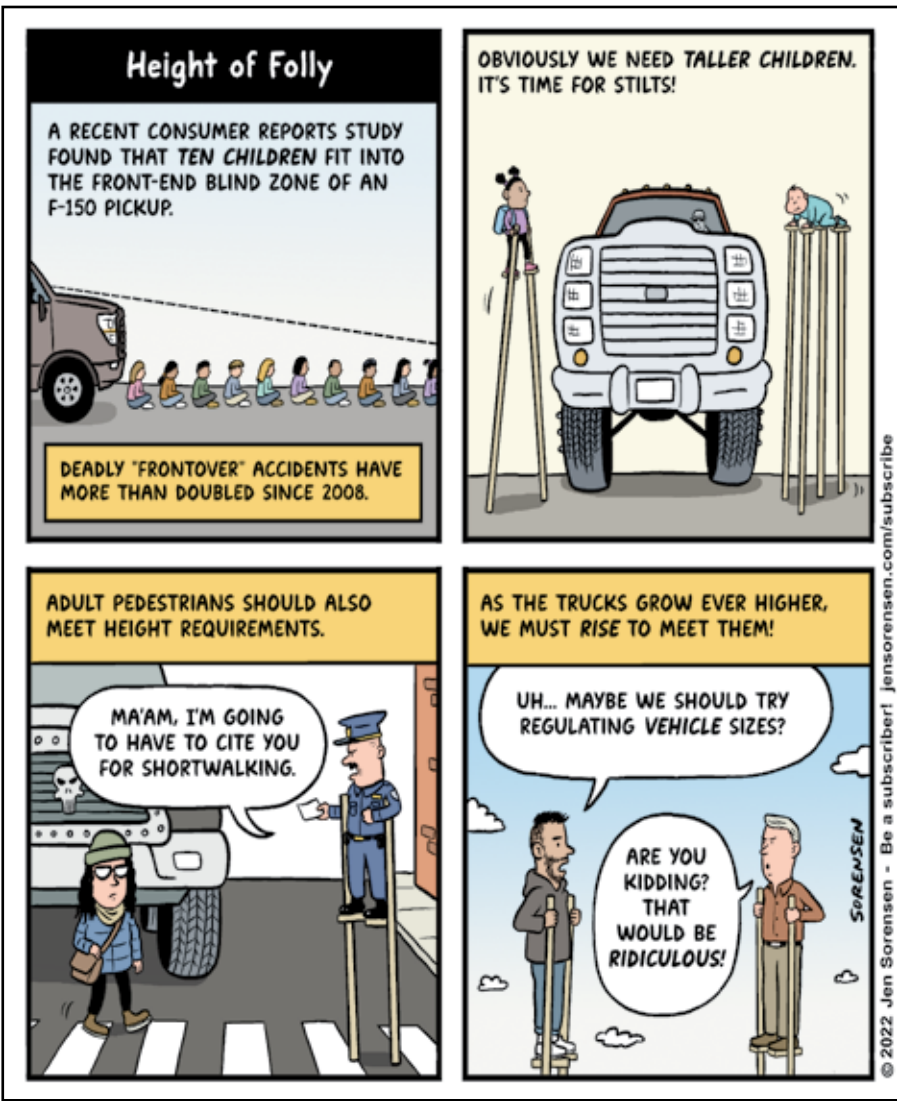
1. American Red Cross founder Barton  
6. Kick off  
11. 120/70, 130/80, etc.: Abbr.  
14. Used a dinghy thingy  
15. "I, \_\_\_\_" (2017 movie)  
16. Pol whose Twitter bio reads "no American should be too poor to live"  
17. Person who supports a family  
19. Maidenform purchase  
20. Sound heard by a shepherd  
21. File menu option  
22. Appear  
23. \_\_\_\_ Fridays  
24. Medium's board  
25. Scoreboard units: Abbr.  
28. Chloé Zhao became one in 2021  
32. "\_\_\_\_ you decent?"  
33. Enthusiasm  
34. Qty.  
35. Cars front man Ocasek  
36. Cry that's shorter (but less fun) than yelling the last words of 17-, 28-, 43- and 59-Across  
39. Univ. near Albany  
40. Like the name Joe, for a barista  
41. Castaway's site  
42. Goal-oriented grp.?

43. Engage in hard-nosed negotiations  
48. Drunkard  
49. "\_\_\_\_ the deal ..."  
50. Kitchenware brand  
51. "How the Other Half Lives" author Jacob  
52. Attached, as a corsage  
55. Org. in some Cold War spy novels  
58. KJ who plays Archie on "Riverdale"  
59. Kind of mint  
61. \_\_\_\_ Ysidro, Calif.  
62. SAG-\_\_\_\_ (Hollywood union)  
63. City south of Florence  
64. Curvy shape  
65. Got off the sofa, say  
66. G-rated, say

Down

1. One of the first five inductees at Cooperstown  
2. Spencer of "Good Morning America"  
3. Territory  
4. Stephen of "V for Vendetta"  
5. Augments  
6. Gloria Bunker's married name  
7. Something you might watch with your parents  
8. Kristen's role in "Frozen"  
9. Loaves that may be marbled

10. Besmirch  
11. One not yet a toddler  
12. For example, to Juan  
13. Hustler  
18. Finger shakes  
22. Depiction on Arizona and New Mexico's flags  
24. Like a masseuse's hands, often  
25. Put another way  
26. Super-hoppy craft brews  
27. Members of religious factions  
29. Like King Itzcoatl  
30. Speed Wagon automaker  
31. 1970 #1 hit with the line "What is it good for?"  
36. Morrow and Damone  
37. "... or thereabouts"  
38. 151, in old Rome  
44. "Abso-freakin'-lutely!"  
45. German chancellor Adenauer  
46. Crossed (out)  
47. DVD player error message  
52. [Just ... disappeared!]  
53. "Give \_\_\_\_ me straight"  
54. Nephew of Caligula  
55. It may be taken in protest  
56. Actress Rowlands  
57. Fiber source in some cereals  
59. Some batteries  
60. It's nothing



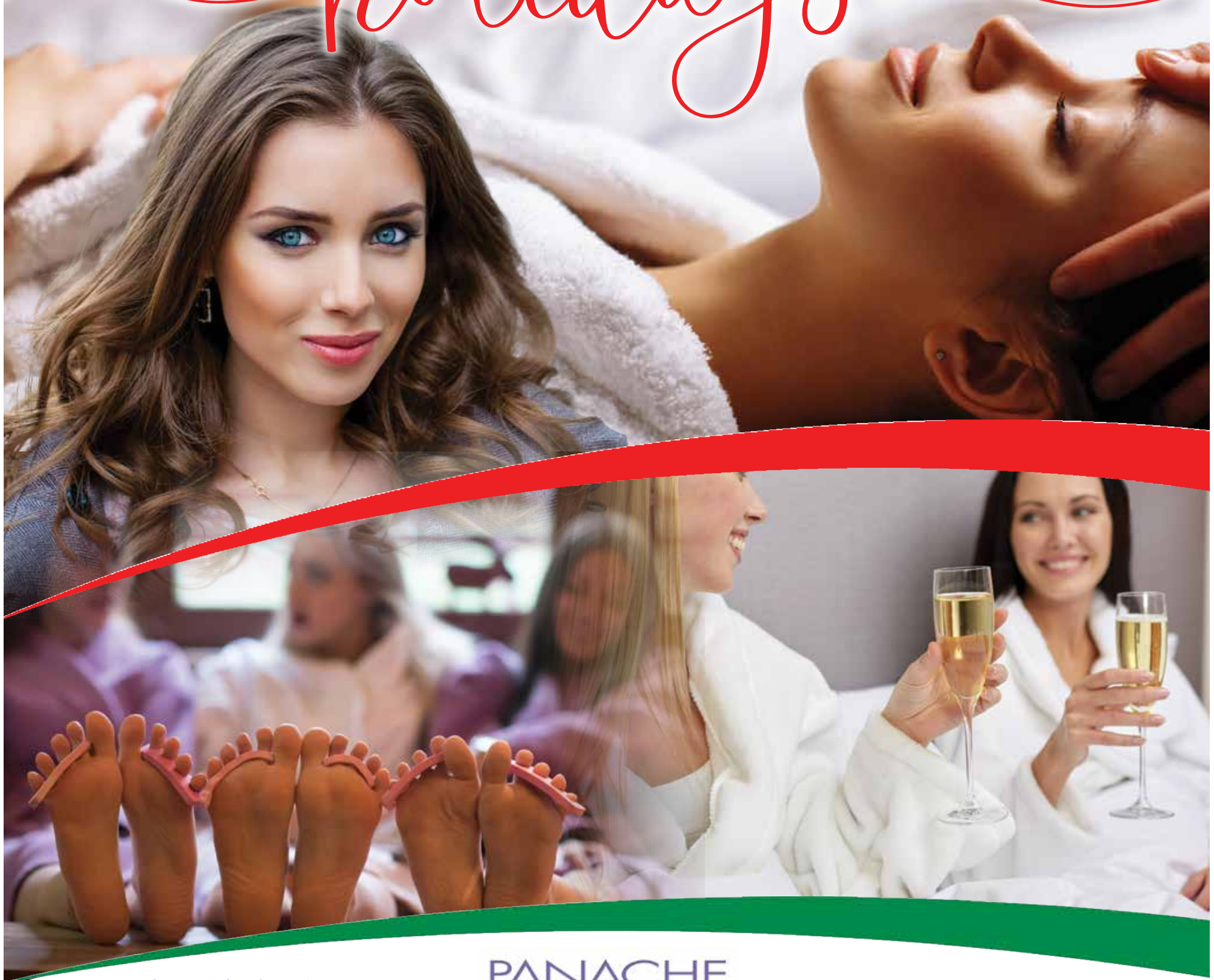
Answers to last puzzle

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





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